

Royal Society's response to the Weatherall Report - *The use of non-human primates in research*

The report on the use of non-human primates in research was published in December 2006 by an independent working group chaired by Sir David Weatherall FRS (Weatherall 2006). The study was initiated by the Academy of Medical Sciences, the Royal Society, the Medical Research Council and the Wellcome Trust who committed to consider the recommendations and to formally respond within six months of its publication. This document contains the Royal Society's response to the individual recommendations and the overarching statement produced by the four sponsors (please see the Annex).

Recommendation 1 There is a strong scientific case for the carefully regulated use of non-human primates where there are no other means to address clearly-defined questions of particular biological or medical importance.

Recommendation 2 In the fields of research considered in this study, namely communicable disease, neuroscience and reproductive biology, there is a strong scientific case for maintaining the use of non-human primates in some aspects of this work, at least for the immediate future.

The Society supports the carefully regulated use of non-human primates in the areas of communicable disease, neuroscience and reproductive biology where there is a strong scientific case.

Recommendation 3 The major specialist organisations involved in research fields that utilise non-human primates, particularly neuroscience, communicable disease, and reproductive and developmental biology, should regularly collate information about evolving research technology in their fields, with particular respect to the need for non-human primates. This information should be disseminated to funding bodies, ethics committees and regulatory agencies.

The Society supports the need to collate information about evolving technologies and to integrate the 3Rs (replacement, refinement and reduction) into future funding decisions. We will encourage our researchers to provide this information to the relevant bodies.

Recommendation 4 As part of their ongoing programmes to assess the outcomes of their research, the major funding organisations should undertake a systematic review of the outcome of all their research using non-human primates supported over the last decade.

We support the recommendation that major funding organisations develop methodology for, and undertake, a systematic review of the outcomes of their research using non-human primates over the last decade. We welcome the commitment by BBSRC, MRC and the Wellcome Trust to undertake such a review. The Society supports scientists from all disciplines, primarily through our Fellowship schemes, providing salaries, limited research expenses, indirect costs under the Full Economic Costs model and a range of other non-financial support. We anticipate that the scientists that we fund that work with non-human primates will also be funded by the Wellcome Trust and/or the Research Councils. We would happily contribute to studies assessing the outcomes of research and provide relevant information from the small number of researchers involved in non-human primate research that we fund.

Recommendation 5 UK research funding organisations, both governmental and charitable, should continue to take every opportunity to encourage and fund research into developing alternatives to the use of non-human primates for both research and toxicology. Funders should expand their support for research into refining non-human primate research practices, particularly in the behavioural neurosciences.

We welcome the progress that the National Centre for the 3Rs (NC3Rs) has made in integrating the 3Rs into all research involving the use of animals. The Society's statement on the use of animals in research outlines its commitment to the promotion and adoption of the 3Rs (Royal Society 2006). The Society welcomes applications from researchers working in this area to its funding schemes.

Recommendation 6 Retrospective reporting on the severity of procedures for non-human primates, as recommended by the LASA/APC pilot study, should be introduced as soon as possible.

The Society supports the retrospective reporting of severity of procedures involving non-human primates providing the process does not result in disproportionate additional bureaucracy for the researcher. This reporting will be important to inform decision making on future studies. We recommend that the Home Office develops a clear mechanism for the implementation of this recommendation in consultation with researchers and funding bodies. We would be happy to contribute to this process.

Recommendation 7 Improvements in the supervised continuous training of research workers in non-human primate research should be instituted.

The Society supports the need for supervised continuous training of researchers using non-human primates. We shall encourage the researchers we support to attend such training and allow them to use the funding that we give them for such courses.

Recommendation 8 Scientific journals should include details of animal welfare and steps taken to ameliorate suffering in all published papers that involve non-human primate research.

The Society will require authors submitting papers to its journals to include details of animal welfare and steps taken to ameliorate suffering in all published papers that involve non-human primate research. Authors are asked to confirm they have included these details upon submission. The Society will also write to editors of other journals to encourage them to include the same information.

Recommendation 9 Work should be accelerated towards improving and applying current best-practice regarding housing of non-human primates, including minimum cage size, an emphasis on the avoidance of single housing, how cage fittings and conditions can be accommodated to the purpose of individual experiments, and a better assessment of the advantages of outside access and visual stimulation.

The Society supports the need for best practice regarding housing of all animals used in research including non-human primates. We will sign up to the NC3Rs guidelines on primate accommodation, care and use and will require all our grant holders who use non-human primates to comply with these guidelines. We also support the continued efforts of scientists to enrich the environmental conditions of primate accommodation.

Recommendation 10 Further efforts should be made to improve interactions between regulatory bodies at national and international levels and between regulatory bodies and the scientific community. Given the

current speed of research in the biological sciences, new approaches to improve these interactions are urgently required.

The Society supports a greater interaction between regulatory bodies and the scientific community with regards to research involving non-human primates. The regulators must ensure that regulations keep up with scientific advances and that best practice is based on sound evidence.

Recommendation 11 Steps should be taken to make the results of toxicological studies involving non-human primates publicly available, in the same way as initiatives to register and publish the results of all human clinical trials.

The Society agrees that the results of toxicological studies involving non-human primates should be made available to the scientific community, perhaps through a relevant industry association.

Recommendation 12 It would be premature to make firm recommendations on how a reduction in the number of non-human primates used in regulatory toxicology might be achieved before the completion of the NC3Rs/ABPI study. However, we urge government and other stakeholders to act on the recommendations of this study, and in the light of its findings, to re-examine responses to the 2002 APC report.

The Society hopes that this recommendation will be taken forward by Government, regulators and industry following the publication of the NC3Rs/ABPI study.

Recommendation 13 Concerns that costs and harassment by activists are forcing scientists and research companies to pursue non-human primate work overseas require urgent examination by the relevant UK research funding and regulatory bodies.

The Society condemns intimidation and harassment aimed at stopping biological and medical research using all animals and will continue to support efforts to address this problem.

Recommendation 14 The major funding bodies, together with government, other stakeholders, scientists, primatologists, vets and welfare specialists, should give careful consideration to the creation of UK centres of excellence for non-human primate research.

The Society believes that all research using non-human primates in the UK should be conducted in 'centres of excellence' but recognises the challenges for individual universities in providing a specialised environment for non-human primate research. The Society supports the report's call for a more integrated approach to non-human primate research in the UK. We welcome the development of a national strategic approach for the use of non-human primates in research, to be led by Government, an important part of which will be the development of specialised research centres ('centres of excellence'). The strategy should be developed in consultation with key stakeholders and we would welcome the opportunity to contribute. In the meantime we would like to see support and funding available to improve existing facilities where required.

Recommendation 15 All bodies involved in engaging the public around issues of science and medicine, including the Government, should ensure that the whole field of research utilising animals, including non-human primates, has a major place in their future programmes. Given the extremely rapid pace of

development in the biological sciences, mechanisms for regular meetings between scientists and the media should be further explored.

The Society supports the need for greater dialogue with both the public and the media in all areas of science and medicine, including the use of non-human primates in research. Initiatives such as the Science Media Centre briefings have started to create a dialogue with the media.

Recommendation 16 The bodies that sponsored this study should establish a mechanism for monitoring progress in achieving the aims of these recommendations over the next few years.

The Society is committed to following up the recommendations made in the Weatherall report and will scrutinise progress, with the other sponsors, within three years of publishing this response.

References

Royal Society (2006) *Statement of the Royal Society's position on the use of animals in research*. Royal Society: London. Available online at <http://www.royalsoc.ac.uk/document.asp?tip=0&id=5223>

Weatherall (2006) *The use of non-human primates in research*. Available online at: <http://www.royalsoc.ac.uk/page.asp?changes=0&latest=1&id=5698>

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Annex: Consensus statement from the sponsors of the Weatherall Report 'The use of non-human primates in research'

We thank Sir David Weatherall FRS FMedSci and the members of the working group for their report '*The use of non-human primates in research*'. This report provides a timely and unique synthesis of information across a diverse and fragmented evidence base. In reviewing the areas where non-human primate research is focused, the report examines the nature of the research questions involved, their broad scientific and medical importance and the current state of progress in other approaches.

The report identifies a strong case for maintaining work on non-human primates for defined research questions of particular biological or medical importance. We will continue to support the use of non-human primates for carefully selected research questions, according to a rigorous assessment of the welfare of the animals, the potential scientific and medical benefits and the availability of other approaches in each case.

Our organisations are committed to following up the report's recommendations and our individual responses outline the steps we will take towards their implementation. We support the report's call for a more integrated approach to UK non-human primate research. We welcome the development of a national strategic approach for the use of non-human primates in research, to be led by Government and bringing together government departments, scientists, industry, animal welfare organisations, regulators, research funders and other stakeholders. This initiative will consider improvements in networks between existing facilities and the establishment of specialised centres ('centres of excellence'), among other issues. We are ready to work with Government, the NC3Rs and others to develop this strategy as soon as is reasonably feasible.

This report provides both a better documented basis for future debate on the use of non-human primates in research and a stimulus for action. We will continue our work with partners and stakeholders to implement the report's recommendations and to scrutinise progress, particularly the development of a national strategic approach for the use of non-human primates, over the coming months and years.