

# Sociology Factsheet



www.curriculum-press.co.uk

Number 11

## Education Policies Since 1944

Since the Second World War successive governments have passed many laws concerning education. It is important that you know;

1. The main policies of governments (this allows you to demonstrate **knowledge**)
2. What they wanted to achieve by these (this allows you to demonstrate **analysis**)
3. How far their policies were successful (this allows you to demonstrate **evaluation**)

**Exam Hint:** Examiners are looking not just for what you know but also for how well you can use the material to answer the question.

### 1944 Butler education act

#### What was it?

- free secondary education for all
- 3 types of secondary school (grammar, technical, secondary modern)
- 11+ exam to decide which type of school to go to
- schools to be equal (parity of esteem) but to provide different types of education

#### What did it want to achieve?

- opportunity for all children to get a good education
- most able would get an academic education to prepare them for university
- technical schools could train some (mostly boys) to learn a trade
- secondary moderns would provide a general education

#### Was it successful?

- some argued there was a waste of talent with those who 'failed' the 11+
- grammar schools had higher status and were regarded as better
- few technical schools were built
- grammar schools recruited more middle class than working class
- people argued the 11+ was an unfair exam because it favoured the middle classes and because it was a poor predictor of later achievement/ability

**Exam Hint:** You could discuss how the 1944 Act seemed to increase rather than reduce class differences in post-war Britain

### Introduction of comprehensives 1960's/1970's

#### What was it?

- from the 1960's onwards governments encouraged a new education system
- the idea was to replace the 3 types of secondary schools with just one
- these would be called comprehensives and would offer an academic education to all

#### What did it want to achieve?

- end the waste of talent under the tripartite system
- offer a high quality education to all
- to end some of the social divisions which happened with 3 types of schools
- to allow children of all abilities to mix and learn together

#### Was it successful?

- some critics argued comprehensives were too large and individuals felt lost
- others criticised mixed ability teaching for not providing for the most and least able
- however if schools streamed pupils it was like the old 3 school system under one roof
- supporters of comprehensives argued that getting rid of the 11+ helped late developers

**Exam Hint:** Discussing the good as well as the bad points of policies will get you extra marks for evaluation

### THE EDUCATION REFORM ACT (1988)

#### What was it?

- introduced the **national curriculum** (subjects all students had to study)
- introduced **SAT's** (testing of all students at different stages)
- allowed some schools to take control of their own finances
- introduced **school league tables**

#### What did it want to achieve?

- **the national curriculum** would make sure all children got the same entitlement to learn the same things
- **testing** would allow us to measure progress and set targets for improvement
- **league tables** would allow parents to compare the performance of different schools
- it was hoped schools would compete more with each other and this would drive standards up

#### Was it successful?

- supporters claim testing has raised standards as schools try to improve from year to year
- league tables are popular with parents who use them to check on schools
- critics claim testing stops real learning as pupils only learn to pass tests
- league tables don't give a true measure of a school, they ignore art, sport etc
- some people don't like the government dictating what schools should teach

**Exam Hint:** Use your own experience of SAT's and league tables to make general points for and/or against the 1988 Act

**New Labour policies 1997 –****What was it?**

- the government has encouraged the growth of **specialist schools** e.g. sports, science etc
- some failing schools have been reopened as **academies** linked to businesses or churches
- the government has set up **Education Action Zones** to improve education in deprived areas
- Education Maintenance Awards** have been introduced to help 16-18 year olds

**What did it want to achieve?**

- the government wants to increase the different types of schools (diversity)
- this will allow more choice for parents and pupils
- the government wants as many young people as possible to get educational qualifications
- if schools are not successful the government hopes to change them to improve standards

**Has it been successful?**

- supporters point to better exam results and more going to university
- some parents do not get the school of their choice as they are often too popular
- the government has made it more expensive to go to university
- some reforms are too recent to fully evaluate

**Exam Hint:** Try to be as up to date as possible. You can read about recent policies at [www.bbc.co.uk/news](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news) and click on education

**New Vocationalism**

Britain has continually tried to introduce a coherent system of work-related education and training with varying degrees of success.

In 1976 the labour Prime Minister James Callaghan gave a famous speech at Ruskin College, Oxford, which attacked schools and colleges for being out of touch with the changing industrial world. By 1986, another concern was being debated- the steady rise in unemployment which was now 12 per cent, representing 3 million people. Apart from the costs of supporting such numbers a valuable resource was being wasted. What became known as 'new vocationalism' was seen as the answer to the problems. Policies to strengthen the links between education and the economy were introduced gradually over the 1980s.

The main aims of 'new vocationalism' were to:

- Rationalise qualifications
- Vocationalise education in schools, further education and adult education
- Instill 'core skills' in students
- Record these and other personal attributes as well as qualifications to improve employment selection in a formal Record of Achievement
- Train the unemployed for work.

To meet these aims **The Youth Training Scheme (YTS)** began in 1983 as a one year foundation course. It became a two-year course in 1985 and by 1993 15 per cent of school leavers were attending youth training courses. The numbers then began to drop as more young people stayed on in school or in further education.

In 1983 the TVEI was introduced. It aimed to help make young people better equipped for working life in a rapidly changing society. However, in a consultation document on the National Curriculum in 1987 there were only two passing mentions of TVEI and since then its role has been reduced.

Since 1986 the government has been working towards setting up a scheme of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). Around 80% of the workforce are now in occupations which have an NVQ qualifications. The aim of the scheme was to rationalise what had been a confusing multitude of vocational courses and awards into one single coherent system of qualifications

GNVQs (General National Vocational Qualifications) were introduced to reduce the gap between vocational qualifications and academic qualifications. They were designed to give vocational qualifications equivalence to 'A' levels and GCSEs. GNVQs have recently been replaced with AVCEs (Advanced Vocational Certificate in Education)

The recent emphasis on essential skills is designed to ensure whatever students study, at whatever level, they are also equipped with the general skills and understanding that would be required whatever the occupation the students eventually enter.

One of the most striking features of the period since 1979 is the large number of schemes there have been and how quickly they have changed, come and gone.

The major problem for vocational courses is that they are separated from academic subjects and this causes problems for progression. The Government have recently considered revising the whole of the education system but they have decided to keep the current academic route of A levels and continue with a separate vocational route.

**Glossary of terms**

**11 + -** The exam taken at 11 to decide what type of secondary school to go to.

**Comprehensive schools**-One secondary school at age 11 which all children attend

**National Curriculum** - List of subjects and topics which governments decide school must teach

**Parity of Esteem** - Where all schools are given equal status

**SAT's** - Standard Assessment Tests which all children take at key stages in their education

**School League Tables** -Published results of SAT's for all schools

**Streaming** -When schools divide up pupils on the basis of ability

**Tripartite System** - Three different types of secondary school introduced in 1944

**Practice Exam Questions**

- Suggest **two** ways that New Labour has tried to improve schools(4)
- Identify and briefly explain **two** reasons why comprehensive schools were introduced (8)
- Identify and briefly explain **two** ways in which governments have attempted to raise standards in education (8)
- Describe the key features of the Education Reform Act of 1988 and explain what it attempted to achieve (20)
- How far have recent government policies succeeded in providing equality of opportunity in the education system? (20)

**Acknowledgements:** This Sociology Factsheet was researched and written by Dave Gilmore and Rosie Owens. Curriculum Press, Bank House, 105 King Street, Wellington, TF1 1NU. ISSN 1351-5136