**ED4 -  Education Policies**

This section will explore the aims of the education policies of the UK. There are four main aims to Education policy and there is a separate section to each of these. Many of the policies we will discuss will link to more than one of the four aims, but what sociologists are interested in is if the policy has been successful in achieving its aim and what were the latent effects of these policies on both the education system as well as the experience of education for staff and students.

The four aims are:

* **Raising Standards**
  + Policies which were trying to improve the education system in comparison to both national and international benchmarks as well as improving the experience of education for the staff and students.
* **Economic Efficiency**
  + Education policies which aim to support the growth and development of the economy by providing individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary to enter the workforce and contribute to the economy. This includes providing education and training programs that are aligned with the needs of employers and the labour market.
* **Marketisation**
  + This policy aim introduced market forces to the education system. This means the the introduction of policies which are similar to those used in the business world. It is NOT about making more private schools.
* **Educational Equality**
  1. These policies can be broken down into 4 subcategories:
     1. Equality of Access - Making sure that all students have access to good schools and education.
     2. Equality of participation - Making sure that all student are able to take part in all aspects of the education system regardless of socio-economic background.
     3. Equality of Outcome - That all students should leave each key stage with the best set of results they can. NOT that all students should receive the same outcome.
     4. Equality of Circumstance - All students should start their educational journey with similar social and emotional skills to allow them to fully engage with the curriculum and school environment.

**RAISING STANDARDS**

**Introduction**

This section will explore policies introduced to raise standards in education, examining the policies of the Conservative Party from 1979 to 1997, as well as more recent policies. It will look at how the policies aim to improve the education system and will identify three key areas: privatisation in education, privatisation of education, and quality control policies.

**Privatisation in Education**

Privatisation in education refers to the idea of changing the internal processes of the education system to mirror a business model. This can involve making the system more efficient and effective. One way this has been achieved is by introducing an external inspectorate of schools, known as Ofsted. This can be considered both privatisation of education and quality control. Ofsted provides a neutral agency that assesses schools on their performance, data, and curriculum. It can, however, be argued that schools may change their methods to meet Ofsted requirements rather than what is best for their students.

**Privatisation of Education**

Privatisation of education refers to bringing private businesses into schools to support their daily running. This can include catering, finance, teacher training, and external agencies to deliver parts of the curriculum. Again, this approach could be seen as a way of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the education system.

**Quality Control Policies**

Quality control policies aim to ensure that all schools provide the best possible education for their students. These policies are introduced to ensure that schools are fulfilling their roles in teaching students, covering the curriculum, and providing the best education possible. This is typically the role of the Department for Education (DfE) and government.

### **Conservative Policies 1979 - 1997**

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the UK government, led by the Conservatives, made some significant changes to the education system. One of the most important was the Education Reform Act of 1988. This introduced several policies and changes to what teachers were doing in the classroom. One of the most significant was the creation of Ofsted, which is an agency that goes into schools to ensure that they are providing the best education possible. However, some people argue that Ofsted is no longer fit for purpose, as schools may change what they do simply to satisfy Ofsted's requirements, rather than doing what is best for their students. The government also introduced the national curriculum, which sets out what subjects and topics schools must cover at each stage of a child's education. This was intended to ensure quality control in education and to provide a minimum standard of education across the country.

National testing was also introduced as part of the Education Reform Act. This involved end-of-key-stage tests, also known as SATs, for students in Year 6 and Year 9. The tests were used as a way for the government to monitor the performance of schools, rather than the individual performance of students. While SATs are still taken by Year 6 students, the Year 9 tests have been discontinued. Some people believe that SATs are no longer effective, and are calling for them to be scrapped, as they don't accurately measure individual student progress, and are no longer necessary for secondary schools, which now do their own baseline testing in Year 7.

Overall, the changes introduced by the Conservatives in the 1980s were intended to ensure quality control in education and to provide a minimum standard of education across the country. However, there are concerns that some of these policies, such as Ofsted and national testing, may be outdated and no longer fit for purpose. Nonetheless, the national curriculum remains an important part of the education system, as it ensures that all students are given the opportunity to learn important subjects and topics, regardless of which school they attend.

### **New Labour 1997 - 2010**

The New Labour government introduced policies to raise standards and improve the quality of education. These policies were successful in some respects, but they have since been abandoned by the Conservative government. The policies were aimed at reducing class sizes, improving school facilities, providing additional funding for deprived areas, and obtaining additional funding from external companies. Although the policies were successful in some respects, they were expensive and not sustainable in the long term. It remains to be seen what new policies will be introduced to raise standards and improve the quality of education in the future.

**Maximum Class Sizes**

The New Labour government introduced maximum class sizes to decrease the ratio of students to teachers, which would enable teachers to provide more individualised learning and improve standards. The policy was successful in reducing class sizes for 5-7 year olds, but it has since been scrapped by the Conservative government. Although health and safety reasons still warrant smaller class sizes in subjects such as practical science, PE and technology, the general policy of maximum class sizes has been abandoned.

**Building Schools for the Future**

The Building Schools for the Future programme was introduced by the New Labour government to improve school facilities and ensure that roofs didn't leak and heating systems worked. It was also a way to modernise school buildings for more suitable education. The programme was funded by the Department for Education, and schools were given contractors to carry out the building work. The programme was criticised for being expensive and unnecessary, and it has since been scrapped by the Conservative government. Schools now have to find their own contractors and obtain planning permission.

**Education Action Zones**

The Education Action Zones policy was aimed at raising standards in areas of deprivation where there were high levels of poverty and free school meals. Additional funding was provided to these areas to support learning, with the money being used to employ more teachers and provide more resources. The policy was successful in improving education in some respects, but it was also expensive, and it has since been abandoned.

**Business Sponsored Academies**

The Business Sponsored Academies policy was introduced by the New Labour government to provide additional funding for state schools from external companies. This additional funding was meant to improve resources and raise standards. The policy was successful in some respects, but it was not a long-term plan. When businesses faced financial hardship, they stopped sponsoring schools, and the schools lost their additional funding.

### **Coalition Government 2010 - 2015**

Michael Gove was the Secretary of State for Education from 2010 to 2014 as part of the Coalition government between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats, and during his tenure, he implemented several significant education reforms. These reforms aimed to raise educational standards, particularly for disadvantaged students, as well as to provide a broader curriculum for students at GCSE level.

**Pupil Premium**

One of the reforms introduced by the coalition government was Pupil Premium, a process designed to provide additional funding to schools for students from deprived backgrounds. Students eligible for the Pupil Premium included those who received free school meals, children from military families, those in foster care or going through adoption, or those who were previously looked after. The funding would go to the school to purchase resources for these students, such as textbooks and revision guides, to raise educational standards.

**English Baccalaureate**

Another reform was the introduction of the English Baccalaureate (EBacc), one of Michael Gove's flagship policies. The EBacc was designed to broaden the curriculum by requiring students to study certain subjects at GCSE, including English, maths, a science (including PE at GCSE level), computer science, a humanities subject, a language, and three other subjects. However, the EBacc did not include any arts or technology subjects, which narrowed the curriculum, despite the aim of providing a broader curriculum. The grading system was also reformed, from A to G to 1 to 9, with grade 9 being reserved for the top 10% of the country.

**Examination Structure Reform**

The examination structure was reformed to make it more rigorous and difficult, as Gove argued that it was too easy and easy to manipulate. Prior to the reform, students took modular exams, with some modules taken at the end of year 10 and the rest at the end of year 11. This allowed students to reset exams, which was disadvantageous for working-class students who could not afford to do so. Gove replaced this with linear exams, with students only taking GCSEs at the end of year 11 and A levels at the end of year 13. A separate one-year course was introduced for A-levels. The purpose was to make exams more rigorous and to stop gaming of the system.

**National Curriculum Reform**

The national curriculum was reformed to give schools more opportunities to shape the curriculum to the needs of their students. The prescriptive nature of the curriculum was reviewed, but still included certain baseline requirements. This reform aimed to raise educational standards overall by providing tailored education to students that best fit their context.

Overall, Michael Gove's education reforms aimed to raise educational standards and to provide a broader curriculum to students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Although some of these reforms were effective in achieving their goals, others faced criticism, such as the narrowing of the curriculum under the EBacc, or the difficulty level of the new examination structure. Nevertheless, these reforms represent an important chapter in the history of UK education, and their impact is still felt today.

### **Conservative Government 2015 - to present**

Since 2015, conservative governance has led to some significant changes in education policy in the UK. This has resulted in various reforms being implemented that aim to improve education standards across the country. However, there are differing opinions on whether these policies have been effective or not. This article will examine the key policies that have been introduced and discuss their potential impact on education.

**Independent Schools Sponsored Academies**

One of the policies introduced was the Independent Schools Sponsored Academies. Private schools provided additional funding, resources, training and facilities to academies to support their students. This was seen as a way of independent schools giving back to the community. The academies benefited from the use of sporting facilities and access to teachers to provide opportunities for students that they may not have had otherwise. This policy can be seen as a form of privatisation of education, as independent schools are private enterprises. However, it also provides opportunities for students to access better facilities and resources and raises education standards.

**Expansion of Grammar School Programme**

The grammar school programme has been expanded, with more grammar schools becoming available for students to attend. These schools are seen as providing a more academic education and are aimed at more able students. While the 11 Plus is no longer mandatory, students who wish to attend a grammar school must still take the test. This policy has been criticised for creating a two-tier education system and limiting opportunities for those who may not have done well in the 11 Plus.

Reformation of Ofsted Ofsted has been reformed to focus more on the curriculum rather than data. The three I’s – intent, implementation and impact – have been introduced to evaluate the effectiveness of schools’ curriculums. This policy aims to ensure that schools are providing the best education possible by focusing on the quality of teaching and learning. By requiring schools to reflect on their teaching and learning, it encourages them to improve their standards.

**Conclusion**

The Conservative government’s policies since 2015 aim to improve education standards in the UK. The Independent Schools Sponsored Academies and expansion of the grammar school programme aim to provide students with better opportunities and access to academic education. The reformation of Ofsted focuses on improving the quality of teaching and learning, encouraging schools to reflect on their teaching practices. However, these policies have been criticised for creating a two-tier education system and limiting opportunities for students. It remains to be seen whether these policies will be effective in improving education standards in the long term.

# Marketisation Policies

Marketization policies in education refer to the creation of a marketplace for education, aimed at fostering competition within and between schools. The purpose of marketization policies is to provide schools with greater independence and more choices on how they operate, what they offer, and the type of students they admit. This competition is meant to improve the quality of education provided by schools, as they will need to raise their standards to attract students.

### **Conservatives 1979 - 1997**

One of the key policies that brought marketization to the forefront of education was the introduction of league tables by the Conservative government between 1979 and 1997. League tables are a ranking system that allows schools to compare their performance against other schools in their area or nationally. The ranking system can be based on Ofsted rankings, GCSE scores, A-Level scores, or international PISA rankings. This system creates a sense of competition between schools as they strive to improve their rankings to attract more students.

Another policy aimed at fostering competition in education is the funding formula. This policy determines how school budgets are calculated based on the number of students enrolled in the school. Each school receives a certain amount of money per student per year. Schools must attract students to their school to receive funding, as the more students they have, the more funding they receive. This competition for funding ensures that schools are motivated to improve their standards and attract more students.

The introduction of open enrolment was also a significant policy in promoting parental choice in education. Prior to 1988, parents could only send their children to the local school in their catchment area. Open enrolment allowed parents to apply to any school, even if it was outside of their catchment area, as long as they could get their child there. The local authority determines where students go based on the number of spaces available and the number of applications received. Looked after children get priority in choosing their school, followed by students with siblings in the school, and finally, children living closest to the school.

The purpose of these policies is to create more parental choice, as parents can now choose the type of school and education that they want for their child. However, critics argue that marketization policies have widened the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students, as more affluent families can afford to move closer to high-performing schools or pay for private education. Marketization policies have also been accused of creating a teaching to the test culture, where schools focus solely on improving their rankings rather than providing a well-rounded education for their students.

### **New Labour 1997 - 2010**

In 1997, New Labour came into power and introduced several changes to the education system in the UK. While they kept the existing elements of the system, such as league tables, funding formulas, open enrolment, and Ofsted, they also introduced specialist schools. Specialist schools were those that had a particular strength in a particular subject, such as PE, music, art, technology, maths, or science. Schools could apply for this specialist school title, and competition arose between schools to achieve it. The title lasted for three or four years, and during this time, no other school in the area could claim the same title.

This competition between schools for specialist school titles gave parents more choice and information about the schools in their area. Parents who wanted their children to attend a school with a particular specialist status could look for those titles. This increased competition also encouraged schools to improve their departments in a specific subject to achieve the specialist school status, ultimately benefiting students.

In addition to specialist schools, business-sponsored academies also emerged during this time. These academies created more independence for schools by lessening the control of the local authority and involving businesses in the running of the school. Businesses provided resources and technology, shaping the school's infrastructure and resources. For example, an Apple school would use iPads and Macs, while a Google school would use Chromebooks and Google Classroom. This independence allowed schools to shape themselves in ways that they wanted and tailor their teaching methods to their students' needs, ultimately leading to a more diverse and student-centred education system.

### **Coalition Government 2010 - 2015**

Michael Gove introduced free schools under the coalition. These schools were free of local authority control, which allowed them to shape their own curriculum and have more freedom in how they ran their schools. Charities, businesses, and parents could apply to open a free school in an area where there was a lack of places for students. This created more competition between schools and gave parents more choice about where to send their children.

The coalition government also got rid of business-sponsored academies and created new style academies, which included multi-academy trusts. These trusts grouped schools together under one umbrella leadership to raise standards and share resources. Some of the larger academies like the Inspiration Trust would even move employees to different schools within the trust if needed. New style academies were freer from local authority dictation, allowing them more independence in how they ran their schools, policies, ideas, and curriculum. Although they still had to follow certain rules and educational policies, they had more freedom to choose. New style academies created competition between schools and gave parents more options for their children's education.

### **Conservative Government - 2015 to present**

The current Conservative government has continued the trend of marketization in education that was initiated during the coalition government. Although their approach to marketization has been more subdued, there are clear indications of marketization in the current remote teaching situation. The government's promotion of remote teaching has provided schools with greater autonomy to determine their approach to remote learning. Consequently, different schools have employed different platforms for remote teaching, such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Google Classroom, and Show My Homework. This has given schools greater freedom to design their remote learning programs in accordance with their unique student populations.

The decentralized approach to remote teaching policies has allowed schools to exercise greater control over their delivery of remote learning. Schools have adopted varied strategies in the implementation of remote teaching policies, including fully live lessons, blended approaches incorporating both live and video elements, and non-screen based learning approaches. These strategies reflect the diverse needs and circumstances of the schools' student populations. The government's remote teaching policies have thus enabled schools to tailor their approaches to remote learning to the specific needs of their students, thus reflecting a market-oriented approach to education policy.

# Equality of Education Policies

In this section, we will discuss policies that aim to create educational equality, as well as how they attempt to achieve economic efficiency. We will begin by examining the four types of educational equality. The first type is access, which means that all students should have access to a good school, regardless of their socio-economic background. This refers specifically to state schools, not private education. We will analyse policies that allow students to access good quality schools, regardless of their background.

The second type of educational equality is quality of circumstance, which refers to the idea that all students should start school at a similar level, regardless of their socio-economic background. This includes skills such as reading, writing, social skills, and fine motor skills. This type of equality is about creating an equal starting point for all students. The third type is equality of participation, which means that all students should be able to fully participate in all aspects of their education, without being excluded due to their socio-economic background, lack of resources, or inability to afford something.

Finally, we will discuss equality of outcome, which is about giving all students the same chances of academic achievement, regardless of their socio-economic background. This does not mean that everyone should achieve the same grades, but rather, that everyone should have the opportunity to do their best. We will explore the idea of equity versus equality in education, where equity means that everyone should be given what they need to succeed, including support for special educational needs or resources for those from deprived backgrounds.

The policies we will examine aim to create a level playing field for all students, where everyone has the same opportunities for academic success, participation, and access to good quality schools. While there is debate around whether equity or equality is the best approach, the goal remains to give every student the tools they need to succeed. Through our analysis, we will gain a better understanding of how policies aim to create educational equality and economic efficiency.

### **Conservative Government 1979 - 1997**

During the Conservative government's reign from 1979 to 1997, policies were introduced to promote educational equality.

The 1988 Education Reform Act introduced several policies to improve educational equality under the conservative government between 1979 and 1997. One such policy was open enrolment, which allowed parents to choose the best school for their child regardless of their catchment area. This policy aimed to create equality of access by ensuring that parents had the freedom to send their child to the best school for them. However, the policy faced criticism due to the covert selection processes that could still occur, meaning that some students did not have equal access to the best schools. Furthermore, the policy was not truly equal as parents from working-class backgrounds may not have been able to afford to move to areas with better schools, leading to a postcode lottery where better schools were only accessible to students from more affluent areas.

Another policy introduced by the 1988 Education Reform Act was the national curriculum, which aimed to create equality of participation and outcome by setting a minimum standard for education. This minimum standard meant that all students would receive the same baseline education, regardless of their background. However, the curriculum's academic nature posed a challenge to equality of participation, as non-academic students may struggle to access the curriculum. This, in turn, impacted equality of outcome, as students who could not access the curriculum would not be able to achieve their best possible grades. Additionally, schools had different interpretations of the national curriculum, which further impacted equality of outcome as students in different schools received different levels of education.

### **Labour Government 1997 - 2010**

During the New Labour era, the government introduced several initiatives aimed at promoting equality in education, including the Education Action Zones (EAZs) and the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). The EAZs were designed to support education in areas of deprivation by providing additional funding, resources, teachers, and experts. This measure was aimed at leveling the playing field between schools that had ample funding and resources and those that lacked such facilities. The EAZs also fostered equality of participation by providing opportunities for students who could not afford certain things, or schools that could not acquire the resources they needed, to receive the same educational opportunities as their peers in more affluent schools.

The EMA was a means-tested initiative aimed at post-16 education. It provided 30 pounds a week directly to the student engaged in post-16 education, regardless of the type of qualification they were pursuing. Bonuses were awarded to students who exhibited good attendance and achievement. The EMA aimed to promote equality of participation by encouraging students from deprived backgrounds to stay on in education and pursue further qualifications, which could lead to higher-paying jobs and ultimately break the cycle of poverty. This initiative created equality of access by ensuring that financial constraints did not hinder students from pursuing post-16 education.

Additionally, the government introduced Sure Start programs, which offered free preschool places to children from deprived backgrounds, providing them with basic reading, writing, fine motor, and social skills. The program also offered parental support and entitled each child to a certain number of hours in preschool. By providing such opportunities, the Sure Start programs aimed to promote equality of circumstance and give children a better start to their educational process.

However, the EMA was short-lived due to its high cost and the challenges schools faced in monitoring attendance. Similarly, Sure Start programs have experienced defunding, leading to closures in many areas. Despite these challenges, the initiatives introduced during the New Labour era were instrumental in promoting equality of access, participation, and circumstance in education, giving students from deprived backgrounds the opportunity to succeed academically and break the cycle of poverty.

### **Coalition Government 2010- 2015**

The Pupil Premium was introduced by the coalition government in order to promote equality of participation among students. The program provides additional funding to schools for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, including those from deprived areas, military families, and those who are looked after or have been previously looked after. The amount of funding varies from year to year depending on the government budget, and the funds are intended to support the child's education by providing resources such as revision guides, stationery, uniform trips, and other educational materials.

While the Pupil Premium has been successful in promoting equality of participation, there have been some concerns regarding its implementation. The allocation of funds is dependent on the discretion of the school and its coordinators, which has led to instances of corruption and misappropriation of funds. Although the funds are ring-fenced and intended solely for Pupil Premium support, there have been cases of the funds being used for other purposes, such as deep-formed exam structures.

One such exam structure is the linear exam, which was introduced by Michael Gove in an effort to promote equality of outcome among students. This system limited the number of times a student could take an exam module, which meant that lower-working-class students were at a disadvantage as they may not have been able to afford to pay for multiple exam resits. While the linear exam system aimed to create equality of outcome by providing all students with the same number of chances to achieve the best grade possible, it was not without its flaws. The system may not have been equitable for all students, as some may perform better in exams than others due to various factors, such as exam anxiety or other extenuating circumstances.

Overall, the Pupil Premium and linear exam structures aim to create more equality of participation and outcome among students, but their effectiveness and fairness depend on their implementation and execution. It is important to continually evaluate these programs to ensure that they are meeting their intended goals and are fair and equitable for all students, regardless of their background or circumstances.

### **Conservative Government 2015 to present.**

The Conservative party introduced a new policy known as T levels in 2017. This policy aimed to promote both equality of outcome and participation by recognizing that not every student is academically inclined and may not excel in traditional academic subjects like GCSEs. Instead, T levels offer more vocational qualifications that are focused on practical skills that students can use in various industries. For example, a student may choose to pursue a T level in car mechanics instead of GCSE history. The goal of this policy was to give students who may not be suited for traditional academic pursuits a chance to achieve educational success and obtain qualifications that can lead to employment opportunities.

Although T levels were introduced with the intention of creating equal opportunities for all students, there are some concerns about how well they are understood by employers and the wider public. It is still unclear how T levels work, and there is a lack of understanding about their value in the job market. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has delayed the full implementation of T levels, and it remains to be seen how effective they will be in practice.

In addition to T levels, the Conservative party also introduced 100% funding for apprenticeships for 16 to 18-year-olds. This policy was intended to ensure that young people have access to quality education and training opportunities. However, some people view this policy as a way for the government to manipulate unemployment figures, as young people who are engaged in education or training until they are 18 are not counted as unemployed.

Despite these concerns, the 100% funding for apprenticeships has provided an alternative option for young people who do not wish to pursue traditional academic routes such as A levels or BTECs. Apprenticeships can range from car mechanics and hairdressing to nursing and electrical engineering. They typically involve three days of work and two days of college learning. Apprenticeships can also lead to higher education opportunities, as they can be used to apply to university. Additionally, the Conservative party has introduced more degree-level apprenticeships, where students work for a company and attend university one or two days a week. This alternative to traditional degrees not only provides students with a wage but also avoids accumulating debt, as everything is paid for by the employer.

# Economic Efficiency

Economic efficiency is a key consideration in education policy. This concept is not about making schools more profitable, but rather about creating a flexible and trained workforce that can meet the needs of society by teaching essential skills. The ultimate goal of education policy is to prepare students for the workforce, and this is evidence of the correspondence principle in action.

To achieve this goal, policymakers have introduced a range of programs and initiatives aimed at helping students develop the skills they need to succeed in the workforce. One such program is the National Work Experience program, which was introduced by the Conservative government in the 1990s. This program consisted of three elements: careers guidance, work experience, and community service. All students in Year 10 (or key stage four) were required to participate in this program and complete two weeks of work experience. Most schools used a collapsed curriculum day to recreate a job centre experience, where students were given the opportunity to choose from a range of work experience opportunities posted around the room, and then had an interview with a member of staff to discuss their choices.

However, the National Work Experience program was eventually discontinued by the New Labour government due to concerns about safety and child protection. Instead, the government introduced a new initiative called the Personal Learning and Thinking Skills (PELTS) program. This program aimed to identify essential skills that students needed to develop and explore throughout their education, such as critical thinking, negotiation, teamwork, compromise, discussion, and debate. Teachers were asked to map these skills to their schemes of work to show where opportunities for skill development were offered.

Although the Pelts program is no longer required, the idea behind it was to identify the skills needed in the workplace and build them into teaching plans. The coalition government later introduced new subjects such as STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) and STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math) to promote the skills and subjects needed to compete in a global workforce. Additionally, the government also introduced programs such as Girls in Science and Technology (GIST) and Women in Science and Engineering (WISE) to encourage girls and women to pursue careers in these fields.

In conclusion, economic efficiency is an important consideration in education policy, and preparing students for the workforce is a key goal. To achieve this goal, policymakers have introduced a range of initiatives and programs aimed at helping students develop essential skills and pursue careers in a rapidly changing global workforce.