Policy on Animal User Training

All personnel involved with the use of animals in science must be adequately trained in the principles of laboratory animal science and the ethical issues involved in animal use. An appropriate training program is an essential component of any institutional animal care and use program. The CCAC Guidelines on: training of personnel working with animals in science (2015) is the basis for the National Institutional Animal User Training (NIAUT) Program.

The underlying purpose of the animal user training program at Queen’s University is to foster a philosophy of compassion and respect for the animals that are used in science, while providing the necessary knowledge (including an understanding of the principles of the Three Rs) and skills to ensure competency in carrying out required tasks and procedures.

The Three Rs tenet is embedded in the conduct of animal-based science in Canada and at Queen’s University and encourages individuals to:

- Replace – avoid or replace the use of animals wherever possible;
- Reduce – employ strategies that will result in fewer animals being used and which are consistent with sound experimental design; and
- Refine – modify husbandry or experimental procedures to minimize pain and distress.

Following training, all personnel involved in the care and use of animals for science must possess:

- An understanding of the ethical issues of using animals for scientific purposes in Canada and an understanding of the 3 Rs tenet.
- Adequate knowledge of the principles of experimental animal science relevant to their area of work (laboratory, field, or agriculture); and
- Adequate knowledge, skills and competency required for any and all technical procedures that personnel will be responsible for, including general handling.

Personnel includes persons intending to use animals as part of a research, teaching, regulatory testing or production (of animals or biologics for scientific purposes) project, or who are involved in breeding as part of a project. This includes investigators, post-doctoral fellows, research staff, graduate students, teachers and study directors, as well as undergraduate students, veterinarians and animal care technicians who take part in animal-based research projects.

Competency refers to the ability to effectively perform a particular task in relation to the care, maintenance or use of the animals, while ensuring their welfare is protected as far as possible within the constraints of any approved studies that the animals are involved in. Focusing on competency rather than training acknowledges that there may be a variety of ways of acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills, and places emphasis on learning outcomes.

Until personnel have had their competency assessed and been found to be competent to perform the relevant tasks or procedures, any work with animals should be carefully supervised. This supervision should aim to reinforce understanding and ensure tasks and procedures are conducted according to the appropriate standard. The duration of supervision required for competence to be attained will vary with the frequency of the task, the technical complexity of the task, and the ability of the individual.

Training programs should contribute to the development of knowledge, skills and competency relevant to tasks that will be undertaken. Such programs should ensure the availability of both theoretical and practical training,
and recognize that a flexible approach is required to address the training requirements of individuals with various needs and levels of experience. Queen’s University sustains an active training program for all users that includes:

- Open dialogue with the University and clinical Veterinarian during design and implementation phases of research
- Online SOP bank (multi-species and facilities)
- Online Biomedical manuals
- Online Theoretical (ethics) Training program
- Practical workshops
- Individualized training for specific technical procedures (following initial participation in a training program, it is recommended that individuals attend additional training sessions as their activities or responsibilities change, or as new and relevant requirements or guidelines come into effect.

**Core Training**

Theoretical Training (QACS 799 – Introduction to Animal Care)

This online course is based on modules from the CCAC’s NIAUT Training Program and must be completed by all individuals (excluding fish and migratory bird users) prior to being listed on an animal use protocol (AUP). This includes Principal Investigators, research associates, veterinary technicians, research assistants, post-doctoral fellows, graduate students, undergraduate students, volunteers, and any other individuals as deemed appropriate. A minimum grade of A- in each of the first five quizzes (and modules) is required to pass the course.

The general QACS 799 – Introduction to Animal Care currently covers:

- Guidelines, Legislation, and Regulations
- Ethics in Animal Experimentation
- The Three Rs of Humane Animal Experimentation
- Occupational Health and Safety
- Pain, Distress and Endpoints

The following topics are also modules included in the course but are not mandated quizzes at this time:

- Research Issues
- Basic Animal Care
- Environmental Enrichment
- Basic Diseases and the Animal Facility
- Analgesia
- Anesthesia
- Euthanasia of Experimental Animals

Aquatic and Migratory Bird (wildlife) users at Queen’s University have additional specie-specific modules to complete.

- QACS 801 Introduction to Experimental Fish
- QACS 800 Introduction to Migratory Birds (Wildlife) in Research (in development)

Lab personnel from other Canadian Universities that provide a copy of a certificate confirming completion of the NAIUUT Training Program may be exempt from theoretical training. Requests for exemption are reviewed on an individual basis by the University Veterinarian and Training Coordinator on behalf of the UACC.
Practical Training Workshops

The Office of the University Veterinarian offers a series of practical workshops which are available year round. Attendance in workshops should be timed in relation to when performance of the skills is required. Users must have completed theoretical training and be listed on an active Animal Use Protocol (AUP) prior to attending any workshops. Practical training is mandatory for all personnel responsible for the care, handling and use of rodents at Queen’s University, regardless of level of expertise acquired elsewhere. This initiative is to assist the UACC in ensuring standardization of technical skills across campus, and supports compliance with SOP’s. Practical training for species other than rodents will be mandatory as courses are developed to ensure that standard methods of performing routine procedures are in place. Workshops for non-traditional species will be held on an as needed basis. Until a level of competency is obtained, the Training Coordinator can request additional training sessions and access to animal facilities to be withheld.

Rodent users will attend Queen’s Practical Workshops – Small Animals (available year round). Large animal users will attend Queen’s Large Animal Surgical Workshop (held annually). Fish users will attend Queen’s Practical Fish Workshop (held annually).

Record of Completion

Completion of all training (theoretical and practical) is recorded and maintained in the Topaz Elements database. Principal Investigators and their respective students are issued a communication with a synopsis of what was covered in the workshops.
Appendix 1. Flow of Animal User Training

New lab associates enrolled in Theoretical Training after initial contact from lab representative.

- Theoretical Training completed - Moodle notification sent to Training Coordinator. Associate details and completion date entered as Training Record in Topaz Elements.
- PI and associate sent notification via email of Theoretical Training completion and Workshop Request Form. PI is advised that associate must be added to the AUP prior to practical workshop participation. Associate submits completed Workshop Request Form to Training Coordinator.
- UACC Coordinator sends notification from Topaz Elements to the lab and to the Training Coordinator when personnel amendment to the AUP has been approved (adding new associate).
- Training Coordinator contacts associate and schedules practical workshops.
- Upon completion of practical workshops, the Training Coordinator sends an email to the PI and student summarizing the session(s). Practical workshop completion dates are entered in Topaz Elements. Associate names and affiliations are forwarded to Animal Care for orientation.
- The new lab associate (with UACC training complete) is mentored in the lab by PI's, senior students and technicians to practice techniques and learn lab-specific procedures.