

## ANNUAL QUALITY IMPROVEMENT REPORT 2022/23

### Appendix 3: External Examiners' report

### Veterinary Gateway

This appendix contains Course Director's responses to 2022/23 External Examiners' comments and updates to actions from previous External Examiners' reports.

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](mailto: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 Year Leader.  Report written by: Dr Jennie Litten-Brown

Report Question	External Examiners' comment in 2021/22	Course Directors response and actions	Update in 2022/23
<b>2.3 Student performance</b>	... a higher incidence of plagiarism.	<p>Incorporate 'avoiding plagiarism' training into the academic tutorial programme for the Gateway cohort. Remind staff to check the Turnitin similarity report for potential plagiarism before submitting marks.</p> <p><b>Action Deadline:</b> 09-Jan-2023</p> <p><b>Action assigned to:</b> L Thurston and all Gateway tutors</p>	<p>In 2022-23, we delivered study skills workshops targeting student understanding of plagiarism; academic tutorials discussing plagiarism examples based around the Biology of Cells in-course assessment essay; and ran a linked plagiarism lecture and directed learning session.</p> <p>The online examination/in-course assessment marking procedures continue to require staff to tick a box stating that they have checked each submission for plagiarism before submitting their mark - this has been helpful in prompting staff to be more diligent in checking the similarity index on the Turnitin software.</p>
<b>3.4 Standard of marking</b>	...concerns regarding the consistency of feedback	<p><b>Action Required:</b></p> <p>Incorporate an online marking rubric to enhance consistency of feedback in assessments.</p> <p><b>Action Deadline:</b></p>	<p>In 2022-23, we introduced a marking rubric for the Gateway PDI module presentations and the library project presentations, which has helped markers to standardise their feedback. We will continue to provide staff with guidance on how to structure their feedback (eg. specific feedback</p>

		01-May-2023 <b>Action assigned to:</b> L Thurston, C Lawson, D Palmer	subheadings for the library project) and reminded them that their written feedback should provide all students with an understanding of the mark awarded and suggestions on where to improve in the future.
--	--	---	---

The Programme

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

**1.1 Course content**

The course content is appropriate for the Gateway course. It has been well designed and continues to enable the students to have a wide range of modules which are well matched to the veterinary science area and our general scientific understanding of the world. Evidence shows that the course is clearly enabling students to progress in their chosen career path.

**COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston**

**Course Director Response:**

We thank the external examiners for their positive comments and will continue to develop the Gateway Programme in response to advances in scientific and/or pedagogical fields.

**Action Required:**

**Action Deadline:**

**Action assigned to:**

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

The Learning objectives were clearly stated on RVC LEARN for the students and examiners to see.

**COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston**

**Course Director Response:**

We thank the external examiners for recognising that all learning objectives are clearly signposted on Learn to students for each learning activity.

**Action Required:**

**Action Deadline:**

**Action assigned to:**

### 1.3 Teaching methods

I have seen evidence from student comments, as well as the official paperwork, that a wide variety of teaching methods and styles are employed in the delivery of this course – partly by design but also due to the range of academics who deliver content. This is clearly appreciated by the students on the course and personally I think it is appropriate as there are many different learning styles present in our students.

In my exploration of the student voice, I found many examples where students praised the teaching methods and felt they were well supported. There was an example of a module where the students were not so happy but I will discuss this in more detail below. It is clear, however, that the students feel they can provide feedback which will be listened to and action taken by staff wherever possible.

#### **COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston**

##### **Course Director Response:**

We thank the external examiners for recognising the significant efforts of the course management team and teaching staff in integrating a wide variety of teaching methods in order to accommodate the needs of the Gateway programme widening participation cohort. We agree that the students feel well supported and when issues do occasionally arise, they feel that problems are dealt with swiftly and effectively. Despite the move back to on-campus teaching we have continued to provide (1) online introductory study material to ensure that all students come to lectures with similar baseline skills; (2) online subject quizzes and revision resources; (3) online module discussion forums where students can post questions to staff (and each other); (4) interactive online anatomy and histology programmes to consolidate on-campus practical teaching; (5) pre-recorded lecture material as a revision resource. These complementary online resources are appreciated by the Gateway students who often have responsibilities away from the RVC that mean they may not be able to attend all on campus teaching (eg. employment, carer, childcare).

##### **Action Required:**

##### **Action Deadline:**

##### **Action assigned to:**

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

There was no evidence in what I saw to suggest resource was a problem for students.

## 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

Overall the performance of the students continues to be similar to other institutions which I am familiar with.

**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

In most modules the whole range of marks were used and there were clearly students who showed high ability as well as those who exhibited much less aptitude. My external examiner colleague analysed this in more detail and it is interesting to note that while each fits a bell shaped distribution curve the mean score achieved is noticeably lower in the IGE exam compared to other modules.

Bio of Cell exam: Bell shaped distribution in results- mean 65%

IGE exam: Bell shaped distribution- mean 46%

Development: Bell shaped distribution- mean 53%

The moving animal: Bell shaped distribution- mean 58%

Integrated Physiology I: Bell shaped distribution - mean 60%

While there are students who are clearly struggling with other modules and, therefore there is an element of student ability, the IGE module continues to be the one which student's performance appears to be an anomaly. I remain impressed by the amount of support the students receive and will receive as they complete their summer resits.

**COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston**

#### Course Director Response:

We thank the external examiners for their positive comments regarding the degree of revision support and interventions provided for students throughout the year and for those who are required to resit examinations/in-course assessments over the summer. Moving forward, those students who have performed less well are identified by the Gateway Year Lead and the Transition Tutor and are supported into the first year of their BVetMed studies.

We agree with the external examiner's observations regarding the performance distributions across the 6 taught modules and the marked decrease in the performance profile in the Inheritance Genes and Evolution (IGE) module. This has mirrored our own analysis of performance across the Gateway modules, but also across the RVC courses as a whole. As the external examiners are aware, this is an ongoing issue which unfortunately has not been resolved in 2022-23 despite significant teaching interventions and changes to the structure of the examination. We have attempted to investigate explanations for this discrepancy - for example, we correlated IGE performance with GCSE maths grade and success in the BVetMed course going forward, but found no significant relationship in either data set. After contacting the Gateway students' schools, we have become aware that they may be lacking in fundamental baseline molecular and genetic skills, as these topics are taught last in the level 3 curriculum and are 'missed' in student cohorts that are viewed to be struggling. In order to address this, we have

delivered fundamental skills transition workshops at the start of the IGE module in an attempt to fill the knowledge gaps. We will tailor the content of these workshops going forward as we learn more about how to prepare the students for their level 4 molecular and genetics modules.

**Action Required:**

**Action Deadline:**

**Action assigned to:**

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

As shown above, unfortunately the IGE module remains an outlier in terms of student performance. Whilst I was capturing the student voice I noticed that there was concern in the students about the management of the module and the timing of information about the assessment, this is also very different feedback to that received about the other modules. I would like to ask colleagues to consider if additional changes could be made which would improve this module? I would imagine that previous changes have now been assessed in terms of success. I appreciate that student ability remains part of the story and analysis shows that students who do not perform well in IGE often do not perform elsewhere but the student voice suggests that some alterations may be possible. There are cases of plagiarism occurring which appear to not be being picked up however I understand there were some problems with the technology so the procedures and staff guidance have been revisited.

#### **COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston**

##### **Course Director Response:**

As discussed previously, unfortunately, the Inheritance, Genes and Evolution (IGE) module has again seen poorer student performance compared to other Gateway modules. We thank the external examiners for recognising the improvements made in the preparation of students for this challenging module and the changes to the module assessments, which bring it in to line with similar assessments in other Gateway modules. I agree with the external examiners that some elements of student feedback in this module are negative, and suggestions that students did not receive adequate communication regarding assessment related information is of particular concern. We will bring this to the attention of the module leader, year 1/Gateway leaders and BSc course director they can implement changes to assessment signposting.

We agree that incidences of plagiarism are still taking place despite additional student training in workshops and via the tutorial system. In the Gateway year, cases of plagiarism investigated via Student Progress and Development are usually found to be non-intentional and due to poor scholarship, indicating a need for additional training throughout the year. In 2023-24, we will be incorporating additional 'plagiarism and how to avoid it' training via the Veterinary Communication support module which will ensure that students are given tuition in this topic that is tailored for each taught module and its associated ICA.

The majority of incidences of plagiarism are being successfully identified by staff, but unfortunately one case of collusion was not picked up until the external examiners reviewed the scripts. Staff will be reminded of the need to rigorously check the Turnitin reports before marking assessments.

##### **Action Required:**

1. Elements of student feedback in the Inheritance, Genes and Evolution (IGE) module were negative, suggesting that students did not receive adequate communication regarding assessment related information. Student information in IGE taught sessions and on Learn should be updated to ensure assessment signposting is adequate and easily accessible.

**Action Deadline:**

01-Oct-2023

**Action assigned to:**

B Cobb, L Thurston, D Palmer, C Lawson

Please comment, as appropriate, on:

### 3.1 Assessment methods (relevance to learning objectives and curriculum)

There continue to be a wide variety of assessment methods employed which is similar to other HEIs within the sector. I believe the online assessment has been embraced by the students and continues to be popular. I have a slight concern about the disparity in the wording of feedback and the marks given, work was second marked and there is no concern that the mark was not appropriate but I feel colleagues need to ensure that the wording of the feedback matches the level of mark awarded, I would also like to see more examples of constructive feedback – ensuring that the students are empowered to perform better in future assessments. I did see very nice examples of general feedback and I wonder if there were efficiencies seen by the staff.

**COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston**

#### **Course Director Response:**

We thank the external examiners for their positive comments. As noted by the external examiners, a benefit of the online assessment format is that it is now more time efficient and straightforward for academic staff.

We agree that while marks awarded are appropriate and fair, there are incidences where the wording of feedback does not directly reflect the marks awarded. We will continue to provide staff with guidance on how to structure their feedback (eg. feedback subheadings for the library project) and reminded them that their written feedback should reflect both the wording found in the RVC grading schemes, and the mark assigned to the assessment.

#### **Action Required:**

#### **Action Deadline:**

#### **Action assigned to:**

### 3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous

I believe the assessment procedures are rigorous and fair, colleagues are well aware of where additional student support is needed and they provide it.

**COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston**

#### **Course Director Response:**

We thank the external examiners for their positive comments on the assessments and also their recognition of the efforts made to support the Gateway widening participation cohort.

#### **Action Required:**

#### **Action Deadline:**

#### **Action assigned to:**

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

The level of assessment in all programmes is consistent with the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.

**COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston**

#### **Course Director Response:**

We thank the external examiners for their positive comment.

#### **Action Required:**

#### **Action Deadline:**

#### **Action assigned to:**

### **3.4 Standard of marking**

I saw many examples of feedback which varied in both quality and quantity, it would be good to have more consistency there. Was the rubric introduced in September 2022? What was the analysis on that? I was able to see evidence of double marking and discussions around marks.

**COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston**

#### **Course Director Response:**

We note the external examiners concerns regarding the consistency of feedback styles on some assessments. The use of online marking has enabled us to provide greater consistency when marking examinations, requiring staff to provide feedback on each sub-section of a question and so, providing the students with a more detailed understanding of the reasoning behind their mark. However, there remains variation between markers in the method and occasionally the quality of the feedback provided for in-course assessments. At present, the RVC assessment policies allow markers to choose the form of their feedback with individual markers opting to provide either a summary feedback report or in-document edits, as they see fit. While this policy remains, it is likely that we will see variation in feedback methods. Regardless of the method of feedback, markers will be reminded that they should be providing detailed and reflective feedback for students with pointers on how they could improve their mark going forward. In 2022-23, we introduced a marking rubric for the Gateway PDI module presentations and the library project presentations, which has helped markers to standardise their feedback. We will continue to provided staff with guidance on how to structure their feedback (eg. specific feedback subheadings for the library project) and reminded them that their written feedback should provide all students with an understanding of the mark awarded and suggestions on where to improve in the future.

#### **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 conducted extremely professionally and my thanks go to the Exams office who were always fully communicative and supportive in order for me to perform my role as external. Papers were sent in plenty of time for proof-reading prior to the exam being set and during the preparation for the final exam board we had additional meetings to ensure the procedures were fully followed. I was unable to attend the board was not face-to-face and technology was problematic on the day but my work was captured and reported.

**COURSE DIRECTOR: Dr Lisa Thurston**

**Course Director Response:**

We would like to thank the RVC Exams Office staff, in particular Emma Rosenberg, for her efficiency in running the Gateway assessments and assisting the External Examiners.

**Action Required:**

**Action Deadline:**

**Action assigned to:**

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

As far as my analysis shows there haven't been changes to the assessment procedures this year.

**3.7 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the procedures**

No additional comments

**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:**

**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:**

**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)**

**Yes**

**Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:**

**4.11 Appropriate procedures and processes have been followed**

**Yes**

**Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:**

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

**Yes**

**Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:**



