
Summary Minutes: AWERB: Standing Agenda Items meeting

Status: FINAL

Meeting held: 23 April 2024 via MS Teams and F82 Hawkshead

Present: 17 plus 1 in attendance and 11 apologies.

1 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 April 2024 were confirmed as an accurate record.

2 MATTERS ARISING/ACTION LOG

2.1 Item 2.2: Training database working group – 6 February 2024 meeting

A couple of meetings have been held. The request that the proposed system be used to record Home Office licences training records has been added to the group's remit. A follow up meeting would be taking place in a month's time.

2.2 Item 6.1: Environmental Controls at Camden (6 February 2024 meeting)

The Principal and Vice Principal for Research and Innovation have been made aware of the NACWOs concerns about the environmental controls. Preplanning discussions for the Camden refurbishment project were taking place and the Establishment Licence Holder would be sitting on this Board specifically to oversee the BSU component.

2.3 Item 3.3: Pest Control (20 December 2023 meeting)

Following the sad news that the Campus Services Manager had passed away, these actions would be taken forward once it was known who had taken over the responsibility for pest control.

2.4 Item 2.4: Culture of Care questionnaire (18 October 2023 meeting)

The questionnaire needed to be reviewed and would then be circulated to AWERB for a final check before being submitted for formal approval.

2.5 Item 2.4: Discussion topics for AWERB meetings (6 February 2024 meeting)

A discussion topic for the June meeting needed to be agreed.

2.6 Item 3.2: GA mouse breeding strategies at the RVC (18 October 2023 meeting)

The person that attended the course on cryopreservation and techniques would be invited to the June meeting to give an update on what she had learned.

3 DISCUSSION TOPIC: ENRICHMENT

It was agreed that it would be useful for AWERB members to have tours of both BSUs so they could see firsthand the different types of enrichment that were available and also how the animals were kept.

3.1 Camden

At Camden the following enrichment elements have been introduced:

- Mice: There was an enrichment rotation that particularly focused on mice. Dedicated shelters and changes in topography of different items have been introduced to give the mice some form of enrichment on a rotation basis. The rotations were carefully monitored to provide a balance of novel elements but not too frequently that the changes would stress the mice.
- Rats: There was a similar rotation system for rats, but with not so many items, as there were not many rat projects.
- Training animals: they got a lot of stimulation and treats to get them used to coming out of the cages and being handled.
- Ferrets: enrichment consists of cubes and blocks where the ferrets can pull things out; as well as tunnels, different shapes and textures. As for the mice, the enrichments are provided on a rotation basis, but not as strict. During the summer, the ferrets are able to go into small ball pit areas with a slide and water pool. The technicians are also with them during the day, interacting and playing with them, whilst cleaning their environment.
- Also for the ferrets, some of the cages are linked by tubes attached to the walls, giving the ferrets freedom to explore and decide which cages to go into.
- Guinea Pigs: there were different approaches depending whether they were teaching or experimental animals. The experimental guinea pigs have a tunnel and nesting material in the form of straw and hay at different time points, because they would be pregnant and on diet restrictions. For these animals it was important to work closely with the PIL and PPL Holders to ensure that any enrichment provided did not impact the studies.
- Zebrafish: this was a developing area. Enrichments include putting items into tanks such as floating plants and lily pads and plastic structures that can be used as shelters which get moved around every couple of months. Permanent substrate pictures have been placed under the tanks to stop shadows which might otherwise impact the fish. It was thought that fish have a preference for certain shapes and colours of rocks, gravel and sand, so there were different pictures under the tanks and behaviours were monitored to check for aggression etc.
- Teaching rabbits and guinea pigs: There has been a move from using cages to floor pens. It was important to monitor the animals, to ensure that any changes made to their environment suited them as the teaching animals were here for a long time.
- Designing studies: Researchers are encouraged to consider their animals' environment when designing studies. For example, one researcher wanted to use cages to house rabbits, but has been asked to consider floor pens as that would be a better environment for the rabbits.
- Calves: there are two teaching calves at Camden (who stay on a rotation basis during term time) and pigs. For these there were brushes and things on the walls that could be used as scratching posts. There were also several other enrichment ideas that needed discussing to ensure that they were suitable.
- AWERB's attention was drawn to a paper which reported on a ferret enrichment project.

3.2 Hawkshead

- Dogs: for the dogs there is a kennel set up, with an open environment, so the dogs are easily able to socialise and interact with each other (though the male and female dogs are kept separate). Benches have been set up so they have different vantage points for them to jump up on. Toys are provided for both the puppies and adult dogs, which are rotated once a week and the dogs are very happy to play with the toys either between themselves or with the technicians. They also have access to an outside paddock, which has toys in it. The outside paddock set up can be moved around to give the dogs a "new" environment to explore. Having this outside area was a real bonus and very unusual for dogs in a research environment. As many of the dogs were rehomed, having this outside area provides opportunity for the dogs to get used to being outside.

Consideration was needed for all environmental enrichment provided to ensure that it did not affect the research being carried out, but the effort was definitely worthwhile.

For the kennels, Home Office guidelines were followed, with between two to six dogs in each kennel. Relationships between the dogs were taken into account when housing the dogs, to make sure that they got along.

The staff spend a lot of time training and socialising with the dogs so that they understand basic commands. The dogs also find this very stimulating, particularly as it involves treats.

- Chickens: they like shiny things such as CDs, so these are scattered around their pens. The pens are very spacious so there is a lot of space to run around. There are also perches for the chicks to roost on. As research has shown that chickens are attracted to the colour red, a lot of red items have been added to the pens for them to peck at. This also helps avoid the chickens fighting or pecking each other.
- Pigs: one of the main enrichments for the pigs is the supply of deep straw beds. The pigs are obtained from a commercial pig farm, where they would have been living on slats, so the pigs love having an environment with deep straw beds and provides many positive effects on their welfare: improving the physical comfort of the floor; providing an important stimulus and outlet for exploration, foraging, rooting and chewing behaviours. The straw is replaced every other day so that they regularly have fresh straw.

The pigs also have toys to play with, which are rotated between them. The pigs enjoy flipping the toys between the pens so they also get rotated that way! The toys consist of things like plastic pipes and old wellies. They also get boxes and balls with treats in that they can play with.

As the pigs are very social creatures, the technicians spend a lot of time playing and being with them.

- Sheep: As sheep are prey animals, they do not like change. They get very easily scared and do not generally like interacting with people. There are exceptions to this, but it was suspected that these are sheep that have been hand reared so are used to being with people. These sheep get as much people interaction as they want. Generally though living outside in the fields as part of a flock is where they are the most happiest. For sheep taking part in studies, attempts are made to try and get them used to being handled by the technicians who will be with them throughout the study, through hand feeding them for a couple of weeks before the study starts. No other people are allowed near the sheep to avoid them getting anxious.
- Alpacas: like sheep, alpacas do not like people. They are more social with the technicians that regularly feed them but anti social to anyone else. They are kept at the farm where they have access to both fields and a large barn, but generally their preference was to be in the field.
- Goats: goats are more social than sheep. As they like climbing, wooden boards have been provided and they also have jolly balls to play with. These items are regularly rotated.
- Horses: There were currently no studies involving horses, but there has been a lot of work done in this area, including training and introducing horses to new things. They were also kept in herds where possible outside, as that was their preference.
- Turkeys: Like chickens, turkeys like shiny things, such as mirrors to play with, scratching areas and red feeders.

AWERB were impressed with the amount of thought and effort that the technicians have put in to improve enrichment for the different species of animals, whilst also ensuring they were accommodating the constraints of individual projects and studies.

4 3RS

4.1 Home Office courses module training

The Home Office were keen to raise more awareness of the 3Rs through the Home Office courses module training. They were aiming to encourage a culture of considering 3Rs from the start of writing a project licence and all the way through the project licence lifecycle. A project was underway with various parties to assess what changes could be made to raise this awareness.

5 FOI REQUESTS

Three FOI requests had been received. The responses were noted.

6 NVS REPORT

6.1 Camden

- **Mice:** a couple of mouse pups had been found dead post procedure. It was not known if the deaths were related to the procedure, but it was thought unlikely given the time intervals. This has been reported.
- **Guinea pigs:** a new batch of guinea pigs were starting on surgical procedures. A new feeding regime has been introduced to see if this improved the ability of the guinea pigs to carry pregnancies to full term.

6.2 Hawkshead

- **Sheep:** changes had been made to the process following problems experienced previously with this study, changes were made to the process and a surgery carried out. As the sheep seemed to make a better recovery and the device was working well, a second surgery was subsequently carried out on another sheep. Unfortunately, at about the same time point for both sheep (two weeks in), the sheep experienced significant complications and both had to be euthanised. The post-mortems showed that the silicon implants had become infected. The project has therefore been stopped and was unlikely to continue. The situation was very sad but for the welfare of the animals, the study could not be allowed to continue.
- **Sheep:** A full meniscal meniscus replacement in the knee has been carried out in 8 sheep. Two sheep had to be euthanised early on: one within 48 hours due to pain and another after about 3 week following sudden onset pain.
- **Dogs:** One of the puppies was weak after birth and had required intensive hand feeding. It was noted that his abdomen was very distended, even between feedings, which was very unusual, so an ultrasound was taken. This identified that the enlargement in the puppy's abdomen was actually his gall bladder. As the puppy continued to clinically decline, he was subsequently euthanised. It was thought that the problems the puppy had experienced were congenital rather than hereditary.
- **Teaching horse:** AWERB sadly noted that one of the teaching horses had to be euthanised following ongoing health issues. The situation had been very stressful and upsetting as the horse had been here for years and staff were very attached to her.

The horse's owners have been informed and her mane and tail cleaned and plaited beautifully by the technicians to give to them.

- **Project licence:** One of the project licences was due to expire mid May and although another PPL Holder was in the process of applying for a project licence that would cover some of this work, it was unlikely to be in place in time. There were maintenance colonies on the licence that would need to be placed under NVS care until the new licence was granted.

7 NACWO REPORTS

7.1 NACWO example animal records

AWERB reviewed the example animal records provided for small animals, dogs and sheep. It was noted that In-depth records were kept – not only because they were required under A(SP)A but also as good practice. It was helpful to have detailed records, so that if there were any issues with the animals then their health history was to hand. They were also useful as study data as the records track what has happened to each animal. The forms used were continually reviewed to make sure they captured the relevant information.

7.2 Camden

- Guinea pigs: the post op guinea pigs were being closely monitored. One guinea pig had a cut on her foot for which treatment was being provided.
- Ferrets: the ferrets were still experiencing occasional diarrhoea. They were being closely monitored by both the research group and the technicians in case the ECE protocol needs to be instigated.

7.3 Hawkshead

- Two of the dogs on the study were experiencing fluctuating body weights so some extra feeds have been added as well as meat, to try and improve their body weight.
- Chicks: a new study had just started which was scheduled to last for about a month.

8 NTCO REPORT

8.1 Camden Report

- The new NTCO was being trained and was booked to attend the NTCO training course in July.
- The new NTCO would be helping with the transition to move to a more electronic format for the training records.
- Training records were being reviewed and reminders provided to PIL and PPL Holders where applicable about ensuring assessments were done.
- The new NTCO was also investigating the training element of ARMIS to see what support this could provide.

8.2 Hawkshead report

There was nothing to report.

9 FEEDBACK FROM PPL HOLDERS THAT HAVE ATTENDED AWERB

AWERB noted the feedback report that had been received from a recent PPL Holder attendee.

10 AMENDMENT TO ESTABLISHMENT LICENCE

AWERB noted that the Home Office had approved the addition of a new NVS to the Establishment Licence.

11 NEW PROJECT LICENCES GRANTED BY THE HOME OFFICE

AWERB noted that one project licence had been granted by the Home Office since February 2024.

12 PROJECT LICENCES AMENDED BY THE HOME OFFICE

AWERB noted that the Home Office have agreed amendments to 5 project licences, including changes of project licence holders, due to retirement.

13 PROJECT LICENCES REVOKED BY THE HOME OFFICE

AWERB noted that one project licence had been revoked early as the research was no longer continuing.

14 STUDY REQUESTS APPROVED SINCE FEBRUARY 2024

AWERB noted that nine study requests had been approved since February 2024.

15 MID TERM PPL REVIEW

AWERB noted the 3 mid term PPL reviews that had been submitted.

16 AWERB TERMS OF REFERENCE REVIEW

AWERB reviewed the quorum, Committee composition and mode of operation sections of the terms of reference. No changes were requested.

17 CONDITION 18 REPORTS

AWERB noted that six condition 18 reports had been submitted to the Home Office and a potential non-compliance incident that was being investigated to establish the cause of the incident.

18 REHOMING OF ANIMALS

AWERB noted that for the period January to March 2024, 11 dogs had been rehomed and 3 rats.

19 DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 8th May at 2.30pm. It would be a PPL review meeting.

Secretary
14 May 2024