

Animals in Science Committee
Minutes of the 48th Meeting: 8th September 2025
Hybrid Meeting

Welcome, Introductions and Conflicts of Interest

1. Dr Sally Robinson, Chair of the Animals in Science Committee (ASC), welcomed Members to the September 2025 plenary meeting. Apologies were received by representatives from the Department of Health, Northern Ireland (NI). No conflicts of interest were declared. A full list of attendees can be found at Annex A.
2. The Chair welcomed officials from the Animals in Science Regulation Policy Unit (ASRPU), who noted that the wider team would attend from ASRPU's update later in the agenda.
3. The Chair updated that the ASC plenary minutes from March 2025 had been published and were now available on the ASC website¹.
4. The Chair continued that the ASC plenary minutes from June 2025 had now been drafted and would be circulated to the ASC for their comments shortly.

Chair's update

Correspondence updates

5. The Chair introduced a summary of correspondence received and responded to since the last plenary meeting. The correspondence included:
 - a) Letters of welcome from: Cruelty Free International, Labcorp and Animal Free Research.
 - b) The Royal Society of Biology on sector-led accreditation in the animals in science sector.
 - c) A member of the public raising concerns on progress with replacing animals in science
 - d) PETA raising concerns on sepsis.
6. The Chair updated Members that, following discussions at the previous plenary meeting, the possibility of establishing a LinkedIn account would not be possible. It was noted that none of the other science advisory committees within the Home Office operated LinkedIn accounts.

Recommendations tracker update

¹ [ASC meeting minutes, 10 March 2025](#)

7. The Chair noted that, following feedback at the last plenary meeting, the recommendations tracker had been updated with the suggested changes and shared with the Committee. Members were informed that the ASRPU had begun completing their sections of the tracker. Work would continue over the next quarter.

Annual report

8. The Chair introduced a draft version of the ASC Annual Report 2022-2025, which she had made the decision to reinstate under her chairship. Producing an annual report was considered to be good practice under the Code of Practice for Science Advisory Committees². However, the ASC had not produced an annual report since 2014 due to historic issues with Secretariat resourcing.
9. The Chair proposed that the first ASC annual report should be backdated to 2022. It was her view that backdating the reports further than this would be unduly resource-intensive for limited added value, as much of the activity predating this period would no longer be relevant. Additionally, the relevant information from prior to 2022 had been published on the ASC website and could be accessed by interested stakeholders through this avenue. The Committee agreed to this.
10. The Chair invited the Committee to provide feedback on the draft annual report, including on the structure, content and purpose. Points made during the discussion included:
- a) The report would be public-facing and should clearly explain the ASC's role and activities, recognising that readers may not have prior knowledge of the Committee. It should make full use of diagrams to maximise engagement.
 - b) The report should focus on outputs and impact in the relevant time period. It should not focus on ongoing activities. Clear narrative should be included to link impacts to policy influence, where relevant.
11. The Committee would aim to publish its first annual report before June 2026. Going forward, the annual report should be published in the first three months of the subsequent year.

Proposed letter on AI to Lord Hanson

12. A Member presented a draft version of a letter that they had written on behalf of the Committee outlining the opportunities and risks for the use of AI in the animals in science sector, particularly in the areas of replacing animal methods and improving ethical review. They proposed that the letter should be sent to the Home Office Minister.
13. The Chair invited the Committee to provide feedback. Points made during the discussion included:

² [Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Committees and Councils: CoPSAC 2021 - GOV.UK](#)

- a) The ASC should avoid endorsing specific AI technologies or assuming future capabilities. Instead, the letter should recommend further exploration and highlight both opportunities and risks.
 - b) Members emphasised the importance of distinguishing between different types of AI, such as large language models (LLMs) and deep learning systems, to avoid conflation and misrepresentation.
 - c) The ASC's limited technical expertise in AI was noted, with suggestions to focus on areas where the Committee has stronger knowledge, such as AI in ethical oversight and the project licensing process.
14. The Committee additionally discussed the most suitable recipient of the letter. The two areas explored fell into different Ministerial portfolios: replacing animal methods was owned by Lord Vallance at the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT), and ethical review was owned by Lord Hanson at the Home Office. The Committee agreed to consider whether a joint letter or two separate letters would be more appropriate during the redrafting.

Action: Letter to Ministers on AI to be redrafted for further review by the Committee.

Ways of Working update

15. The Chair confirmed that the ASC Ways of Working had now been agreed with DSIT with no major additional changes, and was now finalised. It had been agreed that the document would be published after the alternatives strategy as part of the ASC's response, demonstrating a revised approach to working with DSIT to support delivery.

ASC website update

16. The Chair noted that, following discussions on communications at the strategic planning day, the Secretariat had strengthened the navigability of the ASC website using "Collections". All ASC reports had been gathered into one location, linked at the top of the webpage³. Each section now displayed the commission, the report, and the response (where relevant).

ASC Member recruitment

17. Members were informed that recruitment for five new ASC Members was due to launch at the beginning of October. The Chair thanked Members for providing names of potential candidates and reminded them that further suggestions could still be submitted.
18. The Chair confirmed that the link to the recruitment advert would be shared upon launch, and the Secretariat would appreciate Members' support in sharing it more widely.

Alternatives strategy

³ [Animals in Science Committee published reports - GOV.UK](#)

19. The Chair reported that a meeting had taken place with DSIT on 1 September to discuss updates. The strategy was now expected to be published in early November. Delays were attributed to the time required for officials to finalise and approve the content, including ensuring alignment with broader policy understanding.
20. The Chair confirmed that key stakeholders, including government officials and Lord Hanson, had been briefed and were engaged with the strategy. DSIT would be attending later in the meeting to provide an update. Members were encouraged to raise questions with DSIT if needed, and to seek updates on progress.
21. One Member raised concerns about waiting until the alternatives strategy was published to take action, as this risked continuously and indefinitely delaying important workstreams. The Chair agreed this point but noted that it would be more impactful if ASC work aligned with the strategy. If the strategy was delayed beyond 2025, the Chair may reconsider this position.

Futures Working Group deep dive

22. The Chair of the Futures Working Group provided a deep dive on the background of the Subgroup and its findings in its report: “The future of futures: participatory futures research in the ASC”. The aim was to decide next steps for the Subgroup and its recommendations in its report.
23. The presentation covered the context, the potential for futures research, the resources available for futures thinking, the background of the Futures Working Group, a summary of the techniques the Subgroup used and the work it conducted (interviews, horizon scanning, a workshop and a report⁴), and the recommendations that the Subgroup made.
24. The Chair thanked the Subgroup Chair for the presentation. The Committee were broadly in agreement that the futures workstream should continue, but decisions needed to be made on the most suitable way forward. It was decided that the Futures Working Group should convene to fully discuss and draft a proposal for next steps for the Committee’s agreement.

Action: Futures Working Group to convene to produce proposal for next steps.

Project Licence Application review process

25. The Chair described a proposal to review the ASC’s project licence application review process.

⁴ [The future of futures: participatory futures research in the ASC - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/674444/The_future_of_futures_participatory_futures_research_in_the_ASC.pdf)

26. The existing process was that individual project licences meeting the criteria set out in the Guidance on ASPA⁵ were referred to the ASC on a case-by-case basis.
27. The Chair proposed a more strategic, thematic model. This would involve grouping project licences into thematic clusters and reviewing all licences within a theme at the same time, allowing direct comparison of similar licences and the ability to co-opt specific expertise where required. It was noted that this approach would deliver greater benefit for animal welfare through sharing of good practice. The Chair emphasised that there should still be a mechanism for Animals in Science Regulation Unit (ASRU) to refer licences for more novel or contentious projects that it may wish to seek ASC advice on, and vice versa, a mechanism for the ASC to request to see individual licences of a particular nature.
28. The ASC was broadly in favour of the proposed new model. It was discussed that the communications surrounding this change would need to be clear that this was a strengthening of scrutiny, not a weakening, and the benefits to animal welfare should be emphasised. The logistics and transition period would need to be discussed in more detail with ASRU and ASRPU.

Action: Secretariat to facilitate formal agreement of proposal to update the Project Licence Application review process and transitional arrangements.

Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Bodies (AWERB) Subgroup

29. The Subgroup Chair informed Members that the second draft of the non-technical summary (NTS) and retrospective analysis (RA) report had been completed and circulated to the Subgroup for comment. The Subgroup last met on 19 August to discuss feedback and next steps and would reconvene during the week commencing 15 September to finalise the report.
30. Members were invited to present any comments on the draft report during the plenary. The deadline for written comments was 15 September 2025. Key points made during the discussion included:
- a) The introduction to the NTS and RA report should include a section explaining “What is a non-technical summary?” and “What is retrospective assessment?”, noting that the report should be accessible to interested members of the public.
 - b) The ASC should not recommend extending RAs to all project licences, noting that this proposal had not received universal support from either sector or non-sector stakeholders.
 - c) The ASC supported increasing the availability of public information and welcomed the opportunity to address concerns regarding the inclusion of technical detail in public-facing summaries. Consideration should be given to how the public might access more detailed information than is currently

⁵ [Guidance on the operation of the Animals \(Scientific Procedures\) Act 1986 \(ASPA\) - GOV.UK](#)

available, while ensuring that non-technical summaries remained informative and accessible.

- d) The ASC supported training providers including examples of NTSs and RAs as part of their materials.
 - e) ASRU had a legal responsibility to assess NTSs and RAs to ensure compliance with legal requirements, which included accessible, non-technical language. Therefore, recommendations on this point should focus on how ASRU might improve internal processes and guidance to support this.
31. The Subgroup Chair informed Members that the AWERB Subgroup was currently preparing for the October 2025 AWERB Hub workshop, titled, “The Role of AWERBs in Successful Rehoming”. The workshop was scheduled to take place on 15 October 2025 from 13:00 to 16:00.
32. The Subgroup Chair updated that the July 2025 newsletter had been circulated to AWERB Chairs, and the next newsletter was scheduled for January 2026.
33. The ASC Chair wrote to Lord Hanson on 8 July 2025 to refine the scope of the commission on strengthening the functioning of AWERBs and the Named Information Officer (NIO)⁶.
34. The Subgroup was now considering a revised approach, proposing to divide the work into two separate commissions to ensure focused advice:
- a) The first commission would address standards of effectiveness and governance for AWERBs, including a framework to support audit and evaluation.
 - b) The second commission would focus on the effective functioning of named roles, primarily the NIO, with scope to consider other named roles.
35. The Subgroup would reconvene to discuss full scoping, with work due to begin in January 2026. Members of the wider ASC were invited to join the Subgroup for the duration of the commissions, without the need for formal co-option.

Leading Practice Subgroup

36. The Subgroup Chair updated that, following discussions between the ASC Chair and Subgroup Chair, the scope of the Leading Practice workstream was refined to focus on the commission’s core questions:
- a) Reviewing how leading practice is currently developed, shared, and used across the animals in science system, identifying key actors, gaps, and opportunities.
 - b) Recommending how the sector can collaborate to foster a culture where leading practice is developed, shared, and adopted effectively.

⁶ [ASC commissions: letters to Lord Hanson - GOV.UK](#)

- c) Advising on the Regulator's role in recognising and incentivising leading practice, including through the audit framework.
37. The Subgroup Chair updated that recommendations will only be directed to the Regulator and the regulated sector. Comment would be made on the roles of other key actors, such as funders and publishers, but recommendations would not be made directly. Where the Subgroup considered there to be further work required outside of the scope of these questions, they would recommend that further work is commissioned. AWERBs would not be considered in-depth in this report due to the upcoming commissions focused on AWERBs.
38. The Subgroup Chair opened the floor to discussions on the framework, case study, and initial set of draft recommendations involved in this report.
39. One Member suggested that it may be useful to group recommendations thematically in the summary of recommendations to improve readability. The Secretariat agreed to implement this feedback.

National Centre for the Replacement, Refinement and Reduction of Animals in Research (NC3Rs) update

40. The Chair invited a representative from the NC3Rs to provide an update.
41. The NC3Rs informed Members that they were unable to provide an update on the NC3Rs' plans for the next five years, as the outcome of the Medical Research Council (MRC) funding review had not yet been confirmed. The review process began in June 2024, with detailed plans submitted in November and an additional business plan submitted in July 2025
42. A Member raised concerns about the prolonged delay in the funding decision and noted that the outcome had originally been expected in April 2025. They highlighted the uncertainty this created for the organisation and its future.
43. Members expressed continued support for the NC3Rs and its work. The Chair thanked the NC3Rs for the update and offered the ASC's support in any future stages of the review if needed.

Animals in Science Regulation Policy Unit (ASRPU) update

44. The Chair welcomed representatives from ASRPU and invited them to update on their progress with the policy and regulatory reform programmes.
45. ASRPU updated that there had been Ministerial and staff changes at the Home Office. Namely, the Secretary of State for the Home Department was now held by the Rt Hon Shabana Mahmood MP, and restructuring to the senior leadership team has taken place.

ASRPU responses to ASC reports

46. ASRPU provided an update on the response to the ASC's advice on non-human primates bred for use in scientific purposes. A submission addressing the ASC's recommendations, accepted in full by the Minister, had been cleared. ASRU was developing guidance, and a letter from Lord Hanson had been sent to the ASC outlining how each recommendation would be addressed.

47. ASRPU provided an update on the response to the ASC's advice on non-human primates used in service licences. ASRPU had reviewed the ASC's report and recommendations and discussed implementation with ASRU. A submission regarding the review was scheduled to be sent to the Minister within the next month, following Parliamentary recess.

Decapods

48. ASRPU updated that the Government remained committed to an evidence-based and proportionate approach to setting welfare standards for decapod crustaceans and cephalopods. The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) was continuing to build the evidence base and was working closely with ASRPU on next steps.

Forced Swim Test

49. ASRPU noted a continued trend of establishments winding down use of the forced swim test, which would be reported as a technique of special interest in the 2024 annual statistics publication.

Precision breeding

50. ASRPU updated that the project on precision breeding had been paused by DEFRA and that ASRPU continued to engage with DEFRA regularly.

51. A Member asked why this project had been paused. ASRPU agreed to follow-up with DEFRA.

Additional statistics collection

52. In response to Ministerial and stakeholder interest, the ASRPU was exploring the collection of additional statistics on animals bred but not used in procedures. A submission was expected to be sent to the Minister in due course.

Regulatory reform programme

53. ASRPU updated that ASRU's new operating model had a soft launch on 12 August 2025, marking a significant milestone in the reform programme. From this date:

- a) Existing and some new employees had begun in their new roles.
- b) The new model had begun gradual rollout, with no immediate changes to regulatory services for the external community to adapt to.
- c) Temporary Inspectors continued to support delivery, and onboarding of new staff would continue through to the end of 2025.

54. Recruitment for the new organisational structure was progressing well:

- a) Successful candidates had been identified and onboarding was underway.
 - b) Several new staff had started, including one permanent Inspector, with others joining from September.
 - c) ASRU's new management team was in place, with one final appointment expected in October.
55. The official launch of the new operating model was scheduled for 4 November 2025, to be marked by an in-person event including an address from the Minister. Most new ASRU appointments were expected to be in post by this date.
56. Applications for the ASRU Governance Board were open from 3 July to 20 August. A strong field of applicants had been received. Written assessments were ongoing, with interviews scheduled for early to mid-September. Members were expected to be onboarded by late 2025 or early 2026.
57. The formal closure of the reform programme was planned for 2025. This would involve integrating remaining work into ASRU operations or handing it over, with continued policy involvement in some areas. Closure planning included documentation of processes, training, and monitoring adoption of new ways of working. Programme deliverables and benefits continued to be monitored.

Operational update

58. Members were informed that ASRU had begun work to develop a more mature performance framework, following the ASC's June focus on Key Performance Indicators and in line with ASRU's new business framework. With the new Head of Performance now in post, initial scoping had started to explore how ASRU might assess impact beyond operational outputs, including how establishments advance the 3Rs. Updates would be provided in the next quarterly report.
59. ASRU had implemented the first phase of improvements to its GOV.UK web pages to enhance navigation and help stakeholders find information more easily. Working with the sector, ASRU had:
- a) Rewritten page titles and summaries for clarity,
 - b) Added contextual introductions and meaningful headings,
 - c) Reordered content for logical flow,
 - d) Improved link context and language clarity,
 - e) Withdrawn outdated information,
 - f) Converted PDF guidance to HTML for improved accessibility,
 - g) Published further guidance, reports, and documents.

Government architecture teach-in

60. ASRPU provided a teach-in on the architecture of government, outlining where responsibilities sat across departments. The presentation covered the positioning of key UK regulators and emphasised the importance of cross-government

coordination. ASRPU noted that while clarifying ownership was important, it should not lead to siloed working.

61. One Member commented that it had been incredibly useful for the Committee to have the various responsibilities clearly communicated, though cautioned against creating silos. They asked whether ASRPU had any plans to further upskill the public on this topic, noting that correspondence and Parliamentary Questions were often directed to the incorrect Department or body. ASRPU agreed to take this away.

Department for Science, Innovation and Technology update

62. The Chair welcomed a representative from DSIT and invited them to update on progress on alternatives, including the alternative methods strategy, and any other activity in this space.
63. DSIT provided an update on the forthcoming strategy. The draft had undergone several reviews by Lord Vallance, who was supportive of its direction. Final commitments were being agreed with departments including MHRA and UKRI.
64. The strategy would cover animal use across both basic research and testing in the development of medicines and chemicals. It would place strong emphasis on data access and support for computational modelling, AI, and machine learning approaches.
65. It was noted that the strategy would also address the UK's role in a global context and include clear governance arrangements for delivery.
66. In response to a question about the role of the NC3Rs in the upcoming strategy, DSIT confirmed that the NC3Rs would play a strong role in supporting delivery. The organisation was referenced throughout the strategy, both in relation to specific commitments and in helping to establish the environment needed for successful implementation.
67. In response to a question about the likely publication date of the strategy, DSIT stated that while it was not guaranteed, they were hopeful that it would be this year. It was noted that the strategy had taken time due to its complexity and the need to secure firm commitments, but that it now included clear delivery plans outlining what would be delivered, by whom, and when. DSIT added that recent changes in government could affect the timeline, but efforts were being made to publish as soon as possible.

Committee Matters & AOB

Visits

68. The Chair noted that, following a contract research organisation's introductory letter inviting the Committee to visit one of their sites, the Secretariat would shortly be writing to Members to seek availability.

Annex A – List of Attendees

Committee Members

Dr Sally Robinson (ASC Chair)
Professor Andrew Jackson
Dr Carl Westmoreland
Mrs Caroline Chadwick
Dr Dharaminder Singh
Professor Johanna Gibson
Professor Jonathan Birch
Dr Lucy Whitfield (from 12:00)
Professor Stephen May
Dr Stuart Greenhill
Mrs Tina O'Mahony
Professor Christine Watson
Professor Hazel Screen
Professor Martin Knight
Mrs Wendy Jarrett (10:00-14:00)

Secretariat

Emily Townley
Abigail Erickson

Animals in Science Regulation Policy Unit (ASRPU)

William Reynolds
Chloe Jenkins
Mamataj Begum
Alex Allenby-Mckeown
Alice Whiteman
Lucy Duncan
Nicholas Were

Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT)

Anthony Holmes

Apologies

Mrs Wendy Jarrett (ASC Member) (from 14:00)
Dr Lucy Whitfield (ASC Member) (10:00-12:00)
Christine Henderson (Department of Health Northern Ireland)
Karen Somerville (Department of Health Northern Ireland)
Alister Cox (ASC Secretariat)