ANNUAL QUALITY IMPROVEMENT REPORT 2017/18

Appendix 3: External Examiners' report

BVetMed Year 2

This appendix contains Course Director's/Year Leader's responses to 2017/18 External Examiners' comments and updates to actions from External Examiners' reports from previous years (if applicable).

As Course Director/Year Leader 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

There are no outstanding actions from 2016/17!

Collaborative Report

Exam board meeting: 03-Jul-2018

Bachelor of Veterinary Medicine, Year 2, 2017/18

Lead examiner: Dr Karen Noble

Collaborating examiner(s): Dr Harriet BrooksBrownlie , Dr Mark Mclaughlin, Dr Richard Payne

The Programme

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

1.1 Course content

The course continues to cover a wide-range of disciplines that include the core subjects of anatomy, physiology, immunology, general pathology, pharmacology, microbiology, animal husbandry and communication skills.

Response from college requested: **NO**

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

The successful delivery of the learning objectives of the course was assessed by the comprehensive and in-depth examination of the students.

Response from college requested: **NO**

1.3 Teaching methods

Teaching methods include didactic lectures, practical classes (including dissections), directed learning, and tutorials. They appear appropriate and effective.

Response from college requested: **NO**

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

The course appears well resourced.

Response from college requested: **NO**

1.5 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the Programme

The staff successfully deliver a course that builds on learning from earlier parts of the degree programme and that is well-aligned to assessment methods. Quality assurance is robust.

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

The second year course is an integrated course which is similar to other UK vet schools. The distribution of the marks and fail rate were comparable to similar courses in other institutions and were similar to previous cohorts of students studying this course. The external examiners were in agreement with the list of students who were deemed to have failed their second year exam.

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 overall distribution of marks appeared consistent with previous years. The fail rate was in the expected range and the distinction and merit students performed well across the different aspects of the exam.

Response from college requested: NO

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

The overall performance of the students was appropriate for this level. There are however some concerns that the ICA (group presentation) component may disproportionately influence the grade of students on a border line fail and is discussed in section 3.2.

Response from college requested: YES

Dr H.B

perhaps add 'disproportionately' i.e. the ICA component may disproportionately influence etc.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Sarah Channon

Course Director Response:

We have responded to this comment in section 3.2

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

Assessment Procedures

Please comment, as appropriate, on:

3.1 Assessment methods (relevance to learning objectives and curriculum)

The final examination mark consists of the sum of the following components (weighting in brackets) although students are required to achieve a minimum standard in some components.
MCQ paper (28%),
Problem –solving paper (20%),
Essay paper (20%)
ISF oral (12%)
In course continuous assessment (10%)
Research project (10%)
Integration of subject areas is clearly demonstrated by the collaboration of two or more examiners in devising questions for the ISF oral and problem-solving paper. Learning outcomes for subject areas being assessed in written questions were for the most part clearly presented to external examiners. It is clear that the assessment process is varied and aligned to the course learning outcomes.
Once again the integrated structure and function (ISF) oral examination is commended for its organisation and the range of materials available.

Response from college requested: NO

3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous

The examination process is largely well-documented allowing for a full review of the performance of individual candidates.

Paper 1 (MCQ):
This paper tests factual recall. An internal review of the question bank has been undertaken and the external examiners agree that the phrasing of questions has improved from previous years.
This exam was standard set and statistical analysis demonstrated that the paper was fair and discriminatory on the whole, however some non-discriminatory questions were present.
Staff reported that most students completed this exam well within the time limit (90mins).
Not all images had scale bars.

Paper 2 (problem-solving):
The paper assessed the breadth of knowledge and the students' ability to integrate knowledge across different areas and assess raw data. Statistical analysis showed this paper was fair and discriminatory.

Paper 3 (essay paper):
The students selected one from three essay titles in four separate sections. Statistical analysis revealed that marks were significantly decreased across section D in comparison to the other sections. Where a border line fail student was identified, the impact of section D was explored and the conclusion to uphold the grade was appropriate. It does however suggest that student understanding of or engagement with this aspect of the course may be weaker and this may merit special attention in any curriculum review.

Oral exam (ISF):
The examination was well organised with multiple components/aspects that test the students' communication skills while discriminating between students of different knowledge level. The production of an automated marking sheet from previous years went some way to improve efficiency of marking. The process for recording the standard of the performance and award a grade did vary and examiners should be reminded to inform the student when they have reached a certain level (especially level 1). There was apparent inconsistency in the type of questions considered level 1 e.g identify and name a petri dish vs identify and name a specific blood vessel of the heart . Comments in the free-text comments box at the bottom of the form are particularly useful in the case of students with poorer performance and staff are encouraged include such feedback.
Consideration should be given to award a mark for the student's standard of communication, which would not count towards the ISF mark.

In-course assessment (ICA):
The consistency and standard of marking of the in-course assessment (ICA) is not as robust as other components of this assessment. Feedback was intermittent and sub-section grading did not always correlate with the overall mark and these criteria appeared to vary between different markers. Marks for this component of the exam were generally higher than that of other components and this resulted in several students gaining an overall borderline

pass even though they failed the MCQ, problem–based, essay and ISF component of the exam. The external examiners recognise the value of this exercise but suggest that this section have less weighting or perhaps be formative.

Research projects:
The grading of the research projects seemed appropriate and the feedback sufficient. During a discussion with a member of staff it was pointed out that the identification of projects and the level of supervision can be quite variable. While these factors can be difficult to standardise, they would have an impact on the quality of the report and the final grade. Are appropriate mechanisms in place to identify projects that may be problematic?

Response from college requested: YES

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Sarah Channon

Course Director Response:

ISF oral examinations:
We will endeavour to provide clearer guidance to examiners as to what constitutes a suitable level one question. We do have a published list of example level one questions (this is not exhaustive but is accessible to both staff and students prior to the examination) and these will be provided directly to staff ahead of the next ISF oral exam. Staff will also be reminded to signpost the levels throughout the exam, and of the value of their free text comments and feedback in these assessments.

ICA:
We strongly feel that in course assessments are included in our assessment profile in order to assess a broader range of skills, other than those assessed in written examinations. The ICA mark that the external examiners refer to includes both the MCQ exam, sat at the end of term 1 and contributing 5 % of the end of year mark, and the Integrated Concepts group oral presentations - also 5 % of the year mark. The MCQ is an important exam, as it allows the students to gain feedback on their progress at this stage of the course. There is no reason to suggest that the marks for this exam are misaligned with those on the similar paper in the summer exams, though we can undertake this analysis. The oral presentations require students to work as a team to research and present a topic orally - therefore both group work skills as well as communication skills are required to succeed in this assessment. We acknowledge that group work skills are not assessed overtly however. Students typically do very well on these presentations; they are conscientious high achieving students, who typically produce some very insightful work. We feel that if students meet the required standard set out by the descriptors in the (college wide) mark scheme, then this should be rewarded. We disagree that the contribution of this assessment should be decreased simply because students do well and are meeting and exceeding expectations in these areas. In fact, assessing a wide range of skills by a variety of means is good inclusive assessment practice, which is of increasing importance given the numbers of students with learning differences on Veterinary Medicine programmes. The marking scheme used to assess these presentations is the RVC mark scheme for Research and Library Project Oral Presentations which is used across all undergraduate courses at the college. The BVetMed 2 Year leader is of the opinion that this marking scheme is not easy for assessors to use, and so we will recommend that the RVC considers amending this marking scheme. This may lead to better reliability of marking of these assessments.

Research projects:
We agree that supervision of research projects can be variable (a well known issue with this type of assessment across courses and institutions). Research projects are sample marked, with at least one project from each supervisor sampled. As such any discrepancies in the marking of project are identified. During the project process, students have access to a central RP1 Advice contact email, where they can flag to the RP1 director any issues with their project supervision, or ask for support where needed. RP1 advice sessions are timetabled throughout the year, so students are able to use specialist support for issues that are outside the expertise of their project supervisor (for example statistics, questionnaire design).

Action Required:

Example Level One questions to be circulated to staff ahead of ISF oral exams, and a hard copy made available during the exam. Use of feedback comments, and 'signposting' during the exam to be emphasised in pre-exam briefing to staff (ISF coordinator; Exams office).
Analysis of relationship between MCQ ICA and MCQ summer marks (BVetMed Year 2 Leader).
Recommend to LTAC that RVC marking scheme for research and library project oral presentations should be amended or replaced. (BVetMed Year 2 leader; Director of Assessment; Exams Office; BVetMed Course Management Committee)

Action Deadline:

01-Jun-2019

Action assigned to:

ISF coordinator; Exams office;BVetMed Year 2 leader; Director of Assessment; Exams Office; BVetMed Course Management Committee

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

The assessment process effectively and objectively examined a broad range of subjects in an integrated and aligned manner differentiating the depth of knowledge and understanding of individual student.

Response from college requested: NO

3.4 Standard of marking

Overall marking was consistent and generally of a high standard. The application of a statistical analysis, based on a mixed model method, to standard set the MCQ paper appears to be very successful and the pass mark identified appropriate (54.3%).
Sample marking was systematic, clearly recorded and should be commended.
Statistical analysis of the grades for the problem-solving paper was used to direct scrutiny at potential problem areas. A similar analysis was available for the essay paper but was available at a very late stage in the exam process. This delay did cause us some problems, however we appreciate the pressure the staff are under to complete all their marking at this stage of the year. Please see section 3.7 for further comment in this respect.
This analysis is useful and commended and we would be grateful to receive this for all papers on our arrival. It is suggested that, where appropriate, the analyses include the standard error of the regression and also maximum and minimum marks for each question.

It was clear on papers 2 & 3 that for some questions marks were awarded for answers that did not appear on the model. It would be helpful if the model answers are updated ahead of our arrival. Experience at other universities suggests that academic staff are better able to synthesize a comprehensive model answer at an earlier stage in the exam process if second marking occurs before or alongside the initial stages of first marking.

The external examiners welcome the following changes to the examination process which have in part been made in response to our feedback in previous years.
The problem solving questions were divided up so that for the most part each sub-section was marked by the same person. This resulted in more consistent marking.
The consistency of marking and annotation the essay questions was improved on previous years.
The ~~ICF~~ ISF orals marking sheet has been reviewed and improved. The feedback section should always be completed to assist both the external examiners and the students.

Response from college requested: YES

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Sarah Channon

Course Director Response:

Thankyou for your suggestions. We will endeavour to include the standard error of the regression and also maximum and minimum marks for each question on future reports.
Model answers are initially drafted at the same time as questions are written. However on occasion, markers may

need to amend the model answer to include correct answers that have been produced by students, not initially considered in the original model answer. Normally when this occurs the marker will annotate the mark scheme by hand to reflect the changes made. This will then be passed back to the exams office with the pile of scripts. It is possible that the externals received a 'clean' copy of the model answer. We will ask all examiners to ensure model answer amendments are documented and passed back to the exams office, and that the copies provided to externals are updated with any changes. We welcome your suggestions for improving the process for generating model answers, however we do not second mark - we sample mark.

Action Required:

Provide clear instructions to all examiners to ensure model answer amendments are formally documented and passed back to the exams office, and that the copies provided to external examiners are updated with any changes (Exams office).
Include the standard error of the regression and also maximum and minimum marks for each question on future reports (Director of Assessment).

Action Deadline:

01-Jun-2019

Action assigned to:

Exams office; Director of Assessment

3.5 In your view, are the procedures for assessment and the determination of awards sound and fairly conducted? (e.g. Briefing, Exam administration, marking arrangements, Board of Examiners, participation by External Examiners)

The procedures are expertly and comprehensively carried out and well-documented.
The external examiners were asked to review draft questions and were sent specific responses to their feedback.
Analysis of the MCQ paper with comment from staff was sent in good time
The external examiners were given an introductory briefing with the chair of the exam board the year lead and the academic member of staff responsible for statistical analysis. This meeting was informative and these members of staff were generous with their time in the lead up to the exam board meeting.
Excellent support was provided by the exam office throughout.

Response from college requested: NO

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

The role of the spot-test (10% weighting) has largely been subsumed by the ISF (+2%) and the MCQ (+8%) papers with much of the content of the spot exam reconfigured as ”practical-based” MCQs. The MCQ paper however remains the same length (60 questions in 90 minutes)
The external examiners are concerned that 60 MCQ questions may not be sufficient to test practical content in addition to factual recall across such a large range of subject areas and recommend that the widely praised ISF oral exam be given a greater weighting (15 – 20%).

Response from college requested: YES

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Sarah Channon

Course Director Response:

Thankyou for your comments. We are keen to increase the weighting of the ISF oral exam too. We are currently undertaking an assessment review, as part of an ongoing curriculum review. The new curriculum will begin in 2021-22 for BVetMed 2. Assessment changes will be at an earlier stage (2019-20), initially in Year 1, and filtering into Year 2 in 2020-21. Details are still being discussed at course management level, and we will flag your suggestions within these discussions.

Action Required:

Ongoing assessment review, and changes made to Assessment and Award Regulations for BVetMed 2 2020-21

Action Deadline:

01-Nov-2019

Action assigned to:

Director of assessment; BVetMed Course Management Committee; BVetMed Year 2 Leader

3.7 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the procedures

The external examiners acknowledge the considerable cost in staff time in the examination process, in particular the marking of the essay paper. The essays offer a good opportunity for the top students to excel. However, marking these essays in a fair and consistent manner is challenging. The requirement for the essay paper could also be questioned as the material being assessed does appear to cross over with paper 2 on some instances. Perhaps the essay paper could be removed and to compensate, paper 2 could be expanded, either to cover additional areas or increase the time/marks for each question?

Response from college requested: YES

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Sarah Channon

Course Director Response:

We agree with the comments of the externals, and will put forward your suggestions to the BVetMed course management committee at the upcoming autumn meeting. Any changes will be brought in sequentially, for the cohort that enter BVetMed 1 in 2019, thus not affecting BVetMed Year 2 until 2020-21.

Action Required:

Paper to BVetMed course management committee; amendment to Assessment and Award regulations for 2020-21

Action Deadline:

31-Oct-2018

Action assigned to:

Director of assessment; BVetMed Course Management Committee; BVetMed Year 2 Leader

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:

Response from college requested: NO

4.2 An acceptable response has been made

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Response from college requested: NO

4.3 I approved the papers for the Examination

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Response from college requested: NO

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Response from college requested: NO

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Response from college requested: NO

4.6 Candidates were considered impartially and fairly

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Response from college requested: NO

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Response from college requested: NO

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Response from college requested: NO

4.9 I have received enough support to carry out my role

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Response from college requested: NO

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Response from college requested: NO

4.11 Appropriate procedures and processes have been followed

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Response from college requested: NO

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Response from college requested: NO

Completion

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

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

The ISF orals. In particular the external examiners would like to praise
1. Student briefing
2. The calm atmosphere that was created which helped to alleviate any student anxieties.
3. Provision of samples in as clean and hygienic a manner as possible.

Application of statistical evaluation of the students' performance
Provision of all written material for consideration by the external examiners and the conduct of the exam board meeting are also, we would consider, examples of 'good practice'.

Response from college requested: NO

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Sarah Channon

Course Director Response:

Thankyou, we will ensure your praise is passed on to the relevant individuls

Action Required:

Feedback positive comments to Head of Anatomy Services, CBS and PPS HoD, Director of Assessment, Exams office, Exam board chair

Action Deadline:

21-Dec-2018

Action assigned to:

Chair, TQC

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)

Response from college requested: NO