

University of Leeds

Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Committee

Minutes of meeting of 14 September 2023

Nine members attended the meeting with two people in attendance.

The Chair thanked both a lay member who would be leaving the University and the NIO who would be taking early retirement shortly for their service to the Committee.

Minutes

23/1 The minutes of the meeting held on 12 July 2023 were received and approved.

Matters arising

23/2 (min 22/137) Lay members had been added to the staff distribution list to be kept informed of activities.

23/3 (min 22/143) Information received from the NC3Rs regarding the 3Rs champion role would be circulated to members for discussion at the meeting in November.

ACTION: Administrator to share the information and amend the Schedule of Business.

23/4 (min 22/145) The Named Veterinary Surgeon (NVS) had visited four rooms with anterooms which had been identified for animal use outside the facilities. The rooms offered the potential for better PPE provision and would be an improvement to the rooms currently registered. The NVS advised that once work was completed the rooms would be ready for registration early in 2024, following agreement from the Home Office Animals in Science Research Unit (ASRU).

Establishment Licence (PEL) holder and Named Veterinary Surgeon's (NVS) update

(Received paper AWERC/23/01)

23/5 The NVS reported that a new Named Animal Care and Welfare Officer (NACWO) with local knowledge had been appointed at REDACTED. Changes in NACWO's areas of responsibility had also taken place within the facilities, one NACWO had accepted the Named Information Officer (NIO) role and a senior member of technical staff had been identified to take over as NACWO after completing the necessary training. Another NACWO had been appointed to a facilities and Home Office administrative role and would be attending the AWERB meetings in future.

23/6 Two compliance incidents had occurred in REDACTED. Both incidents were assessed as being examples of poor practice, the researchers had been required to undertake additional training and to repeat their induction. Their out of hours access had been withdrawn and they would only be permitted to work when a NACWO was present. Responses from ASRU to both reports were awaited.

23/7 Environmental control issues with lighting had occurred where lights had malfunctioned but staff were not alerted due to a failure of the alarm. As a result, some work with inconsistent results had to be repeated. A breeding room was also impacted but with no detectable consequences to the animals. The NVS considered that the provision of new enrichment, which had allowed animals to hide, could have helped alleviate the effect of the lighting issues in the breeding room. An issue with the lights in an avian holding room had also been identified and manually corrected. Ongoing issues with components requiring repair were considered indicative of the age of the facility. Another incident, not included in the report, had occurred when a room had been found without any lights and at a temperature out of regular parameters. Mice in the room were moved to another holding room and suffered no negative effects.

23/8 The NVS was still awaiting responses from ASRU to condition 18 reports submitted since February.

- 23/9 The NVS had received one non-regulated work proposal during the period since the last meeting. The proposal to use animals that had naturally expired raised no ethical concerns.
- 23/10 Attendance at the recent refresher workshop for personal licensees had been disappointing. The Committee discussed ways of encouraging attendance and the NVS agreed to consider suggestions when arranging future events.
- 23/11 The NVS had visited another establishment and met with a contact willing to discuss movement of work. Facilities for zebra fish at this and another establishment might also be available to researchers and a visit to the second site would take place shortly. A room to house fish at the University required further work before it would be possible to apply for its addition to the PEL. In preparation, the NVS had attended a personal licensee (PIL) training course for fish and a NACWO would also be undertaking this training.
- 23/12 The facilities manager reported that the live lighting position in rooms was being monitored closely and that it should be possible to take pre-emptive action to avoid recurrence of issues. The Committee discussed the correlation between the age of facilities and environmental issues. In view of recent issues, the Committee agreed to invite an appropriate representative from Estates Services and a senior member of Security to attend the next meeting at which environmental controls would be included as a separate agenda item.

ACTION: Facilities manager and HOLC to identify and invite appropriate colleagues.

Animal facilities update

- 23/13 The facilities manager reported that, prior to an audit by the Health and Safety Executive, the safety manager had undertaken a pre-inspection during which no areas of concern had been identified. The Audit would focus on genetically modified organisms, including how animals are transferred and used and cages autoclaved. Relevant Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and risk assessments would be provided.
- 23/14 A new IT booking system had been introduced to manage space and equipment hire that would have wider application due to the facility for tracking activities. An aspiration to make more use of the tick@lab IT system for recording was also reported. Challenges including permission restrictions and resources for significant levels of data entry were discussed.
- 23/15 New NTCO and NIO roles had been agreed with the unions as part of the new staffing structure which would be looked at in the coming weeks. As a result of staff changes, included in the PELh/ NVS report, the staff on one site had been reduced to three and at this low level issues could potentially arise around periods of annual and sick leave. Issues were not anticipated at current levels of activity but logistics and options for support were being considered. The potential impact of varying levels of activity that might arise due to the merger was also being considered.
- 23/16 The Programme Board, which had last met in June, had experienced a long break until a meeting held on the same day as the AWERB. The NVS and facilities manager had started looking at options, as reported by the NVS, and were considering researchers' requirements to find a way to accommodate as much work as possible in REDACTED. Additionally, consideration was being given to alternate options for immunocompromised animals. More data gathering was necessary before decisions could be made and defining next steps defined.

NACWOs' report

(Received paper AWERC/23/02)

- 23/17 The NACWOs reported that, following researcher training and introduction of the use of sutures to reinforce adherence of tissue glue used for head lesions no further problems had occurred.
- 23/18 Assessment of environmental enrichment had been ongoing with specific items now identified to

incorporate in cage setup based on evidence of their use by the animals. Monitoring of animals to identify any strain differences would continue. The Committee welcomed the positive results. The NACWOs also advised that the use of blocks for aged rats should help to reduce problems with tooth overgrowth.

23/19 Two NACWOs would be attending the LASA/UFAW 3Rs Section Meeting looking at evidence-based refinements and a senior staff member of staff was taking the NACWOs training as reported by the NVS. Staff and environmental issues had been included in the reports from the PELh/NVS and the facilities manager.

Membership

(Received paper AWERC/23/03)

23/20 The NVS had invited all the NACWOs to attend meetings of the Committee. Two PhD students had been identified as potential members and it was hoped that another lay member would be recruited in due course. A Security representative would be added, to attend meetings by invitation, as previously discussed.

Mouse housing standard operating procedure (SOP)

(Received paper AWERC/23/04)

23/21 The NVS reported that the SOP had set an increase in the base level for enrichment provision which included flexibility to account for strain preferences. The Committee agreed to review this and other relevant SOPs every two years to align practices. Researchers would be sent the SOP and advised to request changes necessary for their work when drawing up pre-study protocols. The NVS agreed to draft new SOPs for other species.

ACTION: NVS to circulate the SOP to PPL holders and draft additional species SOPs.

Member survey - Maximising the effectiveness of your AWERB

(Received paper AWERC/23/05)

23/22 Following the previous meeting, members had been asked to complete a survey and the NVS had received a small number of responses. Members present agreed to complete the survey during the meeting. Responses would be analysed by the NVS and a summary would be circulated for the next meeting for members to discuss and prioritise actions arising.

ACTION: NVS to draft a paper for discussion.

PPL mid-term review

23/23 Following circulation of the review form the licensee had addressed questions raised by members. These were considered satisfactory and no issues or concerns were raised.

PPL mid-term review pro-forma

(Received paper AWERC/23/06)

23/24 Following brief discussion, it was agreed that the pro-forma should be amended in two places, to establish whether the work undertaken had remained within the prospective severity limit for the project overall, and to remind licensees to write their reports in lay terms.

ACTION: Administrator to amend the document.

PL applications reviewed by sub-committees

(A391 and A392)

23/25 The NVS reported that one application had been granted and that the other was still being considered by ASRU. A member who had been involved in the sub-committees considering new PPL applications reported that there had been greater opportunity for discussion, including how the applicants had considered alternatives. Improvement was already evident from this approach and the Committee agreed that having the flexibility to involve people from similar fields of research had also been helpful.

Schedule of business

(Received AWERC/23/07)

23/26 The Committee received the updated schedule of business for information. The Schedule would be amended to include the item on the 3Rs Champion for consideration in November.

ACTION: Administrator

External meetings

23/27 As reported at a previous meeting, members would be attending various LASA meetings including the Home Office Liaison, Training and Information (HOLTIF) meeting with ASRU in September, the PEL holders' Forum meeting and LASA annual conference in November.

23/28 Invitations to the Animals in Science Committee AWERB Subgroup October Hub workshop on 11th October and the RSPCA Lay Members' Forum on 5 December had been circulated to the Committee along with a call for speakers from the RSPCA for the latter.

23/29 Information regarding a webinar on common conditions in rodents had been sent to animal care staff and details of communications workshops, run by Understanding Animal Research for research staff, had been circulated to PPL holders and principal investigators.

Other business

23/30 The facilities manager reported that the REDACTED Chair would be stepping down so academic members of both faculties were to be invited to submit expressions of interest in the role.

23/31 A PWC survey "*Have your say: 'Experience with ASRU'*" had been shared with named persons. This would be circulated to the Committee and recent PPL applicants for completion.

ACTION: Administrator

Date of next meeting

23/32 The next meeting would take place on Monday 13 November on MS Teams.