

# Induction and training for AWERB members - the 2022 AWERB-UK meeting

## AWERB-UK 2022

Induction and training for AWERB members

6 October 2022, Birmingham



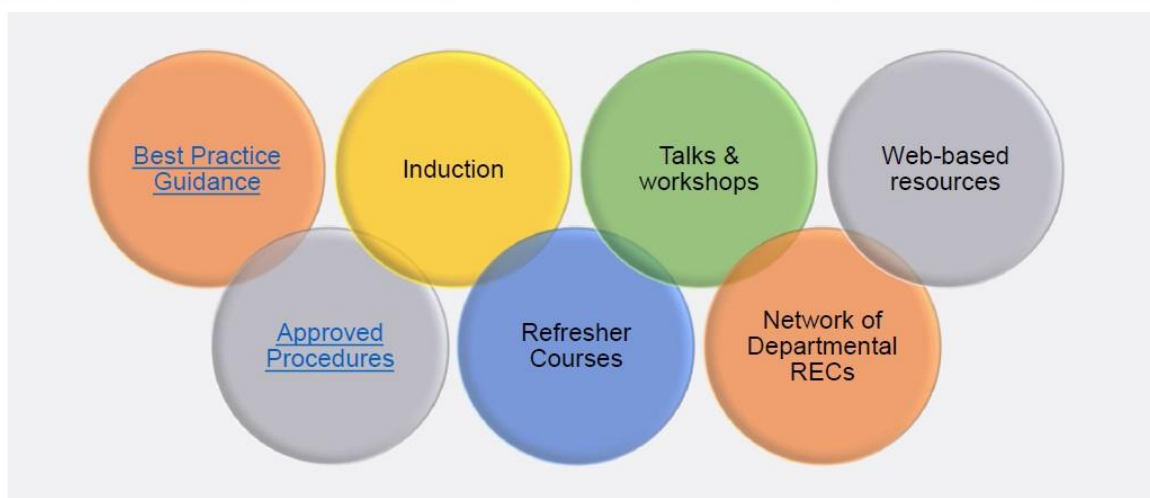
Organised jointly by the RSPCA, IAT, LASA and LAVA, the objective of this meeting was to explore ideas for improving induction, training and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for all Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Body (AWERB) members. This should help secure recognition that a well thought out process of initial induction through to ongoing CPD is essential in order for the AWERB to successfully carry out all its many tasks. This is particularly important given the increased focus on the role and tasks of the AWERB resulting from the Home Office change programme.

A brief survey of over sixty AWERB members carried out before the meeting reinforced the need to consider training issues given the pivotal role of AWERBs within establishments. Only thirty-four percent of respondents had any induction at the start of their membership and, of these, only half thought that it had adequately prepared them for their role. Very few had been given the [RSPCA/LASA Guidance on Induction](#) which is very disappointing. However, respondents made some very useful suggestions regarding induction and training processes and content which will be incorporated in reports from this meeting.

### Comparing training in similar committees

The meeting proper started with a brief review of the training provided for members of committees similar to the AWERB - the [Health Research Authority \(HRA\) Research Ethics Committees](#) (RECs) and the [RECs of the Economic and Social Research Council](#) (ESRC) to see whether there were principles and practices that could be applied to AWERBs. Both organisations require REC members to have appropriate induction, training and CPD and adequate resources must be provided to facilitate this.

### What does research ethics training for REC members look like?



Speaking from her experience both as a HRC REC member and AWERB Chair, Sally Robinson (Cancer Research UK, Manchester) explained that the HRC **requires** new REC members to attend an induction workshop within the first six months of appointment. This provides a guide to what they should expect from their membership. The new REC member is also assigned a buddy from the committee to answer any questions. Both the training and buddy system is intended to reassure the new member that they are 'not alone'; they do not need to be instant experts in everything. Understanding Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity is also part of members' training.

Further training/CPD is then through a system of credits. REC members must complete eight credits (amounting to four hours) of training/CPD relevant to their role each year. This is intended to develop and refine the knowledge and skills they need to fulfil their role. Attendance is recorded through an electronic learning management system. Advanced training on specialist topics is also available. Committee chairs have additional training including in soft skills such as how to develop a team and manage difficult situations.

An advantage of the system is that all training is centralised and overseen by the HRA. The fact that training for all members (expert and lay) is a requirement, demonstrates the important role of REC committees and re-enforces the weight and importance given to REC membership - the members are truly valued.

#### Approaches to AWERB member training

Angela Kerton (The Learning Curve) and Lucy Whitfield (OWL Vets) then talked us through their own thoughts and valuable experiences of running AWERB training workshops. Angela advised that careful thought is required on how to communicate the need for, and importance of, training to all AWERB members to get 'buy-in' from 'above'. She listed some of the key issues to consider when planning training, including timing, duration, modes of delivery and whether internal or external trainers are best for the establishment. She emphasised that the process needs to be interactive and inclusive of different categories of member so that they learn together and appreciate others' roles. Polling software is particularly useful in stimulating discussion and group exercises help people to share ideas and experiences. There are some really good resources available to help, and she listed a number available from the [RSPCA](#) and [LASA](#) websites.

Lucy considered the skills, composition and expertise of a well-functioning AWERB committee and highlighted the pivotal role that the committee plays in an institution's animal care and use. Member training is therefore essential to ensure its proper function in good governance. Lucy compared similar organisational committees and explained that most require some form of education and training, whether a human ethics committee, company board, or community sports club.

The AWERB chair has an essential role in setting the culture, inclusivity and operation of the committee and, whilst some member roles are mandated, they should also consider the mix of skills and attributes that the membership should comprise (so the chair should also be trained!). All members should receive at least introductory orientation, so that they understand the regulatory and ethical framework in which research is carried out. This may be achieved through attending Modular courses, or perhaps in a more focussed way, relevant to AWERB operation. Good committee function also requires inter-personal skills, including dealing with disagreement, an understanding of diversity and expectations of public standards, such as integrity, accountability and objectivity.

## Views from the audience

### Have you received any other training to help you be an effective AWERB member?

Discussion/meeting with chair and meeting observation

Training in Openness about Animal Research, Personal and Project licence course

PPL holder, PIL holder, modular training

Yes through RSPCA. None of the other AWERB members have received any training!

IAT levels 2, 3 and 4. PIL holder training ABC, mouse, rat, rabbit and pig

We have a buddy system with existing AWERB members which was really helpful.

LAVA conferences, NE AWERB hub

No training targeted specifically at being a more effective AWERB member; however, regular attendance at 3Rs events, academic conferences and veterinary conferences etc. all contribute towards being more effective at my role on an AWERB.

Delegates were asked what aspects of induction, training and CPD from the various models discussed they found most helpful - what were the key take home messages for them regarding both processes and content? The audience was extremely interactive and there is not room here to list all their ideas, but they will all be assimilated and used to help determine next steps in progressing AWERB member training. Meanwhile, the most common comments are set out below.

#### Processes

Induction and training were considered to be important, both as issues in their own right and for the support and recognition formalised requirements gave to the AWERB and its members. Although there was debate about whether there should be a mandatory requirement for induction/training, **it was generally thought that the issue was sufficiently important for there to be 'a firm expectation' that all establishments implement a formal induction, training and CPD process.** The centralised nature of the HRA system was considered helpful in terms of ensuring consistency of training requirements and standards within and between establishments.

An induction process was recommended as a foundation for *all* members since *all* need to understand the AWERB's role, tasks, processes and expectations. Subsequent training should be tailored to individual roles (e.g. named persons, scientists, lay) and to different establishments that are likely to have different needs. A buddy system and observation of meetings prior to joining were widely endorsed, together with a 1:1 discussion between the Chair and new members to assess their needs. Facility tours to see procedures as well as animal housing and care, both before and during membership were considered important. Training for Chairs was considered essential, including in the 'soft skills' of team building, managing difficult discussions and ensuring inclusivity. Training for the wider establishment was also mentioned with a view to ensuring that all relevant staff have a good understanding of the AWERB and its role within the establishment.

Training and CPD need to be easy to access, record and feed back to the AWERB as a whole and its importance needs to be recognised by senior management.

Information about the AWERB itself, as noted above, was considered an integral part of training, with the [RSPCA/LASA guiding principles on good practice for AWERBs](#) listed as a useful resource covering this. Information on the nature of work at the establishment - research areas, animal use, types and severity of procedures and acronyms were all considered important to know about, as well as an understanding of the roles of each member and where, as an individual, one can add value.

Harder training issues to address included guidance on the sort of questions to ask during licence review (and how to deal with the answers!); how to ask 'uncomfortable' questions; the perennial question of how to assess harms and benefits; and how to be effective and consistent. Case studies of project review were suggested as a useful training resource.

### **An obstacle course?**

It was agreed there were obstacles to implementing a programme of induction, training and CPD, and no surprise to find that the most common were lack of time (of both trainees and internal trainers) and money. Though establishments might seem supportive, there was rarely a budget for AWERB training. Negative mindsets - to the AWERB and training its members - were also highlighted as a problem.

### **Concluding comments**

The AWERB, through its membership, plays a key role in advising the Establishment Licence holder on compliance, development and maintenance of good practice in science, animal and staff welfare, ethical issues, openness and management of reputational risk. Its value, and that of its members, needs to be better recognised with adequate resources invested in training. The organising bodies will think about how best to progress the information and ideas from the meeting to help better provide for AWERB members' training needs. Meanwhile participants said there was much information and advice that they could immediately take back to their establishments!

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