Royal Irish Academy

Independent diversity review of membership process

Report and recommendations

October 2021

Acadamh Ríoga na hÉireann
Royal Irish Academy

Contents

Background

The Royal Irish Academy (RIA) initiated an independent review of its membership processes in May 2021, following Council's and members' concerns about the lack of diversity (particularly gender diversity) reflected in membership admission in recent years.

The RIA invited four academics from outside Ireland to make up the review panel, namely;

- Professor Lesley Yellowlees (Chair), chemist and former vice principal at the University of Edinburgh. She is a fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE), where she chaired its *Tapping All Our Talents 2018* report. She also chaired the first Senior Academic Leadership Initiative (SALI) expert panel in Ireland.
- Professor Veronica van Heyningen, geneticist and honorary professor at University College London (UCL). She is a fellow of the Royal Society and chairs its diversity committee.
- Professor Knut Liestøl, informatician at the University of Oslo. He is a member of the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters and chairs the expert panel for BALANSE—the gender initiative of the Norwegian Research Council.
- Professor Andrea Pető, historian, gender studies expert at Central European University, Vienna, Austria. She is a research affiliate of the CEU Democracy Institute, Budapest and a Doctor of Science of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

The review panel was asked to consider the following areas in relation to RIA membership and make recommendations:

processes and regulations;
membership criteria;
culture, both internal and external;
HEA National Review of Gender Equality (2016);
international best practice;
maintenance of academic excellence;
greater diversity of academic membership.

Whilst increasing female participation within the RIA membership was an acknowledged driver for the review, the panel was also asked to consider how to increase more broadly the diversity of the membership to reflect Irish society at large. Currently, just under 20% of all members ('ordinary', Council Recommended and Honorary) are women (16%, 36% and 21% respectively).

Introduction

The Review Panel conducted all its activities virtually, given the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Written materials were received from the RIA in the form of a briefing document and a further briefing document written by Professor Pat O'Connor, emeritus professor of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Limerick and visiting professor at the Geary Institute, UCD. Additional material provided by the diversity committee of the RIA and various individuals from the Irish academic community are also gratefully acknowledged.

Internal consultations were held with RIA staff, the RIA president and secretary and the head of the Diversity Committee on 9 and 18 June 2021. Further hearings were held on 22 and 23 June, and 14 and 20 July 2021, which included discussions with the senior leadership team of RIA members (the president, senior vice-president, secretary, treasurer), representatives from Council, the Diversity Committee, the Membership Assessment Committee, the PL&A Committee, the Science Committee, RIA members, external stakeholders, Professor Pat O'Connor, and experts on the Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA).

The hearings and internal consultations detailed above allowed the review panel to verify information received, to pose questions of clarification regarding data provided, to request additional information and to obtain a range of perspectives and views on the issues.

An electronic survey was opened to all Irish academics from 16 July to 13 August to solicit views; around 750 replies were received. The replies were analysed by Dr Danielle Dalimonte-Merckling, a developmental scientist and statistician based at Michigan State University. Key findings are incorporated into this report, with her full survey analysis attached as an appendix. The survey results are a rich source of data for the RIA which will aid progress on issue of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI).

Findings, recommendations and actions

The review panel acknowledges the wide spectrum of views on diversity and inclusion held by those who contributed to the review, including the 747 survey respondents. The panel observes that there was broad support for the need for change within the RIA to reflect current best international practice in EDI so that the RIA can achieve its stated aims 'to promote high levels of scholarship, to act as a national and international body for the various academic disciplines, to advise government in the fields of science, humanities, research and education and to promote collaboration between scholars and different learned institutions at home and abroad'. Furthermore, as a member organisation of ALLEA, the RIA aims to protect and fight for academic freedom.

In order for the RIA to play its full part in Irish society, at all levels, and for its impact to be realised throughout the land, it is vital that the membership should encompass a wide spectrum of knowledge, experiences and views. For the RIA to be relevant to Irish society today and attract members from across all disciplines, all geographic areas, all academic institutions, all protected characteristics—in other words to be truly inclusive—then changes will be necessary in how the RIA selects members.

Sadly, the review panel heard too many times that the RIA was old fashioned, not relevant, an 'old boys club', with limited influence, not an institution to aspire to belong to. The RIA Independent Review of Membership Processes survey (see Appendix) notes that nearly 40% of those commenting stated that the RIA is dominated by older White males. Other themes that emerged were perceptions of the RIA as old-fashioned, outdated or elitist, and some respondents indicated that, while gender diversity has improved, other forms of diversity (such as age, discipline, class, ethnicity, and politics) still need to be addressed.

More positively, those contributing to the review (both in person and through the survey) recognised that the RIA was a force for good, and the potential is there for even greater impact. There was considerable appetite for engagement, and a willingness to work to improve processes and procedures, with promoting greater diversity within the RIA membership a good starting point. Well-established academies continuously have to consider how best to reflect current practices. Then, to achieve optimal academic standards, it is vital to select from the broadest possible range of candidates in terms of gender, ethnicity, institutions and disciplines—any narrowing of the search space for candidates will tend toward decreasing standards. This review panel welcomes the opportunity to help the RIA move forward its inclusion and diversity agenda, paying particular attention to improving diversity of candidates proposed and their admittance to membership.

The underrepresentation of women in science (excluding biological sciences) and at senior leadership positions within academia is a well-articulated global problem. Long-lasting solutions are difficult to achieve as these must involve changes in institutional culture, but recognition of the problem is worldwide. Social, economic and political drivers are prominent in identifying ways forward. The RIA in trying to diversify its membership must work within the academic community in Ireland and Northern Ireland. Thus, the paucity of women at professorial level in Ireland presents a problem. Although the recent appointment of SALI posts will help here, underrepresentation will remain, and the RIA, as a leading academic force, should aim at being instrumental in effecting necessary change in the system. The recent dearth of women attaining RIA membership, however, which is worse in the sciences, highlights possible problems within the membership process that are also reflected in underrepresentation of other groups within the membership.

While the review panel was tasked with addressing EDI issues within the membership appointment process, we also offer some wider suggestions for consideration within the RIA.

The Review Panel is pleased to offer the following recommendations and concomitant suggested actions, in line with comments from review respondents and international best practice.

Recommendation 1: Make EDI a prominent and sustained goal within the RIA

The RIA is uniquely placed to take a strong leadership role on EDI within Ireland, but this requires the president, Council, members to put it up-front. In the short term, tackling EDI issues will need to be the number one priority, stated by the president, articulated in the strategic plan and socialised within the membership. The EDI agenda needs to be embraced, implemented and monitored by all members at all times. In the longer term, EDI should permeate all RIA activities if the RIA is to be a diverse and inclusive academy.

An EDI assessment should feature on all papers, reports, updates, etc. Council member self-assessment forms should ask the question 'How have you supported EDI within the RIA and how do you intend to do so in the future?'. Committee chairs should be explicitly tasked with promoting the EDI agenda. Chairs should report to the Diversity Committee, and through it to Council, on promotion and application of the EDI agenda.

Appoint a member of staff within the RIA whose specific remit is EDI, to support and monitor the identification and implementation of the RIA diversity agenda.

The Royal Society in the UK launched and ran Athena Swan for many years, and the Royal Society of Edinburgh undertook two gender-specific assessments, *Tapping All Our Talents* (producing reports in 2012 and 2018), which established both societies as leaders on gender. The RIA is encouraged to consider a similar high-profile activity, or a series of networking events, to, for example, introduce potential members from underrepresented groups to members; another option to consider is an annual conference discussing strategic planning for increasing inclusivity in the membership of academics from different institutions. Mentoring initiatives; launching an EDI prize; building a programme of talks and discussions about diversity, always ensuring that invited speakers come from diverse backgrounds; or instigating an outreach programme are all possible clear steps forward along this path. Indeed, a combination of some of the above plus additional self-generated ideas are encouraged.

The RIA should regularly monitor the impact of EDI initiatives using its Diversity Committee to keep a watching brief, initiate new activity and report to Council.

The review panel's attention was drawn to the HEA Expert Group (2016) report, which recommended a target of 40% female candidates for election to RIA membership by 2021. The RIA has obviously failed to meet this target and the repercussions of this failure are unknown to the review panel. This stretching target will only be met in the short term by the RIA introducing temporary positive actions until a substantial and sustainable change in membership composition is achieved. Examples of temporary positive actions are given elsewhere in this report. When taking these initiatives, it will be relatively easy and very appropriate to extend inclusivity to other under-represented groups, such as ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ individuals and those who come from backgrounds of socioeconomic deprivation, but also to broaden the academic disciplines covered to include new growth areas; see also Recommendation 8.

Recommendation 2: Increase transparency of RIA processes, procedures, data

Many individuals, both members and non-members, stated that they found the membership process opaque (see the survey results in the appendix). Panels interviewed by the review team stated that membership composition data (gender, subject area, geographic distribution) were not routinely available, but this data when presented to the review panel provided clear evidence that there is a lack of inclusion and diversity within the membership. Publication of such data, for instance on the RIA website, would aid transparency and help the RIA in widening its representation by facilitating better engagement and oversight from members. The RIA is encouraged to collect further, robust EDI data and make such statistics easily accessed through the establishment of a database.

Proposers whose membership bid fails should be given feedback from the Advisory Committee on the Assessment of Candidates for Membership (ACACM committee) to improve resubmission in the next round. The proposers should then share the feedback with their candidates. Such an action will help candidates and provide evidence that ACACM committees discuss and scrutinise all proposals.

Recommendation 3: Broaden definition of 'academic excellence'

There was universal support for academic excellence remaining as a key criterion for RIA membership. The current criteria for membership, however, have a narrow focus when compared with definitions of excellence used elsewhere today. In addition, there is a perception that achievement in publication is the primary selection tool, with other academic achievements having minor or no significance. The growth of multidisciplinary research tackling large-scale, grand challenges has necessitated the need to acknowledge team-work and the role of the individual researcher within the team. Furthermore, the review panel suggests the RIA should recognise the diversity of paths resulting in successful careers possible today.

Thus, the RIA is encouraged to reassess and broaden its definition of academic excellence and give more weight to factors such as societal impact, leadership, team-work, professional standing and innovation activities, including entrepreneurship. This is not to denigrate the 'sole researcher', but rather to expand the reach of RIA membership. In the recent Research Excellence Framework 2021 exercise just completing in the UK the weightings for output : impact : environment are 60 : 25 : 15 having changed from 65 : 20 : 15 in 2014, showing that there has been a shift of emphasis from research output to research impact. Research outputs should be interpreted widely, to include not only published manuscripts but also, for example, conference proceedings, computer code, policy documents, performance pieces.

Finally, quality rather than quantity of output should be measured—it is what the candidate has achieved in the time available rather than quantity that is important; volume is not necessary. This latter point is particularly aimed at helping to reduce the average age of the membership, a change that is desirable in itself and likely to increase diversity. Increasing diversity in the membership will increase the impact of the RIA.

What the RIA defines as 'academic excellence' should be carefully discussed within the Academy and its definition should then be made publicly available.

Recommendation 4: Revamp the proposal documentation

Redesign the proposal documentation to encourage greater diversity and to reflect current international best practice. The RIA may wish to consider:

- the use of narrative CVs (maximum 2 pages) that would permit the role of the applicant in a team endeavour to be espoused,
- a word limit on the proposer and seconder's statements (500 words),
- a section in which circumstances particular to the candidate, such as career breaks, maternity leave, caring responsibilities, disability, can be described (such information will be of significance to an increased number of candidates following the COVID-19 pandemic).

Electronic copies of the candidate's three most significant publications should be included; books may be represented by scans of the title and content pages and the provision of a DOI number.

The review panel was interested to learn that non-members tended to be in the majority on RIA multidisciplinary committees (members around 25%), which may increase the diversity of the committee when compared to that of the RIA membership. The perception is, however, that serving the RIA in such a fashion is not then recognised as contributing to a potential membership case. The kudos of membership comes with an obligation to contribute towards realisation of the RIA's aims. The review panel suggests that a statement should be added to the proposal documentation regarding what is expected of its members, for example, serving on committees. Such information should be reinforced when eager new members are admitted. The RSE has <20% non-fellows (members) serving on committees, and only when expertise is lacking in the fellowship.

Recommendation 5: Widen the pool of proposers and seconders

The number of proposers and seconders is currently a minority of the RIA membership, and if this minority does not come from diverse backgrounds, then this will tend to limit the diversity of candidate nominations. Furthermore, proposers/seconders will tend to nominate candidates from within their own institution, which in turn will exacerbate the problem of members from TCD, UCD and Queen's Belfast dominating the geographic representation of the membership. Proposers should, then, put forward candidates from institutions other than their own. The review panel strongly supports the statement made in the 'Directions for the proposal of Candidates for Membership' paperwork that 'The Proposer and Seconder must be from different institutions from each other', and would suggest that the proposer and seconder cannot both come from Trinity, UCD, Queen's.

Proposers should be encouraged to nominate high-flying candidates from a wide spectrum of disciplines to ensure a balanced spectrum of membership. It is acknowledged that proposing/seconding requires effort. Increasing the percentage of members proposing candidates will help. Nominations should be completed by the proposer, with input from the candidate providing the factual details. The documentation should reflect the achievements of the candidate in a clear and un-embroidered manner—hyperbole is, and should be, counterproductive. The nominator should be seeking out nominees, not vice versa.
There were repeated suggestions/implications that institutions often decide which of their staff they would nominate for membership. Institutions should have no influence on the nomination process.

Directions on the candidate's proposer and seconder paperwork should state that candidature from diverse backgrounds is encouraged.

Recommendation 6: Empower ACACM committees to enforce an EDI agenda

The members of the ACACM committee (drawn from the Science and PL&A committees) review all candidate proposals and recommend nominees to be put to Council for admission to membership. It is therefore imperative that the committee members are continuously aware of the diversity of the candidate pool under consideration. Prior to every assessment meeting, ACACM members should be reminded of diversity issues and provided with statistics on current status.

Unconscious Bias training should be mandatory for members of ACACM committee annually, and the issue should be highlighted by the committee chair before all committee meetings. The results of the training should be reviewed regularly. Thus, manifestations of unconscious bias should be known and recognised by all members and staff. It is important for committee members to feel secure in calling out any bias. Therefore, the review panel suggests that the RIA staff member with responsibility for EDI should monitor and record such issues for subsequent Council action.

Ensure members of the ACACM committee are as diverse as possible—it is important that minority members are not overused, but this may be inevitable initially. Ensure the overall committee is made up of representatives from all different stakeholders. This is acknowledged to pose extra work for those who represent underrepresented groups, but should only be the case in the short term.

RIA staff should produce statistics on diversity of candidates (gender, subject area, institution type, geographic region) and flag to meetings the areas where there is a shortage of nominations. The assessment panels should be reminded by the president to look for a spread of talents in the proposed members.

Ultimately, the Science and PL&A chairs on the ACACM committee should ensure that their proffered lists encompass a diverse group of candidates who will aid the RIA in its activities. Council should then scrutinise the proffered list and if it is not satisfied that this criterion is met then the ACACM committee should be charged with revisiting the list of potential members to check that no suitable candidates have been overlooked. On completion of the selection cycle the Science and PL&A chairs on the ACACM committee should submit a report to the Diversity Committee outlining how EDI issues were considered in the assessment procedure. The RSE has agreed that when the assessment panels draw up their lists of recommendations then if all else is equal (always difficult to assess) then the assessment panel has to choose the diverse candidate.

Recommendation 7: Overhaul referee system

The review panel heard many times, from both those who took part in the review panel interviews and from the survey respondents, of concerns with the current referee system. The ACACM committees rely heavily on referees' comments—positive or negative—in ranking candidates, but many questions were raised about how well the present system is working. Currently there are three 'Proposer Nominated referees' and an additional list of ten suggested independent referees are provided by the proposer without consultation with the candidate.

The Royal Society invites contributions from independent referees (6+), with proposers having no involvement in the selection of referees. At the Royal Society, panel members with no conflict of interest make emailed suggestions of suitable referees to the committee chair, who then sends out (email) letters requesting references from a spectrum of reviewers. Identifying likely international reviewers is effortful and may require the selection committee members assigned to that proposal

to try to understand the broad area of a candidate's work and search for foreign referees with relevant expertise. Referees need not be members of RIA. The RIA is encouraged to build up a database of suitable referees using members of other learned societies, national and international, as a starting point. Proposers should not be involved in selecting referees and have no further role in the election of their candidate once the nomination is submitted. If they happen to be on a selection committee, they need to be completely excluded when their candidate is discussed.

In addition, a set of revised guidelines for referees should be developed within a maximum of 12 months, with input from the Diversity Committee and RIA staff, to promote comparable candidate reviews and to avoid reviewers considering too narrow criteria. The role of the independent referee is crucial in assessing and highlighting the contribution of an individual in a team output and will need to be included in the revised guidelines.

Recommendation 8: Increase the number of proposals for membership from underrepresented groups; establish nomination groups

Increasing the number of nominations for membership from underrepresented groups should result in an increase in diversity in new members. The RIA could issue a statement on its web pages to the effect that the RIA encourages proposals for membership from underrepresented groups, such as women and minority cultural and ethnic groups. In addition, the RIA needs to better reflect the academic landscape in the whole of Ireland, and thus the RIA would want to encourage proposals of membership from academics from Technological Universities, interdisciplinary areas, etc. The review panel suggests, however, that more temporary positive action needs to be undertaken if there is to be a shift in membership recruitment patterns in the short term. From the data provided to the review panel, it is evident that few members engage in the nominations process. It would seem likely that those who do propose candidates do so within their own subject group or from their own institution, although we note a recent amendment that stipulates the proposer and seconder must come from different institutions—this is a welcome step.

Establishing Nominations Groups focusing on underrepresented areas is a solution that has been successfully tested by other academies. The Royal Society set up a Temporary Gender Nominations Group some years ago and currently has a group seeking prospective candidates with industrial links and another looking for those from other under-represented groups, such as ethnic minorities. The RSE initially selected Gender and Creative Arts groups, which were set up nine years ago; professions, business and younger candidates groups were established six years ago. The role of the groups is to proactively identify people who should be put forward for fellowship/membership and match them with appropriate nominators and assessors (proposers and seconders in the RIA). The groups are independent of the rest of the nomination process and once the nomination is received, the candidate is treated in the same way as all other nominations. The RIA selection committees would not be aware that candidates had been identified by a group. The groups meet once or twice a year.

Nominations generated by the RSE groups and their success rates are as given below.

	New Nominations		
Group	2020	2019	2018
Gender	10	5	9
Creative Arts	4	7	3
Professions	6	4	3
Business	3	2	0
Younger	8	3	9
TOTAL	31	21	24

Nominations Group [total numbers since established]	No. of Nominations	No. Elected	Success rate (%)*
Women	80	62	77.5
Creative Arts	42	36	85.7
Business	22	13	59.1
Professions	19	15	78.9
Younger	16	14	87.5

*Usual success rate is around 25%. Data from RSE.

In 2020, 24 of the 64 RSE fellows elected (37%) came through the nominations groups, which is slightly up on previous years (17/62 in 2019 (27%); 19/66 in 2018 (29%); 17/61 in 2017 (28%)). The RS Gender nominations group was only set up for two years and had a noticeable effect at the time, but afterwards proportions of women elected fell again. The Norwegian Academy does not have formal nominations groups but do use them informally to good effect.

The nominations groups work most effectively when the composition of the group is diverse and individuals in the group are prepared to propose or second several candidates—there is no limit to the number of underrepresented area candidates a single proposer/seconder can support. Nomination group members are encouraged to cast their nets widely to include institutions with little track record in successful membership proposals.

Suggested areas for nomination groups for the RIA might be Gender, Industry representation, Institutional/Geographic diversity, Emerging knowledge areas. The review panel notes that the RIA set up a search committee recently to identify potential overseas honorary membership candidates.

The RIA should additionally examine the distribution of its members over all subject areas, comparing its data to the distribution in the academic institutions in Ireland and Northern Ireland. An informal look at the distribution may suggest that areas with high numbers of female scholars, including social science and education, are underrepresented—such underrepresentation may markedly affect the diversity in the RIA.

Recommendation 9: Increase the number of annually elected members, number of sub-committees of ACACM

The one action that made the biggest difference to diversification in the RSE fellowship was increasing the number of fellows elected per year, combined with other positive actions such as establishing nomination groups (Recommendation 8). For example, ten years ago 20% of elected fellows that year were women. This year (2021), 38% of those elected were women.
The review panel noted that the RIA increased the number of elected members (ordinary) in 2017 from 12 to 20 to overcome the declining membership numbers, with the number of ordinary member subgroupings remaining at two: Science and PL&A. Disappointingly, the membership increase did not lead to a great improvement in diversity, thus it would be necessary to combine the suggested increase in numbers with a greater focus on increasing diversity whilst maintaining 'academic excellence' (see Recommendation 3).

Increasing the number of subcommittees of the ACACM, for example, dividing Science into Physical Sciences and Engineering and Life Sciences and PL&A into Humanities and Social Sciences, and introducing a fifth Interdisciplinary grouping will help selection committees focus on a more limited subject area, thereby increasing visibility of underrepresented groups and allowing for new subject areas to be introduced more easily (see Figure 5 in the Appendix.) Interdisciplinary areas have gained prominence over recent years, and it is recognised that identifying experts in these upcoming areas can be problematic. Consideration, then, of this sub-group by a separate panel will aid successful nominations.

The precise numerical increases in annual membership are to be decided by the RIA.

Recommendation 10: Press ahead with establishment of a Young Academy

The review panel strongly supports the establishment of a Young Academy (YA). All international evidence points to the success of a YA. EDI criteria can be built into membership considerations from the start, thereby ensuring the diversity of the YA membership. Established YAs all have status and impact, add to the work of the parent academy, and can provide a recruitment base for the parent academy. The Young Academy of Scotland (YAS) was established ten years ago and has been very successful in its own right. It is not a given that all YAS members will become full fellows, but to date 30 have gone on to full fellowship of the parent academy.

Thank you

References

European Institute for Gender Equality, 'Gender equality in academia and research—GEAR tool', available at: https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/gear

H. Drake, 'Eight ways to support women in science', *Eos* 7 June 2019, available at: https://eos.org/opinions/eight-ways-to-support-women-in-science

Kristin A. Smith, Paola Arlotta, Fiona M. Watt, The Initiative on Women in Science and Engineering Working Group and Susan L. Solomon, 'Seven actionable strategies for advancing women in science, engineering, and medicine', *Cell Stem Cell.* 2015 16 (3) (March 2015), 221–24, available at: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4476252/

Leah H. Somerville and June Gruber, 'Three trouble spots facing women in science—and how we can tackle them', *Science*, available at: https://www.sciencemag.org/careers/2020/10/three-trouble-spots-facing-women-science-and-how-we-can-tackle-them

Central European University, 'Gender equality plan 2019–2022', available at: https://documents.ceu.edu/documents/o-2101

UNESCO, 'Initiatives for Women and girls in science', available at: https://en.unesco.org/women-and-girls-in-science/initiatives

European Research Area—ERA Portal Austria, 'EC sets up working group to support female innovators', 28 April 2021, available at: https://era.gv.at/news-items/ec-sets-up-working-group-to-support-female-innovators/

European Commission, 'Gender equality strategy: achievements and key areas for action', available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-equality-strategy_en

Government of Ireland, 'Gender equality in Ireland', available at: http://www.genderequality.ie/en/GE/Pages/NationalWomensStrategy

Royal Irish Academy Independent Review of Membership Processes

August 2021

Table of Contents

CONTENTS

SURVEY ENGAGEMENT

In August of 2021, the Royal Irish Academy distributed a survey designed to gather perceptions on the Academy and its membership process and commissioned an independent review of the data collected. The analyses in this report draw upon a total of 747 survey responses received.

A content analysis was conducted on the qualitative data obtained through open-ended survey questions. Emerging themes and patterns were manually identified by way of inductive coding using MAXQDA. Coded data were then exported and quantized for further quantitative exploration, including theme frequencies and comparisons among demographic groups. Descriptive and quantitative analyses, including those presented on the demographic and rating scale survey questions, were conducted using SPSS.

Results were reviewed for differences by membership status, gender, institution type, age, ethnic background, and geographic location.
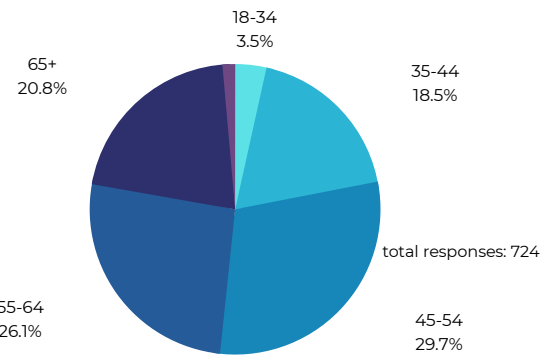
Data were collected anonymously and include 215 responses received from Members of the RIA (29%) and 532 responses received from non-members (71%).

Nearly half of the sample (47%) were over the age of 55, with 21% of respondents over the age of 65 (Figure 1.).
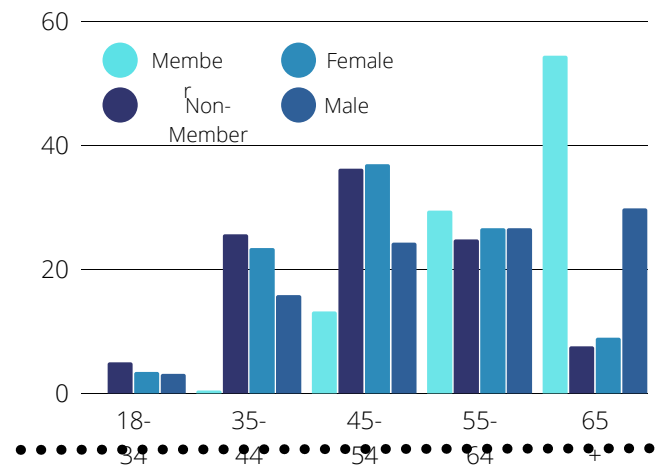
Fifty-six percent of respondents self-identified as male, 41% as female, 0.1% as non-binary, and 2.6% preferred not to indicate gender.

Ninety four percent of respondents were White and, of the 41 respondents that indicated a non-White background, only 5 were Members of RIA (Figures 2 & 4). In addition, only 2 of the non-White respondents identified as Black, representing only 0.3% of the total respondents (Figure 2), thus limiting our ability to understand the experiences of Black scholars. It may be worth considering additional ways to reach this population.

Figure 1: Ages of Respondents

18-34 3.5%
35-44 18.5%
45-54 29.7%
55-64 26.1%
65+ 20.8%
total responses: 724

Ages x Membership and Gender

Member / Non-Member / Female / Male

41%

of all respondents are female

Figure 2: Race of Respondents

total responses: 726

White - Irish (496), Other White (186), Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi (13), Chinese (3), Arabic (3), White - Irish Traveller (3), Other Asian (3), Black (2), Other (inc. mixed) (17)
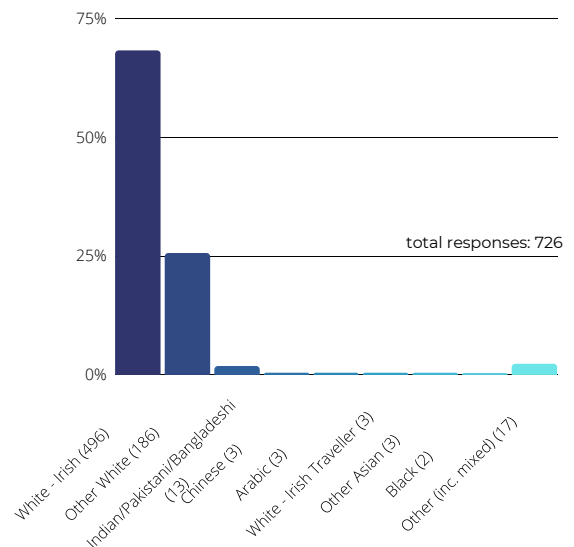
A majority of respondents (89%) work at universities, with the remaining hailing from institutes of technology (3%), technological universities (4%), and private colleges (1%), as well as some who are independent scholars (4%).

While responses from non-members were fairly evenly split between males (49%) and females (48%), only 24% of responses from Members of the Academy came from females (Figure 4).

Additionally, though the overwhelming majority (92%) of responses from non-members were received from those under 65, over half (54%) of the responses from Members of the RIA came from those over the age of 65 (Figure 4). While these figures may be in line with current distributions among the broader RIA membership, they are worth bearing in mind when considering approaches to create a broader sense of diversity and inclusion within the RIA.

Geographically, 93% of responses came from within the island of Ireland, 74% from the Republic of Ireland, and 19% from Northern Ireland. Of the remaining 7%, 3% came from England, Scotland, or Wales, and 4% from other countries, primarily the United States and Australia.

89%

of all respondents
work in a university

93%

of all respondents live on the
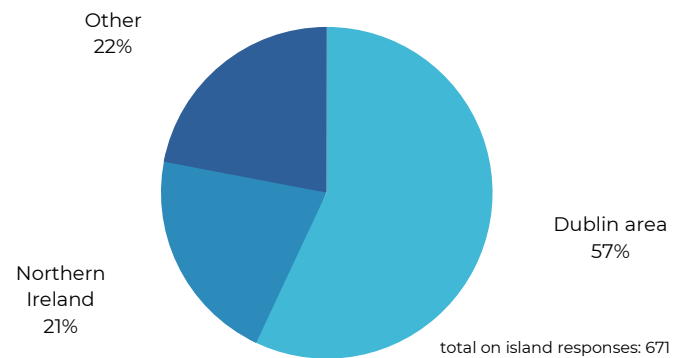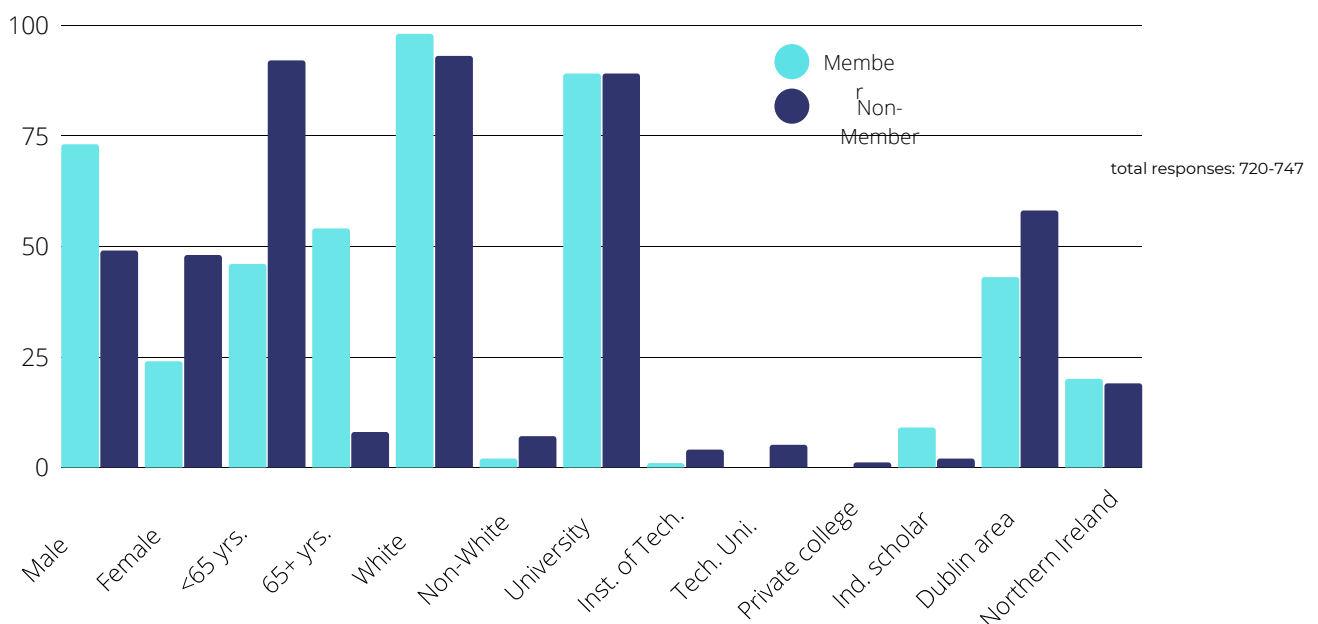island of Ireland

Figure 3: On island distribution

Other
22%

Dublin area
57%

Northern
Ireland
21%

total on island responses: 671

Figure 4: Demographics by Membership Status (%)

Member
Non-Member

total responses: 720-747

Of note, in addition to differences in response rates relative to counties in the North versus the South, over half (57%) of the responses coming from those indicating Irish residency came from counties in the Dublin area (Dublin, Kildare, Meath, and Wicklow) (Figure 3).

In addition, 384 respondents indicated they work in the Sciences and 443 in the Humanities or Social Sciences (these categories were not mutually exclusive). A full breakdown by discipline is shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5: % of Respondents Per Discipline and Membership Status

Member
Non-Member

total responses: 744
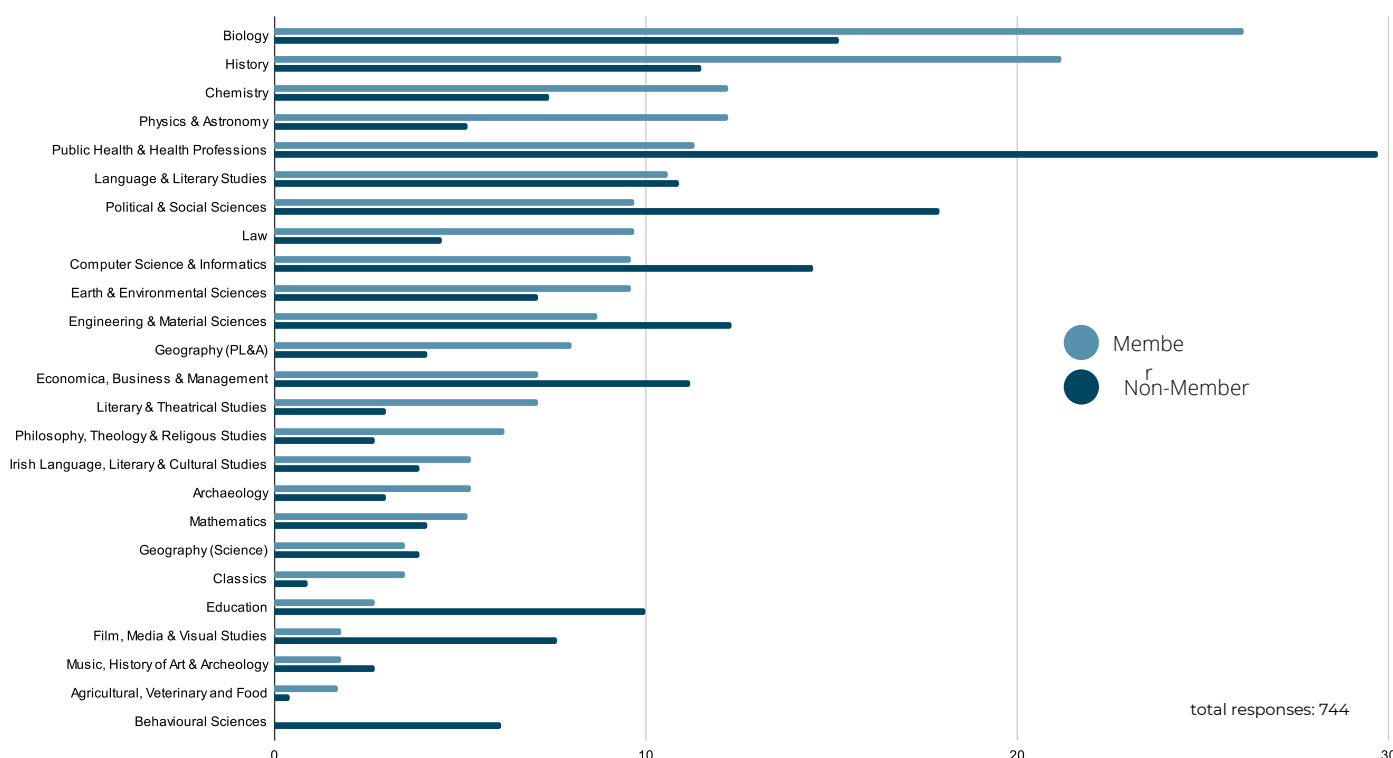
More than half of respondents completed 70% or more of the total survey with all respondents providing answers to at least 38% of the questions. Survey completion rates. were similar regardless of membership status, gender, institution type, age, ethnic background, and geographic location.

Those responding to the survey were asked to rate how familiar they are with RIA membership procedures. Responses ranged from 1 (not at all familiar) to 5 (very familiar). The overall sample mean was in the middle at 2.57, but there were statistically significant differences between:
- Members reporting greater familiarity (3.72) than non-members (2.11);
- Males reporting greater familiarity (2.75) than females (2.32);
- People over 65 reporting greater familiarity (3.44) than those under 65 (2.3); and
- People from any White background reporting greater familiarity (2.6) than those from a non-White background (2.0).

No differences were observed relative to discipline, institution type, or location.

In response to the question 'From your experience, how diverse do you consider the RIA to be?' (on a scale of 1 being less diverse and 5 being more diverse), the full sample mean was 2.34, indicating the level of perceived diversity to be below average. There were statistically significant differences between the views of:
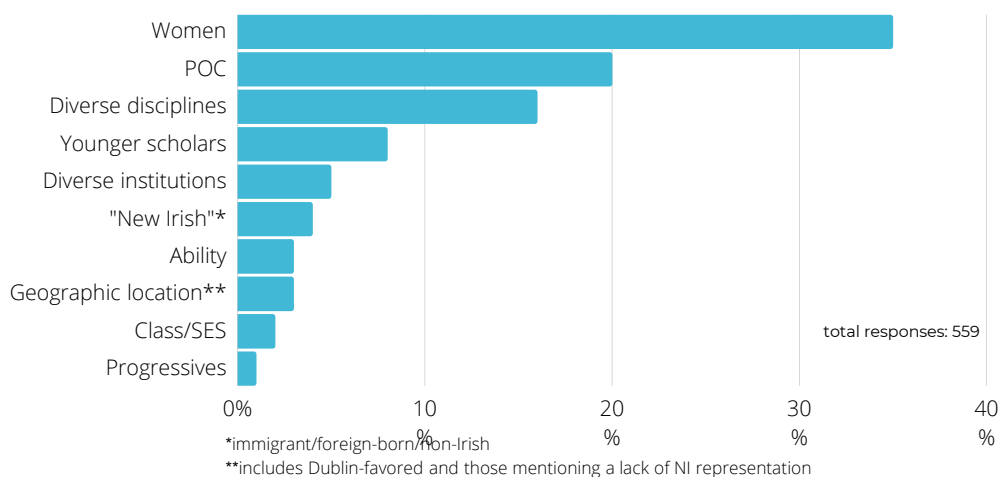
- Members reporting a perception of greater diversity (2.76) than non-members (2.17);
- Males reporting a perception of greater diversity (2.55) than females (2.03);
- People over age 65 reporting a perception of greater diversity (2.71) than those under 65 (2.24);
- People outside of the Dublin area reporting a greater perception of diversity (2.53) than those living within the Dublin area);
- Science scholars reporting a greater perception of diversity (2.49) than non-Science scholars (2.19); but
- PL&A scholars reporting a lower perception of diversity (2.25) than non-PL&A scholars (2.49).

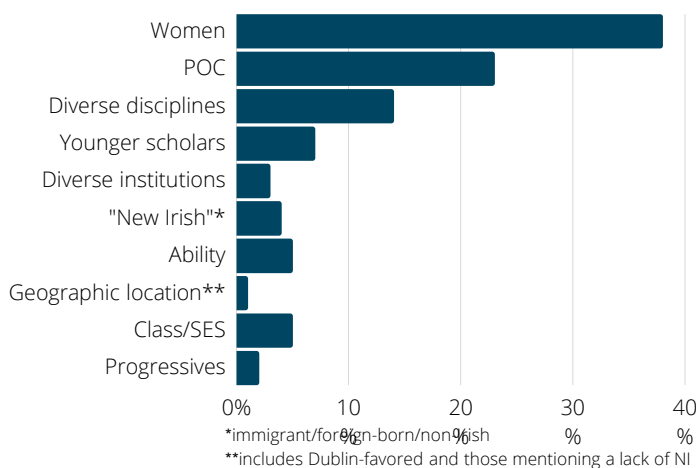No differences were observed relative to ethnicity or institution type.

When invited to provide additional comments regarding the aforementioned rating of RIA diversity, 44% of respondents chose to do so. Many expressed uncertainty or a lack of knowledge regarding the true diversity of RIA membership. There were some who elected to respond to this particular question who suggest that the make up of the Academy is reflective of the demographics of academia in Ireland, if not even the demographics of the island itself. However, the predominant theme among the responses is a perception that the RIA is dominated by older White males. Nearly 40% of those who chose to share additional comments on RIA diversity made reference to this idea. Other themes that emerged were perceptions of the RIA as old-fashioned, outdated, or elitist, and some indicated that, while gender diversity has improved, other forms of diversity (such as age, discipline, class, ethnicity, and politics) still need to be addressed. There is also a sense that committees are more diverse than the actual RIA membership composition and that there is a disconnect between those asked to serve on committees and those actually accepted into the Academy.

Respondents were also asked about populations that are underrepresented within the RIA. While 29 respondents (5%) did state that they do not feel there are any underrepresented groups, Figure 6a shows the categories of diversity that were specifically mentioned as underrepresented in the responses, 6b and 6c show differences in frequencies between female and male respondents.
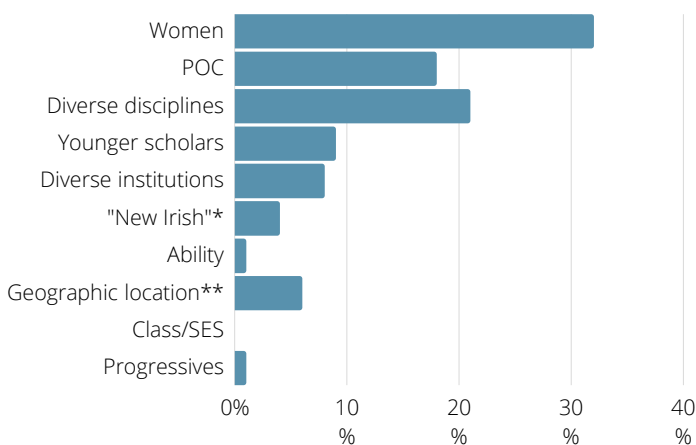
Figure 6a: Underrepresented Groups by Frequency of Mention

total responses: 559

*immigrant/foreign-born/non-Irish
**includes Dublin-favored and those mentioning a lack of NI representation

6b: Females

6c: Males

*immigrant/foreign-born/non-Irish
**includes Dublin-favored and those mentioning a lack of NI representation

Throughout the report, qualitative data are presented conceptually as "n people said x," and, as such, categories are not mutually exclusive. As in this case, if someone explicitly mentioned a need for increased diversity relative to both women and people of colour, they counted as a respondent who mentioned women AND as a respondent who mentioned POC.

While the distribution of responses among Members and non-members was very similar for most of the categories mentioned, a larger percentage of Members noted underrepresentation based on institution type (Members: 9%; non-members: 3%). On the other hand, a greater percentage of non-member respondents than Members mentioned "new Irish" (non-members: 5%; Members: 2%) as a category they feel is underrepresented, as well as specifically highlighting broader representation is needed with respect to ability (non-members: 4%; Members: 1%), and class (non-members: 3%; Members: 1%). In addition, 2% of the non-members who responded felt that it was important to see representation by those with more progressive political views, while none of the Members who responded specifically mentioned politics.

Fifty-nine respondents (11%) cited the current nomination system, whereby new applicants must be nominated by existing Members, as the primary barrier to increasing the representation of diverse groups. Some respondents also indicated that the top scholars in their field were not Members of the RIA. As one respondent stated:

> Besides the issues of gender and ethnic diversity, which certainly could be improved on, there are significant academic or expertise gaps in the membership of the RIA… It comes across as privileged with those appointed being connected to a member of the RIA or being in favour with management in your College, I could name a dozen internationally-renowned people within or outside the academy with extensive and often ground-breaking publications who have never been engaged with as to whether they wished to become a member or not.(1)

It is worth noting that if respondents do not feel that the elite scholars within their particular field are recognised, they may feel disenfranchised and feel that their field or discipline is excluded or devalued by the RIA.

In addition to asking about presently underrepresented groups, respondents were also asked to identify any intersecting obstacles to becoming a member of the Academy. Respondents indicated some difficulty in understanding this question. Of the responses that reported additional barriers or important intersections of barriers, the most common responses related to a lack of access to the types of networks needed for nomination and election as an encompassing barrier to membership. As one respondent commented:

> The current process reinforces privilege as naturally members tend to nominate those who are within their social class and professional network. The criteria for membership means that those with the confidence to situate themselves within these categories will do so. (2)

There was also frequent mention of class as an additional barrier with respondents noting that this is not always properly considered in discussions of diversity or underrepresentation. In addition, respondents pointed to location as being an added barrier using phrases like 'Dublin-centric' and 'focused on Dublin and Belfast' .

The type of institution one works in is also seen as presenting its own intersectional barriers to membership, as summarized by the following respondent:

> One thing that arises is the smaller number of members from institutions outside the 3-4 most prominent universities. I do not think that there is a significant bias against a candidate who is [not] from one of these. But a combination of factors can work against them, such as the greater number of teaching hours required in ITs, sometimes the more interdisciplinary nature of the study, etc. I am not sure the RIA can do much about that, but they can be particularly alert to recognising the scholarly achievements of those outside the dominant institutions. And given the snowball effect, perhaps some kind of self-nomination (perhaps a preliminary process seeking nominators) might be helpful. (The recently introduced requirement that the two nominators be of different institutions might actually work against those in smaller/less prominent institutions.) (3)

Other respondents highlighted discipline or field of study as both an additional barrier and one intersecting with gender. It was noted that some subjects lend themselves to more prolific publications and that some disciplines require more individual work while others are more collaborative. There is a perception that the Academy does not properly value teamwork. Some respondents also perceive a lack of acceptance of inter-/transdisciplinarity. The need to consider the intersection between gender and discipline was also highlighted:

Fields that are well represented with an abundance of male members are likely to produce more nominations which in turn will perpetuate both of these parameters. But a small field with few women members makes it doubly hard for a potential female candidate. (4)

One respondent acknowledged the part that they could play in increasing diversity within the RIA by stating:

I have always valued and appreciated the work of the RIA, and found it to be an open, welcome, and nurturing environment for (I hope) all of those interested in the subjects. Having seen the gender imbalance in the membership, I feel it is time for me as a man to stand back and let others be elected first. (5)

Respondents were asked to weigh in on the strengths and weaknesses of RIA membership procedures. As a matter of interest, the response rate for this question mirrors the response distributions of the survey in total relative to gender, discipline, and location. However, while less than a 1/3 of the overall participation in the survey came from RIA members, they make up 52% of the responses received to this question regarding strengths and weaknesses.

Sixteen percent of the 223 responses to this question were either wholly or primarily positive. Examples included:

- "To judge by people who have been elected and people whose applications have been unsuccessful, I believe that the academy's procedures are robust and fit for purpose";
- "I cannot see a viable alternative to the process of nomination and consideration which is current. Membership of the RIA is quite properly difficult to achieve and people who are already members know what the standards are"; and
- "The existing practices suffice and are inclusive".

Within these responses, despite largely agreeing with the election portion of the process, 5% of strengths-based responses expressed a need for improvement in the nomination process. For example,

> Election process is fine. How to become nominated is nebulous. Unless one would actively campaign and ask members for nomination there seems to be no way in. It might be helpful to add a second component where (a nomination committee) RIA annually looks at all accomplished scientists in Ireland and then recommends some. (6)

Disaggregated survey responses reveal an imbalance between Members and non-members. Eighty-six percent of these positive responses were received from current RIA Members, while only 14% came from non-members. Viewed another way, 26% of Members who responded to this question did so mostly positively, while only 5% of non-members who responded did.

The remaining 188 responses include an explicitly stated need to increase diversity in a number of specific categories. Most frequently cited was a need for greater diversity with respect to gender (12% of total responses), and discipline (10%), followed by type of institution (6%), age (3%), ethnic background (1.8%), and geography (1%), which was primarily in the form of calls for more Members from outside of Dublin. Again, female respondents were more likely than males to call attention to a need for increased gender diversity (females: 18%; males 7%). There were also significant differences between responses from Members and non-members with regard to the expressed need to increase disciplinary diversity (Members: 15%; non-members: 6%) and diversity with respect to age (Members: 5%; non-members 0), although this last difference should be tempered by the fact that only 6 respondents mentioned age specifically.

> If there were innovative and younger voices, given charge over the academy, it could be a brilliant tool for change in the Irish Research ecosystem. (7)

Of the responses addressing weaknesses in the current process, the most frequent emerging themes are shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Weaknesses in the current membership processes

	# of Responses	%
Nomination by existing members is the issue	67	30%
The organization represents an "old boys club"	10	5%
Lack of transparecny in the process	25	11%
Frustration that there is no feedback for an applicant, particular upon rejection	11	5%
The process is antiquated/outdated/old-fashioned	10	5%
The process/forms are complex/difficult/time-consuming	5	2%
Sum	128	

total responses: 223

Perhaps unsurprisingly, non-members were far more likely to find the need for nominations to come from existing Members to be an issue (47% of their responses received). However, 14% of Members who responded to this question also cited this requirement as a weakness. Female respondents were also more likely to see nominations by current Members as problematic (females: 42%; males: 24%).

Eight percent of non-members who responded referred to the RIA as an "old boys club," compared to only one Member. Interestingly, though, respondents from (natural) Science disciplines were also more likely to cite a perceived "old boys club" nature as a current weakness in the process (Science: 8%; non-Science: 2%). They were also significantly more likely than those who are not in a Science discipline to discuss the lack of feedback received by unsuccessful applicants (Science: 9%; non-Science: 2%). No differences were observed with respect to respondents' location.

Twenty respondents (9%) felt the criteria should be broadened or that the wrong criteria are currently being used. Specifically mentioned were calls for greater attention to quality rather than quantity and that there is currently too much emphasis on metrics and quantity of outputs. Thirty-six respondents (16%) also indicated that they did not think applications were objectively assessed or that acceptance was based on merit. In some cases, there is also the perception that the current Members in respondents' particular fields are not the most qualified or best representatives.

Respondents were asked to rate the appropriateness of the current election procedures on a scale of 1 (less appropriate) to 5 (more appropriate). The response rate for this question mirrors the response distributions of the survey in total relative to gender, membership status, discipline, and location. The full sample mean was 3.16, but there were statistically significant differences between views, with:

- Members rating procedures as more appropriate (3.77) than non-members (2.57);
- Males rating procedures as more appropriate (3.34) than females (2.78);
- People over 65 rating procedures as more appropriate (3.54) than those under 65 (2.96);
- People living outside of the Dublin area rating procedures as more appropriate (3.36) than those in the Dublin area (3.06);
- Science scholars rating procedures as more appropriate (3.33) than non-Science scholars (3.02); but
- PL&A scholars rating procedures as less appropriate (3.02) than non-PL&A scholars (3.39).

No differences were observed relative to ethnicity or institution type.

The sharp contrast between the views of Members and non-members draws attention to perceptions non-members may have about the fairness of the process.

When asked to provide comment on whether 'the membership criteria are sufficient to capture the range of research excellence necessary for a successful and modern RIA,' 44% of responses indicated that they do believe the current criteria to be sufficient. Disaggregated responses, again, revealed tension between Members and non-members, with 61% of Members reporting criteria to be sufficient but only 38% of non-members. There was also a noticeable difference between the number of male respondents (52%) and female respondents (34%) who indicated the criteria were sufficient.

Of those that indicated that the criteria were not sufficient, Figure 8 shows the most common reasons given. The table shows the total number of responses that highlighted each reason then displays the comparative portion of those responses for gender, membership status, discipline category, and location with a reminder of the distributions across the full survey for comparison at the bottom.

Figure 8: Reasons given for insufficiency

total responses: 620

No, because...	# of responses	% of responses	female/male	member/ non-member	Science Disc.	HumSoc Disc.	Dublin area/ Outside	North/South
They should include some measure of the applicant's impact on society	68	11%	**58%**/42%	18%/**82%**	47%	**66%**	64%/36%	12%/**88%**
They need greater clarity*	47	8%	31%/**68%**	11%/**89%**	51%	55%	53%/47%	24%/76%
They should include outreach to the community and public engagement	44	7%	**66%**/34%	9%/**91%**	43%	**71%**	57%/43%	14%/**86%**
They are too focused on publications	36	6%	**52%**/49%	25%/75%	50%	53%	61%/39%	20%/80%
They should include measures of teaching and/or mentoring	25	4%	**68%**/32%	12%/**88%**	**60%**	48%	54%/46%	17%/83%
The residency requirement should be eliminated*	22	4%	46%/55%	**46%**/55%	46%	59%	32%/**68%**	**40%**/60%
They should explicitly value inter-/multidisciplinary work and collaboration	13	2%	**54%**/46%	23%/78%	**69%**	46%	64%/36%	23%/77%
They do not sufficiently capture creative outputs	12	2%	**58%**/42%	8%/**92%**	25%	**92%**	**75%**/25%	0%/**100%**
They should include public/government service	5	1%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sum	272							
total survey response breakdown			41%/59%	30%/70%	51%	59%	58%/42%	21%/79%

*This total includes respondents who believe criteria to be otherwise sufficient and those who do not
-Total responses received for this category were too few to meaningfully disaggregate
Note: percentages highlighted in blue are notably higher than may have been expected given the distribution of overall survey responses in each group (shown for reference in the last line of the table). For example, while 41% of overall responses were received from females, they make up 58% of the responses that noted criteria should include a measure of impact on society.

Both respondents who said the criteria was sufficient and those who did not expressed a desire to see the residency requirement modified to include the full Irish diaspora. Likewise, there were respondents who judge the current criteria as otherwise sufficient who also believe they would benefit from greater clarity.

The justification for reconsidering the way scholarly excellence is measured was based in the recognition of a changing academic environment. As one respondent explained:

> As academic careers increasingly operate a two-tier system - tenured = scholars, untenured = u/g teachers - and tenure comes at an advanced stage in an academic career, then to attract younger, more diverse applicants, some recognition of teaching innovation, public engagement, academic service defined in terms of collegial collaborations and endeavour (conference organisation / creative partnerships) should be introduced into the membership criteria. The achievements of sole scholarship as a marker of brilliance no longer seem secure or prioritised within current EU funding structures. There is also an implicit gender bias in these criteria, as many mothers publish later in their career and parental leave is not taken into account in assessing a membership application. (8)

Another respondent expressed a similar view about the need to diversify the metrics:

> The focus on publication is limiting. Other metrics might also be useful - evidence of impact, funding awards, PhD mentorship, public outreach. But more fundamentally why is research excellence alone the criteria? What about contribution to public debate/service, to diversifying the discipline and crucially to teaching. If the criteria is itself exclusionary then the membership will remain narrow. For example, favouring research over teaching and service can introduce gender bias if women carry heavier teaching and service loads or are more conscientious about teaching. (9)

A third stated:

> My view is that the criteria has functioned in the favour of members who have published in very traditional fora and genres and has greatly devalued other forms of publication and academic leadership. To give an instance, a candidate with three slim monographs with a press such as OUP and CUP, with no history of editing work in collections and journals (and therefore no history of mentoring and supporting other scholars, younger scholars etc.) is very likely to be made a member; whereas a member with one monograph, a pioneering edited collection (with dozens of international contributors), and a special issue of a journal article which has broken new ground in their field is very unlikely to be proposed. I detail these instances since they are in turn very likely to be gendered; and recent membership lists give many actual instances in my field of the scenario I have described. (10)

There was also a strong sense that the problems were less with the specific criteria and more that they were not applied fairly. As one respondent stated:

> From my experience they are not the criteria actually used. On the basis of these categories a significant proportion of researchers in all universities could be members (anyone who had international research papers would qualify under criteria one), and all professor/full professors residing in Ireland. The criteria for contribution to the discipline is vague and unspecified, but again if any contribution counts, most, if not all academics, do this through teaching, research and membership of/engagement with learned societies. Therefore, it can only be concluded that other criteria are applied at the time of appointment, perhaps ranking candidates against each other, or other unspecified criteria. This is inherently discriminatory and it is unsurprising that this year's list once again looks like the academy. Athena SWAN and other programmes have shown that creating an explicit and detailed set of criteria that people are judged against creates more diversity and a fairer more transparent system. This criteria should have external scrutiny and be tailored to the RIA and the vision it has for itself, which I hope will be progressive in playing a key role in taking the Irish academy into the future. (11)

SUGGESTIONS

Respondents were asked how the RIA can address discrimination in relation to the nine protected characteristics.
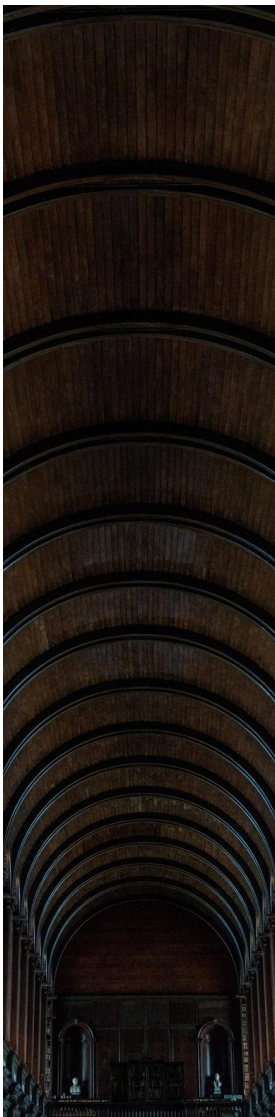
- Expand who can nominate by allowing or encouraging self-nomination or external nominations;
- Offer mentoring opportunities ("existing membership should target the academics that represent the protected characteristics and mentor them through the process");
- Reconsider the definition of academic excellence, including rewarding inter/transdisciplinary and/or collaborative research or teaching achievements;
- See what can be learned from the way universities have improved recruitment initiatives in recent years (e.g. Athena SWAN);
- Scout and recruit members from the protected categories;
- Publicize and promote the diversity of current RIA membership;
- Provide unconscious bias training; and
- Consider whether quotas would be a useful tool, though it was acknowledged that this was a controversial suggestion and should be carefully considered.

It is also worth noting that 31 respondents expressed resistance to the idea of addressing these issues as they do not feel that there is discrimination, believe that it will self-correct with time (as academic institutions hire more diverse scholars, the composition of the RIA will naturally transform), or are against the idea of "positive discrimination" for fear it diminishes the meritocracy of membership.

●

INTEREST BY POTENTIAL NEW MEMBERS

In response to the question "Based on your current understanding, how interested are you in one day being elected a Member of the Royal Irish Academy?" (on a scale of 1 being less and 5 being more), the full sample mean was 3.69, indicated healthy overall interest in joining the Academy. Sixty-two percent of respondents rated their level of interest as a 4 or a 5 (Figure 9). There were no statistically significant differences in the level of interest expressed by gender (shown), age, type of institution, whether respondents came from the Dublin area, or between those residing in Northern Ireland and those in the Republic of Ireland.
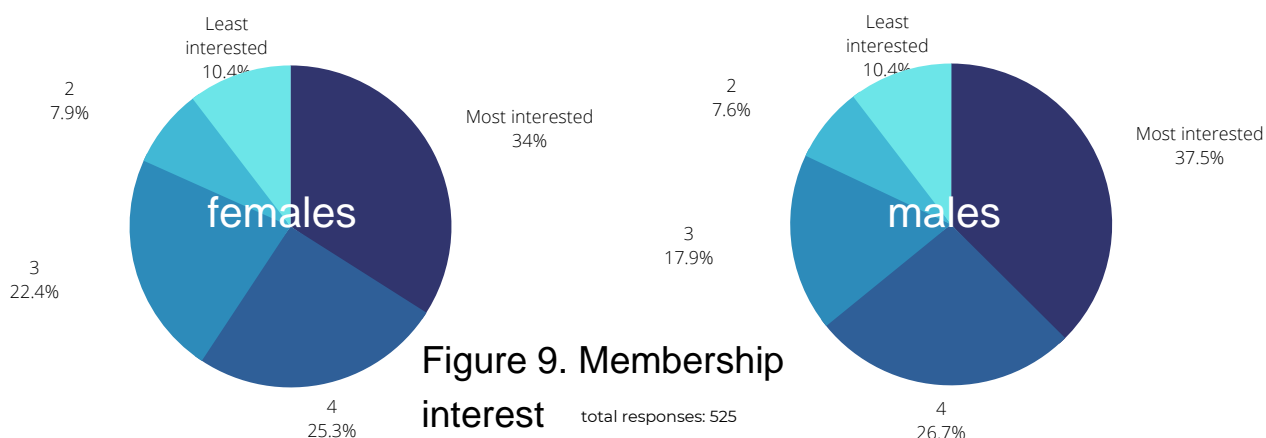

females

Least interested 10.4%

2 7.9%

Most interested 34%

3 22.4%

4 25.3%

males

Least interested 10.4%

2 7.6%

Most interested 37.5%

3 17.9%

4 26.7%

Figure 9. Membership interest   total responses: 525

Ratings were probed further by inviting respondents to supply additional information. Comments were provided by 230 (31%) respondents. Coding of responses did not include those who did not provide information beyond a restatement of their rating of interest from the previous question (e.g. 'Yes, I'm very interested' or 'I have no interest in becoming a member'). Of the remaining responses, 41% expressed a clear interest in being elected to membership. The most commonly stated reasons for interest are for the recognition or prestige of membership and for the opportunity to 'contribute', both by contributing to the ongoing work of the Academy, but a number of respondents also expressed a desire to contribute by way of their presence adding to the diversity of disciplines and backgrounds within the Academy.

As seen in Figure 10, the most common reasons a respondent does not want to become a member are the perception that the Academy is an exclusive club to which they would not like to belong. Many of the respondents who provided comments on their lack of interest in becoming a member point to a belief that the RIA is, in fact, not interested in them. Many feel that their discipline is not presently valued by the Academy or that the type of work they do, for example, practice-based or interdisciplinary research, collaborative work, or a non-linear academic career path is not accepted. A number of respondents also expressed a lack of knowledge about the RIA and a lack of understanding regarding the benefits of membership. Coupled with those who were unable to see the value in attaining membership, this might point to a lack of awareness among scholars of the presence and purpose of the RIA.

Figure 10: Are you interested in future membership?

	# of responses	%
Yes, for the recognition/prestige/honour	34	16%
Yes, in order to contribute	23	11%
Yes, to amplify my work	1	0%
No, it's a club (exclusive, old boys, elitist, who you know)	29	14%
No, I do not know enough	28	13%
No, I do not have faith in the membership process	24	11%
No, I do not believe it would be meaningful/ do not see purpose	20	10%
No, RIA is not interested in my discipline/field or the type of work I do	18	9%
No, because of the lack of diversity	16	8%
No, I tried and was not admitted (will not try again)	8	4%
No, I am not Irish (and believe this to be a tacit requirement)	6	3%
No, because of the term Royal	3	1
Coded responses	210	

Females were more likely than males to cite the perceived exclusive club-like nature of the Academy (females: 18%; males: 7%) and the observed lack of diversity among current members (females: 11%; males: 2%) as reasons not to pursue membership. Non-White respondents were more likely to say they did not feel it would be meaningful or that they cannot see the purpose in joining (non-White: 25%; White: 7%) and to object to the term "Royal" (non-White: 8%; White: 1%).

Respondents outside of the Dublin area (outside of Dublin: 19%; Dublin area: 8%), those in the North (NI: 23%; outside of NI: 10%), and those who indicated they work in (natural) Science disciplines (Sciences: 20%; not Sciences: 6%) were more likely to report that their lack of interest in becoming a member comes from a lack of sufficient knowledge about the RIA. This may indicate these populations would benefit from specific targeted outreach. As an additional point of interest, respondents from Northern Ireland were also more likely than those who reside elsewhere to say that they have been put forward for nomination previously but were unsuccessful (NI: 10%; outside of NI: 2%).

Responses were also explored for differences among respondents from the various types of institutions, but no meaningful differences were found.

There was a strong sense from respondents that RIA membership was comprised of a particular type of person and that they did feel that they would fit in. One respondent stated, 'I'd be waiting for someone to evict me as an unwelcome imposter!', and another described the experience:

I've been at many events over the years wearing different hats - now academic but previously in high level civil and public service roles. Regardless of my position, I have always felt very out of place in the RIA as it exudes an air of elitism into which I never felt truly comfortable. Everyone is very polite, middle class and deeply intimidating!! Sorry! (13)

In addition to concerns over the type of person welcomed into the RIA, concerns over their discipline not being valued were also raised.

> I am most interested in being elected a member, but I am losing faith in this ever happening. My discipline, and allied disciplines in the social sciences that I engage with, are evolving quickly with collaborative work being the norm now. But the RIA seems only to value single-authored pieces as 'gold standard'. Given the integration of funding and scholarship these days, it will be impossible for people such as I to produce the single-authored scholarship required. (14)

The argument that increasing diversity could also help change the culture and perception of the RIA was made by several respondents. It was also repeatedly acknowledged that this would take time and a concerted effort on the part of the RIA but that it could have a significant impact on engagement with members and beyond. One such example included:

> Changing the culture or perception of the RIA will not happen overnight so in order to achieve greater diversity, it would be necessary to review the criteria and outreach to scholars who are less well known and who perhaps don't have the confidence to promote themselves. For example on Northern Ireland, [certain scholars] are the only people ever given air time and promotion. It just gets boring! (15)

SUGGESTIONS

How can the RIA combat intersecting obstacles to membership?

- Modify the nomination/election process to eliminate the need to be put forward by current members and make the process transparent;
- Encourage members to put forward nominations in all diversity categories, with a particular call for members to nominate candidates outside of their own field;
- Reconsider the current division of disciplines (Sciences vs. PL&A), which leaves scholars in some fields (particularly in the Social Sciences) feeling miscategorized;
- Consider removing the annual caps on membership;
- Institute a REF-type framework to assess scholarly output/publications, particularly with respect to impact; and
- Monitor the nomination numbers using a diversity lens so that patterns are clear and intervene if they do not improve.

•

Throughout the survey responses, a need for ongoing education and training regarding diversity is identified repeatedly, both by those declaring a recognized need in others, and those whose responses betray what may be a lack of understanding of systemic disadvantage. Several responses reveal a lack of awareness around distinguishing equality from equity and why historically disadvantaged groups may need to be given intentional advantage in some areas just to reach a level of fairness. In some cases, this may manifest as resistance to proactively addressing diversity issues. While there are some respondents who seem resistant to the idea that there are issues with diversity in the Academy, many more are simply resistant to what they see as "positive discrimination" because they view this as, in some way, unfair or that it could dilute what it means to be a member. Along with an actionable plan to increase levels of diversity among RIA membership, it may be necessary to provide diversity training that includes exploration of the root causes of disadvantage and discrimination and facilitates a greater understanding of the inherent benefits of maintaining a diverse organization.

A key takeaway regarding process is that, over and above concerns raised about the clarity, sufficiency, or necessity of the current membership criteria, as well as any issues raised with the process by which candidates are evaluated, the nomination process is seen by many to be the primary obstacle to increasing diversity and a major source of concern over whether acceptance into the Academy truly reflects members' merit and not simply their network. Primary suggestions are to establish a committee tasked with actively seeking out and proposing members based on clearly defined criteria with a specific view toward increasing diversity and to consider expanding who can put forward nominations to those presently outside the Academy, including allowing self-nomination.

Another common sentiment among survey respondents is that the RIA should gather information on current and future members with regard to various aspects of diversity, including the nine protected characteristics, and to make aggregate statistics available publicly, perhaps on the website. This would not only showcase an ongoing commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion but broadcast a willingness to be accountable regarding the efficacy of efforts to improve. Such transparency may go a long way in strengthening trust and support from the wider academic community in ongoing efforts to recruit and retain a more diverse membership.

●

HIGHLIGHTS

Specific Suggestions and Thoughts
as Written by Respondents

The result of this year's process demonstrates that the system is flawed. It is based on an outdated view of what constitutes excellence in research. There is evidence of unconscious bias. There should be an unconscious bias observer at assessment meetings. The quota of min 40% should be enforced. The 3 year certificate system is very confusing and off-putting. It should be abolished. In order to increase the number of women members as well as those from under-represented groups/disciplines, the cap on numbers admitted each year should be removed. Consider the possibility of making those over 75 who don't pay membership fees anyway a different type of member - same entitlements but not counted in the total number of members! (16)

The election through nomination by members and peer review followed by review by a committee is the correct process. However, there are some changes which could be made to improve the process and lead to more diversity in the membership.
1 Two committees covering all disciplines can lead to challenges in ensuring there is sufficient knowledge in the committee to assess all applicants equally - ensuring there are at least 4 committees into the future will enhance the potential to ensure someone present has disciplinary insight at least.
2 In the current process traditional methods of assessment of publication output appear to dominate decision making. Internationally assessment of research excellence has moved on very substantially through use of a narrative CV, inclusion of measures of impact of research, not just publication metrics, and embracing the DORA principles whereby use of journal metrics as a proxy for quality is inappropriate. The RIA should embrace best practice in this area and ensure its assessment of research excellence is in line with leading institutions internationally - even the ERC has embraced DORA.
3 Peer review and references from internationally reviewers are subject to unconscious bias - ensuring the assessment panel are briefed on this is critically important
4 while the RIA has two criteria for membership (below) it appears the first one dominates in decision making - ensuring the reviewers address the second criterion would help in ensuring enhanced diversity in membership. (17)
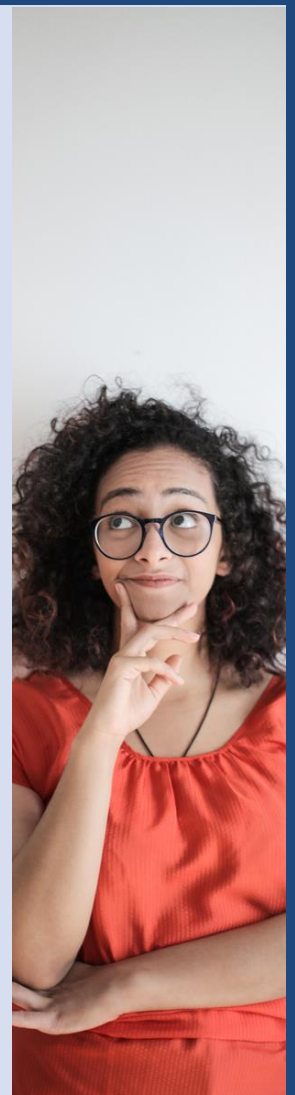
This example encapsulates recognition of the layers of disadvantage to certain groups (in this case, women) perceived in the current system

There are too few women nominated annually in both Sciences and Arts and social sciences. This reflects the overwhelming domination of male membership of the academy, where men nominate other men more frequently than they nominate women. This results in an imbalance and a reliance on women members to nominate women. As women will also be under-represented at senior levels in HEIs this also means that they tend to have to serve on a lot of committees etc to achieve gender balance, increasing their workload and hence the time they have to devote to nominating members. There can also be a culture of neutrality fostered by the male membership that insist that there's no diversity issue to be addressed or that it's easier now for women to be elected than men. Countering this perception can perhaps be best achieved by presenting the evidence to the membership annually, so that perceptions can be challenged. This issue will be even more acute when considering other types of diversity e.g. "race". (18)

It would be really beneficial to see some further material for and guidelines for what is meant by 'other academic achievements' in the above list. For example, for a scholar working at the intersection of visual arts practice and visual culture/cultural commentary and criticism, how would the RIA account for other kinds of scholarly outputs such as the curation of an exhibition or event, or the creation of a unique Digital Humanities archive? How would the RIA criteria capture a scholars contribution to the contemporary cultural and creative sectors in Ireland in a way that generates international interest, without resulting in a publication? How would the RIA measure the success of a scholar who has made a significant contribution to the HEA sector in Ireland and, by doing so, is supporting the continued growth and prestige of this sector internationally? (19)

This is an example of sentiments around the inclusion of work done in creative spaces

APPENDIX A

This example identifies the important point, that it isn't just about getting Members to nominate women (or any other systematically marginalized group) but also battling perceptions that may lead members of these underrepresented communities to refuse nomination

I think women have been underrepresented historically because of the difference in academic career trajectories. In recent years, I have been involved in nominating women - or in trying to get them nominated, but many refuse to be put forward because they do not believe they have any chance. There is a lack of belief and trust. (20

●

APPENDIX B

Responses Received for Each Survey Question

Survey Question	# of responses received
Please tell us about your current relationship with the RIA	747
Discipline (Sciences)	384
Discipline (Humanities and Social Sciences)	443
Gender	720
What type of institution do you work in?	724
Age Category	720
What is your ethnic group/background?	726
Where do you live?	722
From your experience, how diverse do you consider the RIA to be?	716
Additional Comments on Ranking of Diversity within RIA	311
Based on your current understanding, how interested are you in one day being elected a Member of the RIA	525
Additional Comments on Ranking of Interest in Future Membership	230
Familiarity with RIA Membership procedures, from 'not at all familiar' if you have never proposed a candidate or been involved with a proposal, to 'very familiar' if you have proposed several candidates or served as an assessor	401
Familiarity with RIA Membership procedures, from 'not at all familiar' to 'very familiar	537
Do you consider the RIA's election procedures to be an appropriate way of electing new Members?	336
What do you consider the strengths and weaknesses of RIA Membership procedures to be? Do you have any specific ideas of how the procedures can be improved?	223
Are these sufficient to capture the range of research excellence necessary for a successful, modern RIA?	620
Are there additional factors which you believe impact on success in the Membership process?	462
Do you think some groups are underrepresented in the RIA Membership? Why do you think this is the case?	554
Do you see other intersecting obstacles to election to RIA Membership? How can the RIA combat these?	401
How can the RIA address discrimination in relation to any of the nine protected characteristics in its Membership process?	388
Is there anything else you would like us to know in relation to diversity and the RIA Membership processes?	267

*Note: italics indicates open-ended question

Photo Credit

Page 10: image by jarmoluk via Canva
Page 14: image by IdaT via Pixabay
Page 15: image by Suzy Hazelwood via Canva
Page 18: https://www.qub.ac.uk/home/media/Media,697144,en.jpg
Page 20: image by fotografierende via Canva
Page 20: image by Andrea Piacquadio via Canva

Royal Irish Academy
Independent Review of
Membership Processes

Survey Analysis and Report provided by: Danielle Dalimonte-Merckling, PhD
Lansing, Michigan, USA
email address: dalimonte.d@gmail.com

August 2021