

Citizens and Nanotech

Held in Halifax, Yorkshire, NanoJury UK was sponsored by Greenpeace UK, The Guardian, The IRC in Nanotechnology at the University of Cambridge, and the Policy, Ethics and Life Sciences Research Centre at the University of Newcastle. It brought together twenty people, chosen to represent a broad cross section of society but also inclusive of a number of ethnicities and religions, in a citizen's jury type format to discuss issues surrounding nanotechnology.

In general, the Jury called for greater public involvement and clarity, as well as for more emphasis on health, equity and environmental protection when developing the technology. Professor Mark Welland of the University of Cambridge Nanoscience Centre said the Jury process had been a great success. "We hope that NanoJury UK will act as both a catalyst and a model for further public engagement activities as part of the responsible advancement of all new technologies," he said.

The Jury made twenty provisional recommendations (including some specifically on nanotechnology in the areas of health, information & communications technologies and energy). *The general recommendations were:*

GENERAL 1

If public money is being spent, then members of the public and invited representatives of a wide range of organisations (including different social groups and faiths) should form a committee that decides at what stage(s) of research public juries should be set up (according to General 6). This committee needs to be open to groups in society other than just experts (for details see below). If private money is being spent, public juries should have a role at the outset of the research to look at the ethical and possible social/environmental impacts of the potential end products.

GENERAL 2

There should be less ethical controls and government red tape. Such controls lead to the strangulation of inventiveness and reduce job creation, allowing other countries to steal a march on us. Development of new technologies creates jobs through the trickle down of wealth created.

GENERAL 3

There should be more openness on where public money is spent on nanotechnology research.

GENERAL 4

Poor people should be able to decide the prices of new technologies (e.g. new information and communication technologies) that are put onto the market.

GENERAL 5

Nanotechnologies should only be allowed if they develop wealth for everyone.

GENERAL 6

At key stages of the development of any new technology, there should be public juries (like this one).

GENERAL 7

Government should support those nanotechnologies that bring jobs to the UK by investment in education, training and research.

GENERAL 8

Nanotechnologies will only be good if they can enable us to have more quality leisure time including time for families and time for us personally.

GENERAL 9

If public money is to be spent, then it should go on those technologies that contribute towards the solving of longer term issues, such as health and environmental problems. This should be combined with the use of incentives and strings-attached for the private sector.

GENERAL 10

The advertising standards authorities should be made aware of nanotechnology products where there is uncertainty about health and safety in order that they can prevent misleading adverts. Full details about each recommendation and the strength of support for it, together with the other recommendations can be viewed on the Greenpeace UK website.