

Secondary school students representing the four provinces of Ireland participated in the Final of the Debating Science Issues (DSI) competition on 19 April 2012 at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland. After several closely contested debates between schools from Leinster, Ulster, Munster and Connacht, Clonakilty Community College, Co. Cork emerged as the All-Ireland winners. The All-Ireland Final revolved around the motion that 'Animal testing is necessary for the advancement of disease treatment.'



Other finalists included St. Catherine's Vocational School, Killybegs, Co. Donegal, St. Andrew's College, Dublin and Abbey Vocational School, Donegal Town.

Marion Boland, Scientific Programme Manager of the Life

Science Directorate at Science Foundation Ireland, a member of the DSI judging panel commented, "Science Foundation Ireland recognizes how Debating Science Issues (DSI) has been instrumental in engaging young people in science education, and in encouraging them to consider thematic areas that are highly topical, controversial and relevant to present day society. DSI is part of a larger programme of outreach initiatives which can reveal to students career opportunities that exist in science and engineering and how by being a part of a skilled workforce, the vital role they can play in shaping Ireland's future economic success."

Other judges at the DSI Finals included REMEDI's Senior Researcher Cynthia Coleman, Deputy CEO at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland Terry McWade, NUI Galway Lecturer in Philosophy Heike Felzmann, Editor for the Irish Medical News Danielle Barron, Linda Murtagh of Science Foundation Ireland and Sally Montgomery CEO at W5.

All students, teachers, judges and



research and discovery centres involved deserve a sincere thank you for making this worthwhile competition an All-Ireland success for science. Alimentary Pharmabiotic Centre, Biomedical Diagnostics Institute, CRANN, Clarity, Regenerative Medicine Institute, Royal College of Surgeons Ireland, W5 Interactive Discovery Centre Belfast, Cork Institute of Technology and the Centre for Cross Border Studies wish to acknowledge that DSI would not have been possible without the generous funding and support of the Wellcome Trust's People Award.

The Wellcome Trust is a global charitable foundation dedicated to achieving extraordinary improvements in health by supporting the brightest minds. Established in 1936 and with an endowment of around £ 13 billion, it is the UK's largest non-governmental source of funds for biomedical research.

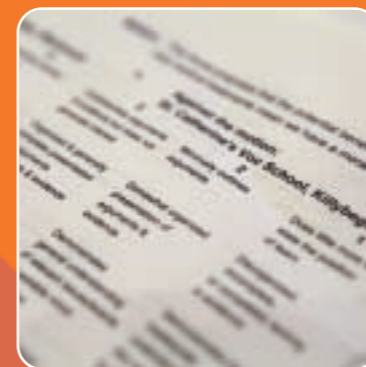


DEBATING SCIENCE ISSUES

September 2012

"The DSI competition increased an interest in science from students of varied ability in science- which is fantastic!!"

Participating teacher



Open to senior cycle students in secondary school across Ireland and Northern Ireland, Debating Science Issues (DSI) is a great opportunity for students to expand and hone their communication, research and scientific skills. As a precursor to the debate competition, each school involved avails of a 3-hour workshop on one of the five debate topics: genetically modified foods, health & self testing kits, stem cell research, nanotechnology and immunology practices. The bioethical workshop kick-starts the research and prepares the students for the first round of debates. From there the debating motions circulate so that all students debate on and learn an array of controversial, topical science issues.

DSI is a dynamic debating competition inviting young people to engage in discussion and debate on the cultural, societal and ethical implications of advances in biomedical science. Funded by the Wellcome Trust, the debating competition is coordinated by REMEDI, the Regenerative Medicine Institute, a Science Foundation Ireland and industry-funded research centre located at NUI Galway, in conjunction with eight science research and discovery centres throughout Ireland and Northern Ireland. Provincial prizes were sponsored by Boston Scientific, Abbott Ireland, Merck Millipore and Pfizer.

In 2012, over 550 students at forty schools across 15 counties engaged in biomedical workshops. Three hundred fifty students went on to form debate teams and compete. This year a new Topic Guide on rare disease funding allocation and orphan drug development was added to the DSI Student Pack. We incorporated two new enthusiastic partners, the Centre for Cross Border Studies in Armagh and the Cork Institute of Technology. We also developed a Facebook page and a YouTube channel this year. We launched our website www.debating-science-issues.com which we hope to enhance with a dialogue platform very soon. Contingent upon funding, this cross-border project will incorporate new schools, students and geographic regions for 2012- 2013.



Connacht / The West

The Western region was co-ordinated by REMEDI, a Science Foundation Ireland and industry-funded research centre located at NUI Galway. Scientists and doctors at REMEDI are working together combining the technologies of gene therapy and adult stem cell therapy to repair and replace tissues damaged by diabetes, heart disease, arthritis and neurological disease.

The Connacht region was re-named The West due to the high incidence of requests for involvement in DSI by schools in Donegal. A wide delivery of biomedical, bioethical workshops to include schools in Counties Galway, Sligo and Donegal this year which started during the Galway Science & Technology Festival, November 2011. A cross-curricular approach to debate preparation was employed in many of the schools involved. Civic, social & political education, drama, English and science teachers worked together to develop scientific knowledge and to enhance communication and research skills in their students. Five of the eight schools in this competition bracket were new to DSI this year.

REMEDI sincerely thanks all of the teachers and judges involved in the provincial heats which were peppered around The West. Special thanks for the gracious hospitality, assistance and local advice to the librarians of Donegal. Three debates were held in the public libraries of Gaoth Dobhair, Letterkenny and Bundoran.

Congratulations and job well-done to teachers Mary Mc Loughlin and Brid Duane and their students at Abbey Vocational School, Donegal Town. This was their first year in the competition. Abbey won three provincial heats debating the moral obligation to explore research with embryonic stem cells, genetically modified foods' benefits to human health, and rare disease funding allocation. Runners-up were Ardscoil Mhuire, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway who gave a strong performance.



“My interest in science has never been very great, but in class, I now notice myself considering more aspects to each topic.”

Participating student

Munster

The Munster Regional section of DSI was coordinated by the Alimentary Pharmabiotic Centre (APC) and Cork Institute of Technology. This year the APC delivered workshops about Genetically Modified Food to Clonakilty Community College, De la Salle Secondary School Waterford, Mount Mercy College Cork and St Vincent's Secondary School, Cork.

CIT delivered workshops Health and Self testing to North Monastery CBS, Bishopstown Community School, Coláiste Pobal Naomh Mhuire, Buttevant and McEgan College, Macroom.

Clonakilty Community College emerged as winners of the Munster Regional Final of Debating Science Issues at Brookfield Health Science Complex, UCC on 14th March. It was a closely contested final between Clonakilty Community College and Coláiste Pobal Naomh Mhuire on the topic of stem cell research. However, Clonakilty Community College in the end persuaded the panel of judges that “the potential benefits of using embryonic stem cells to develop new medical treatments mean we have a moral obligation to support this type of research”.

Participating teacher Mary Lowery from Clonakilty Community College said of the initiative “It is a terrific competition which gives a platform for students to critically engage and debate topical scientific issues. It also allows students to see the many different opportunities within the area of science especially as it promotes the engagement with scientific literature. Furthermore, it promotes skills such as debating and research which are invaluable lifelong skills across many fields.”

Munster has a strong record in the national finals with students from St Mary's Secondary School, Macroom, having won the All-Ireland Finals in 2009 and Ballincollig Community School winning the first DSI Final in 2008.



Ulster

The 2011/ 2012 Debating Science Issues programme saw a dramatic expansion in the geographical area represented from within the province of Ulster. Co-ordinating the Ulster bracket this year was W5 and the Centre for Cross Border Studies in Armagh, an enthusiastic and capable addition to the list of DSI partners. This year, teams hailed from Antrim, Armagh, Donegal, Down, Monaghan and Tyrone. The Ulster regional heats were held in W5 in Belfast, and in the historic Armagh Public Library. Some teams made a trek of up to 130 miles to compete! Competition was fierce as the schools from all over the province began debating. The teams this year varied greatly in experience, although passion for each topic and a desire to win were easy to see in every student.

The level of involvement by all teams in the Ulster region was to be highly commended and it was obvious that pupils had invested large amounts of time researching the various contentious topics chosen for debate. Many different styles of debate were employed by the pupils from sections of highly emotive, fist-clenching speeches; to sections of very factual, well-cited material.

The regional final in W5 came down to a round of very close scoring between Our Lady and St. Patrick's High School, Knock, Co. Antrim and St. Catherine's Vocational School, Killybegs, Co. Donegal. The judges ultimately awarded the regional honours to St. Catherine's Vocational School who went on to represent the Ulster at the All-Ireland Final. The team did a fantastic job at the Finals and impressed the judges with their ability to respond to very difficult questions about the potential benefits of using embryonic stem cells to develop new medical treatments and the necessity of using animals in biomedical research. The team were eventually defeated by this year's champions from Clonakilty Community College.

Thanks and congratulations to all the teams involved, teachers and pupils alike, in this year's debating programme. The effort, skill and time invested in preparing and debating is greatly valued and should be applauded. A special mention must be made of the girls from St. Catherine's who performed so well throughout the competition. Hopefully this will inspire other schools from the province to become involved in the programme!



Leinster

The Leinster region is the most fiercely contested of the DSI competition, with 16 schools vying for one place in the semi-finals. This year, St. Andrew's College, Booterstown, fought off tough competition to represent Leinster. Congratulations also to the runner-up teams from Holy Faith Secondary School, Clontarf, Loreto College Crumlin, and Castleknock College. The standard of debate throughout the preliminary rounds was very impressive, and it was exciting to see how much each team's debating skills developed as they progressed through each round.

The competition kicked-off in January with lively 3-hour interactive workshops at each school, where students were introduced to the social and ethical side of science through round-table discussions. The nanotechnology, self-testing and vaccination topics and motions were introduced by Education & Outreach personnel from CRANN, CLARITY, BDI and RCSI, using novel props, including stain-resistant aprons, video material from CRANN's “Nano in My Life” DVD and home cholesterol test kits. Some schools were particularly lucky to attend workshops facilitated by the award-winning students from RCSI's Debating Society!

We would like to acknowledge the time and commitment invested by all the teachers who assisted and supported their students as they tackled the challenging topics throughout the competition, and often in a very short timeframe.

The success of DSI in the Leinster region relies on support from the wider communities in all of our research centres, and we are grateful to the many members of staff who acted as judges in the preliminary rounds. With such high calibre of debate it wasn't an easy job! We would also like to thank CPL Recruitment for their generous sponsorship of prizes for the Leinster finalists.

