

MEDIA RELEASE

Tánaiste launches Bioethical Advisory body

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For Immediate Release

An independent body to advise on the ethical issues raised by contemporary science and medicine was launched by the Tánaiste, Ms Mary Harney TD, Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, in the Royal Irish Academy yesterday (1.30pm on 22th January 2003).

The Irish Council for Bioethics has established three working groups. One is producing guidance on the composition, structure and operation of ethical committees in Ireland. The second group is examining the ethical issues relating to the collection, use, retention and disposal of human biological material. The third group is investigating the ethical issues surrounding Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) in the medical and agricultural areas.

The Council's brief is to identify and interpret the ethical questions raised by research in the biological sciences in order to respond to, and anticipate questions of substantive concern. It will also suggest ethical guidelines and promote public understanding. The Government can also refer questions to the Council for consideration and advice.

At the Council's launch the Tánaiste said that 'It is vital that we have a body in place to identify, consider and clarify the ethical issues raised by research in the life sciences and their applications. The Irish Council for Bioethics has an important role to play in these ever changing times, and the independent status will be vital to ensure a fair and unbiased approach to their work programme and published works'.

The Council's membership of twenty-one consists of lawyers, philosophers/ ethicists, medics, geneticists, food scientists, biologists, microbiologists, biochemists, and journalists. 'Only interdisciplinary cooperation can bring about an effective exploration of the complex ethical questions society is faced with' says Professor Fottrell, Chairman of the Council.

The Tánaiste said that 'the Council is to be commended for establishing a membership of such highly respected individuals with a vast amount of expertise and knowledge in their respective fields'.

ENDS

Additional information

Terms of reference of Irish Council for Bioethics

- To identify and interpret the ethical questions raised by biological and medical research in order to respond to, and anticipate, questions of substantive concern.
- To make arrangements for examining and reporting on such questions with a view to promoting public understanding and discussion; this may contribute, where needed, to the formulation of new guidelines by the appropriate regulatory or other body.
- In the light of the outcome of its work, to publish reports, to stimulate discussion through other means, including conferences, workshops, and lectures.

Members have been invited to join the Council by virtue of their personal expertise, distinction and authority and not as representatives of particular bodies or professions. Members of the Council shall be obliged to make a declaration of relevant interests to ensure transparency.

Membership of the Council

The Council members Professor Patrick Cunningham MRIA, TCD Department of Genetics; Mr Matt Dempsey, Irish Farmers' Journal; Dr Dolores Dooley, UCC Department of Philosophy; Dr Margaret Fitzgerald, Food Safety Authority of Ireland; Dr Patrick Flanagan, formerly of the Environmental Protection Agency; Mr Dermot Gleeson SC, former Attorney General; Professor Patrick Hannon, St Patrick's College, Maynooth; Mr Kenneth Kearon, Irish School of Ecumenics; Professor Cecily Kelleher, NUIG Department of Health Promotion; Dr Mark Lawler, Cancer Molecular Diagnostics Laboratory, St James's Hospital; Dr Tony McGleenan, QUB School of Law; Mr Peter McKenna, Rotunda Hospital; Ms Mary Mulvihill, Science Writer; Dr Nora O'Brien, UCC Department of Food Science, Food Technology and Nutrition; Professor Fergal O'Gara, UCC Microbiology Department; Professor Ronan O'Regan MRIA, UCD Department of Human Anatomy and Physiology; Professor Anne Scott, DCU School of Nursing; Mr Asim Sheikh, UCD Division of Legal Medicine; Professor Seán Strain, UU School of Biomedical Sciences, and Professor Peter Whittaker, Institute of Environment, Philosophy and Public Policy at Lancaster University and formerly of the NUIM Biology Department.