

2. Dos and don'ts for scientists

Good engagement and communications between scientists and the Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Body (AWERB) are critically important to ensure that the AWERB can implement all of its functions effectively, with benefits for animal welfare, science and the establishment's Culture of Care.

This sheet is taken from a resource pack which aims to help AWERB members, AWERB chairs and scientists understand and support one another better, so that all can benefit. The term 'scientist' refers to personal and project licence holders, regardless of their involvement with the AWERB, plus those carrying out non-ASPA regulated procedures or indirectly involved with animal use (e.g. using reagents derived from animals). An introduction to the resource pack, and the other sheets, can be downloaded via the QR code at the end of this sheet.

Do...	Background
<p>Find out about the role and full list of tasks of the AWERB. Make sure you are clear where the AWERB sits in relation to other bodies in your establishment, such as Research Governance and user groups.</p> <p>Information about your local AWERB and other relevant bodies should be available on the intranet, or you could ask the AWERB chair or secretary.</p>	<p>The AWERB is not only concerned with reviewing project licence applications and amendments. Other 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 tasks.</p>

If possible, find out who is on the AWERB and get to know the individual members.

You could look for information about membership and roles on the establishment intranet, attend events run by the AWERB or meet members if they visit the lab or animal unit.

Meeting members outside of AWERB meetings will help to foster mutual understanding of one another, and of people's roles on the AWERB.

Make sure you are familiar with the different, and complementary, roles of the AWERB and the Home Office Animals in Science Regulation Unit (ASRU).

This should be covered in your induction and training programmes, and you can ask the Named Training and Competency Officer for further learning resources if needed, or discuss with the AWERB chair.

The AWERB is a *local framework* helping to ensure that all animal use is carefully considered and justified; that proper account is taken of all possibilities for the 3Rs; and high standards of accommodation and care are achieved. The Home Office ASRU, through its team of inspectors, regulates animal use and monitors compliance with the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 (ASPA) at a national level.

The AWERB advises the ELH whether to support a licence for submission to ASRU for regulatory approval. Bear in mind that the AWERB works according to the establishment's culture, local perspectives, standards and values, which is why it may have different requirements and make different judgements to ASRU. Nevertheless, advice and support from the AWERB should help deliver well-prepared project applications to the Home Office.

Ask to attend AWERB meetings, even if these are not reviewing your projects (or if you are not a project licence holder).

If you are told it is not possible to attend, ask why.

This will help you to better engage with the AWERB and be aware of how it handles its different tasks. It will also help you gain experience of the kinds of ethical and welfare discussions that take place, including during project review. If you use animals, it is especially valuable to do this before submitting your first project licence application.



Take the opportunity to interact with the AWERB and support its initiatives wherever you can.

Respond to invites to AWERB activities and attend events. You may not recognise what a contribution you and your colleagues can make. Consider being a representative for your research group, liaising with the AWERB and passing on relevant information from and to the AWERB. (See also ideas in the activity sheet.)

All of the AWERB's tasks are intended to benefit science, animal welfare and staff morale, as well as helping to ensure openness and transparency with the public.

Many of the tasks, such as developing and promoting a Culture of Care, advising on the 3Rs and animal welfare, and supporting appropriate training, benefit from scientific input and support.

They can help scientists work more effectively and can also help improve the science. For example, an AWERB recommended a refinement to the Oral Glucose Tolerance Test in mice, reducing the fasting period from 18 hours to 6 hours. This improved welfare and reduced experimental confounds and variance, e.g. due to ingestion of faeces.

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.

If the AWERB is reviewing a project licence application or amendment for you, ask to attend in person to discuss this.

You could check whether the AWERB Terms of Reference (ToR) include protocols for inviting scientists to meetings when their projects are discussed, and if not, suggest that they do.

It is much better to hear first-hand the views of the AWERB on your project and any suggestions for changes (e.g. on potential refinements) rather than to receive these in subsequent email exchanges. This will make it easier to understand the differing perspectives and context of the comments and will also save time because you will be able to answer any queries 'on the spot'.

The AWERB should help you produce project licence applications that go beyond compliance with the ASPA, minimising the need for further meetings and edits.

‘Know your audience’ when preparing materials for, or presenting to, the AWERB.

Getting to know the individual members, as suggested above, will enable you to find out about their backgrounds, views and levels of knowledge about the science done at your establishment. Encouraging people to ask questions during, as well as after, talks will also help you to tailor your presentations.

The AWERB is a different audience from your scientific peers. Members have a variety of expertise, e.g. in law or ethics, and not all of them may understand the details of your specific science, so think about the terminology you use.

Members may also hold differing views, or have differing priorities from you regarding animal welfare, ethics and justification for animal use, and you need to take account of these and be prepared to discuss issues constructively.

Ensure that your project licence application or other information is submitted in good time; show that you take all reviews seriously, including interim and retrospective reviews.

A common complaint from AWERB members is that they do not have enough time to read licences and any associated materials. This can frustrate people, and may also result in them not reading materials properly and making poorly-informed judgements. Interim reviews are essential for the AWERB’s task of following the development and outcome of projects, so it is important to provide the information the committee needs to do this.

If your work is not regulated by ASPA, check whether the AWERB reviews nonregulated work. Ask to at least discuss non-ASPA projects with Named Persons.

Even where research involving animals is non-regulated (e.g. research on some invertebrates, or where animal tissues are used) there can be opportunities for application of the 3Rs. For example, improvements in housing and husbandry or tissue sharing with other research groups may be possible, and there are ethical dimensions to non-regulated studies which should be of interest to the AWERB. An information exchange between you and the AWERB could prove useful to both parties.

Give constructive feedback to the AWERB - both positive and critical - about your experiences.

AWERBs should ask you for feedback, but if they do not, then give it (tactfully!) anyway. For example, you could speak to an approachable member of the committee if you feel unhappy with any aspect of the AWERB process, or how you have been treated, explaining how the committee made you feel.

This will help endorse good practices and highlight any problems that need to be addressed in order to improve the AWERB's performance. Without feedback, the chair and members are likely to assume that they are operating effectively, and there are no issues.

Don't...

Have preconceptions about the AWERB.

Background

The AWERB is intended to be a positive and supportive force for both animal welfare *and* science and is instrumental in developing and maintaining the establishment's Culture of Care. You may hear the AWERB described as 'a hurdle to get over', or have an aversion to committees, but it is better to keep an open mind.

Make assumptions about AWERB members' understanding of your science - do not assume that they will, or will not, understand it all.

Not all the members of an AWERB are scientists - and even as a scientific member, it can be difficult to fully understand the details of a scientific field you do not work in. Members may understand the broad concepts of your science but not the detail, scientific terminology or many acronyms.

Bear this in mind when talking through your project and ask people to let you know if you are going into too much technical detail - or not enough.

Accept poor practice from the AWERB e.g. lack of clarity about the process, timing and information required for project review; or being left waiting outside the meeting room, challenged aggressively, or not given adequate time to talk through your project.

Talk to someone (such as the chair or other approachable member) and explain the problem. Look at the AWERB Terms of Reference and see whether they include items that could help you make your case, or whether they need to be updated.

Assume that there are no ethical or animal welfare issues to address, because your research has already received funding.

It may help identify any potential issues with funded proposals if you suggest the AWERB reviews a pre-proposal document before you submit a grant application.

AWERBs should be set up and run in a manner conducive to achieving an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding. Poor practice means that topics are not being discussed properly, so the AWERB will not be working optimally or achieving its tasks. Unless you say something, nothing will change.

Most funding bodies do not consider animal welfare and ethics as encompassed by the harm/benefit analysis. They leave this to the Home Office, as the regulatory authority; and the AWERB at the establishment where the research is to be carried out, since this considers the *local* perspective on welfare and ethics and applies *local* values.

Do keep in mind that the raising of such issues by AWERB members reflects the differing perspectives on the committee and should not be a criticism of your own welfare and ethical standards. The chair should ensure that discussions are open, respectful and constructive.

Expect different AWERBs to raise the same issues, or draw the same conclusions.

Unlike ASRU, AWERBs are supposed to apply the establishment's own values, perspectives and expertise, and to develop the local Culture of Care. It would therefore be surprising if every AWERB raised identical issues.

Assume that AWERBs address animal welfare only.

You can find out more about the AWERB's roles, and full list of tasks, by: asking the chair for further information; looking on your establishment's intranet (which should include this information); or referring to the RSPCA/LASA Guiding Principles on good practice for AWERBs.

A summary of the tasks can also be found on the RSPCA website (search for '[RSPCA](#)' '[AWERB functions and tasks](#)')

One of the AWERB's tasks is to advise the ELH whether to support project licence applications. However, they should also provide a forum for the development of ethical advice to the ELH, which means addressing both the specific and wider ethical issues associated with individual research projects.

This means not only identifying and reducing harms and applying the 3Rs, but also considering the likely harms against the potential benefits of the project. Wider ethical issues include: how the specific research fits into the wider scientific picture and whether it can be ethically justified in that context; identifying societal concerns; considering ethical issues arising if work is done abroad, or on orphan diseases; the well-being of staff, e.g. when required to kill animals; and alternative approaches to addressing human health problems. See also [What do we mean by 'ethics'](#)? (Search for 'RSPCA' 'what do we mean by ethics')

Other AWERB tasks relate to promoting awareness of the 3Rs and advising on their application, promoting openness, and supporting named persons and other staff dealing with animals on animal welfare, ethical issues and the provision of appropriate training. These also go beyond animal welfare.

This sheet was produced by a working group set up by the RSPCA, which included scientists, AWERB chairs, lay members, and representatives of the Animals in Science Committee AWERB Subcommittee, Animal Research Nexus and NC3Rs. The participants are listed in the introductory sheet, which can be downloaded using the QR code.

