

Slavonic Sub-Faculty Diversity Audit Report TT2025

The Sub-Faculty's commitment to diversity and inclusion, as key components of higher education and as markers of scholarly ambition, is affirmed in our academic staff's research orientation, teaching at all levels of study, and boarder contribution to Faculty life, from admissions to academic events. At the same time, we recognise that diverse practice requires continuous reflection and re-thinking of current norms and we have identified scope for implementing further changes.

Curriculum

Our curriculum emphasises that the distinctive features of the Russian literary tradition include the vast geographical region over which the language has been spoken at various times and its often-productive interaction with other language and cultures. Thus, undergraduates encounter not only texts written by authors active in the capital cities of Saint Petersburg and Moscow, but texts by Russophone authors from Ukraine, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. Questions of empire figure prominently in many nineteenth-century texts, as does the tension between national (*russkii*) and imperial (*rossiiskii*) identities, and similarly, the study of Soviet literature opens up questions of Russian-language writing within a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual state. Ethnicity constitutes an important aspect of literary culture in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, as highlighted in texts by 'ethnic minority' authors such as Tatar author Guzel' Yakhina or Chechen writer German Sadulaev. At the same time, in the nineteenth century, serfdom was discussed in terms analogous to that of slavery and colonialism, prompting students to reflect on questions of class. Furthermore, warfare, revolution and political pressure have displaced many Russophone writers, and emigration and exile are central features of the Russian literary tradition shaped by authors in locations as diverse as the USA and Israel, among them Sergei Dovlatov, Joseph Brodsky, Vladimir Nabokov or Dina Rubina.

The teaching of canonical Russian texts is often contextualised through the lenses of critical theories, among them postcolonial and gender studies. As such, works dealing with problematic issues around race and imperialism are examined in a manner which prompts students' reflection on the link between literature and empire-building. Moreover, such texts are often placed in a dialogue with those authors in the 'periphery', whether Ukraine, the Caucasus, and Central Asia, who 'write back' to the empire, thus offering students an opportunity to compare diverse perspectives on both sides of mainland Russia. Indeed, the study of post-Soviet literary texts from the Caucasus and Central Asia challenges the perception that race does not figure as prominently in Russophone culture as it does in other European literatures. An example is Uzbek author Bibish's autobiographical account of the experiences of the racially 'Other' migrant in Moscow.

Women writers figure prominently on most papers: indeed, when it comes to lyric poetry or autobiography in particular, the Russian tradition is inconceivable without the contribution made by women writers, including Marina Tsvetaeva (a special author on paper X) as well as a flourishing canon of prose works by post-Soviet women writers such as Lyudmila Petrushevskaya (a special author on paper XI) and Tatyana Tolstaya. Paper XII special subject 'Gender and Representation in Russian Culture' covers not only Russian women writers, such as Akhmatova and Tsvetaeva, but some of their less famous predecessors and contemporaries in the context of gender issues, women's history, cinema, the visual arts, and music, among them Karolina Pavlova, Zinaida

Gippius, Nadezhda Teffi, and Anna Prismanova. Students also have a chance to study male and female writers comparatively, or indeed to study male writers in the context of masculinity studies or queer theory. Moreover, half of the directors included in our Russian sole prelims cinema paper are female.

Writing by LGBTQ+ authors is represented on most papers, as is the representation of gender and sexuality more generally. Examples are numerous. Paper XI includes Lyudmila Petrushevskaya's play *Kvartira Kolumbiny* (1981) exploring sexual identity and cross-dressing. Paper VIII includes the poetry of New-York based Slava Mogutin, one of Russia's first openly gay cultural figures. Many undergraduates also read *The Cavalry Maiden*, penned by Nadezhda Durov(a)/Alexander Sokolov, a 19th century author boldly playing with gender identity.

Regional and social linguistic variation features in the linguistic and philological papers of the course. The curriculum also offers Paper XII options in Slavonic languages other than Russian, such as Ukrainian and Polish. This allows students of Russian to branch out into the wider East-Central and Eastern European context; a region that is characterized by strong linguistic and cultural diversity and divergent historical views. On the Prelims course, Russian sole students obligatorily take elementary Polish and an introduction to Church Slavonic and to comparative Slavonic philology, to encourage a broader, multi-faceted and decolonial understanding of the Russian context.

In language teaching, materials chosen for translation, prose and oral classes include authors and sources from multiple ethnicities and genders, with complex and fluid identities, underlining a faculty-wide commitment to highlight different voices at every level of teaching.

At the same time, the Sub-Faculty **continues to discuss** changes that would further increase diversity, especially now that the Sub-faculty team is in full size, with Dr Margarita Vaysman joining us recently in MT2023 and Dr Tamar Koplatadze joining us in MT2022. Dr Koplatadze specialises in Russophone culture and postcolonial studies, while Dr Vaysman puts a much-needed spotlight on authors who deserve a place in the Russian literary canon, but have been denied it for reasons such as their gender. In MT23, we held a meeting led by Professor Polly Jones to discuss our current teaching provision and ways of further diversifying it. We have identified the prelims papers IV, the main literary studies paper taken by first year students, as the most immediate area of consideration. Currently, most authors on the paper are Russian canonical male writers, with only one woman author included (Anna Akhmatova), and no writers of obviously complex identity or varied linguistic and ethnic backgrounds (perhaps with the exception of Pushkin, whose African heritage has increasingly come to the forefront of scholarly attention). A similar pattern was observed in the Special Author Papers X and XI. We plan to offer a more diverse range of authors on both papers, and are discussing a structural overhaul of the special author papers, for instance by organising prescribed texts according to themes and/or movements, as opposed to literary figures. Once we implement these changes, we also plan to rethink our examining practices, to make sure that the questions allow students to apply the full range of their knowledge and understanding. This change will in turn foster greater diversity in the long term, with past papers reassuring students that diverse topics and questions are indeed compulsory, as opposed to complimentary, in their studies.

Furthermore, recognising that diversification cannot end at the level of taught material, and thus risk turning into a box-ticking exercise, we plan to continuously review our progress and consult

with colleagues both across the university and outside of it, and to compare examples of best practice.

The Slavonic sub-faculty is committed to the study of less commonly taught Slavonic languages, which reflects the linguistic and cultural diversity of Central and Eastern Europe. It currently offers degree courses in Czech with Slovak and in Polish, as well as the above-mentioned Paper XII options in Slavonic languages other than Russian for students on the Russian degree course. The M.St./M.Phil. in Slavonic Studies places equal importance on linguistic and literary diversity and different historical perspectives through the compulsory study of a second Slavonic language, including Czech, Polish, Serbian, Slovak, Ukrainian, and a range of literary and linguistic/philological options across all branches of Slavonic.

In the modern literature papers, Czech with Slovak aims for a roughly even split between male and female authors, including in Prelim Růžena Jesenská and Alena Vostrá, in Paper VIII or X and at Masters level Božena Němcová, Karolína Světlá, Gabriela Preissová, Tímrava, Božena Benešová, Daniela Hodrová, Alexandra Berková, Jana Juránová, Daniela Kapitáňová, Petra Hůlová, Bianca Bellová and Lucie Faulerová. Paper VIII also regularly includes the cycle of short stories, *Nechci se vrátit mezi mrtvé*, by the Czech-language Roma writer Erika Olahová, which exploits Roma folklore alongside examination of the contemporary experience of Czech and Slovak Roma women. Thanks to this inclusion, this genre has formed the focus this year of a Paper XIV dissertation, and a story by another Czech Roma writer, Irena Eliašová, was translated by a student for publication as part of the Faculty's diversity in translation project. Czech and Slovak Jewish writers, including Julius Zeyer, Egon Hostovský and Leopold Lahola, regularly feature alongside texts that offer opportunities to discuss anti-Semitism and racism in Czech and Slovak culture. Queer writing is well represented, including Růžena Jesenská, Jiří Karásek and Ladislav Fuks. Several texts also offer opportunities to discuss topics like disability, neurodiversity and mental health. Classes of translation into English (and exam assessments) also feature an at least even split of male and female authors and include texts by various minority voices (Black, Jewish, Roma, Vietnamese and queer writers) and Czech and Slovak reflections on questions of diversity historically and in the present.

Admissions

Passages used in our admissions interviews include texts by a broad spectrum of poets beyond canonical authors and give applicants a taste of some of the diverse topics that we cover, for instance, issues around feminism, bilingualism or perceived linguistic colonisation, as expressed in Russophone poet Bakytzhan's Kanapyanov's poem on his inability to compose in his native Kazakh, used as part of the 2023/24 admissions round.

Slavonic Graduate Seminar and Ilchester Lecture

Students are encouraged to take advantage of the sub-faculty's vibrant intellectual community, and to attend seminars and public lectures that dovetail with their interests that are increasingly wide in terms of geographic scope. Corresponding to our approach of diversifying and decolonising Russian studies, we have hosted speakers, both postgraduate and senior, whose research explores the history, literature and culture of not only Russia, but also Central Asia, Ukraine and Poland, among others (e.g. Nariman Skakov, Ola Sidorkiewicz, Pany Xenophontos and Tamar Koplatadze).

The Sub-Faculty annually holds the Ilchester lecture and awards Ilchester scholarships for research, exhibition or scholarship to encourage the study of the Polish and other Slavonic languages, literatures, and history, ‘with the view of promoting the knowledge of European politics in general and more especially benefitting the diplomatic service’ of the United Kingdom. The choice of speakers for the Ilchester lecture echoes the sub-faculty’s commitment to diversity. The 2022/23 lecture was given by leading Ukrainian author Oksana Zabuzhko. Other recent speakers include Libuše Heczková, who spoke about the history of Czechoslovak feminism, and Uzbek author Hamid Ismailov, who gave a talk on Central Asian literature.

Response to the conflict in Ukraine

Following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, questions of diversity and decoloniality have rightly come to the forefront in Slavonic Studies departments, including our own. The Sub-Faculty offers Ukrainian language papers on its BA in Russian and the M.St./M.Phil. in Slavonic Studies. It has supported a number of initiatives to show academic solidarity, give voice to colleagues in Ukraine and to allow us to hear directly about the conflict and its impact. The Sub-Faculty’s 2022/23 Ilchester Lecture was given by leading Ukrainian author Oksana Zabuzhko, who prompted the audience to re-think the place of Ukrainian culture, and Ukraine as a whole, on the global map. The Faculty hosted a Ukrainian writer, Oleksandr Mykhed for its 2022/23 virtual residency, one of the most prominent Ukrainian writers of his generation. He was later joined by the historian Olena Styazhkina, as the Faculty’s second Ukrainian writer in virtual residency in collaboration with the History Faculty. Both spoke at the Slavonic Graduate Seminar, further contributing to establishing a productive, and hopefully long-term, cross-cultural dialogue. In September 2023, a TORCH workshop ‘Decentering and Digitizing Soviet and Post-Soviet Research’ (organised by our SF’s Polly Jones and Jake Roberston, alongside REES’s Zbigniew Wojnowski) brought together local and international scholars and ECRs to discuss practicalities and ethics of Slavic research in the post-February 2022 world. Our Sub-Faculty members frequently collaborate with The Russian and Eurasian Studies Centre at St Anthony’s (as in the previous example) to hold talks, roundtables and events on Ukraine, including a conference ‘War and The Future of Ukraine’, a Q&A with writer Ukrainian writer Andrey Kurkov (organised by Pany Xenophontos), and a Ukrainian Cultures Reading Group (organised by Ukrainian visiting fellow Darya Tsimbalyuk) in 2023. This has led to the foundation of the interdisciplinary Oxford Ukraine Hub in which members of the sub-faculty are actively engaged. Ukrainian topics also continue to feature in the Slavonic Graduate Seminar, such as a conversation with the writer Kateryna Babkina in May 2025.