

ANNUAL QUALITY IMPROVEMENT REPORT 2017/18

Appendix 3: External Examiners' report

Gateway

This appendix contains Year Leader's responses to 2017/18 External Examiners' comments and updates to actions from 2016/17 External Examiners' report (if applicable).

As 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 to actions from previous years' reports - <i>There were no action points from 2016/17 to be updated for Gateway!</i>
b.	2017/18 Collaborative Annual Report with responses from Course Director/Year Leader

Collaborative Report

Exam board meeting: 27-Jun-2018

Veterinary Gateway Programme, 2017/18

Lead examiner: Professor William Holt

Collaborating examiner(s): Dr Lucy Green

The Programme

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

1.1 Course content

The course content is appropriate and in most respects is clearly aligned against the equivalent BSc1 course and the modules give a wide grounding in science. The Gateway students also study a module in Animal Husbandry, which is essential preparation for those intending to progress towards veterinary medicine. The course structure ensures that the Gateway students are part of a larger cohort, which gives them access to peer support and interactions. The Gateway students have to achieve a high standard in their examinations in order to progress with their degree; this mechanism provides a degree of rigorous selection that ultimately protects both the weaker students and the institution.

Response from college requested: **NO**

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

Many thanks for your positive comments. We have strived to create a dynamic and exciting course for these widening participation students who aspire to the study of veterinary medicine and we are very proud of how this year has been received by students and staff alike.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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

The learning objectives were helpfully included along with the model answers provided to the examiners. We noted some discrepancies between the standards achieved in different modules (notably Development, which was generally poor, versus TMA) and suggest that there should be some consideration given to the underlying reasons. In addition, student performance was especially poor in one of the Animal Husbandry questions (Q1; mean = 17.24%); this was possibly caused by numeracy problems when dealing with some relatively basic arithmetical calculations. It is worth considering whether the problem here was mainly attributable to numeracy or to lack of knowledge about Animal Husbandry itself.

Response from college requested: **YES**

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

We have mapped specific learning objectives to each question on the written examination papers to ensure that assessments cover a wide range of teaching subject matter and skills sets. We are glad that this has been identified as an example of good practice by the external examiners.

The Development module has undergone new module leadership this year and the performance of students highlighted by this examination and the external examiners comments, has been brought to the attention of the new module leader who has already been tasked with reviewing both the in-module assessment and the examination questions.

We appreciate that the poor student performance in Question 1 of the Animal Husbandry module examination might be due to numeracy issues, particularly given the students' widening participation backgrounds, and plan to incorporate more numeracy support into our Gateway skills tutorials for the upcoming academic year. Unfortunately, in order to answer the later sections of this particular question successfully, the student was required to achieve a correct answer in section 1. We will ensure that in future years, each section of the question will 'stand alone' and will not necessitate a correct answer in a previous question in order to score well in subsequent sections. Historically, Gateway students have performed well on the Animal Husbandry paper as they perceive this content to be directly relevant to their chosen career.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

1.3 Teaching methods

The programme offers a wide range of options for study, that includes lectures, projects, Directed Learning and some practical work. It is also evident that there are many online resources as well, including some video tutorials aimed at teaching "common sense" as well as focused scientific topics. However, from some informal conversations with staff we noted that students are tending to substitute the private viewing of online video lectures for the opportunity to see the "live" lecture face-to-face. Moreover, viewing the online video lectures is apparently regarded by some students as their "extended study", to the detriment of wider reading. It would be worth attempting to counter these trends and encourage students to attend lectures in person wherever possible.

Response from college requested: NO

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

We are particularly proud of the variety of teaching strategies employed on the Gateway course and will continue to provide a broad spectrum of content delivery styles.

At present the Gateway lecture content is voice recorded via the Echo system. These voice recordings can be accessed online alongside their PowerPoint slide presentations. We do not yet video record lectures. It is unfortunate that a small number of students might have opted to access Echo (voice recording) rather than attend the lecture in person. I still believe this to be a very small number of students and most students continue to attend in person. We do, and will continue to, strongly encourage students to attend all taught sessions.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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

The external examiners would value a print-out of module descriptors and lecture lists being made available on the scrutiny days (or possible emailed prior to arrival).

It would also be helpful to examiners (particularly new ones) if the RVC set out their objectives or desires for external examiner action in advance of the scrutiny days.

In relation to the point above, it would be valuable if RVC developed a policy document which set out clear guidance for external examiners. As an example, it would be helpful for both staff and examiners to have specific boundaries in relation to the marks achieved by individual students. It is not normal practice for external examiners to be consulted about the marks of a particular student, but this could be stated clearly in a policy document.

Response from college requested: YES

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

We will endeavor to provide you with the module descriptors and lecture listings prior to your arrival to review the assessments. The College provides online training for External Examiners in terms of their role in the quality assurance process. Advice and guidance can be sought from the Exams Officer who oversees the assessments for your course / year as well as the Exam Board Chair. We regularly review the information that is provided to our External Examiners and this will be addressed in due course

Action Required:

Review current training documents for External Examiners

Action Deadline:

01-Jan-2019

Action assigned to:

Head of Examinations, Academic Quality Manager & Academic Quality Officer (Standards)

1.5 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the Programme

Although we have made some critical comments, they are intended to be helpful and constructive.

Response from college requested: NO

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

We welcome all your feedback and thank you for your efforts to improve our Gateway Programme.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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 students were comparable to those at the University of Birmingham (WVH was an external examiner in Birmingham Biosciences for four years).

Response from college requested: **NO**

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

We are reassured that our students are performing at a level comparable with partner institutions.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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

The examiners noted that the spread of marks was right or left skewed in some questions. For example, IGE and AH1 were left skewed, indicating that there were quite a few students who struggled with these modules. The problem may be attributable to the simple arithmetic requirements in these questions. On the other hand, TMA was right skewed, with average mark for TMA1 of 66%; this question was not dependent on arithmetical ability. Our interpretation is that the arithmetical issue is a problem that needs to be solved as it evidently disadvantages some students. One simple solution may be to change the order of questions on the exam paper, and not placing all the arithmetical questions together as a panic-inducing block.

It was apparent that this problem was not specific to the Gateway students and the same trends could be seen in BSc1 answers. On the whole, there was no statistical difference between the Gateway and BSc1 marks.

Response from college requested: **YES**

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

As stated previously, we appreciate that the poor student performance in Question 1 of the Animal Husbandry module examination and the left skewed spread of marks in the Inheritance, Genetics and Evolution module, might be due to numeracy issues, particularly given the students' widening participation backgrounds. We welcome the external examiners suggestion regarding the order of questions within the examination paper and will strive to implement this. In addition, we plan to incorporate more numeracy support into our Gateway skills tutorials for the upcoming academic year.

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**

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

n/a

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

Assessment Procedures

Please comment, as appropriate, on:

3.1 Assessment methods (relevance to learning objectives and curriculum)

There is a good range of assessment procedures; this provides the students with diverse ways to demonstrate their knowledge.

Response from college requested: **NO**

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

We have designed the examinations so they are comprised of a mix of multiple choice, problem solving and essay questions. In doing this, we hope that the students have been motivated to develop a diverse approach to their learning, being able to apply their knowledge in the form of data interpretation, clinical assessment and essay writing.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous

The procedures on the whole are rigorous, but the examiners identified a few issues that could be improved. We note the procedure for moderation that is in place. Part of this is that no further action is taken on discrepancies between the first and moderator markers unless the moderator has selected "yes" on the form. It may be worth considering additional actions such as moderating an expanded sample of scripts if >2 discrepancies are noted. This would provide additional assurances for individual students to whom a difference of a few % could make the world of difference.

In the majority of long answer / essay scripts, the words used to summarise the essay standard (e.g. "very sound answer", "Quite good answer", etc) and the grade awarded did not line up with the common grading scheme. We are aware that markers may feel that the CGS is not well tailored to each programme of study and so it may be that the RVC feel that the CSG needs revision in consultation with staff.

Response from college requested: **YES**

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

Thank you for your comments and helpful discussions during the exam board meeting.

During the sample marking process the member of staff is required to review a minimum percentage of scripts, depending on the size of the marking batch (10% or 20%), but ensuring they sample the full range of marks. If the sample marker is unable to agree/disagree the marks in general, based on the sample selected, they are able to increase the sample size. Should the sample markers disagree with the first marker then the action taken will be determined by the rationale given for disagreement, but would usually start with the sample marker discussing the findings with the 1st marker.

When blind double marking is used, for major Final Year Projects, markers are required to come an agreed mark. We are currently reviewing the use of a 'facilitator' where markers disagree over a broad range to ensure the process for agreeing the final mark is fair, justified and documented.

Markers will be encouraged to adhere as closely as possible to the descriptors contained within the common grading scheme. In collaboration with the examinations office we will explore options for the modification and development of the RVC common grading scheme.

Action Required:

Discuss options for the modification and development of the RVC common grading scheme.

Action Deadline:

01-Jan-2019

Action assigned to:

Lisa Thurston

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

Entirely consistent.

Response from college requested: NO

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

Thank you for this positive comment.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

3.4 Standard of marking

- 1) A general comment is that the quantity and quality of annotation on the exam scripts was variable.
- 2) There were many instances in which a formal summary feedback statement was completely absent at the end of a long answer / essay script.
- 3) In a few instances, the handwriting of markers was illegible.
- 4) In a couple of instances the poor handwriting of students was noted on an exam script. At the board, it seemed that there was no formal strategy for handling illegible scripts. This should be considered. E.g. if more than one in 5 words are illegible then the student could be called in to transcribe prior to marking.

Response from college requested: YES

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

We will remind markers of the importance of the RVC policy regarding the quality of written feedback annotated on scripts.

Illegible handwriting has not been raised as an issue for markers in previous years. Students are required to write legibly and, in line with College regulations, any part of a script which is considered by the Examiners to be illegible will be awarded no marks. Students with extremely poor handwriting should, when discovered, be directed to the Education Development tutors for assistance.

Action Required:

Markers to be reminded about the RVC policy of annotation of scripts when marking is issued.

Action Deadline:

01-Jan-2019

Action assigned to:

Exams Office

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 are absolutely sound and fair. The administration staff are highly efficient, very helpful and should be congratulated.

Evaluation of "In Course Assessments" (ICAs) and projects has to be undertaken using an online system that is rather unhelpful to external examiners. As there are a large number of ICAs, and the examiners would ideally like to have a reasonably objective method of comparing the grades awarded, it may be useful to develop a sampling strategy. If ICA titles could be shown alongside the student's names and marks, it would help the examiners to identify topics within their field of expertise as well as helping them to select a sample of low, middle and highly graded pieces of work. At present the titles are not visible and the titles are shown in obscurely coded format. The Board of Examiners meeting gave all participants the opportunity to voice opinions.

Response from college requested: YES

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

We would like to thank the RVC Exams Office staff, in particular Adam Osgood and Emma Rosenberg, for their efficiency in running the Gateway assessments.

We would encourage the exams office to present ICA information in a format which makes the external examiners role as transparent and easy as possible.

Action Required:

Examinations office to explore the feasibility of providing external examiners with the information requested in their report, regarding in course assessments.

Action Deadline:

01-Jan-2019

Action assigned to:

Exams Office

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

The marking system had not changed and one of the examiners had not been involved in the previous year.

Response from college requested: **NO**

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

n/a

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

3.7 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the procedures

Response from college requested: **NO**

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

n/a

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

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

n/a

Action Required:

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

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

n/a

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

4.3 I approved the papers for the Examination

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Response from college requested: NO

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

n/a

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

n/a

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

Thank you for taking the time to attend our Board of Examiners and for your feedback.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

4.6 Candidates were considered impartially and fairly

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Response from college requested: NO

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

n/a

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

n/a

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

n/a

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

n/a

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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

No

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

The induction day(s) for new external examiners could be improved by explaining more clearly what the RVC expects. To a great extent the external examiner's role is rather unclear, especially when first confronted by large assemblage of exam scripts. As mentioned previously, this could be clarified by developing an examiner's handbook or policy document.

Response from college requested: YES

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

As discussed, the examinations office will receive this feedback and will explore options for the development of an external examiner policy document.

Action Required:

Examinations office to review the external examiner induction day content and explore options for the development of an external examiner policy document.

Action Deadline:

01-Jan-2019

Action assigned to:

Exams Office and Academic Quality Officer (Standards)

4.11 Appropriate procedures and processes have been followed

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Response from college requested: NO

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

n/a

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

n/a

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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:

Response from college requested: **NO**

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

n/a

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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)

Response from college requested: **NO**

COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston

Course Director Response:

n/a

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

