

## Media Briefing: Additional statistics of animals killed in laboratories

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### In brief

Animals undergo around four million experimental procedures in UK scientific research each year, and details of these regulated procedures are published annually by the Home Office. However, in addition to these, there are also large numbers of animals bred for purposes such as providing tissue samples, maintaining breeding colonies or acting as healthy 'sentinel animals', whose condition hints towards any wider health issues in the lab that could impact animal welfare.

Individual institutions keep records of how many such additional animals are used each year, and the EU has introduced a requirement to publish these numbers every five years. These 'additional animal' statistics will provide a record of all animals in the UK which are killed in a research setting without having undergone a regulated procedure.

### Home Office Annual Returns

In 2017, there were 3,789,373 regulated procedures on animals in Great Britain. Around half of these procedures are classed as the creation/breeding of a genetically altered animal. Procedures are classified in the returns by their severity, with categories of mild (at minimum an injection or equivalent), moderate (such as surgery then recovery), severe (severe suffering or prolonged moderate suffering), non-recovery (an animal is not revived from general anaesthetic) and sub-threshold (beneath the threshold for mild). In 2017, 46% of regulated procedures were mild, 29% moderate, 6% severe, 8% non-recovery and 12% sub-threshold.

The United Kingdom has been regulating experiments and publishing annual returns relating to animal research numbers for more than 140 years. In their current form, the annual returns collate the number of animal procedures of all institutions in Great Britain, broken down by species, types of research, severity and more. Lay summaries of experiments are also published. Northern Ireland reports separately, though its numbers are 0.5% of Great Britain's.

### The additional statistics

Reporting requirements in the EU Directive 2010/63 require that every five years (as a one-off the first report deals with 2017 only) each EU country must submit details of the animals that are killed in research facilities without being used in any regulated procedure. Examples of why this may happen include:

- Animals bred for tissue samples
- Animals that were bred for research but could not be used. Reasons include:
  - They were the wrong sex for the research
  - They were involved in creating or maintaining genetically altered lines, but did not express the required genetic alteration (i.e. were born as wild types);
  - The number bred was over and above the numbers needed for the research study (litter sizes can be unpredictable)
- Animals used to sustain inbred colonies (this includes breeding stock and neonatal losses)
- 'Sentinel animals' used for health screening of other animals in the laboratory

## Q&As

### **What is the experience of the animals which are killed without undergoing regulated procedures?**

These animals live within a laboratory environment from birth, subject to the government's Code of Practice, which means they have access to food, water and veterinary care and are, in nearly all situations, socially housed. However, they can also experience the ordinary stressors associated with life in a laboratory, such as frequent handling and more limited space than in natural habitats.

The animals are then humanely killed using an approved 'Schedule 1' method. This might be overdose of anaesthetic, exposure to rising levels of carbon dioxide, or (for smaller animals) instant death through dislocation of the neck.

### **Why have these numbers not been published before?**

Most institutions are open about their animal work, but the emphasis was and is on the welfare of animals actually undergoing procedures, which is why the EU directive only requires the additional animal numbers to be published every five years as opposed to annually. There are also counting differences between the annual and five-yearly statistics, with one counting procedures and the other animals, so it's right that the two are considered separately.

### **If these animals undergo no procedure, are these animals' lives wasted?**

Many animals killed without undergoing a procedure still play a key part in the scientific process. For example, sentinel animals are used to monitor for potential diseases within a laboratory, thereby safeguarding the welfare of other animals in there. Some animals killed without a procedure are used for tissue studies, allowing researchers an alternative method of studying cells and organs in a controlled setting that might not be possible in a living animal, or sometimes replacing the need to use living animals.

## Relevant links

1. Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 (*Schedule 1 methods of euthanasia pages 27-28*)

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/619140/ConsolidatedASPA1Jan2013.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/619140/ConsolidatedASPA1Jan2013.pdf)

2. Code of practice

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/code-of-practice-for-the-housing-and-care-of-animals-bred-supplied-or-used-for-scientific-purposes>

## More information

If you have further questions please contact Chris Magee on 0203 675 1234, or email via [cmagee@uar.org.uk](mailto:cmagee@uar.org.uk)