

# President's Perspective

The last fourteen months have forced us to change the way we run professional meetings across the UK and internationally. Now that the Covid-19 regulations over meeting face-to-face are beginning to ease, it is an opportunity for us to rethink our future meetings programme, and how to make our meetings work best for you, our members. In this President's Perspective, I am reflecting on what we have learnt and setting out options for how we might go forward. I would value your input on the direction you would like us to take.

## **BHS webinar programme**

Firstly, I would like to thank the many people who have helped in delivering such a successful BHS Webinar programme (*Circulation* 146 and 148). We have delivered eight enthralling webinars, with attendance growing and regularly reaching over 200 participants and at times risking going over our Zoom licence limit of 500 people. Especial thanks go to BHS Honorary Secretary Mike Cranston, and his successor Lucy Barker, for developing the webinar programme, and to our UK committee members for supporting with webinar ideas and logistics, particularly Michael Pollock for his social media activity in 2021. Our voluntary speakers deserve equal thanks, as do so many of you, for engaging with this Society activity. I would also like us to appreciate our regional groups, who have also delivered great webinars to a wide audience. All these people given their time voluntarily in a period when home working has added to our professional workloads. I am

also very grateful to ICE Secretary Moira Doherty and the ICE Events Team for their excellent help with meeting organisation and promotion.

From the outset, the BHS webinar programme had three core objectives:

- Keeping BHS members in touch with the ongoing activities and ideas of UK hydrologists while we are restricted in our travel and in-person meetings,
- Providing an inclusive activity, particularly for those with greater personal responsibilities or financial constraints, but for the benefit of all, and
- Promoting the BHS, your activities and the discipline of Hydrology more widely – hence the free access to the live webinars.

## **Emerging opportunities from the online webinar programme and the future**

While the BHS webinar programme developed as a response to restrictions, it has highlighted the benefits of meeting virtually. These include:

- Avoiding the travel and overnight accommodation, saving time and money;
- Reducing impact on work and home commitments: even when meetings are short and nearby, meeting virtually has advantages because it still saves travel time and permits other activities to take place simultaneously – such as keeping track of emails or maintaining caring

- responsibilities at home;
- Offering greater flexibility for participants, for instance virtual meetings are often recorded so can be viewed later via for example the BHS YouTube channel;
  - Reducing our carbon footprint. There is an increasing awareness in the academic and practitioner communities of the carbon footprint of our travel to meetings. For example, over 25,000 people attended the 2019 Fall Meeting of the American Geophysical Union in San Francisco – producing the equivalent of 80,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide from participant travel alone (*Nature*, 15 July 2020). With commitments to carbon neutrality, travel to meetings will be increasingly scrutinised.

Given these benefits of meeting virtually, I am keen that we retain a BHS webinar programme (in a form manageable for our committee volunteers) and consider what digital elements we incorporate within future in-person meetings, including our in-person Symposia

in 2022. This does mean the Society continuing to retain the £1,120 per year 500-participant Zoom licence (and the option to raise numbers for individual webinars to above this when registration numbers begin to approach the limit).

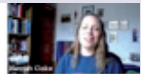
**Webinar presentations from overseas speakers?** To date, our programme has focused on speakers from the UK hydrological community. Given that there are no travel costs associated with speakers in the webinar programme, I would like to know if you would be interested to hear presentations from hydrologists based overseas. Perhaps you also have suggestions for speakers and topics?

**Joint webinar events with learned hydrological societies overseas?**

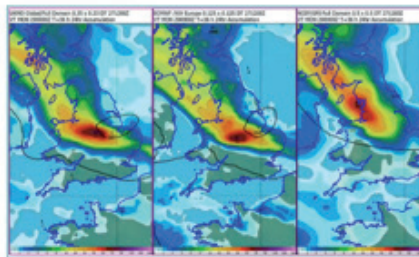
Would you also like to hear from hydrological societies from around the globe? Joint webinars could be a mechanism to begin such initiatives without incurring significant cost to the Society.

I would welcome your thoughts on these two questions via [president-bhs@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:president-bhs@lancaster.ac.uk).

## Methods and scientific understanding



Hannah Cloke



I will share this feedback with the BHS Honorary Secretary and in the next issue of *Circulation*.

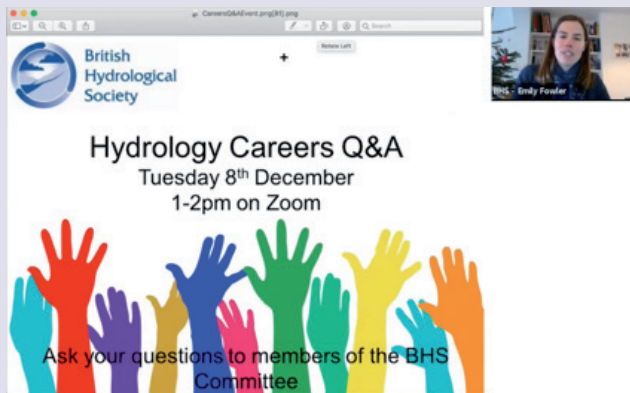
We are aware that by opening our webinars beyond the BHS membership, we may not have given sufficient time for individual BHS members to interact with speakers after presentations. We also know that potential 'conversations' at the end of typical webinars are very public and impartial compared with a face-to-face chat over a coffee. For these reasons, we are planning some online meetings just for BHS members and designing them to enable greater interaction between speakers and BHS participants, as well as informal conversations between BHS members. Our first one-day online event in 2021 – 'Innovation in UK hydrology' on 7 September

agreed to organise an interactive online event on 8 September 2021, in advance of the in-person event in spring 2022.

### Value of face-to-face activities

While we see the value of increased digital communications, we are increasingly aware of their limitations. Indeed, the absence of face-to-face meetings has forced us to think more deeply about what we miss about in-person meetings and how this absence affects advances in hydrological science and practice, day-to-day professional activities, and us personally. I should like to highlight a range of issues:

- Watching an online presentation, where only a tiny live image of the presenter is visible, makes it very difficult to read facial expressions and body language which are so important for the connection between speaker and audience. For the audience, this is a key element of the credibility of the



– will be for members only to help facilitate your two-way participation; others would be welcome to join the Society to participate.

Our early career members are perhaps the most severely impacted by the constraints imposed by the limited nature of two-way discussions in typical online-only meetings: so the organisers of the Peter Wolf Symposium have kindly

presentation (and presenter) and of their learning experience. For the speaker, who is typically unable to see the audience, this means they cannot gain immediate audience feedback, and so modify the presentation accordingly.

- Where we are in a shared venue with our attention solely focused on the speaker we are

'forced' to listen' and so give our full attention to what the speaker has to say. We are giving them more respect and making us better listeners. This is somewhat different to sitting at home half-concentrating on a live webinar as we check our emails!

- While many of us have engaged with live discussions involving online whiteboards, various studies demonstrate that in-person meetings are more effective at 'mind mapping' ideas or in-depth technical discussions (e.g., [www.greatbusinessschools.org/networking](http://www.greatbusinessschools.org/networking)).
- Perhaps the greatest problem with online events is the loss of the impromptu interactions that come with in-person meetings. These *ad hoc* chats are often how we build our professional friendships and broaden our networks. Making these connections is particularly important for early career hydrologists who have less developed networks, but also for our retired members who may have fewer professional interactions outside of a work environment.

- Having a two-way conversation with a 'whole person', including facial expressions, body language etc., rather than with a digital image of an individual, also facilitates greater awareness and respect of differing ideas and perspectives. Consequently, the ability to chat with other hydrologists over a coffee or a poster is very important for social inclusion.
- A prolonged absence from in-person professional meetings and increased remote working can affect our wellbeing. It is likely to degrade our social and communication skills; and has also worsened the work-life balance for some people.
- Field meetings, while being intrinsically safer for Covid-19 transmission (due to considerably better ventilation) have been restricted due to limits on group size and travel. Some worthy attempts at 'virtual field trips' have been made over the past months, but the immersive experience from being in the 'real world' engaging all of your senses, combined with

the informal atmosphere of a field visit, is not readily replaced with an online event. The informal atmosphere of such trips breaks down the barriers between those from different backgrounds or levels of experience.



Exploring field installations and their local context also develops an appreciation of field measurements not easily replicated by other means.

### **Developing in-person meetings: future options for BHS members**

Given this wide range of specific benefits from in-person meetings, it is important that we try to deliver some of these for the BHS membership.

We have two in-person meetings already in the calendar for 2022 – the Peter Wolf Symposium at the University of Strathclyde in spring, and BHS2022 at Lancaster University in the autumn (14th National Symposium 6-8 Sep 2022). Both events will have fieldwork and/or field-visit options.

I am keen to know your thoughts on options for other in-person meetings in 2022 and if you have particular thoughts for the type of in-person meeting you would like to see. Perhaps you would like a field-visit to a particular installation or research site in the UK, and could offer suggestions? Maybe you would value a more traditional meeting with presentations, to be held at a particular academic institution, research organisation, consultancy or regulator building, so that an informal 'look-see visit'

could be incorporated into the day's activities? Perhaps you are missing our meetings at the prestigious surroundings of One Great George Street in London (Institution of Civil Engineers), and would welcome a prompt return to this venue? Or would you like us to host our UK-wide meetings in different parts of the UK? As with your ideas for possible internationalisation of future webinars, I welcome you sending comments and suggestions via [president-bhs@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:president-bhs@lancaster.ac.uk) on these topics. Again, I will share your thoughts with our Honorary Secretary and in the next issue of Circulation.

### **Closing remarks**

I have not really left space for a roundup of hydrological news from the past three months – I will endeavour to highlight these important developments in the next issue. Given the very challenging conditions currently in India, my thoughts are particularly with fellow hydrological researchers and practitioners in India who are trying to maintain their professional activities whilst looking after the welfare of their families.

**Nick Chappell**  
**BHS President**  
*May 2021*

### **Dates for your diary:**

- The Peter Wolf Virtual Event (half-day, as part of the virtual BHS National Symposium): **8 September 2021**
- The Peter Wolf Symposium at the University of Strathclyde:  
**22–23 March 2022**