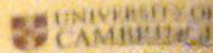


# Education

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## Ask an academic

**Katherine McDonald, 26, is a research fellow in classics at Cambridge University. She has been in the city since 2006**

Read more interviews with academics online at [www.cam.ac.uk](http://www.cam.ac.uk)

**What is your particular area of expertise?**  
I'm a linguist working on languages in the ancient Mediterranean. At the moment, I work on bilingualism and contact between languages in ancient Italy. One of my favourite languages is called Oscan – it's related to Latin, and survives written on stone and metal, but died out around 2,000 years ago. I study the texts written by people who were bilingual in Oscan and another language, like Latin or Greek.

**How would you explain your current work to a stranger on the bus?**  
I like to tell people that about 70 per cent of people in the modern world are bilingual, and that even there was probably even more bilingualism in Ancient Greece and Rome.

Unless we understand how bilingualism worked in those cultures, then we're missing a huge chunk of information about people's everyday lives.

**Where do you do most of your work?**  
I usually work in my office in college, where I keep all my specialist books and articles. In the summer, I enjoy working in the Caius College library, which is a beautiful building but quite busy during term time.

**What first inspired you to study your chosen subject?**  
I was lucky enough to study Latin at school, and I loved learning about Roman culture – it seemed both familiar and completely alien at the same time. That motivated me to come to Cambridge to do a Classics degree, and to learn Ancient Greek too.

**What kind of student were you at school?**  
I was quite geeky and hardworking. I enjoyed studying foreign languages and getting involved in school theatre productions.

**What's the most exciting part of your job?**  
I get to travel on my own round Italy to visit museums and sites once a year or so. I never know exactly what's going to happen from one day to the next, and I've met some fantastic people.

**What keeps you awake at night?**  
I think most academics are perfectionists at heart, so it can be hard to let go and publish your ideas just in case people disagree with you. But friendly criticism really helps you improve your work, so it's worth it.

**What's the worst thing about your subject?**  
Being an academic can be lonely from time to time, since I do most of my work



**My colleagues and students come from all over the world, and are incredibly intelligent and creative**

on my own. But I'm very lucky now to be affiliated to the "Greek in Italy" project, so I have some colleagues to see for lunch and bounce ideas around with.

**What false preconceptions do people have about your field?**  
People often think that there was no migration or multiculturalism before the late 20th century, and that most ancient people lived their whole lives in the same place. Nothing could be further from the truth! Both the Greeks and Romans colonised huge areas, and plenty of people would have travelled for trade or personal reasons. Big cities like Rome were incredibly diverse places.

**What's the most interesting thing you've learned this week?**  
This has been the first week of term, so I've learned all sorts of interesting things about the new students and academics who have just joined my college.

**What one thing don't your students or**

colleagues know about you?  
I was a huge Harry Potter fan in my teens. Knowing Latin was pretty helpful for that!

**What's the best thing about studying/working in Cambridge?**  
The people. My colleagues and students come from all over the world, and are incredibly intelligent and creative. I've learned so much from all of them.

**What do you think will be the next big discovery in your field in the next 10 years?**  
It would be great to think that we could discover a completely new language in Italy. It's definitely possible – new material is found all the time at building sites and people's houses. I'd love to be around for that kind of discovery.

• Dr McDonald is speaking at the Festival of Ideas on October 22. See [www.festivalofideas.cam.ac.uk/events/migration-language-and-identity-greek-italy](http://www.festivalofideas.cam.ac.uk/events/migration-language-and-identity-greek-italy) for details. She also runs the research blog for "Greek in Italy" project: [www.greekinitaly.com](http://www.greekinitaly.com)

## University approves Kettle's Yard development

PLANS for a proposed £7.5 million development of the Kettle's Yard art gallery have been approved by Cambridge University.

The Castle Street gallery was acquired by the university in 1946 along with the two adjoining premises, which were damaged by fire in 2003 and have remained vacant since.

The university now intends to



renovate these buildings to provide a ground-floor space for practical art activities and a second-floor area for

lectures, film and seminars.

The redevelopment will also introduce a new first-floor project space and archive, as well as new toilet facilities. It will also retain the existing three-storey street facade to be demolished and rebuilt.

The existing gallery spaces will also be reconfigured, creating two contemporary galleries, with a new glazed screen introduced to provide

a single point of entrance to the gallery from the exterior courtyard.

The total project is estimated to cost £7.5 million, with £1.2 million already in place, alongside a million saved from the Her Lottery Fund. Initial planning permission for the development has been granted, with the Her Council meeting last month formally give its approval.