

Educational social policy: part 7:

What has educational social policy ever done for us?

(1) The disadvantaged

Occasionally examiners may ask you about the relationship between **social class and educational social policy**. As we saw on the previous guides, educational social policy especially under Labour governments took a **social democratic approach which aimed to increase equality of educational opportunity for all social groups, especially the working-class and other economically disadvantaged groups**. Such policy aimed to **reduce social class inequalities, especially between the middle-class and the working-class**. Most of Labour's educational policy – the comprehensive secondary school system (introduced in 1965), the expansion of HE in the 1960s, EAZs and Sure Start centres in the late 1990s, EMAs (1997) and Aim Higher (2004) had a **positive effect in that it improved working-class opportunity and achievement levels**.

However, ironically **it also improved middle-class opportunity and achievement levels**. Although **working-class pupils get better exam results than previous generations, so too do middle-class pupils**. In fact, the achievement levels of middle-class children have **improved at a faster rate than those of working-class pupils**. Conservative or New Right educational policy has contributed to this especially the fact that the private education system (public fee-paying schools) have not been affected in any meaningful way by educational social policy. Grammar schools continue to exist in some parts of the country. The fact that some academies and free schools are allowed to be **selective at enrolment** also benefits middle-class pupils who are more likely to be **privately tutored** in preparation for these selective enrolment procedures.

There is a danger too that the gap between working-class and middle-class students will increase, especially at **university because of the scrapping (as austerity measures) of the EMA, Aim Higher and the introduction of university tuition fees and loans**. The evidence also suggests that marketisation and the introduction of parental choice has benefitted middle-class families much more than working-class families.

(2) Ethnic minorities

Evidence also suggests that **ethnic-minority pupils who often belong to the most economically and socially disadvantaged section of society have made substantial improvement in terms of their exam results at GCSE and A-level** despite educational policies such as marketisation, the introduction of selective practices, and the scrapping of EAZs, Sure Start centres, EMAs and Aim Higher. Some studies

suggest that Black and Asian students have benefitted from educational policy that has promoted **teacher training aimed at raising awareness of racism in schools**, and the **Gifted and Talented** programme although Gilborn (2008) suggests that the latter favoured White students.

(3) Males and females

The impact of educational policy on male and female levels of achievement is not so clear cut. Since the 1980s, at all levels of the educational system, **females have achieved better exam results than males. There is now some concern that young working-class males are now under-performing more than any other social group within the British educational system.** Partly, this is due to the **cuts** discussed above in Sure Start, EAZs and EMAs. There are signs too that the 'pupil premium' which is supposed to be spent on such boys is not being used effectively.

The education of females improved significantly in the 1970s and 1980s as **educational policy encouraged teacher-training to be more aware of sex-stereotyping in the classroom, and particularly in maths and science.** Teachers were trained to be more conscious of **sexism**, and there was an attempt to **remove stereotypical images and examples from textbooks.** **Equal opportunity laws** were introduced in 1970 and 1975 which resulted in an influx of female role models into teaching. **The 1988 ERA introduced the 'national curriculum' which was gender-neutral.** All boys and girls were expected to take the same subjects. There were also educational policy initiatives such as **Girls Into Science and Technology (GIST)** which aimed to raise female participation in these subjects. Consequently the tendency for some subjects, (for example, Biology, English, Domestic Science) to be dominated by females, and others (for example, Physics, Maths, Technical Drawing) to be dominated by male pupils (which was fairly common in most schools pre-1980s) became a thing of the past. There is evidence too that the decision to introduce **coursework-based GCSEs** in the 1980s benefitted females – these qualifications were replaced by exam-based GCSEs in 2015. (it will therefore interesting to see if this closes the gap between male and female achievement levels).

However, on a negative note, there has been little educational policy aimed at lifting male levels of achievement.