



14-day rule for Human Embryo Research Public Dialogue Oversight Group Meeting 4

Minutes

Date of meeting: 15 January 2026, 13.00-15.00

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:

- 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)
- Hana Ayoob (Independent STEM Engagement Professional)
- Jason Kasraie (Consultant Clinical Embryologist and Andrologist, NHS)
- Laura O'Donovan (Lecturer in Law, University of Sheffield)
- Marta Shahbazi (Group Leader, MRC Laboratory)
- 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)
- Rosamund Scott (Professor of Medical Law and Ethics, King's College London)
- Sharon Martin (Interim Chief Executive, Fertility Network UK)

Nuffield Council on Bioethics:

- Molly Gray (Public Engagement Manager, NCOB)
- Ranveig Svenning-Berg (Policy and Research Manager, NCOB)
- Sumair Nizamuddin (Research and Policy Officer, NCOB)

Ipsos:

- Michelle Mackie (Head of the Qualitative Research and Engagement Centre, Ipsos)
- Jennifer Gisborne (Research Manager, Ipsos)
- Laura Tuhou (Project Manager, Ipsos)

Others in attendance:

- Anna MacGillivray (Independent evaluator, URSUS Consulting), Hilary Livesey (Independent evaluator, URSUS Consulting), Louise MacAllister (Sciencewise Dialogue Advisor), Louis Horsley (Research and Insight Manager, National Voices)

Apologies: Annabel Sowemimo (Community and Sexual Health Consultant, NHS), Catherine Day (Co-founder, National Strategy Project), and Sarah Devaney (Chair of the NCOB 14-day rule Working Group)

Minutes

Item 1: Welcome and introductions

- The Chair welcomed Oversight Group members and attendees and ran through housekeeping and the agenda, including outlining the aims of the meeting.
- The Chair noted that the minutes from the third Oversight Group meeting had been circulated to members by email following the meeting. No substantive comments had been received. The minutes were approved and will be published on the Sciencewise and NCOB websites.

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

- Michelle Mackie (Ipsos) presented an overview of the dialogue progress to date, including:
 - Explaining that the Community Conversations are nearing completion, outlining the fieldwork completed to date and the workshops/interviews that are still outstanding.
 - Noting that a report detailing the Community Conversations findings is being drafted and will be circulated to the Oversight Group in February. It was emphasised that this report is for internal purposes and will not be published, as the findings will be incorporated into the final report.
 - Explaining that the recruitment for the Citizens' Summit has begun via Ipsos's KnowledgePanel (95 participants) and noting the changes made to the recruitment criteria based on feedback from the Oversight Group at the previous meeting.
 - Noting that Ipsos will be visiting researchers who are conducting research on human embryos in various UK labs, in order to produce a video for the Citizens' Summit.
 - Providing an update on speakers for the Citizens' Summit, including highlighting the speaker slots still to fill.
 - Outlining the progress made on the 'future encounters' immersive experiences being created by The Liminal Space, including showing images of the design of the encounters.
 - Highlighting that in addition to the immersive encounters, The Liminal Space will be creating large-print audio transcripts, a participant booklet, and posters for the discussion room.

Item 3: Information provision

- In advance of the meeting, the NCOB and Ipsos provided an overview of the information that will be provided to participants within the Citizens' Summit sessions, including:
 - Presentation slides covering: early embryo development; an introduction to ethical and critical thinking; the history of the 14-day rule; regulation of human embryo research in the UK; what embryo research involves; embryo donation in the UK; an overview of current human embryo research in the UK; alternative and supplementary methods for studying embryo development; future options regarding the 14-day rule; and a case-by-case model for governing embryo research.
 - A world map illustrating how embryo research is governed internationally.
 - A flowchart explaining how embryo research regulation operates in the UK.
 - An illustration of human embryo development.
 - An overview of faith and religious perspectives related to the topic.

- The Chair introduced the agenda item and explained that the main purpose of the meeting was to review and provide feedback on the draft materials for the Citizens' Summit. It was emphasised that input should focus on checking the materials for balance, accessibility, and sufficient coverage.

- Members praised the team for the thorough content and excellent materials, noting that they were of high quality. Broad feedback on the suite of materials included the following suggestions:
 - Including more specific information on what the benefits are to society, and what we can learn from being able to research embryos in the laboratory beyond 14 days.
 - Ensuring clear and careful language when discussing embryo research beyond 14 days.
 - Asking how the 'top trump perspective cards' will be introduced. Ipsos clarified that the cards will be used in small-group workshops during the sessions to help remind participants of the perspectives represented in the immersive environments.
 - Calling the 'top trump' cards by another name.
 - Considering if the spelling 'fetus' would be more accessible for public participants than 'foetus'.

- Members also offered comments on particular materials, including:

Presentations

- Reviewing the slide colours and contrast to ensure accessibility.
- Clarifying why the 14-day limit was chosen originally.
- Adjusting the definition of the 14-day rule.
- Removing the Latin used on some slides to ensure accessibility.
- Strengthening the information explaining that Parliament sets the legal rules governing how long embryos may be used in research.

- Reviewing the language used around ‘ways of working’ to support shared ways of working for both participants and facilitators.
- Suggesting including photographs (with permission) of speakers at the beginning of the presentations.
- Including more content on the public and parliamentary debate surrounding the Warnock Committee and the introduction of related bills.
- Keeping both slides on the international context, including in particular the world map indicating how different jurisdictions regulate human embryo research.
- Taking care in how historical ‘models’ (better: collections) are described in the presentation on alternative methods of embryo research.
- Adjusting the language used when discussing the ethical considerations for embryo models.
- Being clearer in explaining that current embryo research in the UK is conducted responsibly by trained scientists working within a strict regulatory framework.

Faith and belief perspectives handout

- Strengthening the introduction and contextual framing, noting the wide diversity of views within and between faith traditions on this topic.
- Considering alternative options for presenting the information, including the order of presentation.
- Careful reviewing of sections on particular faith and belief perspectives to ensure they are described and interpreted appropriately.

Illustration on human embryo development

- Removing technical language about cell types to improve accessibility, while retaining key labels to indicate important features such as the development of heart and brain.
- Flipping the illustration so that Day 1 appears on the left and development progresses from left to right.
- Indicating which stages of development take place in the fallopian tube as well as in the uterus.
- Adding a label for Day 14 within the illustration.
- Indicating in the illustration when PGT testing happens within the timeline.
- Including a key to indicate the sizes of the embryo at different stages.
- Members agreed to provide additional detailed feedback on the illustration via email.

Flowchart diagram on the regulation of human embryo research in the UK

- Moving reference to the ‘permitted purposes’ to the correct box within the flowchart.
- Adding that a licence granted by the HFEA is time limited.
- Including a reference to the need for researchers to outline funding requirements and to establish partnerships with fertility clinics for embryo donation purposes.

Item 4: Updates on the independent evaluation

- Anna MacGillivray (URSUS Consulting) presented updates on the emerging evaluation findings for the dialogue, particularly focusing on Phase 1 - the Community Conversations:
 - Working collaboratively through trusted VCOSOs took more time than expected but made it possible to include under-represented groups and have lived experiences that contribute to different perspectives.
 - Joint National Voices and VSCO teams provided excellent facilitation.
 - Timings and design of the workshops achieved a balance between informing participants and small group discussions and were tailored where necessary.
 - The information shared to participants felt balanced, comprehensive, and accessible.
 - Most participants seemed comfortable to share their own views, with real variance within groups.
 - The available support provided comfort, even if not widely used.
 - There has been considerable interest in taking part in the Citizens' Summit.

Item 5: AOB and next steps

- The Chair introduced a suggested new title for the dialogue “The Future of the 14-Day Rule for Human Embryo Research”. Members advised keeping the word “future” in the title to generate policy interest.
- The Chair explained that a news story communicating the start of the Citizens' Summit will be published before the Summit begins in early February.
- Oversight Group members were encouraged to observe a Citizens' Summit session to help ensure transparency and rigour.
- The Chair summarised key action points and thanked members for their contributions.
- The next (and final) Oversight Group meeting will take place **online in April 2026** and a Doodle poll will be circulated to gather members availability.