

Communication and the Culture of Care

Good two-way communication between scientists and animal technologists/care staff is a vital component of a good Culture of Care, as set out within the EC [Working Document on Animal Welfare Bodies and National Committees](#). This lists some key factors:

- effective communication throughout the establishment on animal welfare, care and use issues and the relation of these to good science;
- empowered care staff and veterinarians - animal care and technical staff are respected and listened to and their roles and work are supported throughout the establishment; and
- all voices and concerns are heard and dealt with positively ... good interaction and communication between researchers and animal care staff should also be encouraged.

One way to facilitate all of this is to 'encourage development of formal and informal communication channels between researchers and care and technical staff for mutual benefit with respect to science and animal welfare'.

The Culture of Care network has surveyed its members to ask how they achieve effective two-way communication between scientists and animal technologists. Examples of activities are listed below – why not discuss these at your facility and adapt some for your own use?

Special events

Special events are held for all staff, including scientists, veterinarians and animal technologists at all levels of seniority. These include presentations from scientists, animal technologists and care staff about their work, with talks that are accessible to everyone.

A symposium with duo-talks: the researcher talks about the science of a project, and the animal technologist talks about techniques and animal care in the project. The duo-talks give the techs the confidence they need to share their expertise and knowledge.

Our establishment licence holder (person responsible for ensuring compliance with the legislation, Directive 2010/63 Art. 20 2) organises an informal meeting (with refreshments) for all project authorisation holders and persons responsible for overseeing animal welfare and care (Art. 24 1a), unit managers, facility manager and the vets. Welfare issues can be proposed for discussion by any member of staff and potential solutions are collectively agreed.

Regular meetings

The person responsible for education, competence and training (Art. 24 1c) organises regular refresher/update meetings for all project authorisation holders and personal licence holders, including animal technologists. As well as presentations from scientists, a tech will often present a talk, e.g. about passports for genetically altered animals.

Several meetings are held every year where scientists come to present a new model, new results or to discuss any challenges that have arisen. The audience is primarily animal technologists and care staff. Questions and discussions are encouraged and facilitated by the facility manager or the attending veterinarian.

Regular and scheduled user meetings are held for project and personal licence holders, animal technologists and care staff, veterinarians, unit managers, the person responsible for ensuring compliance and Animal Welfare Body (AWB) members. Topics are discussed that relate to animal use, e.g. research, techniques, animal welfare, equipment, staff etc.

Building communications into existing processes

If there is a specific concern regarding an upcoming study, the person responsible for overseeing animal welfare and care, other animal care staff and researchers meet to discuss this concern and how to address it. There may also be a wash up meeting post study to discuss learnings for the future.

Before an experiment, the researcher, techs and AWB meet and talk through the study protocol. They talk through the rationale for the work with the staff and everyone discusses the study/protocol requirements etc; everybody can ask questions, raise issues and share expertise. This enables the techs to raise any issues that may arise during the study, ensuring the protocol reflects good practice before the study begins. Sitting together is better than asking questions via e-mail.

A pre-start meeting is held before each study, and a wash-up meeting post-study, so that everybody involved (project and personal licence holders, animal technologists and care staff, veterinarian etc) can review the study to discuss what went well and what could be improved. Anything that could benefit other researchers, or that is a Three Rs improvement, is reported to the AWB and shared at user meetings.

Other communication ideas

A staff survey for animal technologists, veterinarians, project authorisation holders, scientists and managers, asking participants how much they agree with statements such as: *In our group we listen to others' ideas about animal welfare.*

A 'boxless' event is held once or twice a year, in which anyone can submit 'out of the box' ideas to further improve something, e.g. animal care. The best ideas are chosen to be given as presentations and all ideas suitable for implementation are put into practice.

Other comments from network members:

- Processes for communications need to be facilitated, supported and nurtured by management. Consistent good leadership from senior management, and having the time and resources to facilitate good communication, are key.
- Scientists and animal technologists are usually led by different management and have different targets, and their expertise can be very different. It is important to share common goals and to have shared and aligned expectations.
- Some researchers were uncertain when the Directive 2010/63/EU came into force, but most have come to realise that the reviews and critical comments that they get from, for example, the AWB, pay off later because their application progresses more smoothly when it is submitted to the Competent Authority.
- The closer the working relationship between scientists and animal technologists and care staff, the better the communication and mutual respect. The culture is much better at facilities where scientists are actively involved in the animal work, or where technical staff are an integral part of the scientific group, as opposed to facilities that take 'working orders' from scientists.

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See norecopa.no/more-resources/culture-of-care