

**Animals in Science Committee and Animal Welfare and
Ethical Review Body Hub Chairs Workshop**

21 October 2020

Workshop Report

This report is not intended to be, and should not be interpreted as, a policy statement or a work plan. The Hub Chairs workshop was convened and held under the aegis of the ASC's AWERB Subgroup. The views summarised in this report are those expressed by attendees of the workshop, and do not necessarily represent the views of the ASC.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The sixth Animals in Science Committee (ASC) and Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Body (AWERB) Hubs Workshop was convened on 21st October 2020 via a virtual platform.
- 1.2. The aim of the day was to enable attendees to share and discuss key aspects of Culture of Care, Non-technical summaries and the Harm-Benefit Analysis: Recommendations for AWERBs.
- 1.3. Workshop attendees included the Chairs of regional UK AWERB Hubs, or their nominated representatives, lay members of the regional UK AWERB Hubs, members of the ASC AWERB Subgroup, and presenters. The workshop was chaired by Dr Sally Robinson. The agenda for the day can be found at Annex A.
- 1.4. This report sets out the key points and findings from the day. Presentations provided at the workshop will be made available to attendees to share with their AWERBs.

2. Culture of Care

- 2.1. The ASC AWERB Subgroup collaborated with Penny Hawkins from the RSPCA to provide attendees with guidance and resources to assess the effectiveness of their establishments' culture of care initiatives.
- 2.2. The session provided attendees with an opportunity to discuss ideas on the key elements that constitute a good culture of care, how to promote this within their establishments and also to feedback on any problems they encounter. This report summarises the ideas of the attendees.

What is your own AWERB doing to promote a Culture of Care?

- Engaging with staff – Through exercises using virtual whiteboard to collect ideas during meetings and presentations from staff with different roles within an establishment, such as Named Animal Care & Welfare Officers, animal care staff, scientists. These provide an opportunity for the staff to relay different perspectives on topics such as dynamics of the AWERB meetings.
- Openness and Transparency- Holding open AWERB meetings and finding ways to ensure all voices are heard: e.g. a Culture of Care Subgroup with an open invitation. Providing tours of animal facilities by non-animal care staff with discussion of culture of care and effective interaction with the 3Rs and published AWERB minutes on website can assist in keeping members engaged.
- Creating material – Providing information through use of workshops to get input from different staff departments and using the feedback to develop leaflets, posters and a Culture of Care pledge.

- Engaging with patients - They are already often informing research and can play an important role in conveying culture of care more widely and also provide feedback about what a good culture of care is from a public perspective.

What is the AWERB Chair's role?

- Attendees considered the Chair's role to be wide ranging: from developing the function of the AWERB in its approach to new tasks and responsibilities, to ensuring that the Culture of Care stays on the wider establishment agenda. Whilst also including:
 - Ensuring appropriate finances are released to support appropriate staffing levels and maintain facilities.
 - Ensuring all voices are heard through use of different tools giving opportunity for anonymous feedback (e.g. anonymous surveys, Padlet).
 - Bridging Institutional governance and to keep the committee full and motivated.

What can Hubs do to help AWERBs in their region promote a Culture of Care more effectively?

- Sharing good practice – This can also include the confidential sharing of issues that have arisen and how they were dealt with. Other options considered were: shared e-mail where ideas can be sent and advice sought between meetings, and the potential opportunity to attend other AWERB meetings.
- Caring for staff as well as animals - Meetings could include talks about health and wellbeing, as well as potential emotional dissonance that may be experienced by animal technologists.
- Regular Hub meetings with other Hub contributing participants. This would facilitate wider conversation on the broader issues related to promoting a Culture of Care.

Can you identify any obstacles, and how these might be overcome?

- Attendees reported that issues arise for AWERBs in many areas. These include, but are not limited to:
 - Lay member access to up-to-date versions of the documents for AWERBs, especially when not a member of the establishment.
 - AWERBs with science focused skill-sets who struggle in recruiting lay members.
 - Lack of support for 'Culture of Care' needs from upper management in larger establishments.
 - Time to discuss other topics can be limited due to the AWERB's agenda focusing on project reviews.

- Restructuring the application review process, where possible to allow for pre-review and providing key points for examination and discussion could save AWERBs time on project reviews.

What are you going to do?

- Put Scientist/AWERB engagement exercises on the AWERB agenda
- Have Culture of Care as a subject for 2021-22 meeting of the Hub and local AWERB team.
- Host a health and wellbeing of staff Culture of Care subgroup meeting.
- Consider ways to feed Culture of Care into general aspects of staff welfare across the whole organisation
- Have Culture of Care as a main focus for next Hub meeting.
- Use the Establishment Licence Holders' forum to ensure Licence holders are onboard with promoting Culture of Care.
- Take the outcomes of this session to the AWERB and HUB to make them more aware of progress and direction in this area.

3. Non-technical summaries

3.1. The quality of non-technical summaries (NTSs) had been discussed by the ASC over several years. The Committee's aim is to provide advice and resources to assist AWERBs in improving the overall standard of non-technical summaries.

NTS Readability

3.2. Dr Virginia Warren from the ASC provided the attendees with a workbook ahead of the workshop. This workbook focused on text readability and provided examples of readability scores for randomly selected NTSs from the Home Office website. This scoring was carried out using the Gunning Fog index readability scoring tool, with the selected examples all having a readability score higher than the recommended reading level for NTSs.

3.3. Dr Warren talked through the workbook with the attendees and requested their thoughts and feedback on the potential for AWERBs to use readability scoring to improve NTSs.

3.4. Attendees found the session informative and provided the following thoughts;

3.4.1. It was agreed that the amount of jargon used in NTSs should be reduced. While useful, the Gunning fog index would not pick up on shorter jargon as it is based upon sentence and word length.

3.4.2. Attendees noted that a main concern arose with how the NTS is now constructed from the application form in the new ASPeL system. The NTS is now automatically generated from the application form, as such it now includes a lot of technical information that would not otherwise be there.

This was also affected by the NTS and Licence editing function being linked: It was not possible to edit one without affecting the other.

3.4.3. Other attendees' suggestions to address NTS readability included:

- The NTS being written with input from a non-technical person.

3.4.4. It was also suggested that scientists were underestimating how much technical language is off-putting to other scientists as well: e.g. in grant applications. Less jargon in the entire application would provide a better structure.

NTS Recommendations

3.5. Dr Donald Bruce provided a presentation on issues identified by the ASC as a result of their work in the Licence Review report, recently published on the ASC website (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/licence-analysis-review-report-by-the-animals-in-science-committee>). His presentation highlighted recommendations from the report and opened the discussion to the attendees for their thoughts:

Can your AWERB set up a process whereby the applicant engages with a lay member/non-technical person before the licence is submitted to the AWERB to give time to ensure it is adequately written in non-technical language?

Suggestions to address this included:

- Pre-AWERB meetings where a Scientist, Vet and Lay person review the licence application.
- Retrospective meeting of Lay member and Scientist.
- Dedicated group of Lay members to review the NTS with the applicant after the AWERB meeting.
- Animal technicians at junior technical level to review an NTS before it goes to the AWERB.

Can we get our institutions to recognise the importance of NTS?

Suggestions to address this included:

- Establishments publishing NTSs on their websites could incentivise applicants.
- As part of Culture of Care scientists could be asked to present their NTS to a wider 'lay' audience within the faculty/department at open meetings. A good NTS is also relevant to the 'openness outside the establishment' component of the Culture of Care.

How can we better phrase the question in the form so the applicant describes in non-technical language what their experiments will be?

Suggestions to address this included:

- Applicants should answer the following questions in their NTS:
 - What are you trying to find out?
 - Why is it important?
 - What do you need to do to animals to find the answers to your questions?
 - How will you mitigate the potential harms to the animals?

Have the new ASPeL questions improved the application's section on harms?

- If the applicant engages properly with the questions, then yes.
- The questions have been tricky for applicants where sometimes they may downplay harms or avoid answering the question directly, as if answering in full may hinder approval of their application.

What is the optimum level of harms description for these project summaries?

- The cumulative harm to the anima/s should be included in the description basis.

What type of transparency culture is in your establishment?

Attendees felt that:

- Staff are generally open and signed up to the Concordat on Openness.
- Researchers are made aware of ongoing animal rights situations to support continued openness.
- PETA challenging models in the correct way and within the law has been positive towards transparency and openness.
- Openness is best – redacted AWERB minutes, videos posted on establishment websites and the benefits explained in lay terms whilst also engaging with the student population.

4. Harm Benefit Analysis

4.1. At the 2019 AWERB Hub workshop the ASC presented their report 'Review of harm-benefit analysis in the use of animals in research' (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/harm-benefit-analysis-review-animals-in-science-committee-report>). As part of their work in 2020, the ASC had produced a condensed version, specifically aimed at summarising the recommendations from this report aimed at AWERBs and providing guidance to help AWERBs when carrying out their local harm-benefit assessment.

4.2. Professor Gail Davies gave a presentation 'Harm-Benefit Analysis: key issues for AWERBs'. This outlined the process used by the ASC to produce the report for AWERBs.

4.3. Professor Clare Stanford then provided attendees with an overview of the report for AWERBs, specifically a summary of the five sections where AWERBs can support implementation:

- Assessing harms experienced by animals
- Monitoring and minimising harms experienced by animals
- Assessing benefits of the programme of research
- Weighing harms versus benefits
- Societal concerns.

4.4. Following Prof. Stanford's presentation, the workshop attendees were invited to discuss and respond to the following two questions:

What sources of information and expertise does your AWERB currently use to inform your discussion of project harms and benefits? What reviews, reports, websites or other resources have you found helpful?

Suggestions made:

- Books and training materials for NHS Clinical Research Ethics Committees.
- Concurrent literature on harms and on harm mitigation: e.g. NC3Rs resources.
- Ongoing monitoring of harm/benefit to prevent protocols being approved based only on precedent.
- Encouraging the articulation of assumptions about what an establishment considers acceptable or unacceptable.
- Record keeping – as often the benefits and the harms are based on past experiences and local learning.

What do you think will help you bring more information and expertise to your AWERB discussion of project harms and benefits? How do these differ at different stages of the project? What tips do you have for including societal concerns?

Suggestions made:

- External experts can bring more to institutions' Harm-Benefit Analysis.
- Requesting applicants pre-submit their project plan to AWERB before the funding application to ensure applicants put weight behind the AWERB's HBA.

Obstacles identified:

- Difficulties arise when multiple 'minor' amendments are made that, cumulatively, change a project and its HBA.
- Some Institutions believe that the AWERB is responsible to the institution rather than being an independent body.

- Although non-prescriptive or voluntary processes can be beneficial, it can be difficult for AWERBs to balance these whilst trying hard to apply 3Rs and using HBA as a tool to pressure for change.

5. Next Steps

- A note summarising the workshop discussion would be forwarded to Hubs and the presentations and Padlet exercises would also be added to the Knowledge Hub library.
- A feedback questionnaire to be circulated to attendees.
- More generally, the ASC AWERB Subgroup would reflect on the issues raised during the meeting and how to address these, updating the AWERBs in due course.