
MSC VETERINARY EPIDEMIOLOGY EXTERNAL EXAMINERS REPORTS

Responses to 2015/16 External Examiners' Comments and an update to 2014/15 Actions

To be considered at TQC Meeting on: Tuesday 22nd November 2016, 14:00-17:00

a. Actions from 2014/15

External Examiners' comment	Course Director's Response & Action	UPDATE Oct 2016
<p>2.2 Quality of candidates' knowledge and skills, with particular reference to those at the top, middle or bottom of the range....</p> <p>Several students did very poorly in their projects. One students that did pass noted in her viva that the data only became available to her after about 4 weeks into the project period. The external examiners noted last year "It is necessary to ensure that datasets that are needed for the projects are available on time for the students to avoid high time pressure in data analysis beyond their personal responsibility" and we believe this remains a priority.</p> <p>Further, several students project report were of a low standard, poorly formatted and with very confused presentation, and this reflected the knowledge presented within the work. It is important that the students received clear guidance as to what is required in the production of a high quality report, The students should also be assisted in terms of clearly defining the scope of their project.</p>	<p>Despite updating supervisor guidelines and clearly laying out the requirements of an MSc-level project including timelines, it seems that further improvements are still needed to ensure that our students end up with feasible projects that they can realistically complete in the allotted timeframe. It will be discussed at the next Course Management Committee meeting how this can be achieved.</p> <p>Supervisors will be advised to ensure that complete datasets are available at the outset</p> <p>We will look into scheduling more generic skills training to include report writing into the timetable, and will discuss at the CMC meeting where this best fits in and when.</p> <p>Action Required: Required actions to be confirmed at next CMC meeting</p>	<p>All students present their outline proposals in the spring to audience of course directors and VEEPH researchers where project suitability is checked and suggestions made e.g. for supervisors for those not yet arranged.</p> <p>The course directors discuss with students about the choice of projects. We have specifically mentioned at end of term meetings in previous years that students should choose their projects carefully as they have to be able to demonstrate the application of knowledge and skills learned on the course in their project and that this can be difficult if they choose a project which requires methods not taught on the course (i.e. qualitative methods, more advanced stats or modelling methods beyond what they learn on the modules, etc).</p> <p>A generic skills session was introduced into the timetable in 2012 and will be continued as a permanent feature.</p> <p>It was noted that in 2014, 2 students failed the Research project. Better guidelines were to be provided to students, for example, in how to write up and present their projects, and supervisors, especially those external to the college. Action was completed.</p> <p>The course directors reviewed and revised the supervisors' responsibility guidelines document and this is sent to all supervisors each year. Students also receive this document for their information.</p> <p>Therefore, students are provided with project guidelines, notes on preparation of project, access to supervisor document and feedback from project proposal presentation.</p>

The following data on research project pass/fails suggest that research projects are now getting better marks:

	2015-16	2014-15	2013-14	2012-13
First Sit				
Passed	7	6	7	11
Failed	0	4	2	1
Resit				
Passed	2	0	0	0
Failed	2	1	0	1
Total				
	11	11	9	13

Two students chose not to submit a project.

It has been suggested to record the details of publications arising from student projects so from this year (2016-17) the course administrator will contact supervisors and ask them to inform her when students' projects get published. This will provide useful updates for the course website with links/summaries, as a way of measuring success and promoting the course.

3.1 Assessment methods (relevance to learning objectives and curriculum ...

We have some concern about written paper 2, in which many students scored poorly, and felt that there may have been inadequate time for this paper to be completed to the students best abilities. As noted last year ' It might be good to either reduce the amount of (sub)questions or to provide students with good guidance on how to fill in the exam to avoid they spend too much on writing long answers.' and care should be taken when exams are drafted next year.

We acknowledge that exam paper 2 was probably too long and this was taken into account in the final marks after considerable discussion at the exam board meeting. We will revisit the possibility of shortening the exam papers to 4 (instead of 5) question or alternatively ensuring that question are short enough to enable good performance in the allocated time. We trust the external examiners will closely scrutinise the draft papers next year to ensure that there are no concerns over the length of the exam papers.

Action Required:

Discuss moving to 4 questions for the exam papers at next CMC meeting. Ensure exam papers are of adequate length to enable good performance in the allocated time.

Completed: As of 2015/16, papers 1 and 2 now each contain 4 questions in 3 h, compared with 5 Qs in 3 h for papers 1 and 2 in previous yrs.

Exam practice was a 'You said we did' item. The learning development centre has tutorials and online material and exam technique material and Maria is timetabling a session in spring term 2017 for the Vet Epi students for exam technique training. This is in addition to the following resources/sessions already offered to the students:

- Generic skills session
- Careers workshop (developing employability skills)
- Economics revision session
- Revision session on term 1 material dx tests
- Use of exam Qs in sessions
- LSHTM provides extended epi and STEPH revision session prior to exams in June
- Winter paper critique feedback by tutors (one to one session)
- Library Training (Endnote, Literature Searching, Scout) Sign-up Session
- Students are inducted on learning development techniques (referencing, plagiarism, exam techniques, learning styles and preferences; use of technologies and study aids) at the start of the year and are emailed reminders that they can book a 1-2-1 appointment with one of the Learning Development staff (exam techniques, revision, time-management, etc).

		<p>- Students are informed (and reminded throughout the year) of existing Student Support and Special Exam Arrangements at both institutions</p>
<p>4.1 Comments I have made in previous years have been addressed to my satisfaction...</p> <p>IN the most part these have been addressed, but further care and monitoring is needed in a couple of areas. See comments above</p>	<p>Previous comments related to selection of suitable summer projects and length of exam papers. We fully acknowledge some remaining issues with these aspects of the programme and will continue to put actions in place to ensure these can be resolved for next year.</p> <p>Action Required:</p> <p>Required actions to be confirmed at next CMC meeting</p>	<p>Please see comments above (particularly the comments in the first box, with the details about improved pass rates for the research project in recent years).</p>
<p>External Examiner comments: For College information...</p> <p>We would like to suggest that research project oral examination be up-weighted in the overall assessment - we should suggest it be increased to 20% of the project mark. We felt that, on a number of occasions, the students gave bern good accounts in the oral examination of their work and the complex decisions they faced in undertaking their work and that this information/detail was often not evident in the report, most probably due to word limits. Judging by the marks this year we believe this change would be in the favour of the students and would, overall, ensure the marks provide a more accurate reflection of the students learning, knowledge and ability.</p> <p>We were also concerned that a student choice regarding the type of project they undertook may have implications for the marks they are likely to achieve, as a solidly undertaken logistic regression of existing data seems likely to gain very good marks, whereas some other project types (such as Risk assessments) which require equivalent of greater intellectual engagement, may tend to be marked lower as the time required for such projects to be completed to a very high level may be longer. Hence, we consider it important that project</p>	<p>The increase in % allocation for the oral examination (from 10% to 20%) was discussed at the Exam Board meeting and there was a general consensus that this would be appropriate although we would also like to seek the views of CMC members and the Masters Coordinating Committee on this change.</p> <p>The choice of type of project and associated marking has been discussed in the past although it has not been possible to devise an appropriate 'weighting' for different types of projects given that, to some extent, the level of difficulty of a project is a subjective assessment. We agree that a review of past projects and their marks could be a useful exercise in this regard and will look into the possibility of conducting such a review.</p> <p>See above responses with regard to selection of summer projects and assuring feasibility within the time frame available.</p> <p>Action Required:</p> <p>Required actions to be confirmed at next CMC meeting</p>	<p>We are pleased to report that the external examiners' recommendation to change the weighting of the research project oral assessment (viva) from 10% to 20% has now been implemented. Hence from 2017 exams onwards, the orals will last 30 mins and be worth 20% of the marks for the research module. We apologise that this change took longer to occur than it should have: this was due to a change in course director and a concurrent major restructuring of course committees.</p> <p>This change means that students will have longer to orally discuss their projects and do them justice, and hence make it fairer for students who did 'less safe' projects to excel.</p> <p>See above responses with regard to selection of summer projects and assuring feasibility within the time frame available.</p>

<p>reports be graded in light of what is realistically possible to achieve within the time allowed. Students and supervisors should also ensure that projects are not overly ambitious. We would welcome a review of the projects undertaken in recent years, together with their marks, to better assess whether this impression is valid. If marking does vary by project type I would suggest some form of moderation is needed for those project types that tend to score more poorly.</p>		
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- b. Responses to the comments made by External Examiners in the collaborative Report for 2015/16 written by:
Dr Rob Christley & Professor Ann Lindberg**

Collaborative Report

Exam board meeting: 16-Sep-2016

MSc in Veterinary Epidemiology, 2015/16

Lead examiner: Dr Rob Christley

Collaborating examiner(s): Professor Ann Lindberg

The Programme

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

1.1 Course content

The course content is appropriate for an MSc

Response from college requested: **NO**

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

The learning objectives were clear and appeared to be met

Response from college requested: **NO**

1.3 Teaching methods

A range of teaching methods were used and were appropriate of the course.

Response from college requested: **NO**

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

We are not aware of the resources used

Response from college requested: **NO**

1.5 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the Programme

The programme has been running for many years and is clearly well "tried and tested". The content is excellent and should give students an excellent grounding in epidemiology.

Response from college requested: **NO**

Student performance

Please comment, as appropriate, on:

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

Generally the students performance is similar to those on comparable courses in the UK and Europe.

Response from college requested: **NO**

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

The student's performances varied across the examinations and the in course assessments. interestingly there was variation both with and between students. Some students performed well in one or several modes of assessment, but less so others. the reason for this was not clear - perhaps it reflected different emphasis placed by some students on parts of the course. Similarly, some students scored relatively poorly across several assessment tasks. Reviewing these that indicated these students had, indeed, performed more poorly inn these tasks. Within the examinations this was either due to students providing very limited (short) answers suggesting an inability to answer the question (or inadequate time to do so) whilst occasionally students provided more substantial answers, but failed to address the question, perhaps suggesting that they had either mis-interpreted the question, or had chosen to present what they knew, rather than not answer.

We felt that students quite often performed poorly on those questions that required them to apply skills and knowledge from the course, rather than simply provide remembered facts. Some thought could be given the how students prepare for such questions.

Response from college requested: **NO**

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Julian Drewe

Course Director Response:

We agree that exam preparation and practice is an area that some students could do better at. A range of sessions and support items have been put together to help them do this:

Exam practice was a You Said We Did item.

Students are presented with typical exam questions in classes and encouraged to think about key point answers. Lecturers will be encouraged to do this more in classes, and discuss the student responses.

The learning development centre has tutorials and online exam technique material and the students are directed towards this.

A session on exam technique training is now timetabled for spring term 2017.

The number of questions in each exam paper was reduced to 4 this year from 5 previously and the exam length stayed the same: so lack of time should not have been an issue.

The exam papers from 2015-16 have been uploaded to Learn to give students an idea of what to expect and opportunity to practice answering in their own time.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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

No additional comments.

Response from college requested: NO

Please comment, as appropriate, on:

3.1 Assessment methods (relevance to learning objectives and curriculum)

The range of assessment tasks should enable the students to demonstrate their knowledge and to apply skills. As noted previously, there was evidence that some students struggled at times with the application of skills/knowledge within the exam setting. The exams appeared to be of a reasonable length, with some students being able to provide excellent answers to at least most questions. In most cases it should have been clear to the students how marks were to be allocated and this should aid the students when answering. There were a few sub-questions which were worth a high proportion of the total marks for that question that could have benefited from more detailed explanation of marks allocation, or by being broken into more discrete subquestions.

Response from college requested: **NO**

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Julian Drewe

Course Director Response:

Most exam questions had clear sub-questions with clear mark allocation. We agree that there were a small number of questions where the allocation of marks could have been made more explicit. We will try to ensure this is done from now on. The recent (July 2016) introduction of a named Exams Office person for the Vet Epi course should help this process.

Action Required:

Review exam questions in spring 2017 for the end of year exams to ensure all questions have detailed explanation of mark allocation, or are broken into more discrete subquestions.

Action Deadline:

31-May-2017

Action assigned to:

Course directors (Julian Drewe and Ellen Fragaszy) and Exams Office (Lauren Christian)

3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous

The assessment procedure appeared rigorous and covered the course well. It was noted that the exam did not include questions from all modules, but this is acceptable and I would not anticipate that every module should necessarily be assessed within the examinations.

Response from college requested: **NO**

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

The level of assessment is consistent with the FHEQ

Response from college requested: **NO**

3.4 Standard of marking

The marking appears to be fair and objective. A number of questions were marked using a limited range of possible marks (e.g. a question out of 10 may have only been marked using 0, 5 or 10, rather than other marks being awarded). Given the low number of students it is hard to determine if this was just an aberration, but care should be taken to try to use the full range of marks available.

The external examiners last year raised an issue with project topics, with some appearing to provide a safer route to high marks, whereas others appeared more risky. This did not appear to be a problem this year. However, the recommendation that the weight of the oral assessment (viva) change from 10/100 to 20/100 has not been acted upon.

Response from college requested: YES

Professor A.L

Agree that marking in general showed a high degree of consistency despite being blinded which indicates that criteria for marking are well-defined.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Julian Drewe

Course Director Response:

We are pleased to report that the external examiners' recommendation to change the weighting of the research project oral assessment (viva) from 10% to 20% has now been implemented. Hence from 2017 exams onwards, the orals will last 30 mins and be worth 20% of the marks for the research module. We apologise that this change took longer to occur than it should have: this was due to a change in course director and a concurrent major restructuring of course committees.

This change means that students will have longer to orally discuss their projects and do them justice, and hence make it fairer for students who did 'less safe' projects to excel.

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. The procedures are sound and fairly conducted.

Response from college requested: NO

Professor A.L

Yes

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

Not applicable

Response from college requested: NO

3.7 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the procedures

No additional comments.

Response from college requested: NO

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

No

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Last year we recommended the board consider increasing the weighting of the viva to 20/100. The board may have good reason to not do this, but feedback would be welcome.

Response from college requested: YES

Professor A.L

First year as External Examiner

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Julian Drewe

Course Director Response:

We are pleased to report that the external examiners' recommendation to change the weighting of the research project oral assessment (viva) from 10% to 20% has now been implemented. Hence from 2017 exams onwards, the orals will last 30 mins and be worth 20% of the marks for the research module. We apologise that this change took longer to occur than it should have: this was due to a change in course director and a concurrent major restructuring of course committees.

This change means that students will have longer to orally discuss their projects and do them justice, and hence make it fairer for students who did 'less safe' projects to excel.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

4.2 An acceptable response has been made

No

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

as above

Response from college requested: NO

4.3 I approved the papers for the Examination

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

No additional comments

Response from college requested: NO

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

All student papers were available to me. However, we noted that very few papers were annotated by the examiners. In some cases we were provided with a breakdown of marks by sub-question and sometimes also with comments from the examiners, but this was incomplete and inconsistent. Where papers were annotated by the examiners it was usually easy to see where marks had been allocated. Where total marks awarded for each sub-question was available it was sometimes possible to deduce why marks had not been allocated, based on comments, but this was not always the case, particularly with some larger questions. This made it sometimes difficult to determine precisely why a student received a particular mark for a particular sub-question. However, we found we agreed with the overall marks received.

It would help the examiners if markers would either annotate papers, either using pen on paper, or electronically. provided tables of marks and comments may save the examiners time, but makes the external examiners job more difficult.

The in course assessment materials from LSHTM were difficult to work with. We received papers from ALL students undertaking each module, not just those undertaking this course and these were coded with a different code to the one used by the RVC. Therefore we had to act as code breakers to identify the relevant papers and this became somewhat laborious and made checking across the students more difficult. It would help if the necessary papers etc (along with the assessment tasks themselves, which we had to retrieve ourselves for the moodle) could be provided in folders (paper or electronic) appropriately labelled and coded ready for the external examiners to view.

Response from college requested: YES

Professor A.L

The process of scrutinising a sample of the students' work was cumbersome and could be made more efficient. As mentioned by the Lead Examiner, marking was not done directly in the exam papers, and total marks per question was provided to the external examiners rather than per sub-question. Also, the way marks were reported back to the Exams Office seemed to differ. A suggestion for improvement is to ensure that there is a good resolution in the marks, that it is clear from the exam papers where marks have been awarded and that marks are reported in a consistent manner.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Julian Drewe

Course Director Response:

Re: "It would help the examiners if markers would either annotate papers, either using pen on paper, or electronically."

We fully agree with the external examiners here. All markers were requested to clearly annotate scripts but not all did so. It is also RVC policy that scripts should be annotated so that it is clear where marks were gained/lost. We will reiterate this request next year. The recent (July 2016) introduction of a named Exams Office person for the Vet Epi course should help this process of checking scripts and querying with markers of any that are not clearly annotated.

Re: "The in course assessment materials from LSHTM were difficult to work with. We received papers from ALL students undertaking each module, not just those undertaking this course and these were coded with a different code to the one used by the RVC. Therefore we had to act as code breakers to identify the relevant papers and this became somewhat laborious and made checking across the students more difficult. It would help if the necessary papers etc (along with the assessment tasks themselves, which we had to retrieve ourselves for the moodle) could be provided in folders (paper or electronic) appropriately labelled and coded ready for the external examiners to view."

We apologise that the external examiners had to act as codebreakers this year. They shouldn't have had to. We will request LHSTM supplies the info next year in the format requested by the externals. (NB LHSTM usually does: this year was an aberration.)

Additional comment added on 8/11/16 by Ellen Fragazsy (LSHTM course co-director):

This may be a reference to the LSHTM questions which are marked on a scale of 0-100 and are then converted to an RVC mark on the 17 point scale. We've been told that we have to do this by RVC Exams Office. Scripts are individually marked to the LSHTM 100pt scale then the agreed marks are translated to the nearest mark on the RVC 17 point scale, and whether we go up or down is based on the descriptors.

Action Required:

1. Emphasise to examiners that markers must annotate papers so that it is clear where marks were awarded.
2. Request LHSTM/RVC supplies the exam results next year in a format requested by the externals (i.e. only for the students enrolled on MSc Vet Epi course and using the RVC codes).

Action Deadline:

01-Sep-2017

Action assigned to:

Maria Johnson and Lauren Christian

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

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Response from college requested: NO

Professor A.L

YES

4.6 Candidates were considered impartially and fairly

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

No additional comments

Response from college requested: NO

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

No additional comments

Response from college requested: NO

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

No additional comments

Response from college requested: NO

Professor A.L

Not applicable

4.9 I have received enough support to carry out my role

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

No additional comments

Response from college requested: NO

Professor A.L

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:

No additional comments

Response from college requested: NO

Professor A.L

YES

4.11 Appropriate procedures and processes have been followed

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Response from college requested: NO

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

No additional comments

Response from college requested: NO

Professor A.L

YES

Completion

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

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

no

Response from college requested: **NO**

5.2 External Examiner comments: For College information only (Responses to External Examiners are published on the College's website. Please only use this box to add any comments that you wish to remain confidential, if any)

none

Response from college requested: **NO**

