

TABLE A

GCE ordinary level/GCSE: number of entrants for Greek and Latin 1954-1994

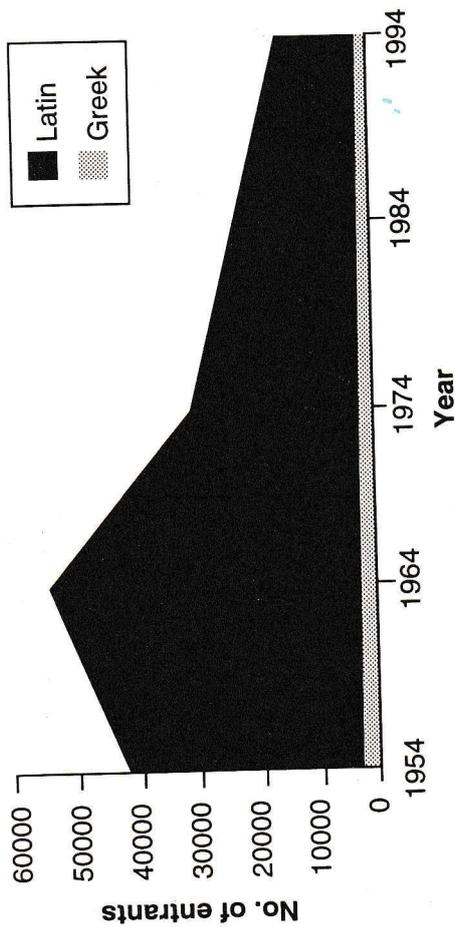


TABLE B

0 level/GCSE entries as a proportion of total entries 1954-1994

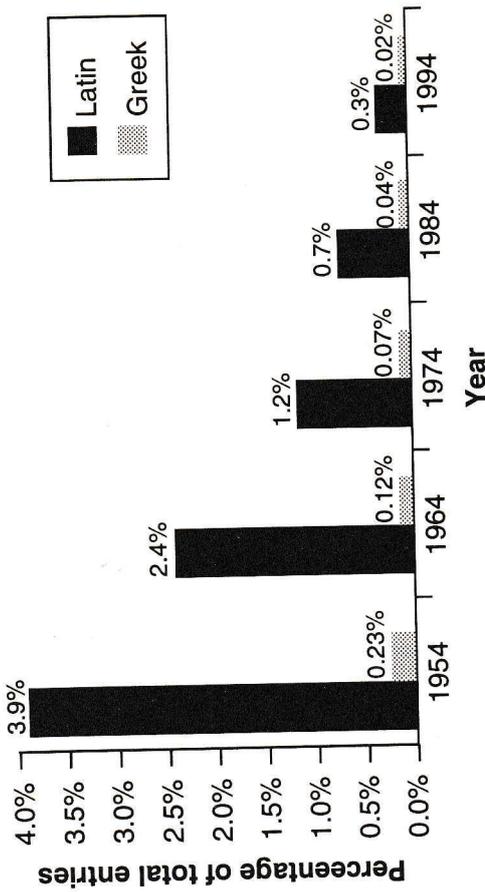


TABLE C

Latin and Greek A level entries 1954-1994 England

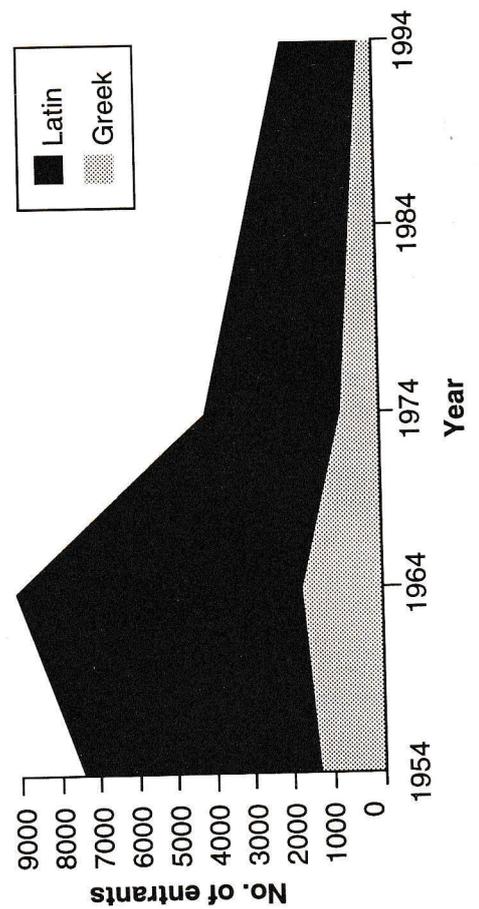
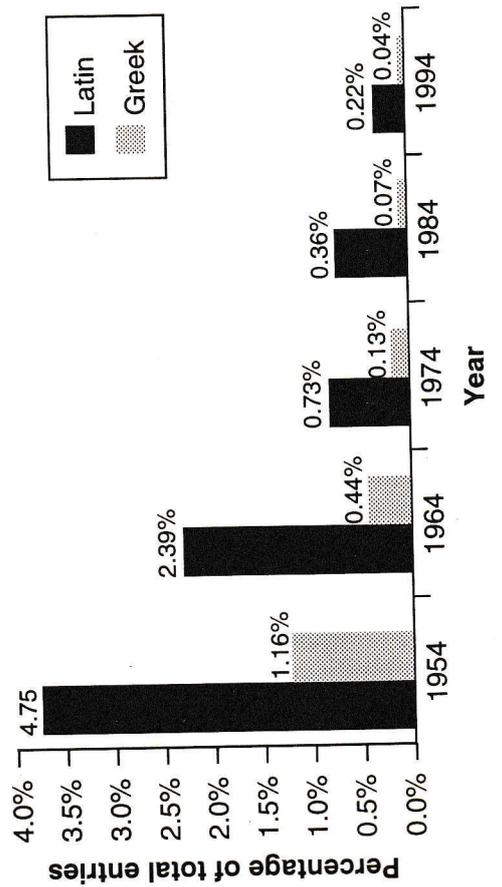


TABLE D

Latin and Greek A level entries as a proportion of total entries



Classics and the National Curriculum

Nicholas Tate

I was concerned to read a letter in *The Times* a few weeks ago (8 April) from Peter Jones. After describing what he felt to be the continuing threat to classics in state schools, he concluded by saying that he was 'not aware that any government educational body is the slightest bit concerned'. I hope I can be exempted from that conclusion. It is precisely because I am concerned that I am here today. It is this threat to the future of classics, and what we can do about it, that I should like to discuss. My talk will be about the context in which classics teaching takes place, not about what might be taught and how. You know much more about that than I do.

First, let me give you some facts. Many of you may be familiar with at least some of them. In 1964 over 53,000 candidates took O level Latin (*Table A*). This figure dropped to 30,000 by 1974, to 20,000 in 1984, and by 1994 - and the figures are now for GCSE rather than O level - to 12,800. Over this 40-year period there was of course a huge expansion in the total number of entries at O level and GCSE. Latin accounted for 3.9% of total entries in 1954 (*Table B*). By 1974 this had fallen to 1.2%, and by 1994 to 0.3%. Although the absolute number of Latin entries increased substantially between 1954 and 1964, Latin's relative share of the total entry was already falling fast at that time. The most dramatic fall, in absolute terms, was between 1964 and 1974, that era of progressivism, flared jeans and Dusty Springfield that my colleague Chris Woodhead, HM Chief Inspector of Schools, has recently pointed up as the source of some of our educational ills. Latin's position at O level and GCSE has continued to decline, though more steadily, ever since.

At A level the pattern is similar: over 7,500 entries in 1964, falling to just under 3,500 in 1974, to 2,300 in 1984 and to 1,700 in 1994 (*Table C*). The drop in Latin entries as a proportion of total entries also follows the same pattern as at O level and GCSE: 2.39% in 1964 down to 0.22% in 1994 (*Table D*). As you will see from the tables, trends in Greek closely follow those in Latin.

Let me give you some other figures. These relate to the last ten years or so, and show a dramatic decline in the number of classics teachers in maintained secondary schools. In 1984 there were 3,400 full-time teachers teaching classics in maintained secondary schools and sixth form colleges (*Table E*). This had fallen to 1,700 by 1988, and to 1,000 by 1992. There were a lot of other classics teachers still in schools, but they were not teaching classics. The continuing decline of classics in schools is also reflected in the small numbers of classics graduates who these days complete postgraduate teacher training. And the numbers here are also falling: from an average of 71 a year in the three year period 1982-84 to an average of 48 a year between 1991 and 1993 (*Table F*).

That is not the whole picture. At the same time as the study of Latin and Greek in schools has declined, the numbers studying classical civilisations and classical literature in translation have increased, at both O level/GCSE and at A level. By 1984 there were already far more candidates taking these examinations at A

The impact of this shift is also apparent in higher education. Here the situation looks at first glance much healthier, with total numbers of classics students (of all kinds) remaining reasonably constant across the period between the late 1970s to the present day. More recently, numbers have increased substantially (*Table G*). About half of these students are not doing honours degree courses in classics, and many of those doing honours degree courses in classics will be doing so as part of joint courses, but it is still a healthier set of figures than someone looking at the A level tables would expect. And although there has been a drop in the number of classics teachers at university level, it has again been far less dramatic than the drop in the numbers of classics teachers in schools (*Table H*).

Looking back over these figures, I should like to make two points before I get into the heart of what I want to say this morning.

First, what these tables signal overall is a major shift in the education of our young people, and in particular in the education of those young people who traditionally have formed this country's educated elite. Far fewer now have any contact with classical languages; far fewer indeed have any choice in the matter. Let me give you one last statistic: in 1993 78% of centres entering candidates for GCSE, and 73% of centres entering candidates for A or AS level, did not offer any classical subject at all.

Obviously the decline in the status of classics goes back beyond the 1950s, but it is since that time that it has been most dramatic. The democratisation of school education has not just failed to extend opportunities in this part of the curriculum to those who previously did not have access to it. It has reduced opportunities for those who traditionally did have such access. This happened long before the National Curriculum had been thought of, so cannot result from its introduction. It happened, clearly, as a result of countless decisions by individual schools, not because of some national plan or government initiative.

The result is that subjects which had been a major influence on the formation of this country's educated elite continuously since Anglo-Saxon times have now been reduced, with a few small exceptions, to what is best described as minority provision within a minority of schools. And, even where it exists, what we are talking about is often classes of three or four, sometimes meeting at lunchtime or after school hours.

My second point is in some ways a contrary one. It is that we can place too much emphasis on what happens in schools, in the same way that we have often placed too little. If our aim is to preserve the consciousness of a vital part of our cultural heritage, so that it can continue as an active element in our culture, there are other ways in which we can set about it.

What about the informal educational role of television, film and radio, of travel, and of the press? How many readers of *The Times*, for example, have had their interest in the classical world stimulated or revived by reading Philip Howard? What about adult and continuing education? We now hear a lot about lifelong

again to cope with further economic change or technological innovation.

The sine qua non for the preservation of this part of our cultural heritage is that there should continue to be a sufficient community of scholars and writers able to sustain, develop and disseminate our knowledge and understanding of things classical. I know the analogy between Greece and Rome and ancient Egypt is a probably unforgivable one, but public consciousness of ancient Egypt has been kept going from a very thin base within the world of formal education. How much more might be done - and is being done - from the much stronger scholarly base (both national and international) available for the study of Greece and Rome? I know there are threats to classical scholarship, but to an outsider such as myself scanning the recent TLS classical edition it looks quite healthy.

That, however, was simply to put in context the figures I have shown you. I am not suggesting that we should not be concerned at what has happened to Latin and Greek in schools. I think we should be very concerned. But why? Let me try to answer that question.

Philip Larkin best illustrates for me some of the attitudes responsible for the decline of classical languages in schools. As well as his notorious statement, often quoted, that 'classical references are a liability nowadays' (a bit like Henry Ford's 'history is bunk'), he also once said in an interview: "To me the whole of the ancient world, the whole of classical and biblical mythology, means very little, and I think that using them not only fills poems full of dead spots but dodges the poet's duty to be original."

It seems odd to link Larkin with 1960s and 70s educational progressivism, but similar currents of thought are at work. There is an implied rejection of tradition and convention, an emphasis on the new and the original, a demand for relevance, a focus on individual, rather than communal, identity. Not too far off within the same mindset - although I am not suggesting this applies to Larkin - is a rejection of the idea that education is concerned with cultural transmission, a preoccupation with relevant skills at the expense of knowledge, and a pervasive relativism about values. All of these are inimical to the ideas that something should be studied because it has been at the core of European civilisation for thousands of years, and that only in relation to a constantly reinterpreted tradition is it possible to be genuinely creative, original and individual.

Let me tackle these assumptions by focusing on the idea of identity as a key concern of education. This is crucial, not just for the sake of the classics. Issues of identity will rise to the forefront over the next few decades as we move towards increasing economic globalisation. Consumerism and the communications revolution threaten us with a double spectre: on the one hand, a terrifying Tower of Babel pluralism, in which young people are overwhelmed with images of different lifestyles and values and are left to feel that like consumers they can pick these up and put them down at will; and on the other, a monochrome global pop culture which undermines difference and destroys traditional ways of life. Already we have a generation of young people some of whom appear to feel that traditions, conventions, cultures and values are simply a matter of consumer choice. And their education sometimes encourages them in this dangerous belief.

Schools need to be concerned with many aspects of identity: family, local or regional, English, British, European and global.

There are few pupils to whom each of these identities is not or should not be important. In addition, there are the identities which some pupils have as members of particular cultural or religious sub-groups within the wider society. In each of these schools need to consider ways in which it might be appropriate to:

- support whatever sense of identity is already present;
- foster a sense of identity where it does not exist;
- help young people understand what is special about this sense of identity for them, and how they might shape it for themselves.

Classics have a particular relevance to our pupils' emerging sense of identity with England and with Europe. To be English one needs to understand something about English history and political thought, about the arts and architecture in England, about Christianity as it has developed in these islands, and about the English language itself, as well as about the ways in which present day England is to some extent a more plural society than England in the past. No understanding of the Englishness of these things would be complete without knowledge of their roots in the world of Greece and Rome. Chaucer, Shakespeare, Eliot, The Bank of England, Hadrian's Wall, the National Gallery, Blenheim Palace, the Reformation, the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary: none of these are comprehensible short of their classical context. Similarly, to feel a sense of identity with other Europeans one needs more than fellow feeling on the benefits or otherwise of the common agricultural policy. Learning could be more unifying than our common roots in Greece, Rome and the Christian religion.

And of course a sense of how British and European identities have been shaped by classical influences creates links where other cultures have European roots, for example in the Americas. There is a fascinating book, published in the USA in 1987, called 'Cultural Literacy' by E.D. Hirsch. Its central theme is the key role of cultural knowledge, not just in giving people a sense of identity and purpose, but as a vital element in the development of children's literacy and conceptual understanding. The book laments the neglect of cultural knowledge in modern educational theory and practice. It points to the disintegrating consequences for society where schools fail to foster a rich and shared frame of reference for pupils which draws on the common threads of language, history, literature, religion, myth and custom which have helped to hold society together. This may of course be an unpalatable message to academics who have abandoned the notion of a canon whose passion is to deconstruct. But they may be part of the problem.

Hirsch concludes with an appendix which lists 'What Literate Americans know'. This is more than an eye-catching gimmick although it is the part of the book that has attracted great publicity - in the same way that Harold Bloom's list of authors has dominated coverage of his Western Canon.

Things that in Hirsch's view every literate American needs to know include the following: Achilles, Achilles' heel, an expression that is dying in England as the number of people who know any kind of classical education diminishes - when did you hear it?, Acropolis, A.D., Adeste Fideles, Adonis, ad hoc, hominem (there are only two people in SCAA who ever use that), ad infinitum, Aegean, Aeneas, the Aeneid, Aeschylus

Table E
Numbers of Classics Teachers
 (maintained secondary schools and sixth form colleges)

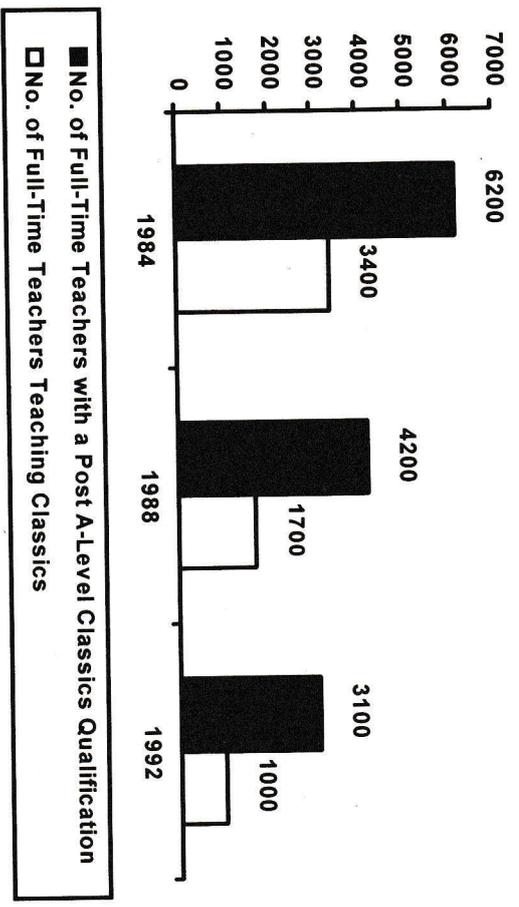


Table E

Table F
Classics graduates completing PGCE training
 1983-1993

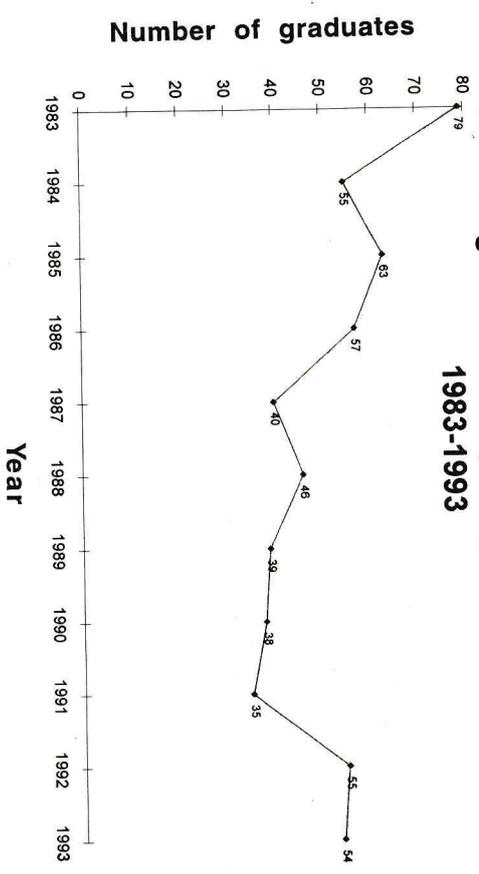
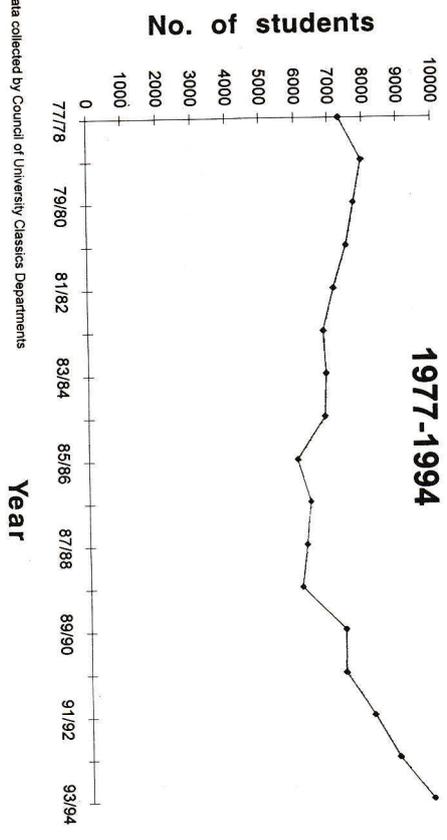


Table F

Table G

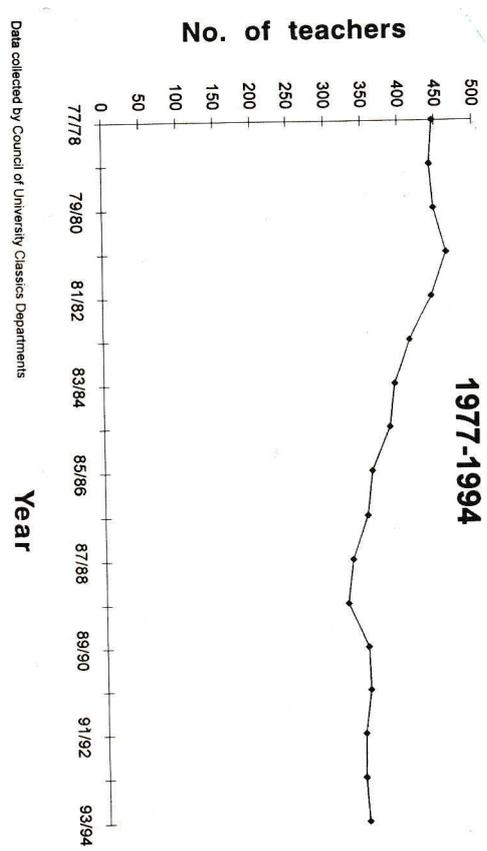
Number of university Classics students
 1977-1994



Data collected by Council of University Classics Departments

Table H

Number of university teachers in Classics
 1977-1994



Data collected by Council of University Classics Departments

Aesop's fables, Agamemnon, Alexander the Great, alpha and omega, anarchy, Andromeda, annus mirabilis (an English version might have to include annus horribilis), antebellum (very definitely an American one), Antigone, Antony's speech at Caesar's funeral (the National Curriculum has at least ensured that this will survive for the next 70 years), Aphrodite, Apollo, Archimedes, aristocracy, Aristophanes, Art is long, life is short, astrology, Athena, Athens, Atlas, Augean stables, Saint Augustine, Augustus Caesar, aurora borealis, autocracy, bacchanalian, Bacchus, bacillus, basilica, beware of Greeks bearing gifts, beware the ides of March, biology, the Birth of Venus, bona fide, bread and circuses, Brutus, Byzantine, and so on.

This is more than just a bluffer's guide to middle class dinner parties. Nor is it a crib for trivial pursuits. It is part of the cement which helps to hold together the consciousness of a nation and to provide some continuity across the generations. Without it the past is a closed book. Without it we are in a boat adrift not knowing where we have come from. Without it, Hirsch concludes, young people are not mentally prepared to continue their society because they do not understand it well enough to value it.

Obviously, knowledge related to Greece and Rome is only a small part of this cultural literacy. The point I am trying to make is that cultural literacy is important, that knowledge of things classical is one part of it, and that this knowledge is something we share with many different parts of the world, not just the rest of Europe.

That was my personal slant on the perennial question of "why bother with the classics?" Can I conclude with a few points about the situation that faces you at the present, with some thoughts about the future, and with a tentative six-point action plan?

First of all, nothing is immutable. Our sense of communal identity is in danger of withering away. We have virtually forgotten our roots in the world of Greece and Rome. But some or much of this can be recovered.

We only have to look to other countries to realise that things happen differently elsewhere, and can happen differently here too, if there is a will. For example, the position of Latin in some European countries is much stronger than it is here. It is compulsory for all pupils at some stage of their schooling in France (where all pupils in the colleges are introduced to Latin at ages 11-14); also, interestingly, in Serbia. In a much larger number of countries it is compulsory for pupils in the higher streams: in Denmark (where it is studied by all pupils specialising in languages), in Luxembourg (for pupils choosing the classical stream), in Italy (for all pupils in certain types of school post-14), in the Netherlands (in pre-university gymnasium courses), in some parts of the former Yugoslavia, in Hungary (the top stream only) and in Romania (the humanities stream). Even where it is optional, it is sometimes an optional part of the centrally prescribed curriculum, rather than, as in this country, part of the curriculum which is left to schools' discretion. This is the case, for example, in both Portugal and Slovakia. In some European countries where Latin is optional, take-up is higher than in England. For example, in Germany 14% of pupils in secondary schools were taking Latin in 1991. In the gymnasium, Latin is typically taken by about a third of the pupils. Finally, in Spain classics have retained a strong place in the revised curriculum due to be introduced in 1996. Here classical culture is

an optional subject in the third and/or fourth years of compulsory secondary education, but all schools must offer it. It involves two hours per week of basic Latin and the study of Greek and Roman culture. In the revised Spanish baccalaureate Latin and Greek are compulsory subjects within the humanities option of the Humanities and Social Sciences stream: four hours of Latin and Greek in the first year, with compulsory Latin and optional Greek continuing into the second year.

It is useful to think about what happens in other countries at a time when we are moving to a much more flexible situation regards the curriculum in England. The Dearing review of the National Curriculum reaffirmed that the study of Greece and Rome remains part of the statutory entitlement of all pupils through the ancient Greece study unit in the key stage 2 history curriculum; through the requirement to study the Roman conquest and occupation of Britain (and the option to study it in depth), also in Key Stage 2, and through the English curriculum where myths and legends and the origins of the English language remain things which schools are required to teach. Dearing has freed up time outside the National Curriculum (20% at ages 5-11 and 40% at 14-16), as well as increasing the scope for flexibility within it. There is therefore a much more flexible situation now than at any time since 1989 for schools wishing to consider retaining or reinstating classical subjects as either an optional or compulsory element of the curriculum during these phases of schooling. There are of course competing pressures for time within both the optional and compulsory elements of the national statutory curriculum: a second modern foreign language; personal and social education; careers education and guidance; additional history and geography; additional physical education; vocational options. But the possibilities for classical subjects are also now there. How schools choose to use this flexibility will obviously depend on the weight they place on competing priorities, on their perception of pupil and parental attitudes, on the availability of staff. I do not necessarily see the growth of vocational options at Key Stage 4 as a problem for classical studies. I would be very surprised if many schools chose to require pupils to opt for a vocational course.

Post-16, the situation is more fluid. As you know, Sir Dearing has just been invited to undertake a major review of qualifications. In advance of Sir Ron identifying issues for further exploration, it would be premature to speculate about the implications for the classics. A move to greater breadth (and I am not saying that this is something I would support) might have the potential for widening access to the classics, but must at the same time raise issues about how best to maintain rigour and standards of GCE A levels. This is a space we will need to watch.

I said I would leave you with a six-point action plan. I wouldn't thank me if it had the appearance of something prescriptive. The choices rest entirely with you. Many of the points apply to both primary and secondary schools.

- First, make sure your schools are using to the full the opportunities which exist for classical study within the National Curriculum. The study of ancient Greece in history is a key element here. What is the best time and the best way in which to teach this? How can learning best be reinforced subsequently? The Roman empire is now an optional subject in Key Stage 3, but are there ways of continuing to teach it within freed-up time? How best can the resources which

been invested in this study be used? In English, what are the best ways of encouraging a study of myths and legends and of the Graeco-Roman contribution to our language?

- Second, put the case I have outlined above for the optional or compulsory study of Latin or other classical subjects 11-14 or 14-16. Focus on what is truly distinctive about classics, not just on features it shares with half the other subjects in the curriculum. Resist pressures to determine the curriculum solely in terms of narrow utilitarian considerations about employability.
- Third, don't be afraid to think the unthinkable. Intensive Latin programmes for 10/11 year olds in US inner cities have been very successful in promoting a greater awareness of English and in speeding up the later study of Romance languages. Given that 20% of primary schools now include some modern foreign language teaching outside the National Curriculum, how long will it be before a primary school includes the study of a classical language as part of its freed-up time?
- Fourth, don't ignore the possibility of business support for this part of the school curriculum. Business links with schools have been one of the great success stories of the last two decades. Business views on the curriculum have often been very refreshing in focusing on the broader aims of education, rather than on just narrow short-term needs for specific skills.

Is there any prospect of business funding of enterprising work in classical subjects? Has anyone tried?

- Fifth, how can the revolution in information technology be best used to support high quality teaching and learning in the classics? How can classics demonstrate its wares on the information superhighway?
- Finally, disseminate as widely as possible the many examples of excellent practice in classics teaching in schools. There is a danger that classicists only talk to other classicists. Make sure that heads and deputies and those who make curriculum decisions in schools are aware of what their pupils are missing.

I said at the beginning that the decline in classics in our schools came about as a result of decisions made by countless individuals in schools and universities, rather than as a result of any central initiative or national plan. Given that there is still a great deal of autonomy in our school system - and much more now than before the Dearing reforms - lots of individual decisions can also reverse this decline. It's over to you to put your case.

Dr Nicholas Tate is Chief Executive of the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority.

He delivered his speech at the J.A.C.T. AGM, 13th May 1995.

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Texts for Today

Bridget Loney

It is a number of years now since the availability of school editions of Classics texts began to present a problem. For some time, Bristol Classical press provided valuable assistance in making editions available. In recent years, however, new types of examinations, together with new types of approach to learning and teaching, have meant different requirements: no longer simply the prescription of, for example, one or two books of the *Aeneid* or the *Odyssey*, but the production of new selections from the works of several authors, prose and verse, with provision of the plain text for reference in "open-book" examinations. These changes have necessitated a different approach for school texts. This article describes the development of a new system for examinations in Scotland, conducted by the Scottish Examination Board.

Two decades ago, the system of Classics prescriptions was fairly straightforward and routine. The Scottish Examination Board's Classics Panel knew from experience which suitable editions had been published, and checked publishers' catalogues to make sure that books under consideration for prescription were still in print. The Board's officer for Classics would write to publishers to obtain confirmation that the books concerned were likely to remain in print for the years for which prescription was envisaged. Regular requests were received from teachers to have details of prescriptions several years in advance, in order to requisition books; the Panel met such requests by forward planning, and the Board issued details of future prescriptions well in advance of the years of the examinations concerned. For some years, this system ran quite smoothly: the published editions or selections more or less matched what the Panel considered appropriate for prescription; books remained in print; and copies were readily available.

Then problems began to appear. Some books, despite publishers' earlier assurances, became difficult to obtain. Sometimes the very prescription of a book caused a sudden demand, which led to a shortage, which led to reprinting, which led to temporary unavailability at the precise time when schools needed copies for the course. On occasion, the Board obtained permission from the publishers to photocopy the prescribed pages for issue to schools which had ordered copies of the book in good time, but, because of delays during reprinting, had not received them. Instructions were given to destroy such photocopies as soon as the book became available. In those days, nearly every school Classics department had its own horror story about non-availability of prescribed texts. This situation was profoundly unsatisfactory for all concerned - pupils, teachers and the Examination Board.

In 1983, a new examination began to be considered: Standard Grade. This was to replace Ordinary Grade, for pupils at age 16. No longer was a syllabus to be defined in terms of content (e.g. unseen, seen, background); instead, elements of a subject were to be identified, with skills for each element, and Grade Related Criteria (GRC) for assessment. For Standard Grade Latin, three elements were identified: Translation (i.e. unseen), Interpretation (i.e. seen) and Investigation (i.e. background).

Interpretation was the element concerned with study of the

content, style and effect of prescribed literature. The decision was taken that some of the prescription would be in the original and some in English. The new type of skill-based question for the examination would require candidates to range widely over the prescription, rather than (as before, in Ordinary Grade) translating seen work - which might involve memorisation of the text - than anything else - and answering factual questions on an extract.

For the new examinations, candidates would require to have access to the complete prescribed text in the examination hall. The "examination" text would have to be a plain text, without help from introduction, notes or vocabulary; yet pupils would require such help in their study of the text during the year. That seemed to mean annotated editions for class-work and plain texts for the examination. Extracts from several authors were considered suitable for the prescription: some letters of Cicero, some short poems by Catullus, and Ovid's version of the story of Icarus, from the *Metamorphoses*. Was this going to involve several separate editions, and also translations of the sections prescribed for study in English - and plain (Oxford or other) editions for the examination? Expense had to be considered. It was crucial to establish which texts (and translations) would be used for the examination, since readings and punctuation could affect the meaning and the interpretation.

The solution reached for Standard Grade Latin - and later for Standard Grade Greek - was for the Examination Board to produce, print and issue a booklet of plain text, containing the sections prescribed in the original, and the further sections prescribed in English. Publishers gave permission for use of short sections of Latin text (plain edited text), and translations of the other sections were written by the committees concerned. Copies of the booklet were made available from the Board to presenting centres for use in the examinations; separate copies were provided for the examinations. This arrangement ensured that the basic text remained available for the duration of the prescription. Publishers and curriculum agencies were asked to produce support material for the prescription as they saw fit; teachers could use such material, and refer to more recent editions, at their discretion.

This arrangement seemed to work well, and the introduction of a new prescription for Standard Grade Latin in 1994 followed the same system.

For Higher Grade and Certificate of Sixth Year Studies, the situation was more difficult. Larger amounts of text were prescribed at these levels than at Standard Grade, and plain editions and translations were still prescribed, with attendant problems of availability. Plain texts were provided for use in the Board in examinations, but these had to be returned to the Board after the examinations, for reasons of copyright (especially in the English sections especially).

In 1992, the Board's Classics Panel began to consider a new prescription for Higher Grade Latin. Teachers had made the case for a booklet of text to be made available for use in class, as had been the case for Standard Grade. Thus began a three-year process for the Classics Panel to produce a booklet of prescribed text

booklet has now been issued by the Board, for the 1997 Higher Grade Latin examination. The text consists of extracts from the works of Cicero (*In Verrem II V*), Virgil (*Aeneid VI*) and Plautus (*Rudens*), partly in Latin and partly in English. The translations are the work of the Panel; the aim is to provide a straightforward version suitable for teenage students.

No system is without flaws or criticisms; but the indications so far are that the advantages outweigh any disadvantages in the development outline above.

So much for the past and the present, and the future until 1997 (as far as plans can be made). After that, nothing is clear, with

regard to prescribed texts, examinations - and education itself. The Examination Board will be involved in a merger, as part of the Government's policy to integrate all post-16 provision in Scotland. It remains to be seen what encouragement and opportunities there may be for Classics in the years ahead.

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Further details concerning Classics examinations in Scotland are available from Bridget Loney, Examinations Officer, Scottish Examination Board, Ironmills Road, Dalkeith, Midlothian, Scotland EH22 1LE (Tel: 0131 663 6601 Fax 0131 654 2664).

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