



Qualitative Vision Consultation

# Professionalisation of Qualitative Research

July-September 2014

## What is this about?

A consultation - **Qualitative Vision Day** - was held in July 2014 with the objective of shaping the future of qualitative research, a central topic being that of accreditation and professional qualifications.

In total 50 qualitative practitioners took part in a workshop that was led by Wendy Gordon and Roy Langmaid. This was followed by an online opportunity for further contributions from 64 practitioners.

The overall response was hugely positive. The primary benefit was that a broad range of people could share their experience of what it is like being a qualitative practitioner today.



## What is the one sentence take out?

Qualitative practitioners are united in their wish to evidence their professionalism and expertise in order to sustain the future of qualitative research and to protect the reputation and validity of our work.

## What are the main challenges?

Most practitioners are aware of several, if not all of the challenges facing the future of qualitative market (social) research.



**Anyone can ask a few questions or get a group together** – there is no barrier to entry and no training necessary.



**Commoditisation** – process, methodology and turnaround time differentiate and define qualitative research today, rather than the expertise necessary to add value through understanding human behaviour.



**Competition** – our territory is being eaten away by a wide range of other disciplines e.g. management consultants, Big Data, behavioural economists, technology/digital platforms, academics, social media experts and more.



**Fragmentation** – the global success of qualitative research, its adaptation to changing contexts and innovation in methodologies has resulted in confusion about what qualitative research is and therefore an inability to judge good from bad.

All comments welcome. Please send them to [info@aqr.org.uk](mailto:info@aqr.org.uk)

## The Vision - what is it?

# ‘The experts in translating what matters to people into what matters to organisations’

Each word of this sentence can be unpacked and expanded. The main point is that so many different qualitative practitioners are able to embrace it. It summarises what practitioners believe they deliver. It unites, conveys respect (expertise), allows diversity, positions qualitative methods as a bridge between people and organisations and implies value to end-users. It is not intended to be outward facing at this time.



### Professionalism rather than Accreditation

Accreditation is not a term practitioners feel comfortable with. It brings up spectres of review boards, automation, pressure to conform, loss of creativity and inflexibility. An accreditation process is feared to exacerbate the downward spiral of commoditisation.

An individual qualification on the other hand, lies at the heart of becoming a professional. Here the creativity of practitioners came to the fore and they were able to imagine a multi-faceted approach taking into account flying time, completion of course modules for different levels of qualification, demonstrative success in skills and methodologies, theoretical models of thinking, self awareness training, 360 peer reviews and so on. A professional body with the resources and expertise to manage such a programme is essential to the success of this future initiative.



### Next Steps

Our consultation process encouraged the voice of all practitioners – those for and against moving towards making qualitative research a respected profession with agreed standards of expertise. There were no voices against. Caution and good thinking yes but outright rejection no.

A full report has been sent to the MRS, AQR, ESOMAR, AURA, APG, ICG and SRA

Wendy Gordon on behalf of Industry Wide Steering Group for Qualitative Professionalism



## List of Sponsors

Each of the following donated £100  
in order to make this consultation possible:

ESOMAR • TNS Qualitative • Podengo • Acumen Fieldwork • Criteria • Discovery • ESRO • The UK Field Company • Thinktank • Take Note • Rite Angle Ltd  
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A special thanks to Andy Bloor and the team at Firefish who donated their time and expertise and did a great deal of work preparing and conducting the online phase of the Vision consultation.



### One Day Qualitative Vision Day

This was jointly conducted by Roy Langmaid and Wendy Gordon on 7th July 2014.

It was over-subscribed and had a total of **50 participants** with the following break-down:

**Agency:** 38  
**Independent:** 12

**Women:** 28  
**Men:** 22

**Age:-**  
**Under 30:** 8  
**30-45 years old:** 15  
**45+ years old:** 27

**Year Practising:-**  
**0-5 years:** 6  
**6-15 years:** 18  
**15+ years:** 26

### Appendix:

There are two parts to the sample



### Online Phase

The Vision Day was followed up with an online phase which ran from August until 21st September 2014.

There were a total of **71 participants** with the following break-down:

**Agency:** 36  
**Independent:** 35

**Women:** 26  
**Men:** 45

**Years Practising:-**  
**0-5 years:** 9  
**6-15 years:** 23  
**15+ years:** 45