

ANNUAL QUALITY IMPROVEMENT REPORT 2016/17

Appendix 3: External Examiners' report

BVetMed Year 2

This appendix contains Course Director's/Year Leader's responses to 2016/17 External Examiners' comments and updates to actions from External Examiners' reports from previous years (if applicable).

As Course Director/Year Leader 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, 01707666938

Appendix 3 consists of:

a.	Updates from Course Director/Year Leader to actions from previous years' reports (if applicable)
b.	2016/17 Collaborative Annual Report with responses from Course Director/Year Leader

a. Update to actions from 2015/16 External Examiners Report:

Question	External Examiners' comments	Course Director's response & Action	Update in 2016/17
3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous	Lack of annotations (more detail here)	Further guidance regarding the level of annotation required on exam scripts to be circulated to staff. This could be sent with marking packs, or provided during assessment inset days Action Deadline: Jun 2017 Action assigned to: Exams Office; Brian Catchpole	This was carried out. As the external examiners (EE's) have noted, " <i>Annotation has for the most part improved on previous iterations of this exam although it was disappointing to see a complete set of scripts devoid of annotations</i> "
3.4 Standard of marking	Recommendations: 1. Marked differences or inconsistencies in the application of the CGS should be addressed in Paper 3 (essays). This is made more necessary given that there will be more choices (and therefore number of markers) added to the paper in future exams. 2. The use of a form or type of sample marking should be considered to raise objectivity of marking	A form to be created to document the question statistical evaluation and sample marking decision making process Action Deadline: 01-Jun-2017 Action assigned to: BVetMed 1, BVetMed 2 and G Year Leaders; Brian Catchpole; Exams Office	The suggested course of action has led to a significant improvement which has led the EE's to comment as follows " <i>Sample marking this year was comprehensive, effective and clearly recorded and should be commended</i> ".
3.5 In your view, are the procedures for assessment and the determination of awards sound and fairly conducted?	Recommendations: 1. At the start of the review process, it is suggested that external examiners be given a short (10-15 min) presentation by the year leader, explaining the examination structure and overall exam performance of the students. It would provide a good opportunity for the external examiners to query the exam process, obtain an overview of the students' performance and be made aware of any issues at the outset of the visit. 2. For 2016/2017 examination, it will be appreciated if the external examiners are given more advance notice of exam board meetings and associated information. A two-week notice was much too short.	Exams office to schedule a formal briefing with the Year Leader, Exam Board Chair and external examiners at the start of their visit to the college. Exam board and ISF dates to be sent to external examiners upon publication of the examination timetable Action Deadline: 01-Oct-2016 Action assigned to: Exams Office	The EE's were briefed by the year leader and the chair of the exam board in June 2017. The EE's were advised of the relevant dates of the ISF orals and Exam boards as soon as they were available.

Collaborative Report

Exam board meeting: 04-Jul-2017

Bachelor of Veterinary Medicine, Year 2, 2016/17

Lead examiner: Dr Harriet BrooksBrownlie

Collaborating examiner(s): Mr David Kilroy, Professor Kin-Chow Chang, Dr Karen Noble

The Programme

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

1.1 Course content

The course continues to encompass the core subjects of anatomy, physiology, pharmacology, microbiology, pathology, animal husbandry and communication skills as appropriate to this stage of veterinary undergraduate studies. The integrative approach facilitates the introduction of clinical aspects of veterinary medicine and helps to soften discipline boundaries.

Response from college requested: NO

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

The successful delivery of the learning objectives of the course was assessed by the examination as illustrated by the inclusion of clear learning objectives for the subject areas being examined.

Response from college requested: NO

1.3 Teaching methods

Teaching methods include didactic lectures, practical classes (including dissections), directed learning, computer-aided learning, tutorials and applied anatomy sessions. They appear appropriate, well-structured and effective and in most cases aligned to assessments.

Response from college requested: NO

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

The course appears well-resourced.

Response from college requested: NO

1.5 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the Programme

The staff continues to deliver a course that is of very high academic standard, that builds on learning from earlier parts of the degree programme and that is well-aligned to assessment methods, with robust quality assurance.

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

The second year course is integrated, similar to other UK veterinary schools. The distribution of the marks and fail rate are not dissimilar to the results of the same course from previous years.

The external examiners have considered the list of students who failed the examination and are in agreement with this list.

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 overall distribution of the marks appeared consistent with previous cohorts on this course. The fail rate was in the expected range for a robust and discriminatory veterinary course.

Borderline students and those deemed to have failed demonstrated lack of factual detail, inadequate understanding, failure to integrate knowledge or failure to use knowledge in context, or poor handwriting.

Distinction and merit students performed consistently well across different parts of the examination, were able to integrate factual information from different subject areas and to apply their knowledge in appropriate context.

Response from college requested: **NO**

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

None.

Response from college requested: **NO**

Please comment, as appropriate, on:

3.1 Assessment methods (relevance to learning objectives and curriculum)

It is apparent that the staff continues to fine-tune the assessment methods based on reflection.

The MCQ paper was designed to cover body systems, whereas the other parts of the exam "mixed and matched" subjects areas with the aim that the entire curriculum would be represented in the examination as a whole.

Integration of subject areas is demonstrated by the involvement of two or more examiners in devising written questions. In addition the learning objectives for subject areas being assessed in written questions are, for the most part, clearly presented to internal and external examiners at the end of the question model of each question.

Some staff reported the value of collaboratively working on questions.

The range of assessment methods is appropriate, comprehensive and effective.

Once again the integrated structure and function (ISF) oral examination is commended for its organisation and the range of material available (especially the plastinated material). Access to live animals (horses, cattle and dogs) during the ISF exam allows the assessment of applied anatomy, a commendable feature in a pre-clinical exam setting.

Response from college requested: NO

3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous

The assessment process is highly rigorous, varied and appropriately aligned. This examination consists of an MCQ paper, a problem-solving paper, an essay paper and the ISF oral. The spot test has been removed from the examination. In addition, there are formative and summative in-course assessments, a research project and assessment on group presentations.

The examination process is transparent and well-documented allowing for review of performance of individual candidates should this prove necessary.

Paper 1 (MCQ):

This paper tests factual recall. An internal review of the question bank for features such as whether questions pass or fail "the cover-up test" was undertaken and the results of this process were made available for external examiner review. Care should also be taken to avoid patterns of wording in the answer options that the "test-wise" student may recognise. The external examiners considered that the exam, as set, was appropriately standard set and statistical analysis demonstrated that paper was fair and discriminatory. The external examiners also confirmed that it was appropriate to remove two ambiguous questions prior to finalisation of the paper.

Paper 2 (Problem solving):

As a change from previous years, this paper did not allow candidate choice of questions this year. This aspect is discussed elsewhere in this report.

Paper 3 (essay paper):

Comments regarding the assessment of this paper are discussed in more detail elsewhere in this report.

Oral exam (ISF):

The examination was well organised with a good range of materials and resources, that were well utilised by the examiners. The exposure of each candidate to four different subject areas and examiners allows for rigour in the assessment and, for the most part, the consistency of marking are also noteworthy. Some examiners appear to be "kinder" in the ISF oral; however the exposure of the candidates to four different examiners (and topics) goes a long way to mitigate the effects of variation in oral examining style by individual staff members. There is some variation in the way the marks sheets are completed by the different sets of examiners and it may be timely to re-assess the role of the mark sheets and re-brief the examiners.

Response from college requested:

NO

Response from Robert Abayasekara (acting Year leader)

We thank the examiners for their comments. The exam office is in the process of re-designing the ISF mark sheet and Dr Michael Doube (who has responsibility for ISF orals) will ensure that when briefing the internal examiners, the importance of filling in the re-designed ISF mark sheet will be stressed.

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

The assessment process effectively and objectively examined a broad range of subjects in an integrated and aligned manner that was discriminatory, differentiating the depth of knowledge and understanding of individual students.

Response from college requested: NO

3.4 Standard of marking

There appears to be considerable internal reflection of the process - both formal and informal - amongst those involved in the examination, and consequent review of the examination process each year which is continuing to tighten up the process as a whole.

The standard of marking was generally of a high and mostly consistent standard and statistical analysis was used effectively as an assessment of the exam process and allowed prompt discussion of anomalies and thereafter appropriate action to be taken where necessary; this is commendable. One inconsistency arose where a cohort of scripts was divided between two staff members and there were considerable inconsistencies between marking standards, which were not able to be resolved by discussion and review. The decision was made to withdraw this question and the external examiners were fully briefed about this and, after consideration of all the facts and ramifications, considered that this was an entirely appropriate course of action.

The external examiners were also involved in discussions about how this situation might be prevented in future years (e.g. tighter marking scheme, marking the same 10 scripts to standardise marking at the start). Further suggestions based on experiences at other institutions are made in section five.

Sample marking this year was comprehensive, effective and clearly recorded and should be commended. It was noted that examiners need to be aware of flexibility in 'acceptable' answers, especially if they are not marking their own topic.

The external examiners were informed that the problem solving paper is likely to have a standard-set pass mark next year. Whilst we consider that this is a good idea, we recommend also that staff should be briefed about the potentially detrimental (and counter-intuitive) effects of overly lenient marking, due to its effects on the pass mark.

The marking of the long answer (essay) questions was improved from last year. In most cases the CGS was well utilised with clear annotation of the scripts ensuring transparency of marking. Annotation has for the most part improved on previous iterations of this exam although it was disappointing to see a complete set of scripts devoid of annotations.

It was felt that there was some inconsistency in marking between some topics, in that marks at the higher end of the scale appeared to be awarded for varying depths of knowledge and discussion between different subject areas. This meant that it appeared "easier" to get 75%, for instance, when choosing certain questions as opposed to others. Notwithstanding that by its nature it is a paper which should have somewhat freer "model" answers to allow more able students to develop ideas according to their background reading, thought should be given to ensuring consistency in awarding marks at the upper end of the scale; considering it is a "choice" paper, performance could be disproportionately affected merely by the choice of question due to its marking.

It is hoped that there will be review of questions which generally weren't answered as well as they should have been, to deduce the reasons for the poorer performance.

Some examiners appear to be more lenient or generous in the ISF oral; however the exposure of the candidates to four different examiners (and topics) goes a long way to mitigate the effects of variation in oral examining style by individual staff members.

Response from Robert Abayasekara (acting Year Leader)

The external examiners positive comments with respect to marking are gratefully received. We are aware of the instance that the externals comment upon with respect to absence of annotation – this occurred due to the marker marking scripts remotely. We are nevertheless gratified that the external examiners

reported that "The standard of marking was generally of a high and mostly consistent standard". They commented upon an issue that arose on occasion with the marking of integrated PSQs where there was the apparent inconsistency between marks awarded by the two markers. The external examiners have suggested possible solutions that the RVC should consider in order to avoid the situation arising in the future. The suggested strategies are:

1. Dividing the scripts - two or more markers cover the same question i.e. each mark 100 scripts part a - d,

2. Dividing the question - each marker marks a part question for all scripts i.e one marker marks 200 scripts parts a & b and the other marks parts c & d.

Discussions are currently underway with Professor Catchpole (Director of assessment) regarding the potential way forward. Initial discussions favour adoption of option 2. A final decision will be forthcoming before the next call for questions (Dec 2017) for the end of year exams in June 2018.

As recommended by the external examiners, internal markers will be briefed to ensure they are aware of the potentially detrimental (and counter-intuitive) effects of overly lenient marking, due to its effects on the pass mark.

Those essay questions that were NOT answered as well as they ought to have been will be reviewed to understand and address any apparent deficits in knowledge within the student body.

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 are expertly and comprehensively carried out and well-documented.

The statistical analysis again proved invaluable as an objective overview of the "performance" of each question.

The internal breakdown of the multiple choice questions was a useful and constructive addition to the documentation this year.

The external examiners received excellent support from the administration team, with access to paperwork and resources required to undertake our review. Notice of examinations, meetings, drafts of papers and additional information were efficiently circulated in good time to allow considered contributions by the external examiners. The initial briefing of the external examiners by the acting Year Lead was useful and informative, as was a subsequent briefing by the Chair of the exam board.

The exam board meeting was well-attended by staff and was efficiently and effectively conducted with an inclusive atmosphere meaning that all staff, and the external examiners, should have felt able to contribute to discussions - from procedural issues to those concerning individual candidates.

Response from college requested: NO

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

The role of the spot-test has largely been subsumed by other parts of the exam (MCQ, ISF oral and to a certain extent, the problem-solving paper) and therefore it was appropriate to drop this paper from the examination.

Removal of choice from the problem-solving paper facilitates comparison across the cohort and helps to mitigate against subjectivity due to individual examiners marking different numbers of scripts. Removal of choice was considered by the external examiners to be an appropriate action for this paper.

Sample marking was documented and this was constructive and informative.

The mostly increased degree of script annotation this year has already been discussed. This enhances transparency and clarity and contributes to internal audit of the process.

Alignment of the subject matter of each question was clarified by inclusion of learning objectives on drafts of written questions. This is a useful exercise both for external examiners - to assess suitability of questioned

material within the context of the curriculum - but perhaps also for the internal examiners, to maintain the focus of the question and to inform the marking.

It was noted that there has been a decline in weighting for the practical component of the examination. We believe that the practical parts of the examination - Spot test and the ISF oral - used to have a combined weighting of 20%. We understand that, since the removal of the Spot test, the ISF oral now has a weighting of 12% with the remaining 8% added to the MCQ. We were surprised by this allocation of marks, considering the fact that the practical aspects of the ISF oral are well regarded and this exam perhaps most closely resembles the jettisoned Spot test.

Response from college requested:

YES

Response from Robert Abayasekara (acting Year Leader)

The external examiners expressed some reservation with respect to the revised weightings allocated to the various components of the exam following the removal of the "Spot test". They *noted that there has been a decline in weighting for the practical component of the examination. We believe that the practical parts of the examination - Spot test and the ISF oral - used to have a combined weighting of 20%. We understand that, since the removal of the Spot test, the ISF oral now has a weighting of 12% with the remaining 8% added to the MCQ.* The external examiners may have misunderstood the situation. Much of the content that had been examined via the spot test has been reconfigured and incorporated into the MCQ paper (paper 1 as "practical-based MCQs". This along with the increase in weighting of the ISF oral exam means that the Spot test marks have merely been redistributed NOT lost. As such the overall exam retains at 20% the weighting for assessing the practical elements of the course.

3.7 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the procedures

ISF orals: This is an impressive and comprehensive mode of examination which yet again impressed the external examiners for its organisation and the range of material available. The use of live animals and plastinated material (and well-maintained pots) is especially commended. For various reasons, not least the Health and Safety aspects of the use of formalinised specimens, optimisation of the examination room environment and for the quality and clarity of the specimens themselves, the external examiners encourage the continued reduction of the use of fresh and formalin-fixed materials.

The external examiners acknowledge the considerable cost in terms of staff time in the organisation and conduction of the examination and do have concerns that it is sustainable.

It is recommended that the marking sheets for the ISF orals are reviewed and their role clarified.

It is also recommended that staff are re-briefed on their role in the marking process (such as clarifying the effects of "dove" versus "hawk" behaviour, the importance of script annotation, the accountability of team marking, and so on).

Response from college requested:

NO

Robert Abayasekara (Acting Year Leader).

We thank the external examiners for their positive endorsement of the ISF oral examinations. We note their concerns regarding the use of fresh/fixed specimens within the exam. Whilst we will continue to make every effort to reduce the utilization of such specimens we would suggest that the complete replacement of all fresh/fixed specimens would adversely affect the quality of the assessment experience and as such do not expect to be in a position to have completely replaced such material in the foreseeable future.

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Response from college requested: NO

4.2 An acceptable response has been made

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Response from college requested: NO

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:

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:

As previously noted, the fail rate was lower than at Liverpool veterinary school although the grade distributions are in line with Dublin veterinary school, for the equivalent examination.

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:

Excellent support was once again provided by the exams office throughout the process.

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:

Both the year leader and exam board chair were generous with their time and were proactive in discussing any pertinent issues with us.

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:

As mentioned previously, access to live animals for teaching and assessment is a great boon to the students' learning experience. Use of fixed specimens (other than good and well-maintained potted examples) should continue to be reduced.

The external examiners appreciate the enormous effort required by staff involved in the examination. However, it is noted that a robust examination system - as is operated at the RVC - does impose a considerable burden on staff, which continues to be a concern. Given the large number of students and the wide-ranging assessment, it is difficult to suggest ways of reducing the current workload although strategies for its alleviation, and / or adequate support of staff involved in the examination process, should be considered important and urgent, and subject of ongoing review.

Regarding the marking of scripts for large cohorts, two strategies may be worthy of consideration:

1. Dividing the scripts - two or more markers cover the same question i.e. each mark 100 scripts part a - d,
2. Dividing the question - each marker marks a part question for all scripts i.e one marker marks 200 scripts parts a & b and the other marks parts c & d.

At Liverpool it is found that option 2 gives a much better consistency of marking and prevents some of the problems that have previously been discussed in this external examiners' report.

Response from **YES**

college

requested:

Robert Abayasekara (Acting Year Leader).

Please See response to 3.4

The concerns of one of the external examiners with respect to current workload is noted. Currently there are no plans to increase student numbers. There are ongoing discussions which may result in a decrease in student numbers which could lead to an alleviation of staff marking burden.

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**