

14-day rule for Human Embryo Research Public Dialogue Oversight Group Meeting 2

Minutes

Date of meeting: 30 September 2025, 14.00-16.00

Location: Hybrid at the Nuffield Council on Bioethics office and online via Microsoft Teams

Attendance

Chair: Nick Hopwood (Professor of History of Science & Medicine, University of Cambridge)

Oversight Group

- Annabel Sowemimo (Community and Sexual Health Consultant, NHS)
- Barbara Czyznikowska (Community Engagement & Inclusion Manager, University of Leicester)
- Cesar Palacios-Gonzales (Senior Research Fellow in Applied Ethics, University of Oxford)
- Emma Yhnell (Reader & Associate Dean for EDI, Cardiff University)
- Jason Kasraie (Consultant Clinical Embryologist and Andrologist, NHS)
- Laura O'Donovan (Lecturer in Law, University of Sheffield)
- Peter Rugg-Gunn (Group Leader and Head of Public Engagement, Babraham Institute),
- Petra Nordqvist (Professor in Sociology, University of Manchester)
- Phil Champain OBE (Independent Faith and Dialogue Consultant)
- Roger Sturmey (Professor of Reproductive Biology, Hull York Medical School)
- Sharon Martin (Interim Chief Executive, Fertility Network UK)

Nuffield Council on Bioethics

- Martin Davies (Associate Director of Policy and Research, NCOB)
- Molly Gray (Public Engagement Manager, NCOB)
- Ranveig Svenning-Berg (Policy and Research Manager, NCOB)
- Sumair Nizamuddin (Research and Policy Officer, NCOB)

Sciencewise

- Louise MacAllister (Dialogue Advisor, Sciencewise)
- Trupti Patel (Sciencewise Programme Lead, Sciencewise)

Ipsos

- Michelle Mackie (Head of the Qualitative Research and Engagement Centre, Ipsos)
- Jennifer Gisborne (Research Manager, Ipsos)
- Mariam Irfan (Social Research Apprentice, Ipsos)

Others in attendance:

Anna MacGillivray (Independent evaluator, URSUS Consulting), Hilary Livesey (Independent evaluator, URSUS Consulting), Grace Howarth (Partnership, Development and Membership Officer, National Voices), Sarah Devaney (Chair of the NCOB 14-day rule Working Group)

Apologies: Rosamund Scott (Professor of Medical Law and Ethics, King's College London), Catherine Day (Deputy Director, Cabinet Office), Hana Ayoob (Independent STEM Engagement Professional), Marta Shahbazi (Group Leader, MRC Laboratory)

Minutes**Item 1: Welcome and introductions**

- The Chair welcomed Oversight Group members and attendees and ran through the agenda, including the aims of the meeting.
- Attendees introduced themselves in person and online. Apologies were received for members unable to attend.
- The Chair noted that the minutes from the first Oversight Group meeting had been circulated to members by email following the meeting. As no substantial comments were received, the minutes were approved and subsequently published on the Sciencewise and NCOB websites.
- Members were reminded that declarations of interests were previously collected and remain available on the NCOB website; members were asked to declare any new or updated interests as they arise.

Item 2: Update on the 14-day rule public dialogue

- Michelle Mackie (Ipsos) presented an overview of the dialogue progress to date, including:
 - Noting that the dialogue is currently in the planning and design phase, with work on the Community Conversations and the Citizens' Summit progressing in parallel.
 - Explaining that a stakeholder workshop was held in September to inform the dialogue design and delivery approach, supported by a light-touch rapid evidence review.
 - Highlighting that the Community Conversations will commence at the end of October 2025. Ipsos and delivery partners plan to engage approximately 135 participants through a combination of in-depth interviews and online/in-person workshops, working with community and grassroots organisations recruited and onboarded by National Voices.
 - The Community Conversations are scheduled to be completed by the end of 2025.

- It was confirmed that creative ‘future encounters’, designed by The Liminal Space, will be used across both phases to support engagement, stimulate deliberation, and explore a range of perspectives around options for the 14-day rule, including social and ethical considerations.

Item 3: Findings from the stakeholder workshop and evidence review

- Jennifer Gisborne (Ipsos) presented a summary of the initial findings from the stakeholder workshop and the light-touch rapid evidence review, including:
 - Emphasising the key information that will be provided to participants, including background on human embryo development; an overview of the 14-day rule; the UK regulatory framework; international approaches; how and why human embryos are used in research; and potential alternatives to embryo research.
 - Noting that the content and materials participants receive need to be clear and accessible, including how the options with respect to the 14-day rule are framed and presented. For each option, stakeholders highlighted the need to present benefits, drawbacks, uncertainties, and trade-offs transparently.
 - Stressing the importance of high-quality facilitation and carefully considering participant well-being throughout the process.
- The Chair facilitated a Q&A session on the initial findings from the stakeholder workshop and rapid evidence review. Members advised that the content be presented in such a way as to recognize that scientists have feelings as well as facts. It was also noted that the topic may be emotionally sensitive for some participants. Ipsos confirmed that inclusion and wellbeing support will be available to all participants and staff.

Item 4: Draft session plans for the Community Conversations

- The Chair introduced Paper 1 (draft session plans for the Community Conversations), which outlined the proposed plans for the workshops and in-depth interviews. An updated recruitment and engagement plan (which included the categories of communities and groups that will participate) was also shared with the Oversight Group to support the discussion.
- Members queried how much can be realistically achieved within the relatively short workshop format, given the complexity of the topic, and discussed how to facilitate these workshops effectively. Members recommended allocating more time in the first half of the workshops and interviews to provide foundational information on human embryo development and the 14-day rule. They emphasised that, whilst the regulation of human embryo research is complex, it is essential to explain this clearly to set the groundwork for informed discussions. Ipsos acknowledged the challenge of balancing information provision and deliberation and confirmed that a range of approaches are being explored, including the use of pre-reading materials.

- Members suggested potentially restructuring the session plans to introduce the 'future encounters' in a less linear way, including potentially reducing the number of encounters in each session. Ipsos responded by highlighting that the encounters work best as a package, as they offer a diverse range of perspectives and provide balance across the different options relating to changes to the 14-day rule. However, Ipsos agreed to explore alternative models for introducing the encounters for different communities and/or presenting the future encounters in a more concise and engaging way.
- Members asked whether different communities and groups should be provided with tailored questions or prompts. They emphasised the need to consider the diverse experiences of each community and how the topic may resonate differently, since this is likely to encourage engagement. Ipsos acknowledged the challenge of balancing consistency of questions with relevance for each community and indicated that they would provide further details to the Oversight Group on how this balance will be achieved. Members suggested innovative approaches to encourage deliberation and support discussion at the workshops, including ranking exercises and 'spectrum line' techniques. They also recommended allowing space for informal conversations between participants.
- Members suggested using short and engaging formats such as podcasts, short stories with creative writers, role-play, flipped learning, and social-media-style videos (e.g., short reels or TikTok-style clips) to present information concisely and in the ways in which most people currently consume such content. Ipsos confirmed that they plan to create short visual podcasts along with other written materials to support participants in the learning phase, but noted that they will work with The Liminal Space to explore other formats.
- Members suggested re-engaging with the participants of the community conversations after they have reflected, potentially had conversations with friends and family, and considered the discussions after a period of time.
- Members highlighted that participants are likely to have varying levels of understanding and awareness of human embryo research and asked if there will be comprehension check-ins with participants during the process. They recommended conducting a simple assessment of prior knowledge to tailor content appropriately, ensuring that discussions neither assume expertise nor oversimplify for those already familiar with the topic.

Item 5: Draft outline plans for the future encounters

- The Chair introduced Paper 2 (draft outlines for the future encounters) and explained that since the last Oversight Group meeting, Ipsos, The Liminal Space and NCOB have taken on board feedback from members on the future scenarios to create a diverse set of 'future encounters' which will be used throughout the dialogue. Ipsos clarified that this is not the only way that different perspectives on the 14-day rule will be brought into the dialogue.

- The Chair introduced each of the encounters in turn, and the Oversight Group provided the following advice on them:
 - Members queried whether the purpose of the encounters was for participants to adopt different perspectives or to observe and listen to various interactions. Ipsos clarified that the intention of the micro-sensory environments is for participants to listen to the conversations to stimulate reflection, discussion, and encourage imagination rather than to adopt a specific viewpoint.
 - Members advised that some of the encounters should be centred on realistic experiences and capture the complexity and ‘messiness’ of everyday life to ensure that especially lay participants can relate to them.
 - Members recommended highlighting patient voices more within the encounters. Where patients are featured, their characteristics and the stories they tell should be relatable and accurately reflect patient populations (e.g., age).
 - Similarly, the voices of embryo donors are important, and encounters should highlight the possible diversity of perspectives on donating embryos to research if the rule changes.
 - Members recommended that encounters that illustrate the perspectives of scientists or researchers should try to represent the range of opportunities or challenges that they might anticipate or experience around options to the 14-day rule.
 - Members recommended that where encounters include faith-based perspectives, careful consideration should be given to which religion is chosen as the main focus in order to reflect best where opposition or debate exists on the issue. They should also ensure that the diversity of perspectives within faiths is represented.
 - Members provided technical feedback within some of the encounters on IVF success rates, and highlighted where changing the future context of some encounters could better draw out key issues and perspectives.
 - Members noted that participants will require a simple explanation of how the current regulatory system operates in the UK to ensure that they can fully understand the encounters.
- Oversight Group members agreed to send any additional detailed written feedback on the encounters via email. Ipsos and NCOB welcomed this.

Item 6: Sciencewise introduction

- Trupti Patel (Sciencewise) provided a summary of Sciencewise’s role as partner and funder of the public dialogue, highlighting their previous work on human embryo research in 2023 and directing members to other relevant resources on the Sciencewise website.

Item 7: AOB and next steps

- No additional business was raised.

- The Chair summarised key action points, and thanked members for their contributions.
- The next Oversight Group meeting will take place on **Wednesday 3 December 2025** (online). Members were advised that they may receive requests for comments on documents and plans between meetings as the design work continues.