

The use of animals in research

The Royal Society of Biology supports the use of animals in research when properly regulated and when no alternatives are available. We actively support progress towards a reduction in the use of animals by refining experiments and developing new ways to minimise the use of and replace animals wherever possible – often referred to as the 3Rs.

Research using animals has directly contributed to medical and veterinary benefits including development of vaccines, antibiotics, and pioneering medical procedures that save and improve the quality of many human and animal lives. It has played a vital role in the major medical advances of the past century. It will continue to be necessary for some time as we search for treatments for life-threatening conditions such as cancer, Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases, AIDS, trauma and many severe infectious and inherited diseases.

Not all medical, veterinary or zoological research depends on the use of live animals, and alternatives are sometimes available including cultures of cells, tissues, computer models and modelling equipment. Every effort must be made to use replacement methods where possible. However, it is still difficult to fully develop new medical or veterinary treatments without using animals at some point, for example where it is necessary to monitor a whole body reaction to a drug or procedure. UK regulations require that all new drugs must be tested on at least two different species of live mammals.

Most research using animals in the UK is regulated by the Home Office and can only be performed with a license. UK regulations are considered amongst the most comprehensive and rigorous in the world. Proposed experiments are subject to thorough ethical review at the application stage and regular review thereafter. The Society contributes to the development of policies in this area through the work of its Animal Science Group and via the UK Bioscience Sector Coalition. We recognise the need for institutions and individuals to work to the highest standards in the governance, monitoring and practice associated with these regulations and experiments, and in the light of the gravity of this area of science.

There are groups and individuals that wish to stop animal research completely, claiming that it is unnecessary and brings no benefit. However, as set out above, this is not the case. Debate of the cases for and against this research must be well conducted.

British public opinion is in favour of animal experiments for medical and scientific research where no alternatives are available. In 2018, 68% of people taking part in an IPSOS-MORI survey accepted the use of animals in scientific research provided that there is no unnecessary suffering of the animals and there is no alternative.

We also consider that licensed research on animals may sometimes be necessary and appropriate in basic biological research, veterinary research, agricultural research, animal welfare research and teaching.

It is a legal requirement that those conducting research on animals are appropriately trained. The Royal Society of Biology accredits training courses for this purpose.

For more information on this topic visit our [Animal Science Group](#) page.

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