Science Council Needs Analysis Summary of Findings

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Introduction

The needs analysis focus groups were intended to give some insight on the following questions:

1. How aware are scientists in general of the Science Council and of the Registers?

2. How attracted are they to becoming registered? (Having been informed about the Registers if they didn't already know.)

3. What could the Science Council do to make registration more attractive to scientists?

4. How appropriate, in principle, does the proposed Common Application Process look to them? (Having been introduced to roughly how it will work.)

So here's a summary of what we learned in relation to each question:

1. How aware are scientists in general of the Science Council and of the Registers?

Of course, nine participants is not enough to draw a clear conclusion, but our sample would suggest that the answer is: Not very.

Almost half of the participants (the younger half) had never heard of the Science Council.

The only younger person that had heard of the Science Council only knew of it through some affiliation to his academic studies and didn't realise the Council had any involvement in a vocational/commercial context.

Of the remaining four participants who had heard of the Science Council, only two of them were aware of the Registers. (One of whom was once a Chartered Scientist but let her registration lapse because she could see no benefit, the other of whom hadn't registered for the same reason. More on that below⋯)

2. How attracted are scientists to becoming registered?
(Having been informed about the Registers if they didn't already know.)

Of course, nine participants is not enough to draw a clear conclusion, but our sample would suggest: Younger scientists at the beginning of their careers are attracted, senior scientists established in their careers aren't.

There was one exception to the above: a senior scientist and business owner who definitely did see value in applying to be Chartered, his reason being that he did quite a bit of business in Europe and the U.S. and "the more letters you have after your name, the more doors are open to you". However, this person already had quite a few letters after his name and we got the impression this was more a "nice-to-have" that he might get round to than something he felt was a necessity.

One of the senior scientists, who already knew of the Register (Chartered in his case), didn't see any value in joining it. He reported that of the ten or so people that he knew had been informed of the Registers, only one had decided to apply.

One of the other senior scientists had been a Chartered Scientist before and allowed her registration to lapse because she, too, couldn't see the benefit. This raises the issue of retention - how are scientists communicated with once they've registered? What can be offered to keep them involved?

One of the senior scientists working in the private sector possibly summed this up with the comment "This is difficult as it's not a legal requirement and we have enough experience to justify our claims of competence."

The younger scientists were very impressed when they learned that the member bodies they had heard of were themselves members of the Science Council, were generally positive and receptive about the overall purpose of the Registers, and *assumed* that there would be value in them getting registered themselves – that it would confer extra credibility and/or help their careers in some way (for example, that the letters after their name might help them get published).

However, taken together these findings suggest that these younger scientists might lose their enthusiasm over time unless the Science Council ups its game in terms of providing benefits to Registrants (and/or communicating the current benefits more actively/effectively).

3. What could the Science Council do to make registration more attractive to scientists?
(Having been informed about the Registers if they didn't already know.)

1. **Increase general awareness of the Science Council and the registers – in industry, in universities, with the general public.**

   It was widely felt by participants that if the Science Council could increase the general awareness of its existence and of the Registers to the wider public, then this would greatly increase the likelihood that scientists would see value in

registering.

This puts a slightly different slant on the previous prioritisation of audiences in that if unregistered scientists are our priority audience, then one of the things they want to *feel* is that everyone knows what "RSci" means (just as everyone knows what "BSc (Hons)" means), so this suggests that during the content review we take seriously promotional activity to the general public to increase awareness (though focusing somewhat on the scientific community would probably still make sense).

There was also a continued theme that member bodies were not doing a very good job of communicating the value of the Registers to their members – that this wasn't their priority. (Roger commented that his body, the IPEM, puts way more energy into selling the different levels of body membership: full member, fellow etc and were promoting these as a way of achieving status over and above the Registers. He felt this was misplaced and the body membership levels were just 'payment for status' - unlike the Registers.)

Idea 1: We suggest that the Science Council should make this as painless a process for member bodies as possible i.e. do their job for them – produce a pack of info (pro forma information that they can customise or send on as is), even get their permission to mail/email their members directly if possible.

The last session with the graduates was a particularly interesting session. They were full of ideas and suggestions.

Fraser was a passionate advocate on the importance of 'putting back in' by going back into secondary schools to talk to pupils about what they do. This has a nice tie in with Careers from Science.

They also felt that other graduates would be very receptive to the Registers. Fraser said that IMechE went in to his University and actively promoted Incorporated Engineer (IEng). This would be a good time to become aware of the over-arching role that the Council plays along with its Registers.

Idea 2: Also consider these other 'competitor registers' in the application process and content review – carry out a competitor analysis.

The recent graduates responded very well to the face to face nature of the focus group and suggested that now that they really 'get it' they would become active advocates.

Idea 3: Hold face to face events where the Science Council and the Registers are sold to groups of potential influencers. The resulting peer-to-peer marketing (or more simply put, word of mouth) could have more impact than just online information. We would suggest that passionate advocates like David as an employer would also be very influential. **Actively target potential key influencers**.

Idea 4: Maintain a presence at undergraduate/graduate science fairs.

Idea 5: Give introductory presentations at universities, science parks and the like.

Idea 6: Enrol key RScis/RSciTechs to become "Registered Ambassadors" along the lines of STEM Ambassadors.

2. **Provide opportunities to "publish".**

The younger scientists expressed a strong desire to get their research work published along with frustration at how difficult this was to achieve.

Idea 7: Whilst we don't expect the Science Council would want to start trying to compete with the top scientific journals in this regard, there may be room for making it an exclusive benefit of being on the Register/s that:
   a. There's a place on the site where Registrants' research activities can be highlighted/promoted.
   b. Registrants can write guest blog articles.

3. **Provide opportunities for networking.**

A desire for networking came up strongly in all three sessions, both as a marketing function (finding clients/partners) and as a resourcing function (finding people to fulfill roles, particularly on a short-term/flexible basis).

Idea 8: Provide, as an exclusive benefit of being on the Register/s, the ability for Registrants to search and filter on a range of advanced criteria (e.g. skills tags, location⋯). (For the general public, leave the Register/s as a simple list with the ability just to search by scientist name.) This would potentially be a **high value, low-maintenance option**, though it would obviously involve a greater initial investment in the "front-facing" listings.

Idea 9: Provide, as an exclusive benefit of being on the register/s, invites to networking events organised by the Science Council, both those for cross-functional mingling and those more tightly targeted at a scientific community of interest. This might not be as difficult as it first sounds. Events could be organised by "volunteer ambassadors" through a service like meetup.com, for example.

Idea 10: Provide, as an exclusive benefit of being on the Register/s, invites to conferences and/or seminars organised by the Science Council. This probably *is* as difficult as it sounds! As such, we're assuming it would be too much for the Science Council to take on but included it here for your interest as it did come up.

4. **Create positive stories about the impact of science in general.**

The younger participants in particular really cared about how scientists are perceived and wanted positive press. As such, clearly promoting the Science Council's stated aims will ring bells with graduates. Their ears pricked up at mention that the Council is a charity with public benefit as a core value.

Tom expressed frustration that, as far as he could see, the general press around the contribution of science to society was more often negative than positive and he felt that the public underestimated the value that science plays. He and his fellow graduates would love it if the Science Council could play a role in reversing

that trend.

Idea 11: As often as possible have the Science Council, create, get published and get credited for stories that highlight the positive contribution of science to society. (Easier said than done, we realise···)

Idea 12: Clearly communicate Science Council values. Make sure this is included in any content review (essential in terms of branding).

5. **Make the Registers a statutory requirement.**

There was a common thread through all three sessions that for this to be a real success the Registers should have a legal basis. In the case of medicine, for example, the Register is losing out against State Registration. There was a feeling that there are lots of different awards and unless this has legal backing it won't have a significant pull or stand out from the crowd.

Amanda and Roger both commented that if anyone could get legal status surely the Council with its member bodies reach should have some political influence.

6. **The importance of communication as a registration requirement.**

David, one of the senior scientists, along with the recent graduates in our final session, felt strongly that communication skills were an important attribute and that having something along these lines as a requirement for maintaining registered status would both help the Register stand out and increase its value. They felt that being required to communicate to peers in the form of a talk or lecture at least once a year, for example, would be a good idea.

However, there was some disagreement on this from other participants so it may need to be explored further. Perhaps the Science Council could facilitate the opportunity for Registrants to speak at events, rather than making it a requirement.

7. **Hook up with other sites and/or social networks.**

Many of the participants, particularly the recent graduates, were very keen on [Research Gate](#) as a forum for information exchange and networking.

Idea 13: Is there a ResearchGate api we can link with?

Idea 14: Is there an equivalent of the LinkedIn follow icon that can be incorporated as an 'AddThis style' social media share opportunity.
Many of the participants assumed that the Science Council website would be a source for competition calls for funding. Funding is a big concern for employers and project managers. David stated that [Innovate UK](#) have "land grabbed this territory".

Idea 15: Explore if the Science Council website could link to the Innovate UK website and/or feed the latest calls or some such. This would be a cheap way of appearing 'useful' and driving more repeat visitors to the site.

8. **Other ideas the particpants came up with that we assume are a no go but have included for your interest (or in case they spark off other ideas) included:**
    a. Provide a service that offers legal advice/assistance.
    b. Offer discounted insurance.
    c. Include multiple memberships to other registers/incorporate all other existing registers.

4. How appropriate, in principle, does the proposed Common Application Process look to participants?
(Having been introduced to how it will work.)

Of course, nine participants is not enough to draw a clear conclusion, but when asked how "appropriately easy" the application process looked to them (easy enough that they'd do it, rigorous enough to be trustworthy), our sample would suggest: Very!

- Almost 50% of participants (4 of 9) gave it 5 out of 5.
- 33% of participants (3 of 9) gave it 4 out of 5 (and essentially just said they'd need to see it for real before giving it 5).
- 1 participant gave it 3 out of 5. (She saw a need for in-person assessment of practical work. More on that below.)
- 1 participant gave it 2-3. (And Richard didn't seem to have a bright outlook on anything very much!)

One participant (Katie), who gave the process a score of 3 out of 5, saw a need for in-person assessment of practical work in order for the award/s to be sufficiently trustworthy. Whilst assume this wouldn't be practical, the only element that was also questioned by other participants was the robustness of the process of vetting supporters. This is something that neither Sue nor I had the knowledge to answer on the day. They all unanimously felt that, for them to have faith in the Registers, it was very important that there was **a rigorous process for qualifying the supporters of applicants**.

It may be that Katie would have been equally satisfied with a convincing answer to the above concern (e.g. if the supporter had to be someone who had been a line manager and seen her perform her day-to-day practical work).

The application process itself should not appear to be too easy. The importance of the approval process and work involved should be seen as a virtue – not something to underplay. Richard exclaimed: "Not another tick box exercise, please".

This is equally true of the renewal process - Tom said that the renewal of the registration should be perceived to be robust and not understated, again to add credibility. He said you don't want it that "£30 equals: letters after your name".