

## The University of Leeds

## EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2011– 2012

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

Faculty / School of:	Modern Languages
Subject(s):	<i>Italian</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	Italian SH, JH (20 <sup>th</sup> and 21 <sup>st</sup> century)
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](mailto: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*

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?*

No

**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.*

Standards and Learning Outcomes are appropriate

**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.*

There was a very good range of assessment methods, from detailed commentaries on texts/films to essays dealing more broadly with themes/context to class presentations. This range should be commended.

Arrangements for marking and moderating were good and are comparable to other similar institutions. Moderators had clearly intervened and been engaged with the marking process.

A high level of student engagement with the material was tangible in many of the essay scripts. They wrote well in general, and were – especially in some of the modules – theoretically informed and had also learnt to theorise their own reactions to texts/films, a level of self-reflexivity which suggests an interiorising of theoretical positions which will serve them – and their employers – very well in the future.

**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.*

Strengths: an evident understanding of the material, theoretical awareness, and ability to express ideas. This year's final year cohort was somewhat anomalous in terms of achieving 1<sup>st</sup> class marks, achieving lower grades than normal, but there is evidence of excellence and ability both in final year and in second year. What is perhaps more notable are the low number of passes and thirds. Most students are managing therefore to attain 2.1s and, more occasionally of course, firsts.

The only weakness lies in the number of students who do not do a lot of secondary reading (this, clearly, is not uncommon across the UK). There are quite a number not reading more than a few books or articles across the modules and I would suggest, especially given the clear commitment of the Italian section to research-led teaching (see my comments below), that they be encouraged to read more.

It appeared that it was very slightly easier for students to attain high marks in some content modules than in others (it appeared harder to get high marks in the dissertation and on cinema). While this probably has to do largely with the cohort, it is something on which the Italian section might reflect.

**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.*

n/a

**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.*

This was something that I wanted to highlight in my report. One of the great strengths of the Italian programme is the notable impact of research-led teaching on the curriculum. One can see this both in the links between the research interests of the lecturers and the module content (and some lecturers are regularly changing final year courses to reflect developing research interests), and the students' awareness of their own critical (and uncritical) approaches to material, and their ability to write critically. What's great about this is that the curriculum remains very well-balanced, with clear and coherent progression through film and literary strands through the programme, while at the same time reflecting staff research, and encouraging students to become involved in the process of researching. This balanced practice is a pleasure to see.

**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**

I was offered mentor support. It's probably a useful additional support, but in this case, as everything was very clear from the outset, I didn't feel the need to take it up.

**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.*

No problems here. All very clear.

**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. Having the handbooks, programme specs, and, for language courses in particular, the marking criteria together with the scripts was very useful.

**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.

**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. Scripts were clearly marked/annotated.

**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.

**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 essay feedback sheets that students receive are very useful. The no-numeric tick boxes are potentially good, but more useful are the 'action points': this seems a very good way of pointing students to using criticism positively for their academic development.

The process was clear, coherent, and very well managed from beginning to end. Looking through the scripts at Leeds the day before the examination meeting was a very good solution, as it enabled me to get a full overview of all modules and to contact the exams officer in person if there were any queries. This is far more efficient than getting scripts sent piecemeal over the essay and exams period, and was appreciated.

**School of Modern Language & Cultures  
Italian Studies**

University of Leeds  
Leeds LS2 9JT



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6 July 2012

Dear

I am writing to thank you warmly for your external examiner's report for BA Italian, 2011-12, and to respond to it after consultation with colleagues.

We welcome your many positive comments about our standards and the assessment process. We are glad that you endorse our range of assessment methods, our arrangements for marking and moderating, and our commitment to research-led teaching while maintaining a balanced curriculum. We are also pleased that you appreciated our students' engagement with the syllabus and their achievements, even if peaks of success were fewer than usual among this year's cohort. As you know, several aspects of the School-wide assessment process were new this year, and it is reassuring that you felt that this process ran smoothly and enabled you to carry out your tasks effectively.

In section 4 you raise an important issue about which we, too, are concerned: the number of students who do not show enough evidence of having carried out and benefitted from secondary reading. In order to help students to approach and use the critical literature on a topic, we will endeavour to do more to ask them to critique articles or book chapters in class discussion, as far as time permits. Our practice in this respect will be discussed further at the start of the coming session, when two new lecturers will be joining us. We have now made a small change in our feedback sheets for essays and commentaries in order to clarify the need for secondary reading: the line 'Bibliography appropriate' has been replaced by 'Good use of critical reading'.

In the same section you mention that it appeared harder for students to obtain high marks in cinema modules and the final-year dissertation. We will certainly keep this point in mind but, as you suggest might be the case, this year's results are somewhat below those of recent years. In 2010-11, for instance, 4 students out of 20 achieved first-class marks in the final-year cinema module, while in the previous year 7 dissertations out of 12 were given marks in the first class.

We have very much appreciated your help and guidance as external examiner this year. It was a great pleasure for all of us to work with you. We wish you a very pleasant summer 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: 2011– 2012

**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):	ITAL2020, 2021, 3360, 2094, 2095, 2400, 2401, 3010, 3020, 3033, 3203, 3350
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	

**Completed report**

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**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*

None.

**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?*

Yes.

**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.

**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.*

Assessment methods allow reliable judgement of student performance. Teaching, learning and assessment methods are entirely appropriate.

**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.*

Yes, definitely.

**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.*

n/a

**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.*

Clearly crucial for the successful teaching of modules. The whole teaching programme appears to rely on a visibly strong research-led ethos.

## 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

**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.

**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.

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

Yes on both account.

**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.

**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**

In a situation generally characterized by the highest standards in teaching- and assessment practices, I should like to highlight the excellent quality of feedback – clear, helpful, always showing students the way ahead. Extremely helpful I also found the feedback sheet, esp. for PG students who may need more guidance than colleagues when acting as markers.

I was also very positively struck by the use of excellent guidance notes for students, which often encourage them to follow best practice over and beyond their individual achievement. Students are actively encouraged to cooperate effectively and to cultivate the sense of a common learning experience to be shared with their peers. This is invaluable and not easy to achieve.

In general, it is a pleasure to note that Italian at Leeds offers a very distinctive notion of what 'Italian Studies' is about – viz., as a distinctive and original contribution to the common cultural patrimony of literary and cultural studies.



School of Modern Language & Cultures  
Italian Studies

University of Leeds  
Leeds LS2 9JT



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18 July 2012

Dear<>

I am writing to thank you warmly for your external examiner's report for BA Italian, 2011-12, and to respond to it after consultation with colleagues.

We welcome your many positive comments about our standards, the examination and assessment process, and the quality of the feedback and guidance that we give to students. We are fortunate to have good assistance from postgraduates in our teaching and assessment but, as you suggest, they do need support, especially if they have been trained in a different university system. We are glad that it is evident that our undergraduates are actively encouraged to cooperate effectively and to share their learning experience. It is especially pleasing that you feel that in Leeds we offer a distinctive vision of the nature and function of Italian studies, as part of a common cultural patrimony.

On the subject of feedback, you might like to know that we have made a small change in our feedback sheets for essays and commentaries in the coming session, in order to clarify the need for secondary reading: the line 'Bibliography appropriate' has been replaced by 'Good use of critical reading'.

We have very much appreciated your help and guidance as external examiner this year. It was a great pleasure for all of us to work with you. We wish you a very pleasant summer and we look forward to seeing you again next year.

Best wishes

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