

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE: EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT 2012-2013 - BA in Italian (all programmes) (Italian Language & Italian Cultural Modules)

Dear Professor Chiesa,

I am writing further to your External Examiner's report for the above programme(s). Your Report has been considered by the Cardiff School of European Languages, Translation and Politics in accordance with our approved procedures. I am, therefore, now in a position to respond on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor to the main points you had raised.

Issues Highlighted

Your Report raised issue(s) which have been referred for consideration by the School.

1. **[3.1) and 8.8] your report of "Great disparity of marks between different questions (even among exams that were awarded a First) in the case of one Italian Language exam";**
2. **[3.2) and 8.14] your detailed observations of "Some inconsistency in feedback in the case of one content module";**
3. **[3.3) and 8.8] your further detailed observations of "highly divergent marks in one content module co-taught with colleagues from other departments;**
4. **[3.3)] in respect of the same content module the External Examiner's query as to "why there was no essay title focusing on Italian texts";**
5. **[4 and 8.16] your reiterated concerns regarding "including orals in sample to be examined by external", "briefing external about arrangements in place for the year abroad and related assessment criteria" and "scanning scripts and sending them as email attachments";**
6. **[6] your comment on "whether it would be possible to allow students to write their dissertation in English" and related observations.**

The following response has been provided on behalf of the School.

"The department is pleased that Prof. Chiesa recognises good practice by the department in terms of balanced structure and content in the programme, and innovative, wide-ranging teaching. The department is particularly pleased by Professor Chiesa's recognition of the way in which the pioneering EU7340 module actively encourages students to undertake individual research. Professor Chiesa's positive comments on the academic standards and assessment processes are also welcome.

Points 3.1 and 8.8 indicate disparity in marks awarded in language exams within the department. These comments were communicated to the department following the January exams, and great care was taken to ensure close harmonisation between markers during the Spring exams, where such disparity was not an issue. Moving forward, this harmonisation will be further enabled by the introduction of new, detailed, marking criteria and grids for use across all departments in EUROP.

Points 3.2, 8.14, 3.3 and 8.8 indicate divergence of marks between colleagues from across departments, in a module convened by a member of the Italian department. Students answer questions on texts written in the language for which they are taking the module, and also on texts (in translation) from other languages. The divergence of marks may be occasioned by students of all languages taking the module and performing to different levels across the questions, as opposed to different marking by colleagues across departments. There is an internal moderator who views scripts marked by all colleagues to militate against divergence, and again the new marking grids and criteria will enhance harmonisation still further.

Point 3.3. notes that there were no questions on Italian texts in the scripts viewed by the external. The module in question, a cross-School module, comprised a number of assessments covering texts in Italian, French German and Spanish, and the Italian texts were assessed in an earlier assessment. As this earlier assessment comprised less than 5% of the degree total, only the final assessment was sent to the external examiner. The module is convened by a member of staff in the Italian department, and so comes under the aegis of the Italian exam board, even though it is a cross-School module.

Point 4 (a) refers to the inclusion of orals in the sample examined by the external. These will be sent in subsequent years.

Point 4 (b) requests that information about the year abroad and assessment be passed on to the examiner. We now assess students on the year abroad by exams taken in the partner University, except in external circumstances, where extended essays may form the assessment instead. Full marking criteria and marking grids have been developed for use across all languages, and these will be communicated to the external examiner in time for next year's boards.

Point 4 (c) and 8.16 refer to the external examiner's request that exam scripts be manually scanned in and sent as email attachments. We investigated this possibility, however it was not deemed practical by School Management. Even though the department was extremely short-staffed due to absence (2 staff carrying the workload of 7 at one point), exam scripts were turned around as quickly as possible (often double-marked within 2 days) to enable the scripts to be sent off periodically in batches, to enable the external examiner to have as much time as possible to view the scripts. Our initial ambitious schedule was respected as far as possible and we do not anticipate similar challenges next year.

Point 6 asks whether it would be possible for students to write dissertations in English. This has already been addressed, and from this year onwards, following deliberation by the School's Teaching and Learning Committee, School policy is to give students the choice of writing dissertations in English or in the target language. Overall the department is pleased by the positive comments made by Prof. Chiesa, and feels that appropriate steps have been taken to respond to his concerns.

Positive Comments

The School and University are pleased to note your positive comments on the School's provision including:

- a. **[1, 2 and 3] your positive indications regarding the programme structure, academic standards and assessment process;**
- b. **[1] your particularly positive comment regarding EU7340, "a module based on Learning Portfolios, actively encourages students to undertake individual research".**

I hope that you will find this response satisfactory and thank you for your service as External Examiner.

In order to meet the expectations of the QAA Quality Code, both the External Examiner Annual Report and this Institutional Response will be published on Registry web pages and will be available publically.

The University's provision of the formal Institutional Response is not intended to constrain direct communication between schools and their External Examiners. Schools are encouraged to discuss with their External Examiners any matters of

detail raised in their Reports and, more widely, any issues impacting on the quality and standards of awards, including possible changes to programmes.

We are most grateful for your comments and for your support in this matter.

Mrs Jill Bedford
Director of Registry and Academic Services