



European Animal
Research Association



stichting informatie
dierproeven

Transparency Agreement on Animal Research in the Netherlands

ANNUAL REPORT 2023

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STICHTING INFORMATIE DIERPROEVEN & EUROPEAN ANIMAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION |

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About this year report

The signatories of the Transparency Agreement on Animal Research in the Netherlands aim to report on their progress and experiences annually. To keep track of the level of openness and transparency, the Stichting Informatie Dierproeven (SID) and the European Animal Research Association (EARA) run a yearly survey among the signatories that asks about activities throughout the year. The results will be a starting point for a discussion among the signatories on what to work on in the coming years. This report shows the summarised outcomes of this survey, the signatories' reflection on the results and their ambitions for the future. This year report is written up by the Stichting Informatie Dierproeven (SID) and the European Animal Research Association and made publicly available on SID and EARA websites.

About the Transparency Agreement

The Transparency Agreement on Animal Research in the Netherlands was launched on 2 November 2021, with 15 signatories.

At the start of 2023, we had 20 signatories...



Amsterdam UMC, Biomedical Primate Research Centre, Charles River Laboratories Den Bosch B.V., Envigo RMS B.V., Erasmus MC, Hubrecht Institute, Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW), Leiden University, Leiden University Medical Center, Maastricht University, Netherlands Cancer Institute, Netherlands Institute for Neuroscience, Netherlands Institute of Ecology, Radboudumc, TNO, University of Groningen, Vereniging Sportvisserij Nederland, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and Wageningen University & Research.

...who were joined by our 21st signatory:

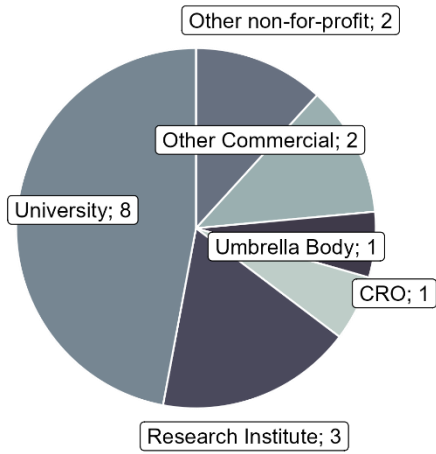
Noldus

Information Technology

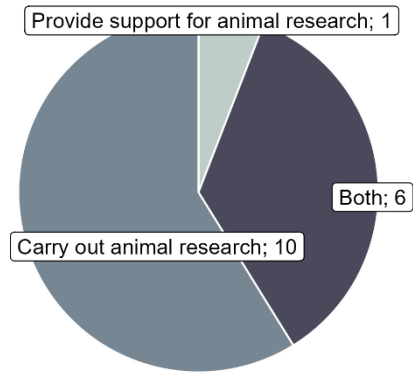
Noldus Information Technology B.V., Wageningen

Most signatories (16/17) carry out animal experiments, while seven signatories are also (or solely) indirectly involved by providing equipment for animal research. Most signatories are public research bodies (universities, research institutes).

Types of organisation



Our signatories...



How the Transparency Agreement started:

The Transparency Agreement was written by a steering group consisting of representatives of the first signatories and was inspired by progress in other European countries (the United Kingdom, Spain, Portugal, and Belgium) which have similar agreements in place. [The European Animal Research Association](#) (EARA) and the [Stichting Informatie Dierproeven](#) (SID) took a supportive role by coordinating this process. Since the launch of the Agreement, the SID, with support from EARA, takes responsibility for the coordination by distributing relevant information, organising meetings, and facilitating the common initiatives and events.

By signing the Transparency Agreement, the signatories commit to the following:

1. We are clear about when, how, and why animals are used in research.
2. We aim for improved communication with the media and the public about animal research in the Netherlands.
3. We proactively provide opportunities for the public to learn about animal research and the relevant regulations.
4. We report on progress and share our experiences annually.

The Transparency Agreement is not a legal document and should not be seen as such. It is a voluntary agreement between organisations to commit to more frequent and proactive communication with society about animal research in an open and transparent manner.

Responses to the survey by commitment

About the survey:

The survey was sent to all signatories in December 2023. Answers were collected throughout December 2023 and January 2024. All 21 signatories responded to the survey. The Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) acts as an umbrella organisation for the Netherlands Institute for Neuroscience, Hubrecht Institute and Netherlands Institute of Ecology and answered on behalf of itself as well as its three member-organisations. Radboud University and Radboudumc gave their combined answers. Therefore, we have 17 responses to this survey.

The answers to this survey concern activities at the signatory institutions within the calendar year 2023.

Commitment 1: We are clear about when, how, and why animals are used in research

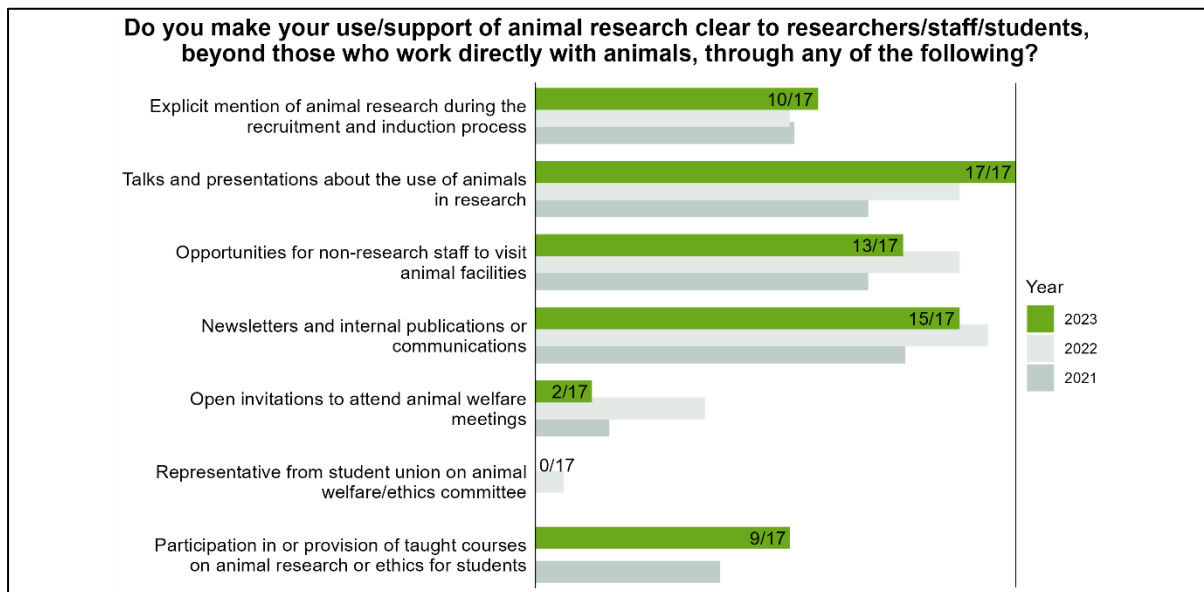
The purpose of the first commitment is to ensure all signatories acknowledge their involvement in animal research within their organisation and towards the outside world. Communication serving this purpose should always be transparent and realistic about the use as well as the limitations of the relevant animal experiments.

Providing information on animal research within the organisation:

A good first step in increasing openness around animal research is to involve the organisation’s own staff that are not directly involved in animal research. Across the country, many people will work in an organisation where animal research takes place and might be eager to learn about it.

All signatories of the Transparency Agreement provide the opportunity for their own staff to find out about the organisation’s involvement in animal research by at least two different activities. In 2023, all signatories held talks about their involvement in animal research for their staff and the number of signatories who explained their involvement during the recruitment process (10/17), invite their non-research staff to their animal facilities (13/17) or talked about animal research in their internal communications (15/17) remained high. Open invitations and inviting student representation to animal welfare meetings remains controversial for signatory institutions (just 2/17 and 0/17, respectively).

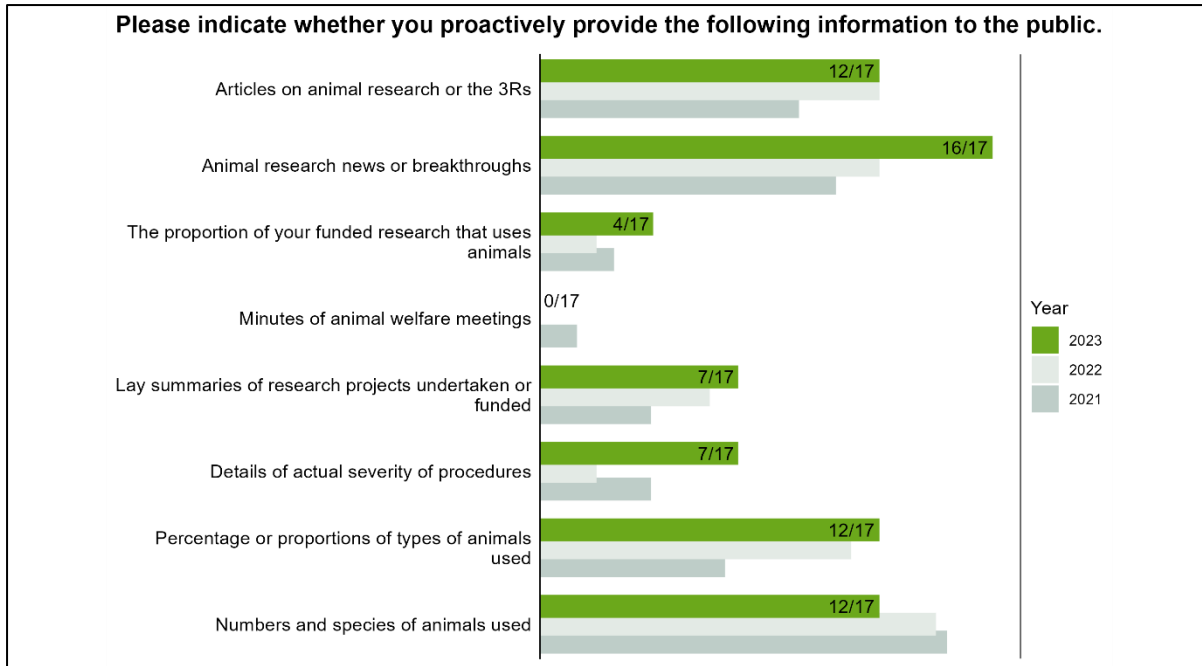
Fig 1.



Providing information about animal research to the public:

Being transparent towards society starts with publishing open and accurate information, starting with the organisation’s own website. All signatory institutions provide information about their involvement in animal research to the public and most (16/17) do so by sharing news or breakthroughs or publishing articles on animal research and the 3Rs principles (the replacement, reduction, and refinement of the use of animals in research). In 2023, more institutions have published such work compared to the previous years. Many institutions (12/17) published what numbers and which types of animals are used in their research. More signatories now share details about what studies they carry out or fund by sharing lay summaries (also known as non-technical summaries) of research projects (7/17) or they share details on procedures and their severity for the animals are shared by more signatories (7/17) this year.

Fig 2.



Apart from facts and numbers, visual content is a great way to show what animal research looks like and has clear influence on the public's perception of what animal research is. Unfortunately, there is a vast amount of footage readily available in the media and on the internet that poorly reflects the actual Dutch research lab conditions and standards. Therefore, it is important that Dutch research institutions share their own footage or labs, animals, and the procedures they might carry out on their animals.

Fig 3.



The number of signatories doing so remained stable compared to the last year with the absolute majority (15/17) sharing either images or video footage of their facilities or animals. Sharing this content and information via social media has overall decreased in popularity among our signatories, but there

are plenty of other channels that our signatories have used in 2023 to share information, a small part of which we highlight here.

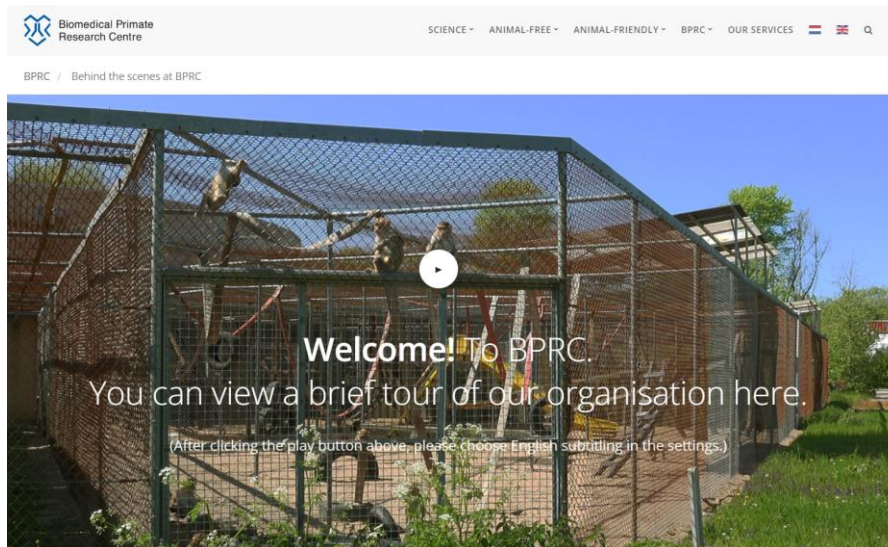
Charles River Laboratories

In response to the European Citizen’s Initiative in 2023, Manon Beekhuijzen, head of Toxicology Operations at Charles River Laboratories, gave an [interview](#) [in Dutch] about the use of animals in toxicology and safety research. She, together with Cyrille Krul, lecturer at the University of applied sciences of Utrecht, discusses where we stand scientifically now, what is happening and where the possibilities and barriers lie. She states that the reality of transitioning to animal-free research is more complex than often talked about, both scientifically and politically.



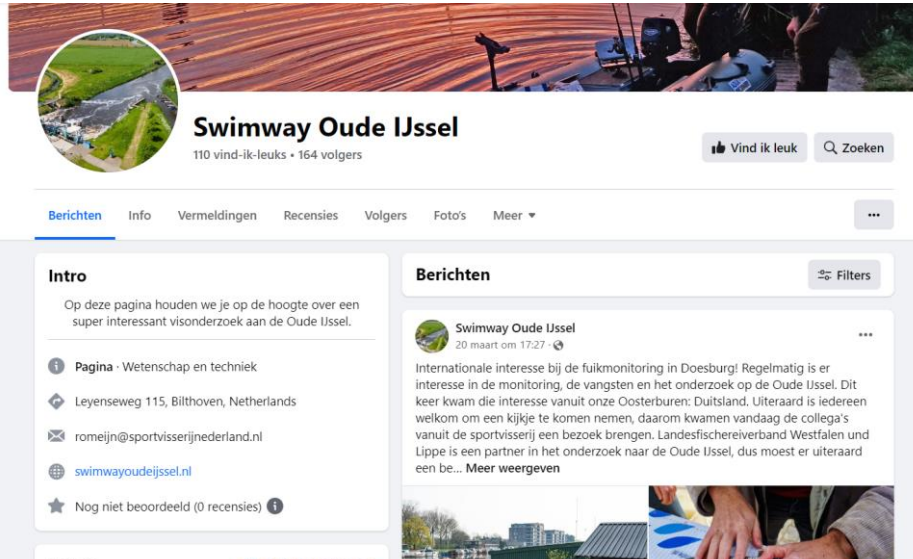
Biomedical Primate Research Centre

Research with primates is undoubtedly a very sensitive topic and many might wonder what monkey facilities look like on the inside. Those who are curious should have a look at the BPRC website, where they have a series of [“behind the scenes” videos](#). Watch how behavioural studies are performed, what the corona lab looks like, what it is like to be a vet at BPRC and much more.



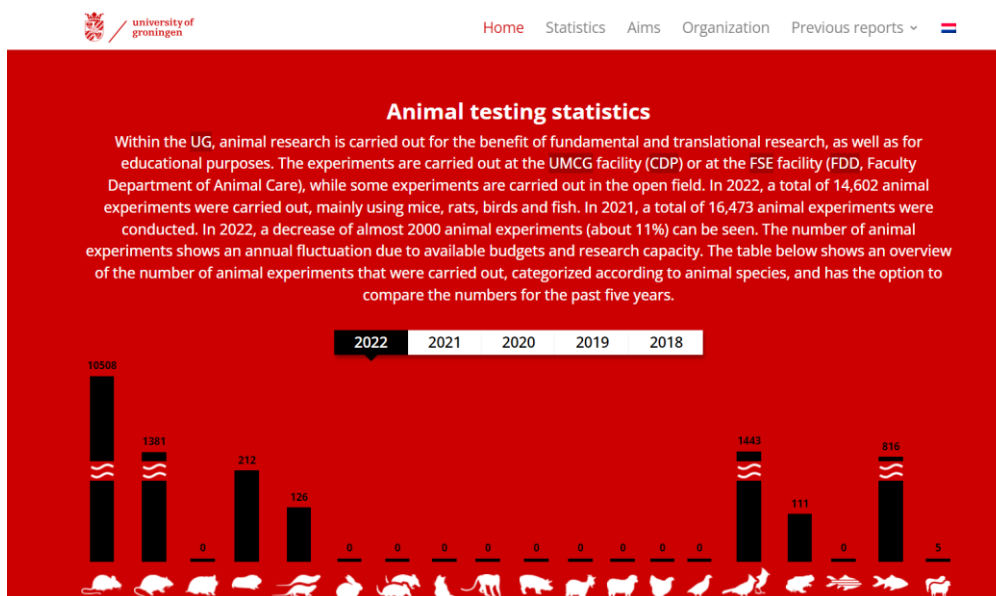
Vereniging SportvisserijNL

Vereniging Sportvisserij NL does research into fish species and fish populations in the Dutch lakes and rivers; field research that looks quite different from the classic mouse in the lab. One of their current projects that started last year takes place at the river Oude IJssel, where they monitor fish migration by following different fish species with a tracker. They keep those interested up to date via a [facebook page](#).



University of Groningen

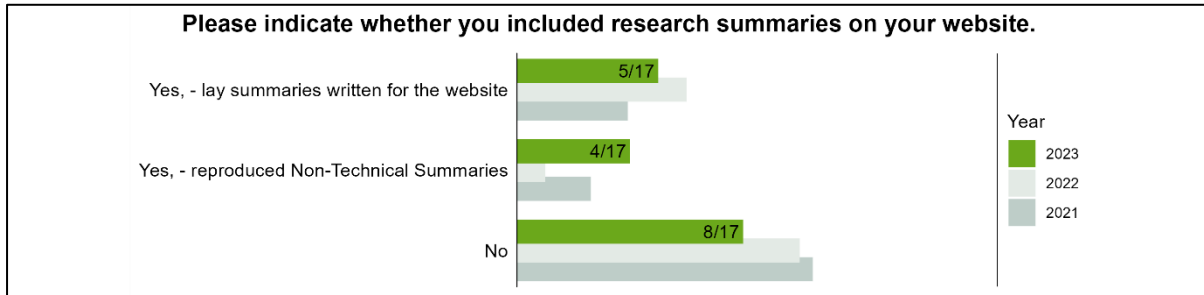
All institutions carrying out animal research register their use of animals in research according to the Dutch law, which are published collectively by the NVWA. However, many Dutch Universities and research institutes also publish their own animal research statistics on their own website and take this as an opportunity to add more context to the numbers. One such example is the webpage of the [University of Groningen](#), which shows not only interactive graphs with statistics per species over the years, but also explains why these studies are performed and within which legal frameworks they take place.



Non-technical summaries:

Lay summaries or non-technical summaries (NTS) are summaries of research projects written without using technical terms or jargon, so that the general public can get a good idea of the research that is carried out at our research institutions. They are an obligatory part of the permit application for animal research. These NTS' are collected in a [database](#), but the institution's own website is generally a place where they would be more accessible and found more easily the public. In 2023, nine signatories published NTS' on their own website, an increase compared to the previous years.

Fig 4.



Dealing with enquiries:

Questions about involvement in animal research could come from both within and outside an organisation. Therefore, we asked signatories what their strategy for such questions is.

Many signatories proactively provide information and a “frequently asked questions” list on their website for those looking for more information there. On many of these websites, one will also find an e-mail address that those with additional questions can turn to. These questions come in centrally, and in case of external questions this might for example be the communications department. Depending on the question, it is forwarded to the person with the right expertise before returning with an answer. It might be the animal welfare body, animal facility, researchers, the communications department, or the legal department contributing to answers. Some institutions instruct their research staff to have questions coming in directly to them first go through the central point, rather than starting individual discussions with external parties. Multiple signatories say they do not hesitate to invite people to visit their animal facilities and discuss any possible concerns in certain cases.

Our signatories are also open to internal questions. Some have a dedicated letterbox where staff can drop their questions, anonymously if desired. These internal questions are likewise answered by the animal welfare body, communications department or researchers with the relevant expertise or knowledge.

Potential barriers for the implementation of the first commitment:

The majority (13/17) report no major barriers for the implementation of the first commitment; to be clear about when, how and why animals are used in research apart from the fact that time, staff and resources are always the constraining factors for implementing strategies or organising event. Barriers that the other signatories reported were:

- Animal research and communicating about animal research being subject to much internal debate, so steps forward in communication strategies require discussion on different levels within the organisation (two signatories);
- Certain specific questions that cannot be answered, due to confidentiality reasons (one signatory).

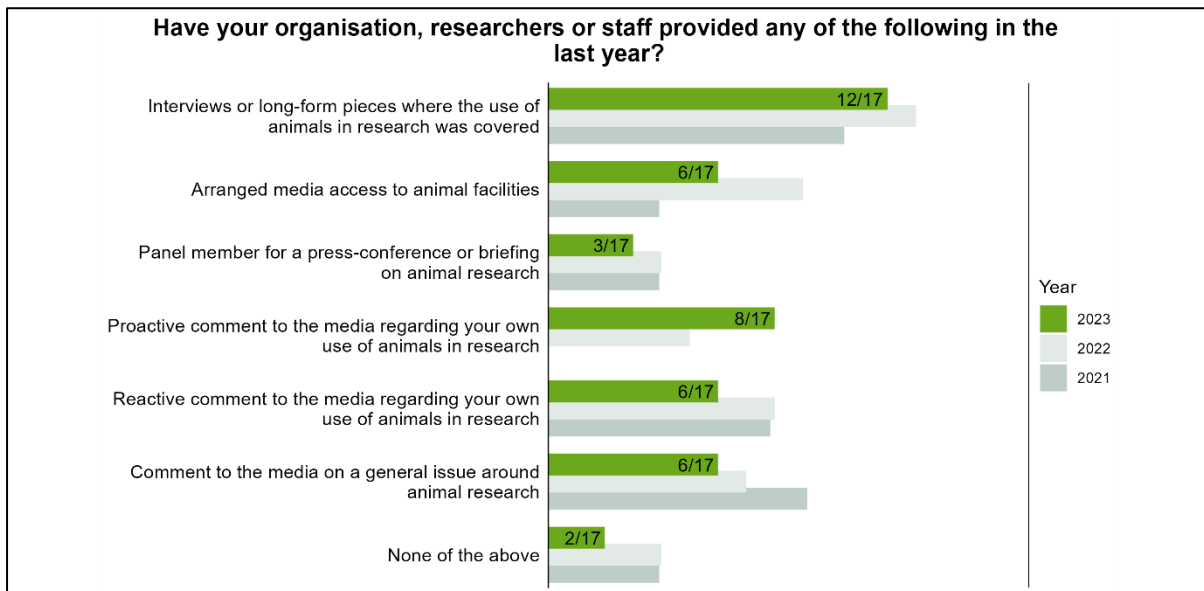
Commitment 2: We aim for improved communication with the media and the public about animal research in the Netherlands

The purpose of the second commitment is to ensure that relevant information about the use of animals is accessible for the public.

Interaction with the media:

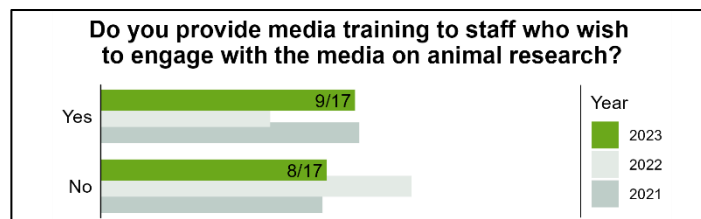
The need for a presence in the media when animal research is under discussion by those who are involved in animal research, is important for a balanced and accurate narrative in public debate. Almost all signatories (15/17) have interacted with the media in 2023 and most did so with an interview or long-form piece (12/17). Proactive comments to the media regarding animal research have occurred more often in 2023 (8/17) than in the previous years and again this year multiple signatories (6/17) arranged access to the facilities for the media. No signatories report to have refused engaging with the media about their animal research or the animal research they are involved in.

Fig 5.



The majority of the signatory institutions offer their staff the opportunity to attend media training. Trained scientists are usually not trained for science communication, therefore media training can help researchers to gain some basic skills and the confidence to make communicating their research with the media, public or policy makers easier.

Fig 6.

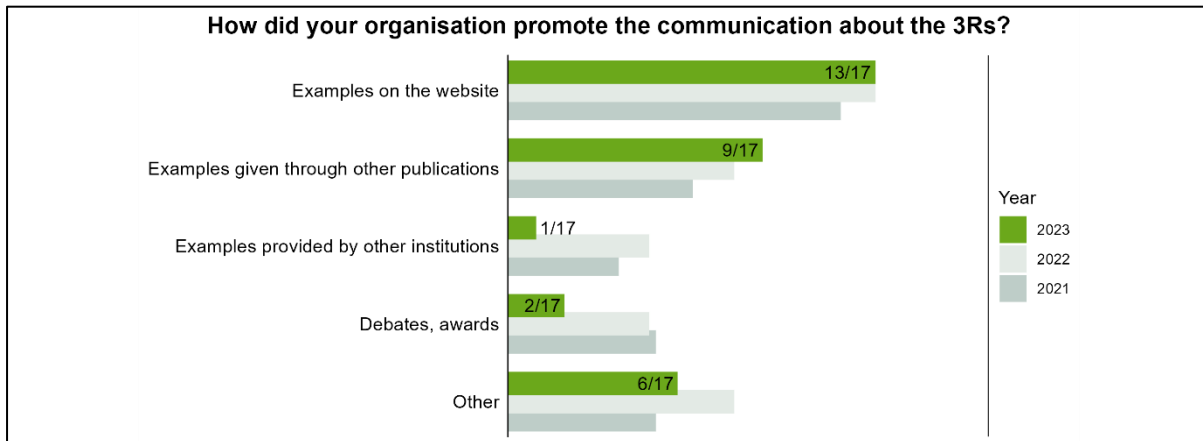


Communication about the 3Rs:

An important element of the Dutch law as well as the EU Directive 2010/63 is the 3Rs, which stand for the replacement, reduction, and refinement of animal research (in Dutch, de 3 V's; vervanging, verminderen en verfijning). The 3Rs ensure that, while we still need the use of animals in research, those involved in animal research make maximum effort to minimise suffering. How the signatory

organisations work on these 3Rs is most commonly communicated through examples of implementation of the 3Rs on the institution’s website (13/17) and other publications (9/17).

Fig 7.



Institutional policy statement:

One of the requirements in the Transparency Agreement is that the signatory organisations have a statement on the use of animals in research on a publicly accessible website. This is an important first step towards more openness and taking accountability towards the work with animals that takes place at or is supported by the signatories. All signatories that perform animal research have such a statement on their website, the weblinks to which can be found in the [attachment](#).

Potential barriers for the implementation of the second commitment:

For the second commitment; ensuring that relevant information about the use of animals is accessible for the public, most signatories (13/17) report no major barriers to the implementation except that time, staff and resources are the limiting factors for the progress that can be made. Other barriers that are reported by some of the signatories are:

- The lack of a clear communication strategy or internal discussion on how and when to communicate (three signatories);
- Confidentiality regarding exact nature of the tested compounds (one signatory);
- Little attention from the press about animal testing (one signatory).

Commitment 3: We proactively provide opportunities for the general public to learn about animal research and the relevant guidelines

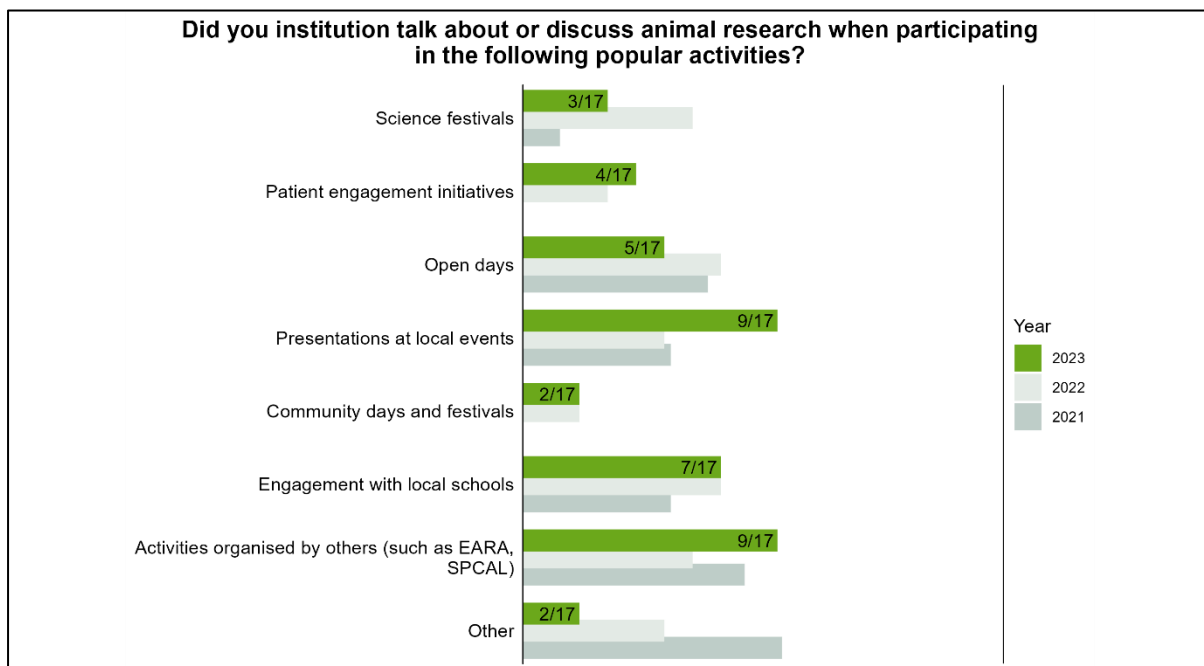
The purpose of the third commitment is to start and encourage the public debate in the Netherlands. Building on the first two commitments, the third is about more interactive activities.

Local popular science events:

Local popular science events are excellent opportunities for organisations to show what research they carry out, including the research in which animals play a role. Formats ranging from science festivals to open days to patient engagement initiatives, often allow for more visual, demonstrative, or interactive forms of science communication and therefore have a big impact on how the public sees scientific research.

The more popular events for our signatories to take part in last year were presentations at local events such as Pint of Science (9/17) and initiatives with local schools (7/17). Multiple signatories held an open day (5/17), participated in, or organised a science festival (3/17) or patient engagement initiative (4/17). Many of the signatories specifically indicated that they would support staff that wishes to hold public events on the use of animal research.

Fig 8.



Pint of Science Festival

[Pint of Science](#) is a global popular science festival where researchers talk about their latest research in bars, pubs, cafes and other public spaces. In 2023, nine Dutch organised Pint of Science events including talks by researchers from signatory institution. Topics concern the entire spectrum of scientific research, from quantum physics to systems biology and some talks, animal research played a role in the research explained, for example:

- Organen-op-chip – Dennis Nahon, Leiden University Medical Center
- The promise of regenerative medicine - Erik Vrij/Martijn van Griensven, Maastricht University)
- The sweet tooth of norovirus - Miranda de Graaf, ErasmusMC Rotterdam

Radboud University Science award

Lisa Genzel won the [Science award](#) which allowed her to develop material for school children to be educated about animal research. She also joined the FENS Kavli network, from where she will be able to stimulate outreach about animal research.

Lisa Genzel: "Currently there is a trend in Europe for animal-rights groups have gained more political power and are pushing for immediate ban on animal research. The reason these groups are becoming more successful, is that traditionally animal researchers are very closed-off and quiet about their work. Thus, the public only hears one side of the story. To ensure that we will still be able to advance our knowledge in Neuroscience in the future, we need animal research, and we also need to communicate more about the research that we do. The FENS-Kavli network is in a unique position to push for more communication and potentially can rally larger groups of researchers to react to this crisis that any individual researcher can."

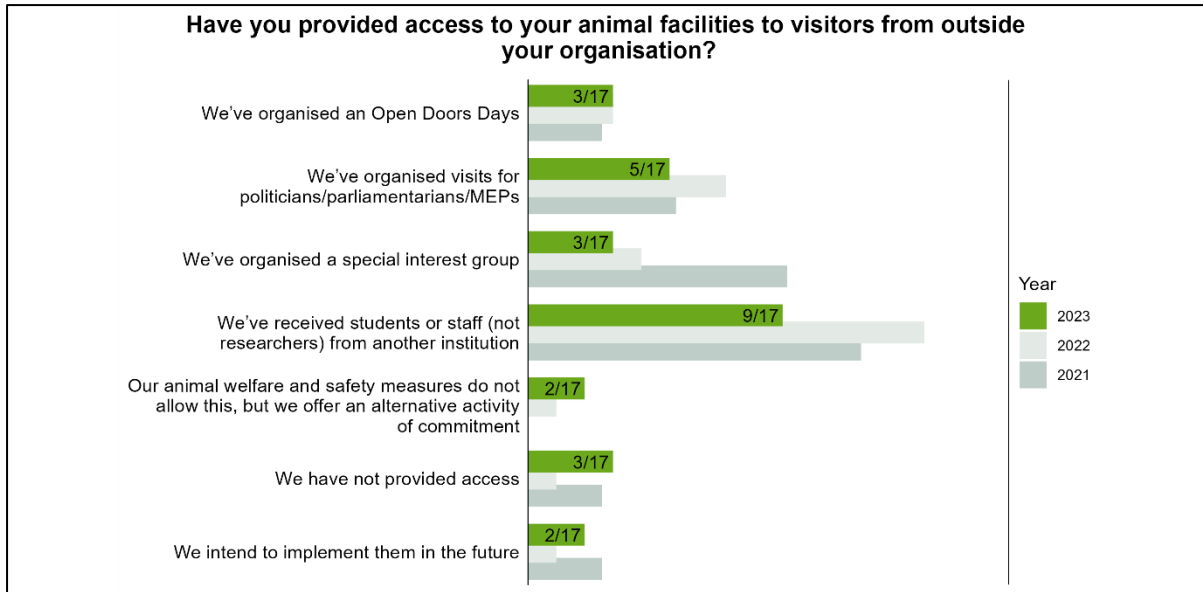
EARA's first Patient Discovery Project

The Radboud University and Radboudumc teamed up with EARA to launch EARA's Patient Discovery Project in the Netherlands. Monique Wolvekamp together with EARA and the Dutch Parkinson Association (Parkinson Vereniging), we recruited 20 Parkinson's Disease patients and their loved ones who were interested to learn more about research with and without animals into Parkinson's Disease. They joined a symposium in the Lux theatre, Nijmegen with talks from researchers about different types of research and got a tour from those same researchers the next day in their research facilities at Radboud University, Radboudumc, as well as the animal facilities.

Providing access to animal facilities:

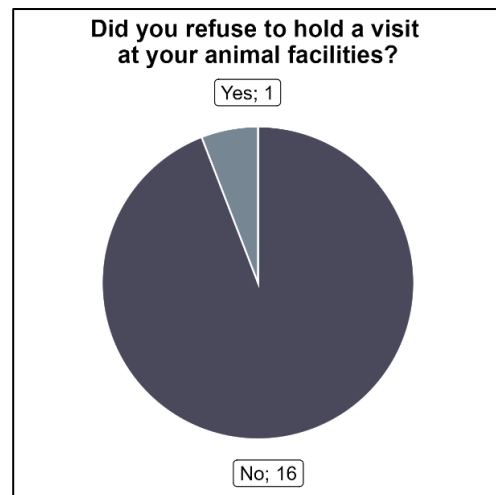
Allowing the media, public, or policy makers and politicians to visit inside an animal facility is the ultimate means of openness and transparency. It is the most direct way to show what research takes place and how it is carried out. It also sends a strong message that animal research is not a dark and secret undertaking hidden away in basements but is carried out with care and for the public. However, not all animal facilities are the same. In some, it will be practically very easy to show visitors around whereas in other facilities, this is a challenge or even impossible, for example for animal welfare or hygiene status reasons.

Fig 9.



Thirteen signatories have animal facilities and have the practical possibilities to invite visitors inside them. The majority (10/13) does this on a regular basis while two signatories are planning to implement visits in the future. Two signatories that have an animal facility but cannot host visits offer an alternative to those seeking to learn more about how animal research is carried out at their organisation. One single signatory refused a request for a visit at their facilities, but that was because the group was too big for a tour in their facilities, and they offered a virtual tour as alternative. There are signatories where field research is taking place rather than research inside a facility and those signatories offer opportunities to visit that field research.

Fig 9.



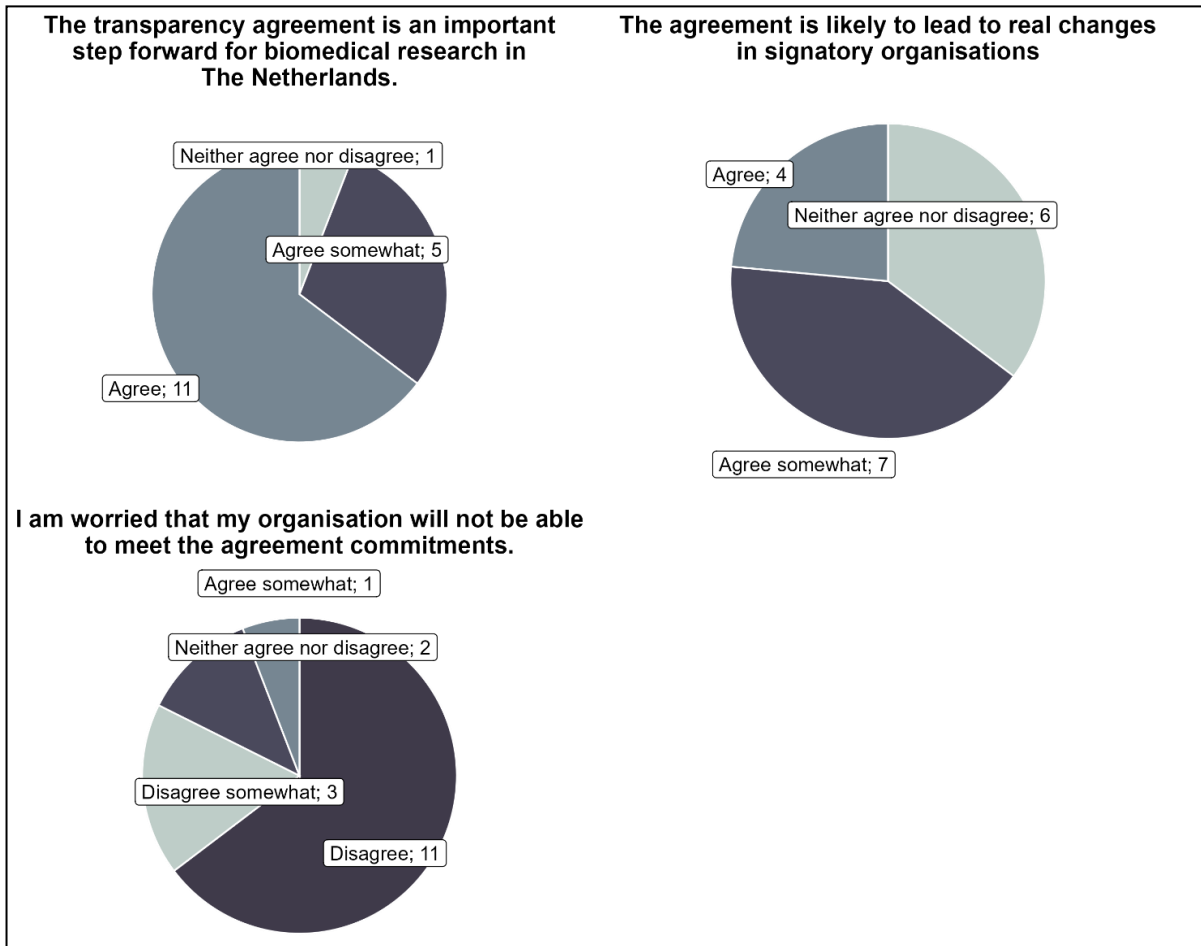
Potential barriers for the implementation of the third commitment:

For the third commitment, to start and encourage the public debate in the Netherlands - again few signatories see major barriers for the implementation. For some signatories, it is practically difficult to have visitor in their facilities and they do not regularly have visitors. Signatories also mention that the third commitment requires motivation in staff members across the organisation, but also report that this motivation is typically there and researchers as well as other staff are interested in participating in the types of events discussed above. The challenge rather lies finding the time.

Reflections on the Transparency Agreement

The signatories continue to look positively at the Transparency Agreement. While some signatories seem to be unsure about their signature leading to actual changes within their organisation, they still look at the Agreement as valuable for their organisation and the research community. Nevertheless, the signatories are confident that they can keep meeting the agreement commitments.

Fig 10.



We have asked our signatories how the Transparency Agreement on Animal Research in the Netherlands could be improved. Their suggestions include:

- Being more proactive in reaching out to and interacting with different stakeholders, including politicians;
- Being more proactive in our communication about the Transparency Agreement to the general public;
- More focus on the 3R's;
- Publishing the SID website in English (many staff members in Dutch companies/institutes do not read Dutch);
- Reach out to organisations that are indirectly involved in animal research/facilitate animal research, and include them in the Transparency Agreement.

Summary of 2023 results

Many signatories already showed a good level of openness before and kept up this level this year. What we at SID hope for is steady progress, as cultural changes cannot be expected and should not go overnight, and this is the trend we see.

All signatories now proactively provide opportunities for their own staff to learn more about the animal research that is going on within their organization. We are happy with this development, as all non-animal research staff across the signatory organisations collectively are a significantly large group that is easier to reach out to than the average member of the public, for whom animal research might be a quite remote topic.

Though we see differences in levels of openness and transparency, we see that certain things are undertaken by all or almost all signatories. We have different types of organisations among our signatories. While all signatories of course comply with the transparency-related regulations by our government, there are differences in how fast they can move forward in terms of voluntary/pro-active openness. Nevertheless, all signatories share news on their animal research results and share either photos or videos of the animal research taking place at their facilities. And more institutions are sharing their non-technical summaries of their studies with animals.

Proactively searching for interaction with the media and society will have a big impact on how animal research is seen by the public. With this year's survey, we see a positive trend that more signatory organisations proactively approached the media and many signatories were present within their local community by participating in local popular science events.

In 2023, Radboud University and Radboudumc hosted EARA's first ever Patient Discovery Project where researchers and patients interact to learn more about research, including animal research. This event took place in collaboration with the Dutch Parkinson Association. Parkinson's Disease patients attended lectures and visited labs and the animal facility. The Biomedical Primate Research Centre will invite members of the Parkinson Association to their animal and research facilities in 2024. This first edition was a great success and will be repeated in other countries, first in Portugal where 12 members of APDP Diabetes are invited to attend lectures and visit facilities at NOVA Medical School in Lisbon.

The ultimate form of openness is holding visits to animal facilities, so we are happy to see that again in 2023, most signatories that have the possibility accommodate people interested in paying a visit.

Most signatories see the opportunities within their organization to keep improving in all commitments of the Transparency Agreement, but the most mentioned potential barrier is that resources are too scarce within the organisation. Both research and communications staff are usually motivated and see the importance of communicating with the public on this topic, but find it difficult to dedicate the required time to it.

Ambitions & plans for 2024

We are happy that in 2023, one new signatory joined us. However, there are many more organizations in the Netherlands that are involved in animal research, and we will keep doing our best to reach out to them about the importance of openness and transparency – and as our signatories mentioned, preferably also organisations that are indirectly involved in animal research/facilitate animal research. Over the next years, we hope to be able to increase dialogue with other stakeholders and politicians and to generate more awareness of our initiative among politicians and the general public, which will hopefully also aid growth.

Attachment: policy statements on animal testing

Amsterdam UMC:

[Dutch] <https://www.amsterdamumc.org/nl/proefdieren.htm>

Biomedical Primate Research Centre:

[Dutch] <https://www.bprc.nl/vragen-antwoorden-bprc#overproefdierbeleid>

[English] <https://www.bprc.nl/en/questions-answers-bprc#aboutouranimaltestingpolicy>

Charles River Laboratories Den Bosch B.V.:

[English] <https://www.criver.com/about-us/about-us-overview/animals-research?region=3696>

Envigo RMS B.V.:

[English] <https://www.inotivco.com/animal-welfare-statement>

Erasmus MC:

[Dutch] <https://www.erasmusmc.nl/nl-nl/pages/over-erasmusmc#e978e56c-ba3e-45a8-a2e1-cae858cedad3>

Hubrecht Institute:

[Dutch] <https://www.hubrecht.eu/nl/maatschappij/transparantieovereenkomst-dierproeven/>

[English] <https://www.hubrecht.eu/society-2/transparency-agreement-on-animal-research/>

Leiden University:

[Dutch] <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/dossiers/onderzoek-met-dieren/waarom-dierproeven>

[English] <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/dossiers/research-with-animals/why-experiment-on-animals>

Leiden University Medical Center:

[Dutch] <https://www.lumc.nl/over-het-lumc/het-lumc/maatschappelijk-verantwoord-ondernemen/dierproeven-verantwoord/waarom-dierproeven2/>

Maastricht University:

[Dutch] <https://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl/nl/proefdierkundig-onderzoek>

[English] <https://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl/proefdierkundig-onderzoek>

Netherlands Cancer Institute:

[English] <https://www.nki.nl/about-us/responsible-research/animal-research/>

Netherlands Institute for Neuroscience

[Dutch] <https://herseninstituut.nl/over-het-brein/proefdieronderzoek/>

Netherlands Institute of Ecology:

Noldus IT:

[English] <https://www.noldus.com/about-noldus/ethics-animal-testing>

Radboudumc:

[Dutch] <https://www.radboudumc.nl/research/verantwoord-proefdieronderzoek>

[English] <https://www.radboudumc.nl/en/research/laboratory-animal-research>

Radboud University:

[Dutch] <https://www.ru.nl/over-ons/beleid-en-gedragcodes/proefdieronderzoek>

[English] <https://www.ru.nl/en/about-us/policies-and-regulations/animal-research>

Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences:

[Dutch] <https://www.knaw.nl/themas/dierproeven>

[English] <https://www.knaw.nl/en/themes/animal-experiments>

TNO:

[Dutch] <https://www.tno.nl/nl/over-tno/maatschappij/dierproevenbeleid/>

[English] <https://www.tno.nl/en/about-tno/tno-society/animal-testing-policy/>

University of Groningen

[Dutch] <https://www.rug.nl/about-ug/policy-and-strategy/research-ethics/proefdieren/dierenexperiment/dierproeven-aan-de-rug?lang=nl>

[English] <https://www.rug.nl/about-ug/policy-and-strategy/research-ethics/proefdieren/dierenexperiment/dierproeven-aan-de-rug>

Vereniging Sportvisserij Nederland:

[Dutch] <https://www.sportvisserijnederland.nl/vis-water/visonderzoek/>

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam:

[Dutch] <https://vu.nl/nl/over-de-vu/onderzoeksinstituten/amsterdam-animal-research-center-aarc>

[English] <https://vu.nl/en/about-vu/research-institutes/amsterdam-animal-research-center-aarc>

Wageningen University & Research:

[Dutch] <https://www.wur.nl/nl/dossiers/dossier/dierproeven.htm>

[English] <https://www.wur.nl/en/dossiers/file/animal-testing-1.htm>