

COMMUNITY

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STORIES

SYNTHETIC BIOLOGY EVENT

LAUNCHES PRESIDENT OF IRELAND

ETHICS INITIATIVE

Stanford University Professor of Bioengineering Drew Endy came to Science Gallery Dublin in 2014 as the inaugural event of the President of Ireland Ethics Initiative, leading to awareness and discussion of critical ethical issues around synthetic biology.



Drew Endy discussing synthetic biology at the launch of the president of Ireland ethics initiative

WHO?

- ▶ Science Gallery Dublin
- ▶ President of Ireland Ethics Initiative
- ▶ Drew Endy, Associate Professor of Bioengineering, Stanford University
- ▶ Hugh Whittall, Director of Nuffield Council on Bioethics, UK
- ▶ Aoife McLysaght, Professor of Genetics, Trinity College Dublin
- ▶ Celsius Research Cluster, Dublin City University
- ▶ President of Ireland Ethics Initiative

WHAT?

The President of Ireland Ethics Initiative is a series of discussions on prominent ethical issues headed by Irish President Michael D Higgins, and the inaugural event was held in Science Gallery Dublin in January 2014. Synthetic Biology pioneer Drew Endy, from Stanford University, spoke about synthetic biology and engaged in a discussion with audience members, geneticist Aoife McLysaght and Nuffield Council on Bioethics Director Hugh Whittall, exploring the nature and ethics of synthetic biology. The event tied in with Science Gallery Dublin's synthetic biology themed GROW YOUR OWN... exhibition.

Evaluation of the event was carried out by the Celsius Research Cluster in Dublin City University. Event attendees were asked questions about synthetic biology before and after the event, and the results showed an increase in awareness of synthetic biology and the ethical issues surrounding it, with 70% of event attendees said they were likely to start a conversation with a friend about synthetic biology, increasing awareness and continuing discussion of the

WHAT

THEY SAID?

'I think it is really critical that we are opening this discussion about synthetic biology, and this is really the occasion where we have the opportunity to reflect on some of the ethical issues associated with scientific research'

— Linda Hogan, ViceProvost of Trinity College Dublin

WHAT WERE THE BENEFITS AND IMPACTS?

- ▶ Inspiring creativity
- ▶ Improving scientific literacy - The number of people who felt 'unsure' about synthetic biology dropped from 57 (out of 105) before the event to just 9 afterwards.
- ▶ Influencing policy making
- ▶ Exposure to new ideas
- ▶ Linking university and city
- ▶ Media coverage



Above: Audience members listening and interacting at the event

LINKS

Watch a video of the event on Science Gallery Dublin's YouTube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OWgxudU4z1o>

Find out more about the President of Ireland Ethics Initiative:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OWgxudU4z1o>

Sources: Science Gallery Dublin documentation of event, Stanford University website, evaluation report on the event prepared by DCU Celsius researchers.

Compiled by: Jessica Stanley, Science Gallery Dublin in 2015

Activity date: 2014