ROTHAMSTED RESEARCH

sciencewise EXPERT RESOURCE CENTRE

Guiding principles for working with industry

a public dialogue

Executive Summary

Report to Rothamsted Research

April 2014

BBSRC 20 Years of Pioneering Great British Bioscience

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OPM GROUP

Guiding principles for working with industry: a public dialogue

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Executive Summary

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Rothamsted Research aims to increase the amount of work it does with industry, in order to maximise the impact of its research and diversify its funding portfolio. As part of its commitment to establishing itself as a listening organisation, Rothamsted Research, with the BBSRC and Sciencewise, asked OPM Group to run a public dialogue which gave people the chance to have their say on how Rothamsted should conduct its relationship with industry partners. This is a summary of the findings from the public dialogue.

About the dialogue

Rothamsted Research, the world's longest running agricultural research institute, aims to increase the amount of work it does with industry in order to increase opportunities for applied research and impact and diversify its funding profile. To this end, Rothamsted is developing a Knowledge Exchange and Commercialisation (KEC) strategy that will help it to achieve this aim. As outlined in its Communications and Public Engagement Strategy, Rothamsted Research is committed to engaging stakeholders and the wider public in its work and to emphasising its role as a listening establishment. To ensure that the development of the strategy is underpinned by a comprehensive understanding of public opinion, Rothamsted commissioned OPM Group to design and implement a public dialogue to gather considered public views on the kinds of guiding principles that should inform Rothamsted's approach to working with industry. Funding and support was also provided by Sciencewise and the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC). This report presents the results of the dialogue and will contribute to Rothamsted's KEC strategy.

The Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) is the UK funding agency for research in life sciences.

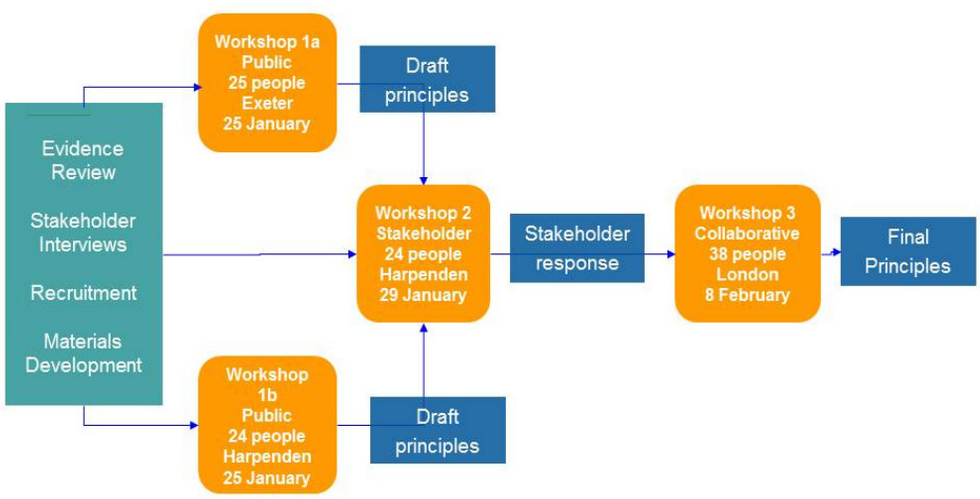

Figure 1 Dialogue process

Sciencewise is the UK's national centre for public dialogue in policy making involving science and technology issues.

The public dialogue began with deliberations by 49 members of the public in two workshops (held in the southern UK towns of Exeter and Harpenden). These locations were chosen as they are both areas where Rothamsted has research facilities. The workshops produced a preliminary set of principles that were considered and responded to by 24 experts and stakeholders at a stakeholder workshop in Harpenden. The dialogue ended with a final collaborative workshop which brought together participants from the Exeter and Harpenden events and some of the stakeholders from the

stakeholder workshop. Together, participants considered the initial principles from each public workshop as well as the stakeholder reactions, and came up with co-produced sets of suggested principles.

Our findings

Defining the dialogue context

An important part of the dialogue was to enable participants to identify and define the context and purpose of the dialogue. Participants came to place great value on Rothamsted Research, especially its long history, impressive track record, expertise, and charitable status.

Many participants had not encountered the concept of guiding principles before the dialogue. As a result participants were interested in how the principles would be applied and how Rothamsted would weigh up the various factors in order to make decisions about working with a particular company. There was a general agreement that it was necessary for Rothamsted to follow guiding principles, but a variety of views on how rigid or flexible these should be.

Finally, participants identified that closer relationships with industry are important for Rothamsted to achieve impact and diversify its funding base. However, most of the discussions during the dialogue focussed on the tensions that typically arise in academic-industry collaborations, because this approach enabled participants to develop guiding principles that they felt would mitigate these tensions. Although the wide range of Rothamsted's industry partners was described to participants, their discussions suggested that participants predominantly saw industry as large manufacturing or chemical companies.

Participants' views on how Rothamsted Research should conduct its relationship with industry are presented under five main themes, shown in the box below. These themes arose through a process of analysing and coding the outputs of the workshops to find the main areas of focus in participants' discussions.

1. Working for the public good
2. Independence and integrity
3. Transparency and public involvement
4. Open access to results
5. Reconciling idealism and pragmatism

1
Working for the public good

Working for the public good

Working for "*the public good*" and ensuring the possibility for "*humanitarian usage*" of knowledge and technologies was strongly supported by participants, particularly in light of Rothamsted's charitable status and its receipt of public funding.

> "Any work undertaken with industry must be subject to a humanitarian usage clause"
>
> **Harpenden public workshop output**

There was, however, an acceptance that the concept of the public good is difficult to define. Most commonly, participants described it in terms of projects that make a contribution to human well-being, environmental sustainability or improved food production.

Participants identified potential industry constraints upon Rothamsted's ability to work for the public good that related to tensions surrounding the private ownership of intellectual property, and the use of products for profit making, rather than humanitarian, reasons. As such, they suggested that all research outputs developed with industry should be subject to a "*humanitarian usage clause*" whereby research is made available for use in situations where it could have an immediate benefit for people in need or in an environmental emergency, irrespective of any other contractual agreements with the company in question. Other suggestions included ensuring re-investment of profits back to Rothamsted and/or government; undertaking an assessment of a company's ethical track record before agreeing to work with them; and an assessment of potential scientific, ethical, socioeconomic and environmental implications of research projects before taking them forward.

2
Independence and integrity

Independence and integrity

Maintaining Rothamsted Research's independence and integrity was an important principle arising throughout the workshops. Participants saw credibility as one of Rothamsted's most valuable assets, which relied on Rothamsted being able to speak independently, based on rigorous and objective scientific research.

> "Rothamsted's integrity is more important and more valuable than money"
>
> **Public participant, London collaborative workshop**

However, there were concerns that working more closely with industry might inhibit Rothamsted's ability to work freely, or that its reputation as an independent research institute could be jeopardised. Some argued that a dependence on industry for funding would, by definition, undermine the independence of Rothamsted, while others argued that it is possible to maintain academic independence separate from financing issues.

A variety of measures were proposed to protect Rothamsted's independence and integrity when working with industry. These included: establishing ethical partnering criteria, with some debate as to whether these should be applied universally, on a case-by-case or on a project-based basis; avoiding becoming over-reliant on a small number of large companies by maintaining a diverse industry funding portfolio; and assessing any risks to Rothamsted's independence and integrity before agreeing on industry collaboration projects.

3
Transparency and public involvement

Transparency and public involvement

There was significant agreement from participants that transparency and greater public involvement are very important in Rothamsted's work with industry. Regarding transparency, it was seen as important that Rothamsted communicate the aims, beneficiaries, and financing of all its work.

> "All of Rothamsted's projects must always be of the highest level of transparency to maintain an ongoing reputation"
>
> **Exeter public workshop output**

Regarding public involvement, having engaged with stakeholders in the collaborative workshop, public participants identified some of the practical difficulties in involving the public on decision making, but insisted that a certain degree of involvement remained important, given that so much of the institute funding is public. Some participants highlighted this dialogue process as an example of suitable public engagement and the value of two-way interaction as opposed to one-way information provision.

A concern was the possibility that industry might restrict Rothamsted's ability to share information about what they are working on and that therefore Rothamsted's reputation could be undermined. Participants therefore proposed a range of measures that might help Rothamsted mitigate such problems. These suggestions included: specific methods to involve the public in order to inform decision-making; improved communication with

the public and awareness-raising; being visibly open to external evaluation and scrutiny; declaring conflicts of interest; risk assessments that involve all Rothamsted staff; and improved interactions with the media

Open access to results

Open access to results was deemed important by public participants, who felt that all research should eventually be in the public domain, although they did develop some reservations following stakeholder feedback regarding the practicalities of the timing of complete openness. Participants were concerned that closer links to industry would mean the development of intellectual property ownership agreements that would prevent Rothamsted from publishing work. The main concern was that this would prevent other research institutes, charities or farmers from accessing Rothamsted knowledge and putting it to use, as well as affecting the career development of individual scientists. However, participants also understood that exclusive access to results for a certain period of time could be an important condition of industry funding.

> "Make information available (open access to results and methods) with caveat to allow exclusivity period for obtaining patents"
>
> **Exeter public workshop output**

A variety of measures were discussed that could mitigate this tension. There was strong support for establishing an exclusivity period, where a private company retained rights for a specified time only, which was viewed as a pragmatic compromise between the requirements of Rothamsted and industry. There was some discussion about timescales for such an exclusivity period, with the general agreement that decisions in this respect should be project specific. Finally, participants felt that the encouragement of knowledge transfer should be a policy advanced by Rothamsted to increase access and use of the knowledge its research generates.

Reconciling idealism and pragmatism

Most of the principles developed by participants carried a moral or ethical weight, and focussed on the potential constraints industry might place on Rothamsted's ability to operate in an independent and ethical manner. However, participants were also keen to ensure that the principles they proposed would not jeopardise Rothamsted's ability to work effectively with industry. This difference in approach was described by one group at the collaborative workshop as principles that are "*idealistic*" and those that are

"*pragmatic*" in nature. Although these priorities were not always viewed as conflicting factors, there was certainly a tension between the two issues, and most participants identified a need to find a suitable balance between them.

> "Need to alleviate the tension between looking after the human good and the potential impact on business progress"
>
> **London collaborative workshop output**

This tension led to three different standpoints. The first standpoint prioritised the more "*idealistic*" principles by ensuring they are safeguarded when working with industry. The second was a *"pragmatic"* standpoint that favoured a compromise approach whereby practical measures were suggested in order to achieve a balance between working within certain moral or ethical boundaries, and meeting the requirements of industry. Thirdly, some felt the two could be resolved by Rothamsted applying the principles at a strategic level rather than on a case-by-case basis. For example, participants suggested that Rothamsted could prioritise making profit and gaining skills on some projects in order to have the resources to prioritise working for the public good in other areas of Rothamsted's research. In each of these standpoints, the topic of undertaking effective contract negotiation was common, and participants were keen to ensure that Rothamsted places a high value on the service it offers to industry.

Conclusion

The public dialogue process has provided Rothamsted Research with an understanding of the main issues of importance to public participants, in order to inform its work with industry. A diverse group comprising public participants and stakeholders was engaged in a dialogue on Rothamsted's work with industry, with a view to developing a set of guiding principles and to support the development of a culture of listening and engaging in dialogue within Rothamsted. The results of the project will inform Rothamsted's KEC strategy and can provide an exemplar to other research institutions.

Rothamsted Research has been providing the world with the results of independent, cutting edge research for more than 170 years.

We continue to develop innovations that benefit our health, agriculture and the environment.

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