

# 1944 EDUCATION ACT

## Introduction

As we explored in the previous lesson, as British society entered the 20th Century, it had begun to evolve a formal state-funded education system; with provision now available (and attendance compulsory) for all children up until the age of 12, and a slowly but steadily expanding secondary sector.

The debate that had led up to these reforms was, however, arguably driven primarily by the needs of the ruling classes and of the economy, rather than the welfare of the working classes - and was certainly not directly concerned with the production of any form of equality of opportunity. During the Second World War, however, the political landscape began to shift towards a more liberal outlook - and with this shift evolved a view that, following the carnage of the war, Britain should be rebuilt as a utopian, ideal and - most importantly - fair society.

Throughout the war, **Rab Butler** had been an eager lobbyist for education reform to meet these new liberal ideals. However, when he took his proposals for reform to Churchill during the war, the prime-minister reacted angrily, indicating that his pet cat was doing more for the war effort by keeping his feet warm and thus saving coal. Following the war, however, Butler was given the opportunity to implement his plans; and consequently produced the **1944 Butler Education Act**, one of the most important reforms in the history of education. The act was underpinned by two main objectives;

- \* To create a highly trained and efficient workforce by transferring vocational skills..
- \* To create a meritocracy via equality of educational opportunity.

The first of these aims was nothing new - after all, the changing needs of the economy were one of the main motivations for the 1870 Act. However the second of Butler's priorities represented a radical new direction in education policy - as it the first instance of the notion that education should be driven by equality of opportunity; that it should give everybody an equal chance to succeed and make the most of their particular talents and abilities.

Under the Butler Act, responsibility for the provision of education was distributed across three levels:

- \* Within central government, a **Ministry for Education** took the responsibility for gathering taxes and allocating resources to local government.
- \* **Local Education Authorities (LEAs)** had responsibility to ensure that enough places were available for all children in their area, and to set the curriculum taught by schools.
- \* Finally, **Headteachers** were given the responsibility of deciding how their money was to be spent and of ensuring that the curriculum specified by the LEA was delivered.

Important changes were also made to the way schools were organised. Elementary schools were re-branded as the primary sector - providing universal education between the ages of 5 and 11. Existing schools were also voluntarily incorporated into the state sector - under a deal which minimised building costs in exchange for the agreement that religious instruction would be an aspect of the curriculum in all schools (in fact, at this point this was the only mandatory aspect of the curriculum).



7. How could it be argued that creating a meritocratic society might help both the individual and the economy.
8. How does control of the curriculum in the current education system differ from that under the 1944 act?

## The Tripartite System

Whilst the amendments outlined above were indubitably significant, the most important reform of the Butler Act was the introduction of a **secondary sector**, established to extend the provision of free education for all to the age of 15 (it wasn't until the 1970s that the leaving age was raised to 16).

The design of the secondary system was heavily influenced by the work of **Cyril Burt** - who, at the time, was the Chief Government Statistician. Burt was a pioneer of **psychometrics** (the psychological measurement of personality "traits"), and had developed tests intended to measure peoples aptitudes. Based on his research, he argued that - even during childhood - each individual had natural aptitudes, inclinations and abilities, which could be identified using carefully designed tests. Burt argued that people could be split into one of three broad "types"; some were academic, others creative and others more suited to manual work (conveniently, this also reflected the economic need for a balance of academic and vocationally trained workers).

Influenced by Burt's advice, Butler decided that offering a "one-size-fits-all" education system would be counter-productive - after all, some people were seen as simply not suited to an academic education. Consequently a three-part (or **tripartite**) secondary system was established, which consisted of three different types of school:

- \* **Grammar Schools** for the academically inclined,
- \* **Secondary Technical Schools** for the practically-minded,
- \* **Secondary Modern Schools** for everyone else.

These schools were intended to have parity of esteem; they were to be treated as different, but equal (and none was therefore meant to be better than any other). In order to ascertain the school best suited to each individual, all children sat an examination at the end of primary school. This examination, which was essentially a variation on Burt's IQ test, was called the eleven-plus.

As the students in each of the schools were seen to have different aptitudes, each school taught a different **curriculum**. In Grammar Schools, for instance, pupils studied academic subjects: the sciences, languages and advanced mathematics. Within Secondary Moderns, by contrast, the curriculum was far more vocational - focusing on subjects with an applied dimension such as book-keeping and home economics. Finally, Secondary Technical schools focused primarily on subjects such as apprenticeship to vocations such as engineering

In addition, students in the different schools could expect to leave with different **qualifications**. In Grammar schools, students tended to sit the more academic General Certificates in Education (at least, they were from 1951, when it was introduced to replace the existing School Certificate) - which could be taken at both Ordinary and Advanced levels. Such qualifications were well respected, and allowed students access to the more prestigious jobs in society.

In contrast, students in Secondary Moderns were entered for a much less standardised range of exams - or simply not at all (leaving instead with a simple High School Certificate, indicating that they had finished secondary education). Without formally recognised qualifications, these students could not access higher levels of education, and were destined for unskilled, manual jobs. The most that they could hope for was to leave schools with the basic skills necessary to move on to apprenticeships and the potential to learn a trade.

## Evaluating the Tripartite System



9. Give at least one way in which the system established in 1944 widened equality of opportunity.
10. Complete the IQ test below. Why might students of more affluent backgrounds find this test easier (try to give examples)? What effect might this have on the balance of social classes assigned to the different schools?
11. Do you think that the test examined a wide range of abilities? Explain your answer?
12. What problems might be associated with assigning students to different schools on the basis of one examination sat at age 11?
13. How would you feel if the results of this test determined which type of school you would attend in the future? How might this impact on your effort and achievement?
14. Secondary technical schools were not widely created - creating what was more like a bipartite system. Why do you think this was the case?
15. Other than those established under the 1944 act, which other types of school continued to exist at this time? Why might it be argued that their existence make the ideal of creating a meritocracy impossible?

### Example IQ Test

1. Which of the following is the odd one out:
  - House
  - Igloo
  - Bungalow
  - Office
  - Hut
2. Which of the following is not a famous composer:
  - Zotram
  - Satsurs
  - Revid
  - Maleso
3. Which one of these five is least like the other four?
  - Mule
  - Kangaroo
  - Cow
  - Deer
  - Donkey
4. Which should come next? 144, 121, 100, 81, 64
  - 17
  - 19
  - 36
  - 49
  - 50
5. Even the most \_\_\_\_\_ rose has thorns.
  - Ugly
  - Weathered
  - Lonely
  - Noxious
  - Tempting
6. John likes 400 but not 300; he likes 100 but not 99; he likes 2500 but not 2400. Which does he like?
  - 900
  - 1000
  - 1100
  - 1200
7. A fallacious argument is:
  - Disturbing
  - Valid
  - False
  - Necessary
8. Which of the five choices makes the best comparison? LIVED is to DEVIL as 6323 is to:
  - 2336
  - 6232
  - 3236
  - 3326
  - 6332
9. If you rearrange the letters "ANLDEGN", you would have the name of a(n):
  - Ocean
  - Country
  - State
  - City
  - Animal
10. NASA recieved three messages in a strange language from a distant planet. The scientists studied the messages and found that "Necor Buldon Slock" means "Danger Rocket Explosion" and "Edwan Mynor Necor" means "Danger Spaceship Fire" and "Buldon Gimilzor Gondor" means "Bad Gas Explosion". What does "Slock" mean?
  - Danger
  - Explosion
  - Nothing
  - Rocket
  - Gas
11. If some Wicks are Slicks, and some Slicks are Snicks, then some Wicks are definitely Snicks. This statement is:
  - True
  - False
  - Neither
12. Inept is the opposite of:
  - Fit
  - Deep
  - Skillful
  - Sad
  - Happy
13. If all Zips are Zoodles, and all Zoodles are Zonkers, then all Zips are definately Zonkers.
  - True
  - False
  - Neither

### Evaluating the 1944 Education Act

- ✓ As was the case with 1870 Act, it is important to note that the 1944 Butler Act dramatically **widened provision of free education**. As a result of its reforms, education became available to all people - regardless of their background - until the age of 15.
- ✓ Furthermore, by making meritocracy one of the act's stated aims, Butler ensured that **equality of opportunity** entered the educational agenda. This concept - which was entirely absent in the 1870 act - has been the benchmark against which all further reforms have been judged.
- ✓ It could also be argued that, by attempting to tailor the education system to the abilities of the individuals within it, the tripartite system **allowed people to make the most of their education**. For instance, non-academic students would not have to struggle through Latin, Calculus and Physics - with all associated negative effects on self-esteem - when their time would be better served learning a trade.
- ✗ However, there were serious flaws with the system. In particular, the **eleven-plus was a poor method of identifying people's aptitudes**. Like other such IQ tests, it tended to be culturally biased - drawing on knowledge and language which is more familiar to white, middle-class students. As a result, working-class children tended to be significantly and unfairly under-represented in the prestigious grammar schools.  
Furthermore, the abilities tested within the 11-plus were limited - usually focusing on logic, language and spatial awareness. Consequently, it could be argued that the examination only offered a partial insight into people's true ability. These problems were compounded by the fact that the 11-plus was completed at such an early age - thus disadvantaging "late bloomers".

- ✗ Secondly, the **ideal of parity of esteem was never realised**. The 11-plus was essentially seen as a pass/fail examination, for three main reasons. Firstly, Grammar Schools attracted the best teachers and greater resources, and thus the quality of education delivered within them was, in actuality, much better. This was further problematised by the differences in qualifications between the schools. Finally, because of the cost of specialist equipment needed to set them up, Secondary Technicals were not widely established - compounding the reputation difference between schools by creating a Grammar/Secondary Modern divide, which was much easier to associate with passing and failing.
- ✗ The effect of this was that the **self-esteem** of students in Secondary Moderns was damaged. This lack of confidence was consequently translated into poor educational achievement (an effect called a **self-fulfilling prophecy**)
- ✗ It has also been argued that the Tripartite system suffered from a substantial **gender-bias**. In part, this was because more boys-only grammars were created. There was, however, also a tendency for girls to do better in the eleven plus and - to avoid an unequal distribution - their scores were "moderated" down.
- ✗ Furthermore, there were **regional differences** in the availability of Grammar-school places - with more in predominately middle-class areas, where parents were more likely to complain about their child not obtaining a grammar-school place.
- ✗ Finally, the **private-sector** continued to exist alongside the Tripartite System. Consequently, true meritocracy could never be realised, as the upper-classes could continue to buy privilege for their children. Furthermore, middle-class parents whose children did not manage to gain a Grammar-school place had the option of paying for private education.

### Summary of the Nature and Effect of the 1944 Education Act