

PARLIAMENT PULSE

ASPA 2026: Restatement Is Not Reform

The Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 (Amendment) Regulations 2026 (SI 2026/663) came into force in June 2026. Ministers presented the instrument as technical housekeeping: assimilated EU rules restated into ASPA, with “no significant policy change.” For campaigners and parliamentarians, that is the point. The law is now fully domestic — and the opportunity to raise the welfare bar was not taken.



1. The EU floor has been removed

References to Directive 2010/63/EU, Annex VIII severity criteria, and related EU reporting rules have been stripped out of ASPA. Equivalent wording now sits in domestic sections 5A, 5BA and new Schedule 2AA. “Keep pace with Europe” is no longer a legal hook. Future tightening or loosening is a UK political decision only.

2. Replacement was not strengthened

The SI adds no duty to use human-specific methods (organoids, organs-on-chips, iPSCs). The existing test remains: a non-animal method must be used where it is “scientifically satisfactory.” The 3Rs are restated, not raised. Government can now say the framework was “modernised” in 2026 without having required a phase-down.

3. Severity is now a UK checklist — use it

New section 5BA and Schedule 2AA list example procedures as mild, moderate or severe (lethal toxicity endpoints, progressive tumours, inescapable shock, forced swim to exhaustion, severe genetic models). Licence conditions must classify actual severity against this framework. Predicted vs actual severity is now auditable against a published UK schedule, not a distant EU annex.

4. Six-month clocks — and AWERBs — are on the face of the Act

Project summaries (s.5D) and retrospective assessments (s.5F) must be published within six months of grant or completion. Schedule 2C now lists AWERB tasks in domestic terms: 3Rs advice, monitoring, project follow-up and rehoming. Delay and weak local review are now statutory issues, not just Home Office practice.

5. Applications must now show their working

New section 5A(1A) requires licence applications to address relevance, 3Rs, severity, animal numbers and life stages, housing and care, pain relief and humane endpoints, reuse, methods of killing, avoidance of duplication, and competence. That does not ban procedures. It does make missing justifications — especially on replacement and duplication — easier to evidence through FOI, AWERB papers and parliamentary questions.

Strong Challenge Point for MPs:

If 2026 was only restatement, what is the plan for actual reduction? Around 31% of experimental procedures in 2024 caused moderate or severe suffering; basic research was 52% of experimental use, with most universities reporting no phase-out date. SI 2026/663 made the rules clearer. It did not create an exit strategy, a dashboard duty for basic research, or a stronger replacement test. Do not let “we updated ASPA in 2026” close the file.

Suggested Written Question for MPs:

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, following the coming into force of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 (Amendment) Regulations 2026, what assessment she has made of (a) compliance with the new six-month publication deadlines for project summaries and retrospective assessments, (b) the use of Schedule 2AA in classifying actual severity, and (c) whether the unchanged “scientifically satisfactory” replacement test is sufficient to reduce animal use in basic research, which accounted for 52% of experimental procedures in 2024.

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Same Playbook, Different Corner of ASPA: Transparency Frozen, Not Reformed

SI 2026/663 restated ASPA without raising its bar. The same pattern — technical tidying presented as modernisation, with the substantive question left untouched — shows up even more starkly in how the Home Office handles transparency about non-compliance. That mechanism was not restated in 2026. It was not reformed at any point. It was simply abandoned, and nobody has evolved it since.

6. Five reports, then nothing

Between September 2014 and October 2017, ASRU published five anonymised investigation reports into substantial non-compliance (A7(1), A8(1), C30(1), C51(1), C75(1)). None have been published since — across three further governments. The gov.uk page carrying them is now formally marked “withdrawn” and “out of date.”

7. Confirmed: abandoned, not evolving

UK Government Web Archive snapshots put this beyond dispute. The page has been crawled roughly 332 times over 13 years — and every capture from 2018 onward shows the identical five documents. Nothing has been added, removed, or edited. Only automated archivers have visited this page in any way that changed the record; no human decision to update, withdraw formally, or replace it is evidenced anywhere in that eight-year span.

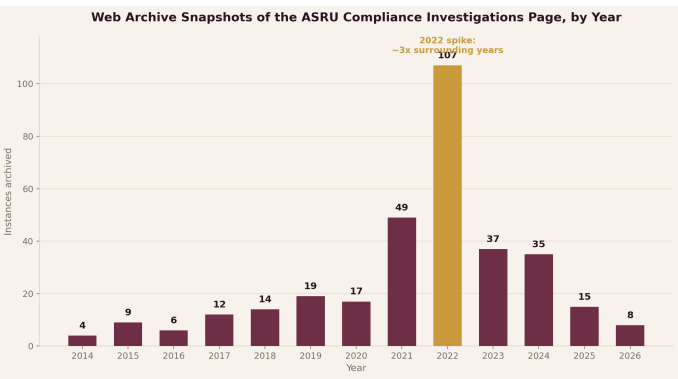


Figure: archive snapshots per year of the ASRU compliance-investigations page. Volume varies with crawl frequency; content has not varied at all since 2018.

8. The reliability gap in what's left

The only transparency tier that has continued under every government — anonymised case summaries inside ASRU's annual reports — has itself proven unreliable. The 2019–2021 report needed correction in 2024: 17 cases omitted, 24 wrongly included, and 143 more with discrepancies. ASRU found this internally, two months after publication; it took a further 15 months to correct.

9. Section 24 still unresolved

The Coalition's 2014 consultation on repealing Section 24 — ASPA's criminal secrecy clause — remains, per an ICO decision notice as recently as 2026, “under active review.” That is twelve years without resolution, spanning the Coalition, two Conservative governments, and the current government.

Strong Challenge Point for MPs:

SI 2026/663 shows government is willing to restate ASPA when it wants to. The compliance-investigations page shows it is equally willing to let a transparency commitment lapse for nine years without a word of explanation. Press ministers to say which this is: was individual investigation reporting deliberately discontinued, or simply forgotten? Either answer is a problem — the first is a policy reversal made without announcement or scrutiny; the second is a regulator that has stopped monitoring its own public commitments.

Suggested Written Question for MPs:

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, further to the Animals in Science Regulation Unit's 2013 commitment to publish anonymised reports of substantial non-compliance investigations, what assessment she has made of (a) why no such report has been published since October 2017, (b) whether this policy has been formally discontinued, superseded, or remains nominally in effect, and (c) her timetable for concluding the review of Section 24 of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, first opened for consultation in 2014.