



*Pekka Aula*

# Message from the Secretary General

**DURING THEIR DAY** of strategy discussions in 2016, the Governing Board outlined the main focal points of the Academy's activities for the coming years as being promotion of the dissemination and impact of advanced research findings within society at large, provision of support for young researchers, strengthening of international connections in all fields of academic research and further development of the Academy's own organization. Looking back on our 111th year it is gratifying to see that the main outlines of its activities did indeed revolve around these themes.

The year 2018 was a time of vigorous development for us. Our academy family grew substantially, as the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters assumed administrative responsibility for the Council of Finnish Academies (CoFA), continued to

develop Young Academy Finland (YAF) and embarked on the Science Advisory Mechanism of Finland (SoFI) project. One aspect common to all of these is the impact of academic study and research within society, with each institution making its own valuable contribution.

Particularly significant was the confirmation of financial backing for the SoFI initiative towards the end of 2018: the preparations that had been taking place during the year became a reality when the Ministry of Education and Culture awarded the sum of 600,000 euros for this three-year project to be carried out jointly by the four academies and coordinated by the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters, with its president, Risto Nieminen, as the responsible leader. The aims of the SoFI project are to promote dialo-

*Professor Pekka Aula was appointed as the Academy's first full-time Secretary General as of 1st January 2016.*

gue between the academic community and those responsible for decision-making within society as a whole and at the same time to build up a scientific advisory system which is capable of refining advanced knowhow for practical purposes and communicating the results to those preparing for and eventually taking such decisions.

The year 2018 was also the first complete year of functioning for the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters' Young Academy Finland (YAF), and I have been extremely pleased to follow its development and rapid internationalization. It has already established its position within the field of academic research in Finland as an agent for promoting this work among young people who are in the early stages of an academic career. YAF has an independent voice of its own, and I have noted with pleasure that it has made its voice heard through numerous statements of opinion and in other academic contexts. Special mention should be made of its very popular Meet A Researcher service which is aimed at lowering the threshold for inviting researchers to visit schools and colleges irrespective of their geographical location or resources, by arranging virtual visits that take place via the Skype network.

Another significant achievement has been the expansion of the Academy's premises at Mariankatu 5 in Helsinki to enable the above-mentioned new organizations administered by it, the SoFI project, CoFA and YAF, to have offices on the third floor. Our future plans for the building at Mariankatu 5 are still evolving, but one attrac-

tive scenario would be that it might become an "academy house" enabling active cooperation to take place between a number of institutions and their visitors. It would also be a wonderful thing if this "academy house" could evolve into a broad-based science forum where members could meet together informally and arrange events.

The questionnaire circulated among members in spring 2018 to elicit opinions regarding the Academy's activities and possible future points of emphasis raised many ideas for developing our activities further. It was good that replies were received from so many members, and it was noticeable that the opinions very largely supported the current focal points and advocated their continuation into the future. The suggestions for improvement may be summed up as calls for the breaking down of barriers and the increasing of interaction both among members and between rank-and-file members and those making up the Governing Board. But of course there was still the inevitable issue of how to encourage the younger members to take part in the Academy's activities.

All in all, this 111th year was a very lively one for the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters, and also a rewarding and enthralling one. Although new winds have been blowing, we have not lost sight of our traditional obligations to work on behalf of science and academic values and for the good of society at large, and we will continue along the path marked out by the Academy's original rules "to promote the cultivation of science and especially of scientific work".



*Photo: Helsinki City Museum*

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