



The Educational Backgrounds of Government Ministers in 2010

May 2010

Introduction

This note provides an analysis of the school and university backgrounds of Government Ministers appointed following the General Election in 2010, and supplements the Sutton Trust's report on the educational backgrounds of Members of Parliament in 2010¹.

There are many factors that determine the select group of people who are elected as MPs and appointed as Ministers to serve the country, but in publishing these figures the Sutton Trust aims to prompt debate about the role of education in particular, and the educational opportunities currently on offer to able children from non-privileged backgrounds. In a more socially mobile world, the hope is that more would seek and gain public office -- and create a Parliament and Government in the future that is more representative of society at large.

The data gathered here is based on official sources, or received directly from MPs themselves. As in previous Trust reports, schools are categorised according to their status at the point at which the MP would have entered the school (at age 11) - often different to the current status of schools. Schools are classified as non-selective state, state grammar, or independent. Former direct grant grammars attended by Ministers, which are now independent schools, are classified as state grammar schools. Universities meanwhile are classified into a number of acknowledged groupings: Oxbridge; and leading research universities, defined by membership of the Russell Group or the 1994 Group, with remaining academic institutions classified simply as other universities.

¹ See: http://www.suttontrust.com/reports/MPs_educational_backgrounds_2010.pdf

Key findings

School backgrounds of Ministers

- Just over six in ten (62%) of Ministers attending Cabinet, and six in ten (60%) Ministers went to independent schools, which educate just 7% of the school population. This compares with half (50%) of backbench MPs from the Liberal Democrat and Conservative Parties in the 2010 Parliament, and just over a third (35%) of all MPs, who attended fee-paying schools.
- Less than a quarter (24%) of Ministers were educated in comprehensive state schools, with the remainder having attended state grammar schools (16%).
- The proportion of independently educated Ministers attending Cabinet (62%) is nearly twice that of previous Cabinets under the Labour Prime Ministers, Gordon Brown (32% in 2007) and Tony Blair (32% in 1997). However, the proportion is lower than that for previous Cabinets under Conservative Prime Ministers, John Major (71% in 1992) and Margaret Thatcher (91% in 1979).

University backgrounds of Ministers

- Seven in ten (69%) Ministers attending Cabinet, and a half (50%) of Ministers were educated at either Oxford or Cambridge universities. This compares with three in ten (31%) backbench MPs from the Liberal Democrat and Conservative Parties in the 2010 Parliament, and 28% of all MPs, who attended Oxbridge.
- Eight in ten (83%) of Ministers attending Cabinet, and eight in ten (82%) Ministers were educated at leading research universities. This compares with two thirds (67%) of backbench MPs from the Liberal Democrat and Conservative Parties in the 2010 Parliament, and just over six in ten (62%) of all MPs, who went to these universities.
- The proportion of Oxbridge educated Ministers attending Cabinet (69%) is higher than that of previous Cabinets under the Labour Prime Ministers, Gordon Brown (45% in 2007) and Tony Blair (16% in 1997). However, the proportion is lower than that for previous Cabinets under Conservative Prime Ministers, John Major (71% in 1992) and Margaret Thatcher (81% in 1979).
- David Cameron re-establishes an academic dynasty at Number 10 that stretches back to before the start of World War 2: with the exception of his immediate predecessor, Gordon Brown, every Prime Minister since 1937 who attended university was educated at one institution - Oxford.

Summary of findings

Table 1 below shows the proportion of Cabinet Ministers, and MPs holding Ministerial posts, who attended different types of schools, and compares these figures with those for backbench MPs from the Liberal Democrat and Conservative Parties. It also provides figures for MPs as a whole. The figures exclude MPs educated abroad, at home, or in specialist schools.

Table 1: school backgrounds of Ministers and MPs in the 2010 Parliament

	Total with known data	Independent %		State Comprehensive %		State Selective %	
All MPs	612	215	35%	263	43%	134	22%
Cabinet²	29	18	62%	6	21%	5	17%
Lib Dem/ Conservative Office Holders	92 (including 13 Lords)	55	60%	22	24%	15	16%
Lib Dem/Conservative Backbenchers	262	131	50%	82	31%	49	19%

Table 2 below shows the proportion of Cabinet Ministers, and MPs holding Ministerial posts, who attended different types of universities, and compares these figures with those for backbench MPs from the Liberal Democrat and Conservative Parties. It also provides figures for MPs as a whole. Leading research universities are defined by those who are members of the Russell Group or the 1994 Group, and include Oxford and Cambridge.

Table 2: university backgrounds of Ministers and MPs in the 2010 Parliament

	Total with known data	Oxbridge %		Leading research (including Oxbridge) %		Other %		None %	
All MPs	613	170	28%	380	62%	172	28%	59	10%
Cabinet	29	20	69%	24	83%	4	14%	1	3%
Lib Dem/ Conservative Office Holders	92 (including 13 Lords)	46	50%	75	82%	13	14%	4	4%
Lib Dem/Conservative Backbenchers	253	79	31%	170	67%	65	26%	17	7%

² Includes Cabinet Ministers and other Ministers attending Cabinet meetings

Table 3: school and university backgrounds for individual Ministers attending Cabinet

Ministerial Responsibility	Name		Party	School Type	School	University
Prime Minister	Cameron	David	CON	IND	Eton	Oxford
Deputy Prime Minister	Clegg	Nick	LIB DEM	IND	Westminster	Cambridge
Chancellor of the Exchequer	Osborne	George	CON	IND	St Paul's	Oxford
Foreign Secretary	Hague	William	CON	COMP	Wath-upon-Deerne Comp	Oxford
Home Secretary	May	Theresa	CON	IND	<i>(See notes below)</i>	Oxford
Justice	Clarke	Kenneth	CON	SEL	Nottingham High School (see notes)	Cambridge
Defence	Fox	Liam	CON	COMP	St Brides High School	Glasgow
Health	Lansley	Andrew	CON	IND	Brentwood	Exeter
Education	Gove	Michael	CON	IND	Robert Gordon's College	Oxford
Business, Innovation and Skills	Cable	Vincent	LIB DEM	SEL	Nunthorpe Grammar	Cambridge
International Development	Mitchell	Andrew	CON	IND	Rugby	Cambridge
Environment, Food & Rural Affairs	Spelman	Caroline	CON	SEL	Herts and Essex Grammar	London
Energy & Climate Change	Huhne	Chris	LIB DEM	IND	Westminster	Oxford
Transport	Hammond	Philip	CON	COMP	Shenfield School	Oxford
Communities and Local Government	Pickles	Eric	CON	SEL	Greenhead Grammar	Leeds Poly
Work & Pensions	Smith	Iain Duncan	CON	IND	HMS Conway <i>(See notes)</i>	None
Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport	Hunt	Jeremy	CON	IND	Charterhouse	Oxford
Treasury	Laws	David	LIB DEM	IND	St George's College	Cambridge
Scotland	Alexander	Danny	LIB DEM	COMP	Lochaber High School	Oxford
Northern Ireland	Paterson	Owen	CON	IND	Radley	Cambridge
Wales	Gillan	Cheryl	CON	IND	Cheltenham Ladies' College	Coll of Law
Leader of the House of Lords	Strathclyde	Lord	CON	IND	Wellington College	UEA
Minister without Portfolio	Warsi	Lady Sayeeda	CON	COMP	Birkdale High School	Leeds

Chief Whip	McLoughlin	Patrick	CON	COMP	Cardinal Griffin RC School	Staffordshire Agriculture
Cabinet	Maude	Francis	CON	IND	Abingdon	Cambridge
Cabinet	Letwin	Oliver	CON	IND	Eton	Cambridge
Leader of the House of Commons	Young	Sir George	CON	IND	Eton	Oxford
Business, Innovation and Skills	Willetts	David	CON	SEL	King Edward's School, Birmingham	Oxford
Law	Grieve	Dominic	CON	IND	Westminster	Oxford

Notes: IND – Independent school; COMP – state comprehensive school; SEL: - state grammar school. Direct Grant Grammar schools have been classed as state selective, on the basis that a majority of their students received free places before the scheme was abolished. According to her official website, Theresa May attended an independent school from the ages of 11-13, and then attended a state school. Iain Duncan Smith attended the naval school, HMS Conway at age 14. Kenneth Clarke attended Nottingham High School when it was a direct grant grammar school.