Prizes: Guidance for RSC member committees

This document is intended as a guide to support RSC member committees in running a competitive prize scheme, and to share good practice and learnings from the RSC's Review of Recognition Programmes.

The first section of the document outlines the questions that, following recommendations from the Review, member committees should address when looking to set up a new prize. If your committee would like to set up a new prize, please complete the Member Committee Prize Proposal form and return it to the RSC Networks team at networks@rsc.org.

The second section of the document is structured chronologically and gives members practical guidance at each stage of the process of administering a prize, from planning and preparation through to celebrating winners.

The scope of this guidance is most relevant to the types of prizes that Interest Groups may administer, but there will be best practice that should be considered across different forms of recognition and prizes.

This is a draft document and we welcome any feedback you may have. Please do not hesitate to get in touch with the RSC Prizes team at awards@rsc.org.

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Section I: Setting up a new prize

Any member committee thinking of introducing a new prize or recognition mechanism should carefully consider and have clarity on each of the aspects below.

- **Purpose of recognition**
- **Long-term viability**
- **Equality, inclusion and diversity**
- **GDPR**

Being clear on the purpose of recognition is key. Any prize might satisfy multiple purposes, but **achieving clarity on the *primary* purpose of what you are trying to achieve will enable strategic decision-making about all other aspects**.

Once committees have clarity on this, it is important to consider whether setting up a new prize is the best and most effective way of achieving this identified objective. We appreciate that setting up and running a prize, considering all aspects of good practice, takes considerable time and resource and is a significant investment by current and for future committees. There can be other mechanisms to achieve the same objective.

Committees should also take time to read section II of this document, to get a sense of the different tasks involved with administering a prize.

Purpose of recognition

While recognition should always be of excellence, a key finding from the RSC's report "Re-thinking recognition: Science Prizes for the modern world" was that there are several valid reasons (Table 1) why organisations or groups might have recognition mechanisms, each with different intended primary beneficiaries.

Purpose	Intended primary beneficiary
Career progression, encouragement, validation and reputation for individuals/teams	The awardee or awardees
Advance or provide incentives in an area, inspire and support others	Scientific community and science
Communicate, highlight and celebrate science	Society and science
Raise the visibility of or serve an organisation and its mission	The awarder and the groups it represents

Table 1 – Purposes of recognition and their intended primary beneficiary

There is no 'one size fits all' approach; each stage of the prize process should be designed with the purpose in mind, from choosing a suitable recognition mechanism, to seeking nominations, to celebrating winners. Figure 1 below, taken from the RSC report, offered a framework for the RSC to use in reshaping its recognition portfolio. Member committees should take a similar approach in designing new recognition mechanisms, or in reviewing existing recognition mechanisms or prizes.

Committees must also consider how any new prize fits within the existing RSC prize portfolio and any possible overlap, both in terms of the scope and purpose of the prize, and the pool of nominees.

Figure 2 – Strategic design of a recognition portfolio

Long-term viability

It is important to consider the long-term viability of running any new prize. Many groups look to set up new prizes with the intention that they will run for several years.

Viability encompasses numerous aspects:

- **Financial** – if there are financial components to the prize, can this commitment be sustained on a regular basis long-term/indefinitely? This can include:
  - Prize money
  - Physical items e.g. medals/trophies/certificates
  - Travel costs associated with attending a meeting

- **Nominee pool** – how large is the group of candidates eligible to receive this prize? Is this pool sustainable? Would the quality and number of nominations be likely to drop off after the first couple of prize cycles?

- **Time** – the time associated with administering a prize, promoting a call for nominations, reviewing nominations, selecting winners, announcing/celebrating winners can be considerable. Consider if this is an activity that your committee is willing to commit their time and resources to, both now and in the future. Consider who in your group would have time and the responsibility to oversee each of these aspects on a regular basis, and who would be willing to sit on a judging panel.

Equality, inclusion and diversity

The Royal Society of Chemistry is committed to supporting and improving inclusion and diversity in the chemical sciences, and this extends to our recognition programmes.

Equality, inclusion and diversity must be embedded at each stage of the design of any prize. This includes, but is not limited to:

- The diversity of your likely pool of nominees.

- Encouraging diversity in its broadest sense in your call for nominations. This is particularly important in relation to protected characteristics, including gender and ethnicity. There are also other measures of diversity, including institution/organisation and sector, which may depend on the purpose of the prize.

- Inclusive eligibility/selection criteria. You should avoid the use of upper age limits in eligibility criteria, be inclusive of nominees who have taken career breaks or non-linear career paths, and avoid reliance on quantity-based metrics.

- The transparency of selection criteria and the judging process.

- Considering carefully any expectations associated with winning a prize. For example, the winner may be expected to deliver a lecture at a group meeting/conference, but there may be practical barriers in doing so (e.g. caring responsibilities). Any expectations should remain flexible, and winners should always be selected in reference to the defined selection criteria.

- The diversity of the judging panel. Panels should have a breadth of expertise across the area of excellence being judged, but you should consider diversity when appointing panel members. Several studies have shown that diverse groups make better decisions.

GDPR

The nomination and selection process for any prize must be consistent with GDPR regulations. RSC member networks have been provided with information and resources to support GDPR best practice.

Practical guidance around data protection in relation to prizes is provided in Section II of this document. Please contact the Networks Team if you need any further guidance on this.

Additional considerations

Eponymous prizes

When looking to set up a prize, some committees may want to consider naming the prize after a leading individual in the field, as a way of acknowledging their contributions to a particular field.

This is a complex topic, with a number of potential risks, and the Royal Society of Chemistry is currently reviewing its approach to eponymous prizes with a view to developing good practice in this area.

Please contact RSC staff as soon as possible if you are considering naming a prize after an individual, and **before** contacting the individual or their family.

Individuals and teams

Whilst recognition of individuals remains important – especially where the purpose of recognition is to benefit the awardee, particularly at early career stages – the Re-thinking recognition report recommended that the RSC increase its recognition of teams and collaborations, to better reflect their importance to science today.

A team prize has the advantage of providing recognition opportunities for a broader range of people working in different roles and at different career stages. This should work in favour of diversity. Recognising a team also presents some practical challenges:

- teams are transient
- teams come in different forms, making them challenging to define

One solution to these challenges, as can be seen in the RSC's new Horizon Prizes, is for a team prize to be awarded based on a defined piece of work, output or project, where every individual who contributed to that piece of work is recognised.

Committees should also think carefully about the prize itself. What may be meaningful for an individual may not be meaningful for a team, and vice versa. Choosing to recognise a team (and therefore multiple individuals) could also have financial implications if there are monetary components/physical items associated with the prize.

Ultimately, the decision to recognise an individual or a team should link back to the intended purpose of the prize.

Section II: Administering a prize

This section has been structured chronologically through each of the different phases of administering a prize.

Committees looking to set up a new prize should read this section carefully, to get a sense of the tasks involved in administering a prize.

1. Planning

Member committees should:

- **Plan timelines** – allow for a broad nomination window, with accessibility and equality in mind. The nomination window for centrally administered RSC Prizes is typically at least 2 months. Set a nomination deadline (date and time) and be firm with this deadline.

- **Appoint a judging panel** – the names of all judges should be in the public domain when nominations open. This signals publicly who is not eligible to make a nomination or be nominated.
  To avoid any perceived or real conflicts of interest, panel members should not be eligible to be nominated, make a nomination, or provide a reference (if references are required).

- **Define and set eligibility/selection criteria** – in setting eligibility criteria, committees should consider equality, inclusivity and diversity. Selection criteria should not be solely based on quantity-based metrics.

- **Plan how you will receive nominations** – it is good practice to have a standard nomination form used by all nominators. This might be a document made available online, or a simple webform. A standard form helps to reduce unconscious bias in that judges can focus their attention on the content of the nomination, rather than the way the content is presented.

Planning phase – guidance

Coordination

Member committees should appoint an individual, or group of individuals, who will be responsible for administering and coordinating aspects of the prize. This might be the group secretary, or Chair.

To avoid any perceived or real conflicts of interest, they should be independent from the rest of the judging or selection panel, if possible, and they should not be eligible to be nominated or make nominations for the prize.

Judging panel

Judging panels should balance expertise in the area of excellence being judged, as well as diversity in its broadest sense, noting that a number of studies have shown that diverse groups make better decisions.

Insofar as is practical or possible, try to ensure that judging panels represent a range of institutions or organisations. This helps to avoid cases where a nominee is based at the same institution as multiple judges, who subsequently are unable to judge the nomination due to a conflict of interest.

It is valuable to have a balance of continuity and rotation in panel membership, so that good practice is passed on as new judges join.

Receiving nominations

In the vast majority of cases, the most appropriate mechanism will be to have an open nomination process. In some cases a formal nomination process might be a barrier to receiving nominations, but committees who opt not to have an open nomination process should take steps to ensure that they are considering all whom may be eligible for recognition.

The RSC Networks team can provide support to committees looking to set up a new prize by creating an online nomination form which complies with data protection legislation. If this is of interest to your committee, please contact Networks@rsc.org for more information.

Self-nomination

Committees may consider whether they wish to permit self-nominations. Self-nomination is generally not permitted for centrally administered RSC prizes for individuals, but is permitted for all team prizes.

The RSC's '*Re-thinking recognition*' report noted mixed views on self-nomination for individuals. This can provide a nomination route for individuals who may be reluctant to approach someone to nominate them; the review also heard the counter argument that such individuals may be even less likely to nominate themselves or prepare a nomination that confidently evidences their excellence.

There was much more consensus that self-nomination is an appropriate mechanism for teams, with the collective nature of the nomination changing the dynamics.

Eligibility criteria

In cases where the primary purpose of a prize is to support an individual's career progression, it might be appropriate to restrict eligibility to a particular career stage.

In setting eligibility criteria, committees should consider equality, inclusivity and diversity. In recent years, the RSC has moved towards eligibility criteria based on years of full-time equivalent professional experience, in preference to age. As an example, for the RSC's centrally administered early career prizes, eligibility criteria are outlined as follows:

- *Nominees should be an early career scientist, typically with no more than 10 years of full-time equivalent professional experience*
- *This should be experience gained as part of a scientific career excluding time spent in full-time education. Time spent as a postgraduate student should not be included e.g. Masters, PhD. Time spent as a post-doctoral researcher should be included*
- *Nominators will be asked to provide details of the nominee's professional experience, in relation to the above criteria*
- *Career breaks will be recognised, and applications are particularly encouraged from those whose career has spanned a break due to caring responsibilities or personal circumstances e.g. a period of parental/adoption leave, family commitments, illness, or other exceptional circumstances*

Selection criteria

Your selection criteria will form the basis of judges' assessments and will also help to structure your nomination form. Selection criteria should not be based on quantity-based metrics.

In light of the selection and eligibility criteria defined above, you should design the nomination form so that:

a) coordinators have the information they need to determine whether a nomination is valid, and are able to contact the nominator and nominee
b) judges have the information they need to make the best possible decision
c) the amount of unnecessary/redundant information collected is minimised

Use word limits on your nomination form, rather than page limits, for consistency.

Celebration mechanism

This should be linked to the defined purpose of the prize, and that this is as meaningful as possible for the recipient(s).

More details about celebration mechanisms can be found in the section on Promotion and Celebration (page 14).

2. Nominations

Member committees should:

- **Put out a call for nominations**. Your call for nominations should detail the following:
    - Who is (and is not) eligible to make a nomination
    - Who is (and is not) eligible to be nominated
    - How to nominate/apply
    - When the nomination window closes (date and time)
    - Who will be judging the prize (names and affiliations)
    - The selection criteria judging panels will use
    - How many winners there will be
    - What the winner(s) will receive, and any expectations associated with the prize

    The RSC Networks team can provide support to committees by putting information about the prize and a link to the nomination form on your webpage, as well as sending out a call for nominations to your members. Please get in touch with Networks@rsc.org.

- **Confirm with nominators that their nominations have been received**.

- **Ensure that all valid nominations proceed to judging**. Where there is no doubt that a nomination is clearly ineligible, based on eligibility criteria in the public domain, the nomination should not proceed to judging. All other valid nominations should proceed to judging.

- **Password-protect nomination material before sending to judges**. This is essential when nominations contain personal information (for example, as detailed on a CV).

Nomination phase – guidance

Communications

It is good practice to promote your prize using a number of different channels and routes to reach the widest possible audience. You might consider using a combination of e-alerts/e-mails, group website posts, promotional flyers, social media posts, word-of-mouth, etc.

Committees should consider whether they inform nominees of their nomination. For centrally administered RSC Prizes, RSC staff inform individuals and teams who have been nominated for transparency, but also as a supportive gesture. We also invite them to complete a short diversity monitoring form. The most important thing is to be consistent in your approach.

Late nominations

You might receive nominations after the advertised deadline, or queries asking if late nominations are acceptable. It is good practice to not accept nominations after your advertised deadlines.

This can be challenging, but is beneficial for inclusion and accessibility, and ensuring equal opportunity for all participants. There may be individuals who feel they can ask for an extension, but there will also be those who will not feel they can do this and will take the deadlines as advertised.

Preparing for judging

Consider whether you make the identity of the nominators known to judging panels. For centrally administered RSC Prizes, the identity of the nominator is never revealed to judging panels. This reduces the potential for unconscious bias and helps to focus committee's attentions on the content of the nomination, rather than on the individual who made the nomination.

If you choose to make nominators anonymous to judges, ensure that coordinators retain this information so that all nominators can be informed of the outcome.

When sending paperwork to judges, it is good practice to remind them of the agreed selection criteria, since this should form the basis of their assessments.

3. Judging

Member committees should:

- **Ensure there is a clear process for judges to declare conflicts of interest**. Further guidance on this is given below.
- **Take steps to ensure that the selection of winner(s) takes place fairly.** Judges should base their decisions solely on the information in the nomination, and in reference to the selection criteria in the public domain.
- **Not select more winners than is stated in the guidelines for the prize**.

Planning phase – guidance

Unconscious bias

It is important to recognise that we all have innate biases, both conscious and unconscious. Unconscious bias is a term that describes the associations we hold, outside of our conscious awareness and control. These can have a significant influence on our attitudes and behaviours. Unconscious bias is triggered by our brain automatically making quick judgements and assessments, influenced by our background, personal experiences, social stereotypes and cultural context.

It is important that judges are aware of their individual unconscious biases when scoring. You might consider organising formal unconscious bias training. There are a number of free unconscious bias tests available, which judges might use for their own information and reflection.

The following videos from the Royal Society may be beneficial to judging panel members:

Making better decisions in groups https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ptOhoizsHaw

Understanding unconscious bias https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dVp9Z5k0dEE

Conflicts of interest

For centrally administered RSC Prizes, a conflict of interest arises if you:

1. Are closely related to a nominee, e.g. spouse or sibling
2. Are currently working in the same institution as a nominee
3. Have previously had a close working relationship with a nominee in industry, academia or other research institution (e.g. PhD/post-doctoral supervisor, co-workers on the same project, collaborators)
4. Are close collaborators with a nominee (e.g. co-author of papers, joint funding co-bidder)
5. Have any other relationship with a nominee or nominator which makes you unable to make an objective evaluation of the nomination

Judges are asked to exclude themselves from the judging of the entire prize if point 1 applies, and from the judging of only the conflicted nomination where points 2 to 5 apply.

These guidelines will not cover all eventualities. When considering if there is a conflict of interest, it can be helpful to question whether a judge would stand to benefit from a particular nominee winning. The most important thing is to ensure that any individual judge feels able to make a clear and unbiased assessment of the nomination.

It is important that conflicts of interest are declared soon after nominations are circulated to judges. Centrally administered RSC Prizes have a target for each nominee to be scored by at least four non-conflicted judges. If this target is not likely to be met based on conflicts declared, RSC staff look to appoint an additional judge(s).

The judging process

In deciding the winner of a prize, it is important to have clear criteria combined with expert judgement.

There are a number of different methods that panels might use to reach a decision, but it is preferable for the panel to meet, physically or virtually, and hold a discussion to determine winners, rather than to have solely voting or scoring. The benefits of having a panel discussion outweigh and reduce the impact of potential biases.

For centrally administered RSC Prizes, each judge independently provides a score for each non-conflicted nominee. Individual judges' scores are submitted to and collated by RSC staff, who then circulate the combined scores to all panel members once all scores have been received. When they meet, these scores are used as a guide to help panels in their discussions.

Initial scoring/assessment might take the form of any of the following:

- A single numerical score, e.g. 1 to 10, taking into account all of the selection criteria
- Multiple numerical scores against each of the selection criteria, which can be weighted accordingly and summed to give a total score
- A ranking of nominations

Each scoring system has its own benefits and drawbacks; however, it is important that scores are used only as a guide, rather than as a definitive ranking. The panel discussion offers an important opportunity for judges to hear different points of view and reach the best collective decision.

Independent witness

Committees might consider inviting an independent witness to their deliberation meeting. All selection meetings to determine the recipient(s) of centrally administered RSC Prizes are attended by an independent witness.

The role of the independent witness is to provide constructive challenge or raise concerns about any of the panel's deliberation that may hinder a fair decision or contravene guidelines that the committee have in place. They should avoid being involved in the merits or otherwise of individual nominees and avoid being involved in discussions as to who should win. This is a challenging but unique and important role.

It is preferable to appoint an independent witness once nominations have closed, to try to avoid/minimise conflicts of interest.

Selection of winners

Selection criteria should not be based on metrics. Assessing nominees based on quantity-based metrics is susceptible to bias.

The Royal Society of Chemistry has recently signed the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA), of which a key recommendation is that journal-based metrics should not be used as a surrogate measure of the quality of individual research articles, or to assess an individual scientist's contributions.

Committees should not select more winners than is stated in the guidelines for the prize. Having several worthy nominees is an inevitable consequence of a competitive recognition programme. For transparency, a decision about the number of recipients a prize can have should be made in advance of the prize opening for nominations and should not be taken by a committee during the selection of winner(s).

If, in the committee's judgement, no nominee demonstrates a contribution significant enough to receive the prize they have been nominated for, then the committee should not award.

Committees should have trust in the integrity of their judging panels and understand that there may be no one right decision, but rather, the best decision that the group can make at that time based on their expertise, experience and judgement.

4. Promotion and celebration

Member committees should:

- **Contact successful nominee(s), as well as the successful nominator, unsuccessful nominators and unsuccessful nominees before any public announcement**. This is a key step to ensure that the nominee is happy to accept the prize, and ensure that all nominators and nominees hear the news first-hand.

- **Ensure that judges delete any physical or electronic copies of nomination paperwork that they have in their possession**.

- **Not select more winners than is stated in the guidelines for the prize**.

Celebration phase – guidance

Communications

The coordinator should contact the successful nominee(s) first. This is a key step to ensure that the nominee is happy to accept the prize.

In line with the purpose of the prize, there may be obligations or opportunities associated with the prize. This is a good time to mention these. Committees should work with the winner(s) on these opportunities, being mindful of matters related to inclusion and diversity.

If the winner is happy to accept, inform the successful nominator, along with unsuccessful nominators (and nominees, if you have previously informed them that they were nominated for the prize).

Committees might consider whether they offer to give feedback to unsuccessful nominees and nominators. This can be challenging to do so in a manner that is detailed, constructive and fair to all individuals. This is particularly the case when there are a large number of nominees; because of variation in initial scoring, it is to be expected that some nominations will be discussed more than others will.

The RSC Networks team can provide support to groups looking to celebrate their prize winners by advising on the different communication channels available. Please contact Networks@rsc.org for more information.

Celebrations

The celebration mechanism should be designed in a way that is meaningful for the participant and fits with the defined purpose of the prize. The prize might consist of one or more of the following:

- Prize money
- A physical component, likely with an official presentation (medal, certificate, trophy)
- Professional opportunities (speaking opportunity, access to mentoring)
- Funding for a specific activity (networking, collaboration, travel grant)

5. Review

At the end of each cycle, committees should briefly review how the process went and whether there are necessary adjustments/mitigations that can be made before nominations next open for the prize.

It is good practice to periodically review your recognition schemes more broadly, to ensure that they are as far as possible fulfilling their defined purpose.

Some starting points are suggested below, but each recognition scheme will have a unique set of challenges and circumstances. If you would like to discuss these with the RSC Prizes team, please don't hesitate to get in touch at awards@rsc.org.

Number of nominations

There can be a number of reasons why a prize might receive few nominations. Committees might consider:

- Awareness – is there more you can do to promote the prize to the community and spread the word?
- Eligibility criteria – are they too restrictive? How large is the community you are hoping to reach through your recognition scheme?
- Nomination process – is the nomination form too lengthy? Does it put nominators and nominees off engaging with the process?
- The prize itself – is it attractive to, or meaningful for, potential nominees?

Diversity of winners/nominations

Increasing the diversity of nominations is a necessary condition for increasing the diversity of the winners of any prize. It is important that nominee pools reflect the diversity in an area that is being recognised.

Diversity should be embedded in all thinking about recognition and at each stage of the process, from nomination through to celebration. The Royal Academy of Engineering/Science Council's Diversity Progression Framework offers a tool to measure strengths and areas for development on this topic.

Committees might consider:

- Data on previous nominations – it is beneficial for policies and procedures to be informed by evidence.
- Eligibility criteria – your eligibility criteria should be inclusive, and adequately account for and normalise non-traditional career paths and career breaks.
- Encouragement – is there more you could do to encourage nominations from and of underrepresented groups of people? Can you develop mechanisms to encourage those making a nomination for the first time?