
AWERB Summary Minutes: AWERB: Standing Agenda Items meeting

Status: FINAL

Meeting held: Wednesday 5 February 2025 at 2pm

Present: 18 plus one in attendance and 14 apologies

1 WELCOME

The external lay panel member, who has joined AWERB for 2025, was warmly welcomed to their first meeting.

2 MATTERS ARISING

2.1 Item 2.7: Pest Control Contracts (06 November 2024 meeting)

The sheer numbers of foxes and rabbits is causing a problem for all departments who have outside facilities. Discussions were being held between these departments to try and identify a solution.

2.2 It was highlighted that another aspect to consider were neighbours (such as surrounding farms) and the impact that steps taken might have on them, so they should be consulted with too. Item 3: Leadership in Openness Award application sub group (06 November 2024 meeting)

The deadline to apply to renew our Leadership in Openness Award is 17th March 2025. A sub group has been convened with the first meeting on 6th February. Other AWERB members who were interested in being involved were very welcome.

2.3 Item 7: Internal tissue requests (15 January 2025 meeting)

Discussions were being held about setting up the new process for internal tissue sharing. The proposal would be coming to a future AWERB for approval.

2.4 Item 2.1: Anonymous Survey of AWERB members (6 November 2024 meeting)

Questions have been drafted but not yet finalised.

2.5 Item 2.3: Animal Suppliers (6 November 2024 meeting)

Guinea pigs for teaching purposes have been provided by animal rescue charities. It had not been possible to obtain rabbits though so these would need to be purchased from a schedule 2 supplier.

2.6 Item 2.5: Teaching Animals – outside area at Camden (06 November 2024 meeting)

An update had been requested on the proposal about building a housing area within the yard turnout area.

2.7 Item 2.6: NC3Rs environmental enrichment workshop (06 November meeting)/ Enrichment seminar

These proposed workshops would be arranged shortly.

One of the AWERB members advised that she gives an Environmental Enrichment seminar to third year undergraduate students and would be happy to give a version to AWERB and the animal technicians, or to try and locate a pre-recorded lecture she had done.

2.8 Item 3.3: Training database working group (with HR) – 23 April 2024 meeting

A couple of people were being trained as NTCOs. As part of their training, the existing training materials and databases for Home Office license records are being assessed. Discussions are underway regarding the integration of these resources, including the establishment of an electronic training system.

2.9 Item 2.6: Fields (6 February 2024 meeting)

This was still on Estates list, but there were more high priority items that had to be resolved first.

3 BOAS PROPOSAL UPDATE

AWERB were reminded that there had been initial discussions at a recent meeting about a request that had been received about supporting a multi-centre clinical trial using a product that would provide relief to BOAS dogs. AWERB had been asked to consider the information and to come back to this meeting to have a further discussion before determining whether there was support in principle of this concept.

The product was a treatment that would need to be given to dogs approximately every 6 months. Initial trials have been held which seemed to have had positive effects for the dogs.

There were several arguments to consider:

- The treatment (if it worked) would alleviate the suffering of affected animals. It however would not be a permanent fix and the treatment would need to be repeated throughout the dog's life.
- The treatment though would be a cheaper alternative to surgery, although surgery was a permanent fix.
- There was a risk that the availability of this treatment might deem it acceptable to continue to breed these types of dogs.
- If AWERB decided to support the trial; then this would be contradictory to the stance being taken by the UK Brachycephalic Working Group (that the RVC belongs to), who are seeking to get legislation changed to outlaw the breeding of extreme phenotypes such as these dogs.
- A harm benefit analysis would need to be undertaken that focused on the harms to the animals.

The following questions were raised:

- How many dogs were involved in the initial trials?
- How many dogs would be needed for these clinical trials?

This information would be obtained. In the interim it was agreed that AWERB members would individually e-mail their thoughts on this subject to the AWERB Chair. A consensus decision would then be taken.

4 CULTURE OF CARE SUBCOMMITTEE

A dedicated Culture of Care subcommittee was being set up. This would initially focus on activities that AWERB have not been able to progress: the culture of care questionnaire; and also the actions identified at the September Culture of Care workshop.

5 MEETINGS ATTENDED:

5.1 RSPCA Rodent Welfare Meeting in Bristol (29 November 2024):

A report back on this meeting was provided:

- There had been a presentation about a group's research that focuses on identifying methods which increase laboratory mice and rats' affective experiences and reduces cumulative suffering. These methods are focused on the 3Hs (Housing, Handling, Habituation) initiatives, the results of which include being able to give intraperitoneal injections to rats without restraint. There had not yet been research to see if this could also be done with mice.

AWERB were interested to hear this, commenting that as it would take time to acclimatise the rats and positive reinforcement, to be able to give i.p. injections without restraint, it would be most beneficial for longer term projects.

- There was a talk about using a commercially available project called "bitter drug powder" which stops the bitter taste of many drugs and has been used as an alternative option to gavaging rodents.
- There was another talk recommending that rodents be housed in reversed light, dark cycles as rodents are more active in the dark. If procedures are carried out in their light phase (so their sleep phase) this would be in the wrong part of their circadian rhythm which might affect the results. Where possible, rodents need to be kept on a reversed light cycle, so that researchers can work with them during their active circadian phase, using red lighting.
- There was a report on a technicians' exchange scheme that had been trialled. It had taken significant organising but had been found to be very beneficial.
- The AWERB attendee had presented a poster describing survey results about methods for holding and restraining rats. They had done a survey asking people about their use of different holding techniques, which was a follow up to work that has been done on the best way to pick rodents up. The survey asked people which holds they found were the easiest and most difficult to perform and which they would recommend for rodent welfare and why. Follow up research was planned, looking at actual rodents,

5.2 LASA Annual Conference (November 2024)

A report was received on this conference. A Vigilitech surgical heat mat for rodents which was for post-surgical recovery was highlighted. This not only kept the rodents warm but also been designed to record their vital signs (so respiratory rate, heart rate, temperature etc) non-invasively.

6 NVS REPORT

6.1 Camden

- Guinea pig study: this was now finished
- Mice: a new study had started which involved injections into renal arteries. As it involves magnified ultra-sound imaging, they were using hair removal cream to remove all the hair, as having fragments of hair stops the ultrasound waves. However, this has resulted in skin surface irritation, so they were reviewing this and were looking into alternative techniques and creams. Razor blades could not be used as that leaves fragments of hair sticking up. The strain of mouse used could not be changed as they were having to use a specific disease model.
- Handling animals:
 - Rats: have been moved into bigger housing which they seem to be enjoying. They were also a lot more relaxed in the handling sessions.

- Guinea pigs: some have had issues with their feet so looking to get some soft blanket bedding to see if that helps. Regular checks were taking place and cream was being used where appropriate.

6.2 Hawkshead

- Dog study: there were 3 dogs on the study who were receiving daily injections.
- Farm animals: the animals that had been at Bolton's Park Farm (alpacas, goats and turkeys) have now been moved to Hawkshead and seem to have settled well.

7 NACWO REPORT

7.1 Camden

- Building work: some of the animals were having sporadic patches of not coping very well with handling sessions (there have been issues of biting for example). It was suspected that this was linked to the external building work, as the loud drilling was heavily vibrating the building. The project management company have been contacted to see if they can provide a timeline for the works. Interim measures have been taken such as putting matting under racking and monitoring the animals stress behaviour responses.
- Humidity: the humidity was still repeatedly out of range. A project to replace the air handling units on the roof was in the process of being approved. This would now be separate to the general BSU Camden refurbishment project, which was currently on hold, following the bankruptcy of the appointed construction company.

7.2 Hawkshead Dog Unit

- Temperatures in the dog unit: there have been problems with the temperatures in the dog unit when it gets really cold, with the building struggling to maintain temperature. The dogs have been given heat lamps to snuggle into, which they were enjoying.
- Dosing: the dogs were still receiving daily injections, with care being taken on where to place the injections to make it as quick and easy for them as possible. The study was due to finish at the end of March.

8 ITEMS TO NOTE

AWERB were asked to review the following items outside the meeting and to refer any comments to the AWERB Chair and Secretary by e-mail:

- Feedback from PPL Holders that have attended AWERB
- New PPLs granted since the previous meeting
- Project licences amended since the previous meeting
- Secondary availability PPLs amended since the previous meeting
- Study requests approved since the previous meeting
- Condition 18s submitted since the previous meeting
- Animals rehomed

9 DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

- 18 February: PPL Review: 10am to 12pm

AWERB Secretary
25 April 2025