

Diversifying the Classics Curriculum

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1. Introduction

The challenge is on. In his engaging protreptic on why Classics matters, Neville Morley (2018) argues for the attractiveness and utility of studying the worlds of ancient Greece and Rome. Covering a wide geographical territory that is culturally and politically diverse, where people interact locally and globally and conduct their lives and relationships in distinctive patterns that shift and change, classical antiquity is open to interrogation from multiple perspectives. In the twenty-first century, Classics can thus be a platform from which to explore a full range of human experiences with sensitivity, tolerance and attention to difference. At the same time, however, Classics appears mired in inherited biases and prejudices that play off its perception as ‘elitist’ and the myth of a ‘(white) European heritage’ founded upon Classical culture (Hanink 2017; Mac Sweeney et al 2018; anon. 2019), and that give rise to aggressive and inflexible visions of humanity based upon racist and misogynistic ideologies (see Zuckerberg 2018). Not only might these inform how the subject is taught, but they can also foster an environment that is physically and intellectually unwelcoming to people of colour (Padilla Peralta 2019; Dhindsa 2020). Structural biases at societal and institutional levels continue to limit the potential of those who are not economically secure white men to engage with and pursue successful careers in the field (Gloyn 2016; Thonemann 2019). How then to realize the progressive potential of Classics and maximise participation?

The ‘Diversifying the Classics Curriculum’ project at the University of Liverpool is one local response. Conceived within a department of Archaeology, Classics and Egyptology that already engages with classical antiquity in a cross-cultural way, and at an institution that has a policy commitment to enhancing inclusivity from recruitment through to attainment for students and staff, the driving ambition is to reflect upon and transform our undergraduate provision at a content level. The current trend towards decolonising the curriculum offers useful frameworks for developing an approach, where the purpose is to recognize and mitigate against the influence of colonialism, imperialism and racism in taught narratives (see Decolonising SOAS Working Group 2018; Royal Historical Society 2018; Morgan 2020; and within Classics, Deacy 2017). Broadening our focus to consider a wider range characteristics, including age, disability, gender, race, religion, and sexual orientation, we aim to build a curriculum that engages students with a range of human experiences in the past in a way that connects with their own situations and identities. Results may range from session development within existing modules (e.g. Greaves 2018) to designing new modules (e.g. Petsalis-Diomidis 2019) to a wider programme reorientation: measures that will ground diversity within Liverpool’s Classics programmes in an organic and layered way that makes them vibrant and sustainable. This reconceptualization of our provision raises wider

questions about what Classics is and does in the twenty-first century, within the ongoing debate.

In the remainder of this document, we provide more background and information on the shape and structure of this project. Due originally to take place in spring 2020, its completion has been pushed back (due to disruptions caused by COVID-19) into the coming academic year. Any feedback on underlying premises, proposed methodology, practical implementation and anticipated outcomes would be extremely welcome in taking the project forward.

2. Classics at Liverpool

Classics in the UK is taught within departments of different shapes and sizes, by staff whose diverse specialisms drive programme content, and within broader institutional contexts that may be more or less interdisciplinary. The University of Liverpool runs three undergraduate BA (Hons) degrees in Classics, Classical Studies and Ancient History. Students on these programmes make their way through a shared suite of modules dedicated to ancient languages, literature and culture, and ancient society and politics, taken on a core or optional basis across three years. These are complemented by archaeology options in the language, history and society of the Mediterranean and Near East (i.e. from other subject areas in the department of Archaeology, Classics & Egyptology) (See Image 1, below). Subject-wise a focus on aspects of ancient Greek and Roman literature, philosophy, religion, economy and society, and on the reception of classical antiquity, is accompanied by a regional focus on the fringes, e.g. Roman Britain, Syria, Egypt, areas in which research synergies between ancient historians and archaeologists are strong. Already, this is a rich and varied suite of programmes that engages students on multiple levels with classical antiquity, broadly drawn. This includes students from Archaeology, Egyptology, History, Politics, English, and Film Studies who take modules on an individual basis or within Honours Select (major/minor combination).

Over the years, programmes have developed responsively: for example, to fit the structures required by Honours Select, following the departure and appointment of staff, and to meet requirements set by institutional educational strategies. Within this churn, there are limited opportunities to reflect holistically on programme development in an open and forward-thinking way or to pursue comprehensive change on an academic basis. In addition, with content delivered through programmes that capitalize upon staff expertise, modules are idiosyncratic and developed in isolation, albeit under the eye of a rotating Subject Lead, who keeps an eye on coherence and range. This automatically brings variety into the programmes. However, the imbedding of diversity into modules as a principle of engagement currently depends on the personal interests and favoured approaches of individual staff. Beyond the integration, or otherwise, of issues like race and gender, in approach colleagues might offer multiple or linear narratives, prioritize voices of the powerless or powerful, incorporate or exclude sources produced by ordinary people or wealthy elites, interrogate lived experience or attend to institutional structures, examine or ignore the historical context of academic study, adopt or interrogate the exceptionalism of classical antiquity, set reading lists that

present a range of perspectives or direct students towards traditional articles (for example). Whether they are made consciously or otherwise, choices like these determine what and how students learn.

Thanks to Beacon Funding awarded by the Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences for innovations in teaching, and the University's general commitment to advancing diversity and inclusivity, as laid out in its Diversity & Equality Framework, it is now possible to review our provision in Classics and Ancient History at Liverpool at modular and programme levels from a 'diversity' perspective. On a practical level, this will involve the identification of implicit and explicit absences or overloads in terms of topics and themes as well as recognition of trends in approach. At core, 'Diversifying the Classics Curriculum' actively engages staff and students in the intellectual and creative process, aspiring through co-creation to make our Classics curriculum attractive to students and exciting to teach. Because of this shared dimension, the project itself contributes to an inclusive pedagogical environment within the department of Archaeology, Classics & Egyptology.

3. The Project

The project runs for 4 months over one semester. It is overseen by a working group, which comprises the Departmental DE&I Lead (Fiona Hobden), UG Subject Lead (Marco Perale) and two PGR placement students (Kate Caraway, Serafina Nicolosi). It is bookended by two workshops that open up the agenda and establish a way forward, respectively. In between, the placement students lead the review, consulting with staff and students to formulate a series of proposals. In the likelihood of restrictions on campus in 2020/21, meetings originally planned as face-to-face may need to be conducted online (e.g. via Zoom, MS Teams).

Activities

Working Group (weeks 1-16): 2-weekly meetings

- To plan activities, manage expenditure and monitor progress
- To support PGR placement students in the development of methods for evaluating the curriculum and organization of student-oriented activities

Workshop 1 (week 1-3): *What would a 'diverse and inclusive' curriculum at Liverpool look like?*

- Attended by all Classics & Ancient History staff and PGR placement students, with discussion facilitated by an external adviser.
- To gain departmental buy-in through collaborative agenda setting and identifying areas of focus and investigation.

Evaluation of curriculum (weeks 4-10)

- Led by PGR placement students, working with staff
- Collect data on module and programme content from online resources

- Discuss content and approaches with individual staff
- Identify patterns and opportunities for development

Soliciting student input (weeks 7-10)

- Led by PGR placement students, working with current UG students, with professional guidance on methods/focus
- Open online survey (attitudes): general or tiered (e.g. by subject area, year)
- Smaller focus groups (changes): in-depth discussion of issues raised in survey

Written report (weeks 11-12)

- Produced by PGR placement students
- Presents results and recommendations based on curriculum evaluation and student input
 - General directions and specific changes
 - Short, medium and long-term perspective and ambitions
 - Areas for further exploration

Workshop 2 (weeks 13-14): *Diversifying our curriculum*

- Attended by all Classics & Ancient History staff, PGR placement students and UG students
- Engaging with and reflecting on principle findings
- Identifying priorities and timeframe for developments
- Agreeing a programme of implementation

Dissemination (in future)

- By members of the Working Group
- Presentation of project and results at local and national teaching and learning colloquia and in a written report, e.g. CUCD Bulletin.

4. Who benefits?

While students and staff in our department are the immediate beneficiaries of our project, its outcomes may be of wider utility to the discipline and academia. These anticipated outcomes include:

- (i) the articulation of strategies and recommendations for enhancing diversity and inclusivity at modular and/or programme level at Liverpool in the short, medium and long-term, plus their implementation
- (ii) an attractive, engaging and relevant curriculum that will increase student recruitment, engagement, attainment and retention within our Classics & Ancient History degrees
- (iii) the critical imbedding of diversity and inclusivity perspectives into individual, departmental and disciplinary agendas via the interplay between teaching and research

- (iv) the generation of a working model that might be more widely applied within and beyond Classics and of results that contribute to the on-going cross-disciplinary debate.

Image 1: Sample selection of modules in undergraduate Classics programmes at Liverpool

| YEAR 1 | YEAR 2 | YEAR 3 |
|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worlds of Odysseus • Virgil & Age of Augustus • Greek Myth & Society • Visual Culture • Warfare, Politics & Society (Greece) • From Hannibal to Severus • Latin • Greek | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Love & Friendship • Nature & Virtue • Ovid's Metamorphosis • Rebuilding Troy • Herodotus, Persia & the Greeks • Politics of the Past • Ruling the Roman Empire • Roman Republic • The Architecture of Power (Athens) • Roman Experience • Latin • Greek | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seven against Thebes • Rules for the Muses • Screening Antiquity • Initiation into the Mysteries • Luxury & Consumption • Augustus & the Foundations of Empire • Syria: Alexander to Constantine • Age of Justinian • Egypt after the Pharaohs • Latin • Greek |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bronze Age Civilisations • Empires and Citizens • Ancient Egypt 1&2 • Origins of Chinese Civilisation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ancient Warfare • Roman Britain • Rethinking British Pre-history • Coptic Language & Texts • Egyptian Religion • Death in Ancient Egypt • Akkadian Language & Literature • The Sumerians | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International Relations • Past, Present, Futures • Houses & Households • Money and Society • Ancient Greek Colonisation & British Imperial Thought • Roman Frontier Systems • Archaeology & Heritage • Social Life in Ancient Egypt • Sumerian Language & Literature |

(blue = Classics & Ancient History; grey = Archaeology)

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