

Irish Council for Bioethics
Comhairle Bitheitice na hÉireann

Minutes of Council Meeting
Thursday 25th June 2009

- In the Chair:** Dr Siobhán O' Sullivan
- Present:** Professor Alan Donnelly; Mr Stephen McMahon; Professor John Vincent McLoughlin; Dr Mary Henry; Dr Sheila Willis; Dr Peter McKenna; Professor Andrew Green; Dr Richard Hull
- Apologies for absence:** Dr Dolores Dooley; Professor Cliona O'Farrelly; Professor David Smith; Professor Richard O'Kennedy; Mr Turlough O'Donnell SC; Mr Asim Sheikh BL (Mr Sheikh gave his proxy approval in advance of the meeting)
- Also present:** Ms Emily de Grae; Mr Paul Ivory; Ms Emma Clancy

1. Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting were adopted and signed.

2. Report from the Managing Scientific Director:

Dr O'Sullivan informed Council that the office of the ICB had been moved to 1 Lower Ormond Quay. Dr O' Sullivan explained that the new office building had the required storage facilities to cater for the large amount of ICB documentation and as 1 Lower Ormond Quay is a non-serviced office, it would prove more cost effective.

4. "Begotten Not Made"

Dr O'Sullivan informed Council that a staged reading of 'Begotten Not Made' was held in the Houses of the Oireachtas on 17th June. The play received positive feedback from those in attendance who said they found the performance stimulating and insightful. On behalf of the Council, Dr O'Sullivan expressed her gratitude to Dr Mary Henry and Ms Emily de Grae for their work in arranging the reading.

Dr O'Sullivan also informed Council that RTÉ had expressed an interest in recording 'Begotten Not Made' as a radio play. She informed Council that she would be seeking a meeting with RTÉ to discuss the feasibility of a radio play and the

possibility of having the broadcast followed by an expert panel discussion. Dr O'Sullivan also informed Council that the secretariat was pursuing funding opportunities, in conjunction with Fishamble Theatre Company and Paul Meade, with a view to staging a full production of the play.

5. NEC Meeting - Prague:

Dr O' Sullivan informed Council that Mr Paul Ivory and herself had attended the National Ethics Council (NEC) Meeting in Prague in June, at which she had presented the preliminary recommendations contained in the draft biometrics opinion document. Dr O'Sullivan noted that the presentation was positively received by the NEC members who said that they looked forward to reading the final report in the autumn.

Dr O'Sullivan also informed Council that she had been approached by the Austrian Bioethics Commission to partner with them on an FP7 project, which would examine how effective NECs are in influencing policy change and engaging with the general public. Council agreed to open dialogue with the Austrian Bioethics Commission with a view to becoming a partner in the project.

6. Biometrics Report:

Dr O'Sullivan invited members of the Council to give general comments with respect to the balance, tone and content of the document.

It was suggested that the tone of the Executive Summary was overly negative towards biometric technologies and did not accurately reflect the tone of the overall document. It was proposed that some of the language in the executive summary should be adjusted to emphasise the more positive aspects of this technology while still reflecting the Council's concerns about the potential to misuse biometric technologies.

The Council suggested that the recommendations in the text did not necessarily have to appear in the same order in the executive summary. It was agreed that the more substantive recommendations should be brought to the fore.

There was a good deal of discussion in relation to the manner in which the material from the focus groups was reported in the text. It was recommended that there needed to be a clear explanation as to why the Council held the focus groups instead of some other form of public consultation (e.g. a questionnaire). In addition, there was a need to clarify that the opinions expressed in the focus groups were not seen as representative of the wider public.

It was agreed that, the document should emphasise that certain biometric technologies are not as reliable as others, *i.e.* there are weak and strong biometrics. Greater emphasis should be placed on comparing different biometric technologies using the seven pillars.

It was suggested that in certain sections of the main document there needed to be greater differentiation between arguments and opinions that should be attributed to the Council and those that should be attributed to other authors. It was acknowledged that the completion of the footnoting and referencing would help with such clarifications.

It was suggested that some of the philosophical discussions needed further clarification, specifically in relation to personal identity, the common good, communitarian arguments, and proportionality.

Dr O' Sullivan informed Council that the redrafting of the executive summary and the text itself would be immediate. A memo detailing the specific changes agreed during the course of the meeting would be sent to members who were unable attend. A revised draft would be circulated to all Council members on Friday July 3rd with members requested to submit final comments by Friday July 10th. The short time frame was necessary to ensure a September launch of the opinion. Council agreed with the suggested *modus operandi*.

7. Dates Of Next Meeting

Dr O'Sullivan suggested that the next Council meeting scheduled for Thursday 3rd September 2009 be rearranged in order to coincide with the launch of the Biometrics Opinion later in September. Support was received for this change. Date for meeting and launch to be confirmed.