

Invitation to tender: background paper on human embryo research in the UK

January 2025

Commissioner: Nuffield Council on Bioethics

Duration: 8-10 weeks

Key dates:

- Application closing date: 24.02.2025
- Expected start date: As soon as possible, exact date will be agreed with the successful applicant(s).
- Deadline for final submission: mid-May 2025.

Fee: £7,500 (inclusive of VAT)

Background and overview

Our 2024-2028 current Making Ethics Matter strategy, identifies three priority areas which encompass some of today's most important developments in biomedicine and health. These raise critical ethical, social and policy issues to which we can offer a distinctive contribution.

One of these priority areas is "Reproduction, parenthood and families" where we consider developments in early developmental and reproductive research, how these intersect with social and policy contexts, and the ethical questions raised. Our most recent publication in this area is a report on the ethical and governance questions raised by [human stem cell-based embryo models, published in November 2024](#).

As part of the Reproduction, parenthood and families priority area, we are looking to further consider developments in research involving human embryos, and the opportunities and concerns that may arise from possible changes to the law. To inform this work, we are commissioning a background research paper on the practical realities of embryo culture in the UK under current law and regulations.

The background paper

The aim of this background paper is to provide an overview of the practicalities, aims, and outcomes of embryo culture carried out for research purposes in the UK. It should cover, as far as is possible, evidence pertaining to:

- A. The scale of embryo research in the UK
- B. The number and sources of embryos used in research
- C. UK embryo research licensing decisions and challenges
- D. The types, aims and focus of embryo research, as well as any evidence as to the outcomes or impact of studies carried out in the UK

- E. Practical/structural aspects of the UK embryo research landscape (such as funding, composition of research groups, the extent of international collaboration)

Relevant literature may come from a range of disciplines, including (but not limited to) law, social sciences and the natural sciences, as well as policy reports and audits. Our expectation is that the successful applicant will take an interdisciplinary approach.

Scope

We are happy to discuss and refine the exact scope of this work with candidates depending on their particular expertise, but the work should draw on (and identify gaps in) published literature, focussing on:

- Research taking place in the UK, and subject to the HFE Act 1990 (as amended)
- Research involving the culture of human embryos for research purposes
- Embryos donated or created for research purposes since the HFE Act came into effect.

Output

The background paper should be concise (maximum 12,000 words, excluding references) and written in accessible language to account for NCOB's diverse stakeholder base. It should include the following:

- Executive summary
- Methods and approach
- Overview of relevant evidence, including identification of any key gaps

The background paper will inform further work by NCOB on embryo research in the UK. The author might be invited to present and discuss findings at NCOB meetings or events. Subject to discretion and agreement between the author(s) and NCOB, the paper might be published on the NCOB's website.

Timescale

The successful applicant will have a period of 8-10 weeks to undertake and deliver the final background paper to NCOB. It is expected that regular update meetings will take place between the reviewer and NCOB staff within that period, and that NCOB will feedback on a complete draft of the review before delivery of the final document.

Application guidelines

Applications should contain the following as a minimum:

- Your CV (and the CVs of any co-authors/collaborators)
- Cover letter (1 page maximum) setting out your interest and suitability for the commission
- A proposal setting out your approach including methods, rationale and a timeline of how the work will be structured over the 8-10-week period
- A sample of recent, relevant writing (either already published, or finalised with the intention to publish)
- Details of two referees (we won't contact them without telling you first).

Skills, qualifications and experience required:

- A relevant degree or equivalent professional experience
- Excellent research skills, including desk-based research
- Ability to write about complex subjects clearly and accurately
- Excellent time management
- A collaborative outlook

Applications, and questions in advance of application should be directed to Ranveig Svenning Berg, Research & Policy Manager at rsberg@nuffieldbioethics.org.

The deadline for applications is **5pm on Monday 24.02.2025**. Please note that we will not be holding interviews as part of the selection process, but may contact you for an informal conversation to discuss your application and proposed approach.