**Life in Britain today.**

Great Britain has population of around 63.7 million [figures from June 2012]

The population is distributed as follows:

England: 53.5million

Scotland: 5.3 million

Wales: 3.1 million

Northern Ireland: 1.8million

In the twelve months to June 2012, there were 813,200 births compared to 558,800 deaths.

In terms of migration, there were 517,800 immigrants and 352,100 emigrants.

This means that the absolute increase in the population growth of United Kingdom was greater than any other European State.

It also means that the United Kingdom’s population size ranks it third behind Germany and France in the European Union.

17% of the population are over 65 years old [10.8 million].

Around 18% of the population are under 16 years old.

However it is expected that by 2018, those over 65 will be greater in number than those under 16 years old.

The population density is high- around 256 people per square kilometre, partly because of the high concentration of the population in England.

In 2013, 47.4% of children were born to unmarried mothers, with the average age of the mothers being 30.

26% of babies are born to mothers who were themselves born outside of the UK.

The majority of the population live in urban environments, with the main cities being London, [7,556,900], Birmingham [984,333], Glasgow [610,268], Liverpool [468,945], Leeds [455,123], Sheffield [447,047], Edinburgh [435,791], Bristol [430,713], Manchester [399,515] and Leicester [339,239].

British children attend school from aged 4 to 17 [changing to 18 in 2015.]

There are two broad types of schooling.

 The first is state education, with schools attended by the majority of children.

The second is private education, with schools attended by around 7% of children.

It is also legal in this country for parents to educate their children at home.

It is estimated that around 50,000 children are educated in this way, but it is difficult to obtain accurate figures.

State education is free from age 5, although children are offered a place in the September after their 4th birthday.

Parents are given free choice of schools, however if there is over subscription then proximity to the school is often a deciding factor in giving children a place.

In very competitive areas, [especially in the larger cities], parents will buy houses in the school catchment area in order to secure a place for their child.

State schools must follow the National Curriculum, with regular tests of pupils and inspections by Ofsted.

Results are published Nationally.

Classes are [by law] no more than 30 children between 5 and 7, then 30 plus from 7 upwards.

Teachers in State Schools must hold Qualified Teacher Status....and have a full security check.

Private schools may choose their own curriculum, have their own system of tests and are inspected by their own inspectors.

Classes sizes are much smaller; generally under 20 children and the schools usually use some type of comprehensive selection procedure for their pupils.

Teachers in Private schools do not have to have Qualified Teacher Status.

Private schools are also able to determine their own discipline policy and their own exclusion system.

A much higher proportion of private school pupils achieve good exam results-

4 x more likely to achieve A\* at GSCE level, 2 x more likely to achieve A grade at ‘A’ level.

Last year 43% of Oxford undergraduates came from private schools, 38% of Cambridge undergraduates came from private schools.

40% of all students over 18 in the United Kingdom continue with post secondary education.

There are 8.2 million pupils in the schools system [state and independent], in a total of 24,372 schools.

The country has around 438,000 full time teachers.

Last year the Literacy Trust published figures showing that around 84% of pupils achieved the Government targets for reading at age 11 and 75% achieved the Government targets for writing at the same age.

There are 1.1 million children in schools who have English as a second language. There are 309 different languages identified as the first languages of pupils currently in schools. Last year, 5 primary schools in the North West and the Midlands had no pupils with English a first language. 240 state schools had 90% + pupils who spoke English as a second language.

The school day for pupils in the State sector is for Primary from around 9 till around 3.30, Monday to Friday. Secondary Schools often start their day earlier-between 8 and 8.30 and finishing around 3. There are three terms a year apart from in Scotland. The Summer holidays are much shorter than those in Europe; schools finish for the Summer in the last week of July and return in the first week of September.

Many schools offer after school clubs which sometimes are free and sometimes are fee paying. These range from football, netball and art to drama, music and karate. There is often provision for before and after school care on site, which is paid for by the parents.

Lots of British pupils, especially in the more affluent areas, participate in clubs in the evenings...for example swimming, gymnastics, football, dancing, karate, choirs, learning instruments.

From this September free school dinners are being given to all 5-7 year olds in a bid to encourage healthy eating habits. [The fat, sugar and salt content of these meals is very closely monitored]. In some of the larger cities, infant school children are also given free fruit at morning break. Schools also encourage children to drink water throughout the day and to have only healthy snacks at break time.

Many children over the age of 7 bring a packed lunch from home to eat in the middle of the day, though some parents buy school dinners and the poorest families are given free school dinners right through their child’s schooldays.

There is currently a great deal of discussion about the problem of childhood obesity in this country. In our towns and cities, we have numerous sources of cheap fast food, sweets and chocolates and these are easy to buy. Children often buy snacks on their way home from school.

In addition, many parents have poor cooking skills, and rely on frozen foods for their main meals. Meat, fruit and vegetables are expensive and so families with lower incomes tend to buy cheaper options.

Greater numbers of children are spending their time watching the TV or playing computer games and less time exercising. They also send a lot of time on Social Media sites. Mobile phones are generally not permitted at primary school, although the decision on this is made by the school Governors.

Large numbers of children are now taken to school by car. [Do not venture on the roads in school run time!!!!]. Schools try to encourage children to walk or cycle and many do, but the majority do not-even for quite short journeys. The situation is better in the cities where schools have a much smaller catchment area. Parents are often very concerned about their child’s safety and cite this as the reason for not allowing them to walk to school on their own.

Children are allowed to work from the age of fourteen –delivering newspapers, leaflets etc. From 16, they can work in shops, cafes, restaurants etc. The majority of young people who are still studying do have some type of part time job and therefore have their own disposable income from quite early on.

Younger children are often expected to help around the house and many are given ‘pocket money’ in return for completing chores...although quite a few don’t do anything and still get it!! 90% of 13 year olds get pocket money...around £5 a week.

A recent report by Unicef suggested that children aged 8-12 in the UK would like to spend more time with their parents, but the parents are too tired or working too many hours to have much quality time together with their children.

Many parents have been under huge financial pressures, particularly in the last few years. Children and parents are exposed to a great deal of advertising of the latest expensive products for children and many try to buy things even when they can’t afford them. This report together with a previous one by Unicef in 2007, rated the UK as one of the worst countries in the developed world for children growing up. The UK seems to have been moving away from children and family and towards work and economy.

There are 7.7 million families in 2012 with dependent children. The average number of children per family is 1.7, although 1 in 7 families had three of more children. This is a higher percentage than three quarters of the countries of the European Union. Of these families, nine out of ten have at least one parent working.

Many children in the United Kingdom say they are happy with their lot. The country’s economic position is improving and parents are becoming less financially pressured than they have been in the past few years. Let us hope they will have more time to spend with their children in the future.

 The debate about quality family life is one for each and every family to consider, wherever they may live.