

# **Animals in Science Committee**

## **Minutes of the 32nd meeting: 13 September 2021**

### **1. Welcome, introductions and conflicts of interest**

- 1.1. The Chair welcomed attendees to the thirty-second meeting of the Animals in Science Committee (ASC), which took place via video conference.
- 1.2. Apologies were received from Stephen May who would not join today's meeting, and Clare Stanford, who would join the meeting late. The Animals in Science Regulation Unit (ASRU) representatives were not in attendance. The list of attendees is attached at Annex A.

### **2. Minutes and actions from the previous ASC meeting**

- 2.1. Minutes from the previous meeting were with the ASRU to review their contributions and would be circulated to members for comments as soon as possible.
- 2.2. The Chair provided a brief verbal update on the following actions:
  - 2.2.1. ASRU to request that the Government Digital Services include an ASC member in its review panel.
    - i. ASRU had informed the Chair that this review would not now take place as originally envisaged. There would not be a panel as the review had now been embedded into the change programme activities.
    - ii. One member raised a concern that the non-technical summary (NTS) section of new ASPeL needed improvement and would like this to be raised with ASRU, as this aspect might get lost within the Change programme.
  - 2.2.2. Secretariat to arrange topic discussions with Health Research Authority (HRA) on human ethics.
    - i. The Secretariat had been liaising with HRA but as yet had not been unable to schedule a date.
  - 2.2.3. Cosmetics testing
    - i. ASRU had separately advised the Chair that this was currently with ministers.
  - 2.2.4. Northern Ireland
    - i. There had been no further update on this action from ASRU ahead of the meeting.

**Action: ASC Secretariat to continue liaising with the HRA training team for an update on when they could present to the ASC.**

**Action: ASRU to provide update on process for engagement with Northern Ireland.**

**Action: ASC to ask ASRU if there are plans to review/improve the NTS section of new ASPeL.**

### **3. Chair's update**

### **3.1.ASC clarity on role, responsibilities and wider government policy ownership**

- 3.1.1. The Chair opened up discussion on the role of the ASC. He updated the committee on the current position in relation to the ASRU Change programme and impact on the role of the ASC.
- 3.1.2. Referencing recent supplementary briefing received from the Home Office Chief Scientific Advisor (CSA), the Chair had sought further clarification from ASRU on several aspects of this. In response, ASRU had provided PowerPoint slides, providing context and explanation of the different roles the ASC were expected to fulfil.
- 3.1.3. Alongside this, the committee were aware that there was ongoing discussion regarding a dedicated legislative and policy unit for animals in science, and where in government that would be situated. Key points that arose during discussion were:
  - i. Members noted that a number of government departments, other than the Home Office, (including DEFRA, BEIS, Department of Health) had policy responsibilities or interests relating to the use of animals in science. As the ASC currently only reported to the minister in the Home Office, they felt this hindered their ability to advise on the full scope of their remit, as set out in Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act (ASPA).
  - ii. In discussion, committee members recognised the need for changes in the organisation of animal policy within government, as the current approach lacked co-ordination and transparency leaving, they felt, limited opportunities for open discussion and provision of guidance. Given the lack of a clear policy lead, it was often unclear to the committee whether the information provided to them was draft policy or directional ideas. This, in turn, made it difficult for the ASC to provide clear strategic advice.
  - iii. In respect of ASRU's Change programme, such as the changes relating to the role of the committee in assessing and advising on societal views, these were felt by members to be unrealistic, with the methodology suggested insufficient to reflect the true breadth of public opinion. However, the financial resource needed to undertake a comprehensive exercise to gather public opinion was not available to the committee. One member raised the significance of conducting another Ipsos Mori survey as 4 years had passed since the last one. This survey would be crucial to properly informing policy on current public opinions.
  - iv. Whilst understanding ASRU's rationale for their Change programme, committee members commented the description of their role, now being offered to them by ASRU, was very different to that described when they joined the ASC. The focus also seemed to be more the types of advice they shouldn't provide; with few examples of what advice was in scope.
- 3.1.4. The Chair noted that the ASC would and should continue to provide independent advice in line with the ASC's legislative obligations under ASPA.
- 3.1.5. The Chair advised the committee that he had also informed ASRU that the ASC expected to continue to be asked to provide advice regarding the harm-benefit analysis (HBA) framework and its implementation, as it fell within the scope of their responsibilities for providing advice.
- 3.1.6. As a next step the Chair, in consultation with the committee, would respond to the briefing and letter sent by the Home Office CSA.

**Action: The ASC Chair to draft a response to the CSA letter and briefing, feeding back the ASC's views on the role of the ASC.**

**Action: Members were invited to review the draft and provide any additional comments/suggestions.**

### **3.2. Harm-benefit analysis – workshop actions**

- 3.2.1. The Chair invited the committee to further discuss the outcomes of the HBA workshop that been held on 2 September 2021. However, the Chair noted that any points that had overlapped with earlier discussion on the role of the ASC did not need further comment.
- 3.2.2. Members noted the paper, commenting on issues around the current interpretation and implementation of the requirements for the undertaking of the HBA by ASRU, that had been produced by ASC member Mr Barney Reed.
- 3.2.3. Members noted that some further clarification was needed regarding ASRU's statements on who should conduct the HBA. It was noted that this remained the legal responsibility of ASRU, and that whilst ASRU advised that AWERBs have a role to play in wider ethical review, it was not the responsibility of AWERBs to carry out elements of the 'formal project evaluation', and nor were they set up or resourced to do this.
- 3.2.4. The Chair informed the committee that this topic was being addressed by the AWERB Subgroup and the committee would be updated accordingly.

## **4. ASRU updates**

- 4.1. ASRU representatives were not in attendance at the plenary meeting, but they had provided written updates on their metrics workshop, harm-benefit analysis and FOI and PQ requests.
- 4.2. Several ASC members attended ASRU's metrics workshop; they provided the committee with the following comments:
  - 4.2.1. The workshop had consisted of presentations and was predominantly an information session given by ASRU rather than to facilitate discussion and feedback from ASC members.
  - 4.2.2. Discussions focussed primarily on the outcome of data analysis conducted on Standard Condition 18 returns (breaches of severity or other controls applies to project licences) as this was one of ASRU's primary issues to address.
  - 4.2.3. A useful segment of the workshop had been a summary of 'proposed priorities' which gave an overview of workstreams ASRU had planned for the next 3 years to address the risks identified by ASRU.
  - 4.2.4. It was noted that some of the risks, identified by the ASC, at an earlier meeting had not been included in priority list. This prompted a discussion by members on the current process for provision of advice to ASRU and the minister and eliciting responses from ASRU on how ASC advice had been considered and accommodated.
  - 4.2.5. The Chair noted that papers were not available for 2 scheduled items: '3Rs – standards and compliance' and 'Cosmetics policy update'. As such it would not be possible to discuss these. However, in respect of the 3Rs, standards and

compliance, the Chair commented that ASRU had been in contact with the NC3Rs about accessing their technical expertise to create a set of 3Rs principles against which research applications could be assessed. This also overlapped with the work being carried out by the ASC Project Licence Strategic Review subgroup on which an update will be provided.

## **5. AWERB subgroup update**

**5.1.** The Subgroup Chair updated the committee on the latest work of the Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Body subgroup.

5.1.1. The SG Chair informed the committee about the finalised plans for the Hub Chair Workshop. The half day workshop would to be held on 5 October on a virtual platform, and cover 3 topics of discussion:

- i. The Hubs – challenges and moving forward
  - a. The AWERB SG were hoping to use this session to gather feedback which could help them reinvigorate the work of some the Hubs that had been less active.
- ii. NC3Rs and the role of AWERBs
  - a. The AWERB SG had invited an NC3Rs representative to present at the workshop on their self-assessment tools. Aimed at research groups and institutions, the tools provide feedback to participants on 3Rs compliance and identify gaps for improvement.
- iii. Severe suffering
  - a. An RSPCA representative had been invited to talk about their work focussing on ‘severe’ suffering, highlighting practical approaches for avoiding or reducing this.

5.1.2. The SG Chair advised the committee that although this was a Hub Chair’s workshop, the SG had opened the invitation to other AWERB members for the second and third topics.

**5.2.** The SG Chair updated the committee on their current programme of work:

5.2.1. Updated support note

- i. This had now been published on the GOV.UK website and circulated to the AWERB Hub network.

5.2.2. Newsletter

- i. The Hub newsletter had been circulated and this had resulted in several new requests to join the AWERB knowledge hub.

5.2.3. NTS guidance

- i. The committee were advised that the NTS advice note was still under discussion and a further draft would be available at the next plenary meeting.

**5.3.** At the last SG meeting the members had discussed their role in providing advice to AWERBs and whether it fell under strategic or operational advice. This discussion

was prompted from the ASRU Change programme and its description of the AWERB SG's role.

- 5.4. The SG had sought greater clarification from ASRU and after some discussion had agreed that it would be beneficial to have a meeting with ASRU to discuss further. The SG Chair would update the committee at the next plenary meeting in December.

**Action: NTS draft guidance to be submitted ahead of the next plenary meeting in December.**

## **6. Project Licence Strategic Review (PLSR) subgroup**

- 6.1. At the May plenary the subgroup had finalised their plans for which topics to focus on. ASRU had requested that the SG initially focus on antibody production as this would be the topic most likely to have an output of immediate use.
- 6.2. The SG began with an initial review of 6 antibody licences, from which they drew up the review criteria. In total the SG agreed a set of 25 questions against which to assess the 36 licences provided by ASRU.
- 6.3. The SG Chair also advised the committee that the SG had planned to ask antibody/immunology experts for feedback on the review criteria to help them identify any potential gaps. Once this had been completed the licences would be divided between the SG members to carry out the reviews.
- 6.4. Following which, the SG would discuss next steps on developing overarching principles for antibody licences and, where appropriate, for licence applications as a whole.
- 6.5. The ASC Chair updated members regarding the EU Network of National Committees working group, which was looking at the use or non-animal derived antibodies, and who had invited the ASC to their next meeting, taking place in October.
- 6.6. Following the UK's departure from the EU, the ASC would need to consider whether it could participate in the working group meeting.
- 6.7. One member informed the committee that the group was led by the Netherlands National Committee and was independent of the European Commission and as such an ASC representative should be able to observe the meeting. The ASC Chair advised he would look into the matter further and inform the committee on the best way forward.

**Action: Chair to liaise with ASRU and HO departments to discuss the ASC's contribution to the EU National Committee Non-Animal Antibody Production Working Group.**

## **7. Task and finish groups**

### **7.1. Futures Capability Working Group (FWG)**

- 7.1.1. The SG Chair informed the committee that the group had held a successful workshop on the 29 July with attendees from a wide range of fields. The feedback and outputs from the workshop had been drafted into an initial outline report by the Home Office Futures team, who was then welcomed to the meeting to provide an overview of the report to the committee.

- 7.1.2. The committee were informed that using the Futures 7-question interview tool, 15 interviews with experts from a range of different backgrounds had been carried out and these had been compiled into an issues paper which would be included in the final workshop report.
- 7.1.3. The main focus of the workshop had been analysis of the horizon scans collected earlier in the year. The group had collected around 50 scans and the workshop was used to review these for gap analysis and driver mapping exercise, to identify the top drivers for further consideration by the Futures SG.
- 7.1.4. The FWG had received positive feedback from participants who found the workshop a useful opportunity and who would welcome the ongoing participation in similar events in the future.

**Action: Futures SG to provide report update at the next plenary meeting.**

## **7.2. Brain Organoids, Reanimation and Sentience Group (BORSG)**

- 7.2.1. The BORSG SG Chair provided the ASC with an update on the progress made by the subgroup since the last ASC Plenary.
- 7.2.2. The SG had been due to hold a workshop at the end of April. Unfortunately, due to several last-minute withdrawals of participants including a key speaker, the workshop had had to be postponed.
- 7.2.3. The SG Chair advised the committee that the plan was now to hold one larger workshop rather than two smaller ones, combining the sentience topic with organoids and reanimation.
- 7.2.4. This workshop was to be held within the first quarter of 2022, with a date to be confirmed.
- 7.2.5. The SG Chair welcomed any further comments or suggestions on the list of potential participants.

## **8. AOB**

### **8.1. Recruitment**

- 8.1.1. The Chair informed the committee that ASC member Susan Sparrow was stepping down from the committee at the end of 2021. The Chair thanked Sue for staying on until the end of the year and for her contributions to the ASC.
- 8.1.2. The Chair advised that there would likely be a recruitment exercise for the ASC to fill posts due to become vacant in late 2022. The committee would be kept updated as to its progress.

### **8.2. European Society for Agricultural and Food Ethics (EURSAFE) conference**

- 8.2.1. An ASC member informed the committee that EURSAFE was holding a conference in Edinburgh on 7 September 2022.
- 8.2.2. Animal ethics was a major focus of EURSAFE's work so the conference may be of interest to ASC members.

## **Annex A**

### Animals in Science Committee members

Dr David Main (Chair)

Mrs Wendy Jarrett

Dr Donald Bruce

Dr Virginia Warren

Professor Christine Watson

Dr Sally Robinson

Mr Barney Reed

Professor Clare Stanford

Mrs Susan Sparrow

Professor Andrew Jackson

Professor Johanna Gibson

Dr Hannah Clarke

### Science Secretariat

Mrs Caroline Wheeler (ASC Secretary)

Ms Jessica Daly (ASC Secretariat)