

Irish Council for Bioethics
Comhairle Bitheitice na hÉireann

Minutes for Council Meeting
Wednesday 9th June 2005

- In the Chair:** Mr. Dermot Gleeson
- Present:** Prof. P. Cunningham; Dr. D. Dooley; Dr P. Flanagan; Prof. M. Lawlor; Dr. P. McKenna; Ms. M. Mulvihill; Mr. A. Sheikh; Prof. A. Scott; Prof. P. Whittaker
- Apologies for absence:** Mr. M. Dempsey; Prof. P. Hannon; Prof. C. Kelleher; Prof. T. McGleenan; Dr. N. O'Brien; Prof. F. O'Gara; Prof. R. O'Regan; Prof. S. Strain.
- Also present:** Dr. S. O'Sullivan; Ms E. de Grae; Dr. S. Dyke, Mr. Paul Ivory, Prof. J. Slevin

1. Minutes

It was noted that in section four "Report from the Chairperson of the research ethics committee working group" of the Council minutes March 9th 2005 that the word *on* had been omitted from the fourth sentence of the first paragraph. It was decided that once this was corrected the minutes would be adopted and signed.

2. Matters Arising

The President of the RIA, Prof. James Slevin made a brief address to the Council. He thanked members for their time and dedication throughout the Council's first term of office. He also thanked members who submitted suggestions for potential members for the Council's second term of office. The President informed members that the Council of the Royal Irish Academy would meet in mid September to finalise a list of potential members.

The President thanked the Scientific Director and the secretariat for their work during the Council's first term of office.

3. Report from the scientific director

Dr O'Sullivan introduced Mr Paul Ivory, the new research officer to Council members. She informed them that Mr Ivory would be responsible for running the Council's outreach programme. Members were told that Mr Ivory would teach bioethics to transition year students using case studies and video clips from medical dramas.

Dr O'Sullivan reported on the 2nd Irish Council for Bioethics public lecture/debate held on Wednesday 11th of May 2005. She told members that the event had been a success

and had attracted a significant amount of media interest. She informed members that the lecture was attended by many health professionals and representatives from the organ donation/transplant sector but that attendance by the general public was less than expected. It was suggested that while the public lecture was a worthwhile project which should be continued some other event might be considered which would be directly aimed at general audiences e.g. showing a science themed film that would highlight various bioethical issues. Dr O'Sullivan informed members that she hoped to initiate discussions with RTÉ about commissioning a 6 part radio series on bioethical issues.

Dr O'Sullivan reported to the members on the NEC forum which took place in Luxembourg on the 23rd and 24th of May 2005. She stated that it was an extremely beneficial meeting, which discussed issues such as stem cell research, organ transplantation and the uses of animals in research. She informed Council that the next NEC forum would take place in London in November.

Dr O'Sullivan also informed members that the European Commission had established new funding initiatives for which the Council would be eligible to apply. She also reported that the Commission had suggested NEC members might twin with each other, and that the Danish Council on Bioethics, has expressed interest with twinning with the Irish Council for Bioethics.

The question was raised as to what topics were being discussed by our European counterparts. Dr O'Sullivan stated that there was a definite shift in focus from research to medical topics e.g. advance directives, resource allocation, organ transplantation. The point was raised that another topic, which may be worthy of consideration by the next Council, would be the treatment of extremely premature babies. Other topics mentioned were nanotechnology and surveillance and control. It was noted that the Council would have to re-draft its terms of reference in order to allow the consideration of topics outside the sphere of medical research. Dr O'Sullivan stated she was aware of this necessity and was in the process of addressing the issue.

Dr O'Sullivan updated members on the REC project, which the Council had been commissioned to undertake by the Department of Health & Children. She informed members that she and Ms de Grae produced a set of standardised documentation and a guidance booklet as well as a position paper on the accreditation of research ethics committees. Ms de Grae told Council that this work had been submitted to the Department of Health & Children in April.

4. Launch of the Human Biological Collections Working Group Report

Dr O'Sullivan told the group that the Tánaiste had been invited to launch the report of the Human Biological Collections working group and that the potential dates for the launch would be 27th and 29th June 2005. Ms de Grae told the group that she was liaising with the Tánaiste's private secretary and would inform members of a date once this was confirmed.

It was decided that the launch would most likely be held in Academy house, this would also be confirmed at a later date.

5. Working Practices of the Council

Dr. O'Sullivan suggested that the next Council might operate in plenary session. This had the advantage of progressing Council's work at a faster pace since substantive discussions on topics would take place at Council level rather than devolving the drafting of reports to working groups. It was noted that working group were useful since it allowed the Council to draw on the expertise not available within the Council. The point was also made that working in plenary would also constitute a significant increase in the workload of Council members. Dr. O' Sullivan pointed out that all council members were also members of working groups and thus, working in plenary should not significantly increase the workload for members and might even be beneficial for those members based outside of Dublin. It was agreed that external expertise had been extremely valuable in preparing reports and opinions and that this should be continued, whether in the form of working groups or inviting stakeholders/experts to appear before the Council. The general consensus was that a mixture between plenary and working group sessions would be beneficial for the second term of the Council.

6. Any other business

Dr. O' Sullivan informed the Council that the report on Genetically Modified Organisms and the opinion document on research ethics committees would be published in Sept/Oct of 2005.

7. Date of next meeting

It was decided that the next meeting would take place either in late August or early September. The Chairman asked then secretariat to solicit the availability of Council members during the first week of Sept. The secretariat agreed to circulate the date for the next meeting, once this had been done.
