

Classics and Joint Schools interview report 2025

In 2025 the College received sixteen applications for Classics, and Classics and joint schools. Four applicants were made offers by the College. Three candidates were successful at 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.

The interview on literature revolved around a passage from Lucretius' *De rerum natura* (adapted from the opening of book 5), 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 Latin 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 20 minutes before the interview to read the passage, which was then discussed in the interview. The most successful candidates were able to identify some of the many points of interest in the passage (e.g. the tension between the poet's praise of Epicurus as a god and Lucretius' general approach to the divine, which was explained to candidates in the contextual information; the implications of the comparison to Hercules, and the distinction between physical and intellectual achievement; Lucretius' rhetorical style and his use of imagery; and the position of such a didactic poem within the wider ancient and modern epic tradition). The strongest candidates responded creatively when asked to consider specific verses or formulations in the passage, and noted relevant similarities to and/or differences from other texts that were familiar to them from schoolwork and/or independent reading. In all cases the interviewers were looking for sensitivity and fluency in literary interpretation; the questions posed were generally open-ended.

In the philosophy interview candidates were first presented with a short passage of text, and were asked to identify the intended conclusion and structure of the argument, identifying weaknesses and suggesting ways to strengthen the argument. The second task was an open philosophical question, in response to which candidates were invited to draw conceptual distinctions and use examples and criteria to ground these distinctions and categories. The strongest candidates showed a strong sense of focus in dealing with the passage that was presented to them, identified and reconstructed the structure of the argument very well, and offered promising and well-justified lines of objecting to the argument. In response to the second question, the strongest candidates demonstrated agility and inquisitiveness in their thought, offered careful and nuanced assessments of the issue they were presented with, and showed a high degree of flexibility in assessing different scenarios and perspectives on the question at hand.