A Guide to EASAC Governance and Operations

This document provides an overview of EASAC's membership, strategy, governance, and operations.

All those taking on new responsibilities at EASAC are encouraged to read this guide before they take up their new role and to use it as a reference throughout their tenure. They may also find it helpful as a tool for informing their own academy's Council/governing body and wider membership about EASAC. Additional information is available on the EASAC website. For any questions not covered in this guide, please contact the EASAC Secretariat at secretariat@easac.eu.

I. General overview - What is EASAC?

EASAC – the European Academies Science Advisory Council – is formed by the national science academies of European Union (EU) Member States, Norway, Switzerland, and the UK, as well as by the Academia Europaea. EASAC's 29 member institutions collaborate with each other in giving advice to European policymakers. In its entirety, EASAC is a mechanism for mobilising Europe's best scientific minds on important public policy issues and for providing science-based advice to European policymakers and civil society.

The supreme strategic and decision-making body of EASAC is its Council in which all member academies are represented. EASAC's main governing board and supreme executive body is the Board, comprising of the President and the Vice-Presidents (VPs). EASAC's main procedures and structures are defined by its statutes.

EASAC policy work is presently organised under three core programmes – Biosciences and Public Health, Energy, and Environment – each led by a Programme Director (PD) and Steering Panel (SP). The experts on EASAC's Steering Panels identify and recommend new projects to Council in the three science areas, but other domains of science that are important to society can also be considered. Once agreed, temporary project-specific working groups (WG) are formed to support individual projects, their most active phase lasting normally between 12 and 18 months.

The EASAC Council, Board, Steering Panels, and individual working groups within the programmes are all supported by the EASAC Secretariat, which is based at the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna, Austria.

Since its establishment in 2001, EASAC has – with the input of its Steering Panels and working groups – produced a substantial number of high quality advisory reports and statements (listed here) aimed primarily at policymakers in the European Commission (EC) and in the European Parliament (EP), and for the science advisory mechanisms within them, including SAPEA. EASAC has an MoU with the Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) and occasionally cooperates with other EU bodies, such as the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS).

FEAM, the network of medical academies, and ALLEA, the association of all academies in geographic Europe, are collaborating networks of EASAC. They have observer status in EASAC Council meetings and can nominate experts for EASAC working groups. EASAC also occasionally works with Euro-CASE, the network of engineering academies.

EASAC is the regional affiliated network for Europe of the InterAcademy Partnership (IAP), the global network of more than 140 national science, medical, and engineering academies, who work together on global science policy issues. Through IAP, EASAC works with other regional academy networks in Africa (NASAC), the Americas (IANAS), and Asia (AASSA), sharing good practice and lessons learned in influencing policy (working at the "science-policy interface") and engaging with the media and civil society. Quite a few projects of EASAC have laid the basis for global projects of IAP.

EASAC's core objectives are outlined in its strategic plan.

II. EASAC Council and Board

EASAC Council
Council is EASAC's supreme strategic and decision-making body. It is composed of highly experienced scientists, nominated by, and representing, EASAC member academies. Council members are expected to regularly consult with their academies about EASAC business, and be empowered by their academies to make decisions on their behalf at Council meetings. Council sets EASAC's direction, agrees the initiation of projects, monitors their progress and reviews and approves reports for publication. It meets two to three times per year (one time in person).

Council members can usually serve for up to two terms of three years each, and are expected to attend each meeting if they can. Council members are required to:

(1)   *Ensure good governance* by monitoring and evaluating the progress of EASAC activities under the three core programmes (Biosciences and Public Health, Energy, and Environment), and ensuring due diligence in EASAC finances and other services provided by the EASAC Secretariat;

(2)   *Contribute actively to EASAC business* by
   * nominating – in consultation with their member academy – experts to working groups, Steering Panels, and as peer reviewers for EASAC reports and statements;
   * communicating EASAC's recommendations on a national level to policymakers (domestically and as national delegates to the EU), civil society, the media, other relevant audiences – including their own academy[1];
   * liaising with their academy's representative in the EASAC Press and Communications Group (PCG) to help promote EASAC's messages nationally through press and media engagement;
   * acting as an intermediary between their own academy and EASAC, making sure information is exchanged in both directions – including giving regular updates to Council on their academy's own policy work and/or relevant national policy development;
   * where possible, sharing good practice and "lessons learned" in evidence-informed policymaking (within their academy and in EASAC business);
   * acting as ambassadors for EASAC in their national and international circles.

New EASAC Council members are encouraged to seek additional briefing from their predecessors and from support staff in their nominating academies. Before attending their first meeting, they should complete a Declaration of Interest (DoI) form and submit it to the EASAC Secretariat. New Council members are also warmly invited to contact the EASAC Secretariat to set up a telephone call or video meeting with one of the members of the EASAC Board or with the EASAC Executive Director.

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[1] For example: arranging the publishing of translated summaries of EASAC output on their academy website, arranging national launch events of new EASAC output or meetings between scientific experts and key national policymakers, convening workshops for key stakeholders, engaging with journalists and national media outlets.

EASAC Board

The EASAC Board, consisting of the EASAC President and Vice-Presidents, is EASAC's main governing board and supreme executive body.

The Board is accountable to Council: it is responsible for implementing Council's decisions and for ensuring that EASAC's business runs smoothly. It is supported by the EASAC Secretariat, which is managed by the Executive Director.

The Board's responsibilities include:

- to develop and implement EASAC's strategy;
- to appoint Programme Directors after consultation with the respective Steering Panel (Co-)Chair(s);
- to be active in EASAC's outreach and science advice activities towards Europe;
- to propose to Council the Steering Panel (Co-)Chairs;
- to propose the annual budget and financial report to the Council;
- to approve projects for EASAC commentaries;
- to endorse the composition of working groups;
- to meet with the Programme Directors and Steering Panel (Co-)Chair(s) for an exchange several times a year.

Board members also build and maintain working links with EU policymakers, EU institutions and other relevant EU and national agencies; liaise and – where relevant – work with other science academy networks, e.g. IAP, ALLEA, NASAC (the network of African Science Academies); maintain close contact with EASAC member academies; and oversee EASAC's communication activities, such as press releases, newsletter and website.

III. EASAC Steering Panels

EASAC Steering Panels are the central bodies overseeing the programme lines of EASAC, and they advise the Programme Director, the Board, and the Council on the scientific scope, strategic significance, value and viability of proposed reports and other EASAC output. Steering Panels are led by a Chair or two Co-Chairs. Steering Panel (Co-)Chairs chair meetings and provide leadership in the development of EASAC's programme work. EASAC has three Steering Panels – Biosciences and Public Health, Energy, and Environment – each run by a Programme Director and meeting normally once every six to nine months (as much of their work is conducted electronically). Steering Panel members are nominated by EASAC member academies and selected on the basis of their expertise in a respective field, complementing the skill set of the rest of the Panel to ensure well-balanced composition in terms of discipline, sector and/or specific policy area, and diversity (with regard to age, region, and gender). In addition to being able to assess knowledge in particular sectors, they ideally also have experience of applying knowledge to public policymaking. Steering Panel members serve terms of three years. They can be reappointed in principle only once.

The primary purpose of the Steering Panels is to advise EASAC on potential projects where EASAC can *add unique value* and have *high impact on EU policy,* drawing on a set of key criteria for project selection – see Annex.
Steering Panel members' responsibilities are to:
- provide leadership in the development of EASAC's programme work (once approved by Council, each project is taken forward by a specific working group appointed by Council);
- support the initiation of new projects, identifying priority topics and target audiences within European institutions, in consultation with their member (nominating) academy;

- explore opportunities for working on cross-sectoral/inter-disciplinary issues with the other EASAC programmes;
- support the development of project working groups by identifying suitable candidates and recommending them to their member (nominating) academy;
- advise on reactive programme work e.g. responding to public consultations from the EU or inaccurate media reporting;
- develop relationships with the European institutions and other interested bodies, where appropriate, as well as key scientists in relevant/associated fields;
- support the dissemination of project outputs at a national and regional level to (1) their member (nominating) academy (drawing on policy and media teams where they have them) and (2) policymakers (domestic and national delegates to the EU), civil society, the media, and other relevant audiences;
- act as ambassadors for EASAC in their national and international circles, especially in Brussels and Strasbourg.

Steering Panel members should familiarise themselves with the project flow chart and must complete a Declaration of Interest (DoI) form (notifying of any changes of circumstances which may be relevant).

IV. EASAC working groups

After a new project has been scoped and recommended by the Programme Steering Panel(s), and subsequently approved by Council, a project working group is established. Working group members are nominated by EASAC member academies, and shortlisted by the Programme Director and relevant Steering Panel (Co-)Chair(s) on the basis of their expertise and its application to the policy question being explored, as well as complementing the skill set of the rest of the group to ensure well-balanced representation (in terms of discipline, sector, diversity, etc.). Endorsement of the composition of a working group rests with the Board, and working group members serve for the duration of the project.

With an average of 3-4 meetings (typically 1 in person) and extensive electronic exchange, each EASAC working group prepares a draft report, which then goes through a thorough peer review process and is finally circulated to all Council members for endorsement by member academies. This process is sometimes fast-tracked when policy timeframes are tight and advice is required urgently, or when the topic is relatively narrow in scope, and a shorter statement is produced instead of a report. Working group drafts become formal EASAC documents once they have been endorsed.

Working group members are required to:
- support the Programme Director and working group (co-)chair(s) in reaching the objectives of work plan/scoping paper for the project;
- contribute significantly to the preparation and drafting of the report/statement to a high standard and to meet the project timeline;
- support the dissemination of project outputs at a national and regional level to (1) their member (nominating) academy (drawing on policy and media teams where they have them) and (2) policymakers (domestic and national delegates to the EU), civil society, the media, and other relevant audiences, liaising with their national member on the Steering Panel where there is one;
- act as ambassadors for the project in their national and international circles, especially in Brussels and Strasbourg.

Working group members should familiarise themselves with the project flow chart and ensure they have completed a Declaration of Interest (DoI) form (notifying of any changes of circumstances which may be relevant).

V. EASAC member academies

EASAC's member academies are its bedrock. EASAC's finances depend upon its members' membership contributions and in-kind support for travel, meeting, staff, and publication expenses. EASAC's expertise relies on its members' nominations of national experts. Without the financial and in-kind support of its member academies, EASAC could not function.

EASAC member academies are expected to:
- provide a Council member (this could be the President, an officer such as the Foreign Secretary/equivalent, or a senior and active member of their fellowship) and help ensure they are engaged and proactive in EASAC business;
- nominate appropriate Steering Panel and working group members, and peer reviewers, according to their own in-house procedures and strength of national expertise;
- support these appointments financially, administratively (e.g. logistics) and intellectually (e.g. with support on national activities and policy demand/development);
- ensure there is a two-way communication between their representatives/nominations in EASAC, their own Council/governing body and – where possible – their core membership;
- support the dissemination of EASAC project outputs in their own national and international business, including policy outreach and translation (where appropriate);
- be alert to intelligence and opportunities for EASAC, particularly with respect to horizon scanning/longer-term perspectives, and feed this into EASAC through their representatives/nominations;
- consider taking the lead on project-specific work where they have intellectual leadership (e.g. strong national expertise and/or previous academy experience) and administrative and/or financial (direct or in-kind) capacity.

The publication of a report or statement is the start of a vital period of dissemination and outreach, to maximise the likelihood of policy impact, with subsequent follow-up to evaluate this impact. EASAC member academies have a special responsibility to support this dissemination and follow-up to ensure that the joint work of the academies in EASAC reaches target audience(s). Member academies are encouraged to engage proactively with their relevant national government policy leads, their EU delegates, their Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), their national press and other media agencies, and relevant parts of civil society. Methods of proactive engagement include personal letters e.g. to relevant ministers; face-to-face meetings with ministers and other senior policymakers; expert meetings with local research communities; meetings that bring different user communities together; national press releases and launch events, as well as using social media. Equally important, member academies are encouraged to follow-up EASAC reports six, 12, and 24 months and longer, after their dissemination, to evaluate their policy impact and potential legacy.

ANNEX: CRITERIA FOR PROJECT SELECTION

1. What policy problem is the project addressing? Why does the problem merit the attention of EASAC?

2. Is the project relevant to the EU agenda and to EASAC's objectives? Does it fit in with the current range of EASAC advisory work? If not, is there a case for expanding that range?

3. Is the project relevant to other parts of the world?

4. Is the problem such that objective scientific evidence is relevant for the policy maker? If so, can EASAC secure access to that evidence?

5. Who is responsible (or should be) for the problem at the EU policy level? What might they do differently as a result of the EASAC project? What is the evidence that they are interested in the problem as formulated?

6. Who are the other stakeholders in the issue being addressed? Does the project proposal accommodate their concerns?

7. What external factors influence the timing of the project, i.e. should it be completed by a certain date in order to have maximum impact?

8. What work is already done by others in this area? Have member academies already been active? Why would EASAC intervention have added value and how would it be distinctive?

9. Is there a case for doing the project together with anyone else?

10. What are the intended project deliverables (e.g. detailed report, shorter statement, workshop or other event)? Why is this particular deliverable the best way to influence the target customer?

11. What issues need to be taken into account by Council for allocation of EASAC resources, e.g. timetable, choice of chair and experts for multidisciplinary working group; and is the topic within the competencies and interests of EASAC member academies?