

About the Boyd Group

The Boyd Group is a forum for open exchange of views on issues of concern related to the use of animals in science. Participants in the Group span a range of expertise and perspective. They include veterinarians, scientists using animals (from industry and academia), members of animal welfare organisations, anti-vivisectionists, members of government and charitable bodies funding or directly engaged in research, philosophers and others.

The Group's objectives are:

- (i) to promote dialogue between these diverse people and organisations;
- (ii) to clarify key issues of concern identified by participants, in order to reveal the basis of the various perspectives and positions on the issues, and to understand where the differences lie; and
- (iii) where possible, to identify points of consensus and make practical recommendations.

The Boyd Group was founded in 1992 following an exchange of correspondence and subsequent meetings between Colin Blakemore, Professor of Physiology at the University of Oxford, and anti-vivisectionist Les Ward, Director of Advocates for Animals. The Group takes its name from its Chairman, Kenneth Boyd, Professor of Medical Ethics at Edinburgh University Medical School and Research Director of the Institute of Medical Ethics.

Illustrations of the Group's work include reports entitled:

- *Ethical review of research involving animals: a role for institutional ethics committees?*
- *Advancing refinement in laboratory animal use*
- *The use of animals for testing cosmetics*
- *Genetic engineering: animal welfare and ethics*
- *The use of non-human primates in research and testing*
- *The use of animals in testing household products.*

General approach

Although the Group's discussions often highlight points of consensus on which practical recommendations can be made, it is important to note that achieving consensus is not the major goal of the Boyd Group. Where consensus is not possible, the Group's aim is to inform public debate by providing an agreed account of where members (as people familiar with the issues) *differ* from one another, regarding what they consider to be the relevant facts, the best interpretation of these facts and relevant moral arguments. In this respect, the Boyd Group can be thought of as a 'testing laboratory' for moral arguments and interpretation of facts put forward in support of those arguments.

This kind of approach has become increasingly important as the Group's work has moved into particularly contentious areas, such as the use of non-human primates in research and testing. In discussion of such difficult issues, members are not expected to leave behind their positions on the issues, but are expected to employ careful argument rather than rhetoric. In this context, the aim of the Boyd Group is not to take the heat out of the debate, but to use the heat to generate light.

Membership and procedures

There are no pre-conditions for joining the Boyd Group, save that representatives of organisations that support violent activity or break the criminal law will not be admitted. Participants comprise members nominated by organisations, individual members with particular expertise or perspective, and observers, who are either nominees of organisations or individuals.

Applications for membership should include a brief statement explaining the reasons membership is being sought – that is, what the applicant hopes to gain from / contribute to the Group. Applications are circulated to all members for comment, prior to the next full meeting of the Group, then the applications and comments are discussed and approved (or not) at the meeting. Members pay a subscription, which contributes to the administrative costs of the Group.

Any participant within the Group can raise any matter related to the use of animals in science for initial discussion by the whole Group. Following this, there may be a more in depth examination of the issue by a sub-group specially appointed for the purpose by the whole Group, which will prepare a report and recommend further action – for example, publication as a discussion document or communication with other bodies.

Publications

Although when the Boyd Group was founded there was no clear plan to produce reports or make recommendations, a number of influential discussion documents have since been published. These include:

1. *Ethical review of research involving animals: a role for institutional ethics committees? (1995).*

Initial discussions within the Group focussed on the question of communication between the scientific and animal welfare / rights communities and on the quality and openness of the review process for project licence applications to use animals under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. One outcome was this report, which discusses the arguments for and against the establishment of such committees and is believed to have helped persuade the British Government's Home Office to require that an ethical review process (ERP) should be in place in every research and testing establishment from April 1999. Home Office reports and advice on the ERP still list the Boyd Group paper as seminal.

2. *Advancing refinement of laboratory animal use (1998).*

This paper makes recommendations on how awareness of refinement can be increased in the education and training of users of laboratory animals, in research protocol review, in the policy of funding agencies and in the day to day conduct of research, assigning specific responsibilities to relevant members of the establishment staff. It also recommends ways in which knowledge about refinement can be more widely disseminated.

3. *The use of animals for testing cosmetics. (1998).*

Discussions within the Group leading to the production of this paper are believed to have influenced wider thinking on this contentious issue. The consensus position reached within the Group endorses the decision by the British Government not to issue any further licences to use animals for testing cosmetics, and this paper sets out detailed background information and arguments in support of that conclusion.

4. *Genetic engineering: animal welfare and ethics (1999).*

This discussion document, like the Group's other publications, is intended to be accessible to a wide audience. It considers fundamental ethical objections to the production and use of genetically modified animals; the consequences for animal welfare; strategies for improving understanding of welfare effects; the benefits sought from genetic modification and the need to use transgenic animals at all. In each of these areas, the factual background to the Boyd Group's discussions is described, and both the common ground and diversity of perspectives within the Boyd Group are reported. Where consensus emerged in discussion, practical recommendations agreed by the Group are noted.

5. Boyd Group papers on the use of non-human primates in research and testing (2002).

This weighty series of consensus papers was published on 9 June 2002 by the British Psychological Society, on behalf of the Group. The discussions leading to these papers involved key experts, including researchers who use primates, specialist primatologists, laboratory vets who care for these animals, and representatives of contract research organisations, as well as animal welfare experts and anti-vivisectionists, and other members of the Group. The full report includes a summary of the Group's discussions, conclusions and recommendations, together with five background papers:

- (i) background information - regulations, statistics and three case studies of the use of non-human primates in research;
- (ii) empirical evidence on the moral status of non-human primates;
- (iii) philosophical arguments about the moral status of non-human primates;
- (iv) welfare and scientific considerations in the use of marmosets and macaques in research and testing; and
- (v) use of non-human primates in regulatory toxicology.

6. Use of animals in testing household products (2002).

This paper was published in December 2002 by the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare on behalf of the Boyd Group. It includes a carefully worded and detailed 'statement of principle' from the Group, arguing for a UK ban on finished household product testing. The statement reflects a common feeling within the Group that animals should not be used to test substances that are widely perceived to be convenience products for which there is little potential need and when similar non-medical products with adequate efficacy are already available. The statement is supported by an extensive background discussion paper, which presents factual information about the use of animals in non-medical product testing generally, explores the arguments for and against a ban on using animals to test finished household products, and emphasises means of reducing the impact on animals of safety testing other non-medical products.

Role as a 'National Platform' in the EU

In a recent development, the Boyd Group has been accepted as a National Platform that can represent the UK in Ecopa, which is a newly founded European forum - the *European Consensus of Platforms on Alternatives*. The requirements that National Platforms have to meet in order to gain a place within Ecopa are stringent. It is vital that the Platform has representatives of four key interest groups – academia, industry, government and animal welfare – and should engage in open discussion relating to all Three Rs.

Membership of Ecopa enables the Group:

- (i) to communicate with other similar organisations across the EU.

For example, it is intended that the Boyd Group's position statement and discussion paper on household product testing will be circulated to all National Platforms within the EU with the aim of opening up debate about this use of animals (and the use of animals in non-medical product testing generally) across Europe;

- (ii) to exert influence at the European level.

For example, the Boyd Group has recently contributed to an Ecopa position statement on the Chemicals White Paper, which will be used to press the EU Commission to take steps to limit the use of animals in testing existing substances to the minimum that is considered strictly necessary on toxicological grounds. If implemented as written the White Paper would require the use of upwards of 10 million animals across the EU – which, as well as being extremely costly in terms of animal welfare, would have enormous financial implications for the companies that are required to carry out the tests.

Other activities

Contribution to public consultations

The Boyd Group regularly submits evidence to public consultations. The Group's wide membership and lack of any particular affiliation or 'agenda', save promoting reasoned discussion and investigation of difficult, topical issues, means that it is a good sounding board on contentious matters.

For example, the Group was able to draw on a wide range of experience of participation in local ethical review processes, and informed commentary on them, in framing a detailed response to the recent Home Office review of the operation of ERPs. This was reproduced in full as part of the Home Office report.

The House of Lords Select Committee on Animals in Scientific Procedures also drew on this strength, by using the Boyd Group as the core constituency for a novel conference to conclude the Committee's evidence taking. The Conference provided an opportunity for participants holding a wide range of views on the issues, including some who do not participate in the Boyd Group, to come together to discuss some of the key areas in which the Committee anticipated that it would make recommendations. The Conference was seen as a final opportunity to influence the Lords' conclusions and the full Committee sat in on the discussions.

Participation in other meetings

The Group has organised and participated in evening discussions at the British Association's Annual Meetings, as well as a session on use of primates in research, at the Fifth World Congress on Bioethics, held in London.

British Library Publication: Animals in Research, For and Against

Participants assisted in the preparation of this comprehensive annotated bibliography, prepared by Lesley Grayson of the British Library. The book is an excellent first point of call for anyone wishing to learn more about the animal experiments debate. It includes a Foreword by the Group's Chairman, Kenneth Boyd.

Web-site

The Group has established a web-site (www.boyd-group.demon.co.uk), which contains information about the Group, copies of all the publications, and links to other useful sites. It is intended to develop the site in future.

Views on the benefits of the Boyd Group

This year sees the 10th anniversary of the foundation of the Boyd Group, which has grown considerably in size and ambition over the past ten years.

The list of obvious, 'external' impacts of the Group, such as the publications detailed above, is quite brief, but this is not surprising given the Group's aims and method of working. Published papers tell only part of the story of the Boyd Group's work. In particular, it is difficult to capture the *process* of discussion in printed words – a process in which understanding between people who have rather different perspectives and experiences in relation to the issues can be enhanced, even if, at the end of the discussions, disagreements between them still remain. Indeed, simply bringing such a diversity of key players to the discussions is regarded by many participants as a major advance.

Participants note that the Group has enabled them to: "share views"; "debate questions of concern"; "air problems and potential solutions"; "show 'both sides' they are not ogres"; "get

questions answered"; "achieve better understanding of the range of perspectives", and "move towards mutual understanding".

"The existence of the Group shows those who say you can't have these kinds of discussions that you CAN".

"The Group occupies a unique niche".

Many participants indicate that they come to the Group "to learn as well as contribute":

"Talking, discussing and *listening* is the only way to progress";

"I've had my beliefs and pre-conceptions challenged";

"The Group has forced me to look at the issues in a different way."

Representatives of scientific societies and funding bodies report that their organisations find the Group valuable and that they feed the concerns and opinions from discussions into the work of policy, animal welfare/ethics, research management or similar working groups; the funding process itself; and/or to members or beneficiaries of the organisations:

"Participating has been useful as a source of views in areas where we are developing our own policy".

On a less positive note, there is concern that only one "out and out anti-vivisectionist" group participates regularly, and this anti-vivisection group urges that more radical, practical action be taken by the Group. In practice, the Group seeks to identify, and wherever possible pursues, practical action to effect change – but it is also true that the Group tends to adopt an evolutionary, not a revolutionary, approach, mainly because it is a forum for discussion, not a political organisation. However, it is important to note that this kind of approach, in itself, can bring practical benefits. For example, the more "cultural" effects that the discussions have on individuals and organisations have and should in future help to pave the way for practical change:

"A lot of key players have started to think differently because of the Boyd Group".

"The Group has forced me to look at the issues in a different way and has changed the nature of debates within my organisation. We are more willing to listen to the anti-vivisectionist point of view and to respect it".

"Our Research Management Group has been influenced by the Group - for example, in setting up an initiative to support work on the Three Rs"

The future

The Group faces considerable challenges in the immediate future, particularly as its discussions move into even more contentious areas. In this work it is vital that all shades of informed opinion are represented. The Group is continuing to strive to ensure that a wide range of participants join the discussions – but, despite the lack of any hidden agenda or pre-condition for participation, is finding this difficult. On a strictly practical note, it is also vital that the Group's funding is put on a firmer footing, if it is to continue to achieve its ambitious aims and accrue the wider benefits described above.