

The University of Leeds

EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2012– 2013

Part A: General Information**Subject area and awards being examined**

Faculty / School of:	Arts / Modern Languages and Cultures
Subject(s):	<i>Italian</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	2 nd and Final Year modules, including Final Year dissertations
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	BA

Completed report

The completed report should be attached to an e-mail and sent as soon as possible, and no later than six weeks after the relevant meeting of the Board of Examiners, to exexadmin@leeds.ac.uk.

Alternatively you can post your report to: **Head of Academic Quality and Standards**
Academic Quality and Standards Team
Room 12:81, EC Stoner Building
The University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT

Part B: Comments for the Institution on the Examination Process and Standards**Matters for Urgent Attention**

If there are any areas which you think require urgent attention before the programme is offered again please note them in this box

I should like to draw the School's/Faculty's attention to one particular aspect of the syllabus. Thanks to its 'open' and flexible structure, the Introduction to Dante module caters for a significant number of students from across the Faculty. It is clearly a highly successful module, currently in its second year of existence and very much in demand. Owing to the sheer number of students taking this module, it would be advisable that adequate resources be allocated to guarantee its delivery.

Only applicable in first year of appointment

Were you provided with copies of previous relevant External Examiners' reports and the response of the School to these?

N/A

For Examiners completing their term of appointment

Please comment on your experience of the programme(s) over the period of your appointment, remarking in particular on changes from year to year and the progressive development and enhancement of the learning and teaching provision, on standards achieved, on marking and assessment and the procedures of the School

N/A

Standards

1. Please indicate the extent to which the programme Aims and Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) were commensurate with the level of the award

- *The appropriateness of the Intended Learning Outcomes for the programme(s)/modules and of the structure and content of the programme(s);*
- *The extent to which standards are appropriate for the award or award element under consideration.*

ILOs were definitely commensurate with the level of the award. The description of such outcomes is eminently clear, and the appropriateness of the required standards immediately visible and accessible to all.

2. Did the Aims and ILOs meet the expectations of the national subject benchmark (where relevant)?

- *The comparability of the programme(s) with similar programme(s) at other institutions and against national benchmarks and the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.*

Yes.

3. Please comment on the assessment methods and the appropriateness of these to the ILOs

- *The design and structure of the assessment methods, and the arrangements for the marking of modules and the classification of awards;*
- *The quality of teaching, learning and assessment methods that may be indicated by student performance.*

The assessment methods adopted by Italian at Leeds represent one of the best examples of teaching practice I have seen so far. In particular, I regard the assessment form as a model of clarity and fairness, whose effectiveness is further enhanced by the excellent quality of the feedback provided on an individual base.

4. Were students given adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the Aims and ILOs?

- *The academic standards demonstrated by the students and, where possible, their performance in relation to students on comparable courses;*
- *The strengths and weaknesses of the students as a cohort.*

Students are placed in the best position to demonstrate their achievement. Feedback received from the teaching staff encourages them always to look forward to further improvement and to a heightened sense of purpose.

5. For Examiners responsible for programmes that include clinical practice components, please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum

N/A

6. Please comment on the nature and effectiveness of enhancements to the programme(s) and modules since the previous year

It would be particularly helpful if you could also identify areas of good practice which are worthy of wider dissemination.

I was particularly pleased with the generalized excellent quality of all essays and scripts I was asked to read. I recommend that the School/Faculty take into due consideration the success of the Dante module (see above). Moreover, I was very pleased to notice that the new members of staff have integrated successfully and demonstrated exceptional expertise and commitment to their teaching responsibilities.

7. Please comment on the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching

This may include examples of curriculum design informed by current research in the subject; practice informed by research; students undertaking research.

In all cases the influence of research is clearly visible in the excellent quality of the curriculum. The new appointments made and the resulting new teaching allocations are in line with the Department's ethos of genuinely considering research and teaching the two faces of the same coin.

For Examiners involved in mentoring arrangements

8. If you have acted as a mentor to a new External Examiner or have received mentor support please comment here on the arrangements

N/A

The Examination/Assessment Process

9. The University and its Schools provide guidance for External Examiners as to their roles, powers and responsibilities. Please indicate whether this material was sufficient for you to act effectively as an External Examiner.

- *Whether External Examiners have sufficient access to the material needed to make the required judgements and whether they are encouraged to request additional information.*

Fully satisfying in every respect.

10. Did you receive appropriate documentation relating to the programmes and/or parts of programmes for which you have responsibility, e.g. programme specifications or module handbooks, marking criteria?

- *The coherence of the policies and procedures relating to External Examiners and whether they match the explicit roles they are asked to perform.*

Yes. I received constant assistance and all the information I needed, both prior to and during my visit.

11. Were you provided with all draft examination papers/assessments? Was the nature and level of the questions appropriate? If not, were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?

Yes. The nature and level of the questions was consistently appropriate.

12. Was sufficient assessed / examined work made available to enable you to have confidence in your evaluation of the standard of student work? Were the scripts clearly marked/annotated?

Yes. Marking and annotations were perfectly legible. I consider the marking practice of Italian at Leeds one of the best examples in the country.

13. Was the choice of subjects for dissertations appropriate? Was the method and standard of assessment appropriate?

Yes on both account. This year, in particular, the high quality of dissertations was confirmed not just by the high number of well-deserved First Class marks but also by the originality of the chosen topics. I was also fully satisfied with the information I received about the supervision students received when engaging with their dissertation topic. It is crucial that these standards are maintained when dissertation will become a compulsory element of the Final Year syllabus.

14. Were the administrative arrangements satisfactory for the whole process, including the operation of the Board of Examiners? Were you able to attend the meeting? Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Board?

Very. I was able to attend the meeting and I was absolutely satisfied with the recommendations of the Board. There were ample opportunities to discuss single issues and to receive clarifications on points of detail.

15. Were appropriate procedures in place to give due consideration to mitigating circumstances and medical evidence?

Yes.

Other comments

Please use this box if you wish to make any further comments not covered elsewhere on the form

The high standards in teaching- and assessment practices I highlighted in my report last year have been confirmed this year too. Feedback remains exemplary in every respect.

I can only reiterate my commendation of the excellent guidance notes for students, which encourage them to cultivate a sense of a common learning experience to be shared with their peers. This, as I repeat, is invaluable, and I am sure it contributes to create in the students' community a sense of belonging of which they must be proud. This also tallies with what I observed for the first time last year and have seen confirmed this year too – that Italian at Leeds has a distinctly recognizable 'brand', while at the same time showing remarkable flexibility in effectively contributing to the University's rich and diversified didactic offer.

Italian School of Modern Languages and Cultures

FACULTY OF ARTS



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Leeds, 29 novembre 2013

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Dear <>

I write you after discussing with colleagues your report as external examiner for the Italian BA in 2012-13, and we wish to thank you warmly for your comments on the teaching and assessment ethos and practices of Italian at the University of Leeds.

We are pleased you commended the overall quality of our modules, and especially the effectiveness of our assessment practices, that you have considered as 'one of the best examples of teaching practice [...] seen so far'. We devote significant attention to the design of modules and we ensure that students are always in the position of expressing themselves at their best individually, while also realising the work of each of them is crucial for the learning experience of all.

Thanks also for looking closely at the module ITAL3360. Introduction to Dante, built on the basis of the existing level2 module ITAL2020.1, but open to students of Classics and English without specific knowledge of Italian. It has been a very successful module, although, as you rightly point out, we should discuss at unit/school/faculty level how catering for non-Italian students impact on the limited strength of the Italian unit.

Similarly, your comments on the dissertation module ITAL3090 will be brought to the attention of the School Learning and Teaching Committee. We are proud of the very good results achieved in the dissertation by some of the finalists this year, but we are also aware that these results came after an individualised path of research involving students and tutors. Since the School will introduce next year a compulsory independent project for final year students, the need to fully account for the time necessary to supervise students' independent projects has to be evaluated carefully.

Finally, it is a pleasure to read you had been in the position of appreciating the great work done, in so little time, by the new appointed members of staff. Their research expertise has fully informed their teaching, thus enriching considerably our didactic provision.

We have very much appreciated your help and guidance as external examiner in the last two years. It was a great pleasure for all of us to work with you, and we look forward to seeing you again next year.

Best wishes

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The University of Leeds

EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2012– 2013

Part A: General Information**Subject area and awards being examined**

Faculty / School of:

Italian Studies, Modern Languages

Subject(s):

Programme(s) / Module(s):

Italian Studies

Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):

BA

Completed report

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Part B: Comments for the Institution on the Examination Process and Standards**Matters for Urgent Attention**

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n/a

Only applicable in first year of appointment

Were you provided with copies of previous relevant External Examiners' reports and the response of the School to these?

n/a

For Examiners completing their term of appointment

Please comment on your experience of the programme(s) over the period of your appointment, remarking in particular on changes from year to year and the progressive development and enhancement of the learning and teaching provision, on standards achieved, on marking and assessment and the procedures of the School

n/a

Standards

1. Please indicate the extent to which the programme Aims and Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) were commensurate with the level of the award

- *The appropriateness of the Intended Learning Outcomes for the programme(s)/modules and of the structure and content of the programme(s);*
- *The extent to which standards are appropriate for the award or award element under consideration.*

All fully commensurate

2. Did the Aims and ILOs meet the expectations of the national subject benchmark (where relevant)?

- *The comparability of the programme(s) with similar programme(s) at other institutions and against national benchmarks and the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.*

Yes

3. Please comment on the assessment methods and the appropriateness of these to the ILOs

- *The design and structure of the assessment methods, and the arrangements for the marking of modules and the classification of awards;*
- *The quality of teaching, learning and assessment methods that may be indicated by student performance.*

Very commendable is the range of assessment (often clearly research-led, and ranging from traditional essays through commentaries and presentations). Feedback given by the staff of the Department is excellent (as are the feedback sheets) – it is supportive, but critical, with really useful points for improvement. It's always important to ensure that students with similar overall marks get similar ticks in the boxes.

4. Were students given adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the Aims and ILOs?

- *The academic standards demonstrated by the students and, where possible, their performance in relation to students on comparable courses;*
- *The strengths and weaknesses of the students as a cohort.*

There is an excellent cohort in final year and I note that the Department is recommending awarding 2 Lucy Whitmell prizes this year, given the high quality of students.

In some areas, it seemed like some students lacked the necessary theoretical underpinning for their feelings, especially on emotionally charged subjects like gender and sexuality.

In one final-year module, in which the material is absolutely contemporary, the lack of secondary reading seems to affect a student's ability to get high marks. While this was a weaker group in any case, directing their secondary reading - given the near absence of primary material - becomes crucial.

5. For Examiners responsible for programmes that include clinical practice components, please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum

6. Please comment on the nature and effectiveness of enhancements to the programme(s) and modules since the previous year

It would be particularly helpful if you could also identify areas of good practice which are worthy of wider dissemination.

Secondary reading has improved very substantially since last year, with concrete evidence of students reading more widely in preparation for their essays. This is excellent.

I was also impressed by Fictions of Fascism, a first-year course which introduces students to literature in the target language and has phased assessment, which begins with simple comprehension. This is good practice, leading the students to read early in their degree in their new target language, facilitating and encouraging reading practice in a foreign language. It also narrows the gap between literature and language learning.

It is also worth noting that some of the Italian Year 1 courses (like the course on cinema) is a course taken by many students outside Italian and which therefore serves the wider student body.

7. Please comment on the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching

This may include examples of curriculum design informed by current research in the subject; practice informed by research; students undertaking research.

There is clear evidence of research-led teaching, with courses designed around current research areas of staff. A very good example of this is the final-year cinema course run by <>, on which he teaches on 'Christmas films', currently central to <> own research.

For Examiners involved in mentoring arrangements

8. If you have acted as a mentor to a new External Examiner or have received mentor support please comment here on the arrangements

n/a

The Examination/Assessment Process

9. The University and its Schools provide guidance for External Examiners as to their roles, powers and responsibilities. Please indicate whether this material was sufficient for you to act effectively as an External Examiner.

- *Whether External Examiners have sufficient access to the material needed to make the required judgements and whether they are encouraged to request additional information.*

Yes, it was.

10. Did you receive appropriate documentation relating to the programmes and/or parts of programmes for which you have responsibility, e.g. programme specifications or module handbooks, marking criteria?

- *The coherence of the policies and procedures relating to External Examiners and whether they match the explicit roles they are asked to perform.*

Yes

11. Were you provided with all draft examination papers/assessments? Was the nature and level of the questions appropriate? If not, were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?

Yes. Questions were all appropriate.

12. Was sufficient assessed / examined work made available to enable you to have confidence in your evaluation of the standard of student work? Were the scripts clearly marked/annotated?

Yes. Marking was excellent, with clear annotations and signs of both first and second examiners attentive reading.

13. Was the choice of subjects for dissertations appropriate? Was the method and standard of assessment appropriate?

Yes.

14. Were the administrative arrangements satisfactory for the whole process, including the operation of the Board of Examiners? Were you able to attend the meeting? Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Board?

Yes. My only negative comment is about being asked to read some material on line through turn-it-in. As an External with a lot of scripts to get through, looking at the material online was time-consuming and inefficient. The turn-it-in programme was not always accessible on the computers we had and opening and closing scripts was time-consuming. I would request paper copies of material if possible in future.

15. Were appropriate procedures in place to give due consideration to mitigating circumstances and medical evidence?

Yes

Other comments

Please use this box if you wish to make any further comments not covered elsewhere on the form

Italian School of Modern Languages and Cultures

FACULTY OF ARTS



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Leeds, 02 dicembre 2013

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Dear <>

I am writing to thank you warmly for your external examiner's report for BA Italian, 2012-13, and to respond to it after consultation with colleagues.

We read with pleasure that, as in the previous year, you judged as excellent the range of assessment, for its variety and for the quality of feedback given to students. With regard to your request to ensure that in feedback sheets 'students with similar overall marks get similar ticks in the boxes', this is something we will ask first and second markers to consider carefully during the process of assessment. In the same form, though, a note specifies that 'there is no arithmetical link between the ticks awarded and the grade score'.

We are also pleased to read you commended the research-based and research-led organisation of modules, which is a priority in our institution. We are aware that, as you rightly point out, new research subjects, especially in the field of contemporary cultural studies, can have less bibliography available for students; we will consider ways to find a balance between involving students in little-explored topics at the centre of lecturers/tutors' research and the need to guide them step by step in the path of independent research. The same will be done in relation to the need to help students to contextualise and theorise emotions and personal feelings, and to express them in an appropriate and academically significant manner in exams and essays.

The point you raise in relation to the use of turn-it-in for reading online students scripts, that you found time consuming and inefficient, will be brought to attention of the School Learning and Teaching Committee. There is no agreement at the moment among tutors on the usefulness of the online marking, although it seems much preferred by students.

We have very much appreciated your help and guidance as external examiner in the last two years. It was a great pleasure for all of us to work with you, and we look forward to seeing you again next year.

Best wishes

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