

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

**Minutes of Council Meeting**  
**Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> June 2008**

- In the Chair:** Dr Peter McKenna
- Present:** Dr Alan Donnelly; Professor Andrew Green; Professor John Vincent McLoughlin; Dr Darina O’Flanagan; Mr Asim Sheikh.
- Apologies for absence:** Dr Dolores Dooley; Professor Linda Hogan; Dr Richard Hull; Mr Stephen McMahon; Professor Cliona O’Farrelly; Professor Richard O’Kennedy; Professor David Smith.
- Also present:** Dr Siobhán O’Sullivan; Dr Stephanie Dyke; Mr Paul Ivory.

**1. Minutes**

The minutes of the previous meeting were adopted and signed.

**2. Report from the Scientific Director**

Dr O’Sullivan informed the Council that the Playwriting Competition was nearing completion. A private reading of a draft version of the play was held in association with Fishamble Theatre and was attended by Dr. O’Sullivan and Ms. Emily de Grae. The response to this private reading was very positive and provided useful feedback to the playwright (Mr. Paul Meade). Dr. O’Sullivan stated that she received the final version of the play from Mr. Meade, incorporating the comments from the reading, on 4<sup>th</sup> June and this would be circulated to the Playwriting Competition Steering Committee for their final approval. Dr. O’Sullivan envisaged that the approval would be forthcoming and suggested that arrangements should be made with Farmleigh House with regards to holding the staged reading there in the coming months. The suggestion was made that Dr. O’Sullivan should contact Farmleigh House to enquire about available dates for this reading.

Dr O'Sullivan reported that she had been part of a three person judging panel, which included Mr Frank Gannon (SFI) and Mr Dick Ahlstrom (Irish Times), for the semi-finals and final of the *Debating Science Issues* school debating competition. Dr. O'Sullivan noted that the topics for these debates were stem cell research (semi-finals) and animal cloning (final). The Council acknowledged that this was an important initiative for the Council to be involved in as it facilitated the discussion, and increased the awareness, of important scientific and ethical issues.

In addition, Dr O'Sullivan informed the Council that she had also been asked to chair a RAW debate held recently in the Science Gallery. The topic of the debate was stem cell research and there was a panel of four invited speakers, Professor Frank Barry (NUI Galway), Dr. Gavin Davey (TCD), Professor Maureen Junker-Kenny (TCD) and Professor William Reville (UCC). Each speaker gave a short presentation relating to stem cell research and this was followed by questions from, and discussion with, the audience. Dr. O'Sullivan noted that this event was well attended and stated that footage of the debate could be accessed on the Science Gallery website. The Council was in favour of participating in such initiatives, which it considered an important part of the remit of the Council.

Dr. O'Sullivan provided an update to the Council regarding the incorporation of the Irish Council for Bioethics. Dr. O'Sullivan stated that the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment had sanctioned the incorporation and Dr. O'Sullivan was now in consultation with solicitors representing the Royal Irish Academy with a view to expediting this process. Dr. O'Sullivan was hopeful that the incorporation process could be finalised in the coming months and thanked the Council for their support during this process.

### **3. Stem Cell Report/Launch**

Dr. O'Sullivan provided an overview of the recently held (Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> May) briefing for members of the Oireachtas on the Council's stem cell document. At the briefing Dr. O'Sullivan discussed the key findings of the stem cell document and answered questions from the TDs and Senators in attendance. Dr. O'Sullivan also provided information and clarification on the background and mode of operation of the Council.

The Council then conducted an evaluation of the launch of the stem cell opinion document. The Council was satisfied that the publication of this document had engendered debate and discussion of the issues relating to stem cell research, both at a public and policy level.

It was also considered that, going forward, it would be worthwhile for the Council to provide a compendium of information, on its website, relating to: the background and composition of the Council; its mode of operation, with particular emphasis on the role and function of the Council's consultation processes; how the Council's work programme is chosen. While all of this information is already available in different sections of the website, the view was expressed that it would be beneficial to amalgamate such information into a single area of the website.

#### **4. Biometrics**

Dr. O'Sullivan reported that the biometrics consultation focus groups had been very successful and that the Secretariat had received the final report from RED C Research & Marketing Ltd. Dr. O'Sullivan noted that, despite the differences in location and/or age between the groups consulted, there was considerable consensus broadly in favour of biometrics among the groups. It was noted that, the focus groups had highlighted a number of areas that needed further discussion in the Council's biometrics document including, function creep, autonomy, bodily integrity, coercion and benefits and risks associated with this technology.

The revised programme for the biometrics policy conference, scheduled for November 2008, was provided to Council for their comments and was approved. It was stated that the programme would be circulated to all Council members to reserve the conference date. It was noted that the Council's biometrics document would be launched on the same day as the conference. With this in mind, the Secretariat envisaged having a full draft of the biometrics document ready for Council review at the next Council meeting in September.

#### **5. Any Other Business**

No other business was raised.

#### **6. Date of Next Meeting**

Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> September 2008, at 10.30 am, venue to be confirmed.