

Research Article

‘I Still See the Elitism’. Classical languages and the language of class at Liverpool

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Abstract

The article discusses the issue of access to Classical education in general and Greek and Latin language in particular currently experienced by working-class students in the UK, both at high school and at University level. It then focuses specifically on the provision of Classical languages in the Liverpool region, traditionally an area of deprivation and a focal point of Classics poverty. The article details the results from a survey conducted on 68 students of the Department of Archaeology, Classics and Egyptology of the University of Liverpool, which shows that even when the cohort is not predominantly middle class, feelings of marginalisation and estrangement continue to be felt by students. Finally, it suggests a number of recommendations to address these concerns, tackle elitism, and promote inclusion.

Key words: Classical languages, elitism, Liverpool, class, school system

Classics and Class in Britain

The words ‘Classics’ (Latin *classicus*) and ‘class’ (*classis*) have the same root; both words come from the Latin verb *clamare*, to ‘call out’, ‘acclaim’. While in Rome the word *classici* referred to the highest class of the Roman people, Classics has always meant ‘first class’ literary products (Lewis and Short, 1896). In the late 2nd century AD, the Roman writer Aulus Gellius referred to the greatest authors as *scriptores classici*, ‘classic writers’ – as opposed to second-rate authors, *scriptores proletarii* (*Noctes Atticae* 19.18.15), the writing proletariat. The British people, especially the English, has always felt a particular association with the Graeco-Roman world (Hingley, 2000, pp. 1–16; Stray, 1998, pp. 7–45). In the Britain of the past three centuries, the Classical curriculum, with its all-male boarding schools mostly run by Anglican priests, has long been understood as a pathway to ‘gentlemanliness’, which meant access to Oxford and Cambridge for the privileged few enrolled in it (Hall and Stead, 2020, pp. 10; 24). Today, things are gradually changing. In Oxbridge, a new Classics programme was created to ensure that students without A Levels in Latin or Ancient Greek are able to study it successfully. The issue of access, however, remains. In 2019, only one in four (26%) students who accepted a place on the three-year Classics course at Cambridge came from state schools, and 14% were from BAME backgrounds, with British Black, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi students among the most under-represented (The Guardian, 2021).

In November 2020, the Council of University Classics Departments published their Equality and Diversity Report, which opens with the following, alarming sentence:

Classics in the UK has particular problems relating to the dominance (and perceptions of that dominance) of a few ancient (pre-1800) universities. The valuing or under-valuing of different educational backgrounds, methods, approaches, and fields of Classics can have a particularly divisive effect, and can exclude people from feeling they have *the ability to study the subject* (italics mine). [...] The focus on competence and fluency in Latin and Greek can be particularly problematic, when the vast majority in the UK do not have the opportunity to study the languages at school (CUCD, 2020, p. 18).

Whilst income and ethnicity have long been recognised as factors historically impacting access to Higher Education, relatively little research work has gone so far into the repercussions at university level of systematic class divide, especially in relation to Classical education¹. Class is not a protected characteristic in the Equality Act 2010, but is crucial in understanding: (i) in what way a significant portion of the student body in Britain has been and is currently being deprived of the possibility of receiving a Classical education; (ii) how those who do, may feel disempowered, alienated, marginalised, thus unable to fit in institutions that are alien spaces modelled on and dominated by the middle-class experience (Canevaro *et al.*, 2021)². For working-class students, barriers are everywhere, at every level:

There’s the lack of financial resources to navigate precarious contracts (no ‘Bank of Mum and Dad’). There’s the imposter syndrome and a nagging feeling of not fitting in. There are

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the demands to ‘tone it down.’ There’s the lack of role models and mentors from a similar class background. And there’s the sense of social displacement and estrangement that comes with our new lives. We no longer fit in where we came from, yet do not quite belong where we have arrived. This is the price of the ticket of so-called social mobility. [...] Underrepresentation, [...] being caught between two worlds, a sizeable class pay gap, even self-elimination from the discipline. Working-class origins affect not just getting *in* but also getting *on*. (Canevaro and Canevaro, 2021).

Class is a concept that is difficult to quantify and may mean different things to different people. The report ‘How White Working-class Pupils Have Been Let Down, And How To Change It’ by the Education Committee of the House of Commons³ states that Free School Meals-eligibility ‘is currently the most pragmatic way to evaluate disadvantage, and is frequently used as a proxy for ‘working class’ (House of Commons, 2021). This clearly amounts to playing to the lowest common denominator: 1.63 million pupils (19.7%) were eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) as of October 2020, but as many as 40% of UK 18–24-year-olds think of themselves as working class. (Social Mobility Barometer, 2021).⁴ The Committee’s report appears to draw from the written evidence to the Committee by Universities UK in July 2020, which states that ‘there is no single definition in what constitutes a pupil as being from a ‘working-class’ background’⁵ But this should not be used as an excuse not to devise and implement reform to a system that keeps failing a large portion of youngsters. The crude reality is that the percentage of students from low-income background (referred to as low participation groups) entering Higher Education has not risen above 15% since 1998 (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2022, Fig. 6). In addition, research suggests a ‘strong direct association between social class background and success in education: put simply, the higher a child’s social class, the greater are their attainments on average’ (Gillborn and Mirza, 2000, pp. 18–19).

According to OCR, the UK awarding body that creates exam papers for GCSEs and A Levels, including Greek and Latin, a total of 1016 students took Latin at A-Level and 188 took Greek in 2020. The figure for Latin is about one twentieth of the figure for Biology or Chemistry. And the trend is downwards: in 2019, it was 1128 for Latin, 219 for Greek; in 2018, it was 1179 for Latin, 246 for Greek. The real problem is not so much one of numbers, but – again – of class: the study of Latin and Greek languages is almost non-existent in the state sector. ‘You could almost say that a working-class state school [...] is one that does not offer any form of Classics’, writes Jerome Moran in his recent pamphlet *Working Class(ics): an Immodest Proposal* (Moran, 2019, p. 105). Considering that state schools count for 93% of the entire student body in England, it is clear that at A level Classics students come from, almost entirely, that mere 7% of pupils for whose education their parents can pay. The scarcity of pupils in the ever-at-threat Classics field is therefore inextricably linked with the very limited access enjoyed by the vast majority of students to Classics as a discipline (Hodgkinson, 2021).

Although the 2021 British Council Language Trends report draws on responses from only 34 state schools in England currently offering Latin at Key Stage 3 (ages 11–14) (British Council, 2021), it must conceal the true, higher figure. For example, Department for Education examination statistics for 2019 (the latest data set available) show that 283 state schools entered students for Latin GCSE that year (Department for Education, 2019)⁶. However, a stark class divide can be seen between independent and state

schools at GCSE level: 65% of independent schools offer GCSE Latin and one in three offer Ancient Greek, compared to 9% and fewer than 2% of state schools respectively (Bracke, 2016, p. 35; Hall, 2016, p. 3). The situation with A-levels is also pretty disheartening. In 2019, only 2% of state-maintained schools offered A-level Latin and only 0.2% offered Greek (Hunt and Holmes-Henderson, 2021). In 2015, Camden School for Girls in north London, the only non-selective, state school in the country to offer A-level Greek, considered ditching the programme citing financial concerns. Teachers issued an appeal for help, published in *The Guardian* newspaper, which apparently prevented the closing of the subject (The Guardian, 2015)⁷. It is paradoxical that of the currently 21 universities offering 32 language-based Classics courses in the UK, 16 of these 32 courses either require or prefer students to have taken Latin and/or Greek at A-Level (Holmes-Henderson and Watts, 2021, pp. 86–87). If the pool of qualified candidates for these language-based Classics courses comes almost exclusively from the independent sector, Classics will always be facing the threat of extinction.

Classics and Class at Liverpool

In this article we reflect on students’ self-perception of class. In particular, we will deal with class composition in terms of class background, focusing on the kind of experience and problems that new Classicists, that is Classics students entering the discipline for the first time, may experience if their class background is not the default one, i.e. the middle class.

At the University of Liverpool, undergraduate students can study the ancient worlds of Greece and Rome via three degrees: Classics, Classical Studies and Ancient History. Of these, only Classics actually requires students to learn Ancient Greek and Latin. In other words, if students wish to study the Classical world, they will not be required to study the language. In Classics (as opposed to Classical Studies or Ancient History), half of the credits in their programme will be spent learning the grammar of Greek and Latin – something that requires a significant investment in time and effort. A typical 15-credit language module, especially at beginners and post-beginners level, will require students to have 33 contact hours and 117 hours of independent study, compared to around 20 hours of lectures and seminars and 130 hours of independent study in other non-language modules⁸. After typically two modules of Latin and four modules of Greek, students are rewarded with the chance to access the works of literature from Greece and Rome in the original language, without having to rely on someone else’s translation – a basic principle of Classical scholarship. It is true that students are not scholars, but they may become such: 27.6% of respondents in the survey informing this study declare in fact that it was precisely their plan to become an academic that motivated them to study Greek and/or Latin.

Data on 2021–2022 modular enrolment of first year-students in the Department of Archaeology, Classics and Egyptology reveal a very low uptake of language modules: only eight students decided to study Classics, the only undergraduate programme where the language component is required. Of the 11 incoming students interested in Classical culture (Classical Studies, i.e. Classics without languages, or with optional language component), only four are taking Greek and two are taking Latin. Of the 17 Ancient History first-year undergraduates, only one is taking Greek and one is taking Latin.

The purpose of this investigation is to understand why Classics students often turn down the chance to learn an ancient language,

even when they see the benefits of such an opportunity. I want to find out whether reluctance to take languages is connected with students' perception of self-worth: is this self-imposed distance from socially allocated privilege stopping students from enjoying Classical languages and flourishing as learners of foreign (in the broader sense of non-English) languages? Is it an issue of lack of self-confidence, and if so, where does that lack of self-confidence come from? Is it justified? Is it an issue of actual or self-perceived lack of linguistic skills? Or is it that students are just sloppy and lazy? Do they simply have a narrow and cynical focus on exams and grades, reckoning it will be less demanding to get a language-free degree? The survey 'Classics and Class at Liverpool' was created with these questions in mind.

Content and Structure of the Survey

The survey, which was entirely anonymous, consisted of 20 questions (see [Figure 1](#)). The first question asked students to give consent to their information being used for research purposes. 67 out of 68 respondents gave consent and completed the survey. Question 2 asked students to identify themselves as either working, middle, or upper class. The remaining 18 questions were subdivided into two main sections, one (Q3–11, pp. 3–11) addressing the concerns of students identifying as working class, the other (Q12–20a, b and c, pp. 12–20) surveying all Liverpool students within the Department of Archaeology, Classics and Egyptology, regardless of class composition, on their perception of ancient languages at Liverpool and beyond. The final page of the survey provided respondents with a list of recommended scholarly contributions on class and social mobility in England; Classics and Class in Britain; and data on the current state of Classics and Classical Civilisation in state schools and the independent sector. In order to ensure that the results were statistically robust, the survey was open to all students in our Department (425, including undergraduates, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research students). The survey contained a combination of multiple-choice questions (Q3–8; 11–12; 14–20) and open-ended questions (Q9–10, 13).

Structuring the survey in this way allowed me to target working-class students on matters affecting specifically their social class, measuring their attitudes to issues such as privilege and elitism in Higher Education. Q3–11 therefore were only answered by students identifying as working class, whereas Q12–20, which target broader issues affecting the discipline, were answered by all students. The first section of the survey looks into the hurdles faced by working-class students, both on an academic and on a personal level. Q3–7 assess the impact of class and socioeconomic factors more broadly on students' self-perception as learners and their confidence in tackling non-English languages.

The second section was designed to capture data on students' attitude to ancient languages with a view to understanding why not only Archaeology and Egyptology, but – most crucially – also Classics and Ancient History students often decline the chance to learn a Classical language, even when they clearly see the benefits of learning one. Q12 asked students whether they were currently enrolled in or planned to take any Greek or Latin module; those who responded negatively (57.6%) were asked why they decided not to take up Greek or Latin (Q15). Those who responded positively (42.4%, Q13–14) were asked to explain what led them to do so and whether they were satisfied with and enjoyed the process of learning.

Q16–18 were about the role played by school education in students' relationship with ancient languages, specifically whether

and how their school experience influenced their choices at university level. Students were asked whether they had any Latin or Greek at school, and at what level (A-Level, GCSE, key stage 3, or just informal sessions). Students who responded negatively (the vast majority, 68.7%) were asked whether any tuition in Latin or Greek at beginners' level would have been beneficial or would have increased their chances to take an ancient language at University (Q18). Q19 tested students' awareness that no prior knowledge of either language was required to attend Greek and Latin modules at Liverpool, with a view to determining whether lack of effective communication from staff was in fact among the contributing factors to the limited take-up of language modules. Finally, Q20 came back to the issue of class from a broader viewpoint, indirectly asking all students (i.e. not just working-class ones) whether maintaining current class structures was in fact among their priorities.

Results of the Survey

For a full breakdown of the responses, please see the Supplementary Appendix.

The answers to this final set of questions reveal that while being acutely aware of class issues affecting the discipline from a learning and teaching viewpoint, students overwhelmingly reject current class constructs; whilst most students consider it important that their teacher obtained his/her PhD from a good University (very important: 27.3%, somewhat important: 43.9%), Liverpool students show virtually no concern over their lecturers receiving their education from Oxbridge (not at all important: 71.2%; not that important: 18.2%).

58.3% of respondents (39 out of 68) identify themselves as coming from a working-class background (Q2). The figure is higher than the average of UK adults who think of themselves as working class (48% according to the 2021 Social Mobility Barometer [Social Mobility Commission, 2021]). This can be explained in part by the specificity of the Liverpool District, which was seen to contain more deprived areas than any other local authority and metropolitan borough in the UK after Birmingham in the period 2014–2020¹⁰. A study conducted by Liverpool City Council in 2019 found that Liverpool is the fourth most deprived local authority in England¹¹. In 2015–16, the University of Liverpool ranked first in the English Russell Group for the recruitment of students from low participation neighbourhoods and also first for the recruitment of students from state schools and colleges¹².

58.3% is still a significant figure, especially when measured against the prevalence rate of middle-class students in British HE. According to UCAS 2017 End of Cycle Report, the most advantaged fifth of students were four times more likely to access higher education in 2017 than the most disadvantaged fifth and pupils receiving free school meals at the age of 15 were half as likely to access higher education in 2017 as those who did not receive them¹³. As the data from the survey does not necessarily reflect objective measurements of class, but students' self-perception, what emerges from the survey is a strong sense of belonging and identification with working-class culture. Strong sense of identity and emotional association with the issues at hand may well have contributed to the high response rate of the survey.

Nearly 70% Liverpool students who identify as working class speak or are currently learning one or more foreign languages (other than Greek and Latin: Q3–4). This shows that working-class students at University Level proactively look for

- Q1. Consent to information being used for research purposes.
- Q2. Do you identify yourself as coming from a working-class background?
- Q3. Do you speak any modern language other than your own native one, or are you currently learning one or more foreign languages? (excluding Greek and Latin)
- Q4. Do you feel your educational background had a negative impact on how you feel about foreign or ancient languages?
- Q5. Are you confident in your linguistic skills? (very, fairly, not very, not at all confident)?
- Q6. Do you feel your ability to learn or general attitude to foreign languages would have been different if you belonged to a higher social class?
- Q7. Do you feel your ability to learn or general attitude towards foreign languages would have been different if you lived in a different part of the UK, for example in the South East of England?
- Q8. Are you currently doing a degree (undergraduate or postgraduate) in Classics or Ancient History?
- Q9. What did you associate Classics and Ancient History with before you started your degree?
- Q10. What do you associate Classics and Ancient History with, now that you're doing a degree on this subject?
- Q11. Would you say, based on your own experience at Liverpool and beyond, that Classics is an elitist subject?
- Q12. Are you currently studying Greek and/or Latin at University, or are you planning to take Greek and/or Latin next year or later as an undergraduate or postgraduate? Q13. What motivated you to study Greek and/or Latin?
- Q14. Do/did you enjoy learning Greek and or Latin?
- Q15. Why did you decide not to take up Latin or Greek?
- Q16. Did you have any Latin and/or Greek at school?
- Q17. Did receiving some Greek and/or Latin classes at school impact your module choices, i.e. did previous experience with ancient languages stimulate your willingness to learn Latin and Greek at a more advanced level?
- Q18. If you responded 'no Greek and Latin at all' to Q16: do you think any beginners Greek or Latin at school would have been beneficial to you and would that have increased your chances to take Latin or Greek at University?
- Q19. Are you aware that no prior knowledge of Greek and Latin is required to attend language modules?
- Q20. Mark the importance that each of these statements have for you: (very, somewhat, not that, not at all important):
- a) my teacher has a PhD from Oxbridge.
 - b) my teacher has a PhD from a good University.
 - c) my teacher comes from the same class as I do.

Figure 1. Survey questions.

opportunities to increase their language skills through the study of foreign languages, *de facto* autonomously remedying a gap in their education. According to the 2019 British Council report on language teaching in primary and secondary schools, there was a 19% reduction in entries for GCSE languages, with French and German each seeing declines of 30% in the 2014–2019 period. However, it is pupils in the state sector that are more negatively impacted by such trends. On average, 84% of Year 10 pupils in the independent sector are currently studying a language for GCSE, compared to 53% in the state sector. In the 2019 Language Trends report, concerns were raised about 'languages becoming a subject only accessible to 'higher attaining' students and reducing access to language learning in the state sector, in perceived contrast to the independent sector'. One teacher surveyed in the report wrote: 'Government policy of successive governments has been a disgrace – it's as if someone wants to deliberately do away with languages in the state sector' (British Council, 2019, p. 17).

It is inevitable to contrast this picture with that of EU countries. In 2019, in the Official Journal of the European Union, the Council recommended that member states...

...explore ways to help all young people to acquire before the end of upper secondary education and training – in addition to the languages of schooling – [...] a competence level in at least one other European language [...], and to encourage the acquisition of an additional (third) language to a level which allows them to interact with a degree of fluency. The acquisition of classical languages, such as Ancient Greek and Latin, can be part of the learner's linguistic repertoire (Council of the European Union, 2020, p. 114).

The social class divide can be clearly seen in the effects the pandemic had in the study of languages in England: in the 2021 British Council's Language Trends it is reported that...

71% of state schools in the most deprived areas reported a ‘big negative impact’ on language learning; 52% of state schools in the most affluent areas reported the same. By comparison just 16% of independent schools reported a ‘big negative impact’ (British Council, 2021, p. 5).

Indeed, nearly 85% of Liverpool students identifying themselves as working class feel that their educational background had a negative impact on how they feel about foreign or ancient languages. 25% would have liked to take up a new language, but feel that their school did not provide them with the necessary skills to do so, and 58.3% would have liked to, but did not feel encouraged or were in fact dissuaded to do so. These are alarming figures, which show at the same time an open and positive attitude of working-class students towards language learning and an educational system frustrating their good will. As a result of such failure, the majority of working-class students (53.8%) say they do not feel very confident in their linguistic skills.

An even more alarming picture emerges from responses to Q6–7. 76.9% of students identifying themselves as working class feel that their ability to learn or their general attitude to foreign languages would have been different if they belonged to a higher social class. Again, this reflects the attitude of residents in the North West of England, who are more acutely aware of social class divides than other areas in the country; whilst 46% of people in Britain at large believe that ‘where you end up in society is mainly determined by your background and who your parents were’ (51% of 18–24-year-olds), in the North West 80% say that ‘there is a large gap between social classes in Britain’ (Social Mobility Commission, 2021).

Students also demonstrate their awareness of the geographical divide in attainment in Britain’s education system. The majority of respondents (46.2%) believe that their ability to learn, or their general attitude towards, foreign languages would have been different if they lived in a different part of the UK, for example in the South East of England. This data substantiates the results of recent socioeconomical research on subject choice at HE level based on POLAR data;¹⁴ it emerged that Classics is the second lowest geographically proportional of all subjects in Higher Education, with only an 8.1% geographical representation in the country (Baig *et al.*, 2020). That is, Classics students tend to come from few, socioeconomically developed areas, mostly in the South East. Working-class Liverpool students are therefore facing a double challenge, the challenge of accessing language education and developing adequate skills coming from a disadvantaged background, and a second, no less significant, challenge posed by the geographical location of their upbringing. Indeed, data recently collected by Hunt and Holmes-Henderson show that the regional distribution of schools offering A-Level Classical Civilisation in England is extremely unequal: only 20 centres in the North of England compared to over 100 in North West London and South Central England and 90 in South East England and South London (Hunt and Holmes-Henderson, 2021, p. 6). It is therefore not surprising that, when asked whether they had any access to Greek or Latin at school (Q16), 68.7% of respondents in the survey said they had no access to the languages at all, and 9% had only a few informal sessions. Q17–18 confirmed my suspicion about the central role played by schools in inspiring and motivating students to undertake a degree in Classics; having a smattering of Latin and Greek before coming to university does appear to increase students’ confidence in their abilities and motivate them to progress at university level; two thirds of respondents said that receiving some Greek and/or Latin at school stimulated their willingness to learn Latin and Greek at a more advanced level (Q17). 63% of students who

were not lucky enough to receive any tuition in Greek or Latin at school felt that prior exposure to the languages would have benefited their experience in HE and would have increased their chances to take Latin or Greek at university.

Q9–11 looked into working-class students’ perception of Classics as a discipline. Q9–10 in particular measured the extent to which working-class students associated Classics with elitism, i.e. the expression of a class that is the polar opposite to theirs, before and after they started their degree. Half the students said they associated Classics with ‘elitism’, ‘privilege’, ‘Eton’ and ‘Oxbridge’ before the beginning of their degree. When asked whether their perception had changed now that they were doing a degree on the subject, a very high number of respondents said that their impression had *not* changed, or at least not significantly. Comments include:

‘My underlying idea has not changed: people coming from higher status/elite backgrounds have more chances to succeed.’

‘Nerdy, impressive subject, elitist and privileged in the sense that only the well educated and wealthy understand what my degree is.’

‘It is still an elitist subject area.’

‘A subject which has been appropriated by middle and upper classes following its marginalisation in state schools’

‘Colonialism, elitism, patriarchal attitudes’

‘Honestly, I still see the elitism. When you look at the career/education history of your lecturers, it feels like almost all of them went to a very prestigious Oxbridge-level university that I could never afford being working class. [...] I guess I associate it with not fitting in, being working class within a subject originally conceived (and still largely dominated by) the elite so not being accepted by them whilst also being seen as an outsider by other working-class people.’

‘Still quite elitist and high brow’

‘Being working class and not having a private education, I lack that edge that being upper class/privately-educated gives you so I need to take every opportunity I can to try and be seen as equal (I think the old saying of having to work twice as hard to be seen as only half as good applies here also).’

‘I do also associate [Classics] with a slight bit of elitism.’

‘The same [as before I started my degree] [Classics is] something that you don’t really do if you’re working class, something you won’t be able to get a career in unless you have connections/money, I got told a lot that yeah it’s interesting but ultimately useless for getting a job/trade.’

Two comments show a slight softening in their perception of the field:

‘Pretty much the same, but less focus on elitism as there are more than a few people on the course who do not fit the usual background.’

‘Still has some problems in terms of access but not inherently elite only.’

Asked whether they would say, based on their experience at Liverpool and beyond, that Classics is an elitist subject (Q11), 76% of students responded affirmatively¹⁵.

The second half of the survey investigated students' interest in Classical languages and the individual reasons to invest their time and energies in a potentially very demanding task. This applied to all students, not just those self-identifying as working class. The picture that emerges from Q13 (on students' motivation) is one of genuine passion for languages: 72.4% of respondents think that learning an ancient language will enrich their learning experience and 51.7% are doing that to read Classical authors in their original language. In addition, 79.3% of respondents said that they enjoy or have enjoyed learning Greek and/or Latin (Q14).

The three main reasons adduced by students for not taking up Latin or Greek (Q15) go back, once again, to issues of confidence in their own linguistic skills (41.7%), anxieties about not being able to keep up and feeling inadequate (52.8%), and not being good at languages in general (38.9%). Practical concerns about graduating on time (13.9%) or general aversion to ancient languages (boring: 5.6%, useless 11.1%) carry substantially less weight on students' decisions. 22.4% of respondents were not aware that no prior knowledge of Greek and Latin is required to attend Classical language modules (Q19).

Steps forward and recommendations

Measures to counteract this apparent disadvantage are already being taken, but there is still a long way to go to solve what appears to be a structural problem of access to Classics education for most students and tackle the more subtle and less visible issues of confidence and estrangement among working-class individuals. Several initiatives have recently alerted the Classics community to problems that, if ignored or dismissed, will pose a threat to the survival of an entire discipline. Most recently, the Network for Working Class Classicists have started working with the Council of Universities of Classical Departments EDI Committee to collect data on class demographics in the field of Classics and determine how class dynamics intersect with gender, ethnicity, disability and sexuality (Canevaro *et al.*, 2021).

As for Liverpool, the University has been recently piloting the use of contextual offers for applicants, offering a two-grade reduction from the standard offer for certain underrepresented groups¹⁶. The Liverpool Hub within Classics for All North has launched a partnership with three independent and four state schools to introduce Classical Civilisation and Ancient History into the schools' curricula (Case and Haley, 2020). The Liverpool Schools Classics Project has been organising, under the aegis of the Department of Archaeology, Classics and Egyptology, a series of events with schools in the Liverpool areas, most recently talks on the set texts for A-level Latin students. In 2020, the Department launched its own 'Diversifying the Classics Curriculum', a project led by Dr Fiona Hobden, where 47 students were asked to question our modular choices and were invited to work with us to ensure greater representation of diversity in the content and delivery of our courses. The project report, produced by Serafina Nicolosi and Kate Caraway, highlighted students' interest in (45%) and willingness to see more space given to (36%) class as a subject. Commenting on Liverpool's Teaching and Learning Environment, 19% of students said they only feel 'included to some extent'. Class features, directly or indirectly, in some of the students' comments:

'I do feel excluded from some CL(assics and) A(ncient) H(istory) modules as they often assume a background

knowledge in classical literature [which favours] people who attended private schools.'

'There is very little diversity in terms of social background in ACE staff.'

'There seem to be a majority of white, southern, middle-class students.'

The teaching and research units within individual institutions should be listening to these concerns and ensuring a level of support to students who feel disconnected from both their peers and their lecturers. While departments in most HE institutions in Britain have well-oiled support systems to address the personal and academic needs of students, mentors are generally randomly allocated to students, who often decline the opportunity to meet and discuss their academic performance and personal circumstances with their academic advisors. In her recent *Higher Education and Working-Class Academics*, Teresa Crew (2020) has proposed an alternative advisory system based on mentors willing and able to support their students to construct their own professional identity through fostering a sense of belonging and promoting role models.

Whilst 25% of respondents in the Survey said one of the reasons for not taking up languages is how difficult and intimidating Greek and Latin look, eight out of ten have shown an extremely high appreciation of Classical language classes and an awareness of the important skills these sessions convey. It is now time to capitalise on these successes. As Classical language teachers, we should be committed to dispel this aura of negativity that surrounds languages, something we inherited from centuries of structural elitism and a deeply unequal education system, which neither we nor our students are responsible for.

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Supplementary material

The supplementary material for this article can be found at <https://doi.org/10.1017/S2058631022000289>.

Notes

- 1 But new, ground-breaking work is currently being carried out. Two seminal studies are worth citing here: Crew (2020) and Reay (2021).
- 2 Loveday (2015) argues that entering HE education for working-class students has been construed in the socio-political discourse as an 'instrumental means of achieving upward mobility, or aspiring to become middle class', in a way that working-class students become indebted to a system of creditors designed to make them feel inferior.
- 3 The report was published on 22 June 2021 as a 'first step' towards supporting left-behind groups. We all look forward to the Committee tackling the issue of non-white left-behind groups.
- 4 The responses to the Education Select Committee inquiry submitted by the Government (see https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1026735/E02682727_CP_524.pdf) and by the National Literacy Trust to the UK Parliament in the same period (see <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/6346/html/>) both question the validity of FSM as a reliable measure of disadvantage (both accessed 21 May 2022).
- 5 Universities UK stated that Universities are responding to the 'potential widening of attainment gaps' through access and participation plans drawing on

'a range of measure including being from a low participation neighbourhood (LPN) and level of parental education' (p. 1): <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/9043/default/> (accessed 21 May 2022). Other criteria used in research as proxies for working class include: parental occupation; household income (either the lowest quintile or below 60% of the median); parental uptake of state benefits; groups experiencing limited social mobility. For further information, see Baars *et al.* (2016, p. 10).

6 For GCSE Latin, there were 283 state schools, with 3,634 entries, and 331 private schools, with 5566 entries ((Department for Education, 2019)).

7 See also Hogg (2017).

8 I have asked students whether teaching delivery was a factor impacting their decision to attend language classes; what emerged from my Survey (Q15) is that only 11.1% of them decided not to take Latin or Greek because they are either 'too shy to participate actively in seminar discussions' or because they 'prefer lectures to seminars'.

9 Lister (2009) and Goodman (2017) both illustrate the various challenges faced by undergraduate students when transitioning from school to university, often having to rethink their working methods and approach to studying, from acquiring a firmer grasp on grammar and spelling to identifying new, more effective translation methods.

10 According to the European Community-led Local Development project: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/442823/ERDF_OP_Annex_on_CLLD_FINAL_070715.pdf (accessed 22 May 2022).

11 See <https://liverpool.gov.uk/media/1359213/imd-2019-liverpool-analysis-main-report.pdf> (accessed 22 May 2022).

12 See https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/media/livacuk/about/University_of_Liverpool_Economic_Social_Impact_Report_on_the_Liverpool_City_Region_2015_2016.pdf (accessed 22 May 2022).

13 See <https://wwwucas.com/file/140396/download?token=TC7eMH9W> p. 5 and p. 23 (accessed 22 May 2022). A slight improvement can be seen in the recently published 2021 figures: 20.9% of students eligible for FSM and a higher proportion of students from the most disadvantaged areas entered higher education. See <https://wwwucas.com/corporate/news-and-key-documents/news/ucas-end-cycle-2021-strong-demand-uk-he-amidst-global-pandemic> (accessed 22 May 2022).

14 Participation Of Local Areas, measuring geographical disadvantage within the country.

15 On Classics and elitism, see now Canevaro (2021), especially p. 194, where he describes the damaging effects of an elitist learning background on the educational experience of learners.

16 See <https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/applying/contextual-data/2021-contextual-admissions-pilot/> (accessed 22 May 2022).

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