

Promoting a Culture of Care

Aim of this resource

To help AWERB members ensure the concept of a Culture of Care is understood and supported within the establishment.

Relevant AWERB task

Help to promote a Culture of Care within the establishment and, as appropriate, in the wider community.

Recommendation

Use this resource to check the effectiveness of your AWERB's Culture of Care initiatives.



The issue

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 AWERB is tasked with helping to promote the Culture of Care, and there is much that it can do to help realise the benefits for animals, staff morale, scientific quality and openness with the wider community.

This resource sets out some ideas to help AWERBs show leadership and help all staff to engage with and develop the Culture of Care.

Key points:

- 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. It goes beyond simply complying with the law.
- This sheet includes links to resources and real-life, practical examples of AWERB initiatives that promote a Culture of Care.
- Every establishment should have a clear vision of their local Culture of Care. Some use input from a range of staff to define their own Culture of Care.
- The Culture of Care is not just about caring for animals. It also includes staff morale and how effectively the 3Rs are implemented. It should lead to tangible benefits for animals, people, and science.
- Some establishments 'assess' their Culture of Care and the AWERB could take a lead with initiating this.
- Local induction and training for all staff – regardless of whether they are directly involved with animal care and use – should include the Culture of Care as a core element.
- Clear, and respectful, communication between staff with different roles is essential.
- The Culture of Care should recognise the 'emotional labour' of staff and make sure support is in place.
- Caring for the wider community should also be included, by ensuring that the public is informed about the Culture of Care in an open and meaningful way.

Background information:

- The ‘Culture of Care’ describes an establishment-wide commitment to improving animal welfare, scientific quality, care of the staff, and transparency for all stakeholders, including the public. The AWERB is not solely responsible for this, but is well placed to help drive the Culture of Care and show leadership.
- The Culture of Care is about more than caring for animals. It encompasses other factors including how staff treat one another and communicate, how effectively the 3Rs are implemented, expectations for high-quality science, and how committed people are to going beyond minimum legal requirements.
- Each establishment has its own culture, so all establishments should have a clear vision of what a Culture of Care means for them. A 2021 [survey](#) conducted with AWERBs in the UK highlighted some aspects of a good Culture of Care. You can also find relevant information and references on a dedicated [web page](#) hosted by Norecopa. Some establishments hold an exercise to set out a definition of their Culture of Care, with input from a wide range of staff, for everyone to sign up to. You may like to suggest this.
- It may be possible to ‘feel’ when establishment culture is good, but it is also possible for impressions to be subjective and for culture to drift or vary within organisations. The Culture of Care should lead to tangible benefits for animals, in the form of better implementation of the 3Rs and rigorous ethical review of their use.
- The European Commission [working document](#) on Animal Welfare Bodies (AWBs) makes five suggestions for these to help promote a Culture of Care:
 - Encourage scientists to work with (and value the contribution of) animal technologists and care staff
 - Provide for on-going involvement of project licence holders in the AWB
 - Provide the opportunity and encouragement for any staff member to attend AWB meetings and raise issues with AWBs
 - Communicate with all staff and promote 3Rs advancements, welfare improvements, policy changes, roles of care staff, training persons and veterinarians, and the AWB itself
 - Provide information on the role and functions of the AWB for new staff and encourage their contributions

Fostering a positive Culture of Care:

- AWERBs may periodically review how effectively they promote a Culture of Care.
 - [Care-full stories](#) provide thought-provoking interactive training resources in the form of role-plays that can be a useful starting point to initiate discussion.
 - Other practical examples of relevant activities for AWBs and AWERBs are provided [here](#) and in the RSPCA/LASA [Guiding Principles on good practice for AWERBs](#).

AWERBs tend to have full agendas and limited time, so you may find it more resource-efficient to make sure internal communications are good and the AWERB knows whether some of the tasks are already being undertaken by other individuals or bodies. If so, the AWERB could take on an oversight role, receiving reports on activities and progress, rather than owning the tasks.

- **Some establishments have begun to assess their Culture of Care, using a survey and information-gathering approach.** This can help to **evaluate the impact of initiatives to progress local culture**, ensuring ongoing progress and challenge to the *status quo*, and checking on **staff morale and animal welfare**. This requires a manageable number of indicators that are subjective (e.g. a survey question asking participants to rate statements like '*I feel accountable for animal welfare*'), objective (such as whether the NVS visits regularly and is sufficiently available), and animal-centred (e.g. information on enrichment or the fates of animals). For practical examples, see [here](#); ideas for indicators are [here](#) and [here](#). You could also use the [AWERB Hub network](#), set up by the Animals in Science Committee, to find out how other establishments are assessing their culture.
- **The local Culture of Care should be a core element of induction and training materials for all staff.** This includes those who do not work with, or contact, the animals, in the name of **internal openness**. This could take the form of a presentation and discussion session, which could come under the AWERB's task of providing a forum for discussion.
- **The aspect of caring for staff includes fostering mutual respect between people with different roles and recognising the emotional labour of staff such as animal technologists and vets.** For practical examples of initiatives to improve communication between scientists, animal technologists, vets and the AWERB see [here](#) and a [poster](#) summarising this. All staff, especially animal technologists, care staff, and vets, can struggle with the emotional impact of caring for animals experiencing adverse effects, or euthanasia, as addressed [here](#). It is not always possible for them to talk to family and friends about this. The AWERB can check whether there is **adequate support in place** (within the task of supporting named persons and other staff dealing with animals).
- **There is an informal, international Culture of Care network that someone at your establishment may like to join.** Members include scientists, animal technologists, vets, AWERB (or AWB) members, and regulators. You can find out more [here](#).
- **The AWERB task refers to promoting a Culture of Care within the establishment and, as appropriate, in the wider community.** You may like to ask for discussion about this. Does the establishment's website mention a Culture of Care, and is this meaningful and descriptive – or does it just say the culture is 'good'? Do communications and dialogue within the community include the Culture of Care? The AWERB can help ensure that the establishment can fulfil any **public-facing statements about local culture, animal welfare, or scientific benefits**.
- **For more materials on the Culture of Care, developed by the RSPCA and colleagues, see [this](#).**