

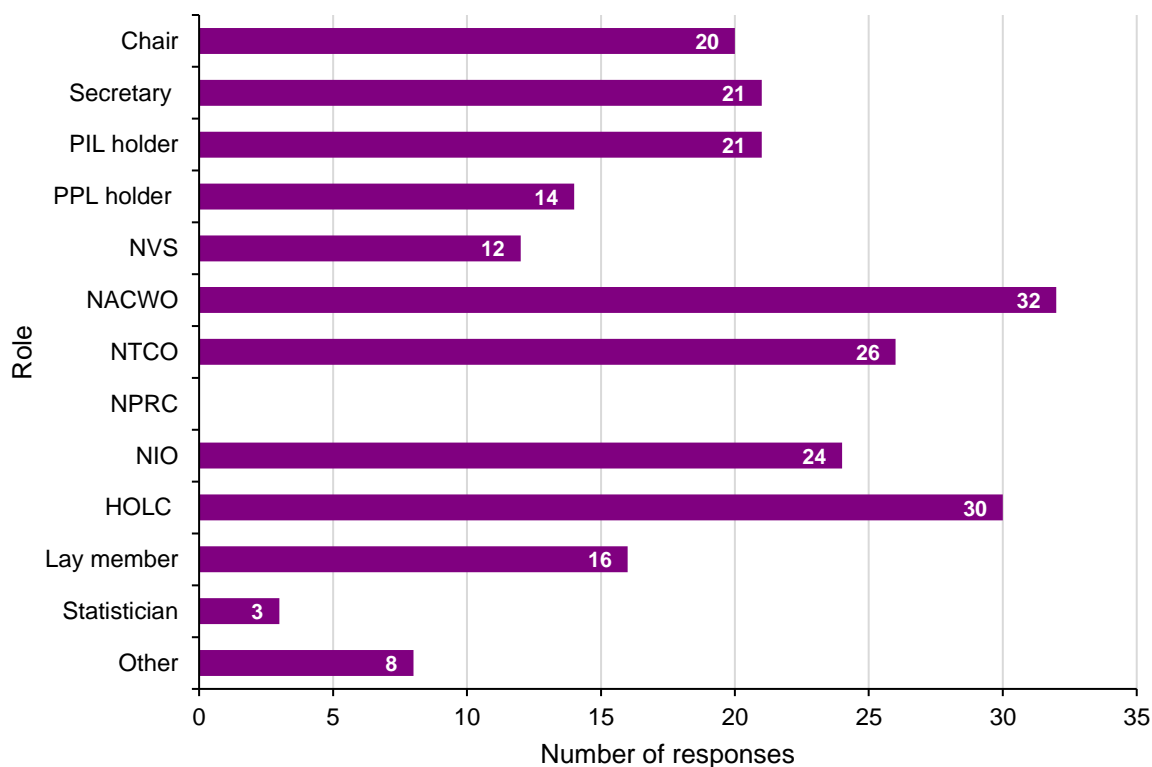
Animals in Science Committee and Animal Welfare Ethical Review Body Hub Workshop: 16 October 2024

The AWERB Hub 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. This report is not intended to be, and should not be interpreted as, a policy statement or a work plan.

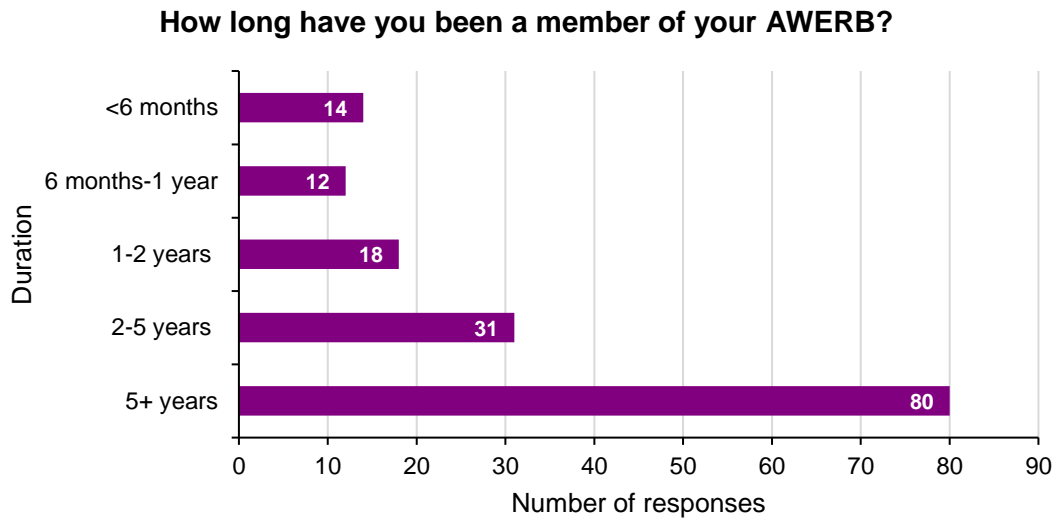
Introduction

1. The eleventh Animals in Science Committee (ASC) and Animal Welfare Ethical Review Body (AWERB) Hub workshop was convened on 16 October 2024 via a virtual platform.
2. The aim of the event was to enable attendees to share and discuss:
 - a. An update on the work of the Animals in Science Committee
 - b. Skills and training needed by an AWERB
 - c. Benefits of an active AWERB Hub
3. More than 200 individuals attended the workshop. Attendees included AWERB Chairs and/or their nominated representatives, and AWERB members from a variety of roles and backgrounds. The event was organised and facilitated by members of the ASC AWERB Subgroup, the ASC Secretariat and presenters, who were all also in attendance. The workshop was chaired by Mrs Caroline Chadwick (Chair of the ASC AWERB Subgroup).
4. The workshop began with two polls to gauge the composition of the audience. The first poll question was, "What is your role within your AWERB?". Respondents were able to select more than one response. 140 attendees responded to the poll.

What is your role within your AWERB?



5. The second poll question was, “How long have you been a member of your AWERB?”. Respondents were asked to select one response. 155 attendees responded to the poll.



6. The agenda for the workshop can be found at Annex A. Presentations were delivered by:
- Update on the work of the Animals in Science Committee: Mrs Wendy Jarrett (ASC AWERB Subgroup).
 - Skills and training needed by an AWERB: Dr Penny Hawkins (RSPCA), Dr Lucy Whitfield (ASC AWERB Subgroup and Director at OWL Vets Ltd.) and Professor Zubair Ahmed (University of Birmingham).
 - Benefits of an active AWERB Hub: Dr John Murphy (Strathclyde University and Scotland AWERB Hub Co-Chair) and Dr Julie Keeble (King’s College London and London AWERB Hub Chair).
7. This report outlines the key points and findings from the event. Presentations during the workshop have been made available to attendees to circulate within their AWERBs.

Update on the work of the Animals in Science Committee

8. Mrs Wendy Jarrett delivered the first presentation, which aimed to provide an update on the work of the ASC since the last ASC AWERB Hub workshop in October 2023.
9. The format of the session was a presentation followed by time for Q&A.
10. The key points covered by the presentation were:
- Nine new Members had been appointed to the ASC, and the Chair and five existing Members had been reappointed. The new ASC AWERB Subgroup had been finalised from the new Membership.
 - The ASC had recently published the [report from its Futures Working Group’s initial workstream](#). The ASC’s most recent [report on non-human primates used in service licences](#) would be published on 24 October 2024.
 - Various letters to Ministers across government, including the Home Office, the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, and Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, had been published on the ASC website.

d. The [Ministerial commission](#) for this year had been published under the previous government in March 2024. Advice was being sought on the future regulation of decapods; improving non-technical summaries and retrospective assessments; strengthening leading practice for the regulated sector, and reviewing best practice for AWERBs and named roles. The detailed commissions were being finalised by the new responsible Minister.

11. At the end of the presentation, attendees were invited to ask any questions. The following points were raised:

a. On the link between the animal testing debate held in Westminster Hall on 16 February 2024 and the new government's manifesto commitment on animal testing, it was highlighted that the new government had signalled similar intentions to the previous government on accelerating the use of alternative methods, but that specific announcements had yet to be made.

b. The new responsible Minister was scheduled to attend the Establishment Licence Holders' Forum meeting later in October 2024.

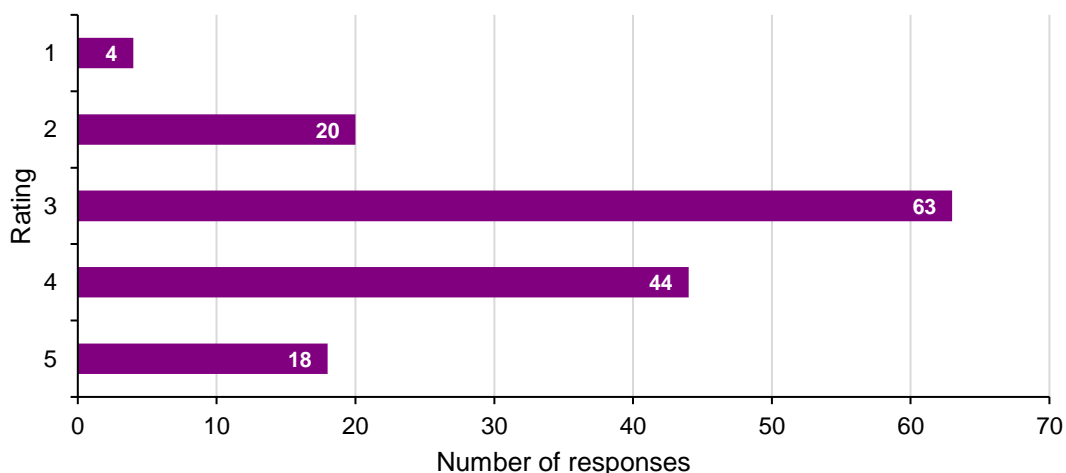
Skills and training needed by an AWERB

12. The Chair then welcomed the three speakers for the next item, Dr Penny Hawkins, Dr Lucy Whitfield and Professor Zubair Ahmed.

13. The format of the session was the delivery of all three presentations in succession, followed by a Q&A session. The attendees were then assigned to break-out groups to discuss an allocated question, before feeding back to the full group in a plenary session. Each break-out group was facilitated by an ASC AWERB Subgroup member or one of the presenters. The aim of the session was to facilitate discussion around the skills and training needed by AWERBs to fulfil their duties.

14. The session began with the following poll question: "How confident are you that all of your AWERB members have the skills and training needed to fulfil the AWERB's role?", where "1 was "not at all confident" and "5" was "very confident". 149 attendees responded to the poll. The average score was 3.3.

How confident are you that all of your AWERB members have the skills and training needed to fulfil the AWERB's role?



15. Following the poll, the Chair introduced Dr Penny Hawkins, who delivered an overview of the recent [RSPCA survey on induction for AWERB Members](#). The key points were:
 - a. Overview of the survey methodology and profile of respondents.
 - b. Overview of the onboarding activities, resources and training that respondents had received. 14% of respondents had received no induction or training at all.
 - c. Respondents' perceptions of their knowledge gaps and training needs, which included experimental design and statistics and alternatives to animal use. It was noted that the AWERB needs to include these competencies, but not all members are expected to possess this specific expertise.
 - d. RSPCA resources and examples available for AWERB inductions (www.rspca.org.uk/awerb)
16. The Chair thanked Dr Hawkins and passed onto Dr Lucy Whitfield, who delivered her perspective on a skillset for AWERBs and their members. The key points were:
 - a. Skills required by an AWERB include technical expertise, behavioural competencies and industry knowledge. While these skillsets are required by the committee as a whole, each member may bring with them an individual set of attributes, not necessarily directly related to their role.
 - b. A training plan should be implemented for all AWERB members to effectively perform the AWERB's functions. AWERBs should consider what they need from their members and determine the core and individual training needs.
 - c. Continuous professional development should be undertaken by members in areas of relevance to committee functions.
17. The Chair thanked Dr Whitfield and passed onto Professor Zubair Ahmed, who delivered an academic perspective on skills and training needed by an AWERB. The key points were:
 - a. Overview of Professor Ahmed's career, research and training activities.
 - b. Personal experiences that made Professor Ahmed a good AWERB member included his expertise, understanding of the research process and need for animal research, and the skills of fairness, critical evaluation, communication and confidentiality.
 - c. Successful AWERBs are those that are able to advise the establishment licence holder on project proposals; promote awareness and implementation of the 3Rs; retrospectively review project impacts; support staff; discuss ethical issues, and disseminate good practice.
18. At the end of the presentations, attendees were invited to ask any questions. The following points were raised:
 - a. On negative experiences with engaging publicly, Professor Ahmed considered it important to be transparent about how the benefits outweigh the harms, and real-world impacts that outputs from animal research will have, but this was in his capacity as a senior academic rather than his role as an AWERB member. It was important to note that, generally, AWERBs should not be given the task of explaining the benefits of animal research, as their role is to critically review whether and how animals should be used. External engagement should focus on how the AWERB promotes the Culture of Care.
 - b. The [guidance for training and continuous professional development](#) published by the Home Office does not refer to AWERBs, but some form of core curriculum derived from

existing published guidance (for example, from RSPCA and LASA) would be useful. This guidance was not owned by the ASC.

- c. The overall effectiveness of AWERBs could possibly become part of the Home Office audit process in future.
 - d. On the number of members for an effective AWERB, it was important to balance having sufficient breadth of expertise while avoiding an increased time burden in making decisions. The University of Birmingham AWERB was approximately 20 members, which was quite a large committee, but one size would not fit all establishments. Effective chairing could help to mitigate any difficulties with larger committees.
 - e. It was difficult for AWERBs to challenge alternative methods and replacement. The ASC AWERB Subgroup was considering bringing this topic to its April 2025 workshop.
19. Attendees were then randomly assigned to break-out groups to discuss one of five questions posed by the ASC AWERB Subgroup. Following this session, attendees returned to the plenary meeting to present the key points and feedback from their discussion. Comments are presented as unattributed quotes; these may not be verbatim, but express the point that was made.

What might standardised training for AWERB members look like?

“A matrix training system, with guidance on what should be included, should be mandatory for AWERB members.”

“Making training mandatory may dissuade potential members, which are already difficult to recruit.”

“A standardised introductory presentation that could be completed as an online course, using scenarios and workshops.”

“Continuous professional development that is offered to AWERB members should be recorded and made available for future use of AWERB members.”

Are there any skills and/or attributes that you feel are missing from your AWERB?

“Expertise in replacement methodologies.”

“Experimental design skills. Not all AWERB members need to have detailed expertise, but having access to ‘experimental design champions’ who can support the AWERB when required would be helpful.”

“Soft skills including open-mindedness, relationship-building, time management and facilitation skills, particularly for the Chair.”

“Administrative support for small AWERBs.”

How do you currently engage with those outside of your AWERB, including academics and the public?

There was some fear surrounding adverse publicity for external engagement.

“For internal engagement: once- or twice-yearly open AWERB meetings where non-AWERB members in the organisation can join the meeting.”

How do you deal with conflicting views within AWERB business?

“An effective Chair is able to read the room and allow people time to share their opinions before a decision is made.”

“The project licence holder should always be given the opportunity to provide explanation when there is a disagreement and all voices should be heard and respected during discussions.”

“The most difficult conflicts come from matters of opinion, especially ethics, as people’s view on whether benefits outweigh the harms can be fundamentally different.”

“Majority decisions rather than unanimous decisions could be made where needed, with the option to revisit the decision after an appropriate set time period.”

“Circulating questions for the project licence holder before the meeting is helpful as it gives the applicant time to resolve any more minor factual points ahead of time so discussion can focus on more substantive points.”

“AWERBs can feel pressure to resolve issues quickly if funding has already been secured.”

What do you think the status of AWERBs should be within the establishment, and how might this be improved?

“The importance of AWERBs is currently not recognised in many establishments, and many AWERB members feel the status should be improved.”

“Some potential applicants may even have a negative view of AWERBs for stopping some animal research from going ahead.”

“Having a strong Chair and secretary is useful, and an external Chair can improve the prominence of the AWERB.”

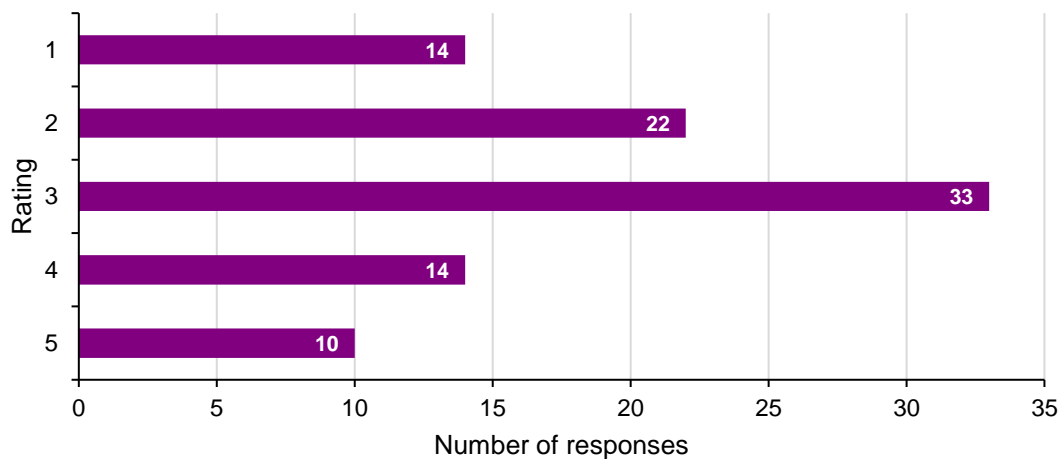
“Circulating outputs from AWERB members more widely in the establishment to raise awareness.”

“ASRU audits can be useful for improving the AWERB, as an external perspective can identify aspects that internal members are missing.”

Benefits of an active AWERB Hub

20. The Chair then welcomed the two speakers for the next item, Dr John Murphy and Dr Julie Keeble.
21. The format of the session was the delivery of both presentations in succession, followed by a Q&A session. The attendees were then assigned to break-out groups to discuss an allocated question, before feeding back to the full group in a plenary session. Each break-out group was facilitated by an ASC AWERB Subgroup member or one of the presenters. The aim of the session was to facilitate discussion the benefits of being a member of an active AWERB Hub and share knowledge between Hubs.
22. The session began with the following poll question: “How active would you rate your current AWERB Hub?”, where “1” was “not at all active” and “5” was “very active”. 93 attendees responded to the poll. The average score was 2.8.

How active would you rate your current AWERB Hub?



23. Following the poll, the Chair introduced Dr John Murphy, who delivered his perspective as the new co-chair of the Scotland AWERB Hub. The key points were:
- Benefits of an active AWERB Hub included the breadth and scope of establishments and species; strength in numbers; a safe space to engage and encourage open, inclusive discussion; open agenda and membership allowing the Hub to be responsive; its use as a networking facility, and sharing of problems and practice.
 - The practicalities of remaining active as an AWERB Hub included engaged key players; meeting regularly (e.g. twice-yearly) with dates held in diaries far in advance; making use of virtual platforms to remove costs for lead institution; rotating the Hub Chair or agreeing administrative assistance, and recording/transcribing the meeting to reduce pressure of minute-taking.
24. The Chair thanked Dr Murphy and passed onto Dr Julie Keeble, who delivered her perspective as an established chair of the London AWERB Hub. The key points were:
- Overview of Dr Keeble's journey to becoming London Hub Chair.
 - Dr Keeble's personal experience of being the Chair of an active AWERB Hub included organising meetings twice-yearly; forgiving yourself and picking back up if Hub activities slip; enlisting the help of others, and remaining open and flexible with membership.
 - An example of the London Hub's general meeting format was: welcome, apologies, minutes and matters arising; presentation on topic of current AWERB interest; discussion around a couple of additional pre-set topics of current interest; ASC Member update; NC3Rs representative update, and any other business.
25. At the end of the presentations, attendees were invited to ask any questions. The one point that was raised was that the ASC will be working over the next few months to support more inactive Hubs to increase their engagement with their associated establishments.
26. Attendees were then randomly assigned to break-out groups to discuss one of five questions posed by the ASC AWERB Subgroup. Following this session, attendees returned to the plenary meeting to present the key points and feedback from their discussion. Comments are presented as unattributed quotes; these may not be verbatim, but express the point that was made.

What would you like your AWERB Hub to do for you?

“The Hub should be a forum for accessing resources such as hot topics for discussion, online training, examples of good and bad reviews, ASRU guidance and online discussion forums for more immediate queries.” For the online discussion forum, it was raised that the AWERB Knowledge Hub could fulfil this.

What do you perceive as the barriers to a better functioning AWERB Hub locally?

“Too few people willing to volunteer to support AWERB Hubs, especially with the time commitment required.”

“In-person events are challenging because there is a lack of financial support for smaller AWERBs to host these, and Hub establishments can be quite geographically widespread.”

“Technical difficulties with receiving Hub information as some establishments restrict external emails.”

“Lack of awareness for individual establishments that their Hubs exist, especially when contact lists become out-of-date, during AWERB Chair changes for example.”

“Misconceptions as to who can attend Hub meetings – in the past, it was limited to AWERB Chairs due to space and cost constraints, but now that meetings are typically online, attendance could be opened up more widely.”

“Misconceptions as to the role of the ASC Member paired with Hubs. Some AWERB members feeling uncomfortable about being open and honest with the ASC Member present.” The ASC would be undertaking some work to better define the role of the paired ASC Member and would disseminate this to AWERBs.

What could be done to help maintain AWERB Hub activity?

“Administrative support for organising meetings.”

“Having a dedicated budget for in-person meetings, and the option to attend online for those who are not able to attend in-person.”

“Suggested relevant current topics for discussion and inviting external speakers to promote discussion.”

“Promoting connections between Hubs to share information, such as through these workshops.”

How can AWERB Hub members have an impact on their local AWERBs?

“Increased engagement with the Hub to make better use of the connections.”

“Sharing information, training and best practice from Hub meetings regularly with local AWERBs.”

What would be helpful to see from the ASC AWERB Subgroup?

“Increased promotion of the ASC Subgroup itself and the resources that it already offers, such as the AWERB Knowledge Hub.”

“General signposting on best practice and lessons learned from AWERBs and Hubs.”

“Collating and sharing suggested relevant current topics for discussion.”

“Advice, guidance and signposting on skills and training.”

Final thoughts and feedback

27. The Chair thanked everyone for joining and sharing their contributions throughout the workshop. Attendees were invited to submit feedback to the ASC Secretariat or to the Chair directly, specifically on:

- a. How relevant participants found the workshop topics.
- b. Suggestions for future workshop topics.
- c. Suggestions for resources to be produced by the ASC.

28. Participants were informed that the slides from the day would be shared, and a report on the Animals in Science Committee website and the AWERB Knowledge Hub.

Annex A – AWERB Hub Workshop (October 2024) Agenda

Time	Topic	Presenter(s)
13.00 – 13.10	Welcome, Introductions and Workshop Protocol	Caroline Chadwick
13:10 – 13:25	Update on the work of the Animals in Science Committee	Wendy Jarrett
13:25 – 14:40	Skills and training needed by an AWERB	Dr Penny Hawkins Dr Lucy Whitfield Professor Zubair Ahmed
14:40 – 14:50	<i>Break</i>	
14:50 – 15:55	Benefits of an active AWERB Hub	Dr John Murphy Dr Julie Keeble
15:55 – 16:00	Final thoughts and feedback	Caroline Chadwick