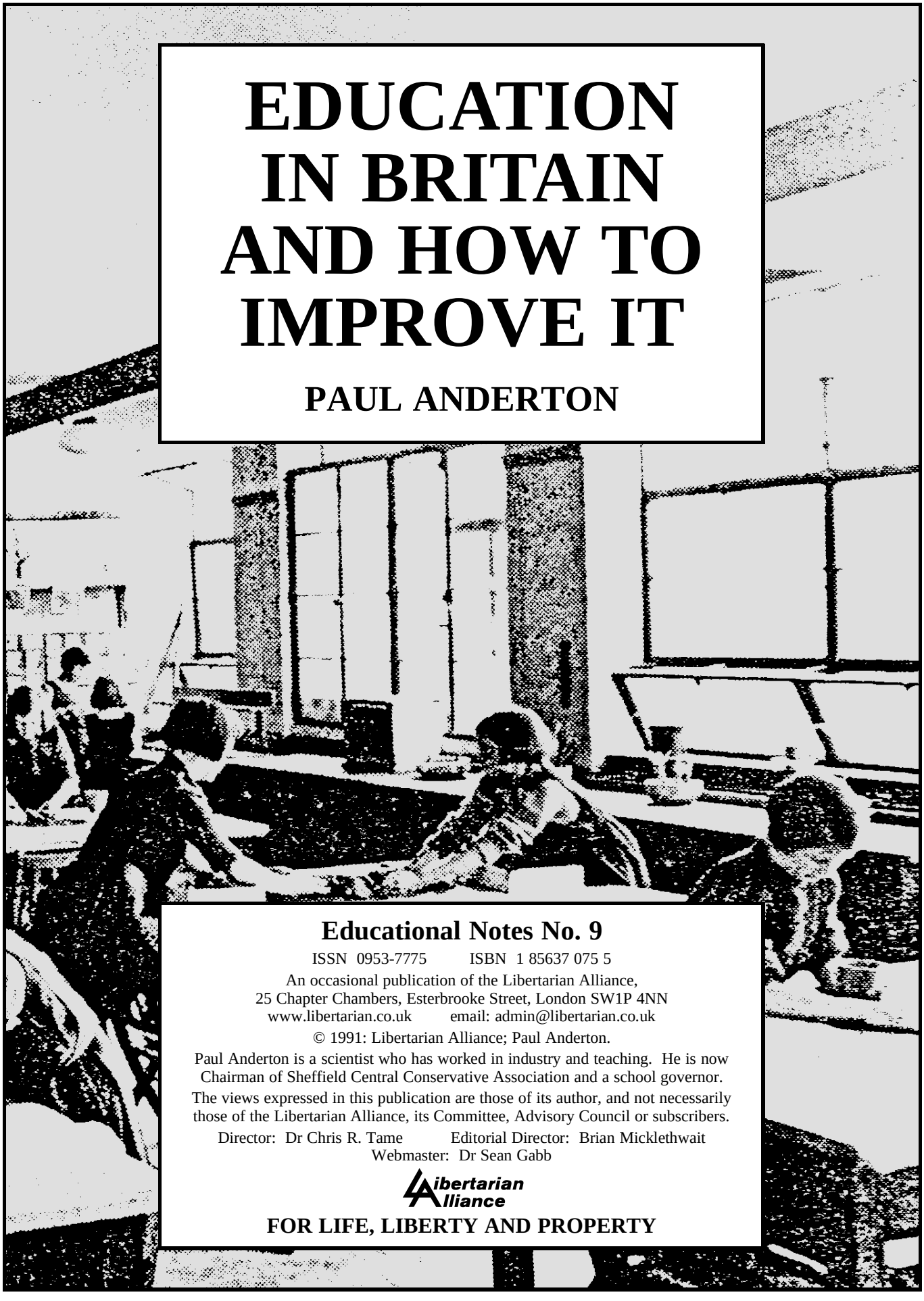

EDUCATION IN BRITAIN AND HOW TO IMPROVE IT

PAUL ANDERTON

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25 Chapter Chambers, Esterbrooke Street, London SW1P 4NN
www.libertarian.co.uk email: admin@libertarian.co.uk

Paul Anderton is a scientist who has worked in industry and teaching. He is now Chairman of Sheffield Central Conservative Association and a school governor.

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One of the distinctive characteristics of human beings, compared with other species, is our ability to transfer knowledge as it is accumulated. Individuals can learn from the experience of others, even people they may never meet or even know about. This is because we are able to store knowledge in a retrievable form by using artefacts and symbols of some sort.

The process of transferring this knowledge[1] is the most general definition of 'education'.

There are two broad categories of knowledge. One may be called purely intellectual (PI) and is mainly knowledge of facts and ideas in symbolic form. Literacy and numeracy are essential to acquire much of this, though verbal abilities are the basis of it. The other sort of knowledge is what might be called sensory-motor (SM) abilities or 'skills'. Though there is some overlap the distinction is important. For instance, anybody with sufficient time and patience can acquire all the PI knowledge required for flying aeroplanes by reading about the theory of flight, structure of aircraft, air-traffic regulations and so on, but this would not enable him/her to be an airline pilot, because this also requires a high level of SM ability which can only be acquired by actually flying aircraft in order to learn what sensory inputs are significant in that situation and how to react appropriately to them.

For most of history virtually everybody was educated, somewhat haphazardly, by their parents and other relatives. It is only when either or both of the above educational requirements are so demanding that this is beyond the capacity of other family members, that any sort of formal education is actually *necessary*. For instance in primitive agricultural communities all relevant knowledge and skill is passed on by direct instruction, but advanced farmers in present-day Europe or America might well consider it appropriate to attend a university to learn about farming. This is because of the technical advances in farming which require so much PI knowledge.

In the usual connotation, 'education' has generally been assumed to contain a much larger proportion of PI than SM. In fact SM has been largely regarded as of secondary importance, the main exception being that associated with sport and games which has quite high prestige in some places, and is of course quite useless.

Literacy is essential to acquire PI knowledge of any extent or depth. Quite important areas of SM knowledge can be, and often are, acquired without literacy. Perhaps the greater prestige of PI knowledge is due to this literacy requirement, but it is more likely to be because individuals of high prestige are not generally noted for their SM abilities, and are in fact often quite incompetent, requiring servants (including secretaries) to perform even very simple tasks.

The growth of state compulsory education has been largely supported by two great pillars of delusion. One of them is that the closer state education approaches to that of prestigious individuals the better. The other is that if a little compulsory education has apparently been a benefit, then more of it must produce even greater benefits.[2]

THE CHURCH AS EDUCATOR

To consider these in order. Early non-family education was only for the noble and rich and was done by private tutors who acquainted the presumed heirs of money and privilege with literacy and the important features of their contemporary culture.

Children were often sent to other families for teaching in small groups, and eventually this was developed into class teaching in Church schools.[3] These had existed from the sixth century in association with cathedrals and monasteries. The primary purpose of Church schools was not instruction but indoctrination. Instruction in literacy and, perhaps, general 'culture' was either a bonus or a bribe according to one's point of view. Early schools were primarily for training priests, but when the Church's influence was essentially all-pervading many other important functions required Church training. Consequently education was sought not only for instruction but also as an initiation process for entry into the more prestigious levels of society. Some schools founded for this purpose[4] still exist, of course, and remain highly desirable and expensive because they are still seen as important staging posts in any career towards high esteem and prestigious employment.

There were also others based on charitable donations to various Churches in the belief that instruction in religion, together with some useful knowledge, was a great service for the Poor. The earliest reports of Parliamentary committees on the education of the so-called 'lower orders' noted that there were provisions for education in some areas from charitable donations but the fact that Roman Catholics were excluded from some and Protestants from others meant that unless there were two foundations in a particular district, some children were inevitably deprived of education.[5] In order to plug these gaps it was proposed to set up schools run by local boards financed from local taxes and this was the beginning of compulsory State provided education which has grown into the present system.

But the concept of education was already polluted by the idea that part of its function was, in effect, indoctrination and other forms of attitude manipulation. The effect of the early Church influence can still be seen in the inclusion of Religious Education as a compulsory part of the National Curriculum.[6]

There are various supposed justifications for compulsory education. Originally the idea was that, as the gaps in educational facilities provided by Churches had to be plugged by public provision, and it was considered that education was self-evidently a Good Thing, then compulsion was a simple way of ensuring that everyone not only contributed but also benefited. (This sort of consideration should be of particular interest to Libertarians because it is rather the obverse of the 'free loader' objection to private police or defence or public works. To a large extent it pre-empts objections to paying for a supposed benefit because everybody has, of necessity, in some way made use of it or at any rate had the chance to make use of it.)

Another rather dubious idea is that an obligation is placed on parents to see that their children get a 'proper' education with the interpretation of 'proper' being very flexible. The conventional wisdom is that this compulsion is something of a favour extended by the government to children which protects them from unscrupulous parents who might send them out to work for the shameful purpose of earning money. On the other hand a good education is generally supposed to enable the fortunate recipient to get a better job which is largely the same as being able to earn more money or earn it more certainly. So it would seem that parents who really wanted to take advantage of the earning power of their children would be keen to get them properly educated for that purpose, particularly if the good education were 'free' (paid for out of taxes).

Another sort of attitude is indicated in the Crowther report.7 It specifically regarded education as a 'national investment'. Also the remarkable assertion "... what the best and wisest parent wants for his own child the community must want for all its children." As is quite typical of much educational theorising this statement managed to combine bad logic with patronising attitudes and a dubious notion of 'community'. In the 'national investment' notion there is the rather dangerous implication that children are in some way the property of this community rather than ends in themselves.

The bad logic is shown clearly by circularity in identifying the 'best and wisest' parents - they must be the ones who keep their children at school as long as possible! The Crowther report, and a previous one, usually known as 'Early Leaving', had produced statistics showing that the children of manual workers - the modern equivalent of the Victorian 'lower orders' - left school as soon as they had endured the legal minimum, whereas those of the professional and managerial classes stayed longer, especially until age sixteen in grammar schools (when the minimum leaving age was fifteen). One explanation, which was not considered of course, was that the reason for early leaving was that the manual worker parents, and possibly the children themselves, had perceived that grammar school education was irrelevant in the light of their opportunities and expectations. Grammar schools at the time certainly provided a very adequate academic education, but at a price in other respects. The perceived quality of a grammar school depended to a large extent on how close an imitiation it appeared to be of Eton or Harrow. Grammar schools had uniforms, corporal punishment, vestigial fagging systems, houses, at least one rough game such as football or rugger, and usually taught both Latin and snobbery. Consequently it is perhaps not at all surprising that the 'higher orders' and their children were more inclined to persevere with grammar school education than were the corresponding 'lower orders'.

In all the reports from 1830 to the present 'education' is often referred to but never defined, and the parents who are supposed to demand it are never asked what they think the term indicates. Very probably what the parents really wanted was literacy and numeracy, which they themselves lacked and which was plainly useful. But leaving the concept undefined meant, in effect, that they had to be content with what they were given (i.e. forced to pay for anyway by taxation) by whoever controlled 'education'.

Instead of consulting the 'lower orders' it was simply assumed that they needed religion (that was self-evident to charitable Victorians and is still taken for granted by the present day experts who dispose of public money) and for anything else the obvious ideal model was what the elite and influential chose for their children by paying for it. But what was really then required of private education, and to a large extent still is today, was glorified child minding. There was really nothing much of a function for children to perform in well-to-do households and their futures were generally assured by family influence and nepotism. The real work was done by servants. Children being inherently noisy, untidy, and demanding, are preferably left in the charge of others so far as people of importance are concerned.

Consequently elitist education was largely a matter of filling in time, maintaining order and discipline, and promoting confidence in the belief that inherited privileges were also well deserved. The results were seen clearly in public schools in the study of topics whose attraction was that they were the subject of scholarship, almost exclusively Church inspired. Simple but unimaginative child minding required repressive discipline, discouragement of independence of thought, and an emphasis on sport, which was largely to fill in time, but also promoted because of the (mistaken) belief that it reduced interest in sex (it might well have some effect in directing interest away from the *opposite* sex!).

GOVERNMENT REPORTS

There have been at least thirty four government reports on the condition of the educational system since the early 1800's. They have usually been about some perceived shortcoming of education and the proposed solutions have invariably been consistent in one respect - more 'resources', that is to say taxpayers' money - were needed to solve the problem. Anybody who has been subjected to lectures on the History of Education in a Teachers' Training Institution will have been familiarised with the contents of many of these reports. The attitude of the lecturers will almost certainly have been that whenever the 'need' for increased spending on education by the government has been accepted and implemented then 'progress' was being made, and any reluctance to do so should be interpreted as a setback.

Surprisingly, it might be thought, the observation that the apparent need for each report actually indicated that previous spending had not been particularly successful was never made. The assumption was always that a little compulsory learning had obviously been a good thing so some

more of it must be even better. There has certainly not been any Royal Commission to enquire into how education should be defined or how its presence could be acertained and measured. Consequently education has grown from indicating, at least for the 'Poor', a few easily identifiable and obviously useful basic intellectual skills [plus Religious Instruction, of course] to include virtually anything that teachers, or educational bureaucrats, have taken it upon themselves to include in it. Whilst costs have increased continuously satisfaction with the results has been constantly questioned but the proposed solutions have always been, in effect, more of what had produced the dissatisfaction. In fact until the recent attempts at reform (initiated to a large extent during the Conservative government of 1979 onwards) the system was quite devoid of any ideas of what it was supposed to be doing or how to measure progress towards any assumed goals. Education was a black hole for tax money and a system in which teachers and supposed experts ran amok spreading confusion and wild ideas about social engineering. The introduction of tests and a National Curriculum looks like an attempt at radical reform, but the impression is deceptive, because fundamental questions have still not been considered.

The basic intellectual skills of literacy and numeracy are fundamental enabling abilities. They give access to the results of thousands of years of civilisation and (presumably) progress. This is the justification for making sure that every citizen has these skills. It would seem to follow, then, that the task of the compulsory system (assuming for the purposes of argument that such a system *is* required) is very limited. Ensure that everybody had reached a minimum standard of literacy and numeracy and then let them get on with availing themselves of whatever other jewels of civilisation and intellectual endeavour they find useful or interesting.

Instead the enabling aspect has been effectively usurped and the curriculum loaded by supposedly important sections of knowledge selected by educationalists and politicians. This can be, and sometimes is, described in terms such as 'opening windows' to areas of knowledge which would otherwise stay closed to the pupils - particularly poor or 'underprivileged' ones of course. Consequently more and more areas of study are added and sanctified by being described as 'educational'. During the sixties and early seventies this reached bizarre proportions so that supposedly life enhancing educational experiences actually replaced basic literacy. There has now been something of a realisation of the absurdity of this resulting in an attempt to redress it.

But if basic literacy enables the possessor of it to open these exciting windows himself what is the rest of compulsory education supposed to be doing? The existence of courses on practically any topic (with some significant omissions as we will see later) actually suggests either a considerable lack of confidence in the ability of pupils and ex-pupils to make independent use of supposedly basic skills and knowledge, or the more sinister suspicion that independent use might result in ideas embarrassing to either the political or educational establishment, which requires pre-emptive conditioning.

EFFECTS ON PUPILS

The system has distinct effects on different pupils. In fact a glaring omission from the numerous distinguished examinations of the educational system is any systematic attempt to see it from the pupils' point of view. They are regarded, by implication, as something of a homogeneous mass which has to be moulded in some way into an acceptable 'product'.

For descriptive purposes the pupil population can be divided into three broad categories though it is not suggested that every individual fits neatly into one of these categories, or cannot change from one group to another.

First there is the academically able group comprising about twenty five to thirty per cent of the total. Apart from being well above average intelligence, they vary just as much as any other children in other characteristics. They can be lazy or industrious, ambitious or contented, from supportive or indifferent family backgrounds. Even the most socially disadvantaged from this group are likely to do fairly well academically. In fact it takes very incompetent teaching to stop these pupils making quite pleasing progress compared with the majority. In the old days of selection, they would have gone to grammar schools, of course. Something which seems to have been forgotten is that it was quite usual in grammar schools for about a third of the pupils to do the 'O' level course in *four* years and then obtain between five and nine good quality 'O' levels. There are no four year courses in comprehensive schools as it would involve early selection, so the most able ten per cent or so of pupils are almost certainly very *under* worked academically. Some of them are frustrated, some become lazy, and some just do what is expected from them and are considered pleasant and successful pupils.

These pupils are inevitably the vast majority of the serious examination entries. So when modern education is criticised for inefficiency, and in its defence statistics are produced to 'prove' that standards have not fallen and have probably even improved, it is this group whose performance is being quoted almost exclusively. Such a result is only to be expected. The fact that this group's performance has apparently not been damaged is nothing to be proud of considering the vast amounts of money spent on reorganising the educational system over the past thirty years. Almost certainly the attitudes and potential of a considerable proportion of this group *have* been seriously damaged.

The second group is the largest, probably around fifty per cent, and contains people of around average intelligence. Some do very well because they work hard and have a lot of home support and encouragement. Most largely drift along neither particularly interested nor disinterested in school, but prepared to follow the path of least resistance. School may or may not be an important part of their life, but other interests such as fashion, music, sport, relationships (i.e. girls/boys) are almost certainly of greater interest. The less able members might well not even be entered in any academic subjects, apart from English and mathematics, in GCSE examinations and will get poor grades anyhow.

The third group consists of the very academically inadequate. The most likely reason for this is simply low intelligence and, like high intelligence, this can be combined with a great range of other characteristics. But nevertheless

the actual intellectual limit of the members of this group is reached fairly early in schooling, by age eleven to twelve, and in secondary school actual academic work can only be either remedying omissions from primary school (often considerable) or doing essentialy the same things in different ways in the hope that some useful knowledge will be retained somehow. But low intelligence is not the same as complete stupidity and these pupils know their own limitations quite well, and are not taken in by 'Edspeak' such as 'learning difficulties', 'socially disadvantaged', 'remedial group', etc.

Depending on character, and the way they are treated, individual reactions can be anything from quiet acceptance and efforts to please as far as possible to complete rebellion and lack of cooperation. The most lurid statistics of illiteracy, and anecdotal evidence of indiscipline, refer very largely to members of this group. The fact is, of course, that school is no place for such people certainly not past the age of twelve or so.

Away from school individuals can sometimes display considerable talents for specialised activities. Probably everybody knows of an adult of limited academic achievement who can nevertheless outperform supposedly clever people on something such as working out betting odds or remembering historic dates. Much the same can occur with children but such abilities are not valued in the school system. This is one cause of resentment - being asked to perform tasks beyond their capability for no very obviously adequate reason, yet having the talents they do possess ignored or even disparaged (e.g. a near encyclopedic knowledge of football or pop music). If two or more such individuals are together in a 'mixed ability' group the temptation for them to achieve some sort of notability, and relief of boredom, by being disruptive is very great. The result is stressed teachers and a marked slowing in the rate of learning of members of the first two groups.

EFFECTIVE REFORM

The most useful immediate reform for state education would be a rapid reduction in the school leaving age. Quite a large proportion of children of all three groups resent being compelled to attend school. For the more intelligent the resentment is often based on their interpretation of principle, but for the others it is because of spending too much time in a childish and basically authoritarian environment and the loss of opportunity to work and make money.

There is a glaring inconsistency in any attempted justification of compulsory schooling to any pupil who finds it irksome. It is a poor alternative to his own ideas about making progress, particularly as a consumer. Education is supposed to get you a 'better job' - eventually. But why not get a job now, if possible? Because it would be a dead end job; for better ones you need 'qualifications'. But the ones in the less able group are never going to get any worthwhile qualifications and they know it. Any 'universal' qualification that anybody can obtain is of no value, of course, and even the most limited academics know that. So their regard for the economic usefulness of education, so far as they are concerned, is effectively zero. Much the same applies to a fair percentage of the middle group.

Allowing children to leave earlier would immediately remove the main impediment to educating the ones who chose not to leave. If the release from the system were conditional on obtaining a leaving certificate which endorsed their ability to perform certain basic intellectual tasks, then the less able, in particular, would be motivated to achieve at least this standard which they certainly are not now. The standard of this certificate would be roughly that which the most able of the first group could achieve at the age of ten or eleven (but there would, of course, be a minimum age for taking this test, as with the now defunct CSE where nobody under 16 was allowed to take it).[8] Obviously higher qualifications would include this basic one so the most able would never need to take it (they would find it ridiculously simple).

The immediate aim should be a reduction in the minimum leaving age to fourteen years in two stages; first to fifteen then after an interval of one or at most two years a further reduction to fourteen.

THE OBJECTIONS

This raises two obvious questions; how to overcome the inevitable hysterical resistance and, why stop at fourteen?

The resistance would have, as usual, two sources. The apparent disturbance of vested interests, and unwillingness to admit previous errors before correcting them. The vested interests are partly political and partly professional.

The political vested interest is in the Ministry where the prestige of Ministers and officials is largely dependent on how much money they spend and how much apparent influence they have. There is no point in pretending this does not occur and the most effective way of coping with it is to recognise the tendency and resist it explicitly. As we shall see, there is a possibility of actually abolishing the Education Ministry completely which would provide an opportunity for Education to perform one of its most celebrated functions - setting a good example.

Teachers are one of the largest groups paid from taxation and their professional influence depends to a large extent on numbers. Any reduction in function implies a reduction in numbers, and Unions in particular are bound to resist any such development. However, as we shall see, the problem might well be one of redeployment rather than redundancy.

Unwillingness to admit errors is seen very clearly in the proliferation of so-called work experience schemes for pupils in the latter stages of secondary education. This does, in fact, interrupt what purely academic instruction there is particularly for the most able group. It also imposes on the goodwill of local employers which could possibly be used more productively in other ways.

Anybody actually within education knows that the real purpose of 'work experience' or 'job shadowing' is to find some way of filling in the time for the less able which they can be persuaded to believe is beneficial and not quite as boring as lessons. In the case of the most able it has the advantage of actually using up some teaching time so there is less need to slow them down with other time wasting.

The best sort of work experience is, of course, work. If those pupils who wanted to were allowed to leave and get a job the situation would be improved for everybody.

As indicated before, schools would become much easier to manage, and their function of instructing those pupils remaining voluntarily would be much more productive. Perhaps more important would be the effect on those pupils who decided to leave.

ADVANTAGES FOR LEAVERS

There is no doubt that the leavers would contain a larger proportion of pupils from families in the so-called lower socio- economic groups than was the case for those who remained at school. This is entirely appropriate. In the first place such families are almost certainly much more in need of money - their own earned money, not handouts - than they are of 'culture' or education beyond the fundamentals. In the second, and possibly more important case, children from these families often need economic significance to establish a position of respect for themselves in the family. They know they are an economic burden on hard pressed parents whether they are specifically told so or not (and quite a lot of them are told so). Lack of prestige consumer goods and experiences is a much more potent source of family tension, and ultimate breakup, than any lack of academic achievement.

So one effect would be an improvement in family relationships in underprivileged sections of society as well as some increase in their economic prosperity. Another would probably be a diminution in crime and vandalism. Most of this is committed by people (mostly boys) between fifteen and twenty years old and the reason for this is largely boredom and economic frustration. This is in no small measure contributed to by quite inappropriate habits developed by underachieving school pupils between the ages of fourteen and sixteen. During this time, in the present circumstances, the academic 'failures' realise that they are not highly regarded by the system and that the supposed benefits of it do not apply to them. Some adopt a resigned attitude, like doing time in jail. Others get amusement by in effect challenging the system, often by truancy; more often by a tacit challenge: "make me do it or make it interesting enough for me to want to". This is, of course, impossible in spite of textbooks that look like comics, computer games, and 'work experience'. The result is usually a very inappropriate attitude to what is perceived as 'authority' and this is quite likely to transfer to any future employer.

Thirdly there is the economic effect. The three basic necessities for economic activity are traditionally taken to be land, capital, and labour. How they are used is critical, of course, as well as their quantity. But potentially at least the more there is of any of them, the better. So an increase in available labour should produce an increase in GDP. This is also obvious because a considerable number of people would change from consuming taxpayers' money to earning it.

PRACTICAL POLITICS

Economics would almost certainly determine the political practicability of reducing the school leaving age. Now (mid 1991), with unemployment rising rapidly, any proposal to increase labour supply would be regarded very unfavourably to say the least! But the situation will change in due course and that is when the opportunity should be taken. There is a projected demographic shortage of young people in the work force so the release of fifteen then fourteen year olds would help correct this. An immediate effect would be to provide employers with the incentive and the opportunity to promote, and presumably train, their present young employees because their places could be taken by the new school leavers.

The next economic recovery must be used to make two rapid reductions in the compulsory school leaving age to fourteen. This trend should be continued if possible, but it is likely that there would have to be a pause for a few years at this level for the following reasons.

Firstly rapid change is difficult to absorb institutionally and managerially. This has been observed with the introduction of so-called reforms over the last few years. Reduction in the leaving age would also cause changes in the labour market which would probably need time to settle before further strains were imposed.

Secondly economic expansion rarely lasts longer than three or four years, so there would be resistance to increasing the labour force further on the usual economic grounds in due course.

Thirdly there is the general principle that it is unwise and even intellectually presumptious to be too prescriptive before the full effects of major changes have been seen. For instance it is at least conceivable that the development of creche facilities in order to facilitate mothers' working would have gone so far as to be nearly universal, and for this to include serious organised instruction for young children. Obviously infant and junior teachers have much in common with working mothers in other jobs and it is possible that presently unforeseen cooperation between what parents want and what teachers are prepared to provide will develop. At least the absurdity of teachers advising parents *not* to instruct their own children in elementary reading and numeracy could be abandoned. It is therefore at least a serious possibility that after lowering the school leaving age the next most appropriate step would be to start raising the school starting age whilst the reduction in leaving age was being economically and socially digested.

The reduction in the school leaving age would present the opportunity for a radical reassessment of the curriculum. Unfortunately this has recently been attempted and the National Curriculum produced at the cost of much upheaval. The trouble is that there is clearly still the influence of supposed higher insight into what is good for everybody to know. The actual effect of this is to reduce useful learning as we can see by considering specific subjects.

ENGLISH

Any language serves several purposes. The transfer of information, the expression of emotion, analysis in the sense of reason or logic, and a means of expressing creative or original ideas which might be anything from a new scientific or philosophical theory to complete fantasy.

The only functions which need teaching in the sense of organised instruction are those of information transfer and clear thought. Both require good knowledge of grammatical structure and the precise meaning of words if confusion and misunderstanding are to be avoided. Unfortunately these aspects are extensively neglected in favour of the literary and supposedly creative functions.

The precise use of language for communication and analysis does not come naturally. It requires teaching and practice over quite a long period. Aristotle is popularly credited with the first systematic attempt to use language for analysis and there has been a lot of development since. This can be simplified for practical applications; and contemporary statements and writings provide numerous examples on which to practice. If the desire to improve the experience and prospects of the underprivileged were really taken seriously this would be the first priority, because the prime cause of the *apparent* inheritance of underprivilege is the *real* inheritance of inadequate language ability. The result is poor communication, sloppy thinking, and susceptibility to manipulation by irrational influences.

One of the basic discoveries in the sociology of education is that so-called middle class children have significant language advantages as compared with so-called working class (or sometimes 'disadvantaged') children as a direct result of their home and family experience. They are likely to be spoken to in fairly structured language such as "Please pass the salt, Jeremy dear" or "You'd better go to your room, Fiona, daddy's drunk again", whereas the underprivileged are more likely to experience language such as, "Gimme that there" or "Gerrout at way, can't you".

But instead of seeking to build on such advantages in the case of fortunate children, and compensate for misfortune in the case of the underprivileged, there has long been a fashion for actually encouraging sloppiness in language and undervaluing precision on the grounds of supporting 'cultural identity' as opposed to 'elitism'. This is not only a complete waste of time and money but a grave disservice to the children.

Some culture is worth preserving perhaps, but quite a lot isn't. In any case the function of education is the transfer of knowledge not social engineering. So far as English language is concerned there is plenty to do in teaching accuracy in the use of it for communication and analysis. For instance, a simple formula for organising thought which can be used as guidance for writing about a lot of topics is: What is it? What does it do? What is it's future? This can be applied to a wide range of subjects from simple objects such as a knife to complicated ideas such as democracy or justice. Writing or talking according to some such pattern (there are others, of course) encourages clear thought, and is much more useful than supposedly creative writing.

In fact there are a good many reasons for not teaching literature, as distinct from language, at all. In the first place attitudes to various examples of literature, and the factors considered important to its appreciation, are hardly matters of undisputed fact. They are largely a matter of fashion - in the case of teachers, usually the fashion that prevailed when they themselves were at university and consequently anything up to thirty years behind the contemporary one. Secondly, a lot of literature worth studying is simply not suitable for young people because they have not experienced the circumstances referred to in it. So it is not of much intrinsic interest (except perhaps the sexy bits, if any, which are good for a giggle!). Thirdly if it *is* intrinsically interesting to children, then there is nothing to stop them reading the books on their own initiative.

This would almost certainly greatly improve the genuine appreciation of literature. It is surely one of the many great ironies of education that advice on passing literature examinations invariably severely warns the candidate that his/her enjoyment or otherwise is beside the point. It is so-called understanding that matters, and the ability to quote from the text - that is to say regurgitating the currently approved view and showing evidence of at least one careful reading.

Fourthly the literature actually studied is often the sort that is effectively, if not actually intentionally, subversive to commercial/industrial requirements. In fact this must apply to just about any literature which explicitly or implicitly adopts an attitude to 'society'. Literary attitudes are almost inevitably some version of tribal morality because literature with social significance (as distinct from fantasy, crime, or adventure tales[9]) explores strained individual relationships of some sort and the subtleties of market mechanisms or commercial creativity are hardly suitable vehicles for such explorations. So we end up with some rehash of the Dickens/Bernard Shaw/D. H. Lawrence attitudes. This is that resources are in some sense naturally communal, and that instant feelings and emotional reactions are a reliable guide for important decisions.[10]

So if a study of literature suggests anything of a cultural view of life or society it is almost certainly an undesirable one. The same applies to attitudes to literature itself. Those who continue to have some serious interest in it often do so for very mixed motives. That it is a fairly easy way to get a university degree is quite usual, and this then involves even deeper immersion into criticism rather than enjoyment.

For the majority, the reaction when study is no longer obligatory is more likely to be one of relief at not having to do something boring, with a consequent long-lasting aversion to any print between hard covers.

A few do escape either fate. They read what interests them on their own initiative. Some join literary societies or form writers groups to experiment with literature of their own and no doubt develop a much more genuinely educated appreciation of literature than they could achieve from gratuitous instruction reluctantly endured. If literature is to be studied at all then this is surely the way to do it. Anybody interested can start at any age. Literary groups are now almost exclusively made up of mature adults, but that is only because it can take several decades for the effect of school instruction to wear off. If the subject were dropped from school completely, genuine interest in it would develop a lot earlier.

Much the same applies to drama. Whilst some children might like the opportunities for 'self expression' and attention seeking that drama provides, quite a lot are either not at all interested or positively appalled at the likely prospect of making fools of themselves. In fact there are plenty of opportunities for participating in drama outside school, and with better instruction. Besides amateur dramatics, there are awareness courses, usually associated with some commercial theatre.[11] As with literary groups their present attendance is limited because so many people are under the impression that they have already been informed of anything that could be interesting about drama from school studies.

MATHEMATICS

It must be admitted that it is apparently *possible* to lead a fairly interesting and satisfactory life in total ignorance of

mathematics beyond simple number manipulation. Millions of people evidently manage it and some of them even pretend to be proud, or at least not ashamed, of their ignorance.

But their world must be a rather peculiar one. They are surrounded by what are effectively mysteries and this must be rather disturbing. More significantly, a very important area where critical judgement needs to be applied has to be surrendered to experts of one sort or another, often effectively self-appointed. Consequently a lot of people are easily taken in by bogus statistics, selective use of proportion instead of actual numerical values and vice versa, and grandiose schemes devoid of any cost calculations. Presumably nobody is very happy to be in this condition (which is why some of them react defensively by pretending that it doesn't matter).

To be adept at mathematics needs a lot of practice. The calculator we have between our ears requires programming over and over again before the instructions really stick, unlike the electronic kind. Unfortunately other parts of the brain can find this boring and want to escape from it. Consequently, when making everything interesting is supposed to be of prime importance the hard work necessary to achieve real facility is avoided and this must eventually reinforce the impression of obscurity surrounding the subject. So it is very easy to convince children that mathematics is either very boring or incomprehensible and not really important anyway. This latter impression is supported by the fact that the usefulness of mathematics is by no means obvious until it has been mastered, unlike reading or swimming, for instance. So the only way of motivating children to work at mathematics is either the 'traditional' one of browbeating and threatening from an authoritarian position, or coaxing by, in effect, appealing to the pleasures of mental exercise and solving puzzles (analogous to solving crosswords perhaps which is also 'useless' but can be interesting).

This device can work quite well for the most able twenty five to thirty per cent but not for the others. They are not likely to require mathematics, apart from arithmetic, in later life and there is really no benefit from burdening them with much else mathematical - with one exception.

In real life the most important phenomenon for which mathematics is critically relevant is compound interest. As might be expected, it is almost entirely ignored in all mathematical syllabuses. This could be partly for historical reasons because actual calculation of compound interest beyond two or three years is tedious and complicated if restricted to only pencil and paper, even with the aid of log tables. But the availability of pocket calculators with built in mathematical functions, and micro computers, has changed the situation dramatically. The effects of changing rates over various periods can be demonstrated very easily, particularly by using the graphical facilities of the computer. Also the compound interest formula illustrates basic algebraic operations. Transforming it for other purposes, such as demonstrating the effect of inflation on capital, provides an example of algebraic manipulation which is evidently useful.

For the more able pupils the formula can be developed to illustrate growth and decay, birth and death rates, atomic disintegration, and exponential functions in general, leading to theory of logarithms (needed for understanding decibels and pH values in science, for instance, though not for calculation).

In practice, of course, a knowledge of compound interest which had really sunk in would make personal debt and government inflationary policies much harder to justify, whilst savings and financially prudent policies would be correspondingly more acceptable.

These considerations are only about the elementary practical aspects of mathematics. If we were seriously thinking about the 'opening windows' aspect of education there would be more to it than that. The same applies to science, and it is appropriate to consider this aspect of the two fields together.

SCIENCE

As with mathematics, it is quite possible to get through life with very little scientific knowledge. People who do so are inevitably condemned to stagger along surrounded by mechanical and electronic mysteries and, even more seriously, are possible victims of pseudo-scientific notions, particularly any which suggest either imminent global disaster or instant simple solutions to serious problems as well as the ubiquitous health scares and supposed miracle cures.

The defence against this misfortune is not an increased burden of supposedly scientific facts in school courses. For anybody interested in such details there is plenty of information available from other sources such as bookshops, libraries, and of course, television. What is needed is the ability to understand and interpret such information which depends primarily on a thorough understanding of basic principles. Laws of motion, conservation principles of mass and energy, elementary properties of heat transfer, and electricity, cover a large proportion of everyday situations.

In fact 'science' has really been effectively hijacked and emasculated. What passes for science is a fairly loosely assembled collection of facts discovered by scientists and which are reasonably considered as basic knowledge for working scientists. This is what is required in examinations for the most able twenty five per cent or so of the pupils, but for the others science is a watered down version with the more obscure topics left out and some supposedly interesting ones emphasised.

Much more importantly there are highly significant ideas that both science and mathematics can illustrate very clearly. One is that so-called common sense is often *wrong*, and another is that the significance of an idea has nothing whatever to do with the character of individuals associated with it.

The reason why common sense is often wrong is because its conclusions are often based on a very limited set of observations. It is, for instance, quite sensible for any individual to conclude that the earth is flat and that the sun moves round it. Only by making detailed observations and measurements that are not strictly necessary for day to day existence can such 'obvious' ideas be questioned. The results can be very far reaching when it is found that previously cherished notions are not sustainable in the light of all the relevant evidence. And the ideas which must replace these cherished notions can be very disturbing.

Actually performing the necessary observations involves both PI and SM skills, the PI being the ability to generate ideas and solutions to problems, and the SM the ability to make appropriate observations, usually with the aid of specialised instruments.

For school purposes the SM abilities do not need to be highly developed. Techniques of making accurate observations with simple instruments such as rulers, meters, and scales together with sources of error and how to allow for them are sufficient. The more advanced techniques can be learned by those who specialise in science. Using such instruments can be learned from practising the standard experimental technique of making a series of observations then getting them to fit a straight line graph from which it is possible to discover the connection between them. That is, in effect, the basic method which must be used for most research.

But it is the PI part of science that is most seriously neglected and major opportunities for the 'opening windows' function to be exercised are missed. The scientific method of making careful observations, constructing some theory to explain any systematic connection between them, testing the theory by further observations, and then improving the theory, can be applied to anything from an enquiry into the Nature of the Universe to improving the quality and marketing of fish fingers.

Unfortunately the implied attitude in school science is much nearer fish finger improvement than the Nature of the Universe. This could be because the fish finger situation is more directly relevant to the balance of payments or the immediate satisfaction of voters, but there is also the suspicion that the past, and possible future, revolutionary nature of scientific discoveries is not considered desirable knowledge because of its possible destabilising effect on ideas which, though popular, are really superstitions. Hence the sanitised and emasculated version of science which gets into GCSE syllabuses and examinations.

Three examples of scientific developments the broad outlines of which should be general knowledge are for instance:

(i) the establishment of classical mechanics in place of the 'common sense' belief that, left to themselves, objects will come to rest and that the sun, rather than the earth, was the centre of the solar system.

(ii) the emergence of species by natural selection and evolution rather than creation. In biology syllabuses natural selection is usually mentioned as a possible explanation of variation. This effective playing down looks suspiciously like a compromise with religious fundamentalists. For school purposes natural selection should be the basis of the syllabus with the details of individual plant and animal species studied primarily to illustrate its operation.

(iii) the residual fundamental difficulties with classical mechanics which were resolved by relativity, including the part played by purely theoretical mathematical considerations in developing non-euclidean geometry.[12]

Any satisfactory account of the above developments would necessarily require some detailed knowledge of the laws of motion and biological structures and, of course, the most able pupils could pursue other topics as well, and in as much depth as they could cope with, particularly atomic theory and chemistry.

Scientists, and mathematicians of course, can vary in personal characteristics just as much as members of any other occupations. The literary stereotypes are again unfortunate and inaccurate. So far as their work is concerned, the personal characteristics are of no consequence because what matters is whether observations are reproducible and theories make verifiable predictions.

The general significance of this it to emphasise that it is not only possible, but very desirable, to subject ideas to objective testing. Their association with charismatic or otherwise admired individuals is purely coincidental and has nothing to do with whatever 'truth' is.

OTHER SUBJECTS

There is no real justification for teaching any other areas of knowledge as 'subjects', before the revised leaving age of fourteen.[13] The reason most subjects are in the curriculum is partly time filling, because of the child minding aspect, partly to employ teachers of these subjects (this has become a self perpetuating roundabout), partly simply tradition and imitating public schools, and partly for supposed, but mistaken, 'cultural' benefits.

Literature and drama have already been mentioned and much the same considerations apply to art and music. There is plenty of activity devoted to these topics by interested and enthusiastic people outside the school system and it is to these that children or their parents should look for facilities and instruction.

History is particularly interesting. There has lately been renewed concern from politicians and others in how it should be taught and what should be included in it. The disagreements have largely been about how history should be used as a means of opinion formation or indoctrination. As an example of glorious nationalism, the struggle against repression by the working class, an exercise in empathy and imagination, or an aid to understanding current problems.

But out of school it is almost impossible to avoid history. Every crisis usually brings out several instant historical explanations of why it is happening. There are innumerable studies of historical developments from highly academic to popular. Historical novels, often carefully researched, and even comedy such as *Blackadder* and *Up Pompeii* no doubt stimulate interest in genuine history, probably more effectively than school empathy exercises or trails round historical monuments (often to the irritation of interested adult visitors). Historical knowledge, and its interpretation, can and should be left for individuals to acquire as and when they decide they want to do so, not foisted on them, at an impressionable age, together with ready-made attitudes to it of one kind or another.

Geography used to be largely about the distribution and structure of features of the earth's surface, together with its effect on human life, particularly economic. This is quite useful knowledge but again there is no difficulty in the way of anybody acquiring it on their own initiative. In fact what now passes for school geography has been extensively infiltrated and corrupted by notions of third world exploitation and simplistic solutions to such problems.

The time-filling function of quite a lot of choices offered in secondary schools to fifteen and sixteen year olds can be seen in the names. Typical are Rural Science, Guidance, Design and Realisation, Child care, Leisure, Graphic Communication, Individual Studies (a euphemism for remedial teaching), Textiles, World Studies. Much of the content is innocuous but hardly so essential that it has to be financed out of taxation when it is all available from other sources. But a significant proportion clearly bears the stamp of the mostly collectivist attitudes which find their way into environmentalism, equal opportunities (with no provisions for deciding when equality has actually been achieved), and 'health education'.

Modern Languages are very problematical. On one hand it is certainly true that children are psychologically capable of picking up languages very easily. But school lessons are hardly the most suitable method - at most about thirty minutes per day interrupted by weekends and holidays. Any person (child or adult) could learn as much of another language in a few weeks intensive course as they learn in the same number of years of school instruction. Perhaps the most useful development would be to revert to teaching Latin for the brighter pupils. Apart from any 'cultural' value this would be a considerable aid to future learning of just about any other European language. Alternatively an invented language such as esperanto could be seriously promoted internationally. After all, the main difficulty with living languages is that they tend to degenerate into regional variations, which has certainly happened with English and Spanish, so there is a lot to be said for either a dead or invented language for purposes of accurate communication. Nevertheless the idea of teaching a foreign language to every pupil is absurd. It would be overambitious to expect two or three coherent sentences from the low ability pupils and, for them, language lessons would degenerate into lessons about the people and countries associated with the language, which is exactly what happens now for a lot of supposedly foreign language teaching.

SCHOOLS AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

The reduction of the leaving age to fourteen would automatically eliminate a lot of time filling and time wasting courses. The children who stay on after fourteen could study separate subjects for a sixteen-plus examination similar to the now defunct O level. This, as an immediate aim, would minimise the disturbance caused by the adjustment.

Post 16 education is at present educationally and administratively overcomplicated. As the students staying on would be academic and presumably seriously considering polytechnic or university studies, then these institutions should take over post-sixteen education. This should ensure suitable continuity through the equivalent of A levels or HNC to higher diplomas or degrees.

Primary education could be left very much as it is for the time being. There has already been a lot of upheaval and reorganisation stimulated by demand for tangible results measured by some sort of objective tests and this needs a few years to settle down.

So far as secondary schools are concerned the retreat from compulsory overloaded 'education' - or low level indoctrination - should be organised in definite stages to minimise staff disturbance and facilitate social adjustment. It is perhaps important to recognise that 'going to school' has now, after about a hundred and fifty years, become accepted as somehow a necessary part of early life, and its sudden ending would quite likely produce reactions analogous to social 'withdrawal symptoms' from a drug which had some pleasant as well as unpleasant effects.[14]

The first phase would simply be to hire some specialist staff from outside agencies to carry on school lessons on a contract basis instead of employing full-time teachers. PE staff from local games clubs and/or 'health clubs' would be the most likely first choice. The individuals would probably be the same but they would be employed by these other agencies instead of schools or local authorities. Consequently they would find their work much more interesting because they would have access to adults as part of their non-school work and possibly even professional athletes. Also career possibilities in the general leisure industry instead of only in education.

Similarly for Art, Music, Literature, Drama and Dance in due course. It is in the interest of businesses such as Publishers, Theatres, Concert promoters, and Art galleries to promote their activities. They could expand their workforces which would be partly paid for by school contract fees, but with the individuals, who would almost all be exteachers of course, also employed on other promotional activities. As mentioned before, publishers' editors and theatre managers/directors are often prepared to lecture and run courses for adult interest groups, and should be more than willing to extend their activities to similarly *interested* young people - their future customers.

The next stage is to sell off the school halls (often with stage and lighting facilities used once or twice a year at most), playing fields, and gymnasia (also often expensively equipped but underused) to the interests supplying the hired staff. Such facilities could then be used more widely for adults as well as children, with the possibility of a large measure of family participation in sport/cultural activities, and the removal of maintenance and replacement costs of such facilities from the educational system.

The compulsory school day could then be reduced to mornings only and the money saved used to finance culture/sport vouchers which could be used partly to pay for use of the now completely privatised sport/literary/artistic facilities.

So why keep a compulsory element at all? Not necessarily in the long run but that depends on unpredictable developments. The most immediate urgent requirement is to produce at least one generation of literate and numerate parents, capable of thinking for themselves rather than merely absorbing fashions and images. This is the primary requirement to break the cycle of inherited intellectual/cultural disadvantage which has been at least implicitly promised at every injection of 'increased resources' but never anywhere near achieved.

An essential step towards this is to change the direction of expert, political, and public expectation away from reliance on schemes to pump more and more supposedly important knowledge into pupils who have totally inadequate basic intellectual skills, and towards the sound development of such skills. This must be combined with the confidence to allow pupils to use their own initiative in utilising them.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

This applies particularly to vocational education which has grown in a haphazard fashion, geared mostly to political requirements to massage the unemployment figures whilst at the same time pretending to alleviate individual problems. A vocational qualification or skill is an asset for both the worker and his/her employer which is supposed to make the worker more employable and better paid and enable the employer to increase output and, presumably, profits. It follows that the people who benefit from the asset should pay for it, not the taxpayer.

In schools vocational courses were introduced to persuade reluctant attenders that some of the time at least was 'useful'. Handicrafts and domestic science were upgraded to, theoretically, saleable qualifications such as joinery, metalwork, or catering skills. These activities are developed in post-sixteen educational institutions together with some others such as hairdressing, motor mechanics, office skills, building work, and so on.

The result is that both workers and employers are encouraged to believe that they can get something of value to them at the taxpayers' expense. Neither, of course, is at all satisfied. The only appropriate training system is one set up by employers, or institutions directly responsible to them, who know what sort of skills are required. This training should be financed by the beneficiaries. Trainees could do this directly in theory, but in practice the only viable system is for them to contribute to their training by being paid much less than a qualified person. This was the system before Unions demanded, and employers were foolish enough to agree, that young and unskilled workers were paid about eighty per cent of skilled workers remuneration. This absurdity has to be corrected if proper vocational training is to be established. It is certainly not a suitable function for schools, but a supply of fifteen and sixteen year old workers would make appropriate pay rates easier to establish and the resulting differential would motivate these workers to undertake proper vocational training.

DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOLS

What the actual effect of such developments would be in practice is really impossible to predict (and any detailed attempt would be presumptious). But it is possible to imagine two 'extremes' for the purpose of being prepared for a variety of possibilities.

(A) Technological development eventually enables every home to be equipped with large screen high definition television, fax terminals, and extensive computer facilities linked into a world-wide network. In addition to so-called entertainment, shopping, and general information, wide-ranging educational schemes could then be delivered, individually tailored for each pupil. Also testing, with the results, and advice based on the results, faxed back in seconds. Consequently schools (whose only real justification is for organising group instruction) would be defunct except for facilities such as practical science.

(B) As a result of the developments described above for effectively privatising a large part of what now passes as education, schools become 'social centres' with a good deal of family and/or group participation in sport, drama, creative writing, music, art, and so on. Teaching of basic literacy and numeracy continues in the mornings with the teachers going on to the other activities afterwards. It is likely that such facilities could be financially self-sufficient. Perhaps the formal teaching would need subsidising, or perhaps the costs would be met from general charges on the grounds that the pupils were a future 'investment' and parents still required the child minding function.

It might seem that the introduction of schools' control of their own budgets would make such possible changes easier to achieve than under the present system of Local Authority control, with its inevitable bureaucracy and vested interests, but this is hardly likely. For one thing any money saved would not be of tangible benefit to the parents of children attending the school which saved it. The new arrangements are directed to spending money 'more efficiently' which does not, of course, include cutting out large chunks of so-called education completely.

Developments such as those indicated above would need strong political encouragement backed by the electorate who have to be first made aware of the unavoidable inadequacies of state education.

EXAMINATIONS AND EXAMINATION BOARDS

There is now a vast range of examination subjects, and variations on subjects. Several bodies have been issuing certificates of standards reached in examinations for quite a long time. The Royal Society of Arts used to be the main body for endorsing mostly SM skills relevant to business such as typing and other office functions. Professional bodies such as the Royal College of Physicians, Inns of Court, Engineers' Institutes and various sport or interest groups, such as the Royal Yachting Association, have for a long time issued qualifications to establish standards in their field of interest. A lot of these are, in effect, duplicated by State educational interests, particularly the examination boards for GCSE and A level and University degrees. There is no real objective justification for this and a lot of economy of both cost and effort in setting and marking papers would result from unifying the system.

Equal status for Universities and Polytechnics would then be achieved because they would all be, in effect, University colleges preparing students for the same external examinations. The independent professional associations and/or interest groups setting and marking examinations would have to be self-supporting by examination fees and would be much more sensitive to what qualifications were required, and at what standard, than is the case under the present arrangements.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS[15]

Education expenditure accounts for about 4.6% of GNP. In approximate figures which are accurate enough for easy assimilation, primary schools account for £5.5 billion (5.5×10^9), secondary schools £6.6 billion, and the total, including Universities, special schools, etc. £20 billion. There are about 24,300 Primary schools, 4,900 Secondary schools, 46 Universities, 4.7 million Primary pupils, 3.55 million Secondary pupils, 213,000 Primary teachers, 240,000 Secondary teachers, giving a primary school pupil/teacher ratio of 22 and a secondary one of 15, and about 190 children on average in primary schools and 725 on average in secondary schools. So primary schools each cost on average about one quarter of a million pounds per year to run and

secondary schools about one and one third million pounds. Typically about 65-70% of cost is teachers' salaries.

A simple *pro rata* calculation on reducing the school leaving age to 14, and assuming half pupils do in fact stay on, gives a saving of about £1.3 billion per year and raising the starting age by one year about £900,000. Reducing the Secondary school day to mornings only by eliminating superfluous courses would save a further £2.6 billion gross, but, initially at least, most of this might be required for vouchers or some other way of financing independently provided alternatives for such reform to be politically acceptable.

However, there are further possible economies which are not immediately quantifiable. The present educational system has generated a vast army of hangers-on - or 'infrastructure' as it is technically known. Such functions as enlarged personnel services in Local Authorities, ancillary staff such as cleaners, secretaries, caretakers, and the prodigious consumers of time and paper who attend conferences and meetings of various sorts to consider problems of organisation, curriculum, and management which expand much faster than recognisable tangible results (Parkinson's Law). Contraction should result in a marked reduction or even total elimination of most of these activities.

There is even some prospect of Education seriously fulfilling one of its most celebrated secondary functions namely, setting a good example. Perhaps the Ministry of Education and the corresponding Local Authority departments could be eliminated. The functions would be taken over by outside bodies, as indicated, so far as they were connected with education and examinations. If all schools (or whatever had replaced them) were locally managed they could be financed or subsidised directly from the Treasury who could also distribute any vouchers or similar individual entitlements through the inland revenue system.

So a whole Ministry might be eliminated, at the cost of a slight increase in Treasury functions, and with it several MP's released from Ministerial responsibilities to devote more time to their constituents and families, and possibly more accurately reflect their 'consciences' in Parliamentary debates and votes.

FOOTNOTES

1. For the time being 'knowledge' can be taken as including 'belief', but they are certainly not always interchangeable!
2. This is accepting the popular view that compulsory state education has in fact been responsible for dramatic general improvement. It is the belief that matters here, not particularly the truth. For an alternative view see Max O'Connor, *State Intervention and Nineteenth Century Education*, Educational Notes No. 3, Libertarian Alliance, London, 1986; and Stephen Davies, *The Private Supply of 'Public Goods' in Nineteenth Century Britain*, Historical Notes No. 3, Libertarian Alliance, London, 1988.
3. The selection of classes according to ability instead of just lumping together as many children as possible for one teacher to look after is generally attributed to the De La Salle Brothers, a teaching Order of Roman Catholic monks. The modern version of the older system is called 'mixed ability teaching'.
4. This applies to virtually all the 'great' public schools, and also to many of the older grammar schools - 'grammar' being derived from teaching Latin and the Litany as distinct from Choir schools.
5. Report of the Parliamentary Committee on the Education of the Lower Orders in the Metropolis and Beyond, 3rd June 1818.
6. Introduced originally in the 1944 Act for the 'political' purpose of integrating Church schools into the State system but still, through the 1988 Act, maintained even though the original excuse is no longer valid.
7. Report of the Central Advisory Council for Education (England) entitled *15 to 18* (The Crowther Report) 1959. Also *Early Leaving*, 1954.
8. This is not a contradiction to the obvious uselessness of a universal qualification because it is not a competitive qualification - more honestly a bribe to be released from the system, an 'achievement' similar to a 'right of passage' to adulthood and employment, and a means of assuring employers and post school trainers that school leavers had certain known skills and knowledge (at present the only safe assumption is that they know virtually nothing).
9. This is not to say that tales of this sort are completely neutral. Though we hear a lot about racial and sexual 'stereotypes' they are certainly not the only ones or even the most invidious. There is a long tradition of goodies and baddies which changes with time and fashion. Fairly recently baddies were Communists and goodies were Western Government agents. Before that baddies were Germans. Now Nazis and Communists are disappearing fast into history, new ones are needed. Drug barons are fairly obvious candidates for further uprating in the demonic heirarchy, and perhaps Moslems are due for recruitment soon. Whether the attitudes are justified or not is beside the point. They are established by non-rational means such as portraying the baddies as always kicking dogs or indulging gratuitous cruelty, and goodies as kind, generous, and happily married. This may be legitimate literary technique, but it can still introduce a high degree of prejudice even if the overt purpose is merely entertainment.
10. Anybody not familiar with performance arts might well be surprised by the number of theatres and theatre companies operating even in quite small towns as well as London and the large provincial cities.
11. One interesting literary study which is becoming popular in school examinations is *An Inspector Calls* by J. B. Priestley. This is a play in which a possibly hoax police Inspector induces anxiety and guilt in the members of a rich family because of their treatment of a distinctly underprivileged woman in about 1912, which included getting her dismissed from two jobs, 'into trouble' (or 'on the priority housing list' in modern vernacular), and eventually suicide. The conventional interpretation is that the Inspector is something of a social conscience and the family are rightly pilloried for their unimaginative and selfish behaviour. An alternative would be that even if money and success make one comfortable, they are no guarantee of sense. The members of the rich family had all accepted uncritically the conventional wisdom of the time, and this should be a warning not to let wealth and success dull the mind as it often does. However, this alternative interpretation is hardly likely to get high marks in a literature paper.
12. In Joanna North, ed., *The GCSE: An Examination*, Claridge Press, London, 1987, there is a much longer discussion of the damage done to mathematical attitudes by recent changes in syllabuses, p. 63.
13. Not teaching subjects could in fact improve both knowledge and proper understanding. Literacy has to be practiced on something, and this would give wide opportunities for both students and teachers to pursue real interests. As an example consider an ostensibly historical topic such as the great explorations (Marco Polo, Captain Cook, Columbus, and others). As a purely historical topic it has limitations of interest but as practice for literacy it could be enlarged on to include geography, technology, and political/religious attitudes. Any student who was not interested in anything historical at all could use it as an opening to consider modern space exploration as a contemporary enterprise with some similarities. In marking literacy papers the examiner only has to take account of the organisation and presentation of information and opinion, and any experienced marker can do this without knowing all the 'facts' himself.
14. As well as the National Curriculum, school can teach quite a few other lessons. Bad language, bullying, sycophancy, homosexual crushes, laziness and drifting for bright pupils, or a defensive contempt for anything resembling thought in dull ones.
15. From *Statistics of Education 1990*, Central Statistical Office.