Teaching Italian Studies in the 21st Century

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Contents

1. **Introduction**

The discipline of Italian Studies has witnessed great changes in the past decade. The transformation of independent departments of Italian Studies into Schools of Modern Languages and/or European Studies and greater emphasis on student employability and satisfaction are some of the challenges and opportunities which those involved in teaching Italian in UK universities are facing in the new millennium. What we teach (and what we do not teach); how we teach it; popular and less popular content options; the links with current trends in research in Italian studies; and the changing student population are important elements that are shaping our discipline in the 21st century.

In September 2012 the HEA funded a project led by Dr Giuliana Pieri (Royal Holloway University of London) entitled *Teaching Italian Studies in the 21st century: Trends and Challenges*. The project's aim was two-fold: to facilitate an evidence-based reflection on the shape of the curriculum in Italian Studies and to engage academics in Italian Studies in a national debate about the current and future shape of the discipline. In March 2013, Dr Pieri led a one-day seminar in London (IMLR) which saw the participation of representatives from a high number of UK departments of Italian and PG students.

The following report has benefited from the support of the HEA, the Society of Italian Studies (SIS), and Royal Holloway University of London; the latter provided all data analysis. The data is based on content courses in all departments of Italian in British and Irish universities in the academic year 2013-14. Whilst it remains a snapshot of the state of Italian and the curriculum in Italian Studies in a particular moment in time, it provides a solid basis on which to reflect upon a number of interrelated issues: the shape of Italian Studies in UK and Irish universities, curricular developments, and the teaching and learning culture of the discipline.

Previous reports published at the time of this project, in 2012-13, have been characterised by an exclusive focus on language provision of Modern Foreign Languages across the university sector (the *UCLM/AULC survey of IWLP activity in universities in the UK*, commissioned by the HEA; *Languages: the State of the Nation*, February 2013, commissioned by the British Academy; and *Languages for the Future, Which Languages the UK needs Most and Why*, 2013 British Council). The focus on language provision highlights a lack of attention towards the role of cultural modules in the study of Modern Languages at degree level.

The principal aim of the data gathered below is to facilitate a more structured discussion of the challenges, opportunities and trends in teaching and learning in Italian Studies in the 21st century, by means of a renewed focus on the cultural modules and the shape of the curriculum, ultimately contributing to the development of sustainable solutions about the future of the discipline.

2. Method

2.1. Surveying the sector

In order to gather the data on existing Italian courses, the survey was sent to all Universities in England, Scotland and Wales who offer an Italian programme. The department had the option of completing the survey or sending the list of the courses on offer to the project administrator. For the purpose of this study, only those institutions providing single/major or joint honours degree programmes in Italian have been used in the final data compilation.

Data for UK universities was presented to the Society of Italian Studies during its AGM in January 2014. As a result of requests from members and thanks to the support of SIS and Royal Holloway, the data collection was extended to Irish universities who are also members of the SIS.

The survey remained open between April 2013 and November 2013. It was re-opened between January and April 2014 in order to include data from Irish universities.

2.2. Questionnaire

The survey template was created by the Strategic Development Office at Royal Holloway, University of London. The survey was constructed as a chart that could be filled in by selecting the appropriate value. Organising rows by year and columns by the module and degree type allowed for the department to complete the survey quickly and efficiently. In order to compensate for differences in programmes and the year abroad option, a maximum of five years were included within the survey. The columns were headed as follows: module title, module category, other module category, optional or core module, and availability—the last two organised together within each degree program. Looking at the diagram below, the columns are set up to distinguish between degree types. Note that the single honours degree type would be followed by the joint honours and minor degrees. This diagram also provides the layout which is repeated for each year.

Year 1			
		Other Module Category	**Single Honours**	
Module Title	Module Category	If selected other please specify	Optional or core module	Availability

Under *Module Title* the participant would insert the title of the course and then select the type of course from a drop-down menu under module category. These categories were organised by historical periods, literary trends and other common subjects within Italian (a complete list of these categories is included below). In the event that the course did not fit a particular category, the participant could then select *Other* and insert an appropriate module category in the next column - *Other Module Category*. Continuing to the next columns, the administrator would indicate whether the course is an optional or core module under the appropriate degree programmes. For instance, the course *19th Italian Fashion* would fall under the *Fashion* category, and would be marked as an optional module for both Single and Joint honours students.

Module Categories

1. Medieval Literature (pre- 15th)
2. Renaissance Literature (15th & 16th)
3. 17th and 18th Century Culture
4. 19th Century Literature
5. 20th Century Literature- Pre WWII
6. 20th Century Literature- Post WWII
7. 21st Century Literature
8. Cinema
9. Cinema- Post WWII
10. Cinema- Pre WWII
11. Dante
12. Fascism
13. 20th Century History
14. Fashion
15. Italian Nationalism
16. Language
17. Linguistics
18. Opera Culture
19. Other
20. Renaissance Art
21. Translation

Once all data was received, the initial twenty one categories were reduced to seven in order to provide statistically significant data.

Modified Module Categories

1. 17th and 18th Century Culture and 19th Century Literature (to include 17th and 18th Century Culture and 19th Century Literature)
2. Translation and linguistics (to include Translation—where translation is not a component of a pre-existing language course but a stand-alone unit of study—and Linguistics)
3. Cinema (to include the three separate categories Cinema, Cinema- Post WWII, and Cinema- Pre WWII)
4. Italian history (to include Fascism and Italian Nationalism)
5. 20th and 21st Century Literature (to include 20th Century literature-Pre WWII, 20th Century Literature-Post WWII, and 21st Century Literature)
6. Medieval Literature, Renaissance Literature, Renaissance Art and Dante (to include Medieval Literature - pre- 15th, Renaissance Literature - 15th & 16th, Dante, and Renaissance Art)
7. Other (comprising the Other, Fashion, and Opera Culture)

2.3. Limitations

The intention of this survey was to collect information on all Italian programmes within England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. The data collection did pose a problem with regards to those programmes that did not offer stand-alone Italian content courses, having instead altered their curriculum to a more cultural approach in order to bridge various languages. For instance, where

Spanish, Italian, German and French were taught in cultural courses designed to cover similar historical, literary and thematic trends such as Romanticism, it was decided that for the purpose of this study, these types of courses and programmes would be removed from the data in order to focus the data and results on Italian specific curricula.

3. Results

3.1. Studying Italian in British Universities

The list of teachers of Italian holding Office in UK and Irish Universities published by the SIS in 2013-14 comprises 45 universities in which Italian is currently taught in some shape.

In Britain, in 2013-14, 40 universities offered Italian language as part of a variety of degree programmes. Cultural modules are offered by 27 of these institutions. 16 institutions offer Single Honours and/or Major degree programmes. A further 10 universities offer Joint Honours programmes in Italian. Lancaster University offers Italian language and cultural modules within a Management BSc.

Italian is taught as Single Hons and/or Major in 13 of 24 Russell Group Universities: Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Cardiff, Durham, Edinburgh, Exeter, Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Nottingham, Oxford, UCL, and Warwick. A further 2 Russell Group universities (Liverpool and Nottingham) offer joint Honours Italian. In the remaining 9 universities in the Russell Group, Italian language is offered in three institutions: King's College London, LSE, Queen Mary.

3.2. Studying Italian in Irish universities

In Ireland, 4 universities offer Italian at degree level: National university of Ireland Galway; Trinity College Dublin; University College Cork; University College Dublin.

3.3. Module Categories

The survey comprised a total of 415 modules, excluding year abroad and/or year in industry. The three largest module categories are: *Other* (94 modules); *Medieval Literature, Renaissance Literature, Renaissance Art, and Dante* (84 modules); and *20th and 21st Century Literature* (80 modules). Notable for the small number of modules offered are two categories: *Translation and Linguistics* (31 modules offered only in a small number of departments) and *17th and 18th Century Culture, and 19th Century Lite*rature (26 modules which, after further analysis, show the near absence of the study of 17th and 18th century Italian culture).

Module categories
There are 415 modules (exc. year abroad/in industry)

- 17th and 18th century culture, and 19th century literature
- Translation and linguistics
- Cinema
- Italian history
- 20th and 21st century literature
- Medieval literature, Renaissance literature, Renaissance art, and Dante
- Other
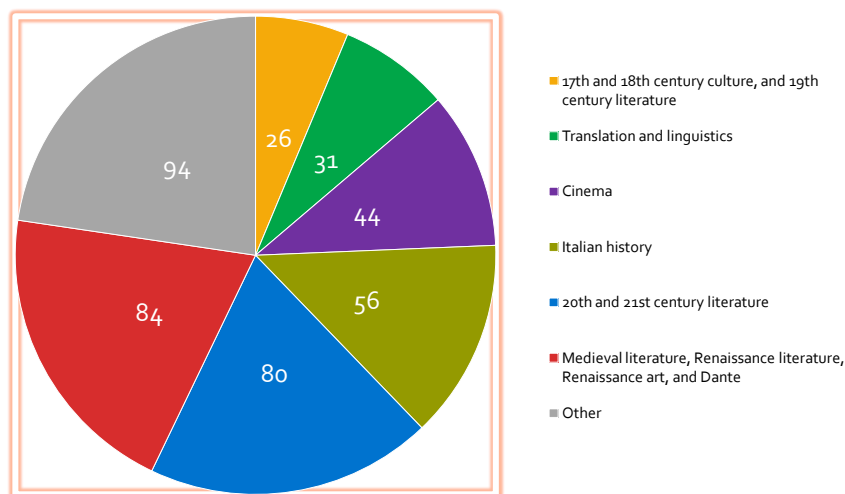
3.3.1. Module Categories by Year

Cultural modules in the first year of study show a higher proportion of modules in the category *Other* (43); this is followed by the study of *Italian History* (25) with individual modules focusing on Italy's unification and/or 20th century history. Modules at second year level are more evenly distributed and include a higher percentage of module categories under *Medieval Literature, Renaissance Literature, Renaissance Art, and Dante*. In the final year of study, the number of

specialist cultural modules and the proportion of modules under specific categories changes considerably from previous years. The two largest categories are *Medieval Literature, Renaissance Literature, Renaissance Art, and Dante*, closely followed by modules under the category *20th and 21st Century Literature*. Also noticeable at final year level is the proportionally higher number of modules from the two smallest categories: *17th and 18th Century Culture, and 19th Century Literature*, and *Translation and Linguistics*.
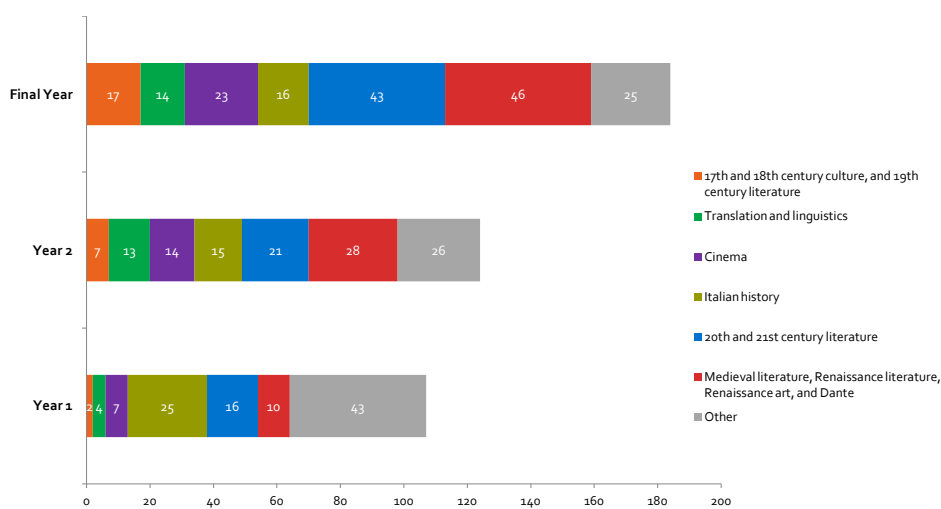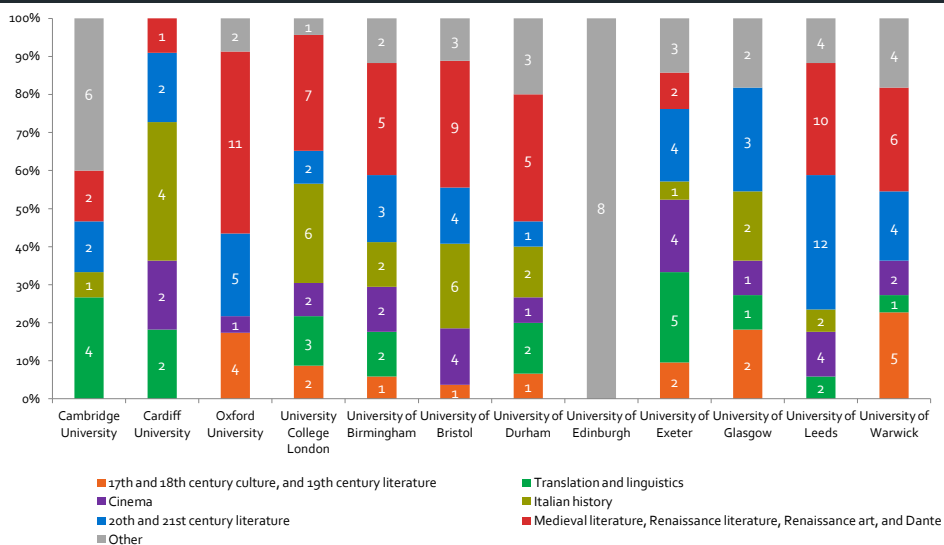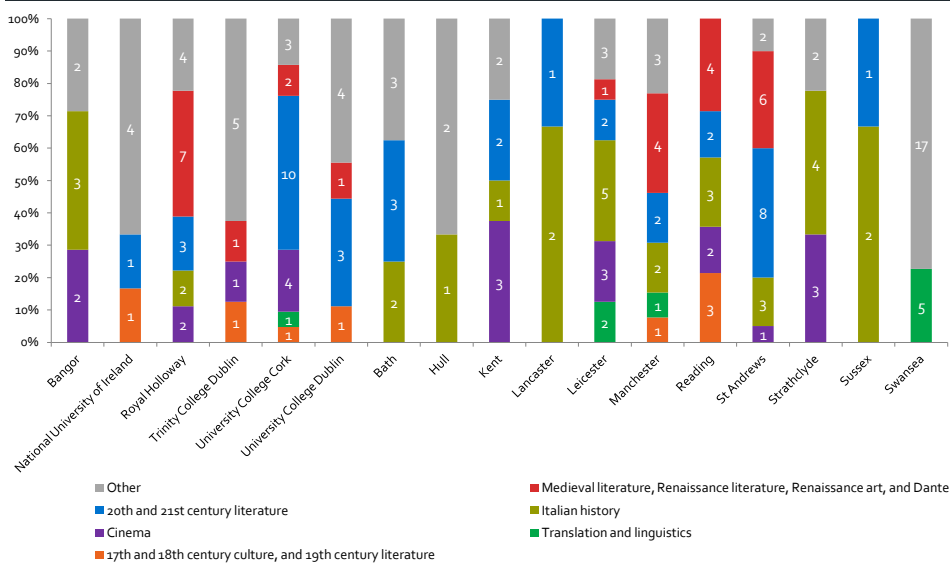

3.3.2. Russell Group and non-Russell Group universities

The following charts illustrate module offerings in Russell Group universities and non-Russell Groups institutions. A further chart compares the two groups of institutions. Curricula are broadly comparable. The most notable difference is in the number of modules in *Medieval Literature, Renaissance Literature, Renaissance Art, and Dante*; these modules are proportionally higher in Russell Group universities. Also noticeable are the module under the category *Other* which are offered in higher proportion in non-Russell Group universities.

Russell Group

Legend:
- 17th and 18th century culture, and 19th century literature
- Translation and linguistics
- Cinema
- Italian history
- 20th and 21st century literature
- Medieval literature, Renaissance literature, Renaissance art, and Dante
- Other

Non-Russell group

Legend:
- Other
- Medieval literature, Renaissance literature, Renaissance art, and Dante
- 20th and 21st century literature
- Italian history
- Cinema
- Translation and linguistics
- 17th and 18th century culture, and 19th century literature
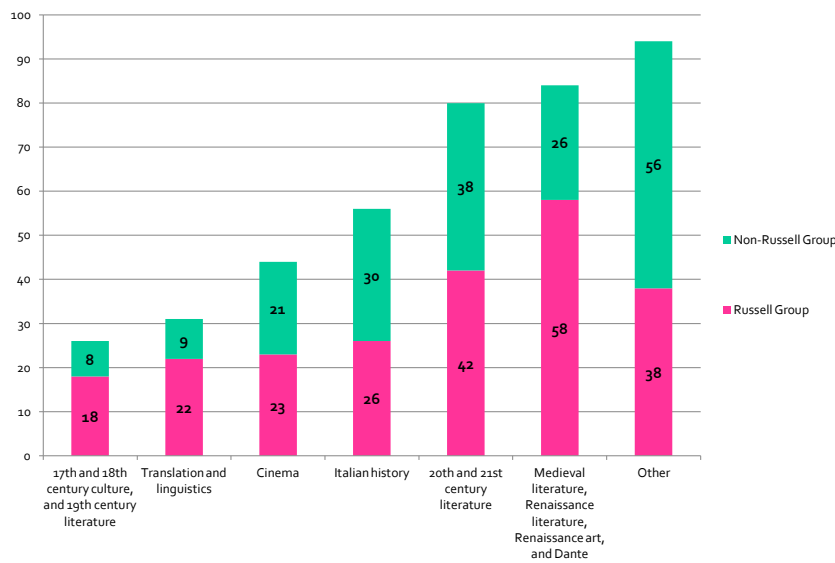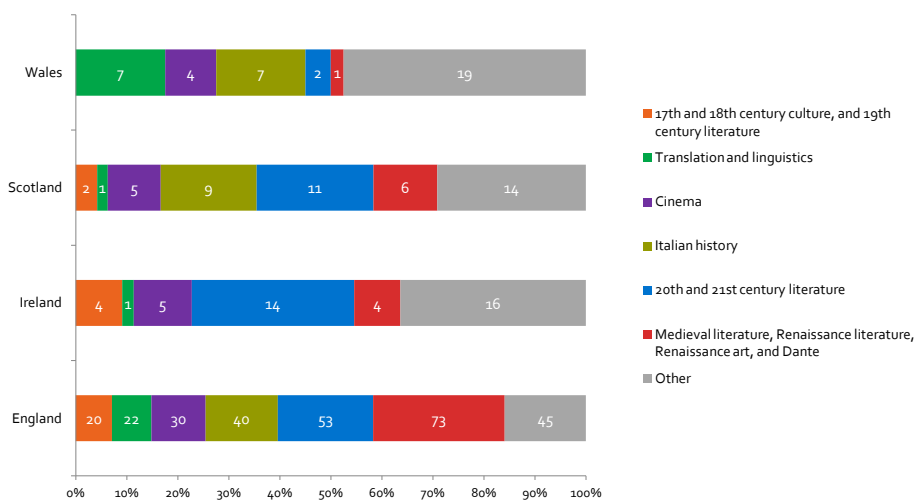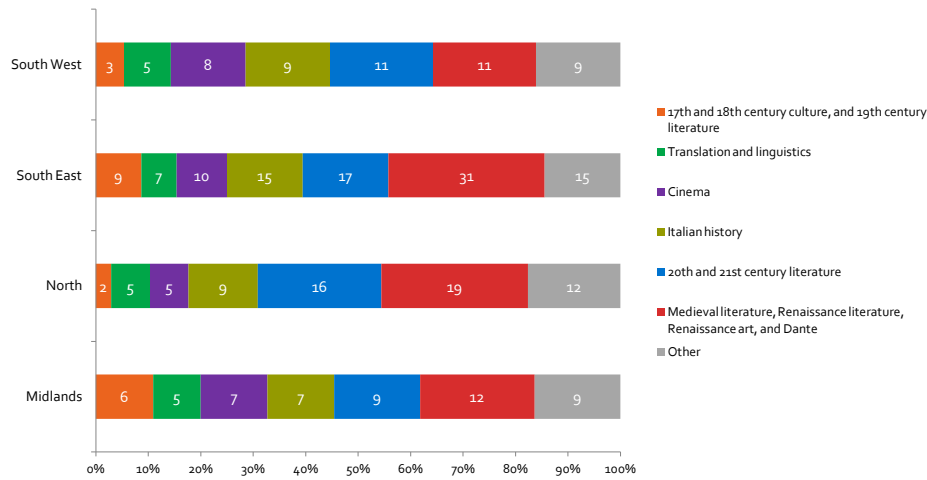
Russell vs Non-Russell group

3.3.3. Module Categories by Country

The charts below provide further analysis of modules available in England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. A further regional breakdown is provided for England which has the largest concentration of Italian departments.
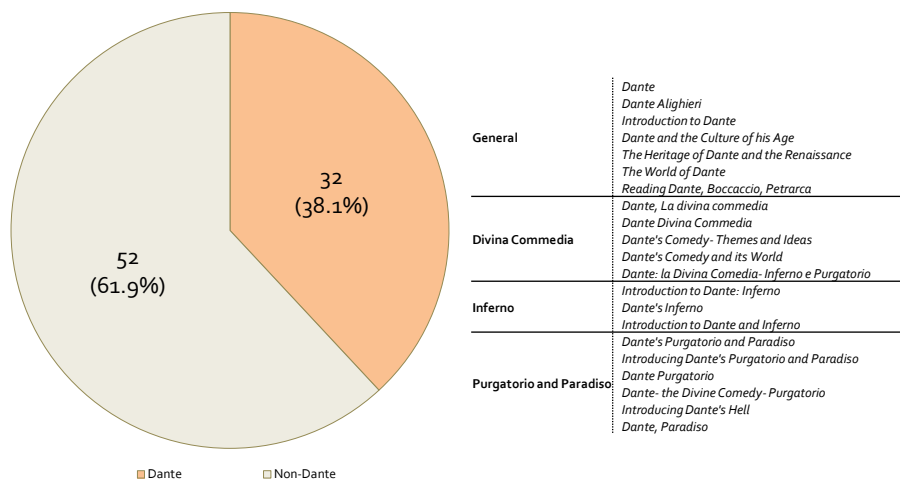
Module categories by country

Module Categories in England

Region	17th and 18th century culture, and 19th century literature	Translation and linguistics	Cinema	Italian history	20th and 21st century literature	Medieval literature, Renaissance literature, Renaissance art, and Dante	Other
South West	3	5	8	9	11	11	9
South East	9	7	10	15	17	31	15
North	2	5	5	9	16	19	12
Midlands	6	5	7	7	9	12	9

3.3.4. Individual module category analysis: Dante

Further analysis was conducted within the first of the two largest module categories: *Medieval Literature, Renaissance Literature, Renaissance Art, and Dante*. The study of Dante continues to remain strong in the Italian Studies curriculum in all four countries with a proportional difference between Dante (modules focusing exclusively on the study of Dante) and non-Dante. The latter are modules that offer the study of Dante in the wider context of Italian medieval OR medieval and Renaissance culture.

Dante within "*Medieval literature, Renaissance literature, Renaissance art and Dante courses* "

Dante: 32 (38.1%)
Non-Dante: 52 (61.9%)

| Category	Modules
General	Dante Dante Alighieri Introduction to Dante Dante and the Culture of his Age The Heritage of Dante and the Renaissance The World of Dante Reading Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarca
Divina Commedia	Dante, La divina commedia Dante Divina Commedia Dante's Comedy - Themes and Ideas Dante's Comedy and its World Dante: la Divina Comedia- Inferno e Purgatorio
Inferno	Introduction to Dante: Inferno Dante's Inferno Introduction to Dante and Inferno
Purgatorio and Paradiso	Dante's Purgatorio and Paradiso Introducing Dante's Purgatorio and Paradiso Dante Purgatorio Dante- the Divine Comedy- Purgatorio Introducing Dante's Hell Dante, Paradiso

3.3.5. Individual module category analysis: Other.

Further analysis was also conducted within the second of the two largest module categories: *Other*. This was the most difficult category to define; it included a wide variety of modules broadly characterised by a study of Italian culture drawing on literary and artistic culture (cinema, visual arts, fashion and design) and the interplay of these disciplinary fields with Italian society (including the study of history). In order to obtain statistically significant data, the modules in this category were further divided into 4 sub-categories: *Individual Project Dissertation* (almost exclusively available to final year students); *Culture and Society* (prevalently non-literature based); *Literature and Society* (prevalently literature based); and *Other* (to include opera, fashion, society and history of the Italian language).

The three charts below show the proportion of modules in the four sub-categories and provide a further break down by Country and, in England, by region.
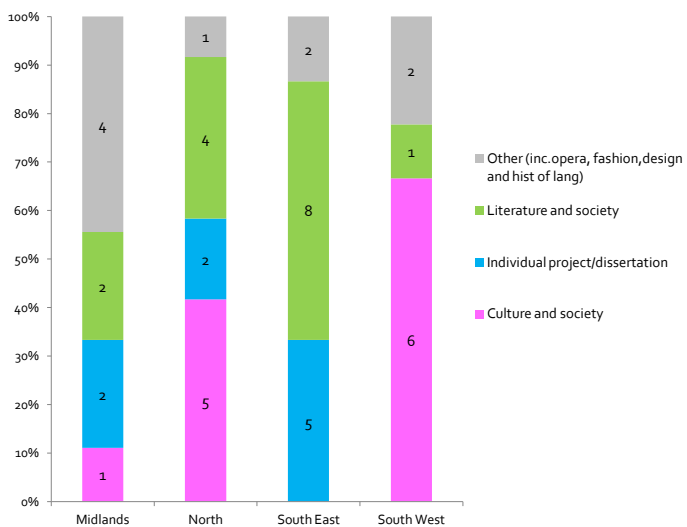
'Other' category includes 94 modules (23% of all modules)

- Culture and society
- Individual project/dissertation
- Literature and society
- Other (inc.opera, fashion,design and hist of lang)
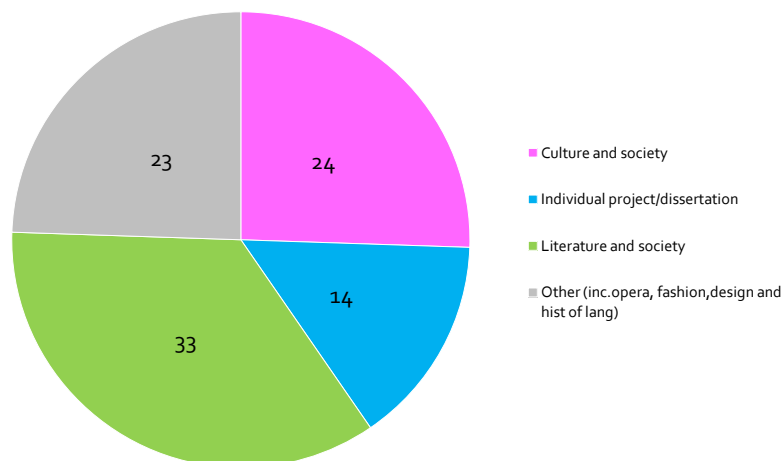
"Other" category by country
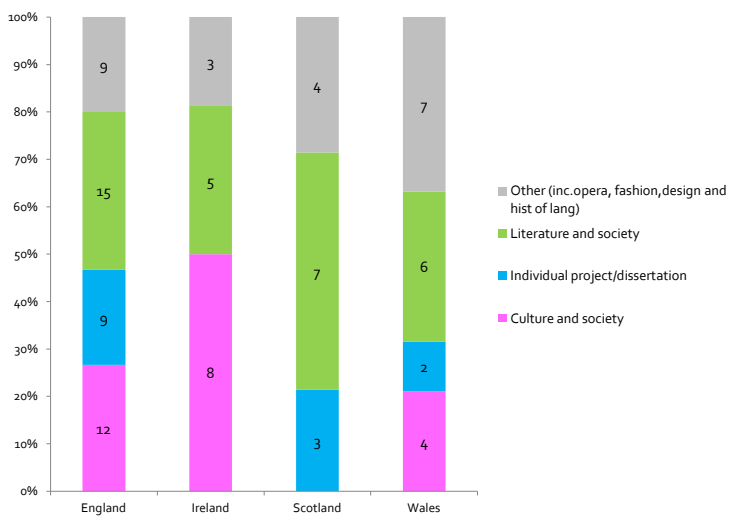
"Other" category in England

4. Conclusions

The data analysed within this report confirms the variety of methodological approaches and chronological range of Italian courses in British and Irish universities: the study of Dante and medieval and Renaissance culture continues to sit alongside the study of 20th and 21st century literary and cultural outputs. The significant percentage attributed to the category *Other* seems to point in two directions: firstly, the employment, in what are often small teaching units, of a variety of creative solutions—including thematic and interdisciplinary approaches—in order to preserve the study of Italian pre-20th century culture; secondly, the impact of cultural studies which has opened up the study of Italian culture to a range of non-literary fields. The overall picture confirms the close link between the shape of the research culture in the discipline of Italian Studies in Britain and Ireland and the research-led teaching in departments across the four countries.

In terms of present and future curriculum developments the data has put in sharp relief the dearth of courses in some areas. The study of 17th and 18th century Italian culture is nearly non-existent. The study of 19th-century literature and culture now occupies a much smaller part of the curriculum and seems to have been broadly superseded by a focus on 20th and 21st century Italian literature and culture. Only a very small number of modules in Italian linguistics are currently offered in Italian departments. The focus of the Italian curriculum is firmly based on the twin areas of early Modern Italian culture (including the study of Dante as a single author) and 20th and 21st century culture, which is still orientated towards the study of literature but often comprises the study of Italian cinematic culture and Italian history in context.

Whilst the teaching and learning culture of the discipline is necessarily a changing entity, evolving with time to respond to multiple stimuli, institutional and disciplinary changes are contributing to shape what we teach and how we teach it. Therefore this data analysis provides the material for an evidenced-based reflection on the current shape of Italian Studies and, it is hoped, will form the basis for a national and local discussion about the future and shape of our discipline.

5. Appendix: List of Participating Institutions

The following UK universities returned the survey:

Bangor, University of

Bath, University of

Birmingham, University of

Bristol, University of

Cambridge, University of

Cardiff University

Durham University

Edinburgh, University of

Exeter, University of

Glasgow, University of

Hull, University of

Kent University

Lancaster University

Leeds Metropolitan University

Leeds, University of

Leicester, University of

Liverpool, University of

Manchester Metropolitan University

Manchester, University of

Nottingham, University of

Oxford, University of

Reading, University of

Royal Holloway, University London

Sussex, University of

Swansea University

University College, London

Warwick, University of

The following Irish universities returned the survey:

National University of Ireland Galway

Trinity College Dublin

University College Cork

University College Dublin