

Reports and Comments

A Guide for Lay Members of Animal Ethics Committees

This brief guide (see details below) gives an overview of Animal Ethics Committees (AECs) and the role of the lay member in these. In particular, it seeks to reassure concerns that lay members, especially those lacking experience in the area, may have about their importance and legitimacy in the ethical review process. After detailing the role of AECs under New Zealand legislation as it relates to the use of animals in research, testing and teaching, the guide then highlights four factors: independence, public representation, animal advocacy and the possession of a fresh perspective as the most important elements contributed by lay members to the review process. What follows is the now customary explanation of the principle of the 3Rs and how they underline the human use of animals in science and teaching, and then helpful suggestions as to questions and issues that a lay member should consider when assessing a proposal. Finally, a short glossary of terms and references are given. As a guide, it acts as a useful introduction for lay members, but anyone seeking to fulfill this role to the best of their abilities will want to utilise the references given to better understand the issues and concerns more deeply.

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FAWC Report on Stockmanship and Farm Animal Welfare

“Stockmanship is the single most important influence on the welfare of farm animals”, thus begins this report from the UK’s Farm Animal Welfare Council into the role and scope of stockmanship, as it pertains to ensuring high standards of animal welfare, and the provision of effective education and training for livestock farmers and stockmen within the UK.

The report highlights the small business nature of agriculture within Great Britain and the conditions under which many within the industry and the estimated 292,000 stockmen have to work. The majority of businesses are run by single operators (60%) with only 6% having 10 or more employees. This poses particular problems as it means that the burden of care falls onto individuals that may often have to work for long hours and have limited networks of support upon which to draw during times of financial hardship, stress or ill-health; all of which may negatively impact on the welfare of their animals. In addition, entry rate to farming is low (2% over the last five years) compared to the exit rate (18% over the same period); a state of affairs that the report attributes to the poor image and status of farming within the UK. Recruitment of suitably knowledgeable and

skilled employees — of which half are under 35 years of age — is also reported as being difficult as is their retention and the report notes that this has been quoted as one reason for business closures.

In an attempt to address such concerns, and a shrinking knowledge and skills base amongst stockmen, the report identifies attributes which it considers to be the ‘Three Essentials of Stockmanship’. These are:

- *Knowledge of animal husbandry.* Sound knowledge of the biology and husbandry of farm animals, including how their needs may be best provided in all circumstances.
- *Skills in animal husbandry.* Demonstrable skills in observation, handling, care and treatment of animals, and problem detection and resolution.
- *Personal qualities.* Affinity and empathy with animals, dedication and patience.

These, the report believes, should form the basis of education, training and motivational programmes for stockmen. An emphasis on these along with easier access to continuing professional development programmes, the report suggests, should facilitate the recruitment and retention of appropriate staff and ensure standards. The report also recommends that, as part of developing a responsible and more knowledgeable attitude towards farm animals and their products, and improving the image and status of the industry, basic elements of agriculture and the humane care of farm animals be incorporated into the national curriculum for pre-16 year olds.

The report then discusses the current provision of education and training within the UK, highlighting the need to ensure that the latest thinking and best practice is effectively communicated to those working with the animals, especially with respect to the understanding of animal behaviour and its interpretation as indices of physical and mental well-being. It notes that the preferred point of delivery of such courses is by in-house or on-farm training schemes that allow the training to be responsive to specific needs. Existing schemes, such as the Certificates of Competence qualifications in pig husbandry, are detailed and recommendations made to establish a central source of information about stockmen training, certification and funding.

The report considers but then rejects the concept of licensing of stockmen, preferring instead the development of improved accreditation schemes. It notes that vocational qualifications for livestock farmers and stockmen should be simplified so that training and certification can be largely undertaken on-site. If this is to occur, however, it requires sufficient numbers of suitably skilled trainers be available to deliver and assess such training and these are also in decline. The report recommends that relevant bodies such as the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons and the livestock industry keep the provision of such husbandry and practical skills within higher level professional courses under regular review to ensure that the needs of the