

BAAS AGM Minutes 2023

The BAAS Annual General Meeting was held at Keele University, 11.45am BST on Thursday, **April 13th 2023**.

The meeting was quorate throughout (67 attendees in person; 3 online).

This is an excerpt from the full minutes, with information relating to the discussion of the Digital Conference in 2024. Please note these minutes have not yet been approved.

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Chair's Welcome (Lydia Plath)

Lydia thanked the team at Keele – David Ballantyne, Hannah Smith, Jim Peacock, as well as tech support staff, catering, and events for hosting so well.

She offered a vote of thanks to all members of the Executive Committee stepping down: Christine Okoth, Jenny Woodley, Jon Ward, and Rachel Williams.

Thanks also to the entire Exec for all their hard work on many exciting initiatives over the past year.

Lydia briefly explained the format of this year's AGM which will revolve around discussion of the forthcoming online 2024 conference.

Members interested in hosting the 2025 or 2026 conference should contact Lydia or Gavan Lennon (head of the Conferences sub-committee).

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2024 Online Conference

Elsa Devienne (co-lead of Green BAAS network with Rebecca Tillett) reporting

The decision to hold the 2024 conference entirely online is part of an ongoing conversation about BAAS's commitment to behaving more sustainably. We hope that the 2024 conference will provide a model to thereafter host a remote conference every second or third year.

In the face of the rapidly escalating climate emergency (which will disproportionately and urgently affect the global South but which is already being felt in the UK in the form of record-breaking summers and hotter winters), the two most meaningful things BAAS can do to address the emergency is:

- Refuse to bank with "dirty" banks (such as Barclays).
- Rethink research practices and behaviours to embrace solutions that do not involve carbon-heavy travel.

Had the 2021 digital conference been held at Hull as originally planned, the conference would have emitted 81.6t CO₂e – the actual emissions were 2t CO₂e.

A commitment to sustainability is embedded in BAAS's values and mission; changing our professional behaviours is difficult (especially given there are strong feelings about the value of in-person conferences) but imperative. As individuals we are not perfectly virtuous and therefore it behoves organisations like BAAS to take the lead on difficult decisions (and members to commit to supporting those decisions).

Other organisations are already considering these questions and researching viable alternatives:

[Disabled Academic Collective](#)

[American Association of Geographers' Climate Action Task Force](#)

Michelle Bastian, Emil Henrik Flatø, Lisa Baraitser, Helge Jordheim, Laura Salisbury, Thom van Dooren, ““What about the coffee break?’ Designing virtual conference spaces for conviviality,” *Geography and Environment* vol. 9, no. 2 (2022). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/geo2.114>.

Members need to hold organisations to account too: large academic organisations are often tied into lucrative contracts with hotels and conference centres that work against the task of tackling the climate catastrophe.

The key questions confronting the BAAS community:

- How can BAAS be a leader in the sector as the climate emergency escalates?
- How can remote or hybrid events be inclusive and not replicate traditional hierarchies of power in the academy?
- How can we hold remote events without making them disproportionately work intensive?

ED highlighted the Green BAAS panel taking place on the last day of the conference and highlighting emerging research in environmental American Studies.

Suzanne Enzerink (2021 Digital BAAS organiser) reporting

The main difference between the 2021 and 2024 conferences is that the former was an improvised response to the pandemic emergency, and the latter will be a considered and conscious decision. SE reflected on her experiences organising the 2021 conference and what this might mean for the 2024 event:

Successes:

- Attendance from delegates across the world – many of whom who would not have been able to attend, for financial and/or logistical reasons.
- The presence of UP editors (especially from the US) and their generosity in offering 1-1 sessions for delegates wishing to discuss book projects.
- Having no more than three concurrent panels meant audiences were generally sizeable.

Challenges:

- The difficulty of replicating organic networking (the “academic speed-dating event was warmly received but thinly attended”) – how can we rethink how people can encounter each other without coffee breaks?
- Generating interactivity, especially in keynote sessions – how do we make these sessions more accessible and welcoming?
- Allowing time for Q&A – occasionally this was cut short as Zoom licenses were shared across sessions.
- Duration – the 2021 conference tried to counteract “Zoom fatigue” by spreading panels out across more days, but this meant that attendance did tail off (especially as the event went into the weekend).

Key questions to consider in advance of 2024:

- How can the keynote be more interactive?
- How can we replicate the in-person coffee break?

Comments from the floor:

- Nick Witham: Keynote sessions could be reconfigured to “state of the field” roundtable sessions (easier to coordinate multiple attendees remotely) – the “History in the Headlines” panel at 2021 BAAS was the best-attended and modelled this sort of session.
- Laura Wilson: we shouldn’t throw out smaller decisions designed to address sustainability (such as reusable crockery and cutlery, ride-share schemes, plant-based options) – we can keep modelling good behaviour even as we make more significant strategic decisions.
- Michelle Coghlan: online conferences can be more inclusive in some ways, but also produce challenges for delegates with childcare/other caring responsibilities who may be trying to attend the conference in the same space/time as they are caring for their loved ones. This presents scheduling questions (e.g. making sure sessions coincide with typical working hours, avoiding weekends). The childcare bursaries at 2023 BAAS have been hugely helpful; could we consider offering something similar even for online conferences?
- Jon Ward: echoed the suggestion of bursaries to facilitate remote attendance by a diverse constituency. Catherine Armstrong confirmed that given the stability of our financial resources our priority should be creating a truly innovative event that meets the needs of the members, rather than making a profit.
- Emily Brady: organising the online conference provides space for ECAs (especially those precariously employed or without a formal institutional affiliation) to get involved where they might not otherwise be able. SE, LP, and CA confirmed that the plan at present is to advertise and appoint **two** paid co-organisers.
- Katie McGettigan: online conferences are not entirely devoid of carbon impact – what about the carbon footprint of data storage, streaming etc? We need to explore green options and embed these concerns in our planning.
- Leila Kamali: the conference should also welcome and provide space for independent scholars and those working outside HE – independent scholars can also be a fantastic resource of expertise and connections!
- Saul Leslie and others: how can access for hearing and/or visually-impaired people, and people with other access requirements, be built into the conference from the start (not just tacked on as an afterthought)? As for people with caring commitments, online conferences can be both more and *less* accessible than in-person events.