

The Royal Irish Academy (RIA)

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Origins of the Academy and Academy House

The Royal Irish Academy was founded in May 1785 and incorporated by royal charter of George III in January 1786. The Academy was established to promote scholarly discussion and the exchange of ideas and learning on scholarly matters in the sciences, polite literature and antiquities.

Academy House, situated at 19, Dawson Street, adjacent to the Mansion House and St Ann's Church, has been the home of the Academy since 1851. The building dates from c. 1750. A good example of an eighteenth-century town house, there is some very fine decorative plasterwork around the staircase in the inner hall. The two rooms built onto the rear of the building, the Reading and Meeting Rooms, were designed by Frederick Villiers Clarendon and opened in 1854.

Mission and structure

Mission Statement

The Royal Irish Academy, the academy for the sciences, humanities and social sciences for the whole of Ireland will vigorously promote excellence in scholarship, recognise achievements in learning, direct research programmes and undertake its own research projects, particularly in areas relating to Ireland and its heritage.

It will reflect upon, advise on and contribute to public debate and public policy formation on issues of major interest in science, technology and culture.

It will continue to offer an independent forum to Irish scholars, it will provide a network of support for scholarly disciplines through its network of national committees and commissions, it will maintain and enhance its unique library, it will publish scholarly papers and it will represent the world of Irish learning internationally.

Evolving Vision

Today, the Academy's mission has evolved and widened considerably. It aspires to be both a national Academy advancing the interests of scholars, scholarship and research on the island of Ireland, and a learned society promoting and supporting excellence in research and scholarship in the sciences and the humanities. As a national academy it is also part of an international network of academies representing scholars and researchers all over the world. Ireland's economy and Irish society have been transformed over the past generation. Ireland is now a wealthy country with a well-developed knowledge-based economy. In the new world there is an unprecedented focus on research, technological development and innovation

The Academy has consolidated linkages with research funding agencies, government agencies and other national stakeholders

Structure and Infrastructure of the Academy

There are two categories of membership to the Royal Irish Academy: Members and Honorary Members.

Membership of the Royal Irish Academy is open to residents of the Republic of Ireland or Northern Ireland. Candidates must be proposed and nominated by five Members of the Academy. From these nominations, twenty candidates who have attained international distinction in science or the humanities and social sciences, as evidenced by their published work, are elected in March of each year after a

rigorous, peer-reviewed selection procedure. There is normally an equal split between science and humanities. Members of the Academy are entitled to use the letters MRIA after their names. At present, there are approximately 400 members of the Royal Irish Academy.

Honorary Membership of the Royal Irish Academy is awarded to persons who have made major contributions to their academic discipline, but who are normally resident outside the island of Ireland. A candidate for Honorary Membership must be proposed and recommended by at least two Academy Members. Proposals for Honorary Membership are peer-reviewed and considered for election on an annual basis. Honorary Members of the Academy are entitled to use the letters Hon MRIA after their names. At present, there are approximately 60 honorary members.

The Academy is governed by a Council, elected from among its Members, who meet four times per annum. The Council is assisted by an Executive Committee- composed of Academy Officers, the Executive Secretary and a staff representative- that links the Council with the day-to-day management of the Academy. The Executive Committee meets ten times per annum, and provides a forum for discussion and decision-making on all matters to do with strategy, direction, organisation and financial management. The Academy currently has 92 staff across its administrative, research and library functions. There is a Stated Meeting of the Academy twice a year for all Members.

The Academy currently supports and manages nine internationally important research projects and has particular research strengths in the areas in which the library and collections are exceptionally rich, including Irish language and literature, linguistics, the history and culture of Ireland and archaeology.

The Academy's main premises are in Academy House in Dublin. From the Academy's inception, the library has been a major research tool for those studying aspects of Irish history, archaeology, language, and culture. Unique features include the invaluable collection of seventeenth to nineteenth-century pamphlets bequeathed by the Dublin merchant Charles Haliday and the library of Thomas Moore, donated by his widow. The library also contains a very valuable and wide-ranging collection of internationally important periodicals, as well as a great number of monographs, with a particular emphasis on Irish material. Even more important are its manuscripts, including the famous *Cathach of Colm Cille*. Indeed the library holds the largest collection of Irish manuscripts in a single repository, prime among those being the *Book of the Dun Cow* (c. 1100), the later medieval *Leabhar Breac*, the *Book of Ballymote*, as well as original manuscript volumes of the *Annals of the Four Masters*.

For further details on the structure, history and mission of the Academy, see www.ria.ie/about/index.html
The Strategic Plan 2007-2012

In the Strategic Plan 2007-2012, four key strategic directions were identified, which will guide the development of the Academy's services and activities in the next five years:

1. Building public engagement
2. broadening participation and representation
3. serving society
4. enhancing Academy Governance structures

(see also: <http://www.ria.ie/about/pdfs/strategic%20plan%2007-12.pdf>).

Scientific Achievements of Members and Impact of Academy Science Policy

Approximately half of the Academy's 400 Members are involved in the sciences. All are world-renowned in their field and make significant contributions to science research both in Ireland and overseas. Past and current Members include: Sir William Rowan Hamilton (discovered quaternions), Professor Ernest Walton (Nobel Laureate), Dr Vincent Barry (discovered a cure for leprosy), Professor Desmond Higgins (his computer programme Clustal, for lining up DNA sequences, is used in almost every molecular biology laboratory around the world) and Professor Patrick Cunningham (Chief Scientific Advisor for Ireland).

The Academy actively works to engage with and inform public policy debates in higher education teaching and learning, R&D and the broader national innovation system. Recent science policy initiatives include *A Discussion Forum on Irish Science, Putting Our Knowledge of the Earth to Work for Ireland* and a number of scientific statements on climate change.

For more information on the Royal Irish Academy's policy remit, see www.ria.ie/policy/index.html

Academy Publications

The Academy is the largest publisher of scholarly journals in Ireland, and also has an extensive list of series and monographs.

The Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy (originally Transactions, first published in 1787) appear in three sections: Section A covers mathematics, Section B covers biological and environmental sciences, and Section C covers history and archaeology. In addition, the Academy publishes *Ériu* (the leading journal in Irish philology and literature), the Irish Journal of Earth Sciences and Irish Studies in International Affairs.

The Academy's series and monographs are frequently based on its own research programmes. Popular successes include the acclaimed Atlas of Ireland, the Excavations at Knowth series, and the lavishly illustrated Treasures of Ireland, with over 20,000 copies printed in Irish, English, Dutch and German. Current projects include the Irish Historic Towns Atlas, *Foclóir na Nua Ghaeilge*, Documents on Irish Foreign Policy and the definitive Dictionary of Medieval Latin from Celtic Sources.

In recent years the Academy has published a number of popular science and history books, which have been both commercial and critical successes, winning awards and reaching new audiences beyond the academic reader. These popular books have been accompanied by either TV or radio series, in conjunction with Ireland's national broadcaster, RTÉ.

The Academy's diverse publication programme continues to reflect its powerful contribution to cultural life both in Ireland and further afield.

For further details on the Academy's publications, TV and radio work, see www.ria.ie/publications/index.html

Major Bilateral and Multilateral International Activities.

Since the 1950s, the Academy has established a network of National Committees which act as a strategic vehicle for all of the academic disciplines within their area. A primary function of each of the Academy Committees is to act as the Irish affiliating body to the relevant international academic unions. There are twelve committees in the Sciences and eleven in the Humanities and Social Sciences.

The Academy also offers a number of Mobility Grants to Irish scholars, to enable them to undertake exchanges, study visits and research projects abroad.

Many of the Academy research projects are the Irish wings of wider European projects, for example the Irish Historic Towns Atlas and the Dictionary of Medieval Latin from Celtic Sources.

The Royal Irish Academy is member of the Steering Committee of ALLEA and is affiliated with The International Council for Science (ICSU), the European Science Academies Advisory Council (EASAC), the Inter Academy Council (IAC), the Inter Academy Panel (IAP) and the Committee on Data for Science and Technology (CODATA).