

Collaborative Report

Exam board meeting: 10-Jul-2024

Bachelor of Veterinary Medicine, Year 1, 2023/24

Lead examiner: Dr Erica Gummery

Collaborating examiner(s): Dr Maureen Bain, Professor William Holt, Dr Gearoid Sayers

The Programme

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

1.1 Course content

Overall, the year 1 programme is comprehensive in content, covering the broad range of topics that is required in a vet med programme. The content is appropriate to the standard required.

Professor W.H

Agreed

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

The programme as specified in the program specification is fit for purpose. The BVetMed1 course is aligned vertically with the later years of the BVetMed course allowing incremental knowledge acquisition. A quality assurance process is in place for a systematic interrogation of the course through internal surveys and external evaluation by accreditation bodies.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

Year leader and director of assessment

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

The LO's are clearly listed. For each exam paper, and questions/model answers were linked to each of the LO's. Each of the LO's has been appropriately examined.

Professor W.H

Agreed

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

All taught content has embedded LOs. All the exam papers are blueprinted against LOs. The LO's are kept updated accordingly.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

1.3 Teaching methods

A range of teaching approaches are in use. These seem to be appropriate to the course outcomes.

Professor W.H

Agreed

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

A diet of teaching methods are in place. From a blended learning curriculum point of view, these include lectures, practicals, directed learning sessions that are delivered in-person and online.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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

No issues identified. The high quality of the anatomy resources is evident.

Professor W.H

Agreed

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

We are constantly developing a variety of teaching resources for anatomy and other courses through a careful analysis of the learner's educational needs and targeting the respective learning outcomes.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

1.5 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the Programme

The programme includes a diverse assessment diet, offering students varied formats by which to demonstrate their understanding. The exam papers represented the somewhat intimidating breadth of the curriculum in a fair and balanced manner. Topic coverage by is evidenced by the blueprint. Could this be carried out at the level of ILOs?

There is a lot of data and manipulation required in arriving at the final mark. In addition to obtaining 50 marks students must meet the PASS requirements. Students can fail several components of their assessment but still pass as long as they meet the following requirements- min 40% paper 1; min 40% combined Paper 2/3 and ISF; 2x ICA; and 5 DOPS. We would be interested in understanding the justification for this approach; do the requirements change as students' progress through the programme? Do students get feedback on their performance across the different forms of assessment?

It is recommended that the reliance on high-stakes, summative assessments is considered, with the option of increasing in-course continuous assessment. Further, a review of the weighting of individual components is recommended. As a comment, Paper 1 & 2 contribute a combined 65% to the final mark, while Paper 3 and ISF oral exam, with 10% and 15% respectively, seem comparably light. Whilst a logical explanation for the low weighting of the Paper 3 was given at the exam board, we would recommend a greater weighting for the oral exam.

Team based assessment: The teaching team may wish to consider making the extended essay a group task and assess as a team exercise.

Professor W.H

Agreed

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

The exam is composed of MCQ, PSQ and ISF papers each testing the taught content from factual recall to interpretation and problem solving questions. In addition to a 'must submit' formative essay. Paper 3 introduce a facet of scholarship where a student evaluates scientific information provided in the form of a scientific paper. The coverage of the exam is based on topics or strands and is integrated. The exam questions are aligned to the LOs of the chosen topics/strands.

The overall pass mark for the exam is 50%. However, a threshold (of 40%) has been set for each paper and below which a candidate cannot receive compensation of marks from other papers. The threshold ensures that a critical knowledge level must be achieved for a candidate to pass overall.

The ISF oral exam weighting currently stands at 15%. This is a 30 min exam exploring a candidate's knowledge level across 4 different topics ie approximately 6 mins per topic. The current weighting at 15% reflects the time spent discussing and exploring a topic.

Exam feedback: Students receive feedback on all forms of formative and summative in-course assessment except for summative MCQ component. However, feedback for the June exam is only provided to students who fail the exam. This feedback helps the students to identify specific and generic gaps in their knowledge base in preparation for resit exams in August.

The extended essay is formatively assessed. The essay is predicated on a topic provided by a tutor and scaffolded with tutor group discussions on the preparation and presentation of the essay. The students in a tutor group are encouraged to discuss the topic amongst themselves with the final presentation being an individual effort.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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

Based on the experiences of the EE's, and the profile of results, the performance of students at the RVC is comparable to those at other institutions.

Sampling suggests that students achieving distinction and merit is fully justified compared students with a pass, to those with a borderline pass / fail and fail students.

The results this year were comparable to previous cohorts. It may be that the post hoc standard setting procedures applied in papers 2 and 3 adjusted for overall difficulty but exam performance may also have been poorer than anticipated because of the return to in person examinations.

Professor W.H

Agreed

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

The comparable results to previous years is acknowledged. This demonstrates the consistency in student selection process for the course as well as the teaching methods employed.

The return to in-person online exams has been received with mixed feelings by a cross-section of students. Overall, the in-person exams have been hailed as providing uniformity in terms of the exam atmosphere and especially the stability of the online platform during the exams.

The exam although reviewed and passed by both internal and external examiners occasionally reveal very low or high scores, which indicate the exam level of difficulty, which consequently require the need for standard setting of such paper or papers.

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

In terms of the ISF oral examinations, the external examiners were impressed with the overall standard of knowledge (average mark of 58%). It was evident that there are some students with excellent knowledge. Equally, those with a poor level of knowledge were identified through the examination process, as it is supposed to do. It is noteworthy however, of the high failure rate of repeat students in the ISF orals (5 of 6). As a recommendation, perhaps some additional support could be provided to these students.

Furthermore, the internal examiners have noted poor engagement with some elements of the programme such as not attending lectures. This should be addressed and highlight to the students the importance of these contact hours.

Gateway students: The number of students failing level 1 continues to be a cause for concern. Some of these students also appear to have repeated the GW programme. Three of the six repeat-year students are failing. What support is available for these students- what additional support can be put in place? E.g summer schools, language support (or review of IELTS requirements).

Professor W.H

Agreed

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

We concur with the observations on ISF.

A number of students find the face-to face nature of ISF a bit daunting or intimidating. However, our examiners are aware of these occurrences and give a lot of assurances and support to the candidates during the process of the examination, needless to mention that they receive a pep talk in the waiting area before the exam.

It is however true that even with the best of support, some students score poorly in the oral exam. As a mitigation, the exam feedback form allow for comments on a student performance, deficiencies and needs. These are signposted to individual tutors Study Skills team for follow up.

A subset of Gateway students perform poorly generally in exams. A follow-up process is in place for failing/repeating students through a Student Performance and Development process to advice on the suitability of the course and available alternatives such as a move to a BSc course.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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

Examination of marks across the three summative exams highlight differences in average scores, with paper 3 recording the lowest average mark (52%) which is in contrast to paper 1 (average mark of 67%). Clearly students are struggling that bit more with the content of paper 3, something that should be examined as to why this is the case. Equally, paper 1 seems to be proving easier than what would be expected. In terms of paper two, with an average mark of 62% correlated closely with the final marks.

In terms of the DOPS exams, there was a noticeable reduction in failed results for this year (relative to last), which is, in part, is a testament to the work of the internal examiners.

Professor W.H

Agreed

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

Paper 3 is a problem solving and interpretation component of the exam with the paper divided into two parts- A journal article, that is provided to the students a week before the exam and a mini-DL which is a form of an extended PSQ. Students get to practice on a similar format of formative exam in term 1 and term 2 as well as inbuilt mini DLs in each of the 5 R&R weeks.

Our expectation of performance of Paper 1 and Paper 2 is a mean between 60-65%. Paper 3 is anticipated to be relatively challenging, particularly Paper 3A (research article) designed to assesses Scholarship and Evidence-Based Medicine, which we expect to be relatively under-developed in first year students. For this reason Paper 3 is weighted less than Papers 1 and 2 in calculation of the final mark. Although we provide a number of formative assessment opportunities for Paper 3 during the first year, engagement with these is not particularly great.

Action Required:

Review the results of paper 3 and provide recommendations to the exam.

Action Taken

Paper 3 is composed of two parts, Part A designed to assess Scholarship and evidence Based Medicine and Part B which is an extended PSQ.

Paper 3 will now comprise of part A only and part B is going to be introduced as an in-course assessment (ICA) using a portfolio-based approach (Pebble Pad Student Record of Achievement) that will vertically integrate with the clinical years.

Action Completed (17-Mar-2025)

Action Deadline:

01-Dec-2024

Action assigned to:

Year leader and director of assessment

Assessment Procedures

Please comment, as appropriate, on:

3.1 Assessment methods (relevance to learning objectives and curriculum)

The variety in assessment methods is evident (oral, written, MCQ's, problem-based learning, critical analysis etc.) and is a commendable element of the programme. In particular, while the DOPS and the ISF orals are time-consuming processes, they provide an invaluable learning exercise for the students.

Professor W.H

Agreed

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

The diet of exams and in deed the results provide a wholistic view of a student achievement and preparation for a veterinary career. They provide clear reflection of attainment in terms of factual recall, problem solving and critical thinking.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous

There is a robust method of assessment employed on the programme. For the written exams marking is fair consistent and carried out to a high standard. Moderations to mark schemes and marks are recorded and justified.

The level to which feedback on each students' answers to exam questions is commendable and facilitates the students to have a better understanding of their mark. The statistical output generated for each paper is also excellent and objectively identified problem assessment areas that need addressing.

In our analysis of student results from the four cohorts (distinction, merit, pass and fail), we were satisfied that the mark allocated to students' efforts is reflective of their knowledge and effort. Marks were awarded appropriately, occasionally we would have awarded +/- 0.5 marks but no major anomalies were identified. As noted previously some questions require a lot of information for a small number of marks, we are generally not a fan of 0.5 marking schemes.

In addition to the above students must complete 2 mandatory tasks- Extended essay and Reflective asset. One examiner reviewed a sample of these - Marking criteria were clear, students received informative feedback. We were pleased to learn that the team were planning on incorporating more reflective portfolio work into future assessments.

Professor W.H

Agreed

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

The examination process, from paper setting by internal examiners and approval by external examiners, is a robust process. The marking process is guided by clear model answers linked to LOs, with marks breakdown provided. Marks breakdown and distribution are dependents on how many parts the question has and is therefore conceivable that some parts will inevitably have more weighting than others.

The exams are marked and then sample marked for validation purposes. Statistical applications are employed to ensure that biases are identified and/or removed and that the exam is fairly marked.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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

We believe the level of assessment to be consistent with the framework.

Professor W.H

Agreed

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

The RVC undertakes a constructive alignment with the FHEQ on both taught content and assessment.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

3.4 Standard of marking

An overwhelming impression this year relates to the incredible degree of care and attention that the examinations team has focused on the student assessments. The standard of marking is very good. It should be noted that a minor issue in final marks for the ISF orals was identified and addressed to the satisfaction of the external examiners.

Written exams: Marking was consistent and carried out to a high standard. Good practice is noted in indicating where marks were awarded/lost in the feedback which will presumably be provided to students.

Moderation has been carried out with appropriate rigour; feedback where provided should be fed back to the question setter as can be insightful.

It is also clear that the examination results have been analysed in objective and forensic detail.

Professor W.H

Agreed

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

We note with appreciation the remarks made on the marking and feedback process. This is a tribute to the internal examiners for a job well done.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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 external examiners have been provided with comprehensive spreadsheets of student marks, assessing every aspect of student performance. The external examiners have also been provided with a wealth of background documents and guidance. One external examiner who is not normally involved in examinations processes and is therefore less familiar than others with the duties and requirements of external examiners, found this information to be invaluable.

The statistical assessment of each paper was useful and welcome. These reports which included question performance metrics were scrutinised by the team in advance of the examiners briefing. The briefing meeting prior to the exam board is extremely useful in providing useful orientation information and a commentary on student performance.

Examiners were invited to observe the ISF and DOPS assessments. The EE able to attend some of the DOPS exams at Hawkshead would like to commend the staff who had to oversee the process. Students were provided with clear instructions about the required animal handling tasks to be completed and the time available.

Everything went ahead very smoothly. We were interested to learn that the students not only have to show their competence at animal handling, but, importantly, are expected to remain calm and professional if things go wrong. That the marking scheme categorises the students as “safe”, “not yet safe” or “unsafe” provides an additional and useful insight into a student’s suitability for a career as a vet.

The EEs attending the ISF orals this year would like to thank the team for welcoming us to that day of assessment. It is noted that this assessment is staff intensive and a massive organisational undertaking, and the staff involved should be commended for their efforts. Assessors were friendly and clear attempts are made to help the students feel at ease during these examinations. Further good practice was noted in the signposting of students achieving L3, to help reassure students. The format has a clear approach to allow for differentiation of students.

Professor W.H

Agreed

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

The exams office in particular need a special vote of thanks for preparing all the documents before, during and after the assessments are completed. In particular Ms Maria Johnson deserves a mention. She did a splendid job of coordinating with internal and external examiners, collating papers, and preparing spreadsheets and summaries for the exam board. A special thanks to Brian Catchpole, director of assessment for his invaluable input especially on statistical evaluation of most of the assessments. Last but not least, a big thank you to all internal examiners who worked with strict deadlines to turn the results around.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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

n/a

Professor W.H

Agreed

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

No changes were made to assessment procedures in comparison to the previous year.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

3.7 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the procedures

n/a

Professor W.H

Agreed

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:

Professor W.H

Agreed

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

We are grateful for EE's comments and we endeavor to provide responses to comments succinctly and in a timely manner.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

4.2 An acceptable response has been made

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Professor W.H

Agreed

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

We are grateful for EE's comments and we endeavor to provide responses to comments succinctly and in a timely manner.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

4.3 I approved the papers for the Examination

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Several months ago, the external examiners were given the opportunity to comment on draft exam papers, and examiners comments were actioned.

Professor W.H

Agreed

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

The exam draft papers were initially reviewed internally by internal examiners. The Exams office did a sterling job and made sure that the EE received the exam papers and course documents in good time and in advance of the exams.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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:

All information required was readily accessible on TEAMS, student answers were accessible through LEARN and the examiner's briefing session was very informative and useful.

The LEARN platform and paper-based copies of Papers and 3 were provided. It would be helpful if paper-based copies followed same question numbering format as used on the learn platform. E.g. Paper 3 – section B part 1 Qc- equates to Q41 on learn.

The allocation of marks was clear and unambiguous, and the provision of a standard grading scheme was also useful.

Professor W.H

Agreed

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

The availability of all the exam content in hard or soft copies to the EE was done in a timely manner.

The misalignment of the questions as cited by the EE was a specific Learn platform issue. The provisions of the Learn platform are restrictive in terms of formatting exam questions. Unfortunately this is technical issue outside the control of the exams office and indeed the RVC.

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:

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

We are grateful that the EE worked with a lot of dedication and participated efficiently in all areas as specified in their roles.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

4.6 Candidates were considered impartially and fairly

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Professor W.H

Agreed

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

The candidates are known by their candidate numbers and assessed anonymously except for the face to face exams such as DOPS and ISF. Nonetheless the exams are marked fairly and impartially. It is noteworthy that even in face-to-face exams, a candidate is examined by 2 examiners in turns and both provide a level of checks and balances in the assessment.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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:

Professor W.H

Agreed

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

The standards are clearly spelt out in the BVetMed year 1 course's assessment and award regulation (AAR).

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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:

Professor W.H

Agreed

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

The standards are benchmarked by accreditation and regulatory bodies that include AVMA, EAEVE and RCVS.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Professor W.H

Agreed

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

The EE receive documents in advance relating to their role. Additionally the EE are invited to relevant inset days at the RVC.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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:

Professor W.H

Agreed

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

The EE receive documents in advance relating to their role. Additionally the EE are invited to relevant inset days at the RVC.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

4.11 Appropriate procedures and processes have been followed

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Professor W.H

Agreed

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

All processes and procedures relating to the exams as stipulated in the AAR and strictly adhered to.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Professor W.H

Agreed

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

The process for assessment and determination of award are set out in the AAR and are clearly followed.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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:

Recommendations highlighted elsewhere in this report are summarised here:

Blueprinting of ILOs to assessment

Reliance on high-stakes, summative assessments is considered, with the option of increasing in-course continuous assessment.

Review of the weighting of individual components is recommended, including a greater weighting for the oral exam.

The teaching team may wish to consider making the extended essay a group task and assess as a team exercise.

Additional support provided to repeat student failing students and those on the Gateway course, although it should be expected that not all students will progress through the course. Further, English language support should be provided for students for whom English is their second language. If support cannot be provided, IELTS requirements should be reviewed.

Consider including fewer .5 marks in model answers

Professor W.H

Agreed

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

The above recommendations will be discussed at the course management level.

Additional support for failing students is accorded through the tutors to those individual students. A Student Performance and Development meeting is usually initiated to discuss a student performance and recommendations made in support of a student. Students are always signposted to Study Skills team when support is required.

Action Required:

The director for assessment to be consulted to provide guidance on the recommendations made on assessments.

Action Taken

Recommendations highlighted elsewhere in this report are summarised here:

Blueprinting of ILOs to assessment:

All MCQs and sections of PSQs are now mapped against ILOs.

Reliance on high-stakes, summative assessments is considered, with the option of increasing in-course continuous assessment:

We have now reduced one component of Paper 3 and introduced continuous assessment using a portfolio-based approach (Pebble Pad Student Record of Achievement) to vertically integrate with the clinical years.

Review of the weighting of individual components is recommended, including a greater weighting for the oral exam:

This has been suggested in previous years by external examiners and has been discussed and considered by internal stakeholders. The consensus is that 15% is a suitable weighing for this component of the assessment portfolio. By its nature, the elements examined with the four mini-vivas represents a sample rather than being blueprinted across the various strands (unlike the written papers which are broadly blueprinted). In addition, there is a subjective element to grading this particular assessment.

The teaching team may wish to consider making the extended essay a group task and assess as a team exercise:

We are currently evaluating our approach to this assignment, given the potential for students to use generative AI.

However, this exercise is designed to prepare students for the Critically Appraised Topic Report (summative assessment) in BVetMed Year 2 and a group exercise would not satisfy that remit.

Consider including fewer 0.5 marks in model answers:

We encourage staff to indicate mark allocation in their model answers and since awarding partial credit (half marks) is permissible, it is somewhat inevitable that staff will try to provide granular detail as to where credit is being assigned. We do not consider this to be detrimental (actually the opposite when it comes to sample marking / quality assurance).

Action Completed (16-Mar-2025)

Action Deadline:

01-Dec-2024

Action assigned to:

Year leader and director of assessment

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)

The high quality of the anatomy resources is evident.

The varied diet of assessment is commendable

Post-exam processes are rigorous and feedback is provided to students

EEs have good opportunity to access information, and the pre-exam board briefing is helpful

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

The above EE comments are deeply appreciated. The synergy and efficiency between the internal examiners and the exams office in discharging their assessment roles in excellent.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to: