

# Sociology Factsheet



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## Social Policy and Education

### What is social policy?

Social policy considers the actions that the governments take to make changes in society. Social policies are developed to help tackle social issues. Social policy informs public bodies such as local authorities and the National Health Service what changes are needed to improve services. The overall aim of this is to improve standards of living in Britain.

### How does this affect the education system today?

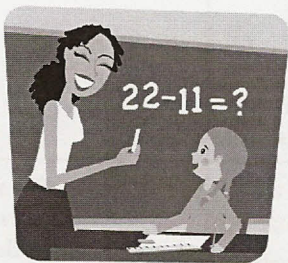
Local education authorities and places of education such as nurseries, schools and colleges must follow changes in legislation that take place when new social policies are implemented that relate to education.

### How does social policy relate to sociology?

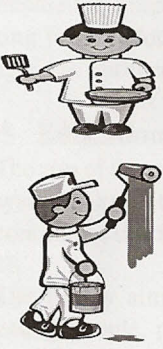
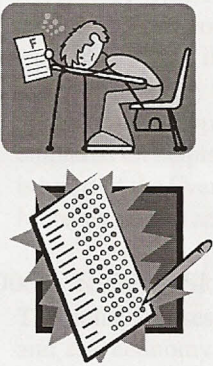
Social policies should be considered in relation to how effective they have been in fulfilling their aims. This can be linked to other areas of education such as differential achievement. For example, some policies have been developed to tackle underachievement in deprived areas.

### Social policy timeline

New specifications focus on changes in the education system since 1988 but it is useful to know the major policies that were implemented prior to this. The table below provides an outline of key policies that have been implemented in England and Wales.

Policy	Key points	Aims	Evaluation
<b>1944 Education Act (Butler Act)</b>  	Tripartite system was set up – 3 types of school: - technical (vocational) - secondary modern (basic, practical education) - grammar (academic subjects, exams) Free compulsory state education to the age of 15. 11-plus exam given to all pupils at the end of primary school. Results of the test determined the type of school each pupil would go to.	Equality in education. To allow all pupils to succeed to the best of their abilities. To improve society and the economy through provision of a better education system.	IQ tests were culturally biased - middle-class pupils more likely to go to grammar school.  Social divisions more evident in the education system.  Grammar schools considered as having more status. Some parents still sent their children to private schools, state school not seen as adequate by all.
<b>Comprehensive Education (1965)</b>	Labour Government introduced the comprehensive education system. Tripartite system abolished - all schools to be the same, 11-plus exam removed. Students put into sets/bands/streams according to ability. Current system still partly based on this theory.	Inclusive approach – all pupils in a local education authority to attend the same type of school, regardless of gender, social class, ethnicity.	Some schools still seen as having more status, usually because of the catchment area that they were in. Catchment areas meant that schools would still have mainly middle-class or working-class pupils. Differences in achievement still evident.  Divisions evident within schools because of streaming/banding/setting. Private education still an alternative



Policy	Key points	Aims	Evaluation
<b>New Vocationalism (1979)</b> 	<p>Vocational training introduced in schools/colleges, previously mainly in the workplace.</p> <p>Continuing focus on vocationalism in schools and colleges today</p>	<p>To equip pupils with skills necessary to gain employment.</p> <p>To strengthen the economy by providing a skilled workforce.</p>	<p>Weakness of economy blamed on schools/colleges.</p> <p>Responsibility of providing a skilled workforce moved to the education system.</p> <p>Education policy, rather than economic policy reviewed.</p> <p>Placements/jobs still needed for young people as not all training for work based skills can take place in schools/colleges. Young people used as 'cheap labour'. (Cohen, 1984)</p>
<b>Education Reform Act (1988)</b> 	<p>Marketisation of education – parental choice introduced and competition between schools encouraged.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National Curriculum introduced.</li> <li>SATs introduced.</li> <li>League tables introduced, based on SATs results.</li> </ul> <p>Parents given choice of which school their children go to.</p> <p>Responsibility of Local Education Authorities reduced, headteachers given more control over how their school would be run.</p> <p>Schools able to 'opt out' of local funding, headteachers able to have more control over budgets.</p> <p>Ofsted inspections become rigorous.</p> <p>City Technology Colleges set up in England.</p>	<p>To introduce market forces into the education system. To raise standards in education by introducing competition between schools.</p>	<p>Pressure to succeed in league tables – arguments that this led to certain pupils not being accepted by certain schools (Gillborn, 2001). Schools with better reputations because of being higher up in the league tables attracted more pupils.</p> <p>This provided them with more money. Consequently, less funding was provided to the schools that needed it most – 'sink schools' created, some closures of such schools. Boys and girls able to study same subjects.</p> <p>Social divisions still evident as pupils put into groups according to ability, determined by SATs.</p>
<b>New Labour (1997+) – various policies introduced</b>  <b>1. Education Action Zones (EAZs)</b>  <b>2. New Deal</b>  <b>3. Curriculum 2000</b>	<p>Focus on post-compulsory education changes.</p> <p>Modernisation of schools with focus on different schools developing different specialisms. Increased number of schools specialising in arts, sport, music, etc.</p> <p>Areas of low achievement were targeted with funding. Mainly in inner city areas</p> <p>Education and training for those unemployed for more than 6 months and aged 18-24 (later extended to 18+) A-levels replaced by AS and A2 level.</p> <p>Teaching and testing of Key Skills introduced.</p>	<p>To provide 'centres of excellence'; to raise standards; to increase places for pupils from other schools.</p> <p>To improve achievement in the most disadvantaged areas.</p> <p>To help young people gain skills and employment.</p> <p>To provide post-16 students with a broader range of subjects.</p> <p>To increase skills needed for the workplace.</p>	<p>Pupils may have to travel a long distance to go to a chosen specialist school.</p> <p>For those not in the area, priority given to those with talent and aptitude in the specialism.</p> <p>Money made a difference but in comparison to other schools many of those in EAZs still have low achievement due to external factors eg. low-income; social class.</p> <p>As this initiative was rolled out to all those unemployed for more than six months, it suggests that it was successful.</p> <p>AS/A2 levels highly criticised when first introduced. Seen by many as inferior to traditional A-levels, although this view has weakened over time. At one point, it was thought that AS/A2 levels would be abolished but it seems that they are to continue but with changes.</p>



**Most recent changes in education**

A number of changes have taken place more recently under the power of New Labour. It is too early to go into these in any depth for evaluation purposes but you should keep updated with news relating to the education sector, in order to find out more. Key changes are outlined below.

**2005 Education and Skills (2005)**

- The aim of this policy is to change the education system in a way that will lead to all young people continuing in education until at least the age of 18.
- The policy aims to improve skills amongst young people, particularly in maths, ICT and English.
- The policy aims to increase choice for young people.
- The introduction of diplomas at levels one, two and three do not replace GCSEs and AS/A2 levels but offer pupils a wider choice of study routes.
- Engaging pupils that are disaffected is a major focus of this policy. The Every Child Matters programme is to help focus on allowing each pupil to succeed to their maximum ability. An emphasis on helping young people to deal with personal issues is a part of the Every Child Matters programme.
- More vocational and work-based opportunities are to be created.

**2006 – Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances**

- This policy focuses on improving skills for industry, employment and the economy, including skills for enterprise and self-employment.
- Every further education institution is to develop at least one specialism.
- The sixth form sector is to be promoted.

**2007 – Children's Plan**

- The needs of families, children and young people are to be considered vital.
- The links between family life and the education of children have been identified as paramount and this is evident in the creation of a new government department in 2007, The Department of Families, Schools and Young People.
- The Children's Plan aims to ensure that every child gets a "world class education".
- Parents are to be encouraged to become more involved in their children's education.
- Barriers to learning are to be tackled.
- Teaching is to be tailored on the stage pupils are at, rather than on the age they are.
- There is to be significant focus on the early years sector of education.

**2008 – Raising Expectations**

There are two key parts to this policy – an aim to provide education or training to all 16 and 17 year olds, and an aim to reform adult education.

**Research Methods and social policy in education**

Social research that is carried out enables government policies to be developed, implemented and evaluated. Without social research, the government would not know which social issues need to be tackled, which policies have been successful and which need rethinking.

**Exam Hints**

*You may be asked to identify and explain how educational policies (or specific policies) have affected differences in educational achievements. Marks would be allocated for each identification with a clear explanation e.g.*

- *The tripartite system: enabling a minority of able working-class pupils to improve their level of achievement by going to grammar school, which they would generally not have been able to do prior to 1944.*
- *Compensatory education: putting additional resources into the early years care and education of poor children/ethnic minorities may have boosted their development and improved their prospects.*
- *Student loans: replacement of grants with loans may have deterred working-class students from entering higher education, as those from poorer backgrounds are more likely to fear getting into debt. Make sure that you don't lapse into a descriptive account of the policies' provisions but clearly show explicitly **how** the policy **affects** achievement.*

**Useful websites**

Find out about the latest changes in education – impress examiners by knowing all of the most recent developments and debates!

[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk) - Office For Standards in Education

[www.dfes.gov.uk](http://www.dfes.gov.uk) – Department for Children, Schools and Families

[www.gsr.gov.uk](http://www.gsr.gov.uk) – Government Social Research

<http://education.guardian.co.uk/> - The Guardian – education news

[www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/](http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/) - Every Child Matters

**Check your understanding**

1. Identify ways that social policy influences education
2. How successful have social policies been in improving education?
3. Explain the key points of the recent changes in education.