RSPCA ANIMALS IN SCIENCE

Scientist - AWERB engagement

Aim of this resource

To help scientists, AWERB members and AWERB chairs to understand and support one another better, to enable the AWERB to implement all of its functions effectively within a good Culture of Care.

Relevant AWERB task

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

Recommendation

Use this resource to improve the scientist-AWERB working relationship and better understand different people's perspectives, by establishing clear, consistent and respectful communication between scientists and the AWERB.



Note: 'scientist' means all personal and project licence holders at an establishment, regardless of their involvement with the AWERB, plus those carrying out non-ASPA regulated procedures.

The issue

Good engagement and communications between scientists and the AWERB are critically important to ensure that the AWERB can implement all of its functions effectively, with benefits for animal welfare, staff morale, science and the establishment's Culture of Care.

However, some AWERB members may have little contact with scientists other than during project review; they may not know how scientists are informed about the AWERB; or how the committee is viewed. Conversely, scientists may also be unfamiliar with the fundamental role of the AWERB, its tasks apart from project review, and how the AWERB can benefit them. All of this can affect not only the operation of the AWERB but also relationships between those with different roles.

Key points:

For all AWERB members:

- Everyone is responsible for using their interpersonal skills to create a respectful, constructive and supportive environment within the AWERB.
- Open and clear communication is essential for an effective AWERB. It is vital to speak up if communication is poor and always read all the materials you are given.
- If you have little contact with scientists other than during project review, you may not know what other pressures scientists come under; or how the committee is viewed and understood.
- There is the potential for emotional labour and compassion fatigue for all members and all staff, whether they are directly or indirectly involved with animal research.

For scientists:

- The AWERB works according to the establishment's individual culture, local perspectives, standards and values, which is why it may have different requirements and make different judgements to the Animals in Science Regulation Unit (ASRU).
- The AWERB does more than project review. Its other tasks are intended to benefit science, animal welfare, staff morale and the Culture of Care, as well as helping to ensure openness and transparency with the public.
- An effective AWERB provides significant benefits for scientists, with respect to project licence preparation, compliance with ASPA and public accountability.
- Scientists should have the opportunity to interact with the AWERB and support its initiatives wherever they can, e.g. by asking to sit in on meetings. This applies even to non-project licence holders.
- Members have a variety of expertise, differing from scientific peers e.g. in law, animal welfare or ethics. Individuals may, or may not, understand the science - it is important for applicants to use language with an appropriate technical level, and tone.

For AWERB Chairs:

- Clear and up-to-date Terms of Reference (ToR) for the AWERB should be readily available to everyone.
- All AWERB members should have an induction and training programme.
- Everyone should be freely able to engage in discussions, fostering a collaborative and open environment.
- It should not be assumed that everyone is happy with the AWERB, and the way it fulfils all of its tasks, without asking the members.

Background Information:

- **Everyone is responsible for using their interpersonal skills to create a respectful, constructive and supportive environment within the AWERB.** Meetings can be an intimidating environment for scientists, who may feel the people round the table are judging them, their ethics, and their science. It is important to create a friendly environment and not to make any assumptions about an individual's beliefs, feelings or motivations. Giving positive feedback about projects, presentations and discussions where deserved is also helpful, with any critical feedback delivered in a constructive manner.

- **Open and clear communication is essential for an effective AWERB. It is vital to speak up if communication is poor and always read all the materials you are given.** Clear, prompt and concise communication, coupled with tailored support and resources, ensures that all members, regardless of scientific background, feel respected and can fully understand and contribute to the ethical review process.

- **If you have little contact with scientists other than during project review, you may not know what other pressures scientists come under; or how the committee is viewed and understood.** Any lack of awareness and understanding from both parties can seriously affect the expectations that AWERB members and scientists have of each other and their working relationships. It's therefore beneficial to take the opportunity to interact with scientists, for example by attending talks and workshops. This will allow you to find out about their backgrounds, views and levels of knowledge about the science done at your establishment.

- **There is the potential for emotional labour and compassion fatigue for all members and all staff, whether they are directly or indirectly involved with animal research.** There has been a lot of focus on the emotional impact of working in animal research with respect to animal technologists, but scientists, named persons and AWERB members can also feel conflicted about animal use. It should be possible to discuss this openly within the AWERB, and all staff should be able to access support if needed [1].

- **The AWERB works according to the establishment's individual culture, local perspectives, standards and values, which is why it may have different requirements and make different judgements to the Animals in Science Regulation Unit (ASRU).** It's important to understand how the AWERB and ASRU complement. This should be covered within relevant induction and training programmes. Nevertheless, if you have any questions, talk to your Named Training and Competency Officer or AWERB chair [2].

- **The AWERB does more than project review. Its other tasks are intended to benefit science, animal welfare, staff morale and the Culture of Care, as well as helping to ensure openness and transparency with the public.** These tasks include advising on and promoting awareness of animal welfare and the 3Rs, promoting a 'Culture of Care' and providing a forum for discussion and development of ethical advice to the establishment licence holder (ELH). Scientists can make important contributions to all of these. You can also ensure that 3Rs recommendations are compatible with your science, and have input into training programmes for staff who will be supporting your work so that they understand the scientific objectives [3,4,5].

- **An effective AWERB provides significant benefits for scientists, with respect to project licence preparation, compliance with ASPA and public accountability.** The AWERB should help scientists produce project licence applications that go beyond compliance with the ASPA, minimising the need for further revisions when the application is submitted to ASRU. It should also help them reflect on the ethical implications of their work and feel reassured that it has been properly scrutinised.

- **Scientists should have the opportunity to interact with the AWERB and support its initiatives wherever they can, e.g. by asking to sit in on meetings. This applies even to non-project licence holders.** This will help them to better engage with the AWERB and see how it handles its different tasks. It will also help them gain experience of the kinds of ethical and welfare discussions that take place, including during project review.

- **Members have a variety of expertise, differing from scientific peers e.g. in law, animal welfare or ethics. Individuals may, or may not, understand the science - it is important for applicants to use language with an appropriate technical level, and tone.** Members may also hold differing views, or have differing priorities from scientists regarding animal welfare, ethics and justification for animal use, and this should be taken into account so that everyone is prepared to discuss issues constructively.

- **Clear and up-to-date Terms of Reference (ToR) for the AWERB should be readily available to everyone.** An up-to-date ToR benefits AWERB operations by defining expectations, ways of working, scope and membership while supporting governance and discussions with ASRU, e.g. during audits [8]

- **All AWERB members should have an induction and training programme.** 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 [2].

- **Everyone should be freely able to engage in discussions, fostering a collaborative and open environment.** 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 . Any personal conflicts, institutional politics or hierarchies should not be allowed to inhibit or overshadow discussions [6].

- **It should not be assumed that everyone is happy with the AWERB, and the way it fulfils all of its tasks, without asking the members.** People will not always speak up 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. Sample survey questions for scientists are available in an editable document here .

This resource is based on our Scientist-AWERB engagement pack, which includes further guidance, resources and activities here

For a full list of references, click here