

LONDON MATHEMATICAL SOCIETY

**Draft document from the ICSU Committee on
Freedom and Responsibility in the conduct of Science (CFRS)**

The following message was sent to Royal Society in respect of a request for comments on a draft document from the Committee on Freedom and Responsibility in the conduct of Science (CFRS).

The draft document from the Committee on Freedom and Responsibility in the conduct of Science (CFRS) has been seen and considered by the Society's International Affairs Committee. The Society's Council met last week and approved the following comments to be passed to the Royal Society.

Generally, the document met with support with positive comments on the document, but with no particular suggestions for improvement. However, there is one aspect where we believe that the document can be improved, in the opening sentences. We suggest the following rewording of the description of science:

Science is the systematic search for natural explanations of phenomena in the physical world through observations and experiments that can be substantiated by other scientists. Scientific discoveries are universal in the sense that they do not depend on nationality, culture or religious belief. Science has a very important value; satisfying human curiosity, enriching the human spirit and changing human perceptions. Etc.

ICSU's reference to the 'Universality of Science' might be misinterpreted to be claiming that science is competent to make judgements on ethical and religious questions. Of course this is not the intention.

Those involved in 'creation science' and 'intelligent design' are constantly looking for vague definitions of science that seem to include what they are trying to promote. The first sentence in the new text above has been redrafted and expanded to avoid such an interpretation. It is adapted from the transcript of the judgement of Judge Jones in the 2005 Dover Case on Intelligent Design (see http://www.pamd.uscourts.gov/kitzmiller/kitzmiller_342.pdf). He quoted the NAS as follows.

NAS is in agreement that science is limited to empirical, observable and ultimately testable data: "Science is a particular way of knowing about the world. In science, explanations are restricted to those that can be inferred from the confirmable data – the results obtained through observations and experiments that can be substantiated by other scientists. Anything that can be observed or measured is amenable to scientific investigation. Explanations that cannot be based upon empirical evidence are not part of science.

I hope these comments are helpful.

Peter Cooper
Executive Secretary