



Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Bodies - moving forward

An RSPCA/LASA/LAVA/IAT AWERB-UK meeting

London, 20 June 2019

Summary of main points from the meeting

The meeting was attended by around 60 participants who were members of AWERBs from industry and academia. All member types were represented, including scientists, AWERB chairs, veterinarians, animal technologists and named persons.

This document summarises some main points. It can be used as a thought starter to prompt reflection on how effectively your AWERB is functioning, how well it is supported, and whether any actions are needed.

An interactive [poll](#) suggested that most participants felt their AWERBs were working well, but there were some issues with **meeting frequency** (not enough) and **duration** (too short). Almost 4 in 10 answered 'no' when asked whether they felt there was enough time at meetings to cover all agenda items and have a proper discussion. Significant numbers also indicated issues with AWERB **budgets and resourcing**, and with **engagement from senior management**.

A question on whether AWERBs addressed all 13 tasks effectively (6 in 10 said some tasks were not fulfilled) led to discussion on the AWERB's 'ownership' of the tasks, and whether these are addressed within the meetings or outside. It may be helpful to **review AWERB oversight and/or ownership** of activities relating to the tasks, and **improve liaisons** with individuals and bodies that are doing these.

Participants were asked to write down 'What frustrates you the most, with respect to the level of support and resourcing your AWERB receives?' and post their answers into a Ballot Box (click [here](#) for full results). The most cited issue was **not enough time** within meetings to cover everything. Problems with **engagement** also came to the fore, including with scientists and also some AWERB members. Wanting **more lay members** was a recurring theme, and '**not doing ethics**' was another problem mentioned in the Ballot and throughout the day.

A second interactive survey (using free text; click [here](#) for full results) identified participants' action points they planned to take away. The most common were **annual plans, with objectives**, and **annual AWERB reports**. There was interest in the new **AWERB assessment tool** from ASRU. Many also planned to set up or improve **induction and training for members** (the [RSPCA/LASA guidance](#) can help with this). Other points included encouraging **directors or senior managers to attend at least one AWERB meeting a year** and **increasing recognition of AWERB members** and the contributions they make. **Communication plans**, including **open meetings**, also featured, and other good ideas included suggesting an **extra meeting every year** and requesting **budget for extra admin support** for the AWERB.

In a session on AWERB chairing, we used a free text interactive survey to list the qualities people felt made a good AWERB chair (click [here](#) for results). These included a mix of **personal qualities** (e.g. approachability and confidence), **interpersonal skills** and specific **AWERB chairing skills**. **Focus, time keeping and listening to all points of view** featured strongly.



Participants had also been asked to write down, and put in the Ballot Box: *'What does your chair do best, and/or what do you think they struggle with? Or, if you are a chair, are there any aspects that you find difficult, or would like more support with?'* In general, participants appreciated chairs who could **keep meetings to time, make people feel included** and **follow actions up**. Interestingly, some like to have a chair who had a **good knowledge of the science**, while others felt their chair's involvement with the science created a **conflict**. Some chairs were reported to struggle with **time keeping, communicating** and some **'soft skills'** (click [here](#) for results).

Useful resources:

- RSPCA/LASA guiding principles on good practice for AWERBs ([here](#))
- RSPCA/LASA guiding principles on developing induction materials for lay members ([here](#))
- RSPCA/LASA/LAVA/IAT/ESRC/University of Nottingham booklet on the AWERB as a forum for discussion ([here](#))
- RSPCA web pages on ethical review ([here](#))

For further information about the 2019 RSPCA/LASA/LAVA/IAT AWERB-UK meeting, contact research.animals@rspca.org.uk