

# Collaborative Report

Exam board meeting: 06-Jun-2024

## MSc in Wild Animal Biology, 2023/24

Lead examiner: Dr Tom Hart

Collaborating examiner(s): Mrs Ghislaine Sayers

### The Programme

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

#### 1.1 Course content

Course content seemed appropriate - the combined MSc is a well-respected programme that has been running for decades and produced a slew of well qualified graduates into the workplace and further study.

Mrs G.S

The content is regularly updated and there have been several changes this year.

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

The learning objectives - as stated for each programme in the RVC learn MSc central areas seem to have been covered. This was assessed by looking through module syllabi and feedback given to assessments. The learning objectives were stated by the majority of questions in the model exam papers

#### 1.3 Teaching methods

Teaching methods are varied - the syllabus seems to be a mixture of in-person lectures, practical sessions and problem based learning, especially in Term 1. Term 2 seems to be increasingly practical and Term 3 is the research project.

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

Mrs G.S

Many of the resources available to the students are available to the external examiners on RVC learn < <https://learn.rvc.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=2431> > These include power point presentations, recordings, links to further reading and assessment tests. Looking at a small subset of these resources, they seem to be set at an appropriate level, are useful and contain appropriate content.

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

I would recommend some form of cross-auditing by teaching staff to ensure best practice and show how teaching materials can be standardised or improved across the course. It's something that I've been thinking about a lot. We collectively never do this because of the time involved, but I don't see any alternative to continually guarantee standards and improvements, especially in the face of AI and a rapidly changing educational environment.

**Mrs G.S**

The course content has been updated this year, making it more relevant and applicable to current practices .

**COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Maria Diez-Leon**

### **Course Director Response:**

We agree that keeping up with best teaching practice is important, thank you for raising this. For two years now, we've been running RVC-ZSL away days, which all module leaders attend and at which we share best practice. We don't necessarily support standardising formats (e.g. format of assessment, or even of lectures) as we see value on variety, both in material and lecturer styles - instead we share minimum expectations with all module leaders and lecturers in terms of materials to be provided, etc. Further, we'll have a periodic review of the courses next year, which will also serve this purpose.

**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

Students' performance was largely similar to comparable courses in terms of mark spread. In terms of the project and the presentations, which was where we have the most access to raw assessments, it seemed good.

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

Broadly as expected.

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

The last report commented on the number of extensions, which seems to have reduced this year.

**Mrs G.S**

No obvious reason for the number of extensions last year was found, so it could be coincidence that the number of extensions has decreased. The organisers have tried to restructure the course to make it "less busy"

## COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Maria Diez-Leon

### Course Director Response:

Indeed, we have seen a decline on extensions request, more in line with numbers pre-pandemic. This seems to be the case not only for this MSc but across the board

### Action Required:

### Action Deadline:

### Action assigned to:

## Assessment Procedures

Please comment, as appropriate, on:

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

We commented in the high number of excellent marks in the supervisor feedback section compared to larger variance in the final grades. We recommend that the supervisor feedback have better guidelines for grade boundaries.

**Mrs G.S**

There continues to be a range of assessment methods allowing each student an opportunity to find a skill that they excel in. The assessment methods test memory, understanding, writing skills, visual presentation, verbal and graphic communication, critical analysis and practical skills

**COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Maria Diez-Leon**

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

Thank you, we agreed during the Exam Board (after discussing this point) on a way forward which is now being implemented

**Action Required:**

**Action Deadline:**

**Action assigned to:**

### 3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous

I'm not sure that all elements of the assessment are going to be robust against advances in AI, although the emphasis on continual assessment, problem based learning and presentations should be. This problem might especially be relevant to the project, especially in the literature review.

**Mrs G.S**

Assessments are made by more than one examiner in the majority of cases and marking rubrics were used in the majority of cases. Written research projects were double marked and where examiners did not agree, an independent examiner adjudicated. Oral assessment of the understanding of the research project was carried out by 2 examiners, neither of which were the project supervisor. The supervisor also assessed the motivation, work ethic and proactiveness of the candidates. Many of the posters and oral presentations were assessed by 2 examiners using a marking rubric. This year the variety of questions in the viva exams were more standardised than last year, with one examiner asking the same non-specific questions to each candidate. Feedback was useful, thorough and relevant for the majority of assessments. Mark calculations are reviewed by the exams team and overall marks for each module are also scrutinised at the interim and final exam board meeting by the external examiners

**COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Maria Diez-Leon**

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

The use of AI is indeed a challenge. We continue to monitor and in the absence of a policy, we are requesting students declare when and how they use it in their final project write up by including a statement similar to those some scientific journals are now requiring.

**Action Required:**

**Action Deadline:**

**Action assigned to:**

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

Overall this seems good in terms of matching FHEQ Level 7, given that there is a mixture of practical and applied elements, such as fieldwork, collaborative projects, presentations and projects that require the application of literature to real-world conservation and health scenarios. In common with many of the other conservation/ecology courses in the UK, there is a mixture of learning with continued assessment to evaluate knowledge and understanding, cognitive skills, research and methodological skills, communication and practical skills. The syllabus and examination we have seen maps well onto level 7.

Mrs G.S

### 3.4 Standard of marking

Mrs G.S

A review of a subset of papers, taking into account the feedback, mark and agreement between markers suggests that the standard of marking is good.

### 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, this seems fair.

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

Mrs G.S

The assessment procedure for vivas has improved since last year and some marking schemes have been updated to standardise them with other MSc level courses

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

## General Statements

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

**N/A**

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

I note that there have been previous issues with access to RVC learn. I have had several issues with this and it took a while to reset.

**Mrs G.S**

Yes,

I have been able to access RVC learn this year, the assessment of vivas seemed more standardised and fairer and I was able to see some of the oral and poster presentations . Some of the posters are now being uploaded onto RVC learn so they are accessible to external examiners ,even if they are unable to travel to RVC to assess one poster presentation.

#### **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:**

**4.4 I was able to scrutinise an adequate sample of students' work and marks to enable me to carry out my duties**

**No**

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

Yes, in terms of most of the assessments, but we will try and be present for more of the presentations next year. We have had continued issues gaining access to RVC learn. There have been temporary work arounds, for exam committee documents, this seems to be best accessed via google documents that are password protected.

**Mrs G.S**

Second examiner : Yes, thanks to improved access to RVC learn and being able to travel to RVC to see one of the poster sessions and oral presentations

**COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Maria Diez-Leon**

**Course Director Response:**

I am aware externals have had issues with access to materials, I believe Exams Office is best placed to address this issue

**Action Required:**

Exams Office to liaise with external examiners to ensure access to materials to be assessed

**Action Deadline:**

16-Apr-2025

**Action assigned to:**

Exams Office

**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:**

We will definitely miss Emma next year!

**Mrs G.S**

Emma Rosenberg in the exams team has been a fantastic support and help; providing rapid response to all queries.

**COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Maria Diez-Leon**

**Course Director Response:**

We will, thank you for working so well with her

**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:**

Yes, although the access to materials has been a problem throughout the year.

**COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Maria Diez-Leon**

**Course Director Response:**

We apologise this has been an issue, hopefully resolved for the next year by Exams Office

**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:

#### 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:**

**Mrs G.S**

I have no suggestions for improvements this year, other than avoiding the use of Teams to share data with externals . This has not worked this year or last year and has led to delayed access to minutes , marks and dates for meetings . If it was not for Emma Rosenberg, I would not have had access to these documents

**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)**

**Mrs G.S**

I loved the teaching and increased emphasis this year on communication skills and the addition of the poster and oral communication to assess communication skills with different audiences .