

University of Leeds, Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Committee Minutes

28 July 2021

10 members of the Committee joined the meeting with one person in attendance.

Apologies

20/120 Apologies had been received from a member who was due to retire from the Committee. As this would have been their last meeting the Chair agreed to write to the member concerned to thank them for their considerable contribution. Discussion regarding the mechanisms for recruiting new members followed and it was agreed that the establishment licence (PEL) holder would consider invitations in the appropriate categories. In view of this, and the anticipated retirement of an academic member, members were asked to contact the administrator with suggestions of people who would be well placed to contribute to the work of the Committee. Action: All.

Minutes

20/121 The minutes of the meeting held on 15 June 2021 were received and approved.

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

(Received paper AWERC/20/28)

- 20/122 The PEL holder provided an update on the excess use of animals previously reported to the Committee (min 20/100). A meeting had been held with the project licence (PPL) holder and a collective response to pre-action letters received by the PEL holder, PPL holder and two personal licence (PIL) holders had been sent to the compliance manager. Whilst accepting the basic facts, issue had been taken with some points in the correspondence from the Home Office (HO). The PEL holder shared a few related points including a possible ambiguity in the PPL regarding what was or was not covered in relation to control animals which had been interpreted differently by the HO and the PPL holder; and the importance of the new IT system which would assist PPL holders in monitoring animal use in future. The final outcome was awaited and would be reported to the Committee.
- 20/123 Discussions that followed were concerned with the impact on the project; the likely impact on the University; delays experienced in the Animals in Science Regulation Unit (ASRU) investigation; lack of communication from the HO inspector prior to receipt of the letter from the ASRU Compliance team; and the roll-out of the IT system. The Committee was asked to note that, due to the gradual roll-out of the IT system, which had commenced in January 2021, this would only contain partial data for ongoing projects. Complete data would be held in the system for new PPLs granted during 2021 but animal use prior to a project team starting to use the system would still have to be taken into account by licensees. The responsibility for this remained with the PPL holders under licence standard conditions.
- 20/124 The NVS reported that two condition 18 reports for one project license had been submitted since the Committee's previous meeting. As a result of recent ASRU operational changes these reports were now submitted to the ASRU Compliance Team and were seen, and comments returned, by different inspectors. Both reports had been accepted by the Compliance Team as compliant with no further action required.
- 20/125 Redacted remained on sick leave and a further update was expected in August.

Named Animal Care and Welfare Officers' (NACWO) Report

(Received paper AWERC/20/29)

- 20/126 The NACWOs reported on a number of staffing challenges but were pleased to report that interviews for an advertised post were due to take place soon; agreed cover on one site would remain in place until September when the arrangement would be reviewed; and agreement for agency staff cover during a period of maternity leave had also been agreed. The Chair echoed thanks to the staff members concerned for providing support during this period.
- 20/127 Training for two remaining staff members to use the IT system was in-hand with training for PPL holders to be provided over the coming months. A member asked about the arrangements for non-regulated animal users to be given access to the system and was advised that, upon request from a principal investigator, unlicensed users could be trained quickly, added to an appropriate team in the system and given access once trained.
- 20/128 Following recent issues with a backup generator during a planned shutdown the NACWO was awaiting a response from Estates Services regarding arrangements for checks and preparation in anticipation of an incident. This issue was concerning but thankfully had not given rise to any animal welfare concern. The NACWO would report to the Committee once the Estates Services report had been received. ACTION: NACWO.
- 20/129 The contract for lighting management had been assigned to another company without the knowledge of the NACWO. The NACWO was seeking to establish whether the new provider had been made aware of the importance of providing a reliable 24-hour response to the animal facility. Concern that the unit had not been informed was expressed. Estates Services had been contacted and a response was awaited. The failure of communication should be raised with Estates Services. Action: NACWO to liaise with Estates Services and contact the PEL holder if problems are encountered.
- 20/130 Problems with cage station lights being left on had affected light cycles and caused problems for a researcher. A reminder had been sent to researchers to stress the importance of turning everything off when leaving an animal room.

ASRU new operating model

(Received papers AWERC/20/30 and AWERC/20/31)

- 20/131 Information regarding the ASRU changes had been sent to all licensees and other users, the changes were significant, but it was too soon to understand their full impact. The NVS/NTCO and NIO/HOLC were disappointed to lose direct contact with the HO inspector and single point of contact previously assigned to the University. The Committee was told that ASRU had taken a Q&A approach with questions to be handled by three central helplines which had been set up to separately triage regulatory, compliance and licensing queries. Factors behind the decision to introduce the changes had included a desire to separate compliance from advice and to develop consistency in responses to establishments. A number of concerns had been raised with ASRU during stakeholder meetings. Duplication within applications and the considerable length of project licences remained a significant issue. The NVS/NTCO and NIO/HOLC would continue to monitor the situation.

Draft Annual Report

- 20/132 Deferred. It was proposed that the report should be agreed by the PEL holder and Chair prior to Council in September. The possibility of having to report the outcome of the HO

investigation was noted and members wishing to see and comment on the draft report were asked to contact the PEL holder. Action: Chair, PEL holder and members.

Terms of Reference

(Received paper AWERC/20/33)

20/133 The Committee was advised that the terms of reference had been produced in line with the HO Guidance on the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act. A member suggested that one of the points should be strengthened to include lifelong learning and the Committee agreed that this wording should be reviewed and amended with the proviso that care should be taken not to set unrealistic targets. Action: Member concerned and administrator.

Project licence applications A372 and A373

20/134 Two applications were received to continue work on a recently expired project for which a short-term breeding and maintenance PPL, reviewed at the previous meeting, had already been granted. Following the presentation which outlined the proposed work and 3Rs improvements under the previous project, comments and questions were invited. Discussions included welfare scoring, humane endpoints, blood sampling limits, monitoring strategy for the more severe procedures and the scope of the licences with licensees to be allocated to different protocols.

20/135 The applicant was asked to make some minor editorial corrections where the plan of work and protocols did not correspond and to include details of additional guidance resources in the applications before submitting to the HO. An amendment to the breeding and maintenance licence would be submitted to match the animal requirements of the two new projects.

Project licence review for Retrospective Assessment S5B51

20/136 The Committee undertook a retrospective review, being told about achievements under the licence and acknowledged that a new PPL to continue the work had been considered and granted earlier in the year. Matters discussed in the review included the application of early interventions and refined end-points to prevent animals from reaching the moderate or severe limits permitted in the licence; the reduction of animals experiencing severe effects from the prospective 5% permitted to 2.1%; the use of alternatives when possible; refinement of welfare assessment sheets as indicated by the work with increased observations to catch adverse effects quickly; and efforts to minimise the number of animals used through pilot studies and by sharing tissues whenever possible.

20/137 The licensee was asked to refine one section of the review before submitting the final version to the HO.

Schedule of Business

(Received AWERC/20/27)

20/138 The Schedule of business was received for information.

Date of next meeting

20/139 The next meeting would be held on Tuesday 28 September at 1400 on Microsoft Teams.