

Classical antiquity as part of the Humanities Area of Learning and Experience in the new Welsh curriculum

Executive summary:

- Classical references pervade modern society. Studying Classical antiquity thus helps pupils **contextualize** their own **Welsh**, British, European and global **identity** and **heritage**.
- Classical antiquity is currently taught at secondary school as *Classical Civilization* and *Ancient History*, and at primary school as the Romans at KS2.
- For the future curriculum, *Ancient History* fits neatly into the **History** curriculum, while *Classical Civilization* and other aspects contribute greatly to **Social Studies** (ancient philosophy and politics as the background of our modern society and thought), Religious Studies (Classical polytheism in connection with study of Abrahamic religions), and Geography.
- Study of Classics develops knowledge of the three **cross-curriculum** responsibilities of literacy, numeracy, and digital competence.
- Study of Classical antiquity also contributes to the four **key purposes** of the new curriculum, as it provides a challenging, aspirational subject, creative projects, awareness of identity and global contexts, and contributes to happiness.
- **Support** for schools is already available and research on the impact on pupil development of non-linguistic Classics, Classics in Wales, Sex and History, and Philosophy for Children can justify and inform the inclusion of Classical subjects into the curriculum.

Two main reasons why school pupils should study Classics are commonly cited: along with the impact on literacy of ancient languages, the **study of Greek and Roman (i.e. 'Classical') history and culture** is considered valuable as it provides pupils with insight into the **basis of Western civilization** and therefore of our modern world. Classics is in fact still **omnipresent** in Western society. Understanding the ancient texts, stories, and images on which modern society is based helps school pupils **contextualize modern issues**, whether in politics, society, or culture. Not a week goes by without politicians, artists, authors, plays, advertising, etc. referencing Classical antiquity. Of course, Welsh, British, and European history and societies draw on many cultural and political aspects **besides** Greece and Rome; but understanding how those aspects engage with Classics (between emulation and rejection) as basis of Western civilization **adds depth and value** to understanding of modern Wales in its native, Celtic, European, and global contexts.

1. Current provision of Classics in Wales

Secondary school

Currently the study of the Classical world is differentiated into two **non-linguistic** subjects which can be studied at GCSE and A-level with qualifications offered by the OCR exam board.¹ OCR have a

wealth of resources available on their website and are also in the process of publishing course books to further support the teaching of specific historical topics.

1. **Classical civilisation** is the study of the civilisation, culture, and achievements of the ancient Greeks and Romans in translation. What is commonly called 'Class civ' involves interpreting evidence such as material culture and literature. Topics include the archaeology of Pompeii, Greek tragedy, and key texts that have influenced Western society such as the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*.
2. **Ancient History** is the study of ancient Greek and Roman history in translation. Topics might include the Persian Wars, Alexander the Great, the fall of the Roman republic, and the rise of the Roman emperors. There is some overlap between the topics covered in classical civilisation and ancient history – but in general, the former is more centred on literature and the arts, whereas the latter is more concerned with military and political history.²

Schools such as Gower College, Coleg Cambria, Ysgol Dyffryn Aman, Monmouth School for Girls, and Ffynone House School offer Class Civ at A-level. Gower College also offers Ancient History.³

Primary school

Currently Classics is only included at **KS2** through study of the **Romans**. Swansea University students taking part in the **Literacy through Classics** project⁴ are, for example, working with the Afan Valley schools to deliver the Romans in Years 3-4. Focus at KS2 lies particularly on the Roman presence in and impact on Wales through study of **archaeology**, such as sites at Caerleon in South Wales and Segontium in North Wales, which many schools visit as part of the curriculum and which create **authentic contexts for learning**. Lots of resources are available on hwb from e.g. the Cornerstones curriculum provider.

Curriculum gaps

Not many schools currently offer non-linguistic Classics, mostly due to the perceived **lack of space** in the curriculum. This means that Classics is a subject mostly available for pupils in private schools, and thus functions as an exclusive subject. Offering it to *all* pupils more broadly will **increase equality and aspirations**.

One particular curriculum gap can be spotted in the lack of attention paid to the **Greeks**. This is particularly poignant at primary school level where the Greeks are not taught at all. However, although the **Roman archaeological heritage** is more immediately visible in Wales, the Greeks have in fact had a significant impact on Wales' **cultural heritage**, in areas of politics, philosophy, art, architecture, and literature, to name but the most obvious.

While most teachers who currently offer Classics engage students with the ancient world through discussion of modern representations of Classical texts, mythology, and history (e.g. *Troy*, *Alexander*, *300*, *Harry Potter*, *Percy Jackson*), they usually do not use those modern representations to discuss modern politics and culture. This is a fruitful area of Classics called **Reception Studies**, however, which can broaden the study of Classics by looking at the parallels and contrasts between modern contexts (e.g. gender, ideology, politics, morality, ethics in film) and ancient contexts (the same concepts in the ancient texts on which films etc. are based).⁵ Particularly the ways in which

Wales has engaged with Classical antiquity are not well known and usually ignored.⁶ However, Wales has a rich and complex relationship with the Classical world – different from England because of its different political landscape and largely working class contexts – which can help pupils understand their cultural heritage and potential for the future.

2. Classics in the new curriculum

Humanities

Considering the scope of the new Humanities curriculum, Classics can be integrated in different ways:

1. Study of Greek and Roman history (i.e. Ancient History) can reasonably be incorporated into the proposed **History** curriculum in its existing form. The exploration and evaluation of both international and local sources and evidence (e.g. key Roman sites in Wales as well as texts which connect Welsh with Roman and Greek heritage, such as Geoffrey of Monmouth who called Welsh ‘crooked Greek’) allows pupils to develop understanding of local and international history.
2. Study of Greek and Roman culture (i.e. Classical Civilization) can reasonably be incorporated into the proposed **Social Studies** curriculum in its existing form, particularly through study of local, national, and global heritage and culture.
3. Study of Greek and Roman antiquity can be integrated **cross-curricularly** in specific areas of the Humanities:
 - a. **Social studies:** Classics incorporates the philosophy and politics of the ancient world. As these have had a huge **impact on modern philosophy** and **politics**, they ought rightfully to be studied at the start of a social studies curriculum.
 - i. *Philosophy:*
 1. Figures such as the pre-Socratic philosophers, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, the Epicureans, and the Stoics have had a profound impact on Western philosophy. A recent **Philosophy for Children (P4C) study** by the Education Endowment Foundation concluded that studying philosophy on a weekly basis helps pupils with maths and English skills.⁷
 2. At a level of ethics and morality, Greek and Roman texts in general can help explore notions of **happiness** (e.g. Aristotle), **truth** (e.g. Plato), **fate** and **free will** (e.g. Sophocles’ play *Oedipus King*), familial **responsibility** (e.g. Aeschylus’ plays *Oresteia*), **morality** (Aesop’s *Fables*), **sexuality** and **gender** (e.g. Plato’s *Symposium*, ancient iconography such as vase paintings and wall paintings at sites such as Pompeii), and others.
 3. Study of philosophy allows pupils to develop their understanding of not only their own **values, beliefs, and cultures**, but also those of others.⁸

ii. *Politics*:

1. The development of **democracy** in ancient Athens still impacts our modern understanding of politics (which derives from the ancient Greek word *polis*, meaning 'the state').
2. The development of Alexander's empire as well as the Roman emperors provides understanding about **empire building**, for example in comparison with the British Empire and current USA.
3. Study of these critical historical events thus allows pupils to develop their understanding of the **principles of democracy** and **citizenship** through critical and independent thinking.

b. **Religious studies**: Classical antiquity provides an interesting model of **comparison** as part of religious studies, as its polytheistic pantheon (the Greek and Roman Olympian gods, but also concepts such as Fate and Fortune, minor deities such as nymphs, and ancestors) contrasts **Abrahamic religions** starkly, yet also in many ways influenced Christianity (e.g. the story of the flood, the concept of the devil derived from demons) and indeed developed alongside it. Particularly in studying early Christianity, the continuity between Classical and Christian thought becomes clear.⁹

c. **Geography**: themes relating to changing state boundaries, changing landscapes, ... fit in. There are so many **Roman sites**,¹⁰ and collections of Roman objects in small museums up and down the country as well as in the National museums.¹¹ Through exploration of these museums and sites, study of the ancient world will markedly enrich pupils' understanding of and engagement with local history, community, and heritage. Museums and sites can provide an excellent resource for any developing curriculum.

These are but some of the areas in which Classics works in an interdisciplinary and cross-curricular way. If these areas are introduced across the age range, Classics can provide a solid basis for understanding Western thought and society, both at primary, secondary, and sixth-form level. At primary school, topics can be introduced which can then be explored in much more detail at secondary school and sixth-form, offering **continuity** and **progression** at all levels.

Cross-curriculum responsibilities: Literacy, numeracy, and digital competence

Classical subjects can be used to develop all three of the cross-curricular aims of the curriculum:

1. **Literacy**: As a subject area with many philosophical, historiographical, and literary texts, literacy is always at the forefront of any class. Reading ancient texts in translation allows pupils to develop literacy skills in English and Welsh, as many of these texts are of a challenging level and therefore encourage pupils to develop linguistic skills.
2. **Numeracy**: Numeracy can be developed through various elements of Classics, from exercises with Roman numerals, to discussion of ancient Greek mathematicians such as Pythagoras (also a philosopher), Euclid, and Archimedes, and their mathematical innovations.

3. **Digital competence:** Many Classical resources exist online (see resources below) and therefore study of Classics can develop the digital competence agenda.

Key Curriculum Purposes

A 2010 survey by the *Friends of Classics* found that study of Classics provides students with added value in life.¹² Classics indeed fits perfectly in the four purposes of the curriculum as distinguished by the Donaldson report:

- *Ambitious, capable learners:* Studying Classics raises **aspirations**, and **challenges** learners by providing them with knowledge of cultural and political history and heritage, and encouraging them to use **creative problem solving** and **critical thinking**. Therefore, opening up provision of Classics to *all* pupils instead of only to those in private education opens up opportunities and knowledge, particularly for pupils in deprived areas. My recent research has demonstrated that engagement with non-linguistic Classics is enjoyed hugely by primary school pupils.¹³
- *Enterprising, creative contributors:* Because Classics can be applied to any modern context, creative productions – such as plays, novels, art, etc. – have thrived throughout history since antiquity. Classically themed plays are still staged regularly in Wales.¹⁴ Classical themes can be used in many varying **creative projects**. Swansea University, for example, runs an annual schools' competition on a specific topic (e.g. last year 'heroes in antiquity', this year 'the environment in antiquity') for which pupils can design their own projects.¹⁵ Teachers praise the project as it allows pupils to develop their creativity and design their own piece of applied Reception. Such projects can easily be incorporated in a curriculum.
- *Ethical, informed citizens:* Classics provides **global** awareness, through the shifting functions it has had throughout history, since understanding the past provides understanding of the future. Moreover, as the Greeks and Romans are both different and similar to us, this allows students to **reflect on their identity, values, citizenship, law, democracy, and gender**, among other topics. Classics also provides a safe space to discuss problematic issues such as sex and gender, war and refugees, and identity, as it offers a historical perspective which allows pupils to consider difficult issues from a distance.
- *Healthy, confident individuals:* The skills gained through studying Classics instil **self-confidence** in learners.

3. Available support and research

School support is already provided by the *Cymru Wales Classics Hub* (www.cymruwalesclassicshub.weebly.com). In January of this year, for example, we organised **teacher training** for teachers interested in introducing Classics in their school. We focused on both the non-linguistic and linguistic aspects, with as result that those schools taking part in the teacher training are now offering Classics of some sort (e.g. Dylan Thomas Community School in Swansea has

started offering a non-linguistic Classics club). We also offer workshops for **PGCE students**, and **CPD** events such as inset days and conferences for current teachers. We are starting to develop **Welsh-medium resources** for Classics teaching and would be happy to discuss what resources will be needed for the new curriculum. Financial support for this project comes primarily from Classics for All (www.classicsforall.org.uk) and the Classical Association (www.classicalassociation.org).

I have just started a new research project on *Classics in the margins: Classical antiquity in modern Wales*. School pupils will be invited to contribute examples of engagement with Classics in their local area to the website which will be set up in the coming months. I blog about **Classics in modern Wales**, for example on Swansea University, the Glynn Vivian Gallery, and Ceri Richards.¹⁶ The project has the explicit aim of making teachers and pupils more aware of Wales' cultural heritage in relation to Classical antiquity.

Professor Edith Hall at King's College London has recently started an AHRC project on raising awareness about – and researching the impact of – studying non-linguistic Classics in UK schools. See <http://edithhall.co.uk/>.

The 'Sex and history' project at the University of Exeter has researched the impact of discussing sexuality through historical (among others, Classical) objects. See <http://blogs.exeter.ac.uk/sexandhistory/>

4. Examples of available resources

There are too many resources to list here. However, these are some of the most prominent ones:

- Literacy through Classics programme on the Romans in Wales: <http://literacythroughclassics.weebly.com/the-romans-years-3-4.html> and the Celts: <http://literacythroughclassics.weebly.com/the-celts-years-3-4.html>.
- Romans in Wales, e.g. resources by SHARE with Schools (Cardiff University): <https://sharewithschools.wordpress.com/resources/romans-in-wales/romans-in-wales-for-pupils/>
- *War with Troy: The Story of Achilles*, by Hugh Lupton and Daniel Morden (CSCP), is a 3 CD audio retelling of the Trojan War, specially created for children, which aims to develop their literacy skills. The War with Troy website contains audio samples, images, a teacher's guide and lesson plans. The sister story Return from Troy (CSCP) concerns the travels of Odysseus from Troy back to Ithaca. http://www.cambridgescp.com/Upage.php?p=mas^war_w_t^intro.
- The British Museum's website Ancient Greece www.ancientgreece.co.uk is an outstanding resource about the ancient Greek world, with interactive games and stories covering many aspects of social and cultural life, including Athens and Sparta.
- *The If Odyssey*, by Peter Warley and Tamar Levi (Bloomsbury Education), introduces children to the exciting fables of Odysseus, and to ancient Greek philosophy through drawing out the philosophy behind each story in Homer's epic tale. Students explore with Odysseus the value of happiness, moral dilemmas, the philosophy of prophecy, and the nature of love.¹⁷
- The *Early Myths* books, introducing characters from Greek myths such as Odysseus, Jason, and Perseus. <http://www.theclassicslibrary.com/the-early-myths-childrens-books-on-classical-myths/>

- Discover and Learn *Romans in Britain* book and activity book:
<https://www.cgpbooks.co.uk/School/whoAreYou.book> HRB21

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Guide for further reading:

¹ <http://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/as-a-level-gce-classics-classical-civilisation-h041-h441/> WJEC only offers Roman civilisation as part of its Latin qualification.

² From the guide to introducing Classics in schools by Steve Hunt, PGCE in Classics coordinator at Cambridge University, written for Classics for All:

<https://clientmedia.true212.com/classicsforall/2016/07/Steve-Hunt-Guide-full-document-1.pdf>

³ I am working on a comprehensive list and can share that when it is available.

⁴ Literacy through Classics programme on the Romans:

<http://literacythroughclassics.weebly.com/the-romans-years-3-4.html> and the Celts:

<http://literacythroughclassics.weebly.com/the-celts-years-3-4.html>.

⁵ For an example of Reception Studies used to look at 21st century morality through Classical imagery, see my blog post on the recent film *Hail Caesar*:

<http://swwclassicalassociation.weebly.com/secretarys-blog/-classical-references-in-hail-caesar-would-that-it-were-so-simple>

⁶ For example the story about late Roman emperor Macsen Wledig's dream which brought him to North Wales to choose his bride:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/history/sites/themes/society/myths_mabinogion_macsen_wledig.shtml.

⁷ See their report: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/our-work/projects/philosophy-for-children>

⁸ For the outcomes, I looked at the Social Studies curriculum in Scotland:

<https://www.education.gov.scot/Documents/social-studies-eo.pdf> p. 1.

⁹ See e.g. Mark Humphries (2006) *Early Christianity*. London: Routledge. Professor Humphries is now Professor of Ancient History at Swansea University.

¹⁰ Map of Roman sites in Wales: <http://www.britainexpress.com/attraction-map.htm?Country=Wales&Attraction=Roman>

¹¹ The National Museum in Cardiff has many classically inspired objects and is itself built in a neoclassical style – it also has resources on its website for pupils:

<https://museum.wales/search/?q=romans>. The National Roman Legion Museum at Caerleon has amazing resources for pupils (<https://museum.wales/roman/>). Swansea Museum houses local objects. The Glynn Vivian Gallery houses a variety of classically inspired objects from Glynn Vivian's journeys abroad. The Carmarthen Museum hosts Roman days and events. Similar museums and events are ongoing throughout Wales.

¹² See the *Friends of Classics* survey: <https://friendsofclassics.wordpress.com/2014/10/30/friends-of-classics-survey-into-secondary-school-perceptions-of-the-value-of-classics/>

¹³ See E. Bracke (2016) 'The role of university students in increasing widening participation to Classics', *Journal of Widening Participation and Lifelong learning* 18.2, 111-29.

¹⁴ For example TSD's recent play *Antigone*: <http://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/news/press-releases/press-releases-2014/successful-main-house-theatre-shows-at-uwtsd-.html>.

¹⁵ Link to the results of the previous schools' competition

<http://swwclassicalassociation.weebly.com/secretarys-blog/heroes-in-the-ancient-world-competition-the-results>

¹⁶ Swansea University (<http://swwclassicalassociation.weebly.com/secretarys-blog/whispers-of-past-and-future-swanseas-classical-heritage>), Ceri Richards (<https://projects.swan.ac.uk/ancient-world/?p=470>), and Glynn Vivian (<https://projects.swan.ac.uk/ancient-world/?p=514>).

¹⁷ <https://clientmedia.true212.com/classicsforall/2016/07/Steve-Hunt-Guide-full-document-1.pdf> p.