

Improving the Culture of Care

The 'Culture of Care' describes an establishment-wide, demonstrable commitment to improving animal welfare, scientific quality, care of staff and transparency for all stakeholders, including the public. Many establishments say their Culture of Care is good, but they do not always set out their own vision of this, or take steps to assess whether it is having a genuine impact. The Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Body (AWERB) is tasked with *helping to promote a Culture of Care within the establishment and, as appropriate, the wider community*¹.

We held an online workshop for 20 AWERB members, to explore how AWERBs could fulfil the above task more effectively. This began with presentations on the how the University of Nottingham fulfils the Culture of Care task, followed by how the University of Southampton defined their Culture of Care.

During the workshop, most attendees agreed that their AWERBs actively drive the Culture of Care, but identified several specific barriers and enablers across four core areas, to improving it. A barrier common to all four was a general lack of time. Key conclusions and action points are set out below.

	Barriers	Enablers
Vision and Mission Statement	• Difficulty in engaging 'non-animal' staff • Challenges in securing senior management support and engagement	• Strong foundational support for the AWERB, with good engagement within the establishment • A dedicated Culture of Care subcommittee
Induction and Training for all staff	• Difficulty in providing appropriate expertise for all subject areas that are covered in induction • Issues with mandating training across non-animal departments such as Human Resources (HR)	• Collaboration with subject experts to help develop local training modules and induction activities, e.g. partnering with safeguarding teams • Engaging courses, e.g. bite-size or with interactive elements • Tailoring induction and training to different teams
Compassion Fatigue and Emotional Labour	• Poor communication between scientists/technicians • Not acknowledging the issue • Low uptake for support programmes • Named persons not being appropriately supported • Difficulty in talking to colleagues, or family/friends, about worries and feelings	• Embedding compassion fatigue and emotional labour into health and safety protocols and also into AWERB agendas • Acknowledging the issue, with strong communication and transparency • Enabling staff to express themselves, listening to them and showing demonstrable actions • Peer-led recognition initiatives e.g. "hug in a box"
Culture of Care Awards	• Lack of funding • Risk of inadvertently excluding staff who may be struggling to cope • Difficulty in defining and assessing award criteria	• Peer-nominated categories e.g. Culture of Care champion, 3Rs champion • Encouraging all staff to nominate colleagues for wider staff awards

¹Culture of Care, p17 in the RSPCA/LASA Guiding Principles on Good Practice for Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Bodies (AWERBs) - <https://science.rspca.org.uk/documents/d/science/guiding-principles-on-good-practice-for-awerbs>

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Based on the enablers identified during the discussion and wider guidance, participants identified their own action points:

- Recognise that **improving the Culture of Care is a continuous process**, that needs to be regularly reviewed and assessed
- **Actively engage with senior leaders** (such as Vice-Chancellors, Directors, budget holders) to ensure they demonstrably support the AWERB and provide necessary time, resource and leadership for Culture of Care initiatives
- **Partner with internal safeguarding and HR teams** to mandate and deliver bespoke Culture of Care training for all staff, rather than restricting it to animal technologists. Also, proactively embed support for compassion fatigue and emotional labour into standard health and safety protocols and regular AWERB meeting agendas
- **Establish a dedicated subcommittee** to clearly define the establishment's Culture of Care vision and drive continuous improvement with support from the AWERB and senior leadership

To discuss:

- Does your AWERB implement the **Culture of Care task** effectively, showing leadership and developing the Culture?
- Do the **barriers and enablers** apply at your establishment? How could you overcome the former, and develop the latter?
- Are you implementing, or could you implement, the above **action points**?

See also

RSPCA/LASA/LAVA/IAT. 2025. Strengthening AWERBs: Resource, Engagement and Recognition
<https://science.rspca.org.uk/AWERB-UK2025>

RSPCA Animals in Science Department. 2025. Scientist- AWERB engagement
<https://science.rspca.org.uk/awerb-engagement>

RSPCA Animals in Science Department. 2026. Induction and Training for AWERB members
<https://science.rspca.org.uk/inductionandtraining>

RSPCA and LASA, 2026, Guiding Principles on Good Practice for Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Bodies (4th edition). A report by the RSPCA Animals in Science Department and LASA Education, Training and Ethics Section. (M. Jennings ed.)
<https://science.rspca.org.uk/guidingprinciples>