
Summary Minutes for the website: AWERB: Standing Agenda items meeting

Status: FINAL

Meeting held: Wednesday 25th September at 2.30pm

Present: 14 plus 1 in attendance, 1 by invitation and 15 apologies

1 WELCOME

A technician was welcomed to the meeting as an observer.

2 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 August 2024 were approved.

3 MATTERS ARISING/ACTION LOG

3.1 Item 2 - CRERB application (6 August 2024 meeting)

A facility questionnaire to be used for reviewing external providers for animal services such as CROs has been drafted. This would be circulated to AWERB for comment.

3.2 Item 4: Teaching Animals (09 July 2024 meeting)

- **Building work:** AWERB were informed that because of the amount of building work taking place at Camden, the decision had been taken not to have teaching cattle at Camden for the foreseeable future.

Going forward, a proposal was being put together to build a housing area within the yard turnout area, which could also be used for teaching. This would improve the health and safety of the animals and people.

- **Blue Tongue virus outbreak:** There was a spreading Bluetongue Virus outbreak in England (from Europe). This is a virus which affects all ruminant species and camelids and is spread by midges. A restriction zone has been put in place which encompasses all the South-East and most of the East of England (so covering the RVC). This means that live animals cannot be moved on or off our property. Although this advice is being changed and updated by the government.

To mitigate risk to study animals, they are being housed inside closed barns to reduce exposure to the midges. Vehicles were also being controlled on and off site.

3.3 Item 3.2: Cryopreservation (25 June 2024 meeting)

Long-term breeding users have been contacted to ask if they would be interested in using cryopreservation if it was offered as a service. The feedback was that there was not a current need for it.

3.4 Item 19.1: Camden Teaching Animals (25 June 2024 meeting)

The new webpage was now live.

3.5 Item 6.1: Culture of Care workshop (20 December 2023 meeting)

This was held on 17 September.

4 RSCPA event: Maximising the effectiveness of your AWERB: 21 June 2024

Several AWERB members had attended this event and had put together a summary of potential actions for maximising AWERB effectiveness following the workshop.

The following points were highlighted/discussed:

Ensuring that a harm-benefit analysis is explicitly done as part of the project licence evaluation:

Possible actions:

- Include this in our AWERB Terms of Reference
- PPL Holders advised to use a harm-benefit analysis tool such as Bateson's cube.
- Providing a guidance template to PPL Holders on what to present when they attend AWERB to discuss their project licence applications. This could be based on Bateson's cube, with the PPL Holders providing a powerpoint slide that sets out what will happen to the animals and the animal experience.
- There should be more focus on the harms and benefits that are likely to arise from the research such as how close to a cure the research was at, to get a more realistic feel for what stage the research was at and how likely success might be.

What is meant by ethics? There was a lack of training or understanding of what ethics is.

Possible actions:

- A short summary could be included within the AWERB terms of reference.
- Ethics training opportunities to be identified and made available to AWERB members. Advice should be sought from RVC ethicists.

Harm-benefit analysis being subjective and difficult

- Some institutes have severity limits above which research is not allowed to go ahead.
- It was recognised that there can be a need for severe protocols to progress research areas that could be very valuable in the future.

Possible actions:

- There have been discussions within the Units identifying work and studies that the RVC would not be comfortable in being involved in. It would be useful to have a similar discussion at AWERB.
- It was important to recognise that different AWERB members might have different viewpoints on decisions made. There should be an explicit statement about whether any agreements were unanimous, general consensus or Chair's judgement.

Managing the workload associated with advising on PPL applications

- There was discussion about the use of AI bots to help summarise information and/or identify answers to questions, however AWERB were strongly discouraged from using these as they carry

significant risks particularly in relation to security and who can subsequently get hold of information discussed.

- There was a lot of pre-work carried out in preparation for submitting a project licence to AWERB. The processes for pre-meeting support for PPL applicants can be variable, and it can place a large workload on advisory staff.

Possible actions:

- A transparent process on who advises applicants and at what stage of the project development was needed.

Lack of familiarity with AWERB culture etc

Possible action:

- It was suggested that there should be a buddy system for new members, who they could approach to sound out any queries they may have, for example if they were worried about asking a question or whether they were covering ground that had been covered before.

Survey

Action:

- An anonymous survey to be carried out of AWERB members to ask for suggestions of how things could be improved or changed and also provide opportunity for members to suggest what would make them feel more comfortable to speak up or ask questions at meetings. Would they feel comfortable expressing disagreement or saying no at meetings? Did members feel that the current format was working or did it need to be changed. Of the possible actions above, which would members prioritise, if any, and would they have suggestions about them?

5 CULTURE OF CARE

5.1 Initial feedback from Culture of Care Workshop held on 17 September 2024

Several AWERB members had attended this Culture of Care Workshop, which they had found very beneficial and interesting. It was agreed that it would be useful to run a similar workshop again in the future and that thought should be given on how to encourage more people to attend, especially PPL holders and more experienced lead animal researchers. A query was raised whether it was possible for some of the exercises to be run in an actual animal environment as that would really enhance the experience.

One exercise that was taking place as a result of the workshop, was 360-degree feedback between a PPL Holder's group and BSU staff to provide feedback and see how they can help and support each other.

5.2 Culture of Care Survey: review comments received and decide next steps

Several comments had been received on this survey which needed to be reviewed and decisions made on the next steps.

6 PPL REVIEWS – DISCUSSION ITEM

Template: Are the current versions of these report templates effective from an openness/collaborative angle or are PPL Holders treating them as a “tick box” exercise?

It was pointed out that one of the questions on the PPL review template, seemed to generate a “no” response: *“Is there anything from the project that we could highlight as a case study or feature on the RVC website to promote the research being done? For example, are you using any novel or innovative approaches? Have you found any surprising results?”*

What could AWERB do to probe this further? Was there a different approach that should be adopted for openness/collaboration? Could the question be rephased?

Another area were the questions relating to whether ARRIVE guidelines had been followed when writing papers. Researchers were responding yes but no checks were made to see if this was actually being done. It was suggested that for this question, if the response was yes, then the researcher should be asked to provide one paper that demonstrates they have done this and to highlight the relevant sections in the paper. It was felt that this was a good suggestion however how would AWERB handle this if the researcher did not provide this information? It was noted that there had been talk about NC3Rs developing a programme that would automatically screen papers to see if the ARRIVE guidelines had been followed but it was not known if this had progressed.

7 NVS REPORT

7.1 Camden

The following report was given:

- **Mice under NVS care:** there were 4 cages of mice that were under NVS care. These were mice born in April.
- **Ferrets – condition 18 report:** A ferret had undergone prolonged sedation following a procedure. The ferret was monitored and initially seemed ok but subsequently deteriorated and the decision was made to euthanise her. The postmortem revealed two large blood clots directly under the sites of the implants. It was believed these were not linked to the sedation protocol. The procedures and medications were being reviewed to ascertain if improvements can be made.
- **Handling guinea pigs:** some of the males that have been bred have had to be euthanised as they were at fighting age. One guinea pig was injured during the fighting.
- **Zebrafish:** a tank of zebrafish was found dead, with no apparent causes of death. An investigation was being carried out and a Condition 18 report submitted.

8 NACWO REPORT

8.1 Hawkshead

The following was reported:

- There had been a litter born in August. They were all happy and healthy
- They were looking forward to having loads of chickens soon.

8.2 Camden

- The NVS and NTCOs were maintaining good communication channels: both electronic and verbally.
- There were a number of follow up actions in terms of retraining for users and BSU staff following recent condition 18 reports and non-compliances, which was being carried out.

9 NTCO REPORT

9.1 Camden: handling animal suppliers

It was reported that there was a challenge in sourcing guinea pigs and rabbits for handling purposes: both for the Home Office licence courses and the veterinary curriculum. To purchase schedule 2 supplied rabbits and guinea pigs costs approximately several thousands of pounds. These animals have to be replaced after a certain time in order to make sure that they are not overhandled and can be rehomed.

A new source for obtaining handling animals needed to be identified due to the associated costs of buying in the rabbits. Thought was therefore being given to contacting local rescue animal centres. There were things to consider though including:

- Risk of biosecurity
- Were there rooms far enough away to quarantine the animals
- The importance of staff following biosecurity rules and changing their PPE properly.

It was agreed that a list of species that were required for teaching purposes, numbers and how often they were needed would be put together to identify what diseases those animals risked bringing into the Unit and what steps could be taken to mitigate this. This would enable a harm benefit analysis to be done.

Once options have been identified they would be brought back to AWERB.

9.2 To note that the Schedule 1 list should now be referred to as the killing register and reference PPL methods of humane killing and confirmation steps too:

AWERB noted that the schedule 1 list was now referred to as the killing register. It should include PPL methods of humane killing and confirmation steps as well as the standard schedule 1 methods and listing all those that are competent to carry out these methods.

10 AMENDMENT TO ESTABLISHMENT LICENCE

AWERB noted that following ASRU's facility audit in May, a full review of the establishment licence areas had been carried out and requests submitted to remove those areas that were no longer required and to update holding codes as applicable. There were approximately 150 changes in total.

11 PROJECT LICENCES AMENDED BY THE HOME OFFICE

AWERB noted that 5 project licences with primary availability at the RVC and one licence with secondary availability had been amended by the Home Office since the June meeting.

12 STUDY REQUESTS APPROVED SINCE JUNE 2024

AWERB noted that 5 study requests had been approved since the June meeting.

13 STUDY REQUEST UPDATE

AWERB noted a study request update that had been submitted.

14 MID TERM PPL REVIEW

AWERB noted the mid term PPL review that had been submitted.

15 END OF PPL REVIEW

AWERB noted the two end of PPL reviews that had been received.

16 CONDITION 18 REPORTS

Eight condition 18 reports had been submitted to the Home Office since the June meeting.

17 ANIMALS REHOMED BETWEEN JUNE AND AUGUST 2024

AWERB noted that 8 dogs have been rehomed during June and August 2024.

18 CONCORDAT ON OPENNESS Annual Review 2024

AWERB noted the RVC's response to the Concordat on Openness Annual Review.

19 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

This was scheduled for 9th October. It would be a PPL review meeting.

Secretary

18 November 2024