Institution: Royal Holloway, University of London

Unit of Assessment: 28 Modern Languages and Linguistics

Title of case study: 'The Italian Academies' (Professor Jane Everson)

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

The AHRC-funded research project 'The Italian Academies 1525-1700' (phase 1 (2006-09): 'A Themed Collection Database', and phase 2 (2010-): 'The First Intellectual Networks of Early Modern Europe') under the direction of principal investigator Professor Jane Everson (Royal Holloway) has established a significant public resource on the Italian Academies. The database forms one of the British Library (BL) series of Themed Collections, specialized catalogues developed to enhance public access to the BL's rich collections. The software model designed by the project team in conjunction with the BL's IT department (eIS) has subsequently influenced the revisions of other catalogues. In this way the project is having direct impact on both CULTURAL LIFE and PUBLIC SERVICES, and has materially improved the METHODS used by library and information professionals.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

Learned Academies represented a vital and characteristic dimension of early modern culture. There were approximately 600 Academies in Italy in the period 1525-1700. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the Italian Academies were responsible for promoting debate and discussion in a range of disciplines, from language and literature, through the visual and performing arts, to science, technology, medicine and astronomy – yet scholars have often struggled to attain a real overview of the complex networks of relations that were central to the way in which the Academies functioned. The collaborative research project 'The Italian Academies 1525-1700' has addressed this problem and has pioneered the comparative and critical study of the Academies using innovative scholarly and technological methods.

a. The project has established a significant scholarly resource on Academies in 23 Italian cities including Naples, Padua, Bologna, Siena, Rome and Venice. Important research outcomes include: (i) the discovery of many Academies not previously listed in existing scholarship; (ii) the evidence of the extensive networks of intellectual exchange within Italy and across Europe; (iii) the identification of the notable contribution of women including as authors, dedicatees and illustrators; (iv) an account of the complex operation of censorship and its variability; (v) much vital new information from the analysis of dedications and dedicatees; (vi) the realization of the importance of illustrations in Academies' books for understanding their interests and operations.

b. The research began in summer 2006 and the project will be completed in summer 2014. The research team consists of: Professor Jane Everson, project director and principal investigator (PI); Drs Simone Testa and Lorenza Gianfrancesco, post-doctoral research assistants. All were employed full-time by Royal Holloway throughout the period. The project developed out of the research interests and publications of Everson in the history of the book in Renaissance Italy, and the doctoral theses of Testa (on sixteenth-century political publications and censorship) and Gianfrancesco (on Renaissance Neapolitan culture), both completed at Royal Holloway. The research for the project began as a pilot project funded by Royal Holloway.

c. The project is a collaboration with the British Library (in both phases) and the University of Reading (phase 2). Although arguably the finest collection of publications produced by the Italian Academies and their members is held in the British Library, much of this material has previously been underused as it was catalogued in ways which did not permit easy access. The Themed Collection database created by Professor Everson and her team overcomes this problem by listing information in a total of 24 fields, all searchable by keyword, thus permitting the user to access the information from multiple entry points. The Themed Collection database is located on the main British Library catalogue and is thus accessible to all readers both within the library and on-line.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

i. J. E. Everson, D. Reidy, S. Testa and L. Gianfrancesco – The Italian Academies 1530-1700: a Themed Collection database, pt I. Naples, Siena, Padua and Bologna, London, British Library, 2007-09 (http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/ItalianAcademies/)

ii. J. E.Everson, D. Reidy, S. Testa, L. Gianfrancesco, L. Sampson and T. Denman – The Italian Academies 1525-1700: a Themed Collection database, pt. 2. Rome, Venice, Verona, Ferrara, Mantua and Sicily, London, British Library, 2010- (http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/ItalianAcademies/)

iii. J. E. Everson and S. Testa, 'Le Accademie senesi e il network intellettuale

della prima età moderna in Italia (1525-1700). Un progetto online.' *Bullettino Senese di Storia Patria*, 117, 2010, pp. 613-37.

iv. J.E.Everson, *Bibliografia delle edizioni del 'Mambriano' di Francesco Cieco da Ferrara*, Contributi e Proposte, Collana di letteratura italiana, Edizioni dell'Orso, Alessandria, 1994, 368 pp. plus 63 pp. of plates.

v. J.E.Everson, 'Every picture tells a story: illustrations for the *Orlando Furioso* after 1542', *Sguardi sull'Italia. Miscellanea dedicata a Francesco Villari*, edited by G.Bedani et al., Society for Italian Studies Occasional Papers n.3, Leeds, 1997, pp.117-133.

Research Grants

  i.   to J. E. Everson (Principal Investigator) – The Italian Academies 1530-1700: a Themed Collection database: AHRC Resource Enhancement grant, 2006-2009, £350,000.
  ii.   to J. E. Everson (Principal Investigator) – The Italian Academies 1525-1700: the first intellectual networks of early modern Europe: AHRC Research Grant, 2010-2014, £800,000.
  iii.   Royal Holloway Research Strategy Fund - £5000 awarded for pump priming in 2005.

Quality

The AHRC Research Grants scheme is rigorously peer-reviewed at all stages. Peer review comments: 'This is a project with very high standards of scholarship, quality, originality and significance. … the final database and the concomitant research outputs will put these important institutions, the Italian Academies, at the forefront of research in the early modern period'; 'The PI and her team … have become authorities in this field'. The project was awarded the highest possible grading by the AHRC, for which the descriptor is: an outstanding proposal meeting world-class standards of scholarship, originality, quality and significance.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The research is a collaborative project which from the outset has involved the British Library. In so doing it makes a contribution to the areas in which the Library is a leading institution: CULTURAL LIFE, EDUCATION, CIVIL SOCIETY. The aim of the British Library Themed Collections series is to open up underused parts of the collections to readers by enhancing the information available. In this case, this was achieved through the creation of a special subset or database relating to that material (a first version went live in 2007 and has been in development since that date). The Italian Academies database is easily accessible from the main, Integrated Catalogue. The database is located on the BL server and is thus accessible to all users both within the BL and externally, and can also be accessed online by those who are not registered readers of the BL. The interface has been configured for ease of use by all readers/users, including the visually impaired.

The software model designed by the project team in conjunction with the BL IT department (eIS) has subsequently, in a very welcome impact that was unforeseen in the planning stages of the project, influenced the revisions of other catalogues. BL staff involved in the replacement of the on-

line catalogue of western manuscripts chose the Themed Collections architecture for the new catalogue system. The Head of Manuscripts (BL) comments: 'One particularly successful example [of Themed Collections] was the Italian Academies Project. We noted how it was possible to customise fields to hold the required data elements […], to create links and structure the data to make provision for simple and advanced searches. Through their experience of working on the system in partnership and gaining external validation, our in-house experts were well able to support our requirements and deliver value for money.' The Italian Academies project has therefore made a clear contribution to informing expert systems for enhanced library on-line cataloguing and to improving the methods used within a profession.

Beneficiaries therefore not only include scholars in a wide range of disciplines working on early modern European history and culture but also include British Library staff in collections and in systems, as well as readers and members of the general public with similar interests, in the UK, Italy, the USA and more widely. The database reveals the extensive intellectual networks of the period and plays a role in the development of an understanding of European cultural heritage. The impact on public discourse has been on-going since the publication of the first stages of the database in 2007. Through presentations in the UK and Italy to members of the general public there has been a significant effect on the awareness and understanding not only of the Italian Academies and their achievements but of the idea of intellectual and social networks more generally, a theme that is of continued interest and relevance to audiences in today's digital age. The parallels the team has drawn with Facebook and other forms of social networks have caught the public's attention, evident in responses to presentations and in press articles in several countries, including Italy and Brazil.

A series of public events has helped to engage with users and with the wider public since the project launch as an event (attended by ca. 80 people) at the British Library in January 2009. A number of BL staff and readers attended the major project conference held at the BL in September 2012. Subsequently the lectures and papers delivered have been made available via podcast on the project webpages (www.italianacademies.org). In December 2012 the database was presented to a BL 'Bite Size' seminar attended by BL staff, designed to brief them on the interlinks between fields in the database, the incorporation of digitised images, and the structure and navigation of the database. On feedback forms for the event those attending emphasised that the presentation would enhance their use of the database. One commented: 'I think it is a fabulous database and excellent worthwhile work'.

In Spring 2012 Professor Everson presented the project in Latina (southern Italy) to an audience which included some 60+ school children and their teachers, and in January 2013 Dr Testa presented to 50 secondary school pupils in Bologna; feedback collected reflects clear enthusiasm for and interest in the visual and networking dimensions of the database. The reactions of the Italian school students again highlight the attraction to the general public of the parallels with modern social media.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. Usage statistics for the Italian Academies Database for the period 1.5.12 to 31.7.13: Unique browsers (ie total individuals) = 2,324. Total visits = 4,484. Average visits per month =300. Data recorded via BL Comscore and is available upon request via the Project Team. This source corroborates the popularity of the project website.

2. Supporting letter from the Head of Manuscripts Cataloguing at the British Library, available on request. This source can corroborate the technical impact of the project.

3. Questionnaires (on paper) circulated to BL staff re Bite Size talk. Hard copies available on request. This source can corroborate the impact and feedback of the event held at the British Library.

4. Questionnaires (on paper) circulated to Bologna school students. Hard copies available on

request. This source can corroborate the impact and feedback of the event held at the British Library.

Sources corroborating some of the media coverage of the project:

5. Enrico Franceschini, 'Quando le Accademie erano come Facebook', *La Repubblica*, Culture section, 1 December 2011, p. 62

6. Jane Everson, 'Intellectual Networks', History Today 62.9 (2012): http://www.historytoday.com/jane-everson/intellectual-networks

7. Paolo Pontoniere, 'Facebook? Un'idea del Rinascimento: le Accademie erano 'social' già nel 500', *La Repubblica*, Jan 10th 2013. http://www.repubblica.it/tecnologia/2013/01/10/news/facebook_un_idea_del_rinascimento_le_accademie_erano_social_gi_nel_500-50142800/?ref=HRERO-1

8. Enrico de Lazaro, 'British Scientists [sic] reveal Facebook of 16th century', Sci-news.com, Jan 16th 2013. http://www.sci-news.com/othersciences/communication/article00824.html

9. Roberta Machado, 'Facebook renascentista'. *Correio Braziliense*, Jan 28th 2013.