

IAU Executive Committee Working group for Professional-Amateur Relations in Astronomy

Annual report for 2021

The IAU working group for professional-amateur relations in astronomy (for short, the pro-am WG) was formed in April 2021 as a WG under the Executive Committee. The IAU Strategic Plan 2020-30 stated that connecting professional and amateur astronomers was one of its goals for the decade (see Strategic Plan, Goal 4). This is also an integral mission of the IAU Office for Astronomy Outreach.

For the first century of its existence, the IAU has had very few formal contacts with the much larger body of amateurs around the world. This changed in 2019 with a successful one-day workshop for amateurs in Brussels, followed by the formation of the new Working Group in April 2021 for professional-amateur relations in astronomy.

At the present time, no-one has a clear idea of how many amateurs there are in the world, but it is likely to be of the order of a million individuals, some two orders of magnitude greater than the number of active professionals in the IAU. The new pro-am WG wants to reach out to the amateur community, with the aim of promoting research collaborations with some of the most active amateurs. Further workshops are also envisaged, following on from Brussels 2019, and the IAU program 'Meet the Astronomer', in which professionals give talks to amateur societies, will be further promoted.

An initial Organizing Committee (OC) for the new WG was established as follows: John Hearnshaw (New Zealand, co-chair), Lina Canas (Japan and Portugal), Beatriz Garcia (Argentina), Stella Kafka (USA), Yuko Kakazu (USA and Japan, secretary), Moein Mosleh (Iran), Mirjana Povic (Ethiopia), Kazuhiro Sekiguchi (Japan), Boonrucksar Soonthornthum (Thailand), Aniket Sule (India, co-chair), Timothy Spuck (USA), Ilya Usoskin (Finland, EC liaison), Antonia Varela (Spain). At the end of 2021, Povic and Kafka both resigned from the WG. They were replaced by Mayra Lebron (Puerto Rico) and Clementina Sasso (Italy).

As a first step, the pro-am WG conducted a survey of amateur astronomers to find out what they want from the IAU and whether this includes closer research collaborations and workshops. The survey was carried out between December 2021 and February 2022. The survey had several thousand responses and the results will be reported in the 2022 Pro-Am WG annual report.

A database of many of the principal amateur astronomical societies, associations and groups around the world has been established, and the survey asked these societies to advertise the survey to their members. The list continues to be updated. Professional astronomers with an interest in pro-am relations were also encouraged to complete the survey. One result of the survey is also to establish a WG membership at large from IAU members who wish to be members of the WG and stay informed of our activities.

John Hearnshaw 24 March 2022