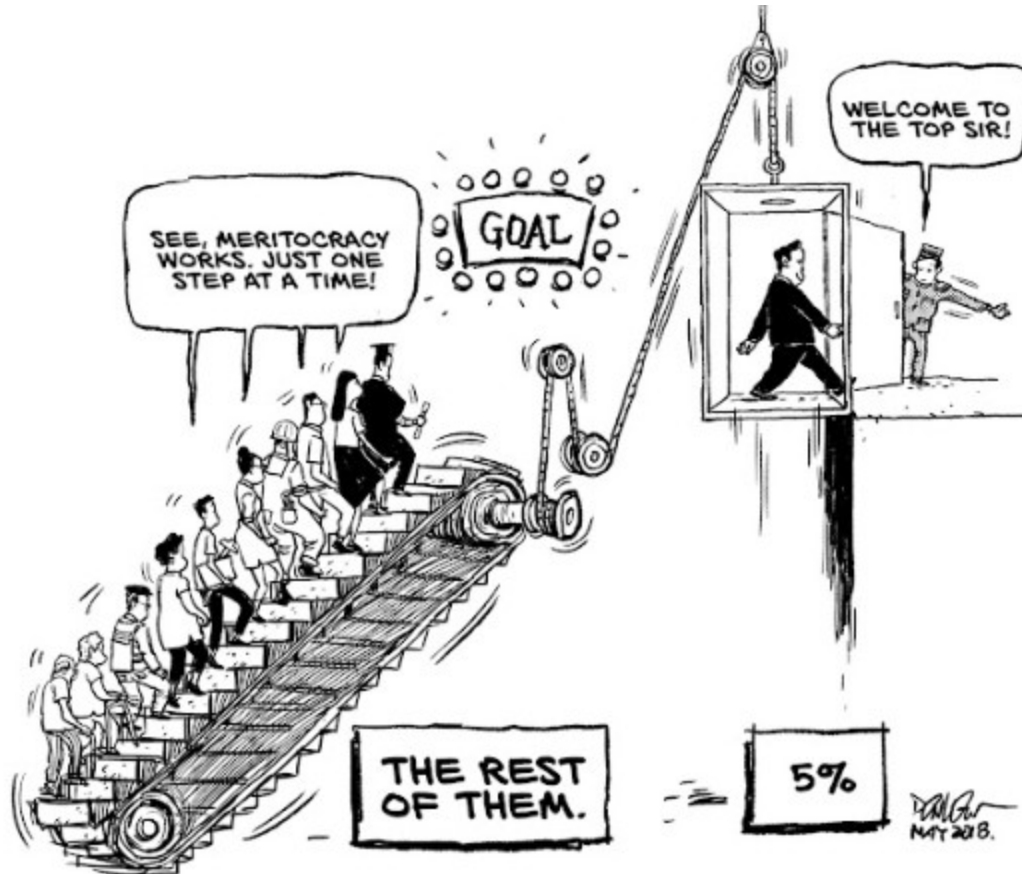


The Myth of Meritocracy in Britain



A meritocracy is a society where success comes solely from merit, talent and effort alone, rather than status or background. We're always told that if we study hard and persevere, our efforts will be rewarded, but that is far from the truth, as the inequalities are start from our earliest school years and follow us throughout our lives.

Access to Resources and Tutoring

Within state schools, the playing field is uneven. As someone from an upper-working class family, for most of my childhood even I considered having access to books, laptops, a quiet space and stable internet as a given. This is simply not the case as for many of my peers, these things were luxuries that they didn't have. As a grammar school student, I knew countless students who had passed the 11+ exam due to private tutoring, and it didn't stop there. Many had tutoring to help with their GCSEs, A-levels and even writing their personal statements. Despite being state-educated, their parents' money still gave them an extra edge. I never had private tutoring, but I did have numerous textbooks to study from, another advantage that isn't universal. The truth is that access to these resources and tutoring, not effort or intelligence alone, decides who gets ahead.

Private schools



As of 2025, there are approximately 1,423 private schools in the UK. The students that attend these private schools benefit from smaller class sizes, more personalised attention, better facilities, and a huge range of extracurricular activities – all of which gives them a head start when applying to the top universities. The results speak for themselves, with private school pupils consistently outperform their state school peers at GCSEs and A-levels. According to the UK Department for Education, around 65% of private school students go on to attend a top-tier Russell Group university, compared to only 25% from state schools.

How is it fair that in 2025, thousands of talented children from ordinary backgrounds are born at a major disadvantage, simply because their families cannot afford to pay an average of £19,000 a year to send them to private school?

Oxbridge

Getting into Oxbridge is still seen as the golden ticket to elite jobs, dominating in fields like law, finance and politics. Getting the top grades won't guarantee you a place at Oxbridge, it's about your personal statement, interview coaching, knowing how to “speak the part”, and having the right people vouch for you. Many applicants from wealthier backgrounds have access to expensive tutors or social networks to help them navigate the notoriously tricky application process, giving them a significant edge. The results speak for themselves, with a concerning 32.4% of UK Oxford students and 20.4% of UK Cambridge students being privately educated. This shows that even with top grades, students without private schooling are far less likely to make it through the gates of Oxbridge and to the best jobs, which are reserved for the wealthy.

The Costs of University



It's no secret that university is not cheap. In 2025, tuition fees for most UK students stand at £9,250 a year (rising to £9,535 soon), paired with living costs of around £1,100 monthly. University is expensive, but it opens the door to higher-paying jobs. Children from poorer families often can't afford university, so they miss out on these opportunities and have to settle for lower-paying jobs that don't require a university degree. When they have children of their own, they end up in the same situation and the cycle continues. Furthermore, many students that are able to go to university have to juggle part-time jobs alongside their degrees to cover costs, which makes university even more difficult. While the wealthy can easily afford university and go on to seek high-paying jobs, less privileged people who are equally as intelligent and talented are often left disadvantaged, unable to access the same opportunities simply because of their financial circumstances, perpetuating inequality rather than rewarding merit.

Fast Track to Political Power



Out of the nine most recent Prime Ministers, four (Blair, Cameron, Johnson and Sunak) were privately educated, two of which (Cameron and Johnson) being from Eton. All except Brown and Major attended Oxbridge. This pattern shows how access to expensive, elite education continues to shape the highest political power in the UK. Despite claims of meritocracy, giving wealthy and well-connected individuals a head start that talent alone can't overcome shows that Britain is anything but.

