

Overview of Royal Irish Academy projects/activities in the area of science-based policy advice

Prepared for European Academies Science Advisory Council (EASAC), 23 January 2013

The Royal Irish Academy (RIA) has a particular focus on **higher education and research (science) policy advice**. Current areas of activity include:

- Research funding and infrastructures
- Scientific integrity
- Open Access policies
- Higher education institutional governance structures
- Science education (inquiry based)

The RIA produces advice papers, both self-initiated and commissioned. However, it places equal emphasis upon its role as a neutral, objective and independent forum for discussion on policy issues. To this end, the Academy has established a role as a convening forum for discussion on cross-cutting issues impacting upon the sciences, humanities and social sciences. Recent activities include a Dialogue Forum on Research Funding Policy in Ireland (October 2012). The Academy Council occasionally convenes Working-groups to develop in-depth statements on substantial policy issues approved by Council. Such Groups may be made up of academy members and experts from universities and industry.

The work is funded by the Academy and chosen by the President and Officers. Work when completed is distributed to government departments, parliamentarians and other interested bodies via the website and a press release is sent out. There is often a small symposium or conference to launch reports followed up by one-to-one meetings to brief civil servants, parliamentarians and interested others.

RIA Strategic Priorities 2013 – 2018 commits to a greater role in encouraging the input and use of scholarly and scientific advice in public policy discussion and formation (See *RIA Strategic Priorities 2013 – 2018*). Academy Committees – whose membership may consist of members, non-members, industry and civil servants – engage in this type of policy work. They have the freedom to choose areas of work, subject to the approval of the RIA Council – and to appoint a working group to produce reports.

- Since 2002, the RIA Climate Change Sciences Committee has produced annual statements that draw on the collective expertise of specialists in climate science and related areas in Ireland to provide objective information and informed judgments to the Academy and the bodies politic regarding the threats posed to and opportunities presented for Ireland by climate change and responses to it.

- In 2011, the RIA Life Sciences Committee instituted an occasional series of statements on issues of public interest in the Life Sciences, with the aim of informing and enthusing a general readership

The RIA runs an ongoing programme of public lectures by scientific experts in which scholarly and scientific knowledge is brought to bear upon pressing public issues e.g. Air pollution and climate policy: a bumpy road to climate stabilization; engineering and innovation, etc.

An overview of the Royal Irish Academy's projects in science-based policy advice as of February 2013

The Royal Irish Academy represents the sciences, humanities and social sciences and so its contributions to science-based policy advice are perhaps more broadly understood than other academies. For the purposes of clarity the Academy defines 'science' for these purposes as representing the totality of the disciplines encompassed within its membership. It also has a long standing history and engagement with cultural and heritage matters on the island of Ireland.

The Academy recognises the value and need for the use and integration of scientific and scholarly advice within the policy cycle as a result of the increasing complexity and multi-dimensional nature of contemporary policy challenges across the social, cultural and economic spheres. It seeks to promote the contribution of the sciences, humanities and social sciences within the policy cycle. Its policy activities are structured around three thematic areas:

1. The practice of research and scholarship

- a. contemporary issues impacting upon the environment within which research and scholarship is undertaken, and the practice of research itself
- b. Values and principles underpinning research and scholarship

2. Culture and Heritage

3. Contribution of research and scholarship to society

Box 1: Overview of ongoing RIA projects in science-based policy advice as of February 2013

- Open Access and the Humanities: A Dialogue on Impact and Implementation + RIA Statement on Open Access & the Humanities (Spring 2013)
- Roll-out and implementation of National Guidelines for Research Integrity (Spring / Summer 2013)
- RIA Statement: Principles of Research Practice (Spring 2013)
- *In development:* Establishment of an all-island Humanities Platform: increasing the profile and impact of the humanities within the policy cycle
- *In development:* Research for Knowledge: a roadmap for the future
- A Discussion Forum on the proposed merger of the Boards of the National Gallery and National Library of Ireland (Spring 2013)
- Parliamentary Reform: a dialogue forum (Spring 2013)
- Fracking: what the science says (breakfast meetings & Dialogue Forum) (Spring 2013)
- RIA Climate Change Committee Scientific Statements ongoing series: next Statement will be on Air (Spring 2013)
- Public Lecture by Prof. Frank Raes, *Air Pollution & Climate Policy: a bumpy road to climate stabilization*
- Life Sciences Statement Series on issues of public interest in the life sciences (ongoing series)

