

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES TO EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' COMMENTS, 2012/2013

Course BVetMed Year 2

Examiner Comment	RVC Response (Please remember to directly quote (copy and paste) our regulations/procedures e.g. from the intranet http://intranet.rvc.ac.uk/StudentsAndTeaching/RegsAndProcs.cfm)	Actions
Sally Argyle, Paul Watson, Maureen Bain, Sionagh Smith		RVC list of actions for 2013-14
1.5 ...We do still notice some gaps in the exam, however, particularly in pharmacology, raising the possibility that the students may not be as well assessed in this particular area as they could be. As acknowledged last year, this may not be a major concern if the area is to be expanded in later years.	<i>BVetMed CMC is conducting a review of Pharmacology teaching throughout the curriculum, which will impact on assessment.</i>	Action (if any) date & name: Brian Catchpole (Date TBC)
3.1 One or two of us questioned the use of a written paper to examine a practically based skill, that of client communication. Examining communication skills in a different way would free up this written question for an area that is perhaps perceived as under-examined (e.g. pharmacology, pathogenesis of disease). We would also like to raise our concerns over the increasing complexity of this exam. There is an immense marking burden on the staff and the complexity seems to increase	<i>We are sympathetic to the view of the external examiners on this issue, and alternative forms of assessment will be discussed at BVetMed CMC.</i> <i>We are not sure to which items the external examiners allude when they infer that the complexity of this examination has increased. The only change that we are aware of is the introduction of Research Project 1 as a component of the Year 2 exams. While this has</i>	Action (if any) date & name:

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Course BVetMed Year 2

<p>every time something is added. We feel that the exam could be simplified without losing any of its discriminatory power as we did not pick up any substantial differences in academic performance within the various parts of the exam. For example, by removing the essay component and replacing with short answer questions (and perhaps reducing choice?) there would be less of a burden placed on individual essay markers. It might also help with the issues raised by sample marking by avoiding the need for it.</p>	<p><i>had unforeseen consequences through the “must-pass” nature of this component, we feel this is a separate issue, which we are in the process of addressing through amendments that have been agreed at the examination board.</i></p> <p><i>With regard to removal of essays and their replacement by short answer questions, these matters are not necessarily within the purview of this examination board as the format of the three main written papers are common throughout BVetMed Years 1&2, Gateway & Graduate Year; it is therefore a matter to be discussed more widely in other committees of the College. Our view, however, is that the this proposed change is not necessarily as beneficial as the external examiners indicate – gain in marking load would be offset by increase in subject areas covered and therefore number of individuals involved in marking. Furthermore, we feel there is considerable benefit to the student to have to engage in a long answer essay that permits integration of information from various parts of the course, under a time constraint.</i></p>	
<p>3.2 Assessment is mostly rigorous and marking is generally consistent and of a good standard. There was one exception affecting one question (Paper 3 Q6) whereby markers appeared not to follow agreed protocol.</p>	<p><i>We will ensure that all examiners are reminded as to the regulations regarding the marking of papers, and insist they do not mark to a different rubric.</i></p>	<p>Action (if any) date & name: Exams Office to give instructions prior to exams</p>
<p>3.2 As has been noted previous years, the common grading scheme (CGS) does not encourage use of</p>	<p><i>Along with their scripts, all markers are provided with a copy of the regulations and the descriptors required to apply the 17-point marking scheme. We regret, on</i></p>	<p>Action (if any) date & name:</p>

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES TO EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' COMMENTS, 2012/2013

Course BVetMed Year 2

<p>extremes so that the excellent standard of some students remains unrecognised. One marker used the 100 point scheme instead of the 1-10 scheme then “converted” to the 1-10 scheme (e.g. converting 42.5 out of 100 to 4 out of 10). So there does still seem to be some confusion over what is expected. We are informed that the CGS is under review this year which will hopefully help to rectify these issues. In the meantime, one of us suggested using a cover sheet to remind markers of current policy, perhaps with a tick box approach to keep all markers as consistent as possible.</p>	<p><i>this occasion, the failure of a few individuals to read the accompanying notes effectively. Together with the Examinations Office, we will endeavour to ensure that this will not occur again through discussion with the individual markers.</i></p> <p><i>The review of the Common Grading Scheme has now been completed.</i></p>	
<p>3.2 Finally, we questioned whether or not Speedwell data is used to assess the quality and discriminatory power of individual MCQs. The data generated this year suggested that some questions were more likely to be answered correctly by otherwise poorly performing students, indicating they were not good discriminatory questions. Many questions were answered well by most students, which may indicate good core knowledge across the board but, equally, suggests the mix of MCQ difficulty is not optimal.</p>	<p><i>We acknowledge that some of the information regarding student performance on individual questions has been hitherto under-utilised. We have the means of addressing this issue, and anticipate that much greater use will be made of this data in the future, making future MCQ papers more robust.</i></p>	<p>Action (if any) date & name: Exams Office</p>
<p>4.2 One question in particular (paper</p>	<p><i>College policy requires that examiners annotate</i></p>	<p>Action (if any) date & name:</p>

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES TO EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' COMMENTS, 2012/2013

Course BVetMed Year 2

<p>3 Q6) did not include any annotations. Since this was a more subjective question (communications) we felt that annotations might be even more important. More pertinently, the final mark awarded for this question was absent from the front page of each script and we are not sure why. We have some other specific concerns which relate to sample marking, particularly for the essays (paper 3):</p> <p>a) The sample marking policy is vague.</p> <p>b) Most examiners seemed to be following the same general sample marking approach but, for one of the essay questions (paper 3, Q6) the approach was completely different....</p>	<p><i>scripts in order to provide both external examiners and students (if requested) ample justification for the marks awarded. Unfortunately, a previous college policy – several years extant – required the opposite and may remain instilled in some of our academics. With the help of the Examinations Office, these few stalwarts will be brought on board and will annotate scripts appropriately in the future.</i></p>	
<p>4.6 One remaining issue which we feel has not yet been addressed concerns the policy of sample marking to ensure consistency and standard. We recommend that this is codified by a written policy which is clear to all examiners, and evidence of its being adhered to acquired by means of a checklist.</p>	<p><i>We agree with the examiners that the sample marking policy must be clear to all examiners. We have revised procedures currently being approved to clarify any ambiguities.</i></p> <p><i>Information will be included in the External Examiner information pack.</i></p>	<p>Action (if any) date & name:</p>
<p>5...Sample marking arrangements have been consistently raised as a potential cause for concern over the last three years as they have implications for the fair treatment of all students.</p>	<p>See 4.6</p>	<p>Action (if any) date & name:</p>

**FOR COMPLETION
AFTER THE
EXAMINATION**

THE ROYAL VETERINARY COLLEGE

EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

Name of Examiner As agreed following discussion at RVC this is a collaborative report. This will be completed by Sionagh Smith (Lead), Sally Anne Argyle, Paul Watson and Maureen Bain.

Programme BVetMed

Year of appointment Sally Argyle: 2010
Paul Watson: 2010
Maureen Bain: 2011
Sionagh Smith: 2011

Year of Examination 2013

Examination BVetMed Year 2

Dates of attendance at the RVC Sally Argyle: 14th and 28th June 2013
Maureen Bain: 28th June 2013
Sionagh Smith: 27th and 28th June 2013
Paul Watson: 27th and 28th June 2013

Please comment on the areas detailed below. If you have no comments in a particular area, please state "Satisfactory", "Good" or "Excellent".

1. The Programme

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

- 1.1 course content
- 1.2 learning objectives, and the extent to which they were met
- 1.3 teaching methods
- 1.4 resources (in so far as they affected the assessment)
- 1.5 the overall quality of the Programme, as revealed by the student performance, with specific reference to particular strengths and weaknesses
- 1.6 the recommendations from this Examination for the curriculum, syllabuses, and teaching methods
- 1.7 the effects of any changes made to the Programme in the last 12 months

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES TO EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' COMMENTS, 2012/2013
Course BVetMed Year 2

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1.1 The course is quite ambitious in its scope, taking an integrative approach to teaching and delivery. A number of strands come together to cover the major body systems and core subjects such as anatomy, pathology, physiology, pharmacology, animal husbandry and communication skills. This manner of teaching aims to give students clinical exposure earlier in the course than more traditional approaches might allow. However, challenges that are integral to this style of teaching include the organisation of a diverse array of teaching staff and ensuring that the students develop an adequate depth of understanding and knowledge for each discipline.

1.2 The course handbook outlines clear and detailed learning objectives for all strands. The objectives that have been examined seem to have been mostly met by the students who successfully completed the programme. The overall spread of marks in this cohort did not appear to be particularly skewed (i.e. some students achieved the distinction and credit levels but not excessively so), suggesting the exam was robust and discriminatory for the most part (see MCQs comment later, section 3.2).

1.3 As far as we can assess, the teaching methods are more than adequate. In fact, a wide spectrum of methods are utilised, from didactic lectures to practical classes and directed learning tutorials. Last year, we commented on how much we liked the in-course project which allowed students to develop their skills in scientific report writing and statistical analysis. We were particularly impressed by the quality of individual written feedback provided by the teaching staff and were surprised to find this replaced by the research project this year (RP1). Nonetheless, successful completion of the RP1 part of the course still appears to have achieved similar results to the previous in-course project, since it has required a final report in the style of a scientific paper and statistical analysis of real-life data.

1.4. Satisfactory. Last year we commented on the pressure on staff to mark scripts in a relatively short period of time. Some inroads were made in alleviating that pressure this year as a result of an increased time interval between the exams and the Board of Examiners' meeting.

1.5 As with last year, cardiovascular and respiratory physiology is well covered by the exam and students generally perform well. The same can be said for immunology/virology and locomotion. We do still notice some gaps in the exam, however, particularly in pharmacology, raising the possibility that the students may not be as well assessed in this particular area as they could be. As acknowledged last year, this may not be a major concern if the area is to be expanded in later years. Less emphasis on communication skills in the written part of the examination would also be our recommendation (section 3.1).

The ISF orals were excellent and very well organised, with a variety of specimens and disciplines covered. During the oral examinations, successful students demonstrated good core knowledge but there were some indications that they were not as strong when it came to linking disparate ideas (i.e. truly integrative understanding was sometimes not apparent).

1.6 The examiners have no specific recommendations in terms of the syllabus.

Prepared by: Ana Filipovic

Date: 15th August 2013 (edited by TQC subgroup on 3rd Dec 2013)

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES TO EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' COMMENTS, 2012/2013
Course BVetMed Year 2

1.7 The main change, as mentioned above (section 1.3), was the replacement of the in-course project with the research project. Since the general aims of this project appeared to be similar, the effect of this change was unlikely to be significant in terms of student learning and outcome (i.e. there was still an emphasis on report writing and statistical analysis, with more of an expectation for students to drive their individual projects forward). The quality of the projects was, broadly, very good and the topics and hypotheses were often interesting and thought-provoking. It was raised at the Board of Examiners' meeting that none of the external examiners had prior knowledge of this change so it had come as a bit of a surprise to us.

2. Candidates

Please comment, as appropriate, on:

- 2.1 impressions of candidates' specific areas of strength and weakness, as revealed by the assessment process
- 2.2 the quality of candidates' knowledge and skills, with particular reference to those at the top, middle or bottom of the range
- 2.3 the candidates' overall performance in relation to students at a similar stage on comparable courses in other institutions, where this is known to you

Type here

2.1 The number of failed students was substantially reduced compared to last year which was encouraging. As indicated in section 1.5 above, the students generally performed well in cardiovascular and respiratory anatomy / physiology, as well as virology/immunology and locomotion. It is difficult to comment as fully on other areas, particularly pharmacology, which did not appear to be as comprehensively examined. Pathology was mainly examined via MCQs and orals. Certainly, the oral examination is probably the best place to assess the students' ability to describe lesions but there was only one essay/problem-solving paper focusing on pathology and this is still to come in the resit examination. It is acknowledged that this may be due to staff availability and other service commitments, however.

In the ISF orals, as indicated above, successful students demonstrated good core knowledge but there were some indications that they were not as strong when it came to linking more disparate ideas or thinking about things in a more applied way. This may simply reflect their relatively early stage in the overall course, however.

In the research projects, there was quite noticeable variation in the students' understanding and application of statistical methods. Some were also better than others at presenting their results clearly. We are aware that the students have access to teaching staff who can advise on study design and statistical analysis but we suspect the burden on these individual staff members is substantial and query whether or not there is enough support in this regard, particularly when a failed project automatically leads to failure of the course ("qualified fail").

Finally, there was very poor performance in one of the problem-solving questions (maximum mark was 7 out of 10, with a large number of students attaining much less

Prepared by: Ana Filipovic

Date: 15th August 2013 (edited by TQC subgroup on 3rd Dec 2013)

than this). This poor performance was raised by the internal examiners responsible for teaching the material and marking the question. They were particularly concerned as they felt that the material had been well covered during the course as a directed learning class supported by 9 one-hour tutorials. The material had also been flagged as examinable. Despite this, attendance of the tutorials had been poor (approximately one third of the year). It is acknowledged that the students are adults and that these classes are not obligatory (though students are encouraged to attend). However, such lack of engagement is discouraging to the teaching staff and detrimental in the long run to the students' experience, especially when it relates to more integrative, applied thinking, as this question did.

2.2 The spread of marks considering students failing, passing and attaining credits and distinctions is acceptable and similar to other institutions in terms of percentages falling within each category (also see section 1.2 above).

2.3 The integrative and diverse approach of this course is fairly unique so direct comparison with other courses at the same stage of veterinary education would be unreliable.

3. **Assessment Process**

Please comment, as appropriate, on:

- 3.1 the appropriateness of the assessment methods to the subject matter and their relevance to the learning objectives
- 3.2 the extent to which the assessment processes are rigorous
- 3.2 whether the assessments reflected the syllabus adequately
- 3.3 the overall standard of marks
- 3.4 any changes from previous years in which you have examined

Type here

3.1 The wide variety of assessments is admirable and complements the many different ways in which the course is delivered in the first place. The care and attention given to individual feedback for the RP1 part of the course is impressive and the teachers are congratulated on their commitment to their students. As mentioned previously (section 1.5), we also acknowledge the tremendous amount of work and logistical organisation that goes into the oral examinations. This is an impressive undertaking that only serves to strengthen the examination process and we are aware of the staffing commitment that it demands.

The external examiners unanimously question the use of a written paper to examine a practically based skill, that of client communication. Examining communication skills in a different way would free up this written question for an area that is perhaps perceived as under-examined (e.g. pharmacology, pathogenesis of disease).

We would also like to raise our concerns over the increasing complexity of this exam. There is an immense marking burden on the staff and the complexity seems to increase every time something is added. We feel that the exam could be simplified without losing any of its discriminatory power as we did not pick up any substantial differences in

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SUMMARY OF RESPONSES TO EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' COMMENTS, 2012/2013
Course BVetMed Year 2

academic performance within the various parts of the exam. For example, by removing the essay component and replacing with short answer questions (and perhaps reducing choice?) there would be less of a burden placed on individual essay markers. It might also help with the issues raised by sample marking by avoiding the need for it and also be more defensible in that all students effectively are examined on the same material.

3.2 The assessment is extensive with three examination papers, a spot test and an oral examination comprising at least four widely varying topics. In addition, there is an in-course assessment which is further subdivided and now includes a significant research project. Assessment ranges widely through the syllabus and covers the full range of disciplines. Assessment is mostly rigorous and marking is generally consistent and of a good standard. There was one exception affecting one question (Paper 3 Q6) whereby markers appeared not to follow agreed protocol. There are also one or two issues regarding how to manage sample marking (see section 4.2).

As has been noted in previous years, the common grading scheme (CGS) does not encourage use of extremes so that the excellent standard of some students remains unrecognised. One marker used the 100 point scheme instead of the 1-10 scheme then "converted" to the 1-10 scheme (e.g. converting 42.5 out of 100 to 4 out of 10). So there does still seem to be some confusion over what is expected. We are informed as we were last year that the CGS is still under review. Hopefully, this will help to rectify these issues. In the meantime, one of us suggested using a cover sheet to remind markers of current policy, perhaps with a tick box approach to keep all markers as consistent as possible.

Finally, although Speedwell data is generated, it is not currently being used to assess the quality and discriminatory power of individual MCQs. The data generated this year suggested that about a third of questions were very easy and non-discriminatory and several were perhaps confusing or ambivalent and more likely to be answered correctly by otherwise poorly performing students, indicating that these questions perhaps should not be used in the future or should be reviewed prior to being used again. Many questions were answered well by most students, which may indicate good core knowledge across the board but, equally, suggests the mix of MCQ difficulty is not optimal. In summary the metrics generated from these questions can provide good information and could be used to inform the standard setting of the paper and future use of MCQs.

3.3 As stated in section 2.2 above the spread of marks was as expected.

3.4 The main change, as mentioned above (section 1.3), was the replacement of the in-course project with the research project, RP1. These projects were marked by a large number of internal examiners, which might raise the criticism of reduced marking consistency. However, one project per examiner was subjected to sample marking, helping to redress this to some extent. There was also a clearer marking policy for this part where significant differences in marks were moderated by the external examiners. Some provision for the facilitator/supervisor to inform the process is also recommended e.g. allocation of some marks which reflects the amount of supervision /advice the student required in order to obtain the desired outcome.

Prepared by: Ana Filipovic

Date: 15th August 2013 (edited by TQC subgroup on 3rd Dec 2013)

4. Assessment Procedures

Please comment, as appropriate, on:

- 4.1 the administration of the examinations, e.g. time available for marking and moderation
- 4.2 arrangements for marking
- 4.3 procedures followed by the Board of Examiners
- 4.4 the participation of External Examiners in the process
- 4.5 adequacy of External Examiners' briefing
- 4.6 comparison with previous years in which you have examined

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4.1 Logistical management and administration were excellent throughout with strong team work apparent. We were particularly glad to see that more time had been incorporated between the exams and Board of Examiners' meeting for marking, hopefully reducing pressure on the internal examiners. All the papers were available for review from the day before the exam board this year, unlike last year when some papers were delayed. Also unlike last year, papers were in numerical order. Both changes were definite improvements that helped the review process to run more smoothly. External examiners were also used as observers this year, rather than as examiners (in the oral exams). The two examiners concerned felt this was also an improvement as it allowed them to observe more examiners, more students and more stations. Furthermore, it provided the chance for them to get to know the internal examiners a little better, which enhances the experience for all concerned (we hope!).

4.2. As indicated above, marking is generally of a good and consistent standard. This is commendable, particularly given the wide spectrum of assessments and examiners, not to mention students. Our review of the exam papers was greatly enhanced by annotations on scripts, which many internal examiners provided. One question in particular (paper 3 Q6) did not include any annotations. Since this was a more subjective question (communications) we felt that annotations might be even more important. More pertinently, the final mark awarded for this question was absent from the front page of each script and we are not sure why. We have some other specific concerns which relate to sample marking, particularly for the essays (paper 3):

a) The sample marking policy is vague. Our understanding is that the purpose of sample marking is to ensure that the frequency and degree of discrepancies between two markers are below a designated level. If this level is exceeded then all papers for the question concerned must be double marked. However, there is some ambiguity as to who makes the final decision on this (presumably the exam board Chair but are others involved?). We believe a written policy is being prepared in time for next year.

b) Most examiners seemed to be following the same general sample marking approach but, for one of the essay questions (paper 3, Q6) the approach was completely different.

Prepared by: Ana Filipovic

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SUMMARY OF RESPONSES TO EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' COMMENTS, 2012/2013
Course BVetMed Year 2

For any discrepancies, it appeared that the two markers had met and decided on an agreed final mark, which sometimes fell between the two separate marks but was sometimes greater than both marks. This final mark was then inexplicably accepted as the true mark, potentially giving that student an advantage (or disadvantage) not conferred on students who were not double marked. This discrepancy was further compounded by the fact that two separate examiners had marked this question.

4.3 As for 2012, the Board of Examiners' meeting was very well attended. We had a clear agenda and all present were able to raise any concerns they might have. The marks were presented and all candidates with fail marks were carefully reviewed.

4.4 As indicated above, we appreciate the opportunity we were given this year to act in an observing capacity, rather than as examiners (two of the four external examiners "floated" in this way). This increased our exposure to students, the various stations and different internal examiners. We concur with the Chair at the Board of Examiners' meeting when he concluded that the process was evolving to allow external examiners to assess the examination process rather than the students, which we strongly agree is as it should be. This is also the general philosophy in other Veterinary Schools with which we are more familiar.

4.5 Communications and briefings were ably and professionally provided by Rebecca Charlton and Paul Charlesworth. We are grateful to them for their guidance and help throughout the process, but particularly during our two days on site. All the papers and provisional marks were available to us from the day before the Board of Examiners' meeting and the MCQ Speedwell data was quickly forthcoming upon request (see section 3.2). We are also very grateful for the provision of a quieter room to scrutinise the scripts, following last year's request.

All four external examiners were able to review the exam scripts, either for both days prior to the Board of Examiners' meeting or for the day of the meeting. All four then attended the subsequent Board of Examiners' meeting so we feel there was adequate coverage of both of these processes.

4.6 The increased time allowance for marking by the internal examiners prior to the examination board has been a significant improvement over previous years. This has meant that all examination scripts have been returned and are in order for review by the external examiners. Organisation by the examinations team continues to be excellent with good communication prior to the exam board and excellent hospitality and accommodation for the external examiners whilst on site. The change in role of the external examiners in the ISF orals is welcomed and worked extremely well this year. In previous years external examiners participated in examination of students whilst this year their role was that of observer. The advantages of this have been outlined above. The participation of a number of external examiners as in previous years should be a practice that is continued. Due to the breadth of this course it would be extremely challenging for an individual to carry out this role. As in previous years the Examination Board itself is very well attended by internal examiners; this is to be commended and is run according to a clear agenda.

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SUMMARY OF RESPONSES TO EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' COMMENTS, 2012/2013
Course BVetMed Year 2

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Course BVetMed Year 2

5. Please delete responses as appropriate

- | | | |
|-----|---|------------|
| 5.1 | Comments we have made in previous years have been acted upon | Some |
| 5.2 | An acceptable response has been made | Mostly YES |
| 5.3 | We approved the papers for the Examination | YES |
| 5.4 | We were able to scrutinise an adequate sample of students' work and marks to enable me to carry out my duties | YES |
| 5.5 | We attended the meeting of the Board of Examiners held to approve the results of the Examination | YES |
| 5.6 | Candidates were considered impartially and fairly | YES |

If you have replied No to any of these questions, please comment more fully:

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Sample marking arrangements have been consistently raised as a potential cause for concern over the last four years as they have implications for the fair treatment of all students.

If you have identified any areas of good practice, please comment more fully:

Type here

Signed

Date

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(Below is the report submitted by Paul Watson, which is based on the collaborative report with a few changes)

**FOR COMPLETION
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THE ROYAL VETERINARY COLLEGE

EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

Name of Examiner As agreed following discussion at RVC this is a collaborative report. This will be completed by Sionagh Smith (Lead), Sally Anne Argyle, Paul Watson and Maureen Bain.

Programme BVetMed

Year of appointment Sally Argyle: 2010
Paul Watson: 2010
Maureen Bain: 2011
Sionagh Smith: 2011

Year of Examination 2013

Examination BVetMed Year 2

Dates of attendance at the RVC Sally Argyle: 28th June 2013
Maureen Bain: 28th June 2013
Sionagh Smith: 27th and 28th June 2013
Paul Watson: 14th, 27th and 28th June 2013

Please comment on the areas detailed below. If you have no comments in a particular area, please state "Satisfactory", "Good" or "Excellent".

1. The Programme

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

- 1.1 course content
- 1.2 learning objectives, and the extent to which they were met
- 1.3 teaching methods
- 1.4 resources (in so far as they affected the assessment)
- 1.5 the overall quality of the Programme, as revealed by the student performance, with specific reference to particular strengths and weaknesses

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- 1.6 the recommendations from this Examination for the curriculum, syllabuses, and teaching methods
- 1.7 the effects of any changes made to the Programme in the last 12 months

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1.1 The course is quite ambitious in its scope, taking an integrative approach to teaching and delivery. A number of strands come together to cover the major body systems and core subjects such as anatomy, pathology, physiology, **biochemistry**, pharmacology, animal husbandry and communication skills. This manner of teaching aims to give students clinical exposure earlier in the course than more traditional approaches might allow. However, challenges that are integral to this style of teaching include the organisation of a diverse array of teaching staff and ensuring that the students develop an adequate depth of understanding and knowledge for each discipline.

1.2 The course handbook outlines clear and detailed learning objectives for all strands. The objectives that have been examined seem to have been mostly met by the students who successfully completed the programme. The overall spread of marks in this cohort did not appear to be particularly skewed (i.e. some students achieved the distinction and credit levels but not excessively so), suggesting the exam was robust and discriminatory for the most part (see MCQs comment later, section 3.2).

1.3 As far as we can assess, the teaching methods are more than adequate. In fact, a wide spectrum of methods are utilised, from didactic lectures to practical classes and directed learning tutorials. Last year, we commented on how much we liked the in-course project which allowed students to develop their skills in scientific report writing and statistical analysis. We were particularly impressed by the quality of individual written feedback provided by the teaching staff and were surprised to find this replaced by the research project this year (RP1). Nonetheless, successful completion of the RP1 part of the course still appears to have achieved similar results to the previous in-course project, since it has required a final report in the style of a scientific paper and statistical analysis of real-life data.

1.4. Satisfactory Last year we commented on the pressure on staff to mark scripts in a relatively short period of time. Some inroads were made in alleviating that pressure this year as a result of an increased time interval between the exams and the Board of Examiners' meeting.

1.5 As with last year, cardiovascular and respiratory physiology is well covered by the exam and students generally perform well. The same can be said for immunology/virology and locomotion **and reproduction**. We do still notice some gaps in the exam, however, particularly in pharmacology, raising the possibility that the students may not be as well assessed in this particular area as they could be. As acknowledged last year, this may not be a major concern if the area is to be expanded in later years. The ISF orals were excellent and very well organised, with a variety of specimens and disciplines covered. During the oral examinations, successful students demonstrated good core knowledge but there were some indications that they were not as strong when it came to linking disparate ideas (i.e. truly integrative understanding was sometimes not

Prepared by: Ana Filipovic

Date: 15th August 2013 (edited by TQC subgroup on 3rd Dec 2013)

15 of 20

apparent). We appreciated the opportunity for external examiners to float between oral teams to observe a range of topics being examined. This allowed a better view of the student ability across the syllabus.

1.6 The examiners have no specific recommendations in terms of the syllabus.

1.7 The main change, as mentioned above (section 1.3), was the replacement of the in-course project with the research project. Since the general aims of this project appeared to be similar, the effect of this change was unlikely to be significant in terms of student learning and outcome (i.e. there was still an emphasis on report writing and statistical analysis, with more of an expectation for students to drive their individual projects forward). The quality of the projects was, broadly, very good and the topics and hypotheses were often interesting and thought-provoking. It was raised at the Board of Examiners' meeting that none of the external examiners had prior knowledge of this change so it had come as a bit of a surprise to us.

2. Candidates

Please comment, as appropriate, on:

- 2.1 impressions of candidates' specific areas of strength and weakness, as revealed by the assessment process
- 2.2 the quality of candidates' knowledge and skills, with particular reference to those at the top, middle or bottom of the range
- 2.3 the candidates' overall performance in relation to students at a similar stage on comparable courses in other institutions, where this is known to you

Type here

2.1 The number of failed students was substantially reduced compared to last year which was encouraging. As indicated in section 1.5 above, the students generally performed well in cardiovascular and respiratory anatomy / physiology, as well as virology/immunology and locomotion and reproduction. It is difficult to comment as fully on other areas, particularly pharmacology, which did not appear to be as comprehensively examined. Pathology was mainly examined via MCQs and orals. Certainly, the oral examination is probably the best place to assess the students' ability to describe lesions but there was only one essay/problem-solving paper focusing on pathology and this is still to come in the resit examination. It is acknowledged that this may be due to staff availability and other service commitments, however.

In the ISF orals, as indicated above, successful students demonstrated good core knowledge but there were some indications that they were not as strong when it came to linking more disparate ideas or thinking about things in a more applied way. This may simply reflect their relatively early stage in the overall course, however.

In the research projects, there was quite noticeable variation in the students' understanding and application of statistical methods. Some were also better than others at presenting their results clearly. We are aware that the students have access to teaching staff who can advise on study design and statistical analysis but we suspect

Prepared by: Ana Filipovic

Date: 15th August 2013 (edited by TQC subgroup on 3rd Dec 2013)

the burden on these individual staff members is substantial and query whether or not there is enough support in this regard, particularly when a failed project automatically leads to failure of the course ("qualified fail").

Finally, there was very poor performance in one of the problem-solving questions (maximum mark was 7 out of 10, with a large number of students attaining much less than this). This poor performance was raised by the internal examiners responsible for teaching the material and marking the question. They were particularly concerned as they felt that the material had been well covered during the course as a directed learning class supported by **a one-hour tutorial for every student**. The material had also been flagged as examinable. Despite this, attendance of the tutorials had been poor (approximately one third of the year). It is acknowledged that the students are adults and that these classes are not obligatory (though students are encouraged to attend). However, such lack of engagement is discouraging to the teaching staff and detrimental in the long run to the students' experience, especially when it relates to more integrative, applied thinking, as this question did.

2.2 The spread of marks considering students failing, passing and attaining credits and distinctions is acceptable and similar to other institutions in terms of percentages falling within each category (also see section 1.2 above).

2.3 The integrative and diverse approach of this course is fairly **unusual** so direct comparison with other courses at the same stage of veterinary education would be unreliable.

3. **Assessment Process**

Please comment, as appropriate, on:

- 3.1 the appropriateness of the assessment methods to the subject matter and their relevance to the learning objectives
- 3.2 the extent to which the assessment processes are rigorous
- 3.2 whether the assessments reflected the syllabus adequately
- 3.3 the overall standard of marks
- 3.4 any changes from previous years in which you have examined

Type here

3.1 The wide variety of assessments is admirable and complements the many different ways in which the course is delivered in the first place. The care and attention given to individual feedback for the RP1 part of the course is impressive and the teachers are congratulated on their commitment to their students. As mentioned previously (section 1.5), we also acknowledge the tremendous amount of work and logistical organisation that goes into the oral examinations. This is an impressive undertaking that only serves to strengthen the examination process and we are aware of the staffing commitment that it demands.

One or two of us questioned the use of a written paper to examine a practically based skill, that of client communication. Examining communication skills in a different way

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES TO EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' COMMENTS, 2012/2013
Course BVetMed Year 2

would free up this written question for an area that is perhaps perceived as under-examined (e.g. pharmacology, pathogenesis of disease).

We would also like to raise our concerns over the increasing complexity of this exam. There is an immense marking burden on the staff and the complexity seems to increase every time something is added. We feel that the exam could be simplified without losing any of its discriminatory power as we did not pick up any substantial differences in academic performance within the various parts of the exam. For example, by removing the essay component and replacing with short answer questions (and perhaps reducing choice?) there would be less of a burden placed on individual essay markers. It might also help with the issues raised by sample marking by avoiding the need for it.

3.2 The assessment is extensive with three examination papers, a spot test and an oral examination comprising at least four widely varying topics. In addition, there is an in-course assessment which is further subdivided and now includes a significant research project. Assessment ranges widely through the syllabus and covers the full range of disciplines. Assessment is mostly rigorous and marking is generally consistent and of a good standard. There was one exception affecting one question (Paper 3 Q6) whereby markers appeared not to follow agreed protocol. There are also one or two issues regarding how to manage sample marking (see section 4.2).

As has been noted previous years, the common grading scheme (CGS) does not encourage use of extremes so that the excellent standard of some students remains unrecognised. One marker used the 100 point scheme instead of the 1-10 scheme then "converted" to the 1-10 scheme (e.g. converting 42.5 out of 100 to 4 out of 10). So there does still seem to be some confusion over what is expected. We are informed that the CGS is under review this year which will hopefully help to rectify these issues. In the meantime, one of us suggested using a cover sheet to remind markers of current policy, perhaps with a tick box approach to keep all markers as consistent as possible.

Finally, we questioned whether or not Speedwell data is used to assess the quality and discriminatory power of individual MCQs. The data generated this year suggested that some questions were more likely to be answered correctly by otherwise poorly performing students, indicating they were not good discriminatory questions. Many questions were answered well by most students, which may indicate good core knowledge across the board but, equally, suggests the mix of MCQ difficulty is not optimal.

3.3 As stated in section 2.2 above the spread of marks was as expected.

3.4 The main change, as mentioned above (section 1.3), was the replacement of the in-course project with the research project, RP1. These projects were marked by a large number of internal examiners, which might raise the criticism of reduced marking consistency. However, one project per examiner was subjected to sample marking, helping to redress this to some extent. There was also a clearer marking policy for this part where significant differences in marks were moderated by the external examiners.

4. **Assessment Procedures**

Please comment, as appropriate, on:

- 4.1 the administration of the examinations, e.g. time available for marking and moderation
- 4.2 arrangements for marking
- 4.3 procedures followed by the Board of Examiners
- 4.4 the participation of External Examiners in the process
- 4.5 adequacy of External Examiners' briefing
- 4.6 comparison with previous years in which you have examined

Type here

4.1 Logistical management and administration were excellent throughout with strong team work apparent. We were particularly glad to see that more time had been incorporated between the exams and Board of Examiners' meeting for marking, hopefully reducing pressure on the internal examiners. All the papers were available for review from the day before the exam board this year, unlike last year when some papers were delayed. Also unlike last year, papers were in numerical order. Both changes were definite improvements that helped the review process to run more smoothly. External examiners were also used as observers this year, rather than as examiners (in the oral exams). The two examiners concerned felt this was also an improvement as it allowed them to observe more examiners, more students and more stations. Furthermore, it provided the chance for them to get to know the internal examiners a little better, which enhances the experience for all concerned (we hope!).

4.2. As indicated above, marking is generally of a good and consistent standard. This is commendable, particularly given the wide spectrum of assessments and examiners, not to mention students. Our review of the exam papers was greatly enhanced by annotations on scripts which many internal examiners provided. One question in particular (paper 3 Q6) did not include any annotations. Since this was a more subjective question (communications) we felt that annotations might be even more important. More pertinently, the final mark awarded for this question was absent from the front page of each script and we are not sure why. We have some other specific concerns which relate to sample marking, particularly for the essays (paper 3):

a) The sample marking policy is vague. Our understanding is that the purpose of sample marking is to ensure that the **primary marker is marking consistently and setting an acceptable standard for the student performance. Differences of 10% between sample marking and primary marking are considered within an acceptable range, but if this is exceeded then all scripts for the question concerned must be marked by a third experienced marker. This marker's result is final.** However, there is some ambiguity as to who makes the final decision on this **procedure (we presume that the exam board Chair approves all such decisions).** We believe a written policy is being prepared in time for next year.

b) Most examiners seemed to be following the same general sample marking approach but, for one of the essay questions (paper 3, Q6) the approach was completely different.

Prepared by: Ana Filipovic

Date: 15th August 2013 (edited by TQC subgroup on 3rd Dec 2013)

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES TO EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' COMMENTS, 2012/2013
Course BVetMed Year 2

Two markers acted as primary markers each marking half of the scripts. Sample marking was done by the other marker. For any discrepancies, it appeared that the two markers had met and decided on an agreed final mark, which sometimes fell between the two separate marks but was sometimes beyond the range of both marks. This final mark was then inexplicably accepted as the true mark, potentially giving that student an advantage (or disadvantage) not conferred on students who were not double marked.

4.3 As for 2012, the Board of Examiners' meeting was very well attended. We had a clear agenda and all present were able to raise any concerns they might have. The marks were presented and all candidates with fail marks were carefully reviewed.

4.4 As indicated above, we appreciate the opportunity we were given this year to act in an observing capacity, rather than as examiners in the oral examination (two of the four external examiners "floated" in this way). This increased our exposure to students, the various stations and different internal examiners. We concur with the Chair at the Board of Examiners' meeting when he concluded that the process was evolving to allow external examiners to assess the examination process rather than the students, which we strongly agree is as it should be. This is also the general philosophy in other Veterinary Schools with which (with one exception) we are more familiar.

4.5 Communications and briefings were ably and professionally provided by Rebecca Charlton and Paul Charlesworth. We are grateful to them for their guidance and help throughout the process, but particularly during our days on site. All the papers and provisional marks were available to us from the day before the Board of Examiners' meeting and the MCQ Speedwell data was quickly forthcoming upon request (see section 3.2). We are also very grateful for the provision of a quieter room to scrutinise the scripts, following last year's request.

All four external examiners were able to review the exam scripts, either for both days prior to the Board of Examiners' meeting or for the day of the meeting. All four then attended the subsequent Board of Examiners' meeting so we feel there was adequate coverage of both of these processes.

4.6 As we have indicated, we valued the opportunity to observe a wider range of oral examinations, and believe this is a change which should be continued. The organisational aspects of the examination seemed to be excellent with improvements even on last year.

One remaining issue which we feel has not yet been addressed concerns the policy of sample marking to ensure consistency and standard. We recommend that this is codified by a written policy which is clear to all examiners, and evidence of its being adhered to acquired by means of a checklist.

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES TO EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' COMMENTS, 2012/2013
Course BVetMed Year 2

5. Please delete responses as appropriate

- | | | |
|-----|---|------------|
| 5.1 | Comments we have made in previous years have been acted upon | Some |
| 5.2 | An acceptable response has been made | Mostly YES |
| 5.3 | We approved the papers for the Examination | YES |
| 5.4 | We were able to scrutinise an adequate sample of students' work and marks to enable me to carry out my duties | YES |
| 5.5 | We attended the meeting of the Board of Examiners held to approve the results of the Examination | YES |
| 5.6 | Candidates were considered impartially and fairly | YES |

If you have replied No to any of these questions, please comment more fully:

Type here

Sample marking arrangements have been consistently raised as a potential cause for concern over the last three years as they have implications for the fair treatment of all students.

If you have identified any areas of good practice, please comment more fully:

Type here

Signed PF Watson Date 19-07-2013

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES TO EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' COMMENTS, 2012/2013
Course BVetMed Year 2