
LAUNCHING THE WOMEN'S CLASSICAL COMMITTEE

In April 2016 the Women's Classical Committee (WCC) held its official launch at the Institute of Classical Studies, London. Inspired by the Women's Classical Caucus (the US equivalent), the WCC UK has similar aims in striving to support women in Classics, promote feminist and gender-informed perspectives in Classics, raise the profile of the study of women in antiquity and Classical reception, and advance equality and diversity in Classics. The launch event was a great success, hosting over seventy participants on the day, promoting lively discussion in a dynamic but inclusive environment, and showcasing some current research projects.

THE LAUNCH

From 9.30am people began arriving at Senate House with tales of travel and eager for tea, coffee, biscuits, and name labels. We were all keen too to get our teeth into the issues we read and talk about online or in exasperating and/or exasperatingly brief conversations with colleagues. We came from (at least) twenty different UK and EU institutions, and there were many more who have been working within Classics (broadly defined) from beyond the confines of the university. A range of career stages and genders were represented and heard.

Liz Gloyn, our indefatigable Administrator, began the day with 'Why are we here?', noting the positive work of the WCC US and the impetus the 2015 [Classics and Feminism Sandpit](#) gave her to start a WCC here in the UK.

Following Liz's welcome, Irene Salvo presented a report on the questionnaire 'Women in Classics in the UK: Numbers and Issues', circulated in the UK Classics community prior to the launch event. Members of the committee (headed by Co-chair Victoria Leonard) constructed the questionnaire for any and all to answer. The questionnaire covered a range of issues relating to the [Aims](#) of the Women's Classical Committee: gender in professional environments; gender in professional interactions; parenting and caring; mental health and disability issues; and a final 'state of the field' section. The questionnaire had an incredible 417 responses – supporting evidence in itself that the issues it addressed are keenly felt. Irene Salvo (aided by Kate Cook, Amy Russell, Katherine MacDonald, Victoria Leonard, and Emma Bridges) marvellously condensed statistics and processed a wealth of 'anecdota' into a 25-minute report. The results revealed some depressing trends about employment in Higher Education generally, particularly for early career researchers, as well as highlighting areas where the Committee could provide some much-needed support. The results of the questionnaire will be disseminated more widely at a future time.

The launch event was not intended to be an exclusively sedentary and passive transfer of information from speaker to audience; we wanted to encourage discussion and productive responses as much as possible. Our 'break-out' discussion groups came next, organised around four topics: 1. Women and postgrads, early-career researchers and casualisation; 2. Women, mental health, disability, and additional need issues; 3. Women and implicit bias; 4. Women and parenthood/caring. Each group was tasked with providing one large-scale solution and two immediate action points following discussion.

The first group confronted the issues facing female postgrads and early-career researchers amidst the increase of casualisation in Higher Education, chaired by Rhiannon Easterbrook and Katherine MacDonald. The group articulated concerns that the most vulnerable point for many academics is the post-PhD period. The current climate in Higher Education Institutions of the exploitative contractual employment of early-careers hampers professional progression. The group's large-scale solution was a cultural shift to open up Classics to be more diverse and inclusive, particularly for those who might



not follow a single, 'typical' progression (BA, to MA, to PhD, to postdoc, to permanent academic job). Immediate action points included extending or improving institutional affiliation for early-career researchers, wider access to libraries, and highlighting positive achievements through the awarding of prizes.

The second break-out group was chaired by Susan Deacy and Lisa Eberle, and focused on women, mental health, disability, and additional-need issues. One crucial point that was identified was the low level of awareness about disability legislation – many institutions implement this patchily or employees and students aren't made aware of resources that could be available to them. That these issues affect women in particular was recognised; a general conclusion was that potential obstacles such as disability were exacerbated by being female.

The third break-out discussion group was chaired by Efi Spentzou and Lucy Jackson and concentrated on women and implicit bias. The major challenges seems to be raising consciousness of how bias works, how it intersects with other bias, and how it is practised at both an individual and institutional level. Various means of targeting these in everyday conversation were identified, such as raising the question of hierarchies of value in the day-to-day evaluation of students' work, as well as noting bias in our own behaviour. This kind of helpful yet rigorous scrutiny could be brought to a larger audience via online media, sharing stories (positive and less positive) of implicit bias.

The fourth break-out discussion group was chaired by Victoria Leonard and Katherine Harloe, and explored issues of women and parenthood or caring. The variability in provision from institution to institution came sharply into focus here, with some participants finding their environment more or less unproblematic, while others had felt more resistance if not outright discrimination. The larger goal was to work towards greater inclusivity for parents and careers across all institutions, and use nationally recognised bodies such as Athena Swan to put pressure on lacklustre departments and institutions. More modest proposals concerned putting together or sharing a 'best practice' document to send to departments and make available online, following the example of the Society for Women in Philosophy (SWIP). There was also a concrete suggestion that funds generated by the WCC might be used to support parents or carers attending conferences.

Finally a whole group discussion chaired by Lisa Eberle allowed the pooling of information and ideas produced by the break-out groups, and generated further lively discussion.

Lunch came with more informal opportunities for discussion and networking, before a series of Spotlight Talks, where participants had a strict time limit of five minutes in which to present current research taking a feminist and gender-informed perspective. Amanda Potter talked about teaching feminism and Classical reception through the Brilliant Club. Deborah Hyde discussed encouraging women to study Classical Civilisations in community education and beyond. David Bullen explored feminism within Euripides' *The Bacchae* in the twentieth century onwards. Ioan McAvoy presented a gender-aware approach to the history of Roman warfare. Kate Cook examined taking a sociolinguistic approach to women's speech in Greek Tragedy. And finally WCC's own Carol Attack discussed ancient and modern whorephobia.

The penultimate event was a Roundtable, bringing together established academics including Rebecca Langlands, Fiona Macintosh, Stella Sandford, Alison Sharrock and Susan Deacy to offer their experiences and advice for women in Classics and the WCC, and share their thoughts on the many ideas and issues that had come up throughout the day. Important questions were raised about the nature of Classics: what does a Classicist look like? Whose Classics is it anyway? The need to move away from a stereotypical image of a Classicist was advocated, alongside a changed culture within Classics, and embedding feminism in education from school-level up. In this discussion the WCC launch was described as a 'culture-changing event'. Positive change since 1970s was highlighted, when there was no recognition of gender-related work. But the rise of short-term and unstable employment contracts was underlined to show that not all change is progress. The need to re-focus feminist, female, and gender-orientated Classical scholarship was emphasised, and for these kinds of scholarship to be used in the creation of broader pressures on individuals and institutions for a more diverse and fair environment for scholars.

Following the Roundtable was the first Annual Business Meeting of the WCC, chaired and minuted by Liz Gloyn. At the meeting we officially adopted our constitution, and laid the foundations for our first major event, 'Classics and Feminist Pedagogy: Practical Tips For Teaching', which took place in July at the University of Birmingham (see [here](#)). Planning began for a WCC presence at the Classical Association conference in Canterbury next year. There are also plenty of other ideas for activity in the future, so follow us on [Twitter](#), and stay up to date through our [Facebook](#) page and our [website](#). You can also become a member of the WCC UK (see more details below).

OUTCOMES

#1 *Experiences are diverse*

The WCC launch event gave us all the opportunity to talk in real life to people at a range of career stages and with a thoroughly diverse set of experiences. The time and space granted by the event to share these experiences, to listen as well as tell our own stories, made the event exceptional.

The event highlighted the challenges particular to any given academic career stage and how that affected the experience (and determined the focus) of participants during the day's discussions. As a result solutions advocated for the gendered issues affecting a PhD student were not effective for an early-career academic, for example.

The perspective of mid-career researchers seemed to be that positive change is happening, but at rates that vary significantly from institutions to institution. Beyond institutional variability, individual experience depends on any number of factors and profoundly shapes how members see the issues and problems facing Women in Classics today.

It was particularly wonderful to have a recurrent emphasis on those who had eschewed 'traditional' routes through, into and around Classics, and how their experiences threw important light on the potential goals of the WCC.

At its very inception, the WCC focused on inclusion – inclusiveness in terms of how we define Women and Classics. It was heartening to see this inclusiveness reflected physically in those who came to the launch – those working within universities and beyond, a good mix of genders, a range of ages, and all career stages represented from undergraduate onward. But what emerged at this event was that the same inclusiveness was even more vital in thinking about how we tackle the variegated picture of gendered experiences within Classics and within the Academy more generally.

The variety of experiences may be a challenge in forming cohesive strategies, but it is also a strength. Ours is, and must be, a flexible, responsive body that sets at its heart the experiences of its members, and those we work with. It is with this in mind that we look forward to next year's annual meeting, to be held in Oxford, where the theme of 'Diversity' will be our focus.

#2 *Resources are out there to be shared*

The new WCC has provided a focal point for the impetus and energy to instigate change. But further to this, the discussions during the launch showed just how much overlap there is with other organisations, organisations that have been tussling with the same kinds of institutional or bureaucratic road blocks, the same insidious forms of bias and prejudice. We can and should be forming alliances with these organisations.

Some of the suggestions made at the launch had been thought about by colleagues elsewhere in the humanities (such as the Royal Historical Society's [Report](#) on Gender Equality and Historians in Higher Education, the [Report](#) on Gender and Career Progression in Theology and Religious Studies, the [Hortensii](#) project, and the Women in Philosophy Blog '[What We're Doing About What It's Like](#)'). Some suggestions were already being put into action - for example, stories in the Cambridge Latin Course, a popular

textbook in schools, were already being revised to include more female figures. Whether it's talking about the WCC to colleagues (in all disciplines), getting involved in online discussions, or sending a new report or piece of research on gender inequality to an email group, we need to be proactive in sharing our resources.

#3 *The importance of finding support*

The physical coming-together of over seventy people in support of the Aims of the nascent WCC was indicative of the will to act, as well as the pressing need for support. But the provision of support must be flexible and multiform.

Since the launch, online interactions with those who attended, together with those following along on Twitter, have increased – an online community bolstered by real-life interaction. For those seeking support from others in achieving research and publication goals, there are discussions underway to set up online writing groups. A mentoring scheme, too, is in its early stages. We will be continuing to seek ideas for further ways to support our members.

Following our launch event the Women's Classical Committee is delighted to announce that it is now formally enrolling members, and can receive payment by cheque or bank transfer. The cost of membership is currently £20 per year, or £5 for students, unemployed, retired, or underemployed members. There's more information on how to join on the Committee's membership webpage.

Ways to help

- Join the WCC! We need the support and input of our members to drive forward change.
- Tell colleagues with UK connections about the WCC, what we're doing, and what we hope to do, and encourage all who can to join.
- Join us for our annual meeting, 20th April 2017, in Oxford. Our theme will be 'Diversity'. We will be applying for funds to help graduates and ECRs with travel costs.
- Keep in touch, either on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), or via our [website](#). We are keen to collaborate and hear from you.
- Make use of our [Links](#) and [Resources](#) pages on our website.
- We'll also be at the [Classical Association 2017](#). Look out for the proposal for an academic panel and a roundtable discussion on Diversity, Feminism and the Classics, as well as a WCC social.

The WCC UK wishes to acknowledge gratefully financial support from the following institutions:

The Department of Classics, Royal Holloway; The Craven Committee, University of Oxford; The Institute of Classical Studies, London.

Special Thanks to Valerie James of the ICS for support on the day.

Institutions represented at the Launch

Warwick, Royal Holloway, Oxford, King's College, Roehampton, University of Wales Trinity St David, Bristol, Manchester, Kingston, Reading, Cambridge, Open University, Nottingham, Notre Dame, Exeter, Göttingen, Birmingham, UCL, The City Literary Institute, and Cardiff. Many more participated online from e.g. Swansea, Edinburgh, West Cornwall, and beyond.

Links

Women's Classical Committee Website: Click [here](#)

Women's Classical Caucus (US) Website: Click [here](#)

Storify of tweets from the Launch: Click [here](#)

Pictures from the WCC Website: Click [here](#)

Blogposts from participants:

- Dr Ellie Mackin: <http://www.elliemackin.net/blog/womens-classical-committee-launch-feelings-and-thoughts>
- Dr Katherine McDonald: <https://katherinemcdonald.net/2016/04/16/the-wcc-launch-and-an-epidoc-workshop>
- Dr Liz Gloyn: <https://lizgloyn.wordpress.com/2016/06/03/the-womens-classical-committee-uk/>

The Committee

Current Chairs

- **Dr Victoria Leonard**, University of Cardiff (@tigerlilyrocks)
- **Dr Katherine Harloe**, University of Reading (@KatherineHarloe)

Steering Committee

- **Dr Rosa Andujar**, King's College London
- **Dr Carol Atack**, University of Oxford/University of Warwick (Treasurer) (@carolatack)
- **Dr Lisa Eberle**, University of Oxford
- **Dr Liz Gloyn**, Royal Holloway University of London (Administrator) (@lizgloyn)
- **Dr Lucy Jackson**, University of Oxford/King's College London (@LucyCMJackson)
- **Prof. Helen Lovatt**, University of Nottingham (@HelenLovatt2)
- **Dr Amy Russell**, University of Durham
- **Dr Elena Theodorakopoulos**, University of Birmingham

The WCC also has a number of liaison officers for different groups. All of us would welcome your input, including questions, concerns, ideas and any other thoughts. Please don't hesitate to get in touch!

- **Dr Emma Bridges**, Open University (Part-time and alt-ac liaison) (@emmabridges)
- **Dr Efrossini Spentzou**, Royal Holloway University of London (Part-time and alt-ac liaison)
- **Chloe Hixson**, University College London (Disability liaison, post-grads)
- **Dr Susan Deacy**, University of Roehampton (Disability liaison, staff and post-PhD)
- **Dr Irene Salvo**, University of Göttingen (LBGTQI liaison) (@IreneSlv)
- **Dr Jane Draycott**, University of Wales Trinity St David (ECR liaison) (@JLDraycott)
- **Dr Katherine McDonald**, University of Cambridge (ECR liaison) (@Katherine_McDon)
- **Rhiannon Easterbrook**, University of Bristol (Graduate liaison) (@RigantonaE)
- **Joanna Johnson**, Head of Classics, Solihull School (Schools liaison)
- **Prof. Amy Smith**, University of Reading (Email list and website)

*By **Lucy Jackson** (lucy.jackson@kcl.ac.uk) and **Victoria Leonard** (LeonardVA1@cardiff.ac.uk) on behalf of the WCC*