

AWERB Hub support note

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Animals in Science Committee

Authored by the AWERB Subgroup

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Abbreviations

AAALAC	Association for Assessment and Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care
ASC	Animals in Science Committee
A(SP)A	Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act
ASRU	Animals in Science Regulation Unit
AWERB	Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Body
IAT	Institute of Animal Technology
LASA	Laboratory Animal Science Association
LAVA	Laboratory Animals Veterinary Association
NACWO	Named Animal Care and Welfare Officer
NC3Rs	National Centre for the Replacement, Refinement & Reduction of Animals in Research
NIO	Named Information Officer
RSPCA	Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
UAR	Understanding Animal Research
UFAW	Universities Federation for Animal Welfare

1.0 Foreword

One of the principal roles of the Animals in Science Committee (ASC) under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act [A(SP)A] is to advise, promote and share good practice among the Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Bodies (AWERBs) throughout the UK.

A key part of fulfilling this mandate has been to set up a national AWERB network, based around regional 'Hub' AWERBs. This stemmed specifically from a workshop in November 2014 at which many AWERB chairs expressed the need for improved means to communicate and share good practice among the AWERBs, and between AWERBs and the ASC.

The Hub Network went 'live' in mid-2017 and, four years on, it is a good time to reflect on progress and to update this Support Note, that was published to coincide with the launch, in the light of feedback and experience to date.

I am grateful to all the organisations that have taken a lead in this project, acting as the regional Hubs connecting the UK's 150+ AWERBs. Membership of each region reflects the wide diversity of AWERBs and their establishments. The hubs have enabled new links to be created between sectors (academia and industry) and establishments of different sizes and with differing areas of regulated work, experiences and needs. The regional model that we originally proposed has been successful, albeit with some realignments as the network settled in. Hubs are working in different ways, appropriate to their membership and regions. We can already say that the first years of the network have created opportunities to improve animal welfare, the effectiveness and rigour of ethical review, the uptake of 'replacement, reduction and refinement' (3Rs) methodologies and the 'Culture of Care' locally, regionally and nationally.

The ASC seeks to facilitate good practice, and to support the activities of the Hubs, without directing them. I am grateful to the ASC's AWERB Subgroup and the Secretariat for their work in creating a Newsletter for the Hub Network; hosting annual workshops for the Hub Chairs and a regional roadshow for representatives of AWERBs around the country and setting up the online Knowledge Hub to enable

ongoing communication between AWERBs.

This support note is written for guidance to the chairs of both Hub AWERBs and the AWERBs in their region. It is intended to be a living document, initiated by the ASC, but shaped and refreshed by input from the Hubs and from member AWERBs. I would like to thank you for all your efforts to date and look forward to your continued collaboration and input in this important initiative for enhancing the effectiveness of our AWERBs.

Yours sincerely

Professor David Main
Chair of the Animals in Science Committee

2.0 Vision and Objectives

2.1 Vision

The ASC's vision for the Hubs is to facilitate a network of AWERBs working together to provide mutual support, effective communications and opportunities for dynamic discussion and information sharing, to help ensure that all AWERBs add value, fulfil all their tasks and are adequately empowered and integrated into their respective organisations. While the ASC facilitated the development of the Hub network in its initial phases, we are pleased that it is gradually becoming more self-sustaining. The Committee expects to progress towards an oversight role, providing appropriate guidance and information as necessary.

2.2 Objectives

The ASC is not looking for a rigid uniformity with respect to the way in which AWERBs approach their tasks and make their decisions. We recognise that each AWERB should define, develop and reflect its own establishment Culture of Care, applying local values and perspectives to each of its functions. Our desire is that a consistency is achieved among establishments in terms of the importance attached to such central factors as promoting a Culture of Care and the 3Rs, recognising the importance of the role of lay members and technicians and of non-technical project summaries.

3.0 Current status of the AWERB Hub Network

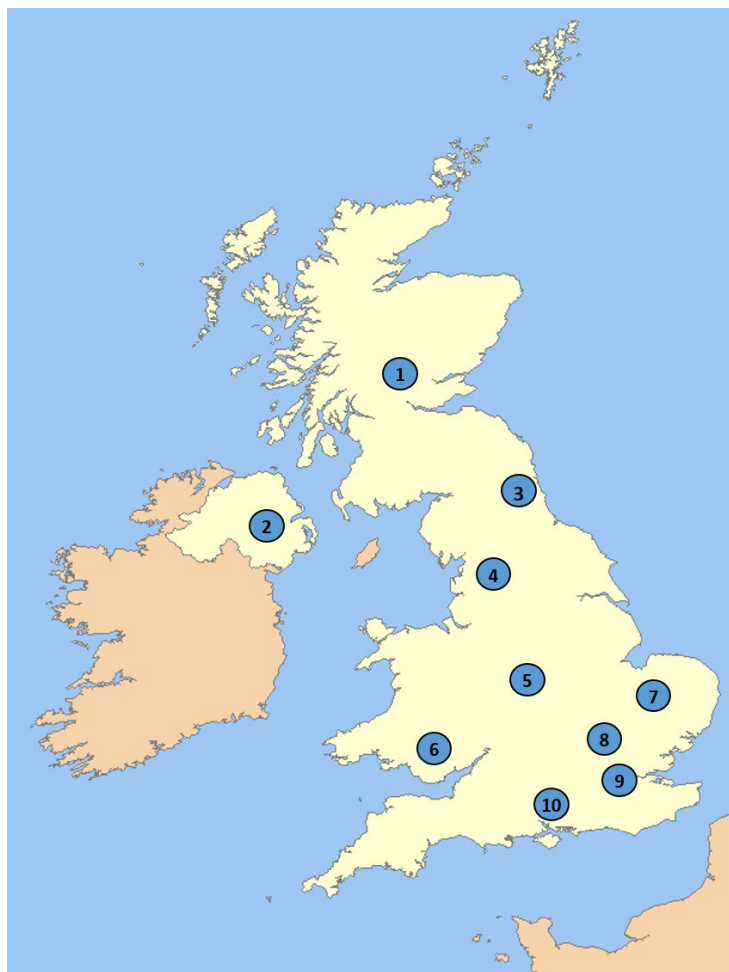
3.1 Current regional Hubs

The ASC considered two possible ways to develop a network. One was to connect AWERBs belonging to similar organisations or pursuing similar lines of work. The other was to group within geographic regions. The regional option was chosen for two reasons. One was to make it easier to arrange meetings and minimise long distance travel. The other was because grouping different establishment types was viewed as an effective way to achieve cross-fertilisation of ideas and approaches for running AWERBs, improving the licence review process, implementing the 3Rs, and ensuring robust ethical review. For example, AWERBs operating within academia and industry can find it helpful to discuss approaches to obtaining support from senior management. Establishments using the same species in different contexts can benefit from sharing good practice. Insights and viewpoints from establishments using different species can often prompt innovative ways of thinking about refinement.

The Hub network has largely retained the original regional model, although some changes have taken place since 2017. These are reflected in Figure 1, below.

There are currently ten AWERB Hubs, most of which have been meeting once or twice per year.

Figure 1: Geographical spread of AWERB Hubs.



1. Scotland
2. Northern Ireland
3. North East
4. North West
5. Central
6. Wales, West and South West
7. East Anglia
8. Home Counties North West & Middlesex
9. London
10. South East

3.2 Sharing Good Practice

The sharing of good practice has a vital role in supporting improvement in the way AWERBs fulfil their functions, particularly in challenging circumstances such as the Covid-19 pandemic. The ASC and AWERB Hubs have worked on multiple mechanisms to share good practice in an accessible way and these are listed in Annex A. Examples include the Annual Workshops for AWERB Chairs and Hub Chairs, regular newsletters, the Knowledge Hub, and regional roadshows. Hubs have also organised training sessions and 'exchanges' between AWERBs.

The Covid-19 restrictions have led to largely on-line meetings, with both pros and cons. These have the obvious disadvantage of not meeting face-to-face but have prompted much easier participation from some of the more widely dispersed regions such as Scotland. The use of more frequent and shorter on-line or hybrid meetings, perhaps focused on a single topic, could be a useful general pattern for hubs post-Covid.

3.3 Hub Tenure

The original concept was to set the tenure of the AWERB acting as host at three years, after which it could be reviewed, and a different establishment might take over as the host. It is for the AWERBs in the Hub to agree which of them is best placed to act as host and to discuss any transition processes. Some have already changed host by mutual agreement. Different models have also emerged with some using rotating hosts. The Hub should inform the ASC Secretariat, which maintains a list of Hub responsibilities and membership, of the change of responsibilities. The same process should be followed if a Hub wishes to relinquish its responsibilities during its tenure. It is important that the ASC Secretariat can keep the details of the Hub network up to date so that invitations to workshops and meetings can be sent to the correct people and information can be circulated in a timely fashion.

4.0 Roles

4.1 Hubs' role in the Hub Network Current

Hubs will aim to:

- Set up and support a network for exchanging information between the partner AWERBs in their region (examples of information exchanges are given in Annex A)
- Identify training needs for AWERB members, share induction and training materials and frameworks, facilitate peer-to-peer learning, identify opportunities for joint training and support networks
- Proactively share good practice with their partner AWERBs and with the ASC, recognising the different approaches of AWERBs within the Hubs. Each Hub is paired with an ASC member contact to facilitate information exchange
- Hold a meeting for all their partner AWERBs at least annually, inviting their nominated ASC member
- Convene or initiate regional, *ad hoc* themed workshops for their partner AWERBs, with topics relevant to all within the region, also inviting their nominated ASC member
- Encourage AWERBs in their region to hold joint meetings and offer reciprocal visits between members of different AWERBs in the Hub Network
- Encourage AWERB delegates to attend Hub workshops and other relevant events arranged by the ASC
- Disseminate information from Hub meetings back into local AWERBs in order to maximise the sharing of good practice.
- Hub Chairs can take the opportunity that the Network provides to raise issues with the ASC, on matters relevant to AWERBs. They can also disseminate information and communications passed forward by the ASC and respond to questions raised by the ASC, liaising with and gathering the opinions of partner AWERBs as well as reviewing and providing suggested updates to the AWERB Hub Support Note.

4.2 ASC role in the Hub Network:

- Convenes an annual workshop of AWERB Hub chairs/nominees
- Produces regular newsletters for onward circulation and provides an e-mail address for direct communication between the Hub chairs and ASC.
- Created the Knowledge Hub, as an online resource for all AWERB members
- Brings new information to the attention of AWERB Hubs;
- Assists the development and championing of good practice to promote:
 - the concept of a good Culture of Care for establishments, Animals in Science Regulation Unit (ASRU), ASC and stakeholder organisations; e.g. LASA, LAVA, RSPCA, UFAW, IAT
 - improved engagement with senior management;
 - suitable and sufficient ongoing engagement with senior stakeholders
 - the active involvement of lay members in the work of AWERBs.

4.3. Relationship between the Hub Network and other organisations working in this area

The regional AWERB Hubs run in parallel with the valuable work of many other relevant organisations. These include the Laboratory Animal Science Association (LASA), Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA), Laboratory Animals Veterinary Association (LAVA), National Centre for the Replacement, Refinement & Reduction of Animals in Research (NC3Rs), Association for Assessment and Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care (AAALAC), the Institute of Animal Technology (IAT) and Understanding Animal Research (UAR). All of these have links to stakeholders, including specific groups and specialists, that are also involved in providing advice and support in an extended Culture of Care.

The AWERB Hub network is a different entity from the AWERB-UK initiative. The latter is co-ordinated by the RSPCA, LASA, LAVA and the IAT and brings together bodies involved in AWERB-related activities (such as providing training opportunities for members). Such activities are not within the remit of the ASC, which is tasked with ensuring the diffusion of 'best practice' between the AWERBs themselves.

5.0 Sources of further information:

The role of the AWERB under A(SP)A

- The roles of an AWERB are laid out in the Guidance on the Operation of A(SP)A (Section 10) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/operation-of-aspa>

Guiding principles on good practice for AWERBs

- Further information on the role of the AWERB in licence application review; experimental design; providing a discussion forum; retrospective assessment; and fostering a Culture of Care, as well as good chairmanship, is available in this document:
http://www.lasa.co.uk/PDF/AWERB_Guiding_Principles_2015_final.pdf

European Commission guidance on Animal Welfare Bodies and National Committees

- The European Commission working document on Animal Welfare Bodies and National Committees to fulfil the requirements under the Directive is also helpful:
http://ec.europa.eu/environment/chemicals/lab_animals/pdf/endorsed_awb-nc.pdf

In addition to these sources of information, the Hub Newsletter includes links to further resources for AWERBs and highlights new resources as they are launched.

Examples of success in sharing good practice

Organised by Hubs:

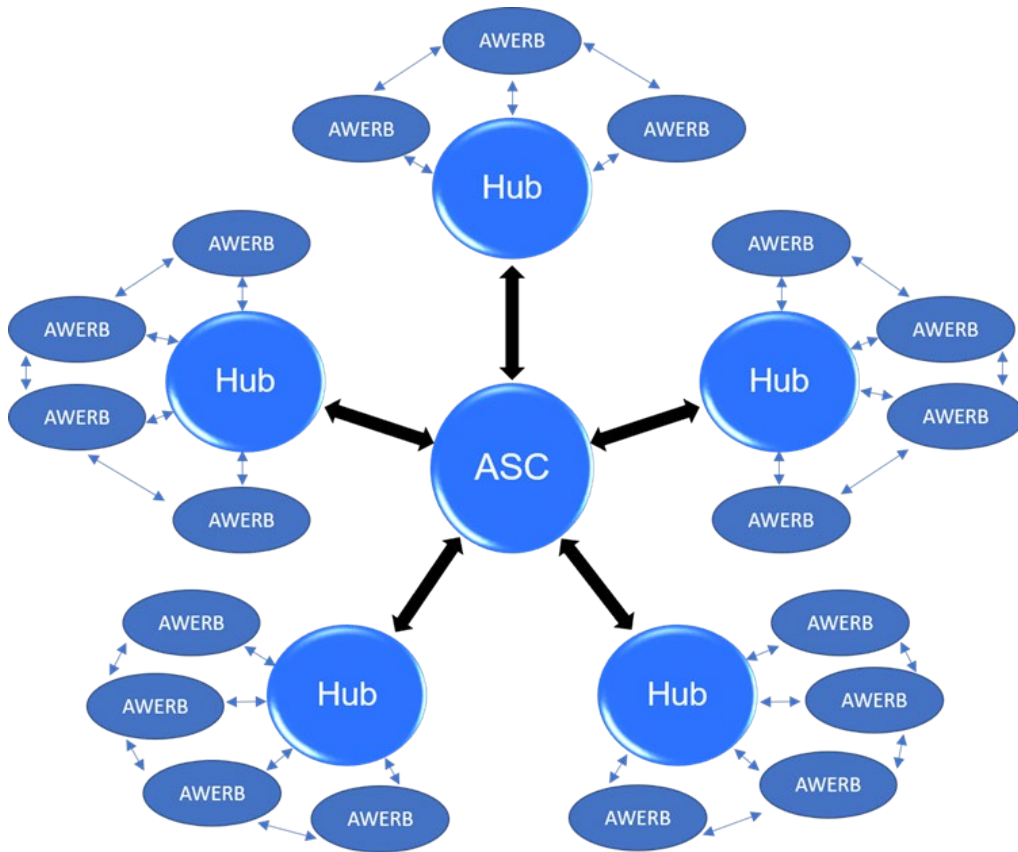
- The London Hub organised a training workshop on key principles of experimental design and statistical analysis of the results. This was aimed particularly at AWERB members who are not normally offered formal training on these topics (e.g. lay members and NACWOs)
- The Northern Ireland Hub organises an annual training session open to all licence-holders. This focuses on maintaining and updating awareness of regulations and severity assessment.
- The East Midlands Hub created and shared a document: 'Scientists and Animals Abroad'. This straddled the regulated and non-regulated contexts, setting out practical expectations for the conditions and protections that animals would experience in various countries. It also shared ways of gathering and recording information about animals being transported into and exported from the UK, and those being worked on by establishment scientists in other countries.
- The North West Hub has organised various methods of sharing good practice, including a joint 3Rs poster event; sharing of refinements such as approaches to implementation of single needle use; approaches to openness, and approaches to managing facilities during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The Home counties NW & Middlesex Hub held a meeting covering the harm benefit analysis, study design, ethics and several perspectives on the use of wild and zoo animals in research.
- The South East Hub has held three annual meetings focusing on Culture of Care, the 3Rs and ethics with multiple external speakers. It has also

organised a facility tour for Hub members to experience the housing and care of salamanders used in research.

Organised by the ASC AWERB Subgroup:

- Regional roadshows – meetings for Hub Chairs and AWERB members to discuss topics such as writing good non-technical summaries, ethics in practice, managing mouse colonies and the harm benefit analysis.
- Hub Chairs' workshops – annual meetings, allowing Hub Chairs to share their experiences, discuss areas of mutual interest and hear from the ASC AWERB Subgroup about latest developments.
- Knowledge Hub – an online member-only resource which acts as a repository for documents and allows for communication between AWERB members.
- Newsletters – keeping Hub Chairs up to date on developments. These are intended for onward distribution to Hub members.

Figure 2: Schematic illustrating the interactions between AWERBs, Hubs and ASC.



Annex C

Table 1: ASC member/ Hub Pairing.

It is the intention of the ASC to have an individual member of the ASC AWERB subgroup assigned to each Hub as a means of enhancing two-way communication and consolidating the relationship between the ASC and the AWERB Hubs.

This table provides an overview of the pairing arrangements.

Region/ Hub	ASC AWERB SG member
Northern Ireland	Wendy Jarrett
North East	Sally Robinson
North West England	Sally Robinson
Scotland	Donald Bruce
Central	Sally Robinson
East Anglia	Gin Warren
London	Wendy Jarrett
South East	Clare Stanford
Wales, West and South West	Sally Robinson
Home Counties North West & Middlesex	Clare Stanford