ANNUAL QUALITY IMPROVEMENT REPORT 2020/21

Appendix 3: External Examiners' report

BVetMed Year 1

This appendix contains Year Leader's responses to 2020/21 External Examiners' comments and updates to actions from previous External Examiners' reports (if applicable).

As 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 – N/A
b.	2020/21 Collaborative Annual Report with responses from Course Director/Year Leader

Collaborative Report

Exam board meeting: 05-Jul-2021

Bachelor of Veterinary Medicine, Year 1, 2020/21

Lead examiner: Dr David Bainbridge

Collaborating examiner(s): Mr David Kilroy, Dr Ian Jeffcoate, Dr Karin Mueller

The Programme

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

1.1 Course content

The content of the course is entirely appropriate.

Dr I.J

agree

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

The objectives are appropriate, and from what we have seen of the assessment outcomes, the course delivered them well,

Dr I.J

agree

1.3 Teaching methods

These were not directly observed, but again the assessment outcomes suggest they were appropriate and enacted effectively, even during the COVID pandemic.

Dr I.J

agree

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

The students are well supported in this regard.

Dr I.J

agree

1.5 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the Programme

n/a

Dr I.J

I wish to emphasise effective enactment of teaching and examination despite obvious hurdles of covid regulations

Student performance

Please comment, as appropriate, on:

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

The students' performance is at least as good as students on comparable courses elsewhere.

Dr I.J

agree

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

The failure rate among 'non-gateway' students was impressively low (and correctly determined, in our opinion) - especially in a year when many UK students entered having not been selected by the usual mechanism of achieving exam grades in actual public exams at school. Thus the top-scoring students were excellent, and the 'tail' of poor-performers was not long.

Performance of 'gateway' entry students was more variable, with some performing superbly, while their failure rate was relatively high. We believe that this latter observation relates to the inherent (and somewhat unavoidable) heterogeneity of this cohort, rather than any failings in the support with which they are provided. Their progress is also continually monitored, and targeted interventions put in place as necessary. It should also be noted that the first year is the time when these students' outcomes would be expected to differ most from other students, and indeed we were told that the data show that attainment gaps decline as the students progress through this (long) course.

The ISF orals were well-run, wide-ranging and appropriately pitched. The performance of some students was rather lower in this assessment element than in others. This may be due to the transition to online vivas - and it is clear that this COVID-affected cohort will be provided with additional support in preparing for ISF/OSCE/viva-type exams in future years.

Dr I.J

n/a

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Sarah Channon

Course Director Response:

Thankyou for your comments about the strong performance of our 'non-gateway' students – we are very proud of their achievements, and are grateful to all the teaching staff for ensuring they remain supported during a very challenging year. Whilst we were of course disappointed to see the relatively more variable performance of gateway alumni, we are very confident that the support we are putting in place for these students is high. This year the transition tutor has worked with these students on specific aspects of the programme such as preparation for ISF oral exams; next year this support will continue to be developed through a transition summer school, and other support activities. We would point out that students from disadvantaged backgrounds were most severely impacted by the pandemic, and so it is gratifying that the number of poor outcomes for students in this group was no higher than in previous non-pandemic years (and in fact somewhat improved).
Thankyou for your comments with regards to ISF orals – this was the first time we had run these online, although the students did get a formative experience. We would suggest the lower than usual performance (although, students historically do perform slightly less well across the board in this assessment) would have been impacted by the relative isolation in which some students worked during the pandemic, limiting their exposure to verbal communication and discussion of scientific topics. As you suggest, ensuring students understand the importance of face to face group work sessions in preparing for these types of assessments in 2021/22 will need to be a deliberate effort on our part.

Action Required:

1. Continued monitoring and efforts to ensure Gateway alumni are supported in transition to BVM1 (Year Leader, Transition Tutor)

2. Students to be reminded that group work and discussions that take place during those sessions prepare them for oral examinations and are vital for developing communication skills (Year Leader)

Action Deadline:

31-Oct-2021

Action assigned to:

Year Leader; Transition tutor

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

Dr I.J

see 2.2

Assessment Procedures

Please comment, as appropriate, on:

3.1 Assessment methods (relevance to learning objectives and curriculum)

We would like to compliment the RVC staff on well-run, thoughtful and imaginative assessment, run under trying circumstances.

Dr I.J

agree unreservedly

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Sarah Channon

Course Director Response:

thankyou, your support is appreciated

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous

The procedures were wide-ranging and rigorous.

Dr I.J

agree

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

The assessment was entirely consistent with that framework.

Dr I.J

agree

3.4 Standard of marking

Marking was appropriately pitched, consistent and showed no evidence of undue inter- or intra-marker variation.

Dr I.J

agree

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Sarah Channon

Course Director Response:

this is pleasing to hear, thankyou

Action Required:

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)

Yes - certainly.

Dr I.J

n/a

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

Most changes related to adaptations due to the COVID pandemic - the RVC examination system seems to have coped with this upheaval very well.

Dr I.J

agree

Mr D.K

A great deal of thought and effort was expended on ensuring that this year's assessments were appropriate and rigorous.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Sarah Channon

Course Director Response:

Thankyou - the exams office team, and teaching staff have been busy, but we are pleased that our efforts and investments have resulted in positive outcomes

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

3.7 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the procedures

We had an enlightening discussing with the examiners about how they balanced factors relating to online exams - time pressures, examination time windows, IT system 'bandwidth'. This has been an ongoing journey for most universities over the last year.

Dr I.J

agree

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Sarah Channon

Course Director Response:

We agree that benefits of and issues related to online exams are numerous, and are being considered widely across the sector. We are continuing to monitor sector challenges and advances in this area, and will continue to make changes and updates to our online assessment accordingly.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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:

Dr I.J

yes

4.2 An acceptable response has been made

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Dr I.J

yes

4.3 I approved the papers for the Examination

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Dr I.J

yes

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:

Dr I.J

yes

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:

Dr I.J

no due to technical issues on-line

4.6 Candidates were considered impartially and fairly

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Dr I.J

no comment

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:

Dr I.J

agree

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:

Dr I.J

agree

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Dr I.J

yes

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:

Dr I.J

yes

4.11 Appropriate procedures and processes have been followed

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Dr I.J

yes

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Dr I.J

agree

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:

Assessment represents a large tranche of work for RVC staff - due to the complexity and range of the material examined, and the large number of students. We would encourage the RVC to continually consider how these pressures on staff may be reduced. The modes of examination are diverse and appropriate, but it is worth considering whether it is possible to reduce the size of some exams, and still maintain the current high standards.

Like most higher education institutions, the RVC will also no doubt consider what has been learnt during the COVID outbreak. Were some altered modes of teaching and assessment actually better than what went before?

Dr I.J

I agree with this statement and suggest that it has been raised in previous discussions

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Sarah Channon

Course Director Response:

Thankyou for your comments, and we agree that our staff put huge efforts and time into assessing our students. We will keep our assessment portfolio under review. It is unlikely that we will return to pencil/paper exams in the future and so we now look to take forward the most beneficial elements of the assessment modes used during COVID19. This will understandably take time as we work through the various benefits and pitfalls of the new methods and consider how compatible they are with existing infrastructure and the ongoing need to satisfy PSRB requirements.

Action Required:

Continual review and improvement of assessment modes and delivery mechanisms

Action Deadline:

01-May-2022

Action assigned to:

Director of Assessment; Head of Exams; Director of Learning and Wellbeing

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)

n/a

Dr I.J

n/a