ANNUAL QUALITY IMPROVEMENT REPORT 2020/21

Appendix 3: External Examiners' report

UG Biosciences

This appendix contains Year Leader/Course Director's responses to 2020/21 External Examiners' comments and updates to actions from previous External Examiners' reports (if applicable).

As Year Leader/Course Director please ensure you reflect on External Examiners' comments in the Course Review section. Please ensure that any actions to be taken in response to these comments have been recorded in your Annual Quality Improvement Report.

For support or advice please contact Ana Filipovic, Senior Academic Quality Officer 'Standards', afilipovic@rvc.ac.uk.

Appendix 3 consists of:

a.	Updates to actions from previous years' reports
b.	2020/21 Collaborative Annual Report with responses from Course Director/Year Leader

Update to actions from 2018-19				
Question	External Examiners comment	CD's response & Action	Update 2019/20	Update 2020/21
1.4 Resources (in so far as they affected the assessment)	Linked to this are examiner observations on variable feedback style (see later) and potential time/resource savings that might be made by a more uniform approach.	c. Variable feedback style and quality is a College wide issue. Some Module Leaders are in the process of developing online rubrics which it is hoped will unify the approach, eg Dev (Bsc1/ Gateway) This has been brought up in teaching committee. LTAC have agreed an updated feedback policy which will need to be implemented in 2020-21. The BSc team have tried to implement rubrics but this was not approved in 2019-20	This has been brought up in teaching committee. LTAC have agreed an updated feedback policy which will need to be implemented in 2020-21. The BSc team have tried to implement rubrics but this was not approved in 2019-20	
3.1 Assessment methods (relevance to learning objectives and curriculum)	For Gateway/ BSc1 /BSc 2 - The removal of essay style questions for gateway/ BSc1 /BSc 2 now brings the programmes in line with other Russell Group courses. Testing for integration and synthesis of knowledge plus demonstration of extensive study beyond the syllabus of lectures is now fulfilled only by in course assessment, e.g. report writing. As already noted, the examiners feel that this must have been of benefit to staff assessment time, and we would imagine that students will find the short answer / MCQ styles to be a more rigorous test of their knowledge. It would be good if the impact of these changes were to be assessed in some way. Certainly from the examiners' perspective, review of examination papers was much more straightforward.	College response: a. We would like to thank the External Examiners for positive comments about the recent changes made to the assessment diet for Gateway/BSc1/2 and will endeavour to provide some analysis from the Departmental Teaching Coordinators regarding staff time (as above) and academic achievement between modules/years of study (as above)	Please see comments above regarding delay to work allocation model publication due to covid	
3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous	For Gateway/ BSc1 /BSc 2 - Examiners observed modules in which the median was lower (IoD) or higher (OH) relative to other modules in that cohort (also noted by 2nd marker on one of these). These observations suggest that it would be of	College response: We thank the External Examiners for the suggestion to analyse grades from individual markers within the marking spreadsheets and will consult with Exams team to	Not complete – will try to carry out analysis 2020-21	

	great value to the overall rigour of the assessment process to set up simple macros within marking spreadsheets and analyse grades according to the marker. We appreciate that there is a solid moderation process in place, but this knowledge would help shed light on the instances where a module grades are observed to be high or lower than others.	set this up (Course Director, Exams Office)		
3.4 Standard of marking	For the BSc 2 project, it was noted that several assessors arranged their feedback comments according to the sections of the report. On the face of it this seems logical, but it may not serve the students as well as if it arranged according to 'features' or 'qualities' – for example categories like 'context', 'analysis', 'critical evaluation', 'presentation' (each with a different weighting) and some of which will cut-across project write up sections. The nature and uniformity of feedback should be reviewed.	bii) Thank you for these comments regarding the feedback of BSc2 projects and suggestions to ask for written comments under different qualities rather than sections of the report. Course Director will raise this at the next CMC. Development of a straightforward feedback rubric for research projects may aid consistency which can then be carried over into BSc3 and MSci research projects (Course Director, BSc2 project co-ordinator?)	Not complete BSc2 year leader and project co-ordinator devised a rubric but this could not be used for marking as has not been approved at all academic committee level (although would have been used formatively for 2020)	
<u>Update to actions from 2019-20</u>				
Question	External Examiners comment	CD's response & Action	Update in 2020/21	
1.2 Learning objectives, and the extent to which they were met	The learning objectives for each course were clearly stated or found on RVC LEARN and readily accessible to us and the students. Exam questions appear to cover the teaching blueprint and learning outcomes. Learning objectives were stated in most draft examination papers for Gateway, BSc 1 and 2. This has improved from previous years. Learning objectives and specific lectures are highlighted as they relate to teaching material for BSc 3.	This is still somewhat a work in progress but pleased to see that most examiners are now providing this valuable information	COMPLETED	
1.5 Please provide any additional comments and	It was noted that one candidate had not received marks for work undertaken as part of a placement in Singapore. It was reported that efforts had been made to	We will review the collaborative agreement to ensure that clear steps are laid out for NTU Exams Office to send results to RVC	IN PROGRESS 2020-21 Noted for review of MOA with NTU	

recommendations regarding the Programme	obtain the missing marks but these had been unsuccessful at the time of the exam board. It wasn't clear why this delay had occurred. A 'no detriment' approach had been taken to resolving this, which is acceptable in the circumstances, but we recommend that the viability of this arrangement is considered carefully if this situation is likely to occur in future, or contingencies put in place to avoid this arising in future years.	Exams Office electronically rather than by mail, thus RVC will be able to process the results in a more timely manner	
2.2 Quality of candidates' knowledge and skills, with particular reference to those at the top, middle or bottom of the range	Gateway - Interestingly, there was a marked improvement in student performance in the "Inheritance, Genes and Evolution" (IGE) module which, despite producing lower marks than the other modules (median was 45%, while all other modules produced medians above 50%) was much higher than last year's equivalent IGE score (26.63%). While some of the overall improvement may have been linked with the different circumstances under which these exams were taken, the IGE exams were undertaken in the normal way and did not involve open books. As IGE has been a problem module for several years in terms of low exam marks, it seems that the lecturing staff have managed to adapt their style of teaching or exam formats in ways that are more suitable for these students. It is also possible that the cohort of students has a generally higher level of ability than those of previous years.	The IGE module leader has worked hard with other question setters on the module to ensure that the framing of the questions within the exam paper are not ambiguous in any way, without reducing the academic quality of the questions.	IN PROGRESS 2020-21 IGE module leader continues to work on the format of the PSQ and will introduce a consolidation session for students for 2021-22
2.2 Quality of candidates' knowledge and skills, with particular reference to those at the top, middle or bottom of the range	BSC 1 - It is noted that overall performance in the IGE module continues to be poor relative to other modules (13 qualified fails and 4 fails). It could be that this performance is due to the students settling in to University, although it could also reflect the way in which they are engaging with this module's specific content / style of teaching. Having said this, the median exam mark of 40% is a slight improvement on last year BSC1 median (37.5%).	as for Gateway) the IGE module leader has worked hard with other question setters on the module to ensure that the framing of the questions within the exam paper are not ambiguous in any way, without reducing the academic quality of the questions.	IN PROGRESS 2020-21 IGE module leader continues to work on the format of the PSQ and will introduce a consolidation session for students for 2021-22

2.2 Quality of candidates' knowledge and skills, with particular reference to those at the top, middle or bottom of the range	BSc 2 – There were more 1st class marks award this year than last. Overall performance in the PID Jan exam was lower (53%) than both the other two modules. These are modules that may (with no detriment) go on to be used in final classification. This was due to both lower results in both the exam (mean 49%) and ICA (61%) components. Marks for the PID exam were particularly low for Questions 1, 4 and 5. Questions 1 and 4 relate to components of the immune system as does much of the ICA and some reflection on the question / teaching may be warranted	We thank the EE for this observation and will pass on to the PID module leader and teaching team for reflection on the immunology teaching on this module	COMPLETED
2.2 Quality of candidates' knowledge and skills, with particular reference to those at the top, middle or bottom of the range	For AAD Jan exam, Questions 5 and 6 (and to a lesser extent Questions 2 and 8) had mean marks on the low-side. These questions all relate to immune function (as above for PID) and reflection on this seems warranted. It may be that additional support to student learning is required	We thank the EE for this observation and will pass on to the AAD module leader and teaching team for reflection on the immunology teaching on this module	COMPLETED
2.2 Quality of candidates' knowledge and skills, with particular reference to those at the top, middle or bottom of the range	For BoD, 8 students achieved 100% of their ICA. This was a write up of a lab practical that was in the form of guided short answers. It will have boosted the overall module performance. By comparison, the performance for a guided short answer in-course assessment for PID didn't yield such high max marks and will have impacted on the overall performance for this module, as noted above	We thank the EE for this observation and will pass on to the PID module leader and teaching team for reflection of the composition of the ICA	COMPLETED
2.2 Quality of candidates' knowledge and skills, with particular reference to those at the top, middle or bottom of the range	BSc 3 - As in the previous year there was a wide range of marks for some of the modules but given this occurred in both terms it would be independent of COVID19 disruption. The subject matter being testing in each exam/module is relevant and up to date, thus the college should have confidence in the delivery of their stated outcomes. There is a clear path to distinguishing those students who excel (not always across the board) and those that do not. The marking and assessment criteria are fair and robust. There was some concern about the % if	We thank the EE for these observation, and will pass on to the BSc3 year leader and module leaders for reflection on the slight overall drop in good degree classifications this year and whether this is a COVID related issue – although applying our no detriment policy impacted only a few students over all (those who had achieved a higher degree classification in 2nd vs 2nd and 3rd year marks combined were awarded their 2nd year degree classification). A	COMPLETED

	students obtaining either 1st class or 2.i class degrees this year compared with the previous year. The proportion is not vastly different 54% vs 64% last year; a more thorough examination of previous years would be warranted before conclusions are stated. The overall outcome of this year's examinations show that students were doing generally well or very well.	number of students improved their overall degree classification as would be expected in a normal year.	
3.1 Assessment methods (relevance to learning objectives and curriculum)	Due to COVID-19, BSc1 and Gateway assessments are formative only and all students progress to year 2. In all programmes, there is a good range of assessment methods; this variety provides students with several ways to demonstrate their knowledge and there is no reliance on a single method of assessment. This is in line with the sector. The heavy reliance on the essays seen in previous years appears to become less which we welcome. BSc Comp Path and other courses: A continuing move towards full online assessments would eradicate a few remaining issues with poor handwriting (students as well as markers occasionally) in short answers questions and project write- ups.	We thank the EE for these positive comments We are using remote proctoring software for MCQ/SAQ/PSQ and OCM dropbox for essay style papers (BSc3 only) this year. If successful then this assessment style could persist beyond COVID-related changes to the examinations	IN PROGRESS College Wide
3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous	For BSc 1 and 2, we note previous examiner steer to analyse marking according to marker. This was being investigated but the outcome of these analyses is not known to the examiners. We note that for pre-COVID exams the moderation / sample marking was working effectively	Analysis of individual markers was not carried out in 2019-20, with electronic marking now in place this may be more straightforward in the future	Not completed due to the volume of work the exams office were required to do
3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous	The procedure for exam script scrutiny was effective. Due to COVID-19, some assessments were only 1st-marked (except summative Jan exams for BSc2). COVID-19 will have substantially impacted on Gateway, BSc 1 and 2 student learning, and it seems likely that it will continue to be	This is definitely something that the BSc leadership team are aware of and are mindful of "gaps" that may need to be plugged. Because of the timing of the Pandemic at the end of the term 2 these are largely analytical and practical research	COMPLETED

	felt in the subsequent years by some students. This will need to be monitored and mitigated where possible.	skills rather than knowledge gaps.	
3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous	BSc 3. There is a clear and robust process in place to distinguish those top tier students from the rest of the cohort. There is a mechanism to reconcile differing marks and this is fair to the student in its outcomes. The quality of feedback on both project reports and module exams is good and staff should be pleased with this.	This practice is to be highly commended and it enabled the external examiners to easily identify where and why marks were assigned for an individual answer. Where there was disagreement between the first and second marker, the disagreements were discussed and a consensus mark awarded. We thank the EE for this observation and will pass on to Comp Path teaching staff and examiners	COMPLETED
3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous	MSci The assessment process was impressively rigorous, with independent second marking. The examiners should be commended on the detailed feedback provided; this was helpful as an external examiner to understand why there were discrepancies in marks between the markers, and the constructive nature of the feedback will be of benefit to the students.	We thank the EE for this observation and will pass on to MSci examiners	COMPLETED
3.4 Standard of marking	Gateway, BSC 1 and 2 – There was evidence of good practice in many places. Notably, the quality of feedback for Gateway and BSc 1 library projects was high. Overall the standard of has improved over the last few years. It is noted, however, that for some assessments there is still inconsistency between markers in style and quality of feedback. We understand from the exams office that steer was given to staff to avoid annotation of work so that feedback to students could be automated. This is an understandable practical approach but has disadvantages in the precision of feedback that can be offered to the students. As previously noted,	We thank the EE for this observation. We are working towards introduction of consistent rubrics for certain pieces of work including the BSc2 projects, which will somewhat allay this. We will disseminate the comments to the Biosciences examining teams	IN PROGRESS Formative rubric for BSc2 projects in 2020-21 – will seek approval for use summatively for 2021-22 then roll out to BSc3 for formative use etc.

	a consensus between markers on style will maximize the value to the students. It is almost as if this needs a structured audit, to bring home the point to markers. Also, prior to marking it may be worth asking the module leads to provide an example of the marking style expected		
3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous	BSc 3 – Marking was maintained at high standard for all modules and for the project elements. There was use of dual marking and moderation at appropriate points and clear justification for an increase or decrease in grade after this moderation has taken place. It was reassuring to see that dual marking for the project reports often yielded identical or near identical results; this level of consistency offers assurance to examiners that the rubric used is robust. There was conversation related to the supervisor grade and the range of marks awarded here, ie. 8% up to 98%. It should be made clear to both staff and students that this grade reflects a different set of examinable outcomes when compared to the report	We thank the EE for this comment and will aim to provide guidance to staff and students on how this component of the marks should be awarded	COMPLETED BSc3 module splits have been harmonised for 2021-22 so all modules are 50% ICA 50% exam
3.5 In your view, are the procedures for assessment and the determination of awards sound and fairly conducted? (e.g. Briefing, Exam administration, marking arrangements, Board of Examiners, participation by External Examiners)	For BSc 1, data on performance in previous years (by module) was included in module handbooks. This was helpful in certain instances (e.g. IGE) and would be of use in BSc2 as well.	We thank the EE for this. We will ask course support and exams office to provide this information in a similar format for BSc2, BSc3 in future	IN PROGRESS
3.6 Opinion on changes to the assessment procedures from previous years in which you have examined	It is quite difficult to comment on this in light of the COVID circumstances. The assessment procedures had to be adjusted to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak in 2020. As noted, it will be important for the College to keep an eye on the pathway of individual students to mitigate impact of the	We thank the EE for this observation and assure them that no detriment policies have been agreed for current BSc3 and MSci students and that these are published on the RVC website	COMPLETED

	pandemic on their learning and ability to perform effectively in assessments in subsequent years. Most examinations were already sat by the time national lockdown implementations were introduced; however, this had an impact on some research project work which could not be completed. The RVC agreed and published a 'No detriment' policy for graduating students for summative assessments which was clearly communicated and adhered to in the following assessment procedures. The college should consider if the no detriment approach they have adopted will need to be adapted to a changing style of deliver for the coming academic year and when these changes should be made such that they are transparent for the students.		
5.1 Do you have any suggestions for improvements based on experience at other institutes? We may use information provided in our annual external examining report:	The clarity and detail of feedback for students for their project work in BSc Comp Path is commendable. Consistency of feedback and alignment to the common marking scheme is very good for BSc 1 library projects. Further value would be derived from annotations on work.	We thank the EE for these observations and positive comments and will pass these on to the Bioscience examiners. The team will continue to look at the opportunities for providing annotations on electronically submitted written work whilst maintaining anonymity of marking	COMPLETED
5.2 External Examiner comments: For College information only (Responses to External Examiners are published on the College's website. Please only use this box to add any comments that you wish to remain confidential, if any)	Using a full online assessment system would make the assessment procedure less prone to mistakes like wrong counting of marks/points, resolve the handwriting issue and facilitate reporting and analysis of results.	We thank the EE for these comments and will evaluate the success and benefits of our changes made in light of COVID, including use of remote proctoring and more use of open book exam styles to enable online examinations in the future	IN PROGRESS College wide

Collaborative Report

Bioveterinary Sciences, 2020/21 including:

BSc Biological Sciences
BSc Bioveterinary Sciences
BSc Biological Sciences or BSc Bioveterinary Sciences with a Certificate in Work-Based Learning and Research
BSc Animal Biology, Behaviour, Welfare and Ethics
MSci Applied Biological Research
MSci Applied Bioveterinary Research
MSci Biological Sciences
MSci Bioveterinary Sciences
MSci Wild Animal Biology
Intercalated BSc Bioveterinary Science
Intercalated BSc Comparative Pathology

Lead examiner: Dr Nick Wheelhouse

Collaborating examiner(s): Professor William Holt, Dr Kerstin Baiker, Dr Lucy Green, Dr Robin Flynn, Dr Dan Lambert

The Programme

Please comment, as appropriate, on the following aspects of the programme:

1.1 Course content

As a general observation, course content is appropriate in all the programmes examined. There is considerable variety and choice available to students and the range of topics provides highly contemporary coverage of the veterinary and biomedical sciences.

BSc Comp Path covers the comparative aspect of the module and is of good academic standard.

1.2 Learning objectives, and the extent to which they were met

The learning objectives for each course were clearly stated or found on RVC LEARN and readily accessible to us and the students. Exam questions appear to cover the teaching blueprint and learning outcomes.

Learning objectives were stated in most draft examination papers for Gateway, BSc 1 and 2. This has improved from previous years. BSc 3 and Comp Path examination papers have consistently mapped questions back to the individual LOs for lectures and sessions; this is a clear benefit to students and staff as it allows for extremely focused feedback. This is evidenced in the feedback seen in examination papers.

Course Director's response: We thank the EE for these positive comments.

1.3 Teaching methods

Teaching methods which include didactic lectures, small group teaching, practicals, guided self-directed learning and research projects appear appropriate.

The examiners note that COVID-19 will have impacted substantially on teaching and assessment processes throughout the year. We also note that the College adapted its methods quickly and attempted to mitigate negative impact on students.

BSc 3 and MSci (including the applied programme) projects were affected due to lack of access to laboratory facilities. Despite this staff should be commended for their efforts in supporting students through conducting data collection.

Course Director's response: We thank the EE for these positive comments.

1.4 Resources (in so far as they affected the assessment)

There were no resource issues identified during the review of the examinations.

1.5 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the Programme

No further comments.

Student performance

Please comment, as appropriate, on:

2.1 Students' performance in relation to those at a similar stage on comparable courses in other institutions, where this is known to you

The performance of students in all programmes is comparable to what we have observed in Russell Group universities offering similar or related programmes of study (Birmingham, Nottingham, Southampton, Sheffield, Cardiff).

2.2 Quality of candidates' knowledge and skills, with particular reference to those at the top, middle or bottom of the range

Gateway
Despite COVID-19 the student performance on the Gateway course was of a generally high standard and in line with previous years, and the number of distinctions (12/60) was very similar to the previous year. The marks for Gateway IGE followed the pattern seen previously, being lower than in other modules. We have previously suggested that exam stress caused students to make careless mistakes when answering simple arithmetical questions, and suspect that this year the problem may have been similar. The most demanding questions required good knowledge of DNA sequences, codons, meaning that simple mistakes can seriously lower marks, even though the students may have a good understanding of the rationales and theory behind the question. Fortunately, the questions also included some flexibility by asking for simple explanations for some of the answers. Gateway students are normally expected to spend some weeks visiting a farm around lambing time and writing a report about their experience. This year, because of COVID-19, they wrote essays based around topics in animal husbandry, for example, the causes and prevention of post-natal mortality in pigs and sheep. Some of these essays were really excellent and achieved high marks (>80%) while others appeared to have been written rather causally and without sufficient care. These were easily recognised (typically achieving around 30-40%) and it is a pity that with greater attention to simple proofreading, they could have produced work of a higher standard. We noted the helpful actions taken by the Gateway teaching staff to offset the problems caused by COVID-19. These included contacting schools to ascertain whether students had been disadvantaged through self-isolation, possibly missing out on some topics (especially including basic molecular biology) that they would have been taught prior to arrival at RVC.
Course Director's response: Gateway comments have been considered in a separate report.

BSC1
The number of students is significantly lower than in previous years. The number proportion of 1st class marks awarded (~20%) is similar to last year. Gaps between ICA and exam median marks were particularly marked for IGE and TMA modules, whereby performance on coursework was substantially better than in the exam. For TMA, the ICS Quiz still appears to be found easy by the students (quite a few achieving 100%) – it would be worth considering whether the apparent ease of this quiz is not helpful in preparing students for the exam (median was 50% this year). The reason for the low median in the exam was not clear, but could be investigated. For IGE, the exam median was 45% which is a rise from last year (40%). We note that there were issues with the exam paper and it is interesting that even without the PSQ, the exam was a challenge. It is also interesting that this module does not, like many others, use MCQ. There are likely to be many factors at play in understanding the continued struggles of students taking this course – having varied styles of assessment across the whole of BSC1 is good, but IGE exam results vs. content is worth investigation again since the results did appear to contribute to a high rate of resits in this cohort.
Course Director's response:
We thank the EE for these observations and note the discrepancies in IGE and TMA exam vs ICA marks and will pass this on to the relevant module leaders
IGE Module leader will introduce another session for 2021-22 to revise and consolidate the DNA transcription and translation LOs

BSc 2
There were similar percentage of 1st class marks award this year.
Marks appeared to be largely consistent across modules. However, the marks from the Imaging of Disease module were significantly lower than the other modules (Mean 48,3%). Marks for IoD were particularly low for Question 1 (mean mark 2.5/10) and some reflection on the question / teaching may be warranted.
Of note there was a significant difference in ICA performance across modules which largely correlated with assessment type. For instance, BoD, 6 students achieved 100% of their ICA (mean mark 76%; median 80%). As with the previous year this was a write up of a lab practical that was in the form of guided short answers, and

which significantly boosted the overall module performance (mean exam mark 46.4% vs 57% for the module). By comparison students fared comparatively less well in essay format ICAs. For instance, in Wild Animal Biology where the 58.9% mean mark (62% median) had a negative impact on overall module performance (Exam 76.7% vs 70.3% module overall).

Course Director's response:

We thank the EE for these observations and thank you for highlighting the discrepancies in median scores between ICA and exam for some modules we will pass this on to the module leaders

BSc 3 and Comp Path students clearly displayed a depth and breath of knowledge across all subject areas that was comparable with previous years. There were no standout issues with respect to a single examination paper and throughout individual students module marks were broadly reflected in the overall year result. From the external examiners (RF) own area there was comparable performance of students with matched areas at another RG institute.

As to be expected in summative assessments, there is a wide range of quality of answers with students in the top range showing high knowledge and skills becoming less obvious or identifiable in student answers with lower marks. The overall outcome of this year's examinations show that students were doing generally well or very well.

Again this year a high proportion of 1st Class Honours were awarded. On close assessment of the distribution of marks it appears that a number of students benefitted from the 'safety net' introduced as a result of COVID which allowed them to count either 2nd year or third year marks for some components toward the final degree classification. Exam performance was strong but there was a good spread of marks and some very testing questions to allow discrimination of more able students.

Course Director's response:

We thank the EE for these observations and note the comment that the Safety Net may have benefited some students. We expect to see an upward trajectory of grades from 1st to 2nd to 3rd year (and so without the safety net some students may achieve a first in their 3rd year but be awarded a high 2.1 because 2nd year grades are taken into account for calculation of final degree classification) and as pointed out this has been reflected in the numbers of 1st vs 2.1 awarded this year

MSci

A high proportion of the MSci (Biol) students achieved first class honours this year, with one also achieving this level for MSci (WAB) for the first time. It was noted that the overall performance of the WAB students was lower but there was nothing to suggest this is a problem and might just reflect cohort differences. A good range of projects were available and some very impressive work noted for all steams, including Applied. The Research Skills module has been expanded to to beyond just a mock grant application to include writing a job advertisement and a journal club presentations; this is an innovative approach to developing employability skills.

2.3 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the students' performance

No further comments.

Assessment Procedures

Please comment, as appropriate, on:

3.1 Assessment methods (relevance to learning objectives and curriculum)

Due to COVID-19, BSc1 and Gateway assessments are formative only and all students progress to year 2.

Course Director's response:

This is not the case for 2020-21 (this no detriment policy was applied to 19-20 only) therefore we have students resitting exams and ICA where they have failed the module overall. They will however be able to resit the year without going through appeals process should they fail at the second opportunity (the 2020-21 no detriment policy)

In all programmes, there is a good range of assessment methods; this variety provides students with several ways to demonstrate their knowledge and there is no reliance on a single method of assessment. This is in line with the sector.

The heavy reliance on the essays seen in previous years appears to become less which we welcome.
A continuing move towards full online assessments has irradiated the previously highlighted issues with poor handwriting (students as well as markers occasionally) in short answer questions and project write- ups.

Course Director's response:

We thank the EE for this observation and there is a general consensus that one of the benefits of online exams has been better legibility for both markers and students accessing their feedback. A move to online exams post-pandemic is a college wide issue that is being discussed at senior management level

3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous

For BSc 1 and 2, the moderation procedure was clear for ICA but less so for the examinations however evidence was provided by the examinations officer upon request that the moderation / sample marking was working effectively across all modules. The procedure for exam script scrutiny was effective.

COVID-19 will have substantially impacted on Gateway, BSc 1 and 2 student learning, and it seems likely that it will continue to be felt in the subsequent years by some students, particularly those whose school education will have also been impacted. This will need to be monitored and mitigated where possible and the examiners were encouraged by the proactive steps being taken by RVC staff with this regard.

Course Director's response:

We thank the EE for this observation and agree with this. We are confident that all learning outcomes (programme level, module and class by class) have been met for these students and we will be ensuring that any gaps in their practical and professional skills are addressed early in AY 2021-22. This is also a requirement for our RSB Accredited Degree status

BSc 3 and Comp Path:
The assessment procedures are rigorous, and there was the introduction of proctored examinations. The double marking scheme which was not clearly evident in the online forms was described by the chair and examinations officer, this appears to be rigorous and effective as in previous years. Likewise, the double marking approach to the BSC3 project material is fair and results in consistent marks across the board. The number of marked items associated with the projects helps to adjust for inherent bias in the supervisor assessment. However, it should be noted that this supervisor assessment is still a minor component of the entire project mark (10%).In BSc Comp Path, there has been a repetition of a small number of exam questions, I recommend increasing the question bank.

Course Director's response:

We thank the EE for this observation and will be addressed by the Comparative Pathology Course Director

For the MSci, assessment is fair, with clear marking rubrics available and double marking in most areas. The only assessments for which this wasn't the case – or wasn't always the case – were the journal club (oral) presentations and particularly the supervisor assessment of engagement with the research projects. Marks for the latter were generally quite high and pulled the overall marks up for several students – this isn't necessarily a problem but it might be worth considering in future how this is moderated and how much of the final mark (currently 5% + for MSci) should be attributed to this component.

Course Director's response:

We thank the EE for this observation. The supervisor mark addresses aspects of professionalism, motivation and technical ability is an opportunity to reward these important transferable skills. These may not be reflected in "academic" written or oral communication from the students that is assessed by independent examiners who have not had the opportunity to interact with the student day to day

3.3 Consistency of the level of assessment with the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)

The level of assessment in all programmes is entirely consistent with the FHEQ.

3.4 Standard of marking

There was evidence of good practice in many places. Notably, the quality of feedback for Gateway and BSc 1 library projects was high. Overall the standard of has improved over the last few years. It is noted however that for some assessments there is still inconsistency between markers in style and quality of feedback. We understand from the exams office that steer was given to staff to avoid annotation of work so that feedback to students could be automated. This is an understandable practical approach but has disadvantages in the precision of feedback that can be offered to the students. As previously noted, a consensus between markers on style will maximize the value to the students. It is almost as if this needs a structured audit, to bring home the point to markers. Also, prior to marking it may be worth asking the module leads to provide an example of the marking style expected.
Course Director's response: We thank the EE for this suggestion and will feed back to the PDI / Library project module leader for specific guidance to markers for this project next year.

There was evidence of good practice in many places- it is clear that attempts have been made to standardise feedback style in most modules, but that there are still individual markers who have not conformed to this. Overall the standard of has improved over the last few years. It is noted however that for some assessments there is still significant inconsistency between markers in style and quality of feedback. Variability in feedback style requires further consideration.
Course Director's response: This is a college-wide issue and Course Director will discuss with Director of Assessment.

As previously noted, a consensus between markers on style will maximize the value to the students and avoid unnecessary confusion. It is perhaps worth considering providing a structured proforma to add consistency between individual markers. For BSc 1 Development, we noted that a tick box format was trialled – it was a binary choice but additional comments were possible. It wasn't easy to line up the number of ticks with the grade awarded.
Course Director's response: We thank the EE for these observation regarding the Development module ICA rubric and will feed your comments back to module leader.

Also, prior to marking it may be worth asking the module leads to meet with the marking teams to provide an example of the marking style expected.
Course Director's response: Thank you, this is a good suggestion and Course Director and Year Leaders will ask module leaders to do this.

Types of issues noted are as follows:
1) Inconsistency in whether work was annotated or not
2) Not all markers indicate where / why a mark has been lost by adding comments
3) Some feedback comments are very vague / gestural
4) In some instances, the common grading scheme was mentioned but no breakdown of marks shown
5) For BSc1 library projects the marking had been standardised by many markers, but variability in style still exists and includes issues to do with key indicator words to match the grade, annotation / or not of work, categorisation / or not of comments. Improvements would enhance the formative value of coursework.
Marking of BSc2 projects was very variable in style. 1) Structured where the feedback was structured by headings, either using features from the common marking scheme (like understanding, critical thinking, etc.) or grouped by project section (aims, methods etc.). 2) Narrative where the feedback takes the form of an in depth often detailed discussion or in a few cases 3) Short, one or two sentences of comment. Despite that feedback was largely appropriate. The examiners were encouraged that a successful pilot project using a rubric format had been completed and are hopeful that this will provide additional consistency in future.
Course Director's response: We thank the EE for these comments. We will evaluate the rubric used for BSc2 projects, submit for consideration at academic committees and aim to have it used summatively for 2022 project marking.

BSc 3 and MSci
The standard of marking is good overall and a number of developments in recent years have continued to improve consistency and clarity. There continues to be a variety in the degree of feedback amongst markers and subjects. This would appear to be aligned with the depth of mapping of exam questions with individual learning objectives. It would be a good thing to slowly migrate all questions towards this complex mapping of learning objectives against questions. This would in time allow for feedback to be aligned with LOs and make the process easier for staff.
Course Director's response: We thank the EE for these observations, the college is considering new curriculum mapping software that will enable us to fully map assessments against LOs.

Very clear marking rubrics were available for some assessments – for example the posters and grant applications for the MSci – others this was less well-defined, particularly the research projects.
Course Director's response: We thank the EE for these comments and will feedback to the MSci Pathway Leader.

This was discussed with the course leaders and several examples looked at; the examiner was satisfied that there was sufficient consistency in marking and the marks awarded were fair. Feedback was quite mixed in terms of style, but overall the level of feedback given to students on their assessments is excellent.
Course Director's response: We thank the EE for these observations. As noted above consistency of feedback is a college wide issue, but if the rubric used for BSc2 projects is deemed suitable we will look to prepare something similar for BSc3 projects in the future.

In BSc Comp Path, marking appears fair and discriminatory with a good practice of detailed feedback for the students.
Course Director's response: We thank the EE for these comments and will feedback to Comp Path Course Director

3.5 In your view, are the procedures for assessment and the determination of awards sound and fairly conducted? (e.g. Briefing, Exam administration, marking arrangements, Board of Examiners, participation by External Examiners)

The procedures employed by the College were fair and all carried out with great efficiency by the Examinations Office. External examiners were given ample opportunity to ask questions or express their opinion despite the necessary move to online scrutiny of papers and online meetings due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. We are grateful to the exams office for their clear communication around the time of exam paper scrutiny, preparation for external examining, and clear links / access to the online systems. Feedback for the MSci Applied programme was particularly detailed.

Course Director's response: We thank the EE for these comments and agree that the Exams office are to be applauded for ensuring that all aspects of the assessment run smoothly.

For BSc 1, data on performance in previous years (by module) was included in module handbooks. This was noted in the last report and the examiners would like to again highlight that this had been helpful in certain instances (e.g. IGE) and would encourage its incorporation into BSc2 as well.
Course Director's response: We thank the EE for this observation and will ask that this information is made available and in a similar way to the BSc1/Gateway data.

BSc 3 and Comp Path data is well presented by the examinations office and allows for a thorough examination of the students marks and their progress.

3.6 Opinion on changes to the assessment procedures from previous years in which you have examined

It is quite difficult to comment on this in light of the COVID circumstances. The assessment procedures had to be adjusted to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak from 2020 onwards. As noted, it will be important for the College to keep an eye on the pathway of individual students to mitigate impact of the pandemic on their learning and ability to perform effectively in assessments in subsequent years.
Course Director's response: We thank the EE for this observation and will ensure that students who have been affected by necessary changes to teaching delivery and assessment are appropriately monitored and supported.

MSci – the addition of new components to the research skills module was seen as a positive development, adding additional employability skills training and diversifying the assessments.
Course Director's response: We thank the EE for these positive comments and will feedback to MSci Pathway Leader

3.7 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the procedures

No further comments.

General Statements

4.1 Comments I have made in previous years have been addressed to my satisfaction

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

We feel that our previous comments have been taken into consideration by the College, thank you.

4.2 An acceptable response has been made

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

4.3 I approved the papers for the Examination

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

4.4 I was able to scrutinise an adequate sample of students' work and marks to enable me to carry out my duties

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

4.5 I attended the meeting of the Board of Examiners held to approve the results of the Examination

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

4.6 Candidates were considered impartially and fairly

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

4.7 The standards set for the awards are appropriate for qualifications at this level, in this subject

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

4.8 The standards of student performance are comparable with similar programmes or subjects in other UK institutions with which I am familiar

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

4.9 I have received enough training and support to carry out my role

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

4.10 I have received sufficient information to carry out my role (where information was insufficient, please give details)

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

4.11 Appropriate procedures and processes have been followed

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

4.12 The processes for assessment and the determination of awards are sound

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Completion

If you have identified any areas of good practice, please comment more fully here. We may use information provided in our annual external examining report:

5.1 Do you have any suggestions for improvements based on experience at other institutes? We may use information provided in our annual external examining report:

Consistency of marking by multiple markers of BSc1 and BSc2 library projects has improved but would benefit from all markers adopting these changes

The clarity and detail of feedback for students for their project work in BSc Comp Path is commendable.

Marking rubrics for some aspects (eg poster) of the MSci were excellent. The depth of feedback given for projects for both BSc3 and MSci was frequently impressive.

Course Director's response: We thank the EE for these positive comments and will feedback to relevant year leaders and pathway leaders. We will continue to strive to improve feedback in those assessments where inconsistencies are highlighted.

5.2 External Examiner comments: For College information only (Responses to External Examiners are published on the College's website. Please only use this box to add any comments that you wish to remain confidential, if any)