



Minutes of the Board meeting

13 February 2020

Present:

Professor Kevin Shakesheff (KS) *Chair*
Professor Chris Denning (CD)
Professor Paul Evans (PE)
Mr Paul Finnemore (PF)
Professor Paul Garside (PG)
Professor Christopher George (CG)
Dr Frances Rawle (FR)
Ms Linda Horan (LH)
Dr David Lovell (DL)
Dr Sally Robinson (SR)
Dr Vicky Robinson (VR)
Professor Blanca Rodriguez (BR)

Office:

Dr Katie Bates (KB) *item 5*
Dr Anthony Holmes (AH) *item 6*
Dr Mark Prescott (MP) *items 7 and 8*
Dr Suzanne McArdle (SM) *item 4*
Kayleigh Purdon (KP) *Secretariat*

Apologies:

Dr Paul Brooker (PB)
Dr Sadhana Sharma (SS)
Professor Jon Timmis (JT)
Professor Lucy Walker (LW)

1. Welcome

1.1 The NC3Rs new Board Chair, KS, welcomed members to the meeting. KS began his term as Board Chair on 1 January 2020.

2. Chief Executive's update

2.1 VR updated the Board on core business activities. This included:

Finance

- Financial accounts for 2019/20 are in a good position ahead of financial year-end.
- The Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI) have committed to increasing their funding contribution to support the Toxicology and Regulatory Sciences programme.
- A proposal to renew the funding agreement with Wellcome will be submitted in the next financial year.

Staff

- The strength and commitment of the NC3Rs team was noted, as was the help and exceptional support provided over the last twelve months by Julie Kemp, Head of HR at the Medical Research Council (MRC).

Data subject access requests

The NC3Rs received a high volume of data subject access requests in recent months. The Data Protection team, led by Rosa Parker at MRC, provided valuable assistance in compiling the response to the requests, a resource intensive activity for both teams.

Pathways to impact

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) recently announced the removal of the Pathways to Impact document as a compulsory component of funding applications. The Funding team are currently assessing the potential impact of this on the assessment of grant applications.

3. QQR and future plans

- 3.1 VR summarised the key points of each section of the NC3Rs quinquennial review (QQR) to the Board.
- 3.2 Members of the Board were impressed with the team's self-critical approach and commented that the report was stellar. A closed session on the review of the NC3Rs was held, focusing on the NC3Rs future plans.

4. Review of the NC3Rs risk register and events policy

- 4.1 The Board reviewed the NC3Rs risk register. Members noted the risks and existing control measures as appropriate.
- 4.2 The NC3Rs are operating in line with the UKRI's risk management policy. Going forward NC3Rs risks will be assessed against the UKRI risk evaluation matrix.
- 4.3 The Board reviewed and endorsed the attendance policy for NC3Rs events. Members noted the importance of providing a safe environment to allow free and frank discussion but that there may be occasion for the policy to be reviewed on a case-by-case basis with the Board.

5. Update on funding schemes

- 5.1 KB provided the Board with an update on the 2019 and 2020 funding calls and Grant holder engagement activities.

Project grants

A total of five awards were made under the 2019 competition. One of the awards fell under the 2019 highlight notice.

105 formal outlines for the 2020 call were received. These will be shortlisted when the Grant Assessment Panel meets in March.

PhD studentships

69 full applications were received, of which 37 were shortlisted during the triage stage.

The Studentship Assessment Panel met in October to consider the shortlisted applications, recommending a total of 16 awards be made. Two awards were made jointly with the British Heart Foundation and a further two joint awards were made in collaboration with Unilever. One award fell under the remit of the 2019 highlight notice.

The 2020 competition will open in May.

The annual NC3Rs Summer School was held in Bristol in June 2019. As part of the NC3Rs regional collaborations, non-NC3Rs students based at the universities of Bath, Bristol, Cardiff and Exeter were also invited to attend. This year's Summer School will take place in London in July and will be attended by first year NC3Rs-funded PhD students and non-NC3Rs funded PhD students from the London universities supporting a Regional Programme Manager.

Training Fellowships

In November, the Training Fellowship Assessment Panel reviewed 13 applications and recommended four awards be made. The 2020 competition will open in July.

A two-day Fellows' meeting was held in June 2019. The meeting was attended by 12 NC3Rs Fellows and seven post-doctoral researchers employed on NC3Rs grants. The programme included a number of talks and workshops focusing on researcher development including commercialising research, experimental design, grant writing and skills for leading research teams.

The next Fellows' meeting will take place in June 2020, with plans to expand the programme to include additional leadership and resilience training for early career researchers.

Grant holder introductory meeting

Staff held an introductory meeting for 28 new Grant holders in September. 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.

Skills and Knowledge transfer

15 informal outlines have been received for the 2020 call, ten of these have been invited to submit a full application.

Cancer Research UK (CRUK) continues to provide co-funding to support joint awards made under the scheme. Of the invited outlines, two fall under the remit of the joint CRUK/NC3Rs awards.

Grant holder visits

Since June 2019, the Funding team have undertaken 26 Grant holders visits to discuss progress and provide advice on the dissemination of 3Rs impacts. Board members participated in ten of these visits.

Researchfish

The 2019 researchfish® report has been published on the NC3Rs website. The report summarises the outputs and impacts reported by NC3Rs Grant holders during the 2019 researchfish® submission period. The 2020 submission period is now live.

NC3Rs Gateway

Four new article types have been introduced as part of the evolution of the Gateway. These include brief reports, data notes, software tool articles and registered reports. Staff continue to provide support to Grant holders during the article drafting process.

6. Update on CRACK IT

6.1 AH provided new Board members with an overview of the CRACK IT programme, highlighting achievements to date and future plans for both Challenges and Solutions.

6.2 The CRACK IT Advisory Panel will meet in March to review Challenges for the 2020 competition.

7. Non-human primate (NHP) activities update

7.1 MP provided an update on the Centre's NHP activities and projects. A behavioural management survey has been launched in collaboration with the Tulane National Primate Research Centre in the USA. The aim of the survey is to gather information on international behavioural management practices to generate an evidence base to inform and support good practice.

8. Home Office – Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) review

8.1 MP led a discussion with the Board to review progress made in strengthening the relationship between the NC3Rs and the Animals in Science Regulation Unit (ASRU) following the implementation of an MoU in 2018. The Board agreed that ASRU remains an essential end-user of NC3Rs resources and that additional time was required to determine if the MoU has been successful in achieving its aims. It was also noted that positive steps had been made in identifying areas of mutual interest through the thematic reviews.

9. AOB

9.1 There were no AOB items.