

P-06-1497: End Welsh Govt funding of animal experiments and divert funds to modern, human-relevant technologies.

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Petition title: End Welsh Govt funding of animal experiments and divert funds to modern, human-relevant technologies.

Text of petition: Over 39,000 animal procedures took place in Wales in 2022, an increase on 2021. However polls show most people oppose animal research, favouring new technologies. (South Wales Argus April 2021)

Four Welsh universities (Aberystwyth, Bangor, Cardiff and Swansea) conduct animal studies. Yet the Welsh Govt is being urged by the Senedd's Cross Party Group on Medical Research (2023 inquiry report) to increase its QR funding to unis and to incentivize the sector in order to accrue economic benefits.

More details

The expansion of medical research without scrutiny of how the money is spent should be a cause of concern to the Welsh people, as public funded research is paid for primarily through taxation. Investment in innovative science such as organ-on-a-chip, 3D bioprinting and computer modelling is called for. It is these technologies, based on human biology, that can boost the economy, strengthen the NHS and deliver for patients. Animal studies, apart from causing immense suffering, are unreliable, costly and block rather than advance medical progress.



Given the Labour Government's manifesto pledge to 'partner with scientists, industry, and civil society as we work towards the phasing out of animal testing' it seems an ideal opportunity to modernise research in Wales. By scrutinising how its financial contribution is used and directing funds to human relevant methods, the Welsh Government can set an example and encourage industry and the charitable sector to follow suit.

1. Background

1.1. Regulation of animal testing

Although animal welfare is a devolved area, scientific testing on animals is reserved to the UK Parliament.

A [House of Commons Library publication](#) (July 2023) provides background to the issue of animal testing in Great Britain, including statistics, trends and the relevant legislation.

The [Animals \(Scientific Procedures\) Act 1986](#) (the '1986 Act') regulates the use of 'protected animals' in any experimental or other scientific procedure which may cause pain, suffering, distress or lasting harm to the animal. Protected animals in the 1986 Act are defined as any living vertebrate (other than humans) and any living cephalopod (marine animals such as octopus and squid).

Licences are required from the Home Office to test on animals protected under the 1986 Act. The UK Government has [produced guidance on these licences and their conditions](#).

1.2. Scale and nature of animal testing in Great Britain

On the scale of animal testing in Great Britain, the 2023 [House of Commons publication states](#):

Pandemic aside, the annual number of procedures has been [falling steadily since 2015](#), a year in which 4.1 million procedures on animals were carried out. The number in 2022 was 33% or around a third lower than this.

Numbers peaked in the 1970s, at around 5.6 million per year, before falling to around 2.7 million per year in the 1990s and early 2000s. The way in which procedures were recorded changed in 1987, which means figures before and after this date are not directly equivalent.

The [House of Commons Library publication sets out](#) the experimental procedures and the level of harm caused, and the animals commonly used:

Around four in ten recorded procedures involve the creation or breeding of genetically altered (GA) animals. These procedures are almost all rated 'sub-threshold' or 'mild' in terms of severity, meaning the harm and/or discomfort they cause. The severity rating of a procedure is determined according to criteria [set out in ASPA](#) [the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986].

Most experimental procedures cause some degree of harm (ranked 'mild', 'moderate', or 'severe'). In 4% of procedures carried out in 2022 the animal did not recover.

Four fifths of procedures in 2022 involved rodents, and two thirds of all procedures involved mice. Since 2007, fish have been the second most common animal used; before this it was rats.

1.3. UK Government policy

The UK Government [published a policy](#) in 2014 (under the 2010 to 2015 Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government) to limit the number of animals used in science through "replacement, reduction, and refinement" of research design - the '3Rs'. This requires licence applicants to demonstrate non-animal alternatives have been considered as far as possible. There is a [delivery plan](#) on the 3Rs.

You may wish to be aware of a [UK Parliament petition](#) calling for animal experiments to be phased out. It attracted over 100,000 signatures and [was debated](#) in the UK Parliament in October 2021. The UK Government [response to the petition said](#):

The Government funds and supports the development of techniques that replace, reduce and refine the use of animals in research (3Rs). This is primarily delivered by the National Centre for the 3Rs.

Another UK Parliament petition, to ban the use of dogs for testing and research purposes in the UK, received over 32,000 signatures. The topic was debated in February 2024. The UK Government responded:

The government does not agree to the proposed ban. Testing would continue in other countries. The UK still requires such data to ensure the safety of medicines before testing in humans.

2. Welsh Government action

2.1. Funding medical research

The petition highlights animal experiments are conducted at Welsh universities.

The Welsh Government's letter on this petition states:

The four Welsh universities which have had staff, premises and experiments licenced under the 1986 Act have all signed up to the 3Rs principles (Reduce, refine, replace) and the Concordat on Openness on Animal Research. These are coordinated by the National Centre for the 3Rs, which has several funding schemes to enhance and increase alternatives to animal testing. One example is the Cardiff University 'micro-lung', developed using human tissue left from operations.

The Welsh Government provides funding to universities via Medr - the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research. Medr is responsible for funding and regulating the tertiary education and research sector in Wales.

Part of the funds are for Quality Related (QR) funding which provides for longer-term strategic investment in an institution's research base. The amount received by each institution is based on a formula linked to their performance in the Research Excellence Framework (REF).

The Welsh Government's letter on this petition highlights that neither the Welsh Government nor Medr specifies how institutions use this funding:

Universities are autonomous institutions, free to decide on their research priorities and therefore how they will use this funding.

Senedd Research is unaware of how much research funding is spent on animal testing.

3. Welsh Parliament action

This issue has not been raised in detail during Senedd business.

The petition references the [Senedd Cross-Party Group on Medical Research 2023 report](#). The report advocated for more spending on medical research, but didn't address the issue of experimenting on animals.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.