



OU Students for Ethical Science Newsletter – Autumn 2014

It's been a fairly quiet year for OUSES. We've been working hard to get the Society itself onto a sounder footing.

The big news is that a forum has been set up on our own website, so that all members can access it even if they're not currently OU students. It's something Diana's been wanting to do for a long time, but never had time until September.

<http://www.ouses.org.uk/phpbb>

There are two sections, SES Meetings and Discussion. SES Meetings was used to hold the AGM this year, and will be in future - it's proved to be quicker than doing it by e-mail, and much less labour-intensive for the Secretary. In between times, it's already proving to be a useful way of co-ordinating what we're doing. If one of us tackles something by ourselves, such as negotiating with the Societies Standing Committee or making a Freedom of Information request to the OU, then we can say so on the forum and everyone knows it's taken care of; and if useful information comes back as a result, that can be posted so any of us can see and use it. Meanwhile, we're hoping that the Discussion board will become a place to ask each other questions about animal science, animal research and the alternatives - the things you currently don't learn from the OU itself!

Please join if you haven't already - it's quick to do and all postings are private, so non-members can't see your name or what you post.

For this autumn's virtual OU "Freshers' Fair", the Student Societies were asked to take a bigger part and put together articles to form a "virtual stall" on the website. The SES Meetings forum has been put to good use already for perfecting ours, and the finished product is at

<http://www.open.ac.uk/ousa/freshers/meet-ou-students/community/societies-showcase>

if you're curious. We've already had at least two new members join since the Fair opened in mid-September. We currently have 55 members, 2 more than last year.

Anna Bond

OU Animal-Computer Interaction Project

Report by Anna Bond

Over the course of this year I've been hearing about an interesting new project at the OU. The Animal-Computer Interaction Laboratory is based at the OU's Centre for Research in Computing. Their aim is to develop technology that's better suited to being used by animals, making life easier for animals living alongside humans. For instance, a lot of their current work is on designing switches, handles and other devices that can be operated by assistance dogs (such as guide dogs). I haven't time to give a thorough account of their projects here, but there's a good account, and links to more information, on their website: http://www.open.ac.uk/blogs/ACI/?page_id=21

Something that impresses me in this project is that it's explicitly based on thinking of animals as sentient people, people who can be taught, communicated with and have lives of their own. It's not a case of anthropomorphism; they're not assuming that dogs think like people. They're assuming that dogs think like dogs, and observing how that is. But they're assuming that dogs, and other animals, *think* - as psychologists have known and published papers on for years, but largely ignored in practice.

This informs the way they treat their test subjects, too. To quote their website:

"To ensure that ACI research is carried out under strictest ethical standards, The Open University has developed an ACI Research Ethics protocol, which grants animal participants the same level of protection granted to children and vulnerable humans, who are not able to give informed consent to their involvement."

Will this be how "animal research" looks in 100 years' time?

It's rather a pity that it had to be left to the Computing department, of all unlikely people, to lead the way. In fact, I wonder if it helped that they were starting from scratch, without much grounding in how it's conventionally "acceptable" to treat animal subjects! Maybe Life Sciences will learn a few things from their example.

I haven't had time to keep up with this as well as I'd like. Further reports or updates from anyone else will be very welcome.

AGM 2014

Report by Anna Bond

(Please note these aren't the official Minutes, which haven't been prepared

yet – just my own account.)

This year's meeting, the first to be held on the forum, started on 24th September and was very sparsely "attended" - only 9 members had joined the forum yet. 4 of these members posted - Diana Isserlis, Vivien Pomfrey, Sam Covington and me.

At the previous meeting we'd heard that Doug Paulley had been diagnosed with heart failure. Vivien passed on the good news that she'd heard earlier this year that that was in fact a misdiagnosis and it was pneumonia, and hoped it had been successfully treated.

Sam reported on the Society's finances:

Treasurer's report

The accounts for the year ended 31 December 2013 are in the process of being prepared and will be submitted before 30 September 2014. Our expenses in that year came to £30.78p for the newsletter and we gave three donations of £50 each to the BUAV, PETA and the Dr Hadwen Trust.

Since 1 January 2014 we have reimbursed John Deadman for many years of webhosting totalling £178.50p. We have also sent £100 each to the BUAV and to the Dr Hawden Trust to thank them for their support with leaflets for our stand at the OUSA Conference 2014 (which we had to share with History because the first marquee, which was larger, blew down). I have received letters of thanks from both organisations.

The grant of £90.90p from O U S A for this year has been paid and will be in our account shortly, bringing our bank balance to £966.46p.

So although outgoings were unusually heavy this year, the donations also happened to be higher than usual, so we still ended up slightly ahead.

Unfortunately, Pei Ling Choo, who volunteered as Secretary and second Scientific Advisor at the last AGM, seems to be unable to carry on - we've been unable to contact her for a while. So Diana offered to take up her old post again, saying that her health had improved and she should be able to manage it this year. She also pointed out that she had taken over the website hosting from John Deadman, and that the post of Network Co-ordinator was unnecessary now we have the forum. So the posts are now:

Chair: Anna Bond

Vice-chair: Peter Lucas

Secretary: Diana Isserlis

Treasurer: Sam Covington

Membership Secretary: Diana Isserlis

Webmaster: Diana Isserlis

InterNICHE Liaison Officer: Vivien Pomfrey

Scientific Advisor: Vivien Pomfrey

Honorary life members: Chris Aldous, Sally Horn and Vivien Pomfrey

I reported the results of my last FoI request (see pages 4-6). There was speculation about whether Life Sciences were being vague on purpose, or whether they really did think that anything not actually involving surgery wasn't worth mentioning as a "procedure". Neither is very encouraging!

It was noted that none of us had heard anything of the OU's annual report to OUSA on the number of animals used in its research. Diana remarked that it usually did need chasing. I said that it might not be OUSA's fault, as last year they'd told me that the OU were always late sending it to *them*. We wondered if they were hoping we'd forget to ask and so we'd be off their backs for another year! I e-mailed OUSA: they say it isn't available yet but will be soon. I'll pass it on as soon as I have it.

The meeting ended with regrets that so few of us are taking any part in the Society's activities. Owing to various health problems and other commitments, the four of us only have time to do what's absolutely necessary to keep the Society afloat. There are fifty more of us; if even a fraction of that did a single one-off thing this year – finding information on an OU research study, telling us what a particular module says about animal research if anything, making informed comments about what the alternatives are when we do identify one that seems to ignore them – we'd be able to make big progress towards making the OU a more animal-friendly place. The new forum should make it much simpler to request and send in things of that nature, without members needing to commit themselves to any ongoing work.

If you agree, see page 7 for one thing you may be able to help with. All the other possibilities that were discussed at the AGM can be seen in the “SES AGM - Election of Officers” thread in the “SES Meetings” forum.

OU Animal Use 2013 Report by Anna Bond

In last year's newsletter there was an account of an FoI request I made to the OU last year, along the lines of Doug Paulley's a few years ago, asking for further details of the OU's use of animals in research. The replies were pretty reasonable, but there were a couple of things missing: details of what was done to the animals, and information on what alternatives to using animals had been considered in each case.

Following this, I've asked again for details of what was actually done to the animals, and in April this year received a reply:

"Dear Anna,

I am sorry that I was unable to send you a response to your query, as I was waiting for further information. I now have some information about research involving animals in 2013 that you may find useful.

In 2013 The Open University used 318 animals in its biological research.

These animals were 178 rats and 140 mice.

The rats were used for research into:

Nerve system repair (68)

The regulation between gut hormone and appetite during the oestrus cycle (32)

Actions of different therapeutic drugs on behaviour and physiology of the model ADHD (78)

The mice were used for research into:

The aging effects in different organ systems (140)

All the animals were euthanized prior to procedures being performed.

You asked about alternatives that were considered. I do not have the information for each case, but I can confirm that the Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Body (that has replaced the Animal Ethics Advisory Group) always queries this if it is not clear in the project application as well as querying the planned number of animals to be used to ensure this is minimised.

I hope this information is useful.

Yours sincerely,

Beverley Midwood"

This is information worth having, but I don't think it really answers the question, although you can guess some of what was done from the remnants of the experiments. Also, they're evidently defining "procedures" in some narrower sense than the obvious - you can't, for instance, study a rat's behaviour on Ritalin after killing it. Probably they meant surgical "procedures".

According to Vivien Pomfrey, the OU's research database can be searched directly at <http://oro.open.ac.uk/cgi/search/advanced>. As an example, she found the abstract of the ADHD study – it clearly *was* done on living rats.

Your support is important to us!

SES is a Society affiliated to the Open University Students' Association (OUSA). Our aim, using peaceful means, is to stop the University using animals, and/or animal/derived materials that are not ethically sourced. We also aim to provide information and support to students who wish to study life sciences without harming animals.

In order to maintain our status as an OUSA Society, we have to ensure that our membership numbers remain above a certain level so, if your membership is due for renewal, we do urge you to return the enclosed membership form, and please do let us know if you have a change of address. We do not release any personal details outside SES.

The OU's Policy on Animal Use

The OU's policy on the use of animals can be found at:

www.open.ac.uk/science/lifesciences/about-the-department/life-sciences-animal-statement.php

SES's Policy on Animal Use

Our policies can be found at: www.ouses.org.uk

Current OUSA policy on the OU's use of animals and animal tissue

Policy Statement 20. Animals in Experiments

This Association recognises the Open University's endorsement of the principles of the 3 Rs (namely Replacement, Reduction, and Refinement) in its use of animals, and in order to demonstrate its continuing commitment to those principles we ask the University to make an annual statement giving numbers of animals used in research and in education, year – on – year, until five successive years are shown and thereafter show the figures for the current and the four preceding years, and that this report be sent to the General manager of OUSA for onward transmission to those who request it. We also ask the University:

- to encourage the development of teaching methods that do not use animals harmfully and ensuring that new modules avoid the use of

animals except when there is no practical alternative

- to encourage research students to discover and use methods that are not harmful to animals
- to source any animal tissues or materials ethically
- to make it clear to students in the module choice publications and web pages that they will be able to opt out of animal experiments without penalty, and/or alternative methods of learning the same processes will be provided
- to include student representation on University Committees and Advisory Groups where animal use is tabled for discussion.

Have you studied an OU science module recently?

Our information on different OU courses is badly out of date, and Diana and I are keen to put that right. But we can only do that if we have information from someone who's recently studied them.

No OU courses use animals directly now, but many of them discuss the use of animal experiments, and often it's without any mention of exactly what's done to the animals or the alternatives, or even that there's any need to try and find alternatives - which implies that this is a harmless and necessary part of the science. This isn't a good message to be teaching. We'd like to compile up-to-date information on which modules talk about animal experiments in this way, and if possible, write companion factsheets giving the missing information about the nature of the experiments used in that particular field, the ethical questions raised and the pros and cons of the alternatives.

Can you help? If you've studied an OU science module within the last year or two, please tell us what animal experiments, if any, it mentions, and whether you think it says enough about the ethics and/or alternatives. (Copy and paste text from the course if it helps). If the module doesn't mention animal experiments at all, we'd like to know that, too. We already have SD329, S288, S345, S346 and S347 covered, so there's no need to do those; all others are very welcome. Your name will be kept confidential, and you don't have to sign up for anything - just send the information to any of our contact addresses, or post it on the members' forum or the Moodle forum. Diana or I will pick it up and when we've collected enough it'll all be used to update the website.

Anna Bond

Can you help by distributing SES information?

We have created a series of factsheets and leaflets which can be downloaded

to print out from our website at: www.ouses.org.uk/resources.html

If you are attending a residential school, revision weekend, open event or OUSA event, please could you distribute this information to people who might be interested?

Find us online

Please visit our website at: www.ouses.org.uk

In common with other OUSA Societies we have an OUSA Moodle Forum associated with us, open to members and non-members. You can access this from your StudentHome page: select the "Student Association forums" link (left-hand side of page, under "Links"), then select "OUSA Live", "Societies and Groups" and finally "OUSA Ethical Science".

We also now have a members-only forum accessible both to current students and non-students. You can find instructions on how to join at:

<http://ouses.org.uk/forums.html>

Email groups

Vivien Pomfrey, our scientific advisor, maintains four email groups to which she sends information on animal-related topics. These are for people interested in:

Animal experimentation and alternatives

Animals generally (especially animal welfare issues)

Veganism

Vegetarianism

If you are not already in any of these groups (or are not sure!) and would like to be included, you can ask to be added to whatever groups interest you by email to: ses.membership@blueyonder.co.uk You can leave a group at any time by emailing the same address.

How to contact us

You can contact the SES Membership Secretary by email at

ses.membership@blueyonder.co.uk or by post at 54 Sunningdale, Yate, Bristol BS37 4JA. For more contact details see

www.ouses.org.uk/contacts.html.