



14th October 2020

Financial Incentives Team
Initial Teacher Training
Great Smith Street,
Westminster,
London
SW1P 3BT

Re. Cuts to Initial Teacher Training bursaries

Dear Financial Incentives Team,

I write in my capacity as Chair of the Classical Association Teaching Board (CATB) to outline our concerns and ask you to revisit the decision announced on 13th October to reduce or, in many cases, remove initial teacher trainee bursaries for a number of humanities subjects, including Classics. This cut in funding is, we believe, short-sighted with regard to future demand and will have a detrimental impact on the diversity of those able to embark on initial teacher training, deterring high-quality applicants who lack the independent means to do so without a bursary.

As you know, Classics PGCE students have previously received bursaries of £26,000, owing to the fact that Classics was identified as a shortage subject. We appreciate the financial strain presented by the current economic climate and realise that the National Foundation for Educational Research has predicted both increased ITT recruitment during the pandemic and higher retention rates. Nevertheless, we are concerned that the decision to reduce the Classics bursary to £10,000 fails to take into account our longer term recruitment crisis.

Some Classical subjects are now state school dominant (e.g. A Level Ancient History students are 95% state school, 5% independent; A Level Classical Civilisation students are 79% state school, 21% independent) and we are delighted at the growth we have seen in the state sector. The charity Classics for All (<https://classicsforall.org.uk/>) and the AHRC-funded project Advocating Classics Education (<http://aceclassics.org.uk/>) have both made great strides in this respect, together introducing or developing the teaching of Classics in over 900 primary and secondary schools, many in areas of socio-economic disadvantage. However, this growth brings with it challenges in supply. While over 170 Classics teacher posts were advertised in the UK last year, this year there are only 60 places available nationally for ITT in Classics. Additionally, while there are a number of places available for trainees in Classics on school-centred initial teacher training programmes, these tend to take the form of replacement posts, rather than new ones. The continued growth of our subject will undoubtedly mean that we will need more teachers of Classics in state schools in the near and distant future.

The reduction in bursary for Classics teacher trainees is likely to deter well-qualified applicants, even those with a strong commitment to a career in teaching. Many will be so economically disadvantaged by the policy that they cannot apply (see this piece by an aspiring Classics teacher: <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/those-who-cant-afford-it-cant-teach/>); others will perhaps decide to postpone their applications until such time as they can afford to apply, or in the hope that the higher bursary might be reinstated in the future. Either way, it is likely that recruitment will go down, exacerbating very quickly our problem with supply.

It is vital that we continue to attract outstanding applicants from a diverse range of backgrounds. Although trainees can access student loans to cover fees and living expenses, there are many for whom the prospect of accruing substantial debts makes this option unfeasible. Many current trainees are telling us that they could not have afforded to undertake the PGCE without their current bursary. Moreover, the PGCE is highly demanding of trainee teachers' time, preventing them from taking on additional paid work to cover their maintenance. We have made enormous progress in recent years towards making Classics more accessible and inclusive and challenging the perception that it is an elitist subject. Recruiting and retaining teachers from a range of socio-economic backgrounds is one key aspect of that mission and we fear that one of the unintended consequences of the reduction in bursary will be to undo some of that progress.

Uncertainty regarding the funding of Subject Knowledge Enhancement courses is a further cause for concern. We believe that SKE courses play a vital role in producing highly trained and knowledgeable teachers, preparing graduates for successful recruitment, retention and progression, and leading in turn to strong student outcomes. Institutions offering SKE courses rely on the funding to provide the specialist staff and resources for this work, and a large number of students who apply for SKE courses are equally reliant on the funding provided to allow them to study. The withdrawal of this funding would further reduce the pool of potential applicants for PGCEs in Classics and is likely to disadvantage promising candidates who have come to Classics later in their education in particular, adding to our concerns relating to inclusivity. Furthermore, the ongoing delay in decision-making is likely to have a serious impact not only on recruitment, but also on the planning and preparation of institutions who are already working in an increasingly challenging climate. We are therefore calling upon the DfE to continue to fund SKE courses and to make that decision as soon as possible in order to prevent further delay in the recruitment of trainees.

We welcome the support Classics has received from the DfE in the past, but we ask you to rethink the policy on ITT bursaries and to put in place adequate and fair bursaries to avoid disadvantaging outstanding future teachers and hindering the development of the subject in state schools. We also make this plea on behalf of other subjects, some of whom have seen their bursaries withdrawn altogether and will have similar concerns about both the impact of this policy on supply and its wider implications for equality and diversity.

Yours faithfully,



Dr Sharon Marshall
Chair of the Classical Association Teaching Board