14-day rule for Human Embryo Research Public Dialogue Oversight Group Meeting 1

Minutes

Date of meeting: 20 August 2025, 14.00-16.00

Location: 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)
- Jason Kasraie (Consultant Clinical Embryologist and Andrologist, NHS)
- Laura O'Donovan (Lecturer in Law, University of Sheffield)
- Marta Shahbazi (Group Leader, MRC Laboratory)
- Petra Nordqvist (Professor in Sociology, University of Manchester)
- Phil Champain OBE (Independent Faith and Dialogue Consultant)
- Rosamund Scott (Professor of Medical Law and Ethics, King's College London)
- Sharon Martin (Interim Chief Executive, Fertility Network UK)

Nuffield Council on Bioethics

- Danielle Hamm (Director, NCOB)
- Martin Davies (Associate Director of Policy and Research, NCOB)
- Melissa Haynes Agoro (Horizon Scanning Manager, NCOB)
- Molly Gray (Public Engagement Manager, NCOB)
- Sophia McCully (Horizon Scanning and Foresight Manager, NCOB)
- Sumair Nizamuddin (Research and Policy Officer, NCOB)

Sciencewise

- Louise MacAllister (Dialogue Advisor, Sciencewise)

Ipsos

- Ceri Davies-Tyrie (Head of Deliberative Engagement, Ipsos)
- Jennifer Gisborne (Project Manager, Ipsos)
- Laura Tuhou (Project Manager, Ipsos)

Others in attendance:
Anna MacGillivray (Independent evaluator, URSUS Consulting), Hilary Livesey (Independent evaluator, URSUS Consulting), Louis Horsley (Research and Insight Manager, National Voices), Amanda Gore (Co-Director, The Liminal Space), Sarah Devaney (Chair of the NCOB 14-day rule Working Group)

Apologies: Annabel Sowemimo (Community and Sexual Health Consultant, NHS), Catherine Day (Deputy Director, Cabinet Office), Hana Ayoob (Independent STEM Engagement Professional), Peter Rugg-Gunn (Group Leader and Head of Public Engagement, Babraham Institute), Roger Sturmey (Professor of Reproductive Biology, Hull York Medical School)

Minutes

Item 1: Welcome and introductions

- The Chair welcomed Oversight Group members and attendees to the meeting, setting out the role and purpose of the Group.

- Apologies were received for members unable to attend.

- The Chair facilitated introductions from the Oversight Group, the NCOB, Sciencewise, Ipsos (and its project partners), and URSUS Consulting (independent evaluators).

- The Chair reminded members that declarations have been previously collected and are available on the NCOB website. Members were reminded to declare any new or updated interests as they arise throughout the process.

Item 2: Introduction to the NCOB and the public dialogue

- Molly Gray (NCOB) introduced the NCOB and the public dialogue, including an overview of its aims and objectives. It was explained that the dialogue sits within a wider programme of work that the NCOB is running that aims to explore the current and future ethical, scientific, social, and policy considerations related to the 14-day rule for human embryo research. It was highlighted that the findings of the dialogue will inform a policy report that the NCOB will produce in Summer 2026. The dialogue findings will also inform government policy and wider public debates by providing well-rounded public perspectives on options for reviewing the 14-day rule. Inclusivity, purposeful creativity, and participant wellbeing were highlighted as key values for the dialogue.

- Members were informed that the dialogue will build upon the 2023 foundational dialogue on human embryo research commissioned by the Human Developmental Biology Initiative (HDBI) and funded and supported by Sciencewise, by exploring the public's views on options for maintaining, amending, or removing the 14-day rule. In particular, this NCOB and Sciencewise dialogue aims to engage a diverse and inclusive group of publics, including under-represented voices.

Item 3: Terms of Reference

- The Chair introduced the draft Terms of Reference and members were invited to share any reflections or comments. No amendments were suggested and the Oversight Group agreed the Terms of Reference.

- It was highlighted that throughout the process, Ipsos and NCOB may engage directly with specific Oversight Group members to draw on specific expertise as necessary.

- Members were invited to provide feedback on the membership of the Oversight Group. No additional suggestions were made, and the membership was confirmed.

Item 4: Overview of the 14-day rule public dialogue plan and process

- Ceri Davies-Tyrie (Ipsos) presented an overview of the plan for the public dialogue and highlighted areas where the oversight group will be required to give input including the scope, stimulus materials, content, and reviewing outputs.

- The Chair facilitated a Q&A session. Members raised questions on the rapid evidence review and the use of AI to complete this. Ipsos confirmed the use of AI for the rapid review and reassured that a plan for the rapid review will be delivered to the Oversight Group in the coming weeks; it will consist of a light-touch review of the current data available on public views towards the 14-day rule; and its purpose will be to inform the public dialogue.

Item 3: Community group engagement

- The Chair introduced Paper 1 (Community group engagement) outlining an overview of the draft recruitment and engagement strategy for the Community Conversations, and highlighting that the aim is to reach diverse communities and groups across the UK.

- Members raised questions and discussion points on the engagement strategy, which included:

    - Seeking clarification on why certain religious and faith-based groups have been suggested and not others, advising that selection for the community conversations should be based on relevant evidence. It was agreed that Ipsos will discuss the approach to engaging with faith-based and religious groups separately with specific Oversight Group members.
    - Querying the reasons behind the proposed engagement methods and activities, and advising that a clear rationale be provided for their use. This includes emphasising the need to carefully consider the physical spaces chosen for community events, as these settings may significantly influence how people engage with the content. National Voices explained that the suggested methods for engaging with communities are based on prior experience with those communities and practical considerations, but noted that additional work will be done on this.

- Advising that the community activities should ensure sufficient geographical coverage across the UK, including adequate representation within regions of the devolved nations.
- Asking about the sampling of LGBTQ+ parents, and whether the various subgroups within this broader community should be considered separately. National Voices and Ipsos confirmed that they will also seek guidance on the best approaches to involving different subgroups from the co-production working group that will be established to support the community work.
- Highlighting that in-person workshops and multi-sensory creative methods may pose challenges for neurodivergent people, and urging that this be carefully considered. Ipsos agreed on the importance of addressing this and noted that discussions are already underway to enhance inclusivity throughout the dialogue sessions and events.
- Advising careful consideration of the inclusion criteria for each group, with specific reference to physical disability, and asking whether equality data monitoring will be undertaken as part of the dialogue. National Voices acknowledged this point and indicated they would return to the Oversight Group with further details on equality data monitoring.
- Highlighting the importance of considering barriers to participation, including digital exclusion, language, and accessibility. Ipsos confirmed that offline alternatives and additional support/accessibility mechanisms would be built into the design.
- Recommending that people who are undergoing fertility treatment, such as IVF, who are not able to freeze embryos, should not be excluded, and highlighting the importance of capturing a broad range of people's experiences with IVF.
- Raising questions about the proposed incentive structure for the Community Conversations, particularly whether the incentives for participants involved in the in-depth interviews and participating through community events are sufficient. Ipsos noted this feedback and agreed to review the approach.
- Seeking clarification on which lived experiences will be prioritised for the co-production working group and how this will be decided. National Voices responded that the group will include at least 10 members, comprising lived experience partners as well as community leaders and partners from the groups the dialogue will seek to engage with.

Item 4: Use of future scenarios in the public dialogue

- The Chair introduced Paper 2 (Future scenarios for the public dialogue), and highlighted that the draft scenarios presented in the paper are intended as provocations to inform the development of creative materials. The idea is to help participants imagine how various options around reviewing the 14-day rule might interact with other social changes, and to aid consideration of opportunities, risks, trade-offs, and priorities. A lively discussion ensued.

- Members commented on the range of the personas and suggested that it could be beneficial to include additional perspectives.

- Members raised questions and sought clarification over some of the detail in the draft scenarios, and highlighted a potential risk of unintentionally implying or suggesting causality between different potential factors within the scenarios. The need was emphasised to avoid inadvertently misleading those unfamiliar with the field.

- Members noted the importance of careful introduction and framing of in vitro gametes (IVGs) and embryo models within the scenarios, to avoid eliciting misleading responses and to address the ethical considerations of these reproductive advances in relation to the 14-day rule.

- Members highlighted that the draft scenarios currently address both regulation in assisted reproduction and research, and advised caution about making connections between changes to the 14-day rule and changes to similar aspects of the regulation of assisted reproduction. It was emphasised that in the UK (unlike in the US), assistive reproductive technologies are tightly regulated and that this regulation should be distinguished from that of research. The NCOB staff clarified aspects of the scenarios and the process of development, and agreed it was important to take these considerations into account in the next stages of translating the draft scenarios.

- Members highlighted the need for the scenarios to be realistic, while also ensuring that discussions of potential regulatory options for the 14-day rule are not considered in isolation.

- Some members offered to provide more detailed feedback on the draft scenarios via email, which was welcomed by NCOB and Ipsos.

- The Chair emphasised that the scenarios are draft and so not in the final form that will be presented to participants. It was also highlighted that the scenarios (once translated to creative design elements) will be presented as a part of a package of materials to inform the deliberations. It was summarised that the next steps will involve incorporating feedback from the Group and developing design concepts for the scenarios, on which the Group will then be invited to comment.

Item 5: Stakeholder engagement

- The Chair outlined the plans for engaging stakeholders to inform the dialogue, highlighting that Ipsos will be hosting an online stakeholder workshop on 8 September 2025 (Paper 3). Oversight Group members provided guidance on the broad categories of stakeholders to include in the upcoming stakeholder workshop, and suggested specific individuals and organisations for consideration, including the Chana Charity and various academics with expertise in science, ethics, law, and the history of medicine.

- Members emphasised that transparency in stakeholder engagement for the dialogue is important in maintaining public trust in the project's process.

Item 6: Independent evaluation

- Anna MacGillivray (URSUS Consulting) introduced the evaluation framework and summarised the focus of the evaluation.

- Members mentioned ensuring that key learnings from previous dialogues are considered, including the value of ensuring transparency in reporting and the importance of capturing participant and all stakeholder experiences as well as policy impacts.

Item 7: AOB and next steps

- No AOB were raised by members.

- The Chair summarised key actions and confirmed that the next meeting will take place in person at the NCOB offices in London at 2–4 pm on **Tuesday 30 September 2025**.

- A poll will be sent to the Oversight Group for the third meeting, which will be held online in late November/ early December 2025.

- Members were thanked for their contributions and reminded that there will be further opportunities to provide feedback and input between meetings.