

Animal Rights group targets University

By [Harry Meek](#)

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Photo credit: DOPAMINEHARPER

Animal Rights activists are planning to protest against the University's involvement in animal testing.

Jonathon Proctor, a spokesperson for the Northern Animal Rights Campaign, said: "We are going to start a campaign against Durham University and York Animal Testing Lab – it's time for people to wake up and smell the unscientific coffee."

A Freedom of Information request, from the Northern Animal Rights Campaign, claimed that the University used 9,928 mice, 234 rats and 128 frogs in experiments between January 2011 and January 2012.

The University released the following statement: "No live vertebrate animals are used in teaching undergraduates at York and whilst a couple of practicals do involve dissection of dead animals, students are free to opt out of these if they wish."

Proctor went on to say: "The fact that one department member went on to be a researcher and director at Huntington Life Sciences (the notorious testing lab) does not surprise me, once a killer, always a killer. We are a Northern Movement and against all animal testing. We are trying to get something sorted as soon as possible at York."

He believes there are many alternatives to animal testing, stating: "many drugs, which were passed as safe in animal tests, have caused serious side effects, and even deaths, in people."

Dr Mark Coles of the Centre for Immunology and Infection at the University of York, is looking into testing drugs on the proteins which cause human disease or illness, rather than animals.

The University has stated that "all projects involving animal research are subject to the University's ethical review process, prior to authorisation by the Home Office."

The Ethical Review Committee, which oversees the welfare of animals involved in testing at York, includes lay representation as well as veterinary and animal care expertise. The Ethical Review Committee ensures that high standards of animal care, welfare and accommodation are maintained, and that University employees working under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act receive appropriate guidance and

training.

The University has said that by “focusing on physiological and psychological processes, [the University] has been able to devise measures to combat medical disorders and transmissible diseases – making major breakthroughs in the last few years”.

Research on malaria two years ago, or pressure ulcers this year, have both contributed significantly in understanding the causes of these illnesses and how to combat them.

They added: “The University is committed to the use of the minimum numbers of animals required to meet the objectives of the study, and the refinement of procedures so as to maximise animal welfare. The purpose is to make certain that the research carried out on animals is conducted humanely, and only when there is no alternative.”

Lancaster University shut down its animal testing facility years ago – calling it “obsolete with modern research”.



2 comments

Paul

20 Jun '12 at 11:52 am

Over the years I've found that information from animal rights organizations is not to be trusted, and it appears that this is another case in point.

The article mentions that “Dr Mark Coles of the Centre for Immunology and Infection at the University of York, is looking into testing drugs on the biological proteins which cause human disease or illness, rather than animals.”

This statement may well be true in a very strict sense, but it is very clear from taking a look at Dr Coles web page and publication record that he also uses animals – mostly mice – in several of his research projects. I expect that Dr. Coles is very much aware of the importance of animal experiments to 21st century medical research.

<http://www.york.ac.uk/cii/staff/academic/coles/>
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22479545>

The statement that Lancaster University shut down its animal research facility because it was “obsolete with modern research” is meaningless in isolation. Almost every University I know of has carried out major upgrades of its animal research facilities – in some case replacing old labs with brand new ones – over the past 10-15 years. These has been driven by both the need for more modern labs to support research involving genetically modified animals (mostly mice) and in order to comply with current best practice in animal welfare. I would not be surprised that a university with a relatively small biological research faculty decided that it was not cost effective to replace its old -and obsolete – lab with new – but expensive- state of the art lab. Not every university can afford to support every type of research.

Report

Andre Menache

8 Jul '12 at 5:32 pm

Ethical committees are currently not a level playing field since the lay members often lack a scientific background and can only challenge the philosophical aspects of animal experiments. The lay persons should have access to outside expert opinion (which is allowed by law). And how about a public debate at the university between scientists for and against animal research, in the spirit of academic free speech?

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