



PHASING OUT LAB ANIMALS



Around 3 million scientific procedures are carried out using animals in the UK each year¹. A further 1.8 million laboratory animals are bred and killed, for example so their organs or tissues can be used in research². This means that UK life sciences currently impacts on around 5 million animals every year. Animals used in research and testing can and do experience pain and distress - which can even be 'severe'.

76% of UK adults are very concerned about the use of animals in scientific research and testing³

The RSPCA believes that much more could be done to avoid or reduce the use and suffering of lab animals. We support the principle of the 3Rs, as well as calling for more effective challenging of whether, and how animals are used.

The 3 Rs stand for Replacement, Reduction and Refinement.

Replacement is the principal goal for the RSPCA. It refers to methods which avoid or replace animal use - exactly what would be achieved through a 'phase out' of animals in labs and 'phase in' of non-animal technologies.

Reduction means ensuring that the minimum number of animals is used to answer the research question, using good experimental design to avoid wasting animals.

Refinement refers to reducing suffering and improving welfare throughout animals' lives, including during scientific procedures, housing, husbandry and care.

Not all animal experiments are for 'essential medical research'. Many animals are used in the development and testing of products ranging from food additives to pesticides, and in fundamental or basic research. Every animal experiment raises its own ethical, scientific and animal welfare issues. In addition to concerns around the impacts on lab animals, there is increasing awareness about the scientific limitations of many animal experiments.

We want to reach a point where no animal, anywhere, suffers in the name of science. Many people within the scientific community say they want to achieve this too, and institutions and companies involved in research and testing are increasingly making statements about their aspirations to transition to non-animal science. The task of phasing out animals in labs is a significant challenge, but we, and the public, believe this is a future we must strive for.

77% of UK adults agree that the UK Government should commit to phasing out the use of animals in scientific research and testing³

We know that the transition to non-animal science will take time, as there is still a need to further develop new technologies and ways of using these. But without a strategic ambition and a serious commitment towards achieving this goal from the UK Government, the UK's progress towards a phase-out will take even longer, and animals will continue to suffer.

79% of UK adults agree that more needs to be done to speed up the development and uptake of alternatives to replace animal experiments³

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-of-scientific-procedures-on-living-animals>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-of-scientific-procedures-on-living-animals#additional-statistics-for-2017>

³ Savanta Comres Polling, April 2022

We are seeing progress in a number of areas of science, but it's not happening fast enough. We cannot achieve the milestone of a phase-out without the support of everyone involved, including MPs and the scientific community.

Phasing-out animal experiments, coupled with phasing-in advanced, non-animal technologies (NATs) and new approach methodologies (NAMs), clearly offers ethical and animal welfare benefits - but support for this is also an important investment in UK science and in the UK economy.



Recent years have seen new technological advances that are offering increasing potential and opportunities for replacing current animal use in some specific tests and areas. For example, advanced *in vitro* models, such as organoids and organs-on-chips⁴, are increasingly available in biomedical research, and a rising number of approaches which avoid the use of animals are being introduced to assess the safety of chemicals⁵. The global non-animal alternatives testing market is growing annually and is expected to be worth an estimated \$2.6 billion by 2026⁶.

But despite the huge transformative opportunities and potential benefits offered by these new technologies and approaches to replace animal use, the current UK Government currently invests less than 0.13% of its research and innovation budget directly towards their development⁷. This is a real missed opportunity and the UK is in serious danger of being left behind by the vision and leadership of others in Europe and the USA. We believe that now is the time for the UK Government to increase its ambitions and commit to work harder to help facilitate a faster transition away from the use of animals in experiments.

The European Union has already clearly stated its “*conviction that animal testing should be phased out*”. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in the USA has also launched its own plan to ‘*eliminate the need for animal testing*’. Since leaving the EU, no such comparative statement has been made by the UK Government.

What the RSPCA is calling for

We want the UK Government to commit to the principle and ambition of phasing out animals in labs and phasing in non-animal technologies and approaches, and to help lead the development of plans to achieve this.

Such initiatives are not about ‘banning’ or stopping important research - they are about reducing and avoiding the negative impacts on animals, improving science, and enabling the UK to exploit new economic opportunities. Taking a leading role in achieving a transition to non-animal science will help to drive innovation and growth in the UK, and help illustrate that the UK is serious about being a science ‘superpower’.

As a politician, please support our call by asking the Minister, George Freeman MP, to publicly commit the Government to this phase out and to set out a detailed plan aimed at achieving this.

For further information please contact Claire McParland claire.mcparland@rspca.org.uk

⁴ e.g. <https://www.cpm.qmul.ac.uk/emulate>

⁵ <https://www.unilever.com/news/news-search/2020/ending-animal-testing-behind-the-scenes-at-our-research-hub/>

⁶ <https://www.researchandmarkets.com/reports/5515092/non-animal-alternatives-testing-global-market>

⁷ Based on a [UK budget for research and innovation](#) of c.£8bn a year; and the Government’s funding for the [NC3Rs](#) - part of whose activities are aimed at ‘replacing’ animals - being c.£10m per year, via UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).