

---

**Summary Minutes:** AWERB PPL review meeting

---

**Status:** FINAL

---

**Meeting held:** 08 March 2023 at 10am via MS Teams and F82, Hawkshead

---

**Present:** 11 plus 1 in attendance, 3 by invitation and 14 apologies

---

## 1 WELCOME

Two observers were welcomed to the meeting. They had applied to the recent call for new members to join AWERB who had an interest in Animal Welfare Science and Ethics and were attending to get a feel for these meetings.

## 2 NEW PROJECT LICENCE APPLICATION

The project licence holder (PPLH) was welcomed to the meeting. He explained that he was applying for a new project licence to replace a licence that was due to expire. The aim of the project was to generate new data and knowledge about (1) fundamental biology and genetics of coccidial parasites and intestinal bacteria, (2) host immune responses, and (3) the interactions and co-interactions of parasites and bacteria with the chicken.

A new addition to the work was the aim to infect chicken embryos with *Eimeria*. The PPL Holder had previous experience of this from work done elsewhere (as did another member of his team) and there were also papers from research carried out in the 1980s. A query was raised whether as the paper references were 40 years+ old, did that mean people had not been able to repeat the studies and decided not to publish their results? The PPLH advised that he was not aware of any such studies.

The following comments/queries were raised by AWERB:

- **Were there any issues in keeping chickens by themselves for up to 96 hours?**  
The preference was not to house the chickens singly as chickens preferred to be kept together. However, when assessing new vaccines, the legislation often required this. The chickens were placed in cages where they could see each other and seemed to tolerate being separated very well. In general, when single housing was required, it was for a maximum of 48 hours. There was only one of the parasites that they were working on that required 96 hours isolation.
- **A lot of the monitoring for adverse effects was reliant on regular husbandry checks. However a lot of the signs were often quite subtle. Was it realistic for staff to pick up on these signs?**  
The PPLH advised that he and the other researchers involved had been doing this type of research for a long time and so knew what to look out for. For the husbandry checks, when there were a lot of birds involved, they followed industry convention by walking slowly around the room to see whether the birds were moving. Those that did not move were then checked and closely monitored. There were also 3 animal technicians who were fully trained on working with the chickens and would help perform the checks.

- **Was it possible to use historic controls rather than having control groups for each experiment?**

Although the preference would be to use historic negative controls, there was a lot of biological variation in each study such as age of the parents and the health of the chicks (in terms of how they thrive and their susceptibility to pathogens). There were also variations in the parasite pathogenicity between different batches of parasites. When parasites were harvested they go through a process called sporulation where they develop into infective forms. These variations have a big effect on growth rates and the lesion scores of birds. Therefore, it was standard in the field to have untreated control groups that were challenged and unchallenged. Having these two groups of controls meant it was possible to combine as many studies as possible and duplications of controls was not needed. It also made comparisons between studies easier.

- **For the sample size calculations, what size effect had been used in the power calculations?**

The information had been based on their experience with the antigens they were looking at. They would add this to the licence.

- **In previous studies there had been quite a high mortality rate in the chicks before they had been used on an actual study. Could that happen again? What should the Establishment do if it did and what would the intervention point be?**

This could be an issue. Variation in chick health and placement success can be influenced by the age of the parents and stage in the laying cycle: if they were very early or late in the laying cycle there was a tendency of a higher mortality rate. It would be made very clear when a bird should be euthanised: for example if a bird was falling behind in weight or becoming lame or was not moving - these were all signs that things were not going well and would be looked for during the routine walks checking the birds. The PPLH had also liaised previously with broiler and layer companies over the environment being provided to see if they had any recommendations for changes that should be made. Some changes to the lighting regimen had been suggested but no concerns had been raised.

The NVS added that they did not have any concerns about the conditions the birds were being kept in. Any birds that were experiencing issues were spotted very quickly. The animal technicians plus the research team were all schedule 1 trained in euthanising the birds, so once a bird needed to be euthanised it was quickly done. Finally, the mortality rates tallied with what was going on in the industry and also with other groups of birds that they have had in the unit.

- **Had there been many birds that were found dead?**

The PPLH advised that they placed a lot of emphasis on carrying out close scrutiny of body weight and condition, so that any birds that were not thriving were spotted early and removed from the study. The aim was to avoid finding dead birds.

- **Non-Technical-Summary: there had been a comment made by one of the lay panel members that it had seemed quite lengthy.** The PPLH advised that it was a balancing act in providing enough information to explain what was going on in the licence versus making the NTS too long. AWERB confirmed that because it was a complex study it was understandable that the NTS would be lengthy and overall did not think it would be a problem.
- AWERB pointed out that as it was not always possible to follow the requirement set out in the Code of Practice for housing chickens, due to aspects of the study requiring that commercial stocking densities have to be followed, this should be explained in the licence.
- A definable level of standard industry level embryo mortality should be added to the licence (animal experience section).
- The licence mentioned the administration of novel compounds and treatments, but that it was not expected that this step would result in any adverse effects. However as these

## **RVC – Summary Minutes: AWERB, 08 March 2023**

were novel compounds, how would it be known whether there were any possible adverse effects?

- For the novel compounds, the in vitro data that had been collated should be included in the project licence as background and to provide reassurance that due diligence had been done.

The PPLH was thanked for attending the meeting. The PPLH would make the requested changes and the licence would then be re-circulated for a final check.

AWERB's consensus was that this was a well written project licence.

### **3 NVS ISSUES**

#### **3.1 Pig barn roof**

A timeline for repairs to the pig barn roof had not yet been given. A reminder had been sent to Estates that morning.

#### **3.2 Dog unit**

Due to a breakdown in one of the pressure vessels and water pumps in a plant room in the dog unit, the water supply had to be turned off and bottled water brought in. The plumbers have managed to put in a temporary fix, so water was running again. The water pump and vessels however needed to be replaced. There had been a good show of teamwork and timely and open communication to resolve the situation and all had worked together to minimise impact on animal welfare. Thanks were also recorded to the Estates Team for being very proactive in co-ordinating what needed to be done and liaising with the different contractors that were involved.

#### **3.3 Culture of care for staff**

In order to provide support for the technicians, breakout meetings were being held with the teams. Resources such as resilience courses and counselling options were also being looked into.

### **4 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2023 were confirmed as an accurate record.

### **5 AMENDMENT TO PROJECT LICENCE**

A project licence amendment had been recently received. It was agreed that this amendment would be discussed at the April AWERB meeting.

### **6 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

This was scheduled for 5<sup>th</sup> April 2023. It would be a PPL review meeting.

Secretary  
09 May 2023