



### **Who Are We:**

The Irish Council for Bioethics is an independent, National body set up by the Government in 2002 to consider the ethical questions raised by recent developments in science and medicine.

The Council has two primary functions. The first is to provide independent advice to Government and policymakers, and the second is to promote public understanding and informed discussion of bioethical issues.

In 2008, the Irish Council for Bioethics became a company limited by guarantee not having share capital. The company known as the Irish Council for Bioethics has three directors, Dr. Dolores Dooley, Prof. Peter Whittaker and Mr. Dermot Gleeson SC who are responsible for nominating the membership of the Council.

### **Terms of Reference:**

1. To identify and interpret the ethical questions raised by biomedicine in order to respond to, and anticipate questions of substantive concern.
2. To investigate and report on such questions in the interests of promoting public understanding, informed discussion and education.
3. In light of the outcome of its work, to stimulate discussion through conferences, workshops, lectures, published reports and where appropriate suggest guidelines.

### **Establishment and Funding:**

In March 1999, the Irish Government established the Inter-Departmental Group on Modern Biotechnology, in response to concerns raised in regard to genetic modification. The group was chaired by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and involved representatives from the Departments of Health and Children, Agriculture and Food, Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the Food Safety Authority of Ireland. The group published a report in October 2000, which recommended that a National ethics committee be established, which would consider the "ethical issues raised by biotechnology in an informed, dispassionate and independent way".

The Irish Council for Bioethics was subsequently established in 2002 by the Royal Irish Academy (Ireland's academy for the sciences and humanities) as an independent, autonomous, non-statutory body to consider the ethical issues raised by developments in science and medicine. The Council was formally inaugurated by

the then Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (currently the Minister for Health and Children), Ms Mary Harney T.D. in January 2003.

The Council is funded by a grant of €437,000 from Forfás, Ireland's national policy and advisory board for enterprise, trade, science, technology and innovation.

**Membership:**

The Irish Council for Bioethics considers a wide variety of topics relating to the ethical questions raised by science and medicine, thus, its membership is multidisciplinary with members coming from backgrounds as diverse as medicine, law, science, philosophy, theology and journalism. Members are invited to join the Council by virtue of their personal expertise, distinction and authority, and not as representatives of particular bodies or professions. Members are appointed for a period of three years and can serve for eight consecutive years. Members of the Council are encouraged to be members of the company, but this is not a mandatory requirement. A member of Council may resign office by notice, to the Chairperson of the Council and to the Directors of the Company. Notice shall take effect on the date that the above parties receive the notice. Council members give their time and expertise on an entirely voluntary basis and do not accept remuneration apart from travel expenses.

**Duty of Confidentiality:**

The members shall observe confidentiality with regard to the deliberations and to documents stated to be confidential.

**Disclosure of Interests Statement:**

Members shall be required to complete a Disclosure of Interests statement.

**Meetings and Procedures:**

The Council meets in plenary session on a bi-monthly basis.

The quorum for a meeting of the Council shall be not less than half the number of members plus one, present in person. Meeting dates are set a year in advance and members are expected to attend at least four of the six meetings held per year.

Minutes of each meeting are drawn up. These minutes are forwarded to all members within a reasonable time before the next meeting. Any objections should be raised prior to or on the day of the meeting. Any suggested amendments to the minutes shall be decided upon at the following meeting. Once minutes are adopted, decisions are recorded and published on the website of the Council.

**Work Programme:**

At the beginning of each term of office, Council members are asked to propose issues, which they would like the Council to consider. In addition, the Government, policymakers and professional bodies can refer questions and issues to the Council for possible consideration. The secretariat then prepares a briefing paper on each of the proposed topics and, from these, Council members select three topics (one for each year of the Council's term of office). Selection is based on a number of criteria, such as public interest and concern, relevance to Ireland and, in particular, whether the Council could make a unique contribution to the discussion of the issue.

Once the three topics are selected, a rapporteur group is appointed for each topic. The rapporteur groups liaise with the secretariat throughout the drafting process and lead discussions at Council level.

**Preparation of Reports:**

To assist its deliberations, the Council consults both stakeholder groups and interested members of the public before drafting any of its reports and opinions. The Council may also commission studies or expert reports and invite experts or other guests to its meetings.

Stakeholder groups are drawn from various fields and are selected based on the relevance of a given topic to their particular area of activity and expertise. Meetings are held, where stakeholder groups can express their views on the range of issues under consideration and they are also given the opportunity to make written submissions.

In order to consult members of the public, advertisements are generally placed in National newspapers inviting people to fill in a questionnaire, which can be submitted electronically on the Irish Council for Bioethics website or by post. Questionnaires also contain an open comment section, where respondents can freely comment on any aspect of the topic under consideration.

The aim of the Council's public consultation process is to ascertain the views of interested individuals, in order to consider a full range of views and opinions in the Council's deliberations on important issues and is not intended to poll public opinion.

The Council considers the views of both stakeholders and the interested members of society who participate in consultations. Over a series of meetings there are wide-ranging discussions of the issues raised. While it is envisaged that the Council will seek to develop a consensus, disagreements shall be determined by a simple majority of votes of the members present and, in the event that voting is equally divided, the Chairperson will cast the deciding vote. Provision will be made for dissenting views to be recorded in a minority report.

**Further Information:**

Reports and other documents are available for free download on the Council's website [www.bioethics.ie](http://www.bioethics.ie)

All of the Council's meetings are minuted and these minutes are and have been available on the website.