

# Using social media as a tool to educate about animal research

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Social media is used to reach a wider audience. Imperial College London (ICL) decided to improve its use of social media and engaged in several campaigns to promote our animal research excellences. Platforms like Instagram and X (formally Twitter) are specifically common among younger audiences. As such, we decided to use them to explain to younger people e.g. Imperial College students, the reasons and the ethics behind animal research at ICL.

## #MiceInResearch Campaign

In 2021 Understanding Animal Research (UAR) started a social media campaign using the #MiceInResearch to celebrate openness and transparency around the use of mice in research and to highlight the role of the most used animal in scientific research. Every year the campaign involves many institutions engaging with millions of people worldwide through social media platforms using the hashtag.

## Imperial College London #MiceInResearch

As mice are the most used animal at ICL, in May 2023 we joined UAR's annual #MiceInResearch social media event with an Instagram takeover. Central Biomedical Services (CBS) opened the doors of the state-of-the-art breeding unit to talk openly about the research and care of mice. The takeover saw as protagonists an Animal Technician, a PhD student and a senior researcher who was also a member of the local Animal Welfare Ethical Review Body (AWERB) working as a team to show the public how we care for mice, why we use mice at ICL and how animal research is regulated.



## How we care for our animals

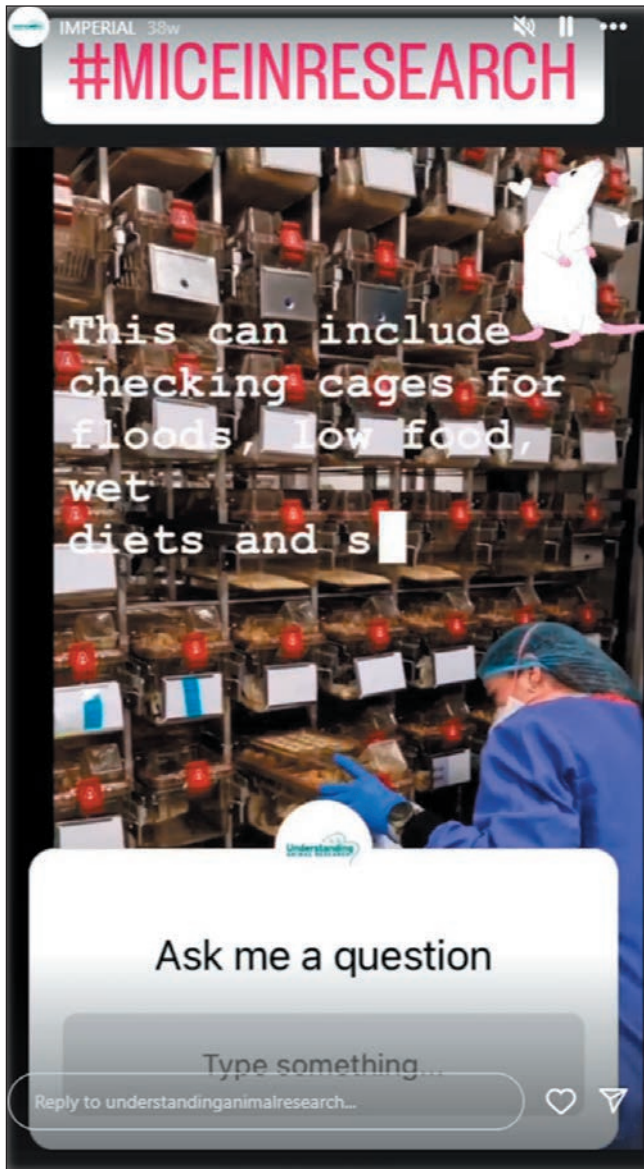
Stephanie Natario showed that:

The health and welfare of our animals is of primary importance, with CBS's high quality in animal care has been AAALAC Accredited since 2018.

We have a team of highly experienced technicians who care for the animals. The animals are provided with food, water, enrichment, companionship and the right environmental conditions to ensure they have a comfortable and happy life.

We also make sure to use the correct personal protective equipment (PPE) that not only protects us but also protects the animals from anything we may bring from the outside into unit.

We work closely with our in-house environmental enrichment committee to give our animals a better lifestyle that allows them to express natural behaviours.



### Why we use animals

Chiara Pojani demonstrated that:

Animal use plays an essential part in many ICL Research Programmes, advancing our knowledge of disease and treatment options.

We work with animals to understand the mechanisms of diseases like obesity and their effects on the human body. Animal research plays a crucial role in identifying ways of treating diseases.

Any experiment is conducted considering the welfare of the animals used and with the principles of the 3Rs in mind.

ICL is transparent about their animal research and aims to communicate it openly.



### How we regulated animal research

Elaine Irvine explained that:

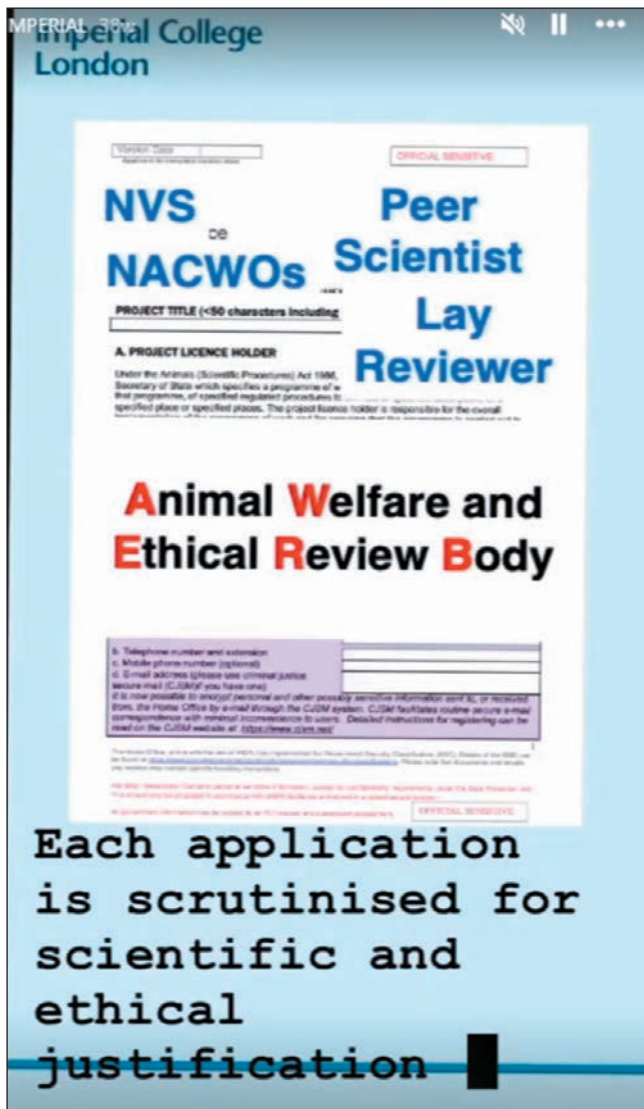
Before researchers can use animals at Imperial there is a rigorous process they need to go through.

They initially need to submit a project licence within ICL which goes through several stages of internal review before being sent to AWERB for further review.

The application is then sent to the Home Office for approval.

Each application is scrutinised for scientific and ethical justification of animal use.

This process can take up to a year to be completed.



We received the openness award from UAR which was a great achievement for us and encourages us to continue to speak to the public about animal research. What made this take over stand out was that it was technician led and brought in people from separate roles.



Thanks to this experience, I felt prouder of my work and felt that what I do is part of a bigger picture. The takeover gave me the confidence to engage more in initiatives involving openness around animal research as there is still a stigma with regards to testing on animals.

### Measuring success

The post-takeover analytics showed that the ICL campaign was followed by a high number of users and attracted a good level of engagement on social media (Figure 1).

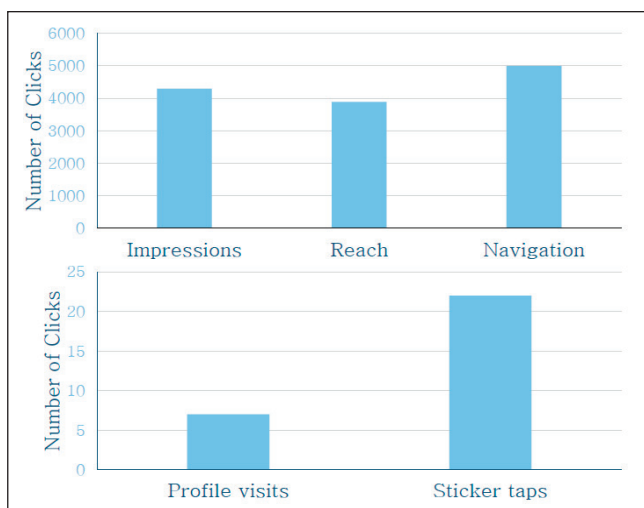


Figure 1.



## **Imperial College London on social media in the future**

We are working on having dedicated Imperial Animal Research social media channels to continue engaging with the public. Moreover, we also want to focus on helping our local communities learn about the research we have going on. Therefore we are working on developing community engagement initiatives and school projects to inform and educate our neighbourhood about animal research across Imperial College Campuses.

## **References**

Instagram Takeover on UAR Instagram Page and the UAR Website.