

## Education study-guide 6

### External factors: Economic factors – the existence of private schools

A very clear social class distinction can be seen in educational outcomes between **state secondary schools** and **private fee-paying private schools**, the best of which are known ironically as **public schools**. The best known public schools which charge fees of over **£30,000 a year** and which belong to an organisation called the **Headmaster's Conference** are **Eton College** which has educated 19 British Prime Ministers, **Harrow, Rugby, Winchester and Westminster**.

- A Durham University study in 2016 found that **privately educated children are two years ahead of pupils in the state sector by the time they reach the age of 16 years**.
- According to the **Sutton Trust**, in 2014 an average of just **11 per cent of state school students went to the leading Russell Group of 24 universities in the UK compared with 38 per cent of students from public schools**.
- **One in 20 students from private schools went on to study at Oxford or Cambridge university in 2011 compared with only one in 100 from state secondary schools**.

Critics of private education claim that public schools are '**engines of privilege**' and consequently **they undermine equality of opportunity and meritocracy**. Statistics suggest that the products of a private and Oxbridge education experience **positive discrimination in terms of elite well-paid jobs**. For example, despite the fact that **only 7 per cent of pupils experience private education, more than 50 per cent of politicians, top civil servants, journalists, bankers, barristers and military personnel attended public schools in the UK**.

**In 2016, the Sutton Trust's Leading People report** tracked the educational backgrounds of leading figures in 10 areas of public life, among them film and music and found that:

- award-winning British actors are more than twice as likely to have had a private education than award-winning pop stars. 42% of British Bafta winners went to an independent fee-paying school compare with just 19% of British winners at the Brit Awards.
- 74 per cent of top judges attended fee-paying schools.
- 54 per cent of the executives of Britain's top 100 earning companies are the products of public schools.
- 61% of the country's top doctors were educated at independent schools.
- 47% of the cabinet attended Oxbridge, compared with 32% of the shadow cabinet.

Critics point out that most fee-paying schools and therefore their advantages in terms of opportunity to gain top jobs, are **out of the reach of most working-class families and their children**. Interestingly, there is also evidence that **role allocation in terms of Oxbridge places may actually be inefficient and wasteful of working-class academic talent**. A study conducted by **Rodeiro and Zanini in 2015** found that despite class disparities in university admissions, that **state school students were more likely to gain a first-class degree than privately educated students with similar A-level results**.

However, access to private education is not the only factor that explains class differences in achievement. **Class differences also exist between and within state secondary schools**. Sociologists have looked to **cultural deprivation** and **economic deprivation** as possible causes of these differences.