



ESRC Research ‘Seminar series on genetics, technology, security and justice. Crossing, contesting and comparing boundaries’

Opening seminar: Genetics and crime. Contested boundaries, benefits and risks

Wed, 2 December 2015, 12:00-18:00, Room A114, Ellison Building, Northumbria University, Northumberland Road, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 8ST

The initial seminar will set the stage for the series by reviewing the historical trajectory of forensic genetics from its first appearance in 1984/5. It will pay particular attention to social science studies of this trajectory, identify main themes in these studies and consider how they have addressed the relationship between criminal justice uses of genetic knowledge and applications in other domains. The seminars will provide commentary on policy and practice assertions of benefits and risks arising from genetic innovations.

Security concerns – about crime, terrorism, mass death atrocities and disasters – are a key driver for the development of new technologies, and human genetics research has played an important contribution here. DNA technologies provide vital resources for the identification of human remains and the production of information that can help to provide evidence in complex crimes.

This seminar is part of a series of six interdisciplinary seminars between 2015 and 2017, which will critically examine the potential and actual contributions of forensic genetics to the production of security and justice in the UK and other contemporary European societies. The series is influenced by the commitment of the European Union ‘Europe 2020 Strategy’ to protect the security of social infrastructures and the safety and freedom of its citizens. At the strategy’s heart lies the development of scientific and technological resources to combat threats arising from natural disasters, crime and terrorism.

The series of meetings and its connected discussions will engage with the relevant biosocial research at the intersections of genetics, technology, security and justice. It will bring together academic researchers, policy makers and practitioners from policing organisations, commercial forensic service providers, public sector organisations and civil society groups, in the UK and abroad. We will discuss how such technologies can be used to support security while respecting freedom. A network of those involved will be established to help disseminate existing research, and to identify new research avenues towards informing UK policy and practice on the uses of genetic information to address the societal challenges of justice and security.

Bursaries for Early Career Researchers are available and will be granted on a first-come, first-serve basis. The bursary can cover reasonable travel costs and accommodation for together up to £250. Bursary holders will be asked to write a brief report about the seminar discussions for the seminar series website. Please contact matthias.wienroth@northumbria.ac.uk for further information.

Confirmed speakers

The UK Biometrics Commissioner, Alastair MacGregor

The chair of the UK NDNAD ethics group, Christopher Hughes

Professor of Forensic Science Studies, Robin Williams (Northumbria University)

Forensic geneticist, Dr Christopher Phillips (University of Santiago de Compostela)

Programme

- Morning Arrival
- 12:00—13:00 Registration & lunch
- 13:00—13:15 Welcome
- 13:15—14:15 Session I – ‘Forensic genetics in society’
Speaker 1 on the scientific and policing history of forensic genetics in the UK
Speaker 2 on a general social history of forensic genetics in the UK
Discussion
- 14:15—15:15 Session II – ‘Contemporary and emerging technologies in forensic genetics’
Speaker 1 on the current repertoire of forensic genetics from a policy perspective
Speaker 2 on emerging technologies: potential uses and issues for investigators, courts and regulators
Discussion
- 15:15—15:45 Refreshments
- 15:45—16:45 Session III – ‘Legal and ethical oversight’
Speaker 1 on current legal issues, and those on the horizon
Speaker 2 on current ethical issues, deliberations and stakeholders, and those emerging
Discussion
- 16:45—17:45 Plenum discussion – Opportunities, gaps and themes for research and policy work
- 17:45—18:00 Close