

Classics and Joint Schools interview report 2023

In 2023 the College received thirteen applications for Classics, and Classics and joint schools, as well as one application for an organ scholarship in combination with Classics and Modern Languages. Five applicants received offers from the College. Three candidates were taken by other colleges.

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

In addition, all applicants for course I (i.e. those studying Greek and/or Latin to A-level or equivalent) received a brief language interview at the College. This interview was designed to take the place of the University's CAT test, which this year had to be discounted due to very unfortunate technical problems that affected many candidates in the UK. Applicants for course II received a language aptitude interview in the Classics faculty.

The interview on literature revolved around a passage from Homer's *Iliad* (4.422-45), which was provided in the original version and in an English translation. Full contextual information was supplied, and no previous knowledge of the poem was assumed. Candidates studying Greek to A-level or equivalent were encouraged to refer to the English translation for guidance; all other candidates were asked to look at the English translation only. Candidates had 30 minutes before the interview to read the passage, and to consider various questions of interpretation. These were then discussed in the interview. The most successful candidates were able to identify some of the many points of interest in the passage, and to articulate their own readings of the text. The strongest candidates also responded creatively when asked to consider specific verses or formulations in the passage. In all cases the interviewers were looking for sensitivity and fluency in literary interpretation; the questions posed were generally open-ended.

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

In the college language interview (for course I applicants only) candidates were provided with a short passage of Greek and/or Latin, as appropriate to their course choice. Each passage contained some deliberate errors in the Greek/Latin wording, and was accompanied by an English translation that correctly expressed the sense. The errors in the Greek/Latin text were errors of morphology and syntax, e.g. a noun that would in its context be expected to be dative was given in the genitive, or a verb that should be in the subjunctive was given in the indicative. Candidates were invited to identify the errors, using the English translation as a guide. Candidates were encouraged to 'talk through' the passage, sharing their thoughts on the grammatical issues with the interviewers. Prompts were offered if necessary. The strongest applicants swiftly identified the errors and explained why they were errors (e.g. 'this verb should be in the subjunctive because it is in a purpose clause'). Candidates were not asked to correct or re-write the passage.

In the philosophy interview candidates were shown a painting and invited to consider some of the necessary conditions for something to count as a forgery of said painting. Candidates were then invited to consider whether a different art form, e.g. a play, was capable of being forged. The best candidates displayed flexibility in their thinking and were able to sense and articulate that there seemed to be a difference regarding the possibility of forgery in the case of a painting and in the case of a play. Excellent candidates were able to broach the question as to what general features of these art forms might explain the apparent possibility of forgery in the one case but not the other.