



K O N I N K L I J K E N E D E R L A N D S E  
A K A D E M I E V A N W E T E N S C H A P P E N

MANUAL CONCERNING ACADEMY ADVISORY REPORTS

*Basic principles, procedure, and quality assurance*

**Adopted by the Academy Board at its meeting of 21 May 2013**

ROYAL NETHERLANDS ACADEMY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES



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# 1. INTRODUCTION

This manual outlines the Royal Academy's procedure for producing advisory reports.<sup>1</sup> It is intended for those who are directly involved in doing so and describes the basic principles and procedure for optimising quality assurance. These parties are, first of all, the committees who prepare the reports, in particular their chairpersons, and, second, the Academy Board, the Society, and the Academy's Policy Advice: Research and Knowledge Division, which assists the advisory committees.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. BASIC PRINCIPLES

### 2.1 Advisory body to the Government

The Academy's advisory role is defined in the law. It may offer solicited and unsolicited advice concerning both 'science for policy' and 'policy for science'<sup>3</sup>. In the case of commissioned advice, it is usually a Minister or State Secretary (for Education, Culture and Science or another ministry) who makes the request. Nevertheless, other external parties may also approach the Academy for advice.<sup>4</sup> In the case of unsolicited advice, the Academy produces the advisory report proactively and the Academy Board formulates the specific question to be addressed. Advisory reports may vary from a brief advisory memorandum taking only a few months to produce to lengthy advisory reports consisting of several sub-reports that take more than a year to complete. The Academy's strategic agenda outlines the various themes that will be covered in the annual schedule of advisory reports. The Academy Board adopts the schedule in late December or early January. The schedule is updated continuously, with new reports being added and completed reports being removed during the course of the year.

Academy advisory reports are drawn up by advisory committees and issued by and subject to the responsibility of the Academy Board, which approves the final text. When acting as an advisory body, the Academy restricts itself to the role of 'honest broker': it does not attempt to take the place of policymakers or implementing bodies.

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1 Some advisory documents are referred to as Academy 'foresight studies'. The difference between the advisory reports and the foresight studies is not sharp; some foresight studies do not contain recommendations.

2 The Academy sometimes issues advisory reports without the Policy Advice: Research and Knowledge Division playing a part in the proceedings.

3 In addition to research policy, this may also consist of educational policy.

4 The term 'party requesting advice' is used in the remainder of this document.

## 2.2 Quality of advisory reports

An Academy advisory report must provide a clearly worded answer to the question that has been posed; it should require specific parties to take action; and it should help them achieve positive effects. It therefore offers an appropriate framework for evaluating actions and effects. An Academy advisory report should be based as far as possible on facts; those producing it should work systematically and independently; and their advice should be timely in terms of relevant policy intentions and trends and developments in society or research.

Academy advisory reports are not research publications. The advisory committees can make use of available research data, however, and they may carry out research themselves on a limited scale, for example a study of the literature, document analysis, bibliometric research, hearings, interviews, focus groups, liaison groups and so on. Their data collection methods must be transparent.

Ideally, the Academy will be in close touch with parties that are expected to commission its advice before any question is actually raised. Such preliminary contact allows the Academy to share insights and ideas with them at an early stage. The Academy Board selects topics on which it intends to offer advice based on specific strategic and operational considerations, including an estimate of whether that advice is likely to be followed.

Draft advisory reports must be reviewed by independent experts as an extra quality check.

## 3. PROCEDURE

### 3.1 The advisory committee

The Board generally appoints a temporary advisory committee to prepare the report.<sup>5</sup> The Policy Advice: Research and Knowledge Division nominates candidates for the advisory committee without approaching them first, leaving the Board free to take a decision. The Board may appoint the advisory committee in stages, starting with the chairperson and then, after consulting him/her, the other members. The Academy prefers to have the Board (i.e. the President of the Board) approach the chairperson, but if this is impossible for practical reasons, the task then falls to the Director General or the Secretary (acting on behalf of the Board).

Advisory committees have between three and nine members, the chairperson included. The chairperson must be a member of the Academy, as should at least forty per cent of the committee's members. Exceptions to this rule are possible. The composition of the advisory committee should reflect the subject of the advisory report as closely as possible. Factors to be considered when appointing committee members include the necessary expertise (including expertise from outside the Academy), the ratio of male to female members, the involvement of new Academy members, and – where possible – an even distribution of committee seats among the various universities.

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<sup>5</sup> The Board sometimes calls on the assistance of existing permanent Academy committees or advisory councils.

The Board or (if the report has been commissioned) the party requesting advice can involve the chairperson in formulating the question, but practical reasons sometimes prevent this from happening. In such cases, the Academy recommends that the Board or party requesting advice should summarise the subject such that the advisory committee has the leeway to work with a practical interpretation of the question.

The resolution inaugurating the advisory committee sketches the committee's main tasks, its composition, its term, and the date when the advisory report will be presented. Appendix A provides an example of a resolution inaugurating a committee.

Temporary advisory committees are dissolved once they have issued their advisory reports. Even after their formal dissolution, however, their members – and in particular the chairperson – should continue advocating implementation of the advice they have offered.

Members of advisory committees are reimbursed only for their travel expenses.

### **3.2 The chairperson and secretary**

The role of the advisory committee's chairperson is crucial to the committee's progress and the quality of its work. The chairperson must ensure that the committee remains objective and produces its report autonomously. He or she should also communicate regularly with the Academy Board and (if the report has been commissioned) the party requesting advice so that the committee's recommendations do not end up deviating too much from the relevant party's expectations. The chairperson must know how to maintain the balance between autonomy and objectivity on the one hand and expectations management on the other. It is not the purpose of an Academy advisory report to gratify the party requesting advice.

The chairperson is responsible for systematically collecting the necessary information. The way in which he or she does so, and what that information consists of, will differ from report to report. What is important is to identify, at the earliest possible stage, what information is needed, how it will be collected, how much time will be required to do so, and how much time is actually available. It may be prudent to define the focus and scope of the advisory report at the very start of the process. There are various ways of doing this: a preliminary study, a kick-off meeting, a Society activity, a survey, a first committee meeting, or any other activity that defines the focus and scope sufficiently. Whether such an activity is necessary depends on what has gone before, what has been laid down in the resolution inaugurating the committee, and what sort of background information is available and known.

The chairperson heads the advisory committee and must ensure that all members contribute to it, for example by taking active part in committee meetings. The chairperson must monitor the committee's 'team spirit'. Where possible, the chairperson should strive to reach consensus, but he or she must not gloss over differences of opinion. After consulting the members of the advisory committee and the official secretary,<sup>6</sup> the chairperson determines the structure and table of contents of the advisory report, organises the information and incorporates it into that framework. The chairperson directs how the secretary should manage the advisory process and, as the advisory committee's representative, acts as its key internal and external point of contact at management level (Academy and party requesting advice). Once the

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<sup>6</sup> Policy officer of the Policy Advice: Research and Knowledge Division. From this point forward: the secretary.

advisory report has been issued, the chairperson should do the same for the media and other external parties in order to promote implementation of the advice given.

The advisory committee is assisted by a secretariat based in the Policy Advice: Research and Knowledge Division. External assistance can also be called in. The secretary is the liaison between advisory committee and the secretariat. He or she is not a member of the advisory committee. The secretary should stress the importance of the review, of managing the expectations of the party requesting advice, and of integration into the Academy management, including the time that the advisory committee should reserve for the latter. The secretariat's task is to coordinate the organisational aspects, for example scheduling committee meetings, collecting literature, producing the draft advisory report, organising the review, and printing and distributing the report.

The chairperson and the secretary should meet prior to the first committee meeting in order to discuss the overall advisory process, and more specifically those aspects described in the resolution inaugurating the committee, the scope of the advisory report, the intended procedure, the report's structure and its possible contents. Their meeting should also cover practical aspects, for example the number of committee meetings considered necessary, the division of responsibilities between the chairperson and the secretary, how the chairperson intends to involve the members and the secretary, and how he or she will communicate with the Academy Board and (where applicable) the party requesting advice. Depending on the model selected (see Section 3.3), the secretary may be assigned other tasks, including the job of writing certain sections of the draft report. The chairperson must consult the secretary before deciding which model should be applied.

At the committee's first meeting, the chairperson should ensure that all members have a clear idea of the question that they will be addressing and of the advisory report's structure and contents, the procedure and the target group or groups. The chairperson will encourage all members to contribute one or more texts; they should be aware, however, that the chairperson – or the secretary acting on the chairperson's instructions – can amend any text. Such amendments may concern not only actual content but also style, length, tone, objectivity, argumentation, facts and opinions expressed. Close cooperation between the chairperson and secretary is essential on this point. The secretary must also clarify the extent to which the secretariat can assist the committee, in both quantitative and qualitative terms.

### **3.3 Models**

It is essential to identify each person's role at the start of the advisory process, as well as his or her responsibility in producing the advisory report. The specific methods that an advisory committee uses will differ from report to report and from chairperson to chairperson. Clarity concerning the procedure and related division of roles and responsibilities may be even more important than the procedure itself. The description below offers three possible models for the arrangements made between the chairperson, the committee members and the secretary.

### *Model 1.*

The chairperson defines much of the procedure and the content. He or she writes most of the draft texts. The chairperson sets the agenda for committee meetings. The committee members' work consists mainly of commenting on the chairperson's draft texts. The chairperson collects the data, assisted by the committee members where necessary. The secretary's role is largely organisational in nature. With respect to the text, his or her contribution mainly comes down to editing. This division of roles means that the secretary has little to contribute to committee meetings in terms of actual content. The chairperson communicates directly with the Academy Board where possible. It is up to the chairperson to decide how often the committee should meet. The advantage of this model is that the chairperson is firmly in control. The disadvantage is that the committee members and the secretary may have less input than they could or would like to have.

### *Model 2.*

The chairperson integrates the views of the members and the secretary so as to arrive at a procedure and content supported by all concerned. The secretary assists the chairperson in this respect. The chairperson divides authorship of the texts between himself/herself, the committee members and the secretary. The chairperson, members and secretary communicate with the Board and the party requesting advice as they see fit. The chairperson divides the data collection task between the members and the secretary. In the chairperson's absence, a deputy chairperson may chair a committee meeting. Committee meetings take place according to a pre-determined schedule. In some cases, it may be enough to simply send documents by e-mail. The secretary may have as much to contribute to the actual content as the chairperson and the committee members. If the chairperson so wishes, the secretary will draw up a kick-off memorandum for the first committee meeting. The advantage of this interactive model is that it makes maximum use of the knowledge and efforts of the chairperson, the members and the secretary. The disadvantage is that mutual coordination leads to delays.

### *Model 3.*

The secretary proposes a working method and produces a draft table of contents. The advisory committee comments on this draft so that the secretary knows what the secretariat must do. The secretariat collects the relevant background information, conducts interviews, attends conferences and so on. After one or two 'constituent' committee meetings, the secretariat writes the first version of the draft advisory report. The advisory committee provides written comments on the draft where possible, and the secretariat then produces a second version. At the end of the advisory process, the advisory committee meets once or twice to finalise the text, in particular the summary and the recommendations and conclusions. In this model, the secretary functions as a project manager and the advisory committee as a steering committee. The advantage is that the number of committee meetings can be limited to just a few, and the advisory process is not delayed by the chairperson's and committee members' busy schedules. The disadvantage is that it may be difficult to get the advisory committee to agree on particular viewpoints and texts.

### **3.4 The role of the Academy Board**

The Academy Board may appoint one of its members as an ‘agenda member’ of the advisory committee to monitor its progress. As soon as the general tenor of the advisory report is clear, the chairperson of the advisory committee or the Board itself may add a discussion item to the agenda for the next Board meeting. Depending on the committee’s progress, the discussion may concern a draft version of the advisory report.

The Board and the chairperson of the advisory committee should in any event discuss the reviewed advisory report. Based on their discussion, the Board will then decide what steps must be taken to finalise the draft version. The report can only be considered final – and, consequently, an Academy advisory report – after the Board has approved it.

### **3.5 Review**

Appendix B describes the review procedure for advisory reports. Key points in this procedure are as follows:

1. The secretary, acting in his/her capacity as a policy officer and independently of the advisory committee, submits the names of possible reviewers to the Board without approaching them first, leaving the Board free to take a decision.
2. The secretary approaches the reviewers on behalf of the Board.
3. The review procedure is not anonymous.
4. Where possible, the Board involves the advisory councils in the review.
5. During the meeting at which it will discuss the reviewed draft advisory report, the Board must have three documents to hand: a) the reviewers’ comments, b) a document indicating what the advisory committee has done with those comments, and c) the resulting draft advisory report.

### **3.6 Implementation of recommendations given in the advisory report**

The recommendations given in an advisory report should be implemented to the furthest extent possible. Besides ensuring that those recommendations are of the highest possible quality, it is therefore prudent to involve those parties that will play an important role in such implementation at an early stage of the process, without losing sight of the necessary requirements of objectivity and autonomy.

The Academy may present the advisory report, for example to a Minister or State Secretary, at an official ceremony. Such presentations are often made by the Academy’s President in the presence of the advisory committee chairperson and members. Before the report is published, the Academy’s Communications Division may advise on an appropriate communications strategy and issue a press release. If the report has been commissioned by a Minister or State Secretary, an official response generally follows.

Once the advisory report has been issued, a new phase commences in which the Academy Board, the (former) chairperson of the advisory committee and, where necessary, the (former) committee members act as ambassadors for the report.

## 4. SIGNATURE

This manual replaces the Academy's '*beleidskader kwaliteitsborging adviezen*' [policy framework for advisory report quality assurance] of 2 November 2010.

On behalf of the Academy Board,  
Amsterdam, 19 July 2013,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Hans Chang', written in a cursive style.

Dr Hans Chang  
Director General

## APPENDIX A: EXAMPLE OF A RESOLUTION INAUGURATING A COMMITTEE

### RESOLUTION INAUGURATING THE *[project name]* COMMITTEE

Having regard to Article 8 of the Academy's Regulations, and having considered that *[text describing reason/problem]*, the Board of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences has decided to install the *[project name]* Committee (hereafter: 'the Committee').

#### Article 1. Assignment

The Committee's assignment is *[at the very least, list 1) the intended effect, 2) to whom the report is addressed (and, in this connection, the language in which it is written) and 3) the nature of the document (e.g. advisory report / foresight study / advisory memorandum)]* *[if the report or study was commissioned, it may be sufficient to refer to the written request and to attach a copy of that document to the resolution as an appendix]*

The Committee will present a draft of the report to the Board by *[date]*.

#### Article 2. Composition and term

The following persons are appointed to the Committee in a private capacity:

*[chairperson]*

*[other members]*

*[non-members of the Academy may sometimes be mandated by their organisations]*

The Committee's term will conclude on *[date]*.

*[Member of the Board]* will serve as an agenda member for the Academy Board. *[Note: Skip this paragraph if no agenda member has been appointed]*

The Committee will be assisted by the Academy's Bureau in accordance with the Director General's instructions.

*[name of appointed secretary may be included]*

#### Article 3. Quality management

Prior to their appointment, the members of the Committee familiarised themselves with the *Code ter voorkoming van oneigenlijke beïnvloeding door belangenverstrengeling* [Code of conduct to prevent inappropriate influence owing to conflicts of interests] and filled in and returned the

declaration contained therein before the Committee's first meeting.

The Committee members have familiarised themselves with the Academy's *Handleiding adviezen KNAW* [Manual concerning Academy Advisory reports] as adopted by the Academy Board on 21 May 2013. The peer review policy is described in Appendix B to the Academy's Manual concerning Academy Advisory reports of 19 July 2013. Deviations from this policy [*are / are not*] permitted. [*If permitted, explain why*]

#### **Article 4. Follow-up and communication**

The Committee will follow up and provide for communication concerning its findings [*add explanation*].

#### **Article 5. Costs and remuneration**

The Committee members will be reimbursed for their travel expenses in accordance with Article 18(2) of the Academy Regulations.

#### **Article 6. Confidentiality**

The Committee will treat as confidential all information that may be regarded as such and that becomes known to its members within the context of this resolution.

Adopted in Amsterdam on [*date*] by the Board of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences.

On behalf of the Academy Board

[*name*]

Director General of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences

## APPENDIX B: REVIEW PROCEDURE

All Academy advisory reports are subject to review, unless the Board decides otherwise, for example in the case of an advisory memorandum or an advisory report that must be issued at great speed, or if a review is not expected to add any further value. The purpose of the review is to have external experts assess whether the report has satisfactory underpinnings, whether the arguments it presents are sound, and whether it properly complies with the assignment described in the resolution inaugurating the committee. The review must be conducted by experts who have not been involved in producing the draft advisory report. It is the task of the Academy Board, and not the advisory committee, to ask external experts to review the draft report.

This means that:

- the resolution inaugurating the committee (Appendix A) must indicate whether a review will take place in accordance with the procedure described in the present Appendix B, and if not, why not.
- if a review is indicated, the Board will approach a minimum of three reviewers.
- one or more chairpersons of Academy advisory councils (or their deputies) will preferably serve as reviewers.
- the committee's secretary will serve as the Board's policy officer in this context.
- the reviewers will address the Board in their reviews. The Board will ensure that the reviews are submitted to the advisory committee.
- the reviewers will be asked not to discuss their comments or the content of the draft report externally.
- the review procedure is not anonymous. In other words, the reviewers' names will be known to the committee members and published in the report.
- the draft report amended in line with the review will be presented to the Board, along with the reviewers' comments, and the advisory committee's response to those comments.
- the Board will have the final say concerning any further changes and will decide whether or not to issue the report.

The reviewers may use the following questions as a guideline:

1. Does the report convey its message to the target group or groups clearly and effectively and does it answer the questions that have been posed?
2. Does the summary paint an accurate picture of the most important conclusions and recommendations?
3. Do the authors adequately support their conclusions and recommendations by facts, analysis and arguments?
4. Do the authors explicitly acknowledge any uncertainties or omissions?
5. Do the authors identify conclusions and recommendations based on opinion as such, and give satisfactory reasons for this?
6. Does the report deal competently with data and analyses?

7. Does it refer to recent relevant literature?
8. Has the committee produced an objective, autonomous advisory report?
9. Are the bibliography and any appendices relevant given the purpose of the report?
10. If you believe the report can be improved significantly, what improvements do you suggest?

## APPENDIX C: INTERNAL ACADEMY PROCEDURE FOR ADOPTING THE SCHEDULE OF ADVISORY REPORTS

When adopting its schedule of advisory reports, the Academy considers whether its reports are likely to make a difference. The Academy also strives to strike an even balance between solicited and unsolicited advice and between the two categories ‘science for policy’ and ‘policy for science’. In support of such decision-making, the Academy follows an internal procedure involving its committees and councils and the Policy Advice: Research and Knowledge Division.

Articles 7 and 8 of the 2012 Academy Regulations provide for the position of its advisory councils and temporary advisory committees (see Appendix D). The Academy has issued regulations concerning the advisory councils that define their tasks (Appendix E). The Academy has also installed a number of permanent committees that may provide the Board with solicited and unsolicited advice. All councils and committees are assisted by the Policy Advice: Research and Knowledge Division.

The councils serve for a five-year term. Their work mainly consists of:

1. proposing advisory topics to the Academy Board;
2. discussing the overall schedule of advisory reports with the Academy Board;
3. contributing to the development of an advisory report or to a review of the same;
4. helping to implement the recommendations offered in such reports.

To assist the councils in these tasks, the council chairpersons, the chairperson of the Board, the director general and the policy officers of the Policy Advice: Research and Knowledge Division hold special ‘Advisory Report and Foresight Study Meetings’ twice a year. During these meetings, they discuss the overall schedule of advisory reports. The councils’ proposals for advisory reports and studies are a fixed item on the agenda. The Board decides on proposals arising from the meetings, allowing for the capacity of the Policy Advice: Research and Knowledge Division.

Another agenda point for these meetings is the requests for advice, as part of the overall schedule of advisory reports. In practical terms, however, entering such requests into the schedule is a dynamic process that does not lend itself to preliminary discussion during the biannual Advisory Report and Foresight Study Meetings. In such cases, the Board takes a decision without awaiting the recommendations arising from these meetings.

## APPENDIX D: ACADEMY REGULATIONS: ARTICLES CONCERNING ADVISORY COUNCILS AND COMMITTEES

### **Article 7. The councils**

1. The Academy will install councils to advise and assist the Board in performing the Academy's task as an advisory body.
2. The Board will adopt regulations providing for the tasks, composition and procedures of the councils referred to in the present article.

### **Article 8. The committees**

1. The Academy will appoint temporary committees to advise and assist the Board.
2. The Board will adopt resolutions providing for the tasks, composition, procedures and terms of the committees referred to in the present article.

## APPENDIX E: ACADEMY ADVISORY COUNCIL REGULATIONS

### Article 1. Definition of Terms

1. These regulations contain provisions for the councils referred to in Article 7 of the Regulations of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (2012).
2. The Board appoints a council for a five-year term. Before a term expires, the Board decides whether the council should continue, which decision may be based in part on the council's self-evaluation.
3. The resolution inaugurating a council must provide for the following, in any event:
  - a. the council's work;
  - b. the council's composition;
  - c. the date on which the council is installed.

### Article 2. Tasks

1. A council makes proposals concerning the overall programme of Academy advisory reports for the year ahead. The Board adopts the annual overall programme of Academy advisory reports.
2. A council supervises advisory reports in its area of specialisation that have been entered into the programme referred to in Article 2.1.
3. A council may organise scientific meetings within the context of the aforementioned tasks.
4. A council advises the Board on all matters at the Board's request.

### Article 3. Members

1. A council will have as many members as is designated in the resolution referred to in Article 1.3.
2. Non-members of the Academy may also be appointed to a council.
3. The Board will appoint members for a five-year term and designate a chairperson and deputy chairperson. The members must not have reached the age of 67 at the time of their appointment.
4. The members may be reappointed for a second five-year term, provided they have not yet reached the age of 67.
5. If a council is to continue after its effective term has expired, at least half of its members must be new appointees.

### Article 4. Chairperson

1. A council's chairperson and deputy chairperson must be members of the Academy.
2. The chairperson will see that all of the council's work is properly prepared and executed.
3. The chairperson will attend Academy meetings concerning the overall programme of Academy advisory reports on behalf of the council.

4. The director general will see that the Academy Bureau provides the chairperson with secretarial assistance, allowing for implementation of the annual overall programme of Academy advisory reports.

**Article 5. Concluding provisions**

1. These regulations may be amended by the Board.
2. These regulations may be referred to as the 'Academy Council Regulations 2012'.