

updated since the Summer TQC meeting

MSc One Health EXTERNAL EXAMINERS REPORTS

Update to actions from previous years (a) and responses to 2018/19 External Examiners' Comments (b)

To be considered at the Summer TQC Meeting, 19th May 2020

a. Update to actions from previous years:

ACTIONS FROM 2017-18

Examiners' Comment:

As external examiners, we have had only limited direct contact with the taught elements of the course. Our involvement was primarily through access to the student examination papers, student research project reports and their subsequent viva examinations (discussed at the exam board meetings that we attended). We were provided with access to the RVC website. We were sent the draft exam questions and with standard answers, prior to the exams, which gave us time to identify any issues and enable correction before the exam. The One Health course is run by the Royal Veterinary College and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM). We had no insight into the last two modules led by LSHTM. The final project assignments largely reflected the One Health themes that were covered within the taught components of the course and focussed on application of a spectrum of methodologies. These ranged from highly quantitative statistical methods to pure qualitative methods such as thematic analysis.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Prof Richard Kock

Course Director Response:

The absence of information on the last two modules 7&8 needs to be addressed for the next round

Action Required:

Co Director LSHTM to be contacted to provide feedback on these modules for the next exam board

Action Deadline:

11-Jul-2019

Action assigned to:

Sian Clarke

Sian Clarke comment 14/07/2020: The LSHTM module specifications for modules 7 and 8 should routinely be included in the materials provided to External Examiners each year, but will only provide limited overview (learning objectives and modes of assessment). If more direct contact to the teaching materials delivered in a particular year is desired, I agree that this would be best addressed if the external examiners could be granted access to view module content and assessments held at both institutions (at RVC via LEARN, and at LSHTM via Moodle).

Examiners' Comment:

As far as we can tell the teaching methods appear to be appropriate. During the exam board meeting the possibility was discussed that students should be able to more flexibly select practical skills courses 'badged' as relevant for final project work. These might include lectures that cover key qualitative or quantitative skills and or science writing skills workshops. The external examiners felt students would benefit from such additional direction to support execution of the students' final project piece and that this should be considered in the upcoming review of the interdisciplinary programme.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Prof Richard Kock

Course Director Response:

This has been an ongoing concern.

Action Required:

To review the curriculum to include more skills teaching during the review process

Action Deadline:

30-Apr-2019

Action assigned to:

Course Directors and Module Leaders

Update:

Richard Kock comment 25/03/2020 In certain modules e.g. Mod 6 we have enhanced the skills set in Systems Dynamic Modelling and we are developing a qualitative science training extra session for pre-project period. This is managed by Sian Clarke and CB may now be party to this process and can comment.

Camilla Benfield and Sian Clarke comment 30/3/2020: Since 2018/19, the statistical training offered in terms 1 and 2 was "badged" as relevant for research projects, to actively promote these optional classes to students and encourage uptake. From 2019/20, two new sessions on Qualitative research methods and Systematic Reviews were added, at the start of the project period, delivered remotely this year to students. This is part of a wider 'skills for research projects' week that Sian Clarke was setting up, but which has been disrupted by COVID-19 this year. Depending on student feedback, we would also like to incorporate other additional sessions (eg, research ethics and informed consent, data quality: collection and management of data in field studies and laboratory research), in future years. **We would therefore consider this action to be largely resolved.**

Examiners' Comment:

Overall the student projects were of a good quality and suitable for the student to research. However, projects in one major area of One Health were missing given that there were no projects that covered intersectoral economic analyses. This is disappointing considering the taught course covers this and this is a cornerstone of contemporary OH.

Appropriate supervision was taken seriously as seen from students' declarations where the majority stated that the project was a joint design, weekly meetings were held and that supervisors' gave inputs to the final write-up. The input from LSHTM was highly valued. More projects had RVC – LSHTM co-supervision compared to the previous year (which was flagged in the previous years report). However, there still are few assessors from LSTHM and they seem not particularly comfortable with using the RVC system for assessment. The coordination team composed of both institutes acknowledges that inter-institutional communication regarding the supervision of projects can and should be strengthened.

There will soon be an overall review of the MSc course (launched in 2013). We support the goal of this review with subsequent revision to strengthen the programme in view of a good mix between qualitative, quantitative and financial methods. It is expected that future students have more diverse backgrounds (e.g. medical, veterinary, biology, nursing).

COURSE DIRECTOR: Prof Richard Kock

Course Director Response:

Some progress in increasing LSHTM assessors.

Action Required:

The range of assessors needs review and further efforts at LSHTM to contribute staff to the lists.

Action Deadline:

28-Mar-2019

Action assigned to:

Sian Clarke

Update:

Sian Clarke comment 14/07/2020. LSHTM assessors were identified and approved as markers for 13 of 14 projects examined in 2018/19. The process is still ongoing for the current academic year but so far LSHTM assessors have been identified for 19 of the 22 projects to be examined in 2019/20. **We would therefore consider this action to be resolved.**

Examiners' Comment:

The strongest students (from taught component assessments and project work) may have been more successful in seeking projects earlier – and these tended to be embedded in groups that were running larger scientific programmes. Across the project work it was clear that projects that demanded the application of qualitative methods showed some significant weaknesses and this was reflected in their final mark. Students who are to embark on qualitative project assignments should in future be provided with additional hands-on training for qualitative work. It is the supervisors' responsibility to make sure they have the needed guidance in accessing methodological support for first steps of qualitative data analysis early in their project work.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Prof Richard Kock

Course Director Response:

This will need to be reinforced by course Directors to supervisors

Action Required:**Action Deadline:**

28-Mar-2019

Action assigned to:

Course Directors

Update:

Sian Clarke comment 14/7/2020: A new session on Qualitative research methods was provided by a social scientist from LSHTM at the start of the project period in April 2020, delivered remotely this year to students. This is part of a wider 'skills for research projects' week that I was setting up (see above), but which was curtailed by the advent of COVID-19 this year.

Examiners' Comment:

We feel it is a shame that some students work was diminished by poor writing skills and communication, often highlighted by assessors of final projects. This diverts attention away from the student's ability to interpret results and put them into a broader context. The examiners recognize that support is made available for writing and presentation skills. This is clearly valuable support for the students. However, if poor writing and presentation is being identified late at project submission and presentation then it is felt that these problems should be picked up and addressed earlier, well before the start of the final project and these students could be guided towards specific support.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Prof Richard Kock**Course Director Response:**

Diversity in disciplines will lead to some diversity in competence in writing and communication skills and styles. This will need both a diversity in assessor skills to address this fairly.

Action Required:

More assessors with a diversity including more qualitative and social science skills to provide a fair assessment of projects.

Students showing weakness in module written assessments to be aggregated for advice before the research projects start.

Action Deadline:

28-Mar-2019

Action assigned to:

Course Directors and Coordinator

Update:

Richard Kock comment 25/03/2020 This is linked with increasing the inputs of LSHTM in providing more assessors especially in qualitative science subject matter. See remark above. During the upskilling for QS the course Directors should solicit for more assessors from the Med Anthropology and other social science sections at LSHTM. All QS resources at RVC should be accessed and CB can review this

CB Comment 10/6/2020: there are only a few qualitative researchers at RVC, many of whom have already been engaged to supervise and mark on this course. The addition of Dr Alarcon as Deputy CD (for 2019-20), based in RVC's VEEPH group and with qualitative science expertise himself, will enable further awareness and access to RVC staff who have these skills. The social and qualitative science sides do however remain much better represented at LSHTM, thus we do rely on their engagement in teaching and assessment of this component of the course.

Examiners' Comment:

The assessment methods were appropriate. Assessors have provided detailed comments to justify when they have marked a project as a qualified fail. However, discrepancies of >2-3 scales between two assessors were frequent. At RVC, module assessments will be harmonised between MSc courses of the same department. It is planned that for new courses only the module lecturer will mark and this marking will be quality assessed by an independent assessor without marking. A third assessor is involved when there is no agreement. This avoids marking divergence. The new marking system needs to be reconciled with LSHTM who commonly needs double marking.

Double marking will remain for final projects. While discrepancies in assessment cannot be avoided when using assessors with markedly different backgrounds (as is needed for interdisciplinary projects) these can and should

be reduced with improved assessment guidelines for assessment. Marks showing a difference across several scales requires justification and considered alignment and agreement from the two markers. It is important that the minimal time for assessments is respected / not cut too short due to granted late submissions.

We support the proposition of the course organisers to foster communication between the two institutes regarding students' expectations and grading and to share responsibility of assigning assessors between two institutes (not RVC alone). Organizers and supervisors would welcome new guidance to advise students who have to re-sit one or two modules on when they should start and/or submit their final project.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Prof Richard Kock

Course Director Response:

For the 2018-19 academic year modular assessments will be 1st and sample marked, not double blind marked as in previous years. This is to ensure that the marking is completed by an appropriate academic with knowledge in the specific area and then the marking batch will be sample marked by another academic (checking for quality, consistency and annotation). The sample marker will need to confirm that they agree / disagree with the marks awarded in general, not on an individual basis. Should there be disagreement then there are several avenues open to us which depends on the type of, and rationale for, disagreement.

Research Projects will remain as being blind double marked by two academics, neither of which are the supervisor, with the two markers coming to an agreed mark in all instances. A facilitator will be employed where there are discrepant marks over a broad range and spanning a classification boundary. The role of the facilitator will be to oversee and document the reasoning of how the agreed mark has been derived by the two.

A further guidance on projects and assessment procedures should be circulated between the institutions before sending to students.

Action Required:

A small committee to be set up as part of the programme review to examine this issue specifically.

Action Deadline:

28-Mar-2019

Action assigned to:

Course Directors

Update:

Richard Kock comment 25/03/2020 This change has been completed without any issues to date
Camilla Benfield comment 30/3: the project guidelines were updated and circulated between CDs at both institutions before being sent to students. These are now superseded by new guidelines to students on desk and literature based projects in light COVID-19 (to be sent this week).

CB Comment 10/6/2020: I do not see a separate committee is needed: this action on assessment is superseded by the Periodic review, the amended guidelines for research projects this year as well as changes for next year necessitated by remote delivery, and the broader remit of CMC/LTAC.

Examiners' Comment:

As far as we could tell for the projects and papers these were fairly marked. However, there was a large proportion of projects showing discrepancies between the two markers, across several scales of marks (see above). While supervisors do not mark their supervised projects, both supervisors and assessors thought it beneficial if - next to the student statement - supervisors could file a brief declaration, for example on the complexity of the assigned work.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Prof Richard Kock

Course Director Response:

Projects vary widely on risk with sometimes technically difficult and or field based activities in remote settings. Some recognition of this in the efforts and success or failure of students to complete planned work should be made and incorporated into the marking. The supervisor declaration seems a good approach.

Action Required:

Request supervisors to provide declaration of the complexity of the assigned work from a technical and practical perspective

Action Deadline:

28-Mar-2019

Action assigned to:

administration – coordination

Update:

Richard Kock comment 25/03/2020 I am not aware if this has been formally inserted into supervisor instructions and assessors guidance but the admin should confirm if this has been done. MJ can assist in this.

Camilla Benfield comment 30/3/2020 course support coordinator can ask supervisors to include this (though 2020 all desk-based projects so for this year not applicable)

Camilla Benfield and Sian Clarke comment 10/6/2020: In the Supervisor Questionnaire, supervisors are asked to rate the degree of technical difficulty involved in the project and also to identify any unforeseen technical problems. **We would therefore consider this action to be resolved.** This year, students have also been asked to submit a short statement explaining how COVID19 outbreak has affected their project

b. Collaborative Report

Exam board meeting: 12-Sep-2019

MSc in One Health, 2018/19

Lead examiner: Professor Esther Schelling

Collaborating examiner(s): Professor Sue Welburn

The Programme

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

1.1 Course content

As external examiners, we have had only limited direct contact with the taught examination papers, student research project reports and their subsequent viva elements of the course. Our involvement was primarily through access to the students' rating of modules, examinations (discussed at the exam board meetings that we attended). We were provided with access to the RVC website. We were sent the draft exam questions and with standard answers, prior to the exams, which gave us time to identify any issues and enable correction before the exam. The One Health course is run by the Royal Veterinary College and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM). We had no insight into the last two modules led by LSHTM, but had seen the students' feedbacks. The final project assignments largely reflected – and this year more than ever - the One Health themes that were covered within the taught components of the course and focussed on application of a spectrum of methodologies. Indeed, the topics – embedded mainly in joint RVC – LSTMH collaborations – were very interesting and One Health. All supervisors need to be applauded for their interesting and 'managerial' topics proposed and their close supervision of the students' progress, which is seen in the throughout good and high-quality final assignments submitted. There were more thoughtfully selected One Health topics proposed, including a qualitative and a human burden cost-effectiveness work.

Course Directors' response:

Camilla Benfield and Sian Clarke: we welcome this positive feedback on the quality of both the research and the standard of supervision for the research projects. We too consider the system of supervision (usually several supervisors with one mandatory internal supervisor) is working well, and is reliant on significant time investment and dedication by supervisors.

The issue about insight into LSHTM modules is discussed, and suggestions made, above.

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

The learning objectives were appropriate and appear to have been met during the course. Only one qualified fail of one module assignment, which speaks of the quality of the course. To note is that module assignments are now marked by one module leader alone – thus this may also be an outlier of all the above mentioned sufficient marks given.

Course Directors' response:

Camilla Benfield and Sian Clarke: single marking of modules is now RVC-wide practice as approved by LTAC. The marker may not always be the Module Leader, but the member of teaching staff with subject-specific expertise who set the particular question. Note that most assessments have several questions or parts, meaning that several different staff ultimately contribute to the final summative assignment marks. Furthermore, sample marking is conducted as a quality assurance measure, in line with RVC Exams Office and QA policy.

1.3 Teaching methods

As far as we can tell the teaching methods appear to be appropriate. This year the students had the needed practical skills, including scientific writing, to conduct, analyse and write up the final assignment. A very good qualitative work was submitted, several projects were interdisciplinary and two assignments have included cost-effectiveness assessments. We encourage the organisers to continue with more intersectoral economics. There is a new module economic module led by LSTMH and also the medical anthropology with good return from students has to be mentioned as an advance towards One Health methods and good collaboration between RVC and LSTMH.

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

We are not aware of the resources used. The course is delivered both by the RVC and LSHTM - the mix of methods and resources used across the Schools is likely to have benefited students

1.5 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the Programme

Overall the student projects were of a good quality and suitable for the student to research. There was appropriate supervision. This was taken seriously as seen from students' declarations. The majority of students stated that the project was a joint design, weekly meetings were held and that supervisors' gave inputs to the final write-up. In total, about the same proportion of projects than in previous years had RVC – LSHTM co-supervision, compared to the previous year (which was flagged in the previous year's report). The coordination team composed of both institutes is pleased that inter-institutional communication regarding the supervision of projects was strengthened. There will soon be an overall review of the MSc course. We support the goal of this review with subsequent revision to strengthen the programme in view of a good mix between qualitative, quantitative and financial methods. It is expected that future students have more diverse backgrounds (e.g. medical, veterinary, biology, nursing).

Course Directors' response:

Camilla Benfield and Sian Clarke: Indeed, the first quinquennial Periodic Review (PR) of the MSc occurred in October 2019 and the written report from the panel received at the end of March 2020. The PR was a comprehensive process involving submission of a great deal of data (including External Examiners reports and responses) and inputs across Course Management, teaching teams and past and current students. In the conclusions of their report, the Panel confirmed that the course is current, relevant, interesting, and valid and should continue to run. The PR report also made required and recommended actions to further improve the course, and these are currently being addressed, attempting to integrate these with the changes towards remote delivery envisaged for 2020-21 which are still being discussed as Senior Management Level and between the two institutes. We note that for these improvements to be delivered, there needs to be joint engagement and work by both LSHTM and RVC for this joint course.

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

Five (of 12 who have so far submitted) students received merits and distinctions - an excellent outcome. We believe the student performance is similar to those of comparable courses in the UK and Europe. Students have applied and integrated qualitative and quantitative approaches across a wide array of topics and were able to examine their results in the context of human, animal and environmental interactions.

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

Essentially, all student's fared well this year. We could not consider the two late submissions (due to various factors).

Course Directors' response:

Camilla Benfield and Sian Clarke: We thank the external examiners for their efforts to review all students, but agree that late submissions (well-justified, as noted under 3.1) may render this difficult. We are mindful in trying to balance the needs of students (for extensions and mitigating circumstances) and those of the project and external examiners (see below) to be afforded time to mark/review the work.

However, we note that, despite 2 late project submissions, the module assessment grades for all students were available and we feel the external examiners' review this year has been comprehensive.

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

We have no further comments. We think that both students and supervisors did well this year.

Please comment, as appropriate, on:

3.1 Assessment methods (relevance to learning objectives and curriculum)

The assessment methods were appropriate. Assessors have provided detailed comments to justify when they have marked a project nearly failed. Double marking will remain for final projects. While discrepancies in assessment cannot be avoided when using assessors with markedly different backgrounds (as is needed for interdisciplinary projects) these can and should be reduced with improved assessment guidelines for assessment. In the duration of this course organisers have fostered communication between the two institutes regarding students' expectations and grading and to share responsibility of assigning assessors between two institutes). Organizers and supervisors welcomed the new guidance to advise students who have to re-sit one or two modules on when they should start and/or submit their final project. This year, there were several (well-justified) late submissions. It is important that the minimal time for assessments of reviewers is respected / not cut too short due to granted late submissions.

Course Directors' response:

Camilla Benfield and Sian Clarke: We absolutely agree this year have agreed among CM and Exams office that a 2-week window for marking by project markers is the absolute minimum where extensions have been granted in order for students to have marks ratified at the September exam board for the usual graduation timing. Where this is not possible, the next opportunity for ratification of marks is the interim exam board on the summer of the subsequent calendar year.

3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous

The assessment procedures were (in examiners opinion) rigorous but fair with two assessors for each final project. No marking of a qualified fail was without detailed justification.

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

As far as we could tell for the projects and papers these were fairly marked. However, there was a large proportion of projects showing discrepancies between the two markers, across several scales of marks (see above).

While supervisors do not mark their supervised projects, both supervisors and assessors thought it beneficial if - next to the student statement - supervisors could file a brief declaration, for example on the complexity of the assigned work.

Course Directors' response:

Camilla Benfield and Sian Clarke: As per above comment, supervisors are asked to complete Supervisor Questionnaire, in which they rate the degree of technical difficulty involved in the project and also to identify any unforeseen technical problems. **I would therefore consider this action to be resolved.** This year, students have also been asked to submit a short statement explaining how COVID19 outbreak has affected their project

3.4 Standard of marking

Marking was of a rigorous, high standard, with dual marking, to ensure a fair outcome for the students. The College also provides guidance and training on the marking scheme. At the exam board, there was discussion concerning the development of marking guidance for final reports (as opposed using the same guidance for all reports), and particularly for interdisciplinary projects. Inter-institutional issues such as different approaches to grading require fostered exchange between both lead institutes.

We recommend that when projects submitted show a high Turnitin score (> 25%) that assessors make a statement about their interpretation of the score, such as 'no suspected plagiarism because texts were correctly cited and referenced'.

Course Director's response:

Camilla Benfield: As per TQC minutes, the Director of Assessment and Head of Exams office have confirmed that this step is part of the current OCM development and it is expected that such statements will start to be included with projects being submitted in September.

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)

Procedures for assessment and determination of awards are sound and fairly conducted. At the exam board, representatives of both institutes were present. The external examiners were present and had full insight into projects submitted, follow-up of procedure guidelines and agreement on final grades.

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

The examiners were invited to sit in for students' vivas.

Camilla Benfield comment 30/3: vivas may be done remotely this year. Could academic quality please contact exams to invite examiners to 'sit-in' again this year, even if virtually , as this seems a positive initiative.

Action completed: CB has asked Exams Office to invite External Examiners to remote vivas this year

3.7 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the procedures

Please see previous comments

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

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:

How to avoid strong discrepancies between two markers was discussed last year. Discrepancies can certainly not be avoided, particularly for projects applying different methods. The reviewers are pleased to see that a system is in place on how to consolidate diverging reviews and explaining main documented reasons of divergence.

Course Directors' response:

Camilla Benfield and Sian Clarke: We thank the external examiners for noting that this has been acted upon

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

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

4.9 I have received enough support to carry out my role

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Yes – also thanks to the fact that there are two external examiners to exchange and share tasks

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:

Yes - see above strong points

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:

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)

Course Directors' response:

Camilla Benfield and Sian Clarke: We thank you very much for your time and rigor in evaluating the MSc and preparing this report, which is very important and very greatly appreciated.

