



Minutes of the Board meeting – 20 November 2023

Present

Professor Kevin Shakesheff (KS) *Chair*
Dr Robin Buckle (RB)
Professor Paul Evans (PE)
Professor Christopher George (CG)
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 Andrew Scott (AS) – Observer
Dr Sadhana Sharma (SS)

Office members attending

Dr Natalie Carter (NC)
Dr Deborah Milligan (DM) *item 5*
Dr Anthony Holmes (AH)
Dr Nathalie Percie du Sert (NPdS) *item 4*
Ms Kayleigh Purdon (KP) *Secretariat*
Dr Fiona Sewell (FS)
Ms Emma Stokes (ES) *item 4*
Dr Cathy Vickers (CV)

Welcome

1. KS welcome members to the meeting, noting apologies from Professor Cathy Abbot, Ms Linda Horan and Professor Jane Hurst.
2. Dr Andrew Scott, Science Leader at Unilever attended the meeting as an observer. Dr Scott will officially commence his Board appointment in January 2024.

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3. The minutes from the September meeting were agreed via email to be an accurate account of the discussions and published on the NC3Rs website on 6 October.

Chief Executive update

4. The Board noted the paper on business activities and the oral update from VR. This included a discussion on the NC3Rs recent stakeholder event, UKRI 2022 pay award, the external operating environment, research and innovation funding and staff-led programmes.
- Feedback from delegates on the stakeholder event had been very positive and the Board commended the oral and poster presentations from the NC3Rs-funded early career researchers.
 - The Board noted the recent UKRI pay award for NC3Rs staff. VR provided an update on the activities and plans in place to ensure the NC3Rs maintained a culture in which staff feel valued.

External environment

- Staff have been involved in several international outreach projects including the China-UK International Forum on laboratory animal welfare, the Indian Laboratory Animal Scientists' Association annual conference and the Danish 3Rs Centre's annual meeting.
- VR noted the productive discussion with the UK Biosciences Sector Coalition's (UKBSC) academic and industry co-chairs regarding the NC3Rs participation in its meeting. The Board welcomed the agreement that the NC3Rs would participate in the UKBSC meetings in an observer capacity.

Research funding and innovation

- [Nine PhD studentships awards](#) have been made with a total commitment budget of £1.18M. This includes one award co-funded by the British Heart Foundation.
- 41 PhD students, Fellows and post-doctoral researchers have been invited to apply for an Early Career Engagement award to support the dissemination of their research. Applications will be assessed internally, and awards will be made in December. A total budget of £70k is available.
- The annual recruitment call for new Panel members is open for applications with a deadline set for late November. New members will attend an induction session in January.
- The four CRACK IT Challenges for the 2023 competition have now closed. The review panels for each Challenge will be held in November and early December.
- Professor Michael Capaldi, Newcastle University has been appointed to Chair the CRACK IT Advisory Panel. The Board welcomed the appointment.
- The second online technology partnering event showcasing technologies with 3Rs potential was held on 15 November.

Staff-led programmes

- The peer review team have reviewed 42 applications since the start of September, taking the number of applications reviewed for this year to 113. The team continues to receive positive feedback from funders but VR noted concerns regarding the amount of resource required to sustain the service. It was agreed the Board would discuss this further at its next meeting.
- Members noted the delay on the replacement technologies programme and the allocation of additional staff resource to support the project on accelerating the use of non-animal derived antibodies. An update will be given at the next Board meeting.
- In October the NC3Rs review of animal testing requirements in WHO guidelines and recommendations for biologics was presented to the WHO's Expert Committee on Biological Standardization (ECBS). The [report](#) was well received and formal notification of the WHO's full response is expected to be received in early 2024. The Board commended the efforts that had gone into the report and welcomed the new funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to support the next steps for the work.
- The [report](#) from the joint workshop with Unilever on the UK's chemicals regulations and embracing new approach methodologies has now been published and shared with officials in the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology and Defra as well as with the Science Minister.

NC3Rs workplan 2024/25

5. Theme leads for experimental design and reporting (NPdS) and communications (ES) updated the Board on activities and plans for 2024/25.

Experimental design and reporting

- NPdS summarised the activities being undertaken by the experimental design and reporting team and the priorities for 2024/25. The Board welcomed the recent upgrading of the Experimental Design Assistant (EDA) platform to improve the user experience and increase the number of registered users. A series of e-learning modules focusing on good experimental design principles were being scoped taking into account existing resources and work planned by others. The team are also working with SciScore, the organisation funded to develop a software tool to automatically assess compliance with the ARRIVE Essential 10. The tool will be released early 2025.
- The Board were supportive of the plans to re-evaluate the RIVER recommendations following referees' comments. Discussion with the expert working group had resulted in agreement to shift the focus of the recommendations to experimental design and reporting of *in vitro* studies (renaming to DRIVER – Designing and Reporting *In Vitro* Experiments Responsibly – to reflect

this). The plan over the next 12 months to develop an online resource to support the DRIVER recommendations.

Communications

- The Board welcomed the plans to mark the NC3Rs 20-year anniversary and the updated NC3Rs logo. The plans include the publication of several themed reports which highlight the impacts of the NC3Rs across its various programmes as well as stakeholder and public engagement activities.

Commercialising the outputs of NC3Rs-funded research

6. Members endorsed plans to implement a new programme of work to support NC3Rs-funded researchers in recognising the potential to commercialise their research outputs leading to greater 3Rs and scientific benefits. Specific entrepreneurial training will be offered to researchers through a proposed joint NC3Rs-BBSCR [ICURE](#) funding call which will replace the current Technologies to Tools scheme.
7. DM and AH thanked CM, NP and CR for their input into the proposal.

Update to the NC3Rs risk register

8. The Board noted the update to the NC3Rs risk register and the inclusion of new risk actions to support its preventative and mitigating controls.
9. Members agreed the risks scores were an accurate representation of the current climate. However, it was requested that the NC3Rs staffing risk be reviewed and additional actions be identified to help reduce the current risk score.

Horizon scanning workshop

10. The Board dedicated part of the meeting to hold a horizon scanning workshop to discuss potential areas of development for the 3Rs and the NC3Rs. The Board took the opportunity to explore a number of areas identified by the NC3Rs senior team which included further embedding diversity and inclusion into 3Rs research and innovation, applying the principles of sustainability into 3Rs research and overcoming barriers with validation testing for regulatory purposes. This discussion was not minuted.

AOB

11. There was one item of AOB:
 - The Board and VR took the opportunity to thank outgoing Board Chair, KS for his support and guidance over the past four years, particularly during the pandemic and the challenges encountered throughout this time.