

Karolinska Institutets Animal welfare body Annual report 2025

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**Karolinska
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Introduction

Karolinska Institutet (KI) has, as one of the leading medical universities, the mission to improve human health and to find new strategies to fight human diseases. The use of research animals is pivotal for many research projects in basic and translational science at Karolinska Institutet.

Research involving research animals is regulated by the Animal welfare act 2018:1192, the Animal welfare ordinance 2019:66 and the Swedish board of agriculture's regulations and general advice on laboratory animals, SJVFS 2025:28 saknr L151 (called L151 from hereon; during 2025 up to 3rd of December, the AWB worked under L150). According to the Swedish legislation described above, all animals used for scientific purposes are protected by law and must be treated in the best possible way, both regarding their housing as well as regarding experimental conditions. The Swedish legislation, namely L151 chapter 5, also defines that each organization carrying out research animal research must establish an Animal Welfare Body (AWB).

The AWB at KI was established on the 1st of January 2013 and is an independent unit which reports directly to the Committee for research and the establishment license holder. The AWB consists of eight members: the chairman, the named animal care and welfare officer (NACWO), a veterinarian and their deputy, a researcher, and their deputy, as well as an animal technician and its deputy. Additionally, for matters concerning aquatic species or non-human primates, an expert in the field or an ethologist will take part in the discussion and decisions, respectively. Other specialists may be co-opted if deemed necessary.

All members of the AWB are appointed by the Committee for research for a 3-year period. The current mandate runs from 2023-01-01 to 2025-12-31. All members of the AWB have also been appointed for the coming mandate running from 2026-01-01 to 2028-12-31.

Since July 2018, principal investigators from KI can apply to the AWB for addendums to their ethical approval if the addendum meets the requirements defined in L151 (please see the AWB webpage for details). The AWB takes all decisions by majority vote.

Current members of the AWB

Lars Bräutigam (Chair)

Elisabet Andersson (NACWO)

Maria Averstad (vet.)

Kajsa Witthuhn (vet., substitute member)

Camilla Svensson (researcher)

Velmurugesan Arulampalam (researcher, substitute member)

Caroline Lindqvist (animal caretaker)

Sara Ferm (animal caretaker, substitute member)

Mikaela Sandbacka (ethologist)

Activities 2025

Amendments

The animal welfare body handled a total of 27 addendums during 2025. Eleven of those addendums were of administrative character such as change or addition of animal facilities, or changing the principal investigator on an ethical approval.

The remaining applications pertained to modifications of experimental parameters included in the underlying ethical approval. The AWB performs a detailed investigation for these applications to assess whether the proposed adjustments meet the prerequisites stipulated in L151/L150 utilizing the specific competences represented within the organization. None of the decisions of the AWB has been appealed against by the Swedish county administrative board, Stockholm ("Länsstyrelsen").

In addition to the regular addendums, the AWB handled one case concerning scientific collaboration with a third country.

Revision of SJVFS 2019:9, Saknr L150

Due to the update of the EU directive on the protection of animals used for scientific purposes, 2010/63/EU, the Swedish authorities were required to update the Swedish board of Agriculture's regulation and general advice for laboratory animals, SJVFS 2019:9 saknr L150. Members of the animal welfare

body were part of a pre-revision group organized by Jordbruksverket as well as part of a group at KM that was working with the revision ("remiss") of L150.

The updated regulations and advice, SJVFS 2025:28, Saknr L151, came into effect from 4th December 2025. There are several changes in the new regulations that affect directly the work of the AWB such as that the AWB does not take decisions anymore, but rather operational decisions based on evaluations of submitted addendums. Those decisions cannot be overruled by Swedish county administrative board ("Länsstyrelsen"), however the Swedish county administrative board can require a re-evaluation of decisions. The establishment licence holder is ultimately responsible that the operational decisions of the AWB body are not violating the Animal Welfare Act (Djurskyddslagen). The AWB has identified several problems caused by the new regulations and an internal discussion with the establishment licence holder is ongoing to solve these issues.

The AWB as point of contact for EARA

During spring 2025, Karolinska Institutet joined EARA – the European Animal Research Association. EARA is a communication and advocacy organization for stakeholders performing animal research. The chair of the AWB is the point of contact between Karolinska Institutet and EARA.

Together with EARA, the AWB has started several projects, including a workshop series on communicating animal research. The first of three workshops, on the importance of being transparent, was held on November 17 at Karolinska Institutet and over 160 people registered. The second workshop, on how to communicate animal research, will be held in early spring 2026 and the third workshop on crisis communication will be held before summer 2026.

Recommendations and projects

The AWB has established or revised several recommendations during 2025. Including "Breeding and maintenance of mice strains" Dnr 1-369/2025 and "Dystocia o Cross fostering" Dnr 1-1016/2025. The AWB has also updated the scoring sheet for animal health together with the veterinary team of KM and included amongst others scoring of aging animals. In addition, the AWB has revised all relevant documents with the aspect of L151.

The AWB has updated and published guidelines for the rehoming of animals, dnr 1-459/2025.

The AWB has coordinated a filming project together with personnel from KM. One film capturing cage-change of rodents was filmed in KMs learning lab and will be used for educational purpose, e.g. members of the ethics committee or the public. Other films, capturing technical details of husbandry processes, will be used for local education of new staff.

Courses, conferences, and workshops

In spring 2025, the AWB started phase 2 of the project to implement non-aversive handling in all animal houses run by KM. During phase 2, all researchers using KMs animal houses were provided with a theoretical education on non-aversive handling and with the help of KMs animal technicians and KMs learning lab, researchers were trained and examined in non-aversive handling of mice.

On October 8th, members of the AWB joined the national animal welfare body meeting in Stockholm organized by the Swedish 3R centre. This year's meeting focused on the refinement of procedures and two representatives of the AWB were giving talks.

On September 30th, the AWB organized together the seminar "Animal welfare from a practical perspective" for which more than 100 researchers signed up. The seminar included, amongst others, talks about colony management and refining surgical techniques.

The chair of the AWB is ordinary member of the Swedish National Committee for the protection of animals used for scientific purposes and in this role, he established a meeting series for the chairs of all Swedish animal welfare bodies to exchange knowledge and discuss current problems. The AWB of Karolinska Institutet is regularly joining the meeting series.

The NACWO presented the AWB work and functions for the Central Research Animal Ethics Committee (CDFN).

Other activities

Planned activities 2026

During 2026, the AWB will organize workshops for animal technicians. The first will be held in early spring covering the identification and management of common clinical symptoms of ophthalmic conditions in mice and rats.

The AWB will organize two seminars on communication of animal research (see above).

The AWB will continuously review and analyse retrospective reports from CDFN, guidelines and strategy documents involving animal welfare. The information will be used to improve animal welfare in current research at all KI institutions in communication with the researchers and in recommendations from AWB.

The AWB will continue to network with other animal welfare bodies in the Stockholm/Uppsala region to facilitate research projects and to meet the demand of research groups which are active at different sites.