

HIGHER EDUCATION IN BRITAIN

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Part 1

Thank you. I have just turned off my mobile phone and I hope yours are turned off too. It's a very serious crime in this university for your phone to ring during a lecture, so, phones off. Ah I've just realized looking at this that I've been, I've been in this university as a lecturer for almost ten years. I hadn't realized that. So, over those years the Education System in, I guess in any country, but certainly in Britain, has undergone certain changes and certain reforms. And what you have to remember when you ask people about the Education System, is often the answer they give you refers to the system *when they were students*. So even if you ask your teacher, they might tell you what the education system was like when they were students. What I'm trying to do today is to update you so that when you start studying in September or October in this university or any other university in Britain, and you start mixing more with the British students, or the students who were educated in Britain, you will understand more of the background and the system in which you are studying.

First of all, my own qualifications for talking about this are of course first of all because I am British, I was born in Britain, I was educated mainly in Britain, but I have also worked and studied in many other education systems in the world. So roughly half of my life has been spent outside of Britain, and most of that in other education systems. So, although I went to school in Britain, in Southampton, for fourteen years, and although I have studied at three British universities, Warwick, Reading, and Aberystwyth. I have also studied and worked in schools and universities in other countries. So, I'm able to compare the systems, and to point out to you things which may not be obvious if you haven't been in England before.

How many of you have actually already studied in a British university before, before Reading. Has anybody studied already? No. Have any of you studied in a language school in Britain or another? Anything else? No? You have. Right. OK a few, good. I suppose I should point out that when we talk about the British Education System, most all of what I say applies to two of the countries of Britain but not necessarily to the other two. The United Kingdom consists of four countries. Yes? England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. The education system that I am talking about is the system in England and Wales. Scotland and Ireland have their own education system. There are some similarities but there are some differences. So some of the things I say do not necessarily apply to Scotland or Northern Ireland.

Most of the population of the United Kingdom does in fact live in England or Wales, you know more than fifty million of the sixty million live in England or Wales. There are three sections to what I have to say. I'd like to, before I talk about the higher education system, I'd like to give you some idea about what goes on *before* the higher education system. So, I'd like the first part to be what precedes higher education. When you mix with British educated students, students who've been educated in Britain, what kind of system have they been through, before they came to the university. Secondly, I'd like to talk about how

higher education is organised and funded. Money increasingly becomes important, so often questions concern funding. And then finally, and perhaps most importantly for you, I'd like to talk to you a little bit about what the higher education system, the system which you are now entering, expects from you as a student. And how that might be different or similar, maybe different from or similar to what you've expected - what you've experienced, in your own countries, the countries where you were previously educated.

Part 2

OK, under what precedes higher education. In England and Wales, all children must go to school for 11 years minimum. So compulsory education is from the age of 5. In most countries in the world it is a later age, compulsory education. But in Britain, it is 5. Having said that, most countries of the world where compulsory education begins at 6 (or even 7 in many countries), those countries often have a more organized preschool education system. Whereas the state in Britain does not actually provide for everybody to have pre-school education, preschool education is more commonly a private business, if you can afford it. The state provides free education for all children from the age of 5. Now your age depends obviously depends on when you were born, and the academic year begins in September on September 1st, and so children are in age groups.

Another difference with many countries I've been in, is that, in Britain in general, if you go to the first year of a school, all the children are roughly the same age. They are all born between the 1st of September and 31st of August, 5 years before. Right? So, at the end of year 1, they progress to year 2, it doesn't depend on exams or pass or failure, it depends on age, which is a fundamental difference with many systems, in Europe for example, where people can retake years that they, quote, 'fail', unquote. So that is one difference between the British education system and at least many systems that I've experienced in Europe and elsewhere.

Compulsory education lasts for 11 years, and in most areas of Britain, of England and Wales, it's divided into primary and secondary. The first 6 years are primary, years 1 to 6 that's what they're called, year 1, year 2, etc. up to year 6. And in most places in Britain at the end of year 6, children transfer to a secondary school (and so year), but the numbers continue, so year 7 to 11 is in the secondary school. Before this system was introduced, the numbering started again. You know when I'm so old, that I was on an old system, but you know we started the numbers again in secondary school-1,2,3,4,5. But nowadays the numbers just go through. So, if you ask a child what year they're in, they will say year 5, that's the fifth year of primary school. If they say year 7, it's probably the first year of secondary school.

About 92 to 93 percent of all British children go to state schools. And the remaining 7 or so percent go to private schools, which their parents pay for. And in the United Kingdom, private schools are very very very expensive. I've been amazed in some other countries how cheap they can be. In Britain, you need to be fairly rich to send your children to a private school. So, only about 7 percent of children go to private schools. You may say well I've seen a lot of private schools in Reading, there are indeed many private schools in Reading. Don't forget a lot of children in private schools are not actually British, they are coming from other countries, rich countries or rich people to be educated. Of British children only 7 percent go to private school.

The, there is - it is legally allowed if the parents, or if one parent of a child is a fully qualified teacher, it is actually allowed not to send your children to school, allowed to teach them at home, as long as you are a fully qualified teacher. For example, I am a fully qualified teacher. I could if I wanted teach my children at home. However, I would be subject to the same inspectors and inspection as the schools. So, the government could send an inspector to my home to make sure I'm teaching the curriculum. A few people do that but not many, but there are - there is, there is a movement in Britain for home education where a few parents prefer to teach their children at home. In state schools, all teachers since 1972, all teachers must be properly qualified teachers under the state system.

Part 3

Qualified by the states, you can be qualified to be a teacher at Reading University, at the Education Faculty for example. All teachers, before 1972 anybody could teach in a school, but since 1972 all state school teachers must be fully qualified. Rather bizarrely you do not have to be qualified to teach in an independent or private school. We always warn parents who are thinking of paying lots of money to send their children to a private school, check the qualifications of the staff. A famous court case just recently, where a teacher at Eton, the most famous private school in Britain was involved in a court case to do with cheating and the Royal Family and all sorts of things. But it was noted in a paper that she wasn't a qualified teacher and some people said to me how did she get a job at Eton without being qualified. Well, you don't have to be qualified to teach in a private school, it's a business they can employ who they like. But in a state school, you have to be a qualified teacher. Interestingly, at university you don't have to be a qualified teacher. I mean, I'm a qualified teacher, but you don't have to be a qualified teacher. You have to have certain qualifications, but you don't have to be a qualified teacher to teach at a university, which I find interesting. You will find that all the people who teach you English or probably any language are qualified teachers, but in other subjects, they may or may not be. I mean the vast majority of people at this university are not qualified teachers. They are qualified academics but they're not qualified to teach necessarily. Which is an interesting point, not just at this university but all universities. My own personal view is that they should be, that anybody who teaches should be qualified to teach. I wouldn't go to a doctor who is unqualified, for example. It's an interesting state of affairs. In schools, there is a national curriculum- in other words there is a curriculum set down by the government in London, which covers all schools in England and Wales. Right? You probably think of course there is. But in fact before 1988, so not very long ago, there was no national curriculum in this country. Schools could theoretically teach whatever they wanted to teach. When I was at school my my head teacher and teachers, they could teach whatever they wanted. Since 1988 there has been a national curriculum which covers all schools. And the curriculum lays down which subjects should be taught during which years, and goes into quite a bit of detail about that. Every year or every two years, it's kind of changed a bit there's some reform and it's actually very difficult to keep up. But obviously there are what are called core subjects, core subjects, C-O-R-E. Those are the subjects which are absolutely essential for all children. English language, mathematics, and science. Then there are other subjects which are compulsory in certain years. Right? So, there are certain technological subjects, certain humanities subjects, certain science subjects, which are compulsory at one time or another. The national curriculum in Britain differs from many others that I know in that government does not lay down the rules of methodology or the course books. Now in almost every country I've worked in outside of Britain government does that. So the government says when you teach English you use this book. Right? But that is not the case in Britain. The

government says you must teach mathematics but one school may use one book and one school may use another book. I mean just go into a good book shop and you will see several publishers publishing the maths curriculum course book. Right? And you would you might see four or five there are four or five big publishing companies who do this. It's up to the schools which one they want to choose. But they must teach certain, they must teach the subjects and they must achieve certain targets at the end of each year. (By the way if you have questions, I'm hoping to finish at twenty to, so that you can ask questions about any of these points if they are not clear or if you have something you want explained.) It's very important within the national curriculum that the school do teach it because at certain points there are national exams. So although the government has not said which book you have to use all the children do the same exam nationally. Now at the ages of 7 and 11 and 14, all children undertake exams which are called SATS, S, A, T, S, I always forget what it stands for something like standard assessment test or something like that. But anyway everybody calls them, SATS, S-A-T-S, using capital letters. And these exams are taken at the age of 7 in English, mathematics, and science, and again at the age of 11. These are not exams which you can pass or fail, there is no such thing as pass or fail. Right? You do not even receive a mark.

Part 4

What you receive or what the parents receive is an indication of how well the child is doing in that subject in relation to all the other children in the country. You understand that? So, I was told that my daughter, in science, there were 15% of the children in the country were better than her and 85% were not as good as her. You see? It's a measurement of all the children against each other, so it actually doesn't actually tell you how good they are in one sense it tells you how good they are relative to all the other children in the country. And of course it would be different maybe different in a different subject you know. They may tell you while English your darling child is you know, only 1% of the children in the country are better but in math 15% are better. Right? It's the way that the government has a controversial way, way that many people disagree with, but the way that the government has of measuring up how well the different schools are doing because the government then says ah this school all the children are in the bottom you know 10% must be something wrong with that school. This is very controversial and a very recent development, it's not something that's been going all that long. I remember well because my own son was in the first year they introduced this stuff, so they were what we call guinea pigs; they were the trial children to see whether the system worked. Those exams are given nationally at 7, age 7, age 11, age 14. Ah at age 14, there was supposed to be I think a foreign language exam as well. But I have a feeling that they forgot about that because there has been a change in the foreign language requirement. For a few years, a foreign language was compulsory from year 7 until year 11 so five years. For a few years that for the last few years that has been the case. The government did not say which foreign language but a foreign language about 90% of the children did French but it you know, it could be another language. However, the government has just changed that rule and said that foreign language is actually only compulsory for three years not five years, so year 7, year 8, and year 9. Having said that, many schools will teach it for more than that because they go beyond what is compulsory. OK, when children ah, students, as they like to be called by this age, reach the end of the compulsory education that's the end of year 11 when they are 16 years old because they started at 5 year? So, when they are 16 years old at the end of year 11, they are supposed to take what are called GCSE exams, again these are national. General Certificate of Secondary Education, so this is almost like the certificate you get when you finish something

yeah? These are pass fail exams. They are national across the whole of England and Wales, and students are supposed to take although it's not a legal requirement but they are supposed to take at least English language, mathematics, one science, one humanity, one technology, and as many other subjects as they care to take. Many children, my children for example took 12 subjects, it's quite common to take between 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 subjects at that level. General certificate of secondary education. There is amazing amount of subjects that you can take these days, I'm amazed. It's so many more that when I was a child. I mean, just technology, you know I think there are 12 different technology subjects that you could take. You know my son took a subject called systems control, it's a bit like engineering. It was never available when I was that age. My daughter did textile technology for example. There are many different subjects, so that's how you sort of build them up. But the essential subjects are really English, you are supposed to take one foreign language although the government has back tracked on that and is not demanding that people take foreign languages any more. They change the ideas every two or three years on that subject. But typically somebody particularly somebody who wants to continue their education will typically take between you know 8 or more subjects. They are graded. A star is the top grade, then A, then B, then C, then D, then E. They are all supposedly pass grades. And F means fail. Right? And there is something called U, unclassified, which I've never quite understood what the difference between unclassified and fail is, but there is such a thing as unclassified.

Part 5

However, although A star, A, B, C, D, and E are all pass grades, in reality only A star, A, B, and C are accepted for continuation onto something else. The other grades are in my view a sort of government trick so the government can say everybody more less has passed. So, in fact what schools say for children who want to continue and what university say is that they only look at grade C and above, they ask you know you have to say what grade you have got. So unless you've got grade C or above quite honestly it isn't really worth very much. Maybe you know if you got eight Cs and above and one D that D will help. But you know if they are all Ds and Es basically you are not going to get far. That's basically the school system you'll hear people talking about GCSEs. After year 11 there are two more years which are not compulsory. You can leave school when you are 16 if you like. You can leave education. But the majority, the vast majority of people I think it's something like 85% now do continue their education beyond 16. And the most common in England and Wales is to stay on at school or a special college for two more years, years 12 and 13, and to study for A or advanced level. Advanced or AS and A. The way that system works now is a two year program. In the first year you do what are called AS, Advanced Supplementary. And in the second year you do what's called A2, right? And these are the these are the qualifications which you need if you want to go to university for example. Yeah, this is what you need to do. There are other systems that are going on in a country at the same time. One which is increasing in popularity is the International Baccalaureate, the IB. This is a school leaving exam which can be taken in any country of the world, but is particularly favoured in Europe. The International Baccalaureate. And quite a few schools in England now offer a choice you can either take A level or you can take International Baccalaureate. The difference, the difference is this. If you do A levels you are usually you restrict yourself to a very small number of subjects. In other words, it's narrow in terms of the number of subjects. But it's supposedly deeper in content. So most students who do this system take four subjects at AS level in the first year and either continue all four of them to A2 or drop one. It's most common to drop one. So many of the students from the last three/four years coming

through the system, because before then the system was different, er will have done probably if you meet them at university will probably say yeah I got four AS levels and three of them I continued to A2 level. That will be most common. Both of my children did that for example. So, to give you an example my son when he went into year 12 his four subjects were economics, English language and literature, French, and Spanish. And then when he went into the second year he continued with the economics, English language and literature, and Spanish, but he dropped French for that final year, and now he's at university. That's a typical way of getting into a university. Right? The IB, the International Baccalaureate is broader. When you do International Baccalaureate you have to do language, you have to do mathematics, you have to do at least one science, you have to at least one humanity. It's broader, right to the end.

It's much more like the French Baccalaureate or the many countries in Europe have them. Or even in your countries, you'll find you know the Arabic 'Togehe', or something it's more subjects. Most countries, it's more like the system in most countries. Ok? Em so, that's the school system. Now moving onto point 2. Ah increasing numbers of students are continuing beyond the school 13 years. By the way you notice that the school system in Britain prior to university is 13 years whereas in most countries it's 12. Yeah. This is one of the explanations as to why a British undergraduate degree takes 3 years and not 4. Because we have a 13 plus 3 system most countries have a 12 plus 4. There is considerable pressure because of an agreement in Europe called the Bologna agreement to standardize everything across Europe. And so this may change. But at the moment in England and Wales most first degrees take 3 years. In Scotland they take, they may take 4 years, but in Scotland somewhat bizarrely first degrees are called Master's degrees whereas in England first degrees are called Bachelor's degrees. You see I told you England and Scotland are different.

Part 6

Growing numbers. One of the big changes in the British Education system has been the number the proportion of students who continue into higher education. You see in the 1960s, only 5 % if that of British students of British people went into higher education. 5 %. Some people say it was less. Right? Now it's between 40 and 50 percent. The present government, the present Prime Minister, Tony Blair, he has a target that 50% of all British people 18, 19 year olds will go into higher education. And he is fast approaching that target. It's already in the forties. There are some doubt as to whether it's 41 or 42 or 43. But it's certainly above 40% now of people going on into higher education. So, there has been a big change in my life time of the attitude towards higher education and so on. And when I went to university it was considered a very rare thing, you know? When my oldest brother went to university you know this was this was massive in the family you know my parents haven't been to university. My mother left school when she was 13. So, this change is quite dramatic within one generation. There are many universities within the higher education system. Some British universities are ancient extremely ancient. For example, Oxford, Cambridge, Durham, these are universities which are hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years old. Yeah? And in Scotland there are at least four universities which are four or five six hundred years old. Scotland has several ancient universities. So, there are some universities that have been going from the days when a university... (first of all they were only for boys you understand, old universities, there were no girls until very recently until the 20th century)... there were all boys and the system which I will come to later when I talk about it was tutorial. You still see elements of this in the older universities, in other words, one to one. You know a boy sat at the feet of the teacher and learnt, which of course is still partially true in some systems. It's a bit like Islamic Mardorocy system where a boy learns

from an Eminent leader and so on. Those are the ancient universities. There are er newer universities and here we come into a difficulty with language. In the 1960s so forty years ago, the government created several new universities. First of all, besides the ancient universities, there were universities which grew up in the nineteenth and early twentieth century like Reading. You see. Reading became the University of Reading in 1926. OK? Previous to that, it existed it existed originally as an out college of Oxford University. Now in the 19th century, some people in Oxford decided that they wanted to do research into various sciences particularly of an agricultural nature. But the good people of Oxford said this is not this is not academic. Academic means religion, means history, means theology, right? So, it had to be distant from Oxford, but not too far, that is how Reading University began, not as a university but as an out college. If you go to the old campus on London Road, have any of you been there yet? If you go to London Road, you will find the original campus of Oxford University, of Reading University. And it looks like an Oxford College. Or it looks like a religious building looks like a mono... you know where monks walk around. Yeah? And the reason for that is because that is basically what how it was set up as part of Oxford University. I have an aunt who remembers it from many many many years ago when she went there, and said it was a bit like you know Oxford removed even though it by then it had become University of Reading. So in the 19 century and in the early 20th century various universities were formed out of institutions that existed in some other form often religious institutions. Because in order to go to universities, the old universities, Oxford, Cambridge, Durham and so on, not only did you have to be male, not only did you have to be Christian, but you also had to be Church of England. So, only a very narrow group of people had the opportunity to go to those universities. This is not true now by the way, ok? Anybody can go now. But I'm talking in before. So, as a reaction against that, many religious people who were not Church of England created their own institutions which later became universities like Birmingham University you know was a what we call a non-Conformist institution, it was founded by people who were Christian actually but they were not Church of England. They were from another Christian, kind of Christianity. And and this happened continuously. The University of Wales where I studied in Aberystwyth originally that was The University of Wales was founded because Welsh people in general were not Church of England so they couldn't go to university. An interesting thing happened because they couldn't go to university many of them became teachers.

Part 7

They set up teacher training colleges which were, allowed anybody to go, not just certain religions. And even today, there is a large a much larger proportion of teachers than you would expect are Welsh. If you go to any school in Britain, you will find a higher proportion, I mean there are only two point something million Welsh people in existence but if you go in a school, the school where my children were for example, which is not in Wales, a quarter of the staff were Walsh. Isn't that amazing? And that, and that shows you historically how it came about. In the 1960^s, the government decided to create new universities. So, they built brand new universities. These other ones like Reading, they say they sort of emerged out of colleges of agriculture or colleges of teaching or something. In the 1960s, the government, Labour government, Harold Wilson established, although it was decided before that government came to power, but they established a whole range of new universities. And so older people you know people who are older than me when they say new university then mean 1960s. But when young people say new universities they don't mean that, they think they are old because they are forty years old. In fact, my I went one of those new universities, Warwick, and it's celebrating its fortieth anniversary, most of them are

celebrating their fortieth anniversary. I've just been invited to a big party, all graduates, you know all sorts of things going on. Right? In the 1960s. Those universities you can usually tell which ones they are because their names are not the names of cities but the names of counties, regions. Warwick is supposed to be Warwickshire but they decided to cut off the shire. It's not actually in Warwick, it's in Warwickshire, in Coventry, ok? So, the universities with county names, regional names, Kent, Essex, Sussex, York, which is supposed to be Yorkshire, they are the universities, which were created in the 1960s. And many of them were dynamic from the word, go, specially Warwick because they, from the word, go, realised that they had to do research and therefore get funding from big business. Warwick is one of the, outside of Oxford and Cambridge, is the richest university now and one of the best also to study in because from the very word go, it tied itself in with local industry, and then it moved its industries, according to that, originally it was with the car industry. It was a big thing. I mean I remember all the halls of residence were named after cars when I was there. They fairly soon realised that the car industry was going down hill and that they'd better move to technology and various other things, which they did. It has one of the most impressive business schools, for example. Those were called the new universities in the 60s. However nowadays if you are students of your age, and they say I went to a new university, they mean the 1990s because in 1992, the institutions which were formally called polytechnics, technical places, were renamed by the government as universities. So, in 1992, I think twenty something polytechnics across the country changed their name and became universities. And now when people say I'm going to a new university like my son goes to a so-called new university, Kingston in London that used to be Kingston Polytechnic until 1992, it's actually a hundred or a hundred and fifty years old, but it wasn't called a university. So, now if you read in the newspaper the new universities, they mean they're sometimes called the post-1992 universities. The problem with calling them that is, it sounds like they were built in 1992 they weren't they existed but they weren't called universities. And finally there are other universities, there are other institutions which are now changing their name to university, but you can only do it with government permission, it takes years to be accepted. Yesterday, the latest one was announced. The Southampton Institute as from August 15th will be the Southampton Solent University. So there are institutions which are becoming universities. I believe Bolton University was named last year and Winchester, what was called King Alfred's College Winchester is about to become Winchester University. So they are even newer in terms of university but they are older establishments. Ok, what does higher education expect of students? This is important for you to realise because (time moves on I see, ah) when you come from a different system,

Part 8

One of the difficulties I had when I was a student I studied in France, for example, in the Sorbonne, I studied in Italy in Venice University. One of the thing I found is that it's not language that's different. I mean, obviously you are learning English you speak good English. It's the system which is different. And knowing what the system expects, one of the differences that some students find when they come to a British university, is that the expectations are different or even difficult to ascertain. One of the biggest differences is that students in British universities are expected to be independent, are expected to work out their own life style, their own way of doing things. And you may find, you may find that you don't receive as much help in doing these things as you would like. However, you've come to the right place because Reading has a very good pre-sessional which helps you with many of these things, which you are on. And we also have an in-sessional which I run, which is available to you throughout your time in the university. And now many other universities

have the same. It's just we've had it longer. When we went round all the different department because we have the opportunity in this university to work with students and staff in every single school, department, faculty, whatever of the university. We found that when we talk to staff there were certain things they agreed students had to be able to do. And they sometimes pointed out that sometimes when students came from certain other education systems, they perhaps found more difficult. I would also say that some of these things are more difficult to do when you are doing them in a foreign language. So it might be, you might be able to speak English but can you actually analyse what other people are saying, can you actually analyse what other people are writing in English. What we call English for academic purposes, EAP, and these were the kind of things that they say sometime students er, it's not it's not just that you come from a different culture, it's also that you've moved up a level in the education system. Some of these things apply to people in British schools. However, I would say that people who have been through the British education system should to a certain extent have worked on many of these skills because the system, as I've observed it with my own children, does actually lead people towards this kind of way of thinking. For example, the idea of opposing somebody else's point of view without being rude without offending anybody is taught in school. That is possible to have an academic argument, discussion with somebody without any offence, but does require a very sophisticated use of language. You need to be able to argue, you need to be able to evaluate to reason and solve problems and so on. And I must say that, although I did this sometime ago, every year, every term, every month, I see students coming to me with pieces of written work on which their tutor, whether it's economics or science or whatever, has written no analysis or no evaluation. You've learned the facts very well but so what, that's not what universities about-facts. It assumes the fact, how do you analyse them, how do you criticise them, how do you weigh up one view against another? I think we've got, yes we have, I think what I will do is stop there and see if you have any questions or comments, brief comments.