

Debating Science Issues – Munster Winners

Colaiste an Phiarsaigh, Glanmire emerged as winners of the Munster Regional Final of Debating Science Issues, a schools science debating competition at The Lifetime Lab, Lee Road, Cork on March 23rd. Clonakilty Community College battled it out with Coláiste an Phiarsaigh, Glanmire in a close debate. However, the confident team from Coláiste an Phiarsaigh persuaded the panel of judges, which included scientists and a journalist, that “the procurement and use of embryonic stem cells for scientific research is unethical”.

Debating Science Issues is a national Science Debating Competition co-ordinated by research and discovery centres on the island of Ireland and is funded by the Wellcome Trust. The competition encourages young people to engage in debate on the cultural, societal and ethical implications of advances in biomedical science. Debates in the Munster region are being co-ordinated by the Alimentary Pharmabiotic Centre (APC) and Tyndall National Institute. Munster schools taking part in the competition initially received 3hour workshops for a group of students to facilitate a discussion forum on the ethical issues raised by either Genetically Modified Food (delivered by the APC) or Nanotechnology (delivered by Tyndall). Schools teams then debate a motion related to the initial workshop in the regional heats. From there, the debating motions are circulated so that students debate on an array of controversial topical issues including stem cell research, genetically modified food, health and self testing, nanotechnology, vaccination, and animal testing.

Participating teacher Sian Joyce from Coláiste an Phiarsaigh said of the initiative “It is a fantastic opportunity to discover the many facets to a career in science whilst also introducing the students to valuable skills such as public speaking and scientific research methods”.

The winning team from Coláiste an Phiarsaigh will go through to the national finals which will take place in the Science Gallery in Dublin on 14th April 2011. Munster has a strong record in the national finals with students from St Mary's Secondary School, Macroom, having won the national final of the competition in 2009 and Ballincollig Community School winning the first national final of the competition in 2008.