

The Future of Postgraduate Training and Skills Development

Could We All Be Better Linguists?

Whatever else happens, languages remain at the heart of what Classicists and Ancient Historians do. Some of us do our research into them and most of us conduct research in ways that assume facility in, sensitivity to or appreciation of language. This engages all of us, to varying degrees, as language teachers or language learners or both. This short article explores the ways in which Classicists care about both classical and modern languages. Here now are two illustrations of what our profession has been, and what it might become.¹

The first example concerns the late Hugh Lloyd-Jones, an old-school Oxford classicist who, according to his obituary in the *Telegraph* (5 October 2009), 'had a good nose for the killer quotation ... His most emphatic put-down, however, was always: "But he doesn't know Greek!"' This curious insult is explained, in the introduction to a Festschrift by Bernard Knox, as follows:

I did my best to explain that Hugh was assessing knowledge of the ancient Greek language by standards so demanding that I, for one, could never meet them. He was a product ... of a type of training in Greek and Latin which was uniquely characteristic of the best English schools, a programme of frequent translation from English to Latin and Greek from the earliest years, starting with prose and proceeding to verse composition in a variety of metres, a programme continued at a more intensive level at the university ... I [on the other hand] had to learn Greek in a school which offered only Latin, German, and French; with the aid of the smaller edition of Liddell and Scott and an occasional session with one of the Latin teachers who knew some Greek, I hacked my way through Murray's Oxford edition of Aeschylus, making what sense I could ...²

From this I take the view that yes, we could all be better *linguists*, but we may already be pretty good *classicists*. I shall try to expand on this point as I go on.

The second example comes from an extraordinary series of emails that were exchanged publicly on the Classicists' List in the early spring of 2013. It began with a perfectly sensible general inquiry from a postgraduate student who wanted to know whether a number of French, German and Italian articles on Mithraism were available in English translation. The first of several replies read somewhat tersely: 'As far as I know, there are no translations of the books quoted – and if you study Classics, you must be able to read French, Italian and German anyway', and this was echoed in several further emails. The exchanges swiftly split into at least two streams. In the first stream a small number of senior colleagues gave sensible reasons that this email thread should end immediately. But in the second stream a

¹ This short paper was presented as part of a CUCD/JACT panel on the future of PGR studies during the Classical Association conference at Nottingham in April 2014. Thanks to Genevieve Liveley for organising the panel.

² B.M.W. Knox, 'Introduction', in J. Griffin (ed.) *Sophocles Revisited: Essays Presented to Sir Hugh Lloyd-Jones* (Oxford 1999) 1-9, at pp. 7-8.

number of people carried on the debate regardless, lamenting the health of the profession and the tendency of British and North American classicists, in particular, to avoid reading scholarship not written in English.

My first reaction to this was to yell loudly at my computer screen that I, for one, would happily learn another language just as soon as minority of smug polyglots learn some basic courtesy. My second was to write a brief email, off list, to the author of the original email, saying how sorry I was to read all this and that she should not be discouraged. At the same time I was intrigued by this second stream, the one containing the smug polyglots. The puzzling thing about their increasingly obscure and self-absorbed comments was how wrapped up they seemed to be in a matter of high principle. In a way I admired them for seeming to care so much about it, because of course on one level they were right: we *could* all be better linguists. What I found depressing was a tendency to disparage people with what they perceived to be an inferior set of skills while apparently taking no responsibility for this state of affairs.³

I should say that I am well placed to comment here because – although I can at times be smug – I am in no way a polyglot. In descending order of competence: my English is OK and I even know some words that other people do not; my Latin probably peaked about ten years ago when I stopped teaching it, and Greek a few years later for the same reason; I have spent a considerable amount of time and money in the last few years trying to improve on my GCSE French, so that I can read books and articles and sustain conversation if people are prepared to be patient; some time ago I put a huge effort into getting my German to a point where I can read it slowly with a dictionary; I learnt some Italian once when I was on holiday, likewise on another occasion Russian; my Welsh is limited to the enthusiastic rendition of a couple of rugby songs and my Mandarin (so far) to the recognition of one or two simple characters.

I shall persevere with European languages although not everything that I fling at the memory seems to stick; and I have a particular difficulty with spoken as opposed to written language – more of a decoder than an actor or a mimic, it is for this reason that I leant towards the classical languages in the first place. But I shall probably never learn Swedish. Hungarian remains a closed book along with Urdu, Swahili, Pidgin and over 6,900 other languages that are spoken in the world today. What is more, I have no facility at all in C++, Curl, Java, Perl, php, SPARQL or Python.⁴

At the same time my Latin and Greek will never be as good as I'd like them to be. I went to Cambridge a few years before the Classical Faculty came to the realisation that they needed actually to teach some Latin and Greek to their students. The exceptions were the students on the intensive Greek track, who had regular language classes: I could see them gradually overtaking me as a Hellenist simply because they were so well taught. The one linguistic skill I gained was the

³ I'm going to refer to these smug polyglots a few more times in this paper. This is an unfair way of grouping together a number of people whom I think I have never met and whose views I was only briefly exposed to. It is best to think of smug polyglotism as a rhetorical position for the purposes of the current article, and not as a movement. Multilingualism, on the other hand, is in itself unproblematic and is practised by nearly half my colleagues in the Classics Department at Reading, well over half of the children with whom my daughters play at school and, indeed, most of the human race.

⁴ I owe this point to Elton Barker in his contribution to the exchanges on the Classicists List that I refer to above.

ability, painstakingly and with the aid of a dictionary, to render thirty hard lines of Latin or Greek into tolerable English prose – because that was what I was taught to do.

So how can I call myself a professional classicist and do I really deserve to be where I am today, simply because twenty-five years ago I was not particularly troubled by an A Level Latin unseen? What I can now do is two things. First, I can read and discuss difficult literary texts with advanced students on the back of less than an hour's frenzied preparation. It's the same feat of short-term memory, I might say, that these days gets me through university committee meetings with 150 pages of papers to read over my cornflakes. In other words, it's a professional skill. Second, I can analyse language with some sensitivity and, if you are *really* interested, I can give you the results of my research on the use in Greek literature of a very small number of abstract nouns.

From this experience I have formed the view that teaching matters. Yes, I did take some responsibility for my own language learning as an undergraduate and have done ever since. But a good teacher will assess a student's learning needs and instruct them accordingly. Self-direction does not always get the best results. So the smug polyglots I spoke of above need to take responsibility for teaching and not simply expect everyone to help themselves. My further conclusion is that, for a classicist, a language competence is a professional skill. If my Latin or Greek is not better than it currently is, that's probably because it does not *need* to be much better. I get on OK in my job; if my work required me to work more closely with Greek texts then I would probably have to be better at Greek.

A PhD is (among many other things) a professional qualification and so research students need to gain professional skills as part of the process. I'm glad to see that we are increasingly *not* joined in the profession by colleagues limited to the public school background of a Hugh Lloyd-Jones, just as I am glad to have people with that sort of expertise around for what they offer. It is several decades since British university Classics departments realised that they did not have to – nor should they – recruit only undergraduates with a school background in classical languages. The next step, which I believe is underway, is to open up the school and university teaching professions fully to people with good degrees in subjects like Classical Studies or Ancient History. The profession can only benefit from this breadth of talent but we also need to develop it. The key, it seems to me, is to approach the linguistic needs of our research students from the point of view of professional skills.

At the University of Reading we have addressed postgraduate language skills at departmental and institutional level. The departmental initiative, which I believe places us slightly ahead of the curve, is to run a Latin summer school specifically for postgraduate students with little or no background in the language. This came directly from an HEA subject centre conference, held in Bristol in January 2011, which focused on *ab initio* language teaching for postgraduates. The university-wide initiative, in which we probably catching up, is to offer teaching in a range of modern foreign languages free of charge to research students.

This emphasis on professional skills is reflected in by far the most useful reaction to that terrible series of emails last year. It was by Neville Morley and he wisely kept it off list and in his own blog. He wrote:

There is an unmistakable archetype of the ideal classical scholar lurking behind all this: not, as one might initially imagine, the academic in his fifties or sixties, but rather a research student in his twenties who is as that sixty-something academic was at that age, or an idealised version thereof. And, yes, I'm pretty sure that it's a 'he' as far as the collective consciousness of the discipline is concerned. So, youngish in age but old in attitude, polymathic, skilled in ancient and modern languages, either single so he can be monkishly devoted to his research in case he comes across another language he has to learn, or supported by loyal and self-effacing girlfriend/wife so he can be monkishly devoted to his work with occasional extra benefits ...

What most struck me ... was the way that this Heroic Classicist is conceived, quite unconsciously, as a Lone Scholar ... Even if he's part of a department, he researches alone, which is why he needs command of all these languages and other skills. Obviously he can't talk to anyone else or draw on their expertise, because that's not how things work ...

If we think of scholarship in terms of a collective enterprise – still more if it's actually organised as a team – then what matters is the blend of skills and knowledge within the team, not the individual accomplishments of a single person.⁵

And Neville goes on to mention his own collaboration with political scientists on his Thucydides project. I think this provides us with a useful template for the future of Classical teaching and research. Instead of bemoaning the state of language education in modern Britain, we should ask ourselves: what else do our best undergraduates have to offer? and, what professional skills do they individually need?

I should end with a small caveat on professional skills. A little while ago my colleague Eleanor Dickey, also posting on the Classicists' List, identified the problem that we have far more PhD graduates seeking academic jobs than there are jobs to go to. The responses, which were then collated and posted by Eleanor, included the sensible view that an academic career should not be over-romanticised or treated as the only objective of doctoral research.⁶ So, when I describe a PhD as professional training, I am actually taking a rather narrow view. My usual view is that a degree programme of any kind is education first and training second. PhD students are certainly trained to do a job in the sense that they are apprenticed to established researchers for three years and (hopefully) given some training as teachers too. But they also have the talent to go out and do all sorts of other things.

D. M. Carter, University of Reading

www.reading.ac.uk/classics/about/staff/d-m-carter.aspx

Twitter: @DrDMCarter

⁵ <http://thesphinxblog.com/2013/03/29/foundational-myths-and-archetypes/>

⁶ See also Eleanor's contribution to this Bulletin at <https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/Classics/CUCD/Dickey.pdf>

Learning & Teaching in HE

Training for Postgraduate Students

This paper comes about in the context of the on-going debate about the value of offering discipline-specific versus generic interdisciplinary training in learning and teaching to postgraduate research (PGR) students. The paper examines the question from the perspective of educational development in HE and through consideration of recent pedagogical research into UG learning and teaching which included a vital contribution from postgraduate students. These ideas were originally presented as part of a panel at the CA conference in Nottingham (2014) contributing to the debate on the future of postgraduate training and skills development in our discipline. Since then the suggestions in my paper have been put into practice in the Department of Humanities at Roehampton.

At Roehampton new PGR students need to take a short SEDA course entitled *An Introduction to Learning and Teaching in Higher Education* before they are allowed to undertake any teaching. The course is generic and is offered to all PGR students across the university in subjects ranging from Dance, Drama, Languages and Humanities to Education, Social Sciences, Life Sciences and Psychology. This approach makes sense logistically as it is practical to bring students together and teach them together. The programme is also built on the findings of educational developers that it is beneficial to take an interdisciplinary approach to share best practice across disciplines rather than sticking with one mode which is essentially the way that you yourself were taught. As Schulman (2005) has convincingly argued, by examining the 'signature pedagogies' of other disciplines, that is the characteristic forms of teaching and learning in each discipline, educators can improve teaching and learning in their own discipline. Another positive aspect is that students get to meet peers from across campus. A similar approach is taken in the longer and more in depth programme for new staff members for a similar set of reasons.

I spoke to a small number of PGR students in Humanities (studying in the fields of Classics, History, Philosophy and Theology) to find out their impressions of this short course. They told me that they appreciated the basic training they had received while undertaking the introductory course. In particular the opportunity to do a trial class in front of their peers was deemed valuable as they received feedback on their teaching style and technique. However all the students surveyed said that the course was too short and very basic. They desired something additional to supplement this course, ideally with a more disciplinary focus. In addition some of these PGR students were keen for further experiences, not just of teaching, but also of developing material for teaching and developing assessments (see also [Hilder](#) in this issue).

Two of these Humanities students subsequently agreed to take part in an HEA funded collaborative project on '[Developing undergraduate students](#)'

[understanding of historical enquiry and research through flexible online learning and feedback](#)’ which was run by my colleague Ted Vallance in collaboration with historians from Edge Hill University. The aim of the project was to ‘develop online platforms to support undergraduate history students’ enquiry and research skills’. The team decided to include input from PGR students as well as academic staff from both institutions to help enhance both subject-specific skills and the kind of independent critical thinking which is needed for university-level study. The main focus in both universities was the teaching of a first-year History skills module, using technology to develop UG students’ research skills. The project made use of PGR students from disciplines other than History including Classics, Philosophy and French. The particular role of the PGR students was to collaborate with each other under the guidance of staff to develop digital material to enhance the modules involved in this project. For example they designed online quizzes for the undergraduate students and they took part in online discussion forums with the undergraduate students on the VLE answering questions and stimulating debate.

The PGR students who took part were happy to be involved in the project as it gave them an opportunity to think through what kind of material to design in teaching a session, how to interlink ideas that were being delivered in the classroom with the learning outcomes, and how to interact with and give feedback to students. There were benefits to the academic staff involved too, because the PGR students came at problems in a different way partly through their experience with technologies and partly because of their memories of learning as undergraduate students made them approach problems differently. The undergraduate students on these modules also benefitted through their use of material developed by the PGR students. In particular those students who engaged fully in one-on-one online discussions with PGR students benefitted substantially, as could be seen from analysis of an exercise in which they answered the same set of questions in week 1 and week 10. In week 10 students who had engaged in the online discussions with PGR students showed that they had met the learning outcomes through their more nuanced and thoughtful answers.

The project demonstrated advantages to all involved when PGR students were involved. But a question remained about how this work could be sustained when the funding came to an end. At the same time, the desire of our PGR students to receive some form of disciplinary training in learning and teaching needed a solution. The solution which I trialled in the Department of Humanities was an enhancement of our peer observation scheme to include PGR students even where they are not teaching. The original simple system paired up academic staff who were asked to watch the teaching of a colleague for an hour and note a couple of things that they had learnt from the session. For the new scheme I created groups of three, each including a full-time member of staff, a full-time or temporary lecturer and a PGR student. While at Roehampton we have a limited number of PGR students, the advantage of working with groups is that larger numbers of students could be accommodated in the scheme. Groups were asked to observe teaching. As an alternative colleagues were encouraged to collaborate with PGR students to develop an idea for teaching in a system of ‘peer collaboration’. Possibilities

suggested were that PGR students might be given the opportunity to get some experience of preparing a class activity, creating a Moodle quiz, or leading a seminar. It was stressed that no activities should be unduly arduous. The groups in our department were interdisciplinary over Classics, History, Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies and Ministerial Theology. The advantage of the scheme is that it is logistically practical, interdisciplinary, and allows colleagues to get to know one another from across disciplines, but at the same time can allow PGR students to learn more about teaching before they undertake it through observing the teaching, or collaborating in teaching-related activities. Research has demonstrated that watching others teach can be more beneficial to learning than receiving feedback on your own teaching, because observers can enhance their confidence and learn new strategies by watching others (Hendry and Oliver, 2012), so just including the PGR students in the rota and encouraging them to observe teaching is valuable on its own. The possibility of peer collaboration as trialled in our scheme is an additional mode of supporting students, but is not essential to enhance their learning. The PGR students were not placed in groups with their supervisors necessarily as working with a range of people over their studies would supplement their knowledge and experiences. This would enable students to gain experience in developing and thinking through teaching materials, styles and approaches as well as gaining practical tips and advice from more experienced staff, while the staff could potentially also learn something e.g. about technology that could be used beneficially in the classroom from the PGR students.

Feedback from PGR students who participated in the scheme was positive. They were pleased that they had been included in the rota and spoke of things that they had learnt from experienced members of staff and the feedback they had received. As Jennifer Hilder has reported in her piece for this issue, the University of Glasgow also ran a peer observation scheme in Classics which included graduate students for the first time this academic year. She noted: 'From my point of view, I think it was very useful particularly for the newer GTAs to get some reassurance as well as constructive feedback, but also as a slightly more experienced GTA I enjoyed seeing other people's teaching style and made me think more about the way I organise class time, for example.' However one PGR student from Roehampton commented that he did not want to take part in the scheme as the staff members in his group were not from the same discipline and he could not see the benefits of observing teaching which was not in his own subject area. Conversely a student in Theology and Religious Studies working on a PhD on sacred space felt that he benefited from his experience observing a field trip for first year classical civilisation students to a neoclassical garden temple at Roehampton, including 'the way such an informal session allowed individual discussion between tutor and student'. Following on from this feedback, I will look carefully at the disciplinary groupings of the PGR students in the scheme going forward to ensure they are offered both disciplinary and interdisciplinary peer observation opportunities in the course of their studies.

The message from PGR students involved this year is that including them in peer observation rotas can be a very valuable way for them to enhance their disciplinary learning and teaching and where possible to gain further insights on learning and teaching through interdisciplinary engagement.

References

[Assisting UG History Students via Online Learning tools \(2014\)](#)

Hendry, G. and Oliver, G. (2012) 'Seeing is Believing: the Benefits of Peer Observation', *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice* 9.1: Article 7

[Hilder, J. \(2015\) 'What Postgraduates Want', *CUCD Bulletin* 44](#)

Schulman, L. S. (2005) 'Signature Pedagogies in the Professions', *Daedalus* summer 2005: 52-9.

Fiona McHardy, University of Roehampton

f.mchardy@roehampton.ac.uk

REF 2014

So what did we learn from the REF?

CUCD has been gathering feedback and opinions.

So have we all. These thoughts are not intended to duplicate the many local enquiries by senior management teams, or the flurry of responses that followed the publication of [the results](#), let alone some pretty hard hitting analyses in the Press. Instead these are simply a few observations about what REF did to our discipline, and what the published results mean for us.

Some of this comes out of discussions at Standing Committee and elsewhere, some is based on material in the public domain, and of course none at all derives from panel members, bound as they are to HEFCE by the most frightful *Omertà*. The formal feedback from the panel chairs has already been published, including [the Classics entry](#) (on pages 58-68) from sub-Panel 31, our panel. It is generally upbeat and helpful and gives a very positive account of the strength of research in classical subjects. It is clearly essential reading for those already preparing for the next REF about which we still know very little, not even the date, except for the announcement about [Open Access requirements](#). This article is less authoritative, a personal view from someone who has been close to the gossip and far from the work of REF 2014.

How we prepared

Preparing for REF felt like much more work than preparing for RAE.

One reason was the need to compile impact case studies, on which more below.

Another reason was the generous resources of cash and staff time which university senior managers were prepared to spend on mini-REFs, allegedly also on ghost-writers for environment and impact statements, and on external consultancy. Senior academics, former RAE panellists, (and in a few cases current REF panellists, although I did not hear of any cases in Classics) were recruited to vet drafts, to assign marks to outputs, and to advise on inclusions and exclusions. Anecdotal evidence suggests this was much more lucrative and much less work than conventional external examining.

The most expensive component of these dummy runs was the time and energy and nerves of the poor dummies being sent on their practice laps. Attempts are being made to estimate the total cost of REF2014: [one estimate](#) has it between £0.5 and £1 billion, perhaps around ten times the cost of RAE2008. Another estimate is that it cost around £1.2 billion: that is about the same amount of QR funding that is distributed each year by HEFCE. And then there is the opportunity cost: how much more of what was being measured could have been written if it was not being measured, or if it had been measured with a lighter touch?

Another cost is less easy to measure. Goodwill and collegiality. 401 individuals were submitted to REF 2014, that is 60 less than were submitted to RAE 2008. The figures look differently in terms of FTEs with a smaller drop from 415 to 383. Yet CUCD statistics

show there was almost no change in the number of staff employed in Classics departments between 2008-9 and 2012-13 (the latest figures that are available). For what it is worth, the figures were 510 individuals in each year and a shift from 445 to 443 FTE. So there has been a significant increase in the number of classicists not submitted. This figure conceals big differences between departments. Some departments submitted everyone who was eligible, others deployed a deeper cut. At least some of the ranking must have been affected by strategies of exclusion (assuming the 'right' colleagues were excluded). Decisions on how inclusive to be will rarely have been taken at the level of departments: but judgments over precisely who to exclude much mostly have been made locally. CUCD should perhaps watch out for the long term consequences of these tactics.

What did we write?

Successive Classics panels have tried to define the subject as inclusively as possible. The sub-panel 31 report celebrates the diversity of subject matter and format in the submissions.

As before, the range of outputs was quite wide. Just over 30% were monographs and most universities asked for these to be double-weighted. Almost every request made (98.8%) was agreed to. Unless the rules change dramatically, that means we should probably all request that our monographs be double weighted next time.

Journal articles made up about 25% of submissions and book chapters just over 30%. The remaining 12% or so included edited books (8.4%) and various other kinds of outputs. Scholarly editions made up only 1.9% of the outputs submitted which might ring a few alarm bells.

How was it read?

We were lucky, once again, to have a sub-panel of our own.

The archaeologists had to cohabit with the geographers, and although our panel was the smallest it had an impressive range of expertise. It was good to see that most of CUCD's nominations for membership were taken up. Two recently retired colleagues were called on in the final stages to help meet the deadlines, and they generously agreed. As a discipline we should be grateful for the time panel members dedicated to reading and to producing carefully considered feedback. There is no need here to repeat the reports they made on the health of various subdisciplines. Those reports were broadly positive, not just about what has been achieved but about the future too, noting the emergence of new specialisms and the presence excellent submissions from early career researchers. The picture their report presents is of a diverse and vibrant research culture in UK Classics. All this is good news.

Everything submitted to sub-panel 31 passed through the hands of classicists. But not all classicists were submitted to sub-panel 31. A number will have been submitted to the History panel or perhaps Archaeology. This is why in the results for Panel 31 there are no entries for a number of CUCD members including Birkbeck, Cardiff, Leicester, Roehampton and Swansea. It is also why KCL submitted 29.9 FTE while UCL 13.00 FTE (UCL ancient historians being in history and their classical archaeologists in archaeology). As in previous exercises it was possible for panels to refer items they did not feel qualified to judge. It would be good to know how effective cross referral

really was. It is surprising to read in the report from Main Panel D that only 4% of outputs were cross referred. It is also clear some sub-Panels exported a lot more outputs than did others. On the face of it, it seems likely that many researchers from CUCD departments had some of their work assessed by other panels.

What else have we been up to?

The broad levels of grant income and its distribution look fairly similar to that of previous years. This perhaps unsurprising given the limited number of funders, and also how well we have done in the past. We still compare quite favourably with many other humanities disciplines. We are also producing more doctorates than ever. There are other questions that might be asked about this, and [some tough answers](#) have been proposed. To the credit of sub-panel 31 attention is drawn in their report to growing casualization, to the plight of early career researchers on temporary and/or teaching only contracts, and to the failure of some of us to think hard (or at least to write coherently) about how our research strategies take account of them.

What about Impact?

This was the major innovation of this exercise. Preparing for it devoured vast amounts of time and energy, partly gathering data we never knew we would need, and partly trying to understand the complex definitions and rules about eligibility. A few departments evidently fell foul of the latter, either because it was difficult to link the public engagement and outreach work they have been engaged in to specific research outputs, or because good examples were ruled out because staff had moved since the original work was done.

Life was toughest for small departments because each impact case study had such a disproportionate impact on the profile as a whole. There are stories of individual researchers being excluded not on the quality of their work, but because their inclusion would raise the size of a department to the point where another impact case study would be required. Much of this is invisible in the eventual results.

The final scores were on the whole less terrifying than many had feared. Overall 41.4% of impact case studies were 4*, compared to only 29.4 % of outputs. If 4* and 3* are added, as in some published tables, the contrast is even sharper: 88.2% of impact case studies were judged in the top two categories, as opposed to 70.4% of outputs. Perhaps there is not much point comparing such different kinds of assessment, except that they end up being worth the same when the final profiles are calculated arithmetically.

All 59 Classics impact case studies can now be read [on the HEFCE site](#) . They are quite varied, but nowhere near all of our subdisciplines are represented. A crude count suggests that archaeology featured as the main element in about half the case studies. A quarter made significant use of digital resources and about a fifth were based reception studies (the categories do overlap). Ancient philosophy featured in surprisingly few impact case studies. Finding ways to demonstrate the impact of philological research or literary criticism proved more difficult but a few case studies were based on Greek drama, and a few emphasised how research had had an impact on education in schools and universities. It only became clear part way through the period of preparation that producing pedagogical materials

or changing education in other ways was regarded as a legitimate form of impact (so long as it was not our own students who were benefiting from our research).

As the newest component of the REF, impact will probably change most in the next exercise. For now we know we need to gather data, and build impact into research projects from the start. Perhaps classics departments without archaeologists or digital humanists should hire a few?

Winners and Losers

RAE and REF have always been presented as based on absolute measures of research quality. There is no rationing of 4* grades. We could, in principle, all get top marks. The Classics panel did not feel that the 400 odd individuals whose work was assessed could easily be sorted into 4*, 3*, 2* 1* or unclassifiable researchers. This obviously has implications for the effectiveness of excluding individuals as opposed to choosing which outputs to submit. The profiles of every department had some 4* elements and most had a little 1* as well. Compared to many other subjects, Classics did not seem to have much of a tail.

All the same league tables were at once produced, based on 4*, 4*+3* or GPA and there has been a national debate over the whether research intensity, research power or market share is the better measure of virtue. One well informed former-VC told me that from looking at websites he reckoned there are now about 35 UK universities in the top 10. And depending on the ranking method adopted some universities shoot up and down the tables. University R is 38, 27 or 19 according to the measure applied, University B is 14, 35 or 34 by the same measures, and so on.

Classics rankings, for whatever they are worth, have been fairly stable through successive exercises. It is clear enough why this is. The cull of Classics departments during the 1980s and the effect of successive RAEs has removed low functioning departments altogether as well as encouraging universities to support their researchers better. Most classics departments are pretty similar especially in terms of the kinds of universities where they are located (meaning broadly similar workloads for staff and resourcing for research). In REF terms most of us inhabit similar environmental niches.

The only very obvious differentiation is that the largest departments rarely do very badly and the smallest rarely do very well, almost irrespective of the measure taken. No surprises here. Size brings larger library resources, more graduate students, better staff/student ratios and often a greater capacity to support research leave. Classics degrees are more complex to run than most humanities degrees (a wider range of subdisciplines, the need to teach languages, usually at a variety of levels) and so members of small departments often have higher administrative burdens than their colleagues in philosophy and history etc. We all know this already. The results of REF2014 had no real shockers for classicists. Only five departments submitted less than 10 FTE and they were near the bottom of most tables. The correlation was less clear at the other end, but no large departments did very badly. Middle sized departments were shuffled a little – between exercises and between tables – but only because these departments are so similar that any REF-based rankings are sensitive to the slightest variation.

Use and Abuse

More serious for Classics departments are two less legitimate means of comparison.

First, given the absence of much of a tail in our discipline – taught in around 30 universities, of which only 22 made submissions to Panel 31 – it arguably doesn't mean as much to be in the bottom quarter of the league table as it does for some other humanities subjects. The History panel looked at 83 departments, the English panel at 89. Being the median department in English is not the same as being the median department in Classics. All the same there are signs that, as in all previous exercises, the lower ranking Classics departments are being given a tough time.

Second, universities are already producing internal tables that compare the profiles of different departments within the same institution. One has to have a very high degree of faith in the comparability of the standards different panels applied to think this sort of comparison tells us very much. As a former RAE panellist I certainly do not have that faith in the absolute equivalence of gradings produced. Unfortunately many senior academics do seem to suspend their critical faculties when they join senior management teams, and collectively forget the limits of what the data-sets generated by the REF can tell us. We do not always help remind them of this. It is easy for us to give in to the temptation to make those rankings seem more legitimate and secure than they are when we boast of our temporary achievements in them. Nationally Impact Data and case studies are being deployed to show the cultural value of the humanities. Most of us believe in that cultural value (or just 'value') and most want to share what we discover and speak out for why it matters. But if we sign up to impact rankings as the best measure of value, we will have only ourselves to blame if less impactful activities are driven out of the Classics. The sub-panel itself was not convinced. To cite their report (p.63 ch. 28) "Sub-panel 31 remained doubtful whether what it was able to demonstrate in REF represented the true impact of different units adequately."

As always CUCD is glad to know of any threats to funding, departments or posts that might follow, and will keep that information confidential if necessary until the point when any public action seems helpful.

Greg Woolf

Greg.Woolf@sas.ac.uk

New Ancient History degrees at Southampton

The University of Southampton will once again be welcoming students to specialise in the study of the Classical World in 2016.

Its Classics department was one of those culled in the 1970s, but this did not mean the end of Classicists at Southampton. Brian Sparkes, specialist in Greek art history, transferred to the Department of Archaeology. Roman Archaeology was represented by Simon Keay, with Martin Millett from 1999 to 2001, and then myself from 2001. Whilst Classical Archaeology flourished, so did Ancient History within the History department. The Parkes Centre for Jewish/non-Jewish relations appointed Sarah Pearce, a specialist in Jewish communities in the Hellenistic and early Roman east, and Dan Levene, who works on Jewish and Aramaic magical texts from Late Antiquity. Through the work of academics in both departments, there was a continual stream of undergraduate, masters and doctoral students specialising in the Classical world, but within the wider context of Archaeology and History, and with limited interaction between the two groups.

In the last 5 years, the changing climate of higher education led to an expansion in Classical topics in both departments. Increasing interest in outreach led to the appointment of Helen Spurling to promote the Parkes Centre as part of her lectureship, whilst Dragana Mladenovic joined Archaeology as part of the Portus Project. At the same time, there was a large increase in History students to over 250 single and combined honours undergraduates being admitted each year. This led to a need for more History modules, and to in part satisfy this, I started teaching modules in Roman history, initially at first and second year levels. These were offered as part of the History programme, and proved popular, both with students wanting to specialise in Ancient History, but also with Medievalists and Modernists who wanted a taste of something different. A consultation with the History students revealed that after 20th century history, they most wanted more Ancient History modules.

This suggested the viability of Ancient History as a degree independent of the History degree, and led to the design of a new single honours programme and a suite of combined honours. These draw on both existing modules as options, and new core modules. The majority of existing modules are offered by History and Archaeology, but collaboration between departments in the Faculty of Humanities means that we can draw on a wider range, such as Ancient Greek Philosophy, reception of ancient myth, and the ancients on film. We are also able to offer beginners Greek and Latin courtesy of the Modern Languages department! This use of existing modules provides a reassuring safety net, and removes some of the risk of embarking on a new programme. These modules will still be available to the students within the department offering them, so warding off threats from the central authorities for low module recruitment.

The structure of the programme echoes that of the History programme. There are compulsory modules in semesters 1 and 2 of the first year, providing a grounding in the key events and features of each phase of ancient history, as well as the materials and controversies. In the second year, the compulsory group project enhances transferable skills, with each group required to research a topic, give a presentation on it, and then generate a public outcome, from a museum display to a session in a local primary school. In the third year, all students are required to undertake a double-weighted dissertation. The remainder of the modules are option modules, initially those already on the books, but in time, developing new ones as the student numbers increase. In the first year, these are mainly single modules, in year 2 a combination of single and double modules, and in year 3, the special subject. These are generally two part double modules, based upon the research expertise of the teaching staff. Current examples include Roman Imperialism and the Jews from Sarah Pearce, and my own Being Roman. For many students, these special subjects feed into their dissertations, and allow them to make the transition to researchers in their own right.

In addition to the traditional three year single honours programme, applicants can choose from further combinations. Humanities departments have a range of combined honours degrees, and it is planned that eventually, there will be combined honours Ancient History and Archaeology, English, Film, Modern Languages, Philosophy, and History. However, these are being introduced in two tranches, and in the first year, combinations of Ancient History and History, and Archaeology, and Philosophy, and Modern Languages will be offered. Also in keeping with Faculty policy, all programmes are being offered as a four year degree, with the third year spent abroad with one of our partner institutions. Once at Southampton, students will also be allowed to register for the 'minor' pathways, using their free-electives to study 25% of their degree in another subject, such as a modern language, another humanities subject, or a subject from social sciences or sciences. This is usually only advised for single honours students, and would give a degree of Ancient History with xxx.

It is this flexibility and the range of topics on offer which we hope will appeal to prospective students. Already, we are able to expand our expertise in anticipation of the degree starting. The removal of the government cap on students resulted in a high recruitment in History for the coming academic year (2015-6). A projected intake of c.240 History students was transformed into an actual intake of over 300, and so a number of 2-year fixed term posts have been approved. Whilst some are earmarked for modern history, we have been allowed to advertise for a post in Ancient Greek History, something identified internally and externally as a gap in our current provision, and a further post in Roman History.

As ever, the launch of a new subject area is a risky undertaking, particularly in the current uncertain climate. However, it has been demonstrated that the demand is there from our current students, and hopefully we can persuade prospective students that Ancient History at Southampton has a lot to offer.

Louise Revell

Louise.Revell@soton.ac.uk