

[letter as submitted to the *Times* and published 14 April, 2014]

Animal Research at Oxford University

Sir,

Since 1979, April 24th has been World Day for Animals in Laboratories, an occasion for thinking about the millions of animals that live and die for science every year. As alumni and other associates of Oxford University, we think particularly of the animals used there - over 180,000 of them during 2013.

The UK law on animals in research has, since 1986, aimed at steadily reducing their numbers, with a “final goal” of none at all (the phrase comes from the EU Directive which governs all such law in member states). At first it was successful, but in this century numbers have been briskly rising again. Since the opening of the new animal-research laboratory at Oxford in 2008, there has been an increase in “procedures” there of about 25%. We are dismayed and mystified by this slighting of a law which, it must be remembered, gives research scientists special privileges and immunities as a *quid pro quo*.

In 2012, Oxford University was one of the signatories to a ‘Declaration on Openness on Animal Research’. If it means to redeem its promise, there is much that could be done to make this bad situation at least more intelligible. The University web-site, for instance, provides too little information and is not kept up to date. There are animal-advocacy groups in the University, junior and senior, which should be given official countenance: why is the new laboratory shown to BBC journalists, but not to them?

Oxford needs to remember that a university should be of all institutions the most reluctant to keep secrets, and the most eager to promote knowledge and informed discussion. It shouldn’t have to make a promise of this at all.

Professor Michael Balls
Professor Stephen R. L. Clark
Professor Martin Henig
Sir David Madden
Dr Desmond Morris
Dr Katherine Morris
Dr Richard Ryder
Dr Matthew Simpson
Professor Peter Singer