

Research Article

What grades are needed to study Classical subjects at UK universities?

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At a time when Classical subjects are in a perilous position in both the school and university curriculum¹, it is vital that Classics educators in the secondary and tertiary sectors work together to share information effectively. One such area requiring careful and coordinated partnership is the setting of entry requirements to undergraduate courses. Doing this well necessitates the communication of which types of qualifications meet these requirements and the promotion of inclusive and alternative pathways to widen access to the study of Classical (and related) subjects in Higher Education.

This article is intended for three audiences: 1) teachers in schools, supporting young people who wish to study Classical subjects at university in the UK, 2) young people themselves who are seeking information about the courses of study available in Classical subjects, and the grades required for entry and 3) colleagues in university Classics departments who can influence the way admissions requirements are set, negotiated and communicated. We hope to improve collaboration between diversely situated actors in the Classics admissions process, to help institutions identify problems with current admissions processes which might currently be a barrier to prospective applicants; and to celebrate models of good practice.

Language-Based Courses

As of May 2021, 21 universities in the UK offer Classics undergraduate courses containing a compulsory language study component in Latin and/or Greek. The UCAS Tariff and A Level entry requirements for such courses are shown in Supplementary Table 1. The information for these grade requirements has been taken from university listings on UCAS pages and course websites for the 2021–2022 admissions cycle. Applicants and teachers should be aware that entry requirements change on a regular basis so it is important to access the most up-to-date information.

Of the 21 universities, 15 are Russell Group universities² (Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Durham, Edinburgh, Exeter, Glasgow, KCL, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, Oxford, UCL and Warwick), which indicates that most opportunities

to study Classical degrees where languages are a compulsory element are at Russell Group universities. The Classics courses at these universities also tend to have the highest entry requirements³, with a minimum offer of BBB (Glasgow) across the Russell Group universities, compared with a minimum offer of BCC (Birkbeck) for the courses at non-Russell Group universities. A direct comparison between this and modern language degrees in the UK is not straightforward given that there is a wide range of modern languages which can be studied and courses vary from stand-alone languages to courses where students study combinations of languages. There are also courses which incorporate modern languages into other disciplines, such as international relations/business or English language/literature. However, taking French as an example of a widely offered modern language, and excluding degrees where French is studied in combination with another discipline, an examination of the courses on UCAS reveals that there are 49 universities in the UK which currently offer French degrees or modern language degrees where French can be taken as the primary language, including 23 Russell Group universities. Using the same criteria to examine Spanish degrees, there are 47 universities in the UK currently offering Spanish degrees or modern language degrees where Spanish can be taken as the primary language, including 22 Russell Group universities. The minimum A Level grade requirement for both French and Spanish degrees is BCC (Aberystwyth, Buckingham, Chester, Manchester Metropolitan, Portsmouth, Westminster) across all the non-Russell Group universities and BBB (Cardiff, Glasgow, Liverpool, Newcastle, Queen Mary University of London) across all the Russell Group universities, in line with the minimum grade requirements for Classics courses. Examining the grade requirements for universities on an individual institutional level, however, reveals that a number of universities require lower grades for their modern languages courses than for their Classics courses. Both the University of St Andrews and the University of Exeter, for example, require AAA - ABB for their Classics courses but AAB - ABB for their modern language courses. The University of Newcastle similarly requires AAB - ABB for its Classics course but ABB - BBB for its modern languages course. This brief comparison suggests that, in at least some UK universities, the entry requirements for studying classical languages are more demanding than those for studying modern languages.

Across the 21 universities that offer language-based Classics courses, there are 32 language-based Classics courses in total. 16 of

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these courses either require or prefer students to have taken Latin and/or Greek at A Level, with six courses specifying that students should obtain at least a B Grade in Latin and/or Greek and seven courses requiring students to obtain an A Grade. In the 2020–2021 admissions cycle, King's College London expresses a preference for candidates to have an A Level in Classical Civilisation, Ancient History or History in addition to the requirement of a Latin or Greek A Level. The University of Birmingham and Royal Holloway, University of London offer some flexibility, permitting students to substitute an A Level in Latin or Greek for a GCSE in one of these subjects, or a modern language in the case of Birmingham. Both the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge offer two different Classics courses; one that requires students to have taken Latin and/or Greek at A Level, and another that is designed for students who have little or no prior knowledge of Greek or Latin. Therefore, half of the language-based Classics courses at UK universities require qualifications in Latin and Greek. Given that, in 2019, only 2% of English state-maintained schools offered A Level Latin and only 0.2% offered Greek (Hunt and Holmes-Henderson, 2021), the pool of qualified candidates for these language-based Classics courses at UK universities comes almost exclusively from the independent sector.

Of the 16 courses that do not require an A Level in Latin and/or Greek, eight express no requirement or preference for some prior subject knowledge relevant to the degree. Of the remaining eight, some require or prefer experience in essay-based subjects; the University of Glasgow requires students to have an A Level in arts or humanities. Several universities express a preference for candidates with some prior language experience; for example the University of St Andrews requires students to have an A or a B in a foreign language A Level. The University of Bristol requires students to have a GCSE in a modern or ancient language, but states that it will accept an 'alternative qualification' in place of this, for example a Greek or Latin short course. Given that OCR discontinued its short course GCSEs in Latin and Classical Greek in 2018 and that the present format of the GCSE does not permit a short course GCSE to be offered (Hunt, 2020), further clarification from Bristol about which alternative qualifications would be accepted would be helpful. For example, would the OCR entry level certificate in Latin or the East Midlands Association of Classical Teachers (EMACT) Greek certificate be suitable alternatives? Durham University requires candidates to show 'evidence of linguistic ability', although it is not immediately clear from UCAS or Durham's website exactly what is expected from candidates to demonstrate this ability. Overall, it is clear that even if students are unable to take Latin and/or Greek at A Level, for certain language-based Classics courses, it remains an advantage to have some prior experience of language study, even if it is modern rather than ancient.

Both the University of Bristol and Royal Holloway use a combination of letter grading and number grading when stating their GCSE subject requirements. In the case of Bristol, it states that a '6 or B at GCSE' in a modern or ancient language is required, while Royal Holloway accepts 'GCSE Latin or Greek at Grade A or 7'. Given that these are the only two universities to list both letter and number grades, it is unclear why letter grades have been included. Presumably, the letter grades either refer to the old GCSE grading system, to accommodate mature students applying with old GCSEs or a mixture of old and new GCSEs, or to IGCSE grades. Whilst it is important to ensure that both mature students and students taking IGCSEs are included in grade considerations, the letter grades could potentially be confusing for current applicants who are not taking IGCSEs and may not be familiar with what the letter grades mean. Including an explanatory note alongside the

grades to clarify whether they represent grades from the old grading system or IGCSE grades would be one way to resolve any possible confusion.

Other Classics Courses

A number of UK universities offer other Classics courses, in addition to, or instead of, language-based ones. Supplementary Table 2 details the UCAS Tariff and A Level grade requirements for these courses; the criteria for inclusion were that the course must contain a substantial amount of engagement with the study of the history and culture of the Ancient World. Most of these courses can be classified as Ancient History or Classical Civilisation courses (some do, however, offer *optional* modules in ancient language learning). The naming of courses within and between institutions is, though, highly problematic. Prospective applicants said, during the recent *Academus Classics Outreach Conference*, that they simply do not understand the difference between university courses labelled variously as Classics, Classical Civilisation, Ancient History or Ancient World Studies. As we discuss below, this is an area of concern. Archaeology courses have been included where the course is specifically in Classical Archaeology (as opposed to the archaeology of other time periods or geographic locations) and includes instances where Classical Archaeology is combined with Ancient History. Where a university offers a non-Classical Archaeology course, these have been included only when combined with Ancient History and when the university does not offer an additional stand-alone Ancient History course.

With these criteria in mind, there is naturally a higher number of such courses available at undergraduate level than language-based Classics courses (since the courses cover a wider range of disciplines): 54 non-language-based courses compared to 32 language-based courses. Non-language-based courses are also more widely available, being offered by 28 universities, compared to the 21 universities which offer language-based courses. 17 of the universities offering non-language-based courses are members of the Russell Group, and therefore Russell Group universities represent a smaller proportion of the universities offering non-language-based courses than of those offering language-based courses. The minimum A Level grade requirement for non-language-based courses is BBB (Cardiff, Glasgow) across the Russell Group universities and BCC (Birkbeck) across the non-Russell Group universities, the same as the minimum entry requirements for language-based courses.

Nine universities have exactly the same requirements for their language-based courses as their non-language-based degrees: Bristol, Durham, Glasgow, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Reading, Swansea and Wales Trinity Saint David. Some universities actually differ in the entry requirements between their various non-language-based courses. The University of Leeds, for example, grants offers in the range of AAB - ABB for its Classical Civilisation course; however it only requires ABB for its Ancient History course. Similarly, the standard offer for UCL's Ancient History course is AAA with an A Level in a Classical Language, Classical Civilisation or Ancient History recommended but not required. In contrast, UCL's Ancient World course has a requirement of AAB with no stated requirement or preference for any specific subjects. The requirements for UCL's Classical Archaeology and Classical Civilisation course are different again, with grade requirements of ABB. It is not clear what the reasoning for such differentiation is and whether it is a reflection of the content or rigour of the courses, or perhaps of the popularity of the courses amongst applicants.

Preferred A Level subjects for non-language-based courses

None of these courses require students to have previously studied Latin or Greek. The University of Oxford does say that prior study of a Classical language, Classical Civilisation or Ancient History may be helpful for its Classical Archaeology and Ancient History course, but this is not a requirement. Some universities indicate requirements or preferences for other A Level subjects; UCL requires History, Ancient History or Classical Civilisation A Level for its Ancient History course, whilst KCL states that it would prefer these qualifications for its Ancient History and Classical Studies courses, but that these are not required. The University of Glasgow requires students to have an A Level (or equivalent) in Arts or Humanities for its Ancient History and Classical Civilisation courses and the University of Southampton likewise requires students to have one Humanities A Level for its own Ancient History course. For its Ancient History and Classical Civilisation courses, the University of Manchester prefers students to have one A Level with a written element (i.e. 'which is not a purely practical programme'). Overall, therefore, non-language-based courses offer a more accessible option for students who wish to pursue the study of the ancient world but who do not have the option to study Latin and/or Greek at GCSE or A Level. Many of these courses encourage students to take up an ancient language as part of, or to supplement, their degree.

What is in a name?

Universities use a range of titles for these non-language-based courses, even in instances where the courses may contain very similar content. For example, a number of universities (Birkbeck, Bristol, Edinburgh, Exeter, Kent, KCL, Lincoln, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Reading, Roehampton, Royal Holloway, St Andrews and Winchester) have a course named 'Classical Studies', whilst others (Durham, Leeds, Nottingham, Swansea, Wales Trinity Saint David and Warwick) which run a similar course instead title it 'Classical Civilisation' or 'Classical Literature and Civilisation' (Birmingham). There is also an 'Ancient World' course at UCL, which is distinct from UCL's 'Ancient History' and 'Classical Archaeology & Classical Civilisation' courses. The University of Glasgow lists its course as 'Classics (Classical Civilisation)' on its website but as simply 'Classics' on its UCAS page. For students who have little or no prior knowledge of the ancient world, and who do not have specialist support in school, such variations in course names are confusing. It is not immediately obvious what differentiates these degrees, or indeed whether they in fact contain very similar content. In the short term, university staff with outreach, access and admissions responsibilities can communicate directly with potential applicants via digital platforms and public engagement, to limit possible misunderstanding and proactively provide clarification. In the medium to long term, CUCD standing committee colleagues might want to discuss the naming of degrees and how they are understood by various groups of stakeholders both within, and outside, the Classics education community.

Non-A Level Qualifications

In addition to the UCAS Tariff and A Level grade requirements, universities often list grade requirements for alternative UK and international qualifications. There are eight key alternative qualifications which students may take instead of, or in addition to, A Levels which regularly appear on university UCAS and website pages: Pearson BTEC, Access to Higher Education Diploma,

Scottish Highers and Scottish Advanced Highers, International Baccalaureate, Welsh Baccalaureate, Irish Higher Level Leaving Certificate and Cambridge International Pre-U. Supplementary Table 3 details the entry requirements for language-based Classics courses for these alternative qualifications, while Supplementary Table 4 details such entry requirements for non-language-based Classics courses. The information for these qualifications has been sourced firstly from the UCAS page of each course, and supplemented with additional information from the course page on the corresponding university's website (in instances where such information is not available on the UCAS page) for the 2021–2022 admissions cycle. A gap in a table cell indicates where information for a specific qualification is not available on the course's UCAS page or university course website page.

In general, the information for these alternative qualifications is much less readily accessible than for the A Levels or UCAS Tariff. Of the 29 universities that offer at least one Classics course at undergraduate level, Durham University, Royal Holloway, the University of Leicester, and the University of Southampton are the only four universities that list information for all eight alternative qualifications on the UCAS or website pages for each of their courses. Of the remaining, nine universities (Bristol, KCL, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, Oxford, and UCL) list entry requirements for seven alternative qualifications. The remaining 16 universities lack information on their UCAS or course website pages for at least two or more of these alternative qualifications. The least-well-attested qualifications are the Welsh Baccalaureate and the Irish Higher Level Leaving Certificate; only 13 universities list information about the Welsh Baccalaureate for each of their courses, while only ten list information about the Irish Higher Level Leaving Certificate. Even in instances where some information is listed for a specific qualification, the information listed may not in fact be a specific grade requirement, but an instruction for candidates to contact the university's admissions department to receive more specific information. Although the University of Leicester and the University of Southampton both provide at least some information for each of the eight alternative qualifications on the UCAS pages for their courses, the University of Leicester prompts students to contact the admissions department for more detailed information about Scottish Highers and Irish Higher Level Leaving Certificate, while the University of Southampton prompts students to get in touch for specific information about Scottish Highers. The University of Nottingham likewise prompts students to contact admissions teams for more information about certain qualifications, while the University of Kent states that in the case of some non-A Level qualifications, candidates will be assessed on a 'case-by-case basis'.

Where universities do not provide information about non-A Level qualifications on UCAS pages or specific course or department pages, it is not always clear whether this is because the information has simply not been included or whether the university does not accept a certain qualification as a viable alternative to A Levels. In many cases where certain qualifications are not listed, universities will direct candidates to another page of their website that lists general entry requirements with grade conversions for alternative qualifications so that students may calculate the entry requirements for a specific course themselves. This is, however, both time-consuming and complicated for prospective applicants as such pages are not always clearly advertised and require students to complete complex grade conversions, without taking into account additional requirements that may be specific to a Classics course, such as Latin or Greek language requirements.

Universities would benefit, therefore, from publishing clear, easily accessible and course-specific guidance for their Classics courses, for the sake of students who are entering university without A Levels or with a combination of A Levels and other qualifications. It would also be advisable for universities to retain consistency across UCAS pages and course pages on their own websites. In the case of the University of Leicester and Durham University, both list information for all eight alternative qualifications on their UCAS pages but on the course pages on their own websites, information is limited to only two or three qualifications. To maintain good practice, we suggest that universities clearly publish course-specific information covering all eight qualifications on both UCAS and on their own websites and where possible make the entry requirements immediately available as opposed to directing students to other website pages or towards contacting admissions teams. Many prospective applicants will find such a request simply too daunting and will seek out a university where their qualifications are listed and they appear to be 'welcome'. Royal Holloway provides a good example of this, as it clearly lists information for all qualifications on the UCAS pages of all of its courses, as well as having drop-down menus on its own website pages that allow students to search through qualifications for a wide variety of UK and international qualifications for each course. In the case of BTECs, Access to HE Diploma and the Welsh Baccalaureate, some universities specify that these qualifications will only be accepted when taken alongside A Levels and not as stand-alone qualifications; however many universities do not specify this. Further clarification on whether (or not) certain combinations of qualifications will be accepted/required would therefore help prospective applicants feel like they belong, from the very beginning.

Scottish Highers

In some instances, further clarification about individual qualifications is also needed, for example in the case of the University of Leeds where the information provided for students taking Scottish Highers and/or Advanced Highers is not straightforward. For both its Ancient History and its Classical Civilisation course, a wide variety of different combinations of Highers and Advanced Highers which may satisfy the entry requirements is listed. For both courses, one of the options is a combination of six Scottish Highers (AABBBB for Ancient History and AAAABB for Classical Civilisation). Given that the majority of students taking Highers do not opt for a workload of more than five Highers (and every other university therefore only requires five), this seems to be an unusually large number of Highers, unless the implication is that students would complete these six Highers in two separate sittings over the course of their two final years of school. If this is what is intended, this should be explicitly stated to avoid confusion for students.

At times, some of the information about subject requirements for these alternative qualifications on the UCAS website or on departmental website pages also appears to be out of date. The University of Exeter lists Classical Greek as a possible subject requirement for students taking Scottish Highers on the UCAS page for its Classics course, whilst Royal Holloway, University of London lists this requirement on the UCAS and website page for its Classics course. Given that SQA Higher Greek was discontinued more than a decade ago, in 2010 (Holmes-Henderson, 2013, p.7), this is a requirement that no one (except, possibly, mature students) can fulfil. Examination professionals and university admissions staff can, by more effectively sharing information, support teachers,

parents and prospective applicants to understand better what entry requirements are needed.

Problems with grade conversions

In general, where entry requirements are provided for non-A Level qualifications, these appear to be fairly consistent with the requirements for A Levels; universities seem to have opted for grade conversions, meaning that the courses with the highest A Level requirements tend to also have the highest requirements for other qualifications (and likewise for those with lower requirements). There is, however, considerable variation in the exact grade conversions used by different universities. Taking two universities as an example for comparison, the University of Birmingham and the University of Leicester both require ABB at A Level for their Ancient History courses. For the BTEC Extended Diploma, however, Birmingham requires DDD, while Leicester requires DDM. In the case of the International Baccalaureate, Birmingham requires 32 points, while Leicester requires 30 points. Likewise, a comparison of the University of Bristol and KCL, two universities which both require AAB at A Level for their Classics courses, reveals that Bristol requires DDD (in a relevant subject) for the BTEC Extended Diploma, while KCL requires DDM and AB in A Levels. In the case of the Access to HE Diploma, Bristol requires 30 credits at Distinction level and 15 at Merit level, while KCL requires 33 at Distinction and 12 at Merit, and in the case of the International Baccalaureate, Bristol requires 34 points while KCL requires 35. Each university therefore requires distinctly different grades and combinations of qualifications for these alternative qualifications, even in instances where the A Level grade requirements are the same. This only lends further support to the need for listing entry requirements for these qualifications more clearly, as there appear to be no standard grade conversions or formulae utilised across all universities.

At times, universities which list specific subject requirements for A Level entry do not list the same subject requirements for alternative qualifications. The University of Birmingham, for example, lists Latin A Level or Greek GCSE as a requirement for its Classics course, but does not specify for candidates taking the International Baccalaureate whether they will be expected to have any specific subject requirements. In other cases, universities may change the wording slightly for their subject requirements; the University of Glasgow, for example, states that candidates taking A Levels must have at least one Arts or Humanities subject, however for the BTEC Extended Diploma, candidates are required to have a subject in an 'appropriate subject area', which is less clear. These disparities are issues that could further be solved by having increased clarity around the requirements for alternative qualifications.

Additional pathways

In addition to the standard qualifications listed in detail above, a number of universities provide information about additional pathways that may help students to study Classics and related subjects at university. 12 universities (Cardiff, Leeds, Leicester, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, Reading, Royal Holloway, Southampton, Swansea and Winchester) state on their UCAS or website pages that where students are taking the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) in addition to other qualifications, the EPQ will be taken into account in the offer; many of these universities state that they will drop an A Level grade requirement if students achieve a required grade in the EPQ. The University of

Manchester lists OCR Cambridge Technical Diplomas as an alternative qualification that may be considered in conjunction with other qualifications. In the case of the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge, candidates are required to do an interview and to undertake specific Classics Admissions Tests. In the case of the University of Leeds, students applying with the Access to Higher Education Diploma may be required to present some written work or undertake an interview in addition.

Contextual Offers

Contextual offers⁴ are used when university admissions staff take into account students' personal circumstances and offer grade reductions if applicants meet certain contextual criteria. Six universities (Bristol, Durham, Manchester, Reading, Southampton and UCL) explicitly list typical grades for their contextual offers on the UCAS pages for their Classics courses. The University of Exeter lists contextual offer grades on the website pages for its courses (but not on its UCAS pages), while the University of Leeds lists typical grades for its Access to Leeds offer on its website, and the University of Edinburgh and the University of Glasgow likewise list grades on their websites for their widening access applicants. The University of Liverpool states on its website that, for the 2021 entry, it has been piloting the use of contextual offers for applicants, offering a two-grade reduction from the standard offer for certain under-represented groups. A number of other universities do not list explicit grades for contextual offers, but do flag on their Classics website pages the possibility of contextual offers for some candidates. Royal Holloway, University of London, for example, states on the website for its Classics course that 'for students who are from backgrounds or personal circumstances that mean they are generally less likely to go to university you may be eligible for an alternative lower offer', and it provides a link to a page where students can learn more about their eligibility for such contextual offers. Similarly, the University of Warwick states on its website that 'Warwick may make differential offers to students in a number of circumstances. These include students participating in the Realising Opportunities programme, or who meet two of the contextual data criteria', and it includes a link to a page with further information about these access schemes. Understandably, universities cannot confirm for students upfront whether they will definitely be eligible for one of these offers, as they are assessed on an individual basis and the offers usually vary between different years and candidates. Nevertheless, in order to help candidates who may be eligible for these offers, information about the possibility of contextual offers should be made as clear as possible on both UCAS pages and university websites, along with any relevant links to other pages on access schemes and with as much clarity as possible about the eligibility criteria.

Holistic Approach

A number of universities, either instead of, or in addition to, the information they share about contextual offers, indicate on the website pages for their Classics courses that they may adopt a holistic approach to entry requirements. This may be expressed in a variety of ways by different universities, either as a grade range requirement (as opposed to a single set of grades) or as a disclaimer stating that applications will be assessed on an individual basis, or a combination of both.

11 universities (Birkbeck, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Exeter, Glasgow, Leeds, Newcastle, Nottingham, Royal Holloway, St Andrews and Winchester) provide grade ranges or UCAS Tariff ranges for their Classics courses, as opposed to single sets of grades. Some

universities explicitly state on their UCAS pages or websites the reasons for providing a grade range in this way. Birkbeck, University of London, for example, states on both its UCAS pages and its website that it 'welcomes applicants without traditional entry qualifications as we base decisions on our own assessment of qualifications, knowledge and previous work experience. We may waive formal entry requirements based on judgement of academic potential.' We corresponded by email with Birkbeck's Classics admissions department and were able to collect more information about the different factors that may contribute to an applicant being offered a grade at the lower end of this range; these could include a student having a strong personal statement and/or relevant work experience and/or demonstrating significant enthusiasm for the course, either in their application or in an interview.

Some universities which opt for single sets of grades as opposed to grade ranges nevertheless include disclaimers on their UCAS pages and/or websites stating that they will assess applicants on an individual basis and take into account a wide variety of different factors. The University of Lincoln states on its UCAS page for its Classical Studies course that 'the University accepts a wide range of qualifications as the basis for entry and will consider applicants who have a mix of qualifications', as well as taking into account applicants with extensive and relevant work experience and giving 'special individual consideration to those who don't meet standard entry qualifications'. The University of Wales Trinity Saint David likewise states for each of its Classics courses that individual cases will be taken on merit, possibly requiring an interview and with 'skills, achievements and life experience' being considered alongside qualifications. Other universities provide this information on their website pages but not their UCAS pages, for example the University of Liverpool which provides a link on the website pages for its courses to a general entry requirement disclaimer stating that students' offers may vary from the typical stated offer as the university 'believes in treating applicants as individuals, and in making offers that are appropriate to their personal circumstances and background'.

Not all universities state so clearly on their UCAS pages or websites the reasoning behind their use of grade ranges, and therefore which factors might affect their decisions. In email correspondence with these universities, we were able to gather more insight into such decisions, and it then became apparent that they vary significantly between universities. The admissions office at the University of Exeter, for example, informed us that it offers grade ranges for some courses due to the wide range of applications received from one year to the next, meaning that offers can depend on 'the individual merits of an application or how many applications are made for the limited spaces available'. The Classics department at the University of Leeds explained that it employs grade ranges as 'some students are high achievers predicted AAB+ and some are not predicted as high at ABB and lower'. Clearly there is significant differentiation between these universities in terms of what these grade ranges may signify. As with contextual offers, although universities may not be able to confirm for students in advance which exact grades they are going to be offered until they have actually submitted their application, students would benefit from more clarity on how decisions are made. Sharing this information on both UCAS pages and university websites makes it easier for prospective applicants *and* staff because students would not have to contact admissions departments and ask questions.

During the course of contacting different admissions departments for this information, it became evident that the universities have a range of contact procedures. Some universities encourage students to get in touch with central admissions

departments via email, while others provide emails for specific members of staff or encourage students to complete standardised enquiry forms. The disparate number of contact methods between universities lends further support to the argument for more information being clearly provided on website pages, so that applicants only need to get in touch with enquiries when absolutely necessary.

The Foundation Year

Another possible approach to encourage students from a variety of backgrounds who may not have previously studied Classical subjects is for universities to introduce Classics courses with Foundation Years. Some universities advertise Classics courses on UCAS with Foundation Years already built into them. Three universities have language-based Classics courses listed on UCAS with a built-in Foundation Year. Durham University states that candidates for its Foundation Year course will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis and that it is designed for students from under-represented groups. The University of Reading and the University of Swansea also offer Classics courses with a Foundation Year, and these have lower entrance requirements than their standard Classics courses. In addition, seven universities offer Foundation Year courses for non-language-based courses (Birkbeck, Nottingham, Roehampton, Royal Holloway, Swansea, University of Wales Trinity Saint David and Winchester), which similarly have lower requirements than their standard courses. The University of Nottingham states that applicants will be required to complete an interview, so that students can be individually evaluated.

In addition to these courses listed on UCAS, other universities offer Foundation Years which may provide students with an alternative route to studying Classics at university. As these are free-standing courses (rather than being integrated into Classics degrees) they therefore do not appear in lists of Classics courses on the UCAS website. The University of Cambridge, for example, recently introduced a Foundation Year in Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences for 2022 entry at certain colleges, which is designed to 'address educational disadvantage and disruption' (University of Cambridge, 2021). Students must meet one or more criteria from a list to apply for the course, which requires students to achieve 120 UCAS Tariff points and to complete an interview and a written assessment. In the 2019–20 admissions cycle, only 4.7% of UK-domiciled young full-time undergraduate entrants to the University of Cambridge were from low participation neighbourhoods, compared with 11.8% of undergraduate entrants across all universities in the UK (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2021). Given these statistics, it is clear that this Foundation Year is an important development to widen access to students from groups currently under-represented at the university.

The University of Oxford is also currently developing a Foundation Year programme which will recruit its first cohort in Autumn 2022, to begin study in Autumn 2023. The Foundation Oxford course will be offered to state school students from less advantaged areas and to those who have experienced personal disadvantage, or a severely disrupted education. Eligible students could include refugees, children in care or those who are themselves carers or estranged from their families. Those offered places will take part in a one-year, bespoke subject-specific course at Oxford. All participants will be based in Oxford colleges, living as part of the Oxford undergraduate student community. It is hoped that those who pass the course will then progress to undergraduate study at Oxford. Once up and running, it is anticipated that the

programme will support up to 50 students every year across selected subjects (Classics included). This course builds on the successful Foundation Year run at Lady Margaret Hall, one of the University of Oxford's colleges, since 2016.

In a study conducted between 2016–2018 by a group of researchers at the University of Cambridge prior to the creation of its Foundation Year, researchers concluded that a discipline-based approach (rather than a thematic approach) would be most effective for promoting diversity in Foundation Years, given that disciplinarity predominates in elite Higher Education (Kettley & Murphy, 2021). In particular, researchers stressed the importance of offering students a choice of disciplines to study during the Foundation Year, 'including those infrequently encountered at school like Archaeology and Classics', as students' 'cognitive interest' is central to learning (Kettley & Murphy, 2021, p. 8). This emphasis was supported by their survey data, in which students prioritised the opportunity to study new disciplines and develop new academic literacies, as aspects that would attract them to a Foundation Year at Cambridge (Kettley & Murphy, 2021, p. 11). This study provides promising evidence, therefore, that even in instances where universities do not offer Foundation Years that are directly integrated into Classics courses, Classics and Ancient World studies may still be able to form an important part of more interdisciplinary Foundation Years and give students a chance to become acquainted with new disciplines which they had not studied at school.

It is important to note, however, that although the study found that the introduction of a Foundation Year might encourage students from low participation neighbourhoods and low socio-economic groups (SEGs) to apply in similar or greater proportions than those from high participation neighbourhoods and SEGs, survey respondents still expressed a number of concerns that may prevent them from applying, such as the financial costs of embarking on such a year, or fears about not being able to 'fit in' at Cambridge (Kettley & Murphy, 2021, pp. 9 and 12). Students also expressed concerns over enrolling in a Foundation Year that was free-standing from other university degrees and therefore did not guarantee entry onto an undergraduate course, suggesting that integrating a Foundation Year pathway into extant degrees (as some universities have already done with their Classics degrees) would in fact be more effective (Kettley & Murphy, 2021, p. 13). The researchers therefore concluded that a Foundation Year is not a 'silver bullet' for the lack of SEG diversity at Cambridge and 'Foundation Years alone cannot compensate for wider institutional or societal inequality' (Kettley & Murphy, 2021, pp. 13–14). The introduction of Foundation Years may be one step towards widening access to Classics in Higher Education but they must be accompanied by other meaningful changes at the university and school level.

Recommendations

1. Prospective applicants - make contact with university departments early via open days/school lectures and ask advice re: subject choice/current grade requirements/likely expectations for non-A Level qualifications.
2. Prospective applicants - check eligibility for university access and widening participation schemes which, in some cases, act as a gateway to the contextual offers process or Foundation Year programmes.
3. Teachers - check the current entry requirements for university Classical courses, and be aware that these change fairly regularly.
4. Teachers - be alert to the fact that EPQs are not universally acknowledged as part of the admissions package.

5. University staff - check that details of entry requirements are clear, coherent and consistent on UCAS and departmental websites.
6. University staff - work with professional services colleagues, exam boards and Classics teachers in schools to provide comprehensive information for prospective applicants regarding non-A Level qualifications.
7. University staff - extend the use of contextual offers and make it clear whether/those are available at your institution.
8. University staff - explore the expansion of Foundation Years as a way to widen access to the study of Classical subjects for those who have faced barriers to learning.

Conclusion

Higher education institutions are autonomous and will continue to set requirements for entry to Classics courses which operate satisfactorily at a local level. This is as it should be. Yet, as was commented at the outset, the reality is that fewer people are choosing to study Classical subjects in schools and at universities in the UK. We believe that there are some simple steps that universities can take to optimise how they communicate course entry requirements to prospective applicants. This is part of a broader ambition to make Classics more inclusive to those from under-represented backgrounds, and to those who come to the study of the ancient world at university without prior knowledge of Classical languages or cultures. We encourage the Classics community, broadly defined, to work together to facilitate better sharing of information between schools, qualification and assessment bodies, university academics and university professional services staff to support prospective applicants in their search for information about what they 'need' to study 'Classics' at university.

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Supplementary material

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Notes

1 Hunt and Holmes-Henderson (2021) provided a comprehensive report on the fragility of Classical subjects in English schools. The situation is even worse in Scotland (Imrie 2019, 2020). At the university level, the most recent Council of University Classics Departments (CUCD) Statistics report (2018–2019) recorded a fall, for the second year in a row, in the overall number of undergraduates studying Classical (and related) subjects at UK universities. 'While the numbers for 'Traditional Classics' remained fairly stable, the numbers for single honours programmes in 'Modern Classics' fell 3.1%.' 'Traditional Classics' here is given to mean an undergraduate course including the study of at least one ancient

language. 'Modern Classics' includes a range of courses where the study of ancient languages is optional, but not compulsory. Ancient History has fared particularly badly in recent years, with a fall in the number of students both on single honours programmes and who take it as a subsidiary or supplementary subject, representing an overall decrease of 100 students.

2 The Russell Group is a self-selected association of 24 public research universities in the United Kingdom, established in 1994 to represent its members' interests, principally to government and parliament. As of 2017, Russell Group members received over three-quarters of all university research grant and contract income in the United Kingdom. 15 of the country's 16 universities in the top 100 are members of the group. More information can be found here: <https://russellgroup.ac.uk/>.

3 All 15 of these universities are on the Sutton Trust's list of highly selective universities (Montacute and Cullinane, 2018, p. 9).

4 For more information on the use of contextual offers in UK Higher Education see: Boliver *et al.* (2019), Mountford-Zimdars *et al.* (2019) and Office for Students (2020).

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