3. Dos and don'ts for AWERB members

Good engagement and communications between scientists and the Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Body (AWERB) are critically important to ensure that the AWERB can implement all of its functions effectively, with benefits for animal welfare, science and the establishment's Culture of Care.

This sheet is part of a resource pack which aims to help AWERB members, AWERB chairs and scientists understand and support one another better, so that all can benefit. The term 'scientist' refers to personal and project licence holders, regardless of their involvement with the AWERB, plus those carrying out non-ASPA regulated procedures or indirectly involved with animal use (e.g. using reagents derived from animals). An introduction to the resource pack, and the other sheets, can be downloaded via the QR code at the end of this sheet.

Do...	Background
Take individual responsibility for creating a respectful and supportive environment. For example, if you agree with someone, say so in the meeting rather than just telling them afterwards; if you do not understand something, say so; if you disagree with something, explain your thoughts in a constructive way. Give positive feedback about projects, presentations and discussions where deserved, and give any critical feedback in a constructive manner.	Although the Chair has overall responsibility for the AWERB's environment and the way it operates, individual members should also make a significant contribution. Whether sitting in on an AWERB meeting, or presenting a project licence application, scientists can feel outnumbered or that they are in an 'interview' situation with the people round the table judging them, their ethics, and their science. This is not conducive to good discussion, so it is important to make scientists feel at ease and ready to discuss and engage with the AWERB processes.

Introduce yourself the first time you speak to a scientist or other invitee in an AWERB meeting.	Joining an established group of people can be intimidating, so it is important to be welcoming and empathetic.
Get to know as many of the scientists at the establishment as you can and show an interest in their work and the science done at the establishment. Take advantage of any talks, workshops or activities that would enable you to meet the scientists outside of AWERB meetings. See the accompanying activities sheet for examples - you might like to suggest that your AWERB initiates some of these.	This kind of background information is essential if you are to make judgements on research projects and help fulfil other aspects of the work covered by the AWERB. It also shows that you are prepared to make the effort to learn and understand both the harms and the potential benefits of the research.
Gain an understanding of the pressures that scientists can be under to obtain funding, carry out their research, respond to corporate demands and/or publish papers. You can ask scientists about this, and see the Nuffield Council on Bioethics analysis of the culture of scientific research in the UK (search for 'Nuffield' 'culture' 'research')	Science is a competitive field and there is considerable competition to obtain jobs and funding. Career progression depends on research output which is often judged by publication of scientific papers in 'high impact' journals. In industry, research directions are determined at a corporate level. All of this creates significant pressure to develop innovative research projects and get these through the review processes (including AWERB, Home Office and funding bodies) as quickly as possible.
Make sure that scientists are provided with opportunities to help the AWERB's fulfil its tasks.	Scientists can have a valuable input into many of the AWERBs tasks and can also play a key role in raising awareness of the AWERB, disseminating

If your AWERB does not appear to include scientists when planning and implementing activities, raise this in a meeting or with the Chair or Secretary. Make sure that the benefits of participating are made clear to scientists.	information and promoting implementation of its recommendations to others in their research groups and across the wider establishment. Many of the tasks, such as developing and promoting a Culture of Care, advising on the 3Rs and animal welfare, and supporting appropriate training, also benefit from scientific input and support - and can help scientists work more effectively. For example, implementing the 3Rs will improve their science; they can input into training programmes for staff who will be supporting their work; and they may not always recognise their own contributions to the 3Rs. The AWERB can also help them produce project licence applications that go beyond compliance with the ASPA, saving time on revisions.
Make sure that verbal and written communications between the AWERB and scientists are clear and timely, paying attention to the language that is used. Speak up if either written communications or language and behaviours in meetings are poor. You could raise this yourself but it might be better to first ask other members if they feel the same and then talk to the Chair, Secretary, or the Establishment Licence Holder (ELH).	Poor (e.g. terse, unclear or jargon-heavy) communication is repeatedly stated as an underlying reason for difficult relationships between AWERBs and scientists/other staff. Attention to this issue can have a hugely beneficial effect.
Encourage scientists to engage in full ethical discussion of their work, including not only	Many AWERB members report that their AWERBs discuss animal welfare and the 3Rs but do not consider ethics, although this is integral to several AWERB tasks. Welfare and the Three Rs are important, but are practical

the harm-benefit analysis, but also wider ethical aspects. It may be helpful to focus on identifying wider ethical issues when reading through materials, discussing these with other committee members in advance if possible. You can also put forward and promote the view that a multidisciplinary approach, bringing a variety of perspectives to bear on a project, is constructive and adds value to research, particularly in terms of enhancing both establishment wide support and public opinion.	issues and relatively easy to address. Identifying and considering ethical issues can be difficult, especially as it may not be clear what counts as an 'ethical issue'. Wider ethical issues include: how the specific research fits into the wider scientific picture and whether it can be ethically justified in that context; identifying societal concerns; considering ethical issues arising if work is done abroad, or on orphan diseases; the well-being of staff, e.g. when required to kill animals; and alternative approaches to addressing human health problems. See also What do we mean by 'ethics'? (Search for 'RSPCA' 'what do we mean by ethics') Those closely involved with a project may not realise that there could be any debate about the justification for the research, so can interpret questions about ethics as being told they are 'unethical' and become defensive.
Thank scientists for their input, contributions and support for the AWERB.	It is important for individual AWERB members to show their appreciation of scientists, and to encourage them to feed this back to all members of their research teams.

Don't…	Background
Make any assumptions about a scientist's views or beliefs regarding animal welfare or ethics; don't assume they made the decision to use animals lightly or prioritise science above all else.	Scientists can have conflicting feelings about the potential for their research to cause harms to animals. They may have thought deeply about the justification for their projects, and it is important to give them the opportunity to express their views.
Make any assumptions about a scientist's views or beliefs regarding the AWERB itself.	Scientists may view the AWERB as a hurdle or obstacle that has to be got through before their project licence application can be submitted to the Home Office, or they could be neutral, or they may look forward to AWERB input, if they regard it as valuable. Much depends on their (and their colleagues), previous experience with the AWERB and their knowledge of its role and tasks.
Allow a 'them and us' situation to develop without taking action. If you think a 'them and us' situation is beginning to arise in a meeting and you are unable to defuse it yourself, or the Chair does not intervene, speak to the Chair afterwards. They have a key role and should intervene to diffuse the situation. If they feel unable to do so, then they are not the right person to be Chair and if the situation persists you may need to explain your concerns to the ELH (also see note below).	Confrontation is not conducive to good AWERB/scientist relations and constructive discussions. It may be that everyone is expecting someone else to address the issue, and while the Chair bears ultimate responsibility, individual members can also be aware and take some personal responsibility.

Accept chairing that does not facilitate constructive conversation, or appears to overlook disrespectful language or behaviours. Discuss the situation with other AWERB members first to see how others feel and then explain the concerns to the Chair. If this does not resolve the problem and the situation continues, explain the problem and the effects it is having to the ELH.	No committee Chair should allow this to happen, but sometimes people are appointed to the position of AWERB Chair without the requisite experience.
Accept the situation if meetings repeatedly run out of time to cover agenda items properly, or scientists do not have enough time to present and discuss their applications. Try to find out why there is a problem and how it could be resolved. For example, consider who sets the agendas and on what basis this is done – is there any input from presenters, for example? You could raise this as an issue for discussion under AOB.	This situation can be extremely frustrating for all concerned and means that the AWERB is not fulfilling its tasks properly. The situation will continue unless someone does something.
Attend meetings or presentations without having read all the materials provided in advance.	It is frustrating and disconcerting for scientists and others who have spent a lot of time preparing materials for the AWERB to find that members have not read things through properly.

Find out before you join an AWERB how much work is involved and do not join if you cannot cope with the amount of pre-meeting reading required. If you are not given meeting papers in sufficient time, or the amount of pre-work increases, talk to the Chair or Secretary about the problem.	

This sheet was produced by a working group set up by the RSPCA, which included scientists, AWERB chairs, lay members, and representatives of the Animals in Science Committee AWERB Subcommittee, Animal Research Nexus and NC3Rs. The participants are listed in the introductory sheet, which can be downloaded using the QR code.