

### Different views on the role of education

- Some people think that the **purpose**<sup>1</sup> of education is **to train**<sup>2</sup> children to enter **the workforce**. To give them the knowledge and the skills that will be necessary in their **working life**.

If this is the case, education should simply **meet the demands** of employers. Companies often complain that students arriving on the work market are not well-prepared for work. On the other hand, companies themselves **have difficulty** predicting the skills they will need **in the medium term**. More and more people say that today school should focus on making children learn how to think (rather than learning 'things') and be adaptable because adaptability will be the most necessary skill in the future economy.

- Other people think the purpose of school is also to give children access to culture, even if it is not directly useful in their working life. In their opinion the role of school is to teach the rules of social life, not only to prepare students for their working life, but to prepare them for their life as citizens. To support this view they point out that people with higher education are generally more law-abiding, they build stable families (a lower divorce rate), they are more involved in political life and volunteer work, which is a positive impact for society as a whole.

- Finally, others **give priority to the view that** education should be a way to **compensate** for / **offset** social inequality. School should be able to offer **equal opportunity** to all children, **regardless of their social background**. School should be able to help pupils from **underprivileged families** to succeed and rise in society. From this viewpoint, education and the education system should contribute **to enhancing**<sup>3</sup> social mobility.

All in all, of course, education should take on the three tasks mentioned above : teaching skills, teaching sociability and promoting social mobility.

### The role of authorities<sup>4</sup>

Traditionnally, it has been the role of elected authorities (the central state in some countries, or local authorities in others) to manage the education system. Authorities collect taxes, and allocate the money to education. They organize education geographically : there must be an equal **distribution**<sup>5</sup> of schools and teachers in a given area.

There are two approaches:

**The former is collective (society provides a service to everyone), the latter is individualistic (people seek the service that they want)**

- In the first approach, authorities provide schools to the public and determine which children attend which school. They also control the **curriculum**<sup>6</sup> so that everyone will receive a similar education. They also organise exams and **assessments**<sup>7</sup> (**SAT : Standard Assessment Tests**) to make sure pupils and schools meet the targets of the curriculum

- In the second approach the authorities simply distribute the money to schools and let them decide what education they will offer and to whom (charter schools in the USA, Free schools in the UK : they choose their own curriculum, their own teachers, their pupils)

The most extreme case of this policy is to give out money directly to parents (this money is called 'vouchers') and let them send their children to the school of their choice. In this system, schools are competing to attract students (it is a market-oriented policy, which considers education as a market).

The second approach is gaining ground in most developed countries. The decision of the British government to allow universities to raise their fees is a good example. The government justifies this measure by explaining that it is fair to ask people to pay for their own **higher education**. A majority of people, the governments claims, do not go to university, so there is no reason for them to pay taxes to finance universities which they don't use.

<sup>1</sup>Purpose : le but, la raison d'être

<sup>2</sup>To train : former

<sup>3</sup>To enhance : renforcer

<sup>4</sup>Authorities : les pouvoirs publics

<sup>5</sup>Distribution : répartition

<sup>6</sup>Curriculum : ce que nous appelons les programmes scolaires, c'est à dire les contenus

<sup>7</sup>Assessment : évaluation

Those who go to university will have better-paying jobs than those who don't, so it is only fair that they should pay for this future advantage.

## The role of parents

Increasingly, parents are demanding more choice:

- They want to have free choice of the public school they can have their children attend
- Parents want to have a say as regards what is taught (the curriculum)
- They want to have a right to say what they think of the way teachers do their work
- More parents choose home-schooling (parents teaching their own children at home)

As regards home-schooling, there are ideological and philosophical considerations :

- Home-schoolers are often people who do not accept **secular** (*laïque*) views (such as evolution).
- They want to **pass on** (*transmettre*) their own values, beliefs and moral standards to their own children.
- They fear state-run schools will / might indoctrinate their children with ideas they disapprove of.
- They consider it is not for society (*and government*) to **outline**<sup>8</sup> what children should learn.

For authorities, there is a risk that these children who are taught at home might be ill-treated

## What is the main problem worldwide?

Worldwide, the main problem is **that of** access to education, as hundreds of millions of children do not benefit from any education. The struggle against illiteracy is fundamental because it is **the way out of**<sup>9</sup> poverty for poor countries.

In rich countries, the main problem is that of academic attainment. There is general agreement that people who leave school without skills will be stuck in low-skilled low-paid jobs all their lives.

Furthermore, a high level of education is a guarantee for someone to be able to learn new skills.

Technological change is so fast nowadays that many jobs are threatened and most people will have to be able to learn new skills to find new jobs.

## Higher Education

As regards higher education, the main issue is the increasing/rising costs. States reduce their spending. As a result, there is a risk that students will have to pay **increasingly higher**<sup>10</sup> tuition fees.

To achieve this, they will have to take loans. The big question is whether they will be able to find well-paying jobs which will make it possible for them to pay back those loans.

Already some people are beginning to wonder whether going to university **is still worth it**<sup>11</sup>.

One of the potential damaging consequences could be that students will **flock to**<sup>12</sup> 'useful' subjects [*e.g. those which open the door to well-paying jobs*] or towards MOOCs.

There is a risk that there be a growing consumerist attitude among students. However, the role of higher education is also and perhaps essentially to give students social skills. Those skills are what holds society together.

Surveys show that **people with higher education** [bonne traduction de 'des diplômés' ou encore 'des gens qui ont fait des études longues'] are more likely to be in stable families (a lower rate of divorce), to be 'good' parents (their children are more successful academically, a lower delinquency rate), are more aware of their health, are less likely to be the victims of addictions, vote more, engage in volunteer work more often, than those with low education achievement : in a way they cost less to society and contribute more.

<sup>8</sup>To outline : définir, déterminer

<sup>9</sup>The way out of : le moyen de sortir de

<sup>10</sup>Increasingly higher : de plus en plus élevées

<sup>11</sup>Is still worth it : si ça vaut encore la peine

<sup>12</sup>To flock to : se précipiter sur

## Education systems

### The US

Education is compulsory over an age range starting between five and eight and ending somewhere between ages sixteen and eighteen, depending on the state.

Public education is universally required at the **K–12** level (short for : from Kindergarten to 12th grade). K–12 public school curricula, budgets, and policies are set through locally elected school boards, who have jurisdiction over individual school districts.

State governments set overall educational standards, often mandate standardized tests for K–12 public school systems, and supervise state colleges and universities. Funding comes from the state, local, and federal government.

Private schools are generally free to determine their own curriculum and staffing policies. About 87% of school-age children attend public schools, about 10% attend private schools, and roughly 3% are home-schooled.

General level (or category)		Level	Student age range (at the beginning of academic year)	
Preschool		Pre-kindergarten	3–5	
<b>Compulsory education</b>				
Elementary school		Kindergarten	5–6	
		1st grade	6–7	
		2nd grade	7–8	
		3rd grade	8–9	
		4th grade	9–10	
Middle school		5th grade	10–11	
		6th grade	11–12	
		Junior high school	7th grade	12–13
High school		8th grade	13–14	
		Senior high school	Freshman/9th Grade	14–15
			Sophomore/10th Grade	15–16
			Junior/11th Grade	16–17
		Senior/12th Grade	17–18	
<b>Higher education</b>				
College (University)		Undergraduate school	First year: "Freshman year"	18-19
			Second year: "Sophomore year"	19-20
			Third year: "Junior year"	20-21
			Fourth year: "Senior year"	21-22
Community college - 2 years				

### Higher Education

41 % of 18-24 are at university (12 % in community colleges, 28 % in 4 year institutions)

3.4 million students at independent ( i.e. private) universities (out of about 20 million at university in general)

For the 2013–14 academic year, the average annual price for undergraduate tuition, fees, room, and board was \$15,640 at public institutions, \$40,614 at private nonprofit institutions, and \$23,135 at private for-profit institutions .

### The UK

Below is a table summarizing the most common names of the various schools and stages

Year	Final exam	Ages	State funded school name	State funded Alternative name	State funded selective school name	Fee paying school name	private
Nursery		3-4					
Reception		4-5	Primary	Infant			
Year One		5-6	Primary	Infant			
Year Two		6-7	Primary	Infant			
Year Three		7-8	Primary	Junior			
Year Four		8-9	Primary	Junior		Prep school	
Year Five		9-10	Primary	Junior		Prep school	
Year Six	SATS, 11+	10-11	Primary	Junior		Prep school	
Year Seven		11-12	Secondary	High school	Grammar school	Prep school	
Year Eight		12-13	Secondary	High school	Grammar school	Prep school	
Year Nine		13-14	Secondary	High school	Grammar school	Public school	
Year Ten		14-15	Secondary	High school	Grammar school	Public school	
Year Eleven	GCSE	15-16	Secondary	High school	Grammar school	Public school	
Year Twelve		16-17	Secondary	Sixth form	Grammar school	Public school	
Year Thirteen	A-Levels	17-18	Secondary	Sixth form	Grammar school	Public school	

### Different types of school

*Unlike in many other countries, there is a movement towards centralisation of primary and secondary education in England :*

*Traditionnally, local authorities (called 'local councils' more or less similar to our 'conseil général') in Britain were in charge of education : opening schools, hiring teachers, paying for the running costs, but now central government is taking charge.*

**Academy schools**, established by the 1997-2010 Labour Government to replace poorly-performing community schools in areas of high social and economic deprivation.

Their start-up costs are typically funded by private means, such as entrepreneurs or NGOs, with running costs met by Central Government and are administratively free from direct local authority control. They are monitored directly by the Department for Education.

**Community schools** (formerly county schools), in which the local authority employs the schools' staff, owns the schools' lands and buildings, and has primary responsibility for admissions.

**Free schools**, introduced by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition in 2010, are newly established schools in England set up by parents, teachers, charities or businesses. They are funded by taxpayers, are academically non-selective, and are not controlled by a local authority. They are ultimately accountable to the Secretary of State for Education.

### Grammar Schools

Public schools which select their own students, through an exam that children take at the age of 11 ( the eleven-plus). Most Grammar Schools **were scrapped** (*supprimées*) in the 1960s, because they selected their pupils at a very early

age, and generally it was mostly middle-class children who passed : this system didn't promote social mobility. Ms. May ( who herself studied at a grammar school) wants to re-establish them.

### **Higher education**

Almost all higher education is delivered by state-funded universities. In 2010 the government decided to allow universities to raise their tuition fees from £3000 to \$9000, causing vast protests.