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**Minutes:** AWERB Minutes

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**Status:** Final

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**Meeting held:** 14 December 2017 at 9am in F82 Hawkshead videolinked to Camden Council Room

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**Attendees:** 11 members present, 1 in attendance, 2 by invitation, 6 apologies sent

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## 1 **PROJECT LICENCE APPLICATION: PRESENTATION BY PROJECT LICENCE HOLDER**

The Project Licence Holder was welcomed to the meeting. The scientist who had been asked to review the project licence application was also attending to provide a scientist's perspective on the project.

The background to the project licence was explained. There was an urgent need for reassessment of the use of colistin in livestock to ensure a global unified strategy for preserving this last resort antibiotic. Quality data to justify the dose used in animals was missing and regulatory agencies desperately needed good scientific evidence to either maintain or ban this drug for therapeutic use in the veterinary field.

Filling the knowledge gap was particularly important, as there was a need to balance the sustainability of this critical antibiotic in people versus its therapeutic use in poultry and other species (calves and pigs) and the welfare of production animals under veterinary care, as there were no ideal alternatives to colistin for treating gram-negative digestive infections. If implementation of other measures to reduce AMD use (such as husbandry and biosecurity improvement and new vaccination protocols) were not sufficient, a consequence of the potential withdrawal of colistin from the veterinary armamentarium would be the increase use of fluoroquinolones (which were even more critical antimicrobial drugs) or using zinc oxide in pigs. These could have disastrous consequences for the environment and antimicrobial resistance progression.

For this project licence the focus would be on the justification of the use of colistin in production birds (broilers), which represented the second highest market share concerning colistin use.

The output of the project would provide rational scientific evidence to re-assess the optimum dosage and the risk of resistance induction in *E. coli* infections using the currently approved dose regimen in poultry.

It would provide a benefit to animal health and also human health as it was a last resort drug used in people to treat multidrug-resistant gram-negative bacteria. This project addressed the urgent need for European authorities to scientifically re-evaluate the risk/benefit ratio of using this drug in animal productions and the derived potential threat to the use in people.

The scientist reviewer said he had found the project licence well written with a clear rationale. He queried why there was only the one protocol though. Was the intention to submit further protocols further down the line? It was confirmed that this was the case, probably after the project had been running for a year. The intention was to carry out the first experiment in the first year. Due to time constraints the initial focus was just on the first protocol with others being added as required

afterwards, although it would mean having to make amendments to the project licence (so requiring a further review to the project licence). Full funding was now in place for the study.

The chickens would be trained to undergo the experimental protocol (acclimatisation to the observation and treatment rooms and equipment necessary for the acquisition of data during the experiment). The researchers would walk amongst the flock at least twice a day for socialisation, Training sessions would also use positive reinforcement and friendly habituation (equipment, staff, observation room, procedures). If a chicken was reluctant in training, it would not be used in the protocol until it accepted the tasks without stress.

A-frame perches would be provided to improve the house environment to allow birds to fully develop their leg and flight muscles. Perches reduce the social stress by providing safe resting sites, which in turn can improve feed and water consumption. Perches would also increase the effective space in the chicken house, provided there was enough clearance above the perches.

The Committee were supportive of the approach to use positive reinforcement by habituating them to the idea of getting used to being handled. The pilot would involve single dosing the chickens either through gavaging or drinking water. The experience from the first project would be useful for refining the method for the amendment.

It was pointed out that the walk through should be done in a particular way for them to be successful and that advice should be sought on this. It was a good idea though for time to be spent in the unit so that the birds got used to human presence. For the gavaging, the birds should be given treats afterwards so they associated the procedure with rewards. It was suggested that video footage be obtained so that it was possible to review their responses over time. This could then be analysed as an undergraduate student project and the results written up as a refinement paper.

The sizing of the cages was queried. The Code of Practice for accommodating animals undergoing scientific procedures sets out the minimum floor area for chickens (which for birds goes up to 2m<sup>2</sup> once the birds pass 600g, which a modern broiler would do by approximately 17 days of age. Floor pens would be the only feasible option at this point).

AWERB asked whether gavage was necessary. Drugs could be given by palatable food so was this possible for this project – for example by using meal worms? This would be looked into to see if this was an option. It would need to be a type of food that could dissolve reliably and easily. It was pointed out that gavage if done well, then the chickens were very accepting of it. Using gavage also meant that it was possible to monitor exactly how much the chicken has had.

The Project Licence Holder was thanked for attending AWERB.

AWERB discussed the project licence in detail once the project licence holder had left. They were supportive of the work proposed under the project licence as it was addressing an important One Health issue. In particular, the committee were impressed with the plans for the training and reinforcement habituation and would be interested to hear whether this actually worked. An update should be provided when the request to amend the project licence was submitted.

AWERB decided that the following changes were needed:

- The 10% loss of body weight end point to be modified so that it was now relative to the control group and no more than 5%.
- The personal licence number should be changed to the new ASPeL format.
- The sizing of the cages should be checked
- The timescales over which experiments would be performed and what would happen to each chicken to be more specific
- The volume of dose for the gavage should be no more than 1 ml.

## **2 WORKING GROUP UPDATES**

### **2.1 Environmental Enrichment Working Group**

One of the aims of the recent audit was to provide guidance for the housing of each type of species the College held or was likely to hold in the future.

It was agreed that the initial emphasis should be on the more popular species: dogs, pigs, sheep, rodents and chickens. A query was raised whether it would be easier to initially review a broader category of species: for example birds, instead of individual species, however it was felt that the needs of the individual species were quite different so should be done individually.

A starting point was to get the basics down first and then put together guidelines for those where the College had many animals. Other species could be added afterwards.

It was noted that the audit would date very quickly, but that it was a starting point and would provide guidelines on what should be updated. If something new came onto the market, then this would be reviewed and if appropriate would be added to the guidelines.

### **2.2 Rodent Handling Group**

A discussion was held around the relative merits of different types of tunnels (clear versus cardboard) for handling

## **3 MINUTES**

The minutes of the AWERB meeting held on 21 November 2017 were agreed to be an accurate record.

## **4 MATTERS ARISING**

### **4.1 Item 11 (November 2017 meeting): Rehoming**

The questionnaire responses had been separated to indicate whether they related to adults or puppies. The next step was to analyse the data as this would determine whether the adults who have lived in the unit for much longer were just as easy to rehome as the puppies.

The rehoming process was being reviewed in order to formalise it. A presentation on the rehoming and socialisation programme would be given. A rehoming pack was being put together and would be circulated for comment and formal approval by AWERB.

### **4.2 Item 2.4: CPD events (October 2017 meeting)**

The CPD programme was in the process of being put together. Technicians were registered to attend the IAT congress; another had been registered to attend a fish conference in Poland in 2018. Other meetings were also being identified that were suitable for the technicians to attend.

Scientists that did research in the unit would be asked to present to both AWERB and the technicians about animal welfare issues. The sessions could be either practical or theoretical. The sessions just needed to be arranged so that they did not clash with other events. Post-mortem training was being arranged. Finally, technicians were being asked to deliver presentations on the projects they were working on.

### **4.3 Item 2.2: Sharing Resources working group (September 2017 meeting)**

Camden now had access to the Hawkshead surgery calendar in order to improve the tissue sharing of larger species. IT would be contacted to see if the sharing resource site could be amended so that it sent out automatic e-mail alerts when a post was added saying that tissues were available. PPL and PIL Holders would be e-mailed on a regular basis reminding them of this resource and that AWERB encouraged tissue sharing.

## **5 TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR AWERB**

The terms of reference for AWERB had been revised in order to put them into the new standardised format that all RVC Committees were now required to have.

AWERB indicated that they were content with the revised terms of reference. It was agreed that new AWERB members should be sent a copy of the terms of reference when they joined as background information. They would also be placed on the intranet.

## **6 COLLABORATION WITH AN AMERICAN UNIVERSITY**

An RVC researcher has been asked to collaborate on a study with an American University that would involve sampling the laryngeal thyrohyoid muscle in client and experimental animals. The researcher has been asked to do the muscle histopathology analysis on muscle samples shipped to the UK.

Was this a study that RVC's name should be associated with? Was the study being done to an ethical standard that AWERB were happy with?

The project was discussed and the following queries raised:

- Thyrohyoid muscle biopsies would be obtained from client owned animals presenting for the investigation of DDSP. This procedure however did not seem to be listed in either the surgical or non-surgical procedures and so it was not known whether this procedure was associated with any adverse effects.
- There was no information provided in relation to obtaining informed consent.

Subject to a satisfactory response on this, AWERB were content for this study to go ahead as it seemed to be a well-designed study.

## **7 CONDITION 18 REPORTS**

Three Condition 18 reports had been submitted to the Home Office.

## **8 PROJECT LICENCE AMENDMENT**

AWERB noted that there had been one project licence amendment approved by the Home Office.

## **9 PROJECT LICENCES – END OF PROJECT REPORTS**

AWERB noted the end of project report that had been submitted. AWERB were of the view that there was interesting science coming out of this research.

## **10 INFORMATION DISSEMINATION**

### **10.1 PEL HOLDERS FORUM**

The Establishment Licence Holder had attended this forum in November 2017.

### **10.2 RSPCA AWERB Lay Members Forum**

Two members of AWERB had attended this forum in December 2017. Summary notes from the event had been circulated and a copy of the slides would be circulated once available.

One of the sessions had focused on the importance of the non-technical summaries (NTS) in the project licences and making use of the lay panel members to check them to make sure that they understood them as they were representative of the public for whom the NTS were aimed at. Often these were not very informative or written so that a member of the public could really understand what the research aimed to do. AWERB agreed that the lay panel members should be sent copies of all the NTS that were submitted to make sure that they were happy with them and to provide feedback on whether they understood them and how they could be improved.

A query was raised about whether new technicians could attend the AWERB meetings as observers as part of their training process to learn about A(SP)A and also about AWERB. It was agreed that this should be implemented.

An undergraduate student had also made enquiries if they could join AWERB. This was discussed and although student representation was encouraged on committees, it was felt that for this type of committee it would be better to be a PhD or post doc. However, they would be happy for the student to attend the meetings as an observer and to join in with discussions.

## **11 ESTATES ISSUES**

### **11.1 Camden**

It was reported that there had been intermittent problems with the air conditioning unit. It had been serviced and was now fine. The cage wash unit had broken and needed to be replaced. A paper would be going to the next College Executive Committee meeting to ask for approval that this be replaced with immediate effect, as the Unit could not function without it.

### **11.2 Hawkshead**

Pigeon netting had been installed in one of the barns. A check was being done to see what the position was with regards to putting in netting for the other barn.

## **12 NVS REPORT**

### **12.1 Camden**

The NVS report for Camden was noted.

### **12.2 Hawkshead**

A verbal report for Hawkshead was given.

Secretary  
18 December 2017