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From the President: new beginnings

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From the President



New beginnings

It is a considerable privilege to be writing this month's column as the first President of The Chartered Institute of Ergonomics and Human Factors. The Institute's name and legal status changed 1st January, the final step on the journey to becoming incorporated with the Privy Council by Royal Charter.

Although not our first change of name, it has to be the most momentous. Founded as The Ergonomics Research Society in 1949, we became The Ergonomics Society in 1977, acknowledging the increasing proportion of members engaged in practice as well as academic activity. In 2009 the Society was renamed The Institute of Ergonomics and Human Factors, establishing unequivocally that human factors is also within the remit. This was in response to growth of human factors activity and groupings and concerns that some describing themselves as human factors experts were poorly qualified as such. There was also disquiet over human factors being presented as different and distinctive from ergonomics in some quarters. Does this sound familiar?

It is understandable that we should want to 'own' ergonomics & human factors (EHF) and be to the fore addressing EHF issues. We have studied, trained and gained the experience to become the specialists. Although there is good recognition of EHF in some sectors, there are other important areas where awareness of the Institute and proper understanding of

EHF is not as widespread as we would wish. Healthcare is a current example. As a case in point, several members remarked on the recent 2014 BBC Reith Lectures by Atul Gawande, which dealt in part with medical errors and the design of healthcare systems. The following comment on the lectures was typical: "Very relevant to EHF, just a shame that he seems never to have heard of the discipline and hence is busy re-inventing the wheel."

Given the transdisciplinary nature of EHF it seems inevitable to me that problems we see as 'ours' will be taken on by those from other backgrounds without EHF credentials. I believe, however, we should see interest and engagement of this nature with EHF terrain as an opportunity. Especially now. Our latest change of name, becoming Chartered, marks authoritative recognition of the important contribution of the Institute, discipline and profession and gives us a much stronger platform from which to spread the word. An important part of our strategy *Towards 2020*, is about just this: using our status and targeting our efforts to raise awareness and gain influence where it can make the most difference.

This is an exciting phase in the Institute's history and a great time to be involved in taking it forward. Would you like to play a part in this? If so, please give some thought to standing for one of the vacancies on Council, as advertised with the AGM notice on page 18 of this issue.

Best wishes