The Journal of Classics Teaching (2026), 1–3
doi:10.1017/S2058631026101330

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

News and Reports

Ancient voices in a modern world

Samantha Newington[1] and Alex Imrie[2]

[1]School of Divinity, History, Philosophy and Art History, University of Aberdeen, UK and [2]School of History, Classics and Archaeology, The University of Edinburgh, UK

In July 2019, the Classical Association of Scotland (CAS) launched a campus-based summer school in central Edinburgh offering Greek and Latin from beginners' level to advanced, with taster sessions in biblical Hebrew, Egyptian Hieroglyphs, and a small selection of non-language topics. This inaugural summer school was the brainchild of the then-Chair of CAS, Prof. Tom Harrison, Sam Newington, and Alex Imrie. The 2019 summer school proved a modest success, bringing teachers and students from different parts of Scotland together in a shared enjoyment of the ancient past. Plans were afoot to replicate the bricks-and-mortar model in 2020 (albeit in another part of Scotland, owing to the expense of hosting a physical school in Edinburgh on the eve of the Fringe Festival) but as with so many other initiatives, this was forcibly abandoned owing to the coronavirus pandemic.

The COVID-19 era in Scotland was, like everywhere, marked by personal isolation and political controversy. Classical subjects in schools were impacted by an exams crisis that rocked the Scottish Government and contributed to the abolition of the nation's solitary examination body, the *Scottish Qualifications Authority* (now replaced with a new organisation, *Qualifications Scotland*).[1] The upheaval was not limited to schools, though, with universities struggling to adapt to fully online provision as well. While the pandemic was evidently catastrophic for the fledgling CAS summer school, it also proved to be a blessing in disguise. It compelled us to reconsider the aims and objectives of our public engagement and outreach efforts.

During the three UK lockdown periods, CAS council members decided to offer a range of free online classes and workshops. These were originally language taster sessions, but we were pleasantly surprised to be approached by academics and postgraduate researchers who wanted to offer sessions of their own design as part of the CAS programme. These offers were gratefully accepted, with both Newington and Imrie offering mentoring and advice on lesson design and delivery to those who required it. Over 2020–2021, we hosted a variety of sessions, including Egyptian Hieroglyphs, Hellenistic numismatics, Roman social rituals (namely the *salutatio*), and a small range of classical reception topics. One of our most popular seminars of this period was undoubtedly a creative session where participants were given a broad introduction to Greek and Roman visual art forms, before they were challenged to create their own ancient-inspired masterpieces.[2]

Corresponding author: Samantha Newington; Email: s.newington@abdn.ac.uk
Cite this article: Newington S and Imrie A (2026). Ancient voices in a modern world. *The Journal of Classics Teaching*, 1–3. https://doi.org/10.1017/S2058631026101330

By offering a framework in which experts and enthusiasts could come together, we noted that our COVID programme reached beyond our domestic audience in Scotland and achieved a much broader global reach. Importantly, we also identified that attendees often arrived from a variety of backgrounds. Indeed, many were lifelong enthusiasts who otherwise lacked access to the discipline in any formal educational setting. It was this combination of factors that ultimately gave rise to the *Ancient Voices* programme.

As the final coronavirus lockdowns were lifted in 2021, it seemed like there was an understandable reflex back towards in-person classes and initiatives. In planning the 2021 CAS summer programme, however, council members agreed that we would resist any such temptation. Rather than feeling constrained by a fully online provision, we felt that a way to engage meaningfully with the world beyond Scotland had been unlocked for us. We were also concerned that advances in equity that had been realised via online participation (both in terms of financial constraints and physical impairments) might be undone by any attempt to revive a bricks-and-mortar model. It was in the course of these discussions that we decided on rebranding the CAS programme as *Ancient Voices*, and that we should decide on a guiding ethos and set of principles to underpin the initiative.

Ancient Voices has thus been created as an inclusive, online learning community to promote ancient languages and to provide an opportunity for global exchange and networking. This begins with our staffing. We began with Scotland-based tutors to retain a predominantly Scottish institutional identity overall, but we have gradually expanded our teaching cohort beyond Scotland's borders, following a principle of bringing global talent towards Scotland. We have endeavoured to support postgraduate researchers and precarious staff wherever possible, so that they may be recognised for their expertise even within an uncertain employment climate. Furthermore, in addition to financial remuneration, all tutors are offered opportunities for mentoring and continuing professional development (CPD) in the design and implementation of their courses.

Moving attention now to the students, *Ancient Voices* aims to promote language learning within schools, community groups, and universities, and within a context of lifelong learning and cultural exchange. When laying out the foundations of this programme, we were motivated in two different ways. First, we wanted to design an initiative that did not directly compete with summer schools and other programmes already existing. We have been particularly inspired by the work of Helen McVeigh in bringing ancient language teaching to Northern Ireland, and so we were

© The Author(s), 2026. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of The Classical Association. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution licence (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted re-use, distribution and reproduction, provided the original article is properly cited.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 18 Nov 2026 at 01:07:10, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/S2058631026101330



Figure 1. Newington and Imrie presenting on Ancient Voices at CA Conference 2025. Photograph courtesy of Working Classicists (https://www.workingclassicists.com/).

determined to complement her work rather than diminish it through direct competition.[3]

Second, from the outset, we were committed to offering access to ancient languages (which are so often intermittent in various curricular contexts) at as affordable a price point as possible. Our hope is that no student is unable to participate owing solely to financial constraints. To this end, we have tried to carefully balance the class pricing to provide unparalleled value for the student while ensuring that we are able to compensate our expert tutors fairly. For the past four years, we have also adopted a sliding scale of fees, meaning that if students wish to take more than one class in our programme, the price per class will reduce. This approach has proven successful in recruiting a student body from all over the world. In fact, we are proud to count students from every continent except Antarctica across the programme's lifespan.

In terms of our course content, we were determined from the beginning to offer as wide a selection of ancient languages and classes as possible, offering learners the chance to make initial steps with languages that may not even be taught in their local university contexts. The language offerings in the most recent iteration (2026), for example, included the classical staple of ancient Greek (beginners–advanced) and Latin (beginners–advanced), with introductory courses in Hebrew, Sanskrit, Ugaritic, Egyptian Hieroglyphs, Hurrian and Sumerian Cuneiform, and a classical civilisation course on ancient Greek mythology. The programme here is an extension and rotation of previous years, in which there have also been taster sessions offered in Phoenician and Ethiopic. Additionally, we have always complemented our initiative with a series of weekly guest lectures, drawing upon globally renowned scholars to further enrich the programme, and to provide an opportunity for socialising and networking among students between different classes. Indeed, the Q&A and discussion surrounding these research papers have been a particularly gratifying experience for our students, not to mention us as organisers.

Without doubt, languages offer an insight not only into the past, ancient cultures and civilisations, but also represent a mechanism to articulate the present and provide foreshadowing insight. Ancient Voices provides an opportunity for academic experts from across the world to share their expertise and passion. It provides avid support for undergraduate internships, postgraduate mentorship, early research career support and CPD as well as teacher resources.

We have also tried to respond to wider needs and requests in the operation of Ancient Voices. In order to meet our commitment to the learning community in Scotland, we have periodically offered a free 'School-to-University' transition course alongside our main programme. This offered school leavers and seniors the chance to experience sample lessons in languages, Ancient History and Classical Studies, in an attempt to demystify the university experience for those about to arrive.

Moreover, we remain open to collaborating with other institutions, groups, and individuals to widen our scope even further. In 2021, for example, we were thrilled to receive financial support from a private donor that allowed us to offer funded places in different classes to MA students from the University of Cape Coast in Ghana. More recently, we were able to assist a student from the University of Tehran to attend classes, overcoming a number of logistical challenges that would otherwise have prevented their participation. These examples are not exhaustive: every year the programme has run, we have received enquiries that require creativity and flexibility to facilitate maximum participation.

Set against a backdrop of curriculum narrowing in schools, the ever-present threat to university departments across the humanities and other global pressures, we are proud to be able to offer a small corner that promotes Classics (in the broadest sense) and something that we hope has encouraged dialogue that is increasingly global in nature. To this end, we were thrilled to present a paper on Ancient Voices at the Classical Association Conference in 2025: another marker of the programme's growth, and an invaluable opportunity to network with colleagues from around the world (Figure 1). The Classics community in Scotland is numerically small, and so we believe that one of the keys to our

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 18 Nov 2026 at 01:07:10, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/S2058631026101330

survival and success is simultaneously to continue looking beyond our borders and to demonstrate the vitality that exists within this Caledonian context.

Information on the Ancient Voices programme and other activities by the Classical Association of Scotland can be found on its new website: https://classicalassociationscot.org/

Notes

1 Imrie, A. (2020) The Coronavirus pandemic, exams crisis and classics in Scottish Schools. *Journal of Classics Teaching* 21, 55–59.
2 This was enabled with the collaboration of Drs Zofia Guertin and Brianna King, with additional input by professional artist Flora Kirk.
3 https://helenmcveigh.co.uk/

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 18 Nov 2026 at 01:07:10, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/S2058631026101330