

# Classics after the Classroom

by Constantine Christoforou and Kathryn Tempest



## Background to the Project

The idea for this project arose from school and university teachers, as well as exam board officers, who have repeatedly stressed the need for evidence regarding the destinations of graduates of classical subjects (Classics, Ancient History, Classical Civilisation/Studies as well as Latin, Greek and Archaeology). The

aim is not just to present statistics; nor is it solely focused on skills and employability. Rather, the plan is to gather as much anecdotal evidence about the life experience of students who have studied classical subjects, asking them to reflect on how their degree has in some way contributed to their career path. In so doing, we hope to provide a resource for instructors and educators, as well as a source of inspiration for students embarking on their classical studies. The project was designed by Kathryn Tempest, one of this report's authors. It was generously funded by the Classical Association. Constantine Christoforou, the other author of this report,



Fig. 1. Constantine Christoforou presenting the Project at the ACE event at the University of Roehampton.

acted as the research assistant; in this capacity he collated the responses to the survey and presented the preliminary results at the [ACE Project](#) event at the University of Roehampton on 21 June 2018.

With support and advice from the Classics Development Group (a special committee for Outreach convened by the Classical Association), we designed a survey which asks respondents to answer the following questions:

- *What subject did you study at university?*
- *Where did you complete your degree and what year did you graduate?*
- *What is your current job and position?*
- *How long have you been in this role?*
- *Please provide brief details of any other profession you pursued after graduation.*
- *In no more than six sentences, please describe how you think your career has benefited from the degree you took. You might consider particular skills, or the perspectives and insight you gained from your studies, as well as any other general observations on how the Classical world has shaped your work life after university.*

This survey was distributed via twitter (@ClassicsATC), CUCD and the Classicists List with a view to reaching a broad range of Classics alumni. This article discusses the first one hundred responses to our survey.

## Responses to the Survey

As the chart (figure 2) demonstrates, a large proportion of our respondents (45%) studied Classics, followed by Classical Civilisation (20%), Ancient History (11%), Archaeology (6%), while 18% of respondents had studied a classical subject as part of a combined honours degree. The responses came from forty-five different universities: from students from all parts of the UK, across Europe and as far as New Zealand and Australia. This sample produced a staggering range of career options: at the time surveyed (within the past six months), there were forty-three different current careers out of a hundred respondents

## What do Classics graduates *do*?

The Higher Education Leavers Statistics 2016-17 support the claim that Classics graduates entered a variety of disciplines. As the numbers in Figure 3 demonstrate, a large proportion of students who graduated in subjects connected to Historical & Philosophical studies and Languages (including Greek, Latin and Classical subjects) enter careers that span education; professional, scientific and technical activities; information and communication; financial and insurance activities; accommodation and food service activities; as well as the arts and recreation services - and more.

■ Classics   ■ Classical Civilisation   ■ Ancient History   ■ Archaeology   ■ Combined Honours

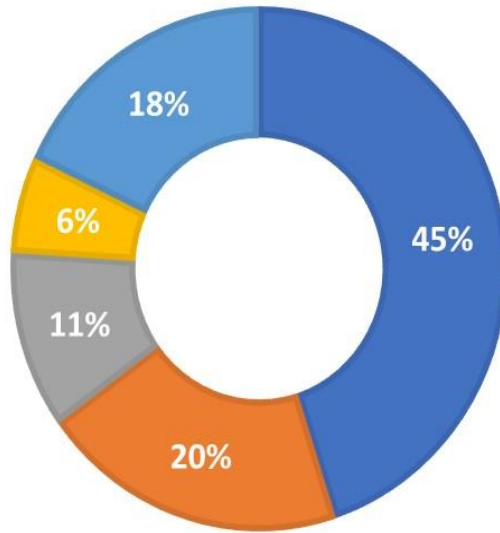
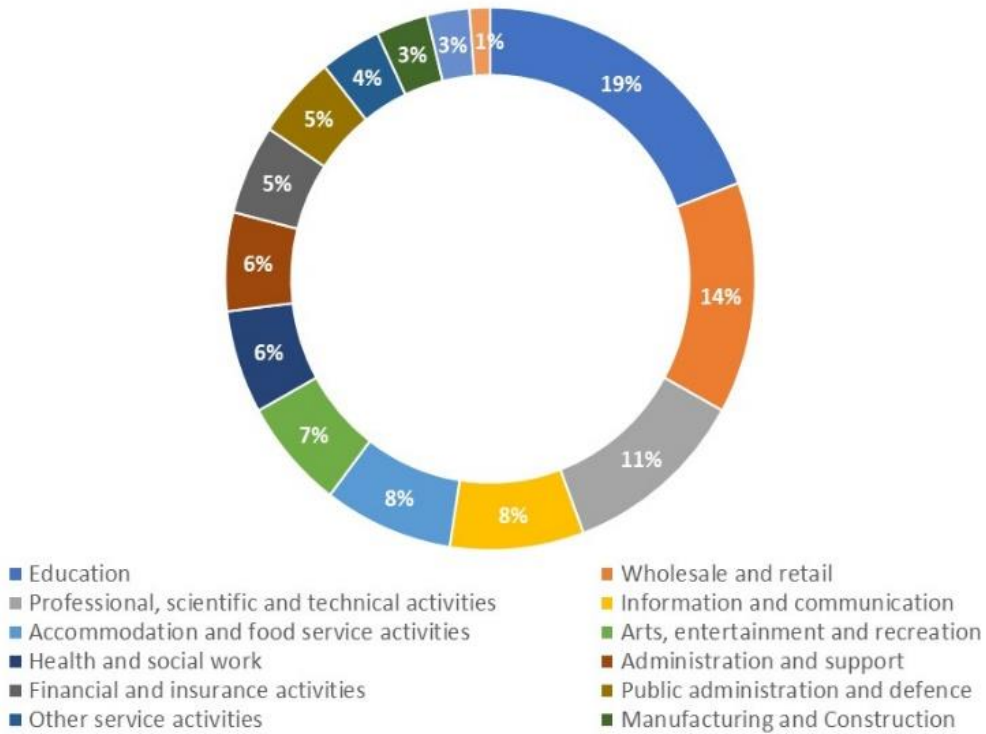


Fig. 2: Responses to the survey: what respondents studied at University



\* Graduate destinations data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2016-17.

Fig. 3: Career destinations: the national picture for graduates in Historical & Philosophical studies and Languages (including Greek, Latin and Classical subjects)

As we expected, then, many graduates went on to further study and undertook jobs in key sectors such as education, demonstrating that Classics graduates are passionate about what they study. The drive to share this learning and engage future generations, either at primary or secondary level, provides a firm career option; likewise, the decision to continue either on a Masters or PhD programme offers an opportunity to develop further research, communication and subject-specific skills.

Of the graduates who pursued further research, some had chosen to continue their studies in Classics, Latin, and History, but there were also students like Jeremy Ogilvie-Harris. Jeremy graduated from Edinburgh University with a degree in Classics. He is now a Law student. Jeremy told us that he:

**developed the ability to understand the motive behind how people act from studying texts such as Homer and Sophocles.**

In other words, studying Classics opens up new perspectives and different ways of understanding; by studying past cultures and literature, Jeremy found himself able to enter into the thoughts and worlds of others, which is a very useful skill in the workplace, and particularly so in Law.

We also had responses from former students who went on to study Medicine, Sociology, Modern Languages and more, demonstrating that Classics students can branch into a range of subjects for further study. The same was true with jobs in Education. There were teachers of Classics, History, English and Religious Studies, but there were also graduates like Andrew Issacs. Andrew graduated from Northwestern University with a degree in Classics and is now the director of UChicago Stem Education, he told us that:

**Close reading of Greek helped with close reading of mathematical proofs. And historical perspective helped in my education work.**

He also told us that knowing the Greek alphabet was helpful in the study of higher mathematics. The natural integration of disciplines in classics - History, Philosophy, Literature, Art History, languages, Sociology, etc. - inspired in him a desire to integrate subject matter in the elementary school, where Andrew taught for a number of years, before going back to graduate school to study Mathematics after which, he wrote elementary Mathematics and Science curriculums before moving to UChicago. These are two sought-after sectors (Law and STEM) which might not be thought to be associated with Classics, but examples such as these show that Classics can aid graduates in further study and in the education sector, by developing key intellectual skills and logical thought processes.

There were also graduates who went on to have careers in the media. John o' Rourke studied at Trinity College Dublin for a degree in English Literature and Greek and is now a producer and director for BBC Television Arts. His response was as follows:

**In the last year, I've produced and directed two documentaries about the ancient world for BBC Four - Akala's Odyssey and Ovid from the RSC. The multidisciplinary nature of Classics was the perfect training ground for mastering multiple briefs in very little time.**

The skills Andrew cites as important here are particularly well developed by studying the ancient world where sources need to be interpreted, assessed and evaluated; students also need to understand and critically engage with a range of viewpoints and critical approaches. As a result, graduates can extract key elements from data - 'mastering multiple briefs' as John puts it - to find solutions and ideas that can be tested both in the creative industry and in any job that requires problem-solving. More than that, mastering a multi-disciplinary subject - one which combines an appreciation of texts, objects, and languages - is a crucial skill in itself, and one which a graduate of Classics can expect to acquire.

That the study of Classics helps develop imaginative skills is easily demonstrated by the number of graduates who have entered jobs in the creative arts and design. One respondent was a graduate who was a theatre director; there were graduates who have gone on to be media consultants, worked in web design, software design, and digital development. Media was a well-represented field and one which requires analytical skills but also creativity which is why Classics graduates tend to flourish. Analytical skills are developed in almost every aspect of studying the ancient world: beginning or mastering a difficult language requires rigorous attention to detail; cataloguing and interpreting evidence demands attention to context and the application of various explanatory models; the analysis of a text, artefact or inscription is best accomplished by a combination of critical and lateral thinking. According to a recent newspaper report, the old idea that employers seek a creative or analytical mind is over; 'now the ideal worker has the perfect mix' (*Evening Standard*, 5 January 2017). The study of the ancient world cultivates this blend by the very nature of the evidence it has left us.

The finance sector had a strong representation within our results, as it does in the national statistics. Lara Borlenghi studied Classics at Cambridge and is now a finance director, Lara told us:

**I would not be doing my job if I had not studied Classics. Classics is seen as a multi skilled degree showing an aptitude to study and learn a variety of disciplines.**

As mentioned above, the fact that the study of Classics equips graduates with a range of competencies is one of the reasons it is attractive to employers. It involves logical thought processes, the capacity to exercise reflection and critical judgment, all of which are necessary when confronted with real-life situations. These skills are honed through the analysis and evaluation that goes into the preparation and presentation of arguments. In other words, linguistic and rhetorical skills are deployed alongside the analytical tools required to identify broad social, material,

and financial trends. These complement the study of subjects such as philosophy, art and archaeology to the extent that graduates of Classics also show an unparalleled ability to shift between disciplines. One of our respondents had gone on to study and practise Law for almost fifteen years, before moving into the Finance Industry, where they have since worked in Finance Litigation for three years. Others commented on how they felt as if they could pursue any career they wanted after studying the ancient world at university.

There were also graduates who made successful ventures into business. Robert Lister graduated with a degree in Classics, followed by a twenty-three-year career in Investment banking before moving into business, he told us:

**I was taught how to think. I was taught how to be constructively critical. I had a broad understanding of the world. I had had to argue both orally and in writing. I had to understand a foreign language.**

Robert Lister told us he is now the Non-Executive Director of five companies. Meanwhile, Charly Henny graduated from Royal Holloway with a degree in Ancient History and then went on to work in the advertising industry for ten years before moving into business. Charly is now the Executive Director of JP Morgan and told us that:

**It really taught me to examine and interrogate ideas from different perspectives. Group work and debates were my first introduction to how to work in large group meetings which are essential skills in any business today.**

Here we have examples of graduates doing extremely well in the business world, many of them rising to management positions and quoting the skills acquired studying the ancient world as pivotal. In addition to subject-specific skills, we see that the organisational, communication and interpersonal skills learned through the study of Classics have all contributed to their various successes.

What else can Classics graduates do? Among our respondents, there were creative artists - writers and a professional soprano who quoted learning ancient Greek and Latin as vital to learning the languages required (mainly German) for their songs. We had responses from people who worked in museums as curators, in galleries, in exhibitions, and on archaeological sites. We had responses from medical professionals, from two graduates who worked for the NHS, and from an Orbital Prosthetist who claimed that Classics improved his ability to read and process complex material and gave him broader people skills and a diverse perspective. We had a response from a coffee advisor for Nespresso who claims he owes his analytical skills, and many more too, to Classics. But, perhaps the most important example of the kinds of skills the study of Classics provides was offered by Prison chaplain Tim Dixon:

Classics is all about people, and how they don't change in essence - that people always have mixed motives, that societies rise and fall, and that humanity is valuable and fascinating. As a prison chaplain I work alongside the same kind of people I see running across the pages of Virgil, Herodotus, Tacitus. It has kept me interested in academia and I am now researching my context with a doctorate in theology and ministry. It gave me a love for languages which I still use in sermon prep and Bible studies, explaining meanings of words and helping people who struggle with literacy understand better. Classics above all is about the love of knowledge and learning as a good in its own right - something I always encourage and try to model - encouraging learning, discussion, reading - all of which can help prisoners re integrate into society and find a new path.

Tim's response perfectly encapsulates what this project has demonstrated thus far: Classics is about people, it is about the love of knowledge and learning, and it is why students who study Classics find themselves prepared and inspired to embark on such a wide range of careers. Not only does the study of the ancient world involve engaging with a wide range of people, cultures, disciplines, in offering an overview of long-term human history it also makes the present intelligible.

The range of careers is vast: creative jobs, analytical jobs, and jobs which require language skills, writing skills, and presenting skills. Studying Classics gives students the opportunity to learn about history, language, poetry, art, drama, politics, and philosophy. The multidisciplinary nature of the degrees available enables graduates to leave not only with a variety of skills but with a range of career choices.

## Where next?

If you would still like to have your voice heard, or if you know of alumni who have further perspectives to share, the survey remains open [here](#). You can also visit our twitter page @ClassicsATC (Classics after the Classroom) where we will display further results and stories from Classics graduates. The goal is for this data to be available to prospective students, parents, teachers and school leadership teams to demonstrate the versatility of Classics by offering real life experiences from students who have studied the ancient world, showing how and why their studies have led them to where they are today.

Please feel free to disseminate the results here, citing: **Classics after the Classroom; Classical Association Survey 2018**

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