

Irish Council for Bioethics

Comhairle Bitheitice na hÉireann

Wednesday, 15 May 2002

In the Chair: Professor P. Fottrell

Also present: Professor E.P. Cunningham; Mr M. Dempsey; Dr D. Dooley; Dr M. Fitzgerald; Dr P. Flanagan; Mr D. Gleeson; Canon K. Kearon; Professor C. Kelleher; Dr M. Lawler; Dr T. McGleenan; Dr Peter McKenna; Ms M. Mulvihill; Dr N. O'Brien; Professor F. O'Gara; Professor R. O'Regan; Professor A. Scott; Mr Asim Sheikh; Professor J. J. Strain; Professor P. Whittaker;

Apologies for absence: Professor P. Hannon

Also in attendance: Dr M. Ryan; Mr P. Dempsey

1. Welcome

Dr Michael Ryan, President of the Royal Irish Academy, welcomed the members of the Council to the Academy and thanked each member for kindly agreeing to serve on the inaugural Council.

2. Introduction

The Chairman outlined the origins and terms of reference of the council, its membership, its independent autonomous status and its relationship with the Academy. He stressed that it was critical that the work and procedures of the Council should be open and transparent and to that end he obtained the Council's approval for the minutes to be posted on the website.

The Council approved the Chairman's nomination of Mr Dermot Gleeson and Professor P. Whittaker as joint chairpersons.

3. Members' Introductions

Each member of the Council introduced themselves and outlined their careers to date.

4. Declaration / Register of Interests

Dr T. McGleenan agreed to draft a Register of Interests for the Council to be circulated before the next meeting.

5. Programme of Work

The Council decided that before considering a programme of work it must first get a measure of best international practice. To that end it was decided that a survey of ethics advisory committees should be undertaken to find out how they carry out their business, how they access expert and public opinion and how they publish their deliberations.

Professor C. Kelleher agreed to draft a document identifying bodies within Ireland interested in Bioethics.

It was decided to invite Dr Sandy Thomas, director of the Nuffield Council on Bioethics, to address a subsequent meeting of the Council on best international practice.

Professor E.P. Cunningham agreed to circulate the Council with a list of what he felt were some of the main Bioethical issues. It was decided that the Council should invite submissions from the general public as to what issues it should treat in the course of its first three year term of office.

The following Council members agreed to prepare and circulate documents on some of the issues they feel pertinent for the Council to treat:

Dr P. McKenna	-surplus embryos
Dr M. Lawler	- biological collections such as tissue samples.
Dr M. Fitzgerald	- analysing the impact of GM foods

Mr A. Sheikh agreed to circulate members with a short list of useful website addresses.

6. Budget

The Council were circulated with the budget for 2002. The Council agreed that once the Council had a Scientific director appointed and a three year plan in place, it would approach bodies such as Science Foundation Ireland, Wellcome Trust and the Nuffield Foundation for additional funding.

7. Appointment of a Director

The job description for the post of Scientific Director was circulated and approved by the Council. Advertisements will be placed in the Irish Times and the Times Higher Education Supplement as soon as possible and all relevant third level institutions will be circulated with the information regarding the post.

An appointment panel was approved consisting of the Chairman, Professor E.P. Cunningham, Dr M. Fitzgerald, and a nominee of the Academy.

8. Schedule of Meetings

The next three meetings will take place at 10.30am in Academy House on 13 June, 11 July, 12 September.

9. Any other business

Canon K. Kearon asked that the headline on the media release 'Genetics + Ethics = Bioethics' be amended as it was misleading.