

AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH COUNCIL
ADVISORY GROUP ON SCRAPIE RESEARCH

Note of Meeting on 1 June 1978

The first meeting was held at 160 Gt Portland Street, London W1 on 1 June commencing at 2.00 p.m.

There were present:

Professor P Wildy (Chairman)

Dr F Brown
Dr A G Dickinson
Dr G D Hunter
Dr R H Kimberlin
Dr Katherine Lévy (MRC)
Professor C A Mims
Dr W Plowright
Dr J T Stamp
Mr J G Watson

Mr K N Burns (ARC office)

1. Origin and Terms of Reference The origin of the present Group lay in Recommendation 3 of the Report of the Advisory Committee on Scrapie:

"An advisory group should be set up. It should consist of scientists from within the scrapie field and also from outside it, together with MRC officers. It might initially concern itself with scrapie research although the relationship between some models of mouse scrapie and the dementias suggests one obvious area of human disease for the joint committee to consider."

This recommendation had been endorsed by Council during its discussion on scrapie on 11 October 1977. Council had considered it was most important to maintain links with the MRC and suggested that when the proposed Advisory Group was set up there should be invited participation from the MRC. The Chairman welcomed the presence of Dr Lévy in this role.
2. Modus Operandi Members considered it very important that, in addition to prepared papers, there should be visits to relevant institutes to have discussions at first hand with those doing the research. Dr Lévy mentioned that this was a procedure followed by the Multiple Sclerosis Co-ordinating Group. It was thought that the first visit should be to Edinburgh, probably in November.
3. Proposals for work at Compton on Creutzfeldt-Jacob disease (Paper ARC 157/78)

) In order that valid work on CJ could be conducted at Compton several important criteria had to be met. It was necessary to avoid any possibility that there could be cross-contamination of the CJ experiments with the scrapie agents which are at Compton, so that a self-contained building which had both animal accommodation and a laboratory was required. The animal accommodation had to house large enough numbers of mice to provide material for the biochemical characterisation of a number of strains of CJ agent. There had to be a very high standard of staff safety.

The paper from Compton set out several options for buildings. There was discussion on these and also on the feasibility of using modular MRE sites (Medical Research Buildings of Maidstone). These would be expected to be cheaper than the present Compton estimates but Dr Hunter pointed out the preparation of the site and the provision of services was a substantial cost. He also pointed out that it would be necessary to allow for the lapse of months between making the decision to proceed and the completion of the buildings. It was the view of the Group that the Compton estimates ought to be re-examined to see if the cost could be reduced and that this should be done on the basis of 400-600 sq ft for mice plus 400 sq ft for a laboratory that is, a total of about 1,000 sq ft.

4. Proposals for work at MRE Porton on Creutzfeldt-Jacob disease (Paper ARC 110/78) Dr Kimberlin's proposal met with general approval. Although Porton was 60 miles from Compton premises were available there for work to start soon and the advantage was that there was no scrapie infection at Porton. Infection of CJ isolates into mice and typing by interaction of the sine gene and histological lesion profile, the method which had been used by Drs Dickinson and Fraser for a number of scrapie agent strains, would go some way to showing whether there were important differences between scrapie and CJ. Costs would be those of keeping the animals, and travel costs would be £1,000 p.a. Dr Kimberlin agreed to provide the detailed protocol at a later date.
5. Inactivation procedures for scrapie in relation to decontamination procedure for Creutzfeldt-Jacob disease. Accommodation suitable for doing this work was available in the Isolation Compound at Compton. The request had come from members of the PHLS who would produce the protocol of the experiment. The Advisory Group thought that the work should be planned in collaboration with workers in sterilisation and disinfection in the medical field. There had been an offer of £5,000 towards costs but as it would be necessary to use several agents the Group thought that the cost would be substantially greater than this. The Chairman agreed to write Sir Robert Williams.