

Dissection of animal materials in school

We receive enquiries about animal material dissection on a regular basis from both teachers and technicians. Many of these simply ask, 'What are we allowed to do?' Our answer is that dissection of animal material is permitted if it is obtained from animals that have been slaughtered for human consumption. Such material may be obtained from butchers, abattoirs, or fishmongers. The dissection materials must be fresh or, if they have been frozen, recently defrosted [1].

A significant number of enquiries relate to the potential use of eyes and brains, with particular concerns over the possibility of them harbouring agents that cause transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs). Again, organs from animals prepared for human consumption may be used for educational purposes. Such animals are deemed to be safe when slaughtered within the prescribed age limit of twelve months for cattle, sheep and goats [2].



Whole organism dissection of mammals and birds is largely unnecessary for Scottish school-based courses. Entire dead vertebrate specimens should not be brought into schools unless obtained from butchers, abattoirs or fishmongers, or unless they have been specially prepared for dissection, or display. Preserved vertebrate specimens may be purchased for the purpose of dissection where relevant in senior phase courses.

While the use of animal material in school can be of considerable educational value, care must always be exercised regarding the sensitivity of pupils, for a variety of reasons, to the use of such material. <<

References

- [1] More detailed guidance on the use of animal material for dissection or experimentation is contained in Section 4 of the document, 'Materials of Living Origin – Educational Uses: A Code of Practice for Scottish Schools and Colleges' (SSERC, 2018). The document can be accessed via the SSERC website: <https://www.sserc.org.uk/health-safety/biology-health-safety/codes-of-practice/>.
- [2] Appendix 8 of 'Materials of Living Origin – Educational Uses: A Code of Practice for Scottish Schools and Colleges' (SSERC, 2018) contains specific guidance on the use of nervous tissue from cattle, sheep and goats. The document can be accessed via the SSERC website: <https://www.sserc.org.uk/health-safety/biology-health-safety/codes-of-practice/>.