**Meeting Report**

**Animalfree Research Forum 2019: Animal-free Education**

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Animalfree Research is a foundation based in Switzerland that supports the research and implementation of the 3Rs principles, with a focus on the replacement of animal experiments. The foundation strives to distribute knowledge about alternative methods and seeks an open and respectful dialogue between the different stakeholders. Every year, Animalfree Research organizes a forum to discuss a topic of high scientific and societal relevance among researchers, students, policymakers, and the interested general public. The 9th Animalfree Research Forum was held on October 31, 2019 in Zurich, Switzerland on “Animal-free Education” (Fig. 1).

Dr Silvia Frey (Executive Director, Animalfree Research) opened the Forum with an outline of the foundation’s main working areas such as research funding, policy work, and education. She highlighted the fact that although the number of animals used for educational purposes is much lower than for example in basic scientific research, the real numbers are certainly higher in Switzerland than the reported statistical figures as the Swiss animal experiment statistics only represent those animals that are protected by animal protection legislation. In Switzerland, with a few exceptions for invertebrates, this legislation only considers vertebrates. Four presentations by internal and external speakers followed.

In the first talk, Dr Miriam Zemanova (Scientific Associate, Animalfree Research) introduced the background of the Forum

Fig. 1: A leaflet announcing the topic of the Forum
Nick Jukes (Coordinator of InterNiche, the International Network for Humane Education) in his presentation pointed out that the majority of conventional animal use has been harmful, including dissection of purpose-killed animals, animal experimentation, and other instrumental animal use. InterNiche defines harm as any action, deliberate or otherwise, that impinges on an animal’s current or future well-being by limiting or denying the freedom to live, freedom to express full natural behavior, or freedom from pain, injury, and disease. Mr. Jukes pointed out that full replacement of the harmful use of animals in education and training is possible. The statement that animal experimentation is the “real...
Manual Skills Lab, Social Skills Lab, and Scientific Skills Lab. Veterinary students acquire skills through three levels of training: general, special, and advanced competences. Within the Skills Lab, students have the chance to develop new models and train the maintenance or improvement of their skills while reducing the number of animals used and refining the indispensable use of animals.

A fruitful discussion between the audience and the invited speakers concluded the Forum. The event was very well received by the participants and paved the way for further work and collaborations in replacing the harmful use of animals for educational and training purposes. We thank all the speakers for sharing their experience and the results of their work (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3: The Executive Director of Animalfree Research, Dr Silvia Frey (left), with the Forum speakers (from left to right): Dr Miriam Zemanova (Animalfree Research), Nick Jukes (InterNiche), Prof. Andrew Knight (University of Winchester) and Prof. Christa Thöne-Reineke (Freie Universität Berlin)

“Real thing” and alternatives are not is a myth that confuses the method with the objective. Rather, the “real thing” is the effective gaining of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, and animal experimentation is only one of the methods by which that objective can be reached. Mr. Jukes addressed the need for multiple levels of skills acquisition and provided an overview of the successful implementation of alternatives to harmful animal use in education. He also mentioned that the lessons in animal welfare might be negated by harmful teaching methods. In contrast, alternatives to harmful animal use provide a win-win solution with multiple positive impacts including sustainable development. Fortunately, alternatives are gaining momentum and could soon become the norm.

Prof. Christa Thöne-Reineke (Director and Professor at the Institute of Animal Welfare, Animal Behavior and Laboratory Animal Science at the Freie Universität Berlin) explained that alternative approaches in education provide excellent refinement of animal use. She introduced the work of the Vet Skills Lab at the Freie Universität Berlin, which consists of three learning stations: Manual Skills Lab, Social Skills Lab, and Scientific Skills Lab. Veterinary students acquire skills through three levels of training: general, special, and advanced competences. Within the Skills Lab, students have the chance to develop new models and train the maintenance or improvement of their skills while reducing the number of animals used and refining the indispensable use of animals.

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