

CAETS Working Group: Engineering for SDGs

Survey analysis

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Survey – June 2021

- We surveyed CAETS academies about their sustainability activities, particularly their experiences of communicating with and influencing political actors.
- Of 31 member academies, 17 responded to the survey and 2 offered email responses.
- The survey data reveals how academies engage with sustainability as a topic; the nature and extent to which they engage with political actors; and their practical experiences of doing so.

Academies' focus on sustainability

- A range of definitions of “sustainability”. Several relate closely to UN, and several consider sustainability in the context of social and economic factors.
- The majority (16 of 19) are currently focusing on sustainability as a topic.
- Most of the 16 see sustainability as an integrated element of other areas, and most said that the topic of sustainability is a high priority for their academy.

Academies and sustainability policies

- 13 of the 19 responders said that they have attempted to communicate with or influence political actors on sustainability issues during the past three years.
- The level of current influence on sustainability policies varies widely.

OPPORTUNITY: Knowledge sharing between CAETS academies to help those with weak influence gain more traction.

- 5 academies have a statutory role to provide advice to govt/political actors.
- All academies that responded said that their national administration has set a target for reaching net zero emissions.

OPPORTUNITY: CAETS academies could play a valuable role helping their governments achieve their net zero target.

Sustainability topics

- Broad range – common ones are climate change, clean energy, electric vehicles, circular economy/zero waste, green plans.
- Several academies actively engaging with political actors about net zero issues - highlighting risks, opportunities, solutions, decision pathways, how to navigate complexity etc.

OPPORTUNITY: Promote value of engineering advice to enable further engagement/support on net zero; knowledge exchange on approaches to specific topics

- A request from Uruguay – ANIU looking to set up a Climate Change Committee to assess Uruguayan concerns including CH₄ emissions, genetic developments in agriculture and forestry to increase resilience, electric vehicles, etc.
- ANIU would like to connect with other CAETS academies working on these areas.

How do academies communicate/influence?

1. Inviting political actors to public-facing events
 2. Publishing policy recommendations via reports or briefings
 3. Responding to government consultations
 4. Inviting political actors to private meetings
 5. Social media activity
 6. Writing to political actors (e.g. by letter or email)
- Those with strong influence tend to take a multi-faceted approach

OPPORTUNITY: Share best practice/case studies on how to do these things successfully?

Tips, tactics, principles

- Independent and transparent advice – to build trust
- Articulating challenges and achievable solutions
- Aligning recommendations with politicians' wider agenda
- Concise reports, short briefings, small number of recommendations
- Meeting policymakers/politicians before and/or after publishing a report
- Continuous communication; pressing for Ministerial engagement
- Repetition of same messages through various channels
- Having set advisory guidelines to follow
- Academy prestige/reputation

OPPORTUNITY: Create a “how to” resource to guide academies, including specific outcomes that these approaches have led to

Challenges when communicating/influencing

- Lack of resource e.g. capability to create a strategic communication plan
- Gaining traction and visibility in a crowded arena
- Lack of government/political recognition of sustainability issues
- Getting senior government officials to engage with the academy
- Time required to build academy profile and reputation
- Maintaining a contact network in face of government re-organisations and political churn
- Political actors with personal agendas

OPPORTUNITY: Outline approaches to overcoming challenges to boost academies' approaches to getting traction and influence

Risks to the academy

- Risks to independence, reputation, credibility etc
- Conflicts of interest
- Upsetting government
- Academy advice not recognised
- Not overcommitting
- Division within Fellowship

OPPORTUNITY: Guidance on how to manage such risks

What can we do next?

Internal facing: CAETS capacity building

- A resource that shares survey findings and group's insight
- Brochure/handbook style resource that provides guidance – e.g. broken down into:
 - i. Introduction: making the case for engineering advice, and how
 - ii. Case Studies: 2-3 practical, detailed accounts of academies' successful approaches, and what enabled them
 - iii. Opinion pieces: 2-3 academies discussing their experiences, their academy's journey, how they operated in specific political environments
 - iv. Contact points: who to speak to within CAETS to enable knowledge sharing conversations

External facing: telling the story of how engineers contribute to SDGs

- How can the survey data help us tell the world about the importance of engineering expertise and advice in achieving the SDGs?

Discussion

- **About the data:** What does the survey reveal about the current capacity of engineers to support political actors on sustainability issues?
- **Next steps:** How can we use the findings to build the capacity of CAETS member academies to take a greater leadership role in sustainability policies?
- **Output:** What would be of benefit to academies within CAETS and beyond