



European Animal  
Research Association

# EARA study of EU-based websites 2018

# **EARA study of EU-based websites to assess institutional openness in animal research (2018)**

## ***(A report to the European Commission)***

### **Contents**

1. Background
  2. Executive summary of findings
  3. Methods used in the study
  4. Results
  5. Overall summary
  6. Methodology
- Appendix 1: Example of a website assessment summary sheet
- Appendix 2: Number of EU-based websites, assessed by country 2018

### **1. Background**

The European Animal Research Association was set up in 2014 to improve openness and transparency in the use of animals in research in the biomedical sector in Europe. Among its strategies is to work with national networks of the life sciences, to help set up and occasionally coordinate Transparency Agreements where the signatories commit to being open and consistent with the public on their communication about the scientific, ethical and moral justifications for animal research.

In order to better get a better understanding of the present situation on openness, EARA has been mapping the websites of European Union (EU)-based institutions that carry out biomedical research using animals. The mapping will help identify areas of good practice on communications and openness in the life sciences sector and areas where improvement is desirable. It will also help EARA provide guidance on best practice to its membership and the wider biomedical sector as a whole across Europe.

Institutional websites are a great tool for informing members of the public, media, decision makers and regulators about the use of animals in research and the contribution of animal research to biomedical science. They also provide strong evidence of the importance of animal welfare to the life sciences, and can highlight the significance of the 3Rs<sup>1</sup>. We believe therefore that this study of the websites of EU-based institutions can be a useful tool that to encourage greater transparency, in line with the recommendations made in Section 3 of the Review of Directive 2010/63/EU in November 2017.

Following a presentation about the website study by EARA, in April 2018, to the National Contact Points 15 Meeting on Directive 2010/63/EU on the protection of animals used for scientific purposes, the Commission made a crucial contribution by agreeing to support the initiative. It agreed to circulate an EARA online survey to all 28 EU Competent Authorities, requesting that this be distributed to all relevant institutions. The online survey asked detailed questions on the content of

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<sup>1</sup> The principles of the 3Rs (Replacement, Reduction and Refinement) were developed more than 50 years ago as a framework for humane animal research.

any websites run by an institution involved with animal research; each response subsequently provided invaluable additional information to the EARA study.

These replies complemented the work of the EARA researchers, who visited the websites of individual institutions within the sector to evaluate the level of openness of website pages.

A total of 1,219 websites within the EU28 were assessed<sup>2</sup> in 2018 and a rating system has been developed to analyse the data. The results of the findings are now presented in this report.

## **2. Executive summary of findings**

By surveying the openness of a large number of websites of biomedical research establishments across the EU, EARA concludes that the sector needs to make greater use of all opportunities to be more accessible and open, and to be more transparent with the public. Whilst progress has been made, we accept that much more could be done.

- Just under half (44%) of the institutions conducting animal research carry a recognisable statement on their websites explaining the use of animals in research and animal welfare.
- Just over half the websites assessed (53%) meet the criterion for providing ‘more information’, for instance by including the kind of animals used.
- Well under a third (28%) of the websites can be considered to have prominent mentions of animal research – such as recognisable statements within three clicks of the homepage.
- Only just over a third (36%) of the websites assessed carry any imagery related to animal research.
- Around half the websites (49%) assessed featured some kind of case study on the animal research they support, fund or conduct.
- Fewer than a quarter (23%) of the websites in the sector provide ‘Extensive Information’ online, for instance, Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) or press releases.

## **3. Methods used in the study**

A full explanation of the methodology used can be found in Section 6, below.

### **Why website transparency is important**

In public opinion polling, the biomedical sector has been perceived to be secretive about its work and the failure to publish information on animal research can also leave an institution open to this accusation. When these ‘secrets’ have been exposed, activists have been given the opportunity to inflict considerable reputational damage on researchers, institutions and the life sciences sector.

Communicating to the public on the importance of animal research via an institution’s website is an important way of increasing understanding and awareness of the work of the life sciences sector and how the 3Rs are being implemented. This openness also puts animal research in context, as a necessary part of biomedical research with benefits to both humans and animals.

### **Objective of the study**

The study aimed to find out how open and transparent EU-based institutions are, that conduct research using animals, by assessing their official websites. The assessment of the openness and

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<sup>2</sup> A further 100 websites from non-EU countries were also assessed.

transparency of each website was therefore measured by viewing the site from the perspective of a member of the general public. In other words, if a member of the public landed on the home page of an institution, what would they be able to find out about the animal research being conducted there? (A full summary of the methodology appears in Section 6, below).

### **How the websites were selected**

As there are no definitive public lists of institutions in Europe which conduct research using animals, it was necessary to compile a database from scratch using various investigative methods. Our understanding is that all the institutions assessed in this study, are either involved in research, or the funding or support of animal research. The study is not yet exhaustive of all institutions that conduct animal research in Europe, or those who may fund research using animal models. We fully expect to add more institutions to the number assessed in future annual surveys.

### **Assessment criteria**

A list of criteria was then defined in order to log the various indicators of openness. Starting at the institution's homepage, whether directly or through a search engine, we assessed each website based on six indicators:

#### Category A

1. Does it have a statement on animal research?

#### Category B

2. Does it provide 'more information' on the research that is conducted?
3. How prominent is animal research on an institution's website?

#### Category C

4. Does it feature images/videos of animals and research facilities?
5. Does it provide case studies of research using animals?
6. Does it provide 'extensive information' that goes beyond a basic description of the research?

Based on these six indicators there are effectively three distinct levels that an institution needs to reach within the content of its website in order to achieve the highest standard of openness and transparency on animal research.

The minimum expected of an institution is Category A, a statement on animal research. In Category B an institution would be expected to provide a greater level of information which is easily accessible. Finally, in Category C, far more detail would be expected as well as images/video.

The websites were then assessed (with a 'yes', 'no' or 'unknown' for each of the six criteria), and by logging the results, the percentages were calculated for each country. Multi-national companies with websites in different countries have had each website assessed individually. The total number of websites assessed in all the six categories always has the same sample size (1,219).

Where an entire website was unavailable during the survey, results were recorded as 'unknown'. This is distinct from where a functioning site did not show relevant pages due to broken links or password protection, which was recorded as a 'No' for the purposes of the survey.

## 4. Results

### CATEGORY A

#### 1. Statement on animal research

A statement on animal research should be considered as a basic requirement for any institution that is involved with animal research. The common feature of these statements is that they should provide deliberate acknowledgement that some form of life sciences work using animals is taking place or being supported. The broad types of statement should include at least one of the following: support for the Basel Declaration; a statement of commitment to the 3Rs, or other welfare measures; a declaration that animal research is an important in conquering disease and/or improving scientific understanding.

Statistics from research in the EU member states show that just under half (44%) of the institutions conducting animal research carry a recognisable statement on their websites supporting such work. The average sector website within EU member states is typically no more likely to feature a statement on its animal research than non-EU countries surveyed, such as Norway or Switzerland.

**Nearly all websites assessed in the UK (139 out of 146 websites) had statements, and 84% of those in Spain had statements. While the study is not extensive, we have yet to find a statement on a website in Estonia, Hungary, Latvia and Lithuania and very few, for instance, in Austria (five out of 38) and Netherlands (29 out of 197).**

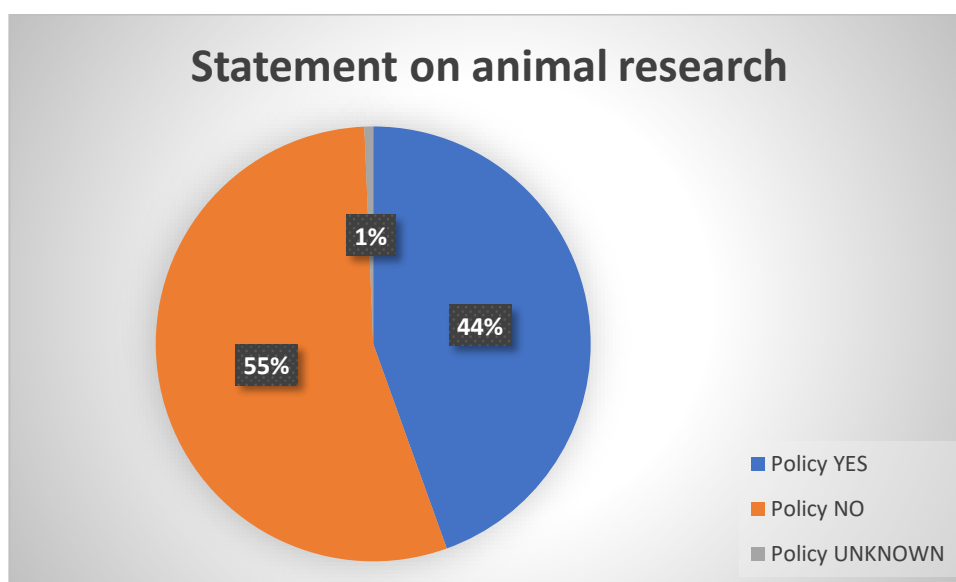


Figure 1: EU website study 2018 (total sample size 1,219)

#### Good practice example:

##### [VIB, Belgium](#)

The VIB is a life sciences research institute, based in Flanders, Belgium, that carries out basic research. It has a well-written statement that explains the necessity of animal research, names the species used and explains the 3Rs in a concise way. The statement page supplies links for

further reading and connects to a PDF of statistics on animal use. The overall design is clear and effective.

**Conclusions:** It is noticeable that two of the countries with the greatest number of policy statements were the UK and Spain, which both have a transparency agreement in operation. Given that we consider this the most important category to measure openness, the fact that approximately half of EU-based organisations in the biomedical sector lack website material demonstrating their convictions on the necessity of animal research (or the 3Rs) is troubling. This overall statistic will also worsen when UK institutions are no longer included in the EU figures.

## **CATEGORY B**

### **2. 'More information'**

The minimum that is required in this category is that the species that are used in research are named, or alternatively that the type of research conducted is explained.

Just over half the EU-based websites (53%) meet the criterion for providing 'more information'. Ideally a mention of the species used should appear on the landing page for animal research on the institution's website; however, our study accepted mentions of species that we found within the website as a whole. For instance, entering search engine terms such as 'mice' and 'rats' – or their European language equivalents – will often lead to one or more of these relevant pages.

**Among the larger countries where more than two thirds of websites had 'More Information' were France, Italy, and UK. Notably Netherlands (29%) and Spain (38%) did not perform well in this category. All websites assessed in five countries with a relatively small biomedical sector supplied 'More Information' (Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Lithuania and Luxembourg).**

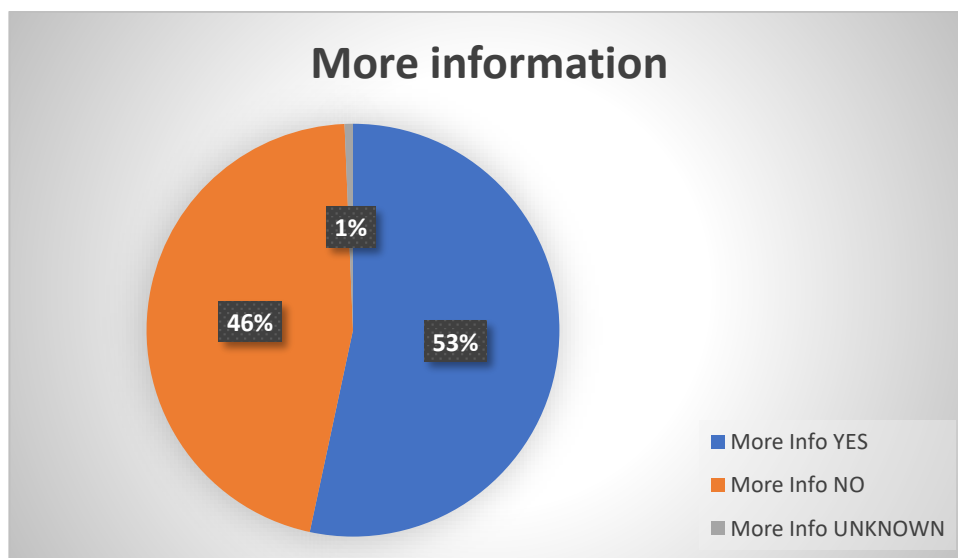


Figure 2: EU website study 2018 (total sample size 1,219)

### **Good practice example:**

#### **[German Primate Centre](#)**

The German Primate Centre, Leibniz Institute for Primate Research is a non-profit independent research and service institute located in Göttingen. The page works well by explaining the nature of animal research statistics, including a detailed discussion of severity levels, and situating the

figures in the context of German law. The same page continually updates with news stories and links out to other pages concern with the institute's work.

**Conclusions:** Compared to other types of institution, universities supplied more information in the 'More Information' category, as they often make research papers available online which include mentions of both the animal species used and type of research carried out. However, some institutions appear to reference pre-clinical studies without indicating whether animal research is an element of these. One way to improve the 'More Information' category rating on animal research on individual websites could be for institutions to publish their annual animal research statistics.

### 3. Prominence of animal research

Several measures can be used to make an assessment in this category. Some websites resolve the question easily, for instance if there is simple navigation from the homepage to the statement on animal research, or if laboratory animals are depicted on the homepage, while some have multiple mentions of animal research distributed across the site, achieving a positive 'Prominence' rating through the volume of material. In general, if a statement supporting animal research can be reached within three clicks from the homepage, this was considered adequate.

**Animal research could be considered prominent in less than a third (28%) of EU-based institutional websites. This was a category where most countries performed poorly. Only six countries had a rating between 50% and 61% – Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Poland, Sweden and the UK – in addition, both websites assessed in Luxembourg (100%) had satisfactory prominence. Countries not displaying animal research prominently include Germany (28%), Italy (17%), Netherlands (10%), Portugal (20%) and Spain (18%).**

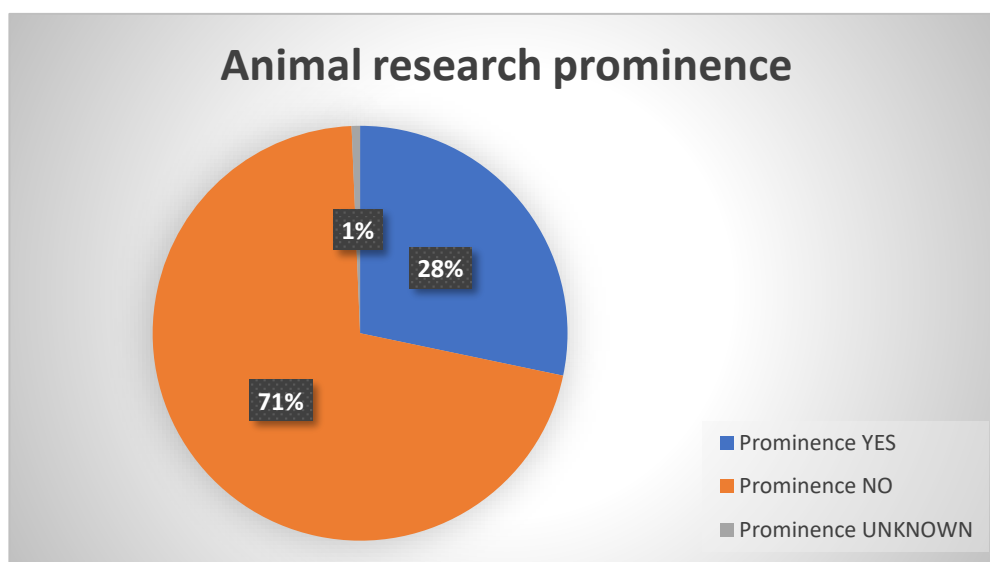


Figure 3: EU website study 2018 (total sample size 1,219)

#### Good practice example:

[University of Portsmouth, UK](#)

The University of Portsmouth website includes a mini-site dedicated to animal research. From here it is easy to get back to the homepage. It is well-illustrated and links out to a number of

relevant pages, increasing the volume of relevant materials online. The pictures are stored in a 'slideshow' format, encouraging visitors to stay online longer.

**Conclusions:** A 'quick fix' for accessibility could be to include animal research information in the dropdown menus from the homepage of an organisation's website. The study found that often sections of institutional websites which discuss openness and transparency have tended to focus on business issues and include statements on company ethics and values and on modern slavery, anti-bribery and equal opportunities in hiring, without mentioning the use of animals in research. Since these statements are used to indicate the importance of self-regulation, it would make sense to incorporate relevant animal research materials into these parts of those websites as well.

## **CATEGORY C**

### **4. Images/videos of animals and research facilities**

The study categorised websites as open when they displayed images of animals which could be connected to animal research, including stock images and clipart. This is an area of significant under-performance with only just over a third of EU-based websites (36%) carrying imagery related to animal research, with many of these only using library/generic images rather than original photographs (see Section 6 for more information on this).

**Two countries notably achieved higher ratings, Denmark (85%) and Sweden (70%). Of the larger countries, only three had roughly half their websites displaying animal imagery, the UK (53%) followed by Belgium and France (both 49%). The Netherlands had just 24 websites out of 197 (12%) that included any images of animals in relation to animal research. In Romania, just four out of 43 websites (9%) displayed images and in Spain the figure was 26%.**

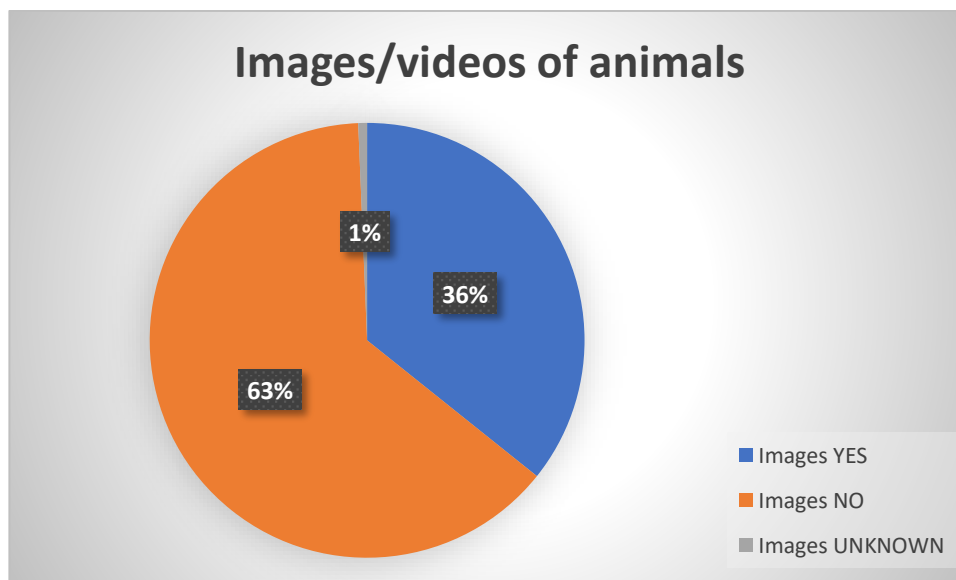


Figure 4: EU website study 2018 (total sample size 1,219)

**Good practice example (images):**

[University of Turin](#), Italy



The University of Turin, Italy has a veterinarian unit which is supported by a gallery of original images. The gallery combines images of teaching facilities, a public-facing veterinary office, animals *in-situ*, and animal skeletons in a teaching collection.

**Good practice example (video):**

[University of Manchester, UK](#)

Linking out from the University of Manchester's research ethics page, the virtual tour offers a realistic insight into how an animal lab operates. It is interactive and user-friendly, underlining a message of 'nothing to hide'.

**Conclusions:** By failing to supply accurate and relevant imagery, including video, the sector is falling behind its critics who campaign using strong visual materials both on websites and social media. This means valuable opportunities to promote the benefits of animal research are missed, including illustration of how the 3Rs and high standards of animal welfare are being met across the EU. With too little original material originating from the sector, opponents have a free hand to circulate out-dated, non-European and context-free materials. Even university websites, which can perform well in other categories, can be seen hosting glossy promotional photographs and staff portrait shots – yet not illustrating the page for the animal facilities on campus. Other universities meet the criteria for original images because medical diagrams, process charts, etc. are included in Case Studies (see below), rather than as part of a wider commitment to openness.

Some institutions already work on illustrating their websites with amateur images taken by colleagues, while other use professional photographers. EARA would advise using either of these types of image in preference to clip-art or stock photography or, worse, no images at all. Indeed, images taken by researchers can give by far the best indication of how a research lab works.

## 5. Case studies

By definition, these case studies will include an explanation of whether researchers use, or have used, animals for scientific, medical or veterinary purposes. Ideally these should be accessible from the main pages of the website and not just as links within other pages.

Around half the EU-based websites (49%) assessed featured some kind of case study of the animal research they support, fund or conduct. This figure is heavily weighted towards the higher education sector, where there is an emphasis on showing value for money with public funds ('impact') by publishing. A case study within higher education typically takes the form of a refereed paper; in pharma/CROs etc, case studies often describe the benefits of a particular treatment or procedure, while referring to the pre-clinical trial that uses animals.

**Countries where three quarters or more of the websites included case studies were Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Luxembourg, Sweden and the UK. However, there were some significant low scores in this category – only a third of websites in Spain had case studies (36%), while in the Netherlands just a quarter of websites (24%) included them. Romania had just five websites with case studies, out of 43 assessed (12%).**

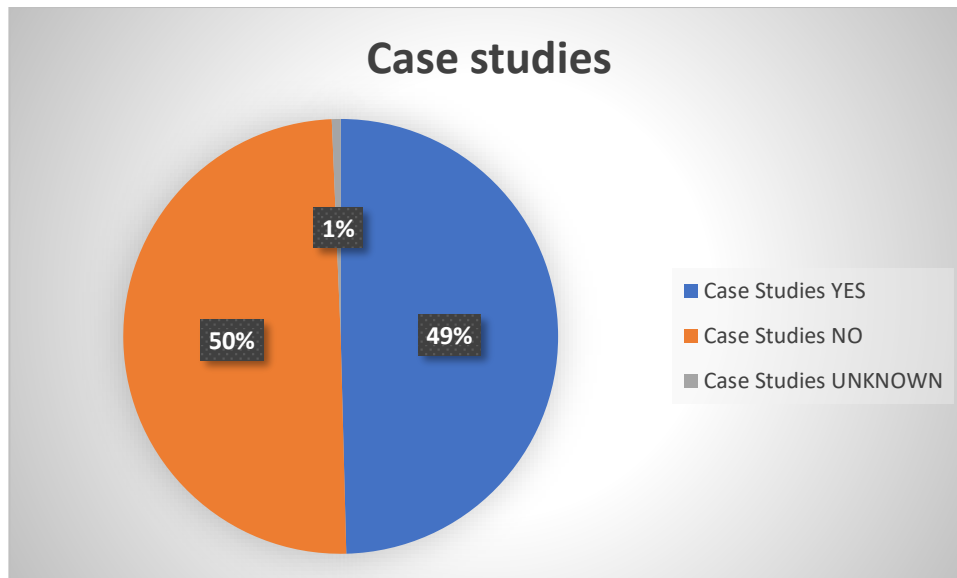


Figure 5: EU website study 2018 (total sample size 1,219)

**Good practice example:**

**[Leibniz Research Institute for Molecular Pharmacology \(FMP\), Germany](#)**

The Department of Physiology and Pathology of Ion Transport (Thomas J. Jentsch) of the FMP sets out its research - including its use of genetically altered mouse models - on a single webpage. There is a clear, non-specialist overview of the research, followed by more specialist one-paragraph summaries, linking out to related pages and, importantly, a final sentence summarising future research and a detailed bibliography. This page was chosen as good practice for its comprehensiveness, because it makes refereed papers available as case studies from a single webpage.

**Conclusions:** Often case studies take the form of a PDF of a refereed paper in a research repository, or a link from an academic's personal web page. A way to strengthen the overall use of case studies in animal research openness would be a link from statement pages to case studies, as a way of showing the beneficial outcomes of the research. By far the best type of case study would be one written with the general public in mind as the audience, but these are not that common currently. Including Non-Technical Summaries (NTS) produced by researchers on an institution's website could be a quick and useful way of improving the amount of information on animal research available to the public.

**6. 'Extensive information'**

In the study, extensive information typically refers to public engagement on animal research and examples of this include Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) sections, press releases, schools outreach work, short courses open to the public, facility tours etc. This category is the most flexible to assess as there are lots of activities that could count under these criteria.

**Perhaps unsurprisingly, this is by far the worst performing category in the study - fewer than a quarter of EU institutions (23%) in the sector provide 'Extensive Information'. The only countries where more than half the websites had 'Extensive information' were**

Luxembourg (100%, two out of two websites), the UK (56%), and Poland (50%). Notable poor performers included Netherlands (10%), Spain (12%) and France (18%).

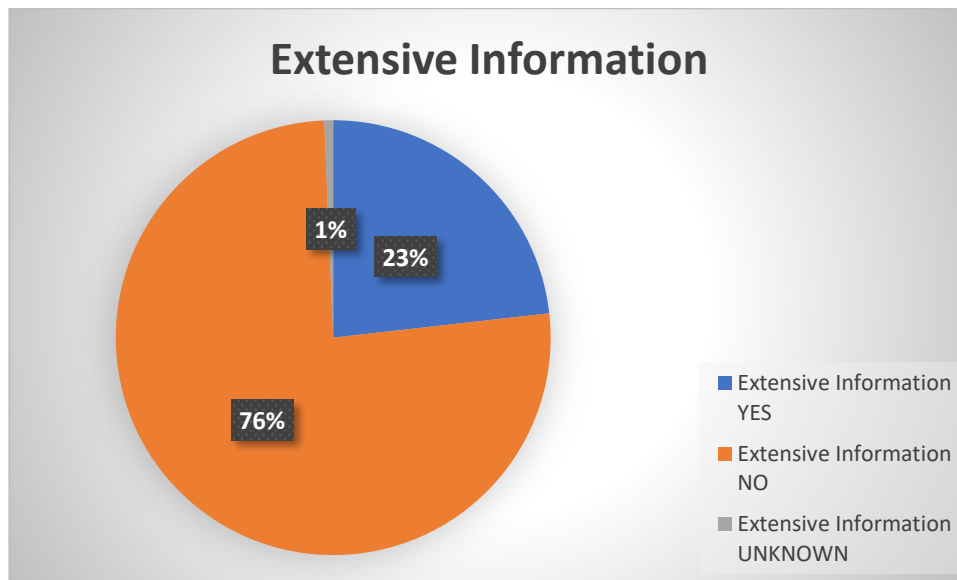


Figure 5: EU website study 2018 (total sample size 1,219)

**Good practice example:**

**[Orsi Academy](#), Belgium**

The Orsi Academy is a pioneer in the field of robotic surgery. It uses animals and animal cadavers for surgical training of various levels of complexity, and this is shared with visitors to the website. Once the viewer has scrolled down the FAQs page to the section on animal use, there is a very specific treatment of how exactly the facility uses the live animals and cadavers. Furthermore, the section opens with the opportunity to click through directly to a designated animal research page. Overall this page works well due to its clarity and accuracy.

**Conclusions:** A true measure of the progress that could be made in institutional openness would be to see the ratings for this category improve in the coming years. This is because many of the examples of extensive information categorised here would involve institutions adopting a broader communications strategy.

One 'quick fix' would be to add FAQs to a website, and EARA has plans to develop a template FAQ that can be used as the basis for developing something more specific for individual institutions.

## 5. Overall summary

By surveying the openness of a large number of websites of biomedical research establishments across the EU, the conclusion of EARA is that the sector is still some way from an acceptable level of openness and transparency in animal research. From a 'user experience' viewpoint, institutions within the biomedical sector need to engage with the public far more. Too many websites yield limited information concerning animal research, often needing a great deal of searching by a curious member of the public. Comparing this to the online materials of those campaigning to end animal research makes it apparent that their activities are far better designed to engage with the public.

The current moment now represents a great opportunity to engage with the public on the benefits and necessity of animal research, but further delay could increase suspicion that the sector is secretive with something to hide - particularly now that a number of institutions have set a benchmark standard for others to follow.

### Assistance by EARA

There are a number of ways that EARA can assist the process of improving the openness of EU websites.

- Given the importance of long-term public trust and accountability for the research community, EARA plans to repeat the survey in 2019 and every 18 months afterwards. We would appreciate the on-going collaboration of the European Commission and the National Contact Points with this important endeavour.
- Having now conducted this study and built up substantial information on the composition of hundreds of websites, EARA is well-placed to offer advice to individual institutions and associations on improving their openness.
- EARA intends to send a detailed report to each EARA member organisation on the openness of their website. We will also give feedback to those respondents to the EARA online survey who asked for further assistance with developing their online content.
- More specifically EARA can provide an advisory role for its member organisations on how to improve case studies and the layout of their websites and other web content to make the institution more accessible to the public. EARA also has plans to develop a template FAQs that can be used as a basis for developing something more specific for individual institutions.
- EARA is experienced and proactive in providing an advisory role in the development of images and videos. EARA can also assist members in arranging for the production of laboratory virtual tour videos and other web content to make the institution more accessible to the public.
- Using the documentation, techniques and baseline measurements developed in the course of this study, it will also possible in 2019 to revisit the websites already analysed and chart the improvement (or otherwise) of the institutional openness of the sector as a whole. We plan to do this by end of 2020.

#### **Other EARA activities related to transparency**

##### Transparency agreements

EARA is working in collaboration with national bodies for the life sciences, to set up Transparency Agreements across Europe to improve the openness and transparency of animal research. Currently there are agreements in the UK and Spain, with future agreements now planned for Belgium and Portugal. The signatories to these agreements commit to being open and consistent

with the public in their communication about the scientific, ethical and moral justifications for animal research.

Inspired by the [Concordat on Openness on Animal Research in the UK](#), the Transparency Agreement contains four commitments for institutions to provide more information about animal research. These commitments call for institutions to speak with clarity on their use of animals for research and provide adequate information for both the public and the media. In addition, they ask the institutions to work towards developing initiatives that generate greater knowledge and understanding of animal research.

A logical consequence of signing a national Transparency Agreement is therefore the improvement of the website of an individual institution. Part of EARA's remit is to give national bodies, and EARA members, advice on how to improve communication on animal research, including their websites.

#### Handbook

In a separate initiative EARA has produced a [Communications Handbook](#), which is free to EARA members, that contains advice about developing and expanding a communications strategy, particularly with regards to an organisation's online presence. It distils the experience of years of working with the sector, in activities that range from briefing employees on the presence of animals in an institution's laboratories, through to the full-blown crisis management needed to respond to the actions of determined campaigners.

#### Workshops

Another aspect of EARA's drive to improve openness in Europe has been to hold workshops about effective science communication on animal research. In 2018 [three workshops on Improving Openness in Animal Research in Germany](#) were held in Berlin, Frankfurt am Main and Tubingen, supported by the Federation of European Neuroscience Societies and the Society for Neuroscience, which brought together communications experts from across the biomedical sector. The intention is to roll out these workshops out with FENS in other European countries in 2019, while a similar project supported by the Max Planck Society is now also underway in Germany.

### **Assistance at EU level?**

At the EU level, there may be ways to encourage institutions to add a policy statement to their website as a priority and make information on animal research more prominent. Another way to improve information on animal research on individual websites could be encourage each EU-based institution to publish its own annual animal research statistics.

EU regulations require Non-Technical Summaries (NTS) to be included as a part of all project proposals that require animal research. In 2018, an EARA working group submitted proposals to the Commission on how to make NTS more understandable to the public. Some institutions already publish NTS on their websites and this could be a quick and useful way of improving the amount of information on animal research available to the public. There may also be scope for National Competent Authorities, or national bodies such as lab animal associations, to encourage more initiatives and outreach activities at the institutions that they oversee.

We would welcome further dialogue with the Commission and National Authorities to discuss how we can help further.

## 6. Methodology

### How the websites were selected

The existing list of EARA member organisations and potential members was used, as was information on organisations that are signatories of established public statements supporting animal research, such as the [Basel Declaration](#), the Concordat on Openness on Animal Research in the UK, and the [Spanish Transparency Agreement](#). Other institution names were gathered from press coverage, or by logging those that had been targeted by animal activists. In addition, EARA approached the various pan-European professional associations, such as FENS (for neuroscience) and FELASA (lab animal technicians), for their knowledge of institutions conducting research.

With the help of the European Commission an EARA online survey was sent to all EU Competent Authorities with a request that this be distributed to all relevant institutions in each country, which also increased the number of institutions included in the study.

A total of 1,219 websites within the EU were assessed<sup>3</sup> in the EARA 2018 study and a rating system has been developed to analyse the data.

### Approach

Researchers first approached each website as if they were curious members of the public locating the home page through a search engine. If there was no obvious indication of animal research, the in-site search engine or sitemap was used to follow this up. Key search terms would include 'animal research', 'animal testing', 'animal welfare', or their national translations. Secondary searches would look for animals by species (e.g. search terms such as 'mice', 'rats', 'rodents' or 'zebrafish'). Keyword searches were conducted first in English and then, if necessary, using the same key words in the specific European language.

### Assessment criteria

A list of criteria was then devised in order to log the various indicators of openness. Starting at the institution's homepage, whether directly or through a search engine, we assessed each EU-based website on six criteria:

#### Category A

1. Does it have a statement on animal research? (This means an affirmative commitment to it, not just matter-of-fact wording that indicates it takes place).

#### Category B

2. Does it provide 'more information'? (The minimum we look for here is naming species or types of research, or equivalent).
3. Is animal research featured prominently on the website or not - for instance, is there a simple navigation from the home page to the statement on animal research, or can it be reached within three clicks?

#### Category C

4. Does it feature images/videos of animals/animal research?

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<sup>3</sup> A further 100 websites from non-EU countries were also assessed.

5. Does it provide case studies of scientific work based on animal research? By definition, such studies explain how researchers use, or have used, animals for scientific, medical or veterinary purposes.
6. Does it provide 'extensive information'? (Typical examples of this include Animal Research FAQs, schools outreach work, short courses open to the public, facility tours etc.)

### **Grading system**

The websites were then assessed (with a 'yes' or 'no' for each of the six criteria), and the results logged. Only institutions where animal research is confirmed to have taken place in the recent period are included in the tabulated research. The aim of the project is to assess, by country in the first instance, the extent to which institutional websites are open about animal research.

### **Further commentary on each assessment criteria**

#### **Statement on animal research**

The broad types of statement are likely to include at least one of the following: support for the Basel Declaration; a statement of commitment to the 3Rs or other welfare measures; a declaration that animal research is important in conquering disease and/or for scientific investigation. Where the animal research is part of veterinary medicine, linking to a professional statement is commonplace. A small minority of institutions have very specific commitments derived from the nature of their work or Corporate Social Responsibility, for instance bee welfare projects – in some cases these are not counted as animal research statements, dependent upon the framing of the activity.

#### **'More information'**

The minimum we look for here is the naming of species or types of research. The issue here is not one of Prominence (see below), but whether or not the relevant pages exist. The naming of species would appear straightforward, however the study found that websites could direct viewers to material on "preclinical" or "in vivo" work rather than specifically mention the species used. Species identification can take place when, say, mice are depicted on a page or cited in a case study; the same information can also be derived from categories 4-5. A significant contribution to the provision of 'more information' comes from universities which include library pages which host PDFs of academic papers written from within the institution.

#### **Prominence**

Several criteria are taken into account to assess this category. Some websites resolve this question easily: is there simple navigation from the home page to the statement on animal research? Others depict lab animals on their home pages. A few have multiple mentions of animal research distributed across the site, but where repeated search engine use was needed to discern any animal research activity, or extensive page clicking where there was no search engine, an institution was not rated positively for prominence. The nature of the organisation could make some sites seem open more than others (for instance the illustrative materials on a veterinary school site). Likewise, charities, or universities hosting animal research have a number of competing priorities which is reflected in the overall composition of a website. Despite this observation, overall such factors made less impact than one might expect.

#### **Images/videos**

The study assessed whether an institution displayed images of animals which could be connected to animal research, including stock images and clipart. Often universities meet the criteria for original images because medical diagrams, process charts, etc. are included in Case Studies (see below), rather than as part of a wider commitment to openness. One predicted mitigating factor was that



the house styles or age of certain websites could make them less amenable to hosting images/videos, but this applied only in a tiny minority of cases.

We also investigated whether the presence of veterinary institutions (where animal imagery was more likely to appear) was distorting the national findings, but it made no significant difference to the overall EU-based results if they were discounted. However, in countries with a small biomedical sector and/or small sample size, one veterinary or agricultural institution could have a disproportionate statistical impact (such as in Croatia).

While not affecting the overall rating in this category, we do consider original pictures taken within facilities or in connection with their work as showing a greater commitment to openness, compared to the use of stock images.

**Case studies** These can be separated into three main types of case study featuring animal research. 1/ The scientific case study which typically involves links from university or company websites to internal research repositories or to publisher websites that house peer-reviewed papers. 2/ The use of case studies in the form of press releases and media briefings describing the outcomes of research for a popular audience. 3/ Copy which describes the benefits of particular products, usually medicines, or vaccines, for human or animal users.

#### **'Extensive information'**

In this category, Extensive Information typically refers to public engagement on animal research. Examples of this include a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) section, the hosting of press releases online, schools outreach work, short courses open to the public, facility tours etc. This category is the most flexible to assess, as there are lots of activities that could count under its criteria.

Extensive information can also depend on the nature of the work of the particular institution. For instance, veterinary colleges, universities and some agricultural colleges will publicise short skills-based courses in safely handling lab animals, in a way that other types of institution would not. Additionally, other institutions are 'extensive' in their actual websites – the animal research statement links to UAR, the Basel Declaration, or to 3Rs websites, or where the work of an Ethics Committee is made open to the public online.

#### **Looking ahead**

The methodology has helped to provide a present-day snapshot of openness in the sector – as institutional openness improves, so too should the methodology used to measure and assess it.

In future years the criteria could also be revised to be stricter. For instance, the emphasis on original images over stock photography could be increased; still images and video could be treated as separate categories; case studies could be rewarded for being more accessible from Statement pages, and so forth.

**March 2019**

## APPENDIX 1

### Example of a website assessment summary sheet (anonymised)



## Individual Website Report from the European Animal Research Association

**Institution:** Anonymous University

**Date surveyed:** 07/03/2018

**Website homepage URL:** <https://www.anonymous.edu>

Categories	Criteria	Y/N
1. Statement	'Does the website carry a statement indicating a commitment to animal research?'	Y
2. More information	'Is it possible from the website to identify an animal species used in research, or the type of research taking place?'	Y
3. Prominence	'Can animal research be considered a prominent part of the website?' This could be measured by having a statement (q.v.) that is easily accessible from the Home Page, a large volume of animal research-related material or, in the case of some sites, the topic made prominent by the nature of the site's publishers.	Y
4. Case studies	'Does the site host case studies of animal research?' For the purposes of the survey, a case study can include refereed papers, online press releases, or commercial copy describing the development/benefits of a type of medication.	N
5. Images	'Does the website contain images or videos pertaining to animal research?' While we strongly encourage original images and video generated through animal research – photos, filmed footage, medical imaging etc – for the initial 2018 survey we have also accepted animal clipart, stock photography etc.	Y
6. Extensive information	This can vary from an FAQ section, to extensive linking out to relevant external webpages, to public lectures; the common denominator is when effort is made to engage the public on the question of animal research.	N

<b>SUMMARY: 4/6</b>	<b>Four out of six criteria met</b>
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## **APPENDIX 2**

### **Number of EU-based websites, assessed by country 2018**

<b>EU Member State</b>	<b>Total Number of Websites Assessed</b>
Austria	38
Belgium	41
Bulgaria	1
Croatia	12
Cyprus	0
Czechia	5
Denmark	13
Estonia	2
Finland	9
France	191
Germany	151
Greece	6
Hungary	4
Ireland	7
Italy	64
Latvia	6
Lithuania	2
Luxembourg	2
Malta	0
Netherlands	197
Poland	4
Portugal	50
Romania	43
Slovakia	9
Slovenia	7
Spain	189
Sweden	20
UK	146
<b>EU28 Total</b>	<b>1219</b>

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