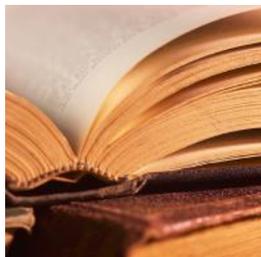


[The main thing](#) [1]

Written by [Dr Madsen Pirie](#) [2] | Wednesday 20 February 2008



The Adam Smith Institute and its supporters think that a range of policies covering every area of government is needed to improve life and prospects in Britain. We think that a flat tax would improve the economy and the range of choices open to people if they could spend more of their own money. We think that universities would do better if they secured their independence from government and were free to pursue their own admissions and tuition practices. We'd like health services that responded to the needs and priorities of patients, rather than to the targets which government and its managers preferred to deliver. We think that much of the regulatory burden could be replaced by industry wide codes of practice and a legal regimen that specified general objectives whose details could be filled in by accumulated case law of test cases and tribunal decisions.

The list of these desirable and necessary changes is a long one, but if we had to pick one out for fast-track priority action, it would probably be the schools. Long an ideological battleground, a social laboratory, and a factory for inculcating fashionable attitudes, many of the state schools have failed to bring out the full potential of their students. Indeed, all too many have even failed to equip them with the basic educational skills needed for a decent life.

It is not that state-produced education needs to be changed; it needs to be ended. Schools should be independent, setting their objectives according to the wishes of parents, headteachers and governors. It should not be a decision of government to replace A-level examinations by a certificate, or to abolish oral tests from language qualifications. It should be up to the school to decide which exams are appropriate for its students, and for various exam boards to offer different alternatives.

City academies are not the answer, and neither are grammar schools. Both are part of the answer because the desired outcome is of a variety of different types of school so that parents can choose one they find suitable. Government's role should not be that of running schools and employing teachers, but of ensuring that everyone has access to a decent and appropriate education. If they were allowed to spend the state funding in schools they choose, like the Swedish model, all parents would be able to choose quality education for their children.

This should be coupled with moves to make it very easy for new schools to be set up, whether by parents and teachers getting together, or by educational organizations taking the initiative. The key factors are free choice for parents and a wide range of choices for them. Yes, we need all the policy changes in other areas, but we need this one most of all, and we need it soon.

Source URL: <http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/education/the-main-thing>

Links:

[1] <http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/education/the-main-thing>

[2] <http://www.adamsmith.org/taxonomy/term/5779>

[3] http://disqus.com/?ref_noscript

[4] <http://disqus.com>