



Institute of Animal Technology

## How well is your AWERB running remotely?

This sheet was produced following an RSPCA/LASA/LAVA/IAT AWERB-UK meeting on **Maintaining an effective AWERB in the age of COVID-19**, held online on 8 February 2021. For information on AWERB-UK meetings, click [here](#). The content is based on presentations and discussions at the event ([agenda here](#)).

Participants identified **advantages** of meeting online, including time and financial savings and no need to travel, which enables a wider range of participants. The ability to comment and ask questions anonymously within meeting platforms was also viewed positively. **Disadvantages** included finding online meetings tiring and lack of face to face interaction with colleagues, which could lead to difficulty 'reading the room'. Some felt there was a focus on project review at the expense of the other AWERB tasks, particularly those involving open discussions such as ethical issues and the local Culture of Care.

We also discussed more specific points around online meetings, set out below. **Your AWERB could review these, for example as an agenda item.**

### Meeting duration and structure

Have you adjusted the structure and length of meetings, rather than keeping the same agenda and timings used for face to face meetings? You could ask people what works for them.

Might it help to have more frequent, but shorter and more focussed meetings? You may not need to include every standing item in every meeting, as long as they are all covered often enough.

Are meetings structured such that they are *effective* with regard to each agenda item, allowing time for discussion, not just time efficient? Is there time to address everything adequately?

### Addressing all functions and tasks

Are you sure your AWERB is dealing *effectively* with *all* of its functions and tasks or is it focussing disproportionately on project review?

You may have found some tasks easier to accomplish online than others. Do you feel concerned about any tasks, e.g. providing a forum for discussion of ethical issues or promoting a Culture of Care? How could you address any issues, e.g. would it help to set up sub-groups for specific AWERB functions?

Do you assess how well the AWERB addresses each of its tasks? This is important under any circumstances and especially when it is unable to meet physically.

### Project review

When reviewing projects online, are ethical issues discussed as well as technical and scientific issues?

Are you (securely) taking full advantage of the available technology, e.g. reviewing and editing documents together in real time, forming online 'breakout groups', using the chat function and 'hands-up' features? Are project licence applicants invited to attend remotely?



Institute of Animal Technology

### Participation and engagement

Are you sure all AWERB members and participants are comfortable with the format and can contribute fully? Would enabling anonymous comments help, e.g. via the chat box or an application such as [Padlet](#)?

If all comments are anonymised, this may risk masking the expertise and experience of the commenter. Might this be an issue, and if so how could it be resolved?

Are you maximising opportunities to invite different participants, e.g. additional lay members, scientists or staff from different disciplines, animal technologists who may not normally attend, or an external speaker with expertise on a specific topic of interest?

Is the chair happy with the way meetings are structured and are they able to ensure all views are expressed and listened to? Do they find 'reading the room' a problem; are they confident they can tell whether individuals are supportive, uncomfortable or happy to speak?

Would your AWERB find it helpful to have a mechanism (e.g. a conflict champion) to manage difficult conversations and move from dialogue between disagreeing parties to a shared discussion?

### AWERB member induction and training

Has the induction process for AWERB members been adequately adapted for remote working?

Do you offer new (or current) members virtual tours of the animal unit, for example using Microsoft Sway, GoPro cameras or similar technology?

Have current members received adequate guidance on how the remote AWERB process works?

### The most important question of all:

**Is your AWERB genuinely operating effectively, or just 'well enough'? Would you consider the AWERB's current level of operating good enough in a non-COVID environment, with respect to addressing all the tasks, engaging everyone, and meeting its objectives?**

### Moving forwards - a hybrid approach?

Many participants said they would like to adopt a hybrid approach when COVID-related restrictions are lifted, with the aim of combining the advantages of face to face and online meetings. Different models were suggested, including:

- Holding some meetings face to face, others remotely
- Allowing some members or co-optees the option to attend face to face meetings remotely, e.g. people who are less able to travel
- Continuing to use the technology for electronic review of shared documents, surveys and polls etc, whether meeting physically or online

Whatever your AWERB's future mode of operation, if remote meetings are involved you may like to reflect on the above questions from time to time. For more guidance on AWERB tasks, see [tinyurl.com/RSPCA-LASA-GP](http://tinyurl.com/RSPCA-LASA-GP)

RSPCA [Animals in Science Department](#) – February 2021