



## Crossways in Cultural Narratives

ERASMUS MUNDUS MASTERS

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### **Crossways Quality Assurance**

The Crossways MA programme has a carefully conceived Quality Assurance system designed to help maintain an appropriate consistency of provision and academic standards across the different institutions and national cultures represented in this broad, diverse consortium of universities. The approach adopted for Quality Assurance in the programme has been modelled on practices common in the UK system of higher education and is supervised by one of our UK partners, the University of Sheffield, School of Languages & Cultures (main quality coordinator: Prof Michael Perraudin). We propose to maintain and further refine this system for a new round of Crossways, if approved.

A crucial part of our Quality Assurance regime is the employment of *two* External Examiners to oversee designated aspects of our work. These are (1) an External Examiner with responsibility for vetting our administrative procedures for efficiency and fairness, and (2) an External Examiner with responsibility for moderating our students' Final MA Dissertations. The former checks how our central and local administrations run, whether we do what we promise, whether our dealings with the students are appropriately responsive and supportive, whether our degrees are fairly awarded, and other equivalent matters. The latter concentrates on the students' substantial and important culminating dissertations, the only portion of the degree that is taught and assessed cross-institutionally. He or she personally reads a significant proportion of the dissertations together with segments of the others in order to verify that the marking is at the right level, that the inter-institutional mechanisms are working well, that students are receiving due information about their performance, and that the standards of the work produced are high. The individuals employed for these examinerships are experienced senior academics from well-reputed European universities, working in subjects relevant to Crossways and with appropriate language skills. Our current examiners, recruited by the Academic Council on the basis of recommendation and their appointments administered by the Learning & Teaching Services Department at the University of Sheffield, are a British Professor Emeritus of Modern Languages from the University of Birmingham (UK) and an Argentinian Professor of Cultural Studies from the University of Leiden (Netherlands). Appointments are of limited duration: normally for three years but renewable for a further one or two years. In addition to their practical work of overseeing the programme, both External Examiners attend meetings of the Crossways Academic Council and report in writing and orally at least once a year on their experiences and perceptions. Their involvement, which began at the inception of *Crossways in Cultural Narratives* six years ago, has been exceedingly helpful and is much to be recommended.

A second major ingredient of our quality regime is the twice-yearly opinion questionnaires we issue and evaluate. In November/December, a schematic Google Forms-based online survey is sent to all stakeholders in the programme: to current students of both years, academics teaching Crossways students, administrators tangentially involved with the programme and directors/administrators of organisations at which students have undertaken approved workplacements (but not to the coordinators themselves). In August, a more detailed survey

of the same type is sent specifically to all graduands, exploring their views of the just-completed programme in some detail. The results of these surveys are evaluated by the Quality Coordinator and they are reported on at each meeting of the Academic Council. They provide a significant insight into strengths and problems of the programme and substantially influence the Council's decision-making.

Thirdly and equally importantly, each year's cohort of the programme has an elected student representative, chosen at the induction each September, who energetically solicits current student opinion about the functioning of the degree in the different institutions and proposes changes of both detail and broad approach as he/she thinks fit. Contacts between representatives and their constituency have improved steadily over the years since this system was initiated, aided by active use of social media, and the Academic Council is greatly helped in correcting faults and raising quality by the information thus provided and the representations made. The excellence and articulateness of recent student representatives has also made a large contribution.

The consortium is strongly committed to maintaining these in our view productive and necessary Quality Assurance procedures. We will aim to refine them further in ways that make the programme more responsive and attentive to student need while also maintaining academic standards and retaining the degree's distinctive and valuable cultural diversity.