

Minutes of the Board meeting – 12 February 2021

Present:

Professor Kevin Shakesheff (KS) *Chair*
 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 Frances Rawle (FR)

Dr Vicky Robinson (VR)
 Dr Sadhana Sharma (SS)
 Professor Jon Timmis (JT)

Office:

Dr Katie Bates (KB) *item 4*
 Dr Anthony Holmes (AH)
 Dr Mark Prescott (MP) *item 4*
 Ms Kayleigh Purdon (KP) *Secretariat*
 Ms Emma Stokes (ES) *item 4*
 Dr Fiona Sewell (FS) *item 4*
 Dr Cathy Vickers (CV) *item 4*

1. Welcome

1.1. KS welcomed members to the meeting and introduced the Board's new members:

- Professor Jane Hurst, University of Liverpool
- Dr Tom Matheson, University of Leicester
- Professor Cathy Merry, University of Nottingham
- Professor Nick Plant, University of Leeds
- Dr Clive Roper, Independent

1.2. FR will be retiring from the Medical Research Council (MRC) and stepping down from the Board in April. KS and VR thanked FR for her contribution over the years which has been invaluable in the growth of the NC3Rs.

1.3. KS outlined his Board Chair objectives for 2021/22. This included the introduction of a new board structure to review the Centre's annual workplan to enable members to advise on strategic priorities for each programme of work and budget allocation throughout the year, with the overall aim of ensuring

linkage back to the NC3Rs mission and focus on the 3Rs valley of death as part of the quinquennial review (QQR) cycle for 2020-25.

2. Board minutes 1 October 2020

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

3. QQR outcome

3.1. VR informed the Board of the outcome of the NC3Rs QQR and provided a summary of the Panel's feedback and final recommendation during a closed session. An 'in principle' decision on funding has been agreed by the MRC and Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) subject to their allocation following the Comprehensive Spending Review.

3.2. VR outlined the Centre's next steps in going forward with its operationalisation plans, this includes the recruitment of key roles and to address lesson learnt from the QQR process.

4. NC3Rs workplan 2021/22

4.1. Programme leads provided the Board with a high-level summary of each programmes' objectives and their planned activities for the coming year. This included measures of success and an analysis of key risk to the programmes.

Animal welfare

The Board noted the plans for finishing the work on refining high yield behavioural studies and plans on a new project for zebrafish welfare. It welcomed the collaboration with the National Cancer Research Institute on the revision of the use of animal in cancer research guidelines.

Communications

The Board noted the priority for the Communications team is to review the functionality of the NC3Rs website including ensuring compliance with accessibility requirements and moving to a new content management system. A revised communications strategy would be circulated to the Board in late summer.

Experimental design and reporting

The Board noted the plans to increase the number of registered users for the Experimental Design Assistant (EDA) and the development of a compliance checker for the ARRIVE 2.0 guidelines as part of the strategy for tackling the 3Rs valley of death. It welcomed the goal of establishing an *in vitro* experimental design programme including the appointment of a dedicated Programme Manager.

Innovation

The Board noted the first mega challenge to be developed which included additional time and funding for commercialisation activities in order to tackle the 3Rs valley of death. It welcomed the comprehensive range of activities that were being put in place to mark the ten year anniversary of CRACK IT. The ability to fund EU based organisations in the CRACK IT Challenges competition was being kept under regular review in light of BREXIT.

Research funding including early career awards

The Board noted the budget for the Project Grant and Skills and Knowledge Transfer schemes. It agreed that the NC3Rs should move to awarding four year rather than three year PhD studentships and welcomed the additional steps that were being put in place to support students, including costed extensions to ensure 3Rs impacts are achieved. It was agreed that the Board would discuss the Early Careers programme at the next meeting in June.

Safety Assessment

The Board noted that the focus of the Toxicology team was to finalise publications from data sharing activities including the follow-up work on recovering animals and microsampling as part of tackling the 3Rs valley of death. It noted the importance of maintaining relationships with organisations such as European Centre for the Validation of Alternative Methods (ECVAM) now that the UK has left the EU.

Working with research funders and universities

The Board noted the important work by the Regional Programme Managers tackling the 3Rs valley of death and welcomed the renewed funding that had been provided by the Universities of Liverpool, Manchester and Sheffield. It also welcomed the planned work with the UKRI Animal Policy Group to raise awareness of the benefits in harmonising policies around animal use across the various research councils.

5. Finance update

5.1. VR gave an update on the NC3Rs financial accounts for 2020/21 and the measures that had been put in place due to the impact of COVID on income and expenditure. A paper on co-funding opportunities was being prepared.

6. AOB

6.1. VR presented the revised NC3Rs Mission statement to the Board, which took into account comments made at the meeting on 1 October.

Members supported the updated text and had no further comment.