
Minutes: AWERB – 26 April 2016 meeting

Status: Chair approved

1 PRESENTATION FROM PPL HOLDER

A presentation was received from a project licence holder that had secondary availability at the College. She was in the process of applying for a new project licence to replace her existing one which was due to expire.

The project licence holder explained that her research addresses basic neuroscience questions aimed at uncovering fundamental principles of brain function. Research themes explore: (1) how auditory cortex supports listening in complex and naturalistic situations. (2) the role of visual inputs to auditory cortex and (3) interactions between auditory cortex and other brain regions. The committee were told of the potential applications of this basic science to inform their harm-benefit analysis of this work.

In the developed world, hearing loss is the most common sensory disability, with around 15% of the population classified as deaf or hard of hearing. Cortical mechanisms of hearing are particularly relevant for age-related hearing loss that frequently involves central deficits in cognitive processing as well as peripheral deficits in sensory transduction. By the age of 60, one in two people will have a significant hearing disorder. The principle complaint of such individuals is that they are unable to follow conversations or discriminate speech sounds in even moderately noisy situations. Similarly, cochlear implant (CI) recipients do phenomenally well at understanding speech in quiet but, again, struggle within more challenging listening conditions and CIs fail to convey the acoustic features relevant for other sounds such as music. If we can understand how the normal central auditory system copes with noise in order to maintain discrimination, then we may be able to use such information to design better signal processing devices for hearing aids and CIs.

The overall aim of this research was to understand better how the sensory brain, and particularly the auditory cortex, functions to facilitate listening. Currently although there was a good understanding how the ear processes sound, it was not known how the brain makes sense of these sounds: how it was able to pick up one sound but ignore others (i.e. listening as opposed to hearing). It was not possible to mimic this ability with a computer yet. Questions from committee members focused on refinement of protocols to ensure the potential harms to the animals involved in these studies are minimised. They were impressed with the detailed and careful approach of the PPL holder. They were reassured by the Named Veterinary Surgeon attending the unit and their observations as to the health and welfare of these animals and the level of enrichment provided by the animal care staff.

The Chair of AWERB thanked the project licence holder for attending AWERB. He advised that she would be required to do a midterm review of how the project licence was progressing but that AWERB were willing to be guided by her as to when she would find this most useful to provide.

2 NEW PROJECT LICENCE APPLICATION

The Project Licence Holder was welcomed to the meeting. She explained that she was applying to replace her current project licence which was due to expire shortly.

This was a generic project licence, which was designed to support the development of new and safe products to improve the health and welfare of farm and companion animals and the safe use of materials to which humans and animals may be exposed to directly or via products from food-producing animals is essential for human and animal health. This was an essential step in product development. This project licence enabled these data to be generated so that it could be checked to make sure that it met the regulatory standard required and the relevant marketing authorisation could be applied for.

For each product to be developed using this licence, a new study plan would need to be submitted to AWERB for approval. This would be in the form of a brief summary page along with a copy of the study plan. It was therefore important that when these were received a harm v benefit assessment was undertaken.

3 RVC POLICY ON AGE TO WEAN PIGLETS

AWERB were asked for their views on whether it was ethical to buy pigs in at 3 weeks of age so that they could be vaccinated at 4 weeks. UK legislation states that piglets could not be weaned if younger than 4 weeks of age unless their mother had stopped lactating, or they were orphaned or sick or surplus piglets.

After discussion the Committee confirmed that their policy would be that piglets could not be weaned if under 4 weeks old unless they were on a licensed procedure where the need for this would have to be justified.

4 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

AWERB have been reviewing the sections within the RSPCA Guiding Principles on good practice for Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Bodies document (2015 version) to see whether any improvements/changes were needed to current practices.

4.1 Section: Accommodation and care

The following points were raised:

Humane killing: a humane killing working group be set up to look at the methods used and whether they were satisfactory and whether the RVC should have a policy on preferred schedule 1 and non-schedule 1 killings.

General care training: the College already had an environmental enrichment working group and they could be asked to consider care aspects for those animals that were unusual or had particular needs. They could also review the new code of practice for housing animals that was due to come in 2017, to ensure that the College met the requirements.

Facilities: regular tour of the facilities for the Ethics and Welfare Committee were arranged which AWERB were always invited to join. The next one was a tour of the fish facility at Camden on 5 May.

Accredited facilities: Where possible animals should be sourced locally in order to avoid stress to the animals in being transported a long way. The list of accredited facilities would be reviewed to remove those which were either too far away; were no longer being used or had not been assessed for a long time.

Single sex studies: the aim was to get researchers to move to using single sex female mice to avoid the male mice fighting.

4.2 Section: Support staff and training

Chairing AWERB: The Chair asked the Committee members whether they had sufficient opportunity and encouragement to speak at meetings. Could the meetings be structured differently in order to encourage more interaction? Did anyone have an issue with how the meetings were held? The aim

was to encourage scientists and named persons to work together. It was noted that Camden BSU had reintroduced discussions between scientists and animal technicians to discuss animal welfare with the first one arranged for July.

NTCOs: a meeting would be arranged with training to see what opportunities and support there was for arranging a training programme for animal care staff and scientists.

Assessing staff: Suggestions of a couple of people who could be approached to see if they would be willing to be assessors for surgical procedures, in order to relieve the pressure on NVS, were made. It was agreed they would be approached.

5 NVS

AWERB received an NVS update.

6 PROJECT LICENCES

AWERB noted that the Home Office had granted one new project licence with primary availability at the RVC. The Home Office had also granted two amendments to existing project licences.

7 PROJECT LICENCES END OF LICENCE REVIEW

Two end of project licence reviews were noted.

8 CONDITION 18 REPORT

AWERB noted the condition 18 report that had been submitted.

9 WORKING GROUPS

As there was not time to discuss this agenda item, it was agreed that it would be deferred to the next meeting and would be taken as one of the first items.

10 TRAINING RECORDS

This item was also deferred to the next meeting.

11 ASSESSORS LIST FOR REVIEW

This list would be reviewed and updated as several names needed to be taken off.

12 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 March 2016 were confirmed as an accurate record.

13 MATTERS ARISING

13.1 Yard

The yard had been done up and was now a much improved environment.

13.2 CPD training – Efficient Breeding of Genetically Altered Animals group

It was reported that there was a lot of external training courses and animal technology based events providing CPD opportunities however it was proving difficult to free up staff to enable them to go on these courses.

13.3 Survey of owners of dogs that had been rehomed from the RVC

The majority of questionnaires had been returned. A short report reviewing the results of the survey would be submitted to the June meeting. All the dogs had settled really well upon rehoming.