# A Survey of Beginners' Latin Teaching in UK Classics Departments (2019)

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Introduction

This article presents the results of a survey of *ab initio* Latin language teaching in UK universities carried out by Mair Lloyd and James Robson in 2018-19. The project we embarked on back then was an ambitious one to say the least: namely, to survey as wide a range of UK Classics departments as possible with a view to examining the factors underpinning student success in beginners' Latin (i.e. the successful completion by students of their modules), as well as student withdrawal and failure. As part of this project, we sought to capture data about the different ways in which Latin was being taught across the country, looking at variables such as the textbooks used, the weighting of modules, class size, and so on, alongside the pass, withdrawal and failure rates in each institution. The work we undertook to collect and analyse these data built on, and very much follows in the wake of, Nick Lowe's ground-breaking study of beginners' language teaching in UK Classics departments published in the CUCD Bulletin (Lowe 1995) as well as similar surveys of Greek and Latin *ab initio* teaching carried out by the present authors in 2013-14 (Lloyd and Robson 2018a and 2018b).

Why carry out such a survey in the first place? Well, part of the reason is that we are both secretly stats fiends and suspect that a number of our fellow classicists have similar proclivities. Yet we hope that this article serves more of a purpose than
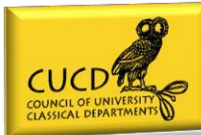
simply feeding our own and others' nerdish hunger for tables and bar charts. Reliable statistics allow the health of classical subjects to be both judged nationally and compared internationally. They can also help to guide the activities of those wishing to support, grow and shore up classics provision by allowing for data-led decision-making. Crucially, too, a survey like this affords individual instructors a glimpse of how others approach the challenge of teaching beginners' Latin to undergraduates and provides them with a useful overview of the ways in which Latin modules are packaged, taught and assessed in other institutions (e.g. in terms of module duration, contact hours, assessment strategy, etc.). Of course, a lot has changed in university teaching since we collected the data for this survey in 2018-19 and for some readers the picture painted in this article will evoke more innocent times, when the face-to-face teaching of Latin was the norm in universities and when technology was utilised far less in Latin instruction than it is today. Put another way, this survey provides us with a detailed overview of a world that was unknowingly on the brink of change.

The data presented in this article were compiled as part of a broader project of ours, *The Battle for Latin*, funded by the British Academy and the Open University. Inspired by the fact that our 2014 survey had revealed that only 77% of students (809 out of 1044) signing up for *ab initio* Latin modules in UK universities went on to complete their studies successfully – and that 23%, or 235, therefore did not – we set up this project to explore factors influencing student success, withdrawal and failure on these modules. The results of our broader investigation into the causes of success, failure and withdrawal are covered in two separate publications (though anyone impatient to know more can turn to the 'Concluding Remarks' section at the end of this article, where we report on some of our key findings in this area). The first of these separate articles, Lloyd and Robson 2023a, provides further statistical analyses of our quantitative data (enough to slake the thirst of even the most insatiable classics-orientated stats nerd, we like to think) in an effort to determine which variables have the most impact on student retention and success. The second article, Lloyd and Robson 2023b, presents and analyses the qualitative data that we collected in a series of interviews with students and instructors of Latin in UK

universities (as part of this article we also place university-level Latin learning in the UK in a broader pedagogical context while setting out perceived challenges of Latin learning, along with strategies used to mitigate them). In line with the objectives of this overarching project, our work focused narrowly on modules catering for undergraduates (rather than postgraduates) and on modules designed for those encountering Latin for the very first time (and not, say, beginners' follow-on courses taken in the second semester).

The 2019 Survey: An Overview

In our survey year, there were 31 universities in the UK known to be offering *ab initio* Latin courses.

Birkbeck, University of London	University of Glasgow
Bristol University	University of Kent
Cardiff University	University of Leeds
Durham University	University of Leicester
King's College, London	University of Lincoln
Manchester Metropolitan University	University of Liverpool
Newcastle University	University of Manchester
The Open University	University of Nottingham
Royal Holloway, University of London	University of Oxford
Swansea University	University of Reading
University College, London	University of Roehampton
University of Aberdeen	University of St. Andrews
University of Birmingham	University of Southampton
University of Cambridge	University of Wales, Trinity Saint David
University of Edinburgh	University of Warwick
University of Exeter	

Pleasingly, this figure represented an increase of four on the 27 institutions offering beginners' Latin at the time of the 2014 survey. However, while all universities completed the 2014 survey, two did not respond to our requests to participate in

2019. This meant our data only covered 29 universities: 26 that had previously participated in 2014 (for which comparisons can therefore be made), and three new universities participating for the first time in 2019. One university taught *ab initio* Latin in groups using two different approaches and therefore heroically completed one return for each. For the purpose of our analyses, we have treated these groups as representing either one institution or two separate modules depending on context. As a result, the statistics reported in the main body of this article cover a maximum of 30 modules and a maximum of 29 universities, though often fewer are covered, since respondents occasionally gave invalid responses. All universities have been anonymised with the exception of our own institution, the Open University, when there was a danger that its high student numbers (combined with its distinctive distance-learning model) might skew statistics. It should also be said that each respondent provided us with data relating to their university's most recently taught beginners' cohort, which for some related to the academic year 2017-18 (14 institutions) and for others 2018-19 (15 institutions). We are extremely grateful to the 29 Latin instructors who gave generously of their time by completing our survey: our warm and sincere thanks go out to you all.

The 2019 questionnaire was slimmed down somewhat relative to its predecessors, partly with a view to making it easier for busy instructors to complete. Topics that were retained include pass rates, teaching hours, assessment, textbooks and attitudes towards technology. Sections 1-13 below provide an overview of responses to the various questions we posed alongside comparisons with the 2014 data where possible and practical.

What has changed between the 2014 and 2019 snapshots of UK universities? Many of the shifts are subtle: for example, the average number of teaching hours fell from 3.68 to 3.5 per week (see Section 3); and while in most institutions learning activities undertaken both inside and outside class had changed very little (Section 10), there was nevertheless an increase in the use of mobile and online tools for students to stay in touch outside the classroom (Section 11). *Reading Latin* and Wheelock remained the most popular textbooks, albeit with a slightly smaller market share than

they once enjoyed: 14 out of 30 modules made use of one of these coursebooks in 2019, compared to 18 out of 27 in 2014 (see Section 7).

Some changes are more marked, however. There has, for example, been a notable shift away from large-scale modules, with a number of institutions slimming down their beginners' Latin offering to make it worth fewer credits – and often teaching this pared-down, introductory module over a single semester rather than a year (see Sections 1 and 2). Indeed, the statistics on module duration are particularly striking, with 62% of modules in our 2019 survey taught over the course of a single semester (or less), compared with just 33% in 2014 when 67% of modules spanned the whole academic year. Most disappointingly, the number of students failing or withdrawing from their beginner's Latin module remained stubbornly high: 76% of the 888 students covered by the 2019 survey passed, which represents a slight decrease on the figure of 77% in 2014 (see Section 5). More inspiring are instructors' accounts of their innovations and the (sometimes considerable) work they had put in to support student learning. These enhancements include efforts to embed an 'applied' element into beginners' modules (through a focus on 'authentic' texts such as inscriptions, or using parallel texts and translations); the use of spoken Latin in the classroom; the development of extensive interactive online materials; and the authoring of numerous guides, exercises, presentations and quizzes to support students' language learning (see Sections 12 and 13). Accounts of singing, acting and the 'physicalisation' of vocabulary to aid student learning also point to some genuine fun being had in the classroom.

The 2019 Survey Results

1. CATS/SCOTCAT points per *ab initio* module

*Q: How many credit points (CATS/SCOTCAT points) does the* ab initio *module carry?*
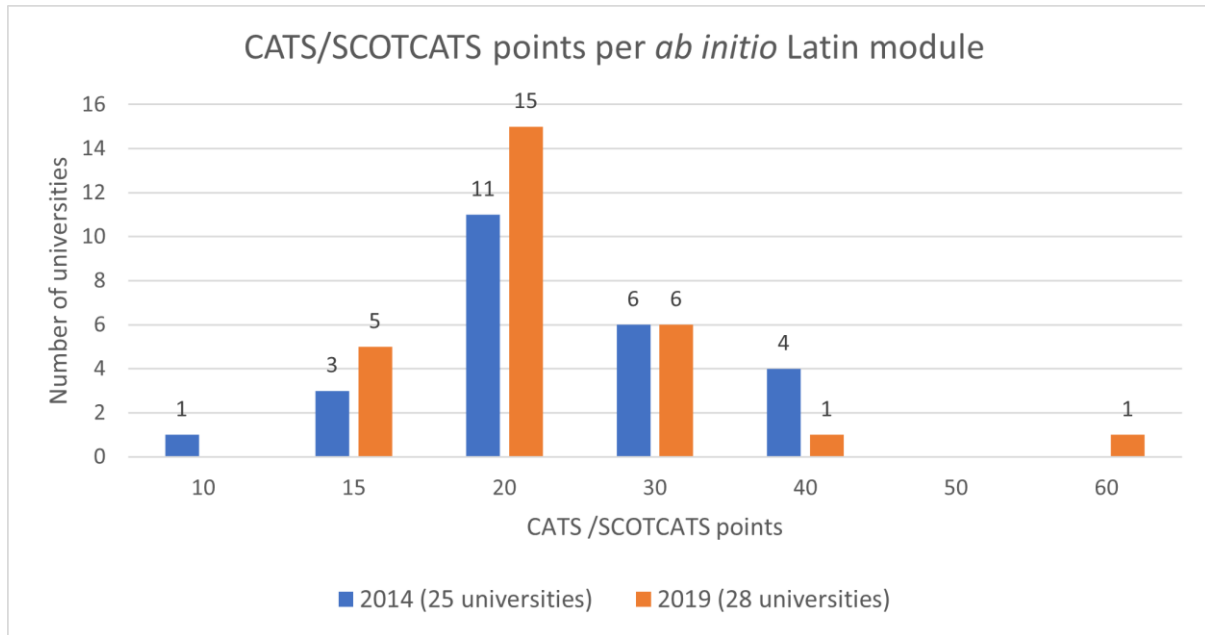
This graph suggests a shift away from high-credit courses, with the number of 40-credit modules falling from four to just one and the numbers of 15 and 20 credit modules rising from 14 (out of 25) to 20 (out of 28). The exception to this rule is the Open University, whose Latin offering changed from 30 to 60 credits (see Section 4 below).

(Note that in the UK, full-time undergraduates typically study 120 CATS/SCOTCATS per year, equivalent to 60 ECTS [European Credit Transfer System] points.)

2. Module duration

*Q: Over what period of time is this* ab initio *module normally studied?*
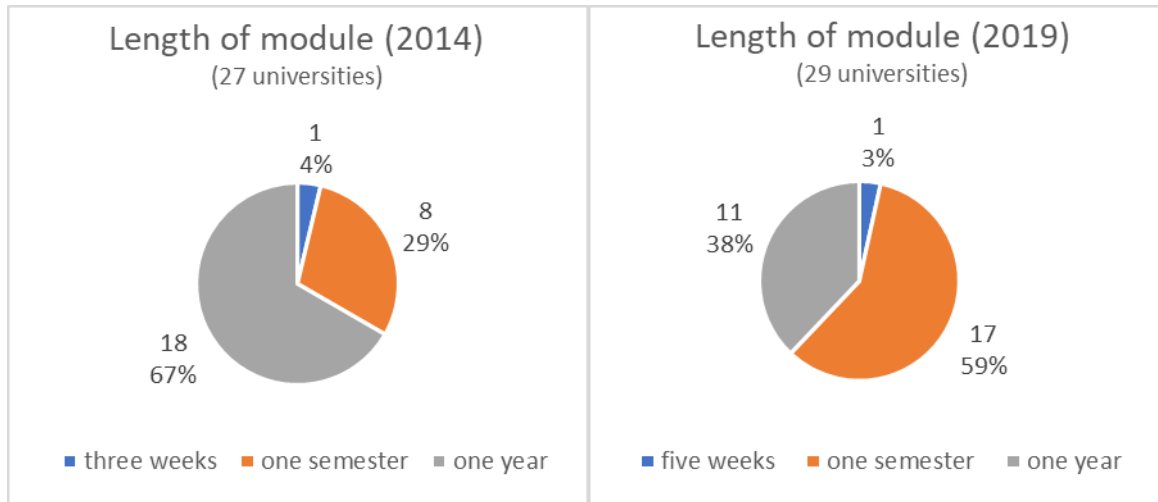
Between 2014 and 2019, eight universities moved from one-year to one-semester modules, while one moved from one semester to five weeks. The three-week module reported in 2014 was recorded as a year-long module this time round and one university that recorded a one-semester module last time has moved to a one-year model. There are three new universities in the 2019 chart, all running half year/one-semester modules. One university that reported a one-year module in 2014 did not respond in 2019. The greater numbers moving to shorter modules is consistent with the apparent shift away from high-credit courses seen in Section 1.

One thing that our survey did not explicitly ask instructors to state was whether students taking a single-semester Latin module had the opportunity at their institution to progress to a post-beginners' module in the second semester. Comments made by survey respondents suggest that that this facility was available in many, if not all, relevant institutions, however, thereby allowing students the flexibility either to continue or, alternatively, to drop their Latin studies after completing their initial module. Many of the institutions that had slimmed their beginners' Latin offering down to a single-semester module since 2014 will therefore have been offering the same or a similar number of Latin credits as they did previously, only chunked into two modules.

3. Contact hours per week

Q: How many contact hours (to the nearest hour) are there per week for this ab initio *module?*
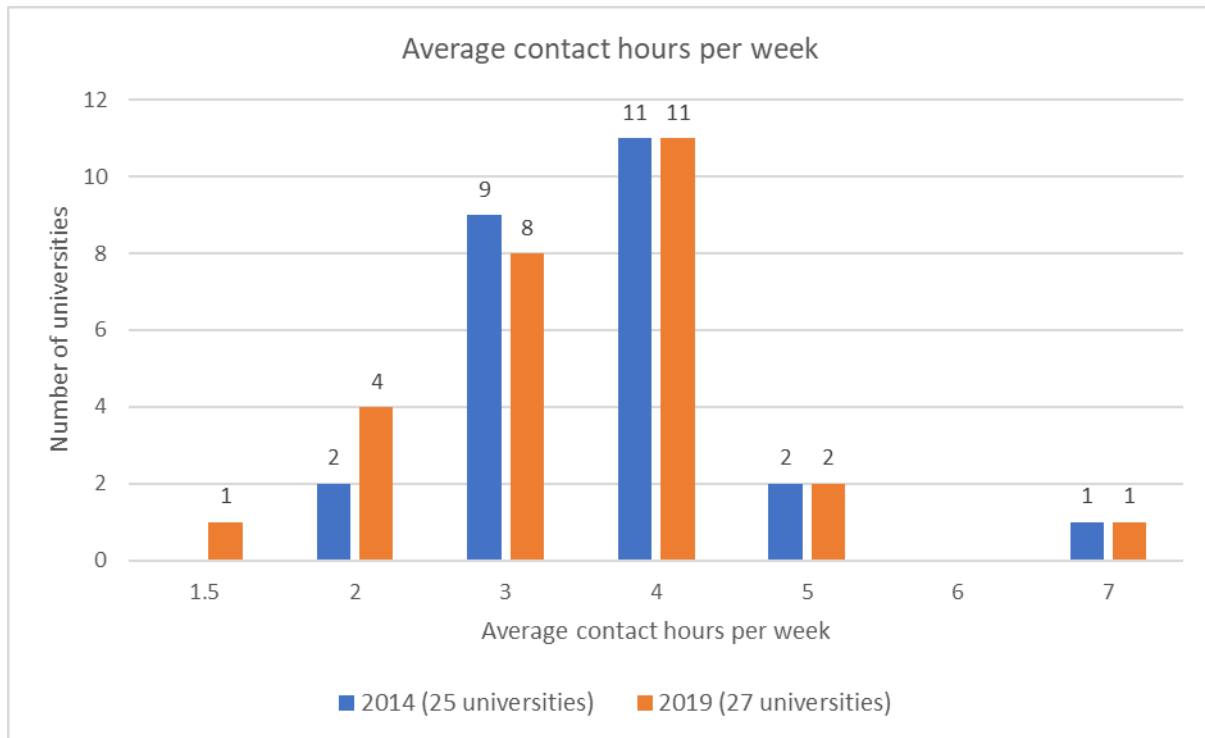
The average number of contact hours per week for standard modules was 3.5; this is slightly down on the average of 3.68 reported in the 2014 survey.

In 2019, two universities recorded unusual delivery modes and were excluded from this chart and the average calculation. One provided an intensive course with 12 hours per week over five weeks, while the Open University provided approximately 16 tutorial hours over the year.

4. Student enrolments

*Q How many students enrolled on the module?*

The data captured in the 2019 survey, based on valid returns from 29 universities, covers 888 students. This compares to 1044 students in 27 institutions for whom data was captured in the 2014 survey.

The graph below shows the variety in undergraduate enrolment figures for the 29 universities making valid returns in the 2019 survey.

Enrolments on beginners' Latin modules (2019)
(29 universities)
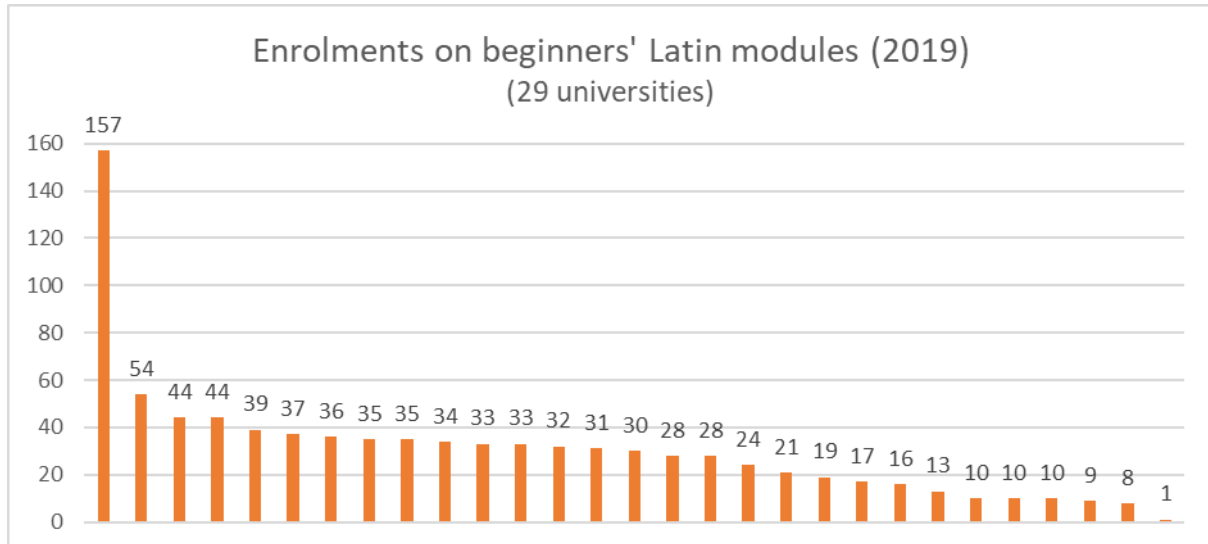
The following graph shows the changes in undergraduate enrolment figures between the 2014 and 2019 surveys for those 22 universities making valid reports for enrolment in both years. Universities new to the survey are not included.

Change in enrolments 2014 to 2019
(22 universities)
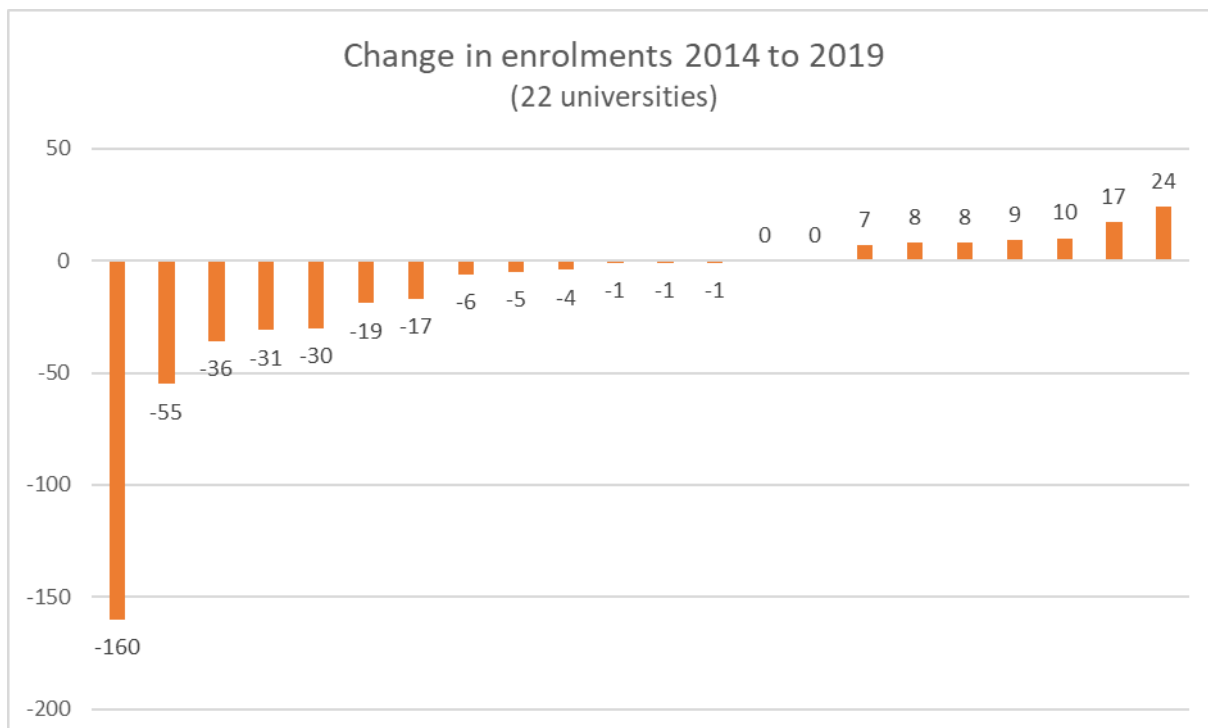
For these matched figures, i.e. for those universities where direct comparison is possible, the overall change in enrolment showed a drop of 283 students. The most significant change (a drop of 160 students) was reported by the Open University,
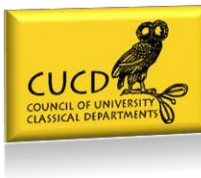
where a new 60-credit module combining the study of Latin language and literature in translation had replaced a more linguistically focused 30-CATS points module. This change was driven by a faculty policy to offer only 60-credit modules at undergraduate level following studies that showed larger credit modules had superior retention rates. (On the design and objectives of this hybrid OU module, as well as its success in retaining more students, see Lloyd and Robson 2019).
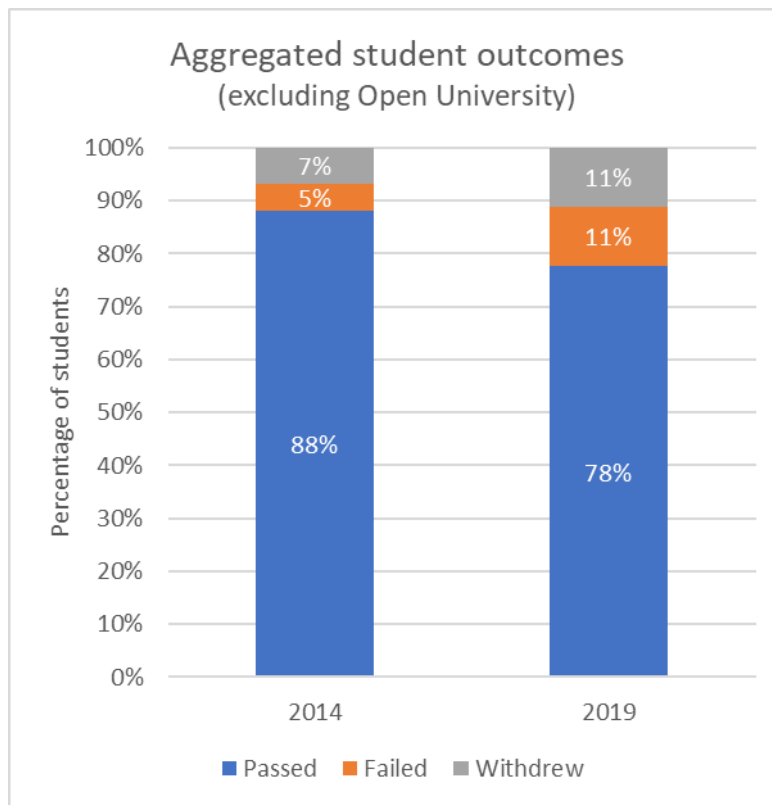
5. Student pass rates

Q *How many students took the final exam (or equivalent)?*

Q *How many students passed the module (including those who passed on resit)?*

The following table shows the aggregate number of students who either passed, failed or withdrew from the 30 beginners' Latin modules included in the 2019 survey. Three sets of figures are given: (i) all students; (ii) all students in conventional (i.e. exclusively or predominantly face-to-face) universities; and (iii) Open University students (i.e. where all students are exclusively distance learners).

	Pass	**Fail**	**Withdrawal**
All students	**76%** (676 out of 888)	**9%** (81 out of 888)	**15%** (131 out of 888)
All students excluding OU	**78%** (568 out of 731)	**11%** (81 out of 731)	**11%** (82 out of 731)
OU students	**69%** (108 out of 157)	**0%** (0 out of 108)	**31%** (49 out of 157)

The overall pass rate of 76% is essentially in line with the 77% recorded in the 2014 survey. More striking, however, is the decline in the pass rate when OU students are discounted. Disappointingly, in conventional universities this has fallen from 88% in the 2014 survey (640 students out of 727) to 78% in 2019 (568 out of 731), a drop of 10%. The percentage of withdrawals also grew in conventional universities: up from 7% in 2014 (49 out of 727 students) to 11% in 2019 (82 students out of 731).

Aggregated student outcomes (excluding Open University)

The following graph provides a detailed overview of the proportion of passes, fails and student withdrawals on each of the 30 modules surveyed in 2019. While five modules had pass rates of 100%, and another six could boast pass rates of over 90%, a further five universities had success rates of 50% or lower.


Student outcomes (2019) (30 modules)
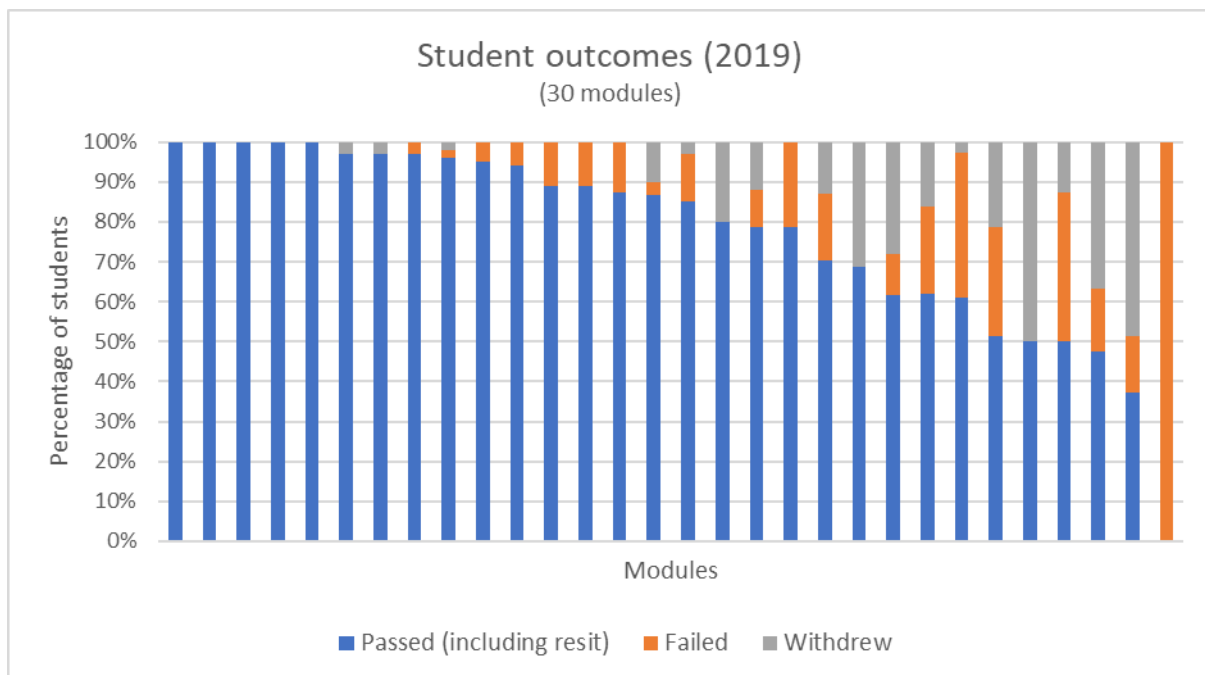
The following graph shows changes in the starter pass rate between 2014 and 2019 for those 22 universities where valid figures were available for both years. The changes were calculated by subtracting each 2014 pass rate from the corresponding 2019 pass rate. The pass rate for the university with two modules in 2019 was aggregated here (i.e. treated as a single grouped module) to give one figure for comparison with that of 2014.

Change in starter pass rate 2014 to 2019 (22 universities)
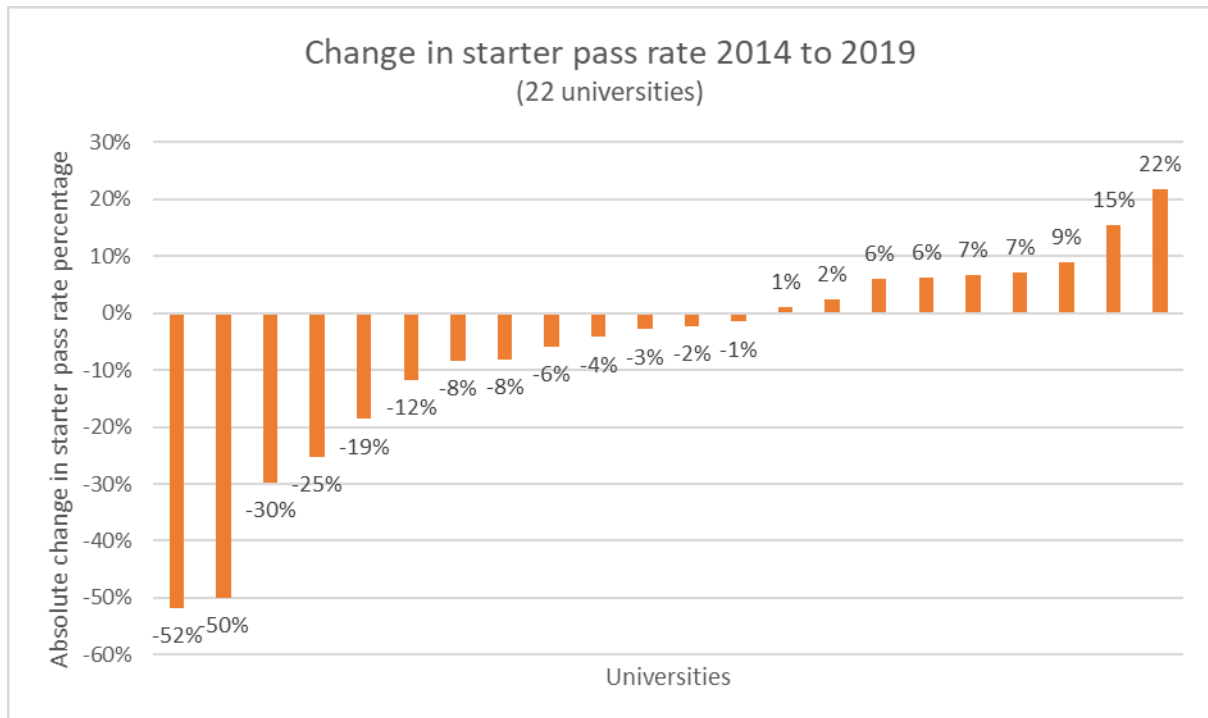
This graph makes it clear that the drop in the aggregated pass rate across 28 universities shown in the bar chart at the beginning of this section is not the result of a shared tendency towards lower pass rates, but of a mix of losses and gains in different institutions. It is also important not to attribute the aggregated drop to one or two universities with large changes in pass rate: these are sometimes based on small enrolment figures (e.g. one of these universities had only one undergraduate Latin student in 2019) making consequent changes to the aggregate negligible.
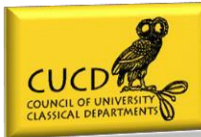
6. Class sizes

Q: Please estimate the average class size for groups taking this module. (Choice of 1-4, 5-9, 10-14, 15-19, 20-24 or 25 or more)

17 out of 28 institutions reported dividing their students into more than one class for Latin instruction, while 11 taught all their beginners' Latinists a single group. A further institution used a mixture of whole-cohort lectures and small-group seminars. Around 60 separate teaching groups were reported overall.

Students on 60% of the beginners' Latin modules surveyed in 2019 (i.e.18 out of a total of 30) were taught in classes of 10-19 students. Five modules (17%) benefited from class sizes of under ten, while on a further seven modules (23%) students were taught in classes of 20 or more.

Direct comparison with the 2014 survey is challenging, since figures were collected and analysed in our previous survey in a different way. Of the 46 separate classes (taught across 23 institutions) whose sizes were captured in the 2014 report, 26% (12) contained fewer than 10 students, 54% (25) 10-20, and 20% (9) over 20.

Class sizes (2019)
(30 modules)

7. Course books

Q. Which course books are used on the ab initio Latin module(s) at your university?

Textbooks used in 2014 and 2019

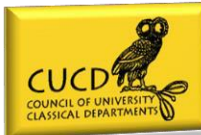| Textbook	2014 (27 modules)	2019 (30 modules)
Jones & Sidwell, Reading Latin	10	8
Wheelock, Latin: an introductory course	8	6
Keller & Russell, Learn to read Latin	2	3
Powell, Veni Vide Vince!	2	2
Oulton, So you really want to learn Latin	1	2
Ørberg, Lingua Latina per se illustrata		2
Balme & Morwood, Oxford Latin Course	1	1
CSCP, Cambridge Latin Course	1	1
Goldman & Nyenhuis, Latin via Ovid	1	1
Cobban & Colbourn, Civis Romanus		1
Cullen & Taylor, Latin to GCSE		1
Dickey, Learn Latin from the Romans		1
Blecher & Maltby, Wiley's real Latin	1	
Betts, Teach yourself Latin	1	
Colebourn, Latin sentence and idiom	1	
Moreland & Fleisher, Latin an intensive course	1	
Shelmerdine, Introduction to Latin	1	
Other (not specified)	1	
None	1	
Bespoke in-house material	1	4

Number of modules

■ 2014 (27 modules) ■ 2019 (30 modules)

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Out of 30 respondents, four reported using more than one textbook. Two of these supplemented *Reading Latin* with another textbook (Wheelock and *Cambridge Latin Course* respectively), while another used Keller and Russell alongside *Lingua Latina per se illustrata*. A further institution supplemented *Civis Romanus* with its own materials.

As in the 2014 survey, two textbooks continued to dominate the *ab initio* Latin scene, though neither loomed quite as large as they once did. *Reading Latin* retained its number one spot, with eight out of the 29 instructors reporting using it in 2019 (albeit sometimes alongside another textbook: see above) compared to ten of the 27 respondents in 2014. Wheelock had similarly lost a few fans, down from eight users in 2014 to six in 2019. Keller and Russell was in third spot with three users and forms part of a group of less widely used textbooks that had essentially held their ground since 2014. They did this despite the arrival of some new kids on the block, such as *Lingua Latina per se illustrata* (two users) as well as *Latin via Ovid*, *Learn Latin from the Romans*, *Latin to GCSE*, and *Civis Romanus* (one apiece). Interestingly, these last two coursebooks, as well the *OLC* and *CLC* which continue to have their adherents in UK universities, are primarily aimed at school-age learners rather than undergraduates. The use of what are essentially school textbooks, combined with the fact that in 2019, four universities had developed their own bespoke materials, suggests that a number of instructors did not see existing university-level textbooks as successfully serving their students' needs.

8. Material covered and credits gained

Q: Please indicate the level which ab initio *students are expected to reach by the end of this* ab initio *module. Where appropriate, please describe this in terms of the chapter which students were expected to reach in a set textbook (or if this isn't applicable, in terms of GCSE, AS level or A level equivalence).*

In answering this question, some respondents referenced the course book used (e.g. *Reading Latin*, *Wheelock*); others stated the scope of the module in other ways, e.g. through rough equivalence to GCSE or A Level study; and a few did both.

As can be seen from the responses below, there are differences in the quantity of
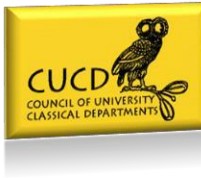
material that students study per credit, though on the whole these are less marked than in 2014 (when, for example, one set of students gained just 20 credits for reaching the end of *Reading Latin* Section 4G, while others gained 40 credits for reaching Section 4A).

(Note that credits are given in terms of CATS/SCOTCAT points rather than ECTS and that when one book is used to supplement another, only the main book may appear in this list.)

Reading Latin
20 credits: Section 2E
20 credits: Section 2E
20 credits: Section 3D
30 credits: Section 3D
30 credits: Section 4A

Wheelock
15 credits: Chapter 19
15 credits: Chapter 20
20 credits: Chapter 16
20 credits: Chapter 22
20 credits: Chapter 24

Keller and Russell, *Learn to Read Latin*
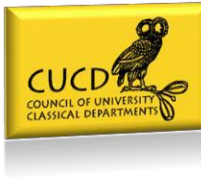15 credits: End of Chapter 3
20 credits: End of Chapter 6
30 credits: End of book

Powell, *Veni, Vidi, Vince!*
20 credits: Unit 12
30 credits: Unit 30

Oulton, *So You Really Want to Learn Latin*

15 credits: End of Volume 1

Ørberg, *Lingua Latina per se illustrata*

30 credits: Chapter 25

Oxford Latin Course

20 credits: End of Book 2

Goldman and Hyenhuis, *Latin via Ovid*

40 credits: Chapter 30

Taylor, *Latin to GCSE*

20 credits: End of Book 1

Dickey, Learn Latin from the Romans

20 credits: Chapter 30

Other

15 credits: Not quite the level of GCSE, but approaching it

30 credits: Approximately GCSE; no original Latin read.

30 credits: The main focus of the module is to enable students to read unseen authentic Latin texts (e.g. New Testament Latin and inscriptions) with the use of dictionaries and/or other relevant handbooks.

30 credits: A Level

40 credits: Equivalent grammar to A level or thereabouts

60 credits: Somewhere between GCSE and AS level upon completion (NB This module is a split between the study of language and literature in translation).

Other credit value: A level; they enter the following year of their degree as equivalent to students who have come with A level.

9. Assessment methods

Q: How is the ab initio *Latin module assessed?*

Final examinations were a popular form of assessment (used by all but three of the 30 modules in our survey), as were in-course tests (used by all but four). This is a similar picture to the 2014 survey where, of the 21 valid responses, 18 stated that their *ab initio* Latin module was assessed (at least in part) by a final examination, and 16 by using in-course tests.

One significant change is the increased use of 'other assessed coursework', however. This featured in the assessment of 11 of the modules surveyed in 2019 (just over a third) compared to five in 2014.
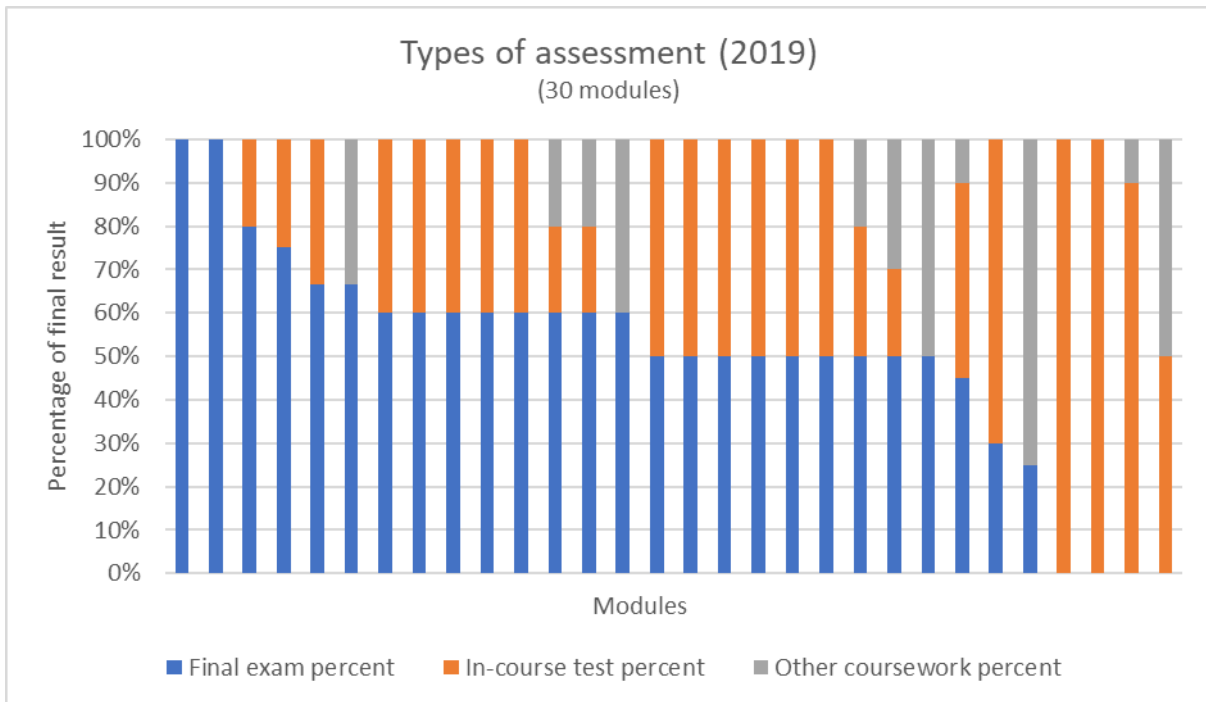
'Other assessed coursework' included the following:

- In-class tests;

- Continuous assessment, based on two in-class examinations (45% each) plus weekly quizzes (10%: best five out of seven to count);

- Open book, online tests for which students may use any tools at their disposal, including dictionaries and online study tools;

- Tutorial work;

- Performance in class activities/class translations;

- 'Latin in Action' assignment, on the basis of a Latin text (e.g. a short poem) plus translation(s). Questions are about forms and grammar, but also about interpretation, with focus on details of the Latin (often on the basis of a comparison with translation(s)).

- Take-home translations;

- Portfolio of assessments (50%) and in-class examination; these include a range of grammar and syntax questions, seen and unseen translations and comprehension questions, and a source analysis;

- Written assignments covering grammar and translation, but also the study of Roman history, culture and literature in translation, with assessment tasks including source analysis, a short essay (on the *Aeneid*) and the comparison of two translations of a Latin poem.

Q: Is the use of dictionaries allowed in exams or other assessments for* ab initio *module(s)?
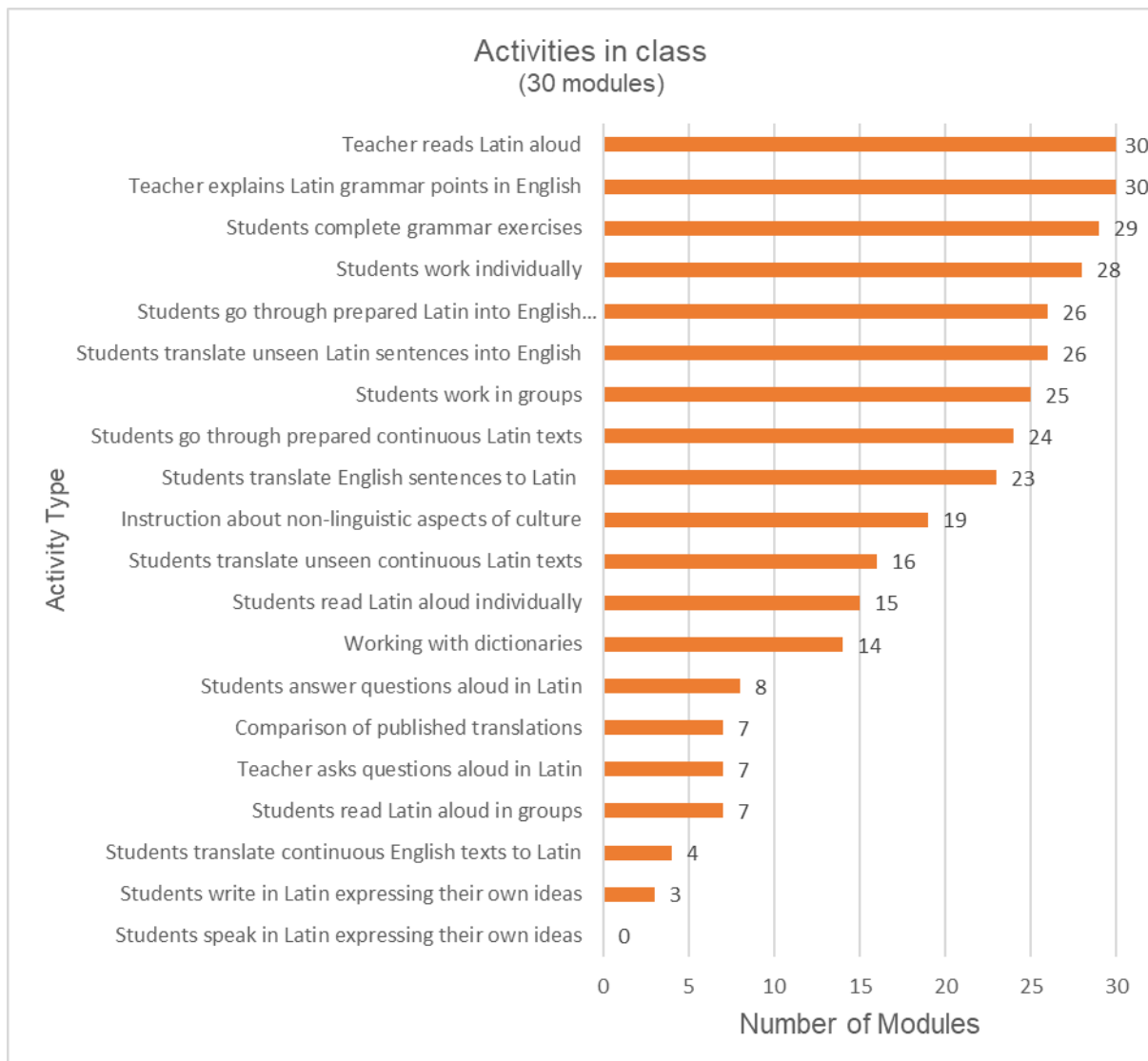
There has been a slight decline in the proportion of institutions allowing the use of dictionaries by students for assessment tasks. Whereas 44% (12) of the 27 modules surveyed in 2014 permitted their use either in the exam and/or for other assessment purposes, this was true for only 33% (10) of the 30 modules surveyed in 2019.
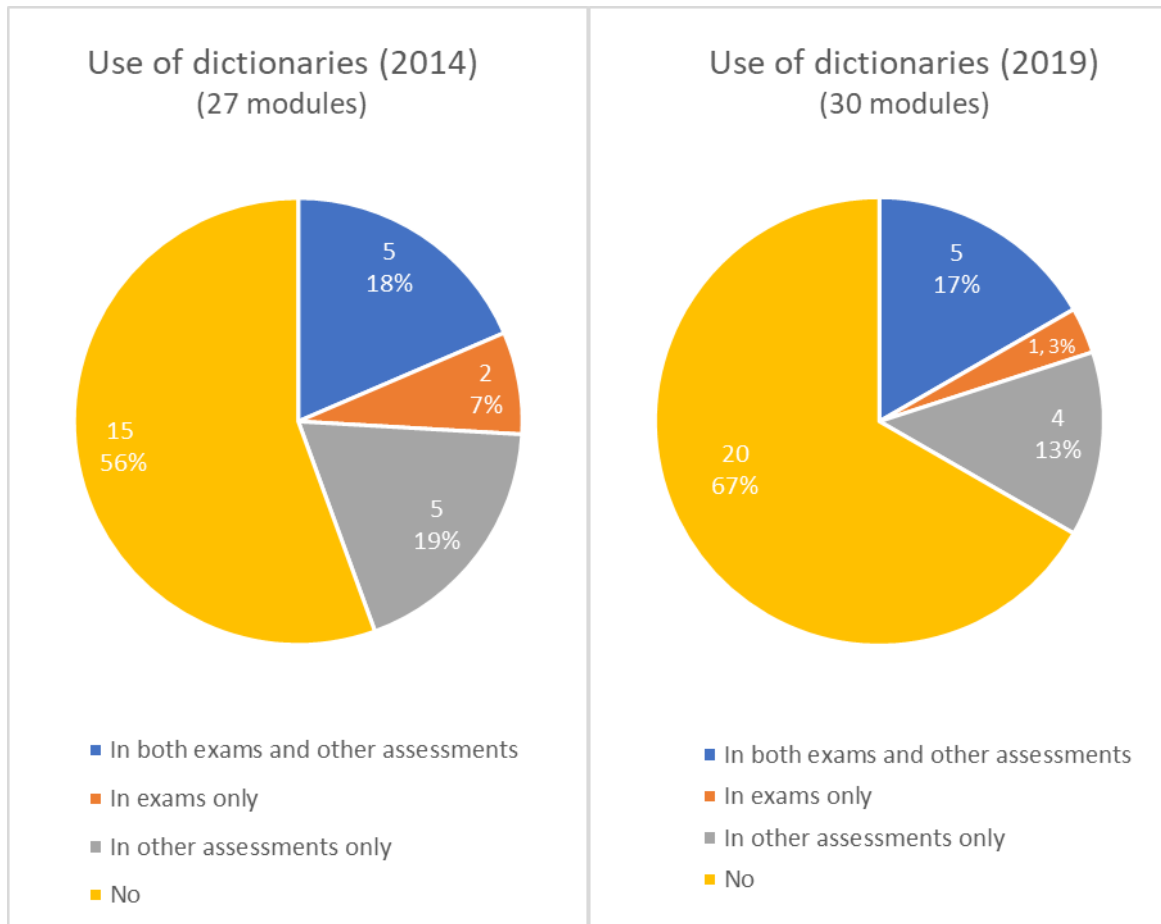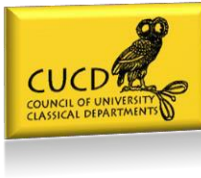
10. Teaching and learning methods

Study in Class

Q: Which of the following activities take place during classes on this ab initio **Latin module?**

Activities in class
(30 modules)

Activity Type	Number of Modules
Teacher reads Latin aloud	30
Teacher explains Latin grammar points in English	30
Students complete grammar exercises	29
Students work individually	28
Students go through prepared Latin into English…	26
Students translate unseen Latin sentences into English	26
Students work in groups	25
Students go through prepared continuous Latin texts	24
Students translate English sentences to Latin	23
Instruction about non-linguistic aspects of culture	19
Students translate unseen continuous Latin texts	16
Students read Latin aloud individually	15
Working with dictionaries	14
Students answer questions aloud in Latin	8
Comparison of published translations	7
Teacher asks questions aloud in Latin	7
Students read Latin aloud in groups	7
Students translate continuous English texts to Latin	4
Students write in Latin expressing their own ideas	3
Students speak in Latin expressing their own ideas	0

Other in-class activities listed include:

- Revision of case forms/verb forms as warm-up;
- Quick exercises, such as *imple spatia* [fill in the gaps], *corrige menda* [correct the mistakes], *non huius generis* [odd one out], usually in groups;
- Students are asked to correct a translation made by the teacher which contains deliberate mistakes;

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- Students do grammar exercises based on English to master grammatical concepts (such as the relative pronoun);
- Discussions of vocabulary and derivations;
- Parsing of verbs in texts being read;
- Teacher hovers around when students are working in small groups and helps;
- Students work in groups to pool ideas as to meaning of words/phrases that they have to deduce when reading the passage in preparation for the next lesson;
- Online self-training;
- Actions to help physicalise vocabulary;
- Dressing up to act out scenes that they have read;
- Singing in Latin in the last session before Christmas;
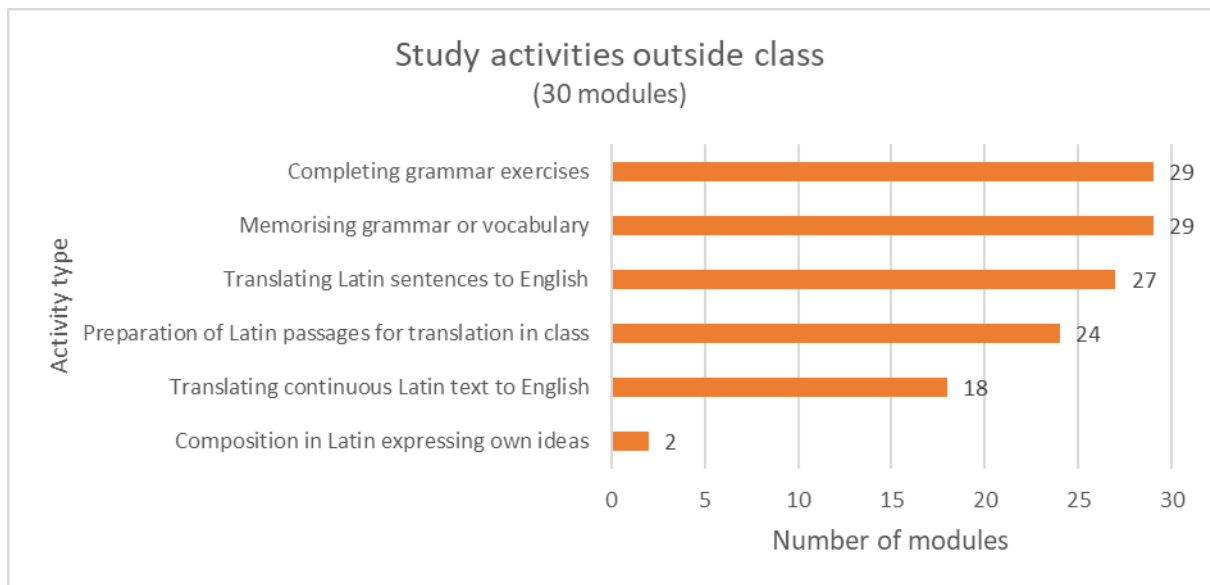- Reading songs in Latin and then singing them.

The popularity of most activities remained fairly constant between 2014 and 2019. Of the few noteworthy shifts, there was an increase in 'instruction about non-linguistic aspects of culture', up from 10 (out of 27) in 2014 to 19 (out of 30) in 2019. The number of teachers using unseen Latin texts in class had fallen from 20 in 2014 to 16 in 2019, although 26 instructors reported using unseen Latin *sentences* with their classes (compared to 24 in 2014). In 2014, two respondents reported asking their students to write in Latin expressing their own ideas during class time; in 2019 three instructors reported doing this in class and two outside class (see below). Disappointingly (for Mair at least), no tutors reported students speaking to express their own ideas in Latin either in 2014 or 2019, though the figure for students responding to questions in Latin has held steady at eight modules.

Study outside class

Q: Which of the following activities are required of ab initio *students outside class time?*

Study activities outside class
(30 modules)

Activity type	Number of modules
Completing grammar exercises	29
Memorising grammar or vocabulary	29
Translating Latin sentences to English	27
Preparation of Latin passages for translation in class	24
Translating continuous Latin text to English	18
Composition in Latin expressing own ideas	2

Other activities listed include:

- Translating English sentences in Latin;
- Grammatical exercises based on English;
- Reading the explanations of grammar in the textbook, on handouts or from *English Grammar for Students of Latin*;
- Listening to recordings of the chapter before the next lesson;
- Reading through (no translation!) a passage of Latin for comprehension;
- Free-writing in Latin for a fixed time (usually ten minutes) based on a story just read, either summarising it or taking it off in an amusing direction;
- Online self-training;
- Preparation of questions (on grammar, interpretation, choice of words and expression, etc.) about Latin texts accompanied by translations;
- Preparation of a gobbet-style discussion of a source e.g. an inscription.
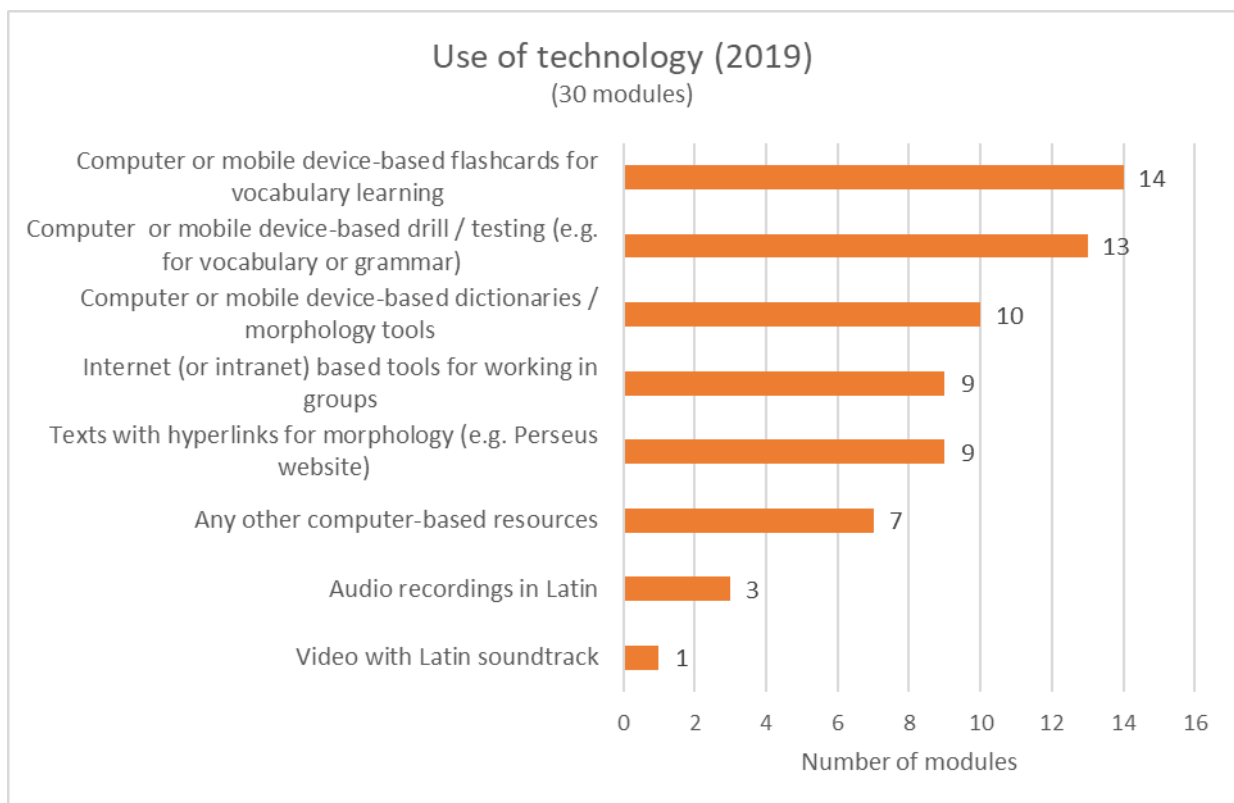
As with in-class activities, the overall picture shows relatively little change since the 2014 survey, with the exception of 'translating continuous Latin text to English', which dipped from 23 out of 27 responses to 16 out of 30. That said, the translation
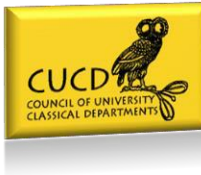
of Latin sentences into English was still an extremely common homework task, with students on 26 modules required to do this.

11. Technology

Q: Which of the following materials are used for teaching on this ab initio *module? Please include anything used in class or actively encouraged for use in students' own time.*

Use of technology (2019)
(30 modules)

| Material	Number of modules
Computer or mobile device-based flashcards for vocabulary learning	14
Computer or mobile device-based drill / testing (e.g. for vocabulary or grammar)	13
Computer or mobile device-based dictionaries / morphology tools	10
Internet (or intranet) based tools for working in groups	9
Texts with hyperlinks for morphology (e.g. Perseus website)	9
Any other computer-based resources	7
Audio recordings in Latin	3
Video with Latin soundtrack	1

Perhaps surprisingly, there was little reported change in the use of technology between 2014 and 2019, with levels of use either remaining roughly static (e.g. 14 respondents each time reporting that their students were actively encouraged to use electronic flashcards) or even falling off (e.g. online/mobile grammar testing being utilised by students in 17 out of 27 modules in 2014 compared to just 13 out of 30 in 2019). Indeed, the only increase revealed in our survey was the use of 'internet (or intranet)-based tools for working in groups', utilised by students on nine modules in 2019 compared to five in 2014. (NB As stated in the Introduction, this survey was

carried out before the Covid pandemic struck the UK and so does not capture any changes in teaching methods that might have occurred since 2020.)

Q: Would you say that the use of technology for Latin teaching is actively embraced by colleagues within your Classics department or Classics-related subject area?
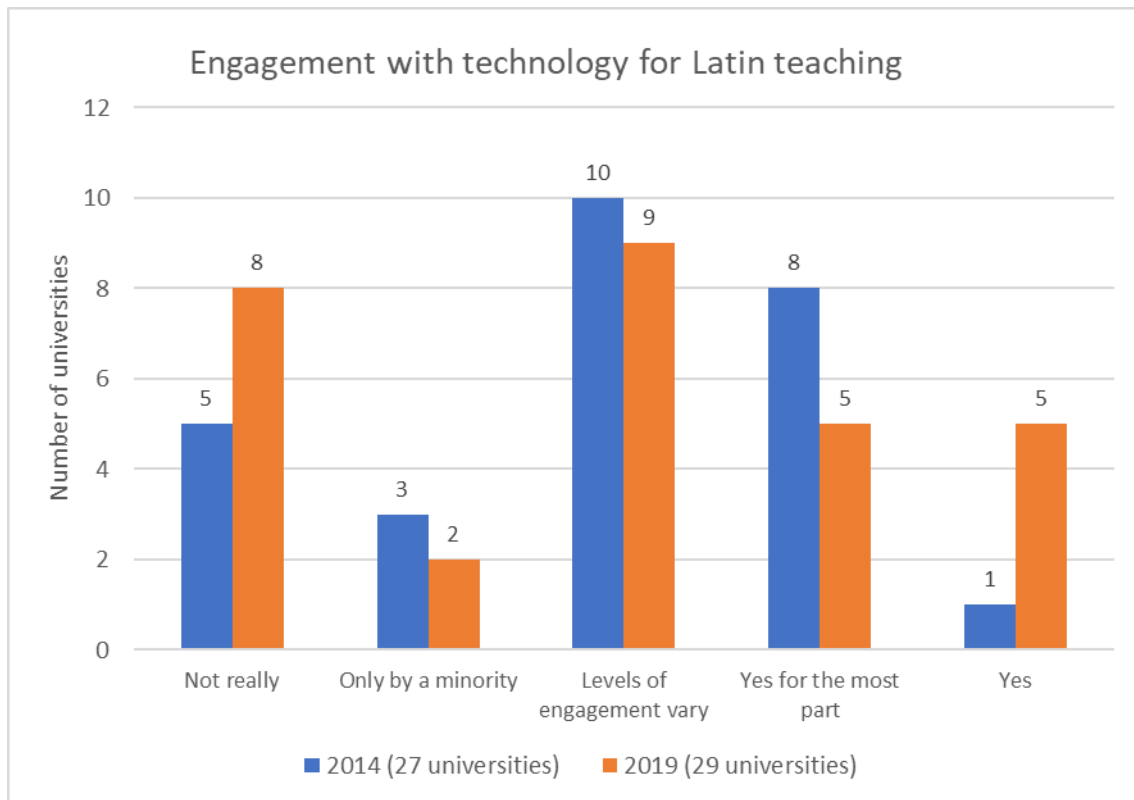
As in the 2014 survey, the responses for 2019 show that roughly a third (10 of 29) of instructors reported that their colleagues were positively inclined towards the use of technology for Latin instruction, with another third seeing the picture as mixed, and a further third finding their colleagues less than enthusiastic. Interestingly, opinions seem to be a little more entrenched than before, with the number of clear 'yes's rising from one to five (4% to 17%) and the number of 'not really's from five to eight (19% to 28%).

12. Module features

Q: Are there any features of this module that you would like to explain in greater depth and/or which you feel differentiate it from other universities (e.g. in terms of target audience, teaching arrangements or assessment)?

Most respondents took the opportunity to comment under this heading, providing interesting reflections on their experience and experiments with *ab initio* teaching. Some outlined the distinctive features of their teaching and/or assessment, while others described the (shifting) challenges of teaching today's cohorts of students. A few noted the frustrations of teaching within university systems that did not always provide a good fit for the unique challenges of Latin learning (e.g. by failing to provide easy exit routes for students who struggle or by requiring their Latin module to align with a particular institutional module format to which it was ill suited).

One theme to emerge was the fact that a number of beginners' modules included an 'applied Latin' element which aimed to connect up with students' broader studies:

Teaching and assessment within the module were a combination of small-group *ab initio* grammar classes and larger seminars which looked at Latin 'in context' (classical and post-classical elegy, inscriptions, historiography, maps and geography, etc.). So, the language was immediately 'applied' within historical (and literary) contexts. The bulk of the assessment took the form of source criticism or essays (in English).

[One hour a week] is taken up with authentic texts, divided between ancient (tombstones, the Christmas gospel) and medieval (the Bayeux tapestry, the Officium Stellae). We also read a large number of neo-Latin inscriptions of various kinds, from tombstones to pub signs.

We utilise object-based learning and organise visits to libraries and museums to view collections and teach Latin through interaction with real editions and manuscripts in Latin.

In the *Latin in Action* component, … we train students from the beginning in literary analysis based on details of the text.
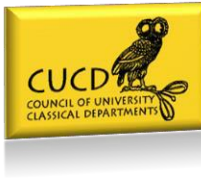
[T]his is very much a language + culture module. 50% of students' time is spent on cultural topics, e.g. the early history of Rome and the literature of the Roman Republic, using the synthetic Latin as a springboard for this study and bringing out, where possible, the ways in which an even elementary knowledge of Latin can allow more meaningful access to Roman culture (e.g. by looking at key Roman terms, values and concepts). In the latter stages of the module, students also work with parallel texts and explore the different ways in which translators approach their task, one aim here being to encourage students to acquire skills to 'read through translation' and make critical judgements about the translations they will inevitably use in other modules when they study the classical world.

Some respondents detailed ways in which they were trying out new pedagogical approaches:

I am experimenting with using some techniques that are central to the teaching of modern languages and which I believe are not used elsewhere in the UK on a core, non-optional course for Latin. I was attracted to it not to train students to speak Latin (this would require much more contact time) but to increase the amount of Latin they are exposed to.

Key differences from my previous practice [are]: we never translate passages – I or they occasionally translate the odd phrase; we do not have vocabulary tests, ever; I do explain some grammatical concepts in Latin.

[W]e spend a lot of time … making the activities as physical, visual and gamified as we can – e.g. team challenges around sentence construction using flashcards.

Others detailed (successful and unsuccessful) experiments with technology:

In all quizzes, students are expected to be under some time pressure so as to enable us to assess core knowledge despite access to all aids, and to improve mark differentiation. Online testing has proven as effective in evaluating student achievement as the equivalent in-class hard-copy testing used previously, did, producing a broadly comparable mark distribution.
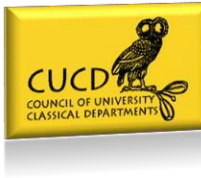
> I have tried courses with computer-related exercises, but in my experience students do not respond well to them, even to vocab learning which I think is really helpful. So we are back to the traditional handbook for learning and preparation.

A number of instructors commented on the challenges of teaching modern cohorts of students:

> Huge effort goes into explaining English as a preface to explaining Latin construction of sentences and passages based on research into Latin language and linguistics.

> [E]veryone has to study one of the two classical languages at an appropriate level … so we try to pitch it at a level which will put those continuing in a good position for the future, but which is sufficiently approachable for others who have difficulties with language learning. We now class those with GCSE two years previously as 'beginners' as it became clear five years ago that even an A* was not enough to enable first years to cope with our intermediate course.

As mentioned above, for some instructors, the university structures in which they were working presented unwelcome challenges:

> [T]he university rules regarding the changing of modules is very tight and only allows this up to the end of the third week of the first term. There is at present no flexibility on this rule. … This means we have a number forced to continue on a module which they will clearly not pass. We are trying to address this by a restructuring of the module into two distinct parts.

> [T]here was an institution-wide shift from 20 to 15 credit modules. … Because it was felt that *ab initio* Latin could not really be taught as 25% of a student load in one semester, the decision was reluctantly taken to 'shrink' the module … . Teaching does not now include grammar elements (though students are given guidance on self-tuition in language, and are pointed towards other language acquisition tools).
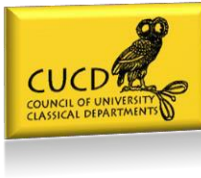
13. Innovation

Q: Are there materials or resources that you or your colleagues have developed specifically for ab initio *students? If so, please describe them briefly here.*

A number of respondents said they had produced bespoke materials for their students. These included:

- Worksheets;
- A book of exercises;
- Running vocabulary and notes on Latin passages;
- Summaries of the grammatical points and vocabulary tested by individual in-course tests;
- A full set of teaching materials for grammar teaching;
- A full Latin grammar;
- A bespoke in-house course;
- Online quizzes, testing grammar, syntax, translation and vocabulary (including extensive resources supporting the study of *Reading Latin* and *Veni, Vide, Vince!* respectively)
- Online assessment, e.g. reusable, randomized tests that can be individualized for students;
- 'Vidcast' and PowerPoint explanations of grammatical and syntactical points, made available to students on the VLE;
- Other handouts and exercise sheets uploaded to the VLE;
- Recordings of Latin passages;
- Recordings of tables for use on mobile devices to help students memorise forms;
- Audio resources exploring various cultural and linguistic topics (e.g. the development of Romance languages from Latin);
- A facility for online contact between students to provide peer-to-peer support;
- A bank of post-medieval epigraphy (primarily local) to explain and reinforce grammatical features, e.g. stained glass windows and pub signs which illustrate the desired feature and nothing else;

- Props and costumes to help physicalise passages read in class.

In addition, the Open University has developed free, open access interactive resources for beginners: Introducing Classical Latin and Getting Started on Classical Latin.

Concluding remarks

As we outlined in the introduction to this article, part of what inspired us to undertake the 2019 survey of beginners' Latin teaching in UK universities was a desire to find out more about which factors contributed to student success, withdrawal and failure on these modules. With this aim in mind, we set ourselves the task of doing some seriously geeky, large-scale number-crunching, using the data we obtained to plot the starter pass, completer pass and withdrawal rates of learners against many module variables, such as module credit value, class size, and so on. Our methodology and findings are laid out in more detail (and with the help of some pretty cool graphs) in Lloyd and Robson 2023a, but the headlines are as follows.

On the whole, module duration and credit value had no discernible impact on student success. However, plotting pass rates against the number of contact hours revealed a more interesting picture, including an apparent difference between the pass rates of modules offering four contact hours or fewer (where the average starter pass rate was 69%) and those few modules where students benefited from more classroom time (the four institutions providing students with five contact hours a week or more had an average pass rate of 95%). Class size may also have a minor impact on student outcomes, since the five modules that taught students in classes of 25 or more performed marginally less well than the modules in our survey which taught their learners in classes of 20 or fewer (the average starter pass rates of larger v smaller classes were 74% v 79% respectively). Textbooks were another factor where some notable differences emerged: Powell's *Veni, Vide, Vince!* underpinned high student success rates in the two institutions which used it as the only textbook (where the aggregate starter pass rate was 92%); this compares markedly with the aggregate starter pass rates for those universities which taught only from *Wheelock* (74%) or *Reading Latin* (63%) (though some individual modules using these popular

textbooks also reported impressive starter pass rates, as high as 100% in one case). One of the cool graphs from Lloyd and Robson 2023a illustrates starter pass rates for the most popular textbooks, included overleaf. (Note that, like the figures above, the graph only shows results for modules where a single textbook is used; where modules use more than one book, comparison is less straightforward.)

Starter pass rate against unique text-book used
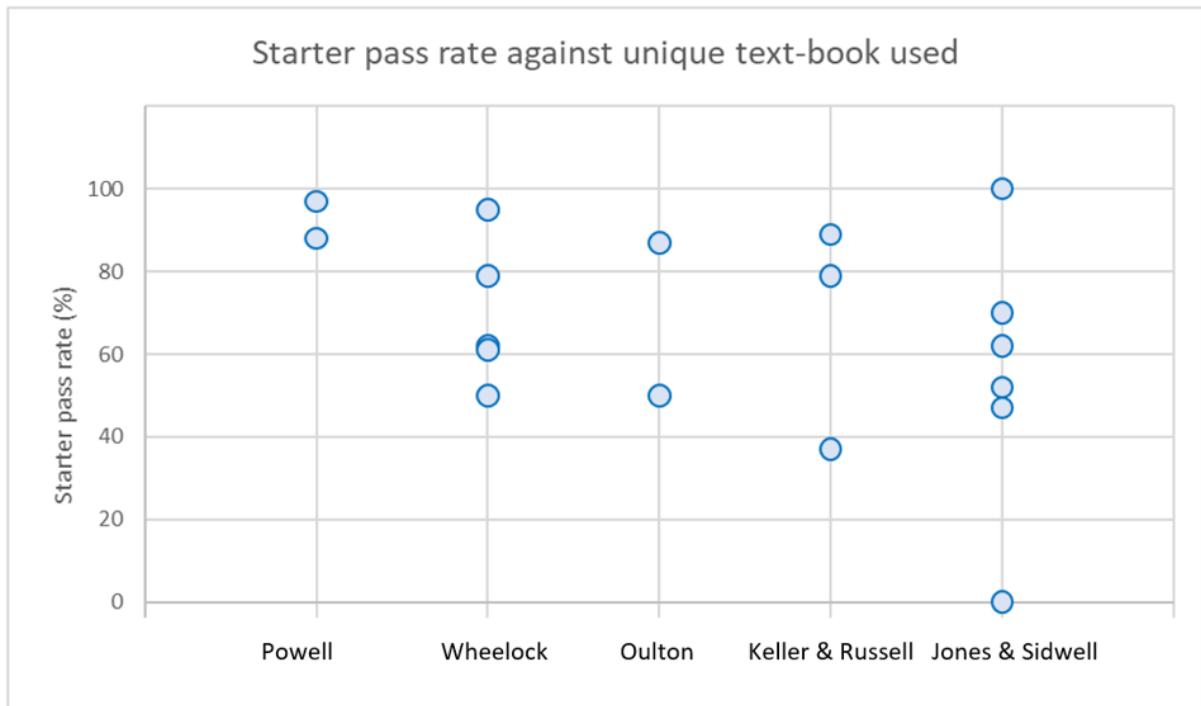
Lastly, while the use of final examinations as opposed to in-course tests seemed to make little difference to average student outcomes in conventional universities, modules employing 'other assessed coursework' as part of their assessment strategy *did* report higher than average starter pass rates (85% for modules that used coursework v 75% for those that did not).

So, where does all this leave us? Well, to summarise our findings boldly, it seems fair to say that we identified no simple way to address the problems of failure and withdrawal among students taking beginners' Latin at university – no magic formula that can be used to ensure that all students successfully complete their module. But importantly, our findings nevertheless provide some food for thought for any beginners' Latin instructors inspired to make changes to their teaching and assessment strategies with the goal of improving student outcomes.
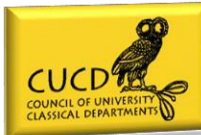
The fact that our analysis of the quantitative data provided no straightforward answers made it all the more important that we had included a further element in our project – a series of classroom observations and interviews with instructors and students to help us better understand the challenges of Latin learning from the point of view of undergraduates. The qualitative data we captured in these interviews allowed us detailed insight into the perceived difficulties – as well as the opportunities – that Latin learning at this level presents. To summarise boldly once again, our study ultimately showed the importance for any student cohort of the relationship between the instructor (and their preferred pedagogical approach) and the students (and *their* preferred learning approach), with the textbook and class dynamic both inside and outside the classroom also forming a crucial part of the mix.

Pleasingly, the students we interviewed were both helpful and enthusiastic about passing on advice to others embarking on the study of Latin for the first time at university. Their ideas can be neatly categorised under three headings: expectations, actions and attitude. First, they recommended that beginners should have a realistic idea of the difficulties they would meet and, rather than be thrown into panic by initial challenges, they should be ready to persist and keep putting in the hours. Actions that they judged would help with progress included: keeping up with the pace of the class through regular attendance; adopting a 'little and often' study pattern; asking questions and seeking help promptly; prioritising the memorisation of vocabulary and grammar; experimenting to find effective learning methods; and building a community of friends to study with. Finally, our students urged others to adopt an attitude that let them find the fun and joy in their studies. This advice, expressed by the students in their own words, is published in full as part of an article in which we summarise these interviews and analyse the implications of the themes to emerge for the future of university Latin teaching in the UK (Lloyd and Robson 2023b).

It is clear from our work that there is much still to be done to understand the factors that drive successful student outcomes. We look forward to progressing our own research in two new directions: first by exploring in more depth teaching practices proving successful in a number of UK universities; and second, by finding ways to hear and amplify the voices of those students who did not succeed in their *ab initio* modules. We also want to encourage others to take forward research and share

practices that improve student outcomes. Certainly, it would be wonderful to be able to report in a future CUCD Bulletin that pass rates and retention rates had finally improved.

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