

A faster transition away from animal experiments

Key Information

- UK life sciences impacts on around 4.5 million lab animals every year. Animals used in research and testing can and do experience pain and distress - which can even be 'severe'.
- In recent years there has been encouraging progress in developing some of the needed non-animal technologies (NATs) and new approach methodologies (NAMs) and we have seen clear statements of intent in several countries that recognise the economic, scientific and ethical benefits in leading the pack on this.
- In February 2024, the then Government Minister announced increased investment, and that a new detailed plan would be produced for speeding up the development, and support the uptake, of non-animal technologies in research and testing. The RSPCA warmly welcomed this.
- 8 in 10 adults believe that more needs to be done to speed up the development and uptake of alternatives to animal experiments.
- The RSPCA believes that the UK Government should make a clear public statement supporting the delivery of an ambition of phasing-out the use of animals in research and phasing-in the use of non-animal alternatives.
- A Strategic Advisory Board (SAB) should be set up, including members from industry, academia, regulatory bodies and NGOs to ensure a broad range of expertise and viewpoints. The SAB should produce a clear, co-ordinated and integrated transition roadmap outlining specific actions, goals and milestones to help enable the adoption of new non-animal methods across all areas where animals are currently used.

Background

UK life sciences currently impact around 4.5 million lab animals every year¹. Animals used in research and testing can and do experience pain and distress - which can even be 'severe'. The RSPCA believes that much more could be done to avoid or reduce the use and suffering of lab animals. We support the fullest implementation of the 3Rs², as well as calling for more effective challenging of whether, and how animals are used.

In recent years there has been encouraging progress in developing some of the needed non-animal technologies (NATs) and new approach methodologies (NAMs). For example, advanced *in vitro*

¹ According to [official data released by the Home Office](#), 2.76 million scientific procedures were carried out using animals in the UK in 2022. In addition, around 1.8 million lab animals are bred and then killed each year, for example so that their organs and tissues can be used in research, or because they are deemed to be 'surplus'.

² REPLACEMENT of animals - by using humane methods which avoid or replace the use of animals; REDUCTION - reducing the animal numbers to the minimum needed to achieve the scientific objectives; REFINEMENT - improving experiments, housing and care to reduce suffering and improve welfare throughout animals' lives.

models, such as organs-on-chips³ and organoids are increasingly available in biomedical research. More approaches that avoid animal use are being introduced to assess the safety of chemicals⁴.

On 19th February 2024, the then Minister for Science, Research and Innovation, announced⁵ increased investment, and that a new detailed plan with cross-Government and wide stakeholder input would be produced, to speed up the development and support the uptake of non-animal technologies and approaches in science. This is something the RSPCA has been calling for and we welcomed this commitment and are keen to work with the new Government to move this forward.

The use of animals in science continues to be an issue of significant public interest and concern. Everyone should be able to agree that it is desirable to reach a point where important science is done without causing pain, suffering, distress or lasting harm to sentient animals. The UK public concurs - 8 in 10 adults agree that more needs to be done to speed up the development and uptake of alternatives to animal experiments⁶.

RSPCA's Position and Recommendations

The Plan announced on 19 February 2024 was a good step forward - but further commitments are needed to ensure continued momentum, with the widest possible positive impact:

- **The new Government should clearly adopt the principle that phasing out the use of animals in research and testing, and phasing in non-animal alternatives, is a desirable and achievable goal.**
- **The Plan must proactively provide direction on this and encourage an ambitious approach, focusing minds and driving practical initiatives for making progress.**
- **The Government should establish an independent Strategic Advisory Board (SAB), supported by key stakeholders and tasked with developing a clear, co-ordinated and integrated national Transition Roadmap ['the Plan'] outlining specific actions, goals and milestones for optimising innovation of non-animal methods and for overcoming barriers to their adoption. This should cover all areas in science where animals are currently used. The SAB will also prioritise the research and testing areas where resources and efforts aimed at avoiding and replacing the use of animals should be targeted⁷.**

³ www.cpm.qmul.ac.uk/emulate

⁴ www.unilever.com/news/news-search/2020/ending-animal-testing-behind-the-scenes-at-our-research-hub

⁵ [Hansard, 19 February 2024, 163WH-184WH](#)

⁶ <https://savanta.com/knowledge-centre/poll/rspca-animal-testing-poll>

⁷ NB. the European Commission is currently engaged in a similar process - for example, a workshop of experts and stakeholders was held in December 2023 to begin work on 'a roadmap towards phasing out animal testing for chemical safety assessments'