
Summary Minutes: AWERB: PPL Review/Standing Agenda Items meeting

Status: FINAL

Meeting held: Thursday 18 September 2025 at 11am: MS Teams

Present:

MS Teams: 13, plus one in attendance, three by invitations and 9 apologies

1 **NEW HOME OFFICE PROJECT LICENCE APPLICATION REVIEW**

AWERB reviewed a new licence application, which represents a continuation of a previous licence, for exploratory studies on an injectable gel intended to treat lower back pain caused by degenerative disc disease. These studies will inform regulatory submissions planned for 2026.

Discussion focused on the proposed animal numbers. It was explained that the requested numbers would allow for both small pilot studies and the main regulatory (GLP) studies, while ensuring animal use is kept to the minimum necessary. AWERB queried the rationale for using both sheep and goats. It was explained that sheep are expected to be the primary model due to easier sourcing within the UK, with goats included as a contingency, as they are also a suitable model.

AWERB asked for justification of the use of multiple intervertebral discs per animal. It was explained that by inducing degeneration in multiple discs- allowing for both treated and control discs - the overall number of animals required could be reduced. However, if pilot studies indicate that this causes pain or distress, the number of discs used per animal would be reduced.

A query was raised about the indicated mortality rate. It was clarified that this relates to anaesthetic recovery rather than the procedure itself.

Further points raised included the need to revise inconsistencies in anaesthetic codes, clarification of monitoring responsibilities and pain assessment protocols, and confirmation of the intended study duration of up to 24 months.

Actions:

- Add supporting literature for animal numbers and timepoints.
- Refine terminology and revise inconsistencies.
- Address all feedback before resubmission for final review.

2 **PIG SURGERY PROJECT – FOLLOW UP OF UPDATE FROM 30 JULY 2025 MEETING**

AWERB reviewed progress on a pig surgery project following concerns raised in July 2025 about stress caused by transportation and fasting. Changes had been trialled to reduce stress. Discussion focused on whether fasting pigs for 24 hours is necessary, as evidence showed no clear benefit in reducing bloating and raised welfare concerns. Alternative methods for reducing bloating, such as bowel decompression and irrigation techniques, were also discussed, though results have been limited.

AWERB noted that terminal anaesthesia may offer a more ethical and scientifically valid approach, avoiding fasting stress and improving surgical conditions. Concerns were also raised about the effectiveness of the current model and the reliability of data being collected.

Actions:

- Trial terminal anaesthesia as an alternative approach.
- Reassess the suitability of the current surgical model.
- Surgeons to revisit alternative techniques for reducing bloating.
- Arrange a meeting to address data inconsistencies and review concerns before inviting the team to a future AWERB meeting for further discussion.

3 MINUTES

The minutes from the AWERB meeting held on 27 August 2025 were formally signed off.

4 FEEDBACK FOLLOWING AWERB ANONYMOUS SURVEY (ITEM 3.5 – 30 JULY 2025 MEETING)

AWERB reviewed actions implemented in response to feedback from the member survey.

Key improvements include:

- Clearer process for highlighting points for discussion during project licence reviews.
- Sharing a list of AWERB members with applicants in advance, rather than individual introductions during meetings.
- Splitting the action log into short-term and long-term items to improve meeting efficiency.
- Recognising AWERB members' contributions through departmental communications and encouraging inclusion in appraisals.
- Introducing regular mini-training sessions on topics such as severity assessment and licence responsibilities, with the first enrichment session scheduled for November.

5 ACTION LOG REVIEW.

AWERB reviewed progress on previous actions:

- **30 July 2025 meeting: Item 4.2: Effectiveness of the new sheep pens in relation to improving the sheep fasting protocol:** Improvements to sheep fasting protocols have been implemented, including relocation of pens, installation of Perspex sheeting, and adjusted feeding schedules. These changes have significantly improved outcomes.
- **16 July 2025: Item 3: Ragwort Control Concern:** Ragwort control concerns have been resolved.
- **05 June 2025 meeting: Item 3: Annual reports from PPL Holders that involve special species (dogs):** The project licence holder for the clinical veterinary studies project licence will arrange for updates to be provided for each individual protocol as it concludes, summarising how the work went. The licence holder is also amending the licence to remove completed protocols, ensuring that only current and active protocols remain listed.
- **05 June 2025 meeting: Item 5.5: Environmental enrichment workshop:** this has been scheduled for November.
- **05 June 2025 meeting: Item 5.6: Culture of Care meetings:** the next meeting has been scheduled for November.

6 REPLACEMENT CHECKLIST

AWERB noted that the checklist for replacing animals in research will be reviewed at a future meeting to determine how best to integrate relevant guidance into current practices.

7 NVS REPORT – CAMDEN

The Named Veterinary Surgeon provided an update:

- **Ferrets:** One ferret was euthanised due to chest tumours, unrelated to any procedures or infections.
- **Zebrafish:** Breeding issues are being investigated, with ongoing water quality testing as part of the assessment.

8 NVS REPORT – HAWKSHEAD

The Named Veterinary Surgeon provided an update on two projects

- **ACL Surgery Project:** The project continues to encounter challenges and is under review.
- **Frog Behavioural Study:** This non-invasive research project has faced significant health issues among frogs supplied for the study, including parasitic infections and bacterial disease. Despite extensive treatment and husbandry measures, the health problems have delayed progress, and no frogs have yet been used for research. Future decisions will depend on funding, licensing, and the health status of the remaining animals.

9 NACWO REPORT - CAMDEN

The Named Animal Care and Welfare Officer reported that technicians are working closely with the veterinary team to monitor the health of ageing mice on arrival. Due to their advanced age, these animals require careful observation to identify and manage potential health issues early.

10 POLICIES FOR FORMAL SIGN OFF

The RVC Policy on Training and Competency for the Use of Animals in Research was formally approved.

11 MID TERM PROJECT LICENCE REVIEWS

AWERB reviewed several mid-term reports:

- **Chicken Gut Health Study:** The review was satisfactory, and no concerns were raised.
- **Mucosal Immunisation Study:** Questions were raised during the review and will be addressed by the project team.
- **Bovine Calf Immunity Study:** The project has concluded, and an update was provided. Comments from the review have been shared with the licence holder for response.

12 ITEMS TO NOTE:

AWERB noted:

- Two new study requests and one amendment were approved.
- Three internal tissue requests have been approved since July 2025.
- One report was submitted to the Home Office under regulatory requirements
- Seven animals (four mice; and three dogs) were successfully rehomed during July and August.

13 DATES OF UPCOMING MEETINGS:

- 30 September: PPL Review: 10am to 12pm
- 13 October: PPL Review: 10 AM.
- 5 November: Standing agenda items: 2pm to 4pm

AWERB Secretary
December 2025