



Ensuring the social legitimacy of animal research ESRC DTP Collaborative Studentship

University of Nottingham and RSPCA

[Further project details for the collaborative studentship - Ensuring the social legitimacy of animal research: Comparing public and policy expectations](#)

Introduction

This document provides some further details about the ESRC Collaborative Studentship entitled '*Ensuring the social legitimacy of animal research: Comparing public and policy expectations*', available at the University of Nottingham. For details of how to apply, [please see the shorter advert and follow the links](#).

Background to the research project

The use of animals as laboratory models is credited with producing life-saving medicines, human health and biological knowledge, and national economic growth. However, the practice has a long history of critique by social movements, particularly in the UK. The continued use of animals relies upon a 'tacit social contract between citizens, scientists and the state' (Davies *et al* 2016). Whilst citizens arguably benefit from the results of animal research, legal and social norms require that those charged with its governance must ensure that animals are used only where no alternative exists. One key aspect of this governance is the system of local ethical review.

By law (ASPA 1986), all commercial businesses and Universities that carry out animal research must have an Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Body (or AWERB) that generally operates as a local committee who meet regularly to undertake a number of tasks. One key function is to operate as a 'forum for discussion', where the societal and ethical issues can be debated. However, preliminary research suggests that some find this difficult to achieve in practice (see Hawkins and Hobson-West 2017 <https://view.pagetiger.com/AWERB/AWERB>) Stakeholders, including the RSPCA, are keen to improve the way AWERBs operate. Several guidance documents have been produced, and new initiatives established. However, there is a lack of understanding about how AWERBs are viewed by general publics, and therefore precisely whether and how they help support the wider social contract between biomedical science and society.

With notable exceptions, social scientists interested in science, health and medicine have traditionally been slow to consider animal research, partly because of the sensitivities involved and a historic tendency to ignore the non-human. However, the recent push to openness from the scientific community, and the so-called 'animal turn' in sociology, has changed the academic and policy landscape, and encouraged an appetite for empirical and theoretical work on animal research, and for collaboration between social scientists, stakeholders and policy-makers. Nevertheless, much of the current work is dominated by multispecies laboratory ethnographies; these can underplay the wider social and political context. More detailed work is therefore required which focuses on the question of public imaginaries of animal research.

Methodology to be employed

We anticipate that the project will be split into three phases. Phase one will involve a critical literature review, including a new synthesis of existing streams of sociological work on scientific governance, public understanding of science, public imaginaries and laboratory encounters. Phase 2 will involve the organisation and running of a series of focus groups (estimated as 6 groups, each with 6-8 participants) with so-called 'lay publics', carefully designed to ensure a mix of backgrounds and gender identities. Phase 3 will involve the qualitative analysis of focus group data, and will explore how 'publics' imagine the work of AWERBs. If a gap exists between public imaginaries and current practice, this will be discussed and analysed, with implications for the social contract established. Whilst the broad parameters of the project are well mapped out, we will encourage the successful applicant to explore and develop their own ideas and interests within this fascinating area.

Supervision and support

This studentship will be co-supervised by Dr Pru Hobson-West and Professor Dimitris Papadopoulos from the Institute for Science and Society at the School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Nottingham. (<https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/iss/>)

Dr Pru Hobson-West is a sociologist who works at the interface of medical sociology, science and technology studies, and the emerging area of animals and society. She is a founder member of the British Sociological Association Human-Animal Studies group, and has an international reputation for interdisciplinary work, including with scientists and clinicians. She holds an Honorary position in the School of Veterinary Medicine and Science at the University of Nottingham, and a Visiting position in the Department of Sociology at the University of Warwick (2019). Pru also has close links with Schools across the University of Nottingham, and with the Centre for Applied Bioethics. As primary supervisor, Pru has extensive experience of providing support to students in navigating the sensitive topic of animal research. The appointed student will also benefit from regular interaction with staff and students working on other aspects of the animal research debate (see <https://www.animalresearchnexus.org/>).

For more details please see <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/sociology/people/pru.hobson-west>

Dimitris Papadopoulos is Professor of Science, Technology and Society and Director of the Institute for Science and Society. His current work investigates the relationship between novel technoscientific developments and processes of social transformation that involve human and more-than-human actors. His most recent book, *Experimental Practice. Technoscience, Alterontologies and More-Than-Social Movements* (Duke University Press 2018), investigates how community technoscience, social innovation projects and the distributed invention power of social movements change policy, politics and the meaning of justice today. As second supervisor, Papadopoulos will contribute his expertise on the role of civil society, public participation and community engagement in the making of science and policy. For more details please see:

<https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/sociology/people/dimitris.papadopoulos>

Dr Penny Hawkins has worked on the issue of laboratory animal research for more than 20 years and has led the RSPCA Research Animals Department since January 2015. Penny has an international profile in the welfare and use of animals in research, and, through her considerable networks, has been highly influential in shaping government policy and lab animal practice in the UK and EU. She sat on the UK national advisory committee on animal use for over a decade and has been a 'lay' member of four AWERBs, so also has personal insights into the workings of this governance system. Dr Hawkins will act as the student's mentor throughout the PhD project, via regular telephone/skype meetings. The student will also benefit from an internship opportunity at the RSPCA Headquarters in Sussex, during which time they will improve their understanding of animal research policy and governance.