

Understanding Animal Research one step at a time

Understanding Animal Research (UAR) is the UK's only organization devoted solely to helping the public understand why and how animals are used in scientific research and to maintaining a supportive operating environment for such research in this country. Formed in January 2009, following a merger between the Research Defence Society and the Coalition for Medical Progress, UAR has a small staff of around 10 people and a Council of 12, chaired by Professor Jeremy Pearson, which oversees our governance. We also have an Expert Network of individuals from across the bioscience sector and related stakeholder organizations that help to inform our work.

Wendy Jarrett

(Understanding
Animal Research)

UAR is a membership organization and we help our members in several ways. Our policy, education and communications work on behalf of the sector as a whole aims to prevent any reduction in the UK public's acceptance of the use of animals in research and maintain the favourable operating environment that exists in this country at the moment. Our work on communicating the facts about animal research over the last eight years has helped to reduce the level of illegal animal rights activity in the UK to an almost negligible level, and since the publication of the Concordat on Openness on Animal Research in May 2014 we are now able to have a much more nuanced conversation with the public about the reality of animal research, its benefits and its limitations.

Our Policy team monitors the main UK political parties to ensure that animal research does not become

a party political issue. In the run-up to the 2015 General Election we worked with several parties on their early draft manifestos to help them understand the implications of any proposed changes to the existing legislation covering bioscientific research. For the 2017 election, we maintained this effort and ensured that no main party manifesto proposed significant changes to the laws on animal research. We also work closely with the UK Bioscience Sector Coalition, the Home Office and the Office for Life Sciences within BEIS on all relevant policy issues.

Our schools programme has been running for nearly a decade and now organises more than 300 talks in UK secondary schools each year. This equates to around two talks each day of the week in term-time. We train and support researchers and animal techs to go into schools to talk about their work. Our team also gives talks in



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schools and runs workshops and summer schools for larger groups of students, covering the facts on animal research and the ethical dilemmas inherent in this work.

We run two main websites: www.understandinganimalresearch.org.uk and www.animalresearch.info. These provide written information, photographs, videos, infographics, leaflets and fact sheets for the public and for our members to use in their own communications. We also run a small website providing factual reports on instances of animal rights extremism around the world: www.animalrightsextremism.info. Happily, this does not have a great deal of content and does not need to be updated very regularly. Social media takes up a large portion of our communications work: we have accounts on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Reddit, LinkedIn and YouTube where we maintain a conversation with the public about why and how animals are used in research in this country.

A major project for us this year has been the development of our www.labanimaltour.org, a 360 degree tour around four UK animal research facilities, supplemented by videos and interviews with researchers and animal care staff.

Support for individual member organizations varies according to each member's needs, but includes specialist consultancy on planning applications and the building of new biomedical research facilities; round-the-clock media relations support in the case of any claims made by animal rights groups; help with media releases and broadcast interviews and advice on

handling Freedom of Information requests. Anybody working within a member organization of UAR can contact us for free help and advice, as can members of Learned Societies, such as the Biochemical Society, that are members of UAR.

We also run a comprehensive programme of training workshops covering various aspects of communicating about animal research. These include formal media training for those who would like to become media spokespeople on this issue; utilizing social media to communicate about research; preparation for debating with those opposed to animal research and preparing to talk to school children about bioscientific research. We offer four free places on these workshops for each of our member organizations each year and are always open to creating bespoke training sessions for our members. Biochemical Society members who would like to take advantage of our training workshops should contact the Society's Scientific Policy Officer, Emma Sykes (emma.sykes@biochemistry.org).

One of our most important pieces of work over the past few years has been the development and implementation of the Concordat on Openness on Animal Research in the UK, currently signed by 116 organizations. This was prompted by a drop of ten percentage points in public acceptance of medical research using animals, as evidenced by the Ipsos Mori public opinion poll in 2012. It was clear that the sector needed to do something radical in order to rebuild the trust and acceptance that had been lost. The result was that a broad spectrum of organizations including Learned Societies, Universities, medical research charities, Research Councils and commercial organizations have committed to taking practical steps to provide more information and public engagement opportunities. UAR publishes an annual report on progress on implementing the Concordat and we hold an annual awards ceremony to recognise and celebrate the good work that is being done to help the public to access more balanced information on animal research. More information on the Concordat is available at <http://concordatopenness.org.uk>.

The year 2014 was a busy one for UAR, in addition to our other work, as we created the European Animal Research Association (EARA), following requests for help from colleagues in Italy, Germany and Belgium. EARA works to set up organizations that help the public to understand animal research in local markets and is also recognised by the European Commission as a pan-European organization representing the bioscience sector. ■

If you would like further information about Understanding Animal Research and what we do, please do get in touch (wjarrett@uar.org.uk).