



# POSITION DOCUMENT ON INCREASED OPENNESS

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## INTRODUCTION

There is a world-wide trend, led by the UK, towards increased openness regarding the use of animals for medical and scientific research. In October 2012, over forty organisations involved with bioscience in the UK signed a declaration, in which they committed to developing a Concordat on Openness on Animal Research in the UK (<https://www.cam.ac.uk/files/concordat.pdf>). The Concordat had 72 signatories at its publication in May 2014, and this number has now increased to 99 – this includes all the major universities, research organisations and charities. Additionally in Europe a new organisation was established in early 2014 called the European Animal Research Association, which exists to encourage more openness and communication about animal research in key EU countries.

Over the last twelve months, ILASA has engaged in an extensive internal consultation and is now recommending that its member organisations sign an Irish commitment on transparency and openness for the reasons outlined below.

### TO ALIGN WITH SOCIETAL TRENDS AND INTERNATIONAL BEST PRACTICE

In line with international progress towards increased openness in all spheres, there is now a move towards an increased transparency about the use of animals in research. Public awareness and knowledge has increased with the coming into force of Statutory Instrument 543/2012 on the Protection of Animals used for Scientific Purposes, with its requirement for published non-technical project summaries and annual statistical returns. It is the opinion of ILASA that it is necessary to move from the current reactive position to having a positive, proactive voice in this process.

### TO DEMONSTRATE THE ROLE THAT ANIMAL RESEARCH PLAYS IN THE OVERALL PROCESS OF SCIENTIFIC DISCOVERY AND TREATMENT DEVELOPMENT FOR BOTH HUMANS AND ANIMALS.

It is important to demonstrate clearly the benefit accruing to both humans and animals from using animals for research and regulatory purposes. The process involved in developing scientific ideas and researching drug treatments & devices needs to be fully explained to the public. ILASA representatives and members of the respective research communities are best placed to do this.

### TO DEMONSTRATE THAT THIS IS A HIGHLY REGULATED FIELD WITH STRINGENT WELFARE, ETHICAL AND LEGAL CONTROLS.

It is the strong opinion of ILASA that making the public at large aware of the internal and statutory controls around the use of animals would contribute greatly to a greater public acceptance of the work that is done. These would include information on local ethical review, input of the statutory Animal Welfare Body, the focus on replacement, reduction & refinement, the role of the HPR, mandatory training and EU oversight.



ILASA also considers it vital that the public are made aware that those who work in the sector respect and care deeply about the welfare of the animals under their care and are acutely aware of their responsibilities.

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#### TO CONTRIBUTE TO OPEN, INFORMED PUBLIC DEBATE ON THE ISSUE.

It is the opinion of ILASA that clear, educational communication, delivered in a transparent manner, about the issue of laboratory animal research will be to the benefit of all. In the absence of such open communication the sole source of public information will be that of the anti-vivisection movement - this current imbalance needs to be addressed so that society at large can make properly informed decisions.

#### RECOMMENDATION

Having discussed the wording of the UK Concordat (which was arrived at after a lengthy consultation process) ILASA is of the opinion that a similar set of principles should be adopted in Ireland, but that it should be given a uniquely Irish title. Accordingly ILASA recommends to each of its member organisations that they sign up to the Comhaontú below.

Additionally there is an appendix containing a series of potential steps towards an increased openness. **It is vital to note that signing up to the Comhaontú would not commit any of the signatories to action any specific measure from that list – rather that each establishment could consider which of the suggested measures would be most appropriate to their local situation and would action those for a period of time & carefully consider the outcome of each. Each establishment would then supply an annual report to ILASA based on their actions and experiences over the course of the year and these would be collated for discussion at the ILASA AGM. In this way knowledge would be shared and cautious progress could be made.**

## COMHAONTÚ

#### COMMITMENT 1:

We will be clear about when, how and why we use animals in research

#### COMMITMENT 2:

We will enhance our communications with the media and the public about our research using animals

#### COMMITMENT 3:

We will be proactive in providing opportunities for the public to find out about research using animals

#### COMMITMENT 4:

We will report on progress annually and share our experiences



## APPENDIX ONE – PROPOSED MEASURES TO INCREASE OPENNESS

- a) Invite internal Communications Departments to visit the establishment's animal facilities
- b) Choose suitably qualified and informed spokespersons to deal with media requests e.g. Communications Department / Designated Veterinarians / Principal Investigators
- c) Develop a proactive strategy for internal communications within the establishment.
- d) Develop a proactive strategy for external communications.
- e) Develop a strategy to reflect the fact that, for reasons related to commercial sensitivity, personal intrusion & protection of animal health, all requests for access, information will not be facilitated.
- f) Have available concrete examples of benefits delivered, medical and scientific breakthroughs.
- g) Be part of science week and other similar events– talks about scientific work and 3Rs etc.
- h) Targeted visits to local schools.
- i) Facility tours by, for example, schools / other departments / students.
- j) Coverage in the national press of scientific breakthroughs that have involved the use of animals.
- k) Facilitation of requests from local schools for guidance nights / practical experience / placements.