

## Report of the RSPCA AWERB Lay Members' Forum 2018

On 10th December 2018, we held our annual Lay Members' Forum at The Royal Society in London. The event was attended by members of AWERBs from more than 40 institutions across the UK who were able to hear presentations and discuss and share their experiences of being a member of an AWERB.

The first talk, from Professor Gail Davies (Animals in Science Committee - ASC), highlighted the recent publication of the [ASC's review\(PDF 6.48MB\)](#) of the harm-benefit analysis (HBA). The review concludes that the HBA remains an effective ethical framework for evaluating the use of animals in research and testing. It also makes 27 recommendations for improving how the HBA is carried out in the future. Of particular relevance to AWERBs are recommendations emphasising the importance of lay members in identifying and addressing societal concerns, and the importance of creating more opportunities for discussion. The new AWERB Knowledge Hub provides a platform for this - all AWERB members (not just lay) can join by contacting the ASC Secretariat at [asc.secretariat@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:asc.secretariat@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk). All of the presentations from the Lay Members' Forum are now available on the Knowledge Hub.

Gail's talk was followed by an interactive [discussion session \(PDF 380KB\)](#), led by Home Office (ASRU) Inspector Katherine Knight, on the implementation of the recommendations made in the ASC report.

Dr Karin Darpel (Pirbright Institute) then shared with delegates her experiences of appearing before the AWERB as a scientist. Karin explained how an effective AWERB can have an amazing impact, not only on improving animal welfare but also ultimately on the quality of the science. She then highlighted some challenges relating to how scientists can feel about their interactions with the AWERB and provided suggestions for AWERB members to help achieve a positive process. This included ensuring feedback to scientists is constructive and objective, includes suggestions for improvement, and highlights positive points even if there is also negative feedback. Including the scientist in round-table constructive discussions of their proposals is better than setting up the meeting so that they feel that they are there to 'defend' their application. Karin also encouraged scientists to see the value in discussing their work with the AWERB, as a way of improving their project licence applications, science and communication skills.

In her presentation, Dr Penny Hawkins (RSPCA) discussed the use of rats and mice - who are naturally nocturnal - during the working day. Using rodents for research when they would usually be asleep can disrupt their biology and behaviour, which may then affect the results of the research, and the animal's welfare. Members were encouraged to consider raising this issue at their own institutions for discussion with the AWERB and the researchers.

Seemingly simple fixes, such as reversing the light cycle in the animal house, may come with their own pitfalls - e.g. it can make it more difficult for staff to health-check animals, so discussion before changes like this are implemented is essential. For more information, see ['The 9 to 5 Rodent – Time for Change? Scientific and animal welfare implications of circadian and light effects on laboratory mice and rats'](#).

Next, Professor Oliver Burman (University of Lincoln) explained how scientists can try to assess an animal's welfare and mental state (mood). Various aspects of an animal's behaviour (e.g. 'escape' attempts), mental processing (by looking at the animal's decisions) and physiology (heart rate or release of stress hormones) can all help to indicate how an animal is feeling, and can help us make important decisions about their welfare and how we interact with them. However, Oliver highlighted that assessment of welfare is most effective when multiple different indicators are considered together.

The final talk of the day was given by Amanda Benton, a lay member at The Francis Crick Institute, who emphasised how lay members can ask the important 'naive' questions, encourage application of the 3Rs, and celebrate and support good practice. In particular, she emphasised how lay members can encourage the production of a good Non-Technical Summary (NTS) and influence scientists to see the NTS as an important opportunity for describing their work to the wider public. The day concluded with a second interactive [discussion session \(PDF 280KB\)](#), led by Jane Smith, which enabled attendees to further share their own experiences of being an AWERB member.

If you would like to receive information about future events we are running, including Lay Members Forums, you can ask us to add your email address to the circulation list for our quarterly e-newsletter, by contacting us at: [research.animals@rspca.org.uk](mailto:research.animals@rspca.org.uk)