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## Sir Ken Robinson

### World Renowned Expert on Innovation and Creativity

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## Our Obsession with Academic Ability by Professor Ken Robinson

### Adapted from an article published in The Express on Wednesday 15 September 1999

Why do so many people think they're not clever? I come across people in every walk of life who think this - people in business, in ordinary jobs, writers, musicians and academics. Why? It usually dates back to their time at school. Instead of finding out what they could do, they find out what they couldn't. Education has made too many bright people feel they are dull. It's vital that we stop doing this.

Young people now face challenges we haven't known before. To meet them they'll need all their wits about them and education is the key.

We need to organise a radical review of the whole curriculum beyond 2000. The truth is that standards have not only been too low in some schools: they have been far too narrow almost everywhere.

So what's the problem and should be done about it? I think it's to do with the whole idea of academic ability. Our education system puts a huge emphasis in academic ability and the rewards go to those who show it. Such ability is very important but it shouldn't be confused with intelligence. This is dangerous because it encourages us to downgrade other intellectual abilities that all children have and which are equally important. This is often why so many bright people leave school thinking they're not.

Academic ability involves particular types of verbal and mathematical reasoning. These are essential, but there is much more to human intelligence, reasoning which enables us to design, compose music, paint, write poetry, compete in sport and to love each other. Human intelligence is creative and diverse. Education should develop the potential in our different ways of thinking.

Our present education system was planned in the Forties to produce an industrial workforce that was 80% manual and 20% professional workers. Grammar schools prepared young people for desk jobs and secondary schools for factories. The 11-plus made the decision. It was really an economic test. Most people didn't know this. They saw it as a kind of blood test, which told them if they were clever or not. This system may have been right for its time. It won't do now.

New technologies are revolutionising work. Suddenly, everyone has to be educated to a much higher level. And employers now want more than academic qualifications. They want people who can think creatively, adapt to change, work in teams and communicate. The ordinary academic curriculum is not designed to develop these things.

Schools have to provide a broad curriculum that allows children to discover their strengths and passions. This means giving equal weight to the arts, the sciences, humanities and to physical education. But the National Curriculum does not reward these subjects. Teachers must be allowed more freedom. Good teachers make learning exciting. They are also expert at spotting how different children think and learn. We all remember good teachers because they inspired us. If we want that for our children, teachers need the freedom to do it.

For the last year I have chaired the Government's National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education, a think tank of leading business people, scientists, educators and entertainers. The report (published in July 1999) urges the Government to rethink the balance of education to encourage a broader range of achievement by all young people.

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