

Animal Ethics Committee education and training resources survey

Introduction

The Animal Research Review Panel (ARRP), with the assistance of NSW Department of Primary Industries, conducted a survey on Animal Ethics Committee education and training resources in late 2020. The aims of the survey were 1) to identify current education and training resources used by members of Animal Ethics Committees (AECs) and 2) to gain insights into what additional education material could be developed to assist AEC members.

The survey was published online via Survey Monkey and was open between 26 October and 23 November 2020.

Current AEC members and people involved in the operation of AECs (such as AEC Executive Officers and research establishment Animal Welfare Officers) were encouraged to take part.

Summary of results

There were 189 responses.

1. AEC Membership

All respondents were from Australia with the majority from NSW (53%), then Victoria (34%) and then Queensland (10%).

Most respondents (75%) were AEC members. There were approximately equal responses from the AEC categories of membership A (veterinarian), B (animal researcher/teacher), C (animal welfare) and D (independent) (around 15% each).

AEC category "Other" respondents were slightly lower (10%) and AEC Chairs were 13%.

About 25% of respondents were not AEC members, and of these, the majority were Animal Welfare Officers or AEC executive support staff. The survey design excluded respondents who were not AEC members from questions specific to AEC members.

The majority of AEC members (39%) had been members for eight or more years and the minority (12%) had been members for less than one year.

Most AEC members (79%) were members of only one AEC.

The majority of AEC members (51%) were from University AECs, followed by Government AECs (22%).

2. Sources of information and support

Free text responses to a question on current sources of information to help in the role of an AEC member, highlighted the following common resources: the Australian Code for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes (the strongest response at around 14%), Animal Ethics Infolink website (around 13%), the Animal Welfare Victoria (Government) website and training (around 5%) and ANZCCART (around 4%).

In response to a question (free text answer) on aspects of their role as an AEC member that respondents felt **least** prepared and supported to carry out, common responses were:

- Assessment of the justification / likely benefit of the research
- Understanding the science
- Understanding the validity of the numbers of animals.

In response to a question (free text answer) on aspects of their role as an AEC member that respondents felt **most** prepared and supported to carry out, common responses were:

- Assessing applications
- AEC procedures
- Understanding the science
- Assessing welfare
- Prepared and supported to carry out all aspects of role as an AEC member.

3. Induction material

The majority of AEC members (79%) were provided with induction material when they joined the AEC. Common responses on induction material provided were:

- The Australian Code for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes
- Legislation
- AEC procedures
- Terms of reference
- Training (online, in person and Government).

In response to a question (free text answer) on what should be provided as induction material for AEC members, common responses were:

- The Australian Code for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes
- Legislation
- AEC procedures
- Terms of reference
- Roles as AEC member
- Opportunities to observe procedures / facilities
- Information relevant to the establishment –such as contacts, type of research and species specific information
- The Victorian government training
- Application assessment

- Structured training package
- History of animal ethics.

In response to a question on the usefulness of sources of information on the roles of AECs the strongest response for “very useful” was the Australian Code for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes (68%) followed by Other AEC members (61%). A number of respondents commented they were not in NSW so were not aware of the NSW resources ([Animal Ethics Infolink website](#), NSW Department of Primary Industries Animal Welfare circulars, [Animal Research Review Panel policies and guidelines](#)). A number of these respondents thought they looked as though they would be useful resources. There were also comments supporting the Victorian government training.

4. New education/training topics

When responding to a question on what topics for AEC members they would like to see new education and training resources developed to address, the strongest support was for:

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| • Assessing applications to AECs | 64% |
| • Refinements to enhance animal welfare | 61% |
| • AEC operating procedures | 55% |
| • Replacement – alternatives to the use of animals | 55% |
| • Animal research legislation | 53% |

5. Information/education delivery

When asked about formats for information delivery, the strongest response for “Very useful” was Online documents (72%), followed by Online videos (64%) and Face to face seminars (62%). The strongest responses for “Not useful” were Podcasts (26%) and Hard copy documents (25%).

Comments on methods of information delivery included:

- Online webinars / videos: *Convenient, cost effective, can be difficult to search information*
- Face to face: *Good to have interaction, can be inconvenient, costly*
- Documents: *Useful to search / go back to, but burden of reading matter*

For education material that is not on-demand (such as face to face seminars, online webinars and training days) the majority of respondents (44%) supported a frequency of delivery as yearly.

The majority of respondents (83%) supported structured training courses for AEC members.

If structured training courses for AEC members were available, the majority of respondents (65%) supported completion being mandatory.

A common theme of additional comments was that training for researchers was also needed.

Outcomes

After consideration of the survey results by the Animal Research Review Panel, the following actions are being progressed:

- Investigate options for the development of structured online training for members of AECs
- Develop guideline material on the assessment of applications by AECs
- Update of Animal Research Review Panel policies and guidelines informed by the survey results:
 - ARRP Policy 15: Orientation of new members of Animal Ethics Committees
 - ARRP Guideline 12: Animal research application form (Model)
 - ARRP Guideline 24: Consideration of high impact projects by Animal Ethics Committees

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