

UCML Exec Committee

4th December 2020 14:00–16:00 by Zoom



Item 10f: Italian Studies

This report is based on ongoing discussion in the discipline, and on updates from representatives of the two main professional associations: Society for Italian Studies in the UK and Ireland (SIS) and Association for the Study of Modern Italy (ASMI).

Follow up from summer Exec's report: the Society for Italian Studies has appointed two **SIS early career representatives** in their Executive Committee: Dr Serena Vandi (University of Oxford) and Dr Guido Bartolini (University College Cork). They will represent the community also in UCML groups.

Most activities have been **slowed down** due to the ongoing pandemic, and this report confirms trends already highlighted during the summer.

There are **widespread worries for the stability of Italian studies** within the broader crisis of Modern Languages under the pressures of the times (neo-liberal approach to management of universities, covid-19 emergency, Brexit-related uncertainties). To the long-term trends of low student recruitment (linked students' perception of Italian Studies and Modern Languages being a 'privileged' area of study, increased costs, shrinking availability of the subject at GCSE and A-level), this year adds the 2019-20 and 2020-21 hesitation surrounding the feasibility of the Year Abroad, seen as the distinctive feature of Modern Languages degrees, both for the pandemic and in relation to Brexit. **Recruitment** has been hit hard in 2020-21 almost uniformly across the country, both at UG and PG level.

Small units like Italian Studies' ones often pay a very high price in terms of **increased administrative and teaching workload** in order to deliver their programmes, with consequent worries **for staff wellbeing**.

The **closure of Italian units and redundancies** within the restructuring of Modern Languages provision (e.g., at Hull and Nottingham Trent University) does not help to keep a positive attitude towards the ongoing changes, their speed, and the limited room for reversing the trend.

On the positive side, the impossibility to continue with research events in presence (in itself another problem of recent times) has at least encouraged members to invest in **virtual events**. Both ASMI and SIS have moved online their conferences (yearly subject-specific symposia, postgraduate and early-career seminars and workshops) which have been very successful in terms of attendance and increase in international collaborations. A reflection on the challenges and rewards brought by the increased use of non-in-presence exchanges

has been presented in a post for the SIS blog by Italian Studies at Kent, who organized the SIS Themed Conference *Visions of Italy* in September 2020:
<http://italianstudies.org.uk/2020/10/16/visions-of-italy/>.

The **SIS blog** has also been successful since its inception in January 2019, and it has now 20 posts focused on the presentation of innovative research projects, events, debates, collaborations within and beyond the discipline.

The work of Italianists at Kent is also a good example of how **Italian Studies thrives when approached within the Modern Languages context**, with comparative, transnational or theoretical approaches. This for example evidenced, in relation to teaching, by their leadership in *the Modern Languages Teaching Forum*, now at their 4th edition (2nd December 2020, supported also by UCML).

In the same line of **keeping Italian studies at the heart of Modern Languages** research and teaching are the outputs of the AHRC research project *Transnationalising Modern Languages*, led by Professor Charles Burdett (University of Durham, soon Director of IMLR, University of London): a handbook with the same title and a series of discipline-specific volumes for different languages, published by Liverpool Press (Italian, Spanish, Russian, German, Portuguese; French is forthcoming in 2021).

Finally, ASMI and SIS are looking forward to the results of the **UCAS granularity project** led by UCML.

Gigliola Sulis (Leeds, 1st December 2020)