

The use of animals in research – the position of the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC)

Biological and bio-medical research using animals has contributed enormously and uniquely to advances in human and veterinary medicine and treatments, and in understanding fundamental, yet complex, processes such as development, growth, innate behaviour and immunology that underpin wellbeing in humans and other animals.

Despite significant progress in recent years to reduce the numbers of animals needed in individual experiments and to replace animals with *in-vitro* and *in silico* alternatives, there are still areas of research in which the use of animals remains essential.

BBSRC supports the continued use of animals in scientific research, but ONLY when strict conditions are met.

All BBSRC grant awards are made on the absolute condition that no work that is controlled by the new Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 (ASPA, amended in 2012 to incorporate changes brought in by European Directive 2012/63/EU) will begin until the necessary licences required under the Act have been obtained. The Act stipulates that animal use must be reviewed at a local level within institutions by an Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Body (AWERB) and no animals may be used if a suitable alternative exists. Further, at the time of making an application to BBSRC, researchers must provide sound scientific justifications for using animals and for the numbers and species of animals used. This justification is assessed during the peer review process. Any outstanding issues are referred for consideration by the BBSRC Bioscience for Society Strategy Panel of independent advisors whose expertise includes bioethics, public engagement and the interface between social science and life sciences. For BBSRC-funded research that involves the use of animals overseas (for example through international collaborative research) researchers are required to satisfy themselves and confirm to BBSRC that standards are consistent with those in the UK.

In addition to the requirements of ASPA, BBSRC supports researchers in providing excellent care and welfare standards for animals used in research. BBSRC is a signatory, with other funding bodies, to two guidance documents 'Responsibility in the Use of Animals in Research' and 'Sharing and Archiving of Genetically Altered Mice'. These set out the funders' expectations of all applicants intending to use animals in their research. When applying for BBSRC funding, applicants whose proposals include the use of animals must fully justify the choice of species and numbers of all animals required. This information is scrutinised during the peer review process and applicants may be asked to make modifications to their plans if the justification is not deemed sufficient.

3Rs

BBSRC funds research to replace, refine and reduce (3Rs) the numbers of animals used in research. It is a co-funder of the National Centre for the 3Rs (NC3Rs) which provides a focus for the promotion, development and implementation of the 3Rs in animal research and advise BBSRC on 3Rs issues. BBSRC also has a policy priority, 'Replacement, refinement and reduction (3Rs) in research using animals', that aims to embed the principles of the 3Rs into all the research within its remit and to encourage grant applicants to consider opportunities to address the 3Rs (www.bbsrc.ac.uk/funding/priorities/oa-3rs.aspx). In recognition of particular public concern about the use of non-human primates, cats, dogs and members of the horse family, NC3Rs are asked to provide 3Rs and animal welfare

review of the small number of research proposals that BBSRC receives that involve the use of these species.

Animal welfare

BBSRC supports a diverse portfolio of research into animal welfare (of laboratory, livestock and companion animals), and encourages applications from researchers working in this area (www.bbsrc.ac.uk/funding/priorities/oa-animal-welfare.aspx).

Communication and partnerships

BBSRC takes seriously its responsibility to be open and transparent about the animal research that it funds, and encourages researchers to communicate about their research. BBSRC provides support to Understanding Animal Research (UAR) which aims to achieve understanding and acceptance of the need for humane animal research in the UK, by maintaining and building informed public support and a favourable policy climate for animal research.

BBSRC also takes seriously the need to protect researchers from attack. It is a co-funder of Support4RS which helps the research sector to develop resilience.

BBSRC is associated with the Animal Science Group of the Society of Biology whose membership represents a variety of individuals and organisations involved in the use of animals in research, including funders, the pharmaceutical sector, researchers and animal technicians. Bringing these different organisations together allows ideas and information to be exchanged among groups that could otherwise remain separate. The Group aims to provide a national focus and forum for animal science issues to inform development of the Society's policies.

BBSRC welcomes and participates in constructive debate with the wider public, including those opposed to animal research and those who disagree with certain scientific procedures or the use of particular animal species in research. We contribute to discussions of this kind through participation in the Boyd Group. This valuable and unique forum enables an open exchange of views between a diverse group of people and organisations. When a consensus on particular issues can be agreed the environment of the Group facilitates taking practical steps towards achieving common goals.

About BBSRC

BBSRC invests in world-class bioscience research and training on behalf of the UK public. Our aim is to further scientific knowledge, to promote economic growth, wealth and job creation and to improve quality of life in the UK and beyond.

Funded by Government, and with an annual budget of around £500M (2012-2013), we support research and training in universities and strategically funded institutes. BBSRC research and the people we fund are helping society to meet major challenges, including food security, green energy and healthier, longer lives. Our investments underpin important UK economic sectors, such as farming, food, industrial biotechnology and pharmaceuticals. Approximately one fifth of the grants that BBSRC funds involve the use of animals.

For more information about BBSRC, our science and our impact see: www.bbsrc.ac.uk.
For more information about BBSRC strategically funded institutes see: www.bbsrc.ac.uk/institutes.