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RAC/TRAC 2024 London

Post conference survey report

June 2024

TRAC Standing Committee

Contents

[**Summary** 2](#_Toc168060492)

[**Key findings** 2](#_Toc168060493)

[**Detailed findings** 5](#_Toc168060494)

[**Conclusion** 11](#_Toc168060495)

[**Recommendations** 11](#_Toc168060496)

[**Acknowledgements** 12](#_Toc168060497)

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**Disclaimer**: This report was structured and edited with the use of ChatGPT3.5

# **Summary**

This report presents the findings of the RAC/TRAC2024 post-conference survey. The survey aimed to collect formal feedback from participants, identify any issues encountered before or during the conference, and gather suggestions to enhance the quality, accessibility, and diversity of future TRAC events.

This year, several new questions were introduced to gain deeper insights into specific aspects, such as session quality and time-keeping. Unlike in 2023, the survey was distributed only once, resulting in a similar number of respondents as the previous year (44 in 2024 compared to 45 in 2023). However, this represents a smaller response rate: **9%** (**44 out of 480**) for RAC/TRAC2024, compared to **31%** (**45 out of 144**) for TRAC 2023. The lower response rate is primarily due to the higher number of RAC participants, who had less incentive to complete the survey, and the single round of survey dissemination compared to two rounds in 2023.

As in 2023 data was collected with a Google form, and not anonymised. The lack of anonymity is helpful when comparing between return participants, with personal data controlled by Dragos Mitrofan, and not shared with the rest of TRAC SC. However, in specific cases, this lack of anonymity should allow organisers to address specific or urgent concerns directly, promoting participant retention and aiding in the design of a better, more inclusive event.

# **Key findings**

Similar to 2023, RAC/TRAC 2024 saw representation from a wide range of institutions. Due to the limited number of responses in 2024 however, it is difficult to ascertain if participation was indeed more UK-centric, as a much larger but in person event (approx. 500 participants compared to 144 in 2023).

Similar to the previous year, the majority of survey respondents are involved in research, primarily as postgraduates or early career researchers (ECRs). This highlights TRAC's strong appeal to young researchers. However, other categories, such as established and senior researchers and professionals, are also well represented.

Participation from junior and established professionals and retirees is slightly lower, likely due to the perception that TRAC is primarily an academic forum for PGRs and ECRs.

There are some interesting patterns regarding how participants learn about TRAC. The graph below includes interim results from the TRAC SE European survey of Roman archaeologists (Mitrofan & Domiter, 2024) to illustrate differences in dissemination sources. Previous publications, such as TRAC proceedings and TRAJ, play a significant role in dissemination in Southeast Europe, whereas this is less true for participants at TRAC2023 and RAC/TRAC2024. Email and other online dissemination methods (Facebook, Twitter/X, Roman Society, etc.) are more frequently cited by conference participants. Notably, peer-to-peer dissemination remains one of the most effective methods for recruiting potential participants.

Participants at both TRAC2023 and TRAC 2024 largely enjoyed the conference, with most grades 8/10 or higher.

More than half of the respondents (**23 out of 44**) reported no issues. However, the remaining participants frequently mentioned specific concerns, particularly the lack of ventilation, the absence of a venue layout in the conference booklet, and disruptive construction works.

Despite these challenges, participants generally felt that the RAC/TRAC organizers made efforts to address some of the more pressing issues, such as ventilation and noise disturbance).

Participants also suggested several improvements, primarily related to the aforementioned issues, but also highlighting new concerns, such as hard-to-read nametags and the large number of parallel sessions. Among the suggestions for improvement, respondents recommended the inclusion of a [quiet room](https://www.inklusionguide.org/spotlight/quiet-rooms#:~:text=Provide%20camp%20beds%2C%20pillows%2C%20and,Provide%20ear%20defenders.) to provide a space for neurodivergent needs, but also other anxious/stressed participants to wind down before presenting or in between sessions. Additionally, given the large number of first-time attendees, participants suggested organising a meet-and-greet event to help newcomers introduce themselves and connect with veteran participants.

# **Detailed findings**

Due to the larger size of the conference and a less representative sample, there were fewer participants who presented at least one paper at RAC/TRAC2024. Typically, TRAC conferences aim for a presenter rate of two-thirds, but the data suggests this may be an overestimate. Registration data from TRAC2023 supports this, with approximately 70 papers presented and 144 participants. While some papers had multiple authors present, this is balanced by participants presenting multiple papers. Consequently, it is possible that the presenter rate is gradually shifting from two-thirds to around one-half.

The trend of having at least half of the delegates attending their first TRAC event persists. This indicates that TRAC remains a gateway for newcomers to conference participation. However, it also suggests that repeat participation is limited, leaving room for enhancement in this area. Interestingly, only three participants completed both surveys (for 2023 and 2024), indicating a low rate of consistent feedback from returning attendees.

For the 2024 survey, an additional question was included to determine whether participants at RAC/TRAC 2024 had also taken part in TRAC webinars, which are the most accessible of our events, being online and free of charge. The relatively low number of participants in webinars likely reflects the fact that many attendees were first timers at TRAC conferences (only **4 / 24** had attended a webinar). Additionally, it's noteworthy that nearly one-third of previous TRAC participants (**6/ 20**) had never attended a webinar, indicating a potential gap in engagement with this online platform among our regular conference attendees.

Despite the challenges outlined in the previous section, participants expressed overall satisfaction with the organisational aspects of RAC/TRAC2024. When asked to rate four different aspects, participants generally gave positive ratings, except for catering, which received an average rating of under 4/5.

In addition to the generally positive feedback on the organizational aspects of RAC/TRAC2024, good feedback was also received regarding the academic program and the content of the conference. Participants appreciated the quality and diversity of the sessions, noting the relevance of the topics discussed and the expertise of the presenters.

Similar to TRAC2023, participants at RAC/TRAC2024 largely felt that the organisers made efforts to address organizational issues, particularly those raised during the conference, such as noise complaints and ventilation concerns. This proactive approach from the organizers was appreciated by attendees, as it demonstrated a responsiveness to their feedback and a commitment to improving the overall conference experience.

Lastly, it's worth noting that the majority of participants expressed a high likelihood of returning to TRAC events in the future, as well as participating in other TRAC-sponsored activities. This positive sentiment underscores the overall satisfaction and value that attendees derive from their TRAC experiences. By indicating a strong intention to return, participants signal their continued engagement and support for the TRAC community, highlighting the conference's enduring appeal and significance within the field.

Looking ahead, for future iterations of this survey, implementing categorical data for this question—ranging from "very likely" to "definitely no"—will provide a more nuanced understanding of participants' intentions to return.

# **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the post-conference survey for RAC/TRAC2024 provided valuable insights into the experiences and perspectives of participants. Despite challenges such as ventilation issues and disruptive construction works, attendees generally expressed satisfaction with the organisational aspects of the conference. Feedback regarding the academic program and content was overwhelmingly positive, highlighting the quality and diversity of sessions offered. Moreover, participants appreciated the organisers' responsiveness to their concerns, indicating a commitment to improving the conference experience. The survey also revealed a strong intention among participants to return to TRAC events in the future, underscoring the enduring appeal and value of the TRAC community.

# **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the survey, several recommendations can be made to further enhance future TRAC events:

* **Address organisational issues promptly**: Continue efforts to address organisational issues raised by participants, such as noise complaints and ventilation concerns, to ensure a more comfortable and conducive conference environment.
* **Provide venue layout**: Enhance the conference experience by providing a detailed venue layout in the conference booklet or through digital channels. This will help attendees navigate the conference venue more efficiently and locate sessions, amenities, and other important areas with ease.
* **Improve Communication**: Additionally, improve communication channels to ensure that important updates, announcements, and changes to the conference schedule are effectively communicated to participants in a timely manner. This proactive approach to communication will minimise confusion and enhance the overall attendee experience.
* **Improve catering services**: Take steps to improve catering services to better meet participants' expectations and enhance their overall experience. Alternatively, avoid the extra cost and ask participants to bring their own lunch for a more sustainable conference.
* **Enhance engagement with webinars**: Increase engagement with TRAC webinars by promoting them more effectively among conference attendees, particularly among those who have not previously participated in online events.
* **Continue to foster a Diverse and Inclusive Environment**: Maintain efforts to foster a diverse and inclusive environment at TRAC events, ensuring that all attendees feel welcome and valued.
* **Expand Networking Opportunities**: Explore additional opportunities for networking and social interaction, such as organising meet-and-greet events, to facilitate connections among participants and encourage collaboration within the TRAC community.

By implementing these recommendations, TRAC organisers can build upon the successes of RAC/TRAC2024 and further enhance the conference experience for future attendees.

# Response from RAC/TRAC organising committee (Chair: Andy Gardner)

On behalf of the RAC/TRAC24 Committee, I want to thank the TRAC standing committee for compiling this very useful report. The feedback is welcome, and along with numerous messages directed to members of the conference committee, the overwhelming impression is of a successful event. Some points should be noted regarding specific issues raised, though also noting that numbers of people raising problems are small. The construction works and ventilation were obviously beyond the control of the committee, and steps were taken to mitigate these problems immediately they were reported, which is recognised in the feedback. Regarding venue layout, the IOE building is very complex and had recently been refurbished with changes to routes. The link to an online map was provided in the booklet, but printing this would have been unhelpful as it would not have been legible. This will obviously vary according to future venues. A quiet room is a good idea, as is a mixer event for people new to conferences, which is an interesting post-pandemic issue.

# **Acknowledgements**

We would like to extend our sincere appreciation to all individuals and organisations whose contributions made RAC/TRAC2024 such a tremendous success!

We are grateful to the conference organisers and volunteers for their dedication and hard work in planning and executing the event, overcoming challenges, and ensuring a smooth and enriching experience for all participants, particularly to **Andy Gardner**, **Issabel Annal**, **Chloe Clark**, **Natasha Gravatt** and **Francesca Lam- March**.

Our heartfelt thanks go to the presenters, speakers, and panellists for sharing their expertise, insights, and research findings, enriching the academic program and fostering engaging discussions throughout the conference.

We are extremely grateful for the support and sponsorship of the **Society for Roman Studies**, whose generous contributions helped make the conference possible and provided opportunities for attendees to network, learn, and collaborate.

We also wish to thank the participants of RAC/TRAC2024 for their active participation, valuable feedback, and contributions to the vibrant and dynamic atmosphere of the conference.

Finally, we express our gratitude to the wider TRAC community for their continued support, enthusiasm, and commitment to advancing archaeological research and scholarship.

**A huge thank you all for your invaluable contributions and dedication to the success of RAC/TRAC2024!**

**See you at TRAC2025!**