



# **Guidelines for the Ethical Treatment of Animals in Research and Teaching at the University of Münster (WWU)**

## **Preamble**

**The use of sentient animals in research and teaching represents a particular ethical challenge as sentient creatures deserve ethical consideration for their own sake. Academic staff and members of other professional groups who work with animals in research and teaching at the University of Münster, be it directly or indirectly, are therefore responsible for addressing these special ethical concerns. They undertake to uphold the principles expressed in the following ethics guidelines and are aware that this responsibility has both a personal and political dimension.**

These guidelines serve several functions: With regard to academic staff and members of other professional groups who work directly or indirectly with animals in research and teaching at the University of Münster, the guidelines should heighten awareness of one's special ethical responsibility and provide support in ethically reflecting upon one's individual actions. Furthermore, they serve to provide clarity and confirmation with regard to both current and future practice on how animals are and should be treated in teaching and research at the University of Münster. With these guidelines, the University expresses its desire to assume responsibility for its conduct in this area. Finally, the guidelines are also to clarify the position of the University with regard to the treatment of laboratory animals in science and research both within and outside the University. The following explanations express these principles in concrete terms and are part of the Guidelines for the Ethical Treatment of Animals in Research and Teaching at the University of Münster (WWU).

Ethics is all about providing justification for the norms and rules of proper conduct. Such norms and rules provide a framework of reference for those who evaluate the moral implication of actions or formulate corresponding recommendations. Their purpose and function is to formulate principles for the handling of sentient animals in research and teaching to which the researchers at the University of Münster and the members of other professional groups who handle laboratory animals can refer for orientation.

The University of Münster offers a broad spectrum of research opportunities in numerous disciplines including biomedical sciences. The University complies with the strict legal provisions of the German Animal Protection Act (Tierschutzgesetz, TierSchG). These stipulate, among other things, that permission to conduct biomedical experiments with animals may only be granted by state authorities, provided that the experiments have been shown to be absolutely necessary and that the anticipated suffering or harm to the laboratory animals is proportional to the knowledge which stands to be gained. These legal regulations remain unaffected by the following guidelines of the University of Münster, which are limited to the formulation of minimum ethical standards for the treatment of laboratory animals. The term “animal testing” is taken to mean any experimental or scientific measure applied to living animals which could potentially result in a strenuous situation with relevance to animal protection for the animals concerned.

Almost all ethical codes of conduct share the premise that humans have moral obligations towards sentient animals. Sentience is defined as the capacity to consciously experience something, either positive or negative. According to current knowledge provided by behavioural research, sensory physiology and neurophysiology, all vertebrates – as well as some invertebrates – possess varying degrees and complexity of sentience. The reason this ability is so significant in moral terms is that (only) sentient creatures possess subjective perception which can be affected by the way they are treated. Various ethical approaches and positions concerning animal treatment differ with respect to how our moral obligation toward animals is justified. These justifications range from contractual-theoretical arguments on ethics which are beholden to the principle of preventing suffering to an ethos of solidarity with fellow creatures or the notion of creatural dignity. They also draw varying conclusions with regard to concrete moral obligations which they presume to be justified. That sentient animals deserve special consideration for their own sake, however, is something rarely disputed in discussions on animal ethics. Prevailing opinion holds that such consideration includes both the negative obligation of not inflicting (unnecessary) pain, suffering or harm to animals as well as positive responsibilities, such as caring for and promoting the welfare of sentient animals.

The moral responsibility of all persons who work with animals in research and teaching has both a personal and a political dimension. The primary bearers of moral responsibility for animals in research and teaching are those who work, directly or indirectly, with the affected animals. It is their duty to do everything in their power to ensure that the animals in their care are treated in accordance with the animals’ concrete characteristics, abilities, needs and welfare. All persons also share the responsibility – to the best of their abilities – to help develop legal regulations, political and economic framework conditions and regulatory requirements which serve to benefit the welfare of the animals in their care. Furthermore, they and the University of Münster are obliged to raise awareness among staff, students and the general public of the particular ethical challenges which arise from using sentient animals in research and teaching.

**Non-delegatable  
personal  
responsibility**

**Academic staff and members of other professional groups who work with animals in research and teaching, bear personal, non-delegatable moral responsibility for their actions. Not only are they responsible for the academic quality of their work, but also for the welfare of the animals placed in their care. In particular, principal investigators and research project applicants are obliged to carry out their own ethical cost-benefit assessment prior to all animal testing. The University of Münster is committed to this cause by offering measures that encourage and actively support all staff members to assume moral responsibility when handling animals in research and teaching.**

The treatment of sentient animals in research and teaching places a significant degree of responsibility for the welfare of animals placed in their care on all participants. Members of all professional groups are obliged to personally bear this responsibility within their respective scope of duties. The provisions put forth in the Animal Protection Act (TierSchG) provide the legal framework for keeping and breeding laboratory animals, as well as planning and conducting animal testing; mere compliance with the relevant legal provisions does not, however, absolve staff from their personal moral responsibility for their actions.

In bearing the scientific, legal and moral responsibility for the respective experiment, the principal investigators or research project applicants are obliged to carry out a specific ethical cost-benefit assessment prior to conducting any test with animals. In particular, they must evaluate whether the planned experiment is necessary and appropriate. Not only does this require thorough study of all relevant issues related to the animal experiment, but also an unbiased assessment, formulated as concretely as possible, of the anticipated benefits (positive effects for humans, animals and/or the environment) on the one hand and the possible risks of harm to the laboratory animals (negative effects relevant from an animal-protection perspective, e.g. pain, suffering, fear or strain) on the other. Moreover, the principal investigators or research project applicants are responsible for ensuring that the number of laboratory animals necessary for the test is kept to a minimum and that they are exposed to the lowest amount of suffering possible (3 Rs principles). Prior to the experiment they should also formulate ethically justified, clearly defined criteria for a termination of the experiment (humane endpoints) and are responsible for the adequate care of the animals following the experiment. The principal investigators or project applicants are likewise responsible for foregoing an animal experiment if it cannot be conducted in an ethically acceptable manner. Furthermore, even if an experiment has begun, it must be aborted if circumstances arise which would negatively affect the ethical cost-benefit assessment.

In addition to the principal investigators or project applicants, all other personnel (academic and non-academic staff) involved in the experiment are morally accountable for their actions in the context of the testing situation within their respective scope of duties. This means, for example, that staff members should acquaint themselves with the current legal provisions prior to testing and obtain the relevant necessary expertise. Staff members are also morally obliged to voice any possible concerns they have with regard to how a specific experiment with animals will be conducted, or point out what they might believe to be ethically relevant problems or potential abuses (whistle-blowing). The Animal Welfare Office of the University of Münster should be the first contact for such concerns.

As an institution which conducts animal testing in research and teaching, the University of Münster also takes responsibility for helping members of various professional groups who work directly or indirectly with laboratory animals to understand their moral responsibility toward these animals. This includes providing suitable training and continuing education courses for staff members of various professional groups which, in addition to imparting necessary expertise, serve to familiarise them with the relevant legal provisions and enhance awareness of the ethical issues involved with animal testing. The University of Münster encourages its staff to critically reflect on their moral responsibility and engage in open dialogue with colleagues and supervisors about ethical matters and concerns with regard to the treatment of animals in research and teaching. The University of Münster has established an Animal Protection Office, to which staff members can direct any concerns regarding legal or ethical matters.

**Minimising animal testing**      **Our moral responsibility toward animals demands that we keep the number of laboratory animals used for research and teaching to a minimum and reduce the individual suffering of animals as much as possible. Experiments which exert strain on animals which exceed a certain limit are essentially unethical.**

Implicit in the moral consideration of sentient animals is an obligation to avoid inflicting unnecessary pain, suffering or harm to the animals. Based on this premise, the principles of replacement, reduction and refinement (the 3 Rs) have become widely recognised as guiding maxims of animal protection law and animal protection ethics in recent years, which members of all professional groups who work with animals in research and teaching pledge to follow. Accordingly, animal experiments should generally be replaced by substitute or supplementary methods whenever possible and legally permissible. Animal experiments should only be conducted with the fewest number of animals necessary for achieving the purpose of the experiment. The staff should do everything possible to improve the well-being of the laboratory animals in the testing situation, or to minimise the strain to the animals while optimising the acquisition of knowledge.

There are conceivable experimental procedures that would result in such extreme suffering or strain to the animals that they would be clearly impermissible and would fail any ethical cost-benefit assessment. It is generally impermissible to conduct experiments which force the animals to endure extreme pain, suffering or fear which will likely last an extended period of time and cannot be adequately relieved. In this case, “extreme” conditions are defined as those which humans would describe as unbearable without alleviative measures. (For initial orientation, please refer to the “negative list” developed by the University of Zurich.) If the objective of the experiment cannot be achieved with less harmful methods, the researchers will have to forego the acquisition of knowledge due to ethical reasons.

The principles of replacement, reduction and refinement should also be applied in teaching and training measures if sentient animals are to be used. The University of Münster and its facilities are therefore taking steps to restrict animal testing to those degree programmes in which the use of animals is indispensable with regard to achieving the respective academic goals. The faculties are making an effort, wherever possible, to develop specific curricula and establish degree programmes which are free of animal testing.

**The keeping and treatment of animals**      **The keeping of animals at the University of Münster must take the needs of the animals and their individual welfare into account in accordance with the current state of knowledge. The responsibility for the surviving animals does not end upon completion of the experiment. Following the experiment, staff should consider whether it is possible to provide the animals with a life perspective.**

Animals used in research and teaching are entitled to be treated in such a way throughout their entire lives that takes their needs into account as required and guarantees their individual welfare. This entitlement must be respected by all persons who handle and work with animals in research and teaching at the University of Münster – and not only within the direct context of the experiment (e.g. by administering suitable anaesthesia as needed). Also when breeding and storing laboratory animals, providing animals for testing and returning or euthanising laboratory animals following experiments, the staff handling them are required to meet the needs of the animals as much as possible. The responsibility of the principal investigators or project applicants and of all other persons involved in the experiment (academic and non-academic staff) does not begin, therefore, at the start of the experiment, nor does it end with its conclusion. Rather, all participants continue to bear responsibility for the welfare of animals placed in their care prior to and after the experiment within the scope of their field of activity.

Following the experiment, the responsible staff should consider the possibility of “rehousing” or “rehomeing” the animals. As this option is rarely feasible, staff should also consider placing the animals in the care of a third party. Only on the condition that both options are not possible may research staff consider euthanasia of the laboratory animal. In such cases, animals are ethically entitled to be put down in a manner as painless and stress-free as possible.

To ensure that members of other professional groups who work with animals in research and teaching are capable of meeting the obligations described above, it is essential that they possess sufficient expertise in the keeping of animals, and that only adequately trained persons are allowed to handle animals in the context of research and teaching. In this regard, the University of Münster is committed to ensuring that sufficient funding is available to offer suitable training and continuing education measures for its staff in the various areas concerned.

**Science**      **Scientific research can and must contribute to replacing, reducing and refining animal testing in the areas of research and teaching. These efforts are focused on a vision of research and teaching which no longer requires experimentation on sentient animals. The University of Münster is committed to supporting such research projects to the full extent of its capabilities.**

The ethically (and legally) mandated replacement, reduction and refinement of animal testing requires that researchers obtain and apply scientific findings for the benefit of the laboratory animals regarding both the welfare of animals as well as their pain, suffering and fears. Without knowledge of current scientific findings and developments, one cannot implement ethically sound goals for handling and protecting animals in research and teaching, nor achieve any adequate level of protection. Interdisciplinary research on the individual well-being of animals plays a particularly significant role in this context. The findings should serve as a basis for

determining and evaluating the strains which animals must endure in testing situations, as well as in their breeding and keeping. Furthermore, the findings should be used for developing methods which can replace and supplement animal experimentation.

The efforts to replace, reduce and refine animal testing are focused on a vision of research and teaching which no longer requires experimental or scientific methods involving sentient animals which lead to strains recognised by animal protection laws as being detrimental.

The University of Münster encourages its researchers to participate in such research endeavours, and pledges to promote and support corresponding research projects with suitable measures.

In order to emphasise the significance of this task and to further stimulate research in the area of animal protection at the University of Münster, the Rectorate will develop a suitable culture of recognition in research and teaching.

**Communication  
and information**

**The University of Münster is committed to fostering open and transparent public relations and engaging the public in an unbiased dialogue regarding the use of animals in connection with research and teaching. To this end, the University organises events and discussion forums etc. which increase understanding of the problematic issues related to animal testing and heighten ethical awareness of this topic among staff, students and the general public.**

The University of Münster is committed to unbiased dialogue and an open atmosphere for discussing the ethical acceptability of animal testing, and welcomes critical questions from the public sphere. It encourages researchers and staff members of all other professional groups who work with animals in research and teaching to actively participate in this discussion, and organises discussion events, lecture series etc. to serve as a forum for unbiased public dialogue.

Aware that transparency is an essential prerequisite for unbiased dialogue, the University of Münster will in future regularly inform the public in a suitable and easily accessible manner about research projects at both the University and the University Hospital Münster (UKM), their corresponding research objectives and the laboratory animals used in such experiments.