

Irish Council for Bioethics
Comhairle Bitheitice na hÉireann

Minutes of Council Meeting
Thursday 2nd November 2006

In the Chair: Mr Dermot Gleeson

Present: Dr Alan Donnelly; Dr Dolores Dooley; Dr Peter McKenna;
Mr Stephen McMahon; Professor Richard O’Kennedy; Mr
Asim Sheikh; Dr David Smith.

Apologies for absence: Professor Andrew Green; Professor Linda Hogan; Dr
Richard Hull; Professor John Vincent McLoughlin;
Professor Cliona O’Farrelly; Dr Darina O’Flanagan.

Also present: Dr Siobhán O’Sullivan; Ms Emily de Grae; Mr Paul Ivory.

1. Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting were adopted and signed.

2. Report from the Scientific Director

Dr Siobhán O’Sullivan informed the Council that the steering committee established to oversee the Council’s Playwriting Competition had their first meeting on Tuesday 26th September. Dr O’Sullivan noted that all the members of the steering committee were very happy and interested to be involved in this project with the Irish Council for Bioethics. Dr O’Sullivan reported that the steering committee meeting was very successful and following on from that meeting Ms Emily de Grae prepared and circulated all the relevant material for the Playwriting Competition (e.g. the competition brief, the advertising material, the entry form, information on the adjudication process, and the overall competition timeline) to the steering committee members. The Council thanked Ms de Grae for all the work she had done on the competition so far. Dr O’Sullivan informed the Council that this material was well received and only minor comments and revisions have been returned by the steering committee. Dr O’Sullivan announced that the official launch of the Playwriting Competition would be made at the end of November or start of December. Dr O’Sullivan then outlined the processes that would be involved in the launch of the competition, including advertisements in the national press, distribution via email lists, and through collaborations with organisations in the Artistic community, e.g. the Dublin Writer’s Museum.

Dr O'Sullivan highlighted a number of issues pertaining to the Council's public lecture for 2006: "Emerging Virus Infections in a Changing World" and questioned whether the Council should continue to organise public lectures in the future. Dr O'Sullivan gave an overview of the promotional work carried out by Ms de Grae in advance of the 2006 lecture and stated that the audience turnout for the lecture, estimated to be approximately 40-50 people, would not represent a proportionate return for the cost and effort involved in organising the event. The view was expressed that the public lecture format was of value for certain groups within society, representing the relevant target audience but otherwise it was difficult to attract the public to these events. Dr O'Sullivan gave an outline of other upcoming public outreach events including, a radio series, a film project and the Playwriting Competition.

The Council agreed that a more modern approach to outreach work would be welcomed. A number of alternative options were then discussed including: a bioethics course; specifically targeted lectures and policy conferences; video conferences; downloads of conferences and other events from the Irish Council for Bioethics website; the establishment of other blog and discussion sites, and greater use of the Internet in general. In response to this Dr O'Sullivan noted that a poll and discussion forum was being developed for the Council's website and the town hall meeting project next year would be pod cast on the Internet. The Chairman requested that the Secretariat prepare a briefing document on alternative approaches for outreach work, for the Council to review and potentially implement.

Dr O'Sullivan noted that the Council's previous policy conferences, including the 2006 conference on Ethical Issues in a Pandemic, had been very useful and had been very well received. Dr O'Sullivan went on to suggest that the Council's policy conference for 2007 should cover the topic of equity and justice in healthcare. The Council was very supportive of this suggestion and noted that such policy conferences offered a great forum to examine and debate such issues. Dr O'Sullivan stated that the Secretariat would present a draft programme for the conference including identifying potential speakers for the Council consideration at its January meeting.

Dr O'Sullivan made reference to the National Ethics Councils (NEC) forum that she attended in Helsinki on 21st-22nd September 2006, the main topic of which revolved around nanotechnology. Dr O'Sullivan noted the national ethics councils of France, Sweden and the Netherlands had already produced reports on this issue. She also noted that the minutes of that NEC forum had been circulated to Council as well as a briefing document, prepared by Dr O'Sullivan on the subject of nanotechnology. Finally Dr O'Sullivan stated that the next meeting of the NEC forum would take place in Berlin in May 2007.

3. Control of Infectious Disease

Dr O'Sullivan informed the Council that the feedback received about the "Ethical Dilemmas in a Pandemic" conference was very positive and all the speakers were very happy to have taken part. Members of the Council's Rapporteur Group involved in organising this conference felt that the conference had been successful and covered a wide range of relevant issues and had received good, balanced media coverage. Chief among the issues highlighted at the conference included: potential gaps in the national plan for coping with pandemics, which the Government's pandemic planning group were

now looking at; the legal framework for pandemic management; the impact of a global epidemic on the wider economy; reciprocity regarding healthcare workers; and resource allocation at the global level. Dr O'Sullivan informed the Council that proceedings of the conference would be produced, containing short essays of the talks presented. It was envisaged that these proceedings would represent an accurate record of the discussions at the conference and would be available in early 2007.

4. Stem Cell Research

With reference to the minutes of the first stakeholder meeting, Dr O'Sullivan informed the Council that the stakeholder consultation process for the Stem Cell Research project had begun and would continue until early December. Dr O'Sullivan stated that any stakeholder group that was unavailable to meet the Council would be asked if they wished to make a written submission to the Council. The point was made that there appeared to be some level of difficulty among some stakeholder groups in that they felt that had to have a formal position regarding stem cell research, which was reflected in some of the correspondence received by the Council. Dr O'Sullivan acknowledged that some groups may have difficulty finalising a position on stem cell research and stated that an additional letter had been sent to clarify that the purpose of the stakeholder meetings was to allow all the groups to identify and discuss any issues that they felt were relevant to any report on stem cell research and, thus, deserved consideration by the Council.

Dr O'Sullivan explained that the public portion of the consultation process would take place in 2007. The view was expressed that as part of the public consultation some form of information leaflet should be circulated to the general public and the design of the overall consultation process should be as simple and straightforward as possible.

5. Any Other Business

Dr O'Sullivan informed the Council that the report on Advance Directives, while almost ready for review, still required some restructuring, particularly with regard to the conclusions. With this in mind it was envisaged that the latest draft of the Advance Directive document would be forwarded to Council via email by the 20th November with a timeline by which Council should return any comments they had on the document. Dr O'Sullivan stated that any Council comments would be incorporated and the final draft of the document would be presented for the Council to sign off at the meeting on January 11th 2007. It was envisaged that document would then be launched officially in the third or fourth week of January.

The Chairperson raised the issue of the reorganisation of the Irish Council for Bioethics as a company limited by guarantee. The Chairperson informed members that he, along with the Chairperson designate and Dr. O' Sullivan, would be attending a meeting with representatives from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE) in early November. It was envisaged that this meeting would help to resolve a number of issues outstanding regarding the future of the Irish Council for Bioethics including, the new structure of the Council, funding issues, as well as staff and other related employment arrangements. The point was made that the Secretariat staff played a very important role in the work of the Council and their interests should be represented in the discussion with the DETE. The view was expressed that all issues surrounding the

security of the staff and the future of the Council as a whole should be resolved before the restructuring process should begin. Mr Gleeson informed the Council that the minutes of the meeting with the DETE would be circulated to all members as soon as possible.

6. Date of next meeting

Friday January 12th 2007 at 10:30am.
