

2008 STATUTORY MEMBERSHIP EXAMINATION

JOINT HORSE EXAMINERS' REPORT

General Comments

Most candidates performed significantly better in the written questions than in the practical, oral and steeplechase sections: this may be because these sections require more integration of knowledge than the written questions and also because other skills – practical clinical examination and also communication skills – are tested by these sections.

Written examination

The written questions were generally well answered and candidates showed a satisfactory general theoretical knowledge. The written questions tested a broad range of equine medical and surgical topics and provided a fair and balanced forum for candidates to demonstrate their knowledge. The candidates generally achieved higher marks in the essay questions. Their performance in the short-answer questions was often very variable indicating significant gaps in their knowledge.

Clinical, oral and practical

Candidate performance in these sections was generally less satisfactory. Many candidates demonstrated poor practical skills, particularly in clinical examination. Knowledge of topographical anatomy was generally poor. Several candidates demonstrated poor ability to integrate their knowledge and to use it to construct differential diagnosis lists and to problem solve. The steeple chase questions were answered to a variable standard and several candidates who had achieved consistent pass marks in the written papers performed poorly or erratically in the steeplechase. In general, candidates seemed to find these sections of the examination more difficult than the written papers and these are the sections that those candidates who failed will need to concentrate on before sitting the examination again.

JOINT SMALL COMPANION ANIMALS EXAMINERS' REPORT

Written Section

Candidate knowledge was satisfactory for those who were allowed to proceed. Candidates who were stopped had obvious deficiencies in their baseline knowledge and little ability to reason or deal with that information at the higher levels of learning. The candidates allowed to proceed had a reasonable knowledge overall with few deficiencies, but showed a variable ability to think or reason through the case scenarios. In a number of cases they simply regurgitated information often missing even the simplest details of dealing with a case such as the importance of findings from a clinical examination. Their terminology was in general correct and up to date.

Clinical Oral Practical

a. Physical Practical Skills (Practical)

While a few candidates showed good physical skills for most of them this area was quite variable, even to the point where one area of the body was examined very well, while another was done poorly or even roughly. Most candidates showed some good areas of skill but it was clear that many were unfamiliar with even the simple tasks they were asked to perform.

b. Recognition and Interpretation (Steeplechase and Practical)

Radiographic interpretation was good especially in common and emergency presentations. Knowledge of the use of basic surgical equipment and techniques was quite variable. Interpretation of clinical chemistry and haematology results was generally satisfactory but few candidates were competent in the examination of electrocardiograms (ECGs). One question that invited an understanding of the veterinary surgeon's duty to attend to the safety of the staff in the workplace in relation to anaesthesia was particularly poorly done and this should be attended to.

c. Clinical reasoning

This was the main area that distinguished the candidates. The poor ones had little ability to pursue a scenario or treatment protocol in a logical clinical fashion. In many cases they were happy to regurgitate information that they had learnt but they were not thinking about the progress of the case at all. The best candidates had excellent clinical reasoning and offered not only the technical basis of the solution but information on how they would present their thinking to the client.

JOINT PRODUCTION ANIMALS EXAMINERS' REPORT

General Comments

The examiners noted a wide spectrum of competence and proficiency that led to a high percentage of candidates not showing sufficient knowledge to progress to Combined Oral and Practical (COP) stage of the exam. While there was a general appreciation of production animal systems and diseases, there seemed to be a superficiality in understanding that prevented candidates from demonstrating appropriate critical thinking in solving production animal-specific problems. There was also an overall lack of appreciation of modern methods and approaches to herd health monitoring and planning which resulted in a rather dated approach to production medicine.

It is important to appreciate the changing UK agricultural economic climate and its relevance to joint clinical decision making between the veterinarian and farmer and to be able to demonstrate a grasp of these issues in all aspects of the exam.

A significant proportion of candidates failed to indicate an adequate appreciation of therapeutic selection criteria in regard to antimicrobial drug use, with specific omissions in legislative and safety considerations.

Specific Comments

1. Written exam:

Overall the essay questions were answered quite well but inadequacies in responses to the short answer questions indicated a lack of breadth of knowledge.

2. Clinical Oral/Practical:

The oral and practical examinations were generally of an acceptable standard. There was evidence of a lack of basic animal handling skills and confidence with large animals. When therapeutic options were discussed candidates often showed a lack of appreciation of selection criteria and safety considerations with respect to antimicrobial use.

JOINT VETERINARY PUBLIC HEALTH EXAMINERS' REPORT

General comments

Throughout the exam, we noticed a number of serious gaps in the knowledge and skills of candidates that were of major concern. Some of these were remarkably consistent and we hope that any training packages or tutoring that may be offered to candidates in the future, will address these areas. Specifically, this was observed when asking questions about:

- Legal framework in UK and EU
- Organisation structures of government veterinary services in the UK, responsibilities and collaboration between agencies and veterinarians in practice
- International context, global infectious disease situations, relevance of international trade, role of international organisations
- Concepts and application of risk analysis in food safety and animal health decisions

Written

Long answers

We observed a general lack of focus in answers and some considerable gaps related to welfare issues and regulations covering stunning (Q 3b VPH 2008 paper). Also, candidates displayed limited knowledge of the European situation regarding notifiable diseases (Q 2a VPH 2008 paper), gaps were seen in the basic understanding of pathological processes (e.g. Q 2a BSE of the VPH 2008 paper) and general microbiology.

Short answers

The quality of answers was highly variable between the questions with some being answered well and others being disappointing. For questions addressing food safety issues there was a general focus on the animal-related hazards and very limited ability to consider consequences along the food chain. Of some concern was the limited understanding of the cascade procedures in some individuals (5 candidates with marks of 0 –1 for Q7 of the VPH 2008 paper) as this is an essential public health duty of practising veterinary surgeons. The lack of realistic risk assessment related to nosocomial infections and zoonoses is of concern, e.g. several candidates would consider euthanizing pets colonised with MRSA.

Some candidates were not aware of the international disease situation for avian influenza (Q10 of the VPH 2008 paper)

Oral

Gaps identified in the written examination were confirmed in some cases accentuated. This related again to the international context, legislation, basic microbiology, diagnostic tests and issues related to the food chain as well as risk analysis. Some candidates were also challenged

by the need to apply logical thinking, comparing issues and translating actual knowledge into specific case examples. While the theoretical understanding of disease notification and control was relatively robust, there were serious gaps in the practical understanding of the consequences of the legal framework. We also want to mention the fact that there were some candidates who displayed excellent understanding and communication of VPH issues. There were no English language issues that would have compromised communication.

Practical

None of the candidates recognised an epidemic curve (Q6 of the VPH 2008 paper). The lack of basic understanding of clinical trials was of particular concern as this forms an essential basis of evidence-based medicine and is essential for the interpretation of information on new treatments (Q7 of the VPH 2008 paper).

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