Dear External Examiner

The main assessment period will start shortly and you will be involved with a Subject Assessment Panel (and Award Assessment Board if you are a designated Award External Examiner) to be held at the University or at one of our partners. May I suggest that you check the External Examiners’ website at www.plymouth.ac.uk/external-examiners before your visit to ensure you are familiar with the latest version of the Notes for Guidance for External Examiners and the relevant regulations.

I should also like to take this opportunity to draw your attention to a number of matters (all of the documents referred to are available via the External Examiners’ website at www.plymouth.ac.uk/external-examiners):

**Annual report: arrangements for completion**

The annual report from each External Examiner continues to be an integral part of the University’s annual review process.

Please ensure that your report is completed on the standard pro-forma which has been developed to ensure it is in line with the indicators of sound practice in the External examining chapter in the QAA Quality Code. The report form also invites your feedback on the implementation of the University’s Assessment Policy.

You are asked to complete and submit the form electronically to facilitate its distribution. The report forms and guidance on where to return the completed forms are available on the External Examiners’ website.

Your completed report should be submitted to the relevant Faculty Quality Administrator as soon as possible after the Panel/Board meetings, and by **31 July 2017** at the latest (or within **six weeks** if the Panel/Board meetings are after this date). It is particularly important that we receive reports in good time in order to ensure that they are available for use in the annual review process.

Where more than one Panel/Board meeting is held per year (for example, for Postgraduate programme or for Continuing Professional Development programmes in the Health area), we would ask you to complete, in addition to the annual report, an abbreviated version of the form, following attendance at subsequent Panel/Board meetings, to provide the University with ongoing assurance of standards. (This abbreviated version is referred to as the ‘Panel’ or ‘Board’ or ‘dissertation’ report, as
appropriate.) Faculty Quality Administrators will provide guidance on reporting requirements and deadlines where this additional requirement applies. I would also draw to your attention that there is a separate **Award External Examiner's** report form which we would ask you to complete as well if you are an Award as well as a Subject External Examiner.

**Student engagement with External Examiners**

The University’s Academic Board has agreed that the full External Examiner’s report should be shared with student representatives through appropriate student/staff committee structures to strengthen student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement. **It is important, therefore, that individual students or members of staff are not identified in External Examiners’ reports.**

In line with the relevant indicators of sound practice in the QAA Quality Code, all students can also access the External Examiner/s’ reports that are relevant to their programme via the student portal/DLE, as well as the details of the name, position and home institution of the External Examiners concerned. This is to ensure that, as it states in the Code, our external examining arrangements are transparent, and to support the involvement of students in quality management processes. We are working with the Students’ Union and student representatives to raise awareness of the importance of the External Examiner’s role.

We will of course continue to make clear to students that it is inappropriate for them to make direct contact with External Examiners, in particular regarding their individual performance in assessments.

**Feedback on issues raised in reports**

You should expect to receive a formal written response from the programme/subject team following consideration of your report as part of the annual review process. The report form incorporates the response to the external examiner as part of the template to improve the transparency of the response process and to make it easier to track responses. We specify that, for undergraduate programmes within the University, the response to the report must be completed by 10 September (or within 4 weeks of the receipt of the report, if the report is not received by this deadline). For Academic Partnerships the equivalent deadline is 28 September (recognising that partners work to different term dates and staff leave patterns). For postgraduate programmes the response must be completed within 4 weeks of the receipt of the report.

Issues referred to the University, including general regulatory or policy matters are brought together once all reports are received and discussed by the Teaching, Learning and Quality Committee in the Spring term. I attach a summary report of issues identified in the report forms for 2015-16, together with the actions to be taken, which I hope enable you to put the comments in context.

The 2017 report and claim forms and guidance for External Examiners can be found on Plymouth University’s website at [www.plymouth.ac.uk/external-examiners](http://www.plymouth.ac.uk/external-examiners). **PLEASE ENSURE YOU USE THE CURRENT VERSION OF THE CLAIM FORMS AND DESTROY ANY PREVIOUS VERSIONS.**
Academic Regulations Review

The University’s academic regulations were reviewed in 2016-17 by the Academic Regulations Sub-Committee. A summary of all the changes that have been made to the University regulations for this academic year is available via the External Examiners’ website.

The standard University regulations have been restructured, to incorporate the former Regulatory Framework for Undergraduate Awards, the Regulatory Framework for Medical Undergraduate Awards, the Regulatory Framework for Dental Undergraduate Awards, and the former Regulatory Framework for Postgraduate Taught Awards.

The standard University regulations are shown in bold and boxed, with explanatory notes underneath. They are structured to reflect the student’s ‘life cycle’ through their programme of study.

Marking and Moderation Policy (Guidance on sampling)

I would draw your attention to the final section of the Marking and Moderation Policy which provides guidance for External Examiners on the sampling of work. You will be guided as to which modules to focus on in any one year, following the expectations set out in the policy, but do of course retain responsibility for confirming standards in each module within your remit and have the right to look in detail at any other modules that, in your professional judgement, you identify as benefitting from further scrutiny.

New Digital Learning Environment (DLE)

The University’s new Digital Learning Environment (DLE) and the move to Moodle facilitates externals’ access to module/course material. Faculties will arrange for external examiners to be given discretionary membership to enable you to access the Moodle sites for the modules you are reviewing. We would welcome your feedback via your annual report on how this arrangement is working and on briefing and sampling arrangements more generally.

Subject Assessment Panels and Award Assessment Boards

This document clarifies the distinction between the various roles at the Panel/Board, and the remit of the Subject Assessment Panel and the Award Assessment Board:

- The Panel reviews the standard of assessment in the modules and agrees the final marks
- The Award Assessment Board looks at students’ overall performance across all modules and makes decisions on progression and awards.

The 2017 report and claim forms and guidance for External Examiners can be found on Plymouth University’s website at www.plymouth.ac.uk/external-examiners. PLEASE ENSURE YOU USE THE CURRENT VERSION OF THE CLAIM FORMS AND DESTROY ANY PREVIOUS VERSIONS.
The two-tier system of Subject Assessment Panels and Award Assessment Boards is standard across the University. Even in cases where there is only one External Examiner for a programme, the University expects the programme to operate a Panel and Board structure, although the meetings may of course be held sequentially in one day.

**May I take this opportunity of reminding you that it is vitally important that you attend the relevant panel/s (and board/s, where appropriate) and review an appropriate sample of assessed work.** You should be notified of the dates of these meetings well in advance. If for any exceptional reason you are unable to fulfil your responsibilities in this area please advise the relevant Faculty as soon as possible so that alternative arrangements can be put in place.

**Communication between Subject and Award External Examiners**

The University’s Notes for Guidance for External Examiners make clear that the Award External Examiner can expect the University to facilitate communication between Subject External Examiners and the Award External Examiner prior to the Award Assessment Board. The University’s preferred means of achieving this is through a face to face meeting but if for logistical reasons (eg the relative timing of Panels and Boards or the number of Subject External Examiners who report into a Board) this is not practicable, then alternative means by which Subject External Examiner issues are drawn to the attention of the Award External Examiner prior to the Board must be put in place (eg direct communication between externals via email or a specific agenda item on the Subject Assessment Panel agenda to ask the Subject External Examiner to confirm whether they have any issues that require discussion with the Award External Examiner).

**Declaration Form**

At the Subject Assessment Panel/Award Assessment Board you will be asked to sign a declaration form (please see the document Subject Assessment Panels and Award Assessment Boards available on the External Examiners’ website at [www.plymouth.ac.uk/external-examiners](http://www.plymouth.ac.uk/external-examiners)) indicating that you agree with the outcomes in relation to the standard in the subject, and with decisions taken about your involvement in referred work.

**Data Protection Act and Freedom of Information Act**

We are once again taking this opportunity to advise you, under the terms of the Data Protection Act, that the University is currently holding your personal data, for example, contact details, qualifications, place of work, fees and expenses paid and, in some cases, home addresses and bank details. The University standard practice is to advise relevant Faculty/Partner College staff of contact details and also to provide such details for any other Subject or Award External Examiner associated with the programme, unless you specifically ask us not to do so.
You should note that, if the University receives a request for a report under the Freedom of Information Act, then the report will normally be released, subject to omitting any reference to named individuals and deleting the name and contact details of the examiner concerned.

**Equality and Diversity**

Plymouth University is fully committed to promoting diversity, eliminating discrimination and providing equality of opportunity for all of its staff and students, applicants and visitors. The External Examiners’ website provides a link to the University’s Equality and Diversity Policies and Schemes. In this context the University would expect External Examiners to raise appropriate equality and diversity issues relevant to the assessment of students with the programme/subject team.

We very much appreciate the assistance which you give the University through your role as an External Examiner. Should you require clarification of any issue, wish to comment on any matter, or experience any problems, please do not hesitate to contact me although I would remind you that payment of fees and expenses is dealt with at Faculty level and any queries relating to payment should be addressed to the relevant Faculty Quality Administrator. You should also note that University financial regulations require that all expenses claims should be submitted within one month of being incurred.

Yours sincerely

_MRS SUE GREGORY_

QUALITY ASSURANCE ADVISER
CENTRAL QUALITY OFFICE

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