

January 31, 2015

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing this letter on behalf of Dr. Eric Scerri, who has asked me to comment on his communications skills in addressing diverse audiences. I have communicated with Dr. Scerri myself over the years and have had opportunities not only to read his publications, but also to observe him in action. The reason that I mention both of these means of communication is because you cannot do one without the other. Dr. Scerri's written communications skills arise from his vast yet profound knowledge of his subject matter, which comprises many areas of the history and philosophy of chemistry, especially as it pertains to the development of the icon of chemistry, the periodic table.

However, knowledge in itself is not enough to communicate one's passion: it must be coupled with enthusiasm, a sense of wonder, sensitivity to one's audience, an engaging manner, a sense of humor, and skill in explaining complex ideas in a manner simple enough for anyone, whether a science professional or a high school student, to grasp. Without running the risk of oversimplifying.

This past August, I had occasion to see the confluence of this set of characteristics in the person of Dr. Scerri. He addressed a diverse audience of students and chemistry professionals on the topic of "The Vexed Story of Element 72 – Hafnium" in a symposium (held at a national meeting of the American Chemical Society) which I had organized entitled "Found and Lost: Incredible Tales of Spurious, Erroneous and Rehabilitated Elements." Not only did Dr. Scerri's talk draw a large audience and enormous applause, but also a lively discussion, insightful questions, and a following of members of the audience after his talk. And his topic was "vexed" indeed – it was one of the most challenging and complicated stories of discovery, undiscovery, retraction, and priority claims that the history of chemistry has ever witnessed.

You will not go wrong if you decide to engage Dr. Scerri.

Sincerely,



Mary Virginia Orna
Professor of Chemistry
Tour Speaker of the American Chemical Society