
Summary Minutes: AWERB minutes

Status: Chair approved

Meeting held: 8 September 2021 at 10am via MS Teams

Present:

Attendees: 9, plus 1 in attendance and 7 apologies

1 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 July 2021 were confirmed as an accurate record.

2 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

2.1 Item 6: MBR Acres: “Camp Beagle”

AWERB were informed that an injunction had recently been served on Camp Beagle to stop them harassing staff, which had resulted in some arrests. UK Bioscience Sector Coalition (UKBSC) had separately written to all the Chief Scientific Advisers for the various government departments such as DEFRA that were involved asking them a) can they contribute to prevent the misinformation that was being circulated; b) get some sort of joined up policy with government. It was reassuring to know that there were things happening in the background on this.

The video footage that had been taken had been reviewed again very carefully. It appeared that most of the handling was actually done with hands around the thorax under the forelimbs, so the dogs were mainly being moved with support. There seemed to be no evidence of the dogs having been mishandled. The handling therefore did not seem to be as bad as had been first made out or as the video seemed to suggest.

It was reported that there was an Animal Sciences Group meeting (part of the Royal Society of Biology) on 22nd September, where the first hour would be focussed on discussing the rationale of using dogs in research. NC3Rs would be one of the presenters and if people were interested, invites would be provided.

2.2 Item 8: Squeezing of zebrafish debate (14 July 2021 meeting)

The debate around the squeezing of zebrafish was on peoples radar and there had been discussions about it and papers on the topic were being read. A zebrafish expert had been contacted who had provided a useful summary of when squeezing of zebrafish was appropriate and how they did it, but they had advised that it should not be done as a routine practice. This advice would be incorporated into the SOPS and policies on zebrafish.

2.3 Item 11: Two end of project licence reports (14 July 2021 meeting)

The 2nd end of project licence report had still not been received. Providing an end of project review was a legal requirement by the Home Office. The Chair would raise this issue with the Establishment Licence Holder about what the next steps should be.

2.4 Item 2: Change of project licence holder for hospital project licence (29 June 2021 meeting)

A senior clinician had been approached but it was unlikely due to the workload and being short staffed in his unit that he could take this on. It was agreed that it needed to be someone who actively worked in the hospital and had experience of the projects that would be run under the project licence. The Head of the department would be approached to see if he had any suggestions.

2.5 Item 3.2: Rat playpens for improved welfare (9 June 2021 meeting)

An informal discussion had been held in relation to the playpens and ideas suggested. These would be put forward at the next staff meeting.

2.6 Item 5: ARRIVE compliance report (9 June 2021 meeting)

The survey had been circulated. The aim was to have enough responses to that they could be reviewed for the October meeting.

2.7 Item 1: New project licence review (26 May 2021 meeting)

The Chair had contacted the project licence holder on several occasions to offer to meet to go through the project licence in order to help make the required improvements, but this offer had not yet been taken up.

3 Keeping large animals at Camden

Estates have been asked to look into options for alternative floor coverings for the stables in Camden.

It was recognised that there had been previous debates about whether the large animals should be kept at Camden as it was not an ideal environment for them. It had previously been asked whether it was possible for the anatomy teaching to be done at Hawkshead so the animals could be kept there, which was a better environment for them. However, this had proved not possible due to timetabling limitations and Hawkshead not having the required anatomy labs. It was also not logistically possible as there were over 200 students involved. It had also been felt that having the animals at Camden was beneficial to the students' mental wellbeing. Instead it had been agreed that the animals should be rotated more frequently between the two campuses and that the environment in which they lived in Camden should be enriched. Each pair of ponies would spend a maximum of six weeks at Camden before being rotated back to Hawkshead. There was uncertainty though whether having frequent rotations might also be stressful to the ponies in having to go through frequent environment changes so that there should be a systematic evaluation of the behaviour and welfare consequences of keeping the animals at Camden (following each rotation) to make sure that the benefits to the students outweighed the harm to the animals.

There were several problems in keeping the large animals at Camden:

- The state of the driveway: there was now a budget available to fix the driveway. It would be levelled out with a new top covering.
- The stables.
- The outside yard as it was also an emergency access point so had to be kept clear and affected what could be put there.

A query was raised whether any checks had been done with the fire brigade directly to see if this area was the most appropriate emergency access point for them. It was agreed this would be done.

AWERB reviewed the pros and cons for keeping large animals in Camden. There were always concerns that it was a massive compromise to animal welfare. As well as the animal welfare concerns, there was the matter of health and safety for both the animals and also people. A new pony was in the process of being sourced for teaching purposes and it was important to ensure that it was a horse that would be safe to use.

Having animals at Camden though did make a huge difference to the teaching element of the courses, which was important to the learning process. There had been discussions previously about holding the teaching at Hawkshead however it had been concluded that it was not practical to transport the students to Hawkshead to do the teaching there. It was added that having the animals at Camden played a significant role in student welfare and mental wellbeing in having the animals on site and being able to be with them and look after them. It was pointed out though that the students would still have access to other live teaching animals such as the rabbits, guinea pigs, rodents and hamsters who were kept in an environment that suited them.

It was noted that the curriculum for the first year students was in the process of being changed so that it included two “R and R” weeks each term where there would be no scheduled teaching. There might be an option for provision to be made for Camden based students to have access to the large animals at the Hawkshead campus whilst under supervision? This would be looked into. It was important though not to just shift the animal welfare issue from Camden to Hawkshead. There was already significant pressure on the teaching animals at Hawkshead and they were being monitored carefully to make sure they were not overworked. The numbers of teaching animals and staff would need to be increased in order to accommodate this additional teaching pressure. Consideration would also need to be given on where the additional animals would be kept and whether it was possible to accommodate the increase in students that there would be from Camden.

AWERB concluded that it was important not to inhibit student access to live animals but that alternative options needed to be looked into.

4 FEEDBACK FROM PPL HOLDERS THAT ATTENDED THE JULY MEETING TO DISCUSS THEIR PROJECT LICENCE

Positive feedback reports had been received from the two project licence holders that had attended the July meeting to discuss their licence applications. They had found attending AWERB to discuss their licences a good exercise, which was a good reflection on how the discussion sessions were run. It was agreed that these feedback questionnaires would be continued to be sent to all PPL Holder attendees as standard practice to help us develop and progress as an AWERB.

5 HOME OFFICE

5.1 Update on ASRU Change Programme

There had been an operational newsletter circulated on 16th August by the Home Office that provided typical timelines (working days) for licensing tasks. These were:

- Initial project application review requiring ASC referral: 55 days
- Initial project application review: 40 days
- Second/subsequent project application reviews: 20 days
- Initial project amendment applications: 20 days
- Second/subsequent project amendment applications: 14 days
- Urgent project amendment applications: 10 days

The main concern was about project licence amendments which did not seem to be as rapid as had originally been indicated would be the case. Project licence holders needed to be aware that they needed to allow additional time when they wanted to submit amendments. For replacement project licences, these needed to be submitted at least 6 months prior to a licence expiring. This was not

actually a change, but had always been the case in theory, it was just that the Home Office Inspectors had been more obliging in the past in pushing licences through.

6 3RS

6.1 3Rs symposium

It was noted that discussions were underway about running another 3Rs symposium at the RVC in 2022. AWERB were supportive of this.

6.2 “All about the AWERB”

RSPCA were running an awareness-raising activity called “all about the AWERB”. This consisted of 4 AWERB weeks to help AWERB address some of the issues that were frequently highlighted by members including ensure support for and engagement with the AWERB. It was agreed that it would be useful exercise to tie in these topics with the AWERB meetings so they could be discussed further.

6.3 Launch of NC3Rs 2021 CRACK IT Challenge

This had just been launched and was focused on applying advanced computational and mathematical modelling approaches including to develop a suite of virtual dog tissues and organs to model toxicological endpoints for new medicines. The model developed would provide a tool to start moving towards replacing the use of the dog as a second species in drug development.

6.4 Survey on rodent models of cancer

NC3Rs were doing a survey on rodent models of cancer. The aim was to set up a working group for best practice in models around cancer.

6.5 Animal-free In vitro technologies

This was a new resource hub and the aim was to enable researchers to explore in vitro options that were truly animal free (<https://nc3rs.org.uk/animal-free-in-vitro-technologies>). There was a webinar series related to that. The weblinks would be provided so they could be circulated to all researchers in case of interest.

6.6 NC3Rs/ IAT Animal Technicians’ Symposium 2021: 11 October to 12 October 2021 (two half day sessions)

This was being held online and was free to register. Registration was now open and would close on Sunday 10th October. Topics included handling, breeding and genotyping of laboratory research animals. There would also be a panel discussion led by experts in animal technology with a track record in promoting animal welfare and the 3Rs.

6.7 Two new species pages

There were 2 new species pages that related to and ferrets: <https://nc3rs.org.uk/housing-and-husbandry-gerbils> and <https://nc3rs.org.uk/housing-and-husbandry-ferrets>

7 AWERB TERMS OF REFERENCE

AWERB reviewed several items of the terms of reference and confirmed that no changes were needed.

8 SCHEDULE 1 REGISTER REVIEW

AWERB noted the latest schedule 1 register. These were checked on a regular basis to make sure they were up to date and that where there were gaps these were identified to see if they could be filled. Current gaps related to cats and horses which were being looked into.

9 NVS REPORT

- Fish: There had been issues with the fish with an increase in the numbers of protozoa due to UV lighting issues. It was not known where the issue actually lay but it was important that it was followed up on and sorted as there would be all sort of problems if the UV lighting system did not work.
- **Establishment Licence:** There was a potential problem with the Establishment Licence at Bolton's Park farm. It had recently been noted that over the years the names of the rooms at the Farm had been changed but this had not been updated in the licence. So for example there were multiple names for rooms/areas such as the loose boxes and horse boxes. The intention was to go round and review the entire schedule of premises (both Camden and Hawkshead) and update it so that everything tallied. There had been no breach of the housing of animals done, wording just needed to be clarified.

10 CAMDEN NACWO REPORT

10.1 Humidity regulation

There were still ongoing issues with humidity regulation. A meeting had been held with Estates that morning where it had been stressed that it was important to ensure that animals were kept in the right environmental conditions as stipulated in the code of practice. As the problem still had not been resolved, it would be raised with the Establishment Licence Holder.

11 HAWKSHEAD NACWO REPORT

The following was noted:

11.1 Animals

There were no animal issues on the ground.

11.2 Replacement teaching pony

The potential replacement pony that had been identified had now been trialled but there were concerns about his suitability, so he was being returned to his owner and another pony was being obtained.

12 PPL AMENDMENTS

AWERB noted that four PPL amendments had been approved by the Home Office since the previous meeting.

13 CONDITION 18 REPORTS

AWERB noted that 3 condition 18 reports had been submitted to the Home Office.

14 END OF PROJECT LICENCE REPORTS

These would be deferred to the next meeting.

15 STUDY REQUESTS

AWERB noted that 3 study requests had been approved since the previous meeting.

16 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 22nd September.

Secretary
3 November 2021