

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE AMTRA COUNCIL

Wednesday 3 February 2010
Eastwood Room, The Farmers Club, London

(Note that these minutes are subject to amendment and approval at the next meeting of the Council.)

PRESENT

Mr Bob Stevenson	Chairman
Mr Peter Rudman	Vice Chairman
Mr John Blackwell	BVA
Mr Andrew Cairns	RPSGB
Ms Meriel France	Pet Care Trust
Mr Colin Hall	(assessor representative)
Mr Mick Hempstead	AHDA
Ms Wendy Kett	(substitute for Martyn Channon, R-SQPs)
Dr Douglas McEwan	(assessor representative)
Mr Ian Scott	(substitute for David Taylor, R-SQPs)
Mr Phil Sketchley	NOAH
Ms Claire Williams	BETA

IN ATTENDANCE

Mr Stephen Dawson	Secretary General
Mr John FitzGerald	Observer, Veterinary Medicines Directorate
Ms Erica Martin	Observer, Harper Adams University College

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Mr Mark Brady	(elected representative of MA Holders reps)
Mr Bert Burns	(nominated industry advisor)
Mrs Kate Byrne	(elected representative of C-SQPs)
Mr Andrew Jackson	co-opted to the Board
Prof Wynne Jones	co-opted to the Board
Mr Adam Quinney	NFU
Mr Chris Taylor	(as chairman of the Education Committee)
Mr Simon Wetherald	(elected representative of E-SQPs)

2. Accuracy of the Minutes of the previous meeting held on 29 September 2009

These were agreed as a correct record subject to amending item 5 to change the title of Bob Stevenson's paper to "What is an SQP", and signed as such by the Chairman.

3. Matters arising not otherwise on the agenda

(a) OTC circulation

Stephen Dawson reported that OTC have confirmed that they are circulating to the full list provided by AMTRA, i.e. including the student SQPs who enrolled within the last 2 years. He added that AMTRA provides OTC (and ETN) with a list each month – inevitably therefore there will be some recent enrolments and recent changes of address that don't get a copy or it goes to their old address.

(b) Locums

This has not been done yet. Stephen Dawson proposed to include a reference to it in the next SQP newsletter and include all the responses on the website with an appropriate warning that AMTRA had not endorsed/vetted the individuals other than as SQPs.

(c) Veterinary Nurse representation on Council

Stephen Dawson reported that nine VNs have responded positively to the idea of putting themselves forward as a VN representative on Council. A short summary about themselves and what they could bring to the role would be circulated with postal ballot papers in time for the new representative to join Council in May.

(d) SQP and MAH representatives on Council – website contact details

Contact details for the SQP and MAH representatives on Council are on the AMTRA website.

(e) Forum

This had been discussed with the potential website developers who are looking at a more interactive website generally. Feedback from them has not been terribly positive as to their experiences with many forums languishing with little input or exchange. In the meantime, a blog has been added to the website, which doubles as a "what's new" page, and offers the opportunity to leave comments and interact on specific stories.

(f) NOAH Compendium – contraindications and warnings

Stephen Dawson had written to NOAH asking them to consider the idea of splitting into two sections the contraindications and warnings for the 2011 editions. Phil Sketchley reported that NOAH members had agreed to implement this, and discussions were

ongoing with the programmers of the content management system to allow this to be done. NOAH would be encouraging companies to make this change for existing products as well as new medicines.

The Council recommended that AMTRA contact Norbrook to suggest that they split contraindications and warnings in the same way in their compendium, and explore with Norbrook the idea of an SQP version to be sent to SQPs (provided that it doesn't promote one product over another).

ACTION: Board to consider

(g) SQP manual review

Copies of the new manual had been circulated to tutors. Harper Adams had advised that they had circulated it to the assessors but this did not appear to have happened; Stephen Dawson would circulate to the Council and assessors.

ACTION: SRD

(h) POM-EA

A submission as discussed last time was made to VMD. Most of the responses VMD received were not supportive, but VMD and VPC are keen to explore the idea further, and a meeting in the spring with interested bodies is planned. John FitzGerald explained that VMD was keen to ensure that those rejecting the idea fully understood the proposals.

4. Discussion of feedback from "Metaplan" session and agreed actions

A Metaplan session had taken place the previous day, involving most of the Council members present at this meeting. The group had discussed the role of AMTRA and then the roles of the Council, Board and secretariat.

It was agreed that it had been a useful discussion, and had stimulated a lot of further questions and issues to be addressed. Council recommended that Stephen Dawson take the lead on producing a paper for consideration with input where needed from Council and Board.

ACTION: SRD & Board to consider

5. Promotion of SQPs

Stephen Dawson introduced the item, suggesting that there would be benefit in promoting the SQP as an "animal health advisor" or some similar term, to help explain to animal owners and others what an SQP is. He suggested that the name "SQP" is not well understood, even when expanded from the acronym.

John FitzGerald suggested that if there were to be a proposal to change the name in the Regulations, that a name starting with "S" would be important to retain the sense of the "S" in POM-VPS and NFA-VPS.

If a new phrase were used, it was important to avoid a "turf-war" with others who are, for instance, also animal health advisors but not SQPs.

The word "specialist" was considered and rejected as it may be misunderstood in veterinary circles.

A number of members had initially favoured a name change but now favoured greater efforts to explain the current name, with some considering that farmers are now starting to know what SQPs are.

Those greater efforts could include displaying SQP certificates in store as part of an effort by employers.

Additionally, branding of premises (as locations where SQPs work) would be helpful.

Ian Scott agreed to get more feedback from the AHDA Council on companies agreeing to promote a phrase such as "animal medicines advisor".

ACTION: IS

6. Validation of UCD, PgC/PgD/MSc Veterinary Pharmacy

Carwyn Ellis had provided a written report, which was summarised by Erica Martin. She explained that the new HAUC qualifications for pharmacy support staff include all of the SQP course content at level 5 (compared to level 4 for the SQP course). Mike Rutter (an AMTRA assessor) had been involved with the validation of the course and was content.

Meriel France noted that this could create a disparity between level 4 SQPs and higher level "new SQPs" trained through the pharmacy route. Erica Martin said that there was scope for looking at providing higher level SQP qualifications if there were demand.

The Council recommended to the Board that the courses are suitable as an alternative educational qualification to the current SQP award.

After some discussion, the Council agreed to recommend to the Board that the viva for those individuals wishing to enrol as SQPs should be carried out by an AMTRA assessor.

ACTION: Board to consider

7. Evaluation of performance of candidates at different assessment centres

Carwyn Ellis had provided a written report, following on from the table of assessment centre performances which had been discussed at the September meeting.

It was noted that there was generally a small spread between outcomes at the centres, with three exceptions. A number of factors could skew results, including the quality of the candidates (which might be influenced by large employers in the area), the differing proportions of candidates taking the farm animal module (which is found to be the most challenging), and differing proportions of candidates who have attended training courses before taking the exams.

Harper Adams proposed a peer-review system of the teaching centres in receipt of funding from HEFCE via Harper Adams. Council agreed to recommend to Board that AMTRA support this.

ACTION: Board to consider

It was noted that getting involved in assessment of teaching would represent a significant change in philosophy. Stephen Dawson said there was a widespread and persistent misconception that the training courses were AMTRA courses, whereas at present AMTRA's role is limited to listing courses on its website with, in principle, the ability to choose not to list courses deemed not to be of satisfactory quality but with no objective way of making that decision.

It was noted that it would be helpful to AMTRA and the colleges to have a clear mechanism for assessors to provide feedback to colleges. It was proposed to allow a member of the college staff to attend viva sessions as an observer. Council agreed to recommend this.

ACTION: Board to consider

7a. Farm animal module examination

Carwyn Ellis had prepared a written paper, which Erica Martin summarised, noting that candidates of the farm animal module do worse than those taking other modules. The improved brief for those doing the farm animal project has helped understanding of what is required. However, in the exam, some candidates are finding themselves short of time. Harper Adams therefore proposed to increase the time from 60 to 90 minutes to ensure that those failing are failing because of a lack of knowledge or understanding rather than a lack of time.

Council agreed to recommend to the Board that AMTRA support this approach.

ACTION: Board to consider

8. Publication of future Council minutes

Council agreed that its minutes should in future be published (after giving members the opportunity to comment on the draft).

ACTION: Board to consider

9. CPD

Stephen Dawson reported that some 141 events have so far been held and points provided to the AMTRA office. The majority of such submissions have included errors which needed resolving, so overall the process of receiving and recording points is relatively time-intensive when coupled with the number of queries from SQPs about apparent errors in their records.

Most CPD is being provided by pharmaceutical companies; AMTRA continues to provide a small number of popular events in conjunction with OTC; the AHDA conference was very popular in part because of its CPD points; and additionally other providers such as RUMA and Moredun have provided a number of events.

While the intention had been to avoid sending out regular CPD points summaries, and instead direct SQPs to an interactive website, that is proving more difficult than anticipated to integrate with our current database without going down blind alleys leading to wasted investment. Although SQPs have been given CPD record cards on which they are asked to record their CPD, it seems that many report difficulty in knowing how many points they've accumulated and Council agreed it would be appropriate to send out fresh written summaries.

ACTION: SRD

Those 141 events resulted in 2212 of the 3633 SQPs (61%) having recorded some CPD, with 17% completed the minimum. Over 100,000 points have been accumulated, but the R-SQPs are heavily over-represented having 42 points each, compared to 15 for E-SQPs and 7 for C-SQPs.

A number of CPD seminar audits have been carried out by the current SQP assessors. These resulted in some very positive feedback about the quality of the CPD being provided. On the basis of these "pilot" assessments, the Education Committee would be discussing how best to do these in future. Council agreed that AMTRA should continue to carry out such audits on third party CPD providers.

Claire Williams noted BETA's plans for events in 2010, but added that free CPD being provided by pharmaceutical companies made it more difficult to encourage attendance.

Stephen Dawson said that feedback from SQPs, and from a number of pharmaceutical companies, was that there was significant demand for distance learning in various formats as an alternative to seminars, but that the current CPD accreditation system only allows for distance learning that take the form of quizzes (or as part of the up to 5 points of personal study that may be claimed, out of 70 for R-SQPs).

A number of members noted that C-SQPs in particular find it more difficult to attend events, and that there are fewer appropriate events being provided. In addition Council had already discussed concerns raised by those in remote areas about the difficulties in attending events. Council agreed to reflect on whether it was necessary for everyone to attend an event.

In the meantime, Council agreed that it would be happy to accept webinars and the like as alternatives to attendance in person. Larger events might be recorded and used subsequently on DVDs or online – this was already being explored for the joint AMTRA/OTC events in 2010.

Council reiterated its view that AMTRA should move to a system in the next CPD period whereby SQPs have to do a proportion of their CPD target in species areas relevant to them, accepting that this might need a revised way of accrediting events particularly if part-attendance is to be permitted.

10. Re-sits

Stephen Dawson drew to the attention of Council a big increase over the last two years in the income from re-sits. He reported his experience that

candidates were almost routinely being granted permission for a fourth attempt at a module in contrast to the written documentation which said that such permission would be given only exceptionally.

Council agreed that AMTRA and Harper Adams should continue to recommend to candidates who fail a third attempt to undertake fresh study and attend a course before making a fourth attempt.

11. Prize presentations

Council agreed with the recommendation from Stephen Dawson that AMTRA continue to work with AHDA and NOAH to provide the prize ceremonies at their respective dinners where there is a large quality audience, at modest cost to AMTRA.

12. Feedback from AMTRA Council members & observers

Bob Stevenson asked how AMTRA and its Council can get more genuine feedback from SQPs. Wendy Kett suggested expanding the AMTRA column in OTC to include contact details for SQP representatives.

ACTION: SRD

Phil Sketchley suggested that the Council agenda include a regular item on the EU regulatory review.

ACTION: SRD

Wendy Kett noted the interesting paper on pet poultry at the AHDA Conference. Council noted that SQPs dealing with this sector needed to have the farm animal module since, though kept principally as pets, such animals were still food-producing.

Phil Sketchley suggested approaching VDS for clarity on the legal liability situation for SQPs working in veterinary practices.

ACTION: SRD

13. Any Other Business

Members expressed appreciation for the helpful notes accompanying the agenda and asked that the package of papers have page numbers next time.

ACTION: SRD

Stephen Dawson added to the summary of SQP numbers circulated with the agenda, noting that at the end of January in 2008, 2009 and 2010 the numbers of SQPs had been 2806, 3143 and 3633 respectively.

Stephen Dawson reported that he was in discussions with NADIS about them providing a disease information service to SQPs which could be accompanied by questions leading to CPD points.

14. Dates of next meetings

Tuesday 18 May 2010

Wednesday 29 September 2010