Appendix 3: External Examiners' report

MSc One Health

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 – n/a
b.	21/22 Collaborative Annual Report with responses from Course Director

Collaborative Report

Exam board meeting: 08-Sep-2022

MSc in One Health, 2021/22

Lead examiner: Dr Tiziana Lembo

Collaborating examiner(s): Professor Sue Welburn

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

1.1 Course content

The course content is very diverse, covering a broad range of topics relevant to One Health, including principles of One Health, endemic and emergent infectious disease agents, epidemiology, surveillance, economics, interventions and policy aspects. The final projects provide the students with opportunities to tackle a wide range of topics and study methodologies. In some instances, the students have an opportunity to generate their own data. In other cases, they work on given datasets and can therefore focus on analytical skills more than data collection methods.

Professor S.W

The course provides an excellent, and broad range of topics for the students, establishing a firm grounding for them for a career demanding application of a One Health Approach.

Course director response

Thanks for the positive comments. No further response required

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

These were all met. Very high standards have been set and maintained over the years. These are comparable to other peer institutions.

Professor S.W

The learning objectives are appropriate and met.

Course director response

No response required

1.3 Teaching methods

The course content is delivered using an excellent combination of methods, from core lectures, lectures delivered by external guests, practical sessions and exercises, group discussions and problem-solving learning. There is a nice range of interactive sessions, from outbreak investigations to system thinking to tackle One Health disease scenarios. The assessments are varied and enable the students to gain a wide range of skills from the more academic to the more practical. This year there was a combination of online and face-to-face delivery.

Professor S.W

Bringing students back to face to face delivery augmented by on-line interactive sessions has been appropriate.

Course director response

No response required

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

The resources available to students are comprehensive. Recordings of lectures were mostly available but the recordings of live lectures were not always of suitable quality. Transcripts and lecture notes did not seem to be available, which might limit the accessibility of materials, particularly to students with learning disabilities or language difficulties.

Professor S.W

Making lecture materials available and of good quality is essential and what students expect. Most institutions make transcripts available for taught course work.

Course director response

Thanks for the comments. In the first term, all lectures were recorded and quality of these should have been good. For term 2, we returned to face-to-face teaching. Recording of the lectures was therefore done differently from full online type of lecture, which resulted in lower quality. However, since all students were expected to attend the session, transcripts/captions of these were not provided. For the following year (2022/23), all the teaching are done f2f, with minimal use of recordings. For those few sessions done via recordings, we will request module leaders to provide a transcript.

1.5 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the Programme

The following areas could be considered for further improvements:

1. While the course offers training in a number of analytical approaches, there does not seem to be a dedicated module in statistics and use of statistical software (e.g. the R programming language). While this training is offered during the project phase to students who embark on projects requiring statistical modelling, all students would benefit from core training in statistics. This would better equip them to tackle data analyses relevant to their projects, to progress academically if the wish to do so or to enter the job market.

2. In most instances, a very good balance of topics relevant to human and animal health is offered – Economics of One Health is a particularly good example of this. However, other modules seem to be dominated by animal disease examples/scenarios, e.g. Module 4 – One Health Epidemiology.

3. Environmental aspects of One Health do not feature in the course as prominently as human and animal health topics.

4. Standardised (quantitative/qualitative) mechanisms to obtain student feedback should be considered as this could provide valuable insights and suggestions for improvements (e.g. to content, delivery, assessment procedures) that could be made in subsequent years as well as highlighting issues the students are facing.

Professor S.W

Feedback in particular for the project, a large part of the course, could be improved. Feedback should be constructive and presented in a consistent format. In addition, adoption and full use of the marking scheme should be encouraged so as to ensure and full allocation of marks available can be applied to students work.

Course director response

Thanks for these very useful comments. Responses below:
-   In 2022/23 – a new module named 'research skills and statistical analyses has been introduced. This module

provides training in basic statistics. It is also important to note that the duration of the research project is 4 months, which is longer than other MScs. This should allow students to get further quantitative skills if interested. For the academic year 2021/22, statistical training was provided, but this was done outside the modules and were optional. Not all students attended these, which is why it was important to introduce the new module.

- Improving the balance of content between human, animal and environmental health is an ongoing process. We agree that further work needs to be done to ensure adequate balance. For this reason, for the academic year 2023/24, a large number of sessions in the 'Ecosystem Health' module (currently available for MSc WAB/WAH students) will be integrated in the 'Foundations of One Health' module. We will explore with module leaders future ways in which we can increase environmental health content. However, for some modules, such as Module 4 (One Health Epidemiology), it was agreed to be more important that the basic concepts and tools are learn rather than ensuring adequate animal-human-environmental health balance.

- We are now taking minutes of course director meetings with students to capture students' feedback. Student's responses to last year module survey were low. For this academic year (2022/23) we have increased the number of reminders to students to complete this and when possible give them some time during thein-class session to help filling the survey.

- We will discuss internally whether we can provide guidelines for project feedback for the research projects. This will need to be in line with college assessment regulations.

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

Good and comparable. Very high standards have been set and maintained. These are comparable to what we experience in other peer institutions, although there were fewer students in the middle range than expected (final mark).

Professor S.W

As expected.

Course director response

No response required

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

Normal distribution. A couple of excellent students. A couple of underperforming students.

Professor S.W

As expected, with full use and allocation of an agreed marking scheme, I would expect project marks to increase.

Course director response

No response required

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

There seem to be mechanisms in place to identify and support underperforming students, although perhaps more structure to this process could be considered. For example, do individual students have access to advisors of studies? In addition, more strategic use could be made of individual student questionnaires on the extent of project supervision received. For instance, the current timing of these (at project submission stage) could be modified to identify issues earlier on in the process so that students can be provided with further support as needed. Something equivalent for supervisors to comment on generic aspects of the student's attitude towards this component of the MSc programme could also be considered.

Professor S.W

Extra support could be better applied to underperforming students, this would be improved with more face to face interaction as face to face teaching resumes.

Course director response

Indeed, students currently have a range of support available to them. This includes access to tutor to discuss concerns, marking feedback or any other related academic issues; access to advice center and access to skill center. The skill center has a range of support areas, from time management, to assessment, etc. The support for this is shown to students at the start of the MSc, during the welcome week, and also by the course directors. Student Performance and Development meetings are carried out with underperforming students or those suffering personal circumstances that affect their capacity to study.

We welcome the suggestions provided. The aim of the student questionnaire is to provide some insight to markers on the difficulties experienced by students and supervisors when undertaking the project. We will discuss whether this can be moved earlier or whether we can introduced a new questionnaire 1 month after the start of the project to check on progress. We also hope that with the returning of the f2f teaching, that the interaction with students will increase and facilitate the support to those students struggling. Module leaders will be requested to help

identify these students early on.

Please comment, as appropriate, on:

3.1 Assessment methods (relevance to learning objectives and curriculum)

Assessments are wide ranging in nature as you would expect for multidisciplinary training.

Professor S.W

Assessments are challenging, test learning and are appropriate.

Course director response

No response required

3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous

Assessments are undertaken with rigor. Very high standards for assessment have been set and maintained. These are comparable to other peer institutions, although in some institutions second marking processes are more standardised and are based on the weight of the assignment, i.e. assignments that make up more than 50% of the final mark are all second-marked. Modules whose assessment comprises only one assignment would all require second marking.

Professor S.W

Consistency in marking could be improved, more explanation of how marks are moderated by a second marker/ markers come to an agreement would be useful.

Course director response

Marking is currently done following RVC wide-college assessment regulations for RVC modules. Students are informed by the course director of the marking criteria and process during the welcome week. For LSHTM modules, double marking is done.

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

Consistent

Course director response

No response required

3.4 Standard of marking

Marking is of good quality as is the feedback, although the extent and quality of feedback vary widely across modules, including the final project.

Professor S.W

High, but more consistency is needed in markers approaches to the final project, adherence of markers to follow the marking scheme and support to use of the full range of marks available to award would be welcome.

Course director response

We will review how to provide support or guidance to markers for the writing of the project feedback

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)

Procedures are sound and applied with appropriate diligence.

Professor S.W

Appropriate.

Course director response

No response required

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

Improved.

Professor S.W

Consistent improvement has been observed.

Course director response

No response required

3.7 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the procedures

The following areas for improvement could be considered:

1. Most modules have only one large assignment, therefore passing the module depends on one single assignment. Multiple assignments could be considered, although risks of over-assessing and student fatigue should also be taken into account.

2. Format and depth of feedback differ across modules. In some cases this is structured with very clear headings (in line with aspects to be assessed), in other cases this is less structured or limited. Consistent feedback forms could be considered as well as some moderation to ensure that the depth of feedback is consistent across assessors and modules.

3. Consider providing students with access to marking criteria in line with what assessors are asked to evaluate, so that they know what they are being assessed against. In the few instances where these are given, they are very concise.

Professor S.W

It would be useful to reconsider the marking scheme and advice given to markers for the project to ensure consistency and also full allocation of marks available. If a project is excellent then award using the full range of marks to 100%

Course director response

We will discuss with module leaders the possibility to increase assessment for those modules having only one summative assessment. We agree that careful consideration should be given to avoid over assessing students and assessment fatigue.
In terms of differences between modules on the marking feedback: Currently module leaders are asked to provide feedback based on the RVC common scheme for RVC modules, or the LSHTM marking scheme for the LSHTM modules. The structure of the written feedback depends on module leader preference. We will discuss with them whether there could be an agreement for the structure of this feedback.

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Professor S.W

Yes

4.2   An acceptable response has been made

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Professor S.W

Yes

4.3   I approved the papers for the Examination

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Professor S.W

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:

Professor S.W

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:

Professor S.W

Yes

4.6 Candidates were considered impartially and fairly

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Professor S.W

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:

Professor S.W

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:

Professor S.W

Yes

4.9   I have received enough training and support to carry out my role

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Professor S.W

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:

Professor S.W

Yes

4.11   Appropriate procedures and processes have been followed

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Professor S.W

Yes

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

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Professor S.W

Yes

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:

This is an excellent course that provides students with wide-ranging multi-disciplinary training in many aspects of One Health. More opportunities to tackle the complexities of health issues at the human-animal-environment interface by integrating relevant disciplines, for example through inter-disciplinary projects, could be considered. Exposure to both qualitative and quantitative data analytical approaches within one project would also likely be beneficial to students and would improve their employability.

Professor S.W

It has been a pleasure serving on this board, the course has consistently improved, the passion and commitment of the staff is to be commended. The students acquire a comprehensive knowledge base and broad skill set appropriate to a career path in OH that will stand them in good stead for their future careers.

Course director response

Thank you again for all your valuable comments. They will help improve our MSc. Regarding the comments on project methods and interdisciplinarity, this is indeed a complex issue. The research project need to provide students with the basic skills on how to implement a research project and write a thesis. It is not possible to restrict the methods, as these can be numerous. The project can also provide students the opportunity to gain a skills they are interested in (e.g. spatial analysis). We allow project to have a focus on a particular discipline, as long as the OH implications or context are provided in the discussion or the literature review. We will consider however the possibility of restricting or encouraging interdisciplinarity projects .

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)

N/A