

Information Sheet 1 - How Research using animals is regulated (Science)

The UK has a long tradition of protecting animals and this is especially true of animals used in research. There have been special controls on the use of laboratory animals in the UK since 1876.

In 1986 the laws governing the use of animals in research were extended and revised to ensure that the welfare of the animals was safeguarded while allowing important medical research to continue.

The resulting Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act is widely recognised as the strictest in the world. This UK Act will only allow research to be carried out using animals if any benefit the research is likely to bring outweighs any pain and distress the animals may suffer.

More detailed information on the 1986 Act can be found on the Home Office Web site at <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/animact/>.

What Scientists have to do before they are allowed to carry out Research using Animals - The Project Licence

Three licences are required for any scientific work using animals under the 1986 Act.

1) THE PROJECT LICENCE

If a scientist wants to carry out research or testing using animals they must first obtain a Project Licence from the Home Secretary who will take advice from the inspectorate in the first instance before granting the licence.

The licence will only be granted if:

- The results of the research are likely to be important enough to justify the use of animals.
- The research cannot be done without using animals.
- Any suffering is kept to an absolute minimum.

- Monkeys, dogs and cats are only used when no other species, usually rodents, are suitable.
- The people working with animals have undergone training and testing on the species of animal they wish to use, the type of procedure they are going to carry out and the level of distress the animal may suffer.

The scientists have shown that they have, as far as possible:

- Reduced the number of animals used to a minimum.
- Refined the way the experiment is carried out to make sure that any animal suffering is minimised.
- Replaced the use of animals with non-animal methods wherever possible.

These three principles, Reduce, Refine and Replace, are called the three Rs and are the guiding principles in animal research.

More information can be found at <http://www.rds-online.org.uk/welfare/threers> and <http://www.nc3rs.org.uk/>.

2) THE PERSONAL LICENCE

The person actually carrying out the research on the animal must first obtain a personal licence by attending the appropriate training courses and passing the relevant examinations. They must be qualified to:

- Work on a particular species of animal.
- Carry out the specific procedure required.
- Work only to the levels of suffering for the animals laid down in the project licence. The suffering is classed as mild, moderate or severe. Very few procedures involving severe levels of suffering are allowed in the UK.

3) THE RESEARCH FACILITY LICENCE

The research must be carried out in an approved research facility which will have been inspected and shown that:

- It has accommodation for the animals that meets the required standards.
- Has vets on call 24 hours a day.

If the facility meets these very rigorous standards then it is given a Certificate of Designation.

Many additions have been made to the Act since 1986 to make it even more stringent. The latest was added in April 1999 and this new regulation means that a project must now pass through an additional local ethical review before a licence is granted.

Adapted from Biomedical Research Educational Trust (BRET) website: Information on Animal Welfare and the laws governing Animal Research

<http://www.bret.org.uk/gov.htm>