

Animals in Science Committee
Minutes of the 38th Meeting: 27th March 2023
Hybrid Meeting

Welcome, Introductions and Conflicts of Interest

1. Professor David Main, Chair of the Animals in Science Committee (ASC), welcomed Members to the first plenary meeting of 2023. Apologies were received from Professor Christine Watson and Dr Vicky Robinson. Dr Hannah Clarke joined the meeting late. No conflicts of interest were declared. A full list of attendees can be found at Annex A.
2. The Chair welcomed officials from the Home Office Animals in Science Regulation Policy Unit (ASRPU) and representatives from the Department of Health, Northern Ireland (NI) who joined the meeting online. The Chair explained that minutes from the previous meetings were in the process of being completed and would be circulated as soon as possible.

Chair's Update

3. The Chair flagged one pending action related to the delayed response by the Home Office to the Licence Analysis report from 2020. ASRPU advised that the report was important to the regulatory reform work and the recommendations would be used to inform the reform programme.

Action: ASRPU to update the Committee at the next plenary on how the recommendations from the Licence Analysis report will input into the reform programme.

4. The Chair then provided the Committee with an update on the meetings that he had attended since the last plenary.

Meeting with Lord Sharpe

5. The Chair met with Minister Lord Sharpe on 5 December 2022. He updated that it had been a productive meeting, with some of the key discussion points covering:
 - a. ASC workstream update
 - b. ASRPU engagement
 - c. Future recruitment to the ASC
 - d. Cross-government engagement
6. The Minister agreed to a further meeting in 2023 to discuss progress on cross-government engagement.

Animals in Science – roundtable meeting

7. The Chair attended a roundtable event on the 14 December 2022. Attendees included representatives from ASRPU, Animals in Science Regulation Unit (ASRU), Department

for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy and the National Centre for the Replacement, Refinement & Reduction of Animals in Research (NC3Rs).

8. This meeting enabled discussion about each organisation's strategic aims, as well as an assessment of the current animals in science landscape and potential next steps for greater cross-departmental engagement.

Meeting with Chair of the Animal Sentience Committee

9. The Chair had an introductory meeting with the Chair of the Animal Sentience Committee in December 2022. The Chair of the Animal Sentience Committee advised they were supportive of the cross-government engagement approach and shared their intentions to focus on the implications of sentience and new policy.
10. Both Chairs agreed to meet again when the Animal Sentience Committee were further along in Member recruitment.

Recruitment

11. The Chair reminded Members that recruitment for future ASC Membership would soon go live. Members were encouraged to circulate the recruitment link (when available) throughout their networks. Members could submit the names of any potential candidates to the Secretariat. It was noted that any referrals would not get preferential treatment and would still need to apply and be considered as part of an open recruitment round.

Actions: Members to forward details of potential recruitment recommendations to the Secretariat.

Animals in Science Regulation Policy Unit Update

12. The Head of ASRPU began the update by giving the Committee an overview of their communication with the Minister, Lord Sharpe, with whom they had monthly meetings.
13. The Minister had visited an establishment that has been the subject of concerns raised by the public regarding the breeding of dogs for use in scientific procedures. The Minister also visited an establishment which carries out regulatory testing.
14. The Minister attended a meeting with animal welfare and protection stakeholders and was planning to attend a regulated sector stakeholder meeting when possible.

Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill

15. ASRPU advised the Committee that the Government intended to use the powers in the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill to 'reinstate' all retained EU law into the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 (ASPA). This would achieve two objectives:
 - a. Keeping the UK law that regulates the use of animals in science as it currently stands;
 - b. Clarifying the law by bringing it under one piece of UK legislation.
16. The Chair asked if any future changes of Directive 2010/63/EU by the EU would be adopted into ASPA. ASRPU advised that that since ASPA was now standalone

legislation, and not harmonised with the Directive, the UK would consider changes as it saw important to make.

17. The Committee asked whether these changes would have an impact on the ability to make future changes to guidance documents e.g. Codes of Practice. ASRPU reassured the Committee that it would make no difference to how guidance documents are developed.
18. The Committee enquired if the requirement to publish non-technical summaries (NTSs) within six months would be included in ASPA. ASRPU confirmed that this would be the case.

Cross-government policy ownership

19. The Committee was provided with an update on progress made with the discussion on cross-departmental ownership of animals in science policy and potential next steps.
20. Opening up discussion about cross-government policy ownership had had a positive impact, with departments more engaged on the issue and aware of their interests and responsibilities.
21. Following official-level engagement, a meeting between Lord Sharpe and the Science Minister, George Freeman MP, was being arranged after the Easter recess.
22. The Committee asked what processes would be put in place to enable government departments to effectively engage in or identify potential cross-departmental issues. ASRPU advised that a cross-government strategic level group had been created to provide a more integrated process and assist co-ordination of future work. Initial work had already identified several key issues relating to non-animal alternatives and modernising regulation.
23. The Committee queried who would lead and chair the cross-government group and was informed that although ASRPU were currently leading the work and setting up the group, the specifics were still being co-ordinated.
24. The Chair invited NI representatives to voice their views on cross-government working. They informed the Committee that they valued the links with ASRPU and ASRU as a source of advice and guidance.
25. Responding to a question about whether the Northern Ireland Protocol would have any impact on cross-government working with NI, ASRPU confirmed that the only potential impact would be around retained EU legislation. Additionally, DEFRA would be the lead when engaging with devolved administrations on animal welfare issues where there were elements of devolved policy. In NI, the Department of Health was responsible for all policy and regulation relating to animals in science, including agricultural matters.
26. Members felt it was important to keep driving towards a unified strategy for animals in science across government as there were visible divergences between departments.

Decapods

27. The Committee were provided with an update on the proposed approach to policy development for the protection of decapod crustaceans used in science.

28. Following ASRPU engagement with stakeholders and other government departments, it had become apparent that further evidence would be needed on how decapod crustaceans were currently being used in scientific research.
29. ASRPU had therefore decided to issue a call for evidence to better understand the current landscape and inform on potential impacts of policy change. The call for evidence would also provide further information towards scoping the range of policy issues and a future commission for the ASC to provide advice.
30. The Committee advised that Crustacean Compassion could be a useful source of information on issues relating to decapod crustaceans.

Training and continuous professional development

31. The Committee were provided with an overview of the draft governance framework for training and continuous professional development. The framework was the first priority identified by the training and accreditation stakeholder group. Ensuring a high standard of continued competence was essential and the establishment of a governance framework for training and accreditation, with clear roles and responsibilities, was a crucial first step.
32. ASRPU had worked with its stakeholder group to co-design a framework with agreed principles, creating a system where there would be suitable accountability. However, the Home Office was responsible for both putting the framework together and setting out the requirements.
33. The stakeholder group would next meet in May 2023 when they hoped to finalise the framework. The Committee would be invited to share their views on the framework at the next plenary meeting.
34. Members also heard that, ultimately, it would be the responsibility of establishments to ensure that, as part of 'good business practice', they have measures in place to ensure business continuity to provide cover for specialist staff if, for any reason, they are absent from the workplace.
35. The Committee noted that, whilst the new framework would work very well for the vast majority of standards and procedures, to avoid any negative impact, it was important that the framework allowed for the development of new techniques and approaches.
36. The Committee were invited to send any further comments on the update to ASRPU for consideration.
37. The Committee welcomed the ASRU operational update but reflected that whilst a metrics-based approach was useful, they would also welcome information on associated outcomes, especially those related to animal welfare. ASRPU advised that, in the next six to nine months the structure of ASRU's updates would change with less focus on the provision of metrics and more on the inclusion of outcomes.
38. In response to a question on the number of audits being undertaken in establishments, ASRPU advised that establishment audits were now more comprehensive and were taking longer to complete, which meant fewer audits were taking place each year. In

addition, any comparisons with the previous two years included remote inspection during the period of Covid-19 and therefore were not directly comparable.

39. The Committee requested information on the ASRU's communication with establishments about Standard Condition 18 reports, specifically if establishments were kept informed about the reasons for delays in sending responses. The Committee felt an update about reasons for delays and dates for a final response would be welcomed by applicants.

Action: ASRPU to note feedback received from the Committee on communicating delays in Standard Condition 18 decisions.

Action: Committee to send in any comments on ASRPU training framework.

Non-Human Primates bred for use in scientific purposes report

40. The Committee asked for clarification on when the Minister would be responding to the ASC regarding the commissioned advice it provided in September 2022 on Non-Human Primates bred for use in scientific purposes.
41. ASRPU informed the Committee that they had sought stakeholder views earlier in the year which had resulted in a lot of feedback. Stakeholder responses were being considered and the next step would be to write to the Minister. A formal response was expected during Summer 2023.

Ways of Working

42. The Chair invited comments and views from Members regarding the most recent edits to the draft Ways of Working document. An open table discussion resulted in several points being noted:
- a. Due to the AWERB Subgroup being a standing Subgroup, it had workstreams that were in response to sections of legislation rather than responding to new topical commissions received by the Committee.
 - b. The tiered evidence 'strength' classification table used by some scientific advisory committees was less appropriate for the ASC given the nature of many of the matters dealt with by the Committee.
 - c. Further discussion was required on processes to maintain the confidentiality, where appropriate, of sources of evidence.
 - d. It was noted that the first table listing 'sources of evidence', that 'expert and stakeholder opinions' should be separated into two categories. Additionally, 'individual independent experts' may provide evidence which is based on their own experience and opinion that may not be shared by their organisation.
 - e. ASRPU suggested that the ASC should consider reviewing their Code of Practice due to the creation of the Ways of Working document as there was a risk of duplication of information. The Chair noted the suggestion and that both documents would be reviewed to ensure the content aligned appropriately.
 - f. NI representatives advised they were content with the references to the department, with minor editorial changes requested.

Action: Secretariat to make editorial changes to the Ways of Working document to reflect points discussed.

Project Licence Strategic Review Subgroup

Forced Swim Test report

43. The Project Licence Strategic Review (PLSR) Subgroup Chair advised the Committee on the key points and recommendations in the Forced Swim Test (FST) report. This included a description of the range of uses of the FST, such as a predictive screen for anti-depressants, but that it was rarely used as a 'model' for depression.
44. Importantly, there was inconsistency in the nature and level of justification provided for the use of the test and, often, the test itself was listed as one among of a number of other tests in a protocol but with no clear information on whether it would actually be used.
45. The Chair thanked the Subgroup Chair and Members for their work on the report; noting its comprehensive nature, he advised that an executive summary would be useful to set out the key findings. In seeking comments from the Committee, and to ensure sufficient time for any final feedback and amendments, it was agreed to extend the report deadline.
46. The Committee agreed to ratify the final version of the report via email circulation.

Action: Comments and suggestions from Members to be sent to the Secretariat for discussion at the next PLSR meeting.

Committee Matters and AOB

Regulating Decapod Research Workshop

47. The Chair informed the Committee about the Regulating Decapod Research Workshop due to be held on the 18 April 2023. Due to scheduling conflicts the Chair was unavailable and invited one or two Committee Members to attend as delegates.

Annex A

Committee Members

Professor David Main (ASC Chair)

Mrs Wendy Jarrett

Dr Donald Bruce

Dr Sally Robinson

Mr Barney Reed

Professor Clare Stanford

Professor Andrew Jackson

Professor Johanna Gibson

Dr Hannah Clarke

Secretariat

Caroline Wheeler

Jessica Stone

Animals in Science Regulation Policy Unit

William Reynolds

Gideon Winward

Apologies:

Professor Christine Watson

Dr Vicky Robinson (NC3Rs)