

# Research Brief

## Parliamentary Privilege - The MPs 2015

The UK general election on May 7 may have produced significant change in the party make-up of the House of Commons. But the 650 members of the new House show little change from those who preceded them in one significant respect: where they went to school and university. Produced with the help of data collected by public affairs consultant Tim Carr and the Sutton Trust team, this research report provides a unique insight into the educational backgrounds of Westminster 2015.

This report shows that 32% of MPs were educated privately, compared with 7% of the population, with 49% going to comprehensive schools and 19% state grammar schools.<sup>1</sup> These figures exclude the small number (1%) educated overseas or home-educated. Almost one in ten of the privately educated MPs for whom we have data went to Eton. On higher education, 89% of MPs are graduates. Of those who went to a UK university, 26% went to Oxford or Cambridge, 28% went to other Russell Group universities while the remaining 35% went to other universities.

This means that the new House of Commons is a little more representative than that elected in 2010, when 35% of MPs were privately educated, but that MPs are still four times more likely to have gone to a fee-paying school than the population as a whole. However, when we compare the

### Key facts

- 32% of UK-educated MPs were educated privately, compared with 7% of the population, with 49% going to comprehensive schools and 19% state grammar schools.
- Almost one in ten of the privately educated MPs for whom we have data went to Eton.
- 89% of MPs are graduates. 26% went to Oxford or Cambridge, 28% went to other Russell Group universities while the remaining 35% went to other universities in the UK or overseas.

new intake with those being re-elected, we see the proportion of comprehensive educated MPs in the new intake, at 64%, is significantly higher than the 43% of re-elected MPs with a non-selective state education. We would expect our MPs to be more likely to have attended good universities, and the data shows that a quarter are Oxbridge educated compared with less than 1% of the UK population.

### Why does this matter

The Sutton Trust collects data on the education of leading figures in British public life to highlight the importance of social mobility, particularly at the top. Earlier Trust reports have shown that more than half of those in senior positions in the judiciary, journalism, medicine and the City were privately educated.<sup>2</sup> Last year, research by the government's Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission found that an equally high proportion of senior civil

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.suttontrust.com/researcharchive/educational-backgrounds-leading-lawyers-journalists-vice-chancellors-politicians-medics-chief-executives/> and <http://www.suttontrust.com/researcharchive/pathways-banking/>

servants, army officers and diplomats had been independently educated.<sup>3</sup>

Earlier Trust research has shown that social mobility, measured by income, declined between those born in 1958 and those born in 1970, and has since stalled.<sup>4</sup> Opportunities to get to good schools – whether independent day schools, the highest performing comprehensives or grammar schools – are all related to family income.<sup>5,6,7</sup>

The best people should be able to become MPs, regardless of their social background, as parliament is intended to represent the

<sup>3</sup> See *Elitist Britain* (Cabinet Office, 2014) [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/347915/Elitist\\_Britain\\_-\\_Final.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/347915/Elitist_Britain_-_Final.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.suttontrust.com/researcharchive/intergenerational-mobility-europe-north-america/> and <http://www.suttontrust.com/researcharchive/recent-changes-intergenerational-mobility-britain/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/open-access-report.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.suttontrust.com/newsarchive/top-comprehensives-socially-selective-half-national-average-proportion-pupils-free-school-meals/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/poorgrammarreport-2.pdf>

<sup>1</sup> Figures are rounded so may not exactly equal 100%

people’s interests. Parliament is also ultimately responsible for our national education policy. And each MP would surely hope that talented children in the state schools in their own constituencies stand the same chances of becoming a future MP as those children from the best schools largely serving the affluent.

Yet despite improvements in overall access to higher education, those from the richest fifth of neighbourhoods are still nine times more likely to go to the top universities than those from the poorest fifth.<sup>8</sup> Highlighting the education of our elites helps make the case for MPs to back measures to improve social mobility, including those highlighted in our Mobility Manifesto.<sup>9</sup>

### Methodology and data

For this study, we sought to get data on all 650 MPs elected on Thursday May 7<sup>th</sup> to the House of Commons. Ultimately we were able to recover information on schooling for 599 of the 650 MPs (92%) and on university education for 623 (96%). We were able to get data on the school background of 312 Conservatives, 219 Labour, 40 SNP, 8 Liberal Democrats as well as 21 other MPs from Plaid Cymru, UKIP, the Greens and the Northern Ireland parties.

The internal Sutton Trust analysis

**Table 2: School education of MPs by gender and entry to House<sup>10</sup>**

	Independent	Comprehensive	State Selective
England (inc London)	36%	45%	19%
London	39%	43%	17%
Scotland	5%	90%	5%
Wales	14%	69%	17%
Northern Ireland	13%	25%	63%

was supported by data collected by public affairs consultant Tim Carr. Information on MPs’ education and career histories was taken primarily from public sources, such as candidates’ campaign web pages. The school and university backgrounds of MPs were obtained by using a number of publicly available sources, such as *Who’s Who* and MPs’ websites, and by contacting prospective MPs directly.

Using historical data gathered by the Trust over a number of years, schools were then categorised according to their status at the point at which the MP would have entered the school - often different to the current status of schools, particularly with former grammar schools. Schools were classified as comprehensive, state grammar or independent. Universities meanwhile were classified into a number of acknowledged groupings: Oxbridge and Russell

Group universities, and others. Where this information was not publicly available, we contacted candidates’ offices directly. While some candidates were happy to cooperate, others were not and some argued that this information need not be publicly available, while others did not reply. Eight MPs were educated overseas, and we have excluded them from this analysis, ensuring comparability with our 2010 report.

### Overall picture: School Background

As Table 1 shows, 32% of UK-educated MPs were educated at independent schools, a drop from 35% in 2010 in the Sutton Trust study. This represents a return to trend as the last Parliament had seen a growth in privately educated MPs after their numbers had fallen over several elections.<sup>11</sup>

49% of MPs were educated at comprehensive schools, com-

**Table 1: School Backgrounds of Members of the 2015 Parliament**

	Independent	Comprehensive	State Selective
ALL MPs	32%	49%	19%
Conservative	48%	34%	18%
Labour	17%	64%	19%
Lib Dem	14%	57%	29%
SNP	5%	90%	5%
OTHER	24%	29%	48%

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.independentcommissionfees.org.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/ICoF-Report-Aug-2014.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.suttontrust.com/researcharchive/mobility-manifesto-2015/>

<sup>10</sup> 10 MPs who were previously members but were not in the 2010-2015 Parliament are regarded as new intake. Figures exclude those educated overseas.

<sup>11</sup> *The Educational Backgrounds of Members of Parliament in 2010* (Sutton Trust, 2010). The SMCP recorded a figure of 33% in 2014 in *Elitist Britain*, which may have reflected by-election changes and slightly more complete data.

pared with just 43% in 2010. The new intake of MPs is more likely to have been comprehensively educated (64%) than those who were re-elected and had sat in the last parliament (44%).

19% of MPs went to selective state grammar schools, a reduction from 24% in 2010, which may reflect the fact that an increasing number of MPs were educated after comprehensive education became the norm in most areas. Just 7% of the UK population goes to a private school. These figures exclude the 1% of MPs who were educated abroad or at home.<sup>12</sup>

Our analysis also shows a gender gap in the education of MPs. 35% of male MPs were independently educated compared with 26% of female MPs, while female MPs are more likely to have attended comprehensive schools.

There has been some reduction in the proportion of Conservative MPs that were privately educated, from 54% in 2010 to 48% in the new Parliament. The proportion of Labour MPs who went to independent schools is 17% (up from 15%) while the proportion of Liberal Democrat MPs who were privately educated has fallen from 40% to 15%, reflecting the large reduction in their numbers. Data for the school education of new SNP MPs was less readily available, but for those for whom we have information, just 5% were privately

educated. Among MPs from the other parties, 26% were privately educated. There are 20 Old Etonians in the Commons.

Comprehensive schools were attended by almost two thirds (64%) of Labour MPs and one third (34%) of Conservative MPs, together with 50% of Liberal Democrats and 88% of the SNP MPs with available data. 32% of other MPs were comprehensive educated. Selective state grammar schools were attended by 18% of Conservative MPs, 19% of Labour MPs and 25% of Liberal Democrats.

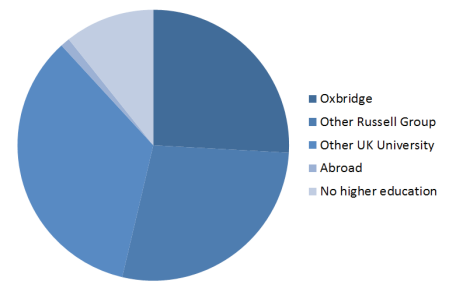
Northern Ireland retains a selective education system, and 63% of the region's MPs went to grammar schools.

### Overall picture: higher education

As Table 4 (see appendix) shows, 26% of MPs were educated at Oxbridge, a drop from 28% in 2010 in the Sutton Trust study. This compares to 1 in 200 of the general population. A further 28% of MPs were educated at other Russell Group universities, compared to approximately 10% of the UK population.<sup>13</sup> 34% went to a less selective or overseas university. Just one in ten MPs had no higher education.

Getting into an elite university, particularly Oxbridge, is often a precursor to many of the leading jobs in British society, and parlia-

Higher Education Backgrounds of Members of the 2015 Parliament

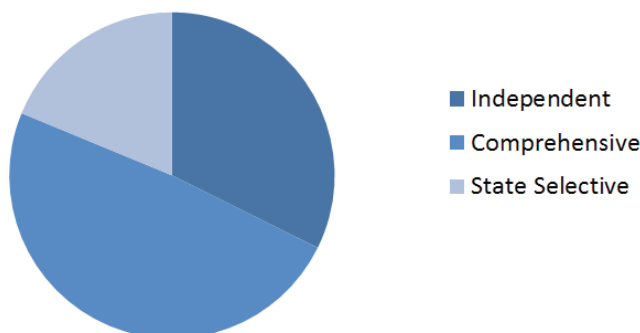


ment is no exception. It is right to expect that MPs should have a good education, but equally it is important that those opportunities are open to more young people from less privileged backgrounds, so that MPs more fully reflect the social backgrounds of the people they represent.

Broken down by party, 34% of Conservative MPs were Oxbridge educated, compared with 23% of Labour MPs and 13% of Liberal Democrats. None of the SNP MPs for whom we had information went to Oxbridge, but 33% attended other Russell Group universities (excluding Oxbridge) compared with 29% of Labour, 25% of Conservative and 50% of Liberal Democrat MPs.

Broken down by gender in Table 5 (see appendix), 28% of male and 22% of female MPs were Oxbridge educated, as Table 5 shows. The new intake was less likely to be Oxbridge-educated than those MPs who were re-elected and had been members of the 2010-2015 Parliament.

School Backgrounds of Members of the 2015 Parliament



<sup>12</sup> Numbers are rounded, so may not add up to 100%.

<sup>13</sup> The 24 Russell Group universities are University of Birmingham; University of Bristol; University of Cambridge; Cardiff University; Durham University; University of Edinburgh; University of Exeter; University of Glasgow; Imperial College London; King's College London; University of Leeds; University of Liverpool; London School of Economics & Political Science; University of Manchester; Newcastle University; University of Nottingham; University of Oxford; Queen Mary University of London; Queen's University Belfast; University of Sheffield; University of Southamp-

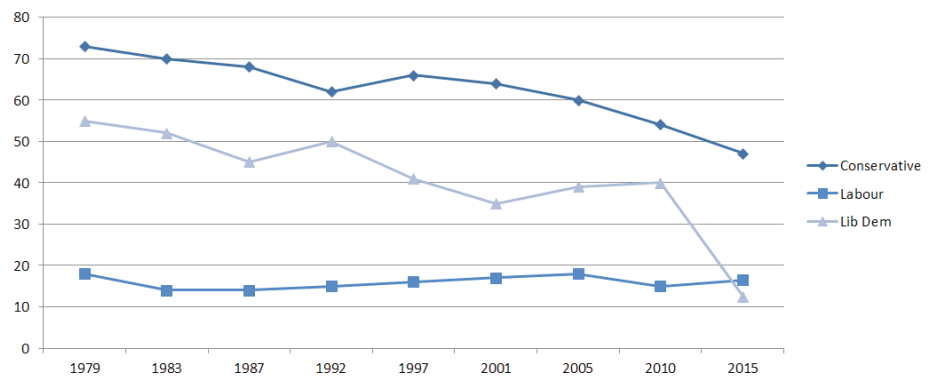
## Changes over time

In our 2010 study of the new Commons elected that year, we showed how there had been a general trend over time towards a lower proportion of MPs who were privately educated, notably from the Conservatives, though an increase in Conservative MPs in that year shifted the overall proportion of privately educated MPs up a little. In this election we have seen a further reduction in the numbers of privately educated MPs, including Conservatives, and the overall proportion is back to 2005 levels. The proportion of Oxbridge educated MPs had declined in what became the coalition parties in 2010, though proportionally more Labour MPs had an Oxford or Cambridge education than during the Labour years in government. This trend has continued at this election.

## Conclusions and recommendations

Parliament is becoming slightly more representative than it was, but it remains the case that MPs

Percentage of Privately Educated MPs Over Time



are much more likely than their constituents to have enjoyed a private education and an Oxbridge education. As our recent Mobility Map showed the life chances of young people are affected both by their social background but also by the opportunities and quality of education available where they live. Progress has been made in improving opportunities for disadvantaged young people in recent decades, but a big challenge remains to break down the barriers that make it hard for those from less privileged homes to fulfil their potential whether it is in parliament or the professions.

This makes it all the more important that the new MPs adopt policies that increase the chances of able young people from low and middle income backgrounds enjoying the same chances of getting on and succeeding as the 2015 House of Commons. The Sutton Trust has proposed ten key policies in our Mobility Manifesto which we would like MPs to advance in the new Parliament.

### Ten Steps to Social Mobility<sup>14</sup>

1. Ensure all disadvantaged children can access the best early years education and care. In particular, all disadvantaged two year-olds should have access to nursery places with well qualified staff.
2. Make improving the quality of classroom teaching the top priority in schools, with effective appraisals and a guaranteed entitlement to good quality training for all teachers.
3. Create fairer school admissions to both state grammar schools and comprehensives at age 11, including through the increased use of ballots and banding in admissions.
4. Improve the impact of the pupil premium through greater use of evidence provided by the Education Endowment Foundation and incentives for schools that narrow the attainment gap.
5. Develop an effective national programme for highly able state school pupils, with ring-fenced funding to support evidence-based activities and tracking of pupils' progress.
6. Strengthen academies' support for low and middle income pupils by regular inspection of chains, publication of more data across chains and speedier interventions where academies are not working.
7. Break down barriers between state and private schools, by promoting more partnership working and opening 100 leading independent day schools to all on the basis of ability rather than ability to pay.
8. Provide every young person with an entitlement to good quality personalised education and careers guidance, strengthening the national careers service to support schools and colleges effectively.
9. Introduce a new body, separate from individual universities, for the effective coordination of evidence-based outreach programmes, backed by more use of contextual admissions to improve access.
10. Greatly expand the number of good apprenticeships so that young people have real options at 18 and employers can develop the skilled workforce they need.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.suttontrust.com/researcharchive/mobility-manifesto-2015/>

## Appendix

**Table 3: School background by gender and date of entry to Commons**

	Independent	Comprehensive	State Selective
<b>Male</b>	35%	45%	20%
<b>Female</b>	26%	58%	16%
<b>New in 2015</b>	28%	64%	8%
<b>Existing MP</b>	34%	44%	22%

**Table 4: Higher Education of the 2015 House of Commons**

	Oxbridge	Other Russell Group	Other University	Abroad	No higher education	Any higher education
<b>ALL MPs</b>	26%	28%	35%	1%	11%	89%
<b>Conservative</b>	34%	25%	30%	1%	9%	91%
<b>Labour</b>	23%	29%	35%	0%	13%	87%
<b>Lib Dem</b>	13%	50%	38%	0%	0%	100%
<b>SNP</b>	0%	33%	56%	2%	8%	92%
<b>OTHER</b>	5%	32%	36%	5%	23%	77%

**Table 5: University attendance by gender and date of entry to Commons**

	Oxbridge	Other Russell Group	Other university	No higher education	Any higher education
<b>Male</b>	28%	27%	33%	11%	87%
<b>Female</b>	22%	31%	38%	9%	90%
<b>New in 2015</b>	18%	35%	36%	11%	88%
<b>Existing MP</b>	29%	25%	34%	11%	88%

**Table 6: Proportion of privately educated MPs over time (percentages)**

	1979	1983	1987	1992	1997	2001	2005	2010	2015
<b>Conservative</b>	73	70	68	62	66	64	60	54	48
<b>Labour</b>	18	14	14	15	16	17	18	15	16
<b>Lib Dem</b>	55	52	45	50	41	35	39	40	14
<b>Three main parties</b>	49	51	47	41	30	31	34	37	33

**Table 7: Proportion of Oxbridge educated MPs over time (percentages)**

	1979	1992	1997	2001	2005	2010	2015
<b>Conservative</b>	49	45	51	48	43	38	34
<b>Labour</b>	21	16	15	16	16	20	23
<b>Lib Dem</b>	27	30	33	27	31	28	13

Figures in both table 6 and 7 compiled by the Trust combined with data from The British General Election of 1951, 55 ... 2005, David Butler and Denis Kavanagh.