

# External Examiner - Report

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**Reference:** EX20274  
**Name:** Professor Tim Kirk  
**Academic Year:** 21/22  
**Home Institution:** Newcastle University  
**Examining Department:** History  
**Course(s):**  
**Year of Study:** 19/20

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## Programme Information

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Did you receive or have access to:

Question	Response	Examiner Comments	Department Comments
1.1 Programme handbooks, programme specifications, including programme learning outcomes?	Yes		
1.2 Module descriptions including module learning outcomes?	Yes		
1.3 Assessment briefs/marketing criteria?	Yes		
1.4 Is there any additional information which could have been provided?	No		

## Course Content and Design

Question	Response	Examiner Comments	Department Comments
<b>2.1 Are the modules and discrete programme elements well integrated resulting in a coherent degree programme?</b>	Yes	Yes, there is always an issue around reconciling student choice with programme coherence. The programme covers both the chronological and (especially) geographical range, and integrates essential elements in developing skills (reflection on methodology and approaches, research exercises)	
<b>2.2 Do the relevant learning outcomes align with the QAA Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies</b>	Yes	Students often see their work as a slice of historical knowledge to be written up on the basis of secondary reading, so it's worth noting that such a high proportion of the work here incorporates the dimensions they often prefer to overlook or dispense (primary source material, historiographical and theoretical issues, reflection on methodology)	
<b>2.3 Where applicable, does the curriculum match the requirements of any Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB)?</b>	N/A		
<b>2.4 Does the structure of the degree programme enable students to demonstrate progression?</b>	Yes		
<b>2.5 Where appropriate, did the placement make an appropriate contribution to the degree programme?</b>	N/A		
<b>2.6 For collaborative courses only, do you think that the collaboration between the University and it(s) partner institution(s) is working well?</b>	N/A		

## Assessment Process

Question	Response	Examiner Comments	Department Comments
<b>3.1 Did you receive all the necessary draft assessments/examination papers for comment in good time?</b>	Yes	On the whole: there was a problem with access to the dissertations, which came very late.	We will be looking at marking deadlines to ensure that externals get dissertations a little bit earlier.
<b>3.2 Were the nature and level of questions and tasks appropriate?</b>	Yes		
<b>3.3 If applicable, were the comments you provided in relation to 3.1 and 3.2 acted upon?</b>	N/A		
<b>3.4 Did you receive an appropriate number of scripts for scrutiny?</b>	Yes		
<b>3.5 Were the marking criteria fit for purpose and appropriate?</b>	Yes		
<b>3.6 Were the standard and consistency of marking appropriate?</b>	Yes	There were new types of assessment related to participation this year, and there seemed to be some discrepancy between the two modules i examined in relation to the range of marks (in case up to 100%, in another up to the high 70s). It may well be that this indicates real differences in level of engagement - although that did not seem to be indicated clearly in the comments it may also be a difference between a stage 2 and a stage 3 module. It is something that programme co-ordinators and internal examiners need to think about.	We are providing updated guidance to staff on these marks.
<b>3.7 Were the scripts marked in such a way as to enable you to see the reasons for the award of given marks?</b>	Yes		
<b>3.8 Were moderation processes clear?</b>	No	Not always, although i understand measures are already being undertaken to ensure that the rationale for moderation is clearer.	We have a new moderation policy for 2021 which should be much clearer for externals.

## Academic Standards

Question	Response	Examiner Comments	Department Comments
<b>4.1 Were academic standards appropriate for the award?</b>	Yes	Very much so. The standard of the best work was really very high	
<b>4.2 Was the overall assessment load for students registered on the degree programme appropriate?</b>	Yes		
<b>4.3 Was the Board of Examiners conducted fairly?</b>	Yes	Impeccably so.	
<b>4.4 Were criteria for determining borderline cases appropriately and consistently applied?</b>	Yes	In cases of doubt there was very extensive discussion before final decisions were made.	
<b>4.5 Were arrangements for consideration of mitigating circumstances appropriate?</b>	Yes		
<b>4.6 In your opinion, are the overall academic standards and achievements at least as good if not better than at other comparable UK institutions?</b>	Yes	Students at Warwick benefit from the retention of year-long modules in terms of the depth and quality of the work produced.	
<b>4.7 For the medical degree (MBChB) programme only, were standard setting processes clear?</b>			

## If applicable, meetings with Students

Although we do not expect you to meet with students in your role as External Examiner, we are keen to have your observations in case you were able to meet with them when you visited the University of Warwick.

Question	Response	Examiner Comments	Department Comments
5.1 Were you provided with an opportunity to meet groups of students informally to talk to them about their degree programme?	No		
5.2 If you met students, please can you comment on any issues raised by them which the School/Department needs to be aware of?			

## Enhancement of Provision

Question	Response	Examiner Comments	Department Comments
6.1 Please comment on any areas of good practice, distinctive and innovative features in relation to teaching, learning and assessment that would be worth sharing across the University.			
6.2 Are there any areas where you feel that the School/Department and/or University has not responded to your comments or suggestions raised in previous reports?	No		

## Issues requiring actions/response

Question	Response	Examiner Comments	Department Comments
7.1 Are there any essential actions matters, in your opinion which put academic quality and/or standards at risk and require immediate attention from the Head of School/Department?	No		
7.2 Are there any advisable actions matters where threshold standards are met but, where in your opinion, significant improvement could be made?	No		

## Other comments

Question	Response	Examiner Comments
8.1 Do you have any other comments which you have not been able to mention anywhere else?	Yes	<p>There are now few places where external examiners are required/able to comment on substantive issues directly related to the modules they have examined. The system at Warwick is unusual in my experience in providing a comprehensive overview of a narrow selection of modules rather than broader oversight over a greater number, and i think this approach has considerable strengths. Having observed in earlier sections that the quality of work is very good, and the assessment procedures are fair and thorough, I would like to take this opportunity to comment on the methods of assessment I've seen this year. There was a greater diversity of approaches to assessment this year, and I was specifically struck by two innovations. One was the introduction of element of self-reflection about participation in seminars (both HI289) , the other was an an exercise in creative writing (HI31z). I might have missed something but it wasn't clear to me whether the student self-evaluation was part of what was being assessed, or whether that was just feedback (and if it was assessed why not in both modules). The issue of assessing participation raises issues that are familiar to all university teachers; the assessment of self-reflection is somewhat less common but in both cases I think raises the question of whether this should just be a form of feedback (i.e. we're not assessing 'history' as such). The other specific issue here (mentioned earlier in the report) is what range of marks is appropriate. In one case the top mark was 100% and in the other a mark in the 70s - for whats seemed form the comments broadly the same level of engagement. The second innovation was the creative writing element in HI31Z (which I thought was an impressively innovative module altogether). I thought the invitation to engage in an exercise in empathy, writing the life story of a victim or perpetrator in the first person. produced some rather problematic and uncomfortable results, and i wonder if that was part of the exercise? I wonder what questions it raises about subjectivity in history (i.e. beyond the familiar subjectivities of genuine diaries, memoirs etc.), and whether the question is more striking because this is a field where fabrications have been controversial (e.g. Wilkomirski). I found it difficult to follow the rationale for assessment for these pieces. It would be useful to know more about the intended learning outcomes and assessment criteria for the exercise.</p>

## Final comments as External Examiner

Question	Examiner Comments
<p><b>9.1 If this is your last year as External Examiner, please provide an overview of your experience as an External Examiner:</b></p>	<p>This is my last year as external. It has been an enjoyable and rewarding experience, and I would like to thank colleagues at Warwick for their hospitality and consideration. Academic and administrative staff both in the History department and the examinations office have invariably been helpful and supportive, and quick to respond - not least to my many queries relating to the navigation of Tabula, a system which sometimes seemed to be consistent only in its ability to frustrate. History at Warwick has many strengths, and I have commented in detail on them elsewhere. I think it is useful nevertheless to reiterate some of the most important. One of the standard questions is above is whether standards are as good as those in similar departments elsewhere. They are better. The quality of work produced by Warwick history students is generally high, and this is fairly reflected in the numbers of good degrees awarded. At the top of the range rewards could be a little more generous, as all external examiners repeatedly point out; but the majority of work is in the II(i) range, and I think it also needs to be said that here too the range of reference, clarity of focus and level of literacy - of general competence - is also very high, even where the final product is not necessarily outstanding, and here again I think examiners could afford to be a bit more generous. Secondly - and the two points are related - the feedback on work is both thorough and constructive, and reflects a level of engagement with students' intellectual interests and development that is commendable. Third, and not least, the modules themselves are just very interesting. All history departments teach across a similar kind of geographical and chronological range; not all are as innovative or engaging. Finally, I think the retention of year-long courses is an important factor in all of this. There is much to be said for semester-length modules, but a full year, especially at more advanced levels, is much more appropriate for enabling students to produce work that has greater depth and is more perceptive.</p>