

THE PLACE OF LATIN IN THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

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I was both distressed and depressed by the *Courier Mail's* report about Christopher Pyne's support for including Latin (and classical Greek) as language options in the National Curriculum. Latin is described as 'extinct for 1500 years' and as the language 'spoken by the ancient Romans' and 'of limited use beyond higher fields of academia'. Latin, in fact, was the language spoken by the educated classes in Western Europe for hundreds of years, not just by 'the ancient Romans'. It remained the language of international communication, science and diplomacy until at least the 17th century. Newton's seminal work, *Principia Mathematica* (1687), regarded as one of the most important works in the history of science, was written in Latin and could thus be understood internationally.

Latin is the language from which Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Romanian developed, which is why they are called 'Romance' languages, i.e. of Roman origin; and there is no doubt that a knowledge of Latin greatly helps in learning these languages, as it does also with learning such languages as German.

Latin is the basis of a huge percentage of the vocabulary of English, with classical Greek giving us yet another significant percentage, especially in the fields of science, medicine, technology and literature.(see insert below. Ed.) If you know Greek and Latin, your command of English is improved beyond measure.

The inclusion of Latin and Greek in the school curriculum is an initiative that I can support wholeheartedly.

(From 1970-2003 Professor Milns was Professor of Classics and Ancient History, The University of Queensland. He was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) in 1997, for services to education, especially in the field of Classics and Ancient History, and the community. In 2003 he was awarded a Centenary Medal for long service to education and the students of Queensland University.)

What percentage of English words comes from Latin? What is the percentage of English words derived from other languages?

About 80 percent of the entries in any English dictionary are borrowed, mainly from Latin. Over 60 percent of all English words have Greek or Latin roots. In the vocabulary of the sciences and technology, the figure rises to over 90 percent. About 10 percent of the Latin vocabulary has found its way directly into English without an intermediary (usually French). For a time the whole Latin lexicon became potentially English and many words were coined on the basis of Latin precedent. Words of Greek origin have generally entered English in one of three ways: 1) indirectly by way of Latin, 2) borrowed directly from Greek writers, or 3) especially in the case of scientific terms, formed in modern times by combining Greek elements in new ways. The direct influence of the classical languages began with the Renaissance and has continued ever since. Even today, Latin and Greek roots are the chief source for English words in science and technology.

(source: FAQs dictionary.com)

