

## **Values, Policy and Innovation Workshop Carberry Tower, 22-23 March 2004**

What values come into play when scientists and companies make innovations in biosciences, or when policy decisions are made? How do these reflect or conflict with wider public concerns? These were some of the key themes explored at a workshop organised jointly by Innogen, the AHRB Research Centre for Studies in Intellectual property and Technology Law and the Church of Scotland Society, Religion and Technology Project. Thirty people from a range of different disciplines, including scientists, social scientists and policy makers gathered over a 2-day period in March to engage with these issues.

Developments in biosciences are increasingly raising questions about basic values, as well as the more familiar issues of risk and benefit. Differing attitudes towards nature, embryos, personal genetic information and the limits of scientific endeavour can lead to different innovation priorities, policy conclusions and may result in public controversy.

Topics covered during this workshop included:

- What drives innovation in pharmaceutical companies and how is R&D affected by public feedback?
- What are the key values behind the Scottish Science Strategy?
- To what extent does the Agriculture and Environment Biotechnology Commission provide a good working model for engaging values in contentious issues?
- Reflection on the UK experience of public engagement in the biosciences.
- An exploration of whether personal choice has become the new moral absolute.

### **Questions raised**

A number of important questions were raised during the workshop, among which were those listed below. Although the terminology 'we' is used, this does not imply that there is consensus around these questions or that these necessarily reflect views held by Innogen or any particular individual attending the conference. The questions rather illustrate the range of issues which exercise people, different individuals often being more or less concerned about different questions.

### **Engaging with values**

- How do we incorporate values and ethics into decision-making? In particular, how do we do that when values are polarised? How do we take this up at the global level?
- Engagement between people from different disciplines and from polarised positions is difficult to do because of the different languages and framings being used. Communication is difficult and time-consuming to achieve. How do we deal with this?
- Consulting on values does not inevitably mean that we arrive at shared values. Sometimes good communication takes place and we discover there are real value differences. How do we cope with these?
- Who is the public and who represents them?
- How do we incorporate the views of those people involved in innovation not through their own choice (e.g. due to illness)?
- How do we harness technology to solve problems of the poor – particularly in developing countries? How do we avoid repeating the mistakes of the past?

### **Involving the public**

- Can we talk about incorporating public values in policy? Perhaps we should rather think about including expert values without devaluing public knowledge. Public groups can have expert knowledge too (e.g. farm workers with respect to segregating GM) and expert knowledge is value-laden. How can different sorts of knowledge be brought together?
- How do we make the political constraints in policy making more obvious when engaging with the public?
- How do we promote participation/negotiation? What new ideas/models exist to do this? Can we do this in a way that fosters respect, openness and honesty without re-enforcing power relationships?
- It is important for the consulted public to feel listened to – but what counts as being listened to? Consultation exercises that don't link to policy may become discredited.
- Are some social scientists being driven by a normative commitment to participatory democracy that is unrealistic?
- What is the role of public participation? To make better decisions? To enhance democracy? To keep lobby groups quiet? Ritualised processes of consultation may be necessary, even if the outcome is obvious.

### **Institutions**

- One-off consultation exercises are not addressing wider institutional issues such as the public's scepticism of the institution. How can we have continuous engagement?
- How do exercises in public engagement fit with the normal business of governance?
- Does the government have the capacity to learn from '*GM Nation?*' and where is the overall repository of this knowledge?
- The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority's processes in regulating stem cell research are perceived by many to have succeeded whereas the processes to regulate GM are perceived by many to have failed. Why?
- Are institutions capable of dealing with upcoming issues and challenges?

### **Role of advisory bodies & regulators**

- How do we combine use of advisory bodies with engaging the public? Engaging the public may take away the responsibility of advisory bodies to articulate public values.
- Public engagement will get today's thoughts but the delivery of a technology is to tomorrow's society. Can public engagement ever be a complete substitute for a mixed group of people engaging with the issue and learning together?
- Does the formation of bodies such as the Agriculture and Environment Biotechnology Commission and Human Genetics Commission validate public anxiety and give higher emphasis to public concern than is needed?
- Whose job is it to articulate public interest? People enjoy being involved but also would like to be able to trust leaders/regulators rather than always be involved.
- What are public expectations of government and regulators?

### **Trust**

- How do we engender trust in an institution, recognising that sometimes bodies worthy of trust are not trusted? Can trust be maintained during periods of change?
- What are the relationships between trust, acquiescence and power?
- If good mechanisms for public engagement exist, do we still need trust?
- Where do the public find a trusted forum for debate given that all institutions have agendas? What is the role of the media in this as it will also follow its own interests?

### **Governance**

- It takes time for people to debate and reflect on an issue but government often has to make decisions under time pressure. Academic time is also very different from political time. How can these be reconciled?
- The government may be faced with particular questions e.g. whether to commercialise GM crops but the public may be concerned about wider aspects such as the future of different types of agriculture. How do we resolve these dilemmas?

### **New technologies**

- How do new technologies gain acceptance? What is behind the relative importance attached to different issues? Why do some things seem terribly important and other things recede?
- How does the debate become focused on specific applications of a technology? There is a danger that short-term decisions may prejudice longer-term applications.

### **Science**

- Who validates scientific knowledge? There is a lot of discussion about the need to hold scientists to account but why doesn't the philosophical community also need to be held to account?
- Does science become ambivalent to us because of the context in which science is played out?
- How do we equip young scientists to deal with values and ethics, and ethicists aware of science? Do students' role models engage with ethics? Is ethics relevant to the students' current context?

### **What are values?**

- Does public engagement always have to be expressed as being against a specific development or not? Are there better ways of public participation that can provide constructive ideas?
- What are values and where do they reside?
- Values are played out in context and may be emergent through discussion. But is anything value free?

### **Choice**

- More information does not unproblematically help choice. Choice is rarely free. It is often constrained and comes with a cost. But the absence of choice has consequences as much as choices have consequences. Is individual choice always better than having someone else make decisions on your behalf even if making the choice implies that you will have to receive some difficult information?
- Individual choices compete against other individual choices. How do we ensure choices are available with some equity?

These questions and the discussions arising from attempting to answer some of these questions during the workshop will be fed into Innogen's research projects where appropriate.