

Queen's University Belfast

Policy on the Use of Animals in Research and Teaching

1. Principles of the University in Guiding Animal Research

Queen's University is committed to the highest standards of humane care and treatment in any necessary research involving animals. Stringent procedures are in place to meet this commitment and to ensure strict compliance with relevant laws and guidelines. The overriding considerations are that:

- The University conducts research on animals only when it will contribute to advancing knowledge that could improve the health and welfare of animals or human beings, or provide a better understanding of the animals themselves.
- The University conducts studies involving animals on the basis of well-defined scientific objectives and the advancement of knowledge, giving due consideration to the welfare of the animals, and avoiding unnecessary duplication.
- The University assesses progress made in the licensed work to ensure that continuation is ethically justified.
- Animals are transported, housed and cared for by dedicated and trained staff under professional supervision to ensure the best health and wellbeing of the animal, with provisions for environmental enrichment.
- Named Veterinary Surgeons are available at all times for consultation, care and attendance.
- The University is committed to the responsible use of animals in all its activities. All University personnel who supervise or undertake activities involving animals are trained to carry out their duties in a responsible and humane manner.

2. The Need to Continue the Use of Animals in Biomedical Research

Queen's University Belfast, in agreement with the majority of the research community and the public, affirms that research using animals has made, and continues to make, a vital contribution to improving human and animal health. In particular, it has enhanced the understanding, treatment and cure of cancer, cardiovascular disease, blindness, neurodegenerative and infectious diseases.

Queen's University Belfast is actively involved in world-leading research into these conditions. Queen's researchers work to the highest standards and use the most relevant research models available. Work on animals is only part of any appropriate research programme, and non-animal techniques such as cell and tissue culture, molecular biology, computer modelling and the study of samples from human patients are used extensively.

The University is actively developing such methods and ensures that animal procedures are replaced with non-animal techniques wherever possible. At present, however, some animal work must continue for further advances to be made in cases where alternative tests do not yet exist, such as the accurate representation of complexities of biological systems. Therefore the University only uses animals in research where there are no alternatives.

3. Control of Animal Research

Research on living animals is regulated by the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, through a stringent licensing system operated by the Home Office, devolved in Northern Ireland to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS). This Act controls what can be done, where and by whom. A project licence is granted to allow a programme of work only if the Home Secretary considers that the potential benefits to humankind or other animals outweigh likely animal suffering.

Furthermore, the research establishment must hold a certificate of designation, and each person involved in animal work requires a personal licence. Those carrying out procedures under the Act must undergo formal training, and are supervised until deemed competent. Compliance is monitored by several members of staff, including the Certificate Holder, the nominated University Veterinary Surgeon and those responsible for the daily care and welfare of animals. The DHSSPS Inspector also makes regular (often unannounced) visits to check for compliance and to advise licensees.

All projects involving animal research are subject to the University's formal ethical review process, prior to authorisation by the DHSSPS. The ethical review committee includes lay representation as well as veterinary and animal care expertise. A rigorous approach is taken on all issues, but particularly those relating to animal welfare and accommodation. The University aims to only support animal use within sustained research programmes that are of international quality, and in receipt of external funding following scientific peer-review. However, the need for small pilot projects to demonstrate feasibility is also recognised. All such work is carried out only when a licence issued by the Home Secretary is granted after weighing its potential benefits against the effects on the animals concerned.

In accordance with the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, research must also be based on a clear set of principles:

- To use the minimum number of animals (Reduction);
- To use alternatives wherever possible (Replacement);
- To strive for the highest possible standard of animal care, use and welfare (Refinement).

Only when the panel is satisfied that the proposed work has addressed the above principles and that any cost to the animals is minimised, does the project go to the Home Office for approval. Hence, projects are typically scrutinised at three different stages:

- At the time of application for external funding from Research Councils or other research funding agencies.
- At the time of Local Ethical Review by the University's Panel.
- At the DHSSPS for final approval.

The objective is to ensure that the high-quality research carried out on laboratory animals is conducted humanely, and only when there is no alternative.

4. **Use of Animals in Teaching**

Procedures are not carried out on living animals for educational purposes. Some fundamental principles in biology and physiology are most appropriately taught using functioning body tissues. Dissection and in vitro experiments are carried out using tissues isolated from animals following euthanasia by methods approved under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. Wherever possible, animal use is limited by replacement with appropriate educational alternatives, such as interactive software.

Links

Home Office: <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/science-research/animal-research/>
Research Defence Society: <http://www.understandinganimalresearch.org.uk/> National
Centre for the Replacement, Refinement and Reduction of Animals in Research
<http://www.nc3rs.org.uk/>.