

DOCUMENT DESIGNED TO AID

AWERB REVIEW OF LESSONS LEARNED FROM COVID19 EXPERIENCE

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The COVID19 crisis resulted in many establishments having to rapidly curtail, stop work, or drastically alter their working practices. It is essential that the AWERB reviews the processes that were in place during the crisis, and their outcomes, not only in the event of similar future episodes, but also in reference to more general disaster management plans in case improvements can be made. This will support future business continuity, as well helping in the delivery of AWERB task; Establishment licence standard condition 6.3

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/establishment-licence-standard-conditions/establishment-licence-standard-conditions> and Directive 2010/63 EU article 27.1 (c) to “Establish and review management and operational processes for monitoring, reporting and follow-up in relation to the welfare of animals housed or used in the licensed establishment “.

Whilst how and what should be reviewed will need to take local circumstances into account, it is suggested that **three phases** are considered as the actions taken and likely issues raised in each phase are different. The **impact on staff**, and difficulties they experienced, are also worthy of discussion, as well as considering whether any changes have led to improvements in processes.

Some suggested starting questions are below; the focus should be on what can be learnt in order to help in future decision making, rather than simply responding to these (or other) specific questions. In reviewing the issues and possible resolutions for the future, AWERBs should consider sharing the experiences of their establishments more widely, as well as looking at how others dealt with the situation via mechanisms such as the AWERB Hubs and industry related organisations.

The initial response to the outbreak

- ❖ Were business continuity plans and/or emergency plans in place?
- ❖ If yes, were business continuity plans and/or emergency preparations successful?
- ❖ Have any gaps been identified in these plans and how were these remedied?
- ❖ Where facilities were partially or fully shutdown, how were decisions made regarding whether, and which, animals to kill? What were the processes involved?
- ❖ Who was involved in decision making? Do these people feel others should have been involved/ that they had enough support?
- ❖ What criteria were considered for decisions to kill animals, shut facilities or limit work? In hindsight were these the right ones? Should any be added/ removed?
- ❖ Could any of the studies that were stopped have been completed or some of all of the animals used in some way or rehomed rather than killed?
- ❖ How were the decisions and actions above communicated and documented?
- ❖ Did actions include planning for the administrative processes necessary to continue PIL and PPL processing and the AWERB?

During lock-down itself

- ❖ How was animal work prioritised?
- ❖ Were deliveries cancelled or delayed? Were there any difficulties in getting supplies of food/ bedding, etc., or with getting vital equipment serviced or mended?
- ❖ Were there any process or communications failures, such that animals were delivered that were not required or could not be accommodated?
- ❖ Were any decisions on breeding management correct (tick-over versus shutdown of breeding)? Was optimum use made of cryopreservation?
- ❖ Were the patterns of work for personnel (shifts, teams, etc.) effective or could there have been better options?
- ❖ Is there anything that could or should have been done to allow use (or rehoming) of animals so that wastage could have been avoided where animals were killed?
- ❖ Were there any unique challenges presented regarding animal husbandry and/ or welfare of animals?
- ❖ Were records kept of all decisions taken?
- ❖ Did AWERB continue to operate? If so how, and was AWERB able to function successfully? If not, why, and what could have been done to keep the AWERB operational?
- ❖ Does the AWERB consider the correct balance was achieved between protecting staff from the risks of COVID-19 whilst maximising the possible outcomes that could be achieved from the animals who had already been bred, delivered or had started on study?

Re-commencement of work & ongoing preparedness

- ❖ Was the timing with respect to sourcing animals/ recommencing and/ or expansion of any breeding correct in terms of allowing commencement of work but without creating additional wastage? If not, how could things have been done differently?
- ❖ What period did it take to return to (near) or “new” normal levels of activity? Were there actions that could have speeded this up without causing issues for personnel or wastage of animals?
- ❖ What were the main barriers to returning to work? Can any of these be reduced or removed for the future?
- ❖ Did planning include consideration of a further wave of infection?
- ❖ Are there contingency plans for further waves of infection (e.g. for staffing, staff support, use or rehoming of animals, supply of consumables, etc.)?
- ❖ How will a culture of preparedness be maintained?

Staff Care and Concerns

- ❖ What was the experience of Animal Technicians? Do they feel that their safety, well-being and their own concern for the animals were taken into account? Do they feel that their work during the COVID outbreak is appreciated? Did they get enough support in respect of their role if they needed it?
- ❖ If the office-based managers worked remotely did the technicians feel communication was adequate? Have there been issues with training for new staff?
- ❖ What was the experience of the veterinarians, researchers, administrators and other members of staff involved in decision making around animal studies and/ or ongoing care (or killing) of the animals? Specifically, were decisions transparent, timely and clearly communicated? Were researchers properly engaged in the decisions about their own work?
- ❖ Have differences in working patterns created concerns or difficulties (for example the need for some people to work longer hours or more days than others), particularly with respect to relationships between staff?
- ❖ Were there particular challenges related to animal studies from changes to “virtual” operating environments?
- ❖ Have staff had an opportunity to debrief? Were relevant support systems available and accessible to staff, for example to address possible compassion fatigue?
- ❖ How can you best canvass opinions from staff as to any of the above (e.g. via an anonymous survey) to ensure the Culture of Care is maintained? Consider utilising questions to probe whether conversations were open and honest. Do people feel they were listened to?

We have all had to adapt to new ways of working through COVID. In addition to reviewing what was less successful in your approaches to dealing with the situation caused by COVID, it is important to consider if there have been any positive outcomes and whether any of the challenges may present opportunities for improved processes.

Looking Forward

- ❖ Which, if any of your new processes/ ways of working do you consider worth keeping post COVID?
- ❖ Which, if any, existing processes have you found to be unnecessary?
- ❖ Are there ongoing issues preventing recommencement of work? What ethical, animal welfare, 3Rs or regulatory consequences might result from these?