

## **Press Release**

**Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> August 2008**

### **The Book of Life and the Poetry of the Human Genome**

The mapping of the human genome – sometimes hailed as “the book of life” – is one of the most important scientific achievements of recent years. Now the celebrated Scottish poet Gillian Ferguson has produced her own literary response to this monumental achievement. In her exuberant collection *The Human Genome: Poems on the Book of Life*, Ferguson presents the genome as itself a poem, composed in DNA over millions of years by the processes of evolution, and at last revealed to human consciousness by science.

But can poetry really convey the meaning of the human genome? Is hard science a fit subject for imaginative literature? Audiences at the Edinburgh International Book Festival will get the chance to judge for themselves when Gillian Ferguson reads extracts from *The Human Genome* and discusses her work with distinguished experts from the world of science. Joining her on stage will be Professor Grahame Bulfield, a leading molecular geneticist who was Director of the Roslin Institute when scientists there cloned Dolly the Sheep, and Professor Susan Lindee, an eminent sociologist of science and commentator on the cultural meanings of DNA. Audience members will have the opportunity to put their own questions to the panel, and the discussion promises to be stimulating and informative.

The “Book of Life” event takes place at the Spiegeltent on Saturday 16 August 2008 at 7 pm.

Tickets are available either through the Edinburgh International Book Festival website ([www.edbookfest.co.uk](http://www.edbookfest.co.uk)) or by phone on 0845 373 5888.

#### **Contact:**

Clare de Mowbray, Project Officer  
ESRC Genomics Policy and Research Forum  
The University of Edinburgh  
College of Humanities and Social Science  
St John's Land  
Holyrood Road  
Edinburgh EH8 8AQ

c.demowbray@ed.ac.uk  
0131 651 4736

### Note to Editors:

Gillian K Ferguson is an award-winning poet whose work has been described as dazzlingly original, luminous and boldly intelligent; combining vivid lyricism and sensuality with a particularly acute 'Celtic' sensibility to nature. Most recently, she won the £25,000 Creative Scotland Award, presented by the Scottish Arts Council, for her project on the Human Genome.

Grahame Bulfield is a Professor in the School of Life Sciences, The University of Edinburgh.

Susan Lindee is Professor of the History and Sociology of Science at the University of Pennsylvania, and an authority on the cultural relations of modern science. Her work includes research into the culture of genetic science and medicine. Among her many books and articles, she is co-author of *The DNA Mystique: The Gene as a Cultural Icon*.

Established in August 2004, the ESRC Genomics Policy and Research Forum is a novel initiative in the field of social science research.

As part of the ESRC Genomics Network (EGN), the Forum acts to integrate the diverse strands of social science research within and beyond the EGN; to develop links between social scientists and scientists working across the entire range of genomic science and technology; and to connect research in this area to policy makers, business, the media and civil society in the UK and abroad.

This is a novel and challenging role, but one which presents huge opportunities. Under the Directorship of Professor Steve Yearley and the Deputy Directorship of Dr Steve Sturdy, the Forum is widening the reception of social science research beyond existing audiences, and building capacity amongst social scientists for public and policy engagement.

The Genomics Forum aims:

- to exploit synergies across the EGN and other relevant ESRC initiatives
- to encourage fruitful interaction between social scientists and scientists working on genomics, both nationally and globally
- to connect social science research on genomics with public policy debates and decision making, and with policy makers, business, the media and civil society, in the UK and abroad
- to develop new lines of engagement between social scientists, biomedical scientists, policy-makers and publics

The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) is the UK's largest funding agency for research and postgraduate training relating to social and economic issues. It supports independent, high quality research which impacts on business, the public sector and the third sector. The ESRC's planned total expenditure in 2008/09 is £203 million. At any one time the ESRC supports over 4,000 researchers and postgraduate students in academic institutions and research policy institutes. More at <http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk>