

ANNUAL QUALITY IMPROVEMENT REPORT 2017/18

Appendix 3: External Examiners' report

BVetMed Year 1

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

As Course Director/Year Leader please ensure you reflect on External Examiners' comments in the Course Review section. Please ensure that any actions to be taken in response to these comments have been recorded in your Annual Quality Improvement Report.

For support or advice please contact Ana Filipovic, Academic Quality Officer 'Standards', afilipovic@rvc.ac.uk, 01707666938

Appendix 3 consists of:

a.	Updates from Course Director/Year Leader to actions from previous years' reports (if applicable)
b.	2017/18 Collaborative Annual Report with responses from Course Director/Year Leader

Update to actions from 2016/17 External Examiners Report:

Question	External Examiners' comments	Course Director's response & Action	Update in 2017/18
<p>2.2 Quality of candidates' knowledge and skills, with particular reference to those at the top, middle or bottom of the range</p>	<p>A high proportion of students gain an overall mark in either the distinction- (18%) or merit-level (19%) category. From scrutiny of the various elements of the assessed work for these students, it is clearly evident such awards are deserved. In contrast, it is also clear that the 12% of students in the bottom range display a uniformly weak performance across the board.</p>	<p>The assessment clearly demonstrate a normal distribution in performance. However, the exam board's interrogation of the bottom range uncovered that a significant number of students in this category gained entry into the BVetMed course through the Gateway programme.</p> <p>Action Required:</p> <p>The Gateway course director has been notified of the poor performance of a section of the students via Gateway entry route and will work towards mapping areas of the Gateway course needing corrective measures.</p> <p>Action Deadline:</p> <p>25-Sep-2017</p> <p>Action assigned to: Dr Lisa Thurston</p>	<p>Data available on this has now been analysed further and regulations have been amended so that students who are struggling are unable to repeat more than one year of the course without going through appeal and that this is inclusive of gateway year.</p>
<p>2.3 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the students' performance</p>	<p>We noted that there was a strong correlation between marks in the ICA and the total marks after the summer sitting, with almost all students who failed overall achieving less than 55% in the ICA. We would encourage staff to continue to robustly monitor these interim results and feedback to individual students, regarding the likely outcome were they not to take action to remedy their performance. Indeed, some students who scored poorly in the ICA went on to pass. The performance of the resit students was disappointing, with only one of the five students who completed the exam passing. Obviously, this is a small statistical sample, but we would encourage careful assessment, discussion</p>	<p>Course Director Response:</p> <p>The year leader consistently remind students of the value of ICA and its significant contribution to the final grade. The students have opportunity to review their ICA grades with the tutors during specific tutor sessions in a view to improve their grades and ultimately the overall performance. The Senior tutor will action all the tutors to specifically engage the students on the content and value of ICAs.</p> <p>Action Required:</p> <p>Senior tutor to introduce ICA reflection sessions within the timetabled tutor meetings and where possible to take place immediately after each ICA results are provided. The Year leader will use the opportunities during Q&A sessions spread out through the academic year to reinforce to the students of the need to consistently improve their ICA grades.</p> <p>Action Deadline:</p> <p>25-Sep-2017</p> <p>Action assigned to:</p> <p>Dr Donald Palmer/ Year Leader</p>	<p>Students are invited to meet with year leader/senior tutor after ICAs to discuss their exams results and those struggling are advised of actions to take to improve their performance. There are also periods built into tutorials for viewing of feedback on exam scripts and discussion of grades with tutors.</p>

	and support before and during the resit year.		
3.1 Assessment methods (relevance to learning objectives and curriculum)	<p>The range of assessment methods is in general appropriate and aligned to the stated learning objectives.</p> <p>Running ISF vivas in a consistent and objective manner is a continuing challenge, but it was perceived that this aim was achieved better this year than previously. However, considering the work and resources involved, ISF orals did not appear to be an effective discriminator for many students. It could be argued, however, that requiring students to undertake a compulsory oral is, in itself, desirable for students' future engagement with the public</p>	<p>Course Director Response:</p> <p>In addition to being an assessment tool, ISF is a valued exam that not only help to determines a student's general and specific knowledge depth but also to gauge one's communication ability.</p> <p>A communications skill session was specifically set up in May, to deal with some of the communications challenges and potential misconceptions that some students have with the ISF oral exam experience. Among other things, they had a chance to use one or two props and role-play both as examiner and examinee during this session.</p> <p>Action Required:</p> <p>To add an extra space in the ISF forms requiring an examiner to make comments on a student's communication ability that may be useful for remedial follow up through Communication skills course.</p> <p>To repeat the communications skill session in the coming year.</p> <p>Action Deadline:</p> <p>15-Dec-2017</p> <p>Action assigned to:</p> <p>Dr Michael Doube</p>	<p>Thank you for your valuable comments. We now have a tick box to flag up students with communication problems on the ISF score sheet and a box for any open comments about the student.</p>
3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous	<p>Essays 1: Due to the high student number, some of us felt that the use of essays may result in a lack of robustness and objectivity in assessment.</p> <p>Essays 2: The rubric on the essay paper cover sheet contains errors, including the time available for a single essay, and mismatching plural/singular nouns/verbs.</p> <p>MCQs: With two exceptions, the MCQs were well set and performed well.</p> <p>PSQs 1: The quality of these four questions varied. In some cases, the questions were not sufficiently clear for the students to know what was expected, nor for the marking scheme to be applied entirely</p>	<p>Course Director Response:</p> <p>The blue printing of the final BVM1 exam was carried out. The MCQ paper now comprise of 60 questions up from previous 45. The PSQ paper is made up of 4 compulsory questions derived from the main strands but also integrating one or more other minor topics. This format of exam in essence means that markers would likewise be drawn from all the teaching staff participating in drafting each exam question. The compulsory nature of the paper was deemed necessary because problem solving is the most constant format of engagement of any practising veterinarian. It was however felt that increasing the PSQ paper to 6 would provide a wider coverage of topics examined. Paper 3 (Essay) is made up 9 questions in 3 sections, with a student choosing a question from each section. The student is supposed to demonstrate depth of knowledge depth rather than breadth. The board meeting recommended that the number of questions in the essay paper be increased to 12 with four sections, and students to answer 4 questions, one from each of the four sections.</p> <p>Action Required:</p>	<p>There are now 6 problem solving questions.</p> <p>It is agreed that essays will be removed from the examination completely as it does not add to the assessment and is an additional effort for students and staff alike.</p> <p>MCQs will remain the same.</p> <p>The marking rubric is sent to all staff involved with clear instructions about the marking scheme and the marking process.</p>

	<p>consistently. This was highlighted when the externs reviewed the draft paper, but the problem persisted into the final version. We suggest that dividing PSQs into more, smaller sections may remedy this problem.</p> <p>PSQs 2: For question 3, the second marker disagreed with the marks for 50% of the papers assessed, yet signed off the marking as agreeing with the marking scheme.</p>	<p>To increase the number of PSQ from 4 to 6. To increase the number of essay questions to 12 (3x4 sections) with a student answering a question from each section. To work with the exam office to ensure that the wording of the rubrics on the cover sheet is systematic, free of errors and succinctly clear to the candidates.</p> <p>To address the issue of discrepancies between marks awarded by two or more makers of the same question through a departmental forum or meeting.</p> <p>Action Deadline: 25-Sep-2017</p> <p>Action assigned to: Dr Vicky Waring</p>	
<p>3.7 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the procedures</p>	<p>We welcome the statistical analysis with which we have been provided - it is impressive. In future, it would be good to receive an analysis of the relative performance of Gateway students. We were grateful to receive direct feedback on our comments on the draft papers this year.</p>	<p>Course Director Response:</p> <p>I understand this to mean ex-Gateway students. We will endeavour to provide the analysis the students against the overall class performance. This would be mainly an introspective look at their performance in order to inform on any teaching deficits in the Gateway year.</p> <p>Action Required:</p> <p>Year Leader and Gateway course director to act on the above.</p> <p>Action Deadline: 25-Sep-2017</p> <p>Action assigned to: Vicky Waring and Lisa Thurston</p>	<p>The performance of ex gateway students is now clearly marked on the spread sheets with a separate analysis of their performance as a cohort.</p>
<p>4.1 Comments I have made in previous years have been addressed to my satisfaction</p>	<p>The externs have previously noticed the relative paucity of questions on Animal Husbandry in the examination, but unfortunately, this problem has not been addressed and persisted this year. In total, this topic was represented by 3 MCQs, approximately one third of a single PSQ, one essay which could be avoided (21 students chose it) and 16% of all the ISF oral questions asked. Except for the ISF orals, these</p>	<p>Course Director Response:</p> <p>There is an overlap of AH and alimentary system topics and for this reason the number of related MCQs were slightly higher than directly observed. However, it is important to note that there was a limitation in the use of MCQs in the data bank because not all the questions available in the data bank had been standard-set while others were deemed not to meet the threshold of the cover-up test.</p> <p>Action Required:</p> <p>Year leader to work Exams office to work in a view to have more questions reviewed, standard-set, created and added to the existing MCQ bank.</p>	<p>We have used a blue print to ensure that all topics taught throughout first year get appropriate representation including animal husbandry. There were 13 animal husbandry MCQS, two animal husbandry PSQs and one 2 animal husbandry essays included for June 2019.</p>

	<p>values are far below the representation of Animal Husbandry in the course, and certainly its importance in veterinary practice. This should be remedied in 2018, and the student told that this will occur,</p>	<p>Action Deadline: 15-May-2018</p> <p>Action assigned to: Troy Gibson, Vicky Waring and Exams office</p>	
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Collaborative Report

Exam board meeting: 10-Jul-2018

Bachelor of Veterinary Medicine, Year 1, 2017/18

Lead examiner: Dr David Bainbridge

Collaborating examiner(s): Mr David Kilroy, Dr Ian Jeffcoate, Dr Karin Mueller

The Programme

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

1.1 Course content

This is appropriate for the course and the qualification awarded at its end.

Response from college requested: **NO**

Dr I.J

none

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

These are appropriate for the course and the qualification awarded at its end, and are generally met.

Response from college requested: **NO**

Dr I.J

none

1.3 Teaching methods

As far as can be discerned by the external examiners, these seem to work well.

Response from college requested: **NO**

Dr I.J

no further comment

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

(DK) The ISF oral component of the exam was significantly improved by the wide range of high quality plastinated specimens.

Response from college requested: **NO**

Dr I.J

1.5 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the Programme

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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

This is similar to performance at comparable institutions.

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

Most candidates had a satisfactory or good standard of knowledge and were able to apply this knowledge to solve problems in a reasoned way. Overall, learning objectives were achieved and candidates were able to demonstrate this achievement. The distribution across the top, middle and bottom achievements were as expected.

Response from college requested: **NO**

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

KM: Essay writing ability was variable. Some students failed to read and digest, and thereby address, the question or task posed. However, these shortcomings are seen across institutes and cohorts, and with regard to essay writing skills you are providing formative learning opportunities.

Response from college requested: **NO**

College's Response:

Thank you for your comments on students achievement of learning objective, distribution of marks and alignment with what is expected of students at other universities. We will continue to provide formative opportunities for students so that they may build upon these skills.

We have listened to your feedback about the value of essays and will be removing the essays from the examination entirely. We will in place be adding two PSQs in. MCQs will remain the same.

The policy on marking and annotation is sent out from the exams office at appropriate time throughout the course and training sessions were run during April 2018 with further sessions to be scheduled by Learning and Wellbeing in future. We will notify external examiners about how their feedback on scripts has been taken into account prior to the examinations taking place.

The Director of Assessment, Professor Brian Catchpole, conducts really detailed statistics to pick out any issues with any questions as well as ANOVA to check for harsh or lenient marking. Model answers are provided to all markers. If a model answer needs to be changed this is to be noted on the model answer for the attention of sample markers and external examiners.

Problem solving – it is not possible to ensure all questions have problem solving but we do try to include a problem solving element wherever possible however this is typically variable in nature. It would be helpful if the external examiners could flag which questions do not include problem solving during their review process.

We do not consider extenuating circumstances at Exam Boards, to influence marks. It is helpful to note in Exam Board minutes any discussions about students with extenuating circumstances.

Please comment, as appropriate, on:

3.1 Assessment methods (relevance to learning objectives and curriculum)

[DB] I had an interesting discussion with the examiners about the extent to which the essays really do test depth of knowledge and allow students to select material to analyse. This may be due to the relatively short time available for each essay, lack of time to 'train' students in essay writing, or the sometimes regurgitative essays which some essay questions (accidentally) invite. I gather that a discussion is taking place about removing the essays from the exam, and instead increasing and modifying the PSQ component so that it includes structured questions which invite higher-level analysis and possibly even student selection of examples which they then discuss. I think this may prove to be a sensible direction to take, not least because of the high examining load imposed by the essay paper.

(DK) I agree with this proposed approach. While the best students produced some outstanding work, the bulk of the essays sampled were recycling factual knowledge with little deeper analysis of the topic being examined.

(IJ) yes, I support this as a way to move forward and reduce marking load.

(KM) A move away from essays in favour of extending the PSQ component would be perfectly acceptable.

[DB] There was one example (Qu 7) in which the 'second examiner' questioned whether a student had been sufficiently penalised for not writing an essay in full prose, despite the fact that the student had included large amounts of relevant, but unlinked information. I have some sympathy with this concern, and would encourage examiners to reinforce to students and markers how important structure and format are considered in the construction of essays.

(IJ) I would second this point. If essays are to be retained then they should be written and assessed as essays not bullet points.

Response from college requested: NO

3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous

[DB] I discussed standard setting with the examiners. The MCQ paper is standard set and subsequently scaled, whereas the PSQs and essays are not, and it is left to the academic judgement of staff to set and mark the papers with the passmark in mind. This system seems entirely appropriate to me – I strongly prefer systems in which defensible professional judgement trumps somewhat opaque systems of standard setting which can give a misleading sense of objectivity.

(KM) Regarding standard setting, you may wish to consider including the PSQ and essay components purely to check for any anomalies (e.g. misunderstanding of concepts or failure to deliver teaching material for a particular cohort). For the ISF Oral component, an ANOVA or similar may be useful to check for particularly harsh or lenient marking (given the large number of examiners involved).

It is not entirely clear how the performance of the ICA is scrutinised (e.g. reason explored why question 2 had a high fail rate (about 25% of cohort)?).

Response from college requested: NO

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

This was consistent with that framework.

Response from college requested: NO

3.4 Standard of marking

(KM) You may wish to consider a common policy for marking a question where a large proportion of students have misunderstood the task set, so that each marker will treat such a situation in the same way. This is particularly relevant for the Essay paper, where students can choose from multiple questions.

DK: Some Paper 2 questions were very clearly and comprehensively annotated; some had little if any annotation. For failing students in particular, I think how and why marks are awarded should be made plain so that appropriate feedback can be given to the student.

[DB] I have some specific comments here regarding the PSQs:

The format of the different PSQs seemed quite heterogeneous – for example, the extent to which each question ‘builds up’ to higher levels of understanding or analysis. This did not render the exam unfair as all candidates must answer every question, but I think more consistency in this would be good in future.

In addition, some of the questions did not seem to be very ‘problem solving’.

I will now make some specific comments about the PSQs, mainly because they seemed to be a valuable way of assessing the students, and their complexity means that there is more to say about them than is the case for the MCQs.

Q1. Good. Students at the RVC, as in every university, cannot seem to believe that the word ‘list’ means what it says!

Q2. Good, although as in most vet schools, students seem to think ruminants eat nothing but carbohydrates.

Q3. Section (e) could, in hindsight, have been slightly clearer about what was expected – i.e. endocrine/paracrine rather than specific examples. Also, some students, but not all, got full marks without mentioning the word ‘paracrine’.

Q4. A few things.

d) Some of the marking seemed weirdly nit-picky. When the students are expected to describe the entire layout of the circulation for 2 marks, penalising them for writing ‘pulmonary artery’ instead of ‘pulmonary trunk’ seems a bit mean.

d) I suggested that the questions should be rephrased to explicitly exclude the need to discuss the hepatic portal system; this suggestion was not acted on and some candidates did waste valuable time describing that system, gaining no extra marks in the process

e) I also suggested that the type of ‘reason’ expected for inter-atrial shunting of blood in the fetus should be made clear, and my suggestion was not acted on. Some described the physical factors which lead to shunting (RAP>LAP) whereas others explained why shunting is required (no gas exchange in lungs). Both are ‘reasons’ yet one type was preferred to another. Also, some candidates got no marks for writing ‘lungs not required for gas exchange’.

f) Again, I think I made suggestions to enhance clarity of what is expected in this question.

So, in general, when complex physiological systems are being asked about, I would encourage examiners to work hard to be as crystal-clear as possible about what is expected. Also, external examiners, being somewhat removed from the teaching and examining, are often well placed to spot lapses of clarity!

Q5. The marking for this question seemed a little variable. Students were sometimes given full marks when their answers did not match the skeleton answers at all, nor really answer the question as set – e.g. when a ‘diagnosis’ was called for in (a), presumably the answer really should include ‘syringomyelia’ or ‘Arnold-Chiari’. Another student received full marks in (d) for a general description of neural tube closure unlinked to the pathogenesis of the lesion.

Q6. Three unrelated things.

a) Is ‘histogram’ an alternative term for ‘image of a histological section’?

d) This became non-grammatical after the extern-comments stage.

e) If a candidate provided one wrong answer and then one correct answer, they received a mark. How many attempts at a question are they allowed before they stumble upon the right answer? Perhaps only their first

answer should be accepted?

Response from college requested: NO

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

Response from college requested: NO

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

Following previous comments, there did seem to be a larger content of animal health and husbandry.

Response from college requested: NO

3.7 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the procedures

In future, for all papers, following submission of externals' comments on drafts, it would be good to receive the final version of the papers, along with (brief!) responses to the externals' comments, and updated skeleton answers.

(KM): To account for examination stress, we would encourage question setters to continue to aim for questions that have a high level of clarity and are to-the-point (clearly labelled images, short sentences etc.). Equally, to continue to improve the quality of MCQs: in particular, phrasing in a way that they pass the cover up test, and reduce answer spotting (formatting well and removing weak distractors) – a move towards a 4-option format may aid this.

Response from college requested: NO

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Response from college requested: NO

4.2 An acceptable response has been made

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Response from college requested: NO

4.3 I approved the papers for the Examination

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Response from college requested: NO

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Response from college requested: NO

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Response from college requested: NO

4.6 Candidates were considered impartially and fairly

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

(KM) In the ISF Oral, examiners managed well to create an atmosphere conducive to candidates demonstrating their knowledge.

Response from college requested: NO

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Response from college requested: NO

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Response from college requested: NO

4.9 I have received enough support to carry out my role

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Response from college requested: NO

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Yes. But please see comment under 3.7.

Response from college requested: NO

4.11 Appropriate procedures and processes have been followed

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Response from college requested: NO

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

We would encourage discussion of the question of whether the marksheet should still be anonymous at the examiners' meeting when the marks are approved. It seems more defensible if the two processes of mark approval and consideration of extenuating circumstances are separated more clearly. Although individual cases are discussed at the meeting, no fair decisions can be made as only some tutors are present, and all the relevant information is not (and probably cannot be) disclosed to the attendees.

Response from college requested: NO

Completion

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

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

For assessments where a large number of examiners are involved with random allocation of students to these examiners, like the ISF Oral component, an ANOVA or similar may be useful to check for particularly harsh or lenient marking.

Response from college requested: NO

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)

none

Response from college requested: NO