

## ANNUAL QUALITY IMPROVEMENT REPORT 2020/21

### Appendix 3: External Examiners' report

### BVetMed Final Year

This appendix contains Year Leader's responses to 2020/21 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).

Appendix 3 consists of:

a.	Updates to actions from previous years' reports
b.	2020/21 Collaborative Annual Report with responses from Course Director Exam board meeting: 15-Jun-2021 Lead examiner: Dr Joseph Cassidy Collaborating examiner(s): Dr Harold Bok, Dr Amanda Boag, Professor Gayle Hallowell, Professor Nicholas Jonsson

Report Question	External Examiners' comment in 2017/18	Course Directors response and actions	Update in 2018/19 & 2019/20	Update in 2020/21
<b>1.3 Teaching methods</b>	Students' approach to answering questions in an examination may not necessarily reflect a problem-based approach as taught in the clinics, which is disappointing.	<p>The problem-based approach that is taught at the RVC is explicitly assessed in this finals exam as well as the 4th year exam. The issue with the patchy use of it by some students (or total lack of familiarity by a few) is likely to relate to inconsistent reinforcement in clinical scenarios and rotations and students failure to avail themselves of the extensive learning support material available. We recognise that the approach may need some modification for farm-related questions and will seek guidance from the production animal teaching team.</p> <p><b>Action Required:</b></p> <p>Discussion with production animal teaching team about how to modify the problem-solving approach taught for individual animals to enhance a problem-solving approach that is suitable for production animal/herd level problems.</p> <p><b>Action Deadline:</b></p> <p>01-Sep-2018</p> <p><b>Action assigned to:</b></p> <p>Jill Maddison</p>	This discussion has occurred	As indicated – this discussion has occurred and the production team continue to work on this issue. Next action would be to assign this to Richard Booth for further comment.

Report Question	External Examiners' comment in 2018/19	Course Directors response and actions	Update in 2019/20	Update in 2020/21
<b>1.3 Teaching methods</b>	The response from the College to comments from last year relating to students' approach to answering questions in an examination may not necessarily reflect a problem-based approach as taught in the clinics, confirmed that the problem-based approach that is taught at the RVC is explicitly assessed in	<p>This is something we are working on and continuing to progress. We have actioned a number of things during the past year and will continue to do so.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. There has been discussion with the farm group what other 'non-animal' factors (environment, husbandry, management etc) we should also be discussing within the define and refine framework</li> <li>2. In the PMVPH intro sessions, we use the</li> </ol>	As notes above under 1.3 of 2017/18 report, discussions continue	As above

	<p>this finals exam as well as the 4th year exam, and an action for the College was to discuss particularly with the production animal teaching team about how to modify the problem-solving approach taught for individual animals to enhance a problem-solving approach that is suitable for production animal/herd level problems.</p>	<p>down cow, define and refine setup as an example but overlay the above on top of this. This is just an example, but shows how the students need to consider</p> <p>this when we are discussing population medicine with them</p> <p>3. This is repeated in year 4 (may not be appropriate to keep repeating this but last year this ensured that everyone got it) and again in the exam prep sessions that were held during Electives</p> <p>5. Farm staff have been asked to signpost this process within their teaching where appropriate</p> <p>6. Clinical decision making is used in rounds (in particular) at both Synergy and Endell when cases are discussed on the final days of both rotations. A lot of these are scenarios that are potential exam questions and both practices play a hand in writing the questions knowing that they are teaching the students in this way.</p> <p>7. The farm questions are made a little more complex as we are trying to add in VPH/economics into some and these won't always fit into the clinical decision-making frameworks but often the first part of the question will depend on the question structure.</p> <p>8. All of the farm finals questions were developed with clinical vets (in practice), so are common conditions and scenarios that they see.</p>		
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<b>Report Question</b>	<b>External Examiners' comment in 2019/20</b>	<b>Course Directors response and actions</b>	<b>Update in 2020/21</b>
<p><b>2.2 Quality of candidates' knowledge and skills, with particular reference to those at the top, middle or bottom of the range</b></p>	<p>Clinical and Professional reasoning examination (Part II) did discriminate overall student performance: the cohort were reasonably distributed. However, two of the three compulsory questions did</p>	<p>Yes - now that we have three years of data on exam performance we are considering introducing a minimum qualifier of 40% for each question. We will be bringing a paper to the Course Management Committee in relation to this for the 2022 graduating year (the 2021 graduating year had started their</p>	<p>Completed. A&amp;A regs have been amended so that two of the three compulsory questions must achieve 50% and no answer may be less than 40%</p>

	<p>have a distorting effect on overall grades.  No students failed one of these questions while ~24% failed one of the other two questions (in turn about half of this 24% were graded as '48'). Further statistical analysis will no doubt assist in determining significance.  As would be expected, student performance in optional CPR questions was better than in the compulsory questions. It remains possible for a student to fail a particular species CPR question (or number of Qs) quite badly (35%) but still pass overall. Is the RVC still considering the introduction of minimum thresholds (e.g. a student must achieve &gt;40% in all questions and not fail more than 2 questions) to pass overall ?</p>	<p>final year in February 2020 prior to the results of this examination).  <b>Action Deadline:</b>  01-Jun-2021  <b>Action assigned to:</b>  Brian Catchpole, John Sanger, Jill Maddison</p>	
<p><b>2.3 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the students' performance</b></p>	<p>The COVID19 pandemic necessitated a reconfiguration of both Part I and II assessment components. In particular the conversion of the Part II Clinical reasoning assessment from 'closed' to 'open' book format and the provision of additional time to complete this assessment would appear to have improved overall student performance - statistical analysis of the data and its comparison with previous Final year cohorts is recommended to further elucidate.</p>	<p>Yes - the failure rate was less than in previous years (2018 = 9%, 2019 = 7%, 2020 = 1%) and this was statistically significant. This is noted and will inform plans for the 2021 Finals exam if it does need to be conducted online.  Should the 2021 final year exams need to be conducted online, there are processes in place for other exams such as limited time access and random release of questions to mitigate the pitfalls of 24h exams which may allow collusion between students.</p> <p><b>Action Required:</b></p> <p><b>Action Deadline:</b></p>	<p>Completed. The 2021 exam was run online with restricted time access to the questions, Student performance was similar to past years.</p>

		01-Mar-2021 <b>Action assigned to:</b> John Fishwick, John Sanger, Jill Maddison	
<b>3.1 Assessment methods (relevance to learning objectives and curriculum)</b>	<p>The broad mix of assessment methods was appropriate. The PSA was a novel, and in the circumstances appropriate, replacement for the OSCEs.</p> <p>Basic farm animal economics may require greater emphasis in Clinical and Professional reasoning questions in Part II. The definition of 'clinical reasoning' may need to be broadened in this context.</p> <p>The Part III Research projects are to be commended: many were of a very high standard and their assessment was very thorough.</p> <p>*PSA Personal Skills Audit</p>	<p><b>Course Director Response:</b></p> <p>Thank you for your comments. The issue of greater emphasis on farm animal economics will be discussed with the appropriate academic staff.</p> <p><b>Action Required:</b></p> <p>This concern to be discussed with the Finals exam convenor and relevant staff in the production animal teaching team.</p> <p><b>Action Deadline:</b></p> <p>01-Feb-2021</p> <p><b>Action assigned to:</b></p> <p>Jill Maddison and John Fishwick</p>	<p>Jill to add comments along the lines</p> <p><i>This has been considered and identified that Ex Ex understanding of the course over all needs to be improved and in particular the assessments in years 4 and 5 .</i></p>
<b>3.4 Standard of marking</b>	<p>Overall, this fair, rigorous and consistent in all three components of BVetMed Final year assessment.</p> <p>For Part II (Clinical and professional reasoning), each written question should have particularly clear rubrics around differentiating distinction, merit, pass and failing students. This will likely need further adaptation if the open-book format is to be repeated.</p>	<p><b>Course Director Response:</b></p> <p>We believe that all of the model answers have provided this clear distinction between grades and would appreciate specific examples of where the examiners did not believe this was the case so we can consider moderation for following years.</p> <p><b>Action Required:</b></p> <p>Further input require from the external examiners please</p> <p><b>Action Deadline:</b></p> <p>01-Feb-2021</p> <p><b>Action assigned to:</b></p> <p>External examiners</p>	<p><i>Completed.</i></p> <p><i>We have not received further details from External Examiner to be able to act up this. This comment has not been repeated this year.</i></p>



# **Collaborative Report**

Exam board meeting: 15-Jun-2021

**Bachelor of Veterinary Medicine, Year 5, 2020/21**

**Lead examiner: Dr Joseph Cassidy**

**Collaborating examiner(s): Dr Harold Bok, Dr Amanda Boag, Professor Gayle Hallowell, Professor Nicholas Jonsson**

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

### 1.1 Course content

The examination process, rather than course content or learning outcomes, were audited/assessed. The nature of the questions posed in Finals Part II and the quality/depth of the vast majority of student answers would suggest the course content is appropriate for this stage in veterinary training

### COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Jill Maddison

#### Course Director Response:

Thank you for this positive feedback

#### Action Required:

#### Action Deadline:

#### Action assigned to:

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

Previous responses from The College have indicated that the finals exam has been mapped to course outcomes, RCVS day one skills and AVMA competences  
The Finals part II long answer questions are designed as a holistic assessment of clinical and professional decision making.

### 1.3 Teaching methods

The examination process, rather than teaching methods, have been assessed. We anticipate that teaching philosophy/methodology within the final 'clinical' years is reflected in final assessment:

1. in the integrated assessment of clinical and professional decision making
2. in the self-directed learning required to complete Finals part III (research project)



**COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Jill Maddison**

**Course Director Response:**

Thank you. It should be noted that the integrated assessment of clinical and professional decision making starts in the BVM4 exam so students have had experience of this method of assessment before entering rotations and then Finals.

**Action Required:**

**Action Deadline:**

**Action assigned to:**

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

On-line proctoring remains a challenge - this year proctoring software (Proctorio) was utilised.

**COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Jill Maddison**

**Course Director Response:**

Proctorio was used for other examinations at the RVC in 2020-2021 but not for Finals.

**Action Required:**

**Action Deadline:**

**Action assigned to:**

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

The RVC, in common with all veterinary schools, has experienced another very challenging teaching/learning/assessment environment in the 2020-21 academic year.

In the context of assessment, the School has been innovative in its delivery, striking a careful balance between the maintenance of academic standards while at the same time acknowledging and being sympathetic to the challenges faced by their students in taking remote, on-line assessments.

### **COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Jill Maddison**

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

Thank you for your positive feedback. It has indeed been a uniquely challenging year for staff and students alike.

#### **Action Required:**

#### **Action Deadline:**

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

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

Student performance is comparable with that in our 'home' institutions.

We note and welcome the introduction of minimum thresholds in Finals Part II to be implemented in the 2021-22 academic year. This should mitigate against the small number of academically weaker students who compensate for weaknesses in particular species using marks attained on questions on other species. An example at this assessment was a student who passed overall having failed three of the four Finals part II clinical and professional decision making questions.

The objective of this modification is to assist in maintaining the goal of 'potential omnicompetence'. Given that students have a somewhat limited question choice in Finals part II it will be important to carefully review the impact of this modification.

### COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Jill Maddison

#### Course Director Response:

Thank you. We will monitor the impact of the new minimum thresholds to be introduced in 2021-2022.

#### Action Required:

Assessment of pass rates under new regulations to be assessed with past pass rates.

#### Action Deadline:

01-Sep-2022

#### Action assigned to:

Head of Exams

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

The quality of knowledge and skills is good as reflected in a very good marks distribution for written papers in Finals Part II (overall mean/median ~58). This trend continued across all species-specific questions, with a slight dip in overall performance in the compulsory farm animal and equine questions, where 48 and 47 students failed to achieve the pass mark, respectively. Of the optional questions students were heavily biased in favour of taking the small animal option.

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

The performance of this student cohort is broadly reflective of that in our home institutes.

The externs considered that the phrasing of the vignette in the compulsory equine question (Q3) was somewhat ambiguous resulting in a considerable proportion of students following an incorrect course of action in answering the question, potentially disadvantaging them. This ambiguity (and its potential consequences) had been pointed out when the question had been initially reviewed by externs but this advice was not acted upon. Only limited remedial action could be taken given the time available once marking was complete to address the negative impact on student performance - this resulted in one less student failing overall. There were likely impacts on many student grades within the greater cohort. Perhaps such a situation could be avoided in the future if some form of arbitration was in place prior to finalising questions?

Externs had some discussion as to how the common grading scheme is applied to questions containing multiple sections - presumably a degree of judgment is used by assessors experienced in using this scheme?

### **COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Jill Maddison**

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

Thank you for your comment and we will ensure that all comments from external examiners are considered formally in the future, arbitrated when appropriate and that a formal response is provided by the assessor should they not agree with feedback provided by the external examiner. We apologise if this did not occur this year. The issue was discussed in some detail by the examiners and myself and the relevant teaching was reviewed to ensure that it was consistent with that aspect of the assessment under discussion. Examiners are experienced with the CGS. There is inevitably a level of examiner judgement but as there is also a great deal of interaction between examiners within teams so that collective judgement is applied for exam answers that may not fully fit the model answer guidance.

#### **Action Required:**

Ensure that all external examiner comments are formally responded to and arbitration used if there continues to be disagreement

#### **Action Deadline:**

01-May-2022

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

Exams Office

Please comment, as appropriate, on:

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

The mix of assessment methods deployed is entirely appropriate.

A number of the skills assessed in the OSCEs are not 'stage appropriate' and could be moved to earlier in the course - e.g. paw bandaging, blood smear, instrumentation packaging...

or could become DOPs

As indicated earlier (1.4), we are very aware of substantial resource implications in running the current range OSCEs. Given this clear commitment to student learning by the College we would like to make sure this effort is optimised and that OSCEs taken by final year students are updated and focussed on topics/procedures relating to day-one competencies.

#### COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Jill Maddison

##### Course Director Response:

The set of the OSCEs this year was severely impacted by the pandemic. We acknowledge that there are some stations that are more appropriate as DOPs and earlier in the course and future OSCEs will not contain such stations.

##### Action Required:

##### Action Deadline:

01-Feb-2022

##### Action assigned to:

Director of Rotations

### 3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous

Sample double-marking, moderation and data analysis in place to ensure a rigorous approach.

Problems with Proctorio on-line invigilation system in Part II Finals identified early and remediated without disadvantaging affected students as evidenced by statistical analysis of results.

#### COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Jill Maddison

##### Course Director Response:

The problem was not with Proctorio but with access to our virtual learning platform. The issues were dealt with promptly and we hope that processes put in place will prevent problems in the future.

##### Action Required:

##### Action Deadline:

01-Feb-2022

##### Action assigned to:

Director of Learning and Wellbeing

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

Consistent with FHEQ level 6/7

### **3.4 Standard of marking**

Moderation in place to insure consistent marking within questions in Finals Part II.  
Post hoc analysis of OSCEs in place to identify any inconsistencies in scoring.

### **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)**

All sound and fair.

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

Current pandemic 'lockdown' restrictions have severely limited the implementation of change/innovation.

As indicated in 2.1 we anticipate and welcome the introduction of minimum thresholds in Finals Part II to be implemented in the next academic year.

As discussed previously, some of the activities assessed in OSCEs seem inappropriate for final examinations - recommend that these be moved to an earlier stage in the course or replaced by DOPS

**COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Jill Maddison**

**Course Director Response:**

**This had been addressed under 3.1 above.**

**Action Required:**

**Action Deadline:**

**Action assigned to:**

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

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

Yes

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

Externs fully appreciate public health restrictions have limited/delayed the implementation of recent comments. Discussions around the updating of OSCEs a priority.

**COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Jill Maddison**

**Course Director Response:**

Thank you. This is noted.

**Action Required:**

**Action Deadline:**

**Action assigned to:**

**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:**

As indicated in 2.3 regarding potential ambiguity in Q3 on Finals part II - arbitration required where differences of professional opinion between question writers and externals.

**COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Jill Maddison**

**Course Director Response:**

As discussed previously

**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:**

#### **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:**

As indicated in report:

1. Anticipate and welcome the introduction of minimum thresholds in Finals Part II
2. Updating of existing OSCEs
3. System of arbitration in place where differences of professional opinion found between question writers and externals.

**COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Jill Maddison**

**Course Director Response:**

Noted earlier and will be implemented

**Action Required:**

**Action Deadline:**

**Action assigned to:**

**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)**

