

Recommendations of the speaker selection review undertaken by Dr Keith Duff and Dr Rebecca Bell and completed in February 2022.

Following their review of the Geologists' Association speaker selection process, Dr Keith Duff and Dr Rebecca Bell have recommended a move away from invited speakers being selected by just a single person or small group of people. The recommendations aim to alleviate the workload on these key people, and share the responsibility more widely. Involving more people in the process, inside and outside the GA, will result in speaker suggestions that are diverse and better reflect the contemporary geoscience community. Their recommendations would not result in a loss of opportunity for scientific debate, but do emphasise the need for the credibility and background of speakers to be considered, particularly those who are given a platform at GA events intended for a family, nonscientific audience, who may not be in a position themselves to assess the speakers scientific credentials. The greater diversity of speakers that would be generated by these recommendations would lead to even greater opportunity to share different ideas and enhance scientific discussion rather than censoring it. The recommendations are presented in five themes, as detailed below.

THEME 1: Widen the speaker selection network within the GA and beyond, and start the process early. One of the challenges in organising vFOG 2021 was that many invited speakers were unable to speak at the event as they were already committed to COP26 activities. Speaker selection ideas were sought from within the Steering Committee and those involved in GA monthly lecture selection, with limited involvement of Council or the Executive.

RECOMMENDATION 1.1 We recommend that for future GA events the organising teams seek speaker selection nominations from the GA Council at the very beginning of the event organisation process.

RECOMMENDATION 1.2 Like the governing bodies of many scientific organisations, the GA council membership is not as diverse as the modern geoscience community, and therefore speaker nominations may be narrow in terms of diversity. We recommend the GA consider the use of open-calls for invited speaker nominations, both from members of the GA and the wider geoscience community, particularly for high-profile events like FoG. These calls for nominations could be done through use of the GA magazine, website, twitter, contacts at universities and open geoscience email mailing lists, for example. The GA will need to consider whether nominations/open calls would require some kind of application form, and how these nominations/applications will be assessed.

RECOMMENDATION 1.3 The Curry Fund and the GA Student Symposium (GASS) both award medals or prizes for outstanding research and presentations. These prize winners should be considered as potential invited speakers at GA flagship events such as FoG, or even the monthly lectures.

RECOMMENDATION 1.4 Speaker selection should be considered at least 10 months before high-profile flagship GA events like FoG, to ensure the best line-up possible for the theme chosen. This long lead in time allows plenty of time for careful consideration of those to invite, whilst inviting speakers early gives them the opportunity to put plans in place so they can attend. This is particularly important for in-person events and for those speakers with caring or other responsibilities.

THEME 2: Risk assessment of the event. We recommend that before any speakers are formally invited to a GA event a risk assessment of the event and its' theme is conducted. In the event that a topic like Global Climate Change is selected the GA needs to decide if they are going to present speakers which reflect the current scientific consensus, or if they are happy to challenge this; if the latter, the potential consequences of this should be carefully considered.

RECOMMENDATION 2.1 Clearly identify the target audience for the event, and select speakers who would appeal to that audience and can deliver a scientifically sound talk pitched to them. This is particularly important for a family-orientated event like FoG where talks are aimed at people aged 10 years and upwards. Due diligence should be undertaken to ensure that the selected speaker can communicate credible science as there is less opportunity for a generalist audience to challenge them. We also recommend that early-career speakers are considered, who may appeal much more strongly to the younger intended audience of the FoG (see Recommendation 1.3).

RECOMMENDATION 2.2 The Geological Society of London have dedicated staff who focus on social media management, risk assessment, and EDI issues, and have considerable experience in these fields. We recommend that the GA President discusses best practice in these areas with the GSL Executive Secretary, to help the GA develop its own procedures.

RECOMMENDATION 2.3 Conduct a risk assessment of the topic selected. Are there any significant controversies? What is the current understanding of the topic? Reach out to wider networks if no one on the immediate organising committee is an expert in the field (see Recommendation 1.1). It might be helpful for the Executive/Council to draft protocols for committees which set out what's expected in terms of consultation and risk assessment.

RECOMMENDATION 2.4 Carry out due diligence to check the scientific credibility of speakers, and for speakers given a very high-profile platform (e.g. FoG) consider due diligence checks to ensure they support the core values of the GA. For high-profile speakers this should include social media posts, to be coordinated with the GA Outreach and Communication and EDI Committees.

THEME 3: Select speakers to reflect the diversity of today's geoscience community. To have a sound geological discussion and debate, encourage people to develop an interest in geosciences, and perhaps even to join the GA, we should provide a platform to the full diversity of people involved in modern geosciences, and avoid platforming only individuals from a narrow demographic.

RECOMMENDATION 3.1 Be conscious of the desirability of inviting a diverse range of speakers, not only in terms of science topic but also gender, race and career-stage. Involve the GA Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee in speaker selection discussions to generate diverse speaker lists and line-ups (see Recommendation 1.1). Open-calls for nominations will also help the GA to identify more diverse speakers. We suggest that speaker diversity is monitored year on year.

RECOMMENDATION 3.2 Consider signing up to the Science Council's Diversity and Inclusion Progression Framework, which includes a spreadsheet to help self-assessment. This programme is intended to help scientific organisations to address EDI issues.

THEME 4: Communication between event organisers and Executive Committee/GA Council.

Communication to the GA Council and Executive of suggested invited speaker lists, before speakers are actually invited, provides an opportunity to reflect on the diversity of speaker selection lists, and also to assess which speakers may be most appropriate for the event and target audience.

RECOMMENDATION 4.1 All GA event organising committees should report to the Executive and GA Council to communicate invited speaker selections, after first discussing the speaker selections with the GA EDI and Communications and Outreach Committees. GA Council members will have the opportunity to comment on speakers, but the ultimate approval of the speaker selections should lie with the GA President, formally delegated as appropriate.

THEME 5: Responding to issues related to speaker selection. If concerns about invited speakers are raised before or after GA events it is important to respond quickly and appropriately after consultation with the GA Executive and Council.

RECOMMENDATION 5.1 Anyone receiving concerns or complaints about GA invited speakers should make the GA Executive aware immediately. An ad hoc meeting should be considered to discuss the concerns and agree a way forward.

RECOMMENDATION 5.2 In the event of controversies or criticisms arising which relate to GA activity, it is very likely that the GA's social media representative will be on the "front line" and will be expected to provide a response on behalf of the GA. The Executive should support this person ahead of the event by providing them with clear statements about the GA's views on the matter so they can respond accordingly.

We thank the GA Council, Executive, vFoG Steering Committee and administrative staff for their assistance in providing the paperwork and information needed to carry out this review. We are also conscious that most of the work of the GA is done by volunteers, and we are pleased to acknowledge their selfless efforts. We believe these Recommendations provide the GA with the basis for developing improved speaker selection procedures for all their future events, and suggest that using our recommendations to draft a speaker selection workflow could be a good way forward.