

PRESS RELEASE – 8 December 2015

Solutions for Education & Training in Laboratory Animal Science in Southern Africa

The South African Association for Laboratory Animal Science (SAALAS) convened a special conference in Pretoria, South Africa from 25-27 November 2015, with the aims to explore the education and training needs for laboratory science personnel in Southern Africa and to agree on solutions to address these needs.



The 83 conference delegates (i.e. 72 national & 11 international) represented universities, research councils, animal ethics committees, regulatory bodies, animal welfare organisations, veterinary and para-veterinary professionals, scientists, wildlife science, facility managers, technical personnel, research organisations, associations and industry.

Conference delegates, who collectively represented all sections of the laboratory animal sciences community, shared common broad expectations for the conference:

“Develop a roadmap for the future, reach a national consensus” (Veterinarian & research centre director)

“Establish the training needs for all levels, from animal ethics committees to animal users” (Animal welfare officer)

“Have a say in the way forward for training in South Africa for all involved in laboratory animal science” (Veterinary nurse)

The conference was organised into ten topics or themes, each of which explored the education and training needs of a specific section of the laboratory animal sciences community. National and international experts described current education and training structures within South Africa and overseas, and provided examples of best practice. Interactive discussion forums were facilitated at the end of each theme, where delegates debated the needs and solutions for each section of the community. Identified critical areas of need included:

- Provision of education and training for all sections of the animal research community, including wildlife
- Courses tailored to needs, including internationally accredited courses (e.g. IAT and FELASA); basic to advanced training (theoretical & practical); courses delivered nationally, regionally and within institutions
- The provision of education and training in animal ethics, welfare and the 3Rs (i.e. to Replace, Refine and Reduce the use of animals) for all involved in the field, including for animal ethics committee members
- Government investment to enable the sustainable development of education, training and critical skills
- Specific legislation in South Africa to govern the care and use of animals for scientific purposes

Delegates were unanimous in their commitment to developing education and training in laboratory animal science within South Africa, recognising the substantial benefits to be gained:

“We must be on the same level as our overseas colleagues” (Laboratory animal technologist)
“Now is the time to pro-actively get things in place” (Scientist & animal ethics committee chair)

The conference agreed that SAALAS would play a central role in driving these solutions forward in Southern Africa. Five Working Groups were convened to champion education & training for subsets of disciplines:

Working Groups – Education & Training	Chairperson(s)
Laboratory animal technology	Mrs Linda Howells (University of Cape Town) Sr Theresa Lotter (Private)
Animal ethics committees	Prof Tiaan Brink (North-West University)
Animal welfare & 3Rs	Sr Janet McCallum (University of Cape Town)
Veterinarians	Dr Tamsyn Fourie (Deltamune)
Scientists	Ms Liezl-Marié Scholtz (North-West University)

Five SAALAS Working Groups were constituted to drive the development of Education & Training programmes in Laboratory Animal Science in Southern Africa. Working Group chairpersons liaise with the SAALAS Executive

The Working Groups identified objectives, priorities and timelines for the next 18 months. Common themes include establishing online resources, discussion forums, stakeholder surveys, accredited programmes, short courses, workshops and continued professional development (CPD). A major event on the calendar is the **March 2017 SAALAS congress**, where Working Groups will host satellite meetings and focused workshops. Colleagues who wish to join Working Groups should email the secretary: Ilse.JansevanRensburg@up.ac.za

A further need was identified for a pan-African initiative to ensure quality education & training in laboratory animal science on the continent. SAALAS, in partnership with ICLAS and others, could also play a role here.

The SAALAS community extend their appreciation to international colleagues who attended the conference and informed on global philosophies – including the International Council for Laboratory Animal Science (ICLAS), the Federation of European Laboratory Animal Science Associations (FELASA), the American Association for Laboratory Animal Science (AALAS), the Institute of Animal Technology (IAT, UK), the National Centre for the Replacement, Refinement & Reduction of Animals in Research (NC3Rs, UK), Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA, UK), Leeds University (UK), the University of Manouba (Tunisia), Autonomous University of Barcelona (Spain) and New University of Lisbon (Portugal).

This report was prepared on behalf of the conference delegates by:

Dr Bert Mohr – SAALAS president; Conference convenor of behalf of the SAALAS Executive committee
Dr Dave Lewis – Bioethicist & scientist, University of Leeds, UK; Conference co-convenor

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