



## OU Students for Ethical Science Newsletter – Spring 2017

### OU Report

#### Article by A. Bond

We've now been requesting, and getting, annual animal use figures from the OU for the past four years. I thought I'd give collected figures. All figures are for research; no animals have been used in residential schools.

| Year | Rats | Mice | Total |
|------|------|------|-------|
| 2012 | 200  | 284  | 484   |
| 2013 | 178  | 140  | 318   |
| 2014 | 30   | 191  | 221   |
| 2015 | 123  | 319  | 443   |

The OU's Animal Welfare and Ethics Review Board (the team that have to approve all animal experiments and get Home Office agreement) has changed the way it reports animal use figures. Previously they were sent to OU Students Association each year (or not, as the case may be) and any interested parties had to request them from OU Students Association. From now on, they'll be published directly on the AWERBs website. The Animal Research Statement, the document laying out the OU's policies on animal research, will be revised each year, and the latest animal use figures will be added to that. It's available at

<http://www.open.ac.uk/research/ethics/animal-research#Animal%20Research%20Statement> .

The report's now also broken down by species; they always used to say just "rodents", I suppose on the principle that nobody would care about "rodents" as they might about "mice". (I got the figures in the table above only because I was sending in Freedom of Information requests asking for various extra details.)

Apart from that, it's still pretty minimal information - for instance, it says nothing about what the research was or what was done - but any move towards giving information willingly, without being asked, is a help.

The AWERB seem to have added quite a lot of new information to their website, in fact, It might be worth a look for some of us (I haven't had time myself). Any move towards willingly telling us things, without being asked, seems like a good thing; if we're talking to each other, we might get somewhere. They didn't do very well at letting people \*know\* the information was there, mind you; I found out about all this only when I e-mailed to ask for the Animal Use Report, thinking they'd failed to send it!

The OU's research isn't all bad news for animals, though. The first ever dedicated Animal Computer Interaction (ACI) conference was hosted by the Open University on 15th, 16th and 17th November 2016. Dr Clara Mancini started the OU's ACI Lab in 2011, and in the years since then, more and more researchers at other institutions across the world have been inspired to set up their own projects. 50 scientists from more than 10 countries attended the conference in November. The conference was even featured on the "Inside Science" programme on BBC Radio 4: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b081l87w>  
Read more at <https://learn1.open.ac.uk/mod/forumng/discuss.php?d=81721>

## Interview with a medical student

### Article by M. Ilston

I recently had the opportunity to interview a medical student who is currently in her second year of four at university. Prior to studying medicine, she studied biomedical science. Her answers are very interesting and make a good read. It's important to hear the facts and opinions of students who are studying at different universities. Please note, that this student has asked to remain anonymous, along with the university that she is commenting on.

**When you first started at the university did they make it clear you would have to be experimenting on animals and did they give you enough information on this?**

Starting my biomedical degree, I think I can remember reading students experiences in the prospectus that made me realise but I don't think the university were very forthcoming on such information otherwise.

**Whilst studying medicine and biomedical science, have you had to experiment on animals?**

Yes, during my biomedical science degree.

**If they don't experiment on animals can you say if they actively told you this information or you had to seek it out. Was it one of their selling points for the degree? Were they proud of not advocating animal experiments?**

At university during my biomedical science degree nothing was ever said about animal testing. It was only one week before a lab experiment that we were warned about dissecting frogs and that if we were uncomfortable about this then we didn't have to take part.

In medicine, animal experiments have never been mentioned and I don't think it comes up in a lot of medical degrees.

**Were these animals alive? Do you know how the university came into possession of these animals?**

The animals were alive up to 10 minutes before we got hold of them. I wasn't told where they had come from. I could take a guess at perhaps the science park. We weren't told any more information than this.

**What species of animals did you have to experiment on and which experiments did you have to carry out?**

A frog and this was dissecting the animal by removing the heart whilst keeping it attached to the animal and administering medications to the heart directly.

**Is there an animal lab at the university? Have you seen it? Are you allowed to go and see it?**

I believe there is an animal lab at the university as I have heard a couple of lecturers mention it discreetly. It was only when someone had broken into the lab and released some of the animals and made it onto the news that it was confirmed there was an animal lab. I have not seen the lab and I don't think we are allowed to either as students, as there is security in place.

**In your course material (supplied/recommended by the university) do they refer to animal experimentation a lot? Is it quite a common thing to read in a textbook/article?**

In my biomedical degree, most lectures consisted of quoting experiments which involved animals. It was also quite common when reading textbooks. However, in my medicine degree, the lectures hardly ever quote experiments involving animals and I haven't seen it in a textbook yet.

**In your opinion, do you think these animal experiments helped you with your studies? Please explain why.**

I don't believe the frog experiment that I carried out helped me. It was fascinating to see but I collected the same information that I could have easily read in a book.

**How do you feel about having to experiment on these animals?**

I felt it was a complete waste of life to dissect the frogs. I imagine it was a way of ticking boxes and trying to be practical. I believe that all these animal experiments have been carried out before and the information has already been collected and is there. So why do we need to keep carrying out the same experiments? This applies mostly to universities.

**How do your fellow students feel about having to perform animal experiments?**

I remember some students feeling quite sad about it but I don't remember there being a huge problem in general.

**Do you believe that that every single animal experiment you've carried out so far has given you accurate results?**

The one time I carried out an animal experiment it did give me accurate results.

**In your opinion, do you think there could be an alternative to experimenting on animals?**

I think there could most certainly be alternatives into animal experimentation. If they can create human skin in a lab, then surely this is a better method than using animals. I don't know whether maybe it's because it's not as cost effective?

**If you can think of a more accurate alternative, why do you think the university hasn't already adopted this?**

Money!

From the answers that were given it's disappointing that the university in question hasn't given its students more information regarding the animals kept on site and the experimentation. It's also saddened me that money is suggested as a problem for this particular university. Surely it should be about which experiment gives the most accurate results? Not which one is most cost-effective. On the other hand, it's positive that this particular student realises it's not necessary to experiment on animals and interesting that they actually stated an alternative to gain information. If you'd like to discuss this further or have any additional questions for this student, please log on to the OUSES forum.

## Cruelty Free Living

### Article by M. Ilston

Did you know that it's easier than you might think to live a 'cruelty free life'? It can also work out cheaper too!

Many years ago, I found it very hard to live a 'cruelty free' life. A lot of products in day to day life have been tested on animals in some way unfortunately. However, I have discovered that it's very easy and cheap to buy products that haven't been tested on animals. You simply need to look on the back of the product for the 'Leaping Bunny' logo.

The standards that Cruelty Free International have set to be able to be put on this list are impressive. To find out more about the 'Leaping Bunny' please visit <https://www.crueltyfreeinternational.org/LeapingBunnyfaqs>

It's worth taking a moment to look at the Leaping Bunny logo. There are a lot of different shapes and sizes of rabbits on the back of products. To make sure you are truly buying cruelty free, always look for the Leaping Bunny logo.



I buy every household item (e.g. kitchen cleaner, hand soap, shampoo and even make-up) from two companies, Superdrug and Co-Op. This is their own brand of products. They are listed on Cruelty Free International and some of their products are even vegan!

Superdrug even provide free delivery if you have a Health & Beautycard or free delivery if you spend over £10.

Another company that sell a nice range of make-up is Beauty Without Cruelty. Again, this company has the 'Leaping Bunny' logo.

Depending upon which brand of household products you currently buy, you could end up saving yourself some money, all while supporting compassionate and ethical companies.

### Your support is important to us!

SES is a Society affiliated to the Open University Students' Association. 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 OU Students Association 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](http://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](http://www.ouses.org.uk)

## Current OU Students Association 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 OU Students Association 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.

## 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](http://www.ouses.org.uk/resources.html)

If you are attending a residential school, revision weekend, open event or OU Students Association 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](http://www.ouses.org.uk)

In common with other OU Students Association Societies we have an OU Students Association 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 "OU Students Association Live", "Societies and Groups" and finally "OU Students Association 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](mailto: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](mailto: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](http://www.ouses.org.uk/contacts.html).