As classicists, we are used to fighting a rearguard, back to the wall action to save our subjects from extinction. This is not going to be that kind of talk. I am delighted to share with you plenty of good news.

Firstly, the number of students presenting Classical Greek for this year’s HSC is the highest for at least the last 40 years (my data goes back to 1978.) The usual number has been about 14, with a very occasional rise to 18 or 19, and occasional dips to single figures, but this year we have 27 candidates in NSW. In addition, 30 candidates from Victoria sat for the NSW Higher School Certificate.

This encouraging rise has happened in the same year that syllabuses in both Latin and Classical Greek in the Australian Curriculum were approved, written, circulated and published. The fight to have these subjects included in the national curriculum began in 2010 and was driven to a great extent by the efforts of Libby Jones, who convened a representative committee of teachers from NSW and Victoria to visit Parliament House in Canberra to make our case before the Federal Minister for Education. Thanks to the efforts of Libby, and those from this Association who supported her, approval was eventually given in Federal Parliament to including a Classical Languages Framework in the Australian Curriculum, beginning with Latin and Greek, and allowing for the eventual inclusion of other Classical Languages such as Hebrew and Sanskrit. As a result, there is now access to Latin and Classical Greek for children from every part of Australia, even in states which no longer offer these subjects in their local curricula. This is a huge step for classics in this country.

This Association was generous enough to support me in some research I did in England in 2015 into “Latin for Literacy”, the movement to include Latin in primary schools as a vehicle to improve literacy and general academic attainments, especially in state schools. Over the last decade, this movement has produced significant improvements in standardised literacy scores among children exposed to Latin programs. Partly as a result of my research, the 2017 Sydney Latin Summer School was persuaded to include a course for primary teachers and brought out Jane Maguire, who runs training sessions for primary teachers in the UK, to teach an accredited course for local primary teachers . No prior knowledge of Latin was expected, and the course was taught through the popular Minimus coursebook that makes Latin very accessible and enjoyable. I am happy to say that this course will be offered again in the 2018 Latin Summer School, taught jointly by my daughter Susanna, who has been teaching primary Latin for four years, and myself. As a result of the 2017 course, Latin for Literacy has taken off both at Abbotsleigh and at Cooma Public School. Of course there are several other primary schools in Sydney with Latin programs, and we hope that more will take up the challenge. It is worth mentioning that in NSW there are primary syllabuses in both Latin and Classical Greek, but that the Australian Curriculum was funded only for Years 7 to 10, in contrast to modern languages. This is a battle still waiting to be fought.

The latest venture in the dissemination of classical languages has been to produce an introductory textbook in Classical Greek for early secondary students that is attractively presented, appealing to young people, and meaningful in an Australian context. I am happy to say that this work is now done, thanks to some generous sponsorship from the Greek community, our wonderful supporter Joydeep Hor of People and Culture Strategies, and the CLTA. While I take responsibility for the concept and the composition of the Greek readings and language content, I very much wanted the book to have the voice of youth. I am delighted that my former student, Emily Kerrison, now studying Classics at this university, wrote the dialogues among fictitious Australian teenagers that frame the course, retold several Aboriginal stories that parallel the Greek myths, and composed delightful puzzles to reinforce the learning of vocabulary. The illustrations that convey the first five stories through cartoon strips are the work of another talented young person, Alex Anstey, whose depictions have excited great admiration from all the school students to whom I have shown them. This, to my knowledge, will be the first Greek textbook produced in a specifically Australian context, and will accord with the general demands of the Australian Curriculum in terms of cross disciplinary content.

All these are positive signs that the Classics are thriving in 21st century Australia. It is, I think, worth giving a moment to reflect on what factors have helped to bring about this change. Before rushing to congratulate those tireless individuals who have kept up the pressure on officialdom and promoted our cause for many years, we need to look at what current factors in our society have kindled and spread an enthusiasm for classical studies.

Popular children’s literature has certainly helped. The famous Harry Potter series, followed by the Percy Jackson books, have presented engaging stories heavily dependent on classical references, mythology and even Latin and Greek phrases. These successful best-sellers have in turn stimulated a rush of fiction based on Greek myths, and ancient history, such as Ursula LeGuin’s *Lavinia*, based on the *Aeneid*, Adele Geras’ *Ithaca*, and numerous other novels for young readers and for adults. I have no doubt that some students have been attracted to the study of classical languages because of these books.

My other reason is not based on evidence but on a gut feeling after many years in education. There is a great deal of talk about “21st century education”, in which technology is king, content is irrelevant, and collaborative, creative, open-ended projects are the only proper way to prepare students for an uncertain future. My observation has been that students get tired of all this quite rapidly, find such activity quite stressful, and often put so much energy into sophisticated presentation that the content itself is quite uncreative and unstimulating. In contrast, structured lessons in Latin and Greek, with measurable progress, are quite soothing to this anxious generation. They love learning what they didn’t know before. They don’t really want a “facilitator” when they can have a teacher whose knowledge they can respect and whose dedication and enthusiasm they can emulate. So they come eagerly to our classes in Latin and Greek.

I believe that all these are signs that the Classics are thriving in this country today. May they continue to do so for many years to come. May this Association and others keep pushing our cause to achieve the recognition that classical subjects deserve in our education system. I gives me great pleasure to propose a hearty toast to the Classics – floreant semper.