

# GOING DEEPER INTO ETHICS

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# TOPICS

- Project work in Bioethics
- Ethical reflection
- Development of Bioethics
  - Relationship between Bioethics and Ethics

# PROJECT WORK IN BIOETHICS

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# CONTEXT

- Are dry projects suitable for an honours degree programme in Biology?

# WHAT ARE THE COMPONENTS OF A PROJECT IN BIOLOGY?

- Define a research problem
- Design / define the methods
- Collect the data using those methods
- Analyse the data
- Discuss the data / present conclusions

# BIOETHICS FITS THE BILL

- Research problem - examples
  - What are the attitudes within a group or population to bioethical issues
  - What factors influence people's attitudes to bioethical issues?
  - Does exposure to a set of issues influence attitudes?

# HOW WILL WE ANSWER THE QUESTION?

- The methods are those most often used in social science
  - Questionnaires
  - Structured interviews
- Need for ethics committee approval: the research subjects are humans
- There is a steep learning curve for biologists!

# CARRYING OUT THE PROJECT

- Select the method that is appropriate for the problem
  - Questionnaire - different types
  - Can responses be 'quantified'?
  - Population sampling versus group comparisons
  - What are the variables?
  - Structured interview - gives opportunity for more open responses

# 'QUANTITATIVE' QUESTIONNAIRES

- A well-established method is to provide a series of statements
- Responses are given on a scale of 1-5, *e.g.* from 'Strongly agree' to 'Strongly disagree'
- Need to avoid bias
- Similar methods are used to obtain student feedback on lectures

# CARRYING OUT THE PROJECT

- Collect the data
  - Sample size
  - Controlling the variables
- Analyse the data
  - Appropriate statistical methods
  - For interviews: 'coding' the responses
- Discuss and conclude

# EXAMPLES

- Does visiting the Eden Project affect attitudes to environmental issues?
- Comparison of UK and USA academic attitudes to teaching bioethics
- What factors affect attitudes of students to stem cell research
  - Gender?
  - Religious commitment?
  - Subject of study?

# MORE EXAMPLES

- **Topics**
  - GM crops
  - Abortion
  - Euthanasia
  - 'Designer babies'
- **Variables**
  - Level of education
  - Age

# CONCLUSION

- Bioethics is a suitable topic for final-year projects in Biology