

University of Leeds, Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Committee

Minutes 22 November 2021

Eight members of the Committee joined the meeting.

Minutes

21/29 The minutes of the meeting held on 28 September 2021 were received and approved.

Matters Arising

21/30 With regard to the applications considered at the last meeting the Named Veterinary Surgeon (NVS) advised that two had been granted and one was still in progress with the Home Office (HO). In each case comments of the Committee had been incorporated before the applications were submitted. Short lay paragraphs had been amended, returned then sent to the Communications Team before being finalized. It was agreed that in future these would be requested well in advance so that the Communications Team's input could be sought before circulation of the drafts to the Committee. In addition to the guidance on the form applicants should also be advised to refer to the RSPCA key points to cover in lay summaries guidance when writing for a lay readership. ACTION: Administrator.

Establishment Licence (PEL) holder and NVS's update

(Received paper AWERC/21/07)

21/31 The Chair observed that he would like papers to be circulated in advance of meetings in order that members should have time to read them. The members concerned apologised.

21/32 The PEL holder reported that the outstanding compliance incident was still the subject of correspondence between the HO compliance team and the PEL holder. It was hoped that a response would be received in time for the next meeting.

21/33 Work to prepare staff for routine inspection during 2022 was ongoing.

21/34 With regard to Standard Condition 18 (SC18) reports, the NVS advised that one report had been closed and resolved with responses to two SC18 reports, sent in early November, still being awaited.

Culture of Care

(Received paper AWERC/21/08)

21/35 A number of possible actions were included in the paper which the Committee would need to reflect on. A need to improve links between the researchers and the animal unit staff was recognized. Discussions included induction and training for researchers which include the culture of care; ways to put staff care needs into greater focus, particularly in the context of the recent resignation of the facilities manager; increased workloads since the units had reopened and since the new IT

system had been brought into use. The Chair observed that the culture of care for staff and a culture of care for animals needed to go hand-in-hand.

- 21/36 Arising from discussions it was agreed that regular seminars for animal care staff and researchers should be arranged in order to deliver presentations in both directions to foster communication, help to inform, and to identify where facility staff needed support. The importance of keeping seminars informal and accessible to unit staff was acknowledged, and it was suggested that these could be delivered through the use of short, virtual presentations to minimize disruption to other work. It was agreed that sessions should be offered jointly across both facilities once staffing levels had improved. ACTION: NACWOs to liaise with research colleagues via the user groups to arrange.
- 21/37 With regard to continuing education it was acknowledged that the annual Continuing Professional Development (CPD) sessions held in previous years had recently been halted due to the pandemic. It was agreed that the University should continue to offer at least one CPD workshop annually for researchers and animal care staff. ACTION: NVS and the member who had been involved in running previous CPD events.
- 21/38 The Committee considered it would be beneficial to have an independent process for “speaking up”, an important activity which should be available to all staff. The Committee was told that a process was already in place to escalate issues through the named persons, which worked well. Despite the process not being anonymous the NACWOs and NVS confirmed that individuals do “speak up” to them and that during training individuals were told that they were able to contact any named person directly, including the PEL holder, and/or to contact the Committee with any concerns. Discussions around this subject included consideration of an appropriate route for directing issues; the importance of presenting “speaking up” as a positive activity; and the risk of urgent matters being missed if an email account outside the normal reporting routes was implemented for use. Once a process had been established the importance of advertising it appropriately with guidelines regarding what could be reported was considered to be essential to be sure that people would be generally aware and then reminded at appropriate intervals. It would be very important to emphasise this as positive activity, enabling people to do things better, rather than “pointing a finger”, in order to encourage people to contribute. The PEL holder confirmed that a general whistleblowing process already existed and that anonymised reporting through that process would find its way to the PEL holder. The importance of having a mechanism that individuals would be comfortable with was acknowledged as was the importance of stressing to staff that concerns could still be raised with the NVS and NACWOs.
- 21/39 It was agreed that this particular proposal should be developed further, and an update provided for the next meeting. “Speaking up” would be added as a separate Agenda item. ACTION: PEL holder and NVS.

- 21/40 With regard to ways of connecting the Committee to researchers, suggestions included periodic newsletters and direct communication from the Committee to PPL holders. The establishment of an AWERC email was suggested so that communications from the Committee would stand out from those sent by the NVS and Named Information Officer (NIO).
- 21/41 Whilst the NACWOs regularly reported on staffing issues, it was agreed that a more systematic assessment by the Committee should take place twice a year to address the questions whether the current workload and levels of staffing in the units, were commensurate with a culture of care. ACTION: Administrator to amend the Schedule of Business and NACWOs to keep workload firmly in view in future reports.
- 21/42 The Chair felt that the paper had presented a very good list but stressed that each separate element would need to be properly resourced.

Named Animal Care and Welfare Officers' (NACWO) Report

(Received paper AWERC/21/09)

- 21/43 The facility manager had left the University on 27 October; an interim manager would be in place until April 2022 to allow time for a new manager to be appointed. On one site arrangements for two new technical staff appointments were in progress and the need to appoint someone with experience had been recognised. Possibilities for internal appointments were considered to be limited due to current staffing levels on both sites.
- 21/44 Training for two members of staff to use the IT system continued to be challenging and was becoming increasingly urgent. However, a high proportion of researchers were now using the system and two new staff members were learning well. The system had proved to be effective in flagging up maximum animal numbers and would provide greater assurance of control to prevent compliance issues.
- 21/45 On the other site one member of staff was on maternity leave and another member of staff was expected to be absent on long term sick leave. Agency staff cover had been put in place for the period of maternity leave and it was possible that further agency staff support would be sought. Remaining staff were facing additional pressures in providing weekend and holiday cover. This would have an impact on staff wellbeing so should be included as part of the culture of care considerations. Concerns that Faculty Management and Human Resources did not recognize all the issues, or their impact were expressed, and the Chair acknowledged that this was a classic management challenge: there needed to be a focus on the people who would face significantly increased workloads when colleagues were absent.
- 21/46 Environmental issues which staff were swiftly alerted to had been resolved

quickly with no effect on temperatures.

21/47 There had been no animal welfare issues to report.

ULBSC report

(Received paper AWERC/21/10)

21/48 The NVS had been asked to highlight the ongoing reduced throughput of work due to Covid which was being addressed by the unit senior staff and NACWOs. A NACWO reported that work on the conventional side of the facility had increased between 30 and 40% above pre-Covid levels.

Project licence (PPL) applications

A379

21/49 The NVS advised that the application was for continuation of work on an existing PPL. During a presentation the applicant advised on the choice of animals, with mice being the species of the lowest sentience suitable to mimic clinical situations; the use of imaging to reduce animal suffering and define early endpoints; and a review of literature and collaboration to inform the choice and design of experiments. Discussions concerned the need for flexibility in the dosing regimen with typical examples being included in the application and maximum limits being made clear in each of the protocols; naïve animals being used in treatment protocols were not to be transferred between protocols. Comments received from the Committee during discussion and from two members prior to the meeting would be incorporated in the draft and the revised application would be shared with commenters. The lay summary was considered to be good and clear.

A380

21/50 Following a presentation delivered by the applicant the committee discussed experimental design; weight loss limits under ASPA which would need to be amended in the application; the use of animals to serve as their own control; a need for greater clarity regarding the scope of the application to place the work in the context of the longer term aims. The applicant was asked to review the RSPCA key points to cover in lay summaries and re-write the short lay paragraph accordingly. The Comms team would be asked to review the final draft before publication. A lay member offered to send suggestions for amendment to the short lay paragraph to the applicant. Comments received from the Committee during discussion and prior to the meeting would be incorporated in the draft and the revised application would be shared with commenters.

Project licence review for Retrospective Assessment (RA)

S5B53

21/51 The Committee received an updated presentation outlining animal use and other information to the end of the project and noted that a full review had been completed earlier in the year when new applications had been submitted to the Committee for consideration. No concerns were raised regarding the RA form; the Committee was

happy with the presentation and the licensee would be asked to submit the final version to the HO.

Schedule of Business

(Received AWERC/21/11)

21/52 The Schedule of Business was received for information. Changes would be incorporated to add "Speaking up" and systematic assessment of staffing to the Schedule. ACTION: Administrator.

Other Business

21/53 With this being the last meeting that the PEL holder would attend before his retirement the Chair expressed his thanks, and those of members of the Committee, to the PEL holder for his leadership, help, guidance, support and wise counsel to the Committee under this and previous Chairs. The Chair would draft thanks to PEL holder to mark his service and support to the University and the Committee.

Date of next meeting

21/54 The next meeting would be held at 1400 on Monday 17 January 2022 on MS Teams.