

**Andrew Mycock**  
**European Studies Research Institute**  
**University of Salford**  
**a.mycock@salford.ac.uk**

*Restricted Access: A history of national political education in Britain*

**Abstract:** The lack of explicit political education in Britain to all young people is widely recognised amongst political and educational elites alike. Since the late-1960s there has been a growing interest in the provision of some form of political education within the state education system. There have been a number of justifications for this interest, but concern over the perceived political apathy, and disengagement, of young people is now seen by some to be threatening the stability, and legitimacy, of democracy in Britain.

The following paper seeks to assess approaches to political education in Britain in a number of differing ways. Firstly, it will consider the value of political education. The paper will then discuss the lack of equality of educational provision in Britain since 1870. There will be consideration of state approaches and attitudes toward political education, and the extent to which the incumbent Labour government has inculcated an active citizenship culture within the education system. The paper will conclude with some comments regarding problems concerning political education provision within the state system in Britain

It has been oft-noted that there has been no explicit tradition of the teaching of citizenship or political education in Britain (Kerr 1999; Arthurs et al 2001). Political education in Britain has traditionally had more resonance and influence within academic and political communities than within the classroom. Thus, political education has been seen to only rise to prominence in Britain within the context of some perceived state or societal crisis (Frazer 1999; Davies 2000). The revival of the global interest in citizenship education, not only as a concept but as a practical solution to a disparate range of political and social issues, has also stimulated a growth in necessity and legitimacy of political education.

The effects of the New Right's backlash against post-war welfarism across North America and Western Europe has seen the potential disengagement of a significant minority. The re-evaluation of liberal social democracy, and acceptance of its redistributive limitations, has seen scepticism emerge regarding the ideological narrowing of political parties, the role and responsibilities of national governments, and the very health and legitimacy of liberal democracy. This has been most strongly felt in the increasing levels of voter apathy, and reluctance to participate in voluntary institutions and organisations.

Issues of civic disengagement concerning established democracies have been highlighted in a number of studies (Verba et al 1993; Putnam 2000). Broad-ranging studies of the attitudes of young people toward civil society generally, and politics specifically has been a cause of increasing concern for political, academic, and educational elites alike (Jowell and Park 1998; Kerr et al 2002). Recent elections in the United Kingdom, at supra-national, national and sub-national levels, would seem to confirm fears regarding attitudes toward participative, or active, citizenship, especially within the younger generations. These fears were confirmed by the low turnout of 18-24 years-olds in the 2001 General Election, with only 39% using their vote (Denver 2002), with predictions for overall turnout for forthcoming elections suggesting further declines in turnout (Electoral Commission/Hansard 2004).

The paper begins with a brief overview concerning the value of political education programmes within state education systems. It will then provide a short historical overview of the asymmetric development political education within the state education system in Britain<sup>1</sup> since the 1870 Education Act. There will be consideration of state approaches and attitudes toward political education, and the extent to which the incumbent Labour government has inculcated an active citizenship culture within the education system. The paper will conclude with some comments regarding the future of political education within the state system in Britain.

### **The Value of Political Education**

Frazer (2000) notes there has been a deep-seated antipathy to citizenship, or the encouragement of political literacy, within the British state education system. Those of the right of the political spectrum have feared indoctrination, either through the explicit teaching of socialist or Marxist ideological themes, or by undermining a sense of tradition and national unity through the promotion of peace, race, gender,

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<sup>1</sup> This study focuses on 'Britain' rather than the United Kingdom in recognition of the unique conditions that influence educational provision in Northern Ireland.

environmental or sexual understanding. Some on the left see civic or political instruction as induction into a restrictive state system that limits economic equality. The nature of partisan party politics stimulated a reciprocal fear of potential repercussions of politically educating all pupils within the state system.

This unease regarding young people and political education has ensured educational elites have also found difficulties in specifying what is 'political' as apart from 'partisan', meaning avoidance of the issue has been easier than resolving these tensions. This has meant that political education in Britain has lacked sustained and systematic attention. Sporadic attempts to introduce some overt, or covert, form of politics into the curriculum have been stimulated by occasional 'waves of moral panic' (Frazer 1999), but there has been a lack of consensus between political parties, the differing national education systems, and the broader education community.

One of the major drawbacks in the teaching of citizenship and British politics is its lack of agreed political history or codified constitutional framework. Recent studies have shown that the British have little conception of citizenship as concept or an identity (Crewe et al 1996). This, as Bryant (2003) points out, is partially due to the establishment of the sovereignty of (the crown in) parliament, thus ensuring that the British tend not to think of themselves as 'we the people', especially as the relevance of the Monarchy has diminished significantly. Increasingly, politics is seen to be something done by, and for, others through a system which excludes the vast majority of people (Electoral Commission/Hansard 2004). This lack of connectedness with the state is extended by the lack of a written constitution or a bill of rights. As Crick (1978) has noted, it is very difficult to teach something which does not exist.

As young people have traditionally been perceived to be lacking in the ability to understand many political issues and procedures, political skills were seen to increase with maturity. But this situation changed with the lowering of the age of majority to 18 in 1970. This has been linked with a greater recognition that young people are subject to policy and legislation that affects them, but for which they have little ability to influence (Frazer 1999).

The recent IEA Civic Education Study of 28 countries has proven that there is no uniform or dominant approach to politically educating young people, and results have indicated variable levels of success on a multitude of variables (Tourney-Purta et al 1999 and 2001). This lack of uniformity is replicated in the differing approaches to political education within the British system. This difference can be seen in two differing contexts; firstly, how should political education be introduced within the curriculum; and secondly, what should be taught?

British political education has embodied two curricular approaches that have consistently lacked symmetry in availability and profile. There have been some attempts to introduce discrete political education, but, as will be discussed, these have lacked consistency nationally or with regard to academic ability. Resistance to discrete teaching comes from those, such as Tate (Citizenship Foundation 1997) and Pring (1999), who argue that cross-curricular approaches to political education has proven sufficient, mainly through Humanities. Others fail to see the contribution of political education within their subject remit, mainly within the Sciences and

vocational subjects, thus stimulating some residual resistance to the appropriateness of politics within primary and secondary education.

Debates regarding what should be taught have proven even more controversial. Politics, and political education, are ambiguous terms that lack agreement regarding remit and detail. As noted previously, political party interest has made the content of any political education highly contentious. But, questions regarding political content may be extended to assess the legitimacy of the state itself, its processes and institutions, and the applicability of other political systems. Furthermore, as approaches to politics have fragmented from traditional party structures, the extent to which single issue concerns of personal and social liberation should infuse the curriculum have become increasingly valid.

There is lack of consensus on what the expected outcomes of formal political education should be. Political education in Britain has tended to focus on factual knowledge of constitutional and institutional arrangements, avoiding potentially confrontational areas relating to party and contemporary political issues. There is, however, a greater willingness to extend the boundaries of political education, but this has stimulated a heated debate regarding aims and objectives.

Some, such as Tate (Citizenship Foundation 1997), have argued that 'values' should be encouraged to stimulate the socialisation of young people within a liberal democratic framework. These 'values' should promote self-awareness and commonality through shared understanding. There are concerns, however, that this approach could provoke conflict with other sources of transmission through family or other social institutions. Gutmann (1987) promotes political understanding as skills which encourage the navigation of societal plurality. Political education must provide young people with the capacity to tolerate and understand others who differ within a democratic framework that encourages consensus. Arthur (1998) highlights a third approach, which embraces communitarianism, focusing on responsibilities, as an active citizen, as well as rights. Communitarians emphasise the importance of the overall school ethos toward inclusive political education that empowers young people, but without indoctrination by the state or other sectional interest groups.

Political education in Britain has drawn on all three approaches outlined, but in an inconsistent and asymmetrical manner. This lack of commonality could be ascribed to the diversity of political culture, but is more likely to indicate a lack of surety in the purpose and contribution of political education, both within the school and in broader society. This inconsistency in approach is highlighted when issues of assessment are considered. Whilst *factual* knowledge, concerning the articulation of political institutions and constitutional understanding, can be formally assessed through coursework and/or examination, it is more difficult to assess political skills or attitudes toward morality, values or participation. The range of academic ability of young people also means that consistency in understanding and articulating political knowledge is not possible. Frazer acknowledges this problem, and notes that "we cannot ask of political education more than we ask of other parts of the curriculum" (1999, 269).

It is also inconceivable that political education should be the only stimulus of political engagement, with community groups, voluntary associations, and social networks all

drawing young people in to the political process (Norris 2002). Emler and Fraser (1999) highlight the potential influence of socio-economic status and family networks on political education within the school. Formal education should not be expected to carry the sole burden of providing political education for young people.

Assumptions that the younger generation are politically apathetic are, however, increasingly being challenged (Kerr et al 2002; O'Toole et al 2003). The concerns of young people have some similarity with the active electorate, but there are areas of significant difference.<sup>2</sup> It is apparent there are a number of variables that can undermine the saliency of, and responsiveness of young people to, political education. Political education has been proven to stimulate political participation (Putnam 2000). But, as Frazer (1999) notes, it is widely accepted amongst political scientists that there is a correlation between education attainment and political literacy. Verba et al (1995) suggest that levels of education and socioeconomic status have long been regarded as the most significant determinants of political engagement. Inequality in the standards of education due to socio-economic environment has a correlated effect on the standard of political understanding and engagement.

Uniformity of provision and assessment within multi-national states are not essential is educating young people to understand the political environment they will enter into. Federal systems in the United States, Australia and Germany have proven that local and regional difference can be accommodated within civic or political education programmes. There is, however, a necessity of the acceptance of overall political commonality which is essential in providing some form of state recognition, without avoiding issues of exclusion or oppression (Frazer 1999). Arthur (1998) has suggested there are a number of potential difficulties in the communitarian approach to citizenship education, which highlight potential conflict between secular and single-faith schools regarding issues of morality and values, and some aspects of political education.

Political education might well not provide the basis for a high level of political discourse or activity in society, as proven in the United States. That noted, it does give all young people a fundamental understanding of the political society they live, and furnishes the ability to make decisions on whether, or not, to participate in elections at all levels, or within other areas of civic society.

### **The Development of the British State Education System**

Education was one of the three institutions that marked social and cultural difference between England and Scotland, meaning the Act of Union of 1707 restricted the establishment of a uniform British education system. Scottish belief that their education system was superior to their English counterparts meant it became a potent symbol of national pride and identity (Humes and Bryce, 1999). Though the influence of the British state increased markedly during the nineteenth century, the merging the

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<sup>2</sup> Professor David Marsh has noted in a forthcoming report that young people are far from being politically apathetic but have differing political priorities and interests. (Citizenship Foundation 'Young people are not politically apathetic, says new research' Citizenship Foundation News 27/01/2004 <http://www.citizenshipfoundation.org.uk/main/news.php?n83> )

English and Scottish education systems was seen as an unnecessary provocation of nationalist sentiment by elites both North and South of the border.

Throughout the mid-nineteenth century, pressure grew upon the British government to establish a national system of state-maintained secondary schools. Griffith (2000) identifies this pressure coming from two sources within British society; those who felt education should introduce some form of moral guidance to maintain the fabric of society; and those who lobbied for a more educated workforce to counter the practical problems of economic decline during the 1860s and improve capitalist production.

Two further pressures forced the British state to extend the provision of elementary education; the expansion of the electoral franchise and the rise in organised political thought and representation. The Franchise Reform Acts of 1867 and 1884/5 increased the size of the male electorate significantly, and ensured that no socio-economic group was unfamiliar with the notion of political participation. The last two decades of the nineteenth century also saw a substantial increase in working class representation through trade unions and the fledgling Labour party. As such, the state, increasingly, had vested interests in the education of all its citizens, these being self-preservation and legitimacy.

Garrard (2002) highlights that, though one cardinal intention behind the 1870 Elementary Education Act (the Forster Act) in England and Wales was to educate and render literate the emerging democracy, the education system was still seen as preserving the values of the existing system rather than encouraging independent, active citizens. The established social framework was thoroughly reinforced by a tripartite system of schools based upon social class and planned occupation. The quality of education was strongly influenced by socio-economic status.

Though the Scottish system differed in some significant ways, the overall ethos of the system was similar to that of England. Scottish claims to provide universal, or near universal, education prior to England have some legitimacy (Brown et al 1998). But there was little desire to provide equality in quality of education. The Scottish education system was infused with the same class divisions as their English counterparts, and educational difference, both quality of school facilities and academic quality, was maintained (Anderson 1999). As such, the emergent 'elementary' system often provided inferior schools and teachers to the established 'secondary' schools.

The Education (Scotland) Act of 1872 mirrored the aspirations of English legislation in striving to create a state system that undermined the dominance of the church. It was founded on the three principles of social diversity, democracy and equality, but religious difference was not resolved. The refusal of Catholic schools to accept the religious settlement of the 1872 Act, ensured that the emergent Scottish system lacked unity in its inception.

In its inception, British legislative approaches to the formation of a unified national system of education were undermined by naivety and fear. The failure to fuse the education systems of England/Wales and Scotland within a framework that supported structural difference but promoted commonality of overall purpose, allowed for

competing approaches to emerge which underlined broader societal difference in values and culture.

There was no attempt to provide a uniform education system across the three nations of Britain, especially in Scotland. This lack of coherence ensured that difference would remain in curriculum, pedagogy and approaches to civic and political education. Whilst there was no necessity to coerce the Scottish into relinquishing their educational independence, there was no attempt to ensure that there was consistency in educational outcomes. Religious difference and residual bigotry undermined the cohesion of the emergent national systems in England, Wales and Scotland, though to differing degrees.

After First World War, within the two education systems in Britain, difference on religious and class grounds were, officially, removed. In Scotland, Catholic schools were integrated into the main education system whilst being allowed to continue to manage and recruit staff independently (Paterson, 2000). But claims of universal access to some form of 'secondary' education could not be made without qualification. Though some form of schooling was available to all pupils who completed their primary education, social class, meritocracy and availability restricted access. 'Secondary' education, and the attainment of qualifications that provided access to higher education, was limited by social background and academic ability. Educational quality and opportunity was still strongly dictated by social class and, to a lesser extent, religious background.

Though the 1944 Education Act attempted to provide some uniformity in the provision and opportunities within the education system in England and Wales, the reality was that it systemised inequality. Class and social standing still strongly influenced the type of education received. Griffith notes "the Butler Act not only perpetuated but polarised the class differences of British society" (Griffith, 2000: 4). The three-pronged approach of grammar, technical, and secondary-modern was doomed to fail from the beginning, as financial restrictions limited the ability to construct the technical schools and provide trained teachers. This saw the technical schools quickly sidelined in favour of secondary-moderns.

Post-war education legislation did not seek redress the differences between the Scottish and English/Welsh educational systems or provide some form of educational consistency and parity. The Education (Scotland) Act of 1945 merely systemised the bipartite approach, furthering embedding inequality (Paterson 1996). The different bureaucratic approaches of the Ministry of Education and the Scottish Office became increasingly clear. Whilst 'party politics' in England and Wales ensured a radical, but politically motivated, approach that often lacked support within the education system, the Scottish Office sought consensus between the various professional education bodies. This difference in culture and approach would further distance the two systems. Phillips (2003) notes that the post-war comprehensivisation of British educational provision increasingly encouraged the emergence of three distinct national education cultures in England, Scotland and Wales that have gradually instilled difference in approaches.

The overt influence of religion in the English education gradually declined in the post-war period. But the acceptance of single-faith schools within the main education

systems of Britain undermined consistency in educational approaches. This difference was most strongly felt in the west-central regions of Scotland, where sectarian attitudes were more prominent in broader society.

Instead, debates regarding the divisions within the structure of the education system, and the expansion of the comprehensive system, dominated the 1960s and 1970s. The expansion of the comprehensive system across Britain had pedagogic and ideological foundations. In England and Wales, the Labour government sought to extend equality of provision to all students by phasing out the grammar school system. The fractured nature of the English and Welsh education system ensured resistance varied regionally, with much of the Welsh system accepting comprehensivisation whilst Conservative-dominated English local authorities resisted reform on ideological grounds. Many teachers within the grammar system argued that equality in opportunity actually meant dilution in standards.

In Scotland, the abolition of differing types of secondary schooling was implemented with much less resistance. Though some teachers harboured concerns regarding dilution, the consensual approach to Scottish education reform meant that the switch to an all-embracing comprehensive system was gradual and took account of local concerns. By the late 1970s, only six percent of Scottish educational provision was provided outside of the state system (Paterson, 1996). But suggestions that the implementation of comprehensive schooling across Britain for the majority would bring equality were wildly inaccurate. Though the comprehensive system brought some consistency in the overall ethos in most secondary schools in Britain, it failed to take account of local socio-economic conditions, national and local political approaches to education provision, or religious difference. As such, it failed to introduce equality in curriculum, pedagogy or educational opportunity.

The election of the Conservatives in 1979 instigated a process of further reform in an attempt to provide a fundamental overhaul of post-war educational structures (Whitty, 1989). Attempts to centralise the funding of the education system, can be viewed as, ideologically, to be at odds with the main thrust of Thatcherite reform, that being the withdrawal of the state from the public sector. The centralisation of the education system highlighted the difference in the ethos of the differing education systems, with political and educational elites in Wales and Scotland almost entirely rejecting the opportunity to opt out of local funding arrangements (Phillips, 2003). Similarly, application and attitudes toward 'choice' and 'marketisation' differed across England, Wales and Scotland. This progress towards a tripartite system was completed with the accommodation of a distinct Welsh National Curriculum within the Education Reform Act (1988). Though the relationship between the each nation's education system was complex and, in part, interlinked, the distinct nature of each system could now be clearly observed.

The education policies of New Labour since 1997 have suggested an extension of New Right thinking, rejecting 'traditional' Labour ascription to equality of provision. New Labour, rather than encouraging uniformity, has expressed commitment to diversity, encouraging the creation of specialist schools, the maintenance of grammar schools, and the continuance of pupil selection. The failure of the comprehensive system to be implemented consistently throughout Britain, and the unequal introduction of market forces, has ensured that socio-economic background has



remained a salient influence in the quality of education available. Furthermore, devolution has encouraged political and education elites in Scotland and Wales to develop their systems to reflect the differing educational climates, encouraging greater diversity in policy and culture.

Similarly, though religious influence within the education system has diminished as the national systems secularised schools of all denominations to a certain extent, the existence of single faith schooling has ensured asymmetry in pedagogic approach and ethos. The debate over the extension of state funding to Muslim schools, and sectarian difference in west-central Scotland, has raised concern regarding the encouragement of faith-based polarisation through separate education provision, highlighting the contentious and controversial nature of religion within education..

Meritocracy and differing approaches to pupil selection, asymmetric funding mechanisms, diverse national systems and cultures of education, pupil socio-economic status and local conditions, curricula content and pedagogic approach, and the lack of political will to provide uniformity within the British educational sphere have all undermined the ability of schools to educate pupils to standards that are uniform in approach and outcome. The asymmetric approach to education implemented during the late Victorian era has remained resilient to ideological change and numerous education reforms.

## **A History of Political Education in Britain**

### *Victorian approaches to political education*

Colley (1992) notes that aspiring elites being educated at University in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were given some instruction regarding the qualities of political leadership and patriotism. Overall responsibility for the provision of education was largely ceded to the Church. Educational opportunities were restricted, in the main, to the sons of upper-class families, this ensuring the preservation of the *status quo*. The British state had little interest in the political education of the masses, fearing that indoctrination, by political or educational elites, could undermine loyalty and stimulate reform (Heater 2002). As such, education was already perceived to have both political and patriotic purposes, to establish the primacy of loyalty of elites to the nation-state, and its associated political and economic systems.

The latter half of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of secular schools, often run by voluntary charities, in deprived urban and rural areas, who attempted to instil some notion of civic awareness that reacted against the moralising influence of the dominant religious schools (Batho 1990). Working class children were given limited education through voluntary socialist and Chartist groups, and the Co-operative movement extended this to provide some adult education classes. These inevitably included some political messages which challenged the state mechanisms of authority and control.

Whilst political and social reform, and the expansion of enfranchisement, encouraged greater political participation during the latter stages of the nineteenth century, there was no desire to promote a uniform or formal induction into the British political system for future generations. The instillation of civic virtue was based wholly on

class or socio-economic status. Victorian attitudes to education, and society as a whole, were strongly influenced by social Darwinism (Marsden 1989). As such, some were born to lead whilst others were born to serve. Those of lower social standing were viewed as lacking in need of instruction of mechanisms of government and the state. Educational standards were strongly influenced by class and religion throughout Britain, and national difference within. Political education, if provided at all to the lower classes, emphasised morality and subservient loyalty to the state and monarchy. Active citizenship was not seen to be encouraged as there was little the lower classes could offer to improve society.

The transmission of identity values of the British empire throughout schools was seen as paramount, and patriotism was also infused with community values and public service on a both a municipal/local, national and imperial level. Political education was largely provided within the framework of the 'Civic' education that was offered to the chosen elites who would form the next generation of leaders. It was seen as a knowledge-based subject, focusing on institutions and offices of government, and active participation outside of school was not encouraged (Batho 1990). The limited number of textbooks that were produced during this time focused on institutions of government and the (unwritten) British constitution. The emergent education systems successfully inculcated a sense of loyalty to defend the British state and empire during the First World War, but they failed to prepare the survivors for the reward of enfranchisement.

#### *First World War and Inter-war Period*

The inter-war period can be noted as a period of intense debate regarding the nature of civic, and political, education in Britain. Following the First World War, there was evidence of a reaction against the extremes of imperial patriotism, and the limitations of unbridled nationalism. The post-war approach to political education mirrored the strong pacifist undertones resonating throughout British society as a whole, and the need to ensure the affirmation of the pragmatic democratic principles that distinguished Britain from her European counterparts. But debate regarding political or civic education was largely confined to academic and educational elites, and there was no attempt by the British government to formally prepare young people to participate, or understand, the state.

Though the majority of pupils in England and Wales, for the first time, had some form of 'Civics' education within the elementary system, its implementation was *ad-hoc*, and aimed to create obedient and passive subjects, not active, democratic citizens (Lister 1998: 256). The reality was that citizenship education increasingly emphasised paternal approaches to social and political responsibility. Those pupils who were 'trusted' with fact-based political education focused on the British Constitution, this, largely, still the recourse of those from affluent families. In Scotland, 'values' education was provided through the ethos of the school rather than through the syllabus, and concentrated on issues of social morality rather than political instruction.

The encouragement of international understanding, and the promotion of democratic values, was expressed through local, national and world citizenship (Gooch 1936; Cole 1942). The role of the League of Nations was promoted as "the supreme instrument for moralising international life" (Marsden 1989). But the timing of such movements was, at best, unfortunate. Though pacifist sentiment, as a reaction to the

First World War, was initially widespread, the disintegration of the European post-war order saw the League of Nations increasing seen in a negative light.

Though the Association for Education for Citizenship (AEC) was founded in 1934 to promote the ideals of democracy in a Europe threatened by political extremism, there was no attempt to engage in explicit political education at school that encouraged independent thought required to reflect the recently enfranchised masses. The younger generation were still perceived to lack the aptitude to be trusted with explicit political knowledge. Lister notes that “official attitudes towards ‘education for citizenship’ were wary and towards political education negative” (Lister 1998, 257).

Whilst there was some effort to encourage global understanding, no attempt to significantly reform attitudes toward the political education of the people was formally countenanced. The shock of the First World War was not sufficient to diffuse imperial paternal sentiment ingrained into the British educational or political establishment. Class difference strongly affected the level and intensity of political and civic education. Throughout Britain, the approach to moral, social and political guidance was strongly influenced by the Christian denominations within mainstream schooling (Carr 1999). Commonality of thought and purpose would require a radicalising experience.

#### *Post-Second World War Britain*

Some commentators have suggested that the political ‘radicalisation’ of the British electorate during the Second World War was a prime factor in the election of the Labour government of 1945-51 (Addison 1994). There was a belief within the Labour Party that the Second World War had stimulated an evolutionary process that would lead to the development of a politicised society that was based on the fundamental principles of socialism. But, though the inculcation of democratic values was seen as important by all political parties, there was a mistrust of left-wing indoctrination from the beginning. As such, the 1944 Education (Butler) Act rejected compulsory political or citizenship education in favour of ‘character-building’ through the whole school (Robbins and Robbins 2000).

Indeed, the impact of wartime efforts to stimulate a new sense of civic virtue can be seen to have been overestimated. Though many sought a more egalitarian Britain, this was mainly within economic terms. As the Labour government believed that societal reform would be evolutionary, seeking impetus from wartime communalism, they saw no reason to revise the curriculum. Though the Ministry of Education (1949) and the Scottish Education Department (1950) produced guidance regarding the civic instruction of pupils, this tended to focus on the formation of good habits and moral virtue. A lack of surety regarding the potential politicisation of the curriculum ensured that government intervention in shaping the curriculum was kept to a minimum (Heater 2002).

Though the idea of citizenship education, that involved some form of political instruction, fitted in well with the post-war Labour agenda to educate the ‘radicalised’ society, the subject was viewed to lack academic weight. Batho notes that “social studies, civics and citizenship became the province of the less able and lesser achievers in the 1950s and 1960s” (1990, 96). A ‘practical’ approach to ‘civics’ teaching essentially meant young people were taught how to use the post-war welfare

system. Though the 'British Constitution' continued to be taught in some grammar schools, this again was seen as a lesser subject. The asymmetry in the approach and provision of political education that infused the Victorian education system remained largely intact.

### *Post-war Decline in Britain*

During the 1960s and 1970s, Britain's social and political framework was radically altered. 'New Commonwealth' migration saw the composition and culture of British society irreversibly altered, stimulating public, and political, unease which resulted in the introduction of restrictive and exclusory legislation. Britain further rejected its former empire through membership of the European Economic Community (EEC). The sureties of the post-war political and economic consensus were questioned increasingly during the 1960s. Decolonisation, economic decline, social liberalisation, political radicalisation, immigration, and insecurity about Britain's role in the modern world, linked with rising unemployment and social alienation saw a decline in civic virtue and political participation. During the 1970s, the growing popularity of right-wing nationalist groups highlighted the fact that the lack of political and civic instruction was having detrimental effects to the fabric of British society.

The introduction of a significant minority of new citizens from the Commonwealth, and membership of the EEC, should have inspired educationalists and politicians to reconsider approaches to political education. But it was expected that new citizens would voluntarily assimilate into the dominant civic and political cultures, and identities. Little consideration was given, however, to the potential of formal civic instruction, both in schools and British society as whole. Though there was an increase in the teaching of citizenship education during the 1960s and 1970s, this, again, was seen as part of a general accommodation of less-able students. In England and Wales, this was achieved through the 'General Studies' syllabus, which had a broad range of study of areas, including politics, culture and morality, not necessarily covered by traditional subjects. But it was only available to A-level students, and then largely those perceived to be less academically gifted.

In Scotland, the 'Modern Studies' syllabus was introduced for 'Highers' students in 1962. It was an amalgam of history and geography, with some reference to contemporary politics. Again, it was initially intended to cater for less-able students. By the late 1960s, the focus of Modern Studies shifted toward current affairs and the implicit development of political literacy (Maitles 1999). This provided teachers, if so inclined, to consider other aspects of citizenship and political participation.

Both the English/Welsh and Scottish approaches suffered from a lack of trained or motivated teachers during the implementation of their respective programmes. Indeed, many humanities and social science teachers were expected to introduce the new syllabuses as well as maintaining their current teaching requirements. There were problems in resource allocation, timetabling, and a general lack of interest. In short, neither approach was compulsory, and lacked explicit governmental support or broad acceptance within their respective education systems.

A counteraction to this malaise concerning civic or political education saw an increased interest in social sciences, which influenced those within schools and universities. A new generation of teachers emerged who were products of the

turbulent period; politicised, radicalised and motivated. The movement for political education that emerged during this period was largely promoted by voluntary and non-government organisations (Lister 1998). The lowering of the voting age to eighteen, in 1969, had an enormous impact on those seeking to promote political education.

Organisations such as the Politics Association, formed in 1969, sought to challenge conventional attitudes that school children were too young to respond to political instruction (Crick and Heater 1977). The profile of political education was expanded by an initiative led by the Politics Association, together with the Hansard Society, under the auspices of the Programme for Political Education (PPE) (Crick and Porter 1978). They sought to promote the teaching of 'politics' as skills rather than as knowledge, focusing on issues rather than institutions and providing access for the many not the privileged few (Robbins and Robbins 2000).

By seeking to rise above the party politics of the British system, the PPE displayed naivety by avoiding a salient factor which had restricted the growth of political education, the lack of consensus between political parties regarding the extent to which the younger generation should be exposed to the confrontational style of British politics. Heater and Crick (1977) note that the lack of tradition regarding the political education of adolescents, poor provision of resources, and the fear of indoctrination still restricted the accommodation of political education both on local and national levels. Crick and Porter's (1978) promotion of political education and political literacy is very much a product of its time. Though it gained mainstream recognition of the need for some form of political education within political and educational spheres, it failed to encourage a sustained campaign for implementation, and was eventually undermined by the party politics it strove to avoid.

### *Thatcherite Britain*

The election of Margaret Thatcher in 1979 instigated a wholesale revision in the approach to civic and political education across Britain. The failure of the post-war political consensus during the 1960s and 1970s to arrest, and reverse, economic decline saw significant rises in unemployment, and, seemingly, comparable increases in societal disorder and civic disengagement. This, according to New Right interpretation, was evidence that the community-based approaches had failed, and responsibility must be passed to the individual. The New Right sought to improve economic efficiency through the encouragement of economic diversity and entrepreneurial spirit within a substantive moral framework (Davies 2000). But, the stark rejection of Keynesian economic idealism saw the unemployment continue to rise, creating more social unrest and an even greater dependency for many on state welfarism, stimulating further disconnection from civil society.

Government attitudes towards political education during the early 1980s were strongly influenced by Victorian approaches, regarding the promotion of moral values within a patriotic framework rather than the encouragement of active citizenship. Attempts to promote compulsory political literacy were portrayed in press and by Conservative politicians as 'disloyal', both within the context of the Cold War and *traditional* conceptions of British society (Scruton 1984). Indeed, fears of political indoctrination within the education system which challenged traditional values were,

partially, influential in the implementation of the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA), incorporating the National Curriculum.

The Conservative government viewed with increasing concern the activities of Local Education Authorities (LEAs) during the 1980s. Utilising their freedoms from central government interference to the full, some LEAs were perceived to be actively politicising pupils by giving teachers freedom to introduce bespoke citizenship education programmes incorporating multicultural, gender, sexual, environmental, peace and anti-racist studies into their curriculum (Davies 1999). Political control of the curriculum was seen as equally important, and the National Curriculum would undermine the ability of those of the 'left', local government mandarins and teachers, to politicise not just the curriculum, but school life as a whole. Fear of political indoctrination seemingly restricted civic education within the National Curriculum.

In Scotland, the general rejection of 'English' education policy increasingly became a matter of national pride, as the effects of the New Right agenda continued to ravage the industrial base built on British imperial strength. The rejection of Conservative education reform was based on the continuing belief in the superior quality of Scottish education. As Brown et al (1998) assert this resistance, meaning many reforms were severely modified and the National Curriculum was resisted.

But, without intention, the 1988 Education Reform Act can be viewed as a significant document in the promotion of political education throughout Britain. Though concerned solely with the English and Welsh education systems, it also influenced Scottish approaches to education provision. Though no element of citizenship or political education was included as compulsory, it did place responsibility upon schools to provide the broad and balanced preparation of pupils for the rigours of life (Fogelman 1997). This provided a stimulus for the debate of civic and political education, which resulted in numerous publications that, though unable to agree on conceptual or pedagogical approaches, ensured that it became a salient political and educational issue (Speakers Commission on Citizenship 1990; National Curriculum Council 1990). The National Curriculum Council announcement that 'education for citizenship' would be one of five voluntary cross-curricular themes taught to all students, comprising of eight essential components promoting a distinctly Thatcherite view of 'society', and largely avoiding issues relating to political education.

Crick (2000) believes that the inclusion of citizenship education within the National Curriculum was due to the Conservative government promotion of 'active' citizenship as an antidote to the social problems created by the reforms of the New Right. Civic duties were encouraged through voluntarism and individual rights and responsibilities, this being linked to greater personal ownership, withdrawal of the Welfare State and consumer rights within the private and public sectors, including education (Kerr 1999).

The incorporation of citizenship education into the curriculum was, however, wholly voluntary, meaning that many schools simply ignored the cross-curricular directive, citing lack of resources, time-table space, and trained personnel. Citizenship education was, however, fatally undermined by the introduction of school performance league tables. Disparities in funding levels disadvantaged the ability of less-academically proficient schools, predominantly within inner-city communities, to provide

comparable opportunities, resources or facilities to express their civic values. The lack of assessment procedures, or recognition of the subject as part of the grading of schools, ensured that the cross-curricular approach failed to gain academic recognition or educational support (Robbins and Robbins 2000). The overall objectives of citizenship education within the national curriculum were unclear and still viewed with suspicion by many educational and political elites. Whilst promoting moral and social responsibility within the curriculum was acceptable, there was to be little encouragement of political literacy.

### *New Labour, New Citizens?*

Though Conservative encouragement of traditional roles of voluntary active citizenship, which would create informal civic responsibilities, were proven to be lacking, the resurgent Labour party took much of the rhetoric but began to articulate it within a broader, communitarian framework. The Labour White Paper on education policy, *Excellence in Schools* (DFEE 1997) pledged to strengthen the teaching of democracy in schools, and recommended the formation of an Advisory Group on Citizenship, to be led by Professor Sir Bernard Crick. It reported back in September 1998 that effective 'education for citizenship' had three separate, interrelated strands; social and moral responsibility, community involvement, and political literacy (QCA 1998). The 'Crick Report' went on to note that, though suggestions that the present generation might not be as politically illiterate as some reports had suggested (Wilkinson and Mulgan, 1995), the provision of political education was "inexcusably and damagingly bad" (QCA 1998: 16).

'Political literacy' was perceived as developing the 1970s definition of political education, setting greater understanding within the context of 'public life' in its broadest sense (Kerr, 2000). The statutory Citizenship Order of 1999 established citizenship within the revised National Curriculum in England from September 2000, but more importantly, enforced citizenship education as a statutory requirement from September 2002. During the two year notice period, preparation was made to change the National Curriculum, publish schemes of work, draw up guidelines for inspection, and train teachers.

The provision of citizenship education sought to accommodate those schools that had already embedded some aspects of citizenship across their curriculum, or had incorporated in specific subjects such as the history, religious education, geography or PSHE. It also made allowances for schools that had ignored previous non-statutory guidelines regarding citizenship, and sought to implement it as discrete subject. The introduction of citizenship education in England stimulated an intense period of academic, political, and educational debate regarding the theoretical, ideological, pedagogical and historical contribution of the subject, its cross-curricular influence, how it related to issues of identity or what areas in which it was deemed to be deficient (see Mycock 2004 forthcoming).

This intense debate in England, and the inclusion of the English programme within the IEA Civic Education Study across twenty-eight countries (Torney-Purta et al 1999 and 2001), has almost obscured, for some, developments regarding citizenship and political education in Wales and Scotland. The Crick Report, and the English approach, has undoubtedly influenced the construction of citizenship education

programmes in Wales and Scotland, if only to provide a platform to develop or react against. The emergent approaches have been seen as emphasising the differing priorities, accommodating political and cultural difference, of a devolved nation-state following New Labour's constitutional reforms since 1997 (Phillips et al, 2003).

Andrews (2001) notes that citizenship education in Wales differs markedly from that in England. Its introduction has failed to provoke the intense debate seen in England, and lacks commonality in status and content. Initially articulated within the Curriculum Cymreig (CCW, 1993, 1998), the cross-curricular approach adopted in Wales differed from the English approach by emphasising the role of the Welsh community and culture, rather than 'civic society' (Phillips et al, 2003). This approach has been developed with the framework of Personal and Social Education (PSE), which is provided through all key stages, has no separate curriculum guidance, and is non-statutory (ACCAC 2000a).

In Scotland, the presence of Modern Studies within the curriculum has meant that overall approaches to citizenship education have been less dramatic and more-considered, and the culture of the Scottish education encouraging greater consultation with teachers, parents, and pupils regarding formulation and implementation. Arthur and Wright (2001) note that the perceived lack of the immediate need to address issues of political literacy has seen the development of citizenship as a pervading theme, with greater emphasis on cultural and active citizenship. The 'Education for Citizenship in Scotland' report published in 2002 encouraged a citizenship programme that focused on the rights, responsibilities and respect of young people within Scottish communities (ACLTS 2002). All three approaches suggested that communitarian thinking resonates strongly.

Debate both within and between national spheres is a healthy sign that political education, through whatever approach, has finally been incorporated into the three education systems. The presence of formal instruction has ensured that the Victorian attitudes that restricted political literacy for the vast majority has finally been rejected. Frazer (2002) notes that political and cultural distinctiveness has been accommodated in the differing approaches to political education across Britain. The mere presence of citizenship and political education has influenced the language of future political generations and will, no doubt, stimulate further debate. But its asymmetric application within each system and across Britain does not necessarily mean that all pupils will receive political education of an acceptable standard or consistency.

### *Where We Are At*

First the good news. New Labour has stimulated a revised interest in citizenship and political education. The determination of Crick's protégé, David Blunkett, to introduce citizenship education in England has influenced educational elites in Wales and Scotland, ensuring that issues relating to political literacy have a broad influence across the respective national education systems. The Scottish approach of seeking a broad consensus toward education policy has also influenced the English and Welsh systems during the construction of citizenship education programmes. This has had a significant effect, ensuring that cross-political party support for political education has been secured only after a broad consultation period that sought a range of political,



educational, academic and broader societal opinion toward content and approach. The necessity and legitimacy of political education within all three systems has broad acceptance, meaning it is unlikely that it will be withdrawn through political or educational revisionism.

The presence of political education in schools in Britain has been largely accepted by those working within education. The traditional lack of encouragement of political literacy in England and Wales has traditionally produced an unease regarding the potential politicisation of the curriculum, and the sensitivity of some political issues. This uncertainty was furthered by the reactions of the Conservatives during the 1980s to any form of perceived political indoctrination. This has been formalised by subsequent legislation, such as the Education Act (1996), which has sought to regulate and restrict political indoctrination or bias.

Teachers are, however, becoming increasingly adept and familiar with the concept of political education within schools, and, across a broad range of subjects, are accepting the political literacy has a significant input and influence. As they become more skilled in discussing the political aspects of society, so their ability to deal with potentially sensitive issues will improve, and fears of the repercussions of indoctrination and bias will decrease. More importantly, pupils are beginning to see themselves as politically active, and their input into political life within the school, and broader society, is seen as increasingly valuable. As the younger generation gain increasing ownership of their political development, they will become more confident and active. Crick (2002) believes a citizenship culture should provide the basis for some informed scepticism toward the state. Within this context, the presence of significant numbers of young people as part of the demonstrations against the current conflict in Iraq should be seen as an encouraging sign. Anxieties regarding the participation of young people in political activism should be limited, and schools must show flexibility in allowing political expression but within formal structures that allow articulation, and recognition, both within the school and in broader society.

As the value and contribution of political education becomes more apparent to those within the education community, there will be greater emphasis placed across the curriculum and the within each school. The numerous political influences that the younger generation are exposed to outside of school strongly affect attitudes and behaviour within it (Tooley 2000). Young people's political views must be addressed in an open and understanding environment, rather than ignored or viewed as insignificant. Failure to acknowledge the political development, and views, of the next generation during their period of formal state education will merely encourage a culture of uninformed apathy, or extremism, which could further dislocation from active participation, encourage social segregation, and undermine the inclusivity of the state education system.

But the presence of political education across the devolved British education system should not be viewed as success alone, and should not encourage complacency within political and education elites, or broader British society. The asymmetric approach to political education means there are many inconsistencies, and differing approaches within the respective systems have seen common and unique problems emerge regarding access to political education, pedagogic approach, teacher training and

resources, emphasis regarding political institutions and overall content, and expected outcomes.

In England, political literacy was one of three main strands of the 'education for citizenship' approach recommended by the Crick Report, and compulsorily implemented across Key Stages 3 and 4 of the National Curriculum. Though it must be noted that allowances should be made for the emergent nature of the subject, a broad range of concerns were articulated prior and during implementation. During the two-year preparation stage doubts were expressed by Ofsted regarding preparedness of some schools to implement the citizenship curriculum, with particular concern being expressed regarding the negative attitudes of some schools, their understanding of the subject, how it would affect the curriculum, teacher training and resources, assessment, and the overall impact on the ethos of the school (OSE, 2002). This did not stimulate a reappraisal of the implementation policy or timetable, and the citizenship programme was implemented in September 2002.

The 'strong, bare bones' approach (Crick, 2002) of the citizenship curriculum, or what has alternatively been described as the 'light touch', was encouraged to maximise flexibility without being overly-prescriptive to encourage schools to accept the subject within a system infused with diversity. Recent evaluations of the first year of statutory citizenship education in England would suggest this 'light touch' has been interpreted by some schools as meaning the subject lacked academic value or importance within the marketised system, thus encouraging a degree of complacency (OSE 2003a). The Ofsted report (2003a), admittedly based on only a small selection schools, noted that in over half the schools chosen "the management of the introduction of citizenship has been unsatisfactory" (i.b.i.d, 5). Ofsted believed that the full implication of citizenship were not understood or, in a minority of cases, not accepted.

In only one out of five schools was the citizenship curriculum well planned or developed, and concerns were expressed regarding teacher training, pupils awareness of the subject, the quality of teaching, the structural approaches, timetabling and resources, and assessment (i.b.i.d, 7-18). An accompanying press release highlighted that many schools were confused about responsibility for the subject, due to the incorporation of the previous cross-curricular approach within the new citizenship curriculum, with the aims and objectives being viewed as, at best, unclear (OSE, 2003b). This would suggest that there some serious concerns regarding the implementation of the citizenship curriculum, and standards of political education, and many of the concerns raised were replicated in a subsequent Ofsted report on the non-statutory implementation of citizenship through PSHE in primary schools (OSE, 2004).

In Wales, the education system has enjoyed some curricula autonomy since the Education Reform Act (1988), but has been exposed to many of the pressures associated with the English system (Phillips et al 2003). As noted previously, the Welsh approach to political education is non-statutory, embedded within the PSE framework. Many of the problems encountered through the English experience have been replicated in Wales. Non-compulsory implementation, as initially enacted in England, suffered from curriculum competition, lack of resources, trained staff, and resistance from some within the education system. There has been no evaluative work

published by the ACCAC regarding problems encountered during the non-compulsory period, or concerning preparations for its compulsory inclusion within the curriculum.

Limited curriculum space means that the PSE has a restricted time frame to cover a broad remit covering personal, social, cultural, and political issues. The pressures of marketisation, and a system assessed through league tables, means that aspects of the PSE curriculum which can not be assessed directly are potentially liable to be devalued, and possibly sidelined. Political education has to compete with a multitude of other issues within the PSE framework, and the overall curriculum. Some awareness of the potential problems associated with the implementation of the PSE programme, concerning teacher training and the potentially negative attitudes of some within the Welsh education system, were outlined in the supplemental guidance issued by the ACCAC (2000b) prior to its compulsory status. More substantial research will be required during the following year to assess the extent to which the PSE subject, and political education, has embedded into the Welsh curriculum.

In Scotland, as noted previously, issues regarding political education have been less controversial. Citizenship education has been introduced as a pervading theme, and the structure of the curriculum has remained unaltered. This does not mean that Scottish pupils are receiving greater levels of political education though. The Modern Studies is one of three options (the others being history and geography) within the humanities strand, meaning that, though 90% of pupils are offered the chance to study politics in greater depth, the reality is that only 30% of students receive formal political education (Maitles 2000). Though cross-curricular infusion of citizenship education might provide some exposure to political education for those pupils who do not take Modern Studies, emphasis on rights, responsibilities and respect could dilute political content, meaning that many Scottish pupils may not receive any significant levels of political education. As such, the Scottish approach is subject to many of the same tensions and problems outlined in the English and Welsh systems.

It is widely accepted that differing forms of educational approach are acceptable across a broad range of factors, such as curriculum structure and pedagogic application (Pring 1999). Britain is a devolved multi-national state, with a diverse population who express difference politically, nationally, ethnically, religiously, and culturally. The differing approaches to political education mirror this diversity and should be encouraged. But there must be a commonality of overall purpose that reflects the fact that Britain is a unified, if not uniform, state.

The difference in the emphasis of three approaches to political education raises concern for the civic development of future generations of British citizens. Whilst English political education emphasises the 'active' role of citizenship relating to local government and the over-arching British political system (Arthur et al, 2001), the Welsh approach focuses on issues of community and culture. Recent guidelines to political aspects of PSE almost wholly focus on the role of the Welsh Assembly with little reference to the British system (Welsh Assembly, 2003). Modern Studies in Scotland provides the most intensive assessment of British state and devolved institutions, this largely being due to the dedicated nature of the subject taught.

Differences in approaches to assessment have also indicated a lack of mutual agreement over the contribution of citizenship and political education. In England

there has been much discussion over whether citizenship should formally assessed. The result of these deliberations has been the introduction of a non-compulsory 'short-course' citizenship GCSE and GCE AS level qualifications. These are not offered by all the English examining boards at all levels, therefore introducing another area of inequality. In Wales, there is no formal system of assessment of PSE, though guidelines are provided to maintain a 'National Record of Achievement' (ACCAC 2000b). Modern Studies, in Scotland, is assessed through formal examination and coursework, but there are no plans to assess citizenship formally. Indeed, English approaches to the assessment of citizenship have been labelled "crazy" by a leading Scottish educationalist.<sup>3</sup> It is not yet clear how the differing systems of further or higher educational establishments will recognise these differing qualifications, within each system or across national divides, and whether they will be treated with the parity accorded to other subjects.

There are also discrepancies relating to age remit for compulsory and non-compulsory political education, with the Welsh approach ensuring compulsory exposure from age 5-16, whilst the English system has non-compulsory citizenship themes within the PSHE subject for ages 5-11, and statutory citizenship education from age 11-16. The Scottish system provides cross-curricular citizenship themes from age 5-16, but the Modern Studies is optional. Given the asymmetry detailed above regarding political education provision, it seems that not only is exposure to political education inconsistent, but also the relative development of young people in Britain can be, to a certain extent, defined by which national system they are educated in.

There are, however, some common problems faced by teachers across the three systems. Teachers remain concerned about accusations of political indoctrination or bias, whether this is due to the sensitivity of certain issues or a general sense of lack of formal training to competently deal with such situations. A recent report by the Community Service Volunteers (CSV) highlights concerns that teachers in England have regarding lack of formal training, assessment, and resources (CSV 2003). The 'light touch' approach has left some teachers unsure what are the core elements of the citizenship education programme, and what are the most suitable resources from the vast range of government, NGO, and broader educational sources to use. Over a third of teachers requested additional training in political literacy, as it noted the confidence of the teacher in dealing with such issues relates strongly to pupils' levels of civic knowledge (i.b.i.d, 5). These are concerns which are familiar to teachers within the Welsh and Scottish systems.

## Conclusions

It seems increasingly likely that the age barrier for voting in Britain will soon be reduced to 16. This makes it essential that all young people are exposed to a coherent programme of political education that is compulsory and covers the whole period of formal state education. More importantly, it is essential that young people are encouraged to think of themselves as active, participative citizens who understand the role, relationship and functioning of the British state at local, regional, national and

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<sup>3</sup> Professor Bart McGettrick (*The Guardian Education Supplement* 09/10/01: 6)

supra-national levels, and that they have a legitimate input into its functioning both within the school and in broader society.

As noted previously, varying reports have highlighted that young people who have been exposed to formal political education are more likely to actively participate than those who have not. A culture that encourages the mutual ownership and development of political education in Britain must be encouraged that emphasises local and devolved political relationships, but within a common over-arching British, European and global framework. This does not mean that the differing systems should be prescribed set pedagogic approaches or curriculum content, merely that there is a common set of aims and objectives that allow for political and cultural difference, but should also encourage commonality. The present situation does not provide such an environment.

Communitarians, such as Tam (2001), have noted that a lack of common purpose diminishes civic virtue and active participation. If this is correct, then, within a local, regional and national context, the New Labour approach must be seen to be failing. Young people need to be made to feel that the years of formal state education are part of an on-going process of political education and activity that reflects their local and national environments. But, government at all levels must ensure that educational opportunity is infused with the principles of equality and consistency. An educational system that seeks to maintain inequality in provision will not encourage a sense of equal citizenship. This, combined with the lack of commonality of approaches to teaching and assessment of political education, if not reconsidered, could provide grounds for increased scepticism of the education system, encouraging greater dislocation from the British state and its electoral processes.

Though, as Kerr (1999) notes, the change of political culture may take a generation or more, there is distinct possibility the fractured approach to political education, as part of an over-arching citizenship education programme or a distinct discipline, might actually deepen the sense of crisis regarding political apathy within the young. Modernisation and reform must have clear aims and objectives before it is initiated. So far, it seems that New Labour's asymmetric approach to the encouragement of political literacy within the differing national systems of education in Britain suffers from a lack of clarity of desired outcome that has also been identified in its overall programme of modernisation of the British state.

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