

Animals in Science Committee and Animal Welfare Ethical Review Body Hub Workshop: 23 April 2026

The value of lay and independent members in the delivery of effective AWERBs

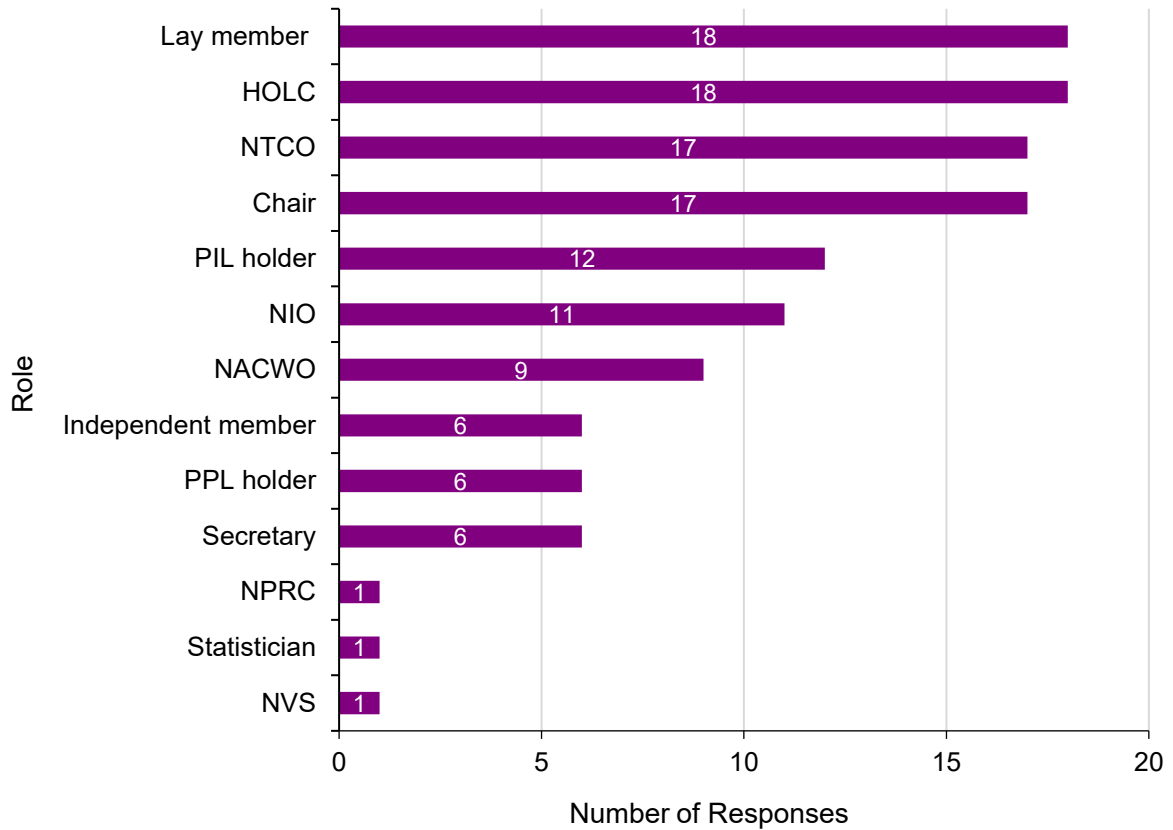
The AWERB Hub workshop was convened and held under the aegis of the ASC's AWERB Subgroup. The views summarised in this report are those expressed by attendees of the workshop, and do not necessarily represent the views of the ASC. This report is not intended to be, and should not be interpreted as, a policy statement or a work plan.

Introduction

1. The fourteenth Animals in Science Committee (ASC) and Animal Welfare Ethical Review Body (AWERB) Hub workshop was convened on 23 April 2026 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. The Top 5 Operational Challenges for AWERBs
 - c. Lay Members' Forum and RSPCA Guidance
 - d. Perspectives on the value of lay and independent members contributions to AWERBs
3. More than 125 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).

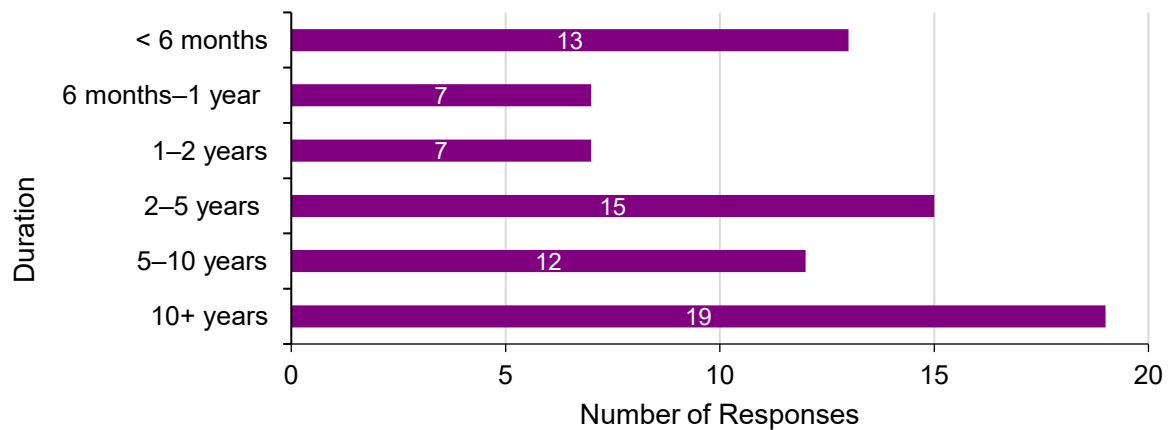
4. The workshop began with two polls to gauge the composition of the audience. The first poll question was, “What is your role within your AWERB?”. Respondents were able to select more than one response. 123 attendees responded to the poll.

What is your role within your AWERB?



5. The second poll question was, “How long have you been an AWERB member?”. Respondents were asked to select one response. 73 attendees responded to the poll.

How long have you been an AWERB member?



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: Mrs Tina O'Mahony (ASC AWERB Subgroup)
 - b. The Top 5 Operational Challenges for AWERBs, the Lay Members' Forum and RSPCA Guidance: Dr Penny Hawkins, and Ms Ellie Muscat (RSPCA)
 - c. The Scientist's Perspective: Dr Stuart Greenhill (Aston University)
 - d. The Lay Perspective: Mr Jason Booth (The University of Birmingham's AWERB)
 - e. The Independent Perspective: Dr Jessica Eddy (NC3Rs)
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 Tina O'Mahony 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 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. Six new members have been appointed to the ASC for 3 years. Five members have completed their tenure with the ASC.
 - b. The ASC had recently published the [ASC AWERB Hub workshop report: October 2025](#).
 - c. The ASC had recently published advice on [strengthening leading practice in the animals in science sector](#), including recommendations primarily for ASRU and additional recommendations on 3Rs CPD and AWERB self-assessment.
 - d. The ASC's role in the [government strategy on replacing animals in science](#) included Chair involvement in cross-government and official-level groups, alongside [updated ways of working](#) to enable DSIT to commission ASC advice.
 - e. Recent correspondence and ongoing commissions had been published, including Home Office responses on [cumulative severity](#) and [decapod regulation](#), letters from the ASC to the Minister on the [alternatives strategy](#) and [generative AI](#), and [current commissions on named persons' responsibilities and AWERB standards](#).
11. At the end of the presentation, attendees were invited to ask any questions, but none were raised.

The Top 5 Operational Challenges for AWERBs / Lay Members' Forum and RSPCA Guidance

12. The Chair then welcomed the two speakers for the next item, Dr Penny Hawkins, and Ms Ellie Muscat, from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA). The format of the session was the delivery of the two presentations in succession, followed by a Q&A session.
13. The Chair introduced Dr Penny Hawkins, who delivered an overview of the top five operational challenges for AWERBs, drawing on outcomes from an [RSPCA/LASA/LAVA/IAT AWERB-UK meeting](#). The key points were:
 - a. The contribution of AWERBs to leading practice, the promotion of a culture of care, and the importance of openness and transparency in maintaining public trust. AWERBs should have adequate resource, engagement, and recognition to function effectively.
 - b. An 'ideal' model in which AWERBs were well integrated within establishments, with two-way engagement, supported by senior management, adequately resourced, and provided with clear terms of reference, induction and continuing professional development (CPD) for all members.
 - c. The five key operational challenges identified were:
 - i. Lack of recognition and reward for AWERB members
 - ii. Lack of training and CPD for members
 - iii. Insufficient time for all those directly and indirectly involved
 - iv. Need for 'professionalisation' of the AWERB, including career progression
 - v. Lack of liaison with Research Integrity Committees and similar bodies
 - d. The relevance of these challenges for lay and independent members was emphasised, alongside practical actions such as reviewing the AWERB-UK report and addressing relevant challenges, establishing or reviewing AWERB self-assessment processes, seeking training and CPD with formal recognition, considering appropriate use of technology to support remote meetings and project review, and reviewing integration with other internal bodies and external AWERBs.
 - e. AWERB Chairs played a key role in enabling balanced discussion and ensuring that non-technical perspectives were heard, supported by actions such as setting clear terms of reference and role descriptions, providing induction and training with minimum CPD expectations, improving efficiency and resourcing of AWERB processes, reviewing approaches to lay and independent membership, and ensuring appropriate reimbursement or payment for their time.
14. The Chair introduced Ms Ellie Muscat, who delivered an overview of Lay Members' Forum and RSPCA Guidance. The key points were:

- a. The RSPCA had organised an annual meeting for lay and independent members of AWERBs since 1999, with the aim of providing training, empowering members, and sharing information and experience on good practice across UK establishments.
 - b. Topics discussed at last year's forum included strategies for replacing animals in science, an overview of the 2025 RSPCA/IAT/LASA/LAVA AWERB-UK meeting, current topics such as rehoming, sex-inclusive research framework and enrichment for zebrafish, and a final session on advising on the 3Rs.
 - c. Additional resources for AWERB members were available through [the AWERB directory](#).
 - d. The international focus on severe suffering meeting, "Progress in Refinement: Addressing Severe Suffering Across Disciplines", was scheduled to be held in Madrid in June 2026.
15. At the end of the presentation, attendees were invited to ask any questions. The following points were raised:
- a. It was noted that named persons generally had clearly defined roles within AWERBs, and that the key requirement was ensuring sufficient resources and access to training to enable them to fulfil those roles effectively.
 - b. In relation to broader committee skills, including negotiation and persuasion, reference was made to tailored training materials such as "[Care-full Stories](#)" developed by the Animal Research Nexus.
 - c. It was suggested that a combination of role-specific training, committee skills development, and appropriate resourcing provided the foundation for effective contribution by AWERB members.

The Scientist's Perspective

16. The Chair then welcomed the three speakers for the next item, Dr Stuart Greenhill, Mr Jason Booth, and Dr Jessica Eddy. The format of the session was the delivery of the three presentations in succession, followed by a Q&A session.
17. The Chair introduced Dr Stuart Greenhill, Aston University, who delivered a presentation on the scientist's perspective on the value of lay and independent contribution. The key points were:
- a. An outline of the legislative basis for AWERBs, noting that while minimum membership requirements were limited, guidance issued under section 21 of ASPA set out an expectation that establishments should exercise discretion to include wider membership, including lay and independent members.
 - b. A summary the minimum AWERB membership requirement: at least one NACWO and NVS and a scientific member (if user establishment) and emphasised the importance of ensuring that establishment NIOs and NTCOs were actively involved in AWERB activities.

- c. AWERBs varied considerably in structure and operation, but despite these differences, all AWERBs benefited from lay and independent input, which provided external challenge and broader perspective.
- d. The value of lay membership was akin to peer review, requiring clear explanation of scientific purpose and justification, strengthening non-technical summaries, and supporting ethical reflection.
- e. Lay members were noted to bring expertise from other fields, such as risk management and organisational resilience, and to help challenge entrenched practices.
- f. Independent members can offer additional benefit by being less influenced by internal politics and institutional pressures. While acknowledged as harder to recruit, external professionals can provide important independent input, even on a limited or case-specific basis. It was emphasised that “lay” and “independent” should not be treated as interchangeable concepts.

The Lay Perspective

18. The Chair introduced Mr Jason Booth, an independent lay member the University of Birmingham’s AWERB currently working in public sector procurement, who delivered a presentation on the lay perspective. The key points were:

- a. Their motivation for joining the AWERB arose from professional experience translating legislation into policy, a strong commitment to ethical standards, concern that animals lacked sufficient safeguards, and a belief that ethics required transparency, openness to challenge, and compassionate outcomes, with ethical oversight being essential to both animal welfare and data quality.
- b. Their aims as an AWERB member were to contribute to ethical oversight of animal research, promote transparency and accessibility, and advocate for animal welfare and humane research practices.
- c. AWERB review involves advance sight of project licence applications, presentations by principal investigators, committee questioning, and collective deliberation on whether to support licence submission.
- d. Their approach to the role was to maintain an active presence, ask fundamental questions, contribute proportionately, and listen to subject matter experts to support balanced discussion.
- e. A key focus area was the non-technical summary, particularly clarity, public understandability and accuracy, and animal welfare considerations, including what would be done to animals, anticipated welfare impacts and proposed mitigations, with checks for consistency across documentation.

The Independent Perspective

19. The Chair introduced Dr Jessica Eddy, National Centre for the Replacement, Refinement, and Reduction of Animals in Research (NC3Rs), who delivered a presentation on the independent perspective. The key points were:

- a. An outline of the definition of independent members under [ASPA guidance](#) and [RSPCA and LASA, 2026, Guiding Principles on Good Practice for AWERBs](#), clarifying that independent members were distinct from lay members, and could include individuals with relevant animal welfare expertise who were wholly independent of the establishment.
- b. The primary value of independent members lay in their objectivity, enabling challenge to established practices, assumptions and internal processes, particularly in relation to animal use, refinement and ethical justification.
- c. Independent members can bring wider experience from other AWERBs or institutions, helping to identify missed opportunities for the 3Rs, and strengthen ethical, animal welfare, and scientific review.
- d. Independent membership can enhance public confidence by providing visible external scrutiny, reinforcing accountability, transparency, and balanced decision-making.
- e. Effective use of independent members depends on clear purpose, meaningful recruitment, structured induction and support, active facilitation by the Chair, opportunities for contribution beyond meetings, and regular review of their impact and experience.
- f. Appropriate support for independent members was described as including tailored induction, training, reimbursement, facility access, encouragement to challenge, inclusion within a culture of care, equitable access to information and shared documents, and attention to confidentiality and security concerns.

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

- a. To make the time commitment manageable for lay members it is helpful to have meeting papers circulated ahead of time and the correct direction of focus in your role.
- b. Non-disclosure agreements are not routinely required for independent members, but there is an expectation of confidentiality.
- c. It is important to discuss up front whether independent members prefer to be named or anonymous in AWERB meeting minutes.

Breakout rooms: Lay and Independent Members

21. 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.

Supporting Effective Contribution

In your opinion, what is the difference in perspective between lay and independent members?

“The discussion highlighted that rigid definitions of ‘lay’ and ‘independent’ were less important than the perspective individuals brought, with emphasis on curiosity, critical thinking and the ability to act as a respectful but robust ‘critical friend’, regardless of role or background.”

How can we encourage lay and independent members to contribute effectively during AWERB meetings?

“Effective contribution was linked to a supportive Chair who set the tone and ensured that quieter members were heard, recognising that confidence in speaking did not equate to intelligence or value.”

How can independence be preserved while still ensuring members feel included and valued?

“Participants emphasised the importance of plain language and avoidance of acronyms and jargon, noting that inclusive communication supported independence, encouraged challenge, and reinforced a culture of critical friendship.”

Recruitment and Advertising

How does your institution advertise roles for external/lay/independent members?

“Participants reported that recruitment was most commonly informal, relying on word of mouth, internal networks, and staff meetings, with examples of lay members drawn from a wide range of professional backgrounds, and some establishments offering introductory sessions to explain the role of the AWERB.”

Should an independent member's tenure be reviewed?

“Discussion suggested that lay status was determined more by lack of involvement in animal research than by tenure length, with agreement that lay members generally remained ‘lay’ over time despite increased familiarity with AWERB processes.”

Induction, Training, and Support

What induction or training is currently provided for lay and independent members?

“Participants described a range of induction approaches, including use of RSPCA guidance, buddying systems, meetings with the Chair, NTCO, establishment licence

holder and NIO, and access to AWERB materials via shared platforms, although some felt the volume of information could be overwhelming.”

What information is most critical for new members to feel confident contributing early on?

“Reassurance that there were no ‘stupid questions’, clear discussion of ethics, access to papers in advance, opportunities to sense-check questions informally, guidance on acronyms and terminology, and support in understanding issues such as appropriate animal numbers in PPLs.”

How can ongoing development (e.g. refreshers, mentoring, shadowing) be improved or standardised?

“Ongoing development was associated with mentoring, shadowing and buddying arrangements, optional access to training such as ethics modules, participation in forums such as the RSPCA Lay Members’ Forum, and periodic retraining or review.”

Defining the Role

How would you define the role of the lay and independent member?

“Participants agreed that lay and independent members shared a common purpose in bringing different perspectives to the AWERB, with lay members in particular representing public perception, supporting transparency, and scrutinising non-technical summaries while also engaging with wider licence content.”

Are “lay” and “independent” the most appropriate term for this role within the AWERB, or is there an alternative term that better reflects the contribution these members make?

“While lay members in the group were comfortable with the term, it was acknowledged that others may find it unhelpful, with suggestions including ‘public’ or ‘community’ member, and for independent members the term ‘external’ was proposed to better clarify independence.”

Breakout rooms: Named Persons and AWERB Standards

22. Attendees were then re-assigned to the 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.

Named Persons

Do you feel as though the named role(s) you hold is/are broadly well defined? Why or why not?

“Discussion suggested that while most named roles were broadly well defined, the NIO role in particular was seen as unclear and still evolving.”

Do you feel as though the named role(s) you hold is/are broadly effective at their duties under ASPA? Why or why not?

“Participants felt that named roles were generally effective but raised questions about the expectations and training of Chairs, the balance of responsibility between Chairs and AWERB secretariats, and clarity over who should appoint AWERB members.”

Named Persons Barriers

In our call for evidence on named roles, barriers that came up across many roles was “engagement with ASRU”. What practical changes could be made to help resolve these issues?

“Participants highlighted inconsistent and delayed feedback from ASRU as a key barrier, noting the loss of continuity from dedicated contacts, variability in advice across similar project licence applications, and slow responses to queries; suggested improvements included clearer and more consistent communications and expectations from ASRU, and the ability for the AWERB to undertake proactive preparation for thematic audits through ASRU signalling audit intention ahead of time and AWERB preparation through the use of locally developed checklists.”

AWERB Standards

Do you feel that your AWERB goes beyond the minimum requirements? Can you give examples? What are the barriers?

“Participants reported that many AWERBs sought to go beyond minimum requirements by expanding ethical oversight, including consideration of non-ASPA use of animals or tissues, and overseas work, with time constraints and high volumes of PPLs identified as the main barriers.”

What are the top 3 priorities for improving AWERB standards?

“Priorities included investment in training, CPD and broader skills development, sufficient budget and resourcing, strengthening a culture of care and AWERB visibility, and enhancing the ethical focus of AWERB work, particularly through effective facilitation by Chairs to ensure lay and independent voices meaningfully influence harm–benefit analysis and decision-making.”

AWERB Standards Barriers

How can we reduce the time burden on AWERBs?

“Participants agreed that the time burden was substantial due to paperwork and volume of work, with mitigating approaches including circulation of papers in advance, use of standing agendas, and, in larger establishments, breaking AWERB responsibilities into different meeting that can be fed into a main committee.”

What training courses would be most valuable for AWERB members?

“Valuable training was described as including induction covering legislation, species and roles, opportunities to observe meetings before active participation, facility tours,

in-house training days, buddying arrangements, and role-specific training supported by a training matrix, with emphasis on the Chair enabling inclusive discussion.”

Does your organisation recognise the commitment of AWERB members? What recognition would be effective?

“Recognition approaches included formal inclusion of AWERB duties in job descriptions, particularly for named persons, and informal recognition such as end-of-year thank-you emails or newsletter updates highlighting AWERB achievements.”

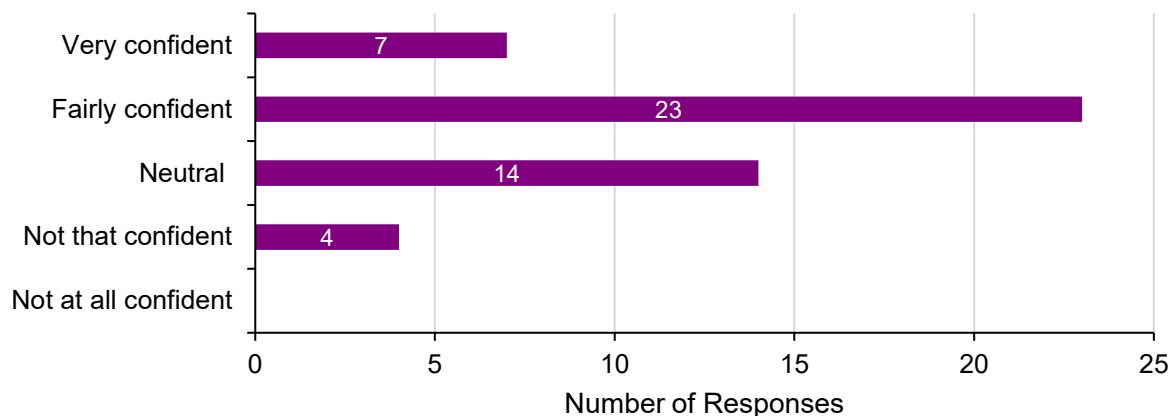
Final thoughts and feedback

23. 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.

24. The workshop concluded with a poll, “How confident are you that your establishment best supports and incentivises their lay and/or independent members?”. Respondents were asked to select one response. 48 attendees responded to the poll.

How confident are you that your establishment best supports and incentivises their lay and/or independent members?



25. 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 (April 2026) Agenda

Time	Topic	Presenter(s)
13:00 – 13:10	Welcome, introductions and workshop protocol	Mrs Caroline Chadwick
13:10 – 13:25	Update on the work of the Animals in Science Committee	Mrs Tina O'Mahony
13:20 – 13:25	Q&A	
13:25 – 13:45	The Top 5 Operational Challenges for AWERBs Lay Members' Forum and RSPCA guidance	Dr Penny Hawkins Ms Ellie Muscat
13:45 – 13:50	Q&A	
13:50 – 14:00	The Scientist Perspective	Dr Stuart Greenhill
14:00 – 14:10	The Lay Perspective	Mr Jason Booth
14:10 – 14:20	The Independent Perspective	Dr Jessica Eddy
14:20 – 14:25	Q&A	
14:25 – 14:35	Break	
14:35 – 15:15	Breakout rooms: Lay and Independent Members	
15:15- 15:55	Breakout rooms: AWERB Standards and Named Persons	