



the  
**MOUSE  
EXCHANGE**  
evaluation

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aims

## AIMS

### Strategic

- i) Design, pilot and refine a low-cost, adaptable and transportable activity based on the Material and Markets research of the Animal Research Nexus
  - ii)
- i) To create a care-full space for curiosity-led enquiry that deescalates the topic of animal research (AR) and allows nuanced, participant-led discussions.

### Activity

- i) To unsettle preconceptions and encourage conversations about mouse breeding, their making, and their associated materials and markets.
- ii) To expose participants how laboratory mice are categorised, e.g. participants may choose to consider the relationship between humans and these mice: are we carers? Creators? Owners? Killers?
- iii) Invite conversations about the ethics of living with laboratory mice by thinking about how the laboratory mouse as a multiple object: a scientific resource, a quality product, a source of profit, a subject of care, a number, and so on.
- iv) Enable discussions around the value of lab animals, how the economies of science may help or hinder welfare efforts.
- v) Collect public perceptions about animal research, which may be useful in shaping emerging research questions or informing future engagement activities.



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methods

## METHODS

### *Becoming Ecological Citizens approach*

This project will build on and adapt a workshop design that is known as the Becoming Ecological Citizens methodology (Roe and Buser 2016). The methodology is forged of two components:

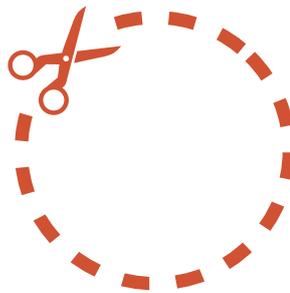
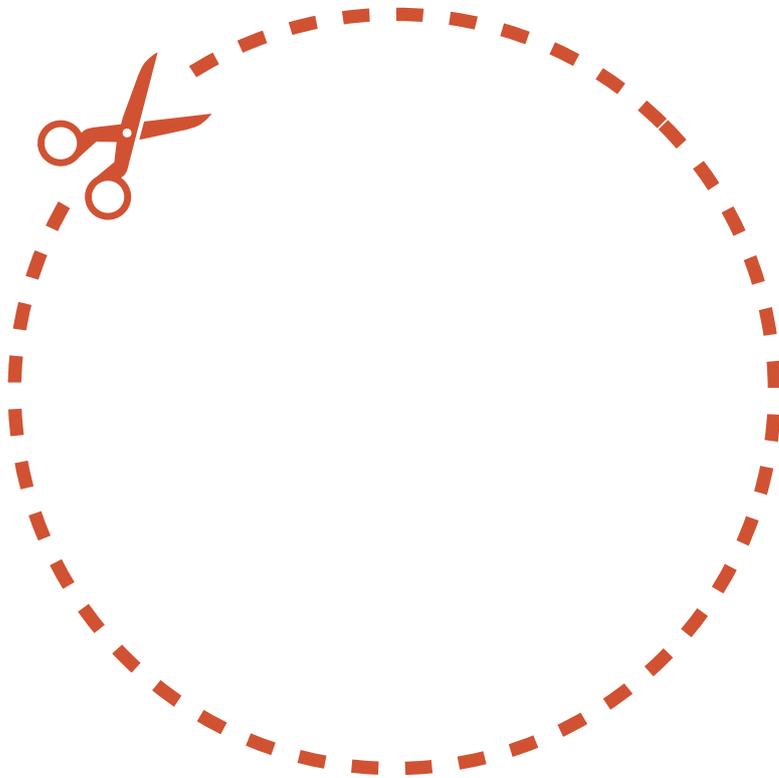
- i) Facilitating sensory experiences with materialities from, or related to, the object of interest.
- ii) Creating a space where people can perform or relate differently, in unusual manners, to the object of interest.

This approach intends to provide a different means of relating to the topic being discussed that is not intellectual and didactic, but is instead practice-based, embodied, and perceptive. It seeks to create connections between humans and non-humans (and other humans!) through embodied engagements, rather than intellectual ones alone.

### *Why apply this methodology to Laboratory Animal Research?*

There is no qualitative research into public understanding of the origins of research animals. Where public opinion of laboratory animal research exists, it is most often directed towards its acceptability, not towards public knowledge of biomedical research practices of laboratory animal production.

This public engagement activity therefore seeks to gently introduce people to engaging with this topic by creating spaces for participants to gain a fresh look at laboratory mice and perhaps relate to them differently, as companion species (Haraway, 2008) and entities with multiple, overlapping and contingent identities (Mol, 2006).



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outline

A table is set up with craft materials and other related tactile objects. Participants are given the simple open invitation, "would you like to join us?".



Participants are then guided through the process of making a mouse and invited to share their thoughts, responses and questions openly.

## Instructions



Cut out a circle of material, fold in half and stitch along 3/4 of the curve. Use toy stuffing to fill and shape the mouse body. When full, complete the stitching to make the body. Leave remaining thread to form a tail.



To form the ears: cut out two small circles of material. Pinch in half and attach to the body with a few stitches. Use additional thread to add whiskers and eyes. Complete the mouse passport.

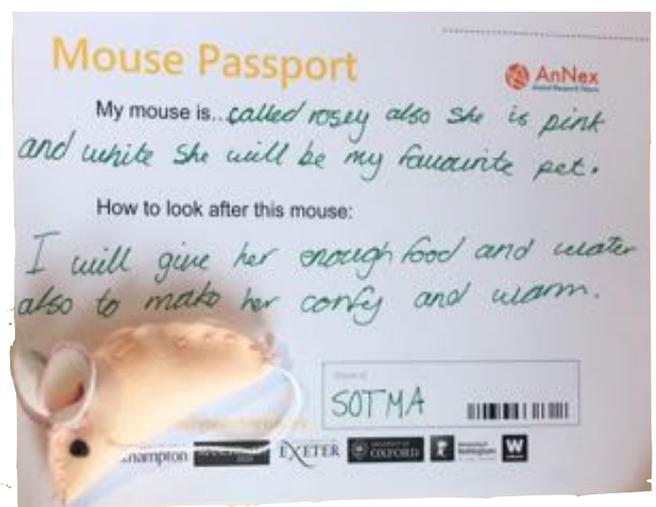
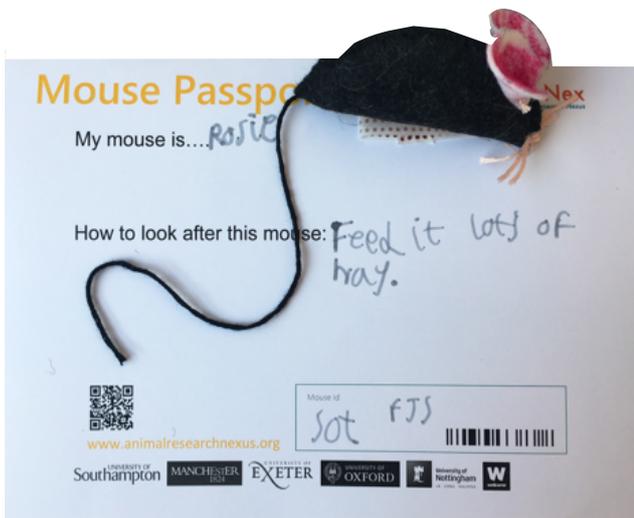




the

# MOUSE EXCHANGE

examples



Example of mice and their passports



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events

## EVENTS

School of Health Science. University of Southampton.  
Colony: Nightingale (NTG) (n = 6)  
October 24th 2018

This initial pilot produced six mice and allowed the activity to be tested live. Discussion topics included personal recollections of caring for rodents and of animal research. One participant said that they thought people did not want to know about AR. People had not thought about where lab animals come from, but responded to themes related more directly to their own fields (e.g. Nursing student: whether or not animal research was mentioned in class; finance students: mice being part of markets).



Hands-On Humanities Day. University of Southampton.  
Colony: Soton (SOT) (n = 60)  
November 17th 2018

This interaction was run as part of the Being Human festival and was used to assess the activity's suitability for families.

Discussion themes included which species were used in research and for what purposes, and how decisions were made to rehome laboratory animals. Most participants were unaware of rehoming and had not previously considered where lab animals had come from - some guessed that these animals might have been taken from the wild; others guessed that they were bred in laboratories. None were aware of suppliers like Charles River.

The majority of participants wanted to rehome 'their' mouse after they had made it, and seemed to enjoy giving it a name and explaining what their mouse liked ('cuddles, carrots, green grapes, love'). Children especially grew quite attached to their mouse and one even came back later to take their mouse passport home with them.

Some participants described how the workshop was a "therapeutic" experience in of itself. They recalled memories of childhood and of "sewing boxes" which lead on to discussions how the act and art of making and caring can be connected.

Transparency and visibility were discussed along with activism and media coverage, and how these can negatively impact on animal welfare and those who care for the animals.



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evaluation

## EVALUATION

### Evaluation process

The Mouse Exchange was developed and refined in consultation with a mix of social scientists, humanities researchers, artists and creative facilitators as part of the Animal Research Nexus programme.

The activity proposal was presented and reviewed by the Animal Research Nexus Public Engagement Subgroup and was run as an activity at the Animal Research Nexus PE Engagement meeting in Bristol. Recommendations were then used to refine and further develop the activity.

After the Hands-on Humanities event the facilitators participated in a focus group to analyse, reflect on and refine the process.

### Were the aims met at both the activity and strategic level?

The activity requires basic craft materials and a small outlay in equipment. Resources for up to 100 mice, plus staging/branding can be easily packed into a small carry-on case, making it low cost, transportable and accessible (Strategic Aim i)

The Mouse Exchange succeeded in creating a care-full space for curiosity lead enquiry. This is evidenced by the drop in, open invitation structure enticing a constant stream of participants that occasionally exceeded the capacity of the facilitators.

## EVALUATION

Participant feedback, gathered by independent evaluators included; 'kept the kids engaged and allowed for wider discussion about the research' and 'thought provoking -great activity'. Six attendees voted the Mouse Exchange as their favourite activity at the Hands-on Humanities day.

The variety, complexity and richness of responses (evidenced by the conversations held and mouse passport care instructions written in by participants), and lack of negative comments or rejection illustrates that the topic of animal research was deescalated and allowed for nuanced, participant-led discussions to take place at each event ((Strategic Aim ii, Activity Aims i-v).

### What are the areas for improvement?

The activity worked well within a family focused event, with many families being drawn to the event by its colourful and "cute" appeal. However, this success impacted on the potential for conversations and enquiries to deepen as the capacities of the facilitators were taken up by assisting and supporting the physical making of the mice.

The focus group discussed building pacing into the activity in order to allow time and space for reflection and responses. It was suggested that the Mouse Exchange could have different variations. One version to be family-oriented and drop in, but with more support staff to free up the facilitators to chat with participants and record discussions. Another version to be for adults only where a facilitator works directly with small groups that all start at the same time, limiting the need to repeat instructions and demonstrations.

## EVALUATION

### Capacity-building and post engagement

The majority of participants decided to take their mouse home. This could be for a few reasons. Firstly, that the personal investment in time and care to produce “their” mouse created a strong sense of ownership. This could close down any consideration of giving the mouse away for another purpose. Secondly, the list of possible fates were hypothetical, e.g. it *could* be reused at another event, it *could* be rehomed to a cat shelter. Thirdly, the tracking system or biobank mechanics (database/digitalised passports) had not yet been finalised. This created a sense of uncertainty and a potential for the connection and engagement to end as the mouse was left behind, rather than generating a sense of curiosity in continuing the experiment.

Attention should be given to outline the possible “fates” of the mice with clear instructions (e.g. website, contact details) of how participants can continue to engage with the Mouse Exchange, and, crucially, their mouse.

However, this should be balanced with the neutrality and openness of the initial offer to participate while capitalising on the sense of curiosity, co-production, and discovery.

## EVALUATION

### Impact and Legacy

This process has been focused on the research and development of the activity. Therefore, the pilots were not formally evaluated for medium or long-term impact.

Each pilot succeeded in meeting both the strategic and activity aims but there is currently only evidence for short-term and immediate impact on the site and directly after the event. An excellent example of this is one family traveling to participate in the activity because a friend had contacted them from the event and told them how excellent it was.

It seems that the process of investing time and care in creating a mouse creates a personal connection. It could therefore be suggested that the value placed on the physical object may increase the likelihood of future discussions. It is possible that the object itself may act as a memory aid in recalling both the tactile process of creation and the conversations that accompanied it.

The Mouse Exchange has great potential to create further medium- and long-term impact and create a legacy. These could be achieved by

- i) realising the online biobank/database for participants to interact with
- ii) training others to hold Mouse Exchange events
- iii) holding additional events, such as citizen juries, to decide on the fate of a colony once it reaches a certain size.



the  
**MOUSE**  
**EXCHANGE**  
future

ID	<b>MCRBSC</b>	
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		<p><b>PHENOTYPE</b></p> <p>Dark grey body White ears Orange eyes, whiskers and tail and seam</p>
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NAME	WILLOW
DOB	11.09.18
POB	MANCHESTER
COLONY	RANSFIELD

**INSTRUCTIONS FOR CARE**

likes salt circles and sage.  
keep in a large colony.

**ACTIVITY LOG**

11.10.18  
Transported to Nightingale

13.10.18  
Returned to Nexus

11.11.18  
Transported to Soton

Rehomed by SMG

Example of online display and features

## COLLABORATORS

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