



European Association of Geochemistry



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Q & A WITH EAG PRESIDENT DEREK VANCE

Derek Vance started his two-year term as President of the European Association of Geochemistry in January 2021. As his term now comes to end, we asked him to reflect on the experience and to offer some thoughts for the future.

Was your experience as EAG President what you expected it to be?

Not entirely... It has been a strange time in the world, particularly with Covid during my presidency. One of the highlights of being president of EAG is hosting the Goldschmidt conference—I think this is the most important thing that EAG and GS do. Acting as co-chair, with Helen Williams, for the Barcelona conference in 2019 was a rewarding experience. But, of course, in 2021 we had to go online. Everyone at EAG, including people in the office, the co-chairs, science committee members, theme chairs, conveners, and participants turned this, I think, into an amazing conference. But it was also great to get back to an in-person meeting in 2022, and I am really looking forward to Lyon next year!

What did you find to be the biggest challenge(s) during your term?

Well, see above I guess... It has also been a time when there have been conflicting demands on EAG. We have been trying for some time to make geochemistry more diverse, inclusive, and equitable. The DEI committees of EAG and GS, which formed just before I became president, have been doing an excellent job—but there is also so much more to do. One is sometimes frustrated by the limitations of what one can do, of what relatively small societies like EAG can do. For example, it seems obvious to me that it is the inequality, globally, of access to education that holds diversity back in academia in general, geochemistry and Earth science generally included. This is a big problem to address, though.

What did you enjoy most in the role, and what were your favourite moments?

Being part of successful Goldschmidt conferences. Being president is also a fantastic way of meeting talented and interesting new people. You get opportunities to build new relationships. The past year, in particular, has seen moments of real pleasure in coming back together after the pandemic.

Do you think there have been any silver-linings to the Covid-19 pandemic for geochemists?

For sure all scientists have learnt—have had to learn something—about new ways of interacting with others. We are all experts now in the technology required to successfully manage remote relationships. There are some silver linings as a result. A hybrid Goldschmidt conference IS more accessible. EAG and GS are now providing free registration to the online component of Goldschmidt for anyone from low and lower-middle-income economy countries who can't afford to, or simply can't, travel. Don't get me wrong, remote attendance is not the same as face-to-face interactions, and in-person conferences. But this has to be a step forward—let alone the consequences for CO₂ emissions.

How do you think the geochemistry community will develop over the next 10–20 years?

Hopefully it WILL become more diverse. Geochemistry in the past 20 years has brought a lot of fields in—the Goldschmidt conference, for example, has become a lot broader scientifically. I suspect that will continue. I suspect science generally will become more interdisciplinary—and geochemistry will, I am sure, be part of that.

FROM THE BLOGOSPHERE: THE EAG FORUM AS A VEHICLE FOR COMMUNITY CHANGE AND IMPROVED EQUITY

As an international community and as an association, we have recently begun talking more openly about how to combat inequities in our discipline (EAG DEI Committee et al. 2022; EAG DEI Committee 2021; Riches et al. 2021; Pourret et al. 2021 and references therein). Our community as a whole benefits when talented individuals have access to opportunities, infrastructure, and scientific networks regardless of their professional privileges, access to certain networks, or personal identity.

How do we go about making this change?

It might be helpful to think of a concrete example of how opportunities in our field often come about. Let's say you're a doctoral student at a university without a particular analytical instrument, or a particular computational tool, that would provide some key additional information for your project. How would you initiate a collaboration that would let you move forward? Most likely through a person in your supervisor's scientific network.

Or if you're an early-career scientist looking to broaden your research and set up a research project together with someone with complementary skills, how likely do you think it would be to get a positive response if you just e-mailed other scientists without someone with name-recognition introducing you first?

To some extent, this may simply reflect the fact that science is a human endeavour, and that scientists are people too: we like to work with people we know, and with whom we already know we work well. But let's be aware, first, of the cultural biases that may unconsciously influence our choice of scientific networks; and second, that such a process also propagates inequalities in accessing opportunities, and the concentration of privilege among the better-connected.

But isn't it silly to use the term 'better-connected' in 2022, when all geochemists can—in theory—very easily be in contact with each other?

Since 2020, the EAG Membership platform has included the **EAG Forum**, a discussion forum for all things geochemistry. It's easy to get started (here's how! <https://blog.eag.eu.com/news/forum-how-to>). Topics include teaching (online and in person), resources for geochemists, and careers and education, to name just a few. Every EAG member has access to this forum—and we as a community can make this a lively space for the exchange of information, ideas, and opportunities that will improve our science and promote equity within our discipline.

Sign in today at <https://members.eag.eu.com/forums> and make your contribution to this effort!

By the **EAG Communications Committee**,
with thanks to the EAG DEI Committee

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