



Policy Making  
in Secondary Education:  
Evidence from Two Local  
Authorities 1944-1972

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## Short Abstract

The 1944 Butler Act laid the legal foundations for a new secondary education system in England, one which would see all children entitled to free and compulsory schooling up to the age of 15. The Act therefore represented a bold step forward in the pursuit of a fairer society: expanding access to training and qualifications, while promoting a more equal distribution of educational opportunities.

This thesis explores the process of constructing and delivering secondary education policy in England following the 1944 Butler Education Act. It offers a close examination of two Local Education Authorities- Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire- exploring how they interpreted and implemented ‘secondary education for all’ after the Second World War. The dissertation is composed of two parts: Part One looks at how selective secondary schooling was developed and operated in the respective areas between 1945 and 1962; Part Two explores the response of both authorities to the prospect of reforming secondary education after 1962.

By exploring the process of policy implementation after 1944, Part One of this thesis highlights the problems of delivering secondary education for all in an era of resource constraint. It is demonstrated in this thesis that Local Authority capacity to build new schools was firmly tethered to Ministerial control. The relatively low priority accorded to education created a decade-long delay between the announcement of policy change and its eventual delivery. The implications of this delay at the Local Authority and school level are explored in chapters three and six. Chapters four and seven question how resources were distributed between selective and non-selective school sectors, while chapters five and eight evaluate the

treatment of selective education within each authority, asking how policy makers conceived of, and operated, the grammar school and secondary modern sectors.

Part Two of this thesis turns to the question of secondary organisation. Debates surrounding the question of comprehensive rather than selective systems of secondary schooling dominated discussions about secondary education policy in the later twentieth century. When it came to comprehensive re-organisation, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire opted for different paths: Oxfordshire adopted comprehensive schooling relatively early with a remarkable degree of county-wide consensus, while Buckinghamshire fiercely resisted external and internal pressure to reform. Chapter ten of this thesis is devoted to identifying the drivers of comprehensive reform in Oxfordshire. Chapters eleven and twelve explore the Buckinghamshire story establishing how and then why this county successfully held-out against wholesale policy change.

## Long Abstract

This thesis explores the process of constructing and delivering secondary education policy in England following the 1944 Butler Education Act. It offers a close examination of two Local Education Authorities - Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire - exploring how they interpreted and implemented 'secondary education for all' after the Second World War.

The 1944 Butler Act laid the legal foundations for a new secondary education system in England, one which would see all children entitled to free and compulsory schooling up to the age of 15. The Act therefore represented a bold step forward in the pursuit of a fairer society: expanding access to training and qualifications while promoting a more equal distribution of educational opportunities. However, the link between secondary education and individuals' life chances has ensured that this area of policy was (and is) hotly contested - subject to competing visions of society, fairness, and economic needs. Particularly, the structure of secondary education, along either selective (tripartite) or comprehensive lines, has dominated popular and official debates on education policy and practice. The widespread adoption of comprehensive schooling after 1962 removed the practice of academic selection at 11 and unified secondary education into one school type. For its supporters, this policy change was seen to offer the route to even greater educational and social equality, but to its critics, secondary re-organisation threatened to suppress academic standards, replace the academic and economic efficiency of the selective system with mediocrity and ultimately limit the capacity of education to facilitate the meritocratic distribution of life chances. Hence, the debate surrounding policy and practice in secondary education has often been emotive and value driven.

The local discussions and disputes which underpinned comprehensive reform have been less prominent in these debates. So too have been the pragmatics and logistical challenges of changing secondary education policy and practice at a local level. Prior to 1988, secondary education was a locally devolved and delivered service. Local Education Authorities were nominally responsible for deciding the form and practice of secondary education and the form of these varied from area to area. Understanding the development of ‘secondary education for all’ therefore requires a thorough analysis of local conditions, personalities and pressures. This thesis seeks to offer an examination of policy making and practice in Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, and sets out to understand the reception of comprehensive re-organisation in each area in the context of each authority’s longer-term development. Therefore, following an introduction to the topic and the literature, the dissertation is composed of two parts: Part One looks at how selective secondary schooling, was developed and operated in the respective areas between 1945 and 1962, and Part Two explores the response of both authorities to the prospect of reforming secondary education after 1962.

Part One is a study of Bricks & Mortars, exploring how local educational pre-endowments and national policy environments conditioned the capacity of each Local Authority to respond to new obligations created by 1944 Act. ‘Secondary education for all’ necessitated the rapid improvement of educational infrastructure to accommodate unprecedented numbers of secondary students. In 1947, the school leaving age was raised from 14 to 15 and this required planners to expand the capacity of existing schools to accommodate an extra year group. Additionally, both Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire experienced population growth after 1944: an increase in the natural birth rate and immigration to the counties accelerated demand for expanded education facilities.

Chapter two explores the starting points of both authorities, examines how well equipped they were to meet these new demands and highlights the role of pre-1944 education policies in shaping the educational landscape in the respective areas. Each case study is then considered separately, looking initially at Buckinghamshire in chapters three, four and five, and Oxfordshire in six, seven and eight. Analysis of the authorities is offered on three different levels. On the first level, chapters three and six, look at the county level processes of policy and planning with particular attention focused on the strains and problems of building ‘secondary education for all’. School building after 1944 represented a vast undertaking at the national and local level. These chapters are devoted to understanding the local dynamics of post-war building programmes by making extensive use of the official papers of the Education Committee and its various sub-committees. In both areas, the limited capacity of the Local Authorities is highlighted; the extent of Ministerial control over building programmes, the reality of resource constraint and the authorities’ own institutional capacity, determined the pace and often shape of local educational infrastructure. It is argued in these chapters that school building programmes were heavily circumscribed by external factors and that Local Authorities delivered secondary education for all in conditions, and along lines, which were far removed from the optimistic projections of their initial 1944 surveys.

These authorities are then examined on a second level, with chapters four and seven investigating the operation of the secondary sector in each area. Within the tripartite model of schooling, grammar schools and secondary modern schools formed the mainstay of secondary provision. Grammar schools, which accepted the minority of pupils, were designed to provide an academic education while secondary modern schools were to offer a more general curriculum. Many critics of selective schooling have highlighted the unequal allocation of resources and staff between grammar schools and secondary modern schools; these chapters investigate the decisions and mechanisms which underpinned this inequality.

In doing so they reinforce the importance of national policy in determining local resourcing decisions: Ministerial control over building schedules and teachers' salaries are highlighted as key areas where the authority had little agency in determining levels of resourcing in each school sector. However, these chapters also argue that each authority adopted allocation practices which perpetuated the inequality of 'inputs' into the selective and non-selective sectors. In the case of Buckinghamshire, the funding formula used to determine recurrent expenditure on schools and the distribution of teachers' promotion posts concentrated resources in grammar schools, with secondary modern pupils receiving less per pupil than their selective counterparts. In Oxfordshire, similar practices were seen, with policy makers explicitly accepting the validity of investing more in grammar school children than their secondary modern peers.

Chapters five and eight add a third level of analysis to this work, moving the discussion away from comparisons *between* school sectors to exploring the quality of education offered *within* those sectors. In doing so, they ask what it was to be educated in different secondary schools across Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire: how effective were the counties' schools at meeting the educational needs of their pupils; how was the operation and practice of schooling influenced by the national and local policy environment explored in earlier chapters. These chapters draw heavily on school level HMI reports and local press coverage to understand the educative capacity of individual institutions. The findings of this research challenge the dominant set of assumptions surrounding secondary modern and grammar schools, discouraging the automatic association of school type with school quality. In both counties, clear variation existed between schools within the same sector. The capacity of a school to operate effectively was determined not only by the composition of its staff, the school buildings and its resources but also by its leadership and its capacity to innovate. In Oxfordshire, examples of school and authority-level policy experiments demonstrate the

successful operation of alternative forms of secondary education which aimed to cultivate the development of the whole child rather than focus solely on academic development. The grammar schools in Oxfordshire also deviated from contemporary and historical understanding of selective schools. As relatively small institutions, and sometimes with poor leadership, many of these schools struggled to cultivate a strong academic reputation.

In examining the complexities of the tripartite system, Part One of this thesis allows for a more thorough understanding of the landscape in which debates on comprehensive education would develop. Using this foundation, Part Two considers 10/65 ‘and all that’: a Circular that shifted education policy once more. This dissertation sets out to understand why Oxfordshire adopted comprehensive re-organisation and why Buckinghamshire did not. Both counties shared a number of characteristics, including demographic make-up and political control, but where secondary re-organisation evolved, seemingly organically in Oxfordshire, in Buckinghamshire, it became contested and politicised.

Oxfordshire offers an example of an LEA which undertook wholesale policy change with a remarkable degree of consensus, collaboration and confidence. Chapter ten of the dissertation asks why this was the case, using local press coverage, official papers and interviews to identify the drivers of comprehensive reform. Oxfordshire’s experience of the tripartite system, as explored in chapter eight, offers one key explanation of the authority’s ready adaptation to comprehensive schooling. Chapter ten investigates the impact on policy decisions of Oxfordshire’s smaller, more fragmented school stock, alongside a poorly performing grammar school sector. Additionally, this chapter examines how effective leadership, policy networks and relationships within authorities could and did facilitate policy change.

Buckinghamshire LEA retains fully selective secondary education to this day and it is only one of two authorities to do so. In stark contrast to Oxfordshire, the local discussions on comprehensive change in this county were fraught with disagreement, delay and dissatisfaction. Chapters eleven and twelve deal with the Buckinghamshire experience from two angles: chapter eleven outlines the process by which comprehensive debates became so politicised and chapter twelve investigates the reasons why the Local Authority took the path of resistance. Chapter eleven draws on the official committee papers and local press in the formative stages of the debate, to chart the chronological development of the comprehensive issue. This research demonstrates that although it began to consider routes to re-organisation, Buckinghamshire missed the window of opportunity to reform (between 1958 and 1967) and that as the 1960s progressed, the politicisation of the issue locally gathered momentum to a point where the debate entered a state of 'lock-in.' Irrespective of the competing educational or social arguments for different models of schooling, the division and distrust within policy making circles came to preclude an open minded and solely pragmatic approach to secondary re-organisation.

To understand why this was the case, chapter twelve examines the determinants of resistance in Buckinghamshire. It explores whether resistance was the product of local or popular preference for particular models of secondary organisation, and examines how the development of secondary infrastructure up to that point shaped policy-makers' assessments as to merits and demerits of comprehensive reform. The Buckinghamshire Authority encountered an earlier and much larger growth in its school population than in Oxfordshire and it therefore met the question of comprehensive reform with a different set of tripartite experiences. Its grammar schools had been more academically successful and its schools both more recently built and more efficient to maintain. Both factors diminished the appeal of wholesale policy change. In this authority, the presence of strong and divergent opinions on

the matter of reform gained greater weight in the policy making process than they might have elsewhere and the second half of this chapter focuses on why this was the case. Particularly, the interaction of the leadership provided by successive Chief Education Officers, with that provided by the local ‘preservationist’ lobby is explored in the context of Buckinghamshire’s complex institutional arrangements.

By offering a micro-study of the Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire LEAs, this thesis highlights the importance of the local dynamics in understanding the development of secondary education in England. The tensions and problems encountered while delivering secondary education for all, and the local experience of post-war policy were crucial in shaping the responses of each authority to the prospect of further reform. This thesis also emphasises the need to locate policy change in the broader social and economic context: the demographic growth of these areas played a critical role in creating educational imperatives and shaping policy makers’ understanding of future needs. As a study in policy making and implementation, this thesis also reinforces the importance of networks, relationships and human capital in ensuring the successful delivery, development and improvement of policy, on the ground, where policy was made practice.

## Authorship Declarations

This dissertation is my own work and any errors are my own.

The thesis is less than 100,000 words (excluding the bibliography).

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## Glossary

LEAs: Local Education Authorities

ROSLA: Raising of the School Leaving Age

HORSA: Hutting Operation for the Raising of the School Leaving age.

CEO: Chief Education Officer

SMSC: School Management Sub-Committee

Joint Four: A federation of the four of the principal teachers' associations which represented grammar school teachers, including: the Incorporated Association of Head Masters, the Association of Head Mistresses, the Association of Assistant Mistresses and the Assistant Masters' Association.





# Introduction

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# Chapter 1 • Making better citizens

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This is the first of the Government Measures of social reform. Let us hope that our work together for the next few weeks, and more perhaps, will carry into the years of victory the thirst for service and advancement, as well as the common sharing of experience and opportunity which we have at present. An educational system by itself, cannot fashion the whole future structure of a country, but it can make better citizens. Plato said: "The principle which our laws have in view is to make the citizens as happy and harmonious as possible." Such is the modest aim of this Bill which provides a new framework for promoting the natural growth and development not only of children, but of national policy itself towards education in the years to come. This Bill completely recasts the whole of the law as it affects education ...

Mr. Butler, Second reading of the Education Bill  
Commons Sitting of Wednesday, 19<sup>th</sup> January, 1944  
(1943-44 House of Commons Hansard, George VI year 8, columns 149-322, Fifth Series,  
Volume 396)

The 1944 Education Act (7&8 Geo.6. Ch.31) was the greatest educational reform of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Starting with the 1870 Education Act, the principle of universal and compulsory education for children aged between five and ten years, had been passed into law. The 1944 Butler Act now promised 'secondary education for all,' raising the compulsory schooling age to fifteen and removing the prohibitive barrier of cost which had excluded so many from this vital means of development and advancement. Britain has never retreated from this commitment to invest in the human capital of the population. On the contrary, we now educate routinely to age 18, and for many, tertiary training is now also standard. Education has variously been conceptualised as making happy citizens, productive workers, as paving the route to a fairer society. The 1944 statute was the first act of many that would craft a new, post-war world, a step towards the New Jerusalem.

The Act takes its name from R.A.B. Butler, a Conservative member of the wartime coalition Government and President of the Board of Education. His vision for the future of education in Britain was at once radical and conservative. In the 1943 White Paper

*Educational Reconstruction*, a document which presaged the 1944 Act and offered a preview of its ambitious reforms, Butler recounted the idealism and vision underpinning his Bill:

The Government's purpose in putting forward the reforms described in this Paper is to secure for children a happier childhood and a better start in life; to ensure a fuller measure of education and opportunity for young people and to provide means for all of developing the various talents with which they are endowed and so enriching the inheritance of the country whose citizens they are. The new educational opportunities must not, therefore, be of a single pattern. It is just as important to achieve diversity as it is to ensure equality of opportunity. But such diversity must not impair the social unity within the educational system which will open the way to a more closely knit society and give us strength to face the tasks ahead...In the youth of the nation we have our greatest national asset.<sup>1</sup>

Alongside this reformist zeal was caution and pragmatism. The second reading of the Bill in the House of Commons saw the President of the Board warning that 'keenness...must be tempered by the consideration of what was possible,' a warning that resources were still to be rationed and investment would be incremental.<sup>2</sup> Lord Butler's later memoirs reiterated the centrality of pragmatism, the title alone, *The Art of the Possible*, indicating the resonance of this sentiment in his thinking on policy and education. Pragmatism meant concession. The 1944 Education Act created universal, free and secular secondary education, but it also accommodated fee-paying public and direct grant schools. It sanctioned a dual system, with religious schools co-opted into the national fabric of education. Such adjustments diluted the radicalism of the Act, removed the possibility of root and branch reform, and preserved divisions. But they also made its existence possible. These concessions were crucial in securing the passing of the Education Bill, the price paid to secure parliamentary consent.

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<sup>1</sup> Great Britain. Board of Education. *Educational Reconstruction*. Cmd. 6458. London: HM Stationery Office, 1943.

<sup>2</sup> House of Commons Hansard Debate, 19<sup>th</sup> Jan 1944 Vol 396 cc405-99.

Translating a principle into a Parliamentary Act represented one challenge. Delivering secondary education for all was quite another. In the wake of the 1944 Act, resources had to be found, the form of schooling contested, its practice negotiated. It is the task of this thesis to examine just how the promise of secondary education for all in the 1944 Act was interpreted and executed at the local level: in Council meetings, in resources received and distributed, in commissioning building works, hiring teaching staff, admitting students, in educating children. At stake was a vision of society, making it an inherently contested topic.

How education policy becomes practice is not idle curiosity. It speaks to important and ever-present issues that guide individual opportunities – for social mobility, employment, for happiness – as well as national fortunes which are built on the human capital of the people. Today, education remains a key policy area, as contested and experimental as in the period under study. This could apply on any number of fronts: The recent coalition government unleashed a period of turmoil in secondary education (for better or worse); one which saw contested visions of standards and excellence competing for primacy and which accelerated the erosion of educators' professional autonomy. Ongoing experiments with the Academy programme and Free Schools have also raised crucial questions over the nature of power and control in education- themes which are taken up in this thesis and explored in the historical context. Furthermore, the past thirty years has witnessed the curtailment of local authority influence in the pursuit of competition, accountability and devolved school management. This has created new mechanisms to regulate school performance but has also triggered concerns about the marketization of the sector and loss of local involvement. Understanding the historical practice of policy making and practice at this level and in this arena has never been more important.

This chapter outlines the context in which education reform was implemented as post-war reconstruction tramped a route from austerity (1940s) to prosperity (1950s) and further social change (1960s). An Act passed by a Conservative led coalition government, would be put into practice by successive governments of different political persuasions: Labour (1945-51), Conservative (1951-1964), Labour again (1964-1970). Changing economic conditions and political standpoints over this period would shape and challenge the priorities laid down by Butler's 1944 settlement, conceptualisations of education would adapt as the assumptions underpinning it were tested and challenged. Historians have already considered many dimensions of this story, and their contributions are briefly summarised. They offer a sound framework for understanding developments at the national level. Some have also delved into the more micro level of the Local Education Authorities (LEAs), the county-based organisations responsible for delivery. It is clear that the LEAs were themselves a source of ideation and policy formation. This thesis picks up that baton and runs with an in-depth study of two comparable but also contrasting, neighbouring authorities: Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. The choice of case studies, their characteristics and sources, along with an outline of the dissertation, are presented towards the close of this introduction.

### *The post-war settlement*

Three dominant influences shaped the secondary education settlement as it emerged after 1944. Firstly, the 1944 Education Act enshrined the principle of equality of opportunity, and rested on the assumption that if access to educational opportunities were made universally available, all children would have a fair chance of maximising their potential. Secondly, was a view of education which promoted 'diversity,' and in doing so borrowed heavily from the content of the inter-war Hadow (1926) and Spens (1936) reports. These documents recommended that schooling be divided between elementary and secondary

education, with a break at 11 and that secondary education should be divided into three school types: grammar schools, technical schools and secondary modern schools, the curriculum and purposes of which would vary in order to complement pupils' naturally different aptitudes and interests. Grammar schools would offer an academic curriculum with a view to its students entering the universities and professions, technical schools would train pupils for skilled vocations and secondary modern schools were to provide a general curriculum.<sup>3</sup>

This emphasis on diversity, while also legitimising the preservation of fee-paying and religious schools, was firmly rooted in the educational and psychological thinking of the inter-war period, something which formed the third underpinning to this settlement. The findings of a 1943 Committee chaired by Cyril Norwood, headmaster of Harrow School, heavily influenced the implementation of the 1944 Act. The 1943 Norwood Report promoted the practice of educational differentiation, separating children based on what were perceived to be innate differences in their aptitude and capacity:

The evolution of education has in fact thrown up certain groups, each of which can and must be treated in a way appropriate to itself.... the pupil who is interested in learning for its own sake, who can grasp an argument or follow a piece of connected reasoning... the pupil whose interests and abilities lie markedly in the field of applied science or applied art. [of the third grouping] the pupil in this group deals more easily with concrete things than with ideas. He may have much ability, but it will be in the realm of facts. He is interested in things as they are; he finds little attraction in the past or in the slow disentanglement of causes or movements.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> HMSO *Report of the Consultative Committee on the Education of the Adolescent*. London, 1926. And HMSO *Report of the Consultative Committee on Secondary Education with Special Reference to Grammar Schools and Technical High Schools*. London 1938.

<sup>4</sup> Board of Education, *Curriculum and Examinations in Secondary Schools : Report of the Committee of the Secondary School Examinations Council Appointed by the President of the Board of Education in 1941*. London: HMSO, 1943. P. 2-3.

Such a view of children, ability and schooling was bolstered by contemporary psychological studies which suggested that ‘ability’ or IQ was a measurable and fixed quality. The influence of educational psychologist and eugenicist Cyril Burt was particularly important in reassuring administrators that pupils could be measured, allocated and thus appropriately educated.<sup>5</sup>

Cumulatively, these three trends fostered the development of what became known as the ‘tripartite’ model of secondary education in England. At the end of elementary (now primary) schools children took the 11+ selection exam, of which the IQ test was a core component, and were subsequently allocated to either grammar, technical or secondary modern schools. This model was increasingly recognised as a bipartite one as technical schools failed to transpire, though in the minority of areas where they did transpire, these institutions worked to provide a curriculum of skilled crafts or industry specific training and mainly recruited students at 13, from either grammar or secondary modern schools. Of course the particular practice of this selective system deviated across the country. Some authorities, notably The West Riding explicitly rejected the assumption that children could either be accurately ‘measured’ at 11, or optimally arranged by way of educational segregation. Other areas, such as the war-damaged London or Coventry pursued different pattern of secondary schooling in ‘multi-lateral’ (later termed comprehensive) schools.<sup>6</sup> These schools varied in

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<sup>5</sup> The term ‘ability’ is used at various points throughout the following work, with a different meaning from that espoused by Norwood and Burt. The idea of ability is not unproblematic, it is both essentially contested and complex. However, when used by the author in this discussion, it is done so to identify the extent to which children possessed the capacity for, and affinity to, academic or classroom-based learning.

<sup>6</sup> Multi-lateral schools became the designation for sites which housed the two or three school types which made up the tripartite system. Though sharing amenities, and often teachers too, these schools still separated children into different school types, according to measured ability. Fully comprehensive schools on the other hand involved the transfer of all children, usually into one large school.

organisation and character, but were generally premised on accepting pupils irrespective of their ability and theoretically offered a broader curriculum which encompassed elements from all the tripartite school types. For many LEAs however, the tripartite model offered an effective means of sorting children into the existing arrangement of buildings, and offered a reassuring element of continuity with pre-war practices in secondary education, the existence of which will be explored further in chapter two.

### *Contexts*

The post-war era, from 1945- 1973, was one of remarkable transformation. One which witnessed Britain transition from war-burdened imperial entity to a modern welfare state. Economic and social historians have observed this period as one of sustained economic growth and full employment and which gave rise to affluence, consumerism and improved living standards.<sup>7</sup> This era is also recognised, especially in contrast to that which followed, as one dominated by consensus politics. After 1945, and despite their political or philosophical differences, both major parties remained committed to fulfilling war time promises: full employment, social security, housing, health and education dominated political agendas like never before. However, such an optimistic picture obscures the cycles of change and adjustment that underpinned these broader shifts. This was also an era of high expectations, scarce and competitively distributed resources, and new vulnerabilities which arose as old social and economic structures collapsed. Politically speaking too, the extent of consensus

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<sup>7</sup> Michael Kitson, 'Failure followed by success or success followed by failure? A re-examination of British economic growth since 1949' and Paul Johnson, 'The Welfare state, income and living standards' in Floud, Roderick, and Paul Johnson (ed.), *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain. Vol. 3* (Cambridge 2008) pp. 27-56 and pp. 213-237.

has been contested, with inter and intra party disagreements having a profound effect on the shape of post-war Britain.

Following a landslide victory, and buoyant with the sense of possibility and hope, Labour assumed office in 1945 equipped with an ambitious programme for social and economic change: the nationalisation of industry, the creation of a National Health Service, the delivery of coalition promises as bound up in the wartime Education Act and Beveridge Report. The party's plans for a prosperous peace were immediately threatened by the impoverished state of the national economy. The cessation of the Lend Lease agreement with the US cut off the country's remaining 'life line,' and though securing American and Canadian loans, the Attlee government was repeatedly besieged by economic crisis throughout the latter 1940s.<sup>8</sup> The consequence was austerity and control. Expansion of welfare services, especially those requiring large scale capital investment, was limited at every turn by shortages in steel, timber and manpower. Rationing continued and consumption held back. Economic historians have estimated that austerity policies kept real wages lower between 1947 and 1951 than they had been in the 1930s, and cites the austere frugality of the Labour administration as putting the party increasingly at odds with a consumer oriented electorate.<sup>9</sup> The outbreak of the Korean War in June 1951 triggered a further contraction of resources available for domestic projects and caused a disastrous fall out within the party leadership.

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<sup>8</sup> P. F Clarke, *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900-1990* (London 1996) pp. 223-231.

<sup>9</sup> M. J. Daunton, *Wealth and Welfare an Economic and Social History of Britain, 1851-1951* (Oxford and New York 2007), p.422.

Despite this troubled backdrop, Hennessy has described the Attlee Labour governments as the most ‘hyper-achieving’ of the post war era, forging ahead to cement the foundations of a new post-war world.<sup>10</sup> Successive education ministers worked tenaciously to deliver on the promises of 1944. Under the determined stewardship of Ellen Wilkinson and later George Tomlinson at the Ministry of Education, Labour resolutely proceeded with the raising of the school leaving age (hereafter ROSLA) to 15, despite anxieties that the policy would jeopardise the progress of post-war reconstruction for the service as a whole.<sup>11</sup> In the broader picture however, education was not high on the agenda. The basics of provision - securing roofs over heads - took precedence over concerted reconstruction or reconceptualization of the secondary education sector. Industry and housing took priority in terms of materials and manpower with the result that material changes to the national education service were largely suspended.

This was despite the rapidly rising number of children entering schools. ROSLA brought 200,000 more pupils into schools by 1947, and an unanticipated increase in the birth rate from 1941 to 1947 placed a large and unexpected demand on primary school provision.<sup>12</sup> To complicate matters, wartime damage had depleted the national school stock by 5000 (20% of existing stock) and the shortage of teachers created a further imperative to construct training colleges. The 1944 McNair Report on teaching supply estimated that the teaching

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<sup>10</sup> Peter Hennessy, and Anthony Seldon. *Ruling Performance: British Governments from Attlee to Thatcher* (Oxford, New York 1987) p.47.

<sup>11</sup> Steven Cowan, Gary McCulloch, and Tom Woodin. ‘From HORSAs to ROSLA Blocks: The School Leaving Age and the School Building Programme in England, 1943-1972.’ *History of Education* 41, no. 3 (2012): 361–80. p. 367

<sup>12</sup> Brian Simon, *Education and the Social Order, 1940-1990*. Studies in the History of Education. (London 1991) p.118, and Lowe, Roy. *Education in the Post-War Years: A Social History*. (London and New York 1988) p.8

corps would still have to be increased to the order of 50,000- 90,000 by 1948-9 to keep pace with the school population, even with a return of servicemen to their posts.<sup>13</sup> Despite the ratcheting scale of demands on the education service, the increases to the Education budget slowed: between 1947-8, the Ministry was granted an 18% increase of £24,500,000 on its previous allocation. In 1950-51, this had been halved to an increase of just £10,500,000, just 5% up on the previous year, and reflecting the ‘squeeze’ placed on resources as a result of rearmament.<sup>14</sup>

The 1951 elections returned the Conservatives Party to office. Though this signalled some change in direction in terms of welfare and spending, the party leadership had largely reconciled itself with the social and electoral necessity of state welfare provision and Churchill’s government continued to build on the foundations established by its Labour predecessor. There was however, a change in priorities, and education did not fare well. The Conservative priority was housing. The Party’s 1951 manifesto had pledged the Party to build 300,000 houses per year, envisaging the involvement of private contractors and promoting the vision of a ‘property owning democracy.’<sup>15</sup> The policy at once appealed to the Conservative preference for private solutions to public problems and their vision of investing in the aspirational, prudent and thus respectable classes. Alongside this political and popular commitment, the continued economic pressure imposed by the Korean War, rising prices, inflation and shortage prompted the Treasury to conduct what Hennessey has described as an

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> HMSO Ministry of Education, *Education in 1951, Being the Report of the Ministry of Education and the Statistics of Public Education for England and Wales* (London, 1957). Brian Simon, *Education and the Social Order, 1940-1990* p.119.

<sup>15</sup> Conservative 1951 Manifesto: <http://www.politicsresources.net/area/uk/man/con51.htm> accessed 10/09/15.

‘agonising reappraisal’ of the costs involved in operating a welfare state.<sup>16</sup> In 1951 the Treasury began what would become a sustained attack on welfare expenditure, one which involved annual ‘economy exercises,’ ministerial and select committee reviews.<sup>17</sup>

For any Department, this backdrop presented a hostile reality; fiscal restraint coupled with other, higher priorities to divert resources. For education, the issue was compounded by the appointment of Florence Horsbrugh as Minister. The *Manchester Guardian*’s Parliamentary Correspondent reported pessimistically on such a choice:

Miss Horsbrugh’s choice as Minister of Education...will not thrill the enthusiast for education. She should have her reward, but at this stage in the application of the 1944 Act there is need for a strong able Minister of Education both able to fight his corner in the Government and energise administration. Miss Horsbrugh has other excellent qualities, but not these. Moreover, she is not in Cabinet.<sup>18</sup>

Horsbrugh would go without a seat in Cabinet until 1953, and therefore lacked access to the one arena where education needed to establish precedence. The Minister also proved incapable of resisting the pressure applied by the Treasury, by RAB Butler no less, to cut expenditure and suspend school building. In both contemporary and historical commentary, Horsbrugh features as the Minister who failed to either secure resources for her department, or to defend what was already there. Between 1951 and 1954 investment in education failed to keep pace with growing student numbers and the pressure to accommodate the baby boom cohorts through primary and then secondary schools obscured any improvements which had

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<sup>16</sup> Peter Hennessy, *Having It so Good: Britain in the Fifties* (London, 2006), p.17.

<sup>17</sup> Rodney Lowe, ‘Resignation at the Treasury: The Social Services Committee and the Failure to Reform the Welfare State, 1955–57’ *Journal of Social Policy*, xviii (1989).

<sup>18</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, ‘*Miss Horsbrugh in Charge of Education, But No Seat in the Cabinet,*’ November 3<sup>rd</sup> 1951. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Guardian and the Observer.

been made. A review of public spending in 1953 by the Parliamentary Select Committee on the Estimates, ‘the traditional guardian of the public purse,’ laid heavy criticism at Horsbrugh’s door.<sup>19</sup> MP’s argued that more, not less, should be spent on the service, that 100,000 more school places should have been provided since the war, and that the size of the current building programme was insufficient to meet basic needs.<sup>20</sup> In Horsbrugh’s defence, she did protect the education service in the face of Treasury proposals to reintroduce school fees and resisted pressure to shorten the school life. But in general, her appointment and subsequent performance featured as a death knell to any hope or optimism that education would assume greater political priority and receive any of the gains of increasing prosperity and stability that was taking shape between 1951-55. It was only with her replacement that fortunes changed.

The arrival of David Eccles at the Ministry of Education in October 1955 heralded a new expansionist era for the education service in England. A pioneering study of the costs and resources in education by John Vaizey pinpointed 1955 as a pivotal year which disrupted a trend of sluggish growth and investment. His *Resources for Education* argued that where investment had languished prior to 1955, after this point ‘it expanded rapidly, remarkably rapidly.’<sup>21</sup> Citing secondary education as an example, Vaizey found that though the secondary age population had increased by over 100% between 1945 and 1955, real expenditure had

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<sup>19</sup> P. H. J. H. Gosden, *The Education System Since 1944* (Oxford, 1983) p.110.

<sup>20</sup> This dispute is explored particularly by John R Dunford *The Association of Education Committees and School Building Policy in England and Wales, 1944-64* (Leeds, 1987) pp.12-15.

<sup>21</sup> John Vaizey, *Resources for Education : An Economic Study of Education in the United Kingdom, 1920-1965* (London, 1968). p.140.

increased only 80%. In contrast, real expenditure doubled between 1955-1965, despite a smaller 50% increase in the secondary age population.<sup>22</sup>

This change in pace was also rooted in the greater prosperity of the latter 1950s. The period between 1955 and 1962 has been widely recognised as a ‘golden age of capitalism.’ Britain’s sustained record of post-war economic growth was now in full swing and standards of living improved as rationing and austerity gave way. Rising wages stimulated rising consumption: car ownership increased from 2.5 to 6 million between 1951 and 1964, the number of households containing fridges, televisions, and later washing machines drastically increased, with the advent of disposable time and money giving rise to leisure and recreation.<sup>23</sup> It was this image of security and prosperity that in 1957 prompted Macmillan’s famous claim that ‘most of our people had never had it so good.’

Full employment lay at the heart of this prosperity, and with growing affluence came growing aspirations. The shifting composition of the British economy, which saw a shrinking of heavy industry and rapid expansion of white collar, light industry and service sector employment, offered unprecedented scope for inter-generational social mobility. Credentials offered a route to better pay, status and security, and in turn, the uptake of secondary and further education expanded rapidly. Between 1950 and 1960, the number of pupils staying on at school beyond the statutory leaving age had doubled. The education service became a prime social and electoral issue. In this respect, civil servant and academic Maurice Kogan

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> Roy Lowe, *Education in the Post-War Years: A Social History* (London and New York, 1988). P. F Clarke, *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900-1990*, Peter Hennessy, *Having It so Good: Britain in the Fifties* and Selina Todd, *The People: The Rise and Fall of the Working Class, 1910-2010* (London 2014).

has cast the early 1960s as the ‘noon tide’ of the Opportunity State where the priority accorded to and demand for education climbed to new heights.<sup>24</sup>

However, the growth of political support and funding for education after 1955 owed a great deal to the ambitions and political gravitas of David Eccles. Not only was Eccles willing and able to defy the Treasury’s calls for expenditure cuts when he felt it would impede the education service, but he also helped to conceptually recast education as a necessary economic investment, re-energising the human capital arguments of the 1944 Act to achieve greater traction within his party. Writing on this point, Martin Daunton has highlighted that Eccles reframed education using language and sentiments which appealed directly to Conservative belief in individual improvement and economic motivation:

education offered a way both of creating a skilled and productive workforce and of providing an incentive for social mobility, personal responsibility and responsiveness to market forces.<sup>25</sup>

The effect was to push education further up the government’s agenda. Education, especially secondary, technical and higher education came to feature in official discourse as the means of securing Britain’s future competitiveness and worked as a pretext for increasing amounts of investment and Ministerial guidance in matters of educational administration. After 1955 the proportion of GDP devoted on education began its climb from 3% to 3.6% in 1960 and 4.1% by 1963. From this point too, Ministers began to devote resources to the improvement of the education service rather than simply aiming to meet basic place provision, a feat which necessitated more ambitious building programmes and longer-term

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<sup>24</sup> Maurice Kogan and Katherine Bowden, *Educational Policy-Making: A Study of Interest Groups and Parliament* (London, 1975). p.26.

<sup>25</sup> M. J. Daunton, *Wealth and Welfare an Economic and Social History of Britain, 1851-1951* p.488

planning. This assertive commitment to service expansion and improvement remained a feature of successive Ministries until the early 1970s, with the education portfolio also gathering in importance and prestige. In many ways therefore, there was considerable continuity between successive ministers and the policies they pursued after 1955, even when Labour returned to office. Indeed, scholars have emphasised this era as one of broad consensus, where education commanded popular support and stood high on the political agenda.

Despite such consensus, the return of a Labour government to office in 1964 heralded one of the most prominent discontinuities in post-war education. The party had officially adopted the policy of comprehensive re-organisation earlier that year and in 1965 Anthony Crosland, now Minister of Education, issued *Circular 10/65*, which requested all LEAs to submit plans for secondary re-organisation. Despite the way this Circular has subsequently been characterised, as the harbinger of comprehensive reform, it was actually a delayed official reflection of policy changes which were already in motion at the local level. By 1965 near 10% of the maintained secondary school population were in comprehensive schools, and a wide range of LEAs considering or experimenting with alternative patterns of secondary schooling.<sup>26</sup> Such experimentation and policy change had been endorsed by the latter Conservative Ministers of Education, especially Edward Boyle, who had both accepted and promoted the validity of different forms of education. *Circular 10/65* however, represented the first Departmental instruction that LEAs adopt a particular path and in doing so

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<sup>26</sup> DES Statistics of Education HMSO, quoted in Mark Pattison, 'Intergovernmental Relations and the Limitations of Central Control: Reconstructing the Politics of Comprehensive Education.' *Oxford Review of Education*, vi (1980)

accelerated the process of comprehensivisation. In practical terms, the Circular had little about it that was new or radical, symbolically however, the measure was more controversial. Though the economic gains of education were still held aloft by the Labour ministry, the language of social justice and egalitarianism were now reintegrated into discussions on education and challenged the political conceptions as to what constituted equality of educational opportunity. This re-casting of education with its emphasis on the social role schools could play in redistributing life chances marked the beginning of a divide in popular and official commentary. As will be explored, competing notions as to the function and structure of education became more pronounced after 1965, feeding into the collapse of cross-party and popular consensus underpinning ‘secondary education for all’. This process will be outlined below and a more detailed review of existing literature on the development of comprehensive schooling is presented in Part Two.

### *Existing Literature*

The stated aims of the 1944 Act included making happy citizens, maximising human capital ‘our greatest national asset,’ and offering equality of opportunity through diverse provision.<sup>27</sup> The existing literature which examines the history of secondary education is vast and wide ranging, but in many respects it has been concerned with testing the relative success of the post-war settlement in achieving these aims. In turn, much of the research into secondary education policy and practice throughout the latter half of the twentieth century has revealed a slow process of disenchantment, challenging (or defending) the validity and

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<sup>27</sup> The term ‘human capital’ is understood as the measure used to capture the productive capacity of individuals within the labour market, as enhanced by investments in their education, training and skill. For a more comprehensive discussion of this concept, refer to Sherwin Rosen on ‘Human Capital’ in Steven Durlauf and Lawrence Blume (Eds), *The New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics*, (New York, 2008) p.681.

efficacy of the systems put in place after 1944 in meeting the needs of the nation and its citizens.

#### Equality of opportunity tested

In the first decade of secondary education for all, there was little in the way of opposition or challenge to the tripartite model as it was then practised in the majority of LEAs. Some authorities, as has been noted above, challenged the premise of selection and differentiation, while others pursued comprehensive patterns of organisation, but otherwise there was widespread acceptance of the emerging service in popular as well as political contexts. By the mid-1950s however, once two cohorts of pupils had been educated under these new arrangements, a number of studies began to reveal the shortcomings of the post-war set up. Particularly, research published by D.V. Glass in 1954 and then Floud, Halsey and Martin in 1956 identified a persistent relationship between social class and educational opportunity, despite the removal of wealth as a condition of access to secondary education.<sup>28</sup> Glass' *Social Mobility in Britain* and Floud et al.'s *Social Class and Educational Opportunity* discovered that educational opportunities remained a function of social status with pupils of working class origins consistently under-represented in grammar school admissions. In Glass's survey of Greater London for example, he found that though the manual working classes constituted the majority of the local population in 1953, only 15% of pupils in grammar schools were drawn from this group.<sup>29</sup> Floud et al.'s research reflected these findings in a survey of West Hertfordshire and Middlesbrough, finding that only 40-45% of

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<sup>29</sup> D. V. Glass, *Social Mobility in Britain* (London, 1954). p. 143

grammar school cohorts were of working class origin, despite the fact that manual workers represented 65% and 85% of the population in the respective areas.<sup>30</sup>

Additionally, the practice of selection at 11+, already unpopular with parents by the mid-1950s and rejected in principle by many, was increasingly criticised as being class sensitive. The use of the IQ test in selection was seen to theoretically offer a scientific and objective means of measuring a child's ability. It also pre-supposed that this ability was a fixed, innate, attribute. However, in *Social Mobility*, Glass had accounted for the relatively low success rate of working class pupils in accessing grammar schools by suggesting that selection mechanisms were 'culturally loaded,' a finding reinforced by Floud et al.'s work which had established that there was a relationship between social class and IQ scores. It was also becoming apparent that though measured IQ correlated with social class, strategies employed by middle class parents— whether it was training children for the 11+ or securing a place at primary schools with a successful 11+ record— added extra weight to this relationship, and was thus seen to limit the capacity of tripartism to offer equal opportunities.<sup>31</sup> The validity of 11+ selection mechanisms was further undermined by two publications in 1957: one from the National Foundation of Educational Research and the British Psychology Society, both of which cast doubt on these tests being either objective or accurate.<sup>32</sup> The former revealed that 12% of children were being wrongly allocated to

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<sup>30</sup> J. E. Floud, A. H Halsey, and F.M Martin, *Social Class and Educational Opportunity* (London, 1956). p.39

<sup>31</sup> J. E. Floud, A. H Halsey, and F.M Martin, *Social Class and Educational* and J Douglas, *The Home and the School*. (London, 1964).

<sup>32</sup> British Psychological Society, *Secondary School Selection : A British Psychological Society Inquiry* (London, 1957) and National Foundation for Educational Research in England and Wales, *Admission to Grammar Schools : Third Interim Report on the Allocation of Primary School Leavers to Courses of Secondary Education* (London, 1957).

schools, while the latter proposed that instead of IQ being a fixed quantity, it developed with education and was conditioned by environmental factors.<sup>33</sup> This latter finding undermined a fundamental premise of segregated schooling and fuelled anxieties that the existing system was not fully developing the wealth or potential of the nation.

Anxieties surrounding the performance of tripartite secondary education were added to throughout the 1950s with the publication of two documents: the 1954 *Gurney-Dixon Report* and the 1959 *Crowther Report*.<sup>34</sup> Both documents examined the problem of early leaving in England and highlighted the impact of a child's home background on their educational opportunities. *The Crowther Report* particularly discovered that even once they secured a place at grammar schools, working class cohorts were not capitalising on educational opportunities as much as their middle class counterparts. Early leaving among the children of manual workers was regarded as particularly problematic and Crowther reported that though early leaving, or 'wastage' as it was commonly termed, was present in all social groups, 72% and 85% of those children leaving prior to reaching 16 or securing qualifications, were the children from the semi-and unskilled working classes.<sup>35</sup>

#### The vision questioned

Throughout much of the work discussed above, the core problem raised was that working class children were failing to access and utilise a grammar school education. In turn

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Sir Samuel Gurney-Dixon, Central Advisory Council for Education, *Early Leaving*, (London 1954) and Geoffrey Crowther, Central Advisory Council for Education *15 to 18: A Report of the Central Advisory Council for Education* (London, 1959).

<sup>35</sup> Geoffrey Crowther, Central Advisory Council for Education *15 to 18: A Report of the Central Advisory Council for Education* (London, 1959). Volume 1. pp. 289-296.

however, this disquiet rested on the acknowledgement that grammar schools, those reserved for only 20-25% of the population, offered an exclusive channel through which students could access qualifications and thus wider/better occupational prospects. By the beginning of the 1960s, this dynamic of tripartite education was itself coming under fire. In his seminal 1963 text *The Comprehensive School*, Robin Pedley characterised the problematic nature of operating selection in a system where opportunities and resources were rationed:

If we are to help all children effectively, we certainly must assess their various qualities, measure and appraise them...But such information must be used to advance the progress of all children on a broad and varied front: the open road to personal fulfilment. Instead we are today using it as a regulator, a turnstile through which people are allowed to pass only in single file on production of standardized credentials.<sup>36</sup>

The crux of the problem expressed here was not so much *who* was accessing selective education (though this definitely featured) but rather the fact that secondary modern schools were not equipped or supported enough to offer a valued form of education. Far from creating happy citizens, productive workers, and varied opportunities, evidence was coming to light that attendance at a secondary modern school actually worsened a child's measured IQ and occupational aspirations, was frequently accompanied by a sense of failure, and that the schools themselves lacked the capacity to offer a diverse and varied curriculum.<sup>37</sup> It had also become apparent by this point, mainly through the detailed work of John Vaizey, that secondary modern pupils attracted far fewer resources than their grammar school counterparts.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Robin Pedley, *The Comprehensive School* (Harmondsworth, 1966) p. 20

<sup>37</sup> Robin Pedley, *The Comprehensive School* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex and Baltimore 1966) p.18

<sup>38</sup> John Vaizey, *The Costs of Education* (London, 1958) p.17

In addition to the existence of resource inequalities, two further works published in 1963 focused attention on the failure of the tripartite system to promote the educational and occupational interests of the majority of students attending secondary modern schools. The first of these, William Taylor's *The Secondary Modern School* highlighted the almost anachronistic existence of tripartite schooling in an increasingly qualified and mobile labour market. Taylor argued that the popular demand for extended and qualification granting courses was a natural by-product of changing industrial and occupational needs. In this context, he argued, the secondary modern sector had made a bid for prestige and popularity by emulating the grammar schools instead of developing their own, distinct 'educational diet'.<sup>39</sup> They did so however with fewer resources, and lesser qualified staff and at the expense of developing the 'whole child', as opposed to just their academic competencies. Criticisms along similar lines emerged from the more well-known Central Advisory Council's 1963 report *Half Our Future*. This document, commissioned by the Minister of Education and headed by John Newsom, was devoted to examining the state of provision for the 'average' child in secondary modern schools.<sup>40</sup> The main findings brought to light the fact that these schools, the subject groups they offered, and so their pupils, were materially disadvantaged. If there were to be an equalisation of educational opportunities with selective school pupils, Newsom argued, the school leaving age needed to be raised to 16, greater investment was needed in promoting a curriculum which revolved around pupil's 'natural and

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<sup>39</sup> William Taylor, *The Secondary Modern School*. (London, 1963). p.162

<sup>40</sup> Central Advisory Council for Education, *Half Our Future : A Report of the Central Advisory Council for Education* (London, 1963).

vocational' interests and secondary modern schools should claim a greater share of educational resources.<sup>41</sup>

### A new hope?

By the beginning of the 1960s therefore, serious problems had been identified with the tripartite model of schooling. Persisting class differentials in educational access and outcomes, growing doubt surrounding the principle and practice of selection and the problematic standing of secondary modern schools had diminished the collective faith in the efficacy and capacity of tripartism to deliver the objectives of the Butler Act. As these criticisms grew louder, scholarly attention turned to identifying models of provision which might have a greater capacity to achieve these aims. Pedley's *The Comprehensive School* in particular offered one of the first widespread surveys of LEA practices in England and Wales with regards to secondary organisation and highlighted the role of comprehensive patterns of provision in circumventing the more problematic elements of selective schooling.<sup>42</sup> Pedley asserted both the educational and social gains to be wrought from expanding comprehensive schools, highlighting the academic performance of existing institutions as evidence that non-selective schools could simultaneously offer high academic standards, make better use of human talent and create fairer, more cohesive educational communities.<sup>43</sup>

As mentioned previously, 1965 witnessed the Labour Party officially pursue comprehensive re-organisation as a matter of national policy. Circular 10/65 officially

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p. xiii

<sup>42</sup> An early survey had been conducted in 1952 the Fabien Research Bureau but this was more exploratory than prescriptive, see Joan Thompson, *Secondary Education Survey : An Analysis of LEA Development Plans for Secondary Education* (London, 1952).

<sup>43</sup> Robin Pedley, *The Comprehensive School*, p198.

requested all LEAs to submit Development Plans for comprehensive re-organisation. In the years surrounding this move, academic and popular commentators attempted to grapple with the implications and rationales for such wholesale reform. Pedley's work marked the beginning of a scholarly outpouring of research and advocacy for different models of secondary schooling. For many, comprehensive education came to feature as an absolute necessity if the social and educational optimism laid out in 1944 was to be realised. A leading voice in such discussions was that of Brian Simon, especially in his collaborations with David Rubenstein in 1968 to produce *The Evolution of the Comprehensive School* and in 1970 with Caroline Benn on *Half Way There*.<sup>44</sup> Both texts emphasised the organic evolution of comprehensive schools in English education since the 1944 Act and highlighted their widespread adoption by Local Authorities since 1963. These works also reinforced what were perceived to be the decaying grounds for operating selective education and asserted the ability of comprehensive education to rectify the inequalities to which the tripartite system had allegedly given rise. Benn and Simon for example provided evidence that in comprehensive schools, a greater proportion of students participated in examinations and advanced level work. *Half Way There* also presented findings which indicated that comprehensive schools allowed for a more equitable distribution of resources.<sup>45</sup>

Notably, the academic debate at this stage was still pre-occupied with the structures of education, and was underpinned by the assumption (confirmed by early research) that changing the conditions of access to education would offer greater scope for equalising

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<sup>44</sup> Caroline Benn, *Half Way There : Report on the British Comprehensive School Reform* (London, 1970) and David Rubenstein and Brian Simon, *The Evolution of the Comprehensive School, 1926-1972* (London, 2007).

<sup>45</sup> Caroline Benn, *Half Way There : Report on the British Comprehensive School Reform* p.81 and p.208.

educational and later occupational opportunities. The endorsement of comprehensive schools therefore reflected an optimism and faith that non-selective schooling could positively mediate social relationships and more effectively deliver secondary education for all.

#### Conceptual shifts and new anxieties

Such optimism was met with a proportional rise in scepticism over the role and capacity of comprehensive education to correct those problems observed in tripartite arrangements. As the practice of comprehensive schooling became more widespread, different areas of research pointed to the persistence of social and educational inequalities even within a comprehensive framework. Accordingly, research on secondary education turned its attention to understanding the mechanisms and processes through which such inequalities were perpetuated.

A dominant theme in this work was the extent to which comprehensive schools continued the divisive practices which they had been designed to remove. Julienne Ford's 1969 *Social Class and the Comprehensive School* for example highlighted that these new schools were simply internalising the explicit divisions of the tripartite system. In particular Ford cited the persistence of streaming in the sample of London schools she surveyed, with students being sorted according to ability and educated separately for the duration of their secondary education. Following a similar pattern to the under-representation of working class students in grammar schools, Ford's survey discovered that only 35% of students in the

higher ability streams were of working class origin and that in turn, this group was over-represented in the lower ability streams.<sup>46</sup>

Alongside criticisms over the operation of comprehensive schools, was a growing body of work throughout the 1970s which found that educational inequalities were the product of family origins. As a result, schooling structures had only a limited capacity in achieving the objectives articulated in 1944. This strand of thinking was especially reinforced in 1967 by the publication of the Plowden Report which emphasised that the differing material and cultural resources available to families of different socio-economic backgrounds directly impinged on educational decisions and academic performance. This report gave rise to an action research scheme which identified Educational Priority Areas and which worked to target intervention (educational and financial) in socio-economically deprived areas.<sup>47</sup> Post-Plowden thinking placed the family and the community at the centre of the educational opportunity debate and argued for a new approach termed ‘compensatory education,’ a form of positive discrimination to address the material and environmental inequalities which underpinned the capacity of different groups to access educational opportunities.

In the aftermath of the Plowden Report, the relationship between in-school educational practices and social class captured increasing amounts of scholarly attention.

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<sup>46</sup>Julienne Ford, *Social Class and the Comprehensive School*. (London; New York, 1969). p. 96.

<sup>47</sup> See Central Advisory Council for Education, *Children and Their Primary Schools : A Report of the Central Advisory Council for Education (England)*. (London, 1967). And A. H Halsey, Dept. of Education and Science and Social Science Research Council (Great Britain), *Educational Priority: Report of a Research Project Sponsored by the Department of Education and Science and the Social Science Research Council*, (London., 1972).

Building on earlier work in this area, such as Jackson and Marsden's *Education and the Working Class*, and research conducted by David Hargreaves and Colin Lacey, educationalists throughout the 1970s and 80s began to recast secondary schools as sites of negotiation and potential conflict between working class norms, and the predominantly middle class structures and values which the schools embodied.<sup>48</sup> Many different strands of work emerged from this area of study: curriculum studies, reviews of teacher training practices and attitudes, exploring the impact of streaming or setting practices all came to factor into understanding how schools could more effectively promote educational engagement of pupils from all social backgrounds.

#### Secondary Education in historical perspective:

Up to the 1980s therefore, much of the work examining secondary education emerged from the social sciences and was pre-occupied with examining contemporary policy settings in relation to social structures. Historical narratives, explaining the drivers and processes of policy change as a subject in their own right, have been far less prominent.

Of course there were a few exceptions to this trend. One of the first studies to examine the logistical implementation of the 1944 Act was authored by a legal scholar, John Griffiths in 1966. Though the intention of this work was to examine the institutional relationship between central and local government in the delivery of public services, *Central*

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<sup>48</sup> Brian Jackson, *Education and the Working Class : Some General Themes Raised by a Study of 88 Working-Class Children in a Northern Industrial City* (Harmondsworth, 1966). David Hargreaves, *Social Relations in a Secondary School* (London 1967). David Hargreaves, *The Challenge for the Comprehensive School : Culture, Curriculum, and Community* (London 1982). Colin Lacey, *Hightown Grammar: The School as a Social System* (Manchester, 1970).

*Departments and Local Authorities* offered an in-depth analysis of the conditioning factors shaping the delivery of the school building programme, highlighting the degree of central control over local authority action.<sup>49</sup> Similar themes were taken up in 1984 by then editor of the TES, Stuart Maclure. His *Educational Development and School Building* detailed the logistics and pragmatics of delivering the post-war school building, as regulated at the national level, emphasising the institutional transformation which this massive undertaking provoked within the Ministry of Education and in LEAs.<sup>50</sup> Academic work on the school building programme was also conducted in the latter 1980s by John Dunford at the University of Leeds, whose thesis examined the influence of the Association of Education Committee on the Ministry of Education and successive ministers in their treatment of the building programme, especially through its Chairman, Sir William Alexander.<sup>51</sup> A unifying theme in each of these works was the relative incapacity of LEAs to re-construct their educational infrastructure, with the reality of constraint and resource rationing determining the operation of secondary education as much as policy makers' initial designs and objectives.

In the past two decades the history of secondary education has achieved far greater prominence with an increasing quantity of work devoted to examining the process of policy change and delivery. In 1988, Roy Lowe's *Education in the Post-War Years* traced the evolution of educational policy and practice in the economic and social context of the post-war era. Additionally, Brian Simon's 1992 *Education and the Social Order*, offered a wide-

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<sup>49</sup> J. A. G. Griffith, *Central Departments and Local Authorities* (London, 1966).

<sup>50</sup> Stuart Maclure, *Educational Development and School Building: Aspects of Public Policy, 1945-73* (Essex, 1984).

<sup>51</sup> John R Dunford, *The Association of Education Committees and School Building Policy in England and Wales, 1944-64* (Leeds, 1987).

ranging analysis of the education service as it developed to that date. This text was pivotal in re-connecting the history of post-1944 educational practices with those of the earlier twentieth century and bringing to the fore the hugely complicated set of policy negotiations, logistical considerations and political dynamics which underpinned the post-war settlement in education.

More recently, scholars at the Institute for Education have devoted considerable attention to the policy environment and resourcing implications surrounding the successive efforts to raise the school leaving age; to 15 in 1947 and then 16 in 1972. Tom Woodin, Gary McCulloch and Steven Cowen's ESRC project *Raising the School Leaving age: Participation in Historical Perspective* has generated several publications that illuminate the key tensions which dominated post-war policy making and practice in secondary education.<sup>52</sup> Not only have these authors explored the political machinations and disputes which underpinned historical attempts to legislate for ROSLA, their work has also reasserted the tension policy makers faced between seizing the political and popular moment to enact substantial change or delaying in the hope that more resources would foster a more effective degree of educational provision. Their 2011 article in particular, *From HORSAs huts to ROSLA blocks*, resonates with the work in this dissertation.<sup>53</sup> Here, Cowen, McCulloch, and Woodin offer a close examination of the contrast between the educational aspirations of measures such as ROSLA,

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<sup>52</sup> Tom Woodin, Gary McCulloch, and Steven Cowan, *Secondary Education and the Raising of the School-Leaving Age Coming of Age?* (New York, 2013).

<sup>53</sup> Steven Cowan, Gary McCulloch, and Tom Woodin, 'From HORSAs Huts to ROSLA Blocks: The School Leaving Age and the School Building Programme in England, 1943-1972', *History of Education*, xli (2012).

and the capacity of early post-war governments (and LEAs) to provide for existing, let alone new, educational demands.

### *Approach & Case Studies*

Part One of this thesis seeks to build on these existing areas of work, and analyses the interplay between policy ambitions, service delivery and educational opportunities at the LEA level after 1944. Where this work departs from current studies is in its local focus. There is a lack of detailed work of this nature conducted in the history of education, with many studies concentrating on the national level, specific school level case studies, or as will be explored in Part Two, with exclusive attention being granted to the roots of comprehensive reform.<sup>54</sup> This relative absence is all the more notable given the nature of education service prior to 1988, as a local service, locally administered. The process of telling the ‘local story’ has also been complicated because it is a story of staggering variety. Not only are the socio-economic profiles of different areas varied, but they each had a different cadre of policy makers, who responded differently to a potentially different set of educational needs. This local history is also harder to access through archival work than its better documented (or archived) national counter-part. However, using the local authority as the unit of analysis holds the benefit of exploring education policies at the point at which national and local agendas meet, and offers the opportunity to see how national level policy translated into the

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<sup>54</sup> Local case studies exploring comprehensive re-organisation are more extensive, for example: Kerchehoff et al. Saran, Pescheck and Brand, Bately O’Brian and Parris. Alan C Kerckhoff, *Going Comprehensive in England and Wales : A Study of Uneven Change* (London, 1996); Rene Saran, *Policy-Making in Secondary Education; a Case Study*. (Oxford 1973); David Peschek and Jack Brand, *Policies and Politics in Secondary Education: Case Studies in West Ham and Reading*, (London, 1966).

delivery and experience of education for a wide range of ‘stakeholders’ including students, teachers, school leaders and officials.

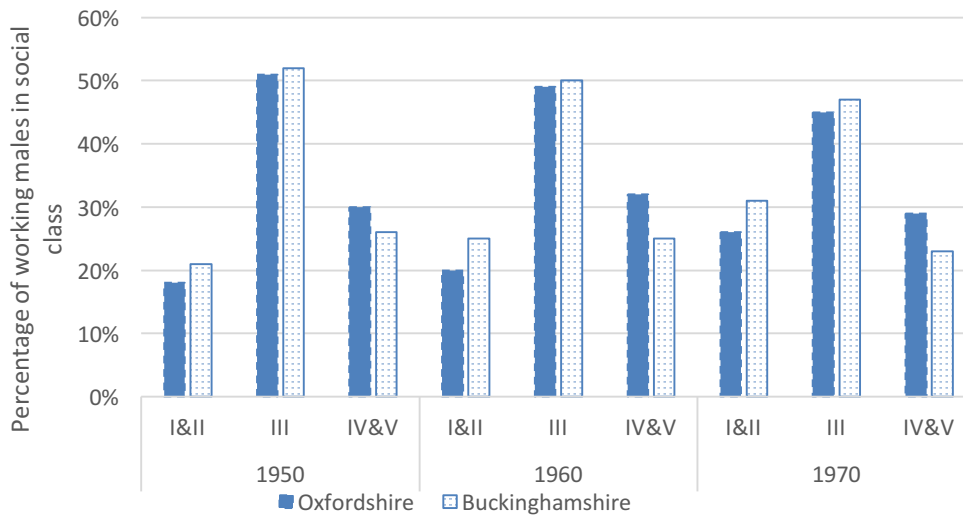
To help address the perceived deficiency in local explorations of policy development and practice, and to add our understanding of local processes throughout a tremendously dynamic era of local government, this thesis offers a detailed account of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Local Education Authorities (LEAs). These two mid-sized and predominantly rural counties in the South East of England are largely considered individually in the pages that follow, but also offer a suitable pair for comparison with clear overlap in their socio-economic, political and educational profiles. These counties offer a particularly interesting comparison as they demonstrated polar opposite reactions to comprehensive re-organisation by the mid-1960s, despite having a number of factors in common. This point of divergence is examined in Part Two of this thesis. In the context of post-1944 educational development however, these two case studies also present the opportunity to study education policy as it evolved in what could arguably be viewed as a ‘best case’ scenario. The dynamic economic and demographic growth of these areas after the Second World War, though presenting its own problems in the context of schooling, entitled these LEAs to new school buildings and more staff. In this respect, both Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire had, in theory at least, the capacity to cultivate ‘secondary education for all’ along more original and well-resourced lines than areas with stagnant or declining populations.

Economically speaking, both areas entered the twentieth century as relatively poor agricultural counties, largely unaffected by industrialisation though with small scale industry evolved in concentrated areas. In line with this, the population in both areas prior to the twentieth century had remained stable or declined, with demographic expansion only gathering pace after 1920. In contrast to their experience in the latter nineteenth and early

twentieth century, the latter half of the century in both counties was one of economic expansion, population growth, and new housing developments. In Buckinghamshire, light industry developed in the southern towns of the county, especially Aylesbury and High Wycombe, and the county's proximity to London meant that the south of the county became a designated recipient of the capital's overspill population. Oxfordshire was not as directly impacted by London, but the county's location as part of the Thames Valley ensured that it too became host to commuters and new businesses alike as the latter twentieth century progressed.

A survey of the socio-economic profile of the two counties, based on the occupational grouping of all working males, demonstrates the degree of comparability between the social geography of the areas. As can be seen in Figure 1 below, the populations of Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire showed a similar social class breakdown, though Buckinghamshire contained a slightly higher proportion of professional workers, and conversely Oxfordshire's population included a higher contingent of semi-skilled and unskilled occupational groups.

Figure 1: Social Structure of Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire 1950-1970.



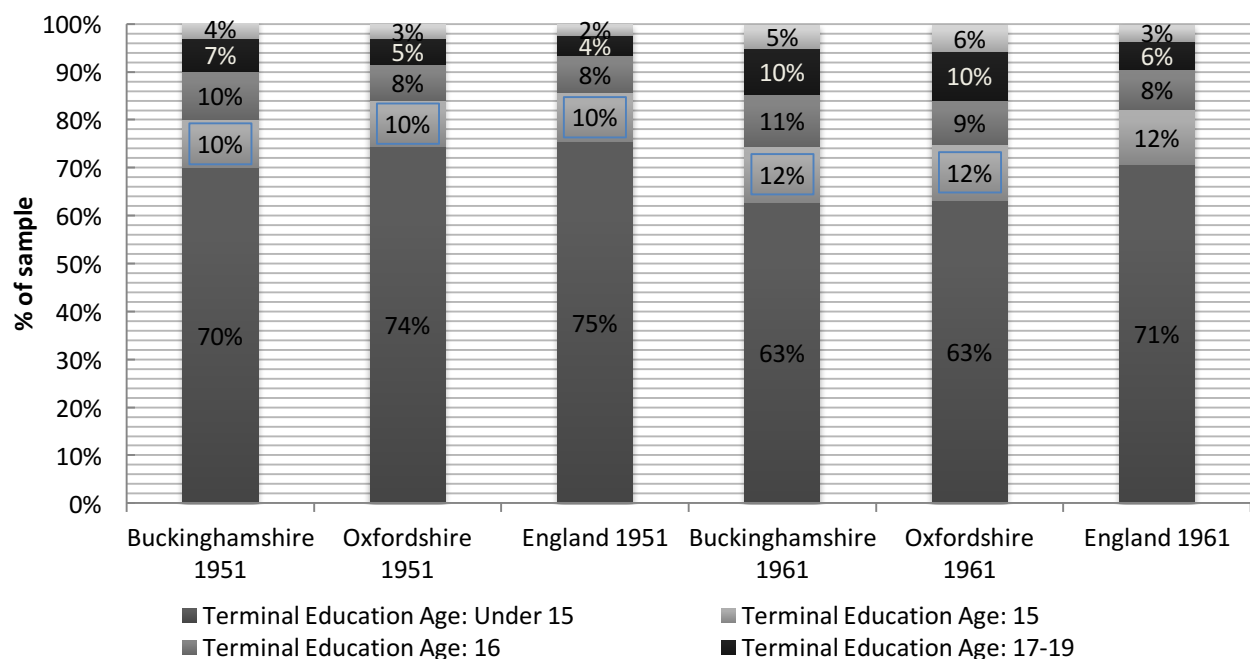
Source: Vision of Britain Through Time

An interesting feature of both counties was their respective political make-up. Both had a long tradition of electing either Conservative or Independent MPs and local officials, with the councils in each authority remaining under Conservative control for the period under study. At the county council level however, there has also been the tendency for well-established aristocratic families to maintain a dominant presence in local government. In Buckinghamshire for example, the Verney family were instrumental in local affairs well into the twentieth century. Similarly in Oxfordshire, Lord Macclesfield stood as Chairman of the County Council between 1937-1970, Lord Saye and Sele was a dominant figure on the Education Committee, while Sir Charles Peers represented another of the county's landed families in local government. In the latter case, this lent a particular character and understanding to local administration as one which gave short shrift to party politicking.

In both counties, the educational legacy of the early twentieth century will be explored in Chapter 2, but a couple of items are worth note in establishing the context for later developments. The first is that the existing levels of education amongst the population in both counties showed a degree of similarity. Figure 2 presents information on the terminal

education age of the respective counties as recorded in the 1951 and 1961 Census and highlights that Oxfordshire had a slightly poorer inheritance in this regard.<sup>55</sup> This comparison matters insofar as it suggests that the authorities were providing for populations with a roughly comparable degree of education.

Figure 2: Age at Termination of Education in Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire in 1951 and 1961



Source: Vision of Britain through time, Education Tables in the 1951 and 1961 Census.

A second and more notable contrast between the authorities was in their experience of population change as the century progressed. Though both areas witnessed dynamic population growth, they did so with different timing and on a different scale.

Buckinghamshire stood as one of the fastest growing counties in the UK throughout the

<sup>55</sup> 1951 and 1961 Census, Education Tables for Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire. Data from [www.VisionofBritain.org.uk](http://www.VisionofBritain.org.uk) and uses historical material which is copyright of the Great Britain Historical GIS Project and the University of Portsmouth.

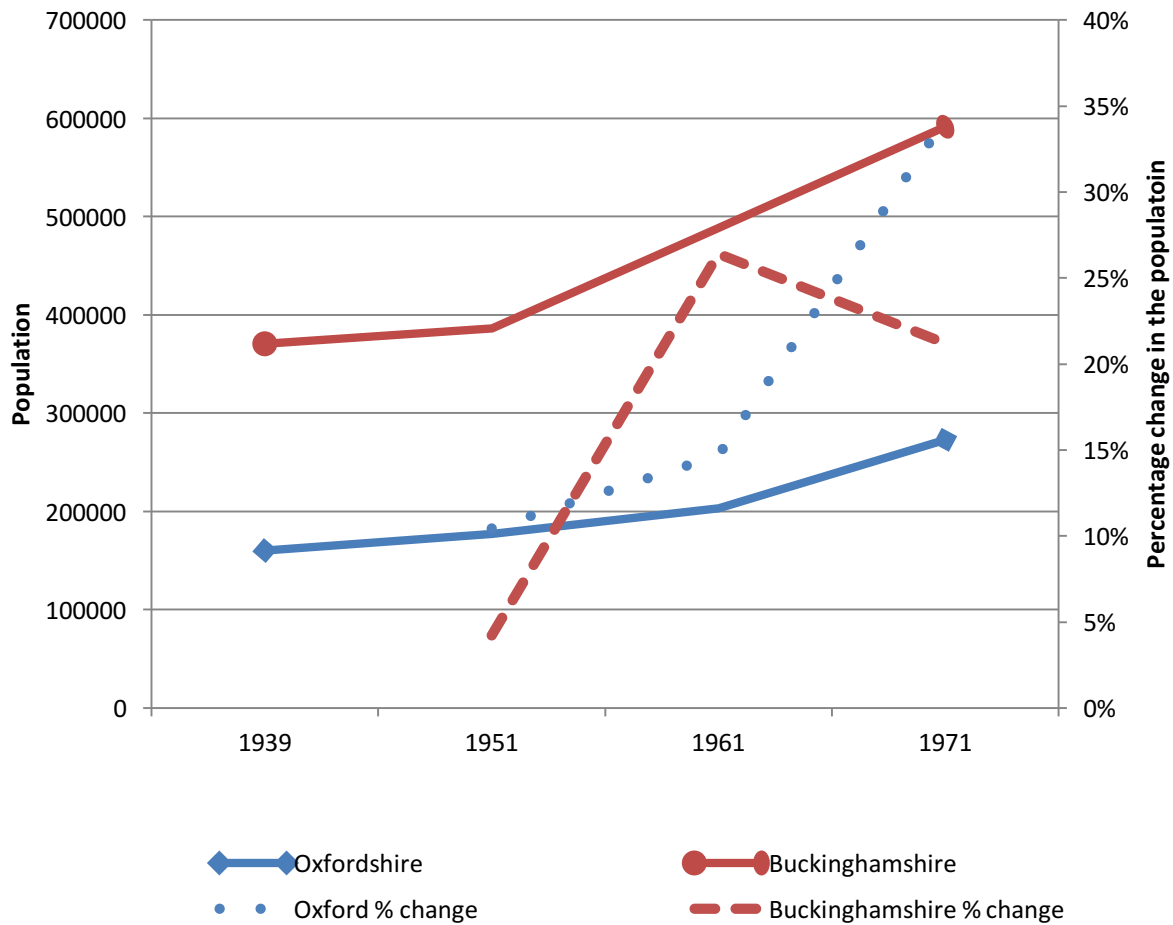
1950s. Where between 1951 and 1962 Oxfordshire's population increased by only 14%, Buckinghamshire's increased at double this rate: the population in 1962 being nearly 30% larger than in 1951.<sup>56</sup> The scale of population change in each authority is presented in Figure 3 below. When it came to the secondary school population in each authority the Buckinghamshire Local Authority also experienced a level of growth that outstripped that in Oxfordshire. Not only did Buckinghamshire have responsibility for roughly double the number of secondary students than Oxfordshire in the early 1950s, but throughout the decade this number proceeded to grow by an average of 11% a year, compared to 7% in Oxfordshire. By 1962-3 therefore, the Buckinghamshire LEA was accommodating two and a half times the number of students more than its neighbour.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> 1951-1971 Census, County Reports for Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, Table 3: Acreage, Population, Private Households and Dwellings. Data from [www.VisionofBritain.org.uk](http://www.VisionofBritain.org.uk) and uses historical material which is copyright of the Great Britain Historical GIS Project and the University of Portsmouth.

<sup>57</sup> Based on county and school population returns 1951-1962 in Institute of Municipal Treasurers and Accountants, Society of County Treasurers, and Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, *Education Statistics 1951-1974* (London, 1953-1975).

Figure 3: Population growth in Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire 1939-1971



Source: Census compiled from census returns for 1939, 1951, 1961, and 1971.

A further contrast between the authorities emerges in relation to their wealth and rateable value. One of the most immediate differences in the descriptions of Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire throughout the 1950s was that the former was very much regarded as a poor authority. In Buckinghamshire, frequent mention is made of financial restraint and there was a sense of frustration surrounding limited expenditure, but in Oxfordshire this takes on a different tone that suggests that severe restraint was a permanent feature of the education service as opposed to temporary anxiety. For example, when introducing the county and its Chief Education Officer in the opening to his memoirs, headteacher of Woodgreen Secondary in Witney, H.W. Pooley explained:

[Chorlton is] a man with a keen and wide interest in education, especially secondary, but whose aspirations were circumscribed by the financial resources of the county until the population explosion of the late 1950s and the 1960s led to a big expansion of the educational provision. In 1953 Oxfordshire was a rural county with only one town...of any size...consequently [it] had a low rate product.<sup>58</sup>

This state of affairs is also reflected in comments made to the press and in committee papers. For example, an *Oxford Mail* report on resourcing in July 1960 characterised education in Oxfordshire as being ‘on a shoe string’ and included quotes from headmaster of Easington Secondary School, Mr A. J.V Page who stated that ‘the authority is hard put, financially, to provide for the essentials of education.’<sup>59</sup>

In an attempt to verify this contrast, the annual Education Statistics collated and published by the IMTA have been consulted. In absolute terms, and as can be seen in Figure 4 and Figure 5

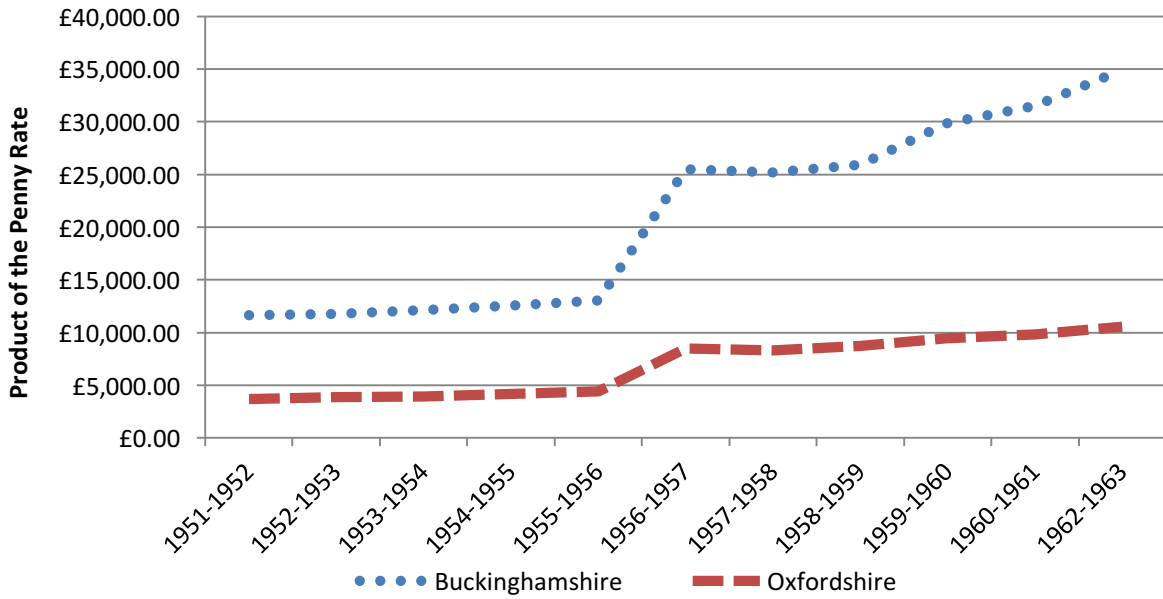
Figure 5, Oxfordshire was clearly a poorer authority; the product of its penny rate was just 35% that of Buckinghamshire and its total service expenditure was far smaller. Accounting for the disparities in population between the counties however, these differences disappear. As evident in Figure 6, returns for expenditure per pupil in the respective authorities actually casts Oxfordshire as the more generous authority in spending terms.

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<sup>58</sup> OHS SZ Stack WITN/373 H.W Pooley, *The story of a school: Wood Green School, Witney: the first twenty years of the struggle towards equality of educational opportunity* (1983).

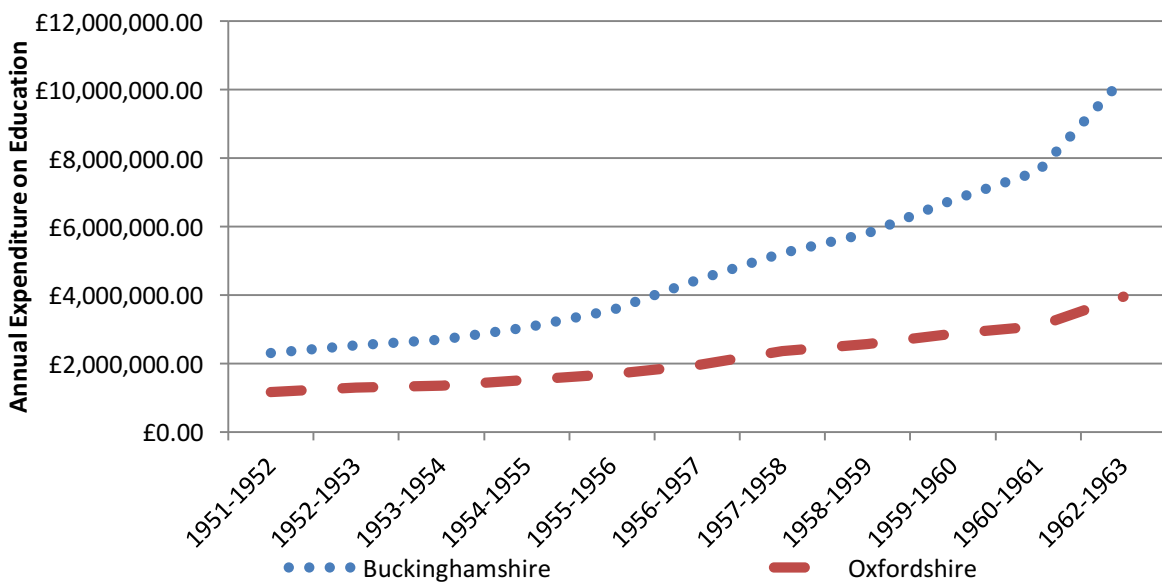
<sup>59</sup> OxMail Banbury Schools Folder: *Education in Oxon 'on shoestring,'* 18th July 1960.

Figure 4: Product of the Penny Rate in Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire 1951-1963



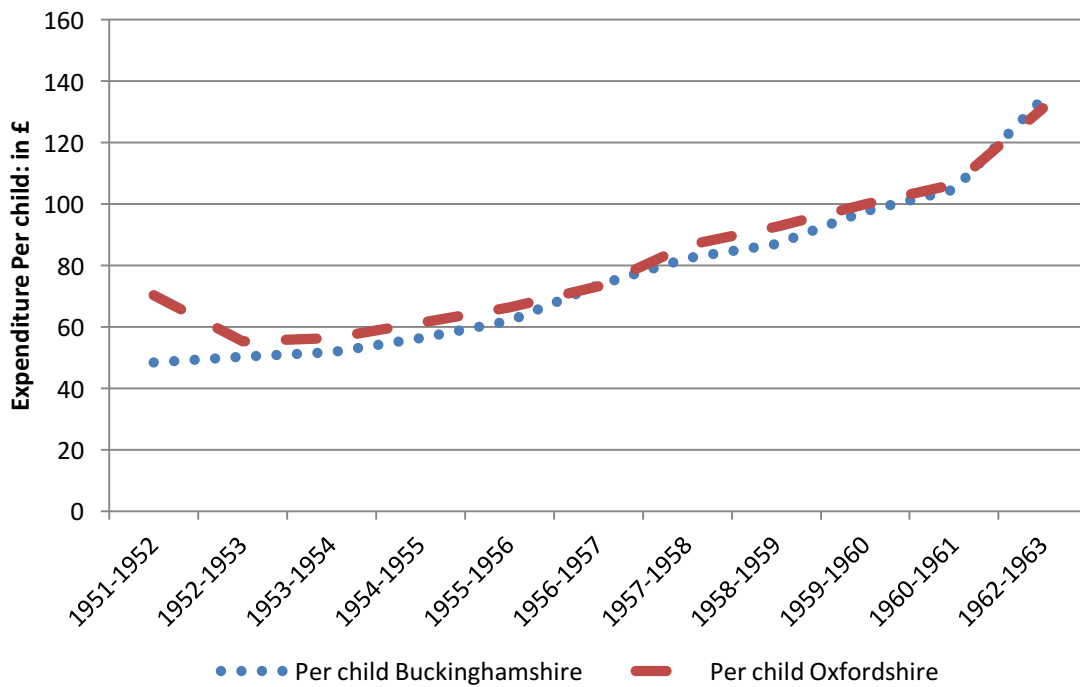
Source: IMTA Education Statistics

Figure 5: Total expenditure on Education (Rate borne and central government grants) 1951-1963



Source: IMTA Education Statistics

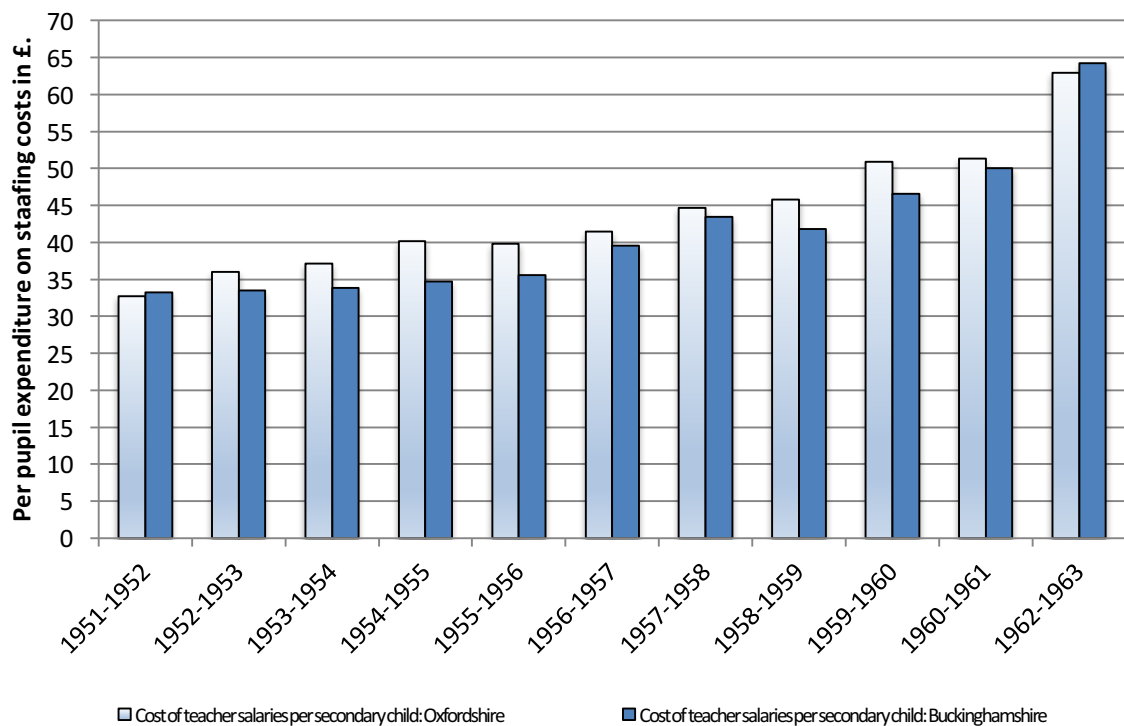
Figure 6: Expenditure per child in Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire 1951-1962



Source: IMTA Education Statistics

It would seem that though Oxfordshire was the poorer authority, the proportionately lower claim on its resources by a smaller population ensured that the authorities were roughly comparable in terms of per pupil expenditure. This finding is also borne out by comparisons between the in-county annual estimates which are available for the two areas. However, Oxfordshire’s relative poverty is still plausible on the grounds that it could not take advantage of the economies of scale that would have accompanied Buckinghamshire’s larger population and schools. Between 1951 and 1963, Buckinghamshire’s secondary schools contained, on average, 100 more pupils than their Oxfordshire counterparts, and there is evidence that this difference in scale allowed for lower staffing costs in the Buckinghamshire authority. As Figure 7 demonstrates below, Oxfordshire spent an average of £2.50 more per student per year throughout the 1950s and early 1960s on teachers than the Buckinghamshire LEA.

Figure 7: Cost Per Place for secondary school staffing for Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, 1951-62



Source: IMTA Education Statistics

### *Chapters and Sources*

Part One is divided into seven chapters with Chapter 2 considering the educational pre-endowments of both LEAs. Research from the Buckinghamshire case study is then presented: Chapter 3 examines the evolution of selective schooling in Buckinghamshire, juxtaposing the ambitions and aims of the LEA with the reality of resource constraint, central control and local capacity; Chapter 4 then explores the relationship between the selective and non-selective sectors within the authority and Chapter 5 seeks to identify the quality of education on offer within the secondary modern and grammar school sectors. Chapters 6, 7 and 8 then examine the Oxfordshire authority along these same lines.

The work for both authorities has been shaped by the archival material available. Extensive use has been made of the official records of the Counties' Education Committee and their associated sub-committees: especially Buckinghamshire's School Management Sub-Committee (SMSC) and Oxfordshire's Secondary Education Sub-Committee (Secondary Education Sub-Committee). A couple of frustrations have emerged in relation to these documents: the Oxfordshire archives are incomplete, and so where the Secondary Education Sub-Committee records disappear, the county's Quarterly Reports have been used to supplement the surface level information available in the Education Committee minutes. Despite this inconsistency, the quality of the Oxfordshire Secondary Education Sub-Committee minutes, both in the style of reporting but also the tendency of the clerk to attach and preserve official appendices and Memoranda has made these documents immensely useful.

In Buckinghamshire, the committee reports are more clinical, and though far more complete, are less prone to detailing the rationales behind decisions, or including all of the memoranda discussed in particular meetings. Part of the reason for this is that the County administered its education service through six Divisional Executives. These bodies operated as sub-units of the central Education Committee and had administrative responsibility for the county's primary and secondary modern schools, but not its grammar schools. The more detailed records for individual schools or regions is contained in these Divisional Executive minutes, and the only remaining set of these records belongs to the Aylesbury region. As a result, gathering information and constructing a narrative for Buckinghamshire has been more of a piecemeal process than in the Oxfordshire case, with the Aylesbury area over-represented in the findings presented. Where the Buckinghamshire archives have proved more useful is in the availability of annual reports from the Youth Employment Service. These latter reports contained a remarkable range of information on school leaving trends,

further education uptake and occupational trends to an extent simply not found amongst any of the Oxfordshire papers. For more detailed information at the school level, Chapters 5 and 8 rely heavily on the HMI reports for individual schools but where available, any existing governing body records have also been consulted.

Where possible, this official reading has been complemented by records of the local press. These documents have proved invaluable in contextualizing and focusing narratives emerging from official sources. In Oxfordshire, most of these records have been found in the *Oxford Mail* library, and though this repository has a remarkable wealth of clippings, the absence of a catalogue or index meant that press articles found here could not always be traced in relation to a particular event or discussion at the official level. In the Buckinghamshire case, matters were far more straightforward in that the *Bucks Herald* and the *Bucks Advertiser* have been stored on microfilm according to year. Helpfully, the local records office also has ‘miscellaneous’ press cutting files which have allowed for the consultation of other local and national press.

To ensure local findings have been held in reference to broader trends, national information sources have been used as much as possible. For example, the Annual Reports for the Department of Education have been widely consulted throughout this work alongside the annual statistical returns of the Institute for Municipal Treasurers and Accountants. The detailed information contained in both the 1959 *Crowther Report* and the 1963 *Newsom Report* has been incorporated where useful. Extensive use has also been made of the *Vision of Britain* website for local demographic change, data complemented where necessary by information from the decadal census returns for the two areas.

## Part One · Bricks & Mortars

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The end of World War Two ushered in one of the most transformative and arguably contested eras in modern British education history. This thesis offers an in depth study of two Local Education Authorities (LEAs), Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. Part One examines their experiences as they attempted to implement the 1944 Education Act. It commences by identifying their initial endowments, briefly tracing secondary education provision before the war. Attention is then paid in turn to each of the case studies, examining their Development Plans and their achievements in building a new school infrastructure in the first and second decades after the Butler Act, under austerity (1944-1954) and then affluence (1955-1964). Issues of equality in access and resources are then explored. Finally, an attempt is made to evaluate the quality of education provided under the tripartite system.

## Chapter 2 • Initial endowments

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Though the 1944 Education Act features as a watershed in British history, it did not represent the beginning of English secondary education. Rather, the Butler Act has been characterised by many scholars as the logical extension of education policy and thinking as it evolved in the latter nineteenth and early twentieth century, with Rab Butler himself admitting that his legislation ‘codified existing best practice.’<sup>1</sup> Existing practice as it stood in 1944 amounted to provision and policies as encouraged by the Education Acts of 1902 and 1918, the Hadow Report of 1926 and the Spens Report of 1936. This policy backdrop and the variable record of implementation by local authorities accounts for the stark contrast depicted by educationalist Frances Stevens in her analysis of post-war education:

In some areas, where it [the Education Act] completed a process which had already been at work for a number of years, the shock was at first scarcely felt; in others it was violent: throughout the country it created a disturbance and disequilibrium the effects of which were and are profound.<sup>2</sup>

The first part of this thesis is devoted to establishing the objectives and capacities of two LEAs in delivering post-war secondary education. A necessary first step in tracing this is to understand the situation in both areas prior to 1944: were Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire among those LEAs for whom the Education Act presented a violent shock, or had they the necessary foundations in place on which to build secondary education for all?

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Timmins, *The Five Giants: A Biography of the Welfare State* (London, 1995). p.99-100. For continuation argument see Brian Simon, *Education and the Social Order, 1940-1990* (London, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Francis Stevens, *The Living Tradition, the social and educational assumptions of the grammar school*. (London 1960).p.38.

To answer this question, this chapter offers a survey of both the national and local development of education prior to 1944.

From 1902 to 1944, progressive steps were taken to consolidate the myriad of agencies (mainly charitable and religious) responsible for providing education at elementary and secondary levels. The availability of central and local government funding for schooling was also increased and the creation of Local Authorities under the 1902 Education Act permitted greater co-ordination in the management and resourcing of schooling.<sup>3</sup> The 1918 Education Act promised to further empower Local Authorities by removing restrictions on the internal allocation of money for the use of education, and by offering the guarantee that at least half of local expenditure on schools would be met by central government (Board of Education) grants.<sup>4</sup> These financial provisions have been described by Brian Simon as the ‘greatest promise’ of the 1918 Act, with the potential to match the level of ambition and dynamism in some local authorities with secure resourcing.<sup>5</sup>

This progressive expansion in the powers and capacities of local authorities was pursued on the grounds that an organised system of national education was both necessary and desirable. It was also intended to support the increasing demands placed on Local Authorities to provide secondary or ‘higher’ education. Prior to the Second World War, the provision of secondary schooling took a variety of forms and reflected the perceived needs of

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<sup>3</sup> For more comprehensive coverage see: Richard Aldrich, *A Century of Education* (London, 2002), Brian Simon, *Education and the Social Order, 1940-1990*. And Olive Banks, *Parity and Prestige in English Secondary Education: A Study in Educational Sociology* (London, 1955).

<sup>4</sup> Section 44 of the Education Act 1918 cited in Brian Simon, *The Politics of Educational Reform, 1920-1940* (London 1974), Appendix II, Finance of Education, p. 360.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.* p29.

British society and industry. The impulse to expand the provision of secondary education ran along two lines. On the one hand, many in power recognised a growing need to recruit talent into the ranks of the elite. At the same time, anxieties over Britain's international economic competitiveness and the skill of its labour force (especially in relation to Germany and the USA) spurred on an awareness and, albeit sometimes begrudging, support of the imperative to invest in public secondary schools.

These twin stimuli resulted in the development of two-tier secondary system. In the first case, the kind of secondary schooling that could lead to university entry and the professions was offered through designated Secondary Schools. These were often church, voluntary or long-standing grammar schools within each area, which charged fees, and thus were inaccessible to the majority of the local population. Successive steps were taken to increase access to this kind of schooling to students of all background and in 1907 a Free Places Scheme was introduced, which made Local Authority funding contingent upon the school providing 25% of its places free of charge. These scholarship places were open to elementary school students on a competitive basis. Though replaced by a Special Places Scheme in 1933, where the financial support offered to place recipients became means-tested as well as academically competitive, this mechanism provided the main route for academically able children in county elementary schools to secure secondary education and was regarded as satisfying the recruitment agenda of the professional and governing classes.

Alongside this top-stratum of secondary schooling, the early twentieth century saw local authorities taking a larger role in providing 'higher' elementary education, expanding provision on a more general level. The 1902 Education Act had highlighted the need for a distinction in the curriculum taught to children before and after age 11, a need which became more salient with the raising of the school leaving age from 12 to 14 as part of the Education

Act of 1918. In line with this legislation and policy opinion of the time, local elementary or central schools, the core of local authority provision, expanded their scope. These schools began to divide between elementary and higher stages, with a separate curriculum for older children and the evolution of end-on or continuation courses offered access to secondary education to 'seniors' (students beyond 11 years of age).

The tradition in secondary and senior schooling was further advanced during the inter-war period by the publication and uptake of the Hadow Report in 1926 (and to a lesser extent its successor, the Spens Report of 1936). This report dealt explicitly with the organisation, curriculum and expectations surrounding the 'education of the adolescent' and prompted a national effort to re-organize elementary education so that senior pupils (as opposed to secondary pupils, who would have attended local voluntary or grammar schools) became a separate educational constituency. Following the recommendations of the Hadow Report, the lines between primary and secondary schooling became more prominent with authorities instructed to re-organise their schools so that senior students were taught in separate departments or institutions. Schools which had previously encompassed all ages, from 4-14 years had to ensure they grouped together senior students and made specific provision for their educational needs.

Importantly these reports recommended the provision of specialist teaching and resources to the new senior (increasingly termed secondary modern schools after 1926) with the Spens report asserting the need for 'parity of conditions' between these institutions and

the older secondary schools.<sup>6</sup> Crucially too, both of these documents envisaged a model of secondary schooling that was selective and differentiated, thus reinforcing the tradition of segregation (whether on the grounds of class or IQ) in English secondary education. In this regard, elementary school reorganisation after 1926 can be seen as an antecedent to reform under the 1944 Act and England's particular pursuit of 'secondary education for all.'

As Nicholas Timmins has observed, on paper at least, the situation as it stood in 1944 seemed promising.<sup>7</sup> Education in some form was free and compulsory for children up to the age of 14. Local Authorities had already been charged with orchestrating the re-organisation of their secondary provision and the Hadow and Spens Reports had firmly established the principal of providing secondary education separately from that of primary (elementary) schooling, and distinguished between three pathways for secondary education, foreseeing grammar, secondary modern, and technical schools operating on an equal basis, with equal resourcing and prestige. In reality several limitations curtailed any optimism implied by of this policy and legislative backdrop. To begin with, the Board of Education (precursor to the Ministry of Education) was very limited when it came to regulating the uptake and actions of local authorities. As a result, the impact of policy recommendations differed depending on the individual circumstances of respective areas. The awarding of Free and Special places for example was a matter left largely to authority discretion and where some authorities were more ambitious, others were either unable or unwilling to pursue this route to expansion.

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<sup>6</sup> HMSO, Consultative Committee on Secondary Education, *Report of the Consultative Committee on Secondary Education with Special Reference to Grammar Schools and Technical High Schools* (London, 1938) p.xvii.

<sup>7</sup> Nicholas Timmins, *The Five Giants: A Biography of the Welfare State*, p. 72.

More importantly, the financial constraint made necessary throughout the inter-war period by economic crises, ensured that this era was one of retrenchment: ‘economic blizzards froze the educational pattern’ in its pre-1914 form.<sup>8</sup> Secondary education was particularly affected by drives to cut public expenditure, with the 1921 Parliamentary Select Committee and the 1922 Geddes Committee identifying this field for deep cuts and efficiencies. School fees were increased, Free Places became Special Places with plans to expand the minimum quota of provision from 25% to 50% abandoned. The 1918 Act- with its promise of greater financial control for LEAs, the development of secondary education in central or end-on schools, and its requirement that LEAs work towards ten year plans, was stillborn, and as one contemporary Labour MP remarked, it lay ‘derelict upon the statute book.’<sup>9</sup> Similarly, the scale of Hadow re-organisation had been firmly constrained by financial stringency and the Spens Report had barely had time to take root before the outbreak of the Second World War.

The effects of economic retrenchment particularly affected school building and schooling infrastructure. In his 1984 survey of Educational School Building, Stuart Maclure, long-standing TES Editor and author of perhaps the most comprehensive account of school building policy in the latter twentieth century, emphasized the shaky foundations on which post-war school building commenced, condemned the inter-war period as one where building and investment had ‘languished’ with successive economic crises starving the maintained

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Morgan Jones, Labour MP for Caerphilly. Quoted in Brian Simon, *The Politics of Educational Reform, 1920-1940*, p.53.

schools of funds and investment.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, and for obvious reasons, the Second World War saw School Building grind to a halt, with attention and resources devoted to the war effort. George Tomlinson in his 1947 report characterized the state of things in 1946 as a ‘sad tale of arrears,’ highlighting the years of stagnation and neglect of educational building in the decade or so preceding the Butler Act.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the national educational pre-endowments with which to meet post-war demand were wholly insufficient.

Such an environment limited what even the most ambitious of authorities could pursue or achieve, and more vitally, shaped the landscape onto which the 1944 Education Act was to be grafted. How had Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire fared in this context?

#### *Local development of secondary education prior to 1944*

Evidence from the Buckinghamshire Local Authority points to this area being quite responsive to early efforts at state-led provision of secondary schooling. During House of Commons debates, Buckinghamshire was often cited for its thoroughness and dynamism in the sphere of education and it could in fact be argued that there was a well established, even progressive, tradition of secondary education in the county. For example, the Parliamentary Secretary’s written response to Questions just prior to the Second World War (May 1939) reveals that under the Special Places scheme, the Buckinghamshire authority was supporting 55.3% of secondary school places as Special Places.<sup>12</sup> This debate also reported that Oxfordshire was reserving 50% of its secondary school places for scholarship candidates,

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<sup>10</sup> Stuart Maclure, *Educational Development and School Building: Aspects of Public Policy, 1945-73* p.3

<sup>11</sup> HMSO Ministry of Education, *Education in 1947; Being the Report of the Ministry of Education and the Statistics of Public Education for England and Wales*. (London, 1948) p.50 & p.15

<sup>12</sup> House of Commons Debates 15 May 1939 vol. 347 cc998, Question from Mr Macdonald to Mr Lindsay on the number of special places held to number of pupils on March 1938.

with each county comparing favourably both with the national average of 44% and with other neighbouring authorities, none of whom exceeded 37% place provision. Given that allocation above the 25% quota was left to LEA discretion, both Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire can be seen here as supporting access to secondary education to a greater extent than their regional counterparts.

A key factor in an authority's readiness for the 1944 Act was the extent to which they had pursued reorganisation of all-age schools along the lines of the Hadow Committee's 1926 recommendations. Figures detailing the progress of Hadow re-organisation in Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire suggest that both authorities had cultivated solid foundations on which to build their post-war education services, though Oxfordshire led the way. For example, the last of the Annual Reports for Elementary School Reorganisation issued by the Board of Education in 1937-38 revealed that 45.6% of Buckinghamshire's senior students were in re-organized senior schools or departments, as were 64% of Oxfordshire students.<sup>13</sup> As can be seen in the table below, Oxfordshire appears to have been consistently more advanced in this respect, marginally exceeding the national average in providing senior education. On closer inspection, the figures for Buckinghamshire reveal that a distinct contrast existed between the more urban and rural areas of the county: where in the latter 75% of students over 11 were still being educated in un-reorganized elementary schools, only 38% of the 11+ population in urban areas were still unorganized. Impressively the Wycombe County Borough (a Part III authority and a later composite of the post war Buckinghamshire LEA) had completely re-

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<sup>13</sup> Ministry of Education, *Reorganisation of Public Elementary Schools in England and Wales* (1938).

organized by this stage. Oxfordshire experienced a more balanced development on this front, with 70% and 69% of urban and rural 11+ cohorts in re-organised schools.<sup>14</sup>

Table 1: Percentage of students over 11+ receiving education in re-organised school.

	<i>1933-34</i>	<i>1935-36</i>	<i>1936-37</i>
<i>Buckinghamshire</i>	30.0%	34.4%	45.6%
<i>Oxfordshire</i>	56.1%	64.3%	64.0%
<i>England and Wales:</i>	53.2%	58.8%	63.5%

Source: Board of Education Annual Reports 1934, 1936 and 1938

The reports and planning documents to emerge from the Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Education Committee's during or towards the end of the war point to a last minute surge from both authorities in pursuing senior schooling. By the end of 1939, Oxfordshire's Education Year Book asserted that 3137 of its 4146 senior pupils (75%) were in re-organised senior schools and in Buckinghamshire the School's Management Sub-Committee stated in 1945 that just 5283 county students remained in un-reorganized schools: only 27% (compared to 55% in 1938) of the 11+ school age population.<sup>15</sup> To achieve such a reduction, Buckinghamshire especially must have continued with reform apace over this period.

The Board of Education returns cited above made no distinction between reorganisation which had occurred through grouping students in 'Senior Departments' within

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<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> OHS: CC1/12/A4 1-3 OLEA *Education Year Book*, 1939 and CFBS: 191 BLEA *School Management Sub-Committee Minute Book*, 16<sup>th</sup> October 1945.

elementary or junior schools, and those which provided new or separate buildings for the purpose. The Buckinghamshire authorities belonged to the latter camp and across the region the scale and focus of inter-war school building points to a greater commitment to the task of reorganisation than might be initially apparent simply by the proportion of students considered re-organized.<sup>16</sup> The significance here is rooted in the fact that school building which occurred between the wars for senior education specifically ensured that the authority was more prepared in terms of capital stock to meet new secondary school accommodation obligations after 1945. This commitment to school building was not nationally replicated and in general, as explained previously, the inter-war years are regarded as a period of neglect and stagnation. Despite these bleak assessments, Buckinghamshire's record of school building throughout the 1930s was energetic and, in this context, anomalous. Out of the twenty-nine 11-14 schools recognized in the 1944 Development Plan, at least 16 (55%) had been built or undergone major renovations during the inter-war period.<sup>17</sup> The vast majority of these schools provided for senior, as opposed to selective or fee paying students, and as such represented a considerable investment in services upon which the 1944 Act would later build.

Despite the evident commitment of the Buckinghamshire authority to building secondary school facilities in the inter-war period, it would be difficult to argue that this was driven by an enthusiastic engagement with new educational philosophy. True, there was a record of school building and elementary re-organisation which compared favourably to other

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<sup>16</sup> The 1944 Buckinghamshire Local Authority incorporated what had previously been three separate entities: Buckinghamshire; Chipping Wycombe (to become High Wycombe), a Part III authority with responsibility for local education; and Slough, which had previously been a Municipal Borough. Especially in the case of the latter two, the pattern of school building during the later 1920's and 30's was dynamic and outstripped national trend.

<sup>17</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR11/89-31 *Buckinghamshire County Council 1944 Development Plan*, 1947.

authorities, but in most cases this reflected escalating levels of need as opposed to relative progress. Between 1931 and 1951, the increase in the county's population was greater than any other county in Wales or England with the exception of Hertfordshire or West Sussex, witnessing a 42.3% increase. This growth was also focused in specific areas, for example Slough and High Wycombe, and to a lesser extent the urban and metropolitan boroughs of Aylesbury and Bletchley. Such was the scale of inward immigration into the Slough and Wycombe areas that these two authorities were responsible for erecting just over half of the sixteen inter-war schools in the county. The Buckinghamshire trend in inter-war school building and even population growth runs counter to the national experience, but the fact remains that Buckinghamshire was adapting more to keep pace with population demands than progressing towards any greater level of provision relative to other authorities.

This point is reinforced by the information contained in the 1944 Development Plan regarding the school population coverage, which notes the existing secondary school stock of the county. In the April of 1944, the authority could count 29 secondary schools among its number, 12 of which were equipped to offer the selective academic education envisaged in the tripartite model and 3 of which were centres providing junior technical education (13-18 years), providing precursors for secondary technical schools. Proportionally however, only 25% of 11+ students in the county were accommodated in these schools: a figure that fluctuated from 33.3% and 29.24% in Slough and Wycombe respectively, to just 21.6% and 21.8% in Aylesbury and Amersham. Eton, in the extreme, had none of its 11+ age group in secondary or senior schools. Those students not in designated secondary schools were still accommodated in all-age or junior schools with Senior Departments, largely classified as 're-organised' according to the expectations of the Hadow Report, but incapable of fulfilling the requirements of the new Act. The 'Appointed day' in 1945 therefore presented educational

planners with the challenge of meeting the accommodation needs of the county's 75% of secondary age pupils who were beyond the scope of existing provision.

Comparable figures for Oxfordshire on the scale of inter-war school building have not been discovered in the surviving records of its Education Committees. However, the official papers of the 1944-5 Secondary Education Sub-Committee and the Development Sub-Committee offer helpful insight into the committee level perception of progress on this front. These make repeated mention of the perceived inadequacy of pre-war developments, doing away with any sense of optimism that the Hadow re-organisation and 1930s school provision could offer any foundation for post-war policy. For example, the Development Committee remarked in its first report to the Education Committee, that

In the large towns Hadow reorganisation has been carried much further than in this county (where it has hardly begun), and Junior Technical Schools there are comparatively common (whereas we have none). Hence in towns the reorganisation required by the Act [Butler] must be seriously influenced by conditions already set up, whereas we in the county have almost a clean slate to work upon and are but little hampered by an existing organization requiring considerable modification. Our problem is different, but no less difficult.<sup>18</sup>

In his 1949 briefing to the Education Committee, Alan Chorlton raised Oxfordshire's record of inter-war school building as offering a particularly problematic legacy for post-war planners to manage:

Little new school building was undertaken in the four or five years before the War, in consequence of which there is no spare accommodation to meet the first impact of the increase [in school population].<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> OLEA: CC1/12/A2/9 *Quarterly Reports of Education Sub-Committees*, First Interim Report of the Development Sub-Committee, 11<sup>th</sup> Oct 1944.

<sup>19</sup> OLEA: CC1/12/A1-1 *Education Committee Minutes*, Report of the Chief Education Officer 'Pressure on school accommodation and the need for new schools,' August 1949.

To further complicate matters, the Development Committee's survey of existing provision in 1945 declared that even those inter-war schools which had been built were no longer fit for purpose:

Reorganisation of education into primary schools and secondary schools in accordance with Section 8 (2) of the Act is incomplete; so far as this re-organisation has proceeded the majority of the modern schools are housed in buildings which will need to be replaced.<sup>20</sup>

Based on these assessments, and irrespective of the 'clean slate' which they had to work from, Oxfordshire policy makers obviously felt that they were embracing the post-war expectations for secondary education from a very deficient starting point.

Compounding this problem was the fact that existing school stock was low capacity and disjointed. A fragmented distribution of plant and staff was commonplace in rural and sparsely populated areas, where village schools formed the backbone of education provision. The scale of this problem in Oxfordshire was significant and attracted considerable attention when the Ministry moved to cap the maximum number of teachers in any authority through a series of circulars and quotas. Of these, the 1948 Circular 86 prompted protests from the County's Staff Board which argued that the unique demands of a rural setting should attract a greater teacher quota and highlighted the extreme inefficiencies inherent in Oxfordshire's educational stock, estimating that 60% of its schools had 'less than 50 on roll,' with 52 one-teacher schools, 50 two-teacher schools and 119 schools with less than 40 on the roll.<sup>21</sup> This distribution of schools was problematic when it came to attempts to expand educational provision: the capacity of schools to operate as effective teaching units with a sufficiently

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<sup>20</sup> NA: ED 152/132, *Oxfordshire County Council 1944 Development Plan*, 1947.

<sup>21</sup> OLEA: CC1/12/A2/9, *Quarterly Reports of Education Sub-Committees*, 10th April 1946.

broad curriculum was severely limited and scarce resources were inefficiently diffused. Oxfordshire's Education Service therefore faced a set of pre-conditions which were not only sub-par, but also highly uneconomical to maintain.

This, then, was the existing landscape for the two LEAs on the eve of 1945. By national standards both authorities had a pre-war inheritance which provided some foundation for post-war planning. Having said this, the scale of work to be completed and the deficit of both schools and teachers in line with student numbers meant that the first decade of tripartism would be fraught and turbulent. Moving on from these starting points, the following two chapters seek to assess how successfully Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire implemented 'secondary education for all'.

## Chapter 3 · Buckinghamshire Delivering 1944

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In 1944 the passing of Butler's Education Act was heralded as a long-awaited game changer. It represented a crucial step forward for educational opportunity and was celebrated as a vital extension of social justice. In reality however, the Act was only the beginning of a long struggle to deliver what were long promised and delayed reforms. Writing on this subject has largely fixed the advent of universal secondary education firmly in 1944-45 as though the official policy announcement was sufficient to transform what was a neglected and hugely convoluted educational landscape. A close account of this period and the process of expanding secondary provision reveals that the obligations of 1944 had only just been met with the completion of elementary and senior school reorganisation by the early 1960s. This lag between policy proclamation and implementation forms the focus of this chapter, the aim being to establish the process and problems encountered by Buckinghamshire in delivering 'secondary education for all' in the tripartite era.

Several lines of enquiry have guided the research into this era of educational reform. The first issue to be outlined here is what the Authority's aims and objectives were as stated in its Development Plan. Leading from this evaluation, is an assessment of how far the authority came in realizing these aims in the first decade after the war. In light of this discussion, the second decade of tripartism in Buckinghamshire is then considered, examining how the authority had evolved and established secondary provision by 1962.

### *Aims of 1944 Development Plan.*

Development Plans, crafted by every authority in response to the 1944 Education Act, offered LEAs the chance to assess the educational needs of their respective areas and to schedule work they considered necessary. Symbolic of both the optimism and energy that pervaded post-war planning, these Development Plans represented a statement as to what each authority saw as their ‘best-case scenario;’ but they were also designed to offer a blueprint of education policy for the post-war decade. In Buckinghamshire, the 1944 Development Plan firmly set in place the authority’s desire to develop secondary education along tripartite lines. It identified a clear role for secondary technical schools throughout the authority, explaining that provision for 20% of the secondary age population would be made in this school type, with 20% to be provided with a grammar school education and the remaining 60% of secondary age pupils to be accommodated in secondary modern schools. Though firmly committed to the tripartite model, emphasising that respective school types should remain separate, the Buckinghamshire authority expressed its willingness to consider multi-lateral schools in areas such as Wolverton where ‘relatively small homogenous populations’ would make the provision of three separate schools unviable.<sup>1</sup> Thus the aims of the Buckinghamshire authority in terms of educational ‘model’ were very much in line with the Norwood-influenced national mood.

Perhaps the most significant feature of the 1944 Development Plan, at least in terms of its aims and objectives, was the large-scale building programme it identified as being necessary to deliver on the promise of ‘secondary education for all’. The Buckinghamshire

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<sup>1</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR11/89-31 *Buckinghamshire County Council 1944 Development Plan*, 1947.

Plan scheduled work on secondary schools to begin in 1947, anticipating the necessity of investment in primary schools in the immediate term and therefore delaying the phasing in of secondary school building. For the period 1947-50 it was expected that Ministerial support and resources would be forthcoming for six new secondary schools, with 15 more major projects scheduled for the 1950-53 period and 36 more projects scheduled for the 1953-62 period.<sup>2</sup> The scale of work that the authority aimed to undertake was therefore vast, but it was not based on an over-inflated account of the level of need. Buckinghamshire planners critically assessed the need and scale of anticipated projects, allotting projects to successive financial years, and carefully mapped out how the education service would evolve as new facilities came into use. In this respect, the document reflected what local policy makers believed to be realistic time-scales for capital works and general progress in implementing the 1944 Act. Similarly, Ministerial approval of the Plan in 1947 firmed up policy makers' expectations that its contents would be fully implemented.

*Buckinghamshire Accomplishments: 1st Decade 1944-1954*

Despite the drive of the Buckinghamshire LEA in 1944, by 1954 the authority was still working to fulfil its post-war obligations. The year before had marked the point at which two whole cohorts had passed through the authority's secondary schools under the terms of the 1944 Act, and yet the county had only managed to complete two new secondary modern schools in that time (out of 21 projects scheduled in the Development Plan). It had put the re-organisation of all-age, especially rural, schools on hold, awaiting the provision of a further nine secondary school new builds. Further, a good proportion of secondary pupils were

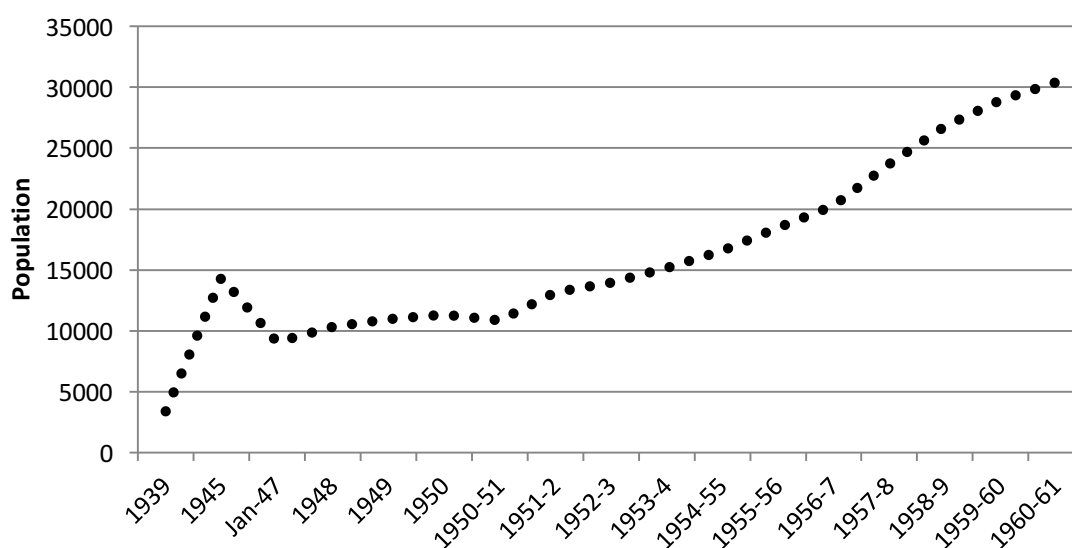
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<sup>2</sup> Based on Major Works applications as reported in CFBS: BLEA AR78/81 1-8 *Education Committee Minute Books 1947-1962* and BLEA AR11/89-31 *Buckinghamshire County Council 1944 Development Plan, 1947*.

receiving their education in hutted emergency accommodation. This was an era of faltering progress and marked frustration, the causes and effects of which will be explored below.

During the short but crucial period between 1944 and 1954, nearly every problem that plagued school building at the national level hampered the capacity of Buckinghamshire Local Authority to implement its Development Plan and, by extension, to realise the 1944 Act. In general these problems can be categorized into either issues of capacity or issues of demand. In the former camp were the limitations placed on educational expansion by the central Ministry of Education, the shortage of labour and resources and the inherently limited capacity of local authorities to undertake work on such a vast scale. Those in the latter (issues of demand) revolved around the expansion of the school age population: whether through the baby boom, the raising of the school leaving age or inward migration to the county.

Figure 8: Secondary age population in Buckinghamshire 1939 to 1958



Source: Figures provided by Director of Education Annual Reports 1947-50 and Institute of Municipal Treasurers and Accountants, Annual Education Estimates thereafter.

As has already been explored, there was a considerable deficit of school places in the Buckinghamshire local authority, even by 1944. Had the school age population stabilised at

1944 figures, the county would have been set to face a potentially overwhelming challenge. As it was, the spectre of population growth and the raising of the school leaving age (hereafter ROSLA) complicated this picture even further. As early as 1946 the Buckinghamshire Education Committee was forced to acknowledge the threat that population growth posed to even basic school-place coverage. As can be seen Figure 8, the increase in the natural population and growth resulting from inward migration to the county acted to propel demand for secondary facilities to unprecedented levels. Points on this chart which show a drop in this population do not detract from the overall trend of continued growth: in the case of the first drop from 1945-1947, it is likely that the removal of the evacuee children from the county where they had stayed for the duration of the war accounts for the overall population reduction, but conceals the pattern of growth of the internal population. The growth trend is also broken between the 1950 and the 1950-51 mark: this is also where there is a break in the records and reporting of annual figures: as earlier figures are drawn from county level annual reports and are drawn from IMTA reports thereafter. It is possible that the change during the time period for which this information is applicable represents an artificial reduction in numbers; for example, the 1950-51 figures, if based on end of year statistics would exclude school leavers who had left school after the Christmas or Easter Term. Newspaper and Committee level discussions in this period talk only of population growth and it therefore seems reasonable to believe that these drops are anomalies.

The growth of the secondary age population was clearly an issue for secondary schools prior to the arrival of the baby boom generation, which is estimated to have really taken hold from about 1953-4. This sustained pressure held serious implications for Buckinghamshire planners. Most immediately, it threatened to overwhelm the county's capacity to provide education at all: as early as October 1946 the Buckinghamshire Education Committee somewhat desperately recorded in their committee report that there was a distinct

possibility that they were going to fail in their legal obligation to provide secondary education, warning that:

Unless considerable progress can be made with building in the next year, your committee will not only be hampered in implementing further the provision of the 1944 education act, but they will have difficulty in meeting their statutory obligations in areas of new housing development.<sup>3</sup>

The Committee also expressed clear anxiety at this stage about the impending raising of the school leaving age, scheduled for April 1947. In legislating for this increase, the effect of the Education Act in Buckinghamshire was to expand the secondary age population by one fifth, keeping a whole cohort in schools for an extra year. Based on 1944 school population figures, this placed pressure on Buckinghamshire secondary schools to accommodate nearly 5,000 extra pupils (though some of these will have been independent school children or returning evacuees). The combined effect of population growth and ROSLA in Buckinghamshire was that the school age population more than doubled within the first ten years: from 9,088 in 1947 to over 20,200 in 1956-7. The authority therefore had to cope with continually shifting goal-posts and the scale of the task it had undertaken in 1944 massively increased before the first ten years of tripartism were out.

What throws this increased ‘need’ into even sharper relief is the incapacity of the local authority to expand supply. The expectations surrounding the ‘New Jerusalem’ offered by post-war welfare, of which the Butler Act was part, and, in turn, the demands placed upon Local Authorities to extend their roles and functions, were huge and unprecedented. The school building programme in the first five and even ten years after the war was not.

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<sup>3</sup> CFBS: BLEA No 58 *Reports of Sub-Committees to Education Committee*, October 1946

Education building after the war was heavily subject to central control and the Education Ministry kept a very restrictive grasp on the building activity of local authorities. The tension between local authorities wishing to expand to meet demand on the one hand and the central ministry tightly holding the purse strings on the other, is a persistent theme throughout the mid-twentieth century. At different points in time, different elements underpinned this: in 1944-55 it was an intractable mix of resource shortages and the education sector playing second fiddle to housing in the cabinet and on the spending priority list. The simple scale of need up and down the country also worked to pull available resources in all directions and such conditions demanded that all public spending be approached with caution and scrutiny.

School building or adaptation was the main tool through which post-war expectations and demands could be met, and yet the process of capital investment and service expansion was so slow and faltering that for at least the first five years (arguably ten) after the Butler Education Act, it created a bottle-neck in policy implementation. For example, when it came to both the short-term and then the annual major works schedule, the Ministry rejected many of the projects put forward. Even with the 1947-8 wave of 'works' applications for building considered urgent and thus processed as emergency requests, only five of the twenty-two projects requested by Buckinghamshire were included and just two of these were secondary schools.

Even when projects had been approved, the Buckinghamshire authority remained particularly susceptible to problems of resource capacity, both in terms of materials and labour. Local authorities were also inherently limited in the scale of their actions insofar as they were relatively small institutions undertaking vast schemes of work. The cumulative total of post-war capital works which were registered as 'urgent' on the Council's building agenda greatly exceeded what it was capable of delivering. In Buckinghamshire, this became

a common problem, the frustrations of which were clearly expressed by the Chairman of the Council's Capital Expenditure Committee, Sir Aubrey Fletcher, in discussing the 1951-2 programme of county capital works:

leaving aside the actual question of cost, there is the practical question. We have before us a programme of building costing just under one million pounds from the various committees- building alone and nothing else. During this past year we may have fulfilled the building programme that we thought we might be able to do, and that is at a cost of £500,000 half of what is proposed for next year. There is a most limited labour force available for the county and how anyone thinks that suddenly, in the twinkling of the eye, we can double the amount of building that we propose to do, I don't pretend to understand.<sup>4</sup>

The frustration of this committee member at the gulf that existed between aims and reality in local policy planning, was evident. As is the fact that educational building was only one part of a complicated balancing act which authorities had to perform. In the remainder of this report, the *Bucks Herald* highlighted the Education Committee in particular as struggling to make progress in developing the service:

The increasing child population, particularly in the south made it absolutely necessary to build schools, if the children were to be educated at all. They had schools in the course of being built which, in order to finish them this year could cost £300,000, before starting any new ones. That was half the labour force available. They did persuade them, and in fact they had to out-vote them on some points, to cut down new schools, all of which they considered most urgently needed.<sup>5</sup>

The original schedule of capital expenditure in the 1944 Development Plan anticipated an average expenditure on school building of just under £600,000 per year between 1950-53 and yet the Capital Expenditure Sub-Committee were forced to admit that they were probably only capable of sustaining this amount for works in *all* sectors throughout

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<sup>4</sup> CFBS Bucks Herald: 'Over Two Million for Bucks Education' January 28, 1949.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

the county.<sup>6</sup> The impact of inter-sectorial competition for resources on education building is clear: as early as 1947, when only two secondary schools were out for tender, the committee blamed the delay in securing building contracts on the fact that 60% of the building labour in the county was already devoted to housing needs.<sup>7</sup> Further down the line, shortages in materials, especially steel, meant that these two secondary schools (Winsor Road and Tonmon Mosley) were set back even further. Thus, internal resource capacity heavily restricted the scope for education building in the first decade after the war: it made the tendering process more difficult and meant that material shortages delayed existing works - even once hard-won Ministerial approval had been granted.

This was not the only internal capacity issue faced by local authorities, and Buckinghamshire in particular: there was also the problem of how many projects could reasonably be undertaken, managed and implemented by what was a comparatively small group of people. In Buckinghamshire, this was most obviously seen in the pressure applied to the county Architect's Department as well as the Education Directorate. In the case of the former, staffing and capacity issues were frequently raised: in January 1951 the Development Plan Sub-Committee reported that though eleven projects had gained approval for starting during the year, they were going to have to seek the assistance of private architects to manage five of them, explaining that the county office was simply overwhelmed.<sup>8</sup> Again in 1956, as building programmes began to expand markedly, the committee recognized that the

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<sup>6</sup> CFBS Bucks Herald: 'Bucks Geddes Fears Marked Rise in County Rate' January 5th 1951.

<sup>7</sup> CFBS: AR78/89 1, BLEA *Education Committee Minute Books*, January 1947.

<sup>8</sup> CFBS: No 62, BLEA *Reports of Sub-Committees to Education Committee*, Development Sub-Committee, January 1951.

Architect's Department was still not sufficiently staffed warning that with the existing support 'it [was] clear that the completion of all the above [projects] cannot be guaranteed.'<sup>9</sup> The Education Department also bore considerable strain in working to deliver the scale of school building and planning asked of it by the Education Committees.

This was also a period in which any hesitancy on the part of the authority to proceed with school building threatened to incur further delays: re-consideration of building programmes by the Ministry, triggered in both 1949 and 1952 as a result of economy measures and the over-heating of the building industry, targeted the suspension of building projects which had yet to begin (this also happened in 1956-7). This was particularly problematic in 1952 as there was a feeling in Buckinghamshire that 'reasonable progress' was finally being made with new school building; progress which was then slowed by the delay of the two new secondary modern schools at Langley and Bletchley, both approved in 1950, were scheduled to start that year. Once the window of opportunity to start building had closed, individual projects were very susceptible to further deferral: for example, Langley Secondary Modern School was deferred from a 1952 start and then delayed again to the 1953-4 programme and as a result not actually completed until the end of 1956.<sup>10</sup>

As a result of these limiting factors, building programmes in Buckinghamshire prior to 1954 deviated, both in scale and in timing, from the Buckingham Authority's original expectations. Despite the ambitions of the 1944 Act and the promises of post-war investment,

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<sup>9</sup> CFBS: AR78/89 3, BLEA *Education Committee Minute Books*, June 1956.

<sup>10</sup> CFBS: No 62, BLEA *Reports of Sub-Committees to Education Committee*, Staff and General Purposes Sub-Committee, Annual Report, December 1952.

the education service had to adapt a 'make do and mend' approach to service provision and secondary education for all was predominantly achieved through piecemeal adaptations.

The main means by which Buckinghamshire could act to expand secondary provision was 'huted' accommodation, pre-fabricated classrooms initially provided to alleviate the pressure on existing accommodation as a result of the ROSLA in 1947. Huted extensions, provided through a scheme called 'HORSA' (Hutting Operation for the Raising of the School Leaving Age) offered the quickest means of extending the number of available spaces at secondary schools and in Buckinghamshire also offered the opportunity to provide the nucleus for a new school. This occurred in the Amersham area, where the grouping of HORSA huts to provide senior accommodation for local all-age primary schools led to the creation of a new Secondary Modern school as a self-contained unit. For Buckinghamshire, it also proved expedient to reorganize its remaining all-age schools as swiftly as possible, 'decapitating' primary schools and grouping senior students together at existing all-age schools which had an established tradition of senior education. Reorganisation along these lines eventually led to the re-branding of some all-age schools as new secondary schools: by 1948, six senior schools had undergone this transition.<sup>11</sup>

Before 1953, there was also no scope to build extra grammar schools and the earliest of the post-war builds came into use by 1956.<sup>12</sup> This presented a particular problem if the county were to retain its commitment to accommodate 20% (40% including technical

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<sup>11</sup> Series of senior schools now being recognised as secondary schools in their own right with separate governing bodies: 1) Queens Park County School 2) Linslade County School 3) Iver County School 3) New Bradwell County school 4) Newport Pagnell County School 5) Wolverton County School 6) Beaconsfield Church of England School.

<sup>12</sup> CFBS: No 65, BLEA *Reports of Sub-Committees to Education Committee*, October 1953.

schools) of an increasing number of students in selective institutions. As an interim measure, the authority extended and adapted where it could, for example converting war-time rest-centre huts into classrooms on school sites or leasing nearby buildings. By these means, Buckinghamshire Education Committee managed to provide an extra 630 places for school entrants, an impressive feat considering that the number of new entrants into the authority's grammar schools did not exceed this number until 1952. To some extent grammar schools were more immune to the immediate shock of having to accommodate ROSLA cohorts; these schools had always catered for students staying on to 18 and as such the adjustment required to cater for the 14-15 age group was less extensive than in senior and secondary modern schools where little or no precedent existed.

There were limits however to what adaptation could achieve, and this was something to which the Buckinghamshire Education Committee was quite sensitive. In October 1953 it acknowledged that it was fast approaching the moment when more aggressive expansion would have to be allowed if the county was to maintain an adequate grammar school coverage, with the Director of Education reporting to the SMSC that:

the committee will no longer be able to rely only on the methods which have been employed so far to meet this increase: increase of classroom space in existing schools, and increased numbers of awards at Direct Grant or Independent schools... we hope for 4 new grammar schools in the next 5 years.<sup>13</sup>

By 1953-4 therefore, there had been a series of educational adaptations as opposed to an educational revolution in Buckinghamshire - at least in terms of bricks and mortar. During the first decade of reform under the Education Act much was delivered within an 'inherited'

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<sup>13</sup> CFBS: No 65, BLEA *Reports of Sub-Committees to Education Committee*, October 1953.

structure and relied heavily on an inter-war legacy which had itself been judged inadequate and deficient according even to its own contemporary needs. The authority had determinedly pursued its Development Plan, as far as the Ministry and resources would allow, but had found mainly frustration and concern as the expansion of the service fell short of expectations and struggled to keep pace with growing demand. Having said this, there was still sense of achievement within the authority at having coped as fully as possible during this first era. By 1955, ten years on from the ‘appointed day’ the Director of Education’s annual report recounted the successes of the first decade: that 19 new primary schools and 11 secondary schools had been established (7 in existing buildings by reorganizing senior schools), with an additional 630 places added to grammar school provision.

However, it was the eight years following this period which that featured both nationally and locally as the more dynamic era of school building and saw great steps forward in improving the education service. This rest of this chapter focuses on that period.

*Buckinghamshire Accomplishments: 2<sup>nd</sup> Decade, 1954-1962*

1954 marked a turning point in the trajectory of education policy and practice after the war. The succession of David Eccles as Minister of Education in place of Florence Horsbrugh placed the Department on a stronger footing. Education was increasingly being recognized as a serious cabinet portfolio and its importance expanded as the urgent demands of war-time recovery receded. For the first time in the Ministry of Education’s Annual Report, the Minister felt able to declare that ‘it became possible to contemplate not merely keeping pace

with...demands but [making] some additional improvement of the educational service.’<sup>14</sup> The following year, in Circular 283, Eccles announced that extra resources were to be made available for school building and authorities were encouraged to submit programmes for approval that would allow them to complete all-age re-organisation. Rural secondary schools, hitherto overlooked in most school building schemes, were allocated to a separate priority building plan and alongside this, the first wave of post-war schools were coming into effective use. Collectively, these changes lent an energy and drive to planning in the second half of the 1950s and it was really in this period that the landscape of secondary education was transformed.

In Buckinghamshire this new drive manifested as a major scaling up of secondary school building and the period between 1954 and 1962 saw activity in this area increase drastically. Information from the annual major works schedules demonstrates this. In the ten years between 1944 and 1954 the Development Programme Sub-Committee had submitted just nine secondary school projects for ministerial consideration and, by 1954 only four of these had been approved and three completed. By contrast, in the four years between 1954/55 to 1957/58, the shift of focus to the secondary education sector was evident in that at least 36 secondary school projects were submitted, 23 of which received approval and 14 of which had reached completion.<sup>15</sup> By January 1963, the Education Committee’s new magazine *The Termly Review* happily reported that the authority had managed to establish a total of thirty-

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<sup>14</sup> Education in 1954: HMSO *Education in 1954: Being the Report of the Ministry of Education and the Statistics of Public Education for England and Wales Cmd. 9521*. (London, 1955), p.1.

<sup>15</sup> Based on compiled Major Works lists from CFBS: No 58- No. 65, BLEA *Reports of Sub-Committees to Education Committee*, Development Sub-Committee.

six post-war schools, in addition to those that they had fully modernized and renovated. Further, this same report detailed the scale of work still underway, cataloguing that in-progress school building programmes were set to deliver 2,400 more secondary modern places before 1964-5, with the plans for that year entailing further expansion in both selective and non-selective sectors. In this same report, the Education Committee estimated that it was managing £3,000,000 worth of building in education. Given that in 1950, the upper limit of capital works for the entirety of the county council (Housing and Education included) was judged to be approximately £500,000, this represented, even once inflation is accounted for, three and a half times the whole of the council's upper limit in 1950.<sup>16</sup>

On the basis of school building therefore, the 1954-62 period was a much more dynamic, even frenzied period, with the Education Committee finally in a position to see its Development Plan realised in some areas of the county. The scale of building work in the secondary sector over this period meant that selective as well as secondary modern schools featured in building programmes. This was important for Buckinghamshire planners on a number of fronts. On the one hand it allowed them to expand grammar school provision, building new schools where most needed: at Aylesbury for example, where population growth had made accommodating 25% of the age group in existing selective schools a near impossibility. Perhaps more importantly, the expansion of school building allowed the authority to pursue secondary technical schools. Though not as common as grammar schools, the Buckinghamshire authority eventually developed large technical schools within each region of the county: one each in Slough, Aylesbury, Bletchley, Wycombe and Chesham. The

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<sup>16</sup> CFBS Schools Miscellaneous Box 1, *Education In Buckinghamshire, A Termly Review*, January 1963.

implications of this will be discussed more fully in later discussions about the variety of educational opportunities throughout the county.

As mentioned above, the greater variety of secondary school projects approved was also vitally important because it allowed for the expansion of rural school building. For all the re-construction after the war, a great majority of the investment was focused in urban centres: those that had been most affected by war damage or those experiencing population increases. The imperative to keep pace with needs in these centres removed the possibility of investment being made in rural areas. This placed a major strain on rural authorities like Buckinghamshire which, despite having rapidly expanding urban centres, had many rural areas with a relatively static population. To add to the magnitude of this problem, the re-organisation of all-age schools (which had been on the agenda since 1926) was contingent upon the provision of new school accommodation: where this was an impossibility, so too was the completion of re-organisation. As a result there emerged an educational divide in this period between areas of population growth and new building and areas of slow growth with whole cohorts of senior students still in attendance at all-age schools.

The expansion of the school building programme in 1954 to include rural schemes of work allowed Buckinghamshire to finally address accommodation deficiencies in all areas of the county, with the Development Sub-Committee seeking approval for eight new secondary modern schools in rural areas, mostly in the Aylesbury rural district. The gains of this change in building policy were also more quickly realised in that rural secondary schools were used by Buckinghamshire to experiment with more efficient building methods such as timber prefabrication. These reduced the demand on both time and resources behind school building. The first two rural schools to be built as part of this rural schools agenda were ready and open within twelve months of being started, just 18 months after being submitted for approval.

Without doubt, this period saw a distinct change in pace and scale when it came to educational investment. However, the problems and frustrations of the early post-war years continued to exert themselves in efforts to develop educational infrastructure. Throughout Eccles' incumbency, and despite the optimism and energy he lent to the role, school building remained vulnerable to cuts and halts, with economies being introduced and recurring problems of Local Authority incapacity holding back progress. For example, in October 1956, the Ministry was forced to defer the start dates of major projects in the 1957 schedule, cutting the funds available nationally for new schools drastically from £60,000,000 to £16,000,000.<sup>17</sup> Again in 1958, economies in school building brought Ministerial approval rates very low: items in the 1958/9 programme were deferred, to such an extent that of the projects requested by the Buckinghamshire authority, which amounted to 6,300 new secondary places, only 2,500 places were approved, with projects omitted which had long been considered urgent and high priority.<sup>18</sup>

Additionally, and irrespective of the momentum behind school building and investment, the period between 1953-4 saw the baby boom generation enter the county's secondary schools. Between the 1953/4 school year and the 1960/1 school year, the number of secondary age pupils attending Buckinghamshire schools had increased by 100%: from 15,146 to 30,423. Though anticipating an increase, the authority had not prepared for this scale of demographic change. In fact, the population numbers forecast for 1971 by development planners in 1951 were exceeded a decade early, by 1961.<sup>19</sup> The extent of this

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<sup>17</sup> CFBS: AR78/89 2 *Education Committee Minute Books*, October 1956.

<sup>18</sup> CFBS Bucks Advertiser, 'Shock Cuts - Technical School Out,' June 20th 1958.

<sup>19</sup> School age population from IMTA Annual Returns and 1951-1971 Census, County Reports for Buckinghamshire, Table 3, Data from [www.VisionofBritain.org.uk](http://www.VisionofBritain.org.uk).

growth added pressure for new school accommodation that outstripped even the improved pace of progress described above, and made existing deficiencies even more pronounced. In nearly every report of the Education Committee throughout the latter 1950s the problem of overcrowding was reported: in 1958, the year when secondary schools were worst hit by the baby boom, the Development Committee reported overcrowding at all schools in the Chesham, High Wycombe, Aylesbury and Winslow areas. Further, the effects of this were felt in new and old schools alike, and though secondary modern schools bore the brunt of the change, grammar schools were not immune. The LEA's decision to retain the normal proportion of grammar school entrants meant that some grammar schools were accepting nearly double the number of students in 1958 than they had in 1950, often without a proportional alteration to the capacity of their accommodation.<sup>20</sup> Secondary modern schools were often the worst affected and by the time new schools were opened they were often too small for the number of students in their catchment area. The Quarrendon School in Aylesbury, for example, opened with more students on its rolls than it was designed for, and operated for at least three years with 75% of its classes over the regulation size of 30.<sup>21</sup>

Paradoxically therefore, although the Education Committee was getting more building projects approved than ever before and whole rafts of new post-war schools were coming into use by the later 1950s, the story was still one of shortage, overcrowding and urgent need. Furthermore, by the latter 1950s the expectations surrounding secondary education had expanded with the county-wide appearance of new post war schools, as modern and well equipped institutions, made the deficiencies of older secondary accommodation seem even

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<sup>20</sup> CFBS Bucks Advertiser, '170 Win a Place at "Grammar,"' 27th June, 1958.

<sup>21</sup> CFBS Bucks Advertiser, 'Head Looks Forward to Cut in Size of Classes,' 27th October 1961.

more extreme. At the committee level, general discussion and appeals to the Ministry emphasised the urgency for new work and acknowledged the intolerable overcrowding and accommodation standards in some schools. At the popular level too, concerns of county representatives and officials communicated increasing public dissatisfaction and impatience with sub-standard provision.

Now that the early-origins of Buckinghamshire's tripartite model have been explored, with the context of constraint and frustration established, the next chapter seeks to understand how the authority interpreted and operated the 1944 Act and tripartite schooling.

## Chapter 4 • Buckinghamshire: Tripartism in operation

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In many ways, the tripartite system which evolved in Buckinghamshire resembled that of many other local authorities nationally: grammar schools and secondary modern schools formed the main avenues of secondary provision, with most grammar school provision being made in pre-war grammar/secondary schools. Selective school coverage fluctuated throughout the period but generally saw a greater proportion of students entering selective schools in the later 1950s than in the immediate post-war period. In the first years of tripartism approximately 19% of the secondary age group was in grammar schools, and despite accommodation shortages, into the latter 1950s the Education Committee reported that 20% of 11+ cohorts were admitted to grammar schools, and 30% if technical school entry was accounted for. By 1963 *The Termly Review* of the Education Committee estimated that 25% of the county's secondary age population were in grammar schools.<sup>1</sup> In terms of coverage therefore the authority was roughly comparable to national averages. Having said this, the Buckinghamshire authority's tripartite model included a number of unusual features.

The first of these features was that Buckinghamshire developed its technical secondary provision with a greater degree of conviction than in many other authorities. As was the case with other LEAs, Buckinghamshire's Development Plan envisaged the provision of a fully tripartite system of secondary education - and though grammar schools

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<sup>1</sup> CFBS Schools Miscellaneous Box 1, *Education In Buckinghamshire, A Termly Review*, January 1963.

and secondary modern schools formed the main components of secondary provision, technical school places were increasingly available and common as post-war building progressed. Buckinghamshire LEA endeavoured to foster a fully tripartite structure for secondary schooling and within the first decade of post-war development, between 350 and 450 students annually transferred into technical schools, with the age of entry being lowered to 11 in 1956. By 1962, however, the impetus behind maintaining full tripartism was waning: by this point only 6% of secondary age pupils were in technical schools (falling substantially short of the 25% outlined in the development report) and grammar schools had become the selective school of choice.

Administratively, the authority also differed from the majority of other local authorities in that it was divided into a series of Divisional Executives. These bodies operated as regional sub-committees with responsibility for the development and implementation of education policy in respective areas: for example, Ayelsbury had its own Divisional Executive which operated separately from those in North Buckingham or Amersham and Chesham. In the main, these Executives acted as the front line education authority, feeding reports and information up to the main Education Committee and in turn being responsible for delivering the Committee's policy. As a result, these bodies were responsible for the secondary modern schools within their area; the Divisional Education Officer was the main point of contact in the authority for these schools and the Divisional Executive made decisions over school appointments and resourcing (for example for the allocation of special allowances for teaching posts) within the bounds set by Education and Schools Sub-Committees. When it came to grammar schools however, the central Education and Schools Sub-Committee retained central control over administration on the basis that these schools' intakes often overlapped Divisional Executive Boundaries.

### *Selection: process and coverage*

Additionally, the authority deviated from the national picture when it came to its selection practices. In Buckinghamshire's discussions surrounding the method of selection, planners encouraged the practice of offering children multiple opportunities to sit for selective school entry. As in other authorities, the 11+ took the form of an IQ as well as an English and Arithmetic test: children sat a preliminary exam before being able to proceed to these main tests, and on this basis only about 50% of each cohort took the full 11+ tests.<sup>2</sup> However, the authority gave children the chance to sit the examination multiple times: students could sit the exam at 10, 11 and 13 years old, and the authority hoped that this would ensure that students were given a fair chance and that late developers were not excluded from the benefits of a grammar/technical school education. In some authorities, the offer of multiple exam sittings were offered in theory rather than in practice, but in Buckinghamshire, documents point to the selection exam being accessible: in 1949 the Schools Sub-Committee reported that 10% of its annual entry into grammar schools came from 13+ candidates and in 1951 the Schools Sub-Committee reported that 50% of students sitting the 11+ exam had already taken the exam in previous years.<sup>3</sup> Even where the pass rate of 10 year old entrants was low, the option to sit the exam, as a trial sitting, was seen throughout the authority as a clear step towards promoting fairness and accuracy in selection mechanisms.

Buckinghamshire also seems to have taken a different approach to the standard required for entry compared to other authorities, especially the neighbouring Oxfordshire

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<sup>2</sup> CFBS: BLEA No 65, *Reports of Sub-Committees to Education Committee*, October 1953.

<sup>3</sup> CFBS: BLEA No 63, *Reports of Sub-Committees to Education Committee*, June 1951.

authority, in that the selection process was seen as strictly selective, rather than competitive. One of the problematic elements of the grammar school distribution in Oxfordshire was that it was uneven, leading the authority to alter the 11+ ‘pass mark’ in different areas to control the number of entrants into grammar schools. In Buckinghamshire, there is little evidence of this practice and actually the opposite appears to have been the case. The committee remained firmly committed to an area-wide 11+ entry standard and the county was much more demand-centric in this regard. For example, as early as 1946 the Aylesbury Divisional Executive explained that it was not willing to extend Aylesbury Grammar School to a three-form entry school ‘since this would involve the admission to the school of pupils below the general educational standard for similar schools in other parts of the county.’<sup>4</sup> A few years later, the headteacher of Buckingham Royal Latin School reported to his governing body that the school had accepted far fewer pupils than they were able to explaining that ‘the county authority has no suitable extras in this area; the barrel has been scraped.’<sup>5</sup>

Even by 1958 the authority maintained this policy; by this time, population growth had inverted the situation described above, with grammar schools expected to expand provision to meet the number of students passing the exam. The *Bucks Herald* picked up on this trend in June 1958 reporting that 170 students in the Aylesbury Grammar School area had passed the 11+, an increase of over 70 students from the year before and nearly double the capacity available at the school for new cohorts. Mr North, then Divisional Executive Officer for Aylesbury, took this opportunity to assert the authority’s

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<sup>4</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR11/89 *Aylesbury Divisional Executive of the Education Committee*, July 1946.

<sup>5</sup> CFBS: AR 11/89 21 *Buckingham Royal Latin School, Governing Body Minutes*, October 1949.

commitment to a constant and region-wide pass-mark, stressing that the authority would provide selective places to ‘all those who are up to standard’ and the School Management Sub-Committee echoed this message at the county-wide level, stating that there would be no change in the standard required for admission despite a 30% increase in the size of the 11+ cohort.<sup>6</sup> This practice went some way towards ensuring that the provision of grammar/selective school places matched fluctuations on 11+ cohort numbers and also set the precedent of a baseline standard of ability (as measured by selection tests) to be maintained amongst grammar school entrants.

*Equality under the tripartite system:*

The previous section has focused on problems encountered in implementing policy, as experienced across all school sectors. However, much of the criticism levelled against the tripartite system (by its supporters and opponents alike) is that, in practice, it led to an unequal division of resources between the two dominant school segments. For example, economist John Vaizey estimated that grammar school children, on average, attracted 170% more money per year than their secondary modern counterparts.<sup>7</sup> The inequality of service inputs to the respective parts of tripartism represented a major obstacle in realising ‘parity of esteem,’ the very principle on which it was premised. A study of this tendency in the Buckinghamshire allows us to see how far national trends were present at the local level, and to understand the particularities of the LEA’s own history. Such an examination also allows for a better understanding of the policy and institutional pre-conditions for the

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<sup>6</sup> CFBS Bucks Advertiser, ‘170 Win a Place at “Grammar,”’ 27<sup>th</sup> June, 1958 and BLEA AR 78/89 4 *Education Committee Minute Books*, School Management Sub-Committee, October 1957.

<sup>7</sup> John Vaizey, *The Costs of Education*, p.17

second major reform impulse in post war secondary education - that of comprehensivisation. In what follows, an attempt has been made to answer three questions: 1) In absolute terms, how equal were the service inputs (in terms of plant, money and staff) into the secondary modern and grammar school sectors respectively? 2) How sufficient were these inputs in relation to the relative resourcing needs of each sector? And 3) what were the implications of this sectorial allocation of resources?

As will be explored in the section of this thesis which deals with Oxfordshire, the main indicators used to answer these questions have been determined by the content of the archives. For example, although a good deal of information is available on the lists of major capital works, inconsistencies in the reporting of minor works make it very difficult to piece together any useful picture. This is also the case with the authority's reporting of pupil teacher ratio's (hereafter PTR) and class sizes: whereas this is reported on as a school (e)quality issue in the Oxfordshire archives, Buckinghamshire records only occasionally allude to class sizes in specific schools and therefore there has been greater reliance on the information contained in individual school reports. The use of school level records brings with it some issues of comparability: for example an HMI report based on an inspection conducted in 1947 vs. 1958 will capture different trends and will undermine the direct comparability of the information recorded. Nevertheless, such comparison can provide a general picture and sense of dynamics within the authority and as such features in the work below.

#### *Service Inputs: Plant, Money and Staff.*

The majority of capital works projects for secondary school building in Buckinghamshire were secondary modern schools. Non-selective schools accounted for approximately 63% of secondary school major works applications between 1947 and 1962,

with grammar schools and technical schools accounting only for 27% and 6% respectively.<sup>8</sup> On the face of things, this allocation of capital investment seems equitable, with the proportion of projects devoted to respective sectors reflecting (roughly) the proportion of the secondary population in each school type. When the value of major works projects is considered, this impression is reinforced even further. Consistent information on individual project cost is not available in the Buckinghamshire documents, and even in the cases where information is available, average costs per project were dictated more by centrally set building regulations than local authority discretion. However, the type of work included in each project does indicate a smaller value per application for grammar schools than it does for other school types: 30% of grammar school projects were extension work as opposed to new school building; and in contrast, the project size for secondary modern and technical schools tended to be larger as they entailed new schools or substantial site development. On the surface, therefore, capital investment inputs into selective and non-selective secondary sectors seems to have been quite fair.<sup>9</sup> However, this overlooks a number of key considerations.

The first of these is that the extent of deficiency within each part of the tripartite system was drastically different: as mentioned above, the 1944 Education Committee inherited 12 fully functioning grammar schools and a similar number of county secondary schools which, combined, could accommodate 25% of the county's predicted secondary age population. Extending grammar school provision from the substantial school stock

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<sup>8</sup> Derived from compiled Major Works lists as reported in BLEA AR78/89 1-9 *Education Committee Minute Books* 1944-1963.

<sup>9</sup> In the context of educational debates, 'fair' and 'fairness' are essentially contested concepts, subject to competing values and interpretations. Throughout this thesis they are used in their most simplistic form, assuming that each child has equal worth and weight in resourcing decisions.

already in existence therefore represented less of a challenging feat than working from just 29 senior schools, a portion of which were due to be discontinued or rebranded as junior schools, to cater for 70% of the county's secondary age population. The secondary school place deficit in the secondary modern sector and the deficiencies of inherited accommodation far outweighed those in the selective sector, and on this basis there was far greater need for the building of new secondary modern schools. In this context, the dominance of secondary modern schools in major works schedules should be seen more as a product of the authority attending to the greater needs of secondary modern institutions than representing any preferential or unequal approach to the one sector over another. Indeed, accommodation deficiencies are a recurring feature of the concerns listed both by HMI inspectors and in governing body reports, and attest to the fact that secondary modern over-representation in major works was not an indication of adequate progress and development of the service.

Thus, secondary modern schools required a greater level of investment than any other sector to bring provision up to baseline standards; their presence on major works programmes was a reflection of service deficiencies, not of them holding relative advantage in post war planning. Additionally, however, and somewhat counter-intuitively, the priority accorded to secondary modern schools in major works schedules could also be a handicap for those schools in the short term because their long term designation removed the incentive to maintain or develop buildings in the interim. Evidence of this having happened in Buckinghamshire can be seen at both the school and authority level, the most obvious being at Whitehill Secondary Modern's post-inspection meeting between HMIs, governors and LEA representatives in 1956. Here, the inspectors reported on 'grossly inadequate teaching accommodation' highlighting that the state of the building made it

impossible to offer a really satisfactory secondary education to the large number of girls who attend there being no science laboratories or special subject rooms (i.e craft or science).<sup>10</sup>

Despite these rather desperate circumstances, the governors' response emphasized the perverse incentives to which they were responding as they explained that they had been 'reluctant to improve the house craft centres for fear of delaying the building of a new school.'<sup>11</sup>

This problem can also be detected in the fact that secondary modern schools' presence on the major works lists made them much more vulnerable to omissions, deferrals or delays in building programmes. As has been explored above, programme deferrals and delays made school building relatively unpredictable for local authorities. In 1952 all new starts were put on hold and even in 1956, with the promise of new resources, building was abruptly halted and then scaled back. The double pronged problem of the investment incentive being removed and programme delays often meant that sub-standard buildings or mixed-use buildings in non-selective education remained that way for far longer than anticipated. At the same time, the authority was investing in either grammar schools or other minor works, further creating the impression of inequality of service inputs.

In many ways, when it came to capital investment, local authorities were relatively powerless to control the scale and pace of post-war building. Resources were approved for specific projects with little scope for transfer to others and it was not the case that there were leftover funds; projects inevitably cost more than the value of the loan approved to

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<sup>10</sup> NA ED 109/ 9297: *HM Inspectorate Reports, Chesham: White Hill County Secondary School, 1956.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

pay for it. It was also a notable feature of spending/ investment in this period (and this point has been made above) that the authority was obliged to maintain several priorities at the same time: it could not proceed with investment in a linear fashion and it was obliged to develop the education service in a roughly equal manner. For example, it could not focus its energies on one school at a time or exclusively on one sector at a time, waiting for it to meet satisfactory standards before proceeding on to the next item on the list. It therefore came about repeatedly that the authority would be investing minor works funds in the refurbishment of buildings for a grammar school sixth form, or adding new laboratories for O Level work while there were still secondary modern school students without a secondary school or being housed in condemned buildings. It is difficult to characterise such a situation as a concerted discrimination or prioritising of one group of needs; it seems more accurate to describe this rationing process as a complicated and compound one, with the authority working to maximise what resources it did have, rationally choosing not to invest further in buildings scheduled for replacement and working to the imperative of evolving the whole service at the same time. This did entrench inequalities between schools but it is difficult to ascribe agency to either the LEA or the Ministry in this scenario – rather, it was an unfortunate reality in which scarce resources and unpredictable progress highlighted and exasperated existing service inequalities.

As has been highlighted in the previous section of this chapter, it would also be a mistake to think that grammar school buildings were fully fit for purpose in this period. Grammar school deficiencies were many and enduring, and in some ways more obvious because of the high expectations placed on these institutions. In a number of post-war HMI reports, grammar school buildings were referred to as offering only ‘third rate facilities.’ For example, the Buckinghamshire Royal Latin School, a prestigious selective school in

High Wycombe, suffered from poor science and sports facilities, which, though criticised as early as 1946 by inspectors, remained a problem until the early 1950s; while in 1953, problems at Aylesbury Grammar School were raised by HMIs who pointed to building deficiencies being partly...

accountable for the weaknesses that remain [with the school needing] some help immediately if it is to overcome the physical handicaps and shortages which limit the scope of the work.<sup>12</sup>

It was also the case in Aylesbury that the new selective Technical School was offered the old premises of the Tonmon Mosley Senior School, which had already been deemed insufficient for secondary education, but which offered the most expedient way of securing space for the new school. It is evident from this that selective schools in Buckinghamshire were not at the top of the capital works priority list, despite often managing with poor accommodation, but that, by virtue of their inherited capital stock, they were more able to adapt to the demands of post-war secondary education and were less vulnerable to delays and restrictions of building work.

The point has already been made that in the post-war context, need was ubiquitous. In all sectors there was a mammoth quantity of work to complete and local authorities found themselves responsible for the lion's share of the task, without a commensurate level of control over its pace and direction. The scale of need ensured that many problems had to be tackled simultaneously and secondary modern schools, as the group requiring greater resources and attention, were more vulnerable to national hold-ups. As a result, both

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<sup>12</sup> NA ED 109/ 8635: *HM Inspectorate Reports, Aylesbury*: Aylesbury Grammar School 1953; NA ED 109/ 8638: *HM Inspectorate Reports, Buckingham*: Buckingham Royal Latin School, 1956 and CFBS AR 11/89 21 *Buckingham Royal Latin Governing Body Minutes*, 1953.

selective and non-selective schools came to rely heavily on their pre-war stock. Parity of esteem never had a chance. Even where secondary modern schools were newly built and replaced old dilapidated buildings, the delay in work ensured that these fledgling secondary institutions, new in conception and purpose, were born into deprivation and stayed there for at least ten years until their new accommodation was ready. Simply on a symbolic front, this did a great deal of damage to the reputation and image of these school types and undermined any rhetoric attempting to brand secondary modern schools as an equal partner to grammar schools.

*Recurrent expenditure:*

Throughout the tripartite era in Buckinghamshire, the authority conformed to the national picture and allocated a greater share of resources to selective schools than it did to non-selective schools. This was particularly the case in the context of recurrent expenditure, where secondary modern schools were consistently under-resourced in comparison to their grammar school counterparts. The rationale behind rationing decisions in the Buckinghamshire authority was not as explicit as in the Oxfordshire authority where the needs of grammar school students, especially in the upper school, were given outright precedence. Buckinghamshire policy makers were not as articulate or explicit on this front. No rationale or justification is provided alongside their allocation statements, but the balance of resources allocated between selective and non-selective schools shows an implicit assumption that grammar schools should attract the greater share.

This latter dynamic is most clearly represented in the decisions surrounding the allocation of the county's Requisition Allowances. This allowance was intended to be the main stream of funding from the local authority for school equipment, books and running expenses and was readjusted three times throughout the period under review; they are

presented in their successive forms below. These Requisition Allowances were so designed that the school size or unit count determined the capacity of respective schools to attract resources. The basis on which these allowances were allocated is laid out in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Requisition Allowances determining supplies allocation to secondary schools 1951-1959

<i>School Type</i>	<i>From 1951</i>	<i>From 1956</i>	<i>From 1959</i>
<i>Secondary Modern</i>	30/- per pupil	24/- per unit	38/- per unit
<i>Re-organised senior</i>	30/- per pupil	30/- per pupil	38/- per unit
<i>Grammar</i>	30/- per unit*	22/- per unit	30/- per unit
<i>Technical</i>	30/- per unit*	22/- per unit	26/- per unit

Source: Reports to the Education Committee October 1951, 1956 and 1959<sup>13</sup>

The use of units in these allocations as opposed to raw pupil numbers highlights the practice of unit sizing which was applied widely in educational resourcing. Unit sizing for schools was a practice whereby students of different ages attracted greater or fewer units, it being most common for older students to count for more units. Establishing the unit allocation of a school was a first step in almost all resourcing decisions during this period throughout England and Wales (particularly teacher allocation and salaries, which will be addressed below). The age weighting of resource allocation in this fashion ensured that selective schools, which by design and purpose had older students on their rolls, nearly always had a greater capacity to attract resources. Secondary modern schools were largely conceived of as providing only a four-year course and its students were expected to leave at 15 years of age to enter the labour force. That age-weighting was built into resourcing

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\* Assessed on the basis of two thirds of the unit total of the school.

formula when the age composition of different school types was so inevitably skewed ensured that, structurally, selective schools were set up to be better resourced institutions.

This is clearly illustrated by the use of unit sizing in the Buckinghamshire authority. The unit values used in the context of Requisition Allowances are shown in Figure 9, with a difference between the lower and upper school age groups to the extent that every child above 17, so any child in a grammar school staying on to pursue A Level study or further O Level exams, was worth ten times any child in the lower school (11-12 years old). In turn, and as is clear in Figure 10 below, the age composition in the sample of secondary modern schools was such that a minimum of 90% of the school population were under 15 years, contrasting markedly with the grammar school sample where nearly 30% of school populations were over 15.

Figure 9: Buckinghamshire units per pupil as used in Requisition Allowance calculations 1951-1959

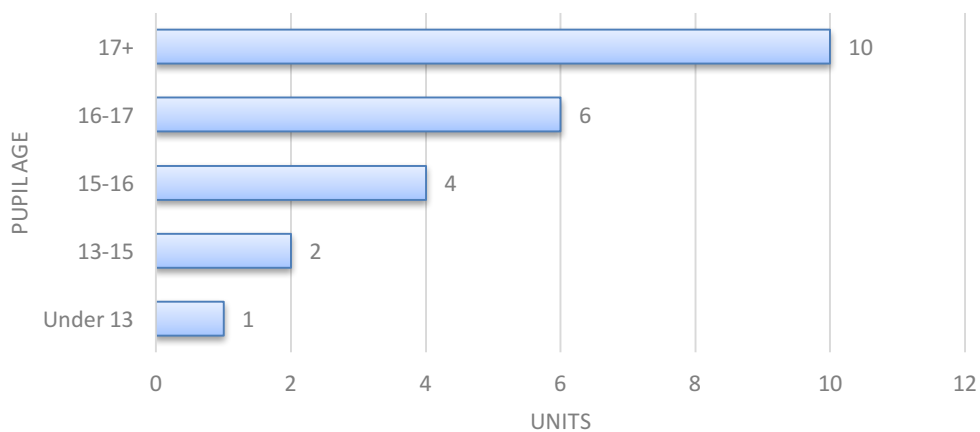
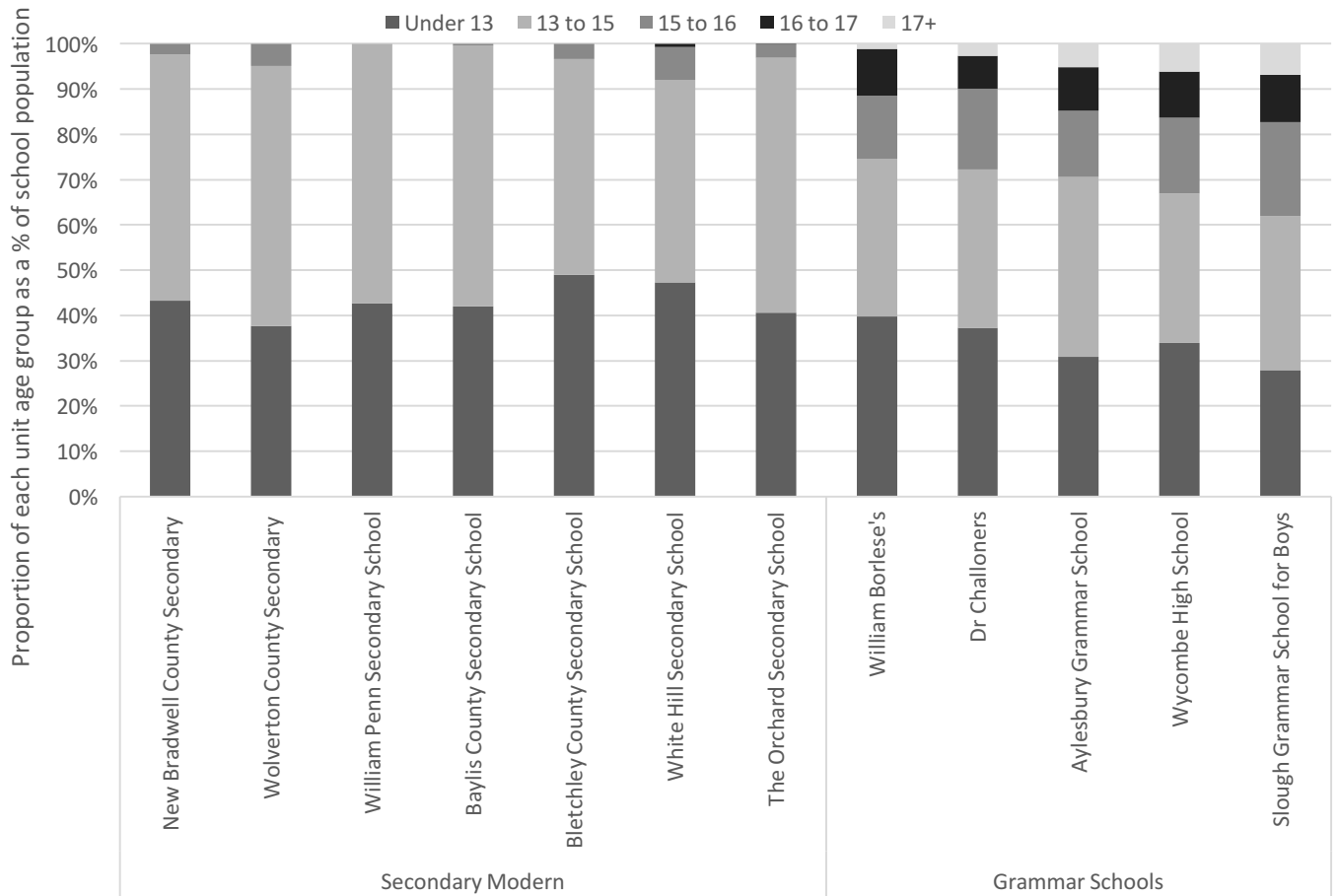


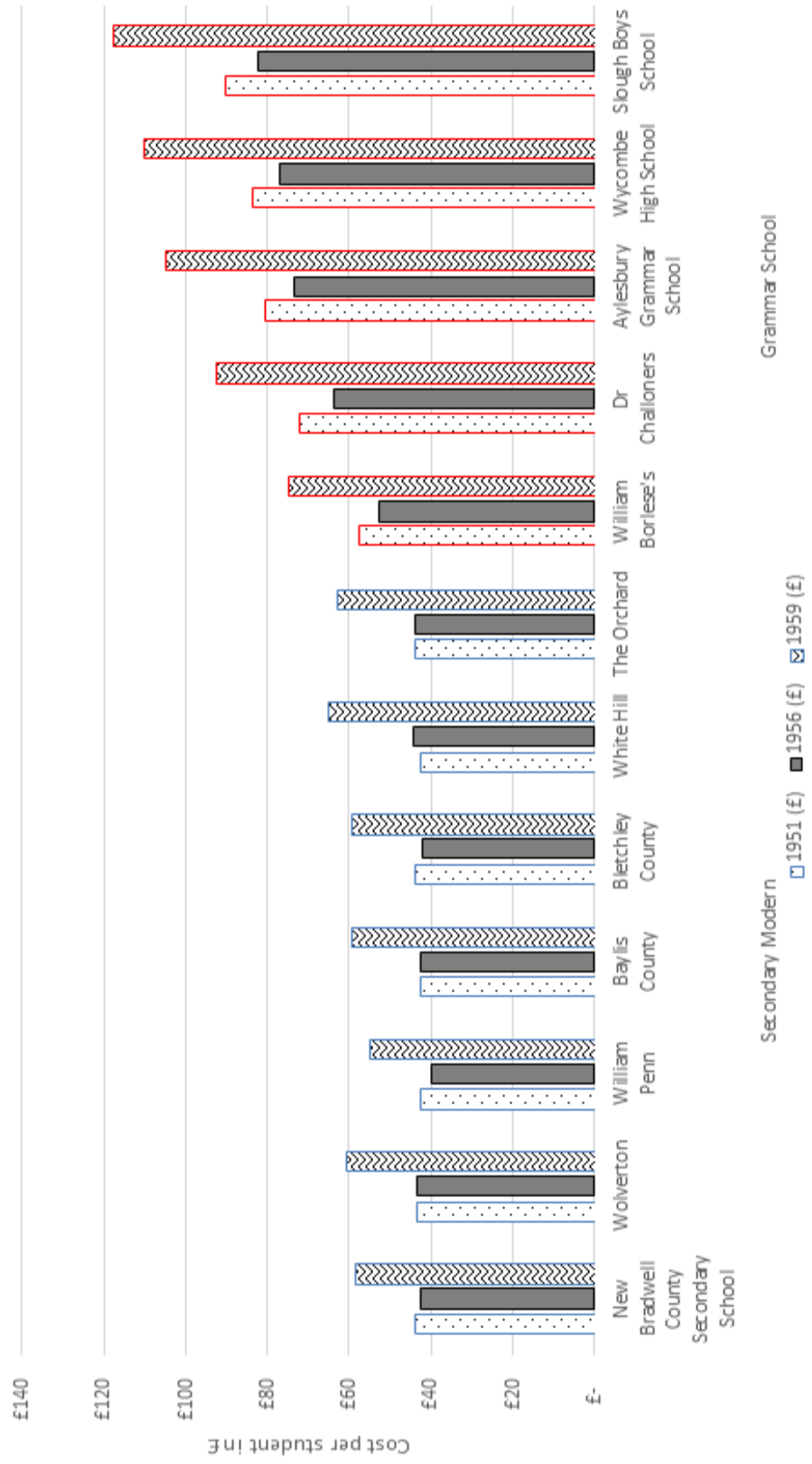
Figure 10: Distribution of age groups in secondary school sample



Source: Age composition based on compiled HMI Reports for respective schools.

The combined effect of the age-weighted formula and the age-group composition of respective schools is presented in Figure 11, which shows a clear division between secondary modern schools to the left hand side of the chart, and the grammar schools to the right. In this sample, William Borlase's Grammar School stands as an exception in that the school had a slightly lower than sample average of 16-17 year olds and not enough 17+ year olds, as was the case at Dr Challoner's Grammar School, to earn 10-unit allocations.

Figure 11: Annual funding per student according to 1951, 1956 and 1959 Requisition Allowances, presented as cost per place (CPP) in 2015 prices



### *Staff resourcing*

Alongside recurrent and capital expenditure, staffing and the provision of teachers represented the most expensive item in education budgets, often accounting for 60-70% of a school's and LEA's recurrent expenditure. Inequality in the allocation of this 'input' between different school types therefore represented a significant determinant in the capacity of respective school types to meet educational, political or social expectations and expand the educational opportunities they had to offer.

Before beginning a comparative analysis of the allocation of staffing resources to different school types, it is worth outlining the post-war context with regards to the teaching profession and teacher supply. Teacher supply was a major area of concern after the war. From the earliest stages of implementing the 1944 Education Act, the shortage of teachers was recognised both as an immediate threat and a long-term challenge to the delivery of secondary education to all. To manage this national shortage, the Ministry of Education operated a quota system, effectively capping the number of teachers any Local Authority could have in its service. In addition to this, the first years of the post-war period saw an Emergency Training Scheme in operation, fast tracking teacher training and deployment. Following this both the Ministry and LEAs launched a variety of campaigns to attract married women who had left the profession back to teaching. Regardless of these efforts, the supply of teachers remained a major problem, especially when combined with such a rapidly increasing child population and expansion of the education service.

Various measures have been developed to capture the allocation of teaching resources within different local authorities. In many instances, the Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) is seen as a good measure of how comfortably a school is staffed and in turn how well teachers are able to perform: i.e are teachers working with classes of 20 or 40?

Teacher numbers in Buckinghamshire secondary modern schools throughout the 1950s were more thinly stretched than their grammar school counterparts: during this decade the average PTR in grammar schools (as available in a series of HMI reports) stood at 1:18 compared to a ratio in secondary modern schools of 1 teacher to every 25 children (1:24.8).<sup>14</sup> There is also evidence to suggest that overcrowding, a persistent feature of the baby boom years, was more prevalent in secondary modern schools than selective ones, which, as already discussed, were more burdened with inadequate accommodation and building delays.

There have also been efforts to capture difference in the respective school types' 'teacher quality,' in the main by looking at the qualification level of school's staff. This measure is accompanied by the problem of assuming that graduate teachers would be 'higher quality' than non-graduates, even when unqualified, or for that matter, that graduate teachers were suited to all the subjects of a secondary school curriculum. This latter problem poses a particular issue in that secondary modern schools were often more heavily committed to practical subjects in which a university education was rare and often considered unnecessary. To see consistent measures on these indicators as a sign of parity between different school types therefore overlooks some fundamental differences between these institutions and does not fully capture the degree of equality between them.

Records for Buckinghamshire indicate as much: there is clear evidence that schools were highly differentiated when it came to the qualification level (graduate status) of its

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<sup>14</sup> Based on the sample of schools in HMI Reports.

staff. In grammar schools the percentage of graduates per school ranged widely between 40% and 90%, with secondary modern schools showing similar variance, many schools having no graduate staff, others as many as 30%.<sup>15</sup> But the ‘quality’ of staff members also appears to have been quite distinct from this measure and in the majority of school records, it is difficult to detect ‘graduate status’ as being a determinant of school capacity or quality. For example, William Penn Secondary Modern School could claim a higher number of graduates on its staff than most other non-selective schools and yet in their full inspection report HMIs emphasised that the school

contains an unusually high proportion of weak teachers... [with] no doubt that the educational standards of the school has been seriously lowered by this dilution of strength.<sup>16</sup>

Conversely, schools with lower than average graduates on staff were reported on much more positively: Mill End School for Boys, with no graduate staff members, was said to have ‘teaching power above average;’ and Aylesbury Grammar School, where only 50% of staff were graduates, compared to a grammar school average of 75%, was praised for the quality of staff’s work:

relations between the Staff and the pupils appear to be excellent; they constitute a firm basis for making the highest intellectual demands on the real abilities of the pupils.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, examining the PTR and graduate status of school staff has only limited utility. They can be seen as only superficial indicators that obscure a more deeply engrained structural inequality between school types in the staffing context. This inequality

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<sup>15</sup> Based on the sample of schools in HMI Reports.

<sup>16</sup> NA ED 109/ 8646: *HM Inspectorate Reports, Slough*: William Penn County Secondary School, 1952.

<sup>17</sup> NA ED 109/ 8642: *HM Inspectorate Reports, High Wycombe*, Mill End County Secondary School for Girls, 1953 and NA ED 109/ 8635: *HM Inspectorate Reports, Aylesbury*: Aylesbury Grammar School 1953.

was rooted in the salary structures and progression routes in the teaching profession as they evolved after 1948. These came to systematically endow selective schools with a greater capacity to attract and retain teaching staff than non-selective schools.

Following the 1944 Education Act, the Burnham Committee (the body responsible for teacher salary negotiation) was charged with the task of bringing together a unified salary structure fit for a new ‘parity based’ education system. This was immediately problematic in a profession that had hitherto been characterized by professional hierarchy and differentiation, especially between those teachers in elementary or primary schools on the one hand and fee-paying grammar or secondary schools on the other. One of the most important outputs of this committee in this regard was the 1948 Burnham Report which succeeded in encouraging greater professional equality by establishing a basic salary scale for all suitably qualified school teachers. However, two factors increased the possibility that there would be discrimination between selective and non-selective schools in the longer term.

The first was that teachers were in extremely short supply, and in an attempt to attract high calibre individuals and/or graduates to the profession, Burnham arrangements increasingly incorporated bonuses or incentives which could draw such individuals into schools. These incentives included the ‘Graduate Addition,’ an additional payment which started at £30 in 1948 but had risen to £100 by 1961, and a ‘Good Honours Payment,’ an addition which increased from £15 to £100 over the same period.<sup>18</sup> In and of themselves,

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<sup>18</sup> In 2013 prices these approximately equate to £990 for 1948 Allowance, £2000 for the 1961 graduate addition. For the good honours payment increase between 1948 and 1961, 2013 prices = £500 to £2000. Conversion using Historical Inflation and Price Conversion: [www.Safalra.com](http://www.Safalra.com)

these additions appeared logical efforts to make entry into teaching a competitive prospect. However, due to the inherited staffing situation of different school types, this reward structure ensured that grammar school staff were visibly better placed to benefit from the evolving remuneration scheme. While in terms of resource ‘inputs’ into schools, the awarding of these allowances had little effect on the resources available within a school (the allowance went directly to teachers), what these incentives acted to do early on was to cement the unequal reputation and image of respective schools while the tripartite system was still in its formative years, thus restricting the longer-term prospect of establishing equality between different school types.

The second and more significant issue arising out of the Burnham Settlements was the committee’s decision to use school unit counts to determine the allocation of staff between schools, the starting salary scales and the distribution of special responsibility posts.<sup>19</sup> Between 1948 and 1956, and as with the Requisition Allowanced described above, the apportionment of units to children of different ages ensured that grammar schools, with a higher portion of children over the age of 15, could accumulate a higher unit count than secondary moderns. In the case of staffing arrangements, the unit scale used showed even greater bias towards older pupils: each pupil under 15 counted only for 1 unit, 15-16 year olds counted for 4, 16-17 year olds were 7 and 17+ counted for 10 units.<sup>20</sup> The inherent

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<sup>19</sup> For more on this, see W. F. Dennison, ‘Points, Unit-Totals, Age-Weightings and Promoted Posts--Their Effects on the Development of the English Schooling System.’, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, xxviii (1980).

<sup>20</sup> P. H. J. H. Gosden, *The Evolution of a Profession: A Study of the Contribution of Teachers’ Associations to the Development of School Teaching as a Professional Occupation* (Oxford, 1972). And HMSO, *Report of the Burnham Committee Representative of Local Education Authorities and Associations of Teachers on Scales of Salaries* (London, 1948).

inequality of this approach is clear and highlighted particularly by comparing the unit earning capacity of different school types in Buckinghamshire: if we compare Bletchley County Secondary Modern school for example, with Wycombe High (grammar) School, each had the same school population of 571, but where Bletchley's unit score was 628, Wycombe's unit score was 1522, so in effect the selective school had 250% of the unit earning power of the secondary modern by virtue of having older cohorts.<sup>21</sup> In 1956, the Burnham Committee altered the unit allocations and doubled the earning capacity of students between 13-15 from one to two units. Though this almost doubled the capacity of secondary modern schools to increase their unit total, the relative difference between these schools and selective ones (who also benefited from the alteration) remained.

This unit allocation determined what scale a teacher's salary would start on, and how much headteachers could be paid, and as such granted a very firm advantage to selective schools when it came to staffing inputs. The point of particular interest here though, is how these unit allocations came to determine how many posts of special responsibility posts (SPR), or 'graded posts' as they became known, could exist in schools. SPR and graded posts took the form of an additional allowance to basic salaries in recognition of a staff member's additional responsibility and they came to represent the main form of professional progression within a school. The terms of the Burnham Reports provided guidance on the number of posts according to the unit size of schools, but often the authority, or in Buckinghamshire's case the Divisional Executives, were given some

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<sup>21</sup> Based on school roll composition in NA ED 109/ 8642: *HM Inspectorate Reports, High Wycombe, Wycombe High School, 1955* and NA ED 109/ 8637: *HM Inspectorate Reports, Bletchley, Bletchley County Secondary School, 1953*.

degree of discretion in deciding the range in value of these posts. On this basis in 1951, the Buckinghamshire Education Committee reported that in secondary modern schools, the value of a special allowance post should not exceed ‘half way between the minimum and the mean of the minimum and maximum allowances’ where in grammar and technical schools the total ‘shall not exceed the mean of the minimum and maximum allowance.’<sup>22</sup> Couched in this language, the inequality in such an allocation was not explicit: but the actual monetary difference was significant. Based on this rule, where in secondary modern schools, special responsibility posts could attract a maximum of approximately £77 a year. selective school posts could offer up to £115 more.

The inequality in the capacity of respective school types to attract staff was further compounded by a combination of Burnham Report changes and Buckinghamshire’s discretionary decisions. In the June of 1955, the School Management Sub Committee deemed all teaching work conducted above O Level to be specialised work and in turn, eligible for extra staff allowances ranging from £75-£350.<sup>23</sup> With the change-over from SPRs to Graded Posts and Heads of Department (HOD) selective schools continued to benefit more than non-selective ones. In Buckinghamshire, HOD posts became mandatory in all schools doing advanced work and, as a result, were granted to all grammar schools in 1957, but only to the three largest secondary modern schools, with the value of such posts being contingent on school unit size.<sup>24</sup> By 1960, the relative inequality between selective and non-selective schools was made clear in a report to the Buckinghamshire Education

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<sup>22</sup> CFBS: BLEA No. 62, *Reports of Sub-Committees to Education Committee*, January 1961.

<sup>23</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR 78/89 2, *Education Committee Minutes*, June 1955.

<sup>24</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR 78/89 3, *Education Committee Minutes*, Report of the School Management Sub-Committee, April, 1957.

Committee which explained that all secondary modern schools could have only 44 posts between them, while the far smaller number of selective schools contained 122.<sup>25</sup> These posts were increased to 77 and 149 respectively following this meeting, but even this left a considerable gulf between the number and value of promotion posts available in non-selective schools and those available in selective ones.

As a result, from the very early stages of tripartite schooling in this authority, grammar schools evolved as more attractive employers. The Burnham salary structure and the use of LEA discretionary powers rewarded advanced work ahead of the work pursued within secondary modern schools and this intrinsically influenced the status and value of the work done in those institutions and of the teachers doing it. This undermined the capacity of respective school types to ever be regarded as ‘different but equal,’ and, more importantly, hampered the capacity of secondary modern schools to create and maintain effective educational programmes. This issue will be discussed in the following chapter.

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<sup>25</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR 78/89 8, *Education Committee Minutes*, Report of the School Management Sub-Committee, June 1960.

## Chapter 5 · School quality and educational opportunities

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Based on the work presented thus far, it is clear that there were inequalities and entrenched problems associated with the evolution of secondary education in Buckinghamshire. For all that the authority benefited from relatively good pre-endowments, and for all that it was relatively successful in major works applications, it was severely limited in evolving its ideal model of tripartite education by building delays, teacher shortage and the capacity of its own internal agencies. As has been explored, these resource inputs established the operating conditions for schools and provided the parameters within which they functioned. Moving away from the county level and policy-planning context, attention now turns to analysing how effective schools were and how the restraints explored in the previous chapter made themselves felt in the context of providing educational opportunities to students between 1945 and 1965.

### *Secondary modern schools: county quality and opportunity*

We turn first to the quality of secondary modern schools in Buckinghamshire, which educated the 75% of students who were not successful in the 11+ examination. Assessing this group of schools is more challenging task than evaluating their grammar or technical school counterparts because the expectations that surrounded them were far more vague and varied. The 1943 Norwood Report, a document integral to the formulation of tripartite secondary education, offered little firm prescription for what these schools should be doing, and as such left considerable scope for regional and county-to-county variety:

On the Modern School would fall the task of providing a general education for the majority of the boys and girls in the country up to the age fixed for the limit of compulsory school attendance... its curriculum... in our view... would fulfil its role in the secondary education of the country if it provided curricula closely related to the immediate interests and environment of its pupils and adopted a method of approach which was practical and concrete... The aim would be to offer a general grounding and to awaken interest in many aspects of life and citizenship before the pupil passed on to the specialised occupations which modern conditions demand with increasing insistence, and not to provide any special training for particular occupations.<sup>1</sup>

As can be seen above, there was the expectation that these schools should offer a general education and as far as possible, facilitate the movement of students into the labour force. Generally, these aims translated into a secondary modern course of four years, with a general curriculum of literacy, maths and humanities, with handicraft, housecraft and commercial studies featuring alongside academic subjects. Most students were expected to leave school once they turned 15. Where, in the case of selective schools, later leaving, examination results and further education entry form the basis for assessment, to judge secondary modern schools entirely on these grounds would be to weigh them according to measures which were not necessarily part of their objectives.

Instead, this chapter takes two approaches. The first of which is to examining the extent to which Buckinghamshire secondary schools, as a whole, facilitated the upward movement of pupils who were academically able and who would benefit from selective education or some form of internal or external examination. Secondly, as with the grammar school sample, HMI reports of individual schools have been used to add depth to this county level survey and to understand the variation in the quality of education offered by respective

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<sup>1</sup> Board of Education, *Curriculum and Examinations in Secondary Schools*: (London, 1943). p.12.

schools. It is in this latter portion especially that the impact of the resource constraints discussed previously will be explored.

#### Promotion of opportunities via transfer at 13

As mentioned previously, the Buckinghamshire LEA was somewhat unusual in that it offered a second chance to secondary pupils to sit the selection examination: at 13, pupils were able to sit for entry into secondary technical schools and transfer to grammar schools. This possibility for later transfer was regarded by the authority as offering a second (or third if they had also sat at 10+) chance to pupils, operating as a mechanism through which policy makers could ensure greater fairness and accuracy in the selection process. As early as 1949 the Education Committee positioned this process as its answer to concerns over opportunities for secondary modern pupils and reasserted that those who were able to benefit from a selective education were provided with ample scope to secure a school place.<sup>2</sup> The Director of Education commented that the authority examined secondary modern children at 13+ to ensure their most appropriate placement, saying

that the whole of the authority's admission to secondary technical schools is made at this age and that nearly 10% of their admission to secondary grammar schools.<sup>3</sup>

In terms of student numbers, this arrangement meant that on average, 23% of the cohort sitting the 13+ exam subsequently moved across to technical schools at 13.<sup>4</sup> The figures for respective years are shown in Table 3 below, and though there was fluctuation

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<sup>2</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR 78/89 1, *Education Committee Minutes*, Response to Circular 192, June 1949.

<sup>3</sup> CFBS: BLEA No 61 *Reports of Sub-Committees to Education Committee*, June 1949.

<sup>4</sup> Derived from Selection Examination Sub-committee Reports, in CFBS: BLEA No 58-66 *Reports of Sub-Committees to Education Committee* and CFBS: BLEA AR 78/89 2-6, *Education Committee Minutes* 1946 to 1960.

from year to year, there was a clear pattern of suitable students being re-allocated. These reports to the Education Committee also point to a small but steady flow of pupils from secondary moderns moving across to grammar schools at 13 years old. Far fewer students were put forward for the grammar school late entrance exam (under 250 pupils a year) and so opportunities in this context were evidently more subject to prior screening or selection, i.e at the recommendation of teachers, or only when parents and pupils actively pursued this option. Having said this, 34% of those who were examined on this basis between 1946-53 were selected, and between 1945 and 1957 this group of late entrants constituted 8% of the annual grammar school entry for the county.<sup>5</sup> Though small, these figures support the claim that the county was offering significant scope for later transfer and that secondary modern schools, in general, were facilitating the movement of pupils to places where it was felt that their educational needs would be best met.

Table 3: Transfer of Buckinghamshire students at 13+, 1945-1959

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<i>Year</i>	<i>No sitting Technical school exam</i>	<i>% of students proceeding to technical schools</i>	<i>No sitting grammar School late entry</i>	<i>% of students proceeding to grammar schools</i>	<i>Late entry as a % of annual grammar school entry</i>
1945	-	-	-	-	4%
1946	1200	26%	97	33%	5%
1947	1343	28%	112	39%	7%
1948	1600	23%	225	-	-
1949	1648	22%	221	17%	6%
1950	1665	24%	224	40%	12%
1953	1883	21%	193	39%	9%
1954	1922	27%	-	-	9%
1955	2547	33%	-	-	10%
1956	2769	21%	-	-	-
1957	3108	20%	-	-	7%
1958	3015	16%	-	-	-
1959	3320	13%	-	-	-

Source: Where available, figures compiled based on annual report of Selection Examination Sub-Committee in School Management Sub-Committee Minutes.

The capacity of a secondary modern school to support this 13+ transfer seems to have been regarded by staff, inspectors and often parents as an indicator of success and treated as evidence that secondary modern schools were successfully educating students in their first few years of secondary schooling. For the students too, this transfer mechanism can be seen as directly promoting their educational opportunities. This trend however also came with more negative implications for those schools where it was particularly prevalent. A prime example of this, and the most extreme of those seen in the Buckinghamshire local authority, was Hatters Lane Secondary School for Boys in 1951. This school, inspectors noted, had been remarkably and consistently successful in helping students proceed to technical and grammar schools: ‘the results’ they commented ‘are all the more creditable when the stage is reached (as in 1951) where virtually the whole of Form 2A leaves the school.’<sup>6</sup> Though praiseworthy, HMIs quickly identified the inevitable consequence of this success: that the

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<sup>6</sup> NA ED 109/ 8642: *HM Inspectorate Reports*, High Wycombe: Hatters Lane County Secondary School for Boys, 1952. New Bradwell County Secondary also had a high transfer rate: 30% of year transfer at 13+.

school saw an exodus of academically able students and was ‘left with pupils who are almost entirely of low academic ability.’<sup>7</sup> Thus a paradox emerged at some secondary modern schools. On the one hand, they were regarded as very effective at securing the transition of students from non-selective to selective schools; but on the other, and as a result, they were cream-skimmed, left with a residualized cohort with disproportionately low levels of achievement and of aspiration at the senior end of the school. As the 1950s progressed and secondary modern schools came to rely on internal leaving certificates or later C.S.E. and G.C.E. performance to mark their capabilities, the transfer mechanism hamstrung how far schools like Hatters Lane could cultivate educational and social prestige.

#### Promoting opportunities via county examinations and Alternative Courses

In terms of the opportunity structures available to students who did not transfer out of secondary modern schools, the picture in Buckinghamshire was highly varied. The curriculum and examinations available to students differed considerably from school to school and one of the clearest features emerging from county level documents is the lack of any central co-ordination of county schemes or certificates.

As will be explored in subsequent chapters, secondary modern schools in Oxfordshire were seen as possessing a defined role and, with the encouragement of the Director of Education and the Chairman of the Education Committee particularly, the sector as a whole was regarded as innovative and often dynamic. A key example was the County Tests of Achievement which the majority of schools co-opted; another, the evolution of Alternative

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

Courses to link vocational interests with academic ones throughout the latter two years of secondary schooling. In Oxfordshire LEA the introduction of these courses was seen to promote a focus on achievement and development amongst non-selective pupils and emphasized the education of the whole student, with a stress on physical pursuits and character development as well as academic study. In the Buckinghamshire documents, such energy surrounding the idea and role of the secondary modern school is simply not present. Clear examples of individually successful secondary modern schools exist and these will be explored presently, but advocacy at the county level for initiatives in non-selective education was certainly not as prominent. Throughout the 1950s, in the reports of the Education Committee and its sub-committees, no mention is made of county schemes for internal examination in secondary modern schools, and where the prospect of Alternative Courses is mentioned, it is in the context of them being prevented by building constraints. If county level sponsorship of tailored or Alternative Courses in secondary modern schools can be treated as an indication that they offered a clearly conceived of educational programme for non-selective students, and especially for those who would not be inclined or able to pursue O Levels, it would seem that the Buckinghamshire local authority and its secondary modern schools performed more poorly than their neighbouring LEA.

#### Promoting opportunities: Extended courses and external examination

Despite the absence of any Alternative Courses or Certificates at county level, however, many Buckinghamshire secondary modern schools developed Extended Courses of their own, and at county level there was support for helping secondary modern children to take external, academic courses when they were deemed capable of doing so. There is evidence that the question of secondary modern uptake of G.C.E. O Level was on the committee's and schools' agenda very early in this period. Mention is made in some of the early HMI reports of Hatters Lane and The Orchard Secondary Modern School running small

groups for G.C.E. study, and in 1955 the Education Committee reported that six modern schools had entered a total of 59 candidates, with 4 and 20 respectively entering the year before.<sup>8</sup> From this point on, secondary modern schools further increased the number of entries and examination options they could run, especially the newer secondary modern schools which were better equipped. By 1960, 15 of the county's 35 non-selective schools were offering students for O Level exams: 259 students in total.<sup>9</sup> The most robust set of information on this matter comes from the Aylesbury Divisional Executive in September 1961, which recounted the then current state of extended course offerings in its secondary modern schools. The summary report of the extended courses on offer in these schools is presented below and it is clear here that all five secondary moderns in Aylesbury had either started or were starting to operate G.C.E. O Level streams, with one even offering A Level options.<sup>10</sup> What is also evident in this list of extended courses is that this group of secondary schools independently offered a variety of examination routes to pupils, with access to a range of academic and vocational qualifications: many of these were not for external examination but encouraged vocationally-oriented schemes of extended study.

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<sup>8</sup> NA ED 109/ 8642: *HM Inspectorate Reports, High Wycombe*: Hatters Lane County Secondary School for Boys, 1952; NA ED 109/ 8646: *HM Inspectorate Reports, Slough*: The Orchard County Secondary School, 1955 and CFBS: BLEA AR 78/89 2, *Education Committee Minutes*, October 1955.

<sup>9</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR 78/89 8, *Education Committee Minutes*, June 1961.

<sup>10</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR11/89 7 *Aylesbury Divisional Executive of the Education Committee*, September 1961.

Table 4: Extended course provision in Aylesbury secondary modern schools, 1961.

School	Extended Courses
The Grange School:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Courses leading to extended external exams: G.C.E. and RSA</li> <li>2) School Leaving Certificate taken in V year</li> <li>3) Some pupils may possibly take A Level subjects: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. English, Maths and Geography are common in all courses, but additional courses can be taken to give a bias towards engineering, commerce, rural science, nursing or general professional courses: French, German, History and Art are also available.</li> </ol> </li> <li>4) Other Courses: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. For internal school leaving certificate for V year, but 'below the standard of CSE or RSA exams...this certificate is being considered as an entry requirement for colleges of FE.</li> <li>b. General Course for pupils who want to remain at school for V year without any particular exam.</li> </ol> </li> </ol>
The Quarrendon School:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Courses leading to externals: i.e College of Preceptors and Union of Education institution leaving examinations at 16+.</li> <li>2) From Sept 1962, it is proposed to enter pupils for the G.C.E. O level, in not less than 5 subjects.</li> <li>3) Other courses: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Technical courses for boys including maths, technical drawing, woodwork and metalwork and for girls, maths, biology, physics, drawing and domestic science.</li> <li>b. Courses with an emphasis on practical subjects inc art and craft, metal work and housecraft.</li> <li>c. Commercial course for girls- with the possibility of an internal exam</li> </ol> </li> </ol>
John Colet School:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) A course of G.C.E. O level - pupils can choose from 14 different subjects</li> <li>2) Some boys preparing for service apprenticeship exams.</li> <li>3) Extended general course but with no exam including rural studies and forestry.</li> </ol>
Linslade:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Pupils entered for the college of preceptors exams at 15+ and 16+ in an average of 6 subjects each</li> <li>2) By 1963 some pupils will be taking G.C.E. O level</li> <li>3) Small number staying on the take general courses</li> </ol>
Wing Secondary Modern:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Small number will be attempting G.C.E. courses with English, Science and Maths as compulsory subjects.</li> <li>2) Other subjects- include rural subjects to meet the needs of the local area.</li> </ol>

Source: From Aylesbury Divisional Executive Report, September 1961.

From this county and divisional level information, it appears that for students who attended Buckinghamshire secondary modern schools there was scope to proceed with their studies to more advanced levels, and that schools were internally offering some curriculum pathways that could be linked to vocational interests and non-academic pursuits. Buckinghamshire schools tried to ensure that, able secondary modern students could access the same qualifications, and therefore choices, as their grammar school counterparts. Vocational and other courses were also valued, especially for their role in stimulating a desire amongst students to remain at school for the full four years, and to gain the leaving certificates which were a pre-requisite for Further Education and day colleges.

As a set of opportunity structures therefore, it is clear that over this period many Buckinghamshire secondary modern schools were attempting to expand their capacity to provide educational options to their pupils. In terms of the number of students involved in this, they had some success. In the first half of the 1950s, county level reports point to a low rate of staying on beyond 15 years old in Buckinghamshire's non-selective schools, with the uptake of full time further education being only about 6% approximately of leaving cohorts.<sup>11</sup> However, by 1958, and as represented in the chart below, the Youth Employment Sub-Committee highlighted the year on year increase in those students continuing their education past the age of 15. The majority of these students went on to the Colleges of Further Education that were established throughout the county, often in conjunction with the secondary technical schools. Here, there were options to pursue one-year courses in a wide range of subjects, from commerce, to catering, technical studies and engineering and which

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<sup>11</sup> Pie chart from YES termly reports to education and graph from 1959 annual report.

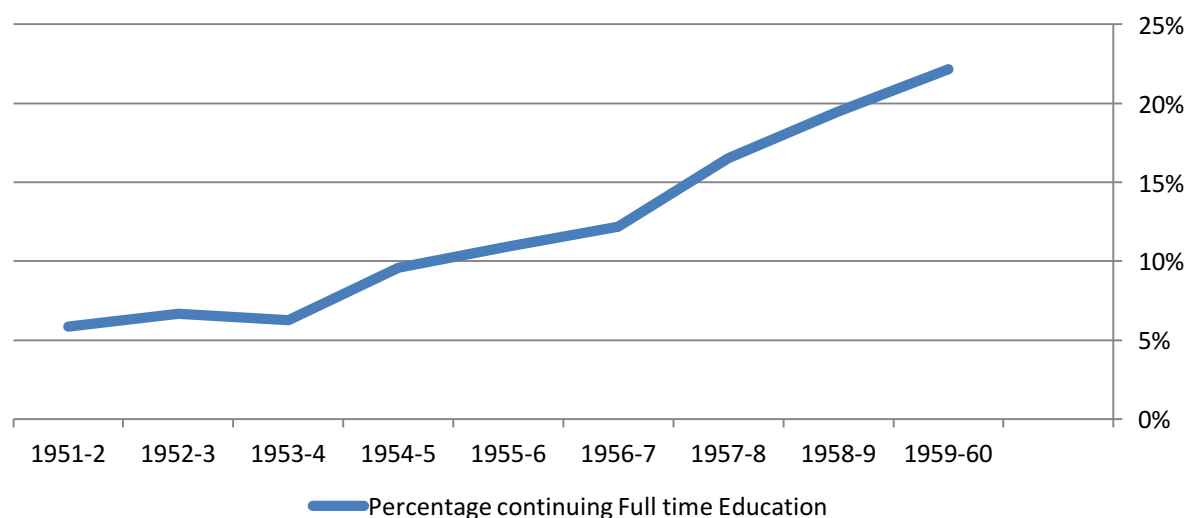
were particularly important for boys wishing to pursue apprenticeships in the engineering and building industries.<sup>12</sup>

Figure 12: Proportion of secondary modern school leavers entering full time (FT) further education (FE) and employment 1948-61



Source: Data from Youth Employment Committee Annual Reports: 1949-1961. Categories in the original documents change so as to only cover FE and employment in 1960-61

Figure 13: Percentage of 15 year olds in Buckinghamshire continuing full time Education 1951-1960.



Source: Data from Youth Employment Annual Reports 1951-1960

As has been noted previously, this era was one of lengthening school lives with pupils across all school types choosing to remain in full time education for longer. It is difficult therefore to disentangle the effects of this general trend and those that were the direct result of the schools' efforts. Comparison to national statistics could help resolve this issue. The Education Department Annual Reports from 1949-1961 record on the number of secondary modern school pupils proceeding to either further education or into employment, but where in Buckinghamshire this is reported as a percentage of the 15 year old cohort, they are presented nationally as a percentage of all school leavers, of all ages, that year. Some comparison however is fruitful: for example, nationally, the number of pupils leaving school at or below 15 years dropped by only 5%, from 98% in 1949-50 to 93% in 1959-60. Over a similar period in Buckinghamshire (1951 to 1960) the percentage of pupils leaving school at 15 moved from 94% to 80%, a change of 14%.

It would therefore seem that Buckinghamshire secondary modern pupils had a higher rate of staying on, and were more inclined than students elsewhere to continue their

education. The reasons behind this better student retention were many, and a full analysis of saying on decisions is beyond the scope of this work. However, there is reason to believe that the regional labour market worked to stimulate later staying on in schools. Local Youth Employment Committee reports highlighted the increasing selectivity of employers as the 1950s progressed, and though this is often noted more in relation to the employment prospects of grammar school children, it is fair to assume that local employment conditions also encouraged many non-selective students to complete their secondary education, and where possible, acquire qualifications.

Up to this point, efforts to assess the quality of secondary modern schools have been focused on indicators or information at the county level. However, even by looking back at the Aylesbury survey of extended course provision, it is striking that there was marked variation between the quality of different schools. For example students at The Grange and John Colet were given far more choice and scope for qualification than students at Wing, Linslade and even Quarrendon. This variation between schools was an authority wide trend and it did not just apply to schools' relative levels of engagement in external examinations but represented the very different levels of prestige achieved or suffered by respective institutions. In the context of Aylesbury it is noteworthy that in a survey of each of the *Bucks Advertiser* and *Bucks Herald* local papers between 1952-1963, Linslade and Wing are almost completely absent in local reports whereas The Grange and John Colet especially appear as headline-worthy institutions. The Grange and John Colet feature in headlines which praise 'School Leavers' Work Prospects,' describe the 'Air of Expectancy at School...[where] enterprise has laid its stamp' and paint the picture of educational success: 'Grange Scholars

*by the Hundred Stay On To Climb Higher.*<sup>13</sup> In 1961, the contrast between the neighbouring Quarrendon and Grange schools was problematic enough that a member of the Aylesbury Divisional Executive came forward to the press, in an article headlined '*School Allocation System is Unfair to Pupils,*' claiming that allocating pupils to these schools on a geographical basis 'did not give equality of opportunity.'<sup>14</sup>

#### School variation: causes and implications

As the Aylesbury example highlights, not only had secondary modern schools become exam-conscious and qualification focused by the latter 1950s, but there was clear variation in the capacity and therefore record of respective schools in offering educational opportunities. This was particularly manifest in the curriculum and qualifications that respective schools could offer and led to clear inequalities between the county's secondary modern schools. Attention now turns to why this was the case. To further understand the heterogeneity of Buckinghamshire secondary modern schools, the HMI reports of 23 out of the 44 (by 1964) secondary modern schools in Buckinghamshire were consulted.

A wide variety of different secondary schools was included in this survey: some pre-war, some post-war new builds, some which served as small rural secondaries and others were large urban schools. There is also a span of 15 years between the earliest report and the latest and those aspects of a school's performance which reflected trends of the period (as opposed to that school specifically), such as lower levels of staying on or external examination uptake amongst the earlier reports, have been accounted for when comparing the

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<sup>13</sup> CFBS: Bucks Advertiser: 'School Leavers' Work Prospects,' July 25<sup>th</sup> 1958, 'Air of Expectancy at School,' June 3<sup>rd</sup> 1960, 'Grange Scholars By the Hundred Stay on to Climb Higher,' July 15<sup>th</sup> 1960.

<sup>14</sup> CFBS: Bucks Advertiser: 'School Allocation System is Unfair to Pupils,' September 15<sup>th</sup> 1961.

schools. An attempt has been made to rank these institutions into three simple bands, (good schools; those which were middling; and those which could distinctly have been seen as weak or poorly performing). Judgements about which band respective schools should fall into have been made based on comments about staff quality, leadership (headteacher) quality, the range and accessibility of the curriculum, and comments surrounding the school culture and ethos.

From this exercise, it is evident that the key differences which emerged between the schools were rooted principally in the resource constraints described in Chapter Four. The survey reinforces the impression, raised in that chapter, that it was bottlenecks in secondary school building and staffing that underpinned secondary modern school capacities, determining how far a school could offer educational opportunities. This topic will be explored in several ways below: looking first at the direct limitations which building deficits and delays placed on individual school capacities, turning next to the indirect extension of this and how staff were recruited and retained, and then looking at how even in new secondary modern schools the reality of delay and piecemeal construction would influence their longer term chances of success.

Most obviously, the smaller staff numbers and deficient accommodation in many of Buckinghamshire's modern schools restricted the possibilities of developing extended courses, new educational initiatives or sometimes even basic curriculum provision. Such restrictions were reported in many of the secondary schools surveyed, with older schools, especially rural ones which only belatedly secured inclusion to major works lists, struggling far more than those in town centres, or those which were newly built. For example, Iver County School which had been formed out of an old senior school and huddled accommodation in 1950 and served roughly 250 students, was severely restricted in how much it could offer

students by virtue of its poor facilities. The inspectors' report illustrates that it was nearly impossible for this school to pursue anything but the most basic level of secondary education:

Lack of accommodation has prevented the introduction of extended courses, it has limited the formation of special classes for remedial work and the splitting of forms into small groups for practical subjects...there is no laboratory, no medical room and no space for teachers to work.<sup>15</sup>

The limiting effects of insufficient space and accommodation were present in nearly every secondary modern report written over this period. For example, comments regarding Beaconsfield Secondary in 1955:

The inadequacy of this for a secondary school of nearly 250 pupils is obvious and the...lack of accommodation and facilities have obviously held back the full development of this school as they have of so many others.<sup>16</sup>

Or Wolverton County School in 1954, where deficiencies in accommodation made basic levels of provision an impossibility:

The premises as they stand cannot be regarded as satisfactory for the needs of Secondary children, and the authority, realizing this, plans to replace them as soon as possible... For the record- deficiencies are listed: No science room; no gym and the hall is small; no medical room or rest room; no showers or changing rooms; no library; no playing field or garden; sanitary provision below current standards.<sup>17</sup>

As is evident here, the direct implication of building limitations was that new or experimental courses were not feasible in many Buckinghamshire secondary modern schools. Even securing provision of what was considered the basic curriculum was sometimes impossible, as for example in the above case at Wolverton County School where the school was unable to offer any science teaching. Nor were such shortages short-term features of secondary education in Buckinghamshire: Iver County School was only closed in 1963 with

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<sup>15</sup> NA ED 109/9297: *HM Inspectorate Reports, Iver*: Iver County Secondary School, 1958.

<sup>16</sup> NA ED 109/8636: *HM Inspectorate Reports, Beaconsfield*: Beaconsfield Church of England School, 1955.

<sup>17</sup> NA ED 109/8649: *HM Inspectorate Reports, Wolverton*: Wolverton County Secondary School, 1954.

the opening of its replacement, Everham School. At the time of the inspection, there was no replacement planned for Wolverton County Secondary (New Bradwell Secondary School was not entered onto the major works list until 1961). Insufficient accommodation and the restrictions that came with it was therefore a pervasive feature of ‘secondary education for all’ for over a decade, determining the educational opportunities these institutions could conceivably offer and in turn limiting the scope for either equality of opportunity or parity of esteem to evolve between school sectors.

Throughout these reports, the paucity of requisition allowances in ensuring schools were well equipped is also revealed. This was particularly problematic in the provision of science or craft equipment and a shortage of library books was also repeatedly raised as a limiting factor of schools’ work. During the 1953 inspection of Baylis Court, for example, the inspectors gave particular mention to an ‘almost total lack of equipment for science teaching...and the need for a much more liberal provision of Library books.’<sup>18</sup> Again, in 1956, inspectors were confronted at White Hill Secondary Modern School by a lack of equipment for practical subjects:

...a lack of certain standard equipment for house craft and needlecraft...and a more serious deficiency: the general lack of books noted in connection with some of the work.’ [There being] very little in the way of a school library.<sup>19</sup>

However, the most difficult aspect of these structural inequalities in Buckinghamshire seems to have been that they significantly reduced the ability of secondary modern schools to recruit staff. Many of the HMI reports surveyed for both grammar and secondary modern

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<sup>18</sup> NA ED 109/8646: *HM Inspectorate Reports, Slough*: Baylis Court County Secondary School, 1953.

<sup>19</sup> NA ED 109/9297: *HM Inspectorate Reports, Chesham*: White Hill County Secondary School, 1956.

schools, speak of the particular difficulties faced in Slough and in the also North Buckinghamshire areas in recruitment, and also discuss the countywide issues being faced in securing teachers. Difficulties finding housing in the area, competitive recruitment within the greatly expanding secondary sector, undesirable or difficult school environments *and* the inbuilt salary disincentives described in Chapter 4 made secondary modern schools particularly susceptible to poor recruitment and staff retention. These issues only became more prominent as the period progressed and reports presented in the early 1960s detailed some extreme instances of shortage and instability. Rarely could headteachers or governing bodies exercise much choice in their recruitment of new staff: adverts for teachers were repeatedly reported as going unanswered, and it seems to have been the norm that only one candidate would apply for a post. As a consequence headteachers and governors were unable to be as selective in their appointments as they might have been otherwise, and thus were less able to regulate the quality of their schools in the same way.

In 11 of the 17 post-1950 reports, HMIs made particular mention of poor quality teachers and the degree of instability in the staffing arrangements. In the best cases, good teachers are described as working in conditions which circumscribed the scope of their teaching (White Hill, Chesham 1956) and in medium ranked schools, the staff is often described as weak or inexperienced; or, when met with ineffective leadership, being poorly focused and lacking proper organisational support to meet each pupil's needs. In the more extreme cases, the whole work of the school was deemed insufficient by inspectors as was the case with the 1960 inspection of Olney Secondary School. Here inspectors noted the long-standing nature of each of the issues they raised and although they praised the efforts of the staff and headteacher, they assessed the task of providing secondary education as beyond the capacity of the institution:

The present position is not a sudden critical situation but simply the latest chapter in a story of increasing difficulties... Only three qualified teachers where a school of this size might normally expect nine.

The curriculum is controlled by the capacity of the small staff. There is still some attempt at specialisation and a valiant endeavour is made to cover as many aspects of a secondary modern curriculum as possible but some subjects have been abandoned altogether...No boys' handicraft, no rural studies specialist, had been no girls PE, no art teaching and only music since 1953....

...All the teachers at present in the school are striving to do their best... but the odds against them are overwhelming and until such conditions improve they cannot hope to achieve much.

Throughout the report the staffing difficulties under which the school is labouring have been stressed. Clearly the situation is not a sudden crisis but a state which has persisted and even worsened over the years: it has led to an intolerable burden upon the staff and a curriculum which is lacking in some sections and unbalanced in others. There is no escaping the conclusion that, under these conditions, over two hundred children in the Olney area are receiving education which falls short of what is expected from a secondary modern school in 1960.<sup>20</sup>

Though clearly sympathetic to the problems faced in this instance, inspectors at Olney were under no illusions about the fact that this institution was simply unable to fulfil its purpose. Olney Secondary School represents the most extreme example, but the problems experienced here reflected those that were being felt in different degrees by most secondary modern schools in the county.

This was especially the case with teacher turnover. In nearly every HMI report available in this period, the high rate of teacher turnover in secondary modern schools was raised as a problem. At the Iver Secondary School referenced above, for example, the teaching was credited with being above average in quality but between its opening in 1950 and the 1958 inspection it had seen 32 teachers through its doors, on a staff which consisted only of 10: only three of the original 1950 staff remained in post and 22 teachers had arrived

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<sup>20</sup> NA ED 109/8644: *HM Inspectorate Reports, Olney: Olney County Secondary School, 1960.*

and left.<sup>21</sup> The Germain Street School, Chesham serves as another prime example in this context: in 1960, out of a staff of 17, nine members had been appointed since January 1958 and seven since 1959, undermining the school's ability to offer a full curriculum, limiting its capacity to ensure continuity and stability for pupils and generally working to constrain the school's potential which was otherwise promising.<sup>22</sup> Again, though this is an extreme example, the problem of staff retention is reflected in most documents reporting on individual secondary modern schools and serves to demonstrate that when difficult building circumstances, insufficient provision of equipment and relatively uncompetitive professional incentives combined, the institutional capacity of secondary modern schools to gain momentum or explore their educational potential was severely hindered.

Many of the references used thus far have been drawn from inspection reports for schools which were housed in old premises as either pre-war senior schools or newly formed schools housed in old buildings with added HORSAs huts for good measure. The hierarchy of schools described above can therefore be seen to have fallen along a number of lines: for example, there were clear inequalities between the capacities of newer schools on the one hand, and those inherited schools or makeshift institutions which were still waiting for inclusion on the major works lists, on the other. This old/new contrast overlapped in Buckinghamshire with urban/rural divisions, with the latter struggling to gain a place in the county's top lists. It was this contrast which became particularly visible in the county's press. The perception that there was a distinct inequality between urban and rural schools is very clear in a number of *Bucks Advertiser* articles of the latter 1950s, especially when major

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<sup>21</sup> NA ED 109/9297: *HM Inspectorate Reports, Iver*: Iver County Secondary School, 1958.

<sup>22</sup> NA ED 109/9297: *HM Inspectorate Reports, Chesham*: Germain's County Secondary School, 1960.

works lists became subject to ministry cuts. In 1958 the paper quoted a council member from North Buckinghamshire describing the conditions of rural schools as ‘absolutely shocking,’ going on to argue that

a large number of people on the committee representing urban districts had no idea about these conditions. In one such school there were 30 children in the top class whose ages ranged from 10-15.<sup>23</sup>

Earlier in the year, similar concerns were raised by council members in Slough who petitioned the Divisional Executive and full council to address enduring deficiencies:

Deploring the shortage of secondary modern education in the Aylesbury Rural area...[requesting] the county to provide all rural children in the district with educational facilities comparable with those provided in urban areas.<sup>24</sup>

From 1955 onwards, many of the new purpose-built secondary modern schools were brought into use and where this happened the immediate issues surrounding inadequate provision of facilities were in principle resolved. However, several perhaps unanticipated problems took their place: the first was overcrowding. As has been discussed in Chapter Four, Buckinghamshire County Council’s projection of future population growth missed the mark substantially, with immigration into the county from the London area propelling local population growth beyond official expectations. As such, the majority of brand new schools began their lives working substantially above capacity and endured chronic overcrowding in their formative years. For example, and as mentioned above, The Quarrendon School worked over capacity initially (for the first three years) because of demand for places within its own

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<sup>23</sup> CFBS: Bucks Advertiser: ‘Slough Member Urges Priority,’ 24th October 1958.

<sup>24</sup> CFBS: Bucks Advertiser: “‘Perfectly Frightening for a Child’ Executive Act on Poor Conditions,’ July 4<sup>th</sup> 1958.

catchment area and then as a 'holding' school for secondary students who were awaiting the opening of the new Mandeville School in Aylesbury: a process which meant that with an official capacity for 600 pupils, Quarrendon was accommodating and attempting to educate over 961 students up until 1962.<sup>25</sup> The Quarrendon example also serves to highlight that the problem of overcrowding was not just a logistical one; it was also educational; as a school which opened in 1957, it had received pupils who had undergone most of their schooling in inadequate buildings and from over-stretched teachers, but was in little position to rectify this process because of its own overcrowding issues. HMI inspectors commented in 1964 that they had found some students 'easily diverted and... hostile' explaining these had been those same pupils who were 'the chief sufferers of overcrowding in their early years of secondary education.'<sup>26</sup>

Connected to this issue of population increase and population growth was that of intake composition. The pace and economies of secondary school building after the war meant that in many cases larger school sizes were opted for in order to most efficiently meet the demand for places, meaning that pupils were recruited from a larger and demographically mixed catchment area. However, as the population of the south and the east of the county expanded with the overspill population from London, it became the case that secondary schools drew their students from a smaller range of primary schools; in these areas, a school designed to recruit from 10-15 primary schools, gradually came to serve between two and five. Such was the case with Warren Field Secondary Modern School (renamed

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<sup>25</sup> CFBS Bucks Advertiser, 'Head Looks Forward to Cut in Size of Classes,' 27<sup>th</sup> October 1961 and NA ED 109/9457: *HM Inspectorate Reports, Aylesbury: Quarrendon County Secondary School, 1964.*

<sup>26</sup> NA ED 109/9457: *HM Inspectorate Reports, Aylesbury: Quarrendon County Secondary School, 1964.*

Comprehensive in 1960) in Slough. In 1965, inspectors noted problems the school was having as a result of recruiting almost its entire student body from two primary schools in what had become a large London County Council housing estate in the north west of Slough, remarking that the school's prospects were limited by the nature of its intake:

The social and educational needs of the school are closely inter-related and it is clear that until right social attitudes prevail- until there is an improvement in general behaviour and in personal relations, and until seriously disturbed or hostile parents receive the treatment they require, educational standards will never be satisfactory throughout the school.<sup>27</sup>

Inspectors reported similar problems in the 1956-built Wilton County Secondary School in North Buckinghamshire and William Penn Secondary in Slough. This indirect consequence of population growth and school placement was therefore more of a problem in some areas than others and added to the variation between respective secondary modern schools.

In terms of school-to-school variation, the Aylesbury example also serves to demonstrate that even when a new school was opened, the timing and sequence of this could work to either promote or circumscribe its chances of educational success. For example, The Grange School was one of the first post-war secondary modern schools to be built and both official and unofficial sources create the sense that this school possessed clear academic focus/purpose: the range of G.C.E. O Level and later A Level options it pursued makes this clear. When Quarrendon School opened three years later the Education Committee decided that IV year pupils who were already on the G.C.E. course at The Grange would continue there to complete their qualifications. For the students concerned this seemed a fair choice, but for the new Quarrendon School it meant that their IV and V year cohort had effectively

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<sup>27</sup> NA ED 109/ 9457: *HM Inspectorate Reports, Farnham Royal: Warren Field County Secondary School, 1965.*

been cream-skimmed and that the newer secondary modern, though new and relatively well equipped, lacked the full ability range at the top end of the school to stimulate its initial 'academic' development. In and of itself this factor did not force a division in the evolution of the two schools but it did hamstring the capacity of Quarrendon School during its formative years to establish its reputation as a school geared towards formal qualifications.

The information presented so far has confirmed how detrimental resource constraints could be to secondary modern schools, especially during the formative era of post-war secondary education. In the short term, their capacity to develop a full curriculum or to experiment with different schemes of work was severely restricted. In isolation, these could be seen as transient, if persistent, inconveniences, but it is suggested here that these short term hold ups permanently limited secondary modern schools in concept and in practice. The greater scale of need throughout secondary modern schools and their vulnerability as nascent institutions ensured that they were more fundamentally affected by these restrictions than other school types, which could more comfortably rest on inherited prestige, tradition and resources. Even when new buildings for new schools were requested early on in this period, there was often a delay of five to seven years before they were ready. During this hiatus, the scope for secondary modern headteachers to evolve varied and well supported curricula with pathways and opportunities which promoted an education that was distinctive and tailored to that school type and its students, as opposed to offering a diluted or insufficiently resourced effort at mirroring work done in grammar schools, was thoroughly diminished. As a result, for new secondary schools eager to establish themselves locally as offering a 'good' curriculum, incorporating G.C.E.s into their curriculum became a means of jump-starting prestige.

As a standalone feature of secondary modern curricula, the provision of G.C.E. extended courses can be regarded as an expansion of those opportunities on offer in non-selective schools. But several points emerging from documentary research indicate that this tendency weakened the longer-term capacity of non-selective schools to create an autonomous and independently prestigious curriculum. The first is that a school's ability to support G.C.E. entry became conflated with its ability to offer educational opportunities. Flowing from this was the inevitable tendency that smaller or more resource constrained schools which could not provide G.C.E. courses would not only struggle to secure a good local reputation, but would also be less competitive than larger schools in attracting staff and additional allocations as part of the requisition allowances.

Secondly, it was often the case that a school would attempt to gain prestige by offering extended courses, but in doing so risked neglecting the educational needs of its other pupils. Of the ten secondary modern schools in this sample who had commenced G.C.E. courses at the time of inspection, seven received concerned feedback from inspectors, nearly all along the same lines: namely, that extending a G.C.E. stream had skewed the curriculum for other students for whom external examination was not appropriate or desired, and that it had diverted attention or resources away from the majority of students towards the G.C.E. streams. The former complaint, for example, was raised by inspectors at The Orchard Secondary Modern School in 1955 who remarked that

in too many...subjects...there is as yet no very clearly marked differentiation between the kind of material to be provided for the ablest and the for the weakest children.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> NA ED 109/8646: *HM Inspectorate Reports, Slough: The Orchard County Secondary School, 1955.*

Inspectors at Baylis, Buckingham and Warren Field all reported a similar tendency:

The school has endeavoured to hold out to the pupils high standards of work and behaviour and to provide the abler ones with opportunities to measure themselves against the demands of external examinations. Staff and pupils have both worked very hard to this end and the success obtained are rightly prized by all. These developments have, however, created certain pressures which not all pupils are able to meet and this is perhaps the moment to pause and take stock of all the needs of all the pupils and of the varied ways in which those of different ability may be helped towards maturity.<sup>29</sup>

Individual successes have brought satisfaction to pupils and staff but the work sometimes bears hardly on those who have little aptitude and leads teachers to adopt methods which are not altogether suitable.<sup>30</sup>

There is a strong impression that in the upper streams the work is too academic and too pre-occupied with the demands of the external examination, for which, as the results show, many pupils have not the requisite ability...In the IV year it would be profitable if boys and girls could be kept working at courses suited to their ability rather than, as now, segregated into forms of 'leavers'...the courses currently proposed for them are not likely to elicit the maximum effort from the most able of those who are placed in such sets.<sup>31</sup>

In each of these examples, inspectors warned that by seeking to establish examination classes or streams within the school, secondary moderns risked overlooking the needs of other children who were not capable or interested in pursuing such a course. This sentiment is mirrored at Wilton Secondary Modern School in 1961 inspectors noted that the school was diverting its already limited staff resources into promoting the educational interests of the minority and thus actively detracting from the attention and support for other students. Here inspectors observed that:

The greatest strength of the staff tends to be concentrated on the few pupils who are following an examination course, and it would be well if the experienced teachers could do rather more with the younger and less able forms.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> NA ED 109/8646: *HM Inspectorate Reports, Slough*: Baylis Court County Secondary School, 1963.

<sup>30</sup> NA ED 109/9457: *HM Inspectorate Reports, Buckingham*: Buckingham County Secondary School, 1964.

<sup>31</sup> NA ED 109/ 9457: *HM Inspectorate Reports, Farnham Royal*: Warren Field County Secondary School, 1965.

<sup>32</sup> NA ED 109/ 9457: *HM Inspectorate Reports, Bletchley*: Wilton County Secondary School, 1961.

Inspectors reported the same problem to Warren Field Secondary's governing body, declaring that the school was 'paying too high a price for its sixth form work.'<sup>33</sup>

Emerging from this collection of material therefore is the distinct impression that the limitations on secondary modern schools in the formative years of their evolution significantly constrained how successful they could become in the long term. Their capacity to promote opportunities through a curriculum or pathways which were independent and distinct from those on offer in traditional schools was severely hindered by resource limitations and as such they found themselves in a position of playing catch-up. Within this scenario, offering extended courses represented the quickest way of establishing some semblance of prestige and value and was readily adopted into secondary modern programmes.

*Grammar schools in Buckinghamshire: quality and opportunity*

In the context of building problems, recurrent expenditure and staffing arrangements in Buckinghamshire, there were clear inequalities between selective and non-selective schools. We must be careful however in characterising this era as one where one sector had all and the other had none. All school types struggled to secure the resources they needed to fulfil their purpose and the struggles encountered by grammar/technical school headteachers and governors testifies to the ubiquitous nature of resource restraint and its direct effect on the evolution of all forms of secondary education in the post-war period. Despite these

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<sup>33</sup> NA ED 109/ 9457: *HM Inspectorate Reports, Farnham Royal: Warren Field County Secondary School, 1965.*

limitations, a range of indicators have emerged which suggest that Buckinghamshire's grammar schools performed well.

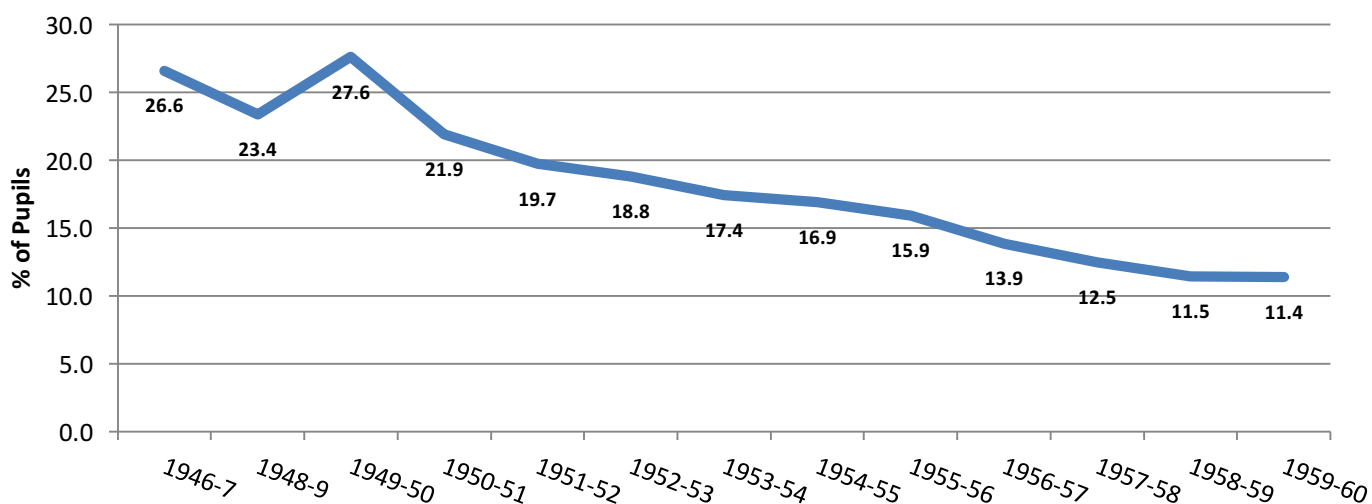
Within the tripartite framework of secondary education, grammar schools were charged with providing selected pupils with an academic education, with an emphasis on external examination and advanced work at sixth form level. As will be explored in the Oxfordshire case study however, some post-war grammar schools struggled to fulfil the letter and spirit of these expectations, while others truly excelled at delivering a high quality academic and pastoral education, signalling clear variation in school performance. Significantly, the collective performance of selective schools underpinned ideas and attitudes surrounding comprehensive school reform and, to understand the drivers of secondary education reorganisation in the later 1960s, it is crucially important to have a clear grasp of how well a county's grammar schools were living up to expectations and the extent to which they were seen as fulfilling their institutional responsibilities.

In what follows therefore, the collective and individual performance of Buckinghamshire's grammar schools is assessed. As far as possible this has been supported by what could be considered 'objective' performance indicators, such as student retention rates and exam performance; the benefit of these being that they allow comparison between schools locally and nationally. However, the documentary content of material relating to schools does not lend itself to the metric-oriented analysis and therefore direct reference to local or national averages is sometimes impossible. For example, even where school records detail exam entries or results, these are expressed as absolute numbers or as number of papers taken as opposed to the proportion of students taking the exams. Additionally, the style of school inspections conducted over this period rest much more on qualitative and subjective comments from inspectors, headteachers and governors than they do on comparable

indicators. To make best use of both kinds of material, two approaches have been used: one has been to analyse trends and key indicators at the county level, with individual schools referenced where information is available or is particularly salient. The other is to consider each school for which material remains available, using the range of comments generated through inspection reports and governing body meetings to draw conclusions about the quality of education occurring within respective schools.

One key indicator of the quality of schools is that of student retention, or the level of ‘wastage’ among the student body. In grammar schools this applied particularly to those students leaving before the age of 16 (as opposed to the school leaving age of 15 in secondary modern schools) because, as a result of withdrawal, they would forgo entry into Ordinary Level examinations. Ordinary Level exams, or ‘O Levels,’ became the standard school leaving qualification in grammar schools from 1951 onwards and were becoming a pre-requisite for entry into white-collar occupations. To leave before the completion of these qualifications was seen as a waste on the part of a student and a failure on the part of the school in not cultivating the interest and aspirations of a pupil. As can be seen in Figure 14, the incidence of early leaving nationally was at its highest in the early 1950s, diminishing throughout the decade and into the early 1960s as entry into the labour market became more competitive and as grammar schools became more adept at securing higher staying on rates.

Figure 14: Percentage of pupils leaving grammar schools who were 15 or under in England and Wales 1946-1960.



Source: Compiled based on Department of Education Annual Returns 1946-1960

In the Buckinghamshire context, what stands out on a first reading of documentary evidence is how small a problem early leaving represented. Generally speaking, there seems to have been a firmly established expectation that students entering grammar schools should complete the whole course (5 years) of secondary education and that the removal of a student prior to 16 years of age was the exception rather than the norm. This informally held expectation was given official status in 1957 with the county approving a measure to charge an early leaving fine of £10 which parents would be obliged to pay if allowing their child to withdraw. A year later, the council instituted a ‘legal agreement’ between parents and schools which committed parents to ensuring pupils remained at grammar schools until after the completion of O Level exams or equivalents.<sup>34</sup> Arguably, the decision to formalise these official measures was stimulated by some problem or anxiety over early leaving, but their emergence seems to be motivated as much by a desire to pre-emptively assert expectations

<sup>34</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR 78/89 3, *Education Committee Minutes*, October 1957.

for grammar school entry. As a clear statement of county level attitudes to selective education, they helped to foster the sense that early withdrawal would only be approved in exceptional circumstances.

From the information available, it does seem that high expectations in the Buckinghamshire authority were effective and that even when students had little intention of entering further education, they still normally completed the full grammar school course.<sup>35</sup> The Annual Reports of the Youth Employment Sub-Committee make it clear that Buckinghamshire selective students were responsive to the more challenging entry requirements which local employers demanded, noting as early as 1953 that:

The intake of the firms appeared lower than even two years ago, whilst in many cases, firms demanded higher educational standards than formerly...Another result of the increasing demand by employers for boys with a proved educational background has been the greater difficulty in obtaining work experienced by leavers from grammar and technical schools who did not complete the full course.<sup>36</sup>

The conditions of the local labour market combined with the culture of expectations in the Local Authority arguably stimulated students' interests and ambitions even when they did not anticipate pursuing higher education. Indeed, any documents dealing with grammar school leaving treat pupil 'wastage' almost as a non-issue. In the Education Committee's 1963 termly review, the Chairman reported, almost flippantly that 'early leaving has never been a problem in Buckinghamshire.'<sup>37</sup> Inspectors at Dr Challoner's in 1950 remarked that 'is

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<sup>35</sup> This point is made particularly in Youth Employment Sub-Committee, June 1957: of the grammar school leavers in 1955-6, 28.2% going to universities and the 'majority of those leaving to enter employment do so at the age of 16 years.' In CFBS: BLEA AR 78/89 4, *Education Committee Minutes* June 1957.

<sup>36</sup> CFBS: BLEA No. 65, *Reports of Sub-Committees to Education Committee*, January 1954 Youth Employment Sub-Committee 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Report 1953.

<sup>37</sup> CFBS Schools Miscellaneous Box 1, *Education In Buckinghamshire, A Termly Review*, January 1963.

it very gratifying to find that there is no serious problem here of early leaving;’ in 1959 William Borlase’s was reported to have ‘little early leaving,’ and by 1964 in Radcliffe (former Wolverton) Grammar School, the problem of early leaving was said to have almost completely ‘disappeared.’<sup>38</sup> Further, in the series of school governing body records which are available for Aylesbury and Buckingham Royal Latin Grammar School, the trend is one where the respective headmasters reported only occasional mid-year withdrawal of students and, when they did so, it is also reported that the student left only after extensive consultation between their parents and the schools.

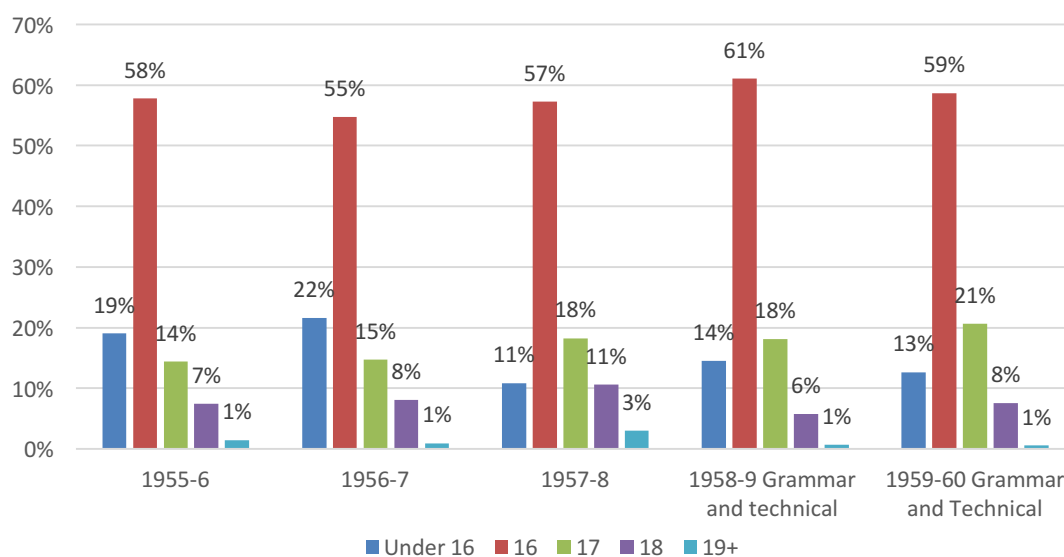
The low incidence of early leaving in Buckinghamshire is also shown by the statistics provided by its Education Committees and school HMI or governing body reports. At the county level, the Youth Employment Sub-Committee Annual Reports offer several years’ worth of information detailing age of leaving from grammar schools and this has been summarised in Figure 15 below, with Figure 16 providing a breakdown of the leaving ages of pupils nationally. The local and national data available is not directly comparable. For Buckinghamshire the annual figures represent the school leaving age of those students who entered employment as opposed to further education, this group will be discussed later. In contrast, the national figures present the whole grammar school cohort and so contain the older cohorts remaining at schools to complete A Levels. It is also worth noting that the last two years presented for Buckinghamshire includes the pupils of technical schools as these two annual reports change format and deal with all selective schools without the distinction

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<sup>38</sup> NA ED 109/ 9457: *HM Inspectorate Reports, Amersham*: Dr Challoner’s Grammar School, 1950, NA ED 109/ 9297: *HM Inspectorate Reports, Marlow*: Sir William Borlase’s School, 1959 and NA ED 109/ 9457: *HM Inspectorate Reports, Wolverton*: Radcliffe School, 1964.

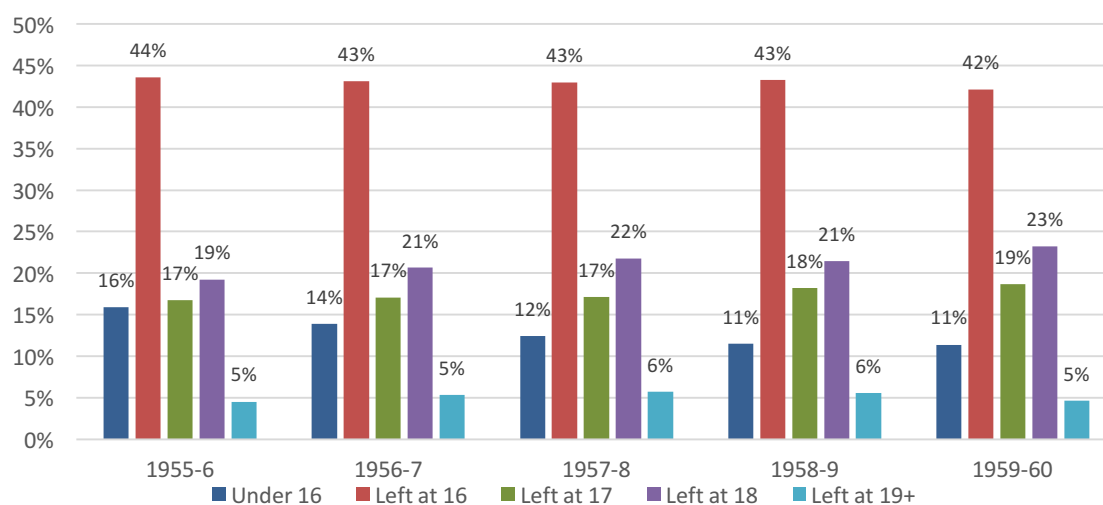
between technical or grammar. As a result, they are likely to over-represent the extent of earlier leaving specifically from grammar schools. Having said this, it seems that the tendency towards early leaving in Buckinghamshire was less prevalent than at the national level.

Figure 15: Age of Buckinghamshire grammar school leavers, represented as proportion of pupils leaving to enter employment.



Source: Data provided in Youth Employment Sub-Committee Annual Reports 1955-1960

Figure 16: Age of all grammar school leavers in England and Wales 1955-1960.



Source: Ministry for Education Annual Reports: 1955-1960

In school level reports too, this pattern can be observed. Though offering a rather inconsistent set of comparisons, the information tabulated below for five schools where data exists shows a substantial gap between early leaving rates in Buckinghamshire’s grammar schools and national levels. Even Slough and Aylesbury Grammar Schools, which had some of the highest rates of early leaving through the county, and were pinpointed by inspectors as having to be particularly competitive against the attractions of dynamic local labour markets, offering employment and high wages to school leavers, had a lower proportion of students leaving prior to 16 than the national average.

Table 5: Percentage of pupils leaving prior to 16

<i>School and Year</i>	<i>% Leaving prior to 16</i>	<i>% Leaving prior to 16 nationally</i>
<i>Dr Challoner’s 1950</i>	1%	28%
<i>Aylesbury Grammar School: 1950, 1951, 1952</i>	13%, 19% and 20%	28%, 22%, 25%
<i>Wycombe High School 1949-1952</i>	11%	29%
<i>Slough Grammar School 1953</i>	20%	23%
<i>Bletchley Grammar School 1961</i>	7%	16%

Source: School data from HMI reports and national figures based on Ministry for Education Annual Reports.

The discussion of ‘wastage’ locally contrasts considerably with the Oxfordshire case study where the issue of early leaving was often accompanied by a sense of crisis.<sup>39</sup> Where in Oxfordshire it attracted press attention, HMI comment and public concern, in Buckinghamshire the issue is conspicuous by its absence. This lends weight to the suggestion that the work of Buckinghamshire grammar schools was relatively effective; as institutions they were able to keep students in school for a full five year secondary course, while also communicating and upholding clear academic expectations.

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<sup>39</sup> OML Oxford Mail: ‘Pupils who Leave Early- Banbury School Warning,’ January 1955.

The impression of academic success is supported by evidence of the examination success of different schools, particularly from HMI reports and governing body reports. Collectively these documents generate the impression that a culture of high academic expectations existed in Buckinghamshire grammar schools and that pupils were guided by clear expectations that they leave school with at least one or two O Levels. Indeed in many governing body headteacher reports, O Level entry and results featured as a second priority: comment is passed for example on the general level of performance, whether it was a good or satisfactory year, but statistically and as a self-reflective performance indicator, A Level results took precedence. This implicit bias in the focus of headteachers' summaries indicates a confidence surrounding O Level uptake and achievement: that even when pass rates or performance fluctuated, entries and results provided no cause for concern or comment.

Based on the school population returns in HMI reports, it also appears that throughout the county's grammar schools, there was a firm tradition of sixth form entry and a steady increase in A Level uptake. Nationally, from the early 1950s onwards, sixth form entry saw considerable growth with greater numbers of pupils staying on to 17 or 18. This latter trend formed some of the focus of the 1959 Crowther Report which examined the development of upper secondary education, and reported that there had been a 66% increase in the number of 17 year olds in schools between 1947 and 1958. Crowther also highlighted the quickening pace of sixth form expansion as the 1950s progressed: in the three years from 1955 to 1958, the number of pupils in school at 17 years of age had increased by 18%.<sup>40</sup> Nor was this

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<sup>40</sup> Geoffrey Crowther and Central Advisory Council for Education, 15 to 18 : A Report of the Central Advisory Council for Education. (London, 1959), Volume II, Chapter 5, p.229

increase found to be a reflection of the high birth rate: Crowther estimated that the proportion of 17 year olds staying on to A Level had risen by 0.5% each year in the decade between 1948 and 1958. Thus, alongside an expansion in absolute numbers associated with larger cohorts of the baby boom, a greater proportion of students was opting for a longer school life.<sup>41</sup>

In Buckinghamshire, evidence suggests that this national trend was particularly manifest. For two schools, HMI reports are available early on in the tripartite era and then after a gap of 10 years in one case and 20 years in the other; these provide two reference points from which to see the extent of change over this period. At the first, William Borlase's Grammar School, the school population as a whole increased by 112% between 1948 and 1959 but over the same period the sixth form increased in size by 350%. Similarly, at The Royal Latin School between 1947 and 1966, while the school population increased by 112%, the sixth form grew by 437%.<sup>42</sup> These figures firmly encourage the notion that sixth form expansion in Buckinghamshire outstripped the pace of local population growth and outstripped the national pace of expansion, as does the rather concerned report of Aylesbury Grammar School's headmaster to his governing body in 1960, which raised his anxieties about accommodating such demand:

The growth of Sixth Forms is a national phenomenon; but it is noticeable that while grammar school pupils have more than doubled in Aylesbury over 10 years, Sixth Form numbers have almost trebled. Only those capable of sitting for 3 subjects are usually admitted ...<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> NA ED 109/ 9297: *HM Inspectorate Reports, Marlow*: Sir William Borlase's School, 1948 and 1959 and NA ED 109/ 8638: *HM Inspectorate Reports, Buckingham*: The Royal Latin School, 1947 and 1966.

<sup>43</sup> CFBS AR 11/89 *Aylesbury Grammar School, Governing Body Minutes*, October 1960.

Ahead of national trends, Buckinghamshire grammar schools can be seen as having collectively supported the expansion of advanced study for selective pupils. In terms of A Level entry, in both governing body and HMI reports there exists a sense that A Levels were increasingly regarded as the ideal focus for grammar school study. For each grammar school included in the sample of HMI reports, there is a solid cohort of students entering annually for A Level examination on a scale consistent with the national average. For example, in 1953, Slough Grammar School for Boys entered 30% of its 16+ cohort (this is the figure used as comparator in national averages provided by Department for Education in their Annual Reports) for examination, a figure which amounted to 41% of its total sixth form. Even Aylesbury Grammar School, which often emerges as a relatively weak grammar school in comparison with others in the county, managed to offer 25% of its 16+ cohort (46% of sixth form) for A Level entry in 1953.<sup>44</sup> Though slipping below the national average for that year, the latter figure includes both independent and Direct Grant schools which tended to have a greater proportion of students sit for A Level and therefore the national figure likely over-estimates what was standard for grant aided LEA schools. Accounting for this caveat at the national level, it is possible to see that Buckinghamshire grammar schools maintained a strong academic emphasis and cultivated a record of examination participation at the advanced level.

Not only were these schools successful in encouraging increased participation in advanced studies, but there is also evidence to suggest that expansion was accompanied by the maintenance, even improvement, of existing academic standards. As will become

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<sup>44</sup> NA ED 109/ 8635: *HM Inspectorate Reports, Aylesbury*: Aylesbury Grammar School, 1953.

apparent in what follows, there was sometimes considerable variation in the standards achieved by different schools. But when looking at the performance and baseline expectations surrounding grammar schools collectively, they can be regarded as a set of quite highly performing institutions.

This contention partly rests on anecdotal information such as the quote, in which the headteacher of Aylesbury Grammar School noted that entry to sixth form was academically selective (accepting students deemed capable of taking three A Levels and which usually meant those who had gained five+ O Levels), but it has also been informed by information about individual schools' exam performance and about student destinations. In the case of exam success, of the HMI reports covering ten county grammar schools, all but one report satisfactory or excellent exam results; often schools are reported as achieving above national averages. A few exceptions existed, for example Buckingham Royal Latin School received a rather frustrated set of comments from inspectors relaying their concerns over the schools' performance:

[The school has] not always succeeded in helping their pupils to achieve the best examination results of which they were capable...The provision made for this school has been generous, but present achievement is not altogether commensurate with it.<sup>45</sup>

But even accounting for these issues, inspectors relay only that exam results were struggling to exceed moderate levels of attainment having 'not been distinguished' rather than them representing a significant failure or weakness on the part of the school. That undistinguished results should attract such a critique suggests the predominance of high standards at neighbouring schools. As can be seen from the various comments from HM

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<sup>45</sup> NA ED 109/ 8638: *HM Inspectorate Reports, Buckingham: The Royal Latin School, 1966.*

inspectors presented in the school tables below, examination success and notes of high performance were a recurring feature of school reports, and paint a picture of Buckinghamshire grammar schools as fulfilling their role for an increasing proportion of the student body at the top end of the ability spectrum.

Grammar schools also seem to have been successful at securing university entrance and scholarships. Obtaining university scholarships, especially the prestigious State Scholarship but also Oxbridge Open Exhibitions, was a mark of academic distinction, since these awards were only granted to students with particularly high examination performance. For a school to have developed a consistent record of annually securing such awards suggest not only that it provided high quality fifth and sixth form work, but also that it was able to drive students' aspirations towards further education. Precise annual statistics per school in Buckinghamshire are not available, but it is clear that overall this collection of grammar schools was at worst moderately, and at best, remarkably successful. Even those schools which could be seen as 'weaker' (Aylesbury and Buckingham Royal Latin) were reported to have secured between two and four State Scholarships each year. In the summer of 1953 the Aylesbury headmaster happily reported that 'the school had had the distinction of the award of four state scholarships...not likely to be a frequent occurrence,'<sup>46</sup> and yet it was an achievement repeated in 1957. If four scholarships were a benchmark of academic quality, this suggests that some other Buckinghamshire grammar schools were doing very well indeed. For example, High Wycombe Royal Grammar School which in 1954 secured six state

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<sup>46</sup> CFBS AR 11/89 *Aylesbury Grammar School, Governing Body Minutes*, October 1960.

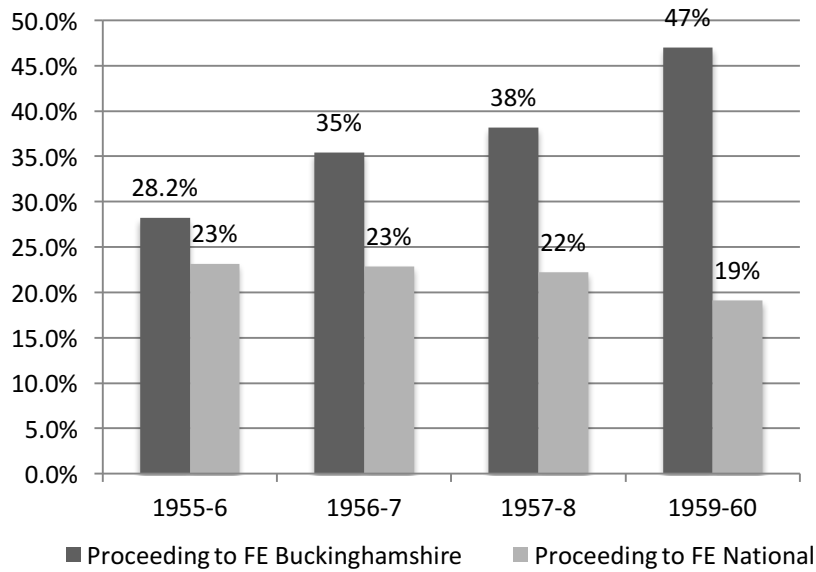
scholarships and which, in the eight years between 1954- 62, had a total of 45 state and open scholarships awarded to students, many of which were for pupils proceeding to Oxbridge.<sup>47</sup>

Connected with this dynamic record of school achievement when it came to scholarships was the solid tradition of Buckinghamshire grammar school pupils progressing on to university and further education (FE). Figure 17 below presents the information over the four years for which county level figures are available and reveals that over this period the county experienced greater success in sending grammar school students into further education than its counterpart schools nationally. The increasing difference between the percentage of Buckinghamshire students proceeding to FE and the national average also shows that where growing competition for university and college admissions into the 1950s restricted the proportion of students nationally who could pursue this path, the proportion of Buckinghamshire students leaving for further education saw a sustained increase. Buckinghamshire grammar schools offered high quality educational opportunities, even relative to those in other selective schools.

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<sup>47</sup> CFBS: BLEA No. 65, *Reports of Sub-Committees to Education Committee*, Scholarships Sub-Committee, January 1954 and L. J. Ashford, *The History of the Royal Grammar School, High Wycombe, 1562 to 1962* (High Wycombe, 1962).

Figure 17: Percentage of grammar school leavers continuing to Universities and other Further Education at the national and county level.



Source: County level figures drawn from Youth Employment Sub-Committee annual reports and for the national level, drawn from the Ministry of Education Annual Reports. (The figure for 1959-60 in Buckinghamshire is an approximation: the report combines Grammar and Technical school leavers and FE entry level is reported at 25% for this combined cohort. Calculation has thus been made on the assumption that the proportional divide of this cohort between grammar and technical school leavers would reflect that of the previous 2 years and approximates based on the previous year that for every 1 technical school pupil to go to FE, 30 grammar school children would.)

As can be seen from the school summaries below, it also seemed to have been the case in these grammar schools that among the proportion of those leavers pursuing further education, it often was the case that a greater number were proceeding to universities than they were to (usually teacher) training colleges. The ratio at Buckingham Royal Latin School stood at 9:2 respectively, indicating that the academic emphasis of the curriculum in Buckinghamshire's grammar schools promoted an interest in academic study alongside the vocational aspirations of its students. Though High Wycombe Royal Grammar School stands out in relation to its local counterparts, the majority of HMI reports for other institutions praise schools for securing a firm tradition of university entry and for consolidating the link between a grammar school education and further academic or specialised study.

Furthermore, even when not embarking upon university education, the majority of Buckinghamshire grammar school leavers pursued paths that entailed further formal training and led to professional or white-collar occupations. Of those that went into further education, especially girls, the great majority trained to become teachers or nurses. Outside of this, clerical, banking and local civil service work predominated amongst leavers entering employment. In general, throughout the body of HMI reports or Annual Reports from the Youth Employment Service the sense emerges that grammar school students were expected to pursue such paths, and instances where this was not the norm are noted with a clear sense of dissatisfaction. For example the HMIs inspecting Buckingham Royal Latin School in 1966 noted that there existed amongst recent leavers a ‘rather long tail of non-descript employment.’<sup>48</sup> When it came to the destinations of student leavers there is definitely the impression that collectively Buckinghamshire grammar schools were fulfilling the academic and vocational role expected of them within the tripartite framework.

When considering the educational opportunities on offer in Buckinghamshire grammar schools, one additional factor worth considering was how well this collection of schools catered for students who were not academic high flyers and whether they were markedly affected by the fluctuating quality of their intake. Even once selection had been accounted for, there was often a lower stream of grammar school students alongside a natural fluctuation in the capabilities of different cohorts. This point is raised here based on the parallel set of findings for from Oxfordshire where a number of schools struggled to cultivate and expand grammar school (academic/ HE) traditions, apparently because of low ability

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<sup>48</sup> NA ED 109/ 8638: *HM Inspectorate Reports, Buckingham: The Royal Latin School, 1966.*

intakes. In Oxfordshire, it seems to have been the case that not only were schools failing to provide a flexible enough curriculum for lower ability students but that they were in turn affected in character and reputation by the general ‘quality’ of their intake. There are some resonances of this issue in Buckinghamshire, but, as with the case of early leaving from grammar schools, the problem appears to have been much more muted. There were only really two schools where this was raised as an issue: William Borlase’s and Aylesbury. In the former, HMIs reported that ‘the intellectual calibre of the intake is not sufficiently high to enable half of it to reach the O level standard in 4 years.’<sup>49</sup> And of Aylesbury Grammar School in 1953 and 1957:

the intellectual weakness and the unresponsiveness of the few members of Form V modern who were present for inspection, caused some concern.<sup>50</sup>

and

it is increasingly evident that those of our pupils who turn out to be weak academically are attempting too much, even in our practical stream, and a drastic reduction of subjects, in spite of the protests of ambitious parents, will have to be considered for these pupils after their third year in the school.<sup>51</sup>

Two points are worth making from these comments: one is that inspectors at William Borlase’s were warning against what was effectively a fast-track O level programme already in operation. The students here were identified as not coping well with an accelerated programme and subsequently the school re-organised its curriculum to introduce different streams. This presented a different issue than that in Oxfordshire where students in some schools were deemed unable to follow a grammar school education at all. In

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<sup>49</sup> NA ED 109/ 9297: *HM Inspectorate Reports, Marlow*: Sir William Borlase’s School, 1966.

<sup>50</sup> NA ED 109/ 8635: *HM Inspectorate Reports, Aylesbury*: Aylesbury Grammar School, 1953.

<sup>51</sup> CFBS AR 11/89: *Aylesbury Grammar School, Governing Body Minutes*, October 1957.

Buckinghamshire, most grammar schools streamed their students by ability, though some gradually abandoned the process as the period progressed. The main tendency however seems to have been to ensure that all students followed the same curriculum, just at a faster or slower pace: content wise, all students had access to the same curriculum up to O Level. In terms of educational opportunity this promoted consistency and greater equality amongst entrants to the respective grammar schools and saw Buckinghamshire grammar schools adapting to different student needs to a greater extent than was seen in their Oxfordshire counterparts.

Secondly, what is also apparent from both instances quoted above is that the impact of low-ability cohorts on respective grammar schools seems to have been less pronounced than in some Oxfordshire cases. Even in a school like Aylesbury Grammar, which suffered most from problems linked to pupil ability, was not characterised by it, and continued to maintain its solid academic performance elsewhere. Such was also the case with Slough Grammar School in the mid-1950s when HMI inspectors reported on the headteacher's intentions to adapt the middle school's curriculum for 'the less gifted.'<sup>52</sup> This was a plan that would ensure the needs of boys at different points along the ability spectrum were suitably addressed, and which would allow the school to cultivate its academic reputation. Throughout governing body records, comments on exam results and on the intellectual calibre of the respective cohorts, though sometimes a point of frustration, was regarded as an unfortunate reality rather than being the focus of anxiety over the school's performance, reputation and institutional confidence.

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<sup>52</sup> NA ED 109/ 9297: *HM Inspectorate Reports, Slough: Slough Grammar School for Boys, 1964.*

Given this set of findings it can be seen that Buckinghamshire developed a solid core of high quality institutions and that even where schools were mid-range in their curricula or staff quality, grammar schools across the region were more or less fulfilling task expected of them. Delays and problems with buildings or teachers could temporarily limit full educational provision and make the running of schools very difficult, but the institutional momentum of the majority of schools was left with little permanent damage, and was able to make up lost ground. The following chapter now turns to exploring the dynamics of tripartism in Oxfordshire, exploring how its experiences resembled or differed from those in Buckinghamshire.

## Chapter 6 · Oxfordshire Delivering 1944

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The Buckinghamshire experience highlights the inherent tensions involved in delivering new welfare and education policies in the post-war environment of shortages and competition over scarce resources. Building an education service within the tight constraints imposed by delays, inflation and economy measures represented a tremendous feat of planning and energy. The Oxfordshire case study offers a similar insight into this process, though with slight differences. Though still marked by frenetic activity, the first two decades of ‘secondary education for all’ in this county were characterised less by the expansive building programmes pursued by its neighbour and more by attempted experiment, frustration and restraint. Its experience therefore illuminates other elements in the local reality of education provision in the crucial decades after the Second World War.

### *Aims of the 1944 Development Plan*

A striking difference is the case of Oxfordshire LEA’s Development Plan. As explored in Chapter 3, Development Plans were prospective blueprints, representing an authority’s vision of local educational provision and offering a forecast of necessary capital investment. Buckinghamshire’s Plan was a straightforward reflection of Ministerial guidance on secondary education, opting for the tripartite model of secondary organisation encouraged by the Norwood Report and the 1943 White Paper *The Nation’s Schools*. In contrast, Oxfordshire declared in 1944 that this was the moment to pursue a ‘bold experiment.’<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> NA ED 152/ 132: *Oxfordshire Development Plan 1944*, 1947.

Indeed, the stated aims of the Oxfordshire Education Committee as they emerged in the Development Sub-Committee meetings departed markedly from official guidance.

To begin with, the Development Sub-Committee stated its intention to introduce an experimental scheme of semi-comprehensive secondary education. Under these arrangements, common 'Lower Schools' would accommodate all 11- 13 year olds in the county and provide a common curriculum. Upon reaching 13 years, the majority of pupils would continue into 'Upper Schools' which were anticipated to run four pathways: a grammar (academic) stream, a technical stream, and two modern streams, with transfer within the same school encouraged as a matter of course. The remaining minority of pupils, 'the exceptionally able' (the committee anticipated that only one in every 25 students would fall into this category) would advance to one of the two 'County High Schools'. These would operate as boarding schools and would offer a highly academic curriculum.

Oxfordshire's Development Plan therefore represented something of a paradox. It signalled that planners accepted and promoted the educational and psychological legacy of Cyril Burt and Cyril Norwood etc.: namely, that children had set aptitudes and abilities that could be identified and sorted into different school types. Planners here also highlighted the premium which they felt should be placed on the more academic pupil. Both sentiments are clearly emphasised in the opening statement of the first provisional Development Plan outline:

Adequate differentiation of ability is most desirable in the case of the most able; pupils with exceptionally good brains are of such value to the community that we ought to guard against their being held back by the presence in the same class of the comparatively dull. It will be seen that full provision for the segregation of the outstandingly able both of the academic and practical types is made in the proposed scheme by means of what are there termed the County High Schools. Your sub-committee are convinced that the extra cost involved is amply justified...and regard this as an essential point in their recommendations.<sup>2</sup>

Interestingly in this suggestion, planners also placed a premium on the so called ‘practical types,’ those children who would have elsewhere been designated as technical school material and who were seen to demonstrate a distinct capacity in skilled artistic, craft or industrially focussed areas of work.

At the same time, however, planners were alert to the social and status related benefits of operating pseudo-multilateral schools in the form of their so-called ‘Upper Schools.’ Here members of the Development Sub-Committee noted not only the educational advantage of students being able to switch between streams, but the benefit offered by this system in being able to secure greater parity of esteem (and resources) relative to a system of separated school types. The Sub-Committee explained:

It is an essential point in your Sub Committee’s submission that the academic and practical streams of an Upper or High School, and the Modern streams if they exist, should form parts of a single school and not form separate *schools*. For one reason, parity of esteem of the various courses in the eyes of parents and employers is highly desirable and would to a considerable extent be promoted by this proviso, without depriving employers of information as to the aptitude and comparative ability of possible employees. Another desideratum is that the school should be a community in which pupils of all types rub shoulders and make their own contribution to its life and activities.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> OHC: OLEA: CC1/12/A2/9 1 *Quarterly Reports of Education Sub-Committees*, First Interim Report of the Development Sub-Committee, 11 October 1944.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Planners articulated a further benefit of this scheme: that it would permit the greatest use of existing buildings and resources. This framework was carried through by the Education Committee into the official Development Plan submitted to the Ministry in 1945. By this point, Oxfordshire planners had adopted the term ‘comprehensive’ to apply to their designated Upper Schools and were unanimous and persistent in asserting that their scheme was the one best suited to Oxfordshire conditions, ‘educationally, administratively, and economically.’<sup>4</sup> In this regard, Oxfordshire should be added to the list of authorities recognised in the post-war period as espousing a more flexible interpretation of tripartism, hoping to pursue some form of comprehensive schooling in the earliest years after the war.

As events transpired, Oxfordshire's plans were heavily circumscribed by Ministerial action. Brian Simon, writing on the tension between local authority planners seeking to trial different educational models and the conservative-inclined Ministry, highlighted the ‘barrage of official advice and guidance which offered not one iota of encouragement to authorities planning comprehensive schools.’<sup>5</sup> The dynamic between Oxfordshire and the Ministry over this period reinforces Simon’s characterisation of educational planning after the war. In the course of submitting its Plan, Oxfordshire was confronted with Circular 73, which encouraged the separate provision of different secondary school types, as well as Circular 90 which categorically ruled out the approval of lower schools with the ministry cautioning any authorities considering ‘admittedly experimental’ schemes. Prior even to a discussion of capital works and service delivery, the initial aims of the Oxfordshire authority had been considerably, and forcibly, altered. In the place of Lower Schools it agreed to pursue the

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<sup>4</sup> NA ED 152/ 132: *Oxfordshire Development Plan 1944, 1947.*

<sup>5</sup> Brian Simon, *Education and the Social Order, 1940-1990* (London, 1991). p.107.

more conventional four-year course secondary modern school; to expedite the provision of selective places it arranged to continue using the county's inherited grammar schools, and technical schools were to be established by adapting the few junior technical colleges that had existed in the county prior to 1944.

The authors of the Development Plan accepted the limitations that the Ministry imposed on the content of their scheme by highlighting how their plans could still give effect 'to the conception of the comprehensive school.'<sup>6</sup> In this vein they put in place a set of guidelines that emphasised that all new school sites would be of ample size, enough to accommodate extensions for 'other types of education when the need arises.' These instructions also stated that where possible, secondary modern schools would be located on the same site as, or on an adjacent site to grammar schools, so as to benefit from the esteem and tradition of the older institution. They also asserted the principle that, in future, buildings would be grouped to share facilities and function under a single governing body in the hope that this would ensure efficiencies and greater parity. This feature of Oxfordshire planning will be explored further in subsequent chapters.

On the logistical side, Oxfordshire's approved Development Plan had less clarity than Buckinghamshire's. It foresaw the building of 29 new secondary schools within the first decade following the Act, and only two new secondary schools the decade after that. Later comments by the County's Director of Education, Alan Chorlton, suggest that planners had not anticipated the scale of new housing developments throughout the county that were to

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<sup>6</sup> NA ED 152/ 132: *Oxfordshire Development Plan* 1944, 1947.

accelerate existing population growth. Subsequent Committee documents are peppered with alterations and additions to the Development Plan to accommodate these changes. However, there is the clear sense in planning documents that Oxfordshire policy makers were keen to maintain flexibility and adaptability in their plans so as to keep open the possibility of experimenting with secondary education.

*Oxfordshire Accomplishments: 1st Decade, 1944-1954*

How far had the Oxfordshire authority met the aims that it set out in its 1944 Development Plan within the first decade of ‘secondary education for all’? As in Buckinghamshire, the first decade of the 1944 Education Act in Oxfordshire was one of frustratingly slow progress. The official record of this decade, and especially the first five years, reveals frenetic activity and a clear anxiety that the LEA would fail to meet its new statutory obligations.

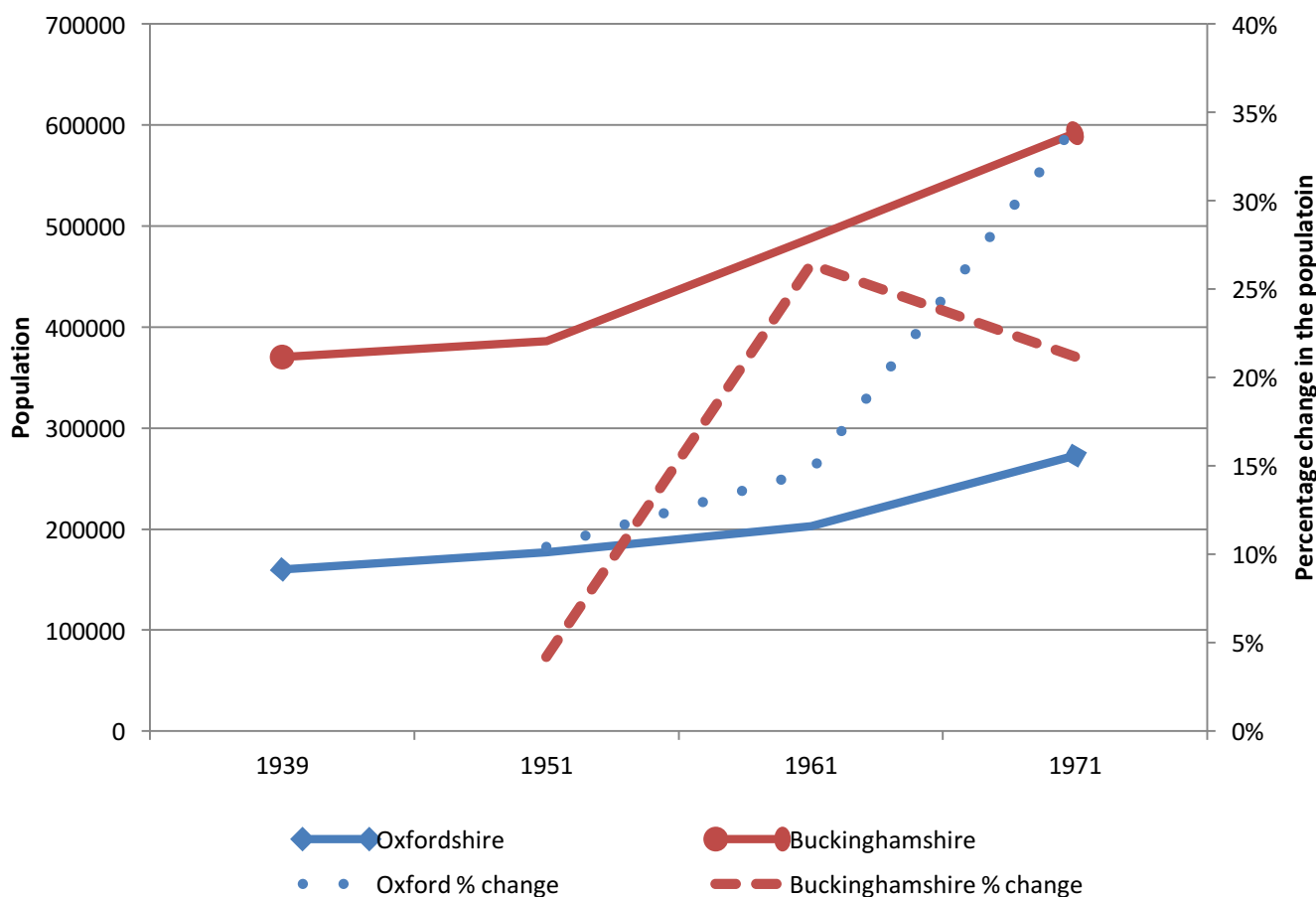
As with the preceding case study, it is helpful to outline the problems of demand versus capacity faced by the authority. Despite the smaller scale of population change in the Oxfordshire authority relative to that in Buckinghamshire (see Figure 18), the LEA was still overwhelmed by the challenge posed by accommodating increased pupil numbers. As reflected in Figure 19, between 1931 and 1951 an increasing birth rate as well as a considerable influx into the county boosted population numbers. A number of districts saw increases of 60-90% from 1931 levels.<sup>7</sup> Reporting in the August of 1949, Chorlton pressed

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<sup>7</sup> 1931 and 1951 Census population tables, [www.visionofbritain.co.uk](http://www.visionofbritain.co.uk): this increase applied in the Bullingdon and Ploughly regions.

home the serious shortage of secondary accommodation in light of these changes. He estimated that immigration to the area was adding a need for approximately 1000 places each year, while the rise in the birth rate would entail the provision of an additional 4000 places within the next three years.<sup>8</sup> From 1947, the county also had to face the extra cohort numbers associated with ROSLA to 15, with early estimates projecting that an additional 2000 places would be required to accommodate this older cohort.<sup>9</sup> This growth injected new urgency into post-war school building and highlighted the inadequacies of existing provision.

Figure 18: Population growth in Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire 1939-1971

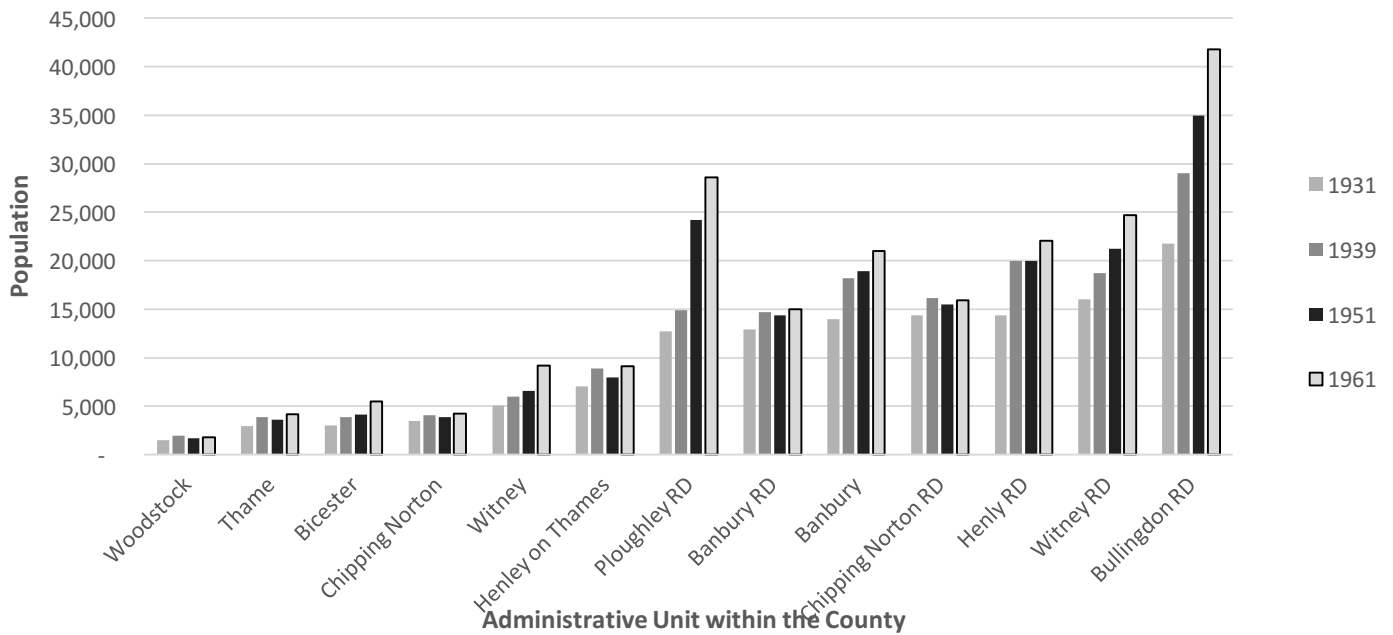


<sup>8</sup> OHS: OLEA CC1/12/A1/2, *Education Committee Minutes*, August 1949.

<sup>9</sup> OHS: OLEA CC1/12/A2/9, *Quarterly Reports of Education Sub-Committees*, January 1945.

Source: compiled from census returns for 1939, 1951, 1961, and 1971.

Figure 19: Oxfordshire Population by Region, 1931-1961



Source: Census returns 1931-1961

As explored previously, this drastic change in demand evolved in a context where school accommodation was already in short supply and even emergency building work was slow to be approved. By 1946 the Education Committee announced that there were several districts in the county ‘where anything like secondary education will be most difficult to

achieve.<sup>10</sup> Further, in April 1947, the Education Committee noted with anxiety that emergency work that *had* been undertaken was delayed:

Your Board have to report that somewhat slow progress is being made in the erection of the new accommodation by the Ministry of works. Of the eleven Schools at which the Ministry have so far been asked to provide new premises, only seven have reached the stage of letting Contracts. At the present time work has begun on four of these contracts...Your Board view these delays with considerable misgiving as the majority of the projects were due to be completed by September of this year.<sup>11</sup>

By 1949, in the same report noted above, Chorlton warned that all accommodation in Banbury, Bicester, Witney, Thame, Charlbury and Henley was exceeding capacity and that Banbury and Bicester particularly would enter a state of 'educational chaos' if major works submitted for these areas were not approved and begun immediately.<sup>12</sup>

Immediate approval was not forthcoming. The scale and timing of Major Building Programmes in Oxfordshire fell drastically short of expectations. It will be recalled that school building in the 1951-1954 period was particularly constrained. These years have been identified as those in which the building-programme, and therefore the Education Act, nearly failed entirely.<sup>13</sup> Under the stewardship of Florence Horsbrugh, the Ministry of Education and its agenda sank down the priority list of the new Conservative government. RAB Butler, newly installed at the Treasury, and despite lending his name to the 1944 Act, imposed a three month halt to all school building on account of labour costs and shortages. Brian Simon has relayed the extent to which Butler laid siege to the promise of post-war educational expansion, by exerting 'consistent, ruthless and unremitting pressure...to cut educational

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<sup>10</sup> OHS: OLEA CC1/12/A2/9, *Quarterly Reports of Education Sub-Committees*, October 1946.

<sup>11</sup> OHS: OLEA CC1/12/A2/10, *Quarterly Reports of Education Sub-Committees*, April 1947.

<sup>12</sup> OHS: OLEA CC1/12/A1/2, *Education Committee Minutes*, August 1949.

<sup>13</sup> P. H. J. H. Gosden, *The Education System Since 1944* (Oxford, 1983) p.110.

spending to a minimum, and if possible, even more severely.’<sup>14</sup> Certainly, this characterises how Oxfordshire experienced the first five if not ten years after 1944.

This renewed urge for restraint at the centre followed on the heels of an already restrictive regime of building control. A reading of the Oxfordshire Finance and General Purposes (FGP) Reports over the period relays the almost impossible environment in which planners attempted to push towards their agreed aims. Not only did The Ministry halve Oxfordshire’s 1949 programme, but much of the capital allocation for the 1950 programme was subsequently absorbed to compensate for the increased labour and material costs of the previous year. The 1951 programme was then capped to just half of the 1950 one and the 1951/2 outline saw only one secondary school project secure approval. But even this was granted just as Butler issued his three-month moratorium on building, a delay which added to the four to six month period it was already taking Oxfordshire to progress from tendering to actually breaking ground.<sup>15</sup> The outcome of this constraint was that by the close of 1954, out of 29 projects anticipated by Oxfordshire in its Development Plan, only three new secondary schools had been brought into use.<sup>16</sup>

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, the Oxfordshire documents offer a slightly different account of post-war education from that in Buckinghamshire. With regards to school building, the two cases mirror one another in that restraint and bottlenecks prevailed. Something which has not been possible to access in the Buckinghamshire archives

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<sup>14</sup> Brian Simon, *Education and the Social Order, 1940-1990* p.162.

<sup>15</sup> OHS OLEA CC1/12/A24/5 *Finance and General Purposes Sub-Committee*, December 1949, June 1950, June 1951 and Sept 1951.

<sup>16</sup> Based on a survey of Major Works Applications in OHS: OLEA CC1/12/A1/2-3, *Education Committee Minutes* and CC1/12/A24/4-6 *Finance and General Purposes Sub-Committee*.

however, but which is present in the records of the Oxfordshire Finance and General Purposes Sub-Committee, is a local authority account of the restrictions placed on its annual budgets, as separate from its capital expenditure. Chapters 1 and 2 briefly discussed this point of tension in the national context, but in the Oxfordshire documents the severity of these measures is thoroughly reinforced and reasserted as a limiting factor on service development. For example, Oxfordshire met the arrival of Circular 240 in the December of 1949 with a sense of powerlessness with Chorlton remarking that:

The real difficulty which faces local authorities who attempt to do this [cut expenditure] is shown by the extent to which their freedom of action is already removed from their hands...general items that are not so strictly controlled are those in which reductions would have a most harmful effect on the service.<sup>17</sup>

Elaborating, Chorlton highlighted that the teaching budget as fixed nationally by the Burnham Settlement claimed 40% of the County's education estimates; rents and rates were items beyond the LEA's control; similarly school transport, now a legal requirement, claimed 5% of the total service allocation. After another Circular in June 1950 urging cuts in local expenditure, Oxfordshire's FGP Sub-Committee responded that even the discretionary costs in the Education Service (furniture, materials and books) were proving impossible to control, the cost of furniture and of school supplies having risen by 20% and 200% respectively since 1945.<sup>18</sup> To meet the expenditure reduction targets through 1950-51, the Oxfordshire authority cut its allowances for the upkeep of existing buildings, suspended £10,000 worth of Minor Works, withdrew its support for school uniform subsidy (already means tested) and increased

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<sup>17</sup> OHS OLEA CC1/12/A24/5 *Finance and General Purposes Sub-Committee*, December 1949

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, December 1950.

its charges for school dinners. In December 1951 it refused to remove a further £8000 from its estimates on the grounds that it would damage the basics of its education service.<sup>19</sup>

Beyond presenting a material limitation on the realisation of the 1944 Act, these successive cuts in the first decade of reforms appear to have provoked a bitterness in Oxfordshire, a sense that the spirit of the 1944 Act was being slowly abandoned. The December 1951 instruction from the Ministry to cut expenditure by another 5% (£18,000) was noted by the Sub-Committee. Their minutes concluded by reiterating the scathing comments of a Manchester Guardian contributor, published earlier that month:

The country's economic situation is not in dispute. The question is whether the only or the best way of escaping economic wolves is to throw our children to them.<sup>20</sup>

It is quite clear from these sources that Oxfordshire LEA found it tremendously difficult to alter the fabric of the education service in the decade after 1944, in the context of both buildings and general resourcing. Steps to expand provision amounted in the main to piecemeal adaptations, a 'hand to mouth' policy as Chorlton described it.<sup>21</sup> Logistically, the authority ensured the provision of secondary education through a variety of means. HORSAs huts provided by the Ministry of Works ensured the accommodation of the extra 2000 students in the 14-15 years age group. By 'judiciously grouping' ROSLA Huts, the LEA was able to create secondary modern units in six locations and by providing more huts at existing primary school and some grammar school sites, the committee could begin four-year

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, December 1951.

<sup>20</sup> OHS OLEA CC1/12/A24/5 *Finance and General Purposes Sub-Committee*, December 1951.

<sup>21</sup> OHS: OLEA CC1/12/A2/9, *Quarterly Reports of Education Sub-Committees*, April 1946.

secondary courses at six more locations.<sup>22</sup> Existing secondary or ‘senior’ schools were continued and expanded where possible. Seven such schools were designated by the Oxfordshire Education Committee, all but one of these having been either church or voluntary schools.<sup>23</sup> Some such schools – the Woodcote Senior and Littlemore Senior School for example – were re-branded Secondary Modern Schools (to become Langtree and Northfield respectively) and continued to form the nucleus of these institutions well into the 1960s when they were incorporated into plans for comprehensive re-organisation. Bar three exceptions, it was only after 1957 that new Secondary Moderns reached completion. The above measures ensured that the Oxfordshire Education Committee could offer secondary education in at least some form up to that point. Nevertheless, to equate this landscape of educational provision with the aims of either the 1944 Act or the County’s own Development Plan would be to overlook the ‘education on a shoestring’ mentality which dominated policy and provision throughout this formative decade.<sup>24</sup>

As in Buckinghamshire, in Oxfordshire non-selective schools took precedence over grammar school expansion, the latter not featuring on major works requests at all until 1955. By the time the 1944 Education Act came into effect, the Oxfordshire authority had nominated eight grammar schools to offer selective education, all of which had functioned before the war as either County schools or Voluntarily Aided endowed Grammar/ County schools. In this regard, there was a good deal of continuity between pre-war secondary

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, January and June 1946, 1946 and December 1948.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, April 1945.

<sup>24</sup> Phrase used by Banbury Grammar School headmaster in OML Oxford Mail: ‘Education in Oxon “on shoestring,”’ 18<sup>th</sup> July 1960.

provision and what became post-war selective provision.<sup>25</sup> On a positive note, this continuity ensured that there were grammar school places readily available for the first intake of successful 11+ candidates, and in the short term the capacity of existing grammar schools in 1945/6 enabled the Education Committee to guarantee nearly 30% coverage in some areas.<sup>26</sup> Reflecting on the local education committee's provisions, one Oxfordshire headteacher emphasized the 'unusual generosity' which characterized the county's approach to grammar school coverage during the first decade of tripartism.<sup>27</sup>

But this reliance on pre-existing grammar school stock also raised problems. It meant that selective coverage was unevenly distributed across the county, bringing about the undesirable situation of some schools setting higher pass marks on the 11+ to allocate scarce places. Further, the continued use of pre-war buildings ensured that those schools set to receive the 'best and the brightest' brought with them a set of deficiencies which were rooted in 1930s neglect. A prime example of this was Bicester Grammar School, which had been designated as the selective school for the north eastern quarter of the county. The governors of this school had repeatedly made representations to the Education Committee prior to 1944, highlighting the extreme unsuitability of its accommodation for the expanding purpose it was expected to serve. As early as 1944, the governing body had stated that the school was working over-capacity, with no capital investment in the school since its opening in 1924.<sup>28</sup> By the June of 1945, the accommodation problem had become still more urgent, with the

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<sup>25</sup> OHS: OLEA CC1/12/A1/2, *Education Committee Minutes*, October 1944.

<sup>26</sup> OHS: OLEA CC1/12/A2/9, *Quarterly Reports of Education Sub-Committees*, January 1946.

<sup>27</sup> OML: Oxford Mail, 'Problem of Children Leaving,' 14<sup>th</sup> Jan 1955.

<sup>28</sup> Ed Com Minutes: 166<sup>th</sup> Report of the Higher Education Sub-Committee: 29<sup>th</sup> Nov 1944: 2012-11-10 15.08.42 p.222.

governors proposing that the lower school buildings be abandoned altogether. Such was the deficiency in this case that the Committee felt compelled to defer all new admissions for the term until urgent temporary works were approved in 1946 and 1947.<sup>29</sup> Despite outstanding problems with grammar school accommodation in Oxfordshire, only five grammar school projects appeared in major works programmes between 1948 and 1960. Four of these were for small-scale extension work (for example installing additional laboratories at Lord Williams's School in 1955-56) with a new grammar school at Littlemore featuring as the only new county grammar school to be built after the war.<sup>30</sup>

In the context of population growth, these arrangements also proved inflexible and inadequate. Between 1946 and 1955 the size of the 11+ cohort increased from 1700 to 2145, while the number of grammar school places, bar the extension by 30 places in Banbury Grammar School, remained unchanged.<sup>31</sup> By 1954 therefore, the Education Committee were forced to accept the Spens recommendation that 15% represented the maximum coverage of selective places they could ensure. They struggled to achieve even this level in West and North Oxfordshire where population growth had accelerated faster than elsewhere and where existing schools could accommodate only 13% of the cohort. Along with Bicester, Banbury Grammar School was operating far above capacity during this decade. As a County School, it had been built to accommodate approximately 300 students; by 1946, however, the school population had risen to 455. By 1949, the school was operating with 200 over capacity and by

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<sup>29</sup> Quarterly Reports: 20th June 1945 IMG\_1307.

<sup>30</sup> Major works compiled.

<sup>31</sup> Figures based on returns to the Secondary Education Sub-Committee in OHS: OLEA CC1/12/A2/9, *Quarterly Reports of Education Sub-Committees* and OLEA CC1/12/A1/2-4, *Education Committee Minutes* 1946-1955.

1953 the Director of Education anticipated that the local school population would have increased by a further 63%, without any realistic scope of expanding grammar school provision.<sup>32</sup> The two examples of Bicester and Banbury Grammar Schools represent the worst of the county's building shortage, but insufficient space and accommodation was felt throughout most of the county's selective schools.

Technical school provision also proved complicated, but piecemeal adaption of pre-war junior technical colleges and the provision of huts ensured that by 1950 four centres could provide a technical course. In this year the Awards Board reported that 127 students who had taken the 11+ admissions test had been allocated to technical courses, a four-fold increase on the number in 1948.<sup>33</sup> By the close of the first decade, secondary technical courses had been established at the Gillotts Technical School for girls and Rycotewood School in South and East Oxfordshire; West Oxfordshire Technology College served the west of the county; and the Woodgreen Technical School in Banbury offered technical provision for the North. The LEA also designated Burford Grammar School as a county centre for agricultural studies, a course classed as technical education, and operated for students between the ages of 13-15 years. Education Committee reports suggest that an average of 130 students per year were transferred at the age of 13 to receive a technical education, about 7% of the 13+ cohort.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> OHS: OLEA CC1/12/A1/2, *Education Committee Minutes*, June 1946.

<sup>33</sup> OHS: OLEA CC1/12/A2/9, *Quarterly Reports of Education Sub-Committees*, Report of the Awards Board, June 1950.

<sup>34</sup> OHS: OLEA CC1/12/A1/3, *Education Committee Minutes*, October 1951.

*Oxfordshire: Accomplishments: 2<sup>nd</sup> Decade, 1954- 1962*

In line with Buckinghamshire, the decade in Oxfordshire after 1955 witnessed an expansion in secondary accommodation at a rate that far outstripped that of 1944-55. By 1962 new buildings had successfully been placed at nearly all secondary schools in the county. Of the 23 non-selective secondary schools, 17 were either new or had received substantial adaptations.<sup>35</sup> Certainly for most schools, conditions in this period were far better and premises more fit for purpose than had been the case before. Oxfordshire planners were also able to improve their grammar school provision over this period by using the more generous minor works allocations (and, increasingly after 1958, major works allocations) to correct deficiencies in existing accommodation. Following the increased allowances after 1955 for example, the committee worked to standardise the science facilities on offer at the county's selective schools. Alongside these improvements, grammar school capacity was expanded through major works at Henley and Banbury Grammar School in 1958/9, taking these schools to two- and three-forms entry respectively. In many ways this decade was one of considerable progress for Oxfordshire, with the infrastructure of the 1944 Act finally coming into focus.

Of course, problems remained. Though official reports chart the steady progress being made, they also reveal a reality of 'hand to mouth,' piecemeal development. Details of the capital allocations to the authority have not been found for Oxfordshire and so direct

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<sup>35</sup> Based on a survey of Major Works schedules, in *Quarterly Reports of Education Sub-Committees and Education Committee Minutes 1955-1962*.

comparison with Buckinghamshire in terms of resourcing is not possible. Despite this, it is evident from a review of annual major works that the scale of building programmes in Oxfordshire was far smaller than that of its neighbour; even with the arrival of Eccles at the Ministry, the authority's annual building programmes saw only two to four projects a year secure ministerial approval (compared to Buckinghamshire's seven per year average) for the remainder of the 1950s. Oxfordshire's agenda throughout the latter 1950s was still dominated by the twin imperatives of accommodating growing population and basic need. Continued population growth placed considerable strain on educational facilities and these emerging pressures diminished the sense of accomplishment that might otherwise have accompanied the increased availability of post-war builds.

Official documents communicate major areas of concern for schools and policy makers that persisted well into the 1960s. One of these was the persistence of all-age schools throughout the county. By 1961, there were still in excess of 300 Oxfordshire secondary students receiving their education in primary or all-age schools.<sup>36</sup> Though Oxfordshire had been successful in having five new secondary schools approved in line with Eccles' Circular 283 for Rural Re-organisation, work was still outstanding in Banbury, Bampton and Steeple Aston. Completion of re-organisation in these areas depended on the success of new school projects in the annual building programme, the chances of which progressively slumped as the minister responded to government economy measures in 1956 and 1957, eventually removing support for schemes designed solely to bring about re-organisation in 1958.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Institute of Municipal Treasurers and Accountants, Society of County Treasurers, and Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, *Education Statistics 1961-1962* (London, 1953).

<sup>37</sup> OHS OLEA: CC1/12/A30/3 *Secondary Education Sub-Committee Minutes*, March 1958.

Consequently, Oxfordshire had three projects (Banbury RC Secondary School, Steeple Aston and Bampton Primary School) which had originally been requested for the 1956-7 programme, but which were omitted in the case of Banbury until the 1959-60 programme and, in the case of Steeple Aston, until 1962-3.<sup>38</sup> Students at these schools, approximately 3% of the maintained secondary-age population in 1962, continued their education in unsuitable and temporary arrangements.

A further anxiety that endured into the 1960s was that schools were heavily overcrowded. This applied to all schools, even those that were new and modernised. The effects of the baby boom were felt in every secondary school throughout the county; population growth outstripped school expansion. Between 1954-5 and 1960-61, Oxfordshire's secondary age population had increased by 77% (Buckinghamshire's by 100%; see Figure 18 above). A 1956 Committee report from the Director of Education surveyed the extent of overcrowding in Oxfordshire secondary schools, highlighting that many schools were operating one or two forms over capacity, having to make dual use of corridors and dining rooms for teaching accommodation. A 1958 Ministerial survey reported that 42.5% of Oxfordshire secondary pupils were being taught in oversize classes, oversize being regarded as 30+. This was a problem which the Education Committee found to be impacting on both selective and non-selective schools with 60% of Secondary Modern and 40% of Grammar School classes working over regulation size.<sup>39</sup> situation.

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<sup>38</sup> Based on a survey of Major Works schedules, in *Quarterly Reports of Education Sub-Committees and Education Committee Minutes 1955-1965*.

<sup>39</sup> OHS: OLEA CC1/12/A1/3, *Education Committee Minutes*, March 1958.

Table 6 offers the summary figures of Oxfordshire’s own 1958 review of the overcrowding situation.

Table 6: Class sizes in Oxfordshire Secondary Schools 1958 survey

<i>Class sizes</i>	<i>County Grammar Schools</i>		<i>County Secondary Moderns</i>	
	No.	%	No	%
<i>0-15</i>	11	10%	4	2%
<i>16-20</i>	6	5%	8	4%
<i>21-25</i>	11	10%	26	14%
<i>26-30</i>	36	34%	35	19%
<i>31-35</i>	36	34%	68	37%
<i>36-41</i>	6	5%	39	21%
<i>41+</i>	0	0%	6	3%
<i>Total:</i>	106		186	

Source: Secondary Education Sub-Committee memoranda. March 1958.

These findings also demonstrate an additional issue associated with school accommodation raised by Oxfordshire policy makers at the time: that several schools either had not, or could not, efficiently organise their staff. Below the sixth form, classes with fewer than 30 were regarded as an inefficient use of teaching power, but in many cases, older school premises with smaller classrooms prevented the most efficient deployment of teachers. This problem was compounded by ministerial restrictions on the establishment size of an LEA, which regulated the number of teachers in a given area and school based on aggregate pupil numbers. The problem this presented to schools in adapted or older premises is highlighted by Bicester Grammar School, whose Governors complained in 1957 that their buildings could not accommodate classes of 30 pupils and that the cap placed on their establishment size would compromise its staffing and curriculum arrangements.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> OHS OLEA: CC1/12/A30/3 *Secondary Education Sub-Committee Minutes*, March 1957.

Two interesting points of divergence between Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire during the 1944-1962 period are worth expanding upon. The first, which has been touched upon already, was that the pace of population change in Buckinghamshire warranted earlier school expansion, and on a larger scale, than its neighbour. Relative to Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire had some breathing room in the first two decades after 1944. It was not until the rate of population growth in Oxfordshire began to gather pace after 1960 that the county needed to contemplate levels of expansion comparable to those of its neighbour, especially to grammar school stock. When it did so, the basis of tripartism was being sufficiently challenged to consider wider re-organisation, as opposed to just the expansion of the existing service. The implications of this major timing differences will be taken up in later chapters.

Another notable point of divergence, and something which factors firmly into a discussion of how successful Oxfordshire was in meeting the aims of its own Development Plan, was the extent to which the authority experimented with secondary organisation. As has been shown, from the earliest plans to the 1947 submission, Oxfordshire's Development Plan opted for an experimental scheme of a quasi-comprehensive nature. Even with the ministry's firm rejection of lower schools and its ambivalence towards bilateral schools, the Oxfordshire planners stated their intention to pursue a comprehensive organisation 'in spirit' so to speak. In some ways, they stayed true to their word. In Burford and Chipping Norton the LEA established nominally bilateral grammar/modern schools. The decision was taken very early on but was only slowly brought into practice after 1955 as newer buildings facilitated the merger of both school sites. Students attending these schools still sat for the 11+ exam and were accordingly placed in modern or grammar departments. But, after 1956-7 the transfer of students between departments became common practice, the staff in respective departments

increasingly taught both streams and the school facilities were shared by all pupils.<sup>41</sup> Further, the Committee held true to its commitment to placing new schools at one large site, with a view to sharing staff and resources. In the planning of Littlemore Grammar School in September 1955, the Education Committee accepted the Director's recommendation to sit on the same site as the existing Northfield School 'so that in the future, further building could bring these two schools closer together if desired.' Similarly, the 'Easington Campus' became the site of both Easington Secondary Modern Schools and the Banbury Grammar School, a proximity which enabled some sharing of resources. Though Oxfordshire students still took the selection examination, the institutional segregation involved in the LEA's secondary layout was more porous and adaptable than it was in Buckinghamshire. These steps were of great significance when discussions on comprehensive reform re-emerged in the latter 1950s, and this will be explored in the second half of this thesis.

Aside from these variations, the picture that emerges from Oxfordshire in the second decade of tripartism resembles that in Buckinghamshire. The same paradox existed whereby the gains of increased capital investment and completion of schools were coupled with a sense of dissatisfaction and anxiety over limited accommodation and associated constraints on educational opportunities. New schools and buildings barely kept pace with expanding needs as more was being demanded of the education service. Furthermore, the appearance of new, modern buildings juxtaposed with older deficient premises highlighted an uncomfortable contrast between the have and have nots.

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<sup>41</sup> OHS: OLEA CC1/12/A2/9, *Quarterly Reports of Education Sub-Committees*, October 1946.



## Chapter 7 · Oxfordshire: Tripartism in operation

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In the collective memory of selective schooling, grammar schools and secondary modern schools have come to occupy contrasting standpoints. Historical and contemporary commentary has placed grammar schools on a pedestal while the relative deprivation of secondary modern schools has been either conveniently forgotten or used as the defining characteristic of this school type. But the tendency to typecast the secondary modern school as ‘the Cinderella of the English education system’ – or as Corelli Barnett would have it, ‘a mere educational settling tank for academic failures’ – risks overlooking the considerable achievements of these schools.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, grammar schools have often been memorialised, depicted as institutions that provided ‘hubs’ of academic rigour and fostered a sense of aspiration and classlessness for their students. In her impassioned defence of the grammar school, Francis Stevens captures the enthusiasm for this school type:

...the maintained grammar school. Fruit of sixty years of change, survivor of two world wars and the years of economic depression, social unifier, provider of members of every profession and nurse to scholars, statesmen, scientists and writers of the first order, the grammar school is an institution that even its critics acknowledge to have been extraordinarily successful.<sup>2</sup>

This type of appealing, if nostalgic, narrative has often crowded out a more realistic account of these schools’ achievements. It was true that grammar schools provided the main

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<sup>1</sup> Corelli Barnett, *The Audit of War: The Illusion & Reality of Britain as a Great Nation* (London, 1986). For a further discussion of this school type see William Taylor, *The Secondary Modern School*. (London, 1963). Gary McCulloch, *Failing the Ordinary Child?: The Theory and Practice of Working-Class Secondary Education* (Buckingham [England]; Philadelphia, 1998). Val Brooks, ‘The Role of External Examinations in the Making of Secondary Modern Schools in England 1945–65’, *History of Education*, xxxvii (2008).

<sup>2</sup> Frances M. Stevens, *The Living Tradition: The Social and Educational Assumptions of the Grammar School*. (London, 1960). p.26.

route to higher education and the professions, and received the greater share of educational resources. However, the automatic assumption that they delivered high quality education needs to be subject to greater scrutiny. So too does the persisting association of secondary modern schools with the absence of opportunity. This chapter seeks to question whether these stereotypes reflected real conditions in Oxfordshire. In doing so it reviews the pattern of resource allocation in this LEA, explores how resources conditioned the capacity of these institutions to offer secondary education, and then finally examines the quality of the schools themselves.

*Service Inputs: Plant, money, staff*

In absolute terms, Oxfordshire was a poorer LEA than Buckinghamshire. This status was aggravated by a smaller, fragmented education service which in turn demanded higher expenditure on staffing. Looking at how resources were allocated, it seems that secondary modern schools bore the brunt of this constraint, with grammar school pupils accorded greater priority. This was true in the context of both capital and recurrent expenditure as well as staffing allocation.

As discussed in the previous chapter, though on a smaller scale than in Buckinghamshire, secondary modern schools (and primary schools) dominated Oxfordshire's major building programmes. Major work to grammar schools was mostly suspended until the latter 1950s or was otherwise consigned to the minor project lists. In minor works too, secondary modern schools dominated annual projects, though in this case grammar schools secured a greater claim of the resources, allowing the authority to address the worst of school deficiencies or make piecemeal adaptations when needed.

As with Buckinghamshire, such a bias in this pattern of capital expenditure reflected the differing levels of need between the two school sectors. Secondary modern schools in Oxfordshire were required to accommodate almost twice as many children as the selective schools and could not rely (as old grammars did) on inherited premises. That this school sector dominated building programmes was a matter of meeting basic needs, not of capturing a relative advantage. It is also worth reiterating the point made in relation to Buckinghamshire, that although inclusion in the major works programme brought the promise of better premises for secondary moderns, it also brought the reality of delays, ministerial omissions and the prevalence of ill-suited temporary interim arrangements, placing students in these schools at a further disadvantage, if only temporarily.<sup>3</sup>

In terms of staffing and recurrent expenditure, Oxfordshire also conformed to the national picture by allocating a greater share of per capita resources to its grammar school pupils. Direct comparison with Buckinghamshire is precluded since committee papers in Oxfordshire do not include consistent reporting of an allocation formula equivalent to Buckinghamshire's requisition allowances, nor do they outline the basis on which special allowance posts for staff were distributed to all the county's schools. Despite this, it can be seen in the county's estimates, provided in detail throughout the mid-1950s, that grammar schools were better resourced. They secured lower pupil teacher ratios (PTR) than other secondary schools and reflected the bias of Burnham allocations in costing more in staff salaries, as these teachers were better paid. Partly as a consequence of this funding bias, the estimates reveal a clear difference in the cost per place at respective school types. For

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example, in both 1955 and 1956 the average cost per place in grammar schools and secondary moderns stood at £73 and £45 respectively.<sup>4</sup> Though offering only summary figures (per sector rather than per school) the 1959-60 Annual Estimates demonstrate that this inequality was maintained: with a difference of £26 cost per place between selective and non-selective sectors. Consequently, though the number of pupils in modern schools was double that in selective schools they attracted only 46% more funding.<sup>5</sup> Even once those items of expenditure that were beyond the direct control of the LEA are excluded, such as teacher salaries and property rents, this difference remains. For key resourcing items such as furniture, books, and general running costs, the allowance per place in the county selective schools was 167% that of non-selective schools.<sup>6</sup>

In the context of resourcing, two points stand out in Oxfordshire that were not detected as clearly in the course of the Buckinghamshire research. The first of these is that in Buckinghamshire resourcing decisions frequently rested on implicit assumptions of perceived differential needs, whereas the Oxfordshire Chief Education Officer and Secondary Education Sub-Committee explicitly considered the rationale for unequal distribution between school sectors. For example, with regards to staffing, this became apparent in the course of discussions held in 1955 on PTRs and the Burnham Committee's additional allowances for advanced work. Though cautioning the committee on the need to regulate the

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<sup>4</sup> OHS OLEA: CC1/12/A30/2 *Secondary Education Sub-Committee Minutes*, Annual Estimates in December 1955 and December 1956.

<sup>5</sup> OHS OLEA: CC1/12/A30/2 *Secondary Education Sub-Committee Minutes*, Annual Estimates in December 1958.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

distribution (and cost) of teachers in grammar schools, Chorlton noted his agreement in principle with the bent of the Burnham allowances:

This is not undesirable in itself, and there is a strong case for reasonable liberality in the staffing of schools which prepare the top levels of intelligence for the universities and professions.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, in discussing the merits of increasing the supply grants to grammar schools in 1958, the Director synthesised the various representations which had been made to justify a change:

The text books in use in grammar schools are generally more expensive than in other secondary schools...There are more subjects in the grammar school curriculum and more text-books are required for each pupil...Three sciences are taught; more equipment is needed and consumed; some of it more expensive than used in secondary modern schools.<sup>8</sup>

The Committee and Director accepted this assessment in both cases, acknowledging that the advanced work and higher school leaving ages of the grammar school should also entitle them the larger supply grants. The specific capitation allowance under discussion was increased and the PTR ratios in grammar schools were kept lower than secondary moderns (1:18-20 rather than 1: 22-25). On the surface of things, this evidence demonstrates quite clearly that the tenets of parity of esteem and parity of conditions (emphasised so emphatically in early County Development Reports as well as the likes of the Spens Committee) had not survived in the operating mentality of policy makers in Oxfordshire by the mid-1950s.

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<sup>7</sup> OHS OLEA: CC1/12/A30/1 *Secondary Education Sub-Committee Minutes*, July 1955

<sup>8</sup> OHS OLEA: CC1/12/A30/2 *Secondary Education Sub-Committee Minutes*, September 1958.

A second difference between the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire LEA records is that the Oxfordshire records contain many more references to the detrimental restrictions that secondary modern resourcing decisions placed on these schools. The capacity of secondary moderns to develop their educational provision was evidently limited by the resource allocation practices of the Oxfordshire LEA. A range of documents show that resources restricted not only what could be considered the basic functions of secondary modern schools, but also hamstrung efforts to experiment with curricula and offer G.C.E. courses. On the first point for example, HMI reports and committee minutes regularly recorded the insufficiency of equipment and resources for the basic running of schools. The 1955 HMI report for Hailey County Secondary school is a clear example:

It is in matters of equipment that the school has most leeway to make up, in spite of steady efforts during the last few years to build up stocks within the limits of the capitation allowance. In almost every department there is the same tale of shortage, not merely of small utensils and tools necessary for practical work, in science, Housecraft and Art, but also of books: essential books like bibles, atlases and anthologies, and still more of reference books in every subject.<sup>9</sup>

A further example, extracted from the memoirs of Witney ‘Woodgreen’ Secondary School headteacher, Mr. Pooley, emphasises the problem posed by the limited staffing in secondary modern schools when it came to delivering what could be considered a standard non-selective school curriculum. This passage also illuminates the almost surprised response of Committee members to the suggestion of a more equitable distribution of staff between school types:

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<sup>9</sup> HMI Report for Hailey County School, 1955 in OHS OLEA: CC1/12/A30/1 *Secondary Education Sub-Committee Minutes*, February 1956.

we were trying to persuade the Education Committee members for improved pupil-teacher ratios in modern schools. The Chairman of the Education Committee asked us if we were demanding parity of staffing with the grammar schools. The teacher member of the Education Committee...replied "yes. If you think of the small classes we have to provide for very backward children, and for craft subjects which make up a larger part of the modern's school curriculum compared with that of the grammar school, there ought to be little difference in the staffing." The Education Committee members looked doubtful; some expressed dissent. Although there were improvements, only the coming of the comprehensives brought us near the staffing previously enjoyed by the grammar schools.<sup>10</sup>

Not only did resource restrictions undermine the baseline provision of education in secondary modern schools like Hailey, they also restricted the capacity of secondary moderns to provide for their more ambitious pupils; this became a point of frustration when modern schools wanted to experiment with their curriculum. This tension was most evident during the county's trialling of 'Alternative Courses' and the County Tests of Achievement (CTA). The idea behind these courses and examinations was to provide a more challenging and focused curriculum and they aimed to offer a scheme of work that was linked to a vocational interest and drive up academic attainment; a local precursor to the CSE. These courses were also designed as an alternative springboard into Advanced Courses running beyond age 15.<sup>11</sup> An early pioneer of this alternative scheme was Witney Secondary School, under the stewardship of Mr Pooley. As a leading force in the evolution of the CTA and Alternative Courses, Pooley attempted to expand curriculum provision at Witney prior to the county-wide uptake of the scheme. Writing on his efforts to encourage this new curriculum he depicted the school's fourth year course in 1957 as

struggling along, short of equipment and time...the commercial course had neither typewriters, duplicators or filing cabinets; the rural group little beyond the usual tools for gardening ...<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> OHS SZ Stack WITN/373 H.W Pooley, *The Story of a School: Wood Green School, Witney*. (1983). p.24.

<sup>11</sup> OHS OLEA: CC1/12/A30/2 *Secondary Education Sub-Committee Minutes*, February 1959. Appendix E: Alternative Courses in Secondary Modern Schools, Report by Director Of Education.

<sup>12</sup> OHS SZ Stack WITN/373 H.W Pooley, *The Story of a School: Wood Green School, Witney*. p.22

The enduring deficiencies in modern schools became more obvious as the sector demanded access to a greater share of resources. For example, the Working Party appointed to review the piloting of Alternative Courses reported to the Secondary Education Sub-Committee in 1959 and listed both equipment and staffing as the limiting factors in schools undertaking this level of work. They listed the following needs as a ‘compromise,’ reassuring the Secondary Education Sub-Committee that schools would ‘make do and mend’ while the pilot scheme was underway, but emphasised that these resources were in large part necessary (and currently lacking) whether or not the scheme was in place:

There will be a need for an increase in the number and quality of textbooks for reference use...The committee is of the view that the current provision of laboratory equipment is inadequate. A panel of teachers has recently examined this question with reference to the Tests of Achievement and has reported on the restrictions imposed by the lack of apparatus. A considerable increase in science equipment will be necessary to cater for the level of work which is envisaged and the working party submit that this should be done irrespective of the needs of Alternative Courses.<sup>13</sup>

The Alternative Course Scheme also brought with it the expectation that an additional 14 teachers would be provided throughout Oxfordshire's secondary moderns – a request that raised the issue of unequal staffing and PTRs between the two school sectors. In 1959 Chorlton co-operated with the Working Party to secure the Education Committee’s agreement to finance the scheme, but even then Pooley’s memoirs speak of restrictive deficiencies (in staff and equipment) that were not equalised until his school merged with the local grammar school in 1965.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> OHS OLEA: CC1/12/A30/2 *Secondary Education Sub-Committee Minutes*, February 1959. Appendix E: Alternative Courses in Secondary Modern Schools, Report by Director Of Education.

<sup>14</sup> OHS SZ Stack WITN/373 H.W Pooley, *The Story of a School: Wood Green School, Witney*. P.25

The inequality of staffing and the limitations this imposed on modern schools really came to prominence when a handful of secondary modern schools attempted to undertake advanced work. Despite these ambitions (which were entirely in line with national trends) there were several instances where plans for the introduction of G.C.E. examinations were discouraged, delayed or abandoned as a direct result of insufficient teacher numbers. The first instance of this is related again by H.W. Pooley, his school being one of the first modern schools to attempt to run a G.C.E. stream in 1953. The response of the Director of Education is recalled:

[He] wrote expressing his displeasure that I was contemplating G.C.E. courses at this early stage of the school's life, and pointed out that Oxfordshire's financial resources would not permit the extension of secondary modern education, which would require the appointment of graduate (higher paid) staff and would deflect teachers from their real role in educating pupils of average and below average ability. He must insist that I refrained from introducing new courses without discussing them first with him.<sup>15</sup>

Nor was Woodgreen Secondary a unique case. By the beginning of the 1960s two of the larger secondary schools, Easington Secondary Modern in Banbury and Gosford Hill in Kidlington, were held back from developing G.C.E. streams, with the committee informing the school governors, in the case of Banbury, that:

in view of the shortage of teachers at the present time and the desirability of exploring closer liaison between the secondary schools in Banbury when the present head of the Grammar School retired, the subcommittee felt that it would be unwise to consider establishing a G.C.E. course at the school in September.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> OHS SZ Stack WITN/373 H.W Pooley, *The Story of a School: Wood Green School, Witney*. p.6

<sup>16</sup> OHS OLEA: CC1/12/A30/2 *Secondary Education Sub-Committee Minutes*, February 1961.

At both schools these proposals were delayed until September 1962, and the brakes were firmly placed on any more secondary modern schools pursuing G.C.E. courses. The Education Committee instead adopted the recommendations made by Chorlton:

that in view of the present position in regard to the supply of teachers the existing arrangements should continue and that the establishment of G.C.E courses at secondary modern schools...should not be contemplated before 1963 when the situation would be reviewed in the light of the teacher supply at that time.<sup>17</sup>

It has already been established that for Buckinghamshire resource constraints were a crucial determinant of secondary moderns' capacity to operate, and the extent of material and staffing limitations are very prominent in HMI reports. The same could be said of Oxfordshire, but one important difference between the authorities was that unequal resource distribution in Oxfordshire was based on a conscious rationing process, one which added to the already limited capacity of its non-selective schools. For example, in Buckinghamshire, the introduction of G.C.E. courses in secondary modern schools is noted encouragingly with no mention (perhaps purposefully) of the resourcing implications; in Oxfordshire these courses were actively delayed at a time when its grammar schools were receiving more generous staffing and capitation allowances. It may have been that the larger establishment sizes of Buckinghamshire secondary schools permitted greater flexibility in expanding its curriculum and objectives, it may also be the case that the Oxfordshire study offers documents, such as Pooley's memoirs, which communicate resource grievances more candidly and thus highlight these restrictions more forcefully. Regardless, it would seem that secondary modern schools in Oxfordshire faced a three fold challenge: operating within a poorer authority, organised in a more

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

fragmented and inefficient way, and receiving an unequal and smaller share of the county's resources.

With a view to understanding the operation of these schools in their own right, rather than in relation to the selective sector, the subsequent section moves on to explore the operation and performance of secondary modern schools, looking to understand what they aimed to do, how effectively they conducted their work, and how far they provided educational opportunities to their pupils. The 'quality' of Oxfordshire grammar schools, as far it can be gauged, is dealt with in the subsequent chapter.

## Chapter 8 · School quality and educational opportunities

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### *Oxfordshire secondary modern schools: quality and opportunity*

Before reviewing the development and quality of the secondary modern schools in this LEA, a couple of caveats should be reinforced. It has already been established that secondary modern schools in Oxfordshire were accorded lesser priority in funding and staffing than grammar schools, rationing choices which added to the structural and circumstantial disadvantages already faced by these schools and their students. As it did elsewhere, the relative impoverishment of this sector undermined the efforts of these fledgling institutions to cultivate status, limiting how far they could establish an identity that went beyond not being the grammar school. Furthermore, it is evident that Oxfordshire parents still preferred their children to enter grammar schools rather than secondary modern schools. Parents campaigned in several areas of Oxfordshire for the expansion of grammar school intakes; there is little evidence in the other direction. They were not clamouring at the doors of secondary modern schools. The Oxfordshire secondary modern schools, despite the positive features reviewed in this chapter, did not drastically transform the operating bias of tripartism.

It is however fair to say that the Oxfordshire LEA and its secondary modern school headteachers invested considerable thought and political will into seeing non-selective schools evolve along independent lines, and in many ways they were successful. Take for example the following extract from the 'Letters to the Editor' section of the *Oxford Mail* in January 1954:

It could be argued that if my daughter were selected for Wheatley Bi-lateral\* School, she would receive a far broader education in terms of curriculum, opportunities for foreign travel, residential education at centres like Holnicote and Tregoyed, and the advantage of co-education, which at present she would not receive in the girls' grammar school.<sup>1</sup>

Here we are offered an interesting inversion the normal grammar school/ secondary modern status hierarchy, with a suggestion that Oxfordshire secondary modern schools had something to offer beyond grammar school emulation and which was capable of making these institutions appealing in their own right. To a large extent, a review of the policy and vision surrounding secondary modern schools in this county supports this impression. This can be seen both in the way that a secondary education was understood by lead policy makers and in the way their ideas translated into clear lines of policy.

Oxfordshire officers conceived of education in secondary modern schools along four lines: (1) they wanted pupils to complete a full four-year secondary course, and receive recognition for their achievements, as well as being equipped in the basic competencies of literacy and numeracy; (2) they desired secondary modern students to receive an education in character, one which encouraged leadership, initiative and all-round achievement; (3) they believed that learning should be connected with pupils' broad vocational interests; and (4) more contested, they also believed that secondary modern students should have access to advanced studies, including G.C.E. O and A Levels. In practice, these tenets translated into the provision of the County Tests of Achievement (CTA), Residential Courses, Alternative Courses, and the evolution of both in-house G.C.E. provision and the planned development of

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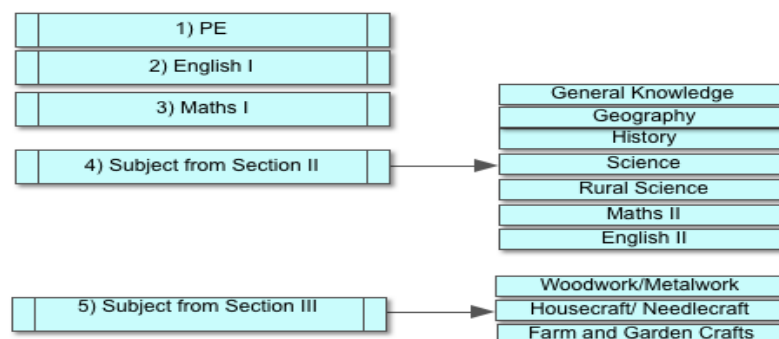
<sup>1</sup> OML: Oxford Mail, 'Letters to the Editor: Grouping Children by Ability,' 24<sup>th</sup> January 1964, \* This school still had an non-selective intake.

Advanced Studies Centres. Taken as a whole, these initiatives were declared by a working party of nine secondary modern school headteachers in 1959 as ‘completing the pattern of secondary education and provide incentives and opportunities to every pupil.’<sup>2</sup> What did these constituent initiatives involve and how far can they be said to have enhanced the experience and value of education to secondary modern pupils in this county?

County Tests of Achievement (CTA)

The County Tests of Achievement were a group of internally examined tests intended to cater for the top 20% of secondary modern cohorts. They were similar in this regard to the Certificate of Secondary Education later introduced nationally. They were group exams, which meant that a student had to take subjects from five categories to earn the full Certificate, the contents of which are illustrated below.

Figure 20: Structure of the CTA Leaving Certificate



For the headteachers and officers designing this scheme, the inclusion of both practical work and physical challenge alongside academic work was regarded as particularly

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<sup>2</sup> OHS OLEA: CC1/12/A30/2 *Secondary Education Sub-Committee Minutes*, February 1959.

important, the feeling being that this balance would help focus achievement in functional skills but would also ‘distinguish the successful all round pupil.’<sup>3</sup> Reporting on the two year pilot of the tests, these organising principles were clear in Chorlton’s remarks:

some local schemes have received a good deal of publicity. All appear to be confined to a limited range of school subjects and to be of a mainly academic character. Only the Oxfordshire scheme seeks to test and set standards for physical and personal development and development of the character as well as academic attainment...covering general as well as practical subjects, giving scope for character training and initiative as well as attention to physical skills... [it is] more advanced in conception and more suitable in scope for the secondary modern school than any other yet devised.<sup>4</sup>

It is clear from Chorlton’s assessment of this scheme, that he felt it fostered the development of the whole child and not just its academic progression. His emphasis on the CTA’s practical subjects (Section III in Figure 20) and the scheme’s unusual inclusion of Physical Education are here cited as evidence that Oxfordshire was operating more holistic form of secondary education than many other counterparts nationally.

The widespread uptake of this certificate indicates a demand and popularity among secondary modern schools in Oxfordshire: having been trialled by 8 schools in 1955, it was adopted by 12 secondary modern schools in 1957, 17 in 1958 and 24 by 1959. HMI reports of the early 1960s indicate that the CTA exams were used in the majority of secondary schools throughout the county.

In terms of providing opportunities for students, there was seen to be an intrinsic and functional benefit to pupils taking the CTA. Headteachers’ comments attest to the focus and

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<sup>3</sup> OHS OLEA: CC1/12/A30/1 *Secondary Education Sub-Committee Minutes*, May 56.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*

motivation with which the certificates provided students, as well as being a source of pride for the schools. Discussions between secondary modern school headteachers and the Directorate emphasized the success of the tests, revealing that they ‘were in fact proving to be the incentive to improved standards of attainment by both pupils and schools that was hoped for.’<sup>5</sup> The CTA was also seen to have an effect on the retention of students at school until the completion of their sixth year, where before they might have left at the Easter or Christmas after turning 15. The headteacher of Wheatley School, Mr Anson, enthusiastically remarked upon this effect of the scheme:

there is now competition and incentive...sufficient to make children work harder in their initial two years and remain here for the full four years. Last year 22 Christmas and Easter leavers stayed the full year to sit the county certificate examination.

Such a tendency was reported at other schools. The headmaster of Witney ‘Woodgreen’ Secondary School reported that the CTAs had actively encouraged staying on, noting that by 1957, 60% of his students were remaining at school to complete their fourth year.<sup>6</sup> The influence of this exam was also raised in HMI reports, with inspectors at Gillotts, the Wenman, Langtree and Icknield associating the retention of students to the end of their IV year with the provision of the CTA.<sup>7</sup>

The presence of this qualification also assisted in holding secondary schools and their staff to account for the standard of education they were delivering. By providing a comparative indicator of performance, the CTA both fostered pride and served as a trigger for

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> OHS SZ Stack WITN/373 H.W Pooley, *The story of a school: Wood Green School, Witney*.

<sup>7</sup> NA: ED 109/ 9500: *HM Inspectorate Reports: Gillotts School 1964, Wenman County Secondary School 1963, Langtree County Secondary School 1965, Icknield County Secondary School 1963*.

improvements. For example, media coverage of the Wheatley School cited above frequently highlighted the number of county certificates gained by students as a demonstration of its comparative performance and success. In 1960, its head, Mr Anson, announced that the school's results 'with 21 certificates- were the second highest among the 24 secondary schools in the county.'<sup>8</sup> The CTA was also used to frame judgements about teacher performance, and problem areas within schools. This was a particularly prominent element of the 1963 Wenman School HMI Report where inspectors noted that only 7 students had gained the full County Certificate in 1963 compared with 22 and 25 in 1962 and 1961 respectively. The reason identified was that the standard of mathematics teaching had declined and had more students passed this subject, there would have been an additional 14 students with the full certificate.<sup>9</sup> Inspections frequently identified weaker teachers based on the work they saw, but in this instance, the evidence of CTA performance added weight and urgency to the criticism and elevated the problem on the governors' agenda.<sup>10</sup>

### Residential Courses

Alongside the CTA, Oxfordshire also evolved Residential Courses, which it would seem were peculiar to this LEA: the local press declared that the scheme was the first of its kind in the county.<sup>11</sup> The inspiration for it sprang from Chorlton and from one of his deputy officers, R.C Naish, and received strong support from successive Chairman of the Education Committee. The key objective, Chorlton explained, was to

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<sup>8</sup> OML: Oxford Mail, 'Wheatley School's New Title' 25<sup>th</sup> November 1960.

<sup>9</sup> NA: ED 109/ 9500: *HM Inspectorate Reports: Wenman County Secondary School 1963*

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> OML: Oxford Mail, '100 Oxfordshire Boys for "Character" Course,' 1<sup>st</sup> April 1955.

Develop initiative, responsibility and self-reliance which we know have never had the chance of appearing in our day secondary schools.<sup>12</sup>

With this aim in mind, the Residential Course originally ran in 1955 as a six week residential trip, taking 25 secondary modern pupils at a time (100 over the year) to the Old Brathay Hall (also Patterdale Hall later on) in the Lake District where they took part in planned expeditions and outdoor pursuits, and where school work continued in the form of locally informed study.<sup>13</sup>

In terms of uptake, this scheme was invariably limited. Only a minority of pupils were selected via interview, to participate and between 1955-1958 the scheme was only available to boys. Furthermore, those selected tended to be those already performing well within the school; successive cohorts described by the course co-ordinator as ‘above average’ in ability.<sup>14</sup> The scheme therefore was not aimed at the majority of pupils. Nor could it be, in terms of capacity and logistics. However, the presence of this scheme was a vitally important feature both for those students who did participate and on a more symbolic level. For the pupils involved, these courses were reported to have been highly successful: personally, socially and educationally. On returning to school, headmasters reported to the Education Committee that these groups remained at school for longer, that their academic performance improved and that they frequently came to function as school prefects or captains, becoming an important part of the school community.<sup>15</sup> The improvement in the physical health of many of these pupils was also a salient feature of many of the Old Brathay reports. For the

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<sup>12</sup> OML: Oxford Mail, ‘Centre in Lake District for Oxon Children,’ 25<sup>th</sup> March 1955.

<sup>13</sup> OHS OLEA: CC1/12/A30/1 *Secondary Education Sub-Committee Minutes*, July 1955.

<sup>14</sup> OHS OLEA: CC1/12/A30/1 *Secondary Education Sub-Committee Minutes*, December, 1955.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

students selected to take part, these residential courses can be seen as a remarkable extension of educational and personal opportunity, one that exceeded the bounds of the opportunities provided by the local grammar schools or many other schools across the country.

On a more symbolic level, the evolution of residential courses on this scale in this period was unprecedented. Its existence not only serves as a demonstration that the Oxfordshire LEA was committed to a broader notion of secondary education, but points to the authority having some success in giving substance and shape to that version. On returning from Brathay, the journals of participants were collected by the authority to assess the success of the scheme. The conclusion of one boy highlighted the essential value of the kind of education being offered:

We feel that in everything we are gaining confidence and developing a sense of responsibility. Above all we are learning to live and work together.<sup>16</sup>

In this sense the Oxfordshire authority came closer than many others in delivering on the most vague of expectations placed on secondary modern schools by the Norwood Report: that non-selective schools should ‘offer a general grounding and to awaken interest in many aspects of life and citizenship.’<sup>17</sup>

### Alternative Courses

With the CTA and the Residential Courses in place by 1955, the Oxfordshire Education Directorate and its secondary modern headteachers turned their minds to shaping

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<sup>16</sup> The Banbury Guardian, ‘Outward Bound,’ 11<sup>th</sup> November 2013.

<sup>17</sup> Board of Education, *Curriculum and Examinations in Secondary Schools: Report of the Committee of the Secondary School Examinations Council* (London, 1943). p.12.

the core curriculum opportunities in non-selective schools. In this task they were particularly eager to link the work of the schools with the vocational prospects of their pupils. To begin with, the commitment and energy behind tailoring secondary modern curricula was school led. This was particularly the case with Northfield Secondary Modern and Witney 'Woodgreen' County Secondary School, the headteachers of which were regarded as particularly ambitious and innovative. In the former case, pre-vocational courses came to occupy a central place in the IV year curriculum and in the latter, efforts were explicitly made to shape a curriculum responsive to local labour demands and the vocational preferences of its students.

Witney School (which opened in 1953) traced its leavers' occupations and identified that four main sectors attracted the majority of its students: engineering, factory/garage and building work; agricultural work; clerical and retail work; and domestic or caring professions. Having established this pattern, the school's head re-organized the fourth year curriculum into technical, clerical, agricultural, domestic and general forms, with each form following a combination of subjects that could promote its skill base in a given field. The technical form, for example, focused particularly on woodwork and metal work, and its mathematics and science syllabuses were tailored to focus on applied aspects, such as the study of electricity. The clerical form focused more on the accounting elements in the mathematics syllabus, and had a greater proportion of its time devoted to English. The headteacher explicitly acknowledged the aim of this reorganisation as integrating final year activities around specific occupations and was eager to connect a student's uptake of educational opportunities

with his or her desire to enter the labour force.<sup>18</sup> Other modern schools also evolved curricula that bridged the education on offer with the local labour market. For example, Burford Grammar School (Modern Department), the Abbey School at Berinsfield and Langtree Secondary School each offered agricultural courses, reflecting the fact that approximately 20% of this region's population were employed in farming.<sup>19</sup>

Based on the perceived success of these courses, the Director of Education convened a working party of secondary modern headteachers in 1958 with the task of devising a comparable scheme for the whole county. The Alternative Course Working Party articulated its aim as being two-fold: firstly,

This scheme of courses frankly seeks to use the vocational interest as a stimulus to focus a child's attention, to unlock the child's energies more fully, and...to reinforce the impetus given by the Tests of Achievement scheme to inspire the quality of teaching, higher standards of attainment and the growing satisfaction and support of the parents for what the new secondary schools can offer for children.<sup>20</sup>

Secondly, the Working Party sought to develop courses which would allow secondary modern schools to expand their remit to integrate work normally associated with technical schools, and thus promote their status. The timing of this development was connected with the phasing out of the few technical secondary schools in Oxfordshire and can be seen as an attempt by policy makers to concentrate secondary education in as few centres as possible. Of the technical schools in existence, both the Rycotewood School and Gillotts Technical School

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<sup>18</sup> OHS OLEA: CC1/12/A30/1 *Secondary Education Sub-Committee Minutes*, September 1955: Appendix I: Witney County Secondary School 4th year courses.

<sup>19</sup> Census occupational tables for 1961 report that upwards of 20% of workforce in these areas were employed in agriculture sector. Census tables from: [www.visionofbritain.org.uk](http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk)

<sup>20</sup> OHS OLEA: CC1/12/A30/2 *Secondary Education Sub-Committee Minutes*, February 1959. Appendix E: Alternative Courses in Secondary Modern Schools, Report by Director Of Education.

were to be absorbed into newly built secondary moderns at Langtree and Gillotts/Henley respectively. Further, the Woodgreen Technical School in Banbury, having failed to justify its separate existence, was scheduled to be discontinued. The Director recommended its closure, partly in the knowledge that secondary moderns could expand to take over its sphere of work:

After 8 years [Woodgreen] shows no sign of being able to undertake any advanced work as it should- it is doing little that the secondary modern schools or the advanced courses at the technical college cannot do equally well or better in fact...One should not overlook at the same time the effect of Woodgreen's existence on the modern schools by reason of "creaming off" each year a number of their ablest pupils halfway through their course. There is no doubt that this is resented by modern schools and is a source of discouragement to them.<sup>21</sup>

A year after this recommendation, the Alternative Course Working Party identified the re-location of technical education within the walls of secondary moderns as an opportunity 'to develop Secondary Schools as technical/modern schools thereby adding considerably to their prestige and efficiency.'<sup>22</sup> Alternative Courses were therefore seen as a route to promoting pupils' vocational opportunities but also as a means of promoting the esteem and reputation of the county's modern schools.

In terms of operation, the Alternative Courses functioned in much the same way as the IV year courses at Witney Secondary School. They began in the third year of secondary education, culminated in a student taking the CTA exam, and worked by matching a student's interests or ability with a vocational sector. There were six varieties of course: Technical, Commercial, Rural, Home Technology, General Technical and General Practical, each with a

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<sup>21</sup> OHS OLEA: CC1/12/A30/2 *Secondary Education Sub-Committee Minutes*, February 1958. Appendix C: Secondary Education in Banbury.

<sup>22</sup> OHS OLEA: CC1/12/A30/2 *Secondary Education Sub-Committee Minutes*, February 1959. Appendix E: Alternative Courses in Secondary Modern Schools, Report by Director Of Education.

different focus and each requiring a greater degree of specialization in different core subjects, similar to the Witney Secondary School model. For example, the General Technical or Commercial courses were highlighted as streams which might be followed by more able pupils aiming for the County Certificate or G.C.E., whereas the General Practical was designed for students with less academic interest or ability. By 1959, eight secondary schools were piloting the scheme and by the early 1960s Alternative Courses of some form were running in most schools across the county.<sup>23</sup>

With the exception of routes to the more standard external examinations, which will be explored presently, the above schemes constituted the main opportunity structures for Oxfordshire secondary modern pupils. In many ways, they can be seen as effective in raising the quality of education on offer in that they provided a structure and sense of purpose for learners, as well as encouraging the full completion of secondary education. Additionally, the operation of these schemes, especially Alternative Courses, worked as a pretext for secondary modern headteachers to lay a greater claim on the county's resources. In this case, the Director's endorsement and Education Committee's approval of the scheme ensured that secondary modern pupils secured material (if marginal) gains that they otherwise would not have seen.

Nevertheless, a core component of this arrangement, the CTA, was treated with ambivalence by some parties. Most notably, Witney secondary modern school headteacher W.H Pooley regarded their introduction as a means of delaying the uptake of G.C.E. courses

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<sup>23</sup> Based on comments made in HMI reports for Oxfordshire secondary modern schools.

in secondary modern schools. In recalling its development Pooley claimed that the ‘CTA deflected Oxfordshire secondary schools from attempting to enter candidates for external examinations.’<sup>24</sup> Certainly, in 1955, while six modern schools were undertaking G.C.E. work in Buckinghamshire, only Northfield Secondary did so in Oxfordshire. It was not until 1958 that Witney Secondary School was permitted to expand its provision in this direction, and later still for the county’s other large modern schools. Though Witney Secondary School was permitted to develop G.C.E. courses from 1958 onwards, Pooley expressed his frustration, explaining that

The CTA had only local currency, [external] examination qualifications were essential for access to the most interesting, satisfying and responsible careers. The thought that any of ‘my children’ should be denied these opportunities...led to some uneasiness between the Director and myself.<sup>25</sup>

This tension reveals quite a fundamental conflict in Oxfordshire which often surfaced between the Education Directorate and local headteachers about to the extent to which secondary modern schools should participate in external examination. Particularly in the case of G.C.E. courses, Chorlton was resistant to their development in secondary modern schools into the mid-1950s, instead proposing specialised centres for advanced study which could provide a broader choice of end-on courses to 15-year-old school leavers than separate institutions could provide. This was partly logistical: Chorlton and the Education Committee were anxious that smaller 3-4 form secondary modern schools would not have the capacity to operate courses for external exams, or that in doing so, the interests of the many would be sacrificed for the examinable few. For Chorlton, however, it also seems to have been an educational concern which resonated with his contention (a widespread one at the time) that

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<sup>24</sup> OHS SZ Stack WITN/373 H.W Pooley, *The story of a school: Wood Green School, Witney* p.12.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

secondary modern curricula should have a different remit from that of the grammar schools.

Pooley explained this:

The Director of Education, was anxious that modern schools should not put themselves in examination chains and restrict their freedom of movement for development and experimentation.<sup>26</sup>

Introducing advanced courses in-house, it was thought, would shackle the operation of these schools to external and unsuitable pressure.

### Extended Courses

In the event, as the demand for in-house extended courses grew, the Education Committee adapted its guidance to allow larger secondary schools to pursue such courses. For the majority of smaller secondary modern schools, however, the limitation remained and students had to transfer across to designated area Advanced Studies Centres in order to pursue post-15 education. This arrangement was restrictive, but its educational benefits were argued for in various memoranda submitted to the Education Committee. For example, in 1961 Chorlton reassured the committee:

at present, there is no part of the county in which a child that fails to secure entry to a grammar school at the age of 11 can be said to be denied access to the kind of course which these schools customarily provide and which are of such importance for subsequent professional and technical training and occupations.<sup>27</sup>

By combining the work of the local Technical Colleges (FE institutions), an Advanced Studies Centre at Northfield, and the provision which had been allowed in select secondary schools, the Director highlighted that every student at each county school had the opportunity to pursue extended courses. All of the Extended Courses remained free of charge,

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> OHS OLEA: CC1/12/A30/2 *Secondary Education Sub-Committee Minutes*, February 1961.

with the authority providing free transport and offering an Educational Maintenance Allowance to students from lower income families. A review of the scale of provision in these centres shows that they were in fact able to sustain a greater variety of courses and opportunities than individual secondary modern schools. For example, the North Oxfordshire Technology College offered a selection of 15 O Level courses, alongside City and Guilds Courses and College of Preceptors Exams. Similarly, at Northfield Secondary School the designated Centre for Central Oxfordshire, G.C.E. O Levels were on offer alongside pre-apprenticeship qualifications and commercial courses. Students attending these centres were therefore presented with a greater degree of choice and range of opportunities than would have been the case had they remained in their respective modern schools.

*Oxfordshire grammar schools: quality and opportunity*

The Oxfordshire grammar schools provide an insight into the problems of delivering selective education in a rural setting. It will be recalled from the start of this section that the original 1944 County Development Plan and the 1947 Education Committee requested that two large and highly academic boarding schools be established to provide the grammar school education in the county. At the time, it was felt that this was the best solution to an otherwise problematic scenario of recruiting enough students of ‘grammar school material’ to keep smaller separate schools academically buoyant and economically viable. A combination of ministerial ambivalence and enforced pragmatism on the buildings front put paid to the LEA’s ambitions in this instance. However, the anxieties that the Development Committee highlighted, in terms of pupils and performance, were borne out by experience.

As with Buckinghamshire, an attempt has been made to judge the quality of Oxfordshire's grammar schools but, as with the preceding chapters, this work has been shaped by what archival material has survived. In terms of assessing school performance the

Oxfordshire material is more limited than that available for Buckinghamshire, particularly with regards to information provided in Buckinghamshire by the Youth Employment Sub-Committee Reports. It is unclear if the Education Committee in Oxfordshire even established a reporting sub-committee along these lines; if it did, those records have not been discovered. Thus, the annual county-wide data that these reports yielded for Buckinghamshire are not available for its neighbour. Nor is this lack compensated for by the main sub-committee reports. Work in Oxfordshire has therefore relied more heavily on press and anecdotal evidence, complemented by a series of HMI reports. Fortunately, in the case of the grammar school reports, they were all compiled (with two exceptions) within a five-year window, adding to the direct comparability of the information contained in them.

Collectively, Oxfordshire grammars schools struggled to demonstrate expected levels of academic performance throughout the 1950s. This can be seen from both official and unofficial documents. Commenting on the LEA's decision to allow secondary modern schools to begin G.C.E. courses, W.H Pooley speculated that the change of heart was rooted in 'the poor performance of the grammar school pupils.'<sup>28</sup> Such was the anxiety surrounding this perceived underperformance across the county that the Education Committee convened a special conference in 1962 to discuss the matter. Its report claimed that Oxfordshire stood as one of the lowest ranked of all English counties in the number of university awards that were received, and that only 50% of grammar students secured 5+ passes at G.C.E. O Level.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> OHS: SZ Stack WITN/373 H.W Pooley, *The story of a school: Wood Green School, Witney* p.14 and OML: Oxford Mail, '2-Stream School Needed at Wheatley,' 20<sup>th</sup> November 1962 discusses Education Committee's reluctance to expand grammar schools on account of existing performance.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

Something that was regarded as particularly alarming in the LEA was the degree of wastage from its grammar schools. As has been explained in the case of Buckinghamshire, pupil ‘wastage’ was the proportion of students who left grammars prior to the age of 16 and the full completion of the grammar school course to O Level. In Oxfordshire, this was considered a major issue and an *Oxford Mail* article in January 1955 reported that in contrast to Oxford City’s 1%, and the national average of 17%, approximately 20% of Oxfordshire’s grammar school pupils were leaving without taking any O Levels.<sup>30</sup> There is also evidence to suggest that this issue persisted towards the end of the 1950s. Throughout 1958, press reports surface charting discussions between councillors as to whether they should introduce an early leaving penalty. Commenting on the problem, Charles Peers, Chairman of the Education Committee and local grandee, admitted that ‘your sub-committee are always very conscious of this difficulty and are always very worried about it.’<sup>31</sup> A survey of HMI reports (summarised in Table 7) also shows that in certain areas of Oxfordshire early leaving posed a problem. It is also clear however that there was marked variation between the county’s grammar schools on this measure.

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<sup>30</sup> OML: Oxford Mail, ‘Problem of children leaving,’ 14 January 1955.

<sup>31</sup> OML: Oxford Mail, ‘Leaving grammar schools too early, Oxon committee to seek advice on penalties,’ 26<sup>th</sup> March 1958.

Table 7: Leaving prior to 16 from Grammar Schools in Oxfordshire

<i>School (Inspection date)</i>	<i>Leaving prior to 16 (national average over same period)</i>
<i>Lord Williams' Grammar School (1958)</i>	5% over previous 2 years (12%)
<i>Henley Grammar School (1956)</i>	7% over previous 3 years (17%)
<i>Holton Park Grammar School (1955)</i>	8% over previous three years (18%)
<i>Witney Grammar School (1957)</i>	'Unusually high proportion staying on 17 or over.' <sup>32</sup>
<i>Burford Grammar School (Department) (1953)</i>	Compared to 1945: 'there is a tendency for pupils to leave when they reach 15 years of age, and recent figures reveal that this tendency has not yet been checked.' <sup>33</sup>
<i>Chipping Norton Grammar School (1955)</i>	17% over previous 3 years (17%)
<i>Banbury Grammar School (1955)</i>	21% over previous 3 years (15%)

Source: Compiled HMI Reports, National averages from Ministry of Education Annual Statistics.

The content of HMI reports concerning the performance of schools in examinations and at sixth-form level also raises questions about the general quality of Oxfordshire grammar schools. The sixth form has been described as 'the crown of the grammar school, almost its justification:' its scholarly focus and link with the universities was regarded as a defining feature of the grammar school tradition.<sup>34</sup> The presence and dynamism of a school's sixth form can therefore serve as an indication as to how well respective schools were fulfilling their institutional *raison d'être* and catering for academically talented pupils.

Though the school level uptake or success at A Levels is not reported consistently enough in Oxfordshire records to allow thorough analysis, figures relating to sixth form cohort sizes, inspector comments on the quality of advanced work, alongside their reportage of further education uptake, have offered some indication as to how effectively schools

<sup>32</sup> Witney Grammar School HMI Report 1957 in OHS OLEA: CC1/12/A30/2 *Secondary Education Sub-Committee Minutes*, May 1958.

<sup>33</sup> NA: ED 109/ 9042: *HM Inspectorate Reports: Burford*, Burford Grammar School 1953.

<sup>34</sup> Frances M. Stevens, *The Living Tradition*, p.75.

maintained sixth-form work. The two tables below summarise information provided in school HMI reports on sixth form size and leavers' destinations.

Table 8 depicts quite stark variation between the grammar schools in terms of student retention and Table 9 demonstrates that while most grammar schools in Oxfordshire were sending pupils on to Further Education in line with or above the national average, only two of the six schools recorded kept pace with the national trend of sending students to university, though notably the Lord Williams's School excelled in this regard. Especially according to levels of university entry, these figures indicate an underwhelming performance from Oxfordshire grammar schools.

Table 8: Sixth form size in proportion to school roll and V Form size.

<i>School (Inspection date)</i>	<i>VI Form size/School rolls</i>	<i>VI Form size/ 15-16 cohort.</i>
<i>Burford Grammar (1963)</i>	4%	35%
<i>Burford Grammar Dept.(1953)</i>	6%	31%
<i>Chipping Norton Grammar (1955)</i>	7%	50%
<i>Henley Grammar (1956)</i>	9%	59%
<i>Witney Grammar (1957)</i>	10%	50%
<i>Holton Park Grammar (1955)</i>	11%	78%
<i>Banbury Grammar (1955)</i>	12%	72%
<i>LWS (1958)</i>	16%	104%

Source: Compiled HMI Reports

Table 9: Grammar School leavers' Uptake of Further Education and University entry

<i>School (Year Inspected)</i>	<i>Period referred to:</i>	<i>Proportion of leavers entering university, Oxfordshire</i>	<i>Proportion of leavers entering university, England &amp; Wales</i>	<i>Proportion leavers entering Further Education, Oxfordshire</i>	<i>Proportion of leavers entering Further Education, England &amp; Wales</i>
<i>Henley Grammar School (1956)</i>	1952-5	6%	10%	15%	25%
<i>Banbury GS (1957)</i>	1953-6	12%	11%	29%	27%
<i>Chipping Norton (1955)</i>	1952-5	5%	10%	27%	25%
<i>Holton Park (1955)</i>	1952-55	2%	10%	30%	25%
<i>Witney Grammar School (1957)</i>	1953-7	2%	11%	26%	26%
<i>LWS (1958)</i>	1956-8	19%	12%	19%	24%
<i>Burford GS (1963)</i>	1962-3	8%	Na (10%+)	16%	na

Source: Compiled HMI Reports

The combined information for wastage rates, sixth form size and leavers' destinations points to wide variation in the performance of respective schools. HMI comments reinforce this impression. On the one hand there appear to have been a group of schools – Henley Grammar, Lord Williams's and Holton Park in particular – which were congratulated by inspectors for their record and performance at sixth form level. On the other hand, Banbury School (despite its larger size and university successes), Witney and Burford Grammar Schools were judged critically. For example, the 1957 inspection report at Banbury commented disappointedly on the school's record with academically able pupils:

the work of the best boys and girls is sound as far as it goes, its scope is not very ambitious. In fact both in intellectual and in its social life the school as a whole lacks any distinction, which might have been looked for in the largest grammar school in the county, serving as it does a vigorous and growing industrial community like Banbury.<sup>35</sup>

Comments made in the local press also suggest that the school's headteacher was frustrated with the performance and momentum of his sixth form, explaining that only 20 from each intake might be expected to proceed beyond 16 and of these, 5-8 (40%) would leave by the end of the first year; at best approximately 16% of a cohort were entering for A Level examination.<sup>36</sup> This proportion stood below the national average, and any figures recorded for Buckinghamshire grammar schools where even schools of a comparable character, such as Slough Grammar School, presented 30% of their cohorts for A Level.

The record at Witney Grammar was treated by inspectors as even more problematic, describing the size of the school's sixth as 'misleading,' its exam performance as troublesome and its sixth form tradition as weak:

These students were not involved in A level studies (or they did not complete them)...The record of passes at the Advanced level in the General Certificate examination is in fact very low. Only 7 of the 14 who left at the age of 18 had passes in any advanced subjects, and only 4 pupils passed in 2 or more subjects... [there is a] present high rate of failure in the O Level papers of the G.C.E. examination...The lack of academic ambition and sixth form tradition is reflected in the careers taken up by leavers... The School is not likely to make a larger contribution to the professions until sixth form work of real quality has been built up.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Banbury Grammar School HMI Report 1957 in OHS OLEA: CC1/12/A30/2 *Secondary Education Sub-Committee Minutes*, July 1958.

<sup>36</sup> OML: Oxford Mail, 'Pupils urged to stay longer at school,' 30<sup>th</sup> March 1955.

<sup>37</sup> Witney Grammar School HMI Report 1957 in OHS OLEA: CC1/12/A30/2 *Secondary Education Sub-Committee Minutes*, May 1958.

Still more scathing were inspector's comments to the governors of Burford Grammar School, highlighting a distinct failure to capture the interest or focus of even the more academic of the cohort:

In past years there had been a certain drift, things had got slack and standards had not been maintained. Work was not good; the school compared unfavourably with other similar grammar schools both in work and behaviour...it is not our practice to judge by examination results, but here they were as bad as they could be...promising children at the bottom of the school seem to deteriorate as they reach the top...the habit of early leaving was infectious.<sup>38</sup>

It should be noted here that the 1953 Burford Grammar School report was an exceptionally bad one; following a later visit, inspectors noted that the school had then been at its 'lowest ebb.' The 1963 report offers a far more optimistic picture of both sixth form work and examination uptake, though one that still stood below national and county averages. This improvement was also witnessed in the county's other grammar schools, which benefited from a national trend of higher staying-on rates and A Level uptake as the 1960s progressed, as well as from expanding local populations. The change of pace secured by these schools is also attested to during interviews with former headteacher of Banbury Grammar School, Harry Judge, and is commented on in Pooley's memoirs. It would seem that after 1963, exam performance began to improve and that Banbury, Burford and Witney joined the ranks of the schools in the South and the East of the county in sending larger groups of students on to universities, more of whom secured open and state scholarships. In comparison with Buckinghamshire however, and certainly in the eyes of contemporary policy makers in Oxfordshire, this development came very late, and as will be explored in subsequent chapters,

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<sup>38</sup> NA: ED 109/ 9042: *HM Inspectorate Reports: Burford*, Burford Grammar School 1953.

its delay had already undermined some of the core justifications for the separate existence of these schools.

#### School variation, causes and implications

Based on these findings, two questions need addressing. Why were some of Oxfordshire's grammar schools struggling to maintain the standards expected of them? And how can we account for variation in school quality?

Contemporaries, including inspectors, headteachers and the Education Committee itself, linked the mediocre performance of the county's schools with the quality of their intake. In Oxfordshire the most prominent message to emerge from commentary surrounding selective schools was that they contained cohorts of students who were not suited to grammar school study. This issue was raised at the school level, but was also seen to be a whole county problem. In a 1955 *Oxford Mail* discussion, for example, headteacher of Banbury Grammar School, Mr Rose claimed

The intelligence quotient of pupils in Oxfordshire grammar schools is among the lowest in the country. This is to be expected in any predominantly rural area, since there is a well-established tendency for intelligence quotients, as measured by tests, to be relatively low in the countryside. Coupled with this fact, the unusual generosity of the Oxfordshire county council in allocating grammar school places would lead to relatively low intelligence among the pupils and the failures partly represent the county's policy of giving an opportunity to every child who seems to have a chance of reaching the standard.<sup>39</sup>

In this piece, Mr Rose articulated a not uncommonly held view that children from the countryside were less likely to have the capacity to perform well in academic grammar schools. This view also surfaces in a range of HMI reports from the period, which mostly cite

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<sup>39</sup> OML: Oxford Mail, 'Problem of children leaving,' 14<sup>th</sup> January 1955.

the slow development of spoken and written language skills on the part of rural pupils. In both cases, rather than examining the quality of local early years education or seeking to understand a child’s home background, a belief in the existence of an inherent and measurable level of ability dominated and at least in the above example, it precluded any further consideration as to why there should be variation in recorded scores.

Irrespective of the contemporary beliefs as to why rural children collectively performed poorly in IQ tests, there is wider evidence that it was in fact the case. A 1962 report on grammar school performance in the county reiterated this argument, summarising that Oxfordshire had the lowest ability pupils of all English counties, according to IQ tests.<sup>40</sup> Further, and at the school level, this issue was registered by HMIs as a significant and long-standing problem in some schools, as can be seen in Table 10 below.

Table 10: Reported concerns with grammar school intakes.

<i>School</i>	<i>Inspectors Comments:</i>
<i>Chipping Norton 1955</i>	‘Although the number who qualify for the admission on the authorities entrance exam has risen lately, HM Inspectors’ observations confirmed the view held by the Headmaster and his staff that as proportion of the children admitted are not of very high academic ability and are likely to find it difficult to follow a traditional grammar school course...’ Headteacher comment: the school ‘experienced problems particular to county grammar schools. Many of these derive from the sparsely populated area it serves and from a certain lack of social and cultural sophistication among a proportion of its members.’
<i>Holton Park 1955</i>	‘The area does not produce a large number of pupils of Grammar School calibre and if the school is to remain full it is necessary to admit a proportion of girls with relatively little academic ability.’
<i>Banbury 1957</i>	‘There is an unduly long and weak tail which could not cope with the normal academic curriculum...’
<i>Buford 1953</i>	‘There were too many who couldn’t cope with the grammar school curriculum. [In the future, there] will not likely to be a grammar school entry of good enough quality to fill a whole form of 30 pupils.’

<sup>40</sup> 1962 Special Conference convened to discuss Grammar School Performance. Papers for this have not been found in the official archives, but Pooley’s memoirs summarize them and Oxford Mail articles allude to both the conference and its main findings.

Source: HMI Reports as compiled from Secondary Education Sub-Committee Minutes and National Archives. Chipping Norton quotation from headteacher in Secondary Education Sub-Committee minutes, February 1956.

The presence of an ‘unduly long and weak tail’ amongst grammar school entrants was therefore highlighted as the main explanatory factor in the mediocre academic output of these schools. To some extent, this explanation is plausible. Certainly those schools that HMIs thought to have notably weak intakes generally underperformed in relation to those where it goes without mention. Should this explanation hold, the variation in the output of respective schools would indicate that more academically inclined pupils were concentrated in the catchment areas for Henley Grammar, Holton Park and Lord Williams’s School. The IQ test results which might confirm this are unavailable. Nevertheless, in the course of examining the social class composition in the respective catchment areas, some idea of intake composition can be gleaned. Figure 20 presents the extent to which professional and managerial (Classes I&II) economic groups were over- or under- represented in each Oxfordshire region in relation to the county average for this category.<sup>41</sup> Given the association between demographics, higher educational aspirations and academic attainment, it is reasonable to expect that a larger proportion of this contingent would produce more students of ‘grammar school material’.

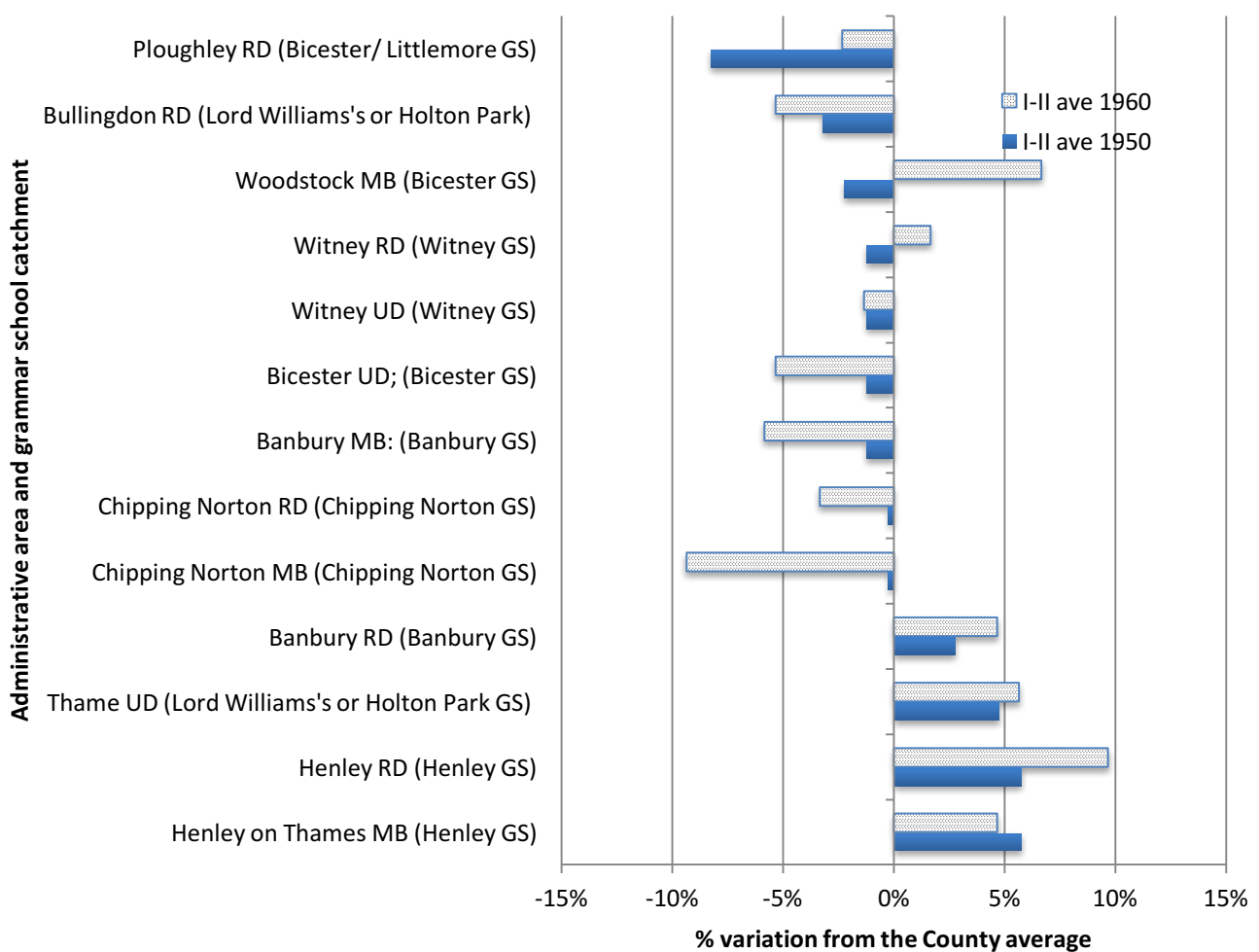
For each school, an attempt has been made to align the administrative regions detailed in the county census with catchment areas. Though roughly correct according to HMI description of catchment zones and county maps, some degree of conjecture was involved and there is little archival information to indicate, on balance, what proportion of students

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<sup>41</sup> County average for the percentage of working-age males in Social Class I and II combined stood at 18% in 1951 and 21% in 1960, based on Vision of Britain Through Time: units and statistics; social structure.

within one school were drawn from urban or rural areas respectively. Nor would schools have operated according to these administrative boundaries, and they may have pulled students from several different areas. Even accounting for some error in this regard, it is obvious from Figure 20 that those regions containing a higher proportion of the professional classes, overlapped with the catchment areas of Henley, Lord Williams's and Holton Park especially, but also Banbury and, by 1960, Bicester too. According to this, schools in the South and the East of the county were recruiting students from more affluent and presumably more educated households. Schools in the West of the county especially recruited from a pool where this group was under-represented. This balance would reinforce the argument that grammar school hierarchy in Oxfordshire was a function of the county's demographic geography.

Figure 20: Representation of Social Class I&II (Professional and managerial) in relation to the county average.



Source: Distribution of socio-economic groups in each region, Vision Through Time Units and statistics.

However, there remain a few issues with this conclusion; according to this logic both Banbury and Bicester Grammar Schools should have performed better than they did. Similarly, it misrepresents the balance of intake at Holton Park, where inspectors noted that the area produced very few girls of grammar school calibre and yet was praised by inspectors for its accomplishments. The dislocation between intake and output, alongside inspection and official records, attest to a more complex set of determinants of grammar school quality.

One such determinant was the capacity (or willingness) of the school to adapt its curriculum and ethos to promote the interests of all students, not just the most scholarly. A comparison of Banbury and Holton Park Grammar School in this respect is illuminating. In the case of Banbury, the primary criticism levelled by inspectors was that the headteacher had refused to act on prior recommendations to introduce a more flexible and accessible curriculum to ensure the needs of the school's less academic entrants were met. The implications of his having failed to do so were relayed critically by lead inspector Lady Helen Asquith: after recording that most of the third stream were capable of O Level examination, she explained how the practices of the school actively undermined their examination prospects:

Until Vth form...no differentiation is made between the needs and aptitudes of the ablest and the weakest entrants... these pupils are at present not getting a course suited to their needs...That they are left [on same path of O level study] until the last possible minute, when it becomes painfully obvious that they have no chance of success, drop out of some subject, leaving them unrounded and incomplete, seems indefensible on any educational grounds. What they need is a specially planned course... not to be in a course designed for the abler and quicker pupils, and when they sink, as most of them do, leave the school with a general sense of failure and work incomplete...<sup>42</sup>

A stark contrast exists between Banbury's report and Holton Park's, conducted two years previously. Here, despite recognising a similar intake problem to that at Banbury, inspectors reported that:

The lines of development for this school have been traced with wisdom and vision and already the girls who come here, both those who have intellectual ability and those who have not, are receiving stimulus and satisfaction in a wide range of fields... remarkably good provision is made all through the school for differing aptitudes and abilities...The more academic are catered for and the less so are offered practical and aesthetic subjects to quite a high level.<sup>43</sup>

The issue which dominates both of these extracts (and one more effectively dealt with in the case of Holton Park) was how to cater for third stream pupils. This occurs to varying degrees in all the grammar school reports reviewed. So, too, does the view of inspectors in most schools where low quality intake and output was observed that the problem lay with the school, not the child. In the two cases above, the (in) flexibility of the school's curriculum was the product of leadership decisions. Certainly in the case of Banbury, the headteacher had purposefully refused to adapt the curriculum fearing that making 'allowances for weaker pupils' would undermine the security of the grammar school's future.<sup>44</sup> Similarly the

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<sup>42</sup> Banbury Grammar School HMI Report 1957 in OHS OLEA: CC1/12/A30/2 *Secondary Education Sub-Committee Minutes*, July 1958.

<sup>43</sup> NA: ED 109/ 9044: *HM Inspectorate Reports*: Holton Park Girls' Grammar School, 1955.

<sup>44</sup> NA: ED 109/ 9339: *HM Inspectorate Reports*: Banbury County Grammar School, 1957.

Headmistress at Holton Park was credited with having the vision and organisation to orchestrate a diverse and successful alternative curriculum.

The quality of Oxfordshire grammar schools, as judged by their provision for the more and less academic student was also determined by their staffing capacity. This issue has been raised in the Buckinghamshire context where teacher shortages and high staff turnover reflected the national shortage of teachers over the period. In Oxfordshire these same trends are evident, and though these schools were granted a preferential PTR, and though HMI reports indicate that many more teachers in these schools were graduates than in secondary modern schools, the educative capacity of many Oxfordshire grammar schools was still limited by staffing problems. The competitiveness of Oxfordshire grammar schools in recruiting staff was weaker than in other LEAs, and even when schools did secure good staff in adequate numbers, their small size meant that trade-offs had to be made between what should be taught and who a school could hope to teach effectively.

To take up the point about competitiveness first, there are signs, both in inspection reports and committee papers that some Oxfordshire grammar schools struggled to be competitive in recruiting staff. This can be seen from the proportion of lesser qualified staff in Oxfordshire schools compared with counterparts nationally; by the mid-1950s only 68% of Oxfordshire grammar school staff were graduates compared to the national proportion of 83%.<sup>45</sup> Evidence of this, however, is most compelling at the school level, and particularly at those schools in the North and West of the county where there were persistent problems of

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<sup>45</sup> This figure is based on survey of staff composition details as provided in HMI reports over this period. National figure provided in Ministry of Education, *Education in 1956, Being the Report of the Ministry of Education and the Statistics of Public Education for England and Wales* (London, 1957).

staff quality. At Witney, for example, inspector comments depict the ‘serious weakness’ of the establishment:

Stability is proving hard to establish, there have been many changes in the last few years and more are pending. In qualifications and experience there are certain deficiencies which taken together constitute a rather serious weakness... The three senior members, the only ones who have been here for any substantial period of time, have had practically all their experience in this school, and only three of their colleagues... have taught for more than a year or so in any comparable school: two are foreigners and six are beginners in their first post. Since the Headmaster too has had to find his way about an unfamiliar organization [having never before worked in co-educational or maintained schools], it has not been easy for him to establish the standards of work or the attitude to study which he would desire, with so little breadth of experience to draw on from his staff.<sup>46</sup>

Similar problems with both staff turnover and quality were reported at Burford, Bicester and the new Littlemore Grammar School, which even by 1960 was said to be ‘having difficulty attracting staff who could establish high standards.’<sup>47</sup> In both of these schools, problems with teacher quality was linked to the schools’ capacity to recruit competitively, and this in turn was linked to their size and range of work.

School size affected staff recruitment in two ways: smaller schools had proportionally smaller sixth forms, and where sixths remained small, the range of work available was reduced and posts were generally less appealing. Most obviously however, school size determined the number and value of special responsibility posts (SPR) to which an institution was entitled. The restriction on the range of SPRs – and associated pay bonuses – that Oxfordshire schools could offer emerges several times in Oxfordshire documents. A year after his school’s inspection, the Witney Grammar School headteacher expressed frustration

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<sup>46</sup> Witney Grammar School HMI Report 1957 in OHS OLEA: CC1/12/A30/2 *Secondary Education Sub-Committee Minutes*, May 1958.

<sup>47</sup> NA: ED 109/ 9339: *HM Inspectorate Reports*: Littlemore County Grammar School, 1960.

to the Education Committee that the small size of his school threatened to hinder staff recruitment, requesting an increase in entry. During a special meeting between the Education Committee and the governors of Witney Grammar School, he pointed out

As the smaller schools were in general restricted in the number of posts they could offer carrying the more attractive special allowances, there was a danger that they [Witney] might be denied the service of the best qualified teachers.<sup>48</sup>

In this instance, the committee was not swayed and refused to expand the size of the school, disregarding the danger raised by the headteacher. It did however acknowledge this problem at the county level later that same year. In a memorandum compiled in September 1958, the Secondary Education Sub-Committee recognised that the county's small two-form-entry schools were unfavourably placed in relation to larger institutions:

Force of circumstance dictates the size of the average Oxfordshire grammar school as 2-form-entry; this limitation of size should not place a school at a marked disadvantage with a 3-form-entry that is the more common size and type in county areas.... It is not so much the number of allowances that is a handicap but the amount of the allowances...some improvement would be helpful to the schools and enable them to compete for more well qualified staff to take charge of vital departments on more nearly equal terms.<sup>49</sup>

In this memorandum, the Chief Education Officer established that the majority (54%) of special responsibility posts in Oxfordshire grammar schools entitled post-holders to only the lowest value grade, worth an extra £125 per year (£2500 approx. present day). In contrast, the report pointed out that other LEAs were more generous, allocating a greater proportion of both Grade B (approx. £200) and Grade C (approx. £275) posts (present day approx: £4000

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<sup>48</sup> OHS OLEA: CC1/12/A30/2 *Secondary Education Sub-Committee Minutes*, May 1958. Appendix, C, Report of meeting between representatives of the Secondary Education Sub-Committee and representatives of the governors of Witney Grammar School.

<sup>49</sup> OHS OLEA: CC1/12/A30/2 *Secondary Education Sub-Committee Minutes*, September 1958. Appendix G, Special Responsibility Allowances: posts of Head of Department in Grammar Schools.

and £5500 respectively). Though some improvement was secured as a result of this discussion, Oxfordshire grammar schools had been operating on this basis for several years and had already been effected.<sup>50</sup>

In Oxfordshire, the size of schools also had implications for the quality and flexibility of the curriculum. Though many schools were reported to have a sufficient number of teachers, the distribution of their specialisms often proved unsuitable. This issue was articulated by HM inspectors on their visit to Henley Grammar School in 1956, referring to a lack of balance in the qualifications held by staff and noting deficiencies in the Mathematics, English and Geography staffing:

This lack of balance is partly due to the national shortage of teachers with main qualifications and partly also to the unavoidable expensiveness in a small co-ed school of specialist teachers in practical subjects, art and PE, who do not easily turn their hand to other subjects in the curriculum.<sup>51</sup>

Frustrations with either staff numbers or specialisms in Oxfordshire grammar schools were reported after every inspection throughout the 1950s. Witney's 1957 inspection revealed that there was no-one qualified to take Biology to O Level standard; Holton Park Grammar had problems of ensuring specialised coverage of the sciences with inspectors advising that only Biology A Level be offered with students having to travel to LWS to pursue Physics or Chemistry at A Level. At Banbury Grammar, inspectors reported that mathematics was in the hands of an English and History graduate, her inexperience and 'her lack of knowledge of

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid. Approximate conversions using a historical price convertor: [www.safalra.com](http://www.safalra.com)

<sup>51</sup> Henley Grammar School HMI Report 1956 in OHS OLEA: CC1/12/A30/1 *Secondary Education Sub-Committee Minutes*, July 1956.

mathematics and of methods of teaching it [making] her hardly equal to the task.<sup>52</sup> This inflexibility can also be seen to have forced schools to make trade-offs in terms of staffing arrangements. This is best illustrated by the situation at LWS where inspectors reported that

The additional appointments to the staff which have been made since the last report have been mainly used to cater for the expanding sixth form and to provide a variety of courses at this stage. Hence, below the Sixth Form there has been little scope for options or much variation of treatment within a subject to suit the different needs of able and less able boys.<sup>53</sup>

Here, the imperative to staff the sixth form in a way which would promote academic work limited the school's capacity to meet any changing needs lower down in the school.

These limitations encourage a view of Oxfordshire selective schools that deviates markedly from popular assumptions about grammar school operating conditions. As to the quality of these schools and the educational opportunities they were able to offer, the degree of regional variation is clear. Those schools with a better record of examination success and curriculum variety were located in the South East, and there existed a second group of schools, especially in the West and North, which struggled to meet expectations.

This survey of school quality and opportunity provision in Oxfordshire presents a varied picture. If we compare the selective and non-selective sectors, it has been demonstrated that there were persistent inequalities in the resourcing and educative capacity of respective school types. However, two anomalies emerge in these case study which require a readjustment in the popular perceptions about these schools. Firstly the presence of a

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<sup>52</sup> Banbury Grammar School HMI Report, 1957 in OHS OLEA: CC1/12/A30/2 *Secondary Education Sub-Committee Minutes*, July 1958.

<sup>53</sup> Lord Williams's School HMI Report, 1958 in OHS OLEA: CC1/12/A30/2 *Secondary Education Sub-Committee Minutes*, July 1959.

relatively innovative and dynamic secondary modern sector in Oxfordshire, slowly gave rise to a reputation and remit that was distinct from the educational diet of the grammar school, but which also managed to cultivate local prestige. The popular demand for examination courses checked the willingness of these schools to deviate too much from curricula which could lead to qualifications, but in general, the LEA can be seen to have promoted the education of ‘the other half’ with greater conviction than in many other areas. A second point of departure from the normative assumptions surrounding tripartite schooling, was that the grammar schools in Oxfordshire struggled to establish a tradition of academic excellence. There were exceptions to this disappointing performance, but other institutions were too small or inflexible to fulfil either national or local expectations.

## Part Two: 10/65 and all that

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The 1943 White Paper, *Educational Reconstruction* optimistically asserted that the post-war settlement should promote diversity and specialisation, ‘open the way to a more closely knit society,’ and maximise the potential (and so wealth) of the nation.<sup>1</sup> The widespread uptake of comprehensive education by the mid-1960s reflected a general anxiety that tripartism had prioritised diversity at the expense of social cohesion and the full mobilisation of human capital. To correct this perceived imbalance, secondary re-organisation removed selection at 11 and put an end to the institutional segregation of children according to deterministic judgements of their ability and aptitudes. The process of comprehensive reform was accelerated by the Labour Government in 1965 with its publication of Circular 10/65, which requested all Local Authorities to re-organise. Despite this national publication, the drivers and processes of reform varied widely as the 146 Local Education Authorities approached the task with different motives, agendas and visions. Part Two of this thesis examines the approach and treatment of the comprehensive issue in Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire. Initially it explores the determinants of reform in Oxfordshire investigating the logistical and institutional dynamics which underpinned local policy change. The latter half of this section then turns to Buckinghamshire where the process of change was more fundamentally contested. In this area a schism emerged between those who held a firm belief in the primacy of diverse provision as a necessary pre-requisite to both

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<sup>1</sup> Great Britain. Board of Education. *Educational Reconstruction*. Cmd. 6458.

social and economic gains, and those who saw comprehensive schools as embodying a better balance of these objectives.

## Chapter 9 • Part Two Introduction

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For many parents, teachers and politicians... the comprehensive school has become a panacea from the embrace of which should be no escape of exclusion. The crusading zeal of these root and branch reformers are opposed to chronic anxieties of those to whom the wholesale destruction of ancient and revered institutions, or even of selective schools established less than a generation ago, appears less as a dream and more as a frightening chimera. In the world of educational discussions acceptance or rejection of the comprehensive school has become the shibboleth, and the arena of debate has become a battlefield across which combatants view each other with increasing desperation.<sup>1</sup>

The extract above, taken from the recently published memoirs of L.F Moore, Deputy Headmaster at a secondary school in Crawley during its secondary re-organisation in the early 1960s, characterises what could still be seen as the state of affairs with regard to the comprehensive debate. Moore's assessment reflects Brian Simon's comment in 1992 that comprehensive schools had become a 'battered political football,' with statements as to their existence, function and performance often a product of faith and belief as much as empirically reasoned or evidenced argument.<sup>2</sup>

The advent national comprehensive re-organisation in England provoked a fevered political debate. On the left, supporters of comprehensive reform have attacked the impotence of Circular 10/65 in effecting wholesale and compulsory policy change. On the right, and especially as the 1970s witnessed the rise of the new-right in education (a process kick started by the *Black Papers*) comprehensive schools came to feature as a threat to excellence and

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<sup>1</sup> F Moore, *Going Comprehensive, Or, Unspoken Thoughts of a Deputy Head* (Great Britain, 2009). p.1.

<sup>2</sup> Simon, The politics of comprehensive reorganisation, a retrospective analysis Brian Simon, 'The Politics of Comprehensive Reorganisation: A Retrospective Analysis', *History of Education*, xxi (1992). p.355.

tradition, institutions guilty of promoting social aims ahead of educational and economic ones. A broader disintegration of the post-war bipartisan consensus on welfare policy widened the gulf between these two camps and contributed to the politicisation of comprehensive education. Collectively, these forces have transformed the debate about secondary re-organisation to a point where it is near unrecognisable from that which first evolved in the two decades after 1944. Two myths have emerged from this fracas: 1) that comprehensive reform in England was the product of a top-down imposition of ministerial will and 2) that comprehensive schools were an urban socialist phenomenon, the creation of an egalitarian-crazed Labour party. But neither belief captures the complex historical reality.

The first misconception has been discredited by a significant body of research demonstrating that comprehensive schools had been planned and developed by local authorities since 1944. As early as 1952, research by Joan Thompson for the Fabian Research Bureau surveyed the Development Plans of 111 out of 146 LEAs in England and Wales, discovering that only 41% of these authorities were intending to deliver secondary education along tripartite lines. In the majority of cases, Thompson found ‘most counties are not committing themselves to one or other of these alternatives but are making a variety of provision.’<sup>3</sup> A second survey, conducted a decade later by educationalist Robin Pedley showed that comprehensive schools were embedded in the educational landscape of England and Wales. In the cities, the *London School Plan* of 1947 had mapped out the development of comprehensive schools throughout the LEA, and by 1962 was operating 68 comprehensives,

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<sup>3</sup> Joan Thompson, *Secondary Education Survey : An Analysis of LEA Development Plans for Secondary Education* (London, 1952).

40 of which were post-war builds; Coventry had introduced comprehensive schools as part of its 'ground-up' post-war reconstruction after 1945; Bristol had introduced some comprehensive schools by the mid-1950s; Birmingham and West Bromwich had most recently introduced comprehensive schools. In rural areas, Pedley discovered that 'the picture...is one of quiet steady growth' in comprehensive schooling.<sup>4</sup>

Later work by Brian Simon confirmed this trend and also detailed the widespread adoption of comprehensive schools prior to 1965. In particular, Simon pinpointed 1963 as the beginning of the more rapid uptake of re-organisation, a period he termed 'the breakout' and which saw LEAs generating experimental schemes and adjustments in order to remove selection and promote greater efficiency in resourcing.<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, a running theme throughout Simon's *Education and the Social Order* (and his earlier collaborations respectively with David Rubenstein and Caroline Benn in *The Evolution of the Comprehensive School* (1969) and *Half Way There* (1970)) was the top down imposition of tripartism, rather than of comprehensive organisation. Simon et al. not only highlight the restrictive parameters set in place by *The Nation's Schools*, and a ministerial refusal to contemplate secondary systems with middle schools, but also point out the more direct actions of the Ministry directing local schemes along selective lines. The refusal of the Ministry to facilitate LEA plans with regards to comprehensives was particularly clear in the 1951 case of Kidbrooke Comprehensive School in London, where the Minister Florence Horsbrugh blocked local plans to close Eltham Grammar School. Simon also cites the

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<sup>4</sup> Robin Pedley, *The Comprehensive School* (Middlesex 1966). pp.47-50.

<sup>5</sup> Brian Simon, *Education and the Social Order, 1940-1990* (London, 1991). p. 271

Ministry's repeated refusal of early comprehensive schemes- for example the scheme in the Development Plans for Middlesex.<sup>6</sup> Oxfordshire could also be counted among this number.

The idea that comprehensive re-organisation was a left-wing scheme, in the pursuit of egalitarianism, has also been seriously challenged by a number of scholars. There is of course a kernel of truth in this association: the Labour Party had in principle supported multilateral schools and comprehensive education since the mid-40s, the dominant focus on equality and social justice at the heart of its ideology had affinities with some of the social rationales underpinning the ideals of comprehensive schooling. Historically too, some of the urban authorities which pursued early re-organisation were under Labour control and Anthony Crosland's attitude in the wake of Circular 10/65 reinforced the impression of a party political divide on selective vs. comprehensive schooling, his antipathy towards the grammar school both clear and dogmatic.

However, the political association of the comprehensive school with the Labour party, and the reductionist association of political party with either comprehensive or selective education, has been challenged in a number of studies. Prime among them is I.G.K. Fenwick's *The Comprehensive School, The Politics of Secondary School Re-organisation* which offers a detailed review of the national level politicking and lobbying surrounding comprehensive school. Fenwick finds that though there was increasing pressure from groups within the flanks of both parties from the mid-1950s on, there was still a firm commitment to

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<sup>6</sup> Brian Simon, *Education and the Social Order, 1940-1990* (London, 1991), David Rubinstein and Brian Simon, *The Evolution of the Comprehensive School, 1926-1972* (London, 2007) and Caroline Benn, *Half Way There : Report on the British Comprehensive School Reform* (London, 1970).

the centre-ground by both Labour and Conservative figures. Fenwick also cites party political publications such as the Labour Party's pamphlet *Learning to Live* in 1958, which advocated comprehensive schools, but did so in 'conciliatory' terms- seeking to reduce wastage, promote opportunity and extend the 'grammar school education for all' rather than use the language of egalitarianism.<sup>7</sup> More wide ranging histories, such as Brian Simon's work and also that of Dennis Lawton which examines the educational philosophy of the Labour Party, have also emphasised the support for grammar schools which existed amongst Labour Party ranks, and highlighted the role of Labour's ambivalence towards wholesale re-organisation in stunting the possibilities of wider reform immediately after the war.<sup>8</sup> Fenwick's work, alongside that of Maurice Kogan's *The Politics of Education* and more recent article such as *Preservation of Renovation? The Dilemmas of Conservative Educational Policy 1955-1960* by Dennis Dean, have also emphasised the centrist and open-minded approach of successive Conservative Education Ministers over this period, especially in the cases of David Eccles and Edward Boyle, who cautiously encouraged experimentation with secondary education and accepted the validity of different organisational forms.<sup>9</sup> Collectively, this work discourages the view that party political agendas dictated the evolution of comprehensive schools in England.

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<sup>7</sup> Keith Fenwick, *The Comprehensive School, 1944-1970: The Politics of Secondary School Reorganisation* (London 1976). p.109

<sup>8</sup> Brian Simon, *Education and the Social Order, 1940-1990* and Denis Lawton, *Education and Labour Party Ideologies, 1900-2001 and beyond* (London 2005).

<sup>9</sup> Maurice Kogan and Katherine Bowden, *Educational Policy-Making: A Study of Interest Groups and Parliament* (London, 1975). Maurice Kogan, *The Politics of Education* (Harmondsworth 1976) and Dennis Dean, 'Preservation or Renovation? The Dilemmas of Conservative Educational Policy 1955-1960', *Twentieth Century British History*, iii (1992).

To understand the development, or lack thereof, of comprehensive schools in England, research on comprehensive change has also focused on individual LEAs. Research based on local case studies has focused around two main queries: 1) how have local dynamics influenced secondary education policy? 2) Has there been a consistent enough pattern in policy determinants to discern a ‘theory of decision making’ behind comprehensive reform?<sup>10</sup> For all the furore over comprehensive reform in national discourses, very few academic surveys have been devoted to understanding comprehensive reform in local authority settings. Most recently Kerkchoff et al.’s *Going Comprehensive* offered an examination of ten local authorities, each of which had ‘gone comprehensive’ by 1974. Prior to this, Rene Saran’s *Policy making in Secondary Education*, Pescheck and Brand’s *Policies and Politics in Secondary Education*, and Bately, O’Brien and Parris *Going Comprehensive* analysed the process of policy change in the anonymised borough of ‘Townly,’ West Ham and Reading, and then in Darlington and Gateshead. Overall, these studies concluded that no unifying set of determinants could be discerned enough to identify a theory or model of comprehensive change, Kerkchoff et al. in fact declared that ‘so much variation’ existed in their ten samples ‘that no analysis can adequately represent it.’<sup>11</sup>

Despite such pessimism, these studies have importantly reinforced the point that the political orientation of respective councils was not directly associated with the decision to go comprehensive and though it certainly acted to influence important elements of local

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<sup>10</sup> Vernon Bogdanor, ‘The Politics of Comprehensive Education’, *Oxford Review of Education*, iii (1977).

<sup>11</sup> Alan C Kerckhoff, *Going Comprehensive in England and Wales: A Study of Uneven Change* (London, 1996), Rene Saran, *Policy-Making in Secondary Education; a Case Study*. (Oxford 1973), David Peschek and Jack Brand, *Policies and Politics in Secondary Education: Case Studies in West Ham and Reading* (London, 1966). Richard Batley, *Going Comprehensive : Educational Policy-Making in Two County Boroughs* (London, 1970).

administration, the presence of a Conservative authority did not serve as a proxy for an authority resistant to comprehensive change. Furthermore, this research points to several ‘variables’ within LEA operations which can be seen to have consistently affected policy outcomes and which would benefit from further exploration. For example, the degree of co-operation between the paid officers (Chief Education Officers) and elected officials on the Education Committees is a recurring and prominent aspect of any analysis. Where relationships were strong, as Batley et al. observed in Gateshead, and Pescheck and Brand saw in West Ham and Reading, policy making progressed quietly and with less local controversy. In Batley’s Gateshead study, the authors remark that re-organisation policy developed ‘with scarcely any reference to the council outside the Education Committee,’ and with more of an administrative than a political tone.<sup>12</sup> Kerkchoff et al. also identified the role of the CEO in their larger survey as being that of an ‘enabler’ and argued that the relative power of Directors to proceed with new policies was proportional to the degree of politicisation of the council. The role of buildings and prior-capital works progress has also been raised as a factor which shaped debates on comprehensive reform. Especially in the case of Gateshead, Batley et al. explain that the absence of any grammar schools in the county in 1944 necessitated a rapid and county-wide building programme after the war. When it came to considering comprehensive reform, these new buildings were in the wrong place and of the wrong size to readily re-organise into comprehensive schools, and this in turn prolonged debates about the form and arrangement of subsequent reform.

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<sup>12</sup> Richard Batley, *Going Comprehensive: Educational Policy-Making in Two County Boroughs*, p.64.

Existing work has highlighted the need for further study at the local level, not only to expand the number of LEAs accounted for in detailed study, but also to further explore these themes as determinants of comprehensive change. Part Two of this thesis is devoted to addressing these areas, but also aims to address the absence, in previous research, of areas which stood against the tide and refused to re-organise. Buckinghamshire still operates a fully selective system, and an understanding as to how it arrived at this position, is worth establishing. As has been established in the previous chapter, Oxfordshire LEA struggled to balance the imperatives of selective school provision with the efficient provision of secondary education in a rural environment. The next chapter seeks to explore this struggle further, and locates it within the discussion of Oxfordshire's decision to pursue comprehensive reform. Chapter 12 and 13 then explore the more complex story of Buckinghamshire's resistance.

As with Part One, as many sources as possible have been consulted in the process of research and the records of the Education Committees in both authorities have been used. A slight difference is that Part II relies more heavily on local press archives to illuminate local feeling and reception of policy change. In the case of Oxfordshire, the absence of the Secondary Education Sub-Committee records from the end of 1962 removed a rich source of information, but availability of both the Quarterly and mainstream Education Committee Minutes, along with copies of memoranda and Development Plans as discovered in the *Oxford Mail* archives ensured that there was enough detail to explore the evolution of comprehensive discussions in this authority. In Chapter 12, use has also been made of the British Local Election Database as compiled by the Elections Centre at the University of Plymouth. Part Two also draws extensively on interview work conducted with individuals who were involved in the processes concerned. These discussions have proved invaluable,

not only in illuminating aspects of change not wholly accessible in official documents, but also in giving shape to the narratives evolving out of archival study.

## Chapter 10 • Oxfordshire Going Comprehensive

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### *Why did Oxfordshire go comprehensive?*

In October 1963, after conducting an extensive three-year review, the Oxfordshire Education Committee voted unanimously in favour of ‘going comprehensive.’ The preface to the 1966 County Development Plan presented this decision as such:

Since 1959, the Education Committee have been actively reconsidering their provision of secondary education and in 1963 they called for a full county review on an area-by-area basis with the objectives (a) of widening opportunities available to children of all levels of ability in the secondary schools and (b) of removing selection at the age of 11. Their study of what was being done in other parts of the country and abroad and of the evidence coming from their own schools had confirmed them in much of their 1944 belief that a unitary system of secondary education had more to offer children than the bi-partite system in operation in most parts of the county.<sup>1</sup>

As a result of such early action, the process of planning was well underway by the time Circular 10/65 was announced in the January of 1965. Plans for re-organisation had already been laid in the majority of areas, and the first comprehensive intakes into newly reorganised schools began in 1966. Figure 23 at the end of this chapter outlines the various models of comprehensive reform intended for each Oxfordshire region and have been provided to illustrate the diversity of schemes the county pursued part of the 1966 Development Plan. By the early 1970s, all of Oxfordshire’s secondary schools had fully re-organised and selection at 11+ had been abandoned.

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<sup>1</sup> OHC: CC1/12/A1/4: *Education Committee Minutes*, October 1966: Appendix E: ‘Oxfordshire County Council Development Plan for Secondary Education.’

There were several distinctive features of comprehensive reform in Oxfordshire which require particular attention. Several of these are raised in the *Oxford Mail's* farewell tribute to Alan Chorlton in 1970:

He resigns this week leaving Oxfordshire with a reputation among the brightest in the local authority league tables for fresh thinking...He leaves a county which was introducing comprehensive schools (for educational reasons) when most politicians hardly understood the word.... he leaves a county with schools studied by scores of foreign educationalists every year.<sup>2</sup>

This extract presents the process of policy change in Oxfordshire as being innovative and forward thinking, as well as one which was regarded as being remarkably successful both as a process of change and in meeting policy expectations. In contrast to many authorities across the county, and particularly to Buckinghamshire, the Oxfordshire authority pursued wholesale policy change with a remarkable degree of consensus and aplomb.

Some of this success was rooted in the method by which Oxfordshire developed comprehensive schemes. As can be seen from a review of the Development Plan, one of the most outstanding features of reform in Oxfordshire was its diversity. Schemes ranged from 11-18 orthodox comprehensive schools, to 11-16 schools with associated prototype sixth form centres, to one-site two-tier, split site two-tier schools and a variety of interim schemes that preserved a form of selection at 13+ until the mid-1970s. This patchwork structure was criticised by some as offering too incoherent a basis for secondary education, but was lauded by many for tailoring reform to local needs.<sup>3</sup> The rationale and process behind this diversity was articulated by the Chairman of the Education Committee, as representing officials'

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<sup>2</sup> OML: Oxford Mail, 'Another Adventure in Education Begins for Alan Chorlton,' 1<sup>st</sup> September 1970.

<sup>3</sup> OML: Oxford Mail, 'Pulled into a Patchwork, But Oxon Schools Involve Veteran Comprehensives,' 17<sup>th</sup> January 1970.

concern not to impose a ‘straitjacket...on different areas with different character.’<sup>4</sup> The Chief Education Officer, Alan Chorlton, added to this in 1964:

All the schemes have been evolved in the same kind of way, on the basis of a general directive from this authority that associations should be formed between groups of schools with the object of making the fullest use of accommodation, equipment and staff and offering a maximum inter-changeability of schools and staff...we have said to headmasters concerned ‘this is the pattern to which we want you to work; you get down to work out the detailed plan that will suit your schools and your areas best.’<sup>5</sup>

The variety of schemes pursued was also heavily influenced by the existing building stock available and as is clear from Chorlton’s explanation, reflected a keen desire to maximise the use of school stock and equipment.

Before moving on, it is worth touching on a further distinctive feature of re-organisation in Oxfordshire as highlighted above: that it was a locally devolved process that co-opted school leaders and staff into the process of change. All schemes that were eventually submitted into the 1966 Development Plan evolved in the first instance from a series of consultations between Heads, governors and staff, with school headteachers specifically becoming the architects of reform in their own area. This process was the product of a particular dynamic in this LEA born out of the relationship between the education service and the county’s schools. This dynamic will be explored more fully in a subsequent section, but its importance in shaping the conception and implementation of comprehensive reform in Oxfordshire cannot be overstated. In most cases, it ensured reorganisation was felt to be a locally embedded process, it fostered a sense of ownership and commitment to policy

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<sup>4</sup> OML: Oxford Mail, ‘The 11-Plus in South Oxon,’ 7<sup>th</sup> November 1964.

<sup>5</sup> OML: Oxford Mail, ‘11-Plus To End in Two More Oxon Areas,’ 1<sup>st</sup> October 1964.

change on the part of schools, and conferred considerable legitimacy on reforms once they were underway.

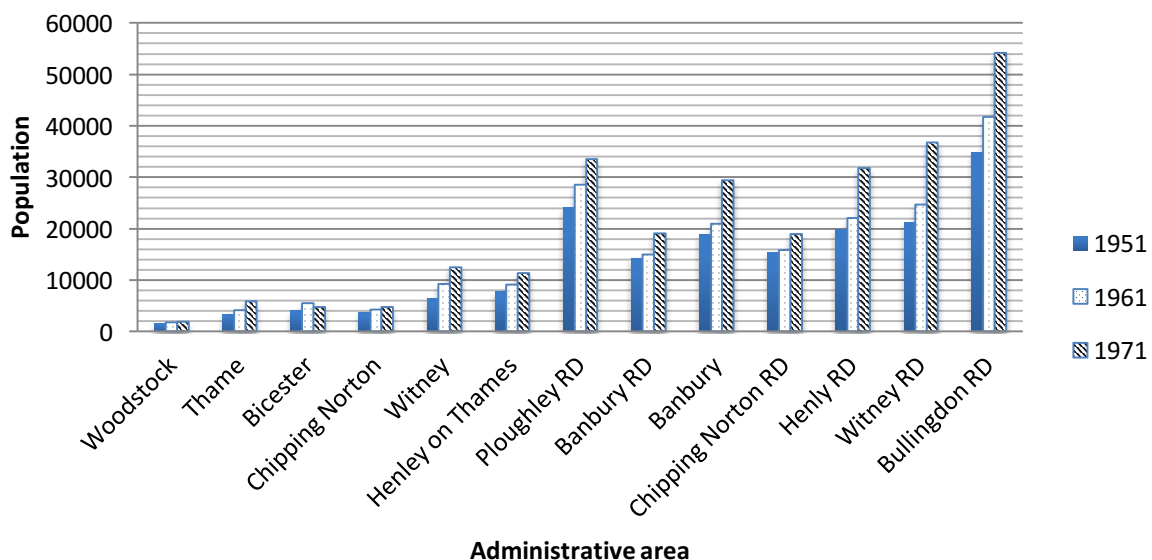
The remainder of this chapter is devoted to exploring the drivers behind this set of policy changes: why did Oxfordshire go comprehensive? This research suggests that two factors were especially important. On the one hand were the structural and logistical problems which confronted the authority by the early 1960s; a series of pressures which triggered a reappraisal of existing policy. On the other was the institutional character of the LEA, something shaped by the presence of particular individuals, relationships and attitudes; this arrangement conditioned both the short and long-term operating mentality in Oxfordshire, in ways that promoted eventual re-organisation.

#### *Changing pressures and viability*

The first collection of drivers behind Oxfordshire's rejection of bipartite education evolved from within its existing service and out of the changing needs and functions of secondary schools. These can perhaps best be described as a series of growing pressures that worked to compel local policy makers to seek alternative models of secondary provision. Several factors were at work here, the first and most basic of which being that schools were catering for more students than ever before. Increased birth rates and migration into Oxfordshire ensured that its population expanded at a rate which far outstripped national averages. Where the census returns for England report a 6% increase in population per decade between 1951, 1961 and 1971, the figures for Oxfordshire stood at 10%, 15% and 34% respectively. The scale and regional concentration of this growth is highlighted in Figure 21. Such a difference was also reflected in the size of its school age population, with secondary school rolls further augmented by the growing demand for education beyond 15. The Ministry for Education charted the effects nationally of the post-war baby boom – 'the

bulge' as it was referred to – estimating that the school population had increased by over 20% between 1951 and 1961.<sup>6</sup> Over the same period in Oxfordshire secondary school rolls had increased in size by over 90%, and as can be seen in Figure 22, growth continued into the 1970s.<sup>7</sup> In practical terms this placed substantial strain on existing school stock: the Secondary Education Sub-Committee estimated an increase in secondary population by over 2000 students in the five years between 1962 and 1967, anticipating that this would necessitate additional accommodation for the equivalent of two forms of entry (60+ students) at every secondary school in the county.<sup>8</sup>

Figure 21: Oxfordshire population by administrative area



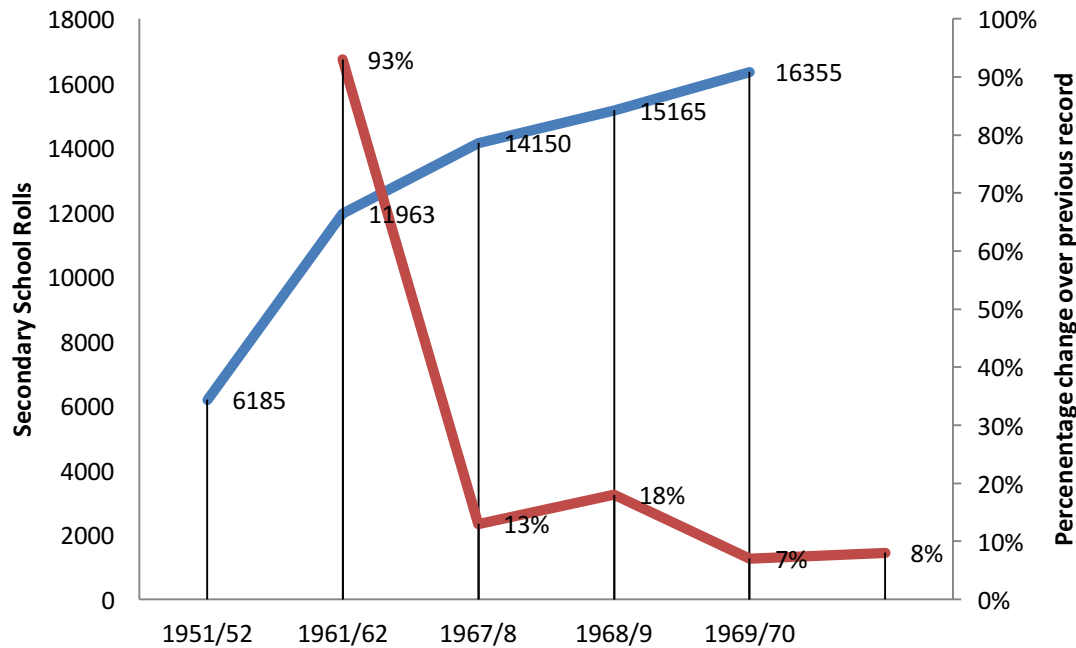
Source: Census returns 1951, 1961 & 1971

<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Education, *Education in 1961: Being the Report of the Ministry of Education and the Statistics for England and Wales*. (1962).

<sup>7</sup> Based on secondary age population returns, Institute of Municipal Treasurers and Accountants, Society of County Treasurers, and Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, *Education Statistics 1951-1961*.

<sup>8</sup> OML: Oxford Mail, 'The Changing Face of Secondary Education in Oxfordshire,' 13<sup>th</sup> June 1962 and OHC: CC1/12/A1/5 *Education Committee Minutes*, October 1968.

Figure 22: Oxfordshire secondary school rolls and percentage increase 1951-1970



Source: IMTA Education Annual Statistics. 1967-1970 from Oxfordshire Education Committee Minutes, October 1968.

This expanding population constituted only half of the problem. Not only were incoming cohort numbers growing, but an increasing proportion of students were staying at school for longer. By the mid-1960s, 40% of Oxfordshire's 14+ cohorts were electing to stay at school beyond the statutory leaving age, a trend that had been in evidence since the earlier 1950s and which showed no sign of reversing.<sup>9</sup> It was also anticipated that the school leaving age would eventually be raised to 16, a move which would entail the accommodation and education of the remaining 60% of 14+ cohorts, an additional 1200 students according to

<sup>9</sup> OHC: CC1/12/A1/4 *Education Committee Minutes*, March 1966. Appendix A: Aspects of Secondary Education in Oxfordshire 1965.

1971 reports.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the anticipated expansion of the early 1960s went beyond providing ‘rooves over heads,’ it also brought with it a more complicated set of educational demands.

The most obvious of these demands was for the provision of advanced courses and paper qualifications. Evidence of this trend can be seen by looking at the county’s grammar schools, which, for all their problems, recorded increased staying on rates and uptake of G.C.E.s at O and A Levels throughout the latter 1950s. A more pronounced change on this front was the experience of the county’s secondary modern schools. The trajectory and positioning of secondary moderns within the Oxfordshire tripartite framework has been explored in the previous chapter, but the features salient to this discussion should perhaps be reiterated. As far as Oxfordshire policy makers were concerned, these schools were only a decade old and as such provided an arena in which to experiment: the committee favoured a ‘flexible approach’ in determining the capacities and functions of these schools and tried to be responsive to both student and school demands.<sup>11</sup> In 1959, a handful of pioneering secondary modern schools such as Witney, Gosford Hill and Easington Boys, under the stewardship of ambitious and vocal headteachers, were seeking to extend fifth year G.C.E. courses in-house for students. There was also an increasing incidence of secondary modern pupils pursuing G.C.E. qualifications at one of the county’s three technical colleges and running parallel to this were efforts by the Education Directorate to provide Advanced Study Centres. By the end of the 1950s therefore, access to G.C.E. courses in Oxfordshire was being pushed beyond the walls of selective schools with several of the county’s secondary

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid and CC1/12/A1/8 *Education Committee Minutes*, January 1973: Memorandum: ‘Principal Reasons for Increase In Cost Of Maintaining The Secondary Education Service 1973-4.’

<sup>11</sup> OHS OLEA: CC1/12/A30/2 *Secondary Education Sub-Committee Minutes*, February 1959. Appendix E: Alternative Courses in Secondary Modern Schools.

moderns clamouring to occupy the educational space which had thus far been the prerogative of its grammar schools.

### *Expansion during the ice age*

By the close of the 1950s, the increasing uptake and interest in G.C.E. study was just one of the demands altering the needs base which secondary provision was expected to serve. Running parallel to this pressure was a demand that secondary modern schools expand their capacity to meet the educational needs of those pupils seen to have ‘average or less than average ability.’<sup>12</sup> Though influenced by the national policy environment, much of the drive to expand provision in this direction had been home grown in Oxfordshire.<sup>13</sup> As has been explored in Part One, there had already been policy efforts within the LEA to evolve tailored curricula for secondary modern students and the introduction of Alternative Courses and the CTA reflected the authority’s commitment to encouraging a diversity of secondary education that could cater to both academic and non-academic demand within its schools. However, the anticipation that greater numbers of pupils would remain at school longer emphasised the need to broaden the range of opportunities on offer and added to the imperative to find a long term and sustainable arrangement to meet the needs of all pupils.

In addition to this was also the prospect of having to extend grammar school supply. Oxfordshire’s population growth diminished the degree of coverage which its existing

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<sup>12</sup> HMSO: *Half Our Future: A Report of the Central Advisory Council for Education* (London, 1963).

<sup>13</sup> This was also influenced by the national policy environment. The 1958 White Paper, *Secondary Education for All: A New Drive* had attempted to re-assert the value and potential of the secondary modern school in catering for a wide range of aptitudes and interests. Further, the Newsom Report, though published in 1963, responded to a 1961 Ministerial request to examine the provision for 13-16 year olds, a request that in itself was borne out of existing concerns over the role and function of secondary modern schools as they existed in the latter 1950s.

grammar school stock could ensure. If coverage were to remain stable, the LEA faced the prospect of having to increase the size of these schools considerably. The problem this posed was highlighted in a February 1958 review of grammar school provision in Bicester (an area which saw comparatively low population growth). In this case, the Director reported that if the grammar school's intake remained static, coverage in the area would fall from 14% in 1958 to 12% by 1966, and this was without factoring in further increases due to 'substantial housing development' already underway.<sup>14</sup> This 'drop' in coverage was anticipated at a time when both Minister and local parents were urging for an increase in grammar school provision.

Therefore, by the latter 1950s the Oxfordshire authority was feeling the pressure to expand its secondary provision in divergent directions: going one way to provide increased levels of access to paper qualifications outside the grammar school setting; in another to expand provision within grammar schools; and in *another* to offer a meaningful/useful curriculum to the Newsom children. Collectively these demands were poised to place a degree of strain on Oxfordshire's secondary infrastructure that, as it stood in the latter 1950s, it was ill equipped to support.

This was true on several fronts, but primarily it applied to the problem of effectively staffing the LEA's secondary schools. Nationally, as we have seen, the latter 1950s was a period troubled by teacher shortages, especially in mathematics and the sciences, with this latter deficit featuring as a recurring anxiety in the Ministry's annual reviews as well as local

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<sup>14</sup> OHS OLEA: CC1/12/A30/2 *Secondary Education Sub-Committee Minutes*, February 1958

HMI reports. In 1959 the Crowther Report (which examined provision for the 15-19 age group and which advocated an increase in the school leaving age) raised the prospect of teacher shortages, as well as of lower quality recruits to the profession, emphasising the need to deploy able staff as effectively as possible. The report drew a stark contrast between the teaching position prior to and after the 1944 Act:

The thirties, that period of so much distress in English life, was a golden age for recruitment to grammar schools. It was a buyers' market, and headmasters and governing bodies could pick and choose between men with good honours degrees... the...golden age of recruitment between the wars [has been] followed by an ice age since...<sup>15</sup>

Nor was it only the appointment of specialist academic staff to grammar schools that proved problematic during these years: secondary modern schools struggled to recruit skilled teachers for non-academic courses such as handicraft, metal work and woodwork. This shortage worked as a limiting factor in both school types in the effective operation and delivery of core subjects.

This teacher shortage was particularly pronounced in Oxfordshire because of the more fragmented distribution of its secondary schools. As has been explored in Part One, Oxfordshire grammar schools were relatively small institutions (average 2 form entry). Not only did this mean that their sixth form yield was relatively low, but it also resulted in smaller establishment sizes and reduced the incentives it could offer to staff in terms of professional experience or responsibility allowances. In turn this factor limited how broad (and effective)

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<sup>15</sup> Geoffrey Crowther and Central Advisory Council for Education, *15 to 18 : A Report of the Central Advisory Council for Education* (London, 1959). p. 239.

a curriculum a school could offer. School size also posed a problem to the county's secondary modern schools. In 1959 the Director brought the Crowther Report's conclusions to the attention of the Secondary Education Sub-Committee, emphasising their particular relevance to the Oxfordshire authority, especially those recommendations pertaining to school size and the expansion of extended (post-15) work:

If secondary schools generally are to have extended courses, there is a minimum size below which they would be highly uneconomical to staff. Although it would be possible for a school with an intake of 90 per year, an intake of 120 would be preferable [3-4FE]. The tendency is thus to bring rather larger modern schools into existence is something as much in the interest of the average and below average pupils as it is of the other ones.... Only a relatively large school will have the varied equipment and the diversely qualified staff to do this. Nearly a third of all modern schools are small communities of less than 75 or less. They will clearly be too small, even when the school-leaving age is raised, to provide adequately for the needs of all their older pupils. We do not think they have a useful future...there is no solution for them except by the provision of staff on a more generous scale than normal.<sup>16</sup>

In 1960, over half of Oxfordshire's secondary modern schools were recruiting cohorts of 75 or less, and only five out of 23 modern schools were operating as 3-4 Form Entry Schools. The arrangement of Oxfordshire's secondary schools therefore fell far from the mark in terms of efficiency.

The incapacity of existing schools to effectively and economically meet changing educational expectations was one of the dominant rationales provided by policy makers when presenting reorganisation reforms to the press and public. For example, in a June 1962 *Oxford Mail* editorial, Chorlton explained to his interviewer the inefficiencies of existing schools:

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<sup>16</sup> OHS OLEA: CC1/12/A30/2 *Secondary Education Sub-Committee Minutes*, February 1960, Appendix B, Secondary Education and the Crowther Report.

They're not viable units anymore - we simply can't provide through them the opportunities we should...Some parts of the county are so thinly populated... Oxfordshire, with 31 secondary schools for 12,000 children, has one of the lowest averages for the size of secondary schools in any county and this means difficulty in providing the wide range of courses and activities which children need... There are parts of the county where there are not enough children of high enough abilities to justify a separate Grammar School.<sup>17</sup>

Referring especially to the issue of teacher recruitment, Chorlton continued:

There are five secondary schools in Banbury for example...this is the sort of problem they're faced with – they can't get a specialist teacher for physical education at each school we can't provide them all with a gymnasium... Its not economical to try to give each school teachers of foreign languages and we can hope, perhaps to attract a really first class mathematics or science teacher to two schools in the five, but not to each one.<sup>18</sup>

Both these comments highlight the problem faced by Oxfordshire planners in reconciling the imperative to expand the range and quality of secondary provision and the confines of their existing infrastructure. In later reflections on reorganisation, the efficiencies rationale was dominant. For example, in 1966 Chorlton reinforced the simplicity of the choice planners faced:

If the decision to go comprehensive had not been taken we would have been left with a great number of small schools that were costly to run and did not attract the right sort of staff.<sup>19</sup>

Even into the late 1960s when comprehensive reorganisation nationally had become mired by political posturing and the rise of the new right in educational thinking, the reform process in Oxfordshire was still discussed locally as one that was an uncontentious and pragmatic development. This was particularly true of the *Oxford Mail* (which closely followed the rolling out of comprehensive schemes) reflecting in 1970 that

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<sup>17</sup> OML: Oxford Mail, 'The Changing Face of Secondary Education in Oxfordshire,' 13<sup>th</sup> June 1962

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> OML: Oxford Mail, 'Oxon Finds All-In Schools The Best,' 28<sup>th</sup> June 1968.

Comprehensive schools developed early because this was seen as a way of saving scarce human and school resources.<sup>20</sup>

The county's approach to policy change along comprehensive lines was also heavily influenced by the performance of its existing grammar schools. In the first case, the underwhelming work of some of the county's selective schools removed the incentive to expand selective provision, even when pressure was being exerted to do so on the grounds of population change or efficiency. A key instance of this concerned Witney Grammar School in February 1958 when it petitioned the Education Committee to increase its intake. Mention has already been made in chapter 7 of Witney's headteacher arguing for this expansion on the grounds that the school would then be in a better position to recruit staff. Alongside this, the school's governors raised the matter of grammar school coverage in the Witney area:

The Governors consider that the committee are insufficiently alive to the growth of population in Witney and the surrounding district and to the need for additional accommodation for the increased demand for grammar school places that will result.<sup>21</sup>

Despite these representations, the Secondary Education Sub-Committee and Director highlighted their reservations:

HM Inspectors' comments at the recent meeting with the governors were that a number of children were making heavy weather of the academic grammar school course. Instead the committee argue that instead of continuous expansion; the school needs a period of consolidation: it would be a disservice to the school and the staff to saddle them with the further period of continuous expansion...<sup>22</sup>

Beyond removing the incentive to expand selective provision, evidence within the authority that grammar school intakes were struggling added to the doubts over the

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<sup>20</sup> OML: Oxford Mail, 'A Pioneer,' 11<sup>th</sup> June 1970.

<sup>21</sup> OHS OLEA: CC1/12/A30/1 *Secondary Education Sub-Committee Minutes*, February 1958. Appendix B, Witney Grammar School and Size of Entry.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

legitimacy of the selection process, and its attendant segregation of children into different school types. This can be observed in statements made by lead policy makers in Oxfordshire. For example, the Chairman of the Education Committee Charles Peers articulated the committee's doubts over selection arising from the performance of grammar school cohorts:

quite a proportion of children admitted to the grammar schools do not profit as well from the academic course as all the evidence considered at the time of selection indicated they ought to do- in fact, they fade away... and those admitted to modern schools do better.<sup>23</sup>

One of the founding principles of bi/tripartism was that children could be identified as possessing certain aptitudes, interests or abilities, which were to be catered for by specialist schools. In Oxfordshire's schools by the latter 1950s, students were demonstrating increasing overlap in terms of interests and aptitudes, and confidence in the accurate identification of these qualities had been eroded. In turn, the educational rationale that underpinned the provision of 'hermetically sealed' institutions, each with a different function, was fading.<sup>24</sup> The incentive to persevere with such a model of education, especially in the knowledge that it represented an inefficient distribution of resources, had therefore shrunk in Oxfordshire to a point where it appeared rationally indefensible. By 1962, the Director of Education in Oxfordshire concluded that the only means of reconciling so many competing demands and changes was 'to be ready to think along unorthodox lines'. In this context comprehensive re-organisation offered the opportunity to expand the efficiency and efficacy of secondary provision.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> OML: Oxford Mail, 'The Changing Face of Secondary Education in Oxfordshire,' 13<sup>th</sup> June and 'The 11-Plus in South Oxon,' 7<sup>th</sup> November 1964.

<sup>24</sup> Phrase used by the NUT to critique segregated schooling outlined in the Hadow Report, quoted in Brian Simon, *The Politics of Educational Reform, 1920-1940* (1974). p.257.

<sup>25</sup> OML: Oxford Mail, 'The Changing Face of Secondary Education in Oxfordshire,' 13<sup>th</sup> June 1962.

If these were the practical and structural concerns that triggered a reappraisal of Oxfordshire's secondary education policy, then what of the second category outlined above: the institutional character of the LEA as constituted by the outlook and character of its lead policy makers and headteachers? In many ways, the policy-making environment as fostered by these individuals acted as much as a determinant for comprehensive reform as the drivers discussed above. It also had a profound effect on the way in which reorganisation was implemented and received.

This applies most strikingly in the case of the Education Directorate, led by its Director Alan Chorlton and his Deputy, John Dorrell. The principal features of their leadership was its stability and co-operation: Chorlton had been Director from 1945-1970, with Dorrell in post as Deputy from 1950-1970 and then as Director until 1974, each man working to complement the other. Harry Judge, Principal of Banbury Grammar School between 1962-73 and later Director of the Oxford University Education Department characterised this dynamic thus:

Chorlton, a man of powerful ideas and enthusiasms, knew that it was Dorrell who, quietly and persistently, made things happen. The one could not have flourished without the other.<sup>26</sup>

In later conversations with Judge, he has reinforced the importance of this collaboration as a driving force explaining fondly that 'Chorlton did the thinking, Dorrell

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<sup>26</sup> Harry Judge, 'John Dorrell,' *The Guardian*, 1st April 2002.

cleaned up the mess.<sup>27</sup> This sentiment is reinforced in comments made by John Sayer, Judge's successor as Principal at Banbury School,

As always, Dorrell was the ideal partner and foil, purposefully unflappable and reliable. He would visit all the 300 schools regularly; he was universally respected and trusted, and headteachers regarded him as a professional and personal friend.<sup>28</sup>

This length of service and professional compatibility was rendered all the more significant in that both men stood in the vanguard of educational thinking. Prior to taking post in Oxfordshire, both had worked in some of the most innovative and dynamic of education authorities: Chorlton had worked with Sir John Newsom in Hertfordshire and Dorrell had served under Sir Alec Clegg in the West Riding. Hence, Judge described Chorlton and Dorrell as 'scions of two great educational dynasties,' bringing to Oxfordshire a legacy of unorthodox thinking and policy innovation.<sup>29</sup> This seems to have particularly been the case with Chorlton, and is evident not only in the way he was regarded by his contemporaries but also when tracing his work within the authority. On the first point, several examples stand out which highlight this impression. Geoff Goodall, Headmaster of Lord Williams' School (1964- 1979) has commented that the comprehensive circular 10/65 was almost an irrelevance to policy change in Oxfordshire, and simply 'coincided with the convenience of Chorlton being a visionary.'<sup>30</sup> Tim Brighouse, later Chief Education Officer of Oxfordshire described Chorlton as having 'a very strong influence over everything that ever happened' and 'profoundly educational in his thinking', and John Sayer added to his comments above by introducing the Director as the 'inspirational legend, the charismatic and

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with Harry Judge, 13<sup>th</sup> December 2012.

<sup>28</sup> John Sayer 'John Dorrell,' *The Independent*, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2002.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Geoff Goodall, 25<sup>th</sup> February 2013.

unpredictable A.R. Chorlton.<sup>31</sup> Outside the realm of schools and headmasters, Chorlton also secured the respect and support of the local press. Oxford Mail coverage of the Director and his work frequently cast him as a ‘guiding light’ in local educational policy, conveying the creative energy he brought to the role, with one reporter writing:

He talks about the education service like a man running a thriving research and development project: what’s needed is to get the best out of what’s there, to give people the maximum life chances within the cash allowed.<sup>32</sup>

Chorlton’s influence and gravitas were pervasive features of the education service in Oxfordshire. Not only was he hugely important in driving and shaping the process of comprehensive reform when it was being discussed in the early 1960s, but his influence throughout the post-war period can be seen as having paved the way for comprehensive reorganisation. This was especially the case with his approach to experimenting with the organisation of secondary education and selection practices between 1944 and 1963.

Chorlton’s disregard for orthodoxy in educational planning can be seen in Oxfordshire’s long-standing experiments with different models of secondary organisation. Prior to any explicit consideration of going comprehensive in 1959, the Oxfordshire LEA was already operating one comprehensive and one bilateral school at Burford and Chipping Norton respectively. The intention to develop both of these schools had been stated as early as 1944, with the Director later explaining that such an arrangement had been pursued in

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with Tim Brighouse, 19<sup>th</sup> June 2014 and John Sayer ‘John Dorrell,’ *The Independent*, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2002.

<sup>32</sup> OML: Oxford Mail, ‘Another Adventure in Education Begins for Alan Chorlton,’ 1<sup>st</sup> September 1970.

these areas because there likely would not have been a sufficient number of pupils of grammar school ability to warrant a separate school.<sup>33</sup>

On a more widespread basis, Chorlton encouraged the evolution of what could be considered multilateral sites, separate schools developed into ‘clusters,’ with the explicit aim of maximising resources. These campuses were developed in Central Oxfordshire, at the Easington Campus in Banbury and eventually at Bicester. Judge described this feature of Oxfordshire’s organisation particularly as ‘Chorlton’s vision’ with his personal influence over these policy trajectories standing as a clear feature of committee documents.<sup>34</sup> For example, when the Finance and General Purposes and the Secondary Education Sub-Committee were considering the location of the new Littlemore Grammar School, the Director recommended it be placed on the same site as the existing Northfield Secondary School, and suggested that

The lay-out of the accommodation for the school should be such as would make it possible at a later date to bring these two schools into even closer association if such a development seemed desirable, and asked the sub-committee to consider a proposals that the siting of the workshop and laboratory block should be arranged in such a manner that it would be possible later to add further practical accommodation which could be shared with advantage by both schools.<sup>35</sup>

With the opening of Littlemore, Chorlton further recommended that the schools collaborate to offer a broader spectrum of provision for each of their pupils:

encouragement should be given to the two heads to make use of each other's staff e.g the Grammar school staff should be able to help with the teaching of the general subjects in the advanced courses; the Modern School staff with the teaching of craft subjects in the Grammar School.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Oxford Mail, ‘The Changing Face of Secondary Education in Oxfordshire,’ 13<sup>th</sup> June 1962

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Harry Judge, 13<sup>th</sup> December 2012.

<sup>35</sup> OHS OLEA: CC1/12/A30/1 *Secondary Education Sub-Committee Minutes*, May 1955.

<sup>36</sup> OHS OLEA: CC1/12/A30/2 *Secondary Education Sub-Committee Minutes*, December 1957.

His influence can be seen again in the creation of the Bicester campus when recommending the location of the new Bicester Grammar School in February 1958. His recommendations to the committee in this case serve to illustrate both the importance of the efficiencies rationale in driving change and the extent to which the development of comprehensive-like schools in Oxfordshire was already a solution deeply embedded in officials' understanding of local needs:

Should the sub-committee decide to include the project...the relationship of the new buildings the existing secondary modern school on the Highfield site will need to be considered. There are numerous advantages in enabling the two schools to work closely together and in planning the layout of the buildings accordingly, e.g i) earlier transfer between courses according to the children's individual rates of development; ii) advantages to the teaching staff through the experience of teaching a wider range of ability, iii) scope for more flexible teaching with a wider variety of courses possible as a result of which- iv) pupils can be offered much improved prospects of selecting a course directly suitable to them, v) easier avoidance of the frustrations of faulty selection at 11+, vi) more and better responsibility allowances with the resulting opportunities to attract better qualified and experienced staff...In due course, and if circumstances indicate as I venture to think they will in this area...the two schools could then be placed under one head without difficulty.<sup>37</sup>

In this case, as with many others, the committee agreed with Chorlton's recommendations. The proposal for the Bicester schools was as close to comprehensive re-organisation as one could get, within the existing system.

Chorlton was also the driving force in modifying the selection practices of the authority. Until 1957, selection practices in Oxfordshire operated along much the same lines as in neighbouring counties: an IQ test coupled with an English and Maths examination that pupils sat at 11. Interestingly, there is evidence to suggest that throughout the mid-50s, the

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<sup>37</sup> OHS OLEA: CC1/12/A30/2 *Secondary Education Sub-Committee Minutes*, February 1958.

Directorate and Education Committee were happy with the accuracy of the test and felt that transfer between schools at 13 corrected any misplacement at 11.<sup>38</sup> Even in 1957, Chorlton identified the local consensus regarding selection procedures being ‘fair and generally satisfactory.’<sup>39</sup> But despite this, it is clear from the Oxfordshire documents that the Director was eager to address key areas of concern with existing practice. He identified these as being the problem of parental and pupil anxiety surrounding the ‘fateful day’ of examination, and the unsatisfactory selection of borderline candidates. This comes across most clearly in the May 1957 meeting of the Secondary Education Sub-Committee, where we witness Chorlton actively steering the committee to sanction a review of selection procedures:

[Chorlton] submitted for the information of the sub-committee extracts from a memorandum to the Leicester Education Committee which had been published recently in Education...

The Director stated that in view of the interest created by the Leicestershire scheme, he felt that the sub-committee might wish him to report on the situation in Oxfordshire.... he was hoping to examine [the role of written tests/ borderline candidates ] and submit proposals, possibly in one or two areas as an experiment.<sup>40</sup>

On this occasion, the Sub-Committee declined to commit to a review, resolving instead that ‘the whole matter of the organisation of secondary organisation at 11 plus should be considered more fully at a later date.’<sup>41</sup> Nor was the matter raised at the subsequent July 1957 meeting. Without accounting for many conversations being held behind closed doors, it must therefore have been a surprise for the committee to see ‘Selection for Secondary

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<sup>38</sup> OHS: SZ Stack WITN/373 H.W Pooley, *The story of a school: Wood Green School, Witney*, p.9.

<sup>39</sup> OHS OLEA: CC1/12/A30/2 *Secondary Education Sub-Committee Minutes*, May 1957.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. The Leicestershire Scheme represented one of the first locally led experiments with selection practices. In 1957 the Leicestershire LEA altered its selection and secondary school transfer arrangements so that all pupils moved from primary schools to junior secondary schools at age 11. At age 14, and after three years in the same school, pupils would then either opt to transfer to local grammar schools to pursue advanced work or to stay at the junior secondary for one more year to then leave at 15.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

Schools' appear on their September 1957 meeting agenda, and even more so to learn the following:

The Director reported that a Working Party of experienced head and assistant teachers had been formed and had agreed, subject to further discussion on detail, on certain changes in the selection procedure....<sup>42</sup>

Based on these recommendations, amendments were made to the selection procedure in Banbury for borderline cases and Chorlton continued to consult with the working party, this time with the Secondary Education Sub-Committee's endorsement. A year later, the Director advocated the trial of a pilot scheme, which dispensed with the written tests element of the selection procedure, informing the committee

The climate of opinion is moving steadily towards the elimination by one means or another of selection of a child's secondary school on a series of written tests...the conclusions I have reached lead me to suggest to the Sub-Committee that the time is ripe for experiment in one area of the county in dispensing with these.<sup>43</sup>

This pilot subsequently ran in the Banbury, Littlemore and Chipping Norton areas of the county and, with the Education Committee's approval, was adopted county wide in the September of 1961. Though the Secondary Education Sub-Committee were fully on board with these experiments by 1959, the May 1957 example serves to highlight how the Director of Education led a constant effort to review and improve the secondary service, when the committee would have otherwise paused and delayed.

These experiments and adaptations signalled a pragmatic and innovative approach to policy making in Oxfordshire, a legacy which facilitated comprehensive reform in several ways. On a symbolic, or perhaps behavioural level, it fostered a sense of confidence and ease

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<sup>42</sup> OHS OLEA: CC1/12/A30/2 *Secondary Education Sub-Committee Minutes*, September 1957.

<sup>43</sup> OHS OLEA: CC1/12/A30/2 *Secondary Education Sub-Committee Minutes*, September 1958.

within the authority in the face of policy change; a willingness to use ‘trial and error’ on new ideas if it meant improving the capacity of their education service. Secondly, this series of policy adaptations prior to 1963 provided an in-house evidence base which guided future policy decisions. Arguably in Oxfordshire, the county’s decision to abandon selection was far better informed than in other counties that did not have the benefit of such experimental impetus and confident leadership. For example, although efforts to improve the county’s selection mechanisms after 1957 were regarded as successful in improving accuracy relative to previous practice, the concerns over grammar school performance, and evidence of so called late developers at Secondary Modern Schools, persisted. Both of these facts added to the feeling that the selection process had been adapted as far as possible within the existing framework but was still proving unsatisfactory, a sentiment clearly present in Charles Peers’ comments made to the *Oxford Mail* in 1964.

Experience has shown that no matter how carefully and fairly the selection procedure is carried out, it is not possible in all cases at this early stage to judge with certainty a child’s ability...<sup>44</sup>

The same could be said of the re-organisation of secondary schools after 1963, in that the confidence to pursue county-wide comprehensivisation was rooted in the county’s prior experiments with secondary schools. For example, the 1966 Development Plan preface directly cites the influence of the county’s comprehensive and multi-lateral schools at Burford and Chipping Norton:

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<sup>44</sup> OM: Oxford Mail, ‘The 11 Plus to End in Two More Oxon Areas,’ 1<sup>st</sup> October 1964.

In both it has been possible to provide a wider range of courses than before, academic success has increased and the contributory primary schools had benefitted from the removal of selection at 11+.<sup>45</sup>

Chorlton later reinforced the influence of these experiments on later policy change, explaining that part of the reason for the county having gone comprehensive was the ‘result of the overwhelming mass of evidence from the comprehensive Burford School.’<sup>46</sup>

On a more practical level, decisions about the organisation and location of schools throughout the 1950s provided the foundations for comprehensive reform in many areas of the county. Reflecting on the integration of Banbury Grammar School and the Easington Schools, French teacher Valerie Norman remarked that the Banbury schools ‘must have been one of most perfect sites for comprehensive planning in the county.’<sup>47</sup> All three schools here existed on the same site, adjacent to one another and with some precedent for sharing facilities. A similar situation predominated at Burford, Chipping Norton, Littlemore and Gillotts School in South Oxfordshire with all new secondary building having been concentrated on one site, with a view to possible integration. In an effort at further integration, Oxfordshire LEA also tended to support the constitution of just one governing body for both grammar and secondary modern schools, once they shared the same site. As a result, when the decision was taken to proceed with reorganisation, the LEA had several ready-made sites from which to form comprehensive schools.

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<sup>45</sup> OHC: CC1/12/A1/4: *Education Committee Minutes*, October 1966: Appendix E: ‘Oxfordshire County Council Development Plan for Secondary Education.

<sup>46</sup> OML: Oxford Mail, ‘Oxon Finds All-In Schools The Best,’ 28<sup>th</sup> June 1968.

<sup>47</sup> Banbury Comprehensive School, *In the Making: Reflections on the First Ten Years of Banbury School* (Banbury 1979). p.15.

*Let fresh breezes blow*

The innovative approach to policy making in Oxfordshire was as much the product of the strong, inclusive and collaborative working relationships that were present throughout the LEA as it was the creativity of its directorate. In this regard, two further constituent parts of the LEA's institutional character should be explored: the first being the involvement and standing of Oxfordshire's headteachers, the second being the composition and disposition of the county's Education Committee.

Throughout the entirety of this study, one of the most striking features about the Oxfordshire education service was the quality of the relationships that existed between the Directorate and schools in Oxfordshire. In many ways, Chorlton and Dorrell directly cultivated this atmosphere. As Sayer highlights, Dorrell was a regular visitor at schools, developing and maintaining relationships with each of the county's headteachers with remarkable success. Additionally, Chorlton and Dorrell were pro-active in seeking the contribution of headteachers to a wide range of policy matters. In considering his early ideas for the CTA, Chorlton enlisted the help of headteachers in successive working parties, following the same process again in 1959 when he wanted to encourage the evolution of Alternative Courses. In this fashion, Oxfordshire headteachers were directly integrated into the policy-making process, not just through the normal arrangement whereby a teacher or headteacher attended the Education Committee, but as policy ideas evolved and developed. Existing memoirs and recent interviews with Geoff Goodall also reinforce the significance of measures introduced by Chorlton to devolve financial responsibility to schools in 1955.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> OHS OLEA: CC1/12/A30/2 *Secondary Education Sub-Committee Minutes*, September 1956

Goodall particularly links Oxfordshire's success in going comprehensive with the fact that Chorlton 'trusted headteachers with money and students.'<sup>49</sup>

What also emerges, having interviewed colleagues of the Director and his Deputy, was that they established a culture of professional investment in Oxfordshire, especially as it evolved into the 1960s and that this underpinned the willingness and enthusiasm behind reform at the school level. Not only were teachers encouraged and supported to shape the education service they were delivering, working party groups were encouraged to visit other LEAs and survey new schemes or practice. Later a teacher exchange programme was in place between Oxfordshire and the West Riding, and the Directorate even supported foreign exchange trips to ensure that pedagogy in Oxfordshire stayed up to date with cutting edge practice. This was especially the case with Dorrell, and Judge has emphasised the quality of support and encouragement that his leadership lent to professional development in the county:

He was at his best in understanding and developing teachers, especially headteachers, and when he suspected that cobwebs were gathering in their minds, he led them off for a few days of hard labour in France or Sweden to see how other societies tackled their problems- and to let fresh breezes blow.<sup>50</sup>

It is not claimed here that the relationships in the county between schools and local officials were always in a state of perfect harmony; there were repeated instances of mutual frustration or small-scale conflict over policy or standards. Further, some of the examples cited above post-dated the decision to go comprehensive and cannot directly have acted as determinants so to speak. Their relevance stands however, in demonstrating the impact of the

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<sup>49</sup> Interview with Geoff Goodall, 25<sup>th</sup> February 2013.

<sup>50</sup> Harry Judge, 'John Dorrell,' *The Guardian*, 1st April 2002.

professional environment of Oxfordshire in facilitating innovation and creativity when looking at policy problems, and they highlight the degree of trust and loyalty which the Directorate could command as local leaders in education.

What is also vital to consider in this dynamic is that several of Oxfordshire's headteachers were considered visionary in their own right. During conversation with Tim Brighouse, he emphasised the presence in Oxfordshire of 'headteachers you'd give your life for,' referring in this instance to Harry Judge, Geoff Goodall and Stanley Percival (respectively, the headmasters of Banbury, Lord Williams', and Bicester Grammar Schools).<sup>51</sup> The work of these men at their respective schools made them nationally respected educationalists. For example, Harry Judge went on to lead the University of Oxford Department of Education, as well as serving on the Public Schools Commission and the James Committee. Brighouse elsewhere stated that the 'un-contentious' process of re-organisation in Oxfordshire, relied heavily on

the quality, imagination and willingness of a core of grammar school heads...to make a leap of faith.<sup>52</sup>

This sentiment could also be applied to a cohort of long serving and dynamic secondary modern school heads in Oxfordshire, Mr Pooley at Witney or Mr Anson just to name but two, many of whom had contributed to the county's curriculum experiments. A 1972 Education Committee report details an almost watershed moment in Oxfordshire history when within the space of one term, four of these Heads either retired or in one case, passed

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<sup>51</sup> Interview with Tim Brighouse, 19<sup>th</sup> June 2014.

<sup>52</sup> Tim Brighouse, 'The comprehensive school within the learning society', in Richard Pring and Geoffrey Walford (eds.) *Affirming the Comprehensive Ideal* (London 1997). p.174.

away. The committee acknowledged the contribution of these heads, ‘many of who themselves started as young innovators in the period after the war,’ noting that they had guided their schools into and through reorganisation with skill and dedication.<sup>53</sup> In the grand scheme of going comprehensive, the presence of these headteachers, to whom the task of designing and delivering reform was devolved, determined not only that the LEA could proceed with reorganisation, but that it could do so with a degree of consensus, local legitimacy and creative impetus.

The presence of positive working relationships in Oxfordshire also extended to its Education Committee. Having attended the final Committee meeting of his career in Oxfordshire, John Dorrell commented that Oxfordshire's education officers

Had been most fortunate in serving [committee] members who had approached the business of meetings in such an open-minded way.<sup>54</sup>

Though understated, this tribute to the outlook of the Education Committee in Oxfordshire highlights another component of the LEA's official character, and illustrates a further cause of Oxfordshire's early decision to go comprehensive; Oxfordshire's Education Committee, throughout much of the 1950s was thoroughly pragmatic; was attended and chaired by individuals with a keen engagement in educational issues; and who trusted the county's Directorate implicitly. This outlook ensured that when its Directorate and Working Party recommended comprehensive re-organisation, the committee had enough confidence in its officers and staff to take that ‘leap of faith’ to undertake wholesale reform.

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<sup>53</sup> OHC: CC1/12/A1/7 *Education Committee Minutes*, October 1972.

<sup>54</sup> OHC: CC1/12/A1/8 *Education Committee Minutes*, March 1974.

This was especially true of the Committee's Chairmen Charles 'Jack' Peers, who was Chairman of the Education Committee between 1956 and 1967. In the press coverage of Oxfordshire's comprehensive re-organisation and in tributes paid to him after his death, Mr Peers features as a critically important contributor to post-war education in Oxfordshire. Primarily, this evolved out of his good relationships with the Directorate, but also from his determination to fully involve teachers, parents and governors in policy decisions. This can be seen as a defining feature of his leadership in the comments below, and reporters credited Peers as being

the right man in the right place to face the problem of a rapidly expanding school population and to direct a crash building programme...later it fell to him to provide inspired leadership for the first critical years of the move to a comprehensive system. A key feature of Jack Peers' determination to involve directly all those concerned...In the event, this traumatic change took place without the bitter controversy experienced in so many other counties.<sup>55</sup>

A further report praised him for his leadership and commitment to reform in Oxfordshire:

He deserves much of the credit that the transition to comprehensive schools was managed smoothly with maximum consultation with parents and teachers. This was in marked contrast to the political acrimony in some other counties.<sup>56</sup>

Peers worked at the committee level to cultivate consensus and act as a reassuring figurehead throughout the process of change. His leadership throughout the county, alongside that of headteachers and the Directorate contributed hugely in providing a strong base from which to contemplate and deliver wholesale reform.

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<sup>55</sup> OML: Oxford Mail, 'Obituaries, Mr Charles John Peers,' 15<sup>th</sup> July 1977.

<sup>56</sup> OML: Oxford Mail, 'Jack Peers,' 12<sup>th</sup> July 1977.

Reorganisation in Oxfordshire was the official policy response to a complex set of inter-related problems, namely: accelerating population growth, the changing function and needs of secondary schools, a loss of faith in selection mechanisms and the unviability of meeting changing demands within an already problematic fragmented service. The changing dynamics within this complex meant that by the 1960s, the Oxfordshire LEA found its resources pulled in different directions to support services that were increasingly aimed at needs that were sharing common ground. However, in the build up to 1963, the mutual confidence between the county committees, the Directorate and schools allowed for a degree of experimentation and daring which would otherwise have been impossible. These relationships and the policy-making environment mattered hugely when it came to evolving and delivering schemes for comprehensive reorganisation. The presence of this dynamic within the authority created a safe channel through which drastic policy change could be smoothly navigated.

Figure 23: Outline of re-organisation schemes pursued in different Oxfordshire regions.

Area	Tripartite model		1966 Development Plan			Timing: First intake
Central Oxfordshire	Schools	Type	Schools to become	Type	Transfer arrangements if applicable	
	Gosford Hill	Secondary Modern	Gosford Hill	11-18 Orthodox Comprehensive		Sep-65
	Marlborough School, Woodstock	Secondary Modern	Marlborough School	11-16 Elective Comprehensive	Students transfer at 14 or 16 to Gosford Hill for O and A Level options- based on parental choice	Sep-66
	Littlemore Grammar School	Grammar School-federated	Peers Comprehensive Upper School	14-18+ Orthodox two/tier Comprehensive		
	Northfield Secondary Modern School	Secondary Modern-federated	Peers Comprehensive Junior School	<b>11-14 Orthodox two/tier Comprehensive</b>	All Students Transfer at 14	Sep-68
	The Abbey School Berinsfield	Secondary Modern	Peers Comprehensive Junior School	<b>11-14 Orthodox two/tier Comprehensive</b>	All Students Transfer at 14	Sep-68
	Harlow School, Old Marston	Secondary Modern	Peers Comprehensive Junior School	<b>11-14 Orthodox two/tier Comprehensive</b>	All Students Transfer at 14	Sep-68
Banbury Borough	Banbury Grammar School	Grammar School	Banbury Comprehensive	14-18+ Orthodox two/tier Comprehensive		Sep-70
	Easington Boys School	Secondary Modern	Banbury Comprehensive	11-14 Orthodox two/tier Comprehensive	All Students Transfer at 14	Sep-70
	Easington Girls School	Secondary Modern	Banbury Comprehensive	11-14 Orthodox two/tier Comprehensive	All Students Transfer at 14	Sep-70
	Grimsbury Secondary School	Secondary Modern	Banbury Comprehensive	11-14 Orthodox two/tier Comprehensive	All Students Transfer at 14	Sep-70
	Blessed George Napier	Secondary Modern	Banbury Comprehensive	11-14 Orthodox two/tier Comprehensive	All Students Transfer at 14	Sep-70
	North Oxford Technical College	Technology College	North Oxford Technical College (NOTS)	16+ College	Work in close connection with Banbury to provide for 16-18 age range.	
Banbury Rural	The Windmill School, Deddington	Secondary Modern	To close	Temporary continuation as junior schools		
	Hook Norton School	Secondary Modern	To close	Temporary continuation as junior schools		
	Dr Radcliffe's Steeple Aston	Secondary Modern	To close	Temporary continuation as junior schools		
			New 8 FE New Bloxham Comprehensive	11-18+ Orthodox Comprehensive	Work in close connection with Banbury and NOTS in the initial stages	Sep-70

Chipping Norton/ Charlbury	Chipping Norton	Multilateral School	Chipping Norton	11-18+ Orthodox Comprehensive	All students in the area enter both schools at 11, with transfer from Spendlove at 14 for all children	Sep-57
	The Spendlove School, Charlbury	Junior Comprehensive	The Spendlove School, Charlbury	11-14 Orthodox two/tier Comprehensive		Sep-65
Bicester	Bicester Grammar School	Grammar School- federated	Bicester Comprehensive	11-18+ Orthodox Comprehensive		Sep-66
	Highfield	Secondary Modern School- federated				
West Oxfordshire Burford	Burford Grammar School	Multilateral School	Burford Grammar	11-18+ Orthodox Comprehensive		Sep-53
	West Oxfordshire Technology College	Technology College	West Oxfordshire Centre for Advanced Studies	16+ College	Work in close connection with Burford to provide for 16-18 age range.	
West Oxfordshire: Witney Eynsham	Witney Grammar School	Grammar School	Witney Comprehensive	11-18+ Orthodox Comprehensive	To generally serve as upper school for witney secondary school lower school	Sep-69
	Witney Secondary School	Secondary Modern School	Witney Comprehensive- lower school	11-16 Orthodox Comprehensive	To serve as 11-16 until at full numbers	Sep-68
	The Bartholomew, Eynsham	Secondary Modern School	Bartholomew Comprehensive	11-16 Orthodox Comprehensive	To serve as 11-16 until at full numbers	Sep-68
	West Oxfordshire Technology College	Technology College	West Oxfordshire Centre for Advanced Studies	16+ College		
East Oxfordshire: Thame/Wheatley	Lord Williams's Grammar, Thame	Grammar School	Lord Williams's Grammar, Thame	14-18 Orthodox two/tier Comprehensive		Sep-71
	Holton Park, Wheatley	Grammar School	Holton Park, Wheatley	14-18 Orthodox two/tier Comprehensive		Sep-71
	The Wenman, Thame	Secondary Modern School	The Wenman, Thame	<b>11-14 Orthodox two/tier Comprehensive</b>	All students to transfer to senior comprehensive at 14	Sep-71
	Wheatley Secondary	Secondary Modern School	Wheatley Secondary	<b>11-14 Orthodox two/tier Comprehensive</b>	All students to transfer to senior comprehensive at 14	Sep-71
Watlington	The Ickneild School, Watlington	Secondary Modern School	The Ickneild School, Watlington	11-16 Comprehensive	Students transfer for post 16 to the Thame, Littlemore Comprehensives or Henley School	Sep-67

South Oxfordshire: Henley/Sonning Common/Woodcote	Henley Grammar School	Grammar	Henley Grammar School	13-18 Elective Comprehensive		Sep-66
	Gillott's Henley	Comp/Modern	Gillott's Henley	<b>11-16 Junior Elective Comprehensive</b>	Students to transfer at 13 if they wish to pursue 5 year academic course at Henley Grammar School. Based on parental wishes and academic performance	Sep-66
	Chiltern Edge Sonning Common	Comp/Modern	Chiltern Edge Sonning Common	<b>11-16 Junior Elective Comprehensive</b>	Students to transfer at 13 if they wish to pursue 5 year academic course at Henley Grammar School. Based on parental wishes and academic performance	Sep-66
	Langtree, Woodcote	Comp/Modern	Langtree, Woodcote	<b>11-16 Junior Elective Comprehensive</b>	Students to transfer at 13 if they wish to pursue 5 year academic course at Henley Grammar School. Based on parental wishes and academic performance	Sep-66
	South Oxfordshire Technology College (SOTC)	Technology College	SOTC	16+		

Source: Oxfordshire Development Plan 1966

## Chapter 11 • Buckinghamshire Resisting Comprehensives

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### *Closing the window of opportunity*

To this day, Buckinghamshire is one of only two local education authorities in England operating a fully selective secondary system. Its grammar schools rank as some of the top state schools in the country and its secondary modern schools (now upper schools and in many cases academies outside LEA control) present a varied and sometimes excellent picture in terms of performance. However, systematic underfunding, repeated instances of school failure, and sometimes school closure have detracted from the esteem and confidence which the sector as a whole has been able to command. In a 2004 funding review of Buckinghamshire LEA, Levačić, Simmons and Smales noted that the authority's 'commitment to selection [was] unequivocal,' and in general the intransigence of the education authority on this front seems to have become an accepted part of local administration.<sup>1</sup>

The retention of the selective system in Buckinghamshire was the product of a strongly contested and protracted discussion which ran from the late 1950s, to the end of the 1970s. It was during this latter period that discussions were at their most fraught. Between 1977-79, both local and national press were alight with speculation about the on-going battle between the Buckinghamshire LEA and the Secretary of State for Education over the

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<sup>1</sup> CFBS: Bucks Press Cuttings Folder: Rosalind Levačić, Katy Simmons and Len Smales, *The Missing Bucks: Buckinghamshire Upper Schools Forum campaign for fair funding and the use of research evidence* (2002).

county's refusal to submit plans for comprehensive reform. Throughout the summer of 1977, journalists described how Buckinghamshire County Council had remained 'defiant to the end,' astutely ignoring the deadline for comprehensive development plan submission. The Secretary of State, Shirley Williams, even threatened legal action in order to 'bring the rebels to heel.'<sup>2</sup> This conflict also permeated every level of operation in Buckinghamshire itself as a 'vociferous comprehensive lobby' fought against a politically entrenched preservationist group in the hope of ending selection.<sup>3</sup>

Despite such frenzied debate continuing until the late 1970s, it is contended here that by this point, the comprehensive debate in Buckinghamshire was in a state of 'lock-in.' Over several years, resistance to reform in the centres of local political power had become so cemented that there was no scope for policy review or re-organisation, irrespective of how vocal and persistent pro-comprehensive groups became. By contrast, the preceding decade had presented the optimal time, a window of opportunity, for any county to pursue reform. During this period, national policy debates had been far more neutral and fluid; LEAs could capitalise on the political and financial endorsement of the Ministry in executing amended or experimental Development Plans; further they could count on support from a public amongst whom the 11+ was unpopular and who craved the provision of a 'grammar school education for all.' But in Buckinghamshire, this window of opportunity was pre-emptively shut: the county's treatment of the comprehensive question even at this early stage narrowed the scope for reform; so much so by the latter 1960s, comprehensive reorganisation was an

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<sup>2</sup> CFBS: Bucks Press Cuttings Folder: Bucks Examiner, 'County Decided to Consult and Defy Deadline,' 8<sup>th</sup> July 1977 and 'Shirley's Court Threat Brings Rebels to Heel,' 25<sup>th</sup> November 1977.

<sup>3</sup> Buckinghamshire County Council: *100 years of service: 1889-1989*, 1989.

impossibility. By this point, the comprehensive debate in Buckinghamshire was almost twenty years old and discussions surrounding secondary re-organisation had been through cycle after cycle of proposal, consultation, delay and division, with each round compounding the issue's divisiveness. In many ways, the experience of this authority could not have been further from that of Oxfordshire. To understand why Buckinghamshire resisted comprehensive reform so resolutely and defiantly, it is necessary to look to this formative decade and assess how dynamics then came to determine the county's controversial policy trajectory later on.

Thus, the documentary research used in these chapters focuses on policy discussions throughout the later 1950s and 1960s. These two chapters set out to explain how the comprehensive debate evolved in Buckinghamshire, and in doing so show why the authority opted for a path of explicit resistance. To do this effectively, Chapter 11 breaks events down into three chronological phases, identifying the turning points and historical pivots within each era. This chronology is presented briefly in Table 11 below. Chapter 12 adds to this narrative analysis of Buckinghamshire's resistance by examining the drivers underpinning the underlying pressures more thematically.

Table 11: Timeline of comprehensive issue in Buckinghamshire 1956-1967

<i>Year</i>	<i>Month</i>	<i>Event(s)</i>
<i>Phase One</i>		
1956		Expansion of selective provision throughout the county as building programmes begin to bear fruit
1958		Warrenfield Secondary School opened, nominally as a comprehensive school
1959	Jan	White Paper 'Secondary Education for All: A New Drive' received from the Ministry, which approves of more experimentation with secondary education
		Council Propose a review of secondary education in the area in light of the Ministry's White Paper
	Feb	Chief Education Officer, Cooke, provides report to Education Committee on secondary provision. Reports differing views from Divisional Executives on the matter of selection and so decides defer recommendations on this in order to discuss further. Some Councillors heavily critical of non-committal nature of outlines planned in this memorandum.
	May	Meeting of Education Committee details request of Aylesbury Divisional Executive to include a comprehensive or bilateral school as and when more secondary accommodation is required in the area
		Education Committee also keep an open mind about future of secondary planning, entertaining the future development of comprehensive schools
		As per Cooke's review of secondary education, Committee resolves to broaden range of courses on offer to pupils in secondary modern schools, either through the formation of school federations or groupings

1960	April	Encouragement given to the development of extended courses at secondary modern schools
	June	Anxiety reported in the press over the 11+ examination, but Chief Education Officer along with several headteachers and councillors come out in support of the examination
	November	Chief Education Officer changeover, F.J North takes over from Cooke
1962	June	North writes to the <i>Bucks Advertiser</i> in support of the 11+ and urges public not to see placement in a secondary modern school as indicating failure
1963	October	Education Committee commission a working party of the Schools Management Sub-Committee to review the arrangements for selection and secondary education in the county. This follows a direct request from Divisional Executives in North Bucks, Eton and Slough for the Committee to do so.
<i>Phase Two</i>		
1964	March	Chief Education Officer's report on reorganisation received by the Schools Management Sub-Committee: Outlines four possible routes of re-organisation, and shows only muted preference for one: Scheme D. Education Committee resolves to canvass opinion and consult teachers and headteachers before proceeding any further
	July	Last All-age school in Buckinghamshire closed; rural re-organisation now complete
	October	Teachers' opinions on Chief Education Officer's memorandum received by Schools Management Sub-Committee, in the absence of any majority agreement, the Sub-committee ask to defer consideration of the question until after the Plowden Committee publish their findings (expected 1967). The Education Committee reject this deferral and ask the School Management Sub-Committee to outline potential pilot areas
1965	January	School Management Sub-Committee decide to proceed with Scheme D: this entails common schools between 11-13 with a modified form of selection at 13. Bletchley designated pilot area for this, despite Divisional Executive's rejection of the scheme during consultation. Education

		Committee asks School Management Sub-Committee to report back in April on plans after more consultation
	February	Conflict and disagreement over Scheme D: Some Divisional Executives wholeheartedly reject the plan, while others support it/agree that it is the most workable
	April	Education Committee decide to shelve any decision on pilot scheme until after the anticipated announcement by Secretary of State on secondary re-organisation
	June	Feedback and discussion over Scheme D still on-going in the press and among different stakeholders (Teachers Associations, Divisional Executives, Councillors etc.) Responses are widely varied and often reveal incompatible aims
	October	10/65 received and discussed by the Education Committee: resolution that segregation at 11 should cease
<i>Phase Three</i>		
1966	April	SMSC appoint working party to consider implications of 10/65 for the area. Key recommendations that segregation at 11 should cease and that the long term plan for the county should involve 12-18 comprehensive schools
		Slough Divisional Executive requesting that the replacement school for Baylis Court Secondary Modern go ahead as a comprehensive school
	June	Education asks CEO to consult all interested parties on the resolution reached in April
	July	Results of CEO's consultations discussed. Education Committee by 20 votes to 11 agree on 12-18 Comprehensives forming the long term plan, with a common age of transfer and a modified form of selection in the interim
	August	County Council discuss and reject Education Committee's recommendations by 43 votes to 24

	October	CEO F.J North dies suddenly, Deputy CEO Harding appointed effective immediately
		Education Committee amend secondary re-organisation plans: in the long term 12-18 comprehensives planned but now this includes the caveat that no future plans will prejudice selective education in the county
1967	January	Divisional Executives, in North Bucks especially, putting in requests for local re-organisation schemes
	April	County Council elections: Conservative controlled council, appoint members to the Education Committee. Comprehensive education now fully politicised

*Phase One: 1956- October 1963: Early encounters*

This period saw the emergence of the comprehensive issue in Buckinghamshire and witnessed the authority grappling with competing views about the role of selection in education. Throughout this phase, the county undertook only very limited experiments with either selection or alternative secondary systems and where these did occur, changes were often conservative and lacklustre, working more to divide and fuel tension than to secure consensus or indicate a clear agenda for change. This process will be explored by reviewing the county's early forays into secondary re-organisation in the form of its first nominal comprehensive school in Slough (Warrenfield Comprehensive) and its engagement with the 1958 White Paper *Secondary Education for All: A New Drive*.

The debate over the status of Warrenfield began when a need became evident for 600+ school places to be provided for the Farnham Royal/ Britwell area, where new housing estates were being erected to cater for the overspill population from London. When planning for the new secondary school demands of the area from October 1954 and Jan 1955, the Slough Divisional Executive suggested the development of a comprehensive school. The

Eton Divisional Executive disagreed. The incompatibility of schemes put forward by the respective Divisional Executives necessitated a wider meeting involving both the Development and School Management Sub-Committees, the outcome of which was no more decisive:

the meeting [being] equally divided between the tripartite system and the comprehensive school and agreement was not reached.<sup>4</sup>

The committee's response to this impasse was to begin building, and in doing so respond to the imperative of place provision, whilst also agreeing that though the school would function initially as a secondary modern school, it would do so 'without prejudice to the future organisation of the school.'<sup>5</sup> A response to Slough Divisional Executive's request for a comprehensive school was thus delayed rather than being resolved.

When this case re-appeared in the Development Sub-Committee in January 1959, the school had been open and occupied for 12 months. By this point, the need to expand and secure extra school places in the 1960/61 building programme featured heavily in all discussions about the school's future. In this context, a decision needed to be reached and it needed to result in a competitive addition to the major works list. The Eton Divisional Executive recommended that the committee should proceed and enlarge the school...

in accordance with the first alternative...['a comprehensive secondary school on the understanding that parents should have the option to send any duly qualified child to an existing grammar school.']...but that this proposal be modified so as to provide a large secondary school with a range of courses and on the understanding that parents shall have an option of sending any duly qualified child to an existing grammar or technical school in the area.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR 78/89 2 *Education Committee Minutes*, October 1955.

<sup>5</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR 78/89 5 *Education Committee Minutes*, January 1959.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

The Slough Divisional Executive concurred with this recommendation and the decision was finally carried up for approval at full committee level. Throughout this process, the explicit aim of introducing a comprehensive school was replaced by the much more conservative plan of developing a larger school with more courses, with no explicit change made to selective school entry. In effect therefore the impetus to reform had been thwarted by a lack of consensus and an official incapacity or unwillingness to garner agreement. The effect was that policy proposals became heavily diluted and that the antagonism between pro and anti-comprehensive agendas continued un-resolved, with ample space and time to become further entrenched.

Another of Buckinghamshire's early encounters with questions of secondary re-organisation came with the arrival of the Ministry of Education's 1958 White Paper, *Secondary Education for All: A New Drive*. The 1958 White Paper has been highlighted by Brian Simon as the 'last gasp defence against comprehensive education' by the Conservative Ministry led now by Geoffrey Lloyd, Eccles' successor.<sup>7</sup> This White Paper represented a determined effort to reinvigorate the secondary modern school in the face of growing support for comprehensives, encouraging broader course provision, promising more resources (especially capital expenditure) and a renewed effort to foster the popular and educational value seen in secondary moderns. The then Chief Inspector of Schools W.R. Elliot welcomed the measure, writing that the white paper aimed to

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<sup>7</sup> Brian Simon, *Education and the Social Order, 1940-1990*, p.204.

Preserve and develop the existing system, removing any premature limitation of opportunities and the anxiety and sense of grievance which such a limitation might create in some parents and pupils...It provides schools where those pupils who are sound but not brilliant, and who thrive best under encouragement, can be the top people....it does not interfere arbitrarily with existing and flourishing institutions. It accords well with the British tradition and temperament in being evolutionary rather than reactionary'<sup>8</sup>

In essence the changes encouraged by the White Paper aimed to reinforce the existing system rather than challenging. And yet, despite the cautious nature of the document and its 'evolutionary' as opposed to 'reactionary' character, it proved divisive in Buckinghamshire. In responding to *A New Drive* in 1959 the Buckinghamshire Education Committee requested that the Chief Education Officer conduct a countywide review of secondary provision. The subsequent report focused on the need to provide a greater quantity and diversity of advanced courses for secondary modern pupils and raised the question of reviewing selection arrangements throughout the county. It was on this latter point that agreement between members within the School Management and Divisional Executive Committees broke down. As a consequence, the School Management Sub-Committee (hereafter SMSC) decided to progress with its consideration of secondary modern curricula but deferred the issue of selection; the minutes relating that:

As the executives have expressed differing views on the section of the Memorandum dealing with the selection of pupils for admission to grammar and technical schools, your Committee have decided to defer consideration of this aspect of the Chief Education Officer's Memorandum until after further discussion with the teachers and consideration by the Joint Advisory (Schools) Committee.<sup>9</sup>

Regardless of what motivated this deferral, whether it was avoidance, committee malaise, or a conscientious desire to consult as widely as possible, the outcome was the same:

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Gary McCulloch, *Failing the Ordinary Child? The Theory and Practice of Working-Class Secondary Education* (Buckingham, 1998). p.99.

<sup>9</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR 78/89 6 *Education Committee Minutes*, June 1959.

the LEA's policy response represented the lowest common denominator solution and barely altered the established parameters of secondary provision. The changes that did occur dealt with matters that could have been addressed within the normal operations of committee governance. For example, the SMSC concluded it should increase the allocation of Heads of Department posts in secondary schools from 44 to 77: a similar change had taken place on this front in previous years independently of any county wide revision or consultation.<sup>10</sup> Further, the recommendations of the committee, that secondary moderns should pursue and work collaboratively to offer a wider range of advanced subjects, though certainly not falling on deaf ears, were met with a sense of confusion in certain circumstances: most of the county's urban secondary moderns were already doing this. The ideas the report did offer, for example in the case of John Colet School, which, it was suggested should become a centre for rural studies, were deemed either unrealistic or arbitrary. Here the school responded that it had an insufficient number of pupils to operate this course efficiently and treated it as an unwelcome distraction from the dynamic work it was already pursuing. At The Grange school too, where school managers were asked to respond to the provision of extended courses in response to *A New Drive*, Governors commented that 'the Grange already has good academic streams...with the promise of an equally good practical side...' remarking that they could offer support in principle but indicating that the Chief Education Officer's response had no tangible effect on their operations.<sup>11</sup> At the school level the Chief Education Officer's report features almost as a non-event and though it was viewed as reflecting an

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<sup>10</sup> Under changes to the 1956 Burnham salary arrangements, these were posts which attracted higher salary and status in schools and were introduced to replace Special Allowances. They only applied to schools over a certain size with advanced level work.

<sup>11</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR 11/89 22, *The Grange County Secondary School Governing Body Minutes*, February 1960 and AR 11/89 24, *John Colet County Secondary School Governing Body Minutes*, April 1960.

encouraging tendency of the education committee to support secondary modern opportunities, it signalled no real change in policy or deviation from current practice.

In this early phase, the prevalence of local division in educational politics ensured two inter-related outcomes: the first being protracted delay in reaching decisions, the second being a whittling down of policy solutions to their lowest common denominator. Both of these outcomes can be seen in the case of Warrenfield School. Discussions over the designation and function of Warrenfield began in the October of 1954, but a resolution was not actually reached until four and a half years later. It is difficult to gauge in this case how far the delays in addressing the school's designation represented legitimate attempts to foster consensus over time, and how far they operated as a stalling tactic. Arguably, in the October of 1954, as the number of pupils in secondary schools rose year-on-year and the future population trends of the area were uncertain, the deferral of a decision on the principles of secondary organisation could be perceived as a practical expedient rather than a demonstration of tactical resistance. The same too can be said of discussions in 1959, where the pressure to reach a decision made for a forced agreement between the two divisional executives. The deferral of decisions in this instance can also be seen to have pushed both executives to a point where the urgent demand for school places trumped their need to pursue or avoid secondary re-organisation. For the Slough Executive, the agreement perhaps met the dual purpose of having places approved by the committee and making at least one step towards securing a comprehensive school. The Eton Executive could also count a victory in having the question of a comprehensive school moved off the agenda. In reality, the resolution was remarkably inconclusive and non-committal and worked to delay the moment where the School Management Sub-Committee would have to actively engage or assert their position on the issue of re-organisation.

The dilution of policy proposals was particularly important in the Warrenfield Case. The final agreement made by Slough and Eton Divisional Executives rested on a commitment to the continuation of selection in the area. As a tactical compromise, this temporarily satisfied both the defenders of selection and of those who were for re-organisation. However, it meant that the Warrenfield became a comprehensive school without a comprehensive intake, its more able cohorts creamed off by the two local grammar schools. Though smoothing the way for action, this policy change commanded little wholesale support from any quarter and was implemented with a deflated sense of purpose and only vague institutional sponsorship. For the school concerned this was perhaps the worst of both worlds. It became a designated comprehensive school in late 1959 but the delay and division that were inherent in the formative planning of the school, undermined the active sense of purpose that might have been expected from the county's flagship comprehensive. Worse still were the problems created for the school itself: the change in name, the planned expansion of courses, and the expectation of being able to develop sixth form work all brought a set of performance expectations that were incompatible with its resource base and with the continued practice of selection from its contributory primary schools.

Within five years HMIs visiting Warrenfield were critical of the school's achievement and status, declaring that up until 1962 the inclusion of comprehensive in its name was still 'anticipatory rather than real, as the proper facilities did not materialise...and the range of work did not justify it.'<sup>12</sup> HMIs also recommended that the school cease its sixth

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<sup>12</sup> NA ED 109/ 9457: *HM Inspectorate Reports, Farnham Royal: Warren Field County Secondary School, 1965*. In this report, the expectation existed that a comprehensive school would have an intake composed of pupils across the whole ability range, and as such would be equipped and staffed to provide for a range of GCE O and A Level work, something which Warrenfield struggled to secure.

form work, arguing that the school was paying too high a price in order to maintain it. HMI's allocated greater blame for these failings on the catchment policy of the school (which drew its pupils almost entirely from two primary schools located in areas of socio-economic deprivation) but the indecision and fragmentation that surrounded the school's launch certainly influenced its chances of success.

At the county level, this school served as the single example of experimentation with secondary education. Even as discussions over re-organisation progressed into the 1960s, the troubled development of Warrenfield, and its inability to rival (in educational and social mobility terms) some of the county's secondary moderns damaged the argument that comprehensive education represented a credible alternative to the tripartite system. For many it certainly did not demonstrate enough of an improvement on selective organisation to convert sceptics of comprehensive reform. Crucially, in the March 1964 review of alternatives to selection, the Chief Education Officer used the Warrenfield example to dissuade the SMSC from opting to pursue 11-18 range comprehensives by highlighting that parents were not sympathetic to this structure:

The committee have, in fact, tried to establish a full range comprehensive school at Warrenfield and they know of the difficulties which have arisen. Parents have opted to allow their children to sit for the secondary schools selection examination and up to now almost every parent of a qualified pupil has chosen an established grammar school. Thus although in theory parents seem to have the choice between the two different systems, their regard for established grammar schools tends to perpetuate a single system.<sup>13</sup>

This situation contrasts markedly with Oxfordshire where experimentation of one form or other was a long-standing feature of authority policy. Here, Burford and Chipping

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<sup>13</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR 78/89 10 *Education Committee Minutes*, March 1964. Report on Secondary Re-organisation to SMSC by Chief Education Officer.

Norton comprehensives were seen to offer clear in-county evidence of workable comprehensive solutions and bolstered arguments that experimentation with secondary organisation could offer greater educational returns.

Buckinghamshire's response to *Secondary Education for All* was a further example of the lack of a local consensus leading to the delay and eventual dilution of proposals for policy change. In this instance, by the time the Chief Education Officer produced his original report in February 1959, he had already consulted groups of teachers and divisional executive representatives in order to draft the committee memorandum. Having reported this to the Education Committee, they in turn referred it to the next meeting of the School Management Sub-Committee who then referred it to each Divisional Executives for comment. The almost inevitable lack of consensus on the more sensitive issue of selection as raised by the Chief Education Officer's report was then deemed by the June 1959 committee to be problematic enough to refer the memorandum on for wider consultation with teachers and with the Joint Advisory (Schools) Sub-Committee. This process of consultation meant that it was at least twelve months before any policy suggestions had resulted from the original January 1959 review. At the end of this protracted consultation period, there was still no agreement on a change to the selection procedure.

The Warrenfield and SEFA examples show how events early in the post-war life of the Bucks LEA had the capacity later to diminish the potential for reform. The fundamental division between those who supported and those who opposed changes to selection, combined with the Education and SMSC Committee's instinct to prevaricate, ensured that changes were slow and that when they did occur, they were limited. Too often they represented an incompatible mix of compromises. Not only did this impede any build-up of institutional momentum for a re-appraisal of selection, it also fostered a sense of inertia and

stagnation within the authority, fuelling frustrations and escalating the divisiveness of the comprehensive issue.

*Phase Two: October 1963- April 1965: Consultation and Contestation*

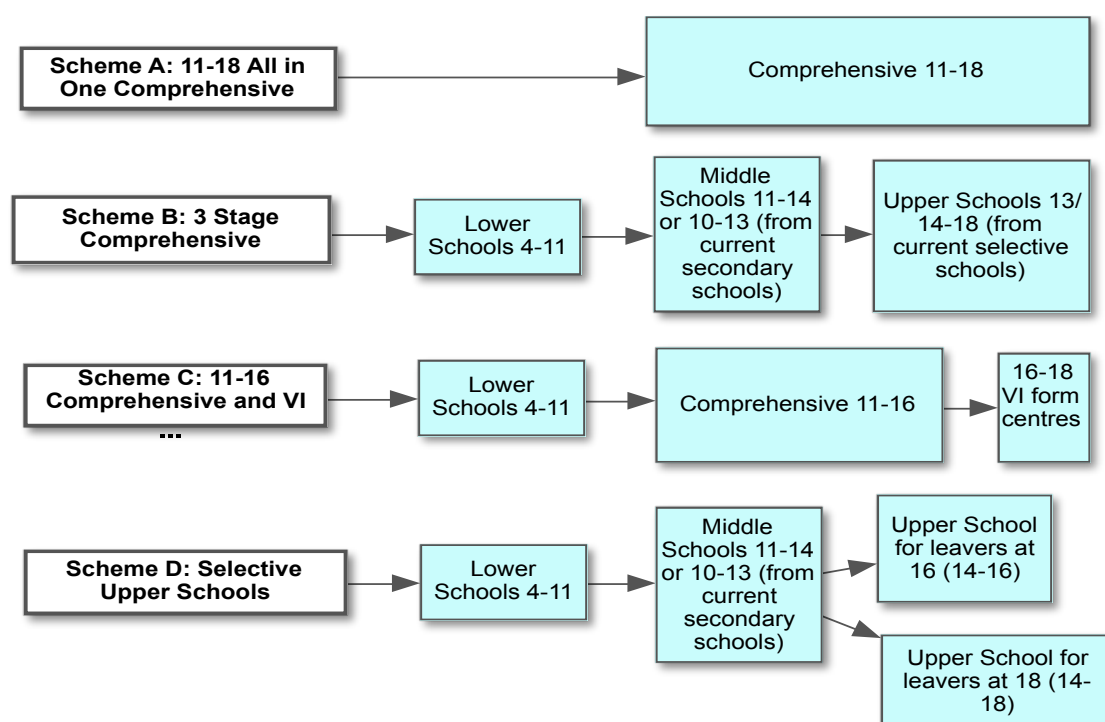
This second phase in Buckinghamshire, from October 1963 to April 1965, involved several rounds of scheme proposals and consultations in relation to secondary reorganisation. Three years after the discussions surrounding SEFA and Warrenfield, the Education Committee was once again entertaining the notion of reform and going through the motions of planning on various schemes. The main focus of this period was the Chief Education Officer's Memorandum in the March of 1964. This proposed a range of alternatives for secondary education and represented the first official consideration of county-wide reorganisation. From this document, the latter of the four proposals presented by the Chief Education Officer was recommended by the SMSC and officially adopted. This option, 'Scheme D,' then occupied official and popular attention until the arrival of Crosland's circular in October 1965. This phase was marked by increasing division among the different stakeholders, with a raft of contradictory opinions about if, how much, when and why secondary re-organisation should occur.

Chief Education Officer's Memorandum & Scheme D

Following a request by the SMSC in October 1963, the Chief Education Officer, Mr North, delivered a summary report of the possible alternative structures of education in Buckinghamshire. This report, presented to a special meeting of the SMSC in March 1964, proposed four main alternatives to current arrangement (summarised Figure 24 below), the Chief Education Officer's own stated preference being a pattern which involved two-stage secondary education, with common schools for the 11-13-age range, and selection effectively operating thereafter. Mr North requested a deferral of decisions at the sub-committee level

until teachers, Divisional Executives and governing bodies had been consulted on each of the schemes. After nearly six months of such consultation, and a confusing array of feedback, the Chief Education Officer advised that the authority should pilot Scheme D, to gather evidence if nothing else, on whether selection at 13 would prove more ‘effective or acceptable’ than current practice.<sup>14</sup>

Figure 24: Summary diagram of re-organisation schemes outlined in 1964 Memoranda



In Buckinghamshire, the discussions surrounding Scheme D worked in several ways to encourage a process of ‘shut down’ in the comprehensive debate. To begin with, the Chief Education Officer’s recommendation demonstrated a willingness on the part of decision makers to grant greater weight to the input of selective school heads ahead of other groups.

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<sup>14</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR 78/89 10-11 *Education Committee Minutes*, March 1964 and October 1964 ‘Summary of Teachers’ Opinions Regarding Alternative Forms of Secondary Education.’

The emergence of Scheme D as the forerunner of the four alternatives did not represent the direct preference of secondary education practitioners. Rather, support for this option came mostly from primary school teachers (54% of whom voted for this alternative) and grammar school headteachers who declared that Scheme D presented the only option that ‘might be made to work.’ Secondary School teachers voted in equal proportion (36% each) for the middle school and VI form models proposed in Schemes B and C, only 31% signalled a preference for Scheme D.<sup>15</sup> As declared by the *Bucks Herald* at the time, Scheme D allowed the authority’s position on selection to remain ‘blurred,’ offering scope for the continuation of the grammar schools, rather than doing away with educational segregation.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, the circulation of Scheme D, along with efforts to see it trialled, entrenched divisions throughout the local authority. This was the case at the committee, sub-committee, regional and popular level. At the committee level, tensions between and within committees on the matter of selection began to surface in the October of 1964 with the Education Committee and SMSC coming into conflict over the pace of discussions. As in previous instances, the instinctive response of the SMSC to disagreement was to prevaricate and delay, and in this case they moved to shelve the question of reorganisation altogether until the publication of the Plowden Report, the completion of which was not anticipated for another three years. It was only through the direct intervention of the Education Committee in October 1964 that the idea of a pilot scheme was pushed forward. By 28 votes to 6 the Education Committee forced the issue of re-organisation back onto the SMSC’s agenda,

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> CFBS: Bucks Advertiser, ‘End of 11-Plus in Sight,’ 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1965.

moving that ‘discussions...be continued by the SMSC and that they be instructed to prepare a pilot scheme, avoiding segregation at 11, for one particular area.’<sup>17</sup> This they did at their January 1965 meeting, pursuing Scheme D (system with modified selection at 13) and identifying Bletchley as the most appropriate area for a pilot scheme. For all the issue was pushed forward in this case, it advanced with marked reluctance from the SMSC on was based on a contested struggle between committees rather than indicating working consensus on the matter.

Even the considerable majority of the Education Committee’s approval vote obscured internal opposition within this committee. The decision to compel the SMSC was driven by a motion of two pro-comprehensive figures on the Committee, Vice Chairman F.S.G. Room and Mrs Scott-Picton, who also urged the immediate abolition of selection in Slough, Bletchley and at least one rural area, and requested the submission of a county-wide proposal which eliminated selection at 11. In its original form, this motion was defeated by 3 votes (16 for, 19 against), a ratio which highlights the potential for conflict and contestation of policy within this arena. On this occasion, there was obviously enough desire to compromise and Ralph Verney (later a leading preservationist and defender of selection) proposed that *one* pilot scheme be prepared with an end to selection in *one* particular area. However, while Verney’s motion required that discussions proceed and plans be laid, it deferred any decision on whether to implement these changes until the following April. By this point it would have taken 18 months before anything resembling a serious policy proposal was to emerge from the original request for alternative schemes. Even though the Education Committee seemed

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<sup>17</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR 78/89 11 *Education Committee Minutes*, October 1964.

far more willing to push the issue of re-organisation than its sub-committee, it would only sanction changes at a very cautious pace and decisions were still subject to fundamental differences of opinion among its members.

Committee Memoranda and local reporting of the Education Committee's decision to pursue a pilot scheme also reveal that regional and local opinion became fraught with disagreement as a result of Scheme D consultations. The proposal was met with myriad responses from the county's Divisional Executives, with only one of the six offering affirmative, as opposed to begrudging, support. Here the Aylesbury Executive was the sole regional committee to officially 'regard the scheme favourably,' though even in this instance the approval of the scheme was carried by just one vote and even here support was subsequently, and unanimously, withdrawn.<sup>18</sup> North Bucks, Wycombe and Slough each deferred judgement on the scheme (though Wycombe was markedly more supportive). Amersham & Chesham Executive tactfully rejected the scheme; explaining that they 'did not consider that it could, with advantage, be introduced in the Amersham and Chesham area.' The Eton Executive announced, somewhat less diplomatically, that it 'deplored the adoption of Scheme D on the grounds that it retains selection, [and]...is not fully comprehensive...' levelling criticism at the central committees that they had not been consulted before implementation was considered.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> CFBS: Bucks Advertiser, 'The 13-Plus,' 26th February 1965 and 'Change of Heart, Aylesbury Plumps For Government Scheme to End 11-Plus,' 24th September 1965.

<sup>19</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR 78/89 12 *Education Committee Minutes*, April 1965. Report of the SMSC on the Structure of Secondary Organisation, Divisional Executives' Opinions.

At the school and teacher level too, Scheme D was met with division, holding little appeal to any particular group. Grammar school heads had already stated their rejection in principle, accepting Scheme D only because it promised to preserve their academic exclusivity. However, the Chief Education Officer's alternative also struggled to command support from secondary modern schools, especially since in many cases it would work to deprive these schools of their resource-attracting upper age cohorts, as well as limiting the scope of their operations. The collated responses of the 1964 consultations on Scheme D clearly point to the unappealing nature of reform along these lines. For example, the Bucks Federation of School Masters (SM Schools) responded that

Scheme D is not acceptable for the following reasons: Secondary Modern Schools in spite of difficulties and obstacles have achieved a high standard and the intended scheme would nullify all the hard work and effort to spent over the past years.<sup>20</sup>

The Bucks Teachers Association completely rejected the scheme, as did the Bucks Federation of Headteacher's Association *and* the South Bucks Association for the Advancement of State Education. Disagreement on Scheme D was even present among the schools in the designated pilot area. While Bletchley Grammar school expressed a willingness to pilot the scheme, both of the secondary modern schools involved, Denbigh and Wilton, rejected Scheme D, preferring Scheme A.<sup>21</sup>

Overall, discussions surrounding Scheme D polarised and complicated relationships between policy makers within Buckinghamshire with evidence pointing to its role in souring educational politics throughout the county. As has been explored above, inter-divisional

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

opinions on reform came into conflict, and so too did those of schools, heads and governors. Supporters of comprehensive reform were left feeling disillusioned and frustrated with the Education Directorate and the committee. For example, central committee members Davidson and Scott-Picton complained to the *Bucks Advertiser* that the Education Committee was a ‘very reactionary committee when it comes to anything new.’<sup>22</sup> In Aylesbury, Scheme D became the focus of resentment for pro-comprehensive divisional committee members, who saw its existence as being ‘designed to keep quiet those who had been campaigning for comprehensive education.’<sup>23</sup> Additionally, throughout policy discussions on Scheme D, opponents of comprehensive change became more defensive and anxious about the prospect of change in general. The same *Bucks Advertiser* piece cited above relayed a thinly veiled warning from Aylesbury Grammar school head, L.W. Tidmarsh, that ‘we are very concerned for the most able children...no risk should be taken with their education...’ very publically implying that any other scheme would pose a threat to the education of current grammar school pupils.<sup>24</sup> Voting on the uptake of the scheme also led to scathing criticism being exchanged between committee members. For example, the in the Aylesbury Executive when then Committee Chairman cast the final and deciding vote to opt for Scheme D, pro-comprehensive supporters condemned her actions as ‘deplorable’ and ‘disgraceful.’<sup>25</sup>

In this case, the anticipation of an announcement from the Secretary of State on the matter of secondary systems provided the opportunity to delay county discussions. For

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<sup>22</sup> CFBS: *Bucks Advertiser*, ‘End of 11-Plus in Sight: A Modified Comprehensive Pilot Scheme is Planned,’<sup>23</sup> January 1965.

<sup>23</sup> CFBS: *Bucks Advertiser*, ‘The 13-Plus: Aylesbury gives its Blessing to the Education Pilot Scheme By One Vote.’ 26<sup>th</sup> February 1965.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

comprehensive supporters this delay presented the opportunity to use the Secretary of State's announcement to bolster their cause with national support for re-organisation. For opponents of reform it offered a hiatus, a chance to shelve the issue and marshal support for resistance. In the April of 1965, the SMSC seized on this opportunity and unanimously recommended that further consideration of the issue be deferred until after Crosland's circular had been received.<sup>26</sup> This recommendation was subsequently carried by the Education Committee, and brought official consideration of Scheme D to a close.

Patently, the CEOs first memorandum, and the process of consultation which underpinned it, provided fertile ground for division and fragmentation within the authority. It immobilised the momentum behind immediate reforms and weakened the scope for future consensus and collaboration. The culmination of Buckinghamshire's efforts to engage with the comprehensive debate at this stage is perhaps best summed up by a contemporary submission to the *Bucks Advertiser* opinion column, the contributor railing against Aylesbury Divisional Executive (but this would also apply to the SMSC and the Education Committee) who had...

approved a scheme that has the whole hearted support of no-one: neither the teachers, nor those campaigning for comprehensive education, nor those who prefer things as they are.<sup>27</sup>

### *Phase Three: April 1966- April 1967: Instability and Politicisation*

The third and final phase in Buckinghamshire, between April of 1966 and April 1967, marked the full transition of the comprehensive debate to one that was politicised and conflict

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<sup>26</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR 78/89 12 *Education Committee Minutes*, April 1965.

<sup>27</sup> CFBS: *Bucks Advertiser*, 'Opinion, 11-Plus' February 26<sup>th</sup> 1965.

ridden. The foundations on which future debate and discussion could occur were fundamentally altered following the County Council's controversial vote rejecting the Education Committee's recommendations, the unexpected death, in-post, of the Chief Education Officer and the instalment of a determinedly anti-comprehensive Conservative lobby on the Council, and subsequently on its Education Committees.

#### April Resolution

In response to Circular 10/65, the SMSC Working Party reconvened and produced what will be referred to as the 'April Resolution,' this formed the basis of plans which were submitted to the County Council in the May and July of 1966. As has been explored in the context of Scheme D proposals, the issue of secondary re-organisation in Buckinghamshire was by this point a hotly contested one, revealing as well as creating divisions along political and regional lines. Ironically, and despite this landscape, the SMSC's recommendations demonstrated far more conviction behind policy change than had ever been seen before. In its original form, the April resolution represented the boldest official statement in support of comprehensive change to emerge from any of Buckinghamshire's committees. At its July meeting the Education Committee (by 20 votes to 11) resolved

that it be recommended to the County Council that the long term plan for the development of comprehensive education for the county...under Circular 10/65 should be based on comprehensive secondary schools with an age range of 12-18.<sup>28</sup>

To have secured such a resolution out of the disagreement which had characterised Scheme D discussions was no small feat. Indeed the working party remarked in its first report to the SMSC that 'views of the bodies consulted, were so divergent that a basis for agreement

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<sup>28</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR 78/89 13 *Education Committee Minutes*, April 1966 and July 1966.

would be difficult to find...’ and yet within the space of three months, it brought Buckinghamshire closer to comprehensive reform than at any other point in its history.

Beyond the symbolic importance of these recommendations, and partially because of their boldness, the SMSC’s accomplishments in precipitating secondary re-organisation were limited. To begin with the April Resolution triggered a reaction from Conservative elements within the County Council and resulted in the dilution and delay of any proposed policy change. Further, the subsequent debates at committee and council level consolidated political divisions, resulting in a situation by the close of 1966 where the comprehensive issue was politically charged and intractable.

#### May amendment

The first step in blocking the SMSC’s proposals was taken in the May of 1966 when its resolution was referred up to the full County Council for approval. Usually, once the recommendations of respective sub-committees had been made and accepted, in this case by the Education Committee, Council approval was regarded as procedural. In this instance however, when the Education Committee recommended the SMSC proposals for the adoption of fully comprehensive education in the county, council members took the controversial step of calling a debate and subsequently a vote; an act which allowed them to amend the committee resolution and refer it back down to the sub-committee. The April resolution was therefore referred back, by 35 votes to 24, with an amendment that any plans for comprehensive change would also cater for the continued provision of selective schools.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR 78/89 13 *Education Committee Minutes*, June 1966 and Bucks Advertiser, ‘Bucks County Council is Told: Fully Comprehensive is Only the Long-Term Aim,’ 26<sup>th</sup> May 1966.

Upon reconvening, the SMSC was forced to integrate this amendment into its recommendations. It adopted much more vague commitments to secondary re-organisation and altered the conception of their 12-18 proposals from being immediate recommendations to longer term aims, and more crucially it sanctioned the continuation of selective schools. It thus asserted:

that consideration will be given to the future scheme's containing provision for the continuance of some existing selective schools and for how they could be fitted into the new long term plan.<sup>30</sup>

The actions of the full Council in this instance placed this group in direct conflict with the SMSC who were clearly angry and shocked by the top down dilution of their work. Even as the SMSC reformed its recommendations to take account of the May amendment, they also made sure their resistance to such a change was publically clear. Stating in their report that

they believe that the long term plan should not envisage the retention of any selective schools, since in any area where there is any selective school the organisation of secondary organisation cannot truly be comprehensive because any selective school would tend to attract more able children.<sup>31</sup>

The SMSC's protest and vocal rejection of the Council's amendment not only serves to demonstrate how incompatible and divergent views were within the same Local Authority, but more importantly highlights the frustration and conflict that was coming to dominate civic relationships.

Nevertheless, this act of Council defiance served two purposes for opponents of comprehensive reform; it delayed the point of having to commit to one policy or another, but

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<sup>30</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR 78/89 13 *Education Committee Minutes*, July 1966.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

crucially it also watered down the April Resolution considerably, meaning that should the resolution be adopted at all, it was likely that Divisional Executives, schools and heads could easily subvert the original intentions of the SMSC. The July manifestation of the resolution, as sent back to the County Council for formal approval in 1966 also represented a very uncomfortable mix of policy proposals. The inclusion of a commitment to existing selective schools ensured that despite an unprecedented degree of momentum from the SMSC working to propel re-organisation, the sense of purpose and direction in the initial resolution had been markedly diffused.

County Council Vote: 28<sup>th</sup> July 1966

For some Conservative members of the full council, this amendment to re-organisation policy was not a sufficient guarantee that the county's grammar schools would be protected. In the late July of 1966 the Buckinghamshire County Council put a halt to its Education Committee's new proposals by voting on a motion put forward by Cllrs. Mr R.F Dunn and Mr P.D Fry. This motion would act to suspend all consideration of re-organisation, until it was known 'when and what financial resources' would be available.<sup>32</sup> This amendment was supported by 43 votes to 24 and was tantamount to the rejection of the Education Committee's recommendations. As with the April amendment, this rejection was controversial in and of itself: not only was it another display of top-down direction of committee business, it also meant that the Council had willingly defied ministerial requests for long-term comprehensive plans to be submitted by the end of July.

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<sup>32</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR 78/89 13 *Education Committee Minutes*, October 1966.

As is clear from the amendment, the rationale for rejecting the July resolution was couched firmly in terms of resources and financial responsibility, and this was in keeping with statements which lead council members had made in the build-up to the county council vote. For example, Ald. Ralph Verney presented resistance to re-organisation as a pragmatic response, asserting that the council was unwilling to entertain a major policy overhaul without a commensurate commitment of resources from the Ministry:

while demanding wholesale changes in the system, the government is not prepared to give one extra penny to make those changes financially possible. What the debate should be about is not so much 'what changes should we make' but 'how on earth can we make any changes at all when we are being financially straightjacketed.'<sup>33</sup>

The immediate effect of this rejection was to delay, indefinitely, the development of re-organisation schemes in Buckinghamshire. The Ministry had already made it clear that no extra resources would be made available for comprehensive re-organisation, and that schemes would have to be resourced using normal works allocations. The Council's declaration that Buckinghamshire would only act after central resources were made available represented a direct challenge to Crosland's Circular. It also guaranteed that Buckinghamshire LEA would not proceed with comprehensivisation for the foreseeable future. Where the May amendment altered the path along which educational reform was heading, the July meeting made backtracking nigh on impossible.

The argument that the May and July votes represented a critical juncture in the consideration of secondary education in Buckinghamshire is reinforced by a number of comments made by contemporaries. As part of the *History of Parliament Oral History*

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<sup>33</sup> CFBS: Bucks Advertiser, 'Pointless Education Debate,' 27<sup>th</sup> May 1966.

*Project*, a series of interviews were conducted with Sir Peter Fry, who fronted the opposition to comprehensive reform within the council and served as chief whip for the Conservative party on the Buckinghamshire council until 1969. These interviews attest not only to the orchestrated nature of the council's response, but also to the sense that had it not been for the obstruction by the council on these two occasions, Buckinghamshire would have proceeded with the comprehensive re-organisation of its secondary schools. For example, when asked what he considered the singular most important achievement of his political life; one that included near thirty years service as an MP and a knighthood, Fry pinpointed his actions in April 1966, claiming that as a result of these he 'saved the grammar schools.'<sup>34</sup> For Fry at least, the May Council meeting was regarded as a definitive turning point.

Despite the ideologically neutral rationale and pragmatic language used in their statements above, Buckinghamshire County Council's obstruction of the Education Committee's recommendations was a politically charged and choreographed act, orchestrated by a small group of pro-grammar school members. The next move by the Council- the resolution passed in July- marked the move of secondary education to the centre of local party politics. This ensured that yet another step was taken towards narrowing the scope for comprehensive re-organisation.

Prior to the April of 1966, local Conservatives assumed that the comprehensive issue was under control, partly because Earl Howe had reassured the group that his Education Committee retained a conservative majority. However, having been outvoted by a committee

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<sup>34</sup> BL C1503/1: *History of Parliament, Oral History Project*, Sir Peter Fry interviewed by Jessica Wilkins, 21-01-05, Track 2.

swollen (as it is told by Fry) by teachers, clergymen and officials, Howe was unexpectedly left with a set of recommendations that he personally did not endorse and had not foreseen receiving enough consensus at sub-committee level to reach full Council. But while he was resigned to the fact that the recommendations would have to be implemented. Fry was not:

So I said ‘well you must try and fight it’ ... I discovered a ploy that if 8 members got up during a [council] debate then you could demand a vote on something. So I canvassed a few ardent Tories and I proposed that when this measure came before the council, I would move the amendment excluding the existing selective schools... and to this day Bucks has got its grammar schools.<sup>35</sup>

To cement this change, Fry also used this tactic to definitively shut down the perceived threat of re-organisation in the later July vote. On the morning of the July Council debate, the *Advertiser* predicted that the vote would land against the Education Committee’s recommendations, but highlighted that

if every county councillor attends and votes according to views he has expressed....the vote...is likely to be a close thing.<sup>36</sup>

Far from being a close thing, the vote for Fry’s amendment was near double that against; a ratio which reflected the orchestrated rejection and discouragement of the Education Committee’s proposals on the day of the vote. The resolution to reject the changes had been circulated and agreed amongst the Conservative group prior to the full council meeting. Commentary on this event by the *Bucks Advertiser* also suggests that the Chairman of the Council, Sir Aubrey Ward, granted a platform to anti-comprehensive speakers in such a way that could encourage voting for Fry’s amendment. Particularly, he permitted the Aylesbury Grammar School Head to open the debate with a strong warning against comprehensive

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid

<sup>36</sup> CFBS: Bucks Advertiser, ‘Will It Be a Vote For Comprehensives Or a Vote Against The Government?’ 28th July 1966.

schools, an address he used to emphasise the risk posed to able children should selective schools be destroyed. In contrast, it was suggested that pro-comprehensive voices were actively silenced throughout the meeting:

The vote was rushed through at the end of the County Council's morning session. Several leading supporters of comprehensives including Aylesbury Cty Cllr. B.G Hyde and Labour Group leader Ald. F.S.G Room were still waiting to speak.<sup>37</sup>

Columnist Peter Smith who also reported on the July meeting, remarked that in place of the lively debate he expected, the occasion was a marked anti-climax, un-representative of the struggle which had preceded it and with little fight from pro-comprehensive members:

after all the months of wrangling and dispute that preceded Thursday's debate- it was supposed to have been "Final Decision Day" --- discussion was quiet with few fireworks and with an atmosphere of resignation as if the decision had already been made elsewhere.<sup>38</sup>

Rather than being a closely contested and loudly disputed item on the County Council's agenda, the vote on comprehensive proposals reflected successful manoeuvring on the part of the Conservative group to rally political support, to emphasise the risks of change and to minimise any contributions which diffused this message.

Prior to this vote, the comprehensive issue in Buckinghamshire had only existed on the fringes of party politics. Though there had been some division in terms of the inclinations of Labour or Conservative politicians towards selection and reform, and though the two leading supporters of secondary re-organisation on the Education Committee were leading Labour figures, there remains the sense in official and press documents that policy was made and voted on according to wide discussion and individual preference, within sub-committees

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<sup>37</sup> CFBS: Bucks Advertiser, 'County Council Goes Against Government, Now What? 4th August 1966.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

that were politically and regionally heterogeneous. The orchestration of the May and July votes broke this tradition and directly contributed to politicisation of education within Buckinghamshire. As a result, the possibilities for future consensus and collaboration narrowed irreversibly. Remarks made by the Education Committee Chairman, Earl Howe, in response to the July vote attest that something had changed in the way policy making was done locally- and that he ‘regretted that such a vital decision should have been thrown into the cauldron of party politics.’<sup>39</sup>

Nor was this party politicking confined to the Council chamber. A reading of the press commentary over this period suggests that this in-council party politicking led to the more explicitly political treatment of the comprehensive issue. For example Conservative Cllr Hindley remarked, in the defence of the County Council’s actions, that:

Socialists accuse the county council of being politically motivated...yet it is they who wish to push through a plan for which at present, we have not the money, teachers, or buildings, for political ends.<sup>40</sup>

Political labels were beginning to feature heavily in debates over education.

Reaction to the April Resolution in Buckinghamshire demonstrated a shifting policy and political landscape. This worked to make the issue of the authority’s secondary organisation more contested publically. To begin with, the Council’s rejection incensed some members of the press and public, fuelling local disenchantment and frustration with local councillors and eroding what willingness was left to ‘buy-in’ to any new policy efforts. The week after the vote, the *Bucks Advertiser* gave front-page headline space to an opinion piece

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> CFBS: Bucks Advertiser, Letters to the Editor, ‘Education: In Defence of That Decision,’ 18<sup>th</sup> August 1966.

that declared: *'This Education non-decision is utterly indefensible'* granting column inches to heavy criticism of the council chamber in an eloquent, if angry, interpretation of the meeting; one which communicates the degree of frustration and exacerbation felt with the indecision clouding education policy:

when... Bucks County Council was asked to make a decision to accept comprehensive education in principle, a majority took for the inexplicable course of deciding not to make any decisions whatsoever. It was not a vote for grammar schools and against the comprehensive principle. It was to even a gallant waving of the banner of Bucks independence against government interference. It was simply a non-decision: an abdication of responsibility. The vote leaves everyone in confusion. The Education Committee ...is left without any direction in which to work. The administrators can have no idea for what kind of future they should plan. Teachers, parents, children are left without any certainty other than that the muddle that has hindered action for 18 months is to continue indefinitely... Instead the council has satisfied nobody, it has brought itself into grave disrepute.<sup>41</sup>

As with the Scheme D proposals a few years earlier, wrangling over the April Resolution added to the fractiousness and sense of disillusionment within official circles. Only two Divisional Executives accepted the July proposals. North Bucks and Aylesbury refused to acknowledge the County Council's amendments, announcing their support only for the original scheme, Eton declared the proposals too vague to decide either way (but pointedly referred to its previous endorsement of fully comprehensive reform). Slough rejected the new scheme, defiantly declaring that the proposals

do not conform fully to the policy laid down by the Secretary of State for education...[and that they did not]... associate themselves with the public meetings to be held by the Buckinghamshire Education Committee.<sup>42</sup>

On the part of the County Council at least, there seemed to have been no regard for this local rejection. With the July vote, the Buckinghamshire County Council had effectively

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<sup>41</sup> CFBS: Bucks Advertiser, Opinion, 'The Education Non-Decision is Utterly Indefensible,' 4<sup>th</sup> August 1966.

<sup>42</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR 78/89 13 *Education Committee Minutes*, July 1966.

voted to suspend the question of secondary re-organisation. Neither criticism from the press, nor its own sub or divisional committees had the capacity to deter its persistence in resisting policy change.

The Council did, however, have to do something in response to 10/65. Though the Circular possessed no legal muscle, Anthony Crosland stood by his policy that only those building works designed to implement comprehensive reform would be sanctioned. This stance threatened to financially cripple the Buckinghamshire school building programme should the authority refuse to offer a new Development Plan. In what was a last effort on the part of the Education Committee to secure approval from the County Council and thus to secure future major works allocations, they put before the November council meeting a set of watered down proposals:

Your Committee have given consideration to means of avoiding delay in the Council's school building programmes which might arise because of possible conflict between the terms of this resolution [July amendment] and the known insistence of the Department of Education and Science on relating secondary school building to reorganisation of secondary education... Your committee are therefore satisfied that the recommendations which they submit below will both preserve the principle of the Council's resolution and overcome possible hindrances to the building programme which might otherwise occur....

That new secondary schools and extensions to existing secondary schools provided in future building programmes should not be incompatible with an intention to introduce comprehensive secondary schools with an age range of 12-18.

That it should be open to the Education Committee to establish new comprehensive schools in areas of substantial development, provided that any such comprehensive school does not prejudice the continuance of any existing selective secondary school.<sup>43</sup>

These recommendations, in practice, had no tangible implications for the existing pattern of secondary organisation. The character and content of the original proposals had

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<sup>43</sup> CFBS No.20, Buckinghamshire County Council, *Council Minutes*, 24<sup>th</sup> November 1966.

been fundamentally altered: there was no expressed intention to introduce comprehensive schooling, just a willingness to not to exclude the possibility in future building work. Further, the crucial amendment to protect existing selective schools neutralised any imminent threat from re-structuring to the county's grammar schools.

The process of policy formation during this latter period had therefore been a polarising one. In much the same way as Scheme D, the April resolution had divided rather than fostered consensus. It succeeded only in offering another vague set of policy proposals that struggled to command wholesale support at either the school, divisional or committee level. The July rejection of the Education Committee's proposals cemented divisions and frustrations, limiting the scope for considered and collaborative debate on educational reform and instead fostering a binary and combative attitude. By the time the July Resolution was referred back up to full Council in November, teaching associations, Divisional Executives, headteachers and committee members of all persuasions had expressed some form of frustration at the cyclical and schism like character of discussions on the comprehensive issue. In this context, the possibility of maintaining either neutral or entirely pragmatic debates about the educational future of the county had been lost.

#### 1967 Elections: April 28<sup>th</sup> 1967

The contention presented at the opening of this chapter was that the decade between 1957 and 1967 presented the most opportune 'window' for Buckinghamshire to evolve schemes for secondary re-organisation. But as has been shown, the debate evolved in such a way that by 1967 the authority increasingly lost the opportunity to proceed with reform. Instead, it became progressively locked in to trenchant opposition.

The final step towards this lock-in was taken with the arrival of the 1967 local elections, which saw the Conservative group re-assert control over the LEA. In the national context, the 1967 local elections saw the Labour vote collapse. Buckinghamshire mirrored this trend with the Conservative Party enjoying a resounding win: of 30 contested seats the Conservatives claimed 20, the remaining 10 being won by Independent candidates.<sup>44</sup> Though part of a national shift, the outcome of the elections in Buckinghamshire was also a response to local political conflicts, especially surrounding comprehensive schools. A well-known columnist for the *Bucks Advertiser*, Peter Tagalog, reported on this win in the May of 1967 highlighting the role secondary education had played in the election itself, emphasising how much the question of re-organisation had dominated the contest:

The Conservatives gained tremendous victories throughout Bucks last month. And opposition to comprehensive education was part of the policy on which many of the new councillors were elected.<sup>45</sup>

Buckinghamshire had always been a Conservative controlled county council, but as suggested by Cllr. Fry's depiction of the Education Committee in April 1966, the Party's control of some sub-committees had been dangerously weakened. The imperative to re-assert tight control over these key arenas led the Conservative group to stack the education committees with its own appointments, something heavily critiqued by Tagalog:

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<sup>44</sup> CS. Railings, M.A.M Thatcher and L. (2006). *British Local Election Database*, 1889-2003. [data collection]. UK Data Service. SN: 5319, <http://dx.doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-5319-1>.

<sup>45</sup> CFBS: *Bucks Advertiser*, 'Committee Control and Education,' 11<sup>th</sup> May 1967

To prevent any recurrence of last year's fiascos when the Education Committee brought in comprehensive style plans twice to have them rejected...the new Conservative dominated council has picked the education committee. In doing so the long established practice of running the county by experience and area representation has been effectively destroyed. Finding that there were scarcely any Labour members left on the committee to turn out, those independents who had dared support comprehensives were picked on. Down they went like nine-pins, regardless of their ability or length of service... The council's new men have chosen education as their battleground.<sup>46</sup>

Tagalog's assessment of this decisive push by the Tory group is borne out when the committee composition is looked at before and after the 1967 elections, the proportions of which are presented for the three main committees in Figure 25 below. As can be seen in these charts, where the Labour group had maintained some influence in the pre-1964 committees, this was almost eradicated in the 1967 appointments. In the Education Committee and the two sub-committees the Conservative group went from equal or minor partner with the Independents, to the dominant element. Further, of the 9 Independents who did remain on the Education Committee, all but one had voted in favour of Fry's amendment at the July vote, indicating their reticence if not unwillingness to entertain comprehensive reform.<sup>47</sup>

Tagalog expressed clear concerns that this was not just a political move, but one that also removed needed experience from key posts of responsibility, pointing out that of 19 new members on the Education Committee, 13 had never served before. However, this view overstated the extent of change. Of 46 members in total, 21 had served in previous incarnations of the body. This was comparable to past practice; in 1961 and 1964 elections, a similar proportion of members continued on: 20 of the 43 strong committee in 1961 and 27 of

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> CFBS No.20, Buckinghamshire County Council, *Council Minutes*, 28<sup>th</sup> July 1966.

48 members in 1964.<sup>48</sup> What was new this time was what happened in the Development and School Management Sub-Committees (both bodies with the greater degree of control over long term education policy) the discontinuity in both members and political make-up is marked. In the case of the SMSC and Development Committee, just 9 of 35 and 3 of 32 had served before, and political control was asserted.<sup>49</sup> Having felt that they had been ambushed by pro-comprehensive committee members once before Buckinghamshire's Conservatives ensured it could not happen again.

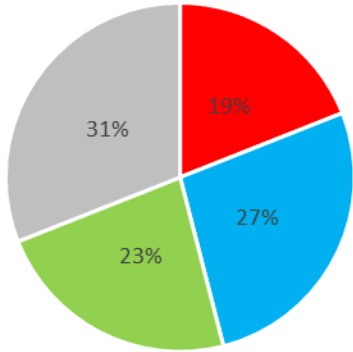
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<sup>48</sup> Based on a survey of the members of the Education Committee before and after local elections in 1961, 1964 and 1967, British Elections Database used to identify political membership.

<sup>49</sup> Based on a survey of the members of the SMSC and Development Sub-Committees before and after local elections in 1961, 1964 and 1967 British Elections Database used to identify political membership.

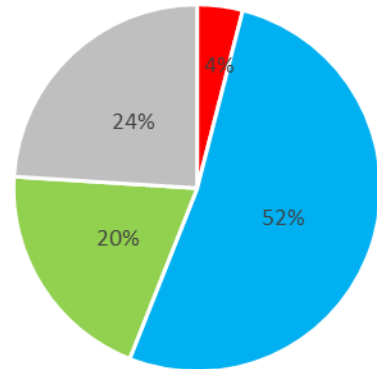
Figure 25: Political composition of respective Buckinghamshire council committee's before and after 1967 elections

Political Composition of the Education Committee in 1964

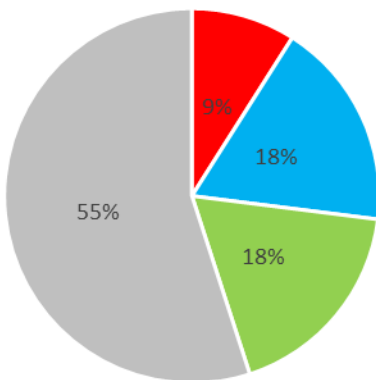


■ Labour ■ Conservative ■ Independent ■ Unaffiliated/unknown

Political Composition of the Education Committee in 1967

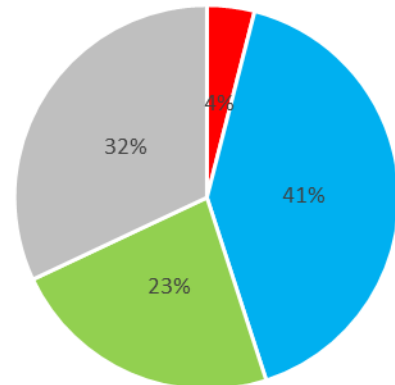


Political Composition of the School Management Sub-Committee 1964

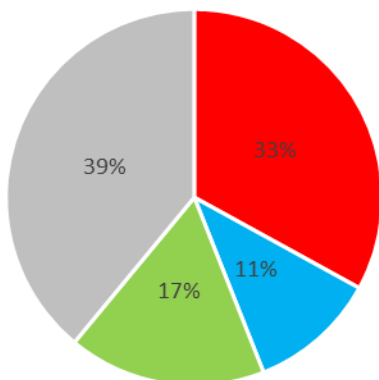


■ Labour ■ Conservative ■ Independent ■ Unaffiliated/unknown

Political Composition of the School Management Sub-Committee 1967

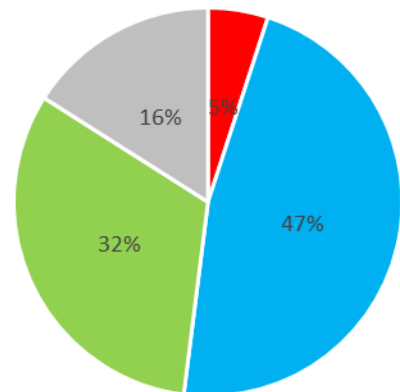


Political Composition of the Development Sub-Committee 1964



■ Labour ■ Conservative ■ Independent ■ Unaffiliated/unknown

Political Composition of the Development Sub-Committee 1967



Source: compiled returns from the British Election Database, UK Data Service

The 1967 election in Buckinghamshire was therefore a turning point. Not only had the election established the issue of comprehensive schooling as a political issue locally, but it also installed a determinedly anti-comprehensive lobby in key posts with control over education policy making. Following this power shift, the Conservative group was well placed to block proposals to reorganise, as and when they emerged within the different divisions- and did so, repeatedly in the face of continuing local calls for reform.

One exception to this rule existed; the Bletchley Division, which successfully pursued re-organisation, having had its proposals approved in principal by the County Council in the November of 1968. However, in committee documents, newspapers and interviews this example features as an anomaly, and then Deputy Chief Education Officer Tim Brighouse accounted for Bletchley's success through its association with the new satellite town for London, Milton Keynes. This area was to become an autonomous authority, of which Bletchley was to be part. The attitude relayed by Brighouse regarding Bletchley's re-organisation was that 'Milton Keynes was coming in anyway and so the sacrifice was ok.'<sup>50</sup> But even here, with the caveat that it was an exceptional situation, and with the unanimous support of the Bletchley Divisional Executive and the Education Committee, the approval of the County Council was only gained on a second attempt and only after the Executive had threatened to involve the Ministry of Education.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Interview with Tim Brighouse, 19<sup>th</sup> June 2014.

<sup>51</sup> CFBS, Bucks Advertiser, 'Comprehensives,' 21<sup>st</sup> November 1968 and BLEA AR 78/89 18 *Education Committee Minutes*, October 1968.

The timing of the 1967 elections was crucial because it preceded an increase in county-wide support for secondary re-organisation. After 1968, and partially as a result of the energy lent to the debate by in-county political wrangling, support for comprehensive re-organisation surged. This era witnessed the establishment of STEP (Stop the Eleven Plus); several CASE (Centre for the Advancement of State Education) branches emerged in towns across Buckinghamshire; and headteachers of secondary modern schools in the county came out in support of reform. Had this mobilisation occurred five years earlier, the pro-comprehensive lobby might have been able to gain more traction. As it was, momentum arrived far too late; comprehensivists found their ambitions capped, and their operating parameters set, by a County Council staunchly in favour of selection.

## Chapter 12 · Why did Buckinghamshire resist Comprehensive reform?

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As seen by the end of Chapter 11 resistance to comprehensive reform had become a politically entrenched feature of the Buckinghamshire authority by the mid-1970s. While the previous chapter explored *how* this resistance became established, the aim of this chapter is to explain *why* it did so. Three lines of enquiry provide a structure to the following work: the first questions whether the authority, and its public, actually wanted secondary re-organisation: did Buckinghamshire's stubborn refusal to adapt reflect public and practitioner will? The second asks if resistance in Buckinghamshire could be explained by a lack of need in the county: was it sufficiently confident in the capacity and efficiencies of its selective set-up to remove any impulse to reform? Lastly, attention turns to the political dynamics in the authority: how much of the resistance was a function of political will and intransigence?

### *Was there demand in Buckinghamshire for re-organisation?*

Resistance to re-organisation in Buckinghamshire was not a foregone conclusion. There was widespread demand for reform throughout the county and this can be seen on a number of fronts. The county witnessed a level of anxiety and discontent with the 11+, as did many other areas of England; there was obvious institutional support for a reconsideration of secondary re-organisation in each of the three phases outlined earlier; and votes (at the county council, central and divisional committee level) point to a consistent proportion of members voting in favour of secondary re-organisation.

To take up the first issue, it is clear from the documents spanning this period that support for a reappraisal of secondary organisation reflected wide and growing concerns over

selective practices. Press coverage of selection in the late 1950s in Buckinghamshire demonstrates that some parents and elected officials were unhappy with the 11+. As early as 1957 the *Bucks Herald* made reference to conflict over the test, reporting that the ‘controversy over whether there should be such a thing as the eleven plus examination or not, still rages.’<sup>1</sup> Further, in the May of 1959 Aylesbury Councillor Mrs Mallalieu was quoted in the *Advertiser* explaining that ‘that there was a great deal of public feeling about the 11 plus examination;’ Mallaieu’s colleague Alderman Bourke went further claiming that

if the [Aylesbury] executive did not acknowledge there was a furore about the 11-plus its members were not living in the same world as the parents.<sup>2</sup>

As the debate persisted into the early 1960s, repeated reference was made in the press by officials stressing the imperative to counteract the unpopularity of the selection exam. They were particularly keen to remove the notion that admission to a secondary modern school was tantamount to failure. By 1962 the futility of this was summarised by Councillor Williams of Aylesbury who remarked that ‘no matter what we say, there is still the feeling with the parents that the be all and end all of everything is the 11 plus.’<sup>3</sup>

Further, it is clear that by the latter 1960s and 1970s support for comprehensive re-organisation had been galvanised and was a dominant feature in local debates over the issue of reform. This manifested particularly in the establishment of pro-comprehensive lobby groups Stop the Eleven Plus (hereafter STEP) as well as the emergence of local branches of Centre for the Advancement of State Education (CASE). Work on the part of these groups,

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<sup>1</sup> CFBS: Bucks Herald, ‘The 11-Plus Exam Results,’ 21<sup>st</sup> June 1957

<sup>2</sup> CFBS: Bucks Advertiser, ‘Comprehensive Schools for Aylesbury,’ 29<sup>th</sup> May 1959.

<sup>3</sup> CFBS: Bucks Advertiser, ‘Right Course for a Great Many Children,’ 5<sup>th</sup> January 1962.

the Education Directorate and the Education Committee itself highlighted the demand for secondary re-organisation throughout the county.

Within the Local Authority too, official support for comprehensive re-organisation was a consistent feature in each of the three phases under review, even if this support was outweighed by the pro-grammar school lobby. As has been demonstrated in the context of Warrenfield Comprehensive and the March 1964 Memorandum, Divisional Executives were persistent in requesting re-organisation in their areas. This persistence continued into the early 1970s with each Divisional Executive by this point having submitted recommendations to re-organise. STEP published a county review in 1973 of Buckinghamshire's treatment of secondary education policy citing the fact that every single executive had, between 1971-1972, requested permission to abolish selection and introduce some form of comprehensive alternative. In Amersham and Chesham, the preference for comprehensives amounted to an 18 to 3 majority in favour of reform when voted on by the respective Divisional Executives, in Aylesbury the ratio stood at 17 to 3.<sup>4</sup> A looming crisis in school place provision worked in all areas to swell support for a comprehensive system that appeared to offer greater efficiency in the use of resources and more economic use of existing buildings. Further, in his 1972 report to the Education Committee, Chief Education Officer Roy Harding highlighted the support for comprehensive schools that had emerged after extensive surveys and consultations, support which he used in part to advocate a shift to all-ability schools.

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<sup>4</sup> Stop the Eleven Plus. Bucks Group, *Our Schools at the Crossroads : The Story of Buckinghamshire's Search for a Secondary Education Policy* (Chesham, 1973). p.43.

It is clear that a plan to change to a comprehensive system would be welcomed by the majority who serve on Divisional Executives and by a majority of teachers in Bucks [70% of the 80% of teachers canvassed supported reform]...there are indications from two local referenda that a change might be welcomed by a majority of parents.<sup>5</sup>

In 1975 the *Bucks Advertiser* summarised that in the preceding three years, the Education Committee had conducted five separate referendums with a total of near 20,000 replies, 63% of which declared a preference for comprehensive change.<sup>6</sup> In many ways therefore, Buckinghamshire experienced a great deal of grass roots and widespread support for comprehensive schools.

We have already seen that there was sufficient support in the Education Committee prior to the 1967 elections to create the official endorsement of comprehensive reform. The motion to pursue reform was carried by a resounding majority of 20 over 11, but even in the later 1960s and 70s, when the council repeatedly rejected Divisional Executive requests to reform, there was a solid minority of council members supporting change. The 1972 rejection was based on a majority of 20 against 16. This same balance was seen in 1975 when the Education Committee rejected Executive's requests. As such, we can see that there was a firm and consistent cohort of councillors within the Council and Committees who advocated comprehensive change. At the civic, official and popular level therefore there is evidence to suggest that secondary re-organisation was wanted and endorsed.

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<sup>5</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR 78/89 19, *Education Committee Minutes*, October 1972, Report of the Chief Education Officer on Future Secondary School Organisation in Buckinghamshire.

<sup>6</sup> CFBS: Bucks Advertiser, 'Action Call to Minister on Schools,' 7<sup>th</sup> February 1975.

*Did tripartism reflect the most efficient form of secondary education?*

It is clear that a lack of popular demand in Buckinghamshire cannot by itself explain the county's resistance to reform, since opinion was much more finely balanced than the political outcomes would suggest. If this is so, were key policy makers resisting change, not as a response to popular demand, but based on what they felt to be a fair assessment of the county's needs? In Oxfordshire the comprehensive system was pursued explicitly on the grounds that it offered greater academic and economic efficiencies compared to the current bipartite model; the imperative to accommodate increasing numbers of secondary pupils, alongside the pressure to meet an increasing demand for paper qualifications, stimulated a reappraisal of selection. Official statements in Buckinghamshire certainly present a contrast to this picture. Going comprehensive, it was argued here, would only incur cost and risk; existing infrastructure was ill suited to re-organisation; any alternatives offered less efficient models in terms of buildings and staff deployment; and the current selective arrangement offered the best academic balance of provision.

These justifications were articulated and defended by leading policy makers in the county. On the first point for example, throughout a range of documents, there was a reticence to change existing structures because so much work had already been invested in existing buildings, which had been specifically designed to complement a selective pattern. As has been explored previously, the timing of Buckinghamshire's population growth (much earlier than Oxfordshire's) meant that it had developed its secondary capital infrastructure to a further extent than in its neighbouring county. Proposals which threatened to undermine this accomplishment were therefore treated sceptically. Such a sentiment is very clearly present in the first of Buckinghamshire's memoranda on secondary re-organisation in the March of 1964. The Chief Education Officer reported thus:

The committee have asked me to report on secondary school organisation [...] before doing so I would ask the committee to bear in mind that since the post-war school building started in 1947 millions of pounds have been invested in buildings for secondary schools in Buckinghamshire in such a way as to develop secondary education in accordance with a system based (with the exception of one school) on selection at 11 and providing selective schools for 25% of the age group. 38 new secondary schools have been built, 7 have been fully modernised and 6 more are being built to fit into this pattern. Thus out of the total number of 64 schools 45 are either in post-war or fully modernised buildings...Moreover, Heads of schools and their staffs have been appointed on the basis of the existing policy and an associated salary structure...<sup>7</sup>

This was the introductory statement of the very first memorandum on secondary re-organisation and reflected the tone of the authority's attitude to policy change. Secondary re-organisation was met not with a sense of opportunity for capital works and experiment (as in Oxfordshire), but with a caution and almost an exasperation that policy should change after so much work had been dedicated to the existing framework. This line of thinking resurfaced often. For example in the September of 1966, the Chairman of the county Finance Committee explained in the *Bucks Advertiser* that

the council have just finished completing its programme for updating its secondary schools but the schools were small and largely unsuited to comprehensive education...we should have to scrap the lot and start from scratch.<sup>8</sup>

At the school level too, this idea was prevalent as was evident in the reflections of Aylesbury Grammar School Headmaster in 1966:

it will...be to our great advantage when we know what any future re-organisation is likely to bring, and when any changes are likely to take place. This is all very ironical, as the Major Capital Work to equip us fully as a 3-stream boys' grammar school is now virtually complete, and all our forward thinking must remain in that direction, unless a firm decision to the contrary is reached.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR 78/89 10 *Education Committee Minutes*, March 1964. Report on Secondary Re-organisation to SMSC by Chief Education Officer.

<sup>8</sup> CFBS: *Bucks Advertiser*, 'County Council Goes Against the Government: Now What?' 4<sup>th</sup> August 1966.

<sup>9</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR 76/89 *Aylesbury Grammar School Governing Body Minutes*, September 1966.

In each of the above accounts, the progress of building work and existing arrangements featured as firm disincentives to comprehensive reform. Rather, preservationists in Buckinghamshire were persistent in asserting that the county's current secondary arrangement represented the optimal economic set up. This was particularly true of grammar school heads who promoted the view that re-structuring intakes would result in making advanced courses less viable in terms of student numbers and staffing. In the 1966 Joint Memorandum submitted by grammar school heads it was claimed that in the current grammar schools 50-100 pupils proceeded each year into the sixth form, where such a level of uptake permitted the provision of 15-16 A Level subjects and represented an economic use of specialised staff. To reorganise along comprehensive lines would mean distributing those pupils likely to pursue A Levels across a greater number of schools, resulting in three possible and undesirable outcomes: having an uneconomic use of qualified staff, increasing the number of under-qualified staff, or seeing a 'lowering of current standards' in terms of the proportion of pupils admitted. The only economically viable alternative for these heads, if variety of courses and good standards were to be maintained, was to offer comprehensive schools that exceeded an intake of 8 Forms of Entry.<sup>10</sup> And though Buckinghamshire secondary schools were relatively large (compared to Oxfordshire) most would not be able to accommodate 1000 pupils. From this point of view, the heads of selective schools saw the county's current selective framework as representing the most economic and efficient use of resources. These voices stand out clearly in official and press archives and were heard by many to offer a compelling case for retaining the selective system.

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<sup>10</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR 78/89 13 *Education Committee Minutes*, July 1966. 'Memorandum to Chief Education Officer from Heads of Bucks Grammar schools.'

Another argument used to resist secondary re-organisation in Buckinghamshire was that the current arrangement offered the best model of academic provision. The position of the grammar schools in the respective counties was particularly relevant in this argument. There was a very clear contrast between Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire in the way their grammar schools were discussed by local press, policy makers and inspectors. As has been explored in Chapter 8, Oxfordshire's selective schools were sometimes a cause for concern on account of their wastage rates, an issue blamed by contemporary commentators on the quality of the school's intakes. Doubt surrounding the county's grammar schools underpinned policy decisions on re-organisation. In Buckinghamshire there was no comparable set of concerns, and grammar schools were regarded as fully meeting, even exceeding, expectations. Highlighting their record of success, grammar school headteachers persistently and publically asserted their belief that selection via the 11+ examination was fairest means of promoting educational opportunities for able children.<sup>11</sup> For example, during the first wave of consultations for North's Scheme D proposals, the Joint Four responded with the very direct assertion that:

They [had] made it clear that they consider the present system educationally sound, preferable to any of the alternatives put forwards. It has undoubtedly been successful and any of the suggested changes would be likely to prove less satisfactory for such pupils as at present in attendance our selective schools.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> CFBS, Bucks Advertiser, Opinion, 'In favour of the 11-plus,' 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1960.

<sup>12</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR 78/89 11 *Education Committee Minutes*, October 1964. Buckinghamshire Joint Four Committee: 'The Structure of Secondary Education, some comments on the Report of the Chief Education Officer, dated March 1964.'

Again in 1972 the Joint Four offered a rejoinder to pressures from Divisional Executives and STEP to end selection, pointedly reiterating their long held view:

that secondary education in the County is best provided by selective and non-selective schools. The record of Buckinghamshire in all aspects of education will stand in comparison with that of any Authority in the country. Such a record could not have been achieved on the basis of an inefficient secondary school organisation. [further]... Selection by ability cuts across the limitations of neighbourhood. The fact that most children endure such limitations at present is no reason for imposing them on all. Nor is the fact that most children cannot go to grammar schools an adequate reason for ensuring that none should do so.<sup>13</sup>

According to the official statements therefore, resistance was based on a reasoned decision that comprehensive reform had little to offer, educationally or economically. What was the veracity of these claims and do they accurately reflect a situation in Buckinghamshire where the county had little to gain through secondary re-organisation?

A number of points stand out immediately in relation to the claim that Buckinghamshire's infrastructure was already too established to accommodate re-organisation. The first being that by 1964 Buckinghamshire stood in a very advantageous position with regards to future planning and building. It was true, as North claimed in the opening to the 1964 memorandum, that much had already been invested in the current infrastructure. Importantly though, North also noted that the anticipated scale of population growth in forthcoming years gave the authority ample scope to act, commenting that

although, as I have said, the buildings have been provided to implement the existing policy, there is room for manoeuvre because over 10,000 new secondary places will be needed in the next 10 years.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR 72/2002, *Schools Sub-Committee Minutes*, May 1972, Special Sub-Committee on Selection and Secondary Organisation, Appendix A: 'Buckinghamshire Joint Committee of the Four Secondary Associations.'

<sup>14</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR 78/89 *10 Education Committee Minutes*, March 1964. 'Report on Secondary Re-organisation to SMSC by Chief Education Officer.'

This expansion, stimulated by county population growth, by increased qualification uptake amongst the 16-19 age group and by the imminent Raising of the School Leaving Age, ensured that most plans for re-organisation could be entertained, allowing the authority to make significant adjustments to existing schools as well as providing scope to plan for new builds.

This expected population growth also undermined arguments that the existing service was too inflexible to permit re-organisation. The argument against change was mainly based on the assumption that selective and non-selective schools were too sector-specific in their design and facilities to be easily adapted for use by the whole ability range. To some extent, school buildings in the tripartite model reflected their respective curricular differences. Grammar schools, for example, were equipped with more in the way of laboratory or sixth form facilities than were present in non-selective schools. Conversely, secondary moderns generally included a broader range of craft rooms, smaller libraries and fewer classrooms on account of their smaller age range. However, in the context of rising student numbers and the attendant promise of building resources, school facilities were becoming increasingly standardised. For example, in the case of Mandeville School mentioned above, later building programmes planned to extend its laboratory facilities in order to cater for O Level and eventually A Level work. In the case of Bucks Royal Latin also mentioned above, school governors were requesting the development of improved craft and art rooms.

Further, as can be seen in the Oxfordshire case, school diversity could be comfortably integrated into the comprehensive system. In Oxfordshire, groups of schools were brought together as one institution, with the facilities of one often complementing the other: a prime example in this regard being Lord Williams's School and the Wenman Secondary Modern, or the Banbury Schools. In some ways this facility sharing was enabled by the close proximity

of the schools, especially in the case of the Banbury schools with the grammar and three secondary moderns located on the same site. This was not the case with the Lord Williams's school which operated with a split site school; the lower school four miles away from the upper. Lord Williams's went on to become one of the most successful schools in the country- and though its headmaster, Geoff Goodall, described this set up as organisationally difficult, a combination of determination and thorough planning ensured that the school was able to thrive and make the most of its inherited facilities.

In the Buckinghamshire context, it was not inconceivable that a similar split site arrangement could have worked. In several of the divisions, secondary modern schools were located within one to two miles of the neighbouring grammar schools. Such was the case with selective schools in Aylesbury, Marlow, Slough and Wycombe. The Royal Latin School and the Buckingham County Secondary School were situated opposite one another. Even if the split site model could not be adapted everywhere in the county, it did represent a possibility in these areas. Nor was it out of the question that these schools be adapted to a three-tier model as was the case in the Central Oxfordshire district. Here three secondary moderns became junior comprehensive schools, taking students from 11-14 before they all proceeded to the ex-grammar school for study up to 18. This represented a feasible option within the existing tripartite set up in Buckinghamshire. It therefore had the potential to reorganise without necessitating great infrastructural overhaul while also maximising existing resources.

There is also evidence in official and press papers that critically undermine the 'efficiencies rationale' as provided by North and the Joint Four. This rationale worked on the assumption that the current arrangement was ideal on the grounds that it concentrated staff and resources in support of advanced academic work in grammar schools. A cornerstone of the preservationists' argument in this regard was that in order for Buckinghamshire's sixth

forms to be viable, secondary provision needed to continue within a selective framework and any alternative would prove less efficient. There were several issues with this reasoning. Key among them was that the operating assumption of the Joint Four Memorandum (that sixth forms would only accommodate 'genuine' pupils working towards three A Levels) was very restrictive. Here they contended that a comprehensive school would have to exceed 800 pupils to present a viable and efficient alternative to any selective set-up. Based on their working for a 6 form entry school (approx. 1000 pupils), they warned that sixth form entry would not exceed 30 pupils at most, a number said to be an uneconomic basis on which to operate advanced work. However, if contemporary and predicted educational trends were accounted for, this number emerges as a considerable underestimate. To begin with, it was incorrectly based on the assumption that just 60% of the equivalent portion of students currently in grammar schools (25% of the whole cohort) would pursue A Level Study. As discussed above, a greater proportion of students than this was already pursuing A Levels and there was also reason to believe that there was an untapped pool of students in existing grammar schools who would add to this number, if offered a more flexible curriculum. If we incorporate these factors, and accept that a fully comprehensive school would accommodate 10-15% of students who might previously have pursued some form of A Level study outside of grammar schools, and an estimated 10-15% of would-be grammar school students who may also have stayed on to pursue one or two A Levels rather than three, the picture changes. On this basis, even at a conservative estimate, 47-50 students staying would remain into the sixth form. If working to these adjusted figures, a 4FE school of 600 could produce an annual sixth form intake of 30 students. Though smaller, many of Buckinghamshire secondary schools did have either the current or expected capacity to accommodate this number of students. In 1962, when the Aylesbury Grammar School Head praising the accomplishments and centrality of the school's sixth form work, its numbers were comparable to this low

estimate, with only 53 students on the roll (and having only recently grown from 30); standing testament to the viability of this cohort size in supporting an academically vibrant institution.

Arguably the Joint Four's argument rested on too exclusive a view of the sixth form. It also reflected an inflexible and short-sighted view of educational trends on the part of the paper's authors. The contrast between the projections made by the Joint Four on the one hand, and a reflection offered six years later by the Chief Education Officer, clearly demonstrate this.

Ten years ago [1962] admissions to VI forms normally depended on the ability to pursue a course leading to two or three A Levels and a degree was often thought to be the main ultimate objective. By 1970 the picture had already altered to a situation where only about 70% of first year VI formers could be looked upon as 'traditional sixth former' following A Level courses... The pattern of change seems likely to speed up rather than slow down.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to this, there is reason to believe that the county's smaller grammar schools faced growing limitations on their scope to maintain the educational opportunities they had traditionally offered students. In the 1966 HMI report of the Buckinghamshire Royal Latin School, inspectors wrote:

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<sup>15</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR 78/89 19 *Education Committee Minutes*, October 1972. Appendix A: 'The Organisation of Secondary Education, Report of the Chief Education Officer.'

The school is small by modern standards and by comparison with the other two selective schools in the north of the County. This fact has inevitably affected some of its provisions and its organisation... But the limited sum available for a two form entry school obviously precludes some of the amenities and facilities which can be provided for a larger establishment. It may be noted... that while the other two selective schools in the north of the county were originally designated as 'grammar technical' and provided with ample facilities for practical work, this school, with the same cross section of pupils, has apparently been regarded as purely a 'grammar' school and given only limited practical facilities. A summary of certain deficiencies in the premises [is listed in appendix] Some have made themselves felt from the beginning; others will prove an increasing impediment as courses develop and the staff use modern methods of instruction.<sup>16</sup>

Bucks Royal Latin was amongst the smallest of the county's grammar schools: its total size at the time of this inspection amounted to 420 students, roughly 2 forms of entry smaller than many other selective schools. However, its experience highlights the issues faced by all these schools in meeting diversifying needs with specialised facilities. As uptake trends and curriculum demands were changing the inflexibility of existing provision, without recourse to re-organisation or sharing facilities, stood to hamper the maintenance of educational standards.

Given these changing needs, in 1972 the Chief Education Officer highlighted the economic comparability between the selective and comprehensive system finding that under a 'mushroom scheme' comprehensive schools would offer a more efficient model. As part of this survey, Roy Harding offers a clear rejection of the idea that a comprehensive system represented a comparatively inefficient basis for secondary education:

It has often been suggested that the comprehensive schools are more costly than schools in a selective system. This would probably be the case if resources were to be provided in order to allow each school to have its own sixth form, regardless of size... [however] if sixth form facilities were rationalised, then the comprehensive system would be marginally less costly.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>NA ED 109/ 8638: *HM Inspectorate Reports, Buckingham: The Royal Latin School, 1966.*

<sup>17</sup>CFBS: BLEA AR 78/89 19 *Education Committee Minutes*, October 1972. Appendix A: 'The Organisation of Secondary Education, Report of the Chief Education Officer.'

Certainly, the majority of the schemes put forward by Divisional Executives in Buckinghamshire opted for a system which would centralise, and so rationalise, upper school resources; by 1972 the official plans for Amersham and Chesham, Aylesbury, Buckingham/Winslow (and the unofficial plan for High Wycombe) each outlined a system where secondary modern schools would become comprehensive schools catering for the 12-16 age range, and existing grammar schools would accommodate 12-18 age range with all 16-18 year old students being educated at this one centre.<sup>18</sup>

The Chief Education Officer's report, alongside these various schemes, were presented six years after the Joint Four's memorandum which had originally asserted the efficiency rationale in defence of tripartite arrangements. To educationalists or school leaders exclusively interested in the economies of school provision, these arguments made either form of organisation (selective or comprehensive) a reasonable proposition. Enduring resistance after their publication was rooted in ideology, not in pragmatic decisions based on the financial or physical viability of alternative approaches. Following these statements, the County Council repeatedly voted to retain selective education: in October 1972, February 1975 and January 1976 it again rejected its Divisional Executive's recommendations to pursue re-organisation.

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<sup>18</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR 78/89 19 *Education Committee Minutes*, October 1972. Appendix A: 'The Organisation of Secondary Education, Report of the Divisional Executives and Stop the Eleven Plus. Bucks Group, *Our Schools at the Crossroads: The Story of Buckinghamshire's Search for a Secondary Education Policy* (Chesham, 1973). Appendix C: Recommendations from Divisional Executives, p. 38.

*Did tripartism offer the best academic balance of provision?*

How far were these (and earlier) rejections motivated by academic concerns? Some answer to this can be found by scrutinising the Joint Four's argument that Buckinghamshire's selective system was 'educationally' superior to any alternative. A range of material suggests that this argument was not entirely correct, once the needs of the majority of children were taken into account. A couple of factors prompt this view, the first being that irrespective of grammar school performance, Buckinghamshire's secondary modern schools and their pupils faced a systematic disadvantage in terms of resources and in their access to educational opportunities. This has been established in the previous chapter dealing with the operation of tripartism in Buckinghamshire LEA, which demonstrated that the educational provision in some secondary modern schools was considered thoroughly inadequate.

As the 1960s progressed in Buckinghamshire, this inequality was seen as particularly problematic in respect of 16-19 year old students. The increasing uptake of A Level subjects amongst Buckinghamshire secondary modern pupils highlighted the existence of a small but significant cohort of students who possessed the capacity and drive for advanced study, but who were left without access to the full range of courses and resources. Between 1962 and 1966 the number of pupils in non-grammar school sixth forms more than doubled, and by 1966 they constituted 12% of the total cohort in the county taking A Levels.<sup>19</sup> The incapacity of the existing service to meet the needs of this group was raised by Mandeville Secondary headteacher, Mr Baker:

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<sup>19</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR 78/89 13-16 *Education Committee Minutes*, March 1967 and April 1969.

It was with bitter regret that the school had been unable to offer these students the chance to stay on for a sixth or seventh year. But how could we offer you sixth form science in a school of only 800 where there are only two laboratories... Where could we have operated sixth form work when we were still having to use the hall, dining room and library as classrooms?<sup>20</sup>

Even where larger or newer secondary modern schools were better equipped to offer advanced work, the availability of specialised staff was more limited and represented an inefficient doubling up of staff between the modern and grammar school sixth forms. Nor was it the case that pupils who found that their schools were unable to accommodate them, were able to access grammar school sixth forms. Records indicate that most selective schools in the area retained high entry requirements and in many cases required that students follow a course of three A Level subjects. This pre-requisite would have excluded a large proportion of a cohort where students generally pursued one or two A Levels. Such an inflexible arrangement to the existing secondary service resulted, by the latter 1960s particularly, in a situation where the authority could not adequately and equitably meet the educational needs of all its 16-19 year olds. This enduring problem was highlighted in the reflections of the Bucks Chief Education Officer in his 1972 review of secondary provision.

The pace at which each [secondary modern school] has been able to change to cater for those staying on beyond the age of 15 has varied considerably and limited staff resources have undoubtedly meant a wide variety of courses at 15+ in some schools and very limited availability in other schools.

Educationally we cannot afford to allow 16+ pupils to suffer from the inequalities of opportunities similar to those that existed for the 15+ pupils in secondary modern schools, especially in the late 1950s and the 1960s.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> CFBS: Bucks Advertiser, 'Head Hits Out at Education 'Diehards',' 27<sup>th</sup> November 1969.

<sup>21</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR 78/89 19 *Education Committee Minutes*, October 1972. Appendix A: 'The Organisation of Secondary Education, Report of the Chief Education Officer.'

Such an admission undermines the assertion that the existing selective framework represented an educationally optimal form of secondary organisation.

There was also some weakness in the claim that any alternative arrangement would prove less ‘satisfactory’ for would-be grammar school pupils. Without doubt, by the late 50s and 1960s, most of Buckinghamshire’s grammar schools had cultivated an impressive academic reputation. However, even within the selective sector, some headteachers expressed frustration at the educational limitations imposed by the resource inflexibilities associated with smaller grammar schools. This point was raised on a number of occasions, with an early example coming from Slough Grammar School where inspectors noted the inability of the headteacher to introduce a broader curriculum in the middle school due to lack of ‘Masters and classrooms.’ Once these were available, the report explained, they

should bring great benefits educationally; the less gifted boys will be able to concentrate on fewer examination subjects while not entirely neglecting the others...<sup>22</sup>

This problem of efficiently providing for the less able grammar school cohorts is also present in statements made the Aylesbury Grammar School headteacher in 1964. In his October Speech Day presentation, Mr Tidmarsh pointed to the desirability of broadening access to the sixth form by lowering the intake requirements, claiming that the school would be able to better meet the needs of their own pupils by doing so. The *Bucks Advertiser* reported:

He had much to say on the work and importance of the VI form. ‘It was an integral part of the grammar school and the main basis of its reputation... There was a need for a less rigorous course than three A Levels, he added, but in a comparatively small school there was not the staff nor the accommodation to provide it.’<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> NA: ED 109/8646 *HM Inspectorate Reports, Slough: Slough Grammar School for Boys, 1954.*

<sup>23</sup> BLEA: Bucks Advertiser, ‘Building Delays Hit School Modernisation,’ 30<sup>th</sup> October 1964.

In this extract, Tidmarsh admits the academic case for greater flexibility in the operations of the grammar school, without using the loaded language of standards and risk. This contrasts considerably with the sense of urgency to defend current standards present in the Joint Four Memorandum, drafted just two years later. In this, grammar school heads were adamant that comprehensive re-organisation would lower standards, ‘which at present stand at pupils offering 3 A Levels’ by admitting more students who were not ‘genuine academic 6<sup>th</sup> form pupils’ and might only follow one course.<sup>24</sup>

This evidence generates the impression that Buckinghamshire experienced similar pressures to those in Oxfordshire. There was a clear need to offer a broader provision for grammar school students who would benefit from a less demanding curriculum; and also to accommodate more effectively the demand to pursue advanced study amongst secondary modern cohorts. In both cases the educational needs of selective and non-selective pupils increasingly overlapped, and could not be comfortably or effectively accommodated within the existing tripartite framework. On these grounds alone there was an educational argument in Buckinghamshire for entertaining some adaptation of its secondary re-organisation.

*Was resistance to reform political rather than educational?*

In the Buckinghamshire LEA the pressures to pursue reform, whether it be to respond to popular demand, or to secure economic or educational gains, were clearly present. By 1972 there was institutional support amongst Divisional Executives and from within the Education Directorate for reorganisation. Demographic change also ensured there was ample scope to

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<sup>24</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR 78/89 13 *Education Committee Minutes*, July 1966. ‘Memorandum to Chief Education Officer from Heads of Bucks Grammar schools.’

implement reform. Why then, did policy makers avoid re-organisation so fervently and pursue a policy of resistance that was incongruous with the popular and policy landscape described above? Research has pointed to three inter-related factors which determined this trajectory: the presence of an official leadership vacuum, combined with a fragmented political structure and a well organised, locally powerful preservationist lobby that stalled, complicated and finally blocked nearly all comprehensive reform in the county.

In the first case, the existence of a leadership vacuum in Buckinghamshire plagued the authority at critical junctures in its policy making process. Throughout the course of the decade discussed, there were three Chief Education Officers in Buckinghamshire: Douglas Cooke from 1946; Mr F.J North from November 1960 to August 1966 and Mr Roy Harding from 1966-1984. Within all local authorities, the role of the Chief Education Officer was pivotal.<sup>25</sup> The impact of Alan Chorlton in Oxfordshire has been discussed in previous chapters; his actions in that authority assuming great significance in that he successfully managed local opinion, offered a combination of educational vision and diplomatic reassurance to navigate potential conflict over new policies, and explicitly co-opted local grammar school heads into the policy making process in order to foster consensus and promote the acceptance of policy change. Tim Brighouse has described Chorlton as having near control in all things, a man with ‘influence in all that happened’ but in Buckinghamshire a combination of factors mitigated against the Chief Education Officers operating with the same drive or effect.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with Tim Brighouse, 19<sup>th</sup> June 2014.

The first of these was simply unfortunate timing. With the exception of Mr North, each Chief Education Officer was a remarkably long-standing member of the Buckinghamshire establishment, each serving near twenty years. However, the retirement of Mr Cooke, and the unexpected death of Mr North in 1966 meant that this key post of leadership was at its most unstable as crucial formative discussions on selection or re-organisation were occurring. Throughout the documents, this can be seen to have had a number of implications. The first consequence, and one raised in contemporary comments, was that Mr Cooke (coming to the end of his career) lacked both the dynamism and commitment to proactively manage the question of selection as it first emerged. This criticism was most clear in responses to Cooke's *SEFA* report. A prominent member of the Committee accused both the Committee Chairman and the Chief Education Officer of wilful ignorance when it came to selection, saying:

You and Mr Cooke must be living in cloisters well protected from any sound penetrating from outside if you have not heard any dissatisfaction with the 11-plus.<sup>27</sup>

Another official attacked Cooke's report as 'wishy washy...[and was] desperately disappointed that [...] there had not been one experimental stage suggested anywhere,' with another Councillor remarking that this was a 'report of someone who is coming to the end of a distinguished career and cannot bring in any attack.'<sup>28</sup> There is a lack of broader documentary evidence surrounding this report to analyse first-hand how reserved it was in its original proposals. What is known, however, is that the report contained recommendations to review selection arrangements and while the eventual recommendations were criticised for

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<sup>27</sup> CFBS: Bucks Advertiser, 'Scrap The 11-Plus in Bucks, Officer's Report Attacked,' 17<sup>th</sup> April 1959.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

being too conservative, they may well have represented an attempt to gradually and strategically introduce reform without rocking the boat or alarming defenders of the status quo. Irrespective, it is clear that Cooke's last contribution to the comprehensive issue in Buckinghamshire only succeeded in adding to divisions and laid a poor set of foundations for later discussions.

Compounding this problem, was the timing of the handover between the respective Chief Education Officers, in that it disrupted an important strand of institutional continuity in the Education Directorate at crucial junctures in the debate about secondary re-organisation. Success in the role of Chief Education Officer demanded cultivation of an institutional presence, and on developing influence over (and rapport with) school heads, committee members and policy makers. These relationships took time and status to cultivate. For both North and Harding, the timing, and in Harding's case the circumstances, of their appointment restricted their scope to build these relationships or secure this influence.

For incoming Chief Education Officer Mr. North, the timing of Cooke's departure, just on the cusp of the crucial first wave of discussions over selection, undermined his capacity to fully control the progress of debates in the county. North assumed office as discussion in the press over the role of the 11+ and selection was intensifying in the November of 1960, and as Chief Education Officer he was expected to react to guide the tone of these discussions despite the distinct disadvantage of not having controlled the issue from the beginning. Further, this crucial phase, one which saw heads and officials stating their preferences on selection, demanded firm leadership. One sufficient to either forge a consensus amongst disparate elements and competing ideas (whether it be for or against change) or at least to manage official and public opinion in such a way that would preserve possibilities for future policy making. Though North had served as Deputy prior to his

appointment, he could not yet lay claim to this degree of influence and his scope to control the tone or content of discussions was certainly circumscribed.

This problem was experienced to a larger extent by North's successor, Roy Harding. North's unexpected death in office in the October 1966 meant that Harding had to take up the mantle of Chief Education Officer just two months after the County Council's controversial rejection of the Education Committee's recommendation to go comprehensive. The sense of near chaos at this point in local politics has already been described in Chapter 11, with the *Bucks Advertiser* writing of the daunting prospect of a complete policy vacuum:

The vote leaves everyone in confusion. The Education Committee ....is left without any direction in which to work. The administrators can have no idea for what kind of future they should plan. Teachers, parents, children are left without any certainty other than that the muddle that has hindered action for 18 months is to continue indefinitely.<sup>29</sup>

At this critical moment, the very recent appointment of Harding firmly restricted his scope to shape events. This is shown in an interview with Tim Brighouse, who served under Harding in the Education Directorate from 1969 and who draws a firm contrast between the political gravitas of the Chief Education Officers in Oxfordshire and its absence amongst those in Buckinghamshire. Speaking of Harding he comments:

When all this was happening [the comprehensive debate in in latter 1960s], he [Harding] was deputy and then Chief Education Officer. He'd been in post when I arrived for no more than two or three years, and he therefore, and I know from my own experience, would have been certainly less well respected i.e he was still establishing himself, than would have been the case in Oxfordshire where Chorlton had been there for years and years and years and had a very strong influence over everything that ever happened.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> CFBS: Bucks Advertiser, Opinion, 'The Education Non-Decision is Utterly Indefensible,' 4<sup>th</sup> August 1966.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Tim Brighouse, 19<sup>th</sup> June 2014.

...I suspect that Chorlton was very powerful, Judge and Goodall will tell you, I think his influence on those heads, both in appointing them and then in the rapport he had with them was very strong indeed. Harding wouldn't have been instrumental in appointments...<sup>31</sup>

In the case of Harry Judge, this perception is supported in the opening chapter of his *Generation of Schooling*, as he reports the circumstances of his appointment as Headmaster of Banbury Grammar School...

The Director of Education... Alan Chorlton, who spoke to me on the stairs after being totally silent throughout my Banbury interview...and told me that (of course) I would be expected to pay early attention to the reorganisation of the whole of secondary education in Banbury.<sup>32</sup>

Harry Judge and Geoff Goodall, headteachers of two of Oxfordshire's most prominent grammar schools, were crucial figures in this county as leading architects of reorganisation and were fully co-opted into the policy-making process. Their collaboration and relationship with Chorlton and the Education Committee proved critical in seeing a successful and accepted policy change in secondary education. On the part of Chorlton, securing these relationships and influence took the exertion of time and care, as well as the skill and tact to appoint outstanding leaders to these key posts. While Chorlton definitely required foresight and vision, he also required a length of service, and the control that brought, to align the centres of influence in a way that would promote consensus on such a contested issue of educational reform. In Buckinghamshire neither North nor Harding had this luxury. Instead, they were presented with grammar school headteachers (whose appointment had largely predated their own, or lay beyond their direct control) who, by 1964, had formed a coherent anti-

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Harry Judge, *A Generation of Schooling: English Secondary Schools since 1944* (Oxford 1984). pp.51-60.

comprehensive lobby and who collaborated with powerful elements within the committee structure. This power imbalance of the Directorate was reflected in remarks made by Earl Howe in the aftermath of the Council's 1972 rejection of the Chief Education Officer's recommendation to re-organise, speaking in the *Bucks Advertiser* he claims:

This County Council has never been and I hope will never be, ruled by its officers. We do not have to accept a report of the Chief Officers. They give us their advice and it is up to us to do the thing we believe is right.<sup>33</sup>

It is clear therefore that successive Chief Education Officers in Buckinghamshire faced a much more unwieldy and factionalised political scene than any counterpart in Oxfordshire. This reduced their scope to act and limited what was possible in terms of fostering consensus and encouraging change. However, it is also clear from the documents that the personal drive and characteristics of successive Chief Education Officers exacerbated these tendencies, further restricting the possibility of consensus and change.

The first of these 'characteristics' is that Chief Education Officers in Buckinghamshire did not entirely doubt the merits of selection. For example, the *Bucks Advertiser* reporting on Mr Cooke's SEFA response in April 1959 included comments from a range of Education Committee officials, one of which relayed Mr Cooke's own opinion that 'the public was satisfied with the 11-plus.'<sup>34</sup> There is also the sense in a variety of documents that Mr North remained committed to the county's selection practices: in the summer of 1962 he wrote personally to the *Bucks Advertiser* on the subject of 11+ results, stating that

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<sup>33</sup> CFBS: *Bucks Advertiser*, 'Loophole' in Bucks School Vote,' 1<sup>st</sup> December 1972.

<sup>34</sup> CFBS: *Bucks Advertiser*, 'Scrap The 11-Plus in Bucks, Officer's Report Attacked,' 17<sup>th</sup> April 1959.

since our purpose is to place children in the schools most appropriate to their ability, where their development will be best fostered and where they will be happiest, the Committee is most anxious to remove any impression in the minds of parents and children that the allocation to a secondary modern school implies failure.<sup>35</sup>

North's attention here is clearly focused on counteracting parental and public anxieties about secondary modern schools, but his statement implicitly accepts the validity of tripartism, buying into the notion that children were inherently suited to different school types. The idea that North was not dissuaded from his belief in selection and tripartism is also hinted at in the final comments offered in his (later) 1964 memorandum where he takes the opportunity to defend the legitimacy of existing selection practice, writing:

Finally, there is perhaps another opportunity to deny emphatically three statements which are made about Buckinghamshire's arrangements: 1) That a decision at 11 is made simply on the basis of one days work in examination conditions. 2) that a final decision about a child's future education is made at 11. 3) that those who enter secondary modern schools have no chance of education after 16. These statements are simply not true.<sup>36</sup>

Though none of these statements represent an explicit siding with one system or another, they do reveal a degree of faith that selection at eleven was legitimate in principle. There is the chance that this material misrepresents the personal opinions of the two Directors; in each of these statements they are operating in an official and representative capacity and as such may have felt obliged to support existing practice. However, throughout committee papers and memoranda generally, they do not appear to raise criticisms over selective practices, beyond referring to worries over its public image.

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<sup>35</sup> CFBS: Bucks Advertiser, 'The 11-Plus Examination and the Pupils Who Don't Pass- They Are NOT Failures,' 8<sup>th</sup> June 1963.

<sup>36</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR 78/89 10 *Education Committee Minutes*, March 1964. 'Report on Secondary Re-organisation to SMSC by Chief Education Officer.'

The absence of outspoken support on the case for policy re-appraisal from respective Chief Education Officers fundamentally reduced the capacity of any pro-comprehensive elements to marshal coherent institutional sponsorship of change, and granted the space (and oxygen) to the preservationist counter-movement. The policy papers provided by North in the build up to his Scheme D proposals illuminate the effects of his neutrality and caution in the process of policy change. His memorandum, *The Structure of Secondary Re-organisation*, demonstrated a scepticism and reluctance to change; this minimised the possibilities of reform, and accorded considerable weight to the risks and logistical problems posed by reorganisation.<sup>37</sup> His scepticism clear in his argument that ‘no changes of an administrative and structural character can of themselves usher in the education millennium.’<sup>38</sup> Further, the Chief Education Officer used this memorandum to point-out how much investment had been dedicated to the existing system, assertions which carry a very clear sense of reluctance to reverse or jeopardise these accomplishments. Additionally, and further into the report, prior to any consideration of the merits of secondary re-organisation, he then casts doubt on the arguments for comprehensive change, emphasising how early on in ‘secondary education for all’ the country was and how it was too early to judge the merits or demerits of the current system. He also goes on to quote the recent Crowther Report that ‘any judgement on comprehensive schools at this stage must be made in faith rather than knowledge.’<sup>39</sup> North then concluded his report asserting that none of his proposals would be free of ‘difficulties and disadvantages’.<sup>40</sup> The memorandum raised valid points with regards to re-organisation,

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<sup>37</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR 78/89 10 *Education Committee Minutes*, March 1964. ‘Report on Secondary Re-organisation to SMSC by Chief Education Officer.’

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

and represented a healthy scepticism of any solution claiming to answer all educational ills. However, the language and content of this document injected a reluctance and negativity into this very first committee level discussion on county re-organisation. The options are deliberately presented, it seems, to appear uninspiring. There is a clear inertia and unwillingness to provide to provide a lead, or advocate a clear course of action.

Without casting any judgement as to whether North was right or wrong to default to such negative standpoint on the possibility of reform, this document could comfortably have been cited by preservationists, it certainly was not capable of encouraging and stimulating support for comprehensives. Its delivery during a formative phase of discussions in the county shows North to have been less effective than his Oxfordshire counter-parts in pro-actively managing opinions and forging a new consensus.

Intentionally or otherwise, North's attitude and approach fed into the inertia and malaise at the committee level. His sceptical approach to comprehensive re-organisation was added to by a seemingly unimaginative approach to policy alternatives. This is demonstrated by looking again at the initial review of alternative schemes presented by the Chief Education Officer in March 1964. In this document, North pre-emptively discounted policy solutions which could have offered viable routes to re-organisation within the county. For example, North dismissed the possibility of pursuing a middle school model, a decision justified according to the results of the survey returned by teachers. North reported that,

almost all teachers take the view that the intermediate schools required by this scheme should have a minimum school life of 3 years. If, therefore the solution is to affect only secondary age groups and schools, the range of the intermediate schools must be 11-14...Two thirds of all teachers who support scheme B regard 14 as too late for a change of school...I think this majority view should be respected, it would be extremely an extremely difficult task to develop a successful comprehensive school with an age of entry of 14.<sup>41</sup>

It was on this basis that the idea of a middle school pattern of re-organisation was abandoned and the pattern of re-organisation which would entail the least amount of new building and staffing disruption, was excluded. Additionally, no weight was given to the suggested alternative that the starting age could be lowered to 9 years old, something dismissed on the basis that it would require an extensive overhaul of the primary schools. Ironically, when the authority decided to resist comprehensive reform in July 1966, one of the only resolutions of the SMSC the County Council did accept was to increase the leaving age of primary schools to 12; something requiring extensive overhaul and additional building work. This adaptability was apparently excluded in the context of these early discussions on comprehensive change.

In this case, the Chief Education Officer also made the assumption that the majority opinion should determine the LEAs course of action, and there are two issues with this. The first problem being the need for leadership and information in decision-making. Though practitioner input represented a vital part of navigating educational reform, short-term biases or individual agendas had the capacity to influence responses in a way not connected with the viability of a policy. For example, in this case, supporting middle school reform would, in North's words, 'decapitate' secondary moderns - delivering a 'crushing blow' to these

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<sup>41</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR 78/89 10 *Education Committee Minutes*, October 1964. 'Report of Teachers' Opinions Regarding Alternative Forms of Secondary Organisation.'

schools.<sup>42</sup> For teachers in these schools, this reform threatened to reverse the gains of a long fought battle to expand their upper school-work. Basing wider policy decisions on this level of response was therefore questionable and was made more so by the actual numbers of respondents concerned. Here the ‘majority view’ actually amounted to just over 500 teachers out of 3000 who responded.<sup>43</sup> In Oxfordshire the Education Directorate definitely consulted and devolved some decision-making, but the final resolution rested with the Chief Education Officer and the School Management Sub-Committee. In Buckinghamshire, in this instance, we witness a deference to survey responses at the expense of a policy route that was arguably the most expedient means of achieving policy change.

North’s memoranda, and his subsequent recommendation to the SMSC to pursue Scheme D also saw an almost arbitrary disregarding of Scheme C. This latter plan (the mushroom scheme) would have modelled re-organisation along the lines requested desired by most Divisional Executives and Roy Harding in the early 1970s; with selective schools working as centres for advanced work (12 or 16-19) and secondary modern schools taking the whole ability age range between the ages of 12-15. Again, this would have represented a practical, well-supported and efficient mode of secondary education. Even within his March version of recommendations, North endorsed this plan along efficiency and educational lines. However, he then shut down the possibility of this route, explaining that ‘Grammar Schools would undergo enormous change... I feel sure that such a revolution would be strenuously

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<sup>42</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR 78/89 10 *Education Committee Minutes*, March 1964. ‘Report on Secondary Re-organisation to SMSC by Chief Education Officer,’ and *Education Committee Minutes*, October 1964. ‘Report of Teachers’ Opinions Regarding Alternative Forms of Secondary Organisation.’

<sup>43</sup> Majority view was counted as 2/3 of the 28% who responded for Scheme B.

resisted.<sup>44</sup> In the SMSC's reappraisal of Scheme C, this rationale was clearly accepted, with anticipated resistance featuring as the prime reason for avoiding the policy option. The Working Party reported that it felt that 'every vigorous head of a secondary school would feel that this [restructuring implied by Scheme C] was a great disadvantage and therefore do not recommend.'<sup>45</sup> As with the necessity of teacher input, the support and endorsement of secondary school heads was vital in seeing the successful delivery of any policy. However, the spectre of resistance was used as a legitimate reason to preclude a reasonable policy option. In Oxfordshire different areas adopted different patterns of re-organisation to suit existing buildings, so reorganisation along the lines of Scheme B and C were two of the more common models used. But in Buckinghamshire, grammar school resistance to all but Scheme D precluded other more viable and more popular options from being properly explored.

Even had the chief officers in Buckinghamshire been as dynamic and influential as those in Oxfordshire, their capacity to shape events was firmly circumscribed by the county's particular institutional organisation. In Buckinghamshire there were seven Divisional Executives, with a slightly lower number of regional Chief Education Officers alongside them. This fragmented the Chief Education Officer's power to act, disrupting his relationships with local schools or regional politicians, and greatly undermined his ability to counter-act the tendency of the School Management Sub-Committee (and others) to delay and defer policy changes they found unpalatable.

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<sup>44</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR 78/89 10 *Education Committee Minutes*, March 1964.

<sup>45</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR 78/89 13 *Education Committee Minutes*, April 1966.

This institutional structure also directly contributed to Buckinghamshire's eventual resistance of comprehensive reform, by facilitating the Education Committee and SMSC's inclination to defer decision-making. This was particularly the case in the earlier phase (1956-1963) under review and it has already been highlighted in Chapter 11 in relation to the 1959 *Secondary Education for All* White Paper. At this stage, the Education Committee felt compelled to collect input from each of its Divisional Executives; there was therefore a twelve month lag between initial discussion and actual recommendations being made. In a similar way, this set up facilitated delay in the production of the 1964 Memorandum (Scheme D) and in the generation of the April Resolution. On an official level this set-up worked hand in hand to promote stagnation and enhance the sense of inertia that already surrounded the comprehensive issue. Further, in Buckinghamshire, where the press were keen commentators on the policy debate and where the preservationist lobby was not shy about promoting the risks associated with policy change, such delay compounded the problems of garnering a workable consensus and mitigating the public's fears and anxieties over change.

Another problem associated with this institutional organisation was that it had the capacity to overcomplicate the process of policy formation. On each round of consultations with Divisional Executives, many expressed different and often incompatible views. The different areas of Buckinghamshire had varying political, social and educational dynamics, and as such, agreement between executives on one scheme for the whole county was highly unlikely if not impossible. For example, prior to the SMSC's April resolution, four Divisional Executives responded that they wanted alternative schemes to 12-18 model and on these grounds refused to back the proposal supported by the committee. Even in this anomalous situation for Buckinghamshire, where the SMSC were endorsing comprehensive change, and where the majority of Divisional Executives also supported secondary re-organisation along

comprehensive lines, disagreement on the particular form of reorganisation worked to weaken the cohesiveness of those pursuing reform.

The institutional set up of Buckinghamshire Education administration emerges here as a marked weakness in the process of policy change, it also facilitated the inclination on the part of policy leaders, primarily the Chairman of the Education Committee and the Chief Education Officer, to make use of bureaucratic delay and consultation. Not only were policy makers already exposed to a much wider variety of inputs in relation to other authorities by virtue of their organisation, but they further exposed themselves to it by persistently resorting to excessive canvassing of stakeholders' views. On this latter point, it is worth highlighting that Buckinghamshire was one of the only authorities to publically consult on the issue of secondary re-organisation.<sup>46</sup> Between 1958 and 1972 it had repeatedly sent questionnaires to Divisional Executives, to the local branches of teachers unions, to its whole teaching establishment and to parents. To some extent, this over-consultation may have reflected a desire on the part of policy makers to act according to the desires of people within the authority. It seems more likely however, that division within official circles pushed both pro and anti-comprehensive activists to seek the validation of public or professional support as a means of breaking the recurrent state of deadlock in official arenas. Even if this very wide consultation reflected a desire to involve as many stakeholders as possible in the process of

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<sup>46</sup> Only a handful of LEAs are reported to have conducted similar public consultation exercises, Peter Mandler identified only Buckinghamshire, Barnet and Gloucester LEAs to have done so in, 'Educating the Nation I: Schools,' *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* (Sixth Series, 2014).

change, it repeatedly undermined efforts to secure agreement, and acted to encourage delay rather than to legitimise decisive action.

These findings point both to a leadership vacuum and to an unwieldy administrative structure as major causal factors in directing the comprehensive debate in Buckinghamshire. But while these elements limited the capacity of the authority to pursue re-organisation, it is very clear that they were thoroughly exploited by pro-grammar school elements within the county. The combination of two key institutional groups, headteachers and council members, resulted in a mutually reinforcing, increasingly powerful and cohesive anti-comprehensive group. This group moulded how the principle of policy change would be received locally.

It has already been made clear that Grammar school headteachers in Buckinghamshire supported the retention of selective schools. As to why this was the case, it is clear in some instances that these school leaders were protecting their own institutional interests. For example, statements made by some heads point to them being exclusively concerned with the education of the most able, rarely engaging with the question of which secondary system education would best serve the majority of students. Instead they repeatedly asserted the benefits of the existing system for the most able students. Not only is this bias apparent in many of their contributions, but so too is also a sense that this group were anxious to protect the relative advantages which belonged to the grammar schools in terms of professional standing and remuneration. For example, when consideration of comprehensive re-organisation was undertaken in 1964 as part of the Chief Education Officer's Memorandum, the Joint Four turned their attention to ensuring that the professional standing of selective school staff would be protected. In the October of 1964 the Joint Four responded to the Chief Education Officer's four Scheme proposals by expressing

Their very real concern with the need to ensure that any school, catering for the full range of pupils up to 13+, should be able to successfully teach the specialist subjects at present taught in the lower classes of selective schools. They wish to emphasise that whatever changes may be made, the greatest care must be taken to safeguard the interests of highly qualified and experienced staff, and to employ them to their best advantage.<sup>47</sup>

Placed as they were (in relation to secondary modern schools) with better staffing, and often better buildings- it would have taken faith and conviction of a social or moral *need* to pursue non-selective schooling to motivate grammar school headteachers to support change. But Buckinghamshire grammar school heads appeared to sincerely believe in the educational and social advantages of the tripartite system. This view was consistently held. In 1960 the headteachers publically argued that selection via the 11+ exam was fairest means of promoting educational opportunities for able children.<sup>48</sup> Four years later, during the first wave of consultations for North's Scheme D proposals, this view persisted:

They had made it clear that they consider the present system educationally superior, and in essentials, preferable to any of the alternatives put forwards. It has undoubtedly been successful and any of the suggested changes would be likely to prove less satisfactory for such pupils as at present attend our selective schools.<sup>49</sup>

In addition to collective statements of support for the retention of selection, headmasters of Buckinghamshire grammar schools repeatedly defended the unique function of their schools, asserting both academic and social rationales. Mr Tidmarsh in particular, the Headmaster of Aylesbury Grammar School, featured regularly in the *Bucks Herald* and *Bucks Advertiser* promoting the singular ability of grammar schools to meet the needs of the ablest

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<sup>47</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR 78/89 11 *Education Committee Minutes*, October 1964, 'Summary of Teachers' Opinions Regarding Alternative Forms of Secondary Education.'

<sup>48</sup> CFBS, *Bucks Advertiser*, Opinion, 'In favour of the 11-plus,' 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1960.

<sup>49</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR 78/89 13 *Education Committee Minutes*, July 1966. 'Memorandum to Chief Education Officer from Heads of Bucks Grammar schools.'

pupils and potential university candidates. Some headteachers were also firmly convinced of the role grammar schools could play in promoting social mobility. For example, at the 1963 prize giving ceremony at Bucks Royal Latin School, headmaster Mr Embleton reminded listeners that:

All through history, the school had given the pupils from all sections of society the opportunity to make themselves better in every way...It was hard to find a more democratic institution than the school where constantly every year many of those who joined the school from a great variety of home backgrounds- very many from "working class" backgrounds- joined as children to leave as young people with fine careers before them.<sup>50</sup>

As demonstrated here, amongst the schools' headteachers, there was a strong belief that Buckinghamshire grammar schools were fulfilling a vital function; secondary re-organisation held little appeal. These beliefs expressed by grammar school heads remained consistent, throughout the formative decade 1958-1968, and all the way through to the 1970s. For example, in 1972 the Joint Four offered a rejoinder to pressures from Divisional Executives and STEP to end selection, reiterating their long-held views:

That secondary education in the County is best provided by selective and non-selective schools. The record of Buckinghamshire in all aspects of education will stand in comparison with that of any Authority in the country. Such a record could not have been achieved on the basis of an inefficient secondary school organisation. [further]... Selection by ability cuts across the limitations of neighbourhood. The fact that most children endure such limitations at present is no reason for imposing them on all. Nor is the fact that most children cannot go to grammar schools an adequate reason for ensuring that none should do so.<sup>51</sup>

Crucially, the reticence of the grammar school heads to re-organise was also matched by that of leading local figures. In Buckinghamshire, influential preservationists, or 'arch-

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<sup>50</sup> CFBS, Bucks Herald, 'Speech Day at Royal Latin School,' 13<sup>th</sup> July 1963.

<sup>51</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR 72/2002, *Schools Sub-Committee Minutes*, May 1972, Special Sub-Committee on Selection and Secondary Organisation, Appendix A: 'Buckinghamshire Joint Committee of the Four Secondary Associations.'

conservatives' as termed by Brighouse, dominated local politics.<sup>52</sup> Of particular importance were Ralph Verney, Earl Howe and Aubery Ward who throughout this period respectively oversaw the County Council Finance Committee, Education Committee and County Council (as well as serving as School Governors for some grammar schools). This cohort of preservationists also included the dynamic local Councillor (and subsequently MP) Peter Fry, whose lead, as explored in the previous chapter, encouraged and mobilised a wider group of pro-grammar school Councillors.

Why did local leaders- socially, not dissimilar to those overseeing Oxfordshire- take such a trenchant and enduring stance against reform? There is a clear sense in both official and press archives that the motivations underpinning resistance shifted between the beginning and end of the comprehensive dispute. Over this period resistance became more reactive, digging in against external pressure. By the mid 1970s, the stand-alone educational imperatives that had been influential in the beginning became submerged by wider party politics. By the 1970s certainly, the preservationist group was exercising resistance to central dictation of policy as a matter of principle. This process of dislocation, between original concerns and the eventual behaviour of policy makers, is something highlighted by the newspaper columnist Tagalog in July 1970. He bemoaned the intrusion of Ministerial instruction, depicting it as distorting local debates over secondary re-organisation away from a slow but progressive consideration of the educational issues and making them contested and polarising:

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<sup>52</sup> Interview with Tim Brighouse, 19<sup>th</sup> June 2014.

It is four years ago now that heads, teachers and parents and education executive members were asked for their views on comprehensives. Then came along that Labour government circular which said in effect...go comprehensive or else, Bucks County Council chose that moment to ignore the views expressed by teachers' organisations and parents meetings and adopt a plan which made it virtually impossible to fully introduce comprehensive schooling.<sup>53</sup>

In this later context, resistance had become a reactive response to a now politicised policy issue. However, other motivations were also felt by officials. For example, there is the occasional impression that officials either rejected the egalitarian underpinnings of comprehensive schooling, seeking to protect the exclusivity and relative advantages which could be gained via a grammar school education. Though individual opinions prove difficult to access in official papers, beyond looking at consistent voting behaviour, coverage in the *Bucks Herald* does illuminate some of these personal biases. In a review it conducted of the 1971 Aylesbury Divisional Executive (re-constituted earlier that year) it is revealed that the majority of members had children at grammar or public schools.<sup>54</sup> These members lacked the direct experience of what it meant to be on the 'losing side' of the 11+, and arguably their faith in the benefits of a grammar school education had been conflated with a faith in the selective system as a whole. One member of this Executive, Miss Carslake – who also served on the Education Committee and County Council, expressed a more extreme meritocratic view in defence of grammar schools- stating quite simply that 'less bright children must receive less attention than intelligent ones.'<sup>55</sup> It is possible therefore that resistance to secondary re-organisation reflected socially conservative or exclusive attitudes of some policy makers.

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<sup>53</sup> CFBS: Bucks Advertiser, 'Free Schools From Selection,' July 9th 1970.

<sup>54</sup> CFBS: Bucks Advertiser, 'The Executive, They Voted Five Years Ago For Comprehensives,' 1st April 1971.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

However, and especially throughout the formative decade between 1958-1968, a different set of motivations can be seen to have triggered the concerted defence of the grammar school system. These involved a set of genuine concerns about preserving what were thought of as excellent schools and excellent traditions. For example, reflecting on the development of the comprehensive issue in Buckinghamshire, Chief Education Officer Roy Harding wrote in 1972 that:

support for the retention of separate grammar schools and modern schools is generally based on the excellent record and high reputation of the grammar schools as an institution. Selective schools can justly claim that they have provided an atmosphere where able children are stretched intellectually and where the pace of work remains brisk from start to finish.<sup>56</sup>

Statements offered by Peter Fry also reflected this sincere belief in the selective system on educational and social grounds. For example he was quoted in the *Bucks Advertiser* in 1966 stressing the excellent record of the county's selective schools and warning against diluting this in pursuit of a comprehensive system:

It was because he believed that the best in the present system should be preserved...Comprehensives schools would inhibit the slowest and the quickest. 'The system would only enhance the mediocre and both ends of the scale would suffer.'<sup>57</sup>

Interviews conducted with Fry in 2012 reinforce the notion that his intervention in 1966 was the product of genuine belief in superiority of the selective system for all secondary students. Not only does Fry cite his own entry and successful career throughout Wycombe Grammar school, but he also emphasised the opportunities it offered to poorer students:

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<sup>56</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR 74/2002, *Schools Sub-Committee*, Special Meeting of the Education Committee: Appendix D: 'An Argument for the Retention of Selective Education in Buckinghamshire,' September 1972.

<sup>57</sup> CFBS: *Bucks Advertiser*, 'Fully Comprehensive Schooling Is Only The Long Term Aim,' 26<sup>th</sup> May 1966.

I knew I'd grown up with boys...some of whom were very poor and who never would have got to a grammar school without the scholarship system...It really was a really large mixture at grammar school [and] It was interesting that there was a real cross section. And I think, with all the talk about comprehensives etc. that there is no doubt that the Grammar schools did a lot to advance a lot of people who today would have been considered deprived.<sup>58</sup>

Defence of the grammar school system in Buckinghamshire did therefore reflect a genuine desire on the part of some policy makers to preserve a system they felt was working. The actions of the committee members and the Council remained consistent with these stated beliefs. In Bletchley for example, the Council made an exception to its systematic blockade of comprehensive schemes; in December 1968 the Conservative Buckinghamshire council voted 'overwhelmingly' in favour of a comprehensive scheme. The reasoning behind this, explained Tim Brighouse, was not simply the arrival of Milton Keynes; the school and its headmaster were regarded as 'no good' by the local authority. It is also salient to note that the headteacher and governing body of Bletchley Grammar school fully supported the scheme.<sup>59</sup> It appears then, that where schools were not regarded as excellent or high achieving institutions, preservationists were not as intent on their retention. This selective protection of schools, on the grounds of their reputation, was also remarked upon by local figures at various junctures in the comprehensive debate. For example in the November of 1968, the Bucks Advertiser reported:

It was made clear by the establishment, that the real object of the council's policy on education is not the defence of the grammar school system itself but of 3 or 4 famous schools in the country which just happen to be grammar schools.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> BL C1503/1: *History of Parliament, Oral History Project*, Sir Peter Fry interviewed by Jessica Wilkins, 21-01-05, Track 2.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Tim Brighouse, 19<sup>th</sup> June 2014.

<sup>60</sup> CFBS: Bucks Advertiser, 'Comprehensives,' 21<sup>st</sup> November 1968.

And again in the June of 1969:

[official] speeches have made it clear that the aim is to maintain 3 grammar schools at all costs, those at Buckingham, Wycombe and Marlow.<sup>61</sup>

Pro-comprehensive Alderman, Mr Room criticised the council's determination to protect the 'sacred cows of Marlow and Wycombe' schools.<sup>62</sup>

The two schools alluded to here, The Royal Grammar school at Wycombe and Sir William Borlase's did have formidable academic and pastoral reputations. By the latter 1960s however, other selective schools like Slough Grammar school and Aylesbury Grammar school were also successful, reporting their best ever exam and university results. This reinforced the support they commanded amongst the Conservative group, but also heightened the sense of risk associated with any whole system overhaul.

The motivations underpinning resistance amongst this influential group were therefore varied. In most cases however they reflected an accepted assumption that the needs of the most able should be prioritised and showed little concern for the 70% of students in non-selective schools. Furthermore, the impulse to defend their faith in the selective system in such a contested policy environment led many of these individuals to reject debate and discussion, instead opting for a more fervent promotion of their own views as the period progressed. The influence secured by the preservationist lobby, at the expense of a hamstrung Education Directorate crucially affected the trajectory of Buckinghamshire's education policy

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<sup>61</sup> CFBS: Bucks Advertiser, 'Intellectual Apartheid,' 19<sup>th</sup> June 1969.

<sup>62</sup> CFBS: Bucks Advertiser, 'Loophole' in Bucks School Vote,' 1<sup>st</sup> December 1972.

and can be seen as having acted at pivotal moments to limit the chance of reform. The ways in which it did so are explored below.

They played an important role earlier on in this decade with their influence cultivating an inertia and discomfort around comprehensive policy debates at the committee level. Anything resembling policy experimentation resulted from demands outside the central administration. In the Warrenfield Comprehensive example, it was through a prolonged campaign on the part of the Slough Divisional Executive that the school became re-designated. This was also the case later in the May of 1959 when the Aylesbury Divisional Executive began to agitate to have comprehensive schools on their major works list, approved as and when new accommodation was needed in the area. When the issue of selection and re-organisation firmly landed on the Education and School Management Committee's agenda, it did so because it had been pushed up from below: with the North Bucks, Eton and Slough Divisional Executives directly petitioning the central committee to convene a working party on the subject. The reluctance on the part of headteachers and council figures to engage with the comprehensive debate ensured that from the earliest point in these discussions, the question of reorganisation was avoided and delayed.

The persistent and assured faith displayed by grammar school heads in the selective system was also crucial in that it heavily reinforced support for the selective system within official circles. Headteachers were directly involved with education committees and its working parties as well as their respective divisional executives. The Education Committee for example included representatives from grammar schools, with the Aylesbury Grammar head, Mr Tidmarsh (a vociferous defender of tripartism) occupying this position on at least three successive Education Committees between 1961-1967. Further, the memorandum and official contributions of the Joint Four Committee, headed throughout this era by Wycombe

Royal Grammar School head Mr Tucker offered ample reasoning and evidence which supported the sceptics of reform. Contemporary accounts of comprehensive debates in the county reinforce the impression that the opinions of the grammar school heads had the ear, and sympathy, of lead decision makers. Some of this impression emerges from the heads themselves. For example, just prior to the pivotal vote of the County Council in the July of 1966, the heads of the grammar schools submitted to the authority a memorandum of their views, warning against the risks of re-organisation. As part of this they implied their expectation that policy makers would defer to their expertise and that their opinions would accordingly carry greater weight than others:

Heads of Buckinghamshire grammar schools trust that their experience and knowledge of the education of the more able pupils and their special knowledge of 6<sup>th</sup> form needs, may receive detailed consideration by the committee in this vital matter.<sup>63</sup>

The primacy accorded to grammar school heads' views was something implicitly critiqued in the *Bucks Advertiser* as it reported the recommendations of the SMSC to the Education Committee and subsequently County Council in the July of 1967:

Included with the sub-committee's report, which will be considered by the Education Committee today, is a resume of the views expressed on the subject during the two-month investigation. But the views expressed at the public meetings held throughout the county are not summarised: nor are the 250 letters received on the subject or the views of primary school managers...[In contrast] Opinion given most weight in the sub-committee documents comes from the headmasters of Bucks grammar schools. Their 610 word memorandum is reproduced in full for the benefit of the Education Committee.<sup>64</sup>

In Buckinghamshire, even had the Education Committee pursued secondary re-organisation with the same energy as its Oxfordshire counterpart, the absence of support from some of the

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<sup>63</sup> CFBS: BLEA AR 78/89 13 *Education Committee Minutes*, July 1966. 'Memorandum to Chief Education Officer from Heads of Bucks Grammar schools.'

<sup>64</sup> CFBS: *Bucks Advertiser*, 'Education Decision Day,' 7<sup>th</sup> July 1966.

most important educational figures locally, diminished the degree of institutional sponsorship and credibility that the pro-comprehensive agenda could hope to gain. The input of grammar school Heads into the policy process directly shaped the parameters of policy debates on secondary re-organisation, stressing the risks posed by ending selection and reinforcing the instinct to preserve existing systems. The scepticism of grammar school heads over comprehensive reform therefore indirectly restricted the scope for change. The importance of this stands out when the Buckinghamshire dynamic is placed in contrast to that in Oxfordshire. Here, leading grammar school headteachers were fully co-opted into the policy making process, serving the crucial role of granting legitimacy to reforms as well as generating confidence in the process of change.

Not only did council members and headteachers work to slow the pace and momentum behind discussions, but they also shaped their tone and content. As has already been explored in the context of the Chief Education Officer's leadership, the presence and influence of a determined preservationist lobby dictated which policy options North was willing to consider. There are also clear examples however of council members limiting viable policy reforms. This point is perhaps best emphasised by a comment made by Earl Howe in the latter stages of the County Council's conflict with the Ministry and STEP. To accusations that the Authority was ignoring public will on reorganisation, Howe retorted:

The majority are ignorant on this matter... at the moment in Aylesbury there are numerous schools and one might ask whether they are capable of being made comprehensive...if it means that teachers and pupils have to travel by car and on foot from school to school, then I don't call that comprehensive education.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> CFBS: Bucks Advertiser, 'School Plea To County Council,' 19<sup>th</sup> October 1972.

In Oxfordshire, the LWS provided clear demonstration that a split site comprehensive school could become very successful. The categorical rejection of this model being applied in Aylesbury, where the schools concerned were within 1-2 kilometres of one another; reinforces the impression that Buckinghamshire policy makers were either too timid, unimaginative or inflexible to consider feasible routes to re-organisation.

In the formative stages of discussion, the preservationist lobby effectively undermined discussions on re-organisation and in many ways set the parameters of the debate, to the detriment of a full and objective consideration of different policy options. In the second and third phases outlined in the previous chapter, the role of this group in directly blocking reform proposals at the Education Committee and County Council level has also been explored.

This body of evidence points to Buckinghamshire's stagnation and resistance in the face of re-organisation as reflecting the (un) willingness and (in) capacity of its collective leadership. In turn, it is clear that resistance in Buckinghamshire was firmly rooted in political will. The authority faced public demand and officials petitioned repeatedly for the rationalisation and perceived gains of comprehensivisation. That neither pressure stimulated policy change was the result of a powerful and influential lobby who systematically diffused reform momentum and supported the preservation of the existing system.



## Conclusion

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This thesis has offered a micro-study of two Local Education Authorities, tracing their efforts to deliver the 1944 Butler Education Act and its promises of ‘secondary education for all.’ Part One of the dissertation asked how LEAs interpreted their new obligations and translated them into an operable service. Part Two then examined how each authority responded to the prospect of comprehensive reorganisation.

In conducting such a close study of Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, this dissertation has called attention to the era of tripartite schooling as one of considerable complexity and variation. It has highlighted the mechanisms through which school-to-school inequality emerged and discredits the binary view of selective and non-selective schooling which de-facto accepts grammar school quality or secondary modern failure. This work has also problematized the process of comprehensive reform as something heavily subject to local influence and structural pre-conditions. In evaluating the divergent experiences of the two LEAs reviewed, this thesis has added to the range of work which seeks to de-centralise and de-politicise the comprehensive debate: comprehensive responses ultimately emerged after a complicated local ‘filtering’ process; through the issue’s treatment and guidance by respective Education Officers, through the power dynamics of internal LEA structures, and through the relational environment prevalent in each authority - whatever the original imperatives were to reform, these processes mutated educational issues into ones which either commanded support and consensus (Oxfordshire), or provoked fractious and heavily contested resistance (Buckinghamshire).

Chapters three and six of this thesis examined how the ambitions of ‘secondary education for all’ manifested in terms of bricks and mortar (or prefab). In both Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, the respective committees and administrators pursued the delivery of policy in strained and austere conditions. Despite expanding populations in these areas, building programmes were often delayed and fell short of local needs, with the capabilities of respective authorities in effecting educational (re)construction limited by both ministerial control and resource availability. By examining the piecemeal construction and adaptation on which the delivery of education policy rested, this thesis has highlighted that providing secondary education for all after 1944 demanded that policy makers made trade-offs between quantity and quality. The process of implementation, especially of a policy with such wide aims, pushed LEAs into a process of ‘satisficing,’ where the ideals and optimism of parliamentary statements on secondary education were subsumed beneath authorities’ frantic efforts to physically accommodate their new statutory obligations.

By maintaining a longer-term perspective of secondary education, and by linking the post-1944 efforts at policy delivery with each Local Authority’s educational pre-endowments, this thesis has also highlighted the impact of path-dependency on educational policy making. In the context of buildings, both case study areas were fortunate in having an above average degree of secondary provision already established by 1944, but the exigencies of post-war building demands encouraged the extension of existing school sites meaning that pre-war educational infrastructure was often carried over into post-war plans. There was no opportunity to start from a blank slate and so this inheritance determined where and how many schools would develop.

Our understanding of education policy and practice as a path-dependent process has also benefited from the examination of secondary modern school building in chapters four to

eight. A wide consultation of local committee minute papers and school HMI reports in these chapters allowed for a detailed interrogation as to how inequalities developed between school types. This work explored the mechanisms through which resourcing and reputational inequalities between selective and non-selective school types became entrenched, emphasising the role of pre-existing absence or deficiencies in secondary modern school stock in exacerbating the relative disadvantage of this school sector into the 1950s and '60s. Many other texts have asserted the poverty of secondary modern school accommodation as fostering broader inequality of opportunity, but by linking educational opportunities with the impact of the school building programme this work highlighted how even new, well provisioned secondary modern schools struggled to cultivate status. These chapters have indicated that the 'hiatus' between the original announcement the 1944 Act and the arrival of new-build secondary modern schools dislocated this school type from the bold optimism of New Jerusalem promises. Had new, well-equipped and resourced schools been available within the first two years of secondary education for all then things might have turned out differently, they might have had far greater capacity to gain traction in the popular imagination and cultivate prestige along autonomous lines. As it was, they could not capitalise on this window of opportunity, arriving nearly a decade into the post-war project. The secondary modern vision and curriculum by this point had become circumscribed by deficient resourcing in existing school stock or huts and the public mood surrounding these schools had soured. In a bid to jump-start prestige, many of these schools then sought to provide examination courses, and though this was as much a response to an increasingly credentialed labour market, the adoption of extended courses and the emulation of grammar school curricula reflected the fact that a delay in building had limited the development of a viable alternative form of secondary education to that offered in selective schools.

Though determined in part by the structural and path-dependent process explored above, inequalities between the two school types have also been shown to be the product of LEA rationing choices. In exploring the mechanisms by which inequality between selective and non-selective schools developed, this thesis has identified that, either implicitly or explicitly, the education of the more able attracted a premium in terms of resourcing. In Oxfordshire this valuation was plainly stated, whereas in Buckinghamshire, rationing decisions rested far more on implicit assumptions. In several areas, the LEA possessed control over the distribution of resources: in requisition allowances, in HOD posts and in pupil teacher ratios and in both authorities, administrators concentrated resources in selective schools.

Part Two of this thesis contributes to our understanding of comprehensive re-organisation in several ways. In asking why one authority successfully pursued comprehensive reform and the other resisted it, important themes have been brought to light. Again, the phrase path-dependency emerges here and can help to explain the divergent trajectories of the two authorities. In Oxfordshire, a slower rate of population growth for the first half of the 1950s ensured that grammar schools were recruiting from sparsely populated areas, which in turn limited their economic and academic capacity. Many of these schools struggled to live up to local expectations and were inefficient units for the authority to maintain. In turn, when the question of comprehensive re-organisation emerged, there was less of a commitment to the preservation of these institutions. In addition to this development, the timing of accelerated population growth by the latter 1950s ensured that the LEA was anticipating a dynamic phase in school building at a point when it was also considering comprehensivisation; it knew it would have the capacity to establish a more efficient system and it had the ambition to do so.

By contrast, in Buckinghamshire, a much earlier phase of demographic growth prompted the construction of larger, more efficient schools. Further, the high performance of the LEA's grammar schools reinforced commitment for the preservation of these institutions. As the comprehensive debate evolved into the latter 1950s therefore, the logistical problems of the county's tripartite set up were less pronounced and thus reduced the incentive to change. Policy decisions subsequently rested more on opinion and values, which underpinned a much more protracted and fundamentally contested debate.

Chapters ten and twelve have also emphasised the importance of the policy making environment in managing the process of policy change of any sort, but especially one as potentially divisive as comprehensive re-organisation. In the Oxfordshire case, the presence and gravitas of the Director and Deputy Director of Education- Alan Chorlton and John Dorrell- was pivotal in forging working relationships, trust, and confidence. So too were the attitude and outlook of the Education Committee, particularly its long-standing chairman, Charles Peers. Though the incentive to reform Oxfordshire's secondary schools was stronger than that felt in Buckinghamshire, it was the presence of strong relationships, networks of co-operation and mutual confidence which supported a smooth and successful transition to comprehensive schooling. Buckinghamshire did not benefit from these networks. The dynamic between the Directorate and the Education Committee was far more administrative and impersonal; accidents of timing and differences in character ensured that the Directorate never gained the same degree of traction in guiding policy or cultivating consensus, whether in the build-up to or throughout policy disputes.

In the broader context, the work of this thesis has pointed to the potentially transformative role which effective local administration can have on the delivery of education policy. Even in Buckinghamshire, where the comprehensive dispute shaped official and civic

(and public/official) relationships, the role of respective CEOs in linking this major area of policy with local conditions: in overseeing the regional development of the education service, in offering regular and thorough assessments of local needs in terms of schools, teachers and curricula. Further, their relationship with, and the broader interaction between headteachers, teaching unions and various committees gave shape to a policy making community, one which offered broad scope for collective involvement and investment in the delivery of a service. In relation to our contemporary framework of educational decision making and process, this presents a stark contrast. The atomisation of the current education service where administrative responsibility is devolved to individual schools and academy groups, and with policy decisions now heavily centralised, has removed a key forum of policy formation. LEAs were the bodies which undertook to breathe life into the promises laid down in the 1944 Act and proved themselves as worthy innovators and agents of policy delivery; now they are substantively defunct. If we are to ensure that policy is effectively delivered and translated to local environments, understanding the historical dynamics of these agencies is crucial, and it is hoped that this thesis has contributed to that understanding.

*Directions for future research:*

There are several areas of study which have been consciously excluded from this thesis on account of time and space, but which would offer fruitful avenues for future study. For example, the development of secondary technical education has featured only peripherally throughout this work, but far more historical investigation and analysis is required to explore the values, ideas and practical constraints which prevented the national growth of this sector. Additionally, a dominant theme to recur in the records consulted for this project has been the idea of ‘girls’ education,’ with both LEAs perceiving that girls required a separate curricula and had distinct educational needs to those of boys. Tracing the evolution of different ideas surrounding girls’ education, and their interaction with pupil

outcomes, occupational structures and present day disputes over the gendered attainment gap would prove both interesting and salient. Furthermore, the relationship of population change and educational planning requires further exploration. In this thesis, the timing of population growth was shown to condition the responsiveness of the two Local Authorities to the prospect of comprehensive change. Investigating the interaction of demographic change, policy choices and outcomes would add greatly to our understanding of education policy and practice.

### *Happy Citizens?*

To re-assert, understanding policy-making in historical perspective is not idle curiosity. The 1944 Butler Education Act set an ambitious agenda. It set out to develop the talents of the nation, to promote children's life chances, to make happy citizens. And yet, 80 years later The Children's Society's *Good Childhood Report* revealed that children in the UK were amongst 'the unhappiest in the world,' The Sutton Trust's June 2015 research brief, *Missing Talent*, drew attention to the waste of talent among highly able pupils once they enter secondary schools, and the relationship between social origins and educational outcomes persists.<sup>1</sup> This thesis has offered a niche historical study of two Local Authorities, but it raises themes, in terms of resourcing, timing, decision-making, relationships and professional autonomy which resonate again and again in contemporary debates on education policy and practice. They continue to impact, directly, on the performance and capacity of our education

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<sup>1</sup> Sally Weale Education correspondent, 'English Children among the Unhappiest in the World at School due to Bullying', *The Guardian*, (2015). The Sutton Trust, 'Missing Talent', *The Sutton Trust Research Brief*, Edition 5 (2015).

system. Understanding the historical conditions which shaped the formation of education policy, and its translation into practice, is vital if we are to understand if, how and where it has failed our expectations. This is a crucial pre-requisite if we ever hope to deliver and improve 'secondary education for all.'



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