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## University Court

### Minutes of Welfare and Ethical Use of Animals Committee

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An extraordinary online meeting of the Committee was held on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2025 to discuss the proposal to outsource genetically altered (GA) mouse breeding.

Present: The Convener, the Director of Biological Services (DBS), the Named Veterinary Surgeon (NVS), a Named Animal Care and Welfare Officers (NACWO), named training and competency officer (NTCO), one scientist, three Project Licence (PPL) holders (also PIL holders), and two lay members, one external. The Dean of School of Life Sciences was also in attendance.

Apologies: Six members and the Dean of School of Medicine had sent apologies. Some of those members sent comments to be raised at the meeting.

#### 1 PROPOSAL TO OUTSOURCE GA MOUSE BREEDING

- a. **Introduction and Background.** The convener summarised the purpose of this proposal is to reduce costs to researchers, the schools and to circumvent the lack of investment to resolve the failing infrastructure within the core breeding facility. The convener also provided information on the tender process to date. In summary, 4 commercial suppliers were asked to submit a tender based on researcher requirements in the current breeding facility. Following panel analysis, one supplier, was preferred based on cost (40%) and quality (60%) and the NVS and NACWO attended a site visit. The report being discussed at this meeting.
- b. **Strategic Justification.** The Dean of SLS acknowledged the situation and shared his frustrations about this proposal since only recently the schools conducted an exercise to explore expansion of animal research facilities in Dundee. However, due to current crisis the university is in a very different place. His views align with the Dean of SoM who was unable to attend this meeting. WHY: Costs of animal work have escalated to a high level over the past few years based on staffing costs and space-based overheads (rise in utilities and RAAC crisis). Funders, specifically MRC have raised this as a specific area of concern. In addition, already mentioned in point a. with no investment in infrastructure, once the autoclave in the core breeding unit fails catastrophically (27 years old and requiring frequent repairs), we cannot preserve the health barrier, critical to preserve the integrity of the breeding animals. Researchers are aware of lower cost alternatives and are moving animal operations externally, which also impacts on cost. VISION scaled back hybrid model to outsource breeding and maintain some breeding (moderate and essential for research) in Dundee as well as experimental work. This is expected to significantly reduce costs and eliminate the requirement for school subsidisation, which is no longer possible. The alternative is to stop all animal work in Dundee. CRITICAL to maintain support from skilled technicians in Dundee to continue the excellent work on improving welfare and 3Rs. Appreciate the impact on welfare from lower caging standards and transport induced issues. However, want to minimise this wherever possible to preserve data integrity but need to identify a model where pricing structure is competitive with rest of UK to sustain good research in Dundee.
- c. **Committee Discussion.** Questions/comments from committee members and answers.
  - Concern about the lack of investment and if the current facility will be fit for purpose in the short term. *Open to all suggestions that do not cost money. Should the worst happen, closure is the only option in the current financial climate.*
  - Who is responsible for making decision about the work in Dundee? *Management will work with researchers to understand requirements and assess capacity to see what is feasible.*

- Clarify the proposal about which animal will be impacted. *Moderate breeding with phenotype will remain in house, as will short term breeding for example timed matings or requirement for young animals. This breeding will be maintained in house at SOPF health status. All other breeding will be outsourced. The current health status will be maintained unless scientific justification is provided from schools to change this.*
- What is the expected timescale? *This will be dependent on researcher sharing their requirements with management and generating their mouse passports ready for shipment. The supplier can begin to accept animals within 8 weeks.*
- What is the true cost, what are the hidden costs and will the cost increase if the 1000 cage estimate is not reached? *The supplier has provided a cost based on per cage per day. This is for 2 years plus the option to extend for another 2 years on an annual basis. This is standard for procurement. The additional costs will be for health screening (shared between all researchers) and biopsy for identification/genotyping. The cage cost is based on up to 1000 cages that will be reviewed if this is not consistently met as well as at the end of the contract and may increase. Procurement in Dundee will be critical in setting the terms and conditions of the contract.*
- Has there been any feedback from research groups using this supplier? *There are 3 research groups in Dundee housing mice at the supplier with positive feedback on the process and communication. However, in all 3 instances, mice will never return to Dundee.*
- The committee appreciate there is no alternative option other than this proposal. This committee provides guidance to the establishment licence holder on the use and source of animals and applying 3Rs. The site visit to the preferred supplier demonstrated that the supplier is legally compliant but welfare standards will be compromised. Therefore, the university will not be in a position to say that we will have best practice on grants and papers for breeding, instead legally compliant with culture of compliance rather than culture of care. Committee members have strived to improve welfare in Dundee over the past decade. Indeed, this committee have supported so many improvements that have been recognised nationally and internationally. There is belief by some members of this committee that this is a backward step to the scientific outcomes due to the lower caging standards and transport induced stress. However, they appreciate the financial issues and necessity but disappointed at the compromises being made.
- Several members of the committee commented that Dundee currently uses the supplier to provide wild type (WT) animals for experiments and breeding and have not previously queried the welfare standards. *There are key difference between the provision of WT and GA animals. They are raised in different conditions, with WT mice spending less time (weeks) at the supplier before being shipped to receiving institutions. GA breeding mice stay in the cages for longer periods (months) – if continuous trio breeding (rarely employed at Dundee, and only for specific cases) is used there can be two litters of mice (perhaps 12-16 pups, dependent on genetic background and the particular line), plus the two females and male, in the same (and 1/3<sup>rd</sup> smaller cage at the supplier) cage at the same time, which will inevitably cause significant stress for all.*
- The NACWO and NVS visited the supplier site and although could see the supplier was lower in welfare standards to Dundee, with limitations on cage size, technical staff to conduct checks, and different breeding strategies were encouraged that the supplier is willing to work with Dundee to better align cage standards. Having mice held in a dedicated separate building provides the opportunity to have a “home from home” and with collaboration potentially influence the supplier to improve welfare standards for all animals in their care.
- The committee support guidance for the supplier to enhance enrichment to allow for natural behaviours as happy mice equals better science.
- The convenor highlighted the impact of the change to service provision of colony management. He noted that researchers will be required to dedicate significant time to manage their colonies and have effective communication with the supplier to ensure colonies are well managed.

- DBS commented that due to a significant number of the team taking voluntary severance, significant changes will be made to current service provision until a decision on outsourcing is formalised.
- The NVS does not recommend this course of action as it goes against her values to improve animal welfare in Dundee. However, will accept certain criteria as there is no alternative.
- The Convenor is of the same opinion.

d. **Actions and recommendations.** All committee members in attendance agreed to proceed to approve, as there is no alternative. Recommendations will be made to the ELH to advise the supplier to enhance cage enrichment and cage size where possible to align as best as possible to Dundee standards within reason of cost and practicality. This will provide a positive path to encourage natural behaviour that works for the company and to hopefully influence the wider community.

#### ACTION LOG

	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Update</b>
02/09/2025	Write a letter for circulation to ELH and subsequently UEG to formalise the decision	Convenor DBS	Letter sent via email 03/09/25 Report submitted for UEG 16/09/25
02/09/2025	Share revised cage cost with committee once received	DBS	Shared via email 05/09/25