



## Minutes of the Board meeting – 31 March 2023

### Present

Professor Kevin Shakesheff (KS) *Chair*  
Professor Cathy Abbott (CA)  
Professor Paul Evans (PE)  
Professor Christopher George (CG)  
Professor Jane Hurst (JH)  
Ms Linda Horan (LH)  
Professor Cathy Merry (CM)  
Professor Nick Plant (NP)  
Dr Vicky Robinson (VR)  
Dr Clive Roper (CR)  
Dr Sadhana Sharma (SS)

### Office

Dr Katie Bates (KB)  
Dr Natalie Carter (NC) *item 6*  
Dr Rachel Eyre (RE) *item 4*  
Dr Anthony Holmes (AH)  
Dr Deb Milligan (DM) *item 5*  
Ms Kayleigh Purdon (KP) *Secretariat*  
Dr Suzanne McArdle (SM)  
Ms Emma Stokes (ES)  
Dr Cathy Vickers (CV)

### Apologies

Dr Robin Buckle (RB)  
Dr Tom Matheson (TM)  
Dr Sally Robinson

### 1. Welcome

1.1. KS welcomed members to the meeting and introduced the Board's new member, Professor Cathy Abbott from the University of Edinburgh.

### 2. Board minutes 22 November 2022

2.1. The minutes from the November meeting were agreed to be an accurate account of the discussions.

### 3. Chief Executive update

3.1. The Board noted the paper on business activities.

### Staff resource

Staff resource continues to remain challenging across the Centre due to long-term absences and difficulty in recruiting specialist skills to support programmes particularly for short-term contracts. The senior management team is regularly reviewing priorities to reduce the impacts on programme delivery, but workload remains a high organisational risk particularly in heads of function and senior roles.

### External environment

VR updated the Board on the increase in animal rights activities and the concerns that this may make the sector less willing to engage on 3Rs issues. It was noted that against this backdrop Frances Rawle's report on the role of review and regulatory approvals processes for animal research had been well-received. There were regular meetings with colleagues in the Animals in Science Policy and Coordination Unit, including a recent discussion that included Frances Rawle. Staff continue to participate in weekly meetings with colleagues from UKRI about matters relating to animal policy and the new funding service and in a range of committee activities.

Plans are now in place for the third annual webinar series in June with five European 3Rs Centres (from Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland). The focus of the series is culture of care in the animal facility.

Recruitment of the NC3Rs Board Chair to replace KS will shortly commence, with the process being managed by the MRC.

### Research and early career funding

VR updated the Board on the joint call with BBSRC on next generation non-animal technologies and the 24 awards made as well as the competitions that were currently ongoing. The Board noted the success of the early career engagement awards.

### NC3Rs gateway

There have been 29 articles published on the gateway since its launch in 2018. The Board noted that there was a strong pipeline of 38 papers in preparation and that this addressed initial concerns about maintaining momentum.

### CRACK IT Challenges

VR updated the Board on ongoing Challenges, noting the awards for the two Challenges in the 2022 competition (Thyroid Tox and T-ALERT) and Phase 2 funding for the 2021 environmental toxicity Challenge SAFE. Funding of £1.6M for Phase 2 of the Mega-Challenge to develop a virtual second species had also been awarded – the largest single award made by the NC3Rs to date. Work was ongoing on developing the Challenges for the 2023 competition.

## Staff programmes

VR updated the Board on the experimental design and reporting, animal welfare and toxicity programmes. The Board commended the work of the team, noting that the RIVER recommendations for reporting *in vitro* research are almost ready for submission to a pre-print repository. The Board congratulated the team on the NIH announcement of its support for the ARRIVE Essential 10.

The peer review team had reviewed 27 applications from five funders in the last five months. Some changes had been introduced to improve the efficiency of the service.

The Board noted the ongoing work by the animal welfare team to promote low stress handling of mice and that the recent webinars had been very popular with high numbers of delegates. The Board welcomed the participation of the team in the annual Institute of Animal Technology Congress.

The Board congratulated the toxicity team on its continued high publication rate and highlighted the importance of the long-standing collaboration with the ABPI, including the recent activities to identify future priority areas. The Board noted the work that was ongoing ahead of the joint workshop with Unilever on opportunities for the UK to develop world leading chemicals regulation.

The Board asked to be kept informed of the progress with the WHO-commissioned project on reducing animal use in the batch release and quality control testing of biologicals and opportunities for funding to support follow-up activities.

## **4. Plan for establishment of networks**

- 4.1. RE gave an update on the plans to establish two stakeholder networks focusing on cardiovascular sciences and oncology following a detailed review of the NC3Rs research funding and innovations portfolio. The review identified these areas as priorities based on amounts invested and strategic factors (e.g. the types of models developed and their wider applicability, and co-funding opportunities). The networks will bring together academics including early career researchers, industry partners and funders to share 3Rs approaches and technologies funded by the NC3Rs which can then be further adopted by the wider scientific community.
- 4.2. The Board was supportive of the plans and the resource and activities proposed. These included developing bespoke NC3Rs website hubs and hosting a dedicated webinar series to share knowledge and models and maintain network momentum, holding in-person meetings to bring cohorts together, and funding for small-scale laboratory visits and exchanges.

## **5. Technology partnering and konfer**

- 5.1. DM provided an overview of the current technology partnering strategy that is focused on a collaboration between the NC3Rs and konfer and proposed an updated webinar-based approach to better showcase 3Rs tools and technologies to new and relevant audiences. The Board supported the plans and the proposal to deprioritise the konfer platform as the primary tool for technology partnering.

## **6. Academic engagement strategy**

- 6.1. NC updated the Board on the review of the academic engagement strategy and the ongoing work of the regional team. The Board highlighted its recognition of the value of the work of the regional team but reiterated its support for the evolution of the programme so that it had a wider, national focus and was not tied to specific institutions. The plans for roll-out of the changes were endorsed.

## **7. AOB**

- 7.1. There was one item for AOB which was deferred to the June Board meeting.