

4. Dos and don'ts for AWERB chairs

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
<p>Ensure that there are clear up to date Terms of Reference (ToR) for the AWERB that are readily available to everyone in the establishment so that the role, membership, functions and modus operandi of the AWERB are clear to all.</p> <p>If ToR are lacking, or they need updating, develop them with the ELH.</p> <p>Make sure they are circulated as widely as possible within the establishment and are contained on an accessible intranet site.</p>	<p>Up to date ToR will be beneficial to smooth running of any AWERB since they lay out expectations, ways of working and membership. Good ToR will also support the Establishment Licence Holder (ELH) in overall governance and can be useful in discussions with ASRU (e.g. in risk review meetings).</p>



<p>Aim to achieve an atmosphere of mutual respect, understanding and teamwork between all AWERB members as well as those who are invited to attend AWERB meetings such as personal and project licensees.</p> <p>Jointly develop an AWERB logo or statement to widen 'ownership' and help engage everyone.</p>	<p>Members should recognise that they are all working together to ensure the AWERB tasks are effectively implemented and that they contribute to the local Culture of Care. Individual members may have different expertise, perspectives and priorities, but this diversity is key to the AWERB achieving its goals.</p>
<p>Formalise membership through letters of invitation to join the AWERB with the ToR and expectations regarding the likely workload clearly laid out.</p>	<p>This enables prospective members to find out how much work is involved, so they can decline if they feel they cannot cope with this in addition to their own work.</p>
<p>Invite prospective lay or independent members to sit in on a meeting and visit the animal unit before they commit to joining the AWERB.</p>	<p>Potential members unfamiliar with the animal unit(s) and the nature of the establishment's scientific work will benefit from visiting the animal unit and meeting research teams. This is particularly important for lay/independent members who may want to check that they personally feel able to deal with the concept of animal use. See also the point below.</p>
<p>Facilitate the provision of induction for all AWERB members.</p> <p>Guiding principles on induction, which can be tailored to individual establishments, have been published by the RSPCA and LASA (tinyurl.com/RSPCA-LASA-ind).</p>	<p>The ELH is responsible for the functioning and effectiveness of the AWERB, so should support a good induction programme. This would be an ideal task for a well-resourced Named Training and Competency Officer (NTCO) and, since the ELH is accountable for the performance of the named persons, they could delegate the task of developing induction to them.</p>



<p>Induction should include the AWERB's ToR, the role of the committee and its individual members, the full list of functions, tasks and processes, and the expected workload.</p>	
<p>Help scientists and AWERB members to get to know one another and understand each others' roles and perspectives.</p> <p>Information about the AWERB and its members can be posted on the intranet but personal interactions are best. The accompanying activities sheet suggests examples.</p>	<p>This will help to foster good relations and mutual understanding of one another, and of people's roles on the AWERB. The ease of doing this will vary with different sizes of establishment. A structured approach is recommended, and it is worth spending some time thinking how best this could be achieved.</p>
<p>Ensure that non-scientific or independent AWERB members have regular opportunities to find out about the science done at the establishment.</p>	<p>This will be essential background information when making judgements and shows that members are prepared to learn. See explanatory note above and the activities sheet.</p>
<p>Regularly review how information about the AWERB, and its work, is communicated and promoted.</p> <p>It is helpful to have a commitment written into the ToR to review the AWERB's materials (regarding both information dissemination and gathering), either at regular intervals (e.g. annually) and if problems arise.</p>	<p>Many AWERB members and scientists comment that awareness of the AWERB's role, tasks and activities can be poor within establishments. Good communications can help to improve relationships and make the AWERB more valued and understood.</p>



The activities sheet includes some example ways of communicating about the AWERB.

A sample survey to seek the views of the establishment's scientists on the AWERB and its communications is also included in this information pack.

Promote better training relating to the AWERB for scientists and at doctoral school level, so that people know what to expect and understand its purpose and value.

If the NTCO is an AWERB member, or sits in on meetings, they can better understand the issues the AWERB faces and thus the training needs of staff.

You could ask the head of the doctoral school, if there is one at your establishment, to include content on animal welfare, ethics and the AWERB, with plenty of opportunities for discussion and reflection.

Invite scientists to attend and present their work, both when their project licence applications are being reviewed and also, more generally, to inform and engage with the AWERB.

The Named Information Officer (NIO) and NTCO play important roles in developing and delivering in-house licensee training modules, refresher training or more specific AWERB-related training. They should also be 'actively engaged with the AWERB'.

The doctoral school training syllabus for all those who are (or will be) directly or indirectly using animals should include animal welfare, ethics and the role and value of the AWERB. This will help to encourage scientists to be more reflective, actively seek to implement the 3Rs and better able to identify ethical issues from an early career stage, with benefits for science, animal welfare and openness and transparency with the public.

This will help scientists better understand the role and processes of the AWERB and the kinds of discussions that take place; it also helps the AWERB better understand the scientists' thinking and the pressures they may be under.

If possible, ask scientists to attend for the whole meeting, rather than summoning them in to discuss their project then sending them out again. However, there may be situations when the committee needs to discuss issues with the licence without the scientist present, e.g. a closed session at the end of the meeting.

Make sure that instructions and requests for information from scientists are clear, realistic and timely.

Ensure scientists are informed well in advance of what they need to do if their licence is reviewed (either prospectively or retrospectively), and check with them how long they need to present an adequate summary of the work.

Elicit feedback 'in the moment' or check the clarity of information requests with a sample group of scientists from time to time.

Think about the layout of the room, and where scientists will sit if they are presenting their project licences.

It can also save time since the scientist can answer any questions 'on the spot' rather than the AWERB having to rely on subsequent, often lengthy, email exchanges.

Unclear instructions and unrealistic timings have been identified as serious problems in a number of AWERBs.

Joining an established group of people can be intimidating. Whether they are sitting in on an AWERB meeting or presenting a project licence application, scientists can feel outnumbered and 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 generating good

	<p>discussion so avoid a confrontational, interview style set-up (for example do not sit a scientist at one end of a long table).</p>
<p>Make sure that enough time is allocated for meetings so that all functions can be addressed, not just project licence review.</p> <p>If time starts to run short in a meeting, actively manage this by reprioritising items and by ensuring that there is a follow up action or review date for those not addressed in the meeting.</p> <p>You may need to request more, or longer, meetings, or consider a wider reaching review of how the AWERB operates. This could include seeing whether other bodies or individuals in the establishment are undertaking some of the tasks, or devolving selected tasks to subcommittees, creating these if necessary. You may find this thought starter from AWERB-UK helpful at tinyurl.com/AWERBaction</p>	<p>Lack of time to discuss agenda items properly, and concern that not all tasks are fulfilled, are commonly reported by AWERB members.</p> <p>If this happens repeatedly, the AWERB is not fulfilling its role adequately which is a compliance issue. You should be able to raise this with the ELH and senior staff, and be supported in taking steps to remedy the problem.</p>
<p>Be aware of the need to discuss wider ethical issues, beyond the 3Rs, and make sure scientists are involved in this.</p> <p>It may be helpful to focus on identifying wider ethical issues when reading through materials</p>	<p>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 issues and relatively easy to address. Identifying and considering ethical</p>



and listening to presentations. The booklet on the AWERB as a forum for discussion provides practical tips on fulfilling this task, and you could organise a special discussion session on identifying ethical issues, or include this in an awayday (see view.pagetiger.com/AWERB/AWERB).

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.

Recognise that both the harms and benefits associated with research can give rise to emotional conflicts for all those involved. This can lead to emotional responses, which can result in confrontations.

There is a 'natural tension' between science and animal welfare that many people struggle with, though this may not be obvious. This needs to be handled sensitively to avoid discussions becoming confrontational.

Make sure you recognise and thank scientists, and encourage them to feed this back to all members of their research teams.

Thanking scientists who attend the AWERB to present their work at the time is obviously good practice and makes them feel welcome and appreciated. It also reinforces the concept that the AWERB and scientists should share the goal of ensuring that science is of good quality and humanely conducted.

Don't...	Background
<p>Assume that scientific staff know what the AWERB does, or are familiar with the full AWERB task list, or know how they could get involved with the AWERB itself or its activities.</p> <p>Check whether they have had access to and read the ToR, seen other AWERB materials or participated in any of its activities.</p>	<p>Scientists often do not receive training regarding the AWERB and its role and tasks, and may not know where to access information about the AWERB. They may think that it only performed project licence review and may not be aware of the range of expertise on the committee.</p>
<p>Overlook disrespectful or patronising behaviour or language in meetings.</p>	<p>This is not an uncommon concern of AWERB members and others who attend meetings, so such problems need to be dealt with promptly by the Chair, either during the meeting if appropriate, or in 1:1 conversations later on.</p>
<p>Allow personal conflicts, institutional politics or hierarchies to inhibit or overshadow discussions.</p>	<p>Another common concern. Issues like these can inhibit people from contributing to discussions during a meeting and can make them (particularly NACWOs and lay members) feel undervalued. The Chair needs to be alert to the potential for this problem and be aware of people who may need support.</p>
<p>Allow poor treatment of project licence applicants, for example: long waits outside the meeting room; insufficient time to prepare for meetings; lack of clarity about</p>	<p>These are all sources of frustration for scientists, who report feeling frustrated and disrespected when they are treated in this way. Some are easier to address than others, but all need to be dealt with in the name of good relations.</p>

<p>what is required; or people failing to review materials that scientists have provided.</p>	
<p>Accept scientists only interacting with the AWERB when it is reviewing their project licence applications.</p> <p>The activities sheet suggests some ways of increasing outreach and encouraging scientists to become more involved.</p>	<p>Many AWERB tasks, such as developing and promoting a Culture of Care, advising on the 3Rs and animal welfare, and supporting appropriate training, benefit significantly if scientists at the establishment are prepared to input and support them. All of the tasks are intended to benefit science, animal welfare and staff morale, as well as helping to ensure openness and transparency with the public, so there is considerable benefit for scientists, the AWERB and the establishment as a whole, from scientists being more involved.</p>
<p>Assume that everyone is happy with the AWERB, and the way it fulfils all of its tasks, without asking them.</p> <p>A sample survey form which can be adapted for individual establishments is included in this information pack.</p>	<p>People will not always tell you if they are not happy, or have concerns about the way the AWERB is run or about people's behaviour. Surveying AWERB members, and scientists, is a helpful way of checking how effectively the committee is working and seeing how people feel.</p>

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.

