



Council of University Classical Departments

<http://cucd.blogs.sas.ac.uk/>

representing classical subjects in UK higher education

CHAIR

Dr Kathryn Tempest
School of Archaeology and Ancient History,
University of Leicester,
University Road,
Leicester,
LE1 7RH

5 March 2025

Dear Professor Lerner,

We are representatives of subject associations and learned societies concerned with classics and ancient history, and we speak for many more colleagues across the UK and internationally, to express concern and dismay at the University of Cardiff's plan to end teaching on a number of its degree programmes, especially in the thriving and economically viable department of Ancient History and Religion.

The narrative about the decline of the Arts and Humanities is driving moves away from these subject areas, which are fundamentally short-sighted. As the recent [HEPI report](#) on the state of the Humanities shows, the sector is healthy and has good prospects. The narrative of decline is driven by US discourse. In the UK among Home and EU students, numbers are steady or growing, and the imminent demographic boom, as [reported by UCAS](#), suggests room for healthy growth. In particular the report notes that a projected 30% increase in demand for higher education means universities and colleges will need to expand, not cut, the options available to students.

In this connection, we commend the creation of a new School of Global Humanities, and we understand the pressure which universities are under to operate more efficiently. The proposal also has intellectual merit because it will foreground the interdisciplinary connections between subject areas that have often been perceived as separate. Yet the disciplines of Ancient History, Religious Studies and Theology are vital to the success of any School that strives to excel in teaching and researching a more diverse and globally aware Humanities curriculum.

Colleagues in Ancient History and Religion are uniquely well placed to contribute to the study of the Global Humanities. In its current format, the Ancient History degree programme already looks far beyond Ancient Greece, Early Italy and Rome, which are crucial to the study of western cultures, to include the ancient Near East, the Sasanian World and Byzantine Empire, as well as the history of early India and Roman Britain. Particularly worthy of note is their strength in the period of late antiquity and the emerging medieval world, which is evidenced by their inclusion in the Marie Curie doctoral consortium on story telling's healing powers in that period: <https://blogs.cardiff.ac.uk/history-at-cardiff/co-creating-new-pasts-and-new-futures-the-roman-diff-fusion-project/>.

Given the opportunity, the Ancient History programme could become even more global in its coverage of the ancient world. Furthermore, there are interesting synergies to explore between their work and that of colleagues in Religious Studies and Theology, which likewise covers the history and religions of India and the Indian subcontinent, Asia, as well as that of Indigenous Peoples and those closer to home, with its important inclusion of British Muslim studies. Investing in the new school will give it a chance to build on existing strengths and create new ones in teaching as well. Shared interests on Migration, Slavery and Identity show the relevance of the subject areas, which are not only important for the decolonization of university curriculums; they are central to the study of Global Humanities in seeking to critique multiple, distinct, and intersecting worlds and show how these remain vibrant and compelling today.

The importance of retaining named degree programmes cannot be over-emphasized in the context of student recruitment. Student numbers for Ancient History are already very healthy at Cardiff. However, as reported in [this article](#) for the Financial Times by Professor Edith Hall, there has been an unprecedented increase in the numbers enrolling for GCSE and A Level courses in both Classical Civilisation and Ancient History, and there has been a corresponding rise at undergraduate level: an uptake of 17.8% for Single Honours and 11.2% for Joint Honours, with numbers up for Classical Studies, Ancient History, and Classical Art/Archaeology, according to the [annual CUCD statistics](#) report. In short, the outlook is optimistic and the importance of retaining Ancient History as a named partner in the joint honours programme with Archaeology is likewise essential for maintaining a healthy recruitment pipeline.

The importance of employability in driving student choice is undeniable, but Arts and Humanities students are eminently employable, and well-placed to benefit from the complexity, volatility and unpredictability of current and near future economic situations, as this [British Academy report](#) shows. At Cardiff, the curriculum is cutting edge, with embedded employability in modules in ways that lead to creative and engaged student learning, especially through the use of authentic assessment methods, such as vlogs, blogs, creative writing, creative projects, presentations and pitches. Efforts like these make graduates who study Ancient History, Religious Studies and Theology highly employable across a range of sectors and roles. The UK needs people who

can adjust, learn new things, work with other people and cultures, communicate effectively, and manage their own projects.

The Department of Ancient History and Religion at Cardiff is very strong in its research profile. According to REF 2021, 90% of Cardiff's research environment in the UOA28 (including History, Ancient History and Religion) is considered conducive to producing world-leading or internationally excellent research. More importantly, that research is shared with the community in Wales, for example through the SHARE with Schools project, where students from Ancient History and Religion go into secondary schools to deliver workshops relating to their research, as well as the CAER project and the [Roman 'Diff fusion project](#).

Recent research into class inequality in Classics, culminating in [this report](#) from the Network for Working-Class Classicists, shows increasing inequality in Classical disciplines, including Ancient History. The importance of regional provision is also highlighted in this new study by the [British Academy](#), which maps changing provision of SHAPE subjects in UK higher education institutions. It shows how regional coldspots in arts and humanities are becoming more pronounced particularly for lower income students, who are less likely to move far from home. The loss of Cardiff's excellent work in promoting the subject area would create an even larger cold spot for the study of Ancient History in Wales.

We acknowledge that times are difficult and Higher Education is a highly volatile sector, and that management have a responsibility to the whole university community. Nevertheless, we strongly urge you to continue to support your excellent Ancient History and Religion colleagues in their highly impressive and successful work.

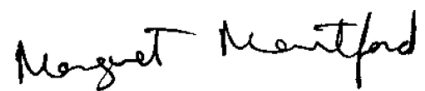
Yours sincerely



Dr Kathryn Tempest
Chair, Council of University Classical Departments



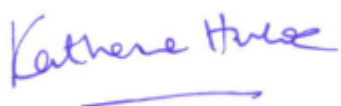
Prof. Roy Gibson
President, Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies



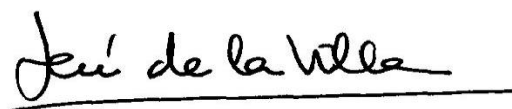
Dr Margaret Mountford
President, Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies



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Professor Katherine Harloe
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Classiques