

ELSI workshop: Synthetic biology - a better future?

09/03/2011, Durham, UK

Synthetic biology is an emerging area of science uniting biology, engineering and the physical sciences with a goal of designing and generating new biological functions and systems not found in nature. Synthetic biology approaches have the potential to provide solutions to many of the challenges currently facing the world including food security, energy and healthcare. Whilst such benefits are unquestionable there is concern from various quarters as to the social and ethical dimensions of the emerging technologies. Consequently before such technologies are developed and released it is necessary to have productive dialogue between people connected by all aspects of such emerging technologies including scientists, engineers, social scientists, policy makers and non-governmental agencies.

This workshop will consider the balance between reward and risk and right and wrong in applying synthetic biology techniques to real-life problems. It seeks to generate a constructive debate between people affected by all aspects of these emerging technologies including academics, industrialists, regulators, media and the general public. The workshop will consist of a set of expert presentations to set the scene followed by an open discussion between an expert panel and all other participants. It is hoped that the unique combination of experts and informed lay-opinion will help develop a consensus as to the best approach relating to the application of synthetic biology methods to current and future global problems

Speakers and panel members at this workshop will include Professor Phil Macnaughten (Institute of Hazard, Risk and Resilience); Dr Ray Elliott (Syngenta Ltd); Professor John Ward (Institute of Structural and Molecular Biology, University College London); Professor Mark Harvey (Department of Sociology, Essex University); Professor Robert Song (Department of Theology, Durham University); Professor Robert Edwards (Food Environment Research Agency).

There is no fee to attend this meeting but all participants are requested to register their intention to attend by contacting - Dr Tom Jenkins (tom.jenkins@biosciencektn.com)