
Summary Minutes: AWERB: Standing Agenda Items meeting

Status: FINAL

Meeting held: 20 December 2023 at 10am via MS Teams

Present: 9 plus 2 in attendance and 10 apologies

1 NEW STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE

A new PhD student representative was welcomed to her first AWERB. She had applied to the recent call for new student members and was attending as an observer.

2 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 December 2023 were confirmed as an accurate record.

3 MATTERS ARISING/ACTION LOG

3.1 Item 2.5: AWERB Training budget (28 June 2023)

The training budget had been used to send several AWERB members to the recent RSPCA Lay Members Forum. Other workshops were being looked into.

3.2 Item 2.8: Training Database (28 June 2023)

Enquiries had been made with HR about what system they used to record training. They were in the process of investing in a new system and a working party was being set up. Details of the proposed system had been forwarded on.

3.3 Item 2.3: Pest control contracts (23 August 2023)

The Campus Services Manager was still on long term sick leave. These actions would be picked up when she was back.

3.4 Item 3.3: Website case study (18 October 2023 meeting)

Discussions were underway to progress using case studies and videos to highlight the research done at the RVC.

3.5 Item 3.4: Camden Stables (18 October 2023)

A review of fire access points had been undertaken, where it was confirmed that the area by the stables was used as a secondary access point. If an alternative area needed to be identified, then this should be raised at the next fire protection safety review audit. As ponies were no longer kept in this area, having this area as a fire access point was no longer such an issue.

3.6 Item 3.5: AWERB discussion topics for meetings (18 October 2023 meeting)

Volunteers were needed to lead the proposed AWERB discussion topics.

3.7 Item 6.1: Proposed joint culture of care workshop (18 October 2023 meeting)

A poll had been circulated and the consensus was that the workshop should be for a half day. It would initially be piloted to AWERB members, with the aim of ultimately offering it to others at the RVC.

4 UPDATE ON PROPOSED WORK WITH CHINA

AWERB were reminded that there had previously (February 2023) been discussions of a proposed pig challenge study with collaborators in China. There had subsequently been a virtual tour of the facilities in July, which had resulted in a list of additional questions and supplemental information/videos being requested. This had now been provided.

AWERB discussed this additional information. It was recognised that it was difficult to remotely assess the ethical aspects of use and care of animals in a country where the standards were very different from that required under UK legislation. The Chinese collaborators had however been very responsive to the queries raised.

AWERB needed to determine was there any reputational risk to the RVC in undertaking this work? It was noted that a contract had now been signed. As part of this, due diligence would have been carried out. In relation to reputational risk, a mild model was being used, that the Chinese collaborators were experienced in using. During the virtual tour, the facilities seemed very clean, but were basic with no bedding or enrichments provided. Although this was different to facilities provided at the RVC, it was not an inappropriate way to keep pigs.

AWERB therefore decided to approve the request to use this facility for the planned animal work but asked that a summary report be provided once the first group of animals had started. This would need to focus on how the animals were doing and whether there had been any unexpected issues or concerns. This report would enable AWERB to monitor the progress of the work with the pigs and the animal welfare.

5 3RS

5.1 DISCUSSION ITEM: Question from external report on the role of review and regulatory approvals process: *This report found that funders very rarely consider housing and husbandry when reviewing grant applications, except in cases where it is critical to the experiment (for example, in studies of the gut microbiome). The funders felt they should rely on AWERBs and ASRU to ensure appropriate refinements were in place. What elements therefore should we as an AWERB be considering when reviewing PPL applications? And are we doing that?*

For this discussion item the following points were made:

- For grant applications that related to large animal recovery studies, there did seem to be questions on housing, enrichment and post-operative care.
- It was agreed that as part of a PPL Holders introductory presentation to AWERB, they should be asked to include whether there was anything specific for that study that would affect the general housing or the husbandry of these animals that needed to be considered. This could be expanded to also include questions about enrichment.
- It was noted that for small animals such as rodents though, there were standardised processes and protocols in place for their husbandry and housing, so unless there was something unusual that would affect the study, it was assumed that this was already in place.
- It was suggested that a future discussion topic could involve people working in the small animal unit talking about how they keep the animals, enrichment they provided and the standard housing.

- Each institution has its own standards, however this did mean there was no general standardisation across the board, so could have an impact on the reproducibility of studies and outcomes. Was there a way of feeding that back to the funders or other institutions? Also, the institution that the applicant was from could be an influence.
- It was suggested that there could be more emphasis on enrichment when reviewing applications and also assessment whether enrichment was something that could actually be engaged with. For example, for nerve injury studies, would animals be able to access the enrichment being provided. It was noted that this would be considered as part of the pre study planning meetings but it was something that should be discussed more at AWERB.

Action: It was agreed that for future PPL applications, PPL Holders would be asked to incorporate how they envisaged the animals being kept and their husbandry as part of their PPL introductory presentation. Was there going to be anything unusual with their study that meant the housing, husbandry or enrichment would need to be adjusted?

5.2 RSPCA Lay Members Forum: 5th December 2023: report back

Several AWERB members had attended this Forum.

The following feedback was given:

- Being able to chat to members of other AWERBs to find out what their AWERBs were like had been useful.
- It would be good to have more networking opportunities between AWERBs. It was noted that there were AWERB Hubs but these were primarily aimed at AWERB Chairs.
- Not many other AWERBs had student members, but the RVC had the advantage of students having a biological background.
- One of the presenters had reported on a survey carried out with the general public about AWERBs. Although the general consensus was that it was important for members of the public to be represented, the people surveyed were not keen to get involved themselves, as they thought it involved too much responsibility as they saw it as representing society as a whole. There had also been concern that they would not understand the subject area. It therefore needed to be highlighted that a lay person's role was to provide input from their personal perspective.
- There had been discussions about what was meant by being a lay person and how to find these people and to encourage them to sit on AWERBs. Recruitment generally seemed to be through word of mouth. It was recognised that there was a risk of lay members becoming "institutionalised" and developing a collective idea of what was and was not acceptable from sitting on a Committee for several years.
- Being a lay member meant that it was possible to ask any question without the expectation of having any knowledge or understanding of the subject area.
- One of the institutions had mentioned that they had noted that sometimes researchers interpreted adverse effects as unexpected adverse effects, so this was something to be aware of.
- It had been reassuring that the majority of the suggestions made in relation to AWERBs, were things that the RVC were already implementing.

The consensus was that it could be difficult to recruit external people to sit on AWERBs, particularly as they were volunteer roles, which could be quite demanding.

6 CULTURE OF CARE

6.1 AWERB Hub Workshop

A report from a AWERB Hub workshop had recently been published. One of the items discussed related to Culture of Care, with attendees given a set of questions to discuss. It had been agreed that it would be useful to consider these questions at these meetings.

The first question was: “***What is the responsibility of AWERB in promoting the replacement of animals in research***”.

- Replacement was probably the most difficult of the 3Rs to implement as there was very little advice available or resources to go to.
- A query was raised about whether there was research being undertaken at the RVC in relation to replacing animals in research. It was highly likely that AWERB would not be aware of it, as this type of project would not need to come to AWERB for review. Perhaps a general enquiry should be made and if this type of research identified, the researchers be invited to give talks in order to generate awareness of what could potentially be done in this area.
- AWERB had a responsibility to challenge PPL Holders when discussing their project licence applications to ask whether they had thought about alternatives to using animals to achieve their study objectives. Did they have an awareness of what was happening in their field in relation to replacing animals. Was it possible to use fewer animals, for example by doing more work before having to use an animal?

It was noted that the workshop report included a discussion on the NC3Rs Self-Assessment Tool. Several attendees had expressed disappointment that upon completion of the assessment they had been scored as only “Fair”, even though there were areas they felt they excelled in. This was something the RVC could sympathise with having also been disappointed in receiving a “fair” score.

7 NVS REPORT

7.1 Camden

- **Mice – spot infections:** spot infections had been picked up in some mice (unrelated studies but located in the same room). These had been sent off for culture and the situation was being monitored.
- **Biosecurity protocols and testing for the unit:** a reassessment of these was being carried out
- **Trial of in-cage filter paper as a replacement for sentinel mice:** this was currently being carried out. An update would be provided at a future meeting.
- **Ferrets:** One ferret had developed a mysterious subcutaneous lump in its belly. This had been removed and sent for testing. The results had come back that morning as a Pyogranulomatous inflammation. This had potentially been caused by a bite. The ferret was more comfortable since the lump had been removed.
- **Ferrets:** the recent batch of new ferrets had experienced skin reactions (scabs on the skin) following injections of anti-parasitic medication. These scabs had been treated with tropical cream and the ferrets did not seem to experience any issues from it. For the next dose, a spot on cream was being considered. Apart from this, the new ferrets seemed to have settled in well.
- **Handling animals - Rabbits:** Two rabbits had experienced sore patches on their back feet which were possibly abrasion lesions. These had been treated with tropical cream and the rabbits did not seem to be affected. The bedding and cleaning materials were being reviewed in case they had caused the abrasions.

7.2 Hawkshead

- **12 sheep recovery study:** This study had now finished.
- **Dog unit:** AWERB were reminded that at the previous meeting an update on a new study trialling a new oral drug which was designed to reduce some of the effects of the muscle breakdown in

the DMD model had been reported, as side effects had been experienced and the treatment was put on hold. The study being undertaken was the first long term safety study. The study was double pronged: it was testing the drug's action on the DMD phenotype and objective measurements as well as undertaking long term safety testing. An amendment to the project licence had been submitted to enable subcutaneous injections to be used as an alternative to oral medication. A subcutaneous injection drug was currently in development and the plan was that when this drug was available this would be used.

- **Dog:** It was reported that an affected DMD dog was beginning to struggle with his phenotypic changes and was being closely monitored.
- **Rehoming of dogs:** AWERB were pleased to hear that a lot of dogs had recently been rehomed and were settling well into their new homes, with their new owners sending in delightful photos of them. As the new PhD student representative had a background in animal rehoming it was agreed that it would be useful for her to review the animals' rehoming policy to get her input.

8 NTCO REPORT

8.1 Training records

Several training records were reviewed. No specific comments were made.

9 PROJECT LICENCES AMENDED BY THE HOME OFFICE

AWERB noted that five project licences had been amended since the previous standing agenda items meeting.

10 SECONDARY AVAILABILITY PROJECT LICENCE AMENDMENTS APPROVED BY THE HOME OFFICE

AWERB noted one secondary availability project licence had been amended since the previous standing agenda items meeting.

11 STUDY REQUESTS APPROVED SINCE 13 OCTOBER 2023

AWERB noted that five study requests had been approved since the previous standing agenda items meeting.

12 END OF PPL REVIEWS

One end of PPL report was noted.

13 RETROSPECTIVE ASSESSMENT – APPROVED

AWERB noted that the Home Office had approved one retrospective assessment.

14 CONDITION 18 REPORTS

AWERB noted that 4 condition 18 reports had been submitted since the previous standing agenda items meeting. There was concern that the Home Office had not yet responded to some reports that had been submitted in June 2023, although it was understood that this was due to the compliance team being short-staffed.

15 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

15.1 Thank you to external lay panel member

AWERB expressed their thanks to the current external lay panel member for her input into AWERB matters. She would be rotating onto a different Committee, with a replacement member coming onto AWERB.

15.2 Openness in Animal Research: A conference to celebrate a decade of the Concordat 2024:

It was reported that the RVC have had two posters accepted for this conference.

Once registration details had been received, they would be circulated to AWERB and it was hoped that several people would be able to attend.

16 DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

17 January 2024: PPL review meeting: 2.30pm to 4.30pm. This would be in a hybrid format.

Secretary

03 January 2024