

This letter was sent to Prof. Robin Osborne (Chair of the Faculty Board, Faculty of Classics, Cambridge) on Monday 10th August 2020.

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Open letter to the Cambridge Faculty of Classics on anti-racism

To: Professor Robin Osborne, Chair of the Faculty of Classics, Cambridge, and the Faculty Board

As staff, students, and alumni of the Faculty of Classics, we write in response to the recent article in the *Spectator*, written by a member of the Faculty, which downplayed the existence of racism within the field of Classics and the under-representation of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) people within UK Classics, and substantially mischaracterised ongoing anti-racism efforts by Classics students at the University of Oxford.¹

This letter is not aimed at the author of this article, whom we therefore choose not to name here, but is addressed to the Faculty as a whole. Although many members of the Faculty will not share the views expressed in this article, it nonetheless prompts us to consider as a Faculty what we can do to become a more inclusive place for BAME people. We write this because downplaying the existence of racism within Classics and the close relationship between white supremacy and Classics, both historically and in the present day, is harmful, particularly to our current BAME members and prospective BAME students; it also undermines efforts to diversify and broaden undergraduate, postgraduate, professional and public access to Classical study, and the Faculty's commitment to 'supporting and sustaining a diverse community'.²

As one former student of the Faculty has written, "having read the *Spectator* piece, as a classicist of colour myself, I would not feel comfortable having its author as an interviewer, a supervisor, a director of studies, a thesis examiner, or a colleague. If I were 17 now, I would not feel comfortable applying to study at the university and department where I did in fact complete my undergraduate degree. If I were still attending that university, I would not feel comfortable encouraging other students of colour to apply to study there: in my experience, there is little benefit to outreach which brings marginalised students to university unless there is sufficient in-reach to support them once they arrive. Articles such as this *Spectator* piece, and silences from colleagues and departments (unwilling to commit to or even publicly acknowledge the need for change) which make them complicit in this, drive away talented

¹ <https://docs.google.com/document/d/11ZpPeC4bFd1QIOzfQJBvq7etsVvxAxYB5j9kOcsKaW4/edit>

² <https://www.classics.cam.ac.uk/directory/equality-diversity>

scholars from marginalised backgrounds or communities and perpetuate the problems which permeate the discipline.”³

We support this call for public acknowledgement of the problems of racism within Classics and the need for active anti-racist work within our discipline. We note also that the forthcoming report from the Council of University Classics Departments (CUCD) on equality and diversity in UK Classics departments reports that according to heads of Classics departments, “the unwillingness of colleagues or peers to discuss or acknowledge race and ethnicity” forms a major obstacle to the progression of BAME staff within their departments. We therefore write to call on the Faculty of Classics to follow the example of other UK Classics organisations, such as the Warwick Department of Classics⁴ and the Cambridge Schools Classics Project,⁵ in committing to sustained conversations with all of its members about the issues of racism in Classics and ways in which this can be addressed within the Faculty and more broadly. As a starting point, this should include:

- an acknowledgement of the existence of systemic racism within Classics and its complicity in racist and white supremacist ideas both historically and in the present day, including (but not limited to) the idea that the Greek and Roman civilisations are the foundation of a supposedly superior ‘Western Civilisation’.⁶
- an acknowledgement of the current lack of ethnic diversity in both UK Classics as a whole and within our own Faculty.⁷ If data exists on the levels of BAME representation amongst successful and unsuccessful applicants to undergraduate and graduate degrees and to jobs at all levels within the Faculty, this should be made public; if not, a system should be put in place to collect this demographic data, as well as to survey the experiences of BAME people within the Faculty.⁸

³ <https://mixedupinclassics.wordpress.com/2020/07/26/reflections-racism-denial/>; see also <https://mixedupinclassics.wordpress.com/2020/07/26/reflections-call-to-action/>. Quoted with permission.

⁴ <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/classics/research/equality>; see also the Warwick Classics Network statement: <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/classics/warwickclassicsnetwork/stoa/bame/>. This note was updated on 4/08/2020 to correct the link to the departmental statement.

⁵ <https://www.cambridgescp.com/black-lives-matter-statement-cscp>

⁶ See, for instance:

<http://pages.vassar.edu/pharos/2019/01/25/western-civilization-means-classics-and-white-supremacy>; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/09/western-civilisation-appiah-reith-lecture>; <https://eidolon.pub/more-than-a-common-tongue-cfd7edeb6368>; <https://medium.com/science-and-philosophy/on-the-very-idea-of-western-philosophy-668c27b3677> (final link added 10/08/20).

⁷ A survey of heads of Classics departments for the forthcoming CUCD report on Equality & Diversity (which received 16 responses) reported that just 1.4% (5/368) of their members of staff were BAME, while 8.1% of the 294 respondents to CUCD’s corresponding survey of the experiences of UK Classics postgraduates and staff were BAME (representing 11.25% of the 80 postgraduate respondents, and 6.25% of the 176 staff respondents). For comparison, the BAME population of the UK was recorded as 13% in the 2011 census; note that the fact that the latter survey focused on experiences of gender and racial discrimination means that BAME people may have been more likely to respond and may therefore be over-represented in the results. Data for student populations was harder to access, but where available, BAME representation ranged from 0-20% at undergraduate level, 0-5% at Master’s level, and 0-20% for doctoral students.

⁸ The data on BAME representation at undergraduate level is referenced within the *Spectator* article for both Oxford and Cambridge, but does not seem to be publicly accessible. The emphasis in this

- a commitment to a firm action plan to tackle the lack of ethnic diversity in the Faculty through both access and outreach work aimed at potential BAME undergraduates, and active recruitment of BAME graduate students, postdoctoral researchers, and lecturers. All such actions should be intersectional, acknowledging and addressing the impact of other factors, in particular socioeconomic status, on access to Classics at school and university level.
- a commitment to active anti-racism, including (but not limited to) the establishment of diversity and anti-racism training. At a minimum, all permanent and temporary members of Faculty research, teaching, and administrative staff, including graduate students who teach undergraduates, should be strongly encouraged to attend this training, and it should be mandatory for those holding positions as Faculty Officers. This training should include institutional racism, white privilege and power, and racial microaggressions as central topics.⁹ It should be carried out by qualified individuals who are fairly compensated for their work, and should be offered at least once every academic year. It should also, however, be regarded as no more than a first step, and should not take the place of further sustained anti-racist actions.
- a commitment to greater inclusivity within the undergraduate and graduate curricula, outlining concrete measures to be taken towards this, including (but not limited to) ensuring that assigned primary sources represent a variety of authorial identities and lived experiences from the ancient world; that secondary reading lists include works by BAME scholars (as well as ensuring balance along other axes such as gender); and ensuring that sources referring to subjects such as slavery, genocide, 'barbarians', imperialism, rape, misogyny, and ableism are properly contextualised when introduced in undergraduate or graduate teaching or in access and outreach events. Such measures are intended not to censor the teaching of particular sources or of 'difficult' subjects, but to lead to greater critical engagement with Classical material and thereby to enrich and deepen the study of this material. To quote the Oxford students' letter mentioned above (n.1), "We can only teach difficult material effectively if we do so consciously, with context".

The *Spectator* article states that "Classicalists have a duty of care to their subject". We assert that they have a duty of care to their students, prospective students, staff, and the general public. We encourage the Faculty to reflect upon its responsibilities in the context of the systemic racism and oppression which the discipline of Classics has upheld and perpetuated.

Signed,

1. Dr Anna Judson (senior member)
2. Dr Carol Atack (senior member)
3. Dr Talitha Kearey (senior member)
4. Heather Briddock (alumna/us)

action point is therefore on public availability, analysis and further action. (This note was added on 10/8/2020 as clarification.)

⁹ Cf. this open letter to HE sector leaders:

<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/letters/we-are-crucial-moment-address-racial-justice-higher-education>

5. Anonymous (postgraduate student)
6. Alexander Hardwick (alumna/us)
7. Deasil Waltho (alumna/us)
8. Katharine Shields (alumna/us)
9. Imogen Gander (undergraduate student)
10. Dr Henry Ka Chun Tang (alumna/us)
11. Ana Maria Guay (alumna/us)
12. Ploy Radford (alumna/us)
13. Sarah Sheard (postgraduate student)
14. Lily Bickers (alumna/us)
15. Iona Morphet (alumna/us)
16. Emily Kiel (alumna/us)
17. Charlie Pemberton (postgraduate student)
18. Dr Matthew Scarborough (alumna/us)
19. Anonymous (undergraduate student)
20. Dr Daniel Benjamin Unruh (alumna/us)
21. Alexandra Schultz (former visiting graduate student)
22. Dr Philip Boyes (senior member)
23. Kathryn Phillips (postgraduate student)
24. Rhianon Smith (alumna/us)
25. Katherine Wills (undergraduate student)
26. Eve Staheli (alumna/us)
27. Cecily Bateman (postgraduate student)
28. Coral Dalitz (postgraduate student)
29. Evie Clarke (undergraduate student)
30. Emily Thompson (alumna/us)
31. Ellie Etches (undergraduate student)
32. Molly O'Connor (alumna/us)
33. Dr Annie Burman (alumna/us)
34. Rachel Phillips (postgraduate student)
35. Virginia Bernardi (alumna/us)
36. Rachel Roberts (alumna/us)
37. Florence Kipps (postgraduate student)
38. Lily Bao (alumna/us)
39. Rosy Sida (alumna/us)
40. Harriet King (undergraduate student)
41. Leon Hewitt (undergraduate student)
42. Dr Tom Geue (alumna/us)
43. Catherine Bird (undergraduate student)
44. Angela Liu (undergraduate student)
45. Dr Elena Giusti (alumna/us)
46. Natalie Chapman (alumna/us)
47. Lily Rafalin (undergraduate student)
48. Claire Rachel Jackson (former postgraduate and senior staff member)
49. Marina McCready (undergraduate student)
50. Katherine Krauss (alumna/us)

51. Dr Elizabeth Mitchell (alumna/us)
52. Lylaah L Bhalerao (graduate and incoming MPhil)
53. Judith Musker Turner (alumna/us)
54. Yung In Chae (alumna/us)
55. Johanna Hanink (alumna/us)
56. Hannah Philp (alumna/us)
57. Tom Foxall (alumna/us)
58. Lea Cantor (alumna/us)
59. Jason Nethercut (alumna/us)
60. Dr Thomas Nelson (senior member)
61. Tom Baarda (postgraduate student)
62. Dr Kay Gabriel (alumna/us)
63. Anna Uhlig (alumna/us)
64. Sol Alberman (undergraduate student)
65. Vidya Divakaran (undergraduate student)
66. Verity Mynors (undergraduate student)
67. Flora Frankopan (undergraduate student)
68. Nicholas Montague-Jones (undergraduate student)
69. Erica Humbey (undergraduate student)
70. Angharad Derbyshire (undergraduate student)
71. Lucienne Jacobs (undergraduate student)
72. Rowena Field (undergraduate student)
73. Eden Dudley (undergraduate student)
74. Emily Lomas (undergraduate student)
75. Sam Hunt (undergraduate student)
76. Siobhan Chomse (alumna/us)
77. Eden-Maia Shackleton (undergraduate student)
78. Dr Liz Gloyn (alumna/us)
79. Dr Emma Greensmith (alumna/us)
80. Dr Jenny Harris (alumna/us)
81. Connie Parker (alumna/us)
82. Dan Zhao (postgraduate student)
83. Dr YN Gershon (alumna/us)
84. Makeda Doyal (alumna/us)
85. Anonymous (alumna/us)
86. Dr Rhiannon Easterbrook (alumna/us)
87. Giselle Overy (undergraduate student)
88. Elsie Linley (postgraduate student)
89. Maria Telnikoff (undergraduate student)
90. Hanneke Salisbury (postgraduate student)
91. Maya Feile Tomes (senior member)
92. Anonymous (staff member)
93. Rosa Andújar (alumna/us)
94. Max Leventhal (senior member)
95. Dr Graham Andrews (alumna/us)
96. Ashley Chhibber (alumna/us)

97. Anonymous (alumna/us)
98. Ryoko Umemoto (undergraduate student)
99. Julia Trocme-Latter (alumna/us)
100. Justine McConnell (alumna/us)
101. Dr Rebecca Lees (alumna/us)
102. Anna Bonnell Freidin (alumna/us)
103. Izzy Luta (alumna/us)
104. Dr Dunstan Lowe (alumna/us)
105. Kelli Rudolph (alumna/us)
106. Dr Ester Salgarella (senior member)
107. Manuela Dal Borgo (senior member)
108. Dr Georg Gerleigner (alumna/us)
109. Dr Helen Roche (alumna/us)
110. Emily Beck (undergraduate student)
111. Betty Townley (undergraduate student)
112. Caterina Pellò (alumna/us)
113. Hannah Willey (senior member)
114. Dr Susanne Turner (Museum of Classical Archaeology staff)
115. Helen Van Noorden (senior member)
116. Tulsi Parikh (postgraduate student)
117. Philippa Steele (senior member)
118. George Pliotis (postgraduate student)
119. Dr Jessica Lightfoot (senior member)
120. Dr Peter Agócs (former JRF)
121. Amy Rowe (undergraduate student)
122. James Darnton (undergraduate student)
123. Eleanor Antoniou (undergraduate student)
124. Samuel Agbamu (alumna/us)
125. Harriet Israel (alumna/us)
126. Dr Antonia Marie Reinke (senior member)
127. Anonymous (postgraduate student)
128. Julia Stanyard (alumna/us)
129. Benjamin Tudor (undergraduate student)
130. Jennie Thornber (alumna/us)
131. Juliette Wise (undergraduate student)
132. Robyn Eveson (alumna/us)
133. Ruari Bride (alumna/us)
134. Vega Boney-Hundal (undergraduate student)
135. Dr Patrick Cook (alumna/us)
136. Lucy Edwards (alumna/us)
137. Leah Wild (postgraduate student)
138. Stefano Frullini (postgraduate student)
139. Astrid Van Oyen (alumna/us)
140. Sana Van Dal (alumna/us)
141. Isobel Higgins (postgraduate student)
142. Katy Lamkin (alumna/us)

143. Juhi James (alumna/us)
144. Zoë Audra (postgraduate student)
145. Vivi Way (alumna/us)
146. Dr Naomi Scott (alumna/us)
147. Helen Lovatt (alumna/us)
148. Shoni Lavie-Driver (postgraduate student)
149. Tatiana Bur (postgraduate student)
150. Mark Darling (postgraduate student)
151. Alice König (alumna/us)
152. Sophie Lamont (undergraduate student)
153. Lauren Wilson (alumna/us)
154. Saskia Wiginton (undergraduate student)
155. Clarice Benney (undergraduate student)
156. Brian Theng (alumna/us)
157. Georgia Lowe (alumna/us)
158. Katie Phillips (alumna/us)
159. Anna Bondarenko (alumna/us)
160. Christina Proffitt (née Edward) (alumna/us)
161. Emma Buckley (alumna/us)
162. Naomi Holford (alumna/us)
163. James Elms (postgraduate student)
164. John Kwon (alumna/us)
165. Lucia Nixon (former student)
166. Anne Thompson (retired research associate)
167. Dr Abigail Baker (alumna/us)
168. Anna Booth (alumna/us)
169. Isabella Nappert-Rosales (alumna/us)
170. Justyna Ladosz (Museum of Classical Archaeology staff)
171. Yaseen Kader (alumna/us)
172. Caitlin Walsh (alumna/us)
173. Freddie Preece (alumna/us)
174. Jennifer Lazarus (alumna/us)
175. Jack Paterson (alumna/us)
176. Y B Masterson (undergraduate student)
177. Prof. Paul Cartledge (senior member)
178. Kay Gammie (alumna/us)
179. Abbas Khan (alumna/us)
180. Laurie Marks (alumna/us)
181. Dr Emma Woolerton (alumna/us)
182. Isla Phillips (alumna/us)
183. Amelia Williams (alumna/us)
184. Hannah Walker (alumna/us)
185. Evie Butcher (alumna/us)
186. Amy Walpole (alumna/us)
187. Meenakkhi Bhattacharyya (alumna/us)
188. Dr Lacey Wallace (alumna/us)

189. Zahra Abbas (alumna/us)
190. Laila Tims (alumna/us)
191. Aleksander Musiał (alumna/us)
192. Holly Cook (alumna/us)
193. Mollie Baker (Former Administrative Assistant for undergraduate affairs)
194. Chris McCartney (Graduate Administrator (2014 - 2017))
195. Shulamit Morris-Evans (alumna/us)
196. Aiden Mainzer (alumna/us)
197. Ben Waters (alumna/us)
198. Eleanor Whittaker (alumna/us)
199. Charlotte Trotter (undergraduate student)
200. Sharon Owusu-Kyereh (undergraduate student)
201. Anonymous (alumna/us)
202. Clare Matthews (alumna/us)
203. Edoardo Chiatelli (postgraduate student)
204. Elton Barker (alumna/us)