

CHAPTER ONE

1944–1960: THE POSTWAR CONSENSUS: EDUCATION FOR ALL?

- The religious question
- Private schooling
- The role of the state, the LEAs and the teaching profession
- The eleven plus, selection and streaming
- The drive towards comprehensivisation

Introduction

Following the end of the Second World War there was a desire by all political parties not to return to the problems of the 1930s and to introduce widespread social and economic reconstruction. The 1944 Education Act recognised the importance of education in raising living standards and enhancing social mobility. Secondary education to 15 was made compulsory, and free school meals and milk were introduced with a range of other welfare services. Children were segregated at the age of eleven by ability and aptitude into grammar, technical and modern schools. However, education was accepted by Labour and Conservative politicians as a major feature of the welfare state.

This chapter, which will focus on the period 1944–60, will examine that postwar consensus and also some of the tensions that started to appear during this period. McCulloch (2002: 35) provides an appropriate summary of the main focus of this period: ‘. . . a period during which an initial experiment with a so-called “tripartite” system of different types of

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secondary schools eventually gave way to a model of a single type of school designed for all abilities and aptitudes, the comprehensive school.' As well as discussing the drive towards comprehensivisation, this chapter will also consider some key issues relating to key reports and publications, with a main focus on the contributions of Education Secretaries (Ministers until 1964). The issues that will be discussed include: the 1944 Education Act, the different phases of education and 'secondary education for all', the drive towards comprehensivisation, the end of selection, the religious question and private schooling. There will also be references to the relationship between central government, the local education authorities and the teaching profession.

Context

Political, social and economic

The end of the Second World War marked a period of massive social reforms in the creation of the welfare state which was established to end the absolute poverty and depression of the 1930s. It also marked the beginning of a huge increase in the role of the state in terms of the extension of state planning and collectivism. This was a period of traumatic economic and social change but there were high expectations of a new welfare world after the war and a great deal of optimism in all sectors of society. Carr and Hartnett (1996) in their discussion of postwar reconstruction note how the increased demand for improved public education came to be embedded in the commitment to the right to employment, family allowances, improved old age pensions, health, housing and education as enshrined in the 1942 Beveridge Report, *Social Insurance and Allied Services*. In the Report which received widespread support, Beveridge outlined in principle the concept of the welfare state and one of the five 'giant evils' in society, Ignorance, would be combated by the 1944 Education Act.

The period 1944–60, in retrospect, might be described as a fairly lengthy era of uneven growth and opportunity characterised, as Kogan (1978: 27) suggests, in terms of three interwoven themes:

- the rise of expectations as to how the 'Opportunity State' would offer widened educational chances as part of the good life;
- the related expansion of the economy and changing distribution of its products;
- demographic pressures and fluctuations.

Initially, however, Britain was only just beginning to recover from the war efforts and despite a postwar boom in some industries and the growing

service industry, as Jones (2003) argues, there was a lack of investment compared to other European countries and competition from these countries. Britain was also heavily reliant on American loans to fund the new welfare state. Thus, in terms of the realities of instigating ambitious changes and reforms, Barber (1994: 188) notes, for example, that ‘the Labour Government of 1945–51 had to work on a mass of competing priorities with strictly limited resources.’ The following section identifies the some of these priorities.

Labour in office 1945–51

Labour came into government with a landslide majority. There were enormous challenges within the education system (Hughes, 1979). During the war years there had been considerable debate about the purposes and structure of postwar Britain, and there was profound agreement on the need to remodel post-primary education, raise the school-leaving age to 15, provide free school meals and milk, implement a system of part-time education beyond the statutory leaving age and provide adequate health and welfare services for schoolchildren. Within these key priorities the government also had to develop strategies for dealing with the desperate shortage of school buildings and teachers to cope with the expansion of the system. For example, the Emergency Training Scheme was introduced which brought for the first time into schools on a large scale young men and women with experience of life outside school or college. The scheme which ran between 1945 and 1951 provided 35,000 additional teachers who qualified after just one year’s training. At the same time a special ‘Huts on Raising of the School Leaving Age’ plan was initiated using temporary accommodation in an attempt to cope with the parlous state of school buildings. This might explain why the Cabinet was keen to postpone the raising of the school-leaving age in order to save money on an extensive and new school building programme and the costs of additional teachers’ salaries.

However, as Fieldhouse (1994: 287) notes: ‘Despite the 1945 Labour Government’s commitment to social reform, it did not have a very radical education policy beyond its determination to implement the 1944 Education Act and raise the school-leaving age to fifteen.’

Schools and colleges

In the following sections the origins of the Act and its passage into legislation are briefly described and key issues such as the ‘religious question’, private schooling and the relationship between the state, the local education authorities (LEAs) and the teaching profession are discussed.

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The 1944 Education Act and related issues

The Second World War brought to a halt a number of reforms which had been developed in the 1930s, for example the raising of the school-leaving age from 14 to 15 due to be implemented in 1939, the reorganisation of elementary education as proposed in the 1926 Hadow Report, and the 1938 Spens Report on the secondary curriculum. There were increasing demands recognised by the Board of Education from the public and the media for significant changes in the education system in the postwar period.

In 1939, the majority of children in England and Wales attended a 5–11 school and then transferred to a senior elementary school or the senior department of an elementary school to complete the final three years of compulsory education, or they attended an ‘all-through’ elementary school. Barber (1994: 1) suggests that ‘80 per cent of children received no further formal education after the age of fourteen’ when they left to join the labour market.

It should be noted that a small minority of elementary school pupils (just over 14 per cent in 1938) had been given the opportunity to transfer to secondary schools at the age of 10 or 11.

It was very different for middle- and upper-class children, admittedly a minority of the overall school-age population, who attended fee-paying day grammar schools or else had access to the separate public school system. The issue of public school education was a major issue for the incoming Labour government of 1945 and will be discussed later in this chapter.

The types of schooling, which served different classes or groups in society, in existence in the immediate postwar period, are identified by Chitty (2009: 20–1) as follows:

- the so-called public schools;
- the direct grant grammar schools;
- the grammar schools;
- a small group of technical, ‘central’ and other types of ‘trade’ schools;
- the new ‘secondary modern’ schools;
- the old, unreorganised ‘all-age’ elementary schools.

Reference is made to each of these ‘types’ in the following discussion.

In 1941, a detailed document which became known as the Green Book was produced: *Education After the War*. This took the form of a memorandum from the Board of Education and was circulated confidentially to a variety of organisations to canvass opinions about educational reforms. Chitty (2009: 114) notes that the Green Book ‘contained many of the proposals which were first presented to Parliament in 1943 and eventually became the 1944 Act.’ R. A. Butler became President of the Board of Education at the Prime Minister’s (Churchill) request in 1942 and began the massive task

of developing and steering an education bill through Parliament using the Green Book as a foundation upon which to act.

The Education Act of 1944 emerged out of a democratic consensus between the coalition wartime government, the churches and the education service (Tomlinson, 2005). It marked the beginnings of what was to become the most comprehensive and expansionary phase in English education since the 1870 Education Act and introduced widespread reforms across all sectors of education: primary, secondary, further and higher education. The Act followed the publication of a number of key policy and discussion documents.

At its heart, the 1944 Act introduced free secondary education for all, raised the school leaving age to 15 from 1947 (with a further rise to 16 at a later date) and established a tripartite system of education. It was clear that ‘secondary education for all’ would be part of a continuous process ranging from the primary sector, through the secondary sector and then into further or higher education.

Earlier, it was noted that the 1944 Act was based upon the 1938 Report of the Spens Committee and the 1943 Report of the Norwood Committee. The former had argued that educational provision post-eleven was inappropriate and its authors outlined a system based on a tripartite division into modern schools, grammar schools and technical high schools. It should also be noted that Spens Committee also recognised the importance of social and cultural background in pupils’ gaining access through scholarships to the grammar schools and argued that ‘parity of esteem’ could be achieved between the different schools. Norwood focused on concerns about the organisation of secondary schooling and argued for a classification of pupils into ‘types’ with different aptitudes, interests and abilities: the ‘secondary grammar’ pupil who is ‘interested in learning for its own sake’; the ‘secondary technical’ pupil whose ‘interests lie markedly in the field of applied science or applied art’; and the ‘secondary modern’ pupil, who ‘deals more easily with concrete things rather than ideas . . . He [*sic*] is interested in things as they are; he finds little attraction in the past or in the slow disentanglement of causes or movements’ (Norwood Report 1943, cited in Ball, 1986: 19). The organisation of secondary schooling was influenced greatly by this delineation of types of pupil.

The ‘religious question’

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the ‘religious question’, that is to say the relationship between the state and religion and educational provision in society, had played an important if not central role in all of the major Education Acts ‘quite out of proportion to its significance in the wider, largely secular society’ (Carr and Hartnett, 1996: 111).

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The 1944 Act marked a new stage in the balance between making voluntary schools viable with the help of public funds while allowing them to retain religious freedom. Butler turned to the ‘intractable problem: the Dual System – the co-existence of the “voluntary” (Church) schools and the publicly provided system’ (Barber, 1994: 38). With great skill and tremendous understanding he undertook a renegotiation of the place of religion and the churches in schools. Barber quotes the then General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers (NUT), Frederick Mander, who suggested the enormity of the ‘problem’ when he described how it ‘lay like a tank trap across the highway to educational advance’ (Barber, 1992: 31).

The Anglican and Catholic churches in particular had huge religious influence and involvement in the school system and ran almost half the schools in the country (Benn, 2011a: 40), thus the government – and in particular Butler and his chief civil servant, Chuter Ede – came under huge pressure in the negotiations which took place from the early 1940s until the passing of the Act. Indeed, it has been argued that Butler gave much more time and attention to the churches than to any other interested parties.

With great difficulty Butler agreed a settlement, the key features of which were increased funding for church schools (which had to opt for voluntary aided or voluntary controlled status) coupled with increased state control, and new legislation on the place of religion in state schools. There were fraught discussions with representatives from the Anglicans, Roman Catholics and Nonconformists. Butler eventually found a compromise which secured the backing of the Church of England which was keen on reform to the education system, the Nonconformists and the teaching profession. The Catholics, who faced the most difficulties in financial terms, were left with no alternative than to accede to Butler’s political manoeuvring in order to avoid being isolated (Barber, 1994; Sharp, 2002).

It should be noted that there were some forthright contributions from key players such as the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, who welcomed the Bill as ‘a notable contribution to social justice, to fuller national fellowship and to growth in religious knowledge’ (cited in Barber, 1994: 80). It was Temple who published *Christianity and Social Order* in 1942 which advocated a higher school-leaving age and contributed to left-wing theories of equality in education (Sanderson, 1987).

The 1944 Act made a requirement that there should be religious instruction and a daily act of collective worship with an agreed syllabus for religious instruction in local authority schools. There appeared to be no serious opposition to this provision which changed only with the 1998 Education Reform Act.

Private schooling

At the beginning of Labour's first administration there were polarised views about the Party's and the government's position on the public schools. It is significant that the 1944 Education Act made no serious attempt to deal with the sensitive issues of the public schools which, as Barber (1994: 10) points out, had 'provided education not only for virtually all Conservative MPs, and many in other parties too, but also for almost the entire senior ranks of the Civil Service, including those at the Board of Education.'

At this time, there was growing criticism of the public schools and they were at their most vulnerable towards the end of the Second World War (Benn, 2011a). There were fears amid the private sector that it would be difficult for the public schools to survive. Indeed, Simon (1991) suggests that public schools had been under fire for many years from a range of individuals and organisations – culminating in a wide popular move against these schools and their hold on access to positions of power and responsibility. It is therefore not surprising, as Tomlinson (2005: 14) notes, to see '... private schools, keeping a low profile during the post-war Labour Government'.

The Fleming Committee had been set up in 1942 to report on the public schools question with the brief 'to consider the means whereby the association between the public schools . . . and the general education system of the country could be extended and developed' (Board of Education, 1944) – a device perhaps to keep a problematic question off the political agenda. Not surprisingly, the committee did not report until the 1944 Act had been approved and its main recommendation was that independent schools reserve at least 25 per cent of their places for children from grant-aided primary schools. However, no national policy was adopted and LEAs infrequently applied these recommendations. The Labour Party at this time seemed to take little interest in the Fleming Committee proposals and it was not until Anthony Crosland was Education Secretary in power from 1965 to 1967 that the debate about private schooling was reopened.

As Butler (1971: 120) stated afterwards, perhaps in self-congratulation: 'the first class carriage had been shunted onto an immense siding', thus, a unique opportunity to unify the country's education system was destroyed. McCulloch (2002: 40), in his succinct overview of secondary education in the period, notes that: '... the independent schools had survived virtually unscathed from the debate over secondary education' and '... they remained a separate system, comprising an alternative form of provision based on parental fees'.

It is not surprising therefore that having survived this threatening situation, the public schools underwent a striking upturn during the late 1940s and, as Lowe notes (1988: 51), 'a public school education began to

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seem particularly attractive to the growing number of parents who could consider the expense’.

The role of the state, the LEAs and the teaching profession

In this section, the critical relationship sometimes referred to as the ‘Golden Triangle’ between the state, the local education authorities (LEAs) and the teaching profession (Dale, 1989) is briefly discussed. Each had areas of responsibility throughout the education system which amounted to a balance of control between central and local powers. This is a theme which, because of its importance in education policy-making and the roles of key players in that process, will also be examined in Chapters 2 and 3.

This balance has been explained by Bogdanor (1979: 157, cited in Dale, 1989: 97) who argues that, following the 1944 Act, ‘power over the distribution of resources, over the organisation and context of education was to be diffused among the different elements and no one of them was to be given a controlling voice’.

Thus the 1944 Act stipulated that LEAs were required to provide secondary education, and schools would ‘not be deemed to be sufficient unless they are sufficient in number, character, and equipment to afford all pupils opportunities for education offering such variety of instruction and training as may be desirable in view of their different ages, abilities and aptitudes’ (Lawson and Silver, cited in McNay and Ozga, 1985: 282). It is important to note that while the LEAs built, staffed and maintained institutions it was teachers at this time who were largely in control of the curriculum and teaching methods. Ranson (1985) cites Briault (1976) who describes the system of educational decision-making as a ‘triangle of tension, checks and balances’.

Barber (1994: 119) argues that the 1944 Act was ‘perceived as a centralising measure’; ‘it increased the power of the state’ and, consequently, the idea of a ‘national system locally administered’ proved highly durable and adaptable.

The LEAs were given a greater degree of control than ever before while at the same time the Ministry of Education was also able to exercise a great deal of influence over the LEAs, far more than the its predecessor, the Board of Education (Barber, 1994).

The eleven plus, selection and streaming

The postwar state education system, although frequently referred to as ‘the tripartite system’, was more accurately a ‘bi-partite system’ because the third element, the secondary technical schools, were never fully endorsed by LEAs or by the governments of the period. Sanderson (1987: 20) argues that the failure to develop the technical schools was ‘. . . perhaps the greatest

lost opportunity of the twentieth century education system' since they could provide valuable education and training which had a direct relevance to the scarce skills which industry needed. In the postwar system children were assessed during their final year of primary education and then allocated through the eleven plus to a grammar school or a secondary modern school. The latter, described by Kynaston (2009: 160) as 'the defining life event', was a universally accepted method of selection and was based on a number of assumptions: that intelligence was fixed and could be measured and that abilities could be measured at the age of eleven and would be fixed for life. Once it was accepted that children could be ranked according to their ability or 'intelligence', then, ranking the schools according to the tripartite system or organising groups of pupils into streams by 'ability' was easily justified.

However, during the 1950s and early 1960s those ideas and practices which had dominated educational thinking and planning for many years were criticised by mounting evidence from sociologists, psychologists and educationalists which showed that relatively few working-class children compared to middle-class children 'passed' the eleven plus. Evidence also revealed regional disparities in the provision of grammar school places thus making it more difficult to pass the eleven plus in some areas than in others. There was also evidence that girls were frequently discriminated against in the allocation of grammar school places.

In the critique of the existing system, the work of Vernon, Yates and Pidgeon (cited in Crook, 2002) demonstrated that both the rationale and methods of so-called 'objective' psychometric testing were severely flawed, particularly when used to predict future performance. It was recognised that such early selection resulted in a wastage of ability and the assumption that working-class children and their families were responsible for their own 'failure' was challenged. The negative effects of the eleven plus on the upper primary school curriculum were evident in the need for widespread streaming and coaching for the examination.

According to Kogan (1971) studies in the late 1950s also showed that as many as 15 per cent of pupils were allocated to the 'wrong' schools and there were limited transfers between the secondary modern and technical schools and the grammar schools at the age of 13.

A key factor which was important in the movement to end the eleven plus was the introduction in 1951 of the General Certificate of Education (GCE) in England and Wales. Gradually, secondary modern schools started to allow some of their pupils to stay at school until 16 in order to take the new GCEs, and the achievement of those schools in terms of good examination results proved to be a further indication of the fallacy of selection at eleven.

Primary and junior school education and nursery education

The 1944 Act recognised the importance of a primary stage of education through which all children should pass before moving on to secondary schooling and thus ended the old distinction between elementary and secondary education that had persisted since the eighteenth century. It was agreed that transition between the two phases would take place at the age of eleven.

The situation facing the Labour government as regards primary and junior education immediately after the war is comprehensively described by Cunningham (2002: 18) who refers to 'the scandalous neglect of the primary school building stock'. In the first years after the war major gains were made through the provision of free school meals and free milk for all pupils, and despite the need for cutbacks in expenditure initially, new buildings did begin to appear.

In terms of teaching and learning there were important developments in what might loosely be termed 'progressive' education – a theme which will be explored in Chapter 2. Some teachers working in newly built schools equipped with specialist teaching areas and classrooms, with libraries and access to new technology (Cunningham, 2002) were introducing new approaches to the curriculum and pedagogy. The diverse and complex movement called 'Progressivism' emphasised the importance of child-centred and activity-based learning and the freedom of the teacher (Jones, 2003). Not all pupils experienced these new approaches and continued to be educated in substandard buildings with inadequate resources. At this time too, many schools adopted strategies that maximised their success and their pupils' success at the eleven plus examination. As a result many schools streamed their pupils and there was much coaching especially for the 'A'-stream pupils who were more likely to gain a place at the local grammar school. Simon (1991: 153), in his study of education in the period under review, suggests that the nature of education within the primary school became 'dominated by the requirements of the selection examination which in most areas by this time took the form of so-called "objective" tests in "intelligence", English and arithmetic'. Thus what was occurring in the upper levels of the system affected junior and primary school pupils' experiences and ran counter to official ideologies focused on progressivism.

Research by sociologists, educationalists and psychologists, as has been indicated, pointed to the enormous pressures that many junior school pupils and their parents were subjected to, and highlighted the fact that selection at eleven was becoming the flashpoint of educational criticism.

Lowe (1997: 210) argues that the failure to accomplish educational reconstruction during this period when progressive educational ideology

was quite dominant meant that: ‘... the new primary education was unable to shake off many of the characteristics of the old elementary schooling, and some were even reinforced because of the greater emphasis on streaming because of the eleven-plus’.

As late as 1951, according to Lowe (1997), there were still some one million pupils in all-age schools and some authorities believed that it was necessary to exclude children of statutory age from schooling for want of facilities.

With regard to nursery education, the 1944 Act seemed to herald a new dawn for nursery education too. Clause 8(2)(b) of the Act instructed the LEAs to plan for the needs of pupils under five while phasing out the all-age schools (Lowe, 1988: 21). It was anticipated that LEAs would follow this advice and would begin to phase out all-age schools and thereby extend the benefits of education to the growing number of under-fives. Lowe (1988: 22) notes: ‘It was a revolution that never took place’ – an example once again of the complicated relationship between policy provision and policy enactment.

Further education

After 1945 both Labour and Conservative governments began to recognise the importance of technical and commercial education and training as a key issue in the nation’s economic success.

The 1944 Act had made clear references to further education and recommended compulsory part-time further education: ‘All young persons from 15 to 18 will be required to attend an appropriate centre part-time unless they are in full-time attendance at school’ (White Paper (1944) cited in Barber, 1994: 67). Although the number of students in further education increased dramatically during the period under review, there were growing concerns about the influence of social class on access to further education.

In 1954 the Gurney-Dixon Report *Early Leaving*, the terms of reference of which had been to consider what factors influenced the age at which boys and girls left secondary school at the minimum school-leaving age, reported that there was considerable ‘wastage’ of talent in these groups of young people. It drew attention to the ‘neglected educational territory’ (McKenzie, 2001: 191) of pupils who left school at 15 to follow a craft or a technical rather than an academic career. The Report recommended maintenance allowances for needy children staying on at school beyond 15.

The White Paper on Technical Education published in 1956 was important because it recommended an expansion in technical education in further education, this once again recognising the importance of investment in science and technology education for the wealth of the nation.

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Fieldhouse (1994), in a review of the Labour government's further education policy 1945–51, argues that the Minister of Education (Ellen Wilkinson) and her civil servants were keen to expand and reform further education (FE) and in 1947 published a detailed national plan for FE. The plan placed a heavy emphasis on vocational education and its most far-reaching aspect was the proposal to introduce compulsory part-time education and training up to the age of 18 for all those who had left school, to be provided in the new county colleges. However, this proposal was overtaken by deepening economic crises faced by the government in the later 1940s and was not implemented.

Voluntary part-time vocational education and training did expand considerably but in a much more limited form than was originally envisaged. At the same time there were quite ambitious plans for non-vocational further and 'liberal' education to be provided through a partnership of the LEAs and other local providers such as universities and the Workers Educational Association. Inevitably, although there was fairly significant postwar expansion, this was uneven and often depended on the commitment and drive of the LEAs (Fieldhouse, 1994), and the worsening economic situation severely limited funding for this provision. The development of further education is further examined in Chapter 2 with particular reference to the 1959 Crowther Report *Fifteen to Eighteen*.

The drive towards comprehensivisation

The growing body of evidence referred to in the section on the eleven plus and streaming was used to demonstrate that the 1944 Education Act was not promoting 'equality of opportunity', had done much less than anticipated for working-class pupils, and was used increasingly by advocates of comprehensive schools. Carr and Hartnett (1996: 105) in their discussion of 'Secondary Education for All' provide a succinct summary of the problem when they argue that: '... it was no longer self-evident that a meritocratic system of education was any more democratic than the class-based aristocratic system that it had replaced.'

There were some pioneers of the comprehensive school from as early as 1945 in Anglesey and the first purpose-built comprehensive school, Kidbrooke, was opened in London in 1954. LEAs began to think about alternatives to the tripartite system – for example, London County Council had planned a scheme of partial comprehensive organisation in 1944 and issued its London School Plan in 1947. Crook (2002: 247) describes the postwar drive for comprehensive education as 'a grassroots initiative', which both began to challenge the 'orthodoxies of tripartism and bipartism'

and thus ‘paved the way for officially non-selective experiments during the following decade’.

Furthermore, Limond (2007: 342) comments: ‘It was a desire to achieve economies of scale rather than ideological fervour that prompted various rural authorities to invest in early comprehensive schemes.’ In this context, Simon argues that these ‘experiments’ in the 1950s provided the background to what he calls the ‘breakout’ of the following decade when the move towards comprehensivisation became more firmly established across the country.

The Labour government, as will be shown in the discussion of the contributions of the two Labour Ministers of Education in the period under review, was slow to adopt comprehensivisation, although the Labour Party had successfully passed a resolution calling on the government to implement the Party’s policy on comprehensive schools in 1950.

In 1951, in the pamphlet, *A Policy for Secondary Education* published by the Party, there was a clear statement of the Party’s full support for the introduction of a comprehensive system. However, as Lowe (1988: 130) observes, the electoral defeat in 1951: ‘committed the Party to a lengthy period of introspection, during which internal dissensions severely weakened its power to promulgate clearly defined policies.’ Chapter 2 explores how the move towards comprehensivisation became a majority concern and was at the forefront of educational debate during the 1960s.

The next section looks at policy through the contributions of the Ministers of State in the Labour and Conservative governments of the period.

The Education Secretaries and policy development

(Note: The Ministry of Education was reorganised as the Department of Education and Science in 1964, and the Minister became known as the Secretary of State for Education and Science.)

In the period under review there were nine Ministers or Secretaries of Education who each came into office bringing a range of abilities, successes, experiences, strengths and personal characteristics. The range included the public school and Oxbridge-educated Conservatives and the working-class and socialist Labour Party members. It is important also to note that Ellen Wilkinson (Labour, 1945–7) was the first female Minister of State for Education and Florence Horsbrugh (Conservative, 1951–4) was the first female Conservative member of the Cabinet. Chapter 3 describes how another female gained the post of Secretary of State for Education and Science: Margaret Thatcher.

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The Ministers during the period 1945–60 were:

Richard Law 1945	(Coalition)
Ellen Wilkinson 1945–7	(Labour)
George Tomlinson 1947–51	(Labour)
Florence Horsbrugh 1951–4	(Conservative)
Sir David Eccles 1954–7	(Conservative)
Viscount Hailsham 1957	(Conservative)
Geoffrey Lloyd 1957–9	(Conservative)
Sir David Eccles 1959–62	(Conservative)

In the discussions focused on these individuals, there will be references to the Minister's main achievements and the influences of the Treasury, the Cabinet and the Party. The Minister's relationship with LEAs, civil servants and the teaching profession, and reference to the Minister's own values and philosophy and own educational experiences, will also be considered when appropriate. Each of the factors, to a greater or lesser extent, influenced the thinking and actions of the Ministers who held office in the period under review.

Before looking at the Labour and Conservative Ministers, however, the contributions of R. A. Butler, Minister in Churchill's Coalition government, and Richard Law, Minister for a short period in 1945, are reviewed.

R. A. Butler

R. A. Butler played such an important part in steering the 1944 Education Act through Parliament. This section begins with a review of his achievements.

R. A. Butler was educated at Marlborough College and then won an exhibition to Pembroke College, from where he then obtained a fellowship at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. Marriage led to financial independence and enabled him to embark on a parliamentary career. He had a comfortable victory in the general election of 1929 when he became MP for Saffron Walden, holding this seat until his retirement in 1965.

Butler held posts in the Foreign Office and a period as parliamentary secretary at the Ministry of Labour gave him a useful acquaintance with the depressed areas and with mass unemployment. Butler spent several years at the Foreign Office, but in July 1941, after nine years as an under-secretary, he became president of the Board of Education. Even further removed from the war than the Foreign Office, education was nevertheless seen to be a major challenge for the Board of Education.

That Butler played a formidable role in postwar reconstruction (he was also Chancellor of the Exchequer after Education) cannot be denied. He also played a significant part in influencing and shaping Conservative policy

in the postwar period, although he was generally opposed to drastic change and contributed to the political consensus and bipartisanship in the period under review.

In 1941 Butler founded the Conservative Post War Problems Committee. Its educational subcommittee reported in 1942 and emphasised the importance of national education in developing a strong sense of patriotism (Sanderson, 1987). The experience of working with the Committee served him well and later in 1941 Churchill appointed him President of the Board of Education. Chitty (2009: 19), in his review of educational policy at the time, comments that Butler was positive about the opportunity to ‘harness to the educational system the wartime urge for social reform and greater equality’ (cited in Butler, 1971: 86). As Barber (1994: 119) argues, ‘. . . like almost everyone else in his time, [he was] inspired by the idea of a democratic, liberal education system for all.’

All Butler’s formidable diplomatic and political skills were needed to secure the agreement of the churches as well as the acquiescence of Churchill and Conservative backbenchers, whom Butler thought ‘a stupid lot’. The 1944 Education Act, which Butler believed would ‘have the effect of welding us into one nation – instead of two nations as Disraeli talked about’ (Timmins, 1996: 92), was Butler’s greatest legislative achievement and was deservedly called after him.

In his study of the making of the 1944 Act, Barber (1994: 36), details how Butler had to use all of his skills’ repertoire to secure widespread support for the Board’s main proposals. He was particularly adept in promoting the reforms in a way which left most of the interested parties believing that they had indeed received a considerable proportion of what they had asked for. For example, as Lawton argues, he had to negotiate a path that allowed him to give in to Conservative pressure to retain the selective direct grant schools and, simultaneously, he had to work closely with belligerent Labour leaders and persuade the Treasury that education reforms would not cost too much money.

Butler’s indefatigable work in dealing with the ‘religious question’ has already been discussed in an earlier section. However, it can be emphasised again that Butler’s role in securing the passage of the 1944 Education Act through a democratic consensus between the wartime government, the churches and the education service was formidable (Tomlinson, 2005).

A final comment summarises Butler’s achievement: ‘The Act was an achievement for Butler who was also pleased that he had safeguarded his Party’s interests: diversity and variety among the state schools, the place of religious instruction, and the autonomy of the Public Schools’ (Jeffereys, cited in Lawton, 1994: 24).

Richard Law, ‘a little known Tory’ (Simon, 1991: 77) who replaced Butler as Minister for Education in Churchill’s caretaker government but not as a

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Cabinet member, was soon replaced by Ellen Wilkinson. A brief entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* by J. Enoch Powell (2004) says of Law: 'When Churchill scraped the ministerial barrel to form a "caretaker government" after the coalition was dissolved in May 1945, Law became Minister of Education; but after six weeks he lost both office and seat.'

The Labour Ministers, Ellen Wilkinson and George Tomlinson, held office between them from 1945 until 1951 and contributed to the monumental task of reconstruction and of implementing the 1944 Education Act. Their respective ministerial careers are examined next.

Ellen Wilkinson

Ellen Wilkinson was born in 1891 in Chorlton, near Manchester, to a socially upwardly mobile family. After a higher elementary school education, she became a pupil teacher and also taught in elementary schools. She won a scholarship to Manchester University and there her interest in politics was firmly established. After a spell in the Communist Party she won the Middlesbrough East seat for Labour in 1924. She was an active and respected Parliamentarian but lost her seat in 1931. She fought back, however, and in 1935 was elected as Labour MP for Jarrow, having led the famous Jarrow Crusade in 1933.

Although she had not had experience of educational planning and policy she saw education as a critical area for the postwar Labour government and approached Attlee to ask for the Ministry (Lowe, 1988). Attlee, according to Wilkinson's biographer, showed the importance he attached to this office when offering her a seat in the Cabinet, despite her reputation for being something of a radical left-winger at the time. Wilkinson, became the first female Education Minister of any political party (Vernon, 1982: 201), and thus at the Ministry's head for the first time was a woman educated within the state system.

On coming into office, Wilkinson claimed, according to Lowe (1988: 38), that her two guiding aims were: '... to see no boy or girl is debarred by lack of means from taking the course of education for which he or she is qualified ... and to remove from education those class distinctions which are the negation of democracy'. Her immediate successes were to almost single-mindedly persuade Parliament to avoid postponing the raising of the school-leaving age to 15, despite great opposition from her colleagues who preferred to see funds directed at the postwar housing programme, and to introduce free school milk in 1946. Her success in securing the raising of the school-leaving age has to be tempered against the fact that in the then economic climate the secondary modern schools, far from achieving parity of esteem, were guaranteed inferior staffing and accommodation.

Her former Parliamentary Private Secretary, Billy Hughes (1979: 158),

argues that during her brief office she also attacked educational privilege by reducing the number of direct grant schools from 232 to 166 and she oversaw the introduction of university scholarships so that no one qualified should be deprived of a university education for financial reasons.

Wilkinson had to operate at a time when there was a desperate shortage of buildings and teachers, and she succeeded in increasing the education budget in a very difficult period where the Treasury controlled the ‘purse strings’ very tightly. She had also wanted to raise the school-leaving age to 16 and to provide universal free school meals. Both were ruled out on the grounds of cost.

It should also be emphasised that the new Labour administration (and the Party itself) had no clear policy on how to implement the 1944 Education Act and certainly had no coherent policy on comprehensive schooling, so all of Wilkinson’s activities have to be judged against that background and context. Inevitably, her own educational experiences influenced the rationale for the educational policies that she pursued. ‘What truly stirred her’, Tomlinson (2005: 152) notes, ‘in the wake of the 1944 Act, was the prospect of a new generation of bright, self-motivated, self-improving working-class children going to traditionally elite middle-class grammar schools and using this experience as a platform for future advance and fulfilment.’ Wilkinson, of course, in her own educational career, had benefited from this kind of experience.

Hargreaves (1985) argues that the Labour government, with Wilkinson at Education, missed a unique opportunity for the radical reform of the education system because it endorsed the tripartite system and postponed large-scale comprehensive reorganisation for almost two decades (cited in McNay and Ozga, 1985: 79).

In a more sympathetic vein, Rubenstein (1979: 167) argues that Wilkinson’s actions as Minister have to be understood in the context of her own origins and experiences, her advisers and her period as Minister. Nevertheless, he suggests that: ‘However worthy her motives, she delayed and attempted to prevent a crucially important reform at a crucially important time.’ Her failure to support comprehensivisation and hence her support for the tripartite system, and her failure to deal with private schools, were actions that were followed through by her successor, George Tomlinson, whose contributions are discussed below.

George Tomlinson

George Tomlinson was appointed as Minister of Education in 1947 following the sudden death of his predecessor, Ellen Wilkinson. He was born in 1890 in the industrial village of Rishton in Lancashire, and after elementary school worked full-time in the local mill. He joined the Independent Labour

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Party and began to establish himself in local politics, eventually becoming Vice-President of the Association of Education Committees. He became an MP in 1945 and was given the post of Minister of Works by Prime Minister Attlee.

As Minister of Education, a post he held for four and a half years, he acted with enthusiasm and application following the direction laid down by Wilkinson (Dean, 1986). Coming into office he stated that his job was '... to implement the 1944 Education Act for a generation. What I shall do is to secure the fullest co-operation between all Local Authorities, without whose help the scheme will fail' (Blackburn, 1954: 177). He had to deal with a number of key issues in his first years of office, in particular the school building programme, an increase in school places and the recruitment of teachers, each of which resulted from the pledge of 'secondary education for all', the postwar 'baby-boom' and the raising of the school-leaving age to 15. Although educational expenditure continued to rise during this period, Britain was still having to deal with enormous financial problems, and according to Dean (1986: 116) 'caution rather than innovation became the Government's guideline'. Nevertheless, Tomlinson was successful in increasing the number of new school places and ensured a rapid increase in the number of trained teachers.

Tomlinson has been criticised for his position on the comprehensive movement and on private schooling. His biographer, Blackburn, argues that: '... he was naturally interested in the idea of the comprehensive schools, but he took the line that he was going to give them every chance to prove themselves and was not going to use his powers to force their adoption anywhere' (1954: 193). Not all critics accept this interpretation. Kynaston (2007: 576) argues that he did little to encourage those backing comprehensive or 'multilateral' schools, and 'he either blocked, delayed or watered down various proposals that came across his desk'. Tomlinson is on record as saying that: 'The Party are kidding themselves if they think that the comprehensive school has any popular appeal' (Kynaston, 2007: 576). He also supported the official view on private schooling (the Labour Party and government were, on the whole, fairly silent about private education at this time) arguing that: '... I personally do not see the sense in getting rid of something that is doing a useful job of work, or making everything conform to a common pattern. I am all for variety, especially in the field of education' (Blackburn, 1954: 193). He, like many at this time, did not see the massive growth in the divide between middle-class and working-class pupils in their different schools.

On the issue of selection and the grammar schools, he seemed to follow the Party line at this time. Grammar schools were still seen to carry enormous prestige both locally and nationally, and were thought to act as an escalator for the talented and hard-working. This was a rationale which

would ring true in Tomlinson's case, as someone who through effort and application had himself 'made the grade'. He believed in 'parity of esteem' and thought that this could be achieved through the tripartite system (Carr and Hartnett, 1996).

Ill-health forced him out of politics and he died in 1952.

The Conservatives in power 1951–59

The Conservative government came into power in 1951 and would remain in office for a further 13 years. During the first period in office the Conservatives pursued much of the reforms that the previous Labour administration had set in motion (Dean, 1992).

The key politicians of this period – Churchill, Butler, Eden and Macmillan – had all had experience of the wartime Coalition government and, according to writers such as Dean (2006) in his analysis of the Conservative government from 1951 to 1955, 'this made it difficult for them to challenge the reforms instigated in this period.' Initially, this may have had some inhibiting influence on the actions of the Conservative Ministers of Education with only Sir David Eccles seemingly having the strength and confidence to act independently.

In what follows the policies pursued by the Conservative Party are examined through the contributions of the Ministers of Education of the period: Florence Horsbrugh, Sir David Eccles, Viscount Hailsham, Geoffrey Lloyd and Sir David Eccles in his second term of office.

Florence Horsbrugh was the Education Minister from 1951 to 1954 in the Conservative government led by Churchill. As senior minister, however, she remained out of the Cabinet until 1953 when she became the first woman to achieve a Cabinet position in a Conservative administration. Dean (2006) argues that her omission from the Cabinet weakened her standing with her partners in the educational world and, for much of her period in office, R.A. Butler was seen as the education spokesman.

In 1950–51 she had been chair of the Conservative parliamentary committee on education and having had a long and loyal career serving the Party, was seen to be a safe appointment in 1951.

Writers such as Hennessy (2006) and Dean (2006) argue that Horsbrugh spent much of her time struggling against the Treasury which was determined to squeeze the education budget. She seemed to be caught in a difficult position, having to make economies to satisfy the Treasury while angering many important interest groups and powerful political allies of the government (Dean, 2006). At this time, health and education seemed to lose out to expensive programmes in other priority fields such as defence and housing because the government was committed to the Cold War and reconstruction, albeit in an uncertain economic climate. Ironically, it was

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R. A. Butler, who as Chancellor declared a moratorium on the school-building programme, something he had fought for during his steering of the 1944 Act through Parliament. Thus Horsbrugh was forced to implement economies which reduced the school-building programme and consequently she found herself open to attacks about overcrowding and inadequate classrooms.

She had to deal with the possibility of lowering the school-leaving age to 14, to consider again charging fees for all secondary school pupils and restrict the numbers of children receiving education aged under five (Lowe, 1988).

Horsbrugh, according to Kynaston (2009: 114), 'although a conscientious Minister, lacked clout and charisma' and in Kogan's estimation was 'a dreary and disliked Minister who was brought only late into the Cabinet, who never fought for and never received an adequate educational budget' (cited in Lawton, 1994: 26).

Simon (1991: 162) is of the opinion that 'she gained a reputation as a cheese-paring Minister during her term of office', but despite her attempts to meet the economies demanded by the Treasury, Churchill remained dismissive and doubtful towards Horsbrugh and, in Simon's words, she was 'unceremoniously dropped and replaced by a very different character, Sir David Eccles, who would serve two terms in office' (Simon, 1991: 161).

According to Lawton (1994: 26), Eccles, alongside Butler and Boyle, is often seen as a modernising Conservative Education Minister and a Minister who was fascinated by educational policy-making and the school curriculum and examination system. He was successful in extracting money from the Treasury and this ability contrasts so starkly with that of his predecessor Florence Horsbrugh.

It must be recognised, as Kogan (1978: 34) aptly does, that at this time there was continuing optimism about economic growth and more resources for education were made available through Eccles's negotiating skills. Eccles held office during a period when, according to Chitty (2009: 24), 'education policy at national level was becoming increasingly "non-partisan" and even almost "bipartisan".'

At an NUT conference in 1955, he outlined his five working rules on secondary education (Gosden, 1983: 31, cited in Lawton, 1994: 26) and these, in Kogan's (1978) opinion, express clearly his 'optimism and opportunism':

1. A new range of 15–25 per cent for grammar plus technical school places.
2. New technical schools would be approved where there was a very strong case.
3. Modern schools would be encouraged to develop extended courses and to strengthen their links with grammar and technical schools, and with further education.