



# Bristol Classics Hub — reflections on the first year

by Hannah Walsh

The Bristol Classics Hub was set up in September 2016 to promote and support the teaching of classical subjects in state schools in the South West of England. Funded by *Classics for All* and the *Institute of Greece, Rome and the Classical Tradition* and delivered in partnership with the University of Bristol, the hub aims to widen access to Classics by offering a powerful and stable focus for regional development.

Historically, there has been a stark divide between educational outcomes in the independent and state sectors in Bristol. In the early 2000s, Bristol was consistently placed as one of the poorest performing local authorities in England in terms of GCSE performance (Raphael Reed *et al.*, 2007) and many parents were choosing to send their children to state schools outside the city or to one of the numerous fee-paying schools within the city. However, in the last decade enormous progress has been made by inner-city schools: between 2010 and 2017, the percentage of Bristol state schools rated as ‘requiring improvement’ or ‘inadequate’ by Ofsted has fallen from 46% to 8% (Ofsted, 2017). Despite these dramatic improvements, the need to tackle educational inequality within the city remains as important as ever. Bristol City Council’s deprivation mapping exercise in 2015 identified the ‘Education, Skills and Training Domain’ as the area where Bristol experiences some of the starkest disparities: a fifth of local areas (LSOAs) are placed within the most deprived 10%

nationally in this ‘domain’, while a fifth are placed within the least deprived 10% nationally (BCC, 2015, p. 30).

The way Classics has been taught in the city exemplifies these broader trends of educational inequality. The vast majority of fee-paying schools in the city boast strong Classics departments which offer several classical subjects. The Department of Classics and Ancient History at the University of Bristol is a highly successful, outward-looking department that thrives on engaging with the public as well as collaborating with scholars from across the world. Yet despite the strong Classics infrastructure within the city, opportunities for state school pupils (both within the city of Bristol and across the South West) to access classical subjects have been relatively limited.

In 2011, a productive partnership formed between *Classics for All* and Dr Genevieve Liveley in the Department of Classics and Ancient History at the University of Bristol. Through this partnership, *Classics for All* part-funded training of final year undergraduates and postgraduates each year, who then went on to lead Latin classes and clubs in a small number of schools in Bristol. This model successfully introduced Latin into several schools which would not otherwise have it but its long-term impact was limited in terms of sustainability and development potential.

In January 2016, *Classics for All* and the Bristol Classics Department initiated

a training and mentoring partnership with Wydean School in Gloucestershire to introduce Latin as part of MFL and English teaching. The success of this particular partnership highlighted the importance of offering flexible, relevant and cost-effective local support to schools; rather than simply sending students in to run Latin clubs for a limited period, this project equipped teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to teach Latin themselves.

Spurred on by the enthusiasm for Classics at Wydean School, preliminary research was carried out in June 2016 to gauge the level of interest among headteachers and teachers in local state schools regarding the introduction of classical subjects. These results were positive and prompted the establishment of the Bristol Classics Hub in September.

In practical terms, the hub consists of a 0.3 FTE project co-ordinator who is responsible for liaising with schools, managing day-to-day hub activity and facilitating training. The co-ordinator is supported by Dr Liveley and Dr William Guast, an IGRCT research fellow responsible for departmental outreach activities.

In the space of 10 months, the Bristol Classics Hub has quickly established itself as an important part of the Classics educational community in the South West. We have:

- built up strong relationships with local schools and worked closely with

11 secondary schools and eight primary schools, many in areas of high deprivation;

- trained over 60 non-specialist primary and secondary teachers to teach Latin, Greek and Classical Civilisation on a sustainable basis;
- organised a GCSE and A Level Classical Civilisation conference which attracted over 80 students from schools across the region;
- provided a range of enrichment events and school workshops for pupils aged 5-18.

In the new 2017-18 academic year, over 1,500 students in 14 schools will either have the opportunity to study a classical subject for the first time or to study a greater range of classical subjects.

When discussing *Classics for All's* regional hubs, Hodgson and Murray-Pollock point out that 'there is no blueprint for success' (Hodgson & Murray-Pollock, 2016, p. 48). This has certainly rung true in Bristol. When establishing the hub, we decided to move away from the model of student-led Classics classes and clubs (which is used with great success and impact in other hubs) and to focus instead on training non-specialist teachers in schools to lead the introduction of Classics. This shift was driven by our vision that the Bristol hub would play a role in empowering the teachers as well as the young people within each school; we want teachers to see themselves as active participants in the work of the hub rather than as passive recipients of outreach activities.

Building strong relationships with individual teachers and departments has therefore been central to the work of the hub this year. By visiting partner schools at regular intervals and responding promptly to teachers' questions, we have tried to support schools in a more personalised manner. Just as there is no blueprint for the success of a hub, so there is no blueprint for the way in which Classics can be introduced into schools. Rather than simply transplanting fixed models for Classics provision from school to school, we aim to remain flexible and responsive to the curricular needs or restraints of individual schools at all times.

As an example, four state secondary schools will be introducing Latin onto the Year 7 timetable in September but each school is taking a slightly different approach. At Orchard School in North Bristol, vocabulary acquisition has been identified as a key barrier to success for students, a large number of whom enter the secondary phase as mid or low prior attainers, with reading ages below their chronological age and with significant gaps in their cultural awareness. For this reason, the decision has been taken to introduce Latin into the Year 7 curriculum: students will have one hour a week of Latin and these lessons will be taught by members of the English and MFL departments, all of whom received two days of intensive Latin training during the summer term. At Clevedon School, the Year 7 English curriculum will include a unit called 'Latin and the craft of writing' in which the teaching of Latin will be used as a foundation from which to develop students' understanding of English grammar. At Beechen Cliff School in Bath, there will be fortnightly timetabled Latin classes, whereas at Chipping Campden School, the teaching of Latin to Year 7 classes will be carried out on a carousel basis by two English teachers who have themselves received training this summer.

Embedding the study of classical texts in translation into the English curriculum has also been a very fruitful way of weaving Classics into the curriculum. For example, at St Katherine's School in North Somerset Year 7 students have enjoyed exploring *The Odyssey* and shaping their own epic narratives in the style of Homer. At the end of the unit, the school canteen was transformed into a banqueting hall and groups of students competed in an oral storytelling competition which was a real treat to judge! The importance of storytelling is also being celebrated at Clevedon School where Jo Carrington, Head of the English Faculty, has been developing an exciting extra-curricular *Xenia* project. This project is inspired by the Ancient Greek concept of *xenia* which involves welcoming strangers and giving them sustenance in return for their story. By recognising the importance of hospitality and stories, the *Xenia* project aims to celebrate the stories of individuals and families, both in the local and global community. In both cases, classical

narratives are being used as the bedrock on which to develop educational projects which empower young people to use and develop their own sense of voice.

When discussing the nature of social justice, Fraser argues that 'overcoming injustice means dismantling institutionalised obstacles that prevent some people from participating on par with others' (Fraser, 2008, p. 16). She proposes three different dimensions of social justice, each of which relates to a particular institutional barrier. When applied to education, the first dimension, redistribution, is about widening access to quality resources. The second dimension, recognition, calls for the identification and acknowledgement of the claims of marginalised or disadvantaged groups. The final dimension, representation, is crucial to achieving the first two dimensions and involves ensuring that active participation in debate and decision-making processes is accessible to all (Tikly & Barrett, 2011, p. 6).

Often efforts to tackle social injustice focus on Fraser's first dimension – redistribution. Redistributing knowledge about Classics and the skills to teach it is a crucial first step and much of the work of the hub this year has been directed to this through training teachers. However, Fraser also calls on us to think about recognition and representation. Through the hub, we need to recognise the needs of particular schools and the students who attend them and to ensure that the voices of teachers and students are heard within the decision-making process. We must also celebrate the inspiring projects being developed by teachers who are passionate not just about redistributing knowledge about the classical world but also about ensuring that the needs of students are recognised and their views are represented.

We have been delighted (and at times overwhelmed!) by the level of demand for Classics within the local state sector. Yet there is no question that the success of the hub over the past year is a testament to the ambition and enthusiasm of committed teachers across the region who have had the courage to embrace Classics and make it work in their own individual contexts in innovative, exciting and powerful new ways.

As the Bristol Classics Hub enters into its second year, we hope to build on this enthusiasm and provide regular

opportunities for teachers (in both state and independent sectors) and academics to learn from each other and share good practice through the introduction of Classics ‘Teach Meet’ events and the development of a peer-to-peer mentoring network. We also hope to widen the geographical scope of the hub this year to ensure that as many teachers as possible from across the South West can participate in the network.

Our programme of events will include opportunities for pupils to demonstrate their Classics learning in fun and creative ways. For example, the hub is working in collaboration with the CSCP, the Graduate School of Education at the University of Bristol and the English PGCE co-ordinator at the UWE Bristol to run the ‘Ovid in the West Country’ competition for Year 7 students in local schools. Students will explore a range of Ovid’s stories in English lessons or writing clubs during the autumn term before developing their own creative take on one of these stories. A celebratory event and prize-giving ceremony will be held at the University of Bristol in December.

The hub will also be working in collaboration with the Bristol Classical Association to run the annual Latin play competition in the summer term. Traditionally most entries to this competition come from independent schools but we will be working closely with state schools that have recently taken up Latin to encourage as many schools as possible to enter.

Following on from the success of our first Classical Civilisation conference for GCSE and A Level students in March

2017, this event will be held again in March 2018 with increased capacity so that more students can attend. In preparation, we will be formalising our training programme for the University of Bristol student volunteers who will be running plenary and break-out sessions for school students during the course of the conference. University academics will deliver lectures at this event and will also provide a series of six talks over the course of the autumn term to Year 12 and 13 students who are participating in a new Classics and Ancient History stream within the University’s Access to Bristol scheme.

The hub is delighted to have received a further three years’ funding and support from *Classics for All*, IGRCT and the University of Bristol. In the coming years, we hope to develop our existing relationships with schools in Bristol, Bath, Gloucestershire and North Somerset and to build up the infrastructure for Classics in more rural parts of the South West. By creating an environment where schools can draw on local expertise and help one another to embed Classics in the curriculum, we aim to foster the growth of Classics teaching and ensure that classical subjects can put down permanent roots in the curriculum plans of the region’s schools.

## References

Bristol City Council (2015) Deprivation in Bristol 2015: The mapping of deprivation within the Bristol Local Authority Area. Accessed on 21/7/17 from <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/documents/20182/32951/>

Deprivation + in + Bristol + 2015/429b2004-eeff-44c5-8044-9e7dcd002faf

Fraser, N. (2008). *Scales of Justice: Reimagining Political Space in a Globalising World*. Polity Press: Cambridge

Hodgson, H., & Murray-Pollock, X. (2016). Classics for All: Establishing the Classics Hub. *Journal of Classics Teaching*, 17(33), 48-49

Ofsted. (2017). ‘Compare local authority areas’ <https://public.tableau.com/profile/ofsted#!/vizhome/Dataview/Viewregionalperformancevertime>

Raphael Reed, L., Gates, P. and Last, K. (2007). Young participation in higher education in the parliamentary constituencies of Birmingham Hodge Hill, Bristol South, Nottingham North and Sheffield Brightside. Technical Report. *HEFCE, Bristol*. Available from: <http://eprints.uwe.ac.uk/10461>

Tikly, L. & Barrett, A. (2011). Social justice, capabilities and the quality of education in low income countries, *International Journal of Educational Development* 31, 3-14

## Author biography: Hannah Walsh

Hannah co-ordinates the Bristol Classics Hub and *Classics for All*’s Electra Programme which supports schools to introduce or develop the teaching of Ancient Greek language and culture. She has taught English and Classics in both state and private schools in the South West and is currently studying part-time for a Masters degree in Education Policy and International Development. [h.walsh@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:h.walsh@bristol.ac.uk)