
Summary Minutes: AWERB Standing Agenda Items meeting

Status: FINAL

Meeting held: 28 June 2023 at 10am via MS Teams

Present:

16, plus 1 attendance and 10 apologies.

1 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 June 2023 were confirmed as an accurate record.

2 MATTERS ARISING/ACTION LOG

2.1 Item 6: Maintaining 3Rs expertise (13 June 2023 meeting)

The meeting to discuss strategies and proposals on how to maintain our 3Rs expertise still needed to be arranged. It would be arranged for July. As part of this, ideas that had already been suggested separately on how best to promote 3Rs awareness within the RVC would be considered (such as having a poster competition and targeted e-mails).

2.2 Item 1: Control of Pests on Campus (26 April 2023 meeting)

The Campus Services Manager had been e-mailed a reminder about the queries that had been raised.

2.3 Item 1: Pest Control Contracts (26 April 2023 meeting)

A meeting had been arranged to discuss whether it was possible to harmonise pest control contracts within the departments and also the problems experienced with rabbits.

2.4 Item 4.11: Induction materials for new AWERB members (26 April 2023 meeting)

A new folder had been set up to store the AWERB induction materials.

2.5 Item 4.11: AWERB Budget (26 April 2023 meeting)

A budget had been allocated for EWC training and 3Rs activities.

2.6 Item 5.1: Culture of Care (26 April 2023 meeting)

The questionnaire was still being finalised. Once done it would be sent to AWERB for comment before being submitted for ethical review. It was also suggested that HR should be informed about the proposed questionnaire.

2.7 Item 10.2: Assessors List (26 April 2023 meeting)

The assessors list was being reviewed and reformatted. Once completed, the list would be circulated for review.

2.8 Item 4.4: PPL Holder Refreshers workshop (26 April 2023 meeting)

Very few people had attended the recent refresher workshop, which was disappointing.

It was agreed that attending this refresher workshop once every 5 years would be made compulsory. If this training was not updated, then no further project licences applications could be submitted.

2.9 Item 4.7: GA mouse breeding strategies at the RVC (26 April 2023 meeting)

The MRC course on cryopreservation and techniques had been fully booked and no further course dates had yet been scheduled.

2.10 Item 4.10: BSU Virtual Tour storyboard (26 April 2023 meeting)

The requested information by senior management had been provided. It was expected a follow on meeting would be arranged.

3 3RS

3.1 Thank you

AWERB were reminded that the NC3Rs were reorganising its regional programme manager (RPM) scheme, so instead of having RPMs linked to specific institutes, NC3Rs would be delivering a range of activities to support 3Rs in academic research nationally. As the RVC's contract with the NC3Rs expired at the end of June, this was our RPM's last meeting. He was thanked for his contributions to AWERB, in particular his expertise in relation to PPL reviews and input on culture of care for staff and animals. He would be missed.

3.2 General Update

- **Culture of Care webinar series:** these talks cover putting a culture of care into practice in different research environments, how to measure impact and progress as well as compassion fatigue: <https://nc3rs.org.uk/3rs-resources/culture-care-creating-right-environment-animal-care>

The talks are about 15 to 30 mins. There were also a series of case studies to be used as discussion points either at AWERB or in team meetings.

- **RIVER recommendations:** These were a new set of reporting standards for *in vitro* experiments that aimed to improve the transparency and reliability of *in vitro* research. NC3Rs were seeking user feedback on the recommendations from users who work with *in vitro* models.

3.3 Question from the external report on the role of review and regulatory approvals process:

As an AWERB, do we ask the right questions to know if the models we are approving (during PPL review) are the most relevant to the researcher's question. What information do we need to ensure the animal models are providing robust and translatable research?

The aim of this question was to see whether AWERB members felt comfortable challenging the PPL Holder choice of model. If the scientist's response was that the model was chosen because that was the model they had and it showed the answers to their scientific question, was that actually enough justification? Just because a researcher had always used that model, was it justification to continue using it?

The following points were raised:

- The literature could be reviewed to see if there were any critical papers about the proposed animal model. The landscape was changing all the time in terms of what people were saying was a good or poor animal model. Researchers therefore should define the element of the model they wanted to use. The majority of models were flawed in some aspects so it was important to check that the model they were using was suitable to answer their research question.
- It was recognised that it could be difficult for AWERB members to challenge PPL holders on the model of animals being used if they did not have expertise in that model. However, the responses to questions on the form should be evaluated to see whether they had been answered adequately. If for example, in terms of replacement, inadequate justification was provided, then this should be challenged. It was the PPL Holders responsibility to check what alternatives were available and if they decided not to use them, then to explain properly why. If they did not do this, then they should be asked to do so.

It was highlighted that there were two areas in licence applications that should be scrutinised in relation to the animal model being used:

- NTS: “why do you need to use animals to achieve the aim of your project”.
- Protocol justification: why is each type of animal, experimental model, and/or method selected for this protocol:
 - The most appropriate scientific approach?
 - The most refined for the purpose?

Within this there were suggestions of how to challenge PPL Holders if it was felt that they had not answered the questions properly. In particular had the researchers justified each animal, each model and each method and not just focussed on answering one of these questions and ignoring the others. It was also important to ensure that each type of animal received a similar level of scrutiny so they were all treated equally: did the animal have the specific characteristic that allowed the scientific question to be answered?

4 POLICIES UPDATE

- **Training and Competency:** 4 new SOPs in relation to training requirements have been drafted. The aim was to issue these by the end of July. These related to training, DOPs, and how to assess people.

5 FELASA RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE REHOMING OF ANIMALS

A copy of FELASA recommendations for the rehoming of animals used for scientific and educational purposes had been circulated. These were based on general concepts. AWERB were asked to consider whether there were any recommendations that would be useful for the RVC to follow.

The rehoming programme was discussed in detail. It was felt that an excellent job was being done but there were also challenges in running the successful programme.

6 EUROPEAN CITIZEN’S INITIATIVE (ECI) PETITION – “SAVE CRUELTY FREE COSMETICS: COMMIT TO A EUROPE WITHOUT ANIMAL TESTING”

AWERB were informed that ECI were petitioning for the end of the use of animals in all biomedical research in the EU by the end of 2024. This had started from an initial complaint about using animals to test ingredients used in cosmetics. There had been a hearing at the European Parliament where the petition was outlined but no life science representatives had

been invited to speak to highlight what had been achieved through animal research (such as the Covid-19 vaccines).

7 FOI REQUEST

The response to a FOI request 1433 was noted.

8 NVS/NACWO REPORTS

8.1 Hawkshead

- **Dog Unit:** Coccidia and Giardia were still present within the unit, resulting in an increasing number of dogs having diarrhoea and being mildly and transiently affected by it. Testing and treatment had been increased but it was difficult to know what to do next to try and resolve the problem.
- **Local water source:** due to ongoing issues, bottled water was having to be brought in again. Work was being done to try and identify why the problems were occurring.
- **High temperatures:** The temperatures have been hot but there had been no problems with the animals.

8.2 Camden

- **Ferrets:** There was an endemic ferret coronavirus within the unit. Several ferrets have been taken ill with gastrointestinal disease. Discussions were being held with an overseas ferret expert who was providing advice on treatment protocols. Whether it was due to the change in treatment, the latest ferret had not had to be hospitalised and was being treated within the Unit.
- **Guinea Pigs:** there had been several abortions in a guinea pig study but there did not seem to be any pattern to them. Microbiology results following post mortems had been requested. It was not known whether there was an actual problem within the population or something that was happening naturally as a level of abortions was expected to occur when breeding guinea pigs as a normal occurrence.
- **Mice:** There was a population of mice that have had various skins issues and had positive swabs for a couple of different organisms. Microbiology sensitive tests have been taken to identify whether this had spread further around the Unit. *Staphylococcus lentus* was not something that had previously been routinely tested for before but would now be done for immunosuppressed or compromised animal imports.

9 ITEM 13: FEEDBACK FROM PPL HOLDERS THAT HAVE ATTENDED AWERB

The feedback from researchers that had attended the April meeting was noted.

10 AMENDMENT TO ESTABLISHMENT LICENCE

The amendments that have been made to the Establishment Licence were noted.

11 NEW PROJECT LICENCES GRANTED BY THE HOME OFFICE

The Home Office had granted 3 project licences since the previous meeting.

12 PROJECT LICENCES AMENDED BY THE HOME OFFICE

The Home Office had approved three amendments to project licences.

13 PROJECT WITH CHINA

AWERB noted that the Challenge Study in China had been approved. A virtual tour of the facilities was in the process of being arranged.

14 STUDY REQUESTS

Four study requests had been approved since 19th April 2023.

15 MID TERM PPL REVIEW

AWERB noted the mid term review.

16 END OF PPL REVIEWS

A end of PPL review had been received but further detail was required and had been requested.

A retrospective assessment to be submitted to the Home Office had been received. AWERB's comments on it would be passed back to the PPL holder to respond to.

17 CONDITION 18 REPORTS

Ten condition 18 reports had been submitted since the previous Standing Agenda Item meeting in April. Six were from the same licence and related to guinea pigs mentioned in the NVS/NACWO report.

18 CONCORDAT ON OPENNESS ANNUAL REVIEW SURVEY 2023

The RVC's response to the annual concordat survey was noted.

19 HOME OFFICE UPDATE

19.1 Facilities Audit Inspection Report

The report from the April inspection was noted. There were no new action points raised.

20 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

This was scheduled for 11 July 2023. It would be a PPL review meeting.

Secretary
7 July 2023