

EDUCATION GOVERNANCE, POLITICS AND POLICY UNDER NEW LABOUR

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the political management of state schooling under New Labour from 1997-2010. The thesis considers and rejects two mainstream approaches to the analysis of New Labour's education strategy which characterise the New Labour education project as either a process of marketisation or as a symptom of a shift to a new governance through networks of diffused power. Instead, the thesis argues that the best general characterisation of New Labour's education strategy is as a centralising project which has increased the power and discretion of the core of the core executive over the education sector at the expense of alternative centres of power. The thesis proposes that the trajectory of education policy under New Labour is congruent with a broader strategy for the modification of the British state which sought to enhance administrative efficiency and governing competence. Changes to education strategies can then be explained as the result of changing social and economic contexts filtered through the governing projects of strategic political actors. The thesis argues that New Labour's education strategy was largely successful in terms of securing governing competence and altering power relations and behaviour in the sector despite continuing controversy over the programmatic and political performance of its education policies.

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Glossary of Abbreviations

ACSL	Association of College and School Leaders
ACSLB/A	Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Bill/Act
ATL	Association of Teachers and Lecturers
BSF	Building Schools for the Future
BTEC	Business and Technology Education Council
CPVE	Certification of Pre-Vocational Education
CSR	Comprehensive Spending Review
CTC	City Technology College
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DoE	Department of Education
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DSG	Dedicated Schools Grant
DSO	Departmental Strategic Objective
EAZ	Education Action Zone
EBP(M)	Evidence Based Policy (Making)
ECM	Every Child Matters
EGT	Endogenous Growth Theory
EIA	Education and Inspections Act
ERA	Education Reform Act
ESA	Education and Skills Act
ETS	Educational Testing Service
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GMS	Grant Maintained School
GNVQ	General National Vocational Qualification
GTC	General Teaching Council
IB	International Baccalaureate
KWS	Keynesian Welfare State
LEA/LA	Local Education Authority / Local Authority
LMS	Local Management of Schools
NAHT	National Association of Head Teachers
NAO	National Audit Office
NASUWT	National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers
NCSL	National College for School Leadership
NDPB	Non –Departmental Public Body
NPM	New Public Management
NUT	National Union of Teachers
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
OFQUAL	Office of Qualifications and Examination Regulation
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education
PFI	Private Finance Initiative
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PIU	Performance and Innovation Unit
PMDU	Prime Ministers Delivery Unit
PPP	Public Private Partnership
PSA	Public Service Agreement

Education Governance, Politics and Policy under New Labour

QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Agency
QCDA	Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency
SATS	Standard Attainment Tests
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SESI	School Effectiveness and School Improvement
SEU	Standards and Effectiveness Unit
SSAT	Specialist Schools and Academies Trust
SSFA	School Standards and Frameworks Act
TDA (S)	Training and Development Agency for Schools
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
TVEI	Technical and Vocational Education initiative
YPLA	Young People's Learning Agency

Introduction: Education Governance, Politics and Policy under New Labour

This thesis investigates the political management of state schooling under the three New Labour governments from 1997-2010. It aims to provide answers to the following questions:

- What policies have New Labour introduced?

A list of the major acts of legislation, policy and non-legislative initiatives introduced by New Labour between 1997 and 2010 is included in Appendix II.

- How should New Labour's education strategy be described?

Section 1 attempts to provide a better general characterisation of New Labour's education strategy than is currently available in the literature. This section considers and rejects two mainstream approaches to the analysis of New Labour's education strategy. Chapter 1 argues that the characterisation of New Labour's education strategy as a process of marketisation or commodification is inadequate since it relies on an unsophisticated state-market dualism. Chapter 2 rejects a general characterisation of New Labour's education strategy that regards recent institutional change as a symptom of a shift to a new governance through networks of diffused power. This narrative, I argue, does not fully capture the dynamic whereby power is transferred upwards to the core of the state despite the use of delegated governance forms. Chapter 3 argues that the best general characterisation of New Labour's education strategy is as a centralising project which has increased the power and discretion of the core of the core executive over the education sector at the expense of alternative centres of power.

- How should New Labour's education strategy be explained?

Section 2 of the thesis moves beyond the provision of an alternative narrative or description of New Labour education strategy and attempts to explain the origin and form of that strategy. Chapter 4 proposes that the trajectory of education policy under New Labour is congruent with a broader strategy for the modification of the British state. The explanation for New Labour's education strategy can then be located at the macro-political level in New Labour's overall governing project. The primary objective of New Labour's governing project is to enhance administrative efficiency and governing competence. Changes to education strategies can then be explained as the result of changing social and economic contexts filtered through the governing projects of strategic political actors.

- How should New Labour's education strategy be evaluated?

Section 3 of the thesis evaluates the success of New Labour's education and governing strategies. Chapter 5 argues that a rounded evaluation of these strategies should consider the success of government projects as well as the performance of individual policies. The chapter develops a typology of policy success and failure building on the work of Marsh et al. (Marsh and McConnell 2008 ; Marsh and Sharman 2009 ; Marsh and McConnell 2010) and Bovens et al. (Bovens, t'Hart et al. 2001 ; Bovens, t'Hart et al. 2006 ; Bovens 2010). This typology is used to analyse the New Labour governing project as a whole. The chapter argues that an evaluation of that project must recognise the governing dilemmas and weaknesses in the British state to which New Labour sought to respond. In Chapter 6, the framework for policy evaluation developed in Chapter 5 is applied to a study of New Labour's education policies, in particular the 'Standards Agenda' and the Academy schools programme. The chapter argues that New Labour's education strategy was largely successful in terms of securing governing competence and altering power relations and behaviour in the sector despite continuing controversy over the programmatic and political performance of its education policies.

Organisation of the thesis

The first section of the thesis comprises three chapters which review the existing scholarly literature on New Labour's education strategy and attempt to supply a general characterisation of that strategy. I consider two candidate accounts, both of which have claimed the approval of other scholars writing in this field. I refer to the first candidate as the educationist or marketisation narrative, which is discussed in the first chapter. According to this approach, the best general characterisation of New Labour's strategy for the political management of state schooling is as a process of marketisation, privatisation or commodification. The claim is that both the technique and the language of commercial enterprise have come to dominate state schooling to the extent that developments in the sector are best understood with reference to the market and to privatisation. Marketisation is held to occur through a combination of ideological commitment of politicians to the market and to neoliberal economic and social policies, the rise of New Public Management (NPM), and as a response to the pressures of globalisation and economic competition. This line of argument is widespread in the literature, as I demonstrate below. It is fair to describe it as the mainstream position within the field of education policy studies, especially among those academics who are employed by institutes or departments of education. I refer to the second candidate as the governance narrative and discuss it in the second chapter. This approach argues that sociological change and increasing complexity has seen a shift away from the bureaucratic top-down government of the past and towards a more collaborative, multi-agency network system of public governance wherein the state is an enabler or facilitator rather than a director of public policy. Though this approach is rarely explicitly defended in its original formulation, its basic tenets and concepts still tacitly inform some public administration research.

I regard both these attempts at a general characterisation of New Labour education strategy as unsatisfactory in a number of respects. First, I regard the marketisation narrative as descriptively inaccurate since it tends to overstate the extent to which private agency or market forces are allowed to affect policy decisions in education.

While they are increasingly present in education politics, I argue that non-public actors are recruited in the service of government objectives rather than setting the agenda themselves. Second, the marketisation thesis relies on an unsustainable dualism of state versus market. The relationship between the two is not a zero sum relationship so that any involvement of the private sector counts as the erosion of the state or vice versa. A straightforward state/market dualism lacks the sophistication to deal with the fact of an altered polity within which quasi-public institutions, delegated governance, quangos, agencies and public-private partnerships proliferate. Such an approach also fails to disaggregate the state satisfactorily, treating it as a single, unitary body rather than divided into core executive, officialdom, local government, departments and so on. I argue that the marketisation approach is the result of the dominance of sociology over political science in the field of education studies and suggest that alternative readings of New Labour's education policy can be produced by giving due attention to the political environment within which education policy is made.

The governance approach, which is the focus of chapter 2, has certain advantages over the marketisation narrative which demonstrate the value of applying political science theories and concepts to the study of education. The governance narrative pays attention to new kinds of actors and new means of service delivery in education policy. As such it does achieve the aim of moving beyond state/market dualism. As with the marketisation narrative, however, the governance narrative lacks descriptive purchase when applied to education policy. In line with my broader argument, I accept that new agents have been recruited to do state work, but I deny that these new agencies, delegated bodies, quangos and public-private partnerships are able to operate with autonomy from the core executive. Furthermore, I argue the governance narrative is innately apolitical since it locates the source of change in impersonal sociological or economic forces rather than in the conscious strategies of identifiable political actors. Increasing social complexity cannot in itself explain why public administration is re-organised. Such an explanation requires an account of how politicians interpret their context and why they choose any particular strategy to manage that context. I divide the

governance literature into two waves representing alternative ontological and epistemological approaches which employ common governance concepts. I develop a critique of the first wave of governance literature (see, for example Rhodes 1997) on the grounds that it tends to neglect a discussion of power relations or over-estimate the extent to which networks have become the most important policy device. I recognise that the second wave of literature (see, for example Bevir and Richards 2009) provides a worthwhile attempt to restore agency and ideas to the discussion, but ultimately reject its approach to the interpretation of British governance. The tendency of this literature to downplay the importance of the institutional context within which actors formulate strategies and beliefs that produce action makes it ultimately unsuitable as a candidate for a general definition of the New Labour education and governing projects.

The first section of the thesis concludes with a chapter which attempts to move beyond both the marketisation and governance approaches in order to develop an alternative narrative of the political management of education under New Labour. My central claim is that understanding education as a properly political phenomenon requires an appreciation of the broader governing project of New Labour and the changing shape of the British state. I argue that change in education is at least in part a symptom of broader trends and processes. Though education has some relative autonomy, it is strongly affected by developments elsewhere in the state. I present an account of education policy that locates the origins of change in both long and short term developments in British politics and the British state, as well as in processes internal to the educational field. The pattern of change that results is contingent on the interpretation of these dynamics by political actors and on the strategies they choose to address them.

The second main section of the thesis moves beyond the provision of an alternative narrative of the recent history of education policy. In this section, I attempt to explain the broader context and political strategies that inform New Labour's educational project. The source of change in education is located in developments both external and internal

to the education sector itself. Change in education is explained as the consequence of the interaction of multiple tendencies operating across different temporal and spatial scales. Long run changes in the social and economic context in which the British state operates present new challenges to governments and foster changing self-understandings of the role and function of the British state. Chapter 4 of the thesis identifies a number of long term trends in British politics seen as presenting problems for governments. Among these, I identify two as especially significant. First, the decline of trust in 'club government', the Westminster Model and the culture of deference (King 1975 ; Moran 2003). Second, the decline of the Keynesian Welfare State and the notion of management of demand as a central task of government. These two developments are held to pose dilemmas for state managers about the proper role and function of the British state. In chapter 4, I argue that two key consequences emerge from these long term tendencies. First, state managers have tended to retreat from 'high politics' in favour of the 'low politics' of public service delivery. Second, state managers have increasingly perceived a need for greater executive authority and have become less willing to spread power away from the central institutions of the British state (Bulpitt 1983).

Further specific features of New Labour ideology and its governing project are also relevant to the explanation of the political management of education. New Labour has developed a distinctive interpretation of these long-run trends in the social and economic context in which the British state is embedded, and developed a governing strategy accordingly. These trends have required New Labour to reassess its purpose and priorities resulting in a retreat from an active political economic strategy involving wealth redistribution especially through fiscal policy, and a corresponding prioritisation of public service delivery and implementation. New Labour has also, in common with some of its recent predecessor governments, adopted a constitutional ideology that favours governing from the centre. As such, New Labour in government has been pre-occupied with pathologies of departmentalism and has focused on building institutional capacity at the centre of government. The process of re-shaping the state in this way has been

made possible by the emergence of immediate windows of opportunity and expedited through the adoption of pragmatic tactical considerations. Windows of opportunity were provided by a confluence of economic and political circumstances which favoured the development of a centralising project. Among these were the strong parliamentary majorities New Labour enjoyed during all 3 governments; the inheritance of reformed institutions that favoured strong executive leadership; strong party leadership with security of office; weak opposition both inside and beyond the party; and strong economic growth allowing rising public service budgets. Many of these conditions became less applicable towards the end of New Labour's period in office as a result of recession, the change in leadership and the resurgence of political opponents, and it is no coincidence that the pace of change slowed markedly as these conditions changed during the third New Labour parliament. Pragmatic tactical considerations also played an important role, with New Labour making extensive use of an array of techniques in order to expedite the changes sought. In particular, techniques of New Public Management, delegated governance and discourses of evidence based policy were employed as means to the achievement of the overall project.

The third section of the thesis attempts to evaluate New Labour's strategy for the political management of education. Chapter 5 considers and ultimately rejects an attempt to provide a purely rationalistic or objective evaluation of the success or failure of New Labour's education policies. Instead, I draw on the work of Bovens et al. (2001) and Marsh and McConnell (2010) who have sought to emphasise the multiple dimensions of success and failure by which policies might be evaluated. This chapter argues that constructions of success and failure were always integral to the New Labour governing project. New Labour discourses consistently placed emphasis on evidence based policy making (EBPM) and programmatic success criteria in the evaluation of their policies. This chapter argues that this tactic helped to define policy success and failure in such a way as to marginalise competing sources of power and competing claims on the evaluation of New Labour policies. As such, New Labour was successful inasmuch as it succeeded in remodelling the education sector to become more

responsive to governmental initiative. From the point of view of policy makers, New Labour's political management of education can be regarded as successful.

Contribution of the thesis

The thesis aims to contribute to existing knowledge in the following areas. Firstly, the thesis offers a relatively novel approach to the analysis of education policy by bringing theories and concepts from the discipline of political science to bear on the study of education. The thesis treats education as primarily a political phenomenon. This represents a somewhat distinctive approach to the subject since the study of education policy is often either parochial – considering the relative merits of education policies without reference to any extra-educational context - or sociological in character. Secondly, the thesis generates an unorthodox reading of the pattern of recent educational change in England. The thesis does not invoke impersonal processes of marketisation or the shift to a new governance to explain educational change. Instead, I attempt to explain developments in education with reference to the changing shape of the British state and the strategies of identifiable political actors. As such, it is a properly political account of the character of education, since it explains change with reference to the strategies of conscious, reflective political actors operating in strategically selective contexts. I do not claim that the thesis offers a wholly original account of the trajectory of change in the British state. The characterisation of the state and of New Labour that I present draws on the work of other scholars such as Moran (2003), Richards and Smith (2002), Flinders (2008), Marsh (2008) Bevir and Rhodes (2006) and others. The novelty of my approach is that it uses an account of the disaggregated British state as a means to explain a further set of developments, namely New Labour's strategy for education policy. Thirdly, the thesis builds on an emerging literature on theorising success and failure in policy and applies these frameworks to a concrete case study of education policies. This section differs from existing treatments of the question by suggesting different criteria for adjudicating success and failure. By addressing success and failure from the perspective of policy-makers' projects to achieve administrative efficacy, I

introduce the possibility that success or failure could be judged according to the success of overall governing projects rather than in strictly programmatic terms.

Section 1: Defining Education Governance, Policy and Politics under New Labour

This first section of the thesis is concerned with providing the best possible general characterisation of New Labour's education strategy. As such, it attempts to describe that strategy as accurately as possible. I consider two existing attempts to provide such a description, both of which are ultimately rejected. Chapter 1 argues that the characterisation of New Labour's education strategy as a process of marketisation or commodification is inadequate since it relies on an unsophisticated state-market dualism. While New Labour has retained many of the policy instruments introduced by major Conservative reform programmes in the period 1988-1997, I argue that these have been used primarily to tighten central control over the education sector, rather than to cede control to the private sector. Chapter 2 rejects a general characterisation of New Labour's education strategy that regards recent institutional change as a symptom of a shift to a new governance through networks of diffused power. This narrative, I argue, does not fully capture the dynamic whereby power is transferred upwards to the core of the state despite the use of delegated governance forms. Chapter 3 argues that the best general characterisation of New Labour's education strategy is as a centralising project which has increased the power and discretion of the core of the core executive at the expense of alternative centres of power. This project has involved extensive re-agenting and institutional innovation which have sought to reduce the discretion of education professionals, local government and the education ministry over the formulation, implementation and evaluation of education policy. The secretary of state, Cabinet Office and the Prime Minister's Office have seen a corresponding increase in their discretion and autonomy. While this strategy has made use of private agency and often the language of the private sector, its primary motivation is administrative/managerial rather than ideological. The motivation for this is to ensure that the implementation of education policy is, as far as possible, governed solely according to the priorities of the

centre so that policy makers at the heart of government are not held accountable for decisions taken at lower levels in the policy hierarchy. As such, it is an attempt to constrain or limit the relative autonomy of education from the executive branch of the state.

Beyond states versus markets: a critique of the marketisation thesis

The academic literature on education policy is dominated by studies which concentrate on the displacement of hierarchical forms of governance by market forms. This chapter argues that studies of English secondary schooling that take this approach are reductive and misleading. By analysing recent developments in secondary schooling in England, this chapter aims to contest the claim that educational change under New Labour can be understood through the lens of marketisation. This chapter seeks to test the claim that recent changes in education policy and politics are best understood as the result of a paradigm shift to neoliberalism, the market, privatisation or commodification. By setting out an alternative and more accurate narrative description of New Labour's education strategy, this chapter seeks to lay the foundation for a better analysis and explanation, as well as a more appropriate evaluation, of that strategy.

First, I dispute the claim that there is an undisturbed continuity between Conservative and Labour governments post-1997. I argue New Labour's education strategy has been distinctive to some degree in terms of its instruments and to a greater degree in terms of its rationale. As such, I dispute the claim that New Labour simply marks an accommodation to the policy programme set out by its predecessor. Second, I claim that education policy under the Thatcher and Major governments was never wholly neoliberal, as Thatcherism and Thatcherite education policy also embodied notions of cultural restoration and contained a high degree of centralisation. Hence the marketisation thesis is not appropriate to either New Labour, or to its Conservative predecessors. Third I attempt to account for the tendency for academic educationists, education professionals and their representatives to equate recent reforms pejoratively with marketisation and neoliberalism. In addition to the lack of empirical purchase provided by the marketisation thesis, it also has weaknesses at a theoretical level. The main criticism made of the marketisation thesis besides its descriptive inaccuracy is that it operates with an unsophisticated conception of the relationship between state and market. Both state and market are typically treated as unitary bodies engaged in a zero-

sum contest for control of the education sector. I argue below that this does not give a solid conceptual foundation for an analysis of the politics of education and that a more sophisticated analysis which disaggregates both state and market is necessary. Theorists of governance would rightly point out that they have long since given up on such crude conceptions of the relationship between state and market. This is true of academic studies in the sub-disciplines of political science, public administration and policy studies. However, the governance-as-marketisation thesis is still commonplace in education studies (see e.g. (Gleeson and Husbands 2003 ; Ranson 2003 ; Trowler 2003 ; Chitty 2004 ; Pongratz 2006 ; Fitz and Hafid 2007 ; Hatcher 2008 ; Reay 2008 ; Ball 2009 ; Whitty 2009), hence I devote this chapter to a critique of that approach. However, the focus on the weaknesses of a state-market dualism is only intended as a ground-clearing exercise. In the remainder of this section of the thesis, I develop an argument that the best way of understanding change in secondary education under New Labour is in terms of a transfer of power from local government, professionals and officials to central government; not from the state to markets, the private sector or to networks of public and non-public agencies.

Narratives of marketisation

(i) Marketisation as neoliberalism

The notions of privatisation, commodification, marketisation and neoliberalisation form the language through which education researchers have sought to understand education policy and politics over an extended period (Cole 1998 ; Demaine 1999 ; Whitfield 1999 ; Noden 2000 ; Whitfield 2000 ; Whitty and Power 2000 ; Ball 2001 ; Tomlinson 2001 ; Gewirtz 2002 ; West and Pennell 2002 ; Whitty 2002 ; Gleeson and Husbands 2003 ; Tomlinson 2005 ; Hatcher 2006 ; West 2006 ; Ball 2007 ; Ozga and Lingard 2007 ; Ball 2008 ; Jones, Hatcher et al. 2008 ; Selwyn 2008 ; Ball 2009 ; Power and Frandji 2010) . According to many of these accounts, there is simply no meaningful deviation from neoliberal principles in education over at least the past 20 years. New Labour's education strategy should then be understood as an accommodation to, and

extension of the settlement reached following the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA). Advocates of this line of argument would point to the continuity of policy instruments through successive changes in government. The key market mechanisms are school choice and 're-agenting' (Jones 2003) i.e. the use of private and business actors as key agents in the transformation of education. The most important choice mechanisms are per capita funding, Local Management of Schools (LMS) and school choice or 'dezoning', i.e. the introduction of legislation allowing parents to express a preference for any school within or outside their Local Education Authority/Local Authority (LEA/LA) and the requirement that schools not refuse these expressions of choice until they have reached a pre-determined capacity. These changes were introduced as part of the 1988 ERA, replacing a system of greater LEA control of funding and neighbourhood allocation through catchment areas. Producer-client relationships in the quasi-market have been bolstered by the use of qualifications targets, league tables, standardised testing and inspections by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED; introduced in the 1992 Education Act), while the role of LEAs/LAs as providers of education has been curbed.

Since 1997, the New Labour government has modified the quasi-market in education through a series of policy measures. In particular, there have been attempts to increase diversity of supply aimed at extending the range of choice available to consumers through the introduction of specialist schools, academies and foundation/trust schools. This policy has been associated more with the New Labour government than with its predecessor, whose initiatives such as City Technology Colleges (CTCs) were much more limited in scope and scale. Undoubtedly re-agenting has also occurred, notably through increasing private ownership of schools (including academies), privatisation of functions which were previously undertaken by the LEA/LA and delegation of implementation to a range of quangos and non departmental public bodies (NDPBs). Crouch (2003), Ranson (2003), and Marquand (2004) interpret this as the decline of public education and the rise of corporatisation, or, in other words, a transformation or displacement of hierarchical modes of governance by market modes. New Labour is to be understood as continuing the neoliberal project begun by Thatcherism (and/or Jim

Callaghan's speech to Ruskin college in 1976 which was widely seen as an attempt to disrupt the post-war educational consensus (Ball 1990 ; Chitty 2009)), accepting both its rationale and its methods.

There is certainly no shortage of commentators who have offered this analysis of the New Labour project, often with the intention of disparaging that project or its claims to novelty (Hall 1998 ; Hay 1999 ; Heffernan 2000 ; Wickham-Jones 2000 ; Callinicos 2001 ; Coates 2001 ; Coates and Hay 2001 ; Wickham-Jones 2002 ; Shaw 2003 ; Jessop 2007 ; Needham 2007 ; Shaw 2007). Studies of the public services under New Labour often tend to be sympathetic to this approach. Marquand, for example claims that:

“There is no sign that Blair and his colleagues dispute their predecessors' assumption that the private corporate sector offers the sole model for the efficient management of public services” (Marquand 2004 60)

Unsurprisingly, this narrative has resonated with many analysts of education, perhaps reflecting their disappointment at the failure of New Labour to fundamentally revise the educational structures they inherited (Demaine 1999 ; Whitty 2002). Chitty and Dunford (1999) claim there is no significant break with the inherited strategy of the Thatcher era, reflecting both path dependency based on institutions, traditions and electoral factors as well as policy network and interest group conflict. This analytical perspective is associated with an implied or explicit critique of the putative dominance of the market over the state in education. The claim is that educational change since the 1960s has, on the whole, been socially regressive, legitimising the further entrenchment of middle class advantage using the rhetoric of market choice (Gewirtz, Ball et al. 1995 ; Reay and Ball 1997 ; Ball 2003 ; West 2006) . Some go as far as to argue that neoliberalism and the market have contributed to the hollowing out of the content of education, the persistence of the academic/vocational divide, the convergence of the major parties'

educational strategies, a “politics of secession” as advantaged groups disengage from the rest of society, a de-professionalisation of teachers and the decline of democratic control of public goods (Tomlinson 2005). Sally Tomlinson and Stephen Ball are perhaps the most prolific and forthright advocates of this position. For example, Tomlinson argues:

‘[E]ducation’ had become a prop for a global market economy, a competitive enterprise in which a rhetoric of ‘opportunities for the many’ covered the retreat of policies promoting social justice and equity ... education in England, under New Labour, had by 2000 been reduced to economic ends” (Tomlinson 2001 271-272)

Similarly, Ball states:

‘[Education is] now regarded primarily from an economic point of view. The social and economic purposes of education have been collapsed into a single overriding emphasis on policy making for economic competitiveness and an increasing neglect or sidelining (other than in rhetoric) of the social purposes of education’ (Ball 2008 11-12).

However, their approach is by no means atypical and similar arguments can be found in a vast array of publications, a selection of which are referenced above.

(ii) *Marketisation as privatisation*

Privatisation is regularly treated as an objective fact in studies of education. For example Ball, insists that “privatisation is a key strategy in education reform” (2009:84) and that it is crucial for education researchers to pay attention to:

new forms of outsourcing ...[as] more of the business of the education state is divested and ‘privatised’...There is a closed , circular logic, privatization, both endogenous and exogenous... which takes on a meta-policy status subsuming *almost every aspect of public services* under its rubric (2009 93 emphasis added).

Cribb and Ball (2005) move directly to a call for an ethical audit of the privatisation of education without pausing to demonstrate that such a development has occurred. Chitty (2009) devotes a chapter to privatisation in his 2009 *Education Policy In Britain* without considering whether the measures he discusses such as the Private Finance Initiative (PFI), academies and contracted out exam marking should strictly be classed as such. For Fitz and Hafid, “the privatisation of public education has been a major theme of the present Labour government’s education policy framework since 1997. Moreover, it has introduced policies that have facilitated the takeover by commercial and not-for-profit enterprises of state education” (2007 273). For Wrigley, “The government’s professed concern for inclusion is used as camouflage for increasingly neo-liberal policy...The privatisation drive is now a dominant feature of the English school system” (2009 5). It is fair to say that the notion that education has been privatized to some degree is firmly within the mainstream of research on education policy.

It is worth considering the use to which the term ‘privatisation’ is being put by these authors. There is a tendency in the literature to resist separating out the concepts of privatisation, marketisation, neoliberalism and New Public Management, so that the terms are often used interchangeably. Rather than being synonymous with marketisation, privatisation represents only on quite specific form that marketisation might take. The use of quasi-markets, consumer choice, purchaser-provider splits and

contracting out would then count as market-oriented techniques that stop short of privatisation. Cribb and Ball explicitly resist this distinction, preferring to label “all forms of organisation or practices which ‘mimic’ the private” as privatisation (2005 127). For Fitz and Hafid, privatisation involves 1) “the transfer of public money and/or assets from the public domain to the private sector” 2) “the provision of services by private corporations, enterprises, and institutions that were once provided by the public sector” 3) “a shift in the control of public resources and change in the structures through which public money is spent” (2007 275-276). Though this at least offers a definition of privatisation, it may not give the term any additional analytical purchase. Defining privatisation as “change in the structures through which public money is spent” seems too inclusive a definition. Furthermore, it is not necessarily clear whether a service such as education is being “provided” by “private corporations and enterprises”. I argue below that what matters about the involvement of new kinds of actors, from the private sector or otherwise, is which actors are powerful in the education field rather than who is present (see also Goodwin (2009)).

The conflation of marketisation with privatisation reveals a deeper weakness in the literature on the marketisation of education. This weakness stems from the tendency to resort to a straightforward dualism between the state and the market such that even publicly funded and publicly managed policy initiatives that “mimic the private” in some way are presented as evidence of privatisation in terms of a shift from the state to the market. I would argue that this kind of approach is inappropriate since it oversimplifies what is an increasingly congested and complex polity, where many mechanisms of governance cannot neatly be classified into one of two categories. For example, OFSTED is treated as a privatised body in Wrigley because it uses inspectors not employed by the public sector but working for OFSTED under contract (2009 5). This statement illustrates the limits of a state/market dualism, since an institution like OFSTED has features of both. Furthermore, I argue below that this approach leads to an overemphasis on the privatisation of education and a lack of emphasis on the political

centralisation of education. The politicisation of education arguably captures the direction of travel in education more correctly than privatization, as argued in chapter 3.

Re-interpreting the role of private agency in education

Stephen Ball represents one strand of educational research that is unapologetic about equating recent education reform with privatisation and the contamination of educational structures by the profit motive. For Ball, privatisation occurs at multiple levels. At the institutional level, Ball claims New Labour policies have presented opportunities for profitable private activity through the sale of professional services such as school improvement packages and turnaround services. Ball insists that this process must be understood in terms of commercial, for-profit agencies delivering public services for profit (2009). Ball's argument for privatisation hinges on the growth of a market in the sale of professional services by private 'edubusiness' to public sector organisations. But this market represents an accommodation to national policies, the content and criteria of evaluation of these professional services are determined centrally. Rather than providing evidence of a slippery slope to privatisation, it could be argued that 'edubusiness' acts as a mediating body between the state and schools in the service of government objectives. Edubusiness performs a function *on behalf* of the state and according to its priorities. On this interpretation, edubusinesses work to disseminate practices determined at the centre, 'translating' them and rendering them intelligible and achievable by education professionals. This reading of the role of edubusiness might lend further support to the notion that greater involvement of the private sector can have the net result of enhancing central capacity. Where the market in edubusiness services responds to government initiative in terms of the products offered, the private sector does not necessarily act as a lobby for further privatisation, but as a buttress to the autonomy of the centre. The private sector acts here as the servant, rather than the master, of the state. In line with the broader thesis, this kind of contractual, formalised relationship between policymakers and private-sector transmission of policy is preferable from a managerial point of view in comparison to relying on implicit, tacit rules which

govern the relationship between governments and officials, local authorities or professionals (Fitz and Hafid 2007 ; Gunter and Forrester 2009).

Ball goes on to argue that, at the national level, there is endemic privatisation since private educational consultancy is embedded in policy networks and delivery networks (2009 84, 89-90, 93) . As such, private consultancy becomes inseparable from the state. The private sector does not need to displace the state because it is incorporated into the state. Ball cites the fact that the Department of Education and Skills increased its spending on private consultants from £5 million to £22 million in 3 years [to 2006] “without considering using its own staff”¹ (2009 89). Ball is proposing that the use of private consultancy is one aspect of a re-articulation of the public/private relationship that collapses the divide or duality between the two. If this is the case, the language of privatisation may obscure more than it illuminates since it strongly evokes the notion of a public responsibility becoming ‘more private’ in character. The private consultancies and agencies discussed by Ball rely on the formal authority of the state to licence their activities, which would suggest they still depend on traditional hierarchical principles of organisation. Arguably, Ball is using the notion of privatisation in a non-standard way in order to capitalise on the emotive impact of the term. Nevertheless, Ball does want to emphasise the indispensability of the profit motive to explaining this phenomenon.

On closer examination of the examples Ball cites, there may be good reason to be more circumspect about equating the use of private consultancy with privatisation and commercialisation. While the use of private consultancy has undoubtedly increased dramatically in education and throughout the public sector, commercial influence has so far not extended to supply and commission, nor to the core business of teaching and learning, pedagogy and curriculum. Private agents are not given discretion over the evaluation of their own performance. In so far as private consultancy has been used, it is

¹ National Audit Office (NAO) reports state that 25% of the department’s consultancy contracts were awarded without being put out to tender (Ibid.)

most often for the purposes of audit according to evaluative criteria pre-determined by public bodies (Gunter and Forrester 2009). There may be benefits to government which have nothing to do with privatisation or profit, in contracting-out this kind of task rather than having the education sector evaluate its own activities. The use of private consultancy must be understood in the context of the bodies that would have provided policy advice in the past such as the 'public consultancy' offered by the departmental civil service. The resort to private consultancy accords with the generally anti-department ethos of government, which I discuss at length in chapter 4, and has the benefit to executive politicians of circumventing the usual route of self-evaluation and the supposed producer capture that characterises government departments. Use of private consultancy may be rendered more likely as a symptom of the loss of policy advice capacity in the civil service. Assuming that the kind of evaluation activity undertaken by private consultants needs to be done, the use of consultancy may be a necessary evil since there are few candidates for the job outside the private sector. Likewise, the use of private consultancy could represent a calculation of the best value for public money, which has the benefit of providing the appearance of impartiality, but which does not require the surrender of any discretion over the terms of reference (Bertelli 2008). If this appears to be an over-generous interpretation of the vast sums expended by New Labour on private consultancy, this is not the intention. The point is that to neglect the strategic calculations of real political actors risks making politicians dupes of forces beyond their control or comprehension. The state, and the reflexive individuals who comprise it, need not be viewed as the passive vessel of wider economic forces, constrained to use its powers to further the ends of profit-making organisations. Instead, the use of governance mechanisms which delegate authority to a range of public, quasi-public, private, voluntary and para-statal organisations can be viewed as a state strategy; one that is selected rather than forced upon the state by external pressures.

This should give good reasons to be wary of assumptions about the dominance of market principles such as profit-maximisation. These principles will confront educational

professional principles and the strategy of state managers on a daily basis at institutional level and in many cases, market principles will be traded off. As Ball notes elsewhere, there may also be other principles in play, whether these are philanthropic, religious or charitable (2008) . More work might be done on the motivations of school sponsors but neither Hatcher nor Ball find much evidence that the majority see school sponsorship as a springboard to for-profit privatisation (Hatcher 2006 ; Ball 2008)² .Major 'edubusiness' firms such as GEMS, Cognita and Edison³ have so far largely stuck to running schools in the independent sector and sale of management services to the state sector, while academy sponsorship has typically been provided by non-commercial charitable or faith organisations such as the Christian charity United Learning Trust, and the non-denominational charity ARK. Under the present organisation of the school system, philanthropy and religious concerns appear to be significantly more important than the profit motive in understanding private involvement in school sponsorship.

(iii) Marketisation as economic policy

A second common narrative of marketisation is that New Labour has reduced education to a form of industrial policy so that it has no relative autonomy from economic concerns and the needs of capital. So, for example, Hatcher argues that “the dominant purpose of marketisation [of education] is economic: to raise ‘standards’ to produce the future workforce that government and employers think the economy needs” (2010 2). Ball concurs, arguing that “[education reform] is focused almost exclusively on entrepreneurship, competition and economic development” (2005 216). There are a number of elements of this claim that require further elaboration. First, there is a difficulty in assuming that governments and employers have identical interests in any simple

² Although Ball does claim (2009 95) that the involvement of edubusiness in policy networks causes a policy convergence that is driven principally by these private actors as they push for greater “commodification and commercialisation of education”

³ Edison has become involved in running schools for profit on a small scale

sense. Second, this would raise a question of the mechanism by which employers (who are assumed to share interests in common as employers rather than having different and possibly rival interests) might transmit the needs of capital as a whole to politicians⁴. Third, it raises a question as to why politicians have taken such a circuitous route to the posited goal. Governments could feasibly introduce for-profit schooling, educational vouchers or allow employers to design curricula which would appear to be more efficient means of achieving the same goal. Fourth, this line of argument tends to share in the weakness of state/market dualism in the sense that it does not effectively differentiate between the constituent elements of either state or market. While under New Labour the Treasury has certainly been vocal about the value of education for fostering endogenous economic growth and the benefits of skills for employment in the knowledge economy (see, for example, DfES, HM Treasury et al. 2004 ; HM Treasury 2006), this agenda has by no means dominated New Labour education policy across all levels. The skills agenda has arguably had comparatively little impact on school-level education where the Prime Minister's Office, rather than the Treasury has been the most important agency of change. While the value of education in terms of human capital is an important New Labour theme, it does not appear to straightforwardly dominate concerns with raising school standards, tackling educational inequality, improving scrutiny and accountability over public money spent on schools or enhancing diversity in the school system and service user choice (DfEE 1997 ; DfES 2001 ; DfES 2005). Nor is it necessarily the case that the economic value of education is always or most often discursively emphasized by New Labour politicians in comparison to its other benefits (Kenny 2010).

New Labour and the legacy of Thatcherism

These narratives of marketisation suggest that education policy under New Labour should be understood as firstly, a continuation along an identical path to its Conservative

⁴ I discuss the possibility that the involvement of edubusiness and private consultancy in the policy process could provide such a mechanism below.

predecessors; secondly, as a process of marketisation and privatisation; and thirdly, as a strategy primarily driven by the needs of employers. However, there is some evidence that New Labour has produced a distinctive education strategy that not only develops its own means or mechanism, but operates according to a different rationale in comparison with its predecessors. In as far as this is true, New Labour can be seen as a 'post-Thatcherite' project, as Driver and Martell have argued (2006 2-4). That is to say that it marks an engagement with and response to the New Right and Thatcherism, but also offers a politics after and beyond Thatcherism that retains a genetic link to its social democratic, liberal and progressive pasts. Those who argue for a continuous process of neoliberal marketisation may point to the retention of the school inspection regime (the re-appointment of figures associated with Thatcherite reforms such as Chris Woodhead at OFSTED and Cyril Taylor at the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) are often cited as evidence of New Labour's acquiescence or agreement with the scathing attacks they made on the teaching profession). Similarly, the refusal to abolish grammar schools, the retention and extension of the quasi-market and the revival of the City Technology College (CTC) policy in the guise of academies are frequently cited as evidence of New Labour's failure to break with a claimed neoliberal trend.

However, it is also possible to find evidence of a distinctive New Labour approach which is not necessarily informed by public choice or free market principles. I do not intend to defend New Labour's chosen strategy against its many critics. Instead, I am attempting to point out that convincing critique would require more than the simple repetition of well-worn criticisms of the New Right, since many New Labour policies do not easily fit into that mould. These policies may be equally deserving of criticism, but this must be appropriate to its object, rather than re-heated arguments left over from the Thatcher years. For example, New Labour has massively increased spending on education⁵, and

⁵ Expenditure has risen from 4.4 % of GDP in 1999 to 6.1% in the last year of the Labour government , an increase of over £30bn DCSF (2009). Departmental Report 2009. London, DCSF.

initiated the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme which involves rebuilding or refurbishing all schools by 2020 at the cost of over £50bn (National Audit Office 2009). Policies such as the abolition of the assisted places scheme, the scrapping of nursery vouchers and measures to bring grant maintained schools back under local authority control and remove their funding advantages do not fit easily with the commodification thesis, especially since education professionals had championed all of these measures. The notion of facilitating quasi-market choice by increasing the diversity of school type is much more associated with Labour than with the Conservatives. New Labour has shown a greater willingness to intervene, even to a fault, and has couched its reforms explicitly in terms of social justice and community regeneration (Paterson 2003 ; Whitty 2009). This consistent focus on 'disadvantage' might be one way in which New Labour education strategy, or at least discourse, is distinctive (Fitz, Gorard et al. 2003). While there are many differences between the Conservative programme for CTCs and New Labour's academies (e.g. smaller demands made of sponsors, greater range of sponsors including non-private actors, greater involvement of LEAs albeit in a different role, much smaller number of schools planned and delivered) one of the principal differences was that the academy scheme was (at least originally) devised to address persistently low standards specifically in deprived urban areas. Similarly, the merging of the schools portfolio with children's services suggests that, far from being hostile to the 'education establishment' as successive Conservative governments undoubtedly were and are ((See, for example Cox and Dyson 1971 ; Cox and Boyson 1975 ; Dale 1989 ; Curtis 2009 ; Gove 2009 ; Gibb 2010) , some fractions of the leadership of New Labour must have shared the long-held belief of many researchers and practitioners that solutions to differential performance and equity issues can only be addressed with reference to the extra-educational context.

The difficulty of claiming continuity between Conservative and Labour governments or of claiming a simple linear process of neoliberalisation or marketisation since Thatcher is exacerbated by the fact that Thatcherite education reform contained competing ideological strands. On this reading, the marketisation thesis is not only unsuitable as a

general characterisation of New Labour's education strategy; it is also unsuitable to describe Thatcherite education strategy. For Barker (2008), the Conservative strategy, far from being driven by a mania for the free market, was an archetype of the 'command and control' model aimed at standardising national education provision. Ball (1990) and Dale (1989) argued persuasively that conflict and contestation between identifiable lobbies of cultural restorationists, new vocationalists, anti-progressives and free marketeers provide the explanation for the often uneasy compromise between centralizing tendencies alongside liberalizing tendencies, traditional values and modernisation in Conservative policy . There could be no better illustration of these tensions than the text of the 1988 Education Reform Act which enacted a quasi-market on the one hand, with the stated aim of freeing the system from the dead hand of government and allowing greater choice and diversity; while simultaneously introducing a highly prescriptive National Curriculum (for which there was no precedent in English education history) that ensured the content of schooling would be controlled to the last detail from Whitehall.

The distinctiveness of the New Labour education project

There appear to be some grounds for claiming that the principles of the New Right whether conceived as cultural restoration or free marketeering were not the only ones in play for New Labour strategists. For example, where the New Right had pilloried the 'education establishment' and disparaged 'progressive' teaching as part of an argument to restrict teacher autonomy⁶, New Labour was far less likely to invoke this type of rhetoric. At the risk of being over-generous to New Labour, its policies of workforce remodelling can be seen as a measure that shores up teacher professionalism rather than undermining it by enabling teachers to concentrate on their core business and by

⁶ This theme still features strongly in Conservative rhetoric , see for example Gove Gove, M. (2009). Speech to conference. [Conservative Party Conference Manchester](#).

codifying a distinction between professional and non-professional classroom roles (Training and Development Agency for Schools 2003). While the academies policy may have been sold as a free-market measure to take struggling schools out of the inefficient control of local authorities and inject them with the decisiveness and entrepreneurial zeal of the private sector, critics of the programme would do well to avoid taking this claim at face value. After all, the net effect of the academy policy is to transfer schools from local authority control to a direct relationship with the education department. In the context of a massive increase in school funding, including BSF, this might be a quite reasonable strategy on the part of government to ensure that the increases in funding are under departmental control given that ultimately, it will be held accountable for school performance. Placing vastly increased funds in the hands of schools and LEAs with a record of persistent weak performance may look like a poor deal from the perspective of the education department or the Prime Minister's Office. Instead, it is possible to propose a logic that would see academies as a means of ensuring that the extra investment made by governments is not diverted through the hands of ineffective or uncooperative local authorities with no record of improvement and which lack a strong democratic mandate to control such large swathes of public resource, or into the coffers of failing schools with falling rolls. Rolling back the frontiers of the state to allow the invisible hand to work its magic need not form any part of the rationale for a policy that exchanges greater central control for increased funding, and the completion of an extensive rebuild and refurbishing of the school capital stock.

New Labour's strategy of "money and modernisation" (Driver and Martell 2006 136) is markedly different from that of the Conservatives, who provided historically low levels of funding to education⁷. The increased budgets in themselves might be seen as representing a different approach to public services as compared to past governments. The actors involved did not regard themselves as following in the footsteps of their

⁷ See Tables 3, 3a, 3b. Although spending increases only began after 1999 and fulfilment of a manifesto commitment to stick to Conservative spending plans over this period.

predecessors. One Labour MP interviewed by Fitz and Hafid, described the difference between the two parties' approaches as follows:

I think perhaps the philosophical difference might be that we would regard the market as a good servant and a very poor master in the delivery of public services ... to make sure that you get the best possible 'bang for your buck' in terms of putting additional public sector taxpayers money into providing those services (Labour MP interviewed in Fitz and Hafid 2007 284-285)

The quotation expresses two important points. First, the explicit recognition that these services will continue to be funded by public money and that the money available to public services will increase. Second, there is an implicit connection drawn between increased investment in public services and control over them in order to ensure value for money. The strategy for achieving value for this additional funding had two main elements. First, extra resources provided to public services must be made accountable through the use of targets and Public Service Agreements (PSAs) - a view Driver and Martell attribute to the Brown/Treasury axis (2006 132). Secondly, there must be greater diversity, choice and user autonomy in public services (a view attributed to Blair)⁸. These principles can comfortably be explained without reference to the New Right or Thatcherism⁹. Although Driver and Martell suggest these principles may be

⁸ Arnott and Menter make a similar distinction with the PM axis focusing on diversity and choice, and the Treasury focusing on remodelling of the teaching profession Arnott, M. and I. Menter (2007). "The Same but Different? Post-devolution Regulation and Control in Education in Scotland and England." European Education Research Journal 6(3): 250-265.

⁹ As Driver and Martell note Driver, S. and L. Martell (2006). New Labour. Cambridge, Polity.

, left social theorists with some influence in intellectual wing of New Labour such as Beck, Giddens and Etzioni were developing criticisms of outmoded bureaucratic forms distinctively separate from the New Right. It could plausibly be argued that NL public service reforms drew on their notions of greater participation,

incompatible, the two are only potentially in tension with one another. Part of the skill of the key actors in New Labour was to reconcile the two elements. For example, the Blairite commitment to new school models was always raised within a context of a standards agenda and strong accountability mechanisms that reinforced the Treasury PSA framework. Likewise, the new model schools that were introduced in the name of greater user choice and diversity relied on centrally controlled budgets that tended to enhance the scrutiny and checks available to those bodies concerned with receiving the best possible value for increased public spending.

Again, I do not intend to try to vindicate New Labour's education strategy here. The point is that, regardless of the value or outcome of New Labour policies, they are informed by rationales other than those employed by their predecessors, and they do more than reproduce their priorities. It is unsatisfactory to offer neoliberalism or marketisation as a general characterisation of New Labour's education strategy principally because at least a substantial part of New Labour's motivation was the enhancement of managerial and administrative efficiency. This also played a role in motivating the Conservative reforms alongside ideological conviction and a drive for cost efficiency and a smaller state. In both the Conservative and New Labour cases, the motivation behind education reform should not be reduced to a commitment to neoliberal ideology. The observed continuity between the policy instruments used by Labour and Conservative governments speaks to the persistence of a governing project based around centralisation and managerial effectiveness which is largely separate from ideological battles over the proper role of state versus market. This continuity can then be seen to reflect shared interpretations of the dilemmas facing British governments and the necessary steps to address these over an extended period of time. If this alternative account of some of New Labour's education policies is at all reasonable, it serves to emphasise the weaknesses of the attempt to explain education politics through a single

accountability, informed choice, user autonomy and especially the erosion of expert and professional privilege rather than New Right discourse.

narrative. While there may be elements of an accommodation with neoliberalism, this cannot provide the whole story and the more 'inconvenient' elements of the recent history of education politics that do not fit the narrative should be given due attention rather than ignored.

Explaining educationists hostility to New Labour's education strategy

As the above discussion has aimed to demonstrate, there is a mainstream argument in education research that suggests recent change in education policy and politics represents an undisturbed process of neoliberalisation and usurpation of the state by the market. In this section, I consider why academic educationists have held fast to the state-market dualism. This dualism as discussed in the education policy literature often carries echoes of the Westminster model and Fabian socialism in that it valorises the state over the market. As a consequence, it can often tend to overstate the degree to which the state is democratic and accountable, and to overstate the extent to which the state and market represent incompatible logics. I argue that the marketisation narrative, underpinned by a fairly rigid state-market dualism represents a response by education professionals and associated intellectuals to the governing projects of successive governments since the 1970s. My argument here partly rests on a claim that the education establishment is responding to an attempt to dismantle the institutions, traditions and cultures which allowed it to operate with considerable autonomy and discretion for much of the post-war period and before.

The threat to the role of education professionals

If the arguments of the 'education establishment' are hyperbolic in relation to privatisation and commercialisation, their impression of the emergence of new, more contractual relations of accountability are less so. I propose that it is the New Public Management (NPM) elements of recent educational change that explain some of the ire of educationists, rather than a perhaps spurious 'slippery slope' to privatisation. For Marquand (2004), the spread of NPM across the public services since Thatcher marked

the transformation of the 'monarchical' state into an agent of marketisation¹⁰. He contends that this has three aspects. Firstly, a linguistic aspect which involves increased use of the language of private enterprise in public services such as 'customers', 'purchasers' and so on¹¹. Secondly, audit, which Marquand insists involves a rejection of the value or even existence of the professional ethic. Thirdly, centralisation, a tendency which is said to rely on the claim that the central state had the right and duty to remodel civil society from the top down (2004 59). On Marquand's account, greater centralisation and prescription on the part of central government paradoxically threatens the 'publicness' of public services such as education. In short, it is the encroachment of the state on areas where professionals once had autonomy that presents the greater threat to educationists and their academic counterparts, rather than the market *per se*.

Academic educationists and education professionals have seen NPM-style reforms in education as corrosive of the public sector ethos, overly punitive, damaging to the professional standing of the teaching profession, and undermining to teachers' motivation. For some, this accountability regime attempts to exert Panoptic, self-disciplinary power over education professionals by removing trust and autonomy from them, and by de-skilling teachers (Harris 1997 ; Gleeson and Husbands 2003 ; Ranson 2003 ; Helgoy, Homme et al. 2007). As such, the thrust of the strategy is to substitute professional expertise by technocracy. This would clearly represent a threat to the status of education professionals and the educationist literature is often marked by a sense of a profession under attack. However, there is a case to be made that this diagnosis depends on a romanticised view of the esteem in which the teaching profession was held in a previous era. For example, Lawn claims that: "Threats and regulation define the English system as once did praise and a language of partnership" (Lawn 1999 105).

¹⁰ It should be noted that Marquand and I use the term 'marketisation' differently. For Marquand, this concerns the erosion of a distinctly 'public' style of practice on the part of public institutions.

¹¹ A point which is also discussed at length in the Nuffield review of 14-19 education which also expresses a fear that this may lead to undermining 'publicness', the public service ethos, and professionals' self-understanding. See also Clarke (2007) and Newman (2007).

It might reasonably be argued that teacher autonomy has always been partial and has not extended to education strategy or control over evaluation of its own activities. Sociologists such as Larson (1977) and Etzioni (1969) have classed teaching as a semi-profession, rather than a profession proper precisely because of this insecure jurisdiction and autonomy. Arguably the incomplete autonomy and professionalism of teachers should be regarded as historical, rather than a novel development arising from NPM-style reforms.

Hostility to New Labour's education strategy may not be universal, but it is reasonable to regard opposition as the mainstream position in education policy research. The source of the objection is often the remodelling of the education sector along the organisational lines common to the private sector. This involves the use of much more rigid accountability procedures, greater standardisation of procedure, the normalisation of educational practice, use of centralised performance targets, and closer monitoring and inspection¹². The response from educationists has been highly critical (McNeil 2000 ; Barker 2005 ; Cribb and Ball 2005 ; Tomlinson 2005 ; Harris 2007 ; Mansell 2007 ; NUT 2007 ; Barker 2008 ; Ball 2009 ; Mansell 2009 ; Pring, Hayward et al. 2009 ; Woolley 2009). Whitty, commenting on a special issue of the *Oxford Review of Education* on New Labour's education legacy, notes that the issue gives a "predominantly negative impression" of New Labour's record and "over half the papers take an overwhelmingly negative view of New Labour's achievements" (2009 273) (see, for example, (Hatcher 2008 ; Reay 2008). The same could also very easily be said of the papers in a recent special issue of *Education Management Administration and Leadership* (see , for example (Ball 2008 ; Ranson 2008). Whitty claims that New Labour's critics choose to

¹² The different policy style in contemporary education is in marked contrast to the governance model favoured in the 1950s and 60s, when, for example, comprehensivisation was achieved without legislation or compulsion on the basis of non-statutory circular to local authorities 10/65. As I argue elsewhere, the 'high water mark years of top-down bureaucracy involve far less prescription than contemporary education governance.

refer to “misdirected expenditure and ideological confusion” (2009 274) to explain its failure and choose to ignore what might otherwise be regarded as qualified successes, such as reducing the number of schools with less than 30% of cohort achieving the GCSE benchmark of 5 passes at grades A*-C including English and Maths (5A*-CEM) from around 1600 in 1997 to 638 in 2007. Whitty also remarks on the tendency to downplay aspects of the New Labour strategy in education that have long informed the wish list of these same left-leaning educationists. For example, improved teacher pay and classroom support, vast improvement of IT infrastructure (Selwyn 2008), huge investment in school building stock through BSF, and a real terms increase of 70% in expenditure on schools and early years (2009 274).

The Nuffield Report (Pring, Hayward et al. 2009) represents a fair summary of contemporary educationist opinion in the England on 14-19 education. What is most striking about it is how far its understanding of the policy realm lies from the vision pursued by policymakers. Its recommendations describe a wish list for much of professional opinion in the sector, but remains firmly outside the mainstream of policy discussion in its call for a unified qualifications system, introduction of licence to practice, parity of esteem for vocational qualifications, a broader range of success indicators and reduction of the use of impenetrable management speak in policy documents. In governance terms, the report calls for a stronger professional voice, greater localization of decision making and genuine independence for bodies responsible for assessment, quality assurance, qualifications and curriculum- reflecting the belief that centrally driven policy initiatives have compromised the credibility of delegated bodies and excluded professionals.

It is central to my overall thesis that the developments which the Nuffield report criticises are precisely the intention of the reforms. The recruitment of delegated bodies as dependent executors of centrally determined initiatives and the curtailment of professional autonomy and credibility as an alternative source of policy are both fundamental to the education strategy of New Labour. Education professionals have

good reasons for wishing to resist this since it tends to compromise their status, autonomy and self-understanding. Their use of the rhetoric of privatisation and commodification represents an attempt to articulate a counter-argument which asserts the value of 'publicness', including the public service ethos and greater professional esteem and autonomy. However, it is an imprecise criticism of the pattern of educational reform under New Labour. The real threat to 'publicness' is not the rolling back of the state in favour of the market, but the encroachment of the state on areas which previously held a degree of autonomy. This is the phenomenon that Moran describes as the rise of the 'regulatory state' (Moran 2003), but it is crucial to the broader case I am making that this is primarily a state strategy rather than a surrender to small government and more market. As such, the marketisation narrative and the state-market dualism that underpins it may have some value ideologically or rhetorically, but the market is not the real source of the grievances held by educationists.

The lack of political science perspectives in education studies

There is a further dimension to the educationist hostility to New Labour's education strategy that is specific to the academic study of education. This concerns the relative absence of the discipline of political science from education as an area of knowledge¹³. Other disciplines such as philosophy and especially sociology are dominant in the field and this has important implications both for the level of analysis, the choice of issues to study and the conclusions drawn by scholars. As Raab observes, political science has not developed a sub-field in the politics of education leading to a weak treatment of structure-agency and micro-macro issues in education policy studies (Raab 1994 19-24). As Harris et al. concede, the study of education as a political phenomenon has become "unfashionable, given the propensity for the sociological gaze to concentrate, as it has, on studying down." (Harris, Delamont et al. 2010 1) . The dominance of sociology

¹³ For example, a recent special issue of the Oxford Review of Education Various (2009). "Special Issue on New Labour's Educational Lethe Disciplines of Education Research." Oxford Review of Education **35**(5).

on the disciplines of education research includes articles on history, sociology, philosophy, economics, psychology and geography but does not mention political science.

over politics in education tends to downplay the importance of the institutional environment within which education policy is made and implemented. Whitty detects a failure to appreciate the dilemmas presented by the institutional setting that New Labour faced and “the realities of the policy making process” (2009 273) . This could certainly be traced to the general lack of engagement with political science literatures that emphasise the constraining role of structures and institutions, the inertial tendencies that militate against radical transformation and the requirements of statecraft and *realpolitik* that politicians confront in making policy. The resort to state-market dualism can be explained as the result of indifference in education studies to important changes in the British state over the past 20 years that have implications for the conduct of education policy. Education does not operate in a vacuum and its political character should not be neglected. As Dale points out, education is not unique as a policy area and can be studied through policy analysis tools developed in other areas. Furthermore, studies in education politics need to include the state as a set of institutions with an effect on education as well as including civil society or the market (1994 32-38) Much of the utopianism and disenchantment of educationist critics of New Labour arguably stems from the neglect of these constraints which inform the strategic choices of political actors.

Conclusion: Privatisation or politicisation?

This chapter has argued that there is reason to doubt that the recent story of educational governance is one of ever-deepening marketisation. The marketisation narrative has three principle weaknesses. Firstly, it lacks descriptive accuracy when applied to the study of education policy under New Labour and even under the Thatcher governments. It cannot account for the full range of policies pursued, and it relies on a very inclusive conception of what it means for a public service to be privatised. The “money and modernisation” strategy of New Labour in public services was accompanied by an energetic and interventionist restructuring of the administration of public services. The prominent role of the core executive in this process brings into question claims about the privatisation of education. Far from the private colonisation of tasks once undertaken

solely by the state, recent education policy can be viewed as a re-assertion of the dominance of central government by different means. Education strategy under New Labour might be more accurately characterised as a disciplining of the old institutional sites of power to central control, as Bache (2003) and Clarke and Newman (1997) have claimed. Bache, for example, found that a range of New Labour measures in the field of educational governance had enhanced central control and power asymmetries rather than power being delegated downwards to schools or out to the private sector. I turn to this theme in more depth in the next chapter as part of a broader critique of the notion that the state is losing the capacity to direct public services. Secondly, it relies too heavily on repeating the criticisms made of Thatcherite education policy and neglects the distinctive features of New Labour ideology and strategy that inform the trajectory of policy. Thirdly, there is an analytical problem in that the marketisation narrative relies on invoking a dualism between state and market that lacks the nuance and sophistication to make sense of a British polity that is far more complex. To propose that control of education has passed from the state to the private sector does not do justice to the power relations and the ensemble of structural and institutional factors involved.

In contrast to the marketisation narrative, I emphasise the politicisation of education under New Labour in the remaining chapters of this section. Even if private involvement in educational policy networks continues to increase, it seems likely that the centre has sufficient resources at its disposal to avoid a serious challenge to its authority in the near future. Private agents involved in school management have not gained discretion over the content, objectives or evaluation of their own activities – these continue to be determined by formally powerful agents within the core executive. On this interpretation, it is central government, rather than the market that fills the void left by a shrinking role for local government, the civil service and professionals. While power is transferred away from these institutions through the measures described above, this power is shifted upwards to central government, not outwards to market and private actors. Furthermore, it is worth repeating that those who discuss the privatisation of state education (e.g. Ball 2009) are consciously invoking a ‘slippery slope’ argument. The

empirical evidence for the usurpation of the state by the market is weak in the case of education. As Hudson points out, any tendency towards privatisation or marketisation has been accompanied by increasingly prescriptive central regulation over educational outputs, curriculum and evaluation (Hudson 2007 270). The secondary education system is still free, universal, funded and managed almost entirely by the state. The state also retains decisive control over everything from admissions and curriculum to teacher training and pedagogy.

The chapter has aimed to move the discussion of education policy and politics beyond a simple state-market dualism. In particular, the focus has been on attempting to move beyond a model which mistakenly extrapolates from the introduction of choice and re-agenting to the subordination of the state to the market. The alternative approach I offer is to root a general characterisation of the New Labour educational project in the specific features of the British state, its particular institutions and history. This is an attempt to develop an account of New Labour education strategy that is primarily political, rather than sociological or economic. On this understanding, the re-agenting of education politics emerges not as a response solely to the failures of collectivism or the post-war consensus, nor as a result of pressure from employers or edubusinesses, nor as the product of British politicians' faith in the free market to deliver efficiency and justice, but rather in response to deeper weaknesses in the British state with a much longer history. If this account is sustainable, those who lament the dismantling of the 'social democratic' post-war education settlement in recent years are misguided since it is not necessarily the values of collective provision, the role of the state or equality of opportunity that are at stake. Instead, the preferred strategy of key New Labour actors in education and elsewhere can be seen to reflect and attempt to resolve a crisis of both the institutions and the guiding traditions of British politics.

Beyond the first and second waves: A critique of the governance approach

In the previous chapter, I presented arguments against the tendency of education researchers to view recent policy change through the lens of marketisation. In particular, I have focused on attempting to move beyond a model emphasises the subordination of the state to the market. In this chapter, I consider a second approach to the question of how best to understand recent changes in the character of the English education state and the British state more broadly. This approach attempts to build explanations of recent political dynamics by broadening the range of objects of study beyond the formally powerful institutions of government to include a multiplicity of non-state actors and politically important, but previously under-explored, relationships between these actors and those more usually associated with public administration and political science research. This general strategy has come to be known as the governance approach. However, the term governance is potentially problematic since it is often defined and applied fairly broadly and imprecisely. Following Dryzek and Dunleavy, governance concerns “the production of collective outcomes (in the context of public problems) that is not controlled by centralized authority” (2009 140). For Kjaer, governance in this tradition means tracking and explaining institutional change in the public sector, or simply “a vogue word for reforming the public sector” (2004 4). Alternatively, governance is “rule by and through networks” (Bevir and Richards 2009 3). Due to the range and variety of studies that appeal to the concept of governance, there is some scepticism over the value and utility of the term as a description of a distinctive approach to the study of political phenomena. It is difficult to stipulate a clear mutually acceptable definition of the term. Kjaer, for example, describes at least four non-overlapping schools of governance within political science and international relations alone (Kjaer 2004), while Moran has claimed that governance may be just a ‘celebrity concept’: a fad that adds little to our understanding of politics (Moran 2009 982). Pierre and Peters provide an apt characterisation of the status of governance in political science, remarking that

governance is a “proto-theory...a set of observations looking for a more comprehensive theory” (Pierre and Peters 2000 7). As this claim would suggest, the term remains somewhat nebulous, but the core claim that unites governance approaches at least within the field of public administration is that:

The decision-making power of public administrators or formal government diffuses outwards to be exercised also by interest groups, non-governmental organizations, private businesses, research institutes, charities, professions and academics (Dryzek and Dunleavy 2009 141)

In general terms, the shift in focus away from government to governance reflects a widely-held belief that a sophisticated understanding of politics must transcend state-market dualism (Stoker and Chhotray 2008). Instead, political scientists must recognise that governance is organised not solely by hierarchy, nor solely by markets, but also by networks. Politics, then, is conducted through the steering of a plurality of state and non-state agents in networks across various levels¹⁴.

As such, the governance approach can be seen as a candidate for an alternative narrative of educational change in England that moves beyond marketisation. The governance approach appears to have certain advantages over marketisation as a general characterisation of New Labour education strategy since it is premised on the

¹⁴ This phenomenon may also be referred to as ‘new governance’, following Rhodes Rhodes, R. A. W. (1996). "The New Governance: Governing without Government." *Political Studies* 44(4): 652-667.

and Bevir and Trentmann Bevir, M. and F. Trentmann (2007). "Consumption and Citizenship in the New Governance" in *Governance, consumers and citizens*. M. Bevir and F. Trentmann. (Ed.) Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.

among others. ‘Governance’ is then used as a broader term to describe configurations of governing arrangements that include steering of multi-agent networks, but also other modes of co-ordination including markets and hierarchies.

disaggregation of institutions and structures. As a result, the governance approach should present a more nuanced and sophisticated analysis which moves beyond a straightforward state-market dualism to grasp the dynamics of educational change more precisely. In this chapter, I critically review some of the attempts to develop governance theories, with particular reference to the British state. The chapter reviews the literature on governance, dividing this literature between first wave or orthodox governance theorists and second wave theorists who have tackled similar problems, but challenged the first wave from a social constructivist perspective. I consider the relationship of the governance approach to alternative ways of understanding British politics such as the Westminster Model or the marketisation narrative. I discuss how political scientists have sought to conceptualise changing relations of political power and responsibility and how they have sought to re-articulate the public-private and state-society divide. The treatment of governance theories given in this chapter is intended to address two of my three main research questions. I begin the chapter by discussing the value of the governance literature for developing a more accurate description of New Labour's education strategy. I argue that the governance approach is useful as a means of sensitising research to the phenomenon of re-agenting whereby state work is done by a new configuration of actors. The value of governance theories is in their recognition of the existence of a differentiated polity rather than a unitary state (See, for example, Bevir and Rhodes 2008). Hence, governance approaches are helpful in the limited sense of moving the debate on from the state-market dualism typical of the marketisation narrative. However, the governance literature embodies a number of empirical and analytical weaknesses that ultimately make it unsuitable as the basis for a general characterisation of the New Labour education project.

Governance theory and education

As discussed in the previous chapter, education research has generally been slow to incorporate concepts and theories derived from political science into its analysis of

education policy and politics¹⁵. With few exceptions (though see Adnett and Davies 2003 ; Hudson 2007 ; Ball 2008 ; Gunter and Forrester 2009), the concept of governance and related concepts such as policy networks have been little used in analyses of British education. Where this has occurred, it has typically been in the form of comments on the advance of market actors, language and logics into the educational field. At best, studies of education policy and politics have adopted a version of the governance-as-marketisation approach which explains recent changes in education policy and institutions as a substitution of the state by neoliberal market principles and actors. Arguments about the decline of the state and the rise of the market made by researchers in this field are often presented as if these claims were not contentious. In these cases, researchers claim that the public domain has ceased to monopolise education and that market actors have moved on to this abandoned terrain (Power and Whitty 1999 ; Gewirtz 2002 ; Chitty 2004 ; Tomlinson 2005 ; Fitz and Hafid 2007 ; Ball 2009). However, there are some analysts of education who have sought to grapple with the same broad issues that have driven governance studies. While this work may not generally share the vocabulary of governance, it deals with similar problems such as the maintenance of efficiency, quality and governability given new public service management techniques and new agents. As such, concepts developed by political scientists may be usefully applied to studies of education politics and policy

Ball detects a nascent interest in governance issues in education policy research, even remarking on “a ‘governance turn’ in education policy studies” (2009 537) in his editorial for a recent issue of the *Journal of Education Policy*. Ball recognises a common concern with ‘new forms and modalities of the state’ (ibid.) in the otherwise diverse papers published in that volume. However, the apparent turn towards studying the shift from

¹⁵ A recent special issue of the Oxford Review of Education Various (2009). "Special Issue on New Labour's Educational Lethe Disciplines of Education Research." Oxford Review of Education 35(5).

on the disciplines of education research includes articles on history, sociology, philosophy, economics, psychology and geography but does not mention political science.

government to governance might be more accurately described as a turn towards 'governmentality', or rather a continuing concern with governmentality and the ideas of Foucault which have long been firmly within the mainstream of education policy research. Amid the papers on school health policy (Vander Schee 2009), quality assurance processes (Reid 2009) and professional performativity (Perryman 2009), there is relatively little evidence that the authors see themselves as responding principally to the governance theories developed in political science. I would argue that what Ball is observing is the capacity of governance theories (with which he does engage directly in his own work) to shed light on otherwise apparently unrelated issues in the sub-field. The studies Ball discusses might be related to each other through governance theories by an external observer, but they do not really represent a 'turn' towards those theories by education researchers, since this is not a deliberate engagement on the part of these researchers. Nonetheless, Ball's claim does validate the more general point that governance theories in the political science sense can provide useful concepts and frameworks for thinking about diverse issues in education policy.

However, governance approaches are limited and cannot provide a satisfactory alternative narrative of New Labour's education project. The weaknesses of governance approaches are both empirical and theoretical. At the empirical level, many governance approaches risk over-interpreting the rise of a differentiated polity as a fundamental shift in power relations. This chapter argues that the presence of new political actors and new modes of political action are compatible with a centralising state project. They do not necessarily entail a diffusion of political power among these new agents. At a theoretical level, governance approaches have tended to downplay the role of political agency in explanation. Instead, they have often invoked overarching narratives of sociological or economic change in order to explain the rise of new governance forms. The second wave, or decentred, governance literature breaks with this approach to explanation and prioritises agency and contingency in its radical constructivist critique of the first wave. However, there are a number of unresolved epistemological and ontological issues with

the decentred approach as presented by its leading advocates. These ultimately render it unsuitable as an alternative means of conceptualising power in the English education state that is capable of transcending state-market dualism and providing descriptive and theoretical purchase on recent dynamics in the sector. The next chapter attempts to develop an alternative narrative of New Labour's education strategy as a fundamentally centralising, executive-driven project which neither marketisation nor governance approaches can adequately describe.

The rise of the governance concept

The governance concept as an organising perspective for the study of public administration emerged with the 'governance turn' in the 1990s. This involved attempts to understand a transformed relationship between the state and civil society whereby non-government agents are increasingly involved in policy. Governance analysts such as Kooiman (1993), Marsh and Rhodes (1992), Scharpf (1999), Rhodes (1996), Borzel (1998), Kickert (1997) and Klijn and Koppenjan (2000) attempted to move beyond accounts which posit a simple displacement of hierarchical modes of governance by the market. Instead, they have described a complex, changing pattern of overlapping and co-existing modes of governance.

Hierarchy, market and network

Governance theorists were concerned with capturing the changing nature of political power in an era of ever-increasing complexity and diversity. Different styles or modes of governance (i.e. collective pursuit of desired public objectives through a variety of techniques) were seen to emerge in response to these broader changes. The typology of hierarchy, market and network, borrowed from organisation studies, provides an interesting heuristic for analysing these processes by describing a series of ideal-type modes of governance. The hierarchical mode of governance is characterised by a high degree of central control over policy design and outcomes; it is organised according to institutionalised bureaucratic rules and active interventions by the central executive. Within a market mode of governance, outcomes are spontaneously generated by private

competitive decisions, and there is no co-ordination of outcomes in advance. Within a network mode, public and private agents interact to create co-operation and consensus with “significant autonomy from the state” (Rhodes 1997 15; Marsh 1998 ; Marsh, Richards et al. 2003 ; Hartley 2007). Networks may include actors from across government, from charitable or voluntary groups, from commercial and non-commercial interest groups, professions, media and consultancy firms¹⁶.

In some formulations, the rise of network governance was understood as an epiphenomenon occurring as a consequence of other processes. Network governance was held to represent an adaptation to a new environment for the conduct of governing. This new environment was the result of greater complexity and autonomy in societal subsystems which rendered them unsuitable for governing by a single logic. The objectively changed conditions in which governance occurs produced a lack of ‘reach’ for government instruments. These tendencies were understood to be accelerated through pressures for competitiveness in an interdependent or globalised world, technological change, the shift from Fordist to post-Fordist production or from welfare states to competition states (See, for examples Jessop 1995 ; Castells 1996 ; Jessop 1997 ; Cerny and Evans 2004 ; Bang 2008)) .

The governance approach was also associated with a number of analytical claims that went beyond the observation of the emergence of the network form. Two important claims concerned the effect of the emergence of networks on state capacity, and the consequences of governance by networks for democracy. In relation to the first, some governance theorists connected the emergence of network forms to a ‘hollowing out of the state’ or a reduction of the state’s capacity to achieve its policy objectives (see Rhodes (1996) for the classic statement of this position; see also, Foster and Plowden (1996)). In relation to the second point, some governance theorists argue that the delegation of political authority which constitutes the process of governance represented

¹⁶ See, for example, Ball (2008) on the composition of education policy networks

a challenge to traditions of representative democracy and accountability (for example , Skelcher (2000), but see Flinders (2008), for a counter-argument).

In the remainder of this chapter, I analyse and challenge the above set of claims, which I associate with a 'first wave' of governance theory. Governance concepts, I argue are useful in moving beyond a state/market dualism and in disaggregating the various institutions involved in the contemporary British polity. As such, they represent an advance on the approaches typical to education policy studies that I described in the previous chapter. My central criticism of the first wave is its tendency to regard network governance as a rational adaptation to a set of objectively changed circumstances for the conduct of politics. This apolitical and deterministic approach tends to deny the agency of political actors, who are reduced to a minor role in implementing the necessary shift from government to governance without initiative of their own. The narrative offered in the next chapter differs from the governance approach in that I treat the strategically informed governing projects of identifiable political actors as important causes of new governance forms. In my analysis, the governing project of addressing historical weaknesses in the British state, strengthening the centre of government and overcoming inertia are among the most important dynamics. As a result, I aim to provide a more explicitly political account of changes in styles of governing. This account emphasises that impersonal sociological or economic forces impact upon political practice only via the strategic actions of political actors. As such, political actors' strategies must provide part of the explanation for any change.

Governance in the study of British politics

For scholars of British politics, the governance turn was associated with an attempt to construct an alternative to the Westminster Model (WM) of the British state. In contrast to the hierarchical and state-centric approach to the study of British politics generated by the WM, the governance approach emphasised the role in the conduct of British politics of new organisational forms, principally networks that crossed the state/market or

public/private divide. (See, for examples, Bevir and Rhodes (2003 ; 2006); Marsh, Richards and Smith (2001 ; 2001 ; 2008), Pierre (2000 ; see also Pierre and Peters 2000), John (2001) and Stoker (1999 ; 2000 ; 2005)). The governance narrative tends to dismiss the notion that states can continue to govern using past mechanisms of central control and bureaucratic rules. A combination of greater autonomy and complexity among the various subsystems of society and international influences and pressures are held to rule out the possibility of a “single dominant point of societal leverage” such as the state (Dryzek and Dunleavy 2009 141). The governance thesis focuses on distributed and delegated authority, emphasising the extra-governmental realm; private and non-state actors’ roles and the importance of institutions such as policy networks, quangos and public-private partnerships. The field of enquiry is extended by scholars of governance in Britain to cover actors and structures other than those classically associated with the constitutional and institutional mechanisms of British central government. The governance approach can be viewed as an attempt to develop a more sophisticated model of the processes by which states govern by giving due attention to the plurality of non-state actors involved in the creation and implementation of policy. As such, the location of power in governance studies has involved the study of a broad range of sites, mechanisms and types of actor in preference to a narrow focus on formally powerful actors within central government (Rhodes 1996 ; Rhodes 1997 ; Rhodes 1999 ; Klijn and Teisman 2000 ; Pierre 2000 ; Pierre and Peters 2000 ; Rhodes 2000 ; Stoker 2000 ; Teisman and Klijn 2002 ; Kooiman 2003 ; Toke and Marsh 2003 ; Stoker 2005).

Governance and overload in the study of British politics

Besides these analytical concerns, governance approaches in the study of British politics often embodied a particular reading of recent British history, albeit often implicitly. This interpretation suggests a fundamental change in the character of the British state and a decisive rupture or schism separating contemporary political practice from the practices of the recent past. The notion of overload which featured strongly in

criticisms of the so-called post-war consensus is often submerged within more contemporary discussions of governance. The overload or ungovernability thesis, most skilfully articulated by Anthony King, suggested that the British state had created a rod for its own back in the post-war period by making itself the principle source of the satisfaction of citizens wants (King 1975). The organisation of the institutions of the British state became dysfunctional with respect to the increased range of functions for which the state became responsible in the Keynesian Welfare State. As a result, the core executive became swamped or overloaded with responsibilities which it had neither the capacity, nor the know-how to administer (King 1975). The normative, conventional framework that comprises the British constitution became obsolete because it is only appropriate to the elite management of a relatively small governmental machine, pursuing a small range of functions. As such, King argued, the state incubated unrealistically high expectations of what could be achieved by governments. Rising demand for state action to resolve social problems became a vicious circle as governments were required to politicise ever greater areas of the private sphere in order to satisfy these demands.

Vestiges of the overload thesis, particularly its warning of the dangers of over-burdening the state, are clearly evident in the governance narrative. For advocates of network governance, the principal benefits of new forms of service delivery and public administration involve the widening of the range of actors involved so as to reduce the pressure on government as both sole tribune of societal demand and as the organ responsible for delivering solutions (Pierre and Peters 2000). Greater use of organisational forms associated with new governance therefore represents a rationalisation of political institutions to greater societal and economic complexity. As Stoker argues, modern governance is exceptionally complex and this novel complexity requires novel solutions. A 'congested state' is held to be the natural consequence of this complexity while the best available "solution to complexity is networked community governance" (Stoker 2004 118-120). However, the presentation of the benefits of governance over government by advocates of governance is rarely accompanied by a

sufficiently political account of how and why governments attempt to resolve this supposed problem. While King's account was rooted in the realities of political contestation during a period of economic crisis, governance narratives are too often prepared to accept that the organisation of the state adjusts rationally to altered circumstances.

Governance, according to this narrative, is to be understood as novel, as a challenge or response to the features of the British state that privilege state, hierarchy and bureaucracy, and as an improvement on this mode of governing. Both its emergence as historical phenomenon and its desirability are justified in terms of the inapplicability of hierarchical governance to the functions which the modern state is required to perform¹⁷. Just as changing economic circumstances allegedly required the development of new forms of political economy, so new state forms and practices must be developed and outdated or dysfunctional practices abandoned. While hierarchical, bureaucratic models of policy delivery and a strong state may have been functional for an earlier period, the governance narrative suggests that the role of the state must be radically altered in order to cope with contemporary social and economic conditions. However, it is important to note that the posited relationship between the hierarchical character of the British state and the KWS model of political economy is not a matter of logical necessity. Rather, as Kerr has argued, the pairing of the two is largely the result of the success of particular discourses of the New Right seeking to denigrate the alleged post-war consensus for its own purposes (Kerr 2001). As a result, the perceived inflexibility and complacency of a bureaucratic state was implicated in an argument chiefly designed to denigrate the KWS as a model of political economy and to emphasise the novelty and radicalism of Thatcherism (Richards and Smith 2002 72).

The hollowing out thesis

¹⁷ For Jessop, change is driven by the crisis of the Fordist developmental regime, for King crisis is driven by overload

The notion of the substitution of 'traditional' government styles with governance by and through networks became widespread in public administration research during the 1990s and early 2000s (see, for example, (Marsh and Rhodes 1992 ; Kooiman 1993 ; Kickert 1997 ; Rhodes 1997 ; Marsh 1998 ; Scharpf 1999 ; Rhodes 2000). Rod Rhodes was the leading figure in this development publishing a number of books and articles throughout the 1990s that advanced a claim that network governance represented a fundamental change in the organisation of British public administration. For Rhodes, "the story of British government as a unitary state with a strong executive is replaced by the story of the hollowing-out of the British state by international interdependencies and multiplying internal networks. There is now a differentiated polity with a hollow crown' (Rhodes 2000 62). Rhodes (1996 ; 1997 ; 1999 ; 2000 ; 2002) argued that changes in the structure of the polity and in the relationship between state and society had rendered hierarchical and market modes of governance ineffective. Networks, which are better able to accommodate increased social complexity, are now the main mode of governance. Since resources are distributed among various social actors rather than concentrated, tackling problems of public administration requires co-operation by interdependent actors sharing common goals who spontaneously form networks to achieve this (Rhodes 1996). According to this account, governance, at least in the British case is about self-organising networks of mutually resource dependent actors , of which the state and its agents are only one set with no privileged position over other actors within the network. For Rhodes, this meant a transfer of power and functions from the central state to the private sector, agencies, sectoral networks and supranational bodies, and the disciplining of public servants' discretion to managerial techniques – a phenomenon which came to be widely referred to as the 'hollowing out of the state' (Rhodes 1996 661; Rhodes 2000 71). For Rhodes, "governance is about managing networks" (1996 658), where networks are "an alternative to, not a hybrid of, markets and hierarchies [that] span the boundaries of the public, private and voluntary sectors ...Government is only one of many actors, [that] does not have enough power to exert its will on other actors" (Rhodes 1996 659). As such, networks are self-organising, they "resist government steering , develop their own policies and mould their environments"

(1996 659) “The informal authority of networks supplements and supplants the formal authority of the government” . On this understanding, power is decentred, and dispersed among a plurality of public and private agencies, while the formal authority of the government is supplanted by the informal authority of networks. (Rhodes (2000 55). See also Kooiman, (1993) , for a European version of a similar thesis).

Rhodes’ account of governance as self-organising networks has certainly been influential¹⁸, even if it has also been criticised. The thesis which has drawn most critical fire has been Rhodes claim that the British state is being ‘hollowed out’. Rhodes’ critics (Holliday 2000 ; Skelcher 2000 ; Marinetto 2003) claim that he extrapolated too readily from a temporary and incomplete project specific to a certain historical period in generalising his claim about ‘hollowing out’ as a more or less complete, inevitable and irreversible process. For Rhodes, governance was “ a *new* process of governing; or a changed condition of ordered rule; or the *new* method by which society is governed” (Rhodes 1996 653). Although Rhodes acknowledged that there was some debate over what constitutes this novelty, he makes little allowance for the possibility that this new order could be eroded or reversed in future. Although Rhodes acknowledged that network governance was not necessarily universal and suited only “some policy areas some of the time” (1996 665), I would argue that the hollowing out thesis may have been extended beyond the range of policy sectors where it might be considered descriptively accurate of recent change in governance structures. Education, at least under New Labour, offers an example of a policy sector that has been resistant to the pressures Rhodes described.

¹⁸ The notion that central state control is unravelling has become received wisdom. See, for example, Hooghe, L. and G. Marks (2003). "Unraveling the Central state, but How? Types of Multi-level Governance." *American Political Science Review* **97**(2): 233-243.

Further, with the benefit of hindsight, Rhodes might be said to have underestimated the extent to which government control over resources, particularly financial resources, would be sufficient to maintain control of the bodies charged with service delivery, even where these were outside the state. In combination with highly prescriptive public service agreements and targets, control over these agencies has even increased according to some commentators compared to previous methods of delivery (see, for example Bache 2003 on delivery through LEAs; Goodwin and Grix forthcoming). Rhodes can also be charged with overestimating the extent to which the alleged weaknesses of New Public Management (NPM) had *required* a wholesale move to new governance and inter-organisational networks. Rhodes appears to have believed that NPM could not survive the transition to new governance since it was only suitable for managing line bureaucracies rather than the self-organising, autonomous networks that now formed the anatomy of British public administration. For Rhodes, principles of trust, negotiation of shared goals and shared responsibility would *of necessity* displace results-oriented management, hierarchies of control and centrally-determined objectives (Rhodes 1996 663). In education, these 'outmoded' principles have been ever further entrenched in the management of policy making and accountability.

Skelcher on the hollowing out thesis

Skelcher accepts much of the thrust of Rhodes' 'hollowed out' conception of the state, but he and Rhodes differ in that Skelcher sees hollowing out as a transient phenomenon, subsequently replaced by a mode of governance based on public-private partnership, collaboration and networking (see also Holliday 2000; Skelcher 2000). So where governance is the hollowing out of the state for Rhodes, for Skelcher governance is an attempt at a solution to the pathologies of hollowing out (A similar argument is also made in Bevir and Rhodes (2006) and Peters (2004)). For Skelcher, hollowing out refers to a largely ideological project carried out over a relatively short period during the 1980s and early 1990s, and designed to address problems of overload by rolling back the state (2000 5-8). The recent history of British public administration can then be periodised into a phase of big government from the 1950s to the 1970s (the overloaded

state), succeeded by a phase of free market ideology and new public management once the previous arrangements had become crisis-prone (the hollowed out state), with this hollowed out, marketised phase followed by a much more complex mode of governance based on collaboration and partnership (the congested state) (2000 4)¹⁹. The cycle is one of wholesale institutional redesign, followed by a moment of crisis, whereupon a new phase of institutional redesign occurs which entirely rejects the logic of previous phases of governance. Change is regarded as complete transformation rather than partial, incomplete, tendential and compromised. Skelcher does recognise a role for political and ideological contestation in the substitution of modes of governance. For him, the hollowed out state is not wholly a functional response which maintains system stasis by adapting to exogenous pressures. Instead, it is the result of successful ideological work done by identifiable political actors to ensure that their characterisation of the 'crisis of overload' becomes widespread, and their proposed solutions became accepted (2000 7).

Skelcher accepts that Rhodes' characterisation of the means of 'hollowing out' were largely accurate, albeit that they were not as enduring as Rhodes implies. He and Rhodes agree that the governing strategy of this period revolved around reallocation of public activities to extra-statal organisations (through privatisation and contracting out), to para-statal organisations (single purpose agencies such as quangos and other NDPBs), to supranational, regional and local tiers of government. This reallocation is accompanied by "reduction in the discretion and influence of public employees- and particularly professionals" (2000 7). The significance of this last element of the 'hollowing out' project is that it involved disruption of the traditional role of public officials. As Skelcher notes, the hollowing out of the state was not simply about the withdrawal of the state, but also about a shifting balance of power with elected politicians becoming more assertive over state bureaucracies, with the discretion of the latter being reduced as their role became more managerial (2000 7) .

¹⁹ Jessop' model of 'policy-churning' might be applied here

However, for Skelcher, hollowing out could not be a once and for all solution to the problems of administering the British state. The use of delegated governance, marketisation and arm's length bodies created their own contradictions, principally concerning the weakening of bureaucratic lines of responsibility, accountability and authority (2000 8). A further consequence of hollowing out was that governance became increasingly an exercise carried out by single-purpose agencies rather than multi-purpose government bodies. So the problem of blinkered departmentalism was simply multiplied by the number of single-issue agencies that had been established. The need to address politically salient 'wicked problems' which cut across multiple issue areas is held to be the driving force of the new governance for Skelcher (2000 6). As such, inter-agency working and partnership was required to restore some of the cohesion lost during the fragmentation created by hollowing out.

The Asymmetric Power Model

As a counter to the notion of declining central capacity contained in the 'hollowing out' thesis, Marsh et al. (2003) developed an alternative Asymmetric Power Model (APM). The APM highlights the resilience of asymmetries in power and maintains that the central state retains authority over other actors. As such, the APM suggests hierarchical modes of governance are persistent, and suggests that the challenge to central power posed by non-government agencies has been over-estimated. According to this line of argument, the governance narrative misreads the change in levels of non-state participation in policy as a fundamental change in power relations. In this case, the networks that exist are not composed of equal partners producing consensus on the basis of mutual exchange relationships. Instead, networks are devices by which the centre is able to increase other actors' dependence and limit the involvement of potentially rival sources of power (see Marsh, 2008; Bevir and Rhodes, 2008).

This is a line of argument that appears to have distinct empirical purchase for the analysis both of New Labour's education project and its broader governing strategy.

Education policy scholars such as Hudson (2007), Barker (2008) and Bache (2003) have emphasised the persistence of hierarchical management of the sector and the absence of autonomous networks or partnerships with government. Similarly, analysts of the governing style of New Labour have commented on its tightening of central control and the marginalisation of alternative site of power and resource both within and beyond the state (Holliday 2000 ; Skelcher 2000 ; Heffernan 2003 ; Marinetto 2003).As such , the APM gives expression to widely recognised features of governance under New Labour and hence should be considered as a strong potential candidate to provide the basis for an alternative narrative of New Labour's education strategy. At an empirical level, it appears to offer greater purchase on the reality of education governance and hence provides a more accurate description than rival approaches such as marketisation and 'orthodox' governance.

Though elements of the APM are useful, there are three relevant criticisms that should be made. First, advocates of the APM (Marsh, Richards et al. 2003 ; Marsh 2008) direct their efforts against Rhodes' more recent work in collaboration with Bevir (e.g. Bevir and Rhodes 2003 ; Bevir and Rhodes 2006). In doing so, they tend to criticise a governance narrative that Bevir and Rhodes (B&R) do not really endorse. The supporters of the APM rightly attack the 'governance narrative' but tend to miss the significance of B&R's contribution. B&R have moved on from the first wave literature, they do not regard governance or the differentiated polity as an adequate single narrative of British politics and the British state (See the exchanges between Bevir and Rhodes (2008) and Marsh (2008) on this point). A second criticism of the APM is that, while it may be useful descriptively, it is less concerned with attempting to explain the lack of development of network modes of governance. In other words, the APM captures something of how British governance (and English education governance) in fact operates, but why it operates in this fashion, rather than in the fashion described by the first wave governance narrative, is less well explained. This suggests a third area which is potentially problematic for the APM. Inasmuch as the APM does offer an explanation of the forms of British governance, much of the work is done by an account of a British

Political Tradition (BPT) and a description of structured inequality in British society which is reflected at the level of the state. Yet this would seem to suggest a fairly stable if not static state. A continuously dominant BPT and relatively stable patterns of structured inequality would logically produce a degree of continuity and only slow, incremental change in the behaviour of the state. As such, the behaviour of governments should be relatively predictable over time given the stability of the dominant BPT and patterns of structured inequality. The next section of the thesis develops an alternative narrative that would regard the New Labour governing project (and by extension its education project) as a fairly substantial break with past governing styles. There is a degree of continuity over time in the behaviour of New Labour and its Conservative predecessors, resulting from common governing dilemmas. But these are the product of a fairly decisive shift occurring during the 1970s to 1980s involving a changing understanding of the purposes and function of government. As such, the APM may tend to overstate the degree of continuity of governing styles and underestimate the degree to which the changing context of politics in Britain has produced novel governing projects. Although the argument presented in this thesis accepts much of the APM's descriptive account of the workings of the British state, it develops a potentially rival explanation for the same basic interpretation.

Moving beyond the first wave

On this account, new governance is a state strategy, chosen reflexively for reasons to do with the political convictions and goals of identifiable political actors. It is not an inevitable rational response to objectively increased complexity or to governmental overload. It represents only one possible form that a response to these circumstances might take. This thesis argues that the state should not be regarded as a self-regulating system that maintains stasis in response to some objectively altered inputs since this is to deny the role of political actors and to 'naturalise' processes which are contingent and need not have occurred in the way they did. The existence and character of new governance mechanisms, partnerships or networks cannot be satisfactorily explained with reference only to grand narratives of sociological or economic change, whether

these are expressed in terms of globalisation, late modernity, increased complexity, post-Fordism, network society (Castells 1996), greater reflexivity, technological change (Bang 2008), or the transition to competition states (Cerny and Evans 2004). Instead, I claim, these developments are filtered through factors that are domestic to Britain, and related to its specific configuration of institutions and the attitudes of elites towards these²⁰. I claim that governance should be understood as partly a problem of public administration and political culture rather than driven by sociological or economic factors which determine it directly. Such an account aims to put politics, strategy, contingency and contestation back into accounts of governance as mediating factors between the broader socio-economic context and the strategies of politicians. This approach rejects explanations rooted in a single causal logic or over-arching narrative, preferring to explain education politics and British politics more broadly as the contingent outcome of the strategic responses of identifiable political actors to the broader context within the unique institutional environment presented by the British state. It regards state managers as active, reflexive and creative participants in the process of change, rather than as passive executors of sociological or economic logics. In this regard, this approach shares many fundamental principles with the second wave or decentred approach to governance.

Second wave governance and the decentred approach

The first wave governance literature has been subjected to a sustained critique by authors working in a social constructivist and anti-foundational tradition in more recent years. This 'second wave' of governance literature has been led by one of the architects of the 'first wave', Rod Rhodes, through a number of publications in collaboration with Mark Bevir (see, for example, (2003 ; 2006). Following the lead of Bevir and Rhodes, Bevir and Richards (2009 ; 2009) have developed the second wave approach, while others such as Skelcher (2008) have been sympathetic to the approach expressed by

²⁰ For example, a loss of faith in the British quasi-constitution and the Westminster Model.

these authors. The second wave literature rejects much of the analysis of the first wave governance and policy networks literature including Rhodes' own earlier work as well as that of his 'institutionalist' critics such as Marsh et al. and Skelcher. This literature describes its own approach to governance as 'decentred'. This is intended to reflect its different ontological and epistemological foundations in comparison to the first wave. This decentred approach attempts to disrupt and challenge the first wave project of explaining patterns of change in governance with reference to a single over-arching narrative. In contrast, second wave theorists prioritised the diverse and conflicting beliefs and practices of political agents and the radical contingency generated by this diversity which rules out any linear account of governance (Bevir and Richards 2009). As such, second wave theorists deny that the displacement of hierarchical government by network forms can be explained as a result of objectively changed circumstances. This critique insists that the reflexive, creative individuals who populate policy networks and state structures must be the focus of governance theorists' attentions and that a greater focus on the agency (if not autonomy) of these individuals was required (Bevir and Rhodes 2006 4).

Bevir and Rhodes have led the field in developing the decentred approach to governance. They note that while first wave theories of governance have challenged the Westminster model of British politics, they have not touched the underlying epistemological framework. As such, these theories have tended to invoke impersonal forces such as functional differentiation or marketisation of the public sector to explain the shift to network governance and state decline (Bevir and Rhodes 2006 74; see also Bevir and Richards 2009 3). Rhodes attributes the tendency of governance theories in public administration, including his own early work on the subject, to neglect the interpretations and agency of actors involved to a misplaced 'social scientific' approach. Public Administration is bound, he claims, by a narrow set of concerns, focuses on managerial issues to the neglect of other relevant concerns, and tends to treat policy networks as objective social facts (Rhodes 2000 66-67). According to Rhodes, his hollowing out thesis is an example of the kind of findings an outsider looking in will

produce. His subsequent work (in collaboration with Mark Bevir) focusing on the beliefs, practices and ideas of political agents can be seen as an attempt to address the limitations of a more traditional 'social scientific' approach, to broaden the research agenda and to widen the horizons of Public Administration research. Bevir and Rhodes (and latterly David Richards) more recent work resists any attempt to generate comprehensive models or single narratives of British governance. At times, they suggest that no model can capture anything accurate about real political phenomena, they can only serve to "tell particular stories from particular perspectives" (Bevir and Rhodes 2008 730). The goal of the decentred approach is partly to restore a concern with agency to the study of governance by emphasising the interpretive dimensions necessary to make sense of the political world. This is an important aspect of the decentred approach's contribution to the governance literature. This approach searches for the sources of change in endogenous changes in strategy, reflexivity and ideas within networks and within the state rather than invoking exogenous, impersonal logics (Bevir and Richards 2009 8).

However, while restoring agents to the processes of governance is a worthwhile task, there are a number of limitations to the decentred approach that ultimately make it unsuitable as a candidate for a general characterisation of New Labour's education and governing strategies. First, as described above, the decentred approach would not recognise the project of producing a 'general characterisation' as valid. They would prefer that social scientists restrict their enquiries to tracing the plurality of competing and overlapping traditions that inform political behaviour. The decentred approach belongs to an epistemological tradition that makes it unfit for the production of a general characterisation or definition of any political phenomena. Secondly, the decentred interpretation tends to treat change as on the one hand, endogenous or internal to networks, strategies and traditions and on the other hand, as the product of external socio-economic forces. These two sources of change need to be brought into a more interactive relationship in explanation where what matters is the structured terrain on which networks operate and actors choose strategies (Goodwin 2009). Thirdly, and

perhaps most significantly, the decentred approach has received sustained criticism for a weak or incomplete treatment of the question of structure and agency. Bevir, Richards and Rhodes have been challenged by critical realists and institutionalists such as Marsh (2008), Smith (2008) and McAnulla (2006) on the basis that they privilege agency and change at the expense of an adequate account of structure and continuity. As such, there is a risk that the decentred approach goes too far in emphasising agential factors in political life to the neglect of important organisational and institutional factors which affect behaviour. This raises the possibility both of over-stating the autonomy of political actors, and under-stating the importance of the context in which they act in constraining or limiting the range of viable actions available to them. The potential problem here is that the decentred approach tends to lack an account of the constraints and 'enablements' of effective state action in terms of institutional and organisational factors (Jessop 2008)²¹. If social reality can be interpreted in unlimited ways, as Bevir and Rhodes suggest, then institutions, structure, and power itself generate no real effects on behaviour and hence continuity in patterns of behaviour is extremely unlikely.

Structure, agency and tradition in the decentred approach

Second wave governance theorists have attempted to overcome these criticisms by referring to the concept of 'tradition' which is intended to substitute the explanatory role played by structures and institutions in other types of analysis. For Bevir and Rhodes, agents' behaviour is not determined by structural constraints, nor by certain social facts about the agents. However, agents are not wholly autonomous, since they act on the basis of their beliefs, which are themselves always held against an initial background 'tradition' (Bevir and Rhodes 2006 7-8). It is 'traditions' that guide the interpretation of the political environment and affect what counts as a problem or what counts as a solution for any given actor. The concept of tradition is employed as a partial

²¹ In Jessop's words, such approaches tend to "neglect the continued importance of law, constitution, violence and bureaucracy for the modern state" Jessop, B. (2008). State Power. Cambridge, Polity.

substitute for notions of structural or institutional constraints upon agency. For Bevir and Rhodes, the concept of structure is “unhelpfully vague” (Bevir and Rhodes 2008 730). They prefer instead to use their notions of tradition and dilemma to substitute the role of structure in explaining change and continuity. But it is hard to avoid the conclusion that unhelpful vagueness persists. Tradition, Bevir and Rhodes claim is “a first influence on people that colours their later actions only if their agency has not led them to change it” (2008 730). There is nothing to prevent or discourage people from changing this influence, nor can anything *cause* them to preserve or transform these influences, nor is there any specification of the type of ‘colouring’ or ‘influence’ traditions may have, provided they have not been modified or jettisoned. Tradition is entirely a matter of individual belief; it resides entirely within the heads of individuals. Two people subject to identical first influences can, in wholly unconstrained and utterly unpredictable ways modify their beliefs to reach completely different end points in terms of their beliefs. This outcome is in no way to be understood as moderated by culture, structure, institutions or lived experience. It is always simply a matter of individual volition, and as such, individuals’ beliefs at any given point are the outcome of a perfectly random and unconstrained process.

However, Bevir, Rhodes and Richards also claim that traditions (by which they can only mean similar beliefs) can dominate collective institutions such as the Labour party and complex social practices such as the conduct of British politics. It is also possible to locate individuals within certain traditions (i.e. as members of groups of people with similar beliefs), or within many different traditions according to the questions asked by political scientists (as members of groups of people with similar beliefs about specific subjects chosen by political scientists)²². (Bevir and Rhodes 2003 ; Bevir 2005 ; Bevir and Rhodes 2006 ; Bevir and Rhodes 2006 ; Bevir and Rhodes 2008 ; Bevir and Richards 2009). Large groups of people, such as ‘senior civil servants’ or ‘police officers’

²² It is not clear what the criterion for so locating them would be. If individuals can be described as either within or outside a particular tradition depending only on the research question of the analyst, then the notion of ‘belonging to a tradition’ is meaningless.

are held to have 'similar beliefs' which explain their behaviour and patterns of conflict and contestation within British politics (Bevir and Rhodes 2008 731). The observation that groups of similarly positioned individuals tend to have certain shared beliefs could be explained in a number of ways, none of which is entirely without its pitfalls. These individuals may develop their beliefs through a common socialisation which transmits to them shared experiences and institutional norms²³; they may occupy similar positions within social structures that place them in similar relationships to other actors; they may, by virtue of similar lived experience develop similar patterns of acculturation to the environment in which they find themselves; they may have particular, real or perceived, material interests as a result of their similar location in a given set of social practices; they may be similarly involved in institutional patterns that reward or penalise particular courses of action that correspond to certain beliefs. The point is that they are ways in which political scientists might account for similarly positioned individuals holding similar beliefs; and that Bevir and Rhodes cannot make use of any of these explanations. In their own words: "no practice or norm can fix the ways in which people will act, let alone how they will innovate when responding to new circumstances" (2006 3).

The authors are left with a non-explanation: similarly positioned individuals hold similar beliefs for no reason other than coincidence. Any pattern of similar belief (or action, since for Bevir and Rhodes, belief explains behaviour) is randomly generated. As such, the concept of tradition is inadequate to overcome the problem of autonomy versus agency. Bevir and Rhodes claim that they have moved beyond notions of autonomous actors, reasoning outside all context (2006 4). But it is far from clear that they do so, since context (in the form of tradition) is only a first influence which can be shed with no further effects at any time by innovating actors. The authors need to

²³ Bevir and Rhodes approach this position in describing tradition as "a set of understandings someone receives during socialisation" (2006 7). However, since the ways in which these inherited beliefs can be modified are unlimited, tradition is as likely as not to have no influence at all on future beliefs or actions. The notion that institutions are repositories of tradition is absent, though it is hard to imagine how traditions could otherwise persist over time and their integrity be maintained.

specify how context influences reasoning and therefore action if they are to move away from the implausible notion of fully autonomous actors.

This thesis retains a concept of structure in its attempt to explain New Labour's education and governing strategies. This is intended to reflect a claim that structures really constrain what individual actors can do- (the actions they can successfully perform), and condition, constrain and enable certain beliefs or strategies (i.e. beliefs about what actions can be successfully performed), although they do not determine them. For example, the powers or resources available to Prime Ministers are not a matter of the beliefs of individuals. They result from the location of the PM's office within a pattern of institutions. The *use made* of these powers is a matter of belief. Similarly, the relationship of the PM's office to other branches of the state is not a matter of belief. The attitude taken towards that relationship is a matter of belief. The strategy chosen to attempt to alter that relationship is a matter of belief. But it is belief about something that is not itself a matter of individual belief. Bevir, Richards and Rhodes' account of governance risks conflating these two elements which are separable. As Smith points out, the reason political scientists refer to institutions and structures as separate categories in their explanations is because "Although institutions are socially created, they are not subject to change as a consequence of the beliefs of most people" (2008 145). Once this recognition of the role of structure is conceded, Bevir and Rhodes account of change and stability is much less problematic. Their insistence that no features of the structural or institutional landscape should be expected to condition individual beliefs leaves them without a satisfactory account of why similarly positioned individuals come to hold similar beliefs.

Decentred approaches need a more convincing account of the apparent stability observed in many areas of governance, such as education. Yet the interpretive ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the decentred approach seem to preclude the development of a more convincing account. As such, the decentred approach cannot serve as the basis of a general characterisation or description of New

Labour's education or governing strategy. The emphasis placed on cultural practice lacks explanatory force without an account of the institutions and structures that sustain and transmit these practices. As argued above, 'tradition' is an inadequate substitute for the concepts it is intended to replace such as institution, episteme or structure. As a result, the conceptualisation of continuity in the decentred approach is weak. As far as Bevir, Richards and Rhodes seek explanations about changes in patterns of executive politics, their interpretive approach guides them to explanations that are about individual beliefs. Bevir and Rhodes explicitly reject the notion that any variable other than beliefs and practices informed by belief can play a part in explanations in the social sciences (2006 20). When they speak of the insufficient 'reach' of central levers, or the power of ministers at the head of key departments, or the lack of co-ordinating machinery at the centre of the British state, as limits on top-down executive government (Bevir and Rhodes 2004 ; Bevir and Rhodes 2008), it is not clear that individual beliefs provide sufficient explanatory power without reference to the structural and institutional landscape within which these individuals seek to attain their objectives. Do central levers have insufficient 'reach' because of individuals' beliefs or because of the balance of resources and capacities between government and the 'targets' of government? Do ministers have power to frustrate prime ministers because of their specific beliefs or because the British state is organised so as to give them that power? What individual beliefs need to change for the core executive to have more effective co-ordinating machinery and why don't individuals simply change their beliefs to secure their goal of greater co-ordination? The beliefs of the actors involved are relevant to explanations of their behaviour, but they are not the only thing that matters. It is hard to imagine how the role of structures and institutions in constraining or enabling action can be excised. The institutional structure of the British governance is not simply what actors make of it; it provides the rules of the game within which actors formulate strategies to achieve their goals. It will favour certain strategies over others and reward or penalise certain kinds of behaviour over others. As such, it constrains or facilitates (without determining) certain courses of action and certain beliefs about what is possible, and which strategies are likely to be successful. The notion of 'tradition' as described in Bevir and Rhodes is an

inadequate substitute for structure, since it refers simply to an initial background of belief which does not carry forward any influence on future beliefs held by an actor. A more adequate general characterisation or description of New Labour education and governing projects will require a more developed sense of the institutional and structural factors which shape political behaviour.

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the political science literature on governance in order to assess its utility in providing a general characterisation of the New Labour governing project in general and its education strategy in particular. The governance approach is superior to narratives of marketisation in two main respects. First, it pays greater attention to the changing institutional landscape of the British state. Second, it fulfils the task of disaggregating the state/market dualism to do justice to the complexity of the contemporary British polity. It recognises both the multitude of quasi-public and delegated governance bodies involved in the process and is stronger on recognising that the state is not itself a unitary actor. As such, the concepts associated with the various governance approaches are useful in analysing education policy from a political perspective. However, this chapter has raised a number of issues with governance approaches, both in relation to analytical and descriptive, weaknesses in the existing literatures. Neither first wave governance, nor the decentred approach of the second wave is suitable for the task in hand. Neither offers a satisfactory description or narrative of the recent development of New Labour education and governance. Furthermore, both approaches involve conceptual weaknesses, particularly with regard to questions of structure and agency, which prevent them from developing adequate explanations. Among the various approaches loosely associated with the governance approach, the Asymmetric Power Model appears to offer the most accurate general description of governance under New Labour. However, to date the model is rather underdeveloped and remains more persuasive as a description of British governance than as an

explanation. Ultimately, none of the governance approaches discussed is suitable as the basis for this account. The disaggregation of state and market which characterises governance approaches must be augmented by the addition of greater explanatory power and a more thorough analysis of the institutional contexts in which political action occurs. The task of the next chapter is to develop a properly political general characterisation of New Labour's education strategy and governing project. As such, it attempts to provide an alternative narrative which moves beyond both marketisation and governance approaches in order to present a more accurate general characterisation or description of the subject in question. The next section of the thesis moves on to discuss possible explanations of the pattern of governance in the New Labour educational state.

An alternative narrative of New Labour's education strategy

The previous two chapters have considered, and rejected, two candidates for a general characterisation of New Labour's education strategy. In this chapter, I attempt to provide a more accurate description of education governance under New Labour that moves away from both the marketisation and governance narratives previously discussed. The marketisation and governance approaches were found to have both empirical and theoretical weaknesses which rendered them unsuitable as the basis for either an accurate description or a convincing explanation of New Labour's education project. The marketisation thesis was descriptively inadequate because the single dynamic of marketisation is not applicable to many elements of that project. At the theoretical level, the marketisation thesis depended on an unsophisticated state-market dualism that cannot adequately capture the complexity of the relationships that exist within the education state. The orthodox (or 'first wave') governance narrative which proposes a shift to network governance as the result of broader socio-economic processes is also not satisfactory as the basis of either a description or an explanation of New Labour's education project. The previous chapter argued that the rise of network governance does not serve as an appropriate general characterisation of New Labour education strategy since it does not adequately acknowledge the persistence and even strengthening of hierarchical, centralised, top-down governmental control over education in recent years. At a theoretical level, the orthodox governance narrative lacked attention to political agency, and neglected the role of political strategy in responding to broader socio-economic change. The 'second wave' or 'decentred' variant of governance theory cannot be accused of inaccuracy in describing political processes since it is founded on an interpretive epistemology that does not attempt to provide 'general characterisations' of political processes in the sense that this thesis does. However, the previous chapter also enumerated a number of analytical problems with the decentred approach that limit its explanatory power. The previous chapter rejected the decentred approach on two main grounds. First, that its unorthodox social ontology left it incapable of dealing adequately with the constraining effects of structures and

institutions on political behaviour, and second, that the reliance on individual beliefs as the only causal or explanatory factor provided insufficient explanatory purchase on questions of change. Having rejected these candidate approaches, the present chapter attempts to construct an alternative narrative or description of education governance under New Labour.

This thesis argues that the New Labour education strategy is best understood as an attempt to disrupt (or further disrupt) old education networks in order to discipline actors in the policy process to central priorities. In as far as any re-agenting has occurred in education, these new actors are recruited as enforcers of this disciplining process and achieve very little autonomy for themselves. A key element of this process, I argue, is the move from the classic model of English education as a national system, administered locally to a national system, administered nationally. As part of this process a variety of policy measures have sought to restrict the autonomy of LEAs, transfer their functions to new kinds of actors, strengthen accountability to central government and increase standardisation of practice across the country. Such a strategy is enabled, I claim, by the dependent relationship of other actors involved in the policy process on central government. The centre is not required to engage in relations of mutual exchange, trust and co-operation with other actors as the network governance narrative claims it must. Its resources of legislative powers and budgetary control enable key actors in central government to assume a much more dominant role than most governance theories would suggest is possible.

This thesis concludes that the best general characterisation of New Labour's education strategy is the concentration of power at the very centre of government despite, or even because of, institutional fragmentation. As such, the narrative offered about the political management of English education is broadly compatible with the Asymmetric Power Model's reading of British politics in general. However, as the next section of the thesis explains, the narrative presented in this chapter is not committed to defending that model. I move on to suggest in the next section that the pattern of change in education

is a symptom of change over time in the state at large, moderated by education-specific factors.

Bringing the state back in to studies of education

As I have argued in the previous chapters, education studies are not strongly influenced by the discipline of political science. Partly as a result of this, education research has tended to downplay the role of the state. This is also a tendency present in some work on governance that results from the emphasis on the participation of a variety of non-state actors in contemporary public administration. Such an approach is valid inasmuch as it attempts to give a more accurate picture of the governing process beyond formally powerful institutions such as Westminster and Whitehall. However, this should not obscure the fact that actors within Westminster and Whitehall have not disappeared. They still participate in policy processes and possess significant resources that place them in strong positions to pursue their objectives. They are neither powerless with respect to other participants in the game, nor do they necessarily have an interest in entering the game on an equal footing with other players. They have their own incentive structure, their own beliefs and traditions about how government and governance should work, and their own resources with which to pursue their goals. It could be reasonably argued that actors within the state might prefer to retain a directive principal-agent relationship with subordinate bodies rather than become simply one actor among many, if such a strategy was deemed at all viable. As such, actors within the state may have good reasons for resisting 'new governance', decentralisation, marketisation or greater delegation.

For example, the proliferation of actors involved within education policy communities (Ball 2008) is not an unambiguous good from the point of view of policy implementation. An increased number of affected parties simply multiplies transaction costs in situations where actors are committed to negotiating objectives and solutions²⁴. There are

²⁴ See, for example Hooghe and Marks Hooghe, L. and G. Marks (2003). "Unraveling the Central state, but How? Types of Multi-level Governance." *American Political Science Review* 97(2): 233-243.

strategies open to principals to circumvent this. Principals (in this case assume government or the core of the core executive) may limit the number of autonomous actors, or they may limit interaction among actors through functional separation (Hooghe and Marks 2003 439). We might also add that principals may seek to limit the autonomy of those actors that are included. If government, or the core executive, is treated as the sole principal, it is clear that it remains in a strong position in terms of resources and capabilities to pursue such strategies, and also has strong incentives for doing so, since it disproportionately bears the costs of policy failure and stands to lose more should transaction costs result in inertia. Though there may be an increased number of interested parties, it is open to actors within governments to try to circumvent 'Scharpf's law' – that greater transaction costs eventually outweigh the benefits of inter-organisational negotiation - by softening or abandoning a commitment to negotiated objectives and solutions. The narrative of education governance under New Labour provided in this chapter allows a more prominent role to the formally powerful elements of the state than either marketisation or governance narratives would allow. In order to explain the shape of education, it is deemed necessary to acknowledge that English school-level education is first and foremost *state* education. That is to say, education is managed within a political context and operates with only a relative autonomy from the state. As such, education governance will be shaped by the governing strategies of state managers and these should be given a prominent role in describing and explaining the changing character of education governance.

The changing institutional landscape of education

It is interesting to note that among those scholars who have made a conscious engagement with political science literatures on governance, there is a marked tendency to challenge the governance narrative and a clear assertion of the continuing prominence of the state. These authors maintain that delegated governance in no way

, Scharpf Scharpf, F. (1999). Governing in Europe. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

undermines central capacity and may even prove an efficient tactic for the enhancement of control over education. These authors accept that the institutional landscape of education has changed markedly through the proliferation of commercial, philanthropic, charitable and voluntary organisation in the education policy process (See, for examples Hudson 2002 ; Ball 2007 ; Hudson 2007 ; Ball 2008 ; Ball 2009 ; Gunter and Forrester 2009). However, they are reluctant to draw the conclusion that policy is now driven by the initiative of networks autonomous from government as the governance narrative might suggest. They are also sceptical of the emergence of a more collaborative policy style based on mutual exchange of resources that is held to be the hallmark of network governance. These authors share a belief that centralised control over education policy has increased despite, or even because of, the existence of new policy actors and institutions.

Hudson (2007) belongs to a revisionist approach to governance that acknowledges the existence of new organisational forms, but suggests that these may actively enhance the capacity of formal government actors to control education. The use of results-oriented management, standardised testing, direct curricular control, limited teacher autonomy and aggressive inspection regimes are, for Hudson, techniques of governance that give education an exceptionally statist character even in comparison to the regimes operating in Nordic countries, despite the usual classification of New Labour as an Anglo-American neoliberal government (2007 270-275). For Helgoy, Homme and Gewirtz (2007 198), “deregulation emphasising increased local autonomy seems to accommodate mechanisms which, paradoxically, tend to increase central control”. Bache (2003) reaches similar conclusions. He claims that despite the rhetoric of a move away from uniformity, central prescription and standardisation, the state has proved extremely reluctant to withdraw from the governance of education and has used new organisational forms to enhance its role. As such, Bache identifies a central tension or dilemma within education politics that is not readily acknowledged in much of the governance literature: “The enthusiasm for greater cross-sectoral involvement, alongside the desire of the centre to retain control over its highest priority policy,

highlights a paradox at the heart of contemporary politics: how the centre governs in the context of governance” (2003 300).

On this understanding, re-agencing and institutional diversity does not compromise, and may even enhance central control. This is because the new agency involved in the administration of education does not enter the field with the appropriate resources of legitimacy or finance to challenge formally governmental power and begin to generate its own interests and initiatives in the policy process. Private consultants, commercial sponsors, delegated bodies, quangos and third sector organisations become involved in education as enforcers, agents and vehicles of strategies not of their own choosing. Their relationship to central government is either contractual, with the prescriptions of the contract leaving little room for autonomous action, or as enforcers of predetermined sets of priorities. The sub-contracting of the delivery of National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies to Capita is an example of the former. The school inspection regime managed by OFSTED, the extension of school choice to parents in combination with centrally published league tables, or the role taken by the Audit Commission in the LEA inspection programme are examples of the latter. The re-agencing of the institutional landscape of education is intended to alter the incentive structure to encourage agents (schools and local authorities) to respond to principals in the desired way. Network governance theory suggests that new agency enters the policy process because either governments lack resources that only non-governmental actors can offer, because this agency represents societal interests that cannot be excluded from the process, or as a means of expanding the range of sources of information available to governments (Pierre and Peters 2000). The case developed in this chapter, in common with the authors discussed above, would regard the desire of central government for enhanced operational efficiency as the key driver of the re-agencing of education with resource exchange and consultation playing at best a minor role.

The inclusion of new agency in the political management of education serves to address the problem Bevir and Rhodes refer to as “rubber levers”: the lack of mechanisms to

ensure that government intention translates into implementation at street level. For Bevir and Rhodes, “rubber levers” represent a serious constraint on the capacities of central governments and partly explain the emergence of more diffuse and plural governance forms in preference to ineffectual top-down command bureaucracy (2008 732). However, New Labour appears to have adopted an alternative strategy in education. Although it has recruited new types of actors, the role of these bodies is to apply sanctions and rewards that incentivise preferred behaviour. These actors police government strategies and seek to ensure that there is no implementation gap between government intention and outcome. Indirect manipulation of incentive structures can prove as effective as direct bureaucratic pressures as means to discipline delivery bodies. New kinds of ‘disciplining’ agencies expand the range of options available to governments, but these agencies remain in a dependent relationship towards policy makers rather than originating policy themselves. So for example, schools that persist with ‘true’ comprehensive curricula instead of adopting specialist status may find themselves financially disadvantaged in comparison to other local schools, those that have failed to pay adequate attention to their raw examination performance may find themselves under pressure to adopt trust or academy status, while schools that fail to adopt preferred pedagogical strategies may find they receive unfavourable OFSTED reports.

A National System, Locally Administered

The re-agenting of education can be read as a strategic move by successive governments to reduce the capacities of non-governmental actors. In this sense, re-agenting is as much, or more, about breaking up old networks as it is about constructing new ones. The changing role of LEAs/LAs is an important aspect of this. Successive governments have occupied themselves with modifying the form and function of LEAs, with the most important changes arising as a consequence of the 1988 ERA. New Labour has persisted with the strategy of altering the LEAs’ role in the political management of education through a series of new policies and structures. In the following section, I describe the changes initiated by New Labour and argue that they

have three principle effects on the governance of education. Firstly, the power of LEAs, already significantly eroded as a result of the ERA, has been further eroded. Second, the transfer of LEA functions to new agents is an important contributor to the growth of institutions of delegated governance in education. Hence, a simpler relationship between central and local government is replaced by a more complex relation involving multiple actors. Thirdly, the resources and capacities of these new agencies are fewer than those possessed by LEAs in the past. The net effect of these changes is to enhance the directive power of central government at the expense of local government such that the English education system under New Labour is better understood as a national system, nationally administered, rather than a national system, locally administered as it has historically been seen.

There is a strong case to say that the most decisive changes in the role of the LEA occurred before New Labour came to office and that the national system, locally administered had already been partially dismantled. The 1988 ERA contained the most significant measures in this regard. The self-perception of English education as a “national system, locally administered” which avoided the *dirigiste* tendencies of continental systems had been an important organising myth for post-war politicians (Chitty 2009 21). The belief that education could and should be run through a “benign partnership” between central government, local government and the teaching profession was the basis of mainstream educational thinking during this time. An almost bipartisan approach to the political management of education may partly have reflected a more widespread post-war consensus, as for example Chitty has claimed (2002 ; 2009). However, it may also have reflected the relatively low priority given to education in this period, with the sector seen as belonging to a realm of low politics that was rather beneath government ministers and could safely be administered lower down the chain of command (Bogdanor 1979). In either case, this partnership model of the political management of education can be seen as a much better exemplar of the diffused, pluralistic network model of governance than the system that subsequently developed

under New Labour. As Bogdanor notes, writing before the collapse of this governance regime, the particular virtues of the partnership arrangement were that:

“Power over the distribution of resources, over the organisation and over the content of education was to be diffused amongst the different elements and no one of them was to be given a controlling voice” (Bogdanor 1979 157-158)²⁵

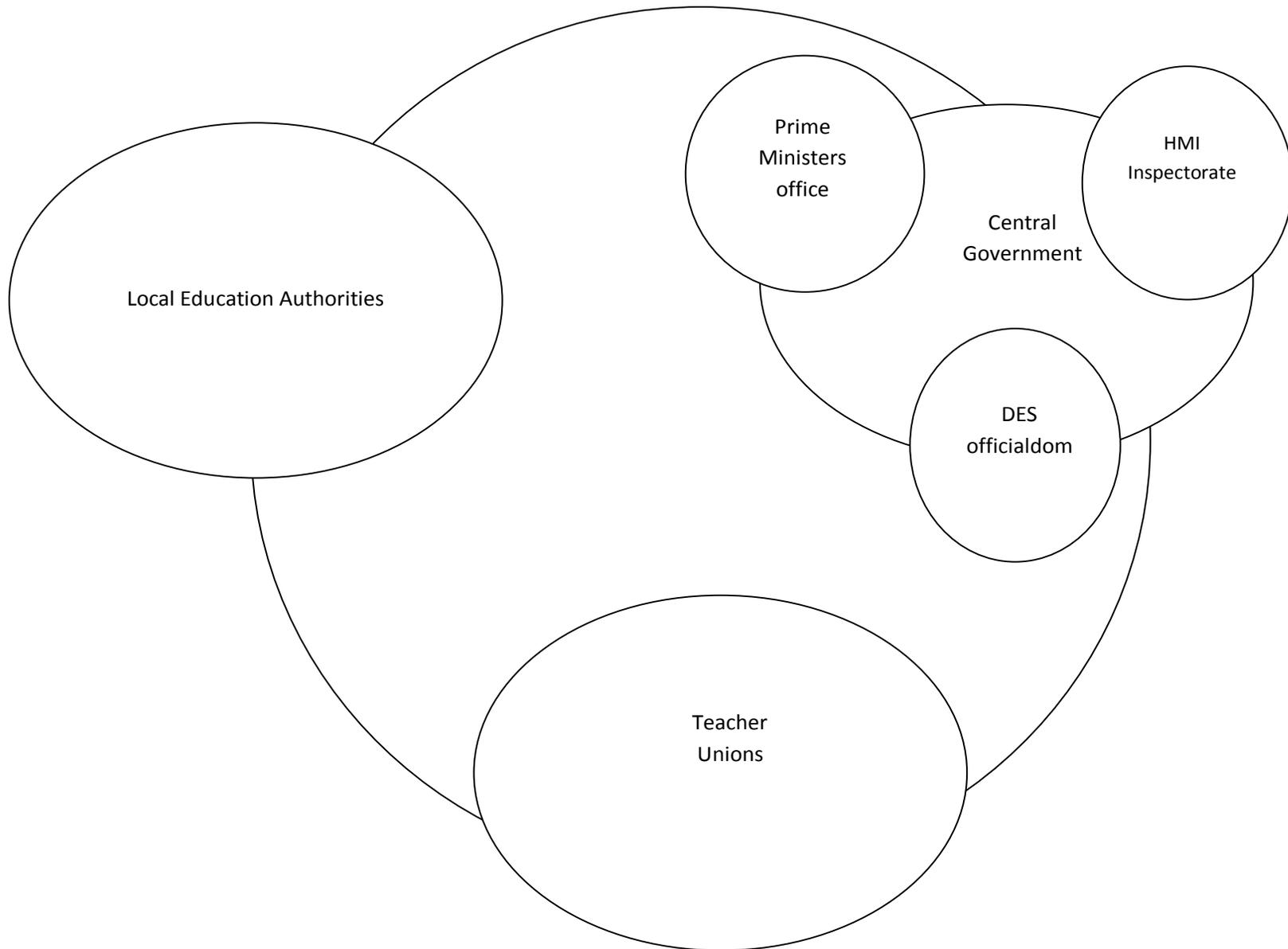
The involvement of networks of professional communities as almost equal partners was also held to be an advantage of the system, since they served to “soften the political antagonisms that might otherwise render the system unworkable” (ibid. 158). In this sense, the post-war education settlement embodied many of the features of the governing style associated with network governance. A range of stakeholders were involved in decision-making on the basis of mutual exchange of resources (Rhodes 1996) and information (Pierre and Peters 2000). The organising principle of these networks was co-operation and mutual trust rather than the carrot-and-stick approach that subsequently emerged, with little focus on accountability or sanctions amongst the partners (Chitty 2002 263). The movement for comprehensivisation demonstrated the belief among the key actors that the partnership model was suitable for the management of even large-scale reforms. The comprehensivisation of English secondary schooling was achieved through the delivery of Circular 10/65 to local authorities *requesting* (rather than requiring) them to submit plans for comprehensivisation. There was no legislative basis for the reform, nor the specification of any sanctions for failure to conform. As Chitty (2009), Kerckhoff (1996) and Kogan (1971) have pointed out, the comprehensivisation programme itself was partly a response to local initiative which had already begun the process without central direction. There are two especially significant features of the comprehensivisation process from a governance perspective. Firstly,

²⁵ In Chitty's words: “no one individual participant should enjoy a monopoly of power in the decision-making process” Chitty, C. (2002). “The Role and Status of LEAs: post-war pride and fin de siecle uncertainty.” *Oxford Review of education* **28**(2): 261-273.

local education authorities had enough autonomy to develop a fairly radical re-organisation of school structures without interference from the national government prior to Circular 10/65. This demonstrates that within the partnership model, initiative for policy change could arise from any of the partners. Secondly, the style of the Circular demonstrated the commitment to a non-directive model of political management in education on the part of the education department. This demonstrates that the co-operation of local authorities was valued and that imposition of policy was regarded, at this time, as a breach of appropriate conduct within the network.

A similar network dynamic was in evidence within central government, albeit as Chitty and Lawton have argued, a dynamic based on tension rather than consensus (Lawton 1984 ; Chitty 2009 120-122). The central network of DES officials, the PM's office and HMI professional inspectors represented an almost archetypal network governance form with each group representing different interests and producing compromised and negotiated outcomes. Though lacking a formal basis, mutual trust, recognition and resource exchange were considered sufficient to maintain the network over time. As such, the network of education management at the centre of British government in the post-war period can be regarded as a model of both incrementalist pluralism on the Lindblom model (1959) and of ideal-type network governance. However, the trajectory of change under New Labour and its predecessor governments has been to unravel this tension system, with officials and professionals losing the capacity to reign in a more activist PM's office. Rather than the governance theorists' shift from hierarchy to network, I argue there has instead been a movement from network (albeit an exclusive, rather than openly pluralist network) to a more monopolistic and hierarchical system with the tension system failing to restrain the Prime Minister's office.

Diagram 1: The Lawton-Chitty Model of Education Governance c.1965-1985



Towards a National System, Nationally Administered

Despite their direct involvement in governance networks, however, LEAs (as with all British local government) remained in a precarious position during this period of benign partnership since they lacked any statutory role. The powers that LEAs held, and even their continued right to exist, were only at the discretion of central government (Bache 2003 303). As Chitty points out, the 1944 Education Act which was regarded as the founding document of post-war collaboration in education gave LEAs no clear duties or powers (Chitty 2009 20). In line with the traditional British policy style, the role of LEAs and their relationship to the centre was uncodified and based on a tacit logic of appropriateness. The weak structural location of LEAs with respect to central government placed the Conservatives under Thatcher in a position to pursue a reforming project aimed at reducing the power of LEAs as the symbol of the cosy centrist consensus politics of the post-war years. The powers of LEAs were significantly eroded as a consequence of Conservative education reforms. LEAs lost control over higher education polytechnics, Further Education, the careers service, the school curriculum (with the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988), testing (with the introduction of SATs), admissions (through open admissions policies and school choice), and school inspection (through the creation of OFSTED in the 1992 Education Act). Despite HMI and DES support for a non-statutory framework for a core curriculum (which itself would mark a clear departure from the past devolution of curricular matters to LEAs), a statutory National Curriculum was imposed by the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State, Kenneth Baker (Dunford 1999 53). The Local Management of Schools (LMS) initiative introduced per capita funding for schools which reduced the discretion of LEAs in distributing budgets. Furthermore, schools were invited to 'opt-out' of local authority management and operate as new types of schools funded directly from central government through the introduction of two new school models: Grant Maintained schools and City Technology Colleges. The 1996 Conservative White Paper made clear that the historic self-understanding of the role of LEAs in the national system, locally administered was a thing of the past, both in its title: "Self Government

for Schools” and in the claim that: “it is not the task of LEAs to control or run schools” (DfEE 1996) From a governance perspective, the Conservative reforms can be viewed as the break-up of a network governance model and the beginnings of the reassertion of hierarchical control. The LEAs’ historic role as an almost equal partner in the education policy network counted for little once the executive chose to exploit the powers it held by virtue of the arrangement of the British constitution. The informal, tacit logic of appropriateness which had held the network together offered little protection once it encountered a more active executive project that viewed LEAs and professionals as obstructive brakes on policy rather than sources of expertise providing necessary checks and balances.

New Labour and the LEA

As a consequence of Conservative reforms, New Labour confronted an education system where LEAs retained comparatively little managerial control over schools. Only 10% of school budgets were distributed solely at the discretion of local authorities, with the majority of LEA activity devoted to the rationalisation of school places, provision of legal and school improvement services, providing for pupils with special educational needs, access and transport, excluded pupils and pupil welfare and strategic management (DfEE 2000 ; DfEE 2001). One additional duty was imposed by the 1998 School Standards and Frameworks Act. This formalised a statutory obligation on LEAs to promote high standards - a precursor for the intensification of output-oriented management in future years (Bache 2003 304). The tactic of curbing local authority management of schools was enthusiastically embraced by New Labour, despite LEAs already being reduced to a residual role in education governance. The new Conservative school models had not proved a great success, with few schools choosing to opt out and follow the GM or CTC models (Walford and Miller 1991 ; Whitty, Edwards et al. 1993 ; Chitty 1999 26). In response to this, New Labour experimented with a number of techniques both for extricating schools from LEA management and for imposing the government’s agenda on local actors. These included the introduction of LEA inspections, the introduction of Education Action Zones (EAZs) which required

LEAs in areas of poor performance and high deprivation to enter into public-private partnerships, changes to school funding arrangements and the introduction of new 'independent state schools' called academies²⁶ which would be outside LEA management. These policies had the effect, and arguably the intention, of disciplining local authorities to central priorities and establishing more direct relationships between schools and the centre. Increased spending on education and on capital funding for school building and refurbishment through the Building Schools for the Future (BSF)²⁷ programme provided the *quid pro quo* for the further curtailment of LEA powers.

LEA inspection was introduced in the first major New Labour education act – the 1998 School Standards and Frameworks Act. All LEAs in England were inspected by OFSTED and the Audit Commission between 1998 and 2001. The findings of these inspections were that there was significant variation and diversity in LEA practices across the country. The inspections were particularly concerned with variation in the proportion of funds delegated to schools by LEAs and questioned the value for money of LEA-provided services to schools (Audit Commission 1999). These findings of diversity lead to a centralising and standardising drive, with targets set for the proportion of funds to be delegated and the transferral to public private partnerships or even full privatisation of some LEAs where decision making was seen as overly politicised²⁸ (Bache 2003 306). This process was emblematic of the policy style pursued by New Labour in its political management of education. Where LEAs were seen as either incompetent or uncooperative in implementing the government programme, central government would not hesitate to intervene. As Bache observed:

²⁶ Announced in 2000 as City Academies. The first academy was opened in 2002.

²⁷ The BSF programme made extensive use of the PFI to provide money for the rebuilding or refurbishment of all secondary schools by 2020

²⁸ Such as Leeds/Bradford (control transferred to public-private partnership EducationLeeds) and Islington (contracted out to Cambridge Education Associates)

Where local bodies had been unable to satisfy these centrally-determined criteria, central government demonstrated a willingness and capacity to intervene directly. The result was to promote local delivery mechanisms more likely to ensure that central policies would be delivered... The fragmentation of education delivery undermined the ability of existing powerful institutions, individual LEAs, to frustrate national policy objectives either through the pursuit of conflicting local policy priorities or through inefficiency²⁹ (Bache 2003 309,312)

Over the course of the New Labour governments, the co-ordinating function of intermediate bodies such as LEAs has been reduced to a role in enabling implementation and ensuring compliance with central directives, while their role in providing expertise for improvement or innovation has been usurped often by centrally appointed school improvement advisors (Gunter and Forrester 2009). The role of central government, however, is only enhanced by the diminution of LEAs' capacity to determine their own priorities, resist central directives, or use their own discretion to allocate monies. One of the weaknesses of the state/market dualism described in relation to marketisation theories of education is the lack of attention this gives to disaggregating the various branches of the state. Rather than reading the pattern of recent educational change as a process of deepening marketisation at the expense of the state, more attention should be paid to the fact that these takeovers enhance control by the central government at the expense of LEAs.

Techniques of central control

The intra-state power struggle between central and local government is an important aspect of recent education policy. From this point of view, the disruption of old networks

²⁹ Or, it could be added, through incompetence

of educational management involving national government, local government and professionals is as important as the displacement of hierarchical government by either markets or networks. The disruption of these networks and the building of central co-ordinating capacity are achieved by a range of additional techniques and processes which in combination amount to a sustained project to reorganise power relations in the education state. In this section, I discuss a number of these techniques and their effects on power relations including political control of the curriculum, changes in school funding, the use of targets and centrally-set standards, the Building Schools for the Future programme, choice and 'parent power', the re-shaping of school leadership roles and machinery of government changes. Taken as a whole, it is possible to interpret these processes as cementing a tendential shift in power relations towards the peak institutions in central government. This shifting balance of power is then taken to constitute a better general characterisation of the New Labour education project than the alternative approaches considered in earlier chapters.

(i) Curriculum

The disruption of the local layer of bureaucracy in education was a key part of the education strategies of both New Labour and its Conservative predecessors. But with the LEA role dramatically reduced, central governments sought to develop techniques with sufficient reach to substitute local management of education. One such technique was the introduction and extension of an unprecedented level of central control of the school curriculum. Historically, government control of the curriculum had never been part of education governance in England and protecting the curriculum from political interference had been regarded as the main reason why the partnership model of education management was necessary. The most important curricular development was the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988, and the parallel introduction of standardised SATs testing which provided a mechanism whereby accountability and delivery could be precisely and publicly measured and enforced. The New Labour project developed from within the institutional framework created by the Thatcherite

reforms and relied on the precedent established by the ERA to develop further central curricular prescription. A striking example of this came at the primary school level where a government commitment to improving numeracy and literacy was pursued through extensive curricular prescription, targets for national testing in the subjects, and intervention in classroom practice and pedagogy through the introduction of National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies³⁰ and compulsory literacy and numeracy hours. Similar techniques were employed at other phases of the curriculum, while centrally published league tables, widely publicised benchmark targets at Key Stage (KS) 2 and Key Stage 4 and rigorous OFSTED inspection ensured that curriculum and pedagogy were extensively policed in order to ensure comparable standards across the system. There is little doubt that strategies such as the extension of the National Curriculum, Standard Attainment Tests (SATs) and national literacy and numeracy strategies have served the goal of greater uniformity and standardisation across the schooling system. Attempts to introduce new types of qualification, such as the International Baccalaureate and International GCSEs in response to similar moves by independent schools have been blocked by qualifications regulators in order to maintain standards and comparability (Eason 2006 ; Marley 2007). Strategies to disseminate best practice on curriculum and pedagogy through the system are also contrary to competitive imperatives since they allow some schools to 'free-ride' on the innovations developed by others. These policies might be best understood as standardisation measures, rather than attempts to use competition to drive improvement through innovation. As such, curricular controls were essential to the drive to raise and maintain standards across the system.

(ii) Changes in school funding

The precarious relationship of local authorities to central government had already been demonstrated by the 1988 ERA. This single Act of Parliament, itself developed by a minority faction on the Right of the Conservative Party, had dramatically disrupted the

³⁰ Managed by the private sector company Capita.

long-standing model of benign partnership between central and local schooling authorities. This process speaks to one dimension of the structural weakness of sub-national bodies in the highly centralised British state. A second dimension of this weakness, which is crucial to allowing the kind of top-down governing project that New Labour pursued, is the financial weakness of local government. Since local government lacks revenue streams of a magnitude to allow it to fund schools itself, local authorities are necessarily always in a dependent relationship with the Exchequer (Travers 1989 ; Jones and Travers 1996 ; Stoker 1999). The power asymmetry in this relationship placed New Labour in a strong position to apply new conditionalities and directives on local authority and school actions once budgets for education began to increase dramatically after 1999. While some governance theorists had questioned whether budget control would be adequate to prevent hollowing out of state functions (Rhodes 1996 ; Rhodes 1997), New Labour demonstrated that this remained a powerful tool for disciplining other actors in the policy process.

The strategy pursued by New Labour with regards to school funding again reflected its broader public services approach of “money and modernisation”. In a bid to demonstrate its fiscal responsibility, New Labour had stuck to Conservative spending plans for the first two years of its period in office. This meant a continuation of historically low levels of funding for school level education. Once this self-imposed and political restriction had been lifted, the overall education budget began to rise sharply. Understandably, the government sought to maintain a degree of accountability over how these extra resources were spent. The favoured strategy was to increase the proportion of school funding that was awarded to schools directly by the education department, while increasing the number of ‘strings attached’ to monies distributed via intermediate bodies such as local authorities. The Fair Funding Initiative reform to school funding was introduced in the SSFA and came into operation in 1999³¹. The Fair Funding policy was

³¹ It was subsequently further developed by the 2002 and 2005 Education Act before the introduction of the Dedicated Schools Grant in 2006-2007

designed to regulate the proportion of education budgets delegated to schools by LEAs (The Local Schools Budget (LSB)) and made this uniform for all school types (West and Pennell 2002 215). This was achieved by setting a series of rising targets for the proportion of the funding passed to LEAs by the education department that should be delegated to schools (Bache 2003 310). Fair Funding allowed LEAs to retain monies only for strictly defined functions such as strategic management, access (including transport and planning school places), school improvement and SEN (ibid). During this period, the Local Schools Budget (LSB) (total funding passing through LEAs), rose dramatically, while the Individual Schools Budget (ISB- the amount of LSB delegated to schools) also increased but became more carefully regulated. Limits were introduced for the amount of the Local Schools Budget that LEAs could retain for Central Expenditure (CE) in any single year. The overall effect of the Fair Funding reforms was to decrease LEA discretion over how much of their budgets to delegate to schools, through pressure from the centre to increase the amount of money outside LEA management³².

A second strand of New Labour school funding reform has involved greater use of targeted grants which go direct to schools and are not subject to LEA management. As Bache observes, the large increase in education funding in the years following the lifting of the cap on public spending in 1999 was “disproportionately for spending on priorities determined exclusively by the centre” (2003 312). Johnson estimates that the proportion of funding reaching maintained schools directly from central government and bypassing the funding formula rose from 4% to 16% between 1997 and 2003 (Johnson 2004), while all academies are funded directly from the centre. It was made clear to schools that the funding streams distributed by the education department were to be spent specifically on the priorities identified by government. Central priorities such as reducing infant class sizes, the development of the National Strategies in Literacy and Numeracy

³² School funding was reviewed again in 2001. Bache notes the resistance of Treasury representatives to moves to increase LEA discretion over a more ‘bottom up’ funding process during this consultation Bache, I. (2003).

"Governing through Governance: Education Policy Control under New Labour." *Political Studies* 51(2): 300-314.

including numeracy and literacy hours in every school and increased school type diversity and curricular specialisation were supported through this type of mechanism. The centrally controlled Standards Fund was created to distribute money to schools for the purposes of providing ring fenced funding for specific government initiatives such as the specialist schools programme and National Strategies. The specialist schools programme, for example, offered additional funding for schools to specialise in a particular curriculum area, supported by increased per-pupil funding. Since eligibility for the programme is contingent on exam results, the policy supports both output-oriented management and the development of diversity and choice in the maintained sector³³. Block grants based on pupil numbers were distributed under the School Standards Grant with the express requirement that LEAs devolve all of this money to schools. Further funding pots such as the £400 million dedicated to National Challenge (the programme to raise GCSE exam performance in schools failing to reach the government target of 30% of pupils achieving 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C) were also distributed directly to schools by the education department without the intervention of LEAs³⁴. Targeted grants such as the Schools Effectiveness Grant were directly tied to central priorities with schools ordered to spend this grant exclusively on the measures described in the Excellence in Schools White Paper. By 2006, direct funding from central government matched the amount reaching schools through the funding formula via LEAs (DfES 2007). In 1998, the Funding Formula total had been double the central government figure.

³³ Where schools do not achieve results that qualify them for specialist status, there is pressure to move towards the academy model, which again brings those schools into a direct relationship with the education department especially in terms of finance.

³⁴ The National Challenge scheme was also explicitly linked to the adoption of preferred school models such as academies and trusts in the event that standards were not seen to improve at a rate acceptable to the education department. £195 million of the £400 million budget for the programme was expected to be spent on the creation of new academies DCSF (2008). National Challenge: A toolkit for schools and local authorities. DCSF. Nottingham, DCSF.

The clearest example of the strategy to circumvent LEAs' role in distributing school funding by New Labour is the academy schools programme. The academic literature on this policy has focused on its role as a step towards marketisation due to the involvement of sponsors and governors from the private sector (Hatcher and Jones 2006 ; Woods, Woods et al. 2007 ; Astle and Ryan 2008 ; Hatcher 2008 ; Chitty 2009 ; Maddern 2009). However, the proportion of funding provided by the school sponsors is modest in comparison to the overall school budget³⁵. Arguably a more significant aspect of the policy is that it brings schools into a direct financial relationship with the education department rather than that relationship being mediated by LEAs. Academy funding is agreed on the basis of individual funding agreements between the school and the Secretary of State. The funding agreement can then be used to attach conditions to continued government funding for the schools. Compliance with the statutory admissions code, for example, is a condition of public funding of academies. While funding for schools within the LEA system was restructured in order to incentivise schools' compliance with central priorities, in academies the process was much simpler since the education department could simply write its priorities into the funding agreement and insist that school budgets be spent in specific ways. This funding model was seen as important both in reducing LEA influence and in enhancing central control as senior education adviser, Conor Ryan, confirmed:

“This investment [in school capital] was crucial in overcoming local authority resistance: ministers could expect new academies as part of an investment and reform package. Equally important were the funding agreements with the education department, which provided guarantees on contentious issues like admissions policies, while keeping local authorities out of their day-to-day management.” (Ryan in Astle and Ryan 2008 5)

³⁵ Comprising no more than 20% of the typical cost of a school building and in most cases, a much smaller proportion than this Fitz, J., S. Gorard, et al. (2005). "Diversity, Specialisation and Equity in Education." Oxford Review of education 31(1): 47-69.

The net result of changes to school funding has been a closer financial relationship between the education department and schools with an increasing proportion of school funding being allocated according to central, rather than locally determined, priorities. This relationship has been enabled by growing education budgets throughout the period from 1999 to 2010. The relationship between schools and the education department relies on a 'carrot and stick' strategy whereby increasing budgets come with conditionalities determined at the centre. This strategy has made use of budget control, legislative powers and priority setting to reward and sanction the behaviour of schools and, as such, can be viewed as an archetypal principal-agent relationship.

(iii) Targets and the standards agenda

The New Labour project in education relied on strengthening top-down control over the schools system as a whole through the use of managerial techniques such as target setting and performance monitoring. This approach requires continuous collection of performance management data and a system of sanctions and rewards if targets are to decisively affect the organisational behaviour of the institutions involved. The majority of institutional innovation undertaken by New Labour has aimed to develop this capacity. In addition to the retention of classic bureaucratic controls, the task of sanctioning and rewarding of schools' or local authorities' performance against targets partly falls to the quasi-market created by parental choice plus league tables; and the OFSTED inspections regime. The delegation of tasks to service users, quasi-markets or quangos seems at first sight to vindicate the 'new governance' narrative. However, traditional instruments of bureaucratic control remain a crucial part of the management of this institutional structure. Legislation and budget control remain the principal source of the government's ability to exert influence over the street-level delivery of public services. Recent reforms in education concern the refinement of structures to ensure that these unique resources of the state exert maximum influence over organizational behaviour at local level.

Centrally published league tables of schools' examination performance can be viewed as one aspect of contemporary education governance that betrays a persistent influence of the top-down public service management that some claim is in decline. The special significance of these tables is in their normative privileging of some educational outcomes over others, their treatment of mitigating factors on performance such as class and prior attainment, and their role in producing relative advantage and disadvantage in local markets for school choice (Adnett and Davies 2003 394). While some might claim that this latter factor makes league tables effectively an auxiliary to a competitive marketplace for schools, they also serve to discipline schools to the specific priorities of the government of the day. As such, they serve to arrogate the evaluation of schools to central government, sharply reducing the capacity of education professionals or local authorities to self-evaluate. While schools may be encouraged to compete with one another by league tables, they are encouraged only to compete on a narrow range of criteria which are determined from above. The function of targets and league tables is not solely to provide 'consumers' of education with the information required to choose between suppliers, but also to make clear governmental priorities and to penalise schools for failure to comply with these. As Adnett and Davies point out, central targets and league tables have multiple roles beyond enabling informed parental choice (2003 394). Firstly, they specify a particular weighting for the different outcomes of schooling (e.g. future productivity, socialisation, personal fulfilment, happiness of pupils while at school); second, they attach a particular weighting (perhaps of zero) to the contribution of intake characteristics, school effect and peer effects to those outcomes; and third, they ensure that success in a local market depends upon the *relative* performance of a school in those tables.

A further function of the tables is to eliminate any grounds of appeal over the performance of schools. Government guidance to OFSTED increasingly insisted that the school inspector give the highest priority to exam benchmark performance in its inspections, which both serves to recruit OFSTED as an agent of the standards agenda

and denies schools the potentially useful resource of a favourable OFSTED report to defend themselves against claims of low standards (OFSTED 2010). New Labour also initiated a number of schemes whereby central intervention measures were triggered by schools' failure to reach a specified standard of performance according to clear and objective targets. So, for example, schools falling below a certain standard of performance at KS2 will be subject to intervention under the Schools Causing Concern programme while at KS4, failure to reach the centrally determined floor target of 30% GCSE 5ACEM triggered intervention under the National Challenge scheme. Both schemes require struggling schools to work with centrally appointed school improvement partners and teams of advisers and may involve replacing the board of governors with centrally appointed Interim Executive Boards. In the case of National Challenge, conversion to academy status was the preferred strategy for improvement for schools below the floor target (DCSF 2008 ; DCSF 2009).

(iv) Building Schools for the Future

Central control of capital funding and, in particular, the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme further strengthened the education department's position in negotiating school organisation decisions with local bodies. Due to the absence of alternative funding streams at local level, strategic actors within the education department have the option to effectively make capital funding conditional on the adoption of preferred forms of school organisation. Though the academies programme and BSF are not formally connected, there is overlap of personnel between the civil service in charge of promoting diversity and those in charge of signing off BSF schemes and the two schemes are clearly linked in the decision-making processes of local authorities and individual school managers. The attraction of the academy model to councillors, parents and politicians alike seems to be significantly enhanced by the additional money made available for improvement to school building stock as part of the programme, with some evidence that access to this additional money is decisive in the approval of academy plans. For example, a Government-commissioned

PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) (2007) survey found that new buildings and facilities were decisive in the decision of 75% of parents of academy pupils to apply, while improvements to buildings and facilities are frequently cited as the main, or only, incentive to apply for academy status rather than any benefits associated with the academy model *per se* (Coventry City Council 2006 ; Hatcher and Jones 2006 ; Beckett and Shepherd 2009). However, there is also some evidence to suggest that the DCSF is able to push through academy schemes against the preferences of local bodies even without the carrot of BSF funding. For example, in Cumbria, a low priority area for BSF, the opening of three new academies was moved forward by one year, despite opposition from both local authorities and the academy sponsors (Stewart 2008). This might suggest that power asymmetries between central and local levels have further dimensions besides financial dependency.

(v) *Choice and parent power*

The prominent rhetorical role given by New Labour to the empowerment of parents and the extension of school choice has received sustained attention from academic educationists (See Goodwin (2009) for a full overview). The majority of this literature has emphasised choice and the promotion of parents' role as educational consumers from within a marketisation narrative. One notable exception to this trend is Adnett and Davies' work, which makes the case for treating the relationship as one whereby parents are recruited to police the governmental agenda. Adnett and Davies suggest that New Labour education strategy has "reduced parents to the role of agents, putting pressure on other agents (schools) to achieve the outcomes that the government, as principal, has determined" (2003 403). As such, neither parents nor the schools themselves participate in the determination of objectives or success criteria. Instead, parents are empowered to impose sanctions on schools that fail to toe the government line. They enforce, but do not participate in policy. Such a strategy may be regarded as efficient for governments compared to command-and-control since service users are recruited to enforce the chosen agenda, while government may be relieved of the obligation to

intervene directly or continuously³⁶. The mechanism is indirect from the perspective of government since it involves creating a performance evaluation regime that forces schools to embed a consideration of parental preferences into their management processes. The belief that school performance (as reflected in exam benchmarks, league table positioning etc) affects recruitment and the use of per capita funding means that schools cannot afford to remain indifferent to the school standards agenda for long without suffering financially³⁷. Previous attempts to foster a more participatory role for parents in actively driving change in education have proved largely unsuccessful. For example, parents failed both to support opting out under the Grant Maintained model (Godber 1999 135), and to take advantage of the provisions made in the 2006 EIA for parents to set up their own schools. It remains to be seen whether Conservative 'free schools' proposals can buck this trend. However, under the New Labour project parents remained largely restricted to a role in policing or enforcing the central agenda which, through curricular, performance evaluation and funding control left little room for participation from other groups such as parents.

(vi) *School leadership*

The diminished role of the local authority in education governance has been reflected in a shift from the local authority to the individual school as the locus of accountability for performance. Changes to the role of school leaders have been an important element of this strategy. In line with its broader educational project, individual school leadership has been ever more closely incorporated into a delivery chain that connects the national level to internal school processes. Gunter and Forrester argue that the defining

³⁶ See , on the need to design 'self-sustaining' public service reforms that do not require continuous , active intervention Barber, M. (2007). *Instruction to Deliver*. London, Politicos.

³⁷ Bradley and Taylor (2000) estimate that an improvement of 10% in a school's examination performance will lead to an increase of seven pupil enrolments.

characteristic of New Labour's approach to school leadership is the attempt to build management capacity that would allow the local authority management functions to be transferred downwards to individual schools. As such, they claim school leaders authority to lead became less a matter of professional excellence and more a matter of managerial competence (Gunter and Forrester 2009 497). The creation of the National College of School Leadership gave institutional expression to this development, while the steady erosion of the requirement for headteachers to hold Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) in favour of the NCSL's National Professional Qualification for Headteachers further reinforces the distinction between managerial and educational leadership. For Gunter and Forrester, this has the benefit of eradicating any possible disjuncture between the 'education professional' culture of headteachers and the 'chief executive' role of headteachers. This can also be read as part of the broader circumvention of the professional voice in education which might be resistant to an exclusive focus on service delivery and the standards agenda. The creation of NDPBs such as the NCSL with a remit determined by the priorities of central units such as the SEU and PMDU were regarded as integral to this process (ibid. 499). This again speaks to the continuing importance of central government institutions and the ability of core executive actors to intervene very directly from a remote position through the use of delegated governance forms.

(vii) Strengthening the centre in education governance

In addition to changes to funding arrangements and policy instruments, the New Labour education project also involved extensive reorganisation of the institutional machinery of the education state. The general thrust of this reorganisation was to continue to disrupt the 'benign partnership' model of education governance described by Lawton and Chitty, a task to which Thatcherite education reforms had also been addressed. The model which emerged to replace this system under New Labour gave the core executive a

much more prominent role, principally at the expense of local authorities and the departmental civil service.

Key actors at the core of the New Labour education project regarded a reorganisation of the power relations with the education department as a priority from the early days of the first New Labour government. As Barber confirms, the departmental culture at the education department was seen as inhibiting the new government's prospects for implementing a fairly radical programme of reform, an analysis that both the education secretary Blunkett and permanent secretary Michael Bichard shared (2007 29). As such, the analysis of the structures of education governance echoed a broader change in the perception of the role of the civil service. New Labour's education reformers tended to share a view of the civil services as excessively risk averse, slow and secretive, and as self-appointed bastions of the 'official view' (ibid. 313). These actors saw themselves as attempting to disrupt and disturb what they regarded as a stultifying political culture that permeated the whole of British politics and was exemplified by the civil service. Barber in particular regarded a profound culture change as vital to any reforming project in order to overcome "very British (and very civil service)" ideas of change as incremental and slow, or Whiggish ideas of progress no matter what happens today (2007 365). The problems identified by Barber et al. were seen as especially acute in the field of education. The education department was seen as overly influenced by producer lobby groups, which generated continuity and incrementalism rather than the paradigmatic change that New Labour's reformers desired. Leadbeater described the government's view of education as a sector wherein "Low aspirations and ambitions were not challenged. Bad performance was not rooted out. Innovations were not spread. Under-performance was allowed to drift" (Leadbeater 2004 92). The resources of central government, Leadbeater claimed, should be put to better use in the sector to "provide challenge and ambition for the system as a whole, challenging 'local equilibria' [and] providing common yardsticks and measures of performance" (92). Given that the resources delegated to the education sector were increasing, the concern with raising standards and tightening accountability became more pressing. On the evidence of the

analyses presented by Leadbeater and Barber, it is clear that key New Labour actors were not persuaded that this could be achieved within the existing structures of education governance.

The creation of the Standards and Effectiveness Unit (SEU) was a key development in the New Labour education project. The Unit was located within the education department but headed by Prime Ministerial appointees (with Barber as director) and reporting to the PM. The SEU was given responsibility for the government's standards agenda. From the outset, it was clear that the SEU was seen as intentionally oppositional to the rest of the department, which was regarded as unacceptably resistant to change and as being too receptive to producer interests (as, for example, in its resistance to 'naming and shaming' poorly performing schools and LEAs) (Barber 2007 32). As such, the SEU represented the voice of the Prime Minister within the education department, and the vehicle by which Blair's agenda could be driven through a potentially obstructive department. The SEU gave institutional expression to an education project around which those sympathetic to the central agenda could organise.

One of the first tasks of the SEU was to produce a white paper that would form the basis of Labour's first major education act, the 1998 School Standards and Frameworks Act. The white paper was produced by a highly insulated policy formulating network, with no representation from the 'old guard' of the departmental bureaucracy and little from the education profession. The group that effectively wrote the SSFA consisted instead of dedicated Blairites from the government and PM's office (Stephen Byers, Estelle Morris, David Blunkett, David Miliband), sympathetic senior civil servants (Conor Ryan, David Pitt-Watson), with Michael Barber as the sole, and distinctly unrepresentative, voice of the education profession (32). The process of production of the SSFA was typical of the governing style that would come to define New Labour's education project with small, insulated networks outside the established Whitehall machine given authority by prime ministerial patronage to pursue a reform project initiated by the Prime Minister. While the SSFA itself was fairly modest in scope, it marked a statement of intent with regard to the

focus on school standards. The core business of the SEU was the establishment and monitoring of performance targets and the initiation of central intervention where standards were deemed too low³⁸. Following this initial success, the SEU also took up the task of disciplining LEAs to the new performance management regime. The programme of LEA inspections initiated by the SSFA was closely monitored by the staff of the SEU, who lobbied OFSTED to accelerate its inspections in order to allow the SEU to insist on LEAs contracting out services. OFSTED clearly increased its programme of inspection after 2000, at the behest of a departmental unit sponsored by the Prime Minister (Barber 2007). This was an important development in education governance since it not only demonstrated that delegated governance bodies such as OFSTED were still subject to government interference, but also that determined central actors could aggressively pursue reform with minimal resistance.

The SEU worked effectively as a branch of the Prime Minister's Office within the education department, a role which was formalised when the director of the unit, Michael Barber, became head of the Prime Minister's Office Delivery Unit in 2001. The PMDU was an important element of the creation of a de facto Prime Minister's Department after the 2001 general election. The Unit formed the institutional expression of the government's prioritisation of public service reform and especially, its commitment to improved service delivery. Education was one of four priority areas for reform, and as such the PMDU became a crucial institution within the pattern of education governance. As with the SEU, its main task in education was the collection of performance information, setting and monitoring of performance targets for the schools system as a whole. As such, the PMDU responded in part to a need for greater national level school accountability as a result of the declining role of LEAs in maintaining standards. The PMDU and Barber in particular also maintained a significant policy role with Barber's vision of a centralising push to drive up standards made self-sustaining through the actions of service users featuring prominently in two subsequent education white papers

³⁸ Through the establishment of Education Action Zones, for example.

in 2001 and 2005. Furthermore, both of these white papers were effectively the creations of the heads of the Prime Minister's Policy Unit (David Miliband and Andrew Adonis respectively) (DfES 2001 ; DfES 2005).

The Treasury also played a role in embedding the standards agenda in education, particularly during the first New Labour government. The 1998 Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) introduced Public Service Agreements (PSAs), describing specific outcomes departments were expected to achieve as a condition of the receipt of public money. PSAs in education were typically tied to the achievement of floor targets for attainment at various National Curriculum Key Stages. Since education was one of four priority areas for the PMDU, PSAs and associated targets were jointly developed between the PMDU and Treasury after 2001 as part of a drive to improve public service delivery following the election of that year. Though any failure to meet the floor targets has usually not seen the withdrawal of public funding, these targets have nevertheless formed an important part of the New Labour performance management strategy in education and have provided the basis of accountability for schools to the PMDU and education department.

The network around the Prime Minister became the decisive political actor in the field of education governance under New Labour. The key actors in the case of school-level education are special advisors and staff of the PM's Office such as Michael Barber, Andrew Adonis and Blair himself³⁹. Barber's account of his time as head of first the Standards and Effectiveness Unit in the DfEE/DfES and the Performance and

³⁹ Whitty claims that Blair personally can be seen as the source of certain New Labour policies in education such as the rejection of the Tomlinson report (with Blair favouring maintaining A Levels while key advisors such as David Miliband had long supported a more skills oriented and less traditional curriculum Finegold, D., D. Miliband, et al. (1990). A British Baccalaureate: Ending the Divisions between Education and Training. London, IPPR.

) Whitty, G. (2009). "Evaluating 'Blair's Educational Legacy?': Some comments on the special issue of Oxford Review of Education." Oxford Review of education 35(2): 267-280.

Innovation Unit/Delivery Unit within No.10 bears witness to the extraordinarily closed nature of policy-making in education during the early years of Blairite reform (Barber 2007) Furthermore, Barber and his colleagues were explicit in explaining that this was a conscious strategy aimed at circumventing the civil service and staff of the DfES (ibid.). Lord Adonis' role was to drive the PM's reform agenda through a conservative and resistant department. He was regarded as an individual capable of changing cultures – a 'trouble-shooter' to be seconded to problem departments where cultures were seen as obstructive ⁴⁰ Phil Willis' comments on the activities of the education select committee on which he served, are typical of the tone of education politics at the time:

"Schools policy was always written by [junior schools minister] Andrew Adonis and the No10 policy unit and imposed on the department. The agenda was centrally-driven without looking at the evidence, so the influence of the committee was minimal, to put it mildly" (Willis quoted in Stewart (2008))

Conclusion

The defining development in education governance under New Labour is the further substitution of the partnership model by a more hierarchical system bolstered by the creation of multiple delegated governance bodies. In this regard, New Labour continued a strategy that was congruent with its predecessors in the sense of seeking to limit the autonomy of actors beyond the executive in education policy processes. As such, the New Labour education project can be characterised as involving two central dynamics. First, New Labour's education strategy continued the longer-term project of dismantling the partnership model with its emphasis on interest representation and incrementalism. Second, it substituted in place of the partnership model a command and control model that focused on the realisation of centrally determined objectives. New Labour's approach is distinctive not in terms of the overall pattern of change in power relations

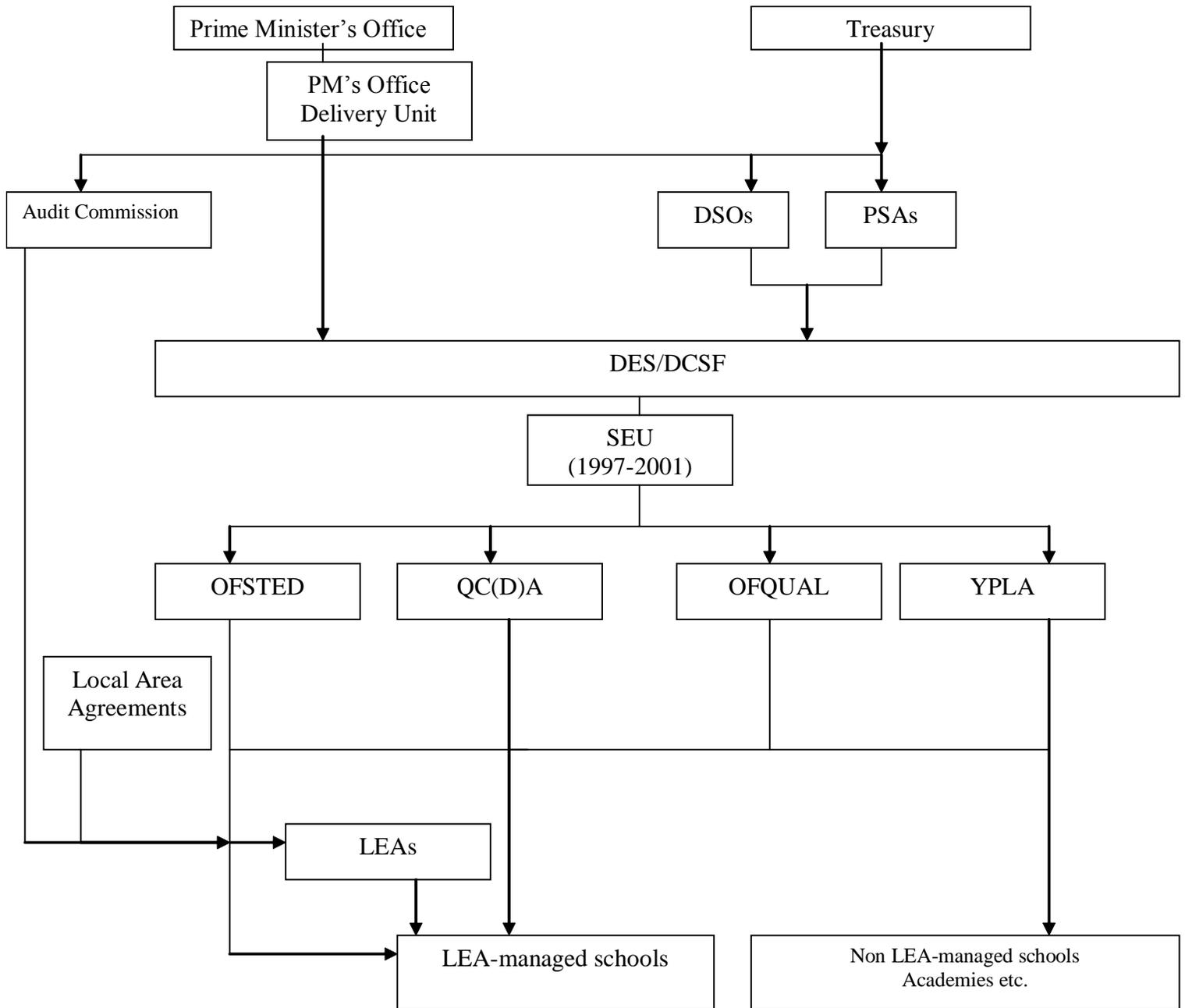
⁴⁰ Adonis subsequently moved to perform a similar role in the Transport department.

that it promotes, but in terms of the techniques and rationale for the strategy. New Labour made greater use of institutional innovation, budget control and has prioritised targets and standards to a much greater degree than its predecessors. Furthermore, one of the primary motivations of this strategy was to secure closer scrutiny over major budget increases, a rationale of 'money and modernisation' that also distinguishes the New Labour project from that of its predecessors.

The New Labour education project reflects the priority of the core executive and the Prime Minister in both principle and practice. Far from an ever more diffuse and dispersed understanding of power that the early governance theorists might have recommended, this reading of education governance under New Labour suggests that small groups of committed actors within the core executive can still exert significant influence over the direction of policy. As in other areas, this strategy is underpinned by a specific set of understandings about the appropriate constitutional roles of the various branches of the British state. Barber states this explicitly in defending the dominance of the PM's Office over education ministers (2007 312). Barber regarded the PM as entitled to take priority over education ministers since the PM had personally prioritised education, vastly increased the education budget and assumed additional risk to him personally in the event of failure to improve the service.⁴¹ As such, the conception of prime ministerial power as "essentially negative" (Richards and Smith 2002 203) seems to be straightforwardly refutable in the case of education reform where the PM's Office positioned itself in opposition both to ministers and to the Parliamentary Labour Party and became the main source of new policy initiatives in education.

⁴¹ This may be seen to speak to one dimension of an increasing personalisation of politics, and also may go some way to explaining the high ministerial turnover under Blair.

Diagram 2: Model of Education Governance under New Labour



One further conclusion suggested by this reading of New Labour education strategy is that central intervention, albeit through techniques which appear to match 'governance', market or partnership approaches, can encourage institutional arrangements that favour the delivery of governments' preferred policies. Under New Labour, command-and-control remained firmly in the repertoire of government techniques to manage public services. This is in clear contrast to the standard governance narrative which finds command and control a redundant relic of a bygone era. Since command and control is seen as unsustainably labour-intensive on the part of government in the long term, the next stage is the use of quasi-markets. These choice and competition mechanisms are seen as key to driving self-sustaining continuous improvement (Barber 2007 335). But this is not because of either faith in, or impotence towards the displacement of the state by the market. Rather it is because *quasi-* markets can recruit service users to discipline providers to the priorities of the centre, without the centre having to apply rewards and sanctions itself. On this interpretation, it is central government, rather than the market, or civil societal bodies that fill the void left by a shrinking role for local government. While power is transferred away from sub-national government through the measures described above, this power is shifted upwards to central government, not outwards to non-public actors.

According to the narrative offered in this chapter, there is a case for continuing to study education governance, policy and politics through the lens of a principal-agent relationship rather than treating education governance as a matter of infiltration by the market or a diffusion of power among a plurality of actors. This approach would treat schools as government franchises whose job is to deliver an educational package the content of which is almost wholly determined at 'head office'. The complex institutional architecture of education governance is not then evidence of a new age of devolved, participatory, networked or partnership governance. It is much less evidence of adaptation to a new post-bureaucratic, differentiated, complex or reflexive network society. Much of this institutional matrix is dedicated to ensuring compliance and

protecting the model of education that has been decided upon by an elite group of actors in central government. This is not necessarily to criticise such a model, but to suggest that there are strong hierarchical counter-tendencies to the rise of either market or network governance in education that seriously bring into question large swathes of the literature on education governance, policy and politics.

The next section of the thesis proposes trying to make sense of education governance from the point of view of state managers. This means asking questions about what they have to gain from centralisation, and what incentives they have to resist or avoid market or network forms. Of course, there is no necessary correspondence between the strategy of state managers and outcomes – there are other players in the game and other structural factors to consider. How and why actors make their decisions, and the content of those decisions, will be profoundly shaped by traditions, the institutional landscape, the economic environment and ideological competition. The point is that politics, agency and strategy, including the strategy of state managers, must form a part of an adequate analysis of governance. Governance forms do not change in order to correspond to economic or social change, nor do they change to correct market or state failure. They emerge and change because identifiable actors decide to change them. In the next chapter, I attempt to account for the governance strategies pursued by actors within the British state and begin to build an explanation for the pattern of education governance described in this chapter.

Section 2: Explaining Education Governance, Policy and Politics under New Labour

Section 1 attempted to develop an alternative narrative or description of the New Labour education project that moved beyond both marketisation and governance approaches. My criticism of the marketisation narrative in Chapter 1 was that it relied on a reductive dualism of state versus market so that all deviation from past models of governing was interpreted as the encroachment of the market. The governance approaches discussed in chapter 2 were considered useful in producing a more nuanced analysis and moving the debate on from this state-market dualism. However, the principle weakness of the governance approach in its first wave formulation was a tendency to write political agency out of the story, while in the decentred formulation, it tended toward the opposite extreme in its neglect of the structural and institutional environment in which political actors operate.

The alternative narrative described in chapter 3 suggested that New Labour's education strategy is best characterised as a centralising, executive-driven project which seeks to extend central direction over a range of alternative sites of power. This second section moves on from description to attempt an explanation of this strategy. I argue that New Labour's education strategy represents a broader governing project 'writ small'. This project aims to increase the managerial effectiveness of elected governments and the core of the core executive by reducing the autonomy of bodies which held significant discretionary power under the classic Westminster Model. As such, the core executive aims to standardise, normalise and formalise relations between political actors which would once have been uncodified and informal. The New Labour governing project aims to exploit the extensive executive powers afforded by the formal institutions of the British state by eroding the conventional and normative institutions that comprise the quasi-constitution of the Westminster and Whitehall model. This governing project represents an attempt to respond to certain long-run social and economic changes, but the strategy is moderated by the extant architecture of the British state. As such, New Labour's

managerial model of government comes into conflict with the conventions of the Westminster Model. The institutions and quasi-constitutional settlement associated with the Westminster Model present an obstacle to New Labour's project. As a result, New Labour has struggled to develop a more efficient and unencumbered model of executive government and to enhance its administrative efficacy by attempting to subvert long-standing quasi-constitutional conventions.

The New Labour governing project & executive power

This chapter attempts to move beyond the provision of an alternative narrative of the New Labour education project towards an explanation of that project. The central claim is that the political management of education under New Labour reflects a broader governing project 'writ small'. As such, the sources of change in education are not only endogenous to the education sector, but can also be located in state managers' responses to much broader governing dilemmas. Changes in education governance are understood as shaped by an overall governing strategy that asserts the right of the core executive to control the 'low politics' of public service delivery and that challenges the protected role of privileged groups such as civil servants and professionals. A number of theorists have suggested that there is no overall pattern, logic or structure behind New Labour's various reform measures. Rather than a grand strategy, these theorists claim, New Labour operates pragmatically, opportunistically and with regard only to local problems and solutions. This position has been argued from various perspectives by Flinders (2008), Smith (2008 148) and Bevir and Rhodes (2006) among others . This chapter presents a case to suggest that there is indeed an underlying logic to the measures taken which means it is warranted to speak of a New Labour 'governing project' or 'state strategy' informed by a particular constitutional ideology. I do not argue that this project is coherent, free of contradictory elements, uncompromised or fully realised. But I do argue that there is more to it than muddling through. I claim that the pattern of governance observed in the field of education represents a broader governing project 'writ small'. On this reading, the style of political management of education reflects a broader project aimed at the restructuring of the architecture of the British state.

This chapter argues that across the public services, key actors within the leadership of New Labour have pursued a strategy of voluntarily governing through new governance measures including delegation, contracting out, networking and agencification. However, the use of these techniques is intended to strengthen the role of the core executive and

to diminish the capacity of potential rival sources of power to subvert the intentions of government. I attempt to account for the observed proliferation of delegation, inter-agency working, partnership, networking and contracting-out in terms of the attempt by actors within the British core executive to enhance their capacity to achieve their own objectives. This, I argue, involves an attempt to re-culture or circumvent traditional public policy machinery while capitalising on resource advantages to manage the entry of new agents into public administration on an unequal footing. According to this claim, the centre may decide under certain circumstances that its interests are best served by administering public policy through delegation, co-operation, networks or partnerships where it can do so while retaining or enhancing control over policy. As such, governance is understood as a state strategy; and not solely as a rationalisation to impersonal, external forces, or as a decline in the capacity of the state due to insufficient 'reach' of its traditional policy instruments. Indeed, this approach raises the possibility that governments might enhance their control over policy through the use of 'new governance' techniques.

The approach of this chapter is to draw on an institutionalist literature on patterns of change in the contemporary British state to develop an explanation of the form of political management of education policy pursued by New Labour. This literature includes works on the British constitution and its history and works on the changing role and function of the various branches of the British state. In particular, I engage critically with the work of Bevir, Richards and Rhodes (Bevir and Rhodes 2003 ; Bevir 2005 ; Bevir and Rhodes 2006 ; Bevir and Richards 2009) and the authors involved in the ESRC Whitehall project (Smith 1998 ; Marsh, Richards et al. 2001 ; Richards and Smith 2002 ; Marsh, Richards et al. 2003 ; Marsh 2008 ; Richards 2008 ; Smith 2008), as well as a number of other works which deal with the changing British state (e.g. Bulpitt (1983) on centre-periphery relations, Flinders (2008) on delegated governance, Moran (2003) on the rise of the regulatory state, Burnham and Pyper (2008) on the civil service). The value of this literature is that it grounds an explanation of change in the strategies of real political actors and the specific institutional environment in which they must operate.

This approach is intended to recognise that it is politicians and other political actors who make history and not abstract socio-economic dynamics or reified ideologies. I argue that it also offers a better prospect of recognising that, although these actors make history, they do so in circumstances not of their own choosing. The specific context in which actors must operate will shape and constrain the range of strategies actors might adopt. The strategies chosen by political actors will be chosen in response to, and recognition of, the institutional environment (and their perceptions / interpretations of the environment) that they confront. The decentred approach in the governance literature tends to neglect this dimension and give the impression that policy change is driven by changes in actors' beliefs without sufficient reference to the institutional context *about which* actors develop these beliefs. I attempt to root the analysis in the specific institutional configuration of the British state to emphasise the importance of this point.

I attempt to build on the institutionalist literature described above in three ways. First, by extending their analysis to cover recent developments in British politics. Much of this literature is historical in tone and some of the works tend to favour thick description of institutional change over explicit theorisation (e.g. Hennessy (2000)). As one of the more theoretically informed strands of research on the changing British state, the literature produced by the ESRC Whitehall project (for example, Rhodes 1996 ; Smith 1998 ; Smith 1999 ; Hay and Richards 2000 ; Marsh and Smith 2000 ; Marsh, Richards et al. 2001) is important to my analysis, but this project covers the period 1974-1999 and as such could not cover changes to British governance under New Labour. I apply some of the insights of this project to the New Labour era. Secondly, I attempt to turn this institutional literature to a different kind of explanatory purpose. Most of the literature I have in mind attempts to first describe, and then in some cases, explain constitutional change or changes to the machinery of government. The dependent variable is the changing form and function of the British state. In the analysis I am attempting to build, the changing state functions as an independent variable, while the forms of political management of education politics and policy are the dependent variable. I attempt to explain patterns of education policy as a function of broader

changes in the British state and the strategies that drive these changes. The advantage of this approach is that it draws together literatures on the changing face of the British state and on education policy and politics that often have little contact with one another. I have suggested in earlier chapters, this division of labour between education and politics research allows theories such as marketisation and network governance which lack sensitivity to institutional specificity and weakly theorise power and change to dominate education policy research. Thirdly, I attempt to move the literature towards new problems. My focus on the strategies chosen by reflexive and creative political actors introduces the possibility that the strategies chosen may be more or less appropriate and more or less successful in achieving their objectives. This introduces a notion of compromise, contingency and contestation that is sometimes absent from the marketisation or governance literatures. This opens a space for a discussion of the success or failure of the policies and strategies pursued, which I attempt in the next two chapters.

The rationale and origins of the New Labour governing strategy

Any governing project of the kind I am discussing cannot emerge *ex nihilo* but must begin from the institutional and discursive environment it confronts. In the British context, any project with pretensions to producing constitutional innovation must necessarily confront the legacy of the quasi-constitution embodied in the Westminster Model. The New Labour project is, as much as anything else, an attempt to disrupt the constitutional ideology associated with the Westminster Model by dismantling the conventions which embody and sustain that ideology. As such, although sociological or economic change may provide a context for the need to enhance co-ordinating capability, any response must confront features of the British state and British political culture that are to some extent unique or exceptional.

This chapter argues that the strategy is primarily motivated by a desire to enhance managerial or administrative efficacy. It concerns establishing a degree of 'governing competence' (Bulpitt 1983). As such, New Labour's governing project is mainly inward-

looking. Although its intention is to achieve improvements in service delivery that contribute to the political capital and electoral success of the party, its targets are institutions within the machinery of the British state. The means to the outcome is located in improving and rationalising the arcane and ineffective elements within the policy process inside the British state. I argue that the project is driven by a preoccupation with the efficacy and success of policy⁴² and the notion that policy failures might be eliminated given enough central control and streamlining of the policy machinery. The project also reflects and embodies commitments about the appropriate role and function of various branches of the architecture of the British state. As such, it is informed by a kind of constitutional ideology insofar as it involves tacit claims about which actors and institutions have the right to formulate and implement law. While the driving force of the project may be a desire for technocratic efficiency, it necessarily also involves confronting and challenging historical constitutional settlements, as embodied in the quasi-constitution of the Westminster Model. Though I understand New Labour's project as principally managerial rather than ideological in motivation, its character is informed by its emergence in the context of a specific pattern of historical development and institutional structure. As such, it necessarily takes a view on what counts as good governance and hence has a normative dimension.

One of the important factors influencing the choice of strategy, I argue, is the desire of actors within the core executive to disrupt the institutions and traditions associated with 'club government' and the relative decline of Britain after the Second World War. This reflects a frustration with, and rejection of, elements of the 'unofficial constitution' provided by the maxims of the Westminster Model (WM). The 'club government' or 'good chaps' theory of government relied on a set of common understandings about the foundational (unwritten) rules of good government. For example, the governing elite

⁴² As opposed to, for example, the efficiency of policy (see Dunleavy, P. (1995). "Policy Disasters: Explaining the UK's Record." Public Policy and Administration 10(2): 52-70.

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could rely on a common understanding of the constitutional importance of conventions such as ministerial priority, elite dominance, a depoliticised generalist civil service and a limited role for the Prime Minister. These conventions provided a kind of substitute for bureaucratisation which had been stalled in the British state by the persistence of laissez-faire ideology and the failure to sweep away aristocratic hegemony (Green 1990 ; Anderson 1992). In the absence of explicit theorising on the principles of good government, the unofficial constitution of the WM provided a logic of appropriateness, and, as Moran points out (2003), a justification for the continuing insulation of governing elites from external pressures. These tacit understandings, maintained and transmitted within an insular political system, comprise the foundations of a British political tradition (Marsh 2008) that had significant influence on both the normative understanding of good government and on the practice of politics for much of the 20th century.

However, in light of Britain's relative decline and the economic crises of the 1970s, the WM's supposed virtues of stability and moderation begin to look more like complacency and inertia in the eyes of the British political elite (See , for example, Wiener 1981 ; Green 1990 ; English and Kenny 2000 ; Moran 2003 ; Burnham and Pyper 2008) The uncoded maxims of the WM promised to insulate the system against rapid, destabilising change and ensure a steady, incremental progress. Instead, it had resulted in stagnation. In what follows, I attempt to provide evidence to suggest that actors within the core executive have responded to this by challenging important elements of the British political tradition. However, this challenge has not been in the form of a surrender of power to societal interests that might accompany a defeatist narrative of overload, or the state's lack of reach. Since the late 1970s, governments have been increasingly unwilling to accept incrementalism and have sought to reserve greater powers to the core executive in order to drive change more actively and with less obstruction from other branches of government. While the promise to 'roll back the state' may have formed an important strand in the narratives of recent Conservative governments in Britain, this has co-existed, even under Thatcher, with a marked centralising tendency (Gamble 1994). Instead of dispersing power to non-state actors, I claim, the executive

has repeatedly sought to enhance its power with respect to other institutions of state. As such, there is evidence of the centre colonising and regulating, or simply circumventing, parts of the machinery of state that had previously enjoyed a high degree of discretion or been insulated from requirements of democratic accountability. The purpose of such a strategy, I argue, is to increase the ability of the core executive to drive its preferred policies through the legislative system, and to increase accountability over implementation and outcomes. The strategy reflects a dissatisfaction with the possibility that governments can be held responsible for action (or inaction) arising from extra-governmental sources, and frustration over the tendency for the institutions of the Westminster Model to stifle governmental initiative and dilute governing competence.

The Westminster Model

A reference to the Westminster Model requires some further explanation since it refers to at least three related but distinct objects. Firstly, it can be used to refer to a set of structures. In this sense, the WM refers to certain concrete institutional features of the British state. For example, the lack of formal separation of powers, the majoritarian electoral system, the priority of national over sub-national government and formalised opposition. Secondly, the WM is a set of ideas and assumptions about the British state. It refers to a famously uncodified constitutional ideology that sets out a logic of appropriateness for the conduct of politics. In this mode, the WM refers to the principles of ministerial responsibility, parliamentary sovereignty, departmental priority and civil service impartiality, among others. This constitutional ideology bears a close but contingent relationship to the WM in the first sense i.e. as a set of structures. Thirdly, the WM refers to a general theory or organising perspective by which political scientists have sought to understand the conduct of British politics (Gamble 1990). This approach emphasised the stability of the institutions of the British state and the tendency, in Birch's phrase, to ensure a balance between representative and responsible government (Birch 1964). In referring to the Westminster Model, I refer principally to the second dimension: the WM as a set of shared assumptions about the appropriate function of the various institutions of the British state, and indirectly to the first

dimension, where the structures of the British state reflect this underlying constitutional ideology.

It has been quite widely accepted by scholars that the WM as a general theory never provided a descriptively accurate account of how the British state worked in practice (Smith 1998). Central planks of the WM, such as the priority of Parliament and Cabinet decision-making, arguably never operated in the way in which the WM suggested they should: empirical reality did not match the normative prescriptions of WM (Smith 1998 47; Heffernan 2003 358-359). So for example, party discipline and the electoral system ensured that the executive held sway over parliament in the majority of cases. In terms of the practical functioning of key institutions, the WM seemed to lack some descriptive purchase. For Flinders, the WM over-stated the degree of unity and hierarchy in the central state and failed to acknowledge that delegation and differentiation were widespread within the British polity ((Flinders 2008) see also Bevir and Rhodes (2006)). Further, academic material which accepted the WM agenda lacked a consistent conception of power and tended to privilege individual agency and volition of political actors, to the neglect of the study of their institutional environment (Smith 1998 50; Marsh, Richards et al. 2001). As such, the study of central government tended to reduce to a series of weakly theorised binary oppositions, between parliament and government, for example, or between the prime minister and the cabinet (ibid.) The perceived inadequacies and inaccuracies of WM as general theory or organising perspective can therefore be seen as the driver of both a concern with an expanded core executive and later theories of network governance which cast the net even wider in the search for a fully explicated model of the operation of British central government.

However, this is not to say that the WM has no role to play in understanding the British state. In its role as constitutional ideology, I argue, it still carries explanatory force in the study of British politics. The WM refers to a set of tacitly understood principles and practices that, in large measure, substitute for a codified constitution in Britain. These are constitutional fictions, tacit or folk understandings that form a distinctive political

culture or tradition that influences political practice and institutional logics via the habitus of actors involved in the political process. Bevir and Rhodes' observations of the working lives of permanent secretaries strongly suggest that the Westminster model and an ideal of loyalty and service to ministers is key to the legitimation of the role of the civil service and guides the actions of officials (hence the WM is real in the sense of having real effects – officials act as *if* ministerial responsibility is real, for example (Bevir and Rhodes 2006 121)). Perhaps equally importantly, the maxims associated with the WM have genuine purchase in the consciousness of the broader public, with implications for their expectations of their government and the actions for which it might be praised or blamed (Flinders 2008 36). While the WM may lack some descriptive purchase as an itemisation of structures or general theory of the British state, it is a relevant feature of British political culture in terms of the normative prescriptions it embodies and the practitioner behaviour that it often informs.

Westminster as a 'smokescreen'

Flinders, in common with Bevir and Rhodes, believes that the WM provides a "smokescreen' behind which lies a highly diffuse and fragmented state system" (2008 94). There is much to be said for this claim, though the WM also has real effects beyond misdirection. It is more than a smokescreen since it affects practitioners' ideas about what they are doing, and public perceptions and judgements about the proper role and purpose of the state. Flinders acknowledges this point, arguing that the importance of the WM is in 'hiding/veiling' or providing a 'comfort blanket' of ministerial responsibility that obviates the need to develop new accountability frameworks because, in theory, there is always a minister responsible to parliament and public (2008 133). But the effects of the WM go beyond hiding or veiling political realities. The WM sets a context for constitutional change that is inescapable for would-be reformers. So far, Flinders argues, potential moments of crisis or windows of opportunity for constitutional change have generally been managed from within the framework of the WM, demonstrating how deeply resistant this model is to radical change. Flinders' central claim is that the British state 'walks without order' (2008 201), pursuing change with no coherent rival

constitutional logic to underlie the changes. As such, there is a marked preference among state managers for *ad hoc*, variable accountability mechanisms, often uncodified, 'soft' and inconsistent from body to body. While I argue elsewhere that Flinders may over-state the lack of an underlying strategy or logic to the New Labour state project, the point here is to emphasise that the WM is an unavoidable contextual constraint that sets the terms of reference for any attempt at constitutional change or reorganisation of the state. As a result, it has a broader significance beyond its empirical accuracy as a description of the workings of the British state.

Westminster as 'club government'

Moran (2003) argues persuasively that the WM as constitutional ideology involves a strong anti-democratic bent which limits popular participation and legitimises a clandestine, elitist 'club government' remote from the mass of the population. Marsh, Richards and Smith identify similar tendencies when discussing a British political tradition based on limited, liberal representation over participation and conservative responsibility (Marsh, Richards et al. 2003 ; Marsh and Hall 2007). As such, the WM can be viewed as a means of managing popular participation so as to minimise its disruptive effects on the operation of elites, whether these elites are political, administrative or professional. For Moran, the constitutional settlement embodied in the institutions of the British state from the mid-19th century involved the securing of spaces of autonomy and discretion for a variety of elites which would insulate them from interference by elected governments and hence, at one remove, from democratic pressure (Moran 2003). I argue that the New Labour state project, particularly in the field of public services, is best understood as an attempt to claw back this autonomy and discretion from privileged groups and to substitute formalised relationships between elected governments and other branches of the state in place of the uncodified logics of appropriateness which had previously operated. As such, the New Labour strategy is explicitly a challenge to the authority of organised groups beyond the core executive who had historically enjoyed some autonomy from political control. As I go on to discuss in chapter 5, the formal institutions of the British state embody a different logic and set of power relations

as compared to the 'unofficial constitution' of the WM. Where the WM tends to produce incrementalism and muddling through, the formal elements of the British constitution instead tend to favour strong executive government, with few checks and balances to prevent active, top-down government. This presents something of a paradox at the heart of the British constitution. The formal institutions present the executive with significant autonomy and resources, but culturally and normatively, many other groups besides the executive believe they have a protected role in the policy process. The unwritten constitution holds the 'real' constitution in check. The checks and balances that prevent the executive from governing alone are primarily conventional and uncodified. I describe New Labour's governing project as anti-WM in the sense that it often prefers to govern according to the 'real' constitution, and seeks to minimise the effect of the checks and balances that form part of the quasi-constitution.

Continuity and change in the New Labour governing strategy

The drive for executive dominance has been a feature of British politics over an extended period and has not been restricted to any single government. For some (e.g. Bevir (2005)), New Labour has been the instigator of this strategy, in sharp contrast to the decentralising, small government approach of its Conservative predecessor, which more closely accorded with the predictions of governance or marketisation theorists. Indeed, some see New Labour's approach as an attempt to re-establish some co-ordinating machinery that had been shattered through Conservatives' delegation of control to the market (Skelcher 2000). Bevir and Rhodes have argued that attempts to reform the co-ordinating machinery of the state in order to achieve 'joined-up government' arise as a result of dilemmas within an explicitly 'socialist' tradition (Bevir and Rhodes 2006 106). However, I argue that this is in fact a perennial problem of British politics related to the institutional structure and culture of the state and not confined to any one political party or tradition⁴³. The account I offer suggests that

⁴³ See, for example, Flinders' claim that early 20th century Liberal reforms were managed by semi-independent boards due to concern over the effects of 'party politics', and concern that civil service staff were too cautious and lacking flexibility Flinders, M. (2008). Delegated Governance and the British State. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

successive governments beginning in the late 1970s have sought to develop a more developmentalist or entrepreneurial state (at least in relation to public services) in contrast to the Lockean liberal individualism expressed in the political structures of the British state. Consequently, when governments have enjoyed sufficiently favourable circumstances, they have sought to build institutions and linkages that are capable of co-ordinating a modernisation project across the public services by strengthening the executive. Bevir and Rhodes interpretive approach leads them to explain a drive for executive dominance in terms of the beliefs of individual prime ministers rather than with reference to the nature and position of the office (2006 108). In contrast, I am proposing that the machinery of the British state has presented challenges to the effectiveness of the executive that have been interpreted in similar ways. As such, both parties, when presented with the right conditions, have pursued strategies which attempt to re-culture or circumvent some aspect of the machinery of government, albeit sometimes by different means and with different justifications. The particular form taken by the New Labour project is then shaped by the stance taken by key actors in relation to the specific constitutional ideology of the WM. The content of the governing project is the different conceptions it contains of the appropriate role and function of a range of bodies within the British polity. The roles assigned by the architects of the New Labour project are also evident in the constitutional reforms conducted by their Conservative predecessors. This similarity, as I have argued above, derives from a common interpretation of recent British history. The conclusion reached by key actors within both parties was that the roles and functions assigned to certain organised groups by the WM needed revision in order to build a solid foundation for decisive and effective government.

Circumventing club government

. So , by the first to second decade of the 20th century , the executive showed signs of preferring to deliberately bypass ministerial departments and parliament , while the Haldane Commission post – WWI raised concerns over the lack of coherence of governing structures, the tendency to sedimentation, obscure structures of bureaucracy and a lack of accountability (2008 68)

British governments since the 1970s have pursued a number of strategies for circumventing club government. The main bias of these strategies is an attempt to enhance central co-ordinating capacity on the one hand, and to disrupt networks which might challenge this authority on the other hand. In the first case of enhancing central co-ordination, one possible strategy is to rely increasingly on the powers of the Prime Minister or other 'core of the core executive' institutions such as the Treasury to effect change. In the case of disrupting existing networks, there is evidence that successive British governments have regarded the civil service and professional interest lobbies as particularly problematic (Hennessy 1991 ; Moran 2003 ; Burnham and Pyper 2008 ; Richards 2008). The longevity and continuity of membership of these groups may tend towards incrementalism and conservatism since decisions are made according to much longer timescales. These cultures may tend to generate path dependency and represent an obstacle to innovation or decisive action. The compressed political time on which governments must operate only adds to the potential frustration. As such, it appears likely that actors within the executive will seek alternative means for pursuing their objectives which seek to bypass, weaken or subvert the cultures of these institutions. This, I argue was fundamental to both Thatcherite and New Labour governing projects. Governing strategies to overcome official inertia include increasing reliance on special advisors, consultants or think tanks without ties of loyalty to any particular department, the restriction of the policy role of civil servants and the rotation of senior civil servants in order to prevent ossification of departmental cultures and empire-building (bureau-shaping) (Richards 2008).

Conservative responses

New Labour's Conservative predecessors grappled with similar dilemmas during their time in office. For example, the creation of Next Steps agencies under the Conservatives can be seen as equally relevant to this dilemma as were New Labour's attempts to pursue 'joined-up government'. Rhodes notes that the Conservative governments of 1979-1997 attempted to address perennial problems for British state managers of "improving management in government, strengthening central capability, the gap

between central policy objectives and local implementation and the accountability of quangos” (1996 661). Their preferred strategy was firstly to attack special purpose bodies, quangos and Non Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs), and then to use them to disrupt traditional patterns of service delivery. However, Rhodes did not draw from this either the conclusion that ‘new governance’ techniques might be used strategically by the executive to attempt to tackle perennial problems, nor that such a strategy might be attractive to governments of any political stripe, rather than emerging solely from one particular political tradition.

The dilemma of executive control was also present under Major’s leadership of the Conservatives, albeit that his governing style appeared at first sight to focus less on enhancing central capacity and more on marketisation. Major clearly echoed the basic assumptions of the governance narrative (and indeed, effectively quoted from Osborne and Gaebler (1992)) in claiming that governments should “steer rather than row the economy” (cited in Richards and Smith (2002 110)) Nevertheless, despite Major’s greater commitment to genuine marketisation, the government continued to enhance its regulatory power through bodies such as OFWAT and OFTEL, designed to control the market. Those who argued that this represented the final decline of the state tended to under-emphasise the persistent role of government as architect and guarantor of the regulatory and legislative system that allowed marketised delivery to function (Richards and Smith 2002 120; Moran 2003). Furthermore, the prediction that these processes of privatisation would accelerate until the state had become entirely ‘hollowed out’ proved to be premature, as the era of large scale privatisation was relatively short-lived. Jessop (2000 9) notes how the marketisation strategy adopted by the Major government eventually came up against the limits of the market mechanism which then required the ‘re-invention’ of means of co-ordination, regulation and supervision of market forces. Dilemmas of autonomy and control, therefore, can be seen as persistent across the period beginning in the late 1970s albeit that these are addressed through various strategies that are pursued at particular times according to the calculations of actors within the state about what is to their political advantage at any given juncture.

The content of the New Labour governing project

(i) Key agents and policy instruments

The New Labour governing project originates from a fairly small group of actors within the core executive. As such, this thesis accepts the central claim of Marsh, Richards and Smith's work on the Whitehall project in that "The key actors in policy-making in Britain are still within, rather than outside, the core executive" (2001 234) Among these, the staff of the office of the Prime Minister is crucial, although it is supported by a range of actors spread across government. The peak or 'core of the core executive' is held to comprise the office of the Prime Minister, the Cabinet Office and the Treasury Office as well as allied bodies across government (such as the SEU in the education department) which are essentially satellites of the peak executive institutions. The project is fundamentally executive in character, and is directed against parliament, parties, officials, local government and public service professionals. As such, the key power relationships are not between the state and markets as such, or between departments and networks or interest groups in the quasi-governmental sector. The key relationship is the hierarchy between the peak of the executive, departments and the implementation agencies. If the thesis holds, it would predict that, over time, the executive would seek to enhance its power relative to departments, to expand the policy role of the executive at the expense of the officialdom and parliament, to enhance the powers of central government at the expense of local government, to move to restrict self-regulation of other professional bodies involved in public policy perhaps through greater scrutiny and transparency, to exploit policy crises in order to regulate previously autonomous domains and to negotiate co-operative or partnership forms only where this did not require any surrender of its regulatory powers. In short, such a strategy would aim to disrupt or disempower alternative sources of authority and expand the sphere of influence of the executive.

A range of policy instruments were used to pursue this strategy, often with little apparent coherence or underlying logic. The choice of instrument is often *ad hoc* rather than

being based on a consistent formula (Flinders 2008). However, though inconsistent, New Labour has demonstrated an attachment to certain styles of action and even particular instruments. For example, public service accountability structures have tended to follow a similar pattern across sectors in becoming increasingly output oriented and with an ever smaller role for professional self-evaluation (Needham 2007). The techniques of New Public Management such as target-setting and quantitative measurement of performance indicators have been widespread, especially in those areas identified as priorities for the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit. The New Labour public service project is also associated with the creation of specialised 'task forces' or the use of appointed advisors, relying on these rather than departmental staffs and ministers. Public service funding for public services was increased, although under greater central scrutiny and with more rigid accountability mechanisms.

The education policy sector under New Labour presented a combination of factors that strongly encouraged a strategy of voluntary government through governance with strong executive management. The key elements of this 'perfect storm' were increasing central budgets, disruptive policy communities where traditional stakeholders were opposed to central initiatives (e.g. professionals, civil service that were seen as obstructive); a policy sector prone to public crises; high political salience with electorate and with apparently intractable problems unlikely to produce credit to government for resolution but likely to produce blame. As such, there were factors specific to the policy sector that tended to magnify the overall pattern of change in governing styles so that education would embody the centralising and executive character of the project even more clearly than other sectors.

(ii) *Institutional reorganisation*

In the remainder of this chapter, I describe the changing roles and functions of five sets of institutions within the British state: departments; the civil service; local government; quangos, agencies and delegated bodies; and the core executive. Taken together, I

claim, these changes amount to a sustained governing project, which may be inconsistent and even incoherent, but nonetheless carries some explanatory force in addressing the New Labour project for the public services in general and education in particular.

Government Departments

For Richards and Smith, one of the key drivers of the New Labour governing project was concern with the “pathology of departmentalism” (2002 6). Departmentalism can be seen as an unintended consequence of some of the core features of the WM, particularly ministerial responsibility and a depoliticised civil service. Whether these principles are consistently evident in political practice is moot, but as institutional ‘logics of appropriateness’ they may exert a real influence on participants’ behaviour and expectations. The departmental system is seen to create competing ‘chimneys’ of policy, lacking appreciation of one another’s work and constantly engaging in turf wars for resources. At its worst, this pathology can create a situation in which the fortunes of the department take higher priority for some ministers and officials than the fortunes of the government as a whole. Similarly, certain challenges which governments face may not match up with departmental boundaries so that resolving them requires co-operation between departments. Since part of the pathology of departmentalism is a narrow concern with the relative status of one’s own department, inter-departmental solutions to problems of concern to the government may be difficult to achieve. The pathology of departmentalism may be viewed as problematic for delivery because political problems do not fit departmental boundaries, which may lead to ‘dumping’ of problems or turf wars where departmental loyalties and bureau-shaping behaviour outweigh other considerations (Dunleavy 1991). For example, the expansion of the DfES to incorporate all children’s and young people’s services can be read as a recognition of the limits of previous arrangements and their weakness in dealing with broader issues that impact on educational performance.

The general tendency of ministers and officials competing with other departments is likely to be conservative, aiming to consolidate or improve the relative position and resources of the department rather than accept additional costs for the sake of the effectiveness of the government. As such, governments would appear to have clear incentives to attempt to disrupt this feature of the British state. Richards and Smith point out that the attempt to assert Cabinet dominance over departments has been a perennial problem of the British state (2002 56), which accords with the claim above that governments of various stripes have faced similar challenges in dealing with the machinery of state. As I suggest below, the specificity of New Labour is in attempting to use and develop the power of the Prime Minister's office in order to address the weakness at the centre, a strategy which appears to have been remarkably successful in driving through an education agenda without depending on support from Whitehall.

Civil service

The civil service has long been regarded as one of the primary obstacles to radical change within the British state. Ministerial memoirs are filled with expressions of ministers' frustration at officials' conservatism and obstruction of ministerial initiative (Kaufman 1980 ; Castle 1984 ; Benn 1989 ; Clark 1993 ; Blunkett 2006). In one respect, this is an important aspect of the civil service's own constitutional self-justification. The function of the officialdom within WM can be seen as providing 'ballast' that prevents radical, destabilising change and ensures steady, incremental progress. This myth sustained the form and function of the civil service for an extended period following the foundation of the modern civil service by the Northcote-Trevelyan report of 1854 which recommended that the civil service be permanent, politically neutral and meritocratically recruited by examination (Northcote and Trevelyan 1854). The model proposed in Northcote-Trevelyan profoundly shaped the civil service for over 100 years. Its net effect was to preserve an elite, social bias in the civil service even while being justified as an attempt to sweep away the old patronage and nepotism that previously characterised the officialdom (Marquand 2004 56). Furthermore, it established a permanent

bureaucratic class whose fortunes did not depend on the success of any particular government. This compromise served as an exemplar of Whiggish attempts to conserve the ancient constitution, even when the rise of democracy seemed to challenge it. My central claim here is that the disconnect between the time horizons of the civil service and that of the executive had profound and lasting effects on both institutions' self-understandings. The relation between politicians and officials was intentionally designed as one in which officials would dampen and constrain the enthusiasm of transient governments in order to preserve the natural stability of the system. As governments in the second half of the 20th century became less and less willing to accept steady incremental progress, the traditional role of civil servants was likely to come under attack.

After the Second World War, the model that had sustained civil service-government relations since the mid 19th century was repeatedly challenged. The Fulton Report of 1968 made numerous recommendations regarding the break up of the Northcote-Trevelyan model and the increasing specialisation and technocratisation of the service including hiving off functions from the generalist model that was seen as outmoded and lacking flexibility (Burnham and Pyper 2008 18; Flinders 2008 73). However, the report expressed reservations about the constitutional and political difficulties of doing this "especially if they affect the answerability for sensitive matters such as social and education services" (Fulton Committee 1968 para.190). In 1968 the Fulton recommendations were still regarded as too much of a disruption to constitutional traditions and the report was shelved. However, as suggested above, this kind of reform was given a window of opportunity by increasing concern over Britain's relative decline, especially following the oil crisis of 1973 and receipt of an IMF loan in 1976 (On relative decline see Wiener (1981), Nairn (1963), Anderson (1992), Barnett (1986), English and Kenny (2000)). The corollary of relative decline, as Moran has argued, was a disillusion with the principles of 'club government' (Moran 2003) that had seen a complacent elite fall asleep at the wheel of the British state. In the search for means to arrest or reverse

this decline, old solutions were dusted off and proposed once more in a more favourable context.

As a result, the process of re-culturing and re-designing government-civil service relations was taken up aggressively by the Thatcher governments. Through a raft of measures including the Rayner report, 1982 Financial Management Initiative and 1986 Ibbs Report, much of the agenda of Fulton was secured (Flinders 2008 78). Ministerial departments were substantially reorganised into executive, or 'next steps' agencies. These measures further established a sharper separation between policy and operations/implementation that undercut some of the civil service role as 'ballast' or a permanent moderating force checking and balancing executive power as set out according to the WM⁴⁴. My central claim here is that the Next Steps process represented an attempt to disrupt the power of the civil service as a possible site of resistance to the executive. The process can be seen as a drive by the government of the day to increase ministers' policy-making autonomy by institutionalising a separation of policy-making from implementation. As such the majority of civil service staff was hived-off to administrative units connected to government through contractual relations. By 1997, 138 Next Steps Agencies accounted for 66% of the civil service workforce.⁴⁵

Some commentators such as Smith (1998) and Flinders (2008) detect no coherence to the Next Steps process in terms of an underlying rationale, while Burnham and Pyper (2008) suggest that reducing waste and inefficiency provided the motive. However, I propose that, although this process may have been carried out in an ad hoc way and through various models of delegation, the goal of asserting executive dominance was the motive force and that this was largely successfully achieved. Dunleavy's explanation of the process (1989) in terms of 'bureau-shaping' suggests that civil servants were

⁴⁴ Although the reforms also reflected increasing cost-consciousness on the part of core executive with regard to functions of the civil service.

⁴⁵ New Labour enthusiastically continued the process. By 1999, 77% of civil service was composed of executive agencies.

perhaps not the passive objects of a reduction in their autonomy, but instead had good reasons to support a process of privatisation and hiving off. For example, his 'bureau-shaping' model suggests civil servants may have seen the process as conducive to maximisation of 'core' budgets and the proportion of senior civil service work devoted to policy over implementation. However, Smith convincingly argues that the net effect of the process was not to increase the policy role of the civil service, but to make the service more managerial (1998 53) – a goal which might be seen as more in accord with the aims of a government seeking to discipline official discretion. Bevir and Rhodes (2006) provide evidence that the policy role of civil servants had indeed declined through their account of everyday life in a ministry. Bevir and Rhodes demonstrate that permanent secretaries' workloads are skewed towards management and representation and away from policy resulting in fewer checks on the policy activities of special advisors and junior ministers (2006 113)⁴⁶.

It is worth noting that the separation of policy from implementation is a feature of ideal-type Weberian bureaucracy. In some sense, the process of agencification and hiving off represents a perfection of bureaucracy, or a correction of the distorted form bureaucracy had taken due to the idiosyncratic features of the WM. The re-design of the civil service as primarily an operations or implementation wing of the state allows the policy formation function to also be re-shaped. With the policy role of the civil service declining, there is an increasing reliance on the contracting out of policy development from central government, cabinet and the top civil service to 'think tanks' within and outside government, special advisers, task forces, tsars and non-departmental advisers. This need not be understood as either chaotic, or as a loss of central capacity. Instead, it could be argued that the process results in the extension of executive capacities in two dimensions. Firstly, the use of agencies arguably removes the obstacles that the civil

⁴⁶ They further note that senior civil servants are often rotated after a few years as a matter of policy. This 'permanent revolution' in Whitehall may have important consequences in terms of the stability of collective institutional memory which ensures continuity in policy styles and avoids duplication of past errors, a point to which I will return in subsequent chapters. (Bevir and Rhodes 2006 116)

service as a policy body was capable of throwing into the path of government. Secondly, the policy development function is placed increasingly into the hands of groups who depend on the patronage and favour of the executive, and who have no protected constitutional role in the British state. The decision to place responsibility for the civil service with prime ministerial appointees (such as Alistair Campbell and Jonathan Powell under Blair who controversially, were both given powers to issue orders to civil servants in a move unprecedented for political appointees) reflects the overall drive to re-culture the civil service, including the insertion of 'outsiders' not socialised into the norms of Whitehall. These 'outsiders' are simultaneously more dependent on ministerial favour and less attached to civil service cultures (Marquand 2004 59). Hence this strategy has two clear benefits in terms of driving through ministerial and executive agenda.

It is true that these developments were complete long before New Labour took office and as such cannot be used to distinguish their governing project from those of their predecessors. If so, it is valid to ask whether there is anything distinctive about the way New Labour has managed the civil service. Burnham and Pyper (2008 121-122) argue that the difference between New Labour and its predecessor governments lies in the rationale for civil service reform. They suggest that the motive force behind Thatcherite civil service reform was, above all else, cost efficiency and reduced spending on the bureaucracy. The New Labour approach, by contrast, was to centralise control over rising departmental budgets in order to achieve policy objectives and improve service delivery. This is an interesting distinction and is, to some extent borne out by the fact that the absolute size of the civil service has increased under New Labour⁴⁷. A significant portion of this increase was accounted for by staff employed by the Cabinet Office (2008 122), one of the key co-ordinating bodies for New Labour's service delivery

⁴⁷ By 50,000 FTE staff between 1997 and 2005 Burnham, J. and R. Pyper (2008). Britain's Modernised Civil Service. Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.

. Note also that numbers of non-industrial civil servants remain relatively stable over period 1980-2000 while numbers of industrial civil servants decline dramatically (ibid. 24)

agenda. In terms of the public justification of civil service reform, there is a clear distinction between the language used by Conservative and Labour governments⁴⁸. However, it is plausible to suggest that the reforms initiated by Thatcher and continued by successive governments have been driven by a recurring dilemma of autonomy and control and a constitutional ideology that has sought to reduce the extent to which the civil service is able to impede active political projects driven from the Prime Minister's office. While cutting costs and improving service delivery can also be seen as ends in themselves for these governments, they shared a concern to undermine the 'ballast' role of the civil service that it had traditionally held according to the quasi-constitution of the WM⁴⁹.

Local government

The dynamic between local and central government provides an example of the persistence of centralisation as a crisis management strategy in the British state. The local tier bears few powers of its own beyond those the centre deigns to grant. As such, it is often subject to domination by the centre, a domination which tends to increase during periods of perceived crisis. The Thatcherite attempt to re-establish central autonomy and authority over local government during the 1980s can be seen as one manifestation of this tendency, wherein the limits of the powers the centre was prepared to concede became clear⁵⁰. Even in a field such as education which liked to represent itself as a national service delivered locally, the relationship between central and local

⁴⁸ Although service delivery was given a higher priority by Major through Citizen's Charters and New Labour did express a desire to control costs of the civil service in the findings of the Gershon Report.

⁴⁹ See , for example Thatcher's head of policy unit at No 10 John Hoskyns insistence that the civil service was a brake on radical policies and a force for centrist continuity , and hence the motivation behind the Thatcher-era administrative reforms was cutting waste and reducing importance of policy advice from senior civil service Burnham, J. and R. Pyper (2008). Britain's Modernised Civil Service. Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.

⁵⁰ See, for example, the use of rate-capping for councils in Sheffield and Liverpool and the abolition of the Greater London Council

government remained precarious, as discussed in earlier chapters. But what is true of education, which historically had an exceptionally strong local dimension by British standards, is also true of the central-local relation more broadly. Once key actors in central government began to question the role of local government, there was little or no constitutional protection of the local role. Stewart suggests that, during the period in question, a kind of “elite contempt” of the value of local government began to circulate in the upper echelons of central government (2000 95-96). Jones and Travers concur, arguing that there exists a common view among ministers and civil servants that “the quality of local government members is not as good as it used to be, and not good enough by any standards” (1996). For New Labour, as with its Conservative predecessors, the role afforded to local government was clearly subservient to the executive. For Blair, the modernisation of local government was necessary not to rejuvenate local and civic initiative or democracy, but so the local government could “in partnership with others, *deliver the policies for which this government was elected*” (Blair cited in Stewart (2000 121), emphasis added). With a declining democratic mandate and narrowing range of powers, local government was in a weak position to avoid being supplanted by the centre. As Davies (2000) notes, the central-local relationship had only ever been held together by trust and once this trust began to evaporate, and local government came to be seen as a problem for central governments, local government had no effective resources to resist.

Quangos, agencies and delegated bodies.

The institutional landscape through which the ‘new governance’ occurs is not simply populated by the formal hierarchies of government departments on the one hand and private enterprises and civil societal organisations on the other. If this was the case, the claims of theorists of network governance for greatly increased complexity would be inappropriate. Much of the complexity that these theorists remark upon is due to the presence in public administration of a plethora of para-statal, quasi-autonomous and delegated bodies whose position on a public-private spectrum or within a hierarchical

diagram of the state is more difficult to discern. Any account of the changing character of the British state must therefore provide an explanation of the role of these agencies in public policy. Flinders (2008) points out the difficulty of confidently ascertaining the functions of these bodies since there has been a marked tendency to avoid codification of their roles, responsibilities, accountability procedures or relationship to other sources of authority. In 2007 the Cabinet Office recommended only that “it may be helpful to draw up a formal agreement setting out the respective responsibilities, rights and obligations of the minister and the company [NDPB]”, it is not a requirement that there be such an agreement (Bertelli 2008 826). This means that governments are relatively unrestricted in terms of the type of body they can set up to deal with policy issues. They are not confined to a choice between a range of ‘models’ for delegation, but can tailor responsibilities and operations, or simply leave them uncodified and subject to constant revision. Since the only authority these agencies have is delegated to them by the state, they are not in a position to assert any claim to operational independence.

If the use of these agencies is seen as an erosion of the capacity of the state proper, then the thesis I am attempting to defend comes into question. It is crucial to my position that increasing reliance on this type of organisation can be tied to executive initiative and an attempt to develop greater executive autonomy and efficacy. Typically, those explanations that have attempted to make this connection have emphasised the insulating function of delegated governance. So, for example, delegated bodies are seen to technocratise politics, allowing experts to develop and manage policy away from the glare of the media and partisan politics. This might be thought to lead to more ‘rational’ and less compromised policy-making. Bertelli pursues this line of argument in suggesting that one motive to place policy-making at arm’s length concerns ‘credible commitments’ (2008 808), or self-restrictions on the exercise of power in areas where it is believed that political considerations should play little part, or where the appearance of independence (from both government and/or private sector interests) is important. The impetus for agencification is then about the credibility of the organisations created.

Alternatively, a strategy of 'agencification' might be seen as a depoliticising move which transfers decision-making away from public scrutiny thus insulating governments from blame. The downside of this strategy of blame-avoidance through delegation, for Hood (2002), is that politicians are also unable to claim credit where quango or agency actions are popular. As such, it might not be a suitable strategy across the range of government activities. However, the WM principle of ministerial responsibility may increase the attractiveness of such a strategy for British state managers. For example, it may be that the contribution of agencies/quangos is simply not recognised by the wider electorate whether or not policies are popular - ministers are still held responsible and may also claim credit. The recent case of the botched delegation of SATs marking to ETS Europe (contracting out perhaps, rather than delegation) does illustrate one instance where governments successfully resisted the apparent demands made by the Westminster tradition that they accept responsibility for their department's fortunes. In a situation which might otherwise have appeared to demand the resignation of the minister responsible, the blame was successfully shifted to Ken Boston's leadership of the QCA and ETS Europe's incompetence. As such, a potential high-profile political failure was reduced to a problem of adverse selection that is inherent in any principal-agent relationship.

A third possible motive for an agencification strategy alongside credible commitments and blame and credit displacement concerns the political salience of the issues concerned with both backbench MPs and their constituents. Bertelli (2008) proposes an argument that quangos' independence will vary according to this political salience, hence low-salience policies will be more likely to be delegated than high-salience issues. Since sponsor department ministers retain both powers of continuance over quangos and retain the right to alter accountability requirements at will after the establishment of quangos, they have the resources to intervene in the operation of delegated bodies. As such, quasi-governmental bodies' autonomy is always fiduciary and liable to infringement by governments for political purposes. Bertelli's findings are consistent with my broader thesis, which he terms the 'paradox of autonomization',

namely that “increased independence of public [and non-public bodies involved in policy] agencies implies a greater degree of centralized, political control over their choices”, or alternatively, agencies have more managerial autonomy and less policy autonomy than the governance mechanisms they replace. This accords with Van Thiel and Leeuw’s (2002) findings on the so-called “performance paradox”, whereby principals rely on intensive audit and reporting to claw back the direct control lost through delegation of managerial autonomy (see also Flinders (2008 145)). This “performance paradox” may undermine the purposes for which delegation was originally chosen as a strategy whether these purposes are understood as increased flexibility, depoliticisation, or enhancing credibility. As Flinders points out, delegation is not a risk-free strategy in the context of democratic politics, and the combination of a need to demonstrate service improvement and the “acutely low-trust/high-blame environment” (145) of contemporary British politics contribute towards a countervailing pressure for intervention in the operation of delegated bodies.

A credible account of the functioning of contemporary British governance must give an adequate explanation of the role and function of the many parastatal and delegated bodies that carry out important state functions. It must also give a satisfactory explanation of the reasoning behind their introduction and the perceived benefits of voluntarily governing through governance for state managers. While a delegation strategy may initially appear to offer some advantages in terms of credibility or depoliticisation, I have argued here that there are balancing pressures which continually favour a strategy of interference and intervention in the workings of delegated bodies. This is especially likely to be the case in high salience areas where media scrutiny and public dissatisfaction are more intense⁵¹, since loss of control over these sectors may outweigh the potential benefits. As such, governments very often have incentives to restrict the autonomy of delegated bodies and very rarely have any incentive to reduce

⁵¹ Education offers a prime example of the kind of policy sector within which a strategy of delegation is unlikely to be stable or resistant to direct interference by government.

scrutiny and control of their operations. The expansion of this layer of governance must be understood in this context.

As Flinders observes, New Labour has continued with a strategy of using delegated mechanisms without formalising the relationships involved. Despite endorsing moves to greater accountability over delegated bodies in opposition and in the 'Modernising Government' white paper of 1999, Labour, like its Conservative predecessors adopted a much more conservative and *ad hoc* approach in power (Cabinet Office 1999 ; Flinders 2008). Delegated governance reform was piecemeal, with the role and accountability mechanisms of delegated bodies remaining informal, *ad hoc* and inconsistent between different institutions. This suggests that key actors within the core executive retained an attachment to a more concentrated distribution of power and were not ready to embrace the supposed greater efficiency and flexibility of delegated forms. As Flinders argued: "The Labour government was simply not willing to fetter its governing capacity by placing any kind of restrictions on its capacity to remould the structure of the state" (2008 83). Granting a formal role to the delegated governance sector would necessarily compromise central authority, and hence could not be in the interests of a government seeking to ensure the highest possible degree of congruence between its intentions and policy outcomes.

Strengthening the centre

I have described the New Labour project for the British state as being fundamentally executive in character. The thrust of the project, I argue, is an attempt to enhance the co-ordinating and directive resources and capabilities of a specific fraction of the core executive. This strategy, while often incoherent, can be traced through two processes. Firstly, there is an attempt to disrupt and dismantle the institutions and cultures that sustain those elements of the WM that present obstacles, or checks and balances to executive power. This can be observed through the erosion of the quasi-constitutional role once enjoyed by the civil service, local government or professional interest groups.

The second process involves an attempt to build the co-ordinating capacity of the traditionally weak central executive institutions of the British state. In particular, the policy role of the Prime Minister's Office and the co-ordinating role of the Cabinet Office across Whitehall have been dramatically enhanced under New Labour. Concern with the pathologies of departmentalism, greater recognition of the existence of cross-cutting or 'wicked' problems, and the reluctance to continue a traditional incrementalist approach to government have all contributed to the search for stronger co-ordinating mechanisms than the British state has typically had. The problem of weak co-ordination is exacerbated where agencies, contracted bodies and quangos are also involved in policy as well as departments. As such, the capacity of New Labour to pursue decisive reforms was initially compromised by the weakness of the strategic, agenda-setting, planning and co-ordinating function within the core executive. I argue here that strategies such as the strengthening of the Cabinet Office and PM's Office, or the creation of super-ministries such as the DCSF are best understood as measures aimed at addressing this⁵².

The favoured strategy for strengthening the centre was to expand the function of the Prime Minister's Office and to forge closer links between this office and the Cabinet Office. The aim in doing so was both to enhance central co-ordinating and steering capacity to better direct departments, and to establish cross-cutting groups that could assist with resolving the perceived pathologies of 'departmentalism' (Hay and Richards 2000 24). As is the case with much of the New Labour governing project, the origins of the Labour strategy can be traced to the crisis of confidence in the British state during the 1970s. The New Labour strategy can be seen as the fulfilment of a process begun with the creation of a Prime Minister's Policy Unit in 1970 and accelerated during the first Thatcher government when the Civil Service Department was abolished and

⁵² It could reasonably be argued that reforms to the internal processes of the party also contributed to the project inasmuch as the sidelining of the party's NEC, the curtailing of trade union influence, the weakening of the role of party conference and changes to leadership selection processes all tended to enhance executive discretion and reduce internal pluralism which might create blockages or veto points

responsibility transferred to the Prime Minister's Office and Cabinet Office. These two central offices became crucial to the New Labour project and both the numbers of civil service staff and the numbers of special advisers employed by these offices increased markedly under New Labour. The effect of New Labour's reforms to the centre of government was to effectively create a Prime Minister's Department through a merger between an expanded Prime Minister's Office and an expanded Cabinet Office⁵³.

The Labour leadership was quite clear that its public services project required an enhanced central government role. In a 2001 statement to the Liaison Committee, Blair defended the programme of reforms to the core executive that he had directed:

“One thing I do say though very strongly is that I make no apology for having a strong centre. I think you need a strong centre, particularly in circumstances where, one, the focus of this Government is on delivering better public services. In other words, the public sector for this Government is not simply a necessary evil we have to negotiate with; it is at the core of what the Government is about. Therefore, delivering public service reform in a coherent way it is, in part, absolutely vital for the centre to play a role. (Blair cited in Richards and Smith (2006 331))

The office of the Prime Minister provided the most suitable vehicle for expressing this strong executive voice. Past governments had also experimented with making greater use of the considerable resources of the office and their reasons for doing so bore close resemblance to the New Labour rationale. For Hennessy, the Prime Minister's Policy Unit during the third Wilson government already represented a prime ministerial cabinet in all but name (1991 382-387). The rationale for the greater exploitation of No. 10, as expressed by the Unit's director Bernard Donoughue was to ensure that: ““the individual

⁵³ The creation of a formal Prime Minister's Department was supported by key actors at No. 10 such as Michael Barber and Jonathan Powell (Barber 2007)

ministries must not be allowed to become isolated from the Government as a whole and lapse into traditional departmental views” (cited in Chitty 2009 124). The model for the future role of the Prime Minister’s Office had been set. No.10 would provide an institutional base separate from the Whitehall machine, and working solely for the PM. Its agenda was to be regarded as synonymous with the agenda of Government, its role would be as a rival or opponent to departmental bureaucracies and its rationale would be to eliminate the capacity of departments to obstruct and disrupt active executive government. While it remained open to different Prime Ministers to exploit the resources of the office more or less thoroughly, the establishment of this function ensured that those prime ministers who were inclined to pursue a more personalised style of governing had at least some of the institutional resources to do so.

Blair and the ‘Department of the Prime Minister’

Under the leadership of Tony Blair, the role of the Prime Minister’s Office was expanded even further to the point that it became perhaps the most important institution in British politics. The key developments in the role of the Prime Minister’s Office involved the creation of new, proactive specialised units within the office such as the Prime Minister’s Delivery Unit ; the enhanced role of its Strategy Unit and Policy Unit ; and the effective merging of the Prime Minister’s Office with the Cabinet Office⁵⁴. Through Orders in Council, rather than through legislation, Blair created a presidential-style cabinet of special advisers including Powell and Campbell with unprecedented powers to direct civil servants. This enabled a new, more assertive and active role for No. 10 within the governance of the British state, both in management of the bureaucracy and in public service delivery.

The Prime Minister’s Delivery Unit was crucial to this latter function. The Unit was created immediately following the 2001 election to execute the government’s (for which

⁵⁴ This latter process was extended by the incorporation of the Performance and Innovation Unit which advised on public service reform, and the PM’s Forward Strategy Unit into the Cabinet Office Strategy Unit in 2002. With both the Strategy Unit and the PMDU continuing to report directly to the PM, this cemented the extended role for No 10 to the extent that the Cabinet Office became effectively an extension of No 10.

read the Prime Minister's) agenda in four priority areas of public service delivery: education, crime, transport and health. The Unit was nominally based in the Cabinet Office but reported directly to the Prime Minister and was headed by a political appointee which from 2001-2005 was Michael Barber who transferred from the DfES Standards and Effectiveness Unit after the election. The Unit's main function was to jointly define cross-departmental targets for public service outcomes, which were then handed down to departments through the Treasury's PSAs, and then to monitor progress towards these targets intervening if progress failed to match expectations. The PMDU therefore became a crucial institution since it was the vehicle by which two key New Labour objectives were to be achieved. Firstly, departments would be disciplined to the government (PM's) agenda and secondly, the evidence of public service improvement required to legitimate the government could be produced. As such, the PMDU became a decisive actor within the priority public service areas and a key element in the fusion of core executive structures to create an informal 'Prime Minister's Department'⁵⁵.

The creation of units such as the PMDU and Strategy Unit and the expansion of the Policy Unit involved a major increase in the staff numbers within No.10. The last Major government had 38 staff in the Prime Minister's Office. During Blair's second term, Marquand put the number of staff employed by No 10 at 74 (Marquand 2004 58), while Burnham and Pyper put the number at 150 during the third term (2008 67). This is a significant development since many of these staff were employed as special advisors, 'tsars' or task force members rather than as 'regular' civil servants⁵⁶. This tends to

⁵⁵ This fusion continued under Brown's leadership with the PMDU being transferred to the Treasury (while still reporting directly to the PM) and the transfer of numerous Treasury officials into the Prime Minister's Office

⁵⁶ Labour had 81 staff employed as special advisors at the time of the 2005 election (with between 20 and 25 working in No.10) compared to around 35 under John Major's premiership (of which between 6 and 8 worked in No. 10) Gay, O. (2010). Special Advisers. London, House of Commons Library.

support some commentators' claims of an increasing tendency towards 'Court politics' wherein access to and the favour of the PM, (or the Chancellor within the Treasury) becomes the key commodity in politics – a trend which runs counter to the Northcote-Trevelyan/ Westminster model of impartiality and professional service ethic (Bevir and Rhodes 2006).

The expansion of the roles and responsibilities of this office was even greater than the numerical expansion of its employees. Again, education offers an exemplary case of the dynamic at work. Under New Labour, there has been a division of labour over education policy with No 10 taking responsibility for school education (especially under Blair) and Brown's Treasury claiming jurisdiction over the skills agenda and FE/HE⁵⁷. The role of the education department has been seriously diminished as a result and conflict between Secretaries of State and Number 10 have contributed towards the high turnover of education ministers under Blair. In school-level education, the most significant of the recent reforms have been strongly associated with the Prime Minister and his/her office. This is true both of the Blair reforms and of earlier reforms such as the 1988 ERA. This tends to provide support for the notion that a perceived conservative incrementalism in the department and civil service had to be overcome from outside, through the 'hijacking' of functions. In the case of Blair, the creation of the Standards and Effectiveness Unit within the DfEE / DfES was crucial since this was effectively a unit of the PM's Office operating behind enemy lines in the department (As SEU-head (and Blair appointee) Michael Barber makes clear in Barber (2007)). The SEU was explicitly intended to disrupt and challenge what the PM and his office regarded as unacceptable complacency and producer-capture. The reform to the Prime Minister's Office created a rival centre of power which through virtue of the authority of the PM, was able to discipline departments such as education to the objectives of the core executive.

⁵⁷ Hence the greater focus on choice and personalisation in the former and the prevalence of the language of endogenous growth and competitiveness in the latter sector.

Underpinning this set of developments lies a vision of government as essentially comprised of a select few institutions at the heart of the core executive. The Cabinet Office's policy review of 2006-2007 makes this explicit where it presents a conception of government as basically composed of the Cabinet Office (including the PM's Office) , and the Treasury (Prime Minister's Strategy Unit 2007). The document gives no privileged role or guarantee of continued existence to any department, or to any other body within Whitehall. The agencies charged with public service delivery are regarded as distinct from government proper, as are the officialdom and Parliament. Though there are doubtless inconsistencies and counter-tendencies in the execution of this constitutional vision in practice, I argue that it is this underlying project of strengthening the peak institutions of the British state at the expense of other once-powerful bodies that explains much of the trajectory of development of the British state over an extended period.

The centrality of prime ministerial power

One of the core elements of the New Labour governing project is a redefinition of the proper relationship between the Prime Minister and departments. As such, the project tends to disrupt long standing norms and traditions about how Prime Ministers should behave – a tendency which has not gone unnoticed in the academic literature (Foley 2000 ; Heffernan 2003 ; 2004 ; Riddell 2004 ; Bevir and Rhodes 2006). This has often been expressed in terms of the increasingly 'presidential' style of governing under Blair, or the dismantling of collective government through Cabinet. As Bevir and Rhodes point out, the framing of this discussion demonstrates the extent to which informal logics of appropriateness about the respective roles of various organs of the British state have become embedded in political discourse. As such, some of this academic literature reads as an appeal to respect the quasi-constitution of the British state and especially the uncodified checks and balances that this places on the Prime Minister.

However, for key New Labour strategists, the disruption of this quasi-constitution was precisely their goal. Barber for example, insisted that Prime Ministerial power should be extended and that those bodies charged with constraining the PM (Cabinet, ministers, civil service) needed to be re-cultured to be effective and valuable. (Barber 2007 315). The model of PM-department relationships whereby the sole function of the PM was to appoint ministers and leave them to govern was seen as unsustainable in contemporary politics. For Barber, the creation of units such as the Delivery Unit and Policy Unit were a strategic response to “a set of underlying trends over the past generation [that] is simultaneously focusing attention on the PM’s ability to deliver and eroding his power to do so” (2007 304). As such, the New Labour project is not one that erodes the status of ministers, civil servants or the Cabinet by neglect, but by design⁵⁸.

I am arguing here against a conception of the PM’s power as “essentially negative” (Richards and Smith 2002 203). The claim that prime minister cannot hope to dominate other areas of government is widespread in scholarship on British politics (Richards and Smith 2002 ; Heffernan 2003 ; Bevir and Rhodes 2006). So, for example, despite their numerous other areas of disagreement, Marsh et al. agree with Bevir and Rhodes that there are significant limits on the power prime ministers can have over departmental ministers (Marsh, Richards et al. 2003 320-325). As a result, they claim, the relationship between prime ministers and ministers is necessarily an exchange relationship rather than zero-sum. I hope to have shown that this claim results from a misreading of developments within the British state under New Labour. The case in hand of education, I argue, provides strong support for an alternative conception of the role of the office of the prime minister under New Labour. I want to argue that the relationship between the prime minister and ministers (as well as a range of other relationships such as that between the executive and civil service, and between central and local government) have become increasingly a case of a zero-sum power struggle over the life of the New

⁵⁸ To the extent that key New Labour advisers such as Barber and Jonathan Powell advocated the formalisation of a Prime Minister’s department incorporating no. 10 and the Cabinet Office (Barber 2007 316).

Labour governments. Moreover, I argue that the core of the core executive, with the office of the prime minister at the heart of this, has won this struggle and come to dominate British politics⁵⁹.

On this interpretation, Prime ministerial power is the resource of choice for driving a governing project through the British state and has been seen as such repeatedly in the history of British politics by, for example, Thatcher and Wilson as well as Blair and Brown. These actors have found it useful to invoke the reserve executive powers of the PM's office to re-shape and re-orient their parties and to tackle 'traditional' practices within the British state. The common academic metaphor of 'presidentialism' is perhaps misleading as an explanation of this process since the office of president in many states including the USA is in fact far more constrained by checks and balances, at least in the field of domestic policy. Presidential systems are characterised by a meaningful distinction between executive and legislature which is absent from the British constitution. As far as the metaphor of presidentialism is apt, it could apply to Blair's use of political appointees and the creation of a policy and management team separate from the parliamentary machinery and managed by appointees with powers to direct civil servants⁶⁰. But if the tendential movement towards an active and interventionist role for the PM in driving a governing project is taken to be the intention of the label of presidentialism, then there have certainly been phases of presidentialism in British politics. These phases have been enabled by the institutional configuration of the British state (its lack of controls on executive power for example) and activated by individuals with clear objectives and visions of the re-modelled state they wish to create. It is open to different prime ministers to take a more or less active role (e.g. Heath, Major) but the point is that the office of PM affords the occupant certain resources and capacities due

⁵⁹ Nowhere is this development clearer than in the field of education policy.

⁶⁰ These developments are partly attributable to individual leadership and statecraft since there was a retreat from this governing style under Brown who replaced the chief of staff with a permanent secretary along classic Whitehall lines (formalising the existence of a PM's department to a degree), placed civil service impartiality on a statutory basis and reined in the line management powers of political appointees

to its structural location. The New Labour Prime Ministers, especially Tony Blair, have exploited this aspect of the British constitution to develop and institutionalise prime ministerial prerogative. This has taken place through the effective creation of a 'prime minister's department', which has involved the colonisation of the Cabinet Office by No. 10 and the division of tasks between No 10 and the Treasury (under Blair) to leave the Prime Minister with a free hand in key policy areas (Bevir and Rhodes 2006 94-95; Barber 2007). As Bevir and Rhodes observe, this has also involved a more personalised governing style (e.g. through Blair's notorious one on one meetings), the marginalisation of Cabinet, and the breaking of the civil service monopoly on policy advice.

Constraints on prime ministerial power

Bevir and Rhodes suggest a number of constraints on the 'presidentialism' of PM's that militate against this kind of personalised power. Among these factors, they suggest there are constraints imposed by 'baronial' politics (especially conflict with the Treasury), the resistance of ministers and departments and the delegation of delivery to extra-governmental networks creating implementation gaps and unintended consequences (2006 98-101). The existence of public sector management through network governance is, for the authors, incompatible with presidentialism since the prime minister must necessarily negotiate and enter into mutual exchange relationships with governance networks and agencies (2006 108). This correlates with the outlook of more orthodox governance theorists who would suggest that activist projects directed from the centre become impossible since "the different systems and sub-systems of society and increasingly autonomous, and cannot be made to work according to a single logic" (Dryzek and Dunleavy 2009 141). As such, Bevir and Rhodes claim that the notion of a 'Blair presidency' is more a rhetorical device to express disapproval of Blair, often underpinned by an implicit appeal to the Westminster tradition of Cabinet and parliamentary government and responsible government (ibid. 104).

However, Bevir and Rhodes account of the limits to central steering are not wholly convincing. Firstly, they claim that the centre has 'rubber levers': there is a gap between

government intention and implementation at street level. As an example, they note that an attempt to instil financial discipline in doctors is likened to 'herding cats' by the Department of Health (2008 732). However, this may not be a generalisable example. The capacity of doctors to resist pressure from the centre may depend on the power of the medical lobby and its privileged institutional position rather than because the centre is simply weak. To return to the education example, there is ample evidence that the levers available to central government, such as targeted funding, budget control, audit and performance management have been more than sufficient to effect a behavioural shift among education professionals and even a cultural change that ensures educational practice is organised according to the priorities of government rather than the preferences of the practitioners involved.

Secondly, the claim that ministerial and baronial politics acts as a serious check on core executive or prime ministerial power is unsustainable. 'Baronial politics' and departments as generators of policy do not appear to have been features of the education policy process under New Labour. Instead, a programme for education reform appears to have been developed by the Prime Minister and the staff of his office, before being handed down to departments and a parliamentary labour party that were largely opposed to the suggested measures. Ministers and departments were successfully bypassed where they were expected to be obstructive of this programme through the creation of policy units such as SEU, Cabinet Office Strategy Unit and Delivery Unit and PIU within the core executive. Prime ministerial power and patronage was absolutely central to this process. Bevir and Rhodes' third limit to central steering is that the centre lacks capacity to co-ordinate effectively since it lacks agreement on goals and a central co-ordinator. Again, I would refer to the previous point. The strengthening of units within Number 10 and the Cabinet Office, plus the increased reliance on unelected advisors recruited through prime ministerial patronage represented a conscious strategy to enhance central co-ordinating capacity at the expense of departments and civil servants that was, at least to some extent, successful.

Marsh et al. also set out a number of factors which combine to constrain prime ministerial predominance. Firstly, they argue that “the prime minister clearly does not have the time or knowledge to be involved in all areas of policy” (2003 320) . This only requires a slight qualification of my central claim. While the prime minister may not be able to dominate all policy areas simultaneously, there is no boundary to prevent him or her from dominating any particular policy area should he or she choose to do so. During his time in office, Tony Blair made a conscious and public decision to take an active and directive role in four policy sectors of high priority, including education⁶¹. This was undertaken under the initiative of the prime minister and his staff alone, without any evidence of an interdependent exchange relationship that needed to be moderated or overcome. As such, Marsh et al.’s claim only presents a practical limit to the breadth of prime ministerial dominance; it does not identify fundamental exchange relationships that militate against it. Marsh et al.’s second claim is that “[the prime minister] lacks the bureaucratic support that the minister has in a particular area” (320). As I have argued above, there has been a sustained attempt to build this capacity at the centre of government, precisely, so I claim, for the purpose of managing the direction of departments. Thirdly, Marsh et al. claim that “much department policy is routine and of little interest to the prime minister” (320). My response is similar to the first claim. If the prime minister does happen to take a particular interest in a certain policy area, there is nothing to prevent him or her from commandeering policy in this field. Fourthly, Marsh et al. claim that “a prime minister cannot continually sack ministers and will lose support if s/he is constantly interfering in the work of departments” (320). It is not clear where this support is supposed to be lost. However, the case of education again appears to disprove this claim. There has been very high ministerial turnover in the department under New Labour⁶², and the interference of prime ministerial appointees such as Michael Barber and Andrew Adonis in the running of departments has been widely

⁶¹ Health, crime and transport were the others.

⁶² With six different Secretaries of State in the six years between David Blunkett’s departure from office in June 2001 and the appointment of Ed Balls in June 2007

remarked on by ministers (Beckett 2000 ; Stewart 2008). In some cases, it could be argued that ministers are accomplices in their own domination, as for example, in the case of David Blunkett who supported the agenda of the Prime Minister's Office in his own education department in order to disrupt and bypass a supposedly obstructive departmental staff (Barber 2007). Of course, prime ministers may have more or less interventionist styles and the level of control is likely to vary according to the character of the department and policy sector. But the fundamental point is that if the prime minister does happen to be minded to effectively take over the direction of a department, there is no obvious way for ministers, officials or anyone else to prevent this.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to explain the patterns of change in education structures described in the previous chapter with reference to a proposed broader dynamic in recent British political history. As such, I trace the origins of change to a particular set of dilemmas that arose for British state managers mostly during the 1970s, and which had to be confronted from within the institutional and ideological parameters inherited from an earlier historical period. This is partly intended to respond to the elements of marketisation or governance narratives that I find apolitical and lacking in sensitivity to the effects of domestic institutions and cultures in mediating the impact of supposedly transnational forces. I have proposed that, over an extended period, British politicians have sought to disrupt or re-configure the institutions and cultures that sustain the quasi-constitution of the WM. The Conservative governments of the 1980s and 1990s were already moving in this direction, and New Labour has pursued this governing project further since its election. The objective of this project, I have argued, has been to remove the obstacles that the WM seemed to present to decisive, non-incremental executive government in order to enhance the effectiveness and speed of execution governmental initiative. In Bulpitt's words, the project sought to enhance 'governing competence' (1983). The method preferred to attain this end, I argue, has been the removal or restriction of the autonomy of organs of the British state and privileged interest groups, with a concomitant strengthening of the oversight and directive functions

of select bodies at the heart of the core executive. In relation to previous chapters, I have aimed to show that the centralisation and increased scrutiny, audit and accountability described in the education sector are partly a symptom of this broader dynamic. New Labour has proved itself unwilling to allow discretion over the political management of education to local government, civil servants or professional groups, regarding these groups as irredeemably conservative and obstructive of the executive agenda. In the next section, I move on to consider the efficacy of this strategy within the education sector, and the prospects for either the continuance or the reversal of New Labour's constitutional project in future.

Section 3: Evaluating Education Governance, Policy and Politics under New Labour

Having described the New Labour education project in Section 1, and attempted to explain that project in Section 2, this third section moves on to the task of evaluation. In Chapter 5, I develop a four-point model of policy failure as a heuristic for evaluating New Labour's education policies, I divide instances of failure among 4 categories building on the taxonomies developed by Marsh et al. (Marsh and McConnell 2008 ; Marsh and Sharman 2009 ; Marsh and McConnell 2010) and Bovens et al. (Bovens, t'Hart et al. 2001 ; Bovens, t'Hart et al. 2006 ; Bovens 2010). First, there is programmatic failure, which refers to the failure of individual policies according to their stated intentions. Second, political failure, which refers to the public contestation over the evaluation of the policy and its perceived success or failure. Third, process failure, which refers to the success or otherwise with which policy makers formulate and build support for their preferred policies. Fourth, project failure, which refers to the contribution of individual policies towards the success of a broader strategy. I argue that New Labour's governing project relies on emphasising the programmatic dimension of policy success/failure as a core element of its own self-justification. I claim that the New Labour governing project for public service delivery contains rationalistic criteria for the success and failure of public policies. As a consequence, I argue, the discourse associated with this service delivery project tends to reduce considerations of success and failure to a single criterion, or to establish this criterion as hegemonic over other possible criteria.

New Labour's governing project is regarded as mostly successful in achieving governing competence in the education sector and more broadly. However, this judgement is understood as relative to the construction of governing success and failure contained within the project. On this interpretation, New Labour's project is successful from the point of view of key policy makers since it produces desired changes in power relations and behaviour. The definition of governing competence at the heart of the New Labour project is understood as a response to perceived long term weaknesses in the

institutions and political culture of the British state, the rectification of which was regarded as necessary in order to achieve competence in government. The invocation of evidence based policy making is understood as a pragmatically useful tool in the achievement of this goal, rather than providing the sole criteria by which New Labour's projects ought to be judged.

Chapter 6 applies the framework developed in Chapter 5 to an evaluation of New Labour's education policies and strategies. In particular, the chapter focuses on New Labour's attempts to improve educational standards in terms of examination results, and on the flagship Academy schools model. The chapter argues that New Labour enjoyed substantial success in the 'project' dimension by establishing governing competence over the education sector, altering the behaviour of actors in that sector, raising overall standards of achievement and enhancing governmental control over increased resources. While New Labour was unable to secure all of its programmatic goals, particularly in relation to educational inequality, this did not seriously compromise its claim on governing competence during its time in office.

Success and failure in the New Labour governing project

This chapter attempts to evaluate New Labour's education and governing strategies and to come to a judgement on whether or not these strategies were successful. A subjective assessment of this question is likely to be of little intellectual value, so this chapter considers the possibility of developing a systematic approach to the inevitably contested question of policy success or failure. As such, it does not necessarily attempt to make a judgement of the success or failure of New Labour strategies *per se*, but rather an assessment of their success *for* particular individuals or groups and *in relation to* various different success criteria. The first main section of this chapter develops a classification of types of policy success/failure from the work of Bovens et al. (Bovens, t'Hart et al. 2001 ; Bovens, t'Hart et al. 2006) and Marsh et al. (Marsh and McConnell 2008 ; Marsh and McConnell 2010). These works have attempted to develop classificatory schemas that can aid the production of a more systematic approach to the study of policy success and failure. Their concepts and categories provide a number of criteria or dimensions in which policy success or failure can be considered. The chapter continues by outlining some of the ways in which questions of government or policy success/failure have been constructed in recent British politics. This involves a discussion of perceived problems or weaknesses in British governance to which a governing strategy might respond. The success or failure of the New Labour strategy can then be understood in terms of an attempt to resolve or defuse tensions and dilemmas in British governance. The chapter argues that success for policy makers and particularly for the core of the core executive actors who drive the New Labour strategies, is principally a matter of securing administrative efficacy and governing competence (cf. Bulpitt 1983). However, the question of what counts as competence and efficacy is open to interpretation and construction by multiple actors.

This chapter argues that New Labour strategists identified a number of aspects of the British state that presented a perceived problem from the point of view of governing competence and defined a specific conception of governing competence in relation to these dilemmas. New Labour's governing project relied on emphasising a specific,

technocratic and rationalistic dimension of policy success/failure as a core element of its own self-justification. The centralising, anti-WM state project in which New Labour was engaged was defended in terms of the improved service delivery it claimed to foster. Hence, policy success or failure was partly about delivering the levels of public service promised by key actors in the core executive. But there were further dimensions to the New Labour project that cannot be measured according to programmatic, rationalistic or 'evidence based' criteria. In particular, this chapter argues that New Labour sought to elevate the importance of public service delivery in British politics, identified tendencies to inertia within the delivery chain, and sought to eliminate these tendencies in order to drive improvement in public service outcomes. I argue in the next chapter that New Labour was largely successful in reconstructing power relations and altering institutional behaviours in the field of education. As such I regard the education project as mostly successful whether or not it can be said to have produced objectively improved public service outcomes. The character of British governance and the political management of education changed in the ways desired by New Labour strategists, and New Labour achieved a degree of governing competence. Hence the overall project can be described as successful, even if the evaluation of outcomes of individual policies remains contested.

Developing a heuristic for argumentative policy evaluation: disaggregating and categorising policy failure

The first step in the development of a heuristic for the systematic study of policy success/failure must be to disaggregate the object of study. One common way of categorizing policy evaluation studies is according to whether they adopt a rationalistic or argumentative epistemology (Bovens, t'Hart et al. 2001 ; Bovens, t'Hart et al. 2006). In the rationalistic tradition, the question of what counts as policy failure is fairly easily settled and there is no real need to decompose the concept: policy failure is the failure of interventions into the organisation of public life, measured against the stated aims of those interventions. Within an argumentative approach, policy failure is a more plural

concept. The question of 'what kind of success/failure occurs?', and the question of 'success for who?' are arguably where the real intractability and 'essential contestedness' of policy success/failure comes in ((Marsh and McConnell 2008 13). I use this section to build on the work of Bovens et al. and Marsh and collaborators in attempting to disaggregate and classify the various types of policy failure as a preliminary step towards addressing these key questions. The aim is to contribute towards the construction of a heuristically useful shared vocabulary for the discussion of policy success/failure which can inform the evaluation of New Labour education strategy. Bovens et al and Marsh et al have between them suggested three categories or dimensions in which policy failure might be considered: the programmatic (rationalistic evaluation according to stated policy intentions), the political (involving the interpretation and contestation of the meaning of policy actions and outcomes), the process dimension (concerning the formation of coalitions of support and process of development and legislation). I discuss each of these categories below in turn, and suggest a fourth possible dimension that considers the success/failure of policies in terms of the overall projects to which they contribute. In the project dimension, individual policies are not the focus of evaluation; instead the broader strategies of political actors provide the basis for a judgement of success or failure.

The Programmatic dimension

Bovens et al. (2001 ; 2006) draw a distinction between programmatic and political dimensions of success and failure. Programmatic factors relate to many of the organizing questions of rationalistic policy evaluation. The authors draw a line from Lindblom and Laswell to this strand of evaluation which treats policy as social problem solving and asks 'what works?' (2006 329). The defining characteristic of programmatic policy success or failure is that it is measured against the stated objectives of policy interventions. Programmatic failure is policy specific; the policy is an instrument with a limited range of pre-identified objectives. Programmatic policy evaluation is oriented towards outcomes, such that successful realisation of policy makers' objective for a programme count as success overall. Increasing resource efficiency, cutting costs,

reducing waste and providing better value for money also belong to this category. It is in this dimension that evidence based policy (EBP) and service improvement are most likely to be invoked. The audit machinery established by New Labour focuses on this dimension of success, to the point that evaluative measures are built into some policies from the outset to allow quasi-experimental studies of effectiveness⁶³. The focus here is on policy *impact* rather than policy design, or the 'sale/marketing' of policy. For Marsh and McConnell, benefiting particular interests or constituencies belongs in this category; though I choose to class that as belonging to the 'political' dimension of success unless supporting these specific groups is explicitly part of the stated intention of policy.

The Political dimension

Bovens et al. regard policy evaluation based on the programmatic approach as unsatisfactory, when it is unaccompanied by other approaches. While acknowledging that programmatic failure is an important dimension of failure, they add a second, 'political' dimension to their classification. This refers to "how policies and policy makers become represented and evaluated in the political arena" (Stone (1997) cited in Bovens, t'Hart et al. 2006 330). In this dimension, the construction of the political consequences of policy is what matters, rather than progress against set programmatic objectives. A policy may be deemed a political success or failure according to its contribution towards the accrual of political capital and the enhancement of electoral success and government reputation. This dimension involves considerations of poll-driven government, election bribes, and the possibility of 'buying' electoral support. Though the authors do not do so, there is a case for expanding this dimension of policy evaluation beyond considerations of electoral success and securing re-election and for giving greater attention to the role of the media. The weakness of this approach is that it is difficult to operationalise, and to identify indicators to allow comparative analysis or rational criticism of judgements in this dimension of success/failure. The possible indicators suggested by the authors include political upheaval (press coverage,

⁶³ Such as the Education Maintenance Allowance policy.

parliamentary investigations, political fatalities, litigation) or lack of it, and changes in generic patterns of political legitimacy (public satisfaction with policy or confidence in authorities and public institutions) (Bovens, t'Hart et al. 2001 21). The purpose of the distinction drawn by Bovens et al. is to emphasise the contingency of policy success or failure on interpretations of policy in the political realm, and to 'bring the politics back in' to policy evaluation studies. But for the authors, political success or failure is only a different dimension of policy evaluation and not the whole story; programmatic failure still matters to the assessment of policy. Programmatic and political performance may well be related, but disparities between success or failure in one field compared to another is both possible and even likely – correspondence between the two should not be assumed. The distinction between the two dimensions of failure recognizes that programmatic failure is not reducible entirely to political failure and vice versa.

The Process dimension

Marsh and McConnell's main criticism of Bovens et al is that they do not make room for a consideration of process-related policy success as well as programmatic and political success. As such, Marsh et al. add a process dimension that gives an extended account of policies, allowing for success or failure in their origin and development (2010 570-571). Process level success/failure concerns the formulation, framing, and consultation processes prior to attempts to implement policies. It incorporates the formulation phase usually considered by US policy analysts that focuses on rational choices between policy options *ex ante*. In this dimension, success/failure may depend on building an 'advocacy coalition' or on attempts to co-opt potentially obstructive interests (Sabatier 2007)⁶⁴. The process of passing the legislation also matters. For Marsh and McConnell this is mainly about either securing opposition support, or resisting amendments (2010 571). It could also be about ensuring party loyalty and avoiding backbench

⁶⁴ The coalition of support itself can come to serve as an argument for success (as in the case of parents' support for academies, the expertise of business involved in the creation of the diploma qualification)

rebellion⁶⁵. Since process related success/failure is concerned with the origins of policy, it may be important in identifying instances of policy transfer and 'garbage-can' decision making. The use of policy transfer can contribute substantially to the subsequent performance of policy in multiple dimensions. In the process-related realm, it may serve both to give policies the 'stamp of approval' from elsewhere, and therefore weakening potential opposition; and to assist the 'sale' of policies to voters⁶⁶. Alternatively, policies may gain legitimacy and enhance their prospects for programmatic or political success if they are seen as being formulated within constitutional processes or subjected to debate and deliberation⁶⁷.

Controversy between Bovens et al. and Marsh et al.

As Bovens notes in his reply to Marsh and McConnell (2010), the introduction of the process dimension of success/failure can be seen as addressing a different object in relation to the other two dimensions. Whereas programmatic and political dimensions concern the outcomes of policy, Marsh and McConnell propose including a consideration of the genesis and process of policies. This is further complicated by the addition of a project dimension which is discussed below. Bovens claims that the process 'dimension' can also be analysed both programmatically and politically in itself (2010 584-585). He suggests instead process and outcomes as two loci of policy

⁶⁵ The hold up of Apprenticeship Children Skills and Learning (ACSL) bill in the Lords could, in itself be considered a failure in terms of leaving too many areas under-specified allowing obstruction and delay.

⁶⁵ The speed at which the 1998 SSFA was drafted, insulated from opposition and then driven through as legislation must count as policy success of one kind, regardless of its effects or implementation. See also the 2010 Academies Bill which was fast-tracked through Parliament.

⁶⁶ For example, Gove's invocation of Sweden and the success of freiskools there gives Tories a patina of 'social concern' through association with a social democratic system, and thus makes the policy more saleable from a PR perspective than claiming transfer from the similar US charter system, but relies on public ignorance of the differences between Swedish and UK schools systems. It has the further benefit of denying that the party are simply repeating the similar policies of Labour

⁶⁷ For example, the 'illegal' war in Iraq is susceptible to being described as a process failure and the process failure at UN may have contributed to its political and even programmatic failure.

success with each being adjudicated according to their programmatic and political results. There is value in this claim since it maintains a sharp distinction between the rationalistic/social scientific mode of analysing success in the programmatic dimension and the interpretive mode concerned with the construction of meaning and discourse. Once additional dimensions such as process and project are introduced, the clear separation of positivist and constructivist criteria begins to soften. However, as Marsh and McConnell point out, to divide process (and project) from the outcomes of policy risks downplaying the interaction between the different dimensions (2010)⁶⁸. This interaction is easier to describe if programme, politics and process are treated as separate 'faces' of policy success/failure. Since the point of the exercise is to develop a shared language for discussing policy success/failure, the inclusion of additional dimensions such as process and project is justified since those terms label specific kinds or specific arenas of success/failure and help to make the discussion more precise.

Project related policy failure

In addition to the three 'faces' of policy success/failure described by Bovens and Marsh and McConnell, I would also add a fourth dimension of success or failure to this classification: project failure. In the project dimension, success or failure would be assessed in terms of the overall governing strategy or project of policy makers. This would involve an expanded view of the intentions of policy makers that is not policy specific but relates to a broader project or strategy of governance. As such, the project level is at least potentially relatively autonomous from the other dimensions since achievement of the overall project may not be dependent on the success of any individual policy. The project level concerns attempts to alter the distribution of power within and beyond the state and contestation over which groups successfully claim the right to originate, modify and evaluate policies. This dimension of policy success/failure shares some features with Bulpitt's concept of 'statecraft' (1983) since it concerns the

⁶⁸ This may also tend to reproduce the 'stages heuristic' which maintains a sharp distinction between policy formulation and implementation and has been strongly criticised by policy analysts (See e.g. Sabatier 2007)

achievement of governing competence, argumentative hegemony and changing the behaviour of actors beyond government.

There is no need for policy makers, parties, or executives to have an overall governing project that informs all policy and scholars such as Flinders have argued that the absence of such strategies is typical of the British political style (2008). However, this category is intended to capture objectives of policy makers that are not specific to the programme in hand. The project dimension could describe an instance of policy success which serves the overall governing project (reducing the discretion of local authorities to administer public services, for example) but may or may not achieve programmatic success in relation to the specific objectives attached to that policy. So, for example, in a programmatic sense, the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) aims to increase the participation of lower socioeconomic groups in post-16 education. Increased participation is therefore the condition of its programmatic success as a policy. But the reason why this goal should be pursued at all resides at the project level. At this level the purpose or intention of the policy is to increase the skills and therefore employability of groups with traditionally lower levels of both as part of a strategy for economic growth and social inclusion. If it could be demonstrated beyond question that participation had increased among target groups (i.e. programmatic success), there would still be a prospect of project failure if, for example, greater participation did not lead to increased likelihood of employment, or employment did not lead to growth.

Diagram 3: Dimensions of policy evaluation

Dimension of policy evaluation	Definition	Indicators
Programmatic	Success/failure of policy in meeting stated intentions of specific policy	Rationalist or quasi-experimental evaluation against stated aims. Performance against audit criteria Efficiency of use of energy or resources
Political	Ability of policy makers to claim credit or avoid blame for policy outcomes	Assessment of political upheaval, media response or legitimacy Success/failure in demonstrating that positive change is the result of a policy intervention Argumentative hegemony
Process	Ability to mobilize support or expedite policy at formulation stage Ability to demonstrate legitimacy consent and accountability	Presence/absence of opposition, presence of plausible narratives to justify policy, speed of passage through machinery of government.
Project	Contribution of policy to overall governing strategies Ability to integrate system of public organisations	Success/failure in effecting desired shifts in power relations or to alter jurisdictional boundaries Governing competence Compatibility of sets of policies

The four categories are intended to represent both levels of analysis, and, albeit less precisely, a chronological sequence. In this sequence, the overall governing project is typically formulated prior to individual policies, the process of building support and passing the policy comes next, an audit of the outcomes of the policy would follow, with a political assessment of the policy's performance following on from that. The sequence begins with the project dimension and passes through process, programme and political in order. This ordering is no doubt imperfect since the dimensions do not necessarily occupy discrete or successive periods of time. A governing project may emerge from the accretion of a series of policies not guided by any overall blueprint, for example (As, for example, Burnham and Pyper (2008) have argued in relation to civil service reform in Britain). The intention in describing a chronological sequence is to clarify the meaning of the categories and to give an impression of the policy process as ongoing and taking place over time, rather than focusing solely on policy impacts at a given moment.

The phenomenon of policy failure can be disaggregated further according to the differential effects on various actors involved. Marsh and McConnell are right to point out that a binary between success/failure is too limited (2008 15-16). The classification should acknowledge the differential distribution of success or failure among various actors. This recognises the fact that two groups of actors may have contradictory experiences of success or failure in relation to the same policy. So, for example, it would be necessary to disaggregate within government to recognise that a policy which is a success for the Treasury might be experienced as a dramatic failure for a government department, success for the Prime Minister's Office may mean failure for parliamentary parties, success for civil servants may mean failure for special advisers and so on. 'The government' is not then the relevant unit of analysis for policy evaluation since there may be internal conflicts leading to different experiences of success and failure.

Identifying problems in British governance

The typology described above is intended only as a heuristic to enable a systematic descriptive discussion of policy success and failure. In order to develop further, policy evaluation studies need to identify regularities and patterns of failure and attempt to formulate explanations for these patterns. They need to establish whether patterns of policy failure can be seen to change over time and whether state managers' strategies or institutional forms have an effect on this. This point connects the analysis of New Labour's education and governing projects to the discussion of policy evaluation. Those projects, as I have argued, placed a high premium on the delivery of objectives determined in the core executive. As such, they prioritized the realization of programmatic success and sought to reconfigure the policy process in order to achieve this. The question of policy success and failure lies at the heart of this governing project, both in the analysis of the governing structures New Labour inherited and in the strategy chosen to rearrange these structures. In the next section, I attempt to develop an account of policy failure in Britain that connects patterns of success and failure (both 'real' and constructed) to specific features of the British state. In doing so, I attempt to explain policy failure from the perspective of policy makers. The key questions here concern the analysis of past failures, and the nature of the strategy chosen to address these. This section asks which features of the British state policy makers have identified as producing consistent patterns of success or failure, and therefore posing a problem of governing competence, and what strategies have they chosen to reinforce or reform these features.

This question concerns the ways in which key strategic actors involved in the New Labour governing project have produced narratives about the connections between certain features of their institutional environment and patterns of policy failure. These narratives necessarily involve the construction of a concept of governing competence and incompetence. I have already introduced some of the fundamentals of what I take to be New Labour's analysis of the failures of the British state in chapter 4. In that section, I argued that failure, for New Labour, meant the inability of the core of the core executive

to prosecute its agenda without obstruction or interference from other branches of the state or other actors beyond the state. I argued that New Labour's analysis of the state connected the residual obstructive powers of bodies such as professionals, departmental bureaucracies and local government to the frustration, and therefore failure of executive priorities. New Labour's chosen strategy to address these weaknesses involved a re-agenting of the structures of policy making in order to reduce the prospects of process failures and a persistent emphasis in public discourse on the need to realise objective programmatic successes, especially in the public services. These two strands of the strategy are mutually reinforcing. The emphasis on delivery, output-based accountability and evidence based policy legitimises the introduction of new agency and the disruption of older policy networks. The re-agenting element reduces the 'friction' in the policy process that key New Labour actors had identified as the source of the frustration of executive policy initiatives.

Dunleavy on policy failure

The New Labour analysis of the weaknesses of the British state was already present in British political discourse prior to the election of 1997. Dunleavy's 1995 paper on policy disasters in Britain makes a number of suggestions as to possible connections between features of the British state and patterns of policy failure. Dunleavy's article famously claimed that "Britain now stands out ...as a state unusually prone to make large-scale, avoidable policy mistakes" (1995 52) which he termed "policy disasters" , defined as "significant and substantially costly failures of commission or omission by government" (52). Dunleavy explicitly connected the prevalence of policy failure (and the relative indifference shown by policy makers towards persistent failure) to exceptional features of the British governing style and institutions (54). A number of the factors identified by Dunleavy concern systems, institutions and embedded political cultures that tended to encourage policy disasters (1995 59-68).

Scale aggregation

Due to the weakness of sub-national government and the (then) lack of mixed public/private implementation systems, policy tends to be made at the national level such that policy mistakes are replicated and multiplied across the whole polity. It is interesting to note that the mixed public/private implementation systems Dunleavy defended as a possible remedy did become a feature of British governance, but with little effect in terms of governing style. The weakness of sub-national government may also militate against the use of social experimentation approaches to policy making of the kind suggested by Weiss and Birckmayer (2006)⁶⁹. In the absence of a suitable sub-national scale at which to administer such experiments and pilots, policies are likely to be rolled out at the national level more quickly. Hence, all failures are likely to be failures on a national scale. New Labour's education strategy and governing project seem to recognise an element of this assessment, but without sharing Dunleavy's prescription. Instead, the New Labour approach was to persist with a highly standardised national approach to education governance and address the potential pitfalls of this through rigorous monitoring and central prescription. Although public/private implementation became increasingly the norm under New Labour, this did not compromise the national character of public service strategies.

Ineffective internal and external core executive checks and balances

As Dunleavy points out, there are no effective checks and balances on the core executive if ministers side with the core executive, and in any case, opposition to the core executive agenda can be overcome by determined key actors. As discussed in chapter 4, the formal institutions of the British state are designed to give executives in-built majorities in the legislature. In combination with strict party discipline and the first past the post electoral system, this severely weakens legislative scrutiny powers over policy. There have been moves to enhance the scrutiny powers of parliament over legislation with the introduction of the select committee system in 1979, but these

⁶⁹ And may prove highly problematic for a strategy of devolving power to localities on the lines of the Conservative 'Big Society' or 'Post-bureaucratic age' philosophy.

committees remained subject to manipulation by party whips⁷⁰. The checks and balances that do exist are primarily conventional and uncodified logics of appropriateness rather than having any statutory or legal basis. As such, determined actors within the executive can subvert or ignore them with relative impunity. The truth of Dunleavy's analysis has been borne out by the executive domination of British politics over recent decades and especially under New Labour. However, from the point of view of policy makers, executive dominance need not be seen as a failing and may in fact be seen as a precondition of governing competence. If success is defined as the prosecution of the government's agenda without obstruction, then governments in fact have a strong incentive to exploit and even further entrench executive independence.

The context of party politics in a two party system might also play a role in assessments of success/failure since success for one party is almost always failure for another. Success may even be defined as undermining or opponents, outflanking them, stealing or 'trumping' their policies. What is true of the party system may also be true of intra-governmental conflict, whereby success for one organ of government may mean defeat for another. The context of increasing executive dominance in the British state may accentuate the zero-sum nature of these conflicts. The adversarial style of British politics should then be seen as rooted in the form of political institutions. Dunleavy identifies "overly speedy legislation and policy making" as a separate set of factors from the inadequate checks on the core executive (60). But there is a clear case for regarding this policy making style as a product of the lack of restriction on the executive. The institutions of the British state create few chances or incentives for parties to seek to reach mutual advantage through co-operation. This again leads to a highly adversarial style of politics which works against the building of coalitions of support for policies over time. The executive is not under any pressure to secure a coalition of support in advance of introducing legislation, and retains a high degree of

⁷⁰ A weakness which the implementation of the Wright committee report in 2010 aimed to rectify

control over the mechanics of parliamentary scrutiny⁷¹. Without the need to actively build support, and without effective scrutiny and oversight from parliament, the policy process is faster and the resemblance of Bill to Act is closer than in more consensual systems. In combination, these factors create a propensity for sharp changes in policy direction and encourage 'overshoot' that might be checked in more consensual or federal systems.

Sector-specific governance problems

As well as general features of the British state as a whole, there may be policy sector-specific contextual variables which contribute towards the explanation of policy failure. The specific structural locations and institutions of particular policy sectors, as well as the tactics adopted towards these by political actors may have profound effects on variation in the conduct of politics across sectors. In education, for example, the context is high salience, high risk, low reward for success, weak professional opposition, and low prospects for depoliticisation. Education is likely to be particularly prone to the politicisation of policy success and failure and highly prone therefore to asymmetry between political and programmatic success. Depoliticisation which benefits governments is especially difficult to achieve. Education and skills policy is integral to economic and social justice debates to an unusually high degree, which imposes additional strategic goals on education policy. The location of the policy sector with regard to other areas of policy has been in transition from a relatively low status sector which was administered through co-operation with a range of actors beyond the central state, to a high-priority strategic sector in which old networks have been disrupted and the core executive has a greater presence. The changing character of the sector is likely to impact on perceptions of patterns of success/failure in ways that cannot be entirely reduced to dynamics at the national level.

The role of strategy and policy style in policy evaluation

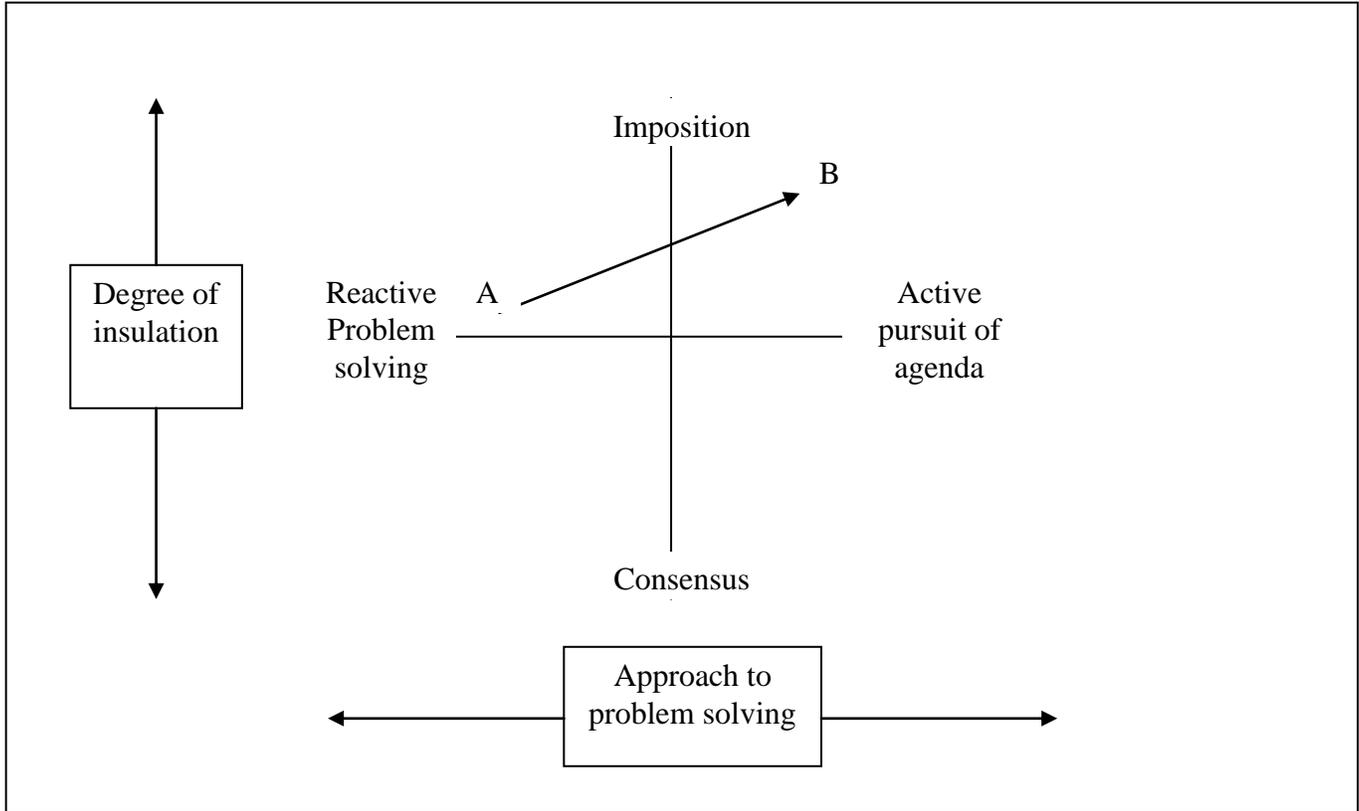
⁷¹ See , for example, Michael Gove's decision to hold the committee stage of scrutiny for the Academies Bill on the floor of the House of Commons

The kind of systemic features discussed above are important in terms of generating the norms and rules by which the game of policy making will be played, and in conferring specific powers on different players in the game. But political actors are in no sense prisoners of these structures. They retain the capacity to innovate, to pursue different strategies within existing structures and to seek to modify the rules of the game. This introduces a source of creative or destructive change which means that institutions of the kind discussed above may only be relatively enduring and do not necessarily remain stable over time. Furthermore, change may occur through exogenous factors, as well as through the endogenous development of strategies by political actors. Hence, a fully rounded treatment of the factors which generate patterns of policy making that come to be interpreted as successful or failing should include a discussion of the strategies of actors within the British state, and an acknowledgement of the role of exogenous and unpredictable events on these.

Bovens et al. (2001) raise the possibility that the strategies of political actors, which they term policy styles, may explain variations in patterns of policy failure across different states. They argue that calculations of success/failure depend on whether one has an 'assembly line' or 'arts and crafts' conception of what counts as good government (657). On the 'assembly line' model, government is hierarchical and rationalistic. Comparisons between private sector companies and governments can usefully be drawn according to this model. According to the 'arts and crafts' conception, governing is inevitably more indeterminate than the assembly line model allows, and this contingency must be recognised. As argued in the previous chapter the institutions of the British state have historically embodied the 'arts and crafts' approach. This conception of good government is manifested in the high value traditionally placed on tacit knowledge, the dependence on common apprenticeship/socialisation of personnel, the rejection of formalisation of procedures, and the prioritisation of personnel over process. For Bovens et al., policy style is comprised of firstly, an approach to problem -solving and secondly, the degree of relative autonomy of policy making from other institutions. So policy style varies on one dimension according to active problem solving versus reactive problem

solving and on the other between top-down imposition and consensus implementation (2001a 16) . Fitting the British policy style into this framework is not a simple task, again reflecting the endemic contradictions and tensions between competing styles. The authors class the UK as highly reactive in its approach to problem solving, but with a high degree of top-down imposition. However, policy style cannot be regarded as static, and, as argued in chapters 3 and 4, there is a trend over recent years towards increased centralisation and a resulting drive towards more active pursuit of governmental agenda and even greater imposition. Rather than thinking of policy style/strategy as a kind of static or fixed 'British political tradition' (cf. Marsh and Hall 2007), policy styles can be understood as inconstant, changing as state managers seek to retain competence in changing or re-interpreted circumstances. Previous chapters have argued that the policy style or strategy favoured by New Labour represented a shift even further away from consensus decision making in comparison to past policy styles, and even further towards the active pursuit of a government agenda (see Diagram 4 below). Given the aggressively centralizing and delivery-oriented strategy adopted by New Labour, the recent history of the British state might be described as the attempt to impose an assembly line model of good government on a set of institutions which derive from an 'arts and crafts' approach. Since the two models contain different constructions of success and failure, the clash of these two approaches may make the British state especially prone to contradiction and the frustration of policy programmes.

Diagram 4: Trajectory of change in British policy style



Bovens et al.'s tentative findings on the relationship between policy style and success/failure were that consensuality was generally more successful across the range of policy areas and states they examined (2001 646)⁷². However, they also found the UK scored well in terms of programmatic success, despite its highly impositional style. This raises interesting questions in the light of the marked tendency for British policy makers to retreat further from consensual management and to seek to impose policy as the means to achieving better programmatic outcomes. The relationship between policy style (or more properly, between degrees of insulation of policy makers) and success/failure might then be hypothesised in two ways. Firstly, consensuality might, other things being equal, tend to produce greater programmatic success. In which case, the strategy of British policy makers in pursuing a more impositional approach presents a further intellectual puzzle. Secondly, there may be a 'varieties of policy style' effect, whereby imposition or consensus both work, but hybrid systems do not. For example, Dutch consensus policy making may have great benefit for political as well as programmatic success, but the Swedish combination of *etatisme* and consensus style is less successful (642). In the case of the second hypothesised relationship, the development of apparently more consensual forms in Britain and especially in English education (e.g. networks, 'new' governance structures, new localism) alongside a more active imposition of central objectives may contribute towards policy failure. Alternatively, the insulation and exclusivity of British policy making, resulting from the lack of institutions for effectively engaging societal interests and building consensus may inhibit process success and make it more likely that there will be disparity between programmatic and political success.

Hyperactivism in British governance

A number of commentators have also identified a tendency to political 'hyperactivism' as characteristic of British policy makers' strategies. In one sense, 'hyperactivity' can be

⁷² The policy areas studied were HIV/blood supply, medical professionals, decline of the steel industry and financial regulation change across a variety of nation states

regarded as an element of state managers' response to perceived weaknesses and tendencies to failure in the British state. For Dunleavy, this hyperactivism resulted from individual politicians' and policy advisors' belief that political capital could be gained from generating new initiatives "almost for their own sake" (1995 61) Dunleavy connected this to a general indifference to evidence or "scientific evaluation" of policy, and also the declining policy advice role for senior civil servants. In a similar vein, Moran suggests that individual ambition among the civil service and ministers may generate hyperactivity as policy becomes oriented to short-term and observable change that cannot be sustained over a longer period (2003). For Clarke and Newman, policy proliferation or hyperactivity reflects an attempt to control fields of policy where issues refuse to be de-politicised and from an attempt to reassure the public that the responsibilities of government are being dealt with (1997 145). Constant activity is therefore required to ensure legitimacy.

For politicians engaged in the practical exercise of policy making, the relevant timescales are always short term – the compressed political time of contemporary politics rules out considerations of long term, 'slow wins'. Since compressed time means that in-depth analysis of all available options at the formulation stage may be unfeasible, this also relates to questions of bounded rationality, insufficient information and garbage can decision making which in turn have implications for the likely success of policy. As discussed above, the British state has certain institutional biases towards the rapid production and implementation of policy. These tendencies are magnified by a hyperactive style of statecraft that views fast policy as good policy, and prioritises the appearance of decisiveness over extended deliberation. From the point of view of policy evaluation, the mutually reinforcing dynamic between the institutional biases and policy makers' strategies risks generating failure in two ways. Firstly, the need to constantly generate new policy may compromise programmatic success through the poor design of hastily assembled policy, and secondly, project-related success may be compromised since a constant stream of new initiatives may lack overall coherence and compatibility with one another.

Challenges to the dominant strategy

Though it is useful in identifying intellectual puzzles, the existence of variation across cases means policy style is perhaps not a very robust explanatory variable when considered in isolation. Typically, neither states nor policy sectors adhere strictly to a consistent style. The problem with using policy style to explain policy failure is that the policy style itself needs to be accounted for. Its continuity or transformation needs to be described and explained. For example, changes in style may reflect learning, or dominant approaches to policy may be challenged by alternative constructions of success/failure. Policy style cannot just be regarded as a constant or static attribute of the states/sectors under investigation – it is itself contingent and emerges through a process of contestation.

One element of such contestation concerns the persistence of norms and values associated with the Westminster Model. These norms have provided resources for those seeking to resist changes associated with recent governing projects. For example, Dunleavy identifies “The arrogance of Whitehall” as one of the features of the British state that contributes to consistent policy failure (1995 62). For Dunleavy, the modernization of the civil service under Conservative governments of the 1980s and 1990s had done little to undermine the traditional generalist model of the British civil service. Civil servants still lacked professional experience and became involved in offering advice on subjects they were ill-equipped to comment on. The effect of the re-modelling of the civil service, he claimed, was to deny civil servants a role in high politics. But the civil service response was to colonise areas of the ‘low politics’ of domestic service delivery to which they were not well suited. Civil servants pushed out of their traditional role in high politics had sought to retain a role by displacing local government so that public services tended increasingly to be administered from Whitehall. For Dunleavy, Whitehall had “become a glorified local government- leaving little room for councillors and local democracy as well” (1995 64). This development can be read as a strategy for self-preservation by civil servants. It can be viewed primarily as a counter-strategy to that of politicians in seeking to disrupt the organizational culture of

the civil service. Just as educationists sought to contest the new education regime by invoking principles of professional autonomy and the public service ethos (see Chapter 1), so bureaucrats sought to invoke their own guiding principles as a challenge to government attempts to impose new roles and functions on them. While this chapter suggests that the New Labour governing project has largely been successful in overcoming these challenges and in altering behaviour and power relations in desired ways, it has not entirely distinguished the attachment to the values associated with the Westminster Model. As such, these norms remain present in British political discourse and may offer valuable resources for those seeking to mount any future challenge to the New Labour governing project (See also Public Administration Select Committee 2008 ; Bogdanor 2009 ; Flinders 2010 ; Richards and Mathers 2010 on the persistence of 'Westminster values')

New Labour's construction of success and failure: Evidence Based Policy Making, "What works", and rationalistic policy evaluation

As the above discussion indicates, New Labour's governing strategy built on longer-term changes in British politics that predated the New Labour project. New Labour policy strategy echoed that of its predecessors in many respects and the analysis of the British state that underpinned the strategy was not a radically novel one. The aim of imposing an assembly line governing style on a set of structures designed from an 'arts and crafts' vision of politics had been present in British politics since at least the 1970s. But the New Labour policy strategy was distinctive in terms of its energetic pursuit of the remodelling of institutions, and in the discursive framing of the strategy in terms of evidence based policy making (EBPM). As discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, New Labour's analysis of the pathologies of the British state led to widespread institutional restructuring at the heart of government. This was accompanied by a kind of discursive restructuring that strongly emphasized the role of rationalistic policy evaluation in ensuring successful and effective policy. As such, constructions of policy success and failure were at the heart of the New Labour project.

The invocation of EBPM is a reflection of the inescapable nature of controversy over policy success and failure. The state is rarely in a position to produce unambiguous success that is above controversy or rival interpretation. The location of the state within a given political and economic system limits the extent to which it can be expected to resolve social problems. As Jessop notes: “[The state’s position] ...means that it is continually called upon by diverse social forces to resolve society’s problems and is equally continually doomed to generate ‘state failure’ since so many of society’s problems lie well beyond its control and may even be exaggerated by attempted intervention” (2008 7). Given that success or failure will always be subject to interpretation and that forces beyond the control of the state play a role in this, policy makers must decide what strategy it is rational or reasonable for them to pursue. If state managers are aware of the insecurity of policy success, what criteria of success or failure should they choose to employ? One possible strategy is to insist on the priority of instrumental rationality in policy making as the least bad option. A second strategy is depoliticisation as a means of either reducing the distorting irrationality of the political process, or simply to deflect blame for failure (Burnham 2001 ; Buller and Flinders 2006 ; Bertelli 2008). Instead of delivering policy themselves and accepting the responsibility for any possible failure, strategic political actors may opt to depoliticize where the probability of failure is high. A depoliticisation strategy therefore involves contracting out the blame for policy failure to organisations which are on the fringes of public accountability systems. The resort to depoliticisation as a governance technique can be seen to demonstrate a recognition of the likelihood of failure and therefore a desire to spread the risk or the blame.

There might have been reason to expect that New Labour would favour a depoliticisation strategy over the more interventionist command and control model they chose instead. According to one influential narrative of British political history, the ambitions of high modernist public policy and the top-down Westminster model of political power had long since disintegrated under conditions of increasing social complexity leading to overload and ungovernability (see e.g. King (1975)). The high

modernist approach to public policy appeared less plausible when the state apparently lacked the reach to impose its chosen policies. Street-level bureaucratic discretion and 'control losses' introduce the notion of an implementation gap, which could also explain policy failure. Failure then is explained as the result of the expansion of the state beyond the limits of the range of activities that it could successfully manage through direct imposition of public policies on society⁷³. However, as I have argued in previous chapters, the preferred strategy of British state managers has not been simply to roll back the state, reducing its role to steering of the extra-state agencies charged with policy delivery.

Although there has been a widespread use of delegation and a reduction of the policy implementation role of the state, this has not represented acquiescence to the inexorable opening up of implementation gaps. Instead, the typical response to the perception of an implementation gap has been to attempt to strengthen central capacities for control and reduce the amount of policy-making that is governed by informal rules and norms or logics of appropriateness in favour of normalised, transparent principles of accountability and control. With the benefit of hindsight, Dunleavy's paper can be read as a criticism of the Conservative reforms of the machinery of state that had taken place during the 1980s and 1990s, but also as a call for exactly the kind of state project that New Labour subsequently pursued. Dunleavy saw the Conservative focus on efficiency, particularly cost-efficiency as a source of the propensity for policy disasters he detected in the British state (1995: 69). But in his call for a focus on efficacy over efficiency, he prefigured the New Labour governing project with its prioritisation of service delivery and outcome-based evaluation. The idea of policy success that Dunleavy advocated became embodied in the New Labour state project.

⁷³ Note the congruence of this explanation with the hollowing out notion of governance or multi-level governance approaches which emphasise the relative autonomy of levels

EBPM and New Labour ideology

Some scholars of New Labour have argued that the appeal to EBPM is a symptom of the fundamental organizing ideology of New Labour. Adherence to EBPM can be connected to Finlayson's notion of New Labour as a party which substitutes a sociological analysis for a political philosophy (1999). For Finlayson, New Labour "policy is legitimated not by ethical principles but by the truth of certain social facts" (271). Since New Labour, according to Finlayson, lacks a settled philosophical foundation, it chooses to legitimise policy on the basis of the need to accommodate to an objectively altered sociological situation, perhaps of late or 'reflexive' modernity. In such a situation, what is required from government is not a set of policies which are rational to the underlying values of the political project, but a set of policies that provide the truest possible reflection of these social facts. Evidence appears in this story as the means to establish the most accurate social scientific analysis possible. In Finlayson's words, the New Labour project comes to rely on the belief that "social trends are always clearly identifiable and neutral phenomena if you have enough statistics. The point then becomes to establish these social or economic trends so that they may inform rational policy" (277). For Finlayson then, EBPM emerges as the result of the (possibly deliberate) failure of the New Labour project to develop a coherent political philosophy.

The notion that EBPM reflects the ideological hollowness, eclecticism or incoherence of the Third Way and New Labour as a project is also a theme in Freedon (1999) and Buckler and Dolowitz (2000). Bevir (2007), offers an alternative analysis in insisting that the New Labour project is profoundly shaped by an engagement with intellectual trends in political philosophy and beyond. Social science and political philosophy, for Bevir, are a direct influence on New Labour's behaviour, and as such, there is a much greater intellectual coherence and linearity to the project than other theorists had allowed. In contrast to Finlayson and others, Bevir insists that New Labour only made EBP the cornerstone of its justification for policy once it had abandoned an earlier set of philosophical values. For Bevir, this shift occurs from 2003 onwards and provides evidence of the intellectual exhaustion of New Labour as it began to abandon the

institutionalist and communitarian principles (faith in network governance and belief in personal responsibility respectively) that had previously guided policy (2007 334). For Bevir, the resort to EBP reflected a declining confidence in the correctness of the course of action New Labour had been pursuing. Bevir's claim appears at first sight to be difficult to sustain given the prioritisation of public service delivery, rigorous target setting and performance management which New Labour had relied on at least from 2001 onwards. However, Bevir wants to maintain a distinction between the use of performance indicators and targets and 'true' EBP which he defines as the use of test cases, social experimentation and pilot programmes.

The instrumental value of EBPM

The call for evidence-based policy or 'what works' betrays a rationalist image of the policy process with policy makers acting as engineers recalibrating policy instruments and maximizing towards given goals. New Labour's avowal of Evidence Based Policy Making (EBPM) and the slogan 'what matters is what works' (Powell 1999 ; Allender 2001) are the most striking indicators of an apparent attachment to the faith that reason (perhaps as embodied by social science) could play a decisive part in policy-making (Centre for Management and Policy Studies 2001 ; National Audit Office 2001). David Blunkett's frequently cited speech to the ESRC in 2000 claimed that:

"social science research is central to the development and evaluation of policy...We will be guided not by dogma but by an open minded approach to understanding what works and why" (cited in Sanderson (2004)).

The appeal to EBPM involves both a claim about the proper role of rationality in the development and evaluation of public policy, and a specific construction of what successful or failing policy is. But the claim about the role of rationality in policy need not be understood as a naïve confidence in the ability of social science to deliver 'correct' solutions to problems of governing. There are good reasons why leading actors within New Labour may choose to appeal to rationalistic and evidence based policy. Such an

appeal may serve to emphasise its pragmatism and openness to expert advice, particularly in the light of its battle with 'dogmatic' old Labour. It might equally be regarded as a corollary of the ideological convergence of British political parties, now reduced to competing on the basis of their superior managerial proficiency rather than on the basis of normative commitments. The EBPM movement might be a genuine attempt to recruit social science researchers as policy advisers in order to expand the range of sources of expertise involved in the policy process. Alternatively, New Labour might be seen as opportunistically attempting to hijack the 'scientific' credibility of social science research in order to pick and choose research findings which support its preferred policies while ignoring those that do not. I argue that EBPM is best understood as a tactic within an overall strategy of governing from the centre as described in Chapters 3 and 4. From this perspective, EBPM or rationalistic policy evaluation carries an instrumental value beyond any claim it might have to put the policy process on an objective, scientific basis.

There is not, and nor could there be, a conveyor belt model of policy whereby the findings of pilots, social experiments or evidence based policy evaluations are directly the cause of policy decisions. The findings of such evaluation exercises are too often controversial or contradictory to various ideological or interest group concerns. This controversy cannot be overcome through open rational criticism and a plurality of independent studies since, as Bovens et al note, "multiple evaluations of the same policy tend to be non-cumulative and non-complementary" (2006 321)⁷⁴ Nevertheless, there is an important role for rationalistic policy evaluation in practical politics, but one that necessarily gives up on the ideal of a social scientific politics that makes policy decisions based solely on objective evidence. Instead its role is profoundly political and driven by calculations of political advantage and value judgements. Weiss and

⁷⁴ See Goodwin Goodwin, M. (2009). "Choice in Public Services: Crying 'Wolf' In the School Choice Debate." *Political Quarterly* **80**(2): 270-281.

for an example with regard to competing evaluations of school choice policies

Birckmayer point to the role of rationalistic policy evaluation and social experimentation in building support for policies. They note that policy proposals with adequate popular or legislative support are usually passed without regard to evidence. But pilot studies or rationalistic evaluation exercises will often be used to keep alive policy ideas that cannot muster sufficient support to ensure immediate passage (2006 814). Similarly, rationalistic evaluation exercises can be used to disparage or undermine the status quo as a means to building a coalition of support for an alternative course of action. On this reading, rationalistic policy evaluation is selectively employed by reflexive political actors in order to legitimise and expedite preferred policies, rather than to impartially decide between competing courses of action.

The construction of success/failure in EBPM

The construction of definitions of success and failure is a crucial aspect of the execution of a governing project. By defining the territory of success/failure, the project may be bolstered or undermined. The range of available criticisms is narrowed as the terms of reference are set by the stated success criteria of the project. Certain kinds of knowledge and argument are privileged over others and some groups or discourses may be excluded. As such, the act of defining success/failure is integral to the overall governing project. Within the EBPM paradigm, success and failure is primarily about success or failure of delivery – it involves a persistent discursive and practical focus on programmatic successes. In invoking EBPM, New Labour collapses, or attempts to collapse, all the various faces of success/failure discussed in above into a single criterion of programmatic success. In Dunleavy's terms, EBPM prioritises policy *efficacy* as the highest good. This contrasts with the prioritization of efficiency (particularly cost efficiency) that Dunleavy associated with the Thatcher/Major governments, or the prioritization of procedural appropriateness characteristic of the public service ethos. The delegitimation of these alternative narratives may be politically expedient in itself for the purposes of weakening criticism. But I argue that the prioritization of policy efficacy also reflects something of New Labour's constitutional ideology as regards the priority of executive government and the purpose and expectations key actors have of the kind of

outcomes politics can produce. This is also a point raised by Bovens et al (2001) and discussed by Marsh and McConnell (2010). The neoliberal project of Thatcherism expressed a broader analysis of the inefficiency of the state through its focus on efficiency. This tactic meant the Thatcher governments were able to equate 'publicness' with failure, drawing on public choice theory to present the claim that democratic systems produce inefficient results due to the self-interested maximising behaviour of public bureaucrats. As discussed in chapter 3, New Labour's analysis of the British political system led its leading figures to equate a toleration of failure with branches of the state such as local authorities and civil servants, especially departmental civil servants⁷⁵. The need to change the culture of these institutions is brought dramatically to the fore by a relentless and exclusive focus on delivery of programmatic success. The self-understanding and ethos of these institutions was challenged by the insistence that delivery and policy outcomes, rather than procedural propriety, were the only criteria for success. In the field of education, this was never clearer than when leading New Labour politicians insisted that, under their administration, there would be: 'No excuses for school failure's and 'zero tolerance of underachievement'. As such, the definition of failure contained within the logic of EBPM is integral to the reorganization of the institutions of state.

Institutionalising EBPM

These constructions of the proper role of rationality and the definition of successful policy also need to be institutionalized in order to affect the policy process in practice. Ideas about the purposes and appropriate methods of public policy cannot have effects in themselves unless they are embedded in organizational cultures, institutions, and norms. Rationalistic policy evaluation need not be simply a question of public rhetoric, masking the 'real' intentions of policy makers. It can also be embedded in institutions

⁷⁵ As Dunleavy had also done in his work Dunleavy, P. (1995). "Policy Disasters: Explaining the UK's Record." Public Policy and Administration 10(2): 52-70.

which make up the context in which political actors must operate. Pawson (2006) advances the claim that evidence is always trumped by politics in the real world and hence the importance of EBPM might be overstated. But whether politicians' invocation of evidence-based policy is sincere or mere lip service is not really the key issue, since the normative and epistemological underpinnings of EBPM are in fact institutionalised into the practice of everyday politics. EBPM has been institutionalized through a range of measures such as creation of new epistemic networks of expertise, expanded research budgets in Whitehall, greater strategic capacity at the centre, the extensive use of targets and performance indicators and more input from extra-governmental bodies such as think tanks⁷⁶ (Balch 2009 615). The creation of new organisational cultures and institutions matters since they create and sustain logics of appropriateness which guide political actors. They also matter in respect of the accountability frameworks they establish (Sanderson 2004 371). The frameworks established according to principles of New Public Management (NPM) are a case in point. A strong performance management and audit culture in public services further reinforces the commitment to EBPM in practice – representing an attempt to gain as much evidence as possible of what works, what are current levels of performance, quantifying improvement and so on in order to improve policy or to spread best practice. The thrust of these reforms is to transfer power from bureaucrats to managers in exchange for rigorous accountability processes based on increased regulation, audit and inspection. As such, NPM attempts to replace professional self-regulation with more codified forms of accountability.

These governance techniques encourage the treatment of the delivery of public services as a rationalist exercise. Delivery requires only procedural efficiency guaranteed by external judgements of effectiveness, rather than relying on professional judgement and internal trust. Hence changes in accountability structures are directly linked to rationalist understandings of policy success and failure. The burgeoning public sector consultancy

⁷⁶ Influential advisers to the remodelled 'Prime Minister's Department' such as Geoff Mulgan (Strategy Unit director 2001-2004) and Matthew Taylor (Head of Policy Directorate 2004-2006) were recruited directly from think tanks

industry charged with delivering these changes in fact *requires*, and has a vested interest in, the maintenance of a high modernist approach to policy making and hierarchical control, even if this is achieved contractually⁷⁷. Consultants contracted by the public sector rely on the notion that policy is primarily a technocratic problem-solving exercise. The message about improving performance data and modelling in order to establish 'what works' has been further reinforced in a succession of government publications aimed at civil servants (Cabinet Office 1999 ; Cabinet Office 1999 ; Centre for Management and Policy Studies 2001 ; National Audit Office 2001). So for example, school league tables produce a kind of rationalistic evaluation of school policies, while international organisations such as the OECD produce assessments and comparisons between national polities that have real effects for politicians (such as the so called 'PISA –panic' created by that study's findings about comparative education performance in various countries) The goal of rational, technocratic management of public affairs is clearly embodied not only in the language of EBPM, but also in the practical measures taken by New Labour in the area of public service reform.

Conclusion: EBPM and the New Labour governing project.

The New Labour governing project rests on a narrative about the institutions and culture of British politics and their relation to patterns of political failures. The root of policy failure in Britain was located in the constitutional bias towards incrementalism which emphasized the procedural correctness of policy processes over their effective delivery of improved outcomes. The New Labour analysis of the British state sees in these traditions the source of a certain complacency and fatalism about consistently disappointing policy outcomes. This pathology was especially acute in areas such as

⁷⁷ Ball Ball, S. J. (2009). "Privatising education, privatising education policy, privatising educational research: network governance and the 'competition state'." *Journal of Education Policy* **24**(1): 83-99.

_____ makes a similar argument regarding the inclusion of 'edubusiness' in education policy networks. The network governance literature often misunderstands the increased use of extra-state agencies such as private consultants in the policy process. The organising tradition of these bodies is just as much out of step with the apparent demands of network governance (as a consultative, deliberative, persuasive non-technocratic exercise) as is the top-down hierarchical model.

public services which historically held low priority for the government and hence had developed a policy style and structures largely insulated from executive scrutiny. According to this narrative, British political traditions and cultures valorise incrementalism and muddling through and deny the possibility or the desirability of assertive and sweeping change. But since this incrementalism resides at the level of the uncodified and conventional quasi-constitution, key New Labour strategists within the core of the core executive were able to expedite a more active and purposeful executive project by relying on the considerable executive autonomy provided by the formal institutions of the 'real' British constitution. The resources for such a project were already present in the formal structures of the British state, which presented minimal checks and balances on a determined executive, provided that the quasi-constitution of the WM that presented normative biases against such a project could be overcome.

The strategy for overcoming persistent failure in public services was to strengthen the executive branch and to marginalize the rival power bases that had grown up around public services during a period of relative executive indifference. The New Labour governing project was therefore about concentrating power within the executive in order to overcome this supposed inertia and prioritise the efficacy and delivery of policy. Whereas some commentators had regarded the lack of checks on the executive as a principal cause of policy failure in Britain, New Labour's leadership found in executive autonomy a potential means for driving a project that could eliminate the complacency and fatalism of the British state. The resources of the executive branch, often under-utilised in the past, presented New Labour with the means to assume control of public service delivery to the point that this could form the bedrock of its legitimacy as a government. Within this project, success in delivering improved public services was the true measure of the success of a government and such a task could not be left to the caprices of bureaucrats or professionals but had to be driven from the centre. This could be achieved largely within the framework of existing institutions since these already provided ample opportunities for assertive executive government, provided that the key actors were unencumbered by the proscriptions of the quasi-constitution. The battle to

overcome the constraints of the quasi-constitution then becomes more a matter of a discursive contest over competing logics of appropriateness than a matter of institutional re-organisation.

EBPM was an important tool in preparing the discursive terrain to allow the institutional re-modelling needed to achieve this. With public service delivery being presented as the *raison d'être* of the government, continuing legitimacy would require the production of evidence to demonstrate that such improvement had in fact occurred. This was pursued through the appeal to EBPM and emphasis on the programmatic successes of policy. In emphasizing the value of EBPM, New Labour pursued a course of action that helps to deal with the ambiguity of a politics that eschews codified rules of action. In the absence of a written constitution, and in the presence of an unwritten constitutional ideology that key actors have interpreted as placing insupportable obstructions on their capacities to act, EBPM has the significant benefit of reducing success and failure to a single dimension. The resort to rationalistic policy evaluation and the focus on the measurable delivery of defined outcomes is a means of reducing the ambiguity presented by a variety of competing logics of appropriateness and institutional norms and values. The New Labour approach rules in one logic of appropriateness and rules out others as invalid. So, for example, as argued in chapter 4, the public service ethos, professional autonomy, departmental cultures and civil service values are ruled invalid. What matters is delivery on the targets set by the executive. The only appropriate action is one that supports the achievement of these targets. Other norms, values or challenges to the validity and worth of the targets are interpreted as at best irrelevant and at worst attempts to duck accountability and make excuses for failure. The discursive emphasis on EBPM entails a relentless focus on results at the expense of rules, procedures and processes that are valued by other actors in the policy chain. Since the overall strategy involves the marginalization of these other actors in order to enhance the efficacy of executive initiative, EBPM has considerable instrumental value from the point of view of policy makers.

According to this interpretation of the New Labour project, a focus on the programmatic success or failure of individual policies is inappropriate, or at least incomplete. Instead, New Labour's success or failure should also be evaluated in other dimensions and especially with respect to its overall projects. Project success is not reducible to the other dimensions of success and failure discussed and the various dimensions are only contingently related. Taking the appeal to EBPM at face value collapses all the possible dimensions of policy evaluation into a single criterion and neglects the instrumental value of the appeal to EBPM in producing desired changes in power relations and behaviour. Understood in this way, the appeal to EBPM assists the generation of governing competence and contributes to the overall governing project by marginalising alternative constructions of governing success or failure. New Labour's success in embedding its own constructions of success and failure into the practices of British politics are crucial to its overall project in seeking to shift away from policy styles and power relationships associated with weaker, less competent governments of the past. The next chapter moves on to a direct evaluation of the New Labour strategy in education and finds that through manipulation of both the discursive and institutional landscape of the education state, New Labour was largely successful in securing its governing project in the sector.

Success and failure in the New Labour education project

This chapter applies the fourfold framework discussed in the last chapter to case study policies in order to give a well-rounded account of the various dimensions of success and failure. According to this classification, policy failure can occur in any or all of four dimensions. This approach does not aspire to objective judgements over the merits or otherwise of individual policies. Success or failure is treated as primarily in the eye of the beholder – this analysis does not distinguish between bad policies and failed policies as such. The approach taken is intended to recognise the inevitably contested character of policy failure, but to do so within a systematic approach. The intention is to be as clear as possible about why instances of failure are so identified, and from what perspective they show up as failures. The framework is inclusive as regards the criteria of success and failure, rather than insisting on a single dimension. As such, it aims to accommodate different conceptions of failure but to do so explicitly rather than implicitly. When success criteria are only implicit in the evaluation of policy, the accounts given can become one-sided. The appraisal of policy will be different in form and outcome depending on whether policies are assessed against the realisation of government's stated intentions (audit), or whether they are judged in terms of an overall normative purpose or goal of education (critique). As Whitty suggests, "it is not altogether clear in what terms the legacy [of New Labour] is meant to be evaluated. Some...seem to assess it against their own hopes and expectations, while others assess it against the aims of New Labour, or, more particularly, the ambitions of Tony Blair himself."(2009 273). It is important, therefore, that the criteria of success/failure are made as explicit and inclusive as possible in order to allow open and rational criticism of the judgements made. Whitty's statement also points to the necessity of treating success/failure as a matter of prudential interpretation and judgement made from a particular perspective by specific groups of actors.

According to this approach, it is inappropriate to measure policies according to an externally imposed, objective standard. The chapter discusses the use of programmatic

evaluation and evidence based policy in education by New Labour, before moving on to discuss various dimension of success and failure in relation to the standards agenda and the academy schools policy. The chapter concludes that New Labour enjoyed substantial success in the 'project' dimension by establishing governing competence over the education sector, altering the behaviour of actors in that sector, raising overall standards of achievement and enhancing governmental control over increased resources. However, this success remains insecure since this governing project remains open to challenge or re-interpretation in the future. As such, the New Labour education project can be regarded as mostly successful in terms of the immediate strategic aims of policymakers, but may come to be seen as an inappropriate future strategy given a changing economic and political environment.

Evidence-based policy and 'what works'.

One way of coming to an objective judgement over the success or failure of New Labour's education strategy would be to refer to a body of social scientific research evidence of the performance of various policies. After all, these policies have been defended as pragmatic, evidence-based exercises in 'what works'. But the prospects of a dispassionate assessment on the basis of the available evidence are remote. One reason is that evidence-based policy is not neutral. What matters is what counts as evidence. Policy may lead the evaluation and acquisition of evidence rather than the other way round. Despite the notion that evidence can be the basis for policy, there is significant disagreement over what has been achieved under New Labour (or since the reforms of 1988) and it is in this opaque and provisional area of knowledge that room for statecraft and strategy emerges. If success or failure was objectively identifiable on the basis of research findings, then education could surely be wholly depoliticised. But since a range of views even about the raw data of whether there has been improvement or not persists, it is open to skilled political actors (and social scientists) to engage in contestation over the meaning of research findings or other kinds of evidence. Though this is hardly a revolutionary notion, it is not difficult to find examples of calls for depoliticisation and a focus on 'what works'. For example, on his resignation, ASCL

head John Dunford called for the issue of education in the 2010 election to be an “evidence-based debate”, claiming that : “We can’t keep education out of politics, but we can appeal for politics to be more rational in the way it discusses education” (Vaughan 2009). His call for a chief education officer to advise government reflects both a desire to increase the professional voice in policy-making and an underlying anti-political bias that would declare that education problems are amenable to technocratic solutions, and therefore do not require taking sides in ideological disputes. This is the kind of rationalistic approach that has been argued against in previous chapters. I have argued that the appeal to evidence based policy making by strategic actors within New Labour is best understood as a tactic within an overall governing project. Success or failure cannot, on this reading, be adjudicated solely in terms of individual policies, but must also be considered in relation to these broader projects.

The difficulty of producing evidence for successful policy intervention has been remarked upon by a number of education scholars. In one paper, Gorard goes as far as to claim that “there is no convincing evidence of the beneficial impact of educational policy interventions, even where the originators and agents of the intervention claim otherwise” (2006 5). But this only applies to policy failure in one dimension: the programmatic. Policies may well fail if policy success or failure is conceived of solely in terms of the ability to achieve claimed objectives or to disrupt trends in outcomes. But the purpose of defining the four-fold classification discussed in previous chapters is to press the case that there is more to the notion of success and failure than this. Policies are not necessarily failures from the perspectives of their originators simply because they do not generate incontrovertible evidence of their efficacy. Gorard, like Weiss and Birckmayer and many others, suggests that policies should be tested according to an experimental design in order to try to isolate the effect of policy changes (Emmerson, McNally et al. 2005 ; Gorard 2006 6; Weiss and Birckmayer 2006)). From the perspective of a social scientist auditing policy, this is, of course correct. But this is to accept claims that governments are only interested in “what works” or “evidence-based

policy” at face value, rather than recognising those ideas as highly political rhetorical tactics.

Numerous factors militate against the adoption of an evidence-based approach to policy. Political timescales do not correspond to the pace of change in education, for example. Political ‘logic’ is not researchers’ logic – politicians require ‘killer’ facts to bolster their preferred policy solutions, rather than measured and balanced appraisals of their merit. Unfavourable international comparison and ‘scare stories’ or crises are far more likely to inspire policy than reasoned weighing of the available evidence. If crisis is a condition of major change in policy direction, it would be surprising if reforming politicians waited for social scientists to produce it. The fortunes of governments are much more likely to be decided by the response of the media, voters and the parliamentary party of which that government is a part than it is by social scientists. Ministers could be forgiven for calculating that impeccably-researched social science findings will hold little sway with the groups that really determine their fate. The incentives are to sell preferred policies, to overstate their benefits, to avoid all mention of any possible drawbacks and to suggest that any and all possible social problems are remediable by a specific policy change. This should not be taken to suggest that politicians are necessarily deceitful in this regard, only that they have reason to adopt a pragmatic approach to passing and supporting policies which they may well sincerely believe in. However, whether these policies work in exactly the same way and for exactly the same reasons as were suggested when the policy had to pass the scrutiny of affected parties is not a relevant consideration. Hence I argue that there is reason to be sceptical about politicians’ appeals to evidence, but that we should not be surprised by the apparent indifference of politicians to the findings of social scientists. The relatively low profile of social science in political decision making is not necessarily due to ignorance, dogmatism or stupidity. Instead, it should be seen as reflecting the fact that policy makers are not only interested in the programmatic success of their policies. There are a range of other success criteria which are at least as important. I develop this point below in relation to New Labour’s educational standards agenda and the academy schools policy.

The Standards Agenda

The notion of falling standards, both in absolute terms and in comparison to other countries has been a recurring discursive trope in British education policy-making over a long period (See, for example, Wolf (2002)). The idea of unacceptably low standards was crucial to the evangelising zeal of New Labour education reforms and featured prominently in the speeches and publications of the DfES and Michael Barber's Standards and Effectiveness Unit⁷⁸ in the early years of the New Labour project. Low educational standards were seen to be expressed in low examination pass rates and low rates of qualification, especially for less socially advantaged groups. Accreditation through examined qualifications, and overall higher levels of education were increasingly regarded as essential to full participation both in the labour market and in terms of social inclusion (Barber 1997 ; DfES 2001 ; Buckler and Dolowitz 2004 ; HM Treasury 2006). Hence, low rates of attainment in examined qualifications presented a problem for individuals as well as for socio-economic prosperity. The discourse of New Labour actors during this period identified a long-running complacency about consistent patterns of failure and the disruption of this pattern became the core of the New Labour education project. For New Labour's analysis of the pathologies of the education system to hold water, it had to be the case that existing institutions and cultures could not reform themselves without outside intervention. The old networks were at best overly cautious and at worst were protecting vested interests in maintaining a conspiracy of silence over school standards (See, for example, Barber 1997 ; 2001). In this respect, the New Labour analysis had much in common with the Thatcher governments' assessment of established education networks (See, for example Cox and Boyson 1975 ; Dale 1989 ; Ball 1990). The strategy chosen to address policy failure also had much in common with that chosen by the third Thatcher government. If patterns of policy failure were to be disrupted, it would not be adequate to exhort existing networks to change. It would be

⁷⁸ An administrative unit within the education department created by New Labour in 1997 responsible for the assessment and maintenance of school standards.

necessary to increase pressure from the outside in order to force changes through, very probably against strong opposition from the existing education establishment.

The impetus for change would then have to come from outside existing networks of education governance. The recruitment of Michael Barber was a key development in the process of forming a new education network at the heart of government. Michael Barber's role was to inject into existing education structures the reforming and modernising thrust that the New Labour leadership believed was required. Barber's involvement in the New Labour education project came first as Chief advisor on Standards to the then Secretary of State David Blunkett in 1997, with Barber at the head of the newly created DfEE Standards and Effectiveness Unit. Following the 2001 election, Barber became head of the newly created Prime Minister's Delivery Unit with education as one of four priority reform areas for the unit. It is difficult to specify the influence of particular individuals, especially those such as Barber who occupied a role somewhere between civil servant and special adviser. But to read Barber's single authored writings on public service and education reform alongside New Labour education white papers, it is impossible to reach any other conclusion than that he was highly influential in defining and prosecuting the standards agenda.

Prior to his direct involvement in government, Barber had already been an advocate of a particular diagnosis and prescription for raising educational standards that subsequently became central to New Labour discourse on education. One example of this was the lecture given by Barber, then an academic at the Institute of Education, University of London entitled "Imagining an End to Failure in Urban Education" (1995). This lecture expressed the idea that too many schools were failing, and that more radical measures would be required to turn around some of the worst failing schools. Barber recommended a 'fresh start' policy which was highly controversial at the time, particularly with the teacher unions. This suggested that where schools were "too intractably damaged to be turned around in a year, and could not be closed", schools would receive new governors, new leadership, new resources to attract staff and

complete refurbishment of the site (Barber 2007 24). This foreshadowed New Labour's flagship academy schools policy which was announced in 2000, although it is interesting to note that, in this lecture there was no mention of the more contentious aspects of that policy such as the involvement of private sector sponsorship, independence of local authority and independence of national pay agreements.

School effectiveness

But it was the analysis of failure that had the most profound impact on New Labour education strategy. That strategy became defined by a commitment to taking a stand against persistent failure (expressed in terms of low rates of attainment and qualification) and rejecting the notion that educational failure was an unfortunate but intractable result of poverty (Barber 2007 23-25). The claim that poverty cannot excuse failure became an important mantra in New Labour education policy for years to come. The sentiment was still prominent in New Labour discourse in January 2009, when Ed Balls repeated the claim in response to criticisms of his National Challenge policy which involved a package of measures to intervene in schools with poor GCSE results (Freaan 2009). The goal of the strategy was the elimination of failure, understood as the persistence of low standards and large gaps between the achievements of the most and the least advantaged pupils.

As such, the New Labour standards agenda was underpinned by a claim that differential performance across schools is primarily due to the differential *internal* processes of schools. This is a point of view shared by a branch of academic educational research usually referred to as school effectiveness research, or school effectiveness and school improvement (SESI). In this sense, school effectiveness is a technical term that also describes a school of thought among education researchers. School effectiveness relies on the notion that school – level factors such as management and pedagogy are the determinants of successful pupil performance (See, for example, Fullan 1993 ; Sammons 1999 ; Kyriakides and Creemers 2007). It represents an opposing view to that which emphasises intake factors such as students' socio-economic status or prior

attainment. It is the school effectiveness approach that drives New Labour policies which express 'zero tolerance' of failure and invoke the claim that poverty, for example, is 'no excuse' for poor school performance (Sammons 2008). The political effect of invoking school effectiveness as the explanation for achievement gaps or low standards is to make individual schools the locus of accountability for outcomes, and to minimise the importance of profound differences in the environments in which schools operate. The standards agenda is then based on the intensive collection of performance data, but also on the understanding that the determinants of success and failure are internal to the schooling system.

Constructing the New Labour education project: the value of evidence-based policy

The originality of the New Labour education project was in connecting this diagnosis of persistent failure to a systematic and centrally driven project to disrupt the institutions and networks that had sustained the alleged pattern of failure. The form in which Barber and key New Labour figures expressed their analysis of the failures of the English schools system carried considerable instrumental value for this broader project. The identification of low (and socially inequitable) educational standards gave a rationale for change, injected the urgency needed to overcome opposition based on "inherited professional shibboleths" (Barber 2006) and posited a plausible link between education outcomes and performance in other areas such as international economic competitiveness. What the narrative does not provide, as Gorard and Smith point out, is a consistent conception of what is meant by education standards (2004 207). This is crucial, since disputes over the proper criteria by which to judge successful school performance could easily derail a project aimed at driving up standards. New Labour's favoured remedy to this problem was to pursue a relentless focus on quantifiable performance measures, specifically the results of national standardised tests and public examinations, bolstered by the use of rigorous targets, inspection and audit. The value of such a model for these same policymakers is in being very clear about what is meant by standards, and sending a clear message to both education professionals and voters

about how success in education policy should be evaluated. Indeed being “clear about what is important” is one of the principal presumed benefits of organising public service improvement according to clearly defined targets (Johnson 2004 183). Since history would suggest that accusations of falling standards are unlikely to disappear, strategic politicians may well calculate that they had better have some evidence to counter these, or at least a measure of performance that would permit some verifiable measure of improvement. This tactic became characteristic of New Labour education policy. As discussed in the previous chapter, it involves collapsing all the possible criteria of educational success into a single dimension. Besides its simplicity, the virtue of this tactic was that it denied credibility to any alternative construction of the proper ends and success criteria by which school performance should be judged. As a result, the standards agenda played an important part in marginalising alternative constructions of educational success and failure arising from potentially rival institutions such as public service professionals, civil servants or local authority officers. This is a point that Kelman’s interview with Prime Minister’s Delivery Unit staff makes explicit:

It is very hard for them to say, “No, we are doing great things,” because we say, ‘Well, the numbers aren’t moving.’ So that’s our real key that unlocks change. Saying, “It’s not happening. It’s not that you are not good people, it’s just not happening.” So I think it’s creating that sense of urgency, transparency (Cited in Kelman 2006 405).

The analysis of standards developed by Barber clearly illustrates the value of the pragmatic appeal to social scientific evidence. According to Barber: “Research showed that the biggest influence *of the system* on pupil performance was the quality of teaching” (Barber 2007 23, emphasis added). The explanation for differential school performance could then be attributed to differences in the quality of teaching across schools. There are two elements of Barber’s claim here that have broader significance for New Labour tactics and strategy in education policy. Firstly, the statement has some internal plausibility since teaching quality is consistently identified as the most important

school level factor affecting pupil performance. But what it fails to mention is that while teaching may be important within the system, the quality of the input in terms of school intake (socio-economic status and prior attainment of pupils) is a vastly more reliable predictor of outcomes (Blanden, Gregg et al. 2005 ; Machin and Vignoles 2005 ; Ball 2006 ; Gorard 2006 ; Reay 2006). Secondly, the statement gives the possibly misleading impression that 'research' has reached a single reliable conclusion about the determinants of pupil performance. Despite the existence of an established sub-discipline of school effectiveness research, which has its own research centres and specialist journals, there is still a great deal of disagreement within the research community about what the determinants of pupil performance are. Despite the popularity of the 'school effectiveness' approach with politicians, a persistent finding of comparative school effectiveness research is to reinforce the importance of the non-school context (Gorard and Smith (2004)). As far as school effectiveness studies can be said to have consistent findings, the most consistent is that

“National systems, school sectors, schools, departments and teachers combined have been found to explain approximately zero to 20% of the total variance in school outcomes. The remainder of the variance in outcomes is explained by student background, prior attainment and error components” (215).

Sammons puts the 'school effect' at between 5 and 18% when controlling for pupil factors (Sammons 1999), while Chevalier et al. estimate it at around 10%, with pupil factors accounting for 33% of variance in performance (Chevalier, Dolton et al. 2005). There is no reliable statistical support for an independent 'school effect' separable from the characteristics of school intake. As such, the surest way to school 'improvement' for any individual school is to attempt to 'improve' the calibre of its intake by recruiting from more advantaged social groups and taking measures to exclude those who fit the profile of low-achievers. Indeed, in Gorard's other work (2005 ; 2009), he suggests that this is precisely the explanation for some of the improvement in examination results within

academy schools. As far as research on educational performance has reached any consistent conclusions, they seem to reinforce the importance of pupil-level rather than institution-level factors in predicting outcomes.

However, the value of making appeal to evidence and school effectiveness is not wholly dependent on its overall coherence or consistency with actual research findings. The lack of consensual research evidence in support of the New Labour analysis of educational effectiveness did not clearly hinder the overall project of education reform under New Labour. In terms of the project dimension of success, the New Labour standards agenda can be regarded as a largely successful tactic. The prosecution of the standards agenda established the executive's right to intervene, installed a performance management regime that marginalised supposedly oppositional elements in the educational state and gave strong incentives for conformity. This was achieved despite the fact that the analysis of school effectiveness offered by New Labour was at best contestable. Quality, reliability or consensus within the research evidence was not a precondition for a successful education project and the apparent contradictions in the 'evidence-based' analysis of school effectiveness did not obviously derail or disrupt the overall strategy. It was perhaps not the use of evidence itself, so much as the *appeal to evidence* that accounted for the success of the project, since that appeal helped to exclude dissenting voices from the debate. As such, it may be more appropriate to understand the appeal to evidence-based policy as less of an end in itself, and more of a means to shoring up governing competence in the sector.

The value of the school effectiveness narrative

A government which regards the improvement of public service delivery as its core mission cannot accept that this improvement can only arise slowly, incrementally and as a consequence of broader social shifts. The demand to pay attention to school context in judging performance is usually considered to be politically progressive. Yet from the point of view of politicians, it must appear unacceptably fatalistic and with a tendency

towards inertia: the cardinal sin for modern politicians. As discussed in chapter 4 it is exactly this attitude of Whiggish complacency that informs New Labour's analysis of the pathologies of the British state as a whole. The perception of an ingrained defeatism within existing educational structures was the motive force for New Labour's aggressively centralising education strategy which sought to mobilise the resources of the Prime Minister's Office to inject some reforming zeal into staid educational networks. But this also requires an effective discursive response to the concerns about the difficulties of raising standards for schools in unfavourable circumstances. Policy makers' response came in the form of a counter-argument that claimed that the demand for attention to context in fact reinforces low expectations and affirms the cultural factors that impact on poor performance. As a result, calls to recognise the disadvantageous conditions under which some schools operate can work against social justice by reinforcing anti-education cultures or low expectations which arguably have as much impact on outcomes as structural and organizational factors (see e.g. Thrupp (2006 318)). This line of reasoning informs much of the early, 'evangelical' phase of New Labour education reform, which refused to countenance 'excuses' for poor performance. For New Labour's reformers, this represented a refusal to reinforce a 'victim' status for those from deprived backgrounds.

Focusing on school level effectiveness has a number of political benefits for policy makers. Firstly, it maintains a focus on the aspects of the system that can, in fact, be reformed from within the brief of the education department. Hence, it does not immediately negate itself by positing factors beyond its control as the cause of low standards and attainment gaps. Secondly, it rules invalid any appeal to the extra-school context as an explanation or excuse for a failure to engage in a concerted attempt to raise standards. Key New Labour figures have repeatedly emphasised this point (DfEE 1997 ; DfES 2005 ; Barber 2007 ; Frean 2009). Thirdly, it legitimates individual school accountability, since schools should be capable of raising standards by improving their own internal workings regardless of the broader system in which they operate. The local authority, for example, is not directly responsible for the internal processes of schools

and therefore for standards, which confirms its peripheral role in education reform. Such a strategy is not without political hazards however, since it also runs the risk of appearing callous, demoralising the workforce and forcing schools to compete on what is a patently uneven playing field. While the school effectiveness argument had clear rhetorical value for policy makers, the standards agenda also required a degree of central micro-management and significantly expanded school budgets to guard against these pitfalls and maintain a critical mass of support for the strategy.

From standards to structures

There is some evidence that the limitations of the school effectiveness approach and standards agenda were recognised by New Labour politicians over time. The slogan that “standards not structures” would be the government’s priority in education was prominent in New Labour discourse over the first years following 1997. But Michael Barber, who coined the slogan later admitted that such an approach was limited and only applied to the first Labour term, while Blair claimed that the slogan had been a mistake (2007 23). After 2000, structural change became much more prominent in the New Labour strategy. This partly reflected the lifting of spending restrictions after 1999, but it also involved the assessment by the architects of the standards agenda of its success. According to Barber, the impact of the SEU by 2000 on school failure “was unquestioned...We had changed the educational landscape irrevocably for the better”⁷⁹ [by 2001] (2007 37-39). This was seen as justifying a decision to move on to new areas of structural reform such as specialist schools, the Excellence in Cities programme, and academies. There were also moves towards a recognition of school context in the accountability system as ‘value added’ measures (which took account of prior

⁷⁹ The language used here may be revealing. Note that improvement is ‘unquestioned’ rather than ‘unquestionable’.

attainment) and 'contextual value added' measures (which took account of the socio-economic background of pupils) were added to the centrally published school league tables in 2002 and 2006 respectively. While the standards agenda had been the almost exclusive focus of New Labour education strategy over the first years of the first government, there was a greater focus on an agenda of social inclusion over time with the introduction of the Every Child Matters programme in 2003, the Children's Plan in 2007, and the reorganisation of the education department to form the DCSF in 2007 (Whitty 2009). The significance of the departmental reorganisation was that it created a large social policy department incorporating education alongside a range of children's welfare and social services⁸⁰. This could be seen as reflecting a view of the importance of the extra-school context rather than ungrounded exam results, which many educationalists have claimed prejudice an output driven system against them from the start. Although these structural reforms and consideration of the extra-school context did begin to emerge over time, the standards agenda was in no sense abandoned. It continued to be pursued vigorously even after the immediate architects of the strategy such as Blair, Barber and DfES permanent secretary Michael Bichard had moved on. The National Challenge policy, for example, which involved direct central intervention in schools which had failed to reach the floor target of 30% of cohort achieving 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C was one of the first major initiatives under the Balls/Brown stewardship of education, demonstrating that the standards agenda was still regarded as a viable strategy.

Assessing the Success/failure of the standards agenda:

(i) Programmatic success and failure

Pupil attainment

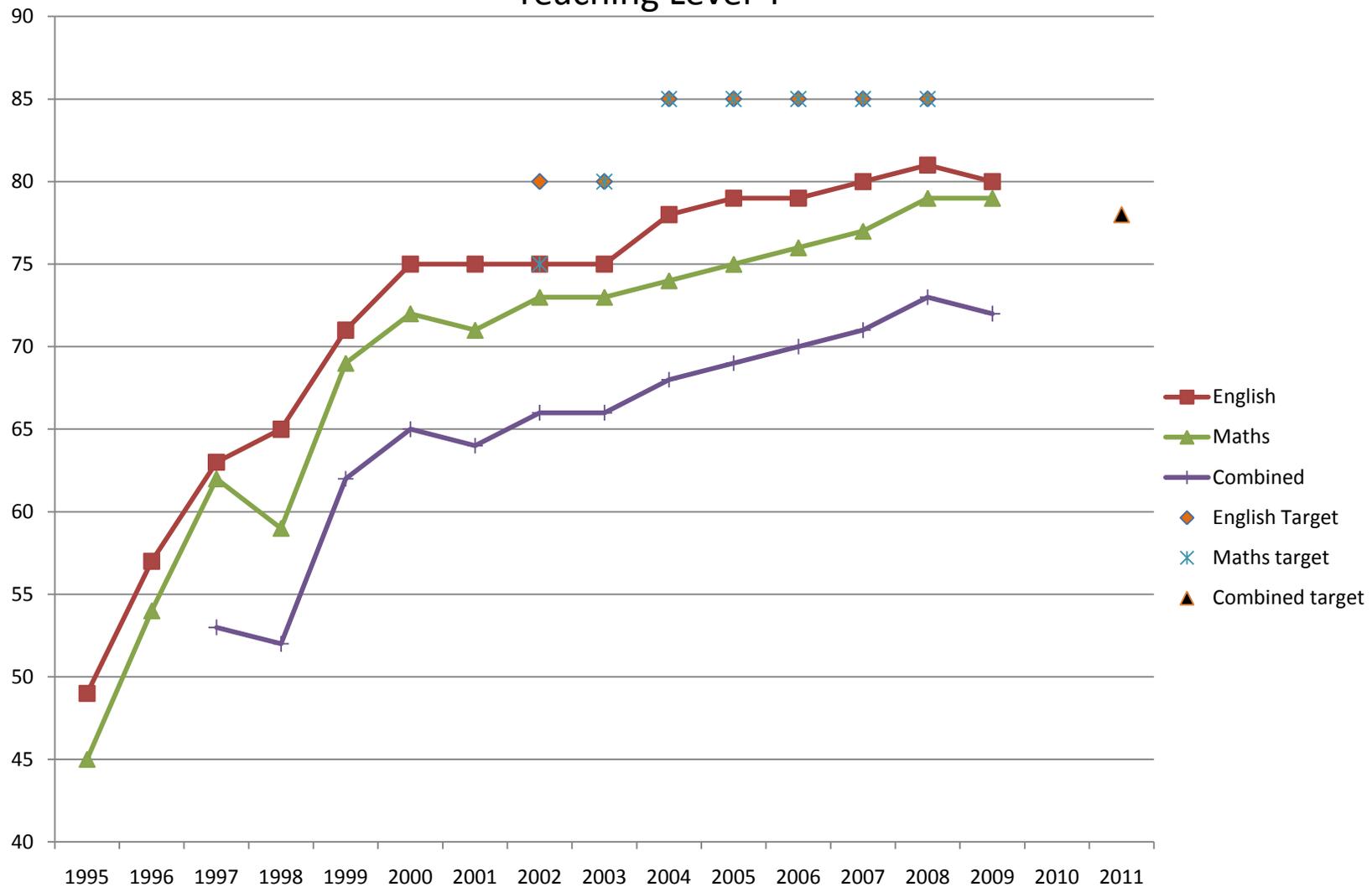
⁸⁰ The incorporation of children's services formalised a relationship that had operated de facto since around 2004. The merger also transferred responsibility for further and higher education out of the new department.

Evaluating the standards agenda in terms of programmatic success means applying rationalistic evaluation criteria to the policies involved. In this dimension of success/failure, the criteria are the policy-specific stated intentions of policy makers. For the bundle of policies that I have described as comprising the mechanisms of the standards agenda, the relevant success criteria is improvement according to the clearly defined criteria of success chosen by the architects of the strategy. Programmatic success for these policies concerns improvement in attainment in the benchmark national standardised tests at National Curriculum Key Stage (KS) 2 (pupils aged 11) and National Curriculum Key Stage 4 (pupils aged 16)⁸¹. The KS2 results are designed to measure performance in primary schools, while the KS4 results measure the effectiveness of secondary schools.

The PSA indicator for performance management purposes is the proportion of 11 year olds who attain the expected level (level 4) in Standard Attainment Tests (SATs) at National Curriculum KS2. KS2 performance is reported in Graph 1.1 below:

⁸¹ Although similar techniques were used to assess performance at KS3, these were less aggressively pursued since these examinations come mid-way through the secondary phase. SATs testing at KS3 was eventually abandoned in 2008.

Graph 1: Key Stage 2 performance against targets: proportion of cohort reaching Level 4



There are two key performance management measures at Key Stage 4, which are included as indicators for Public Service Agreement 10 (HM Treasury 2008). The first, which has received the highest profile in New Labour pronouncements on examination performance is the proportion of pupils at the end of compulsory education who attain at least 5 passes in GCSE examinations or equivalent at grades A*-C (5AC). The second is the proportion of pupils attaining at least 5 GCSE passes or equivalent at grades A*-C, including English and Maths among the subjects studied (5ACEM). This measure was introduced to centrally published league tables in 2006 and a target was set in the 2007 CSR. This benchmark is designed to be a more stringent measure of performance since English and Maths are compulsory subjects, and there are few available equivalent qualifications in these subjects that could be substituted for the more challenging GCSE exam. Performance according to these benchmark measures is reported in Table 1 and Graph 2 below.

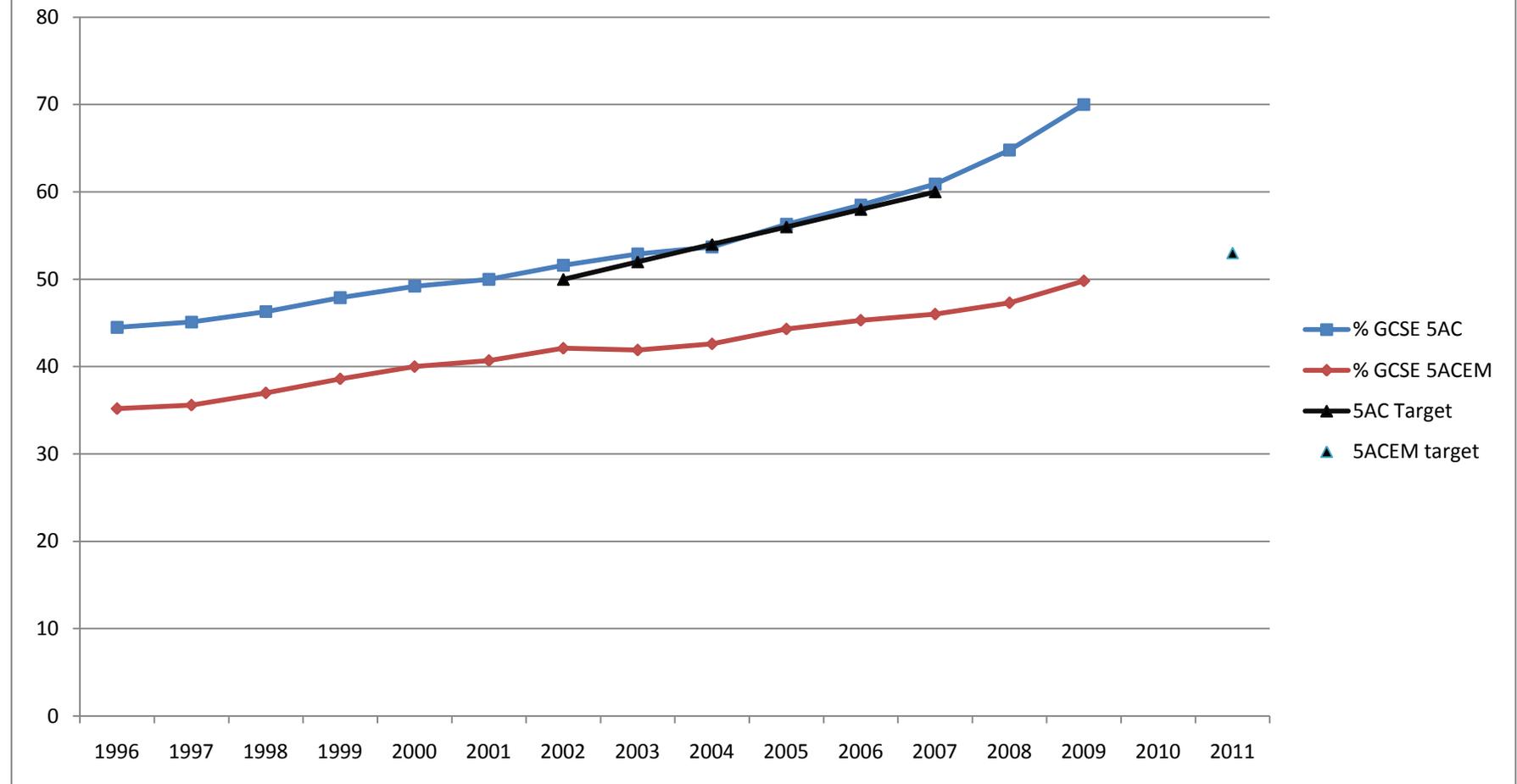
Table 1: Key Stage 4 performance: proportion of cohort achieving GCSE 5AC and 5ACEM

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
% GCSE 5AC	44.5	45.1	46.3	47.9	49.2	50	51.6	52.9	53.7	56.3	58.5	60.9	64.8	70	75.4	
%GCSE 5ACEM	35.2	35.6	37	38.6	40	40.7	42.1	41.9	42.6	44.3	45.3	46	47.3	49.8	53.4	
5AC Target							50	52	54	56	58	60				
5ACEM target																53
5ACEM floor																30
5AC floor									20		25		30			

Source: DCSF Annual reports various years , DCSF National Curriculum Assessment at Key Stage 4, various years
 Targets: Public Service Agreement 10 , HMT various years, comprehensive Spending Reviews , HMT various years

2011 Targets refer to targets set by New Labour in government prior to 2010 general election

Graph 2: Key Stage 4 performance: proportion of cohort achieving GCSE 5AC and 5ACEM



KS4 performance is also backed by floor targets which specify minimum standards in addition to the average standards specified by national targets. 5AC floor targets were set in the 2004 spending review (see Table 1/Graph 2 above). The National Challenge scheme used the specification of a floor target for 5ACEM, based on revised PSA targets after 2007 CSR to trigger central intervention in schools that were in danger of failing to meet the standard. The number of schools below the floor target for 5AC has fallen dramatically between 2004 and 2009 (from 186 in 2003 to 26 in 2008), despite the floor target being revised upwards twice during this period (DCSF 2009 254). The number of schools falling below the National Challenge threshold also fell sharply from 783 in 2006 to 440 in 2008 (DCSF 2009 63). The number of schools judged by OFSTED to be performing poorly throughout the period, as well as the number of schools placed under special measures, also declined sharply over the course of New Labour's three terms (Sammons 2008)

The available evidence on performance in national tests demonstrates a clear and continuous trend towards higher attainment over the course of New Labour's time in office. Absolute levels of average performance have risen at both KS2 and KS4, while fewer schools have fallen below the threshold of acceptable performance. Although targets were not hit in many cases, this does not necessarily present evidence of programmatic failure since it could be plausibly argued that targets should be challenging in order to motivate absolute improvement even if the specific target is not achieved. The targets can be seen to represent a somewhat arbitrary, high level of achievement, rather than an objective which must be achieved.

Educational inequality

In addition to improving absolute performance, the standards agenda can also be assessed in programmatic terms against its ambitions to narrow achievement gaps between more and less advantaged pupils. These indicators fall under Public Service

Agreement 11 and concern narrowing the gap between pupils in relative deprivation and others. The proxy measure for assessing relative deprivation is whether pupils' qualify for free school meals (FSM). At Key stage 2, 53.3 percent of pupils known to be eligible for FSM achieved the expected level in both English and mathematics in 2009; for pupils who were not eligible for FSM the percentage was 75.5 percent (DCSF 2009). The gap in achievement was stable at around 20 percentage points over the period 2002 – 2008 (DCSF 2009 22). On the GCSE benchmark around 27% from the bottom income quintile achieved 5 A-C grades, while 72% from the top income quintile did the same (Goodman, Sibietta et al. 2009). At Key Stage 4 in 2009, 54.2 of pupils not eligible for free school meals achieved 5 or more A*-C grade GCSEs or equivalent including English and mathematics compared to 26.6 percent of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals - an attainment gap of 27.6 percentage points (DCSF 2010). This represented a moderate improvement on the 2002 figure which showed a gap of 30.8 percentage points. At school level, there were persistent achievement gaps between schools with high and low proportions of pupils eligible for FSM (See, for example DfES 2005 18). Persistent achievement gaps could also be observed at local authority level. In 2008/09, 33.3 per cent of pupils in the most deprived 10% of areas achieved 5 or more GCSEs at grades A*-C or equivalent including English and mathematics GCSEs, compared with 72.2 per cent in the least deprived 10% of areas (DCSF 2010).

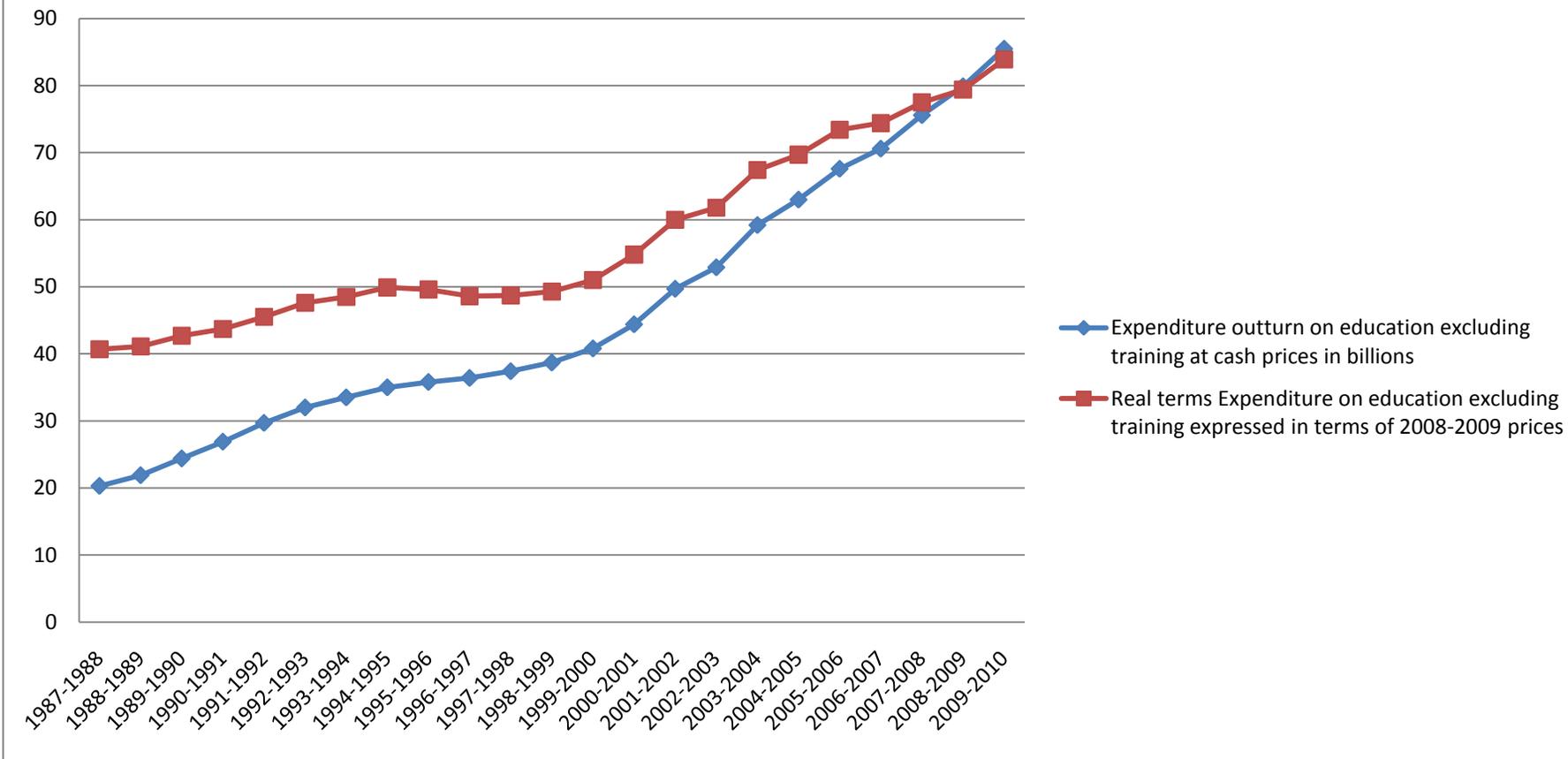
New Labour's record on tackling educational inequality can be seen as somewhat disappointing in terms of the programmatic success criteria set by the government's own performance management framework. This was acknowledged in the white paper that preceded the 2006 EIA: "Although our reforms to date have meant striking improvements for children from all backgrounds, the evidence suggests that those from more deprived backgrounds have not improved as much as others – the attainment gap for pupils has not yet narrowed." (DfES 2005 19).

Value for money

Programmatic success could also be analysed in terms of a cost-benefit analysis. Any improvement in standards would then have to be weighed against the costs of achieving these improvements. The improvement in examination performance occurred in the context of major increases in school spending. Real terms spending on schools rose by 45% in real terms between 1996 and 2008 and per pupil revenue funding increased by 83% in real terms between 1997 and 2010 (Office for National Statistics 2009). Overall spending on education rose from 4.5% of GDP in 1998 to 6.1% in 2009 (ibid.). Estimated spending in 2009-10 was £85.5 billion; more than double the real level in the late-1980s (House of Commons Library 2010 3). Average real terms spending increases across the period 1997-2010 were 4.15% p/a compared to 0.56% from 1992 to 1997 and 1.94% from 1987 to 1997 (ibid. 5). However, independent studies by the Office for National Statistics and Audit Commission questioned whether the increased spending on education and schools had represented value for money. The ONS report found that increased spending coincided with a decline in educational 'productivity' between 1996 and 2006 (Office for National Statistics 2007).⁸² The Audit Commission report claimed that expanding school budgets did not represent good value since schools tended to amass budget surpluses rather than spending the additional money (Audit Commission 2009). Figures on education expenditure under New Labour are reported in Graph 3 below.

⁸² Although the authors accepted that this resulted from the methodology employed, commenting that 'it is unlikely that a single measure of productivity change will ever capture all the costs and benefits of the education sector' (ibid. 6)

Graph 3: Education expenditure 1987-2010



The limitations of programmatic evaluation

These studies point to the limitations of a purely programmatic analysis of value for money. The assessment of whether gains in outputs are worth the resources expended in achieving them immediately introduces value judgements that lie beyond the competence of strictly programmatic assessment. The fact that these studies could not produce conclusive evidence even based on single value for money criteria only reinforces this point. The limitations of a one-dimensional approach to policy success/failure, however, run deeper than this. The type of programmatic success measures discussed above did not, and could not, serve to settle the question of whether New Labour's education strategy had been successful. The facts did not speak for themselves, even in the case of the apparently clear trend to improvement in examination performance. The brute data involved in programmatic evaluations were still subject to controversy and competing interpretations. For example, a number of independent and academic assessments of New Labour policies questioned whether improved examination performance was really a measure of improvement in standards of teaching and learning. One study found that rising KS2 test scores did not reflect improvements in literacy and maths as measured by the analysts own tests (Tymms and Merrell 2007). Comparative international studies such as PISA also raised doubt over whether improved examination performance represented genuinely rising standards since rising KS2 test scores did not appear to consistently improve the comparative standing of English education against other nations (See, for example, OECD 2006)⁸³. A number of studies raised the possibility that schools were 'gaming' on attainment targets by substituting equivalent qualifications such as GNVQ and OCR certificates which produce high pass rates for GCSEs (See, for example, Propper and Wilson 2003 ; Wilson, Coxson et al. 2006). The fact that rising proportions of each cohort were

⁸³ Although there are considerable methodological difficulties with the validity of these international comparisons, as Gorard and Smith demonstrate (2004)

achieving particular levels of qualification did not protect New Labour from accusations that the exams had been subject to 'grade inflation' and that results were simply reflecting this, rather than genuine improvement in teaching and learning (Mansell 2007 ; Gove 2008).

(ii) *Political success and failure*

For programmatic success to be meaningful, it must demonstrate that improvement is the result of policy, and not just occurring at the same time. An important component of political success is developing a plausible narrative about the causal effects of policy on outcomes. One means of achieving this might be to offer evidence that improvement was directly related to the targets set by policy makers. As the above examples show, most of the performance targets set at the national level were not achieved. The Prime Minister's Delivery Unit missed or failed to clearly hit all its targets in 2005 for literacy at 11 years old, numeracy at 11, literacy at 14, numeracy at 14, the 5AC target and the pupil attendance target (Barber 2007 338). It might plausibly be argued that missing targets should not in itself be counted as failure, since the purpose of the targets is to raise expectations and challenge schools to improve. On the other hand, the pattern of steady improvement on all educational indicators since 1997 does not clearly show any disruption of existing trends and appears to be independent of targets set. This might suggest that there is no transformation in outcomes, rather a steady, incremental improvement that may have little or nothing to do with national policies, the activities of the Delivery Unit, or any other policy actors. The lack of evidence for a causal relationship between New Labour's policy interventions and improved outcomes is also discussed in Bradley and Taylor (2007) and Gorard (2005 ; 2006 ; 2009). In the absence of feasible experimental research designs, establishing the links between policy and outcomes is extremely difficult. This leaves the field open for a political contestation over the existence and meaning of the causal connections between the two. Hence the evaluation of success or failure eventually reduces to a discursive and

political contest over subjective interpretations of the available data. This is precisely the kind of outcome programmatic policy evaluation is supposed to avoid.

Academic educationists remained unconvinced, on the whole, that the standards agenda had achieved anything of import, despite improving examination results. For Ball, the disruption to education caused by New Labour's interventions and structural reforms had not been vindicated by these improvements: "indicators of 'gains' in learning since 1997 suggest meagre returns from the deluge of policy interventions, state and privatised, with which schools have had to deal" (2009 88). Gleeson and Husbands claimed in 2003 that: "There is a growing awareness amongst researchers and practitioners that improving the quality of teaching and learning through performance management is not working" (2003 499). Galton also dismissed apparent improvements at Key Stage 2 and claimed that New Labour had caused a decline in standards of pupil motivation, attitudes towards school and pedagogical practice through 'teaching to the test' (2007). Whitty argued, in the context of an overall argument not sympathetic to those who dismiss New Labour's achievements, that absolute rises in raw test scores did not diminish the much less impressive record on addressing achievement gaps between the most and least advantaged pupils, describing this as "New Labour's most disappointing legacy" (Whitty 2009 272). This has provided political opponents with an opportunity to criticise the New Labour record despite the absolute gains in achievement (See, for example, the Conservative policy paper "A failed generation", Gove 2008)⁸⁴ with the most telling criticism coming from the claim that absolute gains in attainment had done little to address unequal outcomes – a claim which threw doubt on the central school effectiveness principle. The criticism of New Labour's record from academic educationalists did not seem to be affected by the apparent improvement in absolute

⁸⁴ The policy paper provoked a response from Ruth Lupton of the Institute of Education which provided evidence of multiple inaccuracies, misrepresentations and selective appeal to the data on inequality, which further emphasises the inevitability of interpretive conflict (Lupton, R. and N. Heath (2008). A Failed Generation? : A Response to Michael Gove. U. o. L. Institute of Education.

attainment. Programmatic evidence did not obviously interact with the political dimension of evaluation to silence criticism. The defenders of the standards agenda were also prone to make somewhat selective reference to the evidence and to attempt to conduct evaluation of policy according to their own favoured criteria. Though the connection between policy intervention and improvement was not strongly established by the figures, and many targets had been missed, this did not prevent the architects of the standards agenda from claiming success (Gorard 2005 ; 2006 ; Bradley and Taylor 2007 ; 2009). Michael Barber, for example, claimed that the work of the SEU had, by 2001, “changed the educational landscape irrevocably for the better” (Barber 2007 39). Any lack of progress on indicators of educational inequality were downplayed or denied (See, for example, Mansell 2007 ; Balls 2009), as New Labour ministers understandably emphasised raw test scores in public to support the overall narrative of improvement they wanted to promote (Whitty 2009 274). The assessment of the effectiveness of the standards agenda was not placed onto an objective basis despite the focus on narrow performance indicators. Evaluation and interpretation of the ‘objective’ evidence persisted at the level of discursive, political contestation.

(iii) Project success and failure

While programmatic evidence of the apparent effectiveness of the standards agenda was not enough to silence political criticism, there is another dimension in which the policy can be evaluated. New Labour’s successes in the realm of education have arguably been achieved primarily at the level of changing institutional cultures, by embedding an expectation of continuous improvement with greater external scrutiny and accountability. In this dimension, the centrally-driven standards agenda can be judged a success if it encourages a shift in cultural attitudes among the implementers of policy that leads to the standards agenda becoming embedded in professional practice. As such, the policy could be judged successful from the point of view of policy makers if it disrupts ‘blockages’ in the policy process arising from alternative logics of

appropriateness and links the practices of staff to the objectives and strategy of the organisation to which they belong. The objective of the strategy is then to disrupt educational cultures, networks and institutions that were regarded as barriers to the policy agenda of the core executive (See for example, Barber 2007 29-33 on Secretary of State David Blunkett and Permanent Secretary Michael Bichard's drive to disrupt the culture of the education department they inherited). In this project dimension of success, the standards agenda is successful for its creators if it strengthens the presence of favoured managerial cultures in the administration of education against professional and bureaucratic cultures. Project success is not therefore primarily concerned with demonstrating that policy interventions have directly caused improvement. Instead, the project dimension of success involves securing (or, in this case, maintaining and extending) a decisive shift in power relations that allows the core executive to set the terms of reference, implement and evaluate policy without outside interference. It is in this dimension that New Labour's education strategy can most confidently be judged a success.

The importance of re-structuring power relations is acknowledged in the education policy literature, but government attempts to influence the distribution of power are typically regarded with suspicion. A number of scholars of the education process have discussed the benefits to policy makers of encouraging 'self-regulation' of schools (see e.g. Ranson (1999), Nuffield Report (2009), Ball Cribb and Gewirtz (2007), Pongratz (2006)) The claim here is that individual teachers, or institutions such as schools can incorporate policy imperatives to the point that "there is no clear distinction between teachers 'being controlled' and teachers 'being autonomous'" (Cribb and Gewirtz 2007 210). Here, the authors suggest that the boundary that distinguishes autonomy from control may not be clear enough to allow an analytic separation of these apparent opposites. One means of following through on this claim is with reference to the work of Michel Foucault. The notion of state power operating through the self-regulation of individual agents who incorporate or internalise certain principles has clear parallels with his discussions of disciplinary power and panopticism (see, for example (1977)). The inverse of this claim

is that control in the form of rules, procedures, operating codes and structures can be productive and enabling as well as coercive and negative (Cribb and Gewirtz 2007 210), a claim which is also present in Foucault's notion of productive power. Cribb and Ball argue that education professionals incorporate the standards agenda to such an extent that they feel "no shame" about "the misrepresentation, fabrication or straightforward distortion of performance figures" (Cribb and Ball 2005 120). The suggestion is that there is something morally corrosive about rigid accountability structures that encourages this dishonesty and 'gaming'. This comes close to the kind of narrative that Bevir and Trentmann have in mind when they criticise accounts of governance reform that rob agents of any power (Bevir and Trentmann 2007). An alternative reading of this development is that output-oriented management creates an opportunity for gaming and that education professionals exploit this for pragmatic reasons. But they feel "no shame" about doing so precisely because they have *not* absorbed the standards narrative unmodified. For education professionals, gaming is appropriate or at least acceptable precisely because performance figures are not 'really' important, they do not measure the things that matter or provide a useful indication of the performance of a school and so the failure to provide clean performance figures is only as much of a deception as the original claim that these figures matter. Just as "that which is not measured is not valued" (Cribb and Ball 2005 122) by politicians keen to demonstrate improvement in education, that which is measured may not be valued by education professionals.

As with many attempts to incorporate the idea of governmentality into studies of public service reform, there is a need to temper the notion of re-culturing with an acceptance that a new self-discipline is not simply achieved without contestation. For example, although Ball (2001) finds the notion of governmentality useful, he acknowledges that existing professional cultures often temper and disrupt its effects (See also Arnott and Menter 2007 ; Bevir and Trentmann 2007). It is not only actors within the state who are capable of acting strategically. Education professionals too can operate pragmatically within the new incentive structure without wholly abandoning principles and practices

which do not accord with the new techniques of management. These professionals are not simply passive recipients of imposed policies but capable of actively resisting, modifying, adapting or rejecting its ethos, within the limits imposed by their structural location. Hence phenomena such as gaming on targets, or offering only bare compliance with measures they do not support. The hostility of education unions towards SATs testing for example led to the Level 3 SATs being scrapped, a boycott of Level 2 SATs testing in 2010 and to the Conservative adoption of a policy to scrap Level 2 SATs. In this case it is clear that the rationale for high stakes testing had not embedded itself in the consciousness of either teachers or parents to the point where teachers internalised the norms handed down from above. The testing regime had been tolerated while the incentive structure made resistance unappealing, but once the opportunity arose, a professional culture which derided teaching to the test, or the notion of schools as factories for producing test results, reasserted itself. Which culture is prominent at any time is about changing patterns of resource and capability. It is not a matter of a simple passive acceptance of whatever culture governments believe is appropriate in the public sector. The notion that autonomy and control can potentially become indistinguishable is intriguing, but the danger is that processes of change and continuity in education policy become depoliticised and the agency of individuals and collectives of individuals is neglected.

Although there may be contestation over the re-culturing of educational institutions, this does not rule out success from the perspective of policy makers. New Labour performance management strategies should not necessarily be measured against a yardstick of success chosen by the policy's opponents. Within an alternative narrative of recent educational history to the mainstream educationist position, changes in performance management and accountability structures under Labour and Conservative governments have been beneficial. For Downes (1999 33-35), rather than the golden age that some researchers wish to present, the period prior to the institution of assertive central performance management in 1988 was marked by complacency and a lack of accountability on the part of schools, with little appreciation among education

professionals of the views of parents, governors or the general public. Godber (1999) concurs that the success of Thatcherite education strategy was in embedding an awareness of parental interest into the management thinking of schools. Given New Labour's identification of obstructive and risk-averse elements within education networks, they may well consider disruption of the norms that sustain these networks as a measure of success. Embedding an emphasis on 'performativity' that intensifies the focus on a narrow range of objectively identifiable measures of success, could itself be classed as evidence of policy success in terms of a successful shaping of a new institutional culture. On this understanding, the disruption of existing educational cultures is a desired goal of the policy, rather than the unintended consequence of the incentive structure created.

Assessing the success/failure of the academies policy

It might be fair to argue that an appraisal of New Labour's standards agenda is made especially difficult since it represents a policy 'style' or overall strategy comprising many individual policies rather than an individual policy which might be more amenable to an evidence-based audit of success or failure. However, the difficulty of isolating single measures of success or failure persists with single policy case studies. In this section, I discuss the evaluation of New Labour's flagship education initiative: the academy schools programme. The proposal to create a new school model, then known as the City Academy, was introduced in 2000. The first such school opened in 2002. The academy model allowed existing schools to close and re-open as academies independent of local authority management. Rather than receiving funding through the schools funding formula via the LEA, they would enter into individual funding agreements between the school and the Secretary of State. The schools were not required to follow national pay bargaining agreements for their staff including teachers. In the initial formulation of the policy, the schools had some flexibility over the teaching of the National Curriculum, over admissions and over the length of the school day. Academies would be managed in partnership with a sponsor who would contribute £2 million, usually for capital projects in

return for taking ownership of the school's physical assets and majority representation on the governing board. Academies' predecessor schools would be extensively refurbished, or more usually, replaced with new buildings. The initial target was to create 200 such schools, with those schools in areas of highest deprivation and with poor exam performance being the principal focus.

The academies policy was highly controversial from its inception. Opponents of the policy developed a number of lines of criticism which refer to various success criteria. The programme was attacked for allowing religious extremists to interfere with the curriculum, for selling out publicly owned assets to the private sector, as a measure of privatisation, and as creating a set of preferentially-funded 'cuckoos in the nest' of local authorities sucking up students and resources without concern for the system effects on other local schools (See, for example, Ball 2005 ; Beckett 2007 ; Woods, Woods et al. 2007 ; Hatcher 2008 ; Chitty 2009). The serious threat to teachers' pay and conditions involved ensured that hostility to the policy was not confined to academia but spread to practitioners (See, for examples, Hatcher and Jones 2006 ; Bangs and Heller 2009 ; Maddern 2009 ; Marley 2009). Despite this, the scope of the policy was expanded several times under New Labour, and has become the foundation of the education reforms introduced by the Conservative-led coalition after 2010. As with the standards agenda, I apply the framework developed in chapter 5, to discuss the multiple ways in which such a policy could be evaluated.

(i) *Programmatic success and failure*

As with the broader standards agenda, there is evidence that pupil performance in academy schools has improved in absolute terms. However, there is considerable room for interpretation of this finding, and particularly as regards the causes of this improvement. Although the academies programme would appear to have straightforward

success criteria, this has not prevented controversy over the efficacy of the policy. A number of independent studies present a broadly positive assessment of the policy, but this assessment is qualified by a number of factors which complicate any attempt to draw a clear causal connection between the academy model and improved outcomes.

Table 2: Academies performance at KS4 benchmarks

		2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Academies	GCSE 5AC	30	37	40	48	60.4
	GCSE 5ACEM	13.6	15.7	22	27	35.6
National average	GCSE 5AC	53.7	56.3	58.5	60.9	64.8
	GCSE 5ACEM	42.6	44.3	45.3	46	47.3

Sources: PwC Academies Evaluation Annual Reports 3rd , 4th and 5th, (2005, 2006, 2007)

De Waal (2010)
National Audit Office Report
(2007)

The National Audit Office's 2007 report found that academies performed better in GCSEs than their predecessor schools, and their performance was similar to comparable other schools⁸⁵ (National Audit Office 2007 6). However, the report found that performance on the GCSE 5ACEM benchmark was comparatively weak, reflecting the concerns raised in other studies that the substitution of vocational and alternative qualifications for GCSEs is the cause of much of the improved examination performance (2007 7; see also De Waal 2008). In 2006, academies achieved 40% of cohort on the 5AC measure compared to 47% for schools in the similar Excellence in Cities (EiC) programme and 58% nationally , with 22% 5ACEM compared to 29% for EiC schools and 45% nationally (2007 17). Although this improvement took place in the context of an overall upward trend in attainment nationally, the rate of improvement on these measures in academies was higher than other comparable schools and the national average (ibid. 18). On measures of contextual value added which controls for prior attainment and pupil background, academies were performing significantly better than both comparable schools and the national average (ibid. 20)

⁸⁵ Comparable schools are defined as those placed in similar programmes of intervention such as 'Fresh Start' and Excellence in Cities

Independent consultants PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PwC) were commissioned by government to undertake a 5 year evaluation of the programme beginning in 2003. Their findings were broadly similar to the NAO findings, although heavily qualified by an emphasis on the diversity of academies by the time of their fifth report in 2008. Though absolute attainment on GCSE benchmarks remained low by national standards, the rate of improvement was substantially higher in academies. The PwC reports noted that there had been a trend towards 'improvement' of academy intakes across the lifespan of the policy with the proportion of academy pupils eligible for FSM declining by 5-6% from 2002-2007 compared to a national average of 1-2% (2008 47) while average prior attainment at Year 7 rose. Other factors being equal, declining FSM and rising prior attainment would predict an improvement in examination outcomes, which may qualify any putative causal relationship between policy and outcomes. The difficulty of making a conclusive assessment of the efficacy of academies is continually emphasised in the PwC reports. The fifth annual report concluded that: "the process of averaging across all Academies has limitations both from a policy and a methodological point of view, and thus any averages across all Academies need to be interpreted within the context of significant diversity that exists between individual Academies" (2008 83). As a result, the PwC reports could not find evidence of an independent 'academy effect' that would decisively connect the academy model to improved performance (2008 217). The PwC reports also noted that the use of high-equivalence but low status qualifications had been a significant factor in the level of improvement achieved by academies against the GCSE performance indicators (ibid. 217). This point was also taken up by De Waal, who demonstrated that the percentage point gap between 5AC measures and 5ACEM attainment was substantially higher in academies than in other maintained schools (2010 6) – 24.8% in 2008 compared to 17.7 in maintained schools. The hypothesis of the report (which could not be definitively demonstrated due to academies exemption from the Freedom of Information Act) was that low status but high league table equivalence qualifications were being substituted for GCSEs in order to boost the 5AC exam performance of academies.

In a number of papers, Stephen Gorard (2005 ; 2006 ; 2009) presented a compelling case that government pronouncements on the success of the academies programme had been at best premature, and at worst disingenuous. Once the performance of academies had been compared to the schools they replaced, and once a measure of social deprivation had been applied, Gorard showed that the supposed improvement in examination results in academies was much less impressive than its champions had claimed. In fact, he found that there was no definite improvement which could be attributed directly to the academies policy rather than to intake factors. Gorard's central argument is that politicians have made claims about the programmatic success of academies that cannot be borne out by the available evidence. Despite the claim that "Academies will break the cycle of underachievement in areas of social and economic deprivation" (DfES standards website cited in Gorard (2009 102)), Gorard does not find evidence that the schools can provide "a solution to the perennial problem for school improvers... [to] deliver superior educational outcomes without changing the nature of their student intake" (102). Hatcher (2010) reaches similar conclusions, citing a number of studies that show no convincing evidence in favour of academies raising standards separately from changing intakes. In common with the assessment of De Waal and the PwC reports, Gorard found that academies achieve some improvement by gaming on targets using GCSE equivalent qualifications, and that academies use this tactic disproportionately in comparison to other schools (2009 103-104) As with the standards agenda as a whole, the programmatic evidence for a direct causal link between policy intervention and higher standards is weak when assessed through a quasi-experimental design. Although there is, at first sight, evidence to support the positive effect of academies, the interpretation of this data involves a much more nuanced and less clear-cut evaluation of the determinants of success and failure.

(ii) *Political success and failure*

The independent research evidence is much more guarded in its conclusions than advocates of the policy have been. Despite the heavily qualified findings of academy success in the NAO and PwC reports, summaries of these findings appeared on the DCSF standards site under the heading “Academies are working” (DCSF 2009). The policy’s key architect, Andrew Adonis claimed that “academies are the future of secondary education, and it works” (Astle and Ryan 2008 xi), while SSAT spokesman Philip O’Hear claimed that the performance of academies in 2006 and 2007 proved that “academies are now best placed to tackle the low expectations that too many pupils have had to accept for too long, and that the government commitment to 400 academies⁸⁶ is well judged” (O’Hear 2007). There was no sense of a policy in its early stages, or of provisional judgements of the progress of the policy. The causal connection between academy structures and rising standards was treated as firmly established. The claim that academies led to improvement in exam results at twice the national rate was frequently repeated by figures responsible for the policy. At different times, this claim has been made by the chief executive of the SSAT, Secretary of State Ed Balls and Schools Minister Vernon Coaker (See De Waal 2010), while education adviser and junior minister Andrew Adonis has repeatedly defended the policy on the basis that there is a direct connection between academy results and improved performance (See, for examples, Adonis 2006 ; 2008). This claim seems to have entered into the ‘common sense’ of education policy, and featured prominently in Conservative pronouncements on plans to dramatically increase the number of academies from 2010 onwards (Gove 2010 ; New Schools Network 2010)

Defenders of the policy were fully prepared to declare the policy a success, with little acknowledgement of the mitigating factors cited by the various evaluations of the programme. The improvement of academy results was held to justify a further expansion of the programme from a planned 200 to 400 schools, announced in Blair’s final

⁸⁶ The expansion of the planned number of academies from 200 to 400 was announced in 2007

education speech before his resignation⁸⁷. This was despite the unequivocal warning against such a strategy given by the Education and Skills Select Committee in 2005. The committee's annual report urged the government to await proper evaluation of the academies programme before expanding it:

“We fail to understand why the DfES is putting such substantial resources into Academies when it has not produced the evidence on which to base the expansion of this programme ... What evidence there is paints a mixed picture. Despite the paucity of evidence, the Government is enthusiastically pushing forward with the programme and with new Academies... Despite the Government's proclaimed attachment to evidence-based policy, expensive schemes seem to be rolled out before being adequately tested and evaluated compared to other less expensive alternatives. We caution against this approach and urge the DfES to monitor carefully the performance of Academies and adjust its policies accordingly....” (House of Commons Education and Skills Select Committee 2005 16)

It is interesting to note that the criticism here comes from concern that there is, to date, *insufficient* evidence to justify expansion of the policy. As such, it is explicitly a call for the government to make good on its appeals to evidence-based policy, and could be easily reconciled with the social experimentation approaches advocated by the likes of Sanderson (2004) and Weiss and Birckmayer (2006). In response to the select committee's report, the government invoked a crisis narrative in urban education, which ruled out the possibility of awaiting the outcome of the 5-year PwC study before committing further to the programme (House of Commons Education and Skills Select Committee 2005 7) This again speaks to the vulnerability of supposedly objective

⁸⁷ In a move widely seen as an attempt to protect the programme from the Brown/Balls axis which was more sceptical of the programme's benefits.

programmatic policy evaluations, since their findings remain open to interpretation and being over-ridden by pragmatic, political exigencies. It also serves to demonstrate the weak scrutiny and oversight functions of Parliament in relation to a determined executive.

While programmatic evaluations produced some evidence that academies were not succeeding, or at least that they could not be causally connected to success, this did not clearly translate into the policy's political failure. There are two strands to this. On the one hand, advocates of the academies policy have much the easier task in selling their narrative since they can call on examples of schools with disastrous performance and discipline records that are now highly popular and whose examination performance improves year on year. The modesty required of competent social scientists in discussing their findings militates against an effective narrative, and hence it is marginalised by policymakers. Talk of controlling for relevant variables and causal patterns do not translate well into everyday political discourse, while the 'killer facts' that would support a convincing counter-narrative are not the currency of social science by and large. Secondly, the finding that academy schools have improved only because their intake has improved is not necessarily a failure for the originators of the policy. If success and failure are judged from perspectives other than the programmatic, there are elements of the policy that can be regarded as successful. Encouraging less socially deprived families to send their children to academies was certainly one of the objectives of the programme, even if the policy was not sold on the back of this aim. Creating schools with a more balanced intake, rather than ghettos of low achievement, falling rolls and general neglect is a worthwhile social policy objective which researchers concerned with social justice might be expected to support. Instead, they were far more likely to deride this as a strategy of making urban schools safe for the middle classes (Tomlinson 2005 108). If middle class parents are sufficiently reassured to place their children in urban state schools rather than opting out to the private sector, or through selection by mortgage, then the policy might justly be called a success by its originators and not solely for its value in terms of spin or positive media reaction, but because it

addresses a problem of social policy. From the policy-makers' perspective, academies could be seen as a success even if the improvement in results is *only* due to improvements in the intake.

There is a further qualification to the programmatic evaluation of the academies policy that is not covered in the studies cited above. The initial conception of the academies policy was not as a generalisable model to be applied nationally (as in the current formulation by the Conservative-led coalition). Rather, as Andrew Adonis acknowledged, it was a solution to a specifically urban problem (hence the original City Academy designation), and even more specifically to a problem with schools in London:

“Academies flowed partly from a frank assessment of the number of inadequate secondary schools being run on traditional lines, particularly in London and our other cities” (Adonis in Astle and Ryan 2008 3)

The initial target of 200 academies to be open by 2010 included a separate target for 60 of these new academies to be in London. Over the first 5 years of the policy, 50% of academies opened were in London. This would seem to present a case for assessing the worth of the academies policy by the performance of schools in London, alongside an assessment of the programme nationally. Though such an assessment is beyond the scope of this thesis, there is some evidence that academies, as a solution to a London-specific problem, have had some success. For example, in 2009 London was the highest performing region in the country for GCSE performance with 54% achieving 5ACEM improving dramatically on the 1997 level of 29%, and continuing the trend which has seen the region perform above the national average for the past 5 years (Sellgren 2010) . If the aim of the academies policy was to make London state schools safe for the middle classes, by demonstrating improvement, investment and making the private sector or 'bussing out' correspondingly less attractive, then the policy could be deemed a success whether or not this policy achieves its stated aim for the stated reasons.

The production of programmatic evaluation studies on the academies policy, however, did little to alter the tenor of political contestation over the value of the programme. Since the academies policy was set up to tackle failure, with incompetent local authorities and “bog standard comprehensives” identified as the weakness in the schools system (Alistair Campbell, cited in Clare and Jones 2001), the programme has also made numerous vocal enemies. The unusual strength of feeling over the policy is demonstrated by the mobilisation of political movements explicitly directed at opposition to academies (such as the Anti-Academies Alliance, while nine anti-academy campaigners were elected to Barrow council in May 2008). Teacher organisations have also consistently been hostile to the policy, understandably given that academy freedoms over recruitment, pay and conditions clearly compromise national collective bargaining (Curtis 2004 ; NUT 2007 ; Shepherd and Curtis 2008). Opponents of academies point to the widespread rejection of academy proposals by local communities during consultation processes as evidence that the government has imposed academies on local communities without regard for the wishes of parents and local communities⁸⁸. On the other side of the debate, partisans of academies can point to the oversubscription of academies as evidence of demand and parental support for the initiative with an average of 3 applications to every academy place, according to NAO figures (Beddell 2008). Alternatively, they might accept that well-run maintained schools

⁸⁸ For example, 55% of parents rejected the Ridings Academy in Gloucestershire, with only 29% supporting Madder, K. (2009) Academies could create two-tier system. Times Educational Supplement 30/01/2009.

, 90% of responses to Derby council’s consultation on a proposed academy were against the proposal , leading to shelving of academy plans Marley, D. (2009) Protests put kibosh on planned academy. Times Educational Supplement 16/01/2009.

90% rejected the academy proposal for Withins Community School in Bolton Lim, M. (2008) All through with the imposition of academies. Times Educational Supplement 14/11/2008.

, while the ULT academy in Barnsley was opened despite a majority of parents voting against the decision Marley, D. (2008) Does X hit the spot in academy consultations? . Times Educational Supplement 31/10/2008.

can be as effective without academy freedoms yet support academies as a catalyst for change, a 'new broom', or just one of many possible sources of innovation and improvement. The point is that the success or failure of the policy represents a moving target. The policy has diverse aims, it does not present a simple metric by which its success or failure can be impartially measured. The dispute seems insoluble with reference to just the 'brute facts'. Often the debate degenerates into citation and counter-citation from research despite the fact that this research loads its conclusions with caveats and qualifiers. The criteria for success can be constantly re-defined by supporters of the academy policy, and easily since the position of opponents of the policy can be caricatured as reflecting Luddite producer interests, while many schools and local authorities have no answer to a history of poor performance. The available research evidence is involved in the debate, but it is not in a position to make a decisive contribution on either side.

(iii) Process success and failure

Though undoubtedly part of the appeal of academies has been their capacity to be 'all things to all people', the programme has not drawn support from across the range of education stakeholders. If process success is held to involve the construction of consensus on policies across the range of stakeholders, then the academies policy might be classed a failure. However, an alternative assessment would note that the progress of the academies policy has not obviously been affected by the existence of opposition and this opposition has largely failed to penetrate education discourse among actors with the resources and capacities to effect change. The construction of a broadly-based coalition or a network of stakeholders in pursuit of a shared goal is rendered unnecessary if opponents of the policy lack any leverage. This again speaks to the difficulty of applying a network governance model to education under New Labour. Policies can be imposed from the top down where there is no benefit to policy makers in negotiating a partnership with policy implementers on the basis of mutual resource

exchange. Schools and local authorities with poor performance records lack resources of credibility and legitimacy, while they remain dependent on central government for financial resources. The fact that Conservatives and Liberal Democrats both support the policy in principle further attenuates the need to negotiate consensus on the issue and denies opponents resources of representation. Opposition to the policy is then largely confined to local authority officers, teacher unions and education academics – three groups that have been progressively excised from education networks and are by now far removed from the relevant centres of power.

Even in the context of the elitist style of education policy making under New Labour, the academies programme was exceptionally strongly associated with a few key individuals. It would not be unfair to suggest that the relevant policy network in the genesis of the policy did not extend beyond Andrew Adonis, Conor Ryan – a special adviser to David Blunkett and Blair, and Tony Blair himself (See, for example, Beckett 2000 ; Ball 2005 221; Barber 2007 ; Chitty 2009 138 on this). The degree to which the policy had been personalised was evidenced by concern that the policy would not survive the departure of Andrew Adonis from his education brief after Blair and Ryan had already departed (BBC News 2008). While the initiative for the policy came from a small grouping at the core of the central state, the practical implementation and expertise required to pursue the policy was provided largely through the use of private consultancy which had the benefit of circumventing potentially hostile departmental and local 'producer interests'⁸⁹. Since the policy also extended additional funding to schools, particularly in the form of support for rebuilding projects, there was no pressing need for an extended policy network in order to ensure the embedding of the policy. The problems faced by the Conservatives' City Technology College project in attracting sponsors were overcome by

⁸⁹ Ball reports that Department of Education and Skills... increased its spending on private consultants from £5 million to £22 million in 3 years [to 2006] without considering using its own staff" Ball, S. J. (2009). "Privatising education, privatising education policy, privatising educational research: network governance and the 'competition state'." *Journal of Education Policy* **24**(1): 83-99.

funding academies primarily from the centre, with a much wider pool of sponsors making a smaller contribution to costs⁹⁰. The additional leverage provided by extra funding, in combination with the performance management regime established by New Labour, placed opponents of the policy in a weak position since the status quo alternative to adoption of academy status could easily be presented as complacency over persistent failure. The combination of these resource asymmetries allowed the policy to be formulated and implemented without the latent resistance to academies presenting a serious challenge to the continuation of the policy.

(iv) Project success and failure

The exclusion of 'producer interests' from the process of coalition building points to a further set of success criteria for the architects of the academies policy. The logic of academies may not depend solely on their ability to equalize life chances or improve the attainment of the most disadvantaged. In fact, the steady dilution of the policy and movement away from its original goals (such as allowing independent schools to become academies) suggest these motivations for the extension of the academy programme became weaker over time. Instead, academies could be understood as a tool or tactic within a broader education and governing strategy that contributes towards the production of governing competence. In this sense, academies might be regarded as a means of ensuring that the extra investment made by governments (through increasing per pupil funding, BSF, and so on) is not diverted through the hands of ineffective or unco-operative local authorities with no record of improvement and which lack a democratic mandate to control such large swathes of public resource, or into the coffers of failing schools with falling rolls. Instead, academies are involved in a direct relationship of steering and accountability with the DCSF which controls the additional funding. Their funding is managed on the basis of individual contracts between the

⁹⁰ A requirement that was relaxed across the lifespan of the policy so that many sponsors paid less than the initial £2 million sponsorship

school and the Secretary of State. Through the creation of directly managed academy schools, the centre reasserts itself over local authorities and, in doing so, secures continuing control over the increased resources invested in schooling. This in itself might be counted a success.

The enhancement of central control at the expense of existing education networks has latterly been given an institutional expression through the transfer of the administration of academies from the DCSF to the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA)⁹¹. As the academies programme has expanded, the capacity of the DCSF to manage each school directly was brought into question. This was perhaps an inevitable result of the success of the policy since the DCSF was required to take sole responsibility for over 200 schools that had previously been managed by over 100 local education authorities. Perhaps surprisingly⁹², the response by the DCSF was to farm out management to an existing institution in the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA), rather than creating a purpose-built body. The academy brief was belatedly added to the YPLA remit, which had initially only covered the provision of 16-19 education. The inclusion of performance assessment responsibility means the YPLA has widely been perceived as a further instrument of government interference in, and dilution of, academy freedoms (House of Commons Children Schools and Families Select Committee 2009 ; Vaughan 2009)). Critics of the move have suggested that the YPLA largely seems to replicate the functions undertaken by local authorities for maintained schools, a measure which academy sponsors have seen as compromising the independence from political interference they regard as crucial to the academy model (ibid. 31).

⁹¹ This was one of the central recommendations of the fifth PwC evaluation study PriceWaterhouseCoopers (2008). Academies Evaluation: 5th Annual Report. Nottingham, DCSF.

⁹² Although such ad hoc measures are characteristic of the British governance style as Flinders (2008) notes

Yet there is a sense in which this development enhances central control by replicating a quasi-LEA function. The YPLA is a quango sponsored by the education department and directly accountable to the department. Its senior staff is drawn from the civil service although, as an NDPB, the agency is outside standard Whitehall structures. The chief executive of the agency is appointed by the Secretary of State, and the unit lacks the separate democratic mandate that LEAs possess, albeit indirectly. As such, the YPLA lacks even some of the meagre resources available to LEAs to resist central control and is directly accountable to ministers in a way that LEAs are not. Weak local education authority performance formed an important part of the rationale for the introduction of academies; hence freedom from local authority management was integral to the policy. But through the substitution of the quasi-local authority of the YPLA, external management of academies is re-established by a body with less independence from the education department. As such, the YPLA provides an example of a delegated governance mechanism that has the paradoxical effect of enhancing central control. The transfer of responsibility for academies to the YPLA cements the exclusion of local authorities from school management and enhances central control of increased education budgets by softening the independence of implementation agencies. As such, this process can be seen as representing the New Labour education project in microcosm. With the Conservative-led coalition government planning to vastly expand the academies policy, the project of disrupting established education networks could well be regarded as a success since there appears to be no immediate prospect of a reversion to past forms of education governance.

Success in education policy: Relentless pursuit of the unattainable?

“As schools and colleges now pursue ... system-wide ‘transformation’ ..., their imposed mission increasingly resembles a forlorn hunt for an unattainable, holy grail-like solution to our problems” (Tosey cited in Barker 2008 678)

The persistence of a settled set of perennial education problems might suggest that attempts to politically manipulate education through policy have been wholly unsuccessful and that educational outcomes will be stable whatever politicians do. On this reading, the attempt to raise standards and address educational inequalities cannot succeed through interventions in schooling policies alone. This is the conclusion reached by Giddens about New Labour's record in education:

“The degree to which one can change education through education was exaggerated [by New Labour]. Education inevitably expresses broader inequalities; moreover, it is often a means of actually creating inequality because of the impact of educational credentials” (Giddens, Nozaki et al. 2009 98)

According to this interpretation, improvement in educational outcomes must await improvement in the broader social structure, and policy success will remain elusive until this happens. However, there are less pessimistic conclusions available. One such conclusion would recognise that while improvement of outcomes may occur, it is extremely difficult to establish any causal connection to policy. Furthermore, the causal link between improved school effectiveness and improved student performance may not be as clear or as immediate as policy makers need it to be. This is arguably a problem for all attempts to audit policy effectiveness, but it is especially acute in education. There are particular difficulties of isolating improvement in a context of constant change, which has been characteristic of recent English education policy. This policy hyperactivity makes for a lack of comparability from one year to the next. Similarly, the length of students' 'career' is out of synch with the speed of policy change – students who begin school under one regime are likely to leave under another with changes in between. No reliable measure of the effectiveness of single policies can be established under these conditions. Even the greatest advocates of school effectiveness and evidence-based policy evaluation would struggle to find many schools with a continuous upward trend of

improvement independent of distorting factors over time and with a stable intake and policy regime.

Conclusion: success as governing competence

The above discussion has attempted to illustrate the fact that programmatic evaluations of policy are always incomplete and cannot fulfil the mission statement of rationalistic policy evaluation in authoritatively settling controversies over policy. I have argued for a more expansive conception of the nature of policy success and failure that also considers the political reception of policy, the process of formulating policy and building a coalition of support, and the relationship of individual policies to manufacturing desired shifts in power relations in governance. The purpose of this discussion is to demonstrate that pure programmatic evaluation cannot capture the full character of policy success and failure. I have argued that policy success and failure is always success or failure *for someone* and *in relation to* something. Attempting to understand policy from the perspective of policy makers is then treated as preferable to attempting to assess policy in the abstract against objective criteria.

This chapter has suggested that success or failure might best be understood in terms of the execution of governing strategies. Within this 'project' dimension of success or failure, what counts as success or failure to policy makers is not necessarily the outcomes of any individual policy. Instead, it is the degree to which administrative and managerial efficacy, or in Bulpitt's phrase 'governing competence' is achieved. Other dimensions of the success or failure of individual policies may bear only a contingent relationship to the success of the overall project. This chapter has raised the possibility that New Labour's educational *project* should be considered a success overall, irrespective of the disputed successes or failures of individual policies. The New Labour education project achieved many of its objectives. Overall standards of attainment rose and more young people achieved accredited qualifications through schooling. Central government retained control over increased resources dedicated to the sector through rigid accountability and audit systems. Dissenting voices advocating alternative

strategies in education reform were successfully marginalised or assuaged through increased education funding. The institutions of the core executive established both the right and the capacity to direct the political management of schooling. The capacity of alternative sources of power such as local authorities or departmental civil servants to disrupt or subvert the government agenda was curbed. Egregious policy failures were avoided. A party which had installed public service improvement and especially educational improvement at the heart of its appeal to voters was returned by the electorate three times. Rival parties failed to articulate distinctive education strategies or policies that could bring into question New Labour's competence to administer the sector. Performance according to the government's self-selected benchmarks remained strong enough to stave off criticism of the overall project. The strategy of building a strong centre in order to drive measurable improvements in educational outcomes can fairly be described as a success.

However, the success of the New Labour education project is fragile. The project pursued in the New Labour era remains open to subsequent re-interpretation. This process has already clearly begun in the first few months of Conservative-led coalition government. Conservatives and Liberal Democrats have begun to re-narrate the past in ways that may have important consequences for retrospective evaluations of New Labour's education policies. There are two main lines of attack to which the New Labour project appears vulnerable. First, opponents may seek to attack the project as producing a bloated, over-funded and wasteful education sector. This approach lends itself to broader narratives which seek to paint the New Labour era as one of unchecked public sector expansion and excessive, unaffordable spending. A milder, but still telling, criticism of New Labour would be that its strategy is only viable in a specific favourable set of economic and political circumstances and hence must be abandoned in more straitened economic times or in the context of the more compromised politics of coalition government. Second, the New Labour project is vulnerable to accusations that it represented the last gasp of top-down, paternalist, even Stalinist, hierarchical 'big government'. The Conservatives 'Big Society' and 'post-bureaucratic age' slogans

demonstrate a clear attempt to distance the party from the governing strategies of New Labour and to articulate an alternative governing style which seeks to delegate and devolve control down the delivery chain. This kind of governing project might have considerable electoral appeal in an environment of low political trust if it can be presented as shifting power from Whitehall to citizens. As such, it might provide the foundations for an alternative governing strategy which nevertheless contributes towards the achievement of governing competence.

Alternatively, it is possible that the evaluation of the New Labour project as a success may come to be strengthened in the light of subsequent experience. The New Labour record in terms of public service outcomes may come to stand as a constant rebuke or unfavourable comparison that dooms coalition attempts to secure a rival project to ensure managerial and governing competence. Reduced public service funding may lead to stalling or declining standards while devolution of power to local providers raises the prospect of uneven standards between localities. The local infrastructure for public service delivery that had been steadily dismantled over the past 30 years may prove incapable of matching the performance of New Labour's centralised public service apparatus. The government may find itself unable to deflect blame for poor public service outcomes onto the institutions to which it has delegated power. Pressures may emerge that push the coalition to impose greater standardisation, which as the evidence of the New Labour project suggests is a much more appealing governing strategy in circumstances of steady economic performance and political security, neither of which is enjoyed by the coalition. As a result, the success of the New Labour project on its own terms may provide the constant counter-example that undermines any alternative project. In this case, the judgement of New Labour's strategy as successful would only be enhanced in future.

Conclusions and future prospects

Overview of thesis

This thesis has had three principal aims: to provide a description or narrative of the pattern of political management of education under New Labour that minimises the weaknesses of similar accounts in the existing academic literature; to attempt an explanation of the education policy project pursued by New Labour ; and to consider how that project might be evaluated. In this conclusion, I revisit these questions before considering the prospects for future education governance, policy and politics and for research in this area.

The first section of the thesis was concerned with defining the nature of the New Labour education project. Chapters 1 and 2 aimed to challenge the existing academic literature on this subject which was regarded as lacking sufficient empirical and theoretical purchase on the task of describing the New Labour education project. Chapter 1 presented a critique of the widely- defended claim that education governance, policy and politics can be understood best with reference to a process of marketisation, commodification, commercialisation or privatisation. Despite occupying a prominent place in the educational studies literature, such a narrative was found to provide a limited and incomplete account of the nature of recent education politics, which lacked empirical accuracy. Furthermore, such accounts were found to operate with an impoverished conception of the state-market relationship which is incapable of capturing the nature of the power relationships involved in a more differentiated polity.

Chapter 2 engaged with writing from a different tradition which can be loosely collected under the label of 'governance'. Such approaches were regarded as preferable to the marketisation thesis on the grounds of their more sophisticated disaggregation of the concepts of both state and market, which allowed a more precise definition of the character of the New Labour education project. However, these approaches were found

to be unsuitable as the basis for the study of education governance, policy and politics due to both empirical and theoretical shortcomings. The 'first wave' of governance theorists tended to over-interpret changes in the mechanisms and forms of public governance for substantive changes in the form of power relations. As such, they posited a shift in power away from traditional state hierarchies as a theoretical precept. When applied to the political management of education in England, such an approach lacked resonance since too many areas of education governance failed to conform to the model. Among the more interpretive, anti-realist approaches of the second wave of governance scholars, the ontological and epistemological foundations of these theories were seen to rob them of explanatory power. In particular, the inability of such approaches to provide a convincing account of change and stability in education governance, politics and policy made the second wave or 'decentred' governance approach unsuitable as the basis for an attempt to explain and evaluate the New Labour education project.

Chapter 3 attempted to provide an alternative definition of the New Labour education project that did not share the empirical or theoretical commitments of either marketisation or governance approaches. This description sought to emphasise the politics of education governance and in particular, the continuing role of actors within the reconstituted state hierarchy. This approach understands education governance in England as primarily the governance of a *state* system and hence emphasises the political dimension of its administration. According to the narrative provided in Chapter 3, New Labour's education project cannot be adequately described without reference to a broader governing project and the changing place of education within that project. This chapter proposes that an adequate definition of the New Labour education project should acknowledge that changes in education governance reflect change over time in the state at large as well as education-specific factors. In particular, this chapter attempted to explain the institutional restructuring observed by governance theorists as the product of attempts to 'nationalise' the political management of schooling and to marginalise once-powerful groups from education governance. This process involved a

transfer of power towards the institutions of the core executive wherein strategic political actors increasingly staked their credibility on the delivery of improved educational outcomes and sought to extend their influence in order to achieve this. This chapter argued that the defining character of the New Labour project was a concentration of power at the core of the state despite, or even because of, increasing institutional fragmentation in public administration.

Section 2 attempted to move beyond the task of describing and defining the New Labour project in order to explain it. Chapter 4 argues that New Labour's education strategy represents a broader governing project 'writ small'. The sources of change in education are not only endogenous to the education sector, but can also be located in state managers' responses to much broader governing dilemmas. Chapter 4 argues that the New Labour governing project aims to increase the managerial effectiveness of elected governments and the core of the core executive by reducing the autonomy of bodies which held significant discretionary power under the classic Westminster Model. The project aims to exploit the extensive executive powers afforded by the formal institutions of the British state by eroding the conventional and normative institutions that comprise the quasi-constitution of the Westminster and Whitehall model. This represents an attempt to respond to certain long-run social and economic changes, but the strategy is moderated by the extant architecture of the British state. As a result, Chapter 4 argues, New Labour has struggled to develop a more efficient and unencumbered model of executive government and to enhance its administrative efficacy by attempting to subvert long-standing quasi-constitutional conventions. The development of prime ministerial power and the reorganisation of the institutional architecture of the core executive are seen as the pre-conditions for a more interventionist education project.

Section 3 moves towards an attempt to evaluate the New Labour governing project. This is a task that involves significant conceptual difficulties since evaluation risks involving the researcher in subjective value judgements about the worth of particular policies. Furthermore, the existing academic literature on evaluating policy success and failure is

thin and largely based on a rationalistic paradigm that is incapable of dealing with the evaluation of a broader project for education or governing reform. Chapter 5 attempts to draw together the existing non-rationalistic work on policy evaluation, particularly that of Bovens et al. and Marsh et al. in order to develop a heuristic for assessing policy success and failure. This chapter argues that New Labour's governing project relies on emphasising the programmatic dimension of policy success/failure as a core element of its own self-justification. I claim that the New Labour governing project for public service delivery contains rationalistic criteria for the success and failure of public policies. As a consequence, I argue, the discourse associated with this service delivery project tends to reduce considerations of success and failure to a single criterion, or to establish this criterion as hegemonic over other possible criteria. New Labour's governing project is regarded as mostly successful in achieving governing competence in the education sector and more broadly. However, this judgement is understood as relative to the construction of governing success and failure contained within the project

Chapter 6 applies the framework developed in Chapter 5 to an evaluation of New Labour's education policies and strategies. In particular, the chapter focuses on New Labour's attempts to improve educational standards in terms of examination results, and on the flagship Academy schools model. The chapter argues that New Labour enjoyed substantial success in the 'project' dimension by establishing governing competence over the education sector, altering the behaviour of actors in that sector, raising overall standards of achievement and enhancing governmental control over increased resources. While New Labour was unable to secure all of its programmatic goals, particularly in relation to educational inequality, this did not seriously compromise its claim on governing competence during its time in office.

Contribution to the literature

The thesis aims to contribute to existing knowledge in the following areas. Firstly, the thesis offers a relatively novel approach to the analysis of education policy by bringing theories and concepts from the discipline of political science to bear on the study of

education. The thesis treats education as primarily a political phenomenon. Secondly, the thesis generates an unorthodox reading of the pattern of recent educational change in England. The thesis attempts to explain developments in education with reference to the changing shape of the British state and the strategies of conscious, reflective political actors operating in strategically selective contexts. The thesis uses an account of the disaggregated British state developed by other scholars such as Marsh, Richards, Smith, Rhodes, Moran and Flinders as a means to explain a further set of developments, namely New Labour's strategy for education governance, politics and policy. Thirdly, the thesis builds on an emerging literature on theorising success and failure in policy and applies these frameworks to a concrete case study of education policies. This section differs from existing treatments of the question by suggesting different criteria for adjudicating success and failure. By addressing success and failure from the perspective of policy-makers' projects to achieve administrative efficacy, I introduce the possibility that success or failure could be judged according to the success of overall governing projects rather than in strictly programmatic terms.

Future developments in education governance, politics and policy

The thesis has attempted to present a definition, explanation and evaluation of New Labour's education project that minimises the weaknesses in the current literature. However, elements of this reading remain open to re-interpretation in the light of subsequent events. A Conservative-led coalition took office in May 2010, bringing with it a programme for extensive education reforms. This has implications, especially for the evaluation of the New Labour project, in two senses. Firstly, longevity might plausibly be regarded as a measure of the success of a governing project (and/or a project for education reform). The overall assessment of the success of the New Labour project might well come to be re-appraised should the coalition government succeed in dismantling or reversing important elements of that project. Secondly, the success or otherwise of the New Labour project might be re-evaluated in comparison to the successes or failures of the coalition projects for governing and/or education. Success

for the coalition strategies would likely mean future researchers produce a more negative evaluation of the New Labour project, while the failure of the new government might serve only to enhance the stature of New Labour's achievements in retrospect. However, from a research perspective, it may be more significant that the Conservative-led coalition must attempt to implement its projects in an altered context. Hence, the coalition might provide a kind of 'natural experiment' which could allow the researcher to attempt to isolate the importance of various contextual factors and their influence on the strategic actions of political actors. The economic and political environments in which the coalition must pursue its education strategy present markedly different challenges and opportunities to those faced by New Labour at the key junctures of 1997 and 2001. As a result, there seem to be a number of contextual factors which would militate against the Conservative-led coalition adopting a similar governing project to that pursued by New Labour. Firstly, the benign economic environment which New Labour confronted at these junctures can plausibly be seen as a key factor enabling the development of their education and governing projects. New Labour's education project was premised on steeply rising investment in education throughout its period in office. This additional investment was crucial in preventing the formation of a coalition of resistance against the more radical aspects of its educational agenda. Funneling the money directly to schools from the department of education also allowed New Labour's education strategists to circumvent existing policy 'blockages' in the form of potentially obstructive departmental and local bureaucracies or vested professional interests (Barber 2007). New Labour pursued a 'carrot-and-stick' approach to public service reform by offering money in return for modernisation, but this tactic is simply not available to the Conservative-led coalition. Any reform programme they produce will have to rely on incentives other than financial inducement. Future developments will show how much the modernisation aspect of New Labour's education strategy was reliant on the money aspect.

But there is a further sense in which the unfavourable economic climate presents a challenge for the coalition government's education strategy. The New Labour focus on public service delivery as the core business of government was informed by a relatively

prosperous and stable economic environment which the coalition does not enjoy. The coalition cannot take public service delivery to be the core business of government since they will inevitably be preoccupied with the economy and deficit reduction, at least initially. The New Labour project prioritised the reform and delivery of public services as its central mission, cementing the historic turn of the party away from the prioritisation of wealth distribution and economic organisation (Miliband 2004). The success of the Thatcherite project in removing issues of redistribution and macroeconomic management from the political agenda forced the Labour party to develop a new rationale for its own existence. The public services project pursued by New Labour was a key aspect of this rationale. For the Conservative-led coalition, however, public services cannot be the priority. Or rather, the improvement of public service delivery cannot be the priority. The coalition's first budget signalled the intention to make the reduction of the deficit the government's absolute priority (HM Treasury 2010), while the coalition's joint programme for government is quite explicit in stating that "The deficit reduction programme takes precedence over any of the other measures in this agreement" (Cabinet Office 2010 35). Where New Labour was able to back its prioritisation of public services with substantially increased investment, the coalition government has chosen to focus on restoring stability to the public finances. The clear consequence of this is dramatically reduced public spending as demonstrated during the first months of coalition government, but it also implies a decline in the prominence of public service delivery in the self-understanding of the government's purpose. The coalition is asking to be judged by a different standard of success as compared to New Labour. For the coalition, the role of government is not to ensure the best possible standards of public service improvement and delivery, but to balance the national budget. Public services only appear in this project as a problem, standing in the way of reduced spending rather than as the central purpose of government. While the resources available for investment in public services are indeed much fewer, this is also accompanied by a decline in the status of public services within the political discourse as management of the economy and the public purse becomes the top priority.

The political environment is also not conducive to the continuation of an education strategy modelled on that of New Labour. The New Labour governing project was premised on the active exploitation of the considerable resources available to the office of the Prime Minister. The coalition lacks the degree of executive and prime ministerial autonomy that New Labour enjoyed because the parties involved lack a parliamentary majority. The British constitution is so designed that there are few checks and balances on a PM leading a majority government comprised of members of his own party. For a reforming Prime Minister, the peak executive of the British state carries extensive powers provided that the conventional, unofficial quasi-constitution, which protects a role for other branches of the state and other sites of power, can be overcome. New Labour, especially under Blair's leadership took advantage of the opportunities offered by the organisation of the British state to energetically centralise the management of the reform of public services. New Labour enjoyed strong and stable majorities and weak opposition for the great majority of its time in office while traditional strong party discipline afforded the opportunity for the extension and increased employment of prime ministerial powers. The Conservatives do not enjoy similar advantages and cannot exploit the full range of powers the British constitution offers to PMs in majority governments. In the absence of a governing majority, with a weak mandate and with the unknown quantity of a coalition partner, the executive powers of the prime minister appear sharply constrained.

However, these contextual conditions do not wholly determine the range of political strategies available to actors within the Conservative-led coalition. The strategic dimension must be considered alongside an assessment of the structural environment in which political actors are operating. It is not immediately clear which strategic direction will be chosen. The coalition and the parties that comprise it appear to lack a coherent project or purpose at this stage. Such a strategy may well emerge over time, and it is quite possible to see the current extensive health and education reform proposals as attempts to force such a project into existence in order to avoid the danger of wasting the Conservatives' first opportunity to exercise power in 18 years. But as yet, the

reforms are not backed by a convincing overall narrative or project. The Conservatives are apparently unable either to refute the Thatcherite legacy or to substantially break with the New Labour project in order to present the present deficit reduction strategy as a step towards an alternative vision of the good society and good government (Kerr 2007) The Liberal Democrats' poor performance in the 2010 general election places them in a subordinate role, albeit one that they appear willing to accept at present and as such, the task of developing such a vision appears to fall to the Conservatives. In the right circumstances, the institutions of the British state offer great autonomy to PMs, but in the presence of party disunity, a small or non-existent parliamentary majority, weak leadership or an absence of an identifiable political project, the PM and core executive can be significantly constrained, as the Major government demonstrated. In the absence of any animating project, the Conservatives may well be dragged back to the centre ground relying on policy paradigms constructed by New Labour rather than developing their own. This scenario mirrors the New Right analysis of the Heath government, which Thatcherites such as Keith Joseph regarded as unable to break out of consensus politics due to a lack of either ideological coherence or an aggressive governing project (Joseph 1976). Through the combination of unfavourable political circumstances and the lack of an identifiable project, it is possible that Cameron's Conservatives will come to be seen as expressing the worst aspects of both the Major and Heath administrations simultaneously.

On the other hand, it is possible that new techniques and even a new role for government might be found. The much-maligned concept of a 'Big Society' as embodied in education by the proposals for 'free schools' offers one such possibility. This might entail a resurrection of an older tradition of civic Toryism which would rely on the 'little platoons' of civil society to take the initiative for public service improvement as the state itself withdraws. But similar experiments on a smaller scale have been reliant on the financial largesse and political direction of the centre to an extent that now seems unthinkable. Nonetheless, developing a credible means of implementing the 'Big Society' idea in practice may be the key to the prospects for a successful education

project. The difficulty for the coalition is how to maintain standards within a depoliticising project of this kind. The third Thatcher government and New Labour chose to manage standards by becoming two of the most centralising administrations in the history of English education. Whether the coalition can develop an alternative education project that does not rely on this strategy remains to be seen.

Appendix I: Additional Tables and Charts

Table 4: Key Stage 2 performance: Proportion of cohort achieving level 4

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
English	49	57	63	65	71	75	75	75	75	78	79	79	80	81	80		
Maths	45	54	62	59	69	72	71	73	73	74	75	76	77	79	79		
Combined			53	52	62	65	64	66	66	68	69	70	71	73	72		
English Target								80	80	85	85	85	85	85			
Maths target								75	80	85	85	85	85	85			
Combined target																	78
Floor target														65			

DCSF Annual reports various years , DCSF National Curriculum Assessment at Key Stage 2, various years

Public Service Agreement 10 , HMT various years, comprehensive Spending Reviews , HMT various years

Source:

Targets:

Table 1: Key Stage 4 performance: proportion of cohort achieving GCSE 5AC and 5ACEM

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
% GCSE 5AC	44.5	45.1	46.3	47.9	49.2	50	51.6	52.9	53.7	56.3	58.5	60.9	64.8	70	74.1	
% GCSE 5ACEM	35.2	35.6	37	38.6	40	40.7	42.1	41.9	42.6	44.3	45.3	46	47.3	49.8	53.4	
5AC Target							50	52	54	56	58	60				
5ACEM target																53
5ACEM floor																30
5AC floor									20		25		30			

Source: DCSF Annual reports various years , DCSF National Curriculum Assessment at Key Stage 4, various years
 Public Service Agreement 10 , HMT various years, comprehensive Spending Reviews , HMT various years

Targets:

Education Governance, Politics and Policy under New Labour

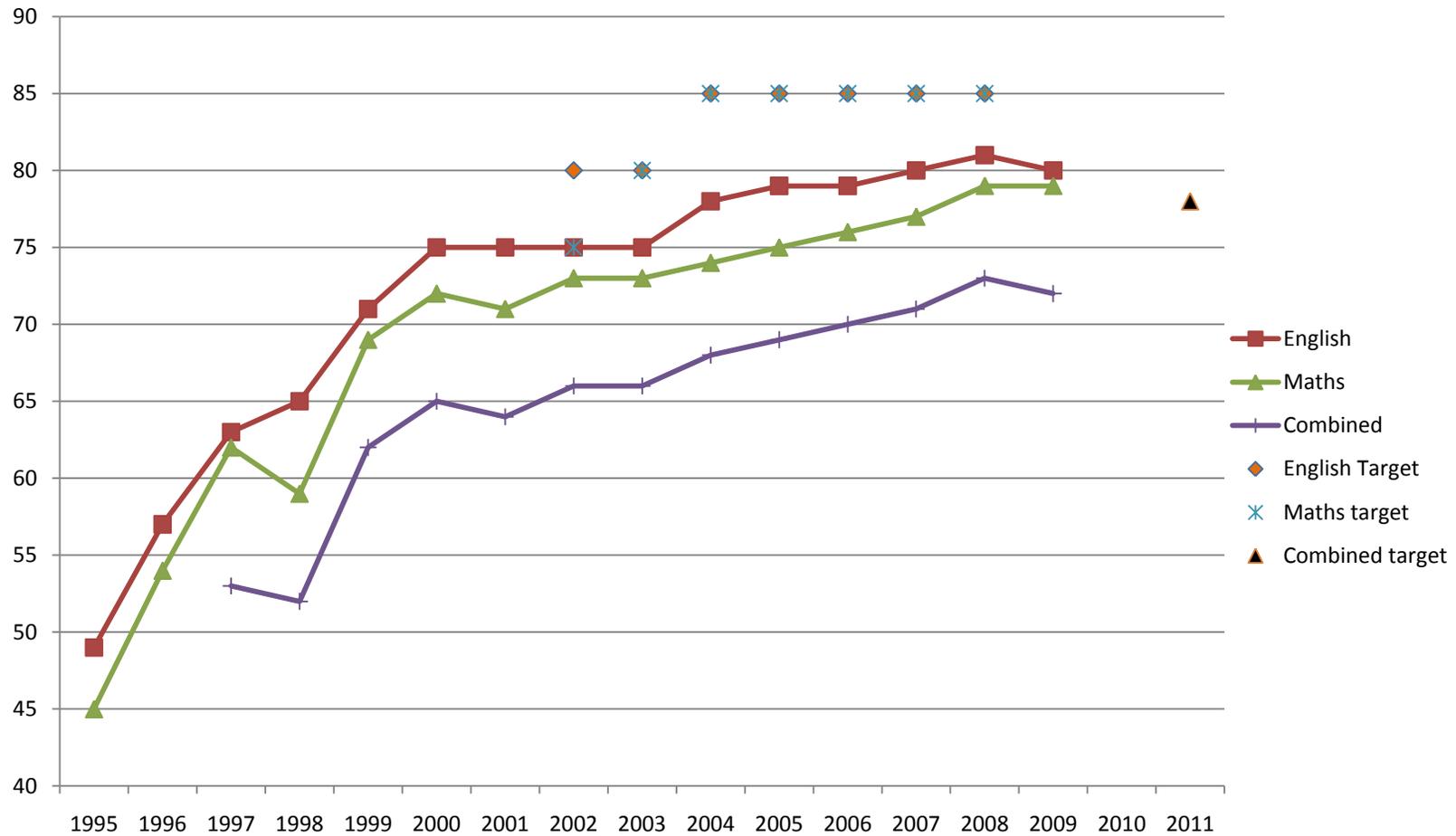
Table 3: Expenditure on Education

	1987-1988	1988-1989	1989-1990	1990-1991	1991-1992	1992-1993	1993-1994	1994-1995	1995-1996	1996-1997	1997-1998	1998-1999	1999-2000	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	
<i>Expenditure outturn on education excluding training at cash prices in billions</i>	20.3	21.9	24.4	26.9	29.7	32	33.5	35	35.8	36.4	37.4	38.7	40.8	44.4	49.7	52.9	59.2	63	67.6	70.6	75.6	79.9	85.5	
<i>Real terms Expenditure on education excluding training expressed in terms of 2008-2009 prices</i>	40.7	41.1	42.7	43.7	45.5	47.6	48.5	49.9	49.6	48.6	48.7	49.3	51	54.8	60	61.8	67.4	69.7	73.4	74.4	77.5	79.4	83.9	
	1987-1988	1988-1989	1989-1990	1990-1991	1991-1992	1992-1993	1993-1994	1994-1995	1995-1996	1996-1997	1997-1998	1998-1999	1999-2000	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	
<i>Spending on education excluding training as %GDP</i>	4.61	4.47	4.54	4.66	4.89	5.1	5.04	4.98	4.81	4.59	4.44	4.35	4.32	4.49	4.82	4.84	5.12	5.19	5.32	5.24	5.33	5.54	6.07	
											1997-1998	1998-1999	1999-2000	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011
<i>Per pupil revenue funding , £</i>											2900	2990	3130	3450	3640	3750	4010	4140	4380	4630	4830	5140	5310	5360

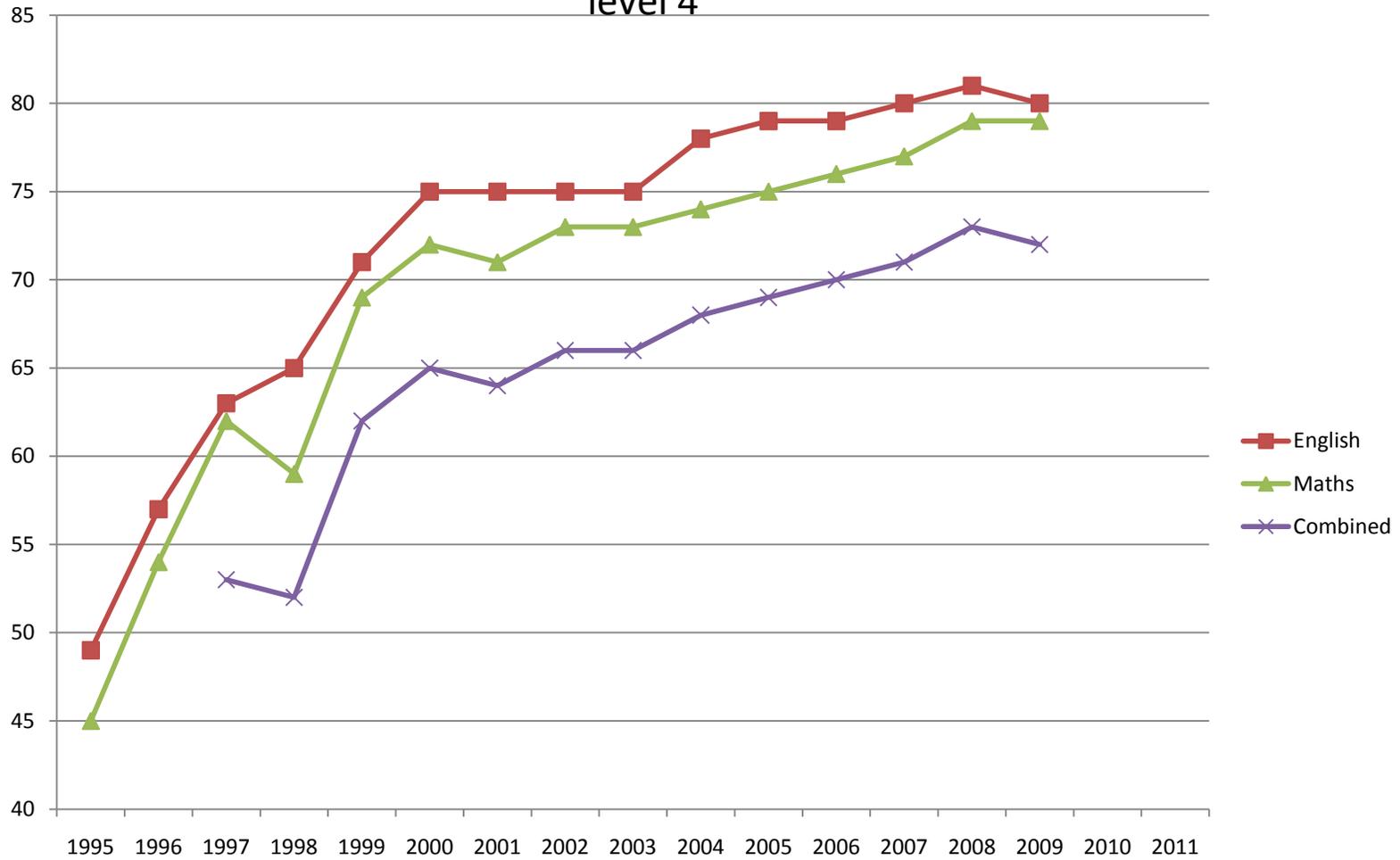
Note: Data are outturn to 2008-09, estimates for 2009-10 and plans for 2010-11

Sources: HM Treasury, PESA 2010, and earlier editions 2009 Pre-Budget Report, HM Treasury Budget 2010, HMTONS - CSDB database

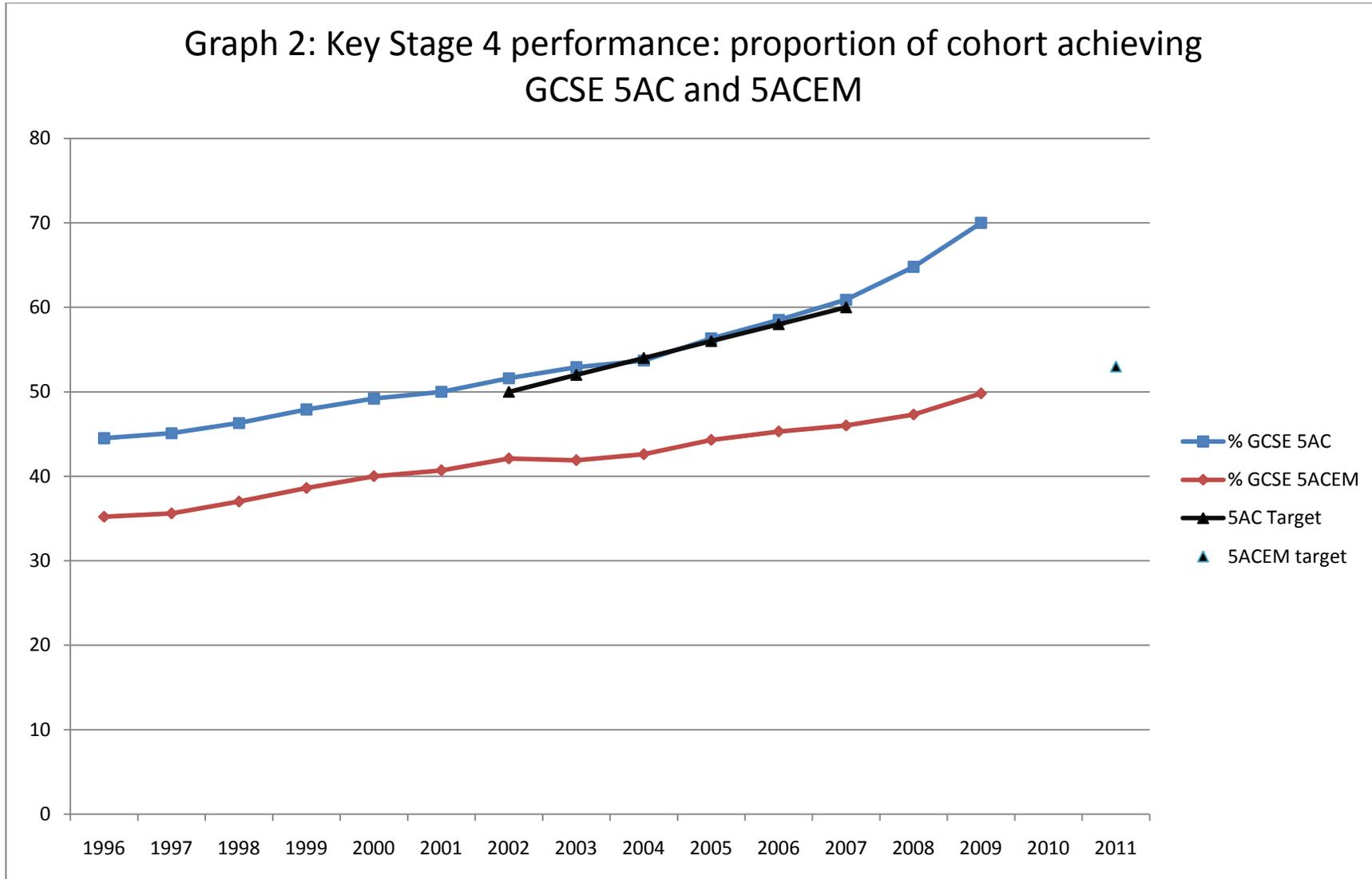
Graph 1: Key Stage 2 performance against targets



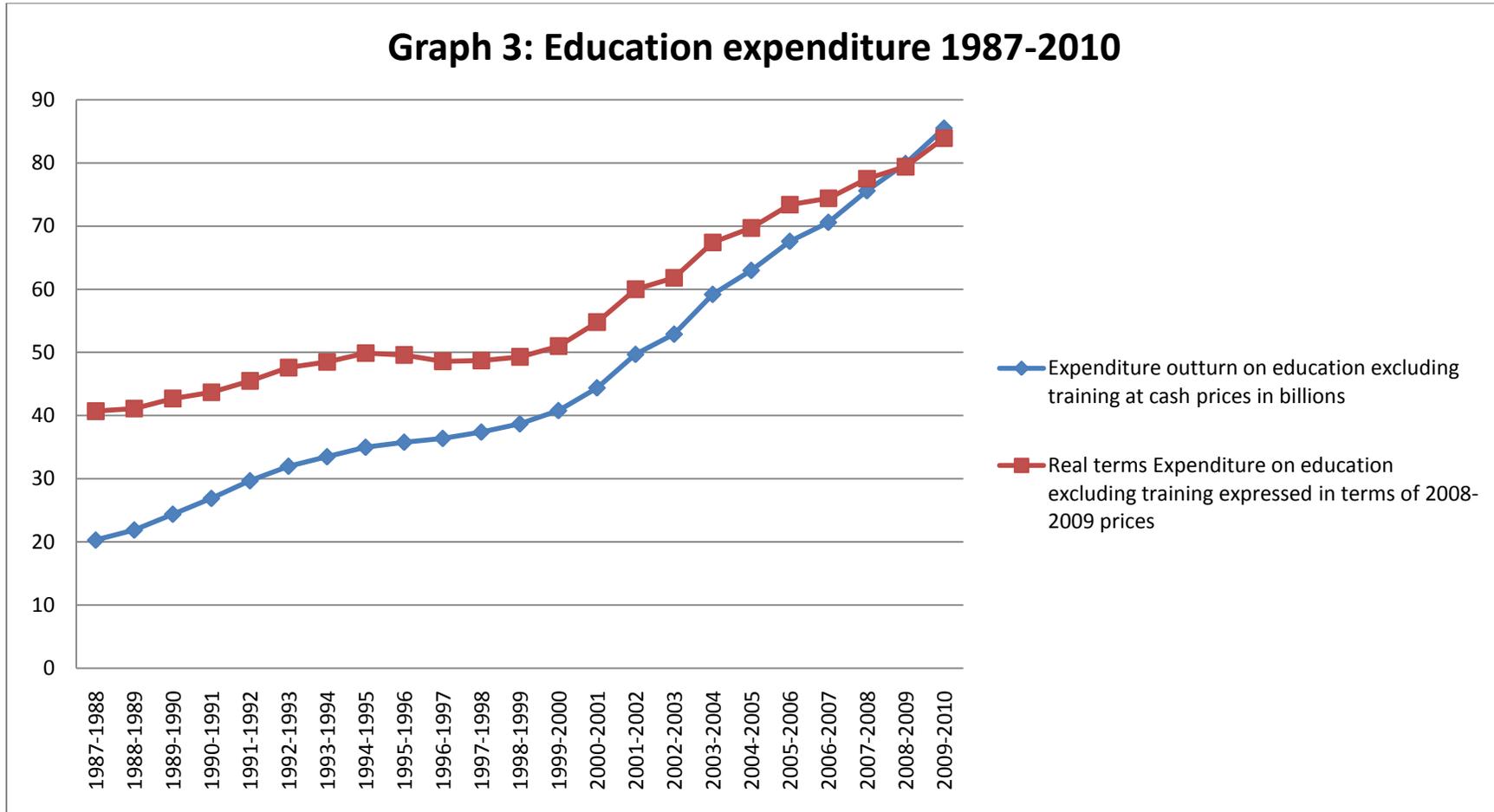
Graph 1.1: Key Stage 2 performance: Proportion of cohort achieving level 4



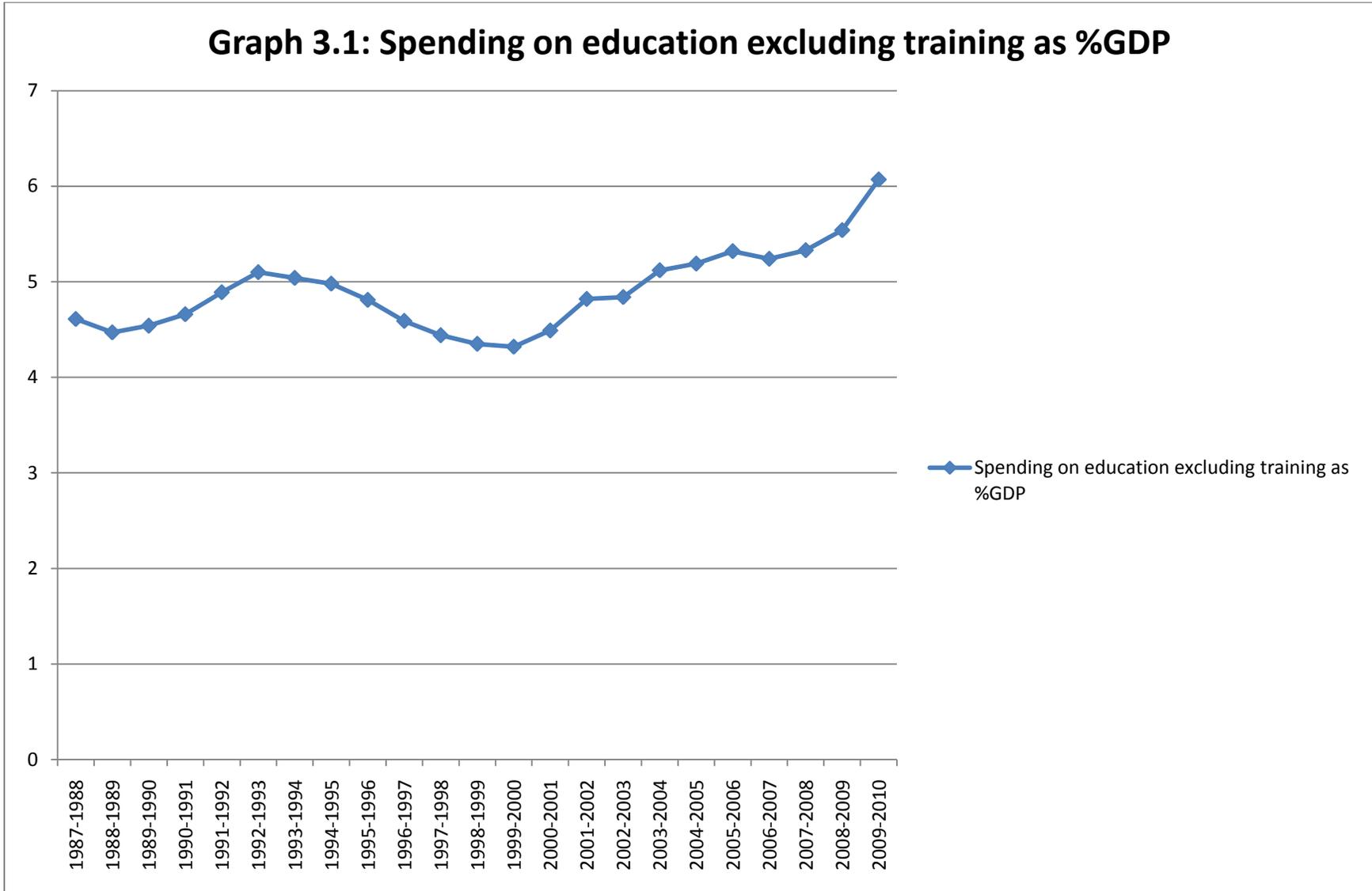
Graph 2: Key Stage 4 performance: proportion of cohort achieving GCSE 5AC and 5ACEM

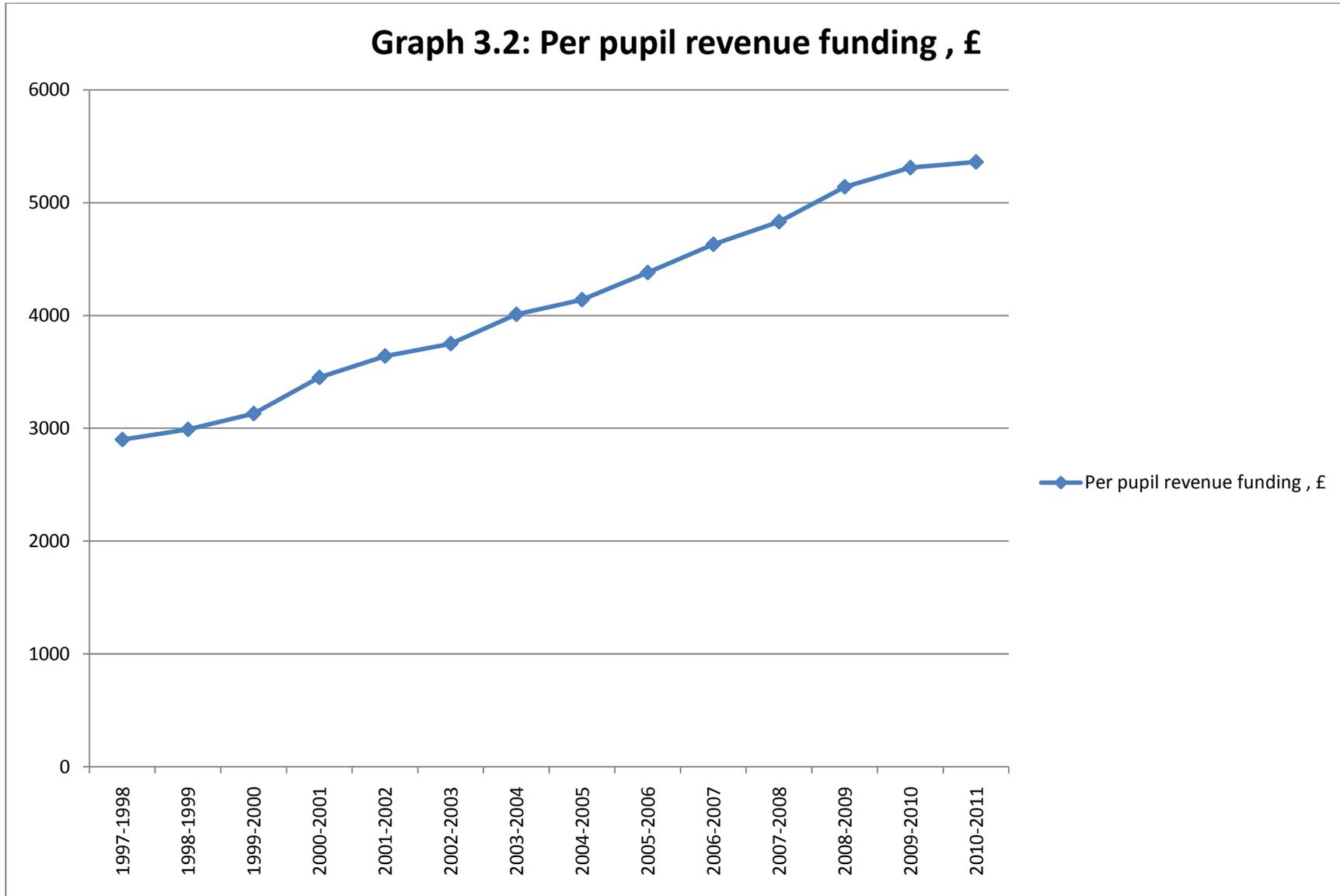


Graph 3: Education expenditure 1987-2010



Graph 3.1: Spending on education excluding training as %GDP





Appendix II: List of major New Labour education policies and initiatives 1997-2010

1997

Education (Schools) Act

Abolition of Assisted Places Scheme (APS)

1998

Teaching and Higher Education Act

1998 Introduction of university tuition fees

School Standards and Framework Act

Abolition of nursery school vouchers

Creation of Beacon Schools model

Creation of Education Action Zones (EAZs)

Fair Funding initiative reorganises school funding mechanism

Fresh Start policy for intervention into 'failing schools'

Introduction of Education Action Zones

Introduction of OFSTED inspection of Local Education Authorities

Introduction of Public Service Agreements including national targets for performance at KS 1-4

Introduction of specialist schools model

Limit on class sizes for children aged 5-7

Phasing out of Grant maintained schools

Specification of proportion of funding passing directly to schools through Individual School Budget (ISB) delegated from Local Education Authority

Statutory duty for LEAs to raise standards and increased powers for Secretary of State to intervene to secure this

Tripartite classification of schools: All schools classed as foundation, aided or community schools

1999

Devolution of education policy to devolved assemblies in Scotland and Wales

Introduction of Excellence in Cities programme

Introduction of mandatory numeracy and literacy hours in primary schools

National Learning Targets introduced for KS2 following Moser report

National Literacy and Numeracy strategies introduced following Moser report

2000

Learning and Skills Act

City academy (later known as Academy) school model announced, implemented 2002

Creation of General Teaching Council

Curriculum 2000 reform of post-16 qualifications .Advanced subsidiary (AS) level examinations re-introduced as standard post-16 qualifications. A2 level qualifications introduced

National College for School Leadership created

2001

2001 DfEE becomes DfES with employment brief moved to newly created DWP

2002

Education Act

First city academies opened

inclusion of value added measures in centrally published league tables

Announcement of vocational GCSEs as replacement for GNVQ

Rationalisation of increased powers of intervention in schools and LEAS, and consolidation of school funding processes

Enhanced powers of OFSTED with respect to inspections of Local Authorities

2003

National Agreement on Raising Standards and tackling workload – workforce remodelling

Revised primary strategy introduced

2004

Publication of 5 year strategy for children and learners

Publication of government-commissioned Tomlinson Review of 14-19 Education and skills

Announcement of Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme

2005

Education Act

Teacher Training Agency becomes Training and Development Agency for Schools

Plans for new work-related Diploma qualification announced

Increased powers of intervention for Secretary of State and LEAs in poorly performing schools

Establishment of Partnerships for Schools (PfS) to deliver BSF with government

2006

Education and Inspections Act

Creation of Trust school model

Dedicated School Grant reorganises school funding mechanism

Extension of OFSTED jurisdiction to include children's services

Inclusion of contextual value added measure (CVA) in centrally published league table

Increased statutory requirements for LEAS with respect to standards and representations made by parents

Publication of government-commissioned Rose Review of Primary Literacy

Increased powers of intervention in schools causing concern for OFSTED and Secretary of State

Revised processes for proposals to establish new schools

2007

DfES becomes DCSF with FE/HE brief moved to newly created DIUS and incorporation of children's services and welfare into education department

KS 3 curriculum revised

2008

Education and Skills Act

Greater prescription of curriculum entitlements at KS 4

First students begin study on Diploma qualifications

Age for compulsory participation in education or training raised from 16 to 18 by 2015

Independent Alexander Primary Review

Introduction of A* grade at A Level

Key Stage 3 SATs abolished

National Challenge policy for intervention into 'failing schools'

Primary and KS 3/4 curriculum review

Requirement for children aged 16-18 to participate in work, education or training

2009

Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act

Establishment of Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA)

Transfer of control over academy schools from DCSF to YPLA

Increased LEA responsibility for education and training of those over compulsory school age

Enhanced powers of intervention in schools causing concern

Creation of Office for Qualifications and Examination Regulation (OFQUAL)

QCA changes name to Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA) with modified functions

National Strategies become non-compulsory

New OFSTED inspections framework to focus on student attainment

Appendix III: New Labour Secretaries of State for Education 1997-2010

David Blunkett	May 1997 – June 2001
Estelle Morris	June 2001- October 2002
Charles Clarke	October 2002-December 2004
Ruth Kelly	December 2004 – May 2006
Alan Johnson	May 2006 – June 2007
Ed Balls	July 2007 – May 2010

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