

University of Leeds

Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Committee

Minutes of Meeting held 13 November 2023

15 members attended with 5 people in attendance.

Minutes

23/32 Minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2023, were received and approved.

Matters arising

23/33 The NVS announced to the members that a potential new student member had been invited to attend the AWERB meeting to decide whether to join the Committee. The NVS thanked the guest for coming. The chair welcomed the guest to the meeting.

The NVS announced that she would be going on parental leave at the end of the year and introduced the new NVS who would be providing cover during this period.

23/34 The new NVS introduced himself and gave some background regarding his experience to the Committee. He had been working with Agenda Veterinary Services, since the Veterinary division was first established; over three years ago and during that, time had provided NVS cover at several establishments, both academic and commercial, across the UK.

23/35 The Chair gave thanks to the incoming Vet and welcomed two more guests to the meeting: University Estates Zonal maintenance manager, (responsible for the south of the University campus, including the CEU Building), and the University Smart Buildings manager, responsible for the HVAC and on-site BMS campus wide.

23/36 The NVS mentioned that there had been a delay in the circulation of this meeting is Agenda and papers due to the time taken in preparing for the Home Office and HSE audits. In light of this, the Chair suggested that the report from the NC3Rs should be circulated for discussion at the January meeting.

NVS/PELh Report

23/37 The NVS welcomed the newly appointed NIO and a new SBS NACWO and reported that the NACWO for the University Farm had left the University. Two technicians at the Farm had been identified to attend NACWO training, so that there would be NACWO cover and back up at the Farm in case of annual leave, or absence in future.

23/38 Environmental failure had been discussed at the previous meeting, but not all facts were known at that time. A user forgot to re-set lighting controls in a holding room back from manual to the auto position, resulting in the lighting in the room being left in the "light on"

phase throughout the night. No alerts were generated, because the system did not recognise the setting as an error. The Users have been reminded to double-check the light settings before leaving for the day.

- 23/39 Home Office Animals in Science Regulation Unit (ASRU) audit. The inspector spent the whole day visiting all facilities, speaking with NACWOs, the Animal Facility Manager, the NVS and researcher staff. The Home Office Inspector's report is due to be issued in two to three weeks.
- 23/40 Preparations for the Home Office audit highlighted that some research groups were failing to keep and maintain individual training records. Potential ways forward would need some support from Tick@Lab system provider and a better understanding of what, exactly, is possible with the system. New procedures should be in place soon.
- 23/41 The NVS and Animal Facility Manager visited Bradford and Sheffield Universities to see if there would be scope for some of the research users from SBS to relocate work there. Space was available at both universities; however, there were pros and cons in each case. Sheffield looked the most promising option, 7th December has been suggested as a date for staff from to Sheffield to visit SBS, and it was hoped that a group of SBS users would be able to meet with them to discuss their needs.
- 23/42 The Chair asked, if it would be possible to use the Bradford or Sheffield facilities, whether someone from Leeds carrying out a protocol at another regulated establishment would come under the responsibility of that establishment's AWERB and what would happen if we were not satisfied with the external arrangements, AWERB etc. The NVS's view was that most of the projects would effectively become jointly owned, with primary availability at one establishment (i.e. Leeds) and secondary availability at the other. AWERBs at both establishments would have to approve the project licence/amendment before it is submitted to the Home Office for approval. This would, inevitably, mean a longer process for the project licence holders. The Chair noted that we would have to hope that we do not end up with one establishment giving approval and the other not, as in his experience this could occur in medical research ethics committees when there were multi-site proposals. Further consideration should be given to how all this is going to work in practical terms, and if arrangements might need to be put in place for the different AWERB officers to meet should it be necessary.
- 23/43 There had been no response to seven Standard Condition 18 reports submitted since February, which is concerning. This was understood to be due to the one person in the Home Office Inspectorate looking after these being on long-term sick leave.
- 23/44 The Chair thanked NVS and PEL for the report.

Facilities Manager Report *(previously circulated)*

- 23/45 During the week of the Home Office audit, we also had an HSE audit. Two Inspectors from the HSE looked at GMO facilities across the University, which included those in CBS. A formal report was awaited but during the exit interview, the inspectors indicated that they were broadly happy with everything in CBS. The only comment raised was regarding the requirement for facemasks for those conducting large animal work something, which will now be reviewed.

- 23/46 Following the early retirement of the HOLC and NIO members of staff from SBS and CBS have been appointed to new roles, meaning SBS staff have been reduced to three. As a result funding to advertise for a new Grade 3 technician has been secured and it is hoped that interviews will take place before the Christmas break, with a view someone starting early in the New Year to improve staffing levels in SBS.
- 23/47 There was nothing further to report about the SBS/CBS merger since the last meeting.
- 23/48 The current ULBS chair was stepping down and expressions of interest had been invited from academics. New terms of reference for that committee were attached at the end of the circulated report.
- 23/49 QReserve had been live for a couple of months with good feedback from the academics. Users were happy with being able to access things themselves, rather than having to go through the technical staff.
- 23/50 The newly appointed NACWO based at SBS attended a Tick@Lab user group meeting last week and will report on how we can make better use of the system for our record keeping.
- 23/51 We are starting to develop the Home Office SharePoint site, which the previous Home Office administrator developed. Licence holders will be able to go on the SharePoint site to get copies of DOPS and SOPs and other useful information and resources.
- 23/52 Following the Home Office ASRU audit, it is understood that there might be a list of required actions and recommendations requiring a response and/or follow up by the University. Based on reports from other establishments following their audits it was unclear whether we would receive the audit report before the Christmas break. Subject to the content of the report, there may be a need for clarifications of facts and further information may need to be provided. However, it would be the University Secretary's role, as Establishment Licence Holder, to sign off the management response.
- 23/53 The PEL holder had attended the Establishment Licence Holders' Forum recently where discussions of the audit report had indicated how ASRU had been receptive to the responses from Establishments.
- 23/54 The last Programme Board meeting was held during the summer and there has not been a meeting since. The two Deans of FBS and FHM chair the Programme Board. The ULBS is currently chaired by a FBS research Professor, who will be standing down and handing over following the next meeting.

CBS/SBS NACWO Reports (previously circulated)

SBS

- 23/55 As previously reported efforts were being made to improve and standardize the environmental enrichment across both sites, and a target of 1st November was set, all of which has been well received.
- 23/56 A proposed refinement in analgesia for intracranial surgeries, recommended by the NVS, met with initial supply problems but following successful purchase of bupivacaine this would be used the next time a group performs intracranial surgeries to provide additional analgesia. The benefit resulting from this refinement will be reviewed with a view to implementing this across the board.

CBS

- 23/57 New Dome homes which were a better fit for the cages, had been trialled for rats and these had proved to benefit the animals in allowing them more room to move around the cage and use the home.
- 23/58 NACWO's from both CBS and SBS attended an external meeting entitled Animal Home Improvements. The NACWO's were pleased to report that both units were already implementing some of the measures highlighted in the meeting.
- 23/59 A member of staff has completed their personal licensee (PIL) training course so will be applying for a PIL to enable them to help with regulated procedures.

FARM Veterinary Report *(previously circulated)*

- 23/60 An external consultant produced the report. The NVS confirmed that the report had been more positive than the previous one. However, the pigtail issue previously reported, was still evident. The external consultant had provided a list of instructions on how to address the issue but major concerns remained.

User Group Report *(previously circulated)*

- 23/61 Some items in the report, regarding the closure process, the plans for CBS going forward and some recurring infrastructure problems, had already been covered in the reports received from the NVS/ PEL and Facility Manager..
- 23/62 Since the CBS User group Chair was unavailable to give the report in person the NVS provided a summary of the report. The deficit in the finances were mentioned and the increase in charges had been questioned. The Facility Manager advised that CBS/SBS were both in deficit with internal Estates Services charges being in line with what was expected at this point in the year. If internal charges should increase, further then researchers would need to account for any increase when preparing their grant applications. Essentially, Estates have increased their charges annually and these have not always been matched by the increase in CBS /SBS charges which the deficit, particularly in CBS, over the past few years
- 23/63 On behalf of users and concerned parties, a letter, written initially by SBS users, but then signed by academics across the University, had been sent to the Executive Group. The correspondence was concerned primarily with the loss of facilities that would occur when SBS is closed and the level of cleanliness that it would be possible to achieve in CBS. Other concerns raised were the impact that the changes would have on research the potential for adversely affecting animal welfare. The letter had been shared with the University Secretary but it would be possible to share this with the Committee.
- 23/64 Regarding costs, the Facility Manger confirmed his understanding of the need for Estates Services to increase prices. However, there will always be a lag period due to funding arrangements. If a grant were approved, then costs subsequently increase the researcher would need to go back to the funder, which is not always feasible. Researchers are advised to include cost increase projections when applying for funding but these are not always going to be accurate or indeed included. . Talking to colleagues at other establishments, costs at the University are high compared to other institutions. In short, Estates costs have

increased by 60% per period, where costs for animal work have only increased by 10% hence we are faced with a dilemma where we should be able to ensure that any costed research on grants is honoured at the level it was originally costed for, so that we're not charging people too much or preventing them from completing their research.

23/65 The PEL holder confirmed that the letter from the SBS User Group Chair had been received and was being given due consideration by the members of the Executive. A response can be expected within the week.

Estates Issues

23/66 Following up on previously reported environmental control issues a number of contributing factors had been identified. It was reported that one of the root causes appeared to have been that the critical alarm process had only been reviewed when an issue occurred which, over time had led to notifications going to the wrong people. The NVS and Facility Manager would work alongside Smart Buildings to do a standard operating procedure for both Facilities to ensure that alarms would be sent to the correct people and that Security Services would know what to do when they get an alarm. Many historical issues were being captured and resolved, and this work is due to be finished by the end December.

23/67 There followed detailed reports and discussion on the state of the infrastructure on both sites, the causes of failure and problems with fault alarms and notification failures. Issues around potential closure to facilitate upgrades, what could be achieved without the need for closure and the need to inform the Programme Board were also discussed.

23/68 In summary, the infrastructure in both units was reaching the end of usable life and would need replacement. It wouldn't make sense to invest in a facility, that was going to be closed down, but if left with only one unit, then there are issues around how such replacement could be done without disruption to research. The position, from an estates maintenance view, for facilities to be maintained for the research then something would need to be done, and decisions made going forward. Support for the improvements found and a more holistic view are needed. This discussion will be fed through to the two Deans through the Programme Board.

Research Ethical Research Chairs Committee report (previously circulated)

23/69 The member reported on the discussions that had taken place with colleagues looking at activities within the University, which had slipped through possible loopholes between different ethical review bodies. It was reported that the Deputy Vice Chancellors Research and Innovation personnel view and non-Regulated animal research work should come to AWERB although this would go beyond legal boundaries. A number of different concerns and potential solutions were reported and action points agreed. These would include working on an electronic form for animal work to run alongside a decision tree to come through to the AWERB through the NVS. **Actions:**

- Subgroup to develop a decision tree
- Closing the gaps and responsibilities. Chair to write to Deputy VC for Research to communicate the AWERB view as to where the responsibility lies.
- What the University expects from staff and students when working with outside partners and or in overseas Establishments

Maximising the effectiveness of your AWERB (previously circulated)

- 23/70 Earlier in the year, The Committee was asked to review a summary of the tasks that are required of AWERBs and recommendations on how those tasks could be delivered. At previous AWERB meetings, members were asked how they felt these tasks were being delivered locally and invited to provide feedback. Having analysed the feedback the NVS reported on the findings. One significant recommendation was to advertise more widely and invite senior management to attend so they would have a better awareness of AWERB activities. Other suggestions were:
- Making an ethical topic a standing agenda item.
 - Confidential concerns box or online
 - Supporting the named people
 - Better training, competency, and improving that process.
 - An induction package for new AWERB members, making more use of the Home Office SharePoint.
 - Encourage increase attendance to AWERB.
 - Increase communications between AWERB, staff and Users.
 - Support for developing a 3R's Champion.
 - Reviewing SOP's.
 - Include a cost benefit for mid-term reviews.

23/71 Matters discussed included the availability of suitable facilities, whilst not in the AWERB remit the AWERB does have a place regarding clarity on the future of the facilities available, which would improve AWERB advice to the PELh on suitability of available accommodation and resources for projects. With regard to raising awareness, the organisation Research in Practice provides free webinars every month, which can be highlighted and disseminated to staff and users. Retrospective reviews are carried out but there would be an opportunity to share more of the learning outcomes from these reviews. There is the possibility of the 3R's days, which were held pre covid, being re-introduced. Raising concerns box to make sure all concerns are addressed and process of dealing with concerns must be alert to possibility that submissions could be malicious; a robust process would need to be in place for addressing concerns.

Severe mid-term review presentation

Severity level severe, not due to the level of pain experienced but due to the protocol itself and an expectation that quality of life will be greatly reduced. In a spinal cord injury pain receptors work differently, therefore pain is not experienced in the same way by the animals. Discussions were concerned with how humane endpoints were defined and how monitoring, interventions and treatments had been changed and improved. A change of strain was reported as having decreased some adverse effects and improved animal welfare under the protocol.

MR63 and MR64 Mid-term reviews

23/72 The NVS reported having concerns with the licence holder responsible for both projects under review. Missing 3R's responses noted. The reviews would be returned to the licensee for them to give due consideration to the 3R's sections.

MR62 and MR65 reviews (previously circulated)

23/73 No concerns raised and both reviews were accepted.

23/74

The next meeting has been scheduled for 1330 to 1530 on 30 January, 2024 via MS Teams