



‘Free Schools’: the role of Conservative and Liberal political thought in shaping the Policy

**Submission for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Education
by**

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Word Count: 99,767
Submission Date: 9th October 2015

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ABSTRACT

‘The landscape of schooling in England has been transformed over the last five years’ (House of Commons Education Committee, 2015:3). More than half of secondary schools in England have become academies, independent of local authorities and funded directly by central government. The programme was begun by New Labour in 2002, and by the time they left office at the 2010 General Election 203 academies had been established. The policy was considerably extended between 2010-2015 by the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition, and ‘Free Schools’ were introduced by Education Secretary Michael Gove: that is, schools ‘set up in response to what local people say they want and need in order to improve education for children in their community’ (DfE, 2013/2015). By the time of the 2015 general election, there were 4,674 newly-sponsored or converter academies and 252 ‘Free Schools’, representing 64% of secondary school students (47% of all state school students), and 51% of secondary schools (32% of all state schools). This research argues the hypothesis that there is a high degree of philosophical continuity on this policy across the main political parties in England. It also analyses the extent to which the policy-makers invoke historical expressions of conservatism and/or liberalism in their articulation of that convergence. Drawing on past associations with politicians, the principal expositors and key architects of the ‘Free Schools’ policy were interviewed, and these transcripts have given insight into how the themes of policy are conceptualised and understood. The data suggests that there are convergent philosophical views across the main political parties, and agreement on the course of history of the policy. There are, however, ethical concerns about the pace of reform, the primacy of the ‘market’, and the extent to which democratic public goods are consistent with schools that are ‘free’.

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Doctor of Philosophy in Education

Trinity 2015

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have many people to thank for their patient advice, encouragement and guidance in the shaping of this research, if not for all the preceding years in political and professional education which led to it.

Firstly, I'd like to acknowledge a few *ad hoc* educational sparring partners, whose brains I have occasionally picked or Twitter accounts probed: Toby Young, co-founder of the West London Free School; Laura McInerney, 'Editor of *Schools Week*, *Guardian* columnist, FOI Warrior'; Jonathan Simons, Head of Education at Policy Exchange; and, sadly no longer with us, Sir Chris Woodhead, Her Majesty's former Chief Inspector of Schools, who was always on the end of a phone to counsel, share or interrogate when needed.

I would also like to thank my former Faculty of Politics & Philosophy at Slough Grammar School, which I led for some of the most fulfilling years of my professional life, teaching A-level Politics and IB Philosophy. Particular thanks to my pastoral and theological deputy, Susan Jesudason; my right-hand man and spiritual guru, Rishi Handa; my ever-fragrant and inspirational 'minion', Sally Martin; my philosophical deputy, Crispian Farrow; and Jonathan Peel, who popped in from time to time to enthuse young minds with the joys of epistemology. I also owe much to Ruth Symons and Zelda Marais, with whom I shared an office through a few sad months but very many happy years; and to Mike Brown, who taught me the meaning of school leadership by simply being. I am also indebted to Dr Niki Elliot in the Faculty of Development and Society at Sheffield Hallam University, who introduced her 'Masters in Education' programme when I became Assistant Principal with responsibility for whole-school Teaching & Learning, and who patiently taught cohorts of teachers (including me) that learning is for life. In addition, I'd like to thank John Puddefoot and Tony Little at Eton College, whose occasional writings, brief meetings and wise interjections nudged me in ways they'll never know.

From the world of politics, I am deeply grateful to all of those who have generously given of their time over the years – not only by being interviewed as part of this research, but by participating in the honing of insights and being passionate about state education. In particular, I want to thank Michael Gove MP for being so generous toward me before he entered politics, and during his years as Shadow Education Secretary and then as Secretary of State. And Chris Skidmore MP, whom I first met when he was an education advisor, and who invited me to participate in a small way during the Free School developmental years in opposition. My appreciation also to Matthew Taylor at the RSA; Stephen Twigg MP; Andrew, Lord Adonis; David Blunkett MP; Conor Ryan at

the Sutton Trust; Nick Gibb MP; Jesse Norman MP; James O'Shaughnessy at the Jubilee Centre; Matthew Hancock MP; Ed Balls MP; Nick Boles MP; Kenneth, Lord Baker; and one anonymous Liberal Democrat who, despite preferring not to put his/her head over the parapet of Coalition altercations, offered some of the important 'outlier' insights into free-school philosophy and possible consequences for local democracy.

Though no longer with us, it would be remiss of me not to thank Margaret, Baroness Thatcher, for the brief meetings and occasional briefer conversations we had over two decades about academic selection, moral education and the seemingly intractable complexities of competing educational interests in 'the system'. We didn't always agree, but I never left her presence without knowing precisely why and to what extent I was wrong. She stamped something on my consciousness. Talking again to Lord Baker roused a few memories: her vision and passion for fundamental educational reform was the historic impetus and philosophical inspiration for this research. I also want to pay tribute to Ralph, Lord Harris, founder of the IEA, whose marketised insights and wit I also miss enormously. And to David Cameron, who was (very briefly) Shadow Education Secretary when I first met him: we only really had time for one meeting, though it went on for two hours and was followed by courteous and helpful correspondence. I never doubted that his absolute primary imperative on becoming Prime Minister would be the immediate passage through Parliament of what became the *Academies Act 2010*.

In the academic world, I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to my supervisors at the University of Oxford, who have patiently juggled diaries as I've straddled two faculties: Dr Liam Gearon and Professor Pam Sammons in the Department of Education; and Professor Iain McLean in the Department of Politics and International Relations. Their expertise, wisdom and professionalism have been exemplary. I would also like to thank Professor Mark Chapman and Professor Martyn Percy in the Department of Theology, who first taught me how to observe, ponder and produce meaningful, useful research. A cumulative decade at Oxford has left enduring bumps, impressions, revelations and a few scars: I wear them with degrees of pride.

And finally, I'd like to thank a few teachers – my teachers – from the very happy years I spent at the Priory Grammar School for Boys in Shrewsbury, in particular: Roger Calvert, Jean Tidy, Daphne Cooper, Alan Viner, and my Headmaster, Mr MA Thorpe, MA (Cantab), who clearly held it all together in ways that a boy could never understand or really appreciate.

Adrian Hilton
9th October 2015

GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

A-level	Advanced level examinations
AFL	Assessment for learning
APS	Assisted Places Scheme
ASCL	Association of school and college leaders
ATL	Association of Teachers and Lecturers
BERA	British Education Research Association
BME	Black and Minority Ethnic
CAF	Common Assessment Framework
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
CDT	Craft, Design and Technology
CTC	City Technology College
CIF	Common Inspection Framework
CPS	Classroom Teachers Pay Spine
CTC	City Technology College
CUREC	Central University Research Ethics Committee
CVA	Contextual Value Added
D&T	Design and Technology
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DfES	Department for Education and Science
DfE	Department for Education
DPA	Data Protection Act
EAZ	Education Action Zone
EBacc	English Baccalaureate
EBP	Education Business Partnership
EiC	Excellence in Cities
EIP	Education Improvement Partnerships
EMC	Education Media Centre
EPA	Education Priority Area
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
EU	European Union
FE	Further Education
FOI	Freedom of Information
FSM	Free School Meals
G&T	Gifted and Talented
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education

GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GM	Grant Maintained
GTC	General Teaching Council
H&S	Health and Safety
HMCI	Her Majesty's Chief Inspector
HMSO	Her Majesty's Stationery Office
IB	International Baccalaureate
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IEA	Institute of Economic Affairs
ILEA	Inner London Education Authority
IPPR	Institute for Public Policy Research
LA	Local Authority
LC	London Challenge
LEA	Local Education Authority
LMS	Local Management of Schools
LSE	London School of Economics
MAT	Multi-Academy Trust
NAHT	National Association of Head teachers
NAO	National Audit Office
NASUWT	National Association of School Teachers/Union of Women Teachers
NC	National Curriculum
NLP	National Literacy Project
NPD	National Pupil Database
NPQH	National Professional Qualification for Headship
NQT	Newly Qualified Teacher
NSN	New Schools Network
NUT	National Union of Teachers
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
OFQUAL	Office for Qualifications and examinations regulation
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education
PANDA	Performance and Data Analysis
PE	Physical Education
PGCE	Postgraduate Certificate of Education
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PFI	Private Finance Initiative
PRP	Performance Related Pay
PRU	Pupil Referral Unit
PSHE	Personal, Social and Health Education

PSHCE	Personal, Social, Health and Citizenship Education
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
QCDA	Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency
QTPS	Qualified Teachers Pay Spine
QTS	Qualified Teacher Status
RE	Religious Education
RSA	Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce
RSC	Regional Schools Commissioner
SACRE	Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education
SED	Scottish Education Department
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SEU	Standards and Effectiveness Unit
SIP	School Improvement Partner
SMCP	Social Mobility and Child Poverty
SMSC	Spiritual Moral Social Cultural
SNP	Scottish National Party
SRE	Sex and Relationship Education
TES	<i>Times Educational Supplement</i>
UTC	University Technology College
VA	Voluntary Aided
VC	Voluntary Controlled

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Part One

Objectives, Context and Rationale

The purpose of this section is: i) to describe the objectives and scope of this study; ii) to define and summarise the ‘Free School’ policy; and iii) to provide an account of the broad context of the thesis from two main perspectives – those of political and academic proponents and detractors (Chapter I). And then: iv) to set out the political-philosophical context of reform; and v) to introduce the educational philosophy of the policy architects (Chapter II).

CHAPTER I

POLITICAL AND ACADEMIC BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

This thesis aims to interrogate understandings of Conservative-Liberal Democrat education policy on ‘Free Schools’ (created by *Academies Act 2010* §9): i) in historical philosophical context; and ii) by engaging in depth with the conceptualisation and self-expression of the principal architects of the policy. The purpose is not to assess the ‘success’ (or otherwise) of the policy of ‘academisation’ – that is, freeing schools from local authority control/influence – in terms of institutional liberty, parental empowerment, democratic communitarianism or academic outcomes, not least because politicians across the parties accept that:

There is a complex relationship between attainment, autonomy, collaboration and accountability. Current evidence does not allow us to draw conclusions on whether academies in themselves are a positive force for change. This is partly a matter of timing but more information is needed on the performance of individual academy chains (House of Commons Education Committee, 2015).

This political assertion has received academic corroboration from Francis (EMC, 2015), who observes that ‘the evidence on whether or not academies have had more success in raising attainment than other equivalent schools is mixed, and hard to pin down’. When I began this research, the evidence was deemed either ‘conflicting’ (Hatcher, 2011:500), or, more forthrightly, ‘it does not appear that the Government’s Free Schools policy is based on robust evidence’ (Sammons, 2011:375). The variables are numerous: ‘The more complex the initiative, the more difficult it becomes to disentangle what aspects of it have brought about change’ (Hutchings, Greenwood *et al.*, 2012:9). Data is now beginning to be analysed on certain issues of social justice: for example, the impact of academisation on the attainment of disadvantaged young people (e.g., Hutchings, Francis, De Vries, 2014); and on school access equality and segregation, where it is concluded that ‘there is no evidence that the academies programme itself has increased segregation’ (West, A, 2014:344). The think-tank Policy Exchange (a proponent of the policy) finds evidence (noting ‘entanglement’ variables [new leadership, etc.]) that ‘Free Schools’ are ‘helping to raise standards not just for the pupils who attend them but for other pupils across the local community’ (Porter & Simons, 2015:6 cf. Stewart, 2015), which is corroborated by a Centre for Economic Performance (LSE) discussion paper which finds ‘significant performance improvements for pupils treated by academy conversion... (which were) more pronounced for those attending schools that gained the greatest autonomy (Eyles & Machin, 2015:25).

While such reports constitute an important part of the context of this thesis, I am concerned not with ‘researching down’ to assess empirical measurements of stakeholder empowerment, selection bias or the relative merits of institutional emancipation, but ‘researching up’ to the architects of policy and their networks to interrogate an understanding of the history and philosophical rationale for ‘Free Schools’. In this context, it is worth remembering that:

The reality (of the role of central government in education) is considerably more complex than any simple conspiracy theory would suggest with different sorts of interests and different levels of concern combining to produce a pattern of power-relations which is dominated by the informal processes of personal negotiation. To illuminate these processes detailed empirical studies... are required... (T)he normative assumptions on which such interaction is based are the real source of power albeit unremarked and unopposed since they carry the power to determine selectively the way in which issues are discussed and the solutions proposed. How this influence is exerted – through participation – in key committees in particular also requires detailed study... (Broadfoot, 1986:61).

This is not, I propose, a ‘simple conspiracy theory’ of a ‘New Right’ agenda of ‘fiscal imperatives’ and ‘quasi-markets’ which may be conveniently slotted into a ‘neoliberal project for education’ (Gordon & Whitty, 1997:453). I shall expound the philosophical terms in due course, but, by way of introduction, my thesis is concerned with the philosophical derivation and historical provenance of ‘Free Schools’ which are, as Broadfoot avers, complex and nuanced, in particular with regard to how policy is developed and ‘influence is exerted’ in political ‘power-relations’. The objective to interrogate these complexities determines the design of the study, which is set out fully in Part Three, but, in summary, I explore ‘elite’ responses to a series of semi-structured, open-ended questions with the principal architects of ‘Free Schools’ – that is, the politicians and their network of advisors.

i) OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE

There are three primary research questions which reflect the task I have set out. These relate to: understanding the political and socio-cultural context of the policy’s emergence (Q1); exegesis of the relevant historical philosophical traditions (Q2); and how and to what extent political elites draw from and construct the meaning of ‘Free Schools’ around conservative and/or liberal¹ philosophy (Q3). These primary areas are divided into sub-questions:

Q1) What was the socio-political context of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition’s education policy?

a) How are ‘Free Schools’ situated within the overarching themes of Coalition policy?

¹ I adhere throughout to the convention observed by Scruton (2001:195): ‘Conservatism with a capital C refers to the party; with a small c to the system of beliefs which that party may or may not embody.’ I apply this convention also to distinguish between Liberalism and liberalism and also to other philosophies.

b) How and to what extent do the principal themes of policy on 'Free Schools' represent continuity with the education policies of previous Conservative, Labour or Liberal administrations?

Q2) What are the historical-philosophical origins of the 'Free School' themes of policy?

- a) What may be understood by a conservative philosophy of education?
- b) What may be understood by a liberal philosophy of education?
- c) How are 'Free Schools' consistent with historic conservative/liberal philosophy?

Q3) How do political elites conceptualise their understanding of conservative-liberal education policy on 'Free Schools'?

- a) How may their own educational experiences have contributed to the policy?
- b) How do they express their understanding of 'Free Schools' i) as part of the present socio-political context; ii) in historical and philosophical perspective?

These questions drive the research design, which is, in large part, an 'insider' inquiry. Having been involved in politics and a former (*ad hoc*) advisor to Michael Gove, I have the necessary knowledge to appear competent and informed (Robson, 2011:402), and there were members of Gove's team whom I knew well. While I never had any guarantees of privileged access, I do possess, as Robson (p404) stipulates, 'street credibility': I know 'how best to approach people' and have 'intimate knowledge of the context of the study, both as it is at present and in a historical or developmental perspective' (p203). This was complemented by a high degree of 'outsider' objectivity by virtue of a three-year period of detachment from political processes and people: I did not follow former colleagues into a governmental advisory role; nor did I associate with individuals after the 2010 General Election other than in pursuit of this research. The methodological issues arising are discussed further in Chapter VI.i.

During the period of this research, Michael Gove MP (Conservative) was Secretary of State for Education, and Stephen Twigg MP (Labour) was Shadow Secretary of State, replacing Andy Burnham MP in 2011. In the 2010-2015 Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition (hereafter, 'the Coalition'), Gove was partnered by Sarah Teather MP (Liberal Democrat) as Minister of State for Children and Families. Nick Gibb MP was Minister of State for Schools. He left the Government in a ministerial reshuffle in 2012, but returned to the same Department (and to the same post) in 2014. Teather resigned in 2012, and the Liberal Democrat presence in the DfE was continued by David Laws MP who was appointed Minister of State for Schools. In subsequent reshuffles, Twigg was replaced by Tristram Hunt MP in 2013, and Gove was replaced by Nicky Morgan MP in 2014. With

the exception of Burnham and Morgan (who respectively preceded and succeeded my 2012-13 interview window), all of the above were invited to contribute to this research, along with some of their ministerial predecessors and political advisors whose philosophies and/or policies have contributed in some degree to the development of ‘Free Schools’. Not all accepted (Teather, Laws and Hunt declined). Others who contributed include politicians Kenneth (Lord) Baker, Andrew (Lord) Adonis, David Blunkett MP, Ed Balls MP, Chris Skidmore MP, Jesse Norman MP, Nick Boles MP, Matthew Hancock MP; and political advisors Matthew Taylor, Conor Ryan and James O’Shaughnessy. The rationale for interviewing each is set out in chapters VI.ii and VII.i. One Liberal Democrat agreed to be interviewed with the proviso of assured anonymity, perhaps reflecting something of the fraught political context of the Coalition and ongoing intra-party divisions.

This is the first doctoral inquiry into the history and philosophy of ‘Free Schools’, and the first attempt to synthesise the insights of the architects of that policy, spanning three decades. It offers a unique insight into educational policy-making during the Coalition years, and makes an original contribution to historical and philosophical knowledge – to which politicians and academics might turn for a reasoned analysis; and which teachers, parents, business leaders, school governors and other interested parties might consider as they seek greater understanding of what is emerging as the new political settlement for state education in England: ‘one of the most radical and encompassing programmes of school reform seen in the recent past amongst advanced countries’ (Eyles & Machin, 2015:i)

ii) ‘FREE SCHOOL’ POLICY

The term ‘Free Schools’ does not appear in statutory legislation: it first appeared in the Conservative Party’s 2001 manifesto, which announced:

Conservatives will introduce “Free Schools”. We will free every school in the country from bureaucratic control and allow them to shape their own character... Letting our best schools expand isn’t enough. We want to see good new schools springing up (Conservative Party, 2001:8).

Following the 2010 General Election and the formation of the Coalition, the term was used in the White Paper *The Importance of Teaching*, in which the pledge was to ‘(s)upport teachers and parents to set up new ‘Free Schools’ to meet parental demand, especially in areas of deprivation (DfE, 2010a:12). These schools were established by the *Academies Act 2010*, though actually referred to as ‘additional schools’ in that Act (§9); that is, additional to converter academies. ‘Free Schools’ are conceptually and legally an extension of Labour’s ‘Academy’² programme (created by *Education Act 2002* §65), which are sponsored, all-ability, state-funded schools, independent of the local

² This term, and that of ‘Free Schools’, hereafter without quotation marks, as this thesis will refer to both many times. The continued use of ‘scare quotes’ suggests a definitional distancing or disagreement with an intended meaning.

authority, in receipt of funding direct from central government. Labour encouraged schools to become academies in order ‘to extend diversity within the state sector and raise standards where existing provision is inadequate’ (Astle & Ryan, 2008:4). It would be simplistic to view the school’s funding arrangement as Labour’s sole determinant or policy initiative to raise standards: academies were accompanied by such programmes as ‘Education Action Zones’ (EAZ), ‘Excellence in Cities’ (EiC) and ‘London Challenge’ (LC) – all designed to improve educational attainment (see Sammons, 2008:653). Free Schools are simply start-up academies, or ‘academies without a predecessor state school’ (Adonis, 2012a:254), identical in law and governance, with greater scope to innovate and learn from successful practice elsewhere (DfE, 2010a): that is to say, the Academy and Free School are both *free schools*.³ Qualifying independent schools cannot become academies, but must apply instead to become a Free School – effectively a state-funded independent school. Where they were selective, admissions policies must be brought into line with the statutory Admissions Code and the school subject to Ofsted inspection under the same framework that applies to all publicly-funded schools.

The vernacular ‘Free School’ (or, indeed, ‘free school’) label is contentious, not least because none of these schools is free in any obvious sense. They are: (i) financed by the taxpayer, so ‘free’ only in the sense that parents do not receive invoices for tuition, as in the private sector; (ii) accountable to governing bodies, and these include sponsors with a financial or commercial interests; and (iii) subject to franchising by the DfE, and so bound by the will of the Secretary of State. It may be adduced, therefore, that the term ‘Free School’ is little more than a demotic ‘feel-good’ term⁴ – rhetoric adopted by the Coalition in order to distinguish policy ownership from that of the New Labour era. Indeed, Adonis (2012c) made that precise allegation: ‘The only reason why the Tories invented the term “free school” was to pretend they were doing something fundamentally different, instead of continuing one of Labour’s most successful policies.’ But he concedes the utilitarian ‘borrowing’ provenance of the term ‘Academies’: for him, they ‘invoked the strong Scottish “academy” brand... I wanted a brand to compete with “grammar school” and “independent school”, the two strongest in the business’ (Adonis, 2012a:61f).

While Labour’s academies ‘were (initially) designed as a school improvement policy tool’ (West, A, 2014:335), being ‘located in areas of very high deprivation with a relentless focus on overcoming disadvantage’ (Adonis, 2012a:254), this socio-economic limitation was abandoned by the Coalition: the *Academies Act 2010* permits groups of ‘suitable’ parents, teachers, charities, universities, business, community or faith groups to establish a Free School wherever there is

³ I shall hereafter distinguish post-2010 Free Schools from free schools (i.e., schools that were historically or are presently equally or comparatively ‘free’) with upper/lower case designation.

⁴ The same, of course, may also be said of Labour’s appropriation of the term ‘Academy’, with its allusions to Platonic educational ideals and a state curriculum fashioned on that in *The Republic*. There is also the moral economy dimension – the development of self-discipline and the ‘good character’ to discern right and just action – which might have informed the Adonis vision (see, for example, *Education with Character* [Arthur, 2003:29-31] and *Moral and Political Education* [Macedo & Tamir, 2002:363-365]).

‘evidence of demand’ (Gillie & Bolton, 2010:1). This institutional diversification then creates an education ‘market’ in which we are told that parental choice will place competitive pressures upon schools to improve standards (DfE, 2010a), continuing a Conservative theme of policy from the 1980s which was framed explicitly in the 1992 White Paper *Choice and Diversity*, which stated: ‘..parental wishes expressed through choice of school will drive improvements’ (HMSO, 1992:15).

The principal choice categories of Free School are: ‘Mainstream’ (all-ability primary, secondary middle or all-through schools); ‘16-19’ (post-16 or sixth-form colleges); ‘Special’ (primarily for pupils with statements of SEN); and ‘Alternative Provision’ (where admission is by referral, for example due to chronic illness, exclusions or behavioural issues). To these may be added ‘Studio Schools’ (14-19, focusing on project-based practical skills, often in partnership with local employers), and UTCs (University Technology Colleges, 14-19, sponsored by universities, often in partnership with businesses and FE colleges). Some universities have established Free Schools with subject specialisms (e.g., King’s College London Mathematics School [16-19 sixth form]); and prominent private schools Eton College and Wellington College have both sponsored non-selective Free Schools. At the time of writing, more than 400 private companies and 45 universities had partnered with UTCs.

UK devolution and ‘British values’

The historic and on-going process of administrative devolution within the UK limits the statutory jurisdiction of the *Academies Act 2010*: ‘While sections of the Act do technically extend to Wales, the effect of the provisions will only permit an academy to be established in England, so it will have no practical impact on, or application to, the organisation of schools in Wales’ (DfE 2010b). Education policy in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is the historic or recently-devolved competence of their respective parliament and legislative assemblies (see Gearon, 2002, for a historic and political overview), so this thesis is concerned only with free schools in England. There are, however, educational traditions and developments in Scotland which merit some scrutiny, not least because of Gove’s own experience of primary and secondary education which was within the Scottish system: he frequently referred to the tradition of the Scottish ‘democratic intellect’; ‘the virtues that shaped Scottish education shaped me’ (Gove, 2009a). Such statements may be seen to be ‘crafting the narrative’ (Arnott & Ozga, 2010:335) of reform identity, perhaps, in part, to position the superiority of his philosophy contra that of the English education establishment or ‘policy community’ which preceded him. This was not without significance in the narrative of educational governance since the election of the SNP minority executive in May 2007; and in the operation of an established ‘policy community’ in Scotland which has historically coalesced to develop and implement policy (see McPherson & Raab, 1988).

The establishment of Free Schools has been contiguous with a greater emphasis on institutional ethos and the mandatory cultivation of ‘Fundamental British values’ (DfE, 2012a:5). The suitability of those who wish to establish a Free School is assessed by the Secretary of State, who ‘will reject any applications put forward by organisations which advocate violence or other illegal activities, or by individuals associated with such organisations. In order to be approved, applications need to demonstrate that they would support UK democratic values including respect for the basis on which UK laws are made and applied; respect for democracy; support for individual liberties within the law; and mutual tolerance and respect’ (DfE, 2011a:8).

With the development of a codified values-orientated framework, a new state morality is being inculcated: it is the educative means by which cohesive social, moral and economic values are propagated. Examination of this necessitates some understanding of the historic and contemporary contexts as they relate to the status of the Church of England; the post-war Christian settlement in education which has been sustained by all governments; the political history of Nonconformist and Liberal (Whiggish) opposition to the Established Church; and the present challenges to that establishment posed by increasing ethnic pluralism and secularisation.⁵ The 1944 ‘Butler Act’, which codified the church-state educational settlement in England, is fundamentally challenged by free schools: the shift is away from the historic “‘One Nation’⁶ assumptions’ (Chadwick, 2001:486) of the Anglican framework toward more diverse expressions of a religious (or possibly atheistic) school ethos within a ‘neutral’ context of state secularity. Could, for example, an atheist/humanist group establish a Free School and thereby abolish statutory RE and the ‘daily act of collective worship’? If they may, are Academy converters also free to derogate? If ethos is devolved and a school is free to forge a unique curriculum provided that it incorporate Maths, English and Science, why should RE remain mandatory if Citizenship is optional? Such socio-political questions go to the essential philosophical nexus: ‘How free are free schools?’

iii) PROPONENTS AND DETRACTORS

‘Educational debate about school reforms tends to become polarised between opposing camps’ (Bamfield *et al.*, 2013:8). Being a relatively new and still evolving policy, very little has been written on Free Schools in the academic spheres of either Political Science or Education. Much more has been written about Academies and the ongoing process of academisation, and the literature serves different functions – there is the ‘official’ debate and the ‘public’ debate: the former being concerned

⁵ Theories of secularisation are beyond the scope of this research. When I use the term, I refer to the fact that ‘people’s perception of social ordering now seldom depends on theological, religious or meta-moral constructions of reality’ (Percy, 2005:60).

⁶ ‘One Nation’ is a term which is frequently applied to the ‘left’ of the Conservative Party, derived indirectly from Disraeli’s *Sybil, or the Two Nations*, in which he described Britain as: ‘Two nations between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other’s habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets: the rich and the poor’ (Disraeli, 1868:ix).

with matters of legislation, parliamentary process or guidance on policy; the latter with media and professional commentary upon or academic analysis of policy, process or legislation. For example, a speech made by the Secretary of State to a favoured think-tank does not serve the same purpose as a speech delivered in Parliament; and neither of these fulfils the same function as an article written for a tabloid newspaper, or a subsequent biographical account of self-justification or ideological apologetic. In my survey of what literature there is, I am concerned with ‘understanding the information relayed and the underlying values and assumptions of the author, as well as any arguments developed’ (Cohen *et al.*, 2011:253).

Free schools constitute a contentious area in academia, despite the apparent emerging cross-party consensus. By ‘consensus’ here I mean the broad one of the three main political parties in England introducing successive statutes over the past 35 years to liberate state schools from local-authority (LEA/LA) control, and increase institutional diversity. While the ‘Baker Act’ substantially increased diversity through the opportunity presented to schools in the state sector to opt for Grant Maintained (GM) status and first permitted persons other than the LA to establish new schools, the first steps toward greater choice and diversification actually came with the *Education Act 1980*, which increased parental choice (and power vis-à-vis LAs), and established the Assisted Places Scheme (APS, permitting tax-payer funding for children to attend private schools).

In 2005, New Labour adopted the theme: they were concerned with ‘freeing up schools to innovate and succeed, bringing in new dynamism and new providers... increasingly driven by parents and by choice’ (DfES, 2005:7). There had long been cross-party unity in the belief that something needed to be done to improve academic standards in the hundreds of ‘failing comprehensive schools’ which were ‘a cancer at the heart of English society’ (Adonis, 2012a:xii). This is political phraseology: academics are divided not only on the diagnosis of ‘cancer’ (e.g., Tomlinson, 2013), but also on the extent of the alleged ‘failure’ and the impact of past reforms for improvement made by successive governments (e.g., Sammons, 2008). They are also divided on the prescription of treatment: for Pring (2013), academisation is a ‘great betrayal’ which heralds ‘the end of secondary education for all’:

We are witnessing the most radical change in public education in England since the Second World War. But unlike the reforms of 1944, which introduced *secondary education for all*, the present ones are being pushed through with minimum parliamentary or public debate. For instance, we are witnessing draconian increase in central ministerial power, the removal of local democratic decision-making, the impoverishing system of accountability through high-stakes testing and league tables, the narrowing of learning experience, the undermining of teachers’ professionalism, the privatisation of education in place of public service, and yet another reform of qualifications with the EBacc.

These sorts of academic observations, like the political ones, raise methodological issues, specifically relating to meaning and the positioning or posturing for a particular audience (or parliamentary vote). On the claim of a ‘draconian increase in central ministerial power’, there are questions of plausibility

and hyperbole: the narrative seems to be one of the ‘educational establishment’ versus ‘the Tories’; or, alternatively, ‘the Blob’ (Gove, 2013b) versus ‘the current hegemony’ (Tomlinson, 2013). The ‘Blob’ metaphor was first used in the UK context by former Chief Inspector of Schools Chris Woodhead:

(The term) is taken from a 1958 science-fiction film about a giant amoeba-like alien that terrorises a small American town. The Blob seeps into every corner of the community, and subsumes any attempt to destroy it, becoming more powerful with every attack. It is a convenient metaphor for what Gove calls the education establishment. Teaching unions, local education authorities, teacher training providers, and education quangos are the core components of the Blob - a bloated morass of vested interests (Hunter, 2013).

Contra this are assertions by educationalists like Pring, who said that the government (i.e., the Coalition) was ‘driven by the belief that in a comprehensive global economy all citizens should be economically proactive’, as though Conservatives and Liberal Democrats were heir to a particular unitary ideology of political economy, despite their reforms being based on policies adopted by New Labour, supporters of which called for an ‘education revolution’ even before Blair won power (e.g., Barber, 1996 cf. ‘complete revolution’ [2008:22]). Phrases like ‘rigid ideology’ and allegations of being ‘driven by belief’ or ‘dogma’ are a natural part of democratic political discourse, and it is necessary to attempt to distinguish between political fact and rhetorical sophistry – hence the ‘elite’ interviews, which attempt to excavate beneath the demotic fray.

Pre-Coalition philosophical consensus

The Conservative Party’s manifesto for the 2010 General Election made commitments to: i) ‘break down barriers to entry so that any good education provider can set up a new academy school’; ii) ‘establish new Academy schools in the most deprived areas of the country’; iii) ‘(ensure) all existing schools will have the chance to achieve academy status, with “outstanding” schools pre-approved; iii) ‘extend the Academy programme to primary schools and give parents the power to save local schools threatened by closure; and iv) ‘make sure academies have the freedoms that helped to make them so successful in the first place’ (Conservative Party, 2010b:53). The Liberal Democrat Party’s manifesto for the 2010 General Election made commitments to: i) ‘free schools from the present stranglehold of central government control and encourage them to be genuinely innovative’; ii) ‘Introduce an Education Freedom Act banning politicians from getting involved in the day-to-day running of schools’; iii) ‘allow other appropriate providers, such as educational charities and parent groups, to be involved in delivering state-funded education’; and iv) ‘Allow parents to continue to choose faith-based schools within the state-funded sector and allow the establishment of new faith schools’ (Liberal Democrats, 2010:34, 36).

Both parties were intent on pursuing a distinctly liberal policy toward devolution of power direct to schools and parents, balanced with conserved powers to improve educational standards and outcomes assessed through inspection (continuing the unifying ‘five great themes’ expressed 18

years earlier as ‘quality, diversity, parental choice, greater school autonomy and greater accountability’ [Docking, 1996:xv]). The *Coalition Agreement* ultimately articulated the liberal-conservative ‘tension’ as:

We will promote the reform of schools in order to ensure that new providers can enter the state school system in response to parental demand; that all schools have greater freedom over the curriculum; and that all schools are held properly to account (Cabinet Office 2010:28).

Trade Union reaction

The policy caused some to take entrenched critical positions, while others were more volatile and equivocal. The main teaching unions – ATL, NUT and NASUWT – were respectively of the opinion that Free Schools are ‘completely undemocratic’ (Bousted, 2011); that they stem from ‘the Conservative Party’s ideological commitment to the introduction of a chaotic marketplace’ (Blower, 2010); and that they open the door to ‘members of racist and fascist organisations working in schools’ (Roach, 2012). The NUT and NASUWT demanded that their members take industrial action – a ‘work-to-rule’ – for reasons which were dismissed by Gove (2013a) as amounting to: ‘we don’t like the last 25 years of education reform, why can’t we party like it’s 1968?’ Negative reaction from sections of the teaching profession may be traced back to Labour’s Academy reforms, when there was an observable ‘teacher resentment of perceived Government prescription and lack of confidence in teachers’ professional skills’ (Sammons, 2008:660).

Despite the decision to retain Labour’s admissions criteria to ensure greater equality of access, the perception persisted that Free Schools were concerned with selection by ability and the narrowing of parental choice. Nansi Ellis, head of education policy at the ATL (often considered the most moderate⁷ of the teaching unions) posited:

A one-size-fits-all suite of qualifications will not develop the diverse range of skills and aptitudes of all young people. If the Government insists on returning to a 1950s grammar school education and qualifications it will discriminate against the thousands of young people who will be more successful in other subjects and more practical qualifications (Ellis, 2011).

While reforms to school structure and governance are *prima facie* conceptually distinct from the concerns surrounding the National Curriculum (NC), they are associated because Free Schools were advanced under the aegis of ‘localism’, so valid questions arise as to how central prescription of the curriculum is consistent with or relevant to such a model. And the conflation of the two issues was understandable in the context of Gove’s own apparent contradictions in talking about a devolved free-school curriculum which is not only constrained to satisfy the requirements of the *Education Act 2002* (that it be ‘balanced and broadly based’ [HMSO, 2010 §1; 2002 §78]), but also constricted by centralised qualifications which determine the syllabus. Hunt (2012) referred to this as ‘Gove’s Paradox’ – the assertion that the Free School agenda is ‘at odds’ with inculcating ‘a certain vision of

⁷ This is often measured in terms of ballots for strike action against the policies of the government of the day (Redman & Snape, 2006). Unlike other teaching unions, the ATL has balloted its members only once in its history, for strike action on 30 June 2011.

history'. Interestingly, on the theme of devolution 'tension', at their 2013 annual conference the National Association of Head Teachers passed a resolution expressing concern that 'too much power is currently given to one person to determine national policy on the basis of personal preference and ideologically-driven assumption' (NAHT, 2013:11). Former chief education officer of the ILEA Sir Peter Newsam (2011) claimed that the office of Secretary of State for Education had become 'totalitarian': decision-making derives from a single-source with 'dictatorial powers' (Rosen, 2013).

Labour Party reaction

Balls (2010) was concerned that 'it is children from poorer families and with special educational needs who will disproportionately lose out'. Miliband (2010) said the policy was about 'empowering the already empowered without any obligation to help the disempowered'. Burnham (2011) was of the view that Free Schools amount to 'Two-tier education and selection by the back-door' because the 'comprehensive ideal...is under attack'. Fiona Millar, a prominent Labour activist and director of the campaign group 'The Truth About Our Schools', said: 'It is very important that Michael Gove and his policies are challenged vigorously... (I) feel Labour policy is too vague at the moment' (Murphy, 2013). And yet Will Hutton, former editor of *The Observer* and current Principal of Hertford College, Oxford, changed his mind on the matter:

I have slowly become a convert to Adonis's advocacy of academies... Academies have autonomy, a proved precondition of academic success. Importantly, private schools in financial difficulty can convert to academy status. Suddenly, the state becomes a legitimate education provider of the best, rather than a defender of the second best. And crucially, academies put private school ideology on the back foot... We are at the beginning of what promises to be a long process, but for the first time in my adult life, I can see how the divisiveness of private education could become socially stigmatised rather than celebrated (Hutton, 2013).

The Millar-Hutton division is indicative of the ongoing debate within the wider Labour movement: the Blair/Adonis/Blunkett Academy programme proved controversial and internally divisive, and the contradictions became manifest. For example, Twigg (2013) made it known that 'Labour will not continue with the Michael Gove's Free Schools policy', yet those that were already open or in development would not be closed. He explained:

What we will have is a new academies programme including parent-led academies, really good teacher-led academies like Peter Hyman's school in East London – those sorts of things. We would want the opportunity for those schools to open... (Kirkup, 2013).

This led Adonis (2013) to clarify: 'Labour will enable more parent-led academies, like the West London Free School, to be established where there is a local demand for places.' And Twigg (2013) appointed Blunkett to identify 'the best way to encourage parent academies'.

But both Peter Hyman's school and Toby Young's West London Free School are *de jure* and *de facto* teacher-led or parent-led Free Schools: if Labour had been intending to continue with 'those sorts of things', they would, in fact, have been continuing Gove's Free Schools but perhaps

rebranding them ‘Parent Academies’ (as opposed to business-sponsored ones); the only difference being that they would be restricted to areas where there is a shortage of school places (noting that Twigg [2013] said ‘where they are needed’; Adonis [2013] said ‘where there is a shortage of *good quality* school places’). Since birth-rates, immigration and student numbers all fluctuate, it is not unreasonable to conclude that Labour’s policy would not have ended surplus places or competition between schools: Twigg appropriated Gove’s policy just as Gove developed that of Adonis/Blunkett.

When he succeeded Twigg as Shadow Education Secretary, Tristram Hunt continued the partisan rhetorical obfuscation: ‘Labour will end the Free School programme... and instead focus spending on areas in need of extra school places’ (Hunt, 2014a). Considering that 26 of the 31 Free Schools approved in 2014 had been located in such areas, and DfE assessment policy had already changed (DfE, 2014a:3f), Hunt’s announcement was not so much a commitment to terminate Gove’s programme as an incremental shift with a further intimation of re-branding. Of course, with less than a year to go to the 2015 General Election, speeches and media appearances were positioned to placate fractious teaching unions, attract the teachers’ vote and attempt to address the most contentious concerns of local democracy and accountability. It might also be observed that prior to joining the Shadow Cabinet, Hunt was not only broadly in favour of Gove’s reforms (Hunt, 2012), he also supported market-incentive solutions such as PRP for teachers (Wintour, 2013). Within weeks of taking office, for one audience he categorised Free Schools a ‘dangerous ideological experiment’ (Hunt, 2013), while, for another, he explained:

There are lots of parents out there who want to set up schools... What I am saying is if you want to do that when we are in government we will be on your side. There has been this perception that we would not be, and I want people to be absolutely clear that we are. I am putting rocket boosters on getting behind parents and social entrepreneurs. We are not going to go back to the old days of the local authority running all the schools – they will not be in charge (Walters, 2013).

The ‘dangerous ideological experiment’ manifestly became less so on the essential structural proposition of LAs not ‘running all the schools’; and the need to ‘boost’ parents to be ‘social entrepreneurs’.

Liberal Democrat Party reaction

Despite being in coalition with the Conservatives, and despite their explicit manifesto commitments and assent to the *Coalition Agreement*, the Liberal Democrat position was somewhat shifting. The political reality of delivery was fraught with tensions, not least because of widely-reported destabilising divisions within the party:

Gove has suffered from Lib Dem roadblockery himself but it’s not the roadblockery that most annoys Tories. It’s the U-turnery. It’s not just Liz Truss who has been the victim of seeing an agreed policy on childcare torpedoed. Theresa May has suffered on the Data and Communications Bill. Gove has suffered from it on education reforms. Most infamously the whole Conservative Party suffered from it on boundaries reform. The Lib Dems back a policy or initiative in a Cabinet committee or in the Quad or even in the *Coalition Agreement* and then U-turn; mainly because of unhappiness within their own party (Montgomerie, 2013).

The Liberal Democrat power-base had traditionally been in local government, and they had long favoured devolving more powers to LAs (cf. Docking, 2000:30). Their policy on Academies – agreed by democratic participation at its annual conference (unlike those of either the Conservative or Labour parties, which are developed by think-tanks and appropriated by the party leadership irrespective of party members) – remained unpopular with many Liberal Democrats, hence the reluctance of their education spokespersons to contribute to this research. This natural tension between philosophy/ideology and political praxis was a recurring theme, exacerbated by the inherent instability of the Coalition and internal party factions.

Academic reception

Amongst educational academics, the debate about Free Schools and widespread academisation was (and remains) particularly fraught. There are critiques of Adonis' reforms which purport to 'make sense' of the policy (Whitty, 2002) or conjecture on the bleak future of state education (Lambert, 2002; Astle & Ryan, 2008; Walford, 2005). Some are critical of Gove's 'revolution' (Hodgson & Spours, 2011) and his departure from (or ignorance of) 'the key pillars of the Good Society – fairness, democracy, sustainability and well-being' (Lawson & Spours, 2011). They observe a 'totalitarian' ideology (Newsam, 2011), and denigrate school proposers' lack of professional expertise and experience (e.g., Higham, 2014 cf. 'teacher professionalism' in Day & Smethem, 2009).

University educationalists argue that the policy 'is not supported by the majority of either professional or public opinion' (Hatcher, 2011:499); that 'Outstanding schools that apply for academy status will...be exempt from OFSTED inspection' (Goodwin, 2011:414); that the policy represents 'the narrowing of learning experience, the undermining of teachers' professionalism (and) the privatisation of education in place of public service' (Pring, 2013); and that Gove is 'exorbitantly ideological' (Jones, 2013:332). In a letter to *The Independent*, a hundred education professors and lecturers criticised Gove for his centrism and his 'serious distrust of teachers'; 'a "dumbing down" of teaching and learning'; and 'micro-management', with an assertion of declining standards because he has 'clearly misunderstood England's decline in Pisa international tests' (Bassey, Wrigley *et al.*, 2013).

The opposition to Gove from within university departments was also values-based; concerned with the apparent shift away from the intrinsic value of education as a character-developing social and cultural process in pursuit of the 'common good',⁸ toward a paradigm of 'neo-liberal... free-market fundamentalism'⁹ (Lawson & Spours, 2011:195). According to Yandell

⁸ Hollenbach (2002) distils this to the stability of the nation and social harmony, but it is a complex and labyrinthine concept.

⁹ While liberalism as a coherent social philosophy dates from the late eighteenth century, 'neo-liberalism' is a recent development and focuses essentially on economic liberalism. I shall expound the concept further in Chapter IV.

(2013:15), the underlying assumption is that ‘the primary purpose of education is an economic one’. We witness the ‘neo-liberal hegemony’ (Wright, 2012:292) of the ‘Neo-Liberal Imaginary’ (Ball, 2012 cf. Ball & Junemann, 2012; Ball & Olmedo, 2013) which dominates the ‘ideology’, with allusions to Labour’s Academy era which ‘perpetuated and reinforced the myths of Conservative thinking’ and ‘succeeded in entrenching Thatcherite discourses which see education neither as an entitlement nor an end in its own right, but as a means to enhancing economic growth and proficiency’ (Reay, 2008:644, 646). Evans (2010) takes the same theme, though expresses it in more derogatory terms (Cameron being a ‘mother’s boy’ [the mother being Thatcher]). The educational academic narrative has become one of market discourse on economic growth and business prosperity supplanting the enlightened pursuit of nurturing knowledge and learning about the transcendental virtues of truth, beauty and goodness for the flourishing of humanity. There is the emergence of derogatory terms such as ‘parentocracy’ (Brown, 1990); and objection to ‘the penetration of educational language by the new language of “performativity”’ (Pring, 2000:115), intrinsic to which is the ‘narrowing curriculum, inhibiting innovation and creativity in teaching and reducing pupils’ enjoyment of school’ (in Sammons, 2008:655).

The overriding narrative in the academic literature is one of systematic fragmentation and the ‘marketisation’ of state education: ‘structural changes that have... introduced market-like mechanisms into the relationship between schools, that have encouraged competition between schools, that have represented parents and/or school students as the consumers of the goods that schools have to offer’ (Yandell, 2013:8). ‘The Coalition government is replacing local democracy through elected local government, including the provision and allocation of school places, by a fragmented market system’ (Hatcher, 2011:499). The consequent polycentric, heterogeneous autonomy is said to represent ‘the beginning of the end of state education’ (Exley & Ball, 2011:118, echoed by Ball & Junemann, 2012:129; Pring, 2012). Neo-liberalism has become ‘a new regime of truth’: ‘Teachers are no longer encouraged to have a rationale for practice, account of themselves in terms of a relationship to the meaningfulness of what they do, but are required to produce measurable and “improving” outputs and performances, what is important is what works’ (Ball & Olmedo, 2013:87, 91). The effects on teachers’ morale and motivation have been debilitating (Evans, 2000 cf. Klassen & Anderson, 2009). For the Church of England – a major education provider – former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan (Lord) Williams (2011) observed:

With remarkable speed, we are being committed to radical, long-term policies for which no one voted. At the very least, there is an understandable anxiety about what democracy means in such a context. Not many people want government by plebiscite, certainly. But, for example, the comprehensive reworking of the Education Act 1944 that is now going forward might well be regarded as a proper matter for open probing in the context of election debates. The anxiety and anger have to do with the feeling that not enough has been exposed to proper public argument.

But there is an observable tendency in the academic literature toward hyperbole: the journalistic caricaturing of ‘Tory policy’ or misrepresentation of ‘Govite ideology’ is evident. For

example, in their observation of the emerging tripartite consensus, some educationalists saw the behind-the-scenes manoeuvring of David Blunkett and his chief advisor Michael Barber, whose contribution to the Academies programme was ‘more pernicious’, because of the focus on ‘the standards agenda, on high-stakes testing, punitive inspections and a narrowly economic view of the purposes of education’ (Yandell: 2012:125). Yet, reading through the nuances of Barber’s *Instruction to Deliver* (2008), it is evident that the ‘narrowly economic view’ is actually Yandell’s: Barber is as reasoned in his critique of conflicting conceptual challenges, and sensitive to the complexities of globalisation with ‘the emergence of the market state, which depends on the international capital markets and... on the modern multi-national business networks to create stability’ (Barber, 2008:333f). Sammons (2008:652) notes that the origins of the political focus on failing schools can be traced back to Barber’s 1995 lecture, ‘The dark side of the moon: imagining an end to failure in urban education’: ‘He claimed a serious debate about failure was necessary to challenge endemic low expectations and raise the quality of education in schools, especially those serving the disadvantaged.’ She further observes: ‘Many academics and professionals were strongly opposed to “naming and shaming”, zero tolerance and market solutions..’ (Sammons, 2008:655). Wright (2012:279) observes that ‘the Conservatives in coalition are eager to continue with the neoliberal agenda... inherited from Thatcherism’ which, he asserts, is incompatible with the goals of social justice and fairness (cf. Ozga & Gewirtz, 1994:122).

Entrenched apprehensions of ‘Thatcherite’ revolution

Objecting to the extension of parental choice, Reay (2008:639) refers to New Labour’s ‘Faustian pact with the forces of neoliberalism’ with an assertion that Blair ‘entrenched Thatcherism’ by supporting Baker’s 1988 reforms which made parents ‘consumers within education’. An alternative reading would be one of a focus on standards and accountability within a framework of diversity and differentiation. Reay acknowledges this (p641), noting that the Labour Party manifesto of 1997 (p3) stated: ‘Some things the Conservative party got right. We will not change them.’

But those for whom free schools are nothing but a ‘Thatcherite’, ‘neo-liberal agenda’ of ‘Tory marketisation’ in which ‘past freedoms have been eroded’ (Day & Smethem, 2009:153f) lack both philosophical understanding and historical perspective, not least because the correlation of Thatcherism with neo-liberalism is highly questionable. Sandbrook (2009) notes that Thatcherism ‘was more fluid, more improvised, more complicated and more contradictory than the neat, sterile neoliberalism of the political science textbooks’. And Cockett (1994:314f) writes of the disillusionment with Thatcher of neoliberal activists like John Hoskins, Norman Strauss and Alfred Sherman:

Although Mrs Thatcher might have *appeared* to be radical, at the vital moment she had failed to grasp the nettle of institutional reform that might have foreshadowed a *real* return to economic liberalism; as it turned out, the levels of public spending (in real terms) in 1990 when Mrs Thatcher

left office, had hardly changed from the year when she had entered Downing Street in 1979. Measured by this important yardstick 'Thatcherism' had thus made very little impact at all.

It might also be observed that, unlike the Swedish *Friskolor* ('free schools'; see Chapter II.ii), providers in England are specifically prohibited from operating 'for profit'. There is a tendency for the left-right partisan politicking to shroud the economic, philosophical and historical reality.

Wright (2012:285f) asserts that Gove's reforms are so damagingly neo-liberal as to mitigate if not nullify social morality:

The Conservatives themselves were a little more hesitant, especially during the 1990s, to expand neoliberal market forces without providing a safety net of traditional moral values favoured by the one-nation Tories. It seems perhaps, after over a decade in the wilderness, that the neoliberal modernisers in the party have won the chance to sediment their public choice intuitions into the heart of 'big C' Conservative discourse.

The perception is that of the ascendance of Thatcherite 'quasi-markets' to counter the 'top-down, bureaucratic management' (p286), which, he avers, rides roughshod over the social conscience of the 'One Nation' tradition of Conservatism. He further informed us (p279) that Gove 'described the new policies, which are likely to create a new drove of autonomous schools, as a "revolution"', and he quoted a BBC source for this (Harrison, 2010). Yet while the BBC article cites two individual supporters who used the word 'revolution', nowhere was the word actually attributed to Gove. Further, Wright (p280) includes no analysis of Liberal Democrat policy papers because, he says, 'the education policy of the coalition government is almost exclusively derived from Conservative proposals', which ignores the rather explicit statements in the Liberal Democrat 2010 manifesto and themes in David Laws' (2004, co-edited) *The Orange Book: Reclaiming Liberalism* (London: Profile Books). Laws' objectives mirror Gove's reforms and pre-date the *Academies Act 2010*. Wright appears to have permitted his own anti-Tory ideological objection to 'a drove of autonomous schools' to convey the sense that Gove saw himself as some sort of ideological crusader, and that the Conservative Party alone was pursuing a 'neoliberal hegemony in which once seemingly incompatible goals of social justice and fairness are being collapsed upon and subsumed by market logics' (Wright, 2012:179f).

The oral argument within academic institutions of higher education is also hindered by misinformation, if not disinformation. At the Oxford University book-launch of Pring's *The Life and Death of Secondary Education for All* (2012), headteachers and educationalists were informed that the Academy/Free-School objective was 'to root out the cancer of comprehensive education', with Adonis's 2012 book *Education, Education, Education* (London: Biteback Publishing) cited as primary-source evidence for this: indeed, the audience was informed that it was a quotation from the book (Hilton, 2013 cf. Tomlinson, 2013). Yet not only is selection by academic ability prohibited by

statute in new Free Schools,¹⁰ Adonis (2012a:xii) used the word ‘cancer’ very specifically in reference to ‘failing comprehensive schools’. There was a real sense in which raw politics clouded the objectivity of academic debate. But this is not a unique phenomenon: in his analysis of the literature surrounding private schools in developing countries, James Tooley (2015), Professor of Education Policy at Newcastle University, observes of the disparity between evidence and academic report:

It appears that the academics, prejudiced as most development experts are against private education... brought their preconceptions to their work.. Here’s a little technique for academics frustrated by research that doesn’t show what you want it to show: simply make up a quote which says what you want, and pretend it came from the article in question.

SUMMARY

With almost 5,000 schools – mostly secondary – now outside of any LA control and responsible for the education of more than three million students, sections of the media on both the political left and right (e.g., Wilby, 2011a; Taylor, 2012; Nelson, 2013b) have joined with many academics (e.g., Lawson & Spours, 2011; Hodgson & Spours, 2011; Fisher, 2011:456; Williams, 2011) who view this as something of a ‘revolution’. Whether or not this assessment is justified is a matter of philosophical analysis and historical review: politicians are prone to rhetoric and journalists to hyperbole in their advocacy of or opposition to transformation or reform. Despite intermittent partisan posturing for differential political advantage, the momentum toward institutional diversity and parental choice in the provision of state education meets with broad ‘official’ consensus across the main parties. Conversely, the ‘public’ consensus among educational academics is overwhelmingly opposed. There are outliers in both camps, but their voices are often side-lined in the political fray, or drowned out in a ‘censorious atmosphere of intimidation’ (Hilton, 2013). In order to understand possible reasons for this, I shall now expound the essential philosophical motivation of my thesis.

¹⁰ There is an important apparent exemption in the legacy inherited from Labour’s ‘Specialist Schools’ which permitted a focus on a particular area of the curriculum and a proportion of students to be selected not by ability but ‘aptitude’. While the scheme was ended in 2010, the DfE (2012b) explained that their inherited admissions criteria may be retained on conversion to a Free School: ‘To be clear, this does not prevent a school from adopting new selection by aptitude. Any school with a relevant specialism can select 10% of its intake by aptitude in sport, modern foreign languages, visual arts or performing arts.’ See also *The School Admissions Regulations 2012* (Pt1, Ch2 §6 [HMSO, 2012]).

CHAPTER II

PHILOSOPHICAL RATIONALE

INTRODUCTION

‘There will always be a need, not least in education, for clarification and resolute testing by logical criteria; this has always been, and will remain, a central function of philosophy in any area of its application’ (Garforth, 1979:xii). But there are valid questions of the extent to which philosophical problems may usefully be scrutinised in isolation from the human context:

Problems of justice, freedom, knowledge, obligation, personal identity and, in education, of authority, equality, autonomy, creativity, curriculum, morality – all these arise initially, become problematic, in actual situations, in the context of which they derive both their meaning and the motivation for their solutions. What I am implying is that the problems of educational philosophy...are best approached (that is, with insight and understanding) through a study which involves them with actual persons speaking from their personal and historical context (p.xii).

As a consequence, most educational (indeed, most Social Science) research has historically been ‘downwards’ – of children as students or teachers as pawns of national policy (cf. Walford, 1994:2). But studying ‘up’ offers an equally important complementary perspective of educational concerns, because ‘(p)owerful people are the cause and cure of social problems’ (Williams, C, 2012:1). The ‘human context’ I am concerned with is that of government officials and their entourage – the ‘policy community’ – interrogating an understanding of emerging political policy through the eyes of its developmental and inspirational architects; to understand what their stated political intentions (or philosophical objectives) were, and how they understood the policy to be effective (or not) in fulfilling its objectives.

i) POLITICAL-PHILOSOPHICAL CONTEXT

The political-programmatic context within which Free Schools were conceptualised was characterised as the ‘Big Society’. It was essentially Cameron’s riposte to Thatcher’s (often misquoted) assertion that ‘there is no such thing as society’.¹¹ As he put it at the 2009 Conservative Party Conference: ‘There is such a thing as society, it’s just not the same as the state’ (Cameron, 2009c). This was his notion of ‘One Nation’ or ‘compassionate Conservatism’,¹² expressed in the pursuit of social justice, which is itself subject to a variety of philosophical apprehensions.

¹¹ See Knox, 2013. Thatcher (1993:626) herself insists that she was quoted out of context, as evident from the original (Keay, 1987).

¹² Olasky (1997:64, 41) observes that nineteenth-century ‘compassionate conservatism’ was based in part on the doctrine of original sin, which held that ‘Man is sinful and likely to want something for nothing... Man’s sinful nature leads to indolence’. The modern expression is more to do with ‘concern for the poor’ in a context of capitalism (Magnet, 1999).

The 'Big Society'

The commitment to extend Labour's Academy freedoms formed part of Cameron's liberal theme of policy which sought 'to create a climate that empowers local people and communities, building a big society that will take power away from politicians and give it to people' (Cameron, 2009a). The stated objective was to revive civic pride by initiating 'a massive, sweeping, radical redistribution of power: from the state to citizens; from the government to parliament; from Whitehall to communities. From Brussels to Britain; from judges to the people; from bureaucracy to democracy' (Cameron, 2009b). Cameron's concurrent concern was with systematic 'brand decontamination' (Heffernan, 2008:290; Evans, 2010:326) as an antidote to the perceived 'capitalist monetarist individualism' (see Jessop *et al.*, 1988) intrinsic to what became known as 'Thatcherism'.¹³

Although the 'Big Society' (not to mention 'One Nation' or 'compassionate Conservatism') may be dismissed as vacuous electioneering sound-bites designed to make conservatism (or, rather, the Conservative Party) more appealing, they have historic resonance in the expression of the conservative objective of empowering communities and inculcating a sense of 'associative relationship' (Blond, 2010 cf. Kruger, 2007). As a campaigning slogan for the 2010 General Election, it may be averred that the 'Big Society' was 'presentational' (Griffiths, 2011:26) and 'just another rhetorical device in the political vocabulary' (Hanvey, 2011). Certainly, it was criticised by representatives of all political persuasions as being 'vague' (Phillips, 2011), 'painfully stale' (Williams, 2011), or 'a cynical attempt to suggest that the shortfall in public provision of social and welfare services would be made up for by the emergence of a large and enthusiastic reserve army of voluntary labour' (Ransome, 2011). The rhetoric¹⁴ of the prevailing political narrative raises methodological challenges, but the philosophical focus here is on the perceived fragmentation of the state's monopoly in the provision of education. The electioneering slogan may have proved ephemeral, but the themes of localism, devolution and the transfer of powers away from centralised bureaucracy remained central to the Coalition's programme of government, and to the structure of state education in particular. Rowan Williams (2012) took this theme in his *Magna Carta Lecture*:

..it remains true that a certain amount of political rhetoric and argument defaults under pressure to a more problematic idea of sovereignty as the sole power that can 'franchise' any kind of association within society. It is a model which crops up in startlingly different settings, from the mediaeval Roman curia to the People's Republic of China. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a distinguished succession of Cambridge historians and political thinkers – Acton, Maitland and Figgis – developed a substantial critique of this, in a way which (despite some questionable historical claims en route) deeply marked one strand of socialist thought in the twentieth century, the anti-Fabian, anti-centralising concerns of many in the ILP, of Harold Laski and others. It has re-entered

¹³ Proponents of the doctrine define it as 'a mixture of free markets, financial discipline, firm control over public expenditure, tax cuts, nationalism, "Victorian values", privatisation and a dash of populism' (Lawson, 1992:64).

¹⁴ This has become a derogatory term, especially in politics. But a rhetorician is simply one who seeks to persuade: rhetoric is an art or skill (Leith, 2011), which Jenkins (2012) terms 'the best lubricant of democracy'. I use it in accordance with its original Aristotelian meaning, which may be briefly defined as 'the art and science of persuasion' (Morrell, 2010:87).

political debate in the guise of argument about the ‘Big Society’, and the critique has been restated by Maurice Glasman and Phillip Blond, though in the interests of different party agendas.

The ‘anti-centralising concerns’ of the ILP – Independent Labour Party (founded 1893) – is not irrelevant to the philosophical context, since Adonis (2012a:35, 233) credits ILP-member and Christian socialist RH Tawney (1880-1962) as an inspiration for Labour’s Academy policy. The ILP, like the Fabians, believed that a Liberal-Labour alliance or coalition was the best mechanism of moving toward educational social democracy with its inherent liberal egalitarianism. Liberal theories of equality are complex and socially contextual, but Williams was essentially concerned with the apprehension of people as equal beings, and so the entitlement to equal distributive access to state services and educational opportunities (see Guttman 1980:90ff). He continued:

This is an intriguing story in itself; but the main point is to note the challenge to a positivist and monopolistic account of sovereignty. The intermediate communities of civil society do not owe their existence or their lawfulness to the state’s licence. But if such communities are there before the state gets around to ‘licensing’ them, it makes sense for the legal systems of the state to recognise that the society they regulate is a mosaic of associations that govern themselves in an enormous variety of ways (Williams, 2012).

Free schools are a ‘mosaic of associations that govern themselves’: they are ‘designed to put teachers back in control, or more fully in charge, of their schools’ (Gove 2013a). While political rhetoric ought not to be taken at face value, especially when promulgated on the run-up to or during a general election campaign, nor should it be dismissed as sophistry simply because that is the manifest fraught context of democratic debate: the research task is to examine as objectively as possible who is saying what to whom and why about the ‘climate that empowers’, and how freedoms are being devolved to ‘local people and communities’ or retained by politicians. So, when Gove told the House of Commons: ‘In matters of ideology I am a Blairite; what’s right is what works’ (*Hansard*, 2012a), critical distance is required, but it was manifestly corroborated by the academic literature that Gove clearly believed his reforms to be contiguous with Labour policy – operationally, if not by philosophical causality.

The Free School policy and free school expansion were consistent with Cameron’s notion of ‘liberal-conservatism’, which, for some (e.g., Norman, 2010) is not so much a political triangulation of mutual exclusions but an active process of decentralisation, the stated objective of which is to improve public services by liberating them from bureaucratic control and distorting targets (cf. Laws & Marshall, 2004). For others, however, it is ‘a new kind of conservatism which conserves nothing, changes everything, and is guided by the very same rhetoric of equality and human rights that shapes the left-liberal agenda’ (Scruton, 2013). In the context of education:

The philosophy of conservatism, launched two centuries ago by Adam Smith, Edmund Burke and David Hume, and on the continent by GWF Hegel and Joseph de Maistre, is, in my view, difficult, intricate and true. Today’s winning political rhetoric, by contrast, is simple, persuasive, and false. The theory of knowledge and its social function that inspires Michael Gove cannot silence the loud cry of the teachers’ unions for equality whatever the cost. The subtle arguments for the market

economy developed by the Austrian school will never extinguish the zero-sum fallacy, which says that if some are rich it is because others aren't. Burke's defence of common law justice, like Hegel's defence of the family and the corporation, has little weight against the rhetoric of "compassion." Even those on the right who believe that the long-term effect of this rhetoric is to make everyone dependent on the state, and the state dependent on borrowing from a purely imaginary future, will go on repeating it. For the ruling belief is that "in the long run we are all dead," as Keynes famously put it—none of us will have to pay for current policies and meanwhile it is best to look caring and nice. The *philosophy* of conservatism has nothing to say in response to this. For it is not about appearing nice. It is about conserving the foundations of civil society. Whatever rhetoric you choose for promoting that cause, the other side is going to describe you as "nasty." For rhetoric is about appearance, not truth (Scruton, 2013).

Scruton is not, of course, the definitive repository of conservative philosophical truth, but he is right on the centralisation-subsidiarity tension at the heart of historic conservatism, and this is exacerbated by the existence of an overarching corpus of Human Rights legislation as codified in the European Convention, to which Parliament is subject, thereby constraining the Secretary of State in the extent to which school curricula may actually be devolved as they relate to, for example, 'equality' (I shall explore this further in Chapter IV). There is a sense that the grand narrative of conservative thought is being compromised or diluted (e.g., Kwarteng, Patel *et al.* [2011]; Montgomerie, Lilico *et al.* [2010-11]). Gove (2011) invoked the term 'postmodern' for this 'Red Tory' (Blond, 2010)/'Blue Labour' (Glasman *et al.*, 2011) context, but the term is abstruse. Political philosophy does not exist in a vacuum: only by placing it in the context of societal transformation or actor advocacy may it be usefully understood.

'Rolling back the state'

The Coalition's educational philosophy consisted in the state facilitating the contraction or 'rolling back' (Hayek, 1945) of the state (cf. 'encroaching state power' [Docking, 2000:xiii] in the pursuit of system transformation for the benefit of children, parents and teachers, and simultaneously reserving to the Secretary of State the centralised authority to regulate this (and so, constitutionally, to repeal it). This was a continuation of previous Conservative and Labour policy (Docking 1996:16-27, 112-124; 2000:32): it is a liberal theory that conserves the powers necessary to intervene against 'harmful' individual interests, hence an inherent conflict because disparate interests cannot all be satisfied simultaneously. This educational philosophy constitutes an expression of liberal justice because it does not preclude the social or communal formation of individual interests; nor does it preclude any choice-market accommodation of rational regulation to ensure social justice – that is, an assurance of access to those amenities which permit 'the meaningful exercise of political rights and individual freedom' (Gutman, 1980:79). These are free schools offering parents a free choice for the free advancement of their children: there are undeniable injustices and inequalities in praxis, but, philosophically, it is for rational actors to maximise their individual opportunities, and for the liberal market in education to expand or contract according to need.

Liberal individualism is a multifaceted and flexible doctrine, but Taylor (1985:187) distils it to the essential Hobbes/Locke¹⁵ social-contract apprehension of ‘a vision of society as in some sense constituted by individuals for the fulfilment of ends which were primarily individual’. This has manifested itself throughout history as being antithetical to the vested interest and privileges of aristocratic elites, and reified through individual rights, limited government and free trade. The notion that society is comprised of individuals in pursuit of their own ends is what Thatcher meant by her ‘no such thing as society’ comment. Educationalists who deem this to be inherently arrogant, selfish or anti-social (or, more often, derogatively ‘neo-liberal’) term it ‘ideology’. The philosophy-ideology distinction is complex, but Freeden (1996:28) articulates a plausible analysis:

..those engaged in ideological discourse make...stipulative assertions about the truth or correctness of their views. In so doing, they seek to legitimate interpretations and courses of political action in competition with other ideologies. Political philosophers...are committed to different enterprises...Demonstration rather than assertion is the method adopted. Continuous reflection and self-criticism are *de rigueur*...

But it is a limited linguistic dichotomy, not least because those who oppose policy (or politician) allege ‘stipulative assertions’, while those who support policy (or politician) will find reasoned ‘demonstration’. There is no single approach to a framework of interpretation: different approaches may be adopted for specific tasks, but, essentially, ‘ideology’ in educational discourse has come to mean ‘policy advocated very strongly to which I am vehemently opposed’. Since politics is concerned with issues of status, the exercise of power, the inculcation of values, and what Gee (1999:2) refers to as ‘social goods’, they must be ‘thought about, argued over, and distributed in society’. But he notes:

There is nothing special then about politics. Politics is part and parcel of using language. But this does not mean that analyzing language is just an invitation to pontificate about our political views. Far from exonerating us from looking at the empirical details of language and social action, an interest in politics demands that we engage with such details. Politics, in terms of social relations, where social goods are at stake, has its lifeblood in such details. It is there that “social goods” are created, sustained, distributed a redistributed. It is there that people are harmed and helped (p2).

I am concerned with how politicians and policy-makers philosophically conceptualise the ‘social good’ of free schools. These utterances may then be examined in the context of liberal-conservative political philosophy.

The term ‘neo-liberalism’ is defined as the view that ‘human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade’ (Harvey, 2005: 2). The ‘neo’ prefix evinces discontinuity with liberalism, advocating capitalism, competition and the privatisation of state-owned services, which, as evidenced in much of the educational

¹⁵ The origins of liberalism are beyond the scope of this thesis: they are nuanced and disputed; perceived in literature from philosophical antiquity to nineteenth-century political discourse. However, Hobbes’ *Leviathan* (1651) and Locke’s *Two Treatises of Government* (1689) are widely considered foundational (e.g., Oakeshott, 1975:63), concerned, as they are, with individual freedoms (of conscience, speech, expression); separation of power (church/state); and doctrines of limited government.

discourse, is viewed as a ‘survival-of-the-fittest’ approach to raising standards. But ‘roll-back’ liberalism is not entirely ‘neo’, and, indeed, in the provision of education it may be traced back at least to the nineteenth century and the theories of JS Mill. By focusing on a grassroots ‘bottom-up’ mobilisation, Gove situated his liberalism between the market and the state: parents are empowered, but their freedom is social insofar as it is expressed in community: there is no ‘dog-eat-dog’ termination of inefficiency because local partnerships and networks or ‘chains’ are designed to intervene, and, where they fail, there is the Secretary of State. Mill’s nineteenth-century focus on the individual in society was conterminous with Burke’s famous dictum ‘to love the little platoon we belong to in society’ (Burke, 1790:68). Those who critique free schools with appeals to ‘neo-liberalism’ invariably ignore the ‘in society’ dimension of their establishment.

Burke’s ‘little platoons’ were appropriated by Cameron and Gove to their ‘roll-back’ political objectives: they have become local community groups, cooperatives and charities (Norman, 2010), operating within and accountable to society. Their autonomy is constrained by the ultimate authority of the Secretary of State and the hierarchical obligation upon the ‘little platoons’ to obey the orders of their commanding officer. While both Mill and Burke had much to say in polemical, rhetorical and argumentative tropes about the inherent tensions between the liberties of the people and the coercive authority of the state in the realisation of the common good, I aim to avoid what Green (2002:256) refers to as the ‘vulgarized conception of Liberalism’ or crude attempts ‘to categorize Burke as a founder of individualist Conservatism’, because their terms and definitions emanate from a different era, and their writings are period-specific. Historic liberalism and conservatism are subject to a variety of definitions within diverse schools of theological and philosophical thought. But, on education, the objectives remain largely unchanged. For Mill, education was concerned with ‘the “science of the formation of character” (which) covers a lot of territory, and seems to embrace both the formation of individual character, and therefore child-rearing and education in all its aspects – moral, cultural and intellectual, and the formation of “national character”’ (Ryan, 2011:658-9). For Burke, it must achieve all that but also manifest ‘an appeal to tradition, custom, and the accumulative wisdom of a people, as that wisdom had been expressed in existing institutions and ways of living’ (Stanley, 2007:188).

Free schools may be understood as part of the Millite/Burkean Liberal-Whig tradition within historic Conservatism – not that the nineteenth-century ideological battles between statist collectivism and free-market liberalism offer a simplistic *a posteriori* paradigm of comprehension; but that the complex libertarian-conservative tensions within the establishment of free schools are the echoes of centuries of Conservative paternalism – the imposition of standards for the good of the individual and society – and the diffuse Liberal philosophies which advocate extents of freedom for the individual. I propose that these may be analysed in their political and intellectual contexts and synthesised into a construction of historic resonance and philosophical coherence (Freedon,

1996:378f; Green, 2002:259). A useful starting point is the expressed philosophy of the principal architect and advocate of policy.

ii) EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY OF POLICY ARCHITECTS

Politicians make speeches which are not constrained by the parliamentary legislative process and which may better expound their personal philosophies. They may be made to academic institutions (e.g., Callaghan, 1976; Blair, 1996); party conferences (Thatcher, 1975; Cameron, 2009b,c; Burnham, 2011); or private organisations (Willetts, 2007; Cameron, 2009a; Miliband, 2010; Twigg, 2013; Hunt, 2014a, 2014b). In each piece of literature, the rhetoric is crafted to a specific audience with a particular political objective. Gove's most important justificatory speeches include: i) Sir John Cass Foundation Lecture (Gove, 2009a); ii) RSA (Gove, 2009b); iii) Cambridge University (Gove, 2011); iv) National College for Teaching and Leadership (Gove 2013a); v) British Chambers of Commerce (2014a); and the Social Market Foundation (2013d), all of which expound his belief in the purposes of education and his understanding of liberalism, conservatism and social justice in that context.

Assertions of evidence

Gove defended Free Schools and the expansion of Academies not only with appeals to Labour's programme (which permitted governing bodies to contract out services – including teaching – to private, profit-making companies [Hatcher, 2011:495]), but also by comparison to 'Charter Schools' in the USA and the *Fristående skolor* (or *Friskolor*) system in Sweden (Gove, 2009b). The Conservative Party (2007:16) stated: 'The country that provides the closest model for what we wish to do is Sweden.' West, A (2014:330) summarises the development in England and Sweden:

In both cases the school-based education system has been transformed with an increased focus on parental choice of school, school autonomy and competition. Whilst England and Sweden differ in terms of their education systems.., in both countries, from the 1980s neo-liberal ideas began to take hold and played a significant role in the development of education policy.

And she distils neo-liberalism to 'the commodification and privatisation of public assets... (and) privatising education services and introducing competition' (p331). As seen in Chapter I, West's apprehension of 'neo-liberalism' is not untypical of educational academics (e.g., Lawson & Spours, 2011:195; Wright, 2012:292), though she does acknowledge that 'the notion of privatisation has been construed in many ways' (West, A, 2014:331), which is important, as the 'privatisation of education' is not infrequently hurled as an anti-Conservative (or, more often, anti-Thatcher) objection to schools administered by private contractors.

By invoking Charter Schools in the United States and *Friskolor* in Sweden, there is a stated preference by Gove for the responsibility for educational delivery to be devolved to parents and

communities in proportion to their competence. But he was not the first to allude to the US/Swedish models. Five years previously, Tony Blair wrote:

Swedish parents can choose an alternative school to their local one, including a diverse range of state-funded independent schools. Studies have found that schools in areas where there is more choice have improved most rapidly. In Florida, parents can choose an alternative school if their school has 'failed' in two of the last four years. Again, studies showed test scores improved fastest where schools knew children were free to go elsewhere...in England there are not yet enough good schools in urban areas; such restrictions are greatest for poor and middle class families who cannot afford to opt for private education or to live next to a good school, if they are dissatisfied with what the state offers. We believe parents should have greater power to drive the new system: it should be easier for them to replace the leadership or set up new schools where they are dissatisfied (DfES, 2005:4)

Blair was evangelistic about Conservative educational freedoms: 'Our reforms must build on the freedoms that schools have increasingly received, but extend them radically' (DfES, 2005, Foreword). Gove was therefore simply continuing the New Labour theme, or 'policy borrowing'.

While the first US Charter schools were established in 1991, scrutiny of their performance relative to other public schools has been a matter of contention. Hoxby (2000:1210) observed of the changing US context caused by their proliferation:

..the short-term effects of reforms are misleading because they depend unduly on the students who actively make a choice in the years immediately following reform. Even if reforms did not require these students to be few and atypical, their experience would be unrepresentative because the supply response to a reform – the entry or expansion of successful schools and the shrinking or exit of unsuccessful schools – may take a decade or more to fully evince itself. Until *many* students experience an increased degree of choice, reforms are unlikely to affect public schools much, either through competitive pressure or through sorting.

What applies in the US to student choice applies equally in the UK to parental and headteacher/governor choice: it is too early to draw conclusions about the benefits of academisation. While Sammons (2011:376) adduced numerous reports which find 'no significant or even marginally negative overall impacts on attainment of attending Charter schools', the first analyses of empirical data relating to the 'productivity' (i.e., economic value) of Charter schools vis-à-vis traditional public schools is only now appearing (e.g., Wolf, Cheng, *et al.*, 2014). And this 'first national study of the productivity of public charter schools relative to district schools' (p8) finds:

..that while charter schools in some states have uneven performance, the average charter in this study outperforms TPS (traditional public schools) on both the cost effectiveness and the ROI (return on investment) measures, overall and for each of the states and the District of Columbia (DC) for which we have complete data on all of the elements in our calculations.

The research focus is invariably on levels of academic attainment and vis-à-vis economic benefit – often dividing opponents and proponents along educational-ideological if not party-political lines – and it is easy to ignore both the history and philosophical rationale of Charter schools. Writing in the *TES*, Laura McInerney (2013) notes the original trade-union inspiration behind the diversification movement:

Few people know that charter schools were originally advocated by US teaching unions. Annoyed by government interference in the operation of schools, Albert Shanker, a union leader, wanted a system where schools could get on with the hard business of teaching untouched by politicians. In Shanker's version of the policy, which he first proposed in the late 1980s, schools would be provided with a "charter" saying what outcomes they should achieve for each child and, as long as those outcomes were met, the local government would have no power to challenge the school's methods.

Taking this to its source, Shanker himself observed:

My main argument is that the poor results of education are a function of a bureaucratic, hierarchical, and factory-like structure of schooling that has remained virtually the same for 150 years, a structure whose organization and assumptions essentially preclude all but one way of teaching... the structure of our schools precludes a variety of approaches to a child's education (Shanker, 1988:91f).

This is not so far removed from the thrust of Gove's educational vision with the creation of Free Schools and the national extension of Academy freedoms. Shanker saw such reform as 'not very different from the way business and industry go about new product development or design or the way medical research and development are structured' (p99), and this 'social market' is evidently deemed to be a positive thing.

Beyond the political fray and media focus on 'failing' Charter schools or *Friskolor* chains, there is a reform consensus in both the US and Sweden. Exley and Ball (2011) note the 'policy borrowing' and inherent 'posturing' to associate President Obama with Charter schools and Sweden's traditional social democratic ideals with *Friskolor*. There are important differences in terms of history, context and development (see West, 2014:331ff), but, whatever the political rhetoric, the move toward 'greater freedoms' in schools (DfE, 2010b) is seen by its advocates across all main political parties as the solution to chronic failure. This is as true of Conservative/Labour/Liberal-Democrat continuity in England as it is for Social-Democrat/Liberal-Conservative continuity in Sweden, and Republican/Democratic continuity in the United States.

The absence of evidence

Notwithstanding these international appeals, it was observed that Gove's planned reforms lacked any credible evidential foundation. But it isn't always clear if the academic analysis didn't itself labour under some misapprehension. For example, the decision to abolish the QCDA could be construed as a liberalising reform, and yet, despite 200 pages of statutory curriculum obligations being pared down to 50, the perception remained one of accelerated centralisation to the DfE and a 'power-grab' (e.g., Wood, 2013) by the Secretary of State. The political-philosophical debate centred upon whether it was more liberal for NC development to be subject to politicians who are accountable to Parliament which is itself subject to the people, or for powers of regulation to reside in a publicly-funded, executive, non-departmental quango of subject 'experts' which is independent of government and not directly accountable to those it is intended to serve.

Few of Gove's critics appeared to be aware (or they were reluctant to acknowledge) that the NC-freedoms review initiated by Gove was conducted by Tim Oates, an external expert, who had previously been a senior official in the QCDA. He continued to argue that 'in the highest performing jurisdictions, students are expected to know more, understand more and, contrary to popular opinion, apply that knowledge more' (Oates, 2013:46). This was a distinct example of expert authority acknowledged and Labour-Coalition(/Conservative) continuity sustained: Gove did not obviate or ignore all expert educational advice, as frequently alleged (e.g., Goldacre, 2013); rather he revamped the DfE's analysis division and changed the accountability structure. Cummings (2014) provides some insider disclosure:

It is fashionable to say that we 'ignored evidence' but it is false. As Tim Oates, head of research for Cambridge Assessment said, "Michael Gove has been vilified for ignoring evidence, but I have never worked with a politician who listens to evidence as much as he does."

The leitmotif of grievance was essentially that Gove did not listen to the preferred evidence of those who opposed his reforms. That Cummings, a DfE special advisor, should advocate for Gove is unsurprising, but the appeal to Oates, whose expertise is acknowledged by Gove's opponents and yet whose direct experience of Gove's *modus operandi* is discounted, was a seemingly inescapable part of the polarised debate surrounding this research.

And yet the allegation was not entirely without foundation. There was indeed a lack of evidence in support of Free Schools prior to the 2010 General Election. The claim in the 2010 White Paper *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE, 2010a:51), based on the experience of Swedish *Friskolor* and US Charter schools, that Free Schools would raise standards of educational attainment in England, was questioned by Lord Krebs in Parliament:

Nick Gibb MP, Minister for Schools in DfE, agreed that policy should be based on evidence because "if they are not based on all the evidence available they will not go in the direction you expect them to go in..." and he described the evidence which had been considered in the formulation of the policy. However, Professor Pamela Sammons, Senior Research Fellow in Education and Professor of Education at the University of Oxford, questioned the claimed benefits of the free schools policy given the "relatively narrow and unrepresentative evidence base" (House of Lords, 2012:25).

The evidence base may indeed have been 'narrow and unrepresentative' (Sammons [House of Lords, 2012:25]), but if that is 'all the evidence available' (Gibb [House of Lords, 2012:25]) or 'the best... evidence available' (House of Lords, 2012:5), it is not strictly *unscientific* to formulate policy with appeal to its authority, but Sammons was right to assert that the evidence for Free Schools derived from international parallels in Sweden in the US was weak (often around 0.05 in meta analyses and typically all under 0.2 in individual studies). The White Paper interpreted this as 'convincing', and, on that basis, the reforms proceeded.

Appeals to liberal-conservative themes of philosophy

Gove alluded numerous times to various traditions of conservatism – specifically those expounded by Burke and Michael Oakeshott; and invoked various liberal schools of thought, including the writings of Mill, de Tocqueville and Thomas Paine. In a 2009 speech at the RSA on the purpose of schooling and his stated intention (a full year before the 2010 General Election) to re-establish the Department for Education (i.e., away from the Department for Children, Schools and Families established by New Labour), he referred to the need for one department which manages schools which sees them ‘as instruments to advance central government’s social agenda’ for ‘the cause of education, the value of liberal learning’ (Gove, 2009b). He cited Paine’s view of the ‘democratically expressed feelings of free citizens’, and disclosed that Oakeshott is fundamental to his educational vision: the view that every human being is born heir to an inheritance – ‘an inheritance of human achievements; an inheritance of thoughts, beliefs, ideas, understandings, intellectual and practical enterprises, languages, canons, works of arts, books musical compositions and so on...’ (*ibid.*). He claimed to be drawing on ‘the Scottish Enlightenment ideal of the Democratic Intellect’, insisting that this ‘underpins everything (he is) arguing for’. In order to realise this, he saw a ‘need to create a virtuous dynamic in education where parents in the state sector exercise the sort of power and control currently enjoyed by those in the private sector’ (*ibid.*).

In a further speech in 2011 at Cambridge University, Gove sought to situate free schools in some historical context, invoking the philosophical debates of the nineteenth century and ‘the Manichean struggle between the crusader Gladstone and his cynical adversary Disraeli, between the Liberal Party in its High Victorian heyday as a guardian of limited Government and a Tory Party of a proudly imperial kind that we no longer know’ (Gove, 2011). He acknowledged ‘how different today’s Liberals and Tories are from those of one hundred and thirty years ago’, but it is evident that this politico-philosophical heritage is important to his understanding of the reform. He referred to ‘an age before structuralism, relativism and post-modernism’ in which state education was governed and administered differently, and so he justified his philosophical educational objective:

I want this because I believe in a truly liberal approach to education – like that outlined by John Stuart Mill – where the state provides the finance and sets high expectations but the delivery of education and the management of day-to-day learning is devolved to genuinely independent schools and chains of schools (Gove, 2011).

Whether such appeals to these strands of history and philosophy may be justified; whether Gove grasped the empiricism, scepticism and common-sense realism of ‘the Scottish Enlightenment ideal of the Democratic Intellect’ (should there be such an ideal); and whether Mill actually proposed the ‘truly liberal approach to education’ pursued by the Coalition, all merit analysis. It is not clear if Gove included Mill in the ‘Scottish Enlightenment ideal’ (he only specifies Francis Hutcheson, Adam Smith, David Hume and James Monboddo [Gove, 2009a]); and nor is it apparent how nuanced Gove’s appreciation was of Gladstone’s own philosophical development over 60 years in Parliament

– from High Tory (1832) to Liberal Conservative or ‘Peelite’ (1846) to ‘The People’s William’ (c1879); only in his later years advocating limited government. This historical analysis is necessary, in part, to help distil Gove’s philosophy of education.

But it is important to note that Gove’s liberal-conservative philosophy was not expressed in political isolation: he had reforming allies among the Liberal Democrats, most prominent being David Laws and political advisor Julian Astle (former director of the liberal think-tank CentreForum), who was ‘very keen to work with liberals with a small “I” in other parties and in no parties at all’ (Stevenson, 2010). He observed:

..many are now calling for a change of direction for the academies programme, away from the “take over” model favoured by the government, towards a “start up” model like that in operation in Sweden. There, new independent providers are invited to establish new schools (known as “free schools”) at the time and in the place of their choosing. They are entering the system not to replace, but to compete with, existing schools (Astle & Ryan 2008:84 [and in Hatcher, 2011:487]).

Laws’ *Orange Book* advocated a return to the ‘classical liberalism’ of Mill and Gladstone and is said to have assisted in ‘paving the way for agreement with the Conservatives on radical reform of educational delivery’ (Marshall, 2012:27). Laws (2012:33) wrote that he was ‘deeply frustrated by his party’s entrenched conservatism towards the reform of public services’, observing that ‘Party spokesmen on health and even education too often sounded like the paid advocates of the public sector unions, and the word “choice” seemed to be regarded as a dirty, right-wing word’. While this suggests that there was a coherent Gove-Laws philosophical axis of reform, the academic literature reserves condemnation for the ‘Conservative-led’ government (e.g., Goodwin, 2011:407; Hatcher, 2011:485, 500; Yandell, 2013:10), which served to isolate Gove’s ‘ideology’ from what I posit to be a much broader consensus of reform.

SUMMARY

While the academic literature seeks to examine Free Schools and academisation in the light of evidence, much of it fails to scrutinise the policy in the context of history, and that which does often perceives the philosophy through the narrow economical-philosophical perspectives of ‘neo-liberalism’ or ‘marketisation’. Educational ‘values’ may be sustained and developed within a framework of autonomy, and these have historically been expressed by a number of conservative and liberal philosophers whom Gove appropriated to his cause. While analyses of the relationship between educational freedom and academic attainment are important to evaluate impact and explore cost effectiveness in the use of public resources, many assumptions are bound in the language of statist solutions, and this is often the basis upon which data is interpreted, evidence appraised and arguments evaluated. The critical narrative is one of unenlightened ‘performativity’, unproven subsidiarity or democratic illegitimacy. In Part Two, I shall articulate some of the gaps in historical

and philosophical knowledge which have brought us to this point, and interrogate some of the shortcomings of previous approaches.

Part Two

History and Philosophy

This section informs the understanding of Free Schools by: i) examining their contemporary development; and ii) expounding the free-school conceptual origins in the post-Reformation era, with particular focus on the debates of the nineteenth century (Chapter III). And then: iii) providing analysis of the philosophical concepts inherent in Free Schools; and iv) expounding the expressed educational philosophy of Michael Gove, the principal architect of the policy (Chapter IV).

CHAPTER III

A HISTORY OF FREE SCHOOLS

INTRODUCTION

In his *Lessons from History of Education* (Routledge, 2006:19f), Aldrich posits the primary duties of the educational historians to the present generation: it is ‘to research, record and interpret past events as fully and as accurately as possible... (and) not to abuse or misuse the record of the past to advance contemporary causes’. While the researcher’s bias is in perpetual tension with ‘as fully and as accurately as possible’, any attempt to fill in the evolutionary gaps in policy formulation – however partial – can only aid understanding. Ball (2008:55) observes: ‘Policy always has to be viewed in terms of both change and continuity.’ I argue that, rather than representing some ‘revolutionary’ change born of a singular ideology, the contemporary Free Schools policy evinces considerable continuity with decades, if not centuries, of cross-party conceptual evolution.

i) CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENT

The history literature relating to the development of Academies and Free Schools tends to trace the policy back to the establishment of CTCs following the *Education Reform Act 1988* (‘Baker Act’). These were private, non-profit institutions funded directly by central government. The Conservative Party’s 1987 election manifesto set out the objective: ‘..to give people greater choice and responsibility over their own lives in important areas such as housing and education’ (Conservative Party, 1987). It was decided to ‘allow state schools to opt out of LEA control’; and that parents ‘should have the right to choose those schools’. These objectives were not *ex ante* ‘Thatcherite’: debates about parental choice in education preceded Thatcher’s premiership. In 1977, former headteacher Rhodes Boyson MP appealed for this very freedom:

I do not believe that there will be high standards until parents have a choice of school. Parents will not support a school which they do not want their children to go to. The important thing is that we must somehow increase the possibility of parental choice of school so that people are involved not simply as parents and governors but because they have chosen the school. I hope that the Labour Party will move, as it has moved on some other issues, towards genuine voluntary choice of school. A voluntary choice has a potential advantage for schools when the time comes that with the falling birth-rate some schools have to close. The schools to close should not be decided by a bureaucratic education authority. They must be the schools to which parents do not want to send their children. They should be closed when the time comes. Parental choice—I say this as a challenge—is a belief in the freedom of the individual as against the corporate government. Parental choice of schools is like owning a house or running a small business. They are part of a way of life which we on this side expect but which does not get great support from Labour Members (*Hansard*, 1977:col.778).

Parental choice began to be expressed in terms of an educational ‘voucher’; that is, passing the mechanism of school funding directly to parents. The idea was principally associated with Keith Joseph (Ball, 2008:76; Docking, 1996:144f). The problem was that:

Before the Education Act 1980, schools were, in many cases, merely administrative units of the LEA. The Education Committee was often the collective governing body for all the county schools in its area. Elected members could serve on any number of governing bodies, which had no significant powers independent of their education authority (HMSO, 1992:4).

The LEAs were not autonomous: as Ball (2008:62) notes, their management of education was ‘part of a unification of the central control of schooling’ derived from reforms during the late-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Aldrich (2006:65) explains that it was the task of the LEA to ‘consider the educational needs of their area and take such steps as seem to them desirable, after consultation with the Board of Education’. The LEAs owned and administered the schools, but the central Board of Education (and later the Ministry of Education, Department of Education and Science, etc.,) was free to approve or reject LEA proposals as they saw fit – a structure of governance which subsisted until the early 1980s. Thatcher (1995:173) observed that this centralised, ‘utopian, monolithic structure’ disappointed parents and failed children:

People living in a crime-ridden council estate with a comprehensive ‘community school’, to which their catchment area under local authority regulation required them to send their children, were often desperate to get out. The lucky few who had a direct grant school in the vicinity might be able to do so. But some socialist local education authorities refused to take up places allotted to them at direct grant schools because they objected to independent schools on doctrinaire grounds...

Only later – first with the Assisted Places Scheme and then with grant-maintained schools – could I, as Prime Minister, do something substantial to help. Not that this situation, which continues today, is entirely satisfactory. We need to make it easier to start up new schools so as to widen parental choice...

The agreed solution was for parents to be given more choice and power: ‘..the reality that the “parents know best” has been accepted more and more’ (HMSO, 1992:4). Further, ‘governing bodies and head teachers of all secondary schools and many primary schools will be given control over their own budgets’ (*ibid.*). The Baker/Thatcher rationale was subsequently made explicit:

The most consistent pressure for high standard in schools comes from parents. They have a powerful incentive to ensure that their children receive a good education. We have already done much through the 1980 and 1986 Education Acts so that parents can make their voice heard. But parents still need better opportunities to send their children to the school of their choice. That would be the best guarantee of higher standards (Conservative Party, 1987).

There was no preference for institutional uniformity: Conservatives ‘support the co-existence of a variety of schools – comprehensive, grammar, secondary modern, voluntary controlled and aided, independent, sixth form and tertiary colleges as well as the reasonable rights of schools to retain their sixth forms, all of which will give parents greater choice and lead to higher standards’ (*ibid.*). Successive political manifestos – Conservative (2001, 2007, 2010a), Labour (1997, 2001, 2005) and Liberal Democrat (2010) – all sustained the themes of parental choice, marketisation and notions of ‘freedom’ from LA control. Manifestos are not, of course, anything but popular appeals

for democratic endorsement of a broad programme of political aspiration: they are not designed to expound a coherent political philosophy, nor do they offer an assurance that legislation will be enacted. But they are historical articulations of philosophical themes, which may be traced further back through policy documents, written statements, policy reviews, white papers, and acts of Parliament.

The contemporary state settlement for institutional diversity may be traced back to the *Elementary Education Act 1870* ('Forster Act'), when the (Seventh) Earl of Shaftesbury observed that Parliament had introduced a Bill which 'abstained from endeavouring to found a uniform system of national education' (*Hansard*, 1870: vol.203 cc821-65). Latitude was built into the state system from the outset: it has always been a liberal-conservative compromise. The Forster Act established a national system of education in England, but it had to be sufficiently latitudinal to accommodate the confessional freedom of belief demanded by the Church, which was focused upon denominational religious instruction and worship. Having secured those freedoms, the nineteenth century saw the Church of England, Non-conformist churches and (eventually) the Roman Catholic Church all establishing and running voluntary schools, and there was rivalry – if not competition – between them (Chadwick, 1997:3-7; 13f). All subsequent acts have sustained freedoms for VA and VC schools, especially in respect of admissions, even as educational structures have changed, as they did significantly in 1944. But some of the freedoms demanded by church schools were constraints for other state schools: the universal un-freedom was that all schools should contribute to the spiritual, moral, mental and physical development of the child in the mandatory context of Christian morality or values. Parents were always free to withdraw their children from both RE and the daily act of collective worship, but the spiritual statute was fixed and has been reiterated by all government since, as recently as the *Education and Inspections Act 2006* (§55).

Educationalists opposed to the broad direction of reform talk of City Technology Colleges (CTCs) as the beginning of 'marketisation', and academisation is cast as divisive or destructive to educational culture. Ball (2008:96), for example, whose self-confessed 'very selective history' notes the 1980 and 1986 acts which 'made moves in the direction of choice for parents', refers sceptically to the rise of 'Conservative neoliberalism' (being keen to associate the one party with the philosophy), and rejects the politics of the 'Third Way' as a "“what works” ideology" (pp81, 96, 150). Educationalists who support the broad direction of reform seek to illustrate the consensus. For example Conor Ryan, who refers to the presence of Thatcher and Baker at a 'bipartisan gathering' to mark 20 years of CTCs, which he describes as 'independent non-fee paying schools that Tony Blair's Labour government further developed into city academies, with Adonis as their tenacious midwife' (Astle & Ryan, 2008:1). Ryan recounts Sir Cyril Taylor's disclosure that 'Thatcher first mooted CTCs with business people in 1986': they would be new schools with 'a strong technology bias and would be sponsored by business' (Astle & Ryan, 2008:2). They would all be non-selective and

‘encouraged to innovate in the development, management and delivery of the curriculum’ (DfES, 2005). CTCs were established alongside GM Schools, also created by the Baker Act, which gave parents and governors of existing schools the freedom to opt out of LEA control and to retain selective admissions procedures if they so wished.

But only 15 CTCs were established between 1988-1993: the historical consensus appears to be that they foundered because of the high cost of sponsorship: ‘the policy was effectively abandoned in favour of the less costly technology colleges or specialist schools. Instead of having to find in excess of £10 million sponsorship, the technology colleges had to find just £100,000, which would be matched by government’ (Astle & Ryan, 2008:2; Ball, 2008:123). But educational specialism was revived with Labour’s ‘Specialist Schools’, the origins of which can be traced back to 1993 when GM schools were permitted to apply for ‘technology college’ status (and thereby introduce a technology specialism into the curriculum). Languages were added in 1995, and Arts & Sport in 1996. While Specialist Schools were industry-orientated toward vocational subjects (and so to academically low-attainers), Labour’s adoption of specialism diversity expanded into the state system a new ethos of selection. The *School Standards and Framework Act 1998* and *Green Paper Schools: Building on Success* (2001) developed the scheme to incorporate Maths, Computing and Science in 2001, and Humanities and Music in 2004. These new freedoms were also granted to VA schools. All Specialist Schools were given the freedom to select 10% of their intake by aptitude, which was defined by Labour’s Stephen Byers as ‘potential’ (Fleetham, 2006:99), though, in assessment and reality, it is no different from selection by ability. West (2014:343) notes: ‘Indeed, it might also be argued that quasi-academic selection continued via the selection of a proportion of pupils on the basis of “aptitude” in subjects such as languages, a feature of sponsored academies under Labour.’

There is nothing disputed about the recent genealogy of Academies and Free Schools. As precursors of the Academy and Free School models, GM Schools were ‘converter’ institutions, and CTCs were new Free Schools with business sponsors. The parallels are indisputable.

ii) HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Far from being an unattended, (post-)modern consequence of globalism, marketisation or ‘neo-liberal ideology’ of recent decades, the term ‘Free School’, as an institutional-organisational categorisation, has a centuries-old provenance. The designation was used in England in succeeding liberal reforms from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries; the first being the ‘free grammar schools’ founded during the reign of Edward VI. But the concept of a free school, in terms of free

tuition for the poor, preceded that. Leach (1915:132) notes twelfth-century disputes across Europe about ecclesiastical control and charitable obligation:

It also seems to have raised the question of free schools. Between 1170 and 1173 Pope Alexander III wrote to the French bishops to rebuke the practice of those who ‘assume the name and dignity of Schoolmaster in the churches’ refusing to give ecclesiastical licence to teach without payment of fees, and orders them to extirpate it at once. He ordered the schoolmasters that whenever fit and well-bred men wished to teach grammar schools (*studia litterarum*) they should allow them to do so without any charge, lest learning, which ought to be given gratis to all, should seem to have a price set on its head.

And many historic documents refer to a free school (*libere scole*) by geographic location: ‘When the college was dissolved, the Chantry Commissioners in 1548 said that “a free school had been kept in Fotheringhay”..’ (Leach, 1915:241); ‘..the Free School of King Edward VI in Berkhamstead’ (p291); ‘..proceeded to erect and found “to endure for ever a Free School to be called in the vulgar tongue ‘The King’s Newe Scole of Warwyke”’..’ (p319).

There is, however, some dispute about the meaning of ‘free’ in this context: Leach (1896:110) says: ‘Dr. Johnson defined it to mean, and that is the obvious meaning of it, a school that is free, – where no payment is made for tuition fees.’ And he despairs at ‘other fanciful explanations devised to escape the obvious meaning’ (p110):

It cannot mean free from ecclesiastical jurisdiction, for not one of the Free Grammar Schools was free from the jurisdiction of the Ordinary, whose licence was a necessity until within the last century. It cannot mean the master or the School, was free from every one but the Crown, for even in Edward VI.’s foundations, notably Shrewsbury, the statutes had to be approved by the Bishop, and the master was almost invariably appointed by the Governors, or a College, or some other person or body, not the Crown; and the phrase was used by private founders, whose heirs were born visitors. It does not mean a School which gives a liberal education, for in the three Free Schools in Yorkshire, founded by Archbishop Holgate, the word for liberal knowledge is used, and it is not *libera*, but *liberalis*. It cannot mean free from the statute of mortmain, because when a licence in mortmain was embodied in the Letters Patent or Charters, it was a licence to a limited amount only, and the School was not freed from the statute generally. It is impossible, if the phrase is regarded in historical development (which cannot be gone into now), that it could have meant anything but what it was popularly supposed to mean – free from payment of tuition fees. Entrance fees, and all sorts of extras and luxuries, such as fires, light, candles, stationery, cleaning, whipping, might have to be paid for; but a free School meant undoubtedly a School in which, because of the endowment, all, or some of the scholars, the poor or the inhabitants of the place, or a certain number, were freed from fees for teaching (Leach, 1896:113f).

He asserts the same after some disputation of his scholarship 20 years later: ‘These schools were now to be made free, at least for the poor. In order that the poor, who cannot be helped by their parents’ means, may not be deprived of the opportunity of learning’ (Leach, 1915:132). But there was a shift during the nineteenth century:

The meaning of the term ‘free’ in ‘free grammar school’ was redefined in several ways in the 19th century: the *libera scola* was said to be a school for *ars libera*; the free school was supposed to be a school for free-men; or the term free was judged to indicate freedom from clerical control (Tompson, 1971:79).

This is also the view of Benjamin Hall Kennedy, headmaster of Shrewsbury School (1836-1866), who asserted:

..the term “free school” was due to numerous foundations under that name attributed to Edward VI – *Libera Schola Grammaticus Edwardi Sexti* – and that *libera* never meant “gratuitous” in classical or medieval Latin; moreover, that the word could not mean “gratuitous” in the days of Edward VI simply because all schools at that time were gratuitous (Miner, 1990:233).

He goes on to note that ‘*libera*’ in this context meant ‘free from jurisdiction of a superior corporation, in this case of ecclesiastical corporation’ (*ibid.*). There is, of course, a context to this dispute, namely the changing class structure of society – ‘the need to accommodate the social and political aspirations of the new middle classes’ (Ball, 2008:56) – and whether England’s public schools, as ‘free grammar schools’, had the moral right to charge fees. And Ball (p60) quotes Tawney (1931:142), who observed: ‘the hereditary curse of English education has been its organization along the lines of social class.’ It was an era in which elementary schooling ‘was left almost entirely to “dame schools”’ (Ball, 2008:58) – small, private schools, usually for working-class children – because education was regarded as ‘an issue of freedom from the state’ (p59).

In the nineteenth-century context of debates surrounding the governance structure, curricular obligations and local accountabilities of English public schools, Shrosbree (1988:11f) notes:

Before the Public Schools Bills that followed the *Clarendon Report*, the public schools had no title that could express their claim to separate consideration and superior status. Their formal titles, which, like that of Harrow, often described them as ‘free grammar schools’, served only to emphasise implications that the headmasters generally wished to forget, avoid or dispute – that the schools had not been provided solely for the wealthy, that there was little legal difference between them and the hundreds of other grammar schools throughout the country and that they had some legal, historical obligation to educate local children.

Eton, Harrow and Rugby were all known as ‘free grammar schools’. Observing the vernacular usage of terms like ‘The Free Grammar School at Shrewsbury’ (Shrewsbury School), these public schools were not only concerned with the establishment of endowments in order to educate some children for free – ‘the word meant not “gratuitous” but “free” from ecclesiastical control’ (Shrosbree, 1988:37 #24), thus free to employ non-Anglican staff and teach a Liberal Arts curriculum. There is also the assertion that ‘public schools and their supporters wanted headmasters to be free from parental influence just as they wanted their schools to be free from Parliamentary influence’ (p122).

On the lexicography of the term ‘Free Schools’, Kennedy (1865:10ff) writes at length, noting their charter foundation (Appendix I). He explains that ‘for political reasons, the King and his Council did not bequeath an uncontrolled Trust; that, on the contrary, the school is *Libera*, free by Charter from all jurisdiction but that of the Crown’ and that statutes may be drawn up relating to admissions and privileges, but ‘not by their own free action: – far from it: – but *with the advice of the Bishop of Lichfield and Coventry for the time being*’ (p15). This, he avers, is no small matter: the

Church and the Crown ‘guard the endowment from the danger of misappropriation or of merely local appropriation: to ensure its being so dealt with this to become a blessing not only to the town and county of Salop, but to the Church of England and the nation at large’ (p16). Deviations from this were often down to ‘unsuitable Trustees’ and the fact that ‘friends of the Reformation... were not everywhere easy to find or safe to rely upon’ (*ibid.*). Interestingly, while ‘narrow local Trusteeship is bad... municipal Trusteeship is worst of all’. This, he points out, ‘is well known and understood’:

I need hardly say that I do not mean to speak with any disrespect of municipal institutions, the real services and uses of which, past and present, I hold in high esteem... But I do consider, and I believe it to be generally considered, that their special constitution and the nature of the case render them an unsuitable body to have in trust the financial and administrative care of a Public School (p17).

In his 1908 *Journal of Education* article ‘The True Meaning of Free Schools’, Leach (1908:378) refers to Kennedy’s thesis as ‘invention’ and accuses him of ‘denying the undeniable’. He goes on to quote Livy, that if *aedes liberae* means ‘free lodging’, then *libera schola* may mean free school: ‘free housing can mean nothing but rent-free housing’ (p379). The historic legal interpretation of the meaning of ‘free schools’ is not a minor quibble in the present context. Of Leach’s early twentieth-century preoccupation with the matter, Miner (1990:6) observes a distinctly contemporary resonance:

Some parents were claiming that the public schools, in becoming the preserve of the wealthy few, had been unfaithful to their original purpose of providing education gratis for those who wished to avail themselves of the opportunities established by the earliest charters of foundation.

SUMMARY

The documentary analysis here reveals that the contemporary model of educational freedom being pursued in free schools is not new: it is a conception of institutional liberty with historical resonance which is dissociated from academic ability and promulgated by statute in the procedures of the liberal democratic state. The pattern of governance evidenced in the free schools of history is manifest in contemporary free schools. The historic objective was firstly to liberate schools from ecclesial bureaucracy and the curriculum constraints imposed by a religious elect, and to secure charitable grants for the free education of the poor. It was then to defend freedoms from ‘municipal Trusteeship’ which (it ‘is well known and understood’) is ‘worst of all’. The present objective is to establish free schools which are both free from tuition fees and free from the general authority and philosophical influence of local government. The architects of policy have not gone so far as to free schools from all ecclesial jurisdiction, just as their predecessors have not since the nineteenth century: there are political limits to assertions of liberalism, and demotic boundaries to freedom. It is to the philosophical debates around liberalism and the thresholds of freedom to which I shall now turn.

CHAPTER IV

THE PHILOSOPHY OF FREE SCHOOLS

INTRODUCTION

‘Essentially, this debate boils down to an almost philosophical point: what makes a free school a free school?’ (Kirkup, 2013). In order to conceptualise the nature of free-school freedom and assess the extent to which the reform represents what Ball (2008:55) refers to as a political ‘shift’ (that is, incremental advance or retreat), or a ‘rupture’ (that is, fundamental change ‘in the form and modalities of the state’), I shall expound some of the contingent philosophical themes. The literature on apprehensions of liberty is vast, so I am necessarily selective toward those which are concerned with tentative political generalisation, not least because Conservatives do not always advocate or legislate for that which is conservative, and Liberals do not always advocate or legislate for that which is liberal.

i) PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPTIONS OF FREEDOM

In an era dominated by the political-philosophical primacy of the freedom to choose (Rose, 1999), the focus in education is on a particular apprehension of freedom:

Conservative philosophy focuses on liberty and ‘fraternity’, but not on equality. Freedom is conceptualised in Hayekian terms as negative ‘freedom from’, but it might be considered that only through state ‘assertion’ of some sort can any semblance of educational equality be ensured (Exley & Ball, 2007).

Free schools are free both positively and negatively (cf. Berlin, 1958) – that is, they are free to make certain local decisions, and free from certain statist coercions, and this liberal-conservative tension is justifiably sustained because not all freedom is beneficial. West (1965:7) notes that the controversies in English education around the extents and thresholds go back to the parliamentary debates of the nineteenth century, preceding the introduction of state education. He quotes Mill’s ally in Parliament, JA Roebuck, who was accused of proposing a model of state education which would deprive people of their freedom. He responded:

I ask, Sir, in the first place, if it rob the people of rational freedom? We every day coerce the people by laws, and rob them of freedom... Freedom in itself is not a good thing – it is only good when it leads to good – if it leads to evil, it must be, it is every day, restrained by the most stringent and coercing bonds (*Hansard*, 1833, Vol.XX, cc139-166).

Freedom in education ‘was thus indissolubly linked with goodness and the arbiter of goodness should be the Government’ (West, 1965:7). In pursuit of the common good, it follows that government must

also be the arbiter of rational and irrational freedoms, which coheres with the developing emphasis on the inculcation, if not coercion, of ‘British values’.

Freedom from un-freedom

Kramer (2008) argues that we cannot build a persuasive normative evaluative, moral and/or prescriptive theory of social or political freedom without first establishing a solid empirical explication of the concept of freedom. His non-normative theory for measuring and evaluating overall freedom strengthens normative arguments in favour of negative liberty precisely because of the current focus by positive liberty theorists on particular freedoms. Free schools are indeed primarily *free from*. Scruton (2013:57) observes of the present context:

Looming slightly less prominently over the battlefield is the rhetoric of freedom. Philosophically speaking it is again highly questionable whether human beings are or ought to be free: free from whom, to do what? In the name of freedom men abandon their families; schools abandon discipline; universities abandon the old and tried curriculum in order to offer students a wider choice of degrees. Freedom means opportunity, and opportunity means that the canny, the determined and the strong rise to the top, enjoy those phenomenal city salaries, and join the new class of global fat cats. Dressed up in this way, individual freedom cries out for top-down control.

Yet freedom also opens the road to the rest of us; educational freedom creates opportunities for those at the bottom of society; economic freedom protects the volunteer and the entrepreneur against the smothering cloak of regulation; freedom of conscience protects us from the rule of priests and mullahs, while freedom of speech enables us to scorn bigots and bullies without fear of reprisal. Freedom, in this sense, is unquestionably a good thing – unless it is abused. And there’s the rub. What counts as abuse, who is to decide, and what should be the penalty? The philosophy here is deep and difficult but the rhetoric is easy. Matthew Arnold summarised the matter succinctly: “a very good horse to ride; but to ride *somewhere*.”

In the affirmative rhetoric, free schools are free from ‘top-down’ control, while the antagonistic rhetoric is one of the illusion of freedom – ‘dressed up’, as Scruton says. The antitheses are nothing new: the whole history of state education in England has long been viewed by educationalists as either ‘chaotic’ on the one hand, or ‘flexible’ on the other (Ball, 2008:62, 67). Whether or not there is perceived coherence or chaos depends essentially on one’s apprehension of normative freedom.

For example, the *Education Act 1944* (‘Butler Act’) prescribed the foundations of the post-war state settlement for moral and political education in England and Wales, establishing unequivocally that ‘it shall be the duty of the local education authority for every area, so far as their powers extend, to contribute towards the spiritual, moral, mental and physical development of the community’ (HMSO, 1944 §II.7). This statist un-freedom was sustained even when state schools were permitted to opt out of LEA control: the Baker Act echoed the Butler Act – to ‘promote the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and in society’ and to prepare children ‘for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life’ (HMSO, 1988 §I.2). All state schools have historically been obliged by statute to fulfil these requirements.

The NC, established in 1988, was a further statist un-freedom, from the constraints of which Academies and Free Schools are free except in the core subjects of English, Maths and Science, complemented by RE, SRE and independent careers advice. Further, all political parties in government have sustained the Christian settlement in England with regard to the daily act of collective worship, which must be ‘wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character’,¹ even as the more mono-cultural and religiously homogenous post-war era has seen ‘the transition of Britain from a strong common culture to a more fragmented, segmented and pluralised one’ (Sacks, 1995:vii). Since 1944, state schools have had to apply to the LEA/LA for exemption from the statutory requirement on collective worship (HMSO 1944 §26-8). But since LAs do not regulate free schools, and since it is the Secretary of State alone who approves their foundation and funding agreements, it follows that (s)he must determine the permissible religious (or secular) ethos which may deviate from the statutory requirements: ‘An academy wishing to have the broadly Christian requirement removed and replaced by collective worship of another faith should apply to the Secretary of State via the EFA’ (DfE, 2014b). The modern free schools – like their post-Reformation forerunners – are therefore still contending with aspects of curriculum/religious freedom, if not ecclesial constraint, but the ‘middle tier’ of local authorisation has been usurped by the Secretary of State: a historical local freedom has become a centralised un-freedom.

After the mandatory components of the curriculum – which are stipulated in each school’s funding agreement – free schools are free to propagate a distinct ethos with a tailored curriculum, provided that it be ‘balanced and broadly based’ (DfE, 2010b §1.6a), thereby meeting the standards set down in Labour’s *Education Act 2002* (§78). There is no longer a statutory requirement to teach Citizenship, which Labour introduced with the objective of inducting students in ‘social and moral responsibility, community involvement and political literacy’ (DfES, 1998). It was specified that it should focus on:

..legal and human rights; national, regional, ethnic and religious differences in the UK; key characteristics of parliamentary and other forms of democracy; the world as a global community (including information about the role of supranational organisations such as the EU) (Education & Skills Committee, 2007:2).

Instead, schools are now required to inculcate ‘Fundamental British values’ as part of Teachers’ Standards (DfE 2012a:5,10). While, as already noted, these were distilled to: ‘democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs’, there would be nothing to prevent a future secretary of state from reintroducing those dimensions of the Citizenship syllabus to which Gove was not particularly disposed; namely, supranationalism, globalisation and the European Union. Having been freed from a discrete curriculum constraint, free

¹ ‘Broadly’ was an amendment of the Baker Act. The requirements were reiterated in Section 386(2) of the *Education Act 1996* and in the *School Standards and Framework Act 1998*. The law has always provided for a parental right of withdrawal from both worship and RE. Teachers also have a right of withdrawal. Sixth-formers were given leave to opt out of the daily act of collective worship (irrespective of parental approval) by the *Education and Inspections Act 2006*.

schools are coerced to be free to inculcate via cross-curricular means whatever the Secretary of State of the day determines to be a fundamental British value.

Freedom to pursue the ‘common good’

Concepts of liberalism are laden with normative and contextual baggage, which, like conceptions of conservatism, are nuanced in their origins of understanding and political expression:

Liberalism is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon. It is: a polyvalent conceptual ensemble in economic, political, and ideological discourse; a strongly contested strategic concept for restructuring market-state relations with many disputes over its scope, application, and limitations; and a recurrent yet historically variable pattern of economic, political, and social organization in modern societies. Liberalism rarely, if ever, exists in pure form; it typically coexists with elements from other discourses, strategies, and organizational patterns. Thus, it is better seen as one set of elements in the repertoire of Western economic, political, and ideological discourse than as a singular, univocal, and internally coherent discourse in its own right (Jessop, 2002:435).

Freedom in education is not the unlimited pursuit of self-interest: there are complex and competing contextual strands to which politicians liberally appeal in their rhetorical cause. But, essentially, in Millite liberalism, it is ‘the free development of individuality... a conception of human nature, educable and maturing... linked to the larger goal of social progress’ (Freedman 1996:145); and in Burkean conservatism, it is individual inculcation into the ‘great society of the dead and living, who have made you what you are; so that the truth in which you believe, the values in terms of which you judge... are part and parcel of the historic continuum to which you belong (Berlin, 1958:130). Common to both traditions is the strand of organic social morality and arguments for restraining authority. And yet a political function of state education (if it is to exist at all) is to propagate and perpetuate the values of the state for the common good of society and the extension of what is now termed ‘social justice’. Free schools are not free from the obligation to inculcate whatever ethos may be dictated by central government in the promotion of what it deems to constitute social or economic progress.

By way of illustration, in a 2013 parliamentary debate on the NC, Education Minister Liz Truss touched upon the tensions between state authority and local autonomy (Appendix II). The political-philosophical equilibrium between local autonomy and statutory centralisation in pursuit of the common good is evident. In previous centuries, the concern was how to free schools from the Church: now the concern is how to free schools from Whitehall: ‘Everything here depends upon the attitude of the state, just as it once depended upon the attitude of the Church’ (Scruton, 2001:141), but ‘God’ remains a prescriptive un-freedom.

Freedom to ‘do God’

The expansion of free schools precipitated the considerable expansion of schools with a religious foundation, building on voluntarist freedoms actually first established in 1870 (expanded in 1944, and reinforced in the *Education Act 1993*, which opened the process to education

‘promoters’ other than LAs). But these freedoms have rarely been taken advantage of by faith communities, except in the establishment of Jewish and Roman Catholic schools (for the few exceptions, see Walford, 2000:83ff). Absent the explicit overarching (Anglican) religious canopy envisaged in the Butler Act, there has been a considerable increase in the number of state-funded Muslim, Sikh and Hindu schools (17% of mapped faith school applications for 2011-12 were from faith groups [Higham, 2014:127]). These are free to forge their own religious ethos (to complement the widespread Church of England, Roman Catholic and Jewish state schools²), and also (in theory³) the country’s first schools with a distinct humanist/atheist ethos (Beckford, 2010). Prominent atheist⁴ Richard Dawkins was quick to observe that the inherent subsidiarity of free-school policy provided *prima facie* the necessary reform to make such schools a possibility, thereby granting governors the right to abolish mandatory RE and the ‘broadly Christian’ dimension of collective worship (Beckford, 2010). But this interpretation of freedom conflicts with the un-free stipulations of the 1944, 1988, 1996, 1998 and 2006 education acts, which have not been expressly repealed.

Under Labour’s Academy reforms, the 1944 Christian settlement was not challenged. Indeed, one headteacher was informed that his plans to establish a school with a ‘secular’ ethos would be a ‘political impossibility’ (Asthana, 2007a), with the contention that ‘we are left with a 19th-century architecture of education in a 21st-century environment’ (*ibid.*). VC and VA schools have historically been free to teach a curriculum which accords with their particular religious worldview on (for example) sexual ethics, but they are not now free from the obligation to provide SRE that is ‘broad and balanced’ (HMSO, 2010). That was clearly the statutory extent of Coalition policy and the manifest understanding of Gove as Secretary of State (Doward, 2012). Yet it appears that he was (or his advisors were) unaware of the extent to which the *Academies Act 2010* conflicts with Labour’s *Human Rights Act 1998* and the subsequent *Equality Act 2010*. Gove was of the opinion that:

The education provisions of the Equality Act 2010 which prohibit discrimination against individuals based on their protected characteristics (including their sexual orientation) do not extend to the content of the curriculum. Any materials used in sex and relationship education lessons, therefore, will not be subject to the discrimination provisions of the act (in Doward, 2012).

But human rights barrister Adam Wagner (2012) issued a corrective riposte:

The way in which the curriculum is taught is, however, covered by the reference to education in section 85(2)(a), so as to ensure issues are taught in a way which does not subject pupils to discrimination. This section also gives effect to Schedule 11 which provides some exceptions to the provisions in this Chapter (HMSO, 2010, sect.89, para.302).

² Under anti-discrimination legislation emanating from the ECHR and the *Human Rights Act 2006* and *Human Rights Act 2010*, the state may no longer discriminate on the grounds of religion in the allocation of public funding.

³ This is a presently developing policy and point of contention: on 24th October 2011 the House of Lords voted against removing the legal requirement to hold a daily act of collective worship which is ‘broadly Christian’, thus free schools are still (in law) not free to be entirely ‘secular’.

⁴ Dawkins is very widely known as one of the world’s foremost atheists and has described himself as a ‘fairly militant atheist’ (Bass, 1994:118). Yet at the Sheldonian Theatre, Oxford, on 23rd February 2012, he described himself as an agnostic (Bingham, 2012).

This ‘freedom conflict’ was just one contemporaneously-evolving instance of apparent incompatibility and mutual exclusion between historic religious liberty and overarching human-rights legislation. It appears that schools are free to ‘do God’ provided that its divine precepts accord with the values and human rights prescribed by the Secretary of State (or the overarching European Court of Human Rights).

The problems which arise are concerned with moral autonomy and the virtue of obstacles to libertarianism. There are questions of participatory justice in any democratic polity, though this is not the place for a discourse on theories of moral justness. But it is worth observing that this theory ‘has become the dominant view of liberty in practical politics and in the writing of many liberal theorists’ (Miller, 1991:8). Social justice demands that ‘real freedom is not only a matter of having the right to do what one might want to do, but also a matter of having the means for doing it’ (Van Parijs, 1995:4): that is to say, justice demands freedom from unjust un-freedoms. Schools with statutory constrictions have their freedom limited in a variety of ways, and this un-freedom is to a significant extent socially and democratically determined. Rawls (1972:204-5) observes the inherent inequalities:

Freedom as equal liberty is the same for all; the question of compensating for a less than equal liberty does not arise. But the worth of liberty is not the same for everyone. Some have greater authority and wealth, and therefore greater means to achieve their aims. The lesser worth of liberty is, however, compensated for, since the capacity of the less fortunate members of society to achieve their aims would be even less were they not to accept the existing inequalities whenever the difference principle is satisfied... Taking the two principles together, the basic structure is to be arranged to maximise the worth to the least advantaged of the complete scheme of equal liberty shared by all.

In the context of free schools, the ‘autonomy freedom’ – the freedom to rule or regulate oneself – is deemed to be desirable because it fosters moral and intellectual capacities, and yet those moral capacities must reflect codified ‘British values’. As the Chairman of the House of Commons Education and Skills (/DCSF) Select Committee, Barry Sheerman MP, observed:

It seems to me that faith education works all right as long as people are not that serious about their faith. But as soon as there is a more doctrinaire attitude questions have to be asked. It does become worrying when you get a new push from more fundamentalist bishops. This is taxpayers’ money after all. (Asthana, 2007b).

‘Fundamentalist’ bishops (priests/rabbis/imams/granthis/acharya) are not free to ‘do God’ in free schools, and the Secretary of State will intervene (or, indeed, close) a free school which fails to inculcate the ‘moderate’ values prescribed. Thus, the ‘little platoons’ – the approved groups of parents, teachers, charities, universities, business, community and faith organisations – are free to ‘do God’, provided that they don’t propagate a robust apprehension of moral orthodoxy or believe anything ‘extremist’ too strongly.

Freedom for the 'little platoons'

In his account of 50 years of education debate, Barber (1994:359) summarises the essential difference between conservatism and socialism 'as that between Conservatives advocating diversity (and therefore, they would argue, inevitably, inequality) and socialists advocating equality (and therefore inevitably uniformity)'. He repudiates the 'tired old dogmas', advocating instead the merging of 'the best of both worlds and seek(ing) equality with diversity' (*ibid.*). This 'third way' was intrinsic to Blair's New Labour and Cameron's 'Big Society', opening (if not quite equalising) the field for new school providers while increasing diversity for parents.

Yet the shift from uniformity to diversity is not a revolution, which would be distinctly un-conservative, but a contingent evolution:

..there has not been one single policy or set of policies that have supported the entrance of private interests into the operation and delivery of schools. Rather, there has been a steady flow of reforms that have had an accumulative effect (Higham, 2014:124).

Conservatism advances organic notions of diversity, choice and competition in public institutions, contra statist monopoly or the imposition of uniformity which tend toward complacency, inefficiency and bureaucratic domination. As Keohane (2011) observes: '..simply getting central government out of the way is not enough; the localism agenda requires measures for "positive" as well as "negative liberty".' A Conservative conception of education is not a narrow ideology based on Darwinian notions of survival or *laissez faire* capitalism which prioritises profit and abandons the children of failing schools to 'the market' imperative. To be 'organic' it must be rooted in the life of a community and pursue the common good.

To be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle (the germ as it were) of public affections. It is the first link in the series by which we proceed towards a love of our country and to mankind (Burke, 1790:75).

Burke's 'little platoons' are 'the cradles of civic responsibility' and 'a way of empowering people' (Alison & Edwards, 1990:224). Some of Gove's critics acknowledge the philosophical genesis: writing expressly 'from the point of view of an educational "left"', Jones (2013:337) refers to a 'community' agenda which 'imagines each school as a culturally bonded little platoon'. Though he goes on to characterise (if not caricature) this as 'an educational army composed of little platoons, fragmented in its pay and conditions, subject in some cases to ferocious regulatory oversight' (*ibid.*). There is apparently no appreciation or understanding of the fact that Burke's 'little platoons' are not philosophically anarchic, morally autonomous or indifferently self-serving: they are freely associated, strategically united and (most importantly) voluntarily subject to the orders of their unifying commanding officer, like all military platoons. Burke's allusion is to a (literally) civilised military unit; not to militant combatants mired in 'fragmented' belligerence, oppressed by a 'ferocious' commandant. There is no individual conscription or corporate coercion: this expression

of conservatism may be subject to the natural laws of the deregulated market, but not at the expense of the regulation necessary for the compassionate functioning of the cohesive society.

Bromwich's 2014 analysis of *The Intellectual life of Edmond Burke* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press) represents the latest scholarship on Burkean philosophy. He situates Burke's 'of the people' philosophy in the context of varieties of democracy and revolution, but his consistent theme is that of the 'natural society'; of society rooted in trust rather than based on the coercive, artificial contract (pp4f). He doesn't advocate popular democracy or societal indifference without 'unchecked power':

..by "the little platoon" he may have meant political party, or the membership of a class, order, or profession. His stress anyway falls on the expansive end of the series and not its first "germ." We move from sympathy with our neighbors or clan or tribe to a feeling about mankind at large (p11).

Hatcher (2011:498) encapsulates the inherent democratic tension:

Advocates of free schools regard enabling groups of citizens and organisations to establish their own state-funded schools to meet local parental demand as exemplifying popular democracy. For critics, free schools fundamentally contravene principles of democratic accountability in a number of ways: the process of bidding, approval and establishment, the governance of free schools, and their independence from and absence of accountability to elected local government.

And yet evidence is beginning to emerge of very real 'Burkean' examples of local-democratic cooperation between schools – not just within Academy chains, but between Free Schools and LA institutions. Bamfield *et al.* (2013:22) observe the merits of an organic 'bottom-up' approach to education reform: '...change that is initially led by the Local Authority with input from schools and colleges will naturally evolve into a bottom-up movement, led by schools and the community, driven by a collective commitment to give every child and young person the best possible start in life and an impatient demand to make it happen.' The allusion is to Burke's organic conception of reform:

As David Hargreaves has written, a self-improving school system depends upon a collaborative network of partnerships and strategic alliances between schools. This entails building collaborative capacity progressively from the bottom up, starting with 'a small group of schools in deep partnership, expanding to a much larger group – an alliance, federation, trust, chain, local authority etc – and from there potentially to a whole region and nation' (Bamfield *et al.*, 2013:23; Hargreaves, 2012:32).

Significantly, ranged against these 'little platoons', the RSA and Suffolk County Council note the antithetical 'powerful forces exerted by institutional structures and embedded organisational cultures or pressures emanating from wider policy and structural arrangements' (p24). They do not specifically mention the Suffolk LA, but that is the institution or organisation which has presided over a decade of declining standards, variously described as: 'systematic underperformance'; 'close to the bottom of the national league tables'; 'poor pupil progression'; 'ranked 142 out of 150 local authorities for attainment at age 16'; 'four places from bottom in national tests of pupil performance at age 11' (p10). If it is not the LA, it is difficult to know what else they might mean by 'institutional

structures and embedded organisational cultures’. Certainly, a tendency toward LA-dependency is identified:

Although the County Council has issued a clear statement of intent that Suffolk headteachers must become the system leaders of the future, there is still a tendency for schools to look to the Local Authority to set the strategic priorities and, crucially, provide the resources to fund them... The danger is that SCC may still be sustaining a kind of compliant dependency with schools and headteachers, where many schools (including Academies) welcome the cushion of local authority ‘bailout’ where needed (p27).

While the LA is praised for its interventions on a number of levels, this research calls for:

..a more radical shift in responsibilities to schools for delivering school to school improvement, collaboration and challenge... a new relationship between schools and the local authority, away from the traditional model based on compliance and dependency, and towards a genuinely school-led model of improvement. Such a model would reflect the new financial reality in an increasingly devolved system, which is that the power to commission services and fund initiatives now lies overwhelmingly with schools (p28).

It is worth noting that the RSA authored this report, and they (at the time of writing) sponsored five academies. But a perceived bias or vested interest is mitigated by the fact that Suffolk County Council, beset by chronically low academic attainment and a culture of underachievement, commissioned the analysis and agreed the methodology. The RSA concludes:

This leads to some fundamental questions about the role of the Local Authority. The education White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE, 2010), set out the view of the coalition government that local authorities should no longer see themselves as ‘running’ schools or providing education services. Instead, they should see their role more in terms of commissioners (ensuring a strong supply of strong schools, with every child – particularly the most vulnerable – having access to a school place) and champions of parents’ interests, and the welfare of children. School improvement is seen primarily as the responsibility of schools themselves, with local authorities expected to facilitate the transfer of inadequate schools to academy status. Authorities might choose to still provide improvement support services but it should be on the basis of these services being marketed and traded. The recent RSA Academies Commission went further still, recommending that ‘over a transitional period of no longer than three years, all local authorities devolve current school improvement resources to school partnerships and no longer hold these at the centre’ (Bamfield *et al.*, 2013:27; RSA/Pearson, 2013:7).

SUMMARY

There is no conveniently codified bivalence between conservative and liberal notions of education philosophy: some find between them irreconcilable antithesis and mutual exclusion; others a multivalent spectrum of inclusive degrees. Free schools cannot be said in any meaningful sense to be free to do that which they are unable to do (such as make a profit; abolish the daily act of collective worship; or set aside the statutory requirement for that curriculum to be ‘broad and balanced’). Any attempt to place free schools within a codified philosophical singularity is to confine probabilistic generalisation by scientific law: the policy is more nuanced than that, being a ‘top-down’ scrutiny of a ‘bottom-up’ affiliation.

ii) MICHAEL GOVE'S PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

Having observed in Chapter II that 'ideology' in educational discourse has come to mean 'policy advocated very strongly to which I am vehemently opposed', it is unsurprising that Gove was frequently accused of being 'ideological'. The term has, over recent years, become a derogative, as though the honourable pursuit of partisan politics may now only be pursued only if it is somehow devoid of 'ideology'. This development is consistent with the postmodern escape from positivism, because 'the language of ideologies is couched in terms of truth-assertions' (Freeden, 1996:94).

In discussing methodologies of education research, Epstein (1983:3) made the observation 30 years ago that 'we have rarely openly acknowledged the existence of ideology in our activities'. Sensitive to allegations of oversimplification, he said that he avoided the terms 'left' and 'right', favouring a more nuanced discourse on the complex correlations between positivist, Marxist and relativist frameworks (p5). And yet the *Comparative Education Review*, which published his article, employed both terms in its title, and little appears to have changed in the intervening period. Thus Dale and Ozga (1993:73) referred to a 'New Right attack on teachers' following allegations that they 'were using the education service as a way of propagating left-wing views', which they then dismissed as 'scapegoating'. The 'New Right' is an essentially Hayekian assertion that 'liberal democracy and a free-market order are inseparable... Liberty cannot flourish until we recapture the wisdom of such eighteenth-century thinkers as Hume, Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson and Burke' (Freeden, 2003:157). Exley and Ball (2011:97) talk about the Conservative Party's 'strong distrust of a "left-wing" teaching profession', and the presentational objective to 'rethink its associations with Thatcherism on education'. And Chris Woodhead – HMCI under both Labour and Conservative administrations (who described himself as 'solidly New Labour' [Woodhead, 2003:164] and who 'publicly identified with the neo-liberal critics of education' [Thrupp, 2001:308]) – referred to the predominance of the narrative of the political left amongst 'the academics and bureaucrats who make up the educational establishment' (Woodhead, 2003:xiii). Much of the education literature is still framed in left-right⁵ terms, and, while 'ideology' may now be more readily acknowledged in educational methodologies, the academic discourse is still prefaced with this political polarisation. The perception remains one of a left-leaning education 'establishment' versus an 'ideological' right-wing Tory government (e.g., Griffiths, 2011:26; Pring, 2013; Exley & Ball, 2011:97 cf. Twigg, 2013).

Beginning with conceptualisations of 'ideology' is important because, in exploring the political objectives of policy, an understanding of the contemporary socio-political context is critical.

⁵ Kruger (2007:14) defines 'right' essentially as 'the thesis of the individual' and 'left' as 'the thesis of the state', though there is something of a spectrum in between. I shall try to avoid the convenient but unhelpful vernacular terms 'left-wing' and 'right-wing', not least because the terms have little meaning in the present context of reform which (as I posit) inclines toward political though not academic consensus.

As Halpin and Troyna (1994:5) observe, it is important for the researcher to ‘grapple with the theoretical, ethical and political dramas associated with their research’, not least because ‘value positions form the broad background against which the theoretical positions are developed or selected, and these in turn impact upon the selection of evidence’ (Ozga & Gewirtz, 1994:122). Yet it is difficult to articulate the disjuncture between genres of political philosophy and ideology without some sort of categorical morphology to analyse the normative features of conflicting worldviews and arrive at an academic mode of construing the social world. Straightforward empiricism may lead to polemical exaggeration, but it is indicative of the challenges raised in seeking to construct valid inferences about education policy in a political context in which ‘the right’ is perceived by a ‘left-leaning’ education ‘establishment’ to constitute a destructive and dangerous ‘neo-liberal’ hegemony which must be opposed (Wright, 2012:292; Tomlinson, 2013).

Gove’s conservative ideology

In consideration of Gove’s ideology, Green (2002:2f) notes that being ‘driven by belief’ – the precise allegation that Pring (2013) made of Gove – isn’t a particularly Conservative characteristic, or at least one which has been prevalent throughout its history. Unlike the liberal and socialist traditions, conservatives are ‘not concerned with articulating a set of principles to explain or legitimate their political behaviour’; ‘the Tory tradition is not best understood as a tradition of ideas’ (Green, 2002:3). Conservatism is more spirit than abstract doctrine: over centuries there has evolved a distinct Conservative position on the governance of the economy, social policy, and the balance between individual liberty and state authority. Free schools lean on a conception of C/conservatism beyond the territory of formal statements, where, Green (2002:3) observes, ‘lies a hinterland of rhetoric, values, and received ideas, which may be expressed in day-to-day political argument, speeches, correspondence, and legislative acts’. Oakeshott (1978:25) suggests that conservatism is an essentially uncoded and immutable disposition or attitude:

The general characteristics of this disposition are not difficult to discern, although they have often been mistaken. They centre upon a propensity to use and to enjoy what is available rather than to wish for or to look for something else; to delight in what is present rather than what was or what may be. Reflection may bring to light an appropriate gratefulness for what is available, and consequently the acknowledgment of a gift or an inheritance from the past; but there is no mere idolizing of what is past and gone. What is esteemed is the present; and it is esteemed not on account of its connections with a remote antiquity, nor because it is recognized to be more admirable than any possible alternative, but on account of its familiarity.

This familiarity is contiguous with the closeness of bonds associated with family: ‘individualism is underpinned and interpreted through a “natural” group framework which is institutionally constraining and morally directive’ (Freeden, 1996:390). These ‘natural groups’ are not restricted to consanguinity, but extended in society to ideological and moral fraternity.

With Free Schools, groups of individuals are acting in communal fraternity: parents, teachers, sponsoring businesses and philanthropists are collectively initiating them. In his Reith Lecture, historian and former Conservative NC advisor Niall Ferguson (2012) commented:

Like de Tocqueville, I believe that spontaneous local activism by citizens is better... than central state action not just in terms of its results, but more importantly in terms of its effect on us as citizens. For true citizenship is not just about voting, earning and staying on the right side of the law. It is also about participating in the troop – the wider group beyond our families – which is precisely where we learn how to develop and enforce rules of conduct. In short, to govern ourselves; to educate our children; to care for the helpless; to fight crime; to clear the beach of rubbish.

This is contiguous with the notion of ‘the active citizen’: in this context, ‘the one who is able to ensure their own children’s educational success and good discipline’ (Reay, 2008:646). It is not, however, an expression of codified unanimity. Like all political families, the Conservative Party is itself a coalition, and Conservatism is in perpetual tension between its Tory-collectivist and Whig-libertarian strands (Freeden, 1996:349). It is therefore no surprise that its education policy is perceived by its critics to be ‘fraught with tensions’ as it seeks to straddle the gulf between ‘Keith Joseph and his neo-liberal zeal over freedom for schools and vouchers for parents’ and ‘Kenneth Baker and his introduction of a prescriptive National Curriculum with national testing’ (Exley & Ball, 2007:97). Yet there is an observable philosophical coherence in the ‘thread’ of history which runs from the Forster Act, through the Baker Act, to Gove’s *Academies Act 2010* – which is predicated on aspects of freedom of choice, parental empowerment and community responsibility, all of which (are designed to) coincide to restrict or diminish the role of the state even as they empower the Secretary of State.

Jones (2013:330) places Gove in the ‘traditional conservative’ lineage of writers like T.S. Eliot, Evelyn Waugh and Kingsley Amis, and politicians like Richard Law and Angus Maude, whom he characterises as being ‘deeply antipathetic towards transformative politics of any kind, but in some way resigned to change’. This is not a teleological acceptance of social, economic or political inevitabilities: Jones also refers to Gove’s inclination to contend against the opposition with ‘combative force’, suggesting an identification with ‘a section of the right (that) remained unreconciled to the (post-war) new order and deeply critical of “official” Conservatism’s accommodation to it’. This is the conservatism of demotic reform:

In reality, Conservatism is a ‘wild’ and ‘adventurous’ force. It is less concerned with holding on to a vanishing past, than with mobilising to seize the future. To this end, it will absorb the ideas and tactics of the very revolution or reform that it opposes. This, writes Robin, quoting de Maistre, is how counter-revolutions are made: not by Oakeshottian quietism, but by rowdy populist politics that appeals to the masses – without disrupting the power of elites (Jones, 2013:330).

I shall turn to the ‘power of elites’ in Part Three, because the Gramscian language of hegemony and inequality permeates the academic discourse and, as Freedon (1998:409) observes, ‘they are not core components of conservative ideology, but instances of conservative institutional practice’. There is

a tension between its traditional structural predisposition toward establishment and the values of organic mutability, and Gove straddles this historic Tory-Whig tension:

It would be tempting to see Gove as an outlier, exceptional in his extravagant abrasiveness, and thus to assume that when the waters close over his period of office, policy will resume its normal course. This would not be the best approach to understanding him. In several ways, Gove typifies the educational politics of the right – its historical affiliations, its international thematics, its discursive emphases, its present strategies – and to view him as someone *sui generis* would miss these continuities and connections (Jones, 2013:329).

Gove's philosophers

In shaping his education policy, Gove disclosed his educational influences to be Antonio Gramsci, E.D. Hirsch and Daniel T. Willingham (Gove, 2013d – setting aside the rhetorical flattery of certain 'brilliant head teachers'). He sought to elucidate his reforms with appeals to the philosophies of de Tocqueville, Paine and Oakeshott (Gove, 2009b); Mill (Gove, 2011, 2013c); and to Francis Hutcheson, Adam Smith, David Hume and James Monboddo (Gove, 2009a) – the founders of 'the Scottish Enlightenment ideal of the Democratic Intellect' which 'underpins everything (he is) arguing for' (Gove, 2009b) – this 'truly liberal approach to education' (Gove, 2011).

The following exposition of Gove's appropriation of these philosophers is prefaced with caveats: as Aldrich (2006:133) reminds us when referring to John Locke as 'the principal founder of philosophical liberalism' and 'the most important educational thinker in English history', it is patent that 'Locke's ideas cannot simply be translated into the twenty-first century'. Nor, indeed, can the ideas of the philosophers of Gove's appeal – an acknowledgement he makes with the recognition: '...how different today's Liberals and Tories are from those of one hundred and thirty years ago' (Gove, 2011). Societal, political, economic and educational conditions are variable, and so is the ideology expounded by the philosopher. Over the course of a decade, for example, Mill shifted his individualist inclination and voluntarist preference to the statist one: '...if parents will not accept responsibility for educating their children, the state must impose it' (Garforth, 1979:24). Philosophers necessarily occupy themselves with contemporary problems, '(n)evertheless, certain continuities may also be noted' (Aldrich, 2006:133), and it is these conceptual philosophical continuities which give rise to what may termed 'ideology', which Giddens (1997:583) defines as 'shared ideas or beliefs which serve to justify the interests of dominant groups'. There are variable apprehensions – positive and negative – but, either way, '(i)deological preferences cannot so quietly lie below the surface when education is the subject since everybody seems to have his own ideas on it' (West, unpublished).

Nor can philosophical discourse be divorced from its setting: Gove's principal speeches on education were made to academic societies, for which (and within which) there is an observable tendency to season political advocacy with allusions to philosophical knowledge and to appropriate philosophers to the cause of a particular policy. Gove was accused of appearing 'to have bastardised

Oakeshott's words in support of a vision of government-driven socialisation' (Jordan, 2014), but it goes with the territory of cynicism surrounding politicians, which is nothing new: Plato's philosopher-kings had to contend with the politician-sophists – those who pretend to knowledge but exercise rule without it (Plato, 2003:VIII.303a-b). Where persuasion combines with compulsion for political reform, the citizens must be presented with both knowledge and authority. When it comes to expounding the imperative of the 'active' citizen motivated by the 'right' school which imparts the 'good' education for a vision of the 'virtuous' life, the participatory academic society (be it Ruskin College for Callaghan and Blair, or Cambridge University for Gove) evokes the authority of the democratic Athenian assembly. Having established the setting, I now turn to the philosophical *fons et origo* from which Gove derived his conception of educational enlightenment.

i) Thomas Paine

Writing in 1791, Paine proposed a method of education funding by which 'ignorance will be banished from the rising generation, and the number of poor will hereafter become less, because their abilities, by the aid of education, will be greater (Paine, 1791/1999:170):

..A nation under a well regulated government should permit none to remain uninstructed. It is monarchical and aristocratical governments, only, that require ignorance for their support.

Suppose then four hundred thousand children to be in this condition, which is a greater number than ought to be supposed. After the provisions already made, the method will be,

To allow for each of those children ten shillings a year for the expense of schooling, for six years each, which will give them six months schooling each year, and half a crown a year for paper and spelling books (Paine, 1791/1999:173).

This may be the first proposal of an educational 'voucher' as a remedy for inequality: West (unpublished:13) says Paine 'did discover the voucher principle – indeed he was probably the originator of the idea'. It was deemed necessary for two principal reasons:

The voucher system was required to emancipate the parent and child from the state not because state institutions were negligent and incompetent. On the contrary the danger was that the ruling power in the government would find state schools an active vehicle for indoctrination and therefore an instrument for perpetuating their power. Thorough despotism led to a despotism over the mind as well as the body. Paine wanted a politically free education as an antidote because a corrupt government cannot stand against an enlightened people. The dilemma was that the state's help was needed in providing the money. For Paine the solution to this dilemma was the voucher principle (*ibid.*).

But there was also a dimension of social justice, because '(m)any a youth, with good natural genius, who is apprenticed to a mechanical trade, such as a carpenter, joiner, millwright, shipwright, blacksmith, etc., is prevented getting forward the whole of his life from the want of a little common education when a boy' (Paine, 1791/1999:170). The problem was that:

Public schools do not answer the general purpose of the poor. They are chiefly in corporation towns, from which the country towns and villages are excluded; or, if admitted, the distance occasions a great loss of time. Education, to be useful to the poor, should be on the spot, and the best method, I believe, to accomplish this is to enable the parents to pay the expenses themselves (p173).

Parents who are enabled to pay for their children's education thereby have a choice of where to deposit the 'voucher'. It is, for Paine, a principle of freedom and democracy that parents as workers should be 'free to make their own bargains' (p183), and the exercise of that power leads to institutional competition and so improvement.

While some demur from the free-market/competition anachronisms, criticising those who 'fictionalize Paine's account to fit their own beliefs' (e.g., Stillwaggon, Callagy *et al.*, 2013:642), Gove's appeal is to Paine's 'common sense' in relation to 'the widely shared and democratically expressed feelings of free citizens' (Gove, 2009b):

One of the central goals of David Cameron's Conservative Party is the breaking up of bureaucratic control, and establishment power, when bureaucracies and establishments are thwarting the common sense of the people. And nowhere is common sense more flouted than among the education establishment and by education bureaucracies (*ibid.*).

There is no dispute about Paine's priority in this regard:

As the founding of political legitimacy in knowledge and understanding sets clear requirements for leadership, it also establishes a foundation for democratic political participation and defines an essential element of democratic life, namely the exchange of ideas and the priority of education as both the means of preparing rulers and the mechanism by which those better prepared to lead might be distinguished. Modern democracy – at least in Paine's view – is rule by those who know how. Based on this definition, taken up in one way or another by a wide variety of democratic thinkers, modern democracy and universal education have become inseparable concepts, tied together by the ideal of all human beings participating in a shared, perfectible nature (Stillwaggon, Callagy *et al.*, 2013:643).

For Paine, as for Gove, government must be meritocratic⁶ – by those who know how, rather than those who inherit – and it is free and adequate education which liberates the potential of the individual to participate in society. Mindful of his own upbringing – through adoption and economic disadvantage – Gove's invocation of Paine is inextricably fused with themes of social justice. It is not that parents, headteachers and school sponsors become unrestricted and that central government has no role; it is that government intervenes only in proportion to the necessity to limit social injustice, hence Gove's vision to replicate the ethos of the private school in public education, because:

..the entire history of formal education has served the preservation of privilege among a small, elite class. Privileged classes' investment in their children's education results in a greater accumulation of power and wealth in the hands of the few. What begins as a socially sanctioned good for particular individuals becomes an evil for society, insofar as it produces power differentials too great to address by civil means. (Stillwaggon, Callagy *et al.*, 2013:644).

⁶ Incorporated also at the risk of anachronism: the term was invented in 1958 by Michael Young in *The Rise of the Meritocracy, 1870–2023: An Essay on Education and Equality* (London: Thames & Hudson). According to Young's son, Toby, it influenced Crosland toward the abolition of the 11+ and the rolling out of comprehensive schools (Young, T, 2015).

On resigning as HMCI in 2000, Woodhead (2003:xiv) observed:

A Conservative government could create the context in which excellence would flourish, if it articulated an approach to reform that, true to basic Conservative principles, gave genuine power to parents to purchase the education they want for their child.

These 'basic Conservative principles' merit further analysis. On one level, there is an apprehension of a 'Conservative Quadrilateral': the individual – choice – the market – wealth creation. But this is to ignore the complementary quadrilateral: community – responsibility – welfare – trusteeship (Alison & Edwards, 1990:217). Depending on one's view of Gove's reforms, the individual/community, choice/responsibility, market/welfare and wealth creation/trusteeship themes of social justice are differently apprehended: as a negative notion of liberty or as non-interference in natural structures and organic associations. Freedon (1996:390) notes of the Conservative Party's 1987 election manifesto that social justice was 'interpreted as a reward for individual success rather than, as welfare ideology has it, the equal treatment of all'.

Gove's liberal conception of conservatism is not concerned with the perpetuation of advantage and privilege, but of contending against those same vested interests which so preoccupied Thatcher, whose conservatism was Tory in its Burkean deference to the great institutions of state, but thoroughly Whiggish and libertarian after Mill in its iconoclastic challenge to the big agencies of state. Harrison (1994:228) observes: 'She was as impatient with the traditionalist and Tory establishment of male clubland as with the corporatist establishment entrenched by Labour.' For Paine, as for Gove, class privilege is a self-perpetuating intergenerational injustice against which government regulation is a 'necessary evil' (Paine, 1776:2).

ii) Alexis de Tocqueville

Gove's appeal to the philosophy of de Tocqueville is more cursory:

The more knowledgeable, intellectually self-confident and adept at distinguishing good arguments from bad our children become, the more healthy all our democratic institutions. De Tocqueville pointed out that democracy is stronger when individual citizens have a stock of knowledge on which to draw which allows them to stand out against tides of opinion which are driven by passing fashions and populist rages (Gove, 2009b).

When the educational establishment is concerned with 'passing fashions' and central government with 'populist rages', it is individual citizens acting locally who enable them to 'stand out against tides of opinion'. De Tocqueville was unequivocal in the anti-democratic nature of socialism and statist notions of equality. Quoted in translation by Hayek (1945:77), he said in 1848:

Democracy extends the sphere of individual freedom, socialism restricts it. Democracy attaches all possible value to each man; socialism makes each man a mere agent, a mere number. Democracy and socialism have nothing in common but one word: equality. But notice the difference: while democracy seeks equality in liberty, socialism seeks equality in restraint and servitude.

This is the conservative conception of equality: social justice is not the realisation of certain abstract ideas – equality and emancipation, for example, with the ‘active pursuit of “social goals”’ (Scruton, 2001:141); it is a system of naturally occurring and beneficial relationships, being essentially the fulfilment of the individual’s need for positive liberty through social membership (Kruger, 2007:52). For Gove, educational social justice is predicated on equality of opportunity, and life’s opportunities are contingent on the acquisition of knowledge. Gove doesn’t make it explicit, but there is an expressed model of governance in de Tocqueville’s philosophy which is contiguous with Cameron’s theme of ‘Big Society’ localism:

In order to understand the consequences of this division, it is necessary to make a short distinction between the affairs of the Government. There are some objects which are national by their very nature, that is to say, which affect the nation as a body, and can only be intrusted to the man or the assembly of men who most completely represent the entire nation. Amongst these may be reckoned war and diplomacy. There are other objects which are provincial by their very nature, that is to say, which only affect certain localities, and which can only be properly treated in that locality. Such, for instance, is the budget of a municipality. Lastly, there are certain objects of a mixed nature, which are national inasmuch as they affect all the citizens who compose the nation, and which are provincial inasmuch as it is not necessary that the nation itself should provide for them all. Such are the rights which regulate the civil and political condition of the citizens. No society can exist without civil and political rights. These rights therefore interest all the citizens alike; but it is not always necessary to the existence and the prosperity of the nation that these rights should be uniform, nor, consequently, that they should be regulated by the central authority (de Tocqueville, 1835:XVIII).

Educational provision may be provincial or ‘of a mixed nature’: central government works with local government because subsidiarity is deemed more just. But when local authorities tend toward the ideological assertion of uniformity, as Gove contends, it is for the central authority to centralise power in order to regulate for institutional diversity and stronger deregulation.

iii) Michael Oakeshott

Gove’s appeal to Oakeshott is to his enlightenment principles of the classical liberal education:

As Michael Oakeshott once argued, every human being is born heir to an inheritance – “an inheritance of human achievements; an inheritance of thoughts, beliefs, ideas, understandings, intellectual and practical enterprises, languages, canons, works of arts, books musical compositions and so on...” (Gove, 2009b).

From Oakeshott’s (slightly paraphrased) ‘Learning and Teaching’ in R.S. Peters’ *The Concept of Education* (1967:157), Gove derived his educational aim:

Education should be a process of granting every individual their rights to that inheritance. Every child should have the chance to be introduced to the best that has been thought, and written. To deny children the opportunity to extend their knowledge so they can appreciate, enjoy, and become familiar with the best of our civilization is to perpetuate a very specific, and tragic, sort of deprivation (Gove, 2009b).

The essence of Burkean-conservative educational philosophy is the inter-generational transmission of the ‘best’ knowledge accumulated by humanity throughout history. To be deprived of this amounts to an injustice; ‘deprivation’ of the necessary capital by which life may be better appreciated and

enjoyed. This is not concerned with ‘neo-liberalism’, the free market or the value of student ‘productivity’ to future GDP: it is learning for the sake of human flourishing.

..for Oakeshott a liberal education is not a technocratic process for creating future workers. It is not even a simple transfer of knowledge from one person to another. It is really a kind of adventure, a kind of initiation into what he calls “the conversation of mankind”. It’s a way in which we learn to be human: by participating in that conversation which makes up our culture. In his words: “The pursuit of learning is not a race in which the competitors jockey for the best place. It is not even an argument or a symposium. It is a conversation.” (Norman, 2015).

Oakeshott’s ‘conversation’ is not only the means of acquiring knowledge; it is the medium of participation in civilisation and of understanding meaning. This ‘inheritance’ is his preferred pedagogical method and the key to understanding his educational thought (Oakeshott, 1972:63). But nowhere is he directly concerned with the structural-institutional means of achieving his educational aim: ‘The marks of a good school are that in it learning may be recognized as, itself, a golden satisfaction which needs no adventitious gilding to recommend it’ (p70).

Appropriating the name of Oakeshott to advance the cause of Free Schools may be rhetorical contrivance, but it may equally be posited that free schools are not inconsistent with his view of freedom:

..the ‘freedom’ which can be pursued is not an independently premeditated ‘ideal’ or a dream; like scientific hypothesis, it is something which is already intimated in a concrete manner of behaving. Freedom, like a recipe for game pie, is not a bright idea; it is not a ‘human right’ to be deduced from some speculative concept of human nature. The freedom which we enjoy is nothing more than arrangements, procedures of a certain kind (Oakeshott, 1951:53f).

This is not freedom as political ideology or human right, but freedom as organic social morality, concordant with familiar human disposition and aspiration. This is his expression of conservatism: to build on what exists rather than to innovate and fabricate novelty for no other reason than abstract ideology. Just as ‘there is no “ultimate man” hidden in the womb of time or prefigured in the characters who now walk the world’ (Oakeshott, 1972:64), so there is no ultimate structural model of doing school: the aim of education is to seek to understand meaning through our common ‘inheritance’, by which children may become participatory in the fullness of humanity (p65).

What we have to do with, then, is a disposition to cultivate the ‘freedom’ inherent in agency, to enjoy individuality, and added to this the disposition readily to concede virtue to this exercise of personal autonomy acquired in self-understanding. And we are concerned with them because this is a historic disposition notably not only in the *moeurs* of modern Europe but also reflected in the character attributed to states and the office attributed to governments (Oakeshott, 1975:239).

It would be a mistake to appropriate a mode of personal autonomy for institutional freedom. But instead of imposing a statist ‘ideal’ of uniformity through rationalist planning, Gove sought a creative Oakeshottian ‘conversation’ – argumentation, even – around existing educational arrangements and procedures, with cooperative agents. Together, they introduce the child to his or her ‘inheritance’. This is not liberalism in the sense of unbridled autonomy against the collective, but freedom as organic civil association for the complete education. The means of defining this

‘inheritance’ is the NC – the introduction of which by the Conservative Party in 1988 had long been demanded by the Labour Party (HMSO, 2009) – but pared down to a minimum and measured by the EBacc, leaving headteachers, parents, governors and associated sponsors to determine the extent of cultural enhancement and the preferred method of inculcation.

iv) JS Mill

Gove invoked Mill in the contexts of parental responsibility, institutional autonomy and the role of the state in financing and maintaining standards:

..I believe in a truly liberal approach to education - like that outlined by John Stuart Mill - where the state provides the finance and sets high expectations but the delivery of education and the management of day-to-day learning is devolved to genuinely independent schools and chains of schools (Gove, 2011).

Conservatives support free schools because they devolve power to Burke’s little platoons. Liberals support free schools because they embody John Stuart Mill’s vision of the state paying for universal education through schools run by autonomous bodies (Gove, 2013c).

Mill wrote extensively on education, and advocated a number of theories of institutional autonomy within the state, so much so that it is possible to derive a number of different (and conflicting) approaches to his thoughts on universal provision in the nineteenth century. ‘What the State can usefully do is to make itself a central depository, and active circulator and diffuser, of the experience resulting from many trials’ (Mill, 1977/1859:306 cf. 309). Contemporary ‘small-state’ proponents (e.g., Blond, 2010) aver that social problems are better solved through cooperation with private companies, charities and religious institutions rather than directly through government departments. In this context, Gove’s appropriation of Millite liberalism in support of marketisation and choice is not unreasonable: ‘An education established and controlled by the state should exist, if it exist at all, as one among many competing experiments carried on for the purpose of example and stimulus, to keep the others up to a certain standard of excellence’ (Mill, 1865:63). Parents would be free to choose a school for their children, and there would be a certain ‘minimum’ level of education (*ibid.*), measured by a centralised examination system, and the acquisition of this knowledge would enhance the future free actions (and so employment and life prospects) of the individual.

For Mill, as for Gove, the statist solution tends toward uniformity, which only diversity in provision can properly address:

All that has been said of the importance of individuality of character, and diversity in opinions and modes of conduct, involves, as of the same unspeakable importance, diversity of education. A general State education is a mere contrivance for moulding people to be exactly like one another: and as the mould in which it casts them is that which pleases the predominant power in the government, whether this be a monarch, a priesthood, an aristocracy, or the majority of the existing generation, in proportion as it is efficient and successful, it establishes a despotism over the mind, leading by natural tendency to one over the body (Mill, 1865:63).

And Gove follows Mill on the limitations of the state in educational provision:

Even if the government could comprehend within itself, in each department, all the most eminent intellectual capacity and active talent of the nation, it would not be the less desirable that the conduct of a large portion of the affairs of the society should be left in the hands of the persons immediately interested in them. The business of life is an essential part of the practical education of a people; without which, book and school instruction, though most necessary and salutary, does not suffice to qualify them for conduct, and for the adaptation of means to ends. Instruction is only one of the desiderata of mental improvement; another almost as indispensable, is a vigorous exercise of the active energies; labour, contrivance, judgement, self-control: and the natural stimulus to these is the difficulties of life (Mill, 1909:948).

But on the finitude of debates around the curriculum, however, Mill was wrong:

Were the duty of enforcing universal education once admitted, there would be an end to the difficulties about what the State should teach, and how it should teach, which now convert the subject into a mere battle-field for sects and parties, causing the time and labour which should have been spent in educating, to be wasted in quarrelling about education. If the government would make up its mind to require for every child a good education, it might save itself the trouble of providing one. It might leave to parents to obtain the education where and how they pleased, and content itself with helping to pay the school fees of the poorer classes of children, and defraying the entire school expenses of those who have no one else to pay for them (Mill, 1909:948).

State education as a ‘battle-field for sects and parties’ is what Gove was attempting to mitigate, but which, in the pursuit, he palpably aggravated. Yet the intensification of hostility to his reforms was, he considered, a price worth paying if the war were ultimately to be won to establish a ‘truly liberal approach to education’ (Gove, 2011), which satisfied the desire of parents – ‘especially poorer parents – (who) want their children to get up and get on.. (which) means acquiring a proper rounded rigorous education’ (Gove, 2013d). For Gove, this ‘proper rounded rigorous education’ has its genesis in ‘the Scottish Enlightenment ideal of the Democratic Intellect’, an ideal which is more concerned with educational curricula, mental philosophy and humanist logic than it is with institutional freedoms – except in the case of Adam Smith’s advocacy of the market in education.

v) Adam Smith

In talking ‘Of the Expence of the Institutions for the Education of Youth’ in *The Wealth of Nations*, Book V (1776), Smith articulates the virtues of choice and competition: when students are ‘left free to choose what college they liked best, such liberty might perhaps contribute to excite some emulation among different colleges’ (Smith, 1776:V.I.140); ‘where the competition is free, the rivalry of competitors, who are all endeavouring to jostle one another out of employment, obliges every man to endeavour to execute his work with a certain degree of exactness (V.I.133). Standards of teaching are contingent on linking salaries to performance (V.I.135), because:

If the authority to which (the teacher) is subject resides in the body corporate, the college, or university, of which he himself is a member, and which the greater part of the other members are, like himself, persons who either are or ought to be teachers, they are likely to make a common cause, to be all very indulgent to one another, and every man to consent that his neighbour may neglect his duty, provided he himself is allowed to neglect his own. (V.I.137).

There is in this ‘common cause’ inclination toward being ‘indulgent to one another’ the precursor to what Gove referred to as ‘the Blob’. The solution, Smith proposes, is scrutiny by an external authority:

If the authority to which he is subject resides, not so much in the body corporate of which he is a member, as in some other extraneous persons, in the bishop of the diocese, for example; in the governor of the province; or, perhaps, in some minister of state it is not indeed in this case very likely that he will be suffered to neglect his duty altogether (V.I.138).

If it is the case that local authorities became ‘indulgent’ of neglect, as Thatcher and Baker averred (and, indeed, Callaghan intimated), there is a need for Ofsted. If that does not resolve the neglect, as Adonis, Blunkett and Gove averred, there is a need for ‘other extraneous persons’. But West (unpublished:11f) identifies a contradiction in Smith’s thesis:

First Adam Smith interferes with the free choice of the people by making them spend money on their own education on the grounds that most of them are not wise enough to provide for it from their own money free will. But once the government has imposed the obligation of education by legal sanction assisted by financial help, he immediately allows them free choice again to select their own teachers. An observer may well ask that if people are stupid in the one thing why aren’t they stupid in the others and wouldn’t their free choice of teachers result in a debasement of standards? One answer by Smith is that his empirical studies show that competition is efficiently workable in the latter aspect. “The demand for such instruction produced what it always produces - the talent for giving it, and the emulation which an unrestrained competition never fails to excite, appears to have brought that talent to a very high degree of perfection. In the attention which the (free enterprise) ancient philosophers excited, in the empire which they acquired over the opinions and principles of their auditors in the faculty which they possessed of giving a certain tone and character to the conduct and conversation of those auditors, they appear to have been much superior to any modern teachers.”

Observing that *The Wealth of Nations* is ‘a delicate piece of interweaving’ (p14), West suggests that Smith is no advocate of the market in education essentially because not all parents know what is best for their children (Smith, 1776:V.I.181f).

Consumer oriented economics he supports and brilliantly develops through *The Wealth of Nations* but he draws the line at education because in this sphere he just does not like the way people spend their money – or rather the way they *don’t* spend their money. Smith the Authoritarian Philosopher takes over and interferes with the consumer’s free choice at this critical point towards the end of the book (West, unpublished:5).

It is an acknowledged reality that ‘parents from different social groups may be better able to make choices because of their higher levels of education, their ability to access information and their ability to navigate the system (West, 2014:339). Thus Smith’s free choice is not ‘regarded for its own sake as it was for Tom Paine but rather because it produced the “right” results’ (West, unpublished:14). And it is perhaps Gove’s concept of ‘rightness’ that best illustrates his philosophy, not least because in a speech to the Social Market Foundation entitled ‘The Progressive Betrayal’, he described his educational philosophy as a ‘liberation theology’ (Gove, 2013d).

Gove’s mission of educational liberation

‘The Big Society concept has not been totally without theological input’ (Cranmer, 2011). By situating his reforms in the emancipatory tradition of ecclesial communities in pursuit of justice

for the poor (and other oppressed groups), Gove's rhetoric became that of evangelical missiology. He expounded his creed:

I began tonight by arguing that for those of us who are political progressives it is also necessary to be educational conservatives. And there is a sense in which all great education has a conservative element – we wish to pass on – protected and if possible enhanced – the whole repertoire of human accomplishment to our children. But while I am proud in many ways to be a conservative I think – in a spirit of proper candour – that I should actually come out and accept that this Government's educational philosophy is not really conservative at all – but rather uncompromisingly radical. Because conservatives have always tended to suspect that many of the things which need to be protected from generation to generation – the Royal Opera House, the House of Lords, the Bar, Oxford High Table, agreeable homes with lovely views over the Downs, marriage, the bench of bishops, Lord Lieutenancies and Tate Gallery directorships – can only be protected if they're enjoyed by a minority. I don't look at the world that way. I think the things we need to protect and enhance – a love of literature, pride in our history, scientific curiosity, beautiful written English, innovative and creative mathematical thinking, joy in discovery, colleges and universities, liberal learning and openness to the world, female emancipation and social mobility – are all better protected if we make them as universal as possible (Gove, 2013d).

Gove's assertion that his educational philosophy 'is not really conservative at all – but rather uncompromisingly radical' accords with academic observations that 'there is growing gap between Cameron's presentation as a centrist politician and the radical ideology pursued by his government' (Griffiths, 2011:26). But this only articulates (once again) the philosophical tension within the Conservative Party itself, which has existed since its inception in the nineteenth century when the Tory Party forged a formal coalition with those Whigs who did not join Gladstone's Liberal Party.

In the context of the nineteenth-century debates on the 'free' public schools, Shrosbree (66 #20) notes:

Clarendon's own career illustrated the uncertainty of party definitions; in early life he had 'strong Whig and Free Trade principles', in 1865 he was 'a very Conservative Whig' and joined Gladstone's Liberal government..'

One of the clearest distinctions between the 'moderate' Tory and 'radical' Whig is evidenced in the manner in which these two groups approached the constraints and deficiencies of the institutions of state. Whiggish/liberal political language includes the themes of 'devolution', 'accountability', 'bottom-up', 'democracy', 'subsidiarity', 'choice' and 'diversity', many of which were central to the Thatcher's Non-conformist view of conservatism (though, as observed, praxis often conflicted). All of these themes were consistent with Cameron's 'Big Society' policy refrain (with which, again, praxis conflicted). If something isn't working, the Whig tends to the view that fundamental political reform is justified, if not urgent, because foundational principles are deficient. The Tory, however, would hold that, although this particular embodiment of the principle is wrong, the value of the principle ought not to be diminished. For the Whig, all interest is centred on the individual's assertion of the need for immediate reform; for the Tory, there is sympathy for established institutions and a desire to interpret their meaning and significance for the whole of society before reformation is attempted. The Tory-Whig 'tension' within educational philosophy has been framed by critics:

On the one hand, within Conservative education policy a belief in markets and a minimal state, basic tenets of neo-liberalism, have meant a push for privatisation, ‘the ‘liberation’ of schools to innovate and diversify, and an enhanced role for parents as consumers in an educational marketplace. On the other, strong distrust of a ‘left-wing’ teaching profession, coupled with firm Conservative beliefs in ‘real subjects’, and that ‘the old methods are best’ when it comes to teaching, discipline and the curriculum, have meant the imposition of strong accountability measures, detailed instruction of what should be taught in schools and a great deal of surveillance imposed from above (Exley & Ball, 2007:97).

Again, it is markets and ‘basic tenets of neo-liberalism. But there are ‘forms and degrees of neoliberalism’ (Jessop, 2002:458) which are rarely assessed in the educational discourse:

Table 1: Forms of Neo-liberalism

Policy Adjustment	Modulation of policies to improve performance of an accumulation regime and mode of regulation
Regime Shift	Paradigm shift in accumulation and regulation, introducing new economic and political principles
Radical System	Transformation Neoliberalism as strategy for moving from state socialism to capitalist social formation

Source: Jessop, 2002:458.

Educational reform relating to free schools is really incremental policy adjustment ‘to improve performance’, though critics invariably cast it as paradigm shift or radical system overhaul in order to gain policy-language advantage.

The principal hurdles to the fulfilment of Gove’s ‘liberation theology’ were those ‘forces which... stand in the way of liberating young people from the chains of ignorance’ (Gove, 2013d). In the rhetoric was an appeal to the work of Gramsci, which merits some exegesis because it goes some way to explaining the philosophical framework of this thesis, which I set out in Part Three. Gove explained:

Antonio Gramsci was a powerful critic of the power structures of his time which entrenched the dominance of traditional elites in Italian life. And one of the greatest concerns he had was that one – increasingly fashionable – ideology which was being sold in Twenties and Thirties Italy as progressive – would only end up reinforcing the inequalities and injustices he hated. The ideology he so feared in inter-war Italy was what we have come to call – with tragic inappropriateness – progressive education... Gramsci saw that – far from being progressive or democratic – this new approach to education risked depriving the working classes of the tools they needed to emancipate themselves from ignorance. As he wrote, “The new concept of schooling is in its romantic phase, in which the replacement of ‘mechanical’ by ‘natural’ methods has become unhealthily exaggerated... previously pupils at least acquired a certain baggage of concrete facts. Now there will no longer be any baggage to put in order... the most paradoxical aspect of it all is that this new type of school is advocated as being democratic, while in fact it is destined not merely to perpetuate social differences but crystallise them in Chinese complexity” (Gove, 2013d).

Appropriating the Marxist Gramsci to the marketised cause of free schools was part of Gove’s revolution-invoking, philosophy-borrowing/conflating strategy to aggrandise his vision and nullify objections from the political left. Gramsci’s writing on education is complex and contradictory: he

observed that each stratum of society has its own type of school ‘intended to perpetuate a specific traditional function, ruling or subordinate’ (Gramsci, 1971:40), but his solution was not to create a multiplicity of different institutions to provide choice, but ‘to create a single type of formative school... which would take the child up to the threshold of his choice of job, forming him during this time as a person capable of thinking, studying and ruling – or controlling those who rule’ (*ibid.*). But he did advocate a hegemony of ‘organic intellectuals’ who could ‘organise and articulate the skein of beliefs and of institutional and social relations’ (Ball & Bellamy, 2003:287) to supplant the preeminent and pervasive ideology of the elite intellectuals who embody (and are bound by) historical continuity. The intellectual elites of the dominant class are thereby overthrown by the masses, led by integrative ‘organic’ elites who speak and act for the working class (pp23f, 376f). The democratic phenomenon is reified by Gove’s appeal to Burke’s ‘little platoons’ of parents, teachers, charities, etc., who may apply to establish a Free School, hence Gove’s emphasis on the imperative of Whiggish meritocracy (as opposed to elite Tory aristocracy), because:

Wherever you look – Cabinets or Shadow Cabinets – newspaper editorial conferences or FTSE 100 boardrooms – the nation’s galleries or bishop’s palaces – the positions of power and influence are overwhelmingly held by the privately-educated or the children of middle class professionals. The social differences which existed in our society before the Nineteen-Sixties have – in all too many cases – not just been perpetuated but crystallised. And it is impossible to reflect on this entrenching of inequality without also reflecting on the educational philosophy which has been so dominant during this period (Gove, 2013d).

Cultural capital, he avers, should not be the sole preserve of an elite:

The rich should no more have exclusive access to the means of intellectual enlightenment than they should have an exclusive hold on the means of economic production, distribution and exchange... When those who have money choose an education for their children it is – almost without exception – in institutions where the acquisition of knowledge and immersion in traditional subject disciplines is central to the school’s mission (*ibid.*).

SUMMARY

Gove situated himself on the Whiggish/Non-conformist/radical wing of the Conservative Party, contra the Tory/Anglican/moderate tradition of benign paternalism. He inclined toward liberty but not complete autonomy or unrestrained individualism because attempts to articulate truths about the world are likely to be founded on observation, and the conservative sustains a disbelief in the instant changeability of human nature. Scruton (2001:8) observes: ‘Freedom without institutions is blind: it embodies neither genuine social continuity nor...genuine individual choice.’ And he further notes that ‘it is a recent venture of the human spirit for men and women to define themselves as individuals, as creatures whose nature and value are summed up in their unique individual being’ (2001:24). Gove’s educational philosophy was in coalition tension because conservatism itself seeks to articulate a middle way between institutional continuity and personal freedom: the individual’s identification with something greater – be it society, class, religion, state or nation – is deemed to

possess an innate authority or to be of a value which transcends the value of individuality. Civil order is maintained only by controlling excessive assertions of individuality and freedom, hence the centralisation of authority to the DfE, to be exercised firstly in the scrutiny and approval of the 'little platoons' (as outlined in Chapter I), and ultimately as a last resort in instances of failure to honour the funding agreement.

Part Three

Theoretical Framework, Research Design and Methodology

This section will: i) expound the interpretive framework of the thesis, grounded in the sociological patterns and observable characteristics of the theory of elites; and ii) offer a justificatory view of Free School legitimacy with an appeal to the principle of *epistemic proceduralism* (Chapter V). I will then set out the research design and methodological approach I have adopted: i) assessing my positionality, influences and ethical considerations; ii) expounding the process of researching policy and interviewing the elite, incorporating: subject selection; researcher conduct; piloting; the interviews proper; hierarchical focusing; and the method of data analysis (Chapter VI).

CHAPTER V

THE THEORY OF ELITES

INTRODUCTION

We make sense of ‘freedom’ partly through the explicit expression of the meaning of the term, and that meaning coherently fitting together with other beliefs. The articulation of the term and the logical interrelation of that articulation with other ideas about the way the world is, the way we know it, and the way we should act within it, are what Charles Taylor (1989:3-24) calls ‘inescapable frameworks’. These facilitate the process of sense-making by articulating and coherently interrelating explicit notions. The internal consistencies between overt ideas used within philosophical frameworks strengthen those frameworks.

In consideration of educational research, Pring (2000:162) observes that it is:

...so often engaged in without any knowledge of, or feeling for, the problems which can only be described as philosophical. What often is seen as a straightforward empirical matter is in fact fraught with problems – unclear concepts, questionable assumptions about verification of conclusions, naive ideas about social facts and reality, and above all, unexamined notions of an educational practice. In other cases, philosophy is entered into, but often without a recognition of the complexity of the issues, as when ‘positivism’ becomes a ‘boo-word’, extended to all quantitative research, or ‘postmodernism’ is embraced as the final stage of philosophic evolution (there can be no post-postmodernism)... Appeal is made to philosophers as authorities. ‘And so-and-so says’ (Foucault, Habermas, Derrida), and there ends the argument.

Marx, Durkheim and Weber are the recurring names in many analytical frameworks of educational research which deal with social-choice theories of (dis-)empowerment and domination, from both economic and authoritarian perspectives. It’s not quite ‘and there ends the argument’, but the ‘top-down’ focus of research is frequently on the positivist paradigm of Durkheim’s observable ‘social facts’; the interpretivist behavioural paradigm of Weber’s ‘ideal types’; or Marx’s critical theory of the inherent social inequalities in the complex dynamics of economy, power and culture. For a ‘bottom-up’ focus on elites in the context of marketisation and choice as conservative apprehensions of social justice, I needed a framework which entertained the study of the policy development of Free Schools as a ‘straightforward empirical matter’; and the inevitability, if not the moral goodness, of market competition, institutional diversity and the existence of an elite policy community of ‘organic intellectuals’ to sustain the themes of autonomy and choice in education.

i) PARETO AND ELITE THEORY

Insofar as I am researching the philosophical generalisations of the architects of policy, who are, by sociological definition, ‘elite’, my theoretical framework is based on the paradigm first explored (if not defined) by Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923). I realise that this sets my research in a value category not usually explored by social scientists – indeed, Pareto (1935:275) contends: ‘The great enemy of all social sciences is the mania for achieving some practical result.’ But it is posited that:

Along with Weber and Durkheim, Pareto is generally considered one of the three ‘great’ political sociologists who challenged the Marxist theory of society. His analysis of the cyclical fluctuation of elites is justly famous... And yet, compared to the other ‘greats’, he receives surprising little attention from the scholarly community (Femia, 2011:1).

Raymond Aron included him in his 1967 second volume of *Main Currents of Sociological Thought* (New York: Basic Books), noting that he chose purposely to be ‘an outcast writer – which... he did not entirely achieve’ (p132). But Femia assumes a persuasive reason for Pareto’s relative obscurity (or what he terms ‘quarantine’):

Optimistic moralising, of a kind favoured by idealistic intellectuals, was his principal target, and he was relentless in exposing the double standards and faulty logic of its purveyors. This has made Pareto ‘*persona non grata* among the right-thinking’... Socialism, peace, equality, social justice – every term in the lexicon of ‘Progress’ was subjected to destructive sarcasm. In so far as he offered a vision of the future, it was one of competitive markets, class division, and inevitable elite rule – hardly the stuff of reveries (Femia, 2011:2 cf. Aron, 1967:129, 132).

Pareto’s concept of ‘social facts’ is antithetical to the positivist apprehension of social progress. He was a contemporary of Gramsci, but in writing about relative market freedoms and constraints of power distribution in the context of the revolutionary ascent of Fascism in Mussolini’s Italy, he took a markedly different view. For Pareto, the ‘bribery and manipulation’ inherent to the democratic process ‘is *not* in the public interest, which is best served by a libertarian, free-market society’ (Femia, 2011:115): it is the market which liberates the people from the ‘experts’.

Insofar as I am also concerned with the morality of marketisation, individualism and institutional liberty, the consequences of class division and the virtues of elite governance – all themes which occupied Pareto’s major work *The Mind and Society* (1916/1935) – his unfashionable ‘right-wing’ study of the inevitability of elites and free markets suits my essential exegetical purpose. I say ‘right-wing’ because Femia (2011:78) calls him ‘a man of the right’ with some justification. The development of ‘Pareto-optimality’ – the assumption that in the allocation and consumption of resources, no one can be made better off without making someone else worse off (Femia, 2011:10) – has a particular contemporary resonance in the free-school paradigm of competition. And in almost affirmatory prescience of contemporary ‘neo-liberal’ theory, ‘social situations really do seem to be

determined by economic “conditions” and change only with changes in these conditions’ (Femia, 2011:22; Pareto, 1935:131-2).

Analysis of market behaviour, according to Pareto, supports the proposition that under certain carefully defined conditions the pursuit by each individual of his own economic preferences (that is, his attempt to maximise the means to satisfaction of his own ends) will lead to the maximum possible satisfaction of all other individuals in the same collectivity. The principle conditions are: rationality of action, mobility of resources, competition, and substantial equivalence in exchange possible only through the elimination of force and fraud. Interestingly, Pareto thinks it unnecessary to include the customary egotistical assumption that ‘man will be guided in his choice exclusively by consideration of his own advantage’. Without detracting from Pareto’s system, we could just as readily assume people to be altruistic, since the goal is the maximisation of *satisfaction* rather than naked *self-interest* (Femia, 2011:93; Pareto, 1971:105).

Pareto coined the term ‘ophelimity’ to designate the spectrum of economic utility that naturally occurs in free-market settings, but it never entered the vernacular of political economy, so I won’t consider it. But I will refer to his analytical typology of ‘residues’ and ‘derivations’ – by which he classified human thought and action – because it has an instinctual appeal. It is a detailed social morphology – at times complex and contradictory – but it is ‘regarded as the foundation of Pareto’s contribution to political theory’ (Femia, 2011:38). Essentially, ‘residues’ are universal, constant, invariant patterns of thought – that is, immutable human predispositions, sentiments, instincts or attitudes. And ‘derivations’ are variable systems of justification – that is, derived from a particular mentality, relating to ‘argument, explanation, assertion, appeal to authority, or association of ideas or sentiments in words’ (Femia, 2011:36, 38ff). Aron (1967:119) explains ‘derivations’ as ‘the intellectual systems of justification with which individuals camouflage their passions or give the appearance of rationality to propositions or acts’. I am aware that this thinking is derivative of (if not bound by) post-1848 revolution morphologies of sociological thought, but I am not concerned with Pareto’s detailed categorical breakdown (he proposes six classes of ‘residues’ and four of ‘derivations’ [see Femia, 2011:38-47]). It is principally his Class II ‘residues’ (‘group persistence, or persistence of aggregates’) which is of particular interest in the context of conservative and liberal political philosophy, and the observation of policy ‘elites’:

Residues of group persistence lie behind all loyalties and all traditions connected with people, places and institutions. The family, the state, the nation, and the religious community are held together by such residues... They are responsible for the transmission of customs and attachments from one generation to another (Femia, 2011:39; Pareto, 1935:1065, 1073).

Pareto’s observation of this tribal instinct or group impulse is akin to the conservative apprehension of the need to sustain organic social arrangements: ergo, ‘little platoons’ are a ‘residue’ or manifestation of the sentiment or instinct for maintaining social cohesion; appeals to Burke, Oakeshott or Mill (etc.,) are ‘derivations’ of the authority by which the proposition is sustained.

I am mindful that ‘(c)ritics of Pareto tend to attack him on political grounds, or else to confront him with their own theoretical prejudices, which are invariably the opposite of his own’ (Femia, 2011:4 cf. Aron, 1967:129), but his association with (and appropriation by) the darker

aspects of fascism is a misreading of both history and his political philosophy, not least because Pareto died just 10 months into Mussolini's reign. Berlin (1958:242) is right to observe that Pareto was 'more sensitive to the deeper currents of (his) own time... and saw a good deal more deeply into the springs of individual and social behaviour'. Pareto's categorical rejection of the reified standpoint of his own contemporary social theory is a precursor to the challenge my research may present to the institutional structuralism that tends to be favoured by educational academia. For Pareto (1902/1966:142), liberal democracy is actually 'demagogic plutocracy' which sustains a necessary fiction of popular representation for its own ends. For me, liberal democracy is yielding education reforms which transcend the vicissitudes of the electoral cycle; continuity being sustained not by subversive conspiracy but by a rotating oligarchy of 'experts':

..it is silly to think of the ruling elite as a static and cohesive body of individuals holding secret meetings to devise mechanisms of subjection. Rather, the elite is 'always in a state of slow and continuous transformation'. It flows on 'like a river, never being today what it was yesterday'. From time to time, however, 'floods' (revolutions, 'sudden and violent disturbances') occur. An elite of lions replaces an elite of foxes or vice versa (Femia, 2011:71; Pareto, 1935:2054-6).

The lions-foxes distinction draws on Machiavellian terminology (*The Prince*, XVIII), which, for Pareto, represents two distinct political personality types: i) foxes, who govern by consent through cunning appeals to popular and participative sentiment and rationality rather than coercion; and ii) lions, who govern with appeals to continuity and social cohesion established through the natural order – family, nation, class, community – but who will resort to force if necessary to silence dissident voices (Femia, 2011:70). It is a convenient if unsophisticated dichotomy, but the essential distinction between democratic and authoritarian oligarchies may be observed in contemporary polity: it is not meant to correspond to the vernacular political left-right division (both of which may manifest the attributes of either lions or foxes). The fact that political alternation results in philosophical policy persistence suggests some sort of elite preoccupation. But there is in Pareto's bifurcation an expression of the essential Tory-Whig tensions which lie at the heart of modern Conservatism, which oscillates between bottom-up democratic liberalism and top-down 'democratic' plutocracy.

The 'circulation of elites'

Williams, C (2012:63) acknowledges that classical elite theory is rooted in the work of Pareto, but complements this with the writings of Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941), for whom governing elites are not merely set apart by wealth or social connection, but are morally and intellectually superior (Mosca, 1923/1939:51). While Pareto repudiates the Marxist emphasis on the proletariat versus the capitalist (Alexander, 1994), advocating more nuanced analyses of categorisation, Mosca thinks in terms of governing oligarchies sustained by their intellectual or moral capacity for strategy and organisation. But there is consensus between both Mosca and Pareto in that those who exert power and influence over political policy which shapes the lives of subordinate others constitute a stratum or structure in society which is both separate from and often inaccessible to lower echelons – socially, culturally or economically. And nor is it concerned with the assertions or notions of

‘equality’: the mechanism for regime change (cf. Pareto’s ‘Circulation of the Elites’ [1916/1935]) observes that society contains natural inequalities – physical, intellectual and moral – and those that rise to the top are naturally (logically) replaced by others who have risen to the top: one elite replaces the other (Femia, 2011:69). Indeed, Young (2015) observes of the current educational context: ‘the meritocratic elite is becoming a hereditary elite’.

This theory of elite ‘circulation’ informs perceptions of continuity in state education policy between politicians (and their advisors) of mutually-exclusive political philosophies. Stich and Colyer (2013:7) summarise the conceptual development:

Prior to the nineteenth century, the term had theological associations; ‘elite’ derived from ‘the elect,’ those marked as chosen by God. Over time, however, ‘elite’ came to refer to social distinctions and issues of class... Shifts in the meaning of elite have been connected to the social, cultural and economic transformations in western societies since the term first appeared... Such shifts are evident in a long history of elite scholarship. Early elite studies (cf. Pareto 1963; Mosca 1939) focused on the ruling classes and the unequal distribution of power... (Now it is concerned with) ‘the power elite’ as a coming together of executives and directorates across the domains, ‘the warlords, the corporation chieftains, the political directorate’.

Thus we see policy developed and interrogated through a series of antagonisms: “‘elite’/“non-elite”, insider/outsider, us/them. To be invited into the inner-workings of the elite is to acknowledge, and then re-articulate, that “elite” is something requiring an invitation’ (Stich & Colyer, 2013:8). Such an invitation is contingent on assent to certain philosophical ‘truths’ or beliefs about a certain direction of policy (if not orthodoxy of ‘values’): it is not a prerequisite for uniformity, but more consent to a particular model advanced by those whose opinion counts.

The existence of an elite educational ‘policy community’ has previously been observed in the context of education in Scotland:

What helped to hold the community together was its members’ subscription to a ‘Scottish myth’ about education, democracy and meritocracy... that discounted the experience of a major part of the population, especially the working class of the industrial, urban West. Those in the network tended to be successful products of the education system, who adhered to the myth and exemplified its reality. In their policy activities, they aimed to reproduce their educational values. They recruited those who were like themselves, and sought to control the policy agenda (Raab, 1992:83f).

These observations are not dissimilar from those sometimes made of Gove and his network of advisors: there is even allusion to an ‘education establishment’:

The main arbiters of membership were the Scottish Education Department (SED) and the Inspectorate of Schools. At least until the 1960s, both tended to be staffed with persons whose connections and affinities with the education world of a small country served as a guide to the dispensing of patronage through appointments to the bodies that advised on policy, implemented it, and acted as vehicles for the intermediation of interests. Between the wars, the policy community was small and the SED managed to constrict the influence of its more progressive members. In the 1950s and early 1960s, the SED involved a growing number of trustworthy outsiders who shared the same ‘assumptive world’... in policy-making for secondary education (Raab, 1992:84).

And he speaks of ‘shared values and collaborations’ (*ibid.*), which is a theme of shared biography in the Academy/Free-School ‘policy community’. But these ‘democratic’ elites need a social mechanism by which their ideological objectives may derive a degree of political legitimacy, and an understanding of this procedure forms a necessary part of the interpretive framework.

ii) DEMOCRATIC ELITISM THROUGH EPISTEMIC PROCEDURALISM

If an elite is to formulate and implement political policy, it is, by definition, vulnerable to allegations of democratic deficit, by which inequalities are sustained, from which injustice results. The normative approaches to social decision-making are bypassed, and a pre-ordained standard or moral judgment is asserted by the elite almost irrespective of the democratic equality intrinsic to ‘one person, one vote’. In the context of educational structural reform, those ‘whose opinion counts’ are intrinsic to the maintenance (or improvement) of standards: there must be a qualified elite presiding over quality control. Estlund (2008:1) observes: ‘Democracy can seem to empower the masses without regard for the quality of the political decisions that will result. Concern for the quality of decisions can seem to lead in an anti-democratic direction, toward identifying and empowering those who know best.’ And he quotes Mill’s *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861) as an original articulation of this dilemma: ‘One of the two, as the wiser or better man, has a claim to superior weight: the difficulty is in ascertaining which of the two it is.’ This essential dichotomy is evident in the contrived accountability structures and sometimes strained functional distinctions between the Secretary of State for Education, the non-ministerial Chairman of Ofsted, and HMCI. In the fraught educational context of questionable political legitimacy, local democratic accountability and quasi-autonomous governmental organisations made up of ‘experts’, quite which office-holder is actually ‘the wiser or better man’ (or woman) to improve standards is moot.

In an attempt to walk a path between political philosophy and praxis – between democratic ‘correctness’ and a consequentialist procedure which places a decision before a democratic vote – Estlund has developed a theoretical framework which he calls *epistemic proceduralism*:

Specific political decisions in a democracy – whether correct or incorrect – are legitimate because they are the outcomes of a democratic procedure, and that procedure itself is legitimate because it is likely – in a way that cannot be rejected by the qualifiedly acceptable – to lead to correct, that is, qualifiedly acceptable, decisions (Enoch, 2009:38).

Estlund (2008:2) observes that ‘detailed factual information, while occasionally useful, is far from the center of our concerns. The focus of the argument is on very general questions of authority and legitimacy in political community’. Thus, in this thesis, all data – empirical findings of researchers in respect of a non-correlation between the policy of free schools and impact in terms of improved student attainment; and political assertions of social injustice and inequality – are subsumed to the

moral authority of the elite in the liberal democratic state to effect political policy in accordance with reasonable consensus and justify their policies to reasonable citizens. That is not to assert that free-school policy decisions or actions are in any sense ‘correct’, or that all reasonable citizens are obliged to agree with the market morality of policy; but that they have moral force because there is normative consent.

Estlund draws on the jury-trial system to illustrate his point:

When it is properly done, a jury trial seems to produce a verdict with legal force, but also with some moral force. If the defendant is exonerated, then other people will have the moral duty not to carry out private punishments. If the defendant is convicted, then the duly appointed jailer will have the moral duty not to set him free. I assume that, at least within limits, these moral implications do not depend on the verdict being correct. If they did, then we should all ignore the verdict and use our own judgment about whether the defendant was guilty or not, and privately punish the truly guilty and open the cells of the innocent. Jailers who appoint themselves judge and jury, and vigilantes who appoint themselves executioner, seem to be acting immorally when there has been a properly conducted (though always fallible) jury trial (Estlund, 2008:7f).

The parallels are not perfect, and some political philosophers (e.g., Enoch, 2009; Christiano, 2009) take issue with the reasoning on a number of levels, not least of which is the (mis)appropriation of judicial proceedings for political metaphor and the equation of ‘fair proceduralism’ (the proposition that voting is ‘fair’ when people disagree) with flipping a coin. But it may be observed that democracy has a similar authority or power to a jury to put us under obligation. The reason the jury trial has this is because it is good at discerning the guilt or innocence of persons and because it is egalitarian. Representative democracy has its comparable epistemic virtues, also considering matters of ‘evidence, testimony, cross-examination, adversarial equality and collective deliberation’ (Estlund, 2008:8). The decisions of the political parties gathered in Parliament are similarly morally binding even when they are ‘incorrect’:

..the bindingness and legitimacy of the decisions are not owed to the correctness of the decisions, but to the kind of procedure that produced them. Still, a central feature of the procedure in virtue of which it has this significance is its epistemic value (Estlund, 2008:8).

This, then, is *epistemic proceduralism*, by which paradigm Free Schools are legitimated because they are a social product of a procedure which has a tendency to make ‘correct’ (i.e., qualifiedly acceptable and morally defensible) decisions: they have developed out of the same politico-philosophical liberal-democratic process which legislated for state education. Just as Forster’s *Elementary Education Act 1870* was the procedural democratic seal of Parliament upon the early Liberal pursuit of state education for all; and just as Balfour’s *Education Act 1902* was the procedural democratic seal of Parliament upon the Conservative church-state system of education for all; and just as Butler’s *Education Act 1944* was the procedural democratic seal of Parliament upon the Conservative tripartite system of grammar, secondary modern and technical schools; and just as Crosland’s *Circular 10/65* was Parliament’s procedural mechanism by which comprehensive schools were rolled out under successive Labour and Conservative governments through the 1960s

and 1970s, so the Free Schools established by the *Academies Act 2010* are legitimate because they are an outcome of the same ‘democratic’ procedure.

This gives Gove’s education reforms the same moral force as any educational modulation which preceded it, and, should the reforms become a generational settlement, arguably greater legitimacy than the national programme of comprehensivisation which was promulgated not by a specifically expansive act of Parliament but by an elite-promulgated circular – a written statement of government policy providing information and guidance (Andrew, 1965). This procedure was not legally coercive, though it may have been considered injurious to LEA freedoms in its specific ‘guidance’ toward widespread adoption (under financial duress, as succeeding Circular 10/66 makes clear [*Hansard*, 1966]). It is in any case deemed to have democratic legitimacy on the basis of Crosland’s election, Labour’s majority, and the Conservative Party’s essential appropriation of the abolition of selection by academic ability, despite NUT assertions that the subsequent Thatcher Circular 10/70 amounted to retraction and support for academic selection (DES, 1970). That circular withdrew Labour’s previous circulars, but Thatcher did not veto LEA preferences to form comprehensives provided they were submitted voluntarily. There are natural outliers on all sides, but over the past 150 years there has emerged a ‘democratic’ consensus (if not a demagogic plutocratic confederation) which believes not only that education should be free (of cost and political coercion), but that a just and fair society ought to be coercively non-selective and inclusive in the exercise of that freedom.

But it is ‘democratic’ (as opposed to democratic) because ‘(t)he inevitability of elite rule makes democracy an imaginary dream. Elites can never be accountable to “the people”. There is an inverse relationship between elites and democracy so that institutions proclaimed to be “democratic” are in reality exercises in futility’ (Femia, 2011:115). Constraints are determined by statutory instrument in the democratic legislative procedures of Parliament, members of which take their seats by virtue of ‘free and fair’ elections. The procedural asymmetry – between the mandatory education acts of Forster and Butler, and the ‘guidance’ of Crosland’s circular – is reconciled in the context of elite theory and parliamentary democracy. The system is by no means perfect, but it contains corrective mechanisms for policy decisions to be adapted incrementally while the broad ideological/philosophical direction is sustained.

SUMMARY

In the consideration of the free school policy consensus and philosophical cohesion, there is a discernable minority – the elite community – who formulate policy and influence society. The democratic consideration then becomes the extent to which these elite are accountable and to whom:

whether, as Williams (2011) asserts, ‘we are being committed to radical, long-term policies for which no one voted’, or, alternatively, we consented to these policies by some sort of ‘false consciousness’ – that is our systematic delusion of the utility of free-market prosperity and the true nature of our long-term interests (Femia, 2001:116). But one apprehension of democratic legitimacy is that its procedure ‘can be held, in terms acceptable to all qualified points of view, to be epistemically the best (or close to it) among those that are better than random’ (Estlund, 2007:98). While both Mill and Burke expressed a certain distrust of democracy (Berlin, 1958:240f; Bromwich, 2014:379-82), the alternative forms of repression and exploitation are worse (Femia, 2011:120). Free schools are not made moral or ‘correct’ by virtue of being a product of democracy, but they are a legitimate ‘social good’ because of the ‘goodness’ inherent to democratic procedure which may contend against the coercive power of the elite: ‘Unequal suffrage introduces an element of rule of some by others that is not present under equal suffrage, and so equal suffrage has a kind of default status as departures are tested against the qualified acceptability argument’ (Estlund, 2009: 219).

CHAPTER VI

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

King *et al.* (1994:8) state that the process of scientific research in public policy must use ‘explicit, codified, *and public* methods to generate and analyze data whose reliability can therefore be assessed’. The methodology of analysis must be transparent, and the researcher’s own position disclosed. I am mindful of the observation of the researcher that professes to write ‘as an “objective” and “dispassionate” scholar, simply retelling the “facts”, will only have designed a text whose language enacts a different set of perspectives and a different politics’ (Gee, 1999:5). It is not possible for the researcher to eradicate his or her own political influences and worldview, but it is possible to mitigate them by being explicit and reflexive about the values and theories which inhere one’s research (Ozga & Gerwitz, 1994:122), and then by permitting respondents to speak for themselves and constantly challenging one’s own interpretive framework and the perspective and values this brings into each interview and subsequent analysis.

i) POSITIONALITY, PERSONAL INFLUENCES AND ETHICS

In the process of interviewing, Bernard (1994:149) speaks of the imperative of the researcher ‘maintaining naïveté’, which he says means ‘working hard at suspending judgment about some things’. Berger and Kellner (1981:69) observe: ‘The act of interpretation necessarily involves a specific detachment. This includes a “bracketing” of the interpreter’s own standpoint.’ However, a complete ‘bracketing’ is never possible, especially when dealing with the judgments about the political genesis of policy and the philosophical impetus behind one’s own research. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1995:103) point out: ‘In researching settings that are more familiar, it can be much more difficult to suspend one’s preconceptions, whether these derive from social science or from everyday knowledge.’ They further observe:

..research is an active process, in which accounts of the world are produced through selective observation and theoretical interpretation of what is seen... However, to say that our findings, and even our data, are constructed does not automatically imply that they do not or cannot represent social phenomena... rather than engaging in futile attempts to eliminate the effects of the researcher completely, we should set about understanding them (p18).

It is therefore important to be honestly reflexive; not to deny personal participation in the social-political world, but to reflect upon its effects upon me as both researcher and analyst. The ethical imperatives are outlined by the University of Oxford’s policy on research (CUREC, 2012), ESRC

(2010) and BERA (2011) guidelines, which are woven throughout my design. My background within state education (as a former assistant principal, head of faculty and teacher of politics and philosophy in a grammar school), and my experience in politics (as a former Conservative parliamentary candidate and an *ad hoc* advisor to Michael Gove as Shadow Education Secretary), presented a number of complex research problems, institutional conflicts and personal dilemmas. But negotiating the ethical issues and sustaining democratic values have been largely complementary to the main objective.

Researching in this context was fraught with political challenges and relational sensitivities, aware, as I am, of allegations that my research is ‘ideologically driven’ or marred by ‘confirmation bias’, if not ‘political polemic’. The challenge was to acknowledge and mitigate these perceptions through reflexivity in order to enhance methodological integrity and research validity. As Tomlinson (1989:158) advises:

If one is aware of potentially radical variation in human construals of phenomena, but interested precisely in people’s cognitive stances and evaluations regarding those phenomena, then it seems important to become self-consciously clear about one’s own view of the phenomena. A first reason for this is that if one is to avoid reducing one’s investigation simply to a semantic study of the meanings interviewees attribute to one’s *own* preferred terms, then one must have a clear analysis of the topic in question and an idea of the sorts of language people might use in relation to it. Only then is there an explicit criterion for what one is going to treat as relevant in the respondents’ offerings, as well as a guide to broaching the subject in the first place.

Analytical distance is important, but there is no pretence that my declared allegiance (and public expertise) had no influence upon interviewees. In a contested and contentious area of education reform, robust questioning is important, and so is rigorous analysis. The necessary premise is that the researcher is aware of potential ‘subjectivity’ impediments to the fair reception of interviewees’ viewpoints, because ethical research requires that ‘individuals must be treated fairly... within an ethic of respect’ (BERA, 2011:5), and intrinsic to that fairness and respect is the mitigation of the researcher’s own attachment to certain philosophical or ideological beliefs. The process begins by knowing the participants, which I expound in the next section. This research is unfunded, and so subject to no obligations to a funding body.

ii) RESEARCHING POLICY AND THE ELITE

The literature is sparse. There are a few previous studies of educational elites which focus on policy formulation (e.g., Kogan, 1971; McPherson & Raab, 1988; Walford, 1994), but these are essentially sociological analyses of policy developmental processes or the networks of relationships between ministers and civil servants. There are fewer studies which begin with educational policy and seek to understand it in historical-philosophical tradition, taking this as the epistemological basis.

Philosophical generalisations

In exploring the themes contiguous with historic conservative and liberal political thinking, I am looking for words, phrases, insights which accord (or not) with these intellectual traditions. It is a qualitative study which falls within the broad 'interpretive' tradition of interviewing as a method of sociological research: it is the analysis of conversation as knowledge. It is interpretivist to the extent that it seeks to uncover the subjective philosophical reasoning of the individual architects of policy in order to understand their motives for social action. And it is positivist insofar as it seeks to identify explanations for the policy within existing philosophically causal terms. 'The positivist assumption of an objective, relatively constant social reality leads to the more optimistic view that general laws governing social reality can be discovered' (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996:23). This may sound qualitatively normative, but 'political philosophy is grounded in commonly held sentiments' (Femia, 2011:97): I am not seeking to confine individuals by some philosophically prevailing 'truth'; rather I am seeking to trace back their contemporary understanding and expressions of policy frameworks to the historic philosophical articulation of liberalism and conservatism, leaving the respondent to argue against assumptions, reason about limitations or demur from unacceptable descriptions.

I am aware of the weaknesses of this approach: principally that data (and, indeed, political philosophy) can be discursive, unsystematic and difficult to categorise. But generalisations have value in the realm of empirical research. As Bassey (2000:6) notes: 'A generalisation is prized precisely because, in not being limited to a particular setting, it is seen as making application possible. Thus generalisations have traditionally been considered the highest level of research and very often as what research should always strive for.'

Policy characteristics

Policy documents are obviously produced for purposes other than research, but it is possible to elicit from them certain 'message characteristics' (Robson, 2011:349). My review focuses principally upon the nature and meaning of key phrases and words, especially those which evidence centralised or devolved approaches to educational governance. A preliminary overview of the documents and public pronouncements/speeches outlined in Chapter IV raised my awareness of themes, words and terminology, and I sought to explore these with interviewees to discern any 'official' ideology or philosophy. Documents may be used at various stages in the research process, usually beginning with the literature search. Robson (1993:275) notes the pervasive methodological approach which seeks to avoid a 'fishing trip', which he defines as those 'occasions when you have documents but no properly formulated notion of what you are looking for'. But in arguing for 'the general spirit of "exploratory data analysis"', it is his view that that 'this prohibition on "fishing" appears unnecessarily limiting'. I share this view, and so 'fishing' for philosophical themes is foundational to the design. In this research, since devolution, liberalisation, choice, pluralisation,

diversity and enhanced notions of justice were the explicit objectives of the structural reforms, I was looking for data which accords with or contradicts this framework.

All description draws on categorisation, and word categories are not neutral resources of description (Peräkylä, 2008:358) so it is important to consider the ‘embedded commentary’ of any piece of text. This is a (de-)constructuralist approach which also draws on the evolution of education policy research and the emergence of what is sometimes termed ‘education policy sociology’: a common way of understanding policy which stresses policy as process and the importance of actors and their context in understanding its nature (Halpin & Troyna, 1994). However, as Tritter (1995:425) observes, ‘the key problem is in defining which actors and contexts are important and this impacts on the debate over macro, micro and meso... as well as on that of structure, agency and structuration’. Being something of a political ‘insider’, I had no problem defining the principal actors or their advisors in respect of the process of academisation. Nor, as a political philosopher, did I have any problem situating their public/parliamentary written pronouncements within an established historical-ideological/philosophical framework.

Having explained researcher positionality and my approach to elite policy research, I shall now delineate my chosen methodology of data-gathering: of individual subject selection, researcher conduct, and philosophical analysis, as determined by the research objectives set out in Chapter I.

Subject selection

In working on the biography of policy, it obviously makes sense to interview the architects and originators first-hand in order that a process of triangulation may be carried out to determine conceptual convergence/divergence and the extents of political pragmatism. Invitations to contribute were therefore sent out to 28 politicians from the three main political parties (present and former secretaries of state, ministers, MPs and their political advisors) who were known to be the principal architects of Academies and Free Schools policy (known not only in terms of public office, but sometimes privately by me as an ‘insider’). These letters/emails were formal, written on University headed paper, and obviously bespoke (Appendix III): I knew some invitees well, and others not at all. I did not approach every living former secretary of state simply because some were in office for relatively short periods of time and were charged more with implementing policy than developing it. As Barber (1994:356) observes of the post-1988 reforms:

In the first two years after the 1988 Act Kenneth Baker and John MacGregor, as successive Secretaries of State, implemented its provisions with a degree of pragmatism. Adjustments were made to some of its original implications and there was a substantial degree of dialogue, if not understanding, between government and the profession. However in September 1990 John MacGregor was replaced by Kenneth Clarke and two months later there was a new Prime Minister. This marked the end of the brief era of free-market pragmatism.

Some education secretaries are reformers; others are adjusters, if not demurrers. I limited my interviewee pool to the principal reformers in office since (and including) Kenneth Baker, and also to those who advised on Academy and Free School policy, after the pattern of which Baker's reforms reached a degree of 'free-market' consummation. I did not extend this pool to those who adjusted policy 'with a degree of pragmatism', but I did request interviews with those who opposed or demurred over aspects of Free School policy during the Coalition years, and so possibly helped to mould it (or perceptions of it).

I had an initial concern that the elites and experts from whose discourses the data would be drawn were mostly 'right-leaning', insofar as this is the political sphere in which I have the most contacts. In the event, this did not arise, but the concern made me mindful that I am not merely looking for quotes to confirm my own bias, and yet that bias determined my initial choice of interviewees and informed the tenor of questioning to become a 'manipulative dialogue' (Kvåle, 2006:484). Bias in interviews is, of course, most often mitigated by random selection (e.g., Fowler, 1984): I incorporated an element of this 'randomness' by asking interviewees to suggest other key players who might be willing to share their insights openly and honestly (Creswell, 2007:133). I am aware, as I say, that there are those who may assert that I am vulnerable to the potential allegation of my somehow attempting to affirm my theories or 'prove' my worldview, or, as Plant (1985:329) says, searching 'for the odd bit of theological backing for one's political preferences which are held on quite other grounds'. It is therefore all the more important to me that Labour and Liberal Democrat participants contributed to this research, and were free to suggest others who might.

Not all invitees responded to my initial letter: those who did not were followed up with a second letter or an email to the appropriate gatekeeper, some of whom were gently reminded of the need to respond. In the case of those politicians whom I knew would be interested but with whom I had no prior rapport, I sometimes made direct, informal contact via Twitter, bypassing the gatekeepers. With my existing public profile, I was often invited in 'for coffee' the next day, and this then became a prelude to a more formal subsequent interview.

Researcher conduct

Orb *et al.* (2000:94) describe three types of problems that may affect qualitative studies: i) the researcher/participant relationship; ii) the researcher's subjective interpretations of data; and iii) the design itself. For me, the design was contingent on relationship; and interpretations of data subject to a degree of 'insider' knowledge. In the interview preparation process, McNamara (2009) notes eight important principles: i) choose a setting with little distraction; ii) explain the purpose of the interview; iii) address terms of confidentiality; iv) explain the format of the interview; v) indicate how long the interview might take; vi) tell them how to get in touch with you later if they want to; vii) ask them if they have any questions before you both get started with the interview; and viii) don't

count on your memory to recall their answers. I fulfilled ethical criteria (i)-(vii) in the second letter I sent out to confirm their participation (Appendix IV), and in the subsequent acquisition of voluntary informed consent ([BERA, 2011:5]). In consideration of (viii), following the experience in the pilot interview (see below), the request to record was made following acceptance to be interviewed.

All participants were asked to sign a declaration of informed consent (Appendix V). By the time the interview was conducted, participants had all been informed of the requisite information in accordance with CUREC, ESRC and BERA ethical stipulations: i) the name and status of the researcher; ii) a brief rationale of the study including its purpose and value and why the individual is being invited to take part; iii) what will happen to any findings (whether data would be shared with others; and iv) whether he/she would be identified. Those who requested anonymity were granted it, and those who asked to approve any quotations were permitted to do so before attribution was made. Those who refused to sign the form of consent established a clear understanding of assent by alternative written means, sometimes with continuous renegotiation.

Pilot interview

The objective was ‘to test the whole... before large-scale data collection’ (Williams, C, 2012:114). The subject may himself be described as an ‘elite’ (the literature relating to which I shall expound below), and this raised ethical considerations from the outset: namely the extent to which I ought to ‘use’ the elite for pilot study when they might themselves expect to be contributing to the ‘main corpus’ of data. I decided that this was justified because I sought someone of stature who had been close to the Blair/Adonis/Blunkett period of education reform but who was now sufficiently detached if not relatively impartial on the politics of school reform; and also someone whose data was highly likely to be included by virtue of the pilot not being substantially different from the main interviews.

The subject was informed fully about the purpose, methods and intended possible uses of the research; what his participation in the research entailed and what risks, if any, might be involved (BERA, 2011:5-7; ESRC, 2010). He was given the right to withdraw for no specified reason, should he so desire (BERA, 2011:6). I made it clear from the outset that the interview was not of a pre-ordained length, but asking for ‘about 20 minutes’ was psychologically preferable to asking for ‘an interview’ of unspecified length. It was not my task to tell the participant what I thought an answer might be or to elicit specific information from them (King *et al.*, 1994:26): I sought nothing more than his description of experience. There was nothing ‘closed’ about the interview questions; they were worded in ‘neutral’ (i.e., non-judgmental, non-emotive) terms (McNamara 2009), and the research participant was free from coercion; at liberty to demur or diverge if he wished. My role was to encourage him essentially to think aloud. I was sensitive to power dynamics or relational status because he was aware of my own knowledge of the complex issues, and of my own former political

status. My task, therefore, was to be humble; not to feign naïveté, as some researchers may (not least because advisors to shadow ministers are knowledgeable), but to communicate that I was there to glean his philosophical insights and historical perspectives. The extent of my verbal involvement was to ask each question, adhere to themes in supplementary questions (some of which were individually prepared, though often spontaneous), and thereafter offer little more than a nod of the head or a ‘uh-huh’ to communicate continuing interest and engagement.

The interview was recorded, and this was a carefully-negotiated request. It was initially made in the introductory letter, which created an instant hurdle of alarm. In my experience, politicians are more trusting (and so forthcoming) when informal notes are taken, and rather cautious if there is a possibility of a recording coming back to haunt them as their careers progress. I was sensitive of any detriment which might arise (BERA, 2011:7). There are methodological issues here relating to reliability, and I was mindful of them. I decided thereafter to incorporate the request to record an interview when we were at the point of agreeing the date and time of the meeting; i.e., after the access had already been agreed. This worked in all but one case, which became a protracted negotiation over many months.

Since words are conceptualised by different people in different ways, it was necessary to test and clarify language and meaning in conversation in order to mitigate the confusion of personal impressions and researcher bias. This can never be fully overcome (King *et al.*, 1995:77,185), but the pilot established the need occasionally to ask the respondent something like: ‘What do you mean by that?’, or ‘Could you explain your definition or understanding of X?’. It was clear that a few of my questions were a little too convoluted (the respondent helpfully pointed out that one question was actually two), and they needed some simplification.

The pilot also made me more aware of the importance of appropriate dress: I had opted for suit, shirt and tie, as I invariably wore to political meetings. However, not all respondents in these contexts are formal: I arrived to be greeted by a PA who gave me a coffee and introduced me to the interviewee who was jacket-less and tie-less with sleeves rolled up. Accordingly, almost spontaneously mirroring the preference for informality, I put my jacket on the back of my chair and loosened my tie before beginning the interview. I chose to attend alone: Orb *et al.* (2000:94) corroborate this approach, observing that a ‘balanced research relationship will encourage disclosure (and) trust’, especially one balanced by numbers. If this research is to have any worth, it must be grounded in the honest disclosure of the participants’ beliefs, values, reality, feelings and experience. Consent has been referred to as a negotiation of trust, and it requires continuous renegotiation (p95), so redaction, if requested, was entirely in order.

The draft series of piloted questions elicited a number of observations, not least of which was my fundamental error in the blanket offer to pre-disclose my interview questions. I reminded myself that I am dealing largely with politicians, for whom to be forewarned is to be fore-armed. The offer of pre-disclosure was removed from all subsequent letters of approach: interviewees had no fore-knowledge of my line of questioning beyond the broad themes represented by the title of the thesis. This made for a more spontaneous dialogue (and some lengthy pauses as they considered their responses). My approach was far more conversational than interrogatory: Berry (2002:682) observes that the best interviews are ‘a casual, comfortable conversation’.

Interviewing the political elite

Having piloted my questions and established a framework designed to elicit historical and philosophical consideration of the Academy/Free-School reforms, I proceeded to conduct a series of semi-structured ‘elite interviews’. I am mindful of the reality that this term is inadequate, not to say misleading, for the elite are only made so by virtue of a perceived distance or separation (class, power, fame, wealth, etc.). The literature on this isn’t vast, but it is judicious; most recently comprehensively expounded by Williams, C (2012), who traces the reproduction of elites from antiquity to the modern era, and emphasises the importance of up-system research for understanding the legitimisation of power. According to Dexter (1970), elite interviewing is characterised not so much by the status of the interviewee but by the method by which the interviews are conducted: I was concerned with open-ended, semi-structured questioning to corroborate or challenge information that had already been collected from other documentary sources – historical, philosophical and policy. Tansey (2007) highlights the potential advantages of elite interviewing over documentary research for ‘process tracing’ (i.e., the acquisition of information about well-defined and specific events and causal processes at work in political life). He notes that process tracing ‘has become an increasingly used and cited tool in qualitative research’ (p765) and ‘frequently involves the analysis of political developments at the highest level of government’ (p766). The method elicits data to establish what the most important political players think – what constitutes their ‘attitudes, values, and beliefs’ (Aberbach & Rockman, 2002:673).

Kvåle (2006:482) views the elite-interview process as one in which ‘a fantasy of democratic relations masks the basic issue of who gains materially and symbolically from the research and where claims of participation disguise the exertion of power’. I made it clear that all parties (and others) would benefit from the research, since I was seeking enlightenment of an educational ‘social good’. Gall *et al.* (2003) highlight the importance of selecting the most appropriate interview style, of which they identify three: i) ‘informal conversational interview’, with organically-arising spontaneous question; ii) ‘general interview guide approach’, with structure and dialogue around set questions or themes which are flexible; and iii) ‘standardised open-ended interview’, in which identical questions are asked, but they are worded so that responses are open-ended, permitting the participants to

elaborate and express their experiences and opinions as they wish. I opted for (iii), principally because '(e)lites especially – but other highly educated people as well – do not like being put in the straightjacket of close-ended questions. They prefer to articulate their views, explaining why they think what they think' (Aberbach & Rockman, 2002:674). It is a minimal restrictive framework: 'questions emerge from the immediate context and are asked in the natural course of things... interviews are built on and emerge from observations; the interview can be matched to individuals and circumstances' (Cohen *et al.*, 2001:413). For Morris (2009:211), 'the semi-structured interview method is a valid one', notwithstanding the tensions between the constructivist position, which seeks to discover and make sense of that meaning, and the ontological positivist one, which may discover meaning where none was intended. But the absence of intention does not negate the discovery any more than the absence of discovery nullifies the research. The focus was on exploring how educational 'framework' concepts like school structure and state regulation are effected and affected by the Free Schools policy, and how those curriculum subjects by which perceptions of society are shaped and by which a school's ethos may be defined – including (though not limited to) History, RE and Citizenship – are understood to contribute to the 'common good', and what the consequences for institutional/societal cohesion might be if they cease to be (mandatory) curriculum subjects.

There are different theoretical conceptions of elite interviewing: I was not concerned with 'the power asymmetries of interview relationships' or 'the exercise of power in politics, management, and education' (Kvåle, 2006:481), though I was necessarily sensitive to such dynamics. I found that the best data was elicited when political elites are treated with a degree of familiarity, and this is undoubtedly facilitated through biographical research about them. It is important to be aware of their interests, concerns, and sensitive to their sociolinguistic perspectives (Briggs, 1986:ch5) in order to ensure as far as possible that questions are understood and that I am engaging with the cultural and linguistic norms used in political discourse.

It is a widely-held view that politicians are 'professional liars' who are 'adept at just giving rhetoric' (Woodhead, 2003:118) and so not yielding good research data (Berry, 2002; Lunt, 2012, cf. Pareto [1902:141]: 'hollow phraseology, empty, high-sounding emotional formulas, abstract and repetitious phrases, vague and airy expressions'). In order to improve the quality of data, the interviews had to be conducted in such a manner that 'awkward' questions could not be shut down or deflected, or the research derailed. From experience, this meant permitting elite interviewees to weave their 'narratives of justification' (Batteson & Ball, 1995:203), or to exaggerate their roles and contribution (Morris, 2009:211) without challenge. I view such 'dishonesty' as intrinsic to what was essentially political interaction. As long as 'the dignity, rights, and welfare of participants' (CUREC, 2012) were upheld, my selective silence or political mutability did not contravene any ethical code. I was able to circumvent political obfuscation to a large extent with most interviewees, drawing on my own existing knowledge of and relationship with them, in particular those with whom I

infrequently worked during 2007-10 as the Free Schools legislation was being developed. Further, all of the invited participants were asked to suggest the names of others who had made significant policy contributions: this was especially important from those who declined to be interviewed in order that information and insight might be gleaned as near as possible to the primary movers. Rather than simply relying on parliamentary speeches, articles and other writings, it is important to let the architects of policy speak for themselves, not least because, with ethical assurances of confidentiality (BERA, 2011:7), information may be gathered which would not otherwise be known; and also because the contemporary political context was fluid and the policy evolving. Within the shifting and occasionally volatile political context of coalition government – not to mention teacher strikes, union discontent and variable apprehensions or applications of the ideology with rumours of Cabinet reshuffles – it was important to do this within a given timeframe, so I aimed to conduct all the interviews between September-December 2012.

Kvåle (2006:482) recommends that interviewers, ‘through careful management of their appearance, build rapport and trust with their interviewees’ because ‘(t)rust is the foundation for acquiring the fullest, most accurate disclosure a respondent is able to make’. Following the lessons of the pilot, I therefore chose attire to suit the status and location of the interview. By examining (sometimes manifestly staged) photographs of the subjects at work, I was able to form a view on their preferred (or presented) mode of rapport. If they were (for example) frequently pictured without a tie, I would myself wear an open-neck shirt. If they habitually wore ‘party colours’ (Conservatives, blue; Labour, red; Liberal Democrats, orange/yellow), I would change my tie to reflect this (I varied this in ‘New Labour’ cases, opting for a magenta hue). Once in the interview room, I would remain either formally suited or take off my jacket, loosen my collar and roll up my sleeves as the subject led. I never did this obviously: it was invariably five minutes or so after the subject had determined the seating arrangements, coffee (or not), and whether a ‘minder’ was remaining in the room. This conscious mirroring of the subject facilitated rapport, not least by visually levelling the relationship.

In preparation for the interviews, I carried out some historical textual research relating to the participants: their previous writings and relevant key speeches; what others had said about them; and, where available, relevant aspects of biography (Appendix VI). This fulfilled two main purposes: i) to ensure a higher likelihood of acquiring new information; and ii) to establish my credibility and assiduousness as a researcher. Being able to drop into conversation certain biographical facts and policy quotations establishes ‘homework done’; that one is competent and informed (Robson, 2011:402). Where it seemed appropriate to do so, I shared my personal biography: for example, when I learned that David Blunkett had been educated in Shrewsbury, I mentioned that I was educated in the same town, and attended the same boys’ grammar school at which former HMCI Chris Woodhead taught (though he never taught me). These details greatly facilitated rapport with opposition politicians in particular.

Having justified the subject selection and explained the interview rationale, I shall now explain the schedule and essential 'shape' of my interrogative process.

'Hierarchical focusing'

While the questions put to each interviewee were more-or-less the same, the discussion and ensuing supplementary questions obviously varied greatly: each interview is a unique experience, the second main variable being the researcher. The questions developed from the pilot and followed a broad 'inverted pyramid' design, beginning with a reminder of where I was coming from to preface a broad introductory question, moving incrementally toward more specific foci. This is what Tomlinson (1989:165) terms 'hierarchical focusing':

At its broadest, the principle of hierarchical focusing is that the interviewer seeks to elicit the interviewee's construals with a minimum of framing and uses a hierarchical interview agenda to raise topics only as necessary. Perhaps the most obvious way of doing so is the 'top-down' approach, in which topics are raised in order of generality. That is, the researcher asks an initial question at the highest level of generality and seek further elaboration and development of anything that emerges, noting which aspects of the agenda are covered as the interview proceeds. In so far as aspects are not mentioned spontaneously by the interviewee, the interviewer raises them, but does so 'top-down', from general to specific, going as far as the most specific issues in the agenda if necessary. They were purposely conversational, and frequently deviated from, not least because respondents were free to respond as they wished and often covered succeeding questions in previous answers.

The questions were not rigidly fixed: if philosophical responses were elicited from the more general end of the agenda hierarchy, the focus on specifics could swiftly follow. If interviewee accounts failed to produce coverage of the research agenda, I developed antennae for raising the next most specific sub-topic myself. I moved up and down and sideways in the exploration, as each interview followed its own distinct discourse. This principle was used iteratively through the various sub-levels until the agenda was covered. The configuration is to begin with 'an initial "access" question and then follow this up by non-directively facilitating the interviewee's elaboration and expansion of the viewpoint they have started to express' (p169). Thus the basic framework (with obvious chronological/biographical variations) was as follows:

1) I think I told you I was an informal advisor to Michael Gove during Opposition years, and this research has benefitted from his input, along with that of (names of preceding contributors who agreed to speak 'on the record'), amongst others ministers, shadow ministers and advisors. Before you joined the (political department) and worked for (minister), you worked in (previous positions). Your perspective on Academies and Free Schools is of particular interest, especially in regard to (area of expertise). What were/have been your priorities in education?

2) Your own background in education is interesting. From (secondary school) and then up to (university) to read (subject). It is interesting to me that so many of those I've interviewed in

respect of this research have been privately educated followed by Oxford and PPE. To what extent do you think your views of education have been determined or affected by your upbringing and social background?

3) In the perspective of history (prior to New Labour and the *Learning & Skills Act 2000*) what do you consider to have been the key or pivotal moments in the development of Free Schools?

4) There's clearly an emerging political consensus on Academies and Free Schools which is transforming the educational landscape. There are nuances of disagreement, but all parties now essentially appear to agree. As far back as 2008 Michael Gove said: "We are on the same page as Andrew Adonis." In coalition, the LibDems seem to support the programme. Tony Blair has referred to Free Schools as 'a great idea'. What do you put this consensus down to?

5) My experience in politics (and observations since) have led me to the conclusion that issues of policy and economics almost negate philosophy: even those who did PPE are quite happy with the politics and economics, but once elected appear to forget the middle 'P'. You yourself followed (degree subject) with (further qualification/experience). What effect do you think your personal political philosophy or ideology has had on the formulation of the Government's education policy?

6) Neil O'Brien, former Director of Policy Exchange, said: 'The goal of Blairites and Govites is to get to a system where funding really follows the pupil, where good schools can expand, parents can vote with their feet, and chronically failing schools are shut.' Some call this a revolution in state education. What do you think?

7) The former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan (Lord) Williams referred last year in the *New Statesman* to 'radical, long-term policies' which are causing 'anxiety'. He specified 'the comprehensive reworking of the Education Act 1944'. Is the Christian ethos which underpins that Act challenged by the freedoms being granted to Free Schools and Academies?

8) According to a report last year from the National College for School Leadership, 11% of English secondary schools (350) are now in chains of more than three schools. There are four federations with at least 20 schools in them. Aren't these conglomerates simply replacing the local authorities?

9) It has been said (by Arthur Henderson, in Hugh Dalton's memoirs) that the first 48 hours decide whether a minister is going to run his office, or whether his office is going to run him.

Lord Adonis refers candidly in his recent book about bureaucratic/civil service opposition to his reforms. What do you put this down to?

10) Teaching unions and many teachers appear to be opposed to Free Schools. Just before Christmas, Mary Bousted of the ATL – arguably the most benign of teaching unions – said that the National Audit Office report showed ‘only too clearly that the expansion of academies is being driven by political ideology and not by what’s best for children’s education’. How do you respond to this?

11) In giving Academies and Free Schools a greater degree of curriculum autonomy, some teachers are concerned that subjects like RE and Citizenship – those subjects acutely concerned with the pursuit of the common good – are being relegated in the pursuit of the academic. What is your view?

12) Some ministers have referred to the government of education as a partnership between the Department, local authorities, and the teachers. Others put the Secretary of State at the head of something that one might describe as a single managerial system, with authority and accountability running through it. Which is your preferred model?

13) Coalition policy apparently advocates the state facilitating the eradication of the state in education, yet, paradoxically the Secretary of State retains the centralised authority to intervene and enforce this (and, constitutionally, to repeal it). How do you reconcile the tension between the instinct to conserve and the desire to liberate?

Interview recordings were kept locked in a filing cabinet, and all copies of transcripts retained in accordance with the relevant requirements of the DPA (1998): that is, participants were made aware of how their data would be handled and utilised (BERA, 2011:7f). In cases where excerpts were sent electronically (for example, draft results to supervisors), they were accompanied by a request to delete after use to minimise any risk of breaching the agreed procedure.

Analysing the data

I transcribed the interviews myself: an intensive and time-consuming process, but in trying to hear every word (sometimes above considerable background din [two interviews took place in crowded locations]) one becomes extremely familiar with the data. The challenge then lay in effectively distilling and codifying it (Creswell, 2007:148) in accordance with the themes of policy which are integral to the interview design: this gave rise to a further concern – that of the additional data and categories not previously identified as they only emerged out of the ‘results’.

The transcripts were analysed and coded (i.e., words and phrases assigned to categories) using NVivo qualitative analysis software, which helps to code and retrieve text according to an analytical framework. While this was not the only possible software for analysing qualitative data, it is the favoured programme within the Faculty of Social Science at Oxford University, where it is considered ‘the standard software system for the development, support and management of qualitative data analysis projects’ (Hood, 2012). Exhaustive analysis of vocabulary, phrases and their frequency was undertaken as they related to history and educational matters of authority, autonomy and morality. While analysis of the interview data cannot be simply reduced to quantitative assessment, word-usage and frequency are useful to illustrate thematic coherence and synthesis: for example, NVivo ‘word clouds’ may be used to give an idea of the sorts of descriptive associations each respondent attaches to Academies and/or Free Schools – positive or negative. I adopt these visual representations in Chapter VII to give a flavour of discourse (both individual and party).

Specific words, sequences, and utterances can be compared and context explored to permit detailed description and analysis. I adopted a positivistic word-matching or sentence-matching technique in order to boost the technical reliabilities (Tomlinson, 1989:158). The challenge for the elite interviewer has to be to elicit useful quality data from politicians; to mitigate the ‘rhetoric’, obviate the ‘lies’, and challenge ‘weakness’ and the imprecision of responses. But it must be observed that the ‘rhetoric’ and ‘lies’ are not confined to politicians; indeed, Morris (2009:211) notes that ‘(m)any writers on interviewing elites assume they are going to be lied to (because) elite respondents agree to be interviewed as they have something to say’. And this narrative seeks to ‘present themselves in a good light... convey a particular version of events... to deride or displace other interpretations and points of view’. Harvey (2011:438) notes that ‘many political and business elites receive extensive media training about how to avoid answering questions’. The challenges were considerable, but the problems not insurmountable with the use of measured confrontation: ‘counter-evidence, arguments or sociological analysis’ (Walford, 1994:147) which was greatly facilitated by ‘insider’ knowledge.

As I say, word-clouds have a use, but the design of my analysis cannot be reduced to numbers and words, or, as Bernard (2002:428f) puts it, ‘reducing people to words – *your* words about the meaning of *their* words’. Gee (2005:xii) also warns of this:

...each human being creates complex meanings in language, but each of us is so good at finding meanings that we are often too quick to attribute meanings to others that are rooted more in our own cultures, identities and fears than they are on a close inspection of what the other person has said or written.

There is no easy solution to this, other than to formulate or adopt a structure of analysis which strengthens objectivity. Williams, C (2012:186ff) advocates an analytical framework which requires:

- i) Comparison (similarities and differences)
- ii) Causation (relation of cause and effect)
- iii) Consistency (agreement or synthesis)
- iv) Contra-arguments (contested or contradictory data)
- v) Common sense (plausibility and reasonableness)
- vi) Critical Process Analysis (audit of actions or methods)
- vii) Conceptualisation (interpreting facts in the light of theory)

Not all of these were relevant to my analysis: I was looking primarily at comparisons (explicit and implicit); consistency (especially in history); contra-arguments and conceptualisation (in philosophical terms). The data included not only policy-related background, but also biographical information on interviewees' upbringing, education and other experiences of life. There was also a focus on those aspects of the curriculum which are concerned with the development of 'character' or the 'moral economy' of schooling. These may offer insights to my thesis, but may also be discursive from the meta-coding categories I adopted (after a formulation by Aberbach & Rockman [2002]), which concern responses that are:

- 1) 'Manifest' – recording direct responses to clearly-focused questions, e.g., the differences between political parties.
- 2) 'Latent' – recording elements of what an interviewee said when a direct response was not explicitly called for, e.g., positive and negative references to something.
- 3) 'Global' – recording an assessment of general traits or styles for the nature of the interview writ large, e.g., did the interviewee have a coherent political outlook; were they 'generalisers' or 'particularisers'?

Quantitative analysis of the data had to be approached with great caution: some respondents used a keyword only once while others used it five or six times. Others still expressed the sentiment without using the precise word or equivalent terms, and others used the same word imbued with a different meaning. In the examination of philosophical discourse, context is crucial to meaning, and scrutiny must be reflexive:

Analysis is a cyclical process and a reflexive activity; the analytic process should be comprehensive and systematic but not rigid; data are segmented and divided into meaningful units, but connection to the whole is maintained; and data are organised according to a system derived from the data themselves (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996:10).

The rigidity observation is important: too much of it and the researcher may impose unwarranted shape on the data; too little, there is a danger of meandering discursively away from the research questions. In the linguistic interpretive process it is possible to over-theorise the research. But even if a primary interview and the later ‘textualisation’ are chronologically distinct, their hermeneutic dependency is manifest because literacy may be viewed as a form of ‘cultural politics’:

Reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world... (T)his movement from the word to the world is always present; even the spoken word flows from our reading of the world. In a way, however, we can go further and say that reading the word is not preceded merely by reading the world, but by a certain form of writing it or rewriting it, that is, of transforming it by means of conscious, practical work. For me, this dynamic movement is central to the literacy process (Freire & Macedo, 1987:35).

I was mindful of the challenges posed to the validity of the sampling and the reliability of the analysis. As Bassey (2000:4) notes: ‘The public problem of generalisation in educational research, and throughout the social sciences, is that researchers are expected by policy-makers, practitioners and the public at large to make scientific generalisations, but can’t because they cannot identify, define and measure all of the variables that affect the events that they study’. To improve coding accuracy and the mitigation of bias, triangulation and multi-person coding were possibilities. But inter-coder differences tend to get larger as one moves from 1-3 above, and there are tensions with assurances on confidentiality and disclosure given to the interviewees. I decided therefore to trawl the data myself, each interview three times over a six-month period. I am mindful of recall biases and what Dean and Whyte (in Dexter, 1970) call ‘bars to spontaneity’ and an interviewee’s ‘desire to please’ (or the opposite). As I say, the researcher may mitigate (King *et al.*, 1994:27f), but rather than being an obstacle to truth recovery, prejudice and bias are ‘integral’: they can never be eradicated:

The man entirely unaffected by sentiments and free from all bias, all faith, does not exist; and to regard that freedom as an essential prerequisite to profitable study of the social sciences would amount to saying that such study is impossible. But experience shows that a person can as it were divide himself in two, and to an extent at least, lay aside sentiments, preconceptions, and beliefs when engaged in scientific pursuit, resuming them afterwards... Such self-detachment is more readily achieved in the natural sciences than in the social sciences. It is an easy matter to look at an ant with the sceptical disinterestedness of experimental science. It is much more difficult to look at human beings that way. But even if complete success in such an effort is impossible, we can at least try to succeed in part, and reduce the power and influence of sentiments, preconceptions, beliefs to a minimum (Pareto, 1935:142f; Femia, 2011:26).

I make no claim to ‘lay aside’ my subjective biases: indeed, they are an explicit inspiration of my research. Honesty, transparency, validity and reliability are higher methodological imperatives.

SUMMARY

Drawing on established ‘elite’ interview literature and research methodologies, I designed a transparent, ethical process for i) approaching potential participants; ii) conducting informed interviews with ‘hierarchical focusing’; and iii) eliciting quality data relating to the history and philosophy of Free Schools through ‘casual, comfortable conversation’. My positionality and personal influences were disclosed and reflexivity is integral. I developed a rigorous interpretive framework using NVivo software and drawing on the insights of Aberbach and Rockman (2002) – namely identifying responses which are ‘manifest’, ‘latent’ or ‘global’.

In the analysis, there was no presumption of any correlation between ‘manifest’ party-affiliation, ‘latent’ opinion or ‘global’ preferences, not least because politicians and their advisors are not usually philosophers. This obvious point needs to be made because of the methodological issue it raises. Bagehot (1859/1974:255) wrote that politicians ‘are men of the world, and the world teaches caution. They are men of business’. They do not bequeath to us coherent works of political philosophy, though coherent themes may be interwoven within their policies and rhetoric. And it cannot be ignored, in a liberal democracy, that each has eyes not only upon political objectives but also on the popular press: the task of the politician has to be simultaneously to reassure sceptics, win converts and rouse the faithful, all while keeping an eye on the media. Despite assurances of confidentiality or permitted redaction (where requested), it is natural for the politician to be ever mindful that their words may be unintentionally misinterpreted by allies or wilfully misconstrued by opponents. These ethical considerations are woven throughout the research design.

Part Four

Analysis and Results

The purpose of this section is: i) to provide the rationale and overview of elite participation; ii) to provide analysis of the meta-coding categories and a general ‘global’ overview of the philosophical themes; and iii) to examine the constitution of the elite ‘policy community’ (Chapter VII). I will then expound the ‘manifest’ and ‘latent’ historical themes which emerged, relating to the periods categorised as: i) Forster; ii) Butler; iii) Baker; iv) Adonis/Blunkett; v) Gove in Opposition; and vi) Gove in Government (Chapter VIII). I will then expound the ‘manifest’ and ‘latent’ elite conceptions of Free School philosophy, distilled to: i) Ideological Division vs Philosophical Consensus; ii) Centralisation/Control vs Devolution/Subsidiarity; iii) Incremental Evolution vs Radical Revolution; iv) Market/Choice vs Morality/Change; v) Progressive Pedagogy vs Traditional Teaching; and vi) Freedoms vs Un-freedoms (Chapter IX). The results are organised in three sections to better address the three principal areas of inquiry set out in Chapter I: namely, i) to examine the existence and constitution of an elite ‘policy community’ and the principal themes of their reforms (Q1a; Q2c; Q3a); ii) elite apprehensions of Free School history (Q1b; Q2c; Q3b); and iii) elite conceptions of Free School philosophy (Q1a, Q2a,b,c; 3b).

CHAPTER VII

POLICY ARCHITECTS AND THEMES OF REFORM

INTRODUCTION

The participation was wide and the data rich. There is no easy, straightforward commentary of findings to be made which does not in some way diminish the depths of analytical possibilities, but results were codified and findings evaluated and interpreted primarily to address the research objectives set out in Chapter I. I examine the possibility of causality between aspects of elite biography and interviewees' educational philosophy, but mindful of variables. I present some of the data in figures and tables, though the philosophy is necessarily discursive, being corroborative of my consensus hypothesis, but with obvious outliers. Some questions of discussion are validly left open, and these constitute possible areas for future research. In order to streamline the argument, I have used a number of appendices to incorporate fuller quotations: my subjects are, after all, prominent political elites who are both creating original historical perspectives and articulating new philosophical definitions. It is of value to future researchers to make available as much of the raw data as possible, to the extent agreed with the subjects in accordance with the ethical framework.

i) CROSS-PARTY PARTICIPATION

Some 28 individuals were invited to contribute to this research, of which 15 accepted. Members of the Labour and Conservative parties were very keen to assist. All the Liberal Democrats associated with formulating pre- and post-2010 education policy initially declined to participate, although one spokesperson eventually agreed on the assurance of anonymity (hereafter 'Anon LD'). This was agreed in accordance with ethical guidelines (BERA, 2011:7). Some other participants consented only with the assurance that they could pre-authorise whatever quotations I wanted to incorporate into the thesis, and those permissions were sought in accordance with methodical-ethical requirements (BERA, 2011:9). Modifications were permitted, but those requested were very minor and restricted almost exclusively to grammatical and sense expression. The one substantive (though relatively uncontentious) redaction which was requested has been included but unattributed.

I made it clear in my principal letter of access negotiation that I reserved the right to interpret the data, and that if permission were not therefore granted on matters of substance, their data would be incorporated in anonymised form. Those politicians and advisors who agreed to be interviewed are listed below (chronologically in order of interview). Participants' names are followed by party

affiliation; the date and duration of the interview and their job-title/status at the time of interviewing. I have italicised their relevant educational/advisory role(s) which pertain to this research:

1 Matthew Taylor, Labour (10 May 2012; 50mins) – Chief Executive of the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA). Formerly *Chief Advisor on political strategy to Prime Minister Tony Blair, 2003-2005; Head of Tony Blair's No10 Policy Unit, 2003-2005.*

2 Rt Hon Stephen Twigg MP, Labour (14 Nov 2012; 43mins) – *Shadow Secretary of State for Education. Minister of State for School Standards, 2004-2005.*

3 Rt Hon the Lord Adonis, Labour (22 Nov 2012; 49mins) – *President of the Independent Academies Association. Advisor to Prime Minister Tony Blair at the No10 Policy Unit, specialising in educational policy, 1998-2001; Head of No10 Policy Unit, 2001-2005; Minister of State for Education, 2005-2007.*

4 Chris Skidmore MP, Conservative (4 Dec 2012; 52mins) – Member of Parliament for Kingswood. Conservative Party *Education Advisor to David Willetts and Michael Gove, 2005-2010.*

5 Rt Hon David Blunkett MP, Labour (12 Dec 2012; 46mins) – Member of Parliament for Sheffield Brightside. *Shadow Secretary of State for Education and Employment, 1994-1997; Secretary of State for Education and Employment, 1997-2001.*

6 Conor Ryan, Labour (12 Dec 2012; 46mins) – Director of Research and Communications at the Sutton Trust. *Senior advisor to David Blunkett, 1993-2001; Senior education advisor to Tony Blair, 2005-2007; Author (with Cyril Taylor) of Excellence in Education (2004) and Freedom from Failure (2002).*

7 Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, Conservative (14 Jan 2013; 31mins) – *Secretary of State for Education (2010-2014).*

8 Anonymous, Liberal Democrat (4 Feb 2013; 48mins) – *Education spokesperson.*

9 Nick Gibb MP, Conservative (5 March 2013; 43mins) – *Member of David Cameron's No10 Policy Unit. Shadow Minister for Schools, 2005-2010; Minister of State for Schools, 2010-2012. Minister of State for Schools and Families, 2014.*

10 Jesse Norman MP, Conservative (5 March 2013; 39mins) – *Member of David Cameron’s No10 Policy Unit*. Author of *Compassionate Conservatism* (2006), *The Big Society* (2010), and *Edmund Burke: The First Conservative* (2013), the first two titles widely considered to be the intellectual ‘guidebooks’ or philosophical framework of David Cameron’s political manifesto.

11 James O’Shaughnessy, Conservative (8 April 2013; 39mins) – Hon. Senior Research Fellow at Jubilee Centre for Character and Values, Birmingham University. *Deputy Director of Policy Exchange, 2004-2007; Director of Research for the Conservative Party 2007-2010; Director of Policy to Prime Minister David Cameron 2010-2011.*

12 Matthew Hancock MP, Conservative (16 April 2013; 29mins) – *Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Further Education (2013-2014)*. Minister of State for Business and Enterprise.

13 Rt Hon Ed Balls MP, Labour (23 April 2013; 43mins) – Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer. *Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, 2007-2010; Shadow Secretary of State for Education, May-Sept 2010.*

14 Nick Boles MP, Conservative (25 April 2013; 26mins) – Minister of State for Planning in the Department for Communities and Local Government. *Director and Founder of Policy Exchange, 2002-2007; Parliamentary Private Secretary to Schools Minister Nick Gibb, 2010-2012*. Minister of State for Skills and Enterprise, 2014.

15 Rt Hon The Lord Baker, Conservative (4 June 2013; 47mins) – *Founder and Director of the Baker Dearing Trust, pioneering and implementing University Technology Colleges as part of the Free School programme. Secretary of State for Education and Science, 1986-1989.*

It will be observed that my original plan to conduct all interviews within a strict timeframe (September-December 2012) in order to mitigate ‘event’ variables (teacher strikes / ‘faith school’ concerns / cabinet reshuffles, etc.) was confronted with some protracted negotiations for access and the reality of restrictive ‘elite’ diaries. Nevertheless, most were carried out within a six-month timeframe.

Of those who declined to participate: five were Liberal Democrats; three were Conservatives who had all initially agreed but were removed from their positions within the DfE during a reshuffle (which inconveniently coincided precisely with my planned interview timeframe); and two Labour politicians who were of the opinion that they had nothing to contribute beyond the greater insights

of Lord Adonis and David Blunkett. While the emergence of a new DfE team (post-reshuffle of 4th September 2012 [Gov.uk, 2012]) eliminated some contacts and took me back to square one in negotiating access, it resulted in a more frank discussion with at least one who had been removed. Importantly for this research – with or without an interview – the Coalition DfE team came to include David Laws, who had placed much more of his thinking on liberal education philosophy/reform in the public domain (via *The Orange Book*) than did his predecessor, Sarah Teather.

An immediate point of biographical interest was the proportion of interviewees who were a) privately-educated; b) Oxbridge-educated; and c) PPE graduates:

Table 2: **Interviewees’ educational background**

State educated	Privately educated	Oxbridge	PPE
Gibb	Balls	Balls	Balls
Blunkett	Hancock	Hancock	Hancock
Twigg	Boles	Boles	Boles
	Norman	O’Shaughnessy	O’Shaughnessy
	Anon LD	Norman	Twigg
	Ryan	Gove	
	Skidmore	Skidmore	
	Adonis	Adonis	
	Gove	Twigg	
	Baker	Baker	

I will examine the significance of these proportions and set them in some comparative context in due course: the potential influences on policy of these educational backgrounds and the implicit elite social stratification are germane to the conceptual framework.

I specifically tried to move beyond seeing the participants only as politicians, not least because of the culture of cynicism which surrounds them and the academic assertion that they tend not to yield good or worthwhile data (Berry, 2002; Lunt, 2012). Although participants were all politicians (or politically-minded advisors), I was mindful that they were also former (/present) philosophers, historians, academics, economists or journalists (as well as, in many cases, parents of school-age children). Each interview is, of course, subject to a host of independent and dependent variables, such as gender, age, position, experience, education and party affiliation. Where these presented concerns, they are addressed in the context of the analysis.

ii) CODING CATEGORIES AND PHILOSOPHICAL THEMES

As Aberbach *et al.* (1975:14) observe:

Simple, manifest coding procedures alone are inadequate to capture the richness and nuance of these interviews. By taping and transcribing the interviews, we are in a position to employ a highly complex coding system which applied very specific codes for answer to explicit questions, codes

gauging latent features of the respondents' answers, and codes requiring coders to make 'global judgements about certain traits of the respondents, based on the interview as a whole'... Coding latent and contextual characteristics strengthens our capacity to represent meaning and subtlety...

The meta-coding categories are set out below. After identifying the individuals (i), and their political affiliation (ii), the manifest and latent coded theme categories (iii-xiv) emerged out of the 'fishing trip' (Robson, 1993:275) themes of the political and philosophical literature surveyed. Some of these are broken down into sub-coded concepts in accordance with the research focus. The following NVivo nodes were derived by grouping terms:

i) Interviewees:

Anon LD
Gibb
Skidmore
Ryan
Blunkett
Balls
O'Shaugnessy
Norman
Adonis
Baker
Hancock
Taylor
Gove
Boles
Twigg

ii) Party affiliation:

Conservative
Labour
Liberal Democrat

iii) History of policy

a) *Development or chronology* (allusions to educational history; "...in the past"; debts / tributes to predecessors; party manifestos; former policy-makers; references to previous acts of parliament; journey from / toward; evolutionary principle)

iv) Political Philosophy

a) Aims and Purposes of Education (opportunity; fulfilling potential; PSHE; Citizenship; social cohesion; character building; imparting knowledge; literacy / numeracy; developing skills; gaining qualifications; inculcating values/morality)

b) Methods and Structures of Education (“academisation”; CTC; GM; UTC; partnerships; LEAs/LAs; quangos; hurdles to change; bureaucracy; voluntary / aided governance; monopoly; authority; accountability)

c) Academic Selection (grammar/selective schools; comprehensive setting / streaming; entrance exams; academic / vocational subjects; liberal arts education; technology colleges; apprenticeships; consequences of academic advantage / disadvantage)

d) ‘Faith Schools’ (i.e., schools with a religious character: Roman Catholic, Church of England, Jewish, Islamic, Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist schools; atheist / humanist schools; religious character; religio-cultural school uniform; “multiculturalism”; religious ethos; charity status; proselytising; “creationism”; voluntary aided; ethnic diversity)

e) Christian ethos (church education; establishment; inculcation of morality; theological values; discipline; spirituality; Religious Education; mission; collective worship; ‘Butler Act’ [1944]; church governance)

f) Market & Economics (marketisation; branding; money / funding; grants; (business) sponsorship; competition; parental choice; vouchers; house prices; supply side; monopolies / controls; profit; debt; poverty; co-op; conglomerates; taxpayer; social market)

g) Centralisation (prescription; control; duties / obligations; accountability; authority; rules; inspection; standards; direction/ constraints; interference; governance; bureaucracy)

h) De-centralisation (operational / educational autonomy; devolution of power; dispersal; freedom/liberty; self-governance; go it alone; partnership;)

i) Democratic Accountability (parental choice / demand; local authority / management; continuing accountability; community; voters; elections; quangos; governance; representation)

v) Philosophical influences – named or quoted

a) named specifically; quoted or alluded to (Mill, Taylor; Locke; Burke, Paine, Rousseau; de Tocqueville, Rawls, Oakeshott; Scruton; Griffin, etc; liberal; libertarian; conservative; collectivism; Marxism; Toryism; Whiggism; utilitarianism; empiricism; social democracy, etc; “..we should have freedom as long as it doesn’t hurt somebody else and their opportunity to also have freedom and to succeed”; “..education is a learning to be human, and it’s an initiation into the presuppositions of your own culture”; “..living your life freely can only take place in a social order that enables the exercise of that freedom”)

vi) Common Good

- a) *Shared attributes*** (values; virtues; character education; community; society)
- b) *Social Justice*** (freedom / equality / equity; social deprivation; academic advantage / disadvantage; fair funding; Pupil Premium; SEN; social conscience; compassion; assisted places; fair admissions; improving standards; support / assistance; “Citizenship”; harmony; cohesion; holistic frameworks)
- c) *Social Injustice*** (inequality; poverty; lack of equity / opportunity; unfair funding; falling standards; failure; division; lack of compassion; isolation; dysfunction)
- d) *Overt expressions of worry/concern*** (“I’m worried” / fearful / concerned / wary; the problem is..; the danger is; threat; anxiety).

vii) Pedagogy

- a) *Teaching*** (style; method; creativity; training; professional judgment)

viii) Standards and Inspection

- a) *Attainment and quality control*** (Success/failure; exams; improvement; rigour; Ofsted; assessment; accountability)

ix) Michael Gove’s character and leadership

- a) *Description and comment*** (“..the person who..”; driving / striving / pushing / controlling / attacking; what he would think/say; consensus with / divergence from political opponents; errors / omissions; achievements / strengths; motives; philosophy)

x) Views on Free School Policy

- a) *Criticisms*** (experimental; driven by ideology; “marketisation”; centralisation; lack of consultation; absence of evidence; unfair funding; speed of reform / revolution; detrimental for communities; lack of local accountability; surplus places; Whitehall control; lack of fair admissions; federations (MATs) becoming monopolies; lack of inspection; social injustice; union opposition)
- b) *Affirmations*** (appeals to evidence; liberating/freeing; parental choice; social justice; MAT partnership; raising standards; children benefit; democratic accountability; pace of reform / revolution; pluralisation; devolution)
- c) *Pace or mode of reform*** (revolution; evolution; progression; speed / scale of reform; time periods; adjectives applied – e.g., seismic/developing/incremental/ill-conceived / visionary / mission)
- d) *Comparisons with Charter Schools / Friskolor*** (cross-cultural policy formulation; triangulation; international cooperation; international models of reform)

xi) Sociology

a) Of education (teacher worldview; teaching methods / standards; cultural / institutional observations; ethos; poverty / affluence; ethnic / religious diversity)

xii) Political Consensus

a) Policy continuity or concurrence (dis/agreement; affirmation / criticism; political expedience; relationship; common objectives)

xiii) Biography

a) Course of life (education; upbringing; experiences; qualifications; accomplishments; career; contacts; policy participation; interests)

xiv) Self-identity

a) Categorisation and “I believe” (“I’m a Liberal” ..Conservative / Labour; expert; not an expert; Thatcherite; Govite; ..it is Christian; ..in freedom; ..in common purpose; ..in social justice)

Global themes

To provide a broad survey of the scope of the data, I have established the proportions of each interviewee’s narrative ascribed to a particular theme (drawn from the 12 substantive thematic NVivo nodes [i.e., excluding (i) name and (ii) party affiliation]):

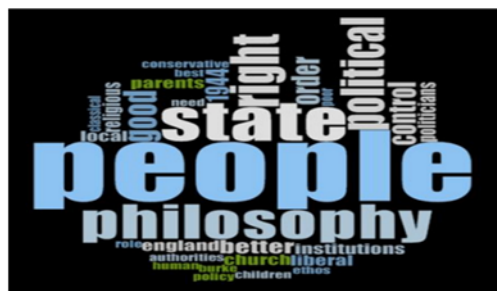
Table 3: The proportion of each interviewees’ narrative dedicated to a particular theme (node).

PERCENTAGE OF INTERVIEWEES’ NARRATIVE DEDICATED TO A PARTICULAR THEME (NODE)																			
Node	1	2	3	4	5							6	7						
Sub-Node			HISTORY a	PHILOSOPHY a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	PHILOSOPHICAL INFLUENCES a	COMMON GOOD a	b	c	d	PEDAGOGY a	
Interviewee	Party		Policy development	Aims/Purposes of Education	Methods/Structure of Education	Academic Selection	Faith Schools	Christian Ethics	Market and Economics	Centralisation	De-centralisation	Democratic Accountability	Named / Quoted / Alluded to	Shared Attributes	Social Justice	Social Injustice	Expressions of Worry/Concern	Teaching	
Adonis (Lab)	Lab		45.68	21.1	50.63	1.83	37.67	28.6	28.42	53.09	60.23	16.54	16.16	42.78	8.83	4.57	1.19	0	
Anon (LibDem)	LibDem		3.23	7.17	13.14	1.41	6.46	1.95	6.2	17.51	22.99	17.69	1.79	15.66	10.91	20.22	6.68	2.4	
Baker (Con)	Con		38.33	31.06	52.23	18.28	5.38	5.2	25.72	59.39	51.54	13.72	6.16	11.4	18.09	15.55	14.52	3.89	
Balls (Lab)	Lab		71.46	22.83	46.79	5.57	9.4	0	21.79	56.32	54	7.6	16.74	1	35.34	17.68	2.94	1.82	
Blunkett (Lab)	Lab		46.22	12.11	42.42	7.45	5.87	7.73	23.99	40.45	51.74	15.26	7.67	8.06	16.27	12.11	10.11	8.14	
Boles (Con)	Con		34.85	18.71	30.17	3.95	3.91	6.18	29.49	25.78	50.48	0	22.19	25.32	10.99	8.27	4.53	14.18	
Gibb (Con)	Con		26.15	6.11	36.54	5.54	0	8.2	22.22	46.86	27.01	31.37	3.41	11.59	1.85	0.9	1.18	3.29	
Gove (Con)	Con		42.86	27.95	16.74	0	13.39	11.1	16.62	39.92	39.86	17.69	48.91	11.59	11.23	0	1.52	7.5	
Hancock (Con)	Con		14.22	17.64	37.94	2.67	0	3.38	36.08	57.79	55.12	23.2	16.74	1.75	14.45	4.95	0	0	
Norman (Con)	Con		25.38	17.36	24.15	0	0	14.67	14.87	50.46	57.2	30.41	32.43	23.02	0	0	0	3.28	
O’Shaughnessy (Con)	Con		26.56	26.59	28.36	2.19	9.77	1.48	42.03	25.93	40.44	18.9	5.87	19.99	4.07	4.07	0	9.64	
Ryan (Lab)	Lab		63.61	13.29	45.08	5.9	6.27	5.51	23.23	38	42.79	10.61	3	7.28	10.54	6.32	9.58	7.29	
Skidmore (Con)	Con		31.12	20.49	30.58	11.72	6.56	5.4	16.76	29.88	28.73	15.15	17.42	12.81	20.2	6.28	5.59	1.86	
Taylor (Lab)	Lab		33.86	20.04	33.63	9.62	11.86	14.95	21.1	66.53	57.88	27.24	25.08	33.11	26.36	15.49	25.57	3.74	
Twigg (Lab)	Lab		37.22	20.28	53.75	4.8	13.75	14.99	14.46	43.92	51.28	19.69	10.38	20.1	20.61	7.62	11.74	11.3	
Conservative mean:			29.93	20.74	32.09	5.54	4.88	6.95	25.47	42.00	43.80	18.81	19.14	14.68	10.11	5.00	3.42	5.46	
Labour mean:			49.68	18.28	45.38	5.86	14.14	11.96	22.17	49.72	52.99	16.16	13.17	18.72	19.66	10.63	10.19	5.38	

Node	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Sub-Node	STANDARDS & INSPECTION a	GOVE'S CHARACTER / LEADERSHIP a	FREE SCHOOL POLICY a b c d	SOCIOLOGY a	POLITICAL CONSENSUS a	BIOGRAPHY a	SELF-IDENTITY a
	Attachment / Control	Description / Comment	Criticism Affirmations	Pace / Mode of Reform International Comparisons Of education	Continuity / Concurrence	Course of Life	Self-categorisation / Beliefs
Adonis (Lab)	29.86	0.38	1.77	38.41	8.82	5	26.52
Anon (LibDem)	9.11	9.03	42.24	7.96	2.59	1.76	3.85
Baker (Con)	42.55	18.43	2.65	40.57	28.89	8.43	20.28
Balls (Lab)	32.42	13.81	28.49	0	13.05	0.8	15.95
Blunkett (Lab)	18.25	10.71	9.5	11.99	15.32	0	17.55
Boles (Con)	35.93	30.09	0	49.02	9.27	0	27.9
Gibb (Con)	2.21	3.13	0	29.44	0.95	1.52	3.39
Gove (Con)	31.23	0	0	15.4	15.07	4.43	31.43
Hancock (Con)	16.03	3.68	0	45.2	9.23	0	7.01
Norman (Con)	7.48	16.69	0	29.44	26.57	0	16.09
O'Shaughnessy (Con)	19.62	8.49	0	1.56	12.88	0	7.49
Ryan (Lab)	26.45	9.05	9.16	27.26	18.84	2.84	11.8
Skidmore (Con)	1.77	4.7	1.7	18.69	31.85	1.69	3.17
Taylor (Lab)	36.31	44.96	54.7	18.26	45.67	0	29.29
Twigg (Lab)	54.82	9.73	5.76	30.29	15.32	0	17.29
Conservative mean:	19.60	10.65	0.54	28.67	16.84	2.01	14.60
Labour mean:	33.02	14.77	18.23	21.04	19.50	1.44	19.73
							25.48
							16.26
							18.15
							6.95
							2.35

This is a ‘global’ overview (as per Aberbach & Rockman, 2002) of respondents’ own emphases presented quantitatively: it is an assessment of manifest narrative proportions; not a measurement of policy advocacy, historical accuracy or depth of philosophical knowledge. NVivo coding and categorisation permit enhanced qualitative and quantitative data analysis of transcribed interviews, and ‘force detailed consideration of all text... line by line’ (Robson, 2011:472) in order to discern confluence and divergence in coded elements. While it is important to avoid the temptation to reduce nuanced narrative text to numbers and frequency (not to mention over-estimate the extent to which logic-form programming can perform critical assessments of philosophical dialogue), word clouds and the percentages of discourse dedicated to a particular manifest theme do provide an objective global ‘flavour’ of an interview and corroborate confluence or divergence of narrative thought and articulation when the obvious conjunctions and conversational vocabulary (‘think’, ‘believe’, ‘well’, ‘really’) and subject terminology (‘schools’, education’, ‘academies’, ‘free schools’, and so on) are removed. Fig. 1 shows the word cloud of Gove’s most prominent ‘global’¹ interview terms (for word cloud analysis of all interviewees, see Appendix VII). The ‘top 30’ terms constitutes the general thematic traits or variations in conversational content of each interviewee:

Fig. 1: Rt Hon Michael Gove MP



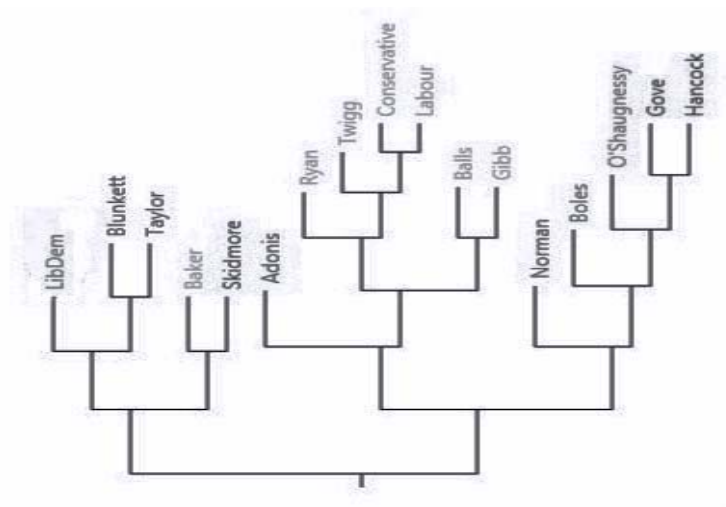
Focus of discourse: People→State→Philosophy→Right→Political→Good (schools)→Control→Order

This is essentially a ‘people’/‘state’ narrative, invoking ‘political’/‘philosophy’ (even specifying ‘Burke’) as global themes from a ‘right’ (political ‘control’ and moral ‘order’) perspective. Significant is the constant invocation of ‘1944’ (Butler Act) – clearly seen as pivotal – in the context of ‘Church’ and

¹ I shall henceforth use Aberbach & Rockman’s (2002) framework terminology – ‘global’, ‘manifest’ and ‘latent’ – without inverted commas, as they are referred to many times throughout the data analysis.

There is here a real sense of both individual and Conservative-Labour discourse in relation to the terminology which gives rise to the themes explored in the interviews. With only one Liberal Democrat participant, the data-set may not be similarly extrapolated by any comparable method. But a significant quantitative Conservative-Labour overlap may be observed on a global view. Set out left-to-right (Fig. 4), there is a reform narrative spectrum ranging from philosophical social-justice concerns (prioritised by Anon LD and Labour's Blunkett and Taylor) to philosophical considerations of 'right' or 'good' (Conservatives O'Shaughnessy, Gove and Hancock).

Fig. 4: Interviewee and Party nodes clustered by discourse word-usage similarity
(calculated by the Pearson correlation coefficient).



This is a global qualitative measurement of the association between independent variables relating to party affiliation and dependent variables relating to word-usage (set out in Table 3). Pearson's r was computed using NVivo to measure the relationship between the variables. While Anon (Liberal Democrat) is polarised leftward from Gove/Hancock (Conservative) on the right (due principally to a different focus on criticisms of (or 'concern' about) policy and matters relating to community and social justice), it is noteworthy – in terms of word-usage means – how convergent the grouped Labour/Conservative participants are (and so how outlying the Liberal Democrat participant is). Notable, also, is the proximity of Gibb (Conservative) to Balls (Labour), and the proximity of Baker/Skidmore (Conservative) to Blunkett/Taylor/Adonis (Labour). Participants may also be viewed in their relative association to the 'central' Conservative-Labour proximity:

Fig. 5: Interviewee and Party Nodes arranged by discourse word-usage similarity

(calculated by the Pearson correlation coefficient).



The scatter-diagrammatic ‘detachment’ of Anon LD from the prevailing consensual Conservative-Labour narrative is evident. This is not a correlative illustration: there is no convenient left-right spectrum, but the ‘social justice’ concerns of Anon LD (and to a lesser extent Balls and Adonis) present a visual polarity to Gove/O’Shaughnessy/ Norman/ Boles/Blunkett.

Problems of thematic coding

Aberbach *et al.* (1975:14) observe: ‘Coding latent and contextual characteristics... also leaves room for error.’ It appears from the global view provided in Fig. 4 that Anon LD is somehow polarised from a block of five Conservatives, and that Balls inclines toward their view, though more median. But there are important variable verbal-sense considerations, not least of which are people’s different speaking styles and the fact that not everyone endows a word with the same meaning. Those presented in Fig. 1 (and others in Appendix VII) highlighted dominant themes; not the definitional variables in political-philosophical apprehension, since global terms provide neither contextual reason nor logic. In an era where political polarities compete for the ‘centre ground’ (Quinn, 2008; Quinn, Bara *et al.*, 2011 [sometimes expressed as ‘common ground’]) with rhetorical appeals to concepts such as ‘fairness’ and ‘equality’, neither side wishes to be seen to be advocating or creating ‘inequality’. But social justice is variously apprehended across a philosophical spectrum – by many Conservatives as ‘a reward for individual success rather than, as welfare ideology has it, the equal treatment of all’ (Freedon, 1996:390). Scruton (2013:29) corroborates the philosophical distinction:

We should not be surprised... at an educational decline that we have witnessed throughout the Western world since the egalitarian agenda was imposed upon schools. It is the inevitable result of confiscating the real goal of education, which is education, conceived as an end in itself, and replacing it with another that no school can coherently aim at or reliably supply, which is equality.

Pareto would doubtless view the focus on social justice as ‘(o)ptimistic moralising, of a kind favoured by idealistic intellectuals’ (Femia, 2011:2); indeed, for Pareto, ‘words like “justice”, “morality” and “goodness” could never be given a descriptive content, since they “designate nothing more than indistinct and incoherent sentiments”’ (Femia, 2011:5; Pareto, 1935:15130). Gove wouldn’t go as far as Pareto (1971:91), that: ‘ideas such as “natural law” or “justice”, being in “patent disaccord with logic and experience”, should simply be regarded as “not existing” or even “meaningless”’ (Femia, 2011:79; Pareto, 1935:445, 463); or that ‘(t)he assertion that men are objectively equal is so absurd that it does not even merit being refuted’ (Pareto, 1971:89f). But, as Scruton makes clear, the contradictions, misunderstandings and mutual exclusions abound.

Noting the tension between assertions of equality and liberty in social arrangements, Freedren (1996:464) quotes Tawney (1966:108), who observes: ‘it is possible that equality is to be contrasted not with liberty, but with a particular interpretation of it.’ Equality is inseparable from notions of ‘freedom’ and so obviously became a major global theme, but it is viewed by one respondent as beneficial when it is freedom from the local authority, while another views the local authority as a beneficial institution enjoying freedom from central government. Both grasp the fundamental negative freedom, but notions of hegemony vary greatly, so ‘we must seek to understand what someone says in terms of the talk that has preceded’ (Bryman, 2012:525). In order to avoid extraneous inferences, I sought to understand – sometimes inductively – how the interviewee may be contextualising a term within a prior theoretical scheme of philosophy. Bryman (2012:578) acknowledges the problem of losing the context of what was said in a myriad of ‘coded’ fragments and disconnected phrases, and he draws attention (p295) to the significance of the (manipulative) use of some words and the (purposeful) neglect of others: ‘At this point, the analyst is searching not just for manifest content but for latent content as well. It becomes necessary to probe beneath the surface in order to ask deeper questions about what is happening’ (p297).

There are obviously multiple latent themes and complex sources of influence: indeed, the amount of data collated and categorised in this schedule would satisfy multiple inquiries into a number of important areas of education policy. It is important to reiterate that I – the interviewer, with a degree of ‘insider’ situation – am a key variable in the data-collection process and coding: what I apprehended, emphasised or drew out in one interview could not be precisely what I apprehended or focused on in another. And the coding process, like each interview, was also subject to conscious adjustments and chronological fluctuation over six months of trawling, such as the later expansion of a latent sub-category or a subtly different focus due to intervening political ‘events’, like the sudden media focus (e.g., Gibbons, 2014; Gilligan, 2014) on the Birmingham ‘Trojan Horse’ inquiry, which evidenced a concerted effort to establish an exclusively (and rather narrow apprehension of) Islamic culture in state schools with no designated religious foundation. This ‘event’ undoubtedly heightened my sensitivity to interviewee’s references to the religious foundation

of Academies and Free Schools, notwithstanding that two of the Birmingham schools were under LA control.

In the triple-trawling of data, I developed coding categories to act as ‘checks’ on category fluctuations and personal changefulness. For example, I would expect to see significant correlation between ‘Political Consensus’ (code xii) and ‘Affirmations of Free School policy’ (code x.b). Similarly, the ‘Pace or mode of reform’ (code x.c) also offers insights into ‘Michael Gove’s character and leadership’ (code x); and ‘Aims and purposes of education’ (code iv.a) is inseparable from an understanding of the ‘Common Good’ (code vi) and the inculcation of morality and values. The meta-coding thereby became a creative hermeneutic auto-check; divergences may explained in, for example, consensus around areas of policy – such as the place of RE in the curriculum or the requirement to teach ‘British values’, neither of which had any direct bearing on Free School policy, but, as I have shown, are philosophically contingent and consequential.

iii) THE ELITE ‘POLICY COMMUNITY’

The ‘circulation’ of educational political-power elites and reputational-advisor elites evidences commonalities in gender, ethnicity, educational paths, social networks, political access and potential religio-cultural-moral inculcation. This has implications not only for democratic theory within both liberalism and conservatism (beyond the scope of this thesis²) but also for the understanding of social inequality insofar as the classical elitist thesis as developed by Pareto, which essentially asserts that the dominant minority cannot be controlled by the majority, whatever democratic means are used. When there is policy consensus among the main political parties, and when ministers, their advisors and their appointed successors are all drawn from an elite educational pool within a distinct socio-moral stratification, there is little that ‘outsiders’ can do to affect the trajectory of reform, which might appear to be almost teleologically determined.

In a Parliament which was at the time of writing (2014-15), 21% female and 4.6% BME; with an Executive Cabinet which was 13.6% female and 4.5% BME, and a Shadow Cabinet which was 40.7% female and 7.4% BME, it is noteworthy that the principal architects of Academies and Free Schools were not only exclusively male and white, but the overwhelming majority (13/15 = 87%) of those who consented to be interviewed were either exclusively privately educated or experienced

² Within both liberal and conservative traditions, the evolution of democracy is complex and variously understood. While not assuming a precise correlative relationship between philosophy and party (not least because parties tend to defend threatened interests irrespective of ideological consistency), democracy within conservatism is essentially that which is exercised freely by the masses under the aegis of and in accordance with the customs and traditions of established civilising institutions – in particular Monarchy, Parliament and Church. Democracy within liberalism inclines toward egalitarianism and the rationalism of the individual to exercise freedom provided that it does not impinge upon the liberties of others. Both traditions have within them strands which assert a notion of ‘quality control’ to ensure competence in government: the conservatives ‘an appeal to an extra-human legitimization of order’ (Freedon, 1996:409); and the liberals ‘an unconscious élitism sustained by education’ (p155).

some state/private combination during their secondary education. And these schools tended to be either nominally or confessionally Christian (12/15 = 80%), following which most interviewees attended Oxbridge (10/15 = 67%), of which no fewer than five graduated in PPE (33%). Moreover, where there was experience of state education, in all but two cases those schools were academically selective. Blunkett's disability necessitated attendance at a specialist school for the blind, thereby removing him from mainstream state education. The Christian/confessional-private/grammar educational heritage of the principal architects of free-school policy is manifest:

Table 5: **Interviewees' secondary/tertiary and confessional/secular education**

<u>State</u>	<u>State/Private</u>	<u>Private</u>	<u>Oxbridge</u>
Blunkett (Special)	Baker (Selective / CoFE)	Adonis (CoFE)	Adonis (History)
Twigg (Non-selective)	Gibb (Selective*/ CoFE)	Anon (RC)	Baker (Law)
	Taylor (Selective**/ CoFE)	Balls (CoFE)	Balls (PPE)
	Ryan (RC)	Boles (CoFE)	Boles (PPE)
		Gove	Gove (English)
		Hancock (CoFE)	Hancock (PPE)
		Norman (CoFE)	Norman (Philosophy)
		O'Shaugnessy (CoFE)	O'Shaugnessy (PPE)
		Skidmore (Inter-)	Skidmore (History)
			Twigg (PPE)
* Also attended a non-selective school			CoFE - Church of England
**Voluntary-aided became independent in Taylor's final year			RC - Roman Catholic
			Inter - Interdenominational

Setting this data in the context of MPs that made up the 2010-15 Parliament, there is a distinctly discernible elite:

Table 6: **Interviewees' and MPs' secondary/tertiary and confessional/secular education (comparative proportions).**

	Elite interview sample:	MPs (2010 intake):
Privately educated:	87%	35%
Christian/confessional:	80%	36.5%/40%*
Oxbridge educated:	67%	28%
Graduated in PPE:	33%	7%**

* No published data available: this figure is derived from my own statistical analysis (Appendix VII). The second figure includes 'nominal' Church of England schools.

** Drawn from a declared 'incomplete' *Wikipedia* (2014) list, but democratically compiled and interrogated.

It is moot as to whether this pattern may be seen to be replicated across other government departments. Some academics (e.g., Kenny, 2009; Reay, 2008) suggest that my observations are no different from the backgrounds of the elite in government or in Parliament generally, which, in interview, Twigg corroborated:

I think if you probably looked at the Cabinet and the Shadow Cabinet, there would be a large number in the Cabinet from private schools plus Oxbridge. In the Shadow Cabinet it would probably be

more state schools plus Oxbridge. But you have certainly got Oxbridge as the common denominator there (Twigg).

But I postulate a significant and importance difference in regard to education: if the DfE formulates school policy based on the narrow empiricism of the elite/private/Oxbridge-educated, it is difficult to perceive any breadth of educational experience by which multiple models of school structure may be considered to equivalent comparative depths. By way of departmental comparison, if the only clinical experience of ministers (and of their primary and subsidiary networks of advisors) in the Department of Health were in the private sector when they were children or teenagers, valid questions would be raised as to the empirical basis for their perceptions or beliefs about the NHS as adults, and the extent to which the BUPA/choice-marketisation-competition ethos might be influencing public policy.

In addition to those who were interviewed, it is worth noting that Stephen Twigg was succeeded by Tristram Hunt MP, who was educated at University College School (independent, secular), followed by History at Cambridge. And in the same reshuffle (7th October 2013) David Laws replaced Sarah Teather in the DfE as the Coalition's Liberal Democrat education minister. Teather was educated at Leicester Grammar School (independent, Church of England) followed by Natural Sciences at Cambridge; Laws was educated at St George's College, Weybridge (independent, Roman Catholic), and Cambridge University, where he read Economics. In a further reshuffle (14th July 2014), Michael Gove was replaced as Secretary of State for Education by Nicky Morgan MP, who was educated at Surbiton High School (independent, Church of England [part of the United Church Schools Trust]), followed by Jurisprudence at Oxford. In this recurring elite private education followed by elite academic education, there are manifest reshuffle 'regime changes', and so something of an elite educational 'circulation'. This seems to occur whether or not those appointed are apparently the 'most qualified' for the task; that is, 'a class of the people who have the highest indices in their branch of activity' (Pareto, 1935:2031), as against the observation that: 'Wealth, family, or social connexions also help in many other cases to win the label of the *élite* in general, or of the governing *élite* in particular, for persons who otherwise hold no claim upon it' (*ibid.* 2036).

Educational 'religious foundation' and the elite character

Many of these private schools are not simply 'nominally'³ Christian, they are perceptibly more overtly confessional: indeed, they are schools which actively market themselves with appeals not only to their Christian foundations, but to the contingent dependence of a child's spiritual

³ The term is often used derogatively in the contemporary pluralist context variously categorised 'multi-faith', 'post-Christian' or 'secular' [Wright, 2013 cf. Woodhead, 2013], but by which I mean the distinction summarised by Duncan (1993:122) between their function of 'service to the community' as opposed to their mission to 'nurture in the faith'. In many state schools the statutory requirement for collective worship is now more honoured in the breach than the observance (ComRes, 2011; Ofsted, 1999:43 [which found 'Seven in ten schools fail to comply fully with the requirement for collective worship']).

development upon (for example) chapel attendance. Prospectuses and websites often emphasise the primacy of ‘Christian values’ (see Appendix VIII) and systematic moral-character education.

There is, of course, no assurance that students pay much attention to sermons preached or doctrine taught (see Gill [2004:188] on secondary-school students’ ‘inattentive compliance’ with this aspect of school practice); and there is no inspection regime which assesses the educational efficacy of this dimension of independent education. Further, it is questionable whether schools with a religious character offer a distinctive educational experience (apart from frequently higher levels of attainment [McLaughlin, 2005:306]⁴) beyond that typified as ‘national tradition, strict discipline and pseudo-Christian morality’ (Wright, 2012:283). But in the consideration of elite educational experiences, Stich and Colyar (2013:9) observe that in these settings ‘students learn how to define themselves as “different” and “special”... What (the school) is teaching is a style of learning that quickly becomes a style of living’. There is nothing definitive to be asserted here as research in this area of elite education is lacking: ‘There does not appear to be a common language amongst researchers or research participants for talking about values, character development, spirituality or ethos; nor are there agreed definitions for these concepts’ (Oldfield *et al*, 2013:44). But, in interview, Adonis was not alone in his observation that school ‘success’ is often linked to an ethos stemming from its religious foundation: ‘Schools need a strong ethos to be successful, and often religious affiliation helps to strengthen ethos’ (Adonis). The hypothesis of the existence of causal relationship between institutional-religious character education and elite networks of policy architects is certainly an area worthy of future research, notwithstanding the observed present lack of a ‘common language’.

Percy (2005:4) observes that the contemporary context is one of increasing pluralism and relativism, and of the ‘dominance of secularization theories’ (principally that of the marginalisation of religion from the public sphere). While there are complexities in how secularisation is defined and manifests itself, Gearon corroborates the shift but observes that, instead of the marginalisation of Christianity, there is an observable political syncretism (and so ‘misrepresentation’) of religion throughout Europe:

Analysis of the convergence of European civil religion and European religious education means that trends in European religious education are a useful way not of witnessing counter-secularisation but of understanding a new and powerful potential agent of secularisation’s confirmation, here meaning if not marginalisation in a classical sense but religion’s incorporation into secular, political goals and ends, and this facilitated, consciously or otherwise, through education (Gearon, 2012b:151f).

The assertion is one of overt ‘political orientation’ of RE toward citizenship, democracy and human rights, which confirms the secularisation: ‘within two generations Europe has transformed close to

⁴ While there are undoubtedly other social/selection variables (see Pennell, West *et al*. 2007), it is interesting to note that the top 10 comprehensive schools in England (in terms of academic attainment; GCSE/A-level raw results) are: 1) Roman Catholic 2) Jewish 3) Jewish 4) secular 5) Jewish 6) Roman Catholic 7) Roman Catholic 8) secular 9) secular 10) Christian (West, E, 2014).

two millennia of Christian identity into a plural, multi-faith orientation in its religious education systems'. And Gearon observes that there are undoubtedly 'very many schools with a Christian foundation that are unlikely to adopt the trend towards uniformity of political-pedagogical purposes' (p156).

The latter point would be of no consequence to Pareto, for whom secular 'religions' – socio-philosophical creeds such as scientism or Marxism – 'could eventually serve the same social function as, say, Catholicism' (Femia, 2011:20):

In an environment imbued with authoritarian principles, a religion of free will can be useful: in an environment tending to anarchy an authoritarian religion is indispensable if the dissolution of society is to be impeded. On the other hand, it is of little importance if the form of this religion is new or ancient (Pareto, 1907/1980:323).

This is not a tangential observation in the context of the emergence of fundamental 'British values' and Ofsted's inspection of a school's inculcation of 'respect of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs' (DfE 2014c:5). Accepting Gearon's thesis, the architects of academisation who are now in their 50s-80s are likely to have experienced a more 'authentic' Christian confessional (or, indeed, non-confessional) education which informed their moral/character development, rather than the contemporary approach to RE and spiritual development which is 'enmeshed with influential political agencies across a wide spectrum of geopolitical contexts' (Gearon, 2012b:155).

The wider 'policy community'

Extending this biographical survey to those politicians who were shuffled into the frame during this research, and also to other politicians and their advisors who were named by interviewees, the (moral/character) educational ethos of the schools attended by the 'policy community' becomes more evident. Including the prime ministers under whose patronage the Academy/Free-School reforms were introduced (Blair 2000-2007), incrementally extended (Brown, 2007-2010), and considerably expanded (Cameron/Clegg 2010-2015), there is a high degree of elite educational commonality, if not religious continuity:

Table 7: **Wider network of Academy/Free-School architects' and advisors' secondary/tertiary and confessional/secular education.**

<u>State</u>	<u>State/Private</u>	<u>Private</u>	<u>Oxbridge</u>
Blunkett (Special)	Baker (Selective / CoFE)	Adonis (CoFE)	Adonis (History)
Brown (Non-selective*)	Gibb (Selective**/ CoFE)	Anon (RC)	Baker (Law)
Balchin (Selective)	Taylor, M (Selective***/ CoFE)	Balls (CoFE)	Balls (PPE)
Taylor, C (Selective)		Barber (Quaker)	Barber (History)
Twigg (Non-selective)		Blair (Inter-)	Blair (Jurisprudence)
		Boles (CoFE)	Boles (PPE)
		Cameron (CoFE)	Cameron (PPE)
		Clegg (CoFE)	Clegg (Archaeology & Anthropology)
		Cook (CoFE)	Cook (History)
		Cummings (CoFE)	Cummings (Ancient & Modern History)
		Davey (CoFE)	Davey (PPE)
		Freedman (CoFE)	Freedman (History)
		Gove	Gove (English)
		Hancock (CoFE)	Hancock (PPE)
		Hill (CoFE)	Hill (History)
		Hilton (CoFE)	Hilton (PPE)
		Hunt	Hunt (History)
		Hyman	Laws (Economics)
		Laws (RC)	Leslie (Classics)
		Leslie	Nash (Law)
		Nash (CoFE)	Norman (Philosophy)
		Norman (CoFE)	O'Shaugnessy (PPE)
		O'Shaugnessy (CoFE)	Skidmore (History)
		Ryan (RC)	Taylor, C (History)
		Skidmore (Inter-)	Teather (Natural Sciences)
		Teather (RC)	Twigg (PPE)
		Willetts (CoFE)	Willetts (PPE)
		Wolf (CoFE)	Wolf (Natural Sciences)

*Actually taught in a fast-stream programme with separate classes.	CoFE - Church of England
**Also attended non-selective schools.	RC - Roman Catholic
***Voluntary-aided became independent in Taylor's final year.	Inter - Interdenominational

In the context of elite theory, this biographical genealogy is not incidental, though the discussion of respondents' values in the context of their schooling is beyond the scope of this thesis. School prospectuses articulate a reified ethos, but it would be erroneous to infer individual moral worldviews from the corporate presentations of professing Christian institutions. Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority (31/36 = 86%) of policy architects and their advisors were either exclusively privately educated or are the product of some private/state-selective combination during their secondary education. If not patently confessional, the professed, public ethos of those educational establishments is concerned with the formation of 'Christian character' (27/36 = 75%), after which most of the architects of policy attended Oxbridge (28/36 = 78%), of which nine graduated in PPE (26%). There were also nine Oxbridge graduates in History (ancient and/or modern), perhaps suggesting a particular (or preferred) disciplinary approach in the development of policy. These proportions correlate so closely to my up-system interview sample that an elite typology may be observed:

Table 8: **Interviewees’ and wider network of architects’/advisor’s secondary/tertiary and confessional/secular education (comparative proportions).**

	Elite interview sample:	Wider architects/advisors:
Privately educated:	87%	86%
Christian confession:	80%	75%
Oxbridge educated:	67%	78%
Graduated in PPE:	33%	26%

The most significant proportional disparity – in Oxbridge attendance – suggests that my research base was actually educationally more diverse than the wider discernible network of architects and their advisors – i.e., that the *wider* political architects of Academy and Free-School policy and their advisors were academically *actually more elite than my interview sample*; that a distinct ‘political class’ (cf. Mosca’s ‘ruling class’ [1923/1939:xli, 51, 70]) controls the policy of academisation; and biographical observations suggest that educational experience may be a key influence on that policy.

Adonis was clear in interview about a correlation: ‘I was quite explicit in the book (*Education, Education, Education* [Adonis, 2012a]) that you can’t divorce what I do from my own background.’ Similarly, Baker (2013:10f) attributes his UTC focus and ‘the importance of learning by doing’ to ‘vivid memories of those practical lessons (in carpentry)’. Williams, C (2012:149f) has observed the effects of educational systems on elite power structures, identifying individuals and organisations ‘who are “tied” by interdependency arising from characteristics such as kinship, interests, beliefs, status, profession and ethnicity’. I posit a distinct ‘epistemic community’ based not only on knowledge and expertise, but on clubs, networks, common characteristics and shared interests: ‘If there is agreement among the elite, it derives from a set of shared circumstances and personal goals’ (Zuckerman, 1977:334). Boles took up this theme in reference to the predominance of graduates in PPE:

That’s really more of a comment on modern British politics, surely, than it is particularly a comment on education policy. Because it just is true, the Prime Minister studied PPE. I studied PPE. Ed Balls studied PPE. Ed Miliband studied PPE. It’s not because of education policy: it’s because that has become – the French have ENA for their top civil servants; we have PPE for politicians (Boles).

But Pareto (1963:2254) observes: ‘The governing class is not a homogeneous body. It too has a government of a smaller, choicer class (or else a leader, or a committee) that effectively and practically exercises control.’ In light of this conceptualisation, it is worth comparing the figures on the educational background of the wider architects of policy to the MPs that made up the 2010-2015 parliament:

Table 9: **Interviewees', wider architects'/advisors' and MPs' secondary/tertiary and confessional/secular education (comparative proportions).**

	Elite interview sample:	Wider architects/advisors:	MPs (2010 intake):
Privately educated:	87%	86%	35%
Christian/confessional:	80%	75%	36.5%/40%*
Oxbridge educated:	67%	78%	28%
Graduated in PPE:	33%	26%	7%**

* No published data available: this figure is derived from my own statistical analysis (Appendix VII). The second figure includes 'nominal' Church of England schools.

** Drawn from a declared 'incomplete' *Wikipedia* (2014) list, but democratically compiled and interrogated.

Thus 35% of all (2010-15) MPs attended independent schools, which educate just 7% of the school population (Sutton Trust, 2010), but which account for 86% of the architects of Academy/Free-School education policy. Around 36.5% of MPs attended a secondary school with a Christian religious character (reflecting the fact that 34% of state-maintained schools in England are 'faith' schools, of which 99% are Church schools [Oldfield *et al.*, 2013:21]), which educate 18% of the secondary school population (Long & Bolton, 2014:9), but which account for 75% of the architects of Academy/Free-School education policy. And 28% of all MPs in the 2010 intake were Oxbridge educated (which accounted for just 1.3% of the UK university undergraduate intake in 2013), but these two institutions alone account for 78% of the architects of education policy.

This is significant because across the three main political parties, the proportion of MPs who went to Oxford or Cambridge universities has fallen since 1951:

Table 10: **How the proportion of Oxbridge-educated MPs from the three main political parties has changed in successive parliaments.**

	1951	1966	Oct-74	1979	1992	1997	2001	2005	2010
Cons (Oxbridge)	52%	57%	56%	49%	45%	51%	48%	43%	38%
LD (Oxbridge)		50%	38%	27%	30%	33%	27%	31%	28%
Lab (Oxbridge)	19%	23%	25%	21%	16%	15%	16%	16%	20%

(Source: The Sutton Trust, 2010).

And those attending private schools has also been following a downward trend:

Table 11: **How the proportion of independently-educated MPs from the three main political parties has changed over recent Parliaments.**

	1979	1983	1987	1992	1997	2001	2005	2010
MPs of the Main Parties	49%	51%	47%	41%	30%	31%	34%	37%
Conservative	73%	70%	68%	62%	66%	64%	60%	54%
Liberal Democrat	55%	52%	45%	50%	41%	35%	39%	40%
Labour	18%	14%	14%	15%	16%	17%	18%	15%

(Source: The Sutton Trust, 2010).

Examining the applications (accepted and rejected) from groups applying to establish a Free School, Higham (2014:137) says there is ‘a danger of elite membership that is “not in touch with purported constituency” (Alexander 2010)’. The Sutton Trust (2010) observes that ‘social mobility levels are low among the highest echelons of British society. The majority of those holding the most powerful and influential positions in modern Britain come from a small social elite’. If this is true of the educational backgrounds of MPs generally, *a fortiori* it is true of those who have devised and developed Academies and Free Schools. Further, the proportion of policy architects and their advisors who were privately and/or Oxbridge-educated exceeds the proportions in the Conservative Party, which has historically elected more MPs from both groups:

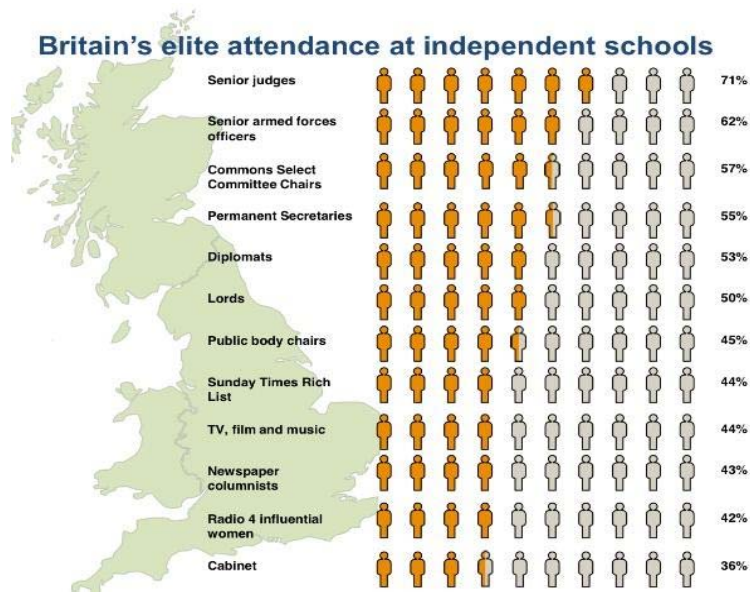
Table 12: **Education of MPs elected in General Elections 1979-2013**

	1979	1983	1987	1992	1997	2001	2005	2010
 Fee-paying school	73	70	68	62	66	64	60	54
 University	68	71	70	73	81	83	81	80
 Oxford & Cambridge	49	48	44	45	51	48	43	34
 Fee-paying school	18	14	14	15	16	17	18	14
 University	59	53	56	61	66	67	64	72
 Oxford & Cambridge	21	15	15	16	15	16	16	17
 Fee-paying school	55	52	45	50	41	35	39	39
 University	45	65	73	75	70	69	79	81
 Oxford & Cambridge	27	30	27	30	33	27	31	28

(Source: McGuinness, 2010).

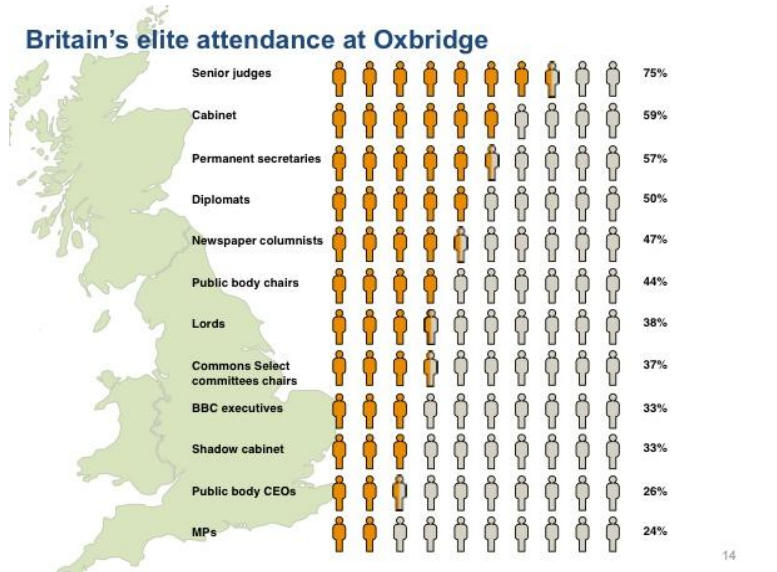
In fact, the proportion of cross-party Academy/Free-School policy architects who were privately and/or Oxbridge educated exceeds even the proportions on the Conservative benches in the House of Lords, for which the most recent figures are 79% and 49% respectively (Sutton Trust, 2005). At 86% privately educated and 78% Oxbridge educated, the proportion of the architects of Academies and Free Schools who were privately and/or Oxbridge *exceeds even the most elite group in society*:

Fig. 6: Professional elite attendance at independent schools.



(Source: *Elitist Britain*, Social Mobility and Child Poverty [SMCP] Commission [2014]).

Fig. 7: Political elite attendance at Oxbridge.



(Source: *Elitist Britain*, Social Mobility and Child Poverty [SMCP] Commission [2014]).

Alan Milburn, Chairman of the SMCP Commission, wrote in the foreword to *Elitist Britain*: ‘Our research shows it is entirely possible for politicians to rely on advisors to advise, civil servants to devise policy solutions and journalists to report on their actions having all studied the same courses at the same universities, having read the same books, heard the same lectures and even being taught by the same tutors’ (SMCP, 2014:2). The evidence suggests that this is certainly true of the Academy/Free-School reforms (Bolton [2014] gives a fuller picture in his research paper *Oxbridge*

'elitism'). In interview, Twigg notes the potential consequences of this for policy formulation, especially vocational education (Appendix IX).

In the Cabinet reshuffle of 14th July 2014 (in which Gove was removed from his position as Secretary of State), there was much conjecture about his possible replacement. Observing the political pressure on Cameron to promote more women (e.g., 'Bagehot', 2013, dissected by Mortimore *et al.*, 2013), there was some speculation that Gove would be replaced by Liz Truss (state educated; Oxford [PPE]). Cameron's decision to appoint Nicky Morgan was possibly a missed opportunity to redress the private/state imbalance.⁵ This reshuffle included the appointment of Nick Boles to the DfE and the re-appointment of Nick Gibb. Morgan herself confirmed that there would be no change in policy:

I want to be clear those who seek to use this case to undermine this government's reform agenda will be disappointed. Today there are more than four thousand academies and free schools serving pupils and parents up and down the country. They are helping thousands of young people, regardless of their background, to unlock their potential and become valuable and rounded members of society. The expansion of the academy programme has been one of the great success stories of this government and the actions of a small number of individuals will not divert us from this path. The programme of reform goes on (*Hansard*, 2014: col.1250).

While accelerated academisation continued, it was unlikely, with her appointment coming 10 months before the 2015 General Election, that the parliamentary timetable would offer much opportunity for her to instigate legislation for any distinctive policy development. In the recent context of Academy/Free-School reform, a perceived conciliatory female secretary of state has succeeded a combative male, perhaps out of political necessity. Both Blunkett and Gove were in office for four years of reform; Estelle Morris and Nicky Morgan succeeded them respectively for what was/is essentially a period of continuation and consolidation. As Ozga and Gewirtz (1994:134) found in their research into education policy-making, 'the researched are an elite, almost exclusively male, fraction of the State bureaucracy'. After two decades of gender equality, minority quotas and all-female parliamentary shortlists (Cracknell & Keen, 2014), the principal architects of free schools remain resolutely male.

Shared networks and ideological consensus

In her critique of Gove's education ideas, Labour's Fiona Millar (2013a) identified common elements of elite education biography: 'All three party education leads, Michael Gove, David Laws and Tristram Hunt, are white Oxbridge-educated men, as are many of the policy advisors' (cf. Reay [2008:639], who observed 'a white middle-class norm'). Millar acknowledged 'notable women' like Liz Truss and Alison Wolf (Morgan wasn't then remotely in the frame), but her journalistic agenda

⁵ It was widely observed that Morgan's promotion was designed more for Conservative electoral considerations and to mollify the teaching unions: 'Gove, agree Tory sources, wasn't removed from the Department of Education because the Prime Minister stopped supporting his reforms but because Gove himself had become a damaging and divisive figure in the eyes of both teachers and parents. Morgan, they say, was brought in to be more conciliatory and charming without performing any fundamental U-turns on academies, free schools and the rest (Simons, 2014).

was distinctly anti-Conservative (or, specifically, anti-Gove), highlighting also the role played by what she termed ‘right-leaning thinktanks’ which, she observed, also tend to be male dominated: ‘Two-way traffic between the thinktanks, government and opposition may be partly to blame for the lack of diversity, says Rick Muir, of the left-of-centre IPPR..’ (Millar, 2013a). Millar doesn’t consider the dominance of private secondary education or the near-universal ethos of moral/character education (by virtue of institutional Christian confession), but she quotes Sam Freedman on the provenance of policy: ‘The ideas behind structural reform, like free schools, had been around for some time and worked on in Policy Exchange.’

Of those listed as the wider architects and advisors, I have identified the following connections with the Policy Exchange think-tank:

Table 13: **Wider architects and policy advisors with links to Policy Exchange.**

Gove	Chairman 2002-2006
Boles	Director 2002-2007
Norman	Executive Director 2005-2006
Skidmore	Research Fellow
O'Shaugnessy	Deputy Director 2004-2007
Leslie	Research Fellow
Freedman	Head of Education Unit 2006-2009
Willetts	Board member 2001-2002

All of these are privately-educated, Oxbridge graduates and, with the exception of Leslie, male. Frequent speakers at Policy Exchange conferences and meetings include all of the above, plus Hancock, Gibb, Adonis, Twigg, Davey, Laws and others sympathetic to the trajectory of reform, including Tristram Hunt, who delivered a keynote speech there in 2014 in which, acknowledging disagreements about ‘the precise limits of the market’s ability to be the guarantor of social justice’, he paid tribute to the think-tank as being ‘indisputably at the vanguard of contemporary Compassionate Conservatism’ (Hunt, 2014a).

Such cross-party participation in a ‘right-wing thinktank’ (Millar, 2013a) is consistent with the emergence of a ‘middle ground’ of consensus around academisation (Adonis, 2012a:117f): the primary concern of contemporary ‘compassionate Conservatism’ or ‘moderate conservatism’ is ‘to reconcile the potential conflict between the requirements of the limited state and the intervention necessitated by modern industrial society’ (O’Sullivan, 2003:155) with a focus on diversity, social justice and civil association (Oakeshott, 1975). It may be viewed as the antithesis of or dualistic counter-defence to ‘individualism’ or ‘neo-liberalism’, though the intellectual tradition is more complex: ‘the collectivist-individualist divide (cannot) be utilized to distinguish between conservatism and liberalism, for it cut(s) across the two ideological families’ (Freeden, 1996:349). Contemporary ‘compassionate Conservatism’ may also be viewed as a philosophical (if not

rhetorical) moral communitarian derivative of (or, indeed, antecedent to [Giddens, 1998:69]) the ‘Third Way’ adopted by New Labour (Exley & Ball, 2011:99). It eschews traditional left-right polarities, and so ‘ideological’ commitments to, for example, academic selection on the one hand or uniform comprehensivisation on the other. A consequence, as O’Sullivan (2003:156) notes, becomes the inability of voters to distinguish moderate conservatism from moderate socialism in the pursuit of ‘one-nation’ social democracy.

From an elite perspective, the Policy Exchange denominator is significant because social entrepreneurs may be seen to benefit from networks of potentially like-minded (though variously-motivated [Higham, 2014:132-134]) individuals:

Several teacher proposers, for instance, described the importance of their Oxbridge networks in bringing other professional expertise into the team. The faith groups were commonly well-established mainstream organisations working in partnership with local professionals. The charities and social enterprises described their networks in the Westminster policy-making process (p130).

This has a perceptible bearing on policy insofar as many of those who apply to establish a Free School may be seen to draw on certain privileges relating to elite access or educational networks:

Having removed free schools from local democratic governance (Hatcher 2011), government has had to create a new process to distribute state resources to fulfil its policy objectives. Of concern, is what is prioritised in the determination of access. While government discourse on openness implies a level playing field, responsibilisation brings into the process of access peoples’ (sic) differential capacity to mobilise expertise, resources and entrepreneurialism. As this mobilisation draws on a range of economic, cultural, social and symbolic capitals (Bourdieu 1986), proposers ‘who begin with particular forms of capital are advantaged at the outset’ (Thomson 2005, 742). In this process, a demand-led system appears able to both prioritise an unequal distribution of capitals, and so reflect and contribute to the wider reproduction of inequality (Thomson 2005), while simultaneously concealing the workings of capital within a discourse of openness (Higham, 2014:125)

Shared experience and common educational catalysts

It is important to acknowledge that, while private education features prominently among the architects of reform, there was and is considerable variety in provision across the independent sector, both in terms of social intake and standards output. Some participants were keen to emphasise this from the outset. Skidmore attended a fee-paying selective school, but:

..it was independent, 50% assisted places when I was there, so there was a huge element which I saw of social mobility, even though I was one of the more fortunate ones whose parents could pay. But I could see people coming from backgrounds like Southmead in Bristol, who could actually transform their lives (Skidmore).

There is a strong suggestion that this educational experience was a determining factor in his views on educational policy. Norman also differentiates his experience at Eton from the elite norm (if there is such a thing), perhaps to distance himself from the ‘ultra-elite’ Old Etonians in government:

There’s a way of looking at my educational background in which it looks very similar to an enormous number of people’s, and there’s a way of looking at it in a way that looks radically different. It might be worth just unpicking those two things... I went to a state primary school, and then I went to a crammer, and then I went to Eton. I arrived at Eton as literally the bottom boy, in

the bottom class, in the bottom year. That experience was a very interesting one, because it meant I had essentially travelled much of the gamut, the spectrum of the educational system, in a few years (Norman).

But it would be simplistic to attribute the impetus for reform solely to a commonality in educational institution or inculcation with homogenous religious ethos: the debates around ‘nurture’ and causal behaviour are complex. Femia (2011:60) expounds Pareto’s observation, that ‘the pattern and distribution of residues in any given individual will be shaped by his or her experiences, but the residues themselves are determined or at least conditioned by our genetic endowment or evolutionary needs’. Sentiments or instincts may be innate or culturally acquired, or the product of both (p58 cf. Young, 2015).

Despite their elite educational experiences, some of the principal architects of policy also experienced significant social disadvantage or some sort of socio-familial hurdle during their education or upbringing. Blunkett was not only blind, his childhood was one of acute social deprivation and, at the age of 12, he lost his father in an industrial accident. In interview, Ryan emphasised how significant Blunkett’s experiences were to Labour’s Academy reforms, and how they became something of ‘touchstone’ for his moral mission:

David Blunkett’s personality in all of this was pretty crucial. And his own background was pretty crucial. And the sort of constituency he represented was pretty crucial. Because he would use that very much as a lodestar for what we were doing, what we were achieving. He would make a point of reality checking what he was being told in the department with headteachers. Not just in his own constituency but around the country. He would make phone calls at weekends to do this. Blair used to do this as well. So that sense of mission, I think, was pretty much what was driving a lot of what we were doing (Ryan).

The ‘mission’ imperative is the pursuit of social justice with a focus on equity as a collective social responsibility. Adonis accords with that mission, as well as sharing biographical adversity having spent his many years himself in a children’s care home and then being adopted. Gove, too, was adopted. In consideration of the backgrounds of these two principal architects of policy, the parallels have been observed (Appendix X).

Adonis (2012a:xvi) writes that ‘fate’ moved him from children’s home to boarding school and thence to Keble College, Oxford, and these experiences gave him ‘a burning sense that education matters fundamentally. That inspirational teachers, and all who work with children, matter fundamentally. That institutions matter fundamentally. And that values, sometimes expressed through religion, matter fundamentally’. He acknowledges that this may be ‘heightened perception from unusual experience’, but the values and structures of chapel, the regimentation of the cadet force and a residual sense of Christian mission fused with secular tradition helped to forge his ‘profound conviction’ for reform. In interview, Gove acknowledged something similar:

...by dint of being adopted, I have got a developed sense of how chancy human affairs can be... I remember when I became the Shadow Education Spokesman, looking at some stats, seeing there

was one school in Liverpool – I think it was in Speke, actually, which had only 1 per cent of children getting five good GCSEs – thinking, ‘Different fate, different decisions’. I could have found myself in a school like that, and that would have had an effect on my childhood. So the sense of the lottery element, whereby finding yourself with the right family and then going to the right school, state or independent, determines things. That has preyed on my mind (Gove).

Both Adonis and Gove make appeals to fate or acknowledge the ‘lottery’ element of their educational experience, and Gove further acknowledged their shared biography:

I think the second thing, and funnily enough, I think someone like Andrew Adonis, who spent some time in care and then went to Oxford, was uniquely lucky in that there was a route which allowed him to go to the right school and so on, and then to university. I think that must have had an impact on him. And John Nash, who is the new Minister here, often says that, with people who are interested in education, there tends to be some kink, or piece of grit, or accident in their past, or event that spurs them. So that has been an impact (Gove).

For Gove, this ‘piece of grit’ which ‘spurs’ the desire for change must be complemented if not nurtured and honed by the ‘right school’:

I am probably analysing the type of school that I went to and the impact it had on me in every respect. I am sure that there are all sorts of influences that are unconscious. But I do think that one of the things, both about the primary school that I went to, and about Robert Gordon’s, but more broadly about Scotland overall, is that there is an assumption someone summed up in a phrase which I have used, which can seem quite pompous and self-regarding, of the democratic intellect. It is a particular Scot’s idea, which is that not only should education be meritocratic – in the sense that the ladder should be available to whoever so they might rise through learning – but also that the intellectual inheritance that our civilisation or our culture have arrived at, belongs to everyone (Gove).

And here he segued into his philosophy and the influence of the Scottish Enlightenment (to which I shall turn in Chapter IX). As a Scot in an essentially English Cabinet, he identified himself in interview as an ‘outsider’. Like Adonis, he attributes his interest in education to the values, traditions and disciplines which were instilled or inculcated at school, which was, for him, intuitively the ‘right school’.

The appeal to the Nash axiom of there being ‘some kink, or piece of grit, or accident in their past, or event that spurs them’ was corroborated by many interviewees:

..having been to a selective faith school, I’m not in favour of selective schools or faith schools (Anon LD).

..I was at school between 1965 and 1978. That was the period when the 1964 Labour government’s education reforms were implemented. So I experienced the consequences of those reforms, and as I entered the later years of secondary school I began to understand what huge damage they were doing to our education system. I remember being in the sixth form, in this weak comprehensive school, seeing a 15-year-old in the library reading an Enid Blyton book. I thought then, “My goodness me, 15 years old, reading Enid Blyton. Something is wrong.” So there’s no question it has had a huge impact on my outlook (Gibb).

..education is very close to my heart. I had a rotten experience personally (Blunkett).

..I have no view on how to teach history, because I learnt no history (Boles).

..I didn’t enjoy school at all. I had a miserable time at school. There is no question that part of my reaction against Michael Gove and Nick Gibb’s views on the curriculum is based actually on the fact that I think what they’re really trying to do is to recreate 1970s grammar schools, and I was at

a 1970s grammar school, and I hated it. So I do have a visceral reaction to what I believe is a simplistic view of the fact that grammar schools were enormously successful, and that we should make every school like a 1970s grammar school, because I don't agree with that (Taylor).

..The only lesson I remember, the only lesson I remember from that grammar school, was the two hours of carpentry I did a week. I made dovetail joints, and tenon joints, and boxes... I believe that children can learn by doing things as well as studying (Baker).

Baker's experience perhaps goes some way to explaining his passion for CDT and apprenticeships, and his drive to establish a network of UTCs to boost vocational education (Baker, 2013).

But such life events or motivational 'kink' or 'grit' are by no means a universal experience among the architects of education policy:

I'm not one of these – I've thought about this because people often say: "Why are you interested in education, where did it come from?" – It's not like I had some eureka moment or I was rescued from poverty, you know, there wasn't something that happened that I always refer to and think that is the moment where I realised that education is my most important thing. I think it's just something about... I don't know, I don't know if this is true, but I kind of rationalise it as saying, as a person, I think one of my better traits, is I try and see the best in people and to develop people and help get the best out of them which is, if you like, an idea that's fairly fundamental to education, which is that people should flourish (O'Shaugnessy).

Nash's axiom applies more to what drives politicians to effect change than to what attracts academics or advisors to contemplate processes and systems. Certainly, in the context of elite political leadership, Williams, C (2012:73f) notes the role of the 'personal' and 'contextual' which gives rise 'justificatory force', and he refers to Dominic Johnson's evolutionary view of how leaders arise:

His 'positive illusions' theory holds that leaders comes to power through a key adaptive psychological trait – overconfidence. The result is a decision-making style reflecting overestimation of the strength of one's personal followership, underestimation of the opposition and neglect of inconvenient information (Williams, C, 2012:74)

Williams (p106) distinguishes these key players from 'sub-elites', such as advisors, 'who shape the decisions of the conspicuous leaders', but the allusion to the psychological traits inculcated by a moral/character educational framework is inescapable.

SUMMARY

In the context of Academy/Free-School reform, there is a high degree of elite social reproduction through a dominant system of independent and/or selective education which inculcates the structures and values of an essentially Christian ethos, focusing on moral/character education. This is, in political realisation if not philosophical justification, analogous to Plato's reproduction of elites through the establishment of philosopher-kings or 'Guardians' to determine how young people might best be educated; 'the question concerning the *summum bonum*, or, what is the same thing, concerning the foundation of morality' (Mill, 1879;ch1 cf. Plato, 2003:112ff, 189ff). It is observed

that Mill ‘reveals a predilection for overruling parental opinion by state decree in order that his own view, or that of a group of educated, “rational” or cultivated superiors should predominate’ (West, 1965). For Pareto (1935:2159), the elite embody ideals and values ‘for purposes of persuasion, for arousing sentiments and urging people along a given line of conduct’. While there may be inter- and intra-party differences on how to enhance democratic legitimacy, improve accountability or propagate social justice, there is an identifiable and distinct epistemic community controlling the strategy.

CHAPTER VIII

ELITE APPREHENSIONS OF FREE SCHOOL HISTORY

INTRODUCTION

Having given interviewees complete freedom to interpret my questions and recount whatever events or signposts to reform they wished, it was possible, as McHugh (1994:63) notes, ‘to obtain a very full picture and to cross-check the different accounts... that is, that if one sets out different perspectives on an event according to different vantage points of the participants, then the truth of the matter will emerge in the round’:

Historians tend to be interested in the details that distinguish historical events from one another and make them unique. Pareto, with his more theoretical perspective, perceived similarities. He wanted to identify the constant factors behind the appearance of variability, since, in his view, historical societies ‘vary little in substance, but widely in forms’ (Femia, 2011:35; Pareto, 1935:1695).

There is a high degree of historical consistency and narrative concurrence ‘in the round’ in interviewees’ apprehension of the evolution of Academies and Free Schools. Variability may be attributed to four principal causes: i) the relative expertise and academic discipline of the interviewee; ii) the tendency of some to exaggerate their roles or contributions to reform – what Fitz and Halpin (1994:45) call the self-conception of the politician as ‘policy hero’; iii) the constraints of party allegiance or the need to ‘stick to a brief’ (especially if a ‘minder’ or other associate was present during the interview); and iv) the need to separate perceived contentious or sensitive matters of politics from the facts of history.

The overriding unifying observation was the manifest design of enabling schools to detach themselves from local authorities in pursuance of greater institutional diversity and parental choice, with a view to raising standards in academic attainment: the agreed cross-party historical objective was school improvement, most recently expressed as a ‘zero tolerance’ of failure. But divergences were evident in apprehension and praxis: what Baker, for example, saw as continuity between CTCs, GM Schools, Academies and Free Schools (‘City Technology Colleges... was the beginning of the Academy movement and the Free School movement’), Balls perceived as incremental departure (‘GM Schools... CTCs... I’m not sure they had a huge amount of relationship with the Academies movement’). But discerning historic antecedents or themes of policy is complex and the process of policy-making often opaque, such that it might appear that the historic evidence used to support a particular policy is sparse or non-existent. For example, when asked how far back they thought the current reforms could be traced, Anon LD responded: ‘From the moment Michael Gove walked into the Department of Education’, eager to emphasise that ‘Andrew Adonis’s academies are very

different from the academies that are going hell-for-leather now'. When asked what that difference was, the focus was on social deprivation and issues of equality: Labour's Academies were 'a way of taking failed schools, bringing in passionate and devoted people who were very, very keen to help, to bring in their expertise, putting in extra money' (cf. Sammons [2008:658] who observes that 'City Academies were viewed as engines of social change', and quotes the NAO conclusion that they 'improved attainment levels and were likely to deliver good value for money'.). This 'social justice' aspect of policy became a major area of philosophical exploration, and one which distinguished many Conservative respondents from some of Labour's and the Liberal Democrat.

In historic terms, the majority saw policy in the perspective of the Baker Act, perhaps reflecting the generational bias of the interview sample or the prevalent academic thesis articulated by Wright (2012:282), namely that:

Neoliberal education reform principally began in the 1980s under the Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher and was principally driven by the belief in the market and its positive outcomes of freedom of choice and raising standards through competition. The 1988 Education Reform Act gave parents the right to choose the school their child attended. Coupled with a change to school funding, so that school budgets became dependent on enrolment numbers, these changes produced what has been called a 'quasi-market.'

Anon LD's event of 'the moment Michael Gove walked into the Department of Education' is seen by opponents of reform as either a seismic departure from the social-justice agenda or a 'Thatcherite' (/marketisation/'neo-liberal') acceleration. But the widespread popular perception – among many teachers, certainly, but also apparent in academic and political circles – that Gove is pursuing his own 'ideology' almost a propos of nothing (e.g., Meltzer, 2012; Lezard, 2013 cf. Jones, 2013), is not borne out by this research. With the exception of Anon LD, all interviewees were aware of a traceable and coherent policy lineage which establishes a high degree of philosophical continuity. By rationalising these sometimes fragmentary accounts – histories constructed by the interviewees – it is possible to discern a distinct chronology, spanning: i) Forster and the late-nineteenth century; ii) Butler and the post-war decades (1944-1979); iii) Baker and the Conservative Grant-Maintained years (1988-1997); iv) Adonis/Blunkett and New Labour Academy years (1997-2010); v) Gove and the development of Free Schools during Opposition (1997-2010); and vi) Gove and the expansion of Academies and realisation of Free Schools in Government (2010-2015). I shall therefore take this chronology as my framework of analysis, with sub-headings of the predominant perceptions.

i) FORSTER:

VOLUNTARISM; SOCIAL MISSION

In seeking to understand the origins of reform, Gove says: 'You have to take – well you don't have to take, but it is helpful to take – the broadest historical perspective.' Perhaps in this advisory

civil is the root cause of much misunderstanding and misapprehension of Free Schools: while academics see them as a relatively recent manifestation of ‘Tory ideology’ or ‘Thatcherite’ ‘neo-liberalism’ (e.g., Furlong, 2013; Tomlinson, 2013), others (e.g., Wright, 2012) view them in the perspective of further decades. But few set them in the landscape of centuries, as Gove does:

Prior to Forster and the 1870 Act, and indeed subsequent acts before 1902, most educational provision in this country was voluntary. Whether it was the Church of England, or Non-Conformists, or Dame schools or whatever (Gove).

Voluntarism

For Gove, the *fons et origo* of his reforms may be found in the pre-nineteenth-century voluntary educational traditions of the churches and ‘Dame schools’, both of which were free from the state and focused on the alleviation of poverty among the working class (Ball, 2008: 58, 98); and the public system of education established by the Forster Act, which established local school boards and a church-state partnership (i.e., the state subsidy of church schools) which still persists. Twigg also alludes to this voluntary foundation, linking Academies and Free Schools to his support of diversity of provision:

It is one of the arguments that I often make when people come up with very sweeping statements about the involvement of the churches in education – that, actually, the reality of the history of English education is that the churches were doing these things well before the state got involved. And the notion of the state as the key provider as well as regulator of schools is really one that has only been around for just over a hundred years. Whereas prior to that, schools were being provided in a range of different ways, most notably by the churches. And it is part of the reason – why I’ve said that I’m actually quite relaxed about different providers of education, which is a controversial view on the left and within the Labour Party (Twigg).

Anon LD also acknowledged this point superficially, including the historic contribution of Jewish state schools: ‘We owe them a great deal. We wouldn’t have had any education at all if it hadn’t been for the churches.’ And Balls observes that this diversity is well established:

We have had a very significant degree of diversity, including faith-based diversity, in our education system, which not only predates the Academies and Free Schools movement, but predates free state education. To the extent that you’ve had diverse faith schools, that’s a hundred-year-old tradition (Balls).

But provision was neither universal nor quality-assured. Before the state assumed responsibility for schools, Boles observes: ‘Then they only supplied a very small proportion of the population, and there were no minimum standards, and some of them were terrible; many of them were terrible.’ Notwithstanding the lack of regulation, Taylor’s historic appeal is to educational voluntarism as applied theology:

I think that where the Church link possibly was at its most benign, was that the Church provided that link between school and community. Because the governance of the school lay in an institution, the Church, outside the school, and so that embedded the school, as it were, in the wider civil society (Taylor).

As a structural template, Adonis acknowledges that Labour's Academies drew on this religious-voluntarist tradition:

The Church is one of the prime providers of independent governance for schools – state as well as private, of course. Because a quarter of state-funded schools are church schools, and therefore making it possible to have more of them, which is what the Academies Bill did on the back of the *Dearing Report*, which required that there should be 100 new Church of England secondary schools, particularly focused in areas of disadvantage. That was one element amongst many in the evolution of the Academies (Adonis).

There are many similarities between Academies/Free Schools and VA maintained schools, certainly in terms of their governance (Adonis, 2012a:13, 123f), but also in terms of admissions and property ownership:

Table 14: **Governing Body functions in different types of state school**

	Voluntary-controlled	Voluntary-aided	Community	Foundation	Trust	Academy / free school
Admissions authority	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Employer of staff	No ^a	Yes	No ^a	Yes	Yes	Yes
Owner of land and buildings	No ^b	No ^c	No	Yes (usually) ^d	No ^c	In certain cases
Revenue funding	LA	LA	LA	LA	LA	Secretary of State
Charitable Status	Exempt charity ^e	Exempt charity ^e	No	Exempt charity ^e	No	Exempt charity ^e

^a While the LA employs staff, the governing body undertakes employer responsibilities

^b In most cases the charitable foundation owns some or all of the land

^c Usually a charitable foundation owns the land and buildings

^d With a foundation - land and buildings are usually owned by a charitable foundation. Without a foundation - the governing body owns the land and buildings

^e An exempt charity is one that is not regulated by, and cannot register with, the Charity Commission

(Source: DfE, 2014b).

The principal variable between the two is the local-central revenue funding. This is not inconsequential when it has been observed (Chapter V.ii) that LEAs effected Crosland's circular 10/65 with coercive grants of public money; and the 'quasi-contractual' (Ball, 2008:183) financial agreement between the Secretary of State and Academy Trusts is a direct financial accountability: it is *prima facie* centralisation, even offering financial inducements to spur governing bodies to convert (Cusick & Garner, 2013). When, in the nineteenth century, voluntarists opposed government educational grants, it was because '(f)reedom was at stake' (Garforth 1979:17). I shall examine this inherent philosophical tension further in Chapter IX.

Social mission

Skidmore (a historian) takes a pre-nineteenth century perspective: he places Academies and Free Schools in a Reformation lineage, observing that Church schools were liberated from the religious elite (or 'elect' [Stich & Colyer, 2013:7]):

I often tell people, the last time there was a grammar school in every town was in the reign of Edward VI. You have got that key shift when the Chantries were dissolved in 1547, where you see education

taken from an inward looking organisation that looked after its own, to a sense of mission. So I think that was a key point, I think that often it is forgotten, the sense, the grammar school's sense of purpose is forgotten about (Skidmore).

He begins where educational historians tend to: 'the unquestioning attribution of so many of the nation's (free) grammar schools to the reign of Edward VI' (Miner, 1990:36 cf. Leach [1896], as expounded in Chapter III.ii). This outward-looking sense of 'mission' seems to have been pivotal to policy development, not least, as Skidmore notes, because of the historic⁶ social-justice dimension: 'grammar schools are not the same as what grammar schools were' because their *raison d'être* is now 'linked with house prices'. And he dismissed the preoccupation of the 'Tory Right' with grammar schools: 'There is an imagined belief that you can somehow roll back to a golden age. It is not applicable.' Taylor expanded this point, linking it more explicitly to issues of poverty and social exclusion:

It's interesting to me that, when you look at the grammar schools that exist now, they have virtually no children with free school meals in them. So I think that that quality of grammar schools, their ability to provide a path to working class pupils, similarly the quality of red brick universities to do that, was to do with what was happening to social class at that time. I think we exaggerate, and we look back, and we say, "If only we could have grammar schools we could return to that time of an expanding middle class, and the opportunities for the working class." Well, no, we couldn't, because that's not what's happening in the economy and society anymore (Taylor).

Skidmore's allusion to the dissolution of the chantries is significant not only in the context of the liberalisation of education from the auspices of the church, but also for the control of finance. In the medieval era, chantries were established by charter and endowed by private individuals largely for the soteriological benefit of the wealthy. When they were closed, some chantries converted into free grammar schools, which still bear the name 'King Edward's'.

With Labour's Academy reforms, Ryan says they were 'always mindful' of the position of the churches:

In fact we had wanted to make what we thought would be a relatively simple structural reform, which was to have one category of voluntary school – which we saw as being the vehicle for church schools. We were persuaded by the Bishops that we needed to maintain Voluntary Controlled and Voluntary Aided schools, and actually got into the complexities and understood the rationale and so on for this. So we were certainly always mindful of the position of the churches on this (Ryan).

Being 'persuaded by the Bishops' is significant in this context, being a reference to a distinct ecclesial elite/elect, 26 of whom sit in the House of Lords and have historically identified with (or been allied to) the Tories through 'old Anglican political theology' (Alison & Edwards, 1990:117). Like Conservative MPs and peers (and, as established in Chapter VII, the architects of Academies and Free Schools), Church of England Bishops are overwhelmingly educated in private or selective schools (86% in 2014 [Davies & Wyatt, 2014]), and exert a degree of political power and legislative

⁶ While Skidmore makes manifest the point that grammar schools have changed over the centuries, it is important to note that other Conservatives (e.g., Willets, 2007) acknowledge that they long ago ceased to be an 'engine of social mobility'. David Jesson (2013:9) notes that between 2005-7 most grammar schools 'recruited very few "disadvantaged" pupils – and that schools where this figure exceeded one in 20 entrants were very much in a minority (just 10 schools out of 164)'.

authority even in an era typified by increasing pluralism and secularity. In 2001, however, it was a Labour government that was expanding the Church-State partnership to focus on the mitigation of educational disadvantage through diversity of provision and parental choice. Chadwick (2001:485) observes: ‘The government appeared sympathetic to the Dearing recommendations for the creation of 100 new Anglican secondary schools’ which, in turn, permitted the Church of England ‘to respond in the light of its “special mission to serve the most disadvantaged in society”’. If this were not quite a *quid pro quo*, the Bishops saw it as ‘opportune to respond to the government’s renewed offer of partnership’ (p486). But this religious/secular dual distribution of power within state education is long established, emerging, as it did, out of ‘the desperate frustrations of education reform which had characterised the 1920s and 1930s’ (Barber, 1994:352), which leads to the next period of reform.

ii) BUTLER:

EDUCATIONAL BUREAUCRACY; FALLING STANDARDS

For Gove, the immediate post-war period was crucial to his impetus for reforms, and the Butler Act was seen as pivotal:

I think that at different times you had diversity on the ground, even as you had people like Fisher, who were seeking quite understandably to raise the school leaving age and to improve standards. In the 1920s and 1930s there were various supports which were attempts to analyse what was going on in the past and what was wrong with education. But the real change happened obviously with the 1944 Act. Everyone looks back at the 1944 Act and thinks of it in terms of the missing third element – technical schools. Or the failure to ensure that secondary moderns were as well funded as grammars. But actually the other thing which it did, is that it was part of the great – or terrible, depending on your point of view – mood of the 1940s, by which everything was systematised, centralised. It was the era of the man in Whitehall (Gove).

Educational bureaucracy

Acknowledging that ‘even though Butler was a Tory’, and observing that ‘there are distinctly Conservative elements to the 1944 Act’, Gove asserts that ‘it was nevertheless a spirit of its time, and the spirit of that time was bureaucratising’. As a method of elite policy implementation, Williams, C (2012:60) observes: ‘Education systems are a major form of bureaucratic control, particularly in authoritarian, socialist and religious contexts’. Barber (1994:352) corroborates that it ‘strengthened the hand of local government in relation to church schools’, and that LEAs ‘planned, provided, recruited, counted and expanded constantly’. For Pareto, bureaucracy is a socialist hindrance which weakens the optimal forces of private ownership and competition (cf. ‘Pareto-optimality’ in Femia, 2011:10, 93f).

Gove’s chronology then moves to the *Plowden Report* (1967), of which he says ‘you had things proceeding for good will’. He refers specifically to ‘the enthronement of progressive

education, discovery method, child-centred learning, which caused real concerns'. He interrupts his account:

Then you have – I missed out Crosland, but actually I suppose that is significant, because, in a way, I suspect that Plowden and progressive education mattered more than comprehensivisation. Anyway, comprehensivisation, you can see is a sort of development of the 1944 principle (Gove).

I shall deal with the dichotomous progressive/traditional philosophies of pedagogy in Chapter IX. As far as the history is concerned, there is nothing partisan in Gove's observation: the *Plowden Report* was commissioned by Conservative Minister of Education Sir Edward Boyle in 1963, but didn't report until 1967, by which time Labour was in power and Crosland had become Secretary of State for Education and Science. For Baker, however, this era is perceived through a distinctly partisan lens. He is of the view that the 'drive to comprehensives was clearly a huge mistake':

Wilson supported them. He would make every grammar a comprehensive school. That's not the way at all. Sufficient attention was not given to really making comprehensives good enough. It was the failure of the comprehensive more than anything else. It was really introduced by Labour for social purposes rather than educational purposes (Baker).

Labour may have introduced comprehensive schools 'for social purposes', but the Conservatives adopted the policy and permitted them to expand under LEA autonomy. Wilson may have supported them, but Heath and Thatcher did not oppose them. For Blunkett, the period post-abolition of grammar schools 'is not a proud era for Labour' because they 'missed the boat quite badly on it':

I think we presumed that doing away with the 11+ would, in its own right, in its own way, change the nature of opportunity. It didn't, because we didn't change the nature of what was being offered. So poor teaching continued to be poor teaching, poor aspiration continued to be poor aspiration... What we failed to notice was that actually we had done a less than successful job in transforming the lives of those children who, to use a word that Michael Heseltine once used in terms of people moving out of communities, 'escaped from' the system that they were caught in (Blunkett).

And he says that grammar schools had allowed people to 'escape' their circumstances:

We failed to actually be able to ensure that the offer that was being made to a large swathe of children, was transformed, so that they could have the kind of chance in life that the grammar schools had given to a much smaller cohort (Blunkett).

The acknowledgment that grammar schools gave children 'the kind of chance in life' which comprehensives generally did not is significant: the latter model was seen to have led to a decline in standards, and this became a manifest injustice.

Falling standards

Many interviewees identified one political speech in particular as the impetus or foundational justification for the free-school theme of reform:

I think modern education policy starts with Callaghan in '76 – the Ruskin College speech and talk of the 'secret gardens'. I always think of that as the start of the standards agenda (O'Shaughnessy).

Then you have really the first politician to give a voice to the ‘Black Paper’ reaction, though in a very statesman like way, and that was Callaghan and the Ruskin speech (Gove).

If you want to trace the origins... you probably have to go back to Jim Callaghan’s 1976 Ruskin College speech. The Ruskin College Speech was probably the pivotal moment in education since RAB’s reforms in 1944. Because I think there was an acceptance, and a realisation in that speech – which was hugely controversial at the time – that something had gone amiss in the education system; that standards had gone amiss; that there was a so called progressive movement had taken hold (Ryan).

Gove’s reference to ‘the “Black Paper” reaction’ concerns a series of pamphlets published between 1969-77 which attacked the ‘excesses’ of ‘progressive education’ that had become ‘fashionable in British schools’ (Cox, 2003:v). According to Ball (2008:71), they ‘forged a “New Right” political identity; they were not only a stout defence of selection and elite education but they also began to articulate a renewed vision of a liberal education system’. The 1975 Black Paper, for example, was co-authored by future education minister (and former comprehensive school headteacher) Rhodes Boyson (Cox & Boyson, 1975:5), and made the case for an education voucher to increase parental choice. O’Shaughnessy’s reference to ‘secret gardens’ is a phrase used by Callaghan, who challenged the monopoly of educationalists over the ‘secret garden of the curriculum’, which, he said, needed to be opened up. The phrase was picked up by Boyson in a 1977 adjournment debate on education standards. He observed that Callaghan made his Ruskin College speech because ‘(t)he Prime Minister realised that the Labour Party was losing votes because of its education policy... There were undoubtedly not only educational reasons but political reasons for the launching of the great debate’. He explained:

We are concerned that there should be no secret gardens in education that we cannot explore. Some of us, however, suspect that there are certain secret gardens that we cannot touch because they are part of the dogma of the Labour Party—for example, the question of whether comprehensive schools are really working in the cities. The figures for Manchester are very different from those for Oxfordshire. Part of the big debate is surely whether comprehensive schools work in the big inner cities. Are Manchester and London typical? Or can we have the great debate only as long as we do not touch the Labour Party’s arks of the covenant or dogmas? (*Hansard*, 1977: col.773)

While Callaghan was never in a position to do much besides setting out the problem,⁷ he did challenge the post-1944 settlement or belief that comprehensive education was the key not only to economic growth and prosperity, but also to enhancing social justice and creating a more equal society. For Conservative critics of Labour’s economic and social policies, a national programme of mandatory comprehensivisation had resulted in lower standards of attainment and increased pupil indiscipline: ‘Employers and industrialists painted a picture of unaccountable teachers, delivering an irrelevant curriculum to bored teenagers who were illiterate and innumerate’ (Chitty, 1996). In response, Callaghan (1976) criticised ‘dubious’ and ‘informal methods of teaching’; made the case for a ‘core curriculum of basic knowledge’; urged greater teacher accountability; championed exam reform and the monitoring of standards of performance; and exhorted belief in Tawney’s maxim (so

⁷ He inherited a minority government in 1976; had to negotiate the ‘Lib-Lab pact’ from 1977-78; was preoccupied with economic recession and widespread industrial unrest which led to the ‘Winter of Discontent’; and lost a confidence motion in 1979.

often invoked by Adonis [e.g., 2012a:35, 233 and in interview]): ‘What a wise parent would wish for their children, so the state must wish for all its children.’

It was not until Baker’s 1988 reforms that some of Callaghan’s proposed national framework became a reality (certainly in terms of curriculum, assessment and inspection), but Ryan says of this speech: ‘for modern education reform, it is pretty key’; that it ‘was probably what started a cross-party consensus on diagnosing the problem’. Ball (2008:74) says: ‘In a number of ways the Ruskin speech anticipates and would not be out of place within the education “policyspeak” of New Labour’, noting that ‘in a strategic sense it opened up a set of policy agendas that were vigorously pursued by the Conservative governments of 1979-97’. Gove confirms the chronology:

But I think things changed really post-Callaghan, in the 1980s. You had the intellectual influence of those who were around the ‘Black Paper’ movement. Not all of them when they were in office, like Rhodes Boyson, were as effective as they should have been. But the critical moment I think was 1988 and the Baker Act. In that I think that a number of things came to a head there – open enrolment, choice, schools being run – City Technology Colleges originally, then Grant Maintained schools – outside local authority control, and a National Curriculum and Ofsted, in order to provide some sort of guarantee and external accountability. That is when things really began to – when the water stopped flowing uphill as it were; when things moved from centralisation to decentralisation (Gove).

Which summary leads to the next historical phase:

iii) BAKER: CURRICULUM CENTRALISATION; INSTITUTIONAL DIVERSIFICATION; CULTURAL CHANGE

For O’Shaughnessy, 1976 led directly to 1988, which introduced ‘the sort of paradoxical situation of a much more prescriptive national curriculum’, but, at the same time, ensured ‘operational autonomy’.

Curriculum centralisation

Baker explained the rationale:

Now, in the days before the National Curriculum – the reasons why there had to be a National Curriculum, was that, in the range of schools across the country, in the schools that were very good you had very good curriculums. In the schools that were good you had good curriculums. In the schools that were average you had average curriculums. In the schools that were poor you had poor curriculums. In the schools that were very poor you had very poor curriculums (Baker).

And the policy had manifest cross-party support: Twigg says ‘it was right to create a National Curriculum’, and Blunkett is unequivocal in his support for the centralisation: ‘Margaret Thatcher introduced a National Curriculum for very good reason, because what came before was a shambles. You couldn’t be sure what was being taught anywhere.’ But Baker discloses the fraught nature of

the ‘wonderfully contentious meetings’ he had with Thatcher about the extent of centralisation (Appendix XI.i), and he provides a hint of a tendency toward a conception of himself as a ‘policy hero’ (Fitz & Halpin, 1994:45): ‘These were his reforms, authored by him and in seeming isolation from other participants in the policy loop’ (*ibid.*).

Thatcher’s own account and those of some of Baker’s contemporaries differ somewhat: Thatcher (1993:569) suggests that Baker’s forte lay with presentation rather than policy formulation; indeed, she later appointed John MacGregor to Education because she ‘thought that he would prove more effective than Ken Baker in keeping a grip on how our education reform proposals were implemented’ (p574). According to Robin Harris, Thatcher’s research director during this period who was closely involved in the writing of her memoirs, Baker ‘allowed the National Curriculum to become a bureaucratic tangle’ (Harris, 2013:308). Far from Baker driving the process of school autonomy in the establishment of CTCs and GM Schools, Ridley (1991:94) says that he ‘was hesitant about the plan throughout... (Thatcher) dragged him inch by inch in the direction we all wished to go’. But what is manifest from Baker’s account is how close Gove was to Thatcher’s vision for a minimalist NC focused on English, Maths and Science, rather than Baker’s elaborate and detailed prescription for a ‘rounded education’: her preference for these basics – which were foundational in National Assessment from 1988 – is consistent with Gove’s for the EBacc ‘core’ knowledge.

Institutional diversification

Ryan observes that Labour’s Academies ‘owed a lot in their origins’ to Baker’s CTCs. Baker justifies these on account of ‘the appalling performance of local authorities in improving schools, you had to have a different thing... That’s why I started CTCs. I wanted to inject into the system a new type of school, which is what CTCs did’ (Appendix XI.ii). When asked to identify the pivotal moments which led to Free Schools, Hancock also identifies: ‘City Technology Colleges and the corporatisation of Further Education colleges 20 years ago’ (Appendix XI.iii). Boles explains that Adonis ‘generously and rightly’ attributes his reforms to the CTCs ‘as the first little seed of independence/specialisation with the comprehensive system’. Gibb said the policy ‘does grow out of the 1988 Act, and the CTCs – the whole concept of schools being outside local authority control and being funded directly by the DfE on the basis of per pupil’. Twigg corroborates: ‘I suppose you can trace back the attempt to look at different structures certainly to some of the reforms that Ken Baker brought in’ (Appendix XI.iv). For Adonis, the template was CTCs and VA schools: ‘What the Voluntary Aided schools brought was the principle of independent governance within the mainstream, state-funded system, which, of course, the churches have been providing for more than a century’ (Appendix XI.v). And Ryan observes the continuation of Baker’s vocational mission: ‘I think Ken Baker’s initial idea with the CTCs was pretty much what he is trying to do to the UTCs now, which was to have a strong technical school model within the English education system. He saw the CTCs as really being industry-related schools.’

The template for structural educational freedom is unequivocal: ‘I think anyone you talk to would confirm that design – they had a basis in that’, Ryan emphasises. CTCs were established in a context of high youth unemployment, when industry was concerned ‘that they weren’t getting the skills they needed and feeling that Britain was becoming uncompetitive’. He says he thought Baker ‘had envisaged more than 15 CTCs, but the sponsorship demand on CTCs was quite substantial’, which was a deterrent to industry funding and participation, so the policy adapted with the support of Cyril Taylor (2013:79ff) with the creation of Specialist Schools (Appendix XI.vi).

Cultural change

Ryan also credits the LMS with a ‘cultural change’ on the calibre of school leadership, the cutting of LA bureaucracy and the raising of teacher morale (Appendix XI.vii). There is research for the period in question which suggests that teacher morale was indeed low in the mid-90s due to ‘salary, status and reforms’ (Evans, 2000:174), though other studies suggest that the relationship between job satisfaction and centrally-initiated government reforms is rather more complex (e.g., Day & Smethem, 2009; Klassen & Anderson, 2009). More research is required on the extent to which institutional autonomy and pedagogical freedoms (if fostered) have positively impacted teachers through academisation, but it is not unreasonable to adduce that, liberated from the historic constraints of unionised CPS/QTPS, a corporate decision (or the subsidiarity possibility) to increase teacher salaries may contribute to an increase in morale.

All of these developments are viewed as significant changes in the educational culture which preceded Labour’s Academies. The planning for the reforms prior to Blair’s victory in 1997 is not generally known. Blunkett explains that Baker’s 1988 reform ‘hadn’t been accepted by Labour, but was by us from 1994’: ‘local management of schools and the governance arrangements for schools were two of the things we determined that we were going to accept and build on’ (Appendix XI.viii). Ryan recounts that in 1995 Blunkett ‘started re-positioning Labour on education policy. One of the things that he embraced were the specialist schools, and he saw specialist schools as potentially a significant model and a way of introducing diversity’ (Appendix XI.ix). And so, within months of becoming Shadow Education Secretary, Blunkett had accepted two of Baker’s most contentious (for Labour) accountability reforms: performance league tables and the belief that the leaders of chronically-failing schools ought to be replaced. Ryan says these were ‘two things that David got most flack for... there was a huge fuss about that at the time’. The educational cultural change within the Labour Party (and the wider movement) was considerable.

**iv) ADONIS/BLUNKETT:
TACKLING FAILURE; INSTITUTIONAL DIVERSIFICATION;
'PUSHING' FREEDOMS**

When Labour won the 1997 General Election, the question remained of what they were going to do with CTCs: 'We had some discussion with them about the way they chose to do their admissions, but beyond that we left them be' (Ryan). The focus in the early years was on establishing a rigorous advisory regime: 'One of the things that David (Blunkett) tried to bring to government in '97 was to have the voice of practitioners increasingly brought into policy making' (Ryan), the inference being that a Labour ideology of education had become somewhat detached from the working reality.

Tackling Failure

Blair's first term focused on 'attempts to address significant underperformance in many state schools... and the sense that there were parts of the country where this issue was greater than in other parts of the country' (Twigg). There was a shift away from an ideological desire for structural uniformity toward the raising of teaching standards and student attainment:

I think what matters is what happens in the classroom. I think there are proper issues around admissions and having fairness in that regard. But I'm very relaxed about the different providers that the Academies movement has brought in (Twigg).

Anon LD acknowledges that the Adonis/Blunkett reforms were necessary and justified:

It is absolutely true that some local authorities failed – no question about that. They failed their communities; they failed their kids; they failed their teachers by not giving them enough support. I believe that not enough attention was paid to that in the past. We were not quick enough to go in and intervene and say, "Look, you are not doing well enough. We are going to partner you with somebody who is doing a lot better. They will show you how to do it for the sake of your children" (Anon LD)

For Labour, Ryan corroborates the neglect:

The sponsored academy model was us trying to find a different way of addressing a problem which was fairly deep-seated in a lot of inner-city schools of a persistent failure of achievement and attainment. But also a neglect, if you like, of those schools; a sense that they felt as if they were neglected by the system and nobody was going to make a difference to them (Ryan).

As does Adonis:

The failure of the comprehensive schools was a dominant factor in setting off Academies. Academies weren't, as it were, set up as a precedent of neutral reflection on best governance models: they were set up in an atmosphere of some crisis, in response to what was a very clear 30-year record of abject failure on the part of many comprehensives, particularly in more deprived areas (Adonis).

For the Conservatives, Gibb notes:

For whatever reason, local authorities seemed to be quite content to preside over failing schools year after year, decade after decade, without taking any action (Gibb).

And Baker:

I think that the movement to Free Schools was a recognition that grammar school education, combined with the appalling performance of local authorities in improving schools, you had to have a different thing (Baker).

Skidmore agrees, observing that the task of ensuring that the best teaching and learning practices are adopted ‘is something that local authorities gave up on long ago’.

To combat this, Labour established the SEU, which saw education practitioners working alongside civil servants and key policy advisors like Michael Barber. For Ryan, this was pivotal: ‘That I think was quite important for example in delivering something like the literacy and numeracy strategies, and that gave a sort of real world element to it.’ But further reforms were deemed necessary because, as Blunkett recounts: Labour ‘recognised that our immediate action in 1997 had had some, but limited impact’ (Appendix XI.x). The policy of ‘naming and shaming’ offended many traditional Labour supporters, as did some of the rhetoric. But Adonis is unequivocal: ‘Although many of my friends on the left didn’t like the language of failure, they knew that that’s what was happening. I mean none of them would have sent their children to a lot of the schools that were replaced by academies, so they did accept that that was the case.’

Norman suggests that Labour’s failure in ‘spreading best practice’ was largely down to a misuse of money (or a misunderstanding of private-sector principles): ‘The approach they took was to buy off the teaching unions by pouring in enormous amounts of money’ (Appendix XI.xi). While not doubting the punitive rates of interest and other charges intrinsic to PFI, Norman is wrong to suggest that Labour’s reforms were all about capital infrastructure and nothing to do with school improvement and the raising of standards. As a result of the 1997 White Paper *Excellence in Schools*, some £24m was spent on the EiC programme in 1999-2000, rising to £139m in 2000-2001 (the first full year), which had risen to £386m in 2005-2006 (the final year: figures exclude expenditure in specialist and beacon schools [Kendall *et al.*, 2005]). There was also ‘London Challenge’, for the delivery of which Twigg was responsible (Appendix XI.xii).

Institutional diversification

The tension for Blunkett was ‘should a school close, or could it transform itself?’ Some schools in his constituency (Sheffield Brightside), like Earl Marshall, he says were transformed (becoming Fir Vale), but others were not:

...and it became clear that they needed a step change, and that step change would have to be more than just a change of the leadership team in the school. It would have to be support systems beyond that normally available from a local authority. And that entailed bringing in both business and, where possible, universities to help (Blunkett).

By 1999 Labour was looking at a number of programmes for educational improvement, specifically seeking out those aimed at under-performing inner-city secondary schools. They agreed that the most significant had been the EiC programme – in many respects a precursor to ‘London Challenge’. But in a significant departure from previous Labour policy, the search for programmes of school improvement was linked to an acceptance of Baker’s forms of accountability and a diversity of provision. Ryan credits Adonis, who ‘initially came up with the idea of finding a new way of advancing the CTC model’ (Appendix XI.xiii). As observed, this was based on the template of governance offered by church schools because, Adonis avers, ‘strong independent governance allied to a very positive ethos helped produce better schools’ (Appendix XI.xiv). Twigg concedes that having different providers within the state system of education ‘is a controversial view on the left and within the Labour Party’. For many in the Labour movement ‘diversity within comprehensive education’ represents something of an oxymoron: schools that are not comprehensive or accountable to a LA are financially autonomous and free to implement some form of selective admissions policy – either by aptitude or ability – thereby challenging if not negating the comprehensive ideal and local-accountability structure (Toynbee, 2002). But Adonis reasons a riposte:

I used to say to opponents, “Are you saying that the only people, who hereafter should be able to manage schools independently within the state system, are the churches?” Because they can do it already. More church schools, indeed, were being set up. But the academies made it possible to have schools with independent governance and ethos which were set up and managed by entities of the church (Adonis).

For Blunkett, the priority was transforming a school into a successful entity, ‘but as part of the community, and collaboratively with the feeder schools’. His task as Secretary of State was to convince the Prime Minister: ‘I had a job explaining it to Tony, really’, and he adds: ‘On free schools, I was driven by only one thing, and it is not the Free Schools that we have got now. It was where parents wanted to lead a change, where there was a need for places’ (Appendix XI.xv). The repudiation of Gove’s Free Schools is manifest, and yet the assent for the philosophy is latent: ‘parents wanted to lead’, and ‘a need for places’ (though Gove and Adonis [2012c/2013] would say ‘good quality’ places).

Blair was seen as a reluctant reformer by Baker as well. He says it was Adonis who ‘persuaded Blair to go for academies: he actually persuaded Blair to go for 200 academies as a target’. They had initially taken the view in government that what was needed to address chronically failing secondary schools was to replace the headteacher and perhaps the governing body, and perhaps give the school a new name to establish a departure from the past. Ryan admits: ‘It worked in a small number of cases but generally did not work well. So we needed something else for addressing the problem of failing schools, and Academies fitted into that context as well.’ And the way forward was

seen to be partnership with private sponsors. But this structural development alone was not the sole mechanism for raising standards: it was contiguous with other initiatives:

I would argue that the various efforts and reforms at tackling failing schools, introducing specialist schools, introducing the literacy and numeracy strategies, and leading up to programmes like Excellence in Cities and the London Challenge and, of course, Academies, that was what they were essentially about (Ryan cf. Hatcher, 2011:490; Lubienski 2009:27f).

‘Pushing’ Freedoms

Blunkett concedes that Labour made an error (though stressing not when he was secretary of state):

..we made a mistake – this is when I wasn’t in government – but we made the mistake of believing that if you set up children and young person’s directorates, and you combined children’s social services with education, that that would have a transformational improvement in terms of what we were doing with young people. I don’t think it did, I think it completely muddled what people thought they were doing (Blunkett).

He also highlights the frustration of some schools either not using or understanding the freedoms they had been granted: ‘They don’t seem to get it. They argue about the fact that they can’t fit this into the curriculum, and that they have got to finish at 3pm. Absolute rubbish... In the end we said, “Well if we have got to push people, let’s push it with the Academies programme”’ (Appendix XI.xvi). Academies were a mechanism for ‘pushing’ freedoms, which were deemed necessary for improving attainment.

Interestingly, words like ‘force’ and ‘intimidation’ were used by opponents of ongoing academisation (Downs, 2012), persuaded that Labour’s ‘London Challenge’ and EiC were more effective in raising standards than institutional autonomy or greater parental choice (as posited by Hutchings *et al.*, 2012). But Blunkett appears to believe the same of coercive improvement strategies: ‘In the literacy and numeracy programmes, we had to do a top-down approach. I would have much preferred it to have been bottom-up. It was partly driven by the necessity of rapid change.’ He makes no reference to the fact that this ‘top-down’ approach was largely collaborative: it was ‘a partnership between central government, local government, schools and other key players’ (Hutchings *et al.*, 2012:1). In many respects, it was a flexible ‘bottom-up’ approach of networking and collaboration: indeed, the fact that the ‘City Challenge’ programme ‘was underpinned by a belief that the educational problems facing urban areas should be addressed at area level’ (p3) and that ‘schools and LAs were centrally involved in the decisions’ (p4) does not sound overly ‘top-down’ as an approach to school improvement.

The need for immediate intervention determined the pace of at which freedoms would be ‘pushed’. Balls also refers to the need for haste: he says a pivotal moment in Labour’s reform was ‘the decision in 2007 to accelerate the Academies programme’:

To drop the entry fee and therefore allow a much broader range of sponsors to come in. I think at the point when I became Secretary of State, you had to put £2m up. There were only two or three universities involved. We went from two or three to over 50. I signed off more academies than any other secretary of state in that period. Andrew and I together (Balls).

The claim that he signed off more academies than any other secretary of state is statistically true (86 during 2007-9 compared to 64 in 2001-6), but Wright (2012:285) notes a change in emphasis under Balls' tenure:

New Labour's education policy discourse showed a considerable shift away from many aspects of neoliberal discourse after Gordon Brown took office and Ed Balls was appointed education secretary. Their White Paper *Your child, your schools, our future* (DCSF 2009) focused predominantly on collaboration and partnership between schools, turning away from the competitive, parent-driven model they had previously espoused. Of course, this move was too late to have any real effect on policy and has, therefore, gone relatively unnoticed, but it is worth noticing the possibility that, had Labour won the 2010 election, we may be seeing a very different educational landscape from what we have currently and what had been practised previously.

This is, of course, conjecture (not least contingent on Balls becoming Education Secretary), but, given the reality that 'collaboration and partnership between schools' is a strong 'bottom-up' feature of the 'little platoons' (as evidenced in the report *No School is an Island* [Bamfield *et al.*, 2013:23 cf. Hargreaves, 2012:32] outlined in Chapter IV.i), it is also a false dichotomy: competition neither negates collaboration or nor nullifies partnership. I shall address the philosophical dimension of this in Chapter IX.

By this point in time, the evidence of institutional well-being and the efficacy of the reforms were seen to be accruing. Boles says Labour's Academies 'established that new independent institutions, outside local authority control, could flourish and do better'. Balls says: 'By the time I became Secretary of State, there was sufficient evidence that transformational change, through building leadership, sponsors, new starts, could turn around under performance.' And this transformation was to such an extent 'that many local authorities were saying, "We want to have Academies like this in our area"'. His stated objective was to make Academies 'powerful, mainstream drivers of transformation as a response to under achievement': he wanted 'to take away some of the unnecessary obstacles to their wider support' (Appendix XI.xvii). The focus, as Wright (2012:285) observed, was in encouraging local partnerships. As Balls said: 'You can't simply have one school in an area which is the expelling school, so other schools pick up the pieces' (Appendix XI.xviii).

Balls saw Academies as 'independent schools which were state financed': he says the need for transformational change 'meant a break from the traditional model' and 'extra freedom':

When I spoke to the many Academy heads, they said, "The thing the freedoms gave us, was an ability to structure our curriculum sometimes to focus on more intensive effort, or catch up. Things we needed to make that transformation occur" (Balls).

But funding arrangements were dependent on political expediency:

Certainly when David Blunkett was Education Secretary we worked to push more money direct to all schools for the pupil. For political reasons, we moved back to local from national funding for Grant Maintained schools, because that was something that we had to do in order to bring the party along with us at the time. Probably not something we would have done now. But at the time that was politically necessary (Ryan).

In this nod to local financial control there was a nuanced shift toward ensuring that LAs passed on a greater proportion of their central funding:

However, what we also did, which is less well known, is that we drove up, through regulation, the amount of money that all schools were getting from the local authority to about 90% from about 80% from when we were elected. So in those four years there was that change (Ryan).

Ryan worked on the 2005 (DfES) White Paper which set out the future vision: ‘that Local Authorities should become effectively commissioners of services and should be there as representing the people that they are elected to represent; not running schools’. But there was always an awareness that this would change as more and more schools converted:

And if you got to a situation for example where all schools were Academies or all schools were Academies or Foundation schools or Voluntary Aided schools, then there may be some logic in saying well actually let’s revisit that and either look at the Local Authority or a consortium being a commissioner. Because I’m not sure that as the numbers grow... it’s going to be sustainable for all of these to be effectively co-ordinated from Whitehall (Ryan).

In setting out what he called the ‘big stepping stones’ in education reform, O’Shaughnessy says this White Paper was pivotal, specifically ‘the Blairite bits of that which talked about much greater operational autonomy’ (Appendix XI.xix). As the New Labour era came to an end, the number of Academies was approaching 300. For Adonis, no matter who won the 2010 General election, the reforms were virtually irreversible: ‘not quite unstoppable, because politicians are perfectly capable of pursuing wrong-headed and unpopular policies because of massive ideological conviction, but there was no huge conviction on the left that more of the same was the right thing’ (Appendix XI.xx). The focus by now was shifting to structures and accountability and the need for some sort of ‘middle tier’ to replace local authorities. Taylor recounts being at No.10 during 2004/5:

Gavin Kelly and I had an argument with Andrew (Adonis) because we thought the lack of any performance management framework, in the context of academies, was problematic. We said to him, “You can’t end up having hundreds and hundreds of schools run from Whitehall. It’s simply not tenable” (Taylor).

And Balls recounts: ‘It was not possible, in the world I was dealing with, for the Secretary of State to have that kind of control. It made no sense (Appendix XI.xxi). If the ‘push’ toward institutional freedom were to continue, there had to be a contiguous push toward subsidiarity; to liberate the growing chains of Academies from what Balls called the ‘outmoded and outdated’ control of central government.

**v) GOVE IN OPPOSITION:
FREE SCHOOL ORIGINS; EDUCATIONAL MORALITY**

It has perhaps become something of a political cliché to describe philosophical (or ideological) transformation by invoking Blair's 'modernisation' of the 1918 Labour Party constitution in respect of public ownership. But Skidmore says New Labour had an educational 'Clause 4 moment' and 'proved itself' when Hackney Downs School closed in 1995. Blair did not side with Labour-run Hackney Council contra the Conservatives, but New Labour 'took on its (Old) Labour local authorities and said, "No I am sorry, you are not good enough."'. This led directly to the establishment of the Hackney Learning Trust in 2002, which was independent of the LA. Skidmore is of the view that 'Blair was extremely brave to take on some of the vested interests' because the opposition was considerable:

..the parents chained themselves to the gates of a school – we had 10 per cent of kids getting good GCSEs – saying: "It was great, I went here, what's was the problem?" Actually to win that argument, he focused on evidence-based policy, and that, I guess, is where you see that broad consensus across the parties; why Michael (Gove) will shout to the rafters how he loves Tony Blair, is through the fact that he chose to place the evidence in front of the ideology (Skidmore).

As reviewed in Chapter I.i, the notion of placing the evidence in front of the ideology is moot, but it is a theme favoured by Skidmore. The *Academies Act*, he says, was 'one of David Cameron's first big tests', because 'any other leader would probably have decided to play politics, and sided with the rebels, because the Academies were still very unproven'. The assertion is that, like Blair, Cameron was inclined to put evidence before ideology – in this case that of his own 'right flank' who favoured a return to grammar schools:

To take that step knowing that actually this was the direction of freedom was the right one. Another Tory leader might have decided to play a short-term game of defeating Blair. We were in it for the long haul, and we were going to behave responsibly. That was always an overriding mission – that we weren't going to play politics with this, given that we knew we were on the right side of the argument (Skidmore).

And so they began to look at liberal education models in other countries.

Free School origins

According to Gibb, Gove was not the first shadow secretary of state for education to propose the Free School policy:

Technically it came from Sweden, because it's from the Swedish '*freiskool*', which was implemented in 1992. I think Theresa May may have been the first shadow education secretary to start mooted the ideas of Free Schools. I don't know where she got her idea from. I know that Michael based it on the Swedish programme (Gibb).

Although his account is sparse – and peppered with honest expressions of doubt ('I think'; 'I suppose'; 'I'm not sure') – it shows the methodological value of not disclosing research questions to

politicians, who are manifestly used to preparing for interviews and delivering stock responses along a briefed or ‘party line’.

Gibb’s post-1988 account accords with the heritage identified by other interviewees across the parties (except for omitting the US Charter school inspiration [DfE, 2010a; Sammons, 2011]): this is not a ‘new’ direction, but a development consistent with the previous 25 years of policy development, through half of which the DfE (/DCSF/DfES) was led by a Labour secretary of state. The fact that Theresa May ‘may have been the first’ to propose Free Schools dates the origins of reform to somewhere between June 1999 and September 2001, when May held the Opposition education portfolio. Some of her (short-term) successors are identified as being pivotal to the progression of the policy, including Cameron (May-Dec 2005), Willetts (Dec 2005-July 2007) and Gove (July 2007-May 2010):

David (Willetts) was enthused by the new politics of it all... Charlotte (Leslie) was working on structures, and David’s approach was very much quite a cautious one. But he was obsessed with what he called “The supply side problem” on education – that there were certain issues that were preventing new good schools from being set up. In particular he was obsessed by things like BB98 and 99. He was very technical, so he wasn’t at that moment in time – there was no concept of “We will set up a new generation of schools.” David’s view was: “How can we use the Academy model to allow people to set up schools?” (Skidmore [Appendix XI.xxii]).

BB98 and 99 refer to DCSF ‘Building Bulletins’ of 2009 on the statutory guidelines relating to minima in the square-footage of school buildings and grounds. Willetts saw the eradication of such bureaucracy as key to encouraging providers like Ark to expand: a new school ‘doesn’t need to be all about the steel and glass; it can be an old disused fire station’, observed Skidmore. He was interested in: ‘How can you move to a position of “who are we there for?” Are we just there to say, “We will set up more rigorous qualifications,” and the tradition of more grammar schools?’ or (by inference) were they there for all children, including those in areas of social deprivation and those who are academically less able? He describes this as a ‘seismic moment in our education policy, where there was a fundamental shift’ – away from the traditional ‘right-wing’ Conservative leitmotifs of selection by ability and rigorous academic qualifications, to those ‘social justice’ issues which spurred Adonis’s Academy Bill:

..looking at free school meals – it is an inexact measure – but if the Conservative Party... if we can prove to the wider public that we are in it for the poorest in society, then we can win the battle of reform and why reform is needed... If we can show that it is the poorest in society who are not taking the good qualifications, these are the areas that we need to improve, this is where Academies need to focus. The Academy model was still very much at that time trained on the worst performing schools (Skidmore).

Socio-educational morality

Boles confirms that, for Gove, reform was not just a question of academic standards, but of morality:

(Gove made) a moral case for it, linking it to the chances of the least well-off, so that it wasn't just the – The problem with the grammar school argument has always been the sense that you're worrying about people who are best equipped to make their way in the world, because they're academically gifted, and you're sort of forgetting about everybody else. Michael, very ably and powerfully, made the Free School movement not about that: it's about the people who most need education can most rely on it to give them better chances in life (Boles).

Skidmore notes that Willets 'was very influenced by Caroline Hoxby from Harvard. This whole idea of, they kept on quoting all the time, "The rising tide that lifts all boats." So the idea that if you set new schools, they would act as a catalyst for driving up the standard in all schools' (Appendix XI.xxiii [examined further in Chapter IX.iv]). This was contiguous with the need for a more rigorous focus on discipline: something of the private/grammar ethos had to be inculcated in order to improve student attendance and raise academic standards. He recounts the role played by Steve Hilton, who 'was also hugely interested in the discipline angle: what do you do about the revolving door of kids coming in and leaving, and getting suspended, not getting kicked out?' He also emphasises the pivotal role played by Gibb:

So there were issues on standards where I think Willets had already anticipated where the Conservative Party would be on things like the EBacc. Nick Gibb is absolutely crucial in terms of – Nick is the one constant – Nick would push David (Willets) into positions I think that David sometimes was unwilling to look at (Skidmore).

With a brief allusion to the era of Keith Joseph, Skidmore provides a succinct account of the development of 'social justice' concepts during their opposition years, from the 'voucher idea', through the influential 2005 pamphlet *More Good School Places* (by O'Shaughnessy and Leslie, for Policy Exchange), which he says first posited the idea of the Pupil Premium (Appendix XI.xxiv). Boles corroborates that this pamphlet was 'very critical' to Conservative thinking in opposition. It was, he says, 'the source of a very large amount of the policy thinking that underpins Michael's (Gove) and Nick's (Gibb) reforms – the Government's reforms'. O'Shaughnessy explains the incremental shift in thinking which led him to realise that 'public service reform policy has to be about improving the services which everyone uses, rather than giving a small number of people an exit' (Appendix XI.xxv).

There is here is a prime example of the battle for ownership of 'compassion' or leading the 'social justice' agenda. Nick Clegg and the Liberal Democrats claimed to have been the inspiration for the Pupil Premium' (Vaughan, 2013), but Skidmore attributes the idea to O'Shaughnessy and Leslie, while Blunkett also claims ownership: 'I invented something called the pupil learning credit' (Appendix XI.xxvi). This DfES scheme made extra funding available to secondary schools with high levels of known FSM eligibility. In addition to providing additional educational opportunities to pupils from deprived backgrounds, it was designed to raise self-confidence and promote inclusion by facilitating participation in those activities so often available only to those who had the ability to pay for the enhancement (Braun *et al.*, 2003:3). In fact, the idea was first proposed by Professor Pam

Sammons as far back as 1997. In the quest for an educational balance between diversity and equity, she wrote:

One possible solution may be to allow only partial selection of academically high attaining students... while at the same time allocating significant extra resources for those with additional educational needs. If resources were targeted at the student level... this would act as a powerful incentive to schools to maintain a wide balance in their intakes... by linking resources directly to the admission of low attaining students at secondary transfer, and ensuring they were specifically used to benefit these students, the current powerful incentives to schools to recruit as many able students as possible would at least be reduced, if not eliminated (Sammons *et al.*, 1997:190f).

Many LAs allocated schools extra resources based on disadvantaged pupil intakes going back to EPAs and funding mechanisms from the 1970s onwards, which were one of key social inequality proposals contained in the *Plowden Report* (see Smith, 1987). This was later expressed in the LMS of the early 1990s, which formed part of the Baker Act. The ILEA in particular had a well-resourced scheme in operation for two decades (see Sammons *et al.*, 1983), and this informed many LAs in the distribution of extra funding for disadvantaged pupils (see Sammons *et al.*, 1993). LMS permitted schools to be taken out of the direct LA financial control, with responsibility handed to headteachers and governors.

Ownership of the ‘social justice’ agenda was an important part of Cameron’s ‘compassionate Conservatism’ agenda. The attribution may, of course, be down simply to ignorance. Skidmore made only passing mention of who invented the policy: his primary focus was how to raise and sustain standards of learning and teaching:

We want to be at a stage where once standards have been decided, that you stabilise those standards. That you get to a situation like with the IB, where you don’t have constant political meddling changing the curriculum. Once the curriculum has been decided, you need that standard to remain constant. So I hope, like with the IB, once that has taken place, that then we can get out of the Callaghan mode of effectively dictating every two or three years what now needs to be taught (Skidmore).

The perception is of a ‘Callaghan mode’ of implicit frequent political meddling in the curriculum, bequeathed by Baker’s notion of a ‘rounded education’. Skidmore inclines toward the Thatcher-Gove curriculum model: state standardisation is to be minimal, leaving schools more free to innovate and enhance.

**vi) GOVE IN GOVERNMENT:
POLICY CONTINUITY; MARKET DIVERGENCE;
‘INNER CIRCLE’ OF ADVISORS; THE MISSING ‘MIDDLE TIER’**

Gove had been an advocate of Baker’s 1988 reforms since he was a student at Oxford:

The first published article that I ever wrote in education was written in I think the Oxford Union Magazine... I wrote an article in it, basically in favour of the Baker education reforms. It was a very

precocious thing for a 19-year-old to do. I can't remember everything in it, but in it I did explain why tests were right and all the rest of it (Gove).

The allegiance is not one based on partisanship: like Adonis's admiration for Baker, it is a manifest affirmation of a particular philosophy, representing continuity.

Policy continuity

Given what preceded, there was no doubt that an incoming Conservative government with Gove as Education Secretary would embrace Labour's Academy reforms, not least because 'most of the sponsored academies of course replaced failing schools, many of them chronically failing schools, which were both undersubscribed and had places for many fewer pupils than the academies do' (Adonis). As far as Adonis is concerned, the results spoke for themselves:

The degree of transformation they brought about is much underestimated. It's not just improvement in results; there's been a huge increase in the number of places that they offer as well. On average at least a third more, sometimes including sixth forms, 50-100 per cent more places. So when you take both the fact that these schools have become much larger in their communities, and are now very popular, whereas their predecessors of course were generally undersubscribed and they were very unpopular, that makes a pretty potent combination (Adonis).

For Adonis, democratic popularity drives (and ensures) continuity. But Taylor suggests that Gove saw Free Schools not simply as contiguous with Academies, but as an authentic, accelerated progression of Labour's policy:

I think that Free Schools are the natural – Look, Michael's brand, politically, has been for some time, although he isn't so much now, but I suspect he is privately – He basically says, "I'm the Blairite who means it." So I think he would say, "Look, all I'm doing is what Tony Blair wanted to do but wasn't able to do." Because he was held back by his own party and Gordon Brown. And it's the natural next step of the process (Taylor).

It is interesting that Taylor interrupts himself in his opening sentence. He appears to be about to say: "I think that Free Schools are the natural progression / consequence / development of Academies." This becomes apparently conflated with what Gove himself (first-person) might claim of his reforms, except that Taylor then refers (reverting to third-person) to Blair (Blunkett/Adonis) being hindered by Brown (/Balls). So, for Taylor himself, Free Schools are 'the natural next step of the process' of reform.

Much of the criticism about Gove's reforms is concerned with the pace of change. Baker says that Adonis's policy 'has been followed very strongly by Michael Gove'. And this 'very strongly', he says, is 'totally destructing the existences' of LAs. He explains: 'I always intended that local authorities should wither on the vine, but they should wither a bit more slowly than they're withering now.' And the reason for this, he says, is 'because I think you have to introduce change in education in a way that makes it acceptable.' He clarified: 'Certainly, Academies are acceptable... what I'm saying is that the scale it's being done, and the speed it's being done..'. He explains his concern: 'There will be failures as well as successes, and you have to cope with the failures.'

There is considerable academic consensus in the wider literature that the policy is one of ‘continuation of the New Labour approach’ (e.g., Goodwin, 2011:407). Indeed, Ball (2008:186f) notes similar opposition aimed at New Labour’s Academies, namely that they were ‘neither state nor private... outside LEA oversight... (a) dramatic step in the “break-up” of the state education system’. Certainly, there is divergence in scale, but why there should be ‘anxiety’ (Williams, 2011) over the incremental universalisation of a ‘radical’ (*ibid.*) school model and not its particularity in areas of high deprivation (which is manifestly evolutionary) is unclear. ‘Radical’, as Norman notes, ‘implies a drastic change over the shorter term’, which he refutes to the extent that ‘it’s not absolutely clear to (him) that the Archbishop (Rowan Williams) fully understood himself what he was saying’.

Skidmore explains something of the rationale behind the pace of reform: ‘It was the failure of the CTC model to get off the ground, because we didn’t go fast enough’ (Appendix XI.xxvii). But tardiness wasn’t the sole problem: there were certain bureaucratic regulations, in particular the ‘surplus places rule’, which the Adam Smith Institute had identified as a hurdle to innovation. The objective of the rule was ‘to ensure that school facilities are fully employed and not duplicated unnecessarily’ (Lambert, 2002:5), but its effect was to prevent the expansion of successful schools and determine that no surplus places (and so no new school) could be created in an area where there was spare capacity, as Gibb explains (Appendix XI.xxviii). Historic hurdles and enduring restrictions may be identified from Gibb’s narrative. Since some of these are referred to numerous times and others are generic, quantitative analysis yields little. It is, however, noteworthy that the 71 coded references concerning bureaucratic or ‘establishment’ resistance accounted for almost a quarter (24.69%) of Gibb’s interview transcript.

Market divergence

Balls is of the view that the Coalition’s approach to Free Schools was somewhat removed from that New Labour’s vision:

..the areas who were most recalcitrant with me, because they didn’t really want to focus on the small number of under performers, are the ones who post 2010 embraced the “If you want to go for an Academy, you’ve got to be outstanding first”. Because the schools which they thought were the ones doing well then became Academies. Whereas I was focused on the ones who weren’t doing well, and who I thought should become academies. That’s why it’s such a difference pre- and post-2010. I think that the shift in Academies policy in 2010 turned good priorities upside down. It may well be there were some people who wanted to move to a more market-based approach to school improvement. But the Academies programme, between ’97 and 2010, was never market-based. It wasn’t a “Set up a school and see if it succeeds”. It wasn’t a “We’ll set up a new Academy” (Balls).

And he gives an example of how his vision differed from Gove’s (Appendix XI.xxix). Balls articulates the essential incompatibility asserted by Wright (2012:282), namely that of competitive pressures affecting institutional ethos or the style of schooling, ‘particularly in the shift from a social-

democratic discourse of schooling based on “comprehensive values” and a more managerial style of schooling based on “market values”. For Balls, this is key (Appendix XI.xxx).

On equality of opportunity, Balls inclines toward the view expressed by Jones (2013:332), that ‘(i)n seeking support for his own programme of change, Gove makes use of intellectual traditions that developed outside Conservative thinking’. The cause of equality has traditionally been the preserve of the left, but in focusing on the themes of emancipation and opportunity contending against bureaucracy and privilege, Gove appropriates a line of Whiggish thought which was long ago absorbed into Conservative thinking. Whereas grammar schools were once the Conservatives’ favoured means of social mobility, it is now Academies and Free Schools which are ‘providing children with the opportunity to transcend the circumstances of their birth’ (Gove, 2011). I shall deal with the philosophy further in Chapter IX.

The market/choice paradigm is, for Balls, manifest in Gove’s curriculum reforms: the focus on the more academic subjects like Maths, English, Science, History and Geography is ‘the opposite of the right learning from the success of the Academies programmes in the last 15 years’ (Balls). He is of the view that vocational subjects – ‘Dance, Drama, Sport, Design Technology’ – are ‘absolutely vital to transformational change’: ‘I don’t think Michael Gove’s curriculum reform has got anything to do with Academies and Free Schools and the future. It’s a nostalgic desire to get back to the curriculum circa 1950, where there were no Academies. It’s ridiculous’ (Balls). Taylor develops this line of critical thought, but links it to communitarianism:

..my experience of Free Schools is that there’s no particular interest in Free Schools about stronger community and parental links. Some of them have been created by parents, but many others have been created by all sorts of organisations and people. There isn’t particularly a model that says a Free School is more embedded in its community... The Free Schools are supposed to emerge bottom-up from community organisation. But the governance going forward – I mean, for example, lots of Academies and Academy chains don’t have governing bodies. Many Academy chains are highly centralised. And they’re highly centralised on a national scale (Taylor).

In this observation lies the fundamental political-philosophical tension, to which I shall return in Chapter IX.

Inner circle of advisors

Confirming observations of a distinct ‘policy community’ (Chapter VII.iii), a recurrent latent issue raised by many interviewees was that of Gove’s reliance on an ‘inner circle’ of advisors. For example, the 2011 review of vocational education – the *Wolf Report* (DfE, 2011b) – was considered deficient not only by Gove’s Labour opponents (e.g., Benn, 2011:21f), but also by Baker. It may have ‘been informed by over 400 pieces of evidence from the public, a number of visits to colleges, academies and training providers, and interviews and discussion sessions with key partners in the sector’ (DfE, 2011b), but Baker is highly critical:

I think the *Wolf Report* was a deeply flawed report. Michael Gove has used the *Wolf Report* to transform education. I think it was a shallow report, written by one woman, by herself, full of prejudices, and not really reflecting what is happening in the rest of Europe and the world, where the rest of Europe is moving to a transfer age of 14, the transition between lower secondary and upper secondary. The countries that have the lowest levels of youth unemployment are those countries that do that. Austria has the lowest level of youth unemployment (Baker).

Alison Wolf is a professor at King's College London (which sponsors a 16-18 [selective] Free School), specialising in the relationship between education and the labour market. Contiguous with the elite policy community observed, she is also the mother of Rachel Wolf (included in the 'wider architects of policy', Chapter VII.iii), a former advisor to Gove and head of the NSN, which was established (with a £500,000 grant from the DfE) to give advice to groups wishing to set up their own Free School. Hatcher (2011:488) notes: 'Its trustees and advisors are supporters of a marketised school system and six of the 13 are involved in running chains of academies.'⁸

With Baker's observation of the *Wolf Report* being 'shallow' and 'full of prejudices', he echoes some of the concerns of Gove's opponents:

Once, the charge from the right was that comprehensives let down bright, poor children who could only truly succeed in grammar schools. Now the argument has subtly shifted – or crudely widened – and comprehensives are accused of failing all children on virtually all fronts, through low academic standards and poor vocational provision: the central finding of Alison Wolf's report in spring 2011. This position chimes with the right's broader refusal to recognise any significant correlation between family background, poverty in general, rising economic inequality and school outcomes (Benn, 2011: 21f)

This also coheres with the decision to abandon the CVA indicator of school performance, which complemented benchmark indicators of raw results by explicitly demonstrating the link between social deprivation and academic attainment. Prior to the 1997 General Election, Woodhead stopped Ofsted implementing a system to contextualise schools' academic results (a methodology of making fairer comparisons, developed by Sammons *et al.* [1994], which was due to be implemented in 1996). Straight after that election, PANDA was introduced which contextualised school results with CVA being the planned follow-up once the NPD allowed linkage of student results to study progress. Also, the families of schools incorporated in the 'London Challenge' provided a means of comparing schools with similar intakes. After the 2010 election, CVA was abolished. Prior to 2010, this was a real political difference between the education policies of Labour and Conservatives, and evidently one which still concerned Baker. But the deprivation-attainment link is, of course, maintained in the Pupil Premium principle, which acknowledges at least in part that schools should be funded differently depending on intake.

The missing 'middle tier'

The one crucial outstanding area of structural development was the 'middle tier' to replace LAs. The need had long been evident, with or without some local-government involvement:

⁸ For further links between the DfE, NSN, Policy Exchange, Conservative Research Department and Dominic Cummings, see Behr (2013).

I think there is a very practical point about where we are now with Academies and Free Schools. Even by 2010 Ed Balls as the outgoing Secretary of State, was directly responsible for two hundred academies. I think that is just about viable for a central government department to have that direct responsibility. When you are talking about two and a half thousand, leave aside arguments about democracy, just in terms of the practicality, I don't think it is a viable system to expect civil servants based in London to be directly responsible for schools in Cornwall and Cumbria and Newcastle. And that is why I think you have got to have an effective middle tier, and I think that does include a role for local government (Twigg).

And Balls agreed:

In the world I was operating in as Secretary of State, I was dealing with between 200 or 300 Academies. In the world Michael Gove has created, where you go from hundreds to potentially thousands, the idea that thousands of schools – with governing bodies and all the things which can occur in that world – that every issue of problem is sorted out by the Secretary of State, unmediated, I think it's totally ridiculous. I think it's ridiculous. It can't last. Therefore, it will end up being sorted out (Balls).

According to Taylor, the impracticability of having so many schools administered centrally only gradually dawned on Gove: 'That's something which Michael now recognises', he says, as though the implications hadn't been carefully considered during the Conservatives' years in opposition (I know personally that they had). But there was an awareness of the need for a 'middle tier' of school oversight from the earliest GM/CTC days. Baker says the acknowledgment of the need goes back to 1988: 'Margaret was always rather keen on the independent schools. She liked CTCs. She said to me, "Kenneth, you will need something like the Girls' Public School Day Trust as intermediaries."'

MATs offer a degree of oversight. Contrasting their function and purpose with those of LAs, Boles observes:

Chains are vitally important, and we probably need more of them... LEAs were just geographical groups that had no commonality beyond the fact that they were all, broadly speaking, in the same part of the country. There was no particular sense that one LEA was competing with another LEA, because that's how people got their school places. There was no particular sense that within an LEA there was a very strong ethos or strong leadership. It was a bureaucratic organisation, whereas a chain is an institution writ large (Boles [Appendix XI.xxxi]).

The matter was addressed during Gove's final year at the DfE with the introduction of RSCs. The 2014 Blunkett review into the possibility of a continuing role for LAs essentially accepted the Gove settlement. It was greeted positively by teachers' unions, despite it being made clear that Blunkett saw Labour policy as one of continuing autonomy, independent governance and the centralised power of the Secretary of State to appoint the RSCs. For Taylor, the lack of local 'legitimacy' remains the outstanding issue of structural accountability (Appendix XI.xxxii).

SUMMARY

There is considerable manifest congruity between the architects of Academies and Free Schools on the historic development of policy. Comparing these accounts with the methodical record outlined in Chapter III, there is not only absolute chronology, but corroborative created history: ‘Arguably all research about powerful people is based on, or will become, or already is, a historical text’ (Williams, C, 2012:41). There is change in form, or Pareto’s ‘derivations’, but the ‘residues’ abide: ‘the substance is generally unchanged. History is a set of variations on certain basic themes’ (Femia, 2011:52; Pareto, 1935:1008f). While the emphasis of cross-party, triangulated apprehension falls on the freedoms created in 1988, Conservative interviewees (Gove, Skidmore, Norman) alone perceived the reforms in the context of wider history, resonant with their own academic specialisms. There are recurrent patterns: ‘Pareto felt that it was too easy for historians to get bogged down in detail and minor differences, to miss the forest for the trees and overlook what “constant in the complex and ever shifting things we have before us in the concrete”’ (Femia, 2011:68; Pareto, 1935:2410). This is not historical redaction or revisionism: there is no attempt to derive contemporary ideological legitimacy from historical educational archaeology. The ‘detail and minor differences’ between interviewees – whether manifest or latent – are principally concerned with matters of philosophy, to which I shall now turn.

CHAPTER IX

ELITE CONCEPTIONS OF FREE SCHOOL PHILOSOPHY

INTRODUCTION

Politicians are often judged by academics in terms of ideological coherence or policy consistency (e.g., Docking, 1999:x; Ozga & Gewirtz, 1994:126), but Walford (2000:115) notes that policy interpretations may be contradictory, not least because to understand politicians ‘requires understanding the interpretations which they give of what they are doing: We need to know their intentions’ (Pring: 2000:98). Some philosophical themes are recurrent, if not universal (Pareto’s ‘residues’), and some are dialectical and contextual (Pareto’s ‘derivations’). Philosophical dialectic admits mutual exclusion, contradiction or inconsistency, and the philosopher can find ‘latent’ reason in ‘manifest’ ignorance, especially since that ignorance, in the politician, may be nothing but a preference not to respond directly. This is not conjecture or supposition, but the philosopher’s need to discern inferences and interpret silences. As McHugh (1994:62) notes, some interviews require creative strategies if one is ‘to get to the underlying values and issues’; and Ball (1994:106), in talking about the ‘struggles and assumptions’ of interviewing the political elite, stresses the importance and value of ‘glimpses rather than thick descriptions’. But when trying to glimpse contemporary policy through the lens of historic expressions of political philosophy, Norman (a philosopher) warned in interview: ‘It is vital to make sure, if you are invoking these philosophies, that what you say actually fits with what they believed. What they believe, when you make a mash-up of a series of different philosophies, is often somewhat inconsistent, and it may also not be something that has any real connection with policy, as people presently understand it.’ The task is not to decipher or depict policy to conform to the historic worldview of the philosopher, but to understand the politician’s themes of policy and their relationship to the philosopher’s enduring frame(s) of reference, whether or not a philosophy is apparent, apprehended or understood.

As discussed in Chapter IV, there is no distinct delineation of political philosophy to which Academies and Free Schools may be conveniently assigned, not least because political parties in a liberal democracy tend not to prioritise philosophical reification, but, of necessity, reflect political alliances of the demographic reality. Policy evolves through decades of debate through commutative social processes. In consideration of the competing interests and mutual exclusions within educational policy, Norman makes manifest the tensions:

It seems to me that what educational policy is, it’s a conflict. It’s a result of a conflicting set of aspirations and expectations. One of them is what you might call philosophical hopes and beliefs, and there I think you see a Burkean strand. That is to say that schools, perhaps par excellence, should be free and independent institutions that, even if funded through state funding, are able to operate in

a way that is not absolutely dependent on the state, and is expressive of an institutional energy that is autonomous, and therefore allowed to be creative and innovative. I think that's a Burkean kind of strand. Also a recognition that schools are social institutions, in and of themselves, and therefore may play a much deeper role in the social eco-structure/ecosystem than people estimate if you just regard them as economic units. That's one strand. Another strand is a set of embedded assumptions within the education establishment about school politics, and a lot of academic research, some of which is good, some of which is bad. A third would be budgetary pressures.. (Norman).

It is the emphases which policy architects place on these competing strands which express – either manifestly or latently – certain aspects of political thought which have influenced their thinking, and they do so to varying degrees of knowledge and depths of insight, even when it is denied. For example, when asked about the philosophy which inspired his 1988 reforms, Baker responded: 'I wasn't driven by political ideology when I set up the CTCs. I just wanted to create new agencies that would tap into new talents. That's the whole background to the Academy movement.' The question posed related to his *philosophy*, but his answer refuted any notion of *ideology*. I dealt with some of the distinctions in Chapter II.i, but the matter of whether Free Schools are negatively apprehended as divisive political ideology or positively apprehended as consensual educational philosophy was germane to discussions, and so became a primary consideration:

i) IDEOLOGICAL DIVISION vs PHILOSOPHICAL CONSENSUS

Observing that politicians and their advisors largely embrace philosophy (if sometimes latently) but eschew ideology, Boles makes manifest the political rationale. In the context of the assertion of the teaching unions that Gove's Academy expansion and Free School propagation are driven by ideology, he observed:

What we have is a clear understanding of what set of circumstances will create strong institutions that can provide a strong education to all of the people who most need that education. We're in the business of trying to transform the education system so that it matches that. Ideology is what people always say about ideas that you don't like. We have an idea of what works, and of what is the best way of running schools (Boles).

It is the reification of a 'clear understanding' that exacerbates division and thereby elicits allegations of an adherence to an ideology (which is, in the vernacular political milieu, either 'partisan' and 'blind' or 'dogged' and 'bigoted', often by inference). In an age of enlightened political ecumenism when consensus and cooperation (if not coalition) are perceived to have supplanted the old left-right fissures of political discourse, to assert that 'an idea of what works' in education (which happens also to be 'the best way') is a jarring dissonance to those who possess an equal but opposing idea of what works best.

Philosophical/ideological influences

When asked what effect political philosophy *or ideology* has on the thinking of those who formulate education policy, Blunkett immediately responded: ‘Very little, is the honest answer.’ But he then proceeded to consider a latent apprehension in biographical context:

If we are defining philosophy as being rooted in values and an understanding of history and a different – I mean, as part of my degree I did philosophy, so I understood the Rousseau, with all his misogynism, but Rousseau with mutuality. Mill with individuality – (Blunkett).

And he goes on to qualify his manifest assertion of ‘very little’ influence with the concession that politicians’ philosophy has a distinct bearing on the way they formulate policy:

But they don’t always see it. I correct myself: it is what they see rather than what they do. The philosophy that is underpinning shines through, but I don’t think that they would accept, or analyse, or explain it in philosophical terms (Blunkett).

When asked what role political philosophy or ideology has on the thinking of those who formulate education policy, Adonis draws a manifest distinction:

I wanted an education policy that would build a highly educated ‘One-Nation’ society. I mean that’s a deep philosophical view, and indeed I used to quote all the time to Labour party audiences R. H. Tawney: “What the wise parent would wish for their child, and so the state should wish for all children”, which was my guiding light in developing the academies policy. I slightly tweaked it by saying, “What I would wish for my children”, and I know that most of my friends and those people who want the best for their children, what they want is what we should want for all children. I used to apply a test to a school when I visited it – and I visited most of the schools that were closed to make way for academies, indeed many of the deals which led to academies came from those visits – I would always apply a very simple test which is ‘would I send my child to this school or not?’. In the case of all of the schools which were closed and replaced by academies, the answer was no (Adonis).

‘One Nation’ is Disraelian and now associated with the ‘centre-right’, appropriated more recently by the political left as collaborative, ‘third-way’ and consensual. Adonis did not seek to build a ‘highly educated “One-Nation” society’ out of some unthinking adherence to a political ideology: his is (he says) ‘a deep philosophical view’, based on empirical evidence: ‘I used to apply a test to a school when I visited it..’. I asked him if his objective was Disraelian, and he responded: ‘It was, yes, Disraelian. Or you could say Tawneyan. I mean actually it’s a progressive “One-Nation” philosophy. And he conjectured of Disraeli:

His ‘One Nation’ view was much more influenced I think by Shaftesbury, wasn’t it? It was the nation of the duties of the rich to the poor, rather than the creation of common institutions, or indeed even institutions, because no one in the late-nineteenth century thought the education institution would be common between the classes. But the big educational reformers did think that you needed significantly better education institutions for the poor. I don’t think Disraeli really engaged with that much... I don’t think Disraeli saw education institutions as part of the formation of ‘One Nation’ (Adonis).

Unlike Gladstone and Salisbury, who were both educated at Eton and Oxford, from the age of 13-16 Disraeli attended ‘an obscure and undistinguished school’ (Kuhn: 2006:28) run by the Rev’d Eli Cogan – a Non-conformist (Unitarian) clergyman, and was thereafter home-educated. He didn’t attend university. Being a Jew, there were contemporary issues of religion and culture, and perhaps

also of character and temperament, which go some way to explaining this (pp26-28; 38f). He also sympathised with the social objectives of the Oxford Movement, leading the ‘Young England’ political group which propounded ‘Social Toryism’, a forerunner of Blond’s (2010) ‘Red Toryism’.

But Adonis’s appeal to Tawney as an inspiration is interesting, because Baker also observed:

You look at the early thinking in the ’20s and ’30s, people like Professor Tawney. He lectured at the LSE, and I remember being taken to a lecture by him on Charles I. He was one of the great thinkers of comprehensive education in the ’20s and ’30s. It was very much social engineering rather than educational grounds (Baker).

For Adonis, Tawney articulated ‘a progressive “One-Nation” philosophy’; for Baker, it was about ‘social engineering’:

What our society is now realising is that if our society is going to work – one of the analogies, and it’s one I use quite a lot – was the hub of the wheel and the rim of the wheel. To some extent you could say that Socialism is about the hub of the wheel, because all responsibility is with the hub. Whereas, if you can disperse responsibility down the spokes of the wheel, which I did by giving schools their budgets, you create independent bodies around the rim of the wheel. That’s how society is going to run in the future. It’s a liberal pursuit, but it’s also how it’s going to work. This is how societies are going to survive. The great drive that came in the late nineteenth century, and to some extent dominated twentieth-century thinking, was you could only do it by planning, by controlling everything from the centre, the hub. That has failed. It has failed. The only way you’re going to make societies work is by dispersing power from the centre, which the Liberals and the Conservatives do, and which now I think Labour has adopted (Baker).

Baker isn’t opposed to change: he shares Pareto’s aversion to *planned* change: ‘change that flows from abstract theoretical imperatives and presumes to follow a blueprint’ (Femia, 2011:53). Baker’s hub/spokes/rim metaphor illustrates a precise philosophy of educational structure: it distinguishes between that which is or ought to be central/statist (‘hub’) and that which institutions ought to be free to choose, mediated/guided/advised by a ‘middle tier’ (devolved via ‘spokes’ to the ‘rim’). The assertion is one of a controlling ‘hub’ to achieve a social end set against the organic inspiration to certain social duties. I shall refer to Baker’s metaphor of subsidiarity further, because he invoked it several times. What is interesting at this stage is that he perceived opposition to the Academy/Free-School model as the ideological pursuit of dogma: ‘It would require an enormous effort of ideology and dogma to take them all back into the state control at some future time. The test is whether you can have an education system which is entirely free-form, which is what ours will be’ (Baker).

For Baker, free schools are virtually irreversible (cf. Adonis’s ‘unstoppable’ [Appendix XI.xx]). While the teaching unions (*inter alia*) are lobbying for a change in direction, if not repeal of the policy, no political party is sufficiently statist in its ideology to commit to doing so. Baker justifies the Conservative position with the essence of conservative thought. Having stated that he ‘just wanted to create new agencies that would tap into new talents’, I suggested to him that the teaching unions might view this as ‘Tory ideology’. His manifest riposte was: ‘I think it’s human nature.’ And therein lies his latent appeal to Burke’s essential conservatism and its accord with the natural order: it is organic human flourishing versus social engineering. Femia (2011:3) positions the dichotomy:

‘Where Marx and other progressives saw “man” as rational and perfectible, Pareto viewed him as essentially a creature of emotions and instincts.’ Or, in Pareto’s own words: ‘We have no knowledge of what *must* or *ought* to be. We are looking strictly for what *is*’ (Pareto, 1935:28; Femia, 2011:88). Society and human nature will not be bound by linear apprehensions of engineered progress: history moves in organic circles just as governing elites are naturally circulated.

When Balls was asked if his PPE degree provided any particular educational insights, he responded: ‘No, not really’, but went on to make a considerable latent biographical appeal (Appendix XII.i). His subsequent discourse not only expounds a distinct moral economy; it identifies by name a manifestly important philosophical influence. It is not quite Pareto’s *homo economicus* – ‘an abstract molecule that responds only to economic stimuli’ (Femia, 2011:8) – but clearly it is economics which informs Balls’ perspective on education. O’Shaughnessy also said of his PPE that the ‘philosophy was entirely pointless’, before considering:

My political philosophy... came much more from the study, I guess, of political theory. I don’t know how much these things you use to assemble arguments to justify what you think already, rather than actually have some moment where you switch from being a Marxist to a Thatcherite or whatever (O’Shaughnessy).

But Hancock’s manifest attribution is unqualified. He says that Academies and Free Schools are ‘entirely in the L/liberal tradition’, expounding a latent ideological Millite view of the individual and his relation to the institution:

I think that a centre-right understanding of the ability of people to better themselves given the tools – that understanding is central to the Academies and the education reforms in two ways. The first is because, instead of a Fabian belief in central command and control, it’s by giving people freedom and flexibility alongside the incentives to do the right thing, which is driving improvement and I think there is strong evidence that that has in the past and will do. That’s the level of the design of the institution of an Academy but it’s also important at the level of the individual. So, we are unashamedly centre-right because we believe in the ability of individuals to transcend the boundaries of their birth and to improve their lot, not least through education and training to improve their academic ability, and there’s a sense where I believe that people have the desire to do that (Hancock).

The emphasis on ‘individual’, ‘freedom’, ‘flexibility’ and ‘incentives’ juxtaposed with ‘better themselves’ and ‘improve their lot’ evinces a traditional liberal/conservative philosophy, but it is qualified:

So this is against both a hard-right belief that only a certain proportion can ever have the capacity to deliver and to engage in an academic way, for instance, Chares Murray, the American right-wing polemicist being the contrasting view point. And against a Fabian, left-wing view that the best thing that the state can do is paternal, top-down and tell schools how to act. I think that’s why there’s this consensus in the middle of the political terrain where, on the right, there are still people who support the expansion of grammar schools as the answer to social mobility problems (Hancock).

There is a manifest ‘hard-right’ apprehension (ideological) and so, by latent inference, a ‘soft-right’ apprehension (philosophical): situated somewhere along a *via media* between the individual and the state, free schools are representative (if not reification) of consensus.

The 'common ground' of 'what works'

Ryan is manifest in his apprehension of the political-philosophical impetus of consensus:

I think there are probably two strands that are influencing. I mean one is, I suppose, a classic Social Democratic strand; and then I suppose there is a sense that if you regard New Labour's approach as a modern version of Social Democracy, then there's that element to it, as well (Ryan).

Social Democracy is a compound entity with a complex heritage, essentially concerned with mandatory means of addressing unequal powers to eradicate inequalities (e.g., gender, race, class) within a framework of membership autonomy. It includes the democratisation of the family, with the result that paternalism 'does not extend to exclusive parental authority over education, or other powers claimed by parents that interfere with the freedom and equality of future citizens' (Gutman, 1995:417). Ryan's equation of New Labour with Social Democracy is a latent reference to a book which became strongly associated with Blair's political-philosophical approach: *The Third Way* (Giddens, 1998) which was subtitled 'The Renewal of Social Democracy'. The stated purpose of the book was 'to find a way beyond market fundamentalism on the one hand and old-style social democracy on the other, and to apply this framework to political problems' (Giddens, 2010).

The appeal, again, is to the syncretised 'Red Tory'/'Blue Labour' (Blond, 2010; Glasman *et al.*, 2011) philosophical themes of consensus; that is, the end of the left/right ideological bisection of education policy, of which Blunkett observes: 'There is a tendency to forget that what we are dealing with is common ground in terms of what works' (Appendix XII.ii). He doesn't fall for the manifest epistemological division that his 'mutuality and mutual support' approach is philosophical, being concerned, as it is, with 'common purpose, common good', while Gove's 'competition and knocking out failure' is ideological, allowing, as it does 'a school to die' with 'a detrimental impact on the children'. Blunkett acknowledges that Gove's 'bit of the philosophy side' is different from his, but the latent inference of a considered philosophy is not a positive apprehension.

Ryan also draws on his own 'soft left' political biography to explain the manifest 'centralist' evolution: 'we had to have a new way of thinking; a new way of presenting policy if Labour was going to get re-elected. And it needed to be rooted in traditions but not weighed down by those traditions' (Appendix XII.iii). But this wasn't merely presentational sophistry: Taylor is of the view that the move toward philosophical consensus or 'crossover' is deeper because it transcends politicians: what is interesting for him 'is the possibility of binding Social Conservatism, by taking from the left a concern about social justice, and from the right a concern for institutions, and traditions, and cohesion, and seeing if we can combine those' (Appendix XII.iv). Here is a manifest apprehension of the essential Conservative tension between Tory-conservatism and Whig-liberalism: the matter is one of attitude, or, as Taylor says, 'fruitful conversations'. Institutional autonomy in education 'is not necessarily (though it may be in fact) affected by the financial dependence of

educational institutions upon state funding. Everything here depends upon the attitude of the state, just as it once depended upon the attitude of the Church' (Scruton, 2001:141).

For Adonis, Blunkett and Twigg, Gove's reforms represent essential continuity with Labour's policy: there are manifest bones of contention (Labour's focus on deprivation; the need for 'transformation'), but, on the latent philosophy of the market, being concerned with institutional autonomy and parental choice, they evince a high degree of consensus. Speaking positively of Academies as a tool of school improvement, Twigg says the policy 'in a sense has been built upon by Michael Gove in two quite different ways – with his Academies programme, and then with Free Schools'. He doesn't expand on 'in a sense', other than to say it is 'quite different' and refer later to 'a distinction between the approach that we took and the approach that Michael Gove is taking'. But while he leaves the substance of divergence unexpressed, he makes a latent assertion that Academy expansion and the creation of Free Schools are both 'a tool of school improvement', and so ideological common ground.

Ideological divergence

For Balls, Free Schools (and Gove's approach to Academies) constitute ideological divergence: 2010 represented a total break from New Labour's objective. He refers to Gove's decision 'to essentially, other than the name, rip up the previous Academies programme and move to a different model': 'That's the big change which happened since 2010. 2010 was much more a chance to break free from local authority control, starting with higher performing schools. Ours was about driving transformational change for under-performing schools (Appendix XII.v). He portrays Gove as placing ideology above educational research, agreeing with Jones (2013:331), who says Gove is '(f)amous for his disregard for "evidence"', and so (again) his approach is deemed 'ideological'.

But Gove, in pursuit of values-based education, doesn't see this as a negative, and Scruton (2001:127) explains why:

It is part of conservatism to resist the loss of ideology. The 'value-free' world is not a human world: it contains no intimation of society. But how should ideology be generated, and what form should it take? This is not a question of policy, but a question of doctrine, a question of the fundamental suppositions at work in determining the particular political choice.

Gove did not perceive himself to be 'ripping up' Labour's Academy programme, but, as Taylor observed, expanding what he believed to be a successful model. Notwithstanding the academic cavils outlined in Chapter I, for Gove and other proponents, the evidence-base is unambiguous. Speaking of the establishment of the Hackney Learning Trust and the side-lining of the LA, Skidmore observes:

Actually to win that argument, to put evidence-based policy, and that is guess where you see that broad consensus across... Why Michael will shout to the rafters how he loves Tony Blair, is through the fact that he didn't place ideology – he chose to place the evidence in front of the ideology. That

is I guess how everyone moved onto the same square... I think with what you might call evidence-based policy making, the debate is moving now into international territory. So you seek now to construct your arguments, not so much on the basis of Locke or conservative political philosophy, but you are trying to at the same time bolster something. That I think you maybe think, “Well trying to set out a vision is difficult, unless it is told in a language of the everyday man or woman on the street who just simply wants a good school” (Skidmore).

And there is in this consensual move toward assertions of evidence-based policy a natural political instinct to appeal to international paradigms – in particular to the US Charter schools or Swedish *Friskolor* movements (Appendix XII.vi).

Gibb was the only Conservative to agree with Balls that consensus remains elusive. There were eight manifest references coded (Appendix XII.vii). Despite the manifest assertion that consensus is only ‘apparent’, the latent theme is of ‘structural consensus’ (i.e., agreement about institutional autonomy and parental choice, and so a market): it is also less about ‘the standards agenda, on phonics, on the nature of the curriculum’, but these matters are tangential. The consensus that Gibb calls ‘apparent’ is then affirmed with latent consensual appeals. It is interesting, in passing, to observe the ego-philosophical ‘Gibbite’, as indistinct from ‘Govite’. In the modern era the suffixes ‘-ism’ and ‘-ite’ are most often reserved for senior politicians recognisably associated with a distinct strand of thinking or *modus operandi*: ‘Gibbite’ is unlikely to enter the political lexicon. As an elite, he may be seen to be creating his own ‘narrative of justification’ (Batteson & Ball, 1995:203) or exaggerating his role and contribution (Morris, 2009:211). But it might be observed that Boles referred to ‘Michaels and Nick’s reforms’; Taylor referred to ‘Michael Gove’s and Nick Gibb’s views’; and Skidmore said: ‘Nick Gibb is absolutely crucial in terms of – Nick is the one constant..’. Considering his reinstatement to the DfE in 2015 to the precise ministerial post he held until the 2014 reshuffle, Gibb’s contribution to Free School policy development appears to have been both considerable and constant (and, hitherto, unrecognised).

Gove’s ‘instinctive’ educational ideology

To say that Gove is ‘ideological’ is true insofar as to be ideological is, as Scruton posits, to possess values and the instinctual desire to benefit others by their inculcation. Gove’s appeal is often to Christian virtues and human nature. He is unafraid to make this manifest:

I think in a lot of cases the best types of Tories are people who are instinctive. In a way, one of the things about Burke is that it required someone who had started as a Whig – and, of course, was born an Irishman – to recognise what Tory doctrine or philosophy might be... the most important thing is political philosophy... the best politicians have a political philosophy... and, in my case, I think that part of my political philosophy is the belief that it is dangerous to centralise too much power or control in bureaucracies: it is better to have, in Burke style, little platoons – vital, independent, intermediate institutions between individuals and the state. And the second thing which I think is important, too, is that you have got ask what sort of virtues or vices – what sort of behaviour do institutions, and the way in which they have been designed, encourage? This is where I am very interested in what people like Gertrude Himmelfarb have written... We all want to – it is a Christian instinct, but it is a human instinct as well – we all want to help those who are poor, disadvantaged, who face difficulty... (Gove [Appendix XII.viii]).

With a professed interest in Himmelfarb, he leans on ‘Victorian values’. In her book *The Moral Imagination* (2006:xi) she observes that eighteenth-century liberalism has become twentieth-century conservatism, and her conceptions of conservatism are geared very much to compassion and notions of social justice. In other writings she focuses on poverty and the restoration of civic virtue through the voluntary associations of ‘families, neighbourhood groups, churches, private social-work agencies, philanthropies’ (Himmelfarb, 1997:48). There is here almost the genesis (if not an identical list) of those groups which are permitted to establish a Free School. Gove’s ideology is a Whiggish conception of self-reliance, individual responsibility and the free market, achieved through Burke’s subsidiary ‘little platoons’ working together under central command.

Gove also made a latent appeal to the influence of Lindsay Paterson:

..who is actually on the left of politics in Scotland, who is a lecturer in education. Who argues much more passionately and effectively than I can, in favour of subject-based teaching, and in favour of basically a Matthew Arnold view, that sweetness and light, the best that has been thought and written, should be available to everyone (Gove).

Paterson wrote the preface to the 2013 edition of George Davie’s *The Democratic Intellect* (originally published 1961). The emphasis is on the relationship between democratic engagement and civic virtue fostered through curriculum inter-disciplinarity and inculcated by the cultivation of a broad intellect. Gove saw his task as being contiguous with Pareto’s residue (Class II); being ‘responsible for the transmission of customs and attachments from one generation to another’ (Femia, 2011:39; Pareto, 1935:1065, 1073). This view of education has also influenced former Blair advisor (and now Free School headteacher) Peter Hyman (2005:376):

My experiences have made it clearer to me that a School should focus on three things: culture, character and skills. By culture, I mean, the Matthew Arnold definition. In his great book *Culture and Anarchy*, Arnold, headteacher and thinker talked of ‘those who have a passion for diffusing, for making prevail, for carrying from one end of society to the other, the best knowledge of all that was harsh, uncouth, difficult, abstract, professional, exclusive; to humanise it, to make it efficient outside the clique of the cultivated and learned, yet still remaining the best knowledge and thought of the time, and a true source, therefore, of sweetness and light.’ Our aim should be that all students are exposed to the best music, arts, history and literature.

Gove expands:

The other influence I suppose, at one remove, would be the example of someone like Alan Bennett. The idea that whatever the background the children might come from, that they can surprise their parents and indeed transcend the expectations if they have got the right education, has always been in my mind (Gove).

This element of social justice is a spur for his reforms, and simply not credited in the academic literature (Wright, 2012:279; Reay, 2008:639; Day & Smethem, 2009:153f, etc. [see Chapter I]). Gove’s philosophy of education is not one of provisional polity for political expedience: these things have ‘preyed on (his) mind’ and ‘always been on (his) mind’. His concern, with Alan Bennett (state-grammar educated; ‘regular worshipper’ in the Church of England; read History at Oxford), is with the chronic injustices that exist in the public-private bisection in education: ‘Souls, after all, are equal

in the sight of God and thus deserving of what these days is called a level playing field. This is certainly not the case in education and never has been, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't go on trying. Isn't it time we made a proper start?' (Bennett, 2014). Gove credits Baker with making the start and Adonis with the kick-start. Bennett's manifesto is not calling for a revolutionary abolition of private education, but for 'gradual reform', because 'to educate not according to ability but according to the social situation of the parents is both wrong and a waste' (*ibid.*).

Unlike Baker, Gove readily assents to having been influenced (if not driven) by a manifest philosophy/ideology, to which he was exposed at both primary and secondary levels of education: the assumption of the 'democratic intellect':

It is a particular Scot's idea, which is that not only should education be meritocratic, in the sense that the ladder should be available to whoever it might be can rise through learning. But also that the intellectual inheritance that our civilisation, or our culture have arrived at, belongs to everyone. That has certainly preyed on my mind (Gove).

Limond (2004:58) notes the origins of the term:

Deriving its name from a remark made by Walter Elliot (1888-1958), sometime Conservative Secretary of State for Scotland and later Minister of Health, the concept of the "democratic intellect", or democratic intellectualism, can provoke admiration and animosity in equal measure. Indeed, the legacy of the Scottish enlightenment, which has been lauded as little short of 'The Scots' invention of the modern world' (Herman, 2003) interacting with Scotland's distinctive Presbyterian culture, was a peculiar tendency in Scotland towards a 'quizzicality' or 'criticality'. This 'philosophical quizzicality' dominated its universities in their life and learning until the end of the nineteenth century when it was all but suppressed in the culmination of a process of anglicanisation that had been underway for at least half a century.

It is a distinctive educational philosophy of the acquisition of a 'general education through philosophy' (Davie, 1961:20). For Gove, intellectual 'quizzicality' or 'criticality' produce democratic features such as mass literacy, and foster a social ethic based on core values. These have been distilled to Pareto's 'derivations' – 'British values' – 'In so far as they embody ideas and values, derivations... are functional because they stimulate conduct along and towards desired goals' (Femia, 2011:48; Pareto, 1935:2159). Gove favours an 'educational system which, combining the democracy of the Kirk-elders with the intellectualism of the advocates, (makes) expertise in metaphysics the condition of the open door of social advancement' (Davie, 1961:xii).

Gove's educational philosophy is humanist insofar as it is influenced by the scholastic intellectualism of the Scottish Enlightenment and the vernacular culture of secular philosophy:

The humanistic bias in the Scottish pedagogical tradition, with its tripartite alliance between philosophy, language and science, is plainly evident in the sort of essays set in Jardine's *Logic* class. The themes set are often concerned less with pure philosophy than with the problem of applying first or philosophical principles to literary, historical, linguistic and economic subjects (Davie, 1961:17).

It is Presbyterian insofar as Gove favours institutions which are free of coercive episcopal oversight and at liberty to order their own affairs. It is holistic insofar as he sees a role not so much for a mandatory philosophy (ethics/values/character) dimension in the curriculum, but for liberal education to become more philosophical, focusing on the attributes of ‘freedom, equilibrium, calmness, moderation and wisdom’ (Davie, 1961:203). By appealing to the principle of the ‘democratic intellect’, Gove places his educational philosophy firmly in the tradition of the general Scottish curriculum rather than the particular or specialised English one. Although Davie is talking about Scottish universities, it must be observed that he is concerned with the nineteenth-century, when admission was at the age of 15 and degrees courses lasted for four years, approximating to modern (‘anglicanised’) secondary education, and reflecting precisely the age-range of Baker’s UTCs. So the same curriculum principles may be observed: ‘..the basic course in Scotland involved classics plus philosophy plus the exact sciences, experimental and mathematical, whereas, in England, philosophy had long tended to drop out of the college courses altogether, and the student had the choice of two highly specialised courses’ (Davie, 1961:10). While this apparent centralisation appears antithetical to Gove’s pared-down NC, the philosophy component is not discrete in the curriculum: mental training and aesthetic appreciation are approached through a holistic ‘Theory of Knowledge’ consideration of perceptions, universals and causality (Davie, 1961:11).

Gove’s philosophy is Whiggishly meritocratic rather than Tory oligarchical or plutocratic, perhaps drawing on an aspect of ‘Scottish Democracy’ which, Davie (1961:15) says, ‘made itself felt in an unusual system of reckoning merit’:

In the competition for prizes... decisions as to the order of rank in class often lay not with the Professor but with a vote of the class. Apparently, the students were accustomed, by the Presbyterian conventions of the country, to take an intense interest in ‘intellectual form’, and enjoyed assessing the competence of their fellows in standing up to the Professors’ questions, and thus the final judgments of the class were concerned with the rival merits of oral attempts of students to elucidate the Professor, and to make sense of his remarks on the text, be it Horace or Euclid or Berkeley (Davie, 1961:15).

In this vibrant democracy the class becomes the judge and court of appeal: the Professor chose the examination questions in matters of logic, history or morality, but the students were free to argue and criticise, ‘and in this way a situation was brought about in which case it was quite customary for students... to get excited... about the fundamental issues in history, politics, physics, metaphysics, and everything’ (Davie, 1961:16). In Gove’s free schools, it is headteachers and governors who, liberated from LA ‘control’ and the constraints of Whitehall ‘interference’, are free to forge a distinct ethos; vary working conditions; and determine aspects of the curriculum. But, like the Scottish Professor, the QCA sets the exam questions to ensure academic integrity and the maintenance of standards (cf. Mill 1998:118). Gove’s (head)teachers are thereby freed from certain bureaucratic constraints (like NQT/QTS/NPQH) to focus on pedagogy: ‘if a teacher arouses interest and excites attention by an able and eloquent exposition of his subject, he has done his part, and the rest may be done, and best done, with private study’ (Davie, 1961:18). The proliferation of such an ethos

mitigates what Gove calls ‘the lottery element’ of education by ensuring that more students attend ‘the right school’, which is attained by increasing parental choice and permitting them (or giving them ‘the necessary resources’) to choose the ‘best’ school for their children (cf. Reay, 2008:644).

ii) CENTRALISATION/CONTROL vs DEVOLUTION/SUBSIDIARITY

Free schools epitomise the structural tensions between institutional autonomy and local accountability, and between local autonomy and national accountability. The liberal-conservative tension is nothing new, not only in reference to GM schools and CTCs, but also in the context of ecclesiology:

Take the point about Church – that is where my love of history came from. That is where, for instance, I learnt first about the Reformation, things like that. Actually, it is why I am quite interested in promoting local history as well as national history; that in order to appreciate what is around you, and the structures and institutions around you... I guess in both areas there is an institution element. That is why I think David Willetts has spoken quite a bit about – just to what extent institutions are signpost marker points in a young person’s life, and should be valued (Skidmore).

There is here a latent conservative appeal to Burkean themes of respect for institutions, which ‘should be valued’ because knowledge, experience and understanding of their history illuminate the present. While Skidmore’s example is ecclesiastical, it applies equally to the educational: the concern is with both the local story as well as the national establishment, because it is the appreciation of community presence which helps people to value the institutional foundation. Scruton (2001:159) makes the point that the Church ‘continues to provide the major institutions which reinforce the attachment of citizens to the forms of civil life, and which turn their attention away from themselves as individuals and towards themselves as social beings.’ For Pareto (1971:46), this is organic, Burkean social theory: ‘It is not the function of theory to create beliefs, but to explain existing ones and discover their uniformities.’ And these uniformities are plural because they are partial: there is no overarching general uniformity because, for Pareto, it is unknowable. Skidmore is mindful that state education in England developed out of the Church, hence his allusion to the local parish and diocese as signposts to understanding the institutional structures and theological precepts bequeathed by the Reformation, which ‘clearly strengthened the element of individual choice and responsibility’ (Femia, 2011:89): it was essentially England’s national ‘localisation’ from the distant, centralised and bureaucratised authority of Rome.

Gove, too, noted the pre-1902 ‘voluntary’ provision of education by the Church of England and Non-conformists, which ‘the state moved in subsequently to regulate and to improve’, leading him to conclude:

..you don't need to have a state monopoly in order to have universally high standards. In fact people like Mill made the case for free schools – the idea that the state should insist that everyone has an education, but he was very clear that, no, the state should not have a monopoly control of that, long predates that (Gove).

The manifest appeal, again, is to Mill, who never resiled from the belief in the minimal role of the state and the right of parents to choose:

Were the duty of enforcing universal education once admitted, there would be an end to the difficulties about what the State should teach, and how it should teach, which now convert the subject into a mere battle-field for sects and parties, causing the time and labour which should have been spent in educating, to be wasted in quarrelling about education. If the government would make up its mind to *require* for every child a good education, it might save itself the trouble of *providing* one. It might leave to parents to obtain the education where and how they pleased, and content itself with helping to pay the school fees of the poorer classes of children, and defraying the entire school expenses of those who have no one else to pay for them. The objections which are urged with reason against State education, do not apply to the enforcement of education by the State, but to the State's taking upon itself to direct that education: which is a totally different thing (Mill, 1998:117).

For Mill, the function of the state is to ensure universal mandatory provision of education and certain curricular minima attained to minimum standards (see Garforth, 1978:chs 4-5): it is for parents to obtain that education for their children 'where and how they please', which implies both institutional diversity and surplus places to permit free choice. Insofar as the state school should exist at all, it should be 'one among many competing experiments, carried on for the purpose of example and stimulus, to keep the others up to a certain standard of excellence' (Mill, 1909:956; West, 1965). There are tensions, of course, between the negative freedom from church/state control and the positive freedom to choose the 'best' school, and philosophical treatises are obviously bound by the social context into which they were written. Mill was by no means the only eighteenth-century advocate of educational reform,⁹ but he has come to epitomise the liberal view.

Boles summarises the institutional/libertarian Tory-Liberal tension thus:

I am a – not in all things, and not 100 per cent – but more than anything else I'm a Gladstonian liberal. So I believe that strong independent institutions, acting freely, is generally the best way of running most things in society, and produces a happier set of outcomes, and an engine of improvement... one has strong institutions, strong leadership, strong ethos, and freedom for them to innovate, and try and be as good as they can be (Boles [Appendix XII.ix]).

The latent appeal is to liberalism and Gladstone; the themes are Whiggish and Burkean: 'common sense', 'culture', 'strong institutions' and 'strong ethos' are contingent on freedom to act and innovate. On the philosophical tension between Gove's stated objective of devolution and liberalisation versus his critics' insistence that he is centralising and empowering the state, Gibb is emphatic:

What we have done, the essence of these reforms, is to make education more genuinely accountable to the people. What was happening until Michael Gove became Education Secretary was that major reforms to education over the last 50 years were happening – apart from the original reforms in 1964

⁹ William Godwin, Adam Smith, J Priestly, JA Roebuck, TR Malthus and JS Mill's father James Mill were notable others. For a summary of their contributions, see West (1965).

– other reforms since then have happened without any accountability to the people of this country. So you’d have quangos like the QCA completely re-writing the curriculum in 1999, and in 2007, with no Bill going through the Commons, with no debate in local elections, or national elections, about the complete shift of policy. All these measures were introduced by non-elected people, and there was no way that the public could say no to that, because the Secretary of State didn’t really have control of what was happening (Gibb).

The theme is that of the Secretary of State taking control in order to devolve control to ‘the people’. Power had to be taken from the ‘out of control’ quangos, ‘advisors in local authorities’, and ‘this national club called the education establishment’ in order to restore accountability:

So I just don’t buy this argument that somehow he has subsumed into himself all this power that before then had somehow belonged to the people, through our different democratic processes. No, I think what he is doing is giving power back to the people. But to do that he has had to take certain powers in the Academies Bill, the Academies Act, and the Education Act 2011, to be able to do that (Gibb).

For Gibb, institutional autonomy and the eradication of regulation like the ‘surplus places’ rule represents the decentralisation and democratisation of state education: ‘No longer will it be run, and the policies determined, by a closed group of education academics, who adhere to a failed education orthodoxy,’ he said. I wanted to be clear on this, so I asked him what he would say to those who insist that the Secretary of State has now assumed the power to determine, effectively, the entire curriculum, by taking control of the exam system. He responded:

What I would say is that at least he is accountable to Parliament, where previously it was so constructed that a quango – and a quango is a very different body from an executive agency: it’s very autonomous; it’s very difficult for later politicians to influence its policy – they were deciding the contents of these exams, combined with completely unaccountable, not even theoretically accountable, exam boards, which had then in recent years become profit centres. That combination, I think, was anything but decentralised or accountable to people (Gibb).

This is a traditional Burkean-Whiggish theme: that of the demotic Parliament as a bulwark against elite oppression; a constitution that is democratic rather than one that is ‘swallowed up in the “austere and insolent domination” of aristocratic abuse’ (Bromwich, 2014:42 cf. Norman, 2013:227).

Devolved choices

Sacks (1995:35) posits that the liberal view of education lays an emphasis on individual choices, but the conservative view is community-orientated, concerned with the rules and virtues of society. Free schools are contiguous with freedom of choice – the individual’s (/parents’) right to make independent choices which shape life, but they are firmly situated in their communities. The concern becomes the tension between the state’s ‘interference’ and the right of parents to choose their child’s education based on their own backgrounds, values and aptitudes. Although he doesn’t express it manifestly, Gibb’s inclination toward reform is based on his aversion to uniformity which leads to mediocrity. But he makes no overt reference other than by dates to the previous Conservative legislation which centralised to establish *inter alia* the NC, Ofsted and the quangos which impinge upon free choice, and with which he is now seen to be contending. The education ‘establishment’, bolstered by Labour’s ‘left-wing’ ideology, is apparently responsible for chronic failure.

Gibb's perception is one of the relative powerlessness of parents whose passive voice has been chronically subjugated to elite educational theorists: their right to choose has been denied. This is to be remedied in part by devolving power and reinvigorating a sense of civic responsibility at a local level. This goes to the heart of the research questions – certainly philosophically (Q2a & b), but also historically (Q3b) insofar as it places his own perception of the post-1988 development of Free Schools in the context of the socio-cultural liberalisation of the 1960s and the near-universal comprehensivisation of state education in the 1970s. The education 'establishment' is seen to have become coercive and deterministic in the culture, and so Gove's mission had a moral purpose: it was to confront centralised power by inculcating choice within the system.

In order to devolve choice to parents, a 'power elite' has supplanted the 'establishment' elite – in accordance with Pareto's 'circulation' – and they have established a basic policy agenda by centralising authority in order to democratise it to the lowest level in accordance with the precepts of subsidiarity, thereby bypassing the bureaucratic 'establishment' middle-tier administration of the LAs. With nods to Mosca and Pareto, what emerges is 'the theory of democratic elitism' (Ball & Bellamy, 2003:442). A new middle tier evolves – MATs with RSCs – which will be monitored to ensure that they conform to free-market principles and competition law. But this is a bottom-up, organic development; not imposed by statute or the elite guardians of knowledge – the 'epistocracy'. This is a consistent theme within the literature, most recently expressed in the RSA/Suffolk analysis which notes the antithetical 'powerful forces exerted by institutional structures and embedded organisational cultures or pressures emanating from wider policy and structural arrangements' (Bamfield *et al.*, 2013:24). Pareto's social theory is corroborative: '(his) conviction that people are not, by and large, motivated by factual and logical argument. Only ideas that appeal to their prejudices or sentiments will spur them into action' (Femia, 2011:20).

For Hancock, it is the political instinct of the Fabian left toward centralisation and denial of choice, but it would be more accurate to say that a Tory/Whig conservative conception of freedom differs from a socialist one, and both differ from a Millite liberal one, though both have occasionally co-opted Mill to their cause (Freedon, 1996:459). There are tensions within and between, but Hancock accords with Mill's theory of liberal education which is concerned with the 'competence and openness which brings both release from conformity and the opportunity for individual growth' (Garforth, 1979:205). State regulation is a necessary interference with educational freedom only to the extent that it secures parental choice, standards of welfare, the imparting of 'core' knowledge and the proper inculcation of (democratic) values (cf. Freedon, 1996:166).

Bureaucratic control

As observed, for Gove, the Baker Act was ‘when the water stopped flowing uphill as it were; when things moved from centralisation to decentralisation’. He explains:

..the most powerful impact of decentralisation should be the common sense and professional judgement taking the place of what the educational bureaucracy or Blob had been responsible for. The Blob got captured by ideas thought of as progressive. It used centralisation to disseminate these ideas through the institutions, which it controlled. The way to counteract that, in order to have an education system which genuinely liberates children, is not to replace the people who are at the Blob with your people: it is to devolve power back down to parents and individual schools, and their common sense, and their self-interest, and their enlightened altruism will lead to a better outcome (Gove [Appendix XII.x]).

Free schools are the liberating antidote to the ‘bureaucratic centralisation’ of ‘the Blob’; the liberation of state education which got ‘captured’ and ‘controlled’. But even devolved institutions have their own necessary constraints: the extent to which free schools are free goes to the crux of what Norman calls ‘part of the Burkean question’:

I don’t think any institution is, or could be, entirely unconstrained, or should be. Now, Free Schools are not unconstrained at all: they’re an attempt to move the dial over towards greater institutional autonomy, and greater empowerment of heads and teachers... The idea of the Big Society is the empowerment of free institutions on the one hand, and the empowerment of individuals on the other hand. Now, if you think about the empowerment of free institutions, you could, in the educational framework, empower local government, and schools would be part of an empowerment of local government, and might have their relations with local government further devolved, as it were, in a way that you give them more operational autonomy... (Norman [Appendix XII.xi]).

Free schools are not only free negatively and positively; their freedoms are in flux because the local-central tensions are still being worked out. But the template is clear: Adonis talks of importing ‘the principle of independent governance’ from VA schools into the mainstream, state-funded system. Reminding us that, for church schools, ‘part of their independence came from making a contribution towards the capital cost of schools’, his whole exposition of the CTC-VA template for Academies is the balancing of, on the one hand, ‘independent governance’; ‘local management’; ‘delegated responsibility’; a sponsor’s ‘managerial control’; ‘budgetary control.. delegated’; and schools being ‘managerially independent of the Local Authorities’, with, on the other hand, schools being ‘licensed’; ‘state funded’ or ‘funded centrally’. In between these polarities was (/is) an ‘imperfect’ structure which left (/leaves) LAs with ‘managerial influence and responsibility’, and so the ever-present danger of the re-imposition of a local bureaucracy.

For Boles, bureaucracy constrains creativity: it was state centralisation that resulted in some poor standards of attainment (cf. Garforth, 1975:23: ‘..bureaucracy, the loss of freedom, the stifling of variety, experiment and individual initiative’). For Mill (1909:940; 1865:81), bureaucracy was contiguous with ‘collective mediocrity’. Boles sees the quality of teaching as being more important than a statutory curriculum disseminating a political notion of the ‘ideal education’:

In the previous system, where every school was in theory controlled by the state, and told what to do, you had lots of crap schools that were doing everything in a crap way. Now, I'd much prefer to have a school doing an excellent job of teaching, and that happen not to cover every single element that I, or Michael Gove, or Nick Gibb might think should be part of an ideal education. I'd much rather that than to have everybody following the same curriculum and most of them doing a fairly mediocre job (Boles).

Centralising power to disempower

Responding to the criticism that, far from localising and devolving, Gove was centralising power (e.g., Pring, 2013), Gibb offers insight into how those who favour the reforms perceive the local-central polarity: the 'establishment' perpetuates an illusion of subsidiarity, and standards in education are subsumed to the democratic fray:

People think that local authorities are somehow a decentralised structure. But when it comes to education, what happens is that a lot of local authorities let their officers run policy. Very few local elections are determined on the basis of the quality of the education system, or indeed on issues of education, or how children are, for example, taught to read. They're usually fought on the basis of the national opinion polls, or on some big local issue about planning, or other services. But rarely have I seen a local election that is determined on how the schools are run and the standards of schools. What tends to happen in the education world is that people move from one local authority to another. So I actually believe that leaving schools under the control of local authorities, and using all that soft power that they have to control schools, is actually more centralised than a system that has taken powers from local authorities, liberated the schools, and given them genuine autonomy (Gibb).

Skidmore expounds the expedient (and urgent) strategy:

I think it was necessary to have that. It is quite a natural conservative approach sometimes that in order to dissolve existing structures – middle tiers – you need to have a massive act of centralisation to then redistribute power to a far more local level. We are still in that stage of having a necessary period of centralisation. The contract obviously used to mean that local authorities were effectively the middle managers. The Secretary of State in the Department has obviously had to have that direct contact with education providers. That can't be sustained in the longer term simply by a force of numbers (Skidmore).

He sees centralisation as a temporary strategic necessity: ultimately, he wants to see the Secretary of State become a commissioner – 'who decides the money is there, and whatever choice provider, the parent can make that choice'. He or she 'will be remain outside of the classroom', but remain accountable to Parliament: 'If taxpayer's money being spent, it must be publicly accountable in the House of Commons.'

On the question of the 'middle tier', Gibb is clear that 'the future is chains of academies', which he sees as 'a very benign thing'. Unlike LAs, they will not be geographically too confined. Gibb wants them to be 'regional or national, so that they don't establish a monopoly in a particular area'. This is a possible area for central intervention. Again, it is a market/monopoly principle to ensure educational quality and standards: 'I hope that if that does become apparent that some chains, however good they are, become too dominant in one particular area, that we'll do something about that structurally.' For Gibb, MATs are justifiably superior to LAs because they are inherently more responsive and 'more sensitive to their reputation than local authorities have historically been'.

Notwithstanding this, it is observed that, in practice, they hinder parent-led applications to start up a Free School. Toby Young observed: ‘It looks as though it will now be less about encouraging groups of parents to set up schools, and much more about encouraging multi-academy sponsors setting up schools’ (Hatcher, 2011:495). There is a perceptible centralisation among key private companies in the application process and subsequent project management which, while it offers choice, may represent the emergence of an alternative *expertois*.

For Gibb, academisation doesn’t even represent a transitional appropriation of power:

But it’s not centralising. It is the opposite of centralising, because it is removing powers from local authorities, and it is funding from the centre, which sounds superficially like centralisation. But in fact it is only by doing that can you liberate schools from control by the education establishment, which is exercised through local authorities (Gibb).

Blunkett articulates this tension with a latent philosophical appeal:

..Rousseau with mutuality, Mill with individuality – that battle continues in our society. It is particularly at large in the English-speaking world because we are very suspicious of the dead hand of collectivism (Blunkett).

If there is here a suggestion that the Blunkett/Adonis decentralisation was more mutual while Gove’s localism is more concerned with individualism, it is subtle. The public-private / social-individual / national-local tensions within state education present evident dilemmas, but the political consensus is that schools needed liberating from ‘the dead hand of collectivism’ or the statist inclination to coercion that requires (or yields) uniformity: as JA Roebuck observed in Parliament in 1833: ‘It is dangerous, they say, to put such an instrument as education into the hands of Government; lest thereby the public mind be debauched, and slavish ideas and habits alone be propagated’ (*Hansard*, 1833, Vol.XX, cc139-166, [in West, 1965]). And yet it is the central function of ‘good government’ to guard against illiteracy, innumeracy and moral degradation: ‘The great object, however, in any plan of general education would be to make “the most instructed classes” the guides... Do what you will, say what we will, this class must guide and govern’ (*ibid.*). And so I return to the (perceived need for a) social-educational elite, at least to arbitrate authoritatively on the contents of examinations, which determine and define the integrity of the ‘core’ curriculum. The argument is not with the need for state prescription, but the extent of the centralisation and whether it is to be expressed as benign Tory paternalism or a more Liberal radical revolution.

When asked directly if he would categorise himself more as a ‘bottom-up’ Whig than a ‘top-down’ Tory, Gove’s immediate manifest response was: ‘I don’t know.’ This was followed by a degree of circumlocution:

I think that there are – there are all sorts of classical liberal ideas that I agree with, but I think that the modern Conservative Party contains a fair number of Classical Liberals – some of them purer and more liberal than me. But I think that again the Burke view, I think all sorts of classical liberal views are very important. I think that the Classical Liberal tradition, going back to Locke, the

importance of property rights as the bulwark of liberty, is critical. However, I side with Burke, which is that it is far better for all of us to depend on accumulated wisdom rather than to trade on our stock of limited reason (Gove).

Gove's view of Classical Liberalism exists on a spectrum: he does not self-identify as being on the extreme ('some of them purer'). His liberalism is set within certain confines ('property rights'; 'accumulated wisdom'), the inviolability of which has become a traditional conservative consideration, reinforced through policy leitmotifs such as 'property-owning democracy' (Thatcher, 1975; Burke, 1790:9 cf. Pareto, 1935:2147, 448), or philosophical foundations like respect for institutions, social customs and values (Norman, 2013:198-200; Burke, 1791:103 cf. Pareto:1963:1122 [Femia, 2011:84]).

Taylor, however, is of the view that Gove's philosophical appeals are more rhetoric than reality:

The Free Schools are supposed to emerge bottom-up from community organisation. But the governance going forward – I mean, for example, lots of Academies and Academy chains don't have governing bodies. Many Academy Chains are highly centralised. And they're highly centralised on a national scale (Taylor [Appendix XII.xii]).

This accord with Balls' view that '2010 was much more a return to break free from local authority control', but this 'control' is refuted by Taylor:

One of the most absurd things – and Tony (Blair) was guilty of this, and Gove is guilty of it – is this ludicrous notion that we are removing the yoke of local education authorities. Local education authorities haven't been a yoke for a long time. So these schools are not sloughing off local education authority control: they're just basically grabbing a few extra grand, and saying, "Well, given that we're pretty much independent anyway from oversight, we may as well have this academy status." So they're doing it for entirely self-interested reasons (Taylor).

Gibb illuminates the disparity, explaining that 'local authority control' was exercised as 'soft power'. When asked what distinguishes a school run by a LA from one run by the DfE, he responded:

Because a local authority will actually seek to run it. Although after the 1998 (*School Standards and Framework*) Act they had less direct power to appoint head teachers, they had a lot of soft power to appoint head teachers. And they used that soft power. They held meetings. They talked to heads. They courted deputies. Those individuals know their career prospects depend on adhering to the local authority orthodoxies and "advice", in inverted commas. So they're not really independent of the local authority. And their funding comes from the local authority, so they can't really act in an independent way. It would be very difficult for a school, in a particular local authority, to deviate significantly from the approach that the local authority would want the school to take (Gibb).

There is here a sense almost of conspiracy: '...they used that soft power. They held meetings. They talked to heads. They courted deputies.' It is a picture of an educational elite intent on propagating an oligarchy almost by subversive means. In the Govite model, there is an assertion of greater democratic accountability with minimal central intervention:

...of course the oversight from the centre will want to identify academies and academy chains that are under-performing, and that's when they will intervene. It's a much more management-by-exception approach, and there's no intention of imposing, through this soft power, any kind of approach to education on those academies (Gibb).

The subsidiarity-centralisation tension is nuanced: he grasps the need for a Whiggish liberal challenge to the Tory ‘benign paternalism’ which is morally obliged to intervene when necessary. But on the question of the potential abuse of centralised power, he is philosophical: ‘There’s just no way around that in our system’ (Appendix XII.xiii).

Gibb makes the negative-freedom need for subsidiarity manifest: free schools had to be freed by central power from local authorities not only because many were ‘weak’ on attainment (Adonis, 2012a:49f); they were recruiting weak leaders. If (as Adonis muses [2012a:28] apocryphally) the centralisation of authority was such that ‘there were heads who had to phone up the council to get a light bulb changed’, it is not unreasonable (as Gibb avers) that local authorities ‘courted’ staff and bestowed promotion on those who subscribed to ‘local authority orthodoxies and “advice”’. It isn’t clear how far back in LEA/LA history Adonis is going, but the ‘what’ of necessary change had been identified: the pace of the ‘how’ was a contentious theme, to which I shall now turn.

iii) INCREMENTAL EVOLUTION vs RADICAL REVOLUTION

The rate at which Gove expanded Academies and rolled out Free Schools was a cause of disquiet across the political divide. Anon LD spoke of Gove driving forward ‘with a vengeance’; Balls said Gove had decided to ‘rip up’ Academies; Taylor spoke of ‘a headlong rush’; Gibb called it a ‘revolution’; Adonis said that revolution of ‘the entire school system... wasn’t intended’; and Baker wanted to progress ‘a bit more slowly’ (Appendix XII.xiv). But Skidmore is adamant that the reforms ‘must be seen in terms of an evolutionary context’ (Appendix XII.xv); while Boles asserts a categorical contradiction: ‘I think it is a revolution. It’s taking a bloody long time. Revolutions are usually quick. It’s a sustained and deep reform.’ But while Skidmore eschews any notion of revolution, he does say of Gove’s centralisation: ‘I do believe that you have to have that initial first push in order to break up, smash up the structures. In that way there is an element of revolution, but it always needs to be sold in terms of a big package, in support of evolution.’

Burkean incrementalism

Framing a policy in the context of evolutionary progression may be politically expedient, but it does not make the policy either evolutionary or progressive. Skidmore articulates a distinctly Burkean incrementalism toward a progressive global outlook:

..in education you have to maintain raised standards against a backdrop of a changing world, a changing global world, in which pupils in India, or 85% of pupils in Singapore do Maths beyond 16. Only 15% of pupils here achieve that... I believe passionately in aspiration. But aspiration is a meaningless word unless you provide the opportunity that goes with it. That is why I feel that in terms of taking decisions now that can be uncomfortable, but have to be quite sudden decisions

given the pace of the global race, which we have been slipping behind in (Skidmore [Appendix XII.xvi]).

Adonis also alludes to the Burkean theme: 'I've always taken the view that you can sell things much more easily in England, given the long and broken history and deep conservatism and all that, if you've got a precedent.' He stresses his incrementalism in developing the Academies policy 'on the basis of reforms that have clearly worked'. He says that Baker 'was a very great and largely successful education secretary', and Academies are a 'direct lineal descendent' of CTCs. His consideration of policy is prefaced with words like 'developing' and phrases like 'guiding light' and 'build on'.

While not negating the organic nature of the reforms, Baker says that they represent 'a tremendous change, because it's irreversible', which would indeed be something of a revolution if it were true: the Diceyan doctrine of the sovereignty of Parliament is complex (if it exists at all), but it essentially prescribes that no government may bind its successors (notwithstanding that prerogative powers have been [and are still being] incrementally eroded, and the Executive 'bound' by quasi-constitutional statutes, particularly relating to human rights [outlined in Chapter IV.i]). Jones (2013:336) confirms that the reforms are 'on such a scale that they will be hard to amend', but 'hard' is not impossible. He continues with the observation that the 'market shaped' system is 'likely to survive a change of minister, or even a change of government – Labour will modify, not substantially change them' (*ibid.*).

Religious pluralism

Eschewing the more spiritual concerns of Rowan Williams (2011) that free schools are causing 'anxiety' because they constitute 'a radical, long-term policy', Norman explains:

But what I think about that is that it's always been a feature of change, and because education has always been a treasured aspect of our politics, whether it's part of the political system or not, therefore education trails the nature of the society that it's in (Norman).

He expands on this by observing the historical incremental shifts in the liberties and coercions of denominational Christianity (Appendix XII.xvii). Gove referred candidly to the opposition he received from Rowan Williams: 'It was striking when I saw the Archbishop that he was very concerned about any diminution of the role of local authorities. I thought that it was more important that the Church of England should ask itself why is Religious Education not taught as well as it should be?' (Appendix XII.xviii). It appears that in private meetings with the Secretary of State, the Archbishop of Canterbury was articulating the same concerns he had previously expressed in the *New Statesman*. Gove's instinct was to tell the Archbishop what the Church's priorities ought to be: local democracy is a structural matter for the state; the RE syllabus and school ethos are 'more important' questions for the Church.

For Boles, however, RE is a matter for the state: a core curriculum subject: ‘..it should give probably greater attention to Christianity because this is a Christian country by constitution and history, even while obviously now being much more than that too..’ (Appendix XII.xix). Gove develops this theme of religious pluralism. When asked if he could foresee free schools being freed to the extent of being able to reject the 1944 (1988 and 2006) requirements for collective worship and mandatory RE; that is, for a free school to be free to espouse an atheist-humanist worldview, he responded: ‘You could do, yes. In fact I explicitly said to Richard Dawkins, if he wanted to set one up then I would be delighted, in order to prove the point that the policy is, in that sense, truly liberal’ (Appendix XII.xx).

In the context of a polity which sustains the Erastian settlement of the Established Church, this is quite a significant, if not profoundly radical statement. Notwithstanding the market caveat that parents may not opt to send their children to such a school, Gove foresaw (indeed, would support) the eventual (if not imminent) unravelling of foundational precepts of the Butler Act (reiterated as recently as 2006) which have been incorporated into every subsequent free-school funding agreement. Gove (and other Conservatives) may take the view that such a reform is evolutionary, being contiguous with the incrementally-changing needs of an increasingly pluralised society, but Liberals would incline to the view that such a reform is long overdue, and would be happy for the break to be immediate and ‘radical’. Of this possibility, Norman observes of the historic Anglican foundation:

That has worked over time because the Church of England has been a very, very, undemanding host, as it were. Now, how it changes as the culture wars take over, and churches become more demanding, and expectations on the public realm become more demanding, is a further interesting question. But the line that I always think of, in this context, is someone saying, “Look, I’m not a religious person. I’m a practising member of the Church of England.” It’s what Oakeshott calls a ‘watery Anglicanism’, and that’s been actually rather a distinctive part of the British polity over many years (Norman).

Accepting that some Christian denominations will take issue with the assertion that the Church of England ‘has been a very, very, undemanding host’ – not least in the relatively recent demands of the Lords Spiritual relating to Baker’s 1988 reforms – the fact remains that ‘Britain is a) changing and b) a historically very mixed bag’ (Norman), and becoming more so, requiring further organic/pragmatic accommodation of religious plurality.

On this, Gove manifested his Whiggish instinct (examined in Chapter IV.ii). This may have caused the (then) Archbishop of Canterbury some ‘anxiety’, but the Bishops essentially see themselves as constituting an element of Burkean institutional privilege, if not of Mill’s educational (and educated) elite, ensuring (as far as they can) the perpetuation of the Liberal Arts and the inculcation of a moral culture (notwithstanding that Mill himself believed religion should be taught ‘non-dogmatically’ [Mill, 1998:119 cf. Garforth, 1979:193]). As Shrobsbree (1988:191) observes, Whig reformist attitudes in education may be expressed, in effect and operation, as Conservative

values. And such attitudes and values require ‘guardians’, of which Gove perceives himself to be one:

Traditional Tory philosophy, with its view of society as a hierarchy, naturally implied an élitist view of government in which ‘the wiser, the more expert, and the more opulent conduct, and by conducting enlighten and protect the weaker, the less knowing and the less provided with the goods of fortune’. In Tory philosophy the governing élite did not have any innate superior abilities but was formed by being brought up from childhood in ‘favourable circumstances’. This ‘Old Whig’ philosophy of the eighteenth century formed Tory views of the nineteenth, and Burke’s description of how the governing élite should be formed was strikingly reminiscent of the common defence of the public schools – that the merit of the public schools lay not in their examination results but in the character of those who came from them.. (Shrosbree, 1988:59f).

Jones (2013:331) says that Gove ‘has the strategic instincts of a revolutionised conservative’, leaving us guessing about the philosophy driving his Labour counterparts.

Insofar as Academies adopted the governance structure of church schools, and are thereby permitted to forge a distinct ethos and character after that pattern of control, it is unsurprising that the churches saw the reform in a mainly positive light. Ryan says: ‘The Church of England was much keener on Academies, or willing to work with us, because actually, as a result of the development of Academies, they got more Church of England secondary schools than the Catholic Church’, observing that the Roman Catholic Church dioceses ‘liked to ensure that they appoint the majority of the governors in their schools’. Another interviewee said (off the record):

Remember in passing, if you look at the statistics, the schools which are most likely to have an above average level of affluence of their intake, relative to catchment, are Church of England schools. I think that is the opposite is true of Catholic education and of other, smaller religious groups. There has historically been a tendency for a Church of England school to draw, from a wider area, pupils into what ends up being a more affluent catchment. So in that sense, I think the Academies movement was a challenge to those trends. I fear that they’re reinforced in the Gove model.

There are obvious sensitivities and ongoing tensions, in particular relating to admissions. But a consequence of accepting the principle (and expanding the reality) of religious equality in the state system challenged the traditional Labour opposition to faith schools:

..we felt logically that if you are going to have Christian schools being supported by the state then it is hard to argue that there should not be Muslim or Sikh or Greek Orthodox or more Jewish schools or whatever. So we did support more faith schools, and David announced the first Muslim school in I think it was ’98. It was the Islamia school in Brent, and we gradually supported more of those (Ryan).

Interestingly, despite increasing social secularity, Labour never sought to address the further logical development of schools with a humanist-atheist ethos, because ‘the act of daily worship is a difficult one’ (Ryan). Acknowledging that it is variously interpreted by school heads and governing bodies, and ‘not one of the most enforced pieces of legislation’, ‘for a school to set up and say we are not going to adhere to that with that part of legislation... would be quite difficult because it is something that is still very much on the statue books’. As mentioned in Chapter VII.ii, the ‘Trojan Horse’ scandal in Birmingham arose while I was coding the interviews. Not all the affected schools

were Academies (two were LA controlled), but in the autonomy granted there are obvious difficulties around the principle of religious determination of school direction, especially concerning the definition and discernment of ‘extremism’, and the inculcation of ‘British values’.

The drive to ‘smash the system’

Adonis is unequivocal about the nature of reform: ‘It’s a revolution’, he says, before reasoning: ‘It was incremental in the sense that it wasn’t like the comprehensive reform, or indeed even the Grant Maintained reform, that the reform was geared from the outset for all schools’ (Appendix XII.xxi). But Taylor observes of Adonis and Gove: ‘They’ve both got a slightly Trotskyite element to them, which is “Just let’s smash the system. As long as we smash the system, something better will emerge.”’ This corroborates Jones (2013:334), who describes Gove as ‘militant’; and Tim Laughton MP who, having been dismissed from the DfE in the reshuffle of 4th September 2012, criticised his running of the Department as ‘terribly anachronistic, terribly bureaucratic, terribly formal’ (PoliticsHome, 2012). He also said that ‘children’s care was being neglected at the expense of Mr Gove’s “radical” changes to the running of schools’. Setting aside Laughton’s understandable animus, the manifest assertion was one of ‘slightly’ autocratic tendencies toward ‘radical’ permanent revolution, overthrowing the feudal LA regime to establish a proletarian struggle to win popular support.

Pareto favoured continuity over disruptive transformation: he ‘was suspicious of deliberate change, which – to him – was typically based on wishful thinking, not concrete knowledge’ (Femia, 2011:51). His inclination was toward incrementalism, and yet ‘revolutions may be “beneficial to a community” in so far as they manifest “salutary” social forces and eliminate a “spineless”, enervating ruling class’ (p52 cf. Pareto, 1935:2191). A sclerotic elite justifies a degree of revolution. Taylor referred to a speech by former Cameron advisor Steve Hilton given at the RSA, which provides a possible insight into the reasons for Gove’s perceived haste:

But there were elements of this in Steve’s presentation, which was, “Look, we know that Tony Blair made the huge mistake of not doing lots of radical stuff as soon as he got into office, and so that, by the time he did his radical stuff, he’d lost his political base. We’re not going to make the same mistake.” So it’s just rushing headlong, and I just don’t think it’s responsible (Taylor).

But, for Taylor, challenging the institutions or the system isn’t necessarily un-conservative:

I have problems with the system... I don’t think it offends the Burkean principle, however, because I think that it’s a revolution which is about dismantling state planning. I imagine that revolutions are permitted if the goal of revolutions is to move from, as Tony (Blair) would say, national monoliths, to thousands of more autonomous institutions (Taylor).

And he refutes with empirical evidence the caricature left-wing portrayal of Gove’s reforms as ‘Thatcherite’ or ‘neo-liberal’ marketisation which nullifies local democracy:

The idea is there’s a revolution because Academies are seizing power against the local authority, and then we’re going to have a market. Well, actually neither of those things is happening. Our

Academy is working very happily with its local authority. It's probably got a better relationship with its local authority now than it had before it was an academy. We don't sit in the school going, "Well, our future all depends upon how successfully we compete for pupils in the local pool." That's an issue. But what we're much more concerned about, terrified of, quaking in our boots about, is bloody Ofsted, the central, hierarchical, bureaucratic overseer (Taylor).

With Ofsted now charged with 'policing' how schools embody 'British values' – a concept which the Church of England's Chief Education Officer says 'has not been thought through in sufficient detail or depth to deal with the complexities of our society or school system' (Genders, 2014) – it is clear that state inspection has moved beyond buildings, curriculum, pedagogy and standards of attainment: the task has become one of ensuring the inculcation of an ethos of 'relevance' and social meaning (Scruton, 2001:142). While this isn't 'smashing' the system, it is something of a departure from the preceding framework, at least in terms made explicit. Academies and Free Schools are ethically free only to the extent that they reify an essentially conservative force – the organic inculcation of fellowship, character and social bonds. If 'British values' are somehow transcendent, they become a quasi-religious creed of 'democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect, and and tolerance of those of different faiths and beliefs' (DfE, 2014c:5). If a secretary of state can require teachers to propagate the 'Prevent Strategy' (HMG, 2011 – the original articulation of those values) in order to combat radicalisation, extremism and insidious terrorist ideologies, he or she can also require them to propagate notions of equality and social justice, or, indeed, Anglican notions of national loyalty and the fraternal society. This accords with Pareto's view of (organised) religion as 'the indispensable cement of every known human society' (Femia, 2011:20): 'the social effects of a religion are virtually unrelated to its theology or theoretical principles but depend primarily on the sentiments they develop and strengthen in men' (p21). While some may see this as a conservative-liberal tension between the autonomous institution and the need for societal cohesion, there is a manifest necessity, as Scruton (2001:134) observes, for a suitable establishment 'to broker the activities of people in every autonomous field (which) can exist in relative independence without risk to the social order'. The 'system' is not so much 'smashed' as superseded by an alternative.

The 'harm' principle

While Gove liberally appropriates Mill to support his Free Schools and academisation programme, Anon LD thinks the policy (or the way it is 'worked out') fails a fundamental Millite precept:

I'm a liberal, not a libertarian. And I think there's a big difference. The difference is really about, "Do what you like, as long as it doesn't harm somebody else." I think there is a big danger in this programme of harming somebody else, because of the way it's worked out. Not so much the philosophy behind it, but the way it's worked out (Anon LD).

What Taylor asserts is a drive to 'smash the system', Anon LD joins Rowan Williams in perceiving the resulting 'harm' (though Williams' contention is philosophical: Anon LD's is 'not so much the philosophy', but praxis). There is a manifest allusion to Mill: 'The only purpose for which power can

be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others' (Mill, 1998:14 [1865:6]). West (1965) observes that Mill 'extended the ideas of harm and cruelty to include the act of *neglecting to develop the child's mental faculties*'. When Anon LD was asked directly if s/he agreed with Mill on this, the response was: 'I do really. I believe we should have freedom as long as it doesn't hurt somebody else and their opportunity to also have freedom and to succeed.' The objection was not to Gove's liberal policy, but with a perceived libertarian 'market' praxis which, it is averred, inclines toward a 'survival-of-the-fittest' or 'dog-eat-dog' notion of harm, a manifest leitmotif of the interviews, to which I shall now turn.

iv) MARKET/CHOICE vs MORALITY/CHANGE

In opposition, Gove was preceded by Willetts, of whom Skidmore disclosed:

The idea of setting up new good schools, he was very influenced by Caroline Hoxby from Harvard. This whole idea of, they kept on quoting all the time, "The rising tide that lifts all boats." So the idea that if you set new schools, they would act as a catalyst for driving up the standard in all schools (Skidmore).

Hoxby is Professor in Economics at Stanford University: her 'catalyst' is parental choice, educational vouchers and institutional competition, which she believes lead to improved teaching and higher standards. Moreover, 'policies that reduce choice...or the benefits of choice (more state control of school expenditure) are likely to increase the share of students in private schools and reduce the share of voters who are interested in the general well-being of public education' (Hoxby, 2000:1237). Her hypothesis is not without criticism (e.g., Rothstein, 2005), but the appeal is to a philosophical aphorism: 'The rising tide that lifts all boats', which is attributed to Adam Smith and often applied to the functioning of the free market (Farmer, 2005:39). Reay (2008:643f) observes that both here and in the USA it is middle-class parents who are 'strongly inclined to choice', and she refers to evidence that 'choice systems promote rather than ameliorate educational inequalities' (p644). The need for further 'top-down' research on any free-school/(in)equality correlation in England's market/choice system is evident.

When asked to identify the fundamental philosophy that underpins the extension of Academies and the creation of Free Schools, one Conservative responded:

...it's trying to recreate, within the state sector, the benign and beneficial aspects of market forces. The theory is, if you can harness those forces, and apply them to the school system, you will get the same benefits of ever-rising standards, as people compete for pupils, and therefore money, on the basis of higher standards. So that's the theory. To do that, you need these bodies to be independently run, without interference from local authorities. So that's the philosophy behind them.

This wasn't 'off the record' in interview: in negotiating subsequent use, there was a request not to attribute this, but it isn't at all clear why: it is quite an unremarkable (and commonly known)

philosophy. But the redaction request does suggest a certain sensitivity to advocating educational manifest ‘market forces’ so candidly. In this paradigm, the market is seen to possess ‘benign and beneficial’ attributes, as distinct, presumably, from malignant and disadvantageous aspects. This raises the questions of how these may be distinguished and how schools, teachers and students may be insulated from associated systemic harm. There may latent allusions here what Blond (2010) refers to frequently as the ‘moral market’.

The ‘conspiracy’ of market-choice morality

What Adonis refers to as his ‘deep philosophical view’ of ‘the wise parent’ is predicated on the parent having the freedom to choose. This does not negate a role for the state: Adonis is not saying that all parents are able to make informed choices, or, indeed, that they should be free to do so: state education should be modelled on the wishes of the ‘wise parent’. Presumably, it remains for the state to determine the extent and define the limitations of that wisdom. As Mill (1909:953) observes: ‘The uncultivated cannot be competent judges of cultivation.’ And Reay (2008:644) notes: ‘New Labour policies, no less than old Tory ones, were based on a notion of the “ideal” parent’. Whatever the centrally-determined criteria, there is no doubt that the Labour, Liberal Democrat and Conservative parties have consensually adopted a market-choice approach, and Boles make the doctrine manifest:

What we want to return to is a position where the guarantee is of both the fact that education will be provided to everyone, and also that it will all be above a standard that’s reasonable to expect. That thereafter you effectively have that model where people can take their money, more or less, where they want (Boles).

But Taylor observes of the ‘market’ trajectory:

You might just say it’s part of a global, liberal conspiracy. But it is interesting, when you look at the work for example that Microsoft did globally, that the notion that competencies should play a bigger part in developing what children should learn at school seems to be a global phenomenon. Interestingly, we’ve been approached by China and Malaysia, because of our curriculum ‘Opening Minds’, which is in a state of flux. Because they think that they are turning out people who have high levels of knowledge but are pretty weak at some of the core competencies, which employers say they now want (Taylor).

While ‘global, liberal conspiracy’ is an unpalatable assertion, associated, as ‘conspiracy’ so often is in the socio-political sphere, with expressions of extremism or paranoia (e.g., Cameron, 2015, contra ‘British values’), it has been observed in the process of policy formulation in New Zealand that ‘perpetrators strive together to steer the policy process in a direction which they believe to be worthwhile and possible’ (Wallis, 1997:1). To ‘strive together to steer’ is unremarkable in liberal democratic polity, except perhaps where the ‘steer’ is contentious but those who ‘strive’ remain covert. It is a point observed by Pareto, who came to see the nineteenth-century ruling class as ‘a great nexus of influence and power, a conspiracy of public officials and plutocrats, concealing itself behind a façade of rigged elections and phony democratic rhetoric’ (Femia, 2011:7). Thus the cross-party, self-perpetuating circulation of Pareto’s elites sustains the necessary epistocracy (cf. Young,

2015, on ‘the cognitive elite... becoming a hereditary elite’). ‘A policy conspiracy is conceived as an exclusive social network of policy participants who commit themselves to the advancement of a policy quest which embodies their shared hopes and who promote one another to positions of influence on the basis of the mutual trust they develop through regular interaction’ (Wallis, 1997:1).

The philosophical question, then, is not whether or not state education can be or has been marketised by ‘policy conspiracy’: as academics observe, the mainstream of Labour and the Conservatives (and the Liberal Democrats through coalition) were united on this:

New Labour post-1997 committed itself to continuing the Conservative policies of creating a diversity of schools, with market competition between schools fuelled by league table publication, school ‘choice’, the extension of a specialist school programme, and enhanced private funding and influence in education (Tomlinson, 2005:156)

The question concerns the market-morality tensions inherent to notions of ‘social justice’ – the equal treatment of all as a collective social responsibility – eschewed for many conservatives by Hayek, but expressed for many liberals by Mill (1879:ch5):

Society should treat all equally well who have deserved equally well of it, that is, who have deserved equally well absolutely. This is the highest abstract standard of social and distributive justice; towards which all institutions, and the efforts of all virtuous citizens, should be made in the utmost degree to converge.

This imperative of ‘should be made’ is a necessary coercion by the elite to ensure social justice.

Economic social justice

For Balls, education is a matter of economic social justice: Academies were primarily concerned with matters of equality:

..about genuinely delivering equal chances – a more aggressively ambitious view of equality of opportunity. So when I see the first tranche of Gove Academies only being outstanding schools. Schools which are disproportionately in higher affluent areas, that’s contrary to my view of equal chances... That has a direct impact on the resourcing and the life chances of the other kids in the school down the road. It is a moral view of equality and the incentives you need to deliver that in a fair way, but also in a way which doesn’t blunt dynamism (Balls [Appendix XII.xxii]).

But he perceives Gove’s conception of social justice differently:

The Gove model is that you wait for pupil walk and parent choice to move students out of the under-performing school into the alternative Free School or higher performing Academy down the road. That wasn’t what we were doing. That was not the reality of the Blair/Adonis/Me Academy model. We were about transformational change in the under-performing school. It’s a very, very philosophically different model. I think if you go back to look at the debates which we had at the time of the legislation, you see a different philosophical approach (Balls).

Indeed, for Balls, Gove’s model is not an expression of social justice at all, being crudely concerned with ‘pupil walk and parent choice’ to manifest educational detriment. But it is interesting to observe Balls’ expression of co-ownership of Academy policy: it was not the Blair/Adonis/Blunkett policy,

but the 'Blair/Adonis/Me model'. Asked to expound his understanding of Gove's policy, he explained:

...(Gove) believes that the sort of economic choice incentive is a stronger driver of behaviour. In the case of going to buy a cup of coffee, if you don't like the coffee and it's cheaper down the road, well go down the road... I assume that he has to take the view that the children who get caught along the way, which will be disproportionately from less privileged backgrounds, that that is a price which is worth paying... What he thinks is that the kid from the disadvantaged background, plucked out to succeed in the Grammar school, that success is of greater value, or of more importance, than the under-performance of the kids who were told at 11 "You're second class", and went to a secondary modern. I don't think that's either rational economics or right morally (Balls [Appendix XII.xxiii]).

Gove's conception of social justice as conceived by Balls is a narrative of unbridled capitalist notions of 'survival of the fittest'. There is no apprehension of conservative conceptualisations of equality or justice, or, indeed, of the location of the market in socialist morphology (see Freedom 1996:477-480). There is no apprehension (or, at least, no bilateral acknowledgement) that Gove has not abrogated state responsibility for student (or parent) welfare; that he inclines toward the Millite view of social and distributive justice which seeks to respond reasonably to the misfortunes presented to us by life's circumstances. Gove is deemed to be not 'right morally' because he does not view social justice as a remedy for *injustices*, but as a political programme to express 'sentiments that we share' (Scruton, 2014:41).

The Gove-critical academic leitmotif that 'competitive, parent-driven' (Wright 2012:285) education is comparable to buying coffee or contiguous with social atomisation is a fundamental misunderstanding of the Mill-Pareto-Thatcher dicta of society. For Mill (1875:469), 'the phenomena of society are, and can be, nothing but the actions and passions of human beings'. For Thatcher, her oft-quoted assertion that 'there is no such thing as society' was followed by a precise understanding of how society may be apprehended: 'There is a living tapestry of men and women and people and the beauty of that tapestry and the quality of our lives will depend upon how much each of us is prepared to take responsibility for ourselves and each of us prepared to turn round and help by our own efforts those who are unfortunate' (Keay, 1987 cf. Pring, 2000:60). For Pareto, community is understood as both a collectivity of individuals and as an organisational unit 'with a real existence over and above the individuals who compose it' (Femia 2011:64; Pareto, 1935:2133); and further, 'The fact that we deal with *individua* by no means implies a number of *individua* taken together are to be considered a simple sum. They form compounds which, like chemical compounds, may have properties that are not the sum of the properties of their components' (Pareto, 1935:66). This line of thinking may represent, for some, an incomprehensible dichotomy, but:

Historians of political thought should resist the natural temptation to iron out inconsistencies... it is worth reminding the reader that Pareto was a liberal economist whose standard of Pareto-optimality identified the well-being of the community with the well-being of each of the individual members (Femia 2011:65).

What is true for individuals in society is also true of schools in community: they are rationally contingent and mutually dependent in a ‘living tapestry’.

Economic incentives

When it comes to his support for Academies, Balls’ manifest appeal is to his academic expertise: ‘Because I’m an economist and I know incentives matter, I want people to be able to succeed, earn and do well; make their choices..’ (Appendix XII.xxiv). But for his support for academisation, Hancock draws on the same discipline as his authority: ‘I’m a trained economist. That makes me think about the incentives in a system..’ (Appendix XII.xxv). Both make manifest the axiom that ‘incentives matter’, but the philosophical disparity is evident: for Balls, the emphasis is on outcome (‘fairer, more equal chances’); for Hancock, it is on cause (‘how people behave’). There is no philosophical division between the two over the fundamental market-choice paradigm: the disjuncture consists in differing understandings of human nature which lead to divergent apprehensions of social contract theory. For Balls, free schools must rationally contend for social equality against individualism and isolation; for Hancock, social equilibrium overrides equality, and it is attained only when we acknowledge that man is neither rational nor perfectible. Hancock is close to Pareto on this, for whom, ‘the social contract remains a ridiculous notion’ (Femia, 2011:89) precisely because ‘in a manner similar to Burke (he believed) that human society is held together by deeply-rooted sentiments... by psychological needs and customary loyalties’ (p90). For Hancock, ‘economics is flawed because it makes unrealistic assumptions about human behaviour’. In this he also echoes Pareto’s view about the inadequacy of ‘calculations of rational interest’ and ‘contractual obligations conjured up by speculative philosophy’ (*ibid.*), notwithstanding Pareto’s assertion that Rousseau’s version ‘is in vogue today because we are living in a democratic age’, but ‘Hobbes’s theory might again prevail tomorrow if a period favourable to absolutism should recur’ (Femia, 2011:90; Pareto, 1935:1146, 1504-7).

Rationally, there can be no incentivised choice without competitive division and diversification. Some Labour interviewees and Anon LD referred numerous times to Gove’s ‘divisive’ Free School policy and his ‘fragmentation’ of state education. Adonis manifestly views diversification as justifiable:

..because the fragmentation which has taken place in respect of Academies and Free Schools is only the institutionalisation of strong, responsible management, school by school. The purpose of it is to lead to far better schools. So much, much less fragmentation than in the old system where you had massive fragmentation between good schools, mediocre schools and bad schools... It’s like the same old argument about the ‘two-tier system’... The whole purpose of these reforms is to try and have a ‘One-Nation’ society which doesn’t have this massive dichotomy between successful and unsuccessful schools (Adonis [Appendix XII.xxvi]).

Educational marketisation as expressed through diversity and choice becomes, for Adonis, the pursuit of a Disraelian/Tawneyan ‘One Nation’ conception of social morality. Autonomy is seen to

mitigate damaging fragmentation and remedy the chronic injustices caused by a multi-tier system which yielded and shielded poor governance. There are limits to this, as Boles articulates, when asked about Neil O'Brien's assertion that the money must flow with parental choice:

I'm not myself a believer that any time soon we're going to want to allow people to top-up their money, and take it off to a posh school, because I just don't think that's politically practical or really justifiable. The money is scarce enough as it is, without imposing a dead weight cost on yourself, just simply to be able to follow completely pure theory. But I think, short of that, ultimately Neil is right (Boles).

If the ultimate objective is that funding is to follow the student, then we arrive at the point originally envisioned by Keith Joseph: if not quite an educational 'voucher', it is a manifestation of a free-market meritocracy framed by a sociology of virtue, or an educational 'social market', the objective of which is to deliver 'the best' pedagogy, inculcate ('British'/character) values and so 'raise the tide' for all schools. The marketised 'voucher' is not antithetical to societal good or educational progress: 'it is a gross mistake to accuse a person who studies only economic actions – or *homo economicus* – of neglecting or even scorning moral actions – that is, the *homo ethicus*. For Pareto, such criticism is the equivalent of saying that geometry neglects and scorns the physical properties of substances' (Femia, 2011:22f; Pareto, 1971:12f).

v) PROGRESSIVE PEDAGOGY vs TRADITIONAL TEACHING

Gove (and others) framed his reforms with the theme of 'progressive education' versus more 'traditional' methods, frequently caricatured as 'the Blob' and 'Gradgrind' respectively – terms which illustrate the polarities¹⁰ but cloud the discourse. There are many 'either-or' antitheses (e.g., Dewey, 1951; Hirsch, 1999, 2006) of whether education is more a process of child-centred development from within or core-knowledge-formation from without, but the narrative surrounding Free Schools essentially distilled these philosophies to the following broad tenets:

¹⁰ Not political polarities, but pedagogical ones. ED Hirsch, for example, is a US Democrat. Having been accused by a Harvard education professor of being 'a neoconservative caricature of contemporary American education', he responded: 'I'm practically a socialist' (Tyre, 2014).

Table 15: Traditional and Progressive education contrasted

Traditional	Progressive
Education should be reasonably authoritarian and <i>hierarchical</i>	Education must be <i>egalitarian</i>
The curriculum should be <i>subject-centred</i>	It must be <i>child-centred</i> and <i>relevant</i>
Emphasis should be on <i>content</i>	Emphasis must be on <i>skills</i>
(Book) <i>knowledge</i> and <i>accuracy</i> are essential	<i>Experience</i> , experiment and understanding are more important
Rationality and the consideration of <i>factual evidence</i> should predominate	Creativity and <i>feelings</i> are more important than facts
Recognition of <i>right and wrong</i>	Right and wrong depend on one's <i>point of view</i>
There should be a <i>product</i>	It is the <i>process</i> that matters
The product, or knowledge of content, should be <i>objectively tested</i> or measured	Criteria provide a framework for <i>subjective assessment</i> or tasks based on skills
<i>Competition</i> is welcomed	<i>Co-operation</i> must take precedence
<i>Choice</i> between different curricula and/or different types of school is essential to maximise individual strengths	<i>Entitlement</i> for all replaces choice and differentiation; <i>equal opportunities</i> can be used to construct equality of result

Source: Campaign for Real Education, 1999.

The source is important: it is perceived philosophical dualism, though *Plowden* (1967:7) did articulate the inclination:

..at the heart of the educational process lies the child. No advances in policy, no acquisitions of new equipment have their desired effect unless they are in harmony with the nature of the child, unless they are fundamentally acceptable to him... Knowledge of the manner in which children develop, therefore, is of prime importance, both in avoiding educationally harmful practices and in introducing effective ones.

While exposition of pedagogical philosophy is beyond this thesis, it is to be observed that Gove (2009b) claimed Hirsch as an inspiration, and a few interviewees made it a latent theme, so some knowledge of the ‘slogans’ of ‘child-centredness’ and the ‘contemporary educational jargon’ of ‘sterile and restrictive clichés’ (Garforth, 1979:73) is relevant, as it illuminates the consensual aversion to a perceived educational ‘establishment’ or ‘the Blob’.

The ‘tyranny of the expertois’

Many interviewees referred to the ‘education establishment’ without defining its make-up, perhaps because they all dealt with it to some extent and were cautious about causing offence. Being recently shuffled out of his role as a DfE minister, Gibb helpfully expounded:

The education establishment are people whose job it is to administer the education system. So it is not leading head teachers. It is directors of education, or directors of children’s services, as they’re called now in local authorities, and their deputies, and the senior staff. It is the Department for Education civil servants. I accept that. They are part of the education establishment. And it is the education academics in the universities, so the senior staff in the education faculty of universities. That is the education establishment (Gibb).

This is a summary of the political ideology or ‘prevailing orthodoxy about education’ from which he understands schools are being freed, and it is expressed in terms of an elite – the *expertois* – which

is bolstered by graduated expressions of socialism: ‘Well, I suspect that Labour are comfortable with the orthodoxies because it’s not a million miles from their own philosophy’ (Gibb). He identifies the propagation by an elite of a certain educational orthodoxy, and concedes the complicity of the ‘power elite’ in the DfE, but not of the close-knit policy community as I have established (Chapter VII.iii), who are predominantly i) privately educated; ii) Oxbridge (PPE) graduates; iii) male (and white). It may be observed that while Gibb sees the education establishment elite as a self-perpetuating, conspiratorial oligarchy that secretly manipulates events in their own (ideological) interest, the new regime follows established constitutional principles and operates openly. Its membership is not closed, he avers, but it is defined principally in terms of what it is not, what it is antithetical to, and many of its members are drawn from a particular elite experience of education.

The education establishment is ‘the Blob’, as postulated by Gove, to which Gibb explains his philosophical objection:

..they tend to adhere to one prevailing orthodoxy about education. The reason for that is – I call it the tyranny of the *expertois* – that in any field, whether it’s the private sector or the state sector, where there is an ideological divide, one side or other will win that debate. And they will use that power, then, to exclude others from seniority within it (Gibb [Appendix XII.xxvii]).

This is the LA ‘control’ from which Blunkett/Adonis and Gove/Gibb desired to liberate all state schools. Twigg agrees that ‘there were severe weaknesses in the old, old system, where all of these things were directly determined by the local authority’. Gibb’s observation of the ‘tyranny of the *expertois*’ accords with elite theory:

When discussing the ‘ruling class’ in so-called liberal democracies, (Pareto) asserts that ‘the chief element’ in what they do ‘is in fact the order, or system, not the conscious will of individuals, who indeed may in certain cases be carried by the system to points where they would never have gone by deliberate choice (Femia, 2011:64f; Pareto, 1935:149).

Gibb was concerned about education reforms over the last 50 years which have proceeded ‘without any accountability to the people of this country’, by virtue of quangos and the absence of debate (Appendix XII.xxviii). He does not perceive himself as belonging to a counter-‘tyranny of the *expertois*’, by virtue of his own education: ‘I was at seven schools, and I was at school between 1965 and 1978. That was the period when the 1964 Labour government’s education reforms were implemented. So I experienced the consequences of those reforms..’ (Gibb [Appendix XII.xxix]).

The 1964 reforms include the rolling out of comprehensivisation, which Gibb identifies as the ‘Labour government’s education reforms’, ignoring the fact that prior to that year 189 comprehensive schools had been established in 39 local authorities (Schwarz [Ed.], 2007:176), many of them (like Leicestershire) Conservative-run, under successive Conservative governments (see, for example, the 1958 White Paper: *Secondary Education for All: a New Drive* [summarised by Dean, 1992:23]). Education Minister Edward Boyle made numerous speeches which opposed bipartite rigidity, so much so that he is perceived by some to be a ‘Conservative champion of comprehensives’

(Crook, 1993:49-62). Allegations that Boyle was ‘out of touch’ with the views of many in his party may be tempered with the political reality: as Wooldridge (1994:332) observes, Boyle (and Douglas-Home) may have been ‘worried that the Party would lose middle-class votes if it identified itself with the 11-plus’.

There is a Conservative disparity between the rhetoric and the reality: ‘Though they habitually praised grammar schools, high-flying Tories also talked of delaying selection, upgrading modern schools, encouraging comprehensive experiments, and merging or eliminating smaller grammar schools’ (Wooldridge, 1994:332): ‘There was a feeling that, under pressure, the defences were being swept away’ (Dean, 1992:30). The psycho-sociological shift was away from measuring the mind with a single examination at 11 (or 12 in some counties) with the resulting categorisation and segregation, toward all-ability inclusion. Many Conservatives, including Boyle, were therefore in sympathy with Labour’s 1964 General Election manifesto commitment to ‘get rid of the segregation of children into separate schools caused by 11-plus selection’, and the assurance that ‘secondary education will be reorganised on comprehensive lines’. They may have differed over the pace and mechanisms of reform, but the broad consensus is a matter of historic fact. Comprehensive schools were considerably expanded under Crosland. By the time Labour was defeated in 1970, their number had risen from 189 to 1,300 (Schwarz [Ed.], 2007:176).

Perhaps this is why Gibb so associates the policy with Labour: the incoming Secretary of State for Education and Science (Thatcher) was known to favour a diverse system of schooling rather than a uniform one, and was sceptical of ‘the sanctity of LEA responsibilities’ (Crook, 1993:62), hence Baker’s 1988 reforms by which the curriculum, inspection and funding of schools all became subject to closer central-government control. This, Gibb says, was necessary because of the prevailing (LEA/educationalist) orthodoxy: ‘You have all these advisors in local authorities, which belong to this national club called the education establishment, going around telling primary schools they should teach maths using chunking and deconstruction’ (Gibb [Appendix XII.xxx]). The LAs and quangos had morphed into ‘the Blob’, but, for Gibb, there is an important issue of accountability:

...a quango is a very different body from an executive agency: it’s very autonomous; it’s very difficult for later politicians to influence its policy. They were deciding the contents of these exams, combined with completely unaccountable, not even theoretically accountable, exam boards, which had then in recent years become profit centres. That combination, I think, was anything but decentralised or accountable to people (Gibb).

To Gibb’s ‘establishment’ *expertois*, Taylor adds the teaching unions, and explains their opposition to Academies and Free Schools in terms of statism and the left-wing tendency toward uniformity: ‘..because they are activist dominated, therefore left-wing, and actually not really representative. So there’s a visceral hostility to modernisation and reform’ (Taylor [Appendix XII.xxxi]). Both Labour and Conservative interviewees identified the principal and consistent

opposition as coming from the teaching unions. For Ryan, this was ‘surprising’, not least because ‘a lot of their members are working in Academies’ and there has been none of the threatened ‘great deterioration in pay and conditions’, but, he says, Academies have ‘tended to offer more generous packages, and they have done so with bringing their staff along’. He expands on the ‘time-warp’ nature of the opposition: ‘In some senses they haven’t even come to terms with the *1988 Education Act*. They are having the same arguments sometimes when league tables get published that faced us when we said that a future Labour government would publish them and that was in 1994’ (Ryan [Appendix XII.xxxii]).

In speaking of the ideological opposition that he encountered, Twigg identified internal divisions within the Labour Party and ‘more broadly, on the left of politics, including the Liberal Democrats’ (Twigg [Appendix XII.xxxiii]). Balls referred specifically to opposition from Labour-controlled LAs: ‘The opposition tended to come from people who said local authorities must always run and manage schools’ (Balls [Appendix XII.xxxiv]). And he observed that there is something in educational culture which is averse to Whitehall imposition:

(Compared to the NHS), schools are completely different, because you’ve got 3,000 units with their own governance and their own head teacher. To be quite honest, whatever the Secretary of State says and whatever the law says, they’ll do what they think is right. It’s a completely opposite culture... That’s the nature of education. In the end, if they believe in it, they’ll do it... But in broad terms, you can’t run the education system through command and control. Which is what they’re trying to do now with Academies. You need to win hearts and minds. Then you need an overarching, more local view, which tells you when things are going wrong (Balls [Appendix XII.xxxv]).

The heart/minds apprehension of education reform leads me finally to the different elite apprehensions of freedom which Academies and Free Schools embody.

vi) FREEDOMS vs UNFREEDOMS

This theme, which obviously pervaded every interview narrative, was (unsurprisingly) most philosophically articulated by politician-philosopher Norman:

But if you think of the classical – and now neo-liberal in particular – position, it is that what matters is the individual. The individual has moral primacy. The individual will cannot be fettered, cannot be properly fettered. In other words, the notion of freedom implicit in liberalism is the absence of impediment to the exercise of the will. This is directly contrary to Burke’s view. Burke’s view is that freedom, liberty, lies in the ability to live your life freely, and that living your life freely can only take place in a social order that enables the exercise of that freedom, whether it’s the rule of law, or the institutions which people associate themselves with: the family, the school, the church, whatever it might be. It’s the existence of those constraints that creates the good life, and in those constraints that freedom exists. So he did and would denounce freedom in the uber-liberal sense as licence, and an abuse of the social order (Norman).

The manifest appeal to family, school, church etc., is not only Burkean: it equates to Pareto’s ‘residue’ (Class II) of the ‘group persistence (which lies) behind all loyalties and all traditions

connected with people, places and institutions. The family, the state, the nation, and the religious community..’ (Femia, 2011:39). Uniquely among interviewees, Norman invoked the term ‘neo-liberal’, but emphasised the philosophical genesis: ‘classical – and now neo-liberal’. It is a categorical shift: neither the philosophy of the individual nor that of the market is ‘neo’: both have their origins in liberal and conservative thinking, and the continuity is self-evident. Elite apprehension may be explored by exposition of some specific freedoms:

Curriculum freedom

Baker explains educational freedom in terms of devolving power in pursuit of a prescribed unified objective: ‘The whole philosophy of this, of course, is that you bring together disparate interests which are dedicated to improving education. That’s the whole philosophy of the Free School movement and of parents.’ He explains this with a hub/rim/spokes metaphor: a subject like Citizenship, for example, he refers to as ‘rim of the wheel stuff’: it ought to be a curriculum matter for individual schools to decide. History, to him, is a ‘hub’ subject, and therefore ought to be centrally imposed in the curriculum:

I was on the committee that recommended (Citizenship). I was always an active member of it, and I was trying to divert it mainly into History. I wanted it to be mainly in the History curriculum, talking about the Constitution of the country, and the law, freedom/law. That’s what I saw as Citizenship (Baker).

It is in the debates around the extent to which the NC ought to be prescriptive that liberal-conservative objectives and tensions are manifest, perhaps because it brings us to the very purpose of state education. Norman observes:

Oakeshott himself believed that some things that many would regard as obvious in politics were profoundly mistaken. He didn’t think that it was the job of the school to turn out a child with lots of qualifications, as such. He didn’t think it was the job of the school, to the extent it had one, to turn out a child who was a little worker, or someone who was going to be a good executive. His famous line is that education is a learning to be human, and it’s an initiation into the presuppositions of your own culture. Now, that’s an incredibly revolutionary, interesting idea, but it’s something that’s 100 million miles away from the political consensus at the moment (Norman).

The notion of children ‘learning to be human’ is the moral essence of educational virtue. The curriculum is the mechanism of inculcation, and the lack of consensus between interviewees on curricular scope is more intra- than inter-party divergence. For Gove, Gibb, Adonis, Taylor, Ryan, Skidmore, Norman, Boles, Hancock, O’Shaughnessy, Blunkett and Twigg, the NC is best minimally prescribed, with ‘cultural’ enhancements freely determined at an institutional level. For Anon LD, Balls and Baker, the NC is best maximally prescribed to guarantee by statute a ‘rounded education’. Off the record, one Conservative interviewee observed:

I still sense that Labour is wedded to the prevailing orthodoxies of the education establishment, when it comes to the curriculum. I cite in evidence the fact they’ve appointed Chris Husbands to head up their policy review. Although he does have his own views, which aren’t always identical to those of the education establishment, he is very much of that way of thinking, in my view.

Chris Husbands is Director of the Institute of Education, University of London. He was a critic of Gove's advocacy of Hirsch's 'knowledge rich' curriculum, and a prominent opponent of the abolition of the requirement for teachers in Academies and Free Schools to have QTS (e.g., Husbands, 2013). Despite five Labour interviewees supporting a pared-down NC and Baker favouring a more prescriptive scope, the partisan perceptions remain, hence Gove's 'push' of curriculum freedoms.

Twigg's equivocation on the NC echoes the fraught Thatcher-Baker discussions (outlined in Chapter VIII.iii):

I think the National Curriculum has become too prescriptive. I think that has contributed to a sense of... a kind of de-professionalisation of teaching. That it is a source of low morale for the teaching profession, and I think therefore weakens educational standards... I think, actually, that if we think that government has a role to play in taking the lead on the amount of time schools spend on PE and Sport, if that is right for maintained schools, then I think that should be right for Academies and Free Schools. If it is wrong – if it too prescriptive and what are politicians doing determining this, then it shouldn't exist for either category of school (Twigg [Appendix XII.xxxvi]).

Here is a disparity between the freedoms envisioned by liberals and statist – Baker's 'hub'/'spokes'/'rim' – and Twigg makes the moral case for a standardised NC irrespective of school type: he inclines to a core, but 'there is a debate to be had'. Boles also explains his support for core subjects, including RE to inculcate a sense of national history and identity (Appendix XII.xix). The central-subsidiarity tensions in praxis were articulated in Parliament by Education Minister Liz Truss, referring to the need to balance statutory SRE with her belief that schools should have greater curriculum freedoms (*Hansard*, 2013 [Appendix XIII]). The appeal was to 'local autonomy' which permits 'flexibility': curriculum freedom is constrained only by the need for 'rounded education' (cf. 'balanced and broadly based' [DfE, 2010a §1.6a]). Thereafter, Truss said, headteachers are 'empowered to decide the content of the wider school curriculum', enhanced by further institutional freedoms, which I shall categorise as 'process'.

Process freedom

Blunkett deemed Gove's approach to Free Schools to be more harmfully libertarian than edifyingly liberal. He owns the concept of creating schools that are free:

But it wasn't free schools in the sense that we were saying, "Just do what you like; here is a group of people and at this moment in time they can use public money in whatever sense they feel appropriate." Because schools are forever, they are not for a particular cohort with a particular set of parents. We have to consider what is going to be the case 10 years down the line; what the governance and accountability arrangements are. So it was more about freeing up the school to face their own reality, and building in the chance to alter the school day (Blunkett).

2010 clearly represents a shift, though he shares some of Balls' propensity for caricature: Gove's Free Schools were not 'Just do what you like... whatever sense they feel appropriate'. As outlined in Chapter I, the process of approval and restrictions on the 'little platoons' are considerable. But Blunkett makes a latent appeal which he shares with Gove: for non-interference; for schools to 'face their own reality' in the context of community and civility (cf. Mill, 1865:ch3).

For Blunkett, the ‘chance to alter the school day’ is an opportunity to be grasped: it is (literally) ‘a chance’ for liberation from restrictive processes, designed to foster improvement:

I felt you needed to stimulate the pressure of success – of what Michael Barber used to call, “Building on previous best.” I don’t think people see that as philosophical, but it is. It is a different approach; it is rooted, on the one hand, in mutuality and mutual support, and on the other, in competition and knocking out failure. And I used to say to Chris Woodhead that a lot of what he said I didn’t disagree with, but you couldn’t allow a school to die. You couldn’t allow a school to wither because the children in it were the victims (Blunkett).

He contrasts his approach – ‘mutuality and mutual support’ – with Gove’s – ‘competition and knocking out failure’. It is a Manichean dichotomy, as though educational competition were unregulated and predisposed to harm and injustice. But by statute, building on Labour’s *Learning and Skills Act 2000*, whichever institutional processes are liberated – the school day; budgetary priorities; teachers’ pay and conditions – the thresholds are determined by overarching state processes which are designed to ensure morality: they are, after all, accountable to Parliament for the use of public money, and (as explained in Chapter V.ii) representative democracy has epistemic virtues considering matters of ‘evidence, testimony, cross-examination, adversarial equality and collective deliberation’ (Estlund, 2009:8). The political-moral imperative is to ensure a regulatory framework of justice such that where a stakeholder, for whatever reason, ‘allow(s) a school to wither’, there is timely intervention to ensure that the children in it do not become ‘victims’. Free schools are not free from the state’s inspection regime designed for this purpose. Adonis articulates the contradictory apprehensions and the limitations:

No school in any society is entirely free... all independence is, to some extent, relative in that there’s no school that is independent in the sense of having no relationship whatsoever with the state, the law, wider society... The question is the extent to which their governance and ethos and management operate autonomously of the state itself.. (Adonis [Appendix XII.xxxvii]).

The obligation to ‘follow the law in key respects’ summarises the contradictory freedoms, because free schools are, of necessity, constrained by ‘key respects’: not only by a (pared-down) NC, but also by national admissions agreements, national tests, national inspection and national child-safeguarding policies, each designed to ensure justice, sustain educational morality, and ensure that children do not become ‘victims’.

But schools that ‘fail’ do have ‘victims’, and those who oppose the reforms objected primarily because of the possibility of perpetual fear, committing parents to uncertainty and children to insecurity. Talk of ‘failure’ in Labour circles has been historically contentious, linked with school ‘effectiveness’ and ‘performativity’ (Pring, 2000:115) or ‘deliverology’ (Barber, 2008:49f): as observed in the academic literature, it is intrinsic to the ‘Tory ideology’ of ‘neo-liberal’ marketisation. But Norman challenges:

..that's a political abuse of the term 'failure'. We're not talking about failing a generation. On the contrary, the argument would be made that leaving young people to rot in schools that have never been put to a proper test of accountability, or performance, is a far greater failure and is all the worse for being unacknowledged. What we're talking about here is schools tasked with the job of education. When they prove incapable, as in some cases they will, then you have to have a regime which a) allows it to happen, so you know it's happening; and then b) has a mechanism by which, in a properly democratic and accountable way, those schools are not only identified but sorted out. That's I think what the government is aiming towards.

Failure is mitigated by monitoring, which requires national tests, performance data and league tables: being 'on the side of the consumer rather than the producer' (Barber 2008:22). Process freedoms are designed to shift the balance.

Contradictory freedoms

In examining the positive and negative liberties in the management and accountability of Academies and Free Schools, Blunkett observes: 'The contradictions abound at the moment. They have always been there. There have always been tensions and contradictions. But they are writ large at the moment with the funding agency and the centralisation of accountability' (Appendix XII.xxxviii). Norman agrees that these contradictions have always been there, but says it is an 'interim story' of 'the process of centralisation in order to remove control'. This isn't new: it is a story that 'gets told almost every decade by government, and in some cases it's true, and in some cases it isn't true'. The principal tension lies between politicians wanting to devolve (or return) power to the people, but 'the people would not allow that alienation of power from politicians: they ultimately required politicians to exercise that power' (Appendix XII.xxxix). This notion of 'freedom imposed' goes to the nexus of the liberalising-conserving philosophy: it is not simply political contradiction; it is democratic paradox.

When challenged on the assertion that Gove had removed local democratic accountability and centralised power in the DfE, Norman says that this is precisely what has been done 'on one account of it':

Because the Government might easily respond, "Well, look, we're setting up a system here. Ultimate accountability for setting the rules of the system, and for failure within the system, lies, as it properly should, at the foot of democratic politicians. But, short of that, we've created a system in which these institutions are freer, and in particular they are free, even if the cost of that is failure. They need to be freer to fail, because if you don't get failure you don't get performance (Norman [Appendix XII.xl]).

For Hancock, however, concerns about the diminution of local democracy by the removal of the LA link are misplaced. When asked about the centralised powers of the Secretary of State and the implications for local democracy, he echoed Gibb's assertion that many LAs had ceased to be democratically responsive at all:

It wasn't a democratic layer; it was an LEA layer. In many places, that meant it was the same party in charge for years and years. But, more importantly, it's that power has been decentralised to people

who are running the schools. This is the opposite of centralisation. It's a decentralisation either from LEAs to schools or from the centre to schools (Hancock).

Boles agreed:

LEAs were just geographical groups that had no commonality beyond the fact that they were all, broadly speaking, in the same part of the country. There was no particular sense that one LEA was competing with another LEA, because that's how people got their school places. There was no particular sense that within an LEA there was a very strong ethos or strong leadership. It was a bureaucratic organisation (Boles).

These perspectives are challenged by Anon LD, for whom the 'harm' caused by Free Schools is much more a matter of political praxis than liberal philosophy. Those who advance school freedoms do so with latent appeals to the local common good, and those who oppose them do so with the same appeal. Proponents perceive the direct DfE-school relationship to be freer than the LA-school relationship, because the latter 'wasn't a democratic layer'; 'it was a bureaucratic organisation'. Of course, the DfE-school relationship is not entirely democratic either, but it is perceptibly more so, because, adopting Gibb's reasoning, 'at least (the Secretary of State) is accountable to Parliament'.

For all the manifest contradictory apprehensions, the consistent consensual appeal among all interviewees was to parental choice – the fundamental 'empowerment' and inviolable freedom. But it is worth noting that that choice is relegated to 'consultation' when it comes to a decision for a school to convert to become an Academy, and the results of that consultation may apparently be set aside by the Secretary of State if those parents choose not to convert. While it is true that parents have been granted statutory representation on governing bodies since 1988, academisation becomes anti-democratic when it is coerced. The appeal of the Secretary of State is then a higher 'good': the imperative for improving 'failing' or 'coasting' schools (however these are defined by the DfE or apprehended by Ofsted) is transformation through greater freedom. Scrutiny of this assumption is beyond the objectives of this thesis, but the question of societal detriment or institutional/individual harm caused by the diminution or eradication of local authority control is not new: Baker had to contend with the same irreconcilables.

He recounted that opposition to the *Education Reform Act 1988* came not only from Labour but also from within the Conservative Party. When he was developing GM Schools, Baker said of some of his colleagues: 'They were really seduced by the local education authorities, and their councillors, who said, "No, we can run these schools. We don't need independent schools. They will be cuckoos in the nest."' It is noteworthy, also, that he says Blunkett and Adonis had 'persuaded' Blair of the need for reform, and there was institutional opposition: 'That was Blair taking on the education department, who didn't like it at all' (Baker). Baker's apprehensions about Gove's reforms are not in any sense a dispute about devolving power or strengthening accountability – 'I am a supporter of all of that, believe me', he says. His objections related very specifically to exam reform:

What Michael Gove is trying to do, which has been tried in the past in British education, is to reconstruct the education system through the exam system. That's what he's trying to do. He's trying to make it compulsory to go to 16, to get this exam. Nothing offered underneath it. Now, the rest of the world is moving away from that. Literally, yearly it is moving away from it (Baker [Appendix XII.xli]).

Baker is undoubtedly promoting (and justifying) his own UTC cause, but he said of Gove: 'He's going to play into my hands', which was suggestive of internal party tensions. Baker almost seemed to be operating to his own agenda (indeed, after our interview, he handed me a copy of his new book, *14-18: A New Vision for Secondary Education* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013): 'I believe the really big change is moving to 14 as the age of transfer... There is no educational reason why children should change at 11', he explained (Appendix XII.xlii). There was a push within the DfE to liberate schools from the rigidity of transfer at 11, by permitting transfer at 14. It wasn't clear if it that local freedom is ultimately intended to become a universal un-freedom.

SUMMARY

There is an apparent mutual exclusion between the conservative and liberal political-philosophical traditions, and the conception of ideological motives and policy objectives is dependent more on philosophical leaning than political affiliation. While Pring (2013) is of the view that free schools constitute 'the most centralised system of education in Western Europe since Calvin's schools in Geneva in the sixteenth century', the architects of policy view the reforms in terms of disempowering government, devolution to communities and decentralisation, all contiguous with notions of 'rolling back the state'. There are contradictions and confusions, but (elite) interviews are not codified dialectic or asserted logic. The central-local tensions evinced by Academies and Free Schools abound, but Sammons (2008:653) notes that 'Central control was viewed as especially important for the coordinated approach to remediate failing schools where the aim was intervention in inverse proportion to success (Barber, 2005)'. Provisional centralisation is deemed necessary for the raising of standards; for inculcating character values and for the propagation of 'the best knowledge' through the meritocratic 'democratic intellect'. The 'power elite' have supplanted the bureaucratic 'establishment elite' in order to effect the necessary reforms and monitor delivery (cf. Barber, 2008:345).

Historians, social scientists and philosophers differ in their conceptions of this process and of the ensuing extension or diminution of liberties, and there is something of a dilemma inherent in education policy which simultaneously seeks to permit a plurality of individual or local self-expression, and yet conserve sufficient commonality and state uniformity for the flourishing of human community. The interviewees were not united on every aspect of reform – in particular, Balls and Blunkett demurred on the notion of the Coalition's Free Schools and converter Academies being

a continuation of New Labour's sponsored Academies. There was certainly not unanimity, but hypothesis of philosophical consensus requires only '(1) general agreement of opinion; (2) majority view' (OED), and I note that even those who demurred in their 'manifest' responses actually agreed with the philosophy in subsequent 'latent' narrative. Anon LD: 'I think there is a big danger in this programme of harming somebody else, because of the way it's worked out. *Not so much the philosophy behind it, but the way it's worked out.*' Gibb: 'I think it is an apparent consensus... *There is more consensus now about the structural changes.*' Balls: 'I don't really see very much relationship at all between the Academies' legislation and Free Schools and what's happened since 2010... *Therefore, the thing which we knew worked with Academies, I wanted to know we could do that in every school.*' Blunkett: '...the Free Schools programme isn't focused on deeply deprived areas, or schools that need complete transformation, which is what we were trying to do... *I think that Gove has cleverly done what we endeavoured to do, which was to build on the best of what was there.*'

Even where it is manifestly denied, refuted or stated 'off the record', the consensus becomes unanimity on the latent philosophy of the market paradigm: all interviewees agreed that schools should be diversely established (including an ethos of religious diversity); that they should enjoy freedom from LAs; and that parents as consumers should be 'free to choose'. These are unifying foundational liberties which, it is averred, drive school improvement. Three interviewees stated to me (strictly off the record) that the Liberal Democrats were not wholly on board with this trajectory of reform, citing the power-base that the party has historically had in local government, and their 'grass roots' aversion to the reforms (akin to the opposition Baker said he experienced in 1988). Despite these intra-party tensions, the Liberal Democrat 'power elite' proceeded as Laws (2012:33) set out in *The Orange Book* – for choice and competition between schools 'in order to deliver pressure for improved service standards'.

Part Five

Conclusions

In this section I shall: i) summarise the historical documentary and contemporary understanding of Free Schools as expressed by the architects of policy; and ii) summarise the philosophical foundations and the theoretical apprehension of Free Schools as expressed by the architects of policy, some of which relates to morality and values; some to structure and institutions; and some are theoretically overlapping (Chapter X). I shall then summarise the findings relating to the culture, ideas and language of the elite policy community; and present the extent of consensus that exists between them, with some suggestions for further areas of research arising from the my findings. (Chapter XI).

CHAPTER X

FREE SCHOOLS: HISTORICAL APPREHENSION AND PHILOSOPHICAL UNDERSTANDING

INTRODUCTION

My research objective was to gain a deeper understanding of Free Schools in historical context and philosophical perspective, by i) researching the historical provenance and philosophical theories as they relate to the reform; and ii) analysing the policy conceptualisation of the principal architects of the reform. My findings provide an empirical statement of what has been discovered about the actual people-events-situation under study – that is the philosophical understanding and historical apprehension of Free Schools as articulated in interview by the elite ‘policy community’ – complemented by some historical and philosophical documentary review. While the historical overview is demonstrative, the philosophical conclusions represent a generalisation of the thoughts of specific politicians being interviewed in the context of contentious and sometimes ambiguous education reform, but such imprecision is intrinsic to all Social Science research because it is contingent upon known and unknown human and social variables. My theoretical philosophical construct may be tested and supported, or challenged and amended, but ultimately its validity lies in a methodology that is rigorous: my findings are verifiable because they may be extrapolated to similar people-events-situations and similar findings may be discovered in similar contexts, not least because political policy is established by statute and interpreted in case law; and liberalism and conservatism have defined philosophical parameters, even if the nuances of strands within these philosophies are not grasped by politicians, educationalists and philosophers, or apprehended by them in the context under consideration.

The data acquired was rich, and by no means excavated on all levels to optimum depth: history is labyrinthine and the pursuit of philosophy inexhaustible. So much of the ‘top-down’ apprehension of school freedoms and contingent social-justice dimensions are beyond the scope of this study, but historical insights and strong themes of philosophy have emerged, and these have been set out and analysed in Part Four. In summary, my research establishes that Academies and Free Schools – *qua* free schools – are consistent with a philosophical framework which is both conservative and liberal: that is, the pursuit of institutional autonomy with a moral-political imperative for curriculum creativity, pedagogical innovation and individual freedom (‘vital, independent, intermediate institutions between individuals and the state’ [Gove (Appendix XII.viii)]), which, it is posited, are the key to democratic-intellectual enlightenment and character-building for participation in the institutions of society (‘virtues or vices – what sort of behaviour do

institutions, and the way in which they have been designed, encourage' [Gove (*ibid.*)]. '(L)iberalism can be interpreted as a more or less "spontaneous philosophy" rooted in capitalist social relations' (Jessop, 2002:456). While there are complexities in the educational balance between public and private values and notions of community cohesion, a basic principle of liberalism is a diversity which frees individuals from assertions of homogeneity. Free Schools emanate from an ideology of liberal individualism – that is, the right of the individual to make choices – but it is not unrestrained individualism because Free Schools are not socially disembodied. They must, as Blunkett said of Academies, be sufficiently free 'to face their own reality', but they are not free to define their own reality: the collective morality is that of the liberal-democratic state.

The educational academic literature routinely terms the policy 'neo-liberal' – principally those opposed – but it is a narrow apprehension of the term which has become synonymous with (if not a caricature of) 'Thatcherism'. In political praxis, if not philosophical theory, it is not a new manifestation of liberalism: it is consistent with the 'New Liberalism' of the early twentieth century, when Mill's successors were concerned with situating his core principles – 'Liberty, individualism, progress, rationality, the general interest, sociability, limited and responsible power' (Freeden, 1996:178) – into the post-Victorian context of increasing free trade. The 'market' in education is not 'free' in the sense of atomised individualism, ascendant consumerism and the obsession with choice for self-realisation. Many interviewees referred to concepts of sociability, interdependence and community. Free Schools are subject firstly to participative scrutiny of proposer groups (with regard to, for example, curriculum compliance, fair admissions and ethical suitability); and secondly, as with Academies, to degrees of intervention where the Secretary of State deems it necessary (in, for example, matters relating to child protection [the inculcation of 'British values'], and ultimately to termination of the Funding Agreement should the contract be breached, by, for example, poor standards of academic attainment). Free schools have a moral obligation – attested to by all interviewees – observing historically that many LAs failed chronically in their responsibilities. The Secretary of State, as 'commander-in-chief', determines the extent of regulation, while responsibilities for adherence are devolved to the 'little platoons'. The DfE is the ultimate compliance officialdom, and the Secretary of State is accountable to Parliament, which, being accountable to the electorate, is seen by many respondents (in particular the global responses of Gove, Gibb, Baker, Boles, Hancock, Taylor and Adonis) to sustain (or restore) the democratic foundation of English state education.

Part One provided an assessment of the socio-political context of Coalition policy (Q1a), with analysis of its academic educational apprehension. In Part Two, I considered the extent to which the themes of policy represent continuity with the education policies of previous administrations (Q1b, Q2c), and expounded what may be understood by conservative (Q2a) and liberal (Q2b) philosophies of education. I have established that the process of academisation is contingent upon and contiguous

with decades of educational policy development (Q1a, Q2c). Analysis of the interview transcripts in Part Four corroborates (latently) that these reforms are mainly seen to be coherent and evolutionary; not aberrational or revolutionary (Q2c), despite some manifest assertions expressing concern at the pace of implementation. I have further established that the educational ideologies/philosophies of the architects of policy are not only significantly consensual; they are affected by their own (predominantly private/Oxbridge) experiences of education (Q3a): their elite apprehensions of the history and philosophy of Free Schools corroborate the preceding analysis. This concluding chapter aims to carry the historical and philosophical analysis further (Q2b, Q3c), and synthesise it within the corpus of educational policy research.

i) HISTORICAL APPREHENSION

Free Schools have a verifiable and traceable genealogy which has a considerable degree of cross-party agreement. With variable scopes of historical reconstruction, the policy community articulated that Free Schools (Conservative/Liberal-Democrat coalition, *Academies Act 2010* §9) are a logical extension of Academies (Labour, *Education Act 2002* §65), which were a development of City Academies (Labour, *Learning & Skills Act 2000* §130), which were based on CTCs (Conservative, *Education Act 1996* §482), and contiguous with GM schools – the first state schools to be free from local authority control (Conservative, *Education Reform Act 1988* §4). This juncture was the historical threshold recognised by most respondents: those who possessed a ‘pre-Thatcher’ perspective recognised that the Baker Act came about largely as a consequence of the education debate which followed Callaghan’s ‘Ruskin Speech’ (Labour: 1976), which was precipitated by concerns about accountability and academic standards in many Comprehensive schools promulgated by Crosland (Labour, *Circular 10/65*); which arose out of discontent with the tripartite system of grammar, secondary-modern and technical schools created by Butler (Conservative/Labour coalition: *Education Act 1944*); which arose as a consequence of joint Church-State schools and the establishment of LEAs by Balfour (Conservative, *Education Act 1902*); which was a response to the fragmented Church-State system and locally-elected ‘school boards’ created by Forster (Liberal, *Elementary Education Act 1870*). Respondents who possessed an even wider historical perspective proceeded to set the reforms in the context of medieval voluntary and charitable societies, and centuries of Church-State conflagration, which I set out in my historical analysis (Chapter III).

This lineage evinces a history of schools being incrementally freed from some unsatisfactory or unwanted authority, be it the social control of the Church, the restrictions imposed by inadequate school boards or failing local authorities, or the insular philosophical mind-set propagated by educational ‘experts’ (or the *expertois*, as Gibb describes them). Far from Free Schools constituting a ‘revolution’ based on ‘Tory ideology’ as a manifestation of ‘neo-liberalism’, they are seen by many

interviewees to be a logical progression of an incremental Burkean approach to educational freedom, following a liberal-conservative thread going back (at least) 150 years. Indeed, the Forster Act (§71) introduced the principle of the provision of school grants based on ‘the efficiency and suitability’ of the school (i.e., academic attainment, or ‘payment by results’). A foundational precept of the ‘neo-liberal’ free market (effectiveness/targets/performance/PRP [cf. Barber, 2008:25f) may therefore be traced back to Gladstonian liberalism: it is not, as Norman intimated, ‘neo’ at all.

Adonis, Hancock and Gibb perceived academisation as something of a beneficial revolution: Baker, Anon LD, Balls and Blunkett expressed the view that it was a potentially harmful revolution. But Skidmore (the historian) insists that the reforms ‘must be seen in terms of an evolutionary context’. Boles encapsulated the conflicting evolution/revolution tension: ‘I think it is a revolution. It’s taking a bloody long time. Revolutions are usually quick. It’s a sustained and deep reform.’ Respondents varied considerably in their emphases, but there was unequivocal unanimity in the view that, historically, at some point during the 1950s-60s, it was becoming apparent that many schools were failing in their social, moral and educational aims, and that by the 1970s and Callaghan’s speech at Ruskin College, there was an emerging a cross-party trajectory of necessary reform away from centralised, statist solutions of uniformity toward subsidiarity, increasing diversity and institutional autonomy.

ii) PHILOSOPHICAL UNDERSTANDINGS

Notwithstanding the philosophical disparities in the policy community’s apprehensions of social justice – which, as seen in Chapter I, is a largely unexamined sphere of individual-societal theory in relation to contemporary education reform (and so one worthy of further research) – Free Schools represent philosophical coherence with preceding Academy reforms, and that coherence – where it isn’t adduced for rhetorical, partisan neutering – is consistent with the political philosophers appropriated to the cause.

Philosophy of religion and values

Historically, the Christian faith has been the mechanism by which moral values and spirituality have been inducted or inculcated, though few respondents articulated that this should remain exclusively the case. Those who did were Conservative (Norman, Gibb and Boles). Conservative participants, on the whole, saw the value of a religious-moral framework to child educational development; that knowledge, understanding, intellectual virtues, imagination and social awareness are enhanced by virtue of being situated within a moral tradition. These things are linked to the formation of identity, which is ‘defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable,

or what ought to be done..' (Taylor, 1989:27). Labour participants tended to articulate an apprehension of values in the context of the school community, invoking common denominators: it was 'mutuality and mutual support' (Blunkett); 'about genuinely delivering equal chances' (Balls) which yields 'transformational change' (Balls). The Liberal Democrat was effusive about the importance of the moral community for the formation of young minds; that unity and fraternity are achieved by commonality (though not uniformity). There was a concern that a fragmented society should be reconciled through a less-fragmented framework of education.

Gove's academic objectives were seen to be moral, with the statutory imposition of what might be termed an 'ideal morality' of the sort Pareto would eschew (Femia, 2011:18; Pareto, 1935:616); a transcendent common moral code – if not a secular 'new religion' (Pareto, 1935:286ff) – to which and in which children must be inducted and then nurtured. His expansion of Academies and the creation of Free Schools was not simply about competing schools in a free-market paradigm of rational liberalism; it was about the competing rationalities of different human traditions and educational philosophies, reified beneath an over-arching paradigm of 'British values', cognisant of and sensitive toward pluralism in community and relativism in personal belief.

There was acknowledgment from both Conservative and Labour interviewees that, as a matter of philosophical logic, if not political expediency, there is no reason why Free Schools should not be free to establish an atheist-humanist ethos should they wish, thereby acknowledging the increasing secularity of society; the inference being that moral and/or character education may be undertaken within a 'neutral' framework of values, without reference to any historical or contemporary religious foundation. These are complex matters of sociology and theology beyond the scope of this thesis, but by touching upon these themes, insights may be gleaned as to possible future freedoms, especially as they relate to educational morality and the inculcation of state secularity. Higham (2014:126) notes that:

..although access to sponsorship has been 'heavily influenced by the differential distribution of capital and the rules (that) tend to favour dominant interests, there remains "some room for autonomy"...generated, at least in part, by motivations such as commitment to social justice.

It is not that humanist-atheist secularity was perceived by interviewees as being necessarily of greater virtue than any existing religious educational frameworks; it is simply that the logical freedom imperative demanded by increasing secularity (McLean & Peterson, 2011) is likely to result in Free Schools which are free from the 1944 settlement of mandatory RE and the daily act of collective worship – as a matter of social justice. While there was no consensus on this (Ryan noted that reform 'would be quite difficult'; for others, it was beyond their sphere of competence), there was a senior Gove-Adonis-Twigg axis of openness to the possibility.

If the liberal state entertains (and finances) the majority of Church schools, an overarching legislative framework of equality demands that it act similarly toward schools of minority religious foundations (cf. Walford, 2000:83ff): it is not the role of the Secretary of State to assert one religion over another. Free Schools are free to inculcate their chosen religious ethos, and the market thereafter determines their success or failure. However, in the wake of the ‘Trojan Horse’ scandal in Birmingham which arose during this research, the pluralism of the liberal framework for religion does not extend to establishing Free Schools which do not accord with the Secretary of State’s definition of ‘British values’, or of his/her notion of basic social morality and the common good. Free Schools, like all schools, are tasked with a community-building task, and an institutional ethos must have that effect, as Boles expressed (Appendix XII.xix):

Schools with a religious foundation – be it associational with church, synagogue, mosque, gurdwara or mandir – enjoy an enhanced freedom, but not to the extent of ‘extreme’ divergence from the state’s framework of justice, which extends to dogmatic (if presently nebulous) assertions of ‘tolerance’ and ‘respect’, which are designed to inculcate public truths. There are implications here for schools with a religious foundation where that ethos is at variance with statist assertions of equality and other public values. This is a complex area (and a contested one): the commonality or universality of variable religious values is beyond the scope of this study. The policy community was largely aware of the tensions ahead – in particular with those religious groups which refute the public-private rationalist approach to religious belief – though this was the one area of inquiry where there was an increased (if not always explicit) desire to speak ‘off the record’.

In philosophical terms, Academies and Free Schools represent, at least in part, a return to the freedoms of the earliest church schools; freedoms still enjoyed principally (on scale) by the Church of England – which missiologically exists to serve the entire parish, irrespective of faith (Chadwick, 1997). The freedoms which were historically granted to the Roman Catholic and Non-conformist churches, and also to Jewish groups, were incrementally extended to adherents of other faiths: Walford (2000:92) notes that post-1997, Labour approved both Muslim and Seventh Day Adventist schools. Despite this heritage, Gove is targeted for the fracturing, if not the fragmentation of English state education. But his opponents must (logically) either believe that churches uniquely should enjoy these educational freedoms, or, out of egalitarian compassion, if not an assertion of social justice, the churches ought to be deprived of their historic status and a totalising secular framework of educational uniformity imposed. No interviewee favoured such an approach. If the churches are to continue to enjoy their Burkean-conservative institutional status as an expression of Millite-liberal diversity, it is difficult, in a context of religious equality and non-discrimination, to justify not extending these same freedoms to schools of non-Christian religious foundations. And if to them, why not to schools which are ‘secular’ or atheist-humanist in ethos? As Adonis summarised:

I used to say to opponents, “Are you saying that the only people, who hereafter should be able to manage schools independently within the state system, are the churches?” Because they can do it already. More church schools, indeed, were being set up. But the Academies made it possible to have schools with independent governance and ethos which were set up and managed by entities of the Church (Adonis).

The age of Anglican like-mindedness and conventional uniformity – if it ever existed – has passed (cf. Walford, 2000:86). As society has become more diverse and religious belief (and non-belief) more divided (and divisive), the liberal instinct is to acknowledge the rights of free, autonomous individuals to make choices; the conservative instinct is to adapt organically and incrementally to the new context, and induct children into the norms, values and beliefs of the state in order to ensure a continuing tradition of some kind. Politicians may quibble over what constitutes ‘good’ in the relative integrities of different traditions, but Free Schools are free to borrow from competing traditions and forge their own ethos, provided that it accords with Mill’s axiom of doing none harm, as Anon LD emphasised.

Philosophy of hegemonic liberalism

Free Schools are seen to manifest conflicting views of freedom: i) for Conservative participants, they are free from the oppressive, deficient and bureaucratic forces which hinder educational progress and diminish individual opportunity; ii) for Labour participants, they are free from those same chronic deficiencies to enhance social justice; and iii) for the Liberal Democrat participant, they are free from those same chronic deficiencies to enhance social justice and fulfil the purposes of local democracy. These are non-negotiable views, but all adopt the freedom of parental choice as the unifying framework, and none articulates conflicting views to the point of irreconcilable tension. Essentially, Free Schools may negotiate an equilibrium between competing apprehensions of the common good, but it is unlikely ever to be expressed in the partisan fray of parliamentary debate or within academic discourse while the *expertois* is opposed to the policy. As Taylor noted: ‘I think some of the most fruitful conversations that are happening – unfortunately they’re not really happening in Westminster..’ It is an elite pursuit reserved for those who know best – the epistocracy – tasked with identifying rival interests, competing rationalities and the areas of overlap between divergent philosophies; and then, as with the Coalition Agreement, developing a common framework of approach, if not a common language of political-moral authority. And the language is that of choice and the market in the sense that, central to educational liberalism, ‘is the phenomenon of the existence in society of diversities in belief, practice and value, to which it is seen as a response’ (McLaughlin, 1992:240).

Gove’s educational worldview was liberal-rationalist – after ‘the Scottish Enlightenment ideal of the Democratic Intellect’ – though that of his successors may not be, and so the threshold is expansively – hegemonically – liberal with regard to the state’s view of religion and belief, so much so that the traditional liberal principal of secular ‘neutrality’ – by which ‘public’ values (binding on

all people) are detached from ‘private’ values (voluntary coercion of individuals) – gives way to a cultural consensus of human rights. Some interviewees were aware of the tensions (and likely future conflicts): none demurred from the hegemony of human rights and ‘British values’; the liberal framework of societal conservation.

Gove emphasised the need to ‘become familiar with the best of our civilization’, which obviously extends beyond his pared down NC. These are best expressed and apprehended in a framework of liberalism which not only permits but ensures and expands diversity. If it imposes a worldview; if, as Pring (2013) states, England now has ‘the most centralised system of education in Western Europe since Calvin’s schools in Geneva in the sixteenth century’ (cf. Wood, 2013), it is because, as Skidmore and Gibb make clear, it was deemed necessary to centralise the power in order to devolve it to regions and/or local communities, which is about ‘giving power back to the people’ (Gibb). Sammons (2008:653) notes that ‘Central control was viewed as especially important for the coordinated approach to remediate failing schools where the aim was intervention in inverse proportion to success (Barber, 2005)’. This was a prominent theme in the interviews, and it corroborates what Gibb and O’Shaughnessy said in their justification of Gove’s ‘centralised system’. The DfE might appoint eight RSCs, and they may all be accountable to a DfE-appointed Schools Commissioner, but there is a presently-evolving latitude in the composition of their advisory boards, and this may be a mechanism by which certain Labour and Liberal Democrat concerns about local democracy and accountability might be addressed.

Philosophy of common ground

The academic debate about left and right ideology (Epstein, 1983) is dated, but the role of the ‘New Right’ in the marketisation of education has an established (and international) heritage (Quicke, 1988). It has long been observed that ‘New Right ideas now dominate the education system of all advanced English speaking countries’ (Dale and Ozga, 1993:63). The politico-philosophical left-right thesis and antithesis have since found further synthesis: the ‘confrontational policy-making climate of the 1970s and 1980s’ perceived by self-confessed ‘marxists’ (sic) Ozga & Gewirtz (1994:132) has given way to the development of the ‘Third Way’ (Giddens, 1994), which is credited with the development of the ideological *viae mediae* of ‘Blue Labour’ (Glasman *et al.*, 2010) and ‘Red Tory’ (Blond, 2010); their principal objective being to forge a ‘radical centre’ to mediate between the perceived extremes of political ideology, being ‘Thatcherism’ and (‘Militant’) Socialism. There is a focus on partnership and active ‘bottom up’ involvement of communities and localities, self-help and contractual economic relations. The notion of partnership reflects the interest in processes of associational economics (Cooke & Morgan, 2000).

In communicating the specific mechanisms of school diversity and institutional autonomy to their respective supporters, politicians had to tread carefully. It seems an obvious point to make –

that political speeches and written articles had to be tailored to specific audiences – but the frequency with which participants of all parties referred to this communication strategy moves it beyond the usual sophistry. Ryan said that in order to convince traditional Labour voters of the rightness of Blunkett's approach to reform, 'you had to present things in certain ways sometimes; you have to make the argument in certain ways'. In a sense, all democratic political parties are coalitions of a broad spectrum of opinions, and no expressed view is going to satisfy all internal interest groups. But for Labour in 1997, an acceptance of successive Conservative education reforms was seen as key to electoral success (Ryan [Appendix XII.iii]). It necessitated strategic positioning of the narrative, which was based on policy continuation relating to centrally-imposed floor targets and minimum standards: 'Driving out failure was an essential part of what we were trying to do' (Ryan [Appendix XV]).

Docking (2000:32) observed of New Labour's Academy reforms: 'It is sometimes said that, for all the rhetoric, the present Government's policies for schools are fundamentally the Conservative's dressed up in New Labour clothes. To a large extent, this is true.' And he specifically identified the common-ground retention of the 'centralisation policies (the National Curriculum, testing, the Teacher Training Agency, Ofsted and the identification of failing schools)' all operating under what he calls 'Thatcherite market policies of competition and choice' (*ibid.*). Wright (2012:283) corroborates this view: 'When New Labour emerged as victors in the 1997 general election, education reform was on top of their political agenda but this by no means meant an end to neoliberal education policy.' Reay (2008: 639) agrees, observing 'Blair's legacy has been one of consolidating and reinforcing previous Conservative policies that stressed parental responsibilities whilst operating with a white middle-class norm'. It is policy discourse and political rhetoric that changes; not the direction of policy *per se*. The Coalition purposely framed their 2010 legislation the *Academies Act* and not the *Free Schools Act*: the policy evinces contiguity and represents continuity. It is observed that the difference is perhaps principally one of scale:

The big change was not free schools (which are, I think, more symbol than substance) but the huge expansion of the academy schools programme. Gove has continued to set up new academies to replace weak schools, but he has also allowed successful schools to convert to academy status. This second phase is important and not well understood: it is producing schools and chains of schools that can act as sponsors for new academies, thus accelerating the most hopeful trends in school improvement (Rentoul, 2012).

Philosophy of markets

Barber (1994:357) posits that the 'era of free-market Stalinism' began with the *Education Act 1993*, the provisions of which were 'the simultaneous promotion of the market idea through the encouragement it offers to the GM idea, and the vast number of new powers it gives to the Secretary of State'. The potential for harm of this accretion of power combined with educational free-market 'ideology' was the overriding concern of some interviewees, and, again, the concerns were not expressed along partisan lines. Anon LD, Balls and Blunkett spoke of children becoming 'victims';

Baker spoke of an unacceptable scale and pace of reform: ‘There will be failures as well as successes, and you have to cope with the failures’, intimating perceived deficiencies in the DfE to be able to do so. But of the market, Taylor asserted: ‘The idea is there’s a revolution because Academies are seizing power against the Local Authority, and then we’re going to have a market. Well, actually neither of those things is happening’, and he talked of Academies working well with LAs and in partnership with other schools. Balls’ concern was that the market presented by Free Schools, being essentially no different from the competition between coffeehouses, would cause societal harm and diminish children’s life chances in areas of high deprivation. But Costa tends not to cooperate with Starbucks, unless it is (illegally) to fix prices, rig the market and thereby create a monopoly in supply. Free Schools and Academies are seen to be associative and cooperative, and, either through MATs or organic local fraternity, are concerned with mutual flourishing and community benefit (Bamfield et al., 2013). A number of interviewees stated explicitly that the Secretary of State would intervene (legislatively) if an Academy Chain (/MAT) came to dominate or monopolise in one single area: the market has a sense of social morality.

Allegations of ‘abandoning children’ or ‘leaving schools to die’ (or ‘wither on the vine’, to use Baker’s phrase) are unrealistic assertions: the Secretary of State is obliged to intervene to ensure justice. It may not always be a timely or inerrant intervention, as seen with the ‘Trojan Horse’ episode (though it might be observed that Gove’s intervention preceded any action by Birmingham LA), but the consensual Conservative-Labour riposte is that it is preferable than the preceding decades of LEA/LA failure to intervene at all: as Hancock made explicit (supported by Adonis, Gibb, Boles): ‘It wasn’t a democratic layer; it was an LEA layer’, typified by bureaucracy and inefficiency, if not apparent indifference to chronic underperformance. As Anon LD said of some local authorities (with which all interviewees concurred): ‘They failed their communities; they failed their kids; they failed their teachers’ (cf. Bamfield *et al.*, 2013:24). The errors and omissions of the DfE, or the potential ‘harm’ caused by the Secretary of State, are seemingly preferable to the LEA/LA tier because, in the final analysis, the failures of the Secretary of State may be exposed in and interrogated by Parliament: transparency, scrutiny and accountability are intrinsic to ‘deliverology’ (Barber, 2008:70ff).

With the exception of Balls (predominantly and manifestly, though also Blunkett, latently) Gove is seen to have built upon a conception of organic subsidiarity: it is classically liberal in the sense of Millite meritocracy and the Gladstonian free market: schools are diverse not because of a naïve assertion of market ‘neo-liberalism’, but because the philosophy upon which they are based (which is acknowledged manifestly by Anon LD) recognises human individuality and metaphysical creedal imperatives in educational formation. Free Schools motivate competition, but they are not aberrational or *sui generis*: they are a manifestation of educational orthopraxis which acknowledges the complexities of freedom of choice, natural ability, individual aspiration and social inclusivity. As Hatcher (2011:500f) observes.

If free schools are not an answer to issues of attainment and equality, they do nevertheless offer a challenge to critics of marketised solutions to continue to develop and popularise credible alternatives... In that context it is not excluded that some free schools might pioneer progressive practices which the wider school system could draw on.

Marketised education is manifestly not without its critics, but all interviewees believed that parental choice offers ‘space’ for educational innovation and so improved attainment (often expressed by interviewees in the context of Labour’s Academies as ‘transformation’). But the Balls/Blunkett social-justice (‘equal chances’) insistence on limiting the reforms to under-performing schools is difficult to grasp, except in the context of continuing intra-party divisions. Quite why ‘transformation’¹ must be limited to chronically underperforming schools in areas of social deprivation is unclear: if freeing schools from LA restrictions helps to ‘transform’ attainment in ‘inadequate’ schools, it is not clear why ‘good’ (or, indeed, ‘outstanding’) schools may not similarly benefit. The research to examine the veracity of these claims is only just beginning to emerge: as observed in Chapter I, it is presently considered ‘mixed’ (if not ‘weak’). The claims made by my interviewees can only be tested by examining the hypothesis of freedom/attainment causality.

Interestingly, contra the univocal academic critiques of ‘neo-liberal’ education and competitive individualism, only one interviewee (Norman, the political philosopher) used the term manifestly: while Balls and Anon LD (and to a lesser extent, Blunkett, and to an even lesser extent, Baker) talked of Free Schools as an expression of free-market fundamentalism, the latent discourse was a consensual one of the acceptance of plurality, institutional diversity and difference; of the essential virtues of enhanced freedoms. This is instructive for those who characterise academisation as a ‘hard’ reification of the ‘Thatcherite’ free market: there is – latently if not manifestly – a ‘soft’ understanding of the market in education, which is social, adaptive to need and responsive to change. The market is not immutable or immaculate, but organic and provisional. The ‘neo-liberalism’ apprehended by educational academia is imperceptive of this morality, because Gove was seen to ‘ignore the evidence’ and lack ‘educational language’ and so the capacity for educational morality (Pring, 2012/13).

But there is an alternative reading of ‘neo-liberalism’, as noted by Jessop (2002:469); one that not only perceives competing, nuanced strands of philosophy in education, but also one that:

..simulates egalitarianism (that of a “we,” a collectivity of individuals, families, and communities all equally confronted with objective, inevitable changes and challenges) and lacks any explicit reference to power and authority, exploitation and domination. It is no surprise, then, that these challenges can be met in ways that will reconcile international competitiveness with local autonomy, economic growth with sustainability, market forces with quality of life, the needs of the highly skilled with the economic development of the entire city. This harmonization of contradictions and antagonisms is to be achieved at the urban level through a rallying of the good and the great, the

¹ Effect sizes are important. Presumably, ‘transformation’ means at least 0.5 (medium effect) in meta-analyses, and preferably 0.8 (strong effect) or above. This would make the ‘transformation’ verifiable and convincing, though, as observed in Chapter I, the variables are numerous (Hutchings *et al.*, 2012:9).

movers and shakers, the rich and the poor, shanty dwellers and property capital, men and women, to the banner of “good governance.”

Significantly, unlike the Swedish *Freiskool* and US Charter school systems upon which Free Schools were based, there is no ‘market fundamentalism’: schools are statutorily prohibited from operating for profit. This may, however, be subject to change in the future. In his evidence to the Leveson Inquiry, Gove (2012:46f) said that he had an ‘open mind’ on profit-making schools. He added: ‘I believe that it may be the case that we can augment the quality of state education by extending the range of people involved in its provision.’ Yet a year later, giving evidence to the Education Select Committee (18 December 2013), when asked if he could envisage taxpayer-funded schools ever being run for profit, he tersely replied ‘No’, notwithstanding that his preferred Swedish model includes multi-school chains which are owned by competing private companies and run on a for-profit basis. By way of explanation for Gove’s apparent reluctance to embrace full marketisation, Hatcher (2011:497) quotes Astle (2011:487):

The ban on profitmaking schools has little to do with good policy, and everything to do with politics. Nick Clegg, deputy prime minister, knows his party hates the idea. Mr Cameron questions whether it is worth the hassle, and worries that accusations of letting supermarkets run schools would be a gift to Labour’s Ed Miliband. Both wonder whether, in their impatience to press ahead, they would leave voters behind – a concern the u-turn over plans to sell off public forests has heightened.

The primary function of the free school, as Gove (2009b:12) articulated, is to pass on ‘the best that has been thought, and written’ to the next generation. That is an intrinsically conservative pursuit: ‘To deny children the opportunity to extend their knowledge so they can appreciate, enjoy, and become familiar with the best of our civilization is to perpetuate a very specific, and tragic, sort of deprivation’ (*ibid.*). This is not free-floating individualism for ‘economic necessity’ or ‘a single, overriding emphasis on... economic competitiveness’ (Ball, 2008:11): it is a conception of community in history – a moral inculcation which acknowledges the families, faiths and disparate communities which constitute ‘civilisation’. The moral imperative for a school is to nurture the pursuit of the ‘best’ knowledge.

Philosophy of goodness

For Gove in particular, freedom of choice is the highest good because it leads to parents choosing the ‘right’ school for their child. It is not for the Secretary of State to arbitrate on what constitutes ‘good’ beyond an Ofsted assessment and classification of standards: the ‘right’ school enhances the possibility of a ‘good life’, which is variously apprehended. This liberal multiplicity is the extent of what must be conserved, and that is traditionally a Whiggish worldview. This is nothing new; nor is it confined to ‘neo-liberal’ states (a common assertion of free-school critics [e.g., Tomlinson, 2013]). In his introduction to Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of Freedom* (1998:13f), Stanley Aronowitz highlights teachers’ “‘right” to academic freedom’; of ‘autonomy in the construction of the curriculum and of the pedagogic process’ being intrinsic to teachers’ dignity and professional

identity. Freire's context is Latin America, where his evaluation of necessary freedoms may not be so easily categorised a manifestation of capitalist 'neo-liberalism'.

For the socialist, free schools are good if what they achieve is social equity – the overriding concern of Ball and Anon LD – in particular relating to fair admissions, social inclusion and more equal outcomes in attainment (cf. Ball, 2008:153). For the liberal, free schools are good when their autonomy is minimally regulated by a framework disposed toward social justice – in particular to mitigate 'harm' and improve levels of attainment (cf. Garforth, 1975:165f). For the conservative, free schools are good when they are from the restrictive ideologies of local tribal chiefs (elected or self-appointed), by which teachers are liberated to innovate, which is the key to social flourishing and higher standards (cf. Scruton, 2001:132f). There is obviously some philosophical crossover: politicians are nuanced individuals, and political parties are coalitions. But in none of these politico-philosophical paradigms are free schools anarchic: they are socially-embodied in the character of English tradition spanning centuries of incrementally-gained freedoms. But only in the liberal-conservative paradigm are they consistent with or sympathetic to England's organic cultural heritage; congruous with notions of natural fraternity and compatible with apprehensions of democratic community. The alternative, as Baker pointed out, is the illiberal remoulding of state education or 'social engineering' (cf. Ball & Bellamy, 2003:341; Popper, 1945), which, he avers, does not incline toward the common good.

Since a heightened focus on respect, tolerance and mutual understanding has been contiguous with and intrinsic to Gove's reform, Free Schools are statutorily obliged to inculcate a sense of common citizenship and communal identity, contra value-pluralism (cf. Ball & Bellamy, 2003:448f): the Secretary of State is the supreme arbiter to resolve conflicting ideals of liberty, justice and democracy. But there is no perceived need of a socialist institutional 'universal solution' – the neutral, secular, comprehensive school – because the state-autonomy model of governance manifest in 'voluntary schools provided by the churches and other voluntary bodies with their distinctive ethos and traditions' (HMSO, 1992:1) has supplanted the statist ideological assertion of social equity achieved through sameness, commonality or uniformity (cf. Ball, 2008:122). The organisational structures, curricula, pedagogical methods and national frameworks are responding to demands for diversity, not with the imposition of liberal rationalism, but the consensual acceptance of the need for a plural framework, which all interviewees perceive to be good.

SUMMARY

There is considerable manifest congruity between the architects of Free Schools on the historical apprehensions of the policy. While educationalists aver that the reforms herald a 'neo-

liberal' cultural disintegration at the behest of the 'New Right', and 'the end of secondary education for all' (Pring, 2012 cf. Ball, 2008:72, 75ff), it would be more accurate to say that Free Schools constitute (as Norman said) a revival of the old 'New Liberalism' or the Whiggish tradition of minority dissent, under the aegis of a consensual conservatism. Some might find this confused, compromised, crude and incoherent, but i) complexity, chaos and 'unstable compromises' (Ball, 2008:61f, 67) have been integral to English state education since its inception; and ii) the new Free Schools – in their history and philosophy – are consistent with the state-public(/free-grammar) reforms of the nineteenth-century, which Ball (2008:68) characterises as a process of 'dissolution and conservation'. The Academy revived or conserves the precise boundary of freedom reified by 'converter' GM Schools; the Free School revived or conserves the precise boundary of freedom reified by 'start-up' CTCs. Both are redolent of historic liberations from religious elects and municipal elites. Incremental 'dissolution and conservation' is perceived as 'good' reform because, as Skidmore observes, 'you have to take society as it stands and reflect society', which is an essentially Burkean pursuit.

CHAPTER XI

THE EDUCATIONAL ELITE

INTRODUCTION

The evidence suggests that education policy relating to the ‘down-system’ development and expansion of Academies, and their enhancement by the addition of Free Schools, was driven by an elite political and educational social group – an ‘up-system’ policy community – which considers itself to possess the necessary expertise, morality and knowledge to discern which individuals, groups, charities or other organisations are best motivated and suited to establishing and running schools; what the overarching ethos of values ought to be; and what ‘the best that has been thought, and written’ consists of. Elitism, according to Quinton (1993:246, 265), does not take human beings and the societies they compose to be theoretically impenetrable: it contends that the best elite is an intellectual one, composed of those who are particularly qualified by abilities and training to understand the workings of society. For Pareto, elite rule is ‘inevitable’ (Femia, 2011:2): he ‘distinguishes between “lions”, the governing elites who rule through decisive action and force, and “foxes”, non-governing elites who use more subtle persuasion and manipulation’ (Williams, C, 2012:59 cf. Pareto, 1963). The cross-party policy community contains both politician-‘lions’ and advisor-‘foxes’ (and a few vice-versa): the decisive action being legislatively democratic; the force being anti-democratic conversion to Academy status, with appeal to a greater ‘good’; namely to raising standards of educational attainment by mitigating the effects of disadvantage or deprivation and so spur social mobility. The consensus is that institutional autonomy and organic civil society combine in pursuit of the common good, provided that ‘harm’ is mitigated by an overarching framework of values monitored by inspection.

The Sutton Trust (2010:3) established that ‘social mobility levels are low among the highest echelons of British society’, and that ‘(t)he majority of those holding the most powerful and influential positions in modern Britain come from a small social elite, and are not reflective of the wider society which the professions are intended to serve’. This is important, they say, because it is ‘Parliament that is ultimately responsible for our national education policy’. My findings establish that an even greater majority of those who were influencing or implementing Academy and Free-School policy came from an even smaller social elite (smaller, even, than the judiciary – the most elite group identified): they were not only unreflective of wider society, but their experience of the types of schools they were seeking to reform was limited, and rarely personal.

i) ELITE CULTURE, IDEAS AND LANGUAGE

The principal elite architect of Free Schools – Gove – is a meritocrat after New Labour’s definition/adoption of the term, which Ball (2008:181) summarises as ‘opportunity, removing barriers and providing possibilities for those with energy and talent, rather than universal provision’. This shifts the focus ‘from the institution to the individual, irrespective of geography or birth, so that every gifted pupil will be stretched and special needs met’ (Blunkett [*Hansard*, 1999]; Ball, 2008:181). Blunkett also emphasised the structural mechanism: ‘It means a substantial expansion of specialist and beacon schools promoting diversity and excellence’ (*ibid.*): specialist schools were selective ‘by aptitude’; beacon schools were the highest-performing; and ‘diversity’ challenged the injustices of both ‘rigid selection’ and ‘deadening uniformity’ (Blair, 2005). This was the common language of Academy and Free School policy evidenced in the interviews.

Gove saw himself as having risen by natural aptitude and applied industry to the position of Secretary of State, by dint of having attended the ‘right’ school which offered a ‘good’ education. He surrounded himself by an elite intelligentsia whose mission was to resolve social inequality by liberating schools from the tripartite ‘bureaucratic’ confines of 1944 to empower parents and reinvigorate local democracy, building on the foundation established by Adonis and Blunkett (which both acknowledge, as do Twigg and Taylor). Of Gove’s *modus operandi*, it is observed:

..he works to discredit and destroy – and sometimes to mimic and co-opt – ideas and working practices associated with a left-wing project to validate knowledge, teacher identities and student dispositions that are seen as problematic for a conservative social order. From one point of view, there is something positive that might be gleaned from this. To critical theory, it might suggest that educational actors beyond the policy-making elite have a role that is not only responsive after the fact of policy – in the sense that policy is adapted and revised when it encounters local circumstances – but also constitutive, in that antagonisms between different social interests affect the focus, framing and justification of policy at government level. From another point of view, it is the imbalance in this relationship of dialogic antagonism that stands out. Gove’s opponents organise themselves ‘post-ideologically’ around positions that tend to avoid explicit contestation – ‘a good local school for every child’ (Jones 2013:332)

As Gibb makes manifest, the LEAs/LAs had long since ceased to be either accountable for failure or responsive to parental concerns, and a self-perpetuating *expertois* occupied this structural tier of administration. The ‘power elite’ policy community sought to dominate and eradicate the *expertois* ‘bureaucratic elite’ in order to restore legitimate authority and so enhance justice. As Williams, C (2012:60) observes: ‘Education systems are a major form of bureaucratic social control, particularly in authoritarian, socialist and religious contexts.’ Education controls through shaping elite culture, ideas and language (cf. Walford, 1994). The educational philosophy of the elite who exert ‘down-system’ control is therefore of considerable sociological, psychological and political significance.

Elite social philosophy

Walford (1994:3) notes that it is ‘particularly those on the political left’ who have tended to investigate the powerful in education. My observations – advisedly and reflectively from the right – of the history, philosophy and narrative accounts of policy provided by the elite architects, establish that Free Schools not only lie within a broad historic liberal-conservative philosophy of education; they are concerned with values, beliefs and practices – or ethos; sometimes expressed as ‘Christian’ – which many of the elite found in their private schools, even as they themselves may have been unbelieving or their schools have become more secular (cf. Adonis, 2012a:xvii). These values, beliefs and practices combine toward ‘duty, discipline and responsibility’ (*ibid.*, xvi), leading to higher educational attainment and so improved life chances.

This is ‘neo-liberal’ in the sense that a Hayekian economic perspective of entrepreneurship, private enterprise and the market underpins the project. But it is also social-democratic in the sense that it is concerned with matters of justice, equality and state-guaranteed security. The tensions between the architects of policy lie not in their support for Free Schools, but in their diverse apprehensions of social justice (including equality); and the perceived role and regulatory function of the central authority (i.e., the balance between freedom and organisation). The left inclines toward a planning, implementing, regulating and inspecting body to administer and enforce greater justice, which then liberates children to realise their individual potentials, ameliorate their communities and thereby benefit wider society (i.e., achieve a conception of equality). The right inclines toward less planning and less regulating in order to free the implementing subject to quasi-independent inspecting, which, when combined with pedagogical innovation, institutional creativity and rigorous qualifications, combines to liberate children to realise their individual potentials, ameliorate their communities and thereby benefit wider society (i.e., achieve a conception of equality). It was Taylor who articulated the essential consensual view:

I have problems with the system... I don't think it offends the Burkean principle, however, because I think that it's a revolution which is about dismantling state planning. I imagine that revolutions are permitted if the goal of revolutions is to move from, as Tony (Blair) would say, national monoliths, to thousands of more autonomous institutions.

The liberation offered by Free Schools is perceived by the elite not only through subsidiarity in terms of pedagogy, curricula, teacher salaries and terms of employment; it includes national emancipation from the dominance of teaching unions, educational academics and local-authority ‘culture’ (which is defined cross-party as ‘bureaucratic’ [Gove/Gibb/Boles/Ryan/Taylor]). While local-authority control has, in fact, not amounted to ‘control’ since the *Education (No.2) Act 1986*, there remained a residual political ideology which is characterised by proponents as the ‘education establishment’ or, more disparagingly, ‘the Blob’. By eradicating the statutory requirement for any (declared or covert) politically-affiliated LA governors to participate in the oversight of Free Schools, it leaves the ‘apolitical’ (not, of course) sponsor representatives, parents, teachers, charities etc., to

fulfil all statutory requirements relating to governance. The elite epistocratic mechanism for challenging the elite *expertois* is the realisation of a diversity of institutions competing to offer choice to parents who are thereby empowered. Democracy is sustained directly; not mediated through a perceived deficient, if not anti-democratic, ‘middle tier’. The newly-appointed intermediaries between the DfE and schools – the developing RSCs – were designed to strengthen subsidiarity and redress the democratic deficit.

ii) ELITE PHILOSOPHICAL CONSENSUS

My hypothesis was that of an essential philosophical consensus between the architects of Free Schools – that is, the political architects and their associated advisors who developed schools that are free from LA control; and initiated or expanded the process now known as ‘academisation’ – not to some caricature individualistic ‘New Right’ agenda of ‘fiscal imperatives’ and anarchic ‘quasi-markets’ which may be conveniently slotted into a ‘neoliberal project for education’ (Gordon & Whitty, 1997:453); but to a cohesive project of classical liberalism – if not of ‘sceptical liberalism’ derived from Pareto’s ethical primacy of the individual (Femia, 2011:chapter 6) – balanced with traditional conservative paternalism. Taylor expresses it as ‘the possibility of binding social conservatism, by taking from the left a concern about social justice, and from the right a concern for institutions, and traditions, and cohesion, and seeing if we can combine those’.

As seen in Chapter IX, the interview narratives were not univocal on apprehensions of Free School philosophy, but consensus does not require unanimity: it may be manifest as majority or general agreement. The disparity between interviewees’ ‘manifest’ and ‘latent’ responses was sometimes pronounced, such that an immediate (perhaps occasionally partisan) repudiation of Gove’s approach became, sometimes within one or two sentences, an essential expression of philosophical support – at least for fundamental aspects of his objectives if not of his *modus operandi*. Indeed, it wasn’t always clear that respondents were aware of their inherent contradictions, some of which were redolent of Twigg’s illogical politicking around Free Schools (examined in Chapter I.iii), when he announced ‘Labour will not continue with the Michael Gove’s Free Schools policy’ (Twigg, 2013), but in the same speech affirmed the Free Schools established by Toby Young (Conservative) and Peter Hyman (Labour), and then pledged in a subsequent interview that he would continue with ‘those sorts of things’ (Kirkup 2013).

Gove perceived a broad cross-party consensus for reform, and attributed it, quite simply, to ‘public dissatisfaction with the poor quality of education that their children received’ (Appendix XIV.i). Skidmore said: ‘I think the consensus began – I mean Blair was extremely brave to take on some of the vested interests – I think the moment when Hackney Downs closed.’ Norman attributed

the consensus to ‘a lot of the economic and cultural expectations about school reform were set during... the 1980s and 1990s (Appendix XIV.ii). Ryan agreed with Gove, that the beginning of consensus was linked to the realisation that in 1976 (‘Ruskin Speech’) that ‘something had gone amiss in the education system; that standards had gone amiss; that there was a so called progressive movement had taken hold’ (Appendix XIV.iii). Baker attributes consensus to ‘a general feeling that the existing school system is letting a lot of children down’ (Appendix XIV.iv). Adonis attributes *academisation* consensus to the fact that ‘it works’ and ‘it’s popular’ (Appendix XIV.v). Blunkett attributes the same consensus to ‘a genuine will to transform the life chances of children and to improve schools’ (Appendix XIV.vi). And Anon LD responded: ‘I put the consensus down to a very strong desire to improve things for children and to try whatever we can to give every child an opportunity at very great length’ (before proceeding to share at great length some concerns [Appendix XIV.vii]). These observations of essential consensus on the process of academisation was cross-party (four Conservative; three Labour; one Liberal Democrat).

There were then some more equivocal responses: interviewees who perceived partial consensus. On my quoting Gove’s assertion in Parliament that the Conservatives ‘are on the same page as Andrew Adonis’, Hancock responded: ‘But we’re not on the same page as Ed Balls... There’s a reactionary part of the Labour Party that isn’t supportive. There’s a progressive part of the Labour Party that is. Their debate is not resolved.’ When I asked him to what he attributed that ‘progressive’ consensus, and he responded: ‘Evidence’ (Appendix XIV.viii). Twigg initially cited ‘fundamental difference’ before equivocating at some nuanced length (Appendix XIV.ix), but later adding:

Academies as a tool of getting school improvement, particularly in areas of under-performance and poverty, was a key Labour reform that in a sense has been built upon by Michael Gove, in two quite different ways – with his Academies programme, and then with Free Schools (Twigg).

So Academies were ‘built on’ by Gove, and Free Schools are perceived to be an equivalent mechanism of school improvement. These observations of qualified or a degree of consensus were also cross-party (one Conservative; one Labour).

The proposition of consensus was manifestly initially repudiated by Boles, Gibb, O’Shaughnessy, Blunkett, Taylor and Balls (three conservative; three Labour). But their subsequent refutation merits some analysis, because (with the exception of Balls) their end positions more properly categorise them as affirming the broad-consensus hypothesis.

Balls refuted the notion of consensus, as Hancock had identified: ‘But the Academies programme, between ’97 and 2010, was never market based. It wasn’t a “Set up a school and see if it succeeds”: it wasn’t a “We’ll set up a new Academy”’ (Balls). His opposition to Gove’s ‘market’ conception of Free Schools was unequivocal. And yet at one point in the interview he referred to ‘the Academies and Free Schools movement’ (singular). Gibb began by saying that consensus was ‘only

apparent’, but went on to state: ‘There is more consensus now about the structural changes; there is not a consensus on the standards agenda, on phonics, on the nature of the curriculum.’ Thus the liberalising philosophy which drives Free School negative freedom (vis-à-vis LAs) becomes a perceived matter of undisputed structural consensus: the divergence is on the scope or extents of residual positive freedoms (curriculum, or ‘process’). Taylor said: ‘I defend Michael a lot, because actually, even though I don’t agree with him, I don’t think it helps to caricature his position.’ And he expanded on the areas of disagreement (Appendix XIV.x), but went on to say: ‘I’m not averse to Free Schools: I am averse to the hostility to notions of planning.’ His personal aversion did not amount to a perception of wider consensus, but the ‘global’ sense of his narrative is of a ‘progressive’ consensus. Boles said: ‘I don’t think there’s a consensus broadly’, but then reasoned a partial consensus among progressive Labour and Liberal Democrat politicians along the lines of Hancock (Appendix XIV.xi). O’Shaughnessy also said that he didn’t agree there was a consensus, but reasoned discursively (without any further interjection from me) that ‘it’s a centrist thing rather than a total consensus’ (Appendix XIV.xii).

By observing word-cloud ‘global’ responses (Chapter VII.ii), and analysing interviewees’ subsequent latent comments, equivocations or alternative frameworks of consensual apprehension (‘centrist’; ‘progressive’), I arrive at a distinct cross-party elite perception of Free School consensus; that is, a perception not of accord with every area of reform, but of the apprehension of *general agreement* on the fundamental philosophical principles which underpin the policy.

Table 16: **Elite perceptions of the extent of cross-party consensus on Free School reforms**

Unequivocal consensus	Partial Consensus	Absence of consensus
Gove	Hancock	Balls
Skidmore	Twigg	
Norman	Taylor	
Ryan	Boles	
Baker	O’Shaughnessy	
Adonis	Blunkett	
Anon LD		
Gibb		

Not only do the elite architects of Academies and Free Schools believe their reforms to be educationally transformational through localisation, liberalisation and the provision of choice, but neither Labour nor Conservative proponents of the policy believe in state education subject to the doctrine of market logic alone. While the educational media narrative tends to emphasise Labour’s compassionate and inclusive commitment to social justice over Conservatives’ austere and divisive market ideology, the reality is more nuanced. If, by ‘progressive’ or ‘centrist’, interviewees aver that Labour has incrementally adopted ‘Thatcherism’ in respect of expanding Baker’s reforms, and the Conservatives have incrementally absorbed social-democratic notions of communitarianism and equality to mitigate the perceived excesses and injustices of the free market, then that would be an

acknowledgement of the Blond/Glasman consensual ‘Third Way’. But that sort of dualism is a Manichean caricature: all respondents were concerned with matters of social justice and civil society, and so the education market is socialised. Just as the free market is subject to regulation (e.g., Ofgem, Ofwat, Ofcom), so Free Schools are subject to regulation (e.g., Ofsted, Ofqual, and an emerging [Royal College] of Teaching to replace the GTC).

O’Shaughnessy observes of the consensus: ‘The interesting thing about education reform in this country, which is a contrast to the health reform, is it’s been very bi-partisan in both directions.’ He posits a lineage:

So you think of Butler, and then the Labour government. You think of Thatcher... closing more grammar schools than any other education secretary. So both the traditional and the progressive; both were pushed by governments of both views, and the kind of long march back to standards started under Callaghan and has had significant moments to now. It’s basically: Callaghan, Baker, Blunkett, and now Gove. So clearly, that’s spanning four different governments and two different parties and all the rest of it (O’Shaughnessy).

When I suggested that Adonis ought to be inserted, he responded: ‘Yes. I was only thinking of education secretaries. He never was. But you’re right, he is clearly in the lineage, yes.’ And Adonis agrees that there is a thread which is underpinned by ‘a consensual instinct’ (Appendix XIV.xiii). The ‘progressive’ or ‘centrist’ consensus has arisen out of the need for something new:

The tired old alternatives of the left and right were clearly not adequate. They were either totally irrelevant, as in the Assisted Places Scheme or new grammar schools which clearly weren’t going to help the poor in poor areas; they just passed them by. Or they clearly failed, like just handing more money to existing badly-managed comprehensives, which was basically the policy of the left (Adonis).

For Adonis, Academies ‘obviously worked and no one had any better answer, either on the left or the right, to the big challenge which everyone accepted of radically improving education in disadvantaged areas’. And, while by no means universal (or even amounting to *general agreement*), it is possible to find cross-party affirmation of Free Schools in the media of both the political left and right (e.g., Wilby 2011a; Garner 2011 [Appendix XVI]). Ryan expressed the essence of my hypothesis of philosophical consensus as a matter of political logic:

Now the solutions I think needed a sort of New Labour and a sort of Cameron-Gove, if you like, in order to develop the consensus, certainly structurally. Where I think we had a degree of consensus emerging before that was probably on the accountability side of things, and on the need for an independent inspectorate and a need for testing and a need for a curriculum and so on. So that consensus came first. But on the structure reforms I think it needed the sort of Blair push and the recognition that actually Academies owed a lot to Conservative policy and CTCs, so it was something that was actually quite logical for them (Ryan).

This is the fulfilment of the plea made by Adonis (2012a:xv) in his Academies ‘manifesto’: ‘I see no reason why this manifesto could not be embraced by all the political parties, for education is too important to be subject to narrow political tribalism. It is an unashamedly progressive agenda, aiming to strengthen society and social cohesion.’ And he called for ‘the state’ to give ‘a strong lead’,

because he is ‘not aware of any other basis upon which social transformation has taken place in the modern age’ (*ibid.*).

SUMMARY

There is something of a dilemma inherent in an education policy which simultaneously seeks to permit a plurality of individual or local self-expression, and yet conserve sufficient commonality and state uniformity for the flourishing of human community. In the context of Free Schools, it is the ‘tensions that inevitably arise between competition and collaboration, between models of autonomy and accountability, and between the claims of freedom and fairness’ (Bamfield *et al.*, 2013:8). Yet this tension is nothing new in the philosophical spectrum that exists between liberalism and conservatism:

The power of the state, then, is a function of its contraction. But, we must recall, its power and authority are not *core* conservative concepts. They are merely a means, albeit a highly efficient one, for subordinating the political to the natural or, if another formulation is preferred, for subordinating those political projects which threaten dominant theories of social balance to those which sustain them (Freeden, 1996:394).

Norman (2010:158), sees the growth of state powers as ‘undermining how we see ourselves’. In contrast to both statist socialism and ‘old’ Conservative paternalism:

‘The new conservatism stresses independent institutions, and horizontal ties, the conversation of many equal voices over the command of one voice, the wisdom of crowds over the fallibility of central control. Its emphasis is not on what the state can do for you or you for the state but on what we can do for each other’ (Norman, 2010:187).

This ‘new conservatism’ draws on traditional Whiggish themes outlined in Chapter IV.ii. ‘There is a real chance to develop a lasting consensus on education, one that outlives changes in Government’ (Ryan, 2013), and the absence of the contemporary consensus is limited to relatively peripheral arguments around the extents of curriculum centralisation and subsidiarity:

The level of prescription in subjects like history – which is now wholly chronological – and English which has a level of detail on grammar unseen since the literacy hour – stands in sharp contrast to the notion that schools would be increasingly free to decide for themselves what they would do. Teachers are freer to decide how to teach, but are much more circumscribed in what they must teach (Ryan, 2013).

Hence the Labour ‘global’ interview emphasis observed in Chapter VII. Adonis accepts the consensus, though the politicking for ownership is evident:

There is a good deal of consensus but let’s be clear – the consensus is a New Labour one. It’s about privilege for all, rather than the old Tory policy of privilege for a few. (Furthermore) Michael Gove is now coming behind my call for private schools to sponsor comprehensives. Labour can take pride that in important areas of public policy the Tories have been forced to accept a New Labour consensus (Beardsworth, 2013).

Which narrative accentuates the manifest divergence of ‘old’ thinking (whether Conservative or Labour): in the ‘new’ thinking of both (‘New Right’ or ‘New Labour’), the structural preference is that of the market-choice paradigm tempered by self-organising civil society facilitated by partnership-based local governance. The RSA in conjunction with Suffolk County Council affirms this sort of ‘organic’ educational collaboration:

In a series of reports for the National College, David Hargreaves has outlined a ‘mature’ model of the self-improving school system, at the heart of which is a collaborative network of strategic alliances. In this model, collaborative capacity is progressively built from the bottom up, starting with ‘a small group of schools in deep partnership, expanding to a much larger group – an alliance, federation, trust, chain, local authority etc – and from there potentially to a whole region and nation’ (Bamfield *et al.*, p78 #7).

‘Bottom-up’, ‘collaborative’, ‘partnership’, ‘shared responsibility’, ‘common purpose’: this is an empirical conservative-liberal cooperative apprehension of a developing reform, corroborative of my philosophical and historical understanding of free schools. As Jessop (2002:460) puts it, ‘there is growing reliance on partnership, networks, consultation, negotiation, and other forms of reflexive self-organization, rather than on the combination of anarchic market forces and top-down planning associated with the postwar “mixed economy”..’.

As I set out in Chapter V.ii, this historical-philosophical thesis is not an assertion that Free School policy decisions or actions are in any sense ‘correct’, or that all reasonable citizens are obliged to agree with the market-morality of the policy: it is simply that they have moral force because there is normative consent for their existence. The democratic tensions are a possible area of potential future research, as are the effects of freedom/un-freedom conflicts represented by the imposition of codified ‘British values’; the hypothesis of causality between religious frameworks of education and membership of the elite; and the effect sizes of any hypothesised correlation between institutional freedoms and raised (‘transformed’) standards of attainment.

As a contribution to knowledge, I have provided a unique philosophical and historical insight into the views of the elite ‘policy community’ which initiated the GM/CTC policy in the Thatcher era (1979-1992); developed the sponsored (City) Academy model through the New Labour years (1997-2010); and considerably expanded it through the Conservative-Liberal Democrat ‘Coalition’ years with the addition of converter Academies and Free Schools (2010-2015). I have interviewed the principal reformers, including a current and three former secretaries of state for education, along with some of their senior advisors. These have provided the historical apprehensions of the policy community, and their philosophical understandings of the associated themes of Free School reform. I recognise that this is an unorthodox contribution to the literature on the socio-economic impact of ‘neo-liberalism’ on education, positioned instead in the perspective of a much older tradition of Classical Liberalism and civic Toryism, in which the state facilitates ‘little platoons’ to coalesce, create, innovate, inspire and inculcate the values necessary for the ‘rounded’ education. As a

contribution to the literature on researching the powerful in education, this thesis is an original, ethical and critically-reflexive analysis of what has become the dominant model of education in England. It is as 'neutral' as any 'insider' research may be; interrogated by a robust methodology which presents the 'global' terms of the narrative; delves beneath the 'manifest' political or official lines of response, extending to analysis of 'latent' thoughts and themes. I observe from this a high degree of philosophical reformist consensus, if not always of affirmation with regard to political praxis.

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Appendices

APPENDIX 1

Extract from SHROSBREE, C (1988). *Public Schools and Private Education – The Clarendon Commission, 1861-64, and The Public Schools Acts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), pp10ff.

The Public School Commissioners in their Report (Vol. I. p.303) say: “In the original charter the School is described as a Free School (*Libera Schola*), by which term is commonly understood a School in which education was to be given gratuitously, though Dr Kennedy disputes the correctness of this interpretation.”

I do not know which of the two interpretations found favour with the Commissioners, collectively or individually, nor can I say, why they thought it right to pass by the consideration of a point so really important in determining the legal character of this and other Schools. But I think they might have stated the question less invidiously than by placing the “common understanding” to the term Free School, and in my opinion to the term *Libera Schola*. For it is quite certain that up to the present moment (some eyes may have been opened by the statements which have appeared in print) not one person in any thousand, to whom the term Free School is a household word, has ever heard of Latin Charters, and of the title *Libera Schola* found in them. This is proved by the fact that none of our English Dictionaries, with which I am acquainted, as Johnson and Webster, under the head Free-School, alluded to the Latin words, but merely explain the phrase according to the common acceptance. In this state of the case, were I to assert that the term Free School does not mean a School in which children are taught without cost, it might be said that on me rests the burden of proving that public opinion, custom, and the dictionaries, are all in error. But this I do not assert. I have no doubt that when the term Free School, as a version of *Libera Schola*, passed, as it rapidly did, into general use, the ambiguity of the English word free*, added to the fact that some gratuitous education existed at all Public Schools, induced and has perpetuated the general use of this term to express a School of gratuitous education: in consequence of which many persons (among whom were John Lyon, the Founder of Harrow, and Laurence Sheriff, the Founder of Rugby School) did found, with the name of Free Schools, institutions for the gratuitous education of local boys. This universal popular notion of the term, and these embodiments of it in actual use, naturally caused lexicographers to interpret Free-School as they have done: and they appear to have had no glimpse of an earlier and true meaning.

I do not, then, deny, that the term Free School has, by the force of custom, acquired the sense popularly attached to it: but I do deny that the term *Libera Schola* in King Edward’s Charters (whether it exists in any others I know not) can bear that meaning. And, in making this denial, I say the *onus probandi* does not rest upon me, but upon those who ventured to ascribe to the adjective *Liber* in this one instance a meaning which it does not bear in any other phrase that can be adduced from any era of the Latin language, more especially, a meaning at variance with its common use in the titles of Royal Charters, in which it universally means “endowed with a liberty (freedom, franchise, immunity or privilege) by Charter”...in all which the adjective has one general meaning “exempt from servitude,” of some kind all other, in all which it is understood to be conferred by Charter on that subject...

...Further: it rests with the same persons to explain how it happens (if the word *Libera*, instead of being, as I confidently affirm, a mere title of privilege and immunity conferred on the School, implies a direction to the Trustees about its management) that the following words of the Charter do not express and embody that direction.

*Yet who will venture to say that Fletcher, when he wrote (Elder Brother, Act IV. Sc. 3) “This scholar never went to a Free School, he is so simple,” did not use the term in the exact sense of our “Public School”?

APPENDIX II

Education Minister Liz Truss, Westminster Hall Debate: ‘Personal, Social, Health and Financial Education’ (16th January, 2013).

Our fundamental belief is that the national curriculum should give schools more flexibility to teach in a way that is suited to their pupils and to how the school operates. As I have mentioned, we have statutory sex education, but we believe in more local autonomy in how things are achieved, so that they are done in the best possible way... We want schools to offer a rounded education, but we believe the best way to do that is to allow more decision making by head teachers, rather than by Whitehall... I have outlined how I think that more teachers should be empowered to decide the content of the wider school curriculum. International evidence shows that giving schools more autonomy results in them being able to make better decisions on the ground. The same applies to teacher training, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South. We are clear that teachers should be free to access high-quality resources and training, such as that provided by the British Heart Foundation on life-saving skills. It is a two-way process, with professionals in schools in regular dialogue with outside bodies, as well as the Government, rather than one with edicts issued from Whitehall about how exactly subjects should be taught (*Hansard*, 2013).

APPENDIX III

Sample letter of introduction/invitation to participate in the research.

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Director Professor Anne Edwards



[REDACTED]
House of Commons
Westminster
London
SW1A 0AA

19th October 2012

Dear [REDACTED],

I had a meeting with [REDACTED] last month – [REDACTED]. I'm writing to invite you to participate in my research into Academies and Free Schools, and I do so not only as a researcher, but as a former teacher, assistant principal, and former advisor to the Secretary of State. I would be appreciative of your perspectives, given your previous [REDACTED]. I'm hoping that you, too, might be willing.

I returned to Oxford last year to pursue doctoral studies on the political philosophy behind the current reforms. I understand this to be the first such doctoral research in this area. I'd deeply appreciate 20 minutes or so of your time over the next few months to glean your input and insights.

I'm meeting [REDACTED] this week (Thursday 25th), and am approaching a number of other politicians and their advisors across the political spectrum who grasp 'what lies behind' the political impetus behind the structural trajectory.

I'd be happy to send you the paperwork which explains in greater detail what I'm doing, and to fulfil the University's ethical requirements. I know you'll be busy with parliamentary work and [REDACTED], and I have no desire to add onerously to your present workload, but I know that you appreciate that Academies and Free Schools are beginning to represent something of shift in state education in England, and I'm sure you'll agree that it's an area worthy of historical analysis and political-philosophical scrutiny.

I hope I may hear from you.

(Please feel free to respond by email: adrian.hilton@education.ox.ac.uk).

Kind regards,

Adrian Hilton MSc MTh (Oxon) FRSA
University of Oxford | Researcher in Education

APPENDIX IV

Sample letter of interview confirmation.

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Director Professor Anne Edwards



3rd December 2012

Dear [REDACTED],

Thank you for agreeing to meet next Monday to discuss Free Schools. The research is being carried out under the aegis of the Department of Education here at Oxford, and the thesis title is: *'Free Schools' in England: the role of Conservative and Liberal political thought in shaping the Policy*. I am aware, of course, that Free Schools are an extension of Labour's Academy programme, making the philosophical inquiry a matter of considerable interest. As I said, this is the first doctoral research in this area, which I hope will contribute to the wider understanding of the underlying philosophy of current education policy – for educationalists, parents, school governors and politicians.

There are certain ethical criteria to fulfil before the interview can take place. For transparency, I remind you that I have been a senior leader within state grammar-school education and was an advisor to Michael Gove during the Opposition years. I am interviewing senior politicians, policy-makers and their advisors from across the political spectrum; those who are or have been closely involved in the development of the Academy and Free Schools programmes. [REDACTED] have been most helpful in this regard (as, of course, has [REDACTED]).

I hope our discussion will take no more than about 30 minutes of your time. Since your former roles [REDACTED] are in the public domain, I hope you will feel free to speak on the record. If you would prefer any of your remarks to be unattributed, please just say so and I will do all I can to ensure that. I'd like to record our conversation, if possible, for my own convenience: if you'd prefer not to be recorded, please, again, just say so and I'll try to make notes instead.

Access to recordings and transcripts will be limited to me, my academic supervisors (named below), and those involved in the University's assessment processes: all digital data will be stored securely under dual password-protected, encrypted hard-drive, and documentation in a locked, metal filing cabinet. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies and legislation. You are, of course, at liberty to decline or withdraw at any time, without reason, and I assure you that any such decision will be without adverse consequence. I also attach the necessary Consent Form which should be read in conjunction with this letter. You may, if you wish, see a transcript of the interview and agree any amendments, though I reserve the right to interpret the data acquired. Should the research findings be published in the future, I hope you would consent to being quoted. If not, please just say so. The final thesis will be archived in the Bodleian Library, and all data stored in a secure metal cabinet for my reference only.

Should you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me or any of my supervisors: Dr Liam Gearon (liam.gearon@education.ox.ac.uk); Professor Pam Sammons (pamela.sammons@education.ox.ac.uk); or Professor Iain McLean (iain.mclean@nuffield.ox.ac.uk).

I look forward to seeing you [REDACTED] next Monday at 6.30pm.

APPENDIX V

Voluntary informed consent form.

CONSENT FORM

Research project: *'Free Schools' in England: the role of Conservative and Liberal political thought in shaping the Policy*

Researcher's name, position and contact details: Adrian Hilton MSc MTh (Oxon), DPhil candidate, Department of Education, Oxford University, 15 Norham Gardens, Oxford, OX2 6PY. Tel: 07774 64460. Email: adrian.hilton@education.ox.ac.uk

Please tick box

I confirm that I have read the accompanying letter, understand the information provided, and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I agree to participate in this study, and understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason. I understand how to raise a concern about the study.

☐

I agree that my data gathered in this study may be stored securely and may be used for future research.

☐

Yes

No

I agree to the interview being audio recorded

☐☐

I agree to the use of attributed quotations in the doctoral thesis

☐☐

I agree to the use of attributed quotations in publications

☐☐

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Adrian Hilton

Xth XXX 2012

Name of Researcher

Date

Signature

APPENDIX VI

Example of background preparation for interview (Lord Adonis)

Broken home, into children's care home, awarded grant by LEA to attend Kingham Hill School (private/boarding) in Oxon.

Educated Oxford (Keble (Modern History, first class) / The House [DPhil: 19thC aristocracy] / Nuffield [fellowship in history/politics])

Became journalist FT/Observer

Headed Blair's Policy Unit

Minister of State for Education (2005)

May 2012

Adonis ditches support for Gove reforms

I was pleased when I heard that Lord Adonis had Ed Miliband's policy advisor as I hoped it would mean the Party resolving to support the Government's policies of allowing free schools to open and more schools to convert to become academies. That would have been good for the Labour Party but it would also have been in the national interest for school choice to be a matter of consensus.

But Labour continue to face both ways on this issue - with Adonis, reversing his previous support for the Coalition's academies programme.

Adonis had previously said he and Tony Blair 'wanted all schools to be eligible for academy status' and given his "support" to the Coalition's expansion of academies to existing schools.

But [interviewed](#) on the Daily Politics on Tuesday, he described the policy as a "gimmick."

Far from resolving matters the appointment of Lord Adonis leaves Labour policy as muddled as ever.

Adonis on Academies

Before:

"Neither I nor Tony Blair believed that academies should be restricted to areas with failing schools. We wanted all schools to be eligible for academy status... The coalition is taking the academies movement further, it is making it possible for more successful schools to become academies too and I support that," ([The Spectator, 13 January 2011](#)).

Now:

"The numbers that were given about the big expansion of academies, let's be clear what's happened, it's not replacement schools for underperforming comprehensives or new schools in areas of disadvantage, most of them are simply existing schools changing the label at the front of the school, to becoming an academy from an existing school."

"No change in their governance at all, simply to pocket £25,000 that the Government gives them for changing. I don't call that a public service reform, I call that just a gimmick." (BBC Two, Daily Politics, 22 May 2012).

Adonis on Free Schools

Before:

"We [Tony Blair and Andrew Adonis] were enthusiastic about the idea of entirely new schools being established on the academy model, as in Michael Gove's Free Schools policy'. Question: What does Adonis think of free schools? Adonis: 'I support them. I have no problem with free schools at all. As you know I am a strong supporter of diversity in the state system and independently managed schools. Provided the schools are funded fairly and they don't have unfair admissions practices, then I think having greater diversity of schools is a good thing." ([The Spectator, 13 January 2011](#)).

Now:

"What we have said is we will look at free schools case by case, on their merits... On the specific point of free schools, free schools should be concentrated in areas where educational standards are low and where children are being failed at the moment. Not simply a quest for establishing more schools for the sake of it." (BBC Two, Daily Politics, 22 May 2012).

Blair backs the Coalition's academies

It would be 'bizarre' to oppose the Coalition's expansion of Academies. 'There are elements of the reform programme that we were doing in government that the present Conservative government are continuing, in other areas they're not. So it would be bizarre if I were to say, you know I don't agree with them doing the Academy programme — why would I want to say that?' [The Times, 9 June 2011](#)

It's 'great' that the government is taking forward the Academies programme. 'I think some of the technical aspects of reform – competition in the NHS, putting the patient first, breaking up the traditional state school system in favour of academies and trust schools – these were things we started. You start something – and if the idea works and is a good idea and people take it forward, that is great' [The Sun, 15 June 2011](#)

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/sep/02/matthew-taylor-schools-are-getting-better>
http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2012/09/13/huffposts-interview-with-andrew-adonis-education-book_n_1880993.html?utm_hp_ref=uk-politics

APPENDIX VII

Interviewees' word clouds of 'global' interview terms:

Fig. 1: Matthew Taylor



Focus of discourse: Local→People→Michael(Gove)→Grammar(Schools)→Left→Policy→Ofsted→Social→State→Community

The focus on 'local' is articulated in a community-orientated narrative ('people', 'social', 'responsible'). Matters of left-right politics, institutional systems, 'policy', 'Ofsted' and assertions of state power

(‘authority/ies’) are subordinate, except in respect of the person of Michael Gove, whose name pervaded the responses.

Fig. 2: Rt Hon Stephen Twigg MP



Focus of discourse: Curriculum→Local→People→
Government→National→Labour→Difference/Different→
State

'Local' and 'people' are contiguous with considerable focus on 'curriculum', authority over which is held in tension with 'national'/'state' policy. Structural terms ('partnership') are evident, but 'difference'/'different'

apprehended through partisan politics ('Labour') and assertions of central authority ('national', 'state', 'government'). Issues of institutional 'ethos' and programmes for 'struggling' schools were conspicuous.

Fig. 3: Rt Hon the Lord Adonis



Focus of discourse: State→Independent→Church→
Governance→System→Right→Values→ Ethos→ Policy→
Citizenship

An obvious emphasis on 'state' power, counterpoised by the imperative of 'independent' 'governance' as the superior 'system'. Emphasis included 'successful' as well as notions of 'failure'. Discussion of 'values'

permeated, with very specific focus on institutional ‘ethos’ and ‘Citizenship’.

Fig. 4: **Chris Skidmore MP**

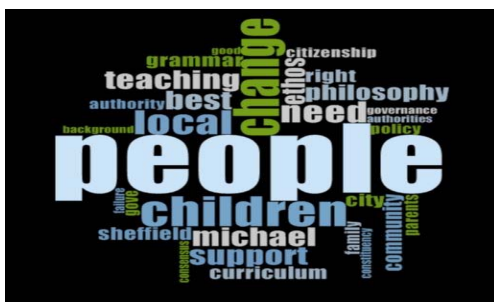


Focus of discourse: People→David (Willetts)→Good
(schools)→Need→Local→Parents→Grammar (schools)→
Pupils→Standards→Conservative

The ‘people’ imperative is complemented by ‘parents’, ‘pupils’ and ‘standards’. The traditional partisan foci are evident (‘grammar’, ‘Conservative’) and ‘David’ (Willett) features more prominently than Gove, due to

prior relation/loyalty. 'Voucher' and 'freedom' ('choice') were also relatively dominant in the discourse.

Fig. 5: Rt Hon David Blunkett MP



Focus of discourse: People→Change→Children→Local→
Need→Best (schools)→Michael (Gove)→Support→
Teaching→ Ethos

While 'people' and 'children' are most prominent, it is policy apprehended in the context of the 'need' for 'change'. Notions of 'governance' and 'authorities' are subordinate to 'best' and 'teaching', while 'family', 'local'.

Fig. 6: **Conor Ryan**



Focus of discourse: Curriculum→David (Blunkett)→
Labour→People→Local→Secretary (of State)→
System→Government→Policy→ (Teaching) Unions

Academy reforms and ‘curriculum’ freedoms apprehended through the person of ‘David’ (Blunkett) and the achievements of ‘Labour’. The objectives of ‘state’ and ‘government’ were recounted through experience with ‘unions’. It is specifically ‘headteachers’ who were germane: ‘specialist’ schools (and ‘CTCs’) with a focus on ‘technology’ evidence concern for vocational education.

Fig. 7: Rt Hon Michael Gove MP



Focus of discourse: People→State→Philosophy→Right→
Political→Good (schools)→Control→Order



This is essentially a ‘people’/‘state’ narrative, invoking ‘political’/‘philosophy’ (even specifying ‘Burke’) as global themes from a ‘right’ (political ‘control’ and moral ‘order’) perspective. Significant is the constant invocation of ‘1944’ (Butler Act) – clearly seen as pivotal – in the context of ‘Church’ and ‘liberal’/‘conservative’ conceptions of ‘good’. The ‘institutions’ of ‘England’ are on par with ‘children’/‘parents’.

Fig. 8: Anonymous Liberal Democrat



Focus of discourse: Children→Good (schools)→Local→
Money→People→Quality→Authority/ies→Evidence→
Parents



Overwhelming narrative surrounding ‘children’, qualified by notions of ‘local’ and ‘good’. Thereafter, it is expressions of ‘quality’ in the context of ‘money’, which comes before ‘teachers’, ‘parents’ and ‘community’. There is also a notable emphasis on the need for reform based on ‘evidence’. Unique were the multiple expressions of being ‘concerned’.

Fig. 9: **Nick Gibb MP**



Focus of discourse: Local→People→Authority/ies→
State→System→Policy→Power→Reforms→Accountable→
Establishment



‘Local’ and ‘authority/ies’ feature prominently, in a ‘people’/‘state’ narrative concerned with ‘systems’ and ‘power’. Thereafter are the almost equally-emphasised themes of reform: ‘surplus’ (places), ‘standards’, ‘accountable’. ‘Teachers’ and ‘children’ featured much less, but ‘independent’ and ‘1988’ (Baker Act) were recurrent.

Fig. 10: Jesse Norman MP



Focus of discourse: People→Freedom→Good (schools)→
Institutions→Government→Money→Autonomy→System→
Educational→Failure→Policy→Church

Narrative prioritising conceptions of ‘good’ in the
context of ‘people’, ‘freedom’, ‘institutions’ and
‘government’. ‘Autonomy’ and ‘money’ permeated the
dialogue, while ‘church’ was more prevalent than

‘local’ or ‘state’. ‘Oakeshott’ was the favoured philosophical appeal.

Fig. 11: James O’Shaughnessy



Focus of discourse: People→Policy→Character→Right→
Good→Philosophy→Big (state)→Academic→
Agree(ment)→Competition→Development→Market

Matters of ‘policy’ meet ‘people’, and thereafter it is
notions of ‘right’ complemented by ‘character’
(education). The state/government is ‘big’. ‘Philosophy’
is explicit, with ‘good’, ‘market’ and ‘competition’
prominent in a narrative which diversifies into ‘curriculum’, ‘standards’, and the consensual ‘agree’.

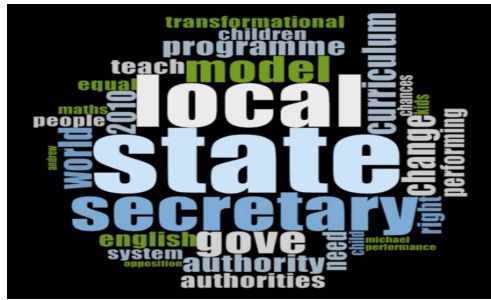
Fig. 12: Matthew Hancock MP



Focus of discourse: People→Right→Local→System→
Leadership→Academic→Deliver→Freedom→State→
Centre→Evidence→Improve

The ‘people’ are followed by ‘right’ (political/moral) in
the ‘local’ context. The focus then is on ‘leadership’
and ‘academic’ (attainment) in the context of ability to
‘deliver’, in the context of ‘freedom’ from the
‘state’/‘centre’. There is also emphasis on the need for reform based on ‘evidence’.

Fig. 13: Rt Hon Ed Balls MP

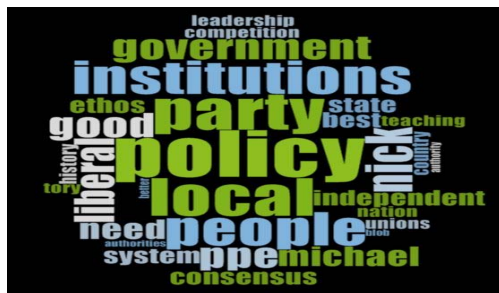


Focus of discourse: State→Local→Secretary (of State)→
Gove→Model→Change→Curriculum→World→
2010→Authority/ies→ Programme

Discourse focused on 'state' and 'local', with 'secretary' (of state) in the person of 'Gove' featuring prominently. Thereafter it was a discourse about the 'model' of education and the theme of 'change'

(/‘transformational’). Reform was apprehended in a ‘world’ context, with ‘2010’ (Academies Act) being pivotal.

Fig. 14: **Nick Boles MP**



Focus of discourse: Policy→Local→Party→Institutions→
People→Nick(Gibb)→Good (schools)→Government→
Liberal→PPE→Michael (Gove)→Need→Best→
Consensus→Ethos→ Independent



In almost equal proportions, matters of ‘policy’ in a ‘local’ context, in which the ‘party’ vies with ‘institutions’ for dominance. Considerable (relational) mention of ‘Nick’ (Gibb), with significant ‘PPE’ focus. Discussion is of ‘liberal’ matters, focusing on ‘independent’ and ‘competition’, perceived in terms of ‘need’ for the ‘best’.

Fig. 15: Rt Hon the Lord Baker



Focus of discourse: Grammar (schools)→Curriculum→
UTCs→People→Good (schools)→Local→System→
Level→Change→History→Independent→Need



Considerable focus on ‘grammar’ (schools) and matters of ‘curriculum’ (especially ‘history’) in the context of vocational education (UTCs). The ‘local’ and ‘people’ outweigh matters of structure (‘system’/‘level’). But ‘change’, ‘need’ and ‘good’ are dominant themes.

The (Religious) Character of MPs' Secondary Education (2010 intake)

This list is incomplete and may contain categorical inaccuracies, but it gives an indication of the proportion of MPs who received a secondary education with a 'religious character' (designated 'F' in Ethos).

The term 'religious character' in this context does not necessarily refer to a school's formal legal designation, but to its professed ethos and culture, relating in particular to moral/character education.

Ethos is judged by inference (eg prominence of school chapel/chaplain/overt reference to faith). 'Nominal' is cultural religion (often **CoFF**) - judged by foundation/association but no overt expression.

Information is drawn from that which is in the public domain (Wikipedia, websites, Almanac of British Politics). Some MPs have not disclosed their education (designated '0' in Order [of researching]).

NAME	CONSTITUENCY	SECONDARY SCHOOL	CHARACTER	TYPE	ORDER	ETHOS
Abbott, Diane (Lab)	Hackney North and Stoke Newington	Harrow County Grammar School for Girls	Secular		1	
Abrahams, Debbie (Lab)	Oldham East and Saddleworth	N/A			0	
Adams, Nigel (Con)	Selby and Ainsty	Selby High School	Secular		2	
Affrue, Adam (Con)	Windsor	Adley and Stanhope School	CoFF	VA	3	F
Ainsworth, Bob (Lab)	Coventry North East	Foxford Comprehensive School	Secular		4	
Aldous, Peter (Con)	Waveney	Harrow	CoFF		5	F
Alexander, Danny (LibDem)	Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey	Lochaber High School	Secular		107	
Alexander, Douglas (Lab)	Paisley and Renfrewshire South	Park Mains High School	Secular		108	
Alexander, Heidi (Lab)	Lewisham East	Churchfields Comprehensive School	Secular		109	
Ali, Rushanara (Lab)	Bedford Green and Bow	Mulberry School for Girls	Secular		110	
Allen, Graham (Lab)	Nottingham North	Forest Fields Grammar School	Secular		181	
Amess, David (Con)	Southend West	St. Bonaventure Grammar School	RC		182	F
Anderson, David (Lab)	Blaydon	Maltby Grammar School	Secular		183	
Andrew, Stuart (Con)	Pudsey	Vagol David Hughes	Secular		184	
Arbuthnot, James (Con)	North East Hampshire	Eton College	CoFF		255	F
Ashworth, Jonathan (Lab)	Leicester South	Philips High School	Secular		256	
Austin, Ian (Lab)	Dudley North	The Dudley School	Secular		257	
B						
Bacon, Richard (Con)	South Norfolk	The King's School Worcester	CoFF	Ind	6	F

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Ellison, Jane (Con)	Battersea					N/A Bradford				0				
Ellman, Louise (Lab (Co-op))	Liverpool, Riverside					Manchester High School for Girls		Ind		124				
Ellwood, Tobias (Con)	Bournemouth East					Egerton School Berkhamsted		Ind		152	F			
Elphicke, Charlie (Con)	Dover					Felsted School in Essex		Ind		125	F			
Engel, Natascha (Lab)	North East Derbyshire					Kent College in Canterbury		Ind		126	F			
Esterson, Bill (Lab)	Sefton Central					N/A				0				
Eustice, George (Con)	Camborne and Redruth					Truro School		Ind		197	F			
Evans, Chris (Lab (Co-op))	Islwyn					Porth County Comprehensive, Pontypriidd				198				
Evans, Graham (Con)	Weaver Vale					Poynton High School				199				
Evans, Jonathan (Con)	Cardiff North					Lewis School, Pengam		Ind		200				
Evans, Nigel (Con)	Ribble Valley													
Evennett, David (Con)	Bexleyheath and Crayford													
F														
Fabricant, Michael (Con)	Lichfield					Brighton Secondary Technical School				26				
Fallon, Michael (Con)	Sevenoaks					Epsom College		Ind		27	F			
Farrelly, Paul (Lab)	Newcastle-under-Lyme					Walstanton Grammar School				28				
Farron, Tim (LibDem)	Westmorland and Lonsdale					Lostock Hall High School				29				
Featherstone, Lynne (LibDem)	Hornsey and Wood Green					South Hampstead High School		Ind		30				
Field, Frank (Lab)	Birkenhead					St Clement Danes School				127				
Field, Mark (Con)	Cities of London and Westminster					Reading School		Ind		128	F			
Fitzpatrick, Jim (Lab)	Poplar and Limehouse					Holyrood R.C. Secondary School				129	F			
Fleelo, Robert (Lab)	Stoke-on-Trent South					King's Norton Boy's School				130				
Flint, Caroline (Lab)	Don Valley					Twickenham Girls School				201				
Flynn, Paul (Lab)	Newport West					St Illtyd's College				202	F			
Foster, Don (LibDem)	Bath					Lancaster Royal Grammar School				203				
Fovargue, Yvonne (Lab)	Makerfield					Sale Grammar School				204				
Fox, Liam (Con)	North Somerset					St. Bride's High School				205	F			

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Hands, Greg (Con)	Chelsea and Fulham					Dr Challoner's Grammar School, Amersham	Secular				212			
Hanson, David (Lab)	Delyn					Verdin Comprehensive School	Secular				213			
Harman, Harriet (Lab)	Camberwell and Peckham					St Paul's Girls' School	Secular	Ind			214			
Harper, Mark (Con)	Forest of Dean					Headlands Comprehensive School	Secular				215		(Now CofE)	
Harrington, Richard (Con)	Watford													
Harris, Rebecca (Con)	Castle Point													
Harris, Tom (Lab)	Glasgow South													
Hart, Simon (Con)	Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire													
Harvey, Nick (LibDem)	North Devon													
Haselhurst, Alan (Con)	Saffron Walden													
Havard, Dai (Lab)	Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney													
Hayes, John (Con)	South Holland and The Deepings													
Heald, Oliver (Con)	North East Hertfordshire													
Healey, John (Lab)	Wentworth and Dearne													
Heath, David (LibDem)	Somerton and Frome													
Heaton-Harris, Chris (Con)	Daventry													
Hemming, John (LibDem)	Birmingham, Yardley													
Henderson, Gordon (Con)	Sittingbourne and Sheppey													
Hendrick, Mark (Lab (Co-op))	Preston													
Hendry, Charles (Con)	Wealden													
Hepburn, Stephen (Lab)	Jarrow													
Herbert, Nick (Con)	Arundel and South Downs													
Hermion, Lady (Independent)	North Down													
Heyes, David (Lab)	Ashton-under-Lyne													
Hillier, Meg (Lab (Co-op))	Hackney South and Shoreditch													
Hilling, Julie (Lab)	Bolton West													

James, Margot (Con)	Stourbridge						Millfield School (6th)	Secular	Ind		44			
James, Siân C. (Lab)	Swansea East						Cefn Saeson Comprehensive School	Secular			45			
Jameson, Cathy (Lab (Co-op))	Kilmarnock and Loudoun						James Hamilton Academy	Secular / Non-denom			46			
Jarvis, Dan (Lab)	Barnsley Central						N/A				0			
Javid, Sajid (Con)	Bromsgrove						Downend School	Secular			139			
Jenkin, Bernard (Con)	Harwich and North Essex						Highgate School	CofE	Ind		140	F		
Jenrick, Robert (Con)	Newark						Wolverhampton Grammar School	Secular			141			
Johnson, Alan (Lab)	Kingston upon Hull West and Hesse						Sloane Grammar school	Secular			142			
Johnson, Diana (Lab)	Kingston upon Hull North						Northwich County Grammar School for Girls	Secular			216			
Johnson, Gareth (Con)	Dartford						Dartford Grammar School	Secular			217			
Johnson, Joseph (Con)	Orpington						Eton College	CofE			218	F		
Jones, Andrew (Con)	Harrogate and Knaresborough						Bradford Grammar School	Secular	Ind		219			
Jones, David (Con)	Clwyd West						Ruabon Grammar School	Secular			220			
Jones, Graham (Lab)	Hyndburn													
Jones, Helen (Lab)	Warrington North													
Jones, Kevan (Lab)	North Durham													
Jones, Marcus (Con)	Nuneaton													
Jones, Susan Elan (Lab)	Clwyd South													
Jowell, Tessa (Lab)	Dulwich and West Norwood													
Joyce, Eric (Independent)	Falkirk													
K														
Kane, Mike (Lab)	Wythenshawe and Sale East						St Paul's RC High School	RC			47	F		
Kaufman, Gerald (Lab)	Manchester, Gorton						Leeds Grammar School	Secular	Ind		48			
Kawczynski, Daniel (Con)	Shrewsbury and Atcham						St George's College, Weybridge	RC			49	F		
Keeley, Barbara (Lab)	Worsley and Eccles South						Mount St Mary's College	RC	VA		50	F		
Kelly, Chris (Con)	Dudley South						Wolverhampton Grammar School	Secular	Ind		51			

Kendall, Liz (Lab)	Leicester West								Watford Grammar School for Girls	Secular				143			
Kennedy, Charles (LibDem)	Ross, Skye and Lochaber								Lochaber High School	Secular				144			
Khan, Sadiq (Lab)	Tooting								Ernest Bevin School	Secular				145			
Kirby, Simon (Con)	Brighton, Kemptown								Hastings Grammar School	CofE			F	146		Nominal	
Knight, Greg (Con)	East Yorkshire								Alderman Newton's Grammar School	Secular				221			
Kwarteng, Kwasi (Con)	Spelthorne								Eton College	CofE			F	222			
L																	
Laing, Eleanor (Con)	Epping Forest								St Columba's School	Non-denom	Ind		F	52			
Lamb, Norman (LibDem)	North Norfolk								Wymondham College	Secular				53			
Lammy, David (Lab)	Tottenham								The King's School, Peterborough	CofE			F	54			
Lancaster, Mark (Con)	Milton Keynes North								Kimbolton School	Secular	Ind			55			
Lansley, Andrew (Con)	South Cambridgeshire								Brentwood School	CofE			F	56			
Latham, Pauline (Con)	Mid Derbyshire								Bramcote Hill Technical Grammar	Secular				147			
Lavery, Ian (Lab)	Wansbeck								N/A								
Laws, David (LibDem)	Yeovil								St George's College, Weybridge	RC	Ind		F	148			
Lazarowicz, Mark (Lab (Co-op))	Edinburgh North and Leith								St Benedict's, Ealing	RC	Ind		F	149			
Leadsom, Andrea (Con)	South Northamptonshire								Tonbridge Girls' Grammar School	Secular				150			
Lee, Jessica (Con)	Erewash								Loughborough High School	Christian	Ind		F	223		Nominal	
Lee, Phillip (Con)	Bracknell								Sir William Borlase's Grammar School	Secular				224			
Leech, John (LibDem)	Manchester, Withington								Manchester Grammar School	Secular	Ind			225			
Lefroy, Jeremy (Con)	Stafford								Highgate School,	CofE	Ind		F	226			
Leigh, Edward (Con)	Gainsborough								The Oratory School,	RC	Ind		F	227			
Leslie, Charlotte (Con)	Bristol North West																
Leslie, Chris (Lab (Co-op))	Nottingham East																
Letwin, Oliver (Con)	West Dorset																
Lewell-Buck, Emma (Lab)	South Shields																

McDonnell, Alasdair (Lab)	Belfast South				St. McNissi's College, Garron Tower	RC				228	F		
McDonnell, John (Lab)	Hayes and Harlington				Great Yarmouth Grammar School	CoFE		VA		229	F	Nominal	
McFadden, Pat (Lab)	Wolverhampton South East				Holyrood Secondary School	RC				230	F		
McGovern, Alison (Lab)	Wirral South				Wirral Grammar School for Girls	Secular				231			
McGovern, Jim (Lab)	Dundee West				Lawsides Academy.	RC				232	F		
McGuire, Anne (Lab)	Stirling												
McInnes, Liz (Lab)	Heywood and Middleton												
McIntosh, Anne (Con)	Thirsk and Malton												
McKechin, Ann (Lab)	Glasgow North												
McKenzie, Iain (Lab)	Inverclyde												
McKinnell, Catherine (Lab)	Newcastle upon Tyne North												
Macleod, Mary (Con)	Brentford and Isleworth												
McLoughlin, Patrick (Con)	Derbyshire Dales												
MacNeil, Angus Brendan (SNP)	Na h-Eileanan an Iar												
McPartland, Stephen (Con)	Stevenage												
Mactaggart, Fiona (Lab)	Slough												
McVey, Esther (Con)	Wirral West												
Mahmood, Khalid (Lab)	Birmingham, Perry Barr												
Mahmood, Shabana (Lab)	Birmingham, Ladywood												
Main, Anne (Con)	St Albans												
Malhotra, Seema (Lab (Co-op))	Feltham and Heston												
Mann, John (Lab)	Bassetlaw												
Marsden, Gordon (Lab)	Blackpool South												
Maskey, Paul (Sinn Fein)	Belfast West												
Maude, Francis (Con)	Horsham												
May, Theresa (Con)	Maidenhead												
Maynard, Paul (Con)	Blackpool North and Cleveleys												
Meacher, Michael (Lab)	Oldham West and Royton												

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APPENDIX IX

Twigg on the potential consequences for policy formulation deriving from the elite education of the policy community:

‘Do I think it shapes policy? It is bound to have an effect. I think the interesting area where it has an effect is this whole issue that we are struggling with again now of the status of technical practical vocational education. We had a very interesting Shadow Cabinet meeting, and – I think I’ve now told this story to so many people that I don’t need to go off the record with this – Vernon Coaker, who is the Shadow Northern Ireland Secretary and a former Minister of Schools, he said his daughter has become a teacher, his son has become a plumber, and the number of his friends who at dinner parties sort of say how wonderful about the daughter and don’t quite know what to say about the son. That is illustrative of a social attitude, and I think when we have got a Cabinet and a Shadow Cabinet where very, very few, if any of us, have followed a more kind of vocational path or, on our side, have been business people – I think that is another issue, more on the Labour side – I think that is a weakness because you do want all of the different aspects of the world to be reflected in your thinking. Now, you do your best to overcome that through advisors and engagement with the wider world. But I think it does affect the collective thinking of Parliament if there are very, very few people in there who have got direct experience of an alternative, in this case vocational education.

APPENDIX X

Fraser Nelson (*The Spectator*, 8th February 2013) on the shared biography of Gove and Adonis:

Gove is just as passionate about the transformative power of education as Andrew Adonis and, I suspect, for the same reason. Both were born in modest circumstances: Adonis to a single father in Camden, Gove to a woman in Edinburgh who gave him up for adoption. Both had the very unusual opportunity of a first-class education. Adonis was sent to boarding school by Camden Council. Gove was adopted by an Aberdonian fishmonger who went without holidays to send him to the fee-paying Robert Gordon's College. Both went to Oxford, and on to the highest offices in the land. Both will be mindful that the circumstances of their birth would have suggested very different outcomes. So what do you do, once you have acquired the power to change things? Thank God for your good fortune and keep climbing the greasy pole, or try to move heaven and earth to make sure more children enjoy the opportunities that you did? Both chose the latter course. If they come across as people who are on a mission, rather than just doing a job, this is why. Both declared war on the Comprehensive system, which Gove has called the greatest betrayal of the working class and Adonis has recently written a book to condemn.

APPENDIX XI

History of Free Schools – detailed interview extracts.

i) Baker on disagreements with Thatcher concerning the National Curriculum:

We had incredibly long and wonderfully contentious meetings on the construction of the National Curriculum. It was after the election. We won on the basis – I had to implement it all. So I had to create a National Curriculum. So I had to set bodies to set it up. I had to set up teams of people to write it all. There were huge debates, that Margaret presided over, on the Curriculum, and ministers appeared. There was the Scottish Minister of Education, the Welsh Minister of Education. There were all other ministers from – a lot of ministers appeared at these committee meetings. They really all extrapolated from their own education, as far as I could see. They all had very limited experience of education, actually, and they didn't do their homework on it, as I did. Because I would send 30 or 40 pages on a Maths curriculum, or a Chemistry curriculum, or History. The focus of the History curriculum was easy.. if I'd had longer I would have probably.. I was moved to another department. They were very contentious arguments, because Margaret basically only wanted Maths, English, and Science. I wanted the rounded education, and we had endless debates on this that went on and on and on. It's only because I have an equitable and cheerful – she used to say to me, "Kenneth, why are you still smiling?"

There was another wonderful occasion, where it went on and on, this debate. She said, "Kenneth, in 20 minutes I'm meeting King Hussein of Jordan to talk about peace in the Middle East. Why are you still insisting that in fact we should discuss this matter?" I would say, "Margaret, I will take it away, and I will come back to you, and I will produce a paper for the next meeting in three weeks' time." Which was very largely the same paper, but a little rounded. But there was one occasion I just got up and walked out. I said, "I'm sorry. I'll put in another paper next week." The Cabinet Secretary was totally amazed. He said, "I didn't record it." He said, "No-one has ever done it." It was one issue. I can't remember what it was. But the thing about Margaret is that she didn't mind a good argument, and she knew that I was well-versed in what I was saying, because I had a view, and it wasn't a trivial view. There were other people supporting me. I wasn't alone in this. I wasn't a lone voice. So she would argue back. She liked all that.

ii) Baker on the development of CTCs:

Back in the 1980s, I got the Cabinet and Margaret (Thatcher) to agree to create schools that were independent of local authorities, the City Technology Colleges. This was a breakthrough, because schools hadn't been like that, unless they'd been private schools. Even grammar schools were under local authorities. To do that, I said I would go to business and raise money, £1m for each one. That was a sweetener, as it were. They announced it at the 1986 conference. There was a lot of opposition from Tories as well to this, I may say. Lots of Conservative education heads thought this was quite wrong. They wanted still to retain ownership of all the schools in the area. Labour opposed it, so did the Liberals, obviously. But we got Cyril Taylor in. I needed someone to make it all happen. And together we raised £44m from various industrialists. Not the traditional big companies. ICI had turned it down. Rolls-Royce turned it down. But the entrepreneurial companies – Hanson, James Hanson, Harry Djanogly in Nottingham, Stanley Kalms at Dixons, people like that, Landau's. The entrepreneurs, if you like, were prepared to support this concept of a school independent.

It wanted to be technologically based. Or rather certainly more computer based at that stage rather than technology based – City Technology Colleges. We got 16 away. They are still some of the most successful schools in the country, actually. Their performances are really stunning. That was the beginning of the Academy movement and the Free School movement. The actual independence of the first 16 has been more or less respected. There are still two who are totally independent. The Telford one, which is very successful, is run by Kevin Satchwell in the West Midlands, in Wolverhampton. He spawned off other UTCs, other independent schools. He set up an agency that offered advice to schools, and curriculum to schools, and all of that, a very successful headmaster, still around, still a trustee.

So that was the beginning of this movement, and the Academies.

Then I also introduced Grant Maintained schools, which were semi-independent from the local authorities. There were 1,000 of those. But Labour cancelled that. Or, rather, re-created them with the Trust schools – almost re-created them with the Trust schools. It was Adonis who really liked this idea and realised that many local education authorities were very poor organisers and runners of schools – complacent, over-staffed, not really understanding the educational process well enough.

iii) Hancock on the ‘pivotal moments; which led to free schools:

City Technology Colleges and the corporatisation of Further Education colleges 20 years ago, which both, obviously, came in at a similar time. Undoubtedly, Andrew Adonis identifies exactly the same. So, they’re two different policies but they both pushed in this direction. Obviously, the CTCs, which came ahead of the Grant Maintained schools, were the first examples of schools which were where the power vested was vested in the leader of the school rather than in the Local Authority. Likewise, making GFE colleges corporate rather than Local Authority organisations gave them huge autonomy. In a sense, they are the precursors to Academies. Because Academies are, structurally, very similar, even though they deliver education in a different space.

iv) Twigg on the origins of free schools:

Concerns about standards didn’t start with the Academies movement or with Tony Blair’s period as Prime Minister. And I suppose you can trace back the attempt to look at different structures certainly to some of the reforms that Ken Baker brought in. The CTC model certainly has similarities with Academies. Grant Maintained is interesting because I think Grant Maintained probably has a closer parallel with the Converter Academies that Michael Gove has bought in. Whereas I think CTCs have a closer parallel with the Sponsor Academies that Labour brought in. I think I’m right in saying that CTCs were focused more in areas of social and economic deprivation. But I think prior to Ken Baker, I think a lot of the debate on school governance structures was still about comprehensives and grammar schools, rather than about how you might create schools with an all-ability intake but that aren’t necessarily directly provided through the Local Authority.

v) Adonis on the origins of free schools:

There were two crucial precedents for the governance structure Academies: one of which was Voluntary Aided schools; the other of which was the City Technology Colleges. What the Voluntary Aided schools brought was the principle of independent governance within the mainstream, state-funded system, which, of course, the churches have been providing for more than a century, and the fact that part of their independence came from making a contribution towards the capital cost of schools. Hence the £2million was quite closely mirrored – I think it was then 15%, it may be 20%, I can’t remember what the portion was of capital costs. The churches were required to meet full costs of Voluntary Aided schools as part of the condition of being Voluntary Aided. That was quite an important precedent. I’ve always taken the view that you can sell things much more easily in England, given the long and broken history and deep conservatism and all that, if you’ve got a precedent. That precedent was one that on which Academies were modelled. But in return for a contribution that was initially set at 10% but then capped at £2million, the sponsor was given managerial control of the school, in the same way as Voluntary Aided schools were managerially independent of the Local Authorities, but covered 15% of their capital costs. So that was quite an important precedent for the Academy movement. But the actual governance model was rather closer to the City Technology Colleges in that these colleges were licensed and funded centrally rather than locally, as in City Technology Colleges. In fact, the legislation used to set up most of the Academies was the City Technology College legislation, slightly tweaked.

vi) Ryan on the troublesome funding structure and consequent demise of CTCs:

By the early '90s – I think by '93 – it was clear that the number of CTCs were going to be limited. So they created the Specialist School, which initially were called Technology Colleges. And it was the same team, Sir Cyril (Taylor) and various others were involved in it with his trust. But the Technology College was, if you like, a CTC-lite. Sponsorship was £100,000 rather than several million. It was something that was initially opened only to Grant Maintained and Voluntary Aided schools. It was later widened to all maintained schools. But it was a way for an existing school to take on some of the specialist aspects that the CTC had. But without having to go through a major capital development programme.

vii) Ryan on local management of schools heralding a 'cultural change':

That was absolutely crucial. Because before that headteachers, if they wanted to repair a window, had to sort of fill in forms and triplicate to the Local Authority and wait for somebody to grace them with a visit a few weeks later and fix the window. Now they had a budget, they could get the local window repair man in and have it fixed that afternoon. That started giving heads a greater sense of responsibility. I think the change that happened within the Labour years was that we began to envisage heads as being capable of thinking even beyond their own school of thinking of developing chains or developing leadership over a number of schools. And actually made headship and school leadership a more ambitious profession. And all of that started to effect the cultural change in schools which was helped by an improvement in the calibre in the early 2000s of teachers coming out of various teaching training routes. We greatly expanded the number in school which Gove is expanding further. All of those sort of things started to change the mindset, so you don't have the same sort of grumpy staffroom that, by and large, was a caricature, if you like – not an unreasonable caricature – certainly up to the mid-90s. I think that is a collective change that has resulted from successive government reforms, Conservative and Labour.

viii) Blunkett on the plans for reforms prior to Blair's victory in 1997:

We immediately indicated we were changing policy from abolishing what the Tories had done to embracing the better parts of it. And local management of schools and the governance arrangements for schools were two of the things we determined that we were going to accept and build on. And the minute you accepted local management of schools and you wanted to build on it; and a recognition that the head was responsible for leading the school; and that the school had to take responsibility for its results – albeit that there should be support systems in place – you'd tacitly accepted that schools would have to accept that duty and responsibility, and couldn't pass it on to someone else.

ix) Ryan on Blunkett's re-positioning of Labour on education policy;

In 1995 David Blunkett published a position paper which went through the Labour Party Conference – it was quite a contentious debate there, but not specifically on this issue – where he started re-positioning Labour on education policy. One of the things that he embraced were the specialist schools, and he saw specialist schools as potentially a significant model and a way of introducing diversity into the comprehensive system. I think was the sort of phraseology that we were talking about then.

He made quite a significant speech in 1996 to the Social Market Foundation which at the time had some fairly excitable newspaper headlines, splashed in *The Standard* and so on. Because what he was saying was that what had happened with comprehensive schools was that people had assumed that mixed ability teaching and comprehensive education were the same, whereas, actually, comprehensive education was about having a genuine mix of ability within schools. But it didn't mean they all had to be in the same classroom in every lesson. There was actually room for setting by subject ability and so on. So it was quite an important speech and quite an important development in Labour thinking. And from that we came to embrace significant expansion – from the time that David Blunkett was Secretary of State – in the numbers of Specialist Schools, and Gillian Sheppard had broadened them when she was Secretary of State to have four categories. And we also increased the number of specialisms. Now with the Specialist School model, there was an acceptance, I think, by David and by New Labour, of the importance of diversity within secondary education.

x) Blunkett on the need for Academy reform:

I think the pivotal moment for academies was when we recognised that our immediate action in 1997 had had some, but limited impact on failing schools. That we had given schools a chance to redeem themselves, and some had taken it. One just on the edge of my constituency at the time... Fir Vale School (it was Earl Marshall), was one of those on the first list of failing schools, and the big row we had about the fact that we had named them and allegedly shamed them, but that was actually a Socialist Workers Party slogan.. From 1997, we were tougher with the local authorities than Gillian Shepherd or John Patten had been. We could afford to be, because we got a large majority and because of Tony's backing to do so. But in doing so, we also forgot that actually spreading best practice was more important than just hammering failure.

xi) Norman on Labour's misuse of money (or a misunderstanding of private-sector principles) in Academy reforms:

Labour introduced academies in an effort to introduce, as it were, greater autonomy, and private sector savvy, as they saw it. The approach they took was to buy off the teaching unions by pouring in enormous amounts of money alongside, and the thing was very much hostage, in many respects, to that decision. Large amounts of money went into the capital infrastructure, and buildings, at very high costs, for PFI purposes. And the things that could have been done without supplying all this additional money, in terms of freeing up the curriculum, or giving more autonomy to the heads, or improving teacher training. Those kinds of softer things that require spending now rather than capital expenditure, weren't done, or weren't done adequately.

xii) Twigg's account of leading 'London Challenge':

My second job in government was as a Junior Minister in Education. I was given a specific task by Tony Blair and Andrew Adonis – who at that time was an advisor in Number 10 – which was to set up what became known as the 'London Challenge'. What this was, was an attempt to improve secondary education in London. The evidence was, firstly, that the performance of Inner London secondary schools was significantly below the national average. And secondly, that parental perception of secondary schools in London, particularly Inner London was extremely poor. And so it was both an attempt to improve reality but also to challenge some misconceptions about the reality as well. And I think that as a programme it has been hugely successful. Almost all the researchers that have looked at it have been very, very positive about it.

Now, Academies were an important element of that programme, and some of the first Academies that the Labour government created were in London. And there were a number of authorities, localities in London that we identified as having a particularly big set of issues. We identified five boroughs in London: Hackney, Southwark, Islington, Haringey and Lambeth, where the under-performance was very significant. And some, though not all of those boroughs, took a very significant number of Academies. Hackney and Southwark were probably the two that had the largest number. So Academies as a tool of getting school improvement, particularly in areas of under-performance and poverty, was a key Labour reform.. I don't think you can pinpoint a year, but the key period was Labour in its early period under Tony Blair trying to find new and different ways of addressing serious under performance in parts of English Education.

xiii) Ryan on Labour's search for programmes of school improvement:

As part of that search, Andrew Adonis initially came up with the idea of finding a new way of advancing the CTC model. But without the major expectations of sponsorship that were required then. I think David (Blunkett) very much positioned it when he announced it in 2000, as being another development of his diversity within comprehensive education approach. He saw it as another way of providing diversity in comprehensive education. I don't think at that stage, if we are honest about it, anybody saw it as something that was going to have either four hundred sponsored academies or the many more converter academies. I think we saw it as something that was going to make a difference within urban education but alongside a number of other programmes at that stage.

xiv) Adonis on the development of Academy structure of governance:

I was very much influenced by the fact that the only independent governance provided to schools in the state system in any large number, before Academies, was provided by the churches. I say 'in any large number': there were a few trusts that were associated with state schools, and of course there were the City Technology Colleges. But the only independent sponsors who were responsible for the governance of schools in any large number were the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church. And they were, by and large, more successful than schools without such governance. And the fact that strong independent governance allied to a very positive ethos helped produce better schools, was, of course, part of the motivation for the Academies movement at large. Though I should add that one of the arguments I always use with the Academy opponents is that church schools were quasi-academies; they were essentially academies but within the Local Authority funded system. Voluntary Aided status is very close to Academy status in terms of the composition of the governing body, the ability of the sponsor to determine the management and ethos of the school, and the fact that the sponsor owns and manages the school in perpetuity, subject to not chronically failing. I mean it is possible to have a process then to change things (Adonis).

xv) Blunkett on Academy development and Free-School comparative:

I had a job explaining it to Tony, really. To keep that ethos of mutual reciprocity and outreach, so that it was the school community. That is what drove us on Academies. On free schools, I was driven by only one thing, and it is not the Free Schools that we have got now. It was where parents wanted to lead a change, where there was a need for places, why not let the parents have a major say? Which we did in Dulwich, and Tessa Jowell had come to me and said, "I have got parents who want... We need the places, they want to be part of the process." We said, "Yes, let's go for it." I did the same in Sheffield with Forge Valley, the new school that was established last year, Forge Valley School.

xvi) Blunkett on the need to 'push' institutional freedoms:

The CTCs, there were only 15 I think of them, had been given the freedom to alter their day. I remember talking about one that was – seeing that you are from Shrewsbury and I went there – just up the road at Telford, there was a school that wanted to do that. And we wanted to say, "Do it." And what has astonished me, if I am honest with you, is that schools still don't think that they can do that. They don't seem to get it. They argue about the fact that they can't fit this into the curriculum, and that they have got to finish at 3pm. Absolute rubbish. There is no reason why they shouldn't alter the school day, and be imaginative about the way they deal with it. We also seem to still think, and we are still amazed that people mix up the curriculum with the syllabus. So quite a long way to go on these... You want to just shake the tree and say, "Go for it." Which is what we wanted to do, we wanted to let the flowers bloom, but in a collaborative mutual sense, rather than going it alone. And we partly pulled it off, but we didn't, which is why I think in the end we said, "Well if we have got to push people, let's push it with the Academies programme".

xvii) Balls on his development of Academies:

So I said to Andrew Adonis, "How important is the £2m entry fee?" He said, "I don't think it makes a huge difference any more". I said, "In that case, let's get rid of it and let's get universities doing it" He said, "We'd love to have more universities". I said, "They're never going to pay £2m, but they can make a big difference". So we did. I said to him, "Are there any Academies which don't teach Maths, English and Science?" He said, "None." I said, "Well, why do you then allow opponents to say that Academies are allowed to not teach Maths, English and Science? Make that part of the core view." He said, "Well, that's what we do do." I said, "Well in that case, just say it".

xviii) Balls collaborative model for encouraging local partnerships:

I said that when we introduce a duty to co-operate with other schools and the local authority to make sure children were safe and their wellbeing is enhanced. Meaning that, for example, schools have to work with social welfare if there's a child protection, whatever. I said, "Why should Academies be

excluded from that? There's no justification for that." The transformational freedom doesn't mean they need to go it alone. Simply on behaviour. We said that schools needed to work together to deal with issues of exclusion and truancy. You can't simply have one school in an area which is the expelling school, so other schools pick up the pieces. I said that Academies should be part of this partnership.

xix) O'Shaughnessy on the importance of the 2005 (DfES) White Paper *Higher Standards, Better Schools For All*:

Then I think you go fast forward then all the way probably to the rethinking that the Blair government did in its second term around public service reform culminating, not so much in the Academies – although obviously they're a precursor to the Free Schools – but the 2005 education White Paper; the Blairite bits of that which talked about much greater operational autonomy. I think it specifically referenced how difficult it was for the Lambeth Secondary School Parents' network, how long it took them to set up a school, and that being a problem. So I think that was a moment.

xx) Adonis on the success of the Academy model going into the 2010 General Election:

..the fact that you had academies that were there and were expanding, and there were a lot more in the pipeline which were clearly dealing effectively with failure, and the existing ones were highly popular, that I think made it, not quite unstoppable, because politicians are perfectly capable of pursuing wrong-headed and unpopular policies because of massive ideological conviction, but there was no huge conviction on the left that more of the same was the right thing. After all, 30 years of chronic failure in the bottom half of the comprehensive system had greatly weakened that surge of the 1960s and 1970s that comprehensives were the answer to educational disadvantage nationwide. On the right, there was obviously no huge surge of enthusiasm for grammar schools and more assisted places, in the certain knowledge that this was going to make a marginal difference to educational standards nationwide.

xxi) Balls on the need for 'middle-tier' restructuring:

Structurally speaking, during the period when the Academies were first being set up, and there was a small number of them. It was fine for their legal form to be reporting to the Secretary of State. By the time I had become Secretary of State, that was already completely outmoded and outdated. Because there was just too many. It was not possible, in the world I was dealing with, for the Secretary of State to have that kind of control. It made no sense. Certainly two different occasions where we had an Academy in such difficulty where the local authority and everybody else was washing their hands. I had to send one of my Ministerial team on the train to visit the school to say, "You've got to get this sorted out". Because I had no other lever. We were in the process, I don't know if it happened in the end, of devolving the central Academies team into regional people within their new schools' funding agency, who were much closer to the schools. You need to have some kind of intermediate tier (Balls).

xxii) Skidmore on the origins of Free Schools:

The Academies Bill had just gone through. There was that one moment – it was a very seismic moment for Cameron – in that by supporting Blair he was able to get the piece of legislation through against his own rebels. David (Willets) was enthused by the new politics of it all... Charlotte (Leslie) was working on structures, and David's approach was very much quite a cautious one. But he was obsessed with what he called "The supply side problem" on education – that there were certain issues that were preventing new good schools from being set up. In particular he was obsessed by things like BB98 and 99. He was very technical, so he wasn't at that moment in time – there was no concept of "We will set up a new generation of schools." David's view was: "How can we use the academy model to allow people to set up schools?" But there was no real discussion at that moment in time about parents setting up schools: we had meetings with Ark and talking about their issues as coming in as educators. But it was very much, "How can we get Ark and other educational providers to set up more academies and in different places?"

xxiii) Skidmore on the origins of Free Schools and philosophical influences on Willetts:

Willetts had by this stage got Chris Cook involved – looking at the structural stuff with Charlotte Leslie. Chris and David were working on this speech on grammar schools, a 7000-word speech that we all helped put together – put component parts together. That was throughout April and then in May 2007 this speech was released. Out of a 7000 word speech, I think two lines got picked up about the middle class parents were the sharp elbows. But David was I think quite determined that this was going to be a break, that he was going to be the person who was going to signal the end of the Conservative's support for more new grammar schools. Regardless of the communication, it was that element about, "Well we do need new good schools, but we can't go back to the 1950s." The idea of setting up new good schools, he was very influenced by Caroline Hoxby from Harvard. This whole idea of, they kept on quoting all the time, "The rising tide that lifts all boats." So the idea that if you set new schools, they would act as a catalyst for driving up the standard in all schools.

xxiv) Skidmore on the development of 'social justice' educational concepts during Conservative opposition years:

Previous shadow Conservative education teams talked about "Let's create a voucher." You get these images in your head of the last helicopter out of Saigon; that actually it is Tories interested in Tory voters' children and not the rest of the country. As if, somehow, there is something wrong with the state system; there is something wrong with the NHS; that we need to then create a voucher to allow the few to profit at the expense of the many. That was why Labour's language was so successful.

Evolution on the other hand, is able to demonstrate that you can end up in the place of a voucher, but you take people with you. So that everyone realises the voucher is not just for the few; it is for everyone. It is for them, and that is the inclusive strategy. You start with the free school meals, and that is what Policy Exchange – James O'Shaughnessy and Charlotte Leslie – had written in that quite influential pamphlet back in 2005, *More Good School Places*. And that was the basis of the pupil premium. It wasn't the Liberals who invented it – that was where it came from.

So you start with free school meals; the free school meals thing becomes eventually a voucher for the poorest in society. That is why I am keen to start there, and expand outwards. Once you have proved that it works; once you have proved that actually giving parents the opportunity to move pupils around rather than being stuck in the same sink school, then people will buy into the idea.

xxv) O'Shaughnessy on the incremental shifts in Conservative education thinking during opposition:

That whole idea about giving people tickets or vouchers to exit public services – I'm not saying I thought it all the time particularly, but in hindsight, it just sort of demonstrated the fact that Tories didn't believe in public service reform, because it was about giving people a way out rather than focusing on the vast majority of people who were staying in it. So that pushed me to looking at this and both seeing its ethical dimensions but also practical dimensions – that our public service reform policy has to be about improving the services which everyone uses, rather than giving a small number of people an exit.

So when I moved to policy exchange in 2004, that was a big focus of my work, which was sort of flipping this on its head and saying, actually, how can you have new entrants come into the state school sector in order to encourage choice, diversity, competition and so on, rather than giving a small number of people an ability to leave? That shift, saying we believe in state-funded services but we think they should be more diversely provided, was a big policy shift from, if you like, the kind of IDS-Howard era into the Cameron era.

xxvi) Blunkett on the genesis of the Pupil Premium:

Blairites would not want to ignore the requirement of additional resource to meet additional need. In other words we would recognise deprivation; we would recognise speciality in terms of disability. Here is the twist: the pupil premium is something that I support because I invented something called the pupil learning credit. But actually the pupil learning credit was the forerunner to the pupil premium, and was intended to allow money to follow the pupil.. to ensure that those opportunities

were opened up in circumstances where families wouldn't ever have dreamt to pay for a kid to go to the theatre, or for outward bound or whatever (Blunkett).

xxvii) Skidmore on the need for pace in the expansion of academisation:

Free Schools cannot be disaggregated from CTCs. It was the failure of the CTC model to get off the ground, because we didn't go fast enough. That I think has always driven the reform. I can remember us having conversations with Michael; discussions about actually – how can we say this – “You want a 1000 academies?” Bob Balchin, now Lord Lingfield, in every education meeting would respond: “Michael do you understand what this will mean? This is an academy, every week you are intending to set up. Is that realistically possible?”... But we knew that we had to get there. It was always the case that we had to move fast, and if we won the election, this had to be the first bill. Cameron knew it had to be the first bill, which is why it ended up being so. It was always there in our minds as a flagship policy, because CTCs never got off the ground, and were closed down.

xxviii) Gibb on the need to abolish the surplus places rule:

There were also some regulatory things that I thought were pivotal to the success of the Academies programme, and the Free School programme, that I managed to push through. One of them is the surplus places rule. It is key that, if somebody wants to set up a school, they are able to do so, even if the area has surplus places. Because at the moment, before we removed that regulation, if you spent capital building new capacity in the school system, the local authority would then have to close some other school, because they weren't allowed to have more than 25% surplus places in their area. This is what scuppered the effectiveness of the 1988 reforms, when money followed the pupil for the first time. The theory then was the good schools could expand and weaker schools could contract. But what happened was that the weaker schools were kept on a life support machine, because the local authorities would never let good schools expand, because they had all these surplus places in their weaker schools. So, in a sense, that surplus places rule was keeping weak schools open. So I was very clear that what we had to do was get rid of that rule – not just for the implementation of the 1988 reforms, but also to ensure that the Academies and Free School programme was a success. And we did get rid of that rule.

xxix) Balls on Coalition/Labour (Gove/Balls) divergence on Academies/Free Schools:

We had an ongoing problem with Ian Gibson (Norwich North MP) and Norwich Council, the Hewett School in Norwich. In the end it became an Academy and is on the right track. Under the Gove model, we would not have fought hard with some local parents, the local authority and the MP to persuade them to turn that school into an Academy. We would have left it to be a local school down the road. It might have become an Academy because it was doing well and had expanded. You might set up a new Free School and you would wait for that Hewett School to just decline. That's the Gove model.

The Gove model is that you wait for pupil walk and parent choice to move students out of the under-performing school into the alternative Free School or higher performing Academy down the road. That wasn't what we were doing. That was not the reality of the Blair/Adonis/Me Academy model. We were about transformational change in the under-performing school. It's a very, very philosophically different model. I think if you go back to look at the debates which we had at the time of the legislation, you see a different philosophical approach. I was very happy to have big rows with many people in the Labour Party, and parts of the teaching union world, about their opposition to our Academies programme. I never shied away from those big arguments and rows, but I also disagree with the Gove model – or the 'Gove/Sweden' model. I still do. I think we were in a different place. I don't really recognise that emerging consensus. I never had any time for the argument which said, “There are some schools and some catchments which will never do as well.” I had no time for the excuses culture. And I think to be honest, that was broadly true across many parts of the teaching profession, but not entirely.

xxx) Balls on Academies as engines of social justice:

I always saw the Academies programme as being about genuinely delivering equal chances. A more aggressively ambitious, view of equality of opportunity. So when I see the first tranche of Gove Academies only being outstanding schools. Schools which are disproportionately in higher affluent areas, that's contrary to my view of equal chances. When I see a Free School where parents think to themselves, "We don't really want our kids going to school with the kids from that estate, or with that mix of ethnicity, but if we set up our own school in a slightly different place, we can have a different kind of catchment." That looks to me like it's about less equal chances as well. That has a direct impact on the resourcing and the life chances of the other kids in the school down the road. It is a moral view of equality and the incentives you need to deliver that in a fair way, but also in a way which doesn't blunt dynamism. Which was how I saw the Academies programme.

xxxii) Boles on the imperative of Academy Chains:

Chains are vitally important, and we probably need more of them. We need some of them to be bigger. We need all of them to be subjected to a pretty demanding test of whether they are improving the schools within them. They can't just become random groups of schools, huddled together in a protectionist group. But you're not going to get a driving up of quality, in a time of great financial constraint, if you have a totally atomised supply side. The best Academies tend to be – not always, but many of them are – ones that are in the bigger and more focused chains. Because those chains can share costs, and also develop an approach that they perfect over time, and they can then impart to other schools. LEAs were just geographical groups that had no commonality beyond the fact that they were all, broadly speaking, in the same part of the country. There was no particular sense that one LEA was competing with another LEA, because that's how people got their school places. There was no particular sense that within an LEA there was a very strong ethos or strong leadership. It was a bureaucratic organisation, whereas a chain is an institution writ large (Boles).

xxxiii) Taylor on Academy-Free School (Blunkett/Gove) divergence on educational communitarianism:

I'm actually more interested, I think, in the community side. Part of my worry about Academies, which is reinforced by the fact I think Michael's not interested in this, is the relationship between schools and communities, because I think that is a very important relationship. I think that where the Church link possibly was at its most benign, was that the Church provided that link between school and community. Because the governance of the school lay in an institution, the Church, outside the school, and so that embedded the school, as it were, in the wider civil society. What worries me a bit about Academies – allied with Michael Gove's lack of interest in community engagement and parental engagement as core activities for schools – is that we're going to have schools being factories of learning rather than parts of the public sphere; that they, in that sense, will be more like foundation hospitals, which are just there to provide a set of functions, but aren't really embedded in their – some foundation hospitals are actually – but..

So I think that one of the interesting things about Free Schools is that part of the rhetoric of Free Schools is that they're created by the community and parents. But in reality, my experience of Free Schools is that there's no particular interest in Free Schools about stronger community and parental links. Some of them have been created by parents, but many others have been created by all sorts of organisations and people. There isn't particularly a model that says a Free School is more embedded in its community. So, given my interest in the relationship between schools and communities more broadly, I find the weakness of that theme in Free Schools quite interesting. Do you see what I mean? The Free Schools are supposed to emerge bottom-up from community organisation. But the governance going forward – I mean, for example, lots of Academies and Academy chains don't have governing bodies. Many academy chains are highly centralised. And they're highly centralised on a national scale.

And on the 'middle tier' imperative of local legitimacy:

What I would do is I would say to local authorities, "This is the deal. You're no longer responsible for the provision of schools, but you are responsible for certain elements of probity, inspection, and oversight." Because I think that the problem is that we associate local authorities with tolerating under-performance. That's because they were conflicted. They were both providers and inspectors, and that is a conflicted role. If you've taken away from them any responsibility for provision, I think they could be quite effective inspectors. No, I don't mean challenging Ofsted's role, but I mean in relation to a variety of issues, you could give them some responsibility in relation to that. In fact, this is exactly what I spoke to Michael about in Downing Street a few weeks ago, and he said, "There's no way LEAs are ever coming back. I'd never want to give local authorities any role at all. They are a disaster. Their record is appalling."

Then yet you need a middle tier. The problem that Michael's got.. is that very often parents love failing schools. I don't just mean failing in the Ofsted sense, but schools which have got problems. Now, if you're going to send somebody in to intervene in that situation, that person's got to have legitimacy, because they're standing in front of parents and teachers who are in the school. If it's just some bloke from Whitehall, they're going to get shouted down. They're going to say, "Who are you to come along and tell us what to do?" So that person's got to have some local legitimacy. So the compromise is Michael Gove is not going to allow local authorities to have a role. He will want to appoint his people. He will want Mike Wilshaw to appoint his people. Fine, okay, you appoint them. But they've got to have local legitimacy. Therefore you appoint them, but their local authorities are the ones that they're answerable to. So that if someone's got to go into the school, and say, "Something profound has got to change", it's somebody who says, "I'm acting on behalf of an elected local authority", rather than being someone who has just been a grade five civil servant, appointed from Whitehall. That's not going to work.

APPENDIX XII

Philosophy of Free Schools – detailed interview extracts.

i) Balls on his university/PPE education:

When I was at Oxford I dropped politics. So I didn't study politics for my second and third year. I always figured that politics was something you could learn through life. So I studied economics and philosophy. I did a lot of stuff in economics. And there is a lot of economics and philosophy cross-over, which is about incentives, choices, rationality, purpose and morality. I studied with a moral philosopher called James Griffin, who wrote about moral choices and well-being, and how to think about equality. He was American. It was about how you could find a synthesis between a progressive utilitarian maximisation, utilitarian view, and a contractual rights-based Rawlsian view. He wrote a book about wellbeing, which was really about equal chances. That was very influential on me, I think. Because the view I've always taken was that it's not enough to have equality of opportunity.

ii) Blunkett on 'the common ground of what works' in education:

There is a tendency to forget that what we are dealing with is common ground in terms of what works. I think the philosophy that I was trying to follow was that you could get a lot more successful common purpose, common good, if you actually were able to pull people together, rather than simply encouraging them to go it alone. I think Michael's bit of the philosophy side is that, actually, you need to stimulate competition to do it. Whereas I felt you needed to stimulate the pressure of success – of what Michael Barber used to call "Building on previous best." I don't think people see that as philosophical, but it is. It is a different approach: it is rooted, on the one hand, in mutuality and mutual support, and on the other, in competition and knocking out failure. And I used to say to Chris Woodhead that a lot of what he said I didn't disagree with, but you couldn't allow a school to die. You couldn't allow a school to wither because the children in it were the victims. So you couldn't plonk a school down in an area and destroy the schools around without having a detrimental impact on the children who were there. That is philosophical.

iii) Ryan on the (biographical) development of New Labour philosophy:

I think there is always going to be some crossover I think in the centre ground of politics. But I think it is interesting. My sort of background politically was, you know, I think I would have been on the left when I was in the Irish Labour party. I got involved in what was called the 'soft left' in the British Labour party, which, at that stage, included people like Tony Blair and David Blunkett. It had a fair range of opinions within it. But what people were driven by was the sense that we had to have a new way of thinking; a new way of presenting policy if Labour was going to get re-elected. And it needed to be rooted in traditions but not weighed down by those traditions.

iv) Taylor on the political-philosophical educational consensus:

I think some of the most fruitful conversations that are happening – unfortunately they're not really happening in Westminster – but some of the most fruitful conversations are conversations that are happening which explore how you can best combine right-of-centre and left-of-centre traditions. For example, we had a fantastic speaker here last week, a guy called John Tomasi, who has written a book to reconcile two principles from Classic Liberalism and two principles from Social Democracy, which he says can be reconciled. The two principles from Classic Liberalism are the fact that property rights are primary human rights, and should be seen as having a status, alongside other human rights, and not be seen as being contingent on secondary rights. Secondly, that, generally speaking, devolving power is the best way to get outcomes, rather than using the state and planning; so a Hayekian kind of epistemology.

Then, from the left, he derives firstly the idea that, actually, institutions in society should be institutions which have broad consent. So they should be based on the idea that all citizens should

have the opportunity to shape the institutions that exist. And, finally, that broadly applying the Rawlsian principle, all other things being equal, we should organise things to most favour those who are most disadvantaged. Now, he says it's possible to bring these principles together, which is absolutely fascinating. He does it from a Libertarian, from a right-of-centre perspective. He's a person on the right, leaning over to the left, rather than a person.. What's particularly interesting to me, and I said to this to Tomasi.. I said what I thought was interesting was that actually look at people like Maurice Glasman, and John Cruddas, and also I've written about this. We take from a completely different right-of-centre tradition, which is not the Libertarian tradition; it's the Social Conservative tradition. So, for me, what is interesting is the possibility of binding Social Conservatism, by taking from the left a concern about social justice, and from the right a concern for institutions, and traditions, and cohesion, and seeing if we can combine those.

v) Balls on 2010 philosophical fissure; New Labour/Gove divergence:

I don't really see very much relationship at all between the Academies' legislation and Free Schools and what's happened since 2010. With the vision that Andrew and I had pre-2010. I think that was the fundamental change in direction. In the hotchpotch of different school models, you had some GM schools. You had some CTCs. Some private schools were coming to the state system. You had a range of past attempts. I'm not sure they had a huge amount of relationship between the Academies movement. The thing which we said about Academies – and this was essentially how the policy had evolved – the thing I was able to do in the new department, me and Andrew together, was to codify this. It was Academies went to – it was absolutely focused on under-performance. The reason why CTCs or GM schools is not really a model – they were closer to the Gove model. That was about better performing schools. Probably with a slightly more affluent than average catchment breaking away from local authority control. Whereas the model which had built up by the time I came in and which we entrenched, were schools which were in disproportionately disadvantaged area and in disproportionate disadvantage catchment, were almost all – and under my position all – under 30% five GCSEs, English and Maths, done with the support of the local authority, not in opposition to the local authority, with a new sponsor coming in. To really drive change with investment to turn round the performance. In my constituency now, the one school which has led the way to going to academy in my constituency, since 2010, was the highest performing school. Whereas, in my constituency, under our model, the school which would have been more likely to have gone for academy, was an under-performing school which needed turning round.

..That's the big change which happened since 2010. 2010 was much more a chance to break free from local authority control, starting with higher performing schools. Ours was about driving transformational change for under-performing schools. It is true to say, in the early period, under Tony Blair and Andrew Adonis, sometimes with the opposition of the local authority. The great irony, from my point of view, was that the local authorities who were supportive of me on Academies, tended to be big Mets. The local authorities which had the most difficult time with me and Academies were Shires. We basically went in through National Challenge. I didn't want Academies to be simply a random opportunity for some, denied others. I wanted there to be no schools who were under performing. Therefore, the thing which we knew worked with Academies, I wanted to know we could do that in every school, where there had to be a solution. We didn't say the solution had to be an Academy, but we had essentially 300 schools in National Challenge to begin with, who were under 30%. And we said, "You're either going to need a rapid turnaround, some kind of federation or partnership, or Academy. And you choose. But the only thing you can't do is not have a plan". By the time I left being Secretary of State, we'd gone from about 300 to about 30 who didn't have a plan. Certain areas, like Kent or Gloucestershire and Leicester, and Leeds. Actually, under the Tories as it happens, were authorities who were quite resistant. I think there was an attitude which was in some areas, "Most of our schools are doing fine". We were saying, "I know, but what about the other ones? What are you going to do?".

vi) Skidmore's observation of appeals to international evidence for free school reform:

..based on looking at what works in Chicago, what works in Helsinki; trying to say, "Well, actually, that is why they have come onto the choice of Sweden.' But it there was a drive to find something extra: you simply couldn't say, "I am a Conservative, therefore I simply believe in freedom, and freedom works." It needed to be more than that; it needed to be, "Well, Obama is backing Charter Schools in Chicago. If Obama thinks it is good, then..." So there was a lot of that type of

triangulation, to try and find not a moral purpose, but a level of authority. I think there was a lack of confidence in trying to... not a lack of sense of purpose, but there was a lack of confidence that other people would understand that purpose. You couldn't simply go about creating reform and expecting people to understand why you were doing it by simply talking about the language of freedom alone. You have to show why this works (Skidmore).

vii) Gibb on the absence of cross-party consensus on free school reform:

- 1 I think it is an apparent consensus
- 2 I don't sense from Labour that they really – I think they are still ambivalent about free schools. They were very hostile when we announced we were going to extend it to primary schools, the notion of academisation.
- 3 Clearly Adonis is 100% on-side, on all aspects of the free school and academies policy.
- 4 There is more consensus now about the structural changes
- 5 There is not a consensus on the standards agenda, on phonics, on the nature of the curriculum.
- 6 If you want this policy to continue, people will just have to vote Conservative in the future
- 7 people like Kelvin Hopkins, a left-wing Labour MP, absolutely, and I don't agree with him on any other area of politics. But on education he is as Govite and as Gibbite as we are
- 8 (Twigg) is in a very difficult position. He is in a very difficult position, because he is in charge of the education policy of a coalition that, as I was saying, includes the unions and Fiona Millar.

viii) Gove on Conservatives and conservative philosophy:

I think in a lot of cases the best types of Tories are people who are instinctive. In a way, one of the things about Burke is that it required someone who had started as a Whig – and, of course, was born an Irishman – to recognise what Tory doctrine or philosophy might be. At different times at the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Whigs would have had theorists. The Tories – like in Addison's caricature of the squire, who thinks the weather was always better before the Glorious Revolution – the Tories were just instinctive; their policies worked because they reflected human nature, and they didn't need to be explained because they were understood as coming from human nature. So there are some of my colleagues, some of the best ministers and some of the stoutest-hearted Conservatives, who don't need to philosophise, and have a proper distaste for it, because it is un-English.

I labour under the handicap of being a Scot. Therefore, as an outsider, I admire that approach. But I can't help thinking, "Where does it come from? How can you classify it? How to sum it up?" But the other thing I think also is that, while you are absolutely right – I haven't even thought of it in this way – while you are absolutely right that you have got to think about economics, and how incentives will drive behaviour and where the money is coming from; and you have got to think about politics – what is the coalition of forces, and win debates; the most important thing is political philosophy, and that even though there are some politicians who have never fully articulated their political philosophy, the best politicians have a political philosophy. And that may change over time. Some politicians have expressed their political philosophy – Churchill – through writing history. Others have done so through their reaction to events, and the speeches that they make in response to those events. Sometimes Lloyd George did that; sometimes, of course, he drove things through in a particular fashion, which laid bare his philosophy as a radical. Teddy Roosevelt laid it out; Ronald Reagan in the radio addresses that he gave even before he became Governor, never mind President, laid out what his philosophy was. So sometimes, even people who don't think that they are adherents of a political philosophy, do have it.

For me, though, the most important thing is to have one, but to recognise that political philosophy has to be open to being changed by events. You have got to recognise that there are some parts of what you may or may not believe that are going to be challenged by change over time. In that respect, Conservative political philosophy is a bit like TS Elliot's description of the tradition, and the tradition of the individual talent, whereby it exists, but every new author or artist changes the whole thing subtly by joining it, and then allowing us to see it in a slightly different way. And so, in the same way, Conservative political philosophy responds to new insights and to new practitioners and to new threats. It is important therefore to make sure that you don't allow it to pickle. But I think it is incredibly important, and, in my case, I think that part of my political philosophy is the belief that

it is dangerous to centralise too much power or control in bureaucracies: it is better to have, in Burke style, little platoons – vital, independent, intermediate institutions between individuals and the state.

And the second thing which I think is important, too, is that you have got ask what sort of virtues or vices – what sort of behaviour do institutions, and the way in which they have been designed, encourage? This is where I am very interested in what people like Gertrude Himmelfarb have written, and Iain Duncan Smith's critique of the welfare state. We all want to – it is a Christian instinct, but it is a human instinct as well – we all want to help those who are poor, disadvantaged, who face difficulty. But how can you construct – How can the state both provide support and care for people whose lives go awry or people or face difficulty, and at the same time encourage enterprise, soft reliance; encourage in its own right, and deferred ratification and so on? (Gove)

ix) Boles on institutional/libertarian Tory-Liberal tension:

I am a – not in all things, and not 100 per cent – but more than anything else I'm a Gladstonian liberal. So I believe that strong independent institutions, acting freely, is generally the best way of running most things in society, and produces a happier set of outcomes, and an engine of improvement. That is important. There are little bits of me, the sort-of Tory, which believe that a nation has to have an idea of itself, and it has to have a common sense of where it came from, and what matters, and culture, and that sort of stuff. So I don't count myself a total libertarian. But I'm much less interested than say Michael (Gove) or Nick (Gibb) are in the body of knowledge is that every child should have. That's not really my interest. My interest is simply that one has strong institutions, strong leadership, strong ethos, and freedom for them to innovate, and try and be as good as they can be.

x) Gove on bureaucratic centralisation / 'the Blob':

And one of the things I think is that while decentralisation might have been seen as an answer to a variety of problems that had developed as a result of bureaucratic centralisation, actually, the most powerful impact of decentralisation should be the common sense and professional judgement taking the place of what the educational bureaucracy or Blob had been responsible for. The Blob got captured by ideas thought of as progressive. It used centralisation to disseminate these ideas through the institutions, which it controlled. The way to counteract that, in order to have an education system which genuinely liberates children, is not to replace the people who are at the Blob with your people: it is to devolve power back down to parents and individual schools, and their common sense, and their self-interest, and their enlightened altruism will lead to a better outcome. In that sense, without wanting to be too ridiculous about it, there are moral fables of the 19th and 20th century – Wagner or Tolkien – that tell you if you think that if you control The Ring and you have central authority you will exercise it wisely, you fall prey to the fatal temptation, which is to centralise when you should be decentralising.

xi) Norman on the extents of institutional liberty:

I don't think any institution is, or could be, entirely unconstrained, or should be. Now, Free Schools are not unconstrained at all: they're an attempt to move the dial over towards greater institutional autonomy, and greater empowerment of heads and teachers. So we'll have to see whether that works or not. I think it's too early to say. It's too early in the process. Of course, what's happening is that different concepts of freedom are being played with here, and we might as well just pick them apart a little bit.

So the first concept of freedom is that of – sorry, let me just make a preliminary comment which is within the concept of the Big Society (either route I take is compatible with the concept of the Big Society). The idea of the Big Society is the empowerment of free institutions on the one hand, and the empowerment of individuals on the other hand. Now, if you think about the empowerment of free institutions, you could, in the educational framework, empower local government, and schools would be part of an empowerment of local government, and might have their relations with local government further devolved, as it were, in a way that you give them more operational autonomy. That would be one way of doing it. What the government has decided to do is to empower schools individually. The way it's trying to empower them – and this is essentially the freedom we're talking

about – is firstly by giving them more powers, more autonomy in themselves. The second is by a parallel case – removing certain impediments that they were previously facing.

But there is a further category, or question about freedom, which is that you might say, “Well, freedom lies, in part, in the ability to make your voice heard if you want to make a change.” The question would be is a school’s voice enhanced by being placed in a relationship with the DfE, over what it would be if it was placed in a relationship with its local authority? I can’t answer the question, and I’m not sure there is a standard answer to that question, because it would depend on the local conditions. But that would be a reasonable question to ask.

xii) Taylor on Free School political rhetoric:

I think that one of the interesting things about Free Schools is that part of the rhetoric is that they’re created by the community and parents. But, in reality, my experience of Free Schools is that there’s no particular interest in Free Schools about stronger community and parental links. Some of them have been created by parents, but many others have been created by all sorts of organisations and people. There isn’t particularly a model that says a Free School is more embedded in its community. So, given my interest in the relationship between schools and communities more broadly, I find the weakness of that theme in Free Schools quite interesting. Do you see what I mean? The Free Schools are supposed to emerge bottom-up from community organisation. But the governance going forward – I mean, for example, lots of Academies and Academy chains don’t have governing bodies. Many Academy chains are highly centralised. And they’re highly centralised on a national scale.

xiii) Gibb on the potential abuse of centralised (/DfE) power:

That is the case in our parliamentary democracy, I’m afraid. Even if we didn’t have those powers, they could be taken. Any incoming government could come in and repeal the whole academies legislation, the whole of the free school legislation, and return it all to the local authority to run. They could tomorrow. So I don’t buy that argument. If you want this policy to continue, people will just have to vote Conservative in the future. Nick Ridley once said, “People have the right to vote for unemployment. If they want to vote the wrong way, they have the right to do that.” There’s just no way around that in our system.

xiv) Various interviewees on the free-school (i.e., academisation) ‘revolution’:

Because he’s been the person who has really driven the programme forward with a vengeance. I think he is completely committed to it to the point where, I think, since it is an experiment, I think it has been very unwise to progress it at the speed that it has been progressed (Anon LD).

I always intended that local authorities should wither on the vine, but they should wither a bit more slowly than they’re withering now. Because I think you have to introduce change in education in a way that makes it acceptable (Baker).

..the election decision by Michael Gove to essentially, other than the name, rip up the previous Academies programme and move to a different model (Balls).

..it was incremental in that it was a reform intended to deal with one particular part of the education system which was failing schools. It wasn’t intended as a revolutionary change to the entire school system (Adonis).

I think intelligent policy recognises that there are certain policy goals that are always in tension. Therefore responsible policy making is about balancing those competing priorities. I think that Free Schools and academisation has lost sight of that. I think it’s a headlong rush towards one policy objective, and I just think that’s weak policy making (Taylor).

It is a revolution. There’s no question. It is extremely radical (Gibb).

xv) Skidmore on Free School evolution:

(Free schools) must be seen in terms of an evolutionary context. Revolutions scare people. If you suggest that something is a revolutionary policy, it is unlikely to get favourable treatment, simply because you are admitting its novelty. What you want to do is to base a policy within the context of progression... Evolution, on the other hand, is able to demonstrate that you can end up in the place of a voucher, but you take people with you. So that everyone realises the voucher is not just for the few: it is for everyone; it is for them.. So you start with free school meals, the free school meals thing becomes eventually a voucher for the poorest in society. That is why I am keen to start there, and expand outwards. Once you have proved that it works, once you have proved that actually giving parents the opportunity to move pupils around rather than being stuck in the same sink school, then people will buy into the idea.

xvi) Skidmore on the essential conservatism of continuing education reform:

In terms of the issue of conservatism, personally why I have conservative beliefs, is that you have to take society as it stands and reflect society. There is an imagined belief that you can somehow roll back to a golden age, it is not applicable. Particularly in education you have to maintain raised standards against a backdrop of a changing world, a changing global world, in which pupils in India, or 85% of pupils in Singapore do Maths beyond 16. Only 15% of pupils here achieve that. That gulf, that I see constantly in my constituency with a new science park being opened, that is unlikely to have any of my constituents ending up getting jobs there, because they don't simply have the skills or qualifications to attain that. For me it leads back to aspiration, and as a conservative, obviously, I believe passionately in aspiration. But aspiration is a meaningless word unless you provide the opportunity that goes with it. That is why I feel that in terms of taking decisions now that can be uncomfortable, but have to be quite sudden decisions given the pace of the global race, which we have been slipping behind in. That it is more than made up for by the conservative principle, the core conservative principle, of ensuring that there is opportunity so that those who aspire can fulfil their destiny.

xvii) Norman on the historical incremental shifts in the evolution of education policy:

So you weren't allowed to teach in an English university, if you were a Catholic, until the late nineteenth century. You had to be an ordained member of the Church of England to teach. Isaac Newton famously, as you may recall, had to be an ordained member of the Church of England. In particular he had to profess a specific adherence to the doctrine of the Trinity in order to teach at Trinity Cambridge. To be a fellow, not even teach, but just to be a fellow at Trinity Cambridge. This caused quite a problem, because of course, unlike everyone else in the world at the time he'd written tens of thousands of words specifically refuting the Trinity as a doctrine of the early church. They had to find a way around it, which was to give him the Lucasian Chair, which didn't require any profession of faith, or adherence to the Trinity as such. So one might argue that if there was a change going on, it is a change because of the changing nature of British society.

xviii) Gove on conversation(s) with Archbishop Rowan Williams on free-school/curriculum reform:

I think one of the issues has been that the Church has tended to rely on the state too much to insist that Religious Education is part of the national curriculum; to mandate assemblies with a mainly Christian character; to get local authorities to provide the support that they do. It was striking when I saw the Archbishop that he was very concerned about any diminution of the role of local authorities. I thought that it was more important that the Church of England should ask itself why is Religious Education not taught as well as it should be? Who is involved in that process? What should the syllabus be? And how can church schools advertise their virtues and advantages as institutions which are influenced by religion? And, as ever, as I imagine lots of politicians and lots of bishops have found, the bishop wanted to talk about politics, and the politician wanted to talk about religion.

xix) Boles on the nature of RE in the curriculum:

I would support the idea that Religious Education should be part of the core that everybody has to do, and that it should give probably greater attention to Christianity because this is a Christian country by constitution and history, even while obviously now being much more than that too. But I wouldn't myself have a problem with a daily act of gathering, whether it's Muslim or Jewish or whatever. I think we've got to be absolutely clear about who we are, in terms of the history of the country.

xx) Gove on whether or not an atheist-humanist Free School might be possible in the future:

You could do, yes. In fact I explicitly said to Richard Dawkins, if he wanted to set one up then I would be delighted, in order to prove the point that the policy is, in that sense, truly liberal. But it is interesting that, in the same way as you had... the majority of schools and universities in this country were founded by people who had a set of religious convictions. There are institutions that have been set up by people who were deists or Unitarians or atheists. UCL, and so on. But it is striking the extent to which, in this country and across Europe, it is people who, even if they weren't necessarily evangelising, felt a sense of mission to help and support the poor, who have played a role. But I think it would be a good thing if we were to have a group who were explicitly going to set out to say, "Our aim is to teach in accordance with these virtues." And then, since no one is being compelled to go, it would be interesting to see how successful it was.

xxi) Adonis on the revolutionary-evolutionary nature of free-school reform:

But all revolution is ideological. It was incremental in the sense that it wasn't like the comprehensive reform, or indeed even the Grant Maintained reform, that the reform was geared from the outset for all schools. I was always very clear that the sponsored Academy model – leave aside the convertor Academy, which in fact I've supported – the sponsored Academy was only ever there for schools whose existing governance was inadequate. So to that extent, it was incremental in that it was a reform intended to deal with one particular part of the education system which was failing schools. It wasn't intended as a revolutionary change to the entire school system.

xxii) Balls on equality / social just dimension of Academies vs Free Schools:

I always saw the Academies programme as being about genuinely delivering equal chances – a more aggressively ambitious view of equality of opportunity. So when I see the first tranche of Gove Academies only being outstanding schools. Schools which are disproportionately in higher affluent areas, that's contrary to my view of equal chances. When I see a Free School where parents think to themselves, "We don't really want our kids going to school with the kids from that estate, or with that mix of ethnicity, but if we set up our own school in a slightly different place, we can have a different kind of catchment." That looks to me like it's about less equal chances as well. That has a direct impact on the resourcing and the life chances of the other kids in the school down the road. It is a moral view of equality and the incentives you need to deliver that in a fair way, but also in a way which doesn't blunt dynamism. Which was how I saw the Academies programme.

xxiii) Balls on Gove's notion of educational market-morality:

(Gove) believes that the sort of economic choice incentive is a stronger driver of behaviour. In the case of going to buy a cup of coffee, if you don't like the coffee and it's cheaper down the road, well go down the road. I think that choices and decisions are much stickier in education than they are in some other goods. Therefore the market is a much slower solver of problems. Secondly, I assume that he has to take the view that the children who get caught along the way, which will be disproportionately from less privileged backgrounds, that that is a price which is worth paying. I don't think in the end he believes, in my view, in equal chances. Because I think that he has to take the view that the child – look, go back 30 or 40 years, Michael, funnily enough, believes in Grammar schools. What he thinks is that the kid from the disadvantaged background, plucked out to succeed in the Grammar school, that success is of greater value, or of more importance, than the under-performance of the kids who were told at 11 "You're second class", and went to a secondary modern. I don't think that's either rational economics or right morally. I think he must take a different view

from me on the power of the economic incentive and on the moral outcome. So in that sense, putting the politics aside, it's about incentive and about fair choice.

xxiv) Balls on economic incentives and educational equality:

Because I'm an economist and I know incentives matter, I want people to be able to succeed, earn and do well. Make their choices. I know that for some kids it's not fair: they won't get the same chance unless we do a bit more. Therefore, when I think of the Academies programme, "What would I do?" I was saying, "If you are living in an area which has got 50% higher free school meals, with a school which has had a poor reputation for the last 30 years, you're not going to get the same chance." I'm quite happy to spend some more money through the Academies programme, whether that's through capital or current, in order to give you that chance to do well. Therefore, the fact that Academies ended up getting better results, with more disadvantaged uptake, that to me says it's possible to deliver fairer, more equal chances. The kids have still got to work hard. The school has got to deliver. The leadership has got to be good. If the local authority is not going to back it, you've got a problem.

xxv) Hancock on economic and incentives I education:

I'm a trained economist. That makes me think about the incentives in a system, because a lot of economics is about understanding incentives. But I'm also quite a sceptic of economics as a profession. In fact, I've written a book about how economics is flawed because it makes unrealistic assumptions about human behaviour in order to make the problems tractable. Which means that you get from unrealistic assumptions to unrealistic outcomes. It would be far better – and it's far better to get into the more difficult, more intractable analysis of human behaviour and, at least, get some accuracy, and some handle, on how people behave – rather than making assumptions that people are perfectly rational, or assumptions close to that, and then coming out with garbage in, garbage out.

xxvi) Adonis on the allegations that Academies and Free Schools have 'fragmented' society:

I think that's complete and utter nonsense because the fragmentation which has taken place in respect of Academies and Free Schools is only the institutionalisation of strong, responsible management, school by school. The purpose of it is to lead to far better schools. So much, much less fragmentation than in the old system where you had massive fragmentation between good schools, mediocre schools and bad schools, with, of course, a very large proportion of schools being in the third camp. That's much, much more damaging fragmentation than the institutionalising of managerial autonomy, school by school, with a view, by the nature of the autonomy that you institutionalise and the people you give responsibility for it, like Toby Young, with a view, a well-founded view, that this will drive standards up significantly higher and therefore lead to much less social fragmentation than you had before.

It's like the same old argument about the 'two-tier system'. You know, we had a five-tier system, and a large proportion was all at the bottom. The whole purpose of these reforms is to try and have a 'One-Nation' society which doesn't have this massive dichotomy between successful and unsuccessful schools.

xxvii) Gibb on the 'education establishment':

And they very much adhere – of course there are exceptions, and there are nuances to all these generalisations – but they tend to adhere to one prevailing orthodoxy about education. The reason for that is – I call it the tyranny of the *expertois* – that in any field, whether it's the private sector or the state sector, where there is an ideological divide, one side or other will win that debate. And they will use that power, then, to exclude others from seniority within it. So you will not become director of education in a local authority, generally speaking, unless you adhere to the prevailing orthodoxies of the education establishment. This has been around for 50 years. These debates, until recently, have not surfaced. They've been taking place below the surface. As a consequence, an education

orthodoxy that I believe has failed has come to dominate our education system. It has been very dominant for 50 years, and it's existed in the local authorities, the Department for Education, and in the education faculties.

xxviii) Gibb on the lack of democratic accountability in education reform:

What was happening until Michael Gove became Education Secretary was that major reforms to education over the last 50 years were happening – apart from the original reforms in 1964 – other reforms since then have happened without any accountability to the people of this country. So you'd have quangos like the QCA completely re-writing the curriculum in 1999, and in 2007, with no Bill going through the Commons, with no debate in local elections, or national elections, about the complete shift of policy. You might have seen an article in the *TES*. There might have been articles in the *Times* and the *Guardian*, on page seven or eight, and a few letters here and there. But generally, changes have been made to education without any say-so from the British public.

xxix) Gibb's education biography, and the effects of comprehensivisation upon him:

I was at seven schools, and I was at school between 1965 and 1978. That was the period when the 1964 Labour government's education reforms were implemented. So I experienced the consequences of those reforms, and as I entered the later years of secondary school I began to understand what huge damage they were doing to our education system. I remember being in the Sixth Form, in this weak comprehensive school, seeing a 15-year-old in the library reading an Enid Blyton book. I thought then, "My goodness me, 15 years old, reading Enid Blyton. Something is wrong." Again, there were a lot of other issues about the school. But there's no question it has had a huge impact on my outlook (Gibb).

xxx) Gibb on the orthodoxy of the 'education establishment'

'Look and Say' became the method of teaching children to read. It fails a quarter of children. Text books were removed in the 1970s from primary schools because they were regarded as Gradgrindian. Mixed-ability teaching came in. Three quarters of geography lessons and history lessons take place in mixed-ability classes. In 2007 a skills-based curriculum was introduced by the QCA. All these measures were introduced by non-elected people, and there was no way that the public could say no to that, because the Secretary of State didn't really have control of what was happening. The QCA was a quango that seemed to be out of control. We talked to officials in the Department about the QCA, and they now express worry about what they were doing. You have all these advisors in local authorities, which belong to this national club called the education establishment, going around telling primary schools they should teach maths using chunking and deconstruction.

xxxi) Taylor on the teachers' unions and their opposition to free schools:

I think the teachers' unions are primarily concerned about terms and conditions, actually. I think that they have held out against these reforms for two reasons. One, because they are activist dominated, therefore left-wing, and actually not really representative. So there's a visceral hostility to modernisation and reform. But also, although most Academies haven't used their freedoms, one of the issues that our Academy Commission is looking at is precisely this question of what happens if Academies and Free Schools do start to use their freedoms. And one of those freedoms is over terms and conditions. So I think the unions have hostility to it because they tend to be left-of-centre, therefore in favour of the state and planning, and uniformity to a certain extent, and also opposed to it because of their worries about terms and conditions.

xxxii) Ryan on the teacher's unions and their opposition to free schools:

I think the teaching unions – and I draw a distinction between the teachers’ and the leadership unions – headteacher unions tend to be much more sensible on these things. But the teaching unions I think just seem to be stuck in a time warp. In some senses they haven’t even come to terms with the 1988 Education Act. They are having the same arguments sometimes when league tables get published that faced us when we said that a future Labour government would publish them and that was in 1994 I think, and you still see the same sort of thing trotted out. Even though there is now quite a lot of evidence that having level of accountability is quite important in driving standards and improving standards. Of course there can be effects and you have to make sure that you are measuring and reporting the right things. But the unions I think would benefit much more from trying to have a dialogue from where we are now rather than from where they would like us to be in the past.

xxxiii) Twigg on the left’s ideological opposition to Academies:

Well, there is a lot; there’s a lot. I don’t think it is a secret, the disagreements that there have always been within the Labour Party, but, more broadly, on the left of politics, including the Liberal Democrats, around the emphasis that was placed on school autonomy by Labour in government. And in particular on the Academies programme that we set up. And in the end my job is to make the case based on evidence and seem to persuade people. Actually last night I was giving the Caroline Benn memorial lecture for the Socialist Education Association in which I made the argument for why Labour had introduced Academies to an audience where probably the majority of people in the room didn’t agree with what we had done.. (Twigg)

xxxiv) Balls on opposition within Labour-run LAs to Academies:

When we consulted the Academies, there were always some people who were ideological – that these were independent schools which happened to be state financed. I never saw them as independent schools which were state financed. I saw them as being part of the state school system. The opposition tended to come from people who said local authorities must always run and manage schools. The thing I always used to think – which was surprising to me – was that, given the opposition within the Labour Party that local authorities must run comprehensive schools, that always seemed to be a bit dissonant with the large number of local authorities I had asking me whether they could have Academies, including many Labour local authorities.

xxxv) Balls on the structural bureaucracy/ ‘system’ / educational culture that contends against education reform:

In the case of the National Health Service – I remember talking to Jim Knight about this because he’d gone to work in the Department of Work and Pensions – if you’re in the health service, or the DWP, you’re the Secretary of State and you say, “This is what we’re going to do.” The thing which is really quite shocking is to discover that six months later, right across the country, tens of thousands of DWP employees, or nurses, or doctors, or managers are all doing what you said. The operating framework in the NHS is massively important, because it’s signed off by ministers and they’ve got to do it. Schools are completely different, because you’ve got 3,000 units with their own governance and their own head teacher. To be quite honest, whatever the Secretary of State says and whatever the law says, they’ll do what they think is right. It’s a completely opposite culture.

Therefore, the thing which we learned, with schools in general, is the only way to really effect change was to win hearts and minds. You have to persuade people it was the right thing to do, or they just won’t do it. That’s what schools are like. That’s the nature of the autonomy of the school unit, with its governors and its head teacher. In some ways, I think what Academies do, is they’re slightly more centralised than about 30 years ago – where you had local authorities who were genuinely telling schools what to do. The Secretary of State has far more ability to tell Academies what to do these days than any local authority can ever tell a maintained school, let alone the Secretary of State. So I think we always saw our job as the opposite of the Health Department and DWP, is you both get to persuade.

A really good example of this is I asked Jim Rose to do a review of the primary curriculum. Jim Rose is a very respected figure in the primary world. He did a very effective piece of work and consultation. He came out with a curriculum which was very close to not only what academics thought was best practice, but what head teachers thought was best practice. I don't remember, in education, a document which was as welcomed, broadly speaking, as the Rose Primary Curriculum. Michael Gove never liked it, because he wanted to be more dirigiste. Therefore, I think, formally speaking, he said that we're no longer implementing Rose. Any time I go to a primary school, I say, "What are you doing with primary curriculum?" They say, "We're doing Rose." You say, "Didn't the Secretary of State, two years ago, say we weren't doing Rose anymore?" They say, "Oh well, we find a way round it." That's the nature of education. In the end, if they believe in it, they'll do it. Sometimes you have to be very challenging to persuade them to change their view.

The reason why the Academies programme was the right thing to do was in certain circumstances, when you could only make the transformational change when you've got a culture which is set the wrong way. But in broad terms, you can't run the education system through command and control. Which is what they're trying to do now with Academies. You need to win hearts and minds. Then you need an overarching, more local view, which tells you when things are going wrong (Balls).

xxxvi) Twigg on the National Curriculum:

On the National Curriculum, I think firstly it was right to create a National Curriculum. So I would not... I'm not one of those who would argue that you could get rid of it all together and go back to days where every school or every locality developed its own curriculum. Secondly, though, I think the National Curriculum has become too prescriptive. I think that has contributed to a sense of... a kind of de-professionalisation of teaching. That it is a source of low morale for the teaching profession, and I think therefore weakens educational standards. So I am in favour of a National Curriculum, but one that is less prescriptive than the one we have at the moment. I actually think that the experience of Academies having greater curriculum flexibility makes the case for a less prescriptive National Curriculum for all schools. But I think that the core of a National Curriculum is certain expectations around literacy, around numeracy, around science education. And when we did the Academy agreements, and I think it is still the case today including Free Schools, they are expected to fulfil the requirements of the National Curriculum, certainly as regards English, Mathematics and Science. And so I think it may well be that when you look at it in detail, a lot of what should make up the National Curriculum is already contained within funding agreements for Academies and Free Schools. You then get into some interesting territory where I think there is a debate to be had. This probably may have arisen in the summer because of the Olympics, which is around Physical Education and Sport. We said in government that there should be a minimum amount of time for PE and Sport. It is not quite National Curriculum, but it is a good example. I think, actually, that if we think that government has a role to play in taking the lead on the amount of time schools spend on PE and Sport, if that is right for maintained schools, then I think that should be right for Academies and Free Schools. If it is wrong – if it too prescriptive and what are politicians doing determining this, then it shouldn't exist for either category of school. But I think the evidence that, actually, left to their own devices, too many schools were doing very little PE and Sport, says to me there is actually a very good argument for that being something where there is a minimum – 2 hours is hardly that demanding – a minimum time set down in National Curriculum terms.

xxxvii) Adonis on the freedom/un-freedom tensions in all schools:

No school in any society is entirely free. I mean we had Chris Ray, the Headmaster of Manchester Grammar School, going on about the characteristics – When you say what is the characteristic of an "independent" school makes it completely independent because of course private schools are inspected by the state. I mean private fee-paying schools are inspected by the state. They have to abide by the law of the land in respect of equalities legislation, and a whole lot of other things that they have to do, too. Although their curriculum.. they're not obliged to follow the National Curriculum. They virtually all choose to follow the National Qualifications and Assessment system, and they know that if they didn't do so, they'd have big problems with the inspector and huge problems with their parents.

Chris Ray, the Headmaster of Manchester Grammar School, then faced with this, because of course the argument I've been making that private schools should sponsor academies as part of their, I mean successful primary schools should sponsor academies as part of their mission, says that you can't do that because, he says, "The central distinguishing characteristic" he says of an independent school, is "financial independence of the state". That is a laughable proposition coming from the Headmaster at Manchester Grammar School which was a direct grant school, was one of the largest recipients of assisted places in the country. And from a headmaster who's been actively campaigning for the – what was it called.. the Lampl scheme – the open access scheme, which involves a massive fusion of state support into his school.

So clearly financial independence is not a central characteristic of independent schools; if it were, then his school, for most of its history, including the period up to the very recent past, was not independent, which is again a laughable proposition on any comparison of governance and ethos of schools nationwide. So all independence is, to some extent, relative in that there's no school that is independent in the sense of having no relationship whatsoever with the state, the law, wider society – and that's clearly nonsense. The question is the extent to which their governance and ethos and management operate autonomously of the state itself. Not that they're entirely independent because they have to follow the law in key respects and obviously they reflect the mores of wider society, but do they actually operate largely autonomously of the state. And that is true of academies in the same way it's true of "independent" schools.

xxxviii) Blunkett on the state/institutional central/local freedom-tensions in free schools:

The contradictions abound at the moment. They have always been there. There have always been tensions and contradictions. But they are writ large at the moment with the funding agency and the centralisation of accountability. You have put your finger on it, and I don't know, I haven't had a chance to talk to Michael Gove about this, but I will be interested in his view as to how he is going to get out of that. Because we even have talk of a specific nature of phonics; of particular reading lists for literature. A particular type of teaching for history. But you can't have all those and freedom as well.

xxxvix) Norman on the state/institutional central/local freedom-tensions in free schools:

There will be an interim story that people will tell. I don't denigrate them by saying that: I'm just saying there will be an interim account to be given of, as it were, a process of centralisation in order to remove control. That story gets told almost every decade by government, and in some cases it's true, and in some cases it isn't true. In some cases they want to give away the power and they never get around to it. In some cases the people do not allow them to get rid of it. I'll give you an example. This government was elected with a very clear manifesto commitment to give more power to doctors within the NHS. Well, it turned out that when they wanted to do that it was very difficult to achieve, because the people would not allow that alienation of power from politicians. They ultimately required politicians to exercise that power, even if this involves an implicit recognition that it might not be as good as having a fully clinician-led service.

xl) Norman on the centralisation of power to the DfE:

Because the Government might easily respond, "Well, look, we're setting up a system here. Ultimate accountability for setting the rules of the system, and for failure within the system, lies, as it properly should, at the foot of democratic politicians. But, short of that, we've created a system in which these institutions are freer, and in particular they are free, even if the cost of that is failure. They need to be freer to fail, because if you don't get failure you don't get performance. You have to have a failure regime for how you deal with institutions that aren't succeeding. If you try to get every institution in perfect shape, you end up funnelling intolerable amounts of public money at institutions which progressively do worse, because they aren't being held to a test of accountability." That would be the argument that's being made.

xli) Baker on Gove's reform to the examination system:

What Michael Gove is trying to do, which has been tried in the past in British education, is to reconstruct the education system through the exam system. That's what he's trying to do. He's trying to make it compulsory to go to 16, to get this exam. Nothing offered underneath it. Now, the rest of the world is moving away from that. Literally, yearly it is moving away from it.

..I think that, in fact, this is where Gove is wrong. He's suppressed too much vocational education below 16. A lot of it was very shallow and weak, as the Wolf Report says, but a lot of it was not.

..He's recreating the school certificate that I took in 1950. I was the last year that took the school certificate.. That was abandoned in the 1950s, because it was too narrow. It failed too many people. There were too many youngsters who just couldn't cope with it. That's going to be the danger of the Gove reform in exams.. Particularly he's going to do away with coursework, and some coursework is good in classes, actually, and exams. Some coursework is good. He's virtually eliminated that, apart from a handful of science lessons. All that is going to produce a lot of youngsters who are very fed up with their education – very fed up, at 13/14, in my view. He's going to play into my hands. Because we engage the disengaged 13 and 14 year olds, and we take average comprehensive intake. They apply themselves.

xlii) Baker on his own vision for education reform:

I believe the really big change is moving to 14 as the age of transfer. It was recommended in 1941. The committee that recommended selective grammar schools, selective technical schools and secondary modern also recommended a transfer age of 13/14. It never went to ministers. The permanent secretary of the day said, "You can't have that, because grammar schools start at 11." In those days there were 1,400 grammar schools. There are 169 grammar schools now. There is no educational reason why children should change at 11. There is no development in the child's mentality, or in social awareness, all the other things of growing up. 11 is meaningless.. (The private schools) change at 14, and Year 9.. That's the sort of model I want to try to move our system to.

APPENDIX XIII

Hansard: Westminster Hall Debate: 'Personal, Social, Health and Financial Education' (16 January, 2013).

LIZ TRUSS: Our fundamental belief is that the national curriculum should give schools more flexibility to teach in a way that is suited to their pupils and to how the school operates. As I have mentioned, we have statutory sex education, but we believe in more local autonomy in how things are achieved, so that they are done in the best possible way... We want schools to offer a rounded education, but we believe the best way to do that is to allow more decision making by head teachers, rather than by Whitehall... I have outlined how I think that more teachers should be empowered to decide the content of the wider school curriculum. International evidence shows that giving schools more autonomy results in them being able to make better decisions on the ground. The same applies to teacher training, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South. We are clear that teachers should be free to access high-quality resources and training, such as that provided by the British Heart Foundation on life-saving skills. It is a two-way process, with professionals in schools in regular dialogue with outside bodies, as well as the Government, rather than one with edicts issued from Whitehall about how exactly subjects should be taught.

APPENDIX XIV

i) Gove on the attribution of reform consensus:

A public dissatisfaction with the poor quality of education that their children receive. I think that is the main thing. I don't think there is... People weren't marching in the streets, but there was public dissatisfaction. That was picked up by and articulated by Tony Blair and Andrew Adonis and Blair's education ministers. I think it is also the case that politicians thinking about how it was that they were going to ensure that Britain or England prospered in the future, would have appreciated how important getting education policy right was. I think globalisation will have reinforced in people's minds the thought that you can't any longer, even if it was ever possible, educate and elite effectively and leave others undereducated. You have got to mobilise every possible brain and pair of hands. I think that the fact that we were developing a better and better sense, through PISA and the OECD, of what other countries were doing in education, and therefore we couldn't any longer compare ourselves simply with our past. We had to look at what other nations were doing. I think all of these had an impact as well. So de-industrialisation, and recognising that traditional working-class jobs were unlikely to come back in anything like the numbers that had been lost, made people think that education was critical. Global economic forces more broadly made people realise that thing were only going to become more acute. Looking at how other countries performed concentrated their minds. Public dissatisfaction with what was happening in a number of schools. And also I think the intransigence of teaching union leaders, and the complacency of local authorities, and people in many but not all education faculties in our universities made people think, "Well these are the people who are the stewards of the system. They don't seem to have any real sense of drive to improve things. We have got to find new ways of doing it" (Gove).

ii) Norman on the development of consensus on Academy/Free-School reform:

I suppose I put it down to the fact that a lot of the economic and cultural expectations about school reform were set during the 1980s and 1990s. They were then inherited, and developed by Tony Blair and Andrew Adonis, as in many ways a highly pragmatic, non-ideological Secretary of State. They were, in some respects, rather small-c conservative in inspiration. So I think there are levels of continuity in education resulting out of that. Will you appreciate, for this conversation, Adrian, that I am absolutely not an expert, and I'm not able to point to chapter and verse to support what I'm saying? It's a kind of intuition more than anything else.

iii) Ryan on the development of consensus on Academy/Free-School reform:

I think that since – well, if you want to trace the origins – it's interesting – you probably have to go back to Jim Callaghan's 1975 or 6 Ruskin College speech. The Ruskin College speech was probably the pivotal moment in education since RAB's reforms in 1944. Because I think there was an acceptance, and a realisation in that speech – which was hugely controversial at the time – that something had gone amiss in the education system; that standards had gone amiss; that there was a so called progressive movement had taken hold. There were a number of celebrated cases, like the William Tyndale case in Islington in the 1970s. So there were a number of things where there was a sense that the education system had lost its way. Now Callaghan was for various reasons not in a position to do more than set out the problem. And it took really until Ken Baker became Education Secretary before the Conservative government did so as well. But I think that was probably what started a cross party consensus on diagnosing the problem. Now the solutions I think needed a sort of New Labour and a sort of Cameron-Gove, if you like, in order to develop the consensus, certainly structurally. Where I think we had a degree of consensus emerging before that was probably on the accountability side of things, and on the need for an independent inspectorate and a need for testing and a need for a curriculum and so on. So that consensus came first. But on the structure reforms I think it needed the sort of Blair push and the recognition that actually Academies owed a lot to Conservative policy and CTCs so it was something that was actually quite logical for them.

iv) Baker on the reasons for consensus on Academy/Free-School reform:

I think a general feeling that the existing school system is letting a lot of children down, therefore schools ought to be better generally. They were letting them down very badly because a whole lot of bad practices got into the teaching profession in the '60s, and a whole lot of very sloppy thinking, child-centred education, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, and a drive to comprehensives, which was clearly a huge mistake. Wilson supported them. He would make every grammar a comprehensive school. That's not the way at all. Sufficient attention was not given to really making comprehensives good enough. It was the failure of the comprehensive more than anything else. It was really introduced by Labour for social purposes rather than educational purposes. You look at the early thinking in the '20s and '30s, people like Professor Tawney. He lectured at LSE, and I remember being taken to a lecture by him on Charles I. He was one of the great thinkers of comprehensive education in the '20s and '30s. It was very much social engineering rather than educational grounds. I think that the movement to free schools was a recognition that grammar school education, combined with the appalling performance of local authorities in improving schools, you had to have a different thing. And there was no doubt that... That's why I started CTCs. I wanted to inject into the system a new type of school, which is what CTCs did. Because I am a supporter of all of that, believe me. What I'm saying is that the scale it's being done, and the speed it's being done, there will be failures as well as successes. And you have to cope with the failures.

v) Adonis on the reasons for reform consensus:

It works. Sorry, it works and it's very popular. These schools, in the latest NAO report, the 2010 NAO report, it quotes the figure of academies being on average twice oversubscribed, that's on average. Now the point about that is that most – this is sponsored academies – most of the sponsored academies of course replaced failing schools, many of them chronically failing schools, which were both undersubscribed, and had places for many fewer pupils than the academies do.

So the degree of transformation they brought about is much underestimated. It's not just improvement in results; there's been a huge increase in the number of places that they offer as well. On average at least a third more, sometimes including sixth forms, 50-100% more places. So when you take both the fact that these schools have become much larger in their communities, and are now very popular, whereas their predecessors of course were generally undersubscribed and they were very unpopular, that makes a pretty potent combination.

So popularity is an important thing. It would have been very, very difficult to start abolishing academies, you would have had a riot on your hands, literally, in community after community. But so it obviously worked and no one had any better answer, either on the left or the right, to the big challenge which everyone accepted of radically improving education in disadvantaged areas, whether comprehensive schools... I mean though many of my friends on the left didn't like the language of failure, they knew that that's what was happening. I mean none of them would have sent their children to a lot of the schools that were replaced by academies, so they did accept that that was the case.

But the tired old alternatives of the left and right were clearly not adequate. They were either totally irrelevant, as in the assisted places scheme in new grammar schools which clearly weren't going to help the poor in poor areas; they just passed them by. Or they clearly failed, like just handing more money to existing badly managed comprehensives, which was basically the policy of the left.

vi) Blunkett on reasons for reform consensus:

I think firstly there is a genuine will – even if we disagree about means – a genuine will to transform the life chances of children and to improve schools. I think that is... I think we just have to accept that as a given. Secondly I think that Gove has cleverly done what we endeavoured to do, which was to build on the best of what was there. Albeit pulling the elastic to stretching point, because I think he is at the moment doing that, in terms of transferring resources in a way that doesn't focus on need. Need in terms of pupil numbers, and need in terms of transformation of a school. It has become

ideological in that sense, because the free schools programme isn't focused on deeply deprived areas, or schools that need complete transformation.

vii) Anon LD on reasons for reform consensus:

I put the consensus down to a very strong desire to improve things for children and to try whatever we can to give every child an opportunity. The problem is, I think, that too many eggs have been put in the same basket too quickly. Andrew Adonis's academies are very different from the academies that are going hell-for-leather now. His academies were a way of taking failed schools, bringing in passionate and devoted people who were very, very keen to help, to bring in their expertise. Putting in extra money. Now, you will find me on record, and my colleague Margaret Sharp, both of us, saying, on many occasions, that we are not against putting extra money behind children that need extra help, because they've been failed formally by their home background, or their earlier schooling, or whatever, to help them to get the same chance that most of us get.

Absolutely not against that. Indeed, of course, that's exactly what the Pupil Premium does. But, if you are going to then take Andrew Adonis's concept of academies, which were formerly failed schools, and say, "Right. Okay. Now we're going to say, 'Any school that's good or outstanding can go it alone.'" That's a very, very different picture. A very different picture. Now, I'm not against professionals having the opportunity to use their professional judgement about how they perform their task in relation to children's education. Indeed, I'm all for that. But I'm still not convinced that that's what we've got here. And, of course, the convertor academies don't have sponsors in the same way as the original sponsored academies. There are in fact many, many ways in which private companies, with a social conscience, or universities, or other organisations, with something to offer, have always been able to get involved with schools. The problem is, a lot of them didn't do it until the academies came along as an opportunity and a framework to allow them to do that. That, I think, is a very good thing. But the problem is, it's gone so fast that there have been ways in which consequences, of the way and the speed in which it's been implemented, that worry me. The issue of fair admissions. In legislation, it's all absolutely fine. In practice, it's not. We have plenty of evidence of that. As far as fair funding is concerned, it hasn't been fair. Many headteachers freely admitted, particularly in the early days, because some of it has been corrected more recently, but in the early days they went for it because of the money. There was no question. Now, you see, if you're going in, particularly at a time when money is short, if you're giving extra money to schools which are already outstanding or good, by definition, because they couldn't have become a convertor academy if they hadn't been, if you're going to give them extra money it's going to come out of the same pot that all the other schools rely on as well. So there are other schools going to suffer. And you mustn't forget there are children at those other schools. And it's their education that worries me. So, think that if you are thinking about all children, then you have got to address failure in quality in all schools. By addressing so much attention and so much funding to schools that are already good, you are just forgetting and leaving behind the others. And there are children there. So that's one of the things that worries me. And, as I say, this is unproven. It's not a magic bullet. We know there are some convertor schools that have not done as well as you might expect, given the advantages they've had. In addition to that, there are some of the original academies which have not demonstrated that the academisation itself has been the force for the level of school improvement that you would have hoped for or expected. There are still some failing ones. So, in light of all that, I really worry about the speed with which the whole thing is being moved. The other thing particularly that bothers me is the issue of the community and the local authority. Now, there was a statement in about 2010 or 2011, about free schools, I think it was while we were still discussing the Academies Bill in the House. A very clear statement was made that local authorities would continue to have a role in relation to school improvement. Well, we're still finding out what that role is. To me, education is a community service. It's not just a service for those particular children and those particular parents in that particular school during that seven years that they're there. It is for the whole community. For all the children and parents that are in a school now, seven years down the track there will be completely different children, completely different parents. Which is why, I think, a democratically-elected local authority should have some involvement in the school. Which is why we've always fought to have at least one local-authority representative on the governing bodies of academies. But, of course, right at the beginning, local authorities, well, they had to go along with it, because the rules were rigged against them. So that if you needed a new school, an academy was the only game in town; you just couldn't get one otherwise. So it had to be an academy. Of course, that took away their involvement in the school in the way that, I think, communities should. And certainly, the levers that local authorities have available to them to carry out the duties they still have are very few. They have to ensure that a place is provided for every child. In some local authorities

where there are – they are all academies, a child comes in from somewhere else, maybe the parents are in the armed forces. I heard of a case not so long ago. They had been studying a particular curriculum. They were turned down by the only feasible school in the local authority. The local authority couldn't do anything about it. They couldn't find them a place. So, I do worry that the levers available to local authorities to carry out the duties which they have are being reduced and reduced. And their role in ensuring that the schools in their area are improved, it hasn't been defined. So that's another thing that worries me. The other thing, particularly at a time of austerity, about free schools, is that surplus places cost money. I don't think enough attention has been paid to the location of free schools. Because what they've been doing is creating surplus places, which, of course, costs more money. It's not many years since local authorities were being told by the government, in no uncertain terms, "You have got to reduce the number of surplus places in your authority." And the reason for that was very straightforward, because surplus places cost money. So it's the planning of the location of these things. The local authority doesn't have any say in the matter. I think consultation has been derisory. Okay, there's been a sort of consultation, but nobody takes any notice of those who say, "No, I don't think you should put it there," or, "No, we don't want our school to convert." No notice is paid to those people at all. So, if you are going to move without evidence, without always the consensus locally, without those who have been elected by the local people having some role, you have to ask a lot of questions really. There have been a number of cases of, well, I can only call it fraud, really, as regards the level of parental demand. I've seen cases where parents have been bribed; they have been, you know, "Fill in this little form and you might win an iPad." I've brought this to the attention of Lord Hill when he was Academies Minister. I have a colleague in the House of Commons who is a Roman Catholic who, at church, he was asked to, "Sign your name on this form. We want a local, new Catholic free school." But he said, "But I don't want to send my child to it." "Oh, just sign your name. We want a Catholic school." So that list will have been shown as evidence of parental demand, when half the people on it have no intention of sending their child there. So things like this undermine what could be a very good programme. It could be. I'm not against, as I said earlier, freedoms for professionals to carry out the job for which they've been trained, if they have been properly trained. But, but, but, but I always believe in evidence-based policy. I'm concerned about things which cut out the local community. And I'm concerned about things which turn out to be divisive within a multicultural country. And the fact that so many of these new schools are faith schools concerns me very much.

viii) Hancock on his qualified observation of reform consensus:

..but we're not on the same page as Ed Balls. There's a reactionary part of the Labour Party that isn't supportive. There's a progressive part of the Labour Party that is. Their debate is not resolved.

(In response to what he attributes the 'progressive' consensus):

Evidence. There's very strong evidence that what matters in schools is leadership. From high quality leadership, comes everything else. So, giving leaders of schools, whether head teachers or those who run academy chains, both the flexibility to deliver on the ground and the incentives to deliver effectively, are absolutely critical. So, I identify leadership as the single most important thing. With, of course, the correct incentives.

ix) Twigg on free-school reform consensus:

I don't think it is a secret, the disagreements that there have always been within the Labour Party, but, more broadly, on the left of politics, including the Liberal Democrats, around the emphasis that was placed on school autonomy by Labour in government. And in particular on the Academies programme that we set up. And in the end my job is to make the case based on evidence and seem to persuade people. Actually last night I was giving the Caroline Benn memorial lecture for the Socialist Education Association in which I made the argument for why Labour had introduced Academies to an audience where probably the majority of people in the room didn't agree with what we had done. But also made a distinction between the approach that we took and the approach that Michael Gove is taking, which I think is different.

I think there is a fundamental difference. I am actually making this point this afternoon to the Academies Association when I speak to them. A difference between the Academies that we promoted and the approach to Academies that Michael Gove has. I think that autonomy is important.

But I don't think it is the most important indicator of success or determinate of success, rather. I think the research evidence shows that the most important factors are about leadership and about the quality of teaching in the classroom.

What I think the Academies movement has done, and Andrew makes this point in his book, is that in the schools that were created, either as replacing existing schools or the brand new Academies, they brought in new people as governors. They brought in new headteachers, often new teaching teams, and that I think was the key reason why most of them have done well.

It is worth saying most of them. Because whilst some of the most successful recent school improvements have been Academies, some of the Academies are struggling, including some of the Academies that Labour set up. It is not universally positive picture. A school that I talk about a lot is the Paddington Academy which is a fantastic school; a United Learning Trust school, serving a very mixed and deprived community with just.. it is a pleasure to go there, it is doing brilliantly well. Not far away from there the Lambeth Academy which is also United Learning Trust, has struggled ever since it opened. Now they are both brand new schools with exactly the same sponsor and the same level of autonomy, but one has struggled and the other one has flourished. And what that says to me is, yes the government structure has an impact. But a much bigger impact is leadership, teaching quality, governance, but also the relationship with the wider community.

I don't think you can take what is essentially a market view of education in the way that's described. A process of expanding and contracting and closing schools is not the same as supermarkets or others that operate within a market economy. I think you have to have a measure of planning. Any system has to have a measure of planning. Free Schools is a very good example. Because, actually, the Free Schools are not run according to a market. In the end, the Secretary of State decides whether a Free School is going to open or close. So I don't share the view there.

I do think that if a successful school has the capacity to expand then that is something that we should support. But I don't think you can run a system where automatically there is an expansion of one that leads to another closing down. Because I think potentially that can have such a bad impact on the children who are in the school that is struggling. Much better to improve that school. Now if you can't improve that school ultimately you probably do close it down. But I don't think you move immediately to a sort of market-based approach that says just because a school is starting to lose numbers you just let it wither on the vine so it will close. Because I think that has a very damaging effect on the children who are in that school.

x) Taylor on disagreements with Gove's reforms:

It is disingenuous, sloppy thinking to imagine that a notional commitment to curriculum freedom is meaningful in the context of a very, very tight and centralised assessment framework... I think intelligent policy recognises that there are certain policy goals that are always in tension. Therefore responsible policy making is about balancing those competing priorities. I think that Free Schools and academisation has lost sight of that. I think it's a headlong rush towards one policy objective..'

xi) Boles on free-school consensus:

I don't think there's a consensus broadly. Firstly, the Blairites are a beleaguered group, practically a rump within the Labour Party. The Labour Party is increasingly in the control of – beholden to the trade unions. The trade unions are violently anti, just as much as they ever were, have shown no signs of reconciliation. The Liberal Democrats I think went along with it because it mattered to us, and because probably the most influential person, at the time when the coalition was being formed, was David Laws. David Laws probably, within the Liberal Democrats, is the only one who truly believes in it. Maybe Jeremy Browne does, maybe Nick Clegg does, I don't know, but certainly not many more than that. But I think that their party in the country, certainly their party in local government, was not remotely persuaded of it. So I think that there's a very fragile consensus among 'small L' liberal reformers, of whom there are some in all parties, but who don't have the ascendancy in at least two of the three parties. They have the ascendancy in the Tory Party, but they're not entirely alone in the Tory Party. But the Tory Party clearly is the most pro it at the moment. Maybe if you believe, as I'm inclined to, that Labour is unlikely to win an election unless the liberal reforms are in the ascendancy, then maybe there's a consensus that you can't win unless you're in favour of free schools, as it were. That's the strongest I could put it.

xii) O'Shaughnessy on the proposition of consensus:

First of all, I'm not quite sure I agree with you. I think there are elements of the Labour Party that agree with it and very many elements that don't. So Adonis clearly does, and Twigg, and then you move leftwards and obviously consensus, not that far leftwards, and the consensus breaks down. So I'm not sure I entirely agree with you. Also, if you go to the right, then you get into kind of privatisation and grammar schools and all the rest of it. So it's a centrist thing rather than a total consensus. What do you put it down to? I think it's a mixture of things. Firstly, each of them kind of justify it in a couple of ways. One is that it seems to work, so it's effective and it goes with the grain of what people want, and secondly, each can find descriptions within their own value-set that apply to each political party to describe what's going on. So not only is it effective, they actually have a language to describe it with, if you like, so that they can talk about it in their own terms, which helps, because it makes a big difference actually, the ability to describe something in a way that would appeal to your own tribe helps a lot.

xiii) Adonis on the thread of reform and consensual instinct:

In governance terms, it's church schools, local management of schools, City Technology Colleges, Grant Maintained schools, Academies – that's the lineage; there is certainly a thread. Now, Academies are distinctly different to all of those previous arrangements, but nonetheless they owe a huge amount to each of them.

There was more of a consensual instinct than there had been in the past. I think that's certainly true. And the fact that... Michael Gove went out of his way to love the Blairites – I shouldn't say loved the Blairites to death – clearly play a part. Equally, I was always very clear – because I'd always taken the view that the truth will out in politics and it's best to be upfront with it – so I was always very explicit about how much I owe, particularly to Kenneth Baker, in developing the academies policy on the basis of reforms that have clearly worked.

I think Kenneth Baker was a great Education Secretary, and two of his reforms were seminal, the local management of schools which was basically the reform that delegated managerial responsibility to schools. It did it imperfectly in all kinds of ways, and still left the Local Authorities with a lot of managerial influence and responsibility. But, nonetheless, budgetary control was delegated for the first time to schools and the City Technology College which was the direct lineal descendant of the academies. Of course to some extent, as I said earlier, the Grant Maintained schools were an influence on Academies too, so he was a very great and largely successful Education Secretary, and I've always said so.

APPENDIX XV

i) Ryan on Blunkett-Gove axis of agreement on standards:

Driving out failure was an essential part of what we were trying to do, and actually I would say one of the biggest successes which Gove has maintained – and which people recognise less that he has maintained – is the floor target or the floor standard, which is a sort of un-sung success of the Labour years and which David Blunkett was the first person to introduce: to say that there is a minimum standard below which you know it is unacceptable for you to remain in existence as a school. And David introduced that first of all – at what would now seem a very low-level, but at the time people were saying this is impossible to achieve. And so that was a sort of fundamental aspect of it. I think what is also less understood is the cultural change that all of this has effected in the calibre of school leaders. And I don't think you could do what you are doing, or Gove could do what he is doing at the moment, if he didn't have a much higher calibre of school leadership than was the case 20 years ago perhaps.

APPENDIX XVI

Examples of cross-party media consensus on Gove's Free School reforms:

Wilby, P (2011a). 'The Silent Revolution' in *New Statesman* (2nd June).

"Broadly, Gove's doing the right thing," he says, "particularly the theme of devolution, encouraging schools to take control of their own destiny." He goes on to explain how it is possible to support both the dirigiste New Labour approach and the more libertarian Tory attitude. "If you're moving from poor to fair, as we're doing with Pakistan's schools and as we did with some failing schools in England, that's one set of techniques. If you're moving from good to great, that's a different set. When you're improving a bad system or bad schools, you need to be really clear: here's what you teach, here's the lesson plans, here's the training. But when a system gets really good, you need to be significantly less prescriptive" (Wilby, 2011).

Garner, R (2011) 'Andrew Adonis on Academies: "It's about giving children an equal start in life"', *The Independent* (13th Oct).

"It is no surprise, therefore, to find that (Adonis) was a participant at the meeting that David Cameron held at Downing Street this month with heads of the country's leading independent schools – at which he sought to persuade Eton, amongst others, to sponsor an academy. "I especially would like to see more independent schools set up and manage academies," he says. "We've already got Wellington College, Dulwich College, the Girls' Day School Trust, which are now engaging in the providing of academies" (Garner, 2011).