



## Minutes of the Board meeting – 28 September

### Present

Professor Kevin Shakesheff (KS) *Chair*

Dr Robin Buckle (RB)

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 Vicky Robinson (VR)

Dr Clive Roper (CR)

Dr Sadhana Sharma (SS)

Professor Jon Timmis (JT)

### Apologies

Professor Paul Evans (PE)

Dr Mark Prescott (MP)

### Office

Dr Natalie Carter (NC) *item 8*

Ms Vanessa Chauhan *item 5*

Dr Anthony Holmes (AH)

Dr Nathalie Percie du Sert *item 4*

Ms Kayleigh Purdon (KP) *Secretariat*

Ms Suzanne McArdle (SM) *item 6*

Dr Frances Rawle (FR) *item 7*

Ms Emma Stokes

Dr Cathy Vickers *item 7*

### 1. Welcome

1.1. KS welcomed members to the meeting.

### 2. Board minutes 24 June 2022

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

### 3. Chief Executive update

3.1. VR updated the Board on business activities. The update included:

## External landscape

- The increase in animal rights activities, particularly against the MBR Acres dog breeding facility was raising concern in the sector. The landscape has changed considerably including as a result of the ASRU Change programme and VR stressed the importance of ensuring the NC3Rs monitored the situation carefully.

## Research funding

- A total of six awards were made under the 2022 call for Project grants.
- 58 applications have been received for the 2022 PhD Studentships call. The PhD Studentship Panel will meet in October.
- A paper has been submitted to the British Heart Foundation to renew co-funding to support 3Rs studentships in cardiovascular research.
- The Research Funding team are awaiting further clarification from UKRI regarding the studentship stipend uplift. The team will notify PhD students and supervisors as soon as possible.
- The annual Summer School for NC3Rs PhD students took place in July, held over two days, with a mixture of in-person and online workshop sessions. Positive feedback was received from participants.
- Grant holder visits have continued to take place virtually. A total of 24 visits have taken place so far this year.
- A total of 69 applications, (of which 60 are within remit), have been received for the joint funding call with the BBSRC on non-animal technologies. Funding decisions will be made in November.
- Staff held an introductory meeting for new grant holders in September. The meeting provided grant holders with the opportunity to learn more about the NC3Rs, its expectations of grant holders, the support available and the chance to meet with the Research Funding team.

## Gateway

- Five new papers have been published on the gateway so far this year. This included the first registered report, three methods articles and one research article.
- Papers on the gateway have received a total of 61,277 views, 8,488 downloads and 114 citations to date. There are a further 14 papers in the pipeline, three of which are at the feedback stage.
- The Research Funding team are in discussion with another 3Rs centre about expanding to the gateway to also allow publication of papers from their grant holders.

## Innovation

- A Single Phase and Two Phase Challenge have been launched for the 2022 competition. The Challenges focus on minimising animal use in the areas of endocrine disruption and cell therapy and include two new Sponsors, Sonoma Biotherapeutics and GentiBio.
- A decision on progression to Phase 2 for the Virtual Dog Challenge will be made in November. An update will be provided to the Board at its next meeting.
- The Business Growth Scheme has made one award to Alcyomics. The award will support the commercialisation of their *in vitro* model of cartilage injury developed as part of the Osteo-Chip Challenge.
- Discussions with the Milner Therapeutics Institute to collaborate on the Technologies to Tools funding scheme is progressing, with the aim of facilitating access for NC3Rs grant holders to Milner's platform technologies for functional genomics screening.

## Peer review service.

- Since January 2022, a total of 49 proposals for nine funding bodies have been reviewed through the peer review service. The top three funding bodies using the service in this period were the BBSRC, MRC and CARB-X. Proposals reviewed included research being undertaken overseas and the use of non-human primates.

## Training resources

- Two new e-learning modules, funded by the NC3Rs, focusing on pre-anaesthetic preparations and choosing an anaesthetic have been launched.
- The NC3Rs is now able to award CPD points for events through the CPD Standards Office.

## Staff-led programmes

- A paper on head fixation, fluid and food control in rodent neuroscience has been published. The animal welfare team is also coordinating the working group on the revision of the animal welfare in cancer research guidelines.
- In January 2022, the toxicology team reached its 100 publication milestone (with an additional three papers published since then). The team are now working on a new initiative to minimise the use of non-human primates and have established a steering group to identify projects in this area.
- The World Health Organisation (WHO) project to promote the uptake of new approach methodologies is making progress with a detailed update to be provided to the Board at the November meeting.

- A survey on searching for replacement technologies has been launched. The survey will look to identify the extent to which researchers search for replacement technologies, what information platforms they use and if there are any gaps for the NC3Rs to address.
- A project to scope the barriers to use of non-animal derived antibodies has commenced. The project will look to identify ways to accelerate their adoption.

### Communications

- There has been a 20% increase in the NC3Rs social media followers since the start of the year. The communications team has also seen an increased number of visitors to the newly developed NC3Rs website, with an average of 60k visitors a month.
- New resources have been launched on the NC3Rs website for zebrafish genotyping and minimising aggression in male mice.
- The number of listeners for the podcast series has plateaued over the last few months, the communications Team plan to review the feasibility of maintaining the podcast.

## **4. NC3Rs workplan 2023/24**

- 4.1. The theme leads for Research Funding and Experimental Design and Reporting programme provided the Board with an update on activities to date and the planned activities for 2023/24.

### Research Funding

- The Board were supportive of the plans presented by CV to evolve the response mode funding schemes in line with the NC3Rs strategy for 2022 to 2024. This included the rebranding of the Skills and Knowledge Transfer scheme to the Partnerships and Impact Awards to better encompass the expanded scope of the scheme. Award amounts will be increased to £200k (80% FEC) which will allow for additional validation work to help build further confidence in 3Rs models, tools and technologies, in addition to providing the opportunity to work with collaborators to expedite the deployment and application of 3Rs approaches within new research settings and areas.
- Members also ratified the proposal to establish a cohort of discipline and technology focused networks. The networks will provide an opportunity for NC3Rs grant holders to disseminate their 3Rs approaches and establish new collaborations to help drive the uptake of their models, tools and technologies and maximise their scientific and 3Rs impacts.
- The Board were supportive of continuing with the Early Career Engagement Awards which were trialled earlier this year. The competition will be open to final year NC3Rs-funded PhD students, Fellows and postdoctoral scientists to undertake networking and dissemination activities to maximise the impact of their 3Rs grants. The scheme will open in November 2022 and close in January 2023.

## Experimental Design and Reporting

- NPdS gave an update on the activities being undertaken by the Experimental, Design and Reporting team and the priorities for 2023/24. This included refreshing the Experimental Design Assistant (EDA) website to bring it in line with the NC3Rs and ARRIVE websites to improve user experience and access to relevant information. The team are also continuing to expand the scope of the feedback provided through the system to ensure the EDA is more useful to a broader range of experiments and users.
- The Board were supportive of the plans to increase the use of ARRIVE 2.0 guidelines including the proposal to partner with learned societies to identify and promote examples of good reporting for different research fields. Members also noted the plans to conduct user testing with the RIVER guidelines for reporting *in vitro* studies are well understood and fit-for-purpose ahead of their publication towards the end of 2023.

## Animal Welfare

- The Board noted the paper update on the animal welfare programme. Members requested further information on the NC3Rs collaboration with the North American 3Rs Collaborative to develop a certified e-learning course on non-aversive handling of mice, particularly how this will be put into practice.

**Action:** Update to be provided to the Board at the meeting in November.

## **5. Finance update**

- 5.1. VC provided a mid-year update on the NC3Rs accounts for 2022/23 including a predicted year end position.

## **6. Update on Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)**

- 6.1. The Board reviewed the revised organisational key performance indicators (KPIs). Members continued to be supportive of the approach being taken but indicated that the list of KPI needed reducing further. It was agreed that the next update on KPIs will be in new year.

## **7. Rawle report**

- 7.1. A review on how the 3Rs are embedded in the funding and approval processes for animal research has been undertaken by Frances Rawle, the former Director of Policy, Ethics and Governance at the MRC on behalf of the NC3Rs. FR presented her main findings, including implications for the work of the NC3Rs. A Board sub-group will be established to review the final draft with FR ahead of publication in the new year.

**8. Academic engagement strategy – preliminary plans**

- 8.1. The Head of Academic Engagement and Partnerships, Natalie Carter, outlined preliminary plans for the Centre's academic engagement strategy, highlighting the excellent work of the regional team. It was agreed that NC would convene a Board sub-group to consider the development of the strategy further.

**9. AOB**

- 9.1. There were no AOB items.