

Local Educational Authorities

Key to understanding the shape of post-1944 British education is the principle of a ‘national system, locally administered’.¹ Historians of education have long stressed the foundational tripartite relationship between central government, Local Education Authorities [LEAs], and schools that made mass secondary education possible.² This framework was not a product of the 1944 Act but reflected the deliberate intention for post-war secondary education to be built upon structures and expertise that had grown-up during the first half of the century.³ Even if some hoped the 1944 Act would allow the newly created Ministry of Education (which replaced the Board of Education) to exercise greater control and direction over national education policy, practical realities meant that mass secondary education depended upon a ‘harmonious relationship’ built upon cooperation.⁴ While the Secretary of State was charged with promoting ‘the education of the people of England and Wales and the progressive development of institutions devoted to that purpose’, LEAs assumed responsibility for the delivery of national policy at a local level. This structure meant the UK had the most devolved education system in Europe for much of the twentieth century and goes a long way to explaining the highly variable nature of schooling not only across the country but often within individual counties or cities. Importantly, a focus upon the role of LEAs in shaping educational reform after the Second World War disrupts entrenched chronologies that pivot largely on reforms made at the national level, and subsequently separate the period into neat phases of tripartite, comprehensive, and marketization. Looking from a local level, we see throughout the period a wide range of different school types, structures, and educational pathways often operating alongside each other in a fragmented state system.

This briefing paper does not attempt to explain the numerous variations seen across different LEAs nor to explore in detail the evolving relationship between individual LEAs and central government. This has been done expertly by numerous scholars since the 1960s, whose work highlights the pitfalls of making sweeping generalizations about Britain’s path towards comprehensive education and the importance of remaining attuned to local particularities.⁵ As these studies detail, the transition to mass secondary education did not unfold evenly across the country as a combination of local priorities, resources, and personalities frequently undercut ambitions in Whitehall. Even so, few offer a clear explanation of how an LEA fitted into the broader apparatus of local government or description of its composition. This briefing paper addresses these omissions in preparation for our research in LEA archives by considering in turn: a brief history of LEAs; LEAs within the broader structure of local government; LEAs’ structure and functions.

¹ Clyde Chitty, *Understanding schools and schooling* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002), ch. 2, pp. 10-24.

² See for example, I. G. K. Fenwick, *The Comprehensive School 1944-1970: the politics of secondary school reorganisation* (London: Methuen, 1976); Vernon Bogdanor, ‘Power and participation’, *Oxford Review of Education*, 5:2 (1979), 157-68; Peter Gosden, ‘The Educational System of England and Wales since 1952’, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 30:1 (1982), 108-121; Roy Lowe, *Education in the post-war years: a social history* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1988); Clyde Chitty, *Towards a New Education System: the victory of the New Right* (Lewes: Falmer Press, 1989); Alan Kerckhoff, Ken Fogelman, David Crook, & David Reeder, *Going Comprehensive in England and Wales: a study of uneven change* (London: Woburn Press, 1996); Gary McCulloch, *Failing the ordinary child?: the theory and practice of working-class secondary education* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1998).

³ David Crook, ‘Local Authorities and Comprehensivization in England and Wales, 1944-1974’, *Oxford Review of Education*, 28:2/3 (2002), 247-260, p. 248.

⁴ Peter Gosden, *The education system since 1944* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1983), p. 9.

⁵ See bibliography for fuller list of such studies.

A brief history of LEAs

LEAs have rightly featured prominently in accounts of educational change in Britain during the 20th century. At the turn of the 21st century, a hundred years after their foundation, LEAs appeared to be terminally threatened, however. Ongoing centralization of educational powers, on the one hand, and, on the other, the fragmentation of the state system and associated empowering of individual schools, saw LEAs squeezed out of traditional roles. While this process of marginalization has distinct historical roots, it is important to remain wary of narratives of the postwar period that move inexorably towards the eclipse of LEAs by central government. Since at least the mid-1970s, many historians of education have lamented the decline of LEAs, fearful that a vital counterweight to the centralizing impulses of successive governments has itself fallen victim to that process. In this telling, LEAs declined from a golden age during the interwar period, when they acted, in Roy Lowe's words, as 'both a civilising and modernising influence within a system which has often been insensitive to local needs', to usurpation by Whitehall in the late 20th century.⁶ For Brian Simon, it was the Education Act 1944 that first suffocated LEAs' capacity to develop a more democratic education system: 'the strict tripartite system was now effectively imposed on England's schools'.⁷ Yet, as Eileen Byrne, Alan Kerckhoff et al, and Gary McCulloch have respectively shown through a careful case study approach of different authorities, the picture was more variegated and contingent upon local constraints, political sympathies, available resources, and personalities until at least the early 1980s. As McCulloch neatly sums-up: 'If strict tripartism was "effectively imposed" on schools, as Simon suggests, it was imposed somewhat ineffectively.'⁸ Many historians of education have tended to endorse Clyde Chitty's complaint that since 1979 LEA's radical, reforming impulses have been systematically suffocated by an overbearing central state, intent on stripping LEA power and unleashing the market onto the education system.⁹ Yet even in this period a close focus on local settings reveals a more uneven picture, particularly between the four nations, with LEAs faring better in Wales and Scotland. The remainder of this section seeks to sketch a brief history of LEA involvement in 20th century education reform.

First established under the 1902 Education Act, LEAs replaced the School Boards created under the 1870 Education Act to administer elementary education at a local level. The establishment of a permanent LEA, appointed by the county or borough authority, was intended to make educational administration more efficient and consistent across the country. 318 new LEAs replaced over 2000 School Boards.¹⁰ Standing alongside the Board of Education (1899), LEAs were intended to be a key pillar in the new administrative apparatus of state education, working to ensure local needs were prioritised in the allocation of state resources. Before 1944 LEAs were responsible for ensuring provision of elementary education, appointing teachers, equipping schools, organizing the transfer of (a minority) of pupils to secondary school at 11, and maintaining school buildings. To do so they relied upon a combination of funding from local rates and central government grants. Welsh LEAs were more actively involved the provision of secondary education in this period, following the Welsh Intermediate Education Act (1889) and creation of the Central Welsh Board (1896), the executive committee of

⁶ Roy Lowe, 'A Century of Local Education Authorities: What Has Been Lost?', *Oxford Review of Education*, 28:2/3 (2002), 149-58.

⁷ Brian Simon, *Education and the social order, 1940-1990*, 2nd edition (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1999), p. 131.

⁸ Gary McCulloch, 'Local Education Authorities and the Organisation of Secondary Education, 1943-1950', *Oxford Review of Education*, 28: 2/3 (2002), 235-46, p. 239.

⁹ Clyde Chitty, 'The Role and Status of LEAs: Post-War Pride and fin de siècle Uncertainty', *Oxford Review of Education*, 28:2/3 (2002), 261-73.

¹⁰ On the 1902 education Act see Neil Dagnish, *Education policy making in England and Wales: the crucible years, 1895-1911* (London: Woburn Press, 1996). For conditions in Wales and the backlash against the 1902 act amongst Welsh Non-conformists see Gareth Elwyn Jones, *Controls and Conflicts in Welsh Secondary Education 1889-1944* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1982).

which was drawn largely from local education committees.¹¹ After the 1910 Education (Choice of Employment) Act, LEAs also became responsible for supporting school leavers' transition to the labour market by providing guidance on job openings and job placement (a role that evolved into the Youth Employment Scheme or Careers Service). Despite the hopes of prominent figures in Whitehall in the early 20th century, including Robert Morant, that LEAs would act as a channel for greater centralization, efficiency, and coherence in education policy, these bodies became the principal interlocutors of local needs. Roy Lowe has described LEAs as the most progressive force in education before 1939; however, approach varied widely depending upon area. While Lowe's claim may hold true in London, in more rural areas LEAs often acted as a block to innovation and drew criticism as such from central government.¹² In the wake of the Hadow Reports (1923-33) central government considered replacing LEAs with larger regional administrative bodies, but the local impulse in education proved too strong and in the aftermath of the Second World War LEAs' influence grew as central government relied upon their expertise to create new structures of secondary and further education attuned to local conditions.¹³

Contrary to popular assumptions, the 1944 Act did not impose a fixed tripartite model. It stipulated that LEAs must provide free access up to the age of 14 (raised to 15 in 1947) to state funded secondary education and required the gradual abolition of all-age schools to be replaced with specialist post-primary schools. Each LEA was required to submit a development plan to the Ministry of Education outlining how it would fulfil these new obligations.¹⁴ This arrangement ensured significant variation in local provision and, of course, tensions did erupt in several LEAs. This was particularly marked in Wales, where, as Gareth Elwyn Jones explains, relations between local and central government proved a lot more tense and confrontational.¹⁵ More broadly, however, far from being a cause of irresolvable antagonism between local and central government, this diffused form of decision making was frequently celebrated at both a national and local level as a 'progressive partnership' between government, LEAs, and teachers 'to build a single, but not uniform system out of many diverse elements'.¹⁶

Even though many LEAs chose to follow the Norwood Report's recommendation for a tripartite (although more often a bipartite) system, McCulloch has shown this was more likely to be a carefully considered decision taken in respect of local circumstances rather than a simple submission to pressure from Whitehall.¹⁷ Other LEAs, in contrast, never accepted a system based on selection and segregation at 11 and worked to subvert this model long before the endorsement of a national comprehensive system by Anthony Crosland in 1965. LEA development plans contained a wide range of different structures that included multilateral schools, bilateral schools, and middle schools in place of, or even alongside, Secondary Moderns, grammars, and Technical Schools. Adding a further layer of complication were those schools that did not fall directly under LEA control: Direct Grant Grammars were funded directly from the DES (although would take LEA scholarship pupils); while Voluntary Controlled (funded by the state) and Voluntary Aided (partially funded by the state) allowed religious institutions to maintain some control over denominational schools through a governing foundation [semi]-independent of the LEA. While the Ministry did not initially encourage a multilateral (comprehensive) alternative it was prepared to sanction this in certain instances where local conditions made it the most financially effective option, such as in Anglesey.¹⁸ Of 54 plans submitted in 1947, more than half stated an intention

¹¹ G. E. Jones, 'Policy and Power: one hundred years of Local Education Authorities in Wales', *Oxford Review of Education*, 28:2/3 (2002), 343-58, pp. 343-44.

¹² Roy Lowe, 'A Century of Local Education Authorities', pp. 151-55.

¹³ Paul R. Sharp, 'Surviving, Not Thriving: LEAs since the Education Reform Act of 1988', *Oxford Review of Education*, 28:2/3 (2002), 197-215, pp. 199-200.

¹⁴ Education Act 1944: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo6/7-8/31/contents/enacted>; Gary McCulloch, *Educational reconstruction: the 1944 Education Act and the 21st century* (London, Woburn Press, 1994).

¹⁵ Gareth Elwyn Jones, *Which Nation's Schools?* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1990).

¹⁶ Ministry of Education, *Education 1900-1950*, Cmnd. 8244 (London: H.M.S.O., 1951), p. 1.

¹⁷ McCulloch, *Local Education Authorities and the Organisation of Secondary Education*, pp. 243-44.

¹⁸ Gareth Elwyn Jones, *The education of a nation* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), ch. 8, pp. 129-47.

to establish at least one non-selective school.¹⁹ Discussions and experimentation around restructuring continued throughout the following thirty years. Brian Simon has identified the pilot comprehensive schemes undertaken by various LEAs during the 1950s as being crucial precursors to the ‘1960s breakout for comprehensivization’.²⁰ Indeed, the six models for comprehensivization suggested in Circular 10/65 (which requested but did not oblige LEAs to reorganize along comprehensive lines) reflected schemes already in operation across the country rather than radical new initiatives thought up by Whitehall civil servants.

LEAs’ internal debates around restructuring could be intensely divisive and idiosyncratic. They highlight the importance of individual personalities in the shaping new provision. A committed Chief Education Officer, like Alec Clegg in West Riding of Yorkshire, or Committee Chairman, such as Bob Cant in Stoke, often proved pivotal in orienting LEA priorities.²¹ For many of those involved in drawing-up new plans, financial, infrastructural, and geographical limitations often overrode any preoccupation with national policy debates or partisan allegiances. Rural LEAs tended to be more conservative in ambition than urban counterparts, because of both instinctive inclination and available resources.²² For these reasons, it is important to reiterate Tim Brighouse’s conclusion from his own experience working as an Education Officer in various LEAs: ‘At any time, any one LEA was markedly different in character and in the way it interpreted its role from another’.²³

Beyond restructuring, LEAs administered many of the core day-to-day elements of school life after 1945. LEAs were responsible for shaping the curriculum in liaison with schools, with Whitehall showing little appetite to interfere in this area before the late-1970s. These decisions often devolved to Headmasters and teachers, but LEAs could stipulate certain expectations or encourage wider access to examination syllabuses. The building of new schools and maintenance of existing buildings remained within the purview of the LEA, considerations which often had decisive influence over development plans.²⁴ By 1969 LEAs had built over 8,500 new primary and secondary schools.²⁵ LEAs organized transfer from primary to senior school, initially through the 11-plus and later through allocation of places. During the 1960s and 70s, it fell upon some LEAs (particularly in London, Birmingham, and West Yorkshire) to manage the transition to a multiracial pupil body, as growing numbers of children whose parents had migrated to Britain reached school age. Provision varied dramatically between LEA and often revealed deep institutional racism at the heart of the education system.²⁶ Even so, responses were not uniform, with several LEAs committing substantial resources to support children learning

¹⁹ Simon, *Education and the social order*, p. 75. For an account of the diversity of response see Kerckhoff et al, *Going comprehensive*, passim.

²⁰ Simon, *Education and the social order*, pp. 203-11.

²¹ Kerckhoff et al, ‘A calculated educational reorganization: Stoke-on-Trent’, in *Going Comprehensive*, pp. 107-16; David Crook, ‘“The middle school cometh”...and goeth: Alec Clegg and the rise and fall of the English middle school’, *Education* 3–13, 36:2 (2008), 117-25.

²² Eileen Byrne, *Planning and educational inequality: a study of the rationale of resource-allocation* (Windsor: NFER, 1974).

²³ Tim Brighouse, ‘The View of a Participant During the Second Half-a Perspective on LEAs since 1952’, *Oxford Review of Education*, 28:2/3 (2002), 187-96, p. 188.

²⁴ Gosden, *The education system since 1944*, pp. 1-51.

²⁵ Harold Dent, *The educational system of England and Wales*, 4th edition (London: University of London Press, 1969), p. 34.

²⁶ On the challenges faced by pupils of colour in the education system, see for example: Bernard Coard, *How the West Indian child is made educationally subnormal in the British school system: the scandal of the Black child in schools in Britain* (London: New Beacon Books, 1971); Brett Bebbler, ‘“We Were Just Unwanted”: Bussing, Migrant Dispersal, and South Asians in London’, *Journal of Social History*, 48:3 (2015), 635-61; Rob Waters, *Thinking black: Britain, 1964-1985* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2019), pp. 125-164.

English as a second language and adapt to school life.²⁷ Until the 1980s, LEAs controlled school governing bodies, often forming a single governing committee to oversee a group of schools in the area. This arrangement contributed to mounting tension with schools and parents as the period progressed, with both groups demanding a greater say over day-to-day provision. Control of governing bodies allowed LEAs to manage the hiring and firing of teachers and direct school finances (which were provided through the LEA). On top of this, LEAs organized school meal provision, transport, careers advice, Special Educational Needs support, maintenance of pitches and grounds, and supply of classroom resources. With LEA duties broadening so much after 1945, central government funds became increasingly more important than local rates in supporting educational provision. Ultimately, this generated greater levels of confrontation as government demanded closer scrutiny and efficiency in LEA spending, while LEAs bemoaned falling budgets from the early 1970s onwards.²⁸

If the period before the late-1960s was generally one of mutual cooperation between LEAs and central government, this started to breakdown in the increasingly polarised atmosphere of the 1970s.²⁹ Although highly politicized battles over comprehensivization explain much of this, confrontations between LEAs and Whitehall often pivoted on questions of autonomy as much as ideology. The largely compliant response to Circular 10/65 reflected its permissive nature. Even as Crosland sought to leverage LEAs by limiting access to funds for anything other than multilateral schools through Circular 10/66, he chose not to compel or set a firm deadline for restructuring.³⁰ Just as after 1945, LEAs responded in different ways and at different speeds, but always in a manner that stressed local independence. It was Ted Short's decision, as Crosland's successor, to bring legislation before parliament to compel LEAs to abolish tripartitism that provoked the strongest backlash. Several Conservative controlled councils, such as in Southport, chose to frame a defence of grammar schools on the broader principal that central government was not entitled to force their hand.³¹ Even so, while these debates could unfold along partisan lines – Labour councils more enthusiastically embracing the end of selection, while Conservative counterparts resisted harder – this binary breaks often down on closer inspection.³² For example, it was a Conservative controlled council that pushed for the introduction of multilateral education in Leeds in the early 1970s, just as a Labour council in Leicester proved more cautious in its embrace.

It is clear, however, that from the early 1970s the DES, then under Margaret Thatcher as Secretary of State, started to become more assertive in its approach to LEAs. Thatcher initially, and paradoxically, framed this more confrontational attitude as a defence of localism. In revoking Circular 10/65 and issuing Circular 10/70, she sought to remove government pressure from LEAs intent on preserving their grammar schools; however, as the number of LEAs wanting to turn comprehensive grew (more schools became comprehensive under Thatcher than any other Secretary of State), Thatcher increasingly rejected decisions taken by elected councils (several of them Conservative) in an effort to stem comprehensivization. With the backlash against comprehensives and progressive teaching methods growing in intensity throughout the decade, successive governments (both Conservative and Labour) chided LEAs for failing to maintain standards, even while cutting funding. The Taylor Commission, appointed by a Labour government in 1975 to examine school administration, recommended sweeping changes to the structure of school governance by devolving some LEA powers to schools and parents

²⁷ Trevor Burgin & Patricia Edson, *Spring Grove: the education of immigrant children* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967); H. E. R. Townsend, *Immigrant pupils in England: the L.E.A. response* (Windsor: NFER, 1971).

²⁸ Byrne, *Planning and educational inequality*, passim.

²⁹ Sharp, *Surviving not thriving*, p. 200

³⁰ Jones makes clear that this move was decisive in forcing Cardiff's Conservative dominated LEA to accept comprehensivization just one year after it had declared it would not abandon the city's grammars, G. E. Jones, 'One hundred years of LEAs in Wales', p. 355.

³¹ Crook, *Local Authorities and comprehensivisation in England and Wales*, p. 253

³² Kerckhoff et al, *Going Comprehensive*, passim

(although it stopped short of suggesting the abolition of LEAs and clearly stated LEAs should remain in overall control of local provision).³³ The report came on the back of far reaching reforms to the structure of local government, which increased calls, particularly on the right, to reduce costs through the introduction of more corporatist structures that would dilute LEAs' autonomy (see below). In the wake of James Callaghan's speech on the state of education at Ruskin College in 1976, both parties promised parents increased power and choice in shaping their children's education by removing LEAs' monopoly on provision.

The shift in power from LEAs to central government and individual schools gathered pace after Thatcher entered Downing Street in 1979. Even as LEAs sought to manage declining resources and pupil numbers, as the baby boomers left the system, through a new spate of school amalgamations in the late-1970s and early 1980s, successive education acts gave Whitehall greater powers. Initially this focussed on parental choice, but gathered pace as the decade progressed, culminating in the Education Reform Act 1988 [ERA] which explicitly codified the Secretary of State's powers in relation to LEAs. It required LEAs to delegate control of finances to individual schools under the Local Management of Schools programme and forced them to take parents' wishes into account when allocating pupils to schools. Between 1980 and 1997, changes such as the removal of control over further education and careers advice services, the introduction of compulsory school governing bodies, GCSEs, the National Curriculum, and Grant Maintained status all served to reduce LEA influence by, on the one hand, creating greater standardization of curriculum and, on the other, fragmenting local authority provision by empowering individual schools. Sharp and Dunford explain that the ERA fundamentally altered the 'basic structure within the education service' in three key ways: it made school governing bodies the key point of contact between government and schools; gave government control over curriculum; and entrenched the principle of 'consumer rights' at the heart of the education system.³⁴

In the aftermath of the ERA, the Audit Commission published a report stressing the ongoing but more limited role of LEAs would play moving forward: to coordinate between schools, to provide parents with information, regulate schools through inspection, and to ensure sufficient school places in the area.³⁵ Even while some LEAs responded positively to their new role, the dual processes of fragmentation of the state sector and diminishing authority continued under New Labour. After 1997 there was no return of lost powers to LEAs. Instead, it was made clear that LEAs should see themselves as just one among numerous bodies tasked with raising standards by 'challenging schools to improve'.³⁶ Despite contemplating their complete abolition and replacement with newly created ad hoc regional bodies – something Paul Sharp suggests would have represented a return to the pre-1902 situation just with 'super school boards' instead of parochial ones – New Labour ultimately endorsed the basic administrative function of LEAs but demanded they earn their place within the educational landscape.³⁷ In 2000, the government definitively stated: 'We believe that Education Authorities have precise and limited functions. It is not their role to run or intervene in schools, except those which are in danger of, or have fallen into, special measures or serious weaknesses; nor should they seek to provide directly all education services in their areas. Rather their job is to provide certain specific planning and support functions which are essential to guarantee adequate school provision.'³⁸ These functions were specified

³³ Department of Education and Science, *A New Partnership for Our Schools* [Taylor Report] (London: H.M.S.O., 1977): <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/taylor/taylor1977.html>

³⁴ Paul R. Sharp & J. R. Dunford, *The education system in England and Wales* (London: Longmans, 1990), p. 39.

³⁵ Audit Commission for Local Authorities in England and Wales, *Losing an Empire, Finding a Role: The LEA of the Future* (London: H.M.S.O., 1989).

³⁶ Department for Education and Employment, *Excellence in Schools* (London: H.M.S.O., 1997).

³⁷ Sharp, *Surviving, not thriving*, p. 198.

³⁸ Department for Education & Employment, *The Role of the Local Education Authority in school education* (London: H.M.S.O, 2000), p. 3:

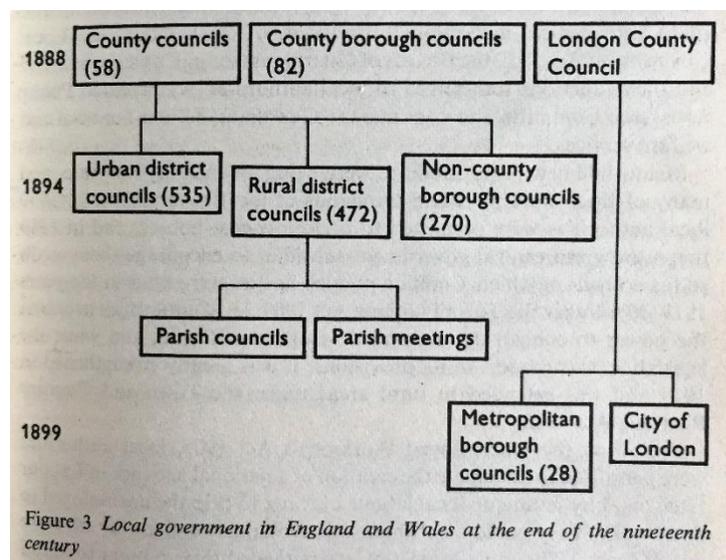
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as those which could not operate efficiently on an individual school basis or had implications for the community at large: identifying children with SEN and ensuring appropriate provision, including operation of Education Psychology services and inter-agency relationships; securing access to schools by providing adequate places, fair admissions policies, and attendance monitoring; management of expenditure on buildings and transport; monitoring school performance and focusing school improvement services on schools which have weaknesses; providing for excluded pupils and those unable to attend school; and strategic management to develop policy, set priorities, allocate resources and draw up plans for delivery in relation to the aforementioned functions. It also, however, advocated a further transfer of financial control to individual schools and new expectations for LEAs to promote a more open market in school services. Crucially, New Labour made clear that in the pursuit of higher standards, local knowledge was no longer paramount and that LEAs would become 'local delivery agents holding a temporary contract'.³⁹ Four years later, the Children Act 2004 amalgamated education with other associated services under New Labour's *Every child matters initiative* and in so doing made LEAs in their statutory form obsolete (although the label continues in popular use to differentiate local authorities with responsibility for education services from those without).

³⁹ Valerie Hannon, "Modernising" LEAs: a changing framework of values', in Michael Fielding (ed.), *Taking education really seriously: four years' hard labour* (London, Routledge Falmer, 2001), 183-9, p. 185.

Structure of Local Government in England & Wales

In many ways, the shape of local government in the late 20th century reflected long established traditions and structures. Since the 15th century, civil authority at a local level had been organised around three principal, interlocking units: the parish, the corporate town (borough or burgh), and the shire (county).



Extensive reform, expansion, standardization, and rationalization of the structures of local government took place across the second half of the nineteenth century to meet the new needs of a rapidly growing and increasingly urbanized population. The resulting structure formed the basis of local government until the 1960s and 70s when growing demands for change again led to wide-ranging reforms.

T. Byrne, Local government in Britain, p. 15

Before 1975 local government in England and Wales varied between three different structures, with a total of 1500 local authorities in existence (excluding parishes)⁴⁰:

- Single-tier, all-purpose authorities (**county boroughs**). These tended to be in cities and large towns and operated independently of county council control. All services were run-by a unitary, elected council. The Local Government Act 1888 stipulated that any town with a population over 50,000 had the right to become a county borough. An exception was offered to towns already classified as counties corporate (with independent control of municipal services) but had under 50,000 inhabitants (e.g. Bath and Oxford). In total, 61 county boroughs were created under the 1888 Act. As the population grew over the next forty years, so more towns applied to become county boroughs. Efforts were made to stem this trend by raising the population threshold and refusing parliamentary permission in response to objections from county councils fearful over loss of revenues. After 1945 the county borough system drew growing criticism for being outdated and inefficient. Shifting patterns of urban settlement made the urban/rural divide that had spurred its initial creation increasingly difficult to sustain. County councils remained frustrated by ‘borough islands’ that disrupted local provision and took away resources, while the growth of larger cities and conurbations meant that multiple authorities had to cooperate or else replicate the same service. By the time of abolition in 1974, there were 82 county boroughs in England and Wales.

Each county borough was responsible for education in its jurisdiction and had a statutory obligation to appoint an LEA. This did not necessarily mean that provision was consistent across the authority, with different structures of secondary schooling often found within the same authority, especially large cities. This depended upon existing buildings, access to funds for new construction, the social and political character of different wards, and experimentation

⁴⁰ For a fuller description see Tony Byrne, *Local government in Britain*, 4th edition (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986).

during the period of comprehensivization. For example, Bristol LEA was an early advocate of comprehensive schooling but due to political pressure and lack of resources introduced comprehensives unevenly across the city, meaning that by 1970 while areas of new postwar housing were served by comprehensives, the city centre and areas of older housing remained divided along tripartite lines.⁴¹



County boroughs in England, 1972 (plus 4 in Wales: Cardiff, Swansea, Newport, and Merthyr)

⁴¹ Kerckhoff et al, *Going comprehensive*, ch. 5, pp. 84-106.

The creation of the Greater London Authority [GLA] in 2000 once again created a two-tier system in London, but control over education remained the preserve of each individual borough.

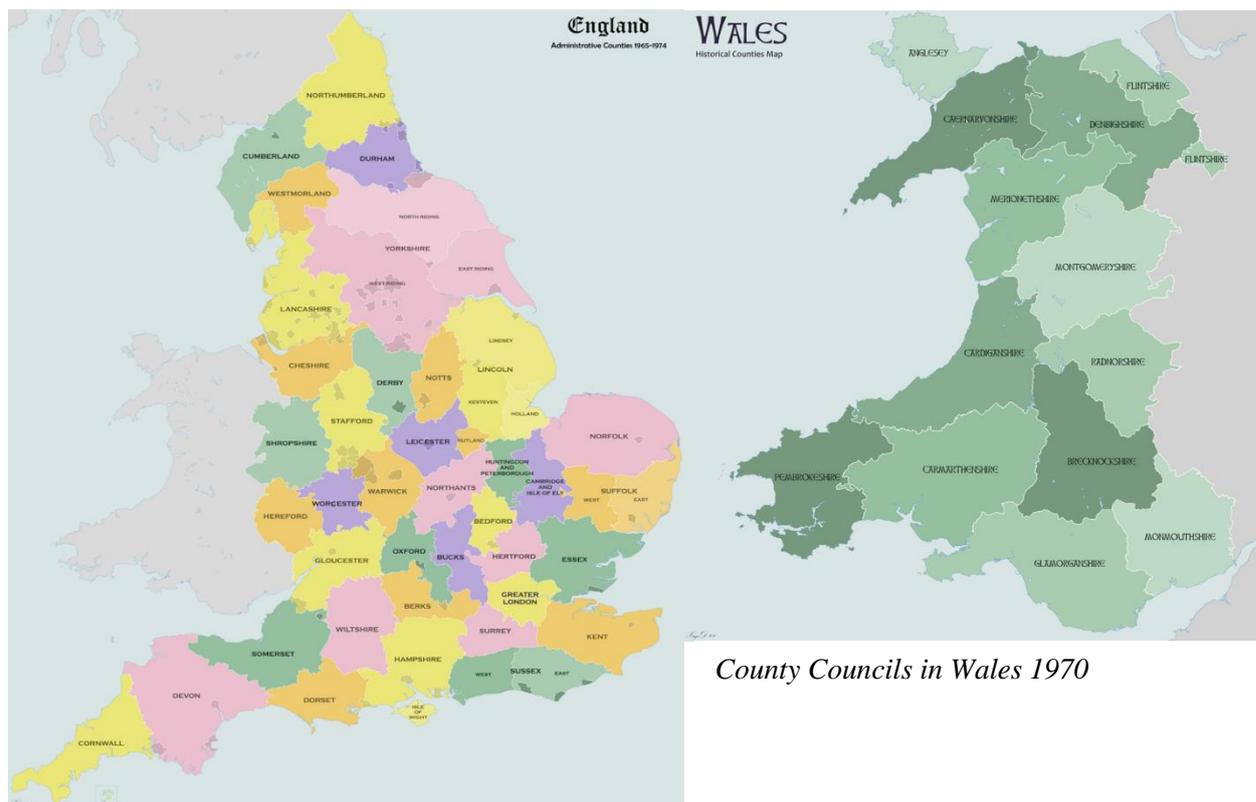
- Three-tier system (**county, district, parish councils**) – Within this model the county council acts as the senior administrative branch responsible for **education**, planning, welfare, and police; the district (either urban, rural, non-county borough) councils for housing, public health, and local amenities; parish councils for footpaths, recreation grounds, trees etc. Before 1975 around 70% of the population lived under this arrangement.

Each County Council had a LEA and was responsible for education provision across the whole county (barring areas covered by a county or metropolitan borough). Even so, provision and structure may have differed between districts depending upon resources, demography, and geography. Unlike county boroughs, county councils normally had to manage the demands of both rural and urban settings across a wide area. For much of the period, county councils were less effected by growing ethnic diversity amongst the school-age population, as this tended to be focussed in larger cities beyond county council jurisdiction. After 1945, county LEAs often experimented with different types of school across districts, something that became more common during the period of comprehensivization (e.g. in the West Riding comprehensives were initially piloted in three districts, while the rest remained bipartite – technical schools having been rejected. Middle schools were then gradually introduced during the 1960s).⁴³

- It is important to flag-up that in terms of LEAs there were exceptions to this general system before 1944. Due to local opposition from existing School Boards in 1902 a third type of LEA was created that sat between the 145 county and county borough LEAs. A further 173 Part III LEAs were created in non-county boroughs and districts (tending to be in urban areas under the broader control of County Councils) to run elementary education. This meant that elementary and secondary education in the same area was run by different authorities. Part III LEAs were abolished under the Education Act 1944, leaving a total of 146 LEAs in England and Wales until 1975.⁴⁴

⁴³ Peter Gosden & Paul. R. Sharp, *The development of an Education Service in the West Riding, 1889-1974* (Oxford: Martin Robinson, 1978); David Crook, 'The middle school cometh'...and goeth: Alec Clegg and the rise and fall of the English middle school, *Education 3-13*, 36:2 (2008), 117-25.

⁴⁴ Nicholas Hans, *Comparative Education: a study of educational factors and traditions* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1958), pp. 257-59.



County Councils in England 1970 (county boroughs shaded out)

County Councils in Wales 1970

Local Government after 1975

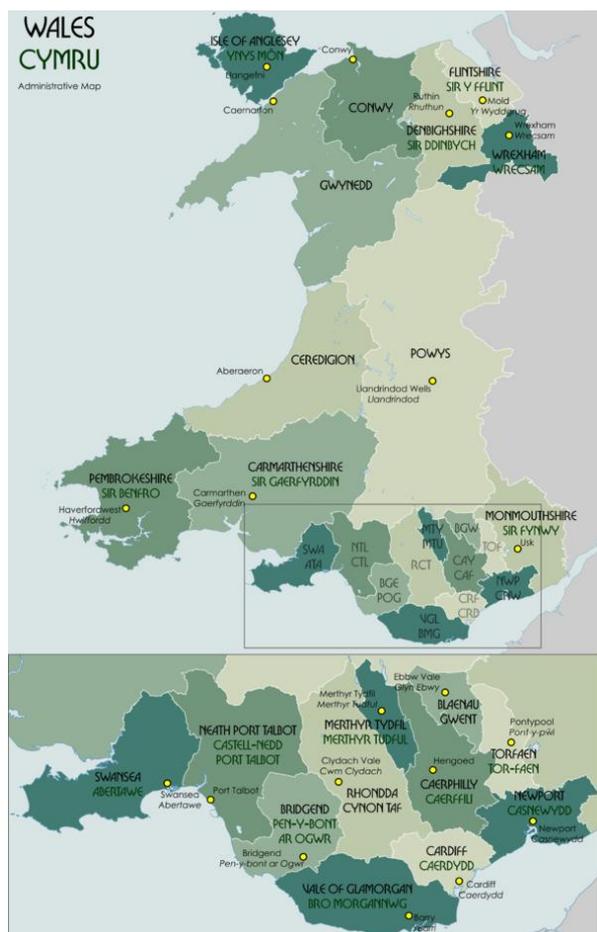
Demands to make local government structures more efficient grew from the 1950s onwards. Many in Whitehall wanted to see a more corporate structure throughout local government, which would help efficiency by linking up local services, reduce duplication, and create greater coherence and oversight at senior levels. Population change made it common for top-tier local authorities to be smaller in size than neighbouring second-tier authorities, thereby hampering efficiency and consistency of provision. Increased centralization of responsibility for previously locally administered services (i.e. health, water, and electricity) under the structures of the welfare state simultaneously undermined local authorities' capacity to generate revenue. Urbanization and suburbanization increasingly meant that the division between 'town and country', upon which the county borough/council structure rested, was increasingly difficult to sustain, while in cities it was common to have several separate authorities reproducing services without any coordinating oversight.

A Royal Commission on Local Government, appointed in 1966 under John Redcliffe-Maud, recommended fundamental structural changes to local government. Principally, the report proposed the introduction of unitary authorities in both counties and towns, where all services would come under one authority. It stressed authorities needed to be large enough to function efficiently (>250,000) but not so large that they became another layer of remote, bureaucratic government (<1,000,000). In the largest cities, the commission recommended the creation of new 'metropolitan areas' that would operate a similar two-tier system to the GLC. With regards LEAs, it emphasised the need for a large enough population to ensure each education service had sufficient resources and teachers, with 250,000 identified as the minimum for efficient delivery.

These proposals provoked significant opposition amongst county councils and sections of parliament, meaning that when Heath's Conservative government passed the Local Government Act 1972, the new structure reflected a compromise between the Royal Commission's proposed changes and existing forms. The bill abolished the county boroughs; reduced the 58 county councils in England and Wales to 47 (39 in England, 8 in Wales), with populations ranging from 150,000 (Powys) to 1.5 million (Hampshire); and created 6 metropolitan counties (Greater Manchester, Merseyside, West Midlands, Tyne and Wear, South Yorkshire, and West Yorkshire), ranging in size from 2.7 million (West Midlands) to 1 million (Tyne and Wear).

In the new county councils, the two-tier system was kept in place. Planning, protective, personal services, and **education were run at a county level**. While at the district level the existing 1249 urban, rural, and non-county boroughs were replaced by 333 new district councils or boroughs (296 in England, 37 in Wales). These ranged in size from 422,000 (Bristol) to 18,670 (Radnor) and assumed responsibility for housing, environmental health, and amenities. Parish councils were maintained in England but had no influence over education provision.

Local government in the six metropolitan counties was structured along a similar two-tier system to London. The upper-tier controlled planning, transport, highways etc; and the lower tier, made up of metropolitan districts/boroughs, took responsibility for housing, welfare, environmental health, and **education**. They ranged in size from 1 million (Birmingham) to 173,000 (South Tyneside). Each metropolitan district/borough became an independent LEA.



Current Welsh unitary authorities, each constituting an LEA.

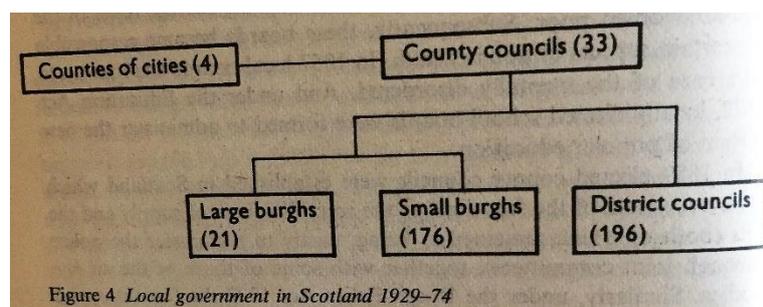
Further reform to the structure of local government came in 1985, when the Conservative government abolished the metropolitan counties and GLC to create single-tier authorities across these areas, without overarching co-ordination. Although this did not affect LEA provision in the metropolitan counties, as this was organised at a district level, it did mean the dissolution of ILEA and with it the assumption of control over education in inner London by individual boroughs. Local government restructuring was again revisited in the early 1990s through the Local Government Act 1992 and The Local Government (Wales) Act 1994. The former sought to expand the number of unitary authorities by breaking up several of the counties created in 1974. Hull, Bristol, and Middlesbrough were amongst several cities to gain unitary authority status independent of county control, thereby creating a picture similar to the pre-1974 county borough system. **Each unitary authority became responsible for education and formed an LEA**. Local government in Wales was also restructured into a single-tier system across all authorities. The 1994 Act created 22 unitary authorities to replace the 8 county and 37 district councils. Each authority has its own LEA, which remains responsible for education provision.

Since devolution in 1997 Welsh LEAs have fared better than English counterparts in terms of retaining control over funding mechanisms.⁴⁵

Subsequent New Labour reforms again extended unitary authorities across England in the early-2000s. Following the Children Act 2004 the term LEA became obsolete, although it continues to be used to distinguish local authorities who hold responsibility for education from those which do not. There are currently 152 such authorities in England and 22 in Wales [see appendix].

Structure of Local Government in Scotland

The basic structure of local government in Scotland was not substantially different to that found in England and Wales before 1975; however, it had evolved into a more complicated system due to historic patterns. Until the 20th century, the principal unit of local authority was the Burgh (equivalent of county boroughs). These were single-tier authorities, which originated in the Medieval period as trading communities and took on increasing amounts of municipal responsibility over the ensuing centuries. There were more burghs in Scotland than England and Wales, but they tended to be significantly smaller in size. Two historic types existed until the early 20th century: Royal burghs (urban towns), and Barony/Regality burghs, established by landholders and the church in more rural areas. The Scottish equivalent of the parish was the Kirk session.



The changes brought by the industrial revolution and subsequent expansion of municipal responsibility led to numerous reforms to local government in Scotland and the introduction of more direct forms of local democracy, along a broadly similar pattern to that seen south of the

border. In 1889 elected county councils were established, although numerous ad hoc bodies, set-up over the course of the 19th century, remained in control of many services, such as the post-1872 School Boards. Elected parish councils replaced the Kirk session in 1894. The 1900 Town Councils Act finally required all royal burghs to establish elected councils, headed by a provost (mayor) and bailies (aldermen). Unlike in England and Wales, Scotland did not see the creation of LEAs in 1902. This reflected a combination of opposition from powerful school boards and the complex relationship between education and religion in Scotland. This left a dense and complex network of authorities, which by 1914 consisted of 200 burgh councils, 33 county councils, 869 parish councils, alongside almost 1000 school boards, various police commissions, county road boards, and district committees across Scotland.⁴⁶

Reforms in 1918, 1929, and 1947 rationalized this structure to create a two-tiered system at county level and 4 ‘counties of cities’ (Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee, and Aberdeen), which were single-tier authorities. **County councils and Counties of Cities took control of education provision in their jurisdiction.** Although the term LEA is not used in Scotland, each Local Authority was statutorily mandated to form an Education Committee, which operated along similar lines to those found in England and Wales.⁴⁷ Unlike in England and Wales, Scotland’s transition to non-selective secondary

⁴⁵ Jones, One hundred years of LEAs in Wales, p. 357.

⁴⁶ David Limond, ‘Locality, Education and Authority in Scotland: 1902-2002 (Via 1872)’, *Oxford Review of Education*, 28:2/3 (2002), 359-71, pp. 360-62.

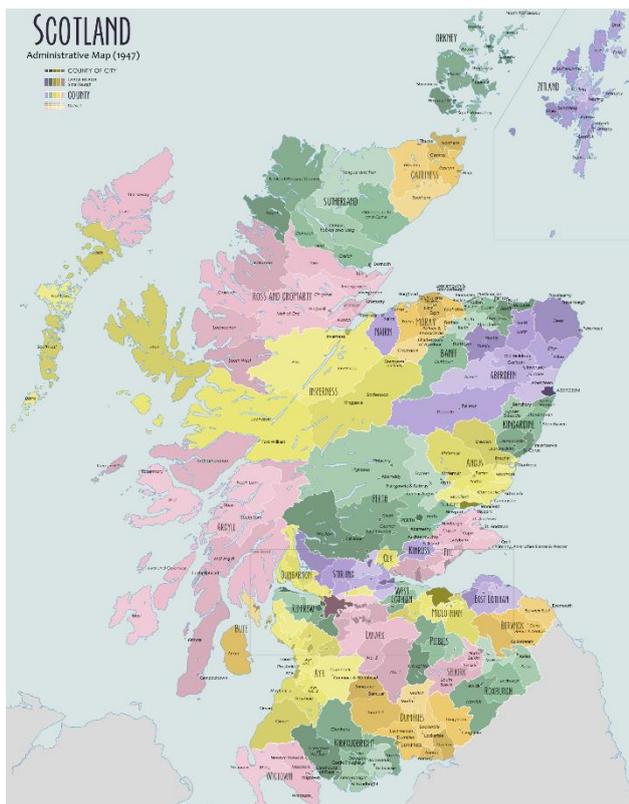
⁴⁷ Local Government (Scotland) Act, 1947, pp. 63-64.

education happened earlier, under greater central control, and with less local divergence [see SESC Scotland briefing paper]. This meant that LEAs did not engage with the same intensity of debate around comprehensivization, although there was significant local opposition to the loss of prestigious Academies (equivalent of grammars) in some towns.⁴⁸

Demands for reform of local government in Scotland grew at the same time and for the same reasons as in England and Wales. A Royal Commission appointed in 1966 (Wheatley Commission) recommended fundamental structural reform, bemoaning a lack of efficiency caused by authorities being too small and unable to generate sufficient resources to run effective services.

The Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 largely followed Wheatley's recommendations for a new two-tier structure, which dispensed with the historic counties and replaced them with regions and districts. The Act created 9 regions each with an elected regional council and 53 districts, with an elected district council. The regions assumed responsibility for transportation, water, sewerage, social work, the police, and **education**. While the districts ran libraries, environmental health, licensing etc. Each regional council formed an education committee, responsible for education provision across its jurisdiction.

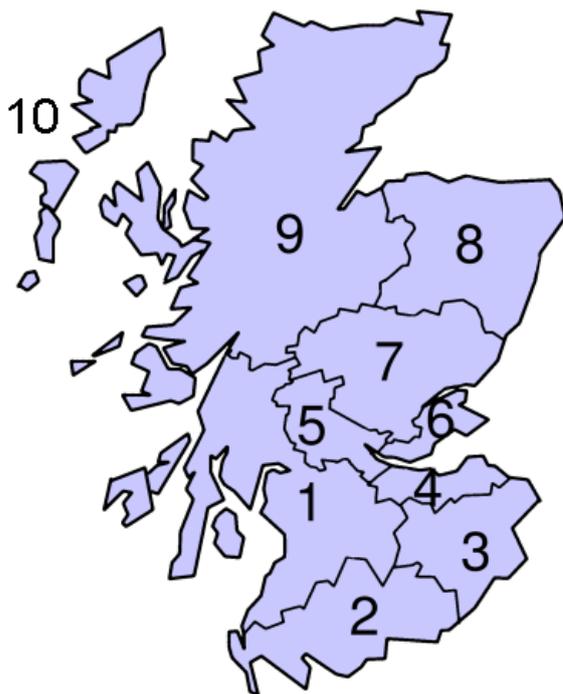
Tensions grew between the Conservative governments of the 1980s and early 1990s and Labour controlled authorities in Scotland (particularly Strathclyde), which contributed to further reforms aimed at limiting local powers.⁴⁹ In contrast to the prevailing pattern of the previous 80 years, where a bricolage of ad hoc bodies gave way to fewer, larger authorities, the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1994 empowered more, smaller authorities. It replaced the two-tier region/district system with 32 unitary authorities, each of which formed an education committee [see appendix for list]. Since devolution the Scottish Parliament has exercised control over education in Scotland. Local authorities remain responsible for delivery in their area and applying nationally agreed guidelines. A national inspectorate is responsible for assessing schools and authorities.



County Councils in Scotland 1970 (shading signifies districts). Plus 4 Cities of Counties (separate LEAs)

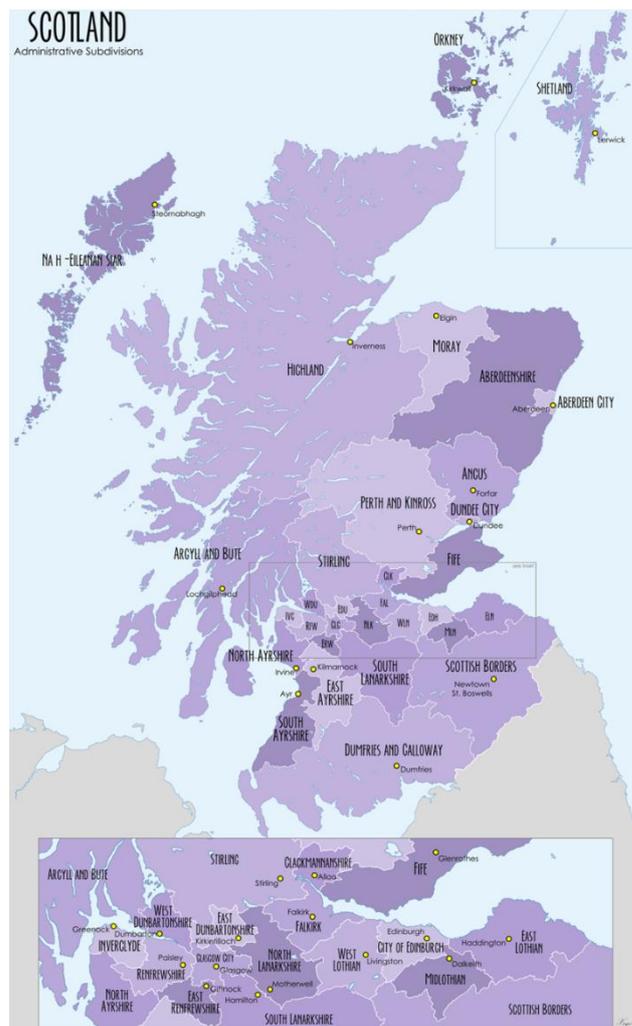
⁴⁸ Limond, *Locality, Education and Authority in Scotland*, pp. 364-65.

⁴⁹ Duncan Graham, *The Education Racket: who cares about the children?* (Glasgow: Neil Wilson Publishing, 1996); Limond, *Locality, Education and Authority in Scotland*, pp. 365-68



Scottish regions 1973-96

1. *Strathclyde (inc. Glasgow)*
2. *Dumfries & Galloway*
3. *Borders*
4. *Edinburgh*
5. *Central*
6. *Fife*
7. *Tayside (inc. Dundee)*
8. *Grampian (inc. Aberdeen)*
9. *Highland*
10. *Western Isles*
11. *Shetlands*
12. *Orkney*



Scottish local authorities post-1996

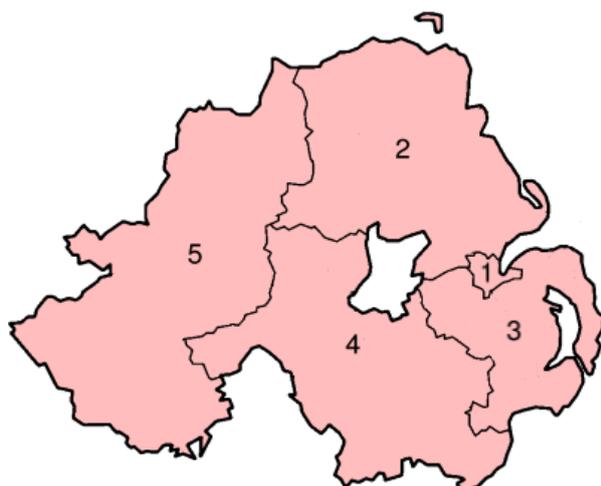
Northern Ireland

In terms of the timeline for reform, local government in Northern Ireland evolved along a similar pattern to the rest of the UK; however, sectarian divisions have always complicated the picture, especially in terms of education provision and administration [see SESC Northern Ireland briefing paper for more detail]. Although a nominally non-denominational National School system had been in place in Ireland since the 1830s, education largely developed through a dual system of religiously segregated schools during the late-19th century. Both Catholic and Protestant schools came under the authority of the respective churches, with the state offering only limited oversight and funding through the Dublin based boards of National and Intermediate Education. The Local Government (Ireland) Act 1898 introduced local government infrastructure similar to that found in England and Wales (and at this point applied to the whole of Ireland). This comprised two-tier county authorities (county councils as the upper tier and district councils as the lower) and several single-tier county boroughs in larger cities (Belfast and Derry in the north). At this stage, Northern Ireland had no apparatus of education administration of its own,

although it did have over 2,000 national elementary schools and 75 intermediate schools, most of which were Protestant run.

Following partition in 1920, Northern Ireland attempted to create a system of education administration in-line with the rest of the UK: a Ministry of Education was created in Belfast and each of the 6 county councils formed an education committee and became a County Education Authority, as did the two county boroughs of Belfast and Derry. The Lynn Committee, established in 1920 to advise on education in Northern Ireland, sought input from both communities; however, the Catholic Church declined to participate, meaning that it had no voice in the subsequent reforms. The Committee's report formed the basis for the Education (Northern Ireland) Act 1923, which sought to build a new network of state education by expanding the National Schools. It recommended non-sectarian schooling Northern Ireland, but this was always viewed with suspicion by the Catholic church and community. Over the following decades, the Protestant churches transferred control of their schools to the state (controlled schools) in return for further privileges on religious education and permanent representation on education committees. Catholic schools, in contrast, remained under the Catholic Church, but with the state paying 50% of capital costs and the salaries of teachers (maintained schools).⁵⁰

The Education (Northern Ireland) Act 1947 stipulated that, like in the rest of the UK, Northern Ireland must provide universal access to secondary education; however, it did not demand that maintained schools become controlled. This meant that while an equivalent to the bipartite system grew-up (with grammars and SMS), based upon transfer at 11 through the 11-plus, Catholic secondary schools remained outside direct local authority control as voluntary maintained schools. These schools had a split governing body, with a 2/3 majority in favour of the Catholic church/community over 1/3 local authority representation.⁵¹ With representation on controlled schools' governing bodies guaranteed to the Protestant church, sectarian division remained entrenched at school level in the secondary system. The Education Act 1968 reaffirmed this arrangement by increasing government funding for voluntary maintained denominational schools. This meant that by the early 1970s, Northern Ireland's LEAs, often dominated by Protestant members, held responsibility only for national schools, which were overwhelmingly attended by Protestant pupils and shaped by a Protestant religious ethos.



Northern Ireland Education & Library Boards, 1972-2014

A major restructuring of local government took place in the early 1970s through the Local Government (Boundaries) Act (Northern Ireland) 1971 and Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 (following the MacCory Report). Both were passed by the Parliament of Northern Ireland and assumed this would continue to function as a legislative body (direct rule from Westminster was imposed in 1972 following the escalation of sectarian violence and education policy was henceforth set by Westminster). The Act replaced Northern Ireland's existing local authorities with 26 single-tier local government districts; however, responsibility for education was transferred to 5 new Education and Library Boards [1. Belfast; 2. North Eastern; 3. South Eastern; 4. Southern; 5. Western], which took over from the

⁵⁰ Sean Farren, 'A lost opportunity: education and community in Northern Ireland 1947-1960', *History of Education*, 21:1 (1992), 71-82, p. 72.

⁵¹ Kirk Simpson & Peter Daly, 'Politics and education in Northern Ireland—an analytical history', *Irish Studies Review*, 12:2 (2004), 163-174, pp. 169-70.

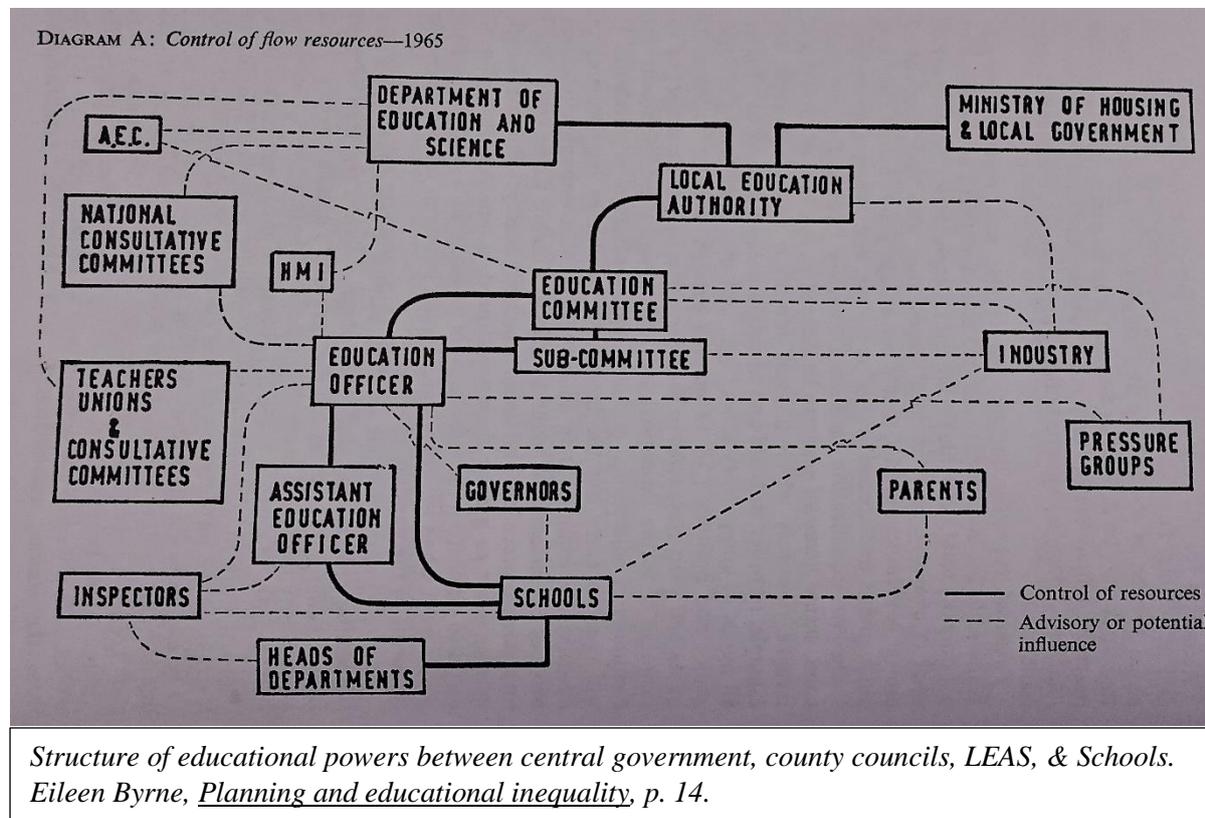
County Education Authorities. These boards were quangos with delegated powers to oversee the allocation of budgets, transport, school meals and resources, and to support on curriculum matters.⁵² Once again, however, these remained divided along religious lines. In 1994 the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment replaced the Northern Ireland Schools Examination and Assessment Council and the Northern Ireland Schools Examination Council. It sets the curriculum and administers examinations for all schools in Northern Ireland and operated independently of the ELBs.

Control over education passed as a devolved power to the reconstituted Northern Ireland Assembly in 1998. Although education has continued to be a communally charged issue, the Northern Ireland Assembly did formally abolish the 11-plus (although selection continues through internal school tests) and in 2014 passed the Education Act (Northern Ireland), which replaced the Education and Library Boards with the Northern Ireland Education Authority. This is a national, non-departmental body responsible for meeting the 'needs of children and young people', including education and youth services. The five ELBs have become sub-regions within the Education Authority. The EA's executive board consists of 20 members: 8 nominees from the political parties; 4 representatives from the controlled schools (Protestant churches); 4 members from Maintained Schools (Catholic Church); 1 member from the integrated schools; 1 member from Irish medium schools; 1 member from voluntary grammar schools; 1 member from controlled grammar schools.

⁵² Samuel J. McGuinness, 'Education Policy in Northern Ireland: a Review', *Italian Journal of Sociology of Education*, 1 (2012), 205-37, p. 208.

LEA Structure

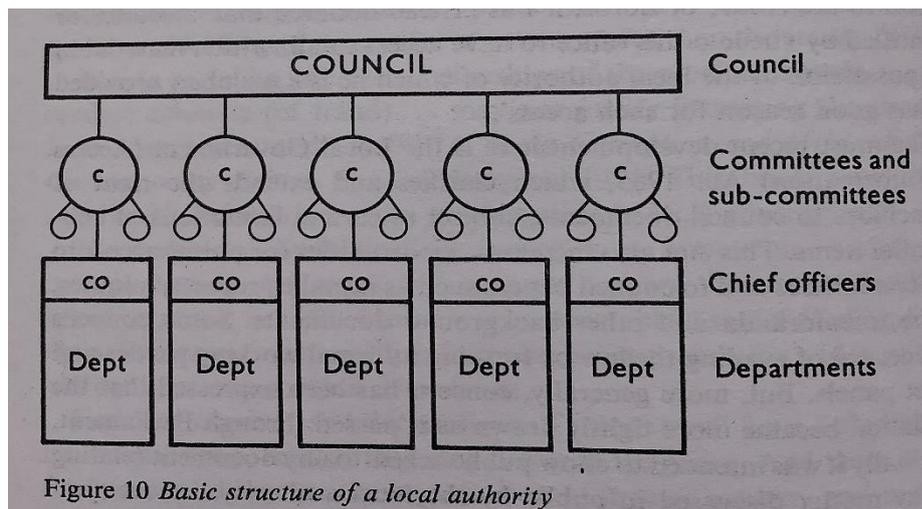
LEA composition and structure varies depending upon local authority, reflecting resources and prevailing ethos. Nonetheless, it is possible to sketch a general model broadly applicable in most instances. In 1979, over 1,000,000 were employed by LEAs across the country (629,312 of whom were teachers).⁵³



All local authorities responsible for the provision of education (be that county, county borough before 1972, or metropolitan district/borough) were statutorily mandated to have an LEA. This comprised a statutory Education Committee, made-up of nominated elected representatives from the council, co-opted members (i.e. Headteachers, teachers, and inspectors, but also representatives from various religious denominations, the NUT, university representatives, and retired/unseated councillors), and the Chief Education Officer/Director of Education [CEO]. The committee would be chaired by a Chairman drawn from the elected councillors, who, along with the CEO, tended to be the dominant influence on the committee. This meant control of the committee switched depending upon which political party controlled the council and party politics could lead to oscillating priorities, particularly around comprehensivization.

Education Committees met at regular intervals to discuss decisions relating to education provision and welfare (i.e. closing or amalgamating of schools), and reports produced by local authority officials employed in the Education Department. The Education Committee could also appoint sub or Joint Consultative committees to advise on policy or consider specific issues, such as comprehensive reorganization, which often included co-opted experts with relevant educational experience and representatives from the local community – such as schools, churches, and business. Many local

⁵³ T. Byrne, *Local government in Britain*, p. 169.



Tony Byrne, *Local government in Britain*, p. 146.

ratification. Councils were forbidden by law from taking decisions about education without first consulting the Education Committee.

The Education Department was headed by the CEO (required by law) and staffed by permanent officials employed as part of the local government service. Like their counterparts in Whitehall, these individuals did not change following an election and were expected to operate as politically neutral (although they were often accused of failing on this). Size of department varied significantly between LEA depending upon budget, historical precedent, and attitude of the CEO and Chairman. In larger departments, it was common to find several Education Officers and perhaps also a Deputy Director, Education Chief Finance Officer and a Development and Building Officer (often styled Assistant Directors), and a Chief Inspector, alongside a large clerical staff. Smaller LEAs may have just had a CEO and clerical staff, but this became increasingly inadequate during the post-war period when LEAs had to oversee all education in their area (primary, secondary, further, and higher) and organize and implement the various restructuring programmes.⁵⁵ Subsequently, many Education Departments underwent significant expansion after 1945 in response to new responsibilities relating to secondary education and school building. For instance, Northumberland grew from 47 in 1943 to 67 in 1950.⁵⁶

The department was responsible for the day-to-day administration of local education, managing the education budget, for organizing transition to school (allocating places, 11+ etc), enacting policy decisions, and, for much of the period between 1945 and 1980, drawing-up plans for structural reorganization. Both the Education Act 1944 and subsequent circulars from the department of Education tended to give LEAs significant leeway to interpret government policy and tailor it to local needs. This was seen most obviously in restructuring but also applied to the delivery of school meals (under 1944 Act LEAs were obliged to provide pupils with meal per day, funded by central government, but no stipulation was made as to whether this would be free or how it would be organized), organizing language teaching for newly arrived migrant pupils, providing support for SEN pupils, and the running of careers services. Officials would carry out research and consultations with teachers, (sometimes) parents, unions, and other interested parties into pressing questions, such as school closures or amalgamation, which would be submitted to the Education Committee as briefing documents. Eileen Byrne's case studies of Nottingham, Lincoln, and Northumberland show the three Education Committees to be dominated by men, a pattern that reflected national trends. It was common for the Chairman of the Education Committee to have an office in the department and be closely involved in

⁵⁴ Gosden, *The education system since 1944*, pp. 121-35.

⁵⁵ E. Byrne, *Planning and educational inequality*, ch. 3, pp. 47-80.

⁵⁶ Byrne, *Planning and educational inequality*, p. 53.

authorities placed associated personal services – such as youth service, careers service, and educational welfare – under or alongside the Education Committee to ensure cooperation and coherence in decision making.⁵⁴ Full committee recommendations were placed before the council for

day-to-day decision making, although this depended on the individual and their relationship with the CEO.

While this general model was common to many LEAs before the 1990s, the dynamics varied significantly from area to area depending upon resources, personalities, local conditions, and, as Eileen Byrne makes clear, generation. A dominant CEO could exercise a decisive influence over the pace and character of reform. The CEO briefed the Education Committee, managed the day-to-day running of the department, oversaw the execution of policy decisions, and frequently played a central role in the formulation and direction of policy. In the decades following the 1944 Act, CEOs including Alec Clegg, John Newsom, Stewart Mason, Eric Briault, Peter Newsam, Lionel Russell, and William Alexander developed national reputations, often advising Whitehall and participating in (or in the case of Newsom heading) government appointed commissions. At the local level, Harold Sylvester's constant prodding, planning, and innovation over a twenty-year period was key to outmanoeuvring opponents to comprehensives in Bristol.⁵⁷ The Association of Education Committees [AEC], under the chairmanship of Alexander from 1944 to its demise in 1977, ensured LEAs a central consultative role in shaping education reform and lobbying for increased funding. Founded in the wake of the 1902 Education Act, the AEC comprised CEOs and sought to give Education Committees a strong collective voice in dealings with central government and municipal associations. After 1944 it comprised representatives from all LEAs in England (bar the LCC), Wales, and Northern Ireland (Scottish LAs had a separate association). It was central in advocating for the acceleration of the schools building programme in the early 1950s and for the introduction of a leaving examination for Secondary Modern pupils, which led to the CSE in 1965. Ultimately, the AEC fell victim to rivalries with, and the politicking of, other municipal associations resentful of the influence and independence enjoyed by Education Committees. The local government reforms of the early 1970s stripped the AEC of its position on the Burnham Committee and increasingly demanded that Education Committees fitted better with new corporatist structures in local government rather than operating independently of these.⁵⁸

Conversely, as Brighouse stresses, a passive CEO or recalcitrant Education Committee Chairman (from either party) could act as a sharp break on innovation and obstacle to structural reform.⁵⁹ Rural LEAs often suffered most from this, with Byrne identifying several figures in Lincoln's LEA in 1940s and 50s who used their entrenched position in local politics to thwart younger colleagues' urging for swifter moves towards comprehensivization. In Lincoln and Northumberland, Byrne did not find political partisanship playing a decisive role in shaping Education Committee decisions before the mid-1960s but reported a more charged atmosphere in Nottingham, where an early experiment with multilateral schools provoked a strong backlash in the 1950s. As debates around comprehensivization intensified, elected councillors appeared increasingly willing to resist Education Officers' recommendations (either in defence of or opposition to grammar schools) but as Kerckhoff *et al* reveal these did not fracture neatly along a Labour/Conservative binary. For example, Conservative Education Committee Chairs Dr Kathleen Ollershaw in Manchester and Patrick Crotty in Leeds were pivotal in cementing the shift to comprehensive education in their respective cities and in so doing overcame entrenched opposition from some Labour counterparts and members of the education department. In this respect, the ability of an LEA to initiate meaningful change inside schools or pursue structural reform depended to a large extent on the personalities involved, as Byrne writes: 'Administration can be constructive, a means of

⁵⁷ Kerckhoff et al, *Going comprehensive*, p. 104.

⁵⁸ Peter Gosden, 'The Association of Education Committees: a retrospect', *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 32:1 (2000), 38-50; papers of AEC held at University of Leeds: <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/c/F116362>

⁵⁹ Brighouse, *The View of a Participant During the Second Half-a Perspective on LEAs since 1952*, p. 188.

helping ideas to become concrete reality; or it can become a machine merely for continuing the status-quo.⁶⁰

Funding & Finance

Until the 1980s, LEAs' control over school spending and finances ensured a dominant position within local education provision. The transfer of these powers to individual schools in the period since 1988 has been a key factor in LEAs' declining power and influence; Patrick Ainley has observed that changes in funding structures have led to 'replacing the former devolved national system of education locally administered by a national system nationally administered'.⁶¹

Local authorities derive their revenue from three principal sources: central government grants, rents and fees, and locally raised rates (council tax after 1992). Revenues are not constant between authorities, varying depending upon population, economic prosperity, and political will. Central government funding comes in two forms, unallocated block grants (which councils divide between all services as they see fit) and specified grants (which must be spent on a specific service). From 1945 to 1985, the proportion of GNP dedicated to Local Government funding grew from around 9% to 12.5%.

From 1945 to 1958 much of the central funding for education (and local services more broadly) came in the form of specified Percentage Grants, whereby the government paid a set percentage of the costs for a specified service (by the mid-1950s this covered around 60% of LEA expenditure).⁶² In addition to the Percentage Grant, from 1948 central government paid local authorities whose income from rates and rents fell below the national average a block grant called the Exchequer Equalization Grant. This was intended to cover any shortfall in revenue with local authorities expected to meet the rising cost of welfare services for a growing population after 1945. For much the period, education formed the largest outlay. Byrne identifies increases of between 361% and 507% in the overall expenditure of Lincoln,

Nottingham, and Northumberland between 1947 and 1965. Much of this increase was accounted for by the expansion of secondary education, with Nottingham spending 1,257% more in 1965 than twenty years earlier (Lincoln with the lowest increase out of the three was still spending 489% more). With spending growing so quickly, complaints started to circulate that central government bore an unfair burden of local costs or that steep rate rises had been applied unfairly and unevenly across the country. Many more-frugal authorities, which received a smaller proportion of their

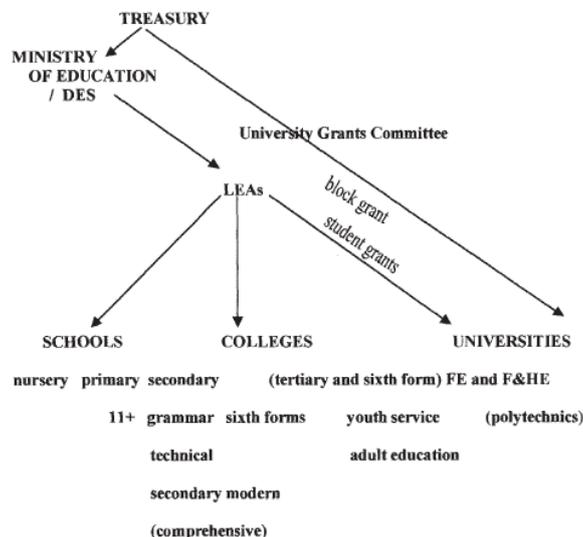


Figure 1. Barebones of the 1944 settlement under the Ministry of Education/ DES of 'a national system locally administered' through LEAs.

Patrick Ainley, The New Leviathan in education and training, p. 459.

⁶⁰ E. Byrne, *Planning educational inequality*, p. 49

⁶¹ Patrick Ainley, 'From a National System Locally Administered to a national system nationally administered: the new leviathan in education and training in England', *Journal of Social Policy*, 30:3 (2001), 457-76, p. 458.

⁶² Gosden, *Education system since 1944*, p. 193.

revenue from central government, felt unfairly discriminated against, arguing the system favoured those authorities that deliberately spent beyond their means without raising rates. In the drive for greater efficiency Percentage Grants were abolished in 1958 and a higher proportion of funds given through non-specified block grants and a new Rate Deficiency Grant to support councils with lower rate incomes.⁶³ Specified grants continued to be given for services such as school meals. This did not, however, automatically lead to greater government control over local authority spending. Councils now had greater freedom to deploy funds as they saw fit and could impose tough limits on LEA spending or even use central government funding intended for education for other purposes. Up until the 1970s any efforts to address this situation met with fierce resistance from the municipal associations. Further reform came in 1966 when these various grants were brought together into a single Rate Support Grant, which included education funding (specified grants continued for the police, supplementary grants were given for transport services, along with housing subsidies).⁶⁴

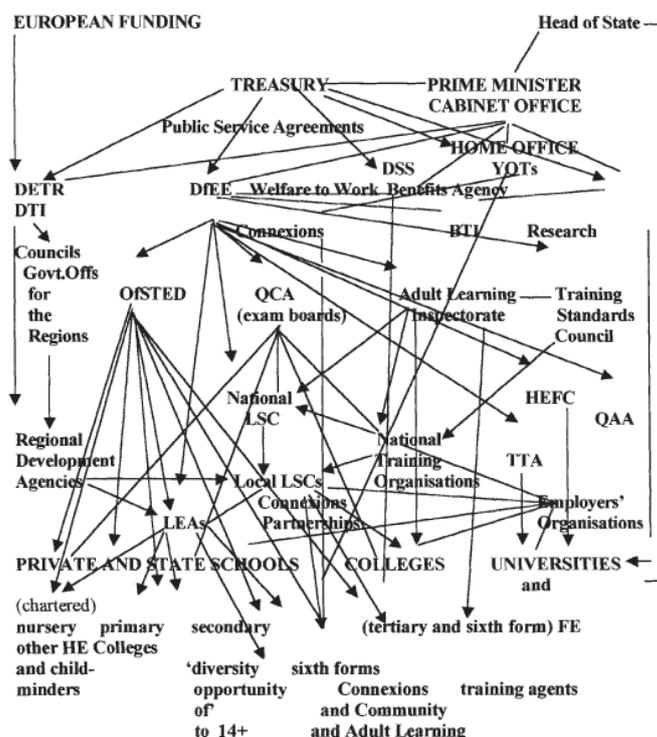


Figure 5. The new administration of education and training by the DFEE and other related Departments and Agencies (as of end 2000).

Patrick Ainley, The New Leviathan in education and training, p. 471.

85% of education funding now came from Westminster.⁶⁵ In 1983, this accounted for the largest proportion of local government revenue funding (36% = £14,586 million) and around 8% of capital funding (£573 million).⁶⁶ It was against this backdrop that the Local Management of Schools initiative was introduced in 1988 to reduce LEA control over school funding. LEAs were now increasingly instructed to delegate funds to schools. Throughout the 1980s and 90s successive governments also

The hugely increased cost of education and welfare services meant that local government spending increased throughout the post-1945 period and with central government reluctant to sanction high rate rises, so reliance on central government grants increased. In the mid-1950s government grants accounted for around 30% of council revenue but this rose to over 50% in the mid-1970s. Thatcher came to power promising to reduce local authority spending and to gain greater control over how central funds were managed. A new unitary grant offered a mechanism to punish authorities that overspent, while the overall local government budget fell. By the mid-1980s central government grants had dropped to 40% of local government revenue (block grant 30% and specified 10% - compared to 30% from rates, and 27% from rents and fees) but over

⁶³ Gosden, *Education system since 1944*, pp. 194-96.

⁶⁴ For details on local government funding structures see T. Byrne, *Local government in Britain*, ch. 11, pp. 193-226.

⁶⁵ Sharp, *Surviving not thriving*, p. 205.

⁶⁶ Byrne, *Local government in Britain*, p. 195.

created a variety of new quangos responsible for the delivery of funds and services previously administered by LEAs, such as youth training schemes.⁶⁷ Far from simplifying education funding, the new model has introduced a far greater number of ‘contractual players’ with each further eroding LEAs’ authority.

Although budgeting and accounting practices varied from council to council, all worked on the principle of ‘maximum expenditure from minimum income’. Under the pre-1988 system, once local authorities received funds from the government the council was responsible for setting its annual budget for all services and allocating a set proportion to the LEA. Much of the education budget was specified by central government, for example funds for school meals and milk, or designated to fund teachers’ salaries (set by the Burnham Committee, not LEAs). Nonetheless, the Education Committee and CEO were empowered to decide the amount spent on resources in schools, to fund specific projects (such as pilot comprehensive schemes), or ask the council to borrow to fund capital investment. Much of this borrowing came through the Treasury and was paid back over an extended period.

Education services were funded by local authorities through a combination of capital and revenue expenditure.

- Capital expenditure: this refers to spending on assets that will remain of benefit to the local authority for a long period of time, such as school buildings. They tend to be expensive to build and are usually funded through borrowing, which is then repaid over a long period. Before the 1980s, much of this borrowing was underwritten by the government. Schools now increasingly raise funds by borrowing from banks and private investors by borrowing against the value of their assets.
- Revenue expenditure: This accounts for consumable items, such as paper or text books, paid for through current LEA revenues rather than borrowed funds.

Under the bi/tripartite system local authorities, often encouraged by central government, spent around 30% more on grammar school pupils in terms of allocation of revenue expenditure on the assumption that brighter pupils required more resources. And consistently expended significantly more capital resources on grammar schools despite there being 4x as many pupils in Secondary Modern schools.⁶⁸

When central government began to demand LEAs economise from the mid-1970s onwards and reduced their ability to borrow, cuts were felt most keenly in day-to-day revenue and new capital expenditure, as LEAs remained responsible for debts incurred during the period of new school building in the 1950s and 60s. Following further cuts in local government spending under Thatcher’s first government, more and more LEAs initiated retrenchment policies. A new wave of school amalgamation sought to make reduce costs by eliminating smaller schools and extending catchment areas, while many schools across the county complained that they were having to increasingly rely on parental fundraising to purchase essential classroom resources.

⁶⁷ Ainley, *The new Leviathan*, pp. 465-66.

⁶⁸ E. Byrne, *Planning and educational inequality*, pp. 29-36

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Appendix: List of current LEAs in England, Wales, Scotland, & Northern Ireland

[<http://schoolswebdirectory.co.uk/maps.php>]

London

- [Barking and Dagenham London Borough Council](#)
- [Barnet London Borough Council](#)
- [Bexley London Borough Council](#)
- [Brent London Borough Council](#)
- [Bromley London Borough Council](#)
- [Camden London Borough Council](#)
- [City of London Corporation](#)
- [Croydon London Borough Council](#)
- [Ealing London Borough Council](#)
- [Enfield London Borough Council](#)
- [Greenwich London Borough Council](#)
- [Hackney London Borough Council](#)
- [Hammersmith and Fulham London Borough Council](#)
- [Haringey London Borough Council](#)
- [Harrow London Borough Council](#)
- [Havering London Borough Council](#)
- [Hillingdon London Borough Council](#)
- [Hounslow London Borough Council](#)
- [Islington London Borough Council](#)
- [Kensington and Chelsea London Borough Council](#)
- [Kingston upon Thames London Borough Council](#)
- [Lambeth London Borough Council](#)
- [Lewisham London Borough Council](#)
- [Merton London Borough Council](#)
- [Newham London Borough Council](#)
- [Redbridge London Borough Council](#)
- [Richmond upon Thames London Borough Council](#)
- [Southwark London Borough Council](#)
- [Sutton London Borough Council](#)
- [Tower Hamlets London Borough Council](#)
- [Waltham Forest London Borough Council](#)
- [Wandsworth London Borough Council](#)
- [Westminster City Council](#)

South West

- [Bath and North East Somerset Council](#)
- [Bournemouth Borough Council](#)
- [Bristol City Council](#)
- [Cornwall Council](#)
- [Devon County Council](#)
- [Dorset County Council](#)
- [Gloucestershire County Council](#)

- [Council of the Isles of Scilly](#)
- [North Somerset Council](#)
- [Plymouth City Council](#)
- [Poole Borough Council](#)
- [Somerset County Council](#)
- [South Gloucestershire Council](#)
- [Swindon Borough Council](#)
- [Torbay Council](#)
- [Wiltshire Council](#)

South East

- [Bracknell Forest Borough Council](#)
- [Brighton and Hove City Council](#)
- [Buckinghamshire County Council](#)
- [East Sussex County Council](#)
- [Hampshire County Council](#)
- [Isle of Wight Council](#)
- [Kent County Council](#)
- [Medway Council](#)
- [Milton Keynes Borough Council](#)
- [Oxfordshire County Council](#)
- [Portsmouth City Council](#)
- [Reading Borough Council](#)
- [Slough Borough Council](#)
- [Southampton City Council](#)
- [Surrey County Council](#)
- [West Berkshire District Council](#)
- [West Sussex County Council](#)
- [Windsor and Maidenhead Borough Council](#)
- [Wokingham Borough Council](#)

East

- [Bedford Borough Council](#)
- [Cambridgeshire County Council](#)
- [Central Bedfordshire Council](#)
- [Essex County Council](#)
- [Hertfordshire County Council](#)
- [Luton Borough Council](#)
- [Norfolk County Council](#)
- [Peterborough City Council](#)
- [Southend-on-Sea Borough Council](#)
- [Suffolk County Council](#)
- [Thurrock Borough Council](#)

West Midlands

- [Birmingham City Council](#)
- [Coventry City Council](#)
- [Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council](#)
- [County of Herefordshire District Council](#)
- [Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council](#)
- [Shropshire Council](#)
- [Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council](#)
- [Staffordshire County Council](#)
- [Stoke-on-Trent City Council](#)
- [Telford and Wrekin Borough Council](#)
- [Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council](#)
- [Warwickshire County Council](#)
- [Wolverhampton City Council](#)
- [Worcestershire County Council](#)

East Midlands

- [Derby City Council](#)
- [Derbyshire County Council](#)
- [Leicester City Council](#)
- [Leicestershire County Council](#)
- [Lincolnshire County Council](#)
- [Northamptonshire County Council](#)
- [Nottingham City Council](#)
- [Nottinghamshire County Council](#)
- [Rutland County Council](#)

Yorkshire & Humber

- [Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council](#)
- [City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council](#)
- [Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council](#)
- [Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council](#)
- [East Riding of Yorkshire Council](#)
- [Hull City Council](#)
- [Kirklees Metropolitan Borough Council](#)
- [Leeds City Council](#)
- [North East Lincolnshire Borough Council](#)
- [North Lincolnshire Borough Council](#)
- [North Yorkshire County Council](#)
- [Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council](#)
- [Sheffield City Council](#)
- [Wakefield Metropolitan District Council](#)
- [York City Council](#)

North West

- [Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council](#)
- [Blackpool Borough Council](#)
- [Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council](#)
- [Bury Metropolitan Borough Council](#)
- [Cheshire East Council](#)
- [Cheshire West and Chester Council](#)
- [Cumbria County Council](#)
- [Halton Borough Council](#)
- [Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council](#)
- [Lancashire County Council](#)
- [Liverpool City Council](#)
- [Manchester City Council](#)
- [Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council](#)
- [Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council](#)
- [Salford City Council](#)
- [Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council](#)
- [St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council](#)
- [Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council](#)
- [Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council](#)
- [Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council](#)
- [Warrington Borough Council](#)
- [Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council](#)
- [Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council](#)

North East

- [Darlington Borough Council](#)
- [Durham County Council](#)
- [Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council](#)
- [Hartlepool Borough Council](#)
- [Middlesbrough Borough Council](#)
- [North Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council](#)
- [Northumberland County Council](#)
- [Newcastle upon Tyne City Council](#)
- [Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council](#)
- [South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council](#)
- [Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council](#)
- [Sunderland City Council](#)

Wales

- [Isle of Anglesey County Council](#)
- [Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council](#)
- [Bridgend County Borough Council](#)
- [Caerphilly County Borough Council](#)
- [Cardiff Council](#)
- [Carmarthenshire County Council](#)

- [Ceredigion County Council](#)
- [Conwy County Borough Council](#)
- [Denbighshire County Council](#)
- [Flintshire County Council](#)
- [Gwynedd Council](#)
- [Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council](#)
- [Monmouthshire County Council](#)
- [Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council](#)
- [Newport City Council](#)
- [Pembrokeshire County Council](#)
- [Powys County Council](#)
- [Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council](#)
- [City and County of Swansea council](#)
- [Torfaen County Borough Council](#)

Scotland

- [Aberdeen City Council](#)
- [Aberdeenshire Council](#)
- [Angus Council](#)
- [Argyll and Bute Council](#)
- [Clackmannanshire Council](#)
- [Dumfries and Galloway Council](#)
- [Dundee City Council](#)
- [East Ayrshire Council](#)
- [East Dunbartonshire Council](#)
- [East Lothian Council](#)
- [East Renfrewshire Council](#)
- [Edinburgh City Council](#)
- [Falkirk Council](#)
- [Fife Council](#)
- [Glasgow City Council](#)
- [Highland Council](#)
- [Inverclyde Council](#)
- [Midlothian Council](#)
- [Moray Council](#)
- [North Ayrshire Council](#)
- [North Lanarkshire Council](#)
- [Orkney Islands Council](#)
- [Perth and Kinross Council](#)
- [Renfrewshire Council](#)
- [Scottish Borders Council](#)
- [Shetland Islands Council](#)
- [South Ayrshire Council](#)
- [South Lanarkshire Council](#)
- [Stirling Council](#)
- [West Dunbartonshire Council](#)
- [Western Isles Council \(Comhairle nan Eilean Siar\)](#)
- [West Lothian Council](#)

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Northern Ireland

- [Education Authority](#)