

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

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

#### **BVetMed Year 1**

This appendix contains Course Director's/Year Leader's responses to 2015/16 External Examiners' comments and updates to actions from 2014/15 External Examiners' report (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](mailto:afilipovic@rvc.ac.uk), 01707666938

Update to 2013/14 actions:

Question	External Examiners' comments	Year Leader's response	2014/15 Update	2015/16 Update
1.4 <b>Resources</b>	The BVM programme structure is complex as a consequence of the integrated, systems approach. To assist stage-specific external examiners, the relationship between, for example, years 1 and 2 could be articulated. We believe such an exercise has been completed for accreditation purposes. This is an aspect which might usefully be tabled at future INSET training.	The external examiners receive the course handbook in advance of proposed visits. The external examiners also received a briefing on the course content and level of knowledge expected for a particular strand or module for each of the years 1 and 2 at the time of the examination. It is however conceivable that very clear demarcation is not very easy to discern in a spiral curriculum like ours. <b>ACTION:</b> To provide an easy to grasp academic snapshot (map) showing interconnection and flow of teaching between years 1 and 2.	This has not been achieved but the process is underway to provide an easy to grasp integration map of teaching in 2015/16. It is however good to note that this was not an issue in the last academic year the reason most likely being that as all examiners are doing their second round of examining at the RVC and well acquainted with the teaching program.	This will be progressed through the mapping of learning outcomes exercise in 2016/17 for the whole BVetMed curriculum.  <b>An email is to be sent out to all external examiners at the same time the summer exams are sent out for moderation ( April 2017) seeking clarification as to which specific document each of the examiners would like see/ has failed to access via the RVC website or otherwise would like to receive in a different format if access on the website is not possible.</b>

Update to 2014/15 actions:

Question	External Examiners' comments	Year Leader's response	2015/16 Update
<b>2.2 Quality of candidates' knowledge and skills, with particular reference to those at the top, middle or bottom of the range</b>	A high proportion of students gain an overall mark in the either distinction- or merit-level category. From scrutiny of the various elements of the assessed work for these students, it is clearly evident such awards are deserving. In contrast, it is also clear that the relatively small group of students in the bottom range display a uniformly weak performance across the board.	The observation that " a relatively small group of students in the bottom range display a uniformly weak performance across the board" is worthwhile noting. Such students should be monitored through Academic Progress Committee (APC) in a view to institute mitigating measures to help them succeed. <b>Action Required:</b> APC committee to be informed of this weak student group <b>Action assigned to: Mark Cleasby</b>	The action is to be reviewed in 2016/17 due to changes with APC committee structuring.  Mark Cleasby has now left the College. As above, the action is to be reviewed.

<p><b>3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous</b></p>	<p>Strategic learning</p> <p>The structure of Papers 2 and 3, which both offer question choice, could allow strategic learning with students able to avoid assessment in major threads of the first year curriculum e.g. animal husbandry and alimentary system. Our analysis of student question choices in the June 2015 examination lends support for this possibility. A remedy would be to introduce a section in each examination paper that contains compulsory questions addressing the major strands, with a free choice in separate sections for strands covered more superficially within the first year.</p> <p>ISF orals</p> <p>These oral examinations continue to provide a rich opportunity for students to excel and the external examiners continue to be impressed by the level of teaching staff engagement in this part of the assessment. However, we continue to note a potential for inequity in the assessment as some students are examined by their tutors which results in a different experience than when examined by a non-tutor. Furthermore, we suggest more consistency is sought when informing students about the transition to level 3 questioning during the oral examination</p> <p>Transition to level 3 questions needs to be different between areas/strands which</p>	<p>The alignment of learning objectives and teaching in the BVetMed course aims at achieving learning irrespective of depth covered in each part of spiral curriculum. While our assessment exercise in the whole course is very robust, it is conceivable that in giving choice in papers 2 and 3 allows for a student to selectively avoid answering a question (s) from specific strands. It is equally important to note on the other hand that making some questions from particular strands compulsory allows the student to deem other parts of the course to be less import. This is a sure recipe for strategic learners to conveniently avoid studying or applying themselves to do a wholesome study of all the topics covered in the year something that the course does not advocate for.</p> <p>Action Required: A set of a 'must answer' questions drawn from strands covered in detail be introduced in sections of the exam question sheet.</p> <p><b>Action assigned to:</b> Raymond Macharia/Exams office/CMC</p>	<p>A blueprinting of the exams exercise is taking place and a number of changes are being adopted for 2016/17 exams.</p> <p>a) Paper 1 –MCQ will now incorporate aspects examined through Spot test ( a practical paper) which is now abolished. Consequently, the number of questions will increase to 60 from the current 45 with the time increased from 1 hour to 1.5 hrs.</p> <p>b) Paper 2- There will be no choice and candidates will answer all questions. The rationale is that all the questions will seek to integrate to varying extent, all the materials learnt in the course and as such each candidate will demonstrate the grasp of the whole course content as opposed to selectively answering some questions relating to only one part of the course.</p> <p>c) Paper 3 ( Essay)-will offer choice of questions and candidates will need demonstrate depth of knowledge .</p> <p>d) Integrated structure and function (ISF) will continue as an important practical paper where students are tested on factual recall to synthesis and application of knowledge.</p>
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	<p>have been covered in lectures superficially as opposed to areas/strands which have been covered in greater depth, i.e. the transition needs to take into account the extent of study in a particular strand.</p>		
<p><b>3.4 Standard of marking</b></p>	<p>Overall, the standard of marking was high and in line with marking guidelines. However, it was noted that in regard of one essay question (Paper 3, June 2015) the marker failed to adhere to the Common Grading Scheme (CGS), to the detriment of numerous students. It should also be noted that the outline answer given for this question included the marker's own marking criteria, which differed from the CGS. The external examiners raised this at the examination board and, as the mean for this question was significantly different from those of the other questions on the paper, a decision was made to remove it from the assessment. Findings from a preliminary study by an internal member of board (B Catchpole) of the methodologies available for statistical analysis of assessment results provided unequivocal support for the question being removed. The external examiners highly commend this initiative.</p> <p>Whilst we commend the process of sample marking it is important to use it also in the process to identify outlying questions for which the marking may not align with the CGS. It is vital it does not become a simple tick box exercise. A way around this is to reconsider the departure from blind marking that was done previously.</p>	<p>The common grading scheme is generic in nature and the descriptors in different categories or grades may not always conform 100% with a markers own model answer both in quality and quantity-in some cases there are grey areas between one grade and the next. However irrespective of these inherent issues lack of adherence to the requirements of the CGS cannot be condoned. It is imperative that a marker should note 1) selection and coverage of material, 2) understanding and 3) clarity in an essay and carefully gauge t against the CGS.</p> <p><b>Action Required:</b> Careful selection of the exam questions (and inspection of the model answer) is carried out by a team of internal experts before submission to the external examiner. Application of statistical tests (as explained by the external examiners) ideally could be helpful in cases where an obvious outlier median mark for an individual question is encountered. However a more marker-specific approach to applying CGS descriptors is to be encouraged other than resulting to statistics. The exams office will provide Ripley analysis data for MCQ paper to gauge the efficiency and accuracy of the MCQ standard setting.</p> <p><b>Action assigned to:</b> Raymond Macharia/ Exams office</p>	<p>Completed</p>

	<p>The absence of Speedwell analysis data for Paper 1 (MCQ) was disappointing, as this would have been very useful in gauging the efficiency and accuracy of the MCQ standard setting (performed for the first time in 2014-2015).</p>		
<p><b>4.1 Comments I have made in previous years have been addressed to my satisfaction</b></p>	<p>Comment made in last year's report: 'Care in marking subjective questions to acknowledge that ethical areas should be treated with equal respect to both sides of the debate'</p> <p>The examiners consider this has not been addressed and this was a significant factor in the problem encountered in the marking of an essay question in Paper 3, June 2015 (see Section 3.4). Subjective questions should be avoided in essay style questions.</p>	<p>The observations made were valid.</p> <p><b>Action Required:</b> That the concerned internal examiner (s) as well as the staff in PS strand be made aware of the need to provide model answers that allow for the alternative views in questions dealing with ethical issues.</p> <p><b>Action assigned to:</b> Elizabeth Chan/ Raymond Macharia</p>	<p>Completed</p>

# Collaborative Report

Exam board meeting: 08-Jul-2016

**Bachelor of Veterinary Medicine, Year 1, 2015/16**

**Lead examiner: Dr Geoff Pearson**

**Collaborating examiner(s): Dr Paul Loughna, Dr Michael Lee**

## The Programme

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

### 1.1 Course content

The course content is appropriate for this stage of an integrated programme of this type.

**Response from college requested: NO**

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

The learning objectives appear appropriate and comprehensive. The content and quality of the students assessed work indicates that the objectives are clearly met for a very high proportion of the cohort.

**Response from college requested: NO**

### 1.3 Teaching methods

As far as we are able to assess, the teaching methodology is broad, is commensurate with both the range of teaching material being delivered and the outcomes being assessed, and includes knowledge, understanding and problem solving.

**Response from college requested: NO**

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

Resources appear adequate. However, there are indications that increasing student numbers may present problems. Our primary concern is the burden on current academic and administrative staff involved in an assessment process for over 200 students, a factor which may have been contributory to a possible missing candidate script in the recent BVetMed 1 examination diet.

There is an associated concern for the quality and objectivity when an individual is required to mark 150 plus essays.

We also wish to flag the potentiality for welfare issues associated with physical examination of live animals (two horses) during anatomy teaching and assessment for large student cohorts.

**Response from college requested: NO**

**COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia**

#### **Course Director Response:**

We take welfare very seriously and there are formal procedures through Ethics and Welfare Committee to oversee the use of animals in teaching.

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

We were given a log in for RVC LEARN but have experienced difficulties accessing documents on the website.

Response from college requested:

**NO**

**Raymond Macharia-Year Leader response-**

An email is to be sent out to all external examiners at the same time the summer exams are sent out for moderation ( April 2017) seeking clarification as to which specific document each of the examiners would like see/ has failed to access on the RVC website or otherwise would like to receive in a different format if access on the website is not possible.

## 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 student ability appears to be commensurate with that of similar cohorts at other UK Universities. The three examiners (from three separate Universities) cover most aspects of the course.

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

A high proportion of students gain an overall mark in the either distinction- or merit-level category. From scrutiny of the various elements of the assessed work for these students, it is clearly evident such awards are deserving. In contrast, it is also clear that the relatively small group of students in the bottom range display a uniformly weak performance across the board.

Response from college requested: **NO**

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

Response from college requested: **NO**



## Assessment Procedures

Please comment, as appropriate, on:

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

The range of assessment methods is in general appropriate (see comment regarding Essays in 3.2) and aligned to the stated learning objectives.

**Response from college requested: NO**

### 3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous

For the most part, the individual assessment processes appear to be rigorously designed and delivered. The examiners are pleased that an issue of Strategic Learning raised in a previous report has been addressed. Areas of concern that the external examiners wish to flag:

Essays

Due to the high student number it is felt that the use of essays may result in a lack of robustness and objectivity in assessment (see 3.4).

MCQs

After reviewing draft examination papers, external examiners have commented on more than one occasion regarding the failure of MCQ questions to pass the 'cover-up test'. This, added to the complex nature of distractors and double negative phrasing in the question stem, places an unnecessary and unwanted time constraint on exam candidates.

**Response from college requested: YES**

**COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia**

**Course Director Response:**

The essay paper (3) is made up of two parts- A and B comprising of 3 questions each from 6 different topics covered in the year. A student must answer two questions from each section. A careful selection and distribution of questions from three topics (strands) that are covered in total and three topics covered partially in the first year ensure a good coverage and assessment of materials taught in the first year.

A great attempt to adhere to the advice of the external examiners have been made but occasionally some questions have inevitably been used that do not meet the 'cover-up test'.

**Action Required:**

Essay and Problem Solving papers: We are in the process of blueprinting the exams and which will translate not only a greater alignment of the assessment with learning but also creating a more rigorous and robust assessment. It is envisaged that creating many sections in the exam requiring a student to answer at least one question per section OR developing individual questions with multiple components from different strands (e.g. Alimentary, Immunology and pathology) will achieve the required assessment threshold.

MCQ: In order to correct the anomalies raised by the external examiners, a team of experts (staff) have been selected to review the existing MCQs bank and in addition suggest topics or areas that may need the drafting of new questions.

**Action Deadline:**

01-Apr-2017

**Action assigned to:**

Raymond Macharia and Exams office

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

The level of assessment is consistent with the FHEQ and is in line with other institutions awarding the veterinary degree.

**Response from college requested: NO**

### 3.4 Standard of marking

Although, overall, the standard of marking was high and in line with marking guidelines, we must unfortunately reiterate a comment made in our 2014-2015 report. In regard of one essay question (Paper 3, June 2016) the marker failed to adhere to the Common Grading Scheme (CGS), resulting in the inaccurate and unfair allocation of marks to a significant number of students. As had happened previously, the outline answer given for this question included the marker's own marking criteria, which differed from the CGS. Furthermore, no indication was given to the candidates on the weighting of marks for the different components of the question (which was indicated in the marker's outline answer).

Possibly due to the time constraints of assessing large numbers of students, it seems that the procedure of sample second-marking (commended in 2014-2015) is no longer routine; sample marking is now conducted on a needs-must basis following a statistical analysis of Paper 2 and 3 question performance. However, whilst such an analysis is informative and can identify unreliable questions, it cannot affirm the correct usage of the CGS during the marking process. We therefore recommend a clear procedure be implemented to deal with outliers following the identification of such questions.

Despite our earlier comments on the style of MCQ questions (see 3.2), we commend the introduction of standard setting of the MCQ assessment. This has clearly enabled the identification of unreliable questions and will result in improvement of the question bank.

**Response from college requested: YES**

**COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia**

#### **Course Director Response:**

Agreed- In one essay question (Paper 3, June 2016) the marker failed to adhere to the Common Grading Scheme (CGS). This was purely inadvertent. The examiner had been requested to reformat the question from a problem solving type to a essay type (and which was done). However the examiner did not change the marking scheme from a 10 point to CGS. When this issue was raised by the externals. From the start this question though sample marked was an outlier after statistical analysis. Routine sample second marking is continuing supplemented by needs based second marking following statistical analysis. A team of subject experts (staff) were assigned to remark the question and align the marks particularly of all candidates obtaining 50% or less marks.

#### **Action Required:**

All the exams questions will be reviewed by an internal panel to ensure adherence to the requisite grading scheme.

In addition, the blueprinting of the exams which is soon coming to effect will ensure that a clear procedure to scrutinise all questions before submitting them to the external examiners.

All Essay questions will be statistically analysed after marking and those deemed to be outliers will be subjected to further sample marking of the whole question in addition to marking of specific questions from failing candidates.

To note: That the statistics carried out this year involved paper 2 and 3 results from this year and the previous 2 years in order to streamline and validate the current results. Fortunately it will be easier for coming academic year (2016/17) as it will involve analysing 2016/17 papers only.

A review of the MCQ bank as stated in the response to 3.2 above will in the first instance clearly identify unreliable questions and will result in improvement of the question bank. The standard setting of MCQ paper will continue as before.

#### **Action Deadline:**

01-Apr-2017

#### **Action assigned to:**

Raymond Macharia/Exams office

**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)**

There is excellent administrative support for the assessment process provided by the examinations office; this extends from the timely drafting and review of papers right through to the board meeting.

As discussed in Section 3.4, there was an issue regarding the adherence to the CGS, which was a reoccurrence from last year. However, marking arrangements were dealt with efficiently by the examination chair, both with the support of the examinations office administration and in full consideration of the views of the external examiners. As such, no candidates in the examination were disadvantaged and the procedures for assessment and the determination of awards were therefore sound and fairly conducted.

**Response from college requested: YES**

**COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia**

**Course Director Response:**

I concur with the examiners observation.

**Action Required:**

As stated in 3.4 above, the mix-up in the grading scheme was quickly addressed. A thorough scrutiny of all questions and their model answers will be put in place to forestall such an unfortunate circumstance.

**Action Deadline:**

01-Apr-2017

**Action assigned to:**

Raymond Macharia/ Exams office

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

The standard setting of MCQ's is to be commended and the new developed methodology should be further disseminated as a pedagogical advancement.

Although we commend the change in structure of Papers 2 and 3, in response to our comments in the 2014-15 report, which now no longer allow students to avoid certain subject areas, we still question the availability of choice within such exam papers within a professional course.

We would also again like to raise concerns regarding the removal of sample marking if essay style questions are to be retained (see 3.4).

**Response from college requested: NO**

**COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia**

**Course Director Response:**

Contrary to the comment made above by the External Examiners, routine sample marking is continuing to take place.

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

INSET days continue to provide an excellent forum for discussion and reflection on assessment methods for the veterinary programme.

A lack of response following external examiners comments on exam scripts was a concern and should be improved. It was not clear why certain comments were not adopted and others were.

**Response from college requested: NO**

**COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia**

**Course Director Response:**

We regret the lack of response which is due to staff changes at a very busy time and will ensure that the response is received in future.

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

**No**

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

See section 3.4 for areas which have and have not been addressed following previous years report.

**Response from college requested: YES**

**COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia**

**Course Director Response:**

A response have been made in in section 3.4

**Action Required:**

**Action Deadline:**

**Action assigned to:**

**4.2 An acceptable response has been made**

**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**

**COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia**

**Course Director Response:**

**Action Required:**

**Action Deadline:**

**Action assigned to:**

**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:**

**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:**

The ISF oral is an excellent component of the assessment process and all staff involved its structure and organisation are commended.

A number of other veterinary institutions no longer use the essay format for major summative examinations. We have raised concerns about essay questions in this and previous reports.

**Response from college requested: NO**

**COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia**

**Course Director Response:**

We believe that the Long answer question is a valid format for assessing depth and integration of knowledge and understanding.

**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**