

Renewing Classical Liberal Education

What it is and its history



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Briar Lipson and Daniel Dieppe



Foreword

As we identify problems in society – whether it be social disadvantage, skills shortage, the dangers of radicalisation, or others – we see education, quite rightly, as a key part of the ‘solution’. But that leads to a problem. It sees education as utilitarian in purpose. The political ‘right’ tend to see it as the means to drive the wealth creation of the future; the political ‘left’ often see it as the means to offset social injustice. Laudable aims. But education has to be about much more than that.

As we reflect on what that might be, we would do well to return to what Burke called the ‘general bank and capital of nations and of ages’. We should remember the injunction of the prophet Jeremiah: ‘Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.’ (Jeremiah 6:16)

This review does just that. It thoughtfully exposes the weaknesses – and limitations – of much of the thinking that has underpinned educational approaches over recent decades. It reminds us of ideas that were once taken for granted and still hold true. Perhaps most importantly, it does so with a noble aim in mind: not to promote or indulge in a form of intellectual and social nostalgia but rather to pursue an approach that emphasises what really matters.

I hope it is widely read. Those who do so carefully might not find all aspects of the classical liberal tradition appealing; nor, perhaps, will they be convinced about how easily it can be applied in every context. But it can hardly fail to recalibrate our thinking, reminding us as it does of true value and true purpose.

In a world of limited resources, to suggest that at the heart of education should be the acquisition of knowledge, the exploration of truth and the formation of virtue requires bravery. However, if we are brave, we might just create a genuine level playing field by giving all children the tools to access knowledge and pursue truth, the opportunities to experience and appreciate beauty and the moral framework to form good character. And we might just solve some problems. After all, children who are educated with these first principles in mind will be successful, to the delight of the utilitarian ‘right’. And they will have the awareness, sensitivity and purpose to recognise and combat injustice, to the delight of the utilitarian ‘left’.

When one thinks along those lines, the classical liberal tradition seems not only attractive but relevant. And needed. Perhaps we should be brave.

John Moule
Warden, Radley College



Executive summary

Classical liberal education is the grounding of a child into a lifelong adventure through ideas and ideals, that they might enter, through the gradual cultivation of wisdom, style and virtue, into the fullness of humanity, ‘the good life’ as we might call it.

The tradition through which Western civilisation preserved and enriched its inheritance for 2,500 years, this education for freedom develops a person’s conscience, so that she might judge beauty and truthfulness, discern what is right and just, make the wise choice when it is not obvious.

However, three developments in culture have eroded the kind of schooling designed for personal freedom and conscience. These are:

- The advance of scientific materialism which, while necessary to science’s empirical and measurable definition of truth, now increasingly displaces humane study (the original purpose of the humanities).
- The rejection of past authorities.
- The provision of mass education by the state with implications for, amongst other things, teacher-student relationships, accountability, and the purpose ascribed to schooling.

Today, the consequences of these developments are so expansive that it is widely assumed by educators, policymakers and parents, and even more widely communicated to children, that the purpose of schooling is preparation for work; schools exist now to boost incomes and gross domestic product (GDP).

Since 2010, approaches to schooling that de-emphasised past authorities have been directly challenged and undermined in England by an evidence and knowledge-rich revolution. Relatedly, in reading, science and maths, England’s 15-year-olds now outperform their peers in almost all other Western countries. This is a meaningful achievement. It could herald the renewal of classical liberal education. Yet so far, unmoored from their rich tradition and rowing in siloed isolation against the tide of scientific materialist, statist and utilitarian ideas, the ability of even the most forthright liberal educators to re-orient schooling has been limited. It is still perfectly possible to pass through school, including with flying colours, having never picked up a work of classical literature, having never considered the nature of truth, without the basics of Western chronology, with not one line of poetry committed to memory. Modern schooling has become a gateway to riches but not our full humanity.

This report charts the history of classical liberal education, of its rise and fall, and what has now replaced it. Next will come a collection of case studies about bastions and green shoots of liberal learning, as well as recommendations for parents, educators and policymakers, for the renewal of classical liberal education in the UK, for the humane benefit of all.

Chapter 1: Classical liberal education: What is it?

Classical liberal education describes the ancient Greek ideal of ‘*paideia*’, which translates to both ‘culture’ and ‘education’.*

Not preparation for exams, or for work, *paideia* is the cultivation of the human spirit; the grounding of a child into a lifelong adventure through ideas and ideals, that they might enter, through the gradual cultivation of wisdom, style and virtue, into the fullness of humanity, ‘the good life’ as we might call it.

In ancient Greece and Rome, the education of the free person, for full and virtuous humanity, contrasted to that of the slave, whose education was preparation for work. This education for freedom, ‘liberal education’ as it is also known, developed the individual’s conscience, so that he/she might judge beauty and truthfulness, discern what is right and just, make the wise choice when it is not obvious.

What sets liberal education apart, and has helped to preserve and enrich Western civilisation for 2,500 years, is its audacious goal, of freedom; that, rather than mould us to the service of the state, education should instead develop fully our capacities:

... that each might live well by the light of their own reason, enjoying, preserving and replenishing the treasures of their civilion: complete individuals, at home in their minds and bodies.¹

However, freedom is an indefinite concept, which Jews, Greeks, Romans, Christians and modern liberals have defined differently. To the ancient Greeks, the education of the freeman meant the pursuit of self-mastery, rational thought and an educated sensibility in matters of value and aesthetics. To the Christian, the only authentic freedom is that found in Christ, so liberal education in the Christian tradition is ordered to ‘the Truth that sets us free’, namely God. And today, the modern liberal conception of freedom is concerned with freedom from external constraints, including tradition. So much so, as we progress in the transhuman era, that the constraints from which freedom is sought increasingly include those of the human body.

It is perhaps unsurprising then that the term ‘liberal education’ is now more widely associated with child-led or progressive education, than with the classical pursuit of inner freedom.

It is for this reason that in this report’s title, ‘classical’ is used to qualify the term liberal education. But from here on, the terms ‘classical education’, ‘liberal education’ and ‘classical liberal education’ will be used interchangeably.

However, before proceeding, it is worth mentioning the scope and limitations of our terms. Since there is no universal model, or right way to organise a classical liberal

* It endures to this day in the word encyclopedia.

school, questions like that of whether the classical languages of Greek and/or Latin must be mastered in order to acquire a classical liberal education are not answered emphatically. Because liberal education is a practical tradition rather than a fixed formula, it incorporates both consistent elements and adaptations to local needs.

Currently, the most vibrant revival of liberal education is happening in America, where the most widely used term is ‘classical’. However, as frequently happens in any ‘new’ philosophical movement, disagreements have emerged, both about *what* classical (and liberal) education is and is not, and what *good* and *bad* versions involve. While inevitably confusing, this process of disagreement and reformulation is ultimately a positive one.

While this report does not dwell on the detail of differences within American classical education, the next report will include a case study about the US renewal. In the meantime, we consider some general principles that should apply to any discussion of classical liberal education.

The threefold man of classical education

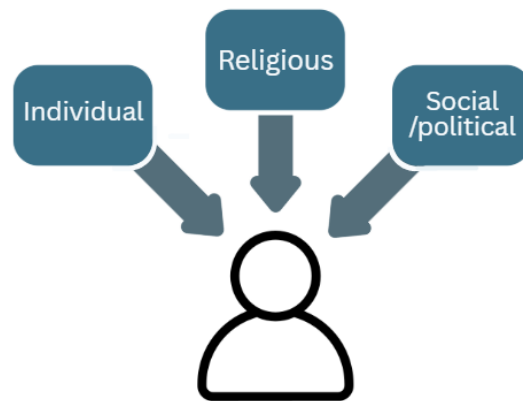
For thousands of years of human history, the individual’s knowledge of herself derived from the ‘transcendent ideas and inherited truths of religion, art, and letters’.² Education, too, reflected this.

However, beginning in the Enlightenment, the idea that we can know ourselves *only* through examination of the material universe, that science alone holds the answers to life’s questions, that there is no limit to reason, has had the unintended consequence of limiting the prevailing conceptions both of truth and of the human person.

In the ancient conception, the individual existed at several different levels that paralleled the worlds. The first was the lowest level of flesh, blood and five senses corresponding with the material nature of the universe. The second was our rational nature, corresponding with the logos inherent in the world. Third came our highest, spiritual, self-transcendent nature, corresponding to the source of goodness that created the universe.³

Another framing for these three domains of the human person is the individual, the sociopolitical and the spiritual. Classical education proceeded on the basis that humans could only come to understand the world and their humanity through mastery of themselves, through participation in a *polis* and through a quest for transcendent truth and beauty.

Figure 1.1: The threefold man of classical education



Source: Author's own.

Armed for full life in all its domains, the free man was the purpose of the Athenian state. An end of the state, not a means, he was educated not only for economic and social utility, but for personal and spiritual freedom.

Today, too, education reflects assumptions and attitudes about the nature of the world, the human person and his purpose. However, narrowed as these assumptions have become towards scientific/material truths and economic and social utility, the individual and spiritual domains are increasingly sidelined in schools. The myths, ideals and narratives that helped give meaning to our ancestors, that helped them make the world intelligible in ways unavailable to science, are increasingly overlooked or disregarded. Children become detached from the wisdom and values of older generations and from their cultural inheritance.

Dialectic, conscience and dogma

One possible tool of the classical educator (though one Plato cautioned against using with adolescents, who lack sufficient experience of life), is what's become known as the Socratic method. Based on the principle that human wisdom begins with recognising our own ignorance, the Socratic method seeks to find and remove it.

The Socratic method always starts with a principal question. Plato gives the example in his book *Euthyphro* of 'What is piety'. After an answer is given, a series of supplementary questions are asked, attempting to find a contradiction to the opening answer. Once a contradiction is found, a new statement answering the first question is sought, and so it proceeds.

Ultimately, Socrates' approach involved making students conscious of their dialectic thinking. This was with a view to helping them deploy dialectic thinking more often, less haphazardly and at higher levels. The goal was development of conscience – the in-built

human potential that links our natural activity of thinking (I want to eat all the cake) to dialectical reasoning (what if someone else wants a piece?).

Both the ancient pagans and Christians held that while the five senses equip us to know the material world, a higher organ must be developed if the individual is to know the truth of her existence. This conscience, or 'intellect' as Aristotle (1975) called it, the divine spark which challenges man's selfish assumptions, must be nurtured if humans are to be knocked off their otherwise egocentric goals. And this is why Plato was cautious about adolescents engaging in what might today be termed 'critical thinking', because without the knowledge or the experience necessary to understand what they are arguing about, 'They can't find any use for it except disputation'.

Thus, it is conscience that matters to classical education, not mere knowledge or even dialectic thinking. Because conscience is what connects thoughts to actions, theory to practice, knowledge to virtue. It is conscience that develops the child's ability to be objective about herself, that forces her to constantly weigh actions against an ideal and find them inadequate, that by urging her to overcome the superficial and selfish, establishes in her the quest for truth and the good life.

And dialectic is very different to science's analytical, sceptical approach. Rather than standing aside and remaining objective, dialectic requires the child to participate, to take a side. Ultimately, she might change sides, she might even do so repeatedly, but the point is that we cannot hope to develop conscience merely by watching objectively from the side.

Where for the scientific method, taking sides binds and confuses, for the dialectic it is essential. As classical education scholar David Hicks puts it, dogmas, which come from the Greek meaning 'that which seems good/true', 'are to dialectic what doubt is to analysis'. Humane learning begins in dogma and ends in dialectic.

And this is where the teacher-student relationship comes in. A child's first opportunity to experience dogma is through his parents and/or teacher. Through initially imitative acceptance of the dogmas of close adults, and then subsequent dialectic challenges to them, the child begins to work out what he thinks. Having had skin in the game, as it were, he will eventually accept, refine or reject the dogma that awakened his conscience in the beginning.

Naturally then, debate is a useful vehicle for the development of conscience (as well as style). To make a case persuasively a child must make a position his own, feel and grow in it, and then understand its shortcomings as well. Having done this, he gains experience of dogma, as well as its dialectic opposite, and grows his intellect accordingly.

To some, the idea of incorporating dogma into schooling is alarming. Similarly, the ancient idea that a higher organ (conscience) must be cultivated in order to understand life's happiness sounds like bunkum or poetry.

Yet, that no material evidence exists for such a higher organ is a conclusion already nested within the narrow assumptions of science. That something higher, beyond the material, cannot be reduced to common language and instead only pointed to is part of its very definition.

And so, the matter rests on whether or not a truth exists beyond our five senses, the case for which the classical educator will argue is manifest daily, in everything from nature to poetry, relationships to music.

For example, for those open to their transcendence, poems use language to enable a person to feel something powerful that's beyond the limitations of language. When asked to explain a poem's meaning in everyday words it inevitably collapses into a banality. The sum of its parts, that powerful emotion or insight, which was greater than the parts, is lost in the reduction.

The same applies to a piece of music. A student might analyse Beethoven down to its series of notes. However, no amount of reason will equip him to understand the greater whole that's been destroyed in the process.

Thus, through humble and gentle coaxing of 'brilliant answers' to his 'stupid questions', Socrates endowed classical education with:

... a wry smile that has never left it. The classical schoolmaster is still a gadfly clothed in humor, because his task cuts across the human grain; he embraces this task knowing that only men and women who want to know more than to be proved right will accept dialectical challenge.⁴

Some principles

To set out what a classical liberal education is, it can help to consider what it might look like in a school. The detailed nature and necessities of a classical liberal curriculum must be the subject of writings elsewhere. However, in re-imagining a liberal curriculum for our modern, more knowing civilisation, some crucial elements include that it:

- Aims at preparation for wisdom, virtue and life in all its fullness, rather than the requirements for employment. In this way, liberal education rests on the crucial assumption that it is in itself the best way to ensure people are ready for adult work.
- Is didactic, in that it seeks to pass on essential knowledge and skills from one generation to the next.
- Is limited in scope, such that, rather than making a child mediocre in many subjects it gives the direction to master the main languages of human

understanding (historical, scientific, artistic, mathematical, ethical, and philosophical) with a view to fulfilling his humanity.

- Facilitates the delight of connections. To achieve this, curriculum content may be selected and sequenced for coherence across the entire school, rather than within departments (or indeed by individual teachers). Perhaps the most widely used (though not only) organising paradigm for coherence is history.*
- Alternatively, Hicks suggests that ‘the ethical question “What should one do?” might provide an even richer context for acquiring general knowledge’ because it ‘elicits not only knowledge, but wisdom, and it draws the interest of the student in every subject’.⁵
- Teaches the best content. If students are to learn excellence they must encounter only excellent models, from the outset. This means, in Matthew Arnold’s words, ‘the best that has been known and said’, from Aristotle to Aquinas to Angelou.
- Emphasises the normative (meaning the implications for behaviour, which relate to conventions or norms) as well as the analytical. This might have implications not only for the focus of lessons (see the section on the ‘Teaching of English Literature’ in Chapter 4) but also for the structure of the school timetable.

For example, while the fragmentation of what used to be called Humane Studies (from the Latin *litterae humaniores*) into academic subjects such as English Literature, History and Religion answers an analytical and practical objective, it also risks undermining humane or normative inquiry by pushing it into the gaps between disciplines. To counter this, Hicks’ suggestion, which while not essential is enlightening, is to structure schools into three departments, those of Maths and Science, Arts and Languages, and Humane Letters.⁶ Then, to ensure that Humane Letters is at the heart, he suggests that lessons in Literature, History, Grammar, Philosophy and Social Science should all happen under the same teacher who, accordingly, meets with just one student group (or perhaps two) per week. In this way, students will return at least twice a day to the beating heart of the classical school, and to their Humane Letters teacher, who becomes something of a moral tutor. Hicks lists numerous advantages of this model, including the motivation that flows from the excitement of making connections across ‘subjects’; the opportunity for both the teacher and student to exercise his mind in a more scholarly way; the enhanced ability to monitor a child’s work afforded by the absence of constant movement between teachers, rooms and subjects; and finally the fostering of the ‘ideal of a profound and intimate relationship between teacher and student’, thereby avoiding the modern tendency towards a merely transactional relationship.

* Two practical examples of schools whose curricula emphasise chronology are provided in the next report.

- Seeks the contradictory purposes of both conserving and subverting culture. A liberal education must teach children both to accept and function in the world as it is, and to think critically and independently about it. In this way it achieves a dialectical relationship with the state and popular culture; not merely aping popular or political attitudes but equipping children with the inherited wisdom to question them.

Conservative reforms, 2010–2024

To achieve everything described above requires a knowledge-rich, teacher-led approach. Since 2010, through a push for more evidence-based (we might say *scientific*) approaches to curriculum and pedagogy, schooling in England has become more knowledge-based. New national requirements for the teaching of English Language marked a dramatic shift.

However, much of the slimmed-down national curriculum that had been introduced in 2000 was also retained, and the extent to which schools teach ‘the best content’ remains unclear.

For English Literature GCSE, for example, pupils must study a Shakespeare play, a 19th-century British novel, a work of post-1914 fiction and an anthology of 15 poems. However, to study just three books (and a minimum of 300 lines of poetry) over 2 years, and for only one of the books to be much older than 200 years, remains comparatively thin gruel.* That ‘the universal myth (or archetype) of almost all art and literature created before the nineteenth century’ remains ‘beyond scope’ is disappointing.⁷

Because, for a liberal education, nothing is more enriching than encountering the ‘heights of human potential’, which include the pinnacles of Western thought – original thinkers from Socrates to Shakespeare, Augustine to Adam Smith, Plutarch to Plath.⁸ And yet, with the exception of Shakespeare, it seems likely that few children will leave school having encountered original works by any of these names. Fewer still will have read the ancients in their original languages, not least because in 2024 fewer than 1,000 students studied A-level Latin and fewer than 200 A-level Classical Greek.⁹

Box 1.1: The 2014 National Curriculum at Key Stage 2

The 2014 national curriculum attempted to address the problem of accessing our mythological inheritance by stipulating, for example, that in Key Stage (KS) 2 the reading comprehension curriculum should increase children’s ‘familiarity with a wide range of books, including fairy stories, myths and legends.’ In response, the best primary schools now include adaptations of stories like ‘Beowulf’ and ‘The Odyssey’ in KS2. However, for reasons explored in Chapter 3, it remains unlikely that these stories will be

* See Chapter 4 for more detail on this, and some comparisons. Two of the options in the GCSE English Literature ‘19th-Century British Novel’ category, *Frankenstein* and *Pride and Prejudice* were written just over 200 years ago (in 1818 and 1813, respectively).

enjoyed for their normative wisdom, that they will be taught ‘classically’. In addition, as the table below shows, even an ambitious and carefully thought-out primary programme still appears historically less comprehensive when compared to the great river of literature into which children attending one of our case study schools (see the next report) are encouraged.

Table 1.1: Comparing English Literature curricula, Years 3-6*						
	From an ambitious England primary school			From a prep school with a liberal arts curriculum		
	Autumn	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Spring	Summer
Year 3	<i>The BFG</i> – Roald Dahl	<i>The Queen’s Nose</i> – Dick King-Smith	<i>The Wild Robot</i> – Peter Brown	<i>The Magician’s Nephew</i> - C.S. Lewis	<i>Tales of Ancient Egypt</i> – Roger Lancelyn Green	<i>Tales of Greek Heroes</i> – Roger Lancelyn Green
	<i>Cloud Busting</i> – Malorie Blackman (poetry)	Brothers Grimm Fairy Tales & Fearless Fairy Tales	<i>Odysseus</i>	Poems by Tennyson, Lear, Rossetti, Coleridge	Poems by Belloc, Hunt, Rossetti and Carroll, Crouch and the Psalms	Poems by Euripides, Shakespeare, Browning, Kingsley, Virgil and Morris, Nonnus, Arnold, Marlowe, Hewlett and Spenser
Year 4	<i>Charlotte’s Web</i> – E. B. White	<i>The Explorer</i> – Katherine Rundell	<i>The Boy at the Back of the Class</i> – Onjali Rauf	<i>The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe</i> – C.S. Lewis	<i>The Adventures of Robin Hood</i> – Roger Lancelyn Green	<i>Beowulf</i> – Michael Morpurgo
	<i>Varjak Paw</i> – S. F. Said		<i>Race to the Frozen North</i> – Catherine Johnson	Poetry by Ahlberg, Updike and Rossetti; Kipling,	Poetry by Lear, Kipling and de la Mare; Shakespeare	Poetry by Wordsworth and Jonson; Barrett Browning and Louis Stevenson

* NB: Though unlikely to be representative, the primary English Literature curriculum detailed in the first column has been chosen in order to well represent what’s included in an ambitious and carefully planned state sector scheme in England.

Renewing Classical Liberal Education

				Farjeon and Belloc	and Chesterton	
Year 5	'Beowulf' – Various (school choice)	<i>The Girl Who Stole an Elephant</i> – Nizrana Farook	<i>The Closest Thing to Flying</i> – Gill Lewis	<i>Prince Caspian</i> – C.S. Lewis	<i>Kensuke's Kingdom</i> – Michael Morpurgo	<i>The Silver Sword</i> – Ian Serraillier
	<i>Riddle of the Runes</i> – Janina Ramirez		<i>Cogheart</i> – Peter Bunzl	First World War poetry by Brooke, McCrae and Binyon; Owen, Seeger and Pope	Poetry by Shakespeare, Chesterton and Masefield; Wordsworth and Carroll	Poetry by Hughes, Mackellar and McGough; Hopkins, Blake and Tennyson
Year 6	<i>Wonder</i> – R. J. Palacio	<i>Letters from the Lighthouse</i> – Emma Carroll	<i>The Other Side of Truth</i> – Beverley Naidoo	<i>The Odyssey</i> , retold by Geraldine McCaughan	<i>Julius Caesar</i> – William Shakespeare	<i>The Hobbit</i> – J.R.R. Tolkien
	<i>Holes</i> – Louis Sachar	<i>Windrush Child</i> – Benjamin Zephaniah	<i>Macbeth</i> – William Shakespeare	Poetry on a Classical theme by Shelley, Masefield and Shakespeare; Southwell, Tennyson and Wordsworth	Poetry by Chesterton, Shakespeare and Arnold; Shakespeare and Henley	Poetry by Henley, Auden and Shirley

Source: The above ambitious and carefully planned English state sector reading programme can be compared with that from a fee-paying prep school that follows a chronological, liberal arts curriculum.

Old books

And liberal education emphasises classical texts not because they are old but because of their emphasis on political liberty, conscience and virtue. It emphasises them because they contain clear and beautiful stories about the battle between good and evil, because through them children cannot just escape the confines of their lives but discover truths about themselves and the world they inhabit. They can learn that our way of doing things is not the only way, and may even be parochial.

Another reason classical education emphasises old books is their preoccupation with timeless questions. Timeless questions are not those without answers, but those

whose answers are discovered only by those who pursue them, conscientiously and dialectically through life. They are the questions that make life's struggles worthwhile – of who are we? Where did we come from? What is life for?

And why is it that old books can shape children in their most humane image? Why does modern literature struggle to achieve these things? It is because they were born of a tradition that, rather than money and power, affirmed the human yearning for freedom, purpose, transcendence and virtue. Rather than reflecting modern culture in an effort to engage their reader, old books challenge and judge against a provocatively tyrannising ideal (see Chapter 2).

One reason old books are sometimes overlooked in modern schools is that most adults haven't read them, and so presume them outdated or inaccessible. Then, amongst those who *have* read them are some who believe their meanings to be beyond the appreciation of young readers. By fixating on the deep analysis of any text (a modern practice explored in Chapter 4) rather than the descriptive and arresting stories, modern teaching obscures the normative gold:

A classic like Beowulf endures because it tells a story more wonderfully and makes an argument more convincingly than any imitator can. Its unaffected simplicity, inimitable beauty, and incisive clarity are precisely what ought to place it at the heart of the curriculum. When fastidious doubts and analytical dredging are not allowed to muddy the waters, the surface of a classic, dancing with light, mirrors the depths of its own accord and reveals its truth to the young reader's own level of maturity and insight.¹⁰

Having been overlooked for decades, nowadays, discussions about old books herald hushed tones and a serious, awe-filled attitude. This renders these timeless texts intimidating, and beyond the reach of both adults and children. However, by ensuring that young children read and comprehend good books in a careful progression, a classical education equips the teenager and young adult to appreciate the greatest books, art and poetry of our inheritance.

Rather than setting them off into uncharted waters it furnishes them with narratives, codes of conduct, ideals and visions for the future. Instead of equipping them only for lives of material wealth, it gives them maps for the imaginative formation of their souls.

Chapter 2: A very short history of classical education

Greek foundations

Liberal education was first conceived in Athens in the fifth century BC, before spreading across the world, like much of Greek culture under Alexander the Great.¹¹ Considered an ‘ideal education’, rather than teaching skills for work (the concern of slaves), it equipped freemen to make their leisure more fruitful and contemplative.¹² Built, therefore, on the assumption that work is a means, not an end, it is the antithesis of modern, utilitarian vocationalism. Yet, it is from the Greek word ‘*scholē*’, meaning leisure, that we get our word school.¹³

For Plato, his student Aristotle, and Isocrates, education sought the ideal of freedom grounded in personal discipline, virtuous habits, intellectual purity, and enjoying, for their own sakes, the pursuits of knowledge, beauty and goodness.¹⁴

Plato

In contrast to the modern maxim (misused from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*) ‘to thine own self be true’, Plato described how we are born conflicted and thus how education might best direct us.

Using more modern terms, O’Hear explains how Plato’s view of education involved developing both sensibility and aptitude for intellectual topics, and that the former must start from the outset, long before the student is ready for intellectual pursuits. Importantly, this is not just because young children are not capable of academic reasoning, but because morality and moral reasoning cannot be achieved merely through critical thinking or reasoning. First, our tastes and preferences, our likes and dislikes, our habits of virtue must be formed and directed. In the Greek tradition, and later adopted by Augustine, education is the right ordering of affections; children must be trained to feel pleasure and shame, delight and disgust at those things that are indeed pleasant, shameful, delightful and disgusting. This way, education will enable the rational mind ‘to be greeted like an old friend when it does arrive’.¹⁵

And so, education in what was then called ‘the muses’, the deities of poetry, music, dance, history and astronomy, becomes fundamental. By introducing the young to reality through delight, this education enlivens the heart, imagination, passions and motivation as well as intelligence. Quinn gives the example of ‘Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star’ as an ideal musical introduction to astronomy because it both includes ‘observations of the heavenly phenomena and stirs the appropriate human emotion: wonder.’¹⁶

Aristotle

One legacy of Aristotle's writings on education is the importance of 'mythos' or narrative, which he believed provided meaning, both for the individual and the wider community.

Originally, the Greek word 'logos' meant simply 'word', the sound or combination of sounds through which an inward thought was expressed. In the beginning, metaphors – the referencing of things as representative or symbolic of other things, likely shaped words. Then gradually, as old words appeared in myths and new metaphors, they developed richer meanings. Attending this process was the discovery of reason. Now that humans could ascribe words to themselves and the world they encountered, they could also begin to rationalise or understand the self and reality. In this way, despite their frequently non-rational nature, myths are demonstrations of the human urge to understand ourselves and the world we inhabit.

Together, *logos* and *mythos*, our reason and mythology, are our:

*... complementary defenses against an unintelligible and hostile world. The mythos represents man's imaginative and, ultimately, spiritual effort to make this world intelligible; the logos sets forth his rational attempt to do the same.*¹⁷

Thus, for a classical education, mastery of the word through a combination of imagination (*mythos*) and detached analysis (*logos*) is essential.

Having acknowledged the *mythos* of words, the classical educator understands that, despite their descriptive weaknesses to science, by activating the imagination and establishing norms, words and myths make the world and our humanity intelligible in ways unavailable to science. The classical educator understands that without the normative ability to make moral or aesthetic judgements, people cannot appropriate experiences meaningfully, only recollect them like machines.

Building upon this, a foundational premise of classical education is that there exists such a thing as an 'Ideal Type', a moral ideal of a 'man both beautiful and good'. Of course, everyone, from the headteacher down to the youngest schoolchild, falls short of the ideal. However, in working towards such a self-transcendent ideal, each develops and constantly refines a life-long struggle for self-mastery and knowledge. To motivate and prepare them for a lifetime of carving their own self-image, the Ideal Type becomes, in a sense, a 'tyrannizing image'.

And our most durable and complete opportunity to understand this ideal, this 'metaphorical incarnation of wisdom and truth', lies in the study of myths. Because questions of value, justice, right and wrong cannot be experimentally or rationally resolved. Instead, myths represent our civilisation's crucial normative basis, without which each individual's decisions rest precariously on his individual assessment of

reasonableness and ‘the flesh of political stability, scientific invention, and social sophistication collapse.’¹⁸

Thus myths, fairy tales and other time-honoured stories are not only crucial to the individual but also to culture. By highlighting the symbolism of men’s actions, they establish shared values in a community. By initiating children into the culture of where they grow up, they offer a sense of cultural ownership. By elevating certain actions they give meaning to existence, helping men transcend self-interest and inspiring great and selfless deeds. Examples abound, but might include *Pinocchio*, which is about filial love and being in a responsible relationship with parents; Augustine’s *Confessions*, which chart the Saint’s youth and conversion to Christianity; and Homer’s ‘The Odyssey’, which through his epic journey explores themes of slavery, gender, wandering and homecoming.

Thus, like Aristotle, the classical educator accepts that while compulsion and habituation will get a child so far, it is myths that will inspire and shape his will. It is through participation in our ‘common psychological inheritance’ that the child’s imagination is stamped, transformed and ‘civilised’.

Nowadays, however, many children have scant access to their mythological inheritance, and where they do it is unlikely to be studied normatively.

Isocrates

Though lesser known, Isocrates founded his school of rhetoric six years before Plato, and is widely recognised by scholars as most influential in transmitting liberal education on to Rome.¹⁹

According to Hadas:

Plato relied on mathematics rather than words for developing the intellect, and Isocrates glorified the word... the object of Isocrates’ education was humanistic or what we should call liberal arts education.

And ‘It was the Isocratean, not the Platonic, ideal which prevailed in the Hellenistic age and in the education of Europe.’²⁰

Likewise, in the words of Marrou, Isocrates was the dominant force ‘who educated fourth-century Greece and subsequently the Hellenistic and Roman worlds’ and from whom:

*... there emerged all those teachers and men of culture, noble idealists, simple moralists, lovers of fine phrases, all those fluent, voluble speakers, to whom classical antiquity owed both the qualities and the defects of its main cultural tradition.*²¹

Writing in *Panathenaicus*, a defence of Athenian culture and institutions, Isocrates attested that the best students were those who were:

*... not spoiled by successes and do not desert their true selves and become arrogant, but hold their ground steadfastly as intelligent men, not rejoicing in the good things which have come to them through chance rather than in those which through their own nature and intelligence are theirs from their birth. Those who have a character which is in accord, not with one of these things, but with all of them—these, I contend, are wise and complete men possessed of all the virtues.*²²

For Isocrates, the ‘fortune of the state’ was decided by the education of the statesmen, so educated people must keep their pleasures under control and act in a decent and honourable fashion.²³

Roman Empire and Christianity

Having helped build Athens into a Mediterranean power and the first building block of Western civilisation, liberal education was later embraced by the Romans. In particular, the statesman Cicero (106–43 BC) and the Stoic philosophers, with their emphasis on self-restraint, supported the introduction of liberal education in the Roman Empire.²⁴ Classicist H. I. Marrou comments that it was ‘remarkable’ how the Romans ‘clamoured for everything connected with’ Greek culture, including their education.²⁵ In Latin, *paideia* translates to ‘*humanitas*’, from which we get the English ‘humane studies’ or the ‘humanities’.

The most significant development of liberal education in the Roman period was the integration of Christianity, which became the official religion of the Roman Empire in 380 AD. Thanks to Saint Augustine’s (354–430 AD) acceptance of the value of pagan authors, liberal education continued into early Christendom. Augustine himself had experienced a liberal arts education, even writing books on liberal arts subjects, including Grammar and Music.²⁶ According to O’Hear and Sidwell, Augustine’s decision to accept and embrace liberal education was the ultimate ‘foundation stone’ of Western culture.²⁷

Christianity modified liberal education in a few important ways. Under Augustine’s guidance, the Greek understanding of *logos* was altered to one primarily based on God rather than human reason, as famously explored in the opening chapter of St John’s Gospel: ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made by him ... In him was life’.²⁸

While the Greeks were much occupied with divine matters, and Augustine’s *The City of God* recognised how close the Platonist position was to his own, Christianity likely altered the focus of education from cultivating the human spirit, to seeking divine truth and shaping the soul in relation to God.

Christianity also added the virtues of faith, hope and love to the classical (or cardinal) virtues of prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude. Concerned as the cardinal

virtues were to subdue emotional responses in favour of rational control, Christianity's additions extended self-mastery to the realm of the soul.²⁹

Box 2.1: The role of faith and Christianity

The overlap between classical liberal education and Christianity is significant, not least because the two are entwined by much shared history. However, the crucial commitment they share is to logocentrism, the belief that the world is ordered, that such a thing as truth exists, and therefore that education should be concerned with discovering it. For Christians this stems from the belief that humans are made in the image of God; to the Greeks it was a divine spark that differentiated humans from animals.

Opposing logocentrism are postmodernism, the position of being sceptical towards all grand or established explanations or ideals, and relativism, the position of refuting the existence of any ultimate authority, meaning or completely objective reality. Yet, all three are commitments of faith, the truth of which cannot be derived from science or evidence.*

In fact, all education involves a degree of faith. For example, the utilitarian who prepares his child for lucrative employment puts his faith in the ideal of a moneyed life. The liberal educator, who prepares his child across the individual, social and spiritual domains, puts his faith in the ideal of virtue, or personal freedom. And the postmodern educator, who prepares his child to understand and evaluate all religions or philosophies, believes that all religions or philosophies are valued equally, and therefore that none has more value than another.

Having thus established the logocentric rather than relative nature of liberal schooling, it is worth interrogating its main influences.

Concerned as it is with passing on cultural reference points, that in the UK many of liberal education's influences are Christian is inescapable.³⁰ That Christians will consider their religion to have the most robust conception of what a person is, their nature and the ideal, is also to be expected. However, because liberal education's origins are in pagan Greece, it not only predates Christian doctrine but is animated by a dialectic tension; while Christianity has influenced our understandings of virtue and wisdom for the past 2,000 years, liberal education is not exclusively Christian. While most of our greatest thinkers and writers experienced a liberal education, they include amongst them many, like Darwin, Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill, who were not Christian.**

And this creative tension between pagan humanism and Christianity runs through both Western culture and liberal schooling; rather than a level playing field in which all

* Postmodernism is a faith commitment because, by denying the existence of truth statements, it makes a truth statement that undermines its own premise.

** Though in his later life Darwin felt that Creationism and his notoriety prevented his attendance at Christian services, Darwin had trained, at Cambridge, to be an Anglican minister. Devoted to his wife, a Quaker, he also brought up his children as Christians.

viewpoints are valued equally and therefore none has value individually, classical liberal education presents the dialectic that propelled the Western world.³¹ Instead of isolating spirituality to Religious Education lessons, a classical liberal curriculum places equal emphasis on individual, social and spiritual growth. Instead of a world with no objective truth, classical liberal education is grounded in a belief that some truth transcends us.

And it is this transcendent aspect that equips the classical educator to knock the individual off course from their otherwise egocentric telos (ultimate aim). Both pagan humanism and Christianity agreed that humanity's greatest weakness was egotism. Yet, while the pagan stoic's emphasis on hardship helped prepare men for the challenges of life, only faith could satisfy the craving some had for a higher justification for choosing self-sacrifice (agape as the Greeks called it).

And in Western history it was the Jesus story that brought so many of our ancestors to faith. By reconciling:

*... the warring camps of pagan philosophy and mythology ... The story of his [Christ's] life ... presented a picture of truth ... a view of man that was complete and comprehensible in a way that no single myth or philosophy ever had been.*³²

Thus, it should come as no surprise that some of the most ardent defenders of liberal education in the last century have been people of faith, that currently the largest renewal of liberal education is being driven by Christians (in America), that the Platonic triad of 'Goodness, Truth and Beauty' are increasingly regarded as postmodernism's antidote.

Yet, if a Christian school wishes to be liberal as well, its children should be trained not only to recite statements such as 'God is Love' and 'God is Good', but to interrogate them as well. They must learn to ask questions such as 'Why should I believe God is Good?', 'What does goodness mean?' and 'What is the alternative to believing in a transcendent being?'

Finally, Christianity put the family at the heart of education: parents were expected to teach the importance of faith, discipline and morality, passing on Biblical stories and doctrines in the home. In contrast to the pederastic relationships between an older male teacher and younger man that were common in Greek culture, Christianity considered parental instruction and example a 'fundamental duty', and the 'natural environment for the development of the Christian soul'.³³ Even in Roman culture, the family was not given as much importance, or as defined a role as in the Christian.³⁴

It was towards the end of the Roman period and during its mediaeval aftermath that the concept of the seven liberal arts, split into the trivium and quadrivium, was formalised.³⁵ Where the trivium was regarded as the route to eloquence, the quadrivium paved the way to erudition.³⁶

Table 2.1: The trivium and quadrivium

Trivium			
Grammar Foundational knowledge	Dialectic Logic and art of reasoning	Rhetoric Expression and communication	
Quadrivium			
Arithmetic Study of pure numbers	Geometry Study of numbers in space	Music Study of numbers in time	Astronomy Study of numbers in space and time

Source: Author's table.

The trivium represents the study of grammar or foundational knowledge, of logic, which is the practice of thinking and questioning profitably, and of rhetoric, which is the ability to express oneself persuasively. Together, these three arts were thought to hone communication, scientific reasoning and the cultural capital that sustains society.³⁷

The quadrivium covers the mathematical arts of Geometry, Arithmetic, Astronomy and Music, and represents the areas of knowledge the trivium ought to be applied to.³⁸

Geometry was the study of shapes and sizes to understand the natural world in a magnitude sense.³⁹ The key text was Euclid's *Elements*, which essentially provides a series of mathematical theorems with accompanying proofs. Until the mid-20th century, English schoolboys used a direct translation of Euclid's *Elements* to study Geometry.⁴⁰

Arithmetic is the study of quantity, which in those days, because the Greeks had no understanding of fractions or surds, meant whole numbers. Today, real-life problems of buying and selling, calculating interest and so forth are central to the teaching of Arithmetic. However, to the ancient mind, Arithmetic was about equipping students to describe the 'harmony and order of the universe'; real-life problems would have degraded this beauty.⁴¹

The third quadrivium subject, Music, was the science of numbers in time. In practice, this meant the understanding of intervals and rhythm. These were then connected with aesthetic and subjective ideas like harmonies. That music was studied so mathematically points to the centrality of numbers to Greek thinking, and the value they held for pursuing both truth and beauty.⁴²

The final quadrivium art, Astronomy, concerned the mathematics of continuous motion of time and space. The most popular of the subjects, Astronomy gave understanding of the Zodiac, constellations, the Earth's axis, poles, and phases of the Moon.⁴³

Medieval period

Following the collapse of the Roman Empire in 476 AD, the Greeks' education tradition might have been lost entirely were it not for the work of a few.

For example, much of its vigour was lost when the Church formalised the 'Ideal Type', the moral ideal of a 'man both beautiful and good' into a creed and dogma. In this way, not only was the dialectic vitality exemplified by Plato and Aristotle outlawed, but the rich myths of ancient Greece were either sanitised or replaced entirely by the stories of the saints.

However, in the same period, other parts of the Church sustained the liberal tradition.⁴⁴ The first medieval classical education revival began with Charlemagne, Holy Roman Emperor between 748 and 814 AD. With the help of Alcuin of York, Charlemagne established what is now known as the 'Carolingian Renaissance', an intellectual and artistic revival designed to rejuvenate Christian culture (including Latin literacy) and piety in Western Europe.

Christian works were central, including those of St Augustine of Hippo, Cassiodorus, and Gregory the Great. However, importantly, Alcuin referenced Plato as a source for wisdom, thus helping to sustain the original Greek spirit.⁴⁵ Libraries established across the Western world collected books and information from Rome.

According to the historian and classicist H. I. Marrou, Christian education:

*... drew so much from the old classical sources that it seems to appear as a continual Renaissance. Despite the barbarian interlude there was a certain continuity of matter, if not of form, that made Western man the heir to the old Classicism.*⁴⁶

This was partly, of course, because Christianity as an intellectual religion opposes barbarism.⁴⁷ But it was also because Christianity, born in the Hellenistic world of the first century, and whose sacred texts were written in Greek, was profoundly influenced by the Greco-Roman culture.

In England, to encourage greater literacy, King Alfred the Great (c. 849–899 AD) translated both Christian and pre-Christian texts into English.⁴⁸ In the 13th century, St Thomas Aquinas rediscovered translations of Aristotle, which he used alongside Christian texts to form the basis of the scholastic movement. As G.K. Chesterton later put it, 'St Thomas did not reconcile Christ to Aristotle; he reconciled Aristotle to Christ.'⁴⁹ Around this time the first European universities were established, teaching the *artes liberales* – 'liberal arts' – referring to the seven liberal arts of the ancient trivium and quadrivium.⁵⁰

The Renaissance: 14th to the 17th century

Between the 14th and 17th centuries, Europe underwent a cultural Renaissance, chiefly characterised by a surge of discoveries, scholarship and a revitalisation of classical studies. This period of cultural rejuvenation also provided new opportunities to defend liberal education.⁵¹

Perhaps the most high-profile advocate for the liberal arts during the 16th century was Sir Thomas More.⁵² In a 1518 letter to the University of Oxford, More denounced as ‘foolish’ certain scholars who were acting to remove the study of Greek Literature. According to him, Greek Literature ‘does prepare the soul for virtue’, and is ‘almost the only reason why Oxford is so crowded’.⁵³ More explained how it was the ‘Greeks who discovered all the most important things and who handed down most accurately what they had discovered, both in other arts and in theology itself’, and so must be maintained in the curriculum.⁵⁴

In 1559, 11 years after opening their first school at Messina in Sicily, the Catholic order of Jesuits published *Ratio Studiorum* (Latin, translation: *Plan of Studies*), a set of school regulations for the provision of ‘a good liberal education’.⁵⁵

Under *Ratio Studiorum*, which required students to study Hebrew, Theology, Latin, Philosophy, Mathematics, Humanities and Grammar, Jesuit education expanded rapidly such that, less than 200 years later, they were running 669 schools in Sicily, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Austria, Bohemia, France and Germany.

While *Ratio Studiorum*’s aim was ‘to lead men to the knowledge and love of our Creator and Redeemer’ it still drew heavily on pre-Christian sources. The Roman statesman Cicero is referenced no fewer than 38 times.⁵⁶ And as Gilbert Highet explains, Jesuit education didn’t only produce:

*... a long list of wise and learned Jesuit preachers, writers, philosophers, and scientists ... [but] it proved the worth of its principles by developing a large number of widely different men of vast talent: Corneille the tragedian, Descartes the philosopher and mathematician, Bossuet and Bourdaloue the orators, Moliere the comedian, d’Urfè the romantic novelist, Montesquieu the political philosopher, Voltaire the philosopher and critic, who although he is regarded by the Jesuits as a bad pupil is still not an unworthy representative of their ability to train gifted minds.*⁵⁷

The Enlightenment

In 1881, one of Darwin’s defenders, T.X. Huxley, and the English poet, school inspector and defender of liberal education Matthew Arnold disagreed about the relative importance of science and humane studies to education.

In Huxley’s view:

*... neither the disciple nor the subject-matter of classical education is of such direct value to the student of physical science as to justify the expenditure of valuable time upon either; and ... for the purposes of attaining real culture, an exclusively scientific education is at least as effectual as an exclusively literary education.*⁵⁸

In response, Arnold expressed the Aristotelian view that knowledge of science is one part of wisdom, of mental and moral freedom, a good in itself. To Arnold, humane education must *include* knowledge of the natural world and its causes, of ‘what has been done by such men as Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, Darwin’, alongside other areas.

However, taking issue with what he perceived as Huxley’s wish to make physical science the ‘staple of education for the bulk of mankind’, he argued that this overlooks the ‘constitution of humane nature’, the powers of conduct, intellect, knowledge, beauty, social life and manners. He then gave the following example:

What a curious state of things it would be, if every pupil of our primary schools knew that when a taper burns the wax is converted into carbonic acid and water, and thought at the same time that a good paraphrase for [the passage in Macbeth beginning]

Can’st thou not minister to a mind diseased?

*was, ‘Can you not wait upon the lunatic?’ If one is driven to choose, I think I would rather have a young person ignorant of the converted wax, but aware that ‘Can you not wait upon the lunatic?’ is bad, than a young person whose education had left things the other way.*⁵⁹

Amongst liberal educators, debate continues about the nature and relative importance of scientific learning. However, that liberal education must involve an encounter with our cultural roots, that it must be an orderly and disciplined initiation into the best knowledge and ideas, including of the natural world, remains. And this emphasis on roots, on looking backwards to past authority, does contrast with modern science’s emphasis, as formalised by Francis Bacon, on freedom from the influence of past authorities.⁶⁰

However, this need not be a problem for humane learning. Studied as one part of a liberal education, science affords knowledge and understanding. Cartesian scepticism and science’s reliance on objective, detached analysis need not jeopardise classical liberal education’s involved and normative approach.

In fact, despite their emphasis on empiricism and reason, respectively, both Bacon and Descartes, leading figures in the founding of modern science, retained strongly Christian beliefs. The section below also catalogues the advocacy of liberal education

by three leading philosophers, each of which might have been expected to prioritise the scientific/material over more humane studies.

Surprising and influential defenders

Despite his philosophical scepticism, David Hume (1711–1776) made a powerful case for books that have stood the test of time when he wrote, in his essay ‘Of the Standard of Taste’:

‘The same Homer, who pleased at Athens and Rome two thousand years ago is still admired at Paris and at London. All the changes of climate, government, religion and language, have not been able to obscure his glory. Authority or prejudice may give a temporary vogue to a bad poet or orator; but his reputation will never be durable or general. When his compositions are examined by posterity or foreigners, the enchantment is dissipated and his faults appear in their true colours. On the contrary, a real genius, the longer his works endure, and the more wide they are spread, the more sincere is the admiration which he meets with.’⁶¹

Adam Smith (1723–1790), the father of free market economics, acknowledged that while specialisation in the workplace raised productivity, it also threatened the formation of a well-rounded, free individual. He argued, therefore, that the state must create a national education system in the Greco-Roman tradition to ensure that each man could use their full ‘intellectual facilities’. This, Smith said, was even though such an action would ‘derive no advantage’ for the state.

Despite his Utilitarian philosophy, John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) (whose own education at the hands of his father and his friend, Jeremy Bentham, had included reading ‘The Iliad’ in Greek before he was 10) made clear his anti-utilitarian perspective on education. In an 1867 address at the University of St Andrews, he argued that:

‘Universities are not intended ... to fit men for some special mode of gaining their livelihood. Their object is not to make skilful lawyers, or physicians, or engineers, but capable and cultivated human beings.’⁶²

However, having contributed so dramatically to technical and economic progress in the past few centuries, the assumption that scientific knowledge should be the dominant model of knowledge in schooling, and that it’s the one best able to provide progress for humanity, has become widespread.

Where the ultimate test of truth used to come from a combination of religion, history and philosophy (including natural philosophy, that is, science), we have reached a stage now where in public discourse, only science (empirical observation of the material universe) can offer certainty or universal truth. This narrowing applies also to education. Where schooling used to be concerned with developing the intangible

outputs of wisdom and virtue, today the conception of knowledge recognised in public discourse is only what's measurable.

Having historically constituted humane learning, subjects like history and literature now focus primarily on analytical learning, an approach that has seeped-out from science's methodology.* And compared to scientific truths, which hold regardless of who observes them, classical education's Ideal Type, the moral ideal of a person 'both beautiful and good', possesses no objective reality beyond the lives and myths of those in whom it is manifested. Replete with value-judgements, evocative language and other normative baggage, the classical liberal classroom provokes the imaginative mind and emotions, the very antithesis of detached analysis or scientific rationalism.

Coupled with the sheer usefulness of modern science, with its capacity to make daily life easier, to create work and incomes and prosperity, the normative domains through which we previously secured our humanity have been eclipsed. The disciplined initiation into traditions, myths, and conversations, the grounding from our ancestors, and without which we can never achieve true intellectual freedom, has become an increasingly difficult sell to parents and students.

So, as schools have narrowed their field of study to that which can be analysed in external nature, they have reduced the scope and objectives of education. Children have been discouraged from realms that are beyond scientific analysis, that constitute humane learning and can bring meaning to life.

Instead of a guide to understanding ourselves, realms beyond reason have been placed in opposition to intellect. The limitations to science of poetry, myth and dogma are obvious. Yet, they still represent our best opportunity to tap knowledge of ourselves and our purpose. The value-free stance may be useful in the material level of being, but it remains a weak position from which to try and discern how to live.

Thus in 1869, Matthew Arnold, who was the son of the influential headmaster of Rugby school, wrote his great work of social critique, *Culture and Anarchy*, in which, having described England as 'drifting towards anarchy', 'social disintegration' and 'doing as one likes', he then prescribed liberal education for all as the solution.

According to Arnold, who was a graduate of Oxford's then *Literae humaniores*, which is Latin for 'more humane literature' (now known as Classics and nicknamed Greats), the best remedy was culture:

*... culture being a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world, and, through this knowledge, turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits.*⁶³

* Chapter 4 provides evidence of this from the English Literature GCSE.

Arnold's ideas about education continue to reverberate in the 20th and 21st century. For example, the introduction to the 1904 Elementary School Code stated:

*The purpose of the Public Elementary School is to form and strengthen the character and to develop the intelligence of the children ... to train [them] ... carefully in habits of observation and clear reasoning ... to arouse in them a living interest in the ideals and achievements of mankind, to bring them some familiarity with the literature and history of their own country ... and to develop in them such a taste for good reading and thoughtful study as will enable them to increase that knowledge in after years by their own efforts.*⁶⁴

Later, the 1927 Hadow Report, the 1943 Norwood report and the 1988 national curriculum all bore striking resemblance to the liberal curriculum Arnold had espoused.⁶⁵

The current, 2014, curriculum was also inspired by his words.⁶⁶ So much so in fact that for the Conservatives' 14 years of leadership, the quest behind which education ministers and many teachers effectively united was to find and replicate the most efficient, evidence-based approaches to passing on knowledge. It was, in many ways, a thoroughly Arnoldian objective.

However, when only measurable knowledge, and its analysis, become the focus of humane subjects, children are left with a limited understanding of themselves and their place in the great conversation of humanity.

When modern educators are discouraged from the 'baggy, baffling, normative questions of style (aesthetics) and conscience (ethics)' that are the very purpose of the humanities, children's opportunities to develop their conscience are stifled. When teachers shy from modelling what it means to live by a dogma (that something exists beyond the material, a higher realm or truth) children miss the chance to experience it.

Accordingly, instead of a curriculum that addresses the timeless tensions 'of war and peace, freedom and authority, faith and doubt, reason and emotion, knowledge and uncertainty, motivation and behaviour, morality and realpolitik, idealism and pragmatism',⁶⁷ students experience a narrow, reductive and unconnected merry-go-round of fragmented content that provides no compulsion or basis from which to make moral or aesthetic judgements.

Unwilling and increasingly unable to discuss concepts like beauty, the sacred, relationships and goodness – all the things that bring meaning and joy and distinguish our humanity – teachers focus instead on the merely material. Students are never initiated into life's quest for answers to questions that are eternal.

Liberal education and the working classes

By the late Victorian period, liberal education was becoming increasingly popular with the working classes. As Jonathan Rose records in *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, many slum dwellers were inspired to read Shakespeare and miners Greek philosophy.⁶⁸ Shakespeare would attract large audiences in mining towns, and in 1862 there was a ‘near-riot’ when a Birmingham Theatre Royal manager attempted to replace *Othello* with a modern comedy.⁶⁹

This working-class autodidacticism was enabled in part by libraries. In South Wales alone, by 1934, over 100 libraries had been funded by miners, despite their low pay.⁷⁰ And in 1889 Boots the chemist established its first Boots Booklovers’ Library, expanding to around half of stores within just a few years and, at their 1938 height, exchanging 35 million books a year.⁷¹

By 1903, the Worker’s Education Association (WEA) had been established to promote liberal education for the working classes.⁷² The WEA’s founder, Albert Mansfield, believed liberal education provided purpose, pleasure, and the opportunity to bathe in ‘the rivers of learning and purity’.⁷³ Participants described the education as ‘knowledge for its own sake’, and ‘a way of escape from the tedious monotony of working life.’⁷⁴ In those days, the WEA offered university-level education with strict discipline, wide reading, but no grades or degrees.

Public and grammar schools

The first organised schools in the UK were established by and for the Church, to train churchmen to read religious texts in Latin. Known as cathedral or grammar schools, the very first one was opened by St Augustine, in Canterbury in 598 AD. Over time, as well as opening up to students outside the Church, the curricula at grammar schools grew to cover more of the Roman trivium and quadrivium.

Following the Reformation, most cathedral grammar schools were replaced by new schools founded or endowed by charitable nobles, wealthy merchants, and guilds.⁷⁵ Some retained the term ‘grammar’ in their names, some went on to become the most prestigious public schools founded, contrary to mainstream belief, to educate not the elite but the poor.

Noteworthy in establishing the reputation of England’s public schools is the legacy of Dr Thomas Arnold (father to Matthew), who was headmaster of Rugby School in the 1830s. Arnold established many of the traditions still widespread in the best state and private schools today, including the house system, prefects, mottos, rewards, hymn-singing and prize-giving.⁷⁶

The 19th century brought reform to grammar schools. In particular the 1864 Schools Inquiry Commission introduced the idea of selection after it recommended that free

places be awarded by competition. The curriculum was also adapted; though ancient languages remained, grammar schools began to also teach literature and science.

Subsequently, the 1944 Education Act paved the way for what became known as the tripartite approach, whereby state secondary education was split between grammar, secondary modern and technical schools. Just three years later the proportion of secondary school pupils in grammar schools reached its peak at just under 38 per cent. Grammar schools' liberal curriculum and explicit approach to developing virtues was becoming widespread. By 1964, there were almost 1,300 grammar schools in the UK.⁷⁷

However, in the following year they became the target of the (publicly educated) education secretary Anthony Crosland, who privately promised he wanted 'to destroy every f***** grammar school in England. And Wales. And Northern Ireland.'⁷⁸

The publicly stated reason for abolition was to make a grammar-school education, including the liberal curriculum, 'available for more children'. Labour campaigned in the 1964 general election for 'grammar schools for all'. However, in practice, 'comprehensivisation' – replacing grammar schools with comprehensives, saw the liberal curriculum largely disappear.

As many of the leading academies in England (see the case studies in the next report) show, having a comprehensive intake does not preclude a liberal approach. However, as Robert Peal explains, 'The founding text of the comprehensive movement was Robin Pedley's hugely popular *The Comprehensive School*', which, following publication in 1963, went through 12 reprints or new editions in total.⁷⁹ And Pedley was an educational progressive, whose book derided and disparaged grammar schools, including his own.

Pedley criticised grammar school lessons for having 'much chalk and talk, a good deal of note-dictating' and 'frequent tests', concluding 'such teaching is bad for all children'. Instead, Pedley called for mixed-ability classes, permissive discipline and classrooms where one sees 'the people who matter – the children – busily concentrating on their particular jobs' with the teacher 'moving around unobtrusively'.⁸⁰

Influenced as they were by Pedley and others, the leaders of most comprehensives quickly dropped academic streaming and the liberal curriculum, as well as most of Thomas Arnold's innovations, from the house and prefects system, to hymn-singing and strong discipline. The methods used in most comprehensives were very far from the grammar schools' approach.

Through the late 1960s and 1970s, the number of grammar schools fell dramatically, such that today just 163 historical anomalies are left. These remaining grammars educate, at most, five per cent of the total state-funded sector and achieve (unsurprisingly) much better (than average) exam results.⁸¹

The list of grammar school alumni, frequently from working-class backgrounds, who went on to influential careers is long. It includes the broadcasters David Attenborough, John Humphrys, Sheila Hancock and Michael Parkinson; the actors Richard Attenborough, Michael Caine, Colin Firth, Patricia Hodge, Anthony Hopkins, Bill Nighy and Alan Rickman; the writers David Aaronovitch, Melvyn Bragg, John Campbell and Janet Street-Porter, and the Prime Ministers Keir Starmer, Theresa May, John Major, Margaret Thatcher, Ted Heath and Harold Wilson.⁸²

Thus, while the record of grammar schools has also been tempered by widespread reports of bullying, of having lower expectations of girls and of overlooking lower streams, that their liberal curriculum played a role in developing the intellectual life of the UK is clear.

And while it need not have been so, grammar schools' widespread (but not total) replacement by comprehensives was a milestone in the displacement of liberal schooling in Wales and England.

Chapter 3: Displacement

Despite its growth and influence, over the past century the tradition of liberal education has been significantly eroded in the UK. The classical telos, of personal freedom, of wisdom and virtue, has been largely replaced by utilitarian goals. Evidence and examples of this are provided in Chapter 4 – however, we turn now to what caused the decay.

No momentous event can be identified in the displacement of education for freedom. There was no defining turn or dark enemy of humane study. Instead, three independent developments in our culture's underlying philosophy have each been instrumental. Explored below, these are the creep of scientific analysis into humane studies, the rejection of past authorities, and increasing state control of education (of which accountability through tests is a corollary).

Displacement 1: Scientific materialism

Beginning in the enlightenment, the idea that science is the route to truth, that we can understand ourselves only through examination of the material universe, intentionally excluding knowledge derived from the inherited or transcendent truths of art, music, religion and literature, has gradually, over three centuries, taken hold.

Alongside science, with its empirical certainties and vast capacity to make daily life more comfortable, the appeal of classical education's demand to look backwards in time, to contemplate myths, abstractions and hypotheticals has waned. Since logical arguments and evidence from myth are valueless in the face of scientific analysis, humanity's normative domains, those that initiate children into what it means to be human have quietly been eroded in schools.

Classical education's pursuit of virtue, meaning and wisdom has gradually come to be seen as less 'productive'. Scepticism, professional objectiveness and utilitarianism have replaced the messy pursuits of the classical classroom.

No particular event can be identified. There was no plot against humane study. Instead, unable to justify itself in scientific terms, the normative and dialectic study of the kinds of questions that can lead to discovering the life of virtue has simply receded, quietly, from the telos of schools.

Accordingly, having been denied the emotional and spiritual wisdom of the past, students may struggle to distinguish between the good and bad, the beautiful and ugly, high culture and otherwise. Beyond popular and on-screen culture, they are gifted little in the form of intellectual ideas, literature or mythology on which to build lives of wisdom and purpose.

Alongside this, cultural relativism has grown and flourished, so much so that today the scientist's analytical, sceptical mindset is interwoven into everything, from history to

literature, art to religion. All cultural expressions are treated equally, whether classical music or drill, whether painted on the Sistine chapel or the underpass wall. The negative side of the dialectic, the critique of existing wisdom and institutions – what the Marxist philosopher Herbert Marcuse himself described as Critical Theory – has come to define both academia and school.

And relativism sidesteps fundamental teaching on morality too. Having been excused from teaching students how they *ought* to be – about ideals such as courage, prudence and gentleness – teachers retreat to conveying merely what humans *can* achieve and be.

Even the Literature teacher, when faced with a normative text, adopts a sceptical, analytic tone, declining to take sides in debates that might enliven or expose her individual or religious domains. However, to teach Literature in such a limited way, denying the invisible and avoiding dogma predetermines a merely sociopolitical, utilitarian outcome. While sucking the vitality out of learning, it encourages students to believe that knowledge and responsibility need not advance concurrently; that what is learned at school is unconnected to how we should behave, what values we might live by or prioritise.

As Hicks writes:

... nonnormative presentation ... does not stir a response in the reader; it fails to judge issues that cry out for judgement; it dresses up colorful moral dilemmas in drab amoral prose (so as not to forfeit a claim to objectivity).⁸³

When humane letters – Literature, History, Religion and Philosophy are taught analytically, our inheritance of pagan and Christian mythology is stripped of its normative wisdom. Scientific analysis is not the only tool for understanding the individual's search for meaning, beauty, and transcendence. Yet, children learn that knowledge matters not because it transforms their hearts and actions, but for some other reason, which, in our present age, is amply fulfilled by utility to the state and market.

Nowadays, vast numbers of schools in the UK are adorned with slogans like, 'Knowledge is Power'. The statement is true, and schools *should* teach knowledge. However, what knowledge, and to what end, matters too. Because to teach men to be powerful over nature without also teaching them the moral consequences and responsibilities of that power is to unleash a recipe not only for harm but despair. In the words of David Hicks:

The past instructs us that man has only understood himself and mastered himself in pursuit of a self-transcendent Ideal, a Golden Fleece, a Promised Land, a Holy Grail ... He defines himself in the quest, not on Kalypso's unblown isle, where he is only judged against himself ... and where there are no moral restraints or

binding ideals. On Kalypso's idyllic estate, Odyssean man is a nobody. He languishes in egocentric frustration, self-doubt, and insecurity. In many ways he is a portrait of the modern student, seated "on the vacant beach with a shattered heart, scanning the sea's horizon with wet eyes" (Fitzgerald 1963). Only Odysseus's knowledge of the past – his longing for Ithaka, Penelope, and Telemakhos – keeps him alive; and only the responsibility he takes for that knowledge rescues him from Kalypso's pointless life of pleasure.⁸⁴

Historically, schooling did play a dialectical role in democratic society. It did tell children how they ought to be. Rather than pandering to the public by reflecting the status quo, schools, through the study of old books, elevated a binding and tyrannising ideal deriving from 3,000 years of mythology. Then, with an authority that many modern schools find arbitrary and inadvisable, they judged both individuals and society against it.

By comparison, nowadays, bereft of that inheritance and the authority it accords, schools risk producing what T.S. Eliot termed 'Provincials of time' who believe progress is natural and that truth will always prevail. Students are educated to acquiesce, unconsciously, in what C.S. Lewis called 'chronological snobbery', 'the uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate of our own age and the assumption that whatever has gone out of date is on that count discredited.'⁸⁵

In one manifestation of this, many schools' version of 'challenging the status quo' centres around teaching students about the Human Rights Act 1998 or, more contemporaneously still, the characteristics protected from discrimination by the Equality Act 2010.

Another example of this type of thinking is when schools name classes or houses after contemporary figures. In fact, according to our research, at least 143 schools have renamed schoolhouses after footballer Marcus Rashford and 88 after Greta Thunberg. Other schools have opted for Sir David Attenborough, Mo Farah, Emma Watson, Serena Williams, Malala Yousafzai, Elton John, Tom Daley, and Michelle Obama.

While there may be nothing intrinsically wrong with elevating these names, by promoting the contemporary culture, schools mislead children about what makes someone truly great; most are figures of today who will be forgotten in a generation or two. With the possible exception of Attenborough, none of these people have devoted their lives to one cause, with significant challenges, and enduring recognition.

Displacement 2: Rejection of past authorities

Although connected to the ascendance of scientific knowledge that began in the Enlightenment, the displacement of liberal education resulting from rejection of past authorities merits its own category.

Because the latter half of the 20th century was a time of significant societal transformation in Britain. Alongside the collapse of traditional social hierarchies, the post-war period was characterised by rapid loss of confidence in established forms of authority, in particular the family and the Church – the ‘death of God’ as Nietzsche called it.

One consequence of this loss of confidence in Christianity has been a breakdown in consensus about what constitutes truth, virtue and beauty. Devoid of such consensus, schools, which were traditionally rooted by Christian morality, have found themselves increasingly positioned at the vanguard of ethical relativism.

One consequence of this has been the ascendancy of materialism. When society cannot agree on what constitutes the immaterial – the good, true and beautiful as they’re sometimes known, schools are left only with the material, that which is scientifically measurable and verifiable, to pass on to children.

One man whose work influenced attitudes to authority was the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau. A founder of the romantic movement of artists and intellectuals which, in response to the Industrial Revolution, emphasised human imagination, beauty and subjectivity, Rousseau might have been expected to have defended humane and normative education. However, in the end, his legacy in education has been to elevate the so-called ‘noble savage’.

Historically, no medieval Christian or pagan, not even Plato (who believed virtue to be an inherent property of man’s nature, later corrupted by society) had ever doubted the imperative to teach virtue. For centuries, the role of the spiritual dimension in education had gone unchallenged. However, according to Rousseau in his 1762 book *Emile (or On Education)*, rather than needing formation in style or conscience, individuals are born instinctively good (noble savages) and therefore are in need of no prescriptive conversion, challenge or censure.

It took more than 100 years for Rousseau’s ideal of the noble savage to find its way into schools. However, with it in mind, in 1896 the American philosopher John Dewey, later known as the father of progressive education, opened the first University of Chicago Laboratory School. In these experimental institutions, the emphasis on giving young children the freedom to pursue their individual interests stood in stark contrast with the classical liberal tradition.

Because when defined in the Deweyian, rather than the classical sense, freedom is not self-mastery through hard work and discipline, it is not the freedom to join what Oakeshott called ‘the conversation of mankind’. Rather it is ‘following your own interests’, ‘being who you want to be’.*

* One example of this from popular culture are the lyrics of ‘Let it Go’, the most famous song from the extraordinarily popular children’s film *Frozen*: ‘No right, no wrong, no rules for me. I’m free. Let it go, let it

And so, in lieu of past authority, and without the definition of freedom we inherited from antiquity, personal liberation is being pushed to its practical extreme. Nowadays, in more and more schools, children learn that all perspectives must be treated equally, that ethics is mostly a matter of not restricting anyone else's freedom and that the highest goods to aim for are not virtue of wisdom but credentials, such as GCSEs.

Displacement 3: The expanding state

Over the 18th and 19th centuries, increasing proportions of working-class children attained some sort of schooling, funded by churches and philanthropy. According to an 1861 Royal Commission, by then at least 95 per cent of children were receiving some schooling.⁸⁶ Yet, it was the 1870 Elementary Education Act that marked the beginning of the state's aspiration to provide schooling for all and the 1944 Education Act that extended provision to age 15.

Accordingly, over the period, schooling in England changed from being a privilege of the elite, a preparation for the young Victorian gentleman of the ruling classes, to an entitlement of all. Education transitioned from a private endeavour serving parents and families, to a predominantly public one, run by Local Education Authorities. It is perhaps unsurprising then that during this time of growing class consciousness, widening access and state management, liberal education's humane and poetic telos was displaced. It was perhaps inevitable that schools would be distanced from their ancient and humane calling and instead fall in line with the more bureaucratic and measurable objectives of the state. Accordingly, nowadays, when asked, most people will tell you that a schools' purpose is to prepare students for their next steps, be that university or work, and/or to pursue political objectives, like campaigns for equality.

In later life, Dewey wrote about the excesses of the progressive approaches he had tested. However, his view, expressed in his 'Pedagogic Creed', 'that education is the fundamental method of social progress and reform', has been resoundingly tested in England's schools.

For example, the political objective of equality is a modern manifestation of the Biblical maxim that all men are made in the image of God. However, viewed in the only way the state can measure it, of everyone getting the same materially, rather than every child fulfilling his/her highest human potential, it has brought the unintended consequence of narrowing schools' focus onto a subset of measurable skills that are rewarded in the job market.

Another government policy that had an unintentionally deleterious impact on state-funded liberal education was the mass closure of grammar schools.

go'. Anderson-Lopez, K. and Lopez, R. (2013) Let It Go. Idina Menzel. *Frozen: Original Motion Picture Soundtrack*. Walt Disney Records.

As described in Chapter 2, historically, grammar schools, like public schools, followed a classical liberal approach. However, having become the target of the political/state objective of equality, through the late 1960s and 1970s the number of grammar schools dropped from almost 1,300 to the 163 now left.

The publicly stated reason for ‘comprehensivisation’ was to ‘preserve all that is valuable in grammar school education for the children who now receive it and make it available for more children’.⁸⁷ This meant the liberal curriculum and the approaches to character formation first trialled in the public schools.

However, while the process could have been successful in widening access to liberal education, as Peal explains, ‘unfortunately, the increasing influence of progressive education ensured that it was not.’⁸⁸

Aside from the question of whether political objectives should be imposed on schools, it is worth considering the benefits, and trade-offs, of the modern, utilitarian school.

There is no doubt that, over the past 100 years, GDP per capita has grown significantly across the West and in the UK, and in part assisted by mass education. That the resulting plenty has raised whole communities out of poverty and made equality more achievable is also clear. However, despite being beyond the reach of empirical analysis, the costs of depriving students access to humane education also bear consideration. For example, schools’ increasing service of consumerism, status, power and money is likely to be a contributing factor to the so-called ‘meaning crisis’. And it’s not as though our plenty has brought the end to avarice and inequality that some sought. In fact, according to many measures the goal of equality is further away than ever before.⁸⁹ Instead, as Hicks puts it:

*... we teach our children to crave much and to respect themselves and others in terms of their wealth – that is their vulgar ability to accumulate non-living matter. We have made education a gateway to riches rather than contentment.*⁹⁰

The school as factory

Another side-effect of increasing state management of schooling has been to turn schools into the types of technocratic organisations which, through fragmentation, can accommodate ill-suited educators on their staff. However, while such structures may be appropriate in the military or industry, they are wholly unsuited to achieving the goals of classical liberal education.

For example, in a school organised to ensure that no individual teacher, as represented by the least competent, can damage the goal, the kinds of teacher-student relationships necessary for the achievement of classical objectives are undermined at every turn school and class sizes are kept large; humane studies lessons, instead of being taught by one teacher, are carved up between teachers of Literature, History, Religion, Economics, Politics and PSHE; and teacher allocations change every year.

This is because modern organisational management techniques overlook the unique nature of classical education. The dialectic method, which by its very nature demands more of teachers, students and society, regardless of how high performing they may already be, falls apart when narrow and analytical management standards are accepted.

And it is standards, as monitored through exams, that now drive much of schooling.

Standards, assessment and accountability

The rationale for examinations is sound. GCSE and A-level assessments were established to indicate students' proficiency to employers and universities. Now that the state funds education, it also has a responsibility to hold schools accountable for their use of taxpayers' money. With the addition of SATs, which measure primary schools, examinations provide the state with empirical evidence that enables accountability.

However, assessments also change teachers' methods and priorities; the creep of analytical approaches into humane study didn't only originate in science but has come from assessment too.

In *Norms and Nobility*, Hicks describes in detail his experience observing a class of 14-year-olds exploring Plato's *Meno*. The teacher, a classicist, had chosen Plato in the hope of provoking the students to connect what they study in school to their behaviour and choices in life. However, beginning with an analytical approach, the kind that would enable the teacher to tick-off as complete the study of *Meno* on a syllabus, the students' learning was thwarted and diminished.

To begin with, the teacher asked his students to outline what virtue is, according to Plato's dialogue. However, when, having analysed the text, the students were confused and completely unmoved by it, he wondered what had gone wrong?

In essence, Plato's classic dialogue had been obscured and the students' understanding of virtue, having been drawn only from analysis, was superficial and detached. They hadn't participated, with Plato, in the dialectical 'struggle of ideas'.

The teacher therefore tried a different method: debate. 'As they argued amongst themselves', Hicks wrote, 'one began to feel the old charisma of the Ideal Type filling the room.' Now the children's understanding was far more than superficial or detached: it was filled with dogma and delight. It was then that he reintroduced Plato's text. However:

... this time not in an analytical attempt to pick apart Plato's argument, but in an effort to grasp the truths of the classic in accordance with the needs and the dogmas of his pupils. Nor was this difficult once their respective dogmas gave them each a role in the Platonic drama of ideas.⁹¹

This may sound to the reader merely like a description of the difference between bad and good teaching. Perhaps it is. However, the point is that in modern schools, well-intentioned teachers are so incentivised (by exams) to fixate on making sure students cover a body of material (usually the exam syllabus) that they forget, if indeed they ever knew, about the humanising purpose of school.

The thorny question of how to better balance necessary assessments with humane education for freedom will be addressed in subsequent reports. However, what is clear is that when analytic approaches, that are good for ticking boxes, eliminate the need for teachers to teach humanely, to question normatively, to participate personally, the ancient, layered and salty richness of classical learning, with all its animating and dialectic revelation, is replaced by a cold, separated and watery gravy.

Chapter 4: The loss of humane study

In his 1943 book, *The Abolition of Man*, C.S. Lewis drew attention to the modern schoolteachers' proclivity to teach children to debunk/see through all sentiments. In doing this the teacher overlooks what Lewis referred to as the 'Tao', or universal way of humanity and, in the name of objectivity, promotes a relativism that impedes the growth of conscience and will. In this way, according to Lewis, modern education produces men capable of explaining away anything with pithy intellect, and yet, still only at the whim of their appetites:

*... such is the tragi-comedy of our situation — we continue to clamour for those very qualities we are rendering impossible. You can hardly open a periodical without coming across the statement that what our civilization needs is more “drive”, or dynamism, or self-sacrifice, or “creativity”. In a sort of ghastly simplicity we remove the organ and demand the function. We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. – C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*.⁹²*

This series of reports rests on the claim that liberal education has been displaced from schooling in the UK, that Lewis is correct about how diminished schooling has become. For readers as yet unpersuaded of this, Chapter 4 catalogues some examples.

Text choices for GCSE English Literature

The texts studied by most 14- to 16-year-olds in the UK are chosen for their simplicity, rather than anything like their humanity or concern with life's perennial questions. Compared with those studied by students in the 1950s and in modern US classical schools, they are notably wanting.

The national curriculum, updated in 2013 by the then education secretary Michael Gove, specifies that for GCSE English Literature students must study a Shakespeare play, a 19th-century British novel, a work of post-1914 fiction, and an anthology of 15 poems.⁹³

One example of the extent to which utilitarian objectives (exam grades) influence text choices is that by far the most popular work of post-1914 fiction studied for GCSE English Literature is *An Inspector Calls* by J.B. Priestley. Analysis of exam-board data shows that in 2024, over 80 per cent of English Literature students in England and Wales studied the short play.⁹⁴ Yet, at only 72 pages, *An Inspector Calls* is hardly longer than a pamphlet, and unlike Shakespeare, Priestley heavily annotates the play with stage directions and explanations.⁹⁵

As for the 19th-century British novel, despite being classed as only a novella, and having a recommended reading age of eight to 12, this category is dominated by

Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*.^{*} Read in Grade 6 (the equivalent of Year 7) in the American classical school, this famous exploration of virtue demands little background knowledge or stamina to read.

Anecdotally, teachers choose *An Inspector Calls* and *A Christmas Carol* because they are easier texts to master. *An Inspector Calls* is certainly far easier contextually, in length, writing and meaning than alternative works of post-1914 fiction like *Lord of the Flies* and *Animal Farm*. Similarly, *A Christmas Carol* is far shorter than other 19th-century British novels like *Silas Marner* and *Pride and Prejudice*.

Because GCSE is the last point at which *all* students are assessed, designing their exams is challenging. That the English Literature exam must be simple enough for weak students to access while also stretching the brightest will always necessitate compromise. This compromise will be explored more in subsequent reports. However, it seems likely that through the texts schools choose to maximise exam success, the current assessment imposes a soft bigotry of low expectations on very many students.

Table 4.1 below details the texts most frequently studied for GCSE English Literature, those required for a 1955 O-Level English Literature paper, and those from a modern classical curriculum from America. While text length is not an accurate proxy for 'greatness' or even complexity, page numbers (of available, standard editions) are also included.

Table 4.1: Texts studied by 14- to 16-year-olds now, in 1995 and in a US Classical School			
GCSE English Literature (2025)**			
<u>Text</u>	<u>Author</u>	<u>Pub. Date</u>	<u>Pages</u>
<i>Macbeth</i>	William Shakespeare	1606	160
Anthology of 15 Poems	Various	1789–present	20
<i>A Christmas Carol</i>	Charles Dickens	1843	144
<i>An Inspector Calls</i>	J.B. Priestley	1945	70

^{*} While a Christmas Carol was read by 70% of students, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Great Expectations* were read by just 0.5% and 0.4% respectively

^{**} For GCSE English Literature each student must study a Shakespeare play, a 19th-century British novel, an anthology of 15 poems, and a post-1914 British play or novel. Listed here are the most popular texts from 2025. It is very rare that a student would study any other English texts at school during their two years of GCSE.

O-Level English Literature (1955)⁹⁶ (most studied 3 to 5 texts from here)			
<u>Text</u>	<u>Author</u>	<u>Pub. Date</u>	<u>Pages</u>
<i>Canterbury Tales</i> (extracts)	Geoffrey Chaucer	1392	504*
<i>Macbeth</i>	William Shakespeare	1623	128
<i>The Importance of Being Earnest</i>	Oscar Wilde	1895	113
<i>Guy Mannering</i>	Walter Scott	1815	512
<i>Gallions Reach</i>	H. M. Tomlinson	1927	251
<i>Far Away and Long Ago</i>	W. H. Hudson	1918	248
<i>Dare to be Free</i>	Walter Babington Thomas	1951	245
<i>Eothen</i>	Alexander William Kinglake	1908	238
<i>Anthology of Longer Poems</i>	Ed. T. W. Moles and A. R. Moon	1938	296
GCSE Age (Grades 9 and 10) Literature curriculum, US classical school⁹⁷			
<u>Text</u>	<u>Author</u>	<u>Pub. Date</u>	<u>Pages</u>
<i>King Lear</i>	William Shakespeare	1606	208
<i>Paradise Lost</i> (Hackett edition)	John Milton	1667	496
<i>Frankenstein</i>	Mary Shelley	1818	352
<i>Pride and Prejudice</i>	Jane Austen	1813	448
<i>Confessions</i>	St Augustine	398	352
<i>Song of Roland</i>	Simon Gaunt and Karen Pratt (Trans.)	1040	206

Renewing Classical Liberal Education

<i>Canterbury Tales</i> (extracts)	Geoffrey Chaucer	1392	504*
<i>The Divine Comedy I, II & III</i> (Hollanders' translation)	Dante Alighieri	1321	736

Source: See individual footnotes *Though 504 pages in length, only extracts of *Canterbury Tales* were studied in both 1955 and at the US classical school.

A comparison across the table shows several differences between the modern GCSE, 1955 O-Level, and the US classical curriculum.

One difference is in the number and length of texts studied over the two-year period. The modern GCSE requires students to study three novels or plays in two years (the most commonly studied books and plays are listed). In practice, this means almost all GCSE students study just three texts over the two-year period, along with an anthology of 15 poems. Based on the most commonly studied texts this is 394 pages in total. In contrast, the classical student in America studies an astonishing eight different books, generally of much longer length (more than 2,800 pages) in the same two-year period.

For the purposes of comparison, Appendix II details how the school week is split across subjects at the US Classical School. However, beyond their timetable, a number of other factors contribute to that school's ability to cover so much literature during a similar length of school year and week.

The first is that, having attended a classical school where grammar, Latin and literature are taught from age five, by age fourteen most children already have sufficient mastery of English language that English lessons can largely be spent on literature. Through reading progressively more 'demanding' texts the students have also developed their stamina.

Secondly, because the curriculum is structured chronologically, and texts read accordingly, pupils bring vast stores of relevant background knowledge to their reading. For example, as the Humanities Department Chair at a leading US classical school explained:

*My students don't always need the notes. We finished Book 4 of Paradise Lost yesterday. When we got to Eve retelling the moment she awakened from her creation, my students didn't need to read the note that connected her to Narcissus - they immediately made that connection on their own. When the scales appear in the sky at the end of Book 4, that was familiar to them. They remembered the fight between Hector and Achilles and Aeneas and Turnus. They recalled it on their own!*⁹⁸

Thirdly, in the classical school the focus of literature lessons is less on form and more on the ideas communicated through the story. Because students are not micro-analysing literary techniques but reading the books for their humane lessons and beauty, they simply get through far more pages. This includes through reading at home,

where in 20 minutes ('not much', as their teacher described it) 15-year-olds are expected to read around eight pages each evening.

Clearly, for a UK school to do this would involve largely overlooking the exam syllabus. It might damage test scores, especially at the margins. However, despite similar implications for the test scores required for college admission in the US, the humane approach to literature is growing in influence. As the US case study in the next report will explain, the proportion of parents choosing classical schools for their children is in sharp ascent.

It is harder to draw a comparison with the O-Level student from 1955 for whom between three and five texts were assessed. However, it is notable that in the 1950s there were actually three Alternative papers offered for English Literature O-Level, depending on the ambition of the school/student. Table 4.1 details only the first Alternative from 1955, with the most limited reading list. The third Alternative, intended for candidates who had followed a wider course of reading than was catered for by the other two Alternatives, was based only on 'Wider Reading'. For example, a Shakespeare question might have been 'Write a brief account of one of Shakespeare's heroines'.⁹⁹ The other questions, from which candidates had to choose three, were also largely generic, allowing students to draw on whatever they had read, for example, to write an essay on 'Wales in English Literature'.

Another difference is the modernity of the texts in the GCSE, compared to the US classical school. Of all the 34 available GCSE texts, almost 40 per cent were published in the preceding 50 years (including two in the last 10 years)¹⁰⁰ compared to none in the American classical school.*

As the classical school's Humanities Department Chair explained:

... consider the alternative. If we don't teach it, who will read Paradise Lost? The answer is the very few who become English majors ... hopefully. Even they may not. In a world that has discarded Milton and where the majority of our teens do not read more than blips on Instagram, we are doing something radical ... We are sending out into the world hundreds of graduates who have read Milton, Dante, Homer, and Vergil, who have written in imitation of each of their styles, who have Shakespeare stored in their hearts, and whose souls have been affected by these stories ...

We are trying to raise students to be life-long readers. Part of what we are trying to do is cultivate their taste for what they read. Our great hope is that students would return to these texts (even again and again) to wring more and more out of them. Because of this, we aren't trying to cram everything into this one reading. We are planting lots of seeds, some of which won't come to fruition for years, or even

* See Appendix I for full list of GCSE English Literature novels and plays.

*decades. Some of their greatest “aha” moments will come when they pick a text up again at the age of 30 and give it another go.*¹⁰¹

In the GCSE list, only *Pride and Prejudice* and *Frankenstein* (1813 and 1818, respectively) are more than 200 years old. Students in England are less likely to study, in the words of Matthew Arnold, ‘the best which has been thought and said in the world’ than their historical and classically educated American equivalents.¹⁰²

Charlotte Mason, a Victorian liberal educator (whose case study will be included in the next report), said the books read in school must be ‘living’; so full of ideas that they stay alive one generation to the next. Accordingly, in the American classical school texts like ‘Paradise Lost’ and ‘The Divine Comedy’ are included because they have proven their worth to generations of our ancestors, rather than because students are most likely to find them easy to read and answer questions on when they sit national exams.

Inhumane humanities

In the UK, humanities are almost universally taught as separate, unrelated subjects. However, as described in Chapter 1, this fragmentation into individual subjects meets an analytical and practical objective while undermining the purpose – to humanise – of the humanities.

Under a humane, integrated approach ‘every subject is seen in the light of each and all, and especially of the good, the true and the beautiful.’¹⁰³ Rather than the accumulation of facts or analytical skills, the purpose of the humanities is to grow the child into their full humanity. Thereby, a poem is savoured for the truth it conveys, its capacity to make us experience something beyond its mere words. A battle is studied so we can see the world through different eyes and grow in discernment about our role within it. A great book is read because we are changed in the process, not because it demonstrates literary techniques.

Frequently, schools following a liberal approach structure humanities around chronology. For example, during a year’s course on the medieval period the curriculum might cover:

- Dante’s ‘Inferno’, Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* and/or Shakespeare’s *Richard III* in English;
- Thomas Aquinas, the Lollards, and the monastic movement in Religious Education;
- The Norman Conquest, Magna Carta and the Hundred Years War in History;
- Population growth in the medieval period in Geography;
- The Black Death and Roger Bacon in Science;
- The Bayeux Tapestry, medieval cathedrals and Leonardo de Vinci in Art; and
- Plainchants and madrigals in Music.

Two school case studies in the next report provide differing exemplars of this approach.

Classical liberal schools will also embed great books into multiple courses. By way of example, at the US classical school the History curriculum for each year includes texts all students will read. In Grades 9 and 10, these are *The Rule of Saint Benedict* and Machiavelli's *The Prince*. In Grades 9 and 10, Rhetoric lessons they read passages from Plato's *Republic*, and in Grades 11 and 12, Latin and Greek, works by Virgil and the Gospel of John. In this way, books are not confined to the study of English literature but key to learning across languages *and* the humanities.

Of course, not every subject can be perfectly aligned with another. Curriculum design always involves trade-offs. However, when humane studies are approached as one, when students are presented with pieces from the *same* puzzle rather than many *different* ones, then they catch glimpses of a map from which to navigate life, they are initiated into mankind's great conversation.

Marked changes in A-level subject choices

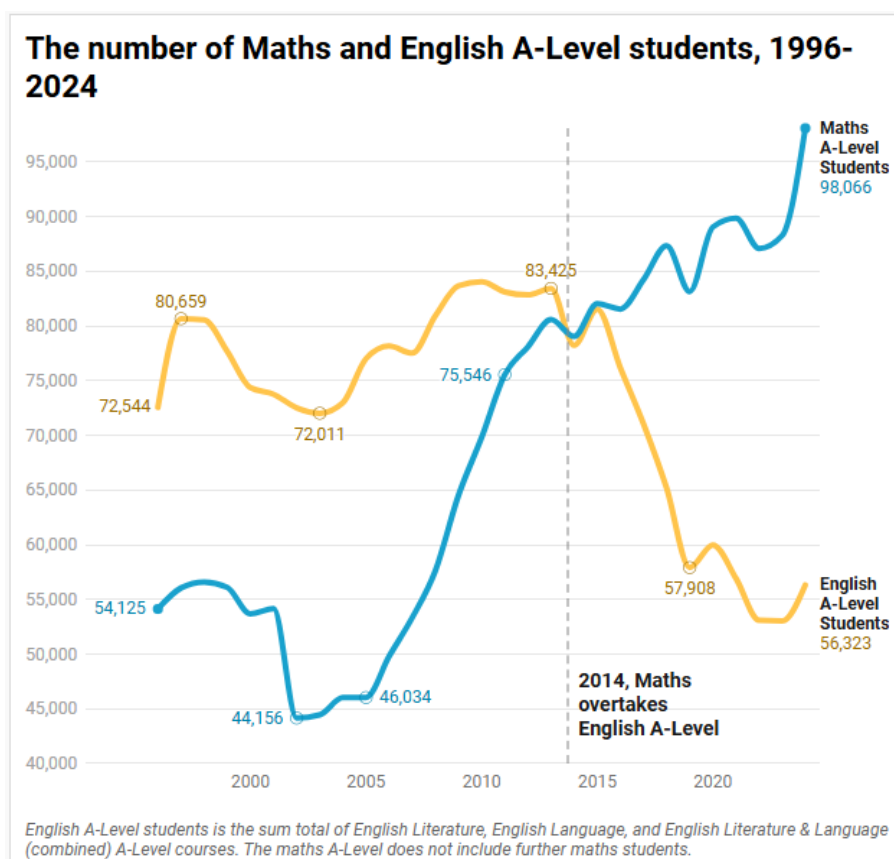
One empirical example of the UK's metamorphosis from a liberal to a utilitarian education appears in the data on A-level subject choices.

For example, Figure 4.1 shows how (over 28 years) the relative popularity of English and Maths has flipped.

While the number of children choosing to study an English subject at A-level (English literature, English language or English language and literature) has fallen by nearly a quarter (despite a rise in the total number of A-level students) those opting for Maths has almost doubled.

Where in 2014 English subjects at A-level were the most popular, they now rank only fifth, behind Maths, Biology, Psychology and Chemistry.¹⁰⁴ Where English literature was the sixth most popular A-level in 2014, today it comes it at a lowly 11th.

Figure 4.1: The number of Maths and English A-level students, 1996-2024



Source: Gov.uk Explore Education Statistics.¹⁰⁵

The teaching of English Literature now and historically

Nowadays, secondary school teachers and the lessons they plan are guided to a significant extent by the nature and content of GCSE exams. Therefore, one way to appraise the nature of English Literature teaching is to evaluate questions asked in the GCSE.

All GCSE English Literature exams assess students against the following Ofqual-determined (and weighted) Assessment Objectives (AOs):¹⁰⁶

1. AO1 (35–40 per cent weighting): Read, understand and respond to texts.
Students should be able to:
 - Maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response.
 - Use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.
2. AO2 (40–45 per cent weighting): Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.

3. AO3 (15–20 per cent weighting): Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.
4. AO4 (five per cent weighting): Use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation.

Reflecting these, below are selected questions from the 2023 English Literature GCSE:

1. Explore how Shakespeare presents Juliet’s feelings towards Romeo in *Romeo and Juliet*.
2. How does Priestley present what life is like for women in *An Inspector Calls*?
3. How far does Golding present Ralph as a strong character in *Lord of the Flies*?
4. In what ways is mystery significant in *An Inspector Calls*?
5. In ‘Scaffolding’ by Seamus Heaney, how does the poet present the speaker’s feelings about their relationship?
6. In *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, how does Stevenson present the importance of reputation?

Preoccupation with easy-to-assess ‘how’ questions (which frequently relate to literary techniques) has changed the way literature is taught and viewed in many schools. Instead of exploring the enduring, humane, normative questions that are central to the texts, teenagers spend much of their time identifying and evaluating the techniques through which writers portray a particular emotion or subject.

And this misses literature’s purpose.

That a pupil could study *Hamlet* and spend their time contemplating Shakespeare’s writing style, rather than the morality of revenge, the nature of duty, the meaning of sacrifice and redemption, is indefensible. It is like studying Mozart’s ‘Requiem’ and listening only for the addition of different instruments. It is exactly because of *Hamlet*’s universal, timeless and humane themes that it is amongst the world’s most famous plays. Doubtless there is much we can learn from Shakespeare’s writing techniques, but to emphasise *them* over participation in *Hamlet*’s wrestle with corruption, morality and duty is like eating only the potatoes when presented with a banquet meal.

Another example of how technique-based exam questions influence the curriculum is the widespread use of inflexible writing formats designed to help students succeed in exams, but at the expense of genuine mastery or creativity. A recent Ofsted English subject report acknowledged this, stating: ‘Writing weaknesses are often masked unhelpfully by narrow approaches, such as extensive use of PEE (point, evidence, explanation) paragraphs.’¹⁰⁷

In a blog on Tacit Knowledge, Daisy Christodoulou offered two particularly egregious examples of PEE ‘paragraphs’:¹⁰⁸ ‘In this poem, the poet is angry. I know he is angry because it says the word “anger”. This shows me that he is angry.’ And: ‘This article

tells us that horse-racing is dangerous. We know it is dangerous because it is dangerous.’

In fact, such has been the popularity of PEE that nowadays numerous iterations exist, including:

- PEZAL – Point, Evidence, Zoom, Appreciation, Link.
- SEIZZE – Statement, Evidence, Inference, Zoom In, Zoom Out, Effect.
- PETER – Point, Evidence, Technique, Explanation, Reflection).
- PEACOCK – Point, Evidence, Analyse, Context, Other views, Counter-argument, Key-link to the question (specifically for a history essay).

As the National Association for the Teaching of English puts it, the student experience of English ‘tends to be a microcosmic analysis of textual features and their alleged ‘effects’ rather than on reading for meaning’.¹⁰⁹

Similarly, a 2024 Ofsted report into English teaching identified that, though pupils, including very young pupils, talk clearly about their learning: ‘most pupils refer to the skills they acquire in English so they can complete the national curriculum tests, rather than the stories, plays and poems in the English curriculum.’¹¹⁰

A counterpoint: Literature teaching in an American classical school

The telos of many of America’s leading classical schools is, rather than exam success, something akin to humane or liberal study. One way this difference manifests is that staff intentionally ignore the format of external exams when preparing and teaching their curricula. It is insightful, therefore, to understand how one such school conceptualises and assesses literature.

At these classical schools the literature curriculum is divided into four equally weighted sections: ‘essential questions’, ‘enduring understandings’, ‘knowledge’ and ‘skills’.

‘Essential questions’ and ‘enduring understandings’ help teachers prioritise the big questions and ideas that make works of literature worth reading. For example, when studying the Greek tragedy *Oedipus*, these include questions and understandings of pride, self-knowledge, fate, nobility and free will. When studying Virgil’s epic poem ‘The Aeneid’, they include the right ordering of duties and loves.

Knowledge and skills, as one might expect, ensure students know about the historical contexts, themes, characters and plots of books they read, and that they learn how to close-read texts using annotations, identifying literary elements and finding particular themes. However, these objective and analytical elements are kept in check by the equal emphasis on ‘essential questions’ and ‘enduring understandings’.

To illustrate how ‘essential questions’ and ‘enduring understandings’ are assessed, below are some examples from end of unit tests:

Renewing Classical Liberal Education

1. Age 13–14: Which of our heroes this semester – Orestes, Oedipus, or Aeneas – shows the most fortitude?
2. Age 14–15: Articulate one way in which you are motivated to pursue the good life more fervently because of the books we’ve read this semester.
3. Age 14–15: Articulate the most beautiful passage we’ve read this year and what effect it has had on you.
4. Age 16–17: Write a response to one of the following prompts, comparing/contrasting two different works from this semester.
 - How does religion shape a culture’s values and/or perception of reality?
 - How important is a sense of community to characters’ wellbeing?
 - Compare/contrast the theme of freedom in two of the works from this semester.
5. Age 17–18: Compare/contrast the theme of truth and honesty in two of the novels read this year. Make a case for what the authors are trying to communicate to their audience.

Covering, amongst other ideals, fortitude, the good life, honesty and beauty, these questions direct both students and teachers towards the humane wisdom in the text they read. Acknowledging the students’ humanity, and the school’s role in developing wisdom and virtue, they concentrate on the perennial questions that have animated civilisation for the past 3,000 years.

Conclusion

The modern approach to education is largely based on a utilitarian, scientific-materialistic view of the world and of the human. In line with this, the telos of education has been reduced to one primarily focused on exam results, to meet the demands of individuals for material comfort and the state for a productive economy.

In this instrumentalised world, anyone raising questions about aims, ideals or different ways to measure success is assumed to be opposed to rigour, to be shy of accountability or to support inefficient methods.

Yet, a time-tested, rigorous and more humane approach exists. Having been our evolving education tradition for centuries, it is only in the last 100 years that it has so lost its humane focus as to have been largely displaced.

As Chapters 2 and 3 show, our Western tradition of education for personal freedom has ancient and enduring origins. Its more recent displacement could, depending on what happens next, mark a blip in the history of the tradition or the end of it.

As Chapter 4 explores, although Michael Gove's curriculum reforms were inspired by Arnold's liberal vision, the landscape of education for freedom is hardly less bleak. State objectives and materialism continue their quiet creep.

However, as the US counterpoint that closes Chapter 4 demonstrates, there is another way. It is possible for schools to look beyond exam results and be not only more humane but more rigorous. There are reasons for hope. Thus, it is to the bastions and green shoots of liberal learning, as well as recommendations, that this series of reports turns next.

Appendix I: GCSE English Literature book list

A list of all books and plays available to study at GCSE English Literature (from all four exam boards):

Shakespeare:

- *Macbeth/Romeo & Juliet/The Tempest/The Merchant of Venice/Much Ado About Nothing/Julius Caesar*, William Shakespeare (1595–1613).

19th-century British novel:

- *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen, (1813);
- *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley, (1818);
- *A Christmas Carol/Great Expectations*, Charles Dickens, (1843/1861);
- *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë, (1847);
- *Silas Marner*, George Eliot, (1861);
- *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, Robert Louis Stevenson, (1886);
- *The Sign of Four (Adventures of Sherlock Holmes)*, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, (1890);
- *The War of the Worlds*, H.G.Wells, (1898).

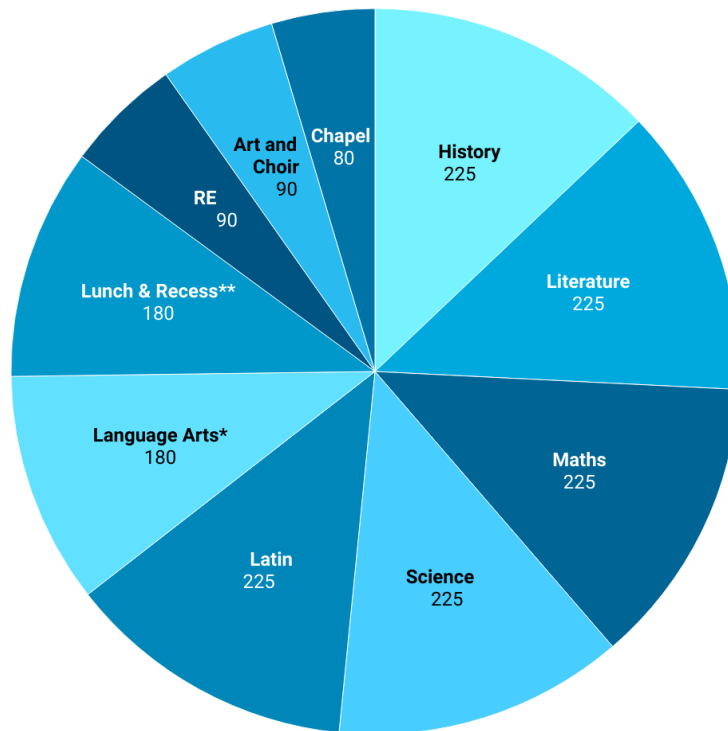
Post-1914 British play or novel:

- *Hobson's Choice*, Harold Brighouse, (1915);
- *Journey's End*, R.C. Sherriff, (1928);
- *An Inspector Calls*, J.B. Priestley, (1945);
- *Animal Farm*, George Orwell, (1945);
- *Lord of the Flies*, William Golding, (1954);
- *A Taste of Honey*, Shelagh Delaney, (1958);
- *Blood Brothers*, Willy Russell, (1983);
- *The Woman in Black*, Susan Hill, (1983);
- *Leave Taking*, Winsome Pinnock, (1987);
- *My Mother Said I Never Should*, Charlotte Keatley, (1987);
- *Anita and Me*, Meera Syal, (1996);
- *Coram Boy*, Jamila Gavin, (2000);
- *Never Let Me Go*, Kazuo Ishiguro, (2005);
- *DNA*, Dennis Kelly, (2007);
- *Boys Don't Cry*, Malorie Blackman, (2010).
- *Pigeon English*, Stephen Kelman, (2011);
- *My Name is Leon*, Kit de Waal, (2016);
- *Princess & The Hustler*, Chinonyerem Odimba, (2019).

Appendix II: US Classical school's Grade 8 weekly time allocations

The following chart depicts how much time is spent on each subject in a weekly Grade 8 (equivalent of Year 9) timetable at a leading classical school in the US.

Figure A2.1: Time allocations, in minutes per week, in Grade 8 (Year 9 equivalent) US classical school



*Language Arts (Logic + Composition + Support) is part of the trivium teaching

**Lunch and Recess comes to only 45 minutes per day because Friday, being a half day, does not include either of these.

Source: Private correspondence with the school.

All sports are voluntary and take place before or after the school day, though a certain number of credits from sport are required each year, and can be collected from sports activities outside of school, or during summer. Modern languages are not taught in the upper school. The total amount of class time is just over 29 hours per week.

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- ⁸⁷ Weeks, A. (1986) *Comprehensive Schools: Past, Present and Future*, Methuen, p.8. Cited in Peal, R. (2014) *Progressively Worse*. Available at: <https://www.civitas.org.uk/pdf/ProgressivelyWorsePeal.pdf> (accessed: 10/09/25).
- ⁸⁸ Peal, R. (2014) *Progressively Worse*. Available at: <https://www.civitas.org.uk/pdf/ProgressivelyWorsePeal.pdf> (accessed: 10/09/25).
- ⁸⁹ For example, the Gini coefficient measures inequality on a scale from 0 to 1, where higher values indicate higher inequality. Since 1968, England's Gini coefficient has risen from 0.27 to 0.32. Our World in Data. *Income inequality: Gini coefficient*. Available at: <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/economic-inequality-gini-index?tab=line&time=1963..latest&country=GBR~USA&mapSelect=~GBR> (accessed: 10/09/25).
- ⁹⁰ Hicks, D. (1999) *Norms and Nobility: A Treatise of Education*, University Press of America, p.128.
- ⁹¹ Hicks, D. (1999) *Norms and Nobility: A Treatise of Education*, University Press of America, p.86-87.
- ⁹² Lewis, C.S. (1943) *The Abolition of Man*, Oxford University Press.
- ⁹³ Department for Education. *English literature: GCSE subject content and assessment objectives*. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7ca069e5274a29d8363d20/GCSE_English_literature.pdf (accessed: 11/09/25).
- ⁹⁴ The figure was calculated in two steps. First, we found the number of students studying GCSE English Literature in 2023-24 across the different exam boards. Table 1 of the spreadsheet available from this webpage gives this information: Ofqual (2025) *Annual qualifications market report: academic year 2023 to 2024*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/annual-qualifications-market-report-academic-year-2023-to-2024> (accessed: 11/09/25).
- Second, we found the total number of students who studied *An Inspector Calls* (AIC) in 2023-24 in each exam board. This article lists all the information for each exam board (except WJEC): Norden, J. (2025) 'Revealed: The most and least popular GCSE English lit texts', *TES Magazine*, 25 April. Available at: <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/secondary/the-top-choices-for-GCSE-English-literature-texts> (accessed: 11/09/25). WJEC data came from 'Question Title 08' on page 8 of the following: Eduqas (2024) *GCSE Examiners' Report: English Literature GCSE Summer 2024*. Available at: <https://www.eduqas.co.uk/media/d32phgch/eduqas-gcse-eng-lit-final-report-s24.pdf> (accessed: 11/09/25).
- Finally, we divided the total number of students studying AIC overall (490,521) by the number studying GCSE English Literature (601,475), giving 81.55 per cent of GCSE English Literature students who studied AIC.
- ⁹⁵ Priestley, J.B. (1992) *An Inspector Calls (Heinemann Plays For 14-16+)*. Heinemann.
- ⁹⁶ Reproduced by kind permission of Cambridge University Press & Assessment. In the 1950s students of English O-Level were offered three different types of examination. The first involved studying three to five books, of which (in 1955) one had to be either Shakespeare/Milton and another Kinglake/poetry anthology. The second examination option required students to learn a similar style and number of books. However, the third option (available to schools only upon application) was, through more generic questions like 'Write a brief account of one of Shakespeare's heroines?' for candidates who had followed a 'wider course of reading than is catered for by the other two' options.
- ⁹⁷ This curriculum is taken from a classical school in Texas.

⁹⁸ Private meetings and correspondence with the Humanities Department Chair at a leading US Classical School.

⁹⁹ Eduqas. *The more things change ... WJEC O Level English Literature in 1951*. Available at: <https://www.eduqas.co.uk/articles/the-more-things-change-wjec-o-level-english-literature-in-1951/> (accessed: 28/10/25).

¹⁰⁰ Odimba, C. *Princess & the Hustler (NHB Modern Plays)*. Nick Hern Books. And de Waal, K. (2016) *My Name Is Leon*. Viking.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Arnold, M. (1869) *Culture and Anarchy*, p.viii.

¹⁰³ Pearce, J. (2021) 'The Legacy of John Senior', *The Imaginative Conservative*, 11 March. Available at: <https://theimaginativeconservative.org/2021/03/legacy-john-senior-joseph-pearce.html> (accessed: 11/09/25).

¹⁰⁴ UK Government (2025) *Time-series - A level subject entries and grade by sex*. Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-catalogue/data-set/45add44a-3cfd-4616-b108-e1f94792ef16> (Accessed: 11 September 2025).

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Department for Education. *English literature GCSE subject content and assessment objectives*. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7ca069e5274a29d8363d20/GCSE_English_literature.pdf (accessed: 11/09/25).

¹⁰⁷ Ofsted (2024) *Telling the story: the English education subject report*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/subject-report-series-english/telling-the-story-the-english-education-subject-report> (accessed: 11/09/25).

¹⁰⁸ Christodoulou, D. (2015) *Tacit knowledge*. Available at: <https://daisychristodoulou.com/2015/07/tacit-knowledge/> (accessed: 11/09/25).

¹⁰⁹ The English Association (2024) *Working Group on GCSE English Reform*. Available at: <https://englishassociation.ac.uk/working-group-on-gcse-english-reform/> (accessed: 11/09/25).

¹¹⁰ Ofsted (2024) *Telling the story: the English education subject report*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/subject-report-series-english/telling-the-story-the-english-education-subject-report> (accessed: 11/09/25).