



Minutes of the Board meeting – 6 June 2023

Present

Professor Kevin Shakesheff (KS) *Chair*

Professor Cathy Abbott (CA)

Dr Robin Buckle (RB)

Professor Christopher George (CG)

Professor Jane Hurst (JH)

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)

Office members attending

Dr Katie Bates (KB) *item 4*

Dr Natalie Carter (NC)

Ms Kayleigh Purdon (KP) *Secretariat*

Dr Cathy Vickers (CV) *item 4*

URKI staff attending *item 5*

Ms Anya Bek

Ms Carole Walker

Welcome

1. KS welcome members to the meeting, noting apologies from Professor Paul Evans and Ms Linda Horan.

Board minutes 31 March 2023

2. The minutes from the March meeting were agreed to be an accurate account of the discussions.

Chief Executive update

3. The Board noted the paper on business activities and the oral update from VR. This included a discussion on staff resource, year-end accounts for 2022/23, the external operating environment, research and innovation funding and the staff-led programmes.

Staff resource

- The senior management team continues to be over-stretched, including as a result of two long-term absences. Efforts to review priorities to reduce the impacts on programme delivery are ongoing. Changes to the regional programme are being implemented in line with the previous Board discussion with an internal preference exercise ongoing to allocate staff to new roles. The changes have been well-received by regional staff and their new roles will be confirmed by the end of June.

Financial accounts

- There was an underspend of £100k for financial year 2022/23. This was due to the late signing of a contract and the full budget for the Technologies to Tools scheme not being utilised.

External environment

- The reaction from stakeholders to the NC3Rs' recent statement on cosmetic testing for consumer and worker safety had been positive. Regular engagement with the Home Office, Office for Life Sciences and the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology continues. There has been an increase in the number of parliamentary questions received particularly on non-animal approaches and VR has been contributing to answering these with colleagues from UKRI.
- A workshop with the UKRI Animal Policy Forum to discuss the Rawle report recommendations had recently been held. This was very useful with a number of actions agreed. The Rawle report has also been covered by various animal welfare and anti-vivisection groups including FRAME and Cruelty Free International.
- The NC3Rs team hosted events in Birmingham, Leeds and London as part of the annual *Pint of Science* festival. The events were well attended and the presentations from NC3Rs grant holders and early career researchers were excellent.

Research funding and innovation

- Due to staff resource the launch of the Partnerships and Impacts funding scheme will be delayed until 2024.

NC3Rs gateway

- There have been four papers published on the gateway in the last two months. A blog on the first registered report on the gateway (on refining rat tickling protocols) has been published on the NC3Rs website.

Staff programmes

- CPD points are being offered to participants attending the Experimental Design Assistant (EDA) workshops. In March, there was the highest number of new EDA accounts created in a single

month since staff started recording this information. A total of 600 hard copies of the ARRIVE guidelines were distributed within the first week of advertising the new Z-cards were available.

- The peer review team has reviewed 49 applications. This includes 35 applications for the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovation's call to expand its global preclinical animal modelling and vaccine testing capabilities/network focusing on biocontainment facilities.
- The animal welfare team presented a review of the evidence base on low stress mouse handling methods at the Canadian Association of Laboratory Animal Science annual meeting, which also included a member of the team providing hands-on training at Charles River.
- The toxicology team held its annual meeting for project licence holders with 17 participants from eight organisations attending. The discussion focused on refining procedures for sham dosing and the removal of fasting requirements in toxicology studies. In partnership with Unilever, the team also hosted a one-day workshop on opportunities for the UK to develop world-leading chemicals regulation. There are a number of follow-up actions from the event planned including a workshop report and a policy paper on modernising the UK chemicals regulations.

NC3Rs workplan 2024/25

4. Theme leads for research funding (KB) and innovation (CV) updated the Board on activities and plans for 2024/25.

Research funding

- The committed budgets and planned activities for 2024/25 were endorsed by the Board. Members noted the plans to transition all NC3Rs response mode funding competitions over to the new UKRI Funding Service and the additional support that will be provided to applicants and Panel members.
- The Board were supportive of the plans to review the training provisions for early careers researchers.

Innovation – CRACK IT Challenges

- The Board noted the planned activities and budgets for 2024/25. This included the launch of the second Mega-Challenge to drive a step-change in the use of organ-on-chip devices and building on long-term strategic partnerships with other funders to increase the budget for CRACK IT. The Board noted the value of the in-kind contributions provided by Challenge Sponsors but welcomed efforts to further secure co-funding arrangements.
- Members were supportive of the plans to conduct an internal review of the programme with input from the CRACK IT Advisory Panel and the Board to analyse the impact of specific programme interventions made over the past decade and to identify opportunities to evolve CRACK IT.

UKRI risk management overview and NC3Rs risk heatmap review

5. Carole Walker, Head of Risk and Assurance at UKRI provided the Board with an overview of the UKRI risk management framework and risk appetite levels.
6. Findings from the recent UKRI risk management audit has identified two key areas where additional guidance is required to help risk managers. These include implementing training to better understand risk controls and how mitigating actions can help to reduce risk scores and bring the risk within appetite. The Board noted the NC3Rs risk heatmap and agreed that the scores were appropriate but that the planned review with the nominated UKRI Risk Business Partner would be helpful. It was agreed that there would be an update in November.

Annual review of the NC3Rs event attendance policy

7. At the March 2023 meeting, CR requested that the NC3Rs events policy be discussed under AOB. The item was carried forward to the June meeting. The Board agreed that the policy remained appropriate and was supportive of how it is implemented by the senior management team.

AOB

8. There were no AOB items.