PLYMOUTH UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SCIENCES

SUBJECT EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT FORM
 ACADEMIC YEAR 2017/18

Please note that this is the full report template which should be completed annually. Where more than one Subject Assessment Panel is held per year eg for Postgraduate or CPD programmes you will be asked to complete an abbreviated version of this template (the 'Panel' or 'dissertation' report) following attendance at subsequent meetings of the Panel.

(If you also hold an appointment as an **Award External Examiner** you should complete the separate Award External Examiner's report form as well.)

Report forms are available at www.plymouth.ac.uk/external-examiners

Please complete and submit your report electronically. Please send your completed report *within six weeks* of the meeting of the Subject Assessment Panel to:

extexhhs@plymouth.ac.uk

Please could you complete *all* sections of the report including the summary questions in C.

(Response text boxes are formatted blue. Please do not amend the formatting.)

Please do not identify any individual students or members of staff in your report to maintain appropriate confidentiality.

Section D (Response to the External Examiner's Report) will be completed by the relevant School/Partner by 10 September for undergraduate reports (or within 4 weeks of receipt, if the report is not received by this deadline) or within 4 weeks of receipt for postgraduate reports.

The complete report (including the response) will be posted on the University website within 2 weeks of the receipt of the response.

Section A

PLYMOUTH UNIVERSITY

Subject External Examiner's report form academic year 2017/18

Part 1
External Examiner's details

Name of External Examiner ***Please include title, eg Professor, Dr etc***
Dr Philip Fine

Subject External Examiner for: ***(please identify relevant Subject Assessment Panel(s))***
MSc in Psychological Research Methods

If you are an External Examiner for a programme/s delivered in one or more of the University's partner institutions, please specify the institution to which this report relates:
n/a

Date of report:	*2/7/18*

Part 2
Responses to comments and recommendations

2.1 Have you received an appropriate formal written response to issues raised in previous reports (continuing examiners only)? Please elaborate on your response, if appropriate, to provide feedback to the subject/programme team on progress made in response to issues identified in your previous report.

n/a – first year of examining

Part 3
Briefing and induction

If you are a new External Examiner:

3.1 Was the information provided for new External Examiners on the External Examiners' website at www.plymouth.ac.uk/external-examiners useful?
Did you identify any gaps in the information provided? (Please specify)

Yes it was, and I was not aware of any gaps in advance of the Subject Panel meeting. However, I believe that Plymouth is pretty much unique in holding Subject Panels as separate from Award Boards. I had made notes for each module, but didn't realise until my first Subject Panel that each module would be scrutinised separately. I have never come across an External being involved in this before (and I do think it an excellent practice) so it might be worth explicitly clarifying to EEs unable to attend the EE conference (as I was), given how unusual this is.

3.2 Did you attend the University's annual conference for new external examiners? If yes,   please provide any feedback on the usefulness of this event and/or any areas for improvement.

No. Unfortunately I was unable to make the dates in either 2017 or 2018. However, I did visit Plymouth in November 2017 for a day's meeting with the Programme Director, and had the opportunity to meet various of his colleagues and some students on the MSc, so believe I have all the information required.

3.3 If you were assigned a mentor, please comment on the effectiveness of this arrangement from your perspective.

I wasn't assigned a mentor. I wasn't aware of mentors until recently, so am not sure how it is decided whether new EEs are assigned mentors or not.

All External Examiners:

3.4 Programme/subject level briefing material Did you receive:	YES	NO
i. The relevant programme handbook/s?		X
ii. The relevant programme specifications?		X
iii. The relevant regulations?	X	
iv. Module descriptors (DMRs)?	X	
v. Assessment briefs/marking criteria?	X	

Please elaborate on your response, if appropriate, to comment on any particular difficulties encountered or good practice identified.
If you are a continuing External Examiner, was all necessary information regarding any changes to the programme/subject you are examining provided?

I was given a good amount of information when I visited in November, and had all the access to each module. But I cannot now find the programme handbook and specification for the MSc. This doesn't mean I wasn't given them, but as (this time) I had access to ModuleBox but not the DLE Moodle, I didn't manage to find them, and thus wasn't quite sure how the individual modules fitted in to the MSc, and which were core and which optional. This wasn't an issue for me in terms of commenting on the individual modules, and I'm sure will be sorted for next year.

External Examiners' website: www.plymouth.ac.uk/external-examiners	YES	NO
3.5 Does the website meet your needs?	X	

Please elaborate on your response, if appropriate, to comment on any particular difficulties encountered or suggestions for improvement.

As always, getting used to a new system is not always straightforward, but I believe that the information on the website answers most of my questions, and the programme director is always happy to help with any emailed queries. No doubt I will become more familiar with it over the next few years.

DLE/Moodle sites	YES	NO
3.6 Does the University's DLE/Moodle sites meet your needs as an External Examiner?		X

Please elaborate on your response, if appropriate, to comment on any particular difficulties encountered or suggestions for improvement.

In fact the answer regarding ModuleBox is YES, but somehow I didn't realise that you

also used Moodle, and I wasn't given access to this until after the Subject Panel. However, now that I have that access, I'm sure that next year I will find everything I need, and some of the questions I have had this year will be answered much more easily.

I do think that Module Box is a very useful resource (I'm not sure whether it's University-wide or not) though there is, naturally, some inconsistency between modules in terms of the information uploaded to it by the individual module leaders.

3.7 If you have acted as a mentor to a new External Examiner at Plymouth, please comment on the effectiveness of the arrangement from your perspective.

n/a

Section B Assessment

Please answer yes, no or N/A to the following questions with an X in the appropriate box and use the space below each question to qualify your answer, if appropriate.

Part 1 Assessment processes: Sampling arrangements and evidence provided

1.1 **Draft examination papers** **PLEASE DO NOT ANSWER QUESTIONS 1.1 AND 1.2 IF THE MODULES YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR ARE ASSESSED BY COURSEWORK ONLY (Coursework is covered in Question 1.3)**	YES	NO	N/A
i. Did you receive all the draft papers?			X
ii. Were the nature and level of the questions appropriate?			X
iii. If not, were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?			X

Please elaborate on your response, if appropriate, to comment on any particular difficulties encountered or good practice identified.

No exams on any of the modules I looked at, so not applicable.

1.2 **Marking examination scripts**	YES	NO	N/A
i. Did you receive a sufficient number and range of scripts to enable you to make a sound judgement on standards achieved?			X
ii. If you did not receive all the scripts, was the method of selection satisfactory?			X
iii. Was the general standard and consistency of marking appropriate?			X
iv. Were the scripts marked in such a way as to enable you to see the reasons for the award of given marks?			X

Please elaborate on your response, if appropriate, to comment on any particular difficulties encountered or good practice identified.

Ditto, n/a

1.3 **Coursework/continuously assessed work**	YES	NO	N/A
i. Was sufficient coursework made available to you to enable you to make a sound judgement on standards achieved?	X		
ii. Was the method and general standard of marking and consistency satisfactory?	X		
iii. Were the scripts marked in such a way as to enable you to see the reasons for the award of given marks?	X		

Please elaborate on your response, if appropriate, to comment on any particular difficulties

encountered or good practice identified.

I was able to see a number of coursework examples for each module and each assignment where there were multiple ones in a module. Feedback between modules was quite variable in its quantity, and I was very impressed by the detail of the feedback on the skills courses in particular, which was excellent. In general, the feedback was appropriate and useful, and reflected the marks given. It was good to see both individual and general feedback given to the students (and available to me).

I couldn't always tie a particular coursework piece to its feedback to its moderation (if applicable) to its final mark, though this may reflect my unfamiliarity with Module Box and lack of access to the DLE this year.

1.4 Dissertations/project reports	YES	NO	N/A
i. Was the choice of subjects for dissertations appropriate?			**X**
ii. Was the method and standard of assessment appropriate?			**X**

Please elaborate on your response, if appropriate, to comment on any particular difficulties encountered or good practice identified.

I will not see the dissertations until the October Subject Panel.

1.5 Performance or studio-based work	YES	NO	N/A
Where performance or studio-based work formed part of the assessment for the modules you examined, were suitable arrangements made for you to view such work?			**X**

Please elaborate on your response, if appropriate, to comment on any particular difficulties encountered or good practice identified.

n/a

Part 2 Maintaining Academic Standards

Please answer yes or no to the following questions with an X in the appropriate box and use the space below each question to qualify your answer, if appropriate.
Please identify examples of exceptional practice or any areas for consideration.

Many of the questions in Part 2 relate directly to the expectations of the University's Assessment Policy[1]. We would value your feedback on progress at programme/subject level in implementing this policy.

	YES	NO
2.1 Were assessments conducted in accordance with the module specification?	X	

Please elaborate on your response, if appropriate

Yes, both the module specification and the specific assessment guidelines usually clarified the scope and details for the assessment. There were two modules where this was not always the case, and I raised this at the Subject Panel – apparently there were issues with at least one of these modules in any case, and neither module leader was able to attend the Subject Panel – but I am not overly worried.

	YES	NO
2.2 Overall, do assessments give students a clear opportunity to demonstrate general and specific subject skills, knowledge and understanding, linked to learning outcomes and future employment?	X	

Please elaborate on your response, if appropriate

The range of assessments on the MSc is extremely good, encompassing a great many useful skills, both general and subject-specific. Some assessments, particularly on the Skills courses (e.g. PSY555 and PSY571) involve peer-review and student-provided feedback, as well as reflecting on feedback and the improvement between assessment drafts. Giving, receiving and acting upon feedback are important skills to develop, so I was pleased to see these in the MSc.

	YES	NO
2.3 Overall, were assessments reliable, inclusive and authentic and designed to minimise the use of modified assessment, and over-assessment of learning outcomes?	X	

Please elaborate on your response, if appropriate

[1] Assessment Policy

I saw no examples of modified assessment or over-assessment.

	YES	NO
2.4 Where alternative assessments were agreed for students with disabilities, were you satisfied that, overall, learning outcomes were addressed in the alternative assessment/s set?		

Please elaborate on your response, if appropriate

I am not aware that any students studying for the MSc have disabilities, so I did not see any examples of alternative assessments.

	YES	NO
2.5 Overall, were assessments valid and aligned to clear and realistic learning outcomes?	X	

Please elaborate on your response, if appropriate

Yes, the mapping of assessment onto learning outcomes was clear and appropriate.

	YES	NO
2.6 Overall, was the amount of assessed work manageable for students and staff?	X	

Please elaborate on your response, if appropriate

On the whole, yes I felt the amount of work was manageable. However, there was discussion at the Subject Panel that the students felt that some of the individual assessments were rather large in comparison with others on the MSc. This will no doubt be taken into account by the department. Also, the amount of feedback for some courses (particularly PSY555, a skills module) is large, and if the cohort size increases, then it may not be feasible to provide quite so much in the future.

	YES	NO
2.7 Do the forms of assessment include both formative and summative assessment?	X	

Please elaborate on your response, if appropriate

Yes, and I was particularly impressed with the use of formative assessment in PSY555, where students submit a draft, receive feedback from both peers and lecturers, revise the assignment in light of this feedback and submit it together with a reflective piece detailing how they used the feedback to improve the work.

2.8 Overall, was the information provided to students and External Examiners about assessment clear, transparent and accessible?	**X**	

Please elaborate on your response, if appropriate

With a couple of exceptions (both module leaders not able to be at the Subject Panel), yes this was all fine. I suspect that the information I couldn't find was on the DLE, which I didn't have access to this year, but the students would have had access to it.

	YES	NO
	X	
2.9 Overall, were assessments marked fairly, using the published marking and grading criteria and appropriate second marking and moderation?		

Please elaborate on your response, if appropriate

This is a qualified YES, as there was some inconsistency regarding module marking using letters A+ to F- and N and/or numbers 1 to 100, and I wasn't quite sure how they mapped onto one another. The moderation seemed to work well, though I couldn't always find all of the marker's mark, the moderator's mark and the agreed mark. Given the relatively small cohort at Level 7, a good proportion of assignments are moderated, and I believe all the dissertations (which I will see in October) are double marked.

It was interesting to see on the moderation form that in some cases the moderator comments on the quality of the marker's feedback to the students. This is a good check, as long as this is reflected upon in the marker's PDR (i.e. the loop closed).

2.10 Were assignments marked anonymously, where practical and appropriate?	**X**	

Please elaborate on your response, if appropriate

As far as I could tell, yes for the non-skills courses. Where video presentation and presented poster presentations are involved, it is naturally harder to assess work

anonymously.

2.11 Based on the views of the students you have met and/or module evaluations provided, was feedback to students on assessment constructive and timely?	X	

Please elaborate on your response, if appropriate

There were some particularly good examples of feedback, and I believe all the module summaries I saw said that grades and feedback were returned to the students within the requisite 20 days. I have not had an opportunity to speak to students directly about this.

2.12 More generally, please identify any areas of exceptional practice and innovation relating to learning, teaching and assessment (including the currency and coherence of the curriculum) which you would wish to commend to the wider University.

Range of assessments: This is my first year examining this MSc, and I am struck by the range of assessment techniques used at level 7 to assess the students' work. This variety of assessment also enables the students to develop both general and subject-specific transferrable skills effectively, so the range of assessments I believe is one of the MSc's strongest points. It is definitely an MSc in Psychology Research Methods, as at least half of the ten modules I looked at were of a methodological nature.

PSY555 in particular is excellent, both in terms of the skills taught and the methods of using feedback, peer-review and reflection. Students also rated their own ability prior to and after completing one of the assignments, and it was good to see how their own

confidence in their own abilities increased. There is a lot of work involved in PSY555 (I noted comments whether it would be better as a 20-unit than 10-unit module), and there was an extremely clear timeline on Module Box.

Feedback: The amount, quality and usefulness of feedback on PSY555, PSY558 and PSY560 in particular was excellent, and most of the other modules I saw had good, if occasionally inconsistent, feedback. I also think that providing general cohort-wide feedback as well as individual feedback is a very good idea.

PSY569: I like the fact that the essay assignment in PSY569, though short (2000 words) was still clearly level 7 as students were only allowed to cite research published in the last 3 years, explicitly requiring them to engage with recent research.

Project marking guidelines: The project modules PSY571 and PSY572 had very clear marking guidelines, including guidelines for the markers as well as for the students. Even though the current cohort have not yet completed PSY572, it was clear how this builds on PSY571 and enables project management skills to be developed to MSc level.

2.13 What changes and improvements would you want to suggest, if appropriate, to strengthen assessment arrangements, improve the currency and coherence of the curriculum, or to enhance the quality of the learning opportunities provided to students?

Consistency of feedback: Feedback was provided in different ways by different module leaders. There were some instances of students' forms requesting specific feedback, in-line feedback typed or written on the assignment, feedback separately on a form, or some combination thereof. Similarly there was sometimes individual feedback only, and sometimes general feedback to the cohort. As long as the students receive useful feedback, I am happy, but some sort of consistency across the MSc modules would be useful both for me and, no doubt, for the students. I note that some modules (e.g. PSY560 Jeffersonian transcription) definitely lend themselves to in-line written, or handwritten, comments, and I would not want to see this stopped if the rest of the modules used feedback forms instead of in-line feedback.

Moderation form consistency: The small-sample moderation form works well, though sometimes agreed marks are included and sometimes not (indeed only sometimes was there an agreed marks column). It would be good if this form could be used consistently for all modules.

Module review forms: The module review forms are very useful, though again not all consistently reported. I found the histograms or scatterplots very useful to demonstrate student performance, but I would suggest that such reports include overall data (e.g. for each grade range) for the previous 2-3 years as well to look for long-term trends.

Engagement with feedback: I did wonder how the feedback loop is closed. Outside PSY555, is there any mechanism to ensure that students engage with their feedback, perhaps through a personal tutor system? [I believe this may have been answered at the Subject Panel, but I didn't note it down.]

2.14 If the programme involves professional accreditation, please comment specifically on whether in your judgement appropriate professional competencies were achieved within the modules you examined.

n/a

2.15 Completing externals only

 If this is your final year as an external you are invited to add any longer term reflections if appropriate.

n/a

Part 3 Operation of the Subject Assessment Panel		
3.1 Date of Subject Panel meeting/s:		
3.2 *Please answer yes or not to the following questions with an X in the appropriate box. If the answer is no, please elaborate on your concerns below.*	**YES**	**NO**
(i) **Was the meeting conducted to your satisfaction?**	X	
(ii) **Were you satisfied with the panel's recommendations?**	X	
(iii) **Were you satisfied that the administrative/organisational arrangements enabled you and the panel to carry out your duties effectively?**	X	
I have not come across an exam meeting which only discusses modules and not students, at which an external examiner is present. I think this worked very well indeed – we do similar at my institution but do not involve an EE.		

Part 4 Mid-Year Visit/Feedback from students[2]		
4.1 *Please answer yes or not to the following questions with an X in the appropriate box.*	**YES**	**NO**
(i) **Were you invited to undertake a mid-year visit?**	X	
(ii) **If yes, were you able to undertake this visit?**	X	
4.2 If applicable, please summarise any feedback you have received from students about their experiences of assessment you have not already covered in your responses to Part 2 above (indicating how you received this feedback e.g. during a mid-year visit or other opportunity that you have had to engage with students). *This was my first ever visit to Plymouth University (November 2017) as I was unable to attend the EE Conference, and I met a few of the students. It was good to meet them, but such meetings will be more useful in the future now I am familiar with the MSc.*		

[2] The University encourages external examiners to make mid-year visits to facilitate broader discussion with staff and students and allow for interim reviews of work. If a mid-year visit is not possible, faculties are asked to facilitate alternative opportunities for externals to engage with students to obtain feedback on their experience of assessment eg by video conference/skype.

Section C - Summary Questions

'In the view of the examiner, the threshold standards set for the modules examined are appropriate for modules at this level, in this subject, with reference to the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications and the relevant Subject Benchmark Statement/s.'
Is the above statement correct?
Yes
If you have stated 'no', or if you wish to give additional information not already provided earlier in your report, please do so below.

'In the view of the examiner, the threshold standards of student performance for the modules examined are broadly comparable with similar subjects at the equivalent level in other UK institutions with which he/she is familiar.'
Is the above statement correct?
Yes
If you have stated 'no', or if you wish to give additional information not already provided earlier in your report, please do so below.

'In the view of the examiner, the processes for assessment for the modules examined are sound and fairly conducted.'
Is the above statement correct?
Yes
If you have stated 'no', or if you wish to give additional information not already provided earlier in your report, please do so below.

If you act as Subject External Examiner for modules/programmes run across more than one of the University's partner institutions or sites, please answer the following additional question:
'In the view of the examiner, the threshold standards of student performance are broadly comparable across partners/sites.'
Is the above statement correct?
n/a
If you have stated 'no', or if you wish to give additional information not already provided earlier in your report, please do so below.

(*delete as appropriate)

Thank you for completing your report.
Please email your report to: extexhhs@plymouth.ac.uk

Section D – Response to External Examiner's Report

- A formal written response must be sent to the External Examiner using the form below by 10 September for undergraduate reports (or within 4 weeks of receipt, if the report is not received by this deadline) or within 4 weeks of receipt for postgraduate reports.

- The response must be approved by the Head of School before being sent to the External Examiner.

- A copy of the response must be sent to the relevant Faculty Quality Administrator by the same deadline.

Date External Examiner's report received:

This report, including the response below, will be posted on the University website - please do not identify any individual students or members of staff.

Issues and good practice (brief summary of the main issues and commendations raised in the report)	**Response** (refer to planned or completed actions, as reported in school/programme/module Action Plan)

If the External Examiner has not made any substantive comments in his/her report, please delete the above table and insert the following statement:

Thank you for your report. We are pleased you are satisfied with standards and the assessment process.

Response Author Name:

Date:

This response is approved by the Head of School:
Signed (Head of School):
Date: