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Common Error No. 96 [1]

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96. "Private sector health and education cream off the very best in resources and personnel from the state sector."

When people pay for private health and education, they save the state money because it no longer has to provide facilities for them. Furthermore, the money they spend for themselves means that the total expenditure on health and education is increased. And because the private sector has to be responsive to what consumers seek, it gives the public sector some idea of what it is that people want. It is not true that it drains away state service personnel; only a tiny fraction of those going to work in private healthcare come from the state sector.

Private health and education do not take resources away from the public sector; they give it more to spend per head. They may, by providing more flexible conditions, attract some of the most talented personnel. But they also improve conditions in the state sector by taking away some of its workload; and there may always be those who prefer to work in the state sector. Machines bought for use in private medicine increase the total supply of health equipment and the supply of equipment per head for the population. Their use enables waiting times for NHS equipment to be cut.

The private sector often acts as pacemaker for the public sector, making advances in services and techniques which the public sector can follow. Some of the innovative treatments are available first in the private sector, and spread over into the state sector once their value and efficacy have been established. In both health and education it is not so much the financial rewards which draw people to the private sector; it is the attitudes and conditions they find there. The weight of bureaucratic compliance and the endless form-filling are absent, and personnel have more time to interact with those they are serving. The parallel private services do not undermine the state services; they bring about their improvement.

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