

University of Leeds, Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Committee

Minutes 17 January 2022

Thirteen members of the Committee joined the meeting (one member for part of the meeting). A new member was welcomed, and introductions were made. The Committee was told that an application to appoint the new Establishment Licence (PEL) holder had been submitted to the Animals in Science Regulation Unit (ASRU) and that confirmation of the change was expected in due course.

Minutes

21/55 The minutes of the meeting held on 22 November 2021 were received and approved.

Matters Arising

21/56 Timelines were requested in relation to holding regular seminars for animal care staff and researchers (min 21/36) and CPD (min 21/37). A member advised that it should be possible to arrange a CPD workshop by April 2022. The Schedule of Business had been amended to include review of unit staffing, this would be amended again to schedule a systematic assessment twice a year (min 21/41). ACTION: NVS and NACWOs to provide an update regarding arrangements for seminars at the next meeting.

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

(Received paper AWERC/21/12)

21/57 The NVS advised that the compliance in incident reported in March 2021 was still outstanding with the ASRU compliance team. Since this report was submitted the Project Licence (PPL) holder had retired and one of the Personal Licence (PIL) holders had left the University. One condition 18 report, reported to the Committee in November, had been referred to the ASRU compliance team and that also remained unresolved. No condition 18 reports had been submitted to ASRU since the last meeting.

21/58 22 out of 47 returns of procedures had been submitted for current PPLs and those that had been terminated during 2021. Licensees had until 31 January to submit their returns and reminders of the deadline had been sent to the PPL holders concerned.

Communications to licensees

(Received paper AWERC/21/13)

21/59 The Committee asked to be included in circulations of important communications to licensees. The Named Information Officer and Home Office Liaison Contact (NIO/HOLC) agreed to liaise with the PEL holder's personal assistant to ensure that the Committee would be copied-in to relevant correspondence from the PEL holder. ACTION: NIO/HOLC.

21/60 The NVS advised that the information in the PEL holder's email to licensees had been preempted as a warning to the scientific community that an ASRU Audit

would take place and that any named persons, unit staff and licence holders could be interviewed during an audit. Although the actual arrangements were not yet known the research community had been advised that timing would be based on risk assessment. It was acknowledged that, due to recent referrals to the ASRU compliance team, it was uncertain how the University's risk profile had been affected. However, at the last review with the PEL holder the University had been classified as low-risk and was understood to be a very compliant community with all issues having been self-reported.

- 21/61 The Committee was advised that the ASRU change to the "bridging ways of working" had been introduced to realign their function as a regulator rather than an advisor to the animal research community. Additionally, the Committee was told that the scale of the audits had been totally underestimated by ASRU and that they had been lobbied by the sector regarding the changes.
- 21/62 The Committee reflected that in knowing what is likely to occur there should be no excuse for licensees and staff not being prepared. The Chair proposed that the named persons as well as the Committee should offer to assist in preparation for the Audit, wait for a date then send a message offering help.

Named Animal Care and Welfare Officers' (NACWO) Report

(Received paper AWERC/21/14)

- 21/63 The NACWOs reported that work to review and update Standard Operating Procedures (SoPs) and link them to Direct Observation of Practical/Procedural Skills (DOPS) training sheets had begun in preparation for the ASRU audit. This work had brought an ongoing IT issue into focus again, where staff at one site were unable to access the shared, secure, server which had been provided to unit staff on campus to facilitate the sharing of important resources including SoPs, DOPS, licences and other information. A member agreed to supply contact details for an IT contact who might be able to assist. The Committee recognized the importance of this matter being resolved and agreed that it was precisely the sort of issue that an audit might pick up.
- 21/64 Both sites were still experiencing staffing challenges and consequently were having to run slightly reduced services. It was hoped that the situation would improve as staff who were absent and isolating returned to work. The grade 4 technician post, included in previous reports, had been approved and would be advertised shortly.
- 21/65 Staff and user training for the tick@lab IT system was ongoing.
- 21/66 Following constructive discussions with the staff and researchers concerned agreement in principle had been reached regarding the transfer of post-operative animals between sites. No animals would be considered for transfer between sites until a NACWO had confirmed that there were no welfare concerns and that the animals would be well enough to undergo the move.

Animals would not be moved if welfare was likely to be compromised.

Membership

(Received paper AWERC/21/15)

21/67 Updated membership details were received for information. Some progress had been made by the PEL holder who had been considering continuity of membership of the Committee and conversations were ongoing. The Committee noted that AWERC membership should be included under the University's workload model because of the level of commitment needed. ACTION: NIO/HOLC to ask the PEL holder for an update.

Speaking up

(Received paper AWERC/21/16)

21/68 A speaking-up process had been in place for a very long time and this was publicised widely in each facility and well-used. Through this researchers and staff were able to raise issues quickly with any of the Named Persons for immediate action. As part of this reporting structure the NVS/NTCO and NIO/HOLC sit within an independent line management, outside the Faculties, which provides a route for people to speak to someone, in confidence, without necessarily having to go through their own line management. A University whistleblowing process is also available to be used when no other option exists, but this should be used only in situations when the normal process is not appropriate and with caution not to cross over boundaries of confidentiality.

21/69 During discussions it was proposed that the existing process should be endorsed by the Committee and shared with researchers across sites with an emphasis on the culture of care and asking people to speak up in that vein. The process should be amended and made available in the animal units to inform people that different routes were available for speaking up, from face-to-face communication to confidential emails. It was also suggested that the Committee could review what had been learned through cautious reporting.

21/70 It was proposed that a generic email should be established for the AWERC. However, existing generic emails were already used very effectively and there was a genuine concern about timelines since animal welfare concerns need to be directed quickly to the correct person and dealt with immediately. If an AWERC email account was to be set up it would need to be directed to someone, the NVS, for example, who would be able to triage communications and when necessary contact the AWERC to take forward any issues, as appropriate, on a person's behalf.

21/71 Actions included talking to researchers to establish what would be beneficial to them and to provide updated details of the process which would include AWERC involvement and the culture of care. Enquiries would also be made of effective speaking up processes in place at peer institutions. ACTION: NIO, NVS and PEL

holder.

21/72 Speaking-up should be included in the report to Council.

Project licence reviews for Retrospective Assessment (RA)

S5B54

21/73 The Committee received an updated presentation outlining animal use and other information to the end of the project, along with details of publications relating to the work. It was noted that a full review had been completed earlier in the year when a new application 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.

S5B54

21/74 The Committee was told that the PPL holder had retired from the University and there were no plans to apply for a new licence to continue the work done under the expired PPL. Following a presentation outlining animal use, severity of procedures and the 3Rs, along with details of publications relating to the work, presentations and CPD no concerns were raised regarding the RA form and the licensee would be asked to submit the final version to the HO.

Schedule of business

(Received AWERC/21/17)

21/75 The updated schedule of business was received for information. This would be amended to schedule a systematic review of unit staffing twice yearly as previously mentioned. ACTION: NIO/HOLC

Date of next meeting

21/76 The next meeting would be held at 1400 Monday 21 March 2022 on MS Teams.