

ANNUAL QUALITY IMPROVEMENT REPORT 2019/20

Appendix 3: External Examiners' report

Graduate Diploma in Equine Locomotor Research

This appendix contains Year Leader's responses to 2019/20 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 – <i>no actions from previous year requiring a response!</i>
b.	2019/20 Collaborative Annual Report with responses from Course Director

Collaborative Report

Exam board meeting: 29-May-2020

Graduate Diploma in Equine Locomotor Research, 2019/20

Lead examiner: Dr Connie Wiskin

Collaborating examiner(s): Dr Sarah Taylor

The Programme

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

1.1 Course content

Course content for both cohorts reviewed was consummate with expectations for the programme. Components cover teaching & learning methods, literature review, case reporting reflection, study design and research fundamentals. As previous the content encourages participating Farriers to consider both existing research (to inform understanding of evidence-based practice) and contribution to the field (though development of an original research investigation).

Dr S.T

no comments

COURSE DIRECTOR: Mr Thilo Pfau

Course Director Response:

Thank you for the encouraging comments.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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

Expectations of learner outcomes seem clear, and appropriate direction to outcomes is available through the online materials portal. Participants have access to these (and presumably to teachers should any outcomes/requirements need further clarification). There is implicit alignment of outcomes to scoring criteria through the marking grids. A question I meant to ask was the degree to which learners have visibility of the score criteria. I assume this is via publication of the RVC common grading scheme, in conjunction with supervisor comments of working drafts, should further directional input be required. Reviewing an extensive sample of submitted work, along with assessor feedback reports and scores, it was possible to see the extent to which published outcomes were met, and to what degree. The process in that respect is confirmed as transparent, and complete.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Mr Thilo Pfau

Course Director Response:

Thank you for these comments. With regards to your question about the grading scheme: this is available to staff and students. We will make sure that a link to the grading scheme is being made available more prominently within the respective modules.

Action Required:

Add links to common grading scheme from within module.

Action Deadline:

01-Sep-2020

Action assigned to:

Course Support

A link to the relevant pages can for example be found in the 'Critical Evaluation of Scientific Literature' Module of the Grad Dip ELR: <https://learn.rvc.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=1504>

1.3 Teaching methods

The course is well-established now, and the current cycle utilises tried and tested methods that work at programme level. Acceptability to learners is a factor for consideration (see 1.5, below).

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

No further comments from the previous cycle(s). The outcome range presented to the exam board, and success of learners in meeting outcomes, suggests that resources met expectations and enabled completion of components to the expected standard. COVID-19 came late the process, but may well be a consideration going forward in that access to physical resources is likely to be limited and remote alternatives may need to be explored (context/environment/staff availability dependent).

COURSE DIRECTOR: Mr Thilo Pfau

Course Director Response:

Thank you. Yes Covid-19 influence was negligible for these cohorts and the blended design of the course is an ideal platform to implement changes that may be necessary for the current and future cohorts.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

1.5 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the Programme

It'd be interesting to see participant feedback, to contextualise assumptions we might make about learner engagement/views from viewing submitted reports and on-line instructions and materials. This was requested in the previous report, and we had hoped to be able to engage more with student perspective this time around. Emergent Coronavirus is likely to have impacted on responsiveness to additional requests, and clearly neither EE could be present for a visit this time, but this is something I think we'd hope to pick up when the climate stabilises.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Mr Thilo Pfau

Course Director Response:

We are sorry about the fact that, similar to the external examiners, the student representatives were not available onsite for direct feedback for the external examiners. We will aim to make a direct communication between student representatives and external examiners possible in the future.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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

To comment on this, one needs to be mindful that this is a vocational programme. Its obvious strength is inclusivity, commendably offering access to education and scholarly pursuit to individuals who (while expert in the practical setting) may have been out of formal education for some time, or indeed not previously had access to this type of research activity. For me (CW) this has great appeal, and I have been impressed during both years of appointment by the endeavour, commitment and quality output of this group. The learning curve for some is likely steeper than for others, but overall the performance level is good, and as expected. Work quality aligns with what I know of another PG programme for mature HCPs, and in some cases (the higher end of the research projects) can exceed diploma expectations and have parallels with healthcare degree programmes. A weakness (albeit it a very small number of cases, proportionally) can be writing style and understanding of how to quote references and use text with full creditation, but this is perhaps to be expected with more mature candidates (compared to those immersed for consecutive years in education before embarking on PG student) and is moderated by staff support on 1st submissions. Overall the programme performs well, and aligns with educational norms for vocational study elsewhere.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Mr Thilo Pfau

Course Director Response:

Thank you for your overall positive comments. We completely agree with this assessment and indeed writing style and quoting of references appears to be an area that some individuals need more guidance and practice than others. A good proportion of this year's graduates are planning on publishing their work in peer reviewed Journals and no doubt will this be a further opportunity for them to improve on this. The supervisors will be available throughout this process as co-authors of the publications and we see this as a further opportunity for the (ex-) students to improve on this and we encourage them to conduct further research and bring it to publication.

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

Results reviewed conformed well to education norms (bell curve) across all components. No particular concerns, and well done to all involved. I reviewed submitted work across fail, borderline, expected, good and excellent categories for all components in both streams. The majority, as one would hope, demonstrated skills and knowledge that aligned with programme requirements and learning objectives. In some cases outstanding work was noted, and I support the full range of scores applied. The quality of work reviewed was very encouraging.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Mr Thilo Pfau

Course Director Response:

Thank you. We are particularly happy that the External Examiners have noted some 'outstanding work'. We completely agree with this.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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

As mentioned at the board one or two need more input perhaps with academic writing. We take on board that academic methods interventions exist early in the teaching, and teacher support is available, but a thought for the future (resources permitting) might be a small number of targeted 1-1 interventions (coaching) outside the teaching for a student identified early on as having extra need. Ignore me if this is already in place and this is my visibility issue.... there is a parallel in medicine where a teacher of academic writing (who is not one of the course tutors, so separate and able to offer confidential support as distinct from the programme/progression) aids with this, which learners have found reassuring. This can be helpful in that any serious problem - like plagiarism enquiry triggered by poor quoting - is remediated before formal work submission when stakes may be somewhat higher.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Mr Thilo Pfau

Course Director Response:

Thank you for this suggestion. The RVC has now introduced 'Smart Thinking' online support for students. This is a 24/7 online support that allows student to submit a piece of writing and receive feedback about format and writing style but not about the topical content.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

Please comment, as appropriate, on:

3.1 Assessment methods (relevance to learning objectives and curriculum)

Assessment methodologies were relevant to learning outcomes and curriculum aims. Assessed work had valid context, in its alignment with 'real world' research tasks (such as critical evaluation of literature and preparation of a viable research proposal). Reference to case studies, and reflection, with the additional requirement to demonstrate some working knowledge of veterinary healthcare statistics, are examples of how the testing matched the programme aims. It was not difficult to see how assessment had purpose, that is to say equipping participants to engage with both following and contributing to the evidence base in their future professional journeys. The content for teaching and testing was aligned, and had clear vocational context.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Mr Thilo Pfau

Course Director Response:

Thank you. We agree that it is particularly important for this group of students (farriers) that the assignments have 'purpose' helping the students to see the relevance of a task in the light of conducting their own research project.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

3.2 Extent to which assessment procedures are rigorous

Adherence to process/guidelines had demonstrable rigour throughout. The conduct of the examination board was exemplary, and transparent. The routine application of double marking (with comments mapping to grid blueprints) was noted.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Mr Thilo Pfau

Course Director Response:

Thank you. Double is being used for marking the thesis. In line with the RVC wide policy, sample marking is implemented for the remaining components, which for a course with between 10 and 20 participants means that between 25% and 50% of work will be seen by more than one marker. .

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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

As far as I can establish the process was compliant with FHEQ standards throughout, and the standard was consistently applied.

3.4 Standard of marking

Standard of marking was good. There was consistency of agreement between blinded markers, and where difference was observed a 3rd marker mitigation policy was available. This aligns with best practice elsewhere. As is often the case in HE some markers gave more detailed feedback than others, but I did not identify any cases where the justification of an award was unclear. Marking aligned closely to the published criteria. I did not have any concerns about standard or calibration (CW). Fuller use of the range was noted, including a 'full marks' score (which I concurred with). I would support this use of full range - where relevant/justified - being encouraged (at both ends of the spectrum). If available marks of 0-100 are advertised they can be used.

COURSE DIRECTOR: Mr Thilo Pfau

Course Director Response:

Thank you. We are encouraging all examiners to provide 'reasonably extensive' feedback to the assignments and to make use of comments made directly in the submitted work, i.e. in the word/pdf documents submitted as well as in the relevant boxes in the online forms.

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)

All expectations were met. Conduct of the board was sound, and decision fair. Anonymised paper sets were provided. External Examiners were offered good notice, full access to all relevant materials, timely technical support (CW) and all necessary preparations. The remote conduct of the board (necessitated by COVID-19) worked well in the circumstances and showed relevant agility in a crisis. All agenda items one might have expected in the more typical face to face meeting were included. The screen shots of the paperwork were helpful (thank you).

COURSE DIRECTOR: Mr Thilo Pfau

Course Director Response:

Thank you for your positive comments and the positive comments will be passed on to the support staff.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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

N/A - as expected.

3.7 Please provide any additional comments and recommendations regarding the procedures

Procedures worked well, and set a model for future remote conduct should lockdown endure. The plagiarism point was interesting, and I thank the tutor and support team for the timely advance response to that query (CW).

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

No

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

The only outstanding point I think - as earlier - would be access to student feedback/evaluations?

COURSE DIRECTOR: Mr Thilo Pfau

Course Director Response:

Again we apologise about this. We will endeavour to make it possible to have a student representative available for direct feedback to the External Examiners if not in person (in particular for US based courses) then via 'zoom' or similar technology.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

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:

Very comprehensive - thank you - full access to all materials.

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:

RVC provides a very learner-focused experience.

4.7 The standards set for the awards are appropriate for qualifications at this level, in this subject

N/A

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

No concerns.

4.8 The standards of student performance are comparable with similar programmes or subjects in other UK institutions with which I am familiar

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

4.9 I have received enough support to carry out my role

Yes

Additional comments, particularly if your answer was no:

Outstanding, actually. All credit to the professional services, academic and support team.

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:

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:

This may already be in place, but I wondered if you had a student representative for each cohort for feedback, or a staff-student committee meeting? I've taken part in these elsewhere and they are very useful for collating views, as the students feed back to their 'rep' as a single point of contact which makes for a focused process (and preserves their individual confidentiality where they may not be comfortable being a 'lone voice' if there is a problem).

Not an 'improvement', but just as a note I assume RVC - like the External Examiners institutions - will be needing to adapt to COVID-19. Resilience planning for environmental/placement limitations, distancing, depleted staff numbers (through shielding etc) and the challenges of finding online quality alternatives for activities are creating significant challenge across the academic community. You are, it seems, reasonably well placed already for the current climate, given the pre-existing online/distance learning nature of some course components. Contingencies for restrictions/disruption to proposed research projects, however, may need consideration. We would welcome a conversation about this, particularly if it impacts on the coming cohorts (and to share ideas between organisations during these extraordinary times).

COURSE DIRECTOR: Mr Thilo Pfau

Course Director Response:

Yes there is a student representative for each cohort and the representative is feeding back concerns/questions from his/her peers to the course directors directly and student representatives are also invited to course management meetings. Admittedly in course with 'remote' students with cohorts between 8 and a maximum of 20 (that has never been reached), and where all students know each other and all staff are familiar with all students, the process may be a little more 'direct' but there is still the opportunity for student representatives to provide feedback in a more formal setting such as the course management meeting. The course with its blended format is reasonably well set up to deal with access restrictions etc but there are components such as practicals that need further planning as well as a strategy to deal with undertaking practical projects as part of the research work for the students' theses. We are working on these aspects.

Action Required:

Action Deadline:

Action assigned to:

5.2 External Examiner comments: For College information only (Responses to External Examiners are published on the College's website. Please only use this box to add any comments that you wish to remain confidential, if any)

N/A

