

Concordat on Openness public dialogue: frequently asked questions

What is the Concordat on Openness?

- In October 2012 research organisations from across the life science sector came together in a commitment to be more open about the use of animals in research. They pledged to undertake a concordat process that would see them committing to greater transparency.

What is the public dialogue on Openness and how does it relate to the Concordat?

- At the request of concordat stakeholders, a public dialogue is being conducted during the summer of 2013. The dialogue will look at public views around openness and transparency where animals are used in research. The results of this dialogue will feed into the draft concordat, so that the concordat reflects aspects of Openness that are of greatest interest to the public.
- The aim of the Public Dialogue is: *To understand what public participants consider to be 'openness' and 'transparency' on animal research, so that these can feed into the on-going Concordat process to develop principles and objectives that align with public perceptions*

The key objectives for the public dialogue – as published in the tender document are:

- **To understand public expectations of openness and transparency around the use of animals in research**
- **To explore what information the public want to receive on the use of animals in research, and how it should be communicated to support greater openness and transparency, including, for example, how research is regulated.**
- **To identify aspects of current practice by the bioscience sector that are considered secretive or hidden, understanding why this is and what would need to change to be considered open and transparent.**
- **To consider what future work could be done to address openness and transparency issues for the life science sector in the future.**

Secondary objectives are:

- To explore possible causes for changes in public opinion around animal research in 2012.
- To explore whether location within the UK or other demographic factors could have any bearing on how the public view the use of animals in research.

The key objectives are central to the public dialogue – the secondary objectives would be useful to understand if contractors are able to draw out any observations but are recognised to likely be out of reach of this dialogue due to the relatively small numbers of people involved.

The dialogue will cover all aspects of openness as it pertains to animal research and will look at what the public want and expect from organisations in terms of how they present their work: what the public consider to be the main considerations and points of interest.

Will the Concordat on Openness and the Home Office consultation on Section 24 ASPA cover the same ground?

- The Concordat is intended to cover what organisations that undertake or fund research using animals will voluntarily and proactively do in relation to openness and transparency; it will look at what information they place in the public domain, how they communicate with the media and how they respond to enquiries or criticism.
- One aspect of 'openness' work is around section 24 (s24) of the Animals Scientific Procedures Act (ASPA). This act, which pre-dates the Freedom of information Act (FOIA), contains a clause - in s24 - which prevents the release of confidential information held in relation to the licensing process. Because it conflicts with the subsequent FOIA the legal status of this clause is now unclear.
- The Home Office is revising this legislation to bring it in line with current law. They are conducting a consultation over the summer of 2013 to decide how s24 should be amended.
- The legal conflict between FOIA and s24 ASPA only pertains to universities, public sector research institutes and the Home Office, as these institutions are subject to FOIA and able to hold licences for animal research. The private sector is not affected as FOIA does not apply.
- Development of the Concordat differs from the work on s24 in that (i) it is intended to go beyond legal requirements for public reporting on project licences and (ii) it will cover the full range of organisations involved in Animal Research – not only those subject to FOIA.

How does the public dialogue and Concordat relate to Home Office consultation on section 24?

- At the time of bringing together the Concordat on Openness, it was expected that section 24 (s24) would be reformed before the end of 2012, as part of the transposition of EU Directive 2010/63/EU, whereas the Concordat would be developed throughout 2013. The timing of the s24 consultation has since been delayed.
- The Public Dialogue workshops will run during July and early August 2013, allowing their outcomes to feed into the Draft concordat in the Autumn 2013, so that the Concordat can be published by the end of the year. The Home Office's long-awaited consultation on the amendment of section 24 ASPA (s24) will also take place over the summer of 2013. The Stakeholder phase of the Home Office consultation is taking place in the early part of the summer, and there will be a public consultation period over August.
- These are two separate initiatives, and have had no part in shaping one another.

What will Concordat signatories do if Section 24 is amended?

- The amendment of s24 will clarify the legal requirements around licences and will determine whether publicly-funded organisations are legally able to disclose them. Concordat signatories will then be able to respond appropriately to FOI requests about animal research without fear of legal action. Regardless of the amendment of s24 organisations signed up to the concordat will be committing to measurable steps towards greater openness on the use of animals in research.

What role do the Home Office have in the public dialogue process feeding into the Concordat?

- The results of the Public Dialogue on Openness may be of interest to the Home Office consultation, and the Home Office are invited to view the dialogue findings, as they would any pertinent public document.
- The Home Office, along with ten other organisations, have provided expertise to the public dialogue by contributing to discussion stimuli, to ensure that the public are furnished with facts and information incorporating a range of perspectives during the dialogue.
- The Home Office have been offered a place to observe the public dialogue sessions should they wish to take it up.

The public dialogue will inform the draft Concordat, but when will wider public have opportunity to comment?

Once the Concordat Steering Group has drafted the concordat, there will be a six week public consultation period. This will allow stakeholders and wider public the opportunity to comment on the draft Concordat in the Autumn 2013.

Who is funding the public dialogue?

The dialogue is funded by [The Medical Research Council](#) , [The British Pharmacological Society](#) and [Sciencewise-ERC](#).

It is being managed by Understanding Animal Research (UAR) on behalf of the funders. In practice this means that the contractors have one point of contact for the Oversight Group and UAR then communicate to the Oversight Group for input and agreement on the activities of the public dialogue.

How does the public dialogue Oversight Group make decisions?

As per the Oversight Group's Terms of Reference decisions on materials are made by group consensus. Disagreement between the Oversight Group will be referred to majority vote.

Bella Williams (UAR) is Chair of the Oversight Group in a personal capacity. Her role is to keep agenda items to task and time and the Chair has no casting vote over the Oversight Group.