The Animal Welfare Body

Barney Reed

RSPCA

A member organisation of
Since 1999, each research establishment using animals in the **UK** must have an **ethical review process**.

**Functions of the ERP**

- Promote the local uptake of the 3Rs
- Provide a ‘local’ view on the acceptability of the research
- Follow progress of projects inc. retrospective review
- Review care and accommodation standards
- Forum for discussion - best practice, ethics, legislation
- Review managerial systems and processes
- Advise on training and ensuring competence
- Advise staff and keep them up-to-date on the 3Rs
- Follow the development and outcome of projects...
- Advise staff on animal welfare (in relation to supply, housing care and use)
- Advise on re-homing schemes
- Review internal operational procedures

**Directive 2010/63/EU**
A continuing ‘process’

- The UK competent authority (the Home Office) was careful to describe the requirement as a ‘process’.

- There is no ‘one size fits all’ approach. Each institution will set up its own process to best fit the requirements, practices and resources of that particular establishment.

- Most do employ some form of central body to facilitate the work, but it should not be viewed as ‘just a committee’.
The local ERP considers local ethical and animal care and use issues from a local perspective in light of local expertise, opinions and facilities.
Personnel

- Vet
- People responsible for the day-to-day care and welfare of animals
- Scientists - both those involved in the design and oversight of projects, and those actually undertaking the procedures
- *Other scientists* (e.g. not involved in animal use)
- Statisticians
- Lay persons, (inc. those independent of the establishment)

- Person responsible for the day-to-day care and welfare of animals
- A scientist
- *Input from a vet*

“At least…”
Our experience

- Sit on a number of ERPs at establishments involved in a range of animal use (e.g. university, pharma, CRO)
- Develop resources and guidance for members of animal ethics committees
- Run an annual workshop for laymembers
The role: What good ERPs achieve

• Helps to generate the ‘right’ culture of care - respect for animals, ethics and regulations
• Provides focal point for advice and communication e.g. on 3Rs
• Promotes shared responsibility
• Provides local knowledge, expertise and support
• Ensures processes (e.g. inductions, CPD and training) and resources (time and money) are in place to help ensure people can become, and stay, informed and knowledgeable
Examples of positive 3Rs impact

• Co-ordinated a process for tissue sharing amongst different research groups within the establishment.
• Scientists shared experiences with others of using newer refined methods of genotyping genetically altered mice.
• Identified lines of GA mice that don’t need to be ‘kept on the shelf’ (i.e. can be bought in when needed, or archived).
• Oversaw local review of establishment standard protocols for blood sampling to ensure in line with best practice.
• Implemented best practice for methods of humane killing.
• Reviewing and refining specific animal models (e.g. in epilepsy research).
Examples of positive 3Rs impact ...

• Developed welfare assessment protocols and score sheets for commonly used procedures and models.
• Ensured that pilot studies were undertaken for new procedures with particular welfare concerns.
• Support for scientists and animal care staff to visit other institutions for 3Rs advice on specific experimental techniques not used before.
• Successfully moved rabbits out of cages and into floor pens.
• Reviewed breeding strategies re: wastage (why animals are requested and not used, or why only one sex is asked for?).
• Discussion of ‘openness’ around animal use by the establishment e.g. website statements.
• Set up an internal 3Rs prize to encourage input and progress.
Some general challenges

• Ensuring the AWB has **authority** and **support** from senior staff.
• Appointing members who are **confident to challenge** existing practice and who are proactive about the 3Rs (e.g. everyone involved recognising that current standard practice might not necessarily be ‘best’ practice’ and doing something about it).
• Ensuring the focus is on **constructive discussion** not paperwork.
• Developing **good communications** both within the institution and with those outside.
Specific challenges... re: information

- Establishing what do AWBs **want/need to know**?
- People don’t know what they don’t know! (“**unknown unknowns...**”).
- **Blockages and bottlenecks of information flow.** How does 3Rs info enter the establishment and how is it passed on - is it reliant on one person?
- Relies heavily on **expertise and enthusiasm** of the individuals involved - particularly the animal care staff and the vet.

- How does my AWB **compare to others**? - effectiveness, resourcing.
- How do you **measure the ‘success’** of an AWB?
Suggested solutions

• Do not rely solely on formal set meetings. *Ad hoc* meetings, email discussions and teleconferences are all useful tools to ‘fast-track’ or progress issues.

• Ensure *all staff understand* what the AWB is for, how it operates and how it can help them (e.g. animal welfare, science, regulatory compliance, public opinion etc.) and what is expected of them personally.

• An AWB membership of just *one or two* people is not going to be sufficient to cover all the key competencies. Need a *range of views, skills, input and expertise*.

• Include *lay/independent* representatives (they have no ‘stake’ in the work, provide a different perspective, challenge traditional assumptions and provide a measure of ‘public’ input).
Suggested solutions...

• Operation of the AWB should **not be viewed in isolation** from other requirements of the Directive e.g. education and training.
• Include the person responsible for **training and competence**
• Create **specialist mini-groups** to discuss specific aspects e.g. housing, enrichment, over-breeding etc.
• Take time to review and **re-evaluate** whether the AWB’s aims are being achieved and whether its operation is appropriately resourced and efficient.
• Encourage ‘guest’ visits from other establishments or ‘**exchange**’ programmes.
“there is no doubt that the ERP has made a positive contribution to the production, care and use of animals for experimental and other scientific purposes”.

UK Home Office