



HM Government

Protecting people from
animal rights extremists:

A progress report



“Hundreds of millions of people in the UK and around the world today are alive and healthy because of the pioneering work of our scientists and researchers. Many millions more will be spared an early death or a life of pain because of the research now under way. They deserve our support. And they should get it.”

Tony Blair

Rt Hon Tony Blair MP, Prime Minister

British scientists, institutions and firms have been world leaders in medical advances for generations. A fifth of the world's 100 top selling medicines were discovered and developed in UK laboratories. Recent developments in the UK have led to new cancer treatments, including a vaccine for cervical cancer, potential gene therapies for inherited disorders, treatment for Parkinson's, a better understanding of Huntington's disease and progress towards a vaccine for malaria. Their research has helped save hundreds of millions of lives.

The UK is renowned for leading-edge research, innovation and an entrepreneurial approach to science and technology, and pharmaceuticals are one of Britain's leading manufacturing sectors, bringing in a trade surplus of £3.4 billion in 2004. In fact, the value of UK pharmaceutical exports in 2005 was £12.2 billion, more than £166,000 per employee.

A quarter of the entire research expenditure by the UK manufacturing sector is funded or carried out by the pharmaceutical sector. Research and development lies at the heart of the pharmaceutical industry and expenditure in Britain on R&D amounts to more than £3 billion, around £9 million a day.

It is the Government's aim to make Britain an even better place for science to flourish. But a small number of animal rights extremists have been attempting to put this success story at risk by an illegal campaign of intimidation and violence against individuals and firms engaged in this vital work because of their use of animals in research and testing.

In July 2004, the Government published a document, "Animal Welfare – Human Rights: protecting people from animal rights extremists". This set out a plan to develop a more co-ordinated strategy to tackle animal rights extremism and to protect those engaged in lawful research and testing using animals.

Over the last two years, we have implemented all the measures we promised.

The strategy was prepared in the context of a rise in extremist activity, including intimidation of the contractors building Oxford University's new biomedical research centre, and long-standing campaigns directed against a family run guinea pig farm and Huntingdon Life Sciences, including arson attacks, criminal damage to property and threats to a wide range of companies and firms connected with the targets of the extremists.

The Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005, introduced on 1 July 2005, strengthened the police's ability to deal more effectively with the intimidatory tactics employed by animal rights extremists. The Protection from Harassment Act 1997 was extended to tackle the harassment of people connected to organisations, universities and companies. The police were given additional powers to deal with harassment and intimidation of people in their homes. And two new offences of 'economic damage' were established to protect targeted businesses.

Since July 2005 it is a serious offence to target any scientist, research facility or company in the supply chain with a campaign of unlawful acts including criminal damage, trespass, blackmail and libel; similarly, it is a serious offence to intimidate persons connected with an animal research organisation.

A new team of specialist police officers now provides a dedicated response to tackling animal rights extremism.

This team co-ordinates operations and investigations nationally. It works closely with the Crown Prosecution Service which has set up a co-ordinated network of prosecutors with specialist expertise in animal rights extremism. Together with police officers across the UK they have had a number of successes against leading extremists. Many of their investigations remain ongoing, but already eight leading animal rights extremists are serving custodial sentences and two more are subject to licence conditions.

In parallel, the National Extremism Tactical Co-ordination Unit (NETCU) works with companies targeted by the extremists and has helped local frontline police to deal with extremist tactics from letter campaigns to pop-up demonstrations.

The Government has provided extra resources to local forces where animal rights extremist activity has been particularly virulent.

Departments and the police work closely with the bioscience sector and its suppliers to provide advice to protect employees and suppliers.

The Government has also adopted industry's suggestions about how the details of Directors and shareholders can be better protected in the current Company Law Reform Bill. Directors will be able to keep their home addresses private, and companies can withhold the names and details of their shareholders.

The Government recognises that there is still more to do to remove the ARE threat. Once the threat is removed our efforts will continue, to prevent the problem from recurring at a later date. The Government is determined to achieve a *sustained* removal of the extremist threat.

We shall keep the law under review to identify and address any remaining gaps in the legislation. We will also explore the applicability of other forthcoming criminal justice initiatives to our strategy.

We are also exploring every lawful means at our disposal to disrupt extremists' funding and communications.

Recognising that animal rights extremism is an international problem, we are working with governments and law enforcement agencies overseas in a concerted international effort.

Reflecting our historic commitment to animal protection, the UK has the strictest regime in the world for licensing animal experiments. No procedures can take place if alternatives exist and suffering must be kept to an absolute minimum. The Government funds work to refine, reduce and wherever possible replace the use of animals in research and to improve welfare standards. To that end the National Centre for the Replacement, Reduction and Refinement of Animals in Research (NC3Rs) was established in May 2004. And we continue to tighten our controls as replacements become available – for example, we banned animal testing for cosmetics, and outlawed in 1997 the use of great apes.

But we acknowledge that current methods are not sophisticated enough to replicate the full biological system of a living animal. And the increasing need to explore the role of particular genes in the whole body means the use of animals is likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

In the EU, we are reviewing the Directives that provide the framework for our own regulations and procedures. In response, we will consider our own implementation of revised Directives and Regulations to deliver the best regulatory system in the world, to continue making it attractive for good science to be carried out in the UK and protecting animal and human welfare and the environment.

We are engaging publicly to explain the way we are approaching these issues. The Government welcomes debate, in line with our democratic processes and traditions, but we are determined to remove the threat posed by those who advocate extremism.

There has been a positive movement in public opinion on the issue of animal research over the last seven years. Those accepting animal experimentation – as long as there is no unnecessary suffering – have increased from 69% to 76%. Those wanting the Government to ban all experiments have fallen from 26% to 18%. And those with a lack of trust in our regulatory regime have fallen from 65% to 36%.

Over 100 leading UK research organisations have now posted statements on their websites backing the ethical use of animals in medical research. And over 1000 leading UK academic scientists and doctors, including four Nobel Laureates, have signed a Declaration supporting humane animal research in this country.

Grassroots movements to support the use of animal testing continue to gain momentum. Pro-Test was started in January by 16-year-old Laurie Pycroft, in response to an animal rights campaign against Oxford University's new biomedical research facility. Pro-Test has helped raise awareness of the medical benefits of research using animals and its backing for the construction of the facility has attracted widespread support from within the University, the City of Oxford, the scientific community, the media and the public.

The People's Petition – an online statement that allows the public to express their support for the continuation of strictly regulated medical research using animals and for the right of those involved to live and work without fear of intimidation or attack – was signed by 10,000 people within 48 hours of its launch in April. The Prime Minister signed in May, and support continues to grow.

The Government is working to encourage further public dialogue so that the debate becomes more reflective of public opinion and support.

The UK Government will continue to take robust action against those extremists who put vital research at risk. By working closely with industry, scientists and enforcement agencies, we have put in place a strategy for the continued success of biotech in the UK.