JACT is 50 years old this year. It is with great pleasure that we enclose a commemorative booklet ‘JACT at 50’, written by members of the individual subcommittees. We hope that you enjoy reading it and look forward to at least another 50 years – easier or harder, time will only tell.

The world of education is endlessly fascinating – and that of teaching Classics in schools especially so - since it seems so dependent on the sort of whims and signs from central government which would task the most respected augurs of ancient Rome. There have been a number of events recently which may have significant effects on the teaching of Classics. The omens are looking more good than bad at the moment. But for how long?

Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Education, has unveiled proposals for the new English Baccalaureate (EBC) examinations, which will replace GCSEs in the subjects of Mathematics, English, Science, Modern History, Geography and one of the 24 or so Modern or Ancient Foreign Languages currently offered in schools. Yes – you read it right! Latin and Ancient Greek are included among the languages which from 2016, perhaps even earlier, will make up the government’s recommended and quite probably compulsory core curriculum of rigorous and ‘facilitating’ subjects. At the same time he has been consulting on whether Primary schools should be compelled from 2014 to offer a Modern or Ancient Foreign Language from a shorter list, from which Latin and Ancient Greek have not been omitted either.

On the face of it this is great news: recognition at last. After all those lean years since the birth of the National Curriculum in 1988, our beloved languages shall take their place in the new, approved curriculum. Even if we have to wait until 2016, or 2014.

But let’s check out those warm entails a bit more closely. I refer to Mary Beard’s piece in the Times Literary Supplement (June 22nd, 2012) where she expresses anxiety that Latin might be being perceived as the ‘favourite subject of the radical right wing’. She wrote this in response to comments by Andy Burnham, the then Shadow Secretary of State for Education, who had publicly scorned the study of Latin during a television programme. Melissa Benn too, the journalist and educational campaigner, in her much-publicised book ‘School Wars’ (Verso, 2011), had joined the attack on Latin. She had accused a school of having the subject in its core curriculum in order covertly to ‘discourage certain kinds of families from applying’ (p. 92). Mercifully Melissa Benn will not be the next Secretary of State for Education, whether there is a change of government or not, and meanwhile Andy Burnham has been moved on and replaced by Stephen Twigg, who has said nothing so far of significance about Latin. Indeed, it is rumoured that there might still be life left in the embers of the career of Lord Adonis, the architect of the Labour Academies programme. In his recent book ‘Education, Education, Education’ (Biteback, 2012) he showed a much more supportive stance towards Latin being made available to all pupils regardless of the type of school they attend (pp. 184-185). He has been tipped as having a major role in education once again if his party is returned at the next election. And there’s the thing: will the EBC be sufficiently developed and stable, with Latin and Greek embedded in it, to survive a possible change of government? One review of the new London musical ‘Sweeney’ opined malevolently that the tunes ‘aren’t even over before you’ve forgotten them’. Will this kind of fate befall the EBC – destined never to be implemented before it is killed off and forgotten by all except the policy-wonks who created it? A recent article in the Times Educational Supplement (January 19th 2013) suggested that Michael Gove might be the only one who thinks the EBC is a good idea. And, if it does get ‘kicked into the long grass’, would Latin and Ancient Greek go with it into oblivion once again?

Who will teach these subjects, if the
EBC does get past the drawing board? I have already shown in this Journal how much teacher training in Classics fails to keep pace with the loss of teachers through retirement or leaving the classics classroom for other reasons. The government’s answer is revealed in the response given by Lord Hill in the recent short debate in the House of Lords kindly initiated by Lord Aberdare, which is reported in these pages. Essentially they are relying on the new freedom afforded to academies and free schools to recruit, like the independent schools, graduates straight from university. In this they fail to recognise that the independent schools themselves want to have trained teachers, just as much as the state schools. And, according to the DfE website, at the time of writing around 40% of state secondary schools are not academies or free schools. And if I was a teacher, I’d quite like a bit of training with some letters after my name, if only to help with my career prospects.

But what about our other Classical subjects? What about Ancient History and Classical Civilization? We have already got used to the idea – bizarre as it is – that Ancient History ‘counts’ as part of the present formation of the EBacc (the crude and, one assumes, temporary measure of school performance hastily invented at the beginning of 2012 and retrospectively applied to 2011 and thenceforth), but that Classical Civilization does not. But there is no mention of Ancient History either in the consultation document about the new EBC. Are we to assume that, somehow, it isn’t as rigorous any more as the Ancient History which does qualify under the EBacc, or as ‘facilitating’ as Modern History?

And there are serious questions to be asked about Michael Gove’s suggestion that the individual examination boards should tender for the franchise to offer an examination for each of the subjects in the EBC. Despite not counting as an EBacc subject, the WJEC Level 2 certificates in Latin have been very successful in attracting some 3,000 unit entries in 2012 from schools – both independent and state – who, for whatever reason, have decided that the standard GCSE examinations are not suited to their needs. How would a single examination board be able to meet the needs of young Latinists who had had such a wide range of educational experiences? It’s all very well for there to be a single examination for a subject like Mathematics, where there has been a consensus among teachers, academics and examiners about the subject matter and where legal requirements exist for the length of time set aside to teach it. In Latin, however, there is no agreement on these matters. Thus a pupil who has been learning Latin from prep school and one who has learnt it from Year 10, or one who has been taught by specialist teachers, and one who has been taught by a non-specialist, and another by distance learning, will take the same exam: the only exam in Latin allowed. Potentially, take the evidence of the 134 applicants who asked The Roman Society for financial support to set up or develop Latin or Roman civilisation courses over the last two years (2011-2012). Here is a breakdown of the applications by type of school:

- 42 state primary schools
- 3 independent preparatory schools
- 76 state secondary schools
- 3 independent secondary schools
- 10 other institutions or individuals

76 of those 134 applications were from secondary schools asking for help to buy Latin course books. Of these, almost all were state secondary schools, and almost all of them were setting up their own Latin departments for the first time. Almost all of them were drawing on existing Modern Foreign Language, History or English teachers and often were taught at lunchtime or before or after school (further details are given later in this Journal). That Latin is being offered in yet more state schools is, of course, a cause for great celebration. But in very many cases it is not being taught by teachers trained as Classics teachers. Let us hope that the putative National Examination in Latin recognises their achievements and provides the sort of public pathways that accommodate the wide range of experiences of teaching and learning Latin today. And let us pray that being inside the EBC turns out to be the godsend we have been waiting for.

I finish with something that fetches a wry smile. It’s the wretched EBacc thing, again. The TA has decided that applicants for University-based teacher-training courses can only get bursaries to cover the fees provided that the subject being trained for is the EBacc. They are only going to offer bursaries for trainees undertaking Latin or Ancient Greek PGCEs. They note that Classical Civilization is not an EBacc subject. They note that we in Cambridge offer a PGCE in Classics, as does King’s College London. They seem to think that Classical Civilization and Classics are the same things. ‘Sorry,’ they say, ‘No bursaries for your Classics trainees – not unless you can show that they spend most of their time learning how to teach Latin or Ancient Greek’. Do none of them know what Classics is? Perhaps Classics graduates these days who enter the Civil Service give the DfE a wide berth and just fly through into the Foreign Office or GCHQ. If they were to look carefully, they would discover that there are no courses in the UK which offer PGCEs in Latin or Ancient Greek at all. Maybe they have looked and hope to save a little cash.

Here’s a man to help: Michael Gove sent a message of support to the Classics for All celebration on 18th July 2012:

‘It’s fantastic news that more and more state schools are offering pupils the chance to study Latin. The classics offer students a chance to commune with some of the finest minds of all time, they offer intellectual training of the most rigorous kind and endless pleasure throughout life. It must also be noted that employers value the logical thinking, clear writing and enquiring nature shown by students who choose to study the classics.’

He seems to know what he is talking about. Perhaps he ought to have a word with the TA.

This edition of JCT is a bumper one and I am very grateful to the numerous people who have presented articles. We intend the next edition (JCT 28) to have a focus on Classics teaching and ICT and we welcome any pieces from teachers or academics.