CUCD Bulletin 55: 2026.03, 9–27
https://cucd.blogs.sas.ac.uk/bulletin/
ISSN 2977-8980

Maintaining the Classics Teacher Supply Chain: A Critical Juncture and Some Suggestions to Help

by Steven Hunt

In 2023 I wrote an article in *CUCD Bulletin* 53 titled '[Initial Teacher Education for Classics. England, 2023. The current position]'. I revisit some of the territory mentioned in that report. But the problems of teacher supply have not gone away and the apparent lack of interest of the present Labour Government towards Classics Education (not least in schools) merits, I believe, a further examination of the challenges facing the recruitment of students into Classics Initial Teacher Education (ITE[1]) courses in England. I go further, in exploring potential strategies – some old, some new – to strengthen future supply. While some countries have seen a decline in the supply of Classics teachers due to shortages of trained teachers, such as Portugal (Pereira, 2025) and Scotland (Imrie, 2025), England itself does not face an existential threat comparable to the situation in New Zealand (Hayden, 2025). Instead, the issue lies in the limited visibility and detail surrounding the distribution, type, and capacity of teacher training institutions that sustain Classics. By presenting this information, the present article aims to inform and support future decisions to secure a sustainable pipeline of Classics teachers not just of the existing schools which provide Classics Education, but also in schools which might wish to add it to their curriculum.

Teaching qualifications

Most teachers have two teaching qualifications: Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) and the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). Until 2010 the usual route to gain them was via a university-based ITE programme lasting around nine months, involving a period in the university and two contrasting school placements. A very small number

[1] ITE (Initial Teacher Education) and ITT (Initial Teacher Training) are used interchangeably by different organizations. I prefer ITE.

of Classics teachers used to train through the Graduate Teacher Programme (GTP), which was school-based, supervised, and whose PGCE and QTS qualifications were validated by a local university Department of Education (DfE). The GTP often suited career changers, for example, and a small number of Classics teachers took the route (Hunt, 2012a). There are now many other routes into teaching, with some offering no qualifications, some only QTS, and others the additional PGCE.

Decades of decline of university-based ITE

The number of universities which provided PGCE programmes for Classics has steadily declined. Ken Dowden, writing in 1983 in the journal *Latin Teaching*, reported that there had been 21 University departments of education which offered a Classics specialism (Dowden, 1983). In his own time that had already reduced to 11 and he predicted that there would only be seven left in 1985: Cambridge, Cardiff, Durham, King's College London, St Mary's Twickenham, the London Institute of Education, and Nottingham.[2] By 2003, this had declined even further to three: Cambridge, King's College London, and Strathclyde, although the last-named had not taken student teachers for several years (Lister, 2007).

In 2008, when I took over the Cambridge Classics PGCE, the only other course was that directed by Dr. Aisha Khan-Evans in King's College London. In 2014 we were joined by the University of Sussex, directed by Rowley Darby, and in 2022 by the University of Durham, under Prof. Arlene Holmes-Henderson. The same year saw the University of Leicester open a combined History and Classics PGCE, directed by Dr. Jane Ainsworth. This rosy picture (for Classics) faded when the Conservative Government enacted a Market Review (2020–2021) of ITE providers, which, in the face of a teacher recruitment and retention crisis, seemed untimely. It led to the closure of many ITE providers, including Durham and Sussex.[3] While they have both since been allowed to reopen for some subjects, Classics has not been among them.[4] These closures have left gaps in the North East and along the South Coast – both areas

[2] For more detail, see Hunt (2025b).
[3] For further details of the effects of the Market Review on the ITE providers, see Cushing & Ellis (2025).
[4] In 2025 several ITE providers were reaccredited after they reapplied for permission to operate (Chantler-Hicks, 2025a). It might be said that the original closure of the courses contributed to a challenging recruitment round which needed addressing.

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where there are significant numbers of schools which offer classical subjects. A more positive turn is the opening in 2025 of a PGCE Classics course at Liverpool Hope University, under Dr. Joanne McNamara. The private University of Buckingham, also offers Classics ITE, but applicants must already be employed in a school.[5] There are no other university Classics ITE providers mentioned in the current Department of Education's *Get Into Teaching* website. Figure 1 shows how the current distribution of university-based Classics ITE providers is thinly spread across England, with large gaps of 'cold spots' everywhere. There are currently no providers of Classics ITE courses in Scotland, Wales, or Northern Ireland.

Figure 1: *University-based Classics PGCE course providers in 2025–2026. © Steven Hunt 2026.*

[5] The University of Buckingham supports teachers already employed in (mostly) private schools who wish to become accredited for QTS in reflection of their previous and ongoing employment history. Andrew Homer supervises the Classics element of the Buckingham programme.

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Note, too, that the cohorts of Classics PGCE students at most university-based institutions are not large (see Figure 2).

University-based Classics ITE courses					
Institution	Qualification award	Age group	Degree required	Recruited 2025–6[6]	Recruitment target 2026–7
King's College London	Classics PGCE + QTS	11–18	2.2	14	18
Liverpool Hope University	Classics PGCE + QTS	11–16	2.2	4	5
University of Cambridge	Classics PGCE + QTS	11–18	2.1	15	18
University of Leicester	History & Classics PGCE + QTS	11–16	2.1	0	2
University of Buckingham	Classics PGCE + QTS	11–18	Not specified	2	3 (anticipated)
TOTAL				**35**	**46**

Figure 2: *University-based Classics ITE courses: current and target student numbers.*
© Steven Hunt 2026.

The rise of the SCITTs

I will now turn to the small number of routes for ITE that are not university-based. The Coalition and Conservative Governments (2010–2024) introduced new routes for ITE, closing the GTP route and developing School-Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITTs), School Direct, Teach First, Troops to Teachers, Researchers in Schools, and apprenticeship routes. Some of these offered only QTS. The move away from the university sector ostensibly provided additional routes for people such as career

[6] The recruitment period lasts between October and June. The target is sometimes missed because students withdraw after being offered a place.

changers, for whom full-time study away from their home might be restrictive. But there was also a more controversial political aspect. Nick Gibb, Minister of State for Schools (2010–2012 and 2014–2023), was openly critical of university-based ITE. In his view, "almost all university education faculties remained steeped in the progressivist ideology. In many regards, they were its wellspring" (Gibb & Peal, 2025, p. 204). These university-based ITE course providers, according to Gibb, were holding pupils back and therefore needed to be dismantled or at least cut back. For Gibb and Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Education (2010–2014), teaching was a practical craft, best developed in the classroom (Gove, 2013). This negative sentiment – based, as Cushing & Ellis (2025) have shown, on a very limited understanding of the nature of university ITE – persisted, despite the fact that the government's *own inspection service* had found the majority of providers to be Good or Outstanding; the period of school placement days was prescribed by law at 120 days; and compliance with the DfE's own regulations for ITE was high. Nevertheless, under such political agitations, the new routes into teaching were heavily marketed, while the number of university placements was reduced, perhaps to encourage applicants to choose one of the new options.[7]

The rules about who could and who could not work in a state-maintained school had to be changed to accommodate this new approach. Under the new rules, teachers could gain QTS working in school without university oversight. According to Gove, state-maintained schools would benefit by having the same unrestricted opportunities that independent schools had for selecting future teachers straight from university (Gove, 2013).

Despite the promises, teacher recruitment and retention grew worse and it seemed that most teachers were committed to training for the PGCE in universities after all. My research of the immediate impact of the changes suggested that most schools which advertised for Classics teachers, whether state-maintained or independent,

[7] From 2012 the total number of places for each subject at each university-based ITE provider was capped centrally by the DfE. So, for example, in Cambridge, the number of Classics PGCE students was set to be reduced from 16 to 12. If this had indeed come to pass, the whole course might have become financially unviable. Fortunately, at my intervention, aided by Lord Aberdare, the DfE changed its mind and restored the total to 16. In 2019, when a teacher recruitment crisis developed, the DfE uncapped all providers.

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wanted teachers to have qualifications (Hunt, 2012b). This continues today: figures from 2024–2025 show only five independent schools advertised for unqualified staff ('graduate teachers') straight from university.[8] My research also indicates that between 2013 and the present day, 35 individual SCITTs have at some time offered Classics ITE.[9] While this might seem a large number, the majority have come and gone over the years: only six SCITTs currently offer Classics ITE. These include the two trusts which operate their own ITE courses: the King Edward's Consortium, based on the King Edward's Foundation in Birmingham, and Future Academies, a multi-academy

Figure 3: *SCITT-based Classics PGCE course providers in 2025–2026. © Steven Hunt 2026.*

[8] My research notes 5 'graduate trainee' Classics posts were advertised in 2024–2025, at Eton College, Harrow School, Shrewsbury School, Tonbridge School, and Whitgift School.

[9] Research by the author, based on statistics collected between 2013 and the present from the Department for Education website *Get Into Teaching*. Most SCITTs have been single schools, operating alone, in consortium with other providers, or as part of a multi-academy trust ITE course. Harris Academies, supported initially by funding from Classics for All, ran Classics ITE between 2016–2022. Liverpool College, validated by Liverpool Hope University, did the same, until the University itself set up its own Classics PGCE in 2025. A list of all SCITTs which have at some point provided Classics ITE is available from the author.

trust based in Pimlico, London. Starting in 2019, Future Academies ITE has promoted the methodology and resources derived from the now-defunct Latin Excellence Programme.[10] The remaining four SCITTs are individual schools or part of other multi-academy trusts. The SCITTs are not at all spread evenly about England, as Figure 3 shows, with most clustered in London and the South East.

Note that the cohorts of Classics PGCE students in SCITTs are very small (see Figure 4).

SCITT Classics ITE courses – recruiting in 2026–7				
Institution	Qualification award	Age group	Degree required	Recruitment target 2026–7
Aspire Basingstoke	Classics PGCE + QTS	11–18	Not specified	1
George Abbot SCITT School Direct	QTS only	11–18	Not specified	1
King Edward's Consortium	Classics PGDE + QTS	11–18	2.1	2
Future Academies ITE	Classics PGCE + QTS	11–16	2.2	9[11]
Kent and Medway Training	QTS only	11–16	Not specified	1
Surrey South Farnham SCITT	QTS only	11–18	Not specified	1
TOTAL				**15+**

Figure 4: *SCITT-based Classics ITE courses: target student numbers. © Steven Hunt 2026.*

[10] From 2022 to 2025, Future Academies worked with over 40 non-selective state schools across England to deliver the Latin Excellence Programme on behalf of the Department for Education.
[11] Future Academies did not respond to an enquiry about recruitment numbers. The target of nine reflects past recruitment targets.

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A comparison of Figures 1 and 3 shows that the uneven geographical distribution of ITE providers is a challenge for recruiters of newly trained Early Career Teachers (ECTs) *outside* London and the South East. SCITTs tend to recruit for their own schools and trusts, thereby leaving the university-based ITE providers to supply the whole country – and also Wales, Northern Ireland, and Scotland, which have no specialist Classics ITE providers of their own.

If recruitment targets for 2026–2027 are hit, the number of places available for Classics ITE in all types of providers will only be 61. Figure 5 shows the geographical distribution of state-maintained schools in England which entered students for GCSE Latin in Summer 2025. For the sake of the subject, we need more ITE providers in the system in the Midlands, the South-West, and the North.

Figure 5: *Location of state-maintained schools which entered students for GCSE Latin in Summer 2025. © Steven Hunt 2026.*

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2010–2024: Politicians want Classics – but not that much

The Coalition and Conservative Governments (2010–2024) sent out mixed messages about Classics in schools. On the one hand, they were broadly positive, suggesting that Classics might provide a key to social mobility in deprived communities (Hunt, 2018). On the other, a strategy to improve the provision of Classics teachers seemed indistinct. At primary school, there were positives: pupils continued to study the Ancient Greeks, Romans, and Egyptians, and when foreign languages were made compulsory at Key Stage 2 (pupils aged 7–11), the DfE generously allowed Latin or Ancient Greek to replace French, German, Spanish, or Italian. However, no training or any other investment was allocated (Hunt, 2023) and it was left to the charity Classics for All to fulfil any of its wishes.[12]

At secondary school, Classics is absent from the National Curriculum at Key Stage 3. But it has reappeared at Key Stage 4, with GCSEs in Latin, Ancient Greek, and Ancient History all included in the EBacc measure (Hunt, 2022). On the one hand, the Government clearly wanted Classics to survive in state-maintained schools, without forcing it onto the timetable. Nor did they want to pay too much for it.[13] On the other hand, it would have looked ridiculous to espouse the importance of a Classics education as a route to social mobility but not to champion it in school. Therefore, the inclusion of Latin, Ancient Greek, and Ancient History on the EBacc was a simple and cost-free way to incentivize school leadership to support the classical subjects in the school curriculum. But there was no strategic uplift in traditional modes of teacher training to meet the potential demand – let alone the existing one. Instead, in 2014 the DfE financed a temporary programme to upskill a few score teachers of *other* subjects to teach GCSE Latin. In a perhaps Gove-inspired sideswipe at the traditional providers (Cambridge and King's College London), the programme was offered to the Faculty of Classics (note, *not* Education) at Oxford University, under the management of Christopher Pelling, then Regius Professor of Greek (Palmer, 2014; Hall, 2014).

[12] The charity and volunteer sector has been successful in raising the profile of ancient languages in primary schools, through a number of initiatives. The largest of these has been through the efforts of the charity Classics for All which has worked with 689 primary schools since its foundation in 2010 (Classics for All, 2024). Smaller organizations include the Iris Project, Vocabulous, Maximum Classics, and The Latin Programme, all of which promote the idea that learning Latin roots will improve pupils' English literacy – a theme popular among head teachers faced with Ofsted-inspired accountability measures.

[13] I was asked by a senior civil servant if I could think of a way to get more Classics into schools 'but at no cost'.

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Wisely, Pelling transferred practical management of the programme to the Cambridge School Classics Project, which drew on the expertise of its own family of state-school teachers and the established directors of the Cambridge and King's College London Classics PGCE courses (myself included).[14] A welcome crumb for Latin; but for the other classical subjects, nothing. Classical Civilisation was even left out of the EBacc, despite being as much a Humanities subject as History, Geography, or Ancient History (which were all included). Add into this the lack of long-term strategy: GCSE Ancient History and Classical Civilisation provide a much more effective pipeline for students through to A level and thence to university than Latin and Ancient Greek in numbers alone (see Fig. 6). If the DfE were looking at how to improve social mobility though access to university Classics courses, they would be looking at how to support A level Classical Civilisation and Ancient History as much as GCSE Latin.

Subject	Number of entries in **2025** (2024)	
	GCSE	**A level**
Latin	**8,408** (8,388)	**989** (995)
Ancient Greek	**935** (900)	**206** (202)
Classical Civilisation	**5,211** (5,128)	**4,135** (4,325)
Ancient History	**1,565** (1, 537)	**1,029** (986)

Figure 6: *Entries for GCSE and A level examinations in classical subjects in 2025 (previous year's figures, i.e. 2024, in brackets) © Steven Hunt 2026.*

In 2018, amid a national recruitment crisis across the board, Nick Gibb sent a letter to ITE-providers encouraging them to try harder at recruiting teachers for shortage subjects, amongst which was Classics. Student bursaries for ancient languages ITE programmes (which must include 70 per cent Latin or Ancient Greek) rose to £26,000 tax free by the end of 2024. This suggested a determination to attract teachers in the face of continued recruitment challenges.

Finally, under Conservative Gavin Williamson, Secretary of State for Education (2019–2021), the Latin Excellence Programme was developed, designed to kickstart the

[14] The courses run by CSCP were successful in attracting around a hundred participants, many of whom introduced Latin into their own schools.

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teaching of Latin in 40 state-maintained secondary schools in areas of socio-economic deprivation around the country. Although the initiative successfully reached its target number of schools nationwide (see Figure 7), its £4 million cost over four years led to its cancellation over Christmas 2024–2025 by the current Labour Government, which was perhaps seeking to reduce expenditure (Chantler-Hicks, 2024). Classics for All has stepped in to support those students who had started their Latin GCSEs in 23 of the Programme's schools (Case, 2025). It is likely that some of these schools will continue to offer Latin even though the funding from the DfE is no longer available.

Figure 7: *Location of the schools participating in the Latin Excellence Programme in 2024. © Steven Hunt 2025.*

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A Labour Government. Time for a change or more of the same?

At the time of writing we are in limbo. A Curriculum and Assessment Review, commissioned by the new Secretary of State for Education, Bridget Philipson, has recently been published. It barely mentions Classics Education. But other recommendations might be damaging. Its suggestion about rationalising the foreign languages taught in primary schools may be a threat to the position of Latin and Ancient Greek there. Changes to the EBacc, by broadening the number of subjects which 'count', may mean that classical subjects lose some of their protected status at Key Stage 4 curriculum. Is it better to be talked about or not talked about? Concerns have been expressed by the Classical Association and Classics for All,[15] and the experience of the cancellation of the Latin Excellence Programme suggests the Labour Government does not consider Classics Education important, something also signalled by the reduction of Classics ITE bursaries to £20,000 for 2026–2027. Despite these setbacks, there may still be opportunities to ensure Classics Education retains its place in state-maintained schools if we emphasise the significant contribution made by the languages, literature, and history to the broader aims of the curriculum, especially in terms of the DfE's continued focus on a knowledge-rich curriculum and the improvement of literacy and oracy. This is an argument put forcefully by the Classics organizations named above.

Recruitment for ITE 2025 onwards

The Government points to targets being hit for ITE recruitment (Gibbs, 2025). Recent figures show applications to train as a secondary school teacher are 12 per cent up on last year. The DfE sees this as the justification for a reduction in training bursaries for English, Maths, Biology, Geography, Music, and Languages (including ancient languages) (Chantler-Hicks, 2025b). However, the overall recruitment target being hit does not necessarily equate to a rise in the numbers of applicants for Classics ITE, which is stymied by a lack of providers and school placements (see Figure 8). Some of this is caused by rule-changes made by the Department of Education in 2024 in the areas of recruitment and mentoring: all Early Career Teachers (ECTs) must

[15] See Hunt (2025a).

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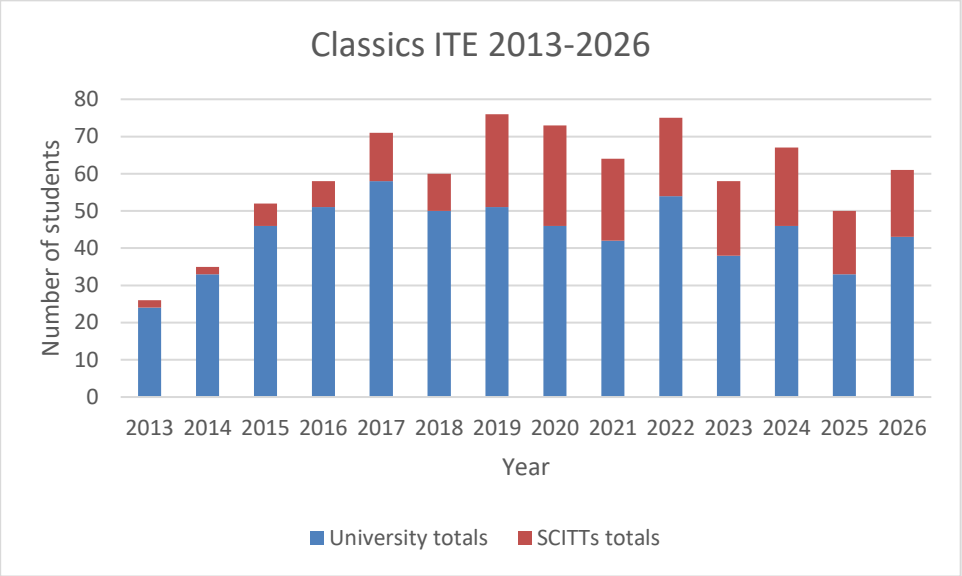

Figure 8: *Number of Classics ITE placements (2026 is aspirational) © Steven Hunt 2026.*

have access to quality mentoring and support in the first two years after their training, and all mentors should undertake 20 days of training per year. The latter requirement has since been rescinded, but too late to make much of a difference to the 2025–2026 recruitment round (Cumiskey, 2024). In short, the pressure on small departments – which includes almost every Classics Department in the UK – can be too much for many mentors to play their full part each year. Luckily, King's College London and Cambridge have well-established school networks, with many Classics Departments just big enough to provide placements as well as carry out the mentoring needed for their own ECTs if they have them.[16] But even for these ITE providers, there is a great deal of negotiation needed each year to provide sufficient school placements to meet targets.

And what of the job market? In the academic year 2024–2025, I counted 177 Classics posts in secondary schools advertised in the teacher press (Hunt, 2026). That is around three times the number of teachers qualifying each year. It is impossible to know whether these posts become vacant because of teachers retiring, or making career moves in or out of teaching. However, the number of advertisements from the

[16] Classics departments in schools which offer placements with Cambridge University range from one to four full-time teachers, with the majority having two.

same schools (and in some cases readvertisement during the same year) suggests that it is increasingly difficult to find qualified teachers from such a small pool.

A critical juncture

The problems of recruitment and retention will not simply go away. A number of commentators note that we have reached a critical juncture. As Professor David Spendlove says, the system needs urgent action to stop further fragmentation of services:

> [A Labour-run DfE] must decide whether to aim to restore coherence and ambition to the teaching profession, or to continue with reactive policies designed to patch over the system's fragmentation and deliver short-term, politically self-serving results… [T]he teaching profession is locked in a crisis of competing paradigms, denied the opportunity to shape its own evolution through professional consensus, and instead subject to change driven by political expediency (Spendlove, 2025).

NASBTT chief executive Emma Hollis urges the government to improve recruitment and retention by practical means:

> [The DfE should] pursue a holistic, long-term approach: improve the attractiveness of the profession; stabilise and rationalise financial support for trainees; reduce workload; retain experienced staff; strengthen regional and school-based capacity; and work collaboratively with providers and teachers (Hollis, 2025).

Professor Rachel Lofthouse additionally suggests that 'society, children and young people, and teachers would benefit from a turn towards a more compassionate, compelling and irresistible profession' (Lofthouse, 2025).

While we are waiting for these potential changes to take place (or even if not), we can have some solutions to pop into the DfE's in-tray – things that did work in the past and things that might work better in the future. We should seize the day. What can we do as a subject community to alleviate the problem of trained teacher supply for Classics?

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Recommendations

- The dormant providers at the University of Sussex and the University of Durham recommence offering Classics ITE.
- A campaign to encourage schools which do not do so to offer Classics ITE placements, either with local ITE providers or with SCITTs.
- ITE providers in the Midlands, South, South West, East Anglia, and North which do not provide Classics ITE should be approached for short courses to be offered 'off timetable' for PGCE students of other, related courses, who might be interested in starting Classics Education in the future. There is previous know-how: Classics for All has produced a booklet for potential PGCE students on other, non-Classics courses and it could be modelled on the successful course which operated at Sheffield University in 2014 with modern foreign languages ITE students learning to use the Cambridge Latin Course (Payne & Griffiths, 2014).
- A series of courses for in-service teachers of other subjects who would expect to introduce Classics Education into their schools in the future. As mentioned above, the *Cambridge School Classics Project*, working with Oxford University and the DfE, ran a series of in-person courses for non-specialist teachers. This programme had a trainer in different parts of the country for weekend starter courses, as well as week-long courses in locations such as Oxford and Cambridge.
- The Classical Association, perhaps working with Classics for All, should develop online courses for teachers, both pedagogical and subject content. These could be recorded and used – as the Historical Association does on its website – as Continued Professional Development. Such courses should not be aligned with particular commercially available course materials, but should be accessible to any teacher who wishes to get language support.
- A 'Get into Teaching Classics' roadshow at Classics-related events.
- Improved publicity about the joy of teaching classical subjects (and less time spent demonising Classics!).

If Classics Education in schools is a serious subject – serious enough to be part of the GCSE and A level 'brands' and (for the moment, at least) worthy of inclusion in the

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EBacc – then we need enough good teachers to teach it, and enough people training to make sure there are. No other subject would expect anything otherwise. The Latin Excellence Programme, while it met with some success in putting Latin into a good number of state-maintained schools, was very expensive (£4 million for 40 schools), monolithic (requiring its own entirely new resources rather than using existing ones), and complex (requiring extras such as school trips, internal assessment routines, and accountability mechanisms). Over the years, other providers have shown that getting Latin into schools can be swifter and a lot cheaper. Some of this could be in-person, others online. But in my view, the DfE must step up with support. The reconstitution of the All-Parliamentary Group for Classics is a good start. It needs regular meetings, updates, and information-sharing with the people who have the connections to make a difference politically and then practically. It is time to stop being amateurs.

As a step towards providing at least some statistical information about Classics Education, I have written three short blog-post 'Classics Education Round-ups' which present data I have collated over many years:

#1: Examination entries in England and Scotland 2025
#2: State-maintained school entries for GCSE examination in England in 2025
#3: Jobs for Classics teachers in the UK in 2024–5

I hope that these will provide useful data to aid future discussions.

Acknowledgements
I wish to thank the following people who helped provide information in the completion of this article: Jane Ainsworth, Alice Case, Andrew Homer, Aisha Khan-Evans, Joanne McNamara, and Ruth Penn.

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Steven Hunt
Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge
sch43@cam.ac.uk