

Collaborative Report

Exam board meeting: 02-Jul-2015

Veterinary Gateway Programme, 2014/15

Lead examiner: Dr James Moffat

Collaborating examiner(s): Dr Lynda Moore

The Programme

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

1.1 Course content

The content of the course tests the students with a mixture of basic science, animal husbandry/handling and transferrable skills, in preparation for entry to the BVetMed programme. Rather than a cut-down version of the first year of the BVetMed, this course “bolts on” as an excellent introduction to the varied subjects and skills that students undertaking the degree programme will be expected to master.

Response from college requested: NO

Dr L.M

I agree with the Lead Examiner's comments. In addition, the idea of taking animal husbandry/handling in the Gateway year, thereby allowing these students more time to concentrate on the other topics in BVetMed1, is excellent.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

Please accept our thanks for your encouraging comments regarding the nature and content of the Gateway Programme. We will continue to monitor and improve the course in response to feedback from students, staff and examiners.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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

The performances of the students achieving the highest marks indicate that the learning objectives are being met on this course. In particular, the essay paper of the final assessment illustrates that students who put in a good effort have a high level of understanding of the course material.

Response from college requested: NO

Dr L.M

I agree with the Lead Examiner's comments.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

We have also been pleased with the high level of attainment achieved by many students on the Gateway Programme. We are confident that this will put them in a strong position to enter the first year of the BVetMed at the RVC and at alternative Veterinary Schools.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

1.3 Teaching methods

The mixture of didactic lectures, tutorials and directed learning sessions are a product of which the RVC should be proud, especially in the current economic climate. The "hands on" feel of the degree is an outstanding feature of this – and other programmes – delivered by the college. A widening participation programme like Gateway is almost certainly going to be successful when a cohort of students with some potential to struggle are given this outstanding mixture of teaching and personal support.

Response from college requested: NO

Dr L.M

It is likewise my belief that the success of the Gateway students is largely embedded in the supportive environment provided by the RVC. The input from tutors, including the very impressive feedback provided to students on course work and in-course assessments, is first-class.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

We will continue to promote a wide range of teaching methods in order for our students to get the most out of their learning experience. The student feedback survey has demonstrated that students certainly feel supported during their studies and are always able to find the help they need from teaching and administration staff involved with the course.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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

We are not aware of any problems with the availability of resources affecting assessments on this programme.

Response from college requested: **NO**

Dr L.M

I agree with the Lead Examiner's comments.

1.5 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the Programme

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 performance of the students is comparable to those on foundation year programmes at St George's, University of London. Students who have achieved to a very high standard have performed as well as students in the first year of B.Sc. students.

Response from college requested: **NO**

Dr L.M

I am aware of the Pre-Veterinary Year (now closed) at Bristol and believe the Gateway students to be comparable in terms of their individual performance. It is not possible to compare the performance of the cohorts because Bristol only had 4-5 students per year.

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

It is clear from the three exam papers in the final assessment that top students have an excellent understanding of most or all of the taught material. These students can solve problems using the skills that they have been taught. Their results on the single best answer (SBA) paper shows that this cohort also has excellent recall of even small details.

The middle cohort showed a good understanding of the taught material and some ability to solve problems. The SBA statistics suggest that these students have poor factual recall compared with the top students.

The poorest-performing students overall do as well as the top cohort in some questions in the SBA paper, but have less rounded (possibly more strategic) general knowledge and the poorest problem-solving skills. Their high performance in the SBA paper might indicate that these students may be relying on factual recall alone. 2.3

This year the minimum threshold to pass the year required a mark of 40% in all papers of the final degree. Some students achieved 50% or more when their assessments were combined, but failed to pass the problem-solving paper of the final assessment. There are several possible, and not mutually exclusive, explanations for this failure of students to thoroughly prepare for the problem solving paper: they may not have fully appreciated the significance of the new "40% rule", they may have been unprepared for this assessment by the directed learning sessions, or they may simply have been over-confident about their learning strategy. The board presented some simple changes to the DL sessions in order to better prepare students for this assessment. Student awareness of the importance of this paper is likely to increase light of the slightly higher failure rate this year. Based on previous years, most students will probably put in a better effort on their resit exams, especially with an awareness of what elements they need to improve on. Overall, the 40% rule is a sound strategy and no unnecessary harm has come from its implementation.

Response from college requested: **NO**

Dr L.M

The quality of work and distribution of marks in the in-course assessments followed a similar pattern to that described for the final assessment. Some of the lambing reports were of a particularly high quality. Although we didn't see any of the student posters, I am convinced that the high marks awarded to some students were justified after discussing the process with the Programme Director.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

We are pleased that the external examiners are supportive of our decision to introduce a 40% minimum pass mark for each component of the examination. This was implemented to bring the Gateway Programme into line with the assessment strategy for the BVetMed examinations and to further emphasise the importance of all assessment methods. While this has resulted in a higher number of students failing to achieve a pass, it has provided a more rigorous examination and will also help to flag students who may need additional support in later years of the course (should they achieve the pass mark in the resit examination). The majority of students who did not meet the 40% criteria, failed to do so on the problem solving paper which demonstrates that while they may have an acceptable level of factual recall, they are lacking the problem solving skills which we hope to develop in our graduates. In order to improve the problem solving ability of our Gateway students we will implement a number of

strategies including incorporating exam format PSQ questions into Directed Learning teaching sessions to allow students continual exposure to and practice of this type of question.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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

Response from college requested: NO

Assessment Procedures

Please comment, as appropriate, on:

3.1 Assessment methods (relevance to learning objectives and curriculum)

This programme uses a fantastic array of assessments: written reports, posters and exams broken into subsections to assess understanding and practical skills. We were both taken by the very high standard set on each of these tasks, and the evidence of close supervision and effective feedback. The exams allowed students to choose questions on topics that they felt more confident about without allowing them to be too strategic in their approach to learning.

Response from college requested: **NO**

Dr L.M

I agreed with the Lead Examiner's comments. I also particularly like the idea that the students are able to submit drafts of their poster material and labbing reports to Turnitin and then make changes before final submission; this allows them to learn about plagiarism in a very applied and relevant way and is an example of good practice.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

We thank the examiners for their comments on our assessment methods.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous

The assessment processes rigorous to a high standard. Some of the exam essay questions had fairly finite answers (e.g. cell signalling) and were marked using the full range of marks. Other, more traditional questions, were opportunities for students to demonstrate wider reading, which they had not always done. Markers of both types of questions are adhering to the common grading scheme, but the questions differ in the spread of material that can be supplied in an answer. Overall, the final exam seems to be a good mixture of the two and there was no apparent favouring of particular topics.

There were still some instances of first markers frustrating second markers by failing to annotate their scripts. Perhaps second markers should be allowed to refuse to mark such scripts?

Response from college requested: **NO**

Dr L.M

I agreed with the Lead Examiner's comments

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

We will continue to ensure that the examinations are composed of questions which assess factual recall, the ability to demonstrate wider reading and the opportunity for discussion of concepts which may span the traditional course modules.

Internal examiners will be reminded to annotate their scripts thus enabling second markers, external examiners and students to understand the rationale for their grades.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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

This programme of assessments appears to be consistent with the FHEQ level 4 criteria for a foundation year.

Response from college requested: NO

Dr L.M

I agreed with the Lead Examiner's comments

3.4 Standard of marking

The standard of marking was high, as evidenced by the only very few discrepancies between markers. All markers are adhering to the common grading scheme and awarding marks that accurately reflect the quality of the answers provided. Some model answers were more rudimentary than others. Standardising the use of "full model" or "skeleton" answers is something the board may wish to consider in future.

Response from college requested: NO

Dr L.M

The use of standardised answers would also help the external examiners!

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

Thank you for your feedback on our use of model answers. We will remind staff to give a comprehensive model answer when submitting exam questions. We do note that some model answers may not be able to incorporate all areas of relevant wider reading relating to distinction level marks. However, an indication of the subject matter which may be covered during discussion of wider reading should be incorporated.

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)

The procedures for the assessments appear to be very fairly conducted and sound. Adam Osgood should to be congratulated once again for all his work in organising (and explaining!) the extensive array of the assessments for consideration by the external examiners.

The board is conducted to a very high professional standard and with considerable sympathy for students who will need to resit the final assessments. In instances where students did not sit the final assessments, the board considered the evidence from several layers of the superb pastoral care provided at the RVC.

Response from college requested: NO

Dr L.M

I agreed with the Lead Examiner's comments

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

Adam and I thank you for these positive comments.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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

It was noted that standard setting is now in place to determine a pass mark for this paper of the final examination. This adds more rigour to the process. The introduction of the 40% adds another degree of rigour.

Response from college requested: NO

Dr L.M

I agreed with the Lead Examiner's comments

3.7 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the procedures

The SBA analyses reveals some questions which favoured the poorer students over the stronger ones. These should be investigated further before being used in subsequent examinations.

Response from college requested: NO

Dr L.M

I agreed with the Lead Examiner's comments

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

We are starting to implement the use of an RVC question bank for SBA examinations. This bank is expected to be fluid with new questions being added and less appropriate questions being removed. Each question will have associated statistics which will allow the question setters to analyse the usefulness of each SBA. Over time we hope that this will eliminate the use of SBA questions such as those identified by the external examiners as favouring the weaker student over the stronger candidates.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

General Statements

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Response from college requested: NO

Dr L.M

Yes

4.2 An acceptable response has been made

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Response from college requested: NO

Dr L.M

Yes

4.3 I approved the papers for the Examination

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Response from college requested: NO

Dr L.M

Yes

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Response from college requested: NO

Dr L.M

Yes

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Response from college requested: NO

Dr L.M

Yes

4.6 Candidates were considered impartially and fairly

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Response from college requested: NO

Dr L.M

Yes

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

Dr L.M

Yes

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

Dr L.M

Yes

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

Dr L.M

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:

Response from college requested: NO

Dr L.M

Yes

4.11 Appropriate procedures and processes have been followed

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Response from college requested: NO

Dr L.M

Yes

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

Dr L.M

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:

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

Response from college requested: **NO**

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**

