

Professor Arlene Holmes-Henderson MBE (2026)

Professor Arlene Holmes-Henderson MBE is a scholar, educator, and advocate whose impact on the world of classics has been nothing short of transformative. Few individuals, if any, have done more to raise the profile of classical subjects among policymakers and within government educational debate at the same time as helping make the ancient world more accessible and relevant within the classroom and wider society.

Currently holding the post of Professor of Classics Education and Public Policy at Durham University, Arlene has had a varied career, including a decade of teaching in high schools before returning to academia, giving her a unique insight into what is happening in the area of classics teaching. As the founder of the Durham Centre for Classics Education Research and Engagement, she has led pioneering work that connects academic research with real-world educational change. Her passionate and tireless campaigning for classical education is extremely admirable, doing all she can to ensure that the study of the ancient world is not only preserved but made relevant and accessible to all.

Arlene's achievements extend far beyond traditional academia. As the co-director for [Advocating Classics Education](#), she is currently training prison educators from diverse backgrounds to teach courses in ancient Greek ethics and rhetoric, opening up new opportunities for learning and reflection in prison communities. One nominator said that this was "just one illustration among many of her utter dedication to the promotion of Classics as a human right and social benefit. This addition to her already lengthy list of publications, typically with a public-facing, vocational impress, makes her possibly the most effective, certainly one of the most admirable, advocates for our subject".

In 2026, Arlene is seconded to the UK Government as a member of the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) Expert Exchange Programme, contributing expertise to a cross-government foresight project focused on the future of childhood and adolescence. Notably, she is the first Humanities scholar to participate in this scheme. Arlene has served as an expert advisor to curriculum and education authorities in countries including New Zealand, Australia, Ireland, and Kazakhstan, shaping how classical and humanities education is taught and understood worldwide.

Through her work with organizations such as the Universities Policy Engagement Network and the British Educational Research Association, and in recent years with the Classical Association as our former Partnerships Officer, as the Chair of the Classics Development Group, and the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Classics she has ensured that Classics remains central to national conversations about curriculum, knowledge, and educational equity. She has been given the royal seal of approval with an MBE awarded for services to education, named in King Charles III's Birthday Honours in 2023.

Yet alongside these remarkable achievements, it is Arlene's generosity and dedication to others that truly set her apart. Another nomination stated: "I nominate Arlene specifically for her generosity: when helping set up a second-level Classics outreach programme in my own university, Arlene gave freely of her time and advice, and her input was and continues to be invaluable. As well as a font of knowledge, Arlene's determination to open Classics to the world is a constant inspiration to me and

a constant reminder of what can be achieved. I can't think of anyone more deserving of the Classical Association Prize". She has mentored students, supported colleagues, delivered countless public lectures, and helped build outreach programmes across institutions and regions, always giving her time, expertise, and encouragement freely.

She continues to inspire those around her with her vision, energy, and unwavering commitment to widening access to education. The next stages of her career will be exciting to follow, especially as she has recently been awarded the Gulbenkian Professorship in the Humanities to work with the University of Lisbon in 2026-27.

Arlene has reshaped how we think about Classics, not as an exclusive discipline, but as a dynamic, inclusive, and socially meaningful field that can change lives. Her work has strengthened its place in schools, universities, and public discourse and has demonstrated its enduring value in shaping both individuals and society. For her leadership, her service to education, and her extraordinary commitment to making classics accessible to all, there could be no more deserving recipient of this year's Classical Association Prize.

Dr Charlotte Parkyn, Partnerships Officer