Royal Veterinary College
University of London

Collaborative Report

Exam board meeting: 17-Sep-2015

MSc in Veterinary Epidemiology, 2014/15

Lead examiner: Dr Rob Christley

Collaborating examiner(s): Professor Jeroen Dewulf

The Programme

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

1.1 Course content

The content is appropriate for an MSc

Response from college requested: NO

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

These are clearly laid out for the students

Response from college requested: NO

1.3 Teaching methods

A range of teaching methods are used. These should enable students to engage with the material.

Response from college requested: NO

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

We were not aware of the resources used

Response from college requested: NO

1.5 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the Programme

The programme remains a very sold one providing excellent training in epidemiology

Response from college requested: NO

Student performance

Please comment, as appropriate, on:

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

The course is a good quality and similar to MScs in other institutions in the UK and Europe

Response from college requested: NO

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

There was a range of performances in the exams, continuous assessment and the research project. In all assessments at least some students performed well and others relatively poorly, and there was a clear pattern with some students excelling and others struggling.

In some cases, some of the struggling students failed to demonstrated an ability to interpret or use quite basic and fundamental knowledge or epidemiological principles.

Several students did very poorly in their projects. One students that did pass noted in her viva that the data only became available to her after about 4 weeks into the project period. The external examiners noted last year "It is necessary to ensure that datasets that are needed for the projects are available on time for the students to avoid high time pressure in data analysis beyond their personal responsibility" and we believe this remains a priority.

Further, several students project report were of a low standard, poorly formatted and with very confused presentation, and this reflected the knowledge presented within the work. It is important that the students received clear guidance as to what is required in the production of a high quality report, The students should also be assisted in terms of clearly defining the scope of their project.

Response from college requested: YES

Professor J.D

I fully agree with the comments made. It should be noted that the poor language and formatting issues were not necessarily due to insufficient knowledge of English since they did also occur in native English speakers.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Kristien Verheyen

Course Director Response:

Despite updating supervisor guidelines and clearly laying out the requirements of an MSc-level project including timelines, it seems that further improvements are still needed to ensure that our students end up with feasible projects that they can realistically complete in the allotted timeframe. It will be discussed at the next Course Management Committee meeting how this can be achieved.

Supervisors will be advised to ensure that complete datasets are available at the outset

We will look into scheduling more generic skills training to include report writing into the timetable, and will discuss at the CMC meeting where this best fits in and when.

Action Required:

Required actions to be confirmed at next CMC meeting

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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

No additional comments

Response from college requested: NO

Assessment Procedures

Please comment, as appropriate, on:

3.1 Assessment methods (relevance to learning objectives and curriculum)

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

Response from college requested: YES

Professor J.D

I fully agree with the comments made. The number of (sub)questions should be in accordance to the available time.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Kristien Verheyen

Course Director Response:

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

Action Required:

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

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous

The processes appear rigorous. It is good that there are always model answers to exam questions.

Response from college requested: NO

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

The level of assessment is consistent with the FHEQ

Response from college requested: NO

3.4 Standard of marking

The marking appears to be fair and objective

Response from college requested: NO

Professor J.D

As the projects are concerned it is noted that some projects (topics / datasets) are more difficult than others. It should be stimulated that students keep on selecting also the more difficult / risky projects. It appears that it is more easy to receive high grading's when lower risk datasets and conventional analytical techniques are used in comparison to more difficult projects. To assure that this can be appropriately judged and the knowledge of the candidate on the performed project can be well assessed taking into account the difficulty of the task. It is suggested to increase the weight of the oral assessment (viva) eg from 10/100 to 20/100.

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

Yes. The procedures re sound and fairly conducted.

Response from college requested: NO

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

Not applicable

Response from college requested: NO

3.7 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the procedures

Response from college requested: NO

General Statements

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

No

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

IN the most part these have been addressed, but further care and monitoring is needed in a couple of areas. See comments above

Response from college requested: YES

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Kristien Verheyen

Course Director Response:

Previous comments related to selection of suitable summer projects and length of exam papers. We fully acknowledge some remaining issues with these aspects of the programme and will continue to put actions in place to ensure these can be resolved for next year.

Action Required:

Required actions to be confirmed at next CMC meeting

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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:

I am happy to work with the College to try to ensure that next years paper are clearly achievable within the time permitted.

Response from college requested: NO

Professor J.D

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:

The papers was all provided in good time. I found it helpful to have the papers annotated by the markers to indicate where marks had been awarded etc.

Response from college requested: NO

Professor J.D

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:

none

Response from college requested: NO

Professor J.D

yes

4.6 Candidates were considered impartially and fairly

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

none

Response from college requested: NO

Professor J.D

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:

none

Response from college requested: NO

Professor J.D

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:

In programmes with small numbers of students there is always "noise" in the students final marks, with some years appearing to perform better than others. This year there was a number of students who appeared to struggle with a number of assessments. This pattern is similar to other programmes with similar sized student cohorts I am familiar with

Response from college requested: NO

Professor J.D

agree

4.9 I have received enough support to carry out my role

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

The support has been excellent - thank you.

Response from college requested: NO

Professor J.D

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

Professor J.D

yes

4.11 Appropriate procedures and processes have been followed

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Response from college requested: NO

Professor J.D

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

Professor J.D

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:

none

Response from college requested: NO

Professor J.D

none

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)

We would like to suggest that research project oral examination be up-weighted in the overall assessment - we should suggest it be increased to 20% of the project mark. We felt that, on a number of occasions, the students gave bern good accounts in the oral examination of their work and the complex decisions they faced in undertaking their work and that this information/detail was often not evident in the report, most probably due to word limits. Judging by the marks this year we believe this change would be in the favour of the students and would, overall, ensure the marks provide a more accurate reflection of the students learning, knowledge and ability.

We were also concerned that a studenst choice regarding the type of project they undertook may have implications for the marks they are likely to achieve, as a solidly undertaken logistic regression of existing data seems likely to gain very good marks, whereas some other project types (such as Risk assessments) which require equivalent of greater intellectual engagement, may tend to be marked lower as the time required for such projects to be completed to a very high level may be longer. Hence, we consider it important that project reports be graded in light of what is realistically possible to achieve within the time allowed. Students and supervisors should also ensure that projects are not overly ambitious. We would welcome a review of the projects undertaken in recent years, together with their marks, to better assess whether this impression is valid.If marking does vary by project type I would suggest some form of moderation is needed for those project types that tend to score more poorly.

Response from college requested: YES

Professor J.D

none

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Kristien Verheyen

Course Director Response:

The increase in % allocation for the oral examination (from 10% to 20%) was discussed at the Exam Board meeting and there was a general consensus that this would be appropriate although we would also like to seek the views of CMC members and the Masters Coordinating Committee on this change.

The choice of type of project and associated marking has been discussed in the past although it has not been possible to devise an appropriate 'weighting' for different types of projects given that, to some extent, the level of difficulty of a project is a subjective assessment. We agree that a review of past projects and their marks could be a useful exercise in this regard and will look into the possibility of conducting such a review.

See above responses with regard to selection of summer projects and assuring feasibility within the time frame available.

Action Required:

Required actions to be confirmed at next CMC meeting

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to: