

Minutes of the Board meeting

17 October 2017

Present:

Professor Stephen Holgate CBE (SH) *Chair*
Dr Paul Brooker (PB)
Professor Chris Denning (CD)
Mr Paul Finemore
Professor Ian Jackson (IJ)
Dr Tony Peatfield (AP)
Professor Stefan Przyborski (SP)
Dr Vicky Robinson (VR)
Professor Blanca Rodriguez (BR)
Professor Lucy Walker (LW)
Dr Carl Westmoreland (CW)

Office:

Dr Katie Bates (KB) *Item 8*
Dr Jonathan Gabriel (JG) *Item 8*
Dr Nathalie Percie du Sert *item 4*
Dr Suzanne McArdle (SM) *item 9*
Kayleigh Purdon (KP) *Secretariat*

Apologies:

Dr Ceri Lyn-Adams (CLA)
Dr Ian Ragan (IR)
Mr Terry Priest (TP)

1. Welcome

- 1.1. SH welcomed members to the meeting and thanked outgoing members CW and TP for their significant contributions to the work of the NC3Rs.

2. Minutes and actions from the meeting on 8 June

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

An amendment was made to 9.1 to reflect that AP had requested the wording to be changed regarding the NC3Rs relationship with the MRC.

- 2.2 VR provided an update on the following actions:

4.2 VR highlighted external funding and the funding bids that had been submitted or were in preparation. It was agreed that it was timely to consider whether there are other mechanisms for industry (and other organisations unlikely to provide core funding) to support the work of the NC3Rs beyond sponsoring posts. VR to develop a plan in consultation with PB.

A paper will be presented at the next Board meeting.

VR had met with the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI) to discuss the two positions they fund. VR had provided additional information on the posts and will be attending the Nonclinical and Biological Discovery Expert Network (NaBDEN) meeting on the 23 October to give an update on the broader work of the NC3Rs.

10.2 VR proposed that the NC3Rs should establish a small ethics committee to review in-house projects involving data sharing since the question of ethical review of such work was increasingly being raised by referees when manuscripts were submitted for publication. VR to update at the next meeting.

Dr Andy Greenfield, Programme Leader at MRC Harwell had agreed to chair the NC3Rs ethics committee. The committee will meet virtually as required.

3. NC3Rs summary on activities and updates

3.1 The Board noted the update on current activities. VR provided further details on:

Staff

- A number of programmes continue to be suspended while programme managers are on maternity leave.
- There have been three internal promotions:
 - MP to Director of Policy and Outreach
 - NPdS to Head of Experimental Design and Reporting
 - SM to Strategic Planning Manager

Funding

- The British Heart Foundation has agreed to continue to provide funding for up to three joint PhD studentships for the next three years.
- The Wellcome Trust has renewed its funding for the NC3Rs peer review service for three years.
- Discussions are ongoing with other charities regarding possible co-funding arrangements.

4. ARRIVE guidelines - update on review

4.1 NPdS described the work that was ongoing to assess the impact of the ARRIVE guidelines in order to provide an evidence base for their revision. The IICARus trial had been completed with the findings indicating that the requirement to complete an ARRIVE checklist had had relatively little impact on the quality of reporting. The trial had also been complemented with a survey of ARRIVE users, including journal editors, that had been conducted by the NC3Rs staff. The results of this and the IICARus trial would be discussed at a workshop in November, chaired by SH, with the goal of publishing revised guidelines in early 2019.

NPdS provided an update on the Experimental Design Assistant (EDA), including plans for new functionality, the recent introduction of the EDA “report” which could be included with grant applications, and work to improve the user experience.

5. Update on proposal for a collaboration with Wellcome

VR provided an update on the briefing paper that had been submitted to the Wellcome Trust about the possibility of applying for funding to support capacity building in the use of non-mammalian model organisms for 3Rs purposes. The Board welcomed the positive feedback and support from Wellcome on the work of the NC3Rs but expressed disappointment that there had not been interest in collaborating in this area. It was agreed that the NC3Rs should explore alternative opportunities for developing the proposal given the potential impact on the 3Rs.

6. Working with the Home Office

The Board expressed concern that the Home Office was no longer able to provide funding to the NC3Rs. It was agreed that there was a need to strengthen the relationship between the NC3Rs and Animals in Science Regulatory Unit (ASRU) since the quality of the interactions had vacillated in recent years. PF stressed the importance of ASRU as an essential end-user of the NC3Rs resources and impacts and proposed that there should be a memorandum of understanding between the NC3Rs and ASRU which sets the expectations of each organisation.

VR to raise the proposal with Dr Will Reynolds, Head of ASRU, and update the Board at the next meeting.

7. What might the social sciences and humanities offer the NC3Rs?

SH welcomed Professor Gail Davies, Professor in Human Geography at the University of Exeter, to the meeting. Professor Davies had been invited to attend to help shape the Board's discussions on future work that the NC3Rs may undertake on changing scientific attitudes to the 3Rs. It was agreed that it would be helpful to have regular updates from Professor Davies as the Wellcome-funded 'The Animal Research Nexus: Changing Constitutions of Science, Health and Welfare' evolves.

8. Research funding update and review of the early career funding schemes

8.1 KB and JG provided the Board with the following updates:

Highlight notice

There are two highlight notices for 2018:

- Reducing reliance on mammalian models of ageing: This is a joint highlight with the BBSRC and applies only to the project grant scheme.
- Systematic reviews for 3Rs purposes: This applies to all schemes and is intended to build capacity in the use of systematic reviews, as well as encouraging use of the Systematic Review Facility (SyRF) which was previously funded by the NC3Rs through an Infrastructure for Impact award.

Grant holder introductory meeting

Staff held an introductory meeting for new grant holders in September. Of the 34 invited, 28 grant holders attended. The meeting provided grant holders the opportunity to learn more about the NC3Rs and its expectations of its grant holders, as well as the chance to meet with the funding team. The programme included talks from the staff and past grant holders.

PhD Studentships

There were 61 applications received for the 2017 competition of which 37 were considered by the Panel post-triage. Fifteen awards were made including three sponsored by the BHF. Two of the awards fell within the remit of the 2017 human tissue highlight notice.

The three-day PhD student summer school took place in July in Nottingham. This year, non-NC3Rs funded students from the Universities of Nottingham, Birmingham, and Leicester were invited to attend.

Staff had started to review operational aspects of the scheme and exploring whether other models would be better in terms of building cohorts of students and attracting external funding.

Project grants

There were 24 full applications received for the 2017 call. Nine awards were recommended for funding at the July Panel meeting, of which one award fell within the remit of the 2017 human tissue highlight notice.

The 2018 competition will open in November.

Skills and Knowledge Transfer

The 2018 call will open in November. Implementing feedback received from the Panel, staff have developed additional guidance for applicants on writing the case for support.

Staff will be hosting a webinar in November to outline the remit of the scheme and provide detailed guidance on what makes a competitive application. This will also include a Q&A. The deadline for informal outlines is 24 November.

David Sainsbury and Training Fellowships

The Board reviewed the budget for the 2018/19 financial year. It was agreed that the budget did not allow the NC3Rs to support two fellowship schemes and that reluctantly the David Sainsbury scheme would be suspended until additional funding was secured. This decision was based on the fact that while the David Sainsbury scheme had attracted high calibre individuals, there are a large number of other intermediate stage schemes available for researchers whereas the NC3Rs Training Fellowship scheme occupied a more unique niche and therefore provided something different in the funding landscape. The Board was grateful to Lord Sainsbury for lending his name to the scheme and it was agreed that VR would contact him to provide an update.

9. Board member role

9.1 SM outlined the role of Board members and opportunities for maximising the ambassadorial aspect of this, particularly with regard to outreach activities. PB suggested that it would be valuable for the Board to maintain dialogue between formal meetings and it was agreed that biannual teleconferences would be introduced. Board members were asked to consider suggestions for possible guest speakers to invite to future meetings.

10. AOB

10.1 A Doodle poll will shortly be sent out to identify a new date in the spring for the next Board meeting.

10.2 MP to update the Board on the NC3Rs peer review and non-human primate activities at the next meeting.