Higher education & social justice

A case study of England’s educational system

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Summary

The focus of this study is to analyze the contribution of HE to social justice in England’s society. Recent educational reforms claimed for a ‘fairer’ educational system, although the literature points to a divergent pattern of participation and attainment rates in education according to the individuals’ socio-economic background. The study of educational equity / equality is a small, but important part of social justice. Inequality is likely to occur in relation to educational opportunities in terms of access (participation), output (attainment) and outcome (the consequences of education). Based on this rhetoric, this study analyzes two functions of HE, its import and export role. As they are both interconnected, this research project offers first an in-depth look at the import role of HE in England, establishing a student profile and discussing recent educational policy reforms. Two different theoretical perspectives (focusing either rational action or social structures) will aid at understanding the differences between social groups, in terms of access / participation and attainment in HE. Overviewing the import role of HE provides a solid foundation upon which the export role will be looked at, by exploring the individual and societal benefits of HE, namely through a key component – knowledge. Even though inequalities are an inherit part of society, the literature points to the positive effects of education, through the widespread applications of knowledge, at both individual and societal levels.
## List of acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BME</td>
<td>black and minority ethnic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DfCSF</td>
<td>department for children, schools and families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FHEQ</td>
<td>further and higher education qualifications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FSM</td>
<td>free school meals</td>
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<tr>
<td>GCSE</td>
<td>general certificate secondary education</td>
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<tr>
<td>HE</td>
<td>higher education</td>
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<tr>
<td>HEFCE</td>
<td>higher education funding council for England</td>
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<tr>
<td>HESA</td>
<td>higher education statistics agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>KS</td>
<td>key stage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEA</td>
<td>local education authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEET</td>
<td>not in education, employment or training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NQF</td>
<td>national qualification framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NS-SEC</td>
<td>national statistics socio-economic classification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>organization for economic co-operation and development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OfFA</td>
<td>office for fair access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEC</td>
<td>socio-economic classification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UFC</td>
<td>university funding council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom (of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)</td>
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1 Introduction

1.1 Overview

Over 2,000 years ago, Aristotle (1995) inquired on the purpose of the education of his age: to produce men, to educate in virtue or to satisfy the material needs of society (Frijhoff, 1996). At present education plays a decisive part in societies confronted with uninterrupted series of economic, structural and social changes (Zajda, 2010). Countries are facing, among other challenges, demographic imbalances with relatively small working age cohorts ahead. In welfare states, such as England, in order to sustain the elderly the productivity of the young must be maximized (Esping-Andersen, 2002). Successfully coping with this issue involves helping individuals to acquire higher-level skills and knowledge, establishing core human values and reinforcing social structures (Galbraith, 1996).

It is through education that societies receive many of their core values and attitudes (Teixeira, 2008) and, overall, investing in education increases the quality of life for the individual and society. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) regards the process of ‘learning’ as vital for a countries’ economical development, social cohesion, and quality of life. Nonetheless, it is dependent on the capacity of the educational systems to be efficient and equitable (Commission of the European Communities, 2006); and, upon public policy and financial support, specially considering the gradual shift of higher education (HE) costs to consumers.

HE’s role is to ensure that graduates, and consequently the nation, possess the skills demanded to be effective in a global, increasingly competitive economic system searching for more efficient production whilst having a less costly labour. Secondly, it needs to narrow the gap dividing individuals who are advantaged (in terms of education, culture or economic resources) and those who are not. However, in highly stratified societies or economic systems, equality of educational opportunity can be difficult to achieve (Zajda, Biraimah, & Gaudelli, 2008) – “inequalities in education are an integral part of the deeper social and economic discrepancies within countries” (Zajda, 2010, p. 67).
The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)\(^1\) adopted as a strategic aim to “widen access and improve participation in HE (…) promoting and providing the opportunity of successful participation to everyone who can benefit from it”, for reasons of social justice and economic competitiveness (HEFCE). The concern with social justice has been historically present since ancient Greece through the works of Aristotle. As he wrote in *Politics* (1995, p. 11): “people…are drawn together by a common interest, in proportion as each attains a share in the good life. The good life is the chief end both for the community as a whole and for each of us individually (…) justice consists on what tends to promote the common interest”. Social justice consists on a basic human right to which all people are entitled to, despite conditions of economic disparity or of class, race, gender, ethnicity, religion, age, citizenship, health or disability (Griffiths, 2003; Zajda, Majhanovich, & Rust, 2006).

In England, the HE system suffered vigorous policy initiatives aimed at widening access and participation for the various social group, although since the 1970’s the gap in participation between rich and poorer individuals has widened (Adnett & Slack, 2007). Castells (2001) perceives universities as mechanisms of selection of the dominant elites\(^2\). However, to achieve a stable and sustainable growth a country cannot rely on a small elite (Department for children, schools and families, 2003; Esping-Andersen, 2002). Countries can no longer afford to waste talent (Barr & Crawford, 2005); their human capital is the most important resource in assuring a dynamic and competitive knowledge economy (Esping-Andersen, 2002). Gordon Brown, Prime-Minister of the United Kingdom (UK) until May 2010, delivered a speech at the Learning and Technology World Forum, in January 2010, in which stated, “education is not just an imperative for opportunity and justice in humanity; it is fundamental to every country’s future prosperity” (Brown, 2010).

\(^1\) The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) is a governmental entity responsible for the promotion and funding of high-quality, cost effective teaching and research, meeting the needs of students, the economy and society.

\(^2\) This is done so through the socialisation process, the formation of networks for their cohesion, and the establishment of codes of distinction between the elites and the rest of society. Castells, M. (2001).
Within this introductory overview a preliminary description of this thesis setting has been presented. By focusing on England\(^3\), a context was drawn and some of its interrelated issues briefly introduced. The *raison d’être* of this study is an attempt to explore the contribution of HE towards the creation of a better society, by focusing on two of its functions. On one hand there are its contributions to the wider society, what Brennan & Naidoo (2008) define as the *export* role of HE. On the other hand, this role is undeniable linked to another HE function, the *import* role, which concentrates on questions of equity and social justice within HE. For Teixeira (2008), equity represents one of three main objectives for HE (along with quality and efficiency). To concentrate solely on this objective fits the purpose of this research study, albeit does not refuse the existence of wider purposes to HE institutions, such as academic freedom or the pursuit of knowledge.

The following sections will offer a precise conceptualization and description of this thesis’ research aims, intentions and rationale, as well as some of its methodological considerations.

### 1.2 Research questions & aims

The aim of this study is to explore HE’s contributions to social justice (through the concept of *educational inequality*) in the wider society, via its *export* function. Nonetheless, the achievement of such goal depends greatly upon the analysis of the *import* function; hence, a fair share of this study is dedicated to explore England’s educational sector (both in terms of organisation and student profile), and its main educational reforms.

The measurement of (in)equality is based on how far disadvantaged groups have progressed in accessing a hitherto inaccessible educational good, and, more specifically, via examining the proportion of individuals whom have accessed a particular education sector relative to their ratio (Lynch & O’Riordan, 1998). For
Zajda, Biraimah, & Gaudelli (2008), the study of equality in education needs to include the dimensions of equity and cultural capital, the latter being a concept which encapsulates the dominant conceptions of what comprehends knowledge, knowing and social value. The HE institutions stay true to what is believed to be knowledgeable, a factor which scholars believe to reinforce disparities in achievement status of class groups, and reward those who oblige to the implicit rules of dominant ideology. Thus, social capital represents the success in schooling for those familiar with the dominant culture. In this sense, the concept of cultural capital appears as a significant dimension of educational inequality.

Being admitted to a HE institution is a matter of social justice, enjoying its ensuing benefits is the result of individual choice (Miller, 1999). The educational attainment theories dissect the mechanisms and factors influencing the decision-making process, and thus comprise the theoretical foundations for this study.

In England, since the 1980’s great weight has been placed on the development of policies on widening access to HE, both at national and institutional level (Gallacher, Osborne, & Postle, 1996). Even with enormous expansion in tertiary education, problems of equal access for various social groups have not been resolved; the students’ profile remains the same, with the majority of undergraduates coming from advantaged backgrounds (Cooke, Barkham, Audin, & Bradley, 2004; Greenback, 2006; Griffiths, 2003). For Zajda, Majhanovich, & Rust (2006), the greater the social inequality, the less present is social justice. However, it remains the only long-term guarantee for the development and achievement of tolerance and harmony in democratic societies.

Based on the above considerations, the main research question of this study is:

**How does HE contribute to the enhancement of equality / equity and social justice in England’s society?**

In order to operationalize this research question four sub-questions will be addressed in sequential order:

1. *How is ‘social justice’, in regard to the educational context, conceptualized*
and interpreted in the relevant literature?

2.) What are the main factors identified in the relevant literature influencing the individual decision-making process of pursuing or not HE?

3.) What are the current educational policies implemented in HE for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds?

4.) Based on theoretical and empirical findings, how can the relationship between HE and societal justice, in England, be interpreted?

The first and second sub-questions of this study are explored in chapter 2. It will present and discuss the main concepts for this research (‘social justice’ and ‘equality / equity’), and the theoretical framework; two separate theoretical perspectives on educational attainment will be attentively looked at, namely the social structure and the rational action perspective. Additionally, the main empirical findings found on the literature review will be summarized. The third sub-question will be addressed in chapter 3; it starts with contextualizing the study, by providing a description of England’s education sector, followed by a student profile (thus setting a measurement of ‘equality / equity’). To finalize this chapter, a chronological analysis of the main educational reforms implemented in this country is presented, focusing the discussion upon the most recent (1998-2008). Finally, the last sub-question is answered on chapter 4. By analyzing and linking the previous sub-questions the primary goal is to reach a fruitful discussion of ‘social justice’, measured through educational (in)equality, in England’s current society. The ultimate and general aim is then, to elaborate a reflection on the export role of HE within this specific context.

1.3 Motivation & rationale

Higher education is a complex and fascinating area of study. It enriches individuals in infinite areas, and prepares them for the diversity and idiosyncrasies of the world. It gives people a chance to improve their lives. It gives them a voice. However, evidence suggests that educational inequalities have increased in the last twenty years
in many countries (Levin, 2003). Paradoxically, among modern economies there is an increasing need for well-prepared and adaptable labour force. Such is the case of England, where, regardless of enormous expansion and intensive policies towards the HE system, problems of equal access for different social groups remain. Burton Clark (in Gumpert, 2007) identified this as one of the main problems within the sociology of HE. Even though Clark’s studies in this area focused social class, race and gender, the author mentioned a need for further research focusing the values, traditions and identities of the educational social systems.

The starting point for this research has been the work of Zajda within the field of social justice and education. In 2006 (p. 13) the author questions *How can we contribute to the creation of a more equitable, respectful, and just society for everyone?*. It assumes HE as a contributor towards the achievement of equity and social justice across the society. “The creation of a more equitable, respectful, and just society for everyone is a dream for all concerned citizens on spaceship Earth” (Zajda, 2010, p. xvi). For Rikowski (2000) the key question is the role of social justice within the social universe of capitalist societies. For the author, within capitalist contexts social justice appears as a utopian goal, as humans are differentially valorised. Due to market-oriented schooling, and substantial tolerance of exclusion and inequalities, the possibility of widening educational inequalities appears as a reality. The OECD regards access and equity, in education, as ‘enduring concerns’, part of a ‘vicious cycle’ (OECD, 2001, p. 26), and expresses a need to widen HE in order to benefit all social groups.

For Bickmore (2008, p. 155) “social justice is a supremely appropriate goal for education”, although conditioned by equity – the act of openness, accessibility, inclusivity, impartiality, of non-repression, non-discrimination, the equivalency status – for all individuals regardless of social differences. The White Paper on *The Future of Higher Education* (2004) states the need of education being not solely a force of entrenched privilege, but needing to adopt a fundamental role in providing opportunity and social justice. Throughout the history of humanity, social justice has been morally defended and adopted as a goal for individuals and societies, yet often is defined in the literature as an unattainable objective (OECD, 2004).
This thesis aims at proportioning a reflexive, critical analysis on the current relationship between social justice and HE, in the English society.

In international benchmarks, the English education system performs well in general (specially regarding ‘quality’ and performance of the HE system), however presents low stay-on rates in post-compulsory education, a major attainment gap between social classes, and poor work-force skills (Johnson, 2004). Given my long time inquisitiveness towards English culture and lifestyle, all in all, combining both the topic and the context embodies an undeniable motivator factor. In response to Brennan & Naidoo (2008, p. 288), whom identified literature in this area as ‘scant’, this study aspires at being a valid contribution to the field of HE and social justice.

Below, figure 1-1, presents a descriptive summary with the main concepts and how they will be articulated and conceptualized in this study.

Figure 1-1 Thesis conceptual framework
1.4 Research Methodology

This section is dedicated to explore the methodological considerations for this study and has been structured around three sub-sections. The first contrasts quantitative versus qualitative research methods, frequently used in educational contexts. Although this study will not be using either, they could not be omitted and are, nonetheless, of particular importance. The second sub-section will present both research design and data collection methods for this thesis. To finalize, some of this studies limitations will be acknowledged in the last sub-section.

1.4.1 Quantitative vs qualitative methods

Albert Einstein once said *not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted.*

The legitimacy and scientific value of academic research are assured through the use of two main approaches, *quantitative* and *qualitative*; both are valued as feasible tools in the production of knowledge. Their ethos and validity have long been debated (Blaikie, 2000). In the words of Fred Kerlinger (*in* Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 40), a quantitative researcher, “There is no such thing as qualitative data. Everything is either 1 or 0”.

*Qualitative* analysis is focused on the social process and its ultimate goal is the production of theory. It intends to observe and interpret at depth a certain social phenomena, and requires the researcher to be open and flexible during this process (Blaikie, 2000). The use of qualitative methods provides, overall, a rich depiction and strategic comparison across cases (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Marshall & Rossman (1999) believe that in this process, the researcher plays a crucial part, and is considered the most important element in qualitative studies. In terms of data collection, qualitative researchers’ resources include observation, interviews (structured, semi-structured, or unstructured), field notes or other papers (Berg, 2001).

On the other hand, *quantitative* studies emphasize a structured empirical observation
and its statistical analysis. Their use is suitable to capture a reality composed of concrete and objective structures, being less appropriate for subjective and dynamic contexts (Conger, 1998); researchers using quantitative analysis are responsible to measure concepts, quantify data, establish patterns and make generalizations over the research findings (Blaikie, 2000) – stressing the use of established procedures, resulting in more precise and generalized results. To collect data researchers make use of scales and questionnaires, e.g. (Berg, 2001)

Fundamentally, both facts and numbers are needed in order to understand the world. Each method on its own is fit to achieve scientifically important and relevant information (Plante, Kiernan, & Betts, 1994). The authors Miles & Huberman (1994) debate not the use of quantitative over qualitative and vice-versa, but rather the approach taken by the researcher – a ‘analytic’ approach to understand some controlled variables, or a ‘systematic’ approach to understand the interaction of variables in a complex environment. The use of both methods of data analysis, according to the authors, will enable the corroboration or confirmation of each other via triangulation, allow to present and develop an intensive analysis, and to begin new lines of thinking through the questioning of paradoxes, providing fresh insight. While quantitative findings are relevant and capture the national education contexts, overemphasizing this method limits the scope of analysis; supplementary methods of triangulation would benefit qualitative description based upon contextualization of the social phenomenon (Jacob & Holsinger, 2008).

1.4.2 Research design & data collection methods

In its essence, this study is considered to be a case study, a process that involves, according to Berg (2001, p. 225), “systematically gathering enough information about a particular person, social setting, event, or group to permit the researcher to effectively understand how it operates or functions”. Thanks to its scope, case studies may also refer to a broader aspects of life and society. For this research, the English HE system will be the focus of analysis, by establishing a descriptive profile of the student population (based on quantitative data), and by overviewing educational
reforms (based on qualitative data); both factors have shaped the HE system as it currently is. These will construct the foundation upon which the concept of ‘social justice’ will be discussed. Zajda, Majhanovich, & Rust (2006) refer to three conceptual and methodological issues when studying social justice: the lack of a consensual definition of the concept; the fact that it is often assumed to be a goal attainable in all societies; and, the ambivalence between social stratification and social justice.

Thus, this study deals with secondary data, both in the shape of statistical releases or policy documents; the main sources have been government publications, articles, journals, books and legislation. Specifically, they can be differentiated in two kinds:

- Policy documents (government legislation, decisions, acts, reports and other related communications).
- Secondary sources (books, journal articles, websites, statistical reports, conference communications and speeches).

However, the data collection process has been influenced by some limitations. The first refers to the choice of the context – England, one of the United Kingdom’s (UK) four constituent countries. In the UK each country has a separate education system. Power devolution, including amongst other the matter of education, has occurred in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Thus, due to space constraints this thesis has decided to solely focus upon England’s HE system. In England, the topic of education is under responsibility of the UK government. This means that in some cases, the data needed was not separate by countries but instead provided an overall analysis of the UK (as is the case with reports produced, e.g., by the OECD or the EU Commission).

### 1.4.3 Limitations

The major limitation for this study, that both constrained and shaped its content, refers to the *time* (one semester) available to complete this master thesis; it does not allow for a comprehensive literature review or exhaustive analytical study. Coupling both the time available and the researchers lack of experience compromised the efficiency
of researching and writing this thesis.

Yet another limitation refers to the holistic nature of the concept analyzed. Establishing the boundaries for this study has proved to be an excruciating task, as social justice and equality / equity relate to broader issues of governance, markets or quality, *e.g.*, that this thesis is incapable of covering in its analysis.

The third limitation, linked with the previous two, refers to the fact that this thesis has not collect any original data and thus its scope of analysis has limited itself to the official data available. The decision to not collect data was influenced by two aspects – one was practical (regarding the short time spam available), and the other was structural (to produce a literature review-based in-depth reflexive analysis). Nonetheless, despite not having quantitative nor qualitative data, this study does acknowledge the importance of such methods. Had their use been implemented, it could strengthen this research by incorporating interviews with key actors (*e.g.* present or past policy makers) in England’s education system. A follow-up study incorporating interviews would allow a deeper analysis of the context and provide an insightful perspective of how social justice in education is perceived.

Acquiring ‘insightful perspective’ would also allow overcoming a personal lack of experience with the English educational context. This can both be perceive as an advantage, allowing me to possess and maintain a distant, neutral and less-biased critical perspective towards it; and a disadvantage, as I lack the experience in practical terms. Nevertheless, this has proved to be a valuable limitation, as I felt the need to further investigate and research the context, both in terms of structure and setting, in order to grasp its totality.
2 Theoretical framework & literature review

This chapter comprises the theoretical framework and the literature review for this study. Overall it provides the basis for discussion and reflexion of social justice in England’s HE system.

It has been divided into two distinct, yet complementary, sections. The first assumes a conceptual character, approaching and defining the concept of ‘social justice’ and its key elements ‘equality / equity’. The second part concentrates on the educational attainment theories used for this study. These are differentiated and shown here, as in the literature, according to their distinct perspectives – theories that emphasize the social structures affecting individuals’ decisions (theory of social reproduction, by Bourdieu), and theories that value how cost and benefit calculations and rational action have an impact on individuals’ choice (Boudon’s social position theory; and the relative risk aversion theory, by Goldthorpe). To finalize, this chapter features a table (2-2, p. 26) summarizing the main educational attainment theories (arguments and criticism) and their literature links.

2.1 Social justice

Over 50 years ago, in 1948, the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which article 26 states “everyone has the right to education (...) higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit”, giving global prominence to the role of education in ensuring economic well-being, political participation and social justice. Emphasising ‘education for all’ is a reminder that restrictions in terms of access (to education) reinforce social injustice (Oduaran & Bhola, 2006).

The concept of ‘social justice’ refers to a multilayered construct, not consensual nor easily defined. Zajda (2010, p. xiv) mentions that its definition depends on “knowledge, expertise, social theory, educational paradigms, political correctness and
religion”. Oppositely to Aristoteles’ era nowadays, nor in the foreseeable future, it is no longer possible to provide a generally accepted definition of social justice that is applicable in all contexts. In the literature, the concept has been regarded as “the general fairness of a society in its divisions and distributions of rewards and burdens” (Zajda, Majhanovich, & Rust, 2006, p. 4), referring to an egalitarian society structured around the ideals of equality and solidarity, that comprehends and supports human rights. “Overcoming oppression and exclusion through measures of equity, resolving conflict without violence, and establishing the conditions for mutual recognition of our individuality and cultural diversity are fundamental ambitions of justice everywhere”; social justice’s ultimate goal is the promotion of human dignity, freedom, social harmony and environmental consciousness (Oduaran & Bhola, 2006, p. v). Maxime Greene (in Zajda, Majhanovich, & Rust, 2006) states, in reference to fairness and equitable treatment, that is does not mean equal treatment, as it is necessary to take into account the diversity of needs within different individuals.

In the literature, two main perspectives on the concept of social justice stand out. On one side there is the work of John Rawls, whom defines the concept in abstract and humanistic terms. According to this author welfare societies cannot override the sense of justice inherently present in all individuals. Inequalities ought to be arranged to maximize the welfare of the worst off. This vision portrays welfare as a function of the ‘primary goods’, those considered essential for people to pursue their individual conception of the ‘good life’ (Pearce & Paxton, 2005). On the other side, Maxime Greene’s work views Rawls conception of social justice as non-universal and non-reflective of higher order. It criticizes Rawls’ work for focusing on the individuals rather than as members of the society. The author is concerned with basic human rights that all individuals are entitled to regardless of factors such as gender, economic disparity or of class, ethnicity, religion, age or disability. Other perspectives perceive the achievement of social justice as dependent on the efforts of individual free citizens, thus minimizing the role of the government. It discards “any notions of a social safety net to assist the disadvantaged, or social contracts where those privileged with power and means voluntarily support those in need, or government regulations to

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bring about a gradual end to inequalities and disparities” (Zajda, Majhanovich, & Rust, 2006, p. 4). It is a point of view congruent with free market economy, deregulation and privatization.

Pearce & Paxton (2005) refer to social justice as contained in four principles: equal citizenship (civic, political and social rights, including the means to exercise them), the social minimum (access to resources that meet individuals’ needs, the principle of sufficiency), equality of opportunity (access to jobs and educational opportunities dependent of motivation and aptitudes) and fair distribution (equality of outcomes).

Some authors defend the existence of two major dimensions of an expanded conceptualization of social justice – the distributional and relational dimensions. The first, distributional justice, relates to values that guide the distribution of goods in society. This dimension is often wholly used as a synonym for ‘social justice’. However, this usage represents a severe limitation of such a broad concept as is social justice; thus, the relevance of embracing in its definition the relational dimension that stresses the nature of relationships which structure society. Distributive justice incorporates the concept of equality, both of opportunity (through equal formal rights, equality of access and equality of participation) and outcome (ensuring equal rates of success for the distinct social groups through direct intervention in order to avert disadvantage) (Gewirtz, 1998).

The greater the social inequality, the less social justice persists. A vital aspect to social justice is the creation of a genuine society of opportunity, in which all individuals can fulfil their potential. As a key concept to pluralist democracies it is believed to be attain in any society. However, Zajda (2010) stresses that capitalist societies are characterized by unacceptable social and economic inequalities and increasingly ingrained social stratification.

The achievement of social justice depends on consensual key factor: that society is working in a fair way, allowing individuals as much freedom as they can have given their role within society. Thus, its achievement is attained through the harmonious cooperative effort of the citizens who, in their own self-interest, accept the current norms of morality as the price of membership in the community. On a micro-level social justice refers to a (moral) virtue ascribed to individuals’ acts, on a macro-level
it designates a regulative principle of order, mainly in terms of redistribution of wealth, income and power. Hence, it emphasises the key relationship between society and the state (Zajda, Majhanovich, & Rust, Education and social justice, 2006). In the educational context, social justice imposes the distribution of education in order to enable access by everyone, everywhere, and at any time. It includes redistributive justice, focusing on equality of outcome rather than solely equality of opportunity devoid of outcomes (Vincent, 2003).

2.1.1 Defining equality & equity

Debating the concept of social justice in education is inevitably linked to equality and equity, to a certain extent. Even though in practical terms, both concepts raise similar concerns, a distinction should be made regarding equality and equity as they, not seldom, appear used in the literature as synonyms, albeit possess different meanings. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, equity refers to the quality of being equal or fair; fairness, impartiality; even-handed dealing, whereas equality is related as the condition of being equal in quantity, amount, value, intensity, etc. In the literature, both concepts also appear differentiated. For Zajda, Biraimah, & Gaudelli (2008) equality requires identical treatment and equity differentiated treatment congruent with relevant differences. Hutmacher, Cochrane, & Bottani (2002, p. 8) refer to equity as a matter of normative judgement, whereas equality is described as a “characteristic of disparity or gap in terms of advantage or disadvantage in material and/or symbolic resources”. The World Bank (in Thomas & Yan, 2008) assumes by equity that individuals should possess equal opportunities of pursuing the life they choose and be spared from very severe deprivation in outcomes.

Opheim (2004, p.13) refers to the concept of ‘educational equity’ as “an educational and learning environment in which individuals can consider options and make choices throughout their lives based on their abilities and talents, not on the basis of stereotypes, biased expectations or discrimination. The achievement of educational equity enables females and males of all races and ethnic backgrounds to develop skills needed to be productive, empowered citizens. It opens economic and social opportunities regardless of gender, ethnicity, race or social status.” It is a broad
definition, emphasizing two aspects – equity in opportunities and equity in educational outcome. Equity in education is not only a matter of the educational system providing the opportunities, but it also embraces the results of various educational choices and performances of the individuals throughout the education system (Opheim, 2008).

The European group of research on equity of the educational systems, (2003) mentions five principles of equality in education: showing no interest in equity; equality of access or opportunities; equality of treatment; equality of achievement or academic success; and, equality of actualization (social output) (refer to index 1, p. 79). The several existing principles do not mean a juxtaposition of contradictory ideas, but rather a broader analysis framework. It comprehends the individual differences of students along several dimensions, which thus impacts their perceptions towards the education system. Different individuals have disparate learning resources acquired (or not) through their family and environment, and thus their individual need for information or training will not be the same. The educational path of each student is influenced by stimuli from parents or their significant social others (whomever constitutes their social network) and the environment; analysing equity in the educational context requires an insight into how the system deals with these dissimilarities.

Several factors have been identified in the literature as perpetuating or culminating in educational inequalities. These aspects portray the multivariate factors that influence disparities through the various levels of education – local, regional or national. Based on the work of Holsinger & Jacob (2008), a resume of such findings is presented on table 2-1.
### Table 2-1 Factors of educational inequality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Literature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Disability</strong></td>
<td>Sternberg &amp; Grigorenko, 2000; Peters, 2003.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Educational attainment opportunities</strong></td>
<td>Breen &amp; Jonsson, 2005; Connolly, 2006.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Globalisation</strong></td>
<td>Carnoy, 1999; Rambla, 2006; Zajda, Biraimah, &amp; Gaudelli, 2008; Zajda, 2010.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language</strong></td>
<td>Zajda, Majhanovich, &amp; Rust, 2006; Brock-Une, 2007.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Neo-liberalism</strong></td>
<td>Colclough, 1996; Ball, 1997; Apple, 2001; Hill, Greaves, &amp; Maisuria, 2008.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Political economy</strong></td>
<td>Collins, 2004; Holsinger, 2005.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Politics</strong></td>
<td>Marginson &amp; Mollis, 2002.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Privatization</strong></td>
<td>Torche, 2005.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race or ethnicity</strong></td>
<td>Modood, 1993; Gillborn, 1997; Connor, Tyers, Modood, &amp; Hillage, 2004; Phalet, Deboosere, &amp; Bastiaenssen, 2007; Wakeling, 2009.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religion</strong></td>
<td>Driessen, 2002.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social class</strong></td>
<td>Lynch &amp; O'Riordan, 1998; (Reay, 1998) van de Werfhorst, 2002; Cooke, Barkham, Audin, &amp; Bradley, 2004; Leathwood &amp; Archer, 2004; Stromquist, 2004; Connolly, 2006.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Societal values or norms</strong></td>
<td>Foster, Gomm, &amp; Hammersley, 2000; Goddard, 2003.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Socio-economic status</strong></td>
<td>Filmer &amp; Pritchett, 1999; Bowers-Brown, 2006; Green, Preston, &amp; Janmaat, 2006; Tieben &amp; Wolbers, 2009.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standardised tests</strong></td>
<td>Baker, Goesling, &amp; LeTendre, 2002; Freeman, 2004.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>War</strong></td>
<td>Davies, 2005.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.2 Theories of educational attainment

The study of equality / equity, a key element of social justice, in educational contexts involves the analysis of the various choices and performances of students throughout their educational path, as referenced by Opheim (2008).

Educational attainment theories focus on a variety of factors and mechanisms to explain socio-economics differences in educational achievement. These are interactive factors, complementary rather than mutually exclusive, and include students’ ability and talent, motivational aspects, parental influence (in terms of cultural and economic resources), the differences in the cost and benefits of education, and its returns. The common principle prevailing is that a person’s chances of achieving their potential in education should be associated with individual talent and effort, and not with characteristics such as gender, wealth, ethnic group or socio-economic background (Opheim, 2008). However, individuals from lower SEC appear under-represented in HE, as both school completion rates and school achievement levels are closely correlated with social class.

A distinction can be made between two sets of theories focusing on social structures that affect individuals’ decisions, and theories centred on how cost and benefit calculations and rational action influence individuals’ choice.

2.2.1 Social structure perspective

The social structure perspective focuses on the impact of culture, values, norms, structure, familial resources, the relationship between the parents / family and school culture and values. Within this perspective, a set of four distinctions can be made between theoretical focus: theories that concentrate on the value of family and theories that highlight the different family resources; theories that stress social differences as a result of resource deprivation and those explaining social differences as a result of diversity. Individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds are seen, by deprivation theories, as culturally and cognitively deprived and for such do not succeed in school. On the other hand, theories concentrating on cultural diversity
would argue that individuals from disadvantaged background origins do not possess
the ‘correct’ cultural resources in order to be successful at school, as educational
contexts do not reward them. Social differences, form this point of view, are
perceived as a result of qualitative differences in familial resources, and not
quantitative (Opheim, 2008).

2.2.1.1 Theory of social reproduction

In 1977 Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron introduced the theory of social
reproduction and symbolic violence, a theory additionally developed by Bourdieu
over the years. It regards the distribution of power in society and the reproduction of
social inequality. Essential concepts in the understanding of Bourdieu’s theory
include habitus, the different forms of capital (economic, social and cultural), and
social fields (Opheim, 2008).

Theory of social reproduction supports that both school and teachers comprehend a
middle class culture that uses a congruent language, examination system, and
environment (Bourdieu, 1979) – “the pedagogical action aims at reproducing the
arbitrary culture of the dominant classes”5 (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970, p. 19).
Students who comprehend and appreciate this culture will feel at ease in school, and
will, as a result, possess a learning advantage in the educational context, thus
increasing their educational attainment. For Opheim (2008, p.32) “the reproduction of
culture through education is at the same time the reproduction of power and the social
structure”. This perspective perceives schools as mechanisms of deferred selection,
translating social inequalities into academic inequalities (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990),
thus legitimizing class differences behind a technical function of producing
qualifications (Bourdieu, 1993).

Bourdieu (1993) differentiates three central types of capital: economic capital
(money, wealth), social capital (individuals’ network of lasting relations, or sphere of

5 Roughly translated from the original, “l’action pédagogique vise à reproduire l’arbitraire culturel
contacts’), and cultural capital (individuals’ use of language, modes of conduct, cultural codes, skills and knowledge). The latter, cultural capital, represents a persons’ acquaintance with the dominant conceptions of what constitutes knowledge, knowing and social value. Educational systems uphold a single standard of what knowledge means, which reinforces the differences in achievement of the various social groups and rewards those who are familiar with the implicit rules of the dominant ideology (Zajda, Biraimah, & Gaudelli, 2008, p. xxv). Cultural capital’s effect extends beyond the educational context, contributing to reproduction of social inequalities in the labour market. Individuals holding an elevated cultural capital are more likely to reveal cultural traits similar to those of higher-class culture on job interviews that could reveal as an asset to the eyes of the employer; empirical findings suggest that high academic qualifications have a strong correlation with high paying salaries (Grenfell & James, 1998). Simultaneously, while capital attracts capital, as more individuals acquire it, it becomes a devalued asset.

A central aspect of the social reproduction theory is the concept of habitus, used to explain how social norms become embedded in individuals. It is a broad, diverse and complex concept that refers to a system of predispositions, acquired and transformed by a person’s experience through upbringing and education (Opheim, 2008). It represents an acquired system of reproductive schemes, adapted to the conditions in which it is formed (Grenfell & James, 1998). Whilst it has an inheriting characteristic, it is also a consequence of routine, disposition and unconsciousness. A person’s level of capital or resources is part of their habitus (Opheim, 2008). The individuals’ habitus constitutes a set of predispositions that are durable (lasting throughout an individual’s lifetime) and transposable (capable of performing in multiple and diverse fields of activity) (Bourdieu, 1993). Individuals acquire from their parents a habitus, an unconscious orientation towards ways of being congruent with their own class position, and, as such, maintain a cycle of social classes reproduction. Habitus of individuals is thus differentiated, and reproduced, according to their socio-economic status (Zajda, Biraimah, & Gaudelli, 2008).

In terms of criticism, Bourdieu’s theoretical perspective has been accused of excessive materialism, idealism, and determinism in the approach presented; and, of over-simplifying class cultures and their interaction. Equally subjected to critics was
the concept of *habitus*, by not providing an accurate concept of structure, in the sense that a large diversity of social arrangements can fall under this category. Another critic refers to Bourdieu’s lack of mention to notions of ‘self-choice’ and ‘action’, by emphasising that practices are a consequence of the relationship between groups and culture (Grenfell & James, 1998).

Boudon’s criticism (*in* Opheim, 2008) towards the social reproduction theory is based upon the primary effects of social stratification. By concentrating on the cultural differences between the school system and individuals socio-economic status, Bourdieu’s theoretical framework limits itself to the explanation of social differences in educational achievements (the primary effects). It fails to portray what Boudon defines as secondary effects – *why* individuals from different social classes make different educational choices. For Goldthorpe (*in* Opheim, 2008), Bourdieu’s theory is based on deviant premises. The author stresses the role that schools can play in the creation and transmission of cultural capital, by compensating and complementing for family influences. Accordingly, schools as agents of re-socialisation play a fundamental task in the reduction of social inequalities.

### 2.2.2 Rational action perspective

Among rational action perspectives, two common premises prevail: the principle that individuals act rationally, forming beliefs towards the options available to them; and that social phenomenon’s can be comprehended in terms of elementary individual actions which compose them (Opheim, 2008). In this perspective, decision-making places greater emphasis on structural elements. Individuals act consciously, influenced by “expected benefits, costs and the probability of success for different educational alternative” (Breen & Jonsson, 2005, p. 227), while taking their values into consideration (Hechter & Kanazawa, 1997).
2.2.2.1 Social position theory

In 1974, Raymond Boudon developed the social position theory. It supports that the decision-making process is influenced by individuals desire to avoid downward social mobility, which represents a stronger wish than that of upward social mobility. According to Boudon, individuals from higher socio-economic classifications (SEC) perform better at school and are more likely to continue doing so throughout their working life in general. Based on his findings, the author separates between primary and secondary effects of stratification (Opheim, 2008). The primary effects are based on the social differences in performance (the academic abilities generated by family backgrounds). Overall, it has been documented in the literature that children from higher SEC, in average, perform better than children from lower SEC (Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997). Secondary effects refer to the social differences in the probability of continuing to HE (the educational choices made by young individuals and their parents at transition points in educational careers). Hatcher (1998) estimates that approximately 50% of class differences in educational outcomes are due to the primary and secondary effects.

The social position theory assumes that individuals’ educational choice is a rational analytical process of cost-benefit estimations, and probability of success for the several options available to them. It is a process based on the available financial and cultural resources, but also on a background-specific perception (Tieben & Wolbers, 2009). Success is defined according to subsequent economic returns, measured both by income and occupational classification. Hence, class differences are a consequence of evaluation disparities made by individuals from different SEC, even when they possess the same level of academic attainment (Hatcher, 1998). Opheim (2008) stresses the social costs of entering HE for the various societal groups. For an individual from a high SEC to enter into HE may appear as a natural step to make (following the same path as peers and family); not to enter HE would latter reflect on occupational status and earnings (considering the empirical correlation between education and social position in society), thus increasing the risk of “experiencing downward social mobility and ending up in a lower social position in society compared to their friends and family” (Opheim, 2008, p. 38). Thus, for higher SEC individuals the cost of entering HE is low compared to the cost of not entering. On the
other hand of the spectrum, for individuals from lower SEC the situation is the opposite; the costs of education are heavy and to proceed studies into HE level represents a risk in terms of moving away, socially, from their peers and family (Hatcher, 1998).

In relation to attainment, Boudon stresses the relevance of parents’ cultural capital (measured through parental education level), which enhances the success probability through two mechanisms: knowledge about the education system (a facilitator of strategic behaviour), and as a helping hand in students’ school-work.

The rational action theories, amongst which is Boudon’s, have been criticized for being grounded on a misunderstanding of how social agents operate. Bourdieu, the main critical force towards this perspective, accentuates the outcomes of conscious calculations. By not including the habitus of individuals (a factor that constrains individuals predispositions to act in certain ways and pursue certain aims), this theoretical perspective regards them as agents without a past, separated from context and social structures (Opheim, 2008).

### 2.2.2.2 Relative risk aversion theory

Derived from Boudon’s empirical findings, John Goldthorpe developed the relative risk aversion theory, in 1996, and in the following year in collaboration with Richard Breen. For the authors, the secondary effects are the key element in shaping the individuals careers within the educational system (Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997). Congruently with Boudon’s theory, for Goldthorpe inequalities are a consequence of a set of several educational decisions (Tieben & Wolbers, 2009). This theory supports that individuals decision-making is ultimately the result of avoiding downward social class mobility (Hatcher, 1998). The main objective in the decision-making process is to minimise the risk of ending up in a lower social class than that of origin; individuals use their parent’s social position as a reference for setting their own aspirations (Opheim, 2008), and simultaneously, parents want their children to obtain (minimally) the same educational level as their own (Tieben & Wolbers, 2009).
Goldthorpe defines class goals are defined solely in economic terms (via income and employment status) (Hatcher, 1998).

A central position to this theory is that individuals’ values towards education are static among social classes; what differs is their academic abilities and economic resources. Oppositely to the social position theory, the relative risk aversion theory rejects the value of social costs in explaining social differences in educational choice. Educational attainment inequalities persist, even when HE is formally available to all individuals, due to the distinct needs of individuals from different social classes. Individuals persist in education until they’ve reached a ‘threshold’ level of education that they consider sufficient for attaining the same social position as that of their progenitors; from this level onwards, the costs of pursuing further education outweigh the utility of acquiring more education (Opheim, 2008). Individuals from lower SEC can maintain the parental status with less educational investment, as lower or intermediate diplomas are enough to reach their parents low status (Tieben & Wolbers, 2009). They perceive little or no utility in pursuing HE for the promotion of their future social class position (Opheim, 2008), and, if they are to take the educational risk they require greater assurance of success (Lynch & O’Riordan, 1998).

Breen & Goldthorpe (1997) mention that although gender differentials in levels of educational attainment have strongly declined, and in some contexts even reversed, since 1970, the process of educational expansion has not, in general, led to children from lower SEC to catch up with those from higher SEC in the average levels of attainment. Empirical findings suggest, indeed, that individuals from higher SEC perform better, on average, than individuals from lower SEC in educational contexts.

The central criticism towards the relative risk aversion theory comes from David Gambetta, who argues that classes over-adapt (the middle class upwards and the working class downwards), a factor that Goldthorpe’s theory cannot explain. Gambetta goes further, in mentioning a need for the theory to include ‘preferences’, not isolated, but integrated into a coherent life-plan (which are culturally influenced, but not determined) (Hatcher, 1998). Lynch & O’Riordan (1998) share the opinion that the relative risk aversion theory does not provide a comprehensive framework for understanding inequalities and overall lacks a firm conceptual framework for the interpretation of generative causes of differences in choices. The authors refer to a
‘weak’ notion of rationality that assists in explaining why people behave a certain way, but does not explain what conditions their choices towards a particular choice; equally, it lacks a substantial explanation on which options are made open or acceptable to specific groups and why (Lynch & O’Riordan, 1998, p. 447).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>View</th>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Main arguments</th>
<th>Empirical support</th>
<th>Criticism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| SOCIOLOGICAL | Value theory (Hyman, 1953) | - Educational attainment seen as the result of social differences placed on the value of education.  
| Social Reproduction | Deferred gratification theory (Schneider & Lysgaard, 1953) | - Postponing immediate satisfaction to achieve a latter goal.  
| Theory of Social Reproduction (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) | - Distribution of power and reproduction of social inequality.  
| SOCIAL STRUCTURE | Signalling theory (Spence, 1973; Arrow, 1973) | - Education as a sorting mechanism.  
- Focused on the benefits of education for the individual (doesn’t require formal causality relation between education-productivity) | Spence, M. (2002). | - High relevance of economic resources and individual strategic behaviour. |
| RATIONAL ACTION | Social position theory (Boudon; 1974) | Educational decision-making results from analysis of costs/benefits; to avoid downward social mobility.  
| Relative Risk Aversion (Goldthorpe & Breen, 1997) | - Parents’ social position functions as a reference for individual aspirations.  
| Human Capital Theory (Mincer, 1958; Schultz, 1961; Becker, 1964) | - Education seen as a human capital investment (with individual and societal benefits).  
3 The context of England

Within the UK’s four constituent countries, England is the largest and the one with the biggest economy; it is where approximately 84% of the UK’s population lives. The society is characterized by a welfare state that is attempting at moving away from high level of inequality, poverty and low social mobility without sacrificing its economic strength – Pearce & Paxton (2005) refer to it as an ‘anglo-social’ welfare state. Esping-Andersen (2002) defends that the shape of a countries’ welfare state results from its social-democratic commitment to participation and responsibility.

In this chapter, the core features of England’s educational system are explored. First, a description of the education system is presented in terms of organization, qualifications and funding. Overall, special emphasis will be given to the HE sector. Second, a HE student profile is elaborated on the basis of age, gender, ethnicity and social-economic classification. The third section provides a chronological overview of the main educational reforms implemented in the last decades; the most recent reforms, from 1998 to 2008, will be subjected to a further analysis.

3.1 The education system

In regard to education, England’s full-time compulsory schooling starts at age 5. The majority of pupils attend state-maintained primary schools until age 11, being submitted to national testing in literacy and numeracy at ages 7 (key stage 1 – KS1) and 11 (KS2), after which they transition to secondary school. At age 15 the pupils face the GCSEs\(^6\) (General Certificate of Secondary Education), marking the end of compulsory education. The private, independent sector is relatively small, although its

\(^6\) The General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) is nationally regarded as the main examination to complete the first stage of secondary or High School education, leading to labour-market-recognized qualifications.
relevance varies geographically – incorporating approximately 7 per cent of the total school-age population.

The end of compulsory education is at age 16, time by which different directions can be chosen. According to the latest data available, for the year of 2008 (Department for children, school and families, 2009a) and regarding young participants (aged 16-18), a low proportion of the cohort, according to international standards, considerably 64% stays on in formal full-time education – the vast majority of those who are successful (obtaining either five or more ‘good passes’ at GCSE), at age 16 corresponds to approximately half of each cohort of students; and, at age 19 corresponds to approximately 76% of students, whom will seek to attain the academic A-level route, thus being formally prepared for entranced into HE.

The different pathways followed by young individuals (aged 16-18) are summarized in figure 3-2, providing a comparative overview for the period of 1998 to 2008. These include full-time education, employment with or without training – employer funded training (EFT), work based learning (WBL), and other education and training (OET) – or not in education, employment or training (NEET7).

7 The Department for children, schools and families has developed a NEET strategy (available for download on: http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/14-19/documents/neet_strategy_0803.pdf), aimed at significantly reducing the proportion of individuals in this cohort by 2013.
Figure 3-2 Different pathways of individuals aged 16-18 over a ten year period

Source: Department for children, school and families (2009a)

The study beyond secondary education, usually between the age of 18 – 21, is provided by two types of institutions, the HE (universities and other HE institutions) and further education institutions. While the first is characterized by academic study ("degree level"), the second is oriented to vocational and skills training.

Qualifications in England are part of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) comprising 9 levels, to cover all stages of learning in secondary education, further education colleges, tertiary colleges, specialist colleges and adult education centre.

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) sets out the levels at which qualifications are recognized, helping learners to make informed decisions on what they desire to pursue.
education, and vocational HE. NQF does not comprehend HE courses rather these are aligned with the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), which allows comparisons between them.

In terms of funding and organization of education, there are 150 Local Education Authorities (LEAs) responsible for organizing and funding pre-school and compulsory education. Even though schools and LEAs have to act in accordance with several central government rules regarding testing, curriculum and funding, they are the ones responsible for delivering education services. Beyond compulsory schooling, at age 16, the responsibility for education is to be shared between the LEAs and the recent Skills Funding Agency\textsuperscript{10} (operational since April 2010). The “changing pattern of responsibility between central government, local government, and schools” is, according to Johnson (2004, p. 174), essential to understand the development of education policy.

The funding of HE is the responsibility of the HEFCE, which allocates approximately £5 billion a year to 131 universities in England (geographically distributed through the national territory). The universities are currently free to set tuition fees, ranging between 0-£3,000; an income-contingent loan system is at the disposal of all students.

According to international standards, the English HE sector reveals high quality research output, and students take short time to complete courses (Johnson, 2004).

In figure 3-3 a visual representation of England’s educational system is depicted.

\textsuperscript{10} The Skills Funding Agency’s main function is to direct funding in a quick and efficient manner to further education colleges and other skills providers.
3.2 Student profile

According to the Office for National Statistics, in 2009 England’s overall population was over 50 millions (roughly 51,092 millions). In terms of ethnic categories, approximately 88% (45,063 million people) were white, whereas the remaining 12% (6,029 millions) belonged to ethnic minority groups.

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11 All data provided in this section refers to England domiciled students in full-time HE, unless stated otherwise.

12 The Office for National Statistics’ (2009a) classification of ethnicity is grounded on 5 groups: white (British; Irish; or, other white backgrounds), mixed (white and black Caribbean; white and black African; white and Asian; or, other mixed backgrounds), Asian or Asian British (Indian; Pakistani; Bangladeshi; or, other Asian backgrounds), black or black British (Caribbean; African; or, other black background), and Chinese or any other ethnic group.
Demographically speaking, this is an ageing population. Estimations show that by 2026 the group of individuals aged between 16-24 years old will be outnumbered in two to one, by individuals aged 65 years old. By 2033, this same group (aged 65 and plus) is expected to reach 23%, whereas the younger group (aged 16-24) is expected to gradually decrease to approximately 10%.

In terms of the young individuals group (aged 16-24), by 2008, they comprised a total of 6.869 million people, of which approximately 32% (2.198 million) were from black and minority ethnic (BME)\textsuperscript{13} groups.

In general the “young participation rate” in HE (HEFCE, 2010, p. 3), meaning individuals aged 18-19, increased from 30% in mid-1990 to 36% at the end of 2000 (refer to index 2, p. 80). In alignment with the overall demographic changes in population, for the year of 2009/10 estimations predict a reduction of approximately 4% in the number of entrants to HE, when compared to the year of 2008/09 (refer to index 3, p. 81). Nonetheless, according to the OECD (2009), in England, from 1995 to 2007, enrolment rates in education of individuals aged 15-19 have remained practically unchanged (approximately 73%), whereas other OECD countries have an average increase of 8%, when compared to the years from 1995 to 2007 (refer to index 4, p. 82).

Referring to participation rates in the year of 2009, according to the Universities and colleges admissions service (2009), within the total population of 6.869 million individuals, 425,063 thousand (6%) entered HE institutions (table 3-3), of which, 77% came from a white group, and 19% belonged to a BME group.

In general, analysing the ethnicity of HE entrants, the data\textsuperscript{14} shows that in 2009, within 4.671 million individuals of the white group, approximately 7% entered HE,

\textsuperscript{13} The acronym for black and minority ethnic (BME) comprises the ethnic categories of black, Asian and other, above mentioned.

\textsuperscript{14} The data available by the Universities and colleges admissions (2009) refers only to UK domiciled students, aged below 24, studying in England, who willingly provided their demographical background information upon entrance to HE. Thus, it does not comprise the entire student population numbers.
whereas from 2.198 million people of the BME group, around 4% got accepted into a HE institution. The increase of BME participation in HE is aligned with the growth in the overall BME population in England.

Table 3-3 Participation rates in HE for individuals aged below 24

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity group</th>
<th>Applicants</th>
<th>Accepted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thousands</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>413,570</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BME</td>
<td>112,185</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>18,530</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>544,285</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Universities and colleges admissions service (2009)*

Although the participation rates in HE for BME groups represent a considerable share of the total population – a ratio of one in each six students – geographically speaking, the literature points to their tendency of studying in areas with large BME populations, a factor that has not changed in the last 12 years. In general, the elite universities (Oxford and Cambridge) recruit fewer ethnic students than the average for all other universities (Business in the community, 2010).

Regarding the students SECoF origin, the higher education statistics agency (HESA) possesses limited information. For a characterization of the overall population, the latest data available refers to the year of 2003, and refers to the cohort of individuals aged 16-59 (namely 31.251,000 million of the total population). Although it is not the most accurate data for the purpose of this study, it allows a rough characterization of the total population, as shown in figure 3-4.
Individuals from NS-SEC\textsuperscript{15} categories 1 to 3 are considered upper / middle social class, and correspond, in this sample, to 44\% of the total population; whereas individuals from NS-SEC 4-7 are referred to as lower social class, and correspond to 39,8\% of the total population aged 16-59. The remaining 16.2\% of the population were described as long-term unemployed.

\textsuperscript{15} The National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC) groups the population into seven classes on the basis of occupation: 1) higher managerial and professional occupations; 2) lower managerial and professional occupations; 3) intermediate occupations; 4) small employers and own-account workers; 5) lower supervisory, craft and related; 6) semi-routine occupations; 7) routine occupations (Archer, L., Hutchings, M., & Ross, A. 2003. \textit{Higher education and social class. Issues of exclusion and inclusion}. London: RoutledgeFalmer).
Considering the data presented above, which portrays the lower social classes\(^{16}\), as the majority of England’s population, in the educational context, however, they are the least represented group. For the academic year of 2007/08, in reference to student’s parents’ SEC background, the proportion of individuals participating in HE from NS-SEC 1-3 (upper-middle social class) corresponded to 71.3% of the student population aged under 21. The remaining 28.7% matched to the NS-SEC categories 4 to 7.

The distribution of student’s according to their parents SEC, for the academic year of 2007/08 is portrayed in figure 3-5.

![SEC distribution of students’ parents (2007/08)](image)

*Source: Equality Challenge Unit (2009)*

Once graduated, the unemployment rates differ by ethnic groups. People from minority ethnic groups have higher unemployment rates than white people. Referring

\(^{16}\) The NS-SEC perceives unemployment as the eight non-official category and is often grouped, for statistical reasons, with the NS-SEC 4-7.
to the year of 2007 / 08, approximately 66% of white students who graduated found a job within a year, compared to 56% of BME students.

Although individuals from BME apply to HE in great proportions, their success rate is low (Wakeling, 2009). In a report about *Breaking the link between disadvantage and low attainment* (Department for children, schools and families, 2009b), individuals socio-economic background was assessed according to their need, or not, of *free school meals*\(^\text{17}\) (FSM). According to such, in every critical educational point (the KS previously discussed) from early years through HE, a FSM pupil has approximately three times worse odds of achieving “good school outcomes” (p. 5), the expected results for their age, when compared to a non-FSM pupil. This relationship between family disadvantage and educational attainment is illustrated in figure 3-6.

In general, since 1997 educational outcomes of individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds have suffered little improvement. Currently, pupils from low SEC are five times more likely to fail academically than their peers. In terms of ethnicity, individuals from white working-class backgrounds are the most underachieving – about 17% of disadvantaged white boys attain 5 or more A*-Cs at GCSE compared to a 56% national average; within the BME group, 19% of boys obtain 5 or more A*-C at GCSE.

Every year, approximately over one in ten pupils leave school with no qualifications (*i.e.*, 26,000 pupils leaving school without any GCSEs); and, 44,000 individuals leave school illiterate (Robson, 2007).

\(^{17}\) The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DfCSF) uses *free school meals* (FSM) as a proxy measure of deprivation, a longstanding binary gauge based on family income. The DfCSF acknowledges its flaws as being a mere indicator household income and not a measure of relative economic well-being. Still, its overall usefulness in analysing the impact of deprivation on attainment prevails (Department of children, schools and families. 2009. *Breaking the link between disadvantage and low attainment*. UK: DfCSF).
3.3 Educational policy overview

In order to fulfil the educational policy goals, and to adapt to internal / external changes, the education system is subjected to frequent changes labelled as reform. These are embedded in historical, social, political and institutional contexts.

An historical retrospective shows that prior to the 1944 Education Act, nearly 90% of young people abandoned school at age 14, only 10% obtained passes in public examination and less than 5% proceeded into HE. Education played a central role in
post-second world war social reconstruction, and the *1944 Education Act* was considered one of the pillars of the welfare state. The time frame between 1945 and 1979 (the year in which Margaret Thatcher was elected UK’s prime minister) was designated as the *post-war consensus*. In this period education policy was heavily based on social democratic consensus, regulated and resourced by governments, in which education was used to achieve redistributive justice, and provide equal opportunity.

For the “first time in the history of public education, there was a real intention to educate the mass of young people to far higher levels than ever before” (Tomlinson, 2005, p. 3), although it soon became clear that the *1944 Education Act* benefited mainly the middle class and a small number of selected working class individuals (as upper class did not attend state maintained schools). The first sign on the end of education as a perpetuator of social class differences appeared in the 1960’s with the development of comprehensive education, and thus giving the whole population a new social and economic purpose.

Between 1980 and 2005 around 34 Education Acts were approved and accompanied by hundreds of circulars, regulations and statutory instruments. This sub-chapter will present a timeline focusing the main educational policy documents (in this case, education acts and governmental reports) considered relevant for the purpose of this study – equality / equity, as measures of social justice, in England’s educational system. The main characteristics of each are presented, and the further analysis and discussion will focus the most recent, from late 1990’s until presently.

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18 According to Tomlinson (2005), the welfare state in England is grounded on three pillars: the *Education Act* (1944), the *National Insurance Act* (1946) and the *National Health Service Act* (1948).
TIMELINE OF ENGLAND’S EDUCATIONAL POLICY
(1944 – PRESENT)

→ 1944: *Education Act*
   - Tripartite system of secondary education (grammar school, secondary technical school and secondary modern school) – separating children based on age, ability and aptitude.
   - Secondary education compulsory until age 15, free for all pupils.
   - Introduction of free school meals; school transport and clothing grants.
   • This act did not promote equality of opportunity for working class individuals (to enter grammar school or receive a balanced and well-resourced education).

→ 1959: *Crowther Report*
   - Refers to the ‘wastage of talent’ among working class school leavers (aged 15-18).
   - Recommended the expansion of HE (which occurred in the 1980’s); a coherent national system of technical and vocational training (still to happen); and, a new external examination for secondary modern schools (the certificate of secondary education exam, 1962).

→ 1963: *Robbins Report*
   - Recommended substantial expansion in HE.
   - Rejected the notion of a limited pool of ability in the population: the IQ tests used to separate children into different schools were influenced by home environment. Children should be given equal opportunity to develop intelligence.
   • In 1964, the newly Labour Government made comprehensive schooling a priority, a long procrastinated process (until 1979).
   • In 1972, compulsory schooling was set to the age of 16.

→ 1976: *Education Act*
   - Non-selective admission to secondary schools.
   - Mainstream inclusion of children with disabilities.
   • The 1970’s were characterized by a commitment to comprehensive
principles although lacking a coherent plan for working-class individuals to proceed into HE.

→ **1980: Education Act**
- LEAs to assist the attendance of able pupils at private schools on a means-tested basis (low income not used as a measure of educational needs).
- Parental choice enhanced (via preference for a school).

• The Conservative government policy during the 1980’s was marked by a desire to reinstate selection (and a parallel social class division) and abandon the comprehensive education system.

→ **1988: Education Reform Act**
- Encouraged central planning of HE and further legislation.
- Introduced a national curriculum and assessment (KS & GSCE’s); open enrolment of pupils (up to a ‘relevant standard number’).
- Student grants were frozen, while large-scale student maintenance loans were introduced (severely criticized for its inadequate design: loans were to be repaid when a student’s subsequent earnings reached 85% of the national average wage).
- Establishment of the Universities Funding Council (UFC).
- Student loan scheme design criticized for not being adequate.

• This act intended to transform education into a product; a competitive market of HE awarding the consumers with market power over producers.

→ **1992: Further and Higher Education Act**
- Creation of new funding councils, HEFCE, (replacing the UFC), responsible for funding all HE institutions in England.
- End of the binary system in HE, abolishing the division between universities and polytechnics.

• This act guaranteed that all HE funding was unified, and that in the future all HE institutions would compete for teaching and research funds. Overall, portrays a governmental commitment to marketisation.

→ **1997: Dearing Report**
- Recommendations include changes in institutional funding; enhancing the HE system; further development of a qualification framework.
- Suggests the ‘end of universal free HE’ – all undergraduate students, as consumers, ought to pay a flat-rate £1,000 tuition fee.
- Poorer students should be supported by a means-tested maintenance grant.

1998: *Teaching and Higher Education Act*
- Introduction of income-tested tuition fees (of £1,125 effective from 2003/04; paid upfront by all, except the poorest students).
- Changes to student funding: the student maintenance grant for living expenses replaced by a student income-contingent loan of £4,000 (repaid at a rate of 9% of the graduates’ income once it is above £10,000). Supplementary hardship loan available (£250 per year).

• The main feature of this period is contradiction: the government both pledges for social justice, and continues to pursue competitive market policies.

2004: *Higher Education Act*
- Assists the execution of the measures suggested in the 2003 White Paper, *The future of HE* (main aim is to widen access and participation to HE institutions, while maintaining their competitiveness):
  a) Introduction of variable fees (HE institutions free to charge up to £3,000 annually per course, and to vary the fees).
  b) ‘Realistic’ student loans (up to £2,700 per year); repayment deferred until graduate’s income reaches £15,000 a year.
  c) Establishment of the Office for Fair Access (OfFA), responsible for supervising access plans of institutions charging fees higher than £1,125.
  d) HE institutions charging top fees to under-represented students will provide a £300 bursary.

2008: *Education and Skills Act*
- Compulsory schooling raised to the age of 18 (to be effective from 2013).
- Aims at increasing participation in learning by young people and adults.

• This act empowers the consumers of education (enabling them to express preference for a school, and to take part in policy matters); it was elaborated to achieve the governments’ goal of ‘world-class skills by 2020’, emphasizing the relevance of human capital.
3.3.1 Main aspects of educational reforms (1998-2008)

In 1997, after 18 years in power, the Conservative Party government lost the elections to a Labour Party. The newly elected government committed itself to a “range of objectives including economic growth, distributional goals, social inclusion, liberty and security” (Barr, 2003b, p. 1). Being directly relevant to all, the HE system faced a decisive moment. HE was no longer perceived as a consumption good enjoyed by an elite, but rather an important element in national economic performance (Barr, 2004).

Until 1998, HE students had no tuition fees; their living expenses were partly covered by student maintenance loans (with mortgage-type repayments – these were to be repaid when the student’s earnings reached 85% of the national average wage) and parental contributions.

In 1998, the Teaching and Higher Education Act introduced upfront fees (corresponding to £1,125 for the academic year of 2003/04) regardless of subject or university. Students living expenses were met by a combination of parental contributions and income-contingent loan of £4,000 (repayed at a rate of 9% of the graduates’ income once higher than £10,000, collected alongside income tax); there was no loan to cover the fee (Barr, 2003b). The income-contingent loan schemes’ design has a built-in insurance against inability to repay, therefore protecting access. The main criticism towards these reform measures refer to the perseverance of central planning, the introduction of (upfront) fees for all subjects in all universities, the abolishment of a grant system, and the existence of a (small, unrealistic, i.e., unable to cover living expenses) loan system incorporating interest subsidies. For Nicholas Barr (2003a) the 1998 loan system design resulted in a continuous dependence of graduates upon parental contribution. The author equally criticized the upfront charges for being inefficient – individuals should not be forced to pay an amount upfront, but rather choose how to pay it; in addition, individuals for whom access is most fragile tend be those less well-informed about HE, and its benefits. There is an element of uncertainty about the returns to a degree (Barr, 2003b). Instead, Barr proposed, as the most effective way of enhancing national economic performance and promoting access, a system of tax funding plus deferred charges in which people have a choice between paying at the time of making deferred payments. Similarly, Migali
(2006) proposes a flexible system that would allow the graduates to choose their preferred repayment system (considering their perceived riskiness and type of degree), according to their earning characteristics.

In 2003, as an attempt to overcome the previously identified issues, the White Paper on *The future of higher education* in England was published and presented the Government’s plans for radical reform and investment in HE institutions. It portrayed an aspiration of expanding HE to meet the needs of the economy and the students, by coming through with new types of qualification. More specifically, it mentioned a need to “enable more people to enter HE, benefiting both individuals and the economy’s need for higher level skills”, to “support those from disadvantaged backgrounds by restoring grants, helping with fee costs and abolishing up-front tuition fees for all students” and “give universities long term financial certainty by helping them build up endowment funds” (Department for Education and Skills, 2003a, p. 5).

In favour of the White Paper measures, the 2004 Higher Education Act (effective from 2006) legislated that universities were to have the freedom to set tuition fees ranging between 0-£3,000 per year, to rise annually in line with inflation, replacing the upfront flat fee (of £1,125)\(^{19}\). The students are given a choice: to pay the fee upfront or take out a loan. In the latter case, the university remains its independent financial position, as the Student Loans Administration pays the fee directly to the institution (Barr, 2004). The income-contingent loans were extended to cover both students living expenses and their tuition fee; the threshold at which loan repayment starts was also raised, graduates start repaying once their annual income reaches £15,000 (in times of low earnings no repayment is required), thus being a system of deferred charges (Barr, 2004). All students are eligible for the income-contingent loan scheme, regardless of their SEC. In addition, the 30% of poorest students are entitled to a (non-repayable) maintenance grant of £1,500, as well as the remission of the first £1,200 of the fees. The means-tested maintenance grants (previously abolished in 1998) were set at £2,700, to increase in line with the inflation.

\(^{19}\) In 2004 only four universities (Greenwich, Leeds Metropolitan, Northampton and Thames Valley) charged less than £3,000. Currently, only one universities remains with lower fees.
A central goal to the White Paper is to enhance access and participation in HE from 43% to 50%, between individuals aged 18-30, by 2010. The 2004 reform brings an Access Regulator, the OfFA, responsible for ensuring that institutions conduct plans to widen access in an attempt to overcome for charging fees higher than £1,125 (Barr, 2004). Universities charging the top fees (i.e., £3000) to students receiving the full maintenance grant\textsuperscript{20} will award them with a mandatory bursary up to £300.

The 2008 \textit{Education and Skills Act} continues the governments’ policy of empowering the consumers of education (allowing them to express preference for a school in which they’d rather receive education in order to prepare them for the A-levels, often between the age of 16-19; and in policy matters, as school governing bodies are required to collect the views of pupils on core matters affecting them). It also increased the years of compulsory schooling\textsuperscript{21} (until students reach the age of 18), a measure that will be effective starting 2013. It is argued that by raising the participation age in education individuals gain new rights, more opportunities for enrolling in education and training, the support needed to engage in learning (Department for children, schools and families, 2008). This measure provides the students more time to become acquainted with the educational \textit{habitus} and overall environment / context.

An independent review of HE funding and student finance is currently taking place, conducted by Lord Browne, to be reported in late 2010.

\textsuperscript{20} Students eligible for a full maintenance grant are those whose household income is £25,000 or less.

\textsuperscript{21} Individuals are required to participate in education or training until the age of 18, through either: \textit{a)} full-time education or training (in school college or home education); \textit{b)} work-based learning (apprenticeship); \textit{c)} part-time education or training (in case they are employed, self-employed or volunteering more than 20 hours per week).
3.3.2 Analysis of the educational reforms (1998-2008)

The predominant educational policy in the 1960s and 1970s transmitted a progressive and egalitarian vision of education, an assumption that has gradually been replaced with marketisation ideals, representing serious implications for human rights, social justice, and democracy. To understand educational reforms it is necessary to accept that educational practices and policies, in general, are heavily influenced by the ever more integrated international economy. Currently, the global culture presses HE institutions to invest its capital in the knowledge market; the main ethos of education is the economic gain – efficiency and profit-driven managerialism (Zajda, 2010).

In England, the introduction of tuition fees marked a fundamental point in the way education was perceived. For the first time students were seen as consumers, purchasing their education (through tuition fees, a partial contribution to some of its costs). Empowering the consumers can be seen as a way of forcing the HE institutions to increase their quality. However, in order for the HE market to function properly there is a need for the consumers – both students and their parents – to be able to make informed choices. For Fazackerley & Chant (2010, p. 8) even though there is a large amount of data available it is far dispersed, making it “often hard to find and understand”. The authors mention a need for specific information on employment and salary prospects, contact hours and class sizes – which HE institutions still resist in making available. There is also a lack of information available in regard to student experiences and the outcomes of HE. The inadequate dissemination of information is also present in terms of student funding scheme, namely the income-contingent loan, which Barr interpreted as a major barrier to access, as consumers fail to understand the costs and support available to them.

On the introduction of tuition fees, opinions diverge. On the contra side, the literature emphasises its disadvantages and potential consequences. Bowers-Brown (2006), in a study analysing the students’ point of view, refers to the introduction of tuition fees perceived as a form of elitism that will intensify the division between social classes. The students major concern relates to not being able to afford the costs of HE – individuals from upper or middle class (NS-SEC categories 1 to 3) are less concerned about the costs of HE as they expect their parents to pay the bill, whilst individuals
from skilled-working class (NS-SEC categories 4 to 7) are the most concerned about the costs of fees and educational materials; they appear more debt averse (Callender & Jackson, 2008). Students feel more secure through a loan system that allows them to repay the educational debt once they have acquired the financial resources to do so; a guarantee for uncertainty and reduces the hindrances to investment in HE (Migali, 2006). Studies point to the perception of cost as having a greater impact on students from disadvantaged backgrounds analysis of HE, rather than the real cost itself.

Callender & Jackson (2008), sustain that the income-contingent loan will increase the average student loan debt on graduation. As student loans represent the major source of income for students, they are increasingly borrowing larger sums, thus escalating their total debt after graduation. Nonetheless, this pattern varies according to the students’ background. Those from lower income families are more likely to be in debt and leave HE with larger debts, than students from higher income families, whose family can afford to help with the expenses.

Supporting the introduction of tuition fees, Jongbloed (2004, p. 4) stresses that it “will allow the price mechanism to work and achieve a better balance between supply and demand for HE courses”. Evidence supports that the market effects of tuition fees improve the quality of teaching and management in the institutions, and reinforce student motivation (Commission of the European Communities, 2006). The latest report by the HEFCE (2010) mentions that despite changes to student support arrangements and tuition fees, the HE participation rate has not suffered any significant changes. For the OECD (2004, p. 2) the costs of education, the funding issues, miss the point that “social gradients in access to HE, and equity in educational attainment more generally, are primarily determined by cognitive developments in early childhood and the foundation laid during school”.

The 2008 Education and Skills Act aims at increasing participation in learning by young individuals, enhancing their chances to gain the skills needed to thrive in society and throughout their working lives. The government’s aim is to achieve ‘world-class skills by 2020’.

For Zajda (2010), finance-driven policy reforms are mainly concerned with efficiency and effectiveness, whereas the topic of inequality remains hollow policy rhetoric. For the OECD (2009, p. 13) the marketisation of education increases the prospect of
widening inequalities and a substantial tolerance for inequalities and exclusion, namely the deterioration of job prospects for the “less-well qualified”. Improving HE, specially in terms of access, for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds has been and remains a necessary measure to rectify the strong socio-economic gradient in university attendance and to improve social justice, during a time in which countries can no longer afford to waste talent (Barr & Crawford, 2005). In general, the English government still has a long way to go before achieving its goal of making HE accessible to all students, including those from non-traditional backgrounds (Fazackerley & Chant, 2010).
4 Social justice & HE in England

This chapter is dedicated to analyzing the relationship between social justice and HE in England. At the core of welfare societies is the rearrangement of inequalities – the creation of a society of opportunities – in function of the ‘primary goods’, those that are essential for individuals to pursue their interpretation of the ‘good life’ and fulfil their potential. Equality / equity and social justice are enduring concerns at societal and national level; HE often imports the agendas from the wider society, and looks inward at ways of improving its performance in these respects – the widening access and participation policies or the recent student funding support schemes, are examples of such. However, the contribution of HE towards improving equality / equity and social justice in the broader society are often unclear. This is denominated in the literature as the export role of HE. Thus, this chapter will be divided into two complementary sections, studying the import and export functions of HE correspondingly.

Although the distinction between both is not harmonious or clear-cut – as concepts are often blurred yet interlinked – it is structurally useful and will serve as a guideline for this section. Hence, the core considerations here presented are based on the previous two chapters (chapter 2 and chapter 3); these have provided the conceptual (educational attainment theories) and structural (educational system structure, student profile and policy guidelines) tools that allow the construction of this analytical structure. As a vital principle of social justice, ‘inequality’ will be used to operationalize the first section of this analysis, via inequality of opportunity (representing the import function of HE). The second section is dedicated to the export role of HE, emphasising the direct / indirect impact of knowledge in the broader society.

In contemporary England, the transition from elite to a majority system of HE has led to a process of increased stratification of the HE institutions. The current educational system is more differentiated, although not grounded on a class-based inclusion and exclusion (Reay, Davies, David, & Ball, 2001). A countries’ wider agenda reflects in all its sectors, including the educational system. As stated by McPherson (in Hutchings & Archer, 2001, p. 88): “as we move towards universal
access…inequalities of access will become less important, but inequalities of participation and outcome more so”

4.1 Import role: social justice within HE

A great share of the educational research literature concentrates on the import into HE of wider societal issues regarding social justice and equality / equity. Like any other organization, HE institutions need to show empathy towards (e.g.) gender or ethnicity inequalities (Brennan & Naidoo, 2008). The political rhetoric claims for widen access, achievement for all and a meritocratic equalisation within mass HE. In global societies, educational policy reforms are financed-driven towards efficiency and effectiveness, reflecting a market-oriented approach. However, their impact upon education systems is translated into an increase of educational inequalities, which the OECD (2004) perceives as enduring concerns.

4.1.1 Inequality of opportunity

Equality of opportunity comprises a basic principle of social justice and refers to a ‘liberal goal’ (Breen & Jonsson, 2005) that a “a person’s life-chances, and especially their access to jobs and educational opportunities should depend only on their own motivation and aptitudes, and not on irrelevant features such as gender, class or ethnicity” (Pearce & Paxton, 2005, p. 5).

Since 1980s great weight has been placed on the development of policies on widening access to HE, both at national and institutional level (Gallacher, Osborne, & Postle, 1996). The 1998 Teaching and higher education act, partially taking into account the measures suggested, in the previous year, by the Dearing Report, introduced income-tested tuition fees that were announced by the government as a strategic measure to transform access to HE fairer (Bowers-Brown, 2006). For the 2003 White Paper, and consequently the 2004 Higher Education Act, widening access and participation to
HE were a central aim, which simultaneously meant “to attract new student groups, or students from groups that have traditionally been under-represented within HE” (Gallacher, Osborne, & Postle, 1996, p. 418). Under-representation in HE occurs for reasons of race, ethnicity, religion, age, gender, disability or location or socio-economic status (International association of universities, 2008). Improving access to HE for people from disadvantaged backgrounds has been and remains a necessary measure to rectify the strong socio-economic gradient in university attendance and to improve social justice and cohesion, during a time in which countries can no longer afford to waste talent (Barr & Crawford, 2005); it enhances the development of human resources, of personal growth and employability, and is seen as a facilitator of sustainable development.

In general, since 1944 the average absolute level of education has risen consistently. Nevertheless, given demographical changes, this increase in participation has been somehow even for the various social classes, hence the relative differences between groups have remained unchanged. According to data presented in previous chapters for the academic year of 2007 / 08 the majority of HE students was from higher social classes individuals (see figure 3-5, p. 35), while lower SEC individuals remain underrepresented in HE participation (Levin, 2003). Individuals from higher SEC have 80% higher probability of entering HE than those from lower SEC, to whom it is almost four times less likely. Both the patterns of exclusion and the determinants of participation, appear as long-term, embedded in family, locality and history, and result in social inequalities (Archer & Hutchings, 2000). A key issue refers not to the moment of HE application, but to the fact that a smaller number of lower SEC students obtain, at age 18, the A-levels that would allow access to HE (Johnson, 2004). Thus, the roots for this relative lack of success are to be found earlier in life (Pearce & Paxton, 2005), conditioning the students’ future path (Brennan & Shah, 2003) Research evidence shows that in all KS of education, the odds on individuals attaining a ‘good’ grade are smaller for lower SEC students, and remain so until entrance to HE (see figure 3-6, p. 37).

For Ganzach (2000) the determining cause of students’ educational attainment are their cognitive abilities and their own parents education. More educated parents have the capability of creating a social and physical environment facilitator of learning,
what Payne (2003, p. 3) denominates as “effective educational support”. Connor, Tyers, Modood, & Hillage (2004, p.xvi) affirm that ‘strong positive parental support / commitment to education’ may have a positive impact in making less severe some negative effects, such as lower socio-economic class.

The lower levels of participation and attainment in HE by individuals from working-class backgrounds can be explained by inadequate cultural capital, access to knowledge regarding HE and due to family history (Archer & Hutchings, 2000). For Boudon a key aspect of the parents cultural capital is their knowledge of the education system (its organization and functioning methods), which enhances the students’ chances of being successful. Participants from ‘non-traditional’ background have a disadvantage in respect to their institutional culture, transforming them into ‘the others’ (Read, Archer, & Leathwood, 2003). For Apple (2001), working class / immigrant families are not necessarily less skilled in developing collective bonds, establishing informal networks and contacts, and develop their ability to work within the system; however, there may be a mismatch between the schools historical habitus and the habitus these families possess. According to Bourdieu (theory of social reproduction), the school habitus is aligned with that of the middle / higher classes, and is systematized through the overall environment, congruent language, and an examination system. This last feature has been emphasised by Woodrow (1999). The author considers the current widespread system of HE admission based on examinations at age 18 – the A-levels\(^2\) - to some extent fair, when compared to previous systems that gave preference to applicants with influential connections or specific political / religious affiliations. Nonetheless, in its totality it is regarded as inadequate. Woordrow refers to it as based upon a system of apparently equal rules (i.e., the same requirements for all individuals), but which, simultaneously, reproduces systematic unequal effects by not taking into consideration varying circumstances.

Amongst such ‘varying circumstances’ is the lack of material resources, a barrier for students to enter ‘better’ secondary schools. Evidence suggests that, regardless of

\(^{22}\) The *advanced level general certificate of education*, commonly referred to as A-levels, assures the suitability of applicants for academic courses in the UK.
ethnicity, individuals from lower SEC frequently work long hours in the labour market, and envisage continuing to do so whilst studying in HE, thus limiting the time available to study, when compared to their wealthier counterparts (Reay, Davies, David, & Ball, 2001). Young individuals from middle-class families with high GCSE’s are more likely to finish HE entirely, because they possess greater self-confidence, bigger aspirations, more supportive family/friends network, and they can easily support educational costs (Hatcher, 1998). Often individuals from lower SEC decide to leave education as they perceive the options available to them as less good, in the sense that the most traditional universities are seldom an option (students refer to a feeling of ‘out of class’ and ‘not fitting in’) – a ‘self-exclusion’ process (Hansen, 1997; Hutchings & Archer, 2001). The end of the binary system, through the 1992 Further and HE act, led to the emergence of new HE institutions hierarchy, in which the older research universities emerged as the prestigious top layer of elite institutions (Reay, Davies, David, & Ball, 2001). Research evidence has shown that individuals from lower SEC are more saturated with a geographical ‘localism’ that seems not to be so strongly present for individuals from higher SEC. The decision-making process is further constrained by psychological factors, which are variable according to the individuals’ ethnicity, social class and gender (Reay, Davies, David, & Ball, 2001). For Hemsley-Brown (1999) it is based on individuals’ preconceptions, which function both as a stimuli in the pursuit of a goal, and as a filter mechanism in the assimilation of information, and are formed, partly, due to parental influence, self-image or group identity. Bourdieu’s empirical findings suggest that individuals are constraint by their habitus; those whom dominate the habitus congruent with the educational system possess a feeling of ‘at ease’ in the HE environment. Class habitus maintains social relations and guides individual choices towards what the self can moderately achieve within the dominant social system (Read, Archer, & Leathwood, 2003). In general, Mann (2001) regards entrance into HE as a process of ‘alienation’.

Whereas Bourdieu emphasises the social structures of the decision making process, Boudon and Goldthorpe’s theoretical perspectives stress the role of rational action. Choice is a medium of both power and stratification. Boudon’s social position theory regards the decision making on whether to persist in education, or not, as a process of rationality of cost-benefits, and the probability of success for the several options available to them; individuals struggle to avoid downward social mobility (Ball,
Davies, David, & Reay, 2002; Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997; Breen & Jonsson, 2000; Hansen, 1997). On the other hand, Goldthorpe (relative risk aversion theory) equally envisages the decision making process as rational, but one in which the individuals’ choice depends upon their socio-economic reference – their parents (van de Werfhorst, 2002). Individuals’ aim is to reach a similar level of education than that of their progenitors; those from lower SEC can attain such level with lower qualifications, and thus their investment towards education is smaller, than individuals from higher SEC.

Since 1980s that the ‘new’ political agendas have gradually reinforced the parental role in education – a reconstruction process between schools and homes (Grenfell & James, 1998). Parents assume an increasingly empowered part as consumers of education, by being given access to choice (Apple, 2001). Within this point one can make reference to the weight that Bourdieu places upon the family, a setting of social and cultural reproduction. The concept of family serves a dual purpose, both as generator institution and a central site for the build-up of cultural capital. Bourdieu’s emphasis on the concept of ‘family’, as the main habitus transmittal, has been further researched over the years. Breen & Jonsson (2005) also emphasize the role of family in shaping the individuals’ educational performance and aspirations, a relationship that the authors denominate as unchanged over time and space. On the other hand, for Hansen (1997) with the passing of years individuals’ decisions (towards economic resources) become increasingly independent from the preferences of the parental figure.

From the access perspective, equality of opportunity is not achieved through the application of equal rules to individuals from disparate educational, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, or through their allocation in special categories outside the dominant rules. The current admission policies are based upon the assumption that educational achievements at age 18 (A-levels) are unrelated to socio-economic or cultural background and represent the individuals’ potential to succeed in HE. Nonetheless, while access policies aim at increasing participation by under-represented groups, the current admission policies and practices help to perpetuate the exclusion of these individuals, by applying rules that strengthen selective norms, as is the case of the overall schools habitus.
The 2004 *Higher education act*, aimed at widening access and participation in HE increased the level of tuition fees, while introduced a reinforcement in the student support system, through ‘realistic’ student loans (capable of covering living expenses) available to all students independent of their SEC (although, lower-income students still have further support, through university bursaries). The payment of the loans is deferred until graduates income reaches a certain threshold (£15,000/year); if the individuals’ income does not reach that threshold, one is not obliged to repay it. This policy measure is congruent with the redistributive goal of social justice, to impose the distribution of HE and enable access to ‘everyone, everywhere, at any time’.

The recently established student funding scheme while attempts to equalize HE to the point of entrance, it simultaneously strengthens its value – in economic terms (by charging higher tuition fees), and individual and societal (by increasing the threshold at which loan repayment is due). At all levels, HE appears as a gradually valued asset. Educational equality / equity requires that individuals’ opportunities – both in terms of access and outcome – are equalised throughout their lives, hence allowing them to fulfil their potential (Pearce & Paxton, 2005).

### 4.2 Export role: social justice in a broader context

As previously mentioned, education transmits core values and attitudes, and investing in it increases the overall quality of life to the individual and the society. Based on the current constitution of the HE sector in England, this section is dedicated to explore its contributions to the wider society, hence its *export* role, a prevailing idea often encapsulated in the notion of HE as a public good (Brennan & Naidoo, 2008).

The export function of HE is seldom debated in the research literature and, consequently, identifying and measuring what constitutes a wider benefit has proved to be a challenging task. Thus, this study will follow the guidelines given by Brennan & Naidoo (2008), whom suggest adopting the educational effects impacting at individual level (personal change and development) to the society in general.
According to such, the discussion will not be cut clear between the public and private benefits of HE.

4.2.1 HE & the wider society

Recently, the 2008 Education and Skills Act’s central aspiration was to increase participation in education for young individuals (compulsory schooling will be raised in 2 years, to the age of 18, by 2013) as a way of enhancing their chances to acquire more skills and thrive in society and the job-market. The literature refers to ‘widening access to HE’ as only one side of the inequality question – as Pearce & Paxton (2005, p. 44) put it “it is not just access to HE that should be of concern” as in itself does not guarantee enhanced life changes thereafter. Moving towards a fairer society involves the encouragement of individuals to establish high goals, since childhood (Pearce & Paxton, 2005). Compared to other OECD countries, the UK’s (therefore England) enrolment rate, of individuals aged 15-19, is below that of the average OECD and compares badly to most other EU countries (appendix 4, p. 82). For Pearce & Paxton (2005, p. 368) the large proportion of individuals aged 16-18 whom do not participate in education, training or employment (NEET) constitute a ‘persistent concern’.

Whereas the number of participants in full-time education has increased over a ten years period (1998 to 2008) from 55% to over 60%, the percentage of NEET individuals has remained stable, corresponding to approximately 10% of the total population aged between 16-18 (see figure 3-2, p. 29). Considering the demographic challenges that England is encountering (the decreasing percentage of young individuals aged 16-24, and the increasing number of individuals aged 65+), and the rising economic demands of the welfare states, the NEET group represents a valuable loss for the nation. In 6.869 million individuals aged 16-24, every year approximately 26,000 (~ 0.3%) leave school with no GCSE’s and 44,000 (~ 0.5%) are illiterate. For the EU, to reach out for those at the margins of society and the labour market is an economic and social priority (Commission of the European communities, 2007).
The OECD, on their 2009 study, stress the importance of equity-related issues arising from the decline in job prospects for individuals less-well qualified. The attainment gap between individuals from high and low SEC (see figure 3-6, p. 37) has been pointed as a major responsible for low social mobility – thus, not allowing that individuals from lower SEC improve their prospects and constraining their societal opportunities. In economic terms, it represents lower productivity and wasted talent (Robson, 2007); economic development is necessary to sustain the provision of social support.

The educational attainment of the adult population (its formal qualifications) is used by the OECD (2009, p. 26) as “a proxy for the knowledge and skills available to national economies and societies” – their human capital. It is believed that if 1% more of the UK’s working population had A-levels rather than no qualifications, its benefit would be around £665 million per year through reduced crime and increased earning potential (Commission of the European Communities, 2006). This perspective assumes that the rates of return or financial benefits ensues to individual students participating in education is worth their financial investment (Ivins & Callender, 2006), in accordance with the work of Psacharopoulos & Patrinos (2002) for whom schooling returns ought to be seen as a valuable sign of productivity of education and an encouragement for individuals to pursue and invest in their own human capital.

In England, returns and rates of return\textsuperscript{23} to education (in special to academic qualifications) are high according to international standards – individuals with HE qualifications earn, on average, about twice as much as those without them (OECD, 2004) – which, according to governmental predictions, represents £400,000 more over a lifetime than non-graduates. It is, in Johnson’s (2004, p. 175) terms, “an unusually large gap between the earnings of the well educated and the less well educated”, a relevant factor for investment in educational success. Research findings also refer to a lower risk of unemployment between individuals qualified at HE level. In England, worklessness is highly correlated with income poverty (Pearce & Paxton, 2005). Both ‘involuntary unemployment’ and ‘fear of unemployment’ have been linked with

\textsuperscript{23} Return refers to the percentage increase in earnings attributable to holding a specific qualification, while rates of return consider the direct costs and opportunity costs associated with education. Johnson, P. (2004).
measures of well-being, objective indicators of physical and mental health (for a
country’s gross domestic product, health issues can represent a long-term drain).
Zajda (2010, p. 50) stresses that “countries with better levels of health and education
are not those with highest levels of economic development, but those with higher
levels of equality in wealth distribution and in access to opportunities”.

The introduction of tuition fees was presented to England’s society as a measure to
restore ‘fairness’ and equality / equity to the education system. It enhances the
importance of HE at individual and societal level. Education is seen as a contributor
to the development of human society, a provider of a deeper sense of social
peace and tranquillity, providing hope and an escape route for individuals from less-
favoured social backgrounds to ascend social strata.

However, in education, whilst inequality of inputs is regarded as a distress, inequality
of outputs is perceived as necessary. Expanding access to HE implied an unobstructed
and meritocratic distribution of credentials that simultaneously resulted in its inflation
and gave a new emphasis to prestige differentiations among similar credentials.
Hence, social differences become misrecognized and educational differences
legitimised, a point previously defended by Bourdieu elsewhere debated in this
chapter. Even though the overall number of individuals from lower SEC accessing
and participating in HE has increased, for the most part they are entering different
universities. The end of the binary system in England (through the 1992 Further and
higher education act) fostered the emergence of a new hierarchy of institutions in
which prestigious research universities have emerged as a top layer of elite
institutions (e.g., Oxbridge). Even though the end result expected was greater
equality, the expansion of the HE system internalized a new inequality between HE
institutions (the central question became which university) (Calhoun, 2006). And it is
these universities – worldwide renowned for their general quality standards – which
remain restricted to some (Pearce & Paxton, 2005) and overwhelmingly white and
middle-class in composition (Reay, Davies, David, & Ball, 2001). This could be
explained by what Boudon denominates as the primary and secondary effects of
stratification – namely, that individuals’ academic abilities (their educational
achievement levels) differ according to their social class of origin, which in turn
constrains future educational choices. Social and cultural capital equip individuals with the necessary know-how, something which, according to Bourdieu’s theoretical perspective, is denied to individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds; social capital the networks between social groups that make possible for individuals to access other status levels of social capital rather than being solely restricted to their own social capital) and cultural capital are constraints to social perceptions and distinctions, hence forms of self-exclusion (Ball, Davies, David, & Reay, 2002). Easily can economic capital be converted into the cultural capital, which schools and institutions require from their students (Apple, 2001); it appears unavoidable that those who do not possess the cultural capital demanded by the educational system, and at the same time don’t have the resources and social capital (networks) to obtain it, will encounter educational failures (Lynch & Baker, 2005).

Brennan & Naidoo (2008) stress that the biggest advantage of possessing HE qualifications arises when individuals are compared to those without any kind of HE, rather than in comparison to equally qualified individuals from higher SEC. For Moore (2009, p. 6) this raises questions between what has changed through successive educational policy reforms and the factors that are responsible for class differences in educational attainment: “Clearly the kinds of things changed and the changes made have had no strong effect in relation to class differentials in education”. Nevertheless, both at individual and societal level, the literature refers to education’s economic, social and cultural advantages, “which are felt for a lifetime” (European group of research on equity of the educational systems, 2003, p. 101), even though it is not possible to precise the advantages linked to increasing skills acquired through education. A main positive advantage linked to higher levels of education refers to the possibility of individuals reaching a higher social status than that of origin – although it is considered in the literature as a ‘double-edged sword’, in the sense that social stratification will always be present and needed in society, and while some individuals may raise their social position others will lower it. The possibility of social ascension entails the possession of a whole series of material goods, associated with a ‘comfortable’ lifestyle. At the same time, individuals whom participate in further education tend to live longer, are less likely to be involved in crime, are more likely to be engaged in politics and their local communities, and tend to be less racist or sexist (Brennan & Naidoo, 2008).
Calhoun (mentioned in Brennan & Naidoo, 2008) emphasises the extension of wider benefits associated with HE (the production of credentials) to individuals who do not directly participate in it, through, p.e., the development of new technologies and contributions to local industries. Overall, the author perceives HE has impacting positively upon the individuals’ value-rational claims, which enhances their self-development and improves citizenship. HE institutions appear as places of collective self-enlightenment that assist in the creation of new frames of understanding (Brennan & Naidoo, 2008). Similarly, Burton Clark (1983) refers to the direct application of knowledge as a way of helping broader areas of the society.

4.2.2 HE & the public good, knowledge

The principle of HE as a public good means that it is non-rivalrous (as consumption by one person does not impair its value for another) and non-excludable (its benefits do not exclude anyone) (Calhoun, 2006). On the basis of the previous mentioned benefits of HE, either direct or indirect, lies knowledge. It represents, according to Burton Clark (1983, p. 11) “a vital aspect of education, a wider body of advanced ideas and related skills that comprise much of the more esoteric culture of nations”. The growth, on the web, of open sourcing of knowledge with mass media represents a contemporary example of its broad circulation (Brennan & Naidoo, 2008).

Although inequalities of access to HE represent a direct restriction to knowledge, these can be compensated (not overcome) when the knowledge acquired through further education is applied to the service and benefit of the wider society. “The development of academic disciplines and interdisciplinary fields, the professionalization of academic work, the improvised resource base for scholarship and science, and the opening of universities to students from working class backgrounds, women and ethnic minorities” have had a major impact in the advances in knowledge and in the HE institutions capacity to fulfil their public missions (Calhoun, 2006, p. 8). Overall, the literature refers to HE institutions as critical and
independent spaces of knowledge appraisal, equipped with intellectual resources for individuals to contribute with balanced and rational public discussions.

Along with competitive market forces, the influence of globalization is articulated under finance-driven policy reforms involving effectiveness and efficiency. In turn, these aspects have developed a massive growth of knowledge industries, which influence educational institutions and the society. Currently, HE institutions are becoming increasingly corporate, technical, utilitarian, and devoted to selling products rather than education. Their gradual marketization, for Zajda (2010) is transforming them into less affordable and accessible institutions (an aspect that England’s recent policy measures tried to overcome, introducing tuition fees supported by student loan systems; and by raising school age until 18 years old). HE institutions are becoming more private, less responsible for public interest and more congruent with private interests.

In Zajda’s (2010) opinion HE institutions research agendas needs to re-incorporate the interests and needs of the majority of the population. Nonetheless, universities should continue to interact with the market (to guarantee sponsored research, e.g.), but such relationship ought to be regulated by clear guidelines intending to reduce potential conflicts of interests, ensuring the free flow of information, protecting the common good, and putting the public interest ahead of profitization. More specifically, amongst some activities that HE institutions could undertake Zajda (2008) refers to the conduction of research that uncovers unfair structures and dynamics, to assist community organizations to become more acquainted with reality, and to aid students at becoming agents of social justice.

It is not solely enough for HE institutions to transmit knowledge, it is also about how they transmit it – emphasising the importance of teaching methods and the curricular content. For Oduaran & Bhola (2006) the curriculum content is designed to receive individuals whom are engaged with the dominant culture, the habitus of the educational context. The notion of cultural capital (Bourdieu) present in educational systems encapsulates a single, static notion of what represents being knowledgeable, knowing and social value. It thus reinforces the differentiated achievements of social groups, while rewarding those whose cultural capital is aligned with that present in educational contexts (Zajda, 2008).
Scholars and HE institutions have, according to Brennan & Naidoo (2008, p. 296) a moral responsibility in being critical of society, and ‘taking truth to power’. They are entitled to promote the common good through knowledge creation and knowledge dissemination; their social responsibility is to treasure their institutional values, nurturing democratic critical and responsible citizens committed to the public good.

Referring to the impact of education and knowledge, Zajda alerts to a possible negative consequence. The author makes reference to the work of Haum Ginot, who based himself upon the words of a Holocaust survivor:

“I am a survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no man should witness: Gas chambers built by learned engineers, children poisoned by educated physicians, infants killed by trained nurses. Women and babies shot and buried by high school and college graduates. So, I am suspicious of education. My request is: Help your students become human. Your efforts should never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, educated Eichmans. Reading, writing, and arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more humane.” (Ginott, 1972 in Zajda, 2010)

This extract exemplifies the supreme importance of HE institutions to be concerned with basic values such as social justice, its promotion, transmission and preservation, in order to avoid being places of teaching and research with workforce and professionals indifferent to human sufferings.

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24 In reference of Otto Adolf Eichmann, a German Nazi, referred to as the ‘architect of the Holocaust’.
5 Conclusion

It was this thesis fundamental goal to analyze the current relationship between HE and social justice in England, and how it can be enhanced. In general terms, this country “has become a fairer, more economically prosperous and democratic country (…) but it remains fundamentally divided by social class, with levels of poverty and inequality that still rank among the highest in Europe (…) it is not a just society” (Pearce & Paxton, 2005, p. xxiii). Referring to the concept of equity / equality, Levin (2003, p. 5) stated that “while we cannot define what it is, we know when we are far from it”.

Referring to the educational context, the literature and data analyzed suggest a disproportional participation and attainment in education for the various social classes. To increase the availability of educational opportunities and to ensure that individuals take advantage of them is a fundamental component of any equitable society. The redistributive component of education is a core feature of social justice, which constitutes in itself a long-term challenge for welfare societies. The notion of social justice is not new, nor consensual. Although capitalist societies have ingrained inequalities – social stratification will always exist – the prevailing idea of social justice in welfare states, aims at enhancing their equity / equality, both in terms of opportunity and outcome, for citizens. Applied to the educational context, social justice aims at improving the distribution of education in order to enable access to ‘everyone, everywhere, at any time’.

Over the years, based on wider societal goals, HE has established several policy reforms concentrated on widening access and participation to HE, denominated in the literature as its import function. While the 2004 Higher education act introduced higher tuition fees, it simultaneously established OfFA, an agency responsible for reassuring that HE institutions carry widening access plans, and a student funding system equally available to all individuals regardless of their inherited characteristics. In 2008 legislation was approved (the Education and skills act) intended at increasing school years until the age of 18, in order to give students broader chances of being acquainted with education, and to explore the educational options available to them. The key equity policy issue regards whether some groups in society have levels of educational participation and attainment below population-wide norms and what can
be done to help such groups achieve their maximum potential. Still, a question prevails: can widening access to HE be considered a social justice measure? It cannot be restricted to a matter of ensuring equal access to a homogenous culture but rather of redistributing human and material resources so that no one occupies an inferior position because they lack specific cultural characteristics. For Levin (2003), policy reforms have concentrated on ‘forcing’ students from disadvantaged backgrounds to adapt to HE as it exists, rather than attempts to change the system itself, adapting it to the specific needs of participants from target groups. Although it is too early to be clear about the effect that recent reforms and approaches are having sector-wide, it is nevertheless difficult to envisage a return to an elite, socially exclusive HE system that so successfully restricted the opportunity to go on HE to only some parts of the society.

The new economic order places an increasing premium on knowledge that makes economies more dependent on the ability of HE to develop high-level skills and citizenship values in individuals – this is denominated as its export role. It refers to education as transmitting core values and attitudes, essential to guarantee a countries development, both in economic and social terms. It is not solely a concern over what is transmitted (curricular content) and how it is transmitted (teaching methods), but rather, as a redistributive goal of social justice, to ensure that the knowledge acquired through education benefits both individual and the society.

Still, HE institutions have been referred to as ‘mechanisms of selection of the dominant elites’ (Castells, 2001) and as perpetuators of social inequalities (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). While equality envisages a right for everyone to choose to be different and thus to be educated in their own differences, the educational contexts are encapsulated in a notion of what is knowledgeable and how it should be transmitted. Using Bourdieu’s terms, schools are aligned with middle-upper classes cultural capital. As such, cultural capital refers to success in schooling, largely dictated by the extent to which individuals have absorbed the dominant culture. Thus, cultural capital, as a significant dimension of educational inequality, continues to shape and influence individuals’ lives and destinies globally. Education plays a key role in allowing the reproduction of parents’ cultural capital and facilitating the reproduction of other forms of capital. Regardless of their emphasis – either on rational action or
social structures – educational attainment theories defend that capital (economic, cultural and social) tends to reproduce itself inter-generationally.

In terms of the future, Fazackerley & Chant (2010) defend that the main challenge for the English HE system is yet to come. As a consequence of the economic recession, public spending cuts are now unavoidable, and HE institutions will face financial pressures. The 2004 reforms are considered of high economic risk, and some authors do not perceive them as economically sustainable – since individuals whom do not reach a certain income threshold, do not have to repay the educational loan taken.

In May 2010, a new Conservative government was elected in the UK. As no official measures or reforms have yet been implemented (refer to index 5, p. 83), one can always remember previous positions defended by this party towards educational measures. In 2004, the conservative party was against the reforms implemented, and instead favoured the abolition of all tuition charges. It also defended the maintenance of participation levels, rather than their increase. Their claim was that the savings from the widening access measures would cover the lost income from tuition fees (Barr, 2003b).

Furthermore, it would be interesting to continue this research encapsulating the positions adopted by the new government towards HE reforms, analyzing the role that social justice plays within the measures adopted by the conservative party. Other issues for further research involve in-depth studies of questions such as:

- How can the evolution of social justice in England’s HE system be characterized?
- To what extent is social justice diffused within curricular content design and teaching methods?
- What is the students’ perspective towards social justice, and how do they perceive HE (namely, its export function)?
- Compared to other countries, how can the English HE system be characterized in terms of social justice?
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Appendix

Appendix 1: Five principles of equality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assumed</th>
<th>Admitted</th>
<th>Criticized</th>
<th>Recommended</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A – No interest in equity: “natural” and “libertarian” positions</td>
<td>Reproduction and maintenance of the “natural” order and differences based on fair acquisition.</td>
<td>Possibly, inequalities in groups of peers. Interventions contrary to liberty.</td>
<td>A stable order, a sharing of functions (society of castes, orders, etc) or a system based on liberty of the actors.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

B – Equality of access or opportunities

- The existence of talents, of potential or natural aptitudes. These define the level or threshold that the individual may hope to achieve.
- Unequal results, provided that they are proportional to aptitudes at the start.

- The fact that merit is not the only criterion for access to the most highly-regarded courses. Socio-cultural bias affecting guidance tests. Imperfections in the evaluation responsible for the fact that, although of equal competence, one pupil succeeds and another fails.

- Objective and scientific detection of talents, and scientific methods of orientation. Equality of access to long courses of study, for children of equal aptitude from advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds.
- A school made to measure, i.e. a varied system of options and courses of education adapted to the ability of students.
- Aid to gifted pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds (scholarships, etc.).

C – Equality of treatment

- The existence of natural talents, potential or aptitudes.
- Unequal quality of teaching, responsible for unequal achievement. Elite schools, ghetto schools, streamed classes, explicit and implicit courses of study that engender unequal quality of education.

- The single-level or comprehensive school, and particularly, the common core for lower secondary education.

D – Equality of achievement or academic success

- Potential for extended learning. Individual characteristics (cognitive or affective) can be modified. Differences in learning styles.
- Differences in results beyond the essential skills.

- The ideology of talents. Negative discrimination (including streamed classes, courses, elite schools and ghetto schools), i.e. all the situations where unequal quality of teaching amplifies the inequalities at the outset.

- Equality of achievement for the essential skills. Positive discrimination, mastery learning, formative assessment, as well as all the support mechanisms aimed at reducing the initial inequalities.

E – Equality of actualization (social output)

- Different individual, motivational and cultural characteristics, but without any hierarchy existing between them.
- Differences in profile of the results.

- The existence of a single standard for excellence. An “elite” culture and a “sub-culture”.

- Individualized instruction.

Source: European group of research on equity of the educational systems (2003)
Appendix 2: Trends in young participation in HE

Source: HEFCE, (2010)²⁵

²⁵ In its report the HEFCE (2010) uses the term young participants in reference to individuals aged 18-19.
Appendix 3: Overall changes in population, HE entrants and participation

Source: HEFCE (2010)
Appendix 4: Enrolment rates of individuals age 15-19

Source: OECD, (2009)

Notes:


- The EU19 is a statistical term defined by the OECD as “All EU countries prior to the accession of the 10 candidate countries on 1 May 2004, plus the four eastern European member countries of the OECD, namely Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovak Republic” (in http://stats.oecd.org/glossary/detail.asp?ID=7020).
Appendix 5: The Conservative Party policies on ‘universities and skills’

The Conservative Party aims at delivering, within the following two years, an extra 400,000 training opportunities to ensure that ‘everyone gets the good start they deserve’.

- Provide 10,000 extra university places in 2010;
- Introduce an early repayment bonus on student loans which are repaid ahead of schedule;
- Work to improve the way that universities are funded so that students get a fair deal, disadvantaged young people don’t miss out and researchers get the funding they need;
- Provide people with much better information about the true costs and benefits of going to university and help people choose the course and institution which is right for them;
- Create an extra 100,000 apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships each year;
- Give small and medium businesses a £2,000 bonus for every new apprentice they hire, and make it much easier for firms to run apprenticeships;
- Provide an extra 100,000 college places over two years so unemployed young people can improve their skills;
- Provide 100,000 new ‘work pairings’ over two years so unemployed young people can get meaningful work experience and mentoring from businesspeople;
- Offer much better careers advice, including providing expert advice in every secondary school and college and setting up a new careers service for adults.
- Establish a Community Learning Fund to help adults who want to learn new skills or restart their careers;
- Abolish many of the further education quangos which Labour have created, and cut bureaucracy and inspections in colleges so teaching staff can spend less time in the office and more time in the classroom; and
• *Delay the implementation of the new funding system* for universities – the Research Excellence Framework – and work with academics to ensure that there is a robust and acceptable way of measuring the impact of all research.

For more information regarding the Conservative Party points of view or policies, refer to: [http://www.conervatives.com/](http://www.conervatives.com/)