



# **Inclusive Classics Initiative. Report on 'Towards a More Inclusive Classics II' International Workshop organised by Professor Barbara Goff and Dr Alexia Petsalis-Diomidis**

**1-2 JULY 2021**

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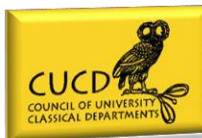
## **1. Introduction**

At the start of July 2021, the Inclusive Classics Initiative, led by Professor Barbara Goff (University of Reading) and Dr Alexia Petsalis-Diomidis (University of St Andrews), held its second event: the online, international workshop 'Towards a More Inclusive Classics II'. The two-day workshop covered a range of subjects: barriers to inclusivity, current projects and approaches aimed at making Classics more inclusive, and priorities for future work. Bringing together multiple perspectives within the discipline, including Classics in higher education and secondary schools, the workshop provided space for discussion about marginalised groups, both during antiquity and as experienced in the subject today.

## **2. The workshop: format and content**

Following last year's inaugural workshop 'Towards a more inclusive Classics', we made plans for a second workshop to continue the discussions begun in 2020. The Council of University Classical Departments and the Institute of Classical Studies very kindly financed a good level of technical and administrative support delivered by Dr Jenny Messenger. As with last year's event, holding the workshop online allowed a large international audience to participate. There were a total of 115 registered participants from 17 countries and 5 continents. The majority of participants were academics, but there were 25 students (at both undergraduate and postgraduate level) and 20 teachers, three of whom were combining postgraduate study with teaching positions in schools or colleges. Other attendees worked in heritage or held outreach posts.

Building on the format of last year's workshop, we pre-circulated material from speakers, which included PowerPoints and short articles. Some speakers chose to share a transcript during their presentations, so that attendees could follow along with the talk. The workshop was co-chaired by Professor Barbara Goff (University of Reading) and Dr Arlene Holmes-Henderson (King's College London and University of Oxford), who very kindly stepped in as Dr



Alexia Petsalis-Diomidis was unwell. We used the Microsoft Teams platform, with technical support from Jo Watts (University of Reading). Each panel followed a slightly different structure: the first panel had three 10-minute talks, each followed by 10 minutes of Q and A (signalled either by the 'raised hand' function or via a typed question in the 'chat'), before participants were randomly assigned to breakout rooms for discussion in smaller groups of around four people. The second panel featured three 10-minute talks, with 20 minutes of Q and A at the end, while the third panel (on Day Two) followed a similar format but had five speakers who presented for five minutes each, with 25 minutes for a group Q and A.

Before the final panel, we held a networking/discussion session based on themes: PhD/ECR, mid-career/professoriate, teachers in schools and colleges, ideas for Inclusive Classics Initiative future events, including a possible panel at the Classical Association 2022, and outreach. We asked attendees to specify which groups they wanted to join when registering. Although we experienced some technical issues with this part of the workshop, participants were able to discuss themed areas and generated a range of interesting points and areas for future development (some of which are summarised in Section Three). The final panel rounded off the workshop with a 20-minute conversation between three speakers and 25 minutes of Q and A. Social media users followed updates on Twitter from the [@inclusiclassics](#) account and using #InclusiveClassicsII. Materials from the presentations are available on the [Institute of Classical Studies website](#).

Professor Jennifer Ingleheart (University of Durham) opened our first panel, 'Embedding Inclusive Practices', chaired by University of Nottingham PhD candidate Ashley Chhibber. Professor Ingleheart gave a Head of Department's perspective about building an inclusive departmental ethos, and discussed her own experience of welcoming incoming students using an individual expression of identity (displaying the rainbow flag), which signalled a safe space. She talked about the importance of thinking inclusively about professional support staff in the Classics community, of mental health training and staff initiatives such as a race reading group; she also noted several challenges to providing training on race, identity, and disability issues, particularly a lack of budget, as well as the need to garner support from the whole department.

In 'Successes and challenges of inclusion at the Open University', Dr Naoko Yamagata (Open University) discussed the OU's success in attracting a relatively large proportion of students with a declared disability, along with the challenge of having very low levels of ethnic diversity among the student population. She mentioned strategies used to make the curriculum more inclusive, from the OU's checklists that challenge assumptions to changing commonly used terms and encouraging more sensitivity around language used for categories of people. Dr Yamagata also noted the hiring of a Dean of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, plans to include more diverse content in the OU's hugely popular Greek and Roman Myth module, and the use of diversified assessment, for example exhibition design as an alternative to a final essay.

The panel's third speaker, Dr Marchella Ward (University of Oxford), offered thoughts on the limitations of some current approaches to inclusivity. She argued for the need to listen to critiques from marginalised students, to take cues from students about what they find most interesting in the subject, and to carry out EDI work before publicising it, in order to avoid



appearing to capitalise on the marketing appeal of diversity. Dr Ward called for a transformed version of Classics, making a distinction between equality (providing the same resources to all) and equity (giving people what they need to do well).

Panel Two featured a series of updates on current projects dealing with diversity and inclusivity, which had first been introduced in last year's 'Towards a more Inclusive Classics' workshop. The session continued themes begun in the first panel, particularly the importance of embedding staff training. Dr Fiona Hobden (University of Liverpool) and Serafina Nicolosi (University of Liverpool PhD candidate) shared the results of a student survey carried out at the University of Liverpool, which suggested that while the teaching and learning environment was inclusive, improvements could be made to further diversify the curriculum by, for example, featuring more women outside the domestic sphere.

Giving an update on the MAPPOLA project, Professor Peter Kruschwitz (University of Vienna) showed how two stories from the margins of the Roman empire were able to destabilise received narratives. For example, one tale gave a very different account of Tomis in comparison to the famous Ovidian version of the port city. Professor Kruschwitz shared recent short videos – including the story of a [dog called Margarita](#) – that have been produced by MAPPOLA, which also provides materials and presentations for schools and outreach groups.

Dr Arlene Holmes-Henderson (King's College London and University of Oxford) illustrated the sheer range of diversely positioned stakeholders in the UK Classics community and some of the success stories of knowledge exchange projects among these groups to date, and, crucially, identified a number of future strategic actions required to improve collaboration.

Day Two began with a panel on 'Decentering the Canon', with talks from teachers in schools and colleges around the UK and Germany, as well as an update on the [Christian Cole Society for Classicists of Colour](#).

Anna McOmish (Aldridge School, Walsall) discussed the value of introducing an Ancient Middle East (3000–479 BCE) module into the Key Stage 3 History curriculum. Ms McOmish reported the success of the module, noting that it enabled the study of geographical areas that were connected to ethnicities represented within the Aldridge School context, enabling these students to recognise important aspects of their heritage in the curriculum. She emphasised the benefits her students derived from studying periods of Middle Eastern history which are not colonial, and thus enabling the centring of non-white cultures and protagonists.

Peter Wright (Blackpool Sixth Form College) spoke about the Classics for All hub in Blackpool, [an area of high socio-economic deprivation](#), and the benefits of using Classics as a tool to boost vocabulary, literacy, and oracy. Mr Wright explained that through the Classics for All hub, there were over 600 students engaging with Classics on a weekly basis, and cited his own local research that showed improvement in vocabulary scores for pupils studying Latin. This builds on findings regarding raising literacy standards in, for example, Alex Quigley's *Closing the Vocabulary Gap*.

Ray Cheung, an undergraduate at the University of Oxford, talked about the Christian Cole Society's aim to build a community of classicists of colour, and the need to re-envision Classics



and change institutional mindsets, as well as to bridge knowledge gaps present in a canonical Classics education. Cheung touched on the importance of classical reception in rethinking the curriculum.

Vijaya-Sharita Baba (Petroc College, Devon) discussed a personal journey from thinking of Classics as an inherently diverse subject to becoming aware of the ways certain curricula can be exclusive, and called for more resources that would be accessible to students who have not learnt Latin and Greek.

Sanjay Sharma (Heinz-Brandt-Schule, Berlin) drew attention to the importance of re-framing and contextualising Classics in modern geographies, and of encouraging students to engage with a wide variety of artistic representations of antiquity.

Our final panel of the workshop was a conversation among Professor Kunbi Olasope, Dr Idowu Alade, and Dr Monica Aneni from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, whose discussion about lecturers and students in partnership showed how Classics admissions at Ibadan had increased over the last ten years, especially at postgraduate level. Collaboration in various ways, including teaching, publication, and active mentoring, had led to a sense of increased student belonging. Classics continued to be a subject of study that could lead to all kinds of careers, ensuring good support from alumni, and a comparative focus on classical reception meant it was clear that Classics remained highly relevant.

### 3. Participants' responses

#### Themes from the 'chat'

This year's online discussion in the 'chat' was lively, engaged, and encouraging, with many offers to collaborate and much sharing of links to helpful articles and resources. These links are collated in the Annex at the end of this report.

Discussion about knowledge exchange touched on the multitude of stakeholders in UK Classics, particularly more informal groups that could be less visible, from meme makers and TikTok classicists to mutual aid and solidarity networks, including [The Sportula](#) and [Sportula Europe](#), the [Black Trowel Collective](#) (focused on archaeology), and affinity groups like Trans in Classics. There was also discussion about the importance of continuing to build communities and support one another, particularly students from under-represented groups. There were comments about approaches within modules, such as the benefits of students being encouraged to create their own visual art to represent their responses to a subject, and examples of modules which include creative and reflective assessments, as well as a tangent thread on Rick Riordan's novels. There was also discussion of staff initiatives to improve inclusivity such as through race reading groups, although heavy workloads were seen as impediments to these. The merits of making one's own identity more visible was touched on, as well as the difficulties of navigating between the benefits derived by students from visible role-models with protected characteristics and the right for staff privacy.



## Breakout group discussions and suggestions

Discussion in the PhD and early career researchers group focused on challenges connected to lack of funding and support structures, and precarious employment, as well as the effect these factors might have on participating in inclusivity work, such as the inability to commit to longer-term initiatives within a department. Suggestions for future plans included sharing resources to help start reading groups and the need to continue online access to events even after in-person events begin again.

The mid-career and professoriate group praised the opportunity to be able to talk to colleagues from other institutions and discussed the networking role Twitter had assumed. Other topics included the need to find time, headspace, and buy-in to implement staff training at a time of increasing overload; embedding diversity in career paths through hiring practices and promotional processes; and which professional bodies had the ability to act and create change.

Colleagues in the teachers in schools and colleges group raised the question of what universities could do to encourage students into Classics, suggesting that talks tailored to the syllabus and virtual visits can be powerful tools. Finally, discussion about future events included plans to help raise the profile of neurodiversity within Classics.

## 4. Future plans

Future plans build on the discussions in this event to a) hold a CA panel on 'Neurodiverse Classics: Constructive connections', co-organised by Professor Barbara Goff and 'guest co-organisers' Dr Martina Rodda and Joe Watson; b) hold a third workshop on the theme of Inclusive Classics and Material Culture, co-organised by Dr Alexia Petsalis-Diomidis and ECR 'guest co-organiser' Dr Tulsi Parikh; c) ensure that participants can continue their productive conversations by maintaining an email list, sharing resources, and cascading this report and the associated blog post.

In comparison with last year's event, there was an improvement in terms of the representation of Oxbridge academics, with three Fellows among the registered attendees in addition to two early career researchers from Oxford and Cambridge. Overall, the balance between students and early career, precarious scholars, on the one hand, and scholars at a mid-career or professoriate stage, on the other, was almost equal among attendees, though the numbers remained slightly higher in the first group.

## ANNEX: Resources listed in the 'chat'

1. Professor Katherine Harloe's [Radio 4 programme Detoxifying the Classics](#)
2. [University of Reading, 'Faces of Reading'](#)



3. Dr Sharon Marshall's module [Dialogues with the Past: Creative Interpretative Project](#) and [Creative Classics in Exeter](#)
4. [Talk by Professor Patrice Rankine](#), The Classics and our Value(s) for University of Reading *Making Classics Better* Series, 2 June 2021
5. [Classical Collections Network](#)
6. [Advocating Classics Education](#)
7. [Academus](#)
8. [Collaboration in UK Classics education](#) by Dr Arlene Holmes-Henderson for University of Reading *Making Classics Better* Series, 12 May 2021
9. [Classical Association Teaching Board Subject Representatives](#)
10. [Classics in Communities](#)
11. [The 5th edition of the Cambridge Latin Course is underway](#), with the opportunity for teachers to join the 'Community Panel'
12. Blog post on [2019 workshop looking at comics and graphic art](#) as conveyors of archaeology and classics education
13. [Black Achilles: The Greeks didn't have modern ideas of race. Did they see themselves as white, black – or as something else altogether?](#) (Professor Tim Whitmarsh, Aeon, 9 May 2018)
14. [Amani Saeed's](#) poem 'Eponymous' on why getting someone's name right matters
15. [Linguistic Racism](#) (Christine Ro, BBC, 3 June 2021)
16. [European ideas of African illiteracy are persistent, prejudiced and, as the story of Libyc script shows, entirely wrong](#) (Professor D Vance Smith, Aeon, 17 June 2021)