# MEDIA RELEASE

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### Independent group announces recommendations on the use of non-human primates in research

An independent report has concluded that there is a strong scientific case for the use of non-human primates in research of biological or medical importance with the potential to improve human health.

Sir David Weatherall, chair of the independent working group that undertook the 18 month study said, "*There is a scientific case for careful, meticulously regulated non-human primate research, at least for the foreseeable future, provided it is the only way of solving important scientific or medical questions and high standards of welfare are maintained.*"

The report highlights the need for non-human primates to address particular research questions related to the immune, nervous and reproductive systems, where rodents and other animals can be too different from humans to provide relevant information. For many treatments of brain diseases such as Alzheimer's or Parkinson's disease and vaccines for infections such as HIV, research in non-human primates provides the only means of ensuring that therapies are safe and effective before they are tested in humans.

Sir David added "*It is estimated that there is funding available for only about 10 major HIV, tuberculosis and malaria vaccine trials in the next 10 years. These trials can take 5 years and involve 10,000 volunteers. Pre-testing in a small number of non-human primates can ensure we only proceed into human trials with vaccines that are likely to prevent millions of people dying of these diseases*".

The report highlights new research approaches that do not involve non-human primates, particularly following advances in brain imaging, computational techniques and other laboratory approaches, and identifies areas where the use of non-human primates is no longer necessary. Consequently, over the last decade, the total number of non-human primates used each year in UK research has remained at around 3,300, with the majority used in safety testing of new drugs and around 450 used in academic research.

Sir David said, "*Completely new avenues of research have opened up in recent years - reflected in the fact that investment in research has almost doubled in the last decade, while the amount of animal, including non-human primate, research has remained more or less the same*."

Against this background of rapid change the report stresses the need for continued rigorous case-by-case assessment of non-human primate research proposals. This is backed up by calls for greater pooling of information on emerging technologies, sustained funding for research into alternatives and greater openness and accessibility of information, to enable a better and more sustainable scientific and public debate.

Throughout the study the working group heard claims that the future of UK non-human primate research is threatened. Sir David said, "*There are concerns that high costs, a shortage of animals and harassment by activists are forcing scientists to pursue non-human primate research overseas, where we have no control over animal welfare. This requires urgent investigation on the part of the government and relevant funding bodies*."

The report urges those involved in non-human primate research to work together in formulating a national strategic plan for the future of UK non-human primate research. This should include a re-evaluation of the organisation of non-human primate research facilities, starting with the development of 'virtual' networks between existing centres.

Sir David said, "W*e are not calling for an expansion in non-human primate research but we need to give careful consideration to the creation of UK centres of excellence in this field. Focusing research at specialised centres would have huge scientific and welfare benefits."*

Initiators of the study - the Academy of Medical Sciences, the Royal Society, the Medical Research Council and Wellcome Trust - are committed to consider the recommendations and to formally respond within six months of publication.

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**Notes for Editors**
Copies of the report are available for download from www.acmedsci.ac.uk, www.royalsoc.ac.uk, www.mrc.ac.uk and www.wellcome.ac.uk.

While the Weatherall report was initiated and sponsored by the Academy of Medical Sciences, Royal Society, 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.

The working group heard oral evidence from 35 individuals representing academia, animal welfare organisations, Government, industry, patients, research funders and other relevant bodies. The group received 62 written submissions from the UK and abroad and visited 4 UK primate research and breeding facilities.

**Working group membership**
Members of the working group were drawn from outside the non-human primate research community.

Sir David Weatherall FRS FMedSci (Chair) - Regius Professor of Medicine Emeritus, University of Oxford
Dr Peter Goodfellow FRS FMedSci - Senior Vice-President, Discovery Research, GlaxoSmithKline
Professor Robert Hinde CBE FRS FBA - Sub-Department of Animal Behaviour, University of Cambridge
Professor John Harris FMedSci - Sir David Alliance Professor of Bioethics, University of Manchester
Professor Dame Louise Johnson FRS - David Phillips Professor of Molecular Biophysics, University of Oxford
Professor Richard Morris FRS FRSE FMedSci - Professor of Neuroscience, University of Edinburgh
Mr Nick Ross Broadcaster
Sir John Skehel FRS FMedSci - Director, MRC National Institute for Medical Research
Sir Crispin Tickell - Chancellor, University of Kent

**Terms of reference**
The terms of reference for the study were as follows:
1. To examine the scientific basis for recent, current and future use of non-human primates within biological and medical research.
2. To assess the nature and implications of recent and prospective changes in the UK and global capacity to undertake non-human primate research.
3. To review the use of alternatives to non-human primates in different fields of biological and medical research.
4. In undertaking these assessments, to take account of associated ethical, welfare and regulatory issues, particularly with regard to the 3Rs principle of refinement, reduction and replacement.

**Sir David Weatherall Biography**
Sir David Weatherall is one of Britain's most distinguished medical scientists. His outstanding career - with particular research interests in haematology and genetics - culminated in his appointment as Regius Professor of Medicine at Oxford University in 1992. He was also founder Director of Oxford University's Institute of Molecular Medicine which

bears his name.  Throughout his career Sir David has taken a close interest in the application of breakthroughs in medical research to the developing world and, since his retirement in 2000, has been particularly active in this area, particularly in the Far East and Sri Lanka.  Sir David has never personally undertaken any NHP research, but his extensive career has given him a broad understanding of the scientific issues involved.

**Broadcast Footage**

Broadcast quality footage of non-human primate breeding and research centers is available from the Coalition for Medical Progress http://www.medicalprogress.org.  Please call 020 7921 0080 to request copies.