

Classics and Joint Schools interview report 2024

In 2024, the College received twenty-three applications for Classics, and Classics and joint schools. Four applicants were made offers by the College. Two 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 one of Pindar's *Pythian Odes* (Jason's summoning of the Argonauts: 4.169-200), 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 20 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 (e.g. the poet's ordering of the list of heroes, the role of Hera in the expedition, the types of virtues promoted by the passage, the function of the passage in an ode composed in the context of an athletic contest, and many more). The strongest candidates 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.

In the philosophy interview candidates were asked to consider whether one could successfully avoid making a difficult decision (in this case a decision between two delicious desserts) by tossing a coin. The best candidates interrogated the nature of decision making, its connection with deliberation and distinguished between different kinds of decision that were involved in the above scenario. Weaker candidates were less flexible in responding to objections to their positions and relied on more familiar material (e.g. determinism) that was not strictly relevant to the questions at hand.