

Approved by Caroline FLINT, MP – to be announced 1 July 2004

**WRITTEN MINISTERIAL STATEMENT ANNOUNCING THE
OUTCOME OF THE REVIEW OF SECTION 24 OF THE
ANIMALS (SCIENTIFIC PROCEDURES) ACT 1986**

ANIMAL EXPERIMENTS

I am pleased to inform the House that the review of section 24 of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 has now been completed. Section 24, the so-called confidentiality clause, prohibits the disclosure by Home Office Ministers and officials of confidential information relating to the use of animals in scientific procedures other than in the discharge of their functions under the 1986 Act. It creates a criminal offence and provides a maximum punishment of two years imprisonment and a fine for unauthorised disclosure of information. The Government undertook to review section 24 in the context of our commitment to freedom of information.

The conflicting views expressed about section 24 in the course of the review have shown it to be a complex and contentious issue which does not lend itself to a decision that will satisfy all of those with an interest. The House of Lords Select Committee on Animals in Scientific Procedures, as well as animal protection and anti-vivisection groups, have called for the repeal of section 24. Those representing the views of many in the scientific community, whilst supporting other means of progressing openness and transparency about the use of animals in scientific research, have expressed significant concern about the potential impact of repealing section 24 and have urged strongly that it be retained.

In the circumstances, we have concluded that section 24 should be retained for the time being. We do not, however, rule out the future repeal of section 24 and, therefore, propose to review the matter again in two years time.

In the meantime, we are pressing ahead with plans to increase openness about the use of animals in scientific procedures by publishing anonymised information about projects licensed under the 1986 Act as part of the Home Office publication scheme under the Freedom of Information Act. This can be done without repealing section 24 and is being taken forward as part of consultation with the scientific community about the revision and streamlining of the project licence application process. This consultation is now well advanced and new processes and training arrangements will be piloted over the summer 2004 with a view to publishing the first licence information under these arrangements in the autumn 2004.

In addition, we have concluded that there would be value in the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Inspectorate publishing an annual report on its work. The Inspectorate's first annual report will be published in the autumn of 2004.