

Dear Vice-Chancellor,

As alumni, honorary graduates, and academics of Oxford, we are proud of our University and mindful of its well-being and reputation. It is for this reason that we are dismayed to see the University committing itself, in its new Animal Laboratory, to the long-term continuation of experiments which cause pain and other suffering to animals. We believe such experiments to be scientifically obsolescent and ethically indefensible. We would like to see Oxford University become, instead, a progressive institution in this matter – as it already is in so many other respects – and lead the way in developing animal-free medical research.

Another worrying aspect of animal-based research under the previous administration has been the secrecy and silence in which it has been enveloped. Debate and transparency should be the hallmark of a university, yet it has taken a request under the Freedom of Information Act, fought all the way by Oxford University, to drag even some basic facts about its animal research into public view. There is a well-established organization called Voice for Ethical Research at Oxford (VERO) which promotes awareness and discussion, within the University, of the scientific and ethical questions raised by animal research. We hope that the new leadership of the University can find ways of acknowledging the interests which VERO represents, and of treating candidly with them.

2009 is the fiftieth anniversary of the launching of the Three Rs (reduction, refinement, and replacement) as the recommended way forward in animal experimentation. These principles were incorporated into the 1986 Animal (Scientific Procedures) Act, as part of an implicit hope and expectation that animal-based research would be less and less used and ultimately abandoned. For some time afterwards this did indeed seem to be happening, but statistics for the last few years have shown that the numbers of animals used in British universities, Oxford included, are again rising. The fiftieth anniversary of the Three Rs is surely an appropriate time to reverse this new trend and to revive the humane intentions of the 1986 Act. We hope that you will be prepared to put in hand whatever measures may be necessary to effect that purpose in Oxford.

Above all, what we would like to see, under your leadership, is a clear Declaration of Intent by the University, saying that it means to put renewed emphasis on the Three Rs, and in particular to commit itself energetically to the replacement of animals in its scientific research. This is an opportunity for Oxford to lead the way in a progressive direction.

Yours sincerely,

Sir David Madden KCMG (VERO Patron)  
Richard Adams  
Mike Baker (Chief Executive WSPA)

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