

## Education system fails poorer students, says Major

[Jack Simpson](#) asks whether it is up to our education system to remedy societal disparity

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Photo Credit: Leeds Student

It is “truly shocking”, according to former Conservative Prime Minister John Major, that the private school-educated and affluent middle class still run Britain.

In the UK, we like to think that, whoever we are, we have a good deal of control over our own lives. Yet the treadmill-like – or should that be escalator-like? – fashion in which children born into affluent households go on to occupy powerful positions in society seems to make a mockery of any such belief.

Major said: “Our education system should help children out of the circumstances in which they were born, not lock them into the circumstances in which they were born.”

Yet the Russell Group recently published a pamphlet detailing which subjects should be studied by pupils aiming to apply for one of the country’s top universities. This was part of a bid to discourage state school pupils choosing subjects that were comparatively easy to score well in.

The odds of a pupil on free school meals in Year 11 attaining a place at Oxbridge is 2000:1, compared to 20:1 for those who have been privately educated.

But perhaps most surprising is the fact that even when they attain the same grades as those from poorer backgrounds, pupils from “professional” families are 1.4 times more likely than working class pupils to go to a top university.

The problem for universities attempting to tackle these problems is that they are often part of an intricately linked set of institutions. And it is obviously extremely difficult for any given university to help socioeconomic groups that are not likely even to apply to them.

Educational institutions have a responsibility to attempt to raise the expectations of those pupils aiming lower than their capabilities would otherwise allow.

The education system must do what it can to provide individuals with pathways that counteract socioeconomic hardship. But the education system itself is so intricately bound to the rest of society that it is often hard, if even possible, to separate them from their causal environments.

The question, then, of whether we want a more equal society should not be placed merely upon the shoulders of those who work in the education system.



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