

Basel Declaration calls for open dialogue 07 DEC



More than 50 top scientists working in Germany and Switzerland have launched a new Declaration about animal research. Meeting in Basel on 29 November, they pledged to be more open about their research, and to engage in more public dialogue. The Basel Declaration is subtitled 'A call for more trust, transparency and communication on animal research'

Understanding Animal Research welcomes the Declaration, which is still open to signatures. The organisers say they are going to send it to deans of medicine and other research leaders in Germany and Switzerland to garner support. They hope to go on to promote it internationally. 'The animal issue is never going to go away,' says Stefan Treue, director of the German Primate Centre in Göttingen. 'We need solidarity among all researchers.'

There have been several issues of particular concern to researchers in Europe that have increased the pressure on them. In recent legal cases in Switzerland and Germany, courts have interpreted national laws as forbidding basic research on primates. Then there is the new EU Directive on animal research, which must be translated into national law in the 27 EU member states within the next two years. While the new Directive is more prescriptive than the old one, it contains broad terms like 'severe pain' that could allow countries to choose wording which makes the legislation more restrictive than intended. An early draft of the Directive included a ban on basic research using primates.

The Declaration stresses:

'Biomedical research in particular cannot be separated into 'basic' and 'applied' research; it is a continuum stretching from studies of fundamental physiological processes to an understanding of the principles of disease and the development of therapies.'

The Declaration makes eight points highlighting the contribution of animal research to biological understanding and medical advances:

'Over the last 100 years biomedical research has contributed substantially to our understanding of biological processes and thus to an increase in life expectancy and improvement in the quality of life of humans and animals. However, the list of challenges and new opportunities remains long... Without research using animals, it will not be possible to overcome the social and humanitarian challenges posed by these problems. Despite new and refined alternative methods, animal experiments will remain essential in the foreseeable future for biomedical research.'

The signatories reiterate the legal and ethical requirements to reduce the use of animals as far as possible and to keep their suffering to a minimum (the *three Rs*). Eight further principles relate largely to open and transparent communication, involving engagement with schools, the media and policy makers. Speaking to *Nature* magazine, Dr Mark Matfield, director of the European Biomedical Research Association, which represents animal researchers across Europe, stressed the success of this approach in the UK.

'Being open and discussing with the public why you sometimes need to use animals is a reliable and tested idea which improved the climate for research in Britain.'

Read the full Declaration and invitation to sign [here](#).