

NUFFIELD COUNCIL ON BIOETHICS MEMBERSHIP PACK

Thank you for your interest in Council membership. The following is designed to give an overview of the NCOB, its structure, the role of Council members, the membership appointment process and project work.

If you have any further questions, please explore our website, or contact press@nuffieldbioethics.org.

General information about the Nuffield Council on Bioethics

The Nuffield Council on Bioethics is a leading independent policy and research centre, and the foremost bioethics body in the UK. We identify, analyse, and advise on ethical issues in biomedicine and health so that decisions in these areas benefit people and society. We were established by the [Nuffield Foundation](#) in 1991, and since 1994 we have been funded jointly by the Foundation, [Wellcome](#) and the [Medical Research Council](#) (now part of UKRI – UK Research and Innovation). We are currently funded on a five-year basis and are in the third year of our current funding cycle (2024 – 2028).

We have an international reputation for providing independent and balanced advice to policymakers and stimulating debate in bioethics. Our recommendations are backed up by a thorough process of consultation, engagement and deliberation with a wide range of people and organisations.

Our strategy, [Making ethics matter](#), has at its centre the aim to put ethics at the centre of decisions about biomedicine and health, so we all benefit.

To achieve this:

1. We will **anticipate scientific developments** and health trends that pose fundamental ethical questions to society.
2. We will undertake and communicate **rigorous ethical analysis** in a way that is clear and relevant to decision-makers and the public.
3. We will demonstrate **the value of ethics to society** and decision-makers and embed ethics in policy making.
4. We will build **greater connections** across bioethics networks to strengthen the voice of bioethics in policy and public debate.

Our values

We are guided by our long-standing core values:

- **Rigour:** Our approach to ethical analysis is multidisciplinary and deliberative. We draw on a wide range of expertise and experience and use the best available evidence.
- **Independence:** We set our own agenda and select our own topics, methodologies and outputs. We do not represent any particular group or view.
- **Relevance:** We explore things that matter to society so we can support real-time policy developments and debates and anticipate those coming down the line.
- **Transparency:** We are open about how we conduct our work, and our outputs are understandable and relevant to our audiences.
- **Inclusiveness:** We engage with a wide range of different voices and views and are committed to increasing the diversity of the people we work with. We create safe and welcoming spaces for deliberation.
- **Sustainability:** We manage our organisation with a focus on contributing to environmental sustainability and reducing our carbon footprint.

Structure of the NCOB

The NCOB consists of the Council itself; its Executive staff body; and a Governing Board.

- **The Council** is the deliberative body that drives the intellectual function of the organisation. Its main responsibilities are to contribute to decisions on the future work programme and strategic direction of the NCOB, scrutinise and ensure the quality of work and outputs, and make decisions on the membership and function of the organisation. Council members are involved in topic selection and project work, as members of the advisory groups that oversee our priority areas. There are also opportunities to be involved more generally in horizon scanning and other projects as they arise.

In addition, Council members may become more involved in particular projects in a variety of ways, examples are being on working groups, participating in workshops, and advising on and reviewing Council publications.

The Chair of Council is Professor Sarah Cunningham-Burley, Professor of Medical and Family Sociology at the University of Edinburgh. There are usually around 15 members, with a variety of backgrounds, and a list of current Council members can be found [here](#).

- **The Executive** is a team of around 15 people that carry out research, manage projects and draft the Council's publications. Staff organise and participate in workshops, meetings, events, and represent the Council at professional and public meetings. There are communications, external affairs and horizon scanning functions

and the team also manage the financial and administrative work. A list of the Executive is [here](#).

- **The Governing Board** is responsible for reviewing and challenging the work of the Council, providing assurance that the Council is operating within its remit and is committing expenditure in line with the terms of the funding grant and the goals of its strategy. The Governing Board meets twice a year with the Council Chair and Director, and a list of its members is [here](#).

Council membership

The role of Council members

As mentioned above, Council members form the deliberative body that drives the intellectual function of the NCOB. Their **core responsibilities** are to:

- Decide questions of strategic direction and topic identification.
- Be part of Advisory Groups that provide advice and guidance on priority areas, topic selection and projects.
- Ensure a thorough horizon scanning process.
- Scrutinise and ensure the quality of outputs at key stages during projects so as to ultimately adopt them.
- Decide on the direction, function and membership of the organisation.
- Provide support and advice to the Executive.

Other responsibilities will normally include:

- Sitting on Council subgroups, for example the Horizon Scanning Advisory Group / Membership Committee.
- Being involved in project work.
- Being a member of a subgroup that pays particular attention to a NCOB project.
- Participating in activities such as workshops.
- Advising on the content of publications such as briefing papers during the drafting process.
- Representing the NCOB at external meetings or conferences.
- Writing blogs.
- Acting as a media spokesperson for the NCOB, if and where appropriate.

Skills

Essential

- **Ethical insight and reasoning in practice:** Ability to engage with ethical questions and dilemmas relating to health, science, technology or society, and to apply ethical

thinking to real-world issues. This may be demonstrated through professional, lived, community, policy or other relevant experience.

- **Purpose-led contribution and values alignment:** Ability to engage constructively with the remit and public purpose of the Nuffield Council on Bioethics, and to contribute in ways that are consistent with its values, independence and role in public debate.
- **Constructive participation in complex discussion:** Ability to contribute thoughtfully and respectfully to complex or contested discussions, including listening to others, articulating ideas clearly, and engaging with challenge or uncertainty in a constructive way.
- **Collaborative and multidisciplinary working:** Ability to work effectively with people from different backgrounds, disciplines and forms of expertise, recognising the value of diverse perspectives and ways of knowing.
- **Equity, diversity and inclusion in practice:** Demonstrated commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion through behaviours, choices and ways of working, including awareness of power dynamics, barriers to participation, and whose perspectives are centred or marginalised.

Desirable

- **Cross-sector engagement and boundary-spanning:** Ability to engage constructively across different sectors relevant to bioethics (for example academia, policy, industry, civil society, and public or community contexts), recognising differing priorities while maintaining ethical integrity and independence.
- **Policy insight and public decision-making:** Ability to understand and engage with policy and public decision-making processes relevant to bioethics, including contributing to, informing or influencing policy, regulation, guidance or public debate through professional, advisory, advocacy or other relevant experience.
- **Strategic thinking and organisational stewardship:** Ability to think strategically about the development, sustainability and impact of organisations or initiatives with a public purpose, which may be demonstrated through experience of governance, strategy development, resource stewardship, fundraising or leading initiatives over time.
- **External awareness and connectivity:** Ability to draw on relevant professional, sectoral, community or lived-experience networks to inform horizon scanning, engagement and understanding of emerging issues, while exercising independent judgement.

The initial term for membership is three years, with the possibility of renewal for one to three years. The renewal process looks at an individual's contribution, capacity and appetite for continuation and considers how this meets the future needs of the Council.

How Council members are chosen

The Council has a Membership Committee, which recommends which disciplines should be advertised, monitors the make-up and diversity of the Council, shortlists, interviews and makes appointment recommendations. It has an independent Chair and has members from the Council and its Governing Board. Its current members are:

- **Sapna Marwaha** (Independent Chair) – Managing Director, Formation Consultancy Ltd and experienced board member and committee chair.
- **Sarah Cunningham-Burley** – Chair of the Nuffield Council on Bioethics and Professor of Medical and Family Sociology / Dean of Molecular, Genetic and Population Health Sciences at the University of Edinburgh.
- **Ruchi Baxi** - Consultant in Public Health Medicine working as a Consultant Advisor for the NIHR Coordinating Centre, based at the University of Southampton.
- **Carol Brayne** - Professor of Public Health Medicine and Co-Director of Public Health at the Cambridge Public Health Interdisciplinary Research Centre in the University of Cambridge

When vacancies arise, they are advertised in a variety of ways, including relevant media, newsletters, social media, through relevant organisations, networks, professional bodies and charities. Applications are considered and shortlisted by the Membership Committee, candidates are interviewed, and recommendations are then made to the Council who have the final decision.

We aim to maintain a wide range of expertise including members with backgrounds in science, medicine, social science, philosophy, law, policy and public affairs, media, communications and industry.

The issues we work on

Over the past 35 years, our work has spanned a wide range of ethical issues across science, medicine, public health, technology and agriculture.

Our horizon scanning ensures we understand the developments coming down the line and we often have many potential work areas in our sights. To enable us to identify the most important issues and prioritise them, we apply our work selection criteria, to help assess where we can bring greatest value using our independence and expertise to shape developments in science and health for a fairer society.

Selection criteria

1. **Achieving change:** Work in this area will put ethics at the centre of decisions about biomedicine and health.
2. **Timeliness:** There are good reasons to do this work now.

3. **Distinctiveness:** We have the knowledge, skills and resources to deliver work in this area, where others do not.

Priority areas

We have selected thematic priority areas around which to focus our work for a 2-3 year period. A range of different projects are being delivered within each priority area, examining both narrow, near-term issues and broad, long-term questions, with outputs targeted towards different audiences.

Through horizon scanning and engagement with experts, we have identified three priority areas for the first phase of our new strategy:

1. **Reproduction, parenthood and families**
2. **The mind and brain**
3. **The environment and health**

We believe these represent today's most urgent and important developments in bioscience and health, raising critical ethical, social and policy issues on which we can offer a distinctive contribution. Issues that cut across our work – such as health inequalities, use of health data, and commercial drivers in research – will be considered in the context of each of the priority areas.

We recognise that we cannot anticipate everything, so as well as carrying out work in the priority areas, we retain the flexibility and capacity to respond to other developments as they emerge. This allows us to take opportunities to apply past work to current policy debates, acknowledging that real change often requires long-term engagement.

Our horizon scanning constantly feeds into our work planning processes and we regularly review our priorities to ensure we are focusing on the right topics.

Information on our current and past work is available on our [website](#).