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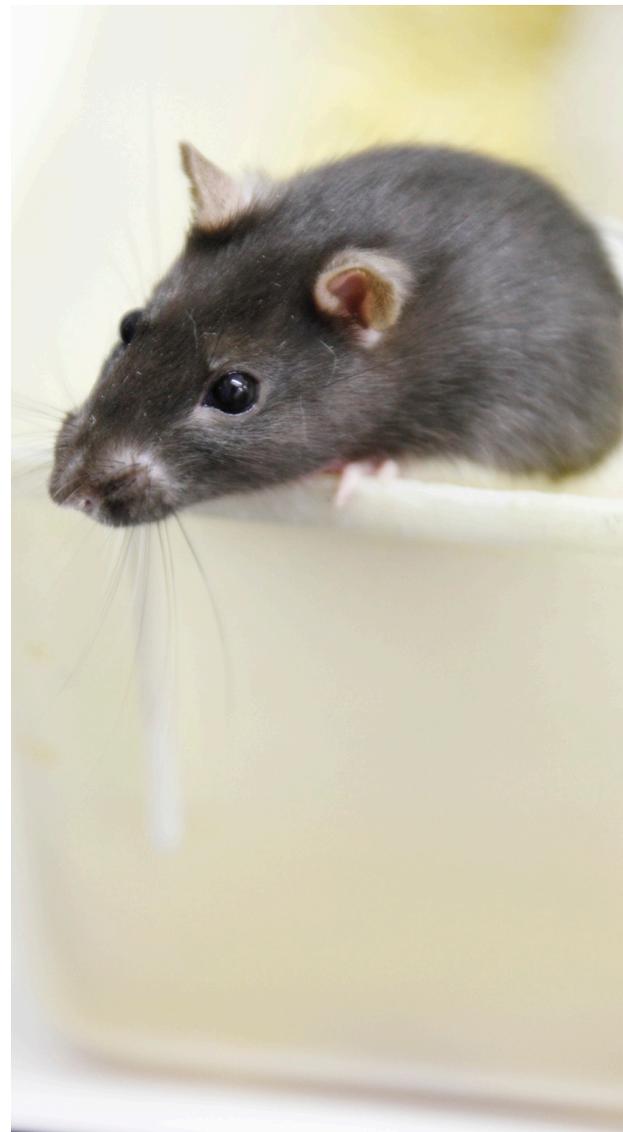
AWERB induction and training survey report



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Introduction

The RSPCA was instrumental in the introduction of the local Ethical Review Process, the forerunner to today's Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Body (AWERB) in the UK. We have continually supported AWERBs and their members, by:

- organising training events for AWERB members;
- providing information and advice to a wide range of stakeholders;
- producing peer-reviewed papers, guidelines, and other resources designed to develop and facilitate the work of AWERBs and other bodies engaged in ethical review;
- participating in events for members of AWERBs and similar committees worldwide;
- sitting as independent members on a number of AWERBs across the UK.

Appropriate induction and training is key to supporting AWERB members, allowing them to make effective contributions to their committees, and helping AWERBs fulfill all of their tasks. However, the content and delivery of induction and training for AWERB members is largely left up to individual establishments and may thus vary greatly. To explore AWERB induction and training practices, we conducted a survey of AWERB members across the UK.

Objectives

To gain a better understanding of AWERB members':

- current induction processes;
- perceived training needs;
- preferred format and method of delivery for new resources.





Methodology

Questionnaire design

The survey was created using Google Forms and was completely anonymous - no personal data were collected from the participants. There were eight questions in total, only one of which required an answer. Five of the questions were multiple choice or checkboxes, one was a three-point Likert scale, and the other two questions were open-text.

Distribution

Responses were collected between 24 January and 27 March 2024 and the survey was promoted via the following channels:

- Animals in Science committee AWERB mailing list
- RSPCA Animals in Science social media (LinkedIn and Twitter/X)
- RSPCA Animals in Science newsletter (email)
- AWERB Knowledge Hub
- sharing by organisations with an interest in AWERBs
- directly to AWERBs on which the RSPCA Animals in Science team members sit.

Participants

A total of **178 participants** completed the survey.

Question 1: What is your role on the AWERB? (178 responses)

This compulsory question asked participants to specify their role on the AWERB from a multiple-choice list. Several options could be selected and participants were also able to select “other” and provide a free-text answer.

Respondents held a variety of roles on the AWERB (**Figure 1**). Nearly one quarter (23.6%) of participants were Named Animal Care and Welfare Officers (NACWOs) and this was closely followed by scientific members (22.5%).

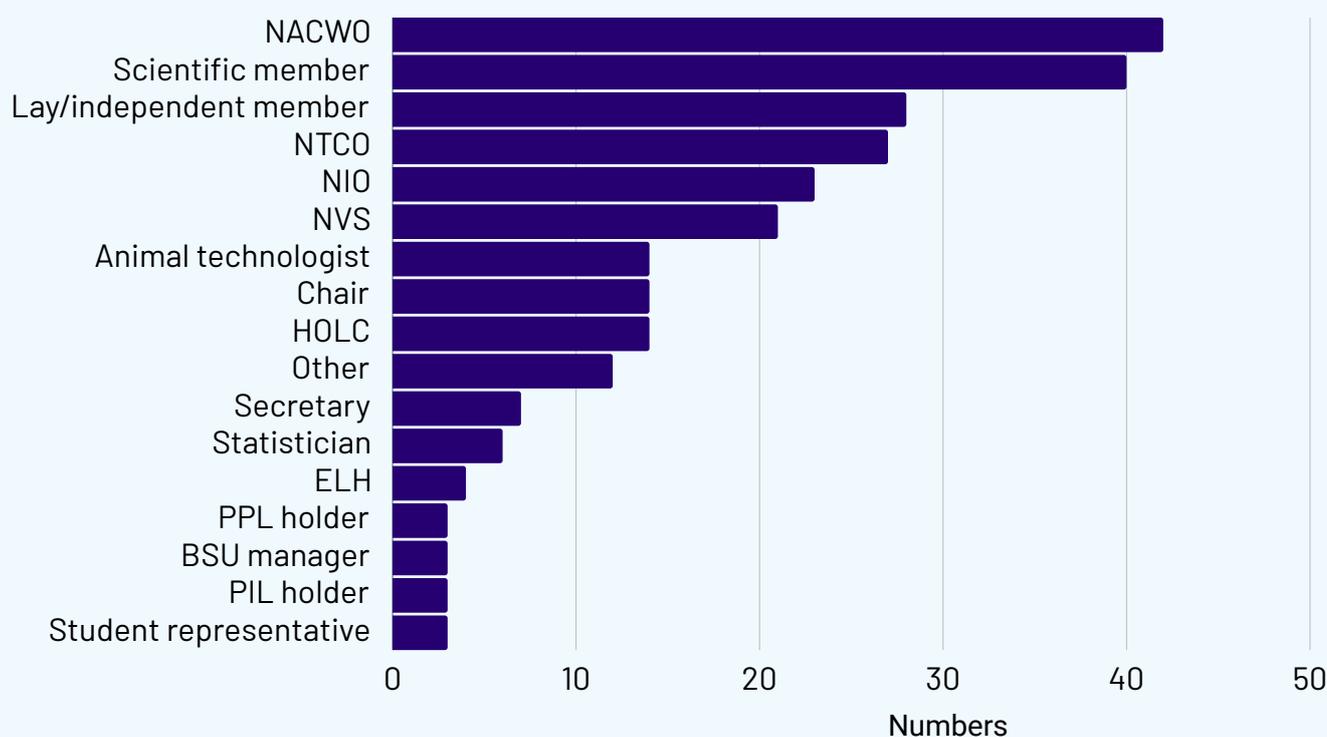


Figure 1. AWERB roles held by respondents

NACWO, Named Animal Care and Welfare Officer; NTCO, Named Training and Competency Officer; NIO, Named Information Officer; NVS, Named Veterinary Surgeon; HOLC, Home Office Liaison Contact; ELH, Establishment Licence Holder; PPL, Project Licence; BSU, Biological Services Unit; PIL, Personal Licence.

Question 2: How long have you been a member of your current AWERB?

(178 responses)

The amount of time participants had spent serving as AWERB members varied from a few weeks to more than 10 years (**Figure 2**). Most respondents had between one and three years' experience as AWERB members (29.8%).

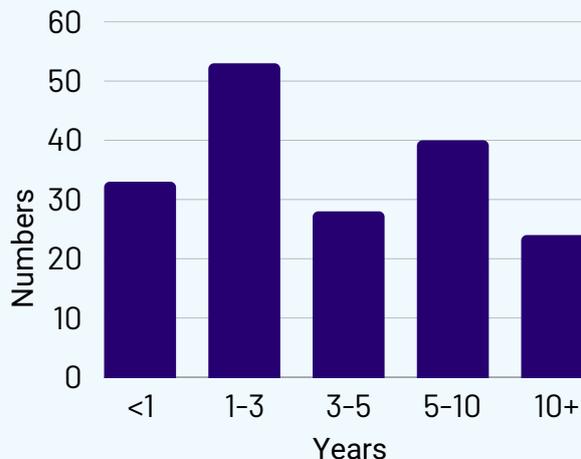


Figure 2. Time served as an AWERB member

Induction and training

Question 3: Which of the following induction or training have you received?

(177 responses)

This question included a multiple-choice list from which several options could be selected. Participants were also able to select “other” and provide a free-text answer. Options provided included various onboarding activities, training courses, and the provision of resources, both by internal and external providers to the licenced establishment. Surprisingly, 25 respondents (14.1%) reported having received no induction or training at all.

14.1%

of respondents had received no induction or training at all

Onboarding activities

Most respondents (57.6%) had personal introductions or one-on-one meetings with the AWERB chair and other members (**Figure 3**). Just under half of participants (48.6%) were given the opportunity to have a tour of the animal facilities and 37.9% were able to observe an AWERB meeting before committing to joining. A very small number (5.6%) of new AWERB members were paired with a more experienced AWERB 'buddy'.

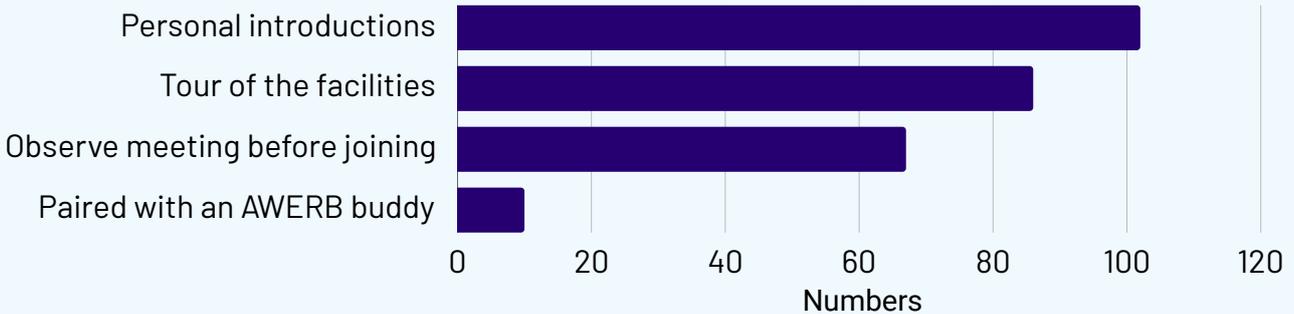


Figure 3. Onboarding activities offered to new AWERB members

Resources

Many participants (39%) were given the [RSPCA/LASA Guiding Principles on Good Practice for AWERBs](#) when joining the AWERB (**Figure 4**). A slightly smaller percentage of respondents (37.3%) were provided with the establishment's AWERB handbook, Terms of Reference, or other internal policy book. In addition, 22.0% and 18.6% of respondents were given links to the [RSPCA AWERB Directory](#) and the [RSPCA Lay Members' Resource Book](#), respectively.

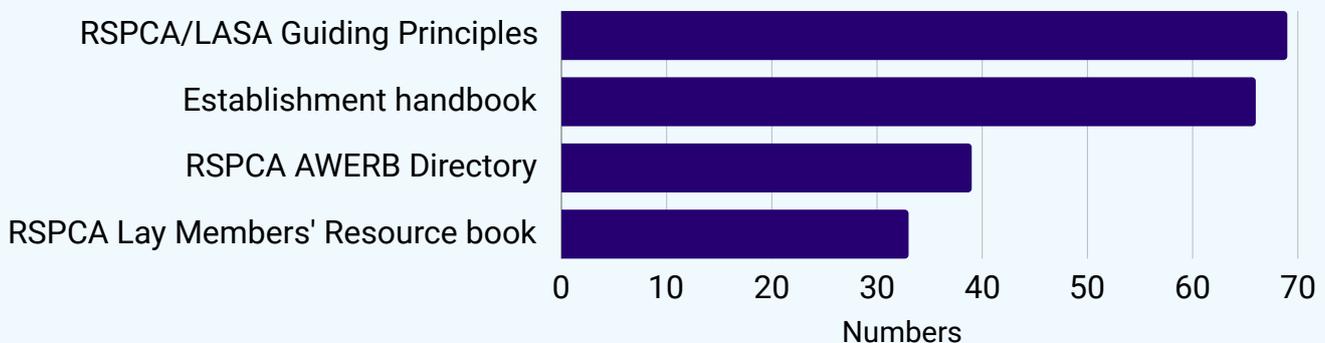


Figure 4. Resources provided to new AWERB members

Training courses and events

Almost half of participants (40.7%) had completed the Home Office Personal Licence training modules E1 and L (**Figure 5**). Some respondents had attended the RSPCA Lay Members' Forum (20.3%) and AWERB-UK meetings* (18.6%), and some had received formal training in reviewing Project Licence applications, either through the establishment (15.3%) or by an external training provider such as The Learning Curve (9%).

**Occasional meetings held by the RSPCA with the Institute of Animal Technology (IAT), Laboratory Animal Science Association (LASA) and Laboratory Animals Veterinary Association (LAVA) to provide training for our respective memberships who sit on AWERBs.*

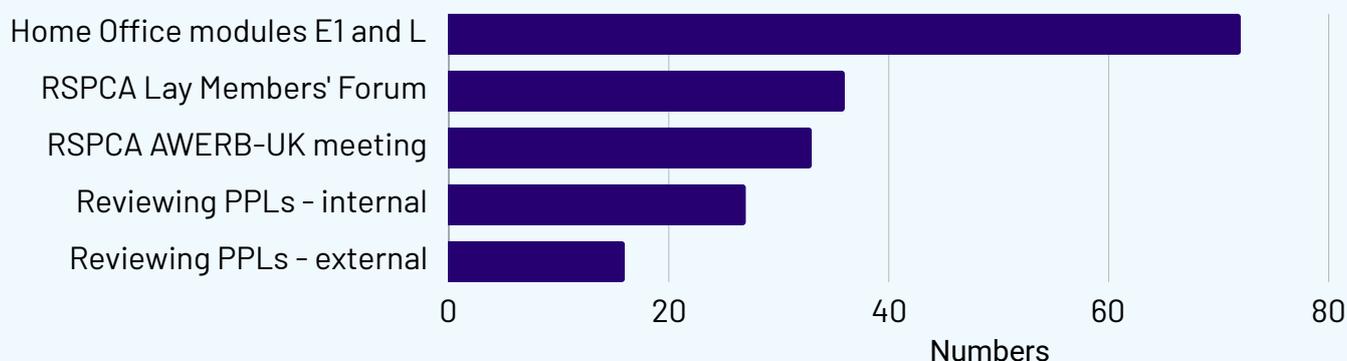


Figure 5. Training and events attended by new AWERB members

Induction and training: Free-text responses

Some respondents (12.4%) indicated having received training or resources not listed in the question. Responses provided in the free-text box included the following:

- Training for Named Persons (e.g. NTCO, NACWO, NIO, NVS courses)
- Home Office courses for Personal and Project Licence holders
- Other training provided internally (e.g. by the facilities manager or Establishment Licence Holder)
- Statistical training
- Extensive previous experience (e.g. 'I have 30+ years experience in animal research/AWERBs').

Perceived knowledge gaps

Question 4: What do you believe are your knowledge gaps? (156 responses)

Participants were asked to select from a list of 11 options (multiple options were allowed) and also had the ability to provide a free-text response. Almost half of respondents felt they were not sufficiently knowledgeable in experimental design, including statistics (44.9%), and Replacement/alternatives to animal use (42.3%; **Figure 6**). Other commonly perceived knowledge gaps included Committee skills (35.3%), the 'science' in Project Licence applications (32.7%), as well as the ASPA and associated legal requirements (24.4%).

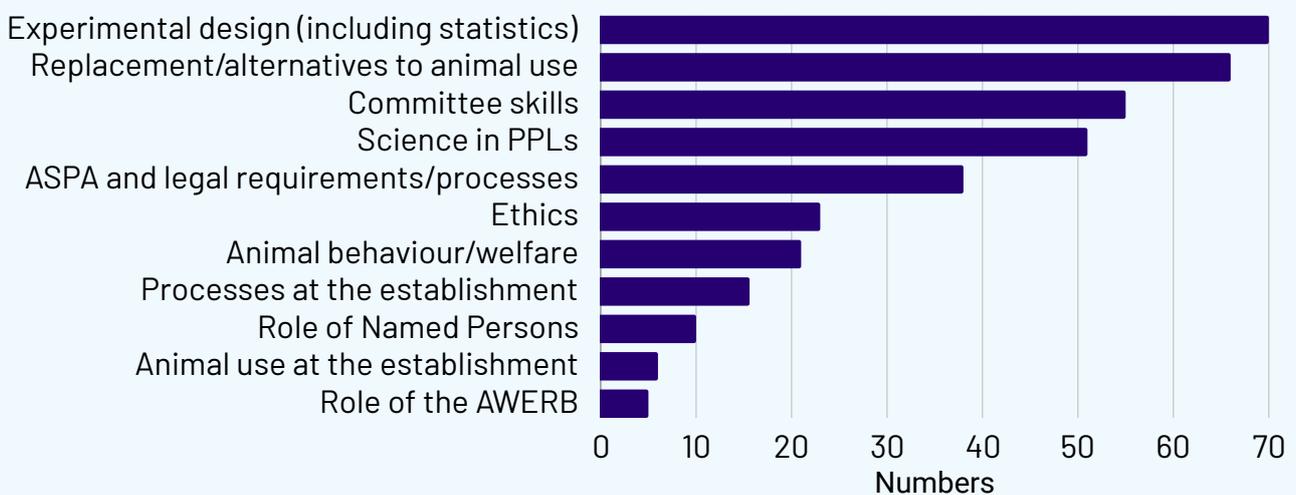


Figure 6. Knowledge gaps as perceived by AWERB members

Perceived knowledge gaps: free-text responses

Responses provided in the free-text box included the following:

- Conducting a harm-benefit analysis ('It seems implicit rather than explicit')
- How best to minute AWERB meetings
- Understanding what is a normal or regular protocol
- Reviewing PPL applications
- Lack of species-specific knowledge
- No detailed knowledge of particular research field or specific opportunities for Replacement

"How can you teach ethics? It's a personal opinion and thus the committee should be a good mix of people."

Free-text response

Topics of interest for new AWERB resources

Question 5: On a scale of 1 (not helpful) to 3 (very helpful), how helpful would you find resources on these topics? (178 responses)

Participants were asked to rate potential topics for new resources using a three-point Likert scale. A list of 18 topics were provided, based on previous surveys conducted by the RSPCA Animals in Science department and on feedback from AWERB members gathered at events organised by the department. Respondents were also able to provide their own suggestions in a free-text box.

The top 10 potential resource topics are ranked here from most to least helpful:

1. Induction and training for AWERB members
2. Good questions to ask when reviewing Project licences
3. A step-by-step guide to reviewing Project licences
4. Providing ethical advice
5. Providing advice on Replacement
6. Dealing with Standard Condition 18 and non-compliances
7. Self-assessment for AWERBs
8. Annual AWERB plans and objective setting
9. Promoting the AWERB (internally and externally)
10. Effective governance

Question 6: Are there any other topics you would like more guidance on? (25 responses)

Responses provided in the free-text box included the following:

- Compassion fatigue
- Facility infrastructure and the role of the AWERB in advising on this
- Guidance for being an AWERB Secretary
- Reviewing projects based on previous work carried out in another country
- Preceding stages of research to arrive at animal studies
- Examples of 3Rs in practice
- Additional considerations for severe protocols
- The role of the Animals in Science Committee
- Practical guide to harm benefit analysis

- ASPA refresher for general users
- Institutionalised bias
- More formal training for lay members
- Making clear the remit of the AWERB
- The importance of good quality statistics and experimental design
- Acronyms for key stakeholders and organisation responsibilities
- Current ethical thinking on experimental animals
- Tools for engagement and outreach with early-career researchers
- A 'mock' AWERB process - i.e. an example of how internal AWERB processes can be managed (e.g. assigning reviewers, how to publish minutes, how to give feedback)

Question 7: Which format would you find most helpful? (177 responses)

Participants were asked to select from a list of eight options of possible formats for resources (multiple options were allowed). The large majority of respondents preferred text-based information sheets (72.3%), short videos (71.2%), and webinars (68.9%; **Figure 7**). Other popular formats included click-through presentations (59.3%) and online workshops (52.5%).

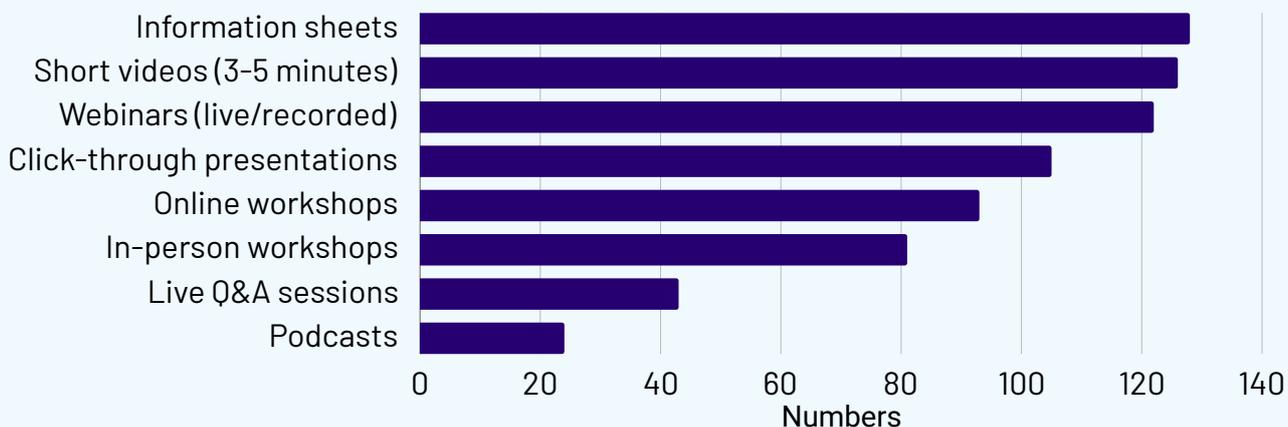


Figure 7. Preferred format for AWERB resources

Other training needs

Question 8: Do you have any other training needs you would like to see addressed?

(21 responses)

In this final question, participants were given the opportunity to name any other training need they may have in a free-text response. There were 21 responses received with the following themes:

- AWERB governance (including the role of the secretary, minute-taking, chairing, compliance, and administration)
- Recruiting lay members
- Managing conflict within the AWERB
- Understanding legal requirements
- Fostering a good Culture of Care

*“There is a very **steep learning curve** for lay members who have no prior knowledge or understanding of invasive studies; I'm still trying to recognise what is normal/regular protocol. I'm learning a lot from listening to other members' contributions, but as yet **don't feel like I have had much to offer due to my inexperience.**”*

*“**How to cope and remain engaged** when you disagree with committee decisions. If research consistently gets approved when you personally disagree that the benefits outweigh the harms, **it is upsetting and risks those members most invested in animal welfare becoming disengaged from AWERB.**”*

*“We are knowledgeable people in the industry however **we can always learn more and make ourselves better with experience and resources** to provide continued care and welfare to the animals undergoing procedures.”*

*“A **compulsory induction training module** would be useful **so induction training is standardised across the board**, both within AWERB members and within AWERBs at different institutions. An additional training module for lay-persons would be useful.”*

Conclusions

Results from this survey have highlighted the **lack of standardised practices** with regard to induction, onboarding, and training of AWERB members in different licensed establishments. The **experiences described by respondents when joining an AWERB vary greatly**, with some receiving no induction/training, and others having access to a mix of formal training events/courses, one-on-one discussions, and being provided various resources. **Very few members had received training specific to AWERB membership.**

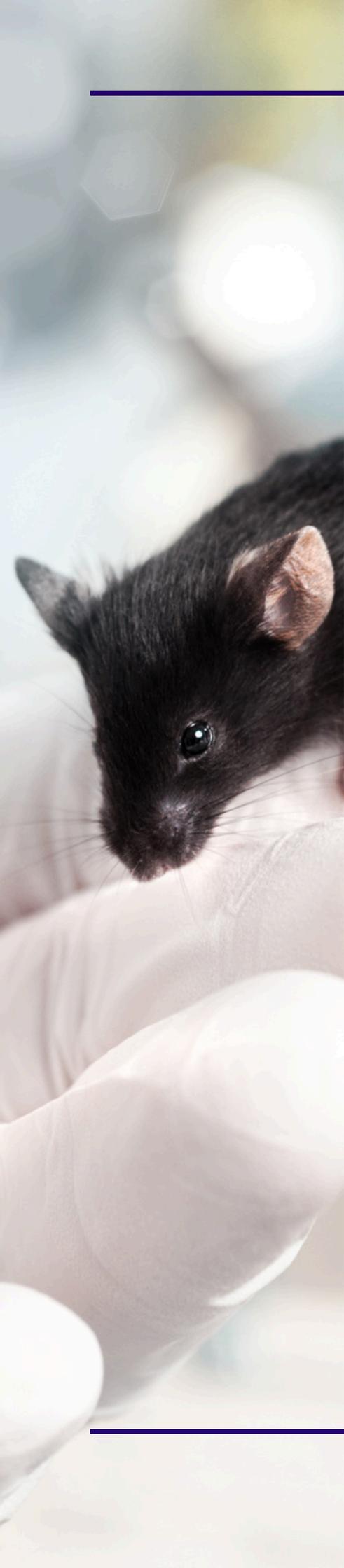
Overall, most new members:

- Were personally introduced to key persons on the AWERB
- Had a tour of the facility
- Completed the Home Office E1 and L modules
- Received the RSPCA/LASA Guiding Principles on Good Practice for AWERBs document

A large number of **AWERB members felt they had knowledge gaps** in certain areas. The question 'what do you believe are your knowledge gaps' was worded deliberately to find out more about respondents' perceptions. This was because we have often observed a disconnect between the expertise individual AWERB members *believe* they should have, and what should actually be expected of them in practice. A large number of participants felt they were not sufficiently expert in the following areas:

- Experimental design and statistics
- Replacements and alternatives to animal use
- The 'science' in Project Licence Applications
- Committee skills





Expertise in committee skills is very important, and training should be available, but **AWERB members are not all expected to have specific, expert knowledge** about experimental design, Replacement or the science in applications. **Effective induction and training ought to make this clear**, and explain how the AWERB functions as a body to collectively ensure that the applicant has effectively searched for Replacements, and made sure that experimental design is robust. The Non-Technical Summary should provide adequate and accessible information about the science.

The knowledge and competencies that AWERB members are, and are not, expected to have should be covered within their **induction and training**, which was also voted the most helpful resource topic. Many of the other topics that respondents listed in the free text responses should be included in each **AWERB's Terms of Reference**, e.g. AWERB governance, reviewing projects based on previous work carried out in another country, role and remit of the AWERB, benchmarking and ensuring that all AWERB tasks are fulfilled. AWERBs should use this report to review the information, induction packages and Terms of Reference they provide. **Although respondents reported a range of induction and training activities, the numbers accessing these were highly variable and it was concerning to see that 14% of respondents had received no induction or training at all.**

The RSPCA Animals in Science Department will use the outcome of this survey to inform the subject matter, and presentation, of our resources and meetings for AWERB members. We hope that AWERBs, and training providers, will also find these insights into training requirements useful in enabling AWERBs to operate effectively, ensuring good animal welfare, science, accountability and a Culture of Care. **We thank everyone who responded to, and shared, our survey.**

Our work

Key resources

The RSPCA Animals in Science team has been producing resources and organising training workshops for AWERB member since the inception of formal ethical review bodies in the UK.

Our key guidance documents are available online:

- [RSPCA/LASA Guiding Principles on Good Practice for AWERBs](#)
- [RSPCA Lay Members' Resource Book](#)
- [RSPCA/LASA Developing Induction Materials for AWERB members](#)

These resources are currently undergoing revision and new versions will be made available throughout 2024/25. All of our resources are available on the [RSPCA AWERB Directory](#).

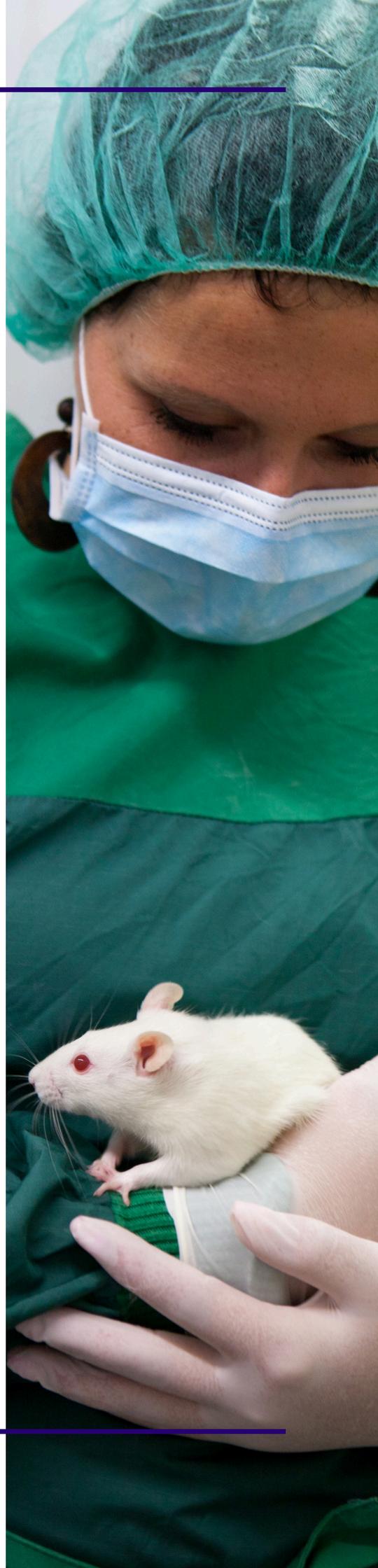
Workshops and training

We currently offer online and in-person workshops for AWERB members and those involved in the care, use, and regulation of animals in science. Some examples include:

- [Developing a good Culture of Care](#) (2h-half day)
- Maximising the effectiveness of your AWERB: advising on ethics, project licence applications, training for AWERB members, and AWERB self-assessment (full day)

These can be tailored for an establishment's specific needs, so do get in touch with animalsinscience@rspca.org.uk should you be interested in running one of these workshops at your establishment.

We also hold our annual Lay Members' Forum in December - do keep an eye on our [newsletter](#) and [LinkedIn page](#) for details closer to the time. This full-day event has been running for 30 years and is popular with all AWERB members.



Keep in touch

Over the next few months, we will be producing new resources to address the knowledge gaps highlighted in this survey. We really value your input and thoughts as all our work in this area is guided by what AWERB members tell us they need. If you have any suggestions, comments, or questions at any time, please feel free to get in touch with animalsinscience@rspca.org.uk. We'd also like to increase our face-to-face outreach to AWERBs, so please let us know if you would like to host a collaborative workshop at your establishment.

 [RSPCA Animals in Science website](#)

 animalsinscience@rspca.org.uk

 [Animals in Science on LinkedIn](#)

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