

THE POLITICS OF

'Education, education, education' was Tony Blair's mantra during the election. He promised billions to reduce class sizes and modernise schools and it struck a chord. But what of his own Cabinet's education? A trawl of ministers' backgrounds reveals a very different group of people to that which ran the country under 'classless' John Major. Just five of the Cabinet went to Oxford or Cambridge, compared with 18 of Major's ministers. Only six went to fee-paying schools, including Blair himself. None went to Eton, compared with four members of Major's hierarchy. And one — John Prescott — failed his 11-plus before making up for it as a mature student. Paul Donnelley examines the academic records of the Cabinet

THE PLAYGROUND

GORDON BROWN

47, Chancellor of the Exchequer

PRIMARY SCHOOL: Kirkcaldy West Primary School, 1955-1961.

SECONDARY SCHOOL: Kirkcaldy High School, 1961-1967: "Eight or nine" Scottish O-grades at age 14, five Highers (the Scottish exam normally taken a year after O-grades), all at grade A, at 15.

UNIVERSITY: 1st class MA in History, Edinburgh University, 1968-1970; PhD (thesis: *The Labour Party And Political Changes In Scotland, 1918-29*), Edinburgh

University, 1981.

SCHOOL REPORT: Brown was precocious from his very earliest days, entering primary school at the age of four: "I don't know how it happened. I was a year ahead," he has explained. He soon built on this early start by gaining a further year as he forged ahead of his contemporaries at Kirkcaldy West.

At secondary school, Brown also excelled at athletics and rugby (scoring a winning try in his first game and injuring himself in the process). He was also in the literary and debating societies and played the

violin in the school orchestra. In his final year (1967), Brown was a prefect and joint editor of the school magazine. One of Brown's fellow pupils, Jamie Millar, remembered: "He was, by far, the most gifted student in our class." Another, Murray Elder, now a special adviser to Donald Dewar, said he was "ferociously bright. He was never a swot. I am not saying his academic success was effortless, but he didn't make a great song and dance about it. He always seemed more interested in Raith Rovers".

Brown first went to

university in October 1967, making him the youngest student (just 16 years old) in the post-war era. However, that was the same month that Brown lost the sight in his left eye and surgeons battled to save his right following a rugby accident. As a result, he missed the whole of the first term and didn't officially enrol until spring 1968. One of his lecturers, Professor Henry Drucker, remembers Brown as "hugely popular, a natural politician, totally self-assured. He was good to everybody... a bit like a Bill Clinton figure". Others have less

favourable opinions, describing the future Chancellor as "dour". At Edinburgh, Brown became involved in student politics, becoming chairman of the Edinburgh University Labour Club and helping with an ultimately successful campaign to force the institution to sell its shares in South African companies, much to the chagrin of the right-wing principal.

On November 10, 1972, Brown was elected rector of the university for a three-year term, which ended in the summer of 1975. It was an uneasy period for Brown, who ▶



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TONY BLAIR 45, Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Minister for the Civil Service



PRIMARY SCHOOL: Western Hill pre-prep school, Edinburgh; then fee-paying Durham Chorister School, 1961-1966.

SECONDARY SCHOOL: Fettes College, Edinburgh, 1966-1971: A-levels in English, French and History (current fees: £13,455 per annum).

UNIVERSITY: St John's College, Oxford, 1972-1975, second-class honours in law
SCHOOL REPORT: At Durham, Blair followed in the footsteps of his father, Leo, a devout Tory, by standing in a mock election as the Conservative candidate.

Things did not go well for the future New Labour supremo at Fettes: "I was homesick and not very happy for the first few years. I think it's not unnatural if you take kids away from home at that age." His housemaster and English teacher, Dr Eric Anderson, recognised something in the young Tony, however: "He was intensely argumentative and every school rule was questioned. He could uphold his side of the debate about the rights and wrongs of everything better than any other boy in the school. He was the sort of boy that you were always struggling with to have his hair cut properly."

Before going up to the all-male St John's College, Blair took a year off in France. His time at St John's is best remembered for his appearance in his second year as lead singer in a rock band called Ugly Rumours.

often clashed with the university administration, but that surely prepared him for the rough and tumble of Westminster political life.

JACK STRAW

52, Home Secretary



PRIMARY SCHOOL: Staples Road County Primary, Loughton, Essex, 1953-1957.

SECONDARY SCHOOL: Brentwood School, 1957-1964 (current fees: £11,283 per annum); 10 O-levels (at 14); 3 A-levels.

UNIVERSITY: LL.B, Leeds University, 1964-1968.
SCHOOL REPORT: Joan and Walter Straw didn't have to pay for their son to go to Brentwood School as he won a boarder's scholarship. He was also head boy. Despite an atheist phase, he was an enthusiastic chorister. Other old boys of Brentwood include Noel Edmonds and Douglas Adams, author of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. At Leeds,

he was president of the University Union, 1967-68, at the same time as the *Daily Mail's* current editor-in-chief, Paul Dacre, ran the student paper.

ROBIN COOK

52, Foreign Secretary

PRIMARY SCHOOL: Aberdeen Grammar School, early Fifties.

SECONDARY SCHOOL: Aberdeen Grammar School, from 1957, Royal High School, Edinburgh, until summer 1964.

UNIVERSITY: Upper second in English Literature, Edinburgh University, 1964-1967.

SCHOOL REPORT: Cook became somewhat cagey about his academic qualifications when questioned by *Punch*. He refused to say how many O-levels he passed and, as for his Highers, he says they were "enough to get me into Edinburgh Uni". There, Cook failed to complete his doctoral thesis on Charles Dickens.



LORD IRVINE

58, Lord High Chancellor

PRIMARY SCHOOL: Unknown.

SECONDARY SCHOOL: Inverness Royal Academy, then Hutchesons' Boys' Grammar School, Glasgow, until 1958 (current fees: £4,221 per annum).

UNIVERSITY: MA Law, Glasgow University, from 1958; BA in law, Christ's College, Cambridge.

SCHOOL REPORT: Like his fellow Scot Robin Cook, Lord Irvine is cagey about details of his educational background. When *Punch* spoke to his office, a very charming aide told us that Lord Irvine would feel it "not essential to give out that information and it would be safe to assume we wouldn't be able to find out for you". How strange.

DONALD DEWAR

61, Secretary of State for Scotland

PRIMARY SCHOOL: Hawick Preparatory School, Perthshire; Moss Park Primary School, Perthshire, until 1948.

SECONDARY SCHOOL: Glasgow Academy, 1948-1955 (current fees: £4,665 per annum).

UNIVERSITY: Glasgow University, MA Law.
SCHOOL REPORT: Both his parents were ill for long periods when Donald was a youngster; his father suffering from tuberculo-

sis and his mother undergoing a serious brain operation. At primary school, Dewar recalls: "I stood out like a sore thumb. I was a quiet child with spectacles and not much confidence." At Glasgow Academy Dewar was let down by his spelling — he is dyslexic — and his lack of sporting prowess. He went to the same university as his love rival, Derry Irvine — who is now married to Dewar's ex-wife — and achieved the same qualifications. Dewar was president of the Glasgow University Union, 1961-1962.

DR MO MOWLAM

48, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

PRIMARY SCHOOL: Unknown.

SECONDARY SCHOOL: Coundon Court Comprehensive, Coventry, 1961-1968.

UNIVERSITY: BA in Social Anthropology, Durham University, 1968-1971; MA, PhD on Cantons of Switzerland, Iowa University, 1971-1976.

SCHOOL REPORT: In her final year at Coundon Court Mo Mowlam was head girl, but at Durham she was something of a radical: "My room was covered in tinfoil with a half-naked picture of Jimi Hendrix on the wall." She went off to Iowa University with a boyfriend. Both got their PhDs but split up in the process.

DAVID BLUNKETT

51, Secretary of State for Education and Employment

PRIMARY SCHOOL: Sheffield School for the Blind, from 1951.

SECONDARY SCHOOL: Course in commercial Braille typing and shorthand, Royal Normal College for the Blind, Shrewsbury; Certificate in Business Studies, Shrewsbury Technical College; Richmond College, Sheffield.

UNIVERSITY: BA Honours Degree in Political Theory and Institutions, Sheffield University; PGCE (Post-Graduate Certificate in Education), Huddersfield College of Education.



JACK CUNNINGHAM

59, Minister for the Cabinet Office and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster

PRIMARY SCHOOL: Felling Primary School, 1946-1951.

SECONDARY SCHOOL: Jarrow Grammar School, 1951-1958.

UNIVERSITY: BSc Chemistry, Bede College, Durham University, 1958-1962; PhD Chemistry, Coventry, 1961-1968.

SCHOOL REPORT: During his final year at Durham University, Cunningham was president of the Union.

RON DAVIES

52, Secretary of State for Wales

PRIMARY SCHOOL: Machen Primary School, Gwent, 1951-1957.

SECONDARY SCHOOL: Bassaleg Grammar School, 1957-1964.

UNIVERSITY: Portsmouth Polytechnic; University College of Wales at Cardiff; London University.

CLARE SHORT

52, Secretary of State for International Development

PRIMARY SCHOOL: St Francis Infants and Junior School, Birmingham, 1951-1957.

SECONDARY SCHOOL: St Paul's Grammar School, Birmingham, 1957-1964.

UNIVERSITY: Keele University, Leeds University; BA (Hons) in Political Science.

GEORGE ROBERTSON

52, Secretary of State for Defence

PRIMARY SCHOOL: Kirn Primary School, 1953-1957.

SECONDARY SCHOOL: Dunoon Grammar School, Argyll, 1957-1964.

UNIVERSITY: St Andrew's University; Dundee University, 1965-1968; MA Honours in Economics.

PETER MANDELSON

44, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry

PRIMARY SCHOOL: Hampstead Garden Suburb Junior School, 1961-1965.

SECONDARY SCHOOL: Hendon County Grammar School, 1965-1972: five O-levels; "two or three" A-levels.

UNIVERSITY: Lower second in PPE (Politics, Philosophy & Economics), St Catherine's College, Oxford.

SCHOOL REPORT: "They weren't fussy about the Os at his school," says his mother, explaining his shortage of O-levels. At the end of his school career, in 1972, Mandelson spent his gap year working on a community project in Tanzania.

ANN TAYLOR

51, Chief Whip

PRIMARY SCHOOL: Johnson Ford County Primary School, 1954-1958.

SECONDARY SCHOOL: Bolton School, 1958-1965 (a direct grant school).

UNIVERSITY: BSc in Economic History; Bradford University; MA in Economic History, Sheffield University.

SCHOOL REPORT: Taylor married during her second year at university. She began, but never finished, a PhD.

CHRIS SMITH

47, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport

PRIMARY SCHOOL: Cassiobury Primary School, Watford, 1958-1962.

SECONDARY SCHOOL: George Watson's College, Edinburgh, 1962-1969 (current fees: £9,156 per annum).

UNIVERSITY: First-class honours degree in English, Pembroke

College, Cambridge, 1969-1972; Kennedy Scholar at Harvard University, 1975-1976; PhD, 1979.

SCHOOL REPORT: Smith went to the same secondary school as Malcolm Rifkind, the former Conservative Foreign Secretary.

ALISTAIR DARLING

44, Secretary of State for Social Security

PRIMARY SCHOOL: "I went to seven different primary schools which left its mark. It made me adaptable and not afraid of change."

SECONDARY SCHOOL: Loretto School, Musselburgh, Midlothian, 1965-1972.

UNIVERSITY: BA Law, Aberdeen University, 1972-1975.

SCHOOL REPORT: "I would not inflict on my own son what was inflicted on me," says Darling of his time at Loretto.

BARONESS JAY

58, Leader of the House of Lords and Minister for Women

PRIMARY SCHOOL: Unknown.

SECONDARY SCHOOL: Blackheath High School, 1951-1958 (current fees: up to £5,180 per annum).

UNIVERSITY: BA in PPE (Politics, Philosophy & Economics), Somerville College, Oxford, 1958-1961.

SCHOOL REPORT: Of her time at secondary school, Jay's father, the former Labour Prime Minister Jim Callaghan says: "I remember when she was about 15 we had awful traumas. Because I didn't have the chance of going to university I suppose I was over-keen on her going, and I pressured her and perhaps bullied her a little. And she resisted very strongly. We had tremendous rows. I remember tears on one occasion." Margaret Jay went to the same Oxford college as Margaret Thatcher and studied the same subjects as Peter Mandelson.

FRANK DOBSON

58, Secretary of State for Health

PRIMARY SCHOOL: Dunnington Primary School, 1946-1951.

SECONDARY SCHOOL: Archbishop Holgate's Grammar School, York, 1951-1958.

UNIVERSITY: BSc in Economics, London School of Economics, 1958-1961.

MARGARET BECKETT

55, Lord President of the Council/Leader of the House of Commons

PRIMARY SCHOOL: St Mary's School, Ashton-under-Lyne; Notre Dame Prep School.

SECONDARY SCHOOL: Notre Dame High School, 1954-1961 (Roman Catholic convent).

UNIVERSITY: Sandwich course in metallurgy at John Dalton Polytechnic and Manchester College of Science and Technology.

SCHOOL REPORT: Beckett was head girl at Notre Dame High School.

NICK BROWN

48, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

PRIMARY SCHOOL: Unknown.

SECONDARY SCHOOL: Swatenden Secondary Modern, 1961-1963; Tunbridge Wells

Technical High School (now Tunbridge Wells Boys' Grammar School), 1963-1968, three A-levels in English, History and Economics.

UNIVERSITY: BA in History, Manchester University, 1968-1971.

STEPHEN BYERS

45, Chief Secretary to the Treasury

PRIMARY SCHOOL: Buxton County Primary School, 1960-1964.

SECONDARY SCHOOL: Chester City Grammar School, 1964-1971.

POLYTECHNIC: Chester College of Further Education, from 1971; BA Law, Liverpool Polytechnic. □

JOHN PRESCOTT 60, Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions

PRIMARY SCHOOL: Brinsworth Primary School, Rotherham, 1945-1949. Failed his 11-plus.

SECONDARY SCHOOL: Grange Secondary Modern, Ellesmere Port, 1949-1954. Left with no qualifications.

UNIVERSITY: Diploma in Economics and Politics, Ruskin College, Oxford, 1963-1965; BSc (third-class) in Economics, Hull University, 1965-1968.

SCHOOL REPORT: Prescott cut his showbiz teeth at school playing Grumpy in the school play, *The Seven Dwarfs*. Despite being promised a bike by his father, Bert, if he passed his 11-plus, Prescott failed and he felt the setback keenly: "I was shattered," he says. "My brother and sister passed and went on to grammar school, so I was the only one who didn't. It gave me a great sense of failure."

Grange Secondary Modern —



now an evening centre for further education — was divided into four streams and Prescott remained in the top stream during his entire time there. Les George, who taught the young Prescott English, says: "He was

an outstanding pupil, always full of life in the nicest possible way. He was never one of the playground ruffians and didn't go in for brawling or anything like that. English was his strongest subject. His essays were always very good and he was academically able." Bill Roberts, the headmaster, had a different view, telling Bert Prescott: "John's a nice lad, but he won't go far."

Prescott certainly did go far in the years that followed, in terms of nautical miles at least, as a steward in the merchant navy from 1955 until 1963. But it was Ruskin College that proved the making of him. "My mind was opened to the pleasures of learning, of shaping the bullets with which to fight," he says. "Ruskin gave me self-confidence in mobilising my arguments. It taught me that I had no need to feel inferior to anybody." Prescott's

history lecturer, Raphael Samuel, recalls: "My student seemed a very incarnation of Jude the Obscure [Thomas Hardy's poor country boy who becomes a student at Oxford], with a tremendous appetite for learning, fiercely independent opinions and a determination to crack the secret of knowledge. He loved arguments, and tutorials were apt to erupt in fierce disagreement." Oddly, Prescott walked out of his first year's mock examinations fearing he could not compete.

At Hull Prescott studied under the left-wing Professor John Saville. The professor, now 82, says: "He was clearly a rough diamond. He didn't apologise for himself and 30 years later his whole persona is very similar to what it was 30 years ago, which I think is very much to his credit."