

SUMMARY OF THE CODE OF PRACTICE ON FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AND RESEARCH INVOLVING ANIMALS

INTRODUCTION

1. Freedom of information may have significant consequences for research involving animals at the College. Although the greater availability of information about what animal research is conducted is expected to improve public attitudes to such research, there are also understandable concerns about the potential security threat to research institutions from animal rights extremists, and about increased anti-vivisection campaigning.

2. Even though it is likely that anti-vivisection groups will obtain some additional information about animal research projects as a result of the Act and that this will be used in some of their campaigns, freedom of information could also favour research.

RESPONDING TO REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

3. The College regularly receives requests for information as part of the normal course of its business. Members of staff will be expected to continue dealing with these requests as usual. However, any request for information that explicitly mentions the Freedom of Information Act must be forwarded to the Central Secretariat.

4. If a member of staff receives any other request for information about which they are unclear on how to respond, or to which they are unwilling to respond, then the request should be forwarded to the Central Secretariat team. **If in doubt they should seek advice from the Central Secretariat.**

EXEMPTIONS

5. Some of the information held by the College may be regarded as exempt information, *i.e.* it will not have to be provided in response to an individual request. **The Central Secretariat will be responsible for deciding if an exemption is applicable.**

6. The key exemptions which are relevant to research involving animals and which the College will consider using in this respect are:

- Personal information (as defined by the Data Protection Act);
- Where disclosure is likely to endanger the safety of any individual;
- Information received in confidence;
- Where disclosure would prejudice commercial interests;
- Information intended for future publication.

CONSULTATION WITH THIRD PARTIES

7. When dealing with requests for information the College will consult with third parties before releasing any data that may affect them. It will also consult with third parties where doing so will assist the College in determining if and how the information should be released,

or if a co-ordinated response should be adopted to ensure that any exemptions are properly assessed and applied and to avoid the possibility that information is being 'triangulated'.

RELEASE OF INFORMATION BY THE HOME OFFICE

8. Another concern for staff involved in animal research is that the Home Office, in responding to requests for information made to it, might release confidential and/ or sensitive information contained in Project Licences. Much of the information in project licences is currently held in confidence by the Home Office under the 'common law' of confidentiality.

9. It is current Home Office policy to consult with licence holders before releasing any information relating to a researcher's work and it is hoped that it will continue to operate this policy once the Act comes fully into force.

10. The Home Office will be putting the "abridged programme in lay terms" about every new project licence in the public domain *via* the Home Office web site as indicated in its *Application for a Project Licence* form. In time this level of openness is expected to have a positive effect on public attitudes to animal research

COLLEGE CONTACTS

11. Any enquiries about this Code of Practice, or for more details on the College's Freedom of Information Policy and Model Publication Scheme should be directed to:

**The Assistant to the Head of Central Secretariat
Imperial College London
Exhibition Road
London
SW7 2AZ**

**Tel: 020 7594 5504
Fax: 020 7594 8802
E-mail: foi@imperial.ac.uk**

FURTHER INFORMATION

[College Freedom of Information Policy](#)

[Code of Practice on the Management of Records](#)

[Code of Practice on Responding to Requests](#)

[Code of Practice on Freedom of Information and Research Involving Animals](#)

[College Data Protection Policy](#)