

GUEST EDITORIAL

Would-be authors with an eagle eye will notice that *Animal Welfare* has recently revised its comprehensive *Instructions for Authors*. As well as a number of changes designed to clarify and facilitate the task of making submitted manuscripts suitable for publication without repeated and extensive revision, they may have noticed that there is a more detailed statement on the editorial policy with regard to the use of animals in work described in submitted papers.

It is obvious of course that *Animal Welfare*, being a journal devoted to the welfare of animals and associated with an organization whose whole existence is related to the welfare of animals, must pay very careful attention to its editorial policy on this matter. Surveys have shown that among scientific journals, editorial policies and instructions for authors concerning the use of animals vary widely (Boisvert 1996; Hart unpublished). A recent working party (Festing and van Zutphen 1997) concluded that a statement of policy should be included, preferably as instructions to authors, in all journals publishing papers which 'might involve animal suffering or distress'. The working party was careful to point out that no one policy statement is likely to be appropriate for all journals; that policy statements need to be backed up by vigilance on the part of the referees; and that authors should provide considerable detail (not all of which need be included in the published paper) to enable referees to judge the animal welfare aspects of the work submitted.

We agree with these aspirations and have done our best to implement them in this journal. In arriving at our stated policy we have had regard to a number of influences:

- i) We tried to avoid well-intentioned but meaningless statements which are neither a helpful guide to authors nor an effective defence against those opposed to the use of animals in research of any kind.
- ii) In the early years of the journal's existence we used a blunt weapon to express our position – 'the journal will not publish any paper which involves unnecessary cruelty'. That statement begged many questions and was rightly criticized on the grounds that it implied that we would publish work based on 'necessary cruelty' – a contradiction in terms of responsible animal experimentation. After careful consideration, we modified the term to retain 'unnecessary' but replaced 'cruelty' with the carefully considered phrase used in the *Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986*: 'pain, suffering, distress or lasting harm'.
- iii) We recognized that there is a narrow path to be trodden by editors of international journals published in the UK when considering potential publications. The UK enjoys a very high standard of regulation of the use of animals for scientific purposes but we cannot always expect authors from other countries to have complied fully with the standards set by UK law. A requirement for submitted work to comply with the 'legal requirements of the relevant national authorities' would not be very practical, as it demands from the editor an expert knowledge of the legal position in all countries from which papers are submitted.

We have concluded, therefore, that our new policy statement:

'Animal Welfare will not include papers based on work which involves unnecessary pain, distress, suffering or lasting harm. Manuscripts describing research involving live animals must include appropriate details, in the methods section, of animals used, housing and feeding, experimental design, experimental procedures, ethical considerations, and licences and approvals under which the work was carried out.'

gives us the best control of the situation. It demands relevant information so that papers may be rigorously scrutinized by the referees and editors to ensure a high state of ethical compliance.

We are confident that our authors will welcome this clarification, from which the journal – and their publications – can only benefit.

References

- Boisvert D P J** 1997 Editorial policies and animal welfare. In: van Zutphen L F M and Balls M (eds) *Animal Alternatives, Welfare and Ethics* pp 399-404. Elsevier Science BV: Amsterdam, The Netherlands
- Festing M R W and van Zutphen L F M** 1997 Guidelines for reviewing manuscripts on studies involving live animals. Synopsis for the Workshop In: van Zutphen L F M and Balls M (eds) *Animal Alternatives, Welfare and Ethics* pp 405-410. Elsevier Science BV: Amsterdam, The Netherlands

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