

PARLIAMENT PULSE

Update: The Engagement Gap — Governance Board & the Limits of Scrutiny

This week's update brings together findings from the Alliance's new report *The Engagement Gap* with the Government's recent claim that a new ASRU "Governance Board" constitutes external scrutiny. The evidence shows a consistent pattern: limited proactive transparency, restricted external oversight, and structures that appear independent in name only.

1. Locked Out of Oversight

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Phasing Out Animal Experiments in Medical Research has sought representation on the government's ministerial committee on animal testing — but has not been granted a seat.

[Register of All-Party Parliamentary Groups](#)

2. Compliance Marking Its Own Homework

In 2024, 69% of non-compliance cases were self-reported by laboratories. Of 68 audits conducted that year, only 10 were unannounced. In 64% of non-compliance cases the sole recorded sanction was inspector advice — no licences were revoked.

3. Real Suffering, by the Numbers

Around 31% of experimental procedures in 2024 — roughly 443,000 — were classified by the Home Office as causing moderate or severe suffering. Documented non-compliance in the same period included animals left without food or water for up to five days, neonatal mice separated from their mothers, and animals affected by flooded cages.

[Home Office: Annual Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals, GB 2024](#)

4. No Exit Strategy for Basic Research

Basic research accounted for 52% of all experimental procedures in 2024 — roughly 741,555 procedures. FOI responses from major universities indicate most have no formal end date or phase-out strategy for animal use in this category.

[Home Office statistics, GB 2024](#)

5. Nowhere to Go: The Rehoming Gap

Universities frequently state they have no authority to rehome genetically altered animals. Existing guidance permits transfer only to a slaughterhouse, or to another laboratory as a "sentinel" animal.

6. "External Scrutiny" — or Self-Appointed Advice?

On 10 September 2026, Minister Sarah Jones responded to a written question from Ruth Jones MP (UIN 21419) stating that no parliamentary inquiry into ASPA was needed because oversight arrangements are "established and proportionate" and have been strengthened by the new Animals in Science Regulation Governance Board. The Minister described the Board as providing "**external scrutiny, advice and challenge**" to the Home Office on the Regulator's performance, strategy and risk.

Yet the job posting (Institute of Regulation) tells a different story: the Board is posted by ASRU, for ASRU; applications go to ASRUapplications@homeoffice.gov.uk; its stated purpose is to help ASRU "effectively meet its goals"; and the Chair reports decisions back to ASRU itself. This is not the independent, periodic external review recommended by the House of Lords Select Committee in 2002 — a recommendation that, more than two decades on, has still not been implemented.

Strong Challenge Point for MPs:

Is "external scrutiny" being redefined as a body recruited by, reporting to, and designed to assist the regulator it is supposed to oversee?

Suggested Written Questions for MPs:

1. To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether the Animals in Science Regulation Governance Board will publish its terms of reference, membership, and any reports or recommendations, and to which external body (if any) the Board is accountable beyond ASRU itself.
2. To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what plans the public accountability dashboard on animal testing (due late 2026) has to report reductions in the use of animals in basic research, which accounted for 52% of procedures in 2024, separately from regulatory testing milestones.

PARLIAMENT PULSE — continued

The Governance Board in Detail: Structure vs. Claim

The Government told Parliament the new Board is “external scrutiny.” The recruitment documents show otherwise. Below is a side-by-side comparison of the claim and the structure actually being created.

Government claim (Written Answer, 10 Sept 2026)	What the job posting actually says
“external scrutiny, advice and challenge to the Home Office on the Regulator’s performance, strategy and risk.”	Board exists to “support and challenge” ASRU by providing “direct operational advice” and assisting it in “shaping its strategy, setting priorities, and managing performance to effectively meet its goals.”
Implied independence from the body being scrutinised.	Posted by: Animals in Science Regulation Unit. Employed By: Animals in Science Regulation Unit. Applications to ASRUapplications@homeoffice.gov.uk.
Strengthens existing oversight arrangements so that a parliamentary inquiry is unnecessary.	Chair “communicates board decisions to ASRU” and works alongside the Head of ASRU — not to an outside authority. One in-person meeting a year; hybrid voluntary roles.

A Pattern, Not an Isolated Point

This fits a repeated pattern in the regulation of ASPA: reform is announced, structures are created, headline numbers move — yet the substance of independent accountability does not arrive. Inspector numbers rise, but the audit function remains thin. KPIs are promised, but months later none exist. A “systemic failure” is formally acknowledged, but full implementation is deferred by years. And more than twenty years after the House of Lords identified the precise gap and recommended the precise fix — periodic review by a body other than the Inspectorate itself — what has been built is a board the regulator recruits for itself, to help it meet its own goals.

None of this means the individuals who take up these voluntary roles will not take the job seriously. It means the structure they are being asked to serve in was never designed to be independent of the body it is meant to oversee — and that distinction is exactly the one Parliament drew in 2002, for a reason. Calling the structure “external scrutiny” in a written answer does not change what the structure actually is.

Sources

- Recruitment listing: Animals in Science Regulation Governance Board Members and Chair — Institute of Regulation
- Government written answer: UIN 21419, Ruth Jones MP to the Secretary of State for the Home Department, answered by Sarah Jones MP, 10 September 2026
- House of Lords Select Committee on Animals in Scientific Procedures (2002) recommendation on external review of the Inspectorate
- Alliance for Cruelty Free Science, *The Engagement Gap* (2026) — FOI responses, official statistics and compliance data

Key Question for Parliament this week:

If the regulator can design, recruit and answer to its own “scrutiny” body, and the Government can then cite that body as the reason no parliamentary examination is required, where does independent oversight of ASPA actually reside?