



Royal
Astronomical
Society

Fellow Engagement Report 2023

How can the
RAS best serve
your needs?

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Introduction

The RAS strategy consultation survey was carried out to get Fellows' feedback on their engagement towards Fellowship in line with the RAS's top-level overarching strategic aims, general questions about the Society, and to see if Fellows agree and support the three strategic aims as below:

- Support early career scientists, the future of our sciences.
- Increase Fellow's engagement and improve Fellow satisfaction.
- Ensure the RAS nurtures, supports and promotes diversity and inclusivity within its core community and wider academia, including support roles.

This report will provide an overview of the responses received from the survey.

Key Findings

Survey methodology

The RAS wanted to reach out to the scientific community to participate in this survey, and created a RAS Fellowship Strategy Working Group. The survey initially went to Fellows prior to NAM. However, the working group decided the best time to reissue and conduct a consultation survey would be at the NAM in Cardiff.

Acknowledgement is given to Jane McArthur, who was responsible for designing and gathering information and results from the survey.

The survey was accessible via a QR code at NAM and on social media at X (formerly known as Twitter). The survey was sent to a total of 1874 attendees at NAM and 350 responses were received from the survey. 346 completed the survey via the QR code and 4 via X. From the

350 responses received. The results show that 94.9% are Fellows (Q5), 30% of these are in Astronomy and 8% are in geophysics and solar system science. 5.1% were not a RAS Fellow.

There were 60 questions in total.

The survey was divided into the following categories:

- RAS Strategy
- Our Fellowship
- Potential future RAS Fellows
- Non-Students (workers and retired)
- Students
- ECR & Students
- Collaborations and Partnerships
- Demographics

Demographics

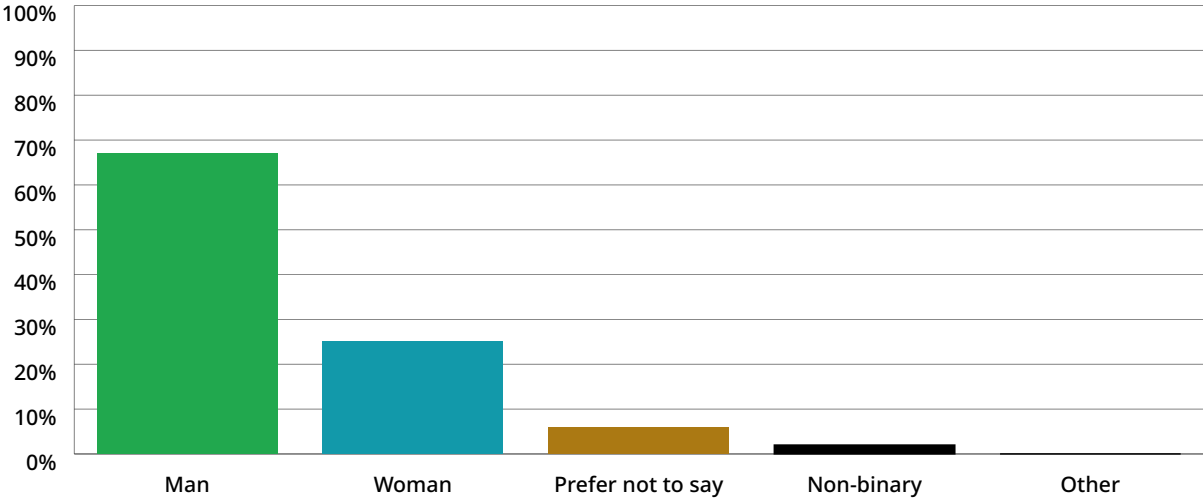
Age

Age	Percentage	Number
65+	30.00%	84
55-64	21.43%	60
25-34	14.64%	41
45-54	14.29%	40
35-44	13.93%	39
Prefer not to say	3.57%	10
18-24	2.14%	6

(Q58, 280/350 respondents – 80%)

Almost one-third of respondents are above 65.

Gender



(Q59, 278/350 respondents – 79%)

Two-thirds of respondents are male.

Key trends

RAS Strategy

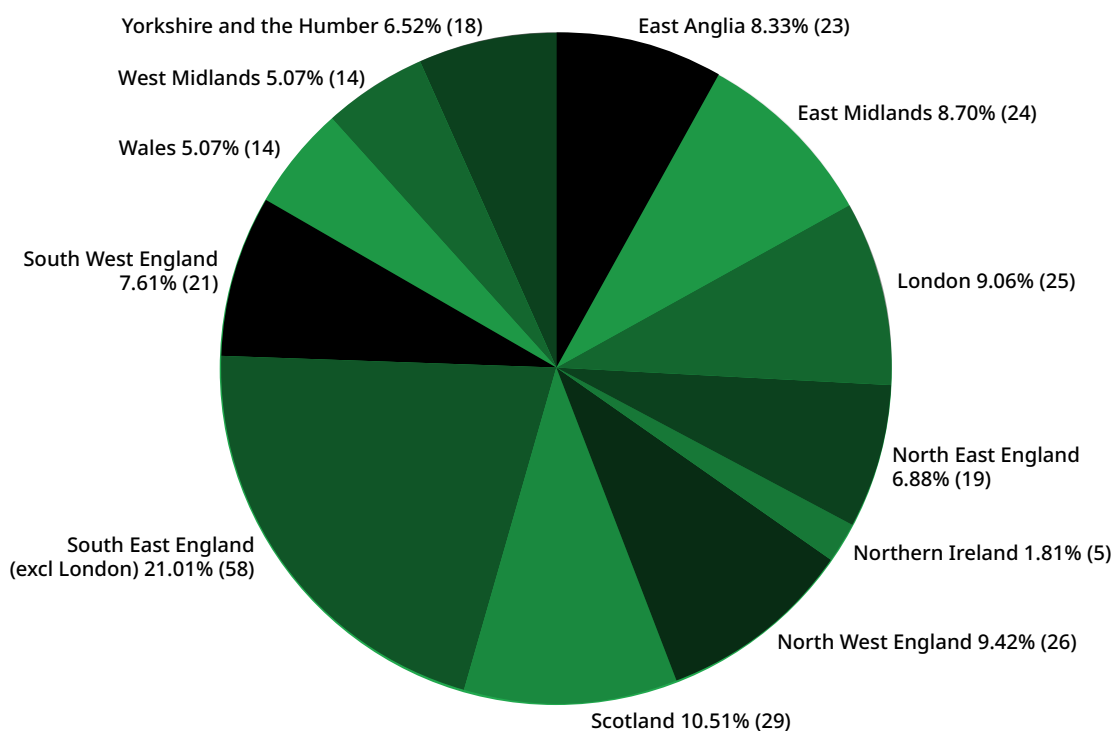
96% agreed with the three top RAS strategic aims (Q1). It is encouraging to know that our Fellowship recognise and support the work that the RAS does and is aligned with our strategic aims.

It was noted from Fellowship responses that our support seemed predominantly to cover academics and professionals and that we should do more to include “bringing the work of the RAS to the wider community” especially

those in the amateur and non-professional community, as well as becoming more visible across the regions in the UK, and inclusive to those retired Fellows of the community.

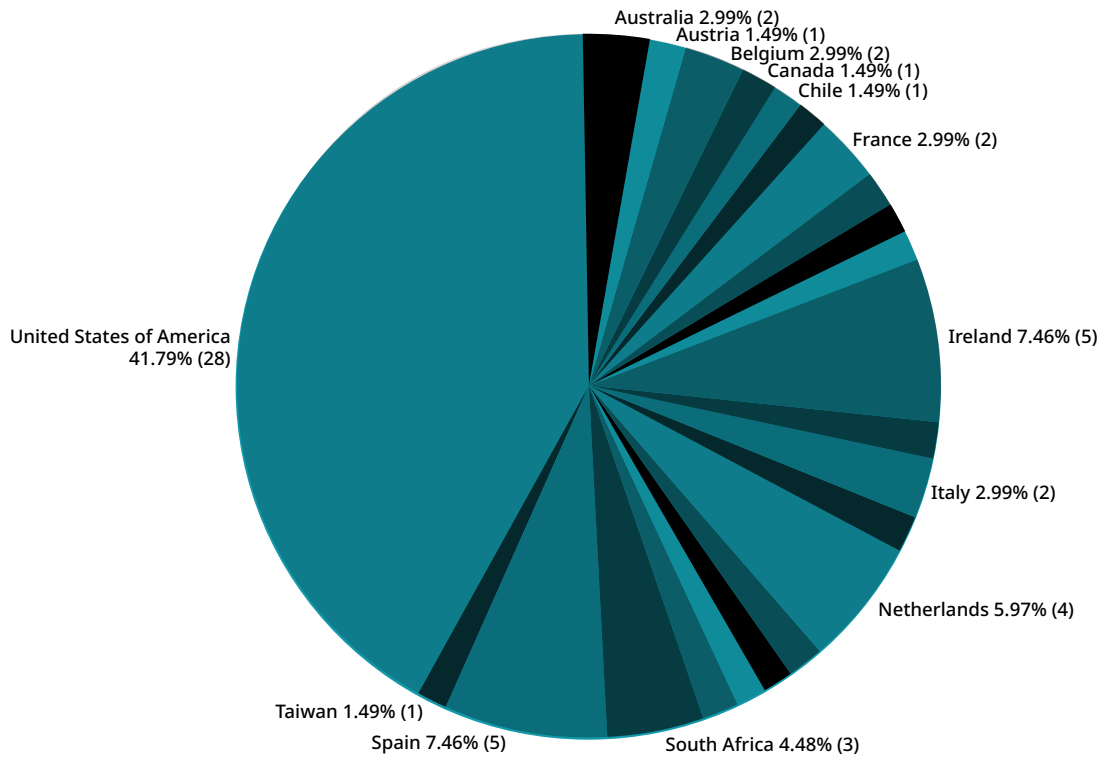
Recurring themes in responses included less London-centricity, more advocacy for the scientific community, and support throughout the Fellowship journey from early careers to retirement.

Our Fellowship



Q3 “If you live in the UK, please specify which region”

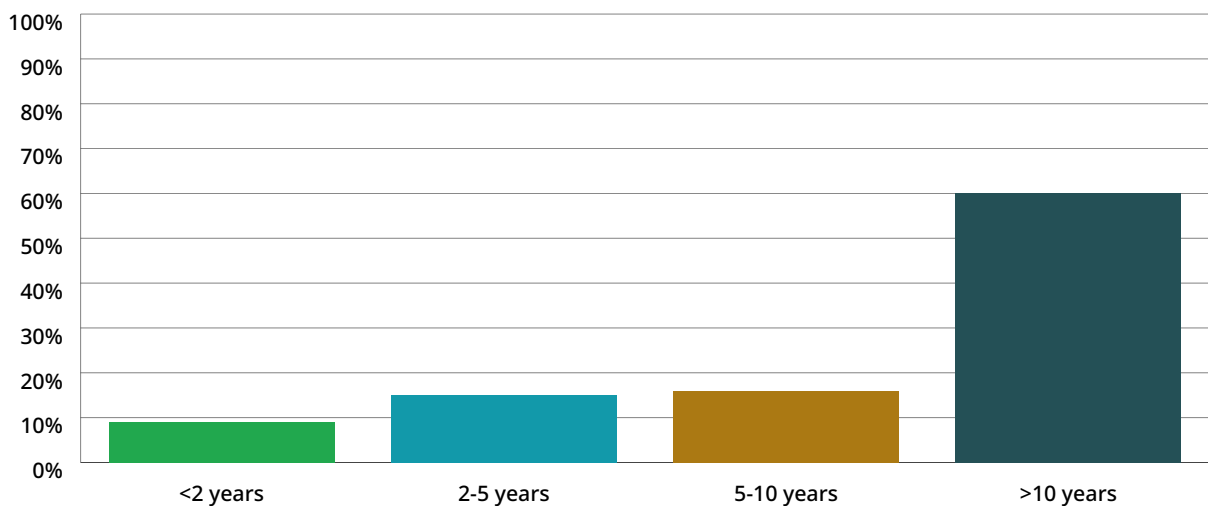
276 respondents out of 350 provided us with where they reside in the UK. The highest concentration of Fellows resides in South East England (excluding London) with 21%, including London 30%. The next highest proportion of Fellows in the UK is Scotland accounting for 10.5%.



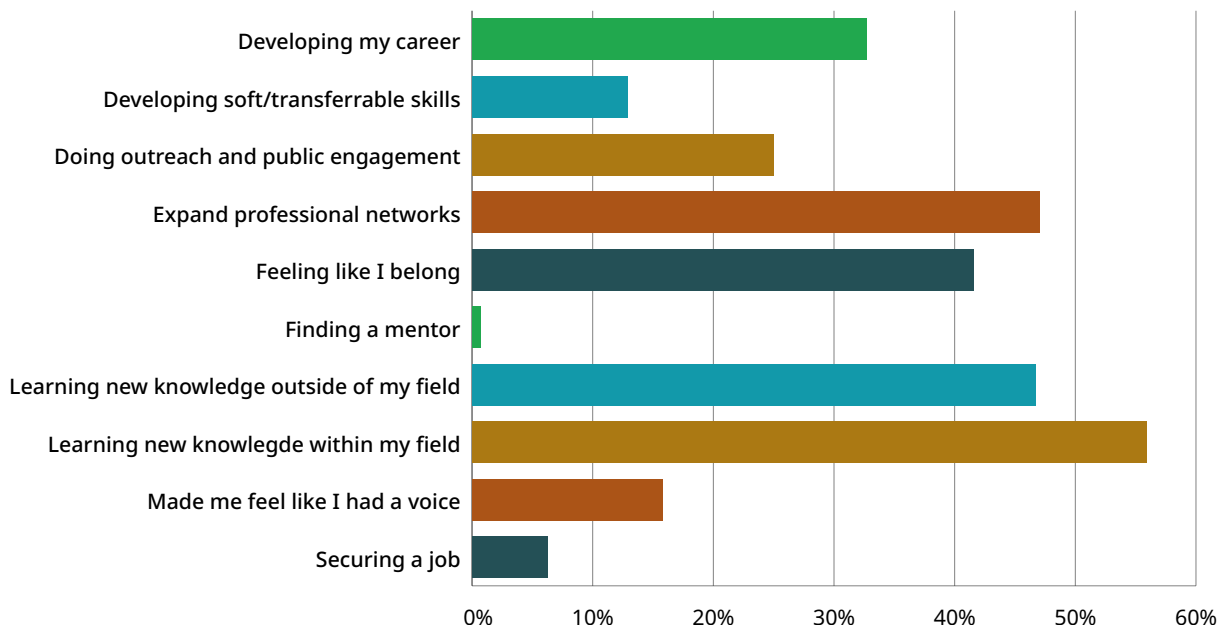
Q3 "If you live outside the UK, in which country do you live?"

Outside of the UK, the highest proportion of Fellows by far was from the USA at 41.7%. Ireland and Spain both represented 7.4%. Chile (1.4%) and South Africa (4.4%), who both have observatories, had some representation.

The majority of the respondents (60%) have been a Fellow of the RAS for more than 10 years.



The RAS has had an impact on respondents (Q7). 55.8% felt that they learnt new knowledge within their field, with 47% felt that the RAS enabled them to expand their professional networks. Where the RAS could have had a greater impact on helping respondents include securing a job (6.2%), finding a mentor (0.7%), and developing soft/transferrable skills (12.8%).



Some comments from the respondents:

“Opportunity to network at RAS meetings and NAM.”

“Being recognised for my belonging to a professional institution (RAS).”

“Since joining RAS I have genuinely felt like I am a part of the UK professional astronomy community and have expanded my networks through the specialist meetings.”

RAS services are valued by Fellowship. The survey showed that 91.3% out of 296 who responded found the scientific meetings and NAM were most important (Q10) followed by the A&G magazine (61.7%) then small grants (42.9%). Clearly there is work to do in some of the services that the RAS provide. 85.6% found the Early Career Network events least important, followed closely by Medals and awards at 81.3%.

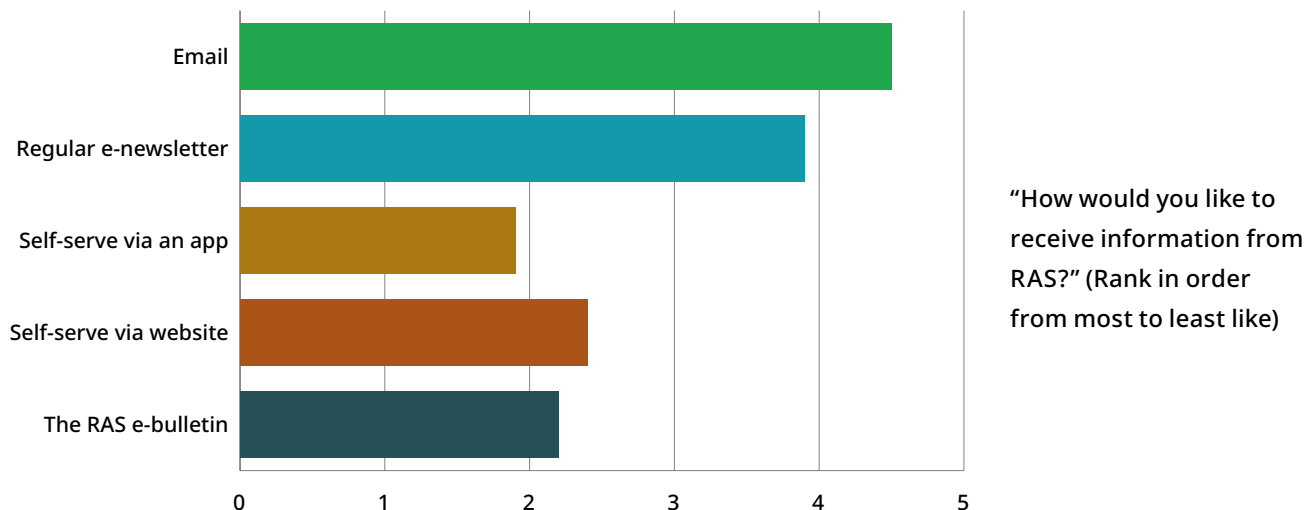
The main activity that our Fellows participated in was voting in the RAS elections (79.7%). 45.1% published in our RAS journals with 31.5% attending the AGM online. Booking a room at Burlington House was the least active activity at 7.5%. The range of services and opportunities offered was rated on average 7/10, from a total of 273 respondents.

Respondents commented that the RAS could offer weekend events, networking events for young Fellows and non-academics, regular and regional events outside of London, improvement in Fellow’s outreach, engagement support, university on-campus presence, and online networking (including an RAS email address), professional development, merchandising, careers guidance, access to Burlington House on Mondays, and lobbying.

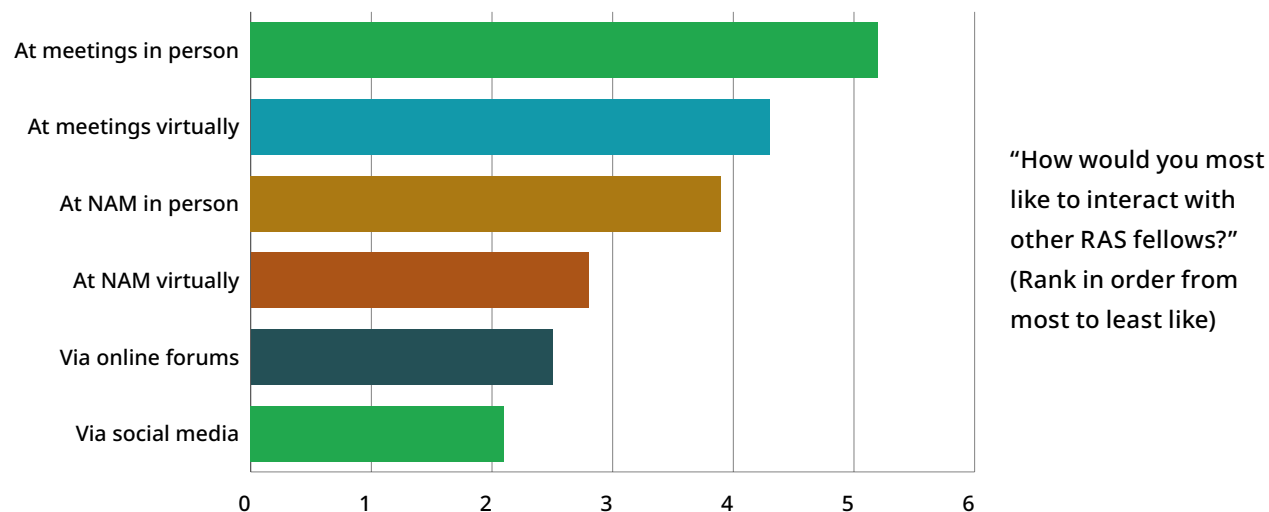
In terms of value (Q19) respondents rated this 7/10 based on 274 responses, and 7/10 respondents based on 276 responses would recommend RAS Fellowship to others (Q20).

Communication

Respondents' preference was to receive information (Q15) from the RAS by email, followed by a regular newsletter. Their least preference was via an app.



42.5% preferred to receive email communications (Q16) whenever the RAS had something to communicate. In terms of frequency respondents preferred to receive information monthly (30.9%), instead of Quarterly (6.8%), Fortnightly (10.5%), and Weekly (9.1%).



The chart above (Q17) showed that respondents most wanted to interact with other RAS Fellows at meeting in-person; via social media was the least popular form of interaction.

Fellows access a variety of communication platforms and 147 respondents (52%) from a total of 283 responses prefer always accessing communications (Q33) from the RAS by email rather than by Facebook (2%), RAS LinkedIn (1.5%), X formerly known as Twitter (5.5%), RAS jobs list (6%) and the RAS point of contact (14.2%).

Respondents felt that online access to eBooks (35.6%), digitisation and improved accessibility of library and archives (34.6%), and online access to other (non-RAS) journals (31.1%) would be very useful enhancements to RAS communications and resources (Q34). An RAS phone app (with news, events, etc) was seen as not a priority with only 5.4% finding this to be a useful enhancement.

RAS Fellowship going forward

71.5% of respondents felt they would still be Fellows of the RAS in five years' time (Q9, 298/350 respondents – 85%).

“No longer in academia or astronomy-related work (difficult situation). But I like to support RAS do what it does. It can be tough to balance the two.”

It is important to reflect on the comments; we will take into account all comments and not just these:

7/10 felt that their RAS Fellowship is a good value (Q19, 274/350 respondents).

“It depends on what is offered. I mainly join to get discounts on NAM fees and apply for funding.”

It’s important to understand what people are looking for when they join a Fellowship organisation (Q28). Only 3% of respondents responded to this question, which is very low, with respondents allowed to ‘skip’ this question. However, the general consensus was opportunities for career growth and support, networking, and representation.

“RAS is very London-centred.”

“I will be a Fellow for as long as the society continues promoting inclusive, progressive values for the community.”

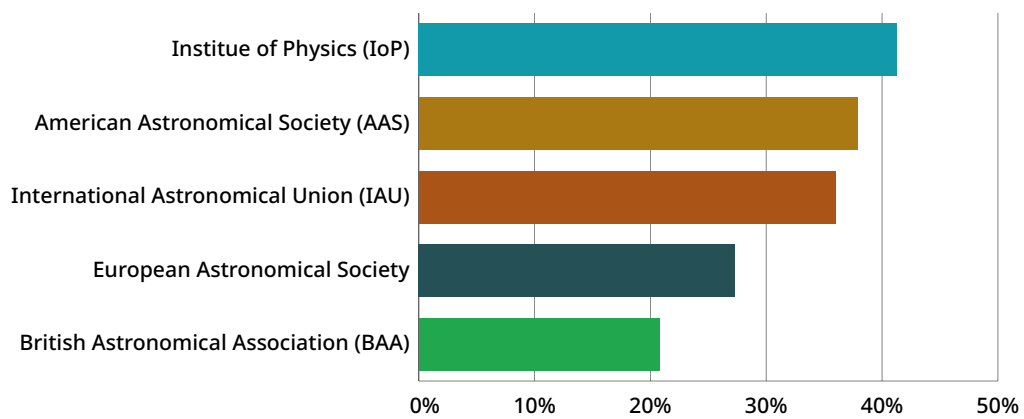
Possible enhancements to RAS Fellowship (Q35) were relatively split across the board from the 278 responses.

	1 (not useful)	2	3	4	5 (very useful)	Total	Weighted Average
Enable more opportunities to volunteer in education and outreach opportunities	4.68% 13	11.87% 33	30.22% 84	29.86% 83	23.28% 65	278	3.55
Improve engagement with astronomers & geophysicists who leave academia	6.16% 17	8.70% 24	24.64% 68	31.16% 86	29.35% 81	276	3.69
Improve local opportunities to network	5.45% 15	9.09% 25	28.00% 77	32.36% 89	25.09% 69	275	3.63
Mentoring scheme for the Early Career Network	6.93% 19	8.76% 24	33.21% 91	30.29% 83	20.80% 57	274	3.49
Specific financial support for Early Career Researchers to attend RAS meetings	7.64% 21	8.36% 23	19.27% 53	33.45% 92	31.27% 86	275	3.72
Encourage train travel, discourage flights, on sustainability grounds	16.73% 46	11.27% 31	21.82% 60	27.64% 76	22.55% 62	275	3.28

Respondents felt that in order for the RAS to stay relevant as a Fellowship organisation in the next ten years (Q56, 110/350 respondents – 31%) should focus on:

- Supporting early careers
- Career development
- Visibility and engagement
- Improve our online offerings in publication, Fellowship, events, and outreach
- Be UK-wide

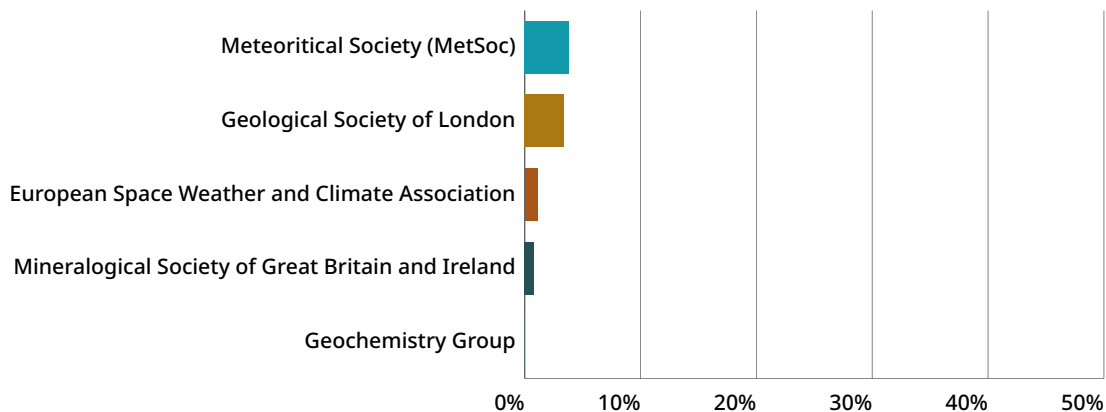
RAS v other organisations



Q3 “Which of these organisations do you find most valuable?”

41% of respondents (Q53, 264/350) found that the IOP was the most valuable organisation, with the American Astronomical Society ranked second at 38%.

The bottom five least valuable organisations include:



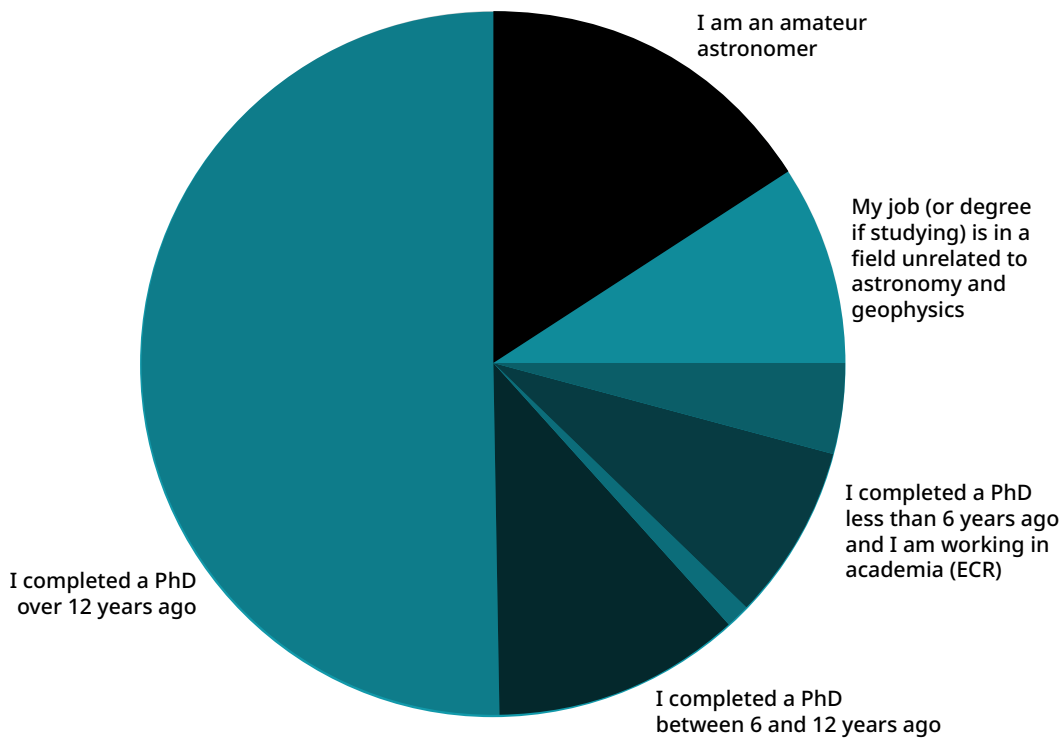
279 out of 350 (79.7%) felt that the three most important factors (Q54) in a scientific Fellowship organisation were:

- Credibility and reputation (57.7%)
- Events and networking (53.7%)
- Sense of community (37.2%), Subject Relevance (37.2%), and Publications (36.9%)

Non-students (workers and retired)

From 251 responses, 22.3% were retired (Q39). The respondents that were in employment (Q40) were largely employed at university (53.3%), followed by 13.3% in industry.

If we analyse the current circumstances of these respondents (Q44, 255 responses), 50% completed a PhD over 12 years ago.



Students

Responses were fewer in number to these questions due to the make-up of the respondents. However, from 32 responses 69% were currently studying for their PhD (Q45). 75% of these respondents (Q46) were studying Physics (including Astrophysics), with 13% studying Planetary Science. 61% (Q47) were hoping to pursue a career in academia.

Only 29% of students are a Fellow of the RAS Early Career Network (Q49, 51 respondents).

Conclusion

The RAS Fellow engagement survey has provided valuable insights into the engagement and satisfaction of its Fellows regarding the organisation's strategic aims. With an encouraging 96% of respondents supporting the three key strategic aims—supporting early career scientists, increasing Fellow engagement and satisfaction, and promoting diversity and inclusivity—the survey indicates a strong alignment between the RAS's goals and its Fellows values.

However, the feedback also highlights areas for improvement, particularly in expanding outreach beyond academia, enhancing support

for early career professionals, and increasing visibility across the UK. The demographic data reveals a significant portion of the Fellowship is older, predominantly male, and concentrated in specific regions, suggesting a need for broader representation and engagement strategies. While many Fellows have found value in RAS services, there is a clear call for more diverse offerings, particularly for younger Fellows and those outside of London. The survey results indicate that while Fellows appreciate the existing services, there is room for growth in areas such as networking opportunities, career development, and improved communication methods.

Recommendations

As part of the RAS Strategy, Fellowship is a core component, and we intend to deliver a series of activities to address the results of the survey. Out of the Strategy, we have developed a detailed delivery plan aimed at delivering activities over the next five years.

Enhance Outreach and Inclusivity

We will look to develop initiatives aimed at engaging amateur astronomers and non-professionals, as well as retired Fellows. This could include regional events and partnerships with local organisations to foster a sense of community beyond the academic sphere. This includes developing partnerships to deliver high-impact Education and Outreach programmes, establish the RAS as an authoritative voice for Education and Outreach information, and fully engaging and supporting our Fellows in Education and Outreach programmes

Support Early Career Scientists

The Early Careers Network needs revival and we should explore mid-career support, especially as this is a crucial stage for many researchers. We will create targeted programmes and resources for early career researchers, including mentorship opportunities, career development workshops, and networking events specifically designed for this demographic. We will aim to meet the needs of our Fellows.

Diversify Communication Channels

Given the preference for email communication, we have already launched an e-newsletter and will enhance our online resources, such as eBooks and access to journals. Improving the website's user experience could facilitate better access to information.

Expand Event Offerings

We will review and assess the practicality of more weekend and regional events to accommodate Fellows who may find it challenging to attend weekday meetings, particularly those outside of London. This could also include virtual events to increase accessibility.

Focus on Fellow Value

We will regularly assess and adapt the services offered to ensure they meet the evolving needs of Fellows. This includes soliciting ongoing feedback and being responsive to suggestions for new initiatives or improvements.

Promote Diversity and Representation

We will actively work towards increasing diversity and inclusivity within the Fellowship. This could involve outreach to underrepresented groups and

creating programmes that specifically address their needs and interests. We will ensure that the RAS nurtures, supports and promotes diversity and inclusivity within its core community and wider academia, including support roles.

The RAS will work on meeting the needs of our Fellows over the next five years. In addition, we will look to survey the full Fellowship to gain a true reflection of our Fellows' thoughts and wants.

We have taken on board your views and have incorporated these within our strategy. More information about how the RAS will meet your Fellowship needs for the next five years as a Fellow can be found in our RAS strategy 2024-29 paper by visiting the RAS's website: tinyurl.com/dnx3f9xu.

If you wish to discuss the results of the survey, please contact Patricia Burrell, Membership Officer, at membership@ras.ac.uk.



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