



Initial Teacher Education for Classics. England, 2023. The current position.

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Introduction

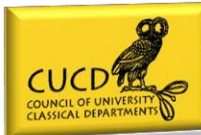
If we want classical subjects not merely to survive in UK schools but also to expand, we also need to find ways of expanding teacher training. There is a shortage of trained classic teachers for both state maintained and independent schools.ⁱ

However, present government policies make expansion of teacher training provision for classical subjects challenging to achieve, as this article aims to demonstrate.

First, the number of placements available for Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in classical subjects remains small, despite the best efforts of a number of provider institutions, with around only 75 placements available each year (see Figure 2).

These numbers are clearly insufficient to meet the demands of secondary school Classics across the UK, with around 250 vacancies advertised in the Times Educational Supplement in 2022-23, for example.ⁱⁱ

Second, the Department for Education (DfE) approach to teacher training provision since the Coalition Government of 2010-16 has long subjected ITE to endless policy shifts, which have created turmoil and inconsistency in the allocation of placements, provider types and funding models.ⁱⁱⁱ Education policy has been marked by hostility to academic expertise more generally (Jones, 2022) and university-based ITE in particular (Bousted, 2022). In an interview with TES Magazine in December 2022, Nick Gibb, Schools Minister and architect of many of the reforms, said that the DfE



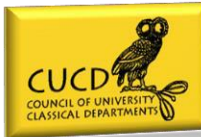
'had to blow up the concrete' of vested professional interests, which he saw as a hangover from the 'progressive education of the 1960s and 1970s' embedded in (among other places) the ITE departments of universities (Gibb, 2022). The destruction of a system, however imperfect, has left us instead with a set of disparate and competing institutions, ill-suited to the nature of getting the job done, as evidenced by the current failure to recruit and retain teachers.^{iv} More specifically for ITE in classical subjects, provision has been patchy and variable, with small placement numbers, and training route availability (Partington, 2011; Hunt, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2013). Numbers, while small, have recently held steady, however, and only time will tell if they will not change for better or worse if the present government, which remains broadly positive towards classical languages in primary and secondary schools, is replaced in the General Election of 2024.^v

Third, the Government's ongoing ITE review and plans for further generic reforms and centralised control of ITE curricula are in danger of blotting out progress made over the years by organisations such as CSCP, Classics for All Hands-Up Education, the Primary Latin Project, and others, and may actually rise if the Latin Excellence Programme takes off in its aim of establishing new departments of Latin in 40 state-maintained schools across England.^{vi}

In the UK education is devolved: Scotland has its own system, and its own difficulties for Classics ITE as Connor (2021) has shown. I shall concentrate on England, which has by far the largest number of training providers.

ITE in England

In almost every country in the world ITE courses are university-led (Moon, 2016). However, since the education reforms of the Coalition Government of 2010-16, England has been an outlier: teachers do not have to train in a purely university system or even train at all.^{vii} Instead, there are multiple routes: 'traditional' university Postgraduate Certificates in Education (PGCEs); School-based Initial Teacher Training (SCITTs), which may be salaried or unsalaried, and which have the right to

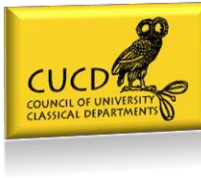


award Qualified Teacher Status and / or the PGCE either by themselves or through a link with a validating university; other apprenticeship models; and agencies such as Teach First. Would-be teachers may also choose to go to work in a state-maintained school without teaching qualifications, providing the school is a Free School or an Academy (this being one of the ‘freedoms’ apportioned to these schools as a means of encouragement to leave Local Authority control). Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) and even a PGCE can also be attained through various accreditation programmes when the teacher has already been in post for a number of years. This number and variety of routes is presented by the Government in the name of providing greater opportunities for people to train – especially those who did not want to travel to or reside in a university (such as people who have families) and those who wish to change career. It also fits with the Government’s current preference of taking training out of the universities, which are presented as hot-beds of supposedly ineffective progressive educational thinking and practices (Fazackerley, 2022).

The numbers don’t add up

For teachers of classical subjects, the opportunities for teacher training have always been more restricted than for other subjects: the University of Nottingham closed its classics PGCE course in 1994, and St. Mary’s College, Twickenham, in 2002 (Lister, 2007), leaving the University of Cambridge and King’s College, London. These two supplied around 28 trained teachers in 2006, fewer than half of those who had been trained in 1993. And yet the number of jobs advertised nationally rose in that period from 52 to 145 (Lister, 2007, pp. 99-100).

At present, around 350 state-maintained and 350 independent schools offer some form of classical subjects at examination level (GCSE or above). The number of training places have never kept pace with demand. Figure 1 shows the number of vacancies for teachers of classical subjects between 2018 and 2023 advertised in the Times Educational Supplement.^{viii} There is, of course, no way of telling how these vacancies arise. It may be through teachers leaving the education sector through retirement or for other employment, or between schools, or within them for



career advancement out of the classroom. My own figures, based on returns for entries for classical subjects at GCSE, suggest that these vacancies represent one member of staff in a quarter of secondary schools across the UK.

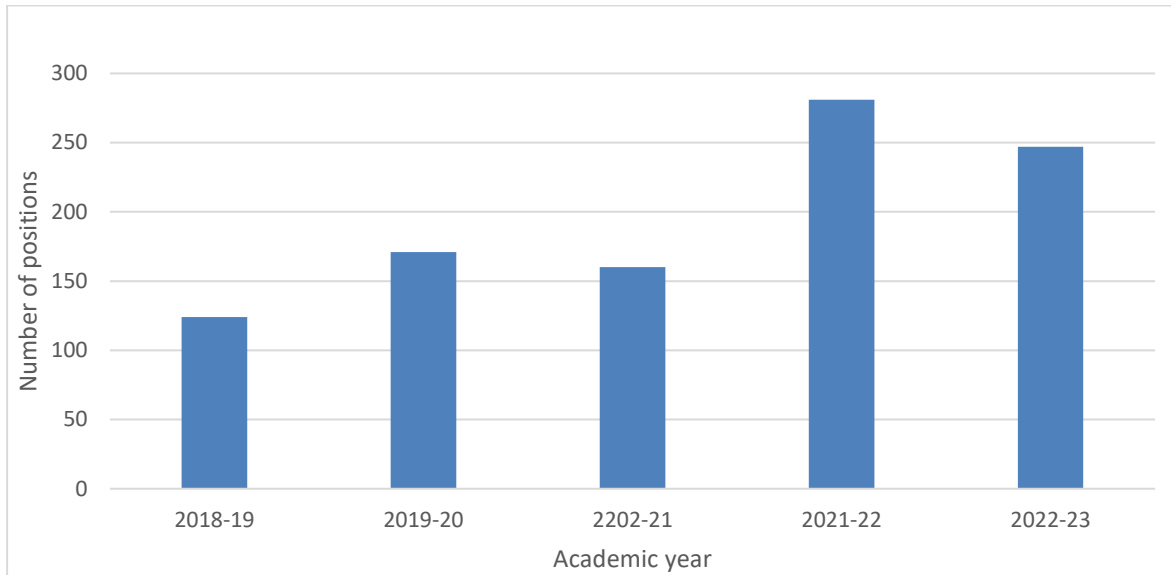


Figure 1 Positions advertised for classical subjects 2018-2023. © Steven Hunt 2023.

Inconsistency of ITE provision

During the Coalition Government (2010-16), due to Government policy to reduce the total number of all university-based PGCE courses by one quarter in order to encourage the growth in its preferred SCITT model, the number of placements at King’s and Cambridge were reduced almost so far as to make their courses financially unviable: in 2013 a mere 24 places were allocated for Classics teacher trainees. But they then rose again, governed by ever-changing education policies towards ITE and DfE awareness that their action was causing a teacher shortage across all subjects. At present, therefore, the total numbers are uncapped across all training routes for all subjects. At one point, Nick Gibb, then Minister of State for Schools, wrote to providers to encourage them to recruit even more trainee Classics teachers, which led to a number of new providers entering the market. Liverpool Hope University (in 2017) and Bishop Grosseteste University (in 2017-19) briefly dipped their toes into the water, but later withdrew, experiencing difficulties with finding placements. From 2021 Coventry University joined, and several SCITTs have been running School Direct programmes, including the multi-academy trust Future Academies Trust (based at Pimlico Academy in London), London-based Harris



Federation ITE, Liverpool College, the King Edward's Consortium in Birmingham, as well as a large number of individual schools.^{ix} The University of Sussex had already joined the Classics ITE 'fold' in 2014; most recently the University of Durham (2022) and the University of Leicester (2023) became providers of ITE in classical subjects.^x The private University of Buckingham also offers a PGCE in Classics: its provision varies from year to year according to demand and I have no figures. The Buckingham route is also almost entirely restricted to teachers who are already in post and working in independent schools.^{xi} Accordingly, I have not included it in the discussions which follow.

While there may in theory be 'no limit' to the numbers of placements offered by providers, the universities themselves restrict numbers (Cambridge, for example, counts PGCE places as Masters equivalents, for which there is a total cap across the University) and SCITTs themselves have limited capacity. So there is a tension between what the DfE would like and what universities and schools together are able to supply. Figure 2 shows the total number of training places offered between 2013-23 for classical subjects.

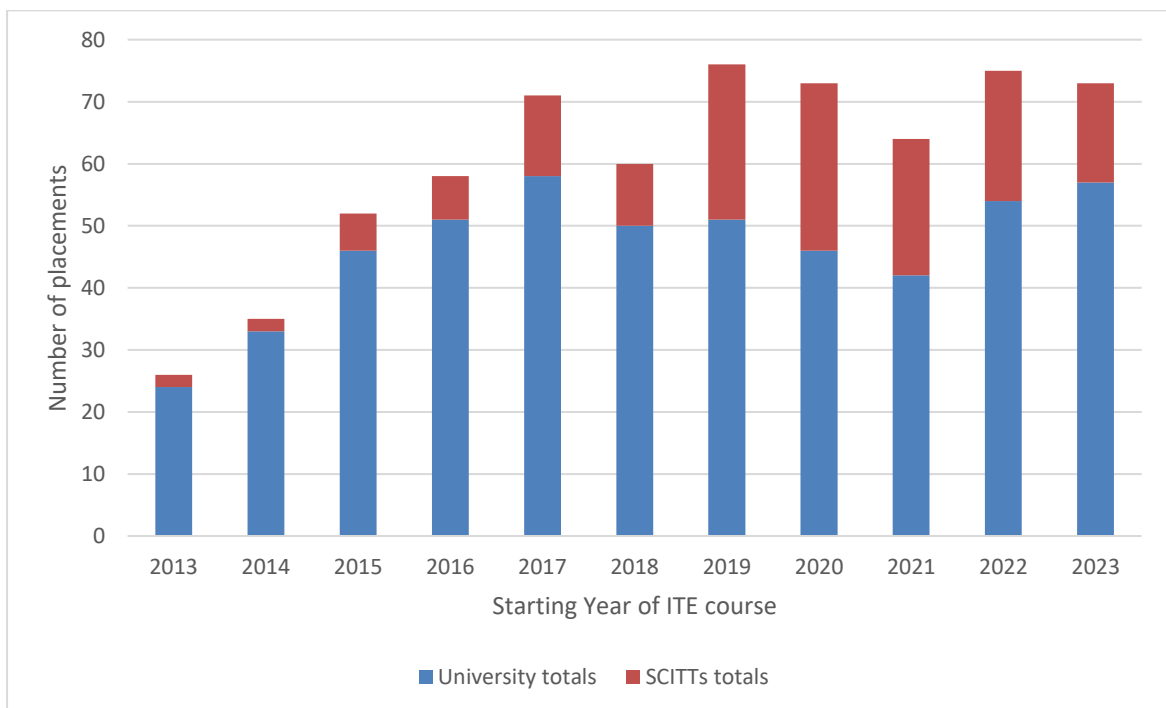
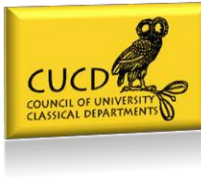


Figure 2 ITE Classics places 2013-23. © Steven Hunt 2023.

Taking Figures 1 and 2 together, it is likely that training places are around a third to



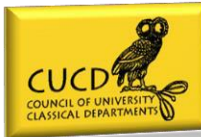
to a half of those required.

For teacher trainees, school or university-based, two contrasting school placements must be found. Trainees in school-based training providers start in the classroom from day one. For university-based PGCE courses the number of days in school is stipulated by law. Time in the university is split between subject specialism and more general education issues, such as safeguarding, behaviour management, wellbeing etc. Training providers are regulated and inspected by Ofsted every few years. The fees for training on a PGCE have kept pace with the undergraduate fee, currently at £9,250 per annum. Trainees on salaried school-based ITE courses do not pay a fee, but their schools pay a fee for training to their providers.

For Classics, the number of routes and, indeed, the number of places where one might train has always been fairly limited – not through choice, but because of the problems of persuading universities to offer what is likely to be a small number of places, and the difficulty of finding training sufficient training placements. In the past the cost of the fees has also acted as a slight disincentive to applicants, but not a major one (Hunt, 2013). At present (2023), a bursary is offered to shortage subjects, including Classics, provided that the course comprises a significant proportion of teaching Latin or Ancient Greek. Each year we have to state that this is so to the DfE, in order for our trainees to qualify for access to the bursary. In the 2021-22 academic year, the bursary was £14,000 (which does not need to be repaid); but for 2022-23 and 2023-24 it is £25,000, the same as that offered to other shortage subjects, such as modern foreign languages and maths. There is no guarantee, however, that this will be the case in years to come.

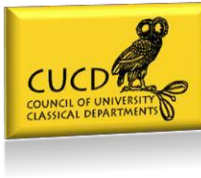
The DfE seems to make recruitment more complicated than necessary. Hilton found that applicants have labelled the process of applying to become a teacher in England confusing and over-complicated (Hilton, 2016). There is a constantly shifting perspective of bursaries and providers; the application website *Get Into Teaching* changes every now and then^{xii} and the application process is slow.^{xiii}

The number of ITE placements for classical subjects, then, is limited. Until recently,



the main providers have been concentrated in London and the South-East (King's College London, and the Universities of Cambridge and Sussex). The paucity of placements and poor geographical spread across England has meant that some entrants to Classics teaching have turned to ITE courses in Modern History, Modern Languages and English.^{xiv} More informal routes for upskilling teachers from other subject disciplines have also been tried in the past. These have included the two-year courses organised by the *Cambridge School Classics Project* (CSCP) in association with the DfE and the University of Oxford's Classics Faculty in 2012. CSCP, *Hands-Up Education* and *Classics for All* all engage seriously in the effort to train up 'non-specialists', who often possess excellent subject knowledge and pedagogical insight for teaching classical subjects (Griffiths, 2010; Hunt, 2020). The Government has encouraged Latin and Ancient Greek at Key Stage 2 in Primary Schools. It also recognises the value of the two languages, and Ancient History at GCSE, by including them in the EBacc. For a long time there has been no active encouragement for classical subjects of any kind at Key Stage 3, in the lower secondary school (ages 11-14). This all changed from 2022 with the introduction of the *Latin Excellence Programme*, which has started to be rolled out this year, the aim of which is to bring Latin into 40 state-maintained schools throughout the UK.^{xv} This will require ITE or upskilling of already-existing staff in each of the schools. According to a presentation at the Classical Association 2023 Annual Conference in Cambridge, given by Charlie Furber, Director of the *Centre for Latin Excellence*, the 40 schools have already been signed up, led by Future Academies Trust. Teacher training will be provided in-house for these teachers, who will be trained to use the bespoke Latin course developed by Furber himself.

In all, Classics ITE is subject to similar, unpredictable demands as other subjects. However, the small numbers involved and the precarity of provision can mean that even small changes in education policy towards ITE more generally can have a disproportionate effect. Supply of Classics ITE does not appear to be keeping up with the present demand, let alone likely to meet future demand if the DfE's own promotion of Latin in particular continues.



DfE Review of ITE

At the time of writing, there is something of a crisis in the recruitment and retention of teachers in England. The figures nationally show that the Government's targets for recruitment are unlikely to be met. Classics, in my experience, has not been immune to this, despite the attraction of some of the largest bursaries. This is not the place to go into the details of why recruitment might be particularly challenging: I advise readers to pick up any newspaper.^{xvi} Targets were also not met last year or the year before. Capriciously perhaps, the DfE set in motion a nationwide review of ITE provision which most commentators agree will make the situation worse by withdrawing accreditation from a significant number of ITE providers from September 2024, leading some to give up on ITE altogether (Schools Week, 2023c). Among those failing to gain accreditation are the Universities of Durham and Sussex, both of which have longstanding records of excellence in ITE,^{xvii} and which between them provide some 15-18 teacher trainees in Classics each year. In the small world of Classics ITE, this represents around a quarter of all placements. All is not quite lost, because these two providers are seeking alliances with other, successfully accredited providers to continue their work.^{xviii} But the process of applying for accreditation, rejection and then re-application and rejection again has been demoralising for them and the sector as a whole.

Meanwhile, the DfE has decided to set up its own central ITE-provider: the National Institute of Teaching (NlOT), which will be run by a number of its own favoured Multi-Academy Trust supporters, including Harris Federation ITE.^{xix} The NlOT aims to focus on 'hard-to-recruit' subjects and to work with schools in socially-deprived areas (Schools Week, 2023b). In a Parliamentary Select Committee meeting on 12th July 2023, the CEO of the NlOT Melanie Renowden suggested that she was 'confident' that they would hit their first year's target of 500 teacher trainees by September 2023 (Schools Week, 2023d). The NlOT is run by a consortium of six providers of ITE, contracted to train some 1,000 trainees from 2024 until 2028. It is not clear whether the target number of trainees replaces or is in addition to those that the CEO and her colleagues already recruit through their own ITE provider organizations. The NlOT,



according to its backers, is already ‘world-leading’, despite never having trained anyone. Its leaders’ pronouncements snub the university education faculties’ research tradition and years of experience. We can assume that Classics will not be in its remit, as recruitment for Classics ITE is, by the DfE’s statistics, more than adequate.^{xx}

In addition, the second part of the ITE review (still ongoing) has required all providers to submit samples of their ‘curriculum’ to the DfE to peruse, assess and give assent. The idea of the independence of the university to choose what is best for its own learners is irrevocably shattered and the expertise of the universities seems subject to attack once more. This is despite the fact that Ofsted, the DfE’s own inspection partner, has consistently labelled most university ITE providers to be *good* or *outstanding*. Meanwhile, the NlOT forges ahead. According to Sir Dan Moynihan, Chair of the NlOT and CEO of the Harris Federation, ‘The world-class teacher development that results from the Institute will enable and inspire the nation’s school workforce to give all children the high-quality education they need and deserve’ (National Institute of Teaching, 2023). But how it will be able to achieve this remains unclear, as David Spendlove, Associate Dean of the Manchester Institution of Education, grimly notes:

It is hard to understand any rationale for even considering marginalising over 30 providers who collectively provided in the region of 4500 training places in the middle of a long-standing recruitment crisis. Yet this is exactly what the DfE have done while gambling that their new favoured ‘providers’, who lack local ITT knowledge and who do not have long-standing partnerships, can address the immediate shortfall in provision. Ultimately, DfE are willing to gamble on ideology rather than sustaining sufficiency in provision (Spendlove, 2023).

Others are more concerned about the influence that the Early Career Teachers’ programmes of study have on DfE thinking and, by association, with the NlOT. These programmes are required reading for all newly qualified teachers. Research carried out by Teacher Tapp (2022) suggests that the ECT programmes’ genericism and lack of subject specificity, their narrow research brief – cherry-picked, micro-studies



which fit the DfE's preferred teaching approaches – do not hold much promise as a means to develop a reflective, autonomous and truly professional workforce.

The combination of challenges with teacher recruitment, retention and ITE has led to calls for decision making to be taken out of the hands of individual Ministers and special advisers (Schools Week, 2023e). Whether this would make a difference to some of the challenges currently facing ITE providers and Classics in particular is a moot point. Certainly, after some 35 years of drift, Classics seems to be nearly back where we were: with Latin and Ancient Greek languages and some ancient history at Key Stage 2, the Latin Excellence Programme at Key Stage 3, and recognition of three out of four classical subjects at GCSE under the EBacc umbrella.^{xxi} We have had the support of some powerful Ministers, including Michael Gove (who allocated subjects to the EBacc), Gavin Williamson (who announced the Latin Excellence Programme), Nick Gibb (who advocates for Latin and Ancient Greek at Key Stages 2 to 4) and even Boris Johnson. But if we don't get ITE right, to provide for all these opportunities to expand, we are at risk of losing it all over again.

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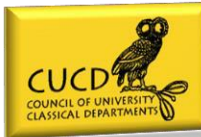
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Centre for Latin Excellence <https://latinexcellence.org/>

Coventry University PGCE <https://www.coventry.ac.uk/study-at-coventry/apply-now/postgraduate/>

Future Academies ITE <https://www.futureteachertraining.org/>

Get Into Teaching <https://getintoteaching.education.gov.uk/>

Harris Federation ITE <https://www.harristraintoteach.com/>

King's College London PGCE <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/ecs/pgce>

King Edward's Consortium SCITT <https://www.teachkec.org.uk/>

Latin Excellence Programme <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/join-the-latin-excellence-programme>

Liverpool College SCITT <https://www.liverpoolcollege.org.uk/teacher-training>

Liverpool Hope University PGCE <https://www.hope.ac.uk/education/>

National Institute of Teaching <https://niot.org.uk/>

University of Buckingham PGCE

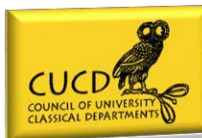
<https://www.buckingham.ac.uk/courses/postgraduate/secondary-pgce-with-qualified-teacher-status#teaching-info-link>

University of Cambridge PGCE <https://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/courses/pgce/>

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University of Leicester PGCE <https://le.ac.uk/education/study/pgce>

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ⁱ The author is the Subject Lecturer for the PGCE in Latin (with Classics) at the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge. I'm regularly contacted by headteachers and heads of department to help with unfilled vacancies in all types of school.

ⁱⁱ Source: the author.

ⁱⁱⁱ For a overview of UK education policy initiatives and effects, see, Jones (2016), Chitty (2014), Forrester and Garratt (2014) and Ball (2017). For the education reforms of the Labour Governments of 1997-2010, see Adonis (2012) and for those of the Coalition Government, see Finn (2015). For suggestions of improvements to education policy making, see Pring (2013) and Bousted (2022).

^{iv} Recruitment and retention are reported to be the worst for some time, with 7% of primary and 40% of secondary sector placements unfilled for the academic year 2022-23 (Schools Week, 2022). Concern is so great that the Parliamentary Education Committee has set up an enquiry (Schools Week, 2023a).

^v The present Conservative Government shows support to classical languages by promoting them under their primary languages policy at Key Stage 2, the Latin Excellence Programme at Key Stage 3, and the inclusion of both languages and Ancient History in the EBacc at Key Stage 4.

^{vi} See *The Centre of Latin Excellence 'Aims'* <https://latinexcellence.org/our-aims>.

^{vii} The Labour Party's plans, if they get elected in 2024, are to reverse this. Their policy statement says that Labour will 'introduce a requirement for all new teachers coming into schools to hold or be working towards qualified teacher status, as part of the guarantee that every child will be taught by a qualified professional' (The Labour Party, 2023).

^{viii} These figures include permanent full-time, part-time and temporary vacancies advertised, in independent and state-maintained schools.

^{ix} The courses are advertised each year on the DfE website *Get Into Teaching* (Department for Education, n.d.).

^x For a number of years providers of ITE in classical subjects must show that the course focus is on teaching classical languages for accreditation. Accordingly, providers have changed the title of their courses to 'Latin' or 'Latin (with Classics)'; unusually, the University of Leicester's new course (starting in Autumn 2023) is named 'History with Classics' and is accredited under History.

^{xi} See <https://www.buckingham.ac.uk/courses/postgraduate/secondary-pgce-with-qualified-teacher-status>.

^{xii} Applications have been at one time outsourced to UCAS Teacher Training, but have returned in-house to the DfE; each provider listed has their own ITE website.

^{xiii} Get Into Teaching <https://getintoteaching.education.gov.uk/>.

^{xiv} Drawing on direct contacts with sixth form teachers at conferences held in 2023 in Manchester and Worcester, I note that this seems especially the case for teachers of Ancient History and Classical Civilisation in sixth form colleges across the UK.

^{xv} For details of the announcement, see Department for Education (2021). For a summary of media reactions to the proposal, see Hunt (2022). For details of how to join, see the *Centre for Latin Excellence*: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/join-the-latin-excellence-programme>.

^{xvi} Teacher workload, school funding, low salaries (for graduates) and below-inflation pay increases are often mentioned (National Foundation for Educational Research, 2023). For an overview, see Allen and Sims (2018).

^{xvii} Both providers have been praised by Ofsted, with Durham ITE receiving an *Outstanding* grade in 2013 and Sussex a *Good* grade in 2023.

^{xviii} See <https://www.durham.ac.uk/news-events/latest-news/2023/03/durham-newcastle-teacher-training-partnership/>. While this article was being written, Durham has announced a 'pause' in the recruitment of teacher trainees for Classics for the academic year 2024-25 and Sussex has agreed a partnership with Chichester University ITE.

^{xix} National Institute of Teaching: <https://niot.org.uk/>.



^{xx} The DfE's target for Postgraduate Classics ITE was 40 in 2021-22 and 30 in 2022-23 (Department for Education, 2023). Thus it can be said that the number of placements for Classics ITE is near double the target and no expansion through additional places in the NIoT may be thought necessary.

^{xxi} Counted in the EBacc are GCSEs in Latin, Ancient Greek, Ancient History, but (oddly) not Classical Civilisation.