



Joint conference of the European Commission and International Network for Government Science Advice (INGSA), 29th-30th September 2016 SUMMARY REPORT



This two-day conference, held at the European Commission in Brussels, was the second INGSA international conference. It attracted a capacity audience of over 600, from 72 countries across the world. This was an important event for *Academia Europaea*, given its role in the SAPEA (Science Advice for Policy by European Academies) project. The AE President, Sierd Cloetingh, and the AE Cardiff Hub Manager, Louise Edwards, were in attendance.

Key themes

Underpinning the Conference was the theme of a **changing landscape for science and policy**. A critical factor behind this is the **digital revolution**. There is a 'tsunami' of knowledge available but much of it sits in silos and is variable in quality. Good analytics are an essential tool to deal with so much information; this is the era of **Big Data**. The importance of **information literacy** was stressed; we must ensure that our citizens are able to evaluate both the source and quality of information. The European Commissioner Carlos Moedas highlighted the importance of **Open Data** for the purposes of transparency; other speakers believed a clear framework and balance was required between Open Data and IPR.

Significant emphasis was put on a **new and evolving relationship between scientists, policymakers and the public**. In the words of one speaker, we are:

'Moving from a world of deference to a world of reference'

What does this mean? There was much talk about '**Post-Normal Science**'. Science is now often non-linear, complex and systems-based. It deals with probabilities rather than certainties. The scientist is no longer seen as the elite expert who has all the answers.

Wider society's expectations of science and policy are changing, with science coming under much closer **public scrutiny**. Worryingly, the public seem to think that scientist and policymakers are not listening to them.

Science and policymaking were described as **distinct cultures**, scientists often characterised as 'arrogant' about policymakers, and vice-versa.

When it comes to **science for policy**, we are dealing with uncertain facts, disputed values, high stakes and often urgent decisions. Science is only one element in the whole process of



policy-making; indeed, policymakers often do not think of science as an important aspect of policy-making.

It is therefore necessary to understand where scientists fit into the process. A sense of timing and rhythm of policy advice is required. Scientists were asked to put themselves in the shoes of policymakers, to listen to policy debate and make themselves understood.

'Politics is hot, science is cold' (conference quote)

Politics and policy-making are driven by **values**, which often take priority over evidence. Politicians can frequently resort to using science as a proxy for competing political decisions; indeed, they can often complain when science does not satisfy their agenda.

Politicians were asked to **trust the process of science**, even when they do not like the outcome.

Scientists were asked to be **honest about what they do not know**, not to overstate what science can do and to produce **options**, not solutions. In short, ask policymakers what they need and how you can help them.

Scientists need to convince the **public** not just the policymakers. People are interested in science that relates to them and their problems. The **quality of communication and engagement** needs to be significantly higher. The challenge is to communicate across the interface between scientists, policymakers and the public; to involve the public and other stakeholders (such as **business and entrepreneurs**) in the **co-creation of solutions** to societal problems.

At the same time, we were urged to recognise the voice of the **softer sciences** and develop **empathy**. It is not a case of *what* you want to do but *whether* you can do it. **Engage the public** in formulating the questions, don't just give them answers. Explain how science is done and make it **intelligible**. In the world of the under-30s, **social media** has overtaken the mainstream press and is trusted more.

In cases of **crisis and emergency**, politicians are often desperate for advice and often fall back on political ideology. Both politicians and scientists are exposed and can lose public trust very quickly. An emergency response needs **teamwork**. In a crisis, people want a sense of safety, calm, hope, connectedness and personal control.

Developing countries were covered quite extensively at the Conference, particularly within the context of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Evidence is regarded as essential to the success of the SDGs but will require an effective **ecosystem** of national advisory systems that are able to interact at an international level through **science diplomacy**. Building **scientific capacity** in developing countries is crucial.

Conclusions



In summary, the **critical success factors** for the new European Scientific Advice Mechanism (SAM) were generally regarded as:



Openness and transparency

Building **trust**, embracing **diversity** and **pluralism**

Explaining the **process** of science

Translating the **language** of science into that of politics

Creating a dynamic **relationship** between stakeholders

Picking the right **champions** for specific issues

The next INGSA Conference is scheduled for Tokyo in 2018.

Sources

Conference website (with programme and presentations):

<http://ec.europa.eu/research/conferences/2016/ingsa2016/index.cfm?pg=home>

INGSA website: <http://www.ingsa.org/>

Declaration of the 2015 Budapest World Science Forum on the Enabling Power of Science:

<http://www.sciforum.hu/declaration/index.html>

World Science Forum: <http://www.sciforum.hu/>

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