

TOPIC AREA: EDUCATION

POSSIBLE TOPICS

Junior Topics

- That schools should be open longer hours.
- That only healthy food should be sold at school canteens.
- That all students should learn a foreign language until Year 12.
- That we should ban the use of mobile phones in school.
- That sport should be compulsory in schools.
- That boarding school is bad for students.
- That it should be compulsory for students to read the newspaper.
- That today's students are poorly prepared for the real world.
- That co-educational schools are better than single sex schools.
- That bullying at school should be a criminal offence.
- That high school should run from 9 to 5.
- That study of an Asian language should be compulsory in Australian schools.
- That schools should be more democratic.
- That Year 7 should still be in primary school.
- That school sport should be compulsory for girls.
- That we learn more from our parents than our teachers.
- That all students should do compulsory community service each year.
- That more class time should be spent on computers.
- That school students should have a say in choosing their teachers.
- That we should guarantee indigenous people a place at university.
- That school hours should be extended to 5pm.
- That students should be prohibited from wearing make up or jewellery at school.
- That we need an increased police presence in schools.
- That schools should have the right to search students' lockers.
- That we should ban home schooling.
- That schools should have the right to monitor digital communications between their students.

Intermediate Topics

- That we should study more Science and less English.
- That schools should have the right to search a student's personal property.
- That school prepares us well for life.
- That all university students should pay full fees.
- That our schooling focuses too much on Australia.
- That single sex schools should be abolished.
- That we should focus more on boys' education.
- That Australian literature should be a compulsory part of the HSC English syllabus.
- That non-Government schools should not receive Government money.
- That secondary school courses should emphasise English literary classics more.
- That we should introduce random drug testing in all schools.
- That school formals should be banned.
- That education begins after school.
- That we should ban senior students from paid employment during their HSC year.
- That selective schools should be banned.

Senior Topics

- That education should focus on career skills.
- That there is a place for corporate sponsorship in schools.
- That we should promote sex education in the developing world.

- That schools should be able to drug-test their pupils.
- That private schools should receive no government funding.
- That it is the legitimate function of a school to promote change in society.
- That the growth of non-government schools strengthens our society.
- That finishing Year 12 should be compulsory.
- That compulsory student unionism should be preserved.
- That we should increase public funding to private schools.
- That the HECS system has been good for Australia.
- That we should have a national curriculum.
- That we should introduce performance based pay for teachers.

EXAMPLES OF RELEVANT ISSUES

a) Public and private education; government funding for schools; government funding for university (HECS)

General context/information

- One of the most contentious social issues in most countries is that of education. In education, people see a clear route to a better life for their children. Most people regard some level of education as a right; the degree of education to which we are entitled by right varies from country to country.
- In Australia, the state provides a free education, for all children, from age 5-18. The aim is to produce a comprehensive and high-quality education for all its citizens. However, if a degree is then pursued, it must be undertaken at the student's expense. There are student-loan facilities in place to limit the financial impact of further education, but the student must pay these back when he/she starts to earn above a certain amount. This system is commonly known as HECS.
- The Australian education system is supplemented in Australia by independent, fee-paying schools to which parents can send their children if they can afford it. This model raises many questions, not just pertaining to itself, but to more general issues as well: do you have a right to an education? To what sort of education are you entitled? If parents wish to send their children to a private school, should they have the right so to do?

For and Against

FOR	AGAINST
Parents who want to send their children to a fee-paying school are making a decision based on what is best for their children. They decide to use the money they have earned to give their children the best opportunities in life. What right does anyone have to tell someone else how to spend their earnings? Private schools provide parents with an alternative to the state sector, and a learning environment, which might better suit their children. All they are doing is using their money to help their children. In addition, whilst there are many bad state schools, there are also bad private schools, and some excellent state schools which compete with the best private schools. It is clear from this last fact that state schools can be the successes that we want them to be, whilst still allowing others the right to choose a different option.	Private schools do not provide all parents with an alternative – only those who can afford it. Such schools perpetuate social inequality, as a better education tends to lead to a better-paid job, which in turn enables one to send one's own children to such a school. Consequently, equal opportunities are denied to the children of poorer families. With the patronage of wealthier parents, private schools attract resources far higher than state schools. Moreover, with the (often academically selected) children from more affluent backgrounds, greater resources and smaller classes, these schools are unsurprisingly more attractive to teachers than state schools. We have a situation where state schools are potentially deprived not only of able pupils, but also very able teachers, thus compounding the inequalities. Such a state of affairs is socially divisive, and must be avoided.
The existence of private education can actually be financially beneficial to state schools. The state funds the education system through taxation. Parents who do not send their children to state schools still pay those same taxes. Therefore, there is more money per child in the state sector. There is evidence that a large number of parents,	State schools will never improve if, instead of funding them, government pays thousands of pounds in assisted place fees in the private sector every year. Furthermore, the bursary system does little more than improve private schools whilst depriving state schools of some of their most able pupils. Another factor is that whilst a small

<p>who send their children to private schools, are both 'first time buyers' – i.e. neither parent attending a private school – and not from the privileged elite that the opposition would have us believe. Moreover, most schools provide bursaries for able pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, and the state itself used to fund such a scheme, called 'assisted places.' This is evidence against private schools being socially divisive.</p>	<p>proportion of children do get in on academic ability with bursaries, they are a small minority of those similarly able and disadvantaged, whilst less able children from more wealthy backgrounds benefit. And children of average or lower intelligence are excluded from these institutions of small classes and more individual attention, from which they may benefit, on two counts: their ability, and their parents' incomes. This should strike any observer as deplorably unfair and discriminating.</p>
<p>On the disparity between private and state schools, the correct way to improve the education for children in state schools is to spend more money on state schools, devote more time, energy and enthusiasm to them. Preventing a minority from having a certain type of education is not the way to help improve the majority's education. By and large, the complaint is that private schools are doing well and providing a good education, whilst state schools lag behind. It is in all our interests to set the standard of education as high as we can – you do this by raising state schools to the supposed standard of private schools, not by depriving children of a private education.</p>	<p>It is true that many of the problems facing state schools stem from within them, but the existence of the private schools outside hardly improves morale amongst staff. It is not as simple as saying we need more money to improve state schools. Since state schools' funding comes via the government, which gets its money through taxation, then an increase in education expenditure – if it isn't to cause cuts elsewhere – inextricably leads to higher taxes. It is the Government which makes decisions over education funding. What is more, the existence of private schools must necessarily diminish the social diversity in state schools. Thus, until private schools are banned, and more social groups are forced to take an active interest in funding issues for state schools, there will not be a sufficiently broad-based, united lobbying force to impel the Government to take the action it fears now would make it unpopular and spend the necessary money. Indeed, the funding problems may more quickly be resolved if a few more prominent and powerful politicians had children in state schools.</p>
<p>A degree or other further study is no-one's right; it is a privilege to be able to extend your education up to this level. Research shows that graduates have better employment prospects, and earn, on average, higher wages than non-graduates. You stand to get a lot out of your degree, it is not unreasonable to expect you to put something in to pay for it.</p>	<p>Higher education should not be a privilege; making students pay for university education will inevitably lead to a huge gulf between those, who can afford to pay, and those who are deprived of the opportunities open to a graduate, because they cannot. Moreover, there are professions, such as medicine and law, in which it takes longer and costs much more to qualify. These professions will be ring-fenced for the social elite, who alone can afford to enter them.</p>
<p>Universities need ever increasing funds, in order to compete in research at the highest levels. Government could pay more, but rather than deprive other areas of funding, it seems fair that students contribute to the universities' funds. With low interest, government loans, which need only be paid back over a number of years, after you passed a certain earning threshold, the burden can be eased considerably.</p>	<p>Despite the HECS system, students will leave university with considerable debt. Those from the poorest backgrounds will be severely disadvantaged. They simply will be dissuaded from pursuing higher education, if doing so means amassing a huge debt. They will be pressed by necessity to go straight into employment. As far as possible we should try to prevent defining, life choices being dictated by financial factors out of the student's control.</p>
<p>When degrees were funded by grants, it encouraged less-motivated people to wander into university. This led to many students who did not have a responsible attitude towards their degrees. With students taking a direct and considerable financial stake in their own university education, degrees will only attract the more responsible,</p>	<p>Far from weeding out the less responsible, as a whole group, this will only dissuade those, who are both less responsible and unable to make the financial commitment. Furthermore, the idea that degrees will be pursued with more intellectual rigour is absurd; a consequence of the burden upon students is that they have to split their</p>

motivated students.	attention between earning money – often in term-time – and studying. Money worries often consume people’s thoughts, and detract from whatever academically responsible dispositions they are purported to have
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b) Selective education

General context/information

- In most countries, schools teach children of a wide range of abilities together, in mixed ability (comprehensive) schools.
- In some countries, however, secondary education varies according to ability, with the most able children attending selective schools (such as grammar schools in the UK and Gymnasia in Germany) until the age of 18. Children who are judged to be less academic attend different schools, receive a more vocational and technical education and typically leave at 15 or 16 to look for work, with little prospect of higher education.
- In Australia, most selective schools begin in year seven, are government funded and require students to pass an exam at the end of primary school in order to be accepted. Some primary schools employ a system of academic streaming, in which particular classes composed only of high-ability students are established alongside mixed-ability classes.

For and against

FOR	AGAINST
Selective education produces better results. Studies have shown that children of equal ability at age 11 go on to have different results at 18, depending on whether they were at a selective school or at a school with children of mixed abilities.	These results are skewed because the mere presence of selective schools mean that able pupils congregate in these selective schools, not giving those of mixed-ability a chance. A fully comprehensive system would ensure good results for everyone. The process of selection is also unfair as the tests children take at the end of primary school attempt to measure their current ability rather than their long-term academic potential. Social class and parental pushing, the quality of their primary school, recent illness, etc. can all play too large a part for the process to be completely objective.
The widespread use of academic streaming to separate children in a mixed-ability school into classes of different abilities recognises that children have different needs. This should be taken further. It is a more efficient use of schools wholly to stream or to be selective. It is also more meritocratic, as bright students from poor homes get the kind of academic education that the rich can purchase for their children in independent schools.	The plan is flawed in that not all children who are good at English are good at Mathematics, for example. Streaming allows a child to be in a high-ability class for one subject and a remedial class for another, which is not possible in a fully selective school. The main point, however, is that the selective system is shockingly and openly elitist. Education is a right, not a privilege. A good education should be available to all, not just the elitist stratum whilst the majority are left to fend for themselves.
Pupils of all abilities benefit from selective education. Rather than aiming at an ill-defined and vague medium, selection allows specialist teachers to stretch the ability of particularly able students or give proper support to students with learning difficulties.	Effective streaming within a mixed ability school can do this too. The difference is that between lessons, at break times and when going to and from school, pupils will mix together socially. This fosters a sense of community, prevents stratification and means that the less able feel valued and more able feel less ostracised.
It is not fair on the majority in a class to have their lessons ruined by troublemakers. Those that want and have the potential to learn should be allowed the chance to be educated properly. If selective education is not provided free by the state, there is a danger that parents of bright students will opt for private education or home schooling instead,	Whilst the rest are dumped! Funding, pupils, teachers will all move to selective schools, whilst mixed-ability schools will be left with those who can't. How is it equitable or morally justifiable to dump kids on the scrap-heap at eleven?

further isolating brighter children from poorer backgrounds.	
Our standing in the world economy depends on a skilled workforce and jobs that can be filled by educated people. For the best to be stretched they need to be challenged educationally.	This is not necessarily true - many leaders of industry, politics and the arts have gone to mixed ability schools. We cannot abandon the majority the majority of students to concentrate on an elite few. All children deserve a good education and the only way that this happen is by ensuring that good teachers and good pupils are taken along the same path as not so able children.
Selection makes it easier for teachers. They can focus on a particular academic level and don't have to try to cope with a wide range of abilities. Most of the problems in schools come from pupils either not being challenged or being given work that they don't understand.	There will never be identical ability, even in selective schools. There will always be slight divergences. The mark of a good teacher is in being able to juggle varying abilities. Giving teachers an easy time is a poor way of justifying such an elitist education. In any case, the problem is a relative one; weaker students within a selective school may become unmotivated and perform less well than they would have done as more able students in a mixed-ability school.

EDUCATION ISSUES IN GENERAL; RESEARCH LINKS

- **“Reform 21”; A British organisation promoting mixed- ability schooling**
<http://www.reform21.org/pages/start.html>
- **Higher Education for Students in Australia; Voluntary Student Unionism**
<http://www.goingtouni.gov.au/Main/Resources/StudentSupport/VoluntaryStudentUnionism.htm>
- **Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations; Voluntary Student Unionism**
http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/policy_issues_reviews/key_issues/VSU/Voluntary_Student_Unionism.htm
- **University of Canberra; Pro-VSU Article**
http://www.canberra.edu.au/monitor-archive/vc/vsu_Apr6_2005.htm
- **Department of Education, Science and Training; Departmental policy and issues**
http://www.dest.gov.au/common_topics/policy_issues/Policy_issues.htm
- **Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations; Higher education policy, issues and reviews**
http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/policy_issues_reviews/policy_issues_review_men.htm
- **Education Topics**
<http://www.edna.edu.au/edna/go/schooled/pid/227>