

# The Aberdeen experience: a bioethics case study

**Dr. A. Jennifer Mordue**



# Rationale

- scientists cannot distance themselves from the implications of their work
- students should be aware of and able to discuss ethical issues

# Participant's Comments

- “Extremely interesting and thought provoking. Without question one of the best courses I have ever done.”
- “Great course, should become a mandatory part of the Honours course.”
- “Really thought provoking, challenging my assumptions of what is right. The best course I have attended in 4 years of studying Zoology.”
- “Fantastic course, important to everybody.”
- “I learnt a great deal and developed a wider knowledge base as a result of this interesting, stimulating course. It would be very useful for all science students and is highly recommended.”

# Course Aims

- to consider the nature of science and its role in culture and society.
- to debate current ethical topics.
- to introduce ethical thinking in science for the development of informed opinion.

# Course Objectives

To provide appreciation and awareness of:

- emotive scientific issues discussed from an informed base.
- an understanding of other people's viewpoints by involvement in case study scenarios.

# Themes Covered (I)

## Animals in research

*animal welfare*

*animal experimentation*

*animal welfare legislation*

## Human beings & other animals

*speciesism*

*the 3 R's*

*species boundaries*

# Themes Covered (II)

## Ethics and Biomedicine

*stem cell research*

*cloning*

*xenotransplantation*

## Medical ethics

*problems in medical genetics*

## Bioethics and the environment

*global environment concerns*

*conservation and development*

*genetic modification in plants and animals*

*impacts of animal husbandry (e.g. aquaculture)*

# Teaching requirements

- philosophical expertise
- introduction to defining ethical issues
- experts in the field
- enabling discussion
- a wide ranging approach to workshops



# Participant's Comments

“ Small tutorial classes should be maintained - vocalisation was important to the course.”

“ Small class size ideal and necessary.”

“A very good way to be taught, e.g. class size discussion.”

“ Small classes ensured learning was a reciprocal process.”

“The course should be introduced at second year.”

“The course should be introduced at an earlier stage, due to it's uniqueness.”

# **Where to place bioethics teaching**

# Honours year (level 4)

	<u>No. students</u>
Parasitology	12
Marine biology in depth	37
Community ecology	23
Bioethics	9

# Level 3 / Post-graduate year

- Experimental design, analysis and presentation. (3<sup>rd</sup> Year Zoology)
- Generic skills course. (Post-graduate)
- Expansion into other areas.  
(Agricultural Science)

# Agricultural science and Bioethics

- definitions of animal welfare and cruelty
- development and implementation of animal welfare legislation
- importance of welfare standards in the animal industry
- animal welfare assessment methods and facility evaluation
- ethical questions related to animal welfare

# Conclusions

- need for bioethics teaching established
- course framework established
- further thought required on integration into undergraduate degree programme
- bioethics teaching at postgraduate level requires consideration