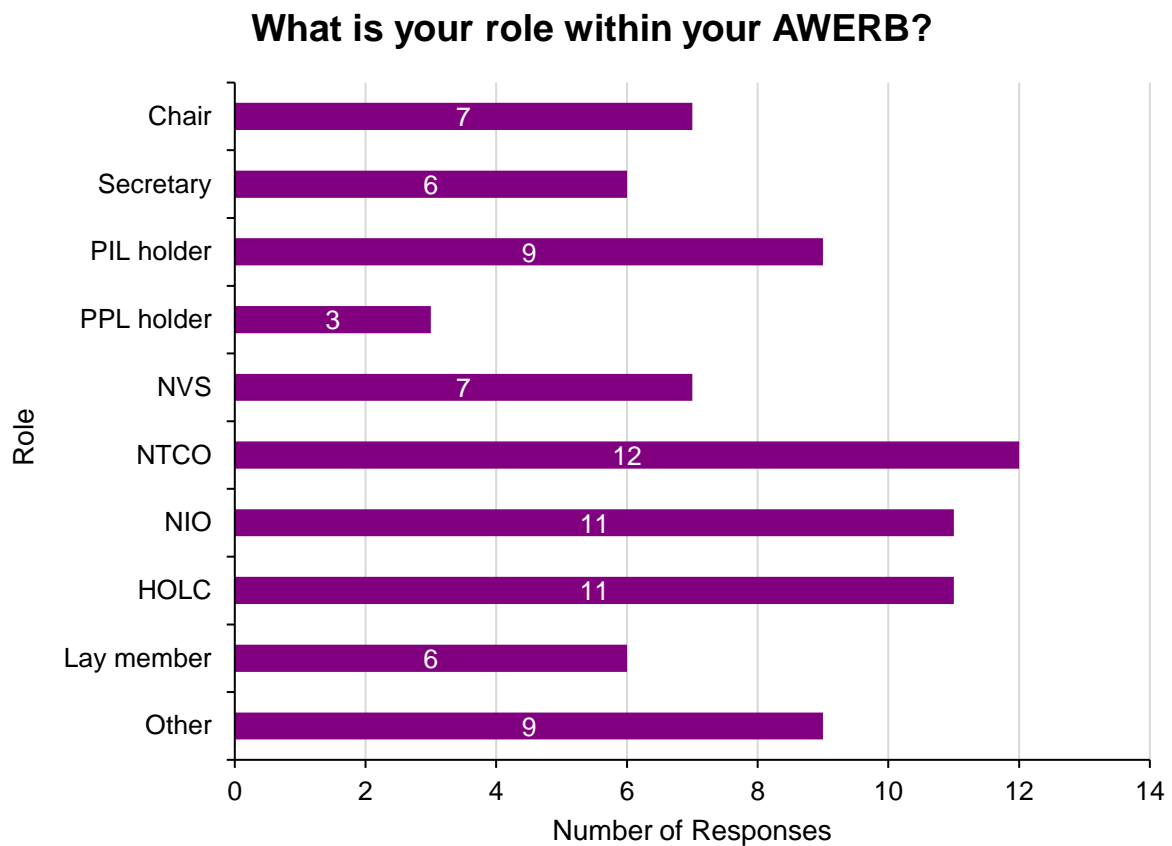# Animals in Science Committee and Animal Welfare Ethical Review Body Hub Workshop: 15 October 2025

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.
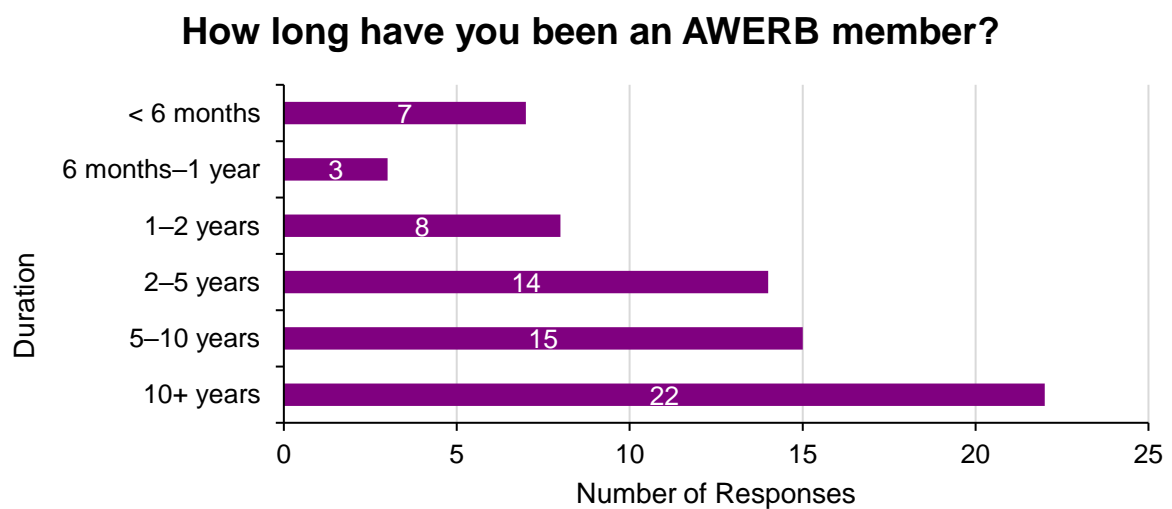
Introduction

1. The thirteenth Animals in Science Committee (ASC) and Animal Welfare Ethical Review Body (AWERB) Hub workshop was convened on 15 October 2025 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. An overview of the requirements, benefits, and barriers to rehoming

    c. Case studies: Rehoming of Welsh Mountain Ponies, University of Auckland's rehoming journey, Homes for Animal Heroes

    d. Setting up & successfully running a re-homing program as part of your Culture of Care

3. More than 100 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. 81 attendees responded to the poll.

What is your role within your AWERB?

Role	Number of Responses
Chair	7
Secretary	6
PIL holder	9
PPL holder	3
NVS	7
NTCO	12
NIO	11
HOLC	11
Lay member	6
Other	9

5. The second poll question was, "How long have you been a member of your AWERB?". Respondents were asked to select one response. 69 attendees responded to the poll.

How long have you been an AWERB member?

Duration	Number of Responses
< 6 months	7
6 months–1 year	3
1–2 years	8
2–5 years	14
5–10 years	15
10+ years	22

6. The agenda for the workshop can be found at Annex A. Presentations were delivered by:

    a. Update on the work of the Animals in Science Committee: ASC AWERB Subgroup

    b. Requirements, benefits, and barriers to rehoming: Bristol Veterinary School

    c. Case study: Rehoming of Welsh Mountain Ponies: Agenda Life Sciences

    d. Setting up & successfully running a rehoming programme as part of your Culture of Care: University of Strathclyde

    e. Case study: New Zealand partnership programme with animal welfare groups: University of Auckland

    f. Case study: US rehoming scheme – Homes for Animal Heroes: National Animal Interest Alliance

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. the first presentation, delivered by ASC AWERB Subgroup, aimed to provide an update on the work of the ASC since the last ASC AWERB Hub workshop in April 2025.

9. The format of the session was a presentation followed by time for Q&A.

10. The key points covered by the presentation were:

    a. Dr Sally Robinson started her tenure as ASC Chair on 1 June 2025.

    b. The ASC is now recruiting for five new Members, welcoming both lay and expert members, to begin their terms on 1 April 2026. The closing date for applications is 11pm on Monday 3 November.

    c. The ASC had recently published the ASC and AWERB Hub workshop report: April 2025.

    d. The ASC had recently published advice on non-technical summaries and retrospective assessments. A brief overview of the report was provided:

        i. Purpose and Method: commissioned by the Home Office to improve transparency and 3Rs under ASPA; evaluated NTSs and RAs against legal and best practice criteria; informed by stakeholder feedback (sector & non-sector).

        ii. Key Findings: NTSs often overly technical, vague, or lacking detail; RAs inconsistent in quality, with delays in publication; poor articulation of cumulative harms, procedures, and 3Rs; limited public accessibility and usability of published documents.

        iii. Recommendations for AWERBs: Lay Review: ensure lay members review NTSs and RAs for clarity; Training: support applicants with training on readability and 3Rs; End-of-PPL Reviews: encourage reflective practice and sharing of lessons learned; Transparency:

> consider self-publishing NTSs and RAs on your own websites where appropriate.

      iv. <u>Other Suggested Improvements:</u> Clearer guidance documents and annotated examples; no word limit emphasised, encourage detailed, readable summaries; improvements to current publishing systems, followed by facilitation of a searchable database for NTSs and RAs; enhanced ASPeL form usability and guidance integration.

    e. Responses to ASC advice had been published:

      i. [Licence analysis review: response from the Home Office](#)
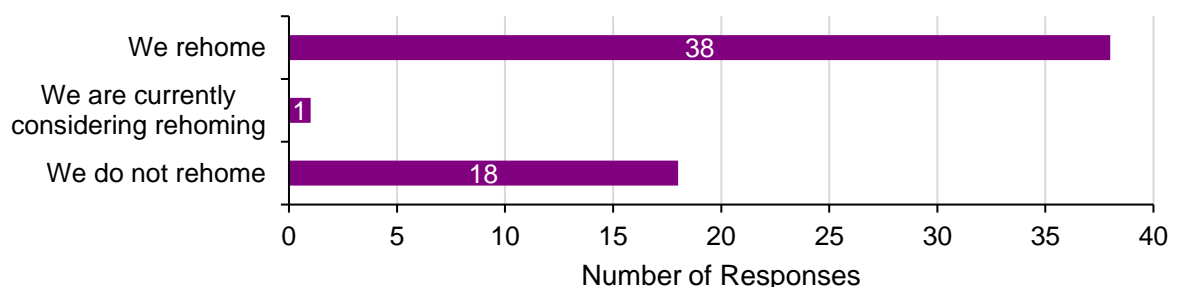   ii. [Non-human primates bred for use in scientific purposes: response from Lord Hanson](#)

    f. The 5th UK Focus on Severe Suffering Meeting, hosted by RSPCA, would be held on 5 November 2025 in Central London.

11. At the end of the presentation, attendees were invited to ask any questions, but none were raised.

12. The ASC Secretariat gave a brief overview of the Knowledge Hub: an online platform for AWERB members to share files, participate in discussions, and access events, aimed at fostering collaboration and resource exchange within the community.

13. This was presented as a potential solution to recurring requests from the April 2025 workshop, including support for lay members and a dedicated forum for AWERB/Named Information Officers (NIOs) to share resources and good practice. The Secretariat highlighted the need for further activity by the AWERB community to fulfil this platform gap.

Requirements, benefits, and barriers to rehoming

14. The session began with the following poll question: "What is your current situation regarding rehoming?". 57 attendees responded to the poll.

What is your current situation regarding rehoming?

Category	Number of Responses
We rehome	38
We are currently considering rehoming	1
We do not rehome	18

15. Following the poll, the Chair welcomed the speaker for the next item, from Bristol Veterinary School, who delivered an overview of the requirements, benefits, and barriers to rehoming.

16. The format of the session was a presentation followed by time for Q&A.

17. The key points covered by the presentation were:

a. The definition of rehoming under ASPA and that, for the context of this presentation, "rehoming" refers specifically to placing animals as companion pets in new homes, distinguishing this from other forms of rehoming such as transfer to non-licensed establishments, use as sentinels, or release for slaughter.

b. A description of the basic conditions required for rehoming animals under ASPA.

c. A description of the positive reasons to rehome: improved animal well-being; support for staff morale and compassion fatigue; encouragement from the Home Office; positive public perception and interest, despite low awareness.

d. A summary of UK rehoming data from a research article[1]: 19 out of 41 surveyed facilities reported rehoming, totalling over 2,300 animals between 2015-2017; barriers included welfare concerns, practical limitations, and fear of negative media attention. When questioned about challenges, the highest scoring response was that there were no issues, but facilities with challenges cited time as the main aspect, with few reporting serious issues.

e. Rehoming is historically biased towards typical pet species such as dogs and cats, which are perceived as more "rehomable" due to factors like individual recognition, longer lifespans, aesthetic appeal, and cultural norms; challenges include limited availability of homes, resource demands, and ethical dilemmas in selecting which animals to rehome.

f. A recent European study (2023)[2] found that rats, despite being perceived as less "rehomable", were the most commonly rehomed species and are expected to remain the most rehomed over the next three years, especially in large-scale rehoming efforts.

g. Rehoming occurs in low numbers but offers clear benefits to both animals and people; challenges include the time-intensive nature of the process, species-related biases, and a lack of welfare-focused guidance. This has prompted ongoing work in Bristol to monitor rat welfare post-rehoming, develop internal policies, and create species-specific toolkits through a collaborative rehoming community.

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

a. Lister Hooded rats are commonly rehomed at Bristol because they are used in research there, not due to specific suitability; other strains can also be rehomed following Home Office guidance.

b. Confirmation that adopters take full responsibility for future veterinary costs; a formal document outlining this is signed and retained for five years, in line with Home Office recommendations.

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[1] A semi-structured questionnaire survey of laboratory animal rehoming practice across 41 UK animal research facilities | PLOS One
[2] Survey among FELASA members about rehoming of animals used for scientific and educational purposes - PubMed

c. Advertising rehoming opportunities remains a challenge; most rehoming in their laboratory is currently arranged via word of mouth due to concerns about public backlash and institutional restrictions on open promotion. Discussions are ongoing to find balanced, transparent ways to communicate availability without attracting negative attention.

Rehoming of Welsh Mountain Ponies

19. The Chair welcomed the speaker for the next item, from Agenda Life Sciences, who delivered an overview of a recent rehoming initiative for Welsh Mountain Ponies.

20. The format of the session was a presentation followed by time for Q&A.

21. The key points covered by the presentation were:

a. Research was conducted using Welsh mountain ponies to support development of a new experimental vaccine against equine herpesvirus, aiming to improve effectiveness over current UK vaccines.

b. An overview of the acclimatisation process and study procedures, including training for handling, vaccination, blood sampling, and routine health monitoring to minimise stress and adverse effects.

c. Description of a refined method of vacutainer blood withdrawal: switching from direct vacutainer sampling to an extension system, allowing greater movement during blood collection and reducing stress for ponies.

d. Description of study-specific and rehoming training, including socialisation and positive reinforcement to prepare ponies for handling and future rehoming.

e. Outline of the communication strategy for supporting pony rehoming, including use of video content, scientific presentations, local staff meetings, and open social media communications, alongside early engagement with prospective owners through screening, site visits, and experience assessment.

f. Outline of the contractual and legal framework for pony rehoming, including vaccination requirements, passport updates, minimum six-month ownership, and restrictions on further rehoming or resale.

g. Outline of the logistics of rehoming ponies, noting that experienced owners manage transport, and on release day a vet is present to confirm health checks, vaccinations, and documentation before transfer of responsibility.

h. Description of post-rehoming follow-up, including maintaining contact through emails and social media, technician visits, monitoring vaccination schedules, and addressing concerns about contract compliance through proactive communication.

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

   a. AWERB involvement occurs primarily at the project licence application stage, with additional support provided organically during planning and owner identification, rather than through a structured process.

   b. Explanation that ponies typically arrive at around six months old, spend three to six months in acclimatisation and study, and are usually rehomed at approximately one to two years of age.

   c. Ponies are not returned to the mountains after studies to avoid population control issues and prevent potential exposure of wild populations to experimental vaccine candidates.

   d. There is no legal obligation to take back ponies if owners cannot continue care, and the contract assigns full responsibility to the new owner. However, the team maintains a moral commitment to support the process if issues arise.There is a positive impact on staff and the culture of care, noting that long-term studies foster strong bonds with ponies, and rehoming outcomes, such as updates from new owners, boost staff morale.

Setting up & successfully running a re-homing program as part of your Culture of Care

23. The Chair welcomed the speakers for the next item, from the University of Strathclyde, who delivered a presentation on setting up & successfully running a re-homing program as part of a Culture of Care.

24. The format of the session was a presentation.

25. The key points covered by the presentation were:

   a. A summary of a research article (Skidmore & Roe, 2020)[3], and the Animals in Science Regulation Unit (ASRU) advice note on rehoming and setting free animals[4], emphasising the expectation to take every appropriate opportunity to rehome.

   b. An outline of the legal framework for consent to re-home or set free relevant protected animals, including assessing suffering and adverse effects, responsibility for the animal, the criteria for consent to re-home, the records required, applying to re-home protected animals, and the information required for consent.

   c. An outline of AWERB's role in rehoming, including developing ethical advice, developing and periodically reviewing relevant policies, ensuring confidence in socialisation, and supporting effective rehoming or setting free schemes as part of promoting a culture of care.
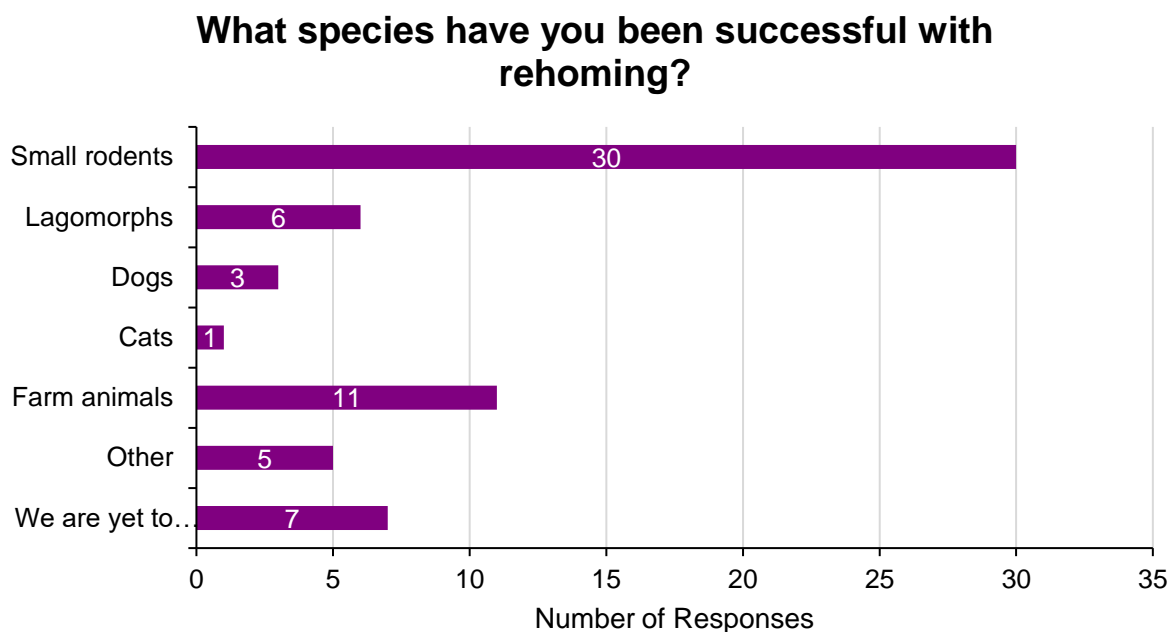
[3] A semi-structured questionnaire survey of laboratory animal rehoming practice across 41 UK animal research facilities - PMC
[4] Advice Note: Re-homing and setting free of animals (ASRU, 2015)

d. An overview of areas to consider when rehoming, including animal identification, methods for finding suitable homes, auditing prospective owners, preparing the animal, and managing the transfer.

e. An overview of common challenges in rehoming and mitigation strategies, advertising approaches, and use of a rehoming gallery to boost staff morale and attract potential owners.

University of Auckland's rehoming journey 2021 – 2025

26. The session began with the following poll question: "What species have you been successful with rehoming?". 43 attendees responded to the poll.

What species have you been successful with rehoming?

Species	Number of Responses
Small rodents	30
Lagomorphs	6
Dogs	3
Cats	1
Farm animals	11
Other	5
We are yet to…	7

Number of Responses

27. Following the poll, the Chair welcomed the speaker for the next item, from the University of Auckland, who delivered an overview of the University of Auckland's rehoming journey between 2021 and 2025.

28. The format of the session was a presentation followed by time for Q&A.

29. The key points covered by the presentation were:

a. Background on the rehoming initiative launched in 2021 alongside the Openness Agreement, aimed at improving staff well-being and reducing euthanasia of animals.

b. Description of rehoming practices prior to 2021, starting with University staff and students and closed partnerships with external organisations and then open partnerships with external organisations in 2021.

c. Key contractual requirements for rehoming to organisations, including compliance with transport and temporary housing legislation, veterinary examination prior to release from the University, no return of animals, provision of health and welfare information and any use in research or teaching, details of species and temperament, avoidance of emotive

language in communications, and AWO sign-off for any public communications.

   d. Summary of positive outcomes, including strong media coverage and public support, a proven academic example of a strong rehoming initiative, reduced euthanasia rates, enhanced reputation for the University of Auckland, improved staff morale, strengthened relationships with external organisations, increased awareness of animal-based research, and better welfare for animals through longer lives as pets.

   e. Lessons were learned about feasibility, logistics, species and strain suitability, and resource requirements; significant challenges included government funding and number of homes vs animals available.

30. At the end of the presentation, attendees were invited to ask any questions, but none were raised.

Homes for Animal Heroes

31. The Chair introduced the speaker for the next item, from the National Animal Interest Alliance, and informed the attendees that they would play a prerecorded presentation on the US based programme, Homes for Animal Heroes.

32. The format of the session was a pre-recorded presentation.

33. The key points covered by the presentation were:

   a. The National Animal Interest Alliance was launched with a mission to promote animal welfare, strengthen the human-animal bond, and safeguard the rights of responsible animal owners and professionals through research, public information, and sound public policy. Homes for Animal Heroes is a program of this non-profit organisation.

   b. The initiative focuses on three programme goals: raising awareness about the purpose of animals in research, sharing knowledge of the care and consideration research professionals give to animals, and rehoming canine heroes through a comprehensive adoption network.

   c. Key contractual requirements include ensuring anonymity, veterinary approval for health and temperament, spay/neuter, vaccinations, preventives, dental cleaning, and microchipping. Partners and adopters are carefully screened with a home visit is conducted and donation is presented as an option.

   d. This programme has informed legislation, contributing to bills such as the "Homes for Animal Heroes Act" and influencing policy changes to support rehoming.

   e. Key challenges include funding limitations and the need for more foster volunteers. A recent NIH policy change now allows grant funds to be used for rehoming and retirement, which is expected to improve sustainability.

   f. Positive outcomes include successful rehoming across multiple states, growing partnerships and volunteer networks, increased public awareness, and strengthened legislative support.

34. Attendees were then randomly assigned to break-out groups to discuss one of four topics 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.

Developing a process

Does your organisation have a rehoming policy?
"Most members of the breakout room indicated that a rehoming policy exists within their organisation, although the level of detail and implementation varies."

What processes does your establishment currently have in place for rehoming suitable animals?
"Academic institutions and commercial establishments are likely to approach this differently. Policies can now be explored in greater depth with discussions highlighting the value of clarifying responsibilities and developing structured tools, such as decision trees for assessing suitability and mechanisms for follow-up after rehoming."

What should a robust and sustainable rehoming process look like?
"Clarify responsibilities in the early stages of setting up a rehoming process. AWERBs should facilitate discussions on rehoming policies, recognising organisational pressures."

Support and Resources

What processes does your establishment currently have in place for rehoming suitable animals?
"Approaches vary widely, from streamlined processes, such as partnerships with charities that broker the rehoming process, to more ad hoc arrangements, such as responding to individual requests."

What types of support, guidance, or resources would help you feel confident about undertaking rehoming activities?
"Resources that save time or streamline processes are essential, as well as resources that address concerns over the destination of rehomed animals. Guidance on home-checking procedures, along with clear criteria outlining when it is acceptable in principle to rehome animals. Centralised platforms could host policy documents, processes, and opportunities for rehoming, particularly within universities. Access to examples of policies from other establishments would also be valuable for benchmarking and improving practice."

How might you work with other AWERBs or other stakeholders to share knowledge on rehoming?
"AWERB hubs are well placed to facilitate sharing of good practice."

Barriers and Challenges

What processes does your establishment currently have in place for rehoming suitable animals?

"Most establishments that can rehome do so, often within the organisation. Approaches range from ad hoc arrangements to more structured processes, such as using posters to raise awareness, inviting potential owners to handle sentinel rats, or working through third-party organisations to maintain anonymity. While these methods provide options, there are questions about whether they always secure the best homes."

What concerns or challenges do you currently face regarding rehoming?

"Challenges include finding suitable homes for species with specific needs, such as large animals, fish, or genetically altered rodents. Animals cannot enter the food chain, and some require neutering before rehoming, which can delay placement. Behavioural issues, such as car phobia in dogs, and concerns about moving animals, specifically Specific Pathogen Free (SPF) or Specified Opportunistic Pathogen Free (SOPF), to a less protected environment add complexity."

If you do rehome, have you ever been in the position where you cannot find new owners?

"Yes, this occurs when numbers are high or species are difficult to place, such as marmosets. Limited availability of appropriate homes can make rehoming impractical in some cases."

Learnings and long-term follow-up

What processes does your establishment currently have in place for rehoming suitable animals?

"Processes may need to be species-specific. Examples included fish rehoming, which can require additional legislation, and rhesus macaques, where biosecurity and quarantine are critical."

How could feedback from previous rehoming efforts be captured and used to improve future schemes?

"Contact zoos early rather than at the point of rehoming to establish clear pathways. A centralised system with one contact person to manage enquiries would help."

What processes could be put in place to monitor the long-term welfare of animals after they leave the establishment?

"Monitoring is important, but the emotional nature of rehoming means processes should be managed carefully."

Final thoughts and feedback

35. 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 participants found the workshop format.

    b. Suggestions for future workshop topics.

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

Annex A – AWERB Hub Workshop (October 2025) Agenda

Time	Topic	Presenter(s)
13:00 – 13:10	Welcome, introductions and workshop protocol	ASC
13:10 – 13:30	Update on the work of the Animals in Science Committee	ASC AWERB Subgroup Secretariat
13:30 – 13:50	Requirements, benefits, and barriers to rehoming	Bristol Veterinary School
13:50 – 14:10	Case study: Rehoming of Welsh Mountain Ponies	Agenda Life Sciences
14:10 – 14:30	Setting up & successfully running a re-homing program as part of your Culture of Care	University of Strathclyde
14:30- 14:40	*Break*	
14:40 – 15:00	University of Auckland's rehoming journey 2021 – 2025	University of Auckland
15:00 – 15:15	Homes for Animal Heroes	National Animal Interest Alliance *(pre-recorded)*
15:15 – 15:55	Breakout Rooms and feedback	
15:55 – 16:00	Final thoughts	ASC