

## Classics and Joint Schools interview report 2021

In 2021 the College received thirteen applications for Classics, and Classics and joint schools, as well as one application for Oriental Studies with Classics. Since one deferred place had been offered in the 2020 admissions round for entry in 2022, there were four places available from the Classics quota this year. (In future years the Classics quota will revert to five places as usual.) Four offers were made from the Classics quota, and two candidates received offers from separate quotas in other subjects. One candidate was taken by another college.

Shortlisted applicants for single-honours Classics (Literae Humaniores) received two interviews, the first on literature and language and the second on philosophy. This arrangement reflects the fact that Classics is a very broad degree, combining a strong linguistic element with literary, historical and philosophical components, and the successful candidates were those who convinced examiners in all or most aspects of the interviews.

This year again no pre-interview reading was set for the literature and language interview. Instead candidates were initially asked questions on the written work that they had submitted, if this work included Classical material. The examiners sought to probe the candidates' understanding of the primary sources, and offered unfamiliar points of view for discussion. As always the examiners were interested less in factual knowledge than in intellectual agility: the most successful applicants were able to take new perspectives on familiar material, and to look for solutions to problems that they had not necessarily encountered before. Please note in this connection the Faculty's helpful advice on how to 'read around' the subject (<https://clasoutreach.web.ox.ac.uk/reading>): 'There is no reading list for students applying for Classical subjects, as we encourage students to read as widely as possible about any Classics materials they find interesting (in literature, history, philosophy, archaeology, and/or philology), and to think critically about their reading.'

Where applicable, candidates were also asked to analyse a passage of Latin taken from this year's CAT: again this was a test, not of factual knowledge (e.g. vocabulary), but of problem-solving ability. Most candidates found this challenging, to various degrees, and the most successful demonstrated a careful and methodical approach to grammatical questions. In the case of applicants for Course II, considerable weight was given to the outcome of the Faculty language interview that complements the CLAT.

Finally all candidates were invited to discuss their particular interests and motivations in applying for the course, often again with reference to Classical material mentioned in their personal statement.

In the philosophy interview this year candidates were presented with the puzzle of material constitution. The question was 'When I am holding a clay jug in my hand how many items am I holding?' Possible answers included 'one' (either the jug or a quantity of clay but not both), 'two' (the jug and a quantity of clay) and 'indefinitely many' (however many particles the jug was composed of). Each of these answers has counterintuitive implications. The better candidates were able to spot that there was indeed a puzzle here. The best candidates suggested possible ways of responding to the puzzle and were able to begin to think through the philosophical implications of their solutions.