

## Judges Report on ESRC Genomics Forum Poetry Competition.

The judges for this competition were Pippa Goldschmidt, Professor Steve Yearley (Director of the ESRC Genomics Forum), Peggy Hughes (Communications Officer at the Scottish Poetry Library) and [Kona Macphee](#) (poet, who kindly stood in for Gwyneth Lewis, who was unwell).

Altogether we received 231 entries from a wide variety of countries, including the USA, New Zealand, the Cook Islands, Uganda, India and Malta.

The winner, '**Forward Deck**', used a compelling and disturbing visual metaphor to address the issue of cloning. It was also one of a handful of poems whose appearance on the page imitated the (by now) iconic image of the double helix.

There was a huge variety in both the subject matter and also the style of the entries, some were formal, others were free verse, and we also received some raps. We welcomed this variety and strove to reflect that in picking the winning and shortlisted poems.

Understandably, most of the poems were serious, and so we particularly enjoyed the humour in one of the runners up, **Improving the Human: "The Poet Gene"**, a nicely self-referential poem which imagines the perhaps negative impact of genetic engineering upon poetry itself. This was also briefly picked up in the third placed poem; '**Chromosome Medley**', an energetic imagining of the impact of genetic choice in the past, present and future.

Often, what marked a good poem was a sense of ambivalence about the apparent possibilities of genetics, and an ability to consider and illustrate all sides of the argument. Many poems did not make it to the final shortlist because they were too insistent that scientists play god. Equally, others were too optimistic

about the possibilities of science. That may or may not be so. But, as ever, you need to show, not tell, in order to persuade your audience.

Many poems clearly found inspiration in the idea that humanity is found in the imperfections. Some managed to illustrate this beautifully, and were very touching. Our second placed poem, '**Digital**', examined the desire to remove apparent imperfection, and where this desire comes from.

There is always a tension when responding to a competition's call for a poem on a particular issue. How close to, or far from the subject matter, can you get? Some poems were beautiful, but did not seem to be obviously related to what the competition had asked for. Or perhaps we were simply not able to spot the allusion. Judging is subjective, and so much relies on the personal likes and dislikes of the individual judges.

Congratulations to all the winners and runners up.

Heartfelt commiserations to all those who took the time and effort to enter the competition, but who didn't get placed. We hope you found it an interesting and inspiring exercise.

**The winners:**

- 1<sup>st</sup> prize      Forward Deck by Sophie Cooke**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> prize      Digital by Nina Boyd**  
**3<sup>rd</sup> prize      Chromosome Medley by Russell Jones**

**Honorable mentions (in no particular order):**

- **Made by Katie Gooch**
- **Improvements by Tony Williams**
- **Unchained melody of genes by Amy Roseingrave**
- **One of those by Ron Howland**
- **Improving the Human: "The Poet Gene" by Scott Anderson**