

(To be sent out to LA1 and LA2 officials , and a copy to ethics committees for information)

Circular letter on the application of art. 32 § 6 and art. 33 § 2 of the Royal Decree of 29 May 2013 on the protection of laboratory animals

Dear responsible,

Each user, breeder or supplier shall ensure that the employed elementary and special caregivers, active participants, and trial leaders keep their knowledge up to date. This requirement also applies to persons responsible for the killing of laboratory animals. In addition, proof of maintenance of knowledge must be shown when requested by the Flemish Animal Welfare Service (afdeling Dierenwelzijn, Departement Omgeving, Vlaamse Overheid).

During inspections by the Flemish Animal Welfare Service, it has so far always been verified whether said personnel follow a relevant training course at least once a year and whether proof of this, e.g., attendance certificates, is kept centrally.

In a collaboration between the Flemish Animal Research Committee (Vlaamse Proefdiercommissie) and a working group of the Flemish Interuniversity Council (VLIR) a good practice was worked out to give shape in a structured way to (monitoring) this training requirement.

Through this note, the structured approach is made known and recommended to all recognised establishments.

Good practice: implementation and follow-up of permanent education

General concept

Each staff member must, according to his or her position, have followed a predefined number of hours of continuing education spread over the previous three years.

Implementation for various target groups

Trial leaders and active participants follow at least 24 hours of continuing education initiatives per three years, of which *at least* 12 hours are obtained by participating in training courses with a quality label issued by a quality control committee (see section 'Quality of the continuing education'), and possibly supplemented with extra hours that can be obtained through or during other activities, namely:

- Following internal training courses
- The internal or external acquisition of skills
- Participating in seminars, workshops, or conferences with a clear animal-related focus¹

¹ Events with a clear animal-related focus have a theme that is animal-related and goes beyond merely reporting on experiments with laboratory animals in a scientific context. For example, a symposium entitled "Animal models in current cancer research" is eligible, but a symposium entitled "Tumour immunology", which also deals with experiments using

- Publishing experimental animal publications², at a rate of maximum 4 hours per peer reviewed publication

Elementary and special animal caretakers follow at least 12 hours of training every 3 years, whereby fully internally organized continuing education initiatives are possible.

Persons who do not belong to one of the above categories but are experts in the killing of animals (Art. 33§2 of the Royal Decree of 29 May 2013 on the protection of laboratory animals) must also keep their knowledge of the killing of animals up to date and be able to demonstrate their competence. However, no minimum number of hours of permanent training is recorded for these persons.

Supplement:

- This means that the end of the third year after obtaining the basic training certificate is the first time at which this obligation must be fulfilled for a person who has completed the basic training.
- The training manager of the institution may choose to extend the 3-year period in case of prolonged absence due to illness or parental absence (or to reduce the number of hours to be completed on a pro rata basis).

Content of the continuing education

Both more general and more specific, and both more practical and more theoretical training initiatives, can be useful. The most appropriate content and form of the continuing education is also determined by the exact function and activities of a staff member.

The level of continuing education required depends on the function actually performed, not on the level of basic training. For example, a person who has received basic training for active participants but is active as a laboratory animal caregiver must complete the continuing education required for animal care providers.

Species-specific knowledge is of great importance for all positions involved. If a staff member has to work with a different (new) species, further training on the new species is needed, even for employees who have been practising a particular technique for a long time.

As stipulated in Article 32 of the Royal Decree, depending on the category in which they find themselves, staff members must keep their knowledge up to date in relation to the topics set out in Annexes 8 to 11 of the Decree. It is explicitly stated here that training initiatives focusing on 3R, alternatives, complementarity between *in vitro* and *in vivo*, the societal perception and view on animal testing, and communication and transparency regarding laboratory animals can be part of the continuous training.

Quality of continuing education

Similar to the distinction FELASA makes between accredited, accepted and internally approved training, it is proposed to follow the same reasoning in continuing education initiatives and to make a distinction between the following categories when monitoring the training of trial leaders and active participants:

laboratory animals, is not. It goes without saying that the events that focus on 3R, alternatives and complementarity between *in vitro* and *in vivo* are pre-eminently covered by the term “with a clear animal-related focus”.

² An “experimental publication” is to be understood in the same sense as the above footnote.

1. Officially FELASA accredited courses and training organized by scientific or laboratory animal organizations such as BCLAS, FELASA, ETPLAS, ... An overview of these courses will be published on the [BCLAS website](#).
2. Training courses and activities with a quality label issued by a quality assurance committee. An overview of accepted training courses will be published on the [BCLAS website](#).
3. Training courses and activities approved by the (training) officer, Animal Welfare Service or ethics committee of the institution.

For trial leaders and active participants, at least 12 of the 24 hours imposed must fall under the first or second category.

Quality assurance committee

With the help of the Flemish Interuniversity Council (VLIR), the Flemish Commission on Laboratory Animals (VPDC) has set up a quality assurance committee. The task of this committee is to check whether the training courses and activities submitted to it have a clear animal-related approach and are of a sufficiently high level to qualify as an 'accepted' (accredited) training initiative.

Monitoring and compliance

It is proposed that employees themselves keep a record of the training they receive in a central system set up by the institution. In this way, the person in charge, and the Flemish Animal Welfare Service in case of inspections, can monitor whether the staff is sufficiently trained at all times.

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