

ANNUAL QUALITY IMPROVEMENT REPORT 2016/17

Appendix 3: External Examiners' report

BVetMed Year 1

This appendix contains Course Director's/Year Leader's responses to 2016/17 External Examiners' comments and updates to actions from External Examiners' reports from previous years (if applicable).

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

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

Appendix 3 consists of:

a.	Updates from Course Director/Year Leader to actions from previous years' reports (if applicable)
b.	2016/17 Collaborative Annual Report with responses from Course Director/Year Leader

a. Update to actions from 2015/16 External Examiners Report:

Question	External Examiners' comments	Course Director's response & Action	Update in 2016/17
<p>3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous</p>	<p>Essays Due to the high student number it is felt that the use of essays may result in a lack of robustness and objectivity in assessment (see 3.4). MCQs After reviewing draft examination papers, external examiners have commented on more than one occasion regarding the failure of MCQ questions to pass the 'cover-up test'. This, added to the complex nature of distractors and double negative phrasing in the question stem, places an unnecessary and unwanted time constraint on exam candidates.</p>	<p>Course Director Response: The essay paper (3) is made up of two parts- A and B comprising of 3 questions each from 6 different topics covered in the year. A student must answer two questions from each section. A careful selection and distribution of questions from three topics (strands) that are covered in total and three topics covered partially in the first year ensure a good coverage and assessment of materials taught in the first year. A great attempt to adhere to the advice of the external examiners have been made but occasionally some questions have inevitably been used that do not meet the 'cover-up test'. Action Required: Essay and Problem Solving papers: We are in the process of blueprinting the exams and which will translate not only a greater alignment of the assessment with learning but also creating a more rigorous and robust assessment. It is envisaged that creating many sections in the exam requiring a student to answer at least one question per section OR developing individual questions with multiple components from different strands (e.g. Alimentary, Immunology and pathology) will achieve the required assessment threshold. MCQ: In order to correct the anomalies raised by the external examiners, a team of experts (staff) have been selected to review the existing MCQs bank and in addition suggest topics or areas that may need the drafting of new questions. Action Deadline: 01-Apr-2017 Action assigned to: Raymond Macharia & Exams Office</p>	<p>COMPLETED Blueprinting of exams has been achieved and incorporated in the Assessment and Award Regulation 2017. They reflect the following: <u>Essay questions</u> A total of nine questions are to be provided in the exam. The questions are in three sections of which the student must a question from each section. The essay topics expect the student to cover depth as opposed to breadth of knowledge. The Topics covered in the essay paper include Animal Husbandry, Alimentary, Neurology, Principles of Science (POS) and Development. <u>Problem solving.</u> Comprise of four questions, all of which must be answered. The questions are made of multiple components from different strands (e.g. Alimentary, Immunology and pathology/ Neurology and Development). <u>MCQ</u> The exam paper has questions increased from 45 to 60. The questions in the MCQ bank have been analysed by experts to correct anomalies and to conform to standards suggested by external examiners.</p>
<p>3.4 Standard of marking</p>	<p>Essays Due to the high student number it is felt that the use of essays may result in a lack of robustness and objectivity in assessment (see 3.4). MCQs After reviewing draft examination</p>	<p>Course Director Response: Agreed- In one essay question (Paper 3, June 2016) the marker failed to adhere to the Common Grading Scheme (CGS). This was purely inadvertent. The examiner had been requested to reformat the question from a problem solving type to a essay type (and which was done). However the examiner did not change the marking</p>	<p>COMPLETED As stated above, the blueprinting of exams has already been achieved. All the exams questions for 2016/17 were reviewed and scrutinise by an internal examiners panel to ensure adherence to the requisite standard and grading schemes</p>

	<p>papers, external examiners have commented on more than one occasion regarding the failure of MCQ questions to pass the 'cover-up test'. This, added to the complex nature of distractors and double negative phrasing in the question stem, places an unnecessary and unwanted time constraint on exam candidates.</p>	<p>scheme from a 10 point to CGS. When this issue was raised by the externals. From the start this question though sample marked was an outlier after statistical analysis. Routine sample second marking is continuing supplemented by needs based second marking following statistical analysis. A team of subject experts (staff) were assigned to remark the question and align the marks particularly of all candidates obtaining 50% or less marks.</p> <p>Action Required: All the exams questions will be reviewed by an internal panel to ensure adherence to the requisite grading scheme. In addition, the blueprinting of the exams which is soon coming to effect will ensure that a clear procedure to scrutinise all questions before submitting them to the external examiners. All Essay questions will be statistically analysed after marking and those deemed to be outliers will be subjected to further sample marking of the whole question in addition to marking of specific questions from failing candidates.</p> <p>To note: That the statistics carried out this year involved paper 2 and 3 results from this year and the previous 2 years in order to streamline and validate the current results. Fortunately it will be easier for coming academic year (2016/17) as it will involve analysing 2016/17 papers only. A review of the MCQ bank as stated in the response to 3.2 above will in the first instance clearly identify unreliable questions and will result in improvement of the question bank. The standard setting of MCQ paper will continue as before.</p> <p>Action Deadline: 01-Apr-2017 Action assigned to: Raymond Macharia/Exams office</p>	<p>before being submitted to the external examiners.</p>
<p>3.5 In your view, are the procedures for assessment and the determination of awards sound and fairly</p>	<p>As discussed in Section 3.4, there was an issue regarding the adherence to the CGS, which was a reoccurrence from last year. However, marking arrangements were dealt with efficiently by the examination chair, both with the support of the examinations office</p>	<p>Course Director Response: I concur with the examiners observation.</p> <p>Action Required: As stated in 3.4 above, the mix-up in the grading scheme was quickly addressed. A thorough scrutiny of all questions and their model answers will be put in place to forestall such an unfortunate circumstance.</p> <p>Action Deadline:</p>	<p>COMPLETED Model answers and grading schemes have been incorporated in the 2016/17 essay and PSQ papers before submitting to the external examiners. In addition, the learning objectives (LO) from which the questions have been set are also clearly entered for the purpose of</p>

<p>conducted? (e.g. Briefing, Exam administration, marking arrangements, Board of Examiners, participation by External Examiners)</p>	<p>administration and in full consideration of the views of the external examiners. As such, no candidates in the examination were disadvantaged and the procedures for assessment and the determination of awards were therefore sound and fairly conducted.</p>	<p>01-Apr-2017 Action assigned to: Raymond Macharia/ Exams office</p>	<p>collating the learning outcomes and the model answers. During marking, each internal examiner is to receive the relevant question and model answer, together with the marking scheme.</p>
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Collaborative Report

Exam board meeting: 11-Jul-2017

Bachelor of Veterinary Medicine, Year 1, 2016/17

Lead examiner: Dr Paul Loughna

Collaborating examiner(s): Dr Michael Lee, Dr David Bainbridge, Dr Ian Jeffcoate

The Programme

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

1.1 Course content

The course content is, in general, appropriate for this stage of an integrated programme of this type. However, Biochemistry is relatively under-represented.

Response from college requested: **NO**

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

Biochemistry is not taught as a stand-alone subject but incorporated within the context of 'whole animal' teaching in the Principles of Science (POS) strand.

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

The learning objectives appear appropriate and comprehensive. The content and quality of the students assessed work indicates that the objectives are clearly met for a very high proportion of the cohort.

Response from college requested: **NO**

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

Efforts have been made to align Teaching and Learning with Assessment.

1.3 Teaching methods

As far as we are able to assess, the teaching methodology is broad, is commensurate with both the range of teaching material being delivered and the outcomes being assessed, and includes knowledge, understanding and problem solving.

Response from college requested: NO

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

Diverse but objective teaching methods are employed in delivering Teaching and Learning. Learning objectives and outcomes are clearly laid out for every topic/lecture or practical that is delivered.

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

Resources appear adequate. However, there are indications that increasing student numbers may present problems. Our primary concern is the burden on current academic and administrative staff involved in an assessment process for over 200 students

There is an associated concern for quality and objectivity when large numbers of scripts for a single question are 'split' between two markers.

Response from college requested: NO

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

There is great emphasis to balance the assessment load among teaching members of staff. Where an exam question has been answered by a majority of students (especially where choice of questions is allowed) two or more members of staff with requisite understanding/knowledge of the subject matter are employed to mark. However, the two or so markers use the same grading scheme (with model answer as the guiding framework) and hence lessen the chance of disparity of marks awarded. In addition, double marking is employed to mitigate any discrepancies.

1.5 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the Programme

Response from college requested: NO

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 student ability appears to be commensurate with that of similar cohorts at other UK Universities. The four examiners (from different Universities) covered most aspects of the course.

Response from college requested: **NO**

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

We have 4 external examiners whose speciality overlap to cover all aspects of the taught course in the first year.

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

A high proportion of students gain an overall mark in either the distinction- (18%) or merit-level (19%) category. From scrutiny of the various elements of the assessed work for these students, it is clearly evident such awards are deserved. In contrast, it is also clear that the 12% of students in the bottom range display a uniformly weak performance across the board.

Response from college requested: **NO**

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

The assessment clearly demonstrate a normal distribution in performance. However, the exam board's interrogation of the bottom range uncovered that a significant number of students in this category gained entry into the BVetMed course through the Gateway programme.

Action Required:

The Gateway course director has been notified of the poor performance of a section of the students via Gateway entry route and will work towards mapping areas of the Gateway course needing corrective measures.

Action Deadline:

25-Sep-2017

Action assigned to:

Dr Lisa Thurston

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

We noted that there was a strong correlation between marks in the ICA and the total marks after the summer sitting, with almost all students who failed overall achieving less than 55% in the ICA. We would encourage staff to continue to robustly monitor these interim results and feedback to individual students, regarding the likely outcome were they not to take action to remedy their performance. Indeed, some students who scored poorly in the ICA went on to pass.

The performance of the resit students was disappointing, with only one of the five students who completed the exam passing. Obviously, this is a small statistical sample, but we would encourage careful assessment, discussion and support before and during the resit year.

Response from college requested: NO

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

The year leader consistently remind students of the value of ICA and its significant contribution to the final grade. The students have opportunity to review their ICA grades with the tutors during specific tutor sessions in a view to improve their grades and ultimately the overall performance. The Senior tutor will action all the tutors to specifically engage the students on the content and value of ICAs.

Action Required:

Senior tutor to introduce ICA reflection sessions within the timetabled tutor meetings and where possible to take place immediately after each ICA results are provided.

The Year leader will use the opportunities during Q&A sessions spread out through the academic year to reinforce to the students of the need to consistently improve their ICA grades.

Action Deadline:

25-Sep-2017

Action assigned to:

Dr Donald Palmer/ Year Leader

Please comment, as appropriate, on:

3.1 Assessment methods (relevance to learning objectives and curriculum)

The range of assessment methods is in general appropriate and aligned to the stated learning objectives. Running ISF vivas in a consistent and objective manner is a continuing challenge, but it was perceived that this aim was achieved better this year than previously. However, considering the work and resources involved, ISF orals did not appear to be an effective discriminator for many students. It could be argued, however, that requiring students to undertake a compulsory oral is, in itself, desirable for students' future engagement with the public.

Response from college requested: **NO**

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

In addition to being an assessment tool, ISF is a valued exam that not only help to determines a student's general and specific knowledge depth but also to gauge one's communication ability.

A communications skill session was specifically set up in May, to deal with some of the communications challenges and potential misconceptions that some students have with the ISF oral exam experience. Among other things, they had a chance to use one or two props and role-play both as examiner and examinee during this session.

Action Required:

To add an extra space in the ISF forms requiring an examiner to make comments on a student's communication ability that may be useful for remedial follow up through Communication skills course.

To repeat the communications skill session in the coming year.

Action Deadline:

15-Dec-2017

Action assigned to:

Dr Michael Doube

3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous

For the most part, the individual assessment processes appear to be rigorously designed and delivered. Areas of concern that the external examiners wish to flag:

Essays 1: Due to the high student number, some of us felt that the use of essays may result in a lack of robustness and objectivity in assessment.

Essays 2: The rubric on the essay paper cover sheet contains errors, including the time available for a single essay, and mismatching plural/singular nouns/verbs.

MCQs: With two exceptions, the MCQs were well set and performed well.

PSQs 1: The quality of these four questions varied. In some cases, the questions were not sufficiently clear for the students to know what was expected, nor for the marking scheme to be applied entirely consistently. This was highlighted when the externs reviewed the draft paper, but the problem persisted into the final version. We suggest that dividing PSQs into more, smaller sections may remedy this problem.

PSQs 2: For question 3, the second marker disagreed with the marks for 50% of the papers assessed, yet signed off the marking as agreeing with the marking scheme.

Response from college requested: **NO**

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

The blue printing of the final BVM1 exam was carried out. The MCQ paper now comprise of 60 questions up from previous 45. The PSQ paper is made up of 4 compulsory questions derived from the main strands but also integrating one or more other minor topics. This format of exam in essence means that markers would likewise be drawn from all the teaching staff participating in drafting each exam question. The compulsory nature of the paper was deemed necessary because problem solving is the most constant format of engagement of any practising veterinarian. It was however felt that increasing the PSQ paper to 6 would provide a wider coverage of topics

examined. Paper 3 (Essay) is made up 9 questions in 3 sections, with a student choosing a question from each section. The student is supposed to demonstrate depth of knowledge depth rather than breadth. The board meeting recommended that the number of questions in the essay paper be increased to 12 with four sections, and students to answer 4 questions, one from each of the four sections.

Action Required:

To increase the number of PSQ from 4 to 6.

To increase the number of essay questions to 12 (3x4 sections) with a student answering a question from each section.

To work with the exam office to ensure that the wording of the rubrics on the cover sheet is systematic, free of errors and succinctly clear to the candidates.

To address the issue of discrepancies between marks awarded by two or more makers of the same question through a departmental forum or meeting.

Action Deadline:

25-Sep-2017

Action assigned to:

Dr Vicky Waring

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

The level of assessment is consistent with the FHEQ and is in line with other institutions awarding the veterinary degree.

Response from college requested: NO

3.4 Standard of marking

All three major comments made under this heading last year seem to have been addressed, and the problems highlighted do not seem to have reoccurred.

Response from college requested: NO

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

It is the duty of the year leader and internal examiners to address matters raised by the external examiners regarding the exams. It is gratifying to note from the external examiners that all previous concerns had been addressed.

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 - the procedures were sound and all administrative and academic staff responded promptly and knowledgeably to all our enquiries.

Response from college requested: NO

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

The chair of the board, the internal examiners and exams office have been working efficiently to deliver a credible examination process.

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

We are pleased to see that all questions on the PSQ paper 2 are now compulsory, as is appropriate for an assessment of this format. We would favour an increase to six PSQs in this paper, to reflect a spread of topics across the course, but retaining the compulsory element.

Response from college requested: NO

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

This is addressed in section 3.2 of this report.

3.7 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the procedures

We welcome the statistical analysis with which we have been provided - it is impressive. In future, it would be good to receive an analysis of the relative performance of Gateway students.

We were grateful to receive direct feedback on our comments on the draft papers this year.

Response from college requested: **NO**

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

I understand this to mean ex-Gateway students. We will endeavour to provide the analysis the students against the overall class performance. This would be mainly an introspective look at their performance in order to inform on any teaching deficits in the Gateway year.

Action Required:

Year Leader and Gateway course director to act on the above.

Action Deadline:

25-Sep-2017

Action assigned to:

Vicky Waring and Lisa Thurston

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

No

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

The externs have previously noticed the relative paucity of questions on Animal Husbandry in the examination, but unfortunately, this problem has not been addressed and persisted this year. In total, this topic was represented by 3 MCQs, approximately one third of a single PSQ, one essay which could be avoided (21 students chose it) and 16% of all the ISF oral questions asked. Except for the ISF orals, these values are far below the representation of Animal Husbandry in the course, and certainly its importance in veterinary practice. This should be remedied in 2018, and the student told that this will occur,

Response from college requested: NO

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

There is an overlap of AH and alimentary system topics and for this reason the number of related MCQs were slightly higher than directly observed. However, it is important to note that there was a limitation in the use of MCQs in the data bank because not all the questions available in the data bank had been standard-set while others were deemed not to meet the threshold of the cover-up test.

Action Required:

Year leader to work Exams office to work in a view to have more questions reviewed, standard-set, created and added to the existing MCQ bank.

Action Deadline:

15-May-2018

Action assigned to:

Troy Gibson, Vicky Waring and Exams office

4.2 An acceptable response has been made

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Response from college requested: NO

4.3 I approved the papers for the Examination

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Response from college requested: 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:

Response from college requested: 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:

Response from college requested: NO

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

The external examiners did a sterling job to ensure that we delivered the highest standard of assessment possible.

4.6 Candidates were considered impartially and fairly

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Response from college requested: NO

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

The candidates are anonymized in their written papers and even ISF where they are not, two examiners are paired so as to compliment one another and grade the candidate fairly and impartially.

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:

Response from college requested: 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:

Response from college requested: NO

4.9 I have received enough support to carry out my role

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

We would like to thank all involved, especially Lauren Christian, for their help and support.

Response from college requested: NO

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

Lauren has been working flat out, collating exam questions, communicating with external and internal examiners in a timely manner and above all placing realistic deadlines for the whole examination process.

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:

Response from college requested: NO

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

Lauren and the year Leader have been working together to ensure that the external examiners (and internal) are fully informed of their duties and roles in the examination process.

4.11 Appropriate procedures and processes have been followed

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Response from college requested: NO

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

The exemplary work done by Laure Christian is noted -As expressed by the external examiners in section 4.9 .

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Response from college requested: NO

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Raymond Macharia

Course Director Response:

The concerted effort by the internal and external examiners to provide quality assessment is hereby noted.

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:

Response from college requested: **NO**

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)