

ANNUAL QUALITY IMPROVEMENT REPORT 2015/16

Appendix 3: External Examiners' report

BVetMed Year 2

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, 01707666938

Update to 2014/15 actions:

Question	External Examiners' comment	Year Leader's response	Update in 2015/16
<p>1.2 Learning objectives, and the extent to which they were met</p>	<p>The examiners would find it highly desirable to have a summarized version of the learning objectives and curricula of the BVETMED2 course as a single document. This would serve two major purposes.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It would greatly facilitate mapping (blue printing) of the contents of the entire examination against the curricula and learning objectives to demonstrate objectivity and balanced sampling of the entire examination. 2. It would provide a reference to the external examiners to track the exam contents 	<p>The BVM2 course handbook does contain the requisite information i.e. the content and learning objectives for each strand delivered in BVM2 is contained within the handbook. My understanding is that the EE's are provided with this document. Do the EE's require an edited version of this? It is also important to point out that given the integrated nature of the BVM curriculum, it would be misleading to consider the objectives and the BVM2 curriculum in isolation. Being given access to Learn pages of all BVetMed years will enable the External Examiners to see the full breadth of the curriculum.</p>	<p>Comprehensive mapping of learning objectives and learning outcomes will be taking place in 2016/17.</p>
<p>2.3 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the students' performance</p>	<p>The students performed well in many areas, similar to previous years. The consistency of the marks was good across the board, with merit and distinction students performing well in most areas and no single paper or section bringing down failing students.</p> <p>This year, students performed poorly in the paper 2 (problem-solving questions) on microbiology and epidemiology. The mean mark for both these questions was below 30%, which was a serious concern for the</p>	<p>The poor performance in the exam in these two subject areas will be drawn to the attention of the current cohort by the year leader. The correlation between poor performance by their predecessors in the exam in these subject areas and the markedly poor attendance at teaching sessions (lectures/DL's) will be reiterated. Staff teaching those particular subject areas will also be invited to</p>	<p>This was not an issue in 2015-16. There were no exam questions that were answered particularly poorly by the whole cohort</p>

	external examiners. This was discussed in some detail at the Board of Examiners' meeting. The externals are satisfied that appropriate effort s were made by staff in contents delivery and that poor student attendance to the corresponding lectures/instructions was a contributing factor to the below par performance.	remind students of the clear relationship between student absence from teaching sessions and their subsequent exam failure! We trust that these measures will avoid a repetition in the 2016 exams.	
3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous	a. Staff to review question performance and standard setting process.	Student performance in individual questions will be monitored. The standard setting process that is followed is uniformly adhered to across the 5 years of the BVM course. The process that was followed for the BVM2 2015 exams utilized the criterion-based Angoff method (Angoff, 1971) and was identical to the methodology used since 2010 - such an approach met with the approval of the External examiners in each of the previous years. The Angoff method has been suggested to be more reliable when compared to other norm-based methods for standard setting in undergraduate medical exams (George et al 2006 BMC Medical Education doi:10.1186/1472-6920-6-46). The detailed statistical output, similar to Speedwell, will be available in future.	Update 11/8/16: Statistics relating to question performance were provided to external examiners this year, as they have acknowledged in their 2015-16 report. The new standard setting process, which uses an average pass mark gained from multiple approaches (internal methodology) piloted (but not used) in 2014-15 and approved by LTAC for use in the 2015-16 exams, replaces the above approach used in 2014-15 and in previous years. The external examiners are happy with this new approach.
3.2 Extent to which assessment	b. The rounding of marks to align with	We will ensure that rounding is carried out centrally at the end of the process	There is still confusion amongst markers regarding whether it is acceptable to give half

procedures are rigorous	the common grading system needs clarification.	and not by individual examiners. The exams office will ensure that clear advice is passed onto to the examiners with respect to the procedure for rounding of marks in when marking PSQ questions.	marks in PSQ questions, and how rounding should be performed. For clarity, we will ask the exams office to state clearly on the instructions in marking packs for future exams, that half marks are permitted, and no rounding should be performed by the marker.
3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous	c. The balance of content in this examination should be revisited. The external examiners also request the opportunity to observe the conduct of the spot exam (as for the ISF (oral exam)).	In response to feedback from External examiners, they were invited to the re-sit Spot Test in September 2015. On this occasion the EE's were unable to make use of the invitation to attend. A similar invitation to observe the conduct of the Spot Test in 2016 will be forthcoming - we hope the EEs will be able to attend on this occasion. In terms of content, both Pathology and Parasitology were examined extensively via the written papers (MCQs and PSQs) and as such were not represented as much in the Spot Test, whose focus was the examination of those areas that were less represented in the written papers. Anatomy, Histology and Imaging are examined more effectively by Spot Tests.	Update 11/8/16: External examiners did not attend the spot test in June 2016 however this examination is due to be removed.
3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous	d. To improve transparency and feedback to students it is recommended that the marking scheme includes the specific descriptors for grades beyond 75%.	The CGS which is utilized for marking of Research Project 1 (RP1) does contain descriptors for grades beyond 75%. There is a reluctance on the part of markers to award marks above 75%. Markers will be encouraged to make use of the full range of the CGS.	This was not a criticism in 2015-16 relating to RP1 suggesting better spread of marks and usage of the scheme by markers. However, the same issue - in terms of variability between examiners in utilizing the spread of available descriptors - was noted with respect to essay exam questions. The use and application of the common grading

			scheme might therefore be a pertinent topic for staff development training. However, the application of the scheme will always be somewhat subjective, and individual variation will continue to occur.
3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous	e. To minimize bias research projects should be randomly assigned to markers.	Such an approach has been discussed with a view to its adoption. Sample marking showed no evidence of bias. However, for 2016 onwards RP1 will be marked summatively by staff other than the tutor but selected from the same department.	Update 11/8/16: This action was not completed. After much internal discussion it was decided that tutors will continue to mark RP1 projects, due to the significantly increased marking workload of the alternative. Random sample marking was again applied this year, to every tutor, again showing no evidence of bias, and satisfaction with the marks awarded.
3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous	f. Reduce the number of staff involved in marking the RP1 projects and provide more time to complete the process.	A decrease in the number of staff marking RP1 would undoubtedly improve the consistency of the marking. However in practice, the sheer number of projects that require marking (>220) means that the current practice of all tutors marking ~6 projects will continue. We are constrained by logistical considerations. We mitigate this by following the College policy on sample marking.	See comment above.
3.5 In your view, are the procedures for assessment and the determination of awards sound and fairly conducted?	a. To continue to make the review process run smoothly in the future, bearing in mind that there would be two new external examiners next year, we suggest that all externals, prior to their visit to the college, be sent by email a list of guides and documents pertaining to the examination process, including:	We will send emails to External Examiners hyperlinking the relevant documentation	I believe this was carried out in 2015-16

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Assessment and awards regulation 2. Previous year's external examiner report 3. How examinations are marked 4. Guidelines for RPI reports 		
	<p>b. At the start of the review process, it is suggested that external examiners be given a short 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.</p>	<p>We thank the External examiners for this excellent suggestion. The incoming year leader (Dr Sarah Channon) will aim to brief the external examiners at the outset of proceeding, providing an overview of both the conduct and student performance in the diet of exams under consideration. She will also use this opportunity to draw the attention of the externals to any apparent anomalies in either conduct or performance.</p>	<p>Update 11/8/16: In 2015-6 both the year leader and exam board chair informally briefed the first external examiner to arrive at the college of the examination performance and any issues that were pertinent. Since the timing of the team of external examiners arriving at the college was staggered to allow for variations in individual travel plans, a formal briefing was not arranged. Instead, the exam board chair and year leader were available to brief the externals, or answer questions on any matters throughout the two day visit. However, since this appears to be a recommendation from the external examiners again in 2016-17 we will endeavor to formally timetable a briefing at the upcoming visit in September and in future years for summer examinations.</p>

Collaborative Report

Exam board meeting: 12-Jul-2016

Bachelor of Veterinary Medicine, Year 2, 2015/16

Lead examiner: Professor Kin-Chow Chang

Collaborating examiner(s): Mr David Kilroy, Dr Harriet BrooksBrownlie , Dr Karen Noble

The Programme

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

1.1 Course content

This course continues to keep its wide-range of disciplines that encompass the core subjects of anatomy, physiology, pharmacology, microbiology, pathology, animal husbandry and communication skills. The integrative approach facilitates the introduction of clinical aspects of veterinary medicine early in the course.

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 comprehensively assessed by the thorough and in depth examination of the students.

Response from college requested: **NO**

1.3 Teaching methods

The teaching methods consist of traditional didactic lectures, practical classes (including dissections), directed learning, computer-assisted learning, tutorials and applied anatomy sessions. They appear wholly appropriate and effective.

Response from college requested: **NO**

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

The course appears well resourced and meets teaching and examination needs.

**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 and 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 an integrated course similar to other UK vet schools. The distribution of the marks and fail rate were comparable to similar courses in other institutions, and were similar to the results of the same course from previous years. The external examiners were in agreement with the list of students who were deemed to have failed their second year exam.

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 years. The fail rate was in the expected range for a robust and discriminatory veterinary course. The distinction and merit students performed well across the different parts of the exam. Some of the borderline students have limited skills in written English which could have affected their performance.

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)

The assessment methods are continually fine-tuned based on an existing robust and well established template. The range of assessment methods is appropriate, comprehensive and effective. Although labour intensive, the oral (ISF) oral exam was commended for being extremely well organised; access to the live animals during this exam was particularly helpful.

Response from college requested: **NO**

3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous

The assessment process is highly rigorous and suitably varied. It comprises an MCQ paper, a problem-solving paper, an essay paper, a spot test and an ISF examination. In addition, there is an in-course assessment, a research project and an assessment on group presentations. The statistical analytical output on examination performance was thorough and detailed.

Paper 1 (MCQ):

Statistical output was presented which was clear and informative and showed the paper was reliable and discriminatory. The external examiners considered the exam to be appropriately standard set (using an average of Hofstee, Cohen and internal methodology) with a pass mark of around 46%. The removal of an ambiguous question from the exam was appropriate.

Paper 2 (Problem solving):

The questions were well constructed, fair and the marking schemes were clear. There are plans to modify the format of this paper to remove choice and present 6 compulsory problem-solving questions. The advantages of such a change will include the ability to better compare individual performance across the entire cohort.

Paper 3 (Essays):

Whilst there was no inconsistency detected within each question, there was little or no annotation in some batches of scripts making it difficult to determine how marks had been allocated. There was inconsistency in the application of the common grading scheme (CGS) system between markers with some markers reluctant to use marks between 0 – 35% or 75 - 100% resulting in one question having an unusual distribution of marks.

Oral exam (ISF):

ISF was well organised and run with a good range of materials and resources that were well utilised by staff. There was a high degree of professionalism and consistency of examination by staff. Most students were able to integrate their knowledge across subject areas and showed considerable skills in adapting to the range of questions posed to them.

Spot exam:

The spot exam was not witnessed by the external examiners which is due to be phased out in next year's exams.

Research projects Research projects (RP1):

The reports produced by students were of a high standard and this component of the assessment requires a different set of skills to the rest of the Year 2 examination.

Response from college requested: **YES**

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Sarah Channon

Course Director Response:

We acknowledge that despite clear steps by the college this year to ensure that markers annotate exam scripts that there is still considerable variability in the amount and quality of annotations. There has been improvement, with the vast majority of markers annotating this year to some extent. Those who did not annotate have been flagged to their line managers. Improving this area is an ongoing project and should continue to progress: further guidance should be provided to staff regarding the level and nature of annotation requested – perhaps in the form of a real anonymised example of good annotation practice, to indicate the optimum level of annotation.

In general markers have been better this year at utilizing the full range of the common grading scheme descriptors. However this is still variable between individuals, since the (by its very nature somewhat subjective) scheme is open to individual interpretation of the descriptors. Questions with unusual distributions of marks will continue to be sample marked in accordance with sample marking guidelines (see later comments re sample marking).

Action Required:

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:

01-Jun-2017

Action assigned to:

Exams Office; Brian Catchpole

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 manner that was able to differentiate the depth of knowledge and understanding of each student.

Response from college requested: **NO**

3.4 Standard of marking

The standard of marking was broadly of a very high and consistent standard, with significant attempts to ensure fairness based on well-defined CGSs. With few exceptions, examiners had annotated scripts which helped to evidence the allotment of marks.

Some examiners were inconsistent in the use of the CGS which could have minor implications for students; the marking of one question in Paper 3 was presented with an unusual distribution of grades. Some internal examiners appeared not to have used the full spectrum of the CGS which could potentially affect grade boundaries of individual students.

The external examiners were made aware that sample marking, unlike previous years, was not undertaken in any of the written papers. Whilst there was no evidence that this omission had any adverse prejudicial effect on overall results outcome, there was some confusion amongst staff whether statistical analysis had replaced sample marking. It is clear that whilst it may be inefficient to sample mark across the board, a more robust system should be put in place to target sample marking at those papers where statistical analysis has revealed an unusual distribution of marks.

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.

Response from college requested: **YES**

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Sarah Channon

Course Director Response:

As agreed at the college's Learning, Teaching and Assessment committee, the newly employed statistical analysis of question performance is NOT intended to replace sample marking, but to complement and enhance the sample marking process. The agreed college guidelines were adhered to: these state that where students have a choice of examination questions (as in the essay paper, and for 2015-16 the PSQ paper), questions "are initially evaluated statistically before deciding whether or not sample marking is required (as judged by the Chair of the exam board and two other members of academic staff). Those questions that show good discriminatory capacity and agreement with the overall student performance in the examination will not be required to be sampled. If the reliability statistics indicate any concern in terms of question performance/marking, they will be sample marked, with 50% of the sample taken randomly across the marking range and 50% of scripts representing those individuals with the most variance from their expected score (based on final mark in the examination)" [Excerpt from LTAC Paper LT/08/15]. In 2015-16 no questions were identified as poorly performing using these criteria, and therefore none were sample marked on this occasion.

In 2016-17, there will be no choice for students in the PSQ paper. Where there is no choice, the whole cohort subject to the same marker, thus reliability statistics will be applied and there will be no sampling unless there is evidence of inconsistency in marking. The risk is low since the opportunity for variability in marking is small where there is more objectivity in assessing

responses against keyword answers to questions of several parts.

The suggestion of a form (recommendation 2) is excellent – this would allow documentation of this (currently informal) decision making process; a tick box proforma for each question for example would ensure correct application of our internal guidelines.

Action Required:

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

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)

Yes. We received excellent logistical support from the administration team which made our task of reviewing the whole assessment much easier. The statistical analysis of exam data was also excellent. In future it would be helpful to have a short presentation to external examiners at the earliest opportunity, summarising exam performance and current policy e.g. it would have been helpful for us to know that sample marking (moderation) had been replaced by statistical analysis.

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.

Response from college requested: **YES**

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Sarah Channon

Course Director Response:

Both the year leader and exam board chair informally briefed the first external examiner to arrive onsite, since this year individual schedules meant that the examining team arrived at different times/on different dates. The year leader is happy to fulfill this request at the next visit of the

externals to the college (and in the future). We will formally schedule a meeting prior to arrival of the external examiners.

The External Examiners were notified of the dates of Exam Board in February 2016. In future confirmation of receipt of these emails would be sought.

Action Required:

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

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

The issue of sample marking has been covered earlier.

The internal examiners did a superb job in assessing a large number of students in a variety of ways. In the long term, some less burdensome ways to assess the students should be considered to alleviate the heavy demand on staff.

Response from college requested: **NO**

3.7 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the procedures

None

Response from college requested: **NO**

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:

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

requested:

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

Mr D.K

'Yes' should follow 'Lead examiner's response'. And 'No' should follow 'Response from College'

required...'

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:

NA

Response from college requested: **NO**

Mr D.K

Access to live animals during ISF oral exams is especially valuable for integrating anatomy with clinical examination.

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)

NA

Response from college requested: **NO**