

University of Leeds

Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Committee, Minutes of 29 March 2023

12 members attended the meeting with two people in attendance. Introductions were made and the Facilities Manager and NC3Rs funded student observer were welcomed to the meeting. Apologies were received from 3 members.

Minutes

22/74 The minutes of the meeting held on 25 January 2023 were received and approved.

Matters arising

22/75 (min 22/49) A University Workload Working Group was seeking to achieve greater consistency between faculties. The Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Committee (AWERC) workload would be fed into this Working Group. A few hours might contribute to citizenship allowance.

22/76 (min 22/50) The Chair had yet to receive an update from the member concerned regarding a statement for Research Ethics Committee chairs. This item would be brought forward.

22/77 (min 22/64) Application review sub-committees were being introduced to address the volume of new Project licence (PPL) applications. The first applicant was seeking to arrange a meeting in April with assistance of the NVS and HOLC. An email from the Establishment Licence (PEL) holder and Chair to PPL holders and Principal Investigators (PIs) to stress the expectation that PPL holders would accommodate meeting requests was being drafted. Short lay paragraphs would be circulated to the full Committee to keep members informed.

22/74 (min 22/65) Review of the process for PPL application evaluation would be added to the Schedule of Business in March 2024.

22/75 (min 22/67 & 22/70) Applications submitted and both awaiting a decision from the the Animals in Science Research Unit (ASRU).

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

(Received paper AWERC/22/17)

22/76 The outcome of two Standard Condition 18 (SC18) reports was still awaited.

22/77 New informal arrangements for discounted personal licensee training to be provided to University staff and students by a preferred commercial course provider were explained. The courses would include a local module on which the Facilities manager, NTCO and NIO had been liaising with the provider to develop. The impact of the additional training costs on grants was acknowledged as an issue and the PEL holder advised that training would be looked at systematically with the NVS in due course.

22/78 Animal welfare issues around one SC18 report had been picked up with a supplier.

Named Animal Care and Welfare Officers' (NACWO) Report

22/79 A leak from a heating pipe in the changing rooms had resulted in a complete loss of heating,

fortunately the repair took approximately an hour to complete and there was no impact on animal holding rooms.

- 22/80 A complete power shutdown of REDACTED was planned to take place over a weekend in April, a meeting had been held with engineers and plans were in place for a NACWO to be on site to check for issues, should any arise.
- 22/81 Animal use had remained lower than usual and this was thought to have been a direct impact of the ongoing uncertainty concerning the planned merger. During discussion the Committee noted that, despite the number of animals reported in the 2022 statistics having the appearance of animal research returning to normal levels, GA breeding had reduced considerably and this would account for the lower number of animals in the facilities.
- 22/82 Another point raised during discussion was the need for ongoing repairs to continue to be prioritised and addressed while a decision on the merger was awaited.

ULBSC Report

(Received paper AWERC/22/18)

- 22/83 Unit staffing levels had improved following recent recruitment and since the new manager had started in February the facilities were in a better position. However, the financial deficit for both sites had increased.
- 22/84 The report from external consultants REDACTED, had confirmed that it would be possible to clean the facility from pathogens and decontaminate. However, to reduce the chances of re-emergence of pathogens significant changes to working practices would be required. In addition, decontamination tasks would not be possible until the facility was emptied, which would impact on ongoing research activity. Furthermore, it was acknowledged that, should some work involving inflow and outflow of animals continue it was unlikely that an effective barrier could be maintained for any length of time. Significant quality control would be needed, as would rederivation of animals which, if done, would incur significant cost.
- 22/85 Four options had been outlined by the REDACTED, two of which (to do nothing or to build a new facility) had not been progressed. The two remaining options were the possibility of making improvements to the current facility or for realigning research within the existing facility provision. Although users' concerns had been conveyed to the REDACTE users remained uncertain whether these had been fully considered.
- 22/86 The Committee considered and discussed a number of factors in the report including concerns that, should a decision be taken to continue high health status work under the proposed arrangements, there was potential for animal welfare issues to arise due to the very different needs of users. The PEL holder confirmed that the changes could present issues, such as the need for an acceptance by researchers of the existence of certain pathogens, as experienced in other establishments, which would need to be addressed on several fronts (e.g. risk appetite, transparency of reporting in articles and any impact on research outcomes).
- 22/87 The REDACTED were involved with REDACTED and a detailed paper with recommendations would progress to the REDACTED for a final decision. The Committee was told that a paper

would be submitted to REDACTED within a few weeks and that several members of REDACTED were familiar with the requirements of ASPA.

- 22/88 As members of the REDACTED, the PEL holder and REDACTED would be involved in the decision making. Animal welfare would be paramount as would ensuring that any housing and use of animals would be done with the right facilities, and care and that all risks would be considered. Due to the planned changes the PEL holder had sought assurance that the REDACTED and REDACTED had been exercising diligence when signing proformas to confirm that resources and facilities would be available for the duration of a licence. One positive had been that the information provided by researchers in response to questions from the REDACTED had contributed valuable information regarding legal and regulatory requirements and animal welfare needs.

Arrangements for PPL mid-term reviews

- 22/89 The Committee agreed to a process for mid-term review where these would be circulated electronically to the full Committee for comment with a deadline for responses. Should any concerns be found, these could be brought to the next meeting. Reviews of PPLs with severe protocols would be brought to the full committee for consideration. The importance of having succinct and focussed information was agreed and the form for review would be adapted accordingly. Two members agreed to assist with review of the form. ACTION: NIO, NVS and two academic members.

Annual Statistical Report

(Received paper AWERC/22/19)

- 22/90 The report was received for information. The Committee was asked to note that animal use numbers were returning to pre-Covid levels and that 74% of all regulated procedures undertaken at the University had been reported as being within the sub-threshold and mild categories with only 2% being reported as severe. This was in line with previous years and with UK statistics.
- 22/91 With cancer research, often requiring the use of immunocompromised high health status animals, accounting for 15% of animal research at the University, members felt that this should be something to bring to the attention of the REDACTED.

Project licence Amendments

C300

- 22/92 The applicant's presentation described the amendment to the licence concerning the study of how insulin affects the brain and the possibility for targeting the brain without the need to perform surgery. Refinements under the existing project had included minimising controls, refining procedures to improve recovery, surgical care and to avoid side effects. Several factors around the amendment were discussed including conditioning animals to avoid anaesthesia where possible; a suggestion to use additional environmental enrichment to occupy animals after surgery and the measures taken to increase space and comfort of the animals. The applicant was asked to add references to use of the method in other species to the amendment; to include overall long-term benefits; and to include continued use in case animals had to be sourced in the UK having been bred under another PPL. With these additions the Committee was content for the amendment to be submitted to ASRU.

C301

- 22/93 The licensee invited the PI, a REDACTED, to deliver the presentation and describe the amendment

which would address a missed opportunity in human cancer treatment. Therapeutic delivery devices, currently being tested by collaborators in a sub cutaneous model, would be taken forward as proof of concept for this model, then when tested and scaled down the proposal would be to conduct brain tumour studies. It was suggested that intracranial implantation and the anticipated percentage risk of sudden death should be added to the protocol. Aspects discussed included the researcher's commitment to monitoring; refining techniques and scheduling operations early in the day to maximise monitoring of animals during recovery; and the alleviation of symptoms. The severity limit accounted for the complexity of the procedure and would reflect the experience of a human patient. The NACWO confirmed that the welfare of animals under the licence had been excellent with highly committed staff involved in the project. The Committee acknowledged the value of the research and how its translation to a clinical setting had considerable potential to improve treatment and outcomes for patients.

Schedule of business

(Received AWERC/22/20)

22/94 The Schedule of business was received for information. The review of training would be added to the Schedule for 2024 along with review of environmental enrichment for the next meeting.

ACTION: NIO

External meetings

22/95 Since the last meeting a member of technical staff had attended the Institute of Animal Technology Congress in March.

22/96 Forthcoming meetings included the Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Body Northern Hub meeting on 30 March, the Laboratory Animal Science Association (LASA) Home Office Liaison, Training and Information Forum meetings with ASRU on 8 May, 10 July and 9 October which the NVS and NIO would expect to attend if available; a LASA Establishment Licence Holders' Forum meeting to be scheduled in October; and the LASA Annual Conference from 21 to 23 November.

22/97 Following a brief discussion of meetings relevant to members, including AWERB Hub meetings and the RSPCA Lay Members' Forum for example, members were encouraged to attend when items to be discussed were of specific interest and subject to availability. New lay members would benefit from attending the RSPCA Lay Members' forum.

Other business

22/98 Due to the retirement from the Committee of two members in September 2023 new members would be sought. A PPL holder would be sought to fill the upcoming PPL holder vacancy and the Facilities Manager agreed to discuss options for a new student member with colleagues and bring proposals to the next meeting. ACTION: Facilities Manager, NACWO and student member.

Date of next meeting

22/99 The next meeting would take place on Tuesday 23 May from 1500 – 1700 via MS Teams.