University of Zurich Policy on Experimental Animal Research

The University of Zurich (UZH) is a leading international institution in the area of life sciences. The knowledge gained in this area of rapid scientific progress is of great significance to Switzerland, both socially and economically. The importance of Zurich as a research center is also determined to a large extent by its ability to integrate results gained across various disciplines, ranging from findings at the molecular level to assessments of entire populations. Each research area has its own methods, which are being constantly developed in order to open up new avenues of research. The large range of research questions demands an equally large range of approaches, selected according to their suitability to solve a particular problem. Experiments on live animals are essential to many research areas within the life sciences.

A respectful, informed and conscientious approach to animal research is a major tenet in the code of ethical conduct at the University of Zurich, and a prerequisite for obtaining valid research results. The University of Zurich and its management bodies are therefore committed to promoting and enforcing compliance with the following tenets and principles; in doing so, they promote the key points of the “Basel Declaration.”

The University of Zurich Policy on Experimental Animal Research, which first entered into force upon approval by the Executive Board of the University on 3 October 2013, is based on the CRUS (Rectors’ Conference of the Swiss Universities) Policy for Animal Research. The amended UZH policy at hand reflects updated legislative requirements and was approved by the Executive Board of the University on 2 February 2021.

The University of Zurich and its management bodies...

1. ... require all staff members involved in animal research to observe a respectful, professional and conscientious treatment of all experimental animals.

2. ... demand exemplary implementation of both the legal provisions on animal welfare and the 3R principles. They support measures for implementing the 3R principles, in particular the application of methods and measures that reduce stress or discomfort in animals and enhance their wellbeing before, during and after an experiment (refinement). They further support the use of state-of-the-art approaches to experiment design for appropriate replicated animal experiments that are reproducible and of broad scientific relevance (reduction), and the replacement of experiments involving animals with alternative procedures wherever possible (replacement). They also appoint a 3R expert to coordinate promotion of the 3R principles and to represent the University of Zurich at the Swiss 3R Competence Centre (3RCC).

3. ... provide animal facilities and research infrastructure that ensure professional housing, breeding and care of laboratory animals, while at the same time facilitating research that reflects the latest developments in technology and scholarly practice and that takes ethical considerations into particular account.

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1 https://www.basel-declaration.org/
3 In addition to the Executive Board of the University, the management bodies of the faculties, departments, and institutes undertake to comply with and promote these tenets and principles.
5 The 3R principles (replace, reduce, refine) refer to a concept developed by William Russell and Rex Burch (Principles of Humane Experimental Technique, 1959). Today, the principles are internationally recognized and, in accordance with legislation on animal protection (e.g., Art. 137 TschV), must be taken into account when designing experiments with animals.
6 https://www.swiss3rcc.org/en/
4. ... advocate knowledge transfer among researchers, also concerning insights gained from unexpected or negative findings (e.g., non-significant results), with the aim of reducing the number of experimental animals and of promoting those approaches that are most suitable for achieving the research objective. In line with the University of Zurich’s commitment to Open Science/Open Data, the results of all animal experiments must be published or recorded in at least one form. Upon publication of results and data, research groups must inform the Office for Animal Welfare and 3R immediately and provide the relevant access information.

5. ... ensure that the training and continuing education programs required by law for researchers conducting animal experiments, for animal technicians and for care takers are provided at a high quality level. Furthermore, they call for and promote complementary training and subject-specific continuing education, especially in the 3R principles, and monitor compliance with the training and continuing education requirements via random checks.

6. ... support researchers in the planning of animal experiments, in conjunction with the Office for Animal Welfare and 3R (animal welfare officers and experts in 3R and experiment design). The animal welfare officers assist researchers in their interactions with supervisory and authorizing offices and help researchers to implement the relevant animal protection requirements. These experts advise and support the researchers, act as an intermediary to the authorities, and oversee the efficient implementation of the agreed-upon measures in animal experimentation and animal care. They intervene and assist in crisis situations (such as during a pandemic) by helping to find solutions that reflect the principles of this policy.

7. ... commit to transparent and constructive communication on animal experimentation, animal welfare and alternatives to animal testing by supporting persons that participate in dialogue on these topics. They present their concerns in an open dialogue with policymakers, law enforcement officials and the general public. Furthermore, they ensure that staff members are sensitized to the complexity of experimental animal research and are aware of the divergent societal perspectives on animal experimentation, thus promoting the formation of informed and differentiated opinion.

All staff members at the University of Zurich working with animals ...

8. ... comply with the Swiss regulatory framework and UZH’s policy on experimental animal research. They hold the professional qualifications required for their work, i.e., they are knowledgeable about the biology of the animals used as well as the relevant legal and institutional requirements, and they are familiar with scholarly research practice.

9. ... take personal responsibility to carefully oversee and document any potential stress or discomfort caused to the animals before, during and after every experiment, and to reduce these whenever possible via suitable measures. Deviations from standard housing, breeding, and care practices are only undertaken in well-justified cases with the approval of the responsible authorities and only if these deviations are unavoidable in order to achieve the objectives of the experiment.

The animal facility managers ...

10. ... are obliged to comply with legal requirements and University standards not only for the housing, breeding and care of laboratory animals but also for recording the phenotypic expression of genotypes. Together with the researchers conducting the experiments, the Office for Animal Welfare and 3R, the veterinarians and, where necessary, the authorities, the animal facility managers contribute to

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8 Art. 129a TSchV, [https://www.admin.ch/opc/en/classified-compilation/20080796/index.html#a129a]
9 Animal Welfare Act (cf. footnote 4) as well as the Ethical Principles and Guidelines for Experiments on Animals, Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences (2005)
developing standardized, well-documented procedures (e.g., in the form of SOPs). They share responsibility for implementing such procedures in their units, thus ensuring professional and humane treatment of the animals.

The heads of research groups ...

11. ... who initiate and lead animal research and apply for research funding are responsible for ensuring the correct implementation of legal guidelines and internal directives within their respective research groups. As those responsible for the studies, they function as role models for their staff. They promote awareness of the issues associated with animal experimentation, and they support training and continuing education at all levels. They are guided in their work by the relevant legislation and UZH guidelines as well as the recommendations of professional organizations for laboratory animal science and the latest findings in research and ethics.

The animal welfare officers and the experts for 3R and experiment design at UZH ...

12. ... act independently of the researchers and heads of the animal facilities. The Office for Animal Welfare and 3R reports directly to the relevant Vice President. In matters of animal protection and animal experiments, the animal welfare officers liaise between the University and the authorities, oversee the correct implementation of measures prescribed both by legislation and by UZH, and encourage the use of established 3R procedures or the development and validation of new ones as required on a case-by-case basis. The animal welfare officers ensure, in line with the legislative requirements, that permit applications for animal experiments are complete and that they fully detail the information required to assess their indispensable extent as per Art. 137 of the Animal Protection Ordinance. The experts for 3R and experiment design assist by providing expertise in these areas. In cases of violations of legal obligations or deviations from agreed protocols, the animal welfare officers of the Office for Animal Welfare and 3R are authorized, upon consultation with the heads of the relevant research groups, to cancel the animal experiment concerned and to refer the matter to the Vice President Research. The Vice President Research may take further measures as required, and they support the head of the Office for Animal Welfare and 3R to resolve any conflicts that may arise.

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10 Standard operating procedures