

**CONFIDENTIAL MATERIAL**

THE UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM  
BIOMEDICAL ETHICAL REVIEW SUB-COMMITTEE (BERSC)

19<sup>th</sup> January 2017

**MINUTES**

Present:

17/01-01                      Apologies

17/01-02                      Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2016 were considered by the Committee and were approved subject to amendments.

17/01-03                      Matters Arising

*Interactive workshop on the NC3Rs' Experimental Design Assistant (EDA) – previous minute 16/11-07*

This workshop was held on 12<sup>th</sup> January 2017 with approximately 25 participants. It was reported that the EDA seemed intuitive and that the feedback it provides on how to improve an experiment is very useful. All those attending the session will be contacted and offered follow up support if needed. There are plans to repeat the session again, depending upon the level of interest.

17/01-04                      Chairperson's Items

There were no Chairperson's items to report.

17/01-05                      Verbal Reports from the Director of BMSU and Named Persons

*Report from the Director of BMSU:*

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- Almost all of the required Project Licence annual returns have now been submitted. Unfortunately a number have been found to be incorrect and this has caused considerable extra work within BMSU. Project Licence Holders have been reminded that it is their responsibility to accurately complete the return and a refresher course on the completion of annual returns will be held next year.
- As part of the ongoing refurbishment of the ground floor of BMSU the cage wash will need to be turned around and will therefore be out of action for a period of time. The Committee was informed that the work will cause considerable vibration and disruption during Spring and early Summer 2017 – logistics have meant that it will not be possible to carry out the work over Easter as was originally planned. The disruption will be minimised as much as possible and users of BMSU will be kept informed as the work progresses. The improvements being made include a new autoclave on the ground floor and waste material will be vacuumed out of the building, which will be more efficient and a considerable improvement over the current system.
- A new Home Office Inspector with experience as a vet and as a research scientist has been assigned to the University. This means that we now have two Inspectors and it is hoped that applications will start to go through the system more quickly as the workload will be shared.
- In relation to the Home Office training course for researchers, changes in the legislation have led to changes in the learning outcomes and the accrediting bodies are now seeking to update the course assessment material. Although concern has been expressed that this would be better done centrally, each individual institution has been asked to prepare new questions of various types by October 2017 which will then be pooled by the accrediting bodies. The Committee's help to develop questions was requested and it was suggested that interested parties arrange a meeting to discuss and work on this further. The learning outcomes will be circulated for reference.

### *Report from the Named Veterinary Surgeon:*

- Routine checks on mortality levels within BMSU have identified a low number of strains which require additional monitoring.

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- Whilst sham surgery is increasingly seen as a gold standard, particularly in terms of journal publication, the Home Office is usually reluctant to approve it for welfare reasons. It was suggested that this matter should be considered further by the Committee. If a researcher wishes to use sham surgery, it should be included within the Project Licence or a subsequent amendment and strong scientific justification should be provided.

*Report from the Named Animal Care and Welfare Officers:*

No items to report.

17/01-06                      Report from the Fast Track Procedure

The fast track procedure is up-to-date.

17/01-07                      Update from AWERB Hub meeting

The Chair and the Director of BMSU recently attended the first meeting of the AWERB Hub.

A draft report, which arose from a previous meeting of the Hub Chairs, was circulated at the meeting. The intended purpose of the Hub system is to encourage and share best practice in both the working of AWERBs and in animal care and welfare. It is intended that each year the Hubs will meet at least once and will hold at least one workshop.

At the meeting it was notable that the University of Birmingham was the largest organisation present (in terms of animal research) with some of the other Hub members having much smaller animal units. As animal units of different sizes are likely to differ in terms of the issues they face, it was felt that in some respects this may make it difficult to effectively share best practice. It was noted that some AWERBs work very differently to others and the way in which projects are set up differs considerably between institutions. For instance, it was noted that in pharmaceutical companies, projects tend to be reviewed once centrally and then will be repeated again and again, with the only difference being the compound used – in such cases there is no need to undertake a full review of the project design each time.

At the meeting, Birmingham offered to plan and organise the first workshop. It was suggested that this could be based on the workshop about the NC3Rs' EDA which was recently held at Birmingham.

17/01-08                      Any Other Business

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- As discussed at an earlier BERSC meeting, it is proposed that a working group should be set up to consider the midterm/retrospective review of work carried out on Project Licences. It is proposed that data will be collected via a light-touch electronic form.
- There are a number of Project Licence applications currently in the system and awaiting consideration by the Home Office Inspectors. Amendments in particular are delayed, due to the backlog of full Project Licence applications. It is hoped that this will now start to improve with an additional Inspector on board.
- It was reported that within the academic community, some concerns are being expressed about variations in the way that the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act is being implemented across the UK and about a lack of consistency in the approach of different Home Office Inspectors. In particular, some researchers feel that decisions are being made on the basis of matters outside of an Inspector's remit, rather than on the basis of animal welfare. The Committee will be updated on this as necessary.

17/01-09

### **Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting is 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2017.

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**GLOSSARY**

AWERB	Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Body
BERSC	Biomedical Ethical Review Sub-Committee
BMSU	Biomedical Services Unit
EDA	Experimental Design Assistant
NC3Rs	National Centre for the Replacement, Refinement & Reduction of Animals in Research
UK	United Kingdom