

# The Education of Women in the United Kingdom from the 1944 Education Act to the End of the 20th Century

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**SVEUČILIŠTE U ZAGREBU**  
**UČITELJSKI FAKULTET**  
**ODSJEK ZA UČITELJSKE STUDIJE**

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**Mentor rada:**

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## Summary

The goal of this thesis is to discover and describe what education looked like for women in the United Kingdom in the period from the Education Act in 1944 to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and to identify the effects on women's education. The education system in the United Kingdom of that time and of modern time are explained and taken as the basis for understanding the events happening in education in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The 1944 Education Act is taken as a starting point for this thesis as it replaced all previous education laws. Even though its goals were benevolent, it led to even greater discrimination of women. Through all phases of education, many scientists found evidence of gender inequality, male dominance, and harassment of girls. The influence of family was strong in choosing schools and jobs, but those decisions were considered less important for girls than for boys, since the emphasis was put on women raising children and taking care of the family, and not being career women. Despite all that, women's educational achievement and success only grew from the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The 20<sup>th</sup> century ended with female dominance at almost all levels of education. However, their success and advance still showed evidence of traditional bias and gender inequality. That begs the question: How long will it take for people to free themselves of gender stereotyping in education and reach equal opportunities and treatment of everyone, not only in the United Kingdom but in the world?

Key words: education, education of women, 20<sup>th</sup> century, the United Kingdom

## Sažetak

Cilj je ovoga rada otkriti i opisati kako je izgledalo obrazovanje žena u Ujedinjenom Kraljevstvu u periodu od Zakona o obrazovanju iz 1944. godine do kraja 20. stoljeća te prepoznati utjecaje na obrazovanje žena. U radu se objašnjavaju i koriste tadašnji i sadašnji sustav obrazovanja u Ujedinjenome Kraljevstvu kao temelj za razumijevanje događaja u obrazovanju u drugoj polovici 20. stoljeća. Zakon o obrazovanju iz 1944. godine uzet je kao početna točka za ovaj rad jer je zamijenio sve prethodne zakone o obrazovanju i donio mnoge promjene. Iako su mu ciljevi bili dobronamjerni, zakon je doveo do još veće diskriminacije žena. Mnogi su znanstvenici pronašli dokaze o nejednakosti spolova, prevlasti muškaraca i uznemiravanju djevojaka u svim fazama obrazovanja. Utjecaj obitelji u odabiru škola i poslova bio je snažan, no te odluke smatralo se manje bitnima za djevojke nego za mladiće jer je naglasak za žene bio na odgajanju djece i brizi za obitelj, a ne karijeri. Unatoč svemu tome, od sredine 20. stoljeća obrazovna postignuća i uspjeh žena neprestano su rasli. 20. stoljeće završilo je prevlašću žena na gotovo svim razinama obrazovanja. Međutim, njihov uspjeh i napredak i dalje je pokazivao prisutnost tradicionalne pristranosti i nejednakosti spolova. To dovodi do pitanja: „Koliko će dugo trebati ljudima da se oslobode spolnih stereotipa u obrazovanju i da se dosegnu jednake mogućnosti za sve i jednako postupanje prema svima, ne samo u Ujedinjenom Kraljevstvu nego i u svijetu?“

Ključne riječi: obrazovanje, obrazovanje žena, 20. stoljeće, Ujedinjeno Kraljevstvo

# 1. Introduction

Education has been one of the primary concerns of all societies since its appearance. Whether it has provoked disagreement and disapproval, or resulted in improvement and growth, it has always been an important part of every society. Unfortunately, the education of women has not often been given the same amount of attention as education in general, and definitely not as to the education of men. There have always been differences between women and men in numerous areas of life, and education is no exception.

At a superficial glance, the history and the culture(s) of the United Kingdom seem to be rather known to many, but specific areas, such as the education of women, are rarely discussed. My opinion is that not much is known about the above said, so I decided to explore the education of women in the United Kingdom in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The goal of this thesis is to discover and describe what education looked like for women in the United Kingdom in the period from the Education Act in 1944 to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and to identify how it affected them and their schooling.

Throughout history England has been dominant in the United Kingdom, and, out of all the countries of the United Kingdom, Wales has been attached to it the most (which is evident in many areas, the education system being one of them). As a result, most of the references used in this thesis will be referring to England and Wales, and less frequently to Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Education and its importance will be discussed in the second chapter. The education system of the United Kingdom will be analysed in the third chapter, including its phases, exams, and schools. In the fourth chapter, some of the most important changes in the education system from the Education Act (1944) will be emphasised, as well as its effect on women's education. The fifth chapter focuses on the term *gender gap*, gender inequality in different phases and aspects of education, and on the influences on women's education.

## 2. Education

One of the definitions that could describe the term “education” is that given by Encyclopedia Britannica: “Education, discipline that is concerned with methods of teaching and learning in schools or school-like environments as opposed to various nonformal and informal means of socialization” (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2020, para. 1). Hundreds of others are written in books, articles, magazines, students’ books and on the internet. Not one of them can fully cover what education is for each and every individual. People have their own experience, visions, expectations, and look at education and what it brings to them in different ways.

### 2.1. *The importance of education*

Mark K. Smith describes education as “a process of inviting truth and possibility, of encouraging and giving time to discovery” (Smith, 2020, Introduction section, para. 2). As it is stated in the latter quote, Smith sees education as a process that takes time and presumably a lot of work, and it is not shaped solely according to an education system, whoever’s it may be. The importance is put on guiding pupils and helping them in shaping their knowledge and visions. Educators help children and young people develop as students, as members of their community, as members of their society, and ultimately as human beings.

John Dewey’s view on education (Dewey, 1916, as cited in Smith, 2020) describes it as ‘a process of living and not a preparation for future living’. In his view “educators look to learning and being with others rather than acting upon them. Their task is to *educere* (related to the Greek [sic] notion of *educere*), to bring out or develop potential both in themselves and others” (Smith, 2020, Introduction section, para. 2). Such education is depicted as:

- *Deliberate and hopeful*. It is learning we set out to make happen in the belief that people can ‘be more’;
- *Informed, respectful and wise*. A process of inviting truth and possibility.
- *Grounded in a desire that at all may flourish and share in life*. It is a cooperative and inclusive activity that looks to help people to live their lives as well as they can (Dewey, 1916, as cited in Smith, 2020, Introduction section, para. 3).

The last point of Dewey’s view on education stresses a segment of education where problems appeared a long time ago, and are still present today. Those problems relate to the inequality of



women in education, which is the main topic of this thesis. Dewey (1916, as cited in Smith, 2020) states that education is an inclusive activity and should help all live their best lives and flourish. That may be the idea and what educators should aspire to, but the reality is different. Women have been treated differently during their education and they haven't had the same opportunities as men, so how is it possible for them to live their best lives and flourish in the way that men have been able to since the appearance of education itself? Many examples that prove the contradiction of Dewey's words will be visible later on in the thesis.

### 3. The education system of the United Kingdom

Modern education in the United Kingdom is compulsory for all children between the ages of five and sixteen (EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE UK, 2012). Compulsory education is free of charge, but parents have the choice of educating their children privately if they want to (O’Driscoll, 2009). The education system of the United Kingdom implies the ‘national curriculum’, as well as religious education and sex education. The national curriculum is a set of subjects and standards used by primary and secondary schools that covers what subjects are taught and the standards children should reach in each subject (GOV.UK, 2014). The term “National Curriculum” refers to England and Wales only (THE EDUCATION SYSTEMS OF ENGLAND & WALES, SCOTLAND AND NORTHERN IRELAND, 2011, Curriculum section).

In this chapter phases, exams, and schools will be analysed. The Education system of the United Kingdom can be divided into three phases – Primary education, Secondary education, and Education beyond sixteen. SATs, the Eleven Plus, GCSEs, and A levels will be discussed more thoroughly as they will be largely mentioned later on in the thesis, and they are the key to understanding certain notions (The UK national curriculum, examinations and qualifications, 2020). Schools are divided into state schools and private schools (O’Driscoll, 2009). Today’s schools will be mentioned, but the schools that were present from the 1944 Education Act to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century will be discussed in more detail.

#### 3.1. *Phases*

Compulsory schooling in the United Kingdom begins at the age of 5 (EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE UK, 2012) and is divided into Primary and Secondary education. The national curriculum is organised into blocks of years called ‘key stages’ (KS) (GOV.UK, 2014, Key stages section, para. 1). There are 4 key stages: key stage 1 (KS1), key stage 2 (KS2), key stage 3 (KS3), and key stage 4 (KS4). Primary education comprises key stages 1 and 2, and Secondary education key stages 3 and 4 (GOV.UK, 2014). Non-compulsory schooling takes place after the age of 16 and it implies Further and Higher education.

### 3.1.1. *Primary education*

Students in the United Kingdom start their education with Primary education, from the age of 5 to the age of 10 or 11. They first attend primary school that lasts for six years and is divided into key stages 1 (Year 1 and 2) and 2 (Years 3, 4, 5 and 6) (GOV.UK, 2014). Compulsory national curriculum subjects at primary school are: English, maths, science, design and technology, history, geography, art and design, music, physical education (PE), including swimming, computing, and ancient and modern foreign languages (at key stage 2) (GOV.UK, 2014, Key stage 1 and 2 section). Religious education (RE) must be provided by schools, but parents can decide whether their child will or will not attend it, completely or partially. Schools often also teach: personal, social and health education (PSHE), citizenship, modern foreign languages (at key stage 1) (GOV.UK, 2014, Key stage 1 and 2 section). The major goals of primary education are achieving basic literacy and numeracy amongst all pupils, as well as establishing foundations in science, mathematics and other subjects (EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE UK, 2012, Primary, para. 2).

### 3.1.2. *Secondary education*

Secondary education (GOV.UK, 2014) lasts for five years, from the age of 11 or 12 to the age of 15 or 16. It is divided into key stages 3 (Years 7, 8 and 9) and 4 (Years 10 and 11). At key stage 3 (GOV.UK, 2014, Key stage 3), compulsory national curriculum subjects are: English, maths, science, history, geography, modern foreign languages, design and technology, art and design, music, physical education, citizenship, and computing. Here, religious education (RE) and sex education must be included in the curriculum (Key stages in schools, 2018). Parents can again exclude their child from all or some of the lessons. Key stage 4 (GOV.UK, 2014, Key stage 4) is rather a milestone for most pupils as they work towards national qualifications – usually GCSEs. The compulsory national curriculum subjects are the ‘core’ and ‘foundation’ subjects. Core subjects are: English, maths, and science. Foundation subjects are: computing, physical education, and citizenship (GOV.UK, 2014, Key stage 4). There are areas from which schools have to offer at least one subject. Those areas are: arts, design and technology, humanities, and modern foreign languages. At key stage 4, religious education (RE) and sex education must again be provided by schools (GOV.UK, 2014).

### 3.1.3. *Education beyond sixteen*

Education after the age of 16 is non-compulsory and is called tertiary education or further education. It may be used in a general sense to cover all non-advanced courses taken after the period of compulsory education (EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE UK, 2012, Further Education, para. 1), but advanced education at university level is termed higher education (Wild-Bićanić & Crawford, 1982).

Further education (FE) includes any study after secondary education that's not part of higher education (that is, not taken as part of an undergraduate or graduate degree) (GOV.UK, 2015, Overview section, para. 1). It is primarily taught in FE colleges, work-based learning, and adult and community learning institutions (EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE UK, 2012, Further Education, para. 2). The courses similar to ones taught at schools are post-16 courses, and those similar to ones taught at higher education (HE) colleges and some universities are called sub-degree courses (EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE UK, 2012). FE colleges include General FE (GFE) and tertiary colleges, Sixth form colleges, Specialist colleges (mainly colleges of agriculture and horticulture and colleges of drama and dance) and Adult education institutes (EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE UK, 2012, Further Education, para. 3).

Higher education (HE) is, as Wild-Bićanić & Crawford (1982) put it, advanced education at university level. There are three main levels of Higher education courses: Postgraduate courses, Undergraduate courses and Other undergraduate courses (EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE UK, 2012). In order to apply for a place at a university, students need to take A levels (Advanced Levels), higher-level academic exams set by an examining board (O'Driscoll, 2009). In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, "the availability of higher education increased greatly ..., but finding a university place is still not easy" (O'Driscoll, 2009, p. 137). Students are normally selected on the basis of A-level results and interviews, but the universities decide who they will accept and nobody has the right of entry (O'Driscoll, 2009).

The phases described above may not be organised in the exact same way as they were in the period from the 1944 Education Act to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Nonetheless, their descriptions serve for better understanding of the general idea of education in the United Kingdom, both then and now, and for better placing of the information from the references that will be discussed later on in the thesis.

### 3.2. Exams

Children in English state (maintained) schools must follow the national curriculum. There are four key stages and the children are tested at the end of each key stage but only in the core subjects (The UK national curriculum, 2020, Key Stages and Tests section, para. 1). SAT`s are taken at the age of 7, 11 and 14, and GCSE`s at the age of 16 (The UK national curriculum, 2020). A levels (Advanced Levels) are taken around the age of 18 (O`Driscoll, 2009). There are also AS levels which refer to the first year of a full A level (A-levels and AS-levels, explained, 2018). Scotland is excluded from this system and has its own curriculum, examinations and examining body (The UK national curriculum, 2020, The Scottish System section, para. 1).

SAT`s (Standard Attainment Tests) are statutory and the results can either serve as feedback for the teacher on the child`s development or are reported to the DfES (Department for Education and Skills) and to parents. SAT`s taken at the age of 7 (key stage 1) test English (reading, spelling, punctuation, grammar) and maths. “There is no external marking, except occasionally for moderation, and the tests themselves tend to be fairly informal” (What Are SATs in the UK?, 2021, SATs at KS1 section, para. 1). The results are used to inform the teacher about the child`s development. The SAT`s taken at the age of 11 (key stage 2) and 14 (key stage 3) are reported to the DfES and to parents. At key stages 2 and 3, children are tested in English, maths and science. At key stage 3 they are additionally assessed by their teachers in art, citizenship, design technology, geography, history, information and communications technology (ICT), modern foreign languages (MFL), music, and physical education (PE) (The UK national curriculum, 2020). Most independent schools will assess children at 11+ or 13+ through The Common Entrance examination, and will not take part in the key stage 2 and 3 SAT`s (The UK national curriculum, 2020).

The Eleven Plus (11 Plus or 11+) is an examination taken by some school pupils in their last year of primary school to get into a grammar school of their choice (What is the 11 Plus?, n.d., para. 1). They are most commonly designed and marked by the schools themselves (The UK national curriculum, 2020, Entry to Independent Public Schools section). The examination consists of four parts: Verbal Reasoning, Non-Verbal Reasoning, Maths and English (What is the 11 Plus?, n.d., para. 4). From 1945 the Eleven Plus was obligatory for all, and children`s future in education was decided upon it. Their entry to a secondary school was based on the results of their Eleven Plus exam (Wild-Bićanić & Crawford, 1982). Both the Eleven Plus and

Grammar Schools faced a lot of criticism and were thought to be unfair towards the less academically gifted children, so in 1976 “the Labour Government gave Local Education Authorities the option to discontinue Grammar Schools in favour of a Comprehensive School which treated all children equally - without the use of an 11+ exam” (HISTORY OF THE ELEVEN PLUS, 2016, para. 3). All Grammar Schools either turned into Comprehensive Schools and Private Grammar Schools, or remained Grammar Schools (History of the 11+, 2021). The Eleven Plus is still used by many Grammar and Independent Private Schools (HISTORY OF THE ELEVEN PLUS, 2016), including those in Northern Ireland, even though the Eleven Plus was officially discontinued there in 2008 (What is the 11 Plus?, n.d.).

GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) is the qualification taken by 15- and 16-year olds to mark their graduation from the key stage 4 phase of secondary education in England, Northern Ireland and Wales (GCSE, 2021). It is a set of exams that is not compulsory and schools choose whether they will enter their pupils for examinations or not. All students are expected to take around nine subjects, but some take around 11 or even 12+ GCSE subjects (What is GCSE in England?, 2020). Compulsory subjects (What is GCSE in England?, 2020) are Maths, English Language, English Literature, Welsh (if you live in Wales), and sciences (biology, chemistry, physics – a combination of one, two or all three) (The UK national curriculum, 2020). Some schools providing GCSE in England make other subjects compulsory, such as PE (physical education), ICT (information and communication technology), and RE (religious education) (What is GCSE in England?, 2020, GCSE UK Subjects section). In Scotland the SCE (Scottish Certificate of Education) is the equivalent of the GCSE (O’Driscoll, 2009).

A levels (or Advanced Levels), as described by O’Driscoll (2009), are higher-level academic exams, taken generally by 18-year olds, that last for two years and are set by the same examining boards as the GCSE exams. They are subject-based qualifications that can lead to university, further study, training, or work. You can normally study three or more A levels ... assessed by a series of examinations (A LEVELS, 2019, para. 1). They are split into A1s and A2s (O’Driscoll, 2009) where the A2 marks the second year of A level study (The UK National Curriculum, 2020). AS levels were introduced in 1989 and refer to the first year of a full A level. Students can study a subject for a year and achieve an AS level qualification. They either take it as an additional subject only in their first year, or continue the subject into their A2 year and pursue it for the full A level qualification. All schools and colleges do not offer AS levels

since they are not legally obliged to (A-levels and AS-levels, explained, 2018). The Scottish equivalent of A levels is the SCE ‘Advanced Highers’ (O’Driscoll, 2009).

### 3.3. *Schools*

In the United Kingdom there is a well-known division of schools into state (funded) schools and private schools (O’Driscoll, 2009). State funded schools, as the name itself implies, are financed through taxes (The Education System in the UK, n.d.). Private schools are, in most cases, financed by school fees paid by parents (Independent school system in a nutshell, 2020). In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century more variety was present with types of secondary schools, therefore they will be studied more closely.

#### 3.3.1. *Schools in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century there are state schools and private schools. State schools are funded through their local authority or directly from the government (GOV.UK, 2016, Overview section, para. 2). The most common are community schools, foundation schools and voluntary schools, academies and free schools, and grammar schools. All of the mentioned, except for academies and free schools, must follow the national curriculum (GOV.UK, 2016). Private schools charge fees and are not obliged to follow the national curriculum (Ahmd, 2020). They are Independent Schools, Private schools, Public schools, Boarding schools, and Prep and Pre-prep schools. The latter are primary schools, whereas all the other ones are secondary schools. All are paid for by the students’ parents.

#### 3.3.2. *Schools in the period from the 1944 Education Act to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century*

In the period from the 1944 Education Act to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there were state schools and private schools. Wild-Bićanić & Crawford (1982, p. 197) see “the first seed of social divisiveness” in private primary schools. Even though the schools were small in number, they see it as a start of inequality that will be present in the secondary stage of education. In the area of state secondary schools there were constant changes and the system was under serious criticism. Hence, the emphasis will be put on state secondary schools. The organisation and the

changes within the system are best described by Wild-Bićanić and Crawford (1982), and are organised into periods.

From 1945 to the seventies there were “three kinds of school: grammar schools, modern schools and technical schools” (Wild-Bićanić & Crawford, 1982, p. 199). This division was the result of the 1944 Education Act, which obliged all LEAs (Local Education Authorities) to provide secondary education that will “cater for the differing abilities and aptitudes of children in its area” (Wild-Bićanić & Crawford, 1982, p. 199). Since the technical secondary schools were not as attended as the other two, and not many teachers were trained to teach technical subjects, the grammar school and the modern school came to be the two main kinds of school provided by the LEA (Wild-Bićanić & Crawford, 1982). From the sixties onwards, the dual system was under a lot of criticism. Grammar schools were considered better, so the children who got into them were seen as successful. Others, who got into modern schools, did so only as a result of having failed the Eleven Plus exam and “began their secondary schooling with a sense of failure” (Wild-Bićanić & Crawford, 1982, p. 200). Another built in inequality, as Wild-Bićanić and Crawford (1982, p. 200) explain, was the fact that “the number of grammar schools was smaller” and “the number of children going to grammar schools varied from region to region, from as low as 15% ... to as high as 40%”.

In the eighties, but starting in the late seventies, “the answer to educational inequality in Britain has been seen in the creation of a new kind of school – the *comprehensive*” (Wild-Bićanić & Crawford, 1982, p. 201). The idea was that children would automatically enter their local comprehensive after finishing primary school. Secondary schools present at that time were comprehensive schools, grammar schools, and modern schools. Those schools were financed by the LEA and attended by over 90% of children in England, Wales, and Scotland. At that time, the majority of children attended comprehensive schools – over 85% (Wild-Bićanić & Crawford, 1982).

In the late nineties, in June 1995 to be more precise, a policy document *Diversity and excellence: A new partnership for schools* proposed the replacement of all existing schools by three types of school:

- *community schools*, based on the existing county schools;
- *aided schools*, based on the existing church schools (voluntary-aided and voluntary-controlled); and



• *foundation schools*, which would ‘offer a new bridge between the powers available to secular and church schools’ (Labour Party 1995:15) (Gillard, 2018, Chapter 16: 1990-1997, Diversity and excellence: A new partnership for schools section, para. 4).

## 4. The Education Act 1944

At the time when the World War II was raging, Britain set their mind on the improvement of their education system. Social and educational demands created by the war and the demands for social reform resulted in the creation of the Education Act of 1944 (1944: Butler and the Tripartite System, 2017). This Act is taken as a starting point for the thesis due to its importance and it being a milestone in the United Kingdom's education history.

One night in March 1943, when Richard Austen Butler, the young president of the Board of Education, was visiting Winston Churchill, the then Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, ended in a signing off on what became the 1944 Education Act (Blatchford, 2014). The Act "replaced almost all previous education legislation and set the framework for the post-war education system in England and Wales" (Gillard, 2018, Chapter 9: 1939-1945, Provisions of the Act section, para. 1). A corresponding Act for Scotland was published on June 15 1945 (*1945 Education (Scotland) Act*), and for Northern Ireland on March 27 1947 (*1947 Education Act (Northern Ireland)*) (Gillard, 2018).

### 4.1. *The most important changes to the educational system of the United Kingdom*

The 1944 Education Act replaced all previous education laws (Barber, 2014) and "involved a thorough recasting of the educational system" (Britannica, 2020, Education Act of 1944 section, para. 1). Some of the Act's key points were:

- the Board of Education replaced by a minister (Ministry of Education)
- LEAs (Local Education Authorities) were strengthened and in charge of implementing the reform
- new classification of education - three progressive stages: primary, secondary, and further education
- leaving age raised to 15
- secondary education available to all (no school fees)
- the tripartite system – three types of secondary school: grammar, technical, and secondary modern schools
- church schools brought into the national system (Blatchford, 2014) (Britannica, 2020) (Barber, 2014).

A minister, who replaced the Board of Education, “was to direct and control the local education authorities, thereby assuring a more even standard of educational opportunity throughout England and Wales” (Britannica, 2020, Education Act of 1944 section, para. 1). The LEAs, which were controlled by the minister, had to develop and submit a development plan for primary and secondary education, and for further education in its area. The plans had to be approved by the minister (Britannica, 2020). However, “the curriculum, the dates of term, the length of the school day, remained under local control” (A Brief History of Education, 2006, para. 2).

The old classification of elementary and higher education was replaced by the progressive stages – primary, secondary, and further education (Britannica, 2020). Primary and secondary education were now obligatory as a consequence of school fees being abolished, and school leaving age being raised to 15, and as soon as “practicable” to 16. It was not until 1947 that the school leaving age rose to 15, and in 1972 to 16 (School Reporters, 2014). A recent study on the history of raising the school leaving age by McCulloch, Woodin, and Cowan (2014) proves it was an “achievement that has led in turn to the further expansion of post-16 education and also higher education over the past decade” (McCulloch, 2014).

The establishment of the tripartite system meant that there were three types of secondary schools available to students: “grammar schools for the academic, technical schools for those skilled with their hands and secondary modern schools for the rest” (Barber, 2014, 'New Jerusalem' section, para. 9). Students were directed to one of these schools at the age of 11 by means of selection procedures called the 11-plus (or Eleven-plus) examination (Britannica, 2020). Students who passed the 11-plus exam were able to attend a grammar school, and those who had not had to attend a technical school or a secondary modern school. Trueman explains the exam was seen as “being divisive and too labelling at an early age” (Trueman, 2015). Grammar schools were, as well, often under attack and considered elitist because students could not attend it without passing the 11-plus exam (1944: Butler and the Tripartite System, 2017). Moreover, discrimination was visible in some grammar schools as they required a higher level of academic for girls than for boys (A Brief History of Education, 2006).

Ensuring the support of the churches for his proposals was probably one of the toughest problems for Butler (Barber, 2014). He reached a deal with them where religious education would be obligatory for all and “the state would pay for their schools, including helping to repair the many inadequate buildings. Anglicans and Catholics would be able to determine the nature of the school's daily act of worship but parents could choose to opt their child out of it”

(Barber, 2014, Church schools deal section, para. 4). Gillard (2018) argues that “the failure to tackle the church school problem ... led ultimately to the scandal of religious fundamentalists being given taxpayers’ money to indoctrinate children” (Gillard, 2018, Chapter 9: 1939-1945, The dual system section, para. 4).

#### 4.2. *The effect on girls and women*

Girls and boys were educated separately in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century secondary schools. When this changed, it caused controversy, since people believed girls were not as intelligent as boys and should take different subjects (School Reporters, 2014). Furthermore, “grammar school places were largely fixed” and “difficulty of entrance to a grammar school varied according to how many children were in a particular cohort” (A Brief History of Education, 2006, para. 4). This resulted in a great discrimination against women in many areas because LEAs wanted an equal number of boys and girls in their grammar schools, and thus required a higher level of academics for girls than boys (A Brief History of Education, 2006). Another mention of women, also negative, is in the fact that working-class children, especially girls, were “more likely to leave grammar schools early for working life” (A Brief History of Education, 2006, para. 4). Even though the 1944 Education Act did not adversely affect all girls, its implementation led to many of them feeling the negative consequences of it.

## 5. Gender inequality

Opportunities, rights, and responsibilities of women and men should not depend on whether they were born female or male. When talking about gender (in)equality, the emphasis is often on females, but it is important to point out that gender (in)equality is not a women's issue, and it should engage men as well as women (European Institute for Gender Equality, n.d.). The term *gender inequality*, unfortunately, appears more often than the term *gender equality* and has been present in societies around the world for a very long time. *Gender inequality*, as defined by the European Institute for Gender Equality, is: “Legal, social and cultural situation in which sex and/or gender determine different rights and dignity for women and men, which are reflected in their unequal access to or enjoyment of rights, as well as the assumption of stereotyped social and cultural roles” (European Institute for Gender Equality, n.d., Gender inequality section). The area which has suffered a lot in terms of gender inequality in the United Kingdom is education, and that will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters.

### 5.1. Gender gap

“The attempt to place women and men on an equal footing is not new” and “until after the Second World War women in Britain actually did suffer from a number of legal and economic inequalities in relation to men” (Wild-Bićanić & Crawford, 1982, p. 231). That started changing after the War, but complete equality has not been reached to this day, neither in Britain nor in the world. It is an ongoing struggle that women face, and, according to the United Nations, “at the current rate of change, the global gender gap will not close for another 100 years” (Women and Girls – Closing the Gender Gap, 2020, para. 2). The *gender gap* is defined as “the difference between women and men as reflected in social, political, intellectual, cultural, or economic attainments or attitudes” (What is the gender gap (and why is it getting wider)?, 2017, What is the gender gap? section, para. 1). The difference between women and men in intellectual attainments or attitudes will be discussed in chapters 5.2. and 5.3.

An important step in trying to achieve equality were Married Women's Property Acts of 1870, 1882, and 1893. They were Acts after which a woman's property (other than land) was her own even after marriage. Property that was jointly acquired belonged to the husband, as did everything else before these Acts were passed. Moving forward, after the Second World War women and men were still not equally paid for doing the same job (Wild-Bićanić & Crawford,

1982). Wild-Bićanić and Crawford highlight the main problem in the social and economic section of gender differences: “Much of women’s work, and very little of men’s has tremendous value but no economic award. It is this imbalance which leads to the statistical caricature of women as worth much less than men in economic terms” (Wild-Bićanić & Crawford, 1982, p. 232, 233). Housework and maternal raising of children are not paid jobs, but they are crucial for reproducing the labour force (Wild-Bićanić & Crawford, 1982). By doing that and looking after their husband, “women form the backbone of the economy” (Wild-Bićanić & Crawford, 1982, p. 233). The “economic activity rate” of married women quadrupled between 1931 and 1971 and the result was that 41% of the labour force were women. That misleadingly showed a 2:3 ratio and looked like near sex-equality, but the situation was different. Nearly two thirds of those women were in just 10 occupations (Wild-Bićanić & Crawford, 1982). Some of the occupations were: “clerical service workers, shop assistants, cleaners, teachers, nurses and textile operatives” (Wild-Bićanić & Crawford, 1982, p. 232). That kind of concentration was not true of men and it was “precisely this tendency for men and women to take up different kinds of work which accounts for much of the lasting differential in their average pay” (Wild-Bićanić & Crawford, 1982, p. 232). It was not until recent 1975 that the Equal Pay Act and The Sex Discrimination Act made it “illegal to discriminate between men and women applying for a job on the basis of sex” (Wild-Bićanić & Crawford, 1982, p. 231). In spite of the acts, the gap between the sexes was still present. “By 1990, women earned 71 per cent of male income in manual occupations and 63 per cent in nonmanual ones ... overall figure of 68 per cent” (Pugh, 2000, p. 342). “Continuing patterns of differentiation in men’s and women’s work” are still present and the equality of pay is still something unknown (Wild-Bićanić & Crawford, 1982, p. 232).

Public, social, economic, intellectual, and other roles of women and men have changed greatly since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, O’Driscoll thinks that British people “still (often unconsciously) expect a fairly large number of differences in everyday behaviour and roles” (O’Driscoll, 2009, p. 52). Looking untidy and scruffy is still more acceptable for a man than for a woman. Showing affection and emotions is still more acceptable for a woman than for a man. But there is a number of former differences that are no longer considered mainly female or male. When analysing domestic roles, a sharp decrease in differentiation between the sexes was noticed in the last few decades (O’Driscoll, 2009). Family’s financial situation is no longer considered a man’s responsibility, and playing a full part in chores “such as changing babies’ nappies, putting the children to bed, dressing them, feeding them and helping them with

homework” is something both women and men do nowadays (O’Driscoll, 2009, p. 52). When speaking of public roles, “a large number of occupations have ceased to be associated with either men or women” (O’Driscoll, 2009, p. 52). In Europe, The United Kingdom was one of the first countries that had a woman chairperson of debate in its parliament and a woman Prime Minister (O’Driscoll, 2009).

## *5.2. Gender differences throughout the phases of education*

In growing up and developing as a person, a crucial role is played by education. Starting from nurseries, primary schools, secondary schools, and up to colleges and universities, education prepares “individuals, not yet regarded as fully ‘mature’ or ‘developed’, for their future lives as adult citizens” (Pilcher, 2002, p. 16). Pilcher (2002) emphasizes the importance of education in creating a workforce that is educated and competent, which is necessary in the modern, industrial society. People’s experience in education and their level of education affect the chances they will get in life. Because of the importance the education system has, “sociologists have examined the education system in terms of the role it plays in reproducing social inequalities” (Pilcher, 2002, p. 16). Examining different research evidence, it will be shown how the education system (re)produces gender inequalities.

In the research “the experiences of girls and women across the different levels of education and training” were examined (Pilcher, 2002, p. 16). A number of common processes that lead to the detriment of girls and women exist in all phases of education. The researches also take into consideration “the role played by other institutions in society, including family life, the media, paid employment and social policy” (Pilcher, 2002, p. 17). Research identified that women and men, or girls and boys, have different experiences of education, which affects their access to paid work later in life. “The education system is ... identified as a key institution which simultaneously produces and reinforces gender distinctions to the particular detriment of girls and women” (Pilcher, 2002, p. 17). Pilcher’s (2002) findings mainly focus on England and Wales, and recognize four processes through which educational institutions differentiate on the basis of gender. These are “bureaucratic and spatial organisation, teachers’ attitudes and actions, curriculum and teaching materials and the cultures of children and young people themselves” (Pilcher, 2002, p. 17). In addition to Pilcher’s findings, which are taken as the basis, significant information stated by Bruley, and Abercrombie, Warde et al. will be used in this chapter.

### 5.2.1. *Primary education*

In the 1970s, the underperformance of girls was noticed as boys were outperforming them across the range of educational qualifications. Feminists of the time “pointed the finger at sexism within the education system” (Bruley, 1999, p. 169). Pilcher (2002) noticed that by the time children enter formal education, they are already skilled in ‘doing gender’ based on the experience they have had so far. They are looking and behaving in ‘gender-appropriate’ ways. “The primary school environment often acts to replicate, emphasise and elaborate pre-existing gendered behaviour and expectations, rather than downplaying or challenging them” (Pilcher, 2002, p. 17).

School’s bureaucratic and spatial organisation is one of the ways in which gender differences are emphasised. Students are often divided into gender groups where there is no need for that. Some of the examples are: class registers arranged by genders, lining up by gender, dress codes where girls are discouraged from wearing trousers and shorts, areas of space in the school building ranged by gender, such as coat pegs, and separate toilet facilities. That differentiation emphasises that pupils are either girls or boys, and that it is an essentially relevant and significant difference (Delamont, 1990, as cited in Pilcher, 2002).

One of the most important adults in children’s lives are teachers. They have an enormous impact on pupils and that is why researchers studied teacher-pupil interaction and the ways gender is present within it (Pilcher, 2002). Dale Spender’s research published in 1982, (as cited in Bruley, 1999), showed that teachers, when they were observed, gave more attention to boys than girls, even though they stated to give equality of treatment. “Evidence of gender stereotyping in the classroom was overwhelming” (Bruley, 1999, p. 169). Pupils’ behaviour and how it was seen by the teachers was another testimony on gender stereotyping. In the classroom, boys were expected to be assertive and that behaviour was met with respect. However, when girls behaved in the same way, they were punished or rebuked (Bruley, 1999). That kind of gender stereotyping is also described in Clarricoates’ study of primary schools published in 1987 (Clarricoates’, 1987a, as cited in Pilcher, 2002). In her studies Clarricoates describes gendered expectations held by teachers about pupils’ aptitudes and abilities. “Boys were said to be more interesting and rewarding to teach”, even though they “require more disciplinary attention from teachers than girls” (Clarricoates, 1987a, as cited in Pilcher, 2002, p. 18). Because of that, teachers may navigate their lessons towards ‘boys’ topics’ so to interest them and keep them disciplined, and they will spend more time talking to and assisting boys during lessons. Clarricoates explains that girls’ passivity, “conscientiousness and diligence makes them “less



bothersome” and “less interesting” to the teachers who consequently turn all their energies and skills to the boys” (Clarricoates, 1987a, as cited in Pilcher, 2002, p. 18). The most worrisome finding is that even though there is evidence on girls outperforming boys at primary school level, “many teachers attribute their achievements to stereotypically feminine characteristics of conformity and acquiescence rather than real intellectual ability” (Pilcher, 2002, p. 18).

Curriculum and teaching materials, such as books, toys, games, and activities contribute to differentiation based on gender. The opportunity for offering boys and girls different subjects in primary school was probably reduced by the introduction of a core set of subjects under the National Curriculum (England and Wales) (Pilcher, 2002). Even when a taught subject is not gendered in any way, the lesson content can be presented and received in a gendered way. The example given by Clarricoates is a primary school class where students were asked by the teacher to take out their books on dinosaurs. The girls objected by saying that they are ‘always doing boys’ topics’, and the teacher responded they would study ‘houses and flowers’ later on in the term (Clarricoates, 1987a, as cited in Pilcher, 2002). Trayhum explains how contemporary topics are gendered too, one of them being computing. Those gender inequalities are indicated by “boys gaining greater access to classroom computers and dominating their use, and the extent to which teachers spend more time with boys than girls when computers are being used” (Trayhum, 1995, as cited in Pilcher, 2002, p. 19). In reading materials used in primary schools, Glenys Lobban’s research (1974, as cited in Pilcher, 2002) discovered twice as many male as female characters, and female characters presented only in domestic settings and activities. 20 years after Lobban’s research, male characters still predominate in children’s literature. “Cairns and Inglis (1989) examined history textbooks and found that only 14.8 per cent of the material dealt with women” (Pilcher, 2002, p. 19). A small-scale study by Best (1993, as cited in Pilcher, 2002) confirmed the relevance of Lobban’s findings in literature aimed at pre-school children. In the books there were twice as many male characters as female ones. 75 per cent of female characters were shown in domestic situations, whereas 81 per cent of male characters were shown outside their homes doing paid work. Those texts teach children what is normal and good in terms of gender. They “promote traditional gender stereotypes which prioritise boys and men over girls and women” (Pilcher, 2002, p. 19, 20). The implicit messages present in those reading materials are part of what is called ‘the hidden curriculum’. “The “hidden curriculum” does what the official curriculum is presumably not supposed to do; it differentiates on the basis of sex” (Clarricoates, 1987, as cited in Pilcher, 2002, p. 20).

Children are also active participants in the construction of gendered school experience. They “hold deeply stereotyped views about gender-appropriate behaviour and activities” (Pilcher, 2002, p. 20), as it was seen in the ‘dinosaur’ incident mentioned above. Research indicates that they segregate themselves by gender. For example, certain games or areas in the playground may be girls or boys ‘only’ (Pilcher, 2002). Also, they compete against each other based on gender to see which gender group is first to complete a task or get more correct answers (Delamont, 1990, as cited in Pilcher, 2002). Their cultures are so gendered that there exist a girls’ world and a boys’ world. Boys differentiated themselves from girls and formed a ‘status hierarchy’ from which girls were excluded. Girls created their own world as well, but it had lesser value since it did not receive validation through the ‘hidden curriculum’. Even though the boys’ culture was dominant, the girls’ culture was not completely subservient to it (Clarricoates, 1987b, as cited in Pilcher, 2002). The strength of their own gendered cultures may mean that “they are resistant to teaching materials which aim to avoid gender stereotyping” (Clarricoates, 1987b, as cited in Pilcher, 2002, p. 21). It is important to highlight that although children have their own culture, it does not exist in a vacuum. They “construct their own gendered social worlds but they do not do so with material of their own choosing or with complete freedom and control” (Pilcher, 2002, p. 21).

### *5.2.2. Secondary education*

After finishing primary school, around the age of eleven, children enter secondary education. They enter a completely new environment. They are meeting new teachers and friends, and are excited and happy, but they are often nervous and scared about a new chapter in their lives. As they grow and transition, so do their bodies. They are changing, and sexuality becomes more important than it was before. As a result of that, friendship groups are much stronger than at primary school. This is the last part of their compulsory education, and they become more focused on their future education, work, and life. This level of the education system abounds in gender inequalities, so researchers have paid special attention to it because of its importance in this stage of a person’s life (Pilcher, 2002).

The importance of sexuality, friendship groups, and the world of post-school indicate that “the context of secondary education differs in crucial respects from primary education” (Pilcher, 2002, p. 22). Here, as in primary schools, gender differences can be emphasised with the bureaucratic and spatial organisation of schools. Some of the examples are that “pupil records

and class registers may record boy and girl pupils separately”, “areas of cloakrooms or ranges of lockers might be designated for each gender”, “school uniforms or dress codes may be different for each gender”, and “in Wales it was common to ask all pupils of one gender to leave a classroom first, followed by the other” (Pilcher, 2002, p. 22). Pilcher thinks that such arrangements “represent an unnecessary emphasis on gender differences purely for administrative convenience” (Pilcher, 2002, p. 22).

Actions and attitudes of secondary school teachers about the attitudes and behaviour of their pupils were also gendered. Based on Riddell’s research from the mid-1980s, boys were considered “aggressive, lacking in discipline and having a poorer academic performance than girls” (Riddell, 1989, 1992, as cited in Pilcher, 2002, p. 22). Girls were seen as “more mature, neat and conscientious than boys” (Pilcher, 2002, p. 22). This affected the ways in which teachers interacted with pupils. They gave more attention to boys and orientated the content of lessons so as to interest them and keep their attention. Another way some male teachers controlled the boys’ behaviour was by using sexual humour at the expense of girls and women (Pilcher, 2002). “Riddell concluded that many teachers subscribed to a gendered ideology which represented all women as mothers or potential mothers, and therefore marginalised them as workers” (Pilcher, 2002, p. 22). In his research conducted in the early 1990s, Mac an Ghaill (1994) encountered sexual harassment of girls by boys, which was not taken seriously by male teachers. The same problem was observed by Measor and Sikes (1992) where male teachers themselves interacted with girl pupils in a sexualised manner. They made “comments on the attractiveness of a girl pupil’s appearance”, they placed “their arms around the shoulders or waists of pupils”, and in one example a teacher spoke to a pupil named Erica by saying ‘Hello, Erotica’ (Measor and Sikes, 1992, as cited in Pilcher, 2002, p. 23). All of these findings show the ways teachers, often unconsciously, “convey gender-stereotyped messages to their pupils about what is normal, natural and acceptable” (Pilcher, 2002, p. 23).

After the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, it was no longer allowed to offer separate subjects according to gender. Before the Act subjects were divided into ‘boys’ subjects’ (woodwork, metalwork, technical drawing) and ‘girls’ subjects’ (needlework, home economics or domestic science). Also, maths and hard sciences were considered ‘boys subjects’, where art, humanities, and biology ‘girls subjects’. As a result of that, there was an extreme underperformance of girls in maths, hard science and technology (Bruley, 1999). Even though it was now forbidden, studies from the 1980s show that some schools continued to offer separate subjects to girls and boys. Delamont (1990) reported that “several schools in South Wales divided girls and boys

into different craft subjects” (Delamont, 1990, as cited in Pilcher, 2002, p. 23). “Gender differences in subject choices suggest that inequalities within schools are related to other aspects of gender inequality”, such as “the gender segregation of the labour market and the continued inequalities in household division of labour” (Abercrombie, Warde et al., 2003, p. 472). From 1988, the National Curriculum in England and Wales prevented gender differences in choosing subjects. However, because of the stereotypes in books and materials used for teaching, and the way content is delivered by teachers, the National Curriculum remained highly gendered (Pilcher, 2002). The ‘hidden curriculum’ made sure that girls knew that education was of minor significance to them, and that marriage and motherhood was their vocation in life. Male and female characters that appeared in teaching materials encouraged the idea of male dominance. Bob Dixon’s survey of reading schemes showed more male characters than female ones, and the leading roles were mostly male. Girls were depicted in less adventurous situations, while boys appeared in active physical roles (Dixon, 1977, as cited in Bruley, 1999). In history teaching materials, analysed by Turnbull, Pollock and Bruley, “women were largely peripheral to the main historical actors in these texts; ‘a merchant and his family’ ... ‘ancient Egyptians and their wives’ ... ‘everyone enjoyed himself on Mayday’, etc” (Turnbull et al., 1983, as cited in Bruley, 1999). Researchers that covered the last years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as Mac an Ghail (1994) and Paechter (1998), confirm that “the secondary school environment continues to ‘systematically privilege’ boys and men over girls and women” (Mac an Ghail, 1994, as cited in Pilcher, 2002, p. 24), and that “girls remain ‘second-class citizens’ via their positioning as ‘Other’ within the education system” (Paechter, 1998, as cited in Pilcher, 2002, p. 24).

Another important way in which secondary schooling divides by gender is through the pupils’ own culture. Riddell (1989, 1992) showed that both girls and boys “challenged the authority of teachers through deliberate emphasis of stereotypical behaviour” (Pilcher, 2002, p. 24). “Girls manipulated codes of femininity as a means of contesting the authority of the school”, while boys exaggerated “masculine behaviour based on violence, sexual bravado and the degrading of women” (Riddell, 1989, 1992, as cited in Pilcher, 2002, p. 24). Girls avoided the aspects of school they found boring or difficult by using the assumption that girls are quiet, helpless, and emotional (Riddell, 1989, as cited in Pilcher, 2002). Even though traditional construction of femininity was dominant among pupil cultures, Riddell described a minority of ‘radical’ girls in the schools she studied. They formed new gender codes of behaviour that centred around academic attainment, “rather than only being a wife and mother” (Riddell, 1992, as cited in

Pilcher, 2002, p. 24). Mac an Ghail (1994) found that girls were not passive “in the face of masculine dominance within schools” (Pilcher, 2002, p. 24). They “developed a variety of responses including co-operation, negotiation and outright resistance” to deal with the gendered hierarchy within the school playground (Mac an Ghail, 1994, as cited in Pilcher, 2002, p. 24).

### *5.2.3. Post-16 Education*

(Re)production of gender division is also present in post-16 education and training. A study of ‘A’ level sixth formers by Stanworth (1983) confirms that and identifies some of the same processes as those present in primary and secondary schools (Pilcher, 2002). Stanworth found that girls appear to themselves and others as less capable than they really are. They are marginalised in the classroom and receive less attention (Stanworth, 1983, as cited in Pilcher, 2002). Evidence shows that young people make choices about their further education based on gender-stereotyped views. The majority of female students take arts and humanities degrees (Halsey, 1988, as cited in Bruley, 1999), and their predominance is also present in degree courses for nursing and teaching (Abercrombie, Warde et al., 2003). They choose social science subjects more often than male students, while more male than female students choose science subjects (Pilcher, 2002). Unfortunately, gender also has a role in choosing vocational subjects. The most sex-segregated subject in Walby’s findings was engineering, and that is usually associated with greater earnings as graduates (Walby, 1997, as cited in Bruley, 1999). Those students who do not choose training areas traditional for their gender face a lot of difficulties (Cockburn, 1987, Pilcher, 2002). In a study of postgraduate journalism course, Parry shows that “even at higher levels of education and training, women face difficulties in areas which are non-traditional for their gender” (Parry, 1990, as cited in Pilcher, 2002, p. 25). Men teachers using derogatory stereotypes in displaying sexist attitudes and expressing their views on the suitability of journalism as a career for women made both female and male students aware of the marginalisation of women students and femininity (Parry, 1990, as cited in Pilcher, 2002). All of this evidence shows that gender differences and marginalisation of women and femininity are present at all levels of education.

### 5.3. *The difference between women and men in exam taking and educational level*

Nowadays, educational qualifications are crucial for finding a job and are what employers look at first. There is a minimum level of qualification prescribed for any position, and that has been changing over the years. People have better qualifications now than they had in the past, so the expected level of education for jobs has grown. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, at age 16, girls tended to be better qualified than boys, though that advantage may have not been reflected in the labour market (Abercrombie, Warde et al., 2003).

Since the national testing of children was introduced in 1988 in England and Wales, it was recognised that girls perform better than boys in most subjects, even at age 7 (Pilcher, 2002). “David, Weiner and Arnot (1997) found marked improvements by gender between the years 1984 and 1994” (Pilcher, 2002, p. 25). GCSE examination results by gender in England and Wales from 1975/6 to 1994/5 are shown in Figure 14.2. in Abercrombie, Warde et al., 2003, p. 471. The data show percentages of female and male students achieving 5 or more GCSE grades C and above. Male dominance was present from 1975/6 for a few years, but the dominance of female pupils started in 1978/9 and had been present throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. From 23% of male and 24% of female students achieving 5 or more GCSE grades C and above in 1978/9, the difference between boys and girls rose up to 38% of male and 48% of female students in 1994/5. That trend continued in 1995/6 where there were 180,000 girls and 151,000 boys achieving 5 or more grades A-C in GCSEs (Abercrombie, Warde et al., 2003, Table 7.8, p. 214). Although there was a greater number of female than male students, traditional gender streaming was distinct in vocational subjects. In Home economics, male students were one-sixth of the examinees, where in Craft, design and technology female students were one fifth of the examinees. There were a lot of subjects at which both sexes were entirely or almost equal, such as Biology, Single science, Double sciences, Maths, English, English literature, and French (Abercrombie, Warde et al., 2003, Table 7.11, p. 216). In 1997, “50 per cent of girls achieved five or more GCSE grades A-C compared with 40.5 per cent of boys” (Abercrombie, Warde et al., 2003, p. 172).

At A-level, the gap between male and female students was much narrower. Table 7.9. in Abercrombie, Warde et al., 2003, p. 214, shows school pupils gaining three or more A-levels by sex in the period from 1985 to 1994. In 1985/6 there were 10% of male and 9% of female students. The numbers were equal in 1990/1 where both male and female students were at 14%. In 1993/4 there was again a difference, only this time there were more female (16%) than male

students (14%) that gained three or more A-levels. This table shows a slight growth in the percentage of male students from 1985 to 1994 (from 10% to 14%) and then stagnation in 1994 (14%), while the percentage of female students had a continuous growth from the 1985/6 with 9%, over 1990/1 with 14%, and up to 16% in 1993/4. In 1995/6, there were “23 per cent of girls and 20 per cent of boys getting two or more A-levels” (Abercrombie, Warde et al., 2003, p. 473). However, subjects studied at ‘A’ level are still largely male or female dominated. Male dominated are mathematics, physics, chemistry, and computer studies and economics (which are becoming increasingly male dominated). Female dominated are arts, humanities, and social studies, including English and modern foreign languages (Pilcher, 2002). Even though women’s cultures and values are still considered second best, “statistical evidence shows that girls have significantly improved their educational attainment, ... especially in national test at age 7 and GCSEs at age 16, but also at ‘A’ levels and under-graduate degree level” (Pilcher, 2002, p. 28).

In 1970/1, the number of male students was double the number of female students in higher education (ONS, 1998a, as cited in Pilcher, 2002). Improvement started in the 1970s and 1980s when “the number of female undergraduates more than doubled whereas male undergraduates only increased by a third” (Walby, 1997, as cited in Bruley, 1999, p. 172). Despite the fact that the gap had been declining, men were still dominant in undergraduate and postgraduate studies. In 1975/6, women were 35% of undergraduate, and 25% of postgraduate students. The numbers were growing year after year, and in 1994/5 there were 48% of undergraduate, and 42% of postgraduate female students (Abercrombie, Warde et al., 2003, Table 7.10, p. 215). Though the latter source shows male dominance from 1991 to 1995, another source cited by Pilcher shows that “in 1992, for the first time, the proportion of women aged under 21 entering higher education overtook the proportion of men of the same age” (DFE, 1993, as cited in Pilcher, 2002, p. 26). Pilcher’s source (ONS, 1998s, as cited in Pilcher, 2002) suggests that female dominance was achieved in higher education in 1995/6, where according to Abercrombie, Warde et al. (2003), in degree-level courses, female dominance was not achieved until 1998. In doctoral studies, men were still in the majority, with only 35% of women students. Despite the above-mentioned dominance of women in higher education in 1995/6, there were still subjects differing by gender. What was known before is that the most common subjects taken by women were nursing and teaching (Abercrombie, Warde et al., 2003), as well as arts and humanities (Bruley, 1999), and they represented a greater number of students in those areas. The data for 1995/6 (ONS, 1998a, as cited in Pilcher, 2002) shows an ongoing dominance of women in

education and languages (70 per cent of all students), and in biological sciences, social sciences and creative arts (more than 50 per cent of all students). In 1998, women were 71 per cent of language students, 53 per cent of humanities students, 52 per cent of medicine and dentistry students, but only 15 per cent of those studying engineering (DFEE, as cited in Abercrombie, Warde et al., 2003). According to 1996 (Living in Britain, 1996, as cited in Abercrombie, Warde et al., 2003) and 1998 (ONS, 1998a, as cited in Pilcher, 2002) data, acquired qualifications still show a great difference between men and women. 1998 survey shows the difference between men and women of working age that hold no qualifications at all. There were 21 per cent of women, and 16 per cent of men. That greatly depends on the age of the subjects, with the difference being greater among older men and women than among the younger population (Pilcher, 2002). Table 7.12 (Abercrombie, Warde et al., 2003, p. 217) demonstrates the differences with data from *Living in Britain* (1996). The subjects were men and women age 16 to 69, having either a degree, an A-level, or GCSE/O-level, or anything equivalent to one of those qualifications. As Pilcher says, the difference is greater among the older population. Men age 60 to 69 held higher qualifications on all three levels. Women surpassed them in GCSE/O-level in the category of 50 to 59-year-olds, and were dominant in that area within all age groups. However, that is the only qualification level at which women were dominant. Only the age group of 20 to 29 showed equality of genders with both 14 per cent of women and men having a degree. All of the sources mentioned demonstrate progress of women, but Bruley states that “their advance still shows evidence of the traditional gender bias” (Bruley, 1999, p. 172).

#### 5.4. *The influence on women’s education*

“Increasing success in the formal educational system is one of the most dramatic improvements in the position of women in society” (Abercrombie, Warde et al., 2003, p. 216). It was thought before that women’s lack of success in education was due to their early socialization into femininity, their orientation to a domestic role, and their upbringing and the structure of their brain which meant that they could not think mathematically on the same level as men (Abercrombie, Warde et al., 2003). All of that was refuted by women’s success and educational achievement, which has only grown from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century up until the end of it.

In the 1950s, there was a strong influence of the home on young people, both in aspirations and expectations. That resulted in many boys and girls taking little interest in choosing jobs, and



they saw school as a preliminary for work, not a preparation for it. “The majority of parents were less concerned with their daughters’ work prospects than their sons’ employment” (Spencer, 2005, p. 58). Those parental attitudes were not surprising since the girls’ opinion at that time was that “their function is to have babies and look after the home, so what does it matter what occupation they enter as so long as the wage is reasonable” (Spencer, 2005, p. 58). Girls were encouraged to stay in school and ensure themselves better careers, however, the dual role model not only included the idea of a career woman, but also of a woman that takes care of the home and brings up children (Coulson, 1957, as cited in Spencer, 2005). The teaching associations were open in expressing “that girls had a duty to society both to enter paid work while they could, and to be caring wives and mothers” (Spencer, 2005, p. 69). Class also played an important role, since it limited the possibilities for some pupils. For example, middle-class parents, who could not afford fees of an independent school, could only ensure a middle-class occupation for their children. At the time, the analysis of the choice of female pupils regarding their future employment was not considered as important since they were “assumed to be bound for domesticity” (Spencer, 2005, p. 61). In the period closer to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, “Riddell (1992), Gaskell (1992) and M. Banks et al. (1992) show that in their teenage years young women are more closely pulled into the domestic arena than young men”, and their “peer-group culture revolves around the anticipation of heterosexual partnerships” (Abercrombie, Warde et al., 2003, p. 472). Young women will choose occupations that offer reasonable access to women and those that they can combine with raising children (Abercrombie, Warde et al., 2003). In 1998, Mann researched 17-year-old working-class and middle-class girls and showed the attitudes of families, or better said women in the families, that influenced the girls’ views on education and the life after it. In the working-class families, mothers often changed their minds on whether their daughters should be further educated or not. Grandmothers, on the other hand, were certain about their granddaughters staying in school, but thought that their job afterwards was to get married and have children. Girls from the middle-class families felt a lot of pressure because of the educational achievements of their families. Their families advocated staying in school, but that sometimes resulted in girls feeling controlled by them (Mann, 1998, as cited in Abercrombie, Warde et al., 2003). Towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the labour market gradually opened up, and there was an “increase in the opportunities for women in the world after education” (Abercrombie, Warde et al., 2003, p. 217). Also, women started changing their orientation to marriage and the fact that it is going to lead to a financially secure future. Thanks to these changes, among others, “women might anticipate taking a higher proportion of top jobs” (Abercrombie, Warde et al., 2003, p. 217).

## 6. Conclusion

By analysing numerous sources, the education of women in the United Kingdom and the way it affected them in the period from the Education Act in 1944 to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was identified and described in this thesis. Education as a process takes time, and is not shaped only according to an education system, but is influenced by various factors throughout all phases of education. Even though the 1944 Education Act, which was taken as a starting point, replaced all previous education laws and had a goal of improving the education system, it did not affect female students in a positive way. On the contrary, it led to even greater discrimination of women and their education. Gender inequality, which is not only a women's issue but a society's issue, has been present from the earliest phases of education. Children entered formal education already skilled in 'doing-gender' and continued to act in 'gender-appropriate' ways. Schools supported such thinking and behaviour, not necessarily directly, but through their bureaucratic and spatial organisation, teachers' attitudes and actions, as well as the curriculum and teaching materials. That, along with the cultures of children and young people, resulted in the reproduction of gender inequality throughout students' education. In all three phases of education there were unnecessary divisions of pupils into gender groups, double standards on how male and female students should behave, teachers behaving in a biased way, harassment of girls, male characters dominance in teaching materials. If that is something students are constantly experiencing, it alters their views on what is normal and acceptable, and gender inequality continues to live and grow, leaving women marginalised at all levels of education. Despite all that, women's educational achievement and success only grew from the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Women started their dominance with GCSEs in the late 1980s, and with A levels in the mid-1990s. More and more women took part in higher education, where they achieved dominance in the late 1990s, with the exception of doctoral studies. Even though women in the United Kingdom achieved a lot, and overcame many obstacles and prejudice in education, their success and advance still showed evidence of traditional bias and gender inequality. That begs the question: How long will it take for people to free themselves of gender stereotyping in education and reach equal opportunities and equal treatment of everyone, not only in the United Kingdom but in the world?

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### **Izjava o samostalnoj izradi rada**

Izjavljujem da sam ja, Đurđica Hibler, studentica Odsjeka za učiteljske studije Učiteljskog fakulteta u Zagrebu [REDACTED], samostalno provela aktivnosti istraživanja literature i napisala diplomski rad na temu The Education of Women in the United Kingdom from the 1944 Education Act to the End of the 20th Century.

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