

**Irish Council for Bioethics**  
*Comhairle Bitheitice na hÉireann*

**Minutes for Council Meeting**  
**Thursday 1st September 2005**

**In the Chair:** Mr. Dermot Gleeson

**Present:** Prof. P. Cunningham; Dr P. Flanagan; Prof. P. Hannon; Dr. P. McKenna; Ms. M. Mulvihill; Dr. N. O'Brien; Prof. R. O'Regan; Prof. P. Whittaker

**Apologies for absence:** Mr. M. Dempsey; Dr. D. Dooley Prof. C. Kelleher; Prof. M. Lawlor; Prof. T. McGleenan;; Prof. F. O'Gara; Mr. A. Sheikh; Prof. A. Scott; Prof. S. Strain.

**Also present:** Dr. S. O'Sullivan; Ms E. de Grae;

**1. Minutes**

The typographical error noted by Prof. Lawler in the minutes of the March 9th meeting was corrected and signed, while the minutes of the meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> June 2005 were adopted and signed.

**2. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising

**3. Report from the scientific director**

Dr O'Sullivan reported to members on the launch, by the Tánaiste, of *Human Biological Materials: Recommendations for Collection, Use and Storage in Research, 2005*, which took place on 29<sup>th</sup> June. She informed members that the launch had been well attended and had received good media coverage. She also informed members that the report had been well received and that Parents for Justice were particularly positive about its focus on the importance of consent.

Dr O'Sullivan informed members that the bioethics teaching project with transition year students would be piloted in a Co. Dublin school in September. A group of 150 students in groups of 30 would have a one-day course in bioethics. She informed members that Mr. Paul Ivory of the secretariat had prepared a module for students, which would consist of a presentation on the basic principles of bioethics. This would be followed by interactive case studies and discussions and finally students would be asked to act as a research ethics committee and to examine several "proposals" compiled by Mr. Ivory. She also informed members that if the pilot was successful plans would be made to roll the scheme out on a national basis, by providing schools with bioethics educational packs and training days for teachers. It was suggested that the secretariat would contact

the Irish Science Teachers Association in order to assist the nationalisation of the process. Dr O'Sullivan informed members that she would circulate the teaching material to members in the near future.

The Chair noted that the present Council was coming to the end of its current term of office. He expressed the view that it would be desirable if the current council would continue to sit until the two remaining documents from the GM and the ethics committee working groups could be completed and signed off. It is anticipated that this would be toward the end of October. There was a consensus among members that this was indeed the best course of action. It was agreed that Dr. O' Sullivan should liaise with the Royal Irish Academy in order to make such a request. In light of the fact that two documents would come before Council for their consideration and approval, the Chair suggested that an additional contingency meeting of the Council be organised in order to deal with any substantive issues, which could arise in relation to either of the documents. Members agreed that such a meeting might be necessary and a date of October 6<sup>th</sup> was set.

Dr O'Sullivan informed the group that TNS MRBI had been commissioned to carry out a survey of public attitudes to bioethical issues. She informed members that face-to-face interviews would be conducted with a sample of 500 people with the requisite distribution among gender, age, socio-economic backgrounds etc. and that a questionnaire had been formulated, the results of which would be presented towards the end of September. A query was raised in relation to the validity of the data collected due to the relatively small sample size. It was acknowledged that a thousand respondents would have instilled more confidence in the interpretation of the data, however budgetary constraints necessarily limited the sample size. Nonetheless it was accepted that the results would be interesting and useful to the work of the Council. Dr. O' Sullivan sought guidance on the question of whether the Council should limit the exposure of the results of the survey to the present and incoming Council or whether the data should be released to the public and press. It was agreed that the Council would consider this question once they had received a copy of the survey report. It was suggested that the results of the survey might be submitted for publication in a peer-reviewed Irish journal.

With regard to the future of the Council, Mr Gleeson informed members that the Executive Council of the Royal Irish Academy (RIA) would meet on 26<sup>th</sup> of September at which they would discuss nomination/selection of members for the next term of office (2005-2008) of the Irish Council for Bioethics. He informed members that the Royal Irish Academy was reluctant to continue housing the Council for Bioethics beyond 2006. This was due to employment issues (permanent status for employees after four years of employment and reporting relationships) relating to the secretariat of the Council for Bioethics. The Chair informed the Council that he would be entering into discussions with the Royal Irish Academy and the Dept. of Enterprise Trade and Employment over the next couple months in order to find a new "parent" for the Council and to address the employment issues in relation to the secretariat staff. The Chair requested that members treat the matter as confidential. Members extended their support to Mr. Gleeson on this matter.

Ms de Grae informed members that she was in the process of organising a half-day symposium for 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2005 on the establishment of a forensic DNA database in Ireland, which would be aimed at politicians, civil servants, legislators, An Garda Síochána and interest groups. She informed members that there would be three

speakers, Mr Martin Fairley, a forensic scientist from the Strathclyde Police Authority in Scotland, Ms Aisling Reidy, Director of the Irish Council for Civil Liberties and Prof. Denis Cusack (to be confirmed) head of the medico-legal division in UCD. She also informed members that Dr Sheila Willis, Director of the Forensic Science Laboratory and former president of the Medico-Legal Society of Ireland had agreed to chair the session. The question was raised whether there should be any media coverage of the event. Ms de Grae told members that she would distribute further information about the symposium in due Course.

#### **4. Report from the Chairperson of the GMO Working Group**

Prof. Whittaker informed members that the GMO working group had prepared a first draft of their opinion document and the group would meet in the afternoon (Sept 1<sup>st</sup>). He said that the opinion, which was mainly Irish centric had received broadly favourable feedback from working group members, however there were still some areas which needed to be expanded and clarified. It was agreed that once a final draft had been signed off on by the working group it would be distributed to Council for discussion at the meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> October.

#### **5. Any other business**

There was no other business.

#### **6. Date of next meeting**

It was decided that a contingency meeting would be scheduled for Thursday Oct 6<sup>th</sup> at 10.30 in Academy House.

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