

Update on the EASA Code of Conduct: A report by the 2019-2020 EASA Executive Committeeⁱ

The online Open Access journal HAU was launched in 2011 and grew rapidly in prominence, popularity and status within the discipline. EASA supported the HAU projectⁱⁱ. In June 2018 the journal became the focus of a major controversy amidst accusations of abusive employment practices. During EASA 2018, the Conference Scientific committee and the Executive decided to organise a roundtable – entitled #HAUtalk - to discuss the broader issues within the discipline raised by the disclosures at HAU.

During the EASA members' forum at Stockholm, eight EASA members tabled a motion proposing that EASA create a “Code of Conduct Working Group” tasked with developing a code of conduct and ways in which EASA could offer support in cases of allegations of professional misconduct, in order to address what the motion described as “systemic and persistent instances of professional misconduct (including but not limited to abuse of power, psychological and sexual harassment and the exploitation of precarious labour, lack of accountability and code of ethics/standards of professional conduct)” within the discipline and its institutions. Before voting, the then Chair (Valeria Siniscalchi) made clear that, if passed, the wider EASA membership would be polled for their views once the working group had developed a code of conduct and a proposal for its use. The motion was passed with 154 votes for the motion (and 5 abstentions). The Exec began to work on the composition and terms of reference for such a working group.

In November 2018, the EASA Executive Committee received a letter from six EASA members asking “the EASA Code of Conduct Committee to carry out an independent inquiry into allegations of malpractice at HAU [...] to provide some closure for those caught up in the HAU controversy through an independent and public recognition of what they experienced, rather than relying solely on social media and gossip.” More precisely they asked the Committeeⁱⁱⁱ to appoint a ‘panel of anthropologists to carry out an independent inquiry of, and prepare a report on, the allegations of misconduct at HAU between 2011 and 2017.’ The signatories felt that those affected by events at HAU had still not had an opportunity to speak to an independent body, and that this silence was having ongoing negative effects, both on them personally and on the reputation of anthropology more widely. They noted the structural conditions that might have contributed to a difficult working environment at HAU, and suggested that the review would provide ‘closure’ as well as the ‘opportunity to learn from the HAU experience’. The letter suggested ‘EASA is the most obvious professional body to carry out such a role’ because many European anthropology departments had sponsored the journal.

Discussing the request, the Executive found it difficult to reach a consensus. As the Code of Conduct Working Group was still in the process of being created, they decided to ask the nascent group to also offer their advice on the HAU request. The Working group, chaired by Chandana Mathur, with a membership of Cris Shore, Agathe Mora and Antonio Maria Pusceddu, was therefore asked to propose to the Executive a code of conduct (furnishing clear guidelines about “professional misconduct”) and to propose ways in which EASA could use this code of conduct in a useful way for its membership. The communication from the Exec made clear that the working group was *not* a Code of Conduct committee (even if the creation of such a committee could eventually be one of its recommendations). The Executive shared the members’ letter with the group, and asked for their advice about the role EASA could play in situations where there is no existing organisational oversight or procedures for dealing with complaints about misconduct.

In March 2019, the new 2019-20 EASA Executive Committee (chaired by Sarah Green) met to discuss the Working Group’s recommendation that an independent review of HAU be carried out. The Working Group had been asked to make this recommendation before completing their main task, which was to make a recommendation on whether EASA should establish a Code of Conduct Committee, and if so, in what form it should take. The Working Group indicated that it would recommend setting up an Ombudsperson Committee. The Exec accepted the recommendation about the HAU review and made no decision about the Code of Conduct Committee, as the Working Group’s report on that matter had not yet been received. The Exec asked the Working Group to recommend terms of reference for the HAU review for the Exec to consider. These recommendations were received in June 2019, discussed by the EASA Executive Committee, and

approved with minor modifications. A summary of these terms of reference were [published](#) in EASA's Summer 2019 newsletter. These included establishing a review committee to consider the HAU matter that would be *entirely* independent of the Code of Conduct working group and the EASA Executive: the members of the review committee would have to be people who had neither contributed to HAU nor ever expressed an opinion on the controversy. Throughout this process the 2019-20 EASA President (Sarah Green) recused herself because of her previous links with HAU.

The intention was for an independent panel to listen to all sides, learn from the experience, write a report, provide some closure and all the discipline to move forward. This would not be an 'inquiry' that sought to apportion blame, pass judgement on individuals, or catalogue wrong-doing.

Over the next six months the EASA Vice President and Treasurer emailed almost fifty professional (and retired) anthropologists (and subsequently, some sociologists and others in cognate fields), who met the key criteria of independence, to ask them to act on this review committee. The proposed timescale was for the committee to review submissions and prepare a short narrative report for EASA 2020.

Many of those approached supported the principle of the review but felt unable to take part because of time, perceived conflicts of interest or competing commitments. Others suggested that any such review should not focus on one journal, but look more broadly at the questions raised by the HAU affair, including issues of precarity, employment relations and the challenges presented by Open Access publishing. Some felt the review did not have the jurisdiction to pass judgement, despite the terms of reference explicitly stating that there was no intention for it to allocate blame or adjudicate. During this period, the directors of the Society for Ethnographic Theory (SET) sent a [letter](#) to the President, the Exec and to the past President questioning EASA's legitimacy to conduct what they called a 'moral inquiry' into HAU. The SET letter, dated November 2019 contained a number of unfortunate inaccuracies. To avoid further misunderstandings, the past President then wrote an [addendum](#) to the EASA August 2019 newsletter.

After six months of concerted effort, it proved impossible for EASA to appoint a panel with the independence, expertise and commitment to carry out this review in a timely and effective manner. In February 2020, the EASA Exec then discussed carrying out the review in-house, offering confidentiality and anonymity to all, with an ethos of 'learning lessons' and 'looking to the future'. EASA's Treasurer informed the six original signatories of this suggested plan, and asked for their views. The revised proposal met with intense anger and disappointment. There was frustration at the lack of progress, a sense that the record would never be set straight, and sadness that their voices were not going to be heard. Several suggested that either EASA should pursue a fully independent and open review, or not to do so at all.

At a June 2020 virtual meeting the Exec reluctantly agreed not to proceed with a HAU-specific Review, given the difficulties faced in recruiting an independent committee. The Code of Conduct Working Group expressed their strong disappointment about this outcome. On July 17th, that Group submitted their final report which concluded their original and main task, which was to make recommendations to the Exec on whether to set up a Code of Conduct Committee and the form it should take. Their report recommended a 'living' EASA Code of Conduct and a Code of Conduct committee. Given the obstacles faced in implementing the HAU-specific review, the EASA Exec will move quickly to take forward and develop these recommendations in conjunction with the Working Group. The Exec met on July 20th 2020 and agreed to come up with an implementation plan within three months.

i The 2019-20 EASA President (Sarah Green) recused herself from all involvement in this process to avoid any perception of a conflict of interest. She had previously expressed her views on the issues, been asked for advice by those campaigning for an inquiry, and acted as Chair of HAU's External Advisory Board.

ii EASA gave HAU a conference stall at 50% of the cost charged to commercial publishers, and offered HAU staff reduced registration rates

iii The Code of Conduct committee referred to in the letter did not exist – only a Working Group.