

PROCEDURES FOR THE PRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF PROACTIVE ACADEMY REPORTS AND STATEMENTS

Approved by The Standing Committee for Engineering - 9 December 2002

Approved by Council - 30 June 2003

1. Purpose

The purpose of this document is to outline Quality Assurance procedures designed to ensure the maintenance of the Academy's reputation with respect to its published reports and statements.

2. Scope

These procedures apply to all proactive reports, statements and other policy documents which are intended for publication by The Royal Academy of Engineering.

The procedures do not apply to responses to Parliament and others, which are dealt with in a parallel document. (*Procedures for the production and review of responses to questions from Government and others (2002)*). Nor do the procedures apply to Press Releases which may be issued by The Academy from time to time.

3. Key Elements

It is recognised that reports produced by The Academy will vary considerably in their scope, importance and method of production. However, there are certain features common to all which need to be managed and checked. They are as follows:

- ? Terms of Reference
- ? Composition of the working group responsible for producing the report
- ? Call for evidence
- ? Circulation of drafts for comment
- ? Review procedure
- ? Final approval procedure

These features are to be dealt with by following the procedures outlined below.

3.1 Terms of Reference

Every study which is expected to produce a report or statement for publication should begin with the definition of Terms of Reference and their approval by the sponsoring Standing committee (or Council).

The review procedure to be applied to the final report shall also be specified at this stage.

Terms of reference define the scope of the study and the deliverables expected.

It should be understood by all concerned that the Terms of Reference will serve as the primary benchmark against which final review and approval will be conducted.

3.2 Composition of the Working Group responsible for producing a report

The Chairman of the sponsoring standing committee will choose a chairman for the working group in consultation with the secretariat and will invite the appointed chairman to choose additional members in a similar way.

At the first meeting of the working group members will be invited to disclose any background, bias or vested interests which are relevant to the study in question. The Chairman and/or members may propose amendments or additions to the working group at this point. Subsequently, a notice will be posted on The Academy's public web site announcing the title and aims of the study concerned and listing the names of the Chairman and members.

Details of members' interests will be recorded and summarised in the final report.

It is recognised that on many issues which are studied by The Academy those who have most to contribute are people with views coloured by experience. It is therefore essential to the acceptability of the final report that the working group is constructed taking into account the nature and sensitivity of the subject matter as well as the need for balance in, and preferably the avoidance of, vested interests. It is also important that the working group contains the competence to address all aspects of its Terms of Reference. For example, economic and social issues associated with an engineering study will normally require the involvement of appropriate external experts in the working group.

There will be occasions when an issue is very contentious and all Fellows who have experience in the field have strongly vested interests themselves. In consequence the likelihood of achieving balance and a dispassionate consensus is nil. To meet such a challenge an effective solution, which has been employed by The Academy, can be to establish a working group whose members have no vested interest in the outcome and then to take evidence in a manner similar to a House of Lords committee. This can work very effectively provided appropriate steps are taken to ensure that draft reports are circulated and review is thoroughly undertaken.

It is also important to be aware that on certain issues whilst there may be a consensus among Fellows this may not be shared outside The Academy. In such situations it is important that this is overtly recognised, if not in the composition of the working group, then within the report itself

Underlying these general statements is a challenge to those responsible for establishing any working group, particularly where the ensuing report is intended to influence Government policy. This is to ensure, as far as is practicable, that readers of the report will not have reason to criticise the working group for presumed bias, vested interest, lack of competence or lack of balance.

3.3 Calls for evidence

If The Academy wishes a report to influence public policy then it is highly desirable that all those outside the Academy who might have views on the subject should be invited to submit evidence. This should be done by posting a notice on the Academy's Web site inviting evidence by a certain date and by the despatch of press releases to those organisations and individuals believed to have something to contribute.

There will be occasions when the working group believes that it need not consult outside the group itself or known experts within the Academy. Whilst this may be acceptable in particular cases, particularly where all that is sought is a consensus opinion among Fellows of The Academy, the first meeting of the group should be invited to discuss this issue and to reach a formally recorded decision.

Written evidence should be supplemented by invited oral evidence on occasion.

3.4 Circulation of drafts for comment

Before a report reaches the review stage it is incumbent on the working group chairman to ensure that all facts which are quoted have been checked and referenced. Equally, the working group is required to ensure that its own interpretation of quoted facts is sound and defensible

Whilst it is not expected that everyone will agree with all of the report it is important to pick up errors of fact and understanding which could undermine the conclusions.

Whenever possible working groups should seek to achieve consensus but where this is not achievable it is important that diversity of opinion is recognised in the final report.

3.5 The Review and approval procedure

When a report is complete in every respect, in the form in which the working group would like it to be published, it shall be subject to review by the whole of the Standing Committee which commissioned the report. The chairman of the working group may be invited to present the report and to answer questions but this shall be at the discretion of the chairman of the Standing Committee.

The review procedure to be followed will have been specified by the Standing Committee at the same time as the Terms of Reference were agreed at the outset of the study. Normally, all proactive reports and statements will be reviewed at one of the Standing Committee's regular meetings. In special circumstances, however, (eg. when time constraints demand urgent action) the Standing Committee may agree at the time when the Terms of Reference are approved to the review being conducted by e-mail, the outcome being subject to the final approval of the Chairman.

Members of a Standing Committee who take part in a review are expected to address their task thoroughly and dispassionately, regardless of personal interests. A checklist of issues to be addressed is attached as an Annex.

The Standing Committee may decide that it has no serious objections to the report presented for review and may approve it for publication without amendment. Occasionally, minor changes may be

required which do not require further review by the Standing Committee. However, where significant issues do arise they shall be passed, without attribution, to the chairman of the working group. The working group must then address each point which is made and record its decisions, before amending the report. When this process has been completed the report shall be re-submitted to the Standing Committee for review and approval.

4. Final note

No set of procedures can cover all possible reports which might be produced by the Academy. However, the underlying principles are clear enough and should be followed when the procedures are found to be wanting or inappropriate.

Annex

Checklist for reviewers

1. Are the terms of reference clearly described in the report? Are all aspects fully addressed?
2. Does the working group go beyond its terms of reference or its competence?
3. Are the conclusions and recommendations adequately supported by evidence, analysis and argument? Are uncertainties or incompleteness in the evidence recognised? If any recommendations are based on the opinions of the authors, is this properly acknowledged?
4. Are the data and analyses handled competently?
5. Are sensitive policy areas treated with sufficient care?
6. Are the style, tone and organisation of the report effective? Do they adequately reflect the objectives of the Royal Academy of Engineering and also meet the needs of the target readership?
7. Is the report fair? Is its tone impartial and devoid of special pleading?
8. Has an Executive Summary been included and does it concisely and accurately describe the key findings and recommendations? Is it consistent with other sections of the report? Is it effective as a stand-alone summation of the report?
9. In your view, has the possible reaction to the report by the media been adequately taken into account?

10. What other significant improvements, if any, might be made in the report?
11. Have the names of the members of the Working Group been listed, together with their affiliations and any other relevant interests.
12. Are you satisfied that your comments are unaffected by your own personal interests?

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