

BAAT Chair's Update – May to September 2022

As we begin a new year of work for BAAT Council, I thought that I would begin by reflecting back over the past two and a half years. When I stood as Chair of BAAT in 2020, one of my main aims was to increase engagement with members and to work towards using more consultation, collaboration and co-design in our work on Council. I promised to be more inclusive in our work, welcoming difference and using language sensitively, widening access to the profession, supporting trainees on their formative journey, and enabling those within the field to make their voices heard by sharing some of the creative, innovative practice across the UK. And I pledged in my role to look ahead, reflect and plan our work together, so that we take a structured and pragmatic approach as a small profession – choosing how we focus our energy and building partnerships to make a real impact for members and service users.

I am so pleased with the progress that we have been able to make as a community over this time, guided by our members' experience and drawing on the outstanding professional skills of our CEO, Gary Fereday, and BAAT staff team.

We really have been able to engage more with members. My monthly drop-in meetings continue and our BAAT surveys (on diversity, equality and inclusion, an all-member survey about BAAT our services and resources, and our strategic plan) have enabled us to gather feedback directly from members and in a way that meant they could use their own words and metaphors to share their views and experiences. We have used this feedback to develop new policy, adapt our ways of working, and to rebrand and to develop our new BAAT website - which just launched this month! We have also developed a strategic plan, which should support us to work thoughtfully, collaboratively and effectively together over the coming year. And we have opened up our annual conference to enable members to submit proposals for presentations about their work, so that we can draw on and showcase the richness of practice across the UK.

We still have steps to take - we need to adopt our Five-Year Strategy, implement the remaining tasks on our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, and then start to develop our communications and public affairs work. I believe that we will need to work even more collaboratively as a profession in the months and years ahead, in a truly inclusive manner, so that we can harness our members' passion, energy, skills and experience.

The professional landscape in which we work is rich and varied and building relationships across this space is vital. We maintain links with our regulator, with the music and drama therapy professional bodies, and attend network meetings for the allied health professions, psychological professions and arts in health. Alongside this, we have links with other art therapy professional bodies across the world, most closely with American, Canada and Australia, New Zealand and the Asia/Pacific region. This month I was invited by New York University to attend an event at the Wellcome Collection that drew together people from arts and health, exploring the transformative power of the arts on the human condition. This is just one example of the kind of exciting, inter-professional networks that are growing to support international dialogue, partnerships and research.

Since our last meeting, I have liaised regularly with our CEO and Caryl Sibbett, Vice Chair of BAAT. We worked on the website, including drafting some of the text for the webpages. We also helped to develop a new role, Professional Advisor, to support our members and I later took part in the recruitment for this role. Gary and I met representative from one of the trainings, in order to support them to respond to proposed changes at their HEI. I have attended IJAT Board meetings, which highlighted the amazing work being done by our editorial team. For our BAAT supervision diploma I took part in two days of Vivas, serving as the internal examiner for eight trainees. I also attended the HCPC meeting for Professional Bodies and some of the HEE Education and Training network meetings. Since our AGM, I have been speaking with new Council members to explore their particular skills and interests, as we start to shape our work programme for the coming year.

We face many challenges, but there are also opportunities. I believe that we need to work together and stand together as an art therapy community. We need to be able to speak out with a clear voice in national debates and to continue to use our shared endeavors to show what it is about our work that provides such a unique resource for service users, staff, organisations and for our communities.

It is exciting to be joined on this next stage of the journey by our newly elected Council members – a very warm welcome to you. And thank you again to those who return to offer service for another year. Being a part of BAAT Council affords each of us an opportunity to give back to our community, to get to know more about our profession, and to make a real difference to the lives of art therapists and service users in each and every part of our four nations.