

The 3Rs Champion

1. In recent years there has been considerable activity on the 3Rs across the scientific community and associated with this has been a rapid increase in the amount of information available. Keeping up with this can be challenging for researchers, animal care staff and ethics committees. The idea of having a dedicated “3Rs champion” has emerged because of the benefits of having support for the adoption of 3Rs approaches on the ground at a local level that takes into account the research priorities, species used and the culture of the institution.

Benefits of a 3Rs Champion

2. Appointing a 3Rs Champion can help to ensure that regulatory requirements and funders expectations on the 3Rs are met, including supporting the functioning of the ethics committee with regards to the 3Rs. The role can be assigned to an existing staff member whose position is already relevant to aspects of the 3Rs (e.g. in the UK the Named Information Officer – NIO) or alternatively a new dedicated role can be created depending on factors such as the budget available and size of the organisation. In either case the most important consideration is that the individual has a permanent role and that they have the time, resources and knowledge to act as a primary point of contact for the 3Rs.
3. There are a number of benefits to having a 3Rs Champion. These include ensuring that:
 - Contemporary information on the 3Rs is collated and shared in a targeted manner so that it is relevant to the recipient;
 - A coordinated approach to fully adopting 3Rs advances is taken, and
 - A programme of activities to embed the 3Rs in local policies and practices is delivered.
4. The goal of the 3Rs Champion should not be to take on, or duplicate, the responsibilities that others have for implementing the 3Rs (including legal responsibilities). Rather the focus should be on providing assistance so that the process of identifying and implementing 3Rs opportunities is expedited and consistent across the organisation. Ideally, organisations should also assign

responsibility for strategic matters related to the 3Rs to a senior individual¹ (e.g. Dean level) in order to complement the on the ground role of the 3Rs Champion by ensuring that the 3Rs are included in decisions such as senior appointments, institutional research directions and investment priorities.

Person specification and recognition

5. The 3Rs Champion should be able to work effectively with researchers and animal care staff and have excellent networking and communication skills and a passion for the 3Rs. Whether the individual needs a scientific background or not is dependent on the needs of the institution but given that replacement and reduction are often not well served by the review and oversight processes for animal research² it seems sensible to focus on skills and knowledge in these areas. The need for direct experience with laboratory animals is similarly an important consideration.
6. The decision to appoint a dedicated 3Rs Champion or assign the role to another relevant individual will be influenced by various factors. Where the latter option is selected, it is essential that the individual has sufficient time to deliver all their responsibilities. The role of the 3Rs Champion should be set out in job descriptions and included in appraisals to ensure that it is appropriately recognised.

Types of activities for the 3Rs Champions

7. The precise activities undertaken by the 3Rs Champion will depend on factors such as the types of research and the species used at the institution. Examples of activities include:
 - a. Organising 3Rs events: this could include organising an annual institutional 3Rs day as well as workshops targeting specific topics such as experimental design for example.
 - b. Collating 3Rs information: this could include collating 3Rs information (e.g. the latest 3Rs developments in the scientific literature, 3Rs funding opportunities) from external sources that are relevant to the research priorities of the institution and sharing with research groups either directly or via an institutional newsletter for example. At larger institutions, particularly where similar procedures or research is being conducted across departments, this could also include collating local 3Rs advances and sharing them within the organisation to ensure maximum

¹ This role is referred to as the academic lead in the NC3Rs [3Rs self-assessment tool](#) for research institutions.

² See for example, the 2023 report commissioned by the NC3Rs on [The role of review and regulatory approvals processes for animal research in supporting implementation of the 3Rs](#).

impact.

- c. Developing strategies and plans to implement 3Rs advances institution-wide: this could include working as part of the local ethics committee to develop and implement plans to roll-out 3Rs advances that are relevant to multiple research groups, for example, refined blood sampling techniques, low stress handling for mice and the single use of needles. The 3Rs Champion could also have a key role in coordinating the use of the institutional 3Rs self-assessment tools provided by the NC3Rs.
 - d. Providing direct support and advice for researchers and animal care staff: this could include supporting researchers in their search for alternatives in preparation for a grant application or assisting animal care staff design an enrichment evaluation study for example.
 - e. Ensuring wider engagement across the organisation on 3Rs matters: this could include working with other departments with relevant remits to ensure a joined-up approach including with research integrity and technology transfer offices for example.
8. It is important that the 3Rs Champion is well connected internally and externally and has the relevant networks to support their work. If the organisation is large or based on multiple sites, it may be advisable for the 3Rs Champion to have a local network of individuals to help disseminate information – such individuals could include early career researchers.

Support from the NC3Rs

9. Having a 3Rs Champion at each institution could help transform how the 3Rs are promoted and adopted on the ground. Ensuring that the 3Rs Champions are well-equipped to do their role is essential and the NC3Rs is committed to supporting 3Rs Champions with dedicated training events and resources.

Acknowledgements

This document is based on the discussions from a workshop held by the NC3Rs in May 2023. The NC3Rs is grateful to the participants for their valuable input and advice.

September 2023