

COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY: RESEARCH INVOLVING ANIMALS

1. Introduction

This paper outlines a strategy for developing the way the University communicates animal research activity, in layman's terms, to both the wider public and the University community. It builds upon previous work by colleagues in the Division of Communications and Marketing and the Faculty of Biology, Medicine and Health, which includes an award winning website. Manchester is the only University to publish non-technical summaries of every licensed study, as well as anonymised minutes of Animal Welfare and Ethics Review Body meetings. A pioneering 360 video depicting the BSF will also be available on the website in the near future.

Over the years, greater openness in research involving animals has been held back for fear of individual researchers and other staff being targeted by animal rights extremists. This has meant information and images on animal research has been monopolised by hostile and partisan organisations, allowing the spread of misconceptions and bad science. The Concordat on openness in animal research, signed by 72 Higher Education Institutions, bio-industry companies, charities and research councils in 2014, including Manchester, is an opportunity to counter this.

Whilst the University is committed to more openness about its animal research, a key principle of our approach is that no scientist should feel under any obligation to take part in any communications activity if they do not want to.

2. Objectives

We are already one of the most transparent and accessible establishments in the UK on the issue of animal research. This strategy will capture this work and allow us to take it forwards by:

- Communicating our highly ethical research environment, where we practise world-class standards of animal welfare.
- Communicating the outcomes of our world leading research involving animals.
- Dealing with the threat of misinformation and rumour before it is allowed to develop.
- Ensuring our staff are able to communicate freely if they want to, but in a safe and responsible way.
- Embedding the principles of the 3Rs – reduction, replacement and refinement - into our communications. The 3Rs have provide a national framework for performing more humane animal research and are embedded in legislation and regulations on research involving animals.
- Creating a communications structure and process so that activities can be efficiently coordinated and carried out.

- Ensuring that grammar, language and style used is appropriate and sensitive.
- Protecting our staff at all times.
- Ensuring that queries from the public and media are dealt with promptly.

3. Target Audiences

Internal

- Staff and students, to improve awareness. In particular, prospective and current students who study anatomy and physiology, who will need reassurance and information about our high welfare standards and world class facilities.
- The research community, so they are aware of our high welfare standards and world class facilities to encourage them to undertake this sort of work.
- Senior colleagues who are responsible for University policy and direction.

External

- Journalists, who lack knowledge, experience or understanding of research involving animals.
- Politicians and policy makers who lack knowledge, experience or understanding of research involving animals
- The local community, especially schools, to improve awareness
- The public to improve awareness.

4. Delivery

The strategy will be delivered through the following delivery channels:

- **Website:** Our website, successfully developed last year, will form the core of our dedicated communications and engagement on the issue of research involving animals
- **Multimedia:** Video and infographics are powerful tools for conveying complex information and ideas.
- **Case studies:** Successful research projects, patient experiences and other case studies are an important way to encourage more researchers to engage with this work as well as to demonstrate audience our ethical conduct and concern for welfare of animals.
- **Media engagement and training:** Local and regional reporters- as well as general reporters on national newspapers - by the nature of their role are less familiar with the issues and so the danger of misreporting is higher here.
- **Internal communications:** Working with the Faculty of Biology, Medicine and Health in partnership with the Division of Communications and Marketing.
- **Engagement activity:** Capturing work such as school visits effectively and safely.

5. Safety

When liaising with animal research, staff and spokespeople need to be safeguarded at all times. To achieve this, the University will:

- Abide by the principle that no scientist should feel under any obligation to take part in any communications activity if they do not want to.
- Anonymize names of individuals at their request, so that they cannot be identified either directly nor indirectly – and take advice from our compliance and risk colleagues where necessary.
- Identify individuals who are happy to speak openly
- Ensure all mentions of research involving animals are seen by the heads of the Biological Services Facility, before they are published
- Ensure correct use of language. Phrases such as ‘animal models’ and graphic descriptions of surgical procedures can be difficult for the public, so a degree of sensitivity is essential. To achieve this, all copy, videos and images, must be signed off by colleagues, such as the head of the Biological Research Faculty or the communications lead.

6. Implementation

A communications plan will need time and resource to deliver it and will rely on input from communications colleagues across the University. To achieve that end, the animals research communications lead and PSS leadership team will coordinate the work of communications colleagues who are able to put together case studies and capture engagement activity, as well as dealing with email and telephone enquiries.