

English for Life in the UK.

Episode 8: Education in the UK.

Hello. Welcome to episode eight of English for Life in the UK, a podcast for intermediate level learners of English, produced by volunteers from the St Augustine's Centre in Halifax, Yorkshire. Today's episode focuses on education in the UK and is presented by Christine and John.

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J: So, Christine, we covered education today on the 23rd of January, in the Life in UK class at St Augustine's....Could you just give me an idea of some of the main topics that we covered as part of education in the UK?

C: Well, we started off by just really talking about the different kinds of schools and ... different educational establishments we have in this country. And the main ones, in age order, being preschool or nursery for children under five and then primary schools and secondary schools. So primary schools up to the age of 11 and then secondary schools from the age of 11 to, typically, 16, although some secondary schools have sixth forms and then in that case they go up to 18 ... And then after school, typically, young people would go to college, an FE college perhaps or a sixth form college depending on whether they were academic or more vocational. But anyway in England, actually we didn't mention this is in the session, but in England, at the moment, it is a requirement for everyone to be in some form of education or apprenticeship ... up to the age of 18. So they would typically go on to college. And we looked at the difference between FE and HE. And by FE, and in fact you were the one who made .. who explained that difference quite well.

J: FE is Further Education whereas HE stands for Higher Education. So we discussed some of the things that you can study ... we brought the prospectuses from Calderdale College ... which show some of the things that you can study in an FE institution. I discussed things that I'd studied: so I studied both academic and vocational ... topics a subjects at FE.

C: And you made an interesting ... you were able to explain the difference between academic and vocational but the students didn't all know that to begin with..

J: Yeah so we did all that actually, used it by dividing up the subjects that I'd studied at FE... So I studied things like electronic engineering, welding which were vocational subjects. I'd also studied politics and history which are known as academic subjects. We discussed a little bit about HE in terms of higher education being the university sector. Myself and Christine discussed about the things that you would study at various universities... and the grades that you'd... would be required from you to study at university. And we also discussed the issue of tuition fees ... which are currently in place in England and Wales, about £9500 a year but are still free to all students in Scotland.

C: Big difference that. And as well as those main branches of schools ... and in fact I would say that nearly 3/4 of the class were parents. They were very interested in the different schools. They were very surprised to hear the difference between

- public schools, as we call them, and which are actually private fee-paying schools and state schools which of course are free of charge.
- J: Yeah we discussed some of the better-known ... public schools which they may have heard of: Eton, Harrow... Obviously these schools are in the news quite often because quite a lot of the government will have attended them. Quite a lot of people in ... We also discussed that ... you know... as even though only 7% of people attend fee-paying private schools, these people tend to be over-represented in government, law, journalism, other such professions.
- C: Yes, yes, they were interested in that. They were also in Halifax in particular is one of the very few areas in the country where they still have grammar schools. Those are schools where aged 11, the children aged 11 when they move from primary school to secondary school, they sit a special test. It used to be called the 11+ and if they passed, and it still happens now, if they pass that test then they can go to one of the grammar schools in Halifax. But if they don't they go to the other secondary schools, which are just called secondary schools now, but in my day they were called 'secondary modern', in the old days. But .. but .. of course that is unusual now in this country. Most areas of the country there is one ... the.. there is no requirement, there is no assessment of pupils before they enter. Everybody and anybody can go to the school and they're called comprehensive those secondary schools.
- J: Yeah we also discussed some of the elements .. elements around the school system so things like OFSTED which is the Well you can tell us about OFSTED, and the national curriculum
- C: Well again it .. it came up because of the interest from the students who are parents and they wanted to know how they could tell whether a certain school was a good school and so I advised them to look at the OFSTED website because OFSTED is the body which inspects schools and they inspect schools regularly ... usually every few years, but they publish their report on the school. And every school is required to ... to publish their OFST.. , the most recent Ofsted report on their school .. website. And they were also interested in the national curriculum which is ... that was introduced ... Oh goodness, was it as much as 30 years ago? Something like 30 years ago ... where schools in ... in the country were required to cover the same syllabus. It's not specified down to the last minute. It's not: 'you have to study this particular item on Monday afternoons' but it's: 'During this year of study children should learn about and understand this and that and the other'. And that curriculum is set down .. in all the core subjects ... English, maths, science, technology, humanities, so history geography, and religious education and ... Have I said design and technology? I think I have but in a whole lot in the whole range of the curriculum there is a national curriculum. These days some schools are exempt. They need to show that they're providing a balanced education but they don't have to follow the letter of the national curriculum some of the academies.
- J: I think that's just about everything that we covered today. Well we also looked at...
- C: I'd quite like to say something if you don't mind about the video we showed.
- J: Oh yeah.
- C: Because we showed a video which was encouraging parents to work with their teachers ... and to come in and help in schools and ... it was it was called, it was

from the ESOL Nexus website. I'm saying this in case anybody would like to look at it. It is called working with your child's teacher and it .. it showed a lot of children really appreciating their parents coming into work with them in school and it was quite a delightful video I'd say ... But then in the discussion afterwards we talked about how at primary school level, it is delightful for children to have their parents come in but at secondary school you made the point ...

J: ... (laughing) maybe less so

C: ..that often when parents come in to school it's because the child is in trouble and it .. it opened up a very interesting debate in the class where you.. you talked about your experience.

J: Well it were nice wasn't it that basically everybody went round the class and some, some experiences are international, aren't they Christine. That most of us have been in bother at school at one point or another so we had some ... some interesting discussions about what happens in Iranian or African schools when .. when children are misbehaving. So, all in all, a very interesting lesson. Yeah we got some really good feedback from the students about, cos I were in a little bit early, a lot of students were there already so we discussed .. the systems of education in their countries and their experiences at college and university. So all in all, a very interesting session today. And look forward to next week when we'll be covering ...

C: Arts and culture.

J: Smashing.

C: Great.

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Language support

This is the part of the podcast where I focus on some aspect of language from the episode. Today I want to pick up on the use of the terms: vocational and academic education. These were covered briefly by Christine and John but I thought it was worth 'unpacking' them – explaining a little more about these terms.

When we refer .. refer to something as being vocational, we mean: it is related to an occupation, to employment, to the world of work. So examples of studies in this area might be: catering or building or fashion or engineering and the particular courses would focus on the skills needed for work in these areas.

Academic education focuses more on ideas, concepts, theories and knowledge rather than specific skills. Subjects in this area would be: history, geography, mathematics, science.

Having said that, there is considerable overlap between the two. For example, in order to be a successful engineer, you need a considerable amount of scientific knowledge and to be successful in catering, you need to know about health and the human body. So, in practice, the link between vocational and academic education is often much stronger than the differences between them.

That's it for this week thank you for listening.