

## **ANNUAL QUALITY IMPROVEMENT REPORT 2015/16**

### **Appendix 3: External Examiners' report**

#### **MSc Intensive Livestock Health and Production**

This appendix contains Course Directors' responses to 2015/16 External Examiners' comments and updates to actions from 2014/15 External Examiners' report (if applicable).

As Course Directors 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, Academic Quality Officer 'Standards', [afilipovic@rvc.ac.uk](mailto:afilipovic@rvc.ac.uk), 01707666938

# Collaborative Report

Exam board meeting: 12-Sep-2016

## MSc in Intensive Livestock Health and Production (Distance Learning), 2015/16

Lead examiner: Ms Carole Brizuela

Collaborating examiner(s): Dr Stephen Lister

### The Programme

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

#### 1.1 Course content

The PgC modules provide an excellent grounding in areas of the relevant livestock production industries that are rarely covered within a veterinary or animals related undergraduate degree and which are imperative to further the knowledge of anyone who wishes to gain an insight and input into improving these industries. The PgD modules cover more traditional veterinary related material that will probably be novel to non vets on the course (i.e. epidemiology, infectious disease control) and provide a relevant revision of material for vets enrolled on the course. Overall the module contents provide a learning opportunity for students to extend their knowledge base and apply it to their working environment.

Response from college requested: **NO**

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

These are appropriate for the modules. Although they are being met I have some concerns on some modules i.e. IDIR Poultry about whether they are being met at Masters level due to the nature of the assessment. The production of a biosecurity leaflet for a poultry farm which I reviewed prior to the CAB was not in my opinion a Masters level assessment.

Response from college requested: **YES**

#### **COURSE DIRECTOR'S RESPONSE:**

As discussed at Exam board, the wiki page may not contain Level 7 material, but the creation of a wiki page demonstrates that the student is able to synthesise knowledge and rewrite for a lay audience. This itself is a skill. We will monitor.

#### 1.3 Teaching methods

The provision of this course in a distance learning format allows people working full time or resident overseas to access relevant learning opportunities that they can apply directly in their workplace which is to be applauded.

Response from college requested: **NO**

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

not applicable

Response from college requested: **NO**

**1.5 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the Programme**

None

**Response from college requested: NO**

## 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

There were very few assignments and exam scripts to review this year and they were of variable quality compared to previous years. Whilst some students are performing well there have been a number of assessments where marks achieved are borderline passes or borderline fails. Both external examiners have found that the marks being awarded (especially on exam scripts) appear over-generous. I cannot help but feel that the marking scheme (the common grading scheme) being generic to all levels of study is not discriminatory enough for Masters level. I have expanded on this in section 3.4

Response from college requested: **NO**

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

The very few students on each module reviewed makes this hard to assess.

Response from college requested: **NO**

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

None at this time

Response from college requested: **NO**

Please comment, as appropriate, on:

### 3.1 Assessment methods (relevance to learning objectives and curriculum)

I consider the assessment methods to be extremely relevant to those enrolled on this course. The ability to utilise material in assignments directly related to the industry within which the student is working is a powerful learning tool. I have however noticed that at times very similar material is produced in both the assignment and the written exam where these occur within the same module. Perhaps some thought needs to be given to posing questions in the exam so that students need to bring different learning into the assessment procedure?

Response from college requested: **NO**

### 3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous

These appear to be rigorous.

Response from college requested: **NO**

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

As mentioned above and below I have concerns that the generic Common Grading Scheme is not discriminatory enough at Masters level. Also some thought needs to go into reviewing the assessment format for the IDIR Poultry assignment to ensure it is assessing students at the required level.

Response from college requested: **YES**

#### **COURSE DIRECTOR'S RESPONSE:**

~~We have discussed CMS before and responded that it was not possible to change. We disagree and feel it is discriminatory at Level 7. IDR Poultry will not run again and therefore this comment has expired. Please find below the response from the RVC's Director of Professional Assessment and Development:~~

The RVC common grading scheme is designed to have a greater number of mark points around the pass mark (where most marks tend to fall) specifically to allow the examiners to be discriminate between similar answers. The standard terminology is intended to allow staff that work on courses at different FHEQ levels to be familiar with decision making around grade boundaries especially pass/fail and is RVC policy that we base our decision making on the language in the common grading scheme. What is implicit in the scheme is that examination questions must be constructively aligned to the nature and level of any course and this means that the definition of terms like "basic knowledge", or the limits of the evidence of critical thinking are different between courses at the various FHEQ levels. We see these comments as an opportunity and a prompt to enhance the detail in our model answers so that it is clear (to examiners and external scrutiny) what is required in an answer in terms of material, understanding and presentation to achieve a pass or any of the other grade points. We take the comparison between the level required to obtain a pass at the RVC and at other institutions seriously as a point of external reference and will try to increase the transparency of our grade boundaries so that there is a clear debate about them and the examination board can take action in relation to marks/results if necessary.

### 3.4 Standard of marking

As mentioned above both external examiners have concerns that there appears to be generous marking of exam scripts. At times it is difficult to correlate the mark descriptor i.e. "A Sound answer" (55 marks) with a descriptor that suggests material covered is basic with some significant errors / omissions and limited evidence of critical ability or powers of argument. At the univeristy where I work this would be a fail at Masters level.

Response from college requested: **YES**

#### **COURSE DIRECTOR'S RESPONSE:**

Please see the response under 3.3. We will continue to monitor marking and where appropriate, take action.

**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)**

As usual the arrangements for reviewing papers (but please be aware external examiners are liable to be away during late July / early August) was very good and the provision of assessment material prior to attending the College was extremely useful in making the most of the time available prior to the CAB to review other assignments and exam scripts and discuss course and assessment matters.

**Response from college requested: NO**

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

n/a

**Response from college requested: NO**

**3.7 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the procedures**

Some of the feedback on assignments and exam scripts was exemplary (of particular note Animal Health Economics, Applied Animal Nutrition, Genetics and Genomics, Current Trends in Food Systems) and allows the external examiner to understand where and why marks are awarded. Other modules had no feedback or comments provided. It would be good practice if all internal examiners could be encouraged to do the same.

**Response from college requested: YES**

**COURSE DIRECTOR'S RESPONSE:**

We continue to request feedback from all markers in line with RVC marking policy. Where this persists, we will speak directly to the marker(s) concerned.-

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

**No**

**Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:**

I still have concerns about the use of a Common Grading Scheme to assess work from level 4 to level 7.

**Response from college requested: YES**

**COURSE DIRECTOR'S RESPONSE:**

~~Please see response under 3.3. We have failed to resolve this and the examiner persists in making this comment. I am not sure how to resolve it~~

**4.2 An acceptable response has been made**

**No**

**Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:**

Although I have been assured that examiners take into consideration the level the students are working at when marking work and that the students are informed of the level they need to be working at, I still fail to see how the CGS and associated descriptors can be used to provide the same mark at different levels. Is it reasonable to expect a first year FdSc student to demonstrate evidence of powers of critical analysis, argument and original thinking and show extensive reading in their exam answers to achieve a mark of 75 (this in my opinion would be achieving 90 plus at level 4) or a Masters student to provide an answer with basic information and errors / omissions / inaccuracies and limited evidence of critical ability and achieve a pass?

**Response from college requested: YES**

**COURSE DIRECTOR'S RESPONSE:**

**4.3 I approved the papers for the Examination**

**Yes**

**Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:**

**Response from college requested: 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:**

**Response from college requested: 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:**

**Response from college requested: NO**

**4.6 Candidates were considered impartially and fairly**

**Yes**

**Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:**

**Response from college requested: 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:**

See my comment in 4.1

**Response from college requested: 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:**

**Response from college requested: NO**

**4.9 I have received enough support to carry out my role**

**Yes**

**Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:**

**Response from college requested: 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:**

**Response from college requested: NO**



**4.11 Appropriate procedures and processes have been followed**

**Yes**

**Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:**

**Response from college requested: NO**

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

**Yes**

**Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:**

**Response from college requested: 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:**

I think it would be very useful for the College to review marking schemes from other institutions (perhaps not veterinary schools) to compare the descriptors for Masters level marking used elsewhere with the CGS.

**Response from college requested: YES**

### **COURSE DIRECTOR'S RESPONSE:**

[Please see the response 3.3.](#)

**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)**

**Response from college requested: NO**