

Campaign for Real Education

www.cre.org.uk

"Freedom to teach, freedom to learn, freedom to choose"

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Newsletter

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Editorial

The recent green paper on education declares an intention "to create an education system that extends opportunity to everyone, not just the privileged few." As the prime minister has pointed out, 'selection' is currently determined, in many cases, by the capacity of parents to purchase a home in the catchment area of a good school. For academically able children, at least, the Government would like to see a new generation of grammar schools, with access linked more to intellectual potential rather than to postcode and parental income.

Many will need to be set up in areas of low educational attainment and of deprivation. Terms of entry, we are promised, will accommodate children whose parents cannot afford to offset the impact of undemanding teaching in primary schools by hiring a private tutor. Greater social mobility is the aspiration and it is long overdue. After around 50 years of comprehensive schools the OECD has concluded that we are the least socially mobile country in the developed world. Whatever the impact of school reform, it is not possible for us to sink below our current bottom place position.

The response from the educational establishment and from many politicians, not all on the left, to the proposal to expand the number of grammar schools has, predictably, been one of opposition, even fury.

Labour's shadow education secretary, Angela Raynor, started the ball rolling by declaring that selective schools belong "in the dustbin of history." "The Government is "foisting their (sic) own evidence-free prejudices upon us", an outraged ex-Westminster boy, Nick Clegg, opined. "This is not selection educationally, it is selection socially," cried social mobility tsar, Alan Milburn. In apocalyptic mode he warned that a return to grammars could be "a social mobility disaster". Nor could former grammar school boy, Michael Wilshaw, the Chief Inspector, contain his anger.

He too hit hyperbole mode, describing as “tosh” and “nonsense” any suggestion that poor children would benefit from the availability of more grammar schools.

In fact, the prime minister has only stated that she wants "an element of selection" in the education system and that new grammar schools will not be forced on areas that do not want them. Opinion polls indicate that she has the backing of most parents. One from ORB suggests that, when undecided voters are removed, 70% of Britons want the ban on grammar schools lifted and 80% think that lifting the ban will boost social mobility.

Doubtless, the mother of all battles lies ahead for the prime minister. Anti-grammar school zealots see ‘selection’ only in terms of the 11+ tests. They ignore the current system of selection by house price and try to focus on disparity of attainment of free school meals (FSM) pupils between Kent which has largely retained its grammar schools and London which has retained only a few.

This comparison between Kent and London is, however, unfair and misleading. Not only are there some high performing grammar schools in the capital, the population profile is very different from the rest of the country. Around 40% of Londoners are immigrants, many on free school meals, and over half of London primary school children have a mother who is an immigrant. This is twice the proportion in the remainder of the UK. Immigrant children tend to be highly motivated and hard working and, according to the OECD, immigrant youngsters in Britain achieve more highly than non-immigrants pupils. The educational attainment of immigrant children in the UK is a rare success story for our education system. Britain is probably the best place in the world in which to be an immigrant pupil.

A much fairer comparison of the average attainment of FSM pupils is between England outside of London and the same category of pupils in Northern Ireland, which has retained a grammar school system. 46% of FSM pupils in Northern Ireland achieved 5 ‘good’ GCSE’s last year. This is 50% better than the average for England outside of London. It is, also, equal to the attainment of FSM pupils in London.

As for Kent, with its grammar school system but also with some areas of notable deprivation, the average percentage of FSM pupils attaining 5 ‘good’ GCSE is 27%. This is close to the national average outside of London of 30%. Some comprehensive school areas do slightly better than Kent but many do worse. Across the full range of social backgrounds the performance of Kent pupils is above average.

The Government’s defensive response to its own proposals has, at times, been poorly informed and tentative. The education secretary, Justine Greening, has sounded positively apologetic. The plan for new grammar schools is "absolutely not about going back to the past", she told the Commons. "There will be no return to the simplistic binary choice of the past where schools split children into winners and losers, successes and failures," she promised. Selection can “play a role” in education

she argues and grammar schools need to be a part of a "very broad-based school system".

How much easier it would be for her to state the simple truth that children are best educated in line with their aptitude and that too many comprehensive schools fail in this duty. We may be bottom of the OECD league table for social mobility but we are at the top for illiteracy and in second place for innumeracy. Employers are consistent in their complaints that too many school leavers, up to 20%, are unemployable. Across the whole spectrum of ability, by the age of 15, the OECD PISA tests place our pupils around 3 years behind their counterparts in the educational superstars states of the Asia Pacific.

According to the OECD, our older generation, educated under the secondary modern and grammar school system, are around the top of the international literacy and numeracy league table. It would seem that things were not quite so bad in the 'bad old days' after all. We are the only country in the developed world in which grandparents out-perform their grandchild.

For all its faults, the 11+ does at least give academically able children from poor backgrounds a chance and that chance would be much enhanced with the establishment of many more grammar schools in deprived parts of the country.

The Government needs to go further, however, than simply expanding grammar school provision. If children are best educated in line with their aptitude we need to recognize that the majority of children are not academic high flyers and that they will be best served by a vocational education at secondary level.

We need grammar schools for the academic and gold standard vocational schools for non-academic children. They should be set up in tandem. The British snobbery that academic is superior to vocational might wither away if more resources were, necessarily, invested in vocational schools and they become the success stories they are elsewhere around the world.

Indeed, the enhanced employment prospects attached to a vocational pathway should lead to many youngsters preferring that route, as is the case in more successful education systems around the world. Take your choice – engineering and the construction industry or higher-level study of literature and geography. It should be horses for courses – different but equally valid pathways.

The argument should be at what age the transition to academic or vocational schooling takes place. There is a strong case to be made that age 11 is too young. The provision of separate academic and vocational pathways might be better left to the age of 13. Entry into secondary education at this age has been a traditional feature of many independent schools. A possible 13+ entry into grammar school was a feature of the old tripartite system.

Provided that a new generation of grammar schools sits alongside gold standard vocational schools, we will have a fairer and a better education system for all. The battle has started and the Government's case should be confident, robust and unassailable, not hesitant and apologetic.

Chris McGovern

A grammar school teacher in Switzerland gives her perspective on the current educational debate here in England over 'selective' schooling.

"As a Swiss teacher I was most interested to learn of Theresa May's wish to extend grammar school provision in England. Grammar schools are an intrinsic part of our school system in Switzerland. For me, the current debate in England has been both baffling and intriguing. Some of the attacks on a selective school system by your educational specialists, commentators and interest groups have been difficult for me to understand.

Children have to be taught in line with their abilities and it is a fact that individuals have different talents, interests and abilities. Why is this simple fact causing so much acrimonious debate in England? Differentiating pupils on this basis does not have anything to do with discrimination. On the contrary, equal opportunities guarantee that each child can choose the path that suits its talents, interests and abilities best and it goes without saying that regardless of their backgrounds, children with academic aptitude should have the opportunity of entering an academic school - a grammar school.

There are various ways of determining who would benefit from a grammar school, with an entrance examination being just one possibility. There are others. One might be, for example, the average marks in key subjects in the last year of primary school. These, used in combination with the head teacher's recommendation, could form the basis for a transferral. In addition, there is the possibility of a trial period after having entered grammar school. Alternatively, a school might just require a satisfactory completion of the first year in grammar school. Of course, a combination of different approaches is possible. All of them have advantages and disadvantages.

A school system, however, that is based on the notion that 'equal opportunities' is synonymous with 'all individuals achieving the same' will fail those who are not able to perform to the required standard and, also, those who can outperform it.

How can a school system meet the needs of all children? Switzerland's answer is to provide a 'dual system'. At secondary level there is both an academic and a vocational pathway. Two thirds of the Swiss children choose vocational education and training (VET). This provides an education in which one or two days' classroom instruction is combined with workplace training. There are 250 VET programmes

from which to choose. They cover a wide range of vocational learning, from commercial and retail employment to health and social care work, from training towards being an electrician, a cook, a carpenter, a plumber or a gardener to being a dental assistant or a draughtsman. The range of opportunities is vast and with a graduation rate of over 90% this system is highly successful.

The close cooperation of the Swiss Confederation (responsible for strategic management and development), the cantons (implementation and supervision, including 75% of funding) and professional organisations (curricula and apprenticeships), make this success possible. They, also, guarantee that the education matches the need of the labour market in terms of occupational skills and the number of available jobs. As a consequence, Switzerland has a low youth unemployment rate.

Another feature making the vocational pathway so attractive is that it can lead on to higher education at one of the Swiss universities of applied sciences (UAS). Vocational school leavers gaining some additional qualifications may, also, apply to one of the cantonal universities or the two federal institutes of technology (ETH Zurich, or EFP Lausanne).

OECD studies confirm the strength of the Swiss system and the fact that other countries, including Germany and the strongest performing education systems of the Asia Pacific, offer similar academic-vocational pathways, at some stage of their secondary school system, is testament to its appeal and to its success.

Adapting it for England, however, may not be easy since the value system for education in these other countries is different. In particular, the esteem vocational training has is a lot lower in England than in Switzerland, Germany or the Asia Pacific

England's over-reliance on skilled personnel from overseas indicates that there might be a lesson to be learnt from Switzerland's two-pathway secondary system of grammar schools alongside vocational schools. One thing for sure we do not regard our system as either unfair or discriminatory. We regard it as a bit of common sense."

Manuela Freihofer

How "Progress 8", the new measure of pupil progress, is going to make pupil assessment rather complicated.

From this year, every GCSE grade will be awarded points and via a labyrinthine formula, Byzantine in its complex ingenuity and brilliance, we will know, supposedly, what progress pupils make between the ages of 11 and 16.

In simple terms it works some thing like this: "Think of a number. Double it. Take these GCSE grades which have been converted into points and add them together: an

8, two 5s, two 6s, a 4, a 3 and a 1. Share them between three baskets and double-weight the answer in the first basket before adding them all together. Divide by 10. Now, add together Key Stage 2 (11 year-olds') SATs scores, divide the answer by 6 and round to one decimal place. Work out the difference between your two answers and take away the number you first thought of.

Please note that for GCSE grade conversion to points purposes, the top GCSE grade will be worth 8 points in 2016 but 8.5 in 2017 and 2018 in some subjects, but 9 for others.

Is all of this nonsense a parody? Well, yes, but only partly. The real thing is even more wonderfully complex and all built on the flimsy evidence of SATs tests at 11 which secondary schools are, in any case, inclined to throw straight into the bin before re-testing the children. You may find all of this somewhat difficult to believe.

The proof that truth can be stranger than fiction can be seen in this simplified explanation for teachers provided by [The Times Educational Supplement](#).

Is going to 'Uni' as beneficial as it is supposed to be?

The growing burden of student debt was supposed to be more than offset by a so-called graduate employment premium of £100,000 in lifetime earnings. Now, it turns out that this extra-earnings claim may not be all it seems. According to the Intergenerational Foundation, it only really applies to some specialist degrees such as medicine, dentistry and technology and to graduates of a few elite universities.

Many young people, it appears, are being duped. At best, they are receiving poor advice from their schools. At worst, they are being deliberately misled by the selling techniques of self-interested universities. The Intergenerational Foundation told *The Sunday Times* that “any politician or policymaker who dangles the carrot of an average lifetime earnings premium should be challenged for gross mis-selling. The current system is fuelling a self-perpetuating debt-generating machine that short changes young people.”

An educational racket has emerged that needs to be stopped. It serves the interests of the producer, the universities, but not always of the consumer, young people. Recruitment of undergraduates should not be a job creation and preservation scheme for universities with long-term debt the price to be paid by the supposed 'beneficiaries'.

Universities are inclined to boast of high employment rates for their graduates but below the headline figures matters look far from rosy.

The Higher Education Statistics Agency recently published its "Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education 2014/15". It showed that 44.4 per cent were employed "on a permanent or open-ended contract" with a further 18.8 per cent on fixed-term contracts.

This is far from the promised land of opportunity and employment that a university degree is supposed to offer. It also explains why a Totaljobs.com survey found that around half of recent graduates wished they had pursued "something more vocational". Several surveys have indicated that close to half of graduates end up under-employed, doing jobs that do not require a degree.

Most school leavers are poorly served by watered-down academic university courses that burden them with life long debt and under-employment. Their own interests, and the interests of the country, would be far better served if academic courses were reserved for the academic. Children whose abilities are not academic should be pursuing a vocational pathway from the age of 13 or 14. This is becoming the norm in successful economies around the world.

If our higher education system is to meet the needs of all young people it needs to hugely expand the provision of vocational education and training. Three quarters of universities should focus on 'applied' teaching and learning. If they can offer 'gold standard' applied courses with enhanced employment prospects the snobbery attached to the 'academic' will disappear as it has in the educational super stars of the Asia Pacific.

For once there is a glimmer of hope on the horizon. The Government has initiated 'degree apprenticeships' which combine university study with a work placement. The Skills Funding Agency estimates that 1500 to 2000 youngsters, across 40 universities, will commence such course this autumn. The employer will pay tuition fees in full.

This is a drop in the ocean, of course, but it is, at least, a recognition that we cannot go on herding youngsters on to worthless degree courses to keep university lecturers in a job. 'Degree apprenticeships' may be a misnomer as, indeed, is the description 'university' when applied to many institutions that carry that name, but recognition of the importance of high quality apprenticeships, free of the burden of debt, is a move in the right direction.

An alternative proposal on how to get a good education for your child

Feeling the blues about your child's schooling? Depressed about the quality of teaching? Dismayed by the dumbing down of standards? Unable to see any light at the end of the educational tunnel? You are not alone! But what's to be done?

Have you considered applying for educational asylum in The Socialist Republic of

Vietnam? The cost of living is low, the cultural life is vibrant and the GIs have long departed. As a one-party state it has political stability and its economy has been booming. The food is great and the millions of tourists who flock there provide a cosmopolitan ingredient.

Most important of all, though, according to the OECD, its educational standards are well ahead of those in the UK. Vietnamese pupils are 8th in the world, for example, in science. Britain does not even make it into the top 20 in any of the three areas assessed – maths, literacy and science.

The downside for Vietnamese families is that although education is state-controlled it is not free. The upside is that the average monthly wage of around £115 - only a twentieth of that in the UK – is enough for a family to live on and to purchase for children a much superior standard of education. Small wonder that school enrolment is among the highest in the world.

In contrast, the UK's 900 per cent 'real terms' increase in expenditure on education since the 1950s has seen our comparative standards plunge dramatically compared to Vietnam and indeed to other parts of the Asia-Pacific. The top of the attainment tree these days is dominated by Shanghai, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea, Macao, and Japan. According to OECD data, by the age of 15, the children of the lowest class of manual workers in Shanghai are, in mathematics, outperforming the average pupil at our most elite private schools.

Want a good education for free or at a rock bottom price? Head eastwards. Go for asylum on educational grounds!

And if you think that Vietnam is a bit too far or a tad too communist and that claiming educational asylum is beneath your dignity, how about some straight-forward emigration by jumping cruise ship in the Republic of Estonia? It has, after all, and however temporarily, freed itself from Russian control. What is more, in economic terms, it is a rare success story among members of the Eurozone. It is the Baltic tiger and has the lowest ratio of government debt to GDP within the EU. Pretty capital city, too.

Compared to the UK, its people remain poor, with average wages only around 40 per cent of those here. In terms of educational attainment, however, it is miles ahead of us, coming 6th in the world for science and in 11th place for literacy and for mathematics.

And if Estonia does not quite fit the bill, nearby Poland comes with a similarly low cost of living and a top ten position for literacy and for science. It falls back to 14th place for maths but that it still a long way ahead us in 26th position.

So, stop despairing of your child's schooling! Claim educational asylum in Vietnam or emigrate to Estonia or to Poland. It really does make sense!

Should private schools be bullied into remedying failure in the maintained sector?

At the recent HMC conference of independent secondary school head teachers, the chairman, Mike Buchanan, warned the Government that, “independent and state schools cannot make our relationships work with a gun pointing at our heads.” The Prime Minister has threatened that private schools with charitable status will lose that status, and the tax breaks worth around £700 million, associated with it, if they do not work to improve state schools. The support required is likely to take the form of setting up a non-selective school, backing an underperforming academy or admitting more pupils from deprived backgrounds.

Most, if not all, independent schools are already making significant charitable contributions that offset the tax benefit of charitable status. In particular, this takes the form of bursaries and various ‘outreach’ programmes. Sharing of facilities and ‘lending’ staff to teach some lessons in state schools is also common. In recent years we have, also, seen leading independent schools sponsoring academies and free schools. The outstanding London Academy of Excellence, a free sixth form college in Newham, is a prime example.

Given the efforts being made on a voluntary basis, it is unnecessary and unacceptable for independent schools to feel that the element of compulsion now planned is equivalent to having a gun head put to their collective heads. It is also unwise. If the threats continue and are backed by statute, the loss of charitable status may have to be accepted and offset by reducing or withdrawing bursaries and other assistance currently provided. This is already being widely discussed and not least by those many private schools that may offer an excellent education but only just manage to keep their heads above water, financially.

All of this will come as good news for that rich ‘elite’ of parents in countries with economies that compete with our own. More places will be available in UK independent schools for their children! Pupils in Shanghai, Singapore and Hong Kong, for example, may be at the summit of educational attainment internationally but when it comes to the ‘crème de la crème’ of schooling many of their most well-off parents are looking to have their offspring educated at UK private schools. Such is the demand and popularity of these British schools that many have opened outposts abroad and not least in the Asia Pacific. British private schools overseas are contributing around £1 billion to the UK economy. They are an internationally admired brand of excellence that does much to raise the general profile of the UK overseas. At a time of Brexit what could be more important?

The coercion being exerted by this Government on the independent sector is ill-considered and misguided. Furthermore, it will be counter-productive. It is likely to make some private schools more exclusive and force others to close altogether and, thereby, increase pupil numbers pressure on the maintained sector.

Instead of penalising independent schools, we should celebrate the fact that one part of our school system, at least, is world beating. State schools need to imitate private schools as far as is possible rather than being a burden on them, learn from them rather than dragging them down. In that context, the independent sector will be free to remain willing and effective partners in raising the performance of state schools.

The views of the CRE are widely sought internationally as these random and recent examples illustrate”:

USA

“University College London’s Anthropology department, issued a trigger warning and offer of amnesty to students who might be disturbed by images of bones or discussions of warfare after active military duty in what he calls a proactive move towards students’ mental health.... the British organization Campaign for Real Education ...called the action symptomatic of “an overprotective nanny state” – a feeling echoed by journalists...” “The Argus”, Wisconsin.

“While some universities in the U.S. have begun including the latest mobile app game “Pokemon Go” in their subjects as strategic tool such that it has recently been made available in Macau for academic purposes, the Salford University in UK proceeded all the way in making it an academic stop (requirement) for its Business Information Technology course...In an opposite view, Chris McGovern who leads the Real Education Campaign is certain that such idea is bound to fail. He critics Krep's move as a half-thought strategy in the beginning, therefore quoting it "farcial", [Tech Times](#) reported. In general, experts believe that Salford University is bound to proceed with this plan in a healthy platform. After all- its pros and cons have already been explored, thanks to McGovern.”

“University Herald”, national.

INDIA

“If you were wondering what new level the Pokemon Go craze would touch, the wait is over. It has landed itself in university curriculum. Salford University is allowing students to play the mobile phone game as a part of their degree course... But the introduction has provoked severe criticism...the Campaign for Real Education said it was 'farcical' and that it encouraged students to rack up huge debts on courses that opened up few job prospects.”

“Outlook” magazine.

PAKISTAN

MANCHESTER – A public research university in England has allowed students to play mobile phone game Pokemon Go as part of their degree course.

Salford University says the game, in which players seek out virtual animated characters in real-world locations, will make its business information technology course more 'accessible'.

Critics, however, claim the move is indicative of the dumbing down of degrees...the Campaign for Real Education, told the Mail Online that the idea was 'farfical' and that it encouraged students to rack up huge debts on courses that opened up few job prospects.

On the other hand, Salford lecturer David Kreps denied the charge and said: "We want new students to feel that our subject is accessible and easy to grasp.

"Daily Pakistan"

NEW ZEALAND

The Campaign for Real Education said that "any short-term stress [resulting from SATs] was worth it if in the longer term it meant that children finished school with better results...Tests in England's schools needed to be tougher to catch up with international competitors...We've got to do something, we've got to act early, and a health check at seven is a good idea."

Radio New Zealand

CHINA

"Chris McGovern, who chairs the Campaign for Real Education, backs the idea of school uniforms, saying they give a badge of identity to school students. He also sees a uniform policy as democratic by enabling students to follow a dress code that applies to everyone.

He told Xinhua in an interview Monday: "It is a characteristic of British schools... If there is a uniform code it is up to parents and children to support it, and supporting the rules of the school in general....I wish that education paid as much attention to skills such as literacy and numeracy as it does to uniforms and dress codes, said McGovern, noting "Currently we are ranked in the bottom two places by OECD in literacy and numeracy."

"You only have to look at schools in China and parts of Asia to realise how far behind we are. Fifty years ago we had traditional classrooms in Britain with teachers at the front of the class facing the pupils. That tradition continues in China and Asia and other parts of the world but has changed here in Britain."

Xinhua News Agency – China's official press agency and its biggest and most influential media organization.

No comment

"It was the first chance the BBC's flagship radio programme had to question the Government over its school revolution. So, perhaps naturally, Radio 4 's Today Programme chose a presenter educated at an elite, fee-paying public school to do the job. Cambridge graduate Mishal Husain, one of the BBC's fastest rising stars, took Education Secretary Justine Greening to task over Tory proposals to improve

children's chances of excelling in the school system."

Daily Mail 10th September 2016

"Research by Cambridge Assessment today reveals that one in three UK schools is going beyond 'Hitler and the Henrys' and is teaching at least one new topic offered in the new OCR A Level History – with *Popular Culture and the Witchcraze of the 16th and 17th Centuries* at the top of the list.

Cambridge Assessment e-newsletter 5th October 2016

"I loved teaching and I miss it profoundly. But my mental health means I just cannot juggle all the balls necessary to be good at it. I demand a lot of myself as a teacher and the demands placed on the teaching profession – by local authorities, Whitehall, governing bodies, heads, parents – mean that I feel a failure far more often than I feel that I am of worth."

The Guardian October 1st 2016

"No freshers turned up for a compulsory consent workshop at Clare College Cambridge on Tuesday morning. The university's women's officer posted a photo of an empty lecture hall and said it was a 'huge step backwards'." **BBC News Education website 6th October 2016**