

Animals in Science Committee
Minutes of the 50th Meeting: 9th March 2026
Hybrid Meeting

Welcome, Introductions and Conflicts of Interest

1. Dr Sally Robinson, Chair of the Animals in Science Committee (ASC), welcomed Members to the March 2026 plenary meeting. Apologies were received by Professor Johanna Gibson and Professor Hazel Screen. 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) and noted that the wider team would attend from ASRPU's update later in the agenda, and a Member of the UK Health Security Agency who was attending as an observer.
3. The Chair commented that the Chief Executive of the National Centre for the Replacement, Refinement & Reduction of Animals in Research (NC3Rs) would later join the meeting as an NC3Rs representative.

Actions and minutes

4. The Chair noted that the published ASC commissions were with policy for response and that the following ASC actions had now been updated.
 - a) The letter on the opportunities and risks of the use of generative artificial intelligence had been sent to Lord Hanson on 27 February 2026 and would be published on 9 March 2026¹.
 - b) The AWERB Subgroup had published and updated the AWERB Hub support note².
5. The Chair reported that a recent meeting had taken place ASRPU to discuss impact tracking and the ASC annual report. It was noted that a more standardised process for evidence gathering was required, including during calls for evidence, to ensure the widest possible range of sources was reached at the outset of each commission. The Chair continued that the project initiation documents, as outlined in the updated ways of working³, could serve as a template for future commissions to support comprehensive evidence collation. A Member commented on the need for a more systematic approach.

¹ [Generative AI in animals in science: letter to Lord Hanson - GOV.UK](#)

² [Animal Welfare Ethical Review Body Hub Support Note, 2026 - GOV.UK](#)

³ [Animals in Science Committee: ways of working - GOV.UK](#)

6. The Chair updated that the ASC plenary minutes from September 2025 had been published and were now available on the ASC website⁴. The Chair noted that the December minutes had been shared with the ASC for comment.

Department for Science, Innovation and Technology update

7. The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) reported that they would provide an update on the alternatives strategy.

8. DSIT reported that significant initial process heavy activity was required at the outset of the strategy's implementation. They noted that the first major step had been taken, with the Medical Research Council (MRC) publishing a £20 million invitation to tender for a pre-clinical translational models hub⁵. The remaining £10 million in the budget had been allocated to a series of networks intended to provide tissues and data for the hub, with details still under development. The hub was expected to be in place by the end of the year.

9. DSIT thanked the Committee for their work reviewing the public attitudes to animal research survey. It was noted that an invitation to tender had been issued to several survey companies, with the intention that costs would be procured in one tranche for three surveys. Any straightforward or corrective amendments had been made, and DSIT would work with the selected survey company to refine the questions further.

10. DSIT confirmed that the details for the UK Centre for the Validation of Alternative Methods (UKCVAM) had not yet been finalised, but that a group had been convened to develop the proposals.

11. DSIT confirmed that they will commission the ASC regarding the membership and working structure of the alternatives committee.

12. DSIT noted that all governance groups were now established and operational. An officials' group had met, and the Ministerial group was due to meet later in the week, indicating that the programme had moved from set-up into delivery.

13. A Member asked about the enforcement aspect of the timelines set out in the strategy's priority for replacement of animal tests, and how the strategy would operate once deadlines were reached for the phasing out of a test. The ensuing discussion included:

- a) The Home Office owned the enforcement aspect of the strategy and would work within its statutory remit for enforcement.
- b) There was a need to manage public expectations and to ensure that the impact of animal testing was communicated clearly.

⁴ [ASC meeting minutes, 8 September 2025](#)

⁵ [Pre-clinical translational models hub – UKRI](#)

- c) Timelines in the strategy were aspirational rather than hard targets. There were concerns raised that failure to meet deadlines could result in public pushback and loss of government credibility, but the strategy had been deliberately worded to provide an honest description of the Government's aims. Timelines were necessary to keep the strategy on a reasonable trajectory and were considered achievable based on knowledge at the time of preparing the strategy.
 - d) The strategy required periodic reporting against targets and confirmed that this would operate as a "conveyor belt" system, supported by an Areas of Research Interest document produced every couple of years.
14. A Member noted that the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) had validated an alternative for *in vivo* skin irritation testing 16 years ago and asked why the deadline for phasing it out was the end of the year. DSIT responded that they would need to liaise with the scientific teams who had drafted the timelines but speculated that the bulk of work had already been replaced and that the remaining focus was on edge cases. DSIT and the NC3Rs agreed to review this further with the Senior Responsible Owner (SRO).
15. A Member noted that as regulators are bound by international guidelines, that in some cases a test may be required even when a validated alternative existed. DSIT acknowledged this. It was noted that focusing on a single test with an accepted validated alternative could help drive progress. DSIT further noted that senior representatives from regulators sat on the Ministerial Board, providing a forum to address these challenges.
16. A Member noted that the strategy required all PhD students to be offered 3Rs training by the end of 2026 and expressed concern that, as of March, no information had been provided. The Member asked when clarity on the UK Research and Innovation's (UKRI) current plans would be available. DSIT replied that they could not speak for UKRI's arrangements but would issue regular updates on all strategy commitments. The NC3Rs added that they were leading on the PhD training work, noting that the training would be delivered as an e-learning module, with a summer school planned for selected students later in the year. They expected the module to be launched by the end of the year.

Decapods deep dive

17. The Chair welcomed representatives from the Animal Sentience Committee, its Secretariat, and Defra policy and invited them to provide a presentation on the Animal Sentience Committee and the use of decapods in science.
18. The Animal Sentience Committee gave a presentation covering:
- a) Remit, governance, structure and membership.
- The Animal Sentience Committee outlined its remit under the Animal Welfare (Sentience) Act 2022, its role in holding Ministers accountable for considering the

welfare of sentient animals in policy development, and its statutory status and membership structure.

b) Ways of working.

The Animal Sentience Committee summarised its triage process, noting that it prioritised issues that were recent, ongoing or likely to have significant impact, after which subgroups gathered evidence and prepared reports.

c) Workstreams.

The Animal Sentience Committee highlighted its recent work on decapods in science, including published correspondence on the definition of animals in UK law⁶, and noted ongoing consideration by the Home Office of whether decapod crustaceans should be brought within scope of ASPA⁷.

d) Relevant policy context.

Defra policy referenced the Animal Welfare Strategy for England⁸ and outlined ongoing research relating to decapod welfare, including evidence gathering, supply-chain research and the development of killing guidance. It also noted the devolved nature of animal-welfare policy.

e) Next steps.

Defra policy reported that its upcoming work included reviewing the decapod welfare research report, assessing findings, progressing the development of killing guidance, exploring policy levers, and commissioning the Animal Welfare Committee for an opinion.

19. A Member asked about the relationship between the ASC and the Animal Sentience Committee. It was discussed that Defra policy meet regularly with HO colleagues and welcome an open dialogue on decapods under ASPA. The Secretariats for the ASC and the Animal Sentience Committee were identified as the best way to link the committees, and the ASC would be happy to present at an Animal Sentience Committee plenary.
20. A Member noted that the Animal Welfare Strategy included a commitment to provide guidance on which methods of killing decapods were compatible with existing legal requirements and asked for expected timelines for this to be published. Defra policy replied that they were not certain of the current timelines

Chair's Update

ASC Member recruitment update

21. The Chair updated that recruitment for new ASC Members was in its final stages, with security clearances underway. Subject to clearance, six Members had been

⁶ [Animal Sentience Committee: impact of definitions of animals in law - GOV.UK](#)

⁷ [Written questions and answers - Written questions, answers and statements - UK Parliament](#)

⁸ [Animal welfare strategy for England - GOV.UK](#)

recruited (including one at 0.5 FTE), with an anticipated appointment date of 1 April 2026.

22. Names could not yet be released pending formal appointment, but the new Members had expertise in *in-vivo* science (including NHPs), animal welfare and protection, ethics and philosophy, AI, and included an AWERB lay member.

Meeting with Lord Vallance

23. The Chair reported that they had met Lord Vallance on 7 January to discuss the ASC's role in the alternatives strategy and had subsequently sent a follow-up letter covering the discussion on the strategy⁹.

Alternatives Strategy

24. The Chair provided an update on the alternatives strategy, noting that they had recently attended the first officials' meeting. It was reported that aspects of delivery were underway, with the initial building blocks in place, and that a further update would be provided at the next plenary. The Chair also noted that they would attend the first Ministerial meeting on the strategy on 11 March 2026. The Committee discussed that an upcoming commission DSIT regarding the new alternatives expert committee and its membership was expected shortly.

25. A Member asked whether minutes from the officials' or Ministerial meetings would be shared, noting that this would help clarify leadership responsibilities in certain areas. The Chair agreed to discuss this possibility with DSIT.

Parliamentary receptions

26. A Member reported that they had recently attended two parliamentary receptions relevant to the ASC's work:

- a) Crustacean Compassion (21 January 2026): The Member highlighted Defra's commitment to publishing humane-slaughter guidance that would exclude live boiling without prior stunning and reported that the organisation called for decapods to be included in ASPA and the Animal Welfare Act 2006.
- b) PETA (4 February 2026): The Member highlighted the pragmatic approach of PETA's science policy unit, which supported the phased reduction of animal use in science.

Visit to a CRO

27. The Chair reported that they, six ASC Members, and three members of the ASC Secretariat visited the CRO facilities on 19 February 2026. The CRO provided a presentation on their organisation, workstreams, and AWERB, followed by a tour of the animal facilities. The Chair commented on the CRO's strong AWERB and culture of care.

Annual Report

⁹ [Animals in Science Committee role in the alternatives strategy - GOV.UK](#)

28. The Chair gave an update on progress with the annual report. The Chair noted that the latest version had been issued following feedback at the previous plenary, and that further substantial revisions would follow the recent workshop with ASRPU, which focused on defining and classifying outputs versus outcomes or impacts and identifying evidence gaps. The workshop recognised that certain effects, such as cultural change, were difficult to evidence and would require a clear qualitative narrative.
29. Two diagrams illustrating the ASC advice process and the ASC's system position were being refined for public audiences. The NC3Rs offered support on developing the public-facing design.
30. The ASC commission timeline and delivery process were discussed, with Members noting the importance of setting expectations for new Members. The Committee discussed how ASC impacts were demonstrated, with narrative impact to be added to the next iteration for Member comment. It was noted that establishments had reported applying ASC recommendations, demonstrating impact.

NC3Rs update

31. The Committee received an update on current NC3Rs activity.
32. The NC3Rs reported that staff continued to deliver work effectively, including supporting the Government's alternatives strategy. They highlighted recent collaboration with Innovate UK on a new £2 million call in two strategy areas, cardiovascular and pharmacokinetics, and ongoing work with the MRC on the translational hub as part of the medical research infrastructure.
33. The NC3Rs updated that they had recently published an ABPI-commissioned report on the UK *in vitro* model landscape, which had received positive feedback from industry and academia.
34. The NC3Rs reported that the key performance indicators had not been circulated following the previous plenary, as new performance measures were likely to be introduced. The intention was still to circulate them to the ASC when available.

Animals in Science Regulation Policy Unit update

35. The Chair welcomed representatives from Animals in Science Regulation Policy Unit (ASRPU) and invited them to update on their progress with the policy and regulatory reform programmes.
36. ASRPU reported that its priorities were to deliver the current Government mandate while providing balanced and objective advice. ASRPU outlined the scale of routine policy demands, noting high volumes of parliamentary and public scrutiny.

37. A Member asked how the ASC could assist with prioritisation. ASRPU responded that knowing which areas the ASC regarded as most important within its advice would be helpful but emphasised that pressures were primarily driven by resourcing. The number and scope of future ASC commissions would therefore need to be managed. The Committee discussed the volume and complexity of PQs and FOIs received. ASRPU noted that, although a central Home Office structure existed for handling these, many queries were highly nuanced and required detailed consideration.

Decapods

38. ASRPU reported that, following the inclusion of decapods under the Animal Sentience Act 2022, the Home Office had considered its position on decapods in relation to ASPA. Ministers had agreed an approach based on endorsing industry-led standards for decapods used in science, alongside a phased roadmap toward possible future inclusion of decapods as protected animals under ASPA. ASRPU noted that they had met the Animal Sentience Committee in January to outline this update and were now examining current sector-led

39. A Member welcomed the planned approach and offered support from their establishment, noting that much of the scientific work would be undertaken by the sector and that, with appropriate collaboration, the timelines could be shortened. It was agreed that a discussion between the Member, the Chair, and ASRPU would be arranged as a next step.

Action: Secretariat to arrange a meeting between the Member, the Chair, and ASRPU on standards for decapods used in science.

Licence Duration Review

40. ASRPU reported that the submission regarding the internal review of licence duration had undergone internal review, and that an updated submission, reflecting recent stakeholder feedback, was being prepared for Ministerial decision.

Non-human primates used in service licences

41. ASRPU updated that the Policy Unit had discussed implementation of the ASC's advice on non-human primates (NHPs) used in service licences¹⁰ with ASRU and had prepared a submission to the Minister for direction.

Retained EU Legislation / Code of Practice

42. ASRPU reported that work was underway to restate retained EU law on the regulation of animals in science to improve clarity and legal certainty while keeping the substance unchanged. A statutory instrument and revised Code of Practice were in final draft and would now move through further clearances, the committee stage and internal processes before they are laid in Parliament.

¹⁰ [Advice on non-human primates used in service licences - GOV.UK](#)

Additional statistics collection

43. ASRPU reported that, following Ministerial and stakeholder interest, work was underway to explore the collection of additional statistics on animals bred for use but not used in procedures. A submission was expected to be sent to the Minister in due course.

NHPs bred for use in scientific purposes

44. ASRPU reported that, following the Minister's acceptance of all ASC recommendations on non-human primates bred for use in scientific procedures in August 2025¹¹, the NHP generations policy introduced strengthened definitions of generational status and self-sustaining colonies, with a transitional period to allow establishments to adapt. Work was underway to support operational implementation, including providing definitional clarification and assurance to ASRU for consistent auditing and establishing structured audit returns. Stakeholder engagement was scheduled for early March to address implementation questions and identify operational issues, which would inform Ministerial consideration of any next steps for the transitional period.

Response to ASC non-technical summaries and retrospective assessment report

45. ASRPU reported that work had begun on the ASC's recommendations from the non-technical summaries and retrospective assessment report¹², with a formal response expected by the end of March 2026. It had been agreed with the ASC Chair that some recommendations would be considered in the longer term alongside the response to the NC3Rs' licensing recommendations, due to overlaps.

Response to ASC leading practice report

46. ASRPU reported that work had begun on the ASC's recommendations from the leading practice report¹³, with a formal response expected by the end of June 2026.

ASRU fees

47. ASRPU reported that a statutory instrument was being prepared to increase ASRU establishment and personal licence fees by 16%, to be laid in Parliament on 16 March and to come into force on 6 April. The increase was intended to address rising inflation-related costs, support investment in modern IT systems, and offset reduced income resulting from a decline in personal and establishment licences.

Regulatory reform programme

¹¹ [Non-human primates bred for use in scientific purposes: response from Lord Hanson - GOV.UK](#)

¹² [Non-technical summaries and retrospective assessments - GOV.UK](#)

¹³ [Strengthening leading practice in the animals and science sector - GOV.UK](#)

48. ASRPU reported that most regulatory reform activity had now been completed, including the changes to ASRU's operating model and organisational design, which had been incorporated into business-as-usual
49. ASRPU continued that the governance board appointments had received Director General approval and candidates were undergoing security checks, with the Board expected to be operational in the next few months. The final reform programme board met in early February and considered risks associated with the final stages of transition to the new operating model, with external members providing useful input on supporting decision-making at the appropriate level.
50. ASRPU reported ongoing improvement initiatives:
- a) A final meeting had taken place between the NC3Rs and ASRU as part of the NC3Rs review of the ASRU application process and ASPeL improvements. A full report with high-level recommendations would follow.
 - b) Updated Harm–Benefit Analysis guidance had been produced and was undergoing internal review, with the intention to publish the guidance externally. The ASC harm-benefit analysis¹⁴ had been reviewed in this initiative.
 - c) Scoping work was underway on the potential introduction of a Customer Relationship Management system, with a decision to follow once the associated report had been reviewed.
 - d) The revised audit programme remained paused during staff transition, with trialling to begin once operationally appropriate.
 - e) New and existing staff continued to benefit from an enhanced training programme, including sessions delivered by external providers such as the NC3Rs.

Operational update

51. ASRPU reported that it had moved into a more proactive phase of strengthening quality and guidance across the unit. Work to develop a full quality-management system was progressing, with completion and a first internal audit planned by the end of 2026.
52. ASRPU continued that a clearer performance framework was being established, with the Senior Leadership Team agreeing an Objectives and Key Results model. Key themes for the year had been identified through a workshop, and three to five high-level objectives would be finalised by the end of March, ahead of a pilot from April to July before wider implementation.

Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Body Subgroup

¹⁴ [Harm-benefit analysis - GOV.UK](#)

53. The Chair of the AWERB Subgroup provided an update on progress across both AWERB-related commissions.

- a) It was noted that work continued on the AWERB standards commission, with the Subgroup Chair emphasising that this was a significant opportunity to provide clear and thorough advice. The Subgroup intended to review key literature in detail and identify expected standards and best practice before undertaking wider consultation.
- b) The AWERB Subgroup Chair updated on the named persons commission. Stakeholder engagement was underway with efforts focused on building upon earlier work, including that undertaken by the NC3Rs. A survey had been circulated to Named Persons and had received over 90 responses.

54. The October 2025 AWERB Hub workshop report had now been published on the ASC website¹⁵, and the Subgroup Chair noted that preparation had begun for the April 2026 AWERB Hub workshop, themed “The value of lay and independent members in the delivery of effective AWERBs,” scheduled for 23 April 2026 from 13:00–16:00.

Futures Working Group update

55. The Committee received an update on the Futures Working Group (FWG). The working group had met to discuss the development of the horizon-scanning portal and the futures workshop. Earlier concerns regarding Freedom of Information were reconsidered, and the group agreed to proceed with the proposed approach. It was noted that the portal would be designed for information-gathering and that guidance would be included to clarify expectations, including limits on submission length.

56. The Secretariat had confirmed with the GOV.UK team that an online submission form was feasible, with limitations manageable through clear communication and an agreed disclaimer outlining how submissions would be handled.

57. The portal was planned for launch at the first Futures workshop, which was currently in the initial planning phase.

58. The Committee considered succession planning for the FWG, noting demitting membership and the arrival of new Members. The Committee agreed that co-option of the demitted Chair into the FWG until the workshop would be appropriate. A list of participants from the 2021 Futures workshop would be reviewed when issuing invitations for the upcoming workshop.

¹⁵ [ASC and AWERB Hub workshop report: October 2025 - GOV.UK](#)

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 Jonathan Birch
Dr Lucy Whitfield
Professor Stephen May
Dr Stuart Greenhill
Mrs Tina O'Mahony
Professor Christine Watson
Professor Martin Knight
Mrs Wendy Jarrett

Secretariat

Emily Townley
Alister Cox
Amy Scheijde
Simon Duncan

Animals in Science Regulation Policy Unit (ASRPU)

William Reynolds
Chloe Jenkins
Mamataj Begum
Lucy Duncan
Bernadette Godson
Seer Ikurior

Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT)

Colin Wilson
Ameila Philpott

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

Vicky Robinson

Animal Sentience Committee

Richard Cooper (Chair)
Katja Stoddart (Secretariat)

Department of Health Northern Ireland

Karen Somerville

Apologies

Christine Henderson (Department of Health Northern Ireland)
Professor Johanna Gibson
Professor Hazel Screen