Induction and training for AWERB members

Aim of this resource

To provide guidance and suggestions around induction and training for AWERB members, including an adaptable template for induction.

Relevant AWERB task

This is relevant to **all** AWERB tasks.

Recommendation

Use this resource to review the current induction processes for new members of the AWERB, as well as the on-going training provided for all members.
The suggested template can be adapted to suit your AWERB's needs.

The issue

AWERBs play a vital role in shaping the standards of animal welfare, ethics, science and support for personnel within an establishment - all essential components of the Culture of Care. They also have to undertake other, specific tasks set out in the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 (ASPA). It is therefore essential that AWERBs provide appropriate induction and training for all their members. Even those already holding roles under the ASPA will need induction and training in AWERB tasks, and how the establishment's own AWERB works, as well as training in the 'soft' or 'committee' skills required and how to deal with issues such as conflicts with personal values.

This resource highlights some key elements of an AWERB induction, and sets out practical steps that establishments can take to improve initial and ongoing training for their members.

Key points:

- Members are likely to be more engaged and supportive when they have a good understanding of the AWERB's purpose, and the processes and people involved.

- Current experiences of joining an AWERB vary greatly across establishments, with some people receiving no induction/training, and others having access to a mix of formal training events/courses, one-on-one discussions, and being provided with various reading or other resources.

- To ensure a well-run, efficient and effective AWERB, all establishments should provide comprehensive induction for their members.

- AWERB members are <u>not</u> expected to all have specific, expert knowledge about aspects such as experimental design, the 3Rs or of the science being considered in applications. Effective induction and training ought to make this clear.

- The induction process should be tailored not only to the individual establishment, but also to the needs of the different categories of participant (e.g. chairs, lay members, scientists, named persons, animal technologists etc).

- Inductions should always include a visit to the animal unit.

- Useful induction activities could include:
  - Interactions with other members of the AWERB and tours of animal facilities.
  - Offering, or facilitating access to, relevant training courses and events.
  - Signposting to useful resources, e.g. documents and websites.

- An adaptable induction template is included in this document for AWERBs to use.

Background Information

- **Members are likely to be more engaged and supportive when they have a good understanding of the AWERB's purpose, and the processes and people involved.** A shared understanding of the AWERB's purpose and processes fosters better communication and collaboration among members, researchers, and animal unit staff. Everyone involved should be aware of, and engaged with, all of the AWERB's tasks. They should also have opportunities to get to know other AWERB members and relevant staff associated with the animal unit.

- **Current experiences of joining an AWERB vary greatly across establishments, with some people receiving no induction/training, and others having access to a mix of formal training events/courses, one-on-one discussions, and being provided with various reading, or other, resources.** Most respondents to a 2024 AWERB training survey (57.6%) had personal introductions or one-on-one meetings with the AWERB chair and other members. AWERBs may like to consider reflecting on what is currently provided, where they would like to be regarding induction and training, and how they could achieve this. Following this, a plan could be developed to improve these processes, ensuring that all members receive consistent training, ideally organised by a single, designated person. This approach would help guarantee that all new members are properly onboarded and well-prepared for their roles.

- **To ensure a well-run, efficient and effective AWERB, all establishments should provide comprehensive induction for their members.** By providing a thorough induction, establishments empower AWERB members to actively participate in reviews and discussions, leading to more informed decisions and a stronger culture of care within the establishment. Audits by the Animals in Science Regulation Unit (ASRU) also require establishments to demonstrate the effectiveness of their AWERBs.

- **AWERB members are not all expected to have specific, expert knowledge about aspects such as experimental design, the 3Rs or the science being considered in applications. Effective induction and training ought to make this clear.** Setting out a series of self-directed questions about AWERB-related knowledge and skills, with associated information and links to resources offers a valuable learning approach; see section 2 of the RSPCA/LASA guidance on induction for AWERB members). This allows members to independently explore and deepen their understanding, either individually or with guidance from experienced members, and ask for any further training they may need.

- **The induction process should be tailored not only to the individual establishment, but also to the needs of the different categories of participant (e.g. named persons, animal technologists, lay or independent members, chairs, scientists etc).** At a basic level (e.g. for those who have not worked under the ASPA or undertaken Home Office modular training), providing information about the local AWERB, and the establishment's culture and processes, is helpful.

- **Inductions should always include a visit to the animal unit.** By visiting animal facilities, new AWERB members gain valuable insights into the culture of the establishment and can interact with a range of staff. Visits can also enhance their understanding of the establishment's animal research, including the animals' experiences. However, in the 2024 AWERB training survey, just under half of participants (48.6%) reported having a tour of the animal facilities. This underlined_information sheet provides guidance on preparing for a visit to the animal unit.

Example induction template (downloadable/adaptable checklist here)
- Have an introductory meeting with the AWERB Chair, or an experienced member, to work through and discuss the self-assessment tables in section 2 of the RSPCA/LASA Guidance on AWERB induction (allow around 1-1½ hours)
- Read the local AWERB Terms of Reference, plus any other useful documents such as meeting minutes - this could be provided in the format of an 'induction booklet' or similar
- Attend your establishment's Local Module to understand foundational knowledge and skills required for their role in the AWERB
- Be assigned an AWERB 'buddy'; a more experienced member to help prepare for meetings and 'debrief' afterwards
- Use The AWERB Dictionary to quickly reference acronyms, understand terms for Project Licence reviews, and find descriptions of key roles, such as the named persons.
- Read the infographic on Being an effective lay member of an AWERB – much of this applies to all members
- Take a tour of the animal unit
- Have opportunities for follow-up discussions, and providing feedback on the above process, with relevant people such as the AWERB Chair

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Other useful resources
- **RSPCA/LASA Induction for AWERB members**
- **RSPCA/LASA Guiding Principles on Good Practice for AWERBs**
- **RSPCA Lay Member's Resource Book**
- **RSPCA's infographic on Being an effective lay member of an AWERB is a good resource for all categories of members**
- **RSPCA's AWERB Directory and ethical review site**
- **RSPCA Lay Members' Forum.**
- **AWERB-UK meetings by the RSPCA with LASA, LAVA and the IAT**

For more information about induction and training for AWERB members, from the RSPCA and colleagues, click here