
Summary Minutes: AWERB

Status: Chair approved

Meeting held: 30 November 2021 at 2pm via MS Teams

Present:

Attendees: 10 plus 1 in attendance and 6 apologies

1 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Several requests for changes to the draft minutes of the meeting held on 24th November 2021 had been received. Subject to these the minutes were confirmed.

2 MATTERS ARISING

2.1 Item 3.5: ARRIVE compliance report (24th November meeting)

A copy of the papers that were used by the students to critique using the ARRIVE guidelines had been passed to the ARRIVE sub group to look at.

2.2 Item 10.2: ASRU (24th November meeting)

The draft SOPs for the PILs and user trainer folders were in the process of being finalised and should be ready for circulation by the next AWERB.

3 FEEDBACK FROM PPL HOLDERS THAT ATTENDED PREVIOUS MEETINGS TO DISCUSS THEIR PROJECT LICENCE

Two feedback forms had been received from PPL Holders that had attended recent meetings to discuss their project licences. Several suggestions for improvement had been made including having more clinicians on the Committee. AWERB discussed this and the following would be put to the Establishment Licence Holder to consider:

- Identify appropriate clinicians to co-opt on to AWERB as and when required if the project licences related to small animals.
- Do a call for small-animal clinicians to join AWERB.

The other suggestions related to comments on the project licences being provided several days in advance of the meeting, instead of the day before and streamlining the process so that questions/concerns were addressed by the applicants in one go rather than having a constant toing and froing between AWERB and the project licence holder. AWERB discussed this but the consensus was the “toing and froing” was necessary in order to have a full discussion, particularly as these discussions then generally resulted in other things needing to be considered that might not otherwise have been thought of. Only having a single round of questions meant there was a risk that things would be missed. It also helped in providing guidance and support to project licence holders.

4 RSPCA: “ALL ABOUT THE AWERB: WEEK 3 – DOING ETHICS” – ITEM DEFERRED FROM 24 NOVEMBER MEETING

AWERB discussed this in detail:

• **What does ethics mean to us?**

How do we feel we approach ethics and what does it mean to us when reviewing project licences:

- We use consensus ethics that is based on A(SP)A and related activities. Lectures were given to students on ethics, in terms of understanding how we relate to animals and society generally and specifically in terms of experimental animals.
- Reviewing the documentation provided had made it clear to one member, that when reviewing and discussing PPLs, there was a tendency to focus on the nitty gritty wording of the PPLs and what the views of the Home Office might be. However, one of the roles of AWERB was also to speak on behalf of the public and ask whether the research was acceptable or not: what would their views be if they were reviewing the project licence?
- This was where lay panel and student members were very useful as they were not so involved in the work and so could provide more of a public perception of how the work might be perceived. They were also often empowered to challenge on the ethics, which other members might find difficult as they “were part of the system”. A lay member could stand to one side and ask those awkward questions.
- It was quite typical for AWERBs to drift away from the ethics core. This was part of the reason why the RSPCA had put these questions together to bring focus to this. The advantage for this AWERB was that because of the way the meetings were now structured, it provided opportunity to get involved and have dedicated discussions on topics that individual members were interested in.
- One member advised that when she had first joined AWERB she had felt her role would just be focussed around study design and checking specifics. However, as she got involved she was considering more than study design when reviewing project licence applications such as what was the purpose of the study and what benefits would it bring?
- Was our AWERB covering all the different aspects of the AWERB work? Were there areas that we could do more on?

• **Does the AWERB need any additional perspectives, or training, to enable it to identify, discuss and address ethical issues?**

- Would AWERB benefit from a refresher of the ethics lectures for E1 or E2?
- As part of the PPL Holders course, there was a session on ethics which goes back to the basics. Would this be of interest? Again, it would be offered to the new lay members.
- As part of the PPL review, it was useful to think about ethical implications. For example consider the client based model that was used and whether we ethically agree with it.

• **Would discussions of relevant topics outside of specific projects be useful, to help the AWERB become more familiar with identifying and critically analysing ethical issues?**

- Yes this would be useful. Potential topics of interest should be put forward.

• **Were there areas that members of AWERB might be uncomfortable with the College being involved in? For example, species of animals, severity levels and animal numbers?**

- It was pointed out that by the time a project licence had got to AWERB it had already been initially reviewed by the NVS, who should have identified those project licences or areas that might cause major problems. It was suggested that it would be useful in future to bring a list to AWERB of any project or protocol that had been discussed at an initial phase where it had then been decided the work should not be progressed.

- AWERB should still be able to query or say no to things in project licences that they were not comfortable with, even if it had already been through an NVS preliminary review.

5 UPDATE ON STUDENT REPS

AWERB were advised that there had been a lot of applications from the recent call to join AWERB as a student representative – this had been narrowed down to a short list of 6 candidates. They had been invited to attend the AWERB PPL review meeting on 14 December as observers and then to meet individually with the Chair and Secretary of AWERB afterwards. They would not be asked to review the project licences but to attend to get a feel of what went on at an AWERB meeting. A final decision had not yet been made about how many student reps to have on the Committee but possibly 3 or 4 and also one for the Ethics and Welfare Committee.

The PPL Holders that had amendments that were due to be discussed at the meeting would be contacted to advise there would be student attendees at the meeting to make sure they were comfortable with that.

It was agreed that it would be useful for the students to have an “introduction to AWERB” session before the meeting to provide a brief background to A(SP)A and the legislation.

6 3RS

6.1 New standard breeding protocol templates

The standard protocols for GA mouse and zebrafish breeding had been updated by the Home Office to include more refined approaches and were formatted to match the new style ASPeL project licence application. Copies would be provided for circulation to AWERB.

6.2 ARRIVE Implementation Action Plan – Universities

The NC3Rs ARRIVE implementation action plan was introduced. This was aimed at universities so that they could support researchers in improving the reporting of animal research using the ARRIVE guidelines. This included interventions that universities could undertake to increase adherence with the guidelines in published manuscripts.

There were 3 levels in the plan.

Level 1:

- **Make a public statement endorsing the ARRIVE guidelines:** done
- **Promote ARRIVE resources to all researchers who work with animals:** done through PIL course etc.
- **Ensure that AWERB raises awareness of the ARRIVE guidelines:** was mentioned on some of the forms that have to be filled in.

Level 2:

- **Encourage researchers who publish animal research to adhere to the full ARRIVE guidelines:** this was done to a certain extent
- **Provide training for animal researchers highlighting the importance and benefits of transparent and complete reporting:** This was currently being looked at as part of our ARRIVE project.
- **Request evidence of compliance with the ARRIVE Essential 10 in any animal research manuscripts published by university researchers:** this should be tied in with the manuscript submission process.

Level 3:

- **Take steps to monitor or audit compliance with the ARRIVE guidelines in animal research publications from the institute: such as asking whether an ARRIVE checklist has been submitted alongside published manuscripts:** Our ARRIVE project had touched on this.

7 REVIEW COMMENTS MADE ON THE MID AND END OF PROJECT LICENCE REPORT TEMPLATES (ITEM DEFERRED FROM 9TH NOVEMBER 2021 MEETING)

It was explained that the approach to reviewing the templates was to identify whether we were missing any opportunities to ask questions that weren't too arduous but would help with our understanding of what had been done under the project licence and also to get the researchers to consider other areas about their research such as smaller improvements they might have made that they could include in the report (such as improvements to in vitro models). Going through the templates areas had been identified where examples could be provided, so that it made it clearer what AWERB were looking for. However, it was important to get a balance to ensure that the template did not get too unwieldy and have too much text.

AWERB were reminded that in the Home Office retrospective assessments they had made it clear that they were wanting all the original aims from the project licence listed and for each one a statement provided explaining what had been achieved including the scientific detail. It was suggested that this should also be emphasised in our templates so that it was in line with what the Home Office was asking.

It was agreed that a working party should be set up to revamp these documents.

8 AWERB TERMS OF REFERENCE REVIEW

AWERB reviewed the "delivery" section of the terms of reference.

The following comments were raised:

- **To promote the appropriate use of animals including reduction, replacement and refinement alternatives, acquisition, accommodation, care and use:**

How much did AWERB address "replacement" and how comfortable were we in recommending alternatives? It was recognised that it was difficult to find out information about alternatives, such as alternatives for animal models. This was a difficulty faced by all AWERBs. There seemed to be no central database that contained this information. AWERB were advised that at a previous ASRU meeting, an attendee had asked whether ASRU could create such a database to find replacements for animal models. ASRU however were under resourced and so were not able to take this on.

One member suggested that where replacement was most effective, was where there were researchers using alternative models, who could then come in and explain how they set up that model. It was recognised that there might be activities taking place already in the College (and elsewhere) that were not known about, for example in vitro research, which were being used as alternatives to animal research. It was suggested that researchers could be asked to speak about the models they used, to draw attention to these. There were plans for a 3Rs symposium (for both internals and externals) and this could be an ideal topic for the agenda.

- **To review, critique and approve Home Office Project licence applications and requested amendments for work to be done at the College, taking into account the extent and nature of benefits related to the cost of projects in terms of animal welfare" and to identify and advise on the 3Rs.**

It was agreed that "cost of projects" should be changed to "harm of projects": as costs could mean several different things, whereas "harm" was more clear.

- **To review care and accommodation standards for all animals**

It was felt that this statement was too vague. It needed to be made clear what animals AWERB were responsible for as there were animals that AWERB did not have responsibility for, such as animal patients; pest animals and Bolton's Park farm animals. An offline investigation was needed to find out who was responsible for these types of animals. In the interim the terms of reference would be amended to specify research and Camden teaching animals.

9 NACWO REPORT

9.1 Camden

- **Air Handling Unit:** the previous day there had been a problem in that some the communal areas and some of the procedure rooms had been freezing cold. This had been reported to estates who had done a temporary fix on the air handling unit but were waiting for a replacement part. In the meantime, the animals and the situation was being monitored.

9.2 Hawkshead

- **DMD Dogs:** One of the dogs had given birth to three puppies, two of whom were stillborn. The remaining puppy was on extra feeds and seemed to be improving.

10 STUDY REQUESTS RECEIVED

AWERB noted that one study request had been approved since the previous meeting.

A query was raised about how were these study requests managed? Were these new animals that were brought in just for these studies? It was explained that the requests were circulated and discussed by e-mail. The main points that were considered were whether the animals that were being requested had been used for multiple things (so end of study animals). Occasionally animals did have to be brought in specifically for a study. For situations like these, other researchers would be contacted to see if they could use any of the remaining tissues. It was agreed that the template should be amended to ask whether new animals were being bought in or if existing study animals would be used. It would also be interesting to have a presentation on how much usage was got out of animals. This should be arranged for when the new members were on board.

It was agreed that it would be useful to do a report for both sites covering the different species that were used for tissue sharing and how the process worked at the College.

11 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

This was scheduled for 14th December 2021 and would be a PPL review meeting.

Secretary
7 December 2021