**MOSCOW STATE TEACHER`S TRAINING UNIVERSITY**

# COURSE PAPER

## **Education in the United Kingdom**

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**Introduction**

### E

ducation in England is not as perfect as we, foreigners think. There are plenty of stereotypes, which make us think, that British education is only Oxford and Cambrige, but there are also many educational problems.During the last fifteen years or so, there have been unprecedented changes in the system of education in England and Wales. I’ll try to explain the changes and the reasons for them. In my work I will also give a description of the system of education, which differs from that in Russia very much.

#### Primary and secondary education

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chooling is compulsory for 12 years, for all children aged five to 16. There are two voluntary years of schooling thereafter. Children may attend either state-funded or fee-paying independent schools. In England, Wales and Northern Ireland the primary cycle lasts from five to 11. Generally speaking, children enter infant school, moving on to junior school (often in the same building) at the age of seven, and then on to secondary school at the age of 11. Roughly 90 per cent of children receive their secondary education at 'comprehensive' schools. For those who wish to stay on, secondary school can include the two final years of secondary education, sometimes known in Britain (for historical reasons) as 'the sixth form'. In many parts of the country, these two years are spent at a tertiary or sixth-form college, which provides academic and vocational courses.

Two public academic examinations are set, one on completion of the compulsory cycle of education at the age of 16, and one on completion of the two voluntary years. At 16 pupils take *the General Certificate of Secondary Education* (GCSE), introduced in 1989 to replace two previous examinations, one academic and the other indicating completion of secondary education. It was introduced to provide one examination whereby the whole range of ability could be judged, rather than having two classes of achievers; and also to assess children on classwork and homework as well as in the examination room, as a more reliable form of assessment. During the two voluntary years of schooling, pupils specialise in two or three subjects and take *the General Certificate of Education* (always known simply as 'GCE') Advanced Level, or 'A level' examination, usually with a view to entry to a university or other college of higher education. **New examinations**. *Advanced Supplementary (AS) levels*, were introduced in 1989, to provide a wider range of subjects to study, a recognition that English education has traditionally been overly narrow. The debate about the need for a wider secondary level curriculum continues, and Labour is likely to introduce more changes at this level. These examinations are not set by the government, but by independent examination boards, most of which are associated with a particular university or group of universities. Labour may replace these boards with one national board of examination.

A new qualification was introduced in 1992 for pupils who are skills, rather than academically, orientated, *the General National Vocational Qualification*, known as GNVQ. This examination is taken at three distinct levels: the Foundation which has equivalent standing to low-grade passes in four subjects of GCSE; the Intermediate GNVQ which is equivalent to high-grade passes in four subjects of GCSE; and the Advanced GNVQ, equivalent to two passes at A level and acceptable for university entrance.

The academic year begins in late summer, usually in September, and is divided into three terms, with holidays for Christmas, Easter and for the month of August, although the exact dates vary slightly from area to area. In addition each term there is normally a mid-term one-week holiday, known as 'half-term'.

##### The story of British schools

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or largely historical reasons, the schools system is complicated, inconsistent and highly varied. Most of the oldest schools, of which the most famous are *Eton, Harrow, Winchester and Westminster*, are today independent, fee-paying, public schools for boys. Most of these were established to create a body of literate men to fulfil the administrative, political, legal and religious requirements of the late Middle Ages. From the sixteenth century onwards, many 'grammar' schools were established, often with large grants of money from wealthy men, in order to provide a local educational facility.

From the 1870s local authorities were required to establish **elementary** schools, paid for by the local community, and to compel attendance by all boys and girls up to the age of 1 3. By 1900 almost total attendance had been achieved. Each authority, with its locally elected councillors, was responsible for the curriculum. Although a general consensus developed concerning the major part of the school curriculum, a strong feeling of local control continued and interference by central government was resented. A number of secondary schools were also established by local authorities, modelled on the public schools.

The 1944 Education Act introduced free compulsory secondary education. Almost all children attended one of two kinds of secondary school. The decision was made on the results obtained in the *'11 plus' examination*, taken in the last year of primary school. Eighty per cent of pupils went to *'secondary modern'* schools where they were expected to obtain sufficient education for manual, skilled and clerical employment, but where academic expectations were modest. The remaining 20 per cent went to *grammar schools*. Some of these were old foundations which now received a direct grant from central government, but the majority were funded through the local authority. Grammar school pupils were expected to go on to university or some other form of higher education. A large number of the grammar or 'high' schools were single sex. In addition there were, and continue to be, a number of voluntary state-supported primary and secondary schools, most of them under the management of the Church of England or the Roman Catholic Church, which usually own the school buildings.

By the 1960s there was increasing criticism of this streaming of ability, particularly by the political Left. It was recognised that many children performed inconsistently, and that those who failed the 11 plus examination were denied the chance to do better later. Early selection also reinforced the divisions of social class, and was wasteful of human potential. A government report in 1968 produced evidence that an expectation of failure became increasingly fulfilled, with secondary modern pupils aged 14 doing significantly worse than they had at the age of eight. Labour's solution was to introduce a new type of school, *the comprehensive*, a combination of grammar and secondary modern under one roof, so that all the children could be continually assessed and given appropriate teaching. Between 1965 and 1980 almost all the old grammar and secondary modern schools were replaced, mainly by coeducational comprehensives. The measure caused much argument for two principal reasons. Many local authorities, particularly Conservative-controlled ones, did not wish to lose the excellence of their grammar schools, and many resented Labour's interference in education, which was still considered a local responsibility. However, despite the pressure to change school structures, each school, in consultation with the local authority, remained in control of its curriculum. In practice the result of the reform was very mixed:

the best comprehensives aimed at grammar school academic standards, while the worst sank to secondary modern ones.

One unforeseen but damaging result was the refusal of many grammar schools to join the comprehensive experiment. Of the 174 direct-grant grammar schools, 119 decided to leave the state system rather than become comprehensive, and duly became independent fee-paying establishments. This had two effects. Grammar schools had provided an opportunity for children from all social backgrounds to excel academically at the same level as those attending fee-paying independent public schools. The loss of these schools had a demoralising effect on the comprehensive experiment and damaged its chances of success, but led to a revival of independent schools at a time when they seemed to be slowly shrinking. The introduction of comprehensive schools thus unintentionally reinforced an educational elite which only the children of wealthier parents could hope to join.

Comprehensive schools became the standard form of secondary education (other than in one or two isolated areas, where grammar schools and secondary moderns survived). However, except among the best comprehensives they lost for a while the excellence of the old grammar schools.

Alongside the introduction of comprehensives there was a move away from traditional teaching and discipline towards what was called 'progressive' education.-This entailed a change from more formal teaching and factual learning tc greater pupil participation and discussion, with greater emphasis on comprehension and less on the acquisition of knowledge. Not everyone approved, particularly on the political Right. There was increasing criticism of the lack of discipline and of formal learning, and a demand to return tc old-fashioned methods.

From the 1960s there was also greater emphasis on education and training than ever before, with many colleges of further education established to provide technical or vocational training. However, British education remained too academic for the less able, and technical studies stayed weak, with the result that a large number of less academically able pupils left school without any skills or qualifications at all.

The expansion of education led to increased expenditure. The proportion of the gross national product devoted to education doubled, from 3.2 per cent in 1954, to 6.5 per cent by 1970, but fell back to about 5 per cent in the 1980s. These higher levels of spending did not fulfil expectations, mainly because spending remained substantially lower than that in other industrialised countries. Perhaps the most serious failures were the continued high drop-out rate at the age of 16 and the low level of achievement in mathematics and science among school-leavers. By the mid-1980s, while over 80 per cent of pupils in the United States and over 90 per cent in Japan stayed on till the age of 18, barely one-third of British pupils did so.

***I. Arguments about the purpose of education.***

There is a feeling that the schools are not succeeding - that standards are too low, that schools are not preparing young people with the skills, knowledge and personal qualities which are necessary for the world of work, and that schools have failed to instil the right social values. These are the criticisms and therefore there have been changes to meet these criticisms.

However, the criticisms take different forms. First, there are those who believe that standards have fallen, especially in the areas of literacy and numeracy - and, indeed, unfavourable comparisons are made with the other countries as a result of international surveys. For example, the recent Third International Mathematics and Science Survey (TIMSS) placed in England and Wales very low in mathematical achievement at 13 - although very high in science. Therefore, these critics emphasize «back to basis» and the need for more traditional teaching methods.

Second, there are those who argue for a rather traditional curriculum which is divided into «subjects» and which calls upon those cultural standards which previous generations have known - the study of literary classics ( Shakespeare, Keats, Wordsworth) rather than popular multi-cultural history, classical music rather than popular music, and so on. Since there are many children who would not be interested in or capable of learning within these subjects, there is a tendency for such advocates of traditional standards to support an early selection of children into «the minority» who are capable of being so educated, separated off from «the majority» who are thought to benefit more from a more technical or practical education.

Third, there are those who question deeply the idea of a curriculum based on these traditional subjects. Many employers, for instance, think that such a curriculum by itself ill - serves the country economically. The curriculum ought to be more relevant to the world of work, providing those skills, such as computer, numeracy and literacy skills, personal qualities (such as cooperation and enterprise) and knowledge (such as economic awareness) which make people more employable.

A very important speech which expressed those concerns and which is seen as a watershed in government policy was that of Prime Minister Callaghan at Ruskin College, Oxford, in 1976.

«Preparing future generations for life» was the theme and he pointed to the need for greater **relevance** in education on four fronts:

1. the acquisition by school leavers of basic skills which they lacked but which industry needed;
2. the development of more positive attitudes to industry and to the economic needs of society;
3. greater technological know-how so that they might live effectively in a technological society;
4. the development of personal qualities for coping with an unpredictable future.

In what follows I give details of the different contexts in which this concern for change was discussed.

1. **Economic Context**

It is generally assumed that there is a close connection between economic performance and the quality and context of education and training, and that therefore the country’s poor performance economically since the second world war (compared with some other countries) is due to irrelevant and poor quality education. During the thirty years from the end of the Second World War not enough pupils stayed on beyond the compulsory school leaving age. There were too many unskilled and semi-skilled people for a much more sophisticated economy. Standards of literacy and numeracy were too low for a modern economy. There was not enough practical and technical know-how being taught.

As a result, it was argued that there must be much closer links between school and industry, with pupils spending time in industry, with industrialists participating in the governance of schools, and with subjects and activities on the curriculum which relate much more closely to the world of work.

Furthermore, there should be a different attitudes to learning. So quickly is the economy that people constantly have to update their knowledge and skills. There is a need for a «learning society» and for the acquisition of «generic» or «transferable» skills in communication, numeracy, problem-solving, computer technology, etc.

1. **Social Context**

There are anxieties not just about the future economy but also about the future of society. Preparing young people for adult life was what the Ruskin speech was about, and there is much more to adult life than economic success - for example, living the life of a good citizen, of a father or mother, of involvement in social and political activity. Therefore, schools are required to prepare young people for a multicultural society, to encourage tolerance between different ethnic groups, to promote social responsibility, to encourage respect for the law and democratic institutions, to develop sensibilities towards the disadvantaged and to ensure girls enjoy equal opportunities with boys. And schools have. Indeed, responded with programs of social education, citizenship, and parenthood. Moreover, they have often done this in practical ways such as organizing projects.

1. **Standards**

The need for educational change arises partly from a concern about academic standards. The sense that Britain is declining has been reinforced by statements from employers. According to them, Britain’s workforce is under-educated, under-trained and under-qualified! These criticisms of standards are pitched at different levels. First, there are worries about low standards of literacy and numeracy. Second, international comparisons give weight to misgivings about the performance of British schoolchildren in mathematics and science. And, therefore, the subsequent changes have tried to define standards much more precisely, and o have regular assessment of children’s performance against these standards.

###### II. Changing Political Control

1. **After 1944**

The key educational legislation, until recently, was the 1944 Education Act. That Act supported a partnership between central government (Local Education Authorities or LEAs), teachers and the churches - with central government playing a minimal role in the curriculum.

**The 1944 Education Act** required the Secretary of State to promote the education of the people of England and Wales and the progressive development of institutions devoted to that purpose and to secure the effective execution by local authorities, under his control and direction, of the national policy for providing a varied and comprehensive educational service in every area.

In the decades following the Act, «promotion» was perceived in very general terms - ensuring that there were resources adequate for all children to receive an education according to «age, ability and aptitude», providing the broad legal framework and regulations within which education should be provided (for example, the length of the school year or the division of education into primary and secondary phases), and initiating major reports on such important matters as language and mathematics teaching.

Within this framework, the LEA organized the schools. The LEA raised money through local taxation to provide education from primary right through to further and indeed higher education, and made sure that the schools and colleges were working efficiently. They employed and paid the teachers. And ultimately they had responsibility for the quality of teaching within those schools.

The Churches were key partners because historically they (particularly the Church of England) had provided a large proportion of elementary education and owned many of the schools.

The 1944 Act had to establish a new partnership between state, LEAs and the church schools.

**b)After 1980**

However, the changing economic, social and cultural conditions outlined in the previous section caused the government to reexamine the nature and the composition of that partnership. The questions being asked during the 1980’s included the following:

Has central government the power to make the system respond to the changing context? Are the local authorities too local for administrating a national system and too distant for supporting local, especially parental, involvement in school? Have the parents been genuine partners in the system that affects the future welfare of their children? And what place, if any, in the partnership has been allocated to the employers, who believe they have a contribution to make to the preparation of young people for the future?

1. **New governing bodies**

Various Acts of Parliament since 1980 have made schools more **accountable**.

Teachers, employers and parents have been given places on the governing bodies. Governors have to publish information about the school that enables parents to make informed choices when deciding to which school they should send their child. Each LEA has to have a curriculum policy that must be considered and implemented by each governing body. Schools also must have a policy on sex education and must ensure that political indoctrination does not take place. This accountability of schools and LEAs has to be demonstrated through an annual report to be presented to a public meeting of parents. The government gave parents the right to enrol their children - given appropriate age and aptitude - at any state school of their choice, within the limits of capacity. Parents already sent their children to the local school of their choice. The decision to publish schools' examination results, however, gave parents a stark, but not necessarily well-informed, basis on which to choose the most appropriate school for their child. Increasingly parents sought access to the most successful nearby school in terms of examination results. Far from being able to exercise their choice, large numbers of parents were now frustrated in their choice. Overall, in 1996 20 per cent of parents failed to obtain their first choice of school. In London the level was 40 per cent, undermining the whole policy of 'parental choice' and encouraging only the crudest view of educational standards. Schools found themselves competing rather than cooperating and some schools, for example in deprived urban areas, faced a downward spiral of declining enrolment followed by reduced budgets. Thus the market offered winners and losers: an improved system for the brighter or more fortunate pupils, but a worse one for the 'bottom' 40 per cent. Schools in deprived parts of cities acquired reputations as 'sink' schools. As one education journalist wrote in 1997, 'There is a clear hierarchy of schools:

**private, grammar, comprehensives with plenty of nice middle-class children, comprehensives with fewer nice middle-class children and so on.'**

1. **Central control**

The government has looked for ways of exercising greater influence over what is taught in schools. New legislation gave the government powers to exercise detailed control over the organization and content of education. **The 1988 Education Act** legislated a **National Curriculum** and a system of **National Assessment**. In addition, significant changes were enacted to make possible the central financing and thus control of schools through creating a new kind of school outside LEA control (first, the provision of City Technology Colleges 9CTC), and, second, the creation of Grant Maintained Schools (GMS)). The government also significantly reduced the power of local authorities by transferring the management of schools from the LEA to the schools themselves (known as the local management of schools or LMS).

At the same time, within this more centralized system, parents have been offered greater choice through the establishment of different kinds of schools (GMS and CTC), through the delegation of management to the governing bodies of the schools (LMS) and through the granting of parental rights to send their children to the school of their choice.

The various Parliamentary Acts (but especially the 1988 Act) gave legal force to a massive change in the terms of the education partnership. **First**, the Secretary of State now has powers over the details of the curriculum and assessment. **Second**, a mechanism has been created whereby there can be more participation by parents (and to a much smaller degree by employers), in decisions that affect the quality of education. **Third**, the LEAs have been required to transfer many decisions over finance, staffing, and admissions to the schools and colleges themselves. **Fourth**, the LEA responsibility for the curriculum has been transferred to the Secretary of State.

1. **Employer involvement**

The voice of the consumers will be heard more, and the consumer includes the employer. Several initiatives encouraged employer participation. First, and possibly the most important in the long run, has been the encouragement of business representatives on governing bodies of schools. Second, there has been a range of initiatives which have given employers a greater say in the purposes which schools are expected to serve and in the means of attaining them.

1. **The role of assessment**

The government decided to develop a reformed system of examinations which would specify the standards against which the performance of individual schools and of pupils might be measured.

The 1988 Education Act legislated for assessment of pupils at the ages of 7, 11, 14 and 16, using attainment targets which all children should normally be expected to reach at these different ages in different subjects - especially in the «foundation subjects» of English, mathematics and science. The assessments relied partly on moderated teacher-assessment, but more importantly on national, externally administrated tests.

As a result of these national assessments, exactly where each child was in relation to all other children in terms of attainment in each subject. And it would be possible to say how each school was succeeding in these measured attainments in relationship to every other school. These assessments, have subsequently, provided the basis of national comparisons and league tables of schools.

In the reform of National Curriculum in the early 1990’s, it was decided that, because of public examinations at 16 , the national assessment should finish at 14.

1. **Inspection**

For over one hundred years, there had been an independent inspection service. The inspectors were called **Her Majesty’s Inspectors (HMI)** to indicate that ultimately they were accountable to the Queen, not to the government from whom they ardently preserved their independence. Until about ten years ago, HMI numbered about 500. They inspected schools and they advised the government.

Senior HMIs were based at the Department of Education and Science (now the department for Education and Employment) but the big majority were scattered over the whole country so that they could advise locally but also be a source of information to central government. Indeed, they were known as «the ears and the eyes of the Minister».

Much of this has now changed as government has sought greater central control. HMI has been cut back to about one third of its previous size. The Chief Inspector is now a political appointment, not someone who has arisen from the ranks of an independent inspectorate. A new office has been created, **the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED),** to which HMI now belong and which is much more at the service of government policy.

Under OFSTED a very large army of «Ofsted inspectors» has been created - often teachers - who, after a brief training, are equipped to inspect schools. The initial plan was to inspect all 25,000 schools every four years and to publish a report which would be accessible to everyone. Every teacher is seen and graded. OFSTED is able to identify «failing schools» and «failing teachers».

It has been very difficult to get rid of very poor teachers. It is now hoped that, with more regular inspection and with clearer criteria for success and failure, it will be easier to sack teachers who are consistently under performing.

The recent changes are increasingly redescribed in managerial and business terms, as the educational system is managed as part of the drive to be more economically competitive.

However, one must be aware of the doubts and dismay of many in this «philosophy». First, there is little consideration of the aims of education - the values which make the relationship between teacher and learner an educational *encounter,* not one of «delivering a service». Second, the new language of «education» is drawn from an entirely different activity, that of business and management. The language of control, delivery, inputs and outputs, performance indicators and audits, defining products, testing against product specification, etc. Is not obviously appropriate to the development of thinking, inquiring, imagination, creativity, and so on. Third, the key role of the teacher is made peripheral to the overall design; the teacher becomes a «technician» of someone else’s curriculum.

The changing economic and social context in Britain seemed to require a closer integration of education, training, and employment; at the same time, a sharper focus on personal development; greater concentration of the partnership to include employers and parents; and a dominant position given to central government in stipulating outcomes were all factors which led the framework of the system is adapting to the new contexts.

**a)The public system of education might be illustrated as follows:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Age** | **Type of school** | **National exams and assessments** |
| 4 | Nursery school (optional and where available) |  |
| Beginning of compulsory education |  |  |
| 5 | Primary school | Baseline assessment |
| 6 | Primary school |  |
| 7 | Primary school | Assessment Key Stage 1 |
| 8 | Primary school of Middle school |  |
| 9 | Primary school of Middle school |  |
| 10 | Primary school of Middle school |  |
| 11 | Secondary school of Middle school | Assessment Key Stage 2 |
| 12 | Secondary school of Middle school |  |
| 13 | Secondary school of Middle school |  |
| 14 | Secondary School | Assessment Key Stage 3 |
| 15 | Secondary School | Start of GCSE course |
| 16 | Secondary School | GCSE exams |
| End of compulsory education |  |  |
| 17 | Secondary School Sixth Form  College of Further Education  Work Training Scheme | Start of A-level course  GNVQ  NVQ |
| 18 | Secondary School Sixth Form  College of Further Education  Work Training Scheme | A-level exams  GNVQ  NVQ |

1. **Schools and the post-16 curriculum**

The maintenance of such a curriculum has been a major function of the examination system at 16, which was originally designed as a preparation for the post-16 courses leading to A-level. It is taken in single subjects, usually not more than three. These three subjects, studied in depth, in turn constituted a preparation for the single or double subject honors degrees at university. In this way the shape of the curriculum for the majority has been determined by the needs of the minority aspiring to a university place. Alongside «A» Levels, there have been, more recently, «AS» (Advanced Supplementary) Level examinations. These are worth half an «A» Level and they enable very bright students to broaden their educational experience with a «contrasting» subject (for example, the science specialist might study a foreign language).

The present «A» and «AS» Level system, however, is thought to be in need of reform. First, it limits choice of subjects at 16 and 17 years, a time, when a more general education should be encouraged. Second, approximately 30% of students either drop out or fail - a mass failure rate amongst a group of young people from the top 30% of academic achievement who find that after two years they have no qualification. Third, the concentration on academic success thus conceived has little room for the vocationally relevant skills and personal qualities stressed by those employers who are critics of the education system. Fourth, there are over 600 «A» Level syllabuses from eight independent examination boards often with overlapping titles and content, making comparability of standards between Boards difficult.

##### The private sector

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y 1997 8 per cent of the school population attended independent fee-paying schools, compared with under 6 per cent in 1979, and only 5 per cent in 1976. By the year 2000 the proportion may rise to almost 9 per cent, nearly back to the level in 1947 of 10 per cent. The recovery of private education in Britain is partly due to middle-class fears concerning comprehensive schools, but also to the mediocre quality possible in the state sector after decades of inadequate funding.

Although the percentage of those privately educated may be a small fraction of the total, its importance is disproportionate to its size, for this 8 per cent accounts for 23 per cent of all those passing A levels, and over 25 per cent of those gaining entry to university. Nearly 65 per cent of pupils leave fee-paying schools with one or more A levels, compared with only 14 per cent from comprehensives. Tellingly, this 8 per cent also accounts for 68 per cent of those gaining the highest grade in GCSE Physics. During the 1980s pupils at independent schools showed greater improvement in their examination results than those at state schools. In later life, those educated at fee-paying schools dominate the sources of state power and authority in government, law, the armed forces and finance.

The 'public' (in fact private, fee-paying) schools form the backbone of the independent sector. Of the several hundred public schools, the most famous are the 'Clarendon Nine', so named after a commission of inquiry into education in 1861. Their status lies in a fatally attractive combination of social superiority and antiquity, as the dates of their foundation indicate: Winchester (1382), Eton (1440), St Paul's (1509), Shrewsbury (1552), Westminster (1560), The Merchant Taylors' (1561), Rugby (1567), Harrow (1571) and Charterhouse (1611).

The golden age of the public schools, however, was the late nineteenth century, when most were founded. They were vital to the establishment of a particular set of values in the dominant professional middle classes. These values were reflected in the novel Tom Brown's Schooldays by Thomas Hughes, written in tribute to his own happy time at Rugby School. Its emphasis is on the making of gentlemen to enter one of the professions: law, medicine, the Church, the Civil Service or the colonial service. The concept of 'service', even if it only involved entering a profitable profession, was central to the public school ethos. A career in commerce, or 'mere money making' as it is referred to in Tom Brown's Schooldays, was not to be considered. As a result of such values, the public school system was traditional in its view of learning and deeply resistant to science and technology. Most public schools were located in the 'timeless' countryside, away from the vulgarity of industrial cities.

After 1945, when state-funded grammar schools were demonstrating equal or greater academic excellence, the public schools began to modernise themselves. During the 1970s most of them abolished beating and 'fagging', the system whereby new boys carried out menial tasks for senior boys, and many introduced girls into the sixth form, as a civilising influence. They made particular efforts to improve their academic and scientific quality. Traditionally boarding public schools were more popular, but since the 1970s there has been a progressive shift of balance in favour of day schools. Today only 16 per cent of pupils in private education attend boarding schools, and the number of boarders declines on average by 3 per cent each year.

Demand for public school education is now so great that many schools register pupils' names at birth. Eton maintains two lists, one for the children of 'old boys' and the other for outsiders. There are three applicants for every vacancy. Several other schools have two applicants for each vacancy, but they are careful not to expand to meet demand. In the words of one academic, 'Schools at the top of the system have a vested interest in being elitist. They would lose that characteristic if they expanded. To some extent they pride themselves on the length of their waiting lists.' This rush to private education is despite the steep rise in fees, 31 per cent between 1985 and 1988, and over 50 per cent between 1990 and 1997 when the average annual day fees were Ј5,700 and boarding fees double that figure. Sixty per cent of parents would probably send their children to fee-paying schools if they could afford to.

In order to obtain a place at a public school, children must take a competitive examination, called 'Common Entrance'. In order to pass it, most children destined for a public school education attend a preparatory (or 'prep') school until the age of 13.

Independent schools remain politically controversial. The Conservative Party believes in the fundamental freedom of parents to choose the best education for their children. The Labour Party disagrees, arguing that in reality only the wealthier citizens have this freedom of choice. In the words of Hugh Gaitskell, the Labour leader in 1953, 'We really cannot go on with a system in which wealthy parents are able to buy what they and most people believe to be a better education for their children. The system is wrong and must be changed.' But since then no Labour government has dared to abolish them.

There can be no doubt that a better academic education can be obtained in some of the public schools. In 1993 92 of the 100 schools with the best A-level results were fee-paying. But the argument that parents will not wish to pay once state schools offer equally good education is misleading, because independent schools offer social status also. Unfortunately education depends not only on quality schools but also on the home environment. The background from which pupils come greatly affects the encouragement they receive to study. Middle-class parents are likely to be better able, and more concerned, to support their children's study than low-income parents who themselves feel they failed at school. State-maintained schools must operate with fewer resources, and in more difficult circumstances, particularly in low-income areas. In addition, the public school system creams off many of the ablest teachers from the state sector.

The public school system is socially divisive, breeding an atmosphere of elitism and leaving some outside the system feeling socially or intellectually inferior, and in some cases intimidated by the prestige attached to public schools. The system fosters a distinct culture, one based not only upon social superiority but also upon deference. As one leading journalist, Jeremy Paxman, himself an ex-public schoolboy remarked, The purpose of a public school education is to teach you to respect people you don't respect.' In the words of Anthony Sampson, himself an ex-pupil of Westminster, the public school elite 'reinforces and perpetuates a class system whose divisions run through all British institutions, separating language, attitudes and motivations'.

Those who attend these schools continue to dominate the institutions at the heart of the British state, and seem likely to do so for some time to come. At the beginning of the 1990s public schools accounted for 22 out of 24 of the army's top generals, two-thirds of the Bank of England's external directors, 33 out of 39 top English judges, and ambassadors in the 15 most important diplomatic missions abroad. Of the 200 richest people in Britain no fewer than 35 had attended Eton. Eton and Winchester continue to dominate the public school scene, and the wider world beyond. As Sampson asks, 'Can the products of two schools (Winchester and Eton), it might be asked, really effectively represent the other 99.5 per cent of the people in this diverse country who went to neither mediaeval foundation?' The concept of service was once at the heart of the public school ethos, but it is questionable whether it still is. A senior Anglican bishop noted in 1997, 'A headmaster told me recently that the whole concept of service had gone. Now they all want to become merchant bankers and lawyers.'

There are two arguments that qualify the merit of the public schools, apart from the criticism that they are socially divisive. It is inconceivable that the very best intellectual material of the country resides solely among those able to attend such schools. If one accepts that the brightest and best pupils are in fact spread across the social spectrum, one must conclude that an elitist system of education based primarily upon wealth rather than ability must involve enormous wastage. The other serious qualification regards the public school ethos which is so rooted in tradition, authority and a narrow idea of 'gentlemanly' professions. Even a century after it tried to turn its pupils into gentlemen, the public school culture still discourages, possibly unconsciously, its pupils from entering industry. 'It is no accident,' Sampson comments, 'that most formidable industrialists in Britain come from right outside the public school system, and many from right outside Britain.'

Britain will be unable to harness its real intellectual potential until it can break loose from a divisive culture that should belong in the past, and can create its future elite from the nation's schoolchildren as a whole. In 1996 a radical Conservative politician argued for turning public schools into centres of excellence which would admit children solely on ability, regardless of wealth or social background, with the help of government funding. It would be a way of using the best of the private sector for the nation as a whole. It is just such an idea that Labour might find attractive, if it is able to tackle the more widespread and fundamental shortcomings of the state education system.

##### Further and higher education

«P

reparation for adult life» includes training in the skills required for a job. These skills can be pitched at different levels - highly job-specific and not requiring much thought in their application, or «generalisable» and applicable to different kinds of employment.

Vocational courses are concerned with the teaching of job-related skills, whether specific or generalisable. They can be based in industry, and «open learning» techniques make this increasingly likely, although in the past, they have normally been taught in colleges of further education, with students given day release from work. Vocational training has not been an activity for schools. But some critics think that schools should provide it for non-academic pupils. One major initiative back in 1982, was the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) in which schools received money if they were able to build into the curriculum vocationally-related content ant activities - more technology, business studies, industry related work and visits, etc. But all this got lost in 1988 with the imposition of a National Curriculum was reformed, providing opportunities for vocational studies to be introduced at 14.

But the real changes in vocational training were to be seen outside the schools. The curriculum in colleges of further education has been closely determined by vocational examination bodies which decide what the student should be able to do in order to receive a qualification as, for example, a plumber or a hairdresser. These qualifications were pitched at different levels - from relatively low-skilled operative to higher-skilled craft and technician. Obtaining these qualifications often required an apprenticeship, with day release in a college of further education for more theoretical study.

Vocational training always has had a relatively low status in Britain. The «practical» and the «vocational» have seldom given access to university or to the prestigious and professional jobs.

Further education has traditionally been characterised by part-time vocational courses for those who leave school at the age of 16 but need to acquire a skill, be that in the manual, technical or clerical field. In all, about three million students enrol each year in part-time courses at further education (FE) colleges, some released by their employers and a greater number unemployed. In addition there have always been a much smaller proportion in full-time training. In 1985 this figure was a meagre 400,000, but by 1995 this had doubled. Given Labour's emphasis on improving the skills level of all school-leavers, this expansion will continue. Vocational training, most of which is conducted at the country's 550 further education colleges is bound to be an important component.

Higher education has also undergone a massive expansion. In 1985 only 573,000, 16 per cent of young people, were enrolled in full-time higher education. Ten years later the number was 1,150,000, no less than 30 per cent of their age group.

This massive expansion was achieved by greatly enlarging access to undergraduate courses, but also by authorising the old polytechnics to grant their own degree awards, and also to rename themselves as universities. Thus there are today 90 universities, compared with 47 in 1990, and only seventeen in 1945. They fall into five broad categories: the medieval English foundations, the medieval Scottish ones, the nineteenth-century 'redbrick' ones, the twentieth-century 'plate-glass' ones, and finally the previous polytechnics. They are all private institutions, receiving direct grants from central government.

Oxford and Cambridge, founded in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries respectively, are easily the most famous of Britain's universities. Today 'Oxbridge', as the two together are known, educate less than one-twentieth of Britain's total university student population. But they continue to attract many of the best brains and to mesmerise an even greater number, partly on account of their prestige, but also on account of the seductive beauty of many of their buildings and surroundings.

Both universities grew gradually, as federations of independent colleges, most of which were founded in the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In both universities, however, new colleges are periodically established, for example Green College, Oxford (1979) and Robinson College, Cambridge (1977).

In the nineteenth century more universities were established to respond to the greatly increased demand for educated people as a result of the Industrial Revolution and the expansion of Britain's overseas empire. Many of these were sited in the industrial centres, for example Birmingham, Manchester, Nottingham, Newcastle, Liverpool and Bristol.

With the expansion of higher education in the 1960s *'plate-glass*' universities were established, some named after counties or regions rather than old cities, for example Sussex, Kent, East Anglia and Strathclyde. Over 50 polytechnics and similar higher education institutes acquired university status in 1992. There is also a highly successful Open University, which provides every person in Britain with the opportunity to study for a degree, without leaving their home. It is particularly designed for adults who missed the opportunity for higher education earlier in life. It conducts learning through correspondence, radio and television, and also through local study centres.

University examinations are for Bachelor of Arts, or of Science (BA or BSc) on completion of the undergraduate course, and Master of Arts or of Science (MA or MSc) on completion of postgraduate work, usually a one- or two-year course involving some original research. Some students continue to complete a three-year perio of original research for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD). The bachelor degree is normal classed, with about 5 per cent normally gaining First, about 30 per cent gaining an Upper Seconi or 2.1, perhaps 40 per cent gaining a Lower Second, or 2.2, and the balance getting either i Third, a Pass or failing. Approximately 15 per cei fail to complete their degree course.

In addition there are a large number of specialis higher education institutions in the realm of the performing and visual arts. For example, there a four leading conservatories: the Royal Academy Music, the Royal College of Music, Trinity College of Music and the Royal Northern College of Music.

There are a large number of art colleges, of whi the most famous is the Royal College of Art, where both Henry Moore and David Hockney once studied. Other colleges cater for dance, film-making and other specialist areas in arts.

In spite of the high fees, Britain's universities, Fl colleges and English language schools host a number of foreign students, in 1996 there were fewer than 158,000.

Female undergraduates have greatly increased proportionately in recent years. In the mid-1960 they were only 28 per cent of the intake, became 41 per cent by the early 1980s, and were 51 per cent by 1996. There is still an unfortunate separation of the sexes in fields of chosen study, arising from occupational tradition and social expectations. Caring for others is still a 'proper' career for women; building bridges, it seems, is not. Unless one believes women's brains are better geared to nursing and other forms of caring and men's to bridge-building, one must conclude that social expectations still hinder women and men from realising their potential. Students from poorer backgrounds are seriously underrepresented in higher education. Although more in social categories C, D and E are now enrolled, it is the more prosperous social categories A and B which have benefited most from university expansion. For Labour there are two issues here:

equality of opportunity, and maximising all of society's intellectual potential.

Ethnic minorities' representation is growing: 1 3 per cent in 1996 compared with only 10.7 per cent in 1990. It is noteworthy that their university representation exceeds their proportion within the whole population, a measure of their commitment to higher education.

In 1988 a new funding body, the University Funding Council, was established, with power to require universities to produce a certain number of qualified people in specific fields. It is under the UFC's watchful eye that the universities have been forced to double their student intake, and each university department is assessed on its performance and quality. The fear, of course, is that the greatly increased quantity of students that universities must now take might lead to a loss of academic quality.

Expansion has led to a growing funding gap. Universities have been forced to seek sponsorship from the commercial world, wealthy patrons and also from their alumni. The Conservative Party also decided to reduce maintenance grants but to offer students loans in order to finance their studies. However, the funding gap has continued to grow and Labour shocked many who had voted for it by introducing tuition fees at 1,000 pounds per annum in 1998. Although poorer students were to be exempted it was feared that, even with student loans, up to 10 per cent of those planning to go to university would abandon the idea. One effect of the financial burden is that more students are living at home while continuing their studies: about 50 per cent at the ex-polytechnics, but only 15 per cent at the older universities.

Today many university science and technology departments, for example at Oxford, Cambridge, Manchester, Imperial College London, and Strathclyde, are among the best in Europe. The concern is whether they will continue to be so in the future. Academics' pay has fallen so far behinc other professions and behind academic salaries elsewhere, that many of the best brains have gon< abroad. Adequate pay and sufficient research funding to keep the best in Britain remains a majo challenge.

As with the schools system, so also with higher education: there is a real problem about the exclusivity of Britain's two oldest universities. While Oxbridge is no longer the preserve of a social elite it retains its exclusive, narrow and spell-binding culture. Together with the public school system, it creates a narrow social and intellectual channel from which the nation's leaders are almost exclusively drawn. In 1996 few people were in top jobs in the Civil Service, the armed forces, the law or finance, who had not been either to a public school or Oxbridge, or to both.

The problem is not the quality of education offered either in the independent schools or Oxbridge. The problem is cultural. Can the products of such exclusive establishments remain closely in touch with the remaining 95 per cent of the population? If the expectation is that Oxbridge, particularly, will continue to dominate the controlling positions in the state and economy, is the country ignoring equal talent which does not have the Oxbridge label? As with the specialisation at the age of 16 for A levels, the danger is that Britain's governing elite is too narrow, both in the kind of education and where it was acquired. It is just possible that the new Labour government, which itself reflects a much wider field of life experience in Britain, will mark the beginning of significantly fuller popular participation in the controlling institutions of state.

**Present situation**

The educational system - its organization, its control, its content - is changing rapidly to meet the perceived needs of the country - the need to improve standards and to respond to a rapidly changing and competitive economy. Those changes might be summarized in the following way.

**First**, there is much greater central control over what is taught. **Second**, what is taught is seen in rather traditional terms - organized in terms of subjects rather than in response to the learning needs of the pupils. **Third**, however, there is an attempt to be responsive to the economic needs of the country, with an emphasis upon vocational studies and training. **Fourth**, there is a rapid expansion of those who stay in education beyond the compulsory age, making use of the «three-track system» of «A» Level, GNVQ (General National Vocational Qualifications) and NVQ (National Vocational Qualifications). Fifth, although the content of education is centrally controlled, its «delivery» pays homage to the «market» by encouraging choice between different institutions so that funding follows popular choice (i.e. the more popular the school with parents, the more money it gets, thereby providing an incentive to schools and colleges to improve their performance.

##### Education under Labour

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ducation was the central theme of the new Labour government. It promised a huge range of improvements: high-quality education for all four-year-olds whose parents wanted it and lower pupil-teacher ratios, in particular that children up to the age of eight children would never be in classes of over 30 pupils. It also declared that all children at primary school would spend one hour each day on reading and writing, and another hour each day on numeracy, the basic skills for all employment. When Labour took office only 57 per cent of children reached national literacy targets by the time they left primary school, and only 55 per cent reached similar targets in maths. The government pledged to raise these proportions to 80 per cent and 75 per cent respectively. It also established a new central authority responsible for both qualifications and the curriculum, to ensure that these were, in the government's own words, 'high quality, coherent and flexible'. It warned that it intended to evolve a single certificate to replace A levels and vocational qualifications, and possibly to reflect a broad range of study rather than the narrow specialism of the A-level system. Because 30 per cent of students who started A-level courses failed to acquire one, it also wanted to create a more flexible system that would allow students still to attain recognised standards of education and training on the road to A levels. However, unlike France or Germany, an increasing proportion of those taking exams at this standard were actually passing.

The government also promised to improve the quality of the teaching staff, with a mandatory qualification for all newly appointed heads of schools, to improve teacher training, to establish a General Teaching Council, which would restore teacher morale and raise standards, and to introduce more effective means of removing inefficient teachers. It also promised to look at the growing problem of boys underachieving at school compared with girls. Finally, Labour asked for its record to be judged at the end of its first term in office, in 2002.

##### Questions

1. When do the british start their education?
2. Do you agree that the british education has problems?
3. What were the lacks of British education?
4. Who can study in public schools?
5. Does the word «public» reflect the real principle of that schools?
6. What political acts became a turning point in British education?
7. What is the most well-spread opinion about the vocational courses?
8. What do you think about the quality of higher education in Britain?
9. What are the main principles of the Labour Patry (concerning education)
10. How had the role of parents in the children’s education changed?
11. How did the changing economic and social situation influence the system of education?
12. What are the most prestigeous schools in Britain?
13. Are there students from other countries in British schools and universities?
14. Is the nursary school compulsory?
15. How do you think: do the Concervative principles of education differ from that of Labour?
16. What are the aims of education in Britain today?
17. Did the level of education become higher after the reforms?
18. What is the GCSE?
19. What types of schools does the british system of education includes?
20. Would you like to study in Britain? (Give your argument for or against it).