

Press release 03 July 2006

## **New group of Oxford academics calls University to account over animal lab**

A new group of Oxford University members and graduates called VERO (Voice for Ethical Research at Oxford) has sent an open letter to the Vice Chancellor of the University (see below) challenging its decision to build a new £20 million animal research centre. Founder member Sharon Howe, who returned her MA degree to the University earlier this year in a protest reported in the national press, believes that the project fails to take into account growing public and political concern over the ethical justification and scientific validity of animal experimentation, and that the money would be much better spent on developing cutting-edge, non-animal techniques. Speaking on behalf of VERO, Sharon said: "Unless resources are invested and a new generation of scientists trained in modern alternatives, we will not be able to make the progress on humane research which is now widely acknowledged as necessary and desirable. We therefore call on our University, as one of the top academic institutions in the world, to lead the way in this field." The new group has a founder membership of over 20 Oxford graduates and academics representing a wide range of disciplines, and is attracting growing support from others outside the University, including scientist and philosopher Richard Ryder, Green MEP Caroline Lucas and human rights campaigner Peter Tatchell. As part of its campaign, the group will be seeking a meeting with University representatives to press for greater transparency over the animal laboratory and the University's animal research policy generally. A public meeting is also planned for the autumn, to which a University representative and other speakers will be invited.

### **OPEN LETTER TO THE VICE CHANCELLOR OF OXFORD UNIVERSITY:**

Dear Vice Chancellor,

I recently wrote to you returning my MA degree certificate in protest at the construction of the new animal research laboratory at Oxford University, for reasons explained in two articles published in the national press. I write today on behalf of the above organisation, a new group of Oxford University members and graduates campaigning for a more ethically responsible approach to biomedical research at Oxford. We are greatly concerned that our University – one of the top academic institutions in the country – should be investing £20 million in this project when it could be leading the way on much-needed humane alternatives.

We oppose the construction of the new laboratory on both moral and scientific grounds. Vivisection - by definition - subjects animals to considerable pain, stress and lasting harm, and there is also a growing body of evidence that animals are neither safe nor suitable models for studying human diseases. 240 MPs have already signed an Early Day Motion calling for an independent evaluation of the scientific validity of animal experimentation – a move that would be welcomed by 83% of GPs, according to a survey by Europeans for Medical Progress. These are factors which the University should surely be taking into account.

Given this evolution in both scientific thinking and public attitudes, we call on the University to redirect the funds earmarked for the laboratory to directly relevant, human-based research. Unless resources are invested and a new generation of scientists trained in such techniques, we will not be able to make the progress on alternatives which is now widely acknowledged as necessary and desirable. Here is an ideal opportunity for the University to develop a centre of excellence worthy of its reputation as a seat of enlightened and humane thought.

We are writing this as an open letter as we believe this issue to be a matter of public interest which should be as transparent as possible. We look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Sharon Howe