

ANNUAL QUALITY IMPROVEMENT REPORT 2019/20

Appendix 3: External Examiners' report

MSc Veterinary Epidemiology

This appendix contains Year Leader's responses to 2019/20 External Examiners' comments and updates to actions from previous External Examiners' reports (if applicable).

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

For support or advice please contact Ana Filipovic, Academic Quality Officer 'Standards', afilipovic@rvc.ac.uk, 01707666938

Appendix 3 consists of:

a.	Updates to actions from previous years' reports
b.	2019/20 Collaborative Annual Report with responses from Course Director

. Updates to actions from previous years' reports

Report Question	External Examiners' comments & suggested actions	Course Director/Year Leader's response & Action	Update in 2019/20
<p>3.4 Standard of marking</p>	<p>... given the modest number of students, sample marking seems of limited benefit wrt reducing work load. Secondly, where discordant marks were recorded for individual students, there seemed no clear system to achieve a revised mark.</p>	<p>Sample marking was introduced on this course for the first time this year in line with College requirements, but due to the small number of students on the course, may not be appropriate. Action: Course directors to consider whether to return to double marking of all assessment and exam scripts for this course.</p>	<p>Sample marking will continue to be used as per College requirements (double marking is no longer an option). If possible, all first markers will be internal even if the question is set by someone external to the College.</p>
<p>4.4 I was able to scrutinise an adequate sample of students' work and marks to enable me to carry out my duties</p>	<p>It would be helpful to have more time to look at student projects, ideally in print, to be able to compare between them easily</p>	<p>External examiners to be invited to attend project vivas (although this will decrease the amount of time they have to look at student projects) and course directors to liaise with Exams Office to see whether it is possible to allow the external examiners more time to review projects.</p>	<p>External examiners have access to student projects online during the week prior to the exam board and are officially invited to be present the day before the exam board as well as the day of the exam board. It was unfortunate that the external examiner was on his own (Dr Ann Lindberg had resigned shortly after the interim exam board and had not yet been replaced) and was only able to be present on the day of the exam board, and thus was unable to make use of the full 1.5 days allotted for the task. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of the Exams Office to print out all projects, and it was felt that asking students to provide a bound hardcopy (at their own expense) solely for this purpose was inappropriate. The external examiners were reminded of the time available to them. Having two external examiners again this year has also relieved some of the pressure from Professor Alasdair Cook.</p>

Collaborative Report

Exam board meeting: 21-Sep-2020

MSc in Veterinary Epidemiology, 2019/20

Lead examiner: Professor Alasdair Cook

Collaborating examiner(s): Dr Jasmeet Kaler

The Programme

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

1.1 Course content

The course continues to offer an excellent training in veterinary epidemiology, benefitting from the association with LSHTM.

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

Clear learning objectives are defined for each module and assessment is matched onto these objectives

1.3 Teaching methods

The course has inevitably been impacted by COVID-19, which has severely limited direct instruction and personal interaction. However, the academic staff and students deserve congratulations for their adaptability and patience with necessary changes.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Kim Stevens

Course Director Response:

Only the final module (Applied Veterinary Epidemiology; 5 weeks x 2.5 days/week) was impacted by COVID - module delivered under lockdown.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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

The course appears to be adequately resourced; it is a strength that optional modules are shared amongst other programmes

1.5 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the Programme

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

I have experience as an external examiner on other UK-based MSc courses. Through this and other personal experience, I consider that students performance on this Vet Epidemiology MSc is equivalent to or greater than that of their peers on other related courses. In particular, they show strength in quantitative analysis.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Kim Stevens

Course Director Response:

Thank you! We consider the extensive quantitative analysis aspect of this course to be one of its main strengths.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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

Students attain a range of marks from pass to excellence in distinction. At the lower end of performance, students display competence in understanding and expressing epidemiological concepts and in conducting data analysis albeit with guidance. At the top end, students demonstrate the ability to undertake independent work in study design, data analysis and reporting, to a level which is excellent as either a precursor to a PhD or for entry into employment in a research-based institution or company at an appropriate level.

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

Students will have been impacted by the unprecedented impact of the COVID pandemic. It is a testament to their resilience and motivation that they have managed their learning effectively, benefiting from the strenuous efforts of teaching staff to mitigate the consequences of COVID

Please comment, as appropriate, on:

3.1 Assessment methods (relevance to learning objectives and curriculum)

A range of assessment methods are used, including formal exams comprising short and longer answers, assessed student presentations and project work. These are both appropriate and directly related to learning objectives.

3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous

Assessment procedures are uniformly rigorous, with oversight across the examinations through the Board of Examiners.

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

Assessment is consistent with FHEQ

3.4 Standard of marking

A high standard of marking is demonstrated. A robust procedure is in place for agreement where any discrepancy arises for double-marked submissions.

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)

Assessment procedures are sound and fair. This year, COVID meant that the Board of Examiners was virtual rather than at RVC. I am grateful to the programme director and administration for making this process as painless as possible.

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

During to COVID, assessment was conducted remotely. I am content that students were given a good level of briefing in advance and that all was done to make the processes as fair as possible. As discussed below, an adjustment process was implemented to account for the possible impact of COVID on learning and assessment.

3.7 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the procedures

, The programme faced a challenge to ensure that students did not suffer any detrimental impact in marking as a consequence of COVID. To this end and in common with guidance across RVC programmes, an adjustment process was implemented to align awards at pass, merit and distinction taking into account student-ranked performance across the year. Any such system may yield apparently anomalous results; for example, where the barrier between a pass and merit occurs. These adjustments were fairly considered by the Board of Examiners . However, in the future, if such an adjustment process is to be used again, the impact of placing a small number of students into grade categories by proportion should be reflected upon. This year, there were 9 students completing their studies. Thus, division into categories of Distinction/ Merit / as the top and second 20% is difficult. It would be helpful if the Board of Examiners were given discretion to moderate between pass/merit/distinction for students who fall on the border between these grades.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Kim Stevens

Course Director Response:

Agree that the adjustment process was not as appropriate for a very small cohort, such as the MSc Vet Epi, as opposed to the larger BVetMed courses for which one must assume it was originally designed, and tweaking the process to allow for use with small cohorts should be considered.

Action Required:

Exams office to create an amended adjustment process for small cohorts or Board of Examiners given discretion to moderate as they see fit.

Action Deadline:

31-May-2021

Action assigned to:

Exams office

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

4.2 An acceptable response has been made

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

4.3 I approved the papers for the Examination

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Comments that I offered were taken into account in the preparation of exam papers.

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:

I greatly appreciated the support from RVC in accessing materials remotely; there were some issues with access that were resolved with help from the IT team. The greatest challenge as an external was in reviewing project reports, as these are naturally lengthy.

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

4.6 Candidates were considered impartially and fairly

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

As noted previously, there were some technical issues with accessing student submission. I am grateful to the programme administration and RVC IT for their help in overcoming these.

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

4.11 Appropriate procedures and processes have been followed

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Completion

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

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

This year, sustaining the high quality of teaching during COVID has been challenging. The programme and all contributors to the course along with the RVC generally are to be complimented for striving to adjust learning and assessment against this unprecedented threat. No doubt the experiences of staff and students will be reflected upon and the current student cohort will benefit from lessons learned.

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)