

ANNUAL QUALITY IMPROVEMENT REPORT 2021/22

Appendix 3: External Examiners' report

FdSc & BSc Veterinary Nursing

This appendix contains Year Leader's responses to 2021/22 External Examiners' comments and updates to actions from previous External Examiners' reports (if applicable).

As Course Director 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
b.	2021/22 Collaborative Annual Report with responses from Course Director

a. Updates to actions from previous years' reports

2020/21 Report Question	External Examiners' comments & suggested actions	Course Director/Year Leader's response & Action	Update in 21/22
<p>1.4 Resources (in so far as they affected the assessment)</p>	<p>The external examiners are concerned that stretched physical and human resources will affect teaching delivery and thus assessment. Further, increased hours dedicated to teaching practical tasks to smaller groups and having to deliver the same material to multiple groups will drain staff time. Additional time spend in teaching has to be taken out of the time budget elsewhere. It is a concern of the examiners that there is the potential for staff to have insufficient time to continue to develop and deliver the assessment portfolio to the same standards as they currently do, with the same levels of feedback and student support to increased student numbers without appropriate uplift in staff numbers.</p>	<p>We agree with the concerns of the external examiners regarding both the physical and human resources available to continue to deliver the course. We have informed the Head of Department (HoD) and the Vice Principal for Learning Teaching and assessment of these concerns. The date for interviewing for maternity cover and a 5th Clinical Educator have been set. The HoD has agreed to fund external markers. The delay in the new building work has meant a delay in obtaining new teaching rooms at least for term 2.</p> <p>Action Required:</p> <p>This will be highlighted in the Annual Quality Improvement Report</p> <p>Action Deadline:</p> <p>24-Nov-2021</p> <p>Action assigned to:</p> <p>Course Directors</p>	<p>Two maternity covers were recruited and stated in March and April 2022. A 5th Clinical Educator was recruited. 2 Clinical Educators moved to permanent part time roles primarily working in the CertAVN course but with module and tutor responsibilities in the UG course. Their CE roles were replaced. The Director of Veterinary Nursing was advertised and offered but declined.</p>
<p>1.5 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the Programme</p>	<p>The external examiners would note the departure of the Professor of Veterinary Nursing. Prof Gregory was a strong advocate for the profession and the course team as well as significant contributor to the course delivery and assessment. We would further note that this departure was announced in June and there appeared to be uncertainty among the team about the vacancy this has created both at a strategic and management level as well as at the 'coal face' in delivery of teaching and assessment. The team needs brought into the journey by senior College management as they develop a plan to fill these roles.</p>	<p>We agree with these comments and recognise the impact the loss of this position has had already. We have discussed the role of what is required and provided draft job descriptions. We envisage the new role will encompass a more wide ranging and strategic responsibilities for veterinary nurses at the RVC. We are awaiting confirmation of the timeline for this new role from senior management.</p> <p>Action Required:</p> <p>Course Directors to alert head of department to these comments</p>	<p>The Director of Veterinary Nursing was advertised and offered but declined. Ongoing discussions with the HoD</p>

<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>The plan outlined last year as part of No Detriment (risk based 3 stages of intervention to support students who had failed one or more element) was delivered but has not prevented several students continuing to perform below the hoped level. Further tough conversations will be required in the interests of the students themselves as well as the rest of the cohort, delivery team and wider College. Even some students passing demonstrated significant weaknesses in knowledge in examinations with their overall pass being possible only because of compensation from their assignment marks.</p>	<p>It has been recognised that some students did not benefit from the Safety Net policy and delayed the inevitable lack of success for these students. We will continue to monitor the students progress through the course and performance meetings have been planned for students wishing to repeat a year of study.</p> <p>Action Required: Continue to monitor the students progress.</p> <p>Action Deadline: 30-Sep-2022</p> <p>Action assigned to: Course Directors</p>	<p>The progress of these students will be reported in the AQIR 2021-22</p>
<p>3.4 Standard of marking</p>	<p>A variety of styles and mechanisms are used with the course to deliver feedback - even between similar styles of assessment. A consistent approach might be beneficial both to the markers, students and the external examiners.</p> <p>Occasionally it was felt that the examiners were trying to find a mark, which if they had not given, the external examiners would have been content for that lower mark to have been awarded. This was not at a level that compromised the fairness nor the integrity of the assessment process but should not creep wider into marking.</p>	<p>Thank you for your comments and we have organised a standardisation meeting within the team to discuss how we ensure parity in marking and feedback.</p> <p>Action Required: Meeting organised to discuss standardisation of marking and feedback</p> <p>Action Deadline: 20-Sep-2021</p> <p>Action assigned to: VN team</p>	<p>A meeting was held with the team and discussed a way forward to standardise the feedback based on what went well and even better if. Also considered was the extent of what we would flag regarding grammar and spelling, referencing and word count.</p>

PREVIOUS REPORTS	External Examiners' comments & suggested actions	Course Director/Year Leader's response & Action	Update in 2019/20	Update in 20/21	Update in 21/22
<p>2.1 Students' performance in relation to those at a similar stage on</p>	<p>Some students do not meet their potential within the 4th year possibly because they are not fully</p>	<p><i>We have problems with students engaging in the modules in the 4th year as many have cited a lack of</i></p>	<p>ONGOING This year the fourth year is delivered entirely online. We can monitor attendance at live</p>	<p>We have tried to provide flexible opportunities for students undertaking the 4th yr as we are aware some are undertaking</p>	<p>We have continued to deliver a blended approach and the amount of face to face sessions</p>

<p>comparable courses in other institutions, where this is known to you</p>	<p>engaged in the programme.</p>	<p><i>accommodation and some students taking up full time work (despite our advice not to). We have tried to provide other activities (Advanced Practice Toolkit module discussion forum) for students to engage in if not attending, but with limited success. The Graduate Diploma electives that students are able to access, are delivered online so there may be some confusion over attendance despite clear advice.</i></p>	<p>sessions but may not be a true representation of engagement.</p>	<p>part time work. Attendance at live sessions continues to be variable but the students access the material at other times. When we had face to face teaching we also had poor attendance. With the CertAVN modules being online we feel that continuing the blended approach is best.</p>	<p>can depend on the electives chosen. We need to consider a stand-alone top up route for external students.</p>
<p>3.1 Assessment methods (relevance to learning objectives and curriculum)</p>	<p>Discuss with course leader in regards to review of the OSCEs. The clinical assessment tool is included to be completed alongside their studies whilst in a practical environment, usually when on placement.</p>	<p><i>We are reviewing the range of OSCEs provided and looking at providing a wider variety of OSCEs and ensuring they encompass the range of methods rather than encouraging rote learning skill</i></p>	<p>Ongoing review</p>	<p>We have removed the skill sheets and explained to the students the reason why. We will continue to review and update where necessary. There is currently an RCVS consultation regarding the day one skills/ competencies and so we can ensure that they align with any changes to these.</p>	<p>The OSCEs continued to be reviewed and updated. The 2022-23 first year intake will be following the new updated day one skills and competencies. There are few changes in the skills.</p>
<p>3.4 Standard of marking</p>	<p>Where there is a discrepancy between first marker's and second marker's results discussion needs to be documented so that there is a full audit trail. The sample marker should not be annotating scripts and should not be indicating any mark allocation unless a decision has been made to be double marked</p>	<p><i>The transition to online marking indicates that some areas needed further clarification for some markers especially regarding sample marking. We have discussed with the exams office and they will assign the sample marking.</i></p>	<p>ONGOING the EE's have mentioned in the recent report that this has improved: "<i>Some changes have been made, the standard and consistency of the annotation in the script have dramatically improved this is to be commended</i>".</p>	<p>We have undertaken examiner training within the team to ensure a more consistent approach</p>	<p>Continue to standardise markers by team marking</p>

Collaborative Report

Exam board meeting: 21-Jun-2022

BSc and FdSc in Veterinary Nursing, 2021/22

Lead examiner: Mr Paul Crawford

Collaborating examiner(s): Dr Jane Furness

The Programme

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

1.1 Course content

The latter years of the course were reviewed in preparation for the 29th June 2022 Exam Board which reviewed the progress and assessment of cohorts 15 and 16 and the early years prior to the 7th September Board when cohorts 17 and 18 were considered along with a small number of resit candidates from cohort 16.

The following modules were reviewed virtually:

Year 4 (cohort 15) BSc Veterinary Nursing

Research Methods (30 credits)
Anaesthesia & Analgesia (A&A) (30 credits)
Emergency & Critical Care (ECC) (30 credits)
Final Research Project (60 credits)

Year 3 (cohort 16) BSc + FdSc Veterinary Nursing - Applied Nursing Care

Year 3 BSc Veterinary Nursing

Applied Nursing Care
Professional Practice
Professional Development & Clinical Skills (III)

Year 3 (cohort 16) BSc Transfer Assignments & Exam

Optional Assessment for Transfer to BSc Year 4
Transfer Assignment 1: Infection Control Report
Transfer Assignment 2: Professional Development

Year 2 (cohort 17) BSc + FdSc Veterinary Nursing

Academic & Professional Development 2 (15 credits)
Diagnostic Techniques (30 credits)
Emergency & Critical Care (15 credits)
Theatre Practice (15 credits)
Understanding Disease (15 credits)
Veterinary Anaesthesia (15 credits)

Year 1 (cohort 18) BSc + FdSc Veterinary Nursing

Applied Animal Health & Welfare 1 (30 credits)
Applied Animal Health & Welfare 2 (30 credits)
Academic & Professional Development 1 (30 credits)
Practical (DOPS) Pass/Fail

One examiner external was on site for both the primary sit and resit OSCEs.

Throughout the modules reviewed, the content reflected the full range of material needed to meet the course requirements. Through the provision of elective modules students were given the opportunity in the latter part of their course to study areas of particular interest in additional depth. The research projects showed a wide range of areas of professional and clinical interest what the students were supported to investigate.

The new course structure, now in the second year, appears to have bedded in well despite the legacy of the covid disruption and ongoing support services issues increasing the delivery team's workload. The delivery team should be commended for delivering this smooth transition to the new course structure, as well guiding the final cohorts through the remaining years of the old structure at their usual exemplary standard.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Ms Hilary Orpet

Course Director Response:

Thank you for your comments - it has been quite a difficult couple of years

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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

All learning objectives were met by the work reviewed as above. There is a clear desire by the team to deliver the over and above the basic minimum needed to meet the learning objective but they encourage the students to explore widely the subject.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Ms Hilary Orpet

Course Director Response:

Thank you. It is intended to try to upskill the students in the application of knowledge rather than just learning content. Introduction to evidence base veterinary nursing and problem solving is embedded in the new curriculum, particularly in the style of delivery utilising patient case-based scenarios.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

1.3 Teaching methods

The relaxation of covid restrictions presented a new challenge and opportunity to the team. Their plans to retain some aspects of the online tuition and assessment, blending the best of the new and old methods is to be commended.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Ms Hilary Orpet

Course Director Response:

Thank you

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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

Last year the external examiners expressed concerned that stretched physical and human resources will affect teaching delivery and thus assessment. We were disappointed to find that one year on the 'head of veterinary nursing' post is still vacant and that the support services offered by the exams and assessment office is severely strained through multiple staff changes and vacancies. With further administration coming the direction of the team relating to changes in the NPL our concerns persist and deepen. Time constraints in the run up to the most recent exam boards left less time this cycle to discuss with the team the current state of physical resource provision.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Ms Hilary Orpet

Course Director Response:

I agree with the comments and attempts have been made to secure a new director of VN. As a niche role requiring specific candidate abilities, there is not a wide pool of applicants. An ideal candidate was offered the position but declined. We are working with the head of the department to source a solution for this role. The loss of key personnel within the exams office also meant a loss of institutional knowledge of the processes. This will take time to re-establish this even though recruitment of new exam officers is in place. There has been an impact on the team to work to solve the issues that have arisen that normally would have been covered by the exams office.

Action Required:

To provide an update on the role of the Director of VN by June 2023

Action Deadline:

27-Jun-2023

Action assigned to:

Course Director

1.5 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the Programme

As already mentioned, there is an urgent need to provide the nursing delivery team with additional human resources. The strategic and management direction this open post provides is essential to maintain the standards of the course and allow the team members to fulfil their own role.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Ms Hilary Orpet

Course Director Response:

As previously mentioned - we are working with the Head of Department

Action Required:

Plan of action to ensure the team is adequately resourced

Action Deadline:

28-Oct-2022

Action assigned to:

Head of Department

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

We can confirm that the students' performance is comparable at each point in the course with students in the other institutes of which we have knowledge. The outcomes for years 1,3 and four were excellent, with a slightly lower pass rate among the students completing their second year. Due to constraints of time we were unable to interrogate the results and follow individual students' progress through year one and two to offer any particular insight on why this may have been.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Ms Hilary Orpet

Course Director Response:

The current second-year students started the course in September 2020 when the majority of the teaching was online. with the exception of the Diagnostic Techniques module, the rest of the modules were taught face to face. this change in style may have affected some students learning. The second year also consists of five short clinical modules and one long Academic and Professional Development module. With many modules come multiple assessment points. While the assessment is spread through the year, some students struggled to keep up and subsequently deferred their first sit to the resit period. This resulted in more assessments during august for these students.

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

Each cohort of students had excellent students, a solid majority of well performing students and a few weaker students. In particular, the top students have exceptional ability to express their understanding and application of knowledge to a range of novel scenarios.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Ms Hilary Orpet

Course Director Response:

Thank you

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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

It is clear that the team go beyond the call in trying to support the weaker students.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Ms Hilary Orpet

Course Director Response:

We try to provide multiple resources to support the students but can be difficult to get them to engage with the additional activities.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

Please comment, as appropriate, on:

3.1 Assessment methods (relevance to learning objectives and curriculum)

Written assessments were reviewed (MCQs, SAQs, written assignments and records of presentations). One external examiner had attended the majority of the OSCE sessions in December 2021 and the resit OSCEs in spring 2022. Overall, the externs believe that the combination of these assessment methods fully satisfy and examine the learning objectives and curricula and in particular commend the marking and feedback sheets developed for the presentations delivered by the second year students under the new curriculum.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Ms Hilary Orpet

Course Director Response:

Thank you

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous

All of the assessment were fair and the marking applied consistently. The new tutors and markers have blended seamlessly into the team. We believe that the maintenance of standards of assessment are a priority for the team.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Ms Hilary Orpet

Course Director Response:

Thank you it is good to hear that we have managed to maintain a good standard despite the difficulties imposed by other departments. While losing two key members of staff to maternity leave - the maternity covers have fitted in well into the team.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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

We believe, upon the work seen and our knowledge and prior experience, the level of assessment closely matches the FHEQ.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Ms Hilary Orpet

Course Director Response:

Thank you

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

3.4 Standard of marking

The standard of marking is consistently high and the new team members have blended seamlessly to provide a consistent approach to marking and feedback across the course modules.

Due to pressures of time it was not possible to interrogate the marking to determine if there continued to be the occasional soft mark highlighted last year. We are confident, however, that the situation has not got any more widespread.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Ms Hilary Orpet

Course Director Response:

Thank you and we value your scrutiny of the assessment.

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 assessment and determination of awards were sound and fairly conducted. However, they were not smooth and put an undue burden on both the external examiners, the nursing team and the smooth operation of the exam board, which had to be paused in June while additional information was gathered.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Ms Hilary Orpet

Course Director Response:

As mentioned previously it will be important for the new Head of Exams to instigate processes that ensure the issues that arose are not repeated

Action Required:

To ensure processes are developed for the smooth running of the exams office.

Action Deadline:

27-Jun-2023

Action assigned to:

Head of Exams

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

We welcome the introduction of the assessed presentations in Year two of the new course. These provide a good opportunity for immediate feedback and the opportunity for students to clarify through the oral questioning after the presentation areas the examiners seek to explore; allowing the students to demonstrate the full depth of their knowledge and aid students with weaker presentation skills in particular to display their understanding.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Ms Hilary Orpet

Course Director Response:

Thank you, we are pleased with how these presentation assessments went.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

3.7 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the procedures

There has been, across the year, an ongoing systemic failure of the smooth operation of the exams office. This has impacted the nursing course delivery team as well as the external examiners. It has resulted in short turnaround times for exam papers sent out for approval, and delays accessing the material to moderate in advance of the exam board. With respect of the most recent board, in September 2022, we continued to have material released to us under 60 minutes before the exam board commenced and the final grade spreadsheets were even later in being released to us.

This led us to having to adopt a different process to our usual practice of all modules being reviewed independently by both external examiners and points debated between ourselves and then the nursing team to one where each external examiner reviewed one cohort and only critical matters raised. We do not believe this change compromised the integrity of the process but it has significantly reduced the suggestions we can make to the team going forward and also has minimised the amount of time we were able to devote to identifying areas of outstanding practice to highlight the positive work of the team. No inference should be drawn from any reduction in the positive comments or highlighted good practice in this report save the systems did not permit us time to identify these.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Ms Hilary Orpet

Course Director Response:

It will be important that the new Head of Exams develops the processes to prevent this from occurring again as it was distressing to all involved.

Action Required:

Develop processes that ensure standards are maintained.

Action Deadline:

28-Oct-2022

Action assigned to:

Head of Exams

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:

Turn-around was very tight on some occasions and some papers came through unformatted - that is simply a document with a list of questions and standard answers so we were unable to ensure that the layout was correct as this can lead to problems just as much as a weak question. Also with the overlapping new and old curriculum, without a fully formatted paper it led to confusion in our minds as to which cohort a paper was being aimed at as similar module names are used at different points in the two iterations of the course.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Ms Hilary Orpet

Course Director Response:

Again the loss of institutional knowledge meant that processes unknown to the Veterinary Nursing team were not being followed. I gather a template is being developed for assessors to create exam papers.

Action Required:

Develop and circulate a template for question papers other than MCQs

Action Deadline:

30-Oct-2022

Action assigned to:

Exams office / Head of Exams

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

No

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

We were able to review sufficient material to carry out the primary task of ensuring the safety of the assessment system and the grades produced thereby. Insufficient time was available, due to slow access to the material to conduct wider support roles of the EE to be a critical advisor to stimulate discussion on future change, nor to highlight all areas of excellent practice and innovation. In particular we did not have time to consider the students in Year two who were failing in a longitudinal fashion to offer any suggestion why such good results in year one were not reflected in year two, nor to determine if the assessment load in year two was contributory or simply highlighted some weaker students.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Ms Hilary Orpet

Course Director Response:

Thank you for your time to complete the initial scrutiny. As previously suggested - we hope that the exams office can ensure that you have access to view first sit scripts earlier in the year to spread the review of the assessment over a longer period.

Action Required:

Ensure scripts are available to EEs after first sit of assessments

Action Deadline:

28-Oct-2022

Action assigned to:

Head of Exams

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was 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:

4.9 I have received enough training and 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)

No

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

See 4.4. above. We feel that the slow release of information through the exams office impacted our ability to do anything beyond the most basic assessment of the soundness of the assessments.

4.11 Appropriate procedures and processes have been followed

No

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

We say no because of the lack of time to fully interrogate the results. The processes as such were followed but rushed in a manner that leaves the potential for a reduction in standards to occur. Though the hard work of the nursing team and the external examiners working additional time in the evening etc the processes were completed, but not in an appropriate manner.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Ms Hilary Orpet

Course Director Response:

Thank you for your honest comments and hope that the exams office can ensure processes are developed and put in place in time for the next assessment period.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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

N/A

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

The processes are sound, it is their delivery and the support the senior management provide to the Nursing team that we have concerns about. In time, unresolved, these processes that currently ensure and maintain quality standards will fail unless urgent changes are made and support delivered to the exams and assessment to ensure the nursing delivery team can concentrate on their core roles of teaching, assessment, research and student support.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Ms Hilary Orpet

Course Director Response:

Thank you for your comments and agree.

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:

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)

