



## Minutes of the Board meeting – 22 February 2022

### Present:

Professor Kevin Shakesheff (KS) *Chair*  
Dr Robin Buckle (RB)  
Professor Paul Evans (PE)  
Professor Paul Garside (PG)  
Professor Christopher George (CG)  
Ms Linda Horan (LH)  
Professor Jane Hurst (JH)  
Dr David Lovell (DL)  
Dr Tom Matheson (TM)  
Professor Cathy Merry (CM)  
Professor Nick Plant (NP)  
Dr Sally Robinson (SR)  
Dr Clive Roper (CR)  
Dr Sadhana Sharma (SS)

### Apologies

Dr Vicky Robinson (VR)  
Professor Jon Timmis (JT)

### Office:

Mrs Vanessa Chauhan (VC) *item 4*  
Dr Anthony Holmes (AH) *item 3*  
Ms Kayleigh Purdon (KP) *Secretariat*  
Ms Suzanne McArdle (SM) *items 3, 5, 6 and 7*  
Dr Mark Prescott (MP)

### 1. Welcome

1.1. KS welcomed members to the meeting.

### 2. Board minutes 23 November 2021

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

### 3. Chief Executive update on activities

3.1. AH and SM updated the Board on core business activities in VR's absence. The update included:

#### Internal updates

- Internal health and safety guidance continues to be reviewed as staff begin to return to the NC3Rs Office following the lifting of the remainder of COVID-19 restrictions. Arrangements across the team continue to be regularly reviewed by the NC3Rs Senior Management Team

(SMT). In light of COVID-19 developments nationally and internationally, it is anticipated that there will be an increase in business travel and in-person meetings in the coming months.

- Two new members of staff have joined the NC3Rs since the last Board meeting. Dr Ah-Lai Law will be leading on the non-animal technologies programme and Dr Ruairidh Wilson joins on a fixed-term contract to support CRACK IT. As the new Head of Academic Engagement and Partnerships, Dr Natalie Carter will take up her position at the start of May.
- Recruitment remains challenging, with pay compared to other organisations a leading factor. UKRI are aware of the risk this poses in hiring and retaining staff and will be factoring pay and reward into their revised HR operating model. The ability to offer flexible and hybrid working arrangements is seen as an important element going forward in order to increase the attractiveness of roles.
- Four Training Fellowships were awarded in the 2021 call, the awards were made in November. The Board agreed that the 2022 call be paused while the review of the Early Careers programme is completed.
- A total of 91 outlines were received to the 2022 Project grant call. The Grant Assessment Panel will meet at the start of March to assess the outlines and invite up to 35 applicants to submit a full application.
- The British Heart Foundation has agreed to fund up to two joint awards that seek to achieve 3Rs impact in the field of cardiovascular research as part of the 2022 Studentships' competition. Cancer Research UK has also agreed to a second three-year co-funding agreement to support awards that seek to obtain 3Rs impact within the field of cancer research as part of the Skills and Knowledge Transfer grant scheme. The Board welcomed the co-funding collaborations.
- There has been an excellent response to the 2022 CRACK IT Challenges submissions. Proposals have been received from GSK, Novartis, Shell, Syngenta, Unilever and the UK Health and Safety authority. The deadline for submissions is the end of February.

#### External updates

- VR will be meeting with representatives from BEIS and the Home Office following the announcement that a new animal policy unit will be established as part of the Animals in Science Regulatory Unit (ASRU) change programme.
- A new collaboration with the Milner Therapeutics Institute has been established to develop NC3Rs-funded cell-based models of disease so that they are suitable for functional genomic screens using the bespoke expertise and resources available at the Institute.

#### **4. Update on the NC3Rs finances**

4.1. VC provided an update on NC3Rs accounts for 2021/22 including a predicted year end position. An overview of the financial forecast for the period 2022/23 to 2024/25 was also provided. VC is continuing to work closely with budget managers to monitor spend and ensure as much flexibility and agility as possible to mitigate for the continued effects of COVID-19.

#### **5. Review of the NC3Rs Governance framework**

5.1. SM led a discussion on proposed updates to the Governance Framework which had been circulated to the Board prior to the meeting. Members agreed with the proposed amendments and RB suggested items where further clarification or detail should be considered for inclusion. This included expanding the description of the NC3Rs independence and objectivity, and providing additional detail on the importance of diversity, skills and experience within the Board recruitment process.

#### **6. Organisational metrics and key performance indicators**

6.1. The Board reviewed and discussed the proposed organisational objectives and key performance indicators (KPIs) for the next four years. Members were supportive of the objectives being implemented to address the issues surrounding the lag between the development and uptake of 3Rs approaches (the 3Rs valley of death) as well as the need to maintain a pipeline for the development of 3Rs methods and approaches. The Board advised that the number of KPIs should be refined and stratified. The complexity of measuring impact and the substantial amount time needed for research to have a scientific and cultural impact was discussed, as was the value of implementing a variety of methods to monitor and assess progress including employing both quantifiable and qualitative approaches. It was suggested that the topic of KPIs be further discussed and brought to a future Board meeting for additional consideration.

#### **7. Board review**

7.1. SM outlined the process for the upcoming Board member review. The review will evaluate the performance of the Board and its contribution towards the NC3Rs strategy and its delivery. A questionnaire will be circulated to members at the start of March with follow-up calls with KS scheduled to take place throughout April and May.

#### **8. AOB**

8.1. There were no AOB items.