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**Summary Minutes:** AWERB Standing Agenda Items meeting

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**Status:** FINAL

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**Meeting held:** 18 October 2023 at 10am via MS Teams

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**Present:** 14 plus 1 in attendance and 13 apologies

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**1 THANK YOU**

Thanks was noted to an AWERB member who was retiring shortly.

**2 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 August 2023 were confirmed as an accurate record.

**3 MATTERS ARISING/ACTION LOG**

**3.1 Item 2.4: Culture of Care Questionnaire (23 August 2023)**

The questionnaire had been updated following AWERB's input. It needed to be re-circulated for final comment, before being submitted for formal approval.

It was reported that there was a nationwide drive for institutes to consider culture of care for their staff. Institutes were coming together (including the RVC) to discuss how best to take this forward.

**3.2 Item 2.9: GA mouse breeding strategies at the RVC (28 June 2023)**

A place on a cryopreservation and techniques course taking place in February 2024 had been booked.

**3.3 Item 2.10 Website case study (was BSU Virtual Tour storyboard): 28 June 2023**

After discussions with senior management, it had been agreed that the focus would change from a virtual tour, to having case studies along with accompanying videos.

**3.4 Item 2.5: Camden Stables (11 January 2023)**

Health and Safety were now involved in discussions about whether the fire and emergency access point near the stables was an appropriate area.

**3.5 Item 3.2.3: Reviewing AWERB practices (11 January 2023)**

The following discussion topics were suggested:

- Enrichment
- Different species
- Bolton's Park Farm
- Refinements in large animal husbandry and animal care

#### 4 AWERB HUB WORKSHOP

An update on the topics discussed at the recent online AWERB Hub Workshop was provided.

There had been three topics:

- **Non Technical Summaries (NTS) – Review of the guidance notes for project licence applications:** currently, these summaries were generated automatically as part of the process of writing project licence applications on ASPeL, however this was resulting in them becoming very technical and difficult for lay people to understand. This was not helped by the guidance notes also not using adequate lay language. Options discussed to resolve this included separating out the NTS so that it had its own dedicated section within the licence and rewriting the guidance notes.
- **An overview of the ASC independent review of the Forced Swim Test:** the Forced Swim Test was a method used to identify potential antidepressive drugs. It was not a test used at the RVC. The review had found that although the forced swim test may have a role in assessing potential anti-depressant agents it should not be used as a model for depression. Much greater clarity was therefore needed for any licence that sought to use the Forced Swim Test. Longer term the Test needed to be replaced as it was a stress for animals.
- **The role of review and regulatory approvals processes for animal research in supporting implementation of the 3Rs - the role of AWERBs:** this review had been commissioned by NC3Rs. The conclusion of the review was that AWERBs did not have enough people with experience to adequately consider the replacement element of the 3Rs. The Hub had therefore considered whether there should be a push for funding councils to generate New Blood lectureships that focused on statistics, experimental design and replacement in order to embed that expertise in universities and their AWERBs.

It was noted that a paper had been received from one of the Ethics and Welfare Committee members (*Recommendations to Improve the EU Non-Technical Summaries of Animal Experiments*) which was about non-technical summaries (NTS) and highlighted what the authors deemed as being good and bad examples to assist researchers to produce better NTS in the future. This had been circulated to AWERB members and would also be sent to PPL applicants to consider when writing their NTS.

#### 5 3RS

##### 5.1 DISCUSSION ITEM: Question from external report on the role of review and regulatory approvals process: *Refinements in the caregiving of animals or in the practice of experiments are often overlooked by researchers as scientific outputs. How can an AWERB better document, report on, and share knowledge of refinements through retrospective review of a project licence?*

For this discussion item the following points were made:

- The teams within BSU were focused on identifying ways to improve basic husbandry and care of the animals.
- There was a lot of experience and expertise in caring for specialist species. This should be publicised and promoted externally such as through posters at conferences to pass this experience on to others.
- Consider having another 3Rs day with awards and inviting external people to it.
- The Home Office Courses that were offered by the RVC were a good opportunity to promote refined handling methods and husbandry techniques.
- Use the mid and end of project licence reviews to identify if there were examples of refinements that could be publicised wider both within the RVC and externally.

- It could sometimes be difficult to step back and identify those areas of animal welfare and husbandry work that could be highlighted as good practice. One way of doing this would be to ask independent people to come in and take a look and get their input.
- Refinement could be species specific. For example, with the horses, studies were run by experienced PIL and PPL holders who automatically did what was in the best interest for the horse and followed standard horse husbandry. However, that did not mean there were not more things that could be done, such as in relation to environmental enrichment. Horses were generally at their happiest when outdoors as they were able to roam and graze with the other horses. When they did have to be put in stables then enrichment such as treat balls were provided. But it did raise the question that maybe more could be done when they were out in the fields to add a bit of variety and fun into their life outdoors too.

## **6 CULTURE OF CARE**

### **6.1 Proposed joint culture of care workshop**

Information had been provided on a joint Culture of Care Workshop that had been held elsewhere. Something similar could be run at the RVC.

It was agreed that a poll should be circulated to AWERB members to gauge whether there was interest in running either a half or full day in person workshop. The workshop would be piloted to AWERB members, with the aim of ultimately offering it to others at the RVC.

## **7 NVS REPORT – HAWKSHEAD**

### **7.1 Pigs**

It was reported that there had been issues with a recent supply of pigs. The RVC have used the supplier for at least 10 years and this was the first time problems had been experienced. One of the pigs had an infected umbilical hernia; others had infected legs (which responded to treatment) and one pig fractured its leg when being unloaded from the trailer. The supplier had been contacted and measures put in place to allow one of the NACWOs to visit the pathogen free site to inspect it. The NACWO had confirmed that the farm was immaculate, so it was thought that it had been a one-off issue. The supplier had agreed that for future delivery of pigs, the NACWO would be able to go on site to do a site inspection and select the pigs to be used.

### **7.2 Sheep**

At the August meeting it had been reported that following surgery one of the sheep had remained very lame and after a follow-up scan was euthanased. Following consultations, refinements have subsequently been put in place and another surgery was now planned which would be closely monitored.

### **7.3 Sheep**

It was reported that three sheep had been booked in for orthopaedic surgery and undergone preoperative treatment. On the day of the surgery it was found that only two implants had been delivered, so one of the sheep had to be withdrawn. There was no obvious impact on the sheep afterwards. Safeguards to minimise future risk of aborting procedures include checking that the implants have been delivered at least three days prior to surgeries and sterilisation processes being undertaken. AWERB endorsed this stance.

**7.4 Third sheep study**

AWERB were informed about a third sheep study involving laryngeal implants with tracheostomies. The initial study had been redesigned following problems that had been encountered. Following a practice on a cadaver, a recovery surgery was recently done, but due to the length of time the surgery was taking, it had to be cut short as there were concerns about the length of time the sheep was under anaesthesia. The sheep was recovered but then deteriorated and did not respond to analgesia so was euthanised. The sheep had been sent for a postmortem. Once the results were known a decision would be made on the next steps.

**7.5 Turkey study**

A new group of young turkeys had been delivered. One of the turkeys had been attacked by others within the group and had to be euthanised.

**7.6 Genetically Modified Pigs**

One of the genetically modified pigs that was on a heart valve study had collapsed from heart failure and had to be euthanised. She had been bred from, but the postmortem revealed she was not pregnant. It also revealed the pig had mitral valve endocarditis, a phenotype that had not been previously associated with this gene, so it was thought that it was a one off.

**7.7 Dog Unit**

Two study dogs were having trouble with salivation which was leading to inappetence. One of the dogs has had previous episodes of not being able to eat very well and so this time was started on medication earlier as that had seemed to work before. For the other dog this was his first episode. Both dogs seemed reasonably happy and perky though but would be closely monitored. The humane end point specified that animals that were unable to eat a minimum of 20% daily calorific requirement over 5 successive days due to eating difficulties would be euthanised. There was not an end point in relation to the numbers of recurrent episodes though. However, the NVS was able to make a call if they thought a dog was suffering too much. There was a balance that had to be considered: the longer a dog was on the study then the more substantial quality study data was produced versus euthanising a dog and bringing another dog onto the study to go through the same process. Hence if a dog was deemed to be within a humane endpoint it would continue on the study.

**8 NVS REPORT - CAMDEN**

**8.1 Ferrets**

Epizootic catarrhal enteritis (ECE) was still a problem in the Unit. However, the previous day there had been no incident of green poo which was encouraging. The technicians were being very vigilant in monitoring for signs of digestive upset with medication and antibiotic therapy being administered as soon as possible as well as supportive care. Cases seemed to be resolving more quicker without hospitalization being required. An emergency medical supplies box was being kept in the ferret room, so that it was easily to hand. New recording forms had also been introduced, and as soon as any issue was spotted, it was recorded.

A new batch of ferrets were being slowly introduced into the Unit and so far, there had been no issues with them.

A ferret specialist had advised using a steroid treatment on ferrets that experienced a second episode, as it was an acute disease that causes gut damage and can progress to an inflammatory bowel type condition.

Ferret screening was also being looked into.

AWERB commended the actions taken by the NVS and the animal technicians in being very quick to react to the disease and making sure that the ferrets got treated as soon as signs were spotted.

## **8.2 Mice**

One batch of mice had experienced a couple of issues including developing small lumps in the injection site where they were receiving IP injections three times a week. It was not known what was causing the lumps, but they did not seem to be causing the mice any problems, as they were eating and behaving normally and there was no sign of inflammation or redness. The injections were administered by different people and their techniques have been checked. The mice had got progressively fatter during the study, so it was possible the injections were accumulating under the skin. Once the study had finished a postmortem would be done and the tissues examined to see if the reason could be identified. One of the technicians had found a paper on pain responses in this mice phenotype which they were reviewing to see if there were any additional behavioural markers that could be used to assess if the mice were in pain.

The same group of mice had also experienced eye issues, which seemed to be conjunctivitis. This was resolving with treatment though two had to be euthanised as they had been in a poor condition. A postmortem was being carried out.

## **8.3 Rats**

There had been signs of haematuria in some of the rat cages, so this was being investigated. This did not seem to be affecting the rats.

## **8.4 Guinea Pigs**

A while ago several of the guinea pigs had abortions. This had been investigated, but nothing identified. The previous week another guinea pig had to be euthanised 10 days post-surgery as it was showing signs of pains and neurological behaviour. It had initially recovered and gained weight but then deteriorated. There were no obvious signs for why she had deteriorated so she had been sent for a post-mortem.

## **9 NACWO REPORT - CAMDEN**

Weekly meetings were being held with Estates to discuss issues such as the BMS and air condenser units.

## **10 NACWO REPORT - HAWKSHEAD**

### **10.1 Dog Unit**

- The outside area had been refurbished and new kennels installed.
- Two more dogs had been bred from. For one of them it would be their first whelping.

## **11 NTCO REPORT**

### **11.1 Training records review:**

Several training records would be circulated to AWERB to review.

### **11.2 Training records**

AWERB were advised that the Home Office had introduced new rules and regulations to replace section 9 of the 2014 Guidance on the Operation of A(SP)A, which came into effect on 14 October 2023. The changes related to the accreditation and assessment of training.

## **RVC – Minutes: AWERB, 18 October 2023**

As a provider of training for licences in the UK, these changes would have an impact on the RVC. One of the main changes was that the Home Office would now be getting involved in the audits of training courses.

The Home Office have also produced a new table of the minimum or mandatory training requirements for different people working in research.

- New trainee animal technicians must attend an E1 and L PIL training course before they can do any animal care. Previously in house training could be provided.
- Anyone working within an animal unit must have completed the minimum modules that would be required if applying for a personal licence.
- NACWOs and NVS should now undertake the PPL course.
- A suggestion had also been raised that NACWOs need to be registered animal technicians but no final decision had been made on that one.

### **12 SECONDARY PROJECT LICENCES GRANTED BY THE HOME OFFICE**

AWERB noted that one project licence with secondary availability at the RVC had been granted by the Home Office.

### **13 PROJECT LICENCES AMENDED BY THE HOME OFFICE**

AWERB noted that three project licence amendments had been approved by the Home Office.

### **14 STUDY REQUESTS APPROVED SINCE 16 AUGUST 2023**

AWERB noted that one study request had been approved.

### **15 MID TERM PPL REVIEW**

AWERB noted the 4 mid term reviews that had been submitted. AWERB's interim comments had been passed to the PPL Holders.

### **16 RETROSPECTIVE ASSESSMENT FOR APPROVAL**

AWERB approved the submission of a retrospective assessment to the Home Office.

### **17 END OF PPL REVIEWS**

AWERB noted the five end of PPL reviews that had been submitted. Comments had been passed back to the PPL Holders.

### **18 AWERB TERMS OF REFERENCE REVIEW (NEXT REVIEW AT FEBRUARY 2024 MEETING)**

The operational section of the terms of reference was reviewed and it was confirmed that no changes were needed.

### **19 HOME OFFICE ISSUES**

#### **19.1 Condition 18 reports**

It was noted that there had been no responses from the Home Office for condition 18 reports submitted from January 2023. This had been raised at a recent HOLTIF meeting and at the Establishment Licence Holders Forum. The Home Office had acknowledged that there had been problems in this area and that resources were being put in to improve this.

**20 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

**20.1 New call for student members to join AWERB, CRERB and SSRERB**

It was noted that a call for new student members to join these boards has recently been circulated.

**20.2 Secondary availability for a PPL at the RVC**

AWERB were informed that a project licence application for secondary availability was due to be reviewed at the next meeting.

**21 DATE OF NEXT MEETING: 8 NOVEMBER 2023 – PPL REVIEW MEETING**

This was confirmed as 8 November 2023 and would be a PPL review meeting.

Secretary

1 November 2023