

1947: Gender in the tripartite system

England had a relatively low proportion of co-educational schools when mass secondary education was first universalised after the Second World War. Grammar schools, most of which were much older than the 1944 Butler Act, were gender segregated. In 1947 they were split roughly 1/3 boys, 1/3 girls, 1/3 co-educational. The technical schools (few and far between) were also reasonably gender segregated and favoured boys, because the types of skills that they catered to mapped onto a gender-segregated workforce. By contrast, in 1947 43.5% of secondary modern schools were co-educational, 28.5% were all girls', and 28% were all boys'. Soon after this time, secondary modern schools surpassed more than 50% co-educational. One reason for this was because co-educational schools were cheaper in terms of resources, staffing, and space.

1951: Introduction of the GCE

First introduced in England and Wales in 1951, the General Certificate of Education replaced the School Certificate by establishing Ordinary (O-levels), sat at 16, and Advanced (A-levels), sat at 18. Unlike under its predecessor, candidates could now achieve passes in individual subjects rather than having to pass a group of subjects to gain a qualification. Both O and A-levels were initially intended for the top 20% of pupils, largely expected to be at Grammar schools, but Secondary Modern schools very quickly started entering more and more candidates.

1959: Scotland's co-educational schools

Most of Scotland's secondary schools were co-educational. In 1959 the secondary school population was 49% female and 51% male, with the number of girls dropping off in the fifth and sixth years. By 1963, the figures were at 48.8% female and 51.2% male, with the figures similarly even up to the fourth year of secondary school.

Gender

1947: ROSLA to 15

The school leaving age was raised to 15 in 1947, a change that had been legislated for in the 1944 Education Act, and had been a long-held aim for educational reformers throughout the interwar years.

1957: Grammar schools favour boys

National statistics showed that the grammar school population in 1957 was 50.6% male, and 49.4% female. This is explained by the tendency of boys to catch up and stay on longer. This bias had switched by the 1970s, when the grammar school gender gap moved in favour of girls, perhaps explained by a number of factors: the staying on difference for grammar school vs. secondary modern girls was much starker than for boys, there were more girls' grammar schools than boys' for the entire tripartite period, and there were more boys than girls at comprehensive schools throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

1962: More boys at Technical schools

Technical schools were always slightly skewed in favour of all boys' schools. In 1962, 43.6% were boys', while just 16.4% were girls', and 40% were co-educational. However, the number of technical schools was in decline throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

1962(-1972): Fall in girls' independent schools

Between 1962 and 1972, there were 28 fewer girls' independent schools but a 3% rise in co-educational independent schools and 9% rise in boys' independent schools.

By the early 1950s an independent school gender gap in favour of boys had been established. There was a much sharper drop in female independent school attendance after the war as middle-class girls moved into maintained grammar schools. Both populations rose from the end of the 1960s in response to the closure of grammar schools, but boys more steeply than girls.

In 1864 the Taunton Commission on secondary education had found no difference in the mental capacities of girls and boys. Early feminist campaigners seized on this finding (which countered long-standing biological arguments about girls' education), and from the 1860s private schools for girls began to open, for example the Girls Public Day School Company was founded in 1871, opening schools that provided a broad liberal education. These girls' independent schools provided the first routes to higher education for middle-class women.

1963: Scottish Education Department annual report

The Scottish Education Department noted its hope that more 15 year-old pupils would complete the three-year course during the 1960s after numbers had dropped evenly between genders. Local Authorities produced two separate pamphlets for girls and boys, 'Let Him Stay on at School' and 'Let Her Stay on at School', describing the benefits of staying on, which were distributed to the parents of pupils starting the third year of a senior secondary course.

1963-5: Introduction of the CSE

With demand rising amongst pupils, parents, and Secondary Modern schools in the late-1950s for a standardized leaving examination open to a higher proportion of pupils, the government-appointed the Beloe Committee recommended a new leaving qualification beneath O-level, with the CSE first sat in May 1965. Taken at 16 upon the culmination of five years of secondary education, it was intended for the 40% below those who took O-levels (judged as the top 20%). Like the GCE, subjects were sat on an individual basis, but grades were awarded on a 1-5 scale, with a 1 representing the equivalent of a pass at O-level. The CSE offered qualifications in a broader range of subjects and included practical and coursework elements.

1963: Newsom Report: *Half our Future*

A report of the Central Advisory Council for Education (England) on children of average or below-average ability.

1962(-1972): Co-educational direct grant schools

Between 1962 and 1972, there were only ever 2 co-educational direct grant schools in the whole of England and Wales. Across the 1940s-1970s there were always more girls' than boys' direct grant schools, reflecting the dominance of girls' Catholic schools in this sector.

1967: Sharp decline of co-educational grammar and technical schools

There was an overall rise in co-educational schooling in England and Wales across the 1940s-1970s, steepest at the beginning of the period as more secondary modern schools opened, rising modestly throughout the 1960s, and then most steeply from the end of the 1960s when comprehensive schools opened more rapidly. Co-educational grammar and technical schools however experienced a sharp decline, after peaking in the late 1960s just as grammar schools were starting to close en masse, and by 1967 just 35% of all grammar schools were mixed.

1970: The Women's Liberation Movement

Between 27 February and 1 March 1970, a national Women's Liberation Conference took place in Oxford. More than 600 women attended the first national WLM conference, with a desire to debate a wide variety of issues affecting women. The second of the WLM's first four demands was 'Equal educational and job opportunities'.

1972/3: ROSLA to 16

In 1964, preparations began to raise the school leaving age to 16. These were delayed in 1968, and eventually the decision was taken that the new upper age limit be enforced from 1 September 1972 onwards. Until the end of the 1960s, when the school leaving age was 15, more boys than girls stayed on at school. Boys were always more likely to leave for employment, girls for further education.

1975: Sex Discrimination Act

This act aimed to promote equality of opportunity between men and women, and provided for the establishment of the Equal Opportunities Commission. Education is dealt with in sections 22-28. Along with the Equal Pay Act (1970), may help to explain why more women chose higher education from the 1980s and beyond.

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1974: Finer Report: *Report of the Committee on One-Parent Families*

This report outlined the special needs of one-parent families.

1975: ROSLA

Post ROSLA in 1975 the Scottish HMI produced a special report highlighting gender differences, showing that boys were more likely to take physics and girls biology. It concluded that these inequities were not a consequence of policy but were deeply entwined with societal gender issues at large.

1977: Scottish Leavers Survey

This Scottish leavers survey found that Higher, O-grade, and non-SCE pupils reported very different experiences of their last two years of secondary school. Boys' and girls' experiences were quite similar, except that a far higher proportion of boys reported experiencing corporal punishment. As in England and Wales, female school leavers in Scotland at the end of the 1960s were going into further education more than boys. Interestingly, the proportion of full-time students that were female in Scottish universities did not drop below a quarter for the entire century, which is much higher than in England.

1975: Girls surpass boys in school staying-on rates

By 1975 there was a higher proportion of 17-year-old girls than boys at secondary schools in England and Wales for the first time ever in history, showing that girls' voluntary decision to stay at secondary school for longer and obtain more education was growing rapidly in the 1970s.

1979: Election of Margaret Thatcher as the first female Prime Minister

On 4 May 1979 Margaret Thatcher, Conservative politician and MP for Finchley from 1959-1992, became the first woman Prime Minister of the UK in 1979. Serving until 1990, her 11 years in post make her the longest serving British Prime Minister. Her hard-line politics led to her being known as the 'Iron Lady'.

1977: Fall in co-educational grammar schools

By 1977 only 98 co-educational grammar schools remained, whilst girls' grammar schools had actually increased by 2.6% of the total, and boys' by 3.8% since 1972.

1977: Gender disparity at comprehensive schools

From the late 1960s there were more boys than girls attending comprehensive schools. This gap was at its widest in the late 1970s. The numbers of all pupils attending comprehensive schools had overtaken the number attending grammar schools in the late 1960s (and likewise for secondary moderns in the early 1970s), adding weight to the argument that we ought to think about comprehensivisation as a long, slow, regional post-1945 process rather than as an 'event' that took place from 1965.

1980: HMI *Matters for Discussion* document 13 – 'Girls and Science'

HM Inspectors' series of 15 discussion documents entitled *Matters for Discussion*, published between 1977-82, included No. 13: 'Girls and Science'. This was a report on an enquiry carried out in 1978 into the teaching of science to girls in coeducational comprehensive schools and an assessment of the factors influencing their choice of science subjects.

1988: Education Reform Act

Perhaps the most important Education Act since 1944, the provisions of the '88 Act concerned the National Curriculum (religious education and collective worship, establishment of curriculum and assessment councils); the admission of pupils to county and voluntary schools; local management of schools; grant-maintained schools; city technology colleges; changes in further and higher education; and the abolition of the Inner London Education Authority.

1983: The Equal Opportunities Inspectorate

The Inner London Education Authority establishes Britain's first 'Equal Opportunities Inspectorate', which inspected schools on these issues and scattered advisory teachers throughout inner London secondary schools to promote philosophies of anti-racism and anti-sexism. IEA became well-known for its leading work on equal opportunities, until it was abolished in 1990.

1982: Co-educational comprehensives rising

This year over 85% of comprehensives were co-ed, rising to 90.4% by 1992. By the early 1990s however, the trend for all maintained schools to be co-educational had slowed considerably due to the resilience of single-sex grammar schools in certain areas.

1983: The first 'Women's Studies' course at the Open University

In January 1983 the Open University (OU) introduced its first Women's Studies course. 'The changing experience of women' combined literature, history, biology, economics, media studies, law and technology. The OU had been founded in 1969 to offer flexible degree-level study to people returning to education later in life. A survey of OU students in 1977 found that the cohort was 40 per cent female and 60 per cent male, with the majority of the women students working and under 39 years of age.

1986-88: GCSE exam system begins

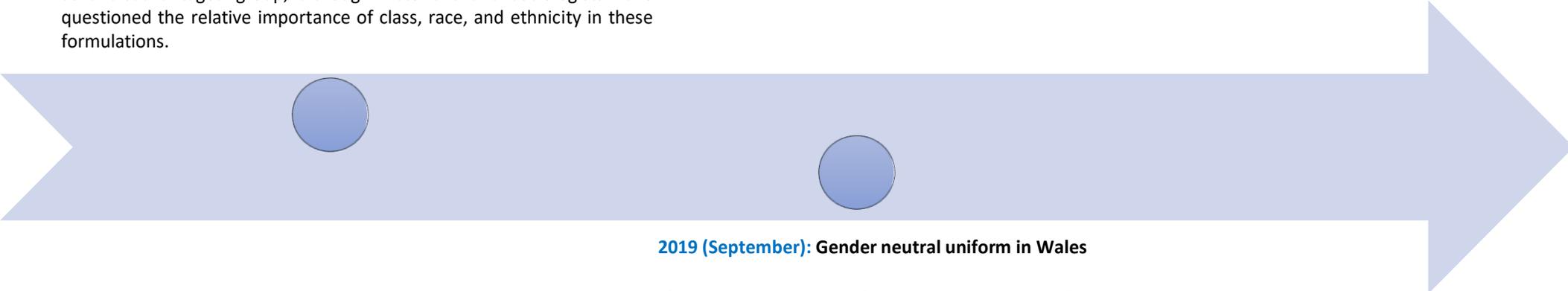
The General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) common 16+ exam system replaced the GCE O Level and CSE exams. The GCSE, a standardised school leaving qualification introduced in response to fears about falling standards, made a big difference to girls' achievements in secondary school. As the GCSE resulted in more pupils leaving school with five or more good grades, more of these pupils were girls.

1992: Polytechnics converted into new universities

Under the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, Polytechnics became fully fledged universities. The 1990s was the period when social change from the outside made girls' and boys' experiences of secondary education in the UK more equal. In this period all girls, not just the elite, could feel cultural change capturing up with structural change. Higher education opportunities for women expanded drastically as the Polytechnics were converted into new universities. The labour market, especially in the professions, opened up to women. Workplaces began to adapt to a new gender order and there was a lively public discourse about working parents.

1998: 'White working class boys' falling behind

During the 1990s, research on gender in British schools shifted to address the growing gender attainment gap between girls and boys, with girls increasingly outperforming boys. A review of gender research published for OFSTED in 1998 noted that 'Girls are more attentive in class and more willing to learn', and that girls were responding better to the non-traditional teaching methods and coursework that were becoming prominent in the school system, possibly causing boys to fall behind. This research, combined with statistical measures focused on the intersection of race, ethnicity, and gender in pupil performance, led to policy and public conversations focusing on 'white working class boys' underperformance in education, during the 1990s and into the 2000s. This issue has continued into the 2010s, with Bangladeshi boys also identified as a disadvantaged group, although historians and sociologists have questioned the relative importance of class, race, and ethnicity in these formulations.



2019 (September): Gender neutral uniform in Wales

The Department for Education's statutory guidance stipulates that as well as keeping uniforms low-cost, uniform policies at Welsh state schools are expected to be gender-neutral. This means that when a list of clothing items would be published by the school, the items would not be assigned to a specific gender. For example, trousers would not be described as a 'boys item'.