

Debating Science Issues

Regional Final Winners - Press Release 20-03-09



From left: Dr Catherine Buckley, Education and Outreach Manager, Alimentary Pharmabiotic Centre, UCC; Aoife O'Donoghue, Tyndall Outreach Officer; Shónagh Lynch and Maria Buckley, team captain of St Mary's, Macroom

St Mary's Secondary School, Macroom, Co. Cork emerged victorious in the Munster Regional Final Schools Debating Science Competition today (March 20th 2009).

The regional final took place in Cork City Library with St Mary's battling it out with St Goban's Secondary School, Bantry for their place in the National Debating Science Competition. St Mary's successfully argued that self-testing is not the future for health management.

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 were 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 10-12 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 evolution.

"The judges deliberated for a lengthy time to choose a winner. The arguments for and against the motion were both strong and very persuasive on both sides. St Mary's sustained their argument consistently throughout the debate which ultimately gave them the edge in the final decision", commented Dr Paul Galvin, Tyndall National Institute.

Participating teacher Mary Kelleher from St Mary's Secondary School, Macroom said that the initiative "increases the students' interest in science issues and improves debating skills."

"It is great to see the students' confidence in discussing contemporary scientific issues grow

as the competition progresses” said Aoife O’Donoghue, Tyndall Outreach Officer.

Debaters in the Munster Regional Final were challenged by judges, fellow students, teachers and audience members to defend their argument. The winning team from St Mary’s, Macroom will go through to the national finals which will take place in the Science Gallery in Dublin on April 2nd 2009. Students from Ballincollig Community School, Co. Cork, won the first national final of the Debating Science Issues competition in 2008.

Maria Buckley, team captain of St Mary’s, Macroom and her team-mate Shónagh Lynch, were supported by a team of researchers from their 5th year class. Teachers: Catherine Kerrigan and Mary Kelleher, Grace Austin and Aoife Crowne received their research support from their team-mates in St Goban’s, Bantry. Teacher: Hazel Jennings.

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Regional Final Press Release 18-03-09

The Munster Regional Final of Debating Science Issues, a schools science debating competition, will take place on Friday 20th March at 11am in Cork City Library. St Mary’s Secondary School, Macroom will battle it out with St Goban’s Secondary School, Bantry for their place in the National Finals. The motion for the debate is “This house proposes that self-testing is the future for health management”.

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“Students are improving their debating skills as well as developing their interests in topical scientific issues” said participating teacher Emer Hallihan from St Mary’s Secondary School, Mallow, “This activity scores very high on the learning pyramid.”

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