

Care through training: how training can benefit a Culture of Care

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Introduction

Culture of Care is a widely used term within the laboratory animal industry context which ensures a long-term commitment to the welfare of the animals, the care of the Animal Technicians that look after the animals in research, clear and consistent transparency and ensuring the highest quality of scientific research (figure 1).

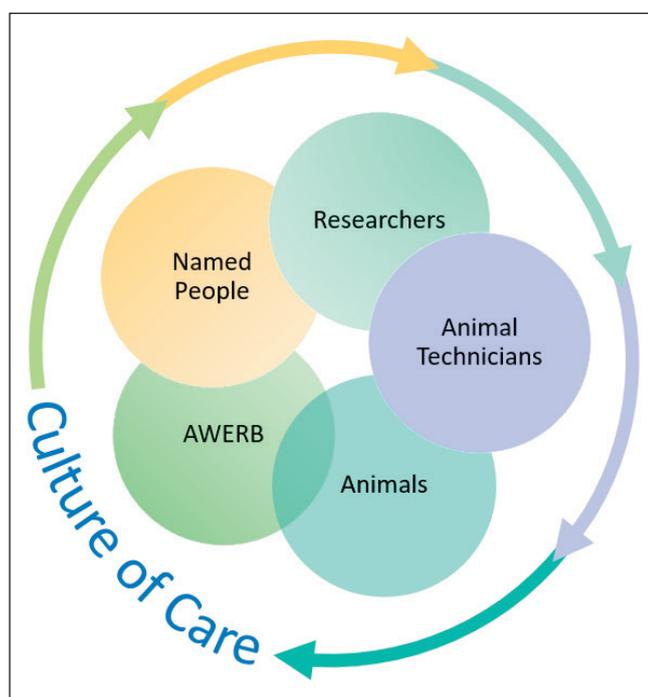


Figure 1. Culture of Care.

Culture of Care is regarding going above and beyond what is enshrined in the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 (ASPA), to ensure the highest level of respect and compassion to the animals as well as the Animal Technicians who are responsible for their care.

Benefits to animals

Having a strong training programme in place has proven to be beneficial to the animal's health and wellbeing but several other aspects of the Animal Technician's work too. These are:

- Animals are provided with husbandry and care of the highest standards, above what is enshrined in ASPA. Healthy animals are happy animals.
- Care is provided by highly skilled, trained professionals.
- Animal Technicians strive to continuously improve the standards of care above and beyond what is expected (figure 2).
- The data gathered from experiments is more reliable and accurate.
- Good reliable, accurate data can also reduce the number of animals and reduce the need for more experiments to be undertaken.



Figure 2.

Background

The Bioresearch and Veterinary Services (BVS) team consists of Animal Technicians within the University of Edinburgh who believe that the Culture of Care for animals used in research, Animal Technicians and research staff is of great importance and strives to actively promote a strong Culture of Care.

Our vision is to instil a strong Culture of Care to ensure the following:

- To provide animals in research with the highest standard of care.
- To ensure the scientific information and data gathered are of the highest quality.
- Equip Animal Technicians with the knowledge and training to support them in giving the highest standard of care for the animals.
- Ensure that Animal Technicians' wellbeing is prioritised to guarantee they feel respected, valued and enjoy being involved within the research industry.
- Actively promote a Culture of Care as our standard approach not a reactionary approach (figure 3).

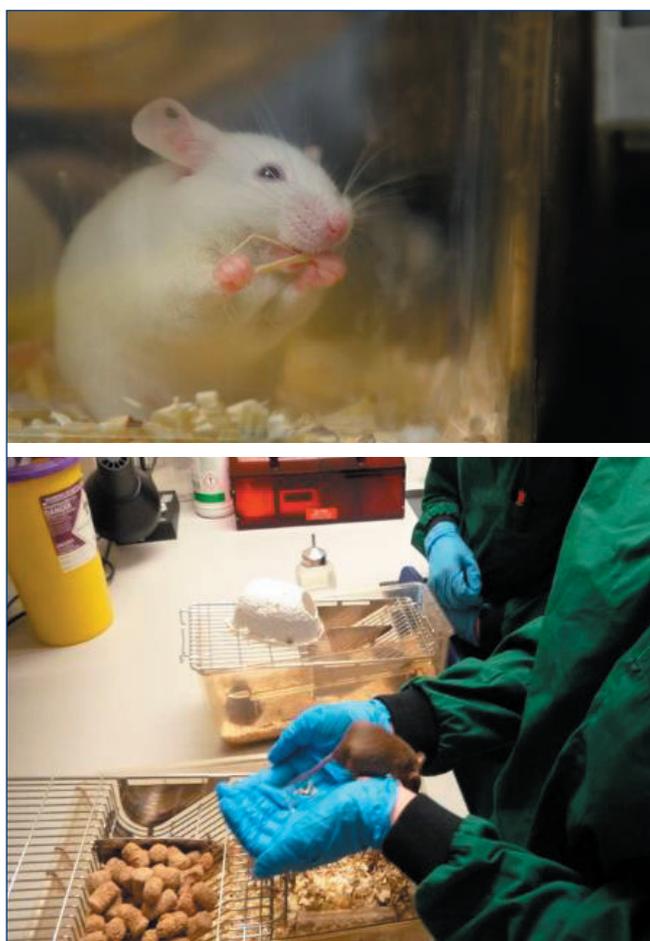


Figure 3.

Benefits to people

After Training Coordinators were introduced and were in position for 3 months, the following benefits were noted in one of our facilities:

- Animal Technicians were able to fully focus on husbandry tasks at busy times without distractions.
- PhD/masters students benefitted from having a designated Training Coordinator to contact and who would be present during their studies.

- Training Coordinators were trained by experienced research staff who then trained Animal Technicians to ensure both staff and skill retention.
- Senior researchers benefitted from a reduced training workload as this became the Training Coordinators role.
- The Facility Management team saved on average 6 to 7 hours per week that was normally spent on booking, organising and carrying out training.
- Animal Technicians felt more appreciated and valued and had a better understanding of the Culture of Care.
- Animal Technicians received a high standard of training in up-to-date methods.
- Animal Technicians had more opportunities to learn specialist techniques from an experienced in-house training team.
- Most importantly Animal Technicians felt they provided animals with the highest standards of care possible.

Initial response

All personal licence holders (PIL) and BVS members of staff were invited to express their views on four areas of the Culture of Care which they would like to learn more about.

- improving animal care and welfare
- support for personal wellbeing
- improving scientific quality
- openness and transparency

In response to the survey and facility discussions, a Culture of Care Day was organised by BVS's in house 3Rs' Committee with focussed talks and panel discussions on the four topics.

This opportunity reiterates the importance of Culture of Care not only towards the animals involved in research but also to everyone involved in the care of animals and research staff.

Three additional events were organised to support our Culture of Care.

1. A public engagement training workshop provided by Understanding Animal Research (UAR).
2. A workshop to discuss the impact of working with animals in research and dealing with compassion and empathy fatigue.
3. Mental health first aid training for all managers initially, which was then offered to other BVS staff by an independent training provider.

Ongoing commitment

To remind staff of our commitment to provide a Culture of Care. Posters and pamphlets were designed and distributed throughout our facilities to reiterate our long-term commitment to Culture of Care and were displayed in the technical, social and laboratory areas.

We will continue to hold Culture of Care Days and encourage and prioritise the importance through education and training (figure 4).



Figure 4.

Moving forward

During the discussions, and within the survey results, there were a few questions that were often asked. These were:

- What is the best way to encourage and educate staff in our vision of Culture of Care?
- Who is best placed to champion and encourage our vision?
- When is the best time to make staff aware of the Culture of Care and its importance and benefits to the animals and staff?

The answers to these questions will continue to form the foundations for our Culture of Care vision.

The importance of training

The University of Edinburgh is a large Establishment with 112 members of the BVS technical team, over 800 PIL holders and 171 PPL holders. The Establishment is based across 12 facilities with a range of species.

Providing a consistent, high standard training programme for all our students and staff working with animals in research is essential to our Culture of Care.

We developed a team of Training Coordinators who work together to ensure our training programme is available to all those at the Establishment.

The team is responsible under the direction of the Named Training and Competency Officer (NTCO) to organise and perform the training and assessments of research and technical staff as well as create a team of trainers.

Our training team has nearly 100 years of combined experience in the research industry.

The remit of the Training Coordinators was to provide the following:

- Education for all staff members regardless of grade, role or experience on the importance of Culture of Care from both an animal and human perspective.
- Ensure training in both husbandry and procedural skills is carried out adhering to our departmental Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to ensure consistency and high standards.
- Promote Culture of Care through interactions with staff and students and ensuring the 3Rs are met (figure 5).



Figure 5.

Acknowledgements

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