

University of Leeds, Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Committee

Minutes 30 September 2020

9 members of the Committee joined the meeting (three for part of the meeting) with one person in attendance.

Minutes

20/1 The minutes of the meeting held on 29 July 2020 were received and approved.

Update on Actions

(Received paper AWERC 20/01)

20/2 The update on actions were received for information.

Establishment Licence (PEL) holder's update and report to Council

20/3 The PEL holder reported that there had been no condition 18 reports since the previous meeting.

20/4 The environment in relation to the pandemic had deteriorated over the past few weeks, but the University was prepared should more strict local or national lockdowns be announced. From the perspective of animal research, arrangements in line with the wider University had worked well when the initial Covid-19 lockdown had occurred in March. Similar arrangements would be made should they become necessary again but the intention would be to maintain a higher volume of research than had been possible in March.

20/5 The draft annual report had been amended and was received by the Council without any concern. The Council had associated itself with the Committee's thanks to the former Chair.

20/6 Members enquired about the amount of research being undertaken following re-opening of the facilities. The Named Veterinary Surgeon (NVS) and Named Animal Care and Welfare Officer (NACWO) advised that this was being led by Faculty approvals for re-starting research. The units had started up quickly but at reduced capacity due to social distancing.

20/7 Processing of new project licence (PPL) applications was up-to-date. However, the potential for a backlog was acknowledged particularly since extensions were not possible beyond the 5 year maximum permissible under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act. The likelihood of licensees submitting new or short, targeted, licences to cover work delayed due to Covid-19 was noted.

NVS's report

20/8 The PPL application discussed at the last meeting had been submitted and granted by the Home Office (HO). With the exception of one rat that had been humanely killed, from which it was still possible to obtain data, the NVS had no animal welfare issues to

report. Communication with the HO inspector had been taking place as usual.

Forced swim test

(Received paper AWERC/20/02)

- 20/9 The Committee considered a letter received from People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) about the use of the forced swim test (FST). The NVS apologized for the delay in bringing forward the paper that had originally been circulated for the meeting that had had to be cancelled in March, and reported that it had been a number of years since the test had been used at the University and that the issues surrounding the test had been discussed with scientists and the HO inspector.
- 20/10 In the course of a full discussion, various factors were discussed, including the input of funding bodies and the assessment of possible benefits. It was noted that other procedures could be equally or more stressful to animals. The Committee agreed that, whilst it could not justify a blanket prohibition on the use of the test, it would be especially rigorous in assessing any application involving the use of FST should any be submitted for consideration. The case would need to be exceptional for the Committee to be persuaded by any future application. Action: PEL holder to reply to PETA.

NACWOs' report

- 20/11 Environmental issues that had been quickly resolved were the only matters for report. None of these had resulted in any animal welfare issues.

Review of lessons learned from Covid-19 experience

(Received paper AWERC/20/03)

- 20/12 The document had been received as a structured and systematic challenge to facilitate review of processes. This was welcomed by the Committee. When the country went into lockdown the animal facilities had been part of the University's plan and actions taken had been included in the report to Council. The Committee was invited to pick out any issues to reflect on and for discussion.
- 20/13 The Committee considered that issues in relation to animal care and welfare had been well covered and there was agreement that the Committee had been kept well informed throughout. However, due to fear of a second wave being both daunting and difficult, it was felt that further attention might be given to staff working under difficult conditions. The Committee was told that staff had been dealing well with the pressures of additional Covid-19 measures. To maintain good communication amongst unit staff currently working in separate teams, the manager and NACWOs had agreed to hold regular staff meetings via Microsoft Teams to share information and provide support to staff. The Committee view was that good communication was essential and an update was requested for the next meeting. ACTION: NACWOs

University of Leeds Biomedical Services Committee report

- 20/14 The NVS reported that the only concern raised by researchers had been in relation

to the speed of granting access to the unit to re-start research work. Faculty management were prioritising research using a system where requests submitted, using a form developed for the purpose, were assessed against other requests. As part of this process the animal facilities were acting upon the decision of Faculty management to grant access to users.

- 20/15 The PEL holder advised that this was entirely consistent with the University's approach observing that it had taken longer than had been hoped to reopen buildings. Priorities had been to ensure water safety and to make buildings Covid-19 secure. The frustration of scientists was understood, particularly since social distancing had resulted in reduced capacity. However, this was considered to be consistent with what was happening elsewhere.

PPL applications

- 20/16 Comments on all three applications had been received from some members in advance of the meeting and these had been conveyed to the applicants.

Application A363

- 20/17 This was the second presentation to the Committee of an application originally considered to be too ambitious. In the presentation the applicant explained how the work would develop imaging techniques to replace the use of more invasive methods and address each of the 3Rs (reduction, refinement and replacement). The application had been amended for the use of mice and rats only and statistics provided were for proof of concept validation studies.
- 20/18 During discussion the Committee considered the fate of the animals; the use of tissues in other studies; the likely experience of the animals; and the ways in which information would be shared to further the 3Rs. It was noted that protocols would be developed for colleagues and that these would require having some flexibility in the licence. Due to this there was some concern that the application did not present adequate power calculations and the applicant was asked to consider a way to re-phrase the application to provide further information and give more clarity as to why it was not possible to be more specific. It was suggested that examples could be provided in an appendix to show how techniques would be developed for other researchers.
- 20/19 The Committee requested changes to the short lay paragraph to replace scientific terms and to make the information more accessible to a lay reader with a suggestion from the Chair as to how the information could be restructured.
- 20/20 It was agreed that some changes would be required and that the amended application should be circulated to commenters before submission to the HO.

Application A364

- 20/21 This was a new PPL application needed to complete work under a previous licence that had been delayed due to recent circumstances and was due to expire.

- 20/22 In discussions that followed a presentation from the applicant the Committee noted the significant reduction in animal numbers in the work done so far. Reductions had been due to the cumulative effect of minor adjustments to methods that were difficult to report. However, a reduction in endpoints had provided up to 85% of the required effect so this change alone was acknowledged as a significant refinement.
- 20/23 Suggested changes to the short lay paragraph included removal of some information, changing scientific terms and reversing the order of the points to discuss the clinical issue followed by the nature of the work to address this.
- 20/24 It was agreed that some changes would need to be made to the application and that with minor tweaks the Committee would be happy for this to be submitted to the HO. The changes should be resolved by circulation to commenters.
- 20/25 In view of the fact that the current licence was due to expire very soon it was agreed that the presentation and discussion with the licensee would satisfy the Committee's requirement to conduct a final review of the current licence.

Application A365

- 20/26 Following a presentation discussions focused on what would happen to the animals, the reasons for the licensee not having published previous work, which had been for intellectual property reasons, and peer review through the funding process. Statistics were considered to have been covered very well in the application.
- 20/27 Members felt that questions had been answered in the presentation. The applicant was asked to provide clearer detail, step by step, of what would actually happen to the animals. It was suggested that the most likely scenario should be included as well as details of the worst-case scenario that had already been provided. References in the text of the application should be listed to provide essential background and support to the application. There was some concern that the benefits had been overstated and the applicant was asked to review these to describe the effect and benefit of the animal model. The schedule for animal monitoring was also discussed and it was agreed that monitoring would be increased to take place 4 hourly during the first 24 hours when it was expected that the first signs of potentially severe adverse effects would occur.
- 20/28 It was suggested that a sentence should be added to the short lay paragraph to detail the steps taken to minimise the number of animals used in procedures and that it should be amended to remove technical jargon.
- 20/29 It was agreed that the amended application could be reviewed by correspondence with the people who had commented.

PPL mid-term review report

(Received paper AWERC/20/04)

- 20/30 Three outstanding mid-term reviews which had been postponed after the March

meeting had been considered by circulation to a sub-group of members. Comments indicated that there was no need for a meeting on this occasion. The Committee agreed to continue in the same manner to work through the backlog of outstanding reviews. The Named Information Officer (NIO) agreed to share membership of the group with the Chair. ACTION: NIO.

Schedule of Business

(Received AWERC/20/04)

20/31 The Schedule of business was received for information.

Date of next meeting

20/32 The next meeting would be held at 1000 on Wednesday 2 December via Microsoft Teams. Members were asked to provide their availability for proposed meeting dates in 2021.