ANNUAL QUALITY IMPROVEMENT REPORT 2022/23

Appendix 3: External Examiners' report

Biosciences

This appendix contains Course Director's responses to 2022/23 External Examiners' comments and updates to actions from previous External Examiners' reports.

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

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

Appendix 3 consists of:

a.	Updates to actions from previous years' reports
b.	2022/23 Collaborative Annual Report with responses from Course Director; Biosciences suite of courses Includes all BSc and MSci pathways, BSc Comparative Pathology and pathways with Placement Year Report written by: Lead examiner: Dr Dan Lambert Collaborating examiner(s): Dr Nick Wheelhouse, Dr Hossein Ashrafi, Dr Jennie Litten-Brown, Dr Kim Jonas

Update to actions from 2018-19				
Question	**External Examiners comment**	**CD's response & Action**	**Update 2019/20**	**Update 2022/23**
3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous	For Gateway/ BSc1 /BSc 2 - Examiners observed modules in which the median was lower (IoD) or higher (OH) relative to other modules in that cohort (also noted by 2nd marker on one of these). These observations suggest that it would be of great value to the overall rigour of the assessment process to set up simple macros within marking spreadsheets and 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.	College response: We thank the External Examiners for the suggestion to analyse grades from individual markers within the marking spreadsheets and will consult with Exams team to set this up (Course Director, Exams Office)	Not complete – will try to carry out analysis 2020-21	Still in progress – with switch now to in person but online we are hopefully ending a period of change which will be a good opportunity to do the analysis

Update to actions from 2019-20				
Question	**External Examiners comment**	**CD's response & Action**	**Update in 2020/21**	**Update in 2022/23**
1.5 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the Programme	It was noted that one candidate had not received marks for work undertaken as part of a placement in Singapore. It was reported that efforts had been made to obtain the missing marks but these had been unsuccessful at the time of the	We will review the collaborative agreement to ensure that clear steps are laid out for NTU Exams Office to send results to RVC Exams Office electronically rather than by mail, thus RVC will be	IN PROGRESS 2020-21 Noted for review of MOA with NTU	complete
3.2 Extent to which assessment	For BSc 1 and 2, we note previous examiner steer to analyse marking	Analysis of individual markers was not carried out in 2019-	Not completed due to the volume of work the exams	In progress As above now we are

procedures are rigorous	according to marker. This was being investigated but the outcome of these analyses is not known to the examiners. We note that for pre-COVID exams the moderation / sample marking was working effectively	20, with electronic marking now in place this may be more straightforward in the future	office were required to do	settled on exam format we can begin to analyse individual markers
3.4 Standard of marking	Gateway, BSC 1 and 2 – There was evidence of good practice in many places. Notably, the quality of feedback for Gateway and BSc 1 library projects was high. Overall the standard of has improved over the last few years. It is noted, however, that for some assessments there is still inconsistency between markers in style and quality of feedback. We understand from the exams office that steer was given to staff to avoid annotation of work so that feedback to students could be automated. This is an understandable practical approach but has disadvantages in the precision of feedback that can be offered to the students. As previously noted, a consensus between markers on style will maximize the value to the students. It is almost as if this needs a structured audit, to bring home the point to markers. Also, prior to marking it may be worth asking the module leads to provide an example of the marking style expected	We thank the EE for this observation. We are working towards introduction of consistent rubrics for certain pieces of work including the BSc2 projects, which will somewhat allay this. We will disseminate the comments to the Biosciences examining teams	IN PROGRESS Formative rubric for BSc2 projects in 2020-21 – will seek approval for use summatively for 2021-22 then roll out to BSc3 for formative use etc.	In progress. Rubric is now being used summatively for BSc2 (group projects) we have used formatively for Arcadia summer projects and had positive responses from the markers – hope we can introduce it summatively for 2024-25 for BSc3 and MSci projects
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	For BSc 1, data on performance in previous years (by module) was included in module handbooks. This was helpful in certain instances (e.g. IGE) and would be of use in BSc2 as well.	We thank the EE for this. We will ask course support and exams office to provide this information in a similar format for BSc2, BSc3 in future	IN PROGRESS	Complete

of Examiners, participation by External Examiners)				

Update to actions from 21-22			
Update to actions from 21-22	**External Examiners' comments**	**College response**	**Update in 2022/23**
1.1 Teaching methods	Continued uncertainty as it relates to COVID19 disruption will need to be considered both in terms of its impact on the learning of students and the future implications of this in later years. The quality of the work produced by students in the MSci pathways would evidence the suitability of the teaching methods employed.	Thank you for your positive comments. As with other institutions we continue to monitor the after effect of COVID disruptions and note this as an action to monitor student learning, for those students affected and still on the programme (entry in 2020 and to some extent 2021 as well as students who interrupted their studies due to COVID or for other reasons, at this time) **Action Required:** Continue to monitor student learning for students who entered the programme 2020, 2021 who may have been adversely affected by measures put in place due to government COVID restrictions. Where appropriate seek ways to offer additional support **Action Deadline:** 01-Jun-2024 **Action assigned to:** Course Director, Year Leaders, Pathway Leaders, Module Leaders	As noted the deadline is June 2024 – we continue to offer support and monitor student progress
1.5 The Programme	With regard to years 1 to 3, examiners would like to note the great effort has been made to ensure the quality of feedback is uniform both within modules and across modules. However, there are still some additional gaps evident. A final push from colleagues could ensure that task is completed. In particular the MSci projects demonstrated an excellent level of feedback which was very detailed and constructive, with helpful facilitation comments where needed; this was supported by an examiner area where feedback/assessments are easily reviewed. Overall this should be approached with a view to aiding the learning of all students but is of particular need to those who may need to resit subjects.	Thank you for your positive comments. We are pleased to hear that quality of feedback is improving. We will continue to advise examiners to provide detailed and constructive feedback, especially on longer pieces of work in the early years. **Action Required:** Remind examiners to provide feedback and where appropriate suggest subheadings especially for longer pieces of work. Module leaders should inform all their examiners of the structure of the feedback they should be leaving and are asked to make sure the Exams Officer is included on emails sent to examiners to inform them of what is required. This will ensure that feedback is uniform for any given piece of work **Action Deadline:** 01-Jun-2023 **Action assigned to:** Court director, Module leaders, exams office	In progress – feedback is an RVC wide issue
2.1 Students' performance	Superficially some modules would appear to achieve a minor uplift in the average grade,	Course Director Response: Thank you for your analysis of the overall marks and constructive comments regarding the differences between	complete

	however when considered against the student overall performance and/or the cohort performance this is not significant. This trend is also evident elsewhere	individual module marks. It is something we continue to monitor especially in BSc year 3 where students take a range of different modules. harmonising assessment weightings across all Yr3 modules so all have 50% in course assessment and 50% examination based has hopefully narrowed the gap but will continue to monitor **Action Required:** monitor marks between different modules to ensure parity, where required to consult with module leaders to ensure that all ICAs are of similar length and should be completed in a similar time frame **Action Deadline:** 01-Jun-2023 **Action assigned to:** Year 3 leader, module leaders, course director	
2.2 Quality of candidates' knowledge and skills,	Gaps between ICA and exam median marks were particularly marked for IGE and TMA modules, whereby performance on coursework was substantially better than in the exam, in line with observations for 2020-21. In line with the Examiner's report from 2020-21, for TMA, the ICS Quiz still appears to be found easy by the students (quite a few achieving 100%, with median grade 86.1%) . We would encourage these to be carefully considered and disparities between the ICA quiz and exam preparation examined. For IGE, the exam median was 47%, the same as the previous year last year (45%). Although students that didn't perform well in the exam tended to perform not to perform so well in other modules, there are a notable number of students that this was a 'blip' for. Additionally, the high number of students that either failed (15%) or achieved a qualifying fail (15%) for the module is out of step with the other modules that average typically <10% of students failing. This warrants further investigation into the module attainment gap, and discrepancy in marks between the ICA and exam. For YR2, overall the breadth of the course is excellent and the variety of assessment methods was very good. Marks appeared to be largely consistent across modules. However, the marks from the CID module were lower (Mean	Many thanks for your in depth analysis and positive comments relating to Yr3 and Yr4. Thank you also for highlighting the discrepancy between TMA and IGE for the ICA and exam. We have previously discussed a modification of the ICA for TMA and will review further. The failure rate for IGE was also of concern and module leader implemented additional activities for 2022-23 cohort to help with revision.Thank you for highlighting the discrepancy between the CID and AAD ICA median marks especially since these are similar assignments. The module leaders will be asked to share their instructions for students if the ICA types remain the same for 2022-23 **Action Required:** IGE module leader to implement further revision activities (November 2022) TMA module leader to review the ICA to make it more discriminatory (March 2023) CID and AAD module leaders to compare and review their instructions and marking schemes for the critical analysis of journal paper review ICA (January 2023) **Action Deadline:** 01-Mar-2023 **Action assigned to:** various module leaders (IGE, TMA, AAD, CID)	Complete, In IGE a new practical class was introduced to help students with some of the concepts IGE module leader made further changes to the structure of questions for 2023-24 CID and AAD ICAs are now different types of assessment

	50.4%) that the other modules this year. Of note this year was the general similarity in ICA performance across modules despite differences in assessment type. The anomalies to this were the AAD module (mean mark 76%) and CID (Mean mark 52%). Both of these relied on the critical analysis of a research paper with similar formatted questions. It is uncertain as to why the differences are so marked with similar assessments and the MLs may which to reflect on their delivery.		
3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous	The disruptions and uncertainty of COVID-19 seem to have substantially impacted on BSc 1 and 2 student learning, and it seems likely that it will continue to be felt in the subsequent years by some students. The examiners would like to draw the colleges attention to the need to monitor and mitigated where possible these impacts.	**Action Required:** We continue to be mindful of the legacy of COVID-19 related impacts and continue to monitor students' attainment and engagement overall and take steps where required, with support from colleagues in Learning and Wellbeing and requesting additional Study Skills support for students (one to one, class workshops, additional online advice and guidance) as appropriate **Action Deadline:** 01-Jun-2023 **Action assigned to:** Course Director, Year Leaders	
3.4 Standard of marking	General types of issues noted are as follows: 1) Inconsistency in whether work was annotated or not 2) Not all markers indicate where / why a mark has been lost by adding comments 3) Some feedback comments are very vague / gestural Moderation of marking was largely evident, however the justification for agreement/disagreement with the 1st marker was not always given. There were occasions when it was unclear if moderation had taken occurred/taken place offline, as it was not evident on the online system. For BSc1, there were additional counts of plagiarism that were identified by the external examiners for the PDI abstracts, initially prompted by high Turnitin scores and scrutiny of the scripts. Moving forward, we would encourage more detailed scrutiny of similarity checks, Additionally to use online flagging of student assessments that are undergoing investigation for assessment irregularities. For YR 2 It is noted however that for the majority of assessments there is still significant inconsistency between markers in	Thank you for your positive comments. We acknowledge there are still inconsistencies with feedback provision. The use of the rubric for the Yr2 projects is a step in the right direction and we hope to roll this out to other assignments and assessments. We will remind module leaders to make it clear for their individual in course assessments what feedback is expected and in what format, ideally with subheadings or pro-forma Course Director will discuss use of grademark with Registrar Examiners are required to confirm that they have reviewed the Turnitin scores and reports before they are able to enter a mark for any work marked through OCM. They should be reminded of the importance of flagging work that has a high similarity for further investigation. CD will ask Academic Conduct / Registrar if work that is under investigation can be flagged to EEs when they are assessing the Examiner packs CD will ask exams officers to make the evidence available to EEs where there have been marking discrepancies that have then been agreed Action Required:	Complete, for now we are not able to use Grademark but this might be reviewed in the future

	style and quality of feedback. Variability in feedback style requires further consideration but also the use of a common method for delivery (e.g. Grademark). A commendation on the marking of BSc2 projects was the incorporation of a rubric marking scheme which provided a degree of clarity to the marks awarded. However, despite this the feedback was very variable in style. The level/quality of feedback is overall very good, however there remains variation from module to module. The college may seek to provide some further guidance to markers to ensure consistency in this regard. Specific suggestions may include, but are not limited to, development of a consensus approach between markers on style will maximize the value to the students and avoid unnecessary confusion. It is perhaps worth considering providing a structured proforma to add consistency between individual markers.	Year leaders to ask module leaders to be very clear about what feedback they need markers to include and in what format so that feedback is consistent for any given piece of work. CD to discuss use of Grademark with Registrar - there are some inconsistencies even taking this approach CD to discuss how to make it clear when work is under investigation for academic misconduct **Action Deadline:** 01-Mar-2023 Action assigned to: Course Director, Year Leaders, Module Leaders	
3.6 Opinion on changes to the assessment procedures from previous years in which you have examined	We agree that it is important to monitor the legacy of COVID-19 as it continues to impact student well being and could affect academic achievement for individual students. Advice Centre regularly signpost their services to students via different channels and tutors are also asked to remind students of available support during tutorials. The Student Union also has a dedicated Welfare officer and there are a number of projects to support well being. **Action Required:** Remind tutors to signpost Advice Centre during tutorials Action Deadline: 01-Jun-2023 **Action assigned to:** Senior Tutor Camden		Complete
3.7Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the procedures	The move to online examination would appear to have been successful for staff involved. If online examinations are to continue, examiners would suggest careful consideration of the use of questions requiring factual recall towards questions requiring a deeper level of understanding, i.e. asking for explanations	Thank you for these comments we agree that it is important to assess the question types used during open book assessments and this is an ongoing discussion across the RVC. Course Director will discuss with Registrar and Director of Assessment for further guidance and training around question setting for these types of assessments. A good suggestion around ensuring	Complete, as we move back to in person (but electronic) exams

	rather than just facts. In most cases this has already occurred but there are still a few factual recall questions. There are few if any systematic issues with the proctoring system used. However, students will be subject to technical problems beyond their control. It might be advisable for the college to consider, if not already doing so, producing a resource for students/staff and what to do should this arise. This would ensure a uniform approach for all and help to minimize the stress should it occur. The college should consider how the level of feedback given on student assessment can be made uniform.	students have resources for problems with Proctorio. There is some guidance and CD will ask Exams Office to remind students to review this when they send out information and links for exams. **Action Required:** CD to discuss format for online exams to ensure they are not based solely on factual recall CD to ask Exams Office to send links to resources for Proctorio issues and ask students to review them **Action Deadline:** 01-Jan-2023 **Action assigned to:** Course Director, Director of Assessment, Registrar, Exams Office	

Collaborative Report

Exam board meeting: 06-Jul-2023

BSc in Bioveterinary Sciences, 2022/23 (Includes all BSc and MSci pathways, BSc Comparative Pathology and pathways with Placement Year)

Lead examiner: Dr Dan Lambert

Collaborating examiner(s): Dr Nick Wheelhouse, Dr Hossein Ashrafi, Dr Jennie Litten-Brown, Dr Kim Jonas

The Programme

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

1.1 Course content

BSc Year1:The course content is appropriate, covering a wide range of subjects and in the depth consistent with degree/program stage.
BSc Year 3: Overall the course provides a challenging and varied curriculum appropriate for this level, supported by rigorous and varied assessments. The assessments offered opportunities for the more able students to shine.
MSci Bioscience and WAB: Again these are challenging courses which I think are commensurate with the level expected. I like the imagination employed in the courses, with good opportunities for the students to build transferable employability skills. This is a real strength of the course. The opportunity to undertake placements provides good opportunities for the most able students to demonstrate their ability.

Biosciences Year 2:: As a general observation, course content is appropriate in all the programmes examined. There is considerable variety and choice available to students and the range of topics provides highly contemporary coverage of the veterinary and biomedical sciences.

BSc Comparative Pathology: The course content is both comprehensive and engaging. It provides a deep understanding of pathological processes at a molecular and cellular level, as well as histological changes. It covers theoretical and practical lectures, making it a useful resource for veterinary students

Gateway: The course content is appropriate for the Gateway course. It has been well designed and continues to enable the students to have a wide range of modules which are well matched to the veterinary science area and our general scientific understanding of the world. Evidence shows that the course is clearly enabling students to progress in their chosen career path.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Charlotte Lawson

Course Director Response:

we thank the External Examiners for these positive comments on the content of each individual year of the programme

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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

MSci Bioscience and WAB: The learning outcomes are met, supported by varied assessment methods.

BSc Year 3: The scope of the course is broad and all learning outcomes covered.

Biosciences Year 2: The learning objectives for each course were clearly stated or found on RVC LEARN and readily accessible to us and the students. Exam questions appear to cover the teaching blueprint and learning outcomes.

BSc Comparative Pathology: The learning objectives were successfully achieved and effectively assessed against the learning outcomes of the course.

Gateway: The Learning objectives were clearly stated on RVC LEARN for the students and examiners to see.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Charlotte Lawson

Course Director Response:

We thank the External examiners for these positive comments on the LOs for each year of the programme

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

1.3 Teaching methods

BSc Year 1: Teaching methods include didactic lectures, small group teaching, practical's, guided self-directed learning appear appropriate

BSc Year 3 and MSci Bioscience and WAB: The teaching methods appear to be appropriate to the programme, I have no concerns here
Biosciences Year 2: Teaching methods which include didactic lectures, small group teaching, practicals, guided self-directed learning and research projects appear appropriate.

BSc Comparative Pathology: A wide range of engaging and interactive strategies, including lectures, group discussions, problem-solving activities, and seminars, has been employed in this course. I believe students have greatly benefited from this effective mixture of teaching methods.

Gateway: I have seen evidence from student comments, as well as the official paperwork, that a wide variety of teaching methods and styles are employed in the delivery of this course – partly by design but also due to the range of academics who deliver content. This is clearly appreciated by the students on the course and personally I think it is appropriate as there are many different learning styles present in our students.
In my exploration of the student voice, I found many examples where students praised the teaching methods and felt they were well supported. There was an example of a module where the students were not so happy but I will discuss this in more detail below. It is clear, however, that the students feel they can provide feedback which will be listened to and action taken by staff wherever possible.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Charlotte Lawson

Course Director Response:

We thank the External Examiners for the positive comments on the teaching methods employed and note that there are some instances where we can improve delivery (to be discussed in a later panel)

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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

BSc Year 3 and MSci Bioscience and WAB: I suggest RVC reflect on the issues posed by AI in their assessments, and also the information students are given around plagiarism

Biosciences Year 2: There were no resource issues identified during the review of the examinations.

BSc Comparative Pathology: There were no resource issues raised.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Charlotte Lawson

Course Director Response:

We thank the External Examiners for these comments. The (mis)use of AI in assessments is a sector wide issue and is being considered very seriously at Institutional level. The Course Director is on a task and finish group together with other Course Directors, Director of Assessment and members of the Student Academic Conduct team. We are in the process of updating our guidance and Course Director has included AI in their "good academic writing and avoiding plagiarism" seminar to BSc1/Gateway. AI will also be discussed with students ahead of BSc2/BSc3 research project write up, introductions to in course assessments, by the appropriate Module Leaders / Project co-ordinators and in the Research Skills module for MSci students

Action Required:

Staff to include guidance on use of AI in introductory seminars on in course assignments, project write up etc.

Action Deadline:

01-May-2024

Action assigned to:

Module leaders, Project co-ordinators

1.5 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the Programme

BSc Comparative Pathology: Overall, the program offers comprehensive knowledge in the chosen field of study and significantly improves career prospects after graduation.

Gateway:

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Charlotte Lawson

Course Director Response:

We thank the External Examiner for these positive comments

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

Student performance

Please comment, as appropriate, on:

2.1 Students' performance in relation to those at a similar stage on comparable courses in other institutions, where this is known to you

Performance appears similar to other institutions, with no concerns for Gateway or BSc1
Biosciences Year 2: The performance of students in all programmes is comparable to what we have observed across the sector.
BSc year 3: Good spread of marks, although fewer firsts awarded in previous years; this isn't a problem given the rigour of the assessments, and might just reflect normal variation between cycles.
BSc Comparative Pathology: I am currently a course leader for Cancer biology course at Kingston University and found that student performance in this course are comparable with our course. I consider the students have met the expected performance levels.

MSci Biosciences and WAB: Overall a good spread of marks, with some students performing very well. - MSci BioVet Sci had a lot of firsts compared to WAB; again this might just reflect variation between cycle as no causative factors were identified. It was surprising that some students improved their performance hugely from 3 year to MSci, but I think this might have been due to personal factors rather than a problem with the programme.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Charlotte Lawson

Course Director Response:

We thank the External Examiners for their positive comments.
Regarding the difference in performance between MSci Bioveterinary Sciences and MSci WAB this may reflect the small numbers on each programme and also the largely research based nature for Bioveterinary / Biological Sciences vs the larger taught component making up the MSci WAB year (50% taught). Typically students with an interest in pursuing a research career undertake the MSci year and so we expect to see an improved performance. From 2023-24 wildlife students will be on the MSci Biological Sciences (Wildlife Health Sciences) which has a large research component (105 credit) similar to the MSci Bioveterinary / Biological Sciences

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

BSc Year 1; The marks awarded appear to be similar across all modules, with the notable exception of IGE, which is typically >10% lower attainment than the average results for other modules. Comparison of results from 2021-22 shows that IGE results have improved by ~5% so hopefully additional teaching and revision sessions that have been implemented for this module will continue this upward trend in exam results. For the resit/second sit exam, there were issues with the exam paper resulting in parts of the PSQ being excluded. This should be investigated to avoid in future years, particularly as similar problems were noted in this exam in 2021-22.

MSci Biosciences and WAB: As above, a range of ability was on show, with more strong performances on the WAB programme - some of this work was excellent
BSc Year 3: A real range of abilities identified, suggesting the assessments are working well. Some very strong students, but also some very weak who struggled across the board. This is normal for assessments at this level, and no concerns were raised. Placement students tend to perform very well.

Biosciences Year 2: As to be expected in summative assessments, there is a wide range of quality of answers with students in the top range showing a high depth of knowledge and skills which are less apparent or identifiable in student answers with lower marks. The overall outcome of this year's examinations show that students were doing generally well or very well. There is a disparity across the modules in terms of performance with students on the PID module fairing generally poorly on the examination (median 42.5%). Of interest no students answered the question posed on transcription/ translation and it may be worth the team reflecting on this and if the students are struggling with the principles of molecular biology. Conversely the marks on the AAD module if anything were somewhat skewed towards the higher end with an overall exam and module mark above 75%.

Gateway: In most modules the whole range of marks were used and there were clearly students who showed high ability as well as those who exhibited much less aptitude. My external examiner colleague analysed this in more detail and it is interesting to note that while each fits a bell shaped distribution curve the mean score achieved is noticeably lower in the IGE exam compared to other modules.
Bio of Cell exam: Bell shaped distribution in results- mean 65%
IGE exam: Bell shaped distribution- mean 46%
Development: Bell shaped distribution- mean 53%
The moving animal: Bell shaped distribution- mean 58%
Integrated Physiology I: Bell shaped distribution - mean 60%
While there are students who are clearly struggling with other modules and, therefore there is an element of student ability, the IGE module continues to be the one which student's performance appears to be an anomaly. I remain impressed by the amount of support the students receive and will receive as they complete their summer resits.

BSc Comparative Pathology: There was a noticeable range in the quality of candidates' knowledge and skills in this course. Those at the top with a best score on the exam performed better on their project presentations. Students with the lower marking scales showed a much less comprehensive grasp of the course content and preformed less well in their project presentation.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Charlotte Lawson

Course Director Response:

We thank the External Examiners for their comments for all years of the programme and for the in depth analysis provided for the BSc1/ Gateway module marks. Taking comments on board from IGE we have added an additional teaching / reflection session and added more activities to the final practical to help students assimilate the complexities of transcription / translation. We hope that this will better equip them in BSc2 where genetics is re-introduced (2024-25)

Action Required:

Introduce additional consolidation session for IGE and additional activities in the final practical -

completed

Action Deadline:

05-Nov-2023

Action assigned to:

Module leader, course director, study skills team

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

Gateway:
As shown above, unfortunately the IGE module remains and outlier in terms of student performance. Whilst I was capturing the student voice I noticed that there was concern in the students about the management of the module and the timing of information about the assessment, this is also very different feedback to that received about the other modules. I would like to ask colleagues to consider if additional changes could be made which would improve this module? I would imagine that previous changes have now been assessed in terms of success. I appreciate that student ability remains part of the story and analysis shows that students who do not perform well in IGE often do not perform elsewhere but the student voice suggests that some alterations may be possible. There are cases of plagiarism occurring which appear to not be being picked up however I understand there were some problems with the technology so the procedures and staff guidance have been revisited.

This is echoed from Yr1 too re the comments made from the Gateway EE.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Charlotte Lawson

Course Director Response:

We thank the External Examiners for their comments. From the discussion at the Examboard and these very helpful comments, the IGE paper has undergone a substantial re-organisation and the PSQ was scrutinised by the Module Leader, Year Leaders and Course Director before being sent to EE for further scrutiny. we hope that this addresses the problems encountered with low student attainment.
With regard to plagiarism detection we do not rely on Turnitin scores but on the software detecting similarities with the repository, all reports should be checked by the examiners by eye. however, as noted there were some technical issues with Turnitin itself detecting similarities erroneously and missing others. We are assured that this has been rectified by the company as it is an impossible task for a human!

Action Required:

Additional Scrutiny of IGE PSQ - complete
Additional scrutiny of turnitin reports - staff reminders - ongoing

Action Deadline:

31-May-2024

Action assigned to:

all examiners - checking individual Turnitin reports when marking scripts

Assessment Procedures

Please comment, as appropriate, on:

3.1 Assessment methods (relevance to learning objectives and curriculum)

MSci Biosciences and WAB: Really like the range of assessments, with some of these innovative and particularly testing employability skills.

BSc Year 3: Good range of assessments testing a number of different skills and knowledge. No single method of assessment is excessively relied upon.
BSc Year 1: A wide range of assessment methods- both ICA and exam based, with different style exam questions were utilised in both Gateway and BSc1 modules, which were entirely appropriate and effect styles of assessment.
Biosciences Year 2: In all programmes, there is a good range of assessment methods; this variety provides students with several ways to demonstrate their knowledge and there is no reliance on a single method of assessment. This is in line with the sector.

BSc Comparative Pathology: The assessment methods used this course were thorough and seems to effectively challenge the students and supports the learning outcomes of the course.

Gateway: There continue to be a wide variety of assessment methods employed which is similar to other HEIs within the sector. I believe the online assessment has been embraced by the students and continues to be popular.
I have a slight concern about the disparity in the wording of feedback and the marks given, work was second marked and there is no concern that the mark was not appropriate but I feel colleagues need to ensure that the wording of the feedback matches the level of mark awarded, I would also like to see more examples of constructive feedback – ensuring that the students are empowered to perform better in future assessments. I did see very nice examples of general feedback and I wonder if there were efficiencies seen by the staff.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Charlotte Lawson

Course Director Response:

We thank the External Examiners for these positive comments. Disparity in feedback provision is an institutional challenge and we are adapting our marking practice year by year - for example the use of marking rubrics on some modules and research projects will help to address this as well as for 2023-24 BSc2 ICAs the division of marking will be assigned differently so that individual members of staff mark a complete set of one part of the question, this way there should be less variation in feedback. All examiners are asked to provide constructive feedback and to include phrases such as "the mark would be improved by..." for essays and reports

Action Required:

ongoing all staff to be reminded of the need for consistent and constructive feedback, and to consider rubrics or alternative ways to divide marking so that there is a consistent approach for any one piece of work within a module, ensuring parity of feedback provision

Action Deadline:

31-May-2024

Action assigned to:

all examiners

3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous

BSc year 3 and MSci: I have no concern with the rigour of the assessment. Double marking or moderation are employed. As below, I suggest further expanding the use of marking rubrics.
BSc Comparative Pathology: The assessments in this course effectively evaluated the intended learning outcomes, and the entire examination process was conducted rigorously and in accordance with the expected standards.
Gateway: I believe the assessment procedures are rigorous and fair, colleagues are well aware of where additional student support is needed and they provide it.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Charlotte Lawson

Course Director Response:

We thank the external examiners for these positive comments and agree that use of rubrics should be employed to a greater extent to ensure parity of feedback provision

Action Required:

ongoing, staff to be encouraged to use rubrics when designing new assessments

Action Deadline:

31-May-2024

Action assigned to:

all staff setting assignments and exam questions

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

BSc year 3 and MSci: All appears appropriate

BSc Comparative Pathology: Appropriate

Gateway: The level of assessment in all programmes is consistent with the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Charlotte Lawson

Course Director Response:

we thank the external examiners for these positive comments

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

3.4 Standard of marking

BSc Year 1: The standard of marking was high. Feedback given was generally good and introduction of marking/feedback rubrics to be commended. There continues to be considerable variation in both the depth/amount of feedback given and way in which the feedback is delivered- e.g., straight into the feedback box in Grademark, versus uploaded document, versus quick marks. This makes the student experience within a module very varied. Marking was clear and moderation visible for all modules on the assessment pages. There were some incidences of plagiarism picked up by the external examiners for Gateway and BSc1. Where this is borderline poor academic practice, it is suggested that this is flagged with students in terms of feedback, which wasn't consistently observed in assessor comments.
MSci Biosciences and WAB: - Generally excellent feedback on projects, more consistent between markers and projects than BSc. Perhaps too much feedback - how is this communicated to students? Is it used going forward?

BSc year 3 : In general the standard of marking was good, although greater use of rubrics would ensure greater consistency. One thing I noticed is in some feedback, but not all, there seems to be quite a lot of focus on writing style, grammar in some (but not all) feedback - is this key in the marking rubric? What support are students given with this, particularly those for whom English isn't a first language?

Biosciences Year 2: The standard of marking was good and consistent across the modules though there are a couple of points.
There were some cases of suspected plagiarism that had not been picked up for example one project that had a similarity of 58% with other sources had received only positive feedback.
There was evidence of good practice in many places- it is clear that attempts have been made to standardise feedback style in some modules (rubric etc), but that there are still individual markers who have not conformed to this and it should be noted that while marking sheets are good for uniformity they do not replace quality feedback. It is noted however that for the majority of assessments there is still significant inconsistency between markers in style, mode of delivery and quality of feedback. It was also noted that more care needs to be taken in the language used. Variability in feedback style requires further consideration but also the use of a common method for delivery (e.g. Grademark).

BSc Comparative Pathology: Overall, the course team has done a thorough job in the marking and assessing the modules and I fully concur and support the marks awarded by the assessors. I am also happy to see that both first and the second markers comments are visible.

Gateway: I saw many examples of feedback which varied in both quality and quantity, it would be good to have more consistency there. Was the rubric introduced in September 2022? What was the analysis on that?
I was able to see evidence of double marking and discussions around marks.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Charlotte Lawson

Course Director Response:

We thank the external examiners for the comments. We have introduced marking rubrics for the BSc2 projects and suggested that it is formatively used for BSc3 projects. A marking rubric was introduced for some ICA reports and has been welcomed by students and staff to try to provide consistency, however this has not been adopted across all modules. The varied approaches to delivering written feedback remains an institutional challenge, and should be tackled across all courses to ensure that examiners who mark on a range of different courses can always adopt the same approach.
In terms of grammar and spelling, our Common Grading Scheme requires "good clarity of expression" at the higher marks. Students are all able to access one to one study skills help and have access to external online tutor schemes. Those students with SpLD are also able to access specific tutors. All students have access to mentoring via the Advice Centre

Action Required:

Remind students of the support available for writing
Remind staff to give guidance to marking teams to harmonise feedback provision when designing new assessments. Staff should be encouraged to read (and implement) the RVC Policy and Guidance on Feedback to Taught Students (https://www.rvc.ac.uk/Media/Default/About/Academic%20Quality,%20Regulations%20and%20Procedures/Examiners%20and%20Assessment/Feedback%20policy%20%20guidance.docx

Action Deadline:

31-May-2024

Action assigned to:

course director, year leaders, module leaders

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)

BSc Year 1: Yes, the exams team were very profession in their conduct. Timing was tighter than usual for scrutinizing of resit/second sit exams, therefore it is recommended that review of practices of when exam questions are collected from module leads to build in sufficient time for external examiner scrutiny and dialogue should this be required.
The level of assessment at BSc2, BSc 3 and MSci is consistent with the FHEQ.

Yes for BSc Comparative Pathology.

Gateway: The procedures for assessment and determination of awards were conducted extremely professionally and my thanks go to the Exams office who were always fully communicative and supportive in order for me to perform my role as external. Papers were sent in plenty of time for proof-reading prior to the exam being set and during the preparation for the final exam board we had additional meetings to ensure the procedures were fully followed. I was unable to attend the board was not face-to-face and technology was problematic on the day but my work was captured and reported.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Charlotte Lawson

Course Director Response:

We are very grateful to the External Examiners for scrutiny of second sit exam papers and review of practices is underway to ensure that there is sufficient time for this in future, asking module leaders to prepare two sets of exam papers where appropriate.

Action Required:

Request that module leaders prepare two sets of exam papers simultaneously to ensure there is adequate time for scrutiny by the EEs for both first sit and second sit and that the balance of both sets of papers is similar

Action Deadline:

01-Dec-2023

Action assigned to:

exams office, module leaders

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

The assessments were conducted in the same format as the previous years.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Charlotte Lawson

Course Director Response:

thank you to external Examiners for this comment

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

3.7 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the procedures

BSc3, MSci: Just a comment on plagiarism. In a number of assignments, and proctored exams, there seems to be a tendency for some students to reword text from other sources. What guidance to they receive on this, and could more training be provided?

Overall this year things were OK however it appears to have become practice of exam papers to be only set in the weeks prior to the assessment and this drift in timing causes significant issues with the ability of the externals to moderate papers, particularly in respect to the Diet 2 resits (although this is a more general problem). A recommendation would be for a deadline within the earl/mid Semester to be set for the submission of Diet 1 and Diet 2 examinations in line with the sector as a whole.

BSc Comparative Pathology: Good procedures were implemented.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Charlotte Lawson

Course Director Response:

We thank the External Examiner for this comment regarding plagiarism and poor academic practice, students are given an interactive seminar in year one and this is followed up before all other major pieces of work, together with online guidance and potential for one to one support in person or online.
We have reviewed our practice with regard to provision of papers and hope that this will resolve the issues faced for the second sit exams in 2023 (please see my comments above)

Action Required:

continue to remind students to be vigilant against inadvertent plagiarism and the support that is available
Request that module leaders prepare two sets of exam papers to ensure there is adequate time for scrutiny by the EEs for both first sit and second sit and that the balance of both sets of papers is similar

Action Deadline:

31-May-2024

Action assigned to:

year leaders, module leaders, course director

General Statements

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

BSc year 3 and MSci: Comments are taken on board although sometimes implementation of changes is quite gradual. This is the same across the sector but I strongly recommend fully implementing some suggestions shared by examiners such as wider use of rubrics to maximise consistency of marking and feedback.
Biosciences Year 2: I feel that my comments have been taken into consideration by the college though work remains on consistency with feedback and marking consistency across the modules.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Charlotte Lawson

Course Director Response:

We thank the External Examiners for these comments. We will continue to strive towards rubrics and more consistency of feedback provision. Paper setting has been much earlier this year and hopefully means that there will be sufficient time for close scrutiny by the External Examiners

Action Required:

Request that module leaders prepare two sets of exam papers to ensure there is adequate time for scrutiny by the EEs for both first sit and second sit and that the balance of both sets of papers is similar
Review feedback and provide some guidance to ensure there is consistency across marking teams, including development and use of rubrics

Action Deadline:

01-Dec-2023

Action assigned to:

exams office, module leaders

4.2 An acceptable response has been made

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

4.3 I approved the papers for the Examination

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

4.5 I attended the meeting of the Board of Examiners held to approve the results of the Examination

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

4.6 Candidates were considered impartially and fairly

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

4.7 The standards set for the awards are appropriate for qualifications at this level, in this subject

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

4.8 The standards of student performance are comparable with similar programmes or subjects in other UK institutions with which I am familiar

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

4.9 I have received enough training and support to carry out my role

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

The examiners are grateful for the support provided by the team at RVC, particularly with preparation for exam boards.

4.11 Appropriate procedures and processes have been followed

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Completion

If you have identified any areas of good practice, please comment more fully here. We may use information provided in our annual external examining report:

5.1 Do you have any suggestions for improvements based on experience at other institutes? We may use information provided in our annual external examining report:

BSc Year 1: Collection of exam papers for resit/second sit exams at the same time as collecting for the first sit papers to build in contingency time and ensure full scrutiny by assessors and external examiners.
BSc 3 and MSci: As stated elsewhere I recommend wider use of rubrics, reduced focus on grammatical issues in assessment (or more training provided) and enhanced training for students around plagiarism. The depth of feedback provided at RVC is exemplary, but I wonder about the impact of this on staff workloads, and if this amount of feedback is really needed, particularly for students in their final year.

Biosciences Year 2: The majority of markers are providing a high quality of feedback and their marking decisions are clear.
With regard to the marking and feedback I would strongly advise that an online platform such as Grademark is used throughout the program to provide consistency in the mode of feedback delivery across and within individual modules.

BSc Comparative Pathology: The course is excellent and contain up to date lectures and compares very favorably with other institutions.

Gateway: I was very impressed that the changes made due to Covid were embraced and moved forward rather than returning to the ways we worked before just because we can, in other institutions I have experience of the temptation is to go back to what we know and have always done.
I would recommend providing students with an opportunity to voice their concerns through "Early or End-of-Module Feedback."
There appears to be a variety of feedback styles among the assessors. It might be worth considering a standardised approach in the future to ensure greater consistency in the feedback provided.
Incorporating marking criteria and feedback through a “Rubric” for assessments would offer significant advantages. This approach enables assessors to provide detailed comments and assign individual marks for each section. Consequently, students will have access to comprehensive feedback from each assessor, which can serve as a valuable reference for their future activities.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Charlotte Lawson

Course Director Response:

We thank the External Examiners for these helpful comments. Hopefully we have answered them elsewhere within the document.
We have reviewed our practice with regard to exam setting timelines and have asked all module leaders to prepare two sets of papers where appropriate to ensure that there is adequate time for scrutiny of second sit papers in the future.
Use of Grademark to provide feedback is an institutional issue and will need approval from the Academic Registrar and discussion with other course leaders and director of assessment. There has been a concern in the past about anonymity of the marker when Grademark is used.
We have some module assessments using rubrics and will continue to encourage their development when appropriate, we agree that this should help to reduce staff workload which can sometimes be overwhelming at busy times of the academic year for marking and assessment.
Like many other institutions we struggle to gather end of term / end of module feedback so introduction of a further student evaluation might not provide the benefit we would hope. However, we encourage year leaders to meet regularly with class representatives to hopefully pick up in-module (or other) issues as they come up, which can then be fed back to the relevant module leader to implement changes as required. Class representatives are also invited to termly course management committee meetings and Undergraduate Biosciences Officers are invited to the Learning Teaching and Assessment Committee which is chaired by the Vice Principal for Learning Teaching and Assessment.

Action Required:

Module leaders to prepare two sets of papers in good time
Year leaders to meet with class reps regularly and feedback to module leaders where appropriate

Academic Registrar to comment on use of Grademark to give feedback on written work
Module leaders to explore further use of rubrics for their written assessments to reduce staff work load and standardise feedback to students

Action Deadline:

31-May-2024

Action assigned to:

module leaders, year leaders, academic registrar

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)