

# Education in Britain



# Structure of British education

**5-11** : primary education (infant school, junior school)

**11-16** : compulsory secondary education, ended by GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education)

**16-18 - the sixth form** - further education, preparation for university ended by A-levels (equivalent of our “maturita”)

**18 +** university education

- **Bachelor's degree** (BA/BSc) – chosen by most students

- **Master's degree** (MA/Msc) – 1-2 additional years

- **PhD degree** (another 3 years)

- **Vocational degrees** (linked to a specific job) : med, vet, arch – up to 7 years

- **Sandwich courses** for engineering students (university study interrupted by a placement year in industry to gain work experience)

# The split

- Private fee-paying schools, called **public schools**, or **independent schools**) > include some very old schools like Eton, Harrow or Rugby
- They comprise a wide range of institutions - from nursery schools to the secondary level
- Prestigious and very expensive > affordable only to well-to-do middle-and upper class families
- tuition fee – on average £21,000 per year
- They have excellent results in league tables and the graduates often end up in high-profile jobs
- **State schools** > provide education free of charge
- *“ In the UK, state schools exist in a bewildering variety of forms. Over the last hundred years, successive governments have struggled to improve education by reforming its structure, over and over again. What all state schools have in common is that they are entirely free to parents, being funded through taxation.”*  
(*Good Schools Guide*, quoted in [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State\\_school](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_school))
- They include **comprehensive schools**, city academies, faith schools, grammar schools and others

# Public schools

- not financed through taxation; instead - funded system by private sources (tuition fees, gifts and charitable endowments)
- Some founded as early as 7-8<sup>th</sup> century
- Criteria for admission: ability to pay the tuition fee (in addition, a limited number of positions is offered to unprivileged but gifted pupils through means-tested bursaries)
- Can determine their own discipline regime > much freer to expel unruly pupils (for drug abuse, dishonesty, violence) > easier to maintain discipline than in state schools
- The interconnection between pupils – continues into their professional lives > mutual support (and career advancement) as a result of shared privileged education > **Old Boy Network/Old School Tie**
- Many public schools – have their specific rites and traditions > encourage “tribal” affiliation and pride of the pupils



# Public school life





# Public schools in literature and movies



# Comprehensive schools

- State schools that do not select their pupils on the basis of ability
- equivalent of American high schools
- Age range – 11 to 18 yrs (pupils can leave at 15)
- Curriculum = a wide range of subjects across the academic as well as vocational spectrum
- Originally – conceived of as neighbourhood schools, taking pupils from a local “catchment area” regardless of their background (and with very limited parental choice)
- Intended as vehicles of social equality/democratization
- Idea: inclusion rather than excellence; developing social skills rather than academic knowledge; the bright pupils will help the poorer ones; the latter will be motivated by the bright



# History of comprehensives

- Until the 1960s > secondary education based on the tripartite system
  - the 11-plus exam decides whether the pupil joins a prestigious grammar school or the unprestigious secondary modern/ technical school
  - Grammar schools – vehicles of social mobility, enabling unprivileged children access to university education and good careers
- During the 1960s – the 11-plus exam becomes much criticized, alongside the low-quality secondary moderns
- On the other hand, many parents don't want to see the abolition of grammar schools either
- However, the comprehensive project is well under way in many places in Britain
- The father of the project: Labour minister Anthony Crosland



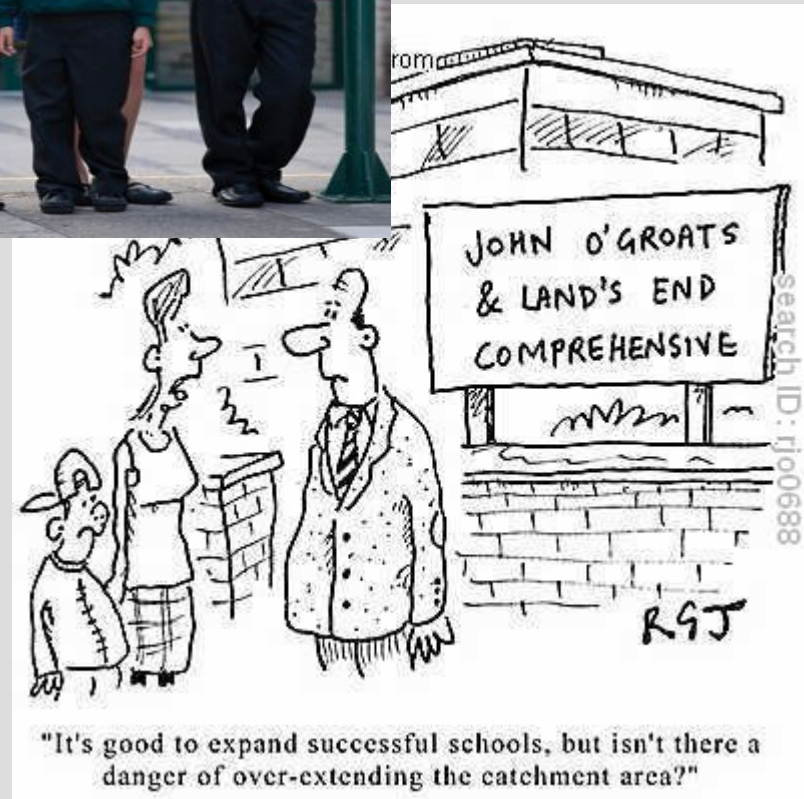


# History of Comprehensives II

*“... the post-war Labour government had been largely indifferent to the comprehensive ideal; many Labour local authorities took great pride in their grammar schools ... By the time that Crosland took over, however, the move towards comprehensives was well under way. During the fifties pressure had been growing from a number of sources: left-wing theorists who argued that comprehensives would be a force of social egalitarianism; educationalists who criticized the flaws in the existing system; and, most importantly, middle-class parents who were frightened that the eleven-plus would condemn their children to a second-rate school”. (Sandbrook, 333)*

- Originally, the comprehensive project was not restricted to Labour Party > it had Conservatives supporters as well
- Despite the closure of grammar schools – 164 of them survived, and have become some of the top schools in the country, often beating private schools in exam results; they are hugely popular with parents

# From the life of a comprehensive



# Some problems of comprehensive education

## **Lack of discipline among pupils**

related to the breakdown of families and anti-social behaviour of British youth

- also, teachers have very limiting means available to restore discipline

## **Falling standards**

exams getting easier all the time

retreat from teaching hard subjects (maths, science, languages) in favour of “soft” subjects (media studies, social studies, arts)

In teaching English – more emphasis of communicative skills and less on accuracy > increasing rate of illiteracy among school-leavers

## **Education as a vehicle of social engineering**

rather than being taught hard facts, children are being infused with established ideologies (this became predominant with the New Labour administration and its politically correct agenda)

**Inconsistent quality of schools** > children from poorer areas gravely disadvantaged and left with little choice



# Academies

- (originally called “city academies”) > an educational project launched by Blair administration in 2000 to help revive and transform failing comprehensive schools
- Funded directly by central government, independent of local education authorities
- Besides government funds, they also receive funds from sponsors (individuals, companies, charities)
  - the sponsors - have a say in the school's > have an influence on the school's curriculum, ethos, specialisation and facilities
  - The system - similar to American “charter schools”
- Mission of academies = to be "creative" and "innovative, to raise educational standards and provide more specialization and commercial orientation

*The scheme is radical: knock down the old buildings, replace them and change that most elusive of things - the school's "ethos". The theory goes that a new environment, replete with technology, will help deprived children see education as exciting and important.* [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/education/4357383.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/education/4357383.stm)

- Although a relatively new project, evidence shows that standards are improving, sometimes radically in these transformed schools

# Controversy over academies

- Academies – often criticized, especially by the left-wing educational establishment, for “cherry-picking” pupils (choosing ones with a good prospect of exam success, thus selecting on ability)
- Steve Sinlott of National Union of Teachers:  
*"The easiest way in which you can make it appear that you are successful is by changing the children, not by changing what you actually do," he said. "The children who are seen as most likely to depress the test results for the school will go elsewhere. "You create a situation in which they become schools that are much more attractive to parents who have the higher aspirations, who have the skills to find their way around the education system."*  
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/education/4348931.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/education/4348931.stm)
- Some other criticism:
  - Contributing to the commercialization of education
  - Bringing in teachers who are not trained in education and who can teach what they want
- However, the academies are very popular with parents
- Despite being created by New Labour, they are also supported by the Conservatives

# Faith schools

- State-funded schools 'with a religious character' > each affiliated with a specific denomination (Anglican, Catholic Muslim, Hindu, Jewish...)
- Their number is growing (631 secondary faith schools in 2011)
- Popular with parents due to offering better educational standards and more emphasis on discipline than comprehensives
- Criticized for creating social division and for being selective (similar to academies)





# Free schools

A new type of school introduced by the Conservative administration after 2010  
Non-profit-making, independent, state-funded school which is free to attend but which is not controlled by a local authority.<sup>21</sup>

Modeled on charter schools in the USA or similar schools in the Scandinavia

Can be set up by various subjects such as parents, education charities and religious groups.

Start-up grants are provided to establish the schools and ongoing funding is on an equivalent basis with other locally controlled state maintained school

Advantage: independence, free to control their own affairs

Disadvantage: tend to be set up in wealthier communities with poorer children excluded, they “steal” the brighter kids from local schools



# Universities - typology

- **Ancient universities** (Oxford, Cambridge, Edinburgh)
- **18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century universities** (University of London, University of Wales, Durham)
- **Redbrick universities** – established in 19<sup>th</sup> century in industrial towns as science and engineering colleges (Birmingham, Sheffield, Manchester, Liverpool)
- **Plateglass universities** > established in the 1960s (the name refers to their design) – University of East Anglia, York, Essex, Kent ...
- **New Universities** > originated in the 1990s through conversion from polytechnics (colleges of higher education)
- **Private universities** (Buckingham)
- **The Open University** > a unique British project of distance learning (through correspondence, TV programmes and occasional tutorials)

# Changes in academic life

- Post-war era (until the 1970s) > a golden age of academics
  - proud of their independence of government and academic freedom
  - taking active part in politics
  - respected for their expert opinions
- The spreading democratization of society > makes the gulf between the academic world and rest of the country more visible and less justifiable
- In addition, the expansion of higher education leads to funding shortages (too many schools to subsidize)
- Finally – policy change under Margaret Thatcher > attempt to impose free-market strategies on the university sector
  - universities required to be cost-effective and competitive
  - learning ceases to be valued for its own sake; its relevance to industry and enterprise is the new norm
  - loss of privilege and income for academics



# Oxbridge

- Despite being a target of anti-elitists > Oxbridge retains its exclusive academic position
- Strong interconnection between Oxbridge and fee-paying secondary schools
  - the high quality of public school teaching makes access to Oxbridge easier
  - admissions of state school pupils remain limited, despite government's attempts to raise their number
- Recent financial difficulties of Oxbridge
  - American colleges far better funded and more independent of government
  - top British scholars leaving for the USA to gain higher-paid positions
  - necessity to admit more and more foreign students to generate income

# Some university images



# Some current university issues

- The proliferation of degrees (subjects like arts and media studies are popular, but is there a need for the resulting jobs?)
- High tuition fees (introduced by Blair's administration)
- Inability of graduates to secure employment
- Limited access of unprivileged pupils to prestigious universities
- Planned government cuts to the education sector



# Open University (OU)

- A distance learning university, established in 1969 during the Wilson administration > one of the greatest post-war educational achievements
- Runs an open entry policy > accepts students regardless of their previous academic achievements to most of its courses
- It's the largest university in the UK (extending its courses worldwide) and also one of the best-rated ones
- Seat: Walton Hall, Milton Keynes in Buckinghamshire
- Tuition: written and audio materials, the Internet (Youtube), disc-based software, DVDs, iTunes; individual tutorials and summer schools
- Funding: partly by the government, partly by tuition fees (lower than at regular universities)
- Famous movie about the OU: *Educating Rita* (1983)

