

## Educational social policy: part 6 – 2010 to present day

### The Coalition Government 2010-2015

In 2010, the Labour Government of Gordon Brown was replaced by a **Coalition Government made up of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats**. David Cameron became the Prime Minister.

A number of important educational changes came about between 2010 and 2015;

1. The **Academies Act (2010)** allowed all existing faith and state schools that had achieved an 'outstanding' grade in OFSTED inspections to become '**academies**'.
2. The Act also encouraged further privatisation of the education system because it positively **encouraged private enterprise to invest in and run academies**. This eventually led to the appearance of **academy chains** – enterprises that run a number of schools across specific regions.
3. The Academies Act authorized the creation of '**free schools**' – these were a type of state-funded school controlled by parents, educational charities and religious groups. By 2014, **331 free schools had been opened or had been approved**. Both academies and free schools are able to set out their own admission policies, and consequently practice **selection**.
4. Michael Gove, the Secretary for State for Education made a number of **reforms to the curriculum in 2013**, which stressed the need for **traditional** ways of teaching. For example, primary school pupils are required to read some Shakespeare plays in full. New and supposedly more **rigorous A-levels and GCSE specifications and exams were introduced**.
5. The **value of vocational qualifications was downgraded** so that schools could no longer use them to boost their league table position.
6. Supposedly in response to the 2008 banking crisis, the Chancellor introduced **austerity measures** and in order to save money **the Educational Maintenance Allowance was scrapped, and more than 500 Sure Start centres were closed down**.
7. **HE tuition fees rose** to £9000 per year in 2010.
8. In 2004, the '**student premium**' was introduced – schools with high numbers of students eligible for free school meals were given extra funding and educational resources to spend on further support for disadvantaged children.

### 2015 to the present day

The **Conservative Party won the 2015 election** and David Cameron continued as Prime Minister of a Conservative Government. After losing the European referendum (BREXIT), Cameron resigned in 2016 and was replaced by **Theresa May**.

The Conservative government continues to support and increase levels of marketisation, privatisation and selection by encouraging the setting up of **free schools**, especially in partnership with private businesses. In January 2016, **the grants that existed for the very poorest students at university were scrapped and replaced with loans. This may mean that fewer bright students from disadvantaged families will apply to university while those that do will encounter greater levels of debt.**

Examples of the **creeping privatisation** of state education

- **Academy chains are increasingly resembling business conglomerates in the high salaries they pay their chief executives, and the decisions they make with regard to the funding of schools, for example, some have sold off school playing fields in order to generate income or cut the number of teachers employed in specialisms such as 'special needs, music and art.**
- Aspects of state education such as careers, catering and educational psychology have been **contracted out to costly private providers.**
- Some Ofsted inspections are now carried out by private companies.
- An American company – Educational Testing Services – was given a government contract to manage SATs in British schools.
- The private company -CAPITA- was given a contract in 2004 to manage the strategy of improving national literacy and numeracy levels.
- Some local councils, for example, Islington have contracted out the management of schools in their districts to private management companies, for example Cambridge Educational Associates.
- Branded fast food and coffee outlets are taking over canteen facilities in universities, colleges and large secondary schools.

### **Evaluation of educational policy 2010-2019**

- **New Right sociologists see privatisation as a good thing because they argue that state services are often inefficient and wasteful. They claim only private companies competing in an unregulated market can provide cheap and profitable educational services to a high standard and meet the wide variety of educational needs.**
- **Critics argue that privatisation will eventually mean that education will no longer be seen as a human right that should be available free to all; it will be a commodity to be bought and sold. The 'best' education will be too expensive for most ordinary people. The poor, in particular, will be priced out of education.**

- **Wintour (2013)** observes that the abolition of EMA has lowered staying-on-rates in sixth forms and FE colleges because **students from low-income families can no longer afford further education.**
- **Ratcliffe (2014)** claims that the student premium is being used by schools to plug the economic gaps caused by austerity cuts in educational spending, rather than specifically used to help disadvantaged students.
- Marxists see the privatisation of educational services as yet another example of the spread of neo-liberal capitalism which sees public services such as state education and health services as ripe for **transformation into profit-making businesses.**
- Critics of free schools claim they have brought in **selection 'by the back door'** and are **failing to meet the needs of disadvantaged children.**