

This report sets out the context, timeline and recommendations of the working group (WG) since its inception in the Autumn of 2018. It outlines the background to the group's formation, its remit and the challenges that it has encountered. In brief, our general recommendation is as follows:

Instead of trying to be prescriptive about what constitutes 'best practice' or coming up with abstract principles, we recommend the adoption of a bottom-up approach that sets out a framework for thinking about professional conduct based on people's personal experiences and existing reflections within anthropology. We also recommend the creation of an EASA Ombudsperson Committee to act as a point of reference on matters pertaining to professional misconduct as outlined below.

## **1. Rationale**

The WG's responsibilities [as outlined by EASA's former president Valeria Siniscalchi in Autumn 2018](#) were to:

1. Propose to the executive a code of conduct furnishing some clear guidelines and functioning as a deterrent in diverse kinds of situation involving "professional misconduct" (including but not limited to abuse of power, sexual harassment and the exploitation of precarious labour).
2. Advice on how EASA could use this code of conduct in a useful way for its membership.

These responsibilities were amended by incoming president Sarah Green on 28 February 2019. The WG was charged with two different tasks:

1. The first was to consider whether EASA should create a code of conduct committee in a general sense, which we took to mean a code of conduct + committee, and draft such a code and the terms of reference for a committee.
2. The second was to consider whether EASA should convene a review of what happened at Hau, in response to the request sent in the [Letter from the LSE](#), and what form this inquiry should take.

## **2. Timeline**

### **28 Feb 2019**

First meeting of the WG (by Skype)

### **6 March 2019**

Initial recommendations:

The WG agreed that an immediate priority for EASA should be the formation of an 'ombudsperson committee', whose first task will be that of an enquiry into the HAU matter.

The WG will begin immediately to consider the terms of reference for this committee, and deliver these to the EASA Executive as soon as possible. Initial thoughts: the committee should have access to relevant legal expertise, perhaps via pro bono assistance, or by including a legal professional as a committee member. Secondly, the parameters for the enquiry should diverge from the suggestions made in the initial letter that was sent to the EASA Executive, in particular, we did not agree with the 'truth and reconciliation' model.

The WG will consider a code of professional conduct for EASA after examining similar instruments developed by associations elsewhere or in other disciplines. Among other things, the code will help determine whether an issue should be referred to the 'ombudsperson committee'.

### **Early March 2019**

Request from EASA EC to send them our views on the creation of a HAU inquiry.

### **13 March 2019**

Our recommendation that EASA's future 'Ombudsperson Committee' should enquire into the HAU matter is based on the following considerations:

First of all, it is useful to remember the wording of the motion passed in Stockholm last July. Along with laying down the legal grounds for the establishment of the present working group and the drafting of a Code of Conduct for the Association, point 2 of the motion goes further, asserting: 'The growing concerns about systemic and persistent instances of professional misconduct [...] in our discipline and institutions have created a momentum for the EASA to create measures and take concrete steps to address such systemic problems' (emphasis added).

The EASA Executive board and a majority of the members present that day voted in favour of the motion in its entirety. Arguably, this means that carrying out a review of HAU (as a possible example of such 'systemic and persistent instance of professional misconduct') is not only advisable, it has already been approved by vote of the EASA General Assembly. According to us, there would, therefore, be no need for the new Executive board to vote a second time on whether taking concrete steps vis-à-vis the HAU matter is advisable. Not doing so would, on the other hand, contradict the public position taken by the EASA AGM and the Executive board in July. Which concrete steps, i.e. the modalities of how such inquiry/review should be undertaken would, however, require the Executive Board's prior approval.

EASA has the potential to serve as a form of recourse for its members in situations where there are no other fora for addressing such issues or where existing fora have failed. This is a legitimate expectation that its members may have of EASA. Members may be justified in

seeing EASA as a transnational 'union' of anthropologists, protecting the interests of our discipline and of its professional values.

We think the HAU matter could constitute one such instance of alleged gross professional misconduct where the opinion of EASA's future 'Ombudsperson Committee' would carry a lot of weight. The idea behind the 'Ombudsperson Committee' is to act as a 'public buffer', it would issue an opinion (not a decision) about a certain issue with the aim of publicly recording the issue. Although the specific modalities of how the Ombudsperson Committee would carry its work are still being thought through, we think the LSE's request (which can be read as a formal complaint of sorts) and the evidence publicly available to date are compelling enough for EASA to publicly acknowledge the need for the Association to look into what happened, within the remit of its constitutional prerogatives.

While EASA lacks the resources or the authority to provide any legal or binding resolution, the carefully considered opinion of EASA's 'Ombudsperson Committee' will definitely count within EASA's community of peers. We are looking at other such instruments developed by similar associations to formulate a code of conduct that cannot be misused to falsely defame colleagues or deny them due process at the same time that it offers recourse to those with legitimate complaints, and establish a complaint mechanism that will not strain EASA's limited resources or constitutional remit.

### **19 June 2019**

WG submitted a draft of the [HAU review guidelines](#) to the EC.

### **11 October 2019**

Cris and Chandana met in Poznan to talk about the work ahead. We proposed that:

- 1/ We should re-read and discuss the material we had collected.
- 2/ We should think further about the role of the Ombudsperson(s) that we had recommended since that will be the central piece of the structure we'll come up with.
- 3/ We should meet again to workshop these proposals.

### **Online meeting end of October 2019**

We spent a lot of time discussing the question of what EASA can (or should) realistically do in cases where there are clear breaches in professional conduct. We are working on some coherent proposals – and trawling through examples of ethical guidelines used by other learned societies.

Instead of trying to be prescriptive about what constitutes 'best practice', or coming up with abstract principles, we thought it would be useful to adopt a more bottom-up (and anthropological) approach that sets out a framework for thinking about ethics/professional conduct based on people's personal experiences.

We wrote to EASA President Sarah Green asking whether we could canvass the membership for narratives of their personal experiences of abuse of power and professional misconduct that we would then use to construct an ethnographic repository. It was

suggested that a better way forward would be to start with general principles. However, we believe that such principles could emerge more clearly from a rich, empirical archive of experiences. Therefore, the useful starting point would be to gather accounts of perceived misconduct, acknowledging that opening up about such experiences can itself provide some restitution to those who may feel victimised. Practically, this could be done by inviting anonymised contributions on a specified and secure email address.

### **Online meeting with Executive committee members David Mills and Monica Heintz on 17 July**

We were disappointed to hear that the EC had not been able to proceed with a review of the HAU incident since the numerous potential reviewers that they had approached were either unable or unwilling to serve in this capacity. While we completely understand the sensitivities and complexities around conducting a review we nevertheless think there are important lessons to be learned from all this and stand with our previous recommendation that such inquiry ought to take place. This and other such instances of alleged professional misconduct should be addressed in the public domain. Not doing so would amount to a collective failure of our discipline. To that end, the meeting decided that the WG would continue its work on the terms of reference for an Ombudsperson Committee.

Rather than being the end of the line for a HAU inquiry, this becomes an expression of EASA's commitment to a fair and robust process for dealing with the HAU and other issues involving possible professional misconduct. It is envisaged that the Committee will be constituted via an open call to EASA members. Its aim will not be to apportion blame, conduct a 'moral enquiry' or carry out a 'truth and reconciliation' process but rather to reflect seriously on what shared lessons can be learned from these situations and how to avoid them in future.

### **3. WG recommendations**

1/ Create an ombudsperson committee. We are working on the terms of reference and aim to send them to the EC after the webinar consultation with the membership. The committee's remit would be to:

- a. Listen
- b. Provide support to complainants
- c. Offer a safe space where individuals can bring complaints and feel that they are being heard
- d. Draw on expert advice where appropriate
- e. Provide guidelines for best practice
- f. Be a repository for useful information relating to professional misconduct guideline issues
- g. Be a point of reference for good conduct: setting out professional standards that we hope researchers and institutions will use.

2/ Along with the creation of a formal ombudsperson committee, we suggest creating a 'living code of conduct' that would consist of:

- a. A searchable repository of resources. We've started compiling existing codes /ethical guidelines /concordats /Open Access manifesto, etc. We would need help from someone within EASA to complete this task.
  
- b. A repository of anonymised members' experiences: ethnographic, reflexive accounts that people can draw on (in collaboration with PrecAnthro). This would necessitate:
  - Sending out a call for experiences (either directly canvassing the membership or sharing a call via different outlets)
  - Compiling these
  - Making them accessible and searchable on the EASA website. Again, we would need help from someone who could help us analyse and compile the data.