

## ANNUAL QUALITY IMPROVEMENT REPORT 2021/22

### Appendix 3: External Examiners' report

## Veterinary Gateway

This appendix contains Year Leader's responses to 2021/22 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](mailto:afilipovic@rvc.ac.uk), 01707666938

Appendix 3 consists of:

a.	Updates to actions from previous years' reports – n/a
b.	21/22 Collaborative Annual Report with responses from Course Director

Report Question	External Examiners' comment in 2020/21	Course Directors response and actions	Update in 2021/22
<p><b>2.3 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the students' performance</b></p>	<p>As observed in previous years, the students' performance in the IGE module was poorer than in other modules. We have previously suggested that exam stress associated with answering simple arithmetical questions may have been responsible for this problem, and it is noteworthy that teaching staff have made considerable efforts to mitigate this effect. This year the students needed detailed understanding of the intricacies of DNA and RNA sequences, where it can be easy to lose marks through lack of care when answering the questions. Perhaps the students would benefit from more practice at answering this type of question.</p>	<p>Unfortunately, the Inheritance, Genes and Evolution module has again seen poorer student performance compared to other Gateway modules. We thank the external examiners for acknowledging the extensive support strategies that have been put in place this year to develop student academic performance (discussed earlier). We agree with the external examiners who state that the questions on the 2020-21 examination paper were demanding and required a good working knowledge of codons and molecular analysis. Given that in this and previous years, the external examiners have discussed the impact of exam stress on a students' ability to cope with intricate numerical/molecular interpretation tasks, we plan to convert this type of assessment to an in-course assessment where students will be able to demonstrate their abilities more effectively. Action Required: Re-design the Inheritance, Genes and Evolution assessments to ensure students complete a DNA/RNA sequence analysis task as part of their in-course assessment, rather than as an examination question. Action Deadline: 01-Dec-2021 Action assigned to: L Thurston, B Cobb</p>	<p><b>Students carried out a molecular sequence task as their in-course assessment. Action Completed 30/04/2022</b></p>
<p><b>3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous</b></p>	<p>COVID-19 will have substantially impacted on Gateway student learning, and it seems likely that it will continue to be felt in the subsequent years by some students. This will need to be monitored and mitigated where possible.</p>	<p>We agree that due to the impact of Covid on student learning, we will need to monitor and support student performance in latter years of the course. To begin to facilitate this the 2020-21 Gateway cohort will be invited to a series of Summer School sessions (July-September 2021), where they will reflect on their learning, focus on AHEMS placement opportunities, be introduced to the BVetMed1 curriculum and directed to pre-learning reading and online anatomy material and celebrate their successes with the first informal Gateway 'Graduation'. In addition, the individual Transition Tutorials that took place during the Gateway year will continue into BVetMed 1 to provide continuity of support. Action Required: Deliver Gateway to BVetMed transition summer school 2021. Deliver Gateway to BVetMed transition tutorials 2021-22. Action Deadline: 20-Sep-2022 Action assigned to: L Thurston, G MacKintosh-Sim</p>	<p>Gateway to BVM1 transition tutorials delivered as planned. Action completed 01/10/2022</p>
<p><b>3.4 Standard of marking</b></p>	<p>It is noted however that for some assessments there is still inconsistency between markers in style and quality of feedback. The examiners considered suggesting that a more highly structured method for providing feedback would be an advantage to students, and this topic was also discussed in the exam board meeting. This issue was left for the teaching staff to</p>	<p>We thank the External Examiners' for their positive comments on the quality of feedback provided by markers, and note their concerns regarding the consistency of feedback styles on some assessments. The use of online marking has already enabled us to provide greater consistency, requiring staff to provide feedback on each subsection of a question and so, providing the students with a more detailed understanding of the reasoning behind their mark. In future years, online marking may enable us to further address some of the external examiners' concerns by implementing strategies that enforce greater consistency in feedback styles, such as an online rubric. In the future, whether assessments are run remotely or in person, we will continue to encourage</p>	<p><b>Marking Rubrics are being trialed in BVM Research Projects in 2021-22 and if proved to be useful in standardising feedback, will be rolled out to the Gateway library research projects in 2022-23. Action completed 01/09/2022</b></p>

	investigate	staff to provide a good standard of feedback and will make suggestions on the format of this feedback which, should be individualised and reflect the common marking scheme. Action Required: Investigate the possibility of introducing an online marking rubric to enhance consistency of feedback in assessments. Action Deadline: 01-Sep-2022 Action assigned to: L Thurston, C Lawson, D Palmer	
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# Individual Report

Exam board meeting: 12-Jul-2022

## Veterinary Gateway Programme, 2021/22

Dr Jennie Litten-Brown

### The Programme

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

#### 1.1 Course content

The course content is appropriate for the Gateway course. It has been well designed and enables the students to have a wide range of modules which are well matched to the veterinary science area. Having been an external examiner on this course many years ago I can see how the course has continued to evolve and move forward with the changes in the subject area and our understanding of the world.

#### **COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston**

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

We thank the external examiners for their positive comments and will continue to develop the Gateway Programme in response to advances in scientific and/or pedagogical fields.

##### **Action Required:**

##### **Action Deadline:**

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

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

The Learning objectives were clearly stated on RVC LEARN for the students and examiners to see.

#### **COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston**

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

We thank the external examiners for recognising that all learning objectives are clearly signposted on Learn to students for each learning activity.

##### **Action Required:**

##### **Action Deadline:**

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

### 1.3 Teaching methods

A wide variety of teaching methods and styles are employed in the delivery of this course – partly by design but also due to the range of academics who deliver content. I believe this is a great advantage in terms of the acknowledgement that there are many different learning styles and we should teach with that in mind. It appears that wherever possible things have returned to the pre-pandemic way in terms of face-to-face teaching and learning, however I believe that there is evidence that the academics have embraced some of the changes that had to be made during COVID and have embedded them in the new ways of working – just because we can go back to the old ways doesn't mean we should!

#### **COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston**

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

We thank the external examiners for recognising the significant efforts of the course management team in integrating the best of online teaching with our post-covid on-campus delivery. We agree that many innovations and support mechanisms were developed during the pandemic and their incorporation into our teaching programmes can only benefit the student experience. In summary we have: (1) provided online introductory study material to ensure that all students come to lectures with similar baseline skills; (2) included online subject quizzes and revision resources; (3) created online module discussion forums where students can post questions to staff (and each other); (4) posted interactive online anatomy and histology programmes to consolidate on-campus practical teaching; (5) continued to provide pre-recorded lecture material as a revision resource.

##### **Action Required:**

##### **Action Deadline:**

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

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

I don't believe any resource issues were identified.

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

n/a

## 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 performance of the students is similar to other institutions which I am familiar with.

**COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston**

**Course Director Response:**

We are reassured that our students are performing at a level comparable with partner institutions.

**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

The whole range of marks were used and there were clearly students who showed high ability as well as those who exhibited much less aptitude. As I have experienced in many institutions, there were students who showed attention to detail and produced some very good work and others who were not as focused for example presentation or even quality of writing. Where possible, for example the library project, a wide range of subjects was covered which enabled the students to show individual interests as well as a information they had learnt during the course. It is impressive the support that will be given, particularly over the summer to those completing resits. Overall the achievements of the students appeared to be comparable to the pre-covid levels – it is possible that some students were, in all institutions, benefitted by the covid-uplift.

**COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston**

**Course Director Response:**

We thank the external examiners for their positive comments regarding the range of research topics on offer to the students for their library projects and agree that this enables them to choose subjects that are of personal interest. As in previous years, we agree that there are a broad range of marks for the library research projects, reflecting individual student performance. Those students who have performed less well are identified by the Gateway Year Lead and the Transition Tutor and supported during the resit period and into the first year of the BVetMed degree.

We appreciate the external examiner's comments regarding the degree of revision support and interventions provided for students who are required to resit examinations/in-course assessments over the summer.

**Action Required:**

**Action Deadline:**

**Action assigned to:**

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

Looking back at previous external examiner reports and the data shown in the programme handbook, the IGE module has historically been the module in which students perform the poorest, this unfortunately remains the case. The students perform better in the coursework than the exam – I wonder whether the coursework gives them a false sense of security in their knowledge maybe? Indeed the average score in the exam is 40.02% which is below that required for a pass. I am aware that some changes have been made and that there are more planned. However it is worth noting that the students who failed this module often had fail or QF in another module or modules so it may be a student related issue rather than purely the module.

There appear to be far more cases of plagiarism occurring and this is believed to be related to more of the assessments being online. The vast majority had been picked up and were being processed by the plagiarism board, however there were a few which had high scores and had not been referred. In some cases the score had clearly been checked against the assignment and the work was still appropriate for marking, it would be very useful if colleagues could tick the relevant box on the online system to save the externals and the exams office valuable time during the final exam board preparation.

### COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

#### Course Director Response:

Unfortunately, the Inheritance, Genes and Evolution module has again seen poorer student performance compared to other Gateway modules. We thank the external examiners for recognising the improvements made in the assessment of this module in 2021-22, including converting the previous examination-based numerical/molecular interpretation task into an in-course assessment.

I agree with the external examiners that some of the students failing the Inheritance, Genes and Evolution module also achieved 'qualified fails' or fails across the Gateway Programme, and so performance in this module may be a predictor of success in the year. However, many students with exemplary marks in other modules failed the Inheritance, Genes and Evolution module. This year the module examination consisted of one problem solving question and 2 (fairly lengthy) short answer questions. Many of the students reported issues with time management when answering these questions, running out of time and thus losing valuable marks unnecessarily. Going forward, for 2022-23, the module examination will consist of one problem solving question and 15 multiple choice questions. This will bring the Inheritance, Genes and Evolution module in line with assessment on other Gateway modules, will minimise the existing time management issues, and will allow us to assess a broader spectrum of taught material.

We agree that there was a higher incidence of plagiarism this year and that this may be a product of the examinations being held online. All cases of plagiarism were investigated via Student Progress and Development and all students were found to have committed non-intentional plagiarism due to poor scholarship. This is likely a bi-product of online learning at level 3 during the pandemic where students had become more reliant on the internet as a source for learning and may have received less teacher-focused training. While we have already implemented study skills workshops for avoiding plagiarism, in 2022-23 we will be reinforcing the importance of these sessions via the academic tutor system.

In 2021-22, the online examination/in-course assessment marking procedures required staff to tick a box stating that they had checked each submission for plagiarism before submitting their mark - this has been helpful in prompting staff to be more diligent in checking the similarity index on the Turnitin software. Unfortunately, some incidences of plagiarism were still not detected by staff marking exam scripts/in-course assessments. Going forward, staff will be reminded gain of he importance of checking the Turnitin reports for each piece of work submitted for assessment.

#### Action Required:

Incorporate 'avoiding plagiarism' training into the academic tutorial programme for the Gateway cohort. Remind staff to check the Turnitin similarity report for potential plagiarism before submitting marks.

#### Action Deadline:

09-Jan-2023

#### Action assigned to:

L Thurston and all Gateway tutors

Please comment, as appropriate, on:

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

As there is evidence of a wide variety of teaching methods there is also a wide variety of assessment methods both between and within a module which is appropriate and in agreement with others in the sector. In addition having the assessment online makes the job of the external examiner so much easier as we have access to so much from the comfort of our computers.

**COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston**

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

We thank the external examiners for their positive comments. As noted by the external examiners, an additional benefit of the online assessment format is that it is now more time efficient and straightforward for academic staff, administrators and external examiners, allowing more comprehensive viewing of the course content, assessments and marking procedures.

**Action Required:**

**Action Deadline:**

**Action assigned to:**

### 3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous

I believe the assessment procedures are rigorous and fair, colleagues are well aware of where additional student support is needed.

**COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston**

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

We thank the external examiners for their positive comments.

**Action Required:**

**Action Deadline:**

**Action assigned to:**



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

The level of assessment in all programmes is consistent with the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.

**COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston**

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

We thank the external examiners for their positive comment.

#### **Action Required:**

#### **Action Deadline:**

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

### **3.4 Standard of marking**

I saw many examples of feedback which varied in quality and quantity and I would certainly like to see more consistency there, I notice that a rubric is going to be introduced in September 2022 so it will be interesting to see the improvement that brings. I did notice that the full range of marks was used and there was evidence in places of double marking.

**COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston**

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

We note the external examiners concerns regarding the consistency of feedback styles on some assessments. The use of online marking has already enabled us to provide greater consistency, requiring staff to provide feedback on each sub-section of a question and so, providing the students with a more detailed understanding of the reasoning behind their mark. Going forward we hope that the introduction of a marking rubric (being trialed in 2021-22 for the BVetMed Research projects) will enable us to further address some of the external examiners concerns by enforcing greater consistency in feedback styles. We will continue to encourage staff to provide a good standard of feedback and will make suggestions on the format of this feedback which, should be individualised and reflect the common marking scheme.

#### **Action Required:**

Incorporate an online marking rubric to enhance consistency of feedback in assessments.

#### **Action Deadline:**

01-May-2023

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

L Thurston, C Lawson, D Palmer

**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 for assessment and determination of awards were conducted extremely professionally and my thanks go to the Exams office who were always fully communicative and supportive in order for me to perform my role as external. Papers were sent in plenty of time for proof-reading prior to the exam being set and during the preparation for the final exam board we had additional meetings to ensure the procedures were fully followed.

**COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston**

**Course Director Response:**

We would like to thank the RVC Exams Office staff, in particular Emma Rosenberg and Adam Osgood, for their efficiency in running the Gateway assessments and assisting the External Examiners.

**Action Required:**

**Action Deadline:**

**Action assigned to:**

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

I am new to the role of external examiner at the RVC this year.

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

No additional comments

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

**Yes**

**Additional comments, particularly if your answer was 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:**

**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:**

**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:**

I was very impressed that the changes made due to covid were embraced and moved forward rather than returning to the ways we worked before just because we can, in other institutions I have experience of the temptation is to go back to what we know and have always done.

**COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston**

**Course Director Response:**

We would like to thank the external examiner for recognising these positive innovations.

**Action Required:**

**Action Deadline:**

**Action assigned to:**

