GALE

Girls' Secondary Education 1910-2000 and The Times Educational Supplement

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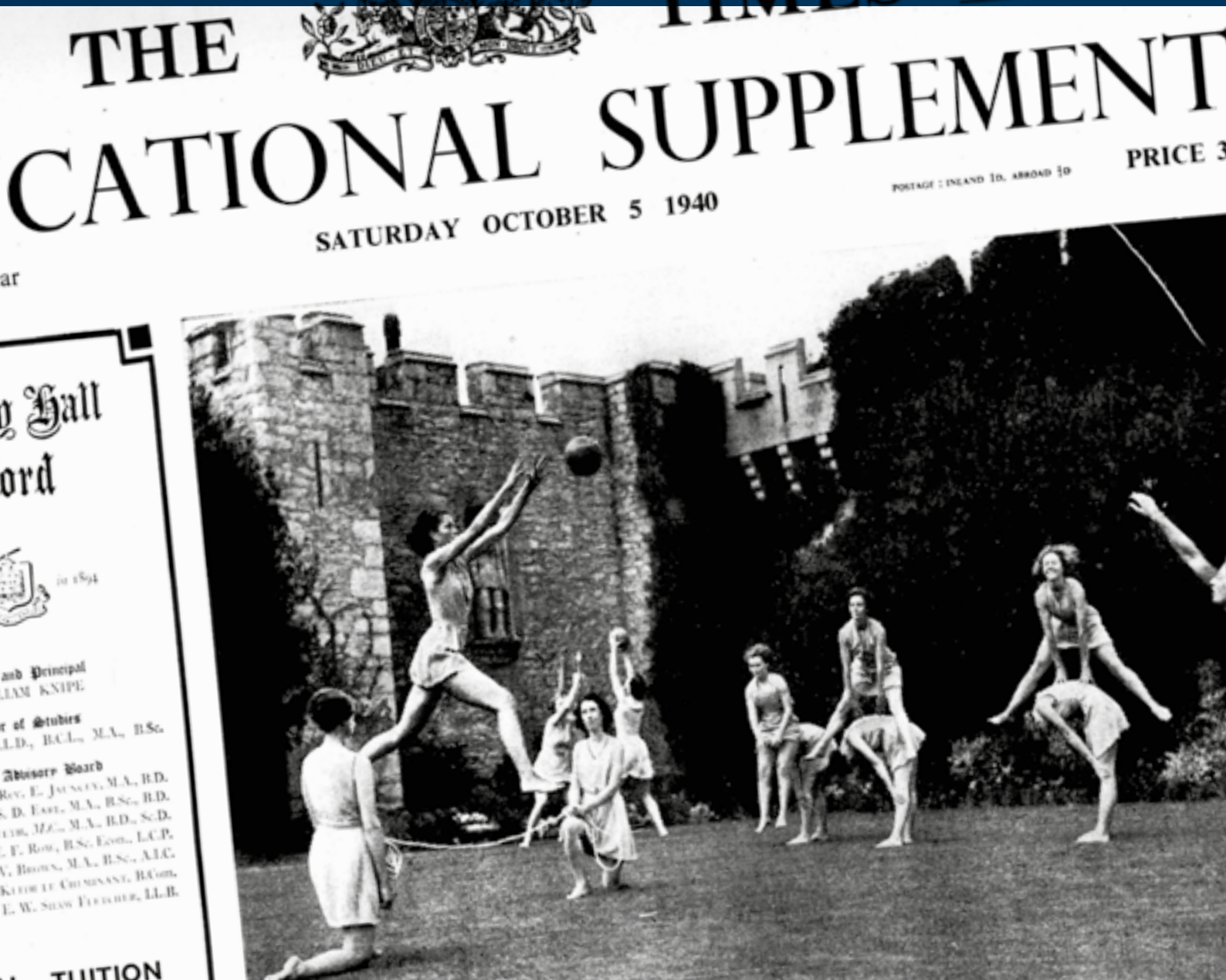
The Times Educational Supplement." *Times Educational Supplement*, 5 Oct. 1940, p. 381. *The Times Educational Supplement Historical Archive*



User note: Boldfaced terms within paragraphs deliver search results.

The underlying tensions between the purpose of education for the benefit of the individual or for the benefit and expectations of society, within both state and independently funded provision, underpin many of the decisions and debates around the development of **girls' secondary** education ("The Education of Women", 9 September 1910). While not necessarily mutually exclusive, for most of the twentieth century, the provision and the format of girls' education was dominated by attitudes towards women and changing expectations of their domestic priorities rather than their future lives as members of the workforce.

The advent of the **National Curriculum** in England and Wales in the late 1980s ensured that all children (in the state sector) had the opportunity to study the same subjects ("Fighting for some space to call their own", 9 February 1990). Even then, deep-rooted differences emerged that saw a gender divide between **girls who preferred humanities** subjects and boys' preference for maths and sciences ("Girls outstrip boys in English exams", 12 March 1993). Whether nature or nurture played a part in these decisions remains contentious and largely unresolved. Gender assumptions (either top down or bottom up) tend to cross the national borders within the UK while government reports and legislation highlighted here may be seen as Anglocentric. Nonetheless they do offer some representation of general educational change across national borders.

Despite changes in legislation aimed at improving **equality of opportunity** between boys and girls over the twentieth century, ("Why girls get the worst jobs", 20 April 1973), concern over discrimination in subject choice remained, and various initiatives such as the **HMI 1980 Report Girls and Science** and **Girls into Science and Technology (GIST)** sought to address this imbalance ("Make science more practical to attract girls say HMIs", 7 November 1980; "Science and sex roles", 6 July 1984). As noted above, legislative provisions for state education differ among England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. By way of example, the Scottish Education Department preferred **guidelines to tramlines** when there was concern that the National Curriculum for England was being introduced through the back door ("Guidelines, not tramlines", 14 July 1990). Meanwhile independent schools also remained outside curricular legislation.

Changes in girls' education reflected changing women's roles during the twentieth century. Two world wars and the **dissolution of Empire** impacted in a variety of ways the preparation of each generation of women and girls for their adult lives ("New responsibilities of women", 29 November 1924). Such changes should not be seen as indicative of a steady improvement in provision. If anything, the actual trajectory, as with women's experiences in general, proved far more uneven, especially as one takes into account the intersection of those experience with matters of **race**, **ethnicity**, **religion**, **disability** and **social class** ("Specific teachers influenced by pupils sex and colour", 10 February 1984; "Exclusions drama turns into a crisis for blacks", 10 October 1997; "Muslim storm over girls", 14 December 1973; "Towards life without fear" 7 April 2000; "Social class still has an impact" 30 October 1998). The **Beveridge Report** in 1942 and subsequent national insurance provision assumed that once married a girl would become a full-time wife and mother, returning to part-time work, possibly for 'pin money' when their children were older ("Unless we plan now", 23 October 1943). It is not hard to see how this attitude shaped approaches to girls' education by policy makers, employers and girls themselves. **Equal pay** for men and women teachers was a long-running battle that affected the status of and recruitment into the profession ("Equal pay for equal work", 15 May 1919). Following the Equal Pay Act in 1963 and the **Sex Discrimination Act** in 1975, the situation had changed dramatically by 2000, although legislation did not always change outlooks or attitudes ("Spirit of sex equality at stake", 17 December 1976). The onus on **women as primary carers** has proven tenacious and has had its share of knock-on effects on girls' choices with respect to future careers or professions ("Schoolgirls and housework", 18 October 1930; "Women no nearer to top rung of career ladder", 10 April 1987).

This essay charts the main legislation in England that related to girls' state secondary education in order to provide a broad framework of change for exploring

the wider debates over co-education and curriculum development in both the state and the independent sector. The desirability of or resistance to co-education and a general curriculum were inflected by social class, religion and ethnicity as well as changes in the social, political and cultural context. Looking beyond legislation and into the needs and attitudes of different stakeholders becomes more than possible for researchers by turning to *The Times Educational Supplement* (TES) as a source of information.

Legislative change in England: A Case Study

The effects of major legislation in England were commonly discussed in detail in comments, editorials and letters pages of the educational press. These data often included minutiae that underscored not only gender difference but critical regional differences, even though much of the English legislation was often echoed by (albeit not identical to) that of Wales and Scotland and Northern Ireland after 1921.

Universal free state secondary education for all children from ages 11 to 15 was introduced in the **1944 Education Act,** part of the coalition government's plans for a post-war welfare state ("The 1944 Act", 27 September 1985). It was hoped that the **school leaving age** could be swiftly raised to 16 although this did not happen until 1971 ("Low income groups will pay price of RSLA", 25 February 1972). It was also expected that the independent sector would wither away in the face of such provision, thereby ameliorating social class differences.

Prior to 1944 both girls' and boys' education were governed by their place in the social hierarchy. Universal basic elementary education was provided from 1870 for both girls and boys to the age of 12 and raised to 14 in 1918. From the **Balfour Act in 1902**, a scholarship at the age of 11 to an academic grammar school was a possibility for clever working-class children, but many did not take up the offer even when they passed the exam since families expected them to contribute to the family income as soon as they were able ("The Grammar School another 40 year struggle?", 4 January 1947). Assumptions of marriage and minimal career take up were a particular deterrent for girls who were offered scholarships.

World War One opened up new possibilities for women and brought home the social inequality that existed ("New professions for women", 3 July 1919; "The training of girls", 6 September 1917). Several reports chaired by **William Hadow** promoted widespread educational change ("William Henry Hadow a centenary appreciation", 25 December 1959). **The Differentiation of the Curriculum Report** in 1923 focused specifically on the distinct traits observed in boys and girls and the subsequent tailored curricula that would be suitable ("The Differentiation Report", 20 January 1923). Concerns over girls' tendency to overwork, leading to mental and physical fatigue, are evident in the findings. As a result, separate curricula were advised in any future developments in secondary education.

With the advent of World War Two and the extreme poverty that became readily apparent during the **evacuation** of school children, the pace of educational change quickened ("Effects of evacuation", 21 February 1942). Through the 1944 Education Act, local authorities were charged with the provision of free secondary education according to ability and aptitude. Although not prescribed by the Act, most authorities adopted the proposals in the report chaired by **Cyril Norwood**, which created a tripartite system of grammar, technical and secondary modern schools ("Pitfalls of Reform", 12 February 1988). Children were assigned their places according to an exam taken at the end of primary school, the 11+. The curricula of the schools reflected the students' expected job prospects. Most **grammar schools were single sex** and in many areas provision for girls was outweighed by the number of places available for boys ("When girls didn't smoke in the lavatories", 10 May 1991). **Technical school places** for boys ("Secondary Education", 22 May 1948) outpaced those for girls with the result that many girls ended up in the more practically focused **secondary modern** schools ("Girls Secondary Education", 18 August 1945). The allocation of places according to sexes was challenged in **Ulster** when in 1984 it became apparent that the paper equality of marking girls and boys separately, to ensure the top 20% of each were awarded grammar places, was regarded as unfair ("11 plus bias concern surfaces in Ulster", 16 March

1994). Since girls matured earlier, grade boundaries had been set higher for girls than boys.

Even for girls who were successful in gaining a grammar school place, many parents still decided that an academic education for their daughters was simply too expensive – both in terms of lost revenue by staying on past 15 to take public exams and in the cost of items like uniforms. In 1954, new concerns emerged over **Early Leaving**, which were addressed in the **Gurney Dixon Report** ("Wastage of Talent", 1 April 1960; "Early leaving examined", 31 January 1954). The report identified the apparent tension between education for the individual and society and made suggestions such as improving girls' sixth form science provision. However, the C**rowther Report in 1957**, ***15-18***, still noted the disproportionate number of girls leaving without completing the full grammar curriculum ("Distinctive needs", 27 May 1960).

The tripartite system was replaced by larger **comprehensive**, usually coeducational, schools in the 1960s ("Girls keener than boys", 28 July 1972). These schools offered girls the option of a wider curriculum although opportunity did not necessarily lead to a broader take up of science and maths subjects. Practical subjects remained highly gendered with boys taking woodwork and girls **domestic science** or **home economics** ("Domestic Science Home Economics, Home Economics Domestic Science", 18 November 1966; "Edinburgh to get home economics centre", 21 November 1969). The 1960s also saw the publication of the **Plowden Report** on Primary schools, but its legacy of progressive methods of teaching were criticized by those on all sides of the political spectrum ("Plowden on Primary Schools", 13 January 1967). The public **debate** around the shortcomings of secondary education ("Let's make it a real debate – Oakes", 4 March 1977) also highlighted achievement differences between the sexes and various initiatives followed, such as **Girls into Science and Technology** ("More than halfway there", 7 October 1983) .

Finally in 1988 **the Education Reform Act** led the way to a **National Curriculum** ("Can the 1944 compromise hold?", 22 July 1988; "Creation of an equality ethos" 28 June 1996), ensuring that all children received tuition and were tested in a range of subjects, including maths and sciences. Officially at least girls finally had the same curriculum as boys, yet the published **league tables** of schools highlighted entrenched differences ("Inspirational imprint", 19 November 1999). Each August the education and popular press focused on differences between boys and girls, emphasizing the continuing **gender gap** ("Gender gaps yawn in the silly season", 8 September 2000). Changes to the National Curriculum and the removal of its mandatory status for academies and free schools suggests that inequity of provision may still exist. Independent schools were never expected to follow the National Curriculum even though the syllabi for public exam subjects applied across the field and gender difference that followed in their wake were repeated in this sector.

The expected demise of the independent sector did not take place as anticipated by the introduction of free state secondary education. If anything, it thrived especially for overseas pupils. Whereas at the beginning of the period most secondary grammar and independent schools were single sex, most are now **co-educational** ("Second try for girls at Rugby", 8 March 1991).

Co-education

In 1910 a girl's experience of her education at a single sex or co-educational school was dependent upon social class. Fee-paying independent preparatory and secondary schools were largely single-sex, and state funded elementary schools were usually co-educational although sometimes with separate sides for girls and boys and different curricula respectively. The single-sex nature of the independent sector occurred mainly by default as middle- and upper-class girls' education had originally taken place often in the home under a **governess** or in **the ladies' academies**, which offered training in accomplishments such as music and art rather than academic subjects ("Private Governesses", 13 May 1920; "Mr. Lloyd George on Girls' Education", 6 July 1935). Upper- and middle-class boys whose formal education was seen as more important were sent away to boarding school or to established endowed grammar schools.

Rapid improvements in middle-class girls' education from the second half of the nineteenth century

were driven by pioneers such as Dorothea Beale of **Cheltenham Ladies College**, **Frances Mary Buss** of the **North London Collegiate** and the women who established the **Girls' Public Day School Trust** (GPDST) ("The Primate and modern life", 15 November 1930; "Frances Mary Buss (1822-1894)", 8 May 1970; "26 Years as Headmistress", 5 May 1967; "The Direct Grant School", 25 January 1957). The Trust, set up in 1872 in order to educate girls to 'be wives, not get husbands' joined the direct grant system in 1944 whereby a proportion of free places were allocated to children from local primary schools. Many of the 120 direct grant schools were single-sex but gained a reputation for high academic achievement. The Trust dropped 'public' from its name in order to be explicitly more open to a wider audience. When the system was abolished in 1976, many of the schools, **including the GPDST**, opted to retain their independent status ("Against integration for girls' schools", 5 June 1970). The schools retained their single-sex status and their high academic, career-motivated ethos beyond 2000. While many of the boys' public schools opted for co-education in the late twentieth century, many girls' public schools remained single-sex only.

One argument put forward in the 1960s by **R.R. Dale**, amongst others, was that boys were more successful in a co-educational environment, whereas girls' social skills might improve but not their academic grades ("Coed or single sex 'makes no difference'", 22 November 1974). **An Irish report in 1995** observed that while girls did not appear to suffer academically, they did suffer higher stress levels in co-educational environments ("Stressful success for coed girls", 7 July 1995).

In advocating for single-sex schooling, feminists were notably accused of a volte face in moving from univocal support of equality in schooling (and therefore co-education) to demands for f**emale friendly spaces** ("Feminist ironies", 6 June 1986). It had not gone unnoted that in girls' schools, science and maths did not hold the stigma of being 'subjects for boys'. In order to encourage more girls to take what were seen as male-dominated subjects, experimental **single-sex classes** within co-educational schools sought to provide girls additional support, becoming in turn the focus of much discussion in the 1990s ("Call for girls-only science", 13 March 1987). While some asserted the fact of different learning styles between girls and boys but again, concerns over **gender stereotyping** inevitably raised their head ("Don't be trapped by gender stereotypes", 13 November 1998).

In 1973 the government's plans for the Sex Discrimination Act were published as ***Equal Opportunities for Men and Women*** ("No equality unless law has teeth", 7 December 1973). The document stated that single-sex schools would not be made illegal, recognizing that many parents wished to retain the option. Moreover, the presence of single-sex schooling had a material effect on the career prospects of women teachers since it was duly noted that whenever schools were amalgamated in the name of comprehensive education, the head of the boys' school—and not the girls' school—was more often re-employed as overall head.

Demands for single-sex schooling were also made on religious grounds with a particularly lively debate in **Bradford** hitting the headlines in the 1980s and 90s ("City faces single sex schooling dilemma", 1 November 1991). Support also came from the Commission for Racial Equality in their publication '**Schools of Faith: religious schools in a multi-cultural society**' ("CRE accused of putting down Christians", 17 August 1990).

The number of single-sex schools declined to 266 in 1991 from over 400 nine years earlier. One third of Local Education Authorities had no single sex provision. **The Association for Maintained Girls' Schools** ("Warnock backs girls-only state sector", 1 March 1991) founded by Sue Campion, actively campaigned to promote the schools on the grounds that had been recognized through the previous century: girls could be 'free to be clever' without fear of compromising their **femininity** ("Femininity factor in girls' choices", 23 March 1982). Societal pressure to conform to such ideals still represented a major roadblock despite apparent changes in social and cultural attitudes.

The discussion over girls' co-education continued to gain ground up to 2000, when comparisons with the **United States** offered additional proof that girls felt more valued in a single-sex environment ("Girls feel

valued in single-sex schools", 4 February 2000).

Curriculum

As far back as 1868 the **Taunton Commission** reported on the sad state of girls' education (with few **exceptions**) ("Pioneers at Queen's", 14 June 1974), and the preparation of girls for their assumed future **domestic** roles continued past the Education Reform Act in 1988 when overt declarations of a suitable 'girls' curriculum were replaced by what now appears as a **hidden curriculum** that reflected expectations of ongoing subject preference and difference along gendered lines ("Learning their place", 10 January 1987; "The great divide", 31 January 1982). Gender stereotypes of learning preferences proved tenacious. Many assumed, **not always correctly** ("Coursework link to girls' success queried", 24 November 1995) that girl suffered greater stress from exams and the advent of **coursework** in the Certificate of Secondary Education (introduced in 1963) and the GCSE was assumed to favor girls' aptitudes over boys ("Why the girls are on top", 22 March 1996).

Linked to girls' alleged difficulty with STEM subjects was the lack of perceived career opportunities for **girls with science qualifications** ("In need of a positive reaction to women", 14 April 1989). **The Women's Engineering Society** offered scholarships in 1947 alongside girls' school initiatives ("Scholarships offered", 27 September 1947), such as one in **Southend**, to link with local industries. But these efforts did not make much headway in changing gendered attitudes ("Science for girls", 3 January 1958).

Ironically, despite best attempts to make a domestic curriculum higher status, official reports such as **Crowther** (***15-19***) in 1959 ("Threats to the status of women (NUT)", 29 April 1960) and **Newsom's *Half Our Future*** in 1963 steadfastly maintained that such subjects appealed to less academically able girls ("Half our Future", 18 October 1963). By default, the girls' grammar school curriculum in the 1950s, despite the provision of domestic subjects (cooking and needlework but rarely **mothercraft**) in the first two years of secondary education, relegated more advanced study to the lower streams (who had still 'passed' their 11+) ("Mothercraft Course", 3 November 1961). Both O and A levels were provided in the subjects again demonstrating an aspiration to raise their status.

The Certificate of Secondary Education enabled a range of courses that were part of consumer or family education syllabus, seeking to improve the status of domestic education. Arguably '**childcare and development**' had a more vocational ring to it than 'mothercraft', which has been so beloved of the secondary modern schools in the 1950s ("Where have all the fathers gone?", 13 March 1981). In the 1980s such courses proliferated. The tension between the practical and a more academic aspirations are present in the different names attached to the subject. Domestic Science and **Home Economics** both appeared to contain an element of hard economics and science ("Why aren't we cooking Miss?", 13 November 1970) and eventually became rolled into the more general **Design Technology** curriculum ("Girls face major crafts barrier", 27 September 1985). Whatever the name, the textile and nutrition subjects remained firmly seen as girls' subjects. Girls' lack of enthusiasm for science subjects was reflected in the standard of teaching, and the lack of **female teacher role models** was an ongoing problem ("Girls-only exam results no better", 12 August 1983). This was not helped by the general **lack of science facilities** in the girls' grammar or established secondary schools ("Equality for women", 20 September 1974), which were dependent upon an historical legacy that had not viewed any sciences other than **botany** as girls' subjects ("Teaching Methods of Today", 6 June 1925). General protests and awareness of **sexism** and gender **stereotyping** along these lines became live topics in the educational press ("Timetable clash forces sex bias says survey", 11 March 1983).

The **Nuffield Science** project, which placed more emphasis on practical discovery-led learning in the 1960s and 70s, was introduced to make science as a subject more interesting ("Too nice for the shop floor", 28 March 1969). However, the sex bias of girls preferring to take biology and shunning **chemistry** and **physics** remained in force ("The science of making a subject appealing", 12 May 1995). This was partly put down to girls' alleged dislike of discovery methods and preference for teacher-led notes. However, criticism of girls' science also

had a knock-on effect in discouraging girls from taking up science teaching. Other problems arose with the assumption that **science was by its nature unfeminine** or that an interest in science or maths compromised girls' **femininity** ("Rabbits rather than machines for the girls", 13 February 1981; "Successful girls seen as failures", 1 November 1985).

Even when a new subject, such as **computing** appeared, it was gendered in favor of boys ("Girls put off computers by sex stereotyping", 13 July 1990), despite the predominance of **girls in typing** classes in secondary modern schools in previous decades ("The perfect secretary", 14 October 1966). With the introduction of computers into schools, research in 1983 attributed girls' lack of confidence to the fall off in interest amongst girls in secondary education. Boys were thought to **dominate the screen time**, and again a lack of women teachers discouraged girls from continuing with the subject ("Terminal sexists hog the computer screen", 7 February 1992). Similar problems appeared in **Germany where single-sex STEM** classes were tried as an experiment in 1998 ("Return to single sex classes", 6 March 1998). Solutions to ensure equal opportunities were tried in a range of areas, particularly in Croydon, where an effort was launched to ameliorate the girls' lack of interest. **The Croydon scheme** in 1982 was funded by the national Girls and Technology project ("Croydon tries to ensure equal opportunities in computers", 20 August 1982). Suggestions included changing the syllabus from an understanding of the inner workings of the machine to their application. Another was to recruit fewer 'techie' role model teachers. Again, gender stereotyping in terms of expectations of what girls would or would not like drove attempts to encourage more girls to take 'boys' subjects. Teachers' and parents' assumptions as to subject preference proved significant to the final research results.

Between 1983 and 1997 the **TVEI (Technical and Vocational Educational Initiative)** introduced a more vocational curriculum as a way to address the unemployment problems of young people and the perceived lack of preparation for employment that was provided by formal education ("MSC presses authorities to act against TVEI sex stereotyping", 30 March 1984). Despite huge changes in women's working patterns, gendered undercurrents in careers advice and expectations were still apparent.

Conclusion

Over the course of the twentieth century the social and economic position of women has changed dramatically. Unsurprisingly this reflects changes in secondary education, an outgrowth of women's increasing participation in the workforce throughout their economically active years. In 1910 girls' education was seen as a separate topic with a distinct purpose. By the end of the period the majority of girls and boys of all social classes were being educated together and had equal access to all areas of the curriculum. However, gender differences in terms of attitudes and expectations by employers, the general public and by girls themselves, still influenced outcomes, underscoring tensions among the various purposes of education, whether for the individual, for future productive employment, or for domestic responsibilities. The conflict among these purposes characterized much of the discussion in the educational press in general and *The Times Educational Supplement*, in particular, over the course of the twentieth century.