

What is Classics?

Classics is the term given to the study of the civilizations of ancient Greece and Rome in all their aspects: language, literature, history, philosophy, art, and archaeology. Traditionally, the study of Classics focused on Greek and Latin language and literature. But in recent decades, there has been a great flourishing of courses on Greek and Roman civilization in which the literature is studied in translation, and in which consideration is also given to the non-literary achievements of the ancient Mediterranean world, such as its art, architecture, and society, from the near East to the British Isles. At Maynooth, Classics may be studied either through our most popular course on Greek and Roman Civilization, or through the languages of Latin and ancient Greek.

What does a degree in Greek and Roman Civilization at Maynooth include?

This degree is composed mainly of modules on the literature and history of Greek and Roman societies. Among the authors studied are such “classics” as Homer, Virgil, Lucan, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes, Plautus, Sappho, Catullus, Ovid, Herodotus, Thucydides, Tacitus, Plato, Aristotle, Lucretius, Cicero and Petronius. In reading these authors through English translation, we gain some familiarity with the major genres which the ancients gave to the modern world—epic, drama, lyric poetry, as well as historical and philosophical prose. In addition, the periods of time covered are some of the most important and influential in western history: Periclean Athens with its flourishing democracy and empire; Alexander the Great, with his astonishing conquests and long-term influence; late Republican Rome and the subsequent Augustan age; and the “fall” of the Roman empire, as medieval Europe began to take shape. The degree also includes modules on Greek myth, philosophy, ancient anthropology, and women in antiquity. In all, the degree offers a wide-ranging and balanced education in many aspects of Greek and Roman civilization.

Why study Classics at Maynooth?

Students tend to do better in courses that they enjoy, and over the years many students have found studying Classics to be an interesting and memorable experience. Though relatively small, the department has an excellent reputation both in Ireland and abroad, and while each member of staff is active in research, the size of the department allows for more personal attention to students’ needs than is sometimes possible in much larger departments. In addition, Classics at Maynooth can be studied alongside many other subjects and makes for an excellent combination with Anthropology, English, History, Philosophy and Politics (among others). Such synergies contribute to the learning process and make the overall degree more valuable to employers.

What can I do with a Classics degree?

In our fast-changing world, few degrees are directly applicable to one's profession, and so increasingly employers look for graduates who are flexible, creative, open-minded, critically aware and articulate. Many of these qualities are fostered by studying Classics. The ability to deal with a variety of material, to read analytically, to think “outside the box”, to conduct independent research, to write and communicate effectively—these are skills that will not go out of circulation and are useful and prized in many fields, whether it be education, journalism, law, politics, publishing, or business. In addition to these transferable skills, Classics forms the indispensable background for understanding our living European heritage and as such can make us, as citizens, more reflective, independent-minded and adaptable.