Strategic Plan
2012-2016
Exploring ethical issues in biology and medicine
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## Terms of reference

Our terms of reference are:

- To identify and define ethical questions raised by recent advances in biological and medical research in order to respond to, and to anticipate public concern.

- To make arrangements for examining and reporting on such questions with a view to promoting public understanding and discussion; this may lead, 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; and to make representations, as the Council may judge appropriate.
After 20 years the Council is now well established, with a body of work and a history in which it has made a significant contribution to the development of bioethics in public policy. Building on that history, our achievements in the period 2007-2011 include publication of a number of influential reports. But there have also been a number of innovations, such as our short versions of reports, our schools education materials, and developing our web and social media capabilities.

We have been pressing ahead with these developments, but now is nevertheless a good time to take stock and reflect. The environment has changed, and the Council needs to adapt. So in 2011/12 we undertook a broad strategy review, aimed at ensuring the Council becomes future-minded and flexible. As part of the review we spoke to a large number of stakeholders from a variety of backgrounds. We learned that our work is appreciated, but that we need to be more diverse in our outlook and more flexible in our actions – not to be trapped by our past and by established practice.

Areas to develop that have emerged from the review include:

❯ The Council’s membership, and its working parties and procedures should better reflect, and be responsive to, the needs of a wider, more diverse society.
❯ The Council should strive for broader engagement so that a wide range of people can both contribute to, and benefit from, the work of the Council.
❯ The Council should be more flexible in considering what kind of activities are most suitable, given the changing environment in which it works.
❯ The Council should be more transparent, and more reflective in terms of regularly evaluating its own role, objectives and impact.
❯ The Council should articulate and review its governance arrangements so that they properly support its work, its independence, and its accountability to its funders.

Our strategic plan sets out the changes we will make to ensure the best use of the investment by our funders, our Council members and all of those who participate in our activities. Bioethics matters and we look forward to continuing to play an important role in public debate and policy formation.

Professor Jonathan Montgomery
About the Council

Our mission is.....

❯ ... to promote and to support public discussion and to inform policy through identifying and exploring ethical issues arising in the biosciences.

Our aims and objectives are.....

❯ ... to help ensure that policy is informed by the best possible consideration of ethical implications through carefully reasoned analysis of important current issues arising out of bioscientific research;
❯ to ensure that discussion about such issues is conducted as broadly as possible, engaging people so as to both inform the deliberation process and to promote public debate; and
❯ to ensure that developments in the biosciences are accompanied by proper consideration of their ethical implications so that their societal benefits can be realised in a way that is consistent with public values.

We do this by......

❯ ....engaging with a range of stakeholders to ensure that we are aware of and responsive to the major issues of interest and concern;
❯ gathering a broad range of expertise and opinion to produce a range of high quality materials, including recommendations that are comprehensive, timely and relevant;
❯ communicating widely to ensure that our work is as fully informed as possible and that it reaches a wide audience; and
❯ promoting discussion in the UK and internationally, within the professional arena, in schools and amongst the wider public.
In keeping with our values of....

❯ **Relevance and timeliness:** the Council should aim to work on issues that are of significance to society, and our outputs should support important contemporary policies and debates.

❯ **Inclusiveness:** no single view or approach to bioethics should be favoured, and the expression of all views should be encouraged and welcomed.

❯ **Learning and listening:** we each can learn from disciplines and perspectives other than our own.

❯ **Quality:** the work of the Council, in all its aspects, should draw on the highest levels of expertise and deliver to the highest possible standards.

❯ **Rationality:** all arguments should be capable of being heard but should be submitted to tests of coherence and rationality.

❯ **Rigour:** the work of the Council should be based on the best evidence available, and supported by careful and comprehensive analysis.

❯ **Transparency:** the Council should work in a way that is visible and accessible to all.

**Independence:**

The Council believes that its distinctive contribution to the field of bioethics is built on its independence, which supports its mission, its aims and its values. This means, importantly, that the members of Council and of its working parties are selected for their individual qualities and expertise, and not to represent any particular group or view; and that the Council, whilst consulting widely, is able to freely select the topics, and the content, of its reports.
For 20 years the Council has been publishing reports that have tackled some of the most difficult issues in the biosciences, and over that time it has built a sound reputation on the basis of the quality and impact of its reports. And whilst the reports are the most tangible product of its work, the Council’s work reaches far beyond this, engaging with many people through consultative processes, published papers and educational materials, meetings and workshops, etc. But the future challenge is that as its work will undoubtedly become more complex, the task of engaging a wider audience will become ever more demanding, and the Council must adapt itself to that task, building on what it has achieved over the past two decades.

It is often said that the pace of change in science and medicine is becoming faster, and that we have to work hard to keep up with the consideration of the ethical and social aspects of these developments. This is undoubtedly so, as developments in areas such as genomics and neuroscience, when combined with rapid changes in digital technologies, produce possibilities that are potentially extremely far-reaching in their breadth and complexity. And the global nature of research and innovation, and their effects, has implications of a scale and nature that we have not previously had to contemplate. Moreover, in the next few years we expect to see significant changes in relation to the functions – even the existence - of several UK advisory bodies such as the Human Genetics Commission and the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority.

So the Nuffield Council on Bioethics, if it is to remain relevant both to policy makers and to a wider public, needs to recognise the importance of these changes and be ready to work in ways that enable it to adapt to an uncertain future. It must look for ways in which it can support a wider engagement in discussing these issues - in a world where science, technology, policy and communications media are constantly changing and interacting.
The Council’s mission is to promote and to support public discussion and to inform policy through identifying and exploring ethical issues arising in the biosciences. Building on the experience, expertise and body of work that it has developed over the years, the Council will maintain its commitment to this, but, in particular, will ensure that:

› It has a diversity of input into its work, ensuring that as wide a range of people as possible are able to contribute.

› It has a wide reach so that both the policy impact and the promotion of public debate are maximised.

› It maintains a range of activities so as to better inform and engage a wide range of audiences.

› It is as transparent as possible so that it is clear to stakeholders how the Council operates and how to interact with it.

› It has appropriate ways of evaluating its own quality, reach and impact.

› It has reporting and governance arrangements in place that support these aims.

The following sections set out the specific ways in which the Council will, over the coming years, ensure that its people, its activities, its procedures and its governance arrangements, are all aimed at supporting this endeavour.
The Council and its people

Council

The Council itself consists of individuals with a wide range of experience and expertise. However, the work of the Council engages a much wider range of people, including its staff, working party members, and a range of other contributors. The value of the input of all these people cannot be overstated, they provide the intellectual momentum and quality that make the Council distinctive. The Council believes that the diversity of these contributions is a great strength, which it will continue to work to expand. This means ensuring that its processes for recruitment, and the opportunities for engaging with its work, are clear and accessible, and looking for new ways of broadening its network. It also means clarifying its distinct deliberative and management responsibilities.

Reflecting its values of quality, inclusiveness and transparency....

...the Council will:

› Make the selection procedures for Council and its working parties more transparent and accessible and increase opportunities for wider input, for example by inviting expressions of interest in each topic before working parties are established.

› Ensure that the composition of the Council better reflects, and is responsive to, the needs of a wider, more diverse society.

› Consider how to engage with current and former working party members, including their ongoing contribution as an expert resource.

› Create a network of ‘associates’ or ‘affiliates’, built around former Council and working party members, and others who have contributed directly to the Council’s work, and who can continue to contribute, being kept informed of its business, and assisting with dissemination and promotion of wider public debate.

› Set out and publish the Council’s committee structure and internal reporting procedures to show the distinctive role of the Council and its supporting activities, including the roles of its working parties and its Secretariat.

› Establish a Council Management Subgroup to oversee business planning and advise on issues of governance and risk.
Nuffield Council on Bioethics Organogram

**Secretariat**
Supports the work of the Council, its subgroups, working parties and other activities, including:
- Briefing papers
- Shorter projects
- Collaborative work with other organisations
- Follow-up of previous work
- Communications

**Council**
A deliberative body that drives the intellectual function of the Council by:
- Deciding on the future work programme and selecting new topics
- Scrutinising and ensuring the quality of reports
- Making decisions on the direction, function and membership of the organisation

**Make-up**
Lay members, and experts in areas including science, medicine, social science, philosophy and law

**Council subgroups**
Scrubinise in more depth the working parties’ draft reports and are responsible for the final ‘sign-off’

**Make-up**
Small group of Council members

**Working Parties**
Expert groups of members chosen to represent a wide range of experience and skills to debate and consult on a topic in order to produce a rigorous consensus report

**Make-up**
Chair becomes a Council member, up to two Council members and external experts

**Future Work Subgroup**
Identifies and considers potential future work topics, and makes recommendations to the Council on which topics should be explored in more detail

**Make-up**
Council members

**Management Subgroup**
Responsible for business planning and advises on issues of governance and risk

**Make-up**
Council Chair and Council members

**Educational Advisory Group**
Engages in educational activities to encourage discussion of bioethics issues among young people

**Make-up**
Council and external members

**Council Membership Subgroup**
Considers and makes recommendations to the Council on future membership

**Make-up**
External Chair and Council members

**Educational Advisory Group**
Engages in educational activities to encourage discussion of bioethics issues among young people

**Make-up**
Council and external members
The work programme

The effectiveness of the Council is built on it having been able to identify the right issues, and to offer intellectually rigorous contributions that have been relevant and appropriate. It has a good record of delivering work that has had a considerable impact. It must continue to work with a range of stakeholders to ensure that it finds the right topics at the right time, and that it is capable of responding to changes in the social and political environment, delivering work that is suited to the needs of its audience. This will mean being continually open to new ways of working and to maintaining a range of activities.

Reflecting its values of relevance, timeliness and transparency.....

...the Council will:

› Ensure that the topic selection process is transparent, making clear the criteria for selection and ways in which stakeholders and the public can contribute to the process at stages where they can have some influence.

› Extend the process of topic selection, providing opportunities for a wide range of people in the UK and beyond to submit ideas and proposals.

› Introduce more flexibility into the approach to its work, and into its type, length and style, leading to possible different outputs (such as reports, discussion papers, review papers, briefing notes, etc).

› Review the topic selection process in 2014 to ensure it is sufficiently open, and does not miss important issues, and review the criteria for topic selection in 2015.
Future Work Subgroup identifies and considers potential future work topics and makes recommendations to the Council on which should be explored in more detail.

Council selects a short list of topics to be discussed at the Forward Look meeting.

Forward Look meeting invites speakers and guests help the Council explore the potential topics in more detail.

Public note available on the website.

Council decides which topics are the most appropriate for further exploration. For a topic to be selected, it must:
- be novel: be linked to substantial new developments in medicine or biology
- raise ethical questions and concerns of some complexity
- be timely: the Council aims to be proactive in its selection of new topics
- lead to work that would be likely to have an important impact on policy or practice
- be within the Council's Terms of reference

Workshop takes the project forward.

Other activities/outputs:
- Publication of the background material
- Briefing paper
- Shorter project
- Collaborative work with another organisation
- Seminar

Stakeholders include:
- Government
- Institutes and Societies
- Industry
- Non-governmental bodies
- Researchers

Affiliates

Funders

General call for ideas through the website and Update newsletter.

Public note available on the website.

Council decision on whether to establish a Working Party.

Public note available on the website.

Working Party takes the project forward.

Output: Council report.
Reaching our audiences

The Council’s terms of reference require it to promote public debate of bioethics, and to make reports with policy recommendations. This means that the range of audiences for the Council’s work is potentially very broad. The Council has taken a number of steps to engage a wider range of people, including short summary reports and materials for teaching in schools. It will continue to look for ways of responding to the needs of different audiences so as to support greater discussion of issues in bioethics and to maximise the value of its work.

Reflecting its values of relevance, inclusiveness and transparency....

....the Council will:

› Identify explicitly the likely audiences for each topic at the outset of each project so that the work can be orientated to meeting the needs of all relevant sectors.

› Keep exploring ways of informing and briefing those in policy roles and in Parliament of issues where bioethics is an important consideration.

› Maintain a database of people willing to speak to the media on bioethics issues, including on behalf of the Council.

› Continue developing electronic and social media avenues (e.g. by introducing a Council blog) to engage with different audiences in a range of different ways.

› Produce a variety of materials tailored to suit different audiences.
Partnerships

The Council has established itself in the context of UK bioethics, but recognises the important contribution made by many other organisations, institutions and individuals with whom it works and whose work it complements. Changes in the bioethics advisory scene may have implications for how the Council works in the future, and it must be ready to respond flexibly, maintaining relationships with other bodies. The Council has also gained prominence internationally, both within the network of national bioethics advisory bodies, and in the interest in, and impact of, many of its reports. It is notable that the increasing globalisation of science and of governance in the life sciences means that social and ethical considerations are also often relevant in a global context. The Council considers it important that it works to maintain both its role in the global bioethics community and its capacity to inform and influence policy where international considerations are relevant. This may mean working with sister organisations, such as networks of national advisory bodies, or with international and intergovernmental organisations, and also making recommendations that are targeted at an international level.

Reflecting its values of relevance, rigour and inclusiveness....

....the Council will:

› Be ready to work in partnership with other bodies, subject to the work meeting the necessary criteria in accordance with its aims, objectives and values.

› Be more responsive to what is happening in a changing environment – e.g. consider working alongside other groups to extend its improve reach and impact.

› Be prepared to seek funding for additional projects, events or activities over and above its core funding.

› Maintain its role in international networks, to both support and inform international dialogue and agenda-setting, but also to help ensure that the Council’s work reaches out into the world where science, ethics and governance are increasingly global activities.
Managing our business

The Council routinely collects a range of data aimed at measuring and evaluating the outcome and impact of its work. This includes, for example, web traffic, media coverage, policy outcomes, publications and citations. The Council nevertheless recognises the need continually to challenge itself to maximise the outcomes of its work. In this regard it needs to work towards a more systematic way of using qualitative and quantitative measures of the value of its work, and to ensure that its systems of governance and accountability support this drive to maintain quality, reach impact and value for money.

In view of its values of quality, rigour and transparency.....

....the Council will:

❯ Implement the recommendations of the governance review commissioned in 2012, which includes the following undertakings.

❯ Set out clear success/outcome evaluation measures and procedures for reporting these to Council, to funders and other stakeholders and the public. These will reflect key outcome measures concerning quality, reach, impact, and value for money.

❯ Set out arrangements for oversight by funders, including twice-yearly meetings and annual written reports.

❯ Undertake a periodic review of the Council’s financial and core administrative procedures.

❯ Establish a Council Management Subgroup to oversee business planning and advise on issues of governance and risk.

❯ Undertake a risk assessment process in respect of, in particular, possible threats to its independence, quality and relevance, overseen by the Management Subgroup.

❯ Set out a timetable for implementing the outcomes of the review.

❯ Undertake a further review in advance of the next funding bid in 2016.
Since the Council was established in 1991 interest in biological and medical research and in bioethics has continued to grow, along with the breadth, complexity and societal importance of the issues to which they give rise.

The mission of the Nuffield Council on Bioethics is to promote and to support public discussion and to inform policy through identifying and exploring the ethical issues that arise in the biosciences.

In continuing to pursue these objectives, the Council’s key priorities over the coming period include:

❯ Diversity of input, ensuring that as wide a range of people as possible are able to contribute.
❯ Wide reach so that both the policy impact and the promotion of public debate is maximised.
❯ A range of activities so as to better engage a wide audience.
❯ Transparency, enabling stakeholders to see how the Council operates and how to interact with it.
❯ Evaluation of quality, reach and impact.
❯ Governance arrangements to support these aims.

“Bioethics matters, and we look forward to continuing to play an important role in public debate and policy formation.”

Professor Jonathan Montgomery, Chair of the Council