

**The final evaluation report of the external experts on the research performance of the Dipartimento di Lingue e Letterature Anglo-Germaniche e Slave, Università Degli Studi di Padova.**

**I. Introduction**

**Composition of the Evaluation Committee**

The invited external experts were (in alphabetical order):

***Professor Maria G. Di Salvo***

Full Professor of Slavic Philology, Milan State University. Research expertise: Slavic linguistics, theory of literature and Russian 18<sup>th</sup>-century literature, and Russian-Italian cultural relations in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

***Professor Patrizia Lendinara***

Full Professor of Germanic Philology, Palermo State University and Coordinator, Languages division of the Sicilian postgraduate school for professional teachers (SISSIS). Research expertise: Old English language and literature, Old Frisian, Gothic and medieval literature.

***Professor Valerie Smith***

Woodrow Wilson Professor of Literature, Department of English and Director, Center for African American Studies, Princeton University, USA. Research expertise: African American literature and culture, film studies, feminist studies, twentieth century U. S. Studies.

***Professor Eija Ventola, Chair of the Evaluation Committee***

Full Professor of English Philology (English Language and Modern English Literature), Dept. of English, University of Helsinki, Finland. Research expertise: systemic-functional linguistics, text linguistics, discourse analysis, multimodal and –medial discourse, semiotics, casual conversation, service encounters, academic writing, conference and negotiation discourse, business discourse, tourism and communication, language and gender, translation studies, Australian literature, linguistic stylistics.

***Professor Friedrich Vollhardt***

Full Professor of German Literature, University of Munich, Germany. Research expertise: Late medieval and early modern studies, Weimar neo-classicism, literature of the twentieth century, history of sciences and cultural studies etc.

**A. The Department**

The research fields and programmes within the Department encompass several languages and their linguistic, philological and literary research fields. The major research fields are English language, linguistics and translation; early and late modernity in Great Britain and Germany; Old English and Old Norse Poetry; minority and postcolonial discourses;

Russian, Polish, Czech and Slovak, Serbo-Croatian, and Slovenian. Some of these languages are rarely taught in universities; as a result, this programme serves a special role not only in Padova, but also in Italy.

For many reasons, the Department has an established position at the University of Padova (scientific area no. 11). Colleagues in the department participate in the major research collaborations with the Warburg Institute (London), the Institute of Russian Literature (St Petersburg); the Institute of Slavic and Balkan studies (Moscow); the Institute of Croatian Language and Linguistics (Zagreb). The impressive scholarly output is produced both by individual scholars and by teams; the Department encourages its junior members to participate in research groups. Several projects of the Department have attracted National funding and seven have received a high evaluation by the CIVR assessment of Italian research. Several of the six programmes of research show a high ratio of productivity and the goals reached are, in many instances, far superior to the resources available. (Worthy of notice is the very large departmental library.) The Department also produces *Carte d'Occasione* (a serial publication), and, in recent years, it has also upgraded and implemented its Web presence and online publications.

#### Staff resources

Most areas of the department are understaffed, and in several areas (such as Slavic studies) this problem has reached crisis proportions. Moreover, there seems to be a generation gap between full professors -- many of whom are close to retirement or have already retired by this time -- and younger researchers. This situation has an impact on the development of research, as the few full professors bear most of the burden of mentoring graduate students and younger scholars and securing financial resources. In contrast, the Department seems to have an appropriate level of administrative and library staff who provide efficient service and support.

#### Financial resources

The research of the Department seems to rely mainly on ordinary funds from the University, but some programmes have also benefited from national project funds both from Padova and from the Ministry. For the department to maintain and improve its position in the rigorous and competitive national and international context, it must receive an increase in its level of funding for research and faculty appointments.

#### Material resources

The present situation with regard to space is exceptionally satisfactory if compared to most Italian universities: the two buildings where the Department is located are very pleasant and offer a quiet ambience for study and modern tools for research. The building where the Anglo-Germanic offices are located is especially appealing, with beautiful indoor and outdoor spaces where colleagues and students can congregate for the sorts of informal exchanges that help consolidate intellectual community. The library is rich and well equipped, with an efficient inter-library loan service. Still, the fact that Slavic studies occupy a different building from the Anglo-Germanic section does not facilitate collaboration between scholars who until a few years ago belonged to separate units.

### **B. Site Visit**

After submitting individual reports, the members of the Committee convened in Padova on January 16, 2008. We met first with the Chair of the Department of Anglo-Germanic and Slavic Languages and Literatures, Professor Giuseppe Brunetti, and a representative of the University's 'Nucleo di valutazione.' Professor Brunetti then hosted a working dinner for the panelists. Prof. Eija Ventola of the University of Helsinki was chosen as Chair, and we decided to share the secretarial responsibilities among all of the members of the committee.

During the morning of January 17<sup>th</sup>, the panelists discussed in executive session our views of the Department and developed a set of questions to ask colleagues in each programme. During the afternoon we interviewed the members of the six programmes of research in separate sessions. On the morning of January 18<sup>th</sup>, we convened again in executive session and drafted the contents of the final report. The work of the Committee came to a close after we edited the final version of the report in the afternoon.

### **C. Critique of the Self-evaluation Report of the Department of Anglo-Germanic and Slavic Languages and Literatures of the University of Padova**

The members of the committee wish to commend the members of the department on the time and effort they devoted to providing a thorough and clear report. We also deeply appreciate their serious and thoughtful participation in the interview process. We found the report to be informative, especially given that this is the first time the Department has been called upon to produce such a document. The Department might consider introducing a few changes into future reports to make them even more effective. First, it would be helpful if descriptions of the research projects had been more consistent in length and comprehensiveness. Second, the report might be better organized to avoid repetition and inconsistencies. Finally, future reports ought to include copies of short cvs of the members of the faculty to provide a fuller sense of the colleagues' achievements and publications.

## **II. Assessment of Individual Research Programs**

### **Programme 1: English language, linguistics and translation.**

(Head: Carol Taylor)

The research foci in this programme are: English linguistics, functional linguistic theory, genre research, language variety research with electronic corpora, applied linguistics, multimodal and –medial research, translation and language teaching and educational research. Most of the research group members are young, dynamic researchers. Research quality of the programme is very good; the goals are clear and coherent. Some members of the programme, specifically Carol Taylor, are internationally well known and have international links; the younger members have also presented papers in national and international conferences. The programme has organized conferences. The group raised the highest amount of external research money from the ministry and other sources. Its productivity output is excellent, but publishing in internationally refereed journals could be increased. The research is relevant in the current academic world. The programme

shows clear novelty in its multimodal approaches and in its research on text genres, some of which have so far been researched very little or not yet at all. The future possibilities of the programme are excellent. The importance of this area of research in English studies will increasingly grow, due to the role of the English language as the leading international and educational language throughout the world. We strongly recommend that this programme be supported with another mid-career, full professorial appointment, to share the supervision responsibility and to guarantee continuity. Further, to enhance and expand the programme and to ease off the heavy teaching loads, some further young researcher positions should be established, either with the university's own funding or with external grant funding; some could be temporary posts and could also host some international experts or younger scholars to further enhance the internationalization of the group.

The final evaluation is very good.

### **Programme 2: Early and late modernity in Great Britain and Germany**

(Heads: P. Bottalla, M. Scattola)

This programme comprises two focal points. It pays attention to the relevant historical and social contexts and the practical and philosophical knowledge that accompany the formulation of literary texts in early modern times (from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century) in England/Scotland and Germany (Deutsches Reich) and provides an essential material basis for examining the literature of the period from a historical and interdisciplinary perspective. Further, the programme aims to re-construct the cultural exchange between European cultures in the first half of the twentieth century, identifying key moments and obvious instances of the interaction between history and narration in England, Germany and Italy.

We were especially impressed with the productivity and international visibility of two of the associate professors, their collaborations with prestigious institutions such as the Warburg Institute-London, the Max Planck Institute for the History of Law-Frankfurt, and the Herzog August Bibliothek- Wolfenbüttel, etc., and their excellent collaboration with other faculties in Padova. The quality of research in this group is at least in part due to the achievements and influence of the late Professor Emilio Bonfatti. He was clearly an inspiration to his colleagues and to generations of students. Although it is clear that a professor of his stature can never truly be replaced, to ensure that that legacy continues, the Department needs to appoint his successor as soon as possible.

The final evaluation is excellent.

### **Programme 3: Old English and Old Norse Poetry: editions, translations, comparativism, informatics**

(Heads: G. Brunetti, M. Meli)

This programme of research spans the centuries by studying the early medieval texts with the most modern approaches and techniques (in particular Professor Brunetti's project). It is also remarkable for the shared theoretical research on the nature and role of editions and translation in two cognate literatures: Old (and Middle) English and Old Norse. The national reputation of the researchers is high and the quality of the products outstanding.

Brunetti's *Beowulf* was selected by the University of Padova among the products submitted for the national assessment of Italian universities, where it was graded as 'excellent'. The human resources are rather limited (2 professors); we recommend that the University hire a 'researcher' in both areas who would be committed to the project of forging connections with Mediaevalists' groups of research in Padova and elsewhere. The final evaluation is very good.

**Programme 4: Minority discourses and their relation to dominant/global culture: debates on gender, race, ethnicity, and citizenship rights in the English-speaking world**

(Heads: A. Oboe, A. Scacchi, W. Boelhower)

The scholars in this group are to be commended for the quality and significance of their research, their national and international visibility, and their productivity. Their path breaking scholarship theorizes the vital connections among the fields of Postcolonial, American and black Atlantic Studies and addresses some of the most pressing issues that face the global community in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We were especially impressed by the *Seachanges* project, a well-funded, multi-year initiative which brought international scholars to Padova to explore the cultural/ theoretical field of circumatlantic studies and to re-chart the notion of the Black Atlantic as initially presented by Paul Gilroy. Through this project, they have been able to create relationships within prominent scholars in their field and find venues in which to publish their research. In the last year an associate professor in the programme left to assume a position in the United States. To secure the future of this programme, we strongly recommend that a new faculty member be appointed, preferably someone at the rank of Assistant Professor. We also recommend that the University continue to invest in their research projects in order to help them maintain their essential connections to scholars elsewhere in Europe, on the African continent, in Brazil and in North America.

The final evaluation is very good.

**Programme 5: Slavic linguistics: minorities, language contact, lexicography, verbal aspect, electronic editions**

(Heads: R. Benacchio, L. Serafini, H. Steenwijk)

This group focuses on Slavic linguistics (both diachronic and synchronic) and on problems of aspect in Slavic languages, especially on the use and meaning of the imperative and questions of language contact (Polish-Lithuanian on one side, Slavo-Romance on the other). The research on aspect, beside its theoretical relevance, may also find application in language teaching. The work on Polish-Lithuanian contacts in the 17<sup>th</sup> century fills a gap in our knowledge of a complex linguistic situation in this area, where German influence was also considered. The wide-ranging study of Resian dialects, which profits from the use of electronic tools, not only traces the history of a Slav linguistic minority in Northern Italy, but also helps to normalize their ongoing linguistic practice. The programme is impressive with regard to all criteria. Due to the retirement of Dr. Loredana Serafini, it seems that the project concerning Lithuanian will not be brought to conclusion. Her departure also signals the disappearance of Baltic studies in the

University of Padova.

The final evaluation is very good.

### **Programme 6: Historical and comparative studies in Slavic Literatures**

(Heads: M. Ferrazzi, M. Piacentini, S. Zani)

This programme comprises historical and comparative studies in Slavic literatures, from the late Middle Ages to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It investigates the impact of Italian culture on the development of Polish, Russian, Serbian and Croatian literatures, the manuscript tradition of Latin texts in Poland, and the transfer of Western culture into Russia after the 18<sup>th</sup> century. From these studies follows a deep analysis of the rise and development of a new system of genres and a new evaluation of their interaction with pre-existing traditions. The authors taken into consideration range from V. Trediakovskij (18<sup>th</sup> century) to V. Odoevskij and L. Tolstoj (19<sup>th</sup>) and Ju. Olesin and L. Cukovskaja (20<sup>th</sup> centuries). The problem of genre is also the core of projects relating to the 20<sup>th</sup>-century Polish writer M. Hlasko and to Serbian and Croatian epic culture in its relation to the rise of the novel. Overall, the research produced by the scholars in this group is relevant to significant developments in the field, and the quality and future possibilities of their work are strong. The latter are threatened by the recent retirement or departure (due to career advancement) of four members of the staff, a situation that seriously endangers the long-standing tradition of valuable Slavic studies in Padova. We strongly encourage the Department to consider making new appointments in this area.

The final evaluation is good.

### **III. Overall Evaluation**

Some of the strengths and weaknesses of the research programmes of the department have already been pointed out in the individual programme evaluations. We highlight the most important ones below.

#### **A. Strengths**

- 1) The department has many programmes that include the use of modern media and developments and technology in research. This is particularly important as globalization and media become increasingly part of the research working environment.
- 2) Several programmes and many researchers are internationally oriented and feature prominent scholars. This environment is crucial for mentoring graduate students and scholars in the early stages of their career and helps them to develop international networks.
- 3) Many of the programmes support younger researchers admirably and invite their participation in a range of projects.
- 4) Some programmes feature outstanding team and individual productivity, and some programmes have the potential to produce, or are already producing path breaking, landmark research in their respective areas.

## **B. Weaknesses**

- 1) It is always a challenge to bring together formerly independent departments, and this difficulty is now partly reflected in the research activities. Many research programmes and projects reflect the old traditional divisions; some projects overlap thematically although not linguistically; and some have very specific, limited foci.
- 2) Some programmes have few linkages with international research.
- 3) Some research programmes and researchers are primarily oriented towards publishing only in Italian.
- 4) In some of the programmes various researchers have retired or will be retiring soon, and it may be that whole programmes are threatened. Some programmes are split between older and very young researchers; scholars in mid-career are underrepresented.

## **IV. Conclusions and Recommendations**

*Evaluation: Very Good*

From the perspective of this committee, the research activity of the Department for the last five years (2002-2006) has achieved a ranking of **Very Good**. A number of excellent projects have been produced. Many of these projects should be continued, both by building on past experience and through collaboration across programmes and with colleagues in other departments. The aforementioned shortcomings are principally due to the time and financial constraints in the Humanities in general, especially in those programmes that have not managed to draw external funding or are burdened by teaching and testing responsibilities. Additionally, faculty members in the department have had to adjust to the dramatic changes precipitated by the departmental reorganization.

The evaluation panel would like to emphasise the following points:

- 1) The department has 6 different research programmes, which in total have 54 research projects. This ratio suggests that research is conducted frequently on an individual basis rather than collaboratively. Those projects that share noticeable thematic and methodological interests should consider the possibilities of joint research. Additional collaborations would bring complementary methodologies and theoretical frameworks to bear upon important research initiatives, reduce the number of research projects, and enhance intellectual exchange across languages. The joint research programmes should then be given sufficient funding for organizing further research seminars, conferences and symposia in which invited national and international experts can participate. These academic events enhance research training and expertise both within this department and in others as well.
- 2) In general, the members of the department have produced an impressive quantity of scholarship. We recommend that they seek out more opportunities to publish

jointly, in international venues, and with more collaborators from abroad. All the department members publish in book chapters primarily, and in volumes produced by national rather than prestigious international publishers. It is unclear whether these publications are nationally or internationally refereed. Indeed, colleagues in some of the programmes feature very few journal publications. Publishing in leading, international, refereed journals would further enhance the department's already high standard of publication.

3) Some of the members of the research groups publish only in Italian. We recommend that all the researchers strive for publishing in other languages as well. Further, although some of the researchers are very active in participating in international conferences and other international organizational events, all colleagues should strive to do so in order to keep abreast with the latest theoretical and applied developments in the researchers' fields. This level of professional activity naturally requires that all members of the department be given travel grants from time to time, if they have their papers accepted for presentation.

4) Since many researchers will be retiring, now would be an appropriate time to re-evaluate the organization of the research programmes. Given the gap between the number of full professors and very young researchers, mid-career scholars ought to be appointed to fill current and upcoming vacancies. Furthermore, we recommend that some permanent and temporary positions for associate and assistant researchers be created. Creation of positions and grants that allow full-time research should be created for younger scholars. These positions will also reduce overall teaching loads that are burdensome in some areas.

5) The research programmes with the highest productivity and greatest future possibilities should be allotted funding in order to enable the continuation of good results without, however, neglecting the financial needs of the programmes with fewer researchers but high quality output.