

THE UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

THE COUNCIL

Annual report of the Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Committee, 2016-17

This is the third annual report from the Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Committee, which was reconstituted as a committee of the Council from the 2014-15 academic year. The report reminds the Council of the University's policy on animal use, summarises the regulatory framework, and includes data on the number and species of animals used during the year.

There are no issues of concern to draw to the Council's attention: the Committee is positive about standards of animal care and welfare, there were no infringements of the relevant Act during the year, and the Home Office evidently regards Leeds as a low-risk establishment.

Background

1. The University carries out medical and biological research using animals in accordance with the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 (as amended in 2012), normally known as ASPA. The following policy statement – which includes some minor editorial changes made in 2017 for ease of reading – summarises the University's overall position on such research:

The University of Leeds carries out research using animals to improve the health and welfare of human beings and animals, to provide a better understanding of the animals themselves, and for educational purposes.

We use animals only when there are no alternatives, and are firmly committed to the replacement, reduction and refinement of the use of animals in research (the 'three Rs').

Research involving animals is driving fundamental advances in understanding, treating and curing a range of health problems including cancer, heart disease, diabetes and mental illness, thus reducing unnecessary suffering. In addition, our researchers continue to develop new strands of thinking to tackle future issues.

We use alternatives to animals wherever possible– including computer modelling, synthetic tissue culture, cell and molecular biology, and research with human subjects – and we are actively involved in developing alternatives to animal tissue use.

However, these alternatives cannot yet properly reproduce the complex biological characteristics of human beings and animals, and nor can they replicate the study of animals in their natural environment.

Whenever animals do have to be used as part of a study, they are treated with dignity, and cared for by professionally qualified staff. All research programmes using animals are carried out to high standards and with recognition that living species are involved.

Research programmes using animals operate within a strict framework of legal controls. Projects must also be approved by an ethical review committee, and researchers are trained in the ethical dimensions of their work and in standards of animal care, welfare and accommodation.

2. The regulatory framework was summarised in the Committee's first annual report (CL/14/86), available on the intranet or from the Secretariat on request. In a nutshell

Reviews of existing project licences

9. As well as considering applications for new project licences, the Committee also carries out mid-term and final reviews of existing project licences to review progress and identify any animal welfare issues that may have arisen during the work. These are in-house exercises except in cases (a) where a licence is for education and training, and (b) where a licence includes procedures which are classified as 'severe'. In such cases, the University is obliged under Section 5B of the Act to return formal retrospective assessments to the Home Office (at intervals specified by the Home Office). Written reports from the licensees are required for all mid-term and final reviews, and, in addition, licensees are expected to attend the Committee in cases when a report has to be made to the Home Office.
10. During 2016-17, six mid-term reviews of existing project licences and two final project licence reviews were carried out. In the event, no material concerns emerged.
11. Five formal retrospective assessments were conducted, in accordance with Section 5B of the Act. Again, no material concerns emerged. Reports have been submitted to the Home Office on each of them, and responses from the Home Office are awaited.

Animal welfare

12. There were no infringements of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act during 2016-17.
13. Regular inspections by the Named Veterinary Surgeon and Named Animal Care and Welfare Officers identified no animal welfare concerns. The Home Office Inspector inspected the animal facilities on three separate occasions and raised no concerns relating to animal welfare.

Condition 18 reports

14. During the year ten 'condition 18' reports from six project licences were submitted to the Home Office to report an increase in the severity experienced by an animal greater than authorised on the relevant project licence. (There were twelve such reports in 2015-16.) In each case the Home Office accepted the explanation offered, and no further action was taken.

Assurance

15. As usual, the Committee has during the year reviewed its terms of reference, and has satisfied itself that it has access to sufficient information and advice to enable it to assure itself that it is discharging its remit appropriately.

Openness

16. As foreshadowed in last year's report, arrangements have been made to publish on the University's website [www.leeds.ac.uk/animalresearch] the minutes of the Committee, statistics on animal use at Leeds, and accessible lay summaries of new project licences granted to staff at Leeds.

Benchmarking

17. The Committee continues to be represented at inter-institution events to share best practice, and it has this year benchmarked itself against advice contained in a publication *The AWERB as a 'forum for discussion'*. Arrangements at Leeds appear on this basis to be broadly consonant with best practice in the sector.

New initiatives

18. A new MRI scanner has been installed in the _____ unit that will enhance our capabilities for imaging tumour-bearing animals.
19. A new _____ was authorised by the Home Office in May 2017 for *in vivo* experiments in animals. This facility was opened officially on 13 July 2017.

Unit Management

20. A new IT system is currently being introduced to provide safe, secure and comprehensive management information on animal use at the University. The new system, which is scheduled to be fully effective during 2017-18, will help the University to discharge its regulatory responsibilities.

Training

21. The University runs mandatory licensee training courses – accredited by the Universities' Accreditation Group² and recognised by the Home Office – for anyone wishing to apply for a personal or project licence and anyone wishing to undertake the humane killing of any animal protected by the Act. The courses include training and relevant legislation and in the ethics of animal research.
22. Three courses were run in 2016-17, in October, January and March respectively. A total of 43 staff and students were trained; the species covered were mice and rats.

Work at the University Farm

23. Apart from occasional blood sampling, research involving the commercial pig herd at the _____ does not fall within the scope of the ASPA. Essentially, the research is non-invasive, mainly involving studies of pig diet. The welfare of the pigs has to be assessed through a framework set by the Animal and Plant Health Authority (APHA). Although the welfare of the pig herd does not therefore strictly fall within the jurisdiction of the Committee, it has been agreed this session that an annual report will be made available to the Committee from a veterinary surgeon engaged by _____ (a vet who specialises in work associated with pig production).
24. The first such report was made available to the Committee in November 2016. The veterinary surgeon confirmed that the building and equipment provision 'is of a high quality' and that husbandry practices 'ensure the highest standards of pig welfare are maintained'. The vet concludes that _____ complies fully with all relevant welfare legislation, codes of practice and relevant quality assurance standards'.

22 September 2017

² The Universities' Accreditation Group is one of three bodies recognised by the Home Office for the accreditation and quality audit of mandatory Home Office licensee training courses in the UK. The others are the Royal Society of Biology and the Scottish Accreditation Board