



Pioneering Better Science

## **Workshop report: Supporting the Named Information Officer**

Results from a [recent survey](#) identified opportunities to better support the Named Information Officer (NIO) roll including through providing training on accessing, filtering and disseminating information and a need for NIO-specific events and peer-to-peer support. To begin to address some of these needs the NC3Rs and the [LASA HOLTIF \(Home Office Liaison Training and Information\) section](#) hosted an in-person workshop for the NIO community in September 2024.

### **Webinar session – Staying informed on advances in animal research**

The first half of the workshop comprised of a series of talks that discussed a key aspect of the NIO role – how to find information relevant to the animal models used at an establishment and how to keep up to date with relevant advances in the 3Rs. The talks were streamed to online attendees and the recordings along with short summaries are available on the NC3Rs website: [Staying informed on advances in the 3Rs and animal research](#).

### **Discussion session – Addressing the challenges of the NIO role**

Workshop attendees were asked in advance what they considered to be their biggest challenge as NIO. The answers provided overlapped considerably with those identified in the recent [Supporting the Named Information Officer](#) survey results, with attendees considering major challenges of the role to be:

- Time to undertake the role.
- Understanding the responsibilities of the role and how to undertake these.
- Keeping informed with advances in animal research and the 3Rs.
- Triaging relevant information to disseminate.
- Selective targeting of information to others.
- Engaging the research community to act on information they share.
- Awareness of the NIO role by the research community.

Two of these challenges, engaging the community and raising awareness of the role, were selected for discussion with the in-person workshop attendees. Here we have summarised the key points from these discussions which stemmed from the NIOs in attendance sharing their own experience and example best practices.

## Engaging the community and raising awareness of the NIO role

To meet the challenges of better engaging the research community and raising awareness and recognition of how the role can provide support, attendees suggested that:

- Understanding the **needs of the research community** is essential to improve engagement. This could include establishing who is important to reach, their research profile (species, procedures, field) and tailoring the content, format and way the information is shared to suit this. For example, databases of animal users within the establishment could be used by (or created by) the NIO to evaluate topics of interest to the research community, then directly emailing topic-specific information to identified relevant research staff.
- Organising **3Rs events can engage a specific or broad audience**, and this can be tailored depending on the local need.
- If sharing information on an online platform (e.g. intranet, website, SharePoint), it is important to ensure that it is easy to access (and manage) and **accessible to all relevant personnel** (this may include external clients that use the animal facilities or those working on non-animal methods).
- In some cases, it may also be possible to **evaluate what mechanisms successfully reach target audiences**, by setting up tracking for emails sent, or monitoring clicks through to pages on intranet/internet sites.
- NIOs should make the most of **existing communication opportunities to engage the research community**, both to learn about their research interests/priorities and to showcase what the NIO role can do for them. This could include meeting new users and finding out about their needs at facility inductions (dependent on the size of the establishment) or reciprocal information sharing at 'lunch and learn' style seminar sessions, in special interest meetings (e.g. field or species-specific meetings) or animal user meetings.
- Using **existing scheduled opportunities in the research/technician community** to establish a personal presence could help get support for, and increase the visibility of, activities run by the NIO. For example, self-promotion/participation at local Home Office Personal Licensee training, visiting facility units, being involved in a 3Rs committee or contributing to the ethical approval process.
- NIOs could gain more recognition and understanding of the value of the role by **formally contributing to the AWERB process** such as through regular NIO reports at AWERB meetings (note, it was acknowledged that the [Guidance on the operation of the Animals \(Scientific Procedures\) Act 1986](#) does not mandate the attendance of the NIO at AWERB meetings but states that they should be 'actively engaged with the AWERB'). In turn, the AWERB could also play a role **in reviewing the effectiveness of and setting priorities for the NIO role**.
- Demonstrating what the NIO can do for the local animal research community could be achieved by communicating the aspects of the NIO that **distinguish it from other named roles**. Highlighting

how the NIO can support researchers to address their scientific, not just legal requirements (e.g. signposting to where staff can get help with literature searches on 3Rs advances). Individuals holding multiple roles could be clearer about which 'hat' is being worn when undertaking activities. For example, using separate email addresses for each of their roles, or displaying posters/organograms in the facility detailing the different roles and support they can provide, or hosting NIO drop-in clinics.

## Addressing replacement

All attendees unanimously agreed that they try to promote the 3Rs as part of their role, but the majority would like to incorporate more 3Rs-related activities. Involvement of the NIO in addressing replacement of animals at a local level was a repeated theme that emerged throughout the discussion session, with many of the NIOs wishing to spend more time on replacement activities. When discussing barriers to the uptake of replacement opportunities:

- NIOs agreed that it should be **everyone's responsibility to consider replacement options** in the research process and that no one person is likely to be an expert in this.
- NIOs echoed the conclusions of [previous comments](#) on the topic of increasing uptake of replacements, indicating that their involvement in the review of replacement opportunities (e.g. when performing ethical review of project licence applications) is **often 'too late' in the research pipeline**.
- It was acknowledged that the [NIO survey results](#) highlight that the group of individuals most likely to have more experience in replacement options – **those not working directly with animals – are not a primary audience** for the NIO role in practice. This is a missed opportunity as these individuals could contribute their expertise to 3Rs-focussed activities (e.g. sitting on 3Rs committees/AWERBs).

When considering how the NIO role could contribute to the uptake of replacements:

- Attendees suggested that the NIO could have a role in **facilitating collaborations** between researchers to encourage uptake of replacement models.
- It was noted that some NIOs are already actively trying to **capture local information related to replacement models**.
- NIOs highlighted that the research community may not fully appreciate that **replacing portions of animal work with alternative methods is a valid replacement strategy** (as it can be typical for researchers to use a combination of *in vivo* and *in vitro* approaches), and the NIO may be well placed to emphasise this further.
- NIOs acknowledged that implementation of replacement models may well require a strategic or top-down approach yet stressed that **replacement should be given the same prominence as refinement or reduction within the governance of research**.

## Priorities going forward

NIOs in attendance identified that their priorities as a community going forward were:

- Taking action to **embed the NIO role within the processes of an establishment** through increasing visibility with specific groups (e.g. AWERB, animal users etc), demonstrating what the role could do for them.
- **Carving out time for the role**, this might meet some barriers but NIOs were keen to try to work with their establishment to move towards this (e.g. by sharing the role across individuals).
- Defining the position of the NIO role in **relation to other named persons**.
- Creating a **framework of activities and direction for the role on a local level**. Potentially including an element of reviewing the effectiveness of the role to inform on what the most impactful activities would be in the future (this should probably be done in conjunction with evaluating all named roles, at the AWERB).
- **Creating a local database** (e.g. intranet or SharePoint site) of resources to facilitate the NIO in sharing information with their research community (Note attendees flagged that regular maintenance would be required to keep links up to date).
- Continued **sharing of ideas, best practice and events** with other NIOs through existing networks (e.g. [Animal Research Community \(ARC\) forums on Research Animal Training platform](#)).