

Item 10.f Italian Studies

This report is based on ongoing discussion in the discipline (mailing lists, annual meetings, seminars and conferences) 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).

A) Key themes discussed in Italian Studies: recruitment; Early Career Academics; Equality, Diversity, and Inclusivity; Year Abroad (Covid-19, Brexit); the digital context; reaching out: closer collaboration with Italian Studies associations beyond the UK and interdisciplinarity within and beyond the Modern Languages.

1. Recruitment

a. Association conferences and AGMs focused on the *worries for the low UG intake in Italian studies*, the issue of assessment of A-level and grading of Modern Languages, and the need to *counterbalance the news reports* that periodically present an even more negative picture of language study in the British context, mostly because only SH students are considered in UCAS data. Much hope is put in the analysis of the JH and mixed languages degrees currently done by UCML. A proactive campaign in this direction could be organised and supported by all language subject associations.

b. The *Choose Italian campaign*, led by SIS in collaboration with ISMLA (Independent Schools' Modern Languages Association, <https://www.ismla.co.uk/>), continues to work to strengthen the links between HEIs and high school and support teachers and students in Italian. At present, a need for more resources for A-level and GCSE preparation has been identified, and Italianists has been invited to collaborate and produce videos/podcasts in Italian on relevant topics (B1-B2 level).

2. Early Career Academics

a. SIS has now *two elected ECA representatives in the SIS Exec*, who work together with the holder of the employability/professionalisation portfolio; one of them represents Italian Studies in the UCML ECA Special Interest Group/Support Network. They have started to map out the presence of ECAs in Italian Studies, with a survey on their roles and needs.

b. A *virtual SIS Early Career Academics event* is being organized by Italian Studies at Cork, (24-25 June 2021): *Italian Studies: Theory and Practice*. The study days have sessions on Digital humanities, Mediating Subjectivities, Intermediality, Deconstructing Whiteness, and two additional professional development sessions on 'What we look for in an article submission for an academic journal' and 'How to write an academic book proposal'.

3. Equality, Diversity, and Inclusivity

a. Created after input from SIS Exec (June 2019, September 2020) and approved by AGM (January 2021), the *SIS EDI Working Group* has circulated its first recommendations, together with a call for broader membership and participation in its meetings.

b. EDI was the topic of the afternoon session of the SIS AGM (5th January 2021), with invited speakers from other disciplines.

c. In the debate, colleagues suggested that UCML could perhaps lead a sector-wide survey on the underrepresentation of BAME students in the Modern Languages, and consequently at higher levels too (pipeline issue in higher education).

4. Year Abroad (Covid-19, Brexit)

a. Warm thanks are expressed by Italianists to UCML for the work done in bringing together and supporting the Modern Languages (also) in this area, from the sessions organised by the YA Special Interest Group to the national lobbying on behalf of the ML constituency.

b. Concerns for the impact of Brexit and for the limitations of the Turing programme remain high.

5. The digital

It seems that after an initial period of standstill, many research-focused activities have thrived in online mode, and new, broader collaborations have been possible. ASMI and SIS are now using most proactively their websites, blogs and social media to promote research, pedagogical and outreach events organised in the community, thus helping to raise their visibility and international participation.

This is perhaps one positive take from the current Covid-19 pandemic.

6. Reaching out: closer collaboration with Italian Studies associations beyond the UK and Ireland and interdisciplinarity within and beyond the Modern Languages

Similar priorities to those listed in this report are indicated by sister organisations outside of the UK, as exemplified by the programme of the 2021 (virtual) Conference of the American Association for Italian Studies (AAIS) (28th May-6th June 2021)), and alignment of needs at present and future directions is evident also with cognate disciplines, within the Modern Languages and more broadly in the Humanities.

There is widespread consensus that closer collaborations should be sought in all areas, and that the work and leadership of UCML is pivotal in making this happen (also for talking to other disciplines). With this in mind, ASMI invited me as UCML Italian representative to present UCML's activities at their Exec meeting (5th February 2021); in that occasion, colleagues expressed the intention of being more actively present in UCML's events and debates.

B) Italian Studies Survey

Following the excellent model of the Portuguese Study Survey carried out by Hillary Owen, an Italian Studies Survey is in the process of being prepared, as a collaboration between the Italian UCML rep and SIS. We aim at discussing and approving it at the SIS summer Exec, for distribution at the beginning of the 2021-22 academic year. If similar surveys were carried out in all subject areas represented in UCML, this would give a useful picture of the state and health of the Modern Languages in our times.

C) Conferences and events

Some planned events have been postponed (SIS Biennial Conference in Warwick, from May 2021 to May 2022) and others adapted to online delivery, namely:

1. *Italian Mediterraneans, 1800-Present*: 2020 ASMI Conference, considering the relation between Italy and the Mediterranean against the grain of methodological nationalism and transnationalism – this took the format of a series of discrete events (a keynote lecture, a roundtable discussion, a series of podcasts/interviews, and possibly an in-person event in June 2021)

<http://www.asmi.org.uk/conferences/asmi-2020-conference-remote/>

2. *100 years of Italian Fascism*: organised by Phil Cooke and John Foot for ASMI in association with the Italian Cultural Institute in London – ongoing series of online events (2021)

<http://www.asmi.org.uk/news/100-years-italian-fascism>

3. *Italy at Work. Representation of Work in Italian Culture*: 2020 SIS Postgraduate Colloquium, November 27th, 2020

<http://italianstudies.org.uk/2021/02/05/sis-pg-colloquium-italy-at-work/>

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