
Summary Minutes: AWERB (Standard agenda items meeting)

Status: FINAL

Meeting held: 11 January 2023 at 10am via MS Teams

Present: 11 plus 1 in attendance and 6 apologies

1 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 December 2022 were confirmed as an accurate record.

2 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES/ACTION LOG

2.1 Item 4.1: GA mouse breeding strategies at the RVC: identifying who offered a cryopreservation service (6 December 2022 meeting)

A facility had been identified that offered a cryopreservation service. This was a free to use service that allowed researchers to archive their novel GA strains but on condition that the strains were made available to the scientific community without restriction. This therefore was not a viable option if intellectual property was not permissible to be shared. It was not known if there was also a paid for option which did not require strains being shared. Things that needed to be considered though was continuity of work with animals that have been working with and also genetic drift. There was also the question of relative costs such as resurrection costs which could be expensive. These costs could be included in future grant applications though.

2.2 Item 4.1: GA mouse breeding strategies at the RVC: costs of purchasing cryopreservation equipment to be looked into (6 December 2022 meeting)

A potential volunteer had been identified who would be asked if they could look into this.

2.3 Item 12.1: Group composition (1 November 2022 meeting)

A call for new members interested in animal welfare from an academic perspective had been circulated.

2.4 Item 3.4: Paper for senior management about the proposed BSU virtual tour (6 December 2022 meeting)

The draft paper had been amended following comments received. It would be re-circulated for one final check.

2.5 Item 2.2: Camden Stables (1 November 2022 meeting)

The issue of the fire access routes being next to Camden stables would be raised again at the next meeting with Estates.

3 REVIEWING OF RESEARCH POLICIES

3.1 Lone Housing of pigs

The original aim behind this policy was that ideally pigs should not be housed on their own and a companion pig be bought in if a study meant that a pig would otherwise be left on its own.

However it had subsequently been suggested that if the lone housing period was for less than 24 hours then this should not actually be a problem as:

- Experience has shown that unlike other species, pigs do not show signs of stress if left on their own, so long as there are people around who interact with them, and they had treats and toys to entertain them.
- A previous Home Office Inspector had given permission for pigs to be singularly housed for up to 72 hours so long as everything was done to minimise the number of single house pigs and the time they spent on their own.

After discussion AWERB agreed that the policy would be amended to stipulate that although pigs should not be purposely kept on their own, if circumstances meant they had to be, then a pig could be lone housed for a short period (up to 24 hours) so long as they were closely monitored and did not show any obvious signs of distress.

3.2 Guiding Principles on good practice for Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Bodies (RSPCA/LASA document)

These Guiding Principles had been reviewed and the following points raised.

3.2.1 CPD scheme for all technicians: was this in place?

It was confirmed that there was. At Hawkshead, CPD sessions were arranged on average once a month and varied from practical skill sessions such as handling needles and figuring out drug dosages to going through project licences and getting [clients-PPL holders](#) to give presentations on their studies. At Camden the sessions were more on an ad hoc basis and consisted of skill set sessions ranging from schedule one techniques to minor procedures. Technicians were also able to attend the annual Institute of Animal Technology conference and were encouraged to submit posters as well as attend other relevant workshops. They could also apply to register for out of hours studying for IAT qualifications. This was all recorded in the technicians training records and certificates provided.

3.2.2 Interim review of PPLs

The guiding principles proposed that as part of the annual return of procedures, AWERB should reflect with project licence holders, on the numbers of animals used and how the work was going. After discussion it was decided that there was not a need to add additional formal reviews of PPLs to the AWERB workload as:

- Regular informal reviews of the project licences were already undertaken on the ground through pre-study checks and pre-study meetings. It was agreed that this could be more formalised through the NACWOs at each campus meeting to discuss the active project licences and identifying if there were any that required information from PPL Holders or those that had issues that needed to be raised at AWERB.
- There were also formal mid-term and end of project licence reviews done.
- A workshop would be formulated with PPL Holders about what to consider when doing mid-term project licence reviews. The workshop would highlight that completing the reviews was beneficial to PPL Holders giving them opportunity to reflect on the work they had done so far.
- It had previously been agreed that for the mid-term reviews, they did not necessarily have to be at the mid-term point but should be at a time that was appropriate for the project licence. The actual timing could be decided either by AWERB if they wanted to do the review at a different

time point or by the PPL Holder if they thought there was a more appropriate time in the project licence life cycle to do it (for example after carrying out pilot studies).

A query was raised about whether project licences were revoked early if no work was being carried out under them? It was confirmed that PPL Holders were generally reluctant to do so in case they needed the licence “further down the line”. As PPLs were not charged for there was no incentive to revoke them.

3.2.3 Regular revision of AWERB practices and compliance in general by setting up regular reviews of these:

It was agreed that this was a good idea. There would be a discussion offline identifying the topics that needed to be reviewed and setting up a schedule for them to be discussed at the AWERB standing agenda items meetings, with people assigned to lead these discussions.

3.2.4 3Rs awareness and 3Rs local culture

The guiding principles recommended using newsletters and targeted e-mails to promote 3Rs awareness rather than sending blanket announcements to all. This would need some thought in deciding the messages to be sent, how to reach people and how to stimulate discussions. One option would be to hold poster competitions as they generally encouraged people to work together.

3.2.5 Turnover of AWERB membership

How often should AWERB membership be changed?

The following was noted:

- AWERB have carried out a couple of recent calls for new student and staff lay panel members.
- There were however no set rules for how long people should stay on AWERB. This was because the RVC was relatively small. The people on it were doing the work very well and diligently and were very important and valuable to how well AWERB was functioning. Finding replacement people with the same equivalent skill set could be difficult in such a small institution.
- Also, there were positions on AWERB that were fixed term by default, such as the student members, so would need to be replaced when they left, which meant that there would be new people coming into AWERB.
- The minutes from AWERB meetings went to the Ethics and Welfare Committee that consisted of external members. They therefore had an oversight and scrutiny of what was discussed at AWERB, so would highlight if they had any concerns about the decisions that AWERB were making.

3.2.6 Being part of AWERB should be recognised as an integral part of staff goals and performance appraisal

- It was noted that the RVC were in the initial stages of implementing a Workload Allocation Management System. As part of that allocation plans were being built for academic staff, covering their complete range of activities over the course of a year. The company managing this process had provided a long list of committees that academics could contribute to. Disappointingly though AWERB had not been included which was surprising as being an AWERB member was a massive time commitment. A request had been made that this be added but it was not known if it had.
- For the NACWOs and NVS, as contributing to AWERB was a requirement of their role, it was not felt applicable to include as a specific goal within their performance appraisals.
- AWERB members however should be encouraged to discuss with their line managers if they did not already, their contributions to AWERB to make sure they were recognised and were included within their appraisals.

3.2.7 Raise awareness of care and good practice in the bigger community

There needed to be a higher-level discussion on a strategy for public engagement and determining how to take forward and who should lead it and ensuring that there was funding available to do this properly.

There were different aspects of public engagement that needed to be considered: not only schools and community but also within the RVC. Before lockdown there had been an initiative around the work that was done on the DMD dogs which involved offering a tour of the facilities and providing talks on the work that was being done and why. Maybe something similar could be offered again, including BSU tours for all staff and students, perhaps on a 6 monthly basis, that interested people could book in for?

Time was spent with hospital staff explaining the work that was done but there could perhaps be more formalised talks particularly for the new staff.

At interviews, candidates were made aware that the RVC used animals in research so they were aware before they took up any appointment.

3.2.8 AWERB Hub

A query was raised whether the RVC was involved in this. It was confirmed that where possible there was RVC representation at the London Hub meetings as well as the AWERB Hub Chairs meetings.

3.2.9 AWERB members visiting animal facilities

- AWERB members were given the opportunity to join the quarterly Ethics and Welfare Committee visits of the BSU facilities, which had recently been restarted.
- For facilities where animals were brought in from external suppliers, there was a SOP in place, which required a questionnaire to be sent out to animal suppliers and it was also possible for an onsite inspection to be carried out.
- With regards to academics collaborating with external researchers and carrying out animal research elsewhere, this was more difficult to have awareness of if there was no funding linked to the collaboration as there would then be no sub-contract put in place and no opportunity for due diligence to be carried out. Ideally if researchers were carrying out animal work overseas then they would put the protocol through ethical review but there was no way to check whether that was being done.

3.3 12 point rodent health check record

It was decided that this document was not actually a policy but a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) so needed to be reviewed in that context.

3.4 Culture of Care sub-group

AWERB discussed setting up a Culture of Care sub-group and seeking expressions of interest from others in the RVC on being involved. As Culture of Care was such a big area though, it was felt that initial work was required to define what needed to be achieved within this. It was noted that a paper was due to be published on this shortly which would include a scoring system. It was therefore decided that this paper should be looked at first and then the next steps decided.

4 3RS

4.1 New research paper

A new research paper on masking and blinding in in vivo experiments had recently been published. This paper offers practical solutions to enable researchers to implement masking as standard. Using this was a way of reducing bias in research and therefore improve the quality of studies.

4.2 NC3Rs Self Assessment review

The results from the recent 3Rs-self assessment that had been carried out were being analysed. A summary would be produced identifying the positives and providing advice for those areas that needed to be worked on.

5 NVS AND NACWO REPORTS

5.1 Hawkshead

- There have been incidences of diarrhoea within the dog unit and there were concerns that it could be coccidia and giardia as there had been previous cases of that.

5.2 Camden

There were no major issues to report.

6 AMENDMENT TO ESTABLISHMENT LICENCE

It was noted that an amendment had been made to the Establishment Licence to add a room providing a suitable area for avian non sterile procedures (terminal).

7 NEW PROJECT LICENCES GRANTED BY THE HOME OFFICE

It was noted that one project licence had been approved by the Home Office since 05 December 2022.

8 STUDY REQUESTS APPROVED SINCE 05 DECEMBER 2022

It was noted that two study requests had been approved by a sub group of AWERB.

9 MID TERM PPL REVIEW

It was noted that the PPL holder had responded to the comments made by AWERB on its mid-term review.

10 AWERB TERMS OF REFERENCE REVIEW

AWERB reviewed the “mode of operation” section of the Terms of Reference and agreed that these were all being met.

11 CONDITION 18 REPORTS

AWERB noted the three condition 18 reports that had been submitted to the Home Office.

12 DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS

These were scheduled as:

- 8 February: PPL review meeting
- 22 February: standing agenda items meeting

Secretary, 20 January 2023