

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES TO EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' COMMENTS, 2012/2013
Course BVetMed Year 2

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3 Q6) did not include any annotations. Since this was a more subjective question (communications) we felt that annotations might be even more important. More pertinently, the final mark awarded for this question was absent from the front page of each script and we are not sure why. We have some other specific concerns which relate to sample marking, particularly for the essays (paper 3):

- a)

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academic performance within the various parts of the exam. For example, by removing the essay component and replacing with short answer questions (and perhaps reducing choice?) there would be less of a burden placed on individual essay markers. It might also help with the issues raised by sample marking by avoiding the need for it and also be more defensible in that all students effectively are examined on the same material.

3.2 The assessment is extensive with three examination papers, a spot test and an oral examination comprising at least four widely varying topics. In addition, there is an in-course assessment which is further subdivided and now includes a significant research project. Assessment ranges widely through the syllabus and covers the full range of disciplines. Assessment is mostly rigorous and marking is generally consistent and of a good standard. There was one exception affecting one question (Paper 3 Q6) whereby markers appeared not to follow agreed protocol. There are also one or two issues

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For any discrepancies, it appeared that the two markers had met and decided on an agreed final mark, which sometimes fell between the two separate marks but was sometimes greater than both marks. This final mark was then inexplicably accepted as the true mark, potentially giving that student an advantage (or disadvantage) not conferred on students who were not double marked. This discrepancy was further compounded by the fact that two separate examiners had marked this question.

4.3 As for 2012, the Board of Examiners' meeting was very well attended. We had a clear agenda and all present were able to raise any concerns they might have. The marks were presented and all candidates with fail marks were carefully reviewed.

4.4 As indicated above, we appreciate the opportunity we were given this year to act in an observing capacity, rather than as examiners (two of the four external examiners "floated" in this way). This increased our exposure to students, the various stations and different internal examiners. We concur with the Chair at the Board of Examiners' meeting when he concluded that the process was evolving to allow external examiners to assess the examination process rather than the students, which we strongly agree is as it should be. This is also the general philosophy in other Veterinary Schools with which we are more familiar.

4.5 Communications and briefings were ably and professionally provided by Rebecca Charlton and Paul Charlesworth. We are grateful to them for their guidance and help throughout the process, but particularly during our two days on site. All the papers and provisional marks were available to us from the day before the Board of Examiners' meeting and the MCQ Speedwell data was quickly forthcoming upon request (see section 3.2). We are also very grateful for the provision of a quieter room to scrutinise the scripts, following last year's request.

All four external examiners were able to review the exam scripts, either for both days prior to the Board of Examiners' meeting or for the day of the meeting. All four then attended the subsequent Board of Examiners' meeting so we feel there was adequate coverage of both of these processes.

4.6 The increased time allowance for marking by the internal examiners prior to the examination board has been a significant improvement over previous years. This has meant that all examination scripts have been returned and are in order for review by the external examiners. Organisation by the examinations team continues.

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5. Please delete responses as appropriate

- | | | |
|-----|---|------------|
| 5.1 | Comments we have made in previous years have been acted upon | Some |
| 5.2 | An acceptable response has been made | Mostly YES |
| 5.3 | We approved the papers for the Examination | YES |
| 5.4 | We were able to scrutinise an adequate sample of students' work and marks to enable me to carry out my duties | YES |
| 5.5 | We attended the meeting of the Board of Examiners held to approve the results of the Examination | YES |
| 5.6 | Candidates were considered impartially and fairly | YES |

If you have replied No to any of these questions, please comment more fully:

Type here

Sample marking arrangements have been consistently raised as a potential cause for concern over the last four years as they have implications for the fair treatment of all students.

If you have identified any areas of good practice, please comment more fully:

Type here

Signed

Date

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(Below is the report submitted by Paul Watson, which is based on the collaborative report with a few changes)

**FOR COMPLETION
AFTER THE
EXAMINATION**

THE ROYAL VETERINARY COLLEGE

EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

Name of Examiner As agreed following discussion at RVC this is a collaborative report. This will be completed by Sionagh Smith (Lead), Sally Anne Argyle, Paul Watson and Maureen Bain.

Programme BVetMed

Year of appointment Sally Argyle: 2010
Paul Watson: 2010
Maureen Bain: 2011
Sionagh Smith: 2011

Year of Examination 2013

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- 1.6 the recommendations from this Examination for the curriculum, syllabuses, and teaching methods
- 1.7 the effects of any changes made to the Programme in the last 12 months

Type here

1.1 The course is quite ambitious in its scope, taking an integrative approach to teaching and delivery. A number of strands come together to cover the major body systems and core subjects such as anatomy, pathology, physiology, **biochemistry**, pharmacology, animal husbandry and communication skills. This manner of teaching aims to give students clinical exposure earlier in the course than more traditional approaches might allow. However, challenges that are integral to this style of teaching include the organisation of a diverse array of teaching staff and ensuring that the students develop an adequate depth of understanding and knowledge for each discipline.

1.2 The course handbook outlines clear and detailed learning objectives for all strands. The objectives that have been examined seem to have been mostly met by the students who successfully completed the programme. The overall spread of marks in this cohort

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apparent). We appreciated the opportunity for external examiners to float between oral teams to observe a range of topics being examined. This allowed a better view of the student ability across the syllabus.

1.6 The examiners have no specific recommendations in terms of the syllabus.

1.7 The main change, as mentioned above (section 1.3), was the replacement of the in-course project with the research project. Since the general aims of this project appeared to be similar, the effect of this change was unlikely to be significant in terms of student learning and outcome (i.e. there was still an emphasis on report writing and statistical analysis, with more of an expectation for students to drive their individual projects forward). The quality of the projects was, broadly, very good and the topics and hypotheses were often interesting and thought-provoking. It was raised at the Board of Examiners' meeting that none of the external examiners had prior knowledge of this change so it had come as a bit of a surprise to us.

2. Candidates

Please comment, as appropriate, on:

- 2.1 impressions of candidates' specific areas of strength and weakness, as revealed by the assessment process
- 2.2 the quality of candidates' knowledge and skills, with particular reference to those at the top, middle or bottom of the range
- 2.3 the candidates' overall performance in relation to students at a similar stage on comparable courses in other institutions, where this is known to you

Type here

2.1 The number of failed students was substantially reduced compared to last year which was encouraging. As indicated in section 1.5 above, the students generally performed well in cardiovascular and respiratory anatomy / physiology, as well as virology/immunology and locomotion and reproduction. It is difficult to comment as fully on other areas, particularly pharmacology, which did not appear to be as comprehensively examined. Pathology was mainly examined via MCQs and orals. Certainly, the oral examination is probably the best place to assess the students' ability to describe lesions but there was only one essay/problem-solving paper focusing on pathology and this is still to come in the resit examination. It is acknowledged that this may be due to staff availability and other service commitments, however.

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the burden on these individual staff members is substantial and query whether or not there is enough support in this regard, particularly when a failed project automatically leads to failure of the course ("qualified fail").

Finally, there was very poor performance in one of the problem-solving questions (maximum mark was 7 out of 10, with a large number of students attaining much less than this). This poor performance was raised by the internal examiners responsible for teaching the material and marking the question. They were particularly concerned as they felt that the material had been well covered during the course as a directed learning class supported by **a one-hour tutorial for every student**. The material had also been flagged as examinable. Despite this, attendance of the tutorials had been poor (approximately one third of the year). It is acknowledged that the students are adults and that these classes are not obligatory (though students are encouraged to attend). However, such lack of engagement is discouraging to the teaching staff and detrimental in the long run to the students' experience, especially when it relates to more integrative, ap

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would free up this written question for an area that is perhaps perceived as under-examined (e.g. pharmacology, pathogenesis of disease).

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4. Assessment Procedures

Please comment, as appropriate, on:

- 4.1 the administration of the examinations, e.g. time available for marking and moderation
- 4.2 arrangements for marking
- 4.3 procedures followed by the Board of Examiners
- 4.4 the participation of External Examiners in the process
- 4.5 adequacy of External Examiners' briefing
- 4.6 comparison with previous years in which you have examined

Type here

4.1 Logistical management and administration were excellent throughout with strong team work apparent. We were particularly glad to see that more time had been incorporated between the exams and Board of Examiners' meeting for marking, hopefully reducing pressure on the internal examiners. All the papers were available for review from the day before the exam board this year, unlike last year when some papers were delayed. Also unlike last year, papers were in numerical order. Both changes were definite improvements that helped the review process to run more smoothly. External examiners were also used as observers this year, rather than as examiners (in the oral

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Two markers acted as primary markers each marking half of the scripts. Sample marking was done by the other marker. For any discrepancies, it appeared that the two markers had met and decided on an agreed final mark, which sometimes fell between the two separate marks but was sometimes beyond the range of both marks. This final mark was then inexplicably accepted as the true mark, potentially giving that student an advantage (or disadvantage) not conferred on students who were not double marked.

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5. Please delete responses as appropriate

5.1 Comments we have made in previous years have

