

ANNUAL QUALITY IMPROVEMENT REPORT 17/18

Appendix 3: External Examiners' report

MSc Wild Animal Health / Wild Animal Biology

This appendix contains Course Director's/Year Leader's responses to 2017/18 External Examiners' comments and updates to actions from 2016/17 External Examiners' report (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 were no outstanding actions from 2016/17!

Collaborative Report

Exam board meeting: 19-Sep-2018

MSc in Wild Animal Biology, 2017/18 (Including MSC WAH)

Lead examiner: Ms Rana Parween

Collaborating examiner(s): Dr Javier Lopez

The Programme

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

1.1 Course content

The course content is varied, up to date and covers all aspects of the two fields in great depth and breadth. Like last year, learners interviewed on the day of oral presentations, unanimously were of the same opinion. Students felt the course was excellent and commented very positively on the way it was taught. They particularly appreciated the guest lectures and range of practical activities undertaken.

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

It would be useful to see the learning objectives/ outcomes on the exam papers ie a reference point that the LOs are being met by that particular assessment.

Course Directors' response:

Where possible this will be performed for the 2018-19 exams. We shall report on the progress at the next examiners board meeting.

Action: Course Directors
Expected date of completion: September 2019

1.3 Teaching methods

Good variety of teaching methods. The use of guest speakers from different institutes has enriched students' learning process. Learners positively commented upon the exposure to specialist lecturers who are well known in their own fields, in addition to ZSL staff

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

Students valued the improvement from last year where they now had a place and computers at ZSL that they could freely use. This year however, they felt that access to ZSL and ZIMS out of ours or on weekend was too limited.

1.5 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the Programme

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

Overall, students' work was of a high standard. Papers written on research projects were like the previous year, with some of a standard suitable for scientific publication and overall of the expected quality in a course of this level. The students were highly motivated and innovative, and achieved a great deal in the short time allocated to these projects.. There was a wide variety of projects this year.

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

This year's cohort of students was of a good standard, reflected by their overall passing rate. (This year, there were two distinctions 2 merits and the rest passes with 2 fails.) However, there was a clear outlayer who did not pass any module

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

As in previous years, the opportunity to attend the Student Conference on the day before the oral exams was valuable to the examiners. The presentations were very well prepared and delivered with confidence. Due to time constraints, the External Examiners did not have the opportunity to attend any of the oral presentations.

The grades for the ecosystem health module appeared better this year, with the difference in overall results between WAH and WAB being reduced. . Attendees at the board last year were informed that this module has now been reviewed. This has clearly had a positive effect on this year's exam results suggesting that the issue raised in respect of difference in level, understanding and expectations has been resolved.

Please comment, as appropriate, on:

3.1 Assessment methods (relevance to learning objectives and curriculum)

Appropriate and relevant to the curriculum; sufficiently varied to assess different skills such as ability to express ideas and make critical analyses through written and oral responses. There were questions on the relevance and quality of some of the MCQs. In some of them there was a majority of students selecting the same confounder and none the right question, which suggests there is an issue with the question. There was a suggestion in the board room that some question might have been from lectures that had actually changed or not been given. It is being proposed to substitute MCQs for more relevant short answer questions, in which case this may not be an issue for 2018/19 MSc.

Course directors' response:

Where possible this will be performed for the 2018-19 exams. The SAQs will have the same time allowance and the same weighting as the previous MCQs. We shall report on the progress at the next examiners board meeting.

Action: Course Directors

Expected date of completion: September 2019

3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous

Suitably rigorous.

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.

3.4 Standard of marking

- a. Mainly consistent, with good use of the scale of marking although there were instances of marked discrepancies between markers (over 35 points at times), which is unusual.
- b. Some students found feedback on their draft assignments valuable for further enhancement of their work.
- c. This however was inconsistent amongst staff; some supervisors going to very specific details while others only offering one line of broad advice.
- d. There was a general consensus amongst students that feedback took too long. It is advised that a standardised mechanism is explored in order to ensure a fair and consistent experience for all students

Course Directors' response:

- a. The selection of internal examiners is based on their experience and availability. The process in dealing with 2 markers which discrepant marks if for them to discuss and come to an agree mark. From September 2019 the process will include the use of a 'Facilitator' where markers individual marks vary over a broad range which spans a classification boundary. The Facilitator will not be used to mark the project but will be there to ensure the agreement process is fair, transparent and to document the justification of the agreed mark.
- b. All students who submit drafts receive feedback on their ICA. However not all students avail themselves of this opportunity, which is a pity.
- c. Students have the option of receiving formative feedback on a scientific review (Module 2), a critical review (Module 3), a scientific presentation (module 6), a case report (module 7) and a scientific poster (module 7). The course directors are unaware of differences between the feedback on these ICA. Also as there are no supervisors for the ICAs, the student feedback to the external examiners may be about feedback from research supervisors.
- d. Formative feedback comes in two forms. 1. Feedback from staff on ICA and 2. Feedback from research project supervisors. The feedback from staff on the ICAs is regimented and has to be back to students by a set date and, to the director's knowledge, always is. The comment from the external examiners in response to student feedback

therefore most likely applies to the latter and research supervisors are given timelines for giving feedback. Since students often select their own supervisors outside of the RVC and ZSL, it is therefore difficult to enforce these deadlines. Advice on this latter problem would be appreciated from the external examiners.

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 for examinations, marking and awards are sound and fair. Meetings of the Board of Examiners are conducted very fairly, and comments of internal and external examiners are fully considered in making decisions. Online feedback was useful for the external examiner but this again was inconsistent

Course Directors' response:

An interim exam board is planned to be held for the first time in May-June 2019. Online feedback would be discussed with external examiners at interim exam board.

Action: Course Directors & Exams office
Expected date of completion: May-June 2019

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

This year, with all the oral examinations being compacted in a few hours in the morning, the external examination process felt more under pressure and a bit rushed at times. This meant we were not able to attend sample of oral examinations as done in previous years.

The lowering of the threshold for distinctions has resolved the issue of low numbers of distinctions in previous courses; however this seems to result in a very narrow mark band for merits which may still affect the expected distribution of awards.

Course Directors' response:

This will be brought to the attention of the Populations Course Management Committee
Action: Course Directors
Expected date of completion: May-June 2019

3.7 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the procedures

As in previous years, the opportunity to meet the majority of the students immediately after the student presentations was very valuable to the external examiners. This year there were around 20 students present. The relevant comments and suggestions made by the students were discussed by the external examiners at the meeting of the Board of Examiners.

It might be useful to have a 5 minute formal debrief of the board just at the beginning of the exam day to remind examiners of how the process is going to be and any details / changes from previous year that might be of relevance.

Course Directors' response:

A pre-exam board on morning of research orals' day will be planned.
Action: Exams Office
Expected date of completion: September 2019

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

4.2 An acceptable response has been made

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

4.3 I approved the papers for the Examination

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

The external examiners were able to scrutinize a sample of students' exams scripts on the day of oral examinations and had access to their marks at the meeting of the Board of Examiners. They also received scientific papers written on student projects, and access to the project reports was provided in advance.

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

4.6 Candidates were considered impartially and fairly

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

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

N/A

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Yes. The mark band for merits maybe too narrow.

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

4.9 I have received enough support to carry out my role

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

4.11 Appropriate procedures and processes have been followed

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

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:

We would recommend more timely and detailed feedback on student work as requested by the learners. If this is already happening then perhaps there is a need for managing students' expectations
Students commented on the lack of organisation of trips. They felt that they travelled long distances for a two hour practical or talk that could have been arranged in a more time effective manner. Perhaps a day trip with more talks during that one day would be more useful for the students.
Holding of a Student Conference for marking research project presentations on the day preceding the oral examinations is an excellent practice that enables the external examiners to fully assess student performance in the research project. The opportunity provided for the externals to meet with the students immediately after the Student Conference in order to discuss issues relating to academic as well as administrative aspects of the course and examinations is also very valuable.
Students positively commented upon the variety of interesting modules offered on the course. They like the practical elements of the course and the freedom to choose their own projects. There were other elements on the course that were positively commented upon by the students for instance, the support that that some get from their supervisors and the knowledge gained by being at ZSL.

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)

