

Sponsor responses

While the Weatherall report was initiated and sponsored by the Academy of Medical Sciences, the Royal Society, the Medical Research Council and Wellcome Trust, members of the working group have worked independently. The four sponsoring organisations did not provide input into the report's content, conclusions or recommendations. The sponsors are committed to consider the report's recommendations and to formally respond within six months of publication. Initial responses are as follows.

Professor John Bell, President the Academy of Medical Sciences said:

"The Academy welcomes the publication of this report. It provides a basis for looking to the future, both in terms of where primates may continue to be necessary and where alternatives may replace their use. This is the first time we have seen a scientific assessment of the use of non-human primates in research. I have every confidence that this will enable researchers to engage in, and contribute to, a more sustainable scientific and public debate."

Professor David Read, Vice-president of the Royal Society, said:

As science rapidly develops it is important that the case for using non-human primates in biomedical research is continually evaluated. For this reason the independent Weatherall report is timely for its comprehensive examination of the evidence surrounding this emotive issue. We welcome this report and will be considering the report's full recommendations in due course."

Professor Colin Blakemore, Chief Executive of the Medical Research Council said:

"The Medical Research Council welcomes this report led by Sir David Weatherall, which after thorough investigation and deliberation, concludes that the continued use of primates in medical research is justified where there is no alternative. The MRC is concerned not only that primates be used only when there is no alternative to answer research questions of particular significance, but also that the standards of housing and care should be as high as possible. We remain of the view that in many areas of research we are still reliant on primates to achieve our goals for improving human health. We greet the expert group's recommendations with interest and will be considering them in detail at the earliest opportunity."

Dr. Mark Walport, Director of the Wellcome Trust said:

"We welcome the publication of this independent report from David Weatherall and his colleagues. Together with the other sponsors of the report we will be considering its recommendations in the coming months. Scientists in the UK rarely use primates, only in carefully regulated situations and where no other alternatives exist. Research using non-human primates has played a major role in improving human and animal health, and this continues to be the case."

-ENDS-

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Notes for editors

1. The independent Academy of Medical Sciences promotes advances in medical science and campaigns to ensure these are translated as quickly as possible into benefits for patients. The Academy's Fellows are the United Kingdom's leading medical scientists from hospitals, academia, industry and the public service.
Website: <http://www.acmedsci.ac.uk>

2. The Royal Society is an independent academy promoting the natural and applied sciences. Founded in 1660, the Society has three roles, as the UK academy of science, as a learned Society, and as a funding agency. It responds to individual demand with selection by merit, not by field. The Society's objectives are to:

- strengthen UK science by providing support to excellent individuals
- fund excellent research to push back the frontiers of knowledge
- attract and retain the best scientists
- ensure the UK engages with the best science around the world
- support science communication and education; and communicate and encourage dialogue with the public
- provide the best independent advice nationally and internationally
- promote scholarship and encourage research into the history of science

Website: <http://www.royalsoc.ac.uk>

3. The Medical Research Council is dedicated to improving human health through excellent science. It invests on behalf of the UK taxpayer. Its work ranges from molecular level science to public health research, carried out in universities, hospitals and a network of its own units and institutes. The MRC liaises with the Health Departments, the National Health Service and industry to take account of the public's needs. The results have led to some of the most significant discoveries in medical science and benefited the health and wealth of millions of people in the UK and around the world.

Website <http://www.mrc.ac.uk>

4. The Wellcome Trust is the largest independent medical research charity in the UK and the second largest in the world. It funds innovative biomedical research, in the UK and internationally, spending around £500 million each year to support the brightest scientists with the best ideas. The Wellcome Trust is committed to public debate about biomedical research and its impact on health and wellbeing.
Website: <http://www.wellcome.ac.uk>