

**BBSRC, MRC and Wellcome Trust response to the Weatherall Report  
Recommendations  
June 2007**

**Recommendation 1**

There is a strong scientific case for the carefully regulated use of non-human primates where there are no other means to address clearly-defined questions of particular biological or medical importance.

*We agree with this statement.*

**Recommendation 2**

In the fields of research considered in this study, namely communicable disease, neuroscience and reproductive biology, there is a strong scientific case for maintaining the use of non-human primates in some aspects of this work, at least for the immediate future.

*We agree with this statement, but would wish to add “developmental biology” (as under Recommendation 3, below).*

**Recommendation 3**

The major specialist organisations involved in research fields that utilise non-human primates, particularly neuroscience, communicable disease, and reproductive and developmental biology, should regularly collate information about evolving research technology in their fields, with particular respect to the need for non-human primates. This information should be disseminated to funding bodies, ethics committees and regulatory agencies.

*We would welcome information from the major specialist organisations about evolving research technologies and their relevance to the operation of the 3Rs, to feed into our peer review processes.*

**Recommendation 4**

As part of their ongoing programmes to assess the outcomes of their research, the major funding organisations should undertake a systematic review of the outcome of all their research using non-human primates supported over the last decade.

*We support the proposal that major funding organisations should undertake a systematic review of the outcomes of their research over the past decade. The BBSRC, MRC and the Wellcome Trust are committed to undertake a review that will aim to assess the “overall efficiency and impact of research of this kind” (p137, 3rd para).*

**Recommendation 5**

UK research funding organisations, both governmental and charitable, should continue to take every opportunity to encourage and fund research into developing alternatives to the use of non-human primates for both research and toxicology.

Funders should expand their support for research into refining non-human primate research practices, particularly in the behavioural neurosciences.

*BBSRC, MRC and the Wellcome Trust already contribute to the National Centre for the 3Rs (NC3Rs) and we see the NC3Rs as a central focus for achieving the aims of this recommendation. BBSRC, MRC and the Wellcome Trust would of course also welcome applications for funding on this topic in response mode.*

### **Recommendation 6**

Retrospective reporting on the severity of procedures for non-human primates, as recommended by the LASA/APC pilot study, should be introduced as soon as possible.

*This is primarily a matter for the Home Office. However, we would be willing to engage with the Home Office regarding this issue.*

### **Recommendation 7**

Improvements in the supervised continuous training of research workers in non-human primate research should be instituted.

*This recommendation refers to animal welfare. We will undertake to discuss this recommendation with NC3Rs and the MRC/Wellcome Trust funded Centre for Macaques (CFM) and, in particular, to consider the type of additional training required. We will exercise our responsibilities as funders to encourage universities (as well as our own research establishments, where relevant), to implement additional continuous training of technicians and researchers.*

### **Recommendation 8**

Scientific journals should include details of animal welfare and steps taken to ameliorate suffering in all published papers that involve non-human primate research.

*We note with interest the activities of the Nuffield Council on Bioethics and the Royal Society in regard to this matter. As funders we will encourage our researchers, through our guidance to applicants, to include advances in the 3Rs in their submitted manuscripts.*

### **Recommendation 9**

Work should be accelerated towards improving and applying current best-practice regarding housing of non-human primates, including minimum cage size, an emphasis on the avoidance of single housing, how cage fittings and conditions can be accommodated to the purpose of individual experiments, and a better assessment of the advantages of outside access and visual stimulation.

*The NC3Rs has issued guidance<sup>1</sup> on this. On behalf of BBSRC, MRC and the Wellcome Trust, the NC3Rs now reviews all applications to the three funders that involve primates, and provides comments on the issues above. Any matters of concern are explored with the applicants and satisfactory answers sought. Grants will not be awarded, even if the proposals are otherwise scientifically sound, if the*

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<sup>1</sup> See: [www.nc3rs.org.uk/page.asp?id=277](http://www.nc3rs.org.uk/page.asp?id=277)

*facilities do not meet the required standard, or if there is not a clear plan for rapid improvement.*

#### **Recommendation 10**

Further efforts should be made to improve interactions between regulatory bodies at national and international levels and between regulatory bodies and the scientific community. Given the current speed of research in the biological sciences, new approaches to improve these interactions are urgently required.

*Whilst this recommendation is not primarily aimed at funders, we support the need for such interactions and are willing to be involved in particular relevant activities.*

#### **Recommendation 11**

Steps should be taken to make the results of toxicological studies involving non-human primates publicly available, in the same way as initiatives to register and publish the results of all human clinical trials.

*Whilst this recommendation is not aimed at funders, we support the idea of making toxicological studies involving primates more readily available to the scientific community.*

#### **Recommendation 12**

It would be premature to make firm recommendations on how a reduction in the number of non-human primates used in regulatory toxicology might be achieved before the completion of the NC3Rs/ABPI study. However, we urge government and other stakeholders to act on the recommendations of this study, and in the light of its findings, to re-examine responses to the 2002 APC report.

*Whilst this recommendation is not aimed at funders, we would support moves by the Government and the pharmaceutical industry to follow-up this recommendation.*

#### **Recommendation 13**

Concerns that costs and harassment by activists are forcing scientists and research companies to pursue non-human primate work overseas require urgent examination by the relevant UK research funding and regulatory bodies.

*For BBSRC, MRC and the Wellcome Trust, the cost of the animals is not the key factor in assessing the value of proposals involving primates. Although the costs of this type of research are high, the funders will meet this cost where the research question is of justifiable significance. We shall make this clear in our guidance to applicants. We are concerned that fear of harassment by animal rights activists might be influencing the decisions of individual researchers. The funders support the activities of the Research Defence Society Resource Centre which provides advice to universities and others undertaking research on animals on, for example, transparency and security.*

#### **Recommendation 14**

The major funding bodies, together with government, other stakeholders, scientists, primatologists, vets and welfare specialists, should give careful consideration to the creation of UK centres of excellence for non-human primate research.

*The Report states “All the stakeholders involved should work together in formulating a national strategic plan for non-human primate research. This should address issues of supply and demand in the short and longer term and include a re-evaluation of the organisation of non-human primate research facilities. In this respect, we urge consideration of the creation of UK non-human primate research centres of excellence, perhaps starting with the development of ‘virtual’ networks between existing facilities”.*

*We support the development of a national primate strategy that considers the issue of the creation of centres of excellence. We stand ready to work with Government, the NC3Rs, other funders and our research community to work towards implementing this as soon as is reasonably feasible.*

### **Recommendation 15**

All bodies involved in engaging the public around issues of science and medicine, including the UK government, should ensure that the whole field of research utilising animals, including non-human primates, has a major place in their future programmes. Given the extremely rapid pace of development in the biological sciences, mechanisms for regular meetings between scientists and the media should be further explored.

*All the funders are firmly committed to engaging the public on this complex issue. Examples of some of the many activities already being undertaken are:*

- *Supporting and working with the Coalition for Medical Progress and the NC3Rs*
- *Working with major UK journalism schools (through the CMP) to provide training in covering the issue*
- *Producing booklets aimed at the public, such as ‘Primates in Medical Research’ (MRC/WT)*
- *Funding the “Every Breath” play (WT) that specifically aims to engage teenagers in the debate*
- *Encouraging our scientists to speak about animal research in public fora, including schools and open days, and to contribute to responsible media coverage of this issue*
- *Running and contributing to various media training courses for our scientists*
- *Holding a one-day workshop for university press officers on handling controversial issues including the use of animals in research.*
- *Advising the media on articles and programmes about animals in research*
- *Ensuring in media releases and annual review publications that where the research has involved animals, this fact is mentioned*

*We shall explore further mechanisms for regular meetings between scientists and the media; these might best be structured around particular newsworthy topics.*

### **Recommendation 16**

The bodies that sponsored this study should establish a mechanism for monitoring progress in achieving the aims of these recommendations over the next few years.

*We have established a cross-funder group that will meet regularly and in doing so, we will review our actions in responding to these recommendations continuously, and in a structured way in not more than three years (by June 2010).*