

ANNUAL QUALITY IMPROVEMENT REPORT 2018/19

Appendix 3: External Examiners' report

Gateway

This appendix contains Year Leader's responses to 2018/19 External Examiners' comments and updates to actions from previous External Examiners' reports (if applicable).

As Year Leader/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, 01707666938

Appendix 3 consists of:

a.	Updates to actions from previous years' reports
b.	2017/18 Collaborative Annual Report with responses from Course Director/Year Leader

a. Updates to actions from previous years' reports

Report Question	External Examiners' comments & suggested actions	Course Director/Year Leader's response & Action	Update in 2018/19
<p>1.4 Resources (in so far as they affected the assessment)</p>	<p>The external examiners would value a print-out of module descriptors and lecture lists being made available on the scrutiny days (or possible emailed prior to arrival). It would also be helpful to examiners (particularly new ones) if the RVC set out their objectives or desires for external examiner action in advance of the scrutiny days. In relation to the point above, it would be valuable if RVC developed a policy document which set out clear guidance for external examiners. As an example, it would be helpful for both staff and examiners to have specific boundaries in relation to the marks achieved by individual students. It is not normal practice for external examiners to be consulted about the marks of a particular student, but this could be stated clearly in a policy document.</p>	<p>We will endeavor to provide you with the module descriptors and lecture listings prior to your arrival to review the assessments. The College provides online training for External Examiners in terms of their role in the quality assurance process. Advice and guidance can be sought from the Exams Officer who oversees the assessments for your course / year as well as the Exam Board Chair. We regularly review the information that is provided to our External Examiners and this will be addressed in due course</p> <p>Action Required: Review current training documents for External Examiners</p> <p>Action Deadline: 01-Jan-2019</p> <p>Action assigned to: Head of Examinations, Academic Quality Manager & Academic Quality Officer (Standards)</p>	<p>COMPLETE</p> <p>The Head of Examinations has updated the RVC Guidance to External Examiners Information and reviewed current policies.</p> <p>The Gateway Lead will provide the external examiners with copies of the module handbooks including lecture content and learning objectives in advance of their visit to RVC.</p>
<p>3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous</p>	<p>The procedures on the whole are rigorous, but the examiners identified a few issues that could be improved. We note the procedure for moderation that is in place. Part of this is that no further action is taken on discrepancies between the first and moderator markers unless the moderator has selected "yes" on the form. It may be worth considering additional actions such as moderating an expanded sample of scripts if >2 discrepancies are noted. This would provide additional assurances for individual students to whom a difference of a few % could make the world of difference. In the majority of long answer / essay scripts, the words used to summarise</p>	<p>Thank you for your comments and helpful discussions during the exam board meeting.</p> <p>During the sample marking process the member of staff is required to review a minimum percentage of scripts, depending on the size of the marking batch (10% or 20%), but ensuring they sample the full range of marks. If the sample marker is unable to agree/disagree the marks in general, based on the sample selected, they are able to increase the sample size. Should the sample markers disagree with the first marker then the action taken will be determined by the rationale given for disagreement, but would usually start with the</p>	<p>COMPLETE</p>

	<p>the essay standard (e.g. “very sound answer”, “Quite good answer”, etc) and the grade awarded did not line up with the common grading scheme. We are aware that markers may feel that the CGS is not well tailored to each programme of study and so it may be that the RVC feel that the CSG needs revision in consultation with staff.</p>	<p>sample marker discussing the findings with the 1st marker.</p> <p>When blind double marking is used, for major Final Year Projects, markers are required to come an agreed mark. We are currently reviewing the use of a ‘facilitator’ where markers disagree over a broad range to ensure the process for agreeing the final mark is fair, justified and documented.</p> <p>Markers will be encouraged to adhere as closely as possible to the descriptors contained within the common grading scheme. In collaboration with the examinations office we will explore options for the modification and development of the RVC common grading scheme.</p> <p>Action Required:</p> <p>Discuss options for the modification and development of the RVC common grading scheme.</p> <p>Action Deadline:</p> <p>01-Jan-2019</p> <p>Action assigned to:</p> <p>Lisa Thurston</p>	
<p>3.4 Standard of marking</p>	<p>1) A general comment is that the quantity and quality of annotation on the exam scripts was variable.</p> <p>2) There were many instances in which a formal summary feedback statement was completely absent at the end of a long answer / essay script.</p> <p>3) In a few instances, the handwriting of markers was illegible.</p> <p>4) In a couple of instances the poor handwriting of students was noted on an exam script. At the board, it seemed that there was no formal strategy for handling illegible scripts. This should be considered. E.g. if more than one in 5 words are illegible then the student could be called in to transcribe prior to marking.</p>	<p>We will remind markers of the importance of the RVC policy regarding the quality of written feedback annotated on scripts. Illegible handwriting has not been raised as an issue for markers in previous years. Students are required to write legibly and, in line with College regulations, any part of a script which is considered by the Examiners to be illegible will be awarded no marks. Students with extremely poor handwriting should, when discovered, be directed to the Education Development tutors for assistance.</p> <p>Action Required:</p> <p>Markers to be reminded about the RVC policy of annotation of scripts when marking is issued.</p> <p>Action Deadline:</p>	<p>COMPLETE</p>

		01-Jan-2019 Action assigned to: Exams Office	
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)	<p>The procedures are absolutely sound and fair. The administration staff are highly efficient, very helpful and should be congratulated. Evaluation of "In Course Assessments" (ICAs) and projects has to be undertaken using an online system that is rather unhelpful to external examiners. As there are a large number of ICAs, and the examiners would ideally like to have a reasonably objective method of comparing the grades awarded, it may be useful to develop a sampling strategy. If ICA titles could be shown alongside the student's names and marks, it would help the examiners to identify topics within their field of expertise as well as helping them to select a sample of low, middle and highly graded pieces of work. At present the titles are not visible and the titles are shown in obscurely coded format.</p> <p>The Board of Examiners meeting gave all participants the opportunity to voice opinions.</p>	<p>We would like to thank the RVC Exams Office staff, in particular Adam Osgood and Emma Rosenberg, for their efficiency in running the Gateway assessments.</p> <p>We would encourage the exams office to present ICA information in a format which makes the external examiners role as transparent and easy as possible.</p> <p>Action Required: Examinations office to explore the feasibility of providing external examiners with the information requested in their report, regarding in course assessments.</p> <p>Action Deadline: 01-Jan-2019</p> <p>Action assigned to: Exams Office</p>	Complete
4.10 I have received sufficient information to carry out my role (where information was insufficient, please give details)	<p>The induction day(s) for new external examiners could be improved by explaining more clearly what the RVC expects. To a great extent the external examiner's role is rather unclear, especially when first confronted by large assemblage of exam scripts. As mentioned previously, this could be clarified by developing an examiner's handbook or policy document.</p>	<p>As discussed, the examinations office will receive this feedback and will explore options for the development of an external examiner policy document.</p> <p>Action Required: Examinations office to review the external examiner induction day content and explore options for the development of an external examiner policy document.</p> <p>Action Deadline: 01-Jan-2019</p> <p>Action assigned to: Exams Office and Academic Quality Officer (Standards)</p>	COMPLETE

b. Collaborative Report

Exam board meeting: 16-Jul-2019

Veterinary Gateway Programme, 2018/19

Lead examiner: Professor William Holt

Collaborating examiner(s): Dr Lucy Green

The Programme

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

1.1 Course content

The course content is appropriate, and in most respects is clearly aligned against the equivalent BSc1 course. The various modules give a wide grounding in the relevant science. The Gateway students also study a module in Animal Husbandry, which is essential preparation for those intending to progress towards veterinary medicine or allied professions. The course structure ensures that the Gateway students are part of a larger cohort, which gives them access to peer support and interactions. The Gateway students have to achieve a high standard in their examinations in order to progress with their degree; this mechanism provides a degree of rigorous selection that ultimately protects both the weaker students and the institution.

Response from college requested: **YES**

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

Many thanks for your positive comments. We have strived to create a dynamic and exciting course for these widening participation students who aspire to the study of veterinary medicine and we are very proud of how this year has been received by students and staff alike.

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

Gateway students, the arithmetic component of questions continues to be a struggle for some students. We note that course leaders have offered directed learning sessions to support students with this element of the assessment, and note in last year's course director response that online tutorial material is being developed by Learning Technology. We also note that the course leaders have attempted to modify the order of examination questions (as suggested in last years' examiners' report) as a way of avoiding the tendency for students to panic when first confronted with the mathematically based questions. It was clear, however, from the examination board discussion that course leaders were very aware of these problems and were making every effort to help.

Nevertheless, the examiners noted that, overall, the exam marks achieved by the Gateway students were very similar to those taking the BSc 1 exams. However, it was also noted that there was a discrepancy in performance between Gateway students and BSc 1 students in terms of the IGE marks (Gateway median was 26.6% compared with 37.5% for BSc 1) and that there were 14 fails among the Gateway cohort. The reasons for this difference were possibly caused by the numeracy issues that have also been identified in previous years.

The learning objectives addressed by a particular examination question were not always stated in guide answers. This was also noted in 2017 and 2018 and it would be an enhancement if this could be achieved for all questions.

Response from college requested: **YES**

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

We appreciate that during the 2018-19 Gateway examinations, there has been a higher number of failing students at the first attempt and will closely monitor this situation. In particular, Gateway students performed poorly in the Inheritance, Genetics and Evolution module, when compared to previous Gateway years and to the present BSc1 cohort. In 2019-20, the Inheritance, Genetics and Inheritance module will have a new Module Leader, who will be tasked with reviewing content and assessment with the view to supporting struggling students.

We agree that the reduced performance of the 2018-19 Gateway student cohort may be related to a lack of confidence with numeracy issues. As the External Examiners state, during 2018-19, we have implemented a number of support mechanisms to assist this widening participation cohort to develop their numeracy skills, including maths-based problem solving Skills Tutorials and multiple data interpretation-based Directed Learning sessions throughout the course including on the Inheritance, Genetics and Evolution module.

Regarding the design of numeracy-based examination questions, we have modified the order of examination questions (as noted by the External Examiners) in order to reduce student anxiety when first confronted with a mathematically based question. In addition, we have ensured that all examination questions incorporate sub-sections which 'stand alone' and will not necessitate a correct answer in a previous section in order to score well in subsequent sections.

Despite these innovations, this year's Gateway cohort have continued to struggle and so, for the 2019-20 intake we will implement further numeracy support for our widening participation students with the assistance of the RVC Educational Development Department. Laura Hamilton (Ed Dev) will be tasked with running a series of timetabled small group numeracy workshops relating to aspects of the course requiring data interpretation (particularly the Inheritance, Genetics and Evolution module and Animal Husbandry module). In addition, Laura will hold 1-2-1 drop in sessions for students with particular numeracy difficulties as identified by in-course assessment performance or by the students themselves. Laura is familiar with the widening participation cohort and already runs a number of support sessions in other areas of the Gateway course covering aspects such as approaching problem solving questions, plagiarism etc.

In addition to numeracy issues, this year's cohort have taken longer to settle into university style learning and this has impacted on their term 1 assessment results, with a higher number of students failing to meet the pass mark in the Biology of Cells Module when compared to previous cohorts. It is potentially worth noting that the 2018-19 cohort entered the Gateway course with lower average offers than in previous years – partly due to a low birth rate year putting pressure on all University courses to fill places. The A-Level average for the 2016-17 cohort was equivalent to BBC; 2017-18 was halfway between BBC and BCC; and the 2018-19 cohort entered with just over BCC, so average qualifications on entry have slowly reduced. This is reflected in the threshold average score at interview to receive an offer with the 2017-18 students achieving a score of 3.46 and the 2018-19 students scoring 3.33. This score has increased to 3.46 for the 2019-20 entry and so we hope that the performance of next years cohort will return to previous performance levels. While this is only one contributing factor influencing student performance, it is something that we are aware of and will explore further. It is reassuring to see that students performed better in their term 2 module assessments, indicating that they are able to learn from previous mistakes and can access the academic material with practice.

Interestingly, the proportion of 2018-19 students who sat the Extended Diploma – BTEC – over A Levels, has increased compared to 2016-17 data, 8 students and 5 students respectively. However, the highest number of students entering the course with the Extended Diploma occurred in 2017-18 (8 students) with no detrimental consequences on examination results, possibly because the BTEC students tend to struggle with extended essay writing and not numeracy.

Lastly, in 2018-19, with the advent of a new route onto the Gateway Course (via the Sutton Trust Summer School), 5 students entered onto the Gateway course without meeting 3 of our previous widening participation criteria. We will monitor this carefully as it is essential that we are identifying excellent students who have not benefitted from optimal learning opportunities before entering the college and not those students who may not have the potential to cope with the academic challenges of the Veterinary Medicine course.

The external examiners note that not all examination model answers included the related Learning Objectives. The Gateway Course Director, module leaders and the exams office have been extremely proactive in encouraging staff to submit this information and it is a shame that not all question setting staff have complied with their requests. We will endeavour to further stress the importance of this information to staff in order to map the examinations to the course objectives.

Action Required:

1. Inheritance, Genetics and Evolution Module Lead to review module content and assessments with the view to supporting students with numeracy issues, in the light of the 2018-19 examination results. (Deadline: April 2020).
2. Educational Development Dept. (Laura Hamilton) to develop and deliver numeracy workshops to support

students struggling with mathematical concepts/data interpretation in the Inheritance, Genetics and Evolution Module and the Animal Husbandry Module. Also, to run a series of drop-in sessions to address the problems of specific students. (Deadline: April 2020)

Gateway Programme Director and exams office to ensure that all examination questions are mapped to specific learning objectives. (Deadline: April 2020).

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

1.3 Teaching methods

The programme offers a wide range of options for study, that includes lectures, projects, Directed Learning and some practical work. It is also evident that there are many online resources as well, including some video tutorials aimed at teaching “common sense” as well as focused scientific topics. However, from some informal conversations with staff we noted that students are tending to substitute the private viewing of online video lectures for the opportunity to see the “live” lecture face-to-face. Moreover, viewing the online video lectures is apparently regarded by some students as their “extended study”, to the detriment of wider reading. It would be worth attempting to counter these trends and encourage students to attend lectures in person wherever possible. We noted that the Gateway course includes an on-farm placement of about 6 weeks, where the students learn hands-on about practical topics such as lambing. It was also apparent from some of the write-ups of this experience that students were also learning how to take on an important degree of personal responsibility for the animals in their care, as well as gaining an understanding of the economics of farm management.

Response from college requested: YES

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

We are particularly proud of the variety of teaching strategies employed on the Gateway course and will continue to provide a broad spectrum of content delivery styles. We also agree that the Lambing placement and associated report are an essential and beneficial element of the course providing an opportunity for students at the beginning of their Veterinary careers to be exposed to real-life farming ethics and economics.

We note the External Examiners’ concerns regarding attendance at lectures. At present the Gateway lecture content is voice recorded via the Echo system. These voice recordings can be accessed online alongside their PowerPoint slide presentations. We do not yet video record lectures. It is unfortunate that a small number of students might have opted to access Echo (voice recording) rather than attend the lecture in person. I still believe this to be a very small number of students and in my personal experience, most students continue to attend in person.

We do, and will continue to, strongly encourage students to attend all taught sessions. During 2018-19 we have identified individuals who prefer to learn via Echo – these have tended to be the students with social anxiety disorders such as Autism Spectrum Disorder. Once identified, these students have been encouraged to engage in a ‘buddy system’ where a group of willing students are asked to check in on their peers and invite them along to teaching sessions.

The Educational Development staff have also engaged with the ‘Echo-learners’ to reinforce the benefits of face-to-face learning. In extreme cases, students have also been assigned a staff Mentor to monitor engagement and assist in facilitating face-to-face learning interactions with the academic staff teaching on their course.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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

No specific information has been provided to examiners in relation to resources for assessment. The resources to deliver effective teaching and learning appear to be excellent and the recent improvements in the site facilities will have enhanced the student experience.

In 2017.18, examiners commented on the resource of academic staff time, as being at risk of being over-stretched given the volume of assessment and the rapidly increasing number of students overall. This year, examiners noted that adjustments had been made to assessment with fewer essay-style questions. No information was provided to examiners as to the impact of more short-answer style exam questions on staff assessment time or on the speed of feedback to students on in-course assessments. Linked to this are examiner observations on variable feedback style and potential time/resource savings that might be made by a more uniform approach.

Response from college requested: YES

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

We thank the External Examiners for their positive comments regarding the academic resources and on-site facilities that enhance our students' learning experience.

The decision to remove essay-style questions from the Gateway Programme's summative examination brings it into line with the rest of the RVC Veterinary Medicine Programme and as such, will not put students at a disadvantage as they progress through the course. Indeed, an earlier and more rigorous exposure to Problem Solving and Short Answer Questioning styles will enable them to cope better with the assessment process as they move through the latter years of their course.

From a staffing perspective, the move to Problem Solving and Short Answer questioning has helped to alleviate the significant assessment load felt in previous years of the modular Gateway Programme.

While the quality of student feedback improves year on year, we recognise that there are still things we can do to optimise feedback from the student perspective. We are confident that the feedback provided by staff on in-course assessments is now of good quality, but that the style of this feedback is varied – something which can be viewed by the students as confusing, particularly when assessments are marked by a team of academics.

In 2019-20, we aim to pilot an online marking rubric for one of the team marked in-course assessments (possibly the Inheritance, Genetics and Evolution module), which if successful could be rolled-out across modules (and potentially courses).

Action Required:

Gateway lead, BSc lead and Inheritance, Genetics and Evolution module lead to devise and deliver a pilot online marking/feedback rubric for the Gateway and BSc1 in course assessment. (Deadline: February 2020)

Action Deadline:**Action assigned to:****1.5 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the Programme**

In 2018 the examiners made a series of suggestions which would help them with their assessments during their scrutiny visits. We did not see that any of these had yet been implemented, and so we re-iterate the same remarks below..

The external examiners would value a print-out of module descriptors and lecture lists being made available on the scrutiny days (or possible emailed prior to arrival).

It would also be helpful to examiners (particularly new ones) if the RVC set out their objectives or desires for external examiner action in advance of the scrutiny days.

In relation to the point above, it would be valuable if RVC developed a policy document which set out clear guidance for external examiners. As an example, it would be helpful for both staff and examiners to have specific boundaries in relation to the marks achieved by individual students. It is not normal practice for external examiners to be consulted about the marks of a particular student, but this could be stated clearly in a policy document.

Response from college requested: YES

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston**Course Director Response:**

We note the External Examiners' comments regarding the provision of module descriptors and lecture listings prior their arrival to assist in reviewing the assessments. We apologise that this did not take place this year. Rather than leaving this to the exams office, in future years the Gateway Course Director will email this information to the External Examiners' in advance of their visit. The External Examiners are also encouraged to access this information (and any other relevant course content documents) by accessing RVC Learn.

The College provides online training for External Examiners in terms of their role in the quality assurance process. Advice and guidance can be sought from the Exams Officer who oversees the assessments for your course / year as well as the Exam Board Chair. We regularly review the information that is provided to our External Examiners' and this will be addressed in due course. Reviews of External Examiner training documents and the Examiner Induction Day are planned for August 2019. In addition, the exams office are presently exploring options for the development of an External Examiner policy document.

Action Required:

Gateway lead to provide the external examiners with module descriptor and lecture listings in advance of the July 2020 Exam board. (Deadline: June 2020).

Exams office to review External Examiner training documents and the content of the Examiner Induction Day. In addition, to explore options for the development of an External Examiner policy document. (April 2020)

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

Mostly, the performance of students is comparable to what we have observed in Russell Group universities offering similar or related programmes of study (Birmingham, Nottingham, Southampton, Liverpool).

For BSc 1 / Gateway it was noted that there was a high degree of fails and Qualified fails in IGE and BoC modules.

Response from college requested: NO

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

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

We hope that we have addressed the External Examiners comments regarding the lower student performance in section 1.2 of this report.

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

For BSc 1 and especially Gateway students, the arithmetic component of questions continues to be a struggle for some students. We note that course leaders have offered directed learning sessions to support students with this element of the assessment, and note in last year's course director response that online tutorial material is being developed by Learning Technology. We also note that the course leaders have attempted to modify the order of examination questions (as suggested in last years' examiners' report) as a way of avoiding the tendency for students to panic when first confronted with the mathematically based questions. It was clear, however, from the examination board discussion that course leaders were very aware of these problems and were making every effort to help.

The examiners noted that, overall, the exam marks achieved by the Gateway students were very similar to those taking the BSc 1 exams. However, that there was a noticeable discrepancy in performance between Gateway students and BSc 1 students in terms of the IGE marks (Gateway median was 26.6% compared with 37.5% for BSc 1) and that there were 14 fails among the Gateway cohort. The reasons for this difference were possibly caused by the numeracy issues mentioned above.

Response from college requested: YES

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

We hope that we have addressed the External Examiners comments regarding the lower student performance and the support mechanisms that we have put in place, in section 1.2 of this report.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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

Overall Gateway and BSc1 - Since the problem-solving question issues have resulted in some changes to practice, it would be of benefit to the examiners if an academic year-year summary (table or graphical) could be generated of performance in problem-based questions for BSc1 and Gateway. This would be helpful to external examiners and module leaders alike as they would be able to judge at a glance whether their innovations or changes were effecting any improvements in exam outcomes.

Response from college requested: YES

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

We agree that this data would be useful to External Examiners and Module Leaders alike and will action the exams office to provide this information as a matter of course.

Action Required:

Exams Office (John Sanger and Emma Rosenberg) to collate a summary of student performance in problem solving questions since the implementation of the modular Gateway course (to be added to each year in advance of the Exam Board) to assist RVC academics and External Examiners in evaluating question setting best practice policies and student support. (Deadline: April 2020).

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

Please comment, as appropriate, on:

3.1 Assessment methods (relevance to learning objectives and curriculum)

The removal of essay style questions now brings the programmes in line with other Russell Group courses. Testing for integration and synthesis of knowledge plus demonstration of extensive study beyond the syllabus of lectures is now fulfilled only by in course assessment, e.g. report writing. As already noted, the examiners feel that this must have been of benefit to staff assessment time, and we would imagine that students will find the short answer / MCQ styles to be a more rigorous test of their knowledge. It would be good if the impact of these changes were to be assessed in some way. Certainly from the examiners' perspective, review of examination papers was much more straightforward .

In all programmes, there is a good range of assessment procedures; this variety provides students with a number of ways to demonstrate knowledge and learning, and there is no reliance on a single method of assessment. The balance between in-course assessments and formal written examinations in modules is broadly consistent across programmes and is in line with wider practice in the sector.

Response from college requested: YES

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

We have designed the examinations so they are comprised of a mix of multiple choice, problem solving and short answer questions. In doing this, we hope that the students have been motivated to develop a diverse approach to their learning, being able to apply their knowledge in the form of data interpretation, clinical assessment and short explanations. In addition, the inclusion of short answer questions has allowed us to assess a broader range of the curriculum than was previously viable with a single essay question.

As stated previously in this report, the removal of essay-style questions brings the Gateway Programme assessments into line with examinations in latter years of the course and also with similar modular courses at other Russell Groups Universities.

As noted by the External Examiners, an additional benefit of this new assessment format is that marking of papers has become more time efficient and straightforward for academic staff, increasing the potential for team marking using rigorous model answers and marking breakdowns.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous

There appeared to be some evidence of discrepancies in the marks awarded to Gateway students for their "Lambing reports" (narratives that summarise and analyse their experiences during an on- farm placement). The discrepancies appeared to relate to the expectations of the difference markers, some of whom appeared to award low marks (i.e. 35 – 40%) while others awarded marks in the 80% range. Although these marks had been moderated, it was often very difficult for the external examiner to understand why such a wide discrepancy existed. It would be worth trying to analyse these results in more detail to see whether this impression was correct

These observations suggest that it would be of great value to overall rigour of the assessment process to set up simple macros within marking spreadsheets to analyse grades according to the marker. We appreciate that there is a solid moderation process in place, but this knowledge would help shed light on the instances where a module grades are observed to be high or lower than others.

Response from college requested: YES

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

We thank the external examiners for their positive comments regarding the rigor of our moderation processes.

We note the External Examiners' concerns regarding a potential marker variation in the Animal Husbandry in-course assessment (Lambing Report). This year, the Animal Husbandry module in-course assessment was team marked by an extended number of staff than in previous years which might have impacted on the variation in marks. However, this in-course assessment was subject to our sample marking processes. We will bring this issue to the attention of the new Animal Husbandry module leader (Nicola Blackie) with the view to carry out some analysis of the potential variation between markers and the development of a more rigorous Lambing report marking rubric in advance of the 2020 lambing period.

To clarify, at present, during the sample marking process a member of staff is required to review a minimum percentage of assessments, depending on the size of the marking batch (10% or 20%), but ensuring they sample the full range of marks. Should the sample markers disagree with the first marker then the action taken will be determined by the rationale given for disagreement, but would usually start with the sample marker discussing their findings with the 1st marker. We are currently reviewing the use of a 'facilitator' where markers disagree over a broad range to ensure the process for agreeing the final mark is fair, justified and documented. Markers are encouraged to adhere as closely as possible to the descriptors contained within the common grading scheme.

Action Required:

Animal Husbandry module leader (Nicola Blackie) to analyse any variation between markers on the 2018-19 Lambing report in-course assessment and to develop a marking rubric to assist academic staff in producing consistent feedback on future reports. (Deadline: February 2020)

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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

Entirely consistent

Response from college requested: NO

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

We thank the External Examiners for this positive comment.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

3.4 Standard of marking

The standard of marking is good overall and a number of developments in recent years have continued to demonstrate improvements in clarity and consistency.

One area for concern is in the consistency of feedback style and quality. This is summarised as follows:

For short answer questions / problem-solving questions:

Some markers used pen which was the same colour as the candidate's and one marker is using pencil (not legible). Some markers consistently assign one tick per mark, while others pepper the page with ticks and then assign a score which doesn't link up with it. Some markers used crosses for incorrect answers and one marker struck through the actual text. Aside from this wide variety of marking style there is also a variable level of annotation of scripts with comments to help explain marks. A consensus should be reached on style to maximise value to the students. A further observation concerned the allocation of marks within short answer questions – sometimes this had not been decided at the time of question setting and notes had been made by markers at the time of marking on guide answers concerning the allocation of marks. As an additional thought, examiners felt it would be of merit for question setters to consider always indicating to students within the body of the question (if more than one part to it) as to how the marks would be awarded – naturally some questions already do this when broken down into parts a, b....etc.

For coursework:

There was some really very good / excellent feedback offered on coursework. A particularly good feature of some markers' feedback was a section on 'Things you could do to improve this work'. However overall, examiners observed a wide range in the style with which feedback is delivered (tracked comments in word/pdf files; excel tabulated, listed within the online system, listed+categorized in some way within the online system etc.). This variability may affect the use that the student can make of the feedback and may also lead to confusion in the student body as a whole. It may be that students get greater benefit from tracked comments but that the online system makes more difficult for some assessors to implement. In some instances examiners awarded a first-class mark and did not give any real justification – for example, 'excellent abstract' as the only feedback does not allow a student to know why they did well and allow them to repeat it with confidence next time. Other instances the feedback language was vague, for example comments like 'sound answer' or 'Brush up on bits' do very little to aid students in evaluating their performance. We also observed many instances in which the feedback descriptors used by a marker did not align with the grade assigned according to the common marking scheme (the value words like 'good' or 'excellent' should align with the grade awarded). This issue was flagged up last year and suggests that it should be reviewed alongside the common grading scheme itself. The nature and uniformity of feedback should therefore be reviewed.

There seemed to be a big emphasis on referencing by many markers, and it was not always clear (largely due to the variable style in which feedback is delivered) what part this played in the mark awarded. As far as the examiners could see, the stance on referencing was not always seen to be mentioned in online course work guidance and certainly does not seem to be mentioned in the common marking scheme.

There appeared to be some evidence of discrepancies in the marks awarded to Gateway students for their "Lambing reports" (narratives that summarise and analyse their experiences during an on- farm placement). The

discrepancies appeared to relate to the expectations of the difference markers, some of whom appeared to award low marks (i.e. 35 – 40%) while others awarded marks in the 80% range. Although these marks had been moderated, it was often very difficult for the external examiner to understand why such a wide discrepancy existed. It would be worth trying to analyse these results in more detail to see whether this impression was correct

Response from college requested: YES

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

We thank the External Examiners' for their positive comments on the standard of marking in examinations and in-course assessments. In addition, we thank them for their positive comments on the quality of feedback provided on in-course assessments, and note their concerns regarding the consistency of feedback styles on examination scripts.

For examination scripts, we will encourage markers to comply with the External Examiners' suggestions regarding the accessibility of written feedback, for instance, the use of contrasting pen colours and not pencil. In addition we agree that on-script annotations should, where possible, relate to the breakdown of marks in the model answer and will pass this on to all staff. In addition, we will continue to encourage staff to provide a good standard of feedback on examination scripts and will make suggestions on the format of this feedback which, should include comments such as 'how to improve your mark'.

We agree that the allocation of marks in short answer (and problem solving) questions should be determined in advance of the assessment and should be made transparent to the students on the examination paper - this will be implemented for the 2019-20 examinations.

We agree that the present online method of marking in-course assessments, allows staff to utilise a number of different feedback mechanisms (track changes, summary report etc.) and that this at times, can be confusing to students. Inevitably, different staff will be more comfortable with particular methods of online feedback, but we will review the different methods and work to develop a more consistent approach.

We agree that some staff tend to only provide extensive feedback for the low scoring in-course assessments and do not comment in detail on those pieces of work that score highly. We will pass these comments on to academics in order to reinforce the concept that excelling students also benefit from a good standard of feedback to enable them to repeat what they did well in subsequent assessments.

We will continue to encourage markers to relate all in-course assessment feedback to the common grading scheme and to avoid vague language.

The use of correct referencing is important in all in-course assessments and as such, is referred to in the common grading scheme. We note that a minority of the in-course assessment guidance sheets have omitted to include information on a requirement to incorporate referencing and we will ensure that this is rectified for the 2019-20 academic year.

Please see previous comments regarding potential discrepancies in the spread of marks for the Animal Husbandry in-course assessment.

Action Required:

Gateway Programme Director to inform module leaders of External Examiner feedback regarding accessibility and quality of written feedback, and allocation of marks on examination scripts (as detailed in the response to the External Examiner Report). (Deadline: October 2019).

Gateway Programme Director to inform module leaders of External Examiner feedback regarding consistency and quality of student feedback using online in-course assessment methods, and the need to provide detailed feedback to all students (including those who score highly), (as detailed in the response to the External Examiner Report). (Deadline: October 2019).

Gateway Programme Director to request that module leaders include information regarding referencing in all in-course assessment guidance sheets. (Deadline: September 2019).

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 procedures are absolutely sound and fair. The administration staff are highly efficient, very helpful and should be congratulated.

Evaluation of in-course assessments and projects has to be undertaken using an online system that is rather cumbersome for external examiners. There are a large number of in-course assessments, and the examiners would ideally like to have a reasonably objective method of comparing the grades awarded, it may be useful to develop a sampling strategy.

Some module leaders were not present at the board meeting which, while probably inevitable, did partially disabled a full immediate discussion around specific issues. External examiners were given ample opportunity within the agenda to voice feedback.

The Board of Examiners meeting gave all participants the opportunity to voice opinions.

Response from college requested: YES

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

We would like to thank the RVC Exams Office staff for their efficiency in running the Gateway assessments and assisting the External Examiners.

We will continue to encourage module leaders to be present at the Exam Board meeting to facilitate discussion and to hear the External Examiner feedback.

We appreciate the difficulties of accessing a large amount of in-course assessment material using the online system and will encourage the exams office to present in-course assessment information in a format which makes the external examiners role as transparent and easy as possible.

Action Required:

Examinations office to explore the feasibility of providing external examiners with the information requested in their report, regarding accessing/sampling in-course assessments. (Deadline: April 2020).

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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

For Gateway and BSc1 - The removal of essays from examinations appear to have been a good development, for staff and students. The assessment of critical thought is developed and assessed through project writing. It will be interesting to see whether the change has any impact on how these students fair when faced with examination essays in subsequent years.

Response from college requested: NO

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

As stated previously, essay-style examination questions have also been removed from assessments in subsequent years of the Veterinary Medicine course and as such, we anticipate no detrimental effects of their removal from the Gateway Programme examinations.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

3.7 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the procedures

We note a comment from the 2017.18 examiner report - "For example, bundles of scripts could be pre-prepared with samples from high- medium- and low-performing candidates already selected and identified.". This didn't happen for 2018.19 and would expedite the examiner process. For all years, an additional graphical display of mark distribution for examiners would be appreciated in future years.

Response from college requested: NO

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

We apologise that script samples were not prepared for the 2018-19 External Examiners' visit and will pass this request to the RVC examinations office for the 2019-20 academic year.

Action Required:

Examinations office to prepare samples of scripts from high- medium- and low-performing Gateway Programme candidates in advance of the External Examiners' visit to expedite the examiner process. In addition, to produce a graphical display of mark distribution for external examiners in advance of their visit. (Deadline: June 2020)

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

We are complimentary of the exams office team for all their support and clear communication. But there has been no real additional clarity given to the external examiner's role following comments made in previous years. Naturally the existing examiners have developed a strategy for the examiner days, informed by prior experience of some examiners during similar roles at other Universities. However, it would be helpful to external examiners if the College sets out clearly its expectations of the external examiner role, and any specific objectives for external examiner action in advance of the visit. This could be set out in a policy document which articulates our role e.g. in relation to scrutinising or validating the marks of individual students, particularly those who have had individual circumstances or who sit at a critical mark boundary. The induction day(s) for new external examiners should complement this by setting out if/how it wishes them to contribute at all stages of the assessment process.

As noted earlier, we would value printed module descriptors, learning objectives, lecture lists and assessment list being available during our visit (and ideally mailed or link emailed prior earlier in the academic session / at time of question setting / review) and perhaps an indication from module leads on how the year went (at start of examiner day).

Response from college requested: YES

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

As stated previously, we note the External Examiners' comments regarding the provision of module descriptors, lecture listings etc. prior their arrival to assist in reviewing the assessments. We apologise that this did not take place this year. Rather than leaving this to the exams office, in future years the Gateway Course Director will email this information to the External Examiners' in advance of their visit. The External Examiners are also encouraged to access this information (and any other relevant course content documents) by accessing RVC Learn.

The College provides online training for External Examiners in terms of their role in the quality assurance process. Advice and guidance can be sought from the Exams Officer who oversees the assessments for your course / year as well as the Exam Board Chair. We regularly review the information that is provided to our External Examiners' and this will be addressed in due course. Reviews of External Examiner training documents and the Examiner Induction Day are planned for August 2019. In addition, the exams office are presently exploring options for the development of an External Examiner policy document.

Action Required:

Actions noted in previous sections of this document.

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

4.2 An acceptable response has been made

Yes

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 Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

Thank you for taking the time to attend our Board of Examiners and for your feedback.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

4.6 Candidates were considered impartially and fairly

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Response from college requested: 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:

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:

Response from college requested: NO

4.10 I have received sufficient information to carry out my role (where information was insufficient, please give details)

No

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

See comments in section 4.1

Response from college requested: YES

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

Please see response in section 4.1

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:

Response from college requested: NO

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

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:

No further comments

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)

No further comments

Response from college requested: NO

