

Reports and Comments

NC3Rs vision document sets out plans for the 3Rs over the next decade

The UK's National Centre for Replacement, Refinement and Reduction of Animals in Research (NC3Rs) recently launched their plans for the following 10 years (Our Vision: 2015-2025). The document provides an overview of the centre's strategy for promoting the 3Rs during the centre's second decade (the NC3Rs was established in 2004). The document outlines the '5Ps' over which the centre plans to have influence: Practice in the biosciences; Procedures on animals; People in the biosciences; Places where animal research is carried out; and Policy related to animal research. In the document, the NC3Rs envision the state of the 3Rs in 2025.

One vision of the strategy is that there should not have been an increase in animals used in research in the UK despite increased research activity and investment in the bioscience sector. This focus is clearly a result of recent trends whereby increased research activity and developments in the generation of genetically modified animals has led to an overall increase in the numbers of animals used in research in the UK despite advances in the reduction and replacement of animals in many models. For continued public acceptance of animal research it is likely that a significant reduction in total animal use over the next decade will be needed and the coalition government has also committed itself to reducing the number of animals used in research. The NC3Rs plans to promote improvements in scientific technique and replacement technologies which should lead to a reduction in the total number of animals used.

Another vision is to support people to "accelerate change" through training researchers and others in 3Rs' methodology. The NC3Rs aims to play a significant role in educating scientists about the 3Rs as well as supporting the careers of researchers dedicated specifically to the 3Rs, who they hope will become "3Rs ambassadors". This vision will require significant commitments from research institutions, particularly the universities and it will be encouraging if this is achieved by persuading institutions to commit significant time and resources to 3Rs' education and research.

Assessment and reduction of the impact of research on animals is addressed in the Practice objective which aims to promote development of "standardised objective measures of animal welfare". For realistic analysis of the harm/benefit balance of animal use in science it will be necessary for the harms to be reliably quantified; at present both advocates and opponents of research on animals rely excessively on conjecture.

The NC3Rs' vision for embedding of a 3Rs' culture in the places where research is carried out aims to improve knowledge and acceptance of the 3Rs in research establishments; recent exposes in the UK have highlighted that despite significant progress and the UK's leading role in the 3Rs there is still significant room for improvements in the "culture of care" in some institutions.

The final vision — on policy, marks a shift towards internationalisation on the part of the NC3Rs in that they aim to "increase international support for the 3Rs" and "improve global harmonisation of regulatory 3Rs practice". Whilst the UK is arguably a global leader in the welfare of animals used in research, unless this expertise is used to influence practice beyond the UK then it is likely that some research may go elsewhere to avoid the regulatory burden which some perceive as more onerous in the UK than elsewhere. Furthermore, the inevitable rapid growth of research in emerging economies presents significant challenges to animal welfare which could be reduced by dissemination of UK-based expertise worldwide.

The vision outlined in the document is a deliberately broad and high-level one with little in the way of concrete proposals, but it presents a commitment to keeping the UK at the forefront of implementing and promoting the 3Rs. It will be interesting to revisit this document in 10 years to see how progress has matched the vision.

Our Vision 2015-2025: NC3Rs (2013). Available at: http://www.nc3rs.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Corporate_publications/NC3Rs%20Our%20Vision%202015-2025.pdf.

H Gollidge,

UFAW

Equine identification and welfare

In 2013, throughout the European Union (EU), there were a number of reported incidences of horse meat entering the human food chain in meat products labelled as other animal origin (eg beef and pork). While not necessarily an animal welfare issue as such, concerns were raised over the lack of traceability within the food supply chain and this highlighted failings of equine identification and traceability systems within the EU. There are approximately 7 million horses within the 28 member countries of the EU.

A number of organisations in the United Kingdom have reported problems with the current system of identifying horses and in 2014 the Associate Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare (APGAW) and the All Party Parliamentary Group for the Horse (APPG for the Horse), in association with the Equine Sector Council, published a briefing document entitled: *The Urgent Need for an Effective, Enforceable and Enforced Equine Identification System*. In the document they state that: "The inability to link a horse to its owner is one of the most significant barriers to holding irresponsible horse owners and breeders to account for welfare abuses".

The document highlights a number of deficiencies within the current equine identification system, such as: over 75 Passport Issuing Organisations (PIOs); PIOs operating to different standards; fraudulent and duplication of passports; low enforcement of the identification rules by local authorities; and poor understanding and negativity of horse owners towards the current system.