

1 **Rachel Williams**

2 **'Worthless qualifications' give false hope to state pupils, says**
3 **Harrow head**

4 *(Original at [http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2010/jan/22/deceive-](http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2010/jan/22/deceive-children-worthless-qualifications)*
5 *children-worthless-qualifications)*

6 Pupils from deprived backgrounds are being told that they can advance in
7 life by a system that gives them "worthless" qualifications, Harrow
8 school's headteacher Barnaby Lenon said today.

9 State schools risk producing students like "those girls in the first round of
10 the X Factor" who tell the judges they want to be the next Britney Spears
11 but cannot sing a note, he said.

12 Bright children from poor backgrounds are being short-changed by those
13 who lead them to believe that "high grades in soft subjects" and going to
14 "any old university to read any subject" were the route to prosperity, he
15 told a conference of leading headteachers.

16 As a result, pupils at state schools, especially those from deprived
17 backgrounds, preferred subjects such as media studies. Meanwhile, at
18 independent schools, pupils were encouraged to take the toughest
19 subjects, such as sciences and modern languages.

20 Michael Gove, the Tory shadow education secretary, backed Lenon. The
21 Tories are planning a return to more academically driven schooling, if
22 elected this year. At the moment, the only subjects students are required
23 to take at GCSE are English and maths, after the requirement for them to
24 study a language was dropped in 2004.

Questions

- 1) The title of the article mentions 'false hopes'. What are these false hopes about?
- 2) Read through paragraphs 3 and to 4 (lines 12 to 19) and pay special attention to verb tenses. Can you explain why simple past is used?
- 3) The article is full of concepts unique to British culture/schooling. Let's have a closer look at them. Who are state pupils (line 2) as opposed to pupils from independent schools (line 18)?
- 4) In the United Kingdom (the UK) Harrow School is what is called a *household name*. This school is known for having educated to-be prime ministers such as Winston Churchill. Given this background information and the opinions of Harrow's headteacher, would you say Harrow is a state school or an independent school? (Confusingly, British independent schools are also referred to as *public schools*)
- 5) 'The X Factor' (line 10) is a version of a very popular TV competition that originated in the US. What is the name of the Czech version of this show?
- 6) Line 13 mentions 'soft' subjects. The opposite of 'soft' is *hard* which does not actually appear in the text. However, its synonym (word meaning the same) does. Find it!
- 7) Give examples of 'hard' and 'soft' subjects according to the text.
- 8) The word 'Tories' (singular and adjective *Tory*; lines 20 and 21) refers to a British political party. Which one? What does this party want to do about British education according to the text?
- 9) The 'GCSE' (line 23) is yet another exclusively British concept. It is an exam that pupils take at 14 to 16 years of age. In very rough terms, it can be compared to a Czech exam you are probably all too familiar with. Which one?
- 10) Now, having thoroughly analysed the text, give a brief summary of it focusing on its main points.
- 11) Do you share the opinion of Harrow's headteacher that soft subjects are 'worthless'? Why/why not? What is the situation like in the Czech Republic?

Vocabulary

background (line 6, 12, 17) – one's origin, education, experience

to short change (line 12) – to deal with unfairly or dishonestly

to read a subject (line 14) – to study (at university)

to drop (a requirement)(24) – to withdraw, to remove (*note that 'to drop' has many other meanings and is a VERY useful word*)

You can find additional explanation and more examples to help you understand and use English words and phrases at <http://dictionary.reference.com>, <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>, or <http://www.merriam-webster.com/>

Přejeme Vám mnoho studijních úspěchů.

Tým jazykové skupiny Spěváček: