

Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Procedure

External Examiners

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1. Introduction and purpose

This document is intended to clarify the role of external examiners at the Royal Veterinary College. The purposes of this procedure are:

- to ensure that the degrees awarded by the RVC are comparable in standard to those awarded by other University of London colleges and by other UK veterinary schools;
- to ensure fairness and consistency in assessment procedures and student classification;
- to scrutinise the effectiveness and appropriateness of the assessment system;
- to assure the wider community of the standard of the RVC's degrees, and of the fairness of its assessment procedures.

This procedure is designed to ensure that the RVC continues to meet the Quality Code's Expectations and Core Practices as well as Office for Students' ongoing Conditions of Registration.

2. Scope

This procedure covers the appointment of External Examiners for all taught programmes of study, both undergraduate and postgraduate. It does not cover research degrees or non-award-bearing continuing education.

3. Procedures

3.1 Accountability

Although External Examiners are nominated initially by Examining Boards via the relevant Course Director, and work closely with departmental staff, they are accountable to the Academic Board.

3.2 Appointments

Potential External Examiners are approached by Course Directors/Year Leaders and given a full verbal/written briefing, including the details of arrangements to carry out their duties (e.g. information about the extent and timing of obligations). They are encouraged to ask for additional information at this stage and are requested to provide a copy of their current Curriculum Vitae. Full information, including Programme Specifications, Assessment and Award Regulations and previous External Examiners' reports are available on RVC website. Nominations of External Examiners will be submitted by Course Directors/Year Leaders to Senior Academic Quality Officer 'Standards'. The Senior Academic Quality Officer 'Standards' will forward nominations for approval to the Chair of the relevant Board of Examiners and Teaching Quality Committee. The Teaching Quality Committee will scrutinise nominations and CVs against the criteria for eligibility laid down in section 4.6 of this document. Nominations supported by the Teaching Quality Committee will be forwarded to the Academic Board for endorsement. For the FdSc/BSc Veterinary Nursing and Cert Advanced Veterinary Nursing, the nominee's CV & CPD Record is initially put forward to the RCVS for approval before the nomination is considered by the RVC. For the MSc LHP and MSc VEPH (Distance Learning) the RVC approves the nomination of external examiners and University of London Worldwide (former International Academy) gives final approval and sends out contracts. For Undergraduate Courses, the Senior Academic Quality Officer 'Standards' will write annually to Course Directors/Year Leaders in the Spring term (with a copy to the relevant Chair of the Boards of Examiners and Programme Support Coordinator) to notify them of External Examiner

appointments for the next academic year. For MSc courses this process will normally take place in the Summer Term.

If the Chair of an Exam Board considers there is cause for concern about the integrity of an imminent examination process, (or an external examiner is unable to attend due to unforeseen circumstances, which may compromise the outcome of an exam board), then a temporary external examiner may be appointed as a one off. The replacement should be identified and agreed by the Chair of the Teaching Quality Committee (verbally or in writing) as soon as possible. The proposed external examiner, in exceptional circumstances, may be a recent employee of the RVC or recent external examiner of the course to be examined.

3.3 Teams of External Examiners

A team of External Examiners should have responsibility for the whole programme although they may examine only part of it in detail. The team of External Examiners should satisfy the criteria in Section 4.6.

Boards of Examiners must include an External Examiner from outside the University of London.

3.4 Period of Appointment

The period of appointment of External Examiners shall normally be from 1st October to 31st December, four years later. The period of appointment will defer for courses that commence outside of the normal academic year. This will enable the External Examiner to be involved in assessments from the start of the academic year and to continue in office to deal with reviews, re-sits etc. External Examiners are normally appointed for one year in the first instance, with the option of extending this for a further three years. Either party may conclude after the end of the first year that the External Examinership should not be extended.

If an External Examiner resigns before the expiry of their normal period of office, he or she should write formally to the Principal, giving sufficient notice for the appointment of a replacement. The Senior Academic Quality Officer 'Standards' will write to the External Examiner inviting them to provide feedback on the reason for their resignation.

If an Examining Board wishes to terminate an External Examiner's appointment, this must be done through a formal proposal to the Teaching Quality Committee, and only with the approval of the Principal as Chair of the Academic Board.

3.5 Appointment Criteria

External Examiners are appointed by, and are accountable to, the Academic Board and report to the Principal, as Chairman of the Board.

External Examiners should normally satisfy the following criteria:

- They should have competence and experience in the field covered by the course. They should be recognised authorities in their subject. This may be demonstrated through experience, seniority, or both. Academic External Examiners should normally be of the rank of at least Senior Lecturer or Reader, or equivalent.
- They should have expertise and experience in assessment at the appropriate level. If the proposed External Examiner has no previous external examining experience, he or she should normally have demonstrable equivalent experience or extensive internal examining experience or have other recent experience relevant to external examining. They should agree to attend

- appropriate induction and, where appropriate, training.
- They should be fluent in English, normally demonstrated through experience of teaching on courses taught in English.
 - They should meet any criteria set out by professional and accrediting bodies.
 - They should have an appreciation of good practice in the design and delivery of teaching and assessment.
 - In order to ensure impartiality, they should normally not have had close involvement with the RVC in the last three years, e.g. as a member of staff; a member of the Council; a student of the RVC; a near relative of an Internal Examiner. They should not be personally associated with the sponsorship of students; or involved closely with student placements. They should have no close personal connection with any candidate being examined. It is acceptable for an external member of a validation and periodic review panel to become an external examiner for the same course.
 - They should not be required to assess colleagues who are recruited as students to the programme of study.
 - They should not be in a position to influence significantly the future of students on the programme of study.
 - After completion of a term of office, a period of three years must normally elapse before an External Examiner is eligible for re-appointment to a Board of Examiners. An external examiner may have his or her term of office extended or may be reappointed to the same Board of Examiners immediately after completion of a term of office only in exceptional circumstances.
 - A new External Examiner should not, where possible, be from the same institution as the retiring External Examiner.
 - Where possible, there should not be reciprocal external examining arrangements in individual subjects. They should normally hold no more than two external examiner appointments at any point in time, including the one at The Royal Veterinary College. It is acceptable for an individual to hold two External Examinerships at the RVC, provided the courses are not closely related.
 - Staff recently retired may be appointed where appropriate; normally they should have retired not more than three years prior to appointment as an examiner. Retired persons should normally have evidence of continued activity in the academic area in question and may be appointed in order to balance the appointment of a relatively junior external examiner with limited experience.
 - When External Examiners are appointed from practice, research institutes and other non-academic institutions, they should normally be part of a team which includes External Examiners with experience in Higher Education. For RCVS accredited veterinary nursing awards, at least one External Examiner must be a subject expert e.g., a registered veterinary nurse etc.
 - The period of appointment of External Examiners shall be from 1st October to 31st December, one year later, with the possibility of re-appointment for three further years.

A team of External Examiners should between them satisfy the following criteria:

- All External Examiners who are members of a Board of Examiners have shared responsibility for the whole Examination, even though each one may examine only part of it in detail.
- External Examiners with limited experience or who are relatively junior may be appointed if their presence is balanced by External Examiners of seniority and experience.

- Appointments of External Examiners to a Board of Examiners should be staggered, to ensure continuity.
- There should, wherever possible, be no more than one External Examiner from the same institution on a Board of Examiners.

Each Board of Examiners must include:

- at least one examiner external to the University of London.
- at least one examiner with academic qualifications to at least the FHEQ level of the qualification being externally examined.
- at least one examiner with current experience working in Higher Education

3.6 Training and Support

Newly appointed External Examiners are required to complete an online induction hosted on the RVC's Virtual Learning Environment 'RVC Learn'. This induction consists of a 30-minute presentation followed by an MCQ assessment. The Senior Academic Quality Officer 'Standards' monitors if the External Examiners have successfully completed the induction.

Although attendance is not compulsory, all External Examiners are invited to attend the RVC's Annual Inset Day on Assessment run by RVC Educational Development. Travel expenses for attending this event are covered by the RVC, however no attendance fees are offered.

The documentation provided to External Examiners at the beginning of the Academic Year includes:

from the Academic Quality Team, Academic Registry:

- A formal initial appointment letter
- A continuation letter (at the end of first year of appointment)
- Invitation to attend the Inset Day on Assessment.

Further documentation available in the External Examiners section of the RVC's website and 'RVC Learn' for which the login details are arranged by the Senior Academic Quality Officer 'Standards' and communicated to External Examiners prior to their visit to the RVC:

- Expense and fee claim forms;
- Details of how to submit your Annual External Examiners Report;
- Exam Timetables (including the dates of Board of Examiners Meetings);
- List of Examiners (including Course Directors, Year Leaders, Chairs and Deputy Chairs of Exam Boards);
- External Examiner reports for the previous year, and the RVC's responses;

Course Information is available on 'RVC Learn' and this includes Learning Objectives, details of In-Course and End of year assessment, links to Programme Specification, Assessment and Award Regulations etc.

The Academic Quality, Regulations and Procedures section of the RVC website includes all of the RVC's regulations on examining and assessment, and the RVC's Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Procedures.

The External Examiner section of the website also includes other useful links and Contacts, such as:

- The current prospectus
- Exams Office Team
- Equality Scheme
- National Subject Benchmarks (where available)
- Learning, Teaching and Assessment Enhancement Strategy
- Framework for higher education qualifications (FHEQ);
- Links to QAA's Concerns Scheme and OfS' notifications.

External Examiners will be notified of any up-dates to the above which will be placed on the external examiners' section of the RVC website.

3.7 External Examiner Duties

External Examiner are required to review a sample of all summative assessed work for their designated course / year prior to results being approved formally at the Examination Board. Usually the reviewing takes place at one of the RVC campuses and is in the period leading up to the Examination Board. External Examiners are expected to attend the Examination Board (both 1st sit and resit) in order to report the findings of the review and participate fully in the process of approving the results.

During the review of the summatively assessed work, the duties of the External Examiners include:

- Reviewing in-course assessments and projects
- Reviewing student scripts from written examinations
- Reviewing statistical analysis for MCQ and EMQ examinations
- Flagging any batches of marking where there are concerns regarding inconsistency or where it is difficult to understand how marks have been determined
- Observe oral examinations
- Observing clinical / practical examinations (this may be at a separate time of year)
- Ensuring the suit of assessments satisfies the objectives of the course and covers the specified content
- Ensuring that there are no irregularities in the conduct of the assessments and the assessments have been conducted in accordance with the Regulations
- Prior to the written examinations, External Examiners will be asked to review and approve papers and submit any comments or concerns they may have. Comments raised will be considered and / or responded to by the appropriate academic.
- At time there may be a need to review work remotely, usually online, due to the course schedule or specific student circumstance.
- External Examiners are asked to look at a sample of scripts and flag at the Exam Board Meeting any batches of marking that lack annotations for the purpose of helping to determine why a mark(s) has been provided. Further information on this process can be found within Constitution and Function of Exam Boards. (under 'Duties of External Examiners').

3.8 Meeting Students

The RVC will, where possible, provide an opportunity for External Examiners to meet relevant students for an informal discussion on the experience of their course. Arranging this type of meeting is dependent on the availability of the students at the time of External Examiners' visit to the RVC.

3.9 Annual Report

External Examiners should be asked to comment on the following (numbering follows report numbering):

The programme

- 1.1 course content
- 1.2 learning objectives
- 1.3 teaching methods
- 1.4 resources (in so far as they affected the assessment)

Student Performance

- 2.1 Students' performance in relation to those at a similar stage on comparable courses in other institutions, where this is known to the External Examiner
- 2.2 Quality of Candidates' knowledge and skills, with particular reference to those at the top, middle or bottom of the range

Assessment Procedures

- 3.1 Assessment methods (relevance to learning objectives and curriculum)
- 3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous
- 3.3 Consistency of the level of assessment with the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)
- 3.4 Standard of marking
- 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)
- 3.6 Opinion on changes to the assessment procedures from previous years in which you have examined
- 3.7 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the procedures

General Statements

External Examiners are asked to answer with Yes or No and provide, any additional comments particularly if their answer was No, to the following statements:

- 4.1 Comments I have made in previous years have been addressed to my satisfaction
- 4.2 An acceptable response has been made
- 4.3 I approved the papers for the Examinations
- 4.4 I was able to scrutinise an adequate sample of
- 4.5 ' work and marks to enable me to carry out my duties
- 4.6 I attended the meeting of the Board of Examiners held to approve the results of the examinations
- 4.7 Candidates were considered impartially and fairly
- 4.8 The standards set for the awards are appropriate for qualifications at this level, in this subject
- 4.9 The standards of student performance are comparable with similar programmes or subjects in other UK institutions with which I am familiar
- 4.10 I have received enough training and support to carry out my role
- 4.11 I have received sufficient information to carry out my role
- 4.12 Appropriate procedures and processes have been followed
- 4.13 The processes for assessment and the determination of awards are sound

External Examiners are also asked to identify any areas of good practice and provide suggestions for improvements.

3.10 Submission and consideration of External Examiners Annual Reports

- During the exam board meeting, external examiners are required to agree whether a collaborative and/or individual report(s) will be submitted. For collaborative reports, a 'lead examiner' must be agreed upon. The exams officer will confirm with the External Examiners whether there is to be a collaborative or individual report(s) and confirm with the Senior Academic Quality Officer 'Standards' who can then set up the online system to send the log in details to External Examiners. Reports must be submitted within 3 weeks of the exam board meeting, via the RVC's online system.
- For a collaborative report, the lead examiner must write the report within one week in the online report and submit it for approval by the collaborating examiners. Collaborating examiners will then receive an email asking them to approve the report in the online system within 1 week. Should collaborating examiners disagree with the content of the report that the lead examiner has submitted, they can request amendments by providing the lead examiner with their comments within the online system. The system will allow changes to the report once only. If after this any of the collaborating examiners continue to disagree with the content of the report and do not wish to approve it, they will be offered to submit their individual report.
- Once submitted, the report is forwarded to the Course Director/Year Leader, to request a response to External Examiners' comments. The response and actions, where applicable, will be agreed between key members of staff, on behalf of the RVC, before submitting it for review and approval by the Annual Quality Improvement Group.
- In cases where an External Examiner's report contains particularly serious or pressing criticism, the Senior Academic Quality Officer 'Standards' will flag this to the Chair of Teaching Quality Committee who will contact the appropriate Chair of Board of Examiners & Course Director/Year Leader (Head of Department where appropriate) immediately the report is received.
- Where the External Examiner has raised an issue of principle which has not already been addressed by the Board of Examiners (Head of Department, where appropriate), it should first be discussed by the Examiners or Course Management Committee, whichever is appropriate to the circumstances. The Chair of the Board of Examiners and/or Course Director/Year Leader or Head of Department, as appropriate, then sends a written response to the Senior Academic Quality Officer 'Standards'.
- Replies from members of staff who have been asked to provide a response and actions where appropriate, to specific External Examiner comments should be submitted in the online system within three weeks.
- When writing a report External Examiners should not include any text that could identify individual staff or students. Where an individual can be easily identified from External Examiners' report comments and the responses to them, these should be treated as reserved business and not published on the intranet, external website etc.
- Individual course reports with RVC responses and actions will form part, as an Appendix 3, of the Annual Quality Improvement Report that will be reviewed by the Annual Quality Improvement Group.
- Course Management Committees, External Examiners, Chairs of Examination Boards and Programme Support Coordinators will be informed when the individual course reports of External Examiner comments and the responses to them are published on the examiners website.
- The Senior Academic Quality Officer 'Standards' and the Annual Quality Improvement Group monitor progress against Action Plans. Course Director/Year Leader are requested to provide updates to the action plan prior to the next Annual Quality Improvement Group meeting.

- The Academic Quality Manager produces an annual summary of Academic Quality Improvement Reports and submits it to TQC, Academic Board and RVC Council.
- The Senior Academic Quality Officer 'Standards' provides Programme Support Co-ordinators with an up to date list of appointed External Examiners. This list includes the following details: External Examiner's name, position, institution. These details are published on each course page on RVC LEARN with a reminder to students to note that they are prohibited from contacting external examiners regarding any aspect of their programme of study. In addition to this, a link is made available for students to access the latest External Examiners' Annual Reports with RVC's Responses.

3.11 Payment of Fees and Expenses

External Examiners are paid their fees and expenses by the Academic Quality Office according to rates agreed from time to time by the Principal following consultation with Teaching Quality Committee. They are paid their fees only on receipt of their report. In addition, in extreme circumstances, the External Examiner's contract would not be renewed the following year. External Examiners would use the relevant forms to claim their fees and expenses. The forms are automatically emailed to External Examiners by the online system upon submission of their final report. These are also available on the website.

Any required accommodation should be booked through the Exams office or via the Course Programme Support Coordinator.

3.12 External Examiner Dinners

At the end of each main examination period, all external examiners for a course (or year of a course with respect to the BVetMed only), can be hosted to a dinner by a maximum of two RVC staff to one external examiner. The total cost should not exceed £40 per person and drinks should be no more than 25% of this. There should be no departmental top-up to meet costs in excess of £40 per head.

3.13 Programmes delivered with the University of London Worldwide

The University of London 'Worldwide' sends letters of appointment and associated documentation to External Examiners on the International Programmes (please see section 4.2 Appointment of this document). After the exams, the University forwards completed External Examiner reports on to the RVC for the necessary responses to any comments raised.

3.14 Intra Mural Rotations (BVetMed)

If a student re-sitting a clinical rotation fails that rotation, written feedback is collected from the appraisal team as to why they felt that student failed, and this feedback can be presented to the External Examiners at the Exam Board meeting for their scrutiny. External Examiners may convene a meeting with the Director of Rotations during the time they are at the RVC to help them scrutinise the process.

3.15 Right to Work in the UK and Data Protection

In compliance with the UK Government's Right to Work, all newly appointed External Examiners are required to complete a right to work in the UK check. We therefore require all External Examiners to present their passport or other proof of ID during their first visit to the RVC. A member of staff (Academic Quality Officer 'Standards' or a member of Exams team), would undertake the right to work check in line with the Right to Work Checklist.

In accordance with the General data Protection Regulation (GDPR, 25 May 2018), the following information is collected and stored securely and used for the purposes in relation to the contractual employment of External Examiners with the RVC:

- Name and contact information (including work or/and home address, phone number and email address)
- Qualifications and experience to enable us to determine the suitability of External Examiners nomination and appointment
- Bank and NI details (held only by the RVC's Payroll and Finance Department).
- Copy of the passport (please note above the Right to Work in the UK check).

4. Associated documents and procedures

- External Examiners Nomination Form
- Online External Examiners Report Template (Word version)
- Constitution and Function of Boards of Examiners
- [External Examiner Online Induction](#) (requires RVC Learn Log-in)
- [External Examiner Online Report System](#) (requires RVC Account Log-in).