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Evaluation of a public dialogue on
Rothamsted Research working with industry

Executive Summary



September 2014



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Final Evaluation Report
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Author	:	Susanne Turrall (Lead Evaluator)
Contacts	:	rhuari@3kq.co.uk susanne@3kq.co.uk 01892 506909
		3KQ Ltd Pantiles Chambers 85 High Street Tunbridge Wells Kent TN1 1XP

Executive Summary

Context: This executive summary provides a synopsis of an independent evaluation of a public dialogue that was convened by Rothamsted Research in 2014. The public dialogue aimed to gauge public opinion as to how it might work with industry in the future. The dialogue will inform Rothamsted Research's Knowledge Exchange and Commercialisation Strategy which will set out the organisations guiding principles for its work with industry. It was the first public dialogue that Rothamsted has undertaken.

Funding and Governance: The dialogue was funded by BBSRC, Sciencewise and Rothamsted Research with a total project cost of £193,973¹. An external delivery contractor (OPM) managed the public dialogue events. All of these organisations (BBSRC, Rothamsted, Sciencewise² and OPM) formed the Management Group, the key decision-making body. An Oversight Group involved eight external stakeholders as well as three Rothamsted staff, and provided a broad range of expertise and advisory support. Evaluators (3KQ) undertook an independent evaluation of the process which included formative feedback as well as the summative conclusions in this report.

Process: The process spanned over ten months from submission of a proposal by Rothamsted in August 2013, to completion in April 2014. This included contracting of the delivery contractor in November 2013 and evaluators in December 2013.

The project process was as follows:

- A scoping exercise involved a web-based review and 11 stakeholder interviews. The results were used to inform the dialogue process, workshop materials and the recruitment of the public.
- The dialogue events were held over a two week period and comprised two public workshops held simultaneously (on 25 January 2014) at two Rothamsted sites (in Harpenden and North Wyke, Devon) in order to develop initial 'guiding principles' on Rothamsted's future work with industry. A total of 49 public participants were involved in the two workshops.

¹ This project cost includes financial support and in-kind contributions.

² Sciencewise is funded by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). Sciencewise aims to improve policy making involving science and technology across Government by increasing the effectiveness with which public dialogue is used, and encouraging its wider use where appropriate. www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk

- A stakeholder workshop with 24 participants (16 external to Rothamsted) was held on 29 January 2014 to discuss the public's guiding principles.
- A 'collaborative' workshop was held on 8 February 2014 which brought together a total of 37 participants (29 public and 8 stakeholders) to review, discuss and agree upon a set of guiding principles.
- Analysis and reporting was carried out after this by the delivery contractor, with the final report being completed in April 2014.
- Within Rothamsted, there was awareness-raising of the dialogue throughout the process and a debrief seminar was held on 14 April 2014 to inform Rothamsted staff of the process and findings. Approximately one quarter of all staff attended.

Evaluation Findings

Satisfaction: Satisfaction levels were very high for all workshop participants. 98% of public participants stated that they were "overall satisfied with the events". Stakeholders were also highly satisfied with the stakeholder workshop – 100% were "overall satisfied with the events". Those involved from Rothamsted have also expressed high levels of satisfaction. Specific areas of satisfaction raised (within evaluation interviews) were the strong collaboration between the organisations throughout the project, and that dialogue outputs would be acceptable and useful. Areas of dissatisfaction raised were the time pressures towards the end of the project and the effect that this had on the project. The Oversight Group members expressed mixed levels of satisfaction, including whether more depth of understanding of the public's views could have been achieved.

Governance: The governance of the dialogue was very successful. The role of the external Oversight Group was clear, and the group agreed the Terms of Reference early on. There was also clarity around who was in the Management Group, and their roles, which was considered particularly helpful by the delivery contractor.

Collaboration was very strong. The Rothamsted project manager was engaged and productive. Overall the OG played a valuable role as a source of diverse expertise, and gave reassurance to the project manager that the process was being carried out appropriately to the best judgment at the time. Unfortunately, the Chair of the OG was not able to attend two of the three OG meetings, which was seen to have reduced the social science input into the dialogue, although the Chair did input to the project in other ways (e.g. via email).

Credibility: The evaluation showed that Rothamsted staff and the Management Group involved in the process considered it a credible process. One issue which was questioned as a potential methodological shortcoming was the way that case studies were used in the public workshop materials and whether they skewed the findings. As evaluators, we conclude that the use of case studies was a useful way to engage the public in a complex topic; if they had been presented as background information rather than reviewed and discussed in detail, they may have played a less prominent role. This has shaped the findings, but does not invalidate the findings overall.

Timeframe: The timescales were set out in the ITTs, and the project was delivered on time. However significant time pressures were felt within the delivery phase which challenged administrative systems (more forward planning may have reduced this) and reduced opportunities for reflection and refining the process of workshop plans.

Overall Impact: The main achievement of the dialogue to date has been the dialogue's

reinforcement that Rothamsted is working in a way that is commensurate with the expectations and interests of the public. This will potentially add weight to any negotiations with industry, the media or others as to what has been learnt from the public dialogue about the principles within which they feel that Rothamsted should engage with industry in future. The medium-long term impact of the dialogue is closely linked to the KEC strategy that will be developed and can only be assessed at a later stage, although indications are that the dialogue results will inform that strategy.

One other immediate impact is that the results of the public dialogue were seen to add weight to any negotiations Rothamsted has in future with industry, the media and others:

“It gives Rothamsted more evidence to back up any standards that they have and advocate”
Oversight Group member

Lessons learnt include that:

- Sufficient time is required for the design and planning phases of a public dialogue
- A multi-stage public dialogue requires sufficient time *between* events
- Clarity at the outset is required around the depth of the public’s views being sought
- A final collaborative workshop bringing together public participants and stakeholders can be a valuable element to a public dialogue
- Public recruitment by sub-contracted agencies may have risks attached that can be difficult to manage
- Having a clear and effective management group can be pivotal to an effective process.

In conclusion, the overall findings of the evaluation are that:

- The project was completed to budget and on time. In retrospect, more time could have been allowed for design and delivery, and also between dialogue events.
 - The governance of the dialogue was strong, and benefitted from the clarity of roles at the outset. The Management Group ran efficiently and effectively and collaboration between the organisations was strong.
 - The process and the findings are credible; the methodology shaped the findings but did not invalidate them.
 - The main achievement of the dialogue was the dialogue’s reinforcement that Rothamsted is working in a way that is commensurate with the expectations and interests of the public. The medium-long term impact of the dialogue is closely linked to the KEC strategy that will be developed and can only be assessed at a later stage.
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Rothamsted Research
West Common
Harpenden Herts AL5 2JQ

Telephone: +44(0)1582 763133

www.rothamsted.ac.uk