EXTERNAL FACTORS-
From key stage 1-3 girls do better than boys in the UK. This trend also continues through GCSE’s. During A-levels it is clear that this gap closes quite significantly however girls still out perform boys. This could be to do with both internal and external factors.

The impact of feminism:
Feminism has challenged the traditional stereotypes of women’s role in society which has had success in improving women’s right and opportunities through changes in law.

McRobbie believes this change has partly come about because of changes in magazines and other forms of media.

→ 1970s = ‘traditional’ women; emphasis on the importance of marriage
→ 1990s = assertive, independent women
→ This has helped raise expectations and self-esteem of women

Changes in the family:
Changes since the 1970s such as an increase in divorce rates, increased cohabitation, smaller families and increased number of lone parent families have impacted girls’ attitudes towards education and has given girls role models.

Changes in women’s employment:
→ 1970 Equal Pay Act – pay gap has since fallen from 30% to 17%
→ 1975 Sex Discrimination Act
→ Proportion of women in employment has risen: 1979=47%, 2007= over 70%
→ Some women breaking through the ‘glass ceiling’ – the invisible barrier to higher level jobs
→ Changes have encouraged girls to see their future in terms of paid work
→ Greater opportunity, better pay and role models provide an incentive for girls to gain qualifications

Changes in ambitions of girls:
Some sociologists have the view that changes in the family and employment are producing changes in girls’ ambitions. Sharpe conducted interviews with girls in the 1970s and 1990s and compared results: show shift in how girls see themselves in the future - 1970s = low aspirations and believe that having ambition and intelligence could be perceived as unattractive, 1990s = wanted to be independent, priorities included being able to support themselves and getting a good career.
The role of education

FUNCTIONALISM

Functionalists are interested in the functions of education which they believe to be social integration, socialization, social placement, social and cultural innovation.

DURKHEIM:

Durkheim’s key concept is social solidarity which means that having the same norms and values transmitted at schools enables society to feel whole. He argues that without similar attitudes in people, social life would be impossible. Education, particularly the teaching of history, provides links between the individual and society. Children will come to see that they are part of something larger than themselves, they will develop a sense of commitment to the social group. Durkheim believes school makes children cooperate with other members of society besides family and friends – it is society in miniature.

Evaluation- Durkheim assumes that the norms and values transmitted into society are beneficial to society whereas Marxists believe that they only benefit the bourgeoisie.

PARSONS:

Parsons’ key concept is on meritocracy, status and role allocation. He believes that school acts as a bridge between society and the family which prepares children for their adult roles. The norms and values that are portrayed in school are said to change peoples ascribed status to the more universal standards (achieved status). Meritocracy is the idea that people work hard as they get implying that there is no inequality from birth- if people choose not to work then they will not achieve. Advanced, industrial society requires a highly motivated, achievement orientated workforce. By using the principle of differential reward for differential achievement, this value is instilled in society through schools.

Evaluation- There is evidence that equal opportunity in education does not exist; achievement is greatly influenced by class background rather than ability- Marxists support this view. Wrong argues that functionalists have an ‘over-socialized’ view of people as puppets of society – wrongly imply that pupils passively accept all they are taught and never reject the schools’ values.
CHUBB AND MOE:
They argue that the American state education has failed and claim that disadvantaged groups have been badly served as it has failed to create opportunity. State education is inefficient as it fails to produce pupils with skills needed by the economy. Private schools on the other hand, deliver higher quality education because, unlike state schools, they are answerable to paying parents.

Chubb & Moe base their arguments of a comparison of the achievements of 60,000 low income families in 1,015 state and private high schools. Evidence shows that pupils from low-income families consistently do about 5% better in private schools. Their research ended up in the call for the introduction of a market system in state education that would put control in the hands of consumers (parents and local communities). They argue that it would allow consumers to shape schools to meet their own needs and would improve quality and efficiency. Their proposal an end to system where schools automatically receive guaranteed funding, and instead propose a system in which each family would be given a voucher to spend on buying education from a school of their choice. This would force schools to be more responsive to parents’ demands as they would have to compete for ‘business’

Evaluation: Gerwitz & Ball believes that competition between schools benefits the m/c, who can use their cultural and economic capital to gain access to more desirable schools. Marxists argue that education imposes the values of dominant minority ruling class, not a shared national culture.

MARXISM:
Marxists see society as based on class conflict and which legitimises inequality through ideology. Their arguments go on to say that education prepares children for the world of work by giving them skills and values they’ll need in a capitalist society.

ALTHUSSER:
Althusser sees education to be an ideological state apparatus (ISA) which means that its main function is to maintain, legitimate and reproduce generation by generation, class inequalities in wealth and power by transmitting ruling-class values disguised as common values. This is done through the ‘hidden curriculum’.

The repressive state apparatuses— maintain the rule of the bourgeoisie by force or the threat of it

The ideological state apparatuses— maintain the rule of the bourgeoisie by controlling people’s idea, values and beliefs

Evaluation: In schools today, there are a range of policies aimed at different children to try and provide equal opportunity. Functionalists would argue that education is meritocratic & fair.