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Social Democracy and Education

The formation of party policy on the question of
comprehensive schooling in England and Austria

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PhD in Social Policy
The University of Edinburgh
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Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in parts, in any previous application for a degree. Except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgement, the work presented is entirely my own.

Anna Pultar

1 May 2018

Abstract

This PhD investigates how the British Labour Party and the Austrian Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) have changed their position on the issue of comprehensive schooling since the 1980s, motivated by a wider interest in how social-democratic parties have interpreted their goals and strategies in education policy after the 'golden age' of social-democratic educational reform in Europe in the 1960s and 1970s.

Throughout the 20th century, the question of whether children should be sorted based on their academic ability into different educational tracks has been one of the most controversial issues in education policy in Western Europe. Since the 1960s and 1970s, when reform movements sought to widen educational opportunities by abolishing academic selection in secondary schooling, comprehensive schooling has remained a reference point in often-passionate political debates over the purpose of education. At their core, debates over comprehensive schooling have focused on the relationship between educational selection, opportunities and standards; however, this policy has also become an umbrella for various reform ambitions and aversions concerning the organisation, content and governance of public schooling. While these controversies tend to be portrayed as a conflict between conservative and progressive perspectives, the positions of political parties on comprehensive schooling have not always been clear-cut. Although officially supporters of comprehensive schooling, social democratic parties often struggled to balance more radical aspirations for educational change with pragmatic strategies to expand educational opportunities within existing educational structures. Changing discursive and electoral contexts since the 1980s have given rise to additional challenges for these parties and their attempts to develop a vision and strategy for education policy.

This research aims to contribute to better understandings of: 1) the different meanings a shared policy aspiration can acquire in different contexts and at different points in time, and 2) how such meanings are constructed, in this case, through the processes in which collective attitudes and policy preferences are formed within political parties. Building on a dialectical conception of political parties, this study understood political parties both as political actors who try to navigate external political arenas as well as internally differentiated coalitions which aim to unite different demands and have over time created shared understandings and collective norms. This research argues that investigating the interplay of parties' engagement with their external

environment and their internal dynamics can provide a more nuanced understanding of what parties want and do in education policy and why. In two in-depth case studies, this research traced processes of policy formation and contestation within the SPÖ and the Labour Party (with a focus on education policy in England) since the 1980s. Drawing on 41 interviews and a wide range of documentary sources, the empirical investigation paid particular attention to the actors involved in these processes, their 'assumptive worlds' and interactions in shaping policy. Based on the case study findings, this study then comparatively analysed on how shared concerns and dilemmas of social-democratic parties in the area of education policy have played out in different political and educational contexts.

The case studies revealed considerable variation in the policy preferences, ideas and processes through which the Labour Party and the Austrian Social Democrats have interpreted and reformulated their positions on comprehensive schooling over time. These findings indicate not only the variety and fluidity of meaning that a shared policy idea can assume across political contexts and over time, but also the interdependence between such meanings and the processes in which collective preferences are formed. Despite their symbolic attachment to comprehensive schooling, both parties displayed a considerable degree of ambivalence in their vision and strategy for educational reform, which sometimes made it difficult to even determine their 'official' policy on comprehensive schooling. As such, this research indicates not only that political parties' policy preferences are shaped by struggles at different 'sites' within the party where policy is created, contested and reinterpreted. The tensions between these different sites and demands also provide important insights into the nature of political parties as complex political organisations which have their own identities and internal lives and whose policies are shaped by both their specific pasts and their ongoing attempts to make sense of themselves in their particular context. The historical and comparative perspective of this research further indicated that the institutional context (particularly political institutions and the 'feedback effects' of previous education policy) exerted considerable influence over actors' perceptions of what is 'possible' and 'desirable' in educational reform in England and Austria. Highlighting the role of institutions, this study at the same time showed that the particular trajectory of the two parties' struggles over comprehensive schooling cannot be understood without recognising the agency of a handful of key individuals, whose personal beliefs and various attempts to mobilise and construct opportunities for (and constraints on) change have left clear marks on the two parties' visions and strategies for educational reform.

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Introduction

This PhD thesis investigates how social-democratic parties have positioned themselves in relation to the issue of comprehensive schooling in Austria and England¹, in particular in the three decades between 1980 and 2010. The research aims to broaden our understanding of the meanings that the issue of comprehensive schooling has assumed in political debates across time and contexts, as well as the processes through which parties have formed their attitudes and preferences regarding education policy. This chapter introduces the aim and rationale of the research and provides an outline of the thesis.

The idea of comprehensive schooling emerged in the early 20th century as a response to the selective nature of traditional European systems of secondary schooling, which sorted children as young as 10 or 11 into different hierarchical educational tracks to prepare them for different occupational pathways (Ringer, 1987). The idea of comprehensive, or non-selective, schooling rested on the belief that selecting children on the basis of their measured academic ability was not only unreliable but also contributed to the reproduction of social inequalities. In the 1960s and 1970s, the demand for comprehensive schooling gained political momentum within wider egalitarian educational and social reform projects. Debates on comprehensive schooling, or a 'common school for all', tended to include not only the demand for abolishing or postponing academic selection but also a range of ambitions for organisational, curricular and pedagogical reforms. Across Europe, these ambitions were accompanied by fierce political debates on the nature of schooling and its contribution to equality and social order. Although political front lines were not always clear-cut, the defence of traditional, selective school systems tended to be mounted from the political Right, while social-democratic parties were key (if at times ambivalent) advocates of non-selective or comprehensive schooling (Schnell, 1993; Wiborg, 2009; McCulloch, 2015).

The reform movements of the 1960s and 1970s resulted in successfully abolishing or postponing academic selection in most countries across Europe. From the 1980s on, however, the

¹ This research focuses on the Labour Party's policy for schools in England. It excludes the party's involvement in education policy in other countries of the United Kingdom (Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland), where education policy is devolved to those countries' administrations.

idea and practice of comprehensive schooling started to face renewed opposition from emerging political discourses and education policy agendas, which emphasised principles such as parental choice, school diversity and competition; questioned post-war understandings of the dominant role and mechanism of the state in public service provision; and thereby also questioned the aim of a 'common school for all' and the principles it rested on (Griffiths, 2014; Gewirtz et al., 1995). A further challenge emerged from changing social attitudes and an increasing heterogeneity of values and educational demands with the potential to weaken popular support for a common educational experience for all (Derouet et al., 2015). Since the 1980s, the nature and social role of the school have re-entered political debates in many countries. While the issue of comprehensive schooling remains a reference point in national education policy debates – even in countries like Austria, which never succeeded in implementing this policy – the boundaries of these debates are blurred and comprehensive schooling frequently served as an umbrella for various policy aims and measures. While this challenges neat categorisations of cross-national policy trajectories it also makes comprehensive schooling a rich site for the study of changing political aspirations as well as controversies about the purpose, nature and organisation of schooling across countries.

This PhD uses the debate about comprehensive schooling as a lens to investigate the formation of attitudes and positions on education policy in social democratic parties. In the 1960s and 1970s, comprehensive schooling had become a centrepiece in educational reform projects of many social democratic parties across Europe, who subsequently were key drivers in abolishing or postponing of academic selection in secondary schooling in most European countries. However, although the aim of comprehensive schooling has come to assume a considerable symbolic dimension for these parties, they often struggled to agree on a clear position on educational reform. While social-democratic parties frequently provided a forum for radical aspirations for educational change, the parties' policy strategies usually focused on more pragmatic and less ambitious attempts to expanding opportunities within existing educational structures. This reflected not only a diversity of ideological strands on the purpose of educational reform within parties but also the parties' electoral considerations and perception of political constraints for education policy-making. These tensions became of particular importance in the period since the early 1980s, when social-democratic parties had to find responses to changing political, discursive and electoral contexts. Much research exists on the resulting transformations in these parties' approaches to social and labour market policy (Bonoli and Powell, 2004; Keman, 2017). However, less is known about their changing positions on education policy in general and

comprehensive schooling in particular, as well as the internal party processes through which they have adapted long-standing policy positions to new conditions.

At the heart of this thesis is how social-democratic parties developed their particular approaches to education policy, focusing on two parties with very different trajectories. Epitomising the wider ideological transformation European social democracy in the 1990s, the British Labour Party also appeared to abandon its traditional commitment to comprehensive schooling, which it had helped to introduce in 1965. During the fundamental overhaul of the party's ideological profile and electoral strategies in the mid-1990s, leading Labour figures criticised comprehensive schooling for its alleged uniformity, lack of choice and failure to achieve educational standards. Although the party remained officially opposed to selection by ability, Labour governments between 1997 and 2010 set out to 'modernise' comprehensive schooling by increasing parental choice, diversity and competition between schools, while marginalising the power of local authorities and the autonomy of teachers. For many observers, this shift constituted an attack on the values the comprehensive schooling project stood for, and the particular practice of comprehensive schooling that had developed in England since the 1960s (Haydn, 2004; Phillips, 2003; Walford, 2001). However, as this thesis will show, the common distinction between 'Old' and 'New Labour' education policy masks the multitude of ideas, motives and struggles that shaped Labour's education policy before and after Tony Blair's election as party leader in 1994.

While the issue of comprehensive schooling has become a key party battlefield over the Labour Party's strategy and identity, the Austrian Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) appears to remain wedded to its traditional commitment to comprehensive schooling. However, having failed to abolish early selection in secondary schooling in the 1970s, the SPÖ's demand for comprehensive schooling has largely disappeared from its agenda during the 1980s and 1990s. It was only rediscovered in the early 2000s when Austria's comparatively unfavourable results in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which had been conducted by the OECD since 1999, triggered a wider debate about the quality of the Austrian education system (Bauer et al., 2005). However, the SPÖ's suffered a renewed failure to introduce comprehensive schooling after 2007. The general failure to introduce comprehensive schooling in Austria has been attributed to the extent of political and social opposition to comprehensive schooling. However, the SPÖ has also been criticised for the gap between its traditional programmatic commitment to comprehensive schooling and its highly pragmatic political strategy and willingness to compromise on this issue (Dermutz, 1983a; Gruber, 2015).

This research has therefore sets out to analyse how these two parties, which share similar ideological roots and social bases, have developed rather different attitudes and preferences regarding comprehensive schooling. It intends to bridge various strands of research literature whose insights have informed the investigation. Firstly, from the history of education and education policy literature (e.g. Glöckel and Achs, 1985; Husén et al., 1992; Pring and Walford, 1997; Benn and Chitty, 1997; Wiborg, 2009), this research has taken the insight that 'comprehensive schooling' has served as an umbrella for wider political debates about the goal, content and organisation of schooling. The issue of comprehensive schooling has therefore extended beyond the question of selection and differentiation and has come to embody very particular meanings in different contexts. These meanings have been shaped by not only educational practice but also wider political debates and struggles over the meanings of equality, fairness and the 'good society' in different political settings. Rather than seeking a parsimonious definition of this policy, this research has chosen to take the fluidity of the debate over comprehensive schooling as a starting point for its empirical analysis. Secondly, while political parties (and individual politicians and intellectuals within them) have been protagonists in educational and ideological debates about the goal and means of educational change, they have also had to navigate real-world political and policy-making arenas that frequently constrained their ability to act on their goals. This research therefore also builds on insights from the various strands of literature on political parties and political institutions (e.g. March and Olsen, 1984; Charlot, 1989; Polletta and Jasper, 2001; Ansell, 2010; Busemeyer, 2015) to gain a better understanding of how parties interpret their policy goals as well as on the opportunities and constraints for political action within the particular contexts in which they find themselves.

This research is guided by the following research questions:

- *How did the British Labour Party (in England) and the Austrian Social Democratic Party position themselves in relation to the issue of comprehensive schooling between 1980 and 2010?*
- *How were attitudes and policies regarding comprehensive schooling formed within the two parties?*

This research therefore aims to uncover (1) the particular meaning of comprehensive schooling in political debates, in different contexts and at different points in time, by (2) investigating the internal debates and processes through which two political parties have formed their policy on this issue, contributing to a more organic understanding of how political parties form their policy preferences.

This study adopted a constructivist-institutionalist perspective (Hay, 2008), paying particular attention to the role of institutions (understood in a broad sense as ranging from formal rules to social norms) and a variety of policy feedback effects that contribute to shaping political processes and actors' policy preferences. Institutions can influence the power balance between political actors and provide certain opportunities and constraints for political action, yet they are here not understood as objective realities but as 'meaningful social constructs' (Parsons, 2010: 81). Thereby, institutions also act as constructs internal to actors, which influence actors' beliefs and interpretations of what constitutes a desirable course of action (Moses and Knutsen, 2012: 148; Schmidt, 2008). Given the contingent and ultimately unpredictable nature of the political process, this research aims to empirically explore the dynamic and open-ended interplay between actors and institutions in the processes of preference formation in the two political parties studied.

The analysis followed a two-staged approach, starting with within-case analysis followed by a comparative analysis. In two in-depth case studies, the shifting meanings of comprehensive schooling and the processes through which policy has been formed and contested within each party were traced over time. These case studies identified the long periods of gradual change as well as the tipping points and critical junctures at which party policy shifted into new avenues. Drawing on 41 personal interviews with actors in and around the two parties, as well as a wide range of document sources and newspaper coverage, the empirical investigation paid particular attention to different groups and individuals; their 'assumptive worlds' (Marshall et al., 1985; McPherson and Raab, 1988); that is, their beliefs, motivations and perceptions of 'desirable' and 'possible' policy avenues at particular points in time; and their interactions in these processes of collective preference formation at different 'sites' in which party policy was created. The aim of the case studies was to uncover situated, context-specific explanations by interpreting actors' motives from the accounts they provided (Flyvbjerg, 2006: 222; Moses and Knutsen, 2012: 222; Parsons, 2010: 93). While conducting the two empirical case studies already contributed to an implicit comparison, a comparison as 'encounter' (Freeman and Mangez, 2013), in which observations from one case acted as prompts to interrogate the other case, in the second step of the analysis, the meanings and processes uncovered in the case studies were then compared more systematically. The aim here was to enable reflection on the more general phenomenon of how social-democratic parties have responded to a changing political and discursive climate since the 1980s, and how shared concerns and dilemmas in education policy have played out differently in particular contexts.

The argument this thesis puts forward aims to bridge insights from the educational and the political science literature. Literature on educational reforms has highlighted the politicised nature of educational debates and the important role of political parties in shaping such debates. However, political parties' motives in their engagement with education policy have rarely been subject to a more systematic study. Literature on political parties and their policy preferences, on the other hand, has only recently started to pay attention to education policy. It has highlighted that the redistributive implications of education policy are rarely clear-cut to provide parties a clear orientation regarding the popular support for reforms within the electorate but depend on the particular educational context (Ansell, 2010). This thesis aims to go further by arguing that political struggles over education policy should not only pay attention to the material (or distributive) conflicts but also the value conflicts educational reforms spark, an issue that has received very little attention in party research. In real-world political debates on education, concerns over the distributive implications of education policy are often intertwined with normative political questions of the 'good society' and how education should contribute to it. Debates over comprehensive schooling within social democratic parties have often resembled a microcosm of social-democratic education policy, wherein past political battles resonated, symbolic attachments were formed and questioned, and future aspirations were channelled. Such debates have revealed considerable ambiguity and fluidity in the goals and means of educational change within social-democratic parties. They have therefore provided a rich field through which to study common goals, as well as dilemmas, for social-democratic parties in education policy.

Such shared ambitions and concerns have evolved very differently across countries. The historical and comparative perspective in this research highlights how educational ideas have developed in different contexts to acquire unique meanings and understandings. These policy meanings are not fixed but subject to shifting interpretations, which, in turn, provide further insight into the processes by which political actors form their preferences. This research therefore argues for a more organic understanding of political parties and their policy preferences. Parties are neither just containers of a political ideology nor coalitions of different interests; neither just transmission belts for societal interests nor vote-maximising electoral machines. While parties can be all of these things, they are also political organisations with their own identities and internal struggles, informed by their particular pasts and ongoing attempts to make sense of themselves. As a heuristic tool, this research used a dualistic understanding of political parties (Charlot, 1989), understanding parties as both actors trying to navigate the external political arena and internally differentiated coalitions with their own 'internal lives'. How a party positions itself on a policy

problem is then shaped by a continuous struggle to respond to various external and internal demands, in particular the interplay of (1) the party's engagement with other political actors and the electorate in its attempt to get elected, participate in government and realise its policy ambitions; and (2) the party's 'internal' dimension: its ideological legacies, shared attitudes, collective identity and internal party lobbies. This research therefore argues that a party's positioning on a particular issue is not a fixed entity but should be understood as a continuing process where at different sites within the party policy is being created, contested and reinterpreted.

Finally, both the case studies and the comparative analysis undertaken for this thesis highlight the importance of political institutions and the general discursive climate in affecting actors' perceptions of what is 'possible' and 'desirable'. In addition, shared norms and practices within the two parties, as well as policy legacies and feedback effects of previous education policy have contributed to creating widely held attachments; group identities and vested interests (within and outside the parties); as well as societal expectation and prevalent interpretations of the 'good school'. However, the complexity and unpredictability of these contexts have provided much room for the agency for actors. Individual actors' beliefs, motivations, strategies of mobilising, and constructions of opportunities and constraint for reform had considerable influence on the direction and nature of change in both parties' policy.

This thesis is structured as follows. Chapter 1 provides the historical context for this study and the first part of the literature review. It starts with an overview of the evolution of debates around comprehensive schooling in Europe, highlighting the reform ambitions and political debates in the 1960s and 1970s, the spread of 'New Right' agendas promoting the introduction of quasi-markets in education from the 1980s, and the diffusion of new ideas about school governance through the activities of international actors since the 1990s. The second part of the chapter provides the educational and political context for comprehensive schooling debates and reforms in England and Austria, and discusses the main gaps and questions arising from the existing literature on the two cases.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature on political parties and education policy and presents the analytical framework for studying policy-formation processes. It begins by reviewing the literature on parties' policy preferences and the political economy of education reforms, which highlights the link between parties' policy preferences and the material interests of the social groups they aim to represent or whose votes they wish to attract, focusing on the redistributive implications of education policy. Second, the chapter reviews the literature on the recent ideological-

programmatic transformations among social-democratic parties, highlighting the change in dominant conceptions of the role of the state in the provision of welfare and governing of public services, and potential implications for the issue of comprehensive schooling. Third, the chapter reviews the literature on party organisation and intra-party policies, highlighting potential tensions between different goals, motivations and factions within parties and the implications such tensions could have in shaping parties' policy preferences. After discussing strengths and weaknesses in this literature, an alternative analytical framework is presented that enables the process of policy formation within parties to be studied as a dialectical process – one that involves an interplay between parties' engagement with their external environment and their internal dynamics. The chapter concludes by discussing the key aspects of each dimension and the theoretical assumptions about the relationship between actors and institutions underlying this approach.

Chapter 3 outlines the research design. It details the methodological decisions guiding the study; provides the rationales for the choice of a case-study design combined with a comparative discussion, and for the selection of the two cases. It presents the strategies employed for data collection; and delineates the sources of evidence used for empirical analysis. The second part of this chapter discusses how the case studies were analysed, the principles informing the comparative discussion, and the methodological challenges involved in studying party attitudes and policy processes across countries.

Chapters 4 and 5 present the findings of the two case studies and highlight the key features of each party's approach to school policy and the specific processes through which these policies came about. The two chapters focus in particular on party-internal dynamics, the motivations and strategies of important factions or groups of actors within the two parties, and how these processes played out within the particular political, socioeconomic and cultural context.

Chapter 4 traces changes in the Labour Party's approach to comprehensive schooling, starting with Labour's time in opposition from 1979 to 1997 during which Conservative governments under Margaret Thatcher fundamentally transformed the policy landscape and discursive climate in relation to education. The chapter documents Labour's struggle to respond to these changes, and Labour's increasing adoption of parts of Conservative rhetoric around educational standards and accountability during the late 1980s. The main focus of the analysis is Labour's programmatic reorientation as 'New Labour' under leader Tony Blair in the mid-1990s, which resulted in the modification of its traditional school policy program as well as considerable

internal party struggles over the goals and means of educational reform. After tracing the key events in the first part of the chapter, the second part assesses the nature of changes to the party's agenda for comprehensive schooling and the interplay between the party's external and internal dimensions, in particular the role of electoral considerations, and wider struggles over the party's project and identity in which comprehensive schooling became entangled.

Chapter 5 then traces the SPÖ's policy on comprehensive schooling in Austria, from its failure to introduce this policy in the 1970s to its most recent attempt (and failure) between 2007 and 2012. It discusses the gap between the SPÖ's continuous programmatic and rhetoric commitment to comprehensive schooling and its highly pragmatic and cautious political strategies. The analysis reveals how comprehensive schooling advocates in and around the party tried to overcome political resistance and mobilise electoral support for comprehensive schooling, in particular by using burgeoning debates around the OECD's PISA studies in the 2000s. Their ultimate failure reveals not only the highly constrained context for educational reforms in but also the party's strong office-seeking orientation of party leaders, their doubts about the extent of public support for comprehensive schooling and a lack of internal party mobilisation on this issue, which nonetheless remains nominally at the core of SPÖ education policy.

Chapter 6 undertakes a comparative discussion of the findings of the two cases. It discusses the common aspirations regarding, and different meanings attributed to, comprehensive schooling in the debates of the two parties and then contrasts the process of policy formation within the parties. It highlights the different meanings that a common aspiration for a 'common school for all' have come to develop for the two parties and how they have changed along different lines over the course of the three decades from the 1980s to the 2010s and how they have been influenced by particular educational traditions and past political struggles. Comparing the party-internal processes in which education policy and attitudes have been formed, a dialectical understanding of political parties uncovers the similarities and differences in the influences on parties' policies. Looking at the internal dimension, the chapter examines how programmatic legacies and educational practice have shaped attitudes and traditional policy commitments, how ideas have become embodied in parties' identities and shared understandings, and how new ideas and understandings of education and the goal of social reform have changed or challenged traditional understandings. However, parties' policy commitments and strategic choices were also shaped by the parties' need to gain popular support and the political constraints involved in policy-making. Looking at the external

dimension, the chapter highlights how the Labour Party and the SPÖ faced different conditions in their quests to gain popular support, to participate in government and to bring about educational change, and which strategies they developed in response to these.

Finally, Chapter 7 concludes the thesis by summarising and reviewing the findings in light of the questions underpinning this research, reflecting on the interplay of actors and institutions in these processes policy formation within political parties and discussing the implications for the literature and.

Chapter 1. Historical and conceptual background:

Comprehensive schooling in the 20th century

Like a few other educational reforms, comprehensive schooling is a political issue that has inspired both aspirations for, and aversions to, social change. In the 1960s and 1970s, a reform movement aimed at creating a 'common school for all' spread across Europe and triggered, in most countries, an end to the previously widespread practice of sorting young children into different school tracks based on their academic ability. This was underpinned by the hope that educating children of all abilities in the same school would break the link between social background and educational opportunity, allowing all learners to develop their educational potential. Postponing educational selection and integrating different secondary school tracks into one comprehensive school track was often accompanied by changes to school-internal differentiation practices, the curriculum and pedagogical approaches. In many countries, these reforms triggered considerable political contestation. For some, comprehensive schooling symbolised the aspiration for a more egalitarian education system and social change, for others it stood for a loss of tradition, educational standards and social order. Since the 1980s, the idea of comprehensive schooling has come under renewed pressure from policy discourses and agendas stressing the need for more choice and diversity in public service provision, which questioned many of the traditional aims behind a 'common school for all'. This research explores these debates through the lens of social-democratic parties, which have been among the key (if often ambivalent) supporters of comprehensive schooling.

This chapter provides the conceptual and historical background for the study, highlighting how educational debates and political struggles have shaped the issue of comprehensive schooling and moved it beyond the narrow question of academic selection and tracking. It will begin by discussing the main issues involved in the debate in the 20th century, before providing an overview of debates and trajectories in England and Austria, highlighting the insights from, and gaps in, the existing literature regarding both cases.

1.1 Comprehensive schooling and aspirations for social change

1.1.1 Reform ambitions and political struggles until the 1970s

The idea of comprehensive schooling emerged in the early 20th century as a critique of the differentiated or tracked nature of secondary school systems, which had developed in Western Europe in the late 19th century and had become consolidated in the middle of the 20th century (Müller et al., 1987). Underpinning these systems was the principle of sorting children early on into different educational pathways to prepare them for different occupational and social roles. Academic tracks, such as grammar schools in England and the *Gymnasium* in Germany and Austria, selected a minority of students based on their academic ability (as measured by intelligence tests or primary school grades) and aimed to prepare them for higher education and the professions through a curriculum dominated by the classics and the humanities. In contrast, the majority of children were educated in lower-tier school tracks, which provided more basic post-elementary education to prepare their pupils for the labour market or further vocational training. These school tracks were generally of lower prestige and provided fewer opportunities for educational and social advancement than selective school tracks (McCulloch, 2008; Baldi, 2012; Wiborg, 2009).

Selective school systems rested on the belief that children's abilities and aptitudes reveal themselves early on in children's lives, that these can be relatively accurately measured and that these different talents can and should be catered for through sorting children into different educational institutions which follow different curricula. This view became increasingly criticised first in the 1920s and 1930s on educational and political grounds, including (but not only) by left-wing parties and educators (Barker, 1972; Glöckel and Achs, 1985; Husén et al., 1992: 47). Demands to abolish selection gained political momentum in the 1950s and 1960s within a broader reform agenda of educational expansion and widening opportunities across Europe (Kerckhoff, 1996: 1). The reliability of measuring children's ability at an early age was cast into doubt by the social composition of the student population in selective school systems. Although academic selection was nominally based on children's innate ability and intelligence, children with more advantaged family backgrounds dominated grammar schools and *Gymnasiums*, while working-class children were overrepresented in lower-tier school tracks (Kerckhoff, 1996). The argument of a social bias in testing and sorting was furthered by research in child development, which questioned the extent of children's innate and fixed abilities and the usefulness of classifying them into 'academic'

or 'practical' types of mind (for a discussion of this research, see e.g. Benn and Chitty, 1997: 8). Since the 1950s, mounting research evidence indicated that the younger children are when they are sorted into different educational routes, the stronger the influence of their social background on their educational pathways (see, for example, Horn, 2009). These insights informed 'a new faith in human educability' (Simon, 1997: 26), which rejected the idea that intelligence was innate and fixed and instead argued that all children possess the capacity to learn and benefit from higher education. The principal justification for many advocates of comprehensive schooling was therefore to allow the full development of a child's personality and diverse talents irrespective of a child's family background and context of upbringing (Benn and Simon, 1970; Husén et al., 1992).

However, reform ambitions for comprehensive schooling generally combined educational arguments with political aims. A key tenet in much left-wing thinking in the early decades of the 20th century had been the aim to break the 'bourgeois' monopoly over education and to provide everyone – including groups previously marginalised in educational provision, such as working-class children or girls – with access to the 'knowledge of mankind' and thereby contribute to individual and collective emancipation (Glöckel and Achs, 1985). Selective practices were seen as reproducing social class divisions and comprehensive schooling was therefore hoped to not only equalise educational opportunities for all children but also tear down class barriers in education and society in a wider sense. The mixing of children of all backgrounds in schools was also hoped to contribute to the development of democratic social values, social harmony, solidarity, and a common culture and national identity. Finally, particularly since the 1960s, economic arguments for postponing selection have become influential, which focused on the need to unearth and use *all* talent in society, regardless of social background, for reasons of human capital development and national economic efficiency (for a discussion of different ambitions in these debates see e.g. Levin, 1978; Glöckel and Achs, 1985; Husén et al., 1992; Kerckhoff, 1996; Benn and Chitty, 1997; Paterson, 1997; Walford and Pring, 1997; Paterson, 2003a; Phillips, 2003; Oftedal Telhaug et al., 2006: 252; Baldi, 2012; Blossing et al., 2014a; Triventi et al., 2016: 5).

However, under the banner of a 'common school for all', a variety of policy measures have been advocated, with different emphasis across national contexts and actors. At the core of comprehensive schooling ambitions has been to reduce the degree of *external differentiation* in schooling by postponing educational selection and integrating different school tracks into a unified comprehensive schooling where children of all backgrounds and abilities were educated together and decisions over educational pathways were postponed until later on in the

educational trajectory (Triventi et al., 2016: 5). Linked to such demands for reducing differentiation between schools was the question of *internal differentiation*, or the practices through which children were sorted by ability within schools. While comprehensive schooling supporters generally opposed the parallel existence of academic and non-academic school tracks under the same roof (*streaming*), opinions have varied regarding whether children ought to be differentiated by their ability in particular subjects (*setting* and *grouping*) or to be taught in heterogeneous groups (*mixed-ability teaching*). Another frequent debate arose over the question of what content (*curriculum*) these 'common schools for all' should teach. The differentiated nature of traditional school systems had rested on the idea of providing a different kind of education to different 'kinds' of minds; school tracks were therefore generally divided along an academic/vocational binary. Some proponents of comprehensive schools instead advocated a 'common curriculum' to meaningfully educate all learners (Lawton, 1980; Simon, 1997). However, supporters of comprehensive schooling were often torn between the goal of expanding working-class children's access to existing cultural traditions and forms of knowledge or the need for novel approaches to the curriculum (Glöckel and Achs, 1985; Paterson, 2015). Apart from organisational and curricular questions, left-wing educators' ambitions for comprehensive schooling were often informed by demands for more progressive and child-centred teaching methods, as well as ambitions to create a more democratic and collegial ethos in schools, which was hoped to overcome an often authoritarian school climate and 'humanize' pupil-teacher relations (Glöckel and Achs, 1985; Oftedal Telhaug et al., 2006: 254; Simon, 1997: 26). Despite or because of the nature of comprehensive schooling as an umbrella for various aspirations for educational change, it allowed varying reform coalitions across European countries in the 1960s, often made up of teachers' circles, left-wing but also often liberal or even conservative political groups, and also enjoyed the support by international actors engaged in education policy, such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), despite their often heterogeneous views on particular policy measures included in comprehensive schooling.

What contributed to making comprehensive schooling in many national contexts, particularly in England and Austria, one of the most controversial issues in education policy in the 20th century (Phillips, 2003; Schnell, 1993; Engelbrecht, 2014), were however not just these particular measures as such. Debates about educational selection and the opportunities of different social groups often became a focal point at which more fundamental values and beliefs about the purpose of education and its links with social stratification and social order, crystallised and collided. The nature of these political debates, the relative strength of the supporters and

opponents, and the cultural, political and educational settings in which these struggles played out lastingly shaped the nature and extent of comprehensive schooling reforms in the 1960s and 1970s (for an overview of national reform trajectories, see e.g. Heidenheimer, 1974; Leschinsky and Mayer, 1999; Ertl and Phillips, 2000; Phillips, 2003; Herrlitz et al., 2003; Clarke, 2010; Blossing et al., 2014b; Sass, 2015; Henkens, 2004; Kerckhoff, 1996; Greveling et al., 2015; Baldi, 2012). Despite the European-wide trend towards a more comprehensive system of secondary schooling in the second half of the 20th century, no single model of such schooling emerged. A rather encompassing vision of comprehensive schooling became realised in Scandinavian countries which resulted not only in abolishing selection in secondary schooling, but also in integrating both primary and secondary schooling into an 'all-through unselective, public school system with mixed-ability classes covering the entire compulsory school age' (Wiborg, 2009: 4). In many other European countries, the introduction of comprehensive schooling resulted in abolishing or postponed selection until 14, 16 or even 18 accompanied by more- or less-encompassing internal school reforms. In a few countries, such as Austria and Germany, comprehensive schooling has failed to be introduced and differentiated or tracked systems of secondary schooling have survived to this day.

Across Europe, social-democratic parties were, not the only but frequently, key political drivers of comprehensive schooling. However, both their ambitions for school reform and the practical strategies they have employed to achieve these ambitions were also frequently ambivalent. This ambivalence often reflected a more general dilemma for progressive education reform between 'equality' and 'meritocracy' (Husén, 1986: 103; see also: Barker, 1972: 43; Halpin, 1997). The aim of expanding educational opportunities, particularly for working-class children, raised the fundamental question of whether this should be achieved by opening up access to the most prestigious (and generally selective) educational institutions by making sorting criteria 'fairer', and these institutions thereby more democratic (whilst also reproducing hierarchies between educational pathways and curricula), or whether to aim for a more radical transformation of educational systems which would overcome educational selection and hierarchies. In other words, social democratic educational reform ambitions faced what Paterson calls the 'conundrum of all mass systems of education' (2003a: 5); that is:

how to reconcile democracy with the necessity of selection, both selection of culture in the maintenance of excellence, and selection of people, allocating individuals to differentiated occupations while also preparing them for life as equal citizens in the common culture of the community. (Ibid.)

Social-democratic parties often provided a forum for advocates for more radical egalitarian or progressive reforms regarding the structure of schooling, the curriculum and pedagogy, whose debates often left an imprint on these parties' programmatic orientation. However, the degree of support for more radical measures to create a 'common school for all' has also varied among social-democratic parties whose strategic choices in education reform processes have often reflected more cautious or pragmatic approaches to educational change (Heidenheimer, 1974; Lawton, 2005; Wiborg, 2009).

However, despite this fundamental ambiguity in social democratic parties' position on educational change, by the 1980s the principle of comprehensive schooling had become a centrepiece within the educational programmes of social-democratic parties in Europe, and often figured as a key ideological marker differentiating Social Democratic parties' education policy from Conservative and Christian Democratic parties' policies. Yet, in the 1980s, this principle started to become challenged again.

1.1.2 Changing education reform agendas since the 1980s

In the late 1970s, the general optimism about the potential of educational and social reform to change structural inequalities in capitalist societies started to become questioned. On the political Left, doubts grew over the potential of gradual reform for educational and social change within capitalist systems (Levin, 1978; Husén, 1986). Even more consequential for contemporary educational debates was a new line of critique of comprehensive schooling from the political Right, which emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This new right-wing critique, which drew on the arguments of Friedrich A. Hayek (Hayek, 1944/1994) and Milton Friedman (Friedman, 1962/2002), was embedded in a wider ideological critique of Keynesian economic policy and post-war welfare-state provision and attacked the dominant role of the state on both epistemic and normative grounds. The belief in the state's capacity to efficiently coordinate and provide welfare and public services was questioned while the market, as the aggregation of individual choices, was propagated as a superior mechanism to efficiently meet demands. The role of the state and its bureaucracy in welfare provision was also criticised from a normative standpoint as it was believed to be fundamentally restricting individual freedoms. In this context, the authority and assumed benevolence of governing elites and bureaucratic experts to make decisions on behalf of society, which had underpinned the vision of societal progress and

efficiency creating the post-war welfare state, was criticised as being not only inefficient but also constraining the fundamental individual right to choose how to live one's life (Griffiths, 2014: 124).

This ideological strand became particularly influential in the educational thinking of the Conservative governments in England in the 1980s (Knight, 1990; Lawton, 1992). Here, a radical critique of the goals and governance of post-war welfare states and educational provision combined with the traditional Conservative scepticism over educational expansion and progressive teaching methods. Comprehensive schools were criticised as part of a uniform, inefficient and paternalistic bureaucratic system of public services that denied choice to parents, prevented innovation and reduced standards (Cox and Dyson, 1969a; 1969b). The aim for introducing 'quasi-markets' in education (Glennister, 1991) was accompanied by a discursive attack on comprehensive schooling and progressive pedagogy, which was blamed for a decline in educational standards, knowledge and traditional values (Lawton, 1992). Gaining currency among Conservative circles in the 1980s and early 1990s, market mechanisms such as parental choice and incentives for competition between schools have since been introduced in the provision and governance of public education across Europe (Whitty and Power, 2000).

Although this new critique has been particularly influential on the Right, social-democratic parties have since endorsed to some degree tenets of this thinking (Gingrich, 2011; Chitty, 2013; Volckmar and Wiborg, 2014; Hicks, 2015). As discussed later in the thesis, aside from the efficiency argument, it was in particular the normative argument about the market enabling freedom which gained considerable influence over, for example, the Labour Party's thinking (Griffiths, 2014). As Chapter 4 will show, in the mid-1990s, Labour politicians started to argue that vested interests in local authorities and an organised public sector workforce had made public service provision not only inefficient but also oppressive, particularly for the most disadvantaged groups (Le Grand, 1997).

Not everywhere in Europe has the introduction of market mechanisms in education and the outright political attack of the comprehensive schooling project been as explicit as in England. However, since the 1990s and (in particular) the 2000s, less ideologically-charged and more technically-framed versions of similar arguments, often called New Public Management, have become endorsed by many supra- and international actors such as the OECD and have increasingly informed national reform agendas and education policy (Hall et al., 2015). This changing approach to governing public services tends to include a shift in emphasis from 'input' to 'output' control; the setting of standardised performance indicators and targets (examination, testing, inspection data and league tables); the shift of responsibilities to the lower level (e.g.

school autonomy over budgets and staffing); a tighter management of professionals (e.g. performance reviews and other accountability processes); and stimulating greater competition within the public sector (e.g. through funding mechanisms where resources follow pupils/parental choice) (Gunter and Fitzgerald, 2013). In general, New Public Management-informed agendas for school governance do not tend to involve a particular support for academic selection *as such*; the OECD, for example, has remained a key supporter of postponing educational selection (OECD, 2011). Similarly, not all measures to improve the accountability of schools or create more minimum standards in the curriculum are fundamentally opposed to the traditional concern of comprehensive schooling for securing equal entitlements for children across schools. However, many observers have highlighted the potential challenge of these new agendas to public service provision to the ideals that had underpinned comprehensive schooling aspirations in the past (Gewirtz et al., 1995). Many highlight a shift in prevalent conceptions of education, for example from education as a public good and a human right to conceptions of education as a private and an investment good; from prioritising social equality to prioritising social inclusion; from solidaristic understandings of equality of opportunity as a collective responsibility towards more competitive understandings of individual opportunity and responsibility (Husén et al., 1992: 53–4; Ozga and Lingard, 2006: 70; Wiborg, 2009: 1; Derouet et al., 2015: 195). In addition, to potentially posing a threat to the more fundamental ‘comprehensive values’ in general (Gewirtz et al., 1995), recent shifts in school governance approaches have also challenged particular manifestations of comprehensive schooling in different national contexts. Several observers have highlighted how historically evolved interpretations of educational goals, pedagogical practices and relationships between different actors involved in public schooling provision have become questioned or transformed since the 1990s (Antikainen, 2006; Oftedal Telhaug et al., 2006; Aasen, 2007; Imsen et al., 2016).

However, national educational debates have differed in their exposure to new reform agendas and the ways in which international discourses have interacted with local contexts and meanings (Ozga and Lingard, 2006; Hall et al., 2015). And while contemporary challenges to comprehensive schooling policy are unlikely to result in an outright reintroduction of selection by academic ability and differentiated systems, changes, as Derouet et al. (2015: 197) likely manifest themselves ‘through slippages, shifts of meaning’ and a ‘degree of blurring’ in the concept of comprehensive schooling and the goals it has come to stand for.

This research aims to uncover shifts in the meaning of comprehensive schooling by focusing on two national education debates and, in particular, by focusing on the attitudes to school policy

within social-democratic parties which have traditionally been associated with demands for comprehensive schooling. The following sections provide the historical and political context for debates and trajectories of comprehensive schooling in England and Austria and discuss the insights and gaps in the literature, which will be addressed in the empirical research undertaken in this study (presented particularly in Chapter 4 and 5). Diagrams depicting the structure of the English and Austrian education (as of 2015) can be found in Appendix A and B.

1.2 The evolution of comprehensive schooling policy in England

1.2.1 Towards comprehensive schooling

Compared to other European parties on the Left, which started to endorse comprehensive schooling in the early decades of the 20th century, the Labour Party only officially endorsed comprehensive schooling in 1951. Before that, several streams of thinking existed in the Labour Party in parallel (for an overview, see Barker, 1972). Support for comprehensive or 'multilateral' schools had grown in the 1920s and 1930s especially among the National Union of Labour Teachers and some local authorities (Kerckhoff, 1996: 16; Simon, 1992: 357). However, other influential voices, for example Sidney Webb (the founder of the Fabian Society) supported educational selection as a means to uncover talent among the working class and believed that through grammar school scholarships, the selective system was a key contribution to social mobility and economic efficiency (Lawton, 2005: 11). The closest Labour came to a shared view of secondary education in the first part of the 20th century was RH Tawney's report, *Secondary Education for All* (Tawney, 1922), which called for the introduction of a universal system of secondary education, which however did not necessarily imply the same kind of (comprehensive) school for all (for a discussion of Tawney's views on this matter see Ku, 2016).

In 1944, later than in most Western European countries, universal and public system of secondary education free of charge was created in England. Emerging from the Education Act ('Butler Act') was a differentiated – or tripartite – system of grammar school, secondary-modern school and technical school tracks, which was modelled on prevalent conceptions of the existence of three 'types of minds' among children (McCulloch, 2006). Admission to the academic grammar schools was based on passing an intelligence test, the so-called '11-plus' examination. Labour's post-war education ministers, Ellen Wilkinson (1945–47) and George Tomlinson (1947–51),

supported this universal-but-differentiated system of secondary schooling. Their views seem to have reflected broader attitudes within the party and its constituencies, where selection based on 'scientific' measures of children's academic ability was perceived as fairer and more efficient than traditional forms of educational selection largely by means of parental wealth. Many observers have since highlighted how grammar schools have during this period gained powerful, and lasting, image as a 'ladder of opportunity' for the bright working-class child (Barker, 1972; Kerckhoff, 1996: 18; Francis, 2006).

However, attitudes towards selection in the Labour Party and the wider public soon started to shift and grassroots support to abolish the 11-plus grew among teachers, local policymakers and parents in the 1950s (Kerckhoff, 1996: 18). Empirical research not only started to cast doubt on the reliability of detecting academic ability in young children but also indicated a social bias in selection procedures which tended to discriminate against working-class children (for a discussion, see Simon, 1997: 22–4; Heath, 1999). Discontent over selection also grew among the middle classes, whose aspirations for a place in a grammar school were often challenged when their children failed the 11-plus and in general by the existing caps on grammar school places (Kerckhoff, 1996: 260). At the same time, first experiments with multilateral schools in some local authorities provided the first experiences of how to organise comprehensive forms of schooling. In 1951, strongly driven by teacher groups, the Labour Party officially adopted the demand for comprehensive schooling (The Labour Party, 1951).

When the Labour Party was elected into government in 1964, its education minister Anthony Crosland requested local authorities to submit plans for reorganising secondary schooling along comprehensive lines (Circular 10/65) (DES, 1965). This Circular did not prescribe any national framework for comprehensive schooling, such as a common organisational model (with specified age groups), or any guidelines for a common curriculum or examination system. This 'hands-off' approach appeared to have reflected a widespread consensus across the political spectrum on the school governance model which had been established in the 1944 Education Act. In this 'national system, locally administered' the governance of public education rested on a 'partnership' between the Ministry of Education, local education authorities (LEAs) (which were responsible for maintaining schools, regulating school admissions, hiring staff, etc.) and teachers (who enjoyed a high degree of autonomy in the day-to-day delivery of education and, in particular, over the curriculum) (McCulloch, 2015: 244). Although many LEAs subsequently introduced 'all-through' comprehensive schools from ages 11 to 18, a variety of other more-or-less comprehensive schools types emerged, which varied in terms of 'age-range, size, intake,

character and coexistence with other kinds of schools' (Halpin, 1989: 342). The freedom of schools and teachers in shaping the curriculum and the internal practices of differentiation allowed much experimentation with new curricular and pedagogical approaches. Nevertheless, the distinction between schools and their curricular and differentiation practices, reflecting their previous status as grammars or secondary moderns, also survived the introduction of comprehensive schooling (Kerckhoff, 1996: 163; Gray, 1999). Although there were some debates over creating a common 'entitlement curriculum' within the Labour Party in the 1970s, no concrete initiatives followed (Lawton, 1993: 112).

The 1970s were marked by the alteration of government power between the Conservative Party (1970-74) and the Labour Party (1974-79). During this period, the reorganisation of comprehensive schooling gained much dynamic, driven by considerable political and popular consensus. Overall, comprehensives proved popular with parents and LEAs (Simon, 1997) gradually culminating in a majority (90 per cent by 1982) of English children attending comprehensive secondary schools (Bolton, 2016). However, during the height of the popularity of comprehensive schooling, the seeds of critique against this policy took root which came to shape educational debates and subsequent policy approaches during the Conservative governments of the 1980s.

1.2.2 The retreat from comprehensive schooling

In the later 1970s, the overall political and discursive climate had started to shift with the end of the post-war economic boom and rising youth unemployment, and the previous (tenuous) bipartisan consensus over educational expansion and reform gave way to increasingly controversial debates between Labour and the Conservatives over education (Kerckhoff, 1996: 38; Batteson, 1997). Doubts over educational standards and accountability were key features of these debates, as well as a critique of the alleged 'permissiveness' of 1960s culture and the performance of public services' (Mandler, 2014: 21-1). In addition, a series of media stories and scandals about 'out of control' schools in 'loony left authorities' challenged comprehensive schooling in the public arena (Kerckhoff, 1996: 40; Davis, 2002). Critiques of comprehensive schooling were reinforced by the circulation of a series of highly influential pamphlets on the political Right – the Black Papers – which were published between 1969 and 1977 (Cox and Dyson, 1969b; 1969a). The Black Papers combined several strands of critique; some of their authors were openly in favour of returning to selection, while others called for a return to traditional teaching methods. In

addition to these more traditional Conservative arguments, the Black Papers also included a novel, highly influential strand of critique directed at public services governance and the welfare state in general (Mandler, 2014: 21), as discussed earlier in this chapter. The Black Papers became a crucial influence on New Right educational thinking in the Conservative Party (Knight, 1990; Ball, 1990b).

Doubts over the direction of educational reform also seeped into attitudes within Labour. On the Left, some highlighted the survival of selective practices in many comprehensive schools and the persistence of educational segregation within the system and demanded a more encompassing educational vision and steering from the Party (see for a discussion e.g. Lawton, 2005: 80). More radical ideas for progressive reform through the curriculum and teaching methods had in the meantime flourished among left-wing teacher groups. However, at the same time, doubts over the ability of comprehensive schools to ensure educational standards became more visible in the attitudes of the Labour leadership when in government from 1974-79 (Kerckhoff, 1996: 40). For many, prime minister Jim Callaghan's 'Ruskin speech' in 1976 signified a turning point in Labour's optimism over the ability of educational expansion and reform, and its trust in the professionalism of the teachers, to deliver educational standards. Yet despite Callaghans' announcement of a 'Great Debate' on education, the topic slipped from the Labour government's agenda in the late 1970s. In a context of pressures for austerity, economic struggles and industrial unrest, the political Right gained hold of the education debate (Batteson, 1997; Lawton, 2005: 96; Chitty, 2013: 52).

When the Conservative Party won the general elections in 1979, 164 selective grammar schools had survived the reorganisation of English secondary schooling. Under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, the process of reorganising secondary schooling along comprehensive officially came to an end by repealing the duty for local authorities to put forward plans for reorganising secondary schooling and allowing local authorities to reintroduce selection. However, only a few local authorities attempted to reintroduce academic selection and after considerable protest from parents and teachers these attempts were generally abandoned (Kerckhoff, 1996: 42). Other measures introduced in its first years of government were aimed at increasing parental choice in the public-school sector and the introduction of subsidies for low-income pupils to attend private schools (the Assisted Places Scheme) (Edwards et al. 1989). Abandoning a full-fledged return to academic selection and a tripartite system, Conservative education reforms shifted towards encouraging subtler forms of selection, specialisation and

differentiation, while fundamentally transforming the organisation and governance of English education (Ball, 1990a).

The most seminal change in English education since 1944 came with the 1988 Education Act, which broke with the traditional 'partnership' approach to school governance. The power of local governments in secondary schooling was drastically reduced, by both increasing the influence of central government in terms of what is taught and tested in schools (in particular through introducing a National Curriculum and standardised testing) and by decentralising responsibilities over budgets and day-to-day running to individual schools ('Local Management for Schools'). Apart from curtailing the influence of local authorities, the 1988 Act was also a decisive step towards creating quasi-markets in the school sector (Gewirtz et al., 1995). Initiatives as open enrolment, parental choice and a new funding formula that linked the allocation of school budgets to pupil numbers aimed to induce competition among schools, which was further encouraged through the publication of school performance data in 1992 ('school league tables').

Within the educational community, the Act was widely seen as an outright attack on the goals of comprehensive schooling. Its market-oriented elements were feared to exacerbate existing hierarchies between schools, to increase the 'selection of children for unequal provision' (Walford, 1997: 56), as well as undermining the principles of local control over education (for a discussion, see Simon, 1992; Edwards et al., 2002; Tomlinson, 2005). Interestingly, the reforms also contained homogenising measures, particularly the introduction of a National Curriculum and a unified examination system at the end of compulsory schooling (aged 16), which resonated with previous demands for a comprehensive curriculum. However, the increase in central government control over the curriculum and the system of national testing and the discourse of suspicion about teachers' commitment to educational standards in which it was embedded was criticised by many comprehensive schooling advocates as undermining the principle of teacher autonomy and professionalism (Paterson, 2003b: 167; Lawton, 2005; Mandler, 2014).

1.2.3 Perspectives on New Labour's position on comprehensive schooling

When in 1997, after almost 18 years in political opposition, the Labour Party returned to government in 1997, it had fundamentally transformed its programmatic orientation (see also chapter 4). Already before its election, leading Labour politicians had declared the need to 'modernise' comprehensive schooling, referring both to the educational practice in English comprehensive schools and to Labour's traditional understanding of the means and goals of

educational reform. While Labour remained officially opposed to selection and the 11-plus, the party's long-standing electoral pledge of abolishing the remaining grammar schools was dropped. During its three terms in government from 1997-2010 Labour aimed to further expand parental choice and the diversity in the school system, in particular through the introduction of new school types, such as specialist schools and academies – state-funded schools independent from the local authority and run by non-profit private-sector actors. Despite fears of increasing overt and covert selection in schooling, the authority of individual schools over their admissions was expanded (West and Pennell, 2002)

There has been much debate in the literature over the nature of this change in Labour's educational discourse and policy, which are frequently seen as broadly continuing previous Conservative education policy around the principles of 'choice and competition', 'autonomy and performativity' and 'centralisation and prescription' (Ball, 1999: 196). For many observers, New Labour's agenda of 'modernising' comprehensive schooling signified a considerable break with the way in which such schooling had hitherto been understood in England and which the Labour Party had previously endorsed (Power and Whitty, 1999; Walford, 2001; Phillips and Furlong, 2001; Demaine, 2002; Walford and Pring, 1997; Demaine, 2002). New Labour's policies are generally seen to have undermined this 'comprehensive ideal' through a 'greater fragmentation into different types of school, greater selection according to a range of different criteria and greater inequity in what schools offer' (Walford, 2001: 55). The weakening of the comprehensive principle was also seen in the increased the role of the private sector in education, especially in the academies policy (West and Pennell, 2002) and the general 'ideological support given to the private sector' through New Labour's enthusiasm for market-oriented governance in the public sector (Walford, 2001: 53). To many, the biggest break in Labour's approach to schooling was visible in the marginalisation of local authorities in school provision (particularly regarding school admissions) and its lack of trust in teachers, which were previously key 'ingredients' in Labour's understanding of comprehensive schooling (Phillips, 2003; Haydn, 2004).

As Chapter 4 will show, such a break between 'Old' and 'New' Labour thinking on education was also deliberately portrayed in New Labour's discourse, first and foremost Tony Blair himself. However, this black-and-white view needs qualification. As highlighted in several historical analyses and commentary discussed above and further investigated in Chapter 4, 'Old' Labour itself had been rather ambivalent towards comprehensive schooling, both regarding the particular goals and means involved in comprehensive schooling and the potential electoral consequences in pushing such a policy (Marsden, 1971; Halpin, 1989; Lawton, 2005). A further

need to qualify the argument that the Labour Party had 'abandoned' comprehensive schooling in the 1990s and 2000s arises from the considerable internal divisions and struggles that accompanied New Labour's modernisation of its educational agenda. Both in the early years (around the mid-1990s) and towards the end of Tony Blair's time as party leader (in the mid-2000s), these contestations and rebellions indicate a more complex evolution of Labour's education policy where both new ideas gained salience while old commitments continued to rally support. Although several studies (Ball and Exley, 2010; Exley, 2012) highlight the drive of individuals on New Labour's education agenda after 1995, the struggles this caused within the party itself are occasionally mentioned (e.g. Phillips, 2003; Chitty, 2013), but the dynamics in which New Labour's education policy was created and contested have not been systematically studied. This question will be taken up again in chapter 4.

1.3 The evolution of comprehensive schooling policy in Austria

Among European social democratic parties, the SPÖ stands out for its early commitment to comprehensive schooling, dating back to the 1920s, and its seemingly unwavering support for this policy until today. And yet, despite having been one of the most successful social democratic parties in the 20th century (measured by its electoral fortunes and government participation), the SPÖ has been one of the least successful parties in bringing about this educational change. To this day, the Austrian school system remains selective and tracked, sorting children at the age in either the *Hauptschule* (general secondary school) or the *Gymnasium* (academic secondary school). Overall, the SPÖ has made three attempts to introduce comprehensive schooling: in the 1920s, the 1970s and after 2007. The 'Viennese school reform' of the 1920s and the school experiments of the 1970s remain key reference points for contemporary education debates in the SPÖ and Austrian politics in general and are therefore briefly discussed in the next sections.

1.3.1 From inter-war visions for educational change to the post-war educational settlement (1920s–1960s)

Comprehensive schooling first reached the centre of educational and political debates in Austria in the 1920s. Following the introduction of democracy in Austria in 1918, the SPÖ had gained political dominance in Vienna, where it embarked on a broad social and educational reform agenda. Social democratic school reforms, developed by a group of educators around Otto

Glöckel, centred on the concept of a 'Common Middle School' (*Allgemeine Mittelschule*) (Glöckel and Achs, 1985), which aimed to integrate the various existing school tracks at the lower-secondary level (ages 10–14) and to overcome the differentiation in qualifications and status of teachers of different school tracks. Such organisational reforms aimed at equalising educational opportunities were linked to curricular and pedagogical reform ambitions, which aimed for realising a more democratic and 'human' culture in schools. Together with egalitarian ambitions, the 'Viennese school reform' (influenced by various streams of reform pedagogy and the Viennese 'School of individual psychology' of Alfred Adler and Carl Furtmüller Achs, 1985: 12–3; Achs, 2015a) also placed a strong emphasis on aligning teaching and learning practices to the individual child. After the introduction of experiments on the 'Common Middle School' in Vienna, the SPÖ adopted this concept as an official policy demand (SDAP, 1926).

By the late 1920s, education policy – particularly the issue of comprehensive schooling and the role of the Catholic Church in education – had become a political battlefield between the Social Democratic Party and the Christian Democrats. A compromise on comprehensive schooling was found in 1927, introducing a new school track for the ages 10–14, the *Hauptschule* which aimed to provide general secondary schooling for the majority of children. This school was internally streamed with the first stream to follow the same curriculum as the selective *Gymnasium*. At age 14, the best-performing pupils (from the upper stream) of the *Hauptschule* could transfer to the *Gymnasium* without examination. Although the curricular alignment was not fully realised in practice within the politically turbulent 1930s, it continued to provide a blueprint for compromises between the two parties throughout the 20th century. In the late 1920s, however, school debates became entangled within an increasingly conflictive and violent polarisation between the two political camps. In 1934 an authoritarian Catholic regime was installed and the Social Democratic Party was banned. four years later, Austria became part of Nazi Germany and the school compromise of 1927 was officially repealed as Austrian schools became part of the German education system (Glöckel and Achs, 1985; Achs, 2015a).

In 1945, the traditional Austrian school system with its dual structure and selection age of 10 years, was reinstalled. However, in contrast to the conflictive nature of the political climate in the interwar period, the relationship between the two main parties, the SPÖ and ÖVP in the post-war decades became highly consensus-oriented. Governing in a grand coalition until 1960, the two parties built an elaborate system of power-sharing in major areas of social administration, which included the proportional appointment of leaderships in schools and school administration based on party membership (Ucakar, 1983). Within this climate of elite consensus the need for a

statutory basis of school provision after the war and continuing unresolved constitutional issues over responsibilities in the federal system again sparked long-standing conflicts on the question of school organisation and the role of the Church in education (Achs, 2015a: 213). While individual SPÖ parliamentarians continued to advocate for comprehensive lower-secondary school along the lines of the 1920s 'Viennese school reform' vision, much of the intellectual and pedagogical legacy of those reforms had been lost within the SPÖ (Achs, 2015a: 216). In addition, the party leadership now adopted a more pragmatic political position towards educational reform, focusing on opening up the *Gymnasium* to working-class children (Achs, 2015b: 105).

In 1962, after a reconciliation between the social democrats and the Catholic Church on the question of subsidies for Catholic private schools and religious instruction in public schools, a compromise between ÖVP and SPÖ was found, which continues to shape Austrian education politics today. The 1962 School Organisation Act (*Schulorganisationsgesetz*) generally improved quality of non-*Gymnasium* school tracks and the qualifications of non-*Gymnasium* teachers, and opened up new opportunities for students to transfer between school tracks. However, the two-tiered nature of secondary schooling, with selection at the age of ten and differentiation in teacher training and status, remained (Eder and Thonhauser, 2015: 43). To safeguard this historical compromise between the two political camps, the Act was granted constitutional status, which means that any future changes to school structure and most other school matters require a two-thirds parliamentary majority. By making both parties de facto veto players in any school reform, this provision remains a key barrier to comprehensive schooling. With legislative changes to school provision so constrained, school experiments have since been the main vehicle for introducing educational change in Austria.

1.3.2 A second wave of social-democratic school reforms (1970s)

The 1962 School Organisation Act quickly came under pressure from growing popular demand for educational opportunities and discontent over an education system which has remained under-resourced since the War. Within this broader public mood for educational and social reforms, education policy rose up the SPÖ party agenda towards the late 1960s. A pragmatic generation of school policymakers in the SPÖ, which had aimed to settle educational disputes in 1962, was succeeded by individuals who had rediscovered the social-democratic educational thinking of the 1920s (Schnell, 1993). Developing the first encompassing education policy programme since the 1920s (SPÖ, 1969) these 'school reformers' placed the demand for

comprehensive schooling at the core of their ambitions. After the SPÖ won an absolute parliamentary majority in 1971, the SPÖ government under Bruno Kreisky announced a broad education reform programme to modernise the Austrian school system to increase equality of opportunity and economic development. Experiments with comprehensive schooling were started in the hope that their evaluation would dispel concerns over educational standards in non-selective schools (Ucakar, 1983: 40). Other important education reforms included the introduction of coeducation across public schooling; a large increase in educational allowances and other subsidies and a general increase in investment in schooling infrastructure; and abolishing selective university admissions and tuition fees for higher education (Wollansky, 1983). While the comprehensive schooling experiments were running, the number of *Gymnasium* school places and upper-secondary vocational colleges was also increased to expand educational opportunities, especially in rural areas and for girls (Schnell, 1993).

Despite a generally favourable evaluation of the comprehensive schooling experiments in terms of equality and educational standards in the late 1970s (Petri, 1979), resistance from Conservative groups had flared up again (Schnell, 1993: 265). Following protracted inter-party negotiations, a compromise between ÖVP and SPÖ was found in 1982 (7. *Schulorganisationsgesetz-Novelle*). Following the pattern of previous compromises, selection at the age of ten into different school tracks continued, but the quality of the *Hauptschule* was improved by introducing many of the innovations piloted in the comprehensive school experiments (in particular with less rigid forms of internal differentiation) to the *Hauptschule*. Through aligning the curriculum between the *Hauptschule* and *Gymnasium*, graduates of the former were given more opportunity to transfer at age 14 into the upper level of the *Gymnasium*.

1.3.3 Perspectives on SPÖ school policy since the 1980s

As Chapter 5 will demonstrate, comprehensive schooling largely slipped from the SPÖ's policy agenda after 1982. It was only in the early 2000s that the issue made a comeback within the wider public debate over Austria's results in the PISA studies (Bauer et al., 2005). In 2007, the coalition government between SPÖ and ÖVP agreed to a new round of school experiments for non-selective 'New Middle Schools' (NMS) (*Neue Mittelschule*), which the SPÖ envisaged as a first step towards the introduction of comprehensive schooling (Altrichter et al., 2015). However, after years of political contestation over the extent of these experiments and the future of the *Gymnasium*, a familiar political compromise was found between the coalition partners SPÖ and ÖVP. In 2011,

it was announced that all *Hauptschulen* were to be converted into *Neue Mittelschulen*, while selection at the age of 10 (and the status of the *Gymnasium*) was to remain (Gruber, 2015).

Education policy-making in Austria since the 1980s in general and on SPÖ education policy (let alone internal party struggles) in particular has attracted limited attention from political analysts. Previous assessments of school policy up until the early 1980s have identified key barriers to introducing comprehensive schooling: the existence of the two-thirds majority requirement, the continuing opposition of the ÖVP to comprehensive schooling, a highly organised *Gymnasium* teacher union and public scepticism towards comprehensive schooling (Glowka, 1975; Budzinski, 1986; Gruber, 2006). The literature has also highlighted the intensity of political controversies between SPÖ and ÖVP, which constitute a clash between two world views and offer limited scope for persuasion through empirical research (Gruber 2015). By political observers, the SPÖ is generally portrayed as the key supporter and driver behind comprehensive schooling in Austria. However, during its long hold over the school ministry between 1970 and 1995, the party was also responsible for a pragmatic and structurally conservative expansion of secondary education (Graf et al., 2011; Lassnigg, 2011) which has likely consolidated the tracked nature of this system. Together with its frequent backing down over its demand for comprehensive schooling, this has led many observers to question to extent of the party's support for comprehensive schooling (Dermutz, 1983a; Dermutz, 1983b; Pelinka, 1985).

From an analytical perspective, it is crucial to investigate not only why the party has displayed so much caution and pragmatism in educational reform but also why, in light of considerable barriers to educational reform in Austria, it has rediscovered its traditional policy demand in the early 2000s. The research undertaken in this study and presented in chapter 5 therefore aims to trace particular evolution SPÖ education policy within the political context since the 1980s and analyses the party-internal dynamics and struggles which has given rise to it.

1.4 Conclusion

Across Europe, demands for comprehensive schooling to overcome the selective nature of traditional school systems reached their peak during the 1960s and 1970s. Debates and national reform trajectories not only centred around postponing or abolishing the selection of children by academic ability into different school tracks but also included a range of 'internal' school reforms aimed at creating a 'common school' for all learners. Reform ambitions often combined pedagogical and social goals as well as political and economic considerations. Thereby, debates

over comprehensive schooling have frequently caused heated political controversies. While the political trenches were frequently not clear-cut, they generally ran between the political Left and the Right. By the 1980s, support for comprehensive schooling had become a centrepiece in educational programs of many social-democratic parties. However, as the history of the two parties under investigation here indicates, views on what this vision for comprehensive schooling entails and the political will of parties to bring this change about have often been ambiguous. Furthermore, their responses to changing educational debates driven by the political Right in the 1980s have varied (Volckmar and Wiborg, 2014).

This study has aims for a more nuanced and empirically grounded study of the dynamics which shaped changing party positions on comprehensive schooling. It aims to uncover the particular meanings of this policy across time and contexts to the ways in which these meanings and policies have been formed within political parties. For this, the nature of political parties and their involvement in political process requires more attention. The next chapter therefore reviews the literature on political parties and their policy preferences and presents the analytical framework, which guided (and emerged from) the empirical and comparative analysis in this study.

Chapter 2. Literature review: Political parties and education policy

What do (social-democratic) parties want in education policy and why? Historical case studies and comparative studies of the evolution of comprehensive schooling, discussed in the previous chapter, have highlighted the often politicised nature of this policy within European educational reform processes in the 20th century (for a discussion, see also e.g. Wiborg, 2009; Sass, 2015). Such research generally indicates a party-political divide between left-wing and conservative parties on this issue, but sometimes also suggests a considerable degree of ambivalence underpinning social-democratic support for comprehensive schooling. Other research reviewed has studied more recent shifts in education policy discourses and reform trajectories towards forms of 'marketisation' of public education (Whitty and Power, 2000), and the challenges this poses to the comprehensive schooling principle (Blossing et al., 2014b; Imsen et al., 2016; Edwards et al., 2002). It has indicated that, although the first impulses in this direction have come from the political Right, some social-democratic parties have also adopted elements of this reform agenda – and therefore potentially changed their attitudes to comprehensive schooling (Volckmar and Wiborg, 2014).

This chapter reviews a different body of research, mainly stemming from comparative political science and party research, in particular on the foundations of parties' policy preferences, the transformation of social-democratic parties and the role of intra-party politics in the process of preference formation. After discussing the insights and gaps in this literature for the purpose of this study, the second part of the chapter then presents the analytical framework. Underpinned by a constructivist-institutionalist perspective and a dialectical understanding of parties, this framework has been considerably influenced by the empirical investigation of internal party policy formation undertaken in this study.

2.2 Comparative party research and policy preferences

Despite the frequently politicised nature of school reforms, political science research has until recently largely ignored education policy (for a discussion, see Jakobi et al., 2010; Busemeyer and Trampusch, 2011a), but recently started to pay more attention in particular to two areas of education policy: the political economy of vocational education (Iversen and Stephens, 2008; Busemeyer and Trampusch, 2011b) and the increasing role of international actors, educational governance and cross-border policy transfer (Martens et al., 2007; Martens et al., 2014). School policy as such has only just started to spark the interest of political science research. Two related research strands have emerged: one focuses on expanding insights from cross-national (quantitative) research on social policy preferences of political parties to educational expansion and spending, the other involving qualitative comparative research investigating the role of political parties particularly in recent school governance reforms.

2.2.1 Political parties and policy preferences

In the literatures on political parties and comparative social policy, parties' policy preferences are generally perceived as relating to the interests of their traditional constituencies, as well as particular voter segments they try to attract in an increasingly fluid nature of electoral competition (Häusermann et al., 2013). Research on the transformation of European social-democratic parties since the 1990s highlights that these changes did not only involve increased efforts in electoral strategies to attract middle-class votes but also more fundamental ideological-programmatic changes (Keman, 2017), with possible implications for parties' attitudes to school policies.

Research into the partisan foundations of European welfare states has conceptualised social policy primarily as a distributive conflict between different social groups (or classes) in society (Korpi, 1983; Hibbs and Dennis, 1988; Hibbs, 1992). In classical works on the emergence of political parties from the social cleavages that arose in late-19th-century European societies (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967), parties are conceptualised as the political representation of particular social groups, with the primary function of competing for public office so as to translate the political interests and social demands of their core constituencies into policy (Mair, 2006: 373). Parties' social policy preferences therefore emerge from the material interests and political values of the major social groups they represent, and are embedded in wider ideological frameworks that have developed in this quest for social change (Schmidt, 2010). Parties belonging to the same 'party

family', such as Social Democracy, are generally assumed to hold similar policy preferences, which are embedded in relatively stable ideological projects (Schmidt, 2010; Keman, 2017). As 'agents of the working class', social-democratic parties have traditionally been expected to prefer a larger share of public ownership of the means of production; a strong government role in economic planning; more support for income redistribution; the expansion of the welfare state with generous social benefits; and labour-market regulation (Castles, 1982; Korpi, 1983; Esping-Andersen, 1990; Huber et al., 1993; Schmidt, 1996).

Education policy, which was long-neglected in research on the partisan politics of social policy, has recently received more attention (Ansell, 2008; Ansell, 2010; Busemeyer, 2007; Iversen and Stephens, 2008; Busemeyer, 2009). Parties on the political Left are generally expected to emphasise educational expansion (with an emphasis on public rather than private spending), a reduction in stratification in secondary schooling and scepticism towards private-sector involvement in educational governance. While these expectations are broadly in line with the partisan theory developed in welfare-state research, research on the politics of education policy highlights potential dilemmas for social-democratic parties. Compared to more direct forms of income redistribution such as social transfers, which, in principle, aim for 'equality of *outcome*', educational expansion is a means of expanding 'equality of *opportunity*' (Busemeyer and Nikolai, 2010: 495–6). Education policy is therefore an instrument of 'targeted redistribution', the effects of which may actually be regressive if it mainly benefits privileged social groups (Ansell, 2008; Ansell, 2010). Social-democratic parties are therefore expected to be more supportive of increasing public spending for universal school policies (e.g. primary and secondary schooling) with clear benefits for lower income groups, rather than expanding higher education, which tends to benefit more privileged social groups which tend to enjoy disproportionately more access to these stages of education (Ansell, 2010).

However, in response to socio-structural changes and weakening links between parties and their traditional constituencies, social-democratic parties increasingly have to cater for groups outside their traditional core clienteles (Pierson, 2001; Green-Pedersen and van Kersbergen, 2002; Clasen, 2002). Drawing on economic theories of party competition (Downs, 1957), much recent research on parties and their policy preferences has focused on the dynamics of electoral competition in shaping party policy. Parties are seen as becoming more flexible in their programmatic commitments and more strategic in using policy platforms to cater for various voter groups in order to secure electoral majorities (Häusermann et al., 2013: 231; Gingrich and Häusermann, 2015). Research of this type indicates that although education policy still involves

redistributive conflicts, parties can use policies of educational expansion (e.g. increasing spending) as a means to forge cross-class coalitions, catering for both the education-savvy middle classes and the rising educational aspirations of traditional working-class constituencies (Busemeyer, 2009: 107; Potrafke, 2011). However, while general educational expansion and investment has become popular among the public (Busemeyer et al., 2017), particular school policies – for example, on school admissions – have the potential to create redistributive conflicts, dividing constituencies of social-democratic parties (Gingrich and Ansell, 2014).

The particular nature of electoral competition between parties over education is also influenced by policy legacies. Busemeyer et al (2013: 525–6) indicate that the nature of previous education policy shapes partisan conflict and who ‘owns’ education policy; that is, who the public positively associates with the issue or perceives as ‘credibly’ concerned with the issue. Issue ownership can help to mobilise broad electoral support by transcending more specific distributional conflicts involved in particular policy issues. In Scandinavian countries, for example, the comprehensive ‘Nordic Model of Education’ (Ofstedal Telhaug et al., 2006) has become associated with the political Left, which has however been pushed into a defensive position after the political Right has challenged this ‘leftist consensus’ and started to ‘own’ recent political debates over education policy by appearing credibly concerned over educational standards. In contrast, in countries like Austria or Germany where policy legacies reflect the strong Christian Democratic influence on education (in particular regarding the issue of early tracking), the political Left ‘owns’ or is credibly associated with the demand for expanding educational opportunities (Busemeyer et al., 2013: 525–6). Political parties ‘owning’ a policy issue can therefore be expected to pay more attention to this issue in their electoral strategies, while the other parties can be expected to downplay these issues.

Overall, the research on the partisan politics of education policy indicates that education policy is not a straightforward case of party preferences and electoral competition between Left and Right; rather, parties’ electoral strategies are influenced by policy legacies and respond to electorates’ changing composition and demands.

Much of this research is of quantitative nature, studying the association of different variables across a large number of countries and is therefore restricted to easily operationalised issues, such as educational spending. However, several ‘small-n’ qualitative comparative studies have recently investigated partisan politics in educational governance, particularly policies that increase parental choice, school diversity and competition (Gingrich, 2011). While this research generally shows that left-wing parties remain more reluctant than right-wing parties to introduce

quasi-markets (Gingrich, 2011; Zehavi, 2011), there has been some support among social-democratic parties for marketisation policies. Particularly in Scandinavia, this has been explained as social democratic parties' responses to a perceived loss in public trust in public services. To maintain popular support for public services and the welfare state – the key power resource for social-democratic parties – these parties have endorsed some forms of marketization, such as expanding user choice. The risk of greater social stratification due to increased choice and competition has been accepted as a means to prevent the loss of the legitimacy of the universal welfare state (Klitgaard, 2007; Volckmar and Wiborg, 2014; Wiborg, 2015). Some research indicates that the overall level of social inequality plays an important role in the perceived risk of marketisation policies; social-democratic parties in more egalitarian Scandinavian societies are therefore less concerned about the redistributive implications of school choice, as Hicks (2015) argues. West and Nikolai (2017) indicate that left-wing parties have used privatisation policies, such as the introduction of 'government-dependent private schools', for a variety of reasons, such as to address existing inequalities (in the case of the Labour Party's academies) or to 'catch up' with educational realities in other regions in federal systems (in the case of left-wing parties in Berlin and Brandenburg). Overall, there appears to be significant variety in responses to this issue among left-wing parties.

In addition to responding to changing electoral contexts and pressures on particular policy positions such as education policy, many social-democratic parties have undergone a deeper ideological-programmatic transformation since the 1990s (Keman, 2011; Griffiths, 2014). Increasing doubts over the sustainability and legitimacy of Keynesian economic strategies and expansive welfare states, which were at the core of the social-democratic project in the second half of the 20th century, have triggered a programmatic 'renewal' in many European social-democratic parties (Bonoli and Powell, 2004; Seeleib-Kaiser et al., 2005; Callaghan et al., 2009; Keman, 2008). In the mid-1990s, debates emerged around the need for a 'Third Way' (Giddens, 1998; Bastow et al., 2002), which would achieve economic progress and social inclusion – beyond the division between post-war social democracy and neoliberalism. This was sparked by changing perceptions among intellectuals and politicians on the Left, which started to challenge post-war conceptions of the role of the state. Rather than shielding individuals from market risks or compensating them through expansive social protection schemes, a new 'activating' state was championed which ought to enable and incentivise individuals to participate in the market (Green-Pedersen and van Kersbergen, 2002: 508). While the literature on the transformation of social-democratic parties has shown limited interest in education policy (exemplified by Bonoli,

2004 or Keman, 2017), within the aforementioned shifts in understandings of the state, education policy appears to have regained significance in social-democratic parties' policy since the late 1990s. Increased educational investments and opportunities are seen as an important part of 'social investment and a key to increase economic competitiveness and promote social inclusion (and compensate for the retreat from redistributive and de-commodifying social policies)' (Potrafke, 2011).

However, while education as a tool for social reform has potentially received renewed attention among social-democratic parties, approaches to education policy have since been marked by debates over how to provide public services such as education have changed. As discussed in this chapter as well as in section 1.1., building on arguments previously made on the political Right and going back to thinkers such as Hayek and Friedman, scepticism of 'statist' and 'paternalist' versions of socialism spread among social-democratic policymakers from the mid-1990s. This was particularly visible in debates within the British Labour Party in which since the mid-1990 both the epistemic argument against state planning as being inefficient and the normative argument of it restricting individual freedom has gained much salience (Griffiths, 2014). While this represented an early and radical example of ideological transformation among European social-democratic parties, the general shift of these parties from their traditional emphasis on a state monopoly of public service provision towards an acceptance of New Public Management approaches has potential implications for traditional conceptions of comprehensive schooling, which require further investigation.

2.2.2 Intra-party politics

The research reviewed so far has conceptualised political parties as responsive to changing electoral and discursive contexts and thereby as actors within an external political arena. But how are these responses formed, and what happens when changing electoral strategies or programmatic reorientation challenges a party's longer-standing policy commitments? The literature on party organisation highlights that parties are not unitary but collective actors whose audience are not only its constituencies among the electorate but also the various groups and factions within the party with potentially diverging interests and ideas about a particular policy (Katz and Mair, 1993). Apart from disagreements over policy as such (the wider goals, specific measures and desirable strategies), intra-party politics also often involves tensions between different party goals and priorities, such as between policy-, vote- and office-seeking (Katz and

Mair, 1993; Helboe Pedersen, 2012; Harmel and Janda, 1994; Müller and Strøm, 1999). While these aims are to some degree mutually compatible and interdependent, they can come in conflict; for example, when traditional policy commitments are deemed unpopular with marginal voter groups or stand in the way of forming government coalitions. Political parties therefore frequently face 'hard choices' in balancing various goals (Pierson, 2001), which can affect their policy commitments.

Although changes in parties' policy positions can be triggered by exogenous changes (e.g. shifts in public opinion, electoral defeats, other crises) they are mediated by intra-party politics, particularly the internal balance of power, and especially between leaders and activists (Harmel and Janda, 1994; Budge et al., 2010). A common distinction in party factions has been between the 'party in public office' and 'the party on the ground', which are expected to differ in their primary motivations regarding the pursuit of policy goals (Katz and Mair, 1993). The 'party in public office' (the party leadership and elected officials) is conceptualised as primarily being motivated by vote-maximising and office-seeking strategies, as being more responsive to 'environmental incentives' (such as the economy or public opinion) and as being more aware of constraints on policy-making and the necessity to strike compromises – including, if necessary, at the expense of traditional policy commitments. Conversely, the 'party on the ground' (the party's rank-and-file and policy activists) is seen as largely motivated by 'policy seeking', and therefore more willing to sacrifice short-run electoral gains to uphold long-standing programmatic positions (Katz and Mair, 1993). Research on social-democratic parties generally expects parties' activists to be more left-wing and committed to egalitarian principles, and to have more radically redistributive preferences, than the party leadership. Social-democratic parties' endorsement of neoliberal policies therefore depends on not only the strength of environmental factors (e.g. electoral defeat) but also the internal party power balance between activists and leadership (Helboe Pedersen, 2012; Marx and Schumacher, 2013; Schumacher, 2012; Schumacher, 2014).

While this conceptualisation is useful for understanding different motivations of actors or factions involved in intra-party politics, and regarding the general tensions that might arise from the pursuit of different party goals, few studies comprehensively investigate the particular internal processes through which party policy is developed, deliberated and contested. Gauja (2013) indicates that, in practice, these policy processes rarely reflect the formal rules and procedures laid down in party constitutions. Such constitutions generally dictate that policy proposals, which might be developed in local party branches, commissions or working groups, with more or less

input from think tanks and party members, are put to vote and adopted by the party conference – the highest decision-making body in political parties. These collectively endorsed demands from the ‘party on the ground’ then ought to guide the political choices of the ‘party in public office’ in parliament and government politics. This ‘archetypal model’ of policy-making, however, rarely mirrors the actual processes of policy-making within political parties, which tend to be much more centralised (Gauja, 2013: 118; Scarrow et al., 2002: 145). Policy proposals are more likely to be developed by a small group of actors within very informal settings and with the endorsement of the party leadership, before being formally adopted by the party conference. In addition, the ‘party in public office’ tends to have considerable leeway in translating more general agreed policy commitments into particular legislative and executive decisions (or non-decisions) (Gauja, 2013). However, practices are also likely to vary across parties and policy areas, suggesting the need for more empirical research.

2.2.3 Insights and gaps in the party literature

So far, this chapter has reviewed different strands of research on political parties and their policy preferences, the recent transformation of social-democratic parties and the roles of party organisation and intra-party politics. While only a few of these studies attend to education policy, they nonetheless offer several insights for the study of parties’ education policies and attitudes. Research on parties’ education policy preferences indicates that parties are generally responsive to changing electoral contexts, and that using education policy to cater for different constituencies (particularly lower and middle income groups) involves opportunities as well as electoral dilemmas for this type of political party. Research has also indicated that recent programmatic transformations among social-democratic parties have gone beyond tactical and short-term changes in electoral strategies, but potentially include more fundamental changes in parties’ shared assumptions about the role of the state and interpretations of equality and fairness with potential implications for parties’ positions on education policy.

However, there are certain limitations of this research regarding the insights it can provide for the purposes of this study. Much research on party preferences consists of quantitative, large-n studies of ‘party effects’ – the correlation of parties’ government participation with the output of such a government (such as spending levels) – which involves operationalising education policy preferences into easily quantifiable variables (such as educational spending). Although research on social-democratic parties’ programmatic

transformation has paid more attention to policy preferences as such, as expressed in party manifestos, it tended to focus either on shifts in parties' general positioning (on a Left–Right scale) or on their labour-market and social policies, and has generally paid limited attention to education policy issues. In addition, much research on political parties' policy preferences, voting behaviour and party competition, is underpinned by strong assumptions of rationality which has been criticised on ontological as well as methodological grounds (see e.g. Hay, 2002: 8; Mulé, 2009: 34; Budge et al., 2010). An additional limitations stems from the fact that education policy is primarily understood as a redistributive issue, which neglects both the relevance of value conflicts party competition over education as well as the role of discursive framing, which are likely to play a role in the case of comprehensive schooling (as Busemeyer et al., 2013, indicate in their discussion of issue ownership).

Qualitative comparative studies of educational reform processes have provided more insights into less-easily quantifiable dimensions, such as policies related to school choice and marketisation. They have also indicated that the reasons for social-democratic parties adopting such policies, and the particular form they take, vary across different contexts (Hicks, 2015; Gingrich, 2011; Klitgaard, 2007). Most importantly, scholars have highlighted cross-national differences in the meaning of particular policies, the policy goals and ideals that underpin them, and their influence on parties' strategic choices in educational reform processes (West and Nikolai, 2017).

Research on intra-party politics indicates that changes in parties' electoral strategies or programmatic positions are rarely smooth processes; rather, they tend to involve intra-party struggles between factions motivated by different goals. For social-democratic parties, these struggles tend to be between more left-wing, policy-seeking activists and more ideologically moderate, vote- and office-seeking leaders. However, very little research exists on the particular processes of policy development and contestation within parties, or how the struggles between and motives of different factions play out in shaping parties' policy aspirations and strategic choices.

2.3 Analytical framework

The analytical framework discussed in this section developed iteratively during the process of empirical investigation and analysis. Rather than aiming for generalisations across cases, the main purpose of this framework was to help make sense of the interplay of actors and motivations

within each of the two parties studied, as well as to facilitate joint discussion of the findings from both cases.

First, the framework builds on the insights from the historical literature on education reform in Europe which highlights that comprehensive schooling frequently served as an umbrella for wider reform ambitions and controversies. Rather than starting from a narrow and technical definition of comprehensive schooling as the absence of selection or tracking, it is the explicit aim of this research to explore the particular *meanings* that the idea of comprehensive schooling has come to embody within political debates in the two parties over time. While abolishing selection of children by ability is at the core of comprehensive schooling definitions, it is in its other policy dimensions and overall goals where changes in policy and political struggles over these have frequently occurred. Rather than operationalising comprehensive schooling in a narrow sense, this research aims to make a virtue of the ambiguity and intricacy of this policy in political debates, so as to investigate the struggles over the goals and means of education policy within political parties.

Second, this research draws several insights from the political science and political sociology literature to develop a more holistic understanding of political parties and their policy preferences. Although parties are (to some degree) political manifestations of wider ideologies with particular conceptions of the 'good society', they are also political actors that have to navigate real-world political arenas, which constrains their ability to realise their goal of creating such a 'good society'. While much of the literature on parties conceptualises them as unitary actors navigating political arenas, this research will empirically investigate the 'black box' of *policy formation* within political parties: how attitudes on schooling have evolved and how policy has been developed, contested and decided while the party navigates the political process in changing conditions. As discussed in the next section, the analytical framework underpinning this research builds on a dialectical understanding of political parties in which party policy is shaped by the interplay of various (and often conflicting) external and internal demands. These demands include the party's engagement with other political actors and the electorate in its attempt to get elected, participate in government and realise its policy ambitions, as well as the party's ideological legacies, the shared attitudes and collective identity among its followers, and the potentially conflicting interests of internal party groups and lobbies (as discussed in the next section). Policy formation is therefore not only a potentially complex and contested process but also takes place at different 'sites' within the party, making a clear-cut determination of party 'policy' or 'preference' difficult (as further discussed in Chapter 3).

Third, this analytical framework has drawn insights from the neo-institutionalist literature frequently employed to study welfare-state change from a historical perspective. This literature has highlighted not only the role of formal political rules and social norms in constraining political action but also the various feedback effects through which past policy can influence actors' perceptions of 'possible' and 'desirable' political action (as discussed below). The analytical framework presented here is informed by a constructivist and open-ended perspective on education policy-making and party politics. While political parties and the actors therein interact with their environment, their policy preferences cannot simply be deduced from the political and educational context in which they act. The aim of this empirical investigation is to explore how key actors within parties came to hold their attitudes to education policy, how they perceived the constraints and opportunities for education policy in their particular context, and how this influenced their behaviour.

2.3.1 A dialectical understanding of parties and their policies

In the party literature, parties' policy preferences have been operationalised in different ways. One dominant strand of research focuses on what parties *say* they want to do, i.e. their positioning through the goals and measures they set out in party and election manifestos. Another strand focuses on what parties *actually* do when in political office, i.e. their policy preferences as manifested in the strategic choices they undertake to influence policy (or refrain from it), which is most commonly indirectly measured as 'partisan effects' in quantitative research or studied through process tracing in qualitative research. However, parties are not just 'an instrument for acquiring and using power' but also have a life of their own (Drucker, 1979: vii); similar observations have been made in the literature on party organisation, most famously Katz and Mair's 'three faces of party organisation' (1993). For studying the dynamic processes of policy formation and contestation, Charlot's (1989) conceptualisation of the 'dual party' seems particularly conducive.

Every party is a dual party to the extent that it exists in itself and for itself (its leaders, its members) and that it can never attain its objectives (political power, the achievement of political projects) except by interacting with other agencies of power in a constraining environment, by mobilizing support (notably electoral support) which is always limited and transforming its environment (if possible and never completely). Internal analysis neglects the external constraints on the party. Analysing

the linkages or exchanges between the party and its environment neglects the internal constraints. To come as close as possible to reality, the party must be analysed in its fundamental duality. (Charlot, 1989: 361)

This understanding seems more open to studying the various (and often overlapping) motivations of actors as they move between the internal and external dimensions of party life in their quest to shape the party's policy. From this perspective, parties are characterised by a constant balancing act between their 'public face turned towards the media, the voters and the rest of the world, and an inward-looking face' (Charlot, 1989: 361). Parties themselves can be seen as 'institutionalised coalitions' that have 'adopted rules, norms, procedures' (Aldrich, 1995: 9).

The analytical framework presented here builds on this *dialectical* understanding of political parties as both *strategic actors* navigating the political arena and *collective actors* or political organisations shaped by their own internal dynamics. A party's policy preferences arise from the tensions and deliberations between these different dimensions. Understanding party policy processes, as shaped by this dialectic, also draws attention to the constraints for policy arising from both dimensions: 'the multiplicity of expectations and individual actions of party members is doubly regulated; inside the group by the unequal distribution of decision-making power, outside it by competition from other parties and the rules of the political, economic and social game' (Charlot, 1989: 361).

This division between 'internal' and 'external' dimensions of party life should be seen as a heuristic device facilitating the analysis rather than an exact depiction of political processes, in which the boundaries between the dimensions are less clear-cut (as will become evident in the two case studies). The following section discusses important features of these dimensions, which have both been highlighted in the literature and emerged from the empirical research during this study.

2.3.1.1 The party's interaction with its external environment

Competing in elections for public office and participating in government to influence policy are at the core of most political science definitions of what (mainstream) parties are and do (White, 2006: 6). The main activities in this dimension – deciding on policy priorities for electoral campaigns or government agendas, steering electoral campaigns and policy discourses, bargaining and coalition-formation with other political parties – are usually driven by 'the party

in public office' (Katz and Mair, 1993): the party's leadership, elected representatives (especially in national legislatures), ministers and policy advisers.

The party's relationship with its external environment, particularly voters, other parties and other political actors, can constrain the pursuit of particular policy commitments. Formal political institutions (such as constitutional rules), as well as informal conventions underpinning political processes and policy-making, can have a profound effect on not only what parties can do to bring about educational change but also their likely policy and political strategies (such as consensus-seeking) (Bonoli, 2001). In addition, informal conventions, dominant practices and the general political culture can play a similar role in creating shared expectations and behaviour for the members of a polity, which can have a considerable effect on parties' perception of desirable and possible political action (Peters, 2012: 144).

Parties' policy preferences are frequently influenced by the constraints and opportunities these actors perceive in the electoral arena and in the process of forming coalition governments and policy-making. Particularly in countries with proportional electoral systems, winning elections generally does not lead to absolute majorities and thereby the freedom to shape the government agenda. Here, it might be even more necessary for the party to succeed in 'winning' the formation of government coalitions than to win an electoral majority. Coalition agreements with another party can constrain a party's choices in realising its policy commitments, or otherwise risk it being unable to participate in government. Further constraints on a party's policy can arise within the policy-making process. Political systems differ in the extent to which they concentrate government power and allow other actors (e.g. opposition parties, different levels of government, other social interests) to influence, or even veto, government policy (Bonoli, 2001: 239). Veto players can also arise from education policy legacies themselves, such as the influential *Gymnasium* teacher union in Austria. By providing beneficiaries with particular privileges and a common identity, particular policies can create powerful vested interests over time that oppose changes to the status quo (Campbell, 2012).

As indicated in much of the literature on political parties, parties' policy is likely affected by their overall electoral considerations and strategies, within which education policy proposals can be considered either a risk or a potential asset. Expansive education policy can be useful to create cross-class coalitions of electoral support but particular policies, such as on school admissions, can also involve distributive conflicts that cut across social-democratic parties' constituencies. However, the redistributive implications of education policy and their effect on popular support for policy are not straightforward. Who benefits and who loses out as a result of

particular policies can depend on the structure of the education system overall, e.g. the nature of educational transitions and alternative pathways that affect dominant patterns of educational demand and competition over school places (Busemeyer, 2015). Feedback effects on public expectations and educational strategies can also arise from past policies, such as policies expanding school choice or publishing school league tables, which influence residential patterns (Gingrich and Ansell, 2014).

Past policies can also have 'ideational', or interpretive, feedback effects on societal attitudes (Béland, 2010; Jordan, 2009). Selective schools, such as the *Gymnasium* or the grammar schools, can be expected to raise resistance among parents directly affected by a proposed closure of such selective school. However, selective schools can also have a longer-term and broader influence on popular images about what constitutes 'proper' education and 'natural' hierarchies between different types of education and curricula (Halpin, 1989). Such images can be an obstacle to creating support for comprehensive schooling reforms, which aim to provide not only non-selective schooling but also a different form of education. As societal attitudes are often ambiguous, opposition to educational selection can coexist with the popular image of selective schools.

Despite the proliferation of opinion polls, political parties operate under much uncertainty about popular support for different education policies (Budge et al., 2010). Although public attitudes can provide a challenge to parties' policy proposals, they do not determine parties' responses. If a policy is deemed unpopular it could be dropped, but it could also be kept and merely downplayed while other, more popular policies are foregrounded. Parties' discursive strategies could attempt to increase the legitimacy of the policy and convince the public of its merit. Public attitudes and voter interests are also influenced by the discursive battle between political parties mobilising shared images and symbols. The role of national educational traditions and policy legacies in party policy is therefore not deterministic in creating societal demands but should rather be seen as 'repositories of ideologies' (Paterson, 2003a: 5) that actors can mobilise to create legitimacy for their proposals within the wider electorate. This empirical investigation must therefore study perceptions of and beliefs about popular support for different policies within political parties, the strategies they undertake to respond to these and what this implies for parties' policy preferences.

In sum, the characteristics of the political and educational systems do not determine a party's policy preferences, but they can create particular opportunities and constraints that affect the party's ability to further its policy aims, and may therefore influence the strategies it adopts,

including for bargaining and compromise-seeking. In addition, anticipation of these barriers can lead to the pre-moderation of a party's policy aspirations. Finally, political constraints for introducing a policy can also provide a justification for party inaction.

2.3.1.2 Internal party dynamics

While a key characteristic of mainstream political parties is their aim to compete for participation in public office, they also share characteristics with social movements or organised social interests in uniting their members with a common purpose and providing them with a source of identification. Parties' education policy preferences can originate from the interests of particular groups as well as wider party ideology or paradigms (Hall, 1993) relating to the goals and means for social reform. Legacies of different ideological streams and inherited ideas, the influence of educational theory and vested interests of particular groups can become consolidated and part of the party's organisational culture, thereby relating to not only what the party *does* but also what it *is* (Mair and Mudde, 1998: 220; Peters, 2012: 145). In organisational literature, collective identity is understood as the characteristics 'that members perceive as ostensibly central, enduring, and distinctive in character that contributes to how they define the organisation and their identification with it' (Gioia and Thomas, 1996: 372). Political ideologies, policy statements and other symbols are important means for creating a collective identity.

A party's ideology is shaped by not only its intellectual traditions and doctrine but also its 'ethos', or its 'traditions, beliefs, characteristic procedures and feelings which help to animate the members of the party' (Drucker, 1979: 1). According to Drucker, ethos acts as a kind of 'ideological glue' and solidarity to hold the party together, giving a sense of a common past and a common future project (ibid, p. 35):

Collections of half-remembered, often repeated and occasionally embellished tales of a specific past of a specific people ... (which) serve to bind that specific group of people together. A past, in this sense, is a force making for group identity. This past defines 'us'. (Drucker, 1979: 31)

Collective identities are often fluid and overlapping. They are actively produced and reproduced through political activity and strategic framing (or 'identity work'), which is important to sustain internal solidarity and commitment within the community, using 'nostalgia and other elements of collective memory to construct a past for a group' (Polletta and Jasper, 2001: 290, 299).

Parties can therefore reproduce values, interpretations and norms and develop their own 'logic of appropriateness' (March and Olsen, 2006; Peters, 2012: 145), or 'ethos' (Drucker, 1979), in which particular policy goals or ideas – such as comprehensive schooling – become embedded. This, in turn, creates and reproduces attachments to policies beyond the group directly affected by them as they become a source of identification for the wider party. Such identification does not necessarily involve an in-depth understanding of the more technical aspects of a particular policy, and can even cover up underlying tensions or disagreements over policy among different actors or groups within the party. A degree of ambiguity over the meaning of a policy can even be helpful in uniting a coalition with potentially diverging understandings and interests. Such diffuse but shared attachments do not necessarily lead to any policy action, but they can be mobilised by actors seeking to commit the party to policy action (e.g. in the legislative arena) to make the policy a priority on the party's agenda and gain legitimacy for their policy proposals. In turn, such a 'logic of appropriateness' or 'party ethos' can pose constraints for actors wishing to change party policy in a different direction.

Challenges to entrenched policy commitments within parties can come from vote- or office-seeking strategies when policy demands are moderated or dropped to account for perceived shifts in public opinion or to form coalitions with other political parties. Long-standing policy commitments and understandings can also be challenged by growing doubts over the working of the policy in practice, and/or the exposure to new ideas and educational and political discourses. This can lead to a more gradual process of adapting shared understandings about policy to changing conditions and integrating new ideas. But such a vulnerability can also be exploited by 'policy entrepreneurs' who aim for a more radical change of the party's policy (as discussed below). And finally, policy commitments entrenched within wider ideological projects can also become challenged when the wider ideological project is transformed in processes of broader programmatic change within a party.

2.3.2 Actors and institutions

Parties do not act in a vacuum but in particular political, discursive and educational contexts. This research examines the way in which the context is largely structured through institutions – institutions underpinning the political system in which parties operate (as well as their own internal structures) and arising from the education system towards which parties' policies are oriented. Institutions in this sense encompass both the 'formal or informal procedures, routines,

norms and conventions embedded in the organizational structure of the polity' (Hall and Taylor, 1996: 938), as well as the legacies and feedback effects arising from previous education policies and the wider education regime. Institutions create an 'opportunity structure' that parties actors reflect on to devise their strategies, but institutions also affect parties' internal life and create a 'logic of appropriateness' (March and Olsen, 1984; 2006). As such, institutions contain both normative and cognitive dimensions, which affect how actors are socialised into particular roles and norms of behaviour and provide them cognitive scripts and models for action (Campbell, 1998). Institutions in this sense can 'affect the very identities, self-images and preferences of actors' (Hall and Taylor, 1996: 939). Apart from the formal and informal institutions underpinning national political systems and the rule and shared practices within political parties, past education policies can themselves act like institutions, affecting both policy attitudes and opportunities and constraints for policy change (Pierson, 1993; Pierson, 2006; Béland, 2010; Jordan, 2013). Institutions can affect not only which policy goals and strategies political actors see as *possible* but also those they see as *desirable*.

However, actors' perceptions and the strategies they develop from them are not determined; rather, the inherent complexity and unpredictability of political systems leave much room for agency (Hay, 2002: 14). Actors can therefore also mobilise constraints and opportunities in different ways – and, through their actions, contribute to their construction:

Actors are strategic, seeking to realize certain complex, contingent, and constantly changing goals. They do so in a context which favours certain strategies over others and must rely upon perceptions of that context which are at best incomplete and which may very often prove to have been inaccurate after the event. Moreover, ideas in the form of perceptions 'matter' in a second sense—for actors are oriented normatively towards their environment. Their desires, preferences, and motivations are not a contextually given fact—a reflection of material or even social circumstance—but are irredeemably ideational, reflecting a normative (indeed moral, ethical, and political) orientation towards the context in which they will have to be realized. (Hay, 2008: 63)

This research explores the evolution of parties' attitudes and policies on comprehensive schooling as they emerged from the interplay between the parties' internal and external dimensions. It focuses on individual actors in parties located within (and moving across) these dimensions, and their ideas about school policy and the educational and social goals it should contribute to. Actors might disagree about not only the substance of their party's education policy but also whether

that policy is a potential risk in the pursuit of other party priorities, such as gaining electoral support, forming political coalitions and exercising government power. Party actors are here conceptualised as being neither pure instrumentalists driven by the pursuit of power, nor pure idealists, solely driven by their ambition for societal change. The political and educational contexts in which they engage affects their opportunities and constraints for realising policy aspirations and, to some degree, already their attitudes towards and ideas about education in the first place. Rather than deducing the effects of the aforementioned institutions on parties' attitudes and policies, this research studies their effects through actors' 'assumptive worlds', their 'subjective understandings of the environment in which they operate', comprising 'several intermingled elements of belief, perception, evaluation, and intention as responses to the reality "out there"' (Young, 1977: 2–3). The empirical investigation focuses on how the two dimensions, and the motivations therein, interacted in particular processes in which policy was developed, deliberated and contested within the parties. In these processes a crucial role is played by actors who aim to create change and steer policy ideas through these different contexts. These actors – often called 'policy entrepreneurs' or 'change agents' (Kingdon, 1995; Béland, 2005: 10; Mintrom and Norman, 2009) – may have a variety of motivations but can be characterised by their 'effort to promote significant policy change' (Mintrom and Norman, 2009: 651). As such, they invest significant time and effort in pushing their conceptions of problems and policy proposals in order to 'soften up the system' for policy change. They are strategic actors looking out for windows of opportunities where they can 'hook solutions to problems, proposals to political momentum, and political events to policy problems' (Kingdon, 1995: 182).

To recognise and seize opportunities, policy entrepreneurs need to have a high degree of perceptiveness or social acuity, and to understand 'the ideas, motives, and concerns of others in their local policy context and [respond] effectively' (Mintrom and Norman, 2009: 652). In political parties they need to understand the dynamics of both the party's external environment and its inner life in order to mobilise support and mediate between contending interests. A key quality of successful policy entrepreneurs is rhetorical or 'framing' power to define policy problems, and the need to reform, effectively. Policy change can require changing the dominant narrative and meaning of a policy in parties' discursive practices; this can be achieved through strategic and creative use of language to (re)define problems, mobilising support and building coalitions (Finlayson, 2004; Béland and Cox, 2016: 429). Policy entrepreneurs 'advocate not only for specific proposals but for conceptual understandings of policy issues and problems that legitimate and build support for their proposals' (Béland and Cox, 2016: 441). These have to be

framed within culturally sensitive ways, building on popular imagery and existing ideological repertoires (Béland, 2005: 2–3); in the case of education policy, these understandings are likely to reflect particular national educational traditions, the symbols and ‘myths’ around them (as discussed above), or linking to themes emerging from international education discourses to increase the legitimacy of policy proposals among both the party and the wider public. These actors therefore not only strategically evaluate the shared understandings, opportunities and constraints for policy but also try to mobilise – and even construct – these to further their policy aims.

Policy entrepreneurs, or change agents, are usually seen as external actors who gain privileged access to policymakers in the government (or party leadership); for example, as policy advisers. However, the notion of ‘change agent’ can also be used to analyse the actions of actors located within parties (Little, 2017); for example, policy spokespeople, actors in ministerial positions or parliamentary committees, or other actors mobilising for policy change. However, not all actors who pay regular attention to policy (such as ministers) are necessarily policy entrepreneurs (Little, 2017). Change agents or policy entrepreneurs might not always be present in the party, and actors who desire change might not always be as successful or influential as the ideal-typical image presented above. For long periods, a party’s policy preferences might remain stable, or they might evolve incrementally through the interplay of its internal demands and external constraints. But change actors, and their ability (or failure) to steer policy by navigating the intricacies of a party’s internal and external dimensions, can provide an important insight into more radical periods of change in party policy (or their absence).

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the insights gleaned from comparative research on political parties and their policy preferences into social-democratic parties’ comprehensive schooling policy. By adopting a dialectical understanding of political parties and a constructivist-institutionalist perspective, the chapter presented the analytical framework that underpins the empirical investigation of the nature of, and changes in, such policy. This framework is intended not as a tool for testing theory but as a heuristic guide. It is thus intended to help disentangle and make sense of the interplay between various actors and motivations within internal party processes of policy formulation, contestation and decision-making. As such, the study aims to shed more light

on the interaction between actors, ideas and institution, in the complex, contingent, real-world political processes of policy-making.

The next chapter outlines the research design underpinning the empirical investigation of party attitudes and policy.

Chapter 3. Research design

This chapter presents the research design chosen for this study and the key decisions that shaped the empirical investigation. It starts by discussing the rationale behind the choice of combining a case-study design with a comparative analysis. It then justifies the case selection, gives an overview of the main sources for the empirical analysis and discusses data collection and analysis strategies employed. The chapter concludes with a discussion of methodological challenges involved in this research.

3.1 Case-study design and comparative analysis

The investigation of how social-democratic parties have positioned themselves on the issue of comprehensive schooling had two objectives: to capture the shifting meanings of comprehensive schooling in two contexts over time, and to investigate the internal party processes in which policy had been formed. Although the research was initially conceptualised as a comparative study of the trajectory of party policy in the two cases, it soon became clear that more flexibility and openness was necessary to investigate the intricacies of these processes in each case. This led to a two-staged research strategy: first, two parallel case studies were conducted allowing an in-depth 'within-case' analysis by tracing the political processes within particular historical, political and cultural context; second, the findings of the case studies were then discussed comparatively to tease out commonalities and differences between the two cases.

As discussed in section 2.2., conceptualising a party's policy is not always straightforward. This research therefore started not with a narrow definition of 'policy preferences' but with the aim of discovering the relationship between different manifestations ('sites') of party policy. Generally, parties' education policy is understood here as comprising *both* the goals and aspirations the policy aims to achieve *and* the concrete means or instruments proposed to achieve them (Howlett and Cashore, 2014: 19). A party's 'official' policy, or its 'party line', primarily manifests as the party's collectively adopted programmes and manifestos that specify the goals and means for policy action. However, policy is also 'the exercise of political power and the language that is used to legitimate that process' (Codd, 1988: 235); that is, the strategic choices the party's elected officials make (or refrain from making) to achieve these goals in the political

arena, and the discourses they use construct. As the case of the SPÖ indicates, there can be considerable gaps between programmatic aspiration and strategic choices. Both can therefore be understood as particular 'sites' of the party's policy, and their relationship then needs to be assessed empirically. In addition, particular group interests or widely shared attitudes and attachments within the wider party can give rise to particular demands in parties' programmes or set limits to the policy of the 'party in public office'. Such attitudes could be considered a factor influencing the parties' 'official' policy – or, in the case of widely shared attachments (in the sense of Ducker's party 'ethos'), even a unique 'site' of party policy themselves, which can outlive the particular policy actions of elected officials. As discussed earlier, the meaning of comprehensive schooling and the parties' positioning on this issue were difficult to define a priori.

This research therefore adopts a broad perspective on *party policy* in order to study the interplay between different sites of party policy (and the actors behind them) and between shared attachments or specific interests within the party, the party's manifestos, and the strategic choices and discourses of its elected officials. Accepting the fundamentally blurred nature of comprehensive schooling and 'party policy' allowed exploration of the shifting meanings of, and interactions between, different manifestations ('sites') of party policy and debate. This, in turn, resulted in greater understanding of how different actors have formed party policy, and those actors' interactions and struggles. The two case studies therefore focus on 'policy' as emerging from the interplay of a party's engagement with its 'external' environment, as well as from its 'internal' dimension and the wider attitudes and interests in the party (Drucker, 1979; Charlot, 1989; Harmel et al., 2018).

While case studies are particularly useful to investigate a 'contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly given' (Yin, 2003: 13), this research was also motivated by a comparative interest in social-democratic education policy. The choice of two cases rather than one case was made to broaden the empirical terrain for exploring different ways in which parties interact with education policy and respond to new challenges within particular political and educational contexts. Although the two case studies were designed to allow sensitivity to case-specific policy meanings and the political dynamics involved, both studies were informed by similar methodological procedures and analytical objectives, which were refined during the parallel conduct of the two empirical investigations. In contrast to the classical approach to comparative research in political science (Lijphart, 1971; Hopkin, 2002), the aim here was not to isolate explanatory variables and contribute to a generalisation of causal factors shaping party policy. However, as the empirical

and analytical work in the two case studies were conducted in parallel, they have iteratively 'spoken' to each other, raised new questions for each other and helped to uncover tacit assumptions, working as a 'springboard for theoretical reflections about contrasting findings' (Bryman, 2012: 75). The concluding comparative discussion of findings from both cases (as presented in chapter 6) allowed for reflection on the unique features of education debates and policy formation in different political and cultural contexts, as well as the 'dilemmas and questions that straddle both cultures and time' (Moses and Knutsen, 2012: 253) and the changing relationship between social-democratic parties and education policy across contexts. More detail on this form of comparison as 'dialogue' is given in section 3.3.

3.2 Case selection

3.2.1 Social-democratic parties²

Social-democratic parties have historically been key actors in comprehensive schooling reforms. Studying changing attitudes to education policy among these parties can therefore improve our understanding of the possibilities of, as well as limits to, bringing about educational change. While social-democratic parties have often been influenced by aspirations for more radical educational and social change, as key actors in political and policy-making processes their policy aspirations have frequently been constrained in these processes. Social-democratic parties have, since their foundation in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, fluctuated between more revolutionary ambitions and reformist strategies of using democratic means to bring about social change (Sassoon, 2010; Jackson, 2013).

Apart from the constraints of the democratic political process, a reformist approach to social and educational change also involved more ideological or programmatic dilemmas. While social-democratic reform strategies tended to focus on improving working conditions and

² The label 'social democratic' does not always correspond to parties' self-designation. In particular, in the case of the Labour Party, the term 'social democratic' has frequently referred more to one of several factions within the party (which, until the mid-1990s, were on the party's right wing), as well as to a party faction that broke away in 1981 to form a separate Social Democratic Party. In Austria, the SPÖ held various names over the course of the 20th century, from Social Democratic Workers' Party to Socialist Party in 1945 and, from 1991, the Social Democratic Party. Nevertheless, this research uses the label 'social democratic' rather than the broader label of 'centre-left' parties, because the latter is frequently used in comparative party research to depict parties' positioning on a left-right dimension, thereby often including green or liberal parties.

redistributing social wealth through labour-market, social and economic policies (Seeleib-Kaiser et al., 2005), education policy had an important role in the goal of providing an opportunity for social advancement for children of the working classes. However, this often posed difficult questions as to whether the opening up of opportunities for disadvantaged groups should take place within established educational hierarchies or should involve a more fundamental restructuring.

While both parties in the focus of this research, and perhaps European social-democratic parties more generally, can be characterised as political parties with generally long-standing ideological and programmatic legacies, throughout their history they have gone through waves of 'revisionism' and 'renewal', in which the role of education policy has been reconsidered. School reforms remain a focus for more utopian aspirations about social change and the future. With the lessening of linkages between social-democratic parties and their traditional constituencies, the dynamics of electoral competition are expected to become more important to social-democratic parties than their ideological foundations. Comprehensive schooling encapsulates many of the tensions social-democratic parties face in education policy. In the two parties studied, it seems to live on in parties' ideological legacies as a symbol for past reform ambitions, and to occasionally become mobilised as well as reinterpreted. However, as a policy and goal for educational reform, it has blurred meanings rather than straightforward redistributive implications. Debates over comprehensive schooling have involved both distributional questions and value conflicts over the nature of change or the preservation of educational traditions and practices. The decision not to impose a narrow definition for comprehensive schooling (e.g. as selective school admissions) in this study therefore allows for the use of policy debates on comprehensive schooling, which are a rich field for studying how social-democratic parties' thinking and action on education policy has evolved, and the dilemmas parties have perceived in different contexts.

3.2.2 *The British Labour Party³ and the Austrian Social Democratic Party (SPÖ)*

The choice of the two parties for this research was made for both *intrinsic* reasons (motivated by an interest in the particular path policy evolution has taken in each country) and *instrumental*

³ The focus of this research is on the Labour Party's school policy in England, given the degree of autonomy education policy and politics enjoy in Scotland, Northern Ireland (and to a lesser degree) Wales and the long-

reasons (to provide a wider empirical terrain for studying how social-democratic parties have responded to changing educational and political landscapes, opportunities and challenges since the 1980s in contrasting contexts).

The *intrinsic* interest in how these two parties engaged with school policy in particular political and historical contexts resides first in their unique features – in all their ‘particularity *and* ordinariness’ (Stake, 2000: 437). Both parties have previously pushed for the introduction of comprehensive schooling, yet even then both parties displayed considerable ambiguity regarding interpretation of the policy, its goals and policy dimensions, and the political strategies through which to bring it about. However, each party has displayed a particular dynamic in its engagement with education policy: the Labour Party has struggled over the goals and means of education policy, and the SPÖ over the tension between programmatic aspiration and pragmatic (in)action. The aim of the case studies is to explore these particular dynamics and the conditions and processes that gave rise to them.

The different dynamics underpinning both cases do not easily lend themselves to comparison. However, both cases hold insights from a more *instrumental* rationale (Stake, 2000: 437). Both are cases of a larger phenomenon of how European social-democratic parties responded to, and constructed, changing educational and political climates since the 1980s. Investigating the commonalities and particularities of the two cases can increase our understanding of common concerns and dilemmas for social-democratic education policy at the beginning of the 21st century, as well as the diversity in the policy meanings and processes involved. The two case studies proved particularly useful because comprehensive schooling has recently featured in internal debates in both the Labour Party and the SPÖ. This provided rich empirical material for studying not only internal party policy debates and processes but also the taken-for-granted beliefs and tacit assumptions that revealed themselves when challenged by contending ideas and political struggles. The aim was to investigate how a common phenomenon, played out in different contexts, can broaden our theoretical insights into a diversity of meanings and processes involved in different real-world contexts through the analysis of the dynamic interplay between actors and their interpretations of these contexts. The research

standing divergence of policies in secondary schooling (see also Raffe et al., 1999). Two interviews were conducted with Scottish Labour education policy-makers. These and other interviewees indicated a limited flow of ideas on education policy from Scotland to England within the Labour Party.

therefore emphasised within-case analysis because it can 'stimulate the imagination' regarding possible theoretical implications (Eckstein, 2000).

Finally, this case selection also involved more pragmatic rationales. My language skills and background knowledge gained from having lived and studied in both countries proved particularly useful in exploring different meanings of policy and the wider historical and cultural contexts in which they emerged in these two cases.

3.3 Data collection

The key aims of the empirical analysis were: 1) to explore the interplay of actors and their interpretations and motives for education policy, and 2) to reconstruct internal party policy processes within wider political and educational contexts. As discussed in section 3.1, this extended beyond studying policy preferences as expressed in party manifestos, or the policy reforms introduced by the parties when in government. Case studies allow for complementing and contrasting a variety of evidence (Yin, 2003: 8) to gain a holistic, in-depth picture of political processes. While the data collection strategy was broadly similar in both cases, the in-depth immersion in each case allowed flexibility and 'soaking and poking' (Bennett and Checkel, 2015: 18) in each case and its particularities.

A variety of complementary data sources were used for this research. *Secondary literature and newspaper coverage* provided the initial information for reconstructing political processes and identifying the key events and actors involved. A range of party *documents* evidenced the nature of, and changes to, party thinking and policy on comprehensive schooling. Finally, *interviews* with key actors were the key source of information on their assumptive worlds and more in-depth internal party processes of policy formation. These types of sources are discussed in the following sections.

3.3.1 Documentary sources

3.3.1.1 Secondary literature and media coverage

As a first step, existing secondary literature and media coverage helped to reconstruct the longer-term political and education policy processes in which the parties have engaged. With the aid of

electronic newspaper archives (Factiva database), education policy debates were followed within quality newspapers in both countries (in particular *Der Standard* and *Die Presse* for Austria; *The Guardian*, *The Times* and *Times Educational Supplement* for England), with varying availability from the early 1980s to 2010 in England and (due to the restricted availability of online archives) from the early 1990s to 2013 in Austria.

As with any other source, media coverage is not an 'objective' source of evidence; issues of potential bias, as well as selectivity in attention paid to particular issues and voices at certain points in time, must be taken into account by triangulating and contrasting information with other sources. Nevertheless, newspaper coverage proved a highly useful information source for the initial reconstruction of political processes and debates in both countries, as well as the general discursive climate and wider spectrum of political opinions at particular times. Newspaper sources were particularly relevant for reconstructing political processes and identifying key events in Austria, where secondary literature on education policy and politics is scarce. Media sources were also helpful in providing some initial information on internal party debates and the actors involved therein. Even for England, where secondary literature is more prevalent than for Austria, newspaper coverage provided important information on particular moments of internal party debates and struggles that have been only cursorily commented on in the secondary literature. Sifting through newspaper coverage also uncovered a range of primary sources in the form of commentaries by, or interviews with, key protagonists in these processes. Finally, information from newspaper coverage provided an additional perspective on the 'remembered' history of political actors, serving as prompts during the interviews and triangulation in the analysis.

3.3.1.2 Documents

The primary documentary sources for assessing policy goals and preferences of political parties as a whole were party programmes, election manifestos and other education policy documents and position papers (including white papers and bills). Policy documents served as the main source of information on the parties' 'expressed preferences', their understandings of comprehensive schooling (both in its wider aspirations and justifications and in concrete policy domains) and its change over time. Policy documents, such as party manifestos, were evidence of not only dominant problem perceptions and policy aspirations but also their use in various coordination and communication processes – both within the party and with voters, interest groups and other parties (Daubler, 2012: 51) – and were followed up in many interviews. Selection

criteria were inclusive; I reviewed all official national party documents dealing with education policy that I could find. In England, these involved party and election manifestos (in particular: The Labour Party, 1979; 1982; 1983; 1987; 1992; 1997; 2001; 2005), several education policy documents when the party was in opposition (in particular: The Labour Party, 1985; 1991; 1994; 1995a; 1995b); and white papers and other documents from the Department of Education when Labour was in government (in particular: DES, 1965; DfEE, 1997; 2001; DfES, 2001; 2003; 2004; 2005). In Austria, I reviewed all party and election manifestos ((SPÖ, 1979; 1983; 1986; 1990; 1994; 1995; 1998; 1999c; 2002; 2006; 2008; 2013) as well as the three education policy programmes the party has written since 1945 (SPÖ, 1969; 1999b; 2004). A more detailed discussion of how documents were analysed is provided in section 3.3. below.

In addition to official party documents, *policy pamphlets* and other *publications authored by key individuals* were important sources for this research (for the Labour Party: Crosland, 1956; Radice, 1986; Kinnock, 1985; Kinnock, 1986; Radice, 1992; Blair, 1994; Barber, 1996; Adonis and Pollard, 1997; for the SPÖ: Schnell, 1980; Matzenauer et al., 1985; Matzenauer, 1990; Cap and Duffek, 1999; Duffek, 2001; Gusenbauer, 2002; Niederwieser, 2009; Niederwieser, 2006; Duffek, 2008; Niederwieser, 2008; Schmied, 2012), as well as a variety of speeches and further commentary by key actors (usually uncovered via media research, as discussed above). A particularly useful source for studying the assumptive worlds were *memoirs* by key actors who have had an important influence on parties' school policy, particularly in England (Blunkett, 2006; Barber, 2007; Blair, 2010; Adonis, 2012). In Austria memoirs are less common, but secondary literature, authored by previous SPÖ education spokespeople, on the history of education policy (Schnell, 1993; Achs and Sretenovic, 1999; Seel and Scheipl, 2004) provided some insights into their assumptive worlds and the party's internal policy processes. As Batteson and Ball (1995) highlight, memoirs are particularly useful sources to reveal individuals' attitudes and justifications for their actions.

These sources reflect the opinions and assumptive worlds of individual actors who have been important in representing, as well as shaping, *wider party attitudes* and policy. However, at times these actors' opinions have been in conflict with more widely held assumptions in the two parties, and the research also aimed to gain insights into conflicting views within the two parties. For the Labour party, evidence on internal party opposition could be found in publications of the Labour-led Parliamentary Education Committee (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2004; 2005; 2006) and the 2004 *Alternative White Paper* authored by party backbenchers (Compass, 2005), while voices from the wider educational community at the

margins of the party were found in magazines such as *FORUM for promoting comprehensive schooling* and the website of the Socialist Educational Association. For the SPÖ, some evidence about critical voices both within and at the margin of the party was found in journals such as *Freie Lehrerstimme* and *Schulheft* as well as the party's discussion journal *Zukunft* (albeit with limited coverage of education policy since the mid-1980s). Section 3.3. discusses in more detail how this research approached the relationship between individual and collective attitudes in the two parties.

Other documentary sources, such as parliamentary debates, were only selectively drawn on for this research. Given the high degree of party discipline in the SPÖ (and, to a lesser extent, the Labour Party), parliamentary debates provided less information on internal party disagreements than the sources discussed above. However, debates in Austria around political compromises over comprehensive schooling in 1982 and 2011, and the legitimisation strategies school ministers adopted, gave some insight into internal party critics of these compromises. In England, parliamentary debates around the 2005 white paper and 2006 Education and Inspections Act provided some insight into different motivations among Labour backbenchers. Finally, although initially envisaged, this research did not involve archival research on the documentation of party conferences or internal meetings. In Austria, this was due to the non-existence of a contemporary party archive and the generally limited insights from the official party conference documentation for this research (conference reports for the past 15 years have been examined). In England, given the abundance of other primary data, a pragmatic decision was taken not to undertake an originally planned visit to the Labour Party archive in Manchester.

In balancing the desire for a systematic analysis of data sources with the limitations inherent to a historical-comparative analysis, the focus (especially in the documentary analysis) was using the most crucial moments and documents to piece together a rich understanding of key interactions and processes, with sensitivity to alternative accounts or opposing views. However, while the wider spectrum of opinion and attitudes in the parties were explored, more weight was given to the attitudes and activities of key groups influential in policy formulation and contestation.

3.3.2 Interviews

While media coverage and documents allowed a general reconstruction of policy meanings and processes, personal interviews with policy actors have long been considered a key source for

gaining in-depth insights into policy-making processes (McPherson and Raab, 1988; Walford, 1994; Grek, 2011). The purpose of conducting interviews was twofold. First, interviews allowed exploration of the 'assumptive worlds' of key actors involved in developing (or contesting) party policy, particularly their interpretations, beliefs and motives underpinning their engagement with education policy and party politics (Marshall et al., 1985; McPherson and Raab, 1988; Selwyn, 2013). The interviews allowed for clarification of the different meanings of, and attachments to, comprehensive schooling policy within the parties, as well as actors' perceptions of opportunities and constraints in the political process. Second, interviews provided crucial information on the processes through which parties' policy preferences were constructed and contested (Hay, 2002: 82). Based on the preliminary information gleaned from newspaper coverage and documentary sources regarding internal party struggles over policy, the interviews were invaluable in uncovering the nature of these micro-political processes, the identities and motivations of different actors, and informal processes of bargaining and decision-making.

3.3.2.1 Selection, logistics and consent

The selection of interview partners aimed to cover a broad range of actors or groups involved in the party over the past 30 years. For analytical and practical reasons, the samples leaned more heavily towards actors at the centre of the parties' education policy processes and actors involved relatively recently (in the 1990s and 2000s). Forty-one interviews were conducted. Given the limited availability of secondary literature for the Austrian case, the analysis of SPÖ policy processes depended on interviews more heavily than the English case. I therefore interviewed 26 people in Austria: a broad range of actors within and outside the party. Due to the much more comprehensive availability of written sources in England – including those authored by core actors themselves – the 15 interviews conducted in England were less immediately necessary to reconstruct policy processes; but have provided important insights into the nuances of internal party processes and their protagonists' assumptive worlds.

Interviews were conducted with three main groups of interview partners. The core group consisted of individuals at the centre of party education policy, such as education secretaries, ministers and their political staff (advisers and civil servants); parliamentary spokespeople; and members of party think tanks. The second group consisted of a wider group of actors who had been involved in or tried to influence internal party debates on education policy, such as teacher representatives, education policy activists and representatives of other affiliated societies or

organisations around the party. The third (and most heterogeneous) group was selected for additional insight into national education policy debates and the role of the parties therein. In Austria, this group included representatives of the two other parties (ÖVP and the Green Party), the *Gymnasium* teacher union (with Christian Democratic affiliation) and the Federation of Industrialists, all of which provided important background understanding of the political dynamics in Austrian education politics. In England, this group included two Scottish Labour education policymakers to assess the relevance of Scottish education policy and debates to Labour's education policy in England. In both countries a small number of education experts were interviewed; some of these had been involved as advisers in party or government education policy while others were external observers.

Interview candidates were identified from the secondary literature and newspaper coverage as well as through recommendations from other interviewees. Snowballing provided an important tool to gain a more complete picture of the 'universe' of relevant actors involved in policy processes behind the scenes. In addition, recommendations (or discouragement) from other actors gave useful insights into different political communities within the parties.

Interviews took place in May and June 2015 in Austria, and in October and November 2015 in England, with a few interviews taking place during 2016. Interviewees were initially contacted by email or phone. In most cases, access was immediately granted; in some cases, following up or recommendations from other actors were necessary. A few potential interviewees declined or did not respond even after follow-ups; in these cases, information from written sources and other interviews generally provided sufficient information for the analysis. Interview duration was generally around 60 minutes, with the shortest interview lasting for 25 minutes and a few extending 2 hours. Almost all interviews took place in person, usually at interviewees' workplaces; in Vienna, they frequently took place in coffee houses. For logistical reasons, three interviews took place via phone and one via email. All but two interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed by myself; two interviews were not recorded and written notes were taken. The Austrian interview quotes (and other quotes in German presented in this thesis) were translated to English by myself (giving priority to conveying particular expressions rather than linguistic style in the translation).

Respondents were provided with information about the research project and, upon request, with a more detailed interview schedule before the interviews. Given different customs, consent procedures varied across countries. In Austria, verbal consent was given on tape, while interviewees in England signed consent forms. Procedures for attribution of interviewees' quotes

differed according to the position of the interviewees. In the case of the key actors involved in party processes, the anonymity of the quotes would have been not only difficult to achieve but also uncondusive to the narrative. In these eight cases, quotes were then sent for authorisation, which resulted in some cases in minor linguistic changes and clarifications or a moderation in tone and occasionally in less candid expression of opinions compared to the original. Other interviewees, who were chosen for their function as representatives of wider groups or had less-prominent positions, are not named in the quotes. These individuals were provided with the opportunity to request to authorise the quote from their interviews, which most did not request.

3.3.2.2 *Interview topics and conduct*

The group of actors interviewed was highly heterogeneous in terms of their positions and relevance in the policy-making process over time and across countries. Interview schedules were therefore individually prepared and highly personalised to probe particular episodes and events in which actors participated in greater depth. However, interview schedules also contained some common ground to gain insights into different interpretations of common issues and to cross-check different accounts of events and processes. Three main types of questions were asked, which related to policy interpretation, internal party policy processes and the external dimension of the party's policy, with varying sub-topics in relation to specific policy events or debates:

- *Policy aspirations and preferences*: Their opinion on comprehensive schooling (meaning, support and doubts, relative importance) and questions on related school policy issues (e.g. school governance, choice, diversity, curriculum, private schools, grammar schools/*Gymnasium*); problems, strengths and weaknesses in education in general; wider education policy aims; and the relevance of education policy to social-democratic parties.
- *Internal party processes of policy formulation and contestation*: Their views on the main drivers of policy- and decision-making procedures; the sources of ideas and policy; the scope of opinions in the party and relationships between different factions; and key struggles and their outcomes.
- *External dimension*: Their views on the opportunities and barriers arising from the parties' participation in policy-making and elections, in particular their perception of relevant political allies and veto players (parties, interest groups, etc.), voters, public opinion and the media, as well as the roles of experts, research and international discourses (depending on the interviewee).

The interviews were based on a list of questions and probes tailored to each interviewee. However, the interviews were flexible as to the order of themes and to allow interviewees to bring up new topics, which was a frequent occurrence and generally useful.

Compared to other forms of interviewing, interviewing political elites has the advantage that they tend to be experienced in talking freely about policy issues and comfortable in speaking about their personal views and their role in the policy process. However, politicians are also skilled at taking control over conversations, dodging questions and giving 'rehearsed, sometimes platitudinous, replies' (Gewirtz and Ozga, 1994: 194). The issue most frequently stressed in the literature on interviewing elites is unequal power relations, although different perspectives exist on the actual extent of different groups of elites' power and authority, and the implications for interviewing (see e.g. Harvey, 2011; Grek, 2011; Smith, 2006).

The actors interviewed for this research varied considerably in their levels of authority, experience and confidence. The most senior policy figures were generally quite relaxed and comfortable in speaking about their opinions, policy processes and even past mistakes. Representatives of interest groups were often more reluctant and careful in answering questions. Among the core party actors interviewed, most had retired or moved on to other positions but maintained an interest in education policy developments. This group of retired actors tended to be the most candid and outspoken in the interviews and seemed to welcome the opportunity to reflect on past processes, their contributions and disappointments (similar experiences have been reported by Selwyn, 2013 and Ball, 1994). There were a few problems regarding memory gaps and some obvious instances where past events were interpreted from current viewpoints, which is never fully avoidable and a few interviewees themselves highlighted. Most interviewees were quite comfortable talking about different opinions and conflict in the party and education policy in general, which sometimes even included outright gossiping. Only on a few occasions were statements requested to be 'off the record'. Attempts to present themselves in a good light were common, as were self-critical assessments.

A common issue in interviews are struggles over control of the interview agenda. However, as Grek (2011) highlights, power imbalances in interview situations can be used for analytical purposes. Being perceived as a young and 'harmless' researcher, one is frequently told 'how things work here', along with other 'didactic' performances from interviewees that reveal underlying agendas and narratives in education policy (Grek, 2011: 238). I frequently heard 'you might not know this about England/Austria...' or 'this might be different where you come from', followed by rich explanations and justifications of particular practices of common understandings.

However, thorough preparation for each interview was crucial to not only put this didactic exercise into perspective but also make sure this did not crowd out other themes I wanted to explore. While interviewees were generally willing to go beyond rehearsed stories once I demonstrated background knowledge on particular issues or events, on some occasions I was less successful.

3.4 Data analysis

This research adopted a constructivist perspective to the analysis of political processes and political actors' policy preferences (Hay, 2008). It understood actors' preferences as related to external conditions and the constraints arising from the political structure, but nevertheless as ultimately socially and discursively constructed. Actors' preferences are therefore 'perceived' interests influenced by ideational and discursive frames of reference (Hay, 2002: 25), and action is affected by 'the meanings that particular groups of people developed to interpret and organize their identities, relationships, and environment' (Parsons, 2010: 80). Institutions are not objectively given but 'meaningful social constructs' (Parsons, 2010: 81) that shape power balances between actors, providing certain opportunities and constraints for political action; but they are also constructs internal to actors, influencing actors' beliefs about and interpretations of desirable course of action (Moses and Knutsen, 2012: 148; Schmidt, 2008). While actors' interpretations and actions are not entirely voluntarist, political processes are complex, lending themselves 'to many interpretations that open endless options for human agency' (Béland and Cox, 2010: 11). The starting point for the empirical analysis was therefore actors' interpretations (or 'assumptive worlds'; Marshall et al., 1985; McPherson and Raab, 1988); their identities and preferences; the problems they wish to address and the policy solutions they see as desirable; and the opportunities and constraints they perceive for doing so. It aimed to uncover situated, context-specific explanations by interpreting the motives of actors from the accounts they provide (Flyvbjerg, 2006: 222; Moses and Knutsen, 2012: 222; Parsons, 2010: 93). Acknowledging the importance of political and educational contexts to providing particular opportunities or constraints for political action, it is ultimately through actors' interpretation that such opportunities and constraints become meaningful for understanding political action and processes (Moses and Knutsen, 2012: 191).

The analysis therefore followed a two-stage approach: 1) two case studies involving thematic analysis and process tracing, followed by 2) a comparative discussion.

3.4.1 Case studies: thematic analysis and process tracing

The analysis of the two case studies involved both a thematic analysis of policy meanings and tracing the processes through which policy was formed within the two parties.

3.4.1.1 Thematic analysis: the meaning of comprehensive schooling

First, a thematic analysis of comprehensive schooling policy was undertaken to assess interpretations of this policy (beyond the principle of non-selection) in each case, as well as its shifting meanings over time. Given the analytical emphasis on the processes through which different understandings and policies came about, the thematic analysis did not engage in systematic, in-depth textual or discursive analyses. The aim was rather to uncover and map dominant and shared meanings in the party, changes to those meanings and contending interpretations between important groups in the party. Policy documents such as party manifestos showed the 'official' or collectively agreed interpretations of policy, while interviews provided individual opinions and information on shared attitudes in the party. These sources were coded with qualitative data analysis software (NVIVO) to map:

- policy goals;
- policy dimensions (e.g. selection, internal differentiation, curriculum, governance); and
- support vs. doubts and justifications (including the relevance of education policy / comprehensive schooling for the party's wider goals).

To gain a more in-depth understanding of the shifts in thinking on education policy, attitudes to related education policies (e.g. grammar schools/*Gymnasium*/vocational education) and fundamental questions in education policy (e.g. on the rights and responsibilities of the state, the market and the individual) were also coded. The coding process entailed a considerable degree of iteration, starting from key policy dimensions identified in the literature and complemented by themes emerging from the empirical material (e.g. the notion of 'school ethos' in England). The parallel empirical investigation of the two cases also enabled the capturing of silences, as well as themes relevant to one case but not the other.

3.4.1.2 Process tracing: the formation of preferences

The main part of the within-case analyses involved tracing processes of policy formation within the two parties. As a first step, based on detailed historical timelines (created with the aid of secondary literature, newspaper sources and party documents), long periods of gradual evolution were distinguished from tipping points at which attitudes and policies shifted (e.g. 1995/96 or 2005/06 for Labour; the early 2000s for the SPÖ). References to these events were then scrutinised further in the interviews and the written sources (as discussed above) to gain further insights into interactions between different party actors; their motivations, tacit assumptions and perceptions of internal and external constraints or opportunities; and their strategies for influencing party policy. A particular emphasis was given to investigating the processes by which collectively endorsed party documents (analysed in the thematic analysis; see above) were created and negotiated.

Process tracing enables the study of how processes unfold in particular multi-layered contexts and how deeply embedded institutional legacies affect political actors' beliefs and choices, leading to a diversity of responses to similar challenges (Falleti and Lynch, 2009: 1157). It pays attention to the temporal context (the timing and sequence of events) and is therefore particularly useful in uncovering 'critical junctures' and path dependence, or 'the repercussions of early events on subsequent and possibly historically distant outcomes' (Mahoney and Villegas, 2009: 78). Although process tracing is frequently used in historical-comparative research from positivist or critical realist perspectives, which aim to uncover causal mechanisms and test theory (Bennett and Checkel, 2015; Hall, 2013), its potential for constructivist political research has been recognized e.g. in Moses and Knutsen (2012: 225).

Piecing together the multiple actors, ideas and interactions into an analytical narrative involved a considerable amount of iteration: between theory and data, and between the observations made across the two cases. A key insight from the empirical investigation was the importance of the internal party dimension for understanding evolving party policy. The analytical framework presented in Chapter 2 therefore did not precede the analysis but largely emanated from this iteration, and from trying to make sense of the findings in both cases. Using the interaction between parties' internal and external dimensions proved a workable framework to delineate and account for different motivations and interactions within the party, as well as the different political, discursive and educational systems in which they took place.

3.4.2 Comparative analysis

In the second stage, comparative analysis explored the 'common phenomenon in its multiple manifestations' in different contexts (Moses and Knutsen, 2012), building on the parallel empirical investigation of the two cases. This involved contrasting the meanings of comprehensive schooling policy, patterns in the processes through which policy was formed, and reflections on the wider context in which they took place. While the two within-case analyses (presented in chapters 4 and 5) emphasised chronology and individual actors' perception and agency, the joint discussion of their findings (Chapter 6) gave greater emphasis to shared elements (in their different manifestations) across cases, as well as the influence of political institutions, the discursive climate and education policy feedback effects.

Rather than a term-by-term comparison (which follows the logic of an experiment to isolate causal factors), the comparative analysis in this research served to create an encounter or dialogue between two cases; observations and particularities in each case served as prompts to interrogate the other, opening up an 'arena of reflection' (Freeman and Mangez, 2013). The aim of this comparative discussion is not to provide generalisable explanations for the evolution of social-democratic parties' education policy across the two cases, or even beyond. However, looking at two contrasting cases illuminates our understanding of shared ambitions and challenges for comprehensive schooling policy, as well as the particular meanings and processes underpinning education policy in different countries. It hopes to shed more light into how two political parties with relatively similar social bases and ideological roots have evolved differently in their educational thinking and policy strategies. It also highlights the variety of meanings that comprehensive schooling can embody and the tacit, taken-for-granted assumptions in political debates within each case – without restricting them to a parsimonious measure of party 'preference'. The two case studies also allowed for reflection on the complex interplay between context and actors and between the roles of political institutions, discursive climates and educational legacies – and how they shape and are shaped by political actors – without producing a simple answer to the relative influence of each 'factor'. Aware of the risk of satisfying neither the desire for nuance sought among case-study advocates nor the desire for elegance sought by comparativists, this research has nevertheless benefited greatly from dialogue between the two cases.

3.4.3 Issues in combining case studies and comparative analysis

As discussed above, this study adopted a 'bottom up' research strategy, starting with the 'assumptive worlds' of the key actors involved in processes of collective preference formation before situating these processes within wider national, temporal and finally comparative contexts. Such cross-national analysis always involves tension between exploring socially and culturally embedded meanings and the need for more generic concepts that travel across borders and make the analysis intelligible (Hantrais, 2009). Conducting two case studies in parallel reduced the depth in which each analysis could engage (or that can be presented in a thesis). Neither can such an analysis represent the full range of attitudes or interactions in the processes studied. It necessarily treats the cases as the representation of a particular empirical phenomenon, to some degree, which hides some elements while emphasising others. However, while this account cannot fully do justice to context-specific meanings, the implicit dialogue involved in this cross-national study was a major source of discovering such meanings in the first place. Conducting parallel case studies was particularly useful in teasing out what is special about each case and what are more common and shared concerns. The process of going back and forth between different cultural and political settings seems particularly fruitful for stumbling over and making sense of tacit assumptions about 'normality' in education and policies, within both the 'other' context and one's own. As Hopkins argues, cross-national research 'brings a sense of perspective to a familiar environment and discourages parochial responses to political issues' (Hopkin, 2002: 249), which helps to avoid reifying national traditions and their uniformity (Rose, 1991: 541).

Political processes do not occur independently from the interpretations of political actors who participate in them or of those who observe them. A particular value of case studies is that they allow attention to the specific and varied meanings of policy and careful tracing of how political processes unfold in specific historical and national contexts. There is never just one 'true' narrative of how policies are made or how party opinions shift; policy-making is inherently contested, and tensions between different accounts of 'what really happened' are unavoidable. This research obtained accounts from a variety of perspectives and opinions within the parties via interviews and other sources of evidence, attempting as far as possible to cross-check accounts of policy events by triangulating sources. Although it sought to triangulate different sources and accounts, in some cases not enough material existed or materials could not be obtained in the required timeframe; in these cases events could not be fully corroborated, meaning that some claims are more tentative than others.

Finally, there is always a degree of tension in social research between the interpretations and justifications given by the actors studied and those of the researcher. While I am not a member of any political party and no personal connections to either of these parties existed previous to this research in case of the Labour Party or were used to gain access to interviewees in case of the SPÖ, it is impossible to prevent personal political opinions from influencing research. However, while a personal concern over educational inequalities have stimulated my interest in the issue of comprehensive schooling, the complexity of the issues involved in this debate also helped to question my own implicit assumptions about the desirability of particular policies throughout this investigation. A certain detachedness of this analysis from this question was also facilitated through the main interest of this research was not in evaluating the policy of comprehensive schooling, but in uncovering how political actors have come to think in particular ways about this issue. The analysis therefore attempted to take actors' assumptive worlds, understandings of comprehensive schooling policy and interpretations of the contexts they found themselves in as the starting points of the investigation. Without claiming to provide a more truthful account of these processes than the actors involved, through engaging with different sources across contexts, as well as with the theoretical literature, this account aims to add a nuanced perspective to a complex story with many interpretations.

Chapter 4. The 'modernisation' of Labour's school policy and its struggle over comprehensive schooling

The comprehensive revolution has been a great success, probably the greatest success ever introduced by the Labour Party. If it is abandoned the Labour Party could collapse. (Hattersley quoted in Hugill, 1994)

We did not revive the principle of selection ... but in every other respect, we broke with the traditional comprehensive state school. We made it clear that, in time, all schools could and should become self-governing trusts ... with far greater flexibility in staffing and pay, with partners from whatever sector they wished. (Blair, 2010: 575)

Tony Blair's election as leader of the Labour Party in 1994 initiated a profound change in the Labour Party's school agenda, particularly its approach to comprehensive schooling. Blair announced the need for 'modernisation' of comprehensive schooling and, soon after, for a 'post-comprehensive' era. Although New Labour remained officially opposed to selective schooling, the party's new educational agenda was perceived as a clear departure from its traditional commitment to comprehensive schooling, the goals it stood for and the particular meaning it had come to embody in England since its introduction in the 1960s (Chitty, 2013; Walford, 2001; Tomlinson, 2005). As discussed in Chapter 1, much literature focuses on how far New Labour's education policy resembled a continuity of Conservative education policy and thereby a break with 'Old Labour' education policy. The aim of this chapter is to provide a more nuanced picture of the interactions between different ideas and actors, at multiple sites within the party, in the creation and contestation of Labour education policy since the 1980s.

The first part of this chapter provides an account of the general evolution of Labour's education policy within the wider political context, starting with Labour's long years in political opposition after 1979, which prepared the ground for both the profound changes in its approach to education policy and the internal party battles in the 1990s and 2000s. After a brief assessment of the nature of change in Labour's school policy in terms of its goals and policy dimensions, the chapter will provide a more in-depth analysis of the interplay between actors and their motivations and the battles that contributed to shaping the party's school policy in these 30 years.

4.1 The evolution of Labour's policy on comprehensive schooling

4.1.1 The Labour Party in opposition (1979–94)

After the victory of the Conservative Party in 1979, the process of reorganising secondary schooling along comprehensive lines was officially ended. In the early 1980s, about 90 per cent of children attended comprehensive schools in the early 1980s, but 164 selective grammar schools had survived (Bolton, 2016).

The Labour Party was to remain in political opposition for 18 years, during which it started a process of programmatic transformation that would culminate under Tony Blair in the mid-1990s. After its electoral defeat in 1979, the Labour Party was battered by internal factional struggles and moved to the Left, while a faction on its right wing broke away to establish the Social Democratic Party (which later merged with the Liberal Party) (Thorpe, 2015). After a second consecutive election defeat in 1983, former shadow education secretary Neil Kinnock (1979–83) became party leader and stabilised the party at the centre-left. During these struggles, education policy was not a high priority on the party's overall agenda (Inglis, 1991). Overall, the party's aspiration remained to defend and continue with the unfinished project of comprehensive schooling set out in the 1960s and 1970s. However, there was also a perception that the Labour Party had never been entirely clear on what it meant by comprehensive schooling, and that previous debates had overemphasised abolishing selection:

I used to argue ... that we have to change our understanding of the word 'comprehensive' in education ... that what we meant by comprehensive is what insurance salesmen ... or people offering holiday brochures mean by comprehensive, that is to say, 'covers all the necessities'. But comprehensive education has been used as a term that means 'everybody in' – well that's just a tiny part of the meaning, ... putting everybody into the same school in the neighbourhood, that's spray on, that's not comprehensive. Comprehensive is what you do in the school. (Neil Kinnock, interview, 2015)

Our education policy, two aspects really, one was trying to resist the effect of what the Tories were doing, financially and educationally, and a lot of energy had to go into that, the protest side if you like, the resistance side, and on the other side there

was a continuation ... of the basic precepts. ... [Anthony] Crosland [previous Secretary of State for Education] had set as properly comprehensive education, of social cohesion, of education maintenance and governance ... Having achieved the introduction of non-selective education over most of the country, [the Labour governments of the 1960s and 1970s] didn't then follow it through ... by saying 'this is what we mean by education that is comprehensive' and these are facilities and changes that we will introduce in order to bring that about ... part of it was basically constraints, part of it was ... [they] became quite content with the changes they made between '64 and '70 ... if Tony [Crosland] and Shirley [Williams] had picked up and pressed on, they could have made the change ... but after that, we went into opposition for 18 bloody years with Thatcherite policies ... all of that stuff. (Kinnock, interview, 2015)

Among educational circles within the party, several debates and initiatives to develop a more encompassing understanding and framework of comprehensive schooling, including the curriculum and assessment to secure equal entitlements for pupils across the country, emerged (The Guardian, 1984; The Labour Party, 1982; Lawton, 2005: 104). However, the main impetus for Labour's educational agenda in the remainder of the 1980s came from the need to respond to the reforming zeal of the Conservative government and, increasingly, from electoral considerations. After 1986, growing public concerns about the Conservative government's educational cuts and conditions in schools were perceived as providing Labour with an opportunity to use education as an electoral asset:

This increased public interest in and concern about education is good news for the Labour Party. Not only is education a more salient issue but, in contrast to the position in 1983, Labour now has a big lead in the public opinion polls on education. ... The new surge of public concern about education and about the Government's handling of it has given the Labour Party a fresh opportunity to recreate a progressive consensus in favour of educational change. That opportunity has to be seized (Radice, 1986: 2–3).

For the first time for a decade, Labour's educational policies are likely to be a significant asset to the Party, because they now run not against but with the grain of popular opinion (Radice, 1986: 19).

In the view of Labour's shadow education secretary Giles Radice (1983–87), the Labour Party ought to claim the debate on educational standards by linking its traditional agenda of

comprehensive schooling, educational investment and opportunity to a new emphasis on parental concerns, educational standards and accountability, which had traditionally been the domain of Conservative educational discourse (The Labour Party, 1985; Radice, 1986). Comprehensive schooling was presented as crucial in providing high standards for all children, and was seen as running not against but 'with the grain of popular opinion' (Radice, 1986: 2). To further increase standards in education, Radice urged a new 'framework for partnership' to provide a better balance between central and local governments, and a new advisory 'Education Council' as a forum for 'education partners' – such as teachers and parents, experts, industry, unions and the inspectorate – to advise on the development of a core curriculum and an assessment system (Radice 1986: 17). Although the press labelled this new attention to educational standards as a 'significant turn for Labour' and its traditional approach to school governance (Moncur, 1985), Labour's approach to school governance largely remained within the parameters of the traditional 'partnership' approach to school policy established in 1944; for example, it positioned central government as an advocate for more educational equality, but refrained from setting minimum provision standards through legislation.

While Labour attempted to align its traditional agenda of comprehensive education with a new emphasis on standards and accountability in schooling, the Conservative government's reforms, and the ideological framework in which they were embedded, transformed the English education system from the ground, posing fundamental challenges to educational thinking for the Left (Tomlinson, 2005 p. 27). Towards the 1987 General Election, public debate on education was dominated by the Conservative Party and its plan for a 'Gerbil' – the 'Great Education Reform Bill', which would become the 1988 Education Act. The electoral campaign foreshadowed dominant themes in educational debates to come: a National Curriculum, regular testing of student performance to raise standards, and strengthening parents' role as 'consumers' of education (Hetherington, 1987). Labour education spokesperson Radice started to lose support from the party, especially among local councillors, for his lacklustre performance against Conservative education secretary Kenneth Baker's powerful voice in the education debate (Gunn, 1986; Wavell, 1987).

After winning the 1987 election the Conservative government introduced the 1988 Education Act, which fundamentally transformed educational governance in England (Ball, 1990a). The Act reduced the power of local governments in secondary schooling, both by increasing the influence of central government in terms of what was taught and tested in schools (National Curriculum and national testing) and by decentralising responsibilities for budgets and day-to-

day running to individual schools (Local Management for Schools). Open enrolment, parental choice and a new funding formula linking the allocation of school budgets to pupil numbers were the first decisive steps towards the introduction of quasi-markets in the public-school system (Glennerster, 1991). Competition among schools was further encouraged through the publication of school performance data (school inspection reports, after the 1992 National Curriculum test results).

The Act also introduced two new school types, which would prove highly consequential for future Labour policy. First, schools could choose to become grant-maintained, receiving their funding directly from central government and thereby opting out of local government authority. Until the mid-1990s, Labour's opposition to Conservative education policy focused on this policy, which the party perceived as the key attack on the comprehensive principle (Labour party advisor on education policy, interview 2018) because it undermined local control over schooling, potentially created a two-tier system between schools with different funding and governance conditions, and enabled schools to select a small share of their intake by ability. The second new school type, introduced in 1988, was City Technology Colleges – state schools sponsored by businesses. Although only a few of these came into existence, they were to become a template for New Labour's academies policy in 2000 (discussed below).

The Labour Party responded highly critically to the Conservative government's social and education policy agenda. However, after losing the third consecutive General Election in 1987 the party entered a period of programmatic transformation (Thorpe, 2015) Aiming to gain votes from the 'upwardly mobile' sections of the electorate – the aspirational 'modern working classes' (Kinnock, 1986: 2) – the party started to systematically evaluate its complete policy offer in terms of its electoral implications (the so-called 'policy review'). Labour's commitment to comprehensive schooling was not yet perceived as an electoral obstacle in need of 'modernisation' (Kinnock, interview, 2015), as it would be interpreted in the mid-1990s. However, the emphasis on parental concerns, accountability and standards in Labour's education policy became more pronounced during the process of the policy review, and increasingly visible in the statements of the party's new shadow education secretary, Jack Straw (1987–92). In the education chapter ('Parents in Partnership') of the final policy review report (The Labour Party, 1989), the party appeared anxious not to be seen as 'soft' on standards. Media coverage at that time portrayed this shift as even more radical:

Nothing illustrates more graphically the shift in Labour's thinking over the past eleven Thatcher years than the approach it is now adopting to education. Left-wing

buzzwords such as anti-sexist and anti-racist education, associated with the now-defunct Labour-run Inner London Education Authority in the mid-Eighties, find no place in the party's prospectus for the Nineties. Instead, in words uncannily reminiscent of much right-wing criticism of state education since the Black Paper days of the late Sixties and early Seventies, the accent is on standards, accountability and the predominance of the consumer over the producer. (Wood, 1990)

Impulses for this emphasis on standards also came from the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA). The biggest local education authority in England, the ILEA had once been the vanguard in the drive for comprehensive schooling; since the 1960s and 1970s it had fostered much development and experimentation with comprehensive admission systems, curriculum development and progressive teaching methods (Kerckhoff, 1996; Benn and Chitty, 1997). Largely Labour-controlled (except from 1967–70), it regularly came under attack as a key 'looney-Left council' by the Conservative press and government during the 1980s (Davis, 2002). In light of its looming break-up by the Conservative government (which occurred in 1990), ILEA leaders started to push forward with a more consumerist agenda than mainstream Labour thinking at the time. Even before the 1988 Act, Labour ILEA leaders' suggestions for regaining public confidence in the public (comprehensive) school system included publishing school league tables of exam results, creating 'magnet schools' (inspired by US reforms) and introducing a more rigorous system of standardised testing (Bosley, 1986). ILEA-leader Fletcher also started to accuse the Labour Party of complacency about low standards and of privileging teachers' needs over those of parents and children (Rose, 1987; Wood, 1988). While Labour's shadow education secretary, Straw, officially distanced Labour's official policy from Fletcher, many ideas appear to have found their way into Labour's policy in the following years.

The media at that time called these changes in Labour's educational policy, driven by Straw and Fletcher, a 'revolution from above'; as they did not necessarily reflect wider thinking among the party's grassroots and rank-and-file (*The Guardian*, 10 November 1987). Teachers still had a strong presence in the Labour Party, but the influence of their unions and associations on Labour's education policy diminished in the late 1980s (teaching union representative, interview, 2015). Straw's public questioning of schools' and (indirectly) teachers' accountability created frictions. The relationship between Labour and the National Union of Teachers particularly deteriorated in 1991, when the latter called for a boycott of curriculum tests for 7-year-olds, which Straw labelled 'indefensible' (Tytler, 1991).

Education policy remained high on the Labour Party's agenda until the General Election in 1992. In light of polls showing growing public concerns about school standards, school policy was generally perceived as an electoral asset for Labour as the main opposition party (Crequer, 1990). The main emphasis in Labour's education policy discourse was attacking the Conservative government for having eroded educational standards (The Labour Party, 1991). Another key issue in Labour's critique was the government's policy of grant-maintained schools, which was accused of creating a two-tier system of secondary schooling and reintroducing selection 'by the back door' (Wood, 1992). Labour also called for more accountability in public schooling, which mirrored many of the tenets in the Conservatives' discourse but attributed more responsibility to local authorities than central state involvement (e.g. local authority-driven systems of measuring school performance, and systems of appraisal to weed out 'bad' teachers).

While the Labour Party remained supportive of comprehensive schooling as a principle, more fundamental debates about its goals and the means to achieve them remained largely restricted to educational circles. In an attempt to distance itself from the more radical debates about progressive teaching practices that had emerged within the comprehensive schooling debate, Labour's education policy and communication in the late 1980s became even more strongly geared towards attempting to credibly display a concern for parental preferences and educational standards, increasingly adopting many elements of the Conservative education agenda. This trend was only briefly interrupted from 1992–94, when Labour's education policy briefly retreated to more traditional confines. After Labour lost the General Election in 1992, John Smith replaced Neil Kinnock as party leader and the new shadow education secretary, Ann Taylor (1992–95), promised to revive Labour's education strategy from the bottom up. After large-scale consultations with the educational community and Labour grassroots, a policy document called *Opening Doors to a Learning Society* (The Labour Party, 1994) was developed, which included a commitment to further develop the principle and practice of comprehensive education while rejecting recent Conservative reforms to school governance. It promised to abolish national tests and school league tables, retreat from a centrally prescribed National Curriculum and restore the power of local authorities. However, after party leader Smith unexpectedly died in 1994, this document became known as the last 'Old Labour' education document and was quickly shelved after the election of Tony Blair as party leader (Conor Ryan⁴, interview 2015).

⁴ Conor Ryan was senior advisor to David Blunkett from 1993–2001 and senior education advisor to Tony Blair from 2005–7

4.1.2 New Labour and the 'modernisation' of comprehensive schooling (1994–2010)

4.1.2.1 The modernisation of comprehensive schooling

Tony Blair became party leader in 1994 on a platform promising to restore the party's electoral fortunes and give it a new sense of purpose through a fundamental change in its programmatic orientation – a 'Third Way', as it was coined, between the party's socialist past and the Tories' neoliberal agenda (Thorpe, 2015). In the party's discourse, particularly that of the party leader himself, education policy received unprecedented attention:

Since I became leader of the Labour Party, I have emphasised that education will be a priority for me in government. I have done so because of the fact – increasingly recognised across our society – that our economic success and our social cohesion depend on it ... I said that my three priorities for the government would be education, education and education. (Blair, 16 December 1996)

With education policy as the cornerstone in New Labour's discourse, Blair was quick to highlight that Labour would not undo the educational reforms, particularly those around school governance and accountability, introduced by the previous Conservative governments. While many of these tenets had already become part of official Labour Party education discourse in the late 1980s to some degree, it was the brief intermezzo in the party's education policy between 1992 and 1994, as well as wider attitudes among Labour members and educational circles, which served as the contrast to signal New Labour's departure from Old Labour education policy:

Labour had not yet fully reconciled itself to the changes that the Conservatives had brought in ... I mean the challenge we had was that an education policy document called *Opening Doors to a Learning Society* had been published ... [Tony Blair] was, to put it mildly, he was not very pleased with its contents and felt it was stodgy and felt that it was really not addressing sort of the voters he knew he would need to win in 1997 ... So our task really was, I mean we said we were building on that document, the reality was we were fundamentally changing a lot of its principal tenets. (Ryan, interview, 2015)

The programmatic bases for this reorientation, which came to underpin much of Labour's policy agenda in its first two terms of government (1997–2005), were developed in the years preceding the 1997 General Election (The Labour Party, 1995b; The Labour Party, 1995a; The Labour Party,

1997). Like no party leader before, Blair became personally involved in shaping the party's education policy, and kept a tight control over the agenda throughout his time as party leader (1994–2007). Apart from David Blunkett (Labour's shadow education secretary after 1995), policy advisers were the key influences in shaping the education agenda in the early years of New Labour; the party's traditional partners, such as teaching unions and LEAs, were largely excluded (Ball and Exley, 2010; Exley, 2012). A key influence in New Labour's reorientation on education policy was Michael Barber, a former university professor, who became the main driver in the party's standards and school improvement agenda. At the centre of developing the party's electoral strategies, as well as much work on education policy, was David Miliband – a former policy analyst at the think tank the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), Blair's policy adviser in 1994 and later head of the Prime Minister's Policy Unit. Important input in the early years also came from centre-left think tanks (such as the IPPR and Demos) and Conor Ryan (David Blunkett's communication expert and later Tony Blair's education adviser). New Labour also consulted other individuals, often from individual LEAs which had started to adopt innovative approaches to school improvement in the early 1990s (Brighouse & Bell, interviews, 2015).

I think certainly by '95, '96 we had diagnosed the problem and we had a philosophy which underpinned, ... a lot of Blairite education policy [of the following two terms in government]. (Ryan, interview, 2015)

In 1994, '95, '96, everyone knew that Tony Blair was going to be a very different Labour politician, everyone knew that New Labour wanted to do something really quite dramatic on education ... Labour came into power on 1 May [1997] and everything started on the next day, there was no gap, everything was brilliantly prepared ... New Labour was pretty good joining in a lot of people ... it was a kind of intellectual hothouse ... There was a New Labour education project and you might say that the education project was the best developed of all the New Labour projects when Labour came to power. (David Bell, interview, 2015)

What would become the educational agenda that underpinned post-1997 school reforms in Labour governments was first set out in the documents *Diversity and Excellence* (The Labour Party, 1995a) and, after its adoption at the party conference, *Excellence for Everyone* (The Labour Party, 1995b). While the title of these documents deliberately alluded to previous Conservative education rhetoric (e.g. the 1992 white paper *Choice and Diversity*), New Labour's education agenda reiterated some of Labour's traditional promises, such as to end scholarships for low-income families to attend private schools (the Assisted Places Scheme) and bring grant-

maintained schools back under the local authority fold. However, as 'foundation schools', these schools would still enjoy large freedoms from local control, such as responsibility for their own assets and hiring of staff, and large autonomy in their admissions. In addition, the documents endorsed the principles of 'local management of schools', calling LEA control of schools 'a thing of the past' (The Labour Party, 1995a: 11). Crucially, while the documents reiterated the party's formal opposition to academic selection at age 11, it announced that a Labour government would not abolish existing grammar schools through legislation without the support of parents affected (The Labour Party, 1995a: 11). Endorsing the key tenets of the previous Conservative education agenda around choice and competition (e.g. the publication of league tables) and wishing to 'move on' from the ideological debates of the past, in particular about the remaining grammar schools, New Labour also announced the need to 'modernise' comprehensive schooling (Blair, 1995) (discussed below). The changes to core tenets of the party's education policy announced in *Diversity and Excellence* produced considerable unrest within the wider party; its adoption at the party conference resulted in 'one of the closest votes in the Blair era' and 'the last really tough pre-election debate that we had at the Labour Party conference' (Ryan, interview 2015) (further discussed below).

After winning a landslide victory in the 1997 General Election, David Blunkett became education secretary, Michael Barber became head of the new Standards and Effectiveness Unit in the Department for Education and Employment, and David Miliband became head of Tony Blair's policy unit. An important influence also came from Cyril Taylor, who had advised the previous Conservative government on City Technology Colleges and became a key adviser on the policy of specialist schools (Exley, 2012). Finally, former journalist Andrew Adonis became Blair's education policy adviser (and, in 2001, Head of the Policy Unit) and the main architect of the academies policy.

At the centre of Labour's discourse on schools in its first term of government (1997–2001) was its 'zero tolerance' approach to failing schools, including exchanging the leadership or closing schools that did not improve ('Fresh Start') (DfEE, 1997). Labour endorsed the previous Conservative governments' 'accountability' agenda and continued controversial policies such as national testing, publishing school league tables and school inspections. The most visible continuity was the retaining of Chris Woodhead, controversial chief school inspector of the previous Conservative government. The centralisation of powers at the Department for Education increased, leading to further marginalisation of local authorities and teachers' professional autonomy in day-to-day teaching. Underpinning these policies and discourses was a general loss

of trust in the ability of educational practitioners – both teachers and LEAs – to deliver good education.

While New Labour's modernisers officially held on to their opposition to educational selection, they were unified in their perception that comprehensive schooling needed 'a big shake-up' (Ryan, interview, 2015). This was embedded in a wider discourse and policy agenda, executed during the first two terms of government, of 'tackling school failure' and raising standards of achievement. In a speech at the conservative think tank Social Market Foundation in 1996, David Blunkett set out the agenda for this modernisation, which he justified through the failure of comprehensive schooling to achieve its aspirations:

In spite of ... 30 years of comprehensive education, the pattern of excellence at the top, and chronic underperformance at the bottom persists. Too many commentators associate comprehensives with the worst features of secondary moderns ... not without justification in too many cases ... Our commitment to comprehensive education cannot be a commitment to continued mediocrity, to sameness or to tolerance of failure. Ours is a vision of a very different future, offering the opportunity to the many rather than to the few. (Blunkett quoted in Charter and Sherman, 1996).

Shortly after being elected, the Labour government published a white paper setting out its new educational agenda, including the aim for 'modernisation of comprehensive schooling' (DfEE, 1997). This critique of comprehensive schooling combined different strands of argumentation, including that such schooling hadn't overcome inequality and disadvantage, and that it had undermined both parental choice and incentives for schools to develop an 'ethos of excellence':

Although I'm a great believer in comprehensive education ... the truth was that it hadn't by itself brought about the transformation that we wanted... so in the sixties the Labour Party felt that, to put it very simplistically, if every secondary school was a comprehensive school, that would probably solve the problem, by the early nineties we had understood that that wasn't the case so we were looking for different policies in order to raise standards. (Estelle Morris, interview, 2015)

Patronising those who live in deprived urban environments with an expectation of failure will not help my constituents or those in other working-class areas to escape the poverty trap – as it would not have helped me. High standards of education ... are vital ... There is one C word which is anathema to Labour's education policy: complacency. I make no apologies for that. (Blunkett, 9 March 1996)

I think there was another feeling that there was a sameness about them, that they were a bit monolithic, that they were too big, that they didn't allow schools to have their own ethos and their own identity, that is very much the prime minister of the time Tony Blair's view. (Morris, interview, 2015)

Comprehensive schooling was presented having failed to transfer 'the best of the grammar school education', 'academic scholarship' and rigour into the comprehensive system. These were presented as key reasons why comprehensive reorganisation had not resulted in a more far-reaching transformation of the system (David Blunkett, interview, 2016):

The way comprehensives were introduced and grammar schools abandoned was pretty close to academic vandalism... grammar schools (selective but also excellent) were changed into comprehensives (non-selective and frequently non-excellent, and on occasions truly dire). (Blair, 2010: 579)

New Labour's reformers linked the 'failure' of comprehensive schooling to the model of school governance that underpinned this policy in England. Local government was seen as having 'never really addressed issues of school standards', as they were frequently driven by the 'vested' interests of local bureaucrats and teaching unions that prevented educational innovation and competition between schools (Bell, interview 2015):

We were never in favour of selection ... but we felt that comprehensive education needed a big shake-up and that was what underpinned some of the programmes that we were doing, whether it was Excellence in Cities or London Challenge or the academies programme. It was all about saying, we are going to have non-selective schools but just leaving them with a local authority as they are at present, generally speaking, wasn't doing the job. (Ryan, interview, 2015)

Fatally, the comprehensive principle became confused with dogmatic attachment to a bureaucratic model of school governance which institutionalised weak and unambitious school leadership. Comprehensives failed on governance ... Among the worst was the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) ... whose sweeping ambitions, vast bureaucracy and intense ideological debates did little to remedy the deep and deplorable failure of most of its comprehensives. (Adonis, 2012: 20)

The conservative Left had spent generations attacking private schools, 'elitism' and underfunding as the causes of England's educational ills ... But when it came to reform of the comprehensive itself, and the local education bureaucracies which had

sustained failing comprehensives for decades, [they denounced] virtually any change besides an increase in education spending ... [There was a] sad lack of knowledge of the real world of comprehensives and council estates ... What was needed was a fundamentally new approach to secondary education ... which was Blairism at its best. (Adonis, 2012: 36–7)

New Labour's response to the perceived uniformity and low standards in comprehensive schools was to increase 'diversity' – first through a return to internally differentiating pupils (grouping and setting by ability) instead of mixed-ability teaching, which was justified as necessary to take account of children's different abilities, stretch them accordingly, allow for different speeds of learning and therefore increase standards (Labour Party, 1997; DfEE, 1997: 38). Within the specialist school programme, which built on the idea of City Technology Technologies introduced in 1988, schools were also encouraged to develop different curricular specialisms and profiles and to seek private-sector sponsors (DfEE, 1997; DfES, 2003). Some New Labour reformers thought diversity within and between schools should focus on the need of schools to cater to individual learners, meeting the 'needs and aspirations of all children' (Blunkett, 15 March 2000); others, such as Blair and Adonis, emphasised the role diversity for allowing parents to choose and therefore pressuring schools to improve. Overall, competition between schools was seen as crucial in creating incentives for schools to improve standards of teaching and pupil performance:

The diverse system we want to build will be one where schools differ markedly from each other in the particular contribution they choose to make but where all are equally excellent in giving their students a broad curriculum and the opportunity to achieve high standards. Far from concentrating success in a few schools, diversity is about motivating individual schools, spreading excellence, sharing success and working collaboratively. This is at the heart of specialist schools. (DfEE, 1997: 38)

(Is there a future for comprehensive schooling?) Yes, but in an entirely new way ... you get a better mix of intake into a school through ... improvement; ... specialisation; ... making sure that you play to the strength of the child in the school; ... setting, not necessarily streaming; ... outer school activities; ... tutors. ... Nurture the excellence for children who can benefit from it, and let's deal with those who have got big challenges and special needs ... So in a sense going back to the whole essence of education, which ... should be pupil-based, ... develop the system around the needs of the child, rather than fitting the child into the system. That to me would be truly

comprehensive education. That within the same campus, you have a whole range of opportunities ... [and] working together with other schools. (Blunkett, interview 2016)

Linked to diversity and competition between schools, another key ingredient for school improvement was seen as a change in the 'culture' within schools. Much of New Labour's discourse and measures to strengthen school ethos reverted to features traditionally associated with the independent school sector and grammar schools, such as a 'powerful sense of excellence, tradition and purpose' (Adonis, 2012: 23). A new school ethos, building on strong school leadership, high expectations for pupils and 'healthy' competition between both schools and pupils (former school minister, interview, 2015), would raise standards and increase the schools' appeal with parents (DfES, 2003).

Part of the turning around of weak schools was having a culture in the school that was about learning, that was disciplined, that kids are not going to be distracted all the time by bad behaviour, quite often having a uniform because that sort of gave a sense of belonging to a particular school and in disadvantaged areas actually that was often quite a big thing just to bring a uniform in. ... The idea of the house system ... vertical tutoring system ... you got a bit of a healthy competition between the houses within a school, so there were just various ways of really just trying to recognise that in private schools ... ethos is quite important, it is not just the exam results, there is a sense that there are various skills that you gain, social skills, team building, and so on and actually trying to get a sort of sense of purpose in the schools and the schools that were more successful were the ones that got that ethos right as well as getting the exam results. (Ryan, interview, 2015)

In addition, a strong ethos around discipline and standards was seen as necessary in overcoming the 'culture of complacency' and low expectations of teachers towards the educational potential of working-class children, which had 'perpetrated social divisions' (Blunkett, 1995).

During Labour's first term in government, these ideas about diversity, competition and ethos primary became embedded in its specialist schools programme. Out of the specialist school programme and several previous initiatives targeted at failing inner-city schools emerged the academy schools policy, Labour's cornerstone for the 'post-comprehensive era' (Blair quoted in Woodward, 2001). Academies were announced in 2000 and introduced with the Education Act 2002. Academy schools would take over failing schools in deprived areas and were independent of local authorities. They were funded based on individual funding arrangements with central government, and were to be sponsored by a private-sector actor – in the early academies, often

local businesses. Academies received extensive freedoms in the running of the school (including relating to staff and pay), their admissions and the curriculum (West, 2014). The academies' freedoms, private-sector sponsorship and (in the case of the early academies) new school buildings were expected to contribute to turning the schools around and attracting local middle-class parents, who had previously avoided local schools. From the start, Andrew Adonis, who developed the programme and pushed for its expansion, envisaged academies as a radical departure from comprehensive schooling (Adonis, 2012):

Academies were born of the failure of comprehensivization to achieve its goals. For all the idealism of their pioneers, a large proportion of comprehensives were little better than the secondary modern schools they replaced and very few were highly successful. The key objective of academies was to replace failing and 'bog standard' comprehensives ... with successful all-ability schools, founded and managed on a different and better basis. (Adonis, 2012: 11)

What these 'secondary modern comprehensives' required wasn't an incremental improvement but fundamental reinvention. They needed to be closed and replaced by schools with a fundamentally new and better ethos, new and better governance, new and better leadership, ... teaching, ... curriculum, Facilities, extra-curricular activities, ... parental and community engagement. The schools to replace 'secondary modern comprehensives' needed to be strong, self-confident institutions, not council bureaucracies in school buildings. And these new schools need a missionary zeal to transform educational standards and aspirations in their localities. (Adonis, 2012: 23)

During its time in government, New Labour also gradually reduced the role of local authorities in regulating school admissions. This included both increasing parental choice and expanding the share of those schools with power over their own admissions (first the foundation schools, then academies and other types of school). Schools were expected to adhere to a non-binding 'Code for Practice' for Schools admissions in 1998, which banned selection by ability,⁵ but New Labour remained very reluctant to regulate admissions in a more comprehensive and statutory manner

⁵ The remaining grammar schools, and a few other schools that had partially selective admissions before the 1998 Act, were allowed to continue with their selective admissions. In addition, specialist schools were allowed to select 10% of their intake by 'aptitude' in their given specialism, but few schools chose to do so (Coldron et al., 2009).

(West and Pennell, 2002: 210). As a former (early 1990s) adviser to New Labour's education team recalls:

If you allow every school to have its own admissions arrangements, how can you secure equity for everybody? ... they are mutually exclusive. But they have never been willing to tackle admissions. They are all trying to make the code fairer and we had endless arguments ... and in the end, they didn't make the code fairer ... it's always been a battle. (Tim Brighouse, interview, 2015)

4.1.2.2 *Beyond modernisation*

Much of New Labour's initial school policy discourse focused on standards and school improvement through increasing diversity, choice and competition within a system of comprehensive education perceived as too uniform and frequently failing to achieve high standards. Towards Labour's third term in government from 2005-2010, the emphasis of its school policy agenda shifted towards a more radical reform of school and public service governance, aiming to blur the divide between the private and public sectors (Blair, 2010: 210–2). This agenda included a move away from the strong central state involvement that had characterised New Labour's early initiatives to tackle school failure. Independence was presented as an even more crucial ingredient for the development of school 'ethos' and excellence, mirroring the perceived successes of private schools and the remaining grammar schools. In Blair's view, the success of these schools was due to not only their selective intakes but also their independence:

They have an acute sense of ethos and identity. They have strong leadership, and are allowed to lead. ... They innovate because no one tells them they can't. They pursue excellence. And – here is a major factor – they assume excellence is attainable ... failure ... is their fault ... not the fault of 'the system', 'the background of the children' or 'the inadequacy of the parents'. (Blair, 2010: 579)

This agenda, driven strongly by Tony Blair himself and Andrew Adonis as his key adviser, led to the proposal of 'independent specialist schools' (DfES, 2004; The Labour Party, 2005) and culminated in the proposal for trust schools and the highly controversial white paper *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All* (DfES, 2005). The white paper announced that all schools were to become 'independent state schools', free from local authority control and run by a non-profit making trust, which could be third sector actors and/or commercial actors (on a non-profit basis). Like academies, trust schools would receive extensive freedoms in their management of budgets,

assets, staff, curriculum and – crucially – admissions. The traditional role of the local authorities as a ‘provider of education’ was reduced to being the ‘commissioner’ for education, as well as ‘the champion of parent choice’ (DfES, 2005: 1). While the 2005 white paper announced some measures to improve ‘choice’ for less advantaged parents, such as choice advisers and transport subsidies, it insisted that schools needed to develop their own approach to ‘fair admissions’, within the precepts of the ‘Code of Practice’ on admissions.

The white paper raised considerable discontent among not only long-standing critics of New Labour’s education agenda but also considerable parts of the Parliamentary Labour Party and former ‘modernisers’, leading to ‘fierce internal arguments’ even among the Blair’s closest staff (Blair, 2010: 579). After heated inner-party struggles during much of 2005 (further discussed below), and in light of a looming rebellion among Labour MPs, some concessions were made around school admissions and the power of local authorities. Still, the vote following the third reading of the 2006 Education and Inspections Act produced the biggest parliamentary rebellion among Labour MPs under Blair’s premiership, and the Act could only be adopted with the support of the Conservative Party.

In 2007, Gordon Brown succeeded Tony Blair as prime minister and leader of the Labour Party, but no major initiatives followed in school policy until 2010. Academies were made to follow the National Curriculum for the main subjects, and the range of possible sponsors was expanded to include universities, charities, faith groups and even local authorities (West, 2014). Although Brown had been more sceptical of the academies programme and, during his term as Chancellor of the Exchequer, reluctant to release further funding, the expansion of the academies continued after 2007;⁶ by May 2010, 203 schools had become academies (Long, 2015). After Labour lost the General Election in 2010, the academy programme was continued and expanded by Conservative-led governments (Avis 2011; Hatcher 2011; Ball 2013).

⁶ Some sources indicate that Brown had, over time, become convinced over the merits of academies (former schools minister, Interview 2015) – a view also held by Adonis himself (Adonis, 2012) – while others indicate that a deal was struck between Blair and Brown that linked Blair’s resignation as prime minister to Brown’s support of the academy program (Vaughan, 2009).

4.1.3 Continuity and change in Labour's comprehensive schooling policy

As discussed in the next section, Labour's support for comprehensive schooling in the 1960s had emerged from, and built on, an uneasy consensus between several strands of intellectual traditions, educational practice and electoral considerations, as well as a considerable degree of pragmatic support for the existing educational landscape. By the 1980s, much of what has become regarded as Labour's 'traditional' policy on comprehensive schooling had been shaped by educational practice on the ground, which official policy programmes then more or less tacitly endorsed.

From the 1960s to the 1980s, a key feature of this 'traditional' comprehensive schooling policy was support for non-selective school admissions and all-ability schools (implicitly accepting the diversity of schools in age ranges and organisational models), in line with its support of the model of school governance that had emerged following the 1944 Education Act. As many internal party struggles over comprehensive schooling (discussed in the next section) reveal, Labour's support for this 'partnership' approach to school governance (or a 'national system, locally administered') has become one of the strongest features of its comprehensive schooling policy. This approach built on the principle of democratic control over schooling: LEAs as the main providers and regulators of schools, with central government having only a limited role. It also included a general trust in the professionalism of teachers, who enjoyed much autonomy in the practical organisation and content of teaching. The support for mixed-ability teaching (in principle, not necessarily in practice; see e.g. Hatcher, 1997: 7), which was particularly held among Labour teachers, became part of Labour's policy manifestos in the 1980s. A further crucial characteristic of Labour's traditional comprehensive schooling policy was restraint in setting national requirements for the curriculum (e.g. a common core curriculum, or a balance between academic and vocational elements),

While the party's support for comprehensive schooling was evident, in the early 1980s there was a general perception that the party had to delineate this policy more clearly in its official programme. In the early 1970s and early 1980s in particular, there were several debates and initiatives that aimed to overcome divisions in the curriculum and examination system (The Labour Party, 1982). However, while the commitment to comprehensive schooling remained a 'cornerstone of Labour's philosophy' in education policy documents from 1979 to 1992 (e.g. The Labour Party, 1991), during the 1980s the emphasis in discourse and policy documents shifted towards issues such as parental rights, educational standards and accountability. For many, this

did not contradict the central tenets of comprehensive schooling, for which a guarantee of adequate standards in *all* schools was a prerequisite to realise opportunities for *all* students (Radice, 1986). But critical voices within the education community felt that in light of the Conservatives' attacks, Labour provided 'no coherent defence of comprehensive schooling' (Tomlinson, 2005: 46), and that 'Labour's agenda of comprehensivization, mixed ability groupings, social education and the removal of inequality and discrimination in education ha[d] slipped from the centre of the debate' (Inglis, 1991: 7). Participating in the ongoing debate over standards in English state schools, of which the majority were comprehensive schools, Labour was criticised as ultimately strengthening the Conservative argument that performance standards were poor because of comprehensive schooling, rather than defending comprehensive schooling as crucial for raising educational standards for all pupils (Inglis, 1991: 8–9).

Despite the degree of ambiguity in Labour's educational programme and its endorsement of parts of the Conservative accountability agenda (even before the 1990s), there were several key differences between Labour policy during the later years of Kinnock's leadership (until 1992) and Labour policy during Tony Blair's leadership (after 1994). The first such difference related to the opposition to selection. Until 1992, every Labour election manifesto included a demand to abolish the remaining grammar schools; but while New Labour remained opposed to the principle of selection by ability, it dropped this demand after 1995, and, when in government, New Labour appeared rather lenient towards other forms of selection (e.g. allowing a small degree of selection by aptitude, and officially banning selection by ability but loosely enforcing it in practice by making more and more schools their own admissions authorities). Although there were some suggestions of balancing admissions between schools to mitigate social selection (e.g. in the 2005 white paper, which suggested banding or admissions by lottery), New Labour governments remained reluctant to regulate admissions more proactively.

Other changes appear to be less straightforward. New Labour's critique of mixed-ability teaching and demand for schools to introduce internal differentiation practices (such as setting by ability) were seen as a clear break in the traditional understanding of comprehensive schooling. Despite support for this general principle, there has always been some scepticism among Labour politicians as well as a diversity in teaching practices on the ground. Perhaps the *real* break in Labour policy in the 1990s was that New Labour's demand for internal differentiation signified central government interference in internal school practices.

Another less straightforward change between 'Old' and New Labour school policy was the encouragement of diversity between schools. Unlike in other countries, Labour's

understanding of comprehensive schooling has never built on a notion of a national framework for the curriculum and school organisation. The existing diversity among comprehensive schools was generally supported as reflecting local needs, and proposals to guarantee a broad curriculum in the 1980s were debated within these general parameters of local diversity (see e.g. The Labour Party, 1982). To some degree, the introduction under New Labour of a range of new school types, which differed in funding, governance and curricular specialisation, was similarly justified as allowing schools to respond to local demands. However, it appears that there was a shift from a more universalist understanding of diversity and local community, with a concern for social selection (albeit a concern not always manifested in actual policy outcomes), towards a more market-oriented understanding of choice and competition, with less-evident concern about social selection (although, as discussed below, there were some differences in opinion among New Labour politicians, in particular beliefs about the importance of market mechanisms to improve the conditions of the most disadvantaged).

Overall, the clearest change in Labour's policy was in the area of school governance – specifically, the party's departure from its original support of the post-1944 'partnership approach', in which comprehensive schooling became embedded after its introduction in the 1960s. Until the mid-1990s, the Labour Party's understanding of comprehensive schooling situated local authorities as the main providers and regulators of schooling, and invested a high degree of trust in teachers' professionalism in the delivery and content of education. This understanding was challenged – first by the Conservative government in the 1980s and then by New Labour from the mid-1990s – via the marginalisation of local authorities; the reduction of teachers' autonomy; the granting of greater freedoms to individual schools and their leaders; increased central prescription (e.g. in the curriculum and teaching methods); and the greater involvement of private-sector actors and market-inspired mechanisms, such as choice and competition, in public-school provision. New Labour endorsed the New Public Management and the system of school accountability that had developed during the 1980s (including national testing and the publication of school performance data). It further strengthened the powers of the central government while increasing the autonomy of individual schools in their day-to-day business – both to the detriment of local authorities. What emerges as the clearest strand of change in Labour's school policy is therefore the reduced role of local government, greater trust in teachers and more market-oriented approach to the provision of schooling, expanding parental choice and stimulating diversity and competition between schools. Much of this change was epitomised in the academies; these remained all-ability schools, but (as Tony Blair's quote at

the beginning of this chapter indicates) they 'departed in every other respect' from the traditional comprehensive school. Opinions about the extent of this change differ:

The academies largely are comprehensive schools but they are under a different leadership and there was an attempt to try other kinds of partnering arrangements ... So still comprehensive schools but with new models of school governance. So I think Labour, to be fair, was entirely consistent in its approach to the value of comprehensive education but it wanted it to evolve. (Bell, interview, 2015)

I used to be able to say that one of the great strengths and weaknesses of the British education system was that it's a national system, locally administered, which meant that because the local councils were responsible for the administration of schools two things happened: One, they had to relate to the needs of an area, and two, they could get kicked out by the electorate, if it was going wrong. ... That's being changed, so that we have a system that, theoretically, was going to be administered at school level ... but is actually now more centralised than ever in our history because of the authority that the Ministry of Education has got in the establishment and operation of schools and the multi-academy and trust organisations and so on that are responsible for those schools. So we lost the advantage of a national system, locally administered and replaced it with a centralised system operated as a series of small businesses. (Kinnock, interview, 2015)

4.2 The formation of party policy and the struggle over Labour's soul

The remainder of this chapter attempts to provide more in-depth insights into the various (and often overlapping) motivations of the actors involved in Labour's education policy, which were revealed during internal party struggles over such policy. While the previous sections indicated key motivations and justifications for New Labour policy changes, the following analysis aims to provide a more nuanced picture of the motivations of the actors who drove these changes (from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s), the actors who upheld Labour's 'traditional' commitment to comprehensive schooling, and the internal party struggles these divisions caused.

4.2.1 Traditional attachments

4.2.1.1 The educational community

A key characteristic of the drive towards comprehensive schooling in England, as well as its support by the Labour Party, was its bottom-up nature; the drive was led by teachers, local councillors and the wider education community rather than the party's ideologists or leadership. In the 1920s, the National Association of Labour Teachers led the advocacy for comprehensive education, both in general and as official Labour Party policy (Simon, 2000: 92–3). From the 1950s on, left-wing academics and activists at the periphery of the Labour Party (such as Caroline Benn and Brian Simon) became key advocates of comprehensive schooling and, in the 1960s, gained considerable influence over the Department for Education (Kerckhoff, 1996: 29). After 1965, during the implementation of comprehensive schooling, the key actors were again teachers and local authorities, both of whom had a strong presence in the Labour Party. Equally, there seems to have been a clear majority in Labour-controlled local governments for ending selection, which parents also saw as divisive (former Local Government Association representative, interview, 2015). The link between comprehensive schooling and the principles of local authority control and teacher autonomy was therefore less an outcome of a particular educational or social doctrine than of actual processes of educational reform. It appears that a strong degree of ownership developed for this reform among teachers in particular. The 1980s Conservative governments' attacks on comprehensive schooling and teachers seem to have increased this attachment and the defence of the project among many left-wing teachers (teaching union representative, interview, 2015).

Much of teachers' protests against New Labour's policy came from a feeling of being unfairly blamed in New Labour's discourse about failing schools and teacher's complacency and low expectations towards disadvantaged students. Resistance to New Labour's policy of marginalising local authorities and teachers was therefore perceived as a sign of limited trust and a curtailment of their influence and autonomy (teaching union representative, interview, 2015). In terms of particular education policies, some division of opinion was apparent between teachers' unions and associations of school leaders (which generally welcomed, for example, New Labour increasing the powers of school leaders). However, among both teachers and head teachers there appears to have been a considerable normative attachment to comprehensive schooling:

I would say most people concerned with some form of policy activism in the Labour Party are motivated by non-selective educational ideologies. (*Also within the teaching force?*) Yes, yes. I think that's one of the strongest features of the policy of organised teachers. (Teaching union representative, interview, 2015)

Even today, the main forum for comprehensive schooling supporters – among not only teachers, local councillors, academics but also policy activists and MPs – is the Socialist Education Association (successor of the National Association of Labour Teachers). While affiliated with the party, the Association's influence over Labour education policy has significantly diminished since the 1960s and 1970s – particularly under New Labour, which saw it as representing Old Labour views (Socialist Education Association representative, teaching union representative and former Local Government Association representative, interviews, 2015):

You can see that shift happening in the nineties when Labour was the opposition party. Labour's first response to the 1988 Education Act ... was initially critically, and it called in effect for a defence for the status quo ... but you can see its attitude changing in the early nineties towards support for New Public Management, a system based on centralisation [of powers to the central government, away from local authorities], decentralisation [of powers to individual schools], a National Curriculum, a strong assessment system, a strong inspection system, all these things were problems for teachers but became part of Labour's policies. (Teaching union representative, interview, 2015)

4.2.1.2 Attitudes in the wider party

This attachment to comprehensive schooling in the party seems to have transcended the circle of actors directly involved in educational practice. Protest against New Labour's 'modernisation of comprehensive schooling' in the mid-1990s came from both an alliance of teachers and local authority representatives (generally considered to be on the party's left wing) and a group rooted in the 1960s project of 'egalitarian socialism' (on the party's right wing), the latter of which was personified by Roy Hattersley, Labour's deputy leader between 1983 and 1992. Comprehensive schooling and its embeddedness in the party's 'egalitarian project' of welfare-state expansion in the 1960s and 1970s had become a core principle; it symbolised 'what Labour stood for', and was a key battlefield for struggles over the party's wider societal vision and identity after the mid-1990s. Hattersley openly criticised that New Labour's refusal to abolish grammar schools and its

plans to create different types of schools and expand parental choice would create social selection and the 'death of comprehensive education' (Hattersley, 1995).

New Labour modernisers were aware that selection had become a 'hugely totemic issue' for the Labour movement (Ryan, interview, 2015) and that the survival of grammar schools was 'a deep-seated and long-standing irritation to the bulk of the Labour Party' (Blunkett, 2006: 173). It seems that, for many supporters of comprehensive schooling, personal and familial experiences with the individual consequences of selection were linked with wider concerns over the socially divisive effects of selection:

[Comprehensive schooling is] an issue which, to me, is fundamental to the Labour Party. That is the principle of comprehensive, non-selective education ... I feel passionate about the issue of comprehensive education because ... I failed the exam and still today remember the trauma ... One of the reasons I joined Labour was because of their stance on comprehensive schools and the principle of equal educational opportunity. ... The Labour Party has a duty to ensure that the principles of comprehensive education are maintained and improved. ... All members of the Labour Party should, as a matter of conviction, give their 100 per cent support to the comprehensive system and no one should be seen to be undermining it. (Steinberg, quoted in Riddell, 1996)

It appears that this attachment to comprehensive schooling and local authorities was not grounded in the ideological 'doctrine' of Labour's 1960s revisionism, but rather had become part of the party's 'ethos' – 'the traditions, beliefs, characteristic procedures and feelings which help to animate the members of the party' (Drucker 1979, p. 1):

The comprehensive system came about under Labour government and that was not an accident because left-of-centre politicians felt that the previous education system was divisive and it needed to create a system that was more inclusive. So that was very deep in the psyche of Labour that it had been the party of government that had introduced the comprehensive principle, had seen through comprehensive reorganisation across the country and it was still very, very heavily committed to that sense that local schools should serve children of all needs and abilities. ... I think there was some suspicion that some of these New Labour politicians including perhaps Tony Blair as Prime Minister didn't really believe in the comprehensive system (Bell, interview, 2015).

Traditionally Labour Party left-wing people believe that [comprehensive schooling] is very much about fairness, about social justice, and the frustration has been that [while] we claim to be the party of fairness and social justice ... our very inequitable system ... has disadvantaged a lot of people. ... This is an issue for lots of people within Labour and there're lots of Labour members working hard locally to fight for a truly comprehensive system across the country ... and they're passionate about that. (Member of the National Policy Forum, interview, 2015)

New Labour attacks against local government similarly 'didn't go down very well with quite a lot of the membership', and 'it was felt within the party that he [Tony Blair] was developing a view that was not a traditional Labour view' (member of the National Policy Forum, interview, 2015). The link between support for local authorities and support for comprehensive schooling was evident in the critique of grant-maintained schools that could opt out from local government; it was feared that these would create a two-tier system of secondary schooling, in which a 'top' tier of schools would be well-funded and attractive to the middle classes, while the working classes would have to attend the 'bottom-tier' local authority schools (Hatcher, 1997: 7).

When the blueprint for Labour's new education agenda was put to vote at the party conference in 1995, a stand-off between Hattersley and shadow education secretary David Blunkett epitomised the basic rift in the party. The media interpreted this stand-off as a battle of 'different worlds, different ways of thinking', in which Hattersley spoke from the 'deep dark heart of Labour's conscience', 'expressing the anger of an old social-democratic egalitarian and a centraliser' while Blunkett 'spoke for the current reality of state education, a world where schools do fail' (Marr, 1995). Labour's support for comprehensive schooling was compared to its support for the NHS (Marr, 1995) as 'one of the most strongly held beliefs of many Labour members'; one that had outlived its support for public ownership (the symbolic 'Clause Four' in the party's constitution, which Blair abolished):

The party in the country ... wanted to win, but was slightly bewildered, ... afraid of what this change would mean – were we losing our roots? Were we disavowing our values and ideology? ... between the two was the parliamentary party, ... they had to go back each week to their community, ... their parties would say: 'What's going on? What's all this rapid change?' (Blunkett, interview, 2015)

Blunkett had been totally sincere when saying and believing that we have to do better for the children of the majority. ... But he still had to get up at the Labour Party conference and give the categorical assurance that there was going to be 'no return

to the 11 plus'. How do you let things get to a state where you have to say that? That's how distrusting the Labour audience – and not just Labour Party members, the wider audience – became of what the ambitions and purposes were of the Blair government. (Kinnock, interview, 2015)

The looming revolt over New Labour's policy document was only contained after Blunkett famously promised: 'watch my lips – no selection either by examination or interview under a Labour government' (Sherman, 1995).⁷ The education policy was adopted with one of the smallest majorities ever at a Labour conference, and only due to the union block vote (Ryan, interview, 2015; see also Sherman, 1995).

Shortly after the adoption of the 1995 document, another revolt broke out in the Parliamentary Labour Party after Blair defended his shadow health secretary for sending her child to a grammar school. This provoked much unrest in the Parliamentary Labour Party, which led to both the resignation of the long-standing chairman of Labour's backbench Education Committee, Gerald Steinberg (see quote above), and to Blair facing one of his 'toughest weeks' in his first two years as party leader (Riddell, 1996):

Grammar schools were by and large cordially detested by the party ... my nearest and dearest in the office thought it pretty indefensible ... the party went into turmoil ... people really did tell me my leadership was on the line. (Blair, 2010)

The opposition to New Labour's education policy within the wider party and the educational community continued after the party's election in 1997. However, the prospect of returning to government, and the high priority that education policy (and increasing educational spending) received in the party's agenda, pacified much resistance (Phillips, 2003):

After a period of a complete lack of investment of the Conservatives in the state education system, the people were just very pleased to see that we were moving into the right sort of direction as far as education is concerned. (Comprehensive schooling activist, interview 2015)

⁷ Blunkett later corrected this statement to mean 'no more selection', referring to the fact that a Labour government would prohibit the introduction of new forms of academic selection, but not abolish existing grammar schools

Can you imagine what it felt like as an educationalist to have a prime minister was saying 'education, education, education'? I couldn't believe that. (Brighouse, interview 2015)

Critiques of Labour's education policy continued after 1995, but there were no more major rows over education policy at the party's conferences. This was partly the consequence of the introduction of the National Policy Forum, which shifted the process of policy deliberation away from the party conference and towards a more fragmented system of discussions among delegates throughout the country. Although the aim of the National Policy Forum was to increase intra-party democracy, critics in the party have seen it as a means to centralise decision-making and diffuse internal opposition to policy:

The Policy Forum was seen as a way of giving the membership something to do, giving them the sense that they are involved in the process but not really valued as anything significant as far as the major decision. ... Labour Party policies were the ones that were coming out from Tony Blair and his team and there wasn't anything else, so that was it ... we knew that the Policy Forum is full of these people who were of the same shade as the leadership. (Member of the National Policy Forum, interview 2015)

4.2.2 Motives for modernisation

As discussed above, the reorientation in the party's school policy after 1994 was developed and driven by a 'handful of people and the predispositions and opinions of their advisers' (Brighouse, interview 2015) around party leader Tony Blair. It appears that these actors were driven by a range of motivations for 'modernising' comprehensive schooling, including a strong wish to get the party elected, as well as a perception that a fundamental overhaul of Labour's programmatic outlook was intrinsically necessary and desirable. In school policy, this included a general acceptance – and even endorsement – of the status quo on school governance set out by the Conservative governments of the 1980s:

Labour was fairly clear that it wasn't going to unpick much of what the Conservatives had done. That was partly an administrative drive, why spend all your time just unpicking things that had been there? But actually, I think this is a really important point, New Labour *believed* in a lot of these things anyway ... that public information about school performance through league tables, OFSTED inspections, those were

things that left-of-centre politicians should be supporting, because they were enhancing power towards individual citizens and their families by giving more information about schools, by exercising school choice and so on. (Bell, interview, 2015)

While it is difficult to distinguish actors' motivations from the justifications they give, it seems fair to say that while electoral strategies and pragmatic considerations were an important component in the overhaul of Labour's education policy under Blair (see also discussion in the next section), New Labour's reforming zeal in education policy was also strongly driven by ideological motivations; it seems that the wish to change individual policies was embedded in a much more encompassing vision for societal change. However, apart from a shared 'Third Way' ideology for social change, it seems that the individual experiences and beliefs of Labour's 'modernisers' played a considerable role in their outlook, both on education policy in general and on the specific policies brought forward.

4.2.2.1 Individual experiences and missions

The importance of personal and biographical experiences in shaping the views of key policymakers was frequently highlighted in the interviews (e.g. Brighouse, Ryan, Morris) and by the protagonists themselves, e.g. Blair's middle-class upbringing and attendance at a prestigious private school (Blair, 2010: 103). In contrast, David Blunkett, whose experience of school was that of a blind pupil from disadvantaged background, came to be very critical about the opportunities offered within the existing system (Blunkett, 2006). While there was a shared sentiment that fundamental change was necessary, the different backgrounds and experiences within New Labour – particularly between Blair and Blunkett – led to different emphases regarding 'modernising' comprehensive schooling, such as the tensions between equity and choice, and between community and competition, discussed in the first part of this chapter.

Blair didn't understand maintained education for the great majority anyway. He'd been to public school, he went to Oxford and was – is – a highly intelligent, very decent guy. So he didn't have any malevolent idea but he just had no real experience of the education system in which we're all brought up and he didn't have a real perception of the place of education in society. ... I would distinguish between Blair and Blunkett, Blair, through a lack of knowledge and understanding accepted what I think are crap ideas about improving education through competition. Blunkett

moved from being very much on the Left to being part of the mainstream to become a faithful adherent of Blairism, of 'modernisation' as a guarantee of progress, and competition as a force for advance. ... It was a pity because he's a very great guy with really decent progressive instincts and judgement but he really did embrace this idea of competitiveness in education. He'd be totally sincere when saying and believing that we have to do better for the children of the majority. (Kinnock, interview, 2015)

Michael Barber had started his career as a teacher in a comprehensive school that had retained a 'grammar school ethos':

In part, the educational views I came to hold so strongly a decade or more later were shaped here: yes, equity really did matter, but it would be achieved not by lowering expectations or abandoning traditional good teaching, but by demanding them everywhere. (Barber, 2007: 13)

During his engagement in local politics in a Labour-led council 'chock full of mad people' (Barber, 2007: 7), Barber became critical of Labour's approach to school policy and the strength of 'producer' [of public services] interests, i.e. organised public sector workforce such as teachers and local councillors in the party.

The local party ... was heavily influenced by the left-wing local branch of the National Union of Teachers and obsessed with a tokenistic attitude to equality. There was no debate about the shockingly bad standards of achievement among, for example, black boys in Hackney schools, but there was a massive row over whether or not the word 'anti-heterosexualist' should appear in the published version of the plan. (Barber, 2007: 11)

Finally, Andrew Adonis, who grew up in a deprived council housing estate before being 'rescued' by a scholarship for a boarding school, became probably the most ardent critic of comprehensive schooling in the Labour Party:

As soon as I started in No. 10 I focused on one objective above all: how to reinvent the comprehensive school. (Adonis, 2012: xii)

I didn't arrive in No. 10 with a worked-up policy, but rather a sense of what made for a good school, from my own school days and from my experience as an education journalist, school governor and university lecturer. I had a profound conviction that the status quo needed fundamental, not incremental, reform. A complete reinvention of the comprehensive school was required. (Adonis, 2012: 34)

I saw failing comprehensive schools, many hundreds of them, as a cancer at the heart of English society. (Adonis, 2012: xii)

The emphases in these actors' memories might be exaggerated, but it appears that they were driven by a strong personal urge to change schooling and strong convictions about what this change should look like. Adonis, for example, speaks of the 'foundation and re-formation of schools' as 'a hallmark of every age ... often the greatest legacy one generation passes on to another' (Adonis, 2012: 10).

Despite their different backgrounds, these actors were united in a condemnation of Old Labour and its 'misguided' approach to equality and opportunity, a scepticism of existing structures of school governance, and an admiration of the 'ethos' of grammar and private schools. While disagreements among these actors became more pronounced during Labour's time in government (as discussed below), when New Labour developed its new approach to school policy after 1994 and had to gain the wider party's support, these different backgrounds – particularly between Blair and Blunkett – were useful. New Labour was aware that it 'needed to win the party over to our philosophy before the 1997 election' (Ryan, interview, 2015), in particular at the 1995 conference, where Labour's blueprint of this philosophy was voted on (The Labour Party, 1995a). David Blunkett's credentials from his previous involvement in local Labour politics and his more moderate approach became an important bridge between the more radical New Labour ideas of Blair and Adonis and the more traditional wings of the party, particularly during the early years of Blair's premiership. For example, Blunkett convinced Blair of the need for a compromise to bring grant-maintained schools, which had opted out of local authority control, back into some sort of local framework in order to gain the wider party's support for New Labour's education agenda (Ryan, interview, 2015).

However, in the early 2000s tensions increased within the New Labour team. Some of these arose over influence on the government's education agenda, in particular over Blair's and Adonis' micromanaging of the Education Department's policy agenda⁸ However, differences were also visible in policy ideas and goals, in particular. While Blair and Adonis emphasised parental choice and competition between schools, and were highly critical of local authorities, education secretaries Blunkett and Morris emphasised the need to raise standards to overcome social

⁸ Andrew Adonis is generally believed to having authored most of New Labour's white papers following becoming Blair's advisor in 1997 (and later school minister). Estelle Morris's resignation as education secretary has been attributed to this micromanaging from No. 10 (see e.g. Hamed and Hinsliff, 2002).

disadvantage, and the need for schools to collaborate with each other and with local authorities (Brighouse & Ryan, interviews, 2015).

I think the real dividing line is this, Tony Blair and Andrew Adonis, I think they were really, really sceptical about local authorities and given their time again I think they may have preferred to get rid of them between 1997 and 2001. David and I weren't that sceptical, David comes from a local authority background as I do ... and we worked really hard between 1997 and 2001 to reform local authorities ... because David and I felt that schools belong to, schools had a place in their locality and they needed to hold together and so if you take the word independence ... Tony Blair and Andrew Adonis, more favoured the words 'independent autonomous schools', David and I more favoured the words 'independent schools working within the family of schools', and there's the difference between the two viewpoints, so what we were always doing was compromising on it ... and then from 2002 onwards the dividing lines seemed to strengthen. (Morris, interview, 2015)

The basic problem was policy. Estelle fought shy of controversy on the Left and favoured incremental reform. Tony and I favoured bold reform. There was much we agreed on ... But we disagreed on both the need for bold reform and on the reforms themselves, notably the principle of independent state schools ... Estelle had just about been content to see academies launched as a small experiment in 2000 although she hadn't been keen. Had she and not David Blunkett been education secretary at the time, I suspect that the fundamental principle to state schools being managed independently of local authorities might have been a show-stopper. (Adonis, 2012: 89)

Throughout the 2000s, the school agenda was even more strongly driven by Tony Blair and Andrew Adonis, and became a key area in which Blair wanted to leave a legacy after his time as party leader and prime minister:

Despite all the difficulties, I felt enormously confident of what I was doing ... I was now completely on top of the policy agenda ... for the first time since I became prime minister, I was guided simply by what I genuinely thought was right. ... With a trusted inner group of ministers who shared the same vision and knew this was where Labour had to be, we were still very much in a struggle with a large part of the party. (Blair, 2010: 374-375, 581)

In 2005, Estelle Morris joined the opposition of backbench Labour MPs against Blair's education policy and the 2005 white paper (see below).

4.2.2.2 The perception of electoral dilemmas and opportunities

As the previous section indicated, electoral considerations were an important, but not the only, motivation behind New Labour's overhaul of school policy. It is, however, difficult to assess the direction of this relationship. It appears that, within a generally strong orientation towards making the party electable, school policies themselves were largely shaped by the convictions of key actors involved, and electoral strategies and discourses were then used to sell these policies to the public (and to justify them to critics within the party). However, different strands of motivations cannot easily be disentangled by the researcher (or the actors themselves); nor can this section provide a full account of electoral strategies and public attitudes. Instead, the aim here is to provide some historical context for the changing role of electoral considerations in Labour's education policy, and to report on the different themes stated in the interviews.

The influence of electoral considerations over Labour's stance on comprehensive schooling was not entirely new. In the 1960s, popular dissatisfaction over selection had grown and the introduction of comprehensive schooling was perceived to go with the grain of popular opinion, including among large sections of the middle classes (Kerckhoff, 1996). However, Labour politicians, including Crosland himself, remained nervous about the electoral risk involved in closing down grammar schools (see e.g. Halsey interviewed in Klingston, 1994). The introduction of comprehensive schooling was sold as 'grammar school education for all' (DES, 1965). Comprehensive schooling advocates indicate that the decision to allow for local proposals over the form of comprehensive schooling, and the range of debates and deliberations this involved on the ground, created a sense of ownership over 'going comprehensive', through which 'the ideas behind comprehensive education have been lodged securely in the hearts and minds of countless local populations and communities' (Simon, 1997: 17). However, there was also a perception that, in contrast to grammar schools, comprehensive schools had not developed a clear image (Halpin, 1989):

In education, despite the fact that the public would never accept the re-imposition of the 11 plus, many quite like the idea of grammar schools for *their* kids ... grammar school attributes ... uniforms, teachers in gowns, an old-fashioned curriculum and selection *within* the school. (Kinnock, interview, 2015)

From the 1970s on, including during Labour's long years in political opposition in the 1980s, the image of comprehensive schooling was attacked via media scare stories about out-of-control educational experiments in 'looney-left councils' (Kerckhoff, 1996: 40), and the Conservative governments' school reforms and discourse challenged Labour's educational legacy:

It's almost like every time you had an example of something going wrong in a school, it was blamed on the comprehensive system. So that was picked up, this idea that if you're going to improve schools that you have to ... move away from the comprehensive model in some way, without reverting back entirely into selection. It was very easy to scapegoat, the comprehensive model, but at the same time there are very good examples of comprehensive schools throughout the country and in London, so it was an argument that was used for a purpose in my view. (Labour Party activist, interview, 2015)

From the mid-1980s on, in an attempt to regain its hold over the public education agenda, electoral considerations were more strongly emphasised in Labour's education policy. This increasing emphasis on educational standards and parental concerns was presented as a necessary correction of the image that Labour had been unconcerned with standards, as well as a tool to attack the Conservative governments in charge of schooling in the 1980s (Radice, 1986). As discussed in section 4.1., in the late 1980s Labour's education discourse focused on the need to respond to parental preferences. But it seems that, while Labour perceived parents as worrying about educational standards and individual school quality, the party nonetheless perceived the project of comprehensive schooling as popular among the public (Radice, 1992).

Under Tony Blair, electoral considerations and the strong urge to appeal to middle-class voters took centre stage in adjusting not only Labour's school policy but also its overall programme and image:

There was a concern in the Labour Party, and certainly amongst New Labour, that what you didn't ever want to do was to frighten away middle-class voters who have come over very strongly to vote for Labour in 1997 and 2001. (Bell, interview, 2015)

The modernisers wanted to signal their credibility and commitment to educational standards, which built on a very strategic and deliberate communication strategy and media spin, steered mostly by Blunkett's media adviser Conor Ryan and involving the repetition of mantras such as 'standards, not structures' and promises to continue to publish school league tables (Blunkett, 1994):

For some reason the Left has never been associated with high standards and rigour and the basics, it's the right wing who was seen to value reading and writing and the Left was too often associated with airy-fairy that doesn't make a difference ... we wanted to give a clear signal that the basics were important and that we understood the need for a child to read and write. (Morris, interview, 2015)

The first statement that David issued when he was appointed, he started talking about raising standards in schools and the language was quite important because the phrase 'raising standards' was not one that had been used that much, it was seen as too right wing, but it was a deliberate point, and it coincided with some quite important changes that had happened in accountability, particularly in the English system ... we had to do a few symbolically important things to show people that we meant that. ... Blunkett wrote an article for *The Times* and did an interview with *The Frost Programme* where he said that Labour was going to continue publishing league tables ... it was a carefully argued piece. (Ryan, interview, 2015)

Endorsing and deliberately using the image of a division between 'producer' and 'consumer' interests in education, which had been commonplace in the Conservative discourse, New Labour's discourse not only aimed to signal sensitivity to parental concerns and to distance itself from the teaching unions but also served to undermine internal party opposition to its new education project:

It was a perception that Labour's education policy had [been], with the exception probably when Jack Straw was shadow education secretary, ... too closely aligned with the teaching trade unions. ... Blair was very keen that Labour's education policy was going to be much more aligned to the concerns of parents ... the National Union of Teachers and others were outraged and highly critical when we did that. We didn't mind that because actually, that was sending a signal to a lot of the people who Labour wanted to vote for them, that we were on their side and we weren't on the side of poor standards in schools, so you needed to do something big like that. (Ryan interview, 2015)

The more the trade unions opposed us the better it was for us politically, they never realise that if we had an awful time, and we had many awful times at trade union meetings, of being yelled at, the result was the public felt we were standing up for their children against militant teachers. (Senior Labour politician, interview, 2015)

Perhaps most importantly within Labour's overall electoral discourse, school policy – particularly the party's changing stance on comprehensive schooling – was used as a symbol to signal the party's change from 'old' to New Labour; to paint a broader picture about its values and goals, about individual aspirations and opportunities, and about the future role of the state. School policy therefore functioned to 'sell' the party and its new policy to the wider public, whose orientation, particularly in Blair's view, had become meritocratic rather than egalitarian:

The purpose of focusing on education ... also served to emphasise how we saw the role of the state: enabling the fulfilment of potential, not controlling lives or business. (Blair, 2010: 103)

(Why was education part of the modernisation agenda?) [It was] about modernity and coming to terms with globalisation and understanding how the world was working. In other words, being on the same page as the electorate and recognising what was happening with business. Underpinning that was education, because education is a symbol of reform and modernisation – if you believe in reform, you believe in modernisation – then you got to start with educating the workforce, educating the individual for the world of tomorrow ... in the minds of the electorate, in the minds of parents, what you say about education gives them an impression of what you stand for overall, what your general political offer is. (Blunkett, interview 2016)

[Old] Labour politicians] didn't 'get' aspiration. ... When injustice and inequality were reduced – in part through their efforts – they failed to see what would happen ... It is about aspiration, ambition ... having their children do better than them. My dad's greatest wish was that I be educated privately ... The problem with the intellectual types was that they didn't quite understand this process, or ... [they] resented it ... they wanted to celebrate the working class, not make them middle class – but middle class was precisely what your average worker wanted himself or his kids to be. ... The impulse of many of those helped by well-meaning intellectuals was essentially meritocratic, not egalitarian – they wanted to be helped on to the ladder, but once on it, they thought ascending it was up to them. (Blair, 2010: 43)

Through its electoral discourse, New Labour aimed to create a wider cross-class appeal for its education policy, lifting its education proposals beyond distributive conflicts between disadvantaged and middle-class families by creating the category of 'ordinary but aspirational' people. Attacking standards in comprehensive schools was justified as both benefiting the poor (who had been 'failed' by comprehensive schooling) and attracting the middle classes (preventing

their exit from the public to the private school sector). Through improving the quality of public schooling – by increasing diversity, improving school ‘culture’ or ‘ethos’ and expanding ‘choice for all’ – New Labour’s electoral strategy tried to link its traditional concern with equity with a discursive emphasis on the ‘consumers’ of education. This construction of a cross-class coalition was mirrored by the link between Blair’s middle-class persona and Blunkett’s personal experience of disadvantage:

I had a philosophy that was clear and clearly different from that of a traditional Labour politician. I was middle class, and my politics were in many ways middle class. My programme was every bit as much geared by the aspirations of the up-and-coming as the anxieties of the down-and-out. (Blair 2010)

These different strands of electoral concerns and strategies are particularly visible in statements regarding Labour dropping its long-standing electoral promise to abolish the remaining grammar schools. The main justifications given for this were that retaining grammar schools signalled moderation and that ideologically charged debates were an undesirable distraction:

Labour could never have closed grammar schools ... in 1997, any more than the Tories opened new grammars after 1979. For both parties, the policy has been a symbolic statement to signal moderation on education. (Ryan, 2007)

[People in the wider party] were still nostalgic about the idea that we should have abolished the remaining 163 grammar schools and we said we’re not getting side-tracked ... diverted into the old shibboleths of grammar schools versus the rest. (Blunkett, interview, 2016)

I came to accept the line ... that we shouldn’t be distracted by 168 schools, ... we will use up a huge amount of political capital and time and resources solving a problem that didn’t affect that many people. ... We would occasionally discuss it and then, in the end, it went back into the too-difficult drawer. (Former schools minister, interview, 2015)

The decision to not abolish grammar schools was also presented as informed by calculations of electoral risk, or the potential loss of votes among parents affected by the changes. Critics, however, doubted the actual level of electoral risk involved:

We knew that in order to win support in marginal constituencies, we had to drop the idea of abolishing grammars. (Ryan, 2007)

We had Labour MPs in areas with grammar schools who would come with a terrified look in their eyes 'if you do this I'm gonna lose my seat' ... everyone knows that there's something wrong there and they [grammar schools] don't really work ... no one really knows what to do about them because they're popular in the areas where we have them because, in the end, aspirational parents are the more articulate, the most likely to vote, all think that their kid's gonna get into grammar schools. (Former schools minister, interview, 2015)

[The grammar school issue] was too emotionally based because of this kind of fear that we would lose votes – and I'm not convinced that anybody had actually demonstrated that we *would* lose votes, to be honest, but it was believed that this was about losing voters. (Labour Party activist, interview, 2015)

I think they constructed the parent as a particular sort of entity, I think there were other ways of constructing the diversity of parent interests ... I would say that Labour has absolutely nothing to lose in opposing grammar school education. (Teaching union representative, interview, 2015)

But it wasn't only pushy middle-class parents who New Labour believed to be attached to grammar schools; the party believed that old myths about grammar schools as 'proper education' and a 'ladder of opportunity' were also alive and well among lower-middle class constituencies:

The feeling [in the Labour Party] is that the most vocal people ... are not the middle-class people, they're those with aspiration, lower-middle-class people who think it's their children's chance to do better for themselves ... wanted to retain the 11 plus; the people that we see as our core voters ... aren't aware of this full argument ... that most children will not get into the grammar schools ... they just see the aspirational aspect of it and see the prospect of their opportunity being taken away as very negative. (Member of the National Policy Forum, interview 2015)

There was also a feeling amongst the public that we'd lost something good in the old grammar schools, they say 'ah the days of the grammar schools' ... there was a feeling ... that grammar schools were good, it was secondary-modern schools that we wanted to change. ... And I think some working people thought, we'd sooner have had the chance to fight for a grammar school place and probably not got it than not have the chance to get it at all ... It's like buying a lottery ticket. You know you're not gonna win ... I'd sooner spend the two pounds and hope I'd win rather

than abolishing the lottery. So it is quite complicated in a way. (Senior Labour politician, interview, 2015)

Although the issue of grammar schools only affected a small share of the electorate (those who lived in areas where selection still existed), grammar schools were perceived to have left an imprint on the public imagery as embodying educational standards and ethos, and there was considerable nostalgia for them. The issue of grammar schools therefore highlights the symbolic dimension of education policy – the values and ideals these schools assumedly embodied in the minds of voters. New Labour thought (or at least stated) that even for the wider electorate, most of whom have never been inside a grammar school, these schools were symbols of educational excellence and meritocracy – in stark contrast to presumed dissatisfaction with comprehensive schooling:

You went out into the wider world and no one was saying thank God we've got comprehensive schools, there was a level of dissatisfaction with secondary education and comprehensive education got blamed if you like, so things had to change, so given we decided as a party not to have more selection we had to do something about the comprehensive system, so I think that did become described as modernising comprehensive schools, which is good, I think that was fine. (Morris, interview, 2015)

New Labour likely thought that being seen as closing down grammar schools – even if local parents would have supported this⁹ – would be damaging for the message about 'aspirations' and 'meritocracy' and educational standards that underpinned its general narrative. Mobilising long-standing collective myths about grammar schools remained a feature of Labour's agenda to modernise comprehensive education and school ethos, especially in the academies programme (as discussed above).

New Labour attempted to create cross-class appeal for its education policy through a discourse that constructed similar interests, aspirations and opportunities between different social groups (helped by the fact that investment in education was increased substantially). But tensions within Labour's policy became visible in growing public concerns over school admissions. The increasing competition between parents over places in oversubscribed schools, and the

⁹ The specification for parental ballots on grammar schools in the 1998 Standards and Framework Act have been criticised as being biased towards the status quo. The only (negative) parental ballot took place in 2000 in Ripon (Chitty, 2013: 91).

opportunity for some schools to select parents, created concerns among parents. It seems that some of MPs' discontent regarding the Labour governments' reluctance to regulate school admissions was also informed by feedback from parents in their constituencies (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2004).

4.2.3 Modernisers divided

During fights over school policy between the New Labour government on the one hand, and the wider party, local councillors and teachers on the other, the Parliamentary Labour Party appears to have taken a middle position. As discussed, occasional unrest over school policy had flared up in the early 1990s, but many Labour MPs supported New Labour's education agenda of tackling school failure and increasing educational investment (for example, through the specialist school programme). Academies had initially been popular among MPs in areas with failing schools; they were seen as a way of tackling school failure through new investment and of being more attractive to middle-class parents, which was hoped to lead to a better balance in school intakes (Socialist Education Association representative, interview, 2015). At the same time, fears remained that the increasing differentiation between schools could lead to a stronger hierarchy between schools, which would undermine the party's general commitment to comprehensive schooling (Exley, 2012: 234). Over time, worries over the diversity of school types and the increasing complexity of school admissions had grown, and the Labour-led Education Select Committee in the House of Commons launched an inquiry into the government's secondary school policy (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2004). During the early 2000s, the Committee became a vocal critic of the government's ambivalent approach to selection and reluctance to regulate school admissions beyond a non-statutory code of admissions:

A government that permits the continuing expansion of selection, by ability or by aptitude, can only be understood to approve of both the practice of selection and its outcomes. ... The Government needs to explain how it reconciles its insistence that there will be no return to selection with its willingness to retain and increase selection where it already exists. (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2004: 5)

Allowing an increasing number of schools to be their own admission authorities was seen as not only contradicting the party's traditional opposition to selection by ability but also furthering schools' selective practices, undermining the principle of parental choice:

The weakness of the regulatory framework for admissions has eroded the role of parental preference by failing to regulate school admissions effectively and address the behaviour of admissions authorities which attempt to choose their pupils by covert means; thus the rhetoric of parents choosing schools has been transformed into schools choosing parents. (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2004: 75)

While academies were not necessarily opposed as a targeted solution for underperforming schools, concerns became more widespread when trust schools became a blueprint for the whole school system in a 2005 white paper (Socialist Education Association representative, interview, 2015). Unease within the Parliamentary Labour Party about the Labour government's education policy grew in the months leading up to the publication of the white paper, the presentation of which sparked heavy debates, as well as the publication of an *Alternative Education White Paper* (Compass, 2005) signed by 58 backbenchers (including nine former government ministers). The *Alternative White Paper* particularly criticised the absence of a mandatory admissions code, the ban on local authorities establishing new community schools and the forced conversion of schools to trust schools, and displayed a general unease with a 'market-driven' approach to schools, which ran 'contrary to Labour values' (Martin Salter, (HC Deb, 15 March 2016: 1517). Although the trust school policy did not go as far as the academies policy, it would affect the whole school system:

What was actually being proposed was not quite as dramatic as the way the story was spun ... I think that there was a widespread concern that the more schools you allow to be their own admissions authorities ... the more potential there is for selection, and that's what united a lot of people. (Comprehensive schooling activist, interview, 2015)

School policy became entangled in disagreements over Blair's radical public-sector reform agenda, as well as a general leadership struggle between Blair and Brown and their supporters. As a New Labour adviser recalls, there 'was a bit of politics going on both sides' and the Schools Bill became a sort of 'litmus test' for a 'group of middle-ground ... soft-left MPs, who were feeling increasingly dissatisfied with the direction of public service reform' and the 'general direction of travel' (Ryan interview 2015).

After months of negotiations and some concessions around admissions and the powers of local authorities, as well as out of concern that the Conservative Party would benefit from the

disunity among Labour, many rebels – including the chairmen of the Education Select Committee Barry Sherman and many the authors of the white paper – backed the government (e.g. Martin Salter, (HC Deb, 15 March 2016: 1516-1517). However, 46 MPs remained opposed to the 2006 Education and Inspections Bill – the biggest backbench rebellion in a third reading during Blair's premiership.

As well as this unrest among Labour backbenchers, more prominent figures in the moderniser circle expressed unease with Labour's school policy, including Blair's deputy prime minister, John Prescott. Having failed the 11-plus as a child, Prescott had been a strong supporter of comprehensive schooling, but in the late 1990s had become convinced of the need to modernise it. During the early 2000s, he then became concerned about academies (and then trust schools) leading to more social selection and producing a 'first-class/second-class' education system (Prescott quoted in Crosland, 2005). During the negotiations between Blair and the rebel MPs, he figured as a mediator. Other senior members of the Labour Party, such as Neil Kinnock and Estelle Morris, publicly criticised the policy, including at events organised by comprehensive schooling campaigners in 2005. Kinnock had been generally supportive of Blair's modernisation of the Labour Party, perceiving it as building on the groundwork he laid in the 1980s, but he nonetheless became critical of New Labour's school policy. The following statements by Kinnock and Blair reveal their differences in opinion:

Tony Blair and his education secretaries had this idea that schools could be treated as competitive units and that improved education would come about because of a contest for higher standards. ... It was bound, as I warned Blair (it was our most serious disagreement) to lead to worse social segregation, reduced social mobility and locked-in underperformance, it was bound to happen ... You will get oversubscribed schools, where parents who are knowledgeable and articulate will manage to get their kids in, even if they have to move house, and the school that has attracted applicants by being successful will become more successful and not really part of that community. ... It isn't that it's philosophically transgressing against the comprehensive idea, especially if that only means 'all-in schools', but it does mean that, in practice, we are gradually getting more social selection which is even more invidious than the honest upfront 11+ examination, stupid though it was. ... He said I was old-fashioned, it's in his autobiography, it was the one really big row we had and it lasted quite a long time. Indeed, it came to a head when they came up with this lunatic idea in about 2004, 2005, of 'trust schools', which would have gone a step beyond academies ... that was the last big row I had with him ... I was very

loyal and we remained good friends, but he was fundamentally wrong about education, absolutely. (Kinnock, interview, 2015)

[Kinnock's] take on academies was that they were elitist ... they weren't ... they were better than other local schools. For me, this was the point. However well motivated, it was classic levelling down. It was an argument that went to the heart of what New Labour was about and its championing of aspiration. Equity could not and should never be at the expense of excellence. My abiding insistence was never give up on excellence, wherever it might be. Attacking it – irrespective of what we felt about grammar schools, private schools, special schools, any schools – was to commit a fatal solecism. It meant that, in the ultimate analysis, we were prepared to get rid of something that was excellent on the basis that it represented the wrong ideology. (Blair, 2010: 578)

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter has traced the main processes underpinning the evolution of Labour's attitudes towards, and strategies on, comprehensive schooling policy.

The change in Labour's school policy over the past 30 years was strongly linked to a profound change in the party's wider ideological orientation and overall policy project. The party's embrace of what has been called 'Third Way' involved clear changes in its understanding of the roles of the state, the market and the individual, and a shift from a notion of *equality of opportunity* towards a more individualistic conception of *aspiration*. Comprehensive schooling was portrayed as a symbol for a bureaucratic and paternalistic welfare state that denies choices and prevents innovation. Within the ambition of modernising the Labour Party, New Labour policymakers attempted to modernise its approach to the governance of public services in general and to comprehensive schooling in particular.

Internal party struggles over comprehensive schooling emerged as a pronounced conflict between defenders of the party's traditional approach to such schooling and those wishing to fundamentally alter the policy position. However, the interplay of actors and motivations behind the struggles that gave way to the evolution of Labour's policy are more complicated, and often overlapping. Although the main cleavage in this struggle was between the 'party in public office' and the 'party on the ground', at times this cleavage was bridged while at other times fissures emerged – including within New Labour's moderniser circle itself.

Key to understanding Labour's traditional attachment to comprehensive schooling was first of all its emergence from educational practice – teachers and local authorities had developed a strong sense of ownership over this policy through their involvement in the implementation and day-to-day practice of comprehensive schooling since the 1960s. Second, support for the principle of comprehensive schooling had become part of the 'ethos' of the wider party, linking many Labour members' individual or proximate experiences of selection in school with a general attachment to Labour's 'egalitarian project' of welfare-state expansion in the 1960s. It seems that the Conservative governments' assaults on what was perceived as Labour's legacy in schooling (and the welfare state in general) both strengthened the emotive attachment to the principle of comprehensive schooling and, to some degree, sowed doubts over its effectiveness.

During the 1980s Labour's discourse on education policy became more concerned about the issue of standards and the need for the party to consider the concerns and preferences of parents in educational matters, without however questioning the policy of comprehensive schooling as such. The considerable change in the Labour Party's school policy from the mid-1990s on resulted from a change in the actors involved in policy formulation. For New Labour's school policy modernisers (central among whom was Tony Blair), electoral tactics were linked with wider shifts in programmatic thinking about the goals and means of social reform, as well as leading policymakers' personal educational experiences, and they clearly admired the educational traditions that grammar and private schools were seen to embody. The trend towards centralisation within Labour's policy formulation and decision-making, which had begun under party leader Kinnock, was strengthened under Blair. Policy advisers and think tanks gained important influence over the education policy agenda, which was steered more strongly than before by the party leader himself, while teaching unions and local government representatives were largely excluded from policy development.

The change in the party's education policy led to a few big rows in the wider party in the years between Blair's election as party leader (1994) and Labour's election to government (1997). Opposition came from not only those directly affected by the policy changes (such as teachers and local government) but also an unease in the wider party, particularly its former right wing, for whom debates over school policy were linked with debates over the party's identity. These initial rows required some concessions, but Blair's prioritisation of education and electoral outlook helped to overcome open resistance within the party. Internal party opposition was made further invisible through the introduction of the National Policy Forum: – a forum for policy deliberation outside of the party conference. New Labour's successive electoral successes continued to

provide a strong basis for withstanding internal party critique, but internal party unease with New Labour's school policy continued throughout Blair's leadership.

In 2006, a more radical agenda of school governance reform, strongly driven by Blair and his advisers, led to one of the biggest parliamentary backbench rebellions in a third reading the Labour Party has ever witnessed. These debates in the Parliamentary Labour Party highlighted that many had initially supported the agenda of tackling school failure and moderate changes to educational governance, including (to some degree) parental choice and the introduction of academies to replace failing schools. However, concerns voiced under the banner of comprehensive schooling included the rising involvement of private-sector actors, the loss of 'local democratic control' over schooling, and the deregulation of school admissions and the danger of these leading to social selection and the reproduction of social disadvantage. For both Blair and his critics, school policy became a core symbol for both public service reform and the Labour Party project overall. These debates ultimately revealed divides even within the former moderniser circle. Since then, there has been a degree of unease with Blair's legacy (which Conservative-led governments have built on since 2010) without a clear alternative vision for school policy to emerge. If the election of Jeremy Corbyn as party leader in 2015 will stimulate a new debate over Labour's educational vision remains to be seen.

Chapter 5. SPÖ school policy: between utopia and pragmatism

It all goes back to the 1920s... the reform ambitions ... and the obstacles for these ambitions ... and this continues until today. It is the last really ideologically dominated policy field with completely rigid ideological convictions ... diametrically opposed, alas. (SPÖ senior civil servant, interview, 2015)

There is this century-old lip service paid by the social democrats to comprehensive schooling, but it has never been important enough to make it a precondition for agreeing to a coalition [government] ... it was always 'if there's a way, good, if not, then we will find some sort of compromise'... under this Austrian willingness to compromise, school policy has badly suffered. (Education researcher and policy activist, interview, 2015)

The Austrian Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) has displayed some of the longest-standing support for comprehensive schooling among European social-democratic parties – and has had the least success in bringing this goal about. After the failed attempts to introduce comprehensive schooling at the lower secondary level (by postponing selection from the age of 10 to 14) in the 1920s and 1970s, the party's programmatic aspiration for such schooling has coexisted with its pragmatic and compromise-oriented political strategy, which has largely side-lined its traditional demand in favour of expanding educational opportunities within the existing differentiated school system. However, in the 2000s, comprehensive schooling made a comeback on the education agenda and the SPÖ pushed once more for school experiments with non-selective schooling. This third attempt ended in 2012 with a political compromise between the SPÖ and its coalition partner, the Christian Democratic Party (ÖVP), in which the quality of the lower-tier track was to be improved and possibilities for transferring between school tracks at the end of lower secondary schooling were increased, while academic selection at the age of ten was to remain. Research on the party's previous initiatives to introduce comprehensive schooling has often doubted the SPÖ's political will for such change (Dermutz, 1983b; Pelinka, 1985; Gruber, 2015). However, given the extent of political opposition to changing the structure of the Austrian school

system these authors also highlight, it is important to also ask why this policy has ultimately survived as a programmatic aspiration for the SPÖ.

This chapter aims to shed more light on the fundamental tension between the SPÖ's continuing programmatic commitment to comprehensive schooling and its pragmatic, risk-averse political behaviour. It starts by tracing the main developments in the party's school policy from the early 1980s until the most recent compromise on school organisation in 2012. It will then investigate how far the SPÖ's policy on comprehensive schooling has changed and the interplay of actors, motivations and strategies that has shaped the party's policy over the past three decades.

5.1 The evolution of SPÖ school policy

5.1.1 From the speechless 1980s to new hopes in the 1990s

In the 1980s, social-democratic education policy in Austria was characterised by two a widespread disillusionment among comprehensive schooling supporters following the end of the comprehensive school experiments of the 1970s, while the SPÖ was coming to terms with the loss of its absolute majority and its attempts to modernise the its programme and profile in the public. Although the SPÖ continued its control over the school ministry until the mid-1990s, education policy barely figured on the party's agenda during the 1980s, and the SPÖ was generally perceived as having lost the political initiative on education policy (Seel and Scheipl, 2004).

The 1982 Act (*7. Schulorganisationsgesetz-Novelle*) had marked the end of a decade of educational expansion and reforms under the SPÖ governments of the 1970s. In 1971, the SPÖ government had initiated experiments with comprehensive schooling hoping to expand them their non-selective nature to all public secondary schools. Ten years later, despite a generally favourable evaluation of these pilots, comprehensive schooling had failed to gain political support from the ÖVP, whose votes were necessary to reach the required two-thirds majority for changing school legislation (which had been given constitutional rank in 1962). The SPÖ eventually agreed to a compromise in 1982, which maintained academic selection but allowed mainstreaming the other organisational and pedagogical innovations tried out in the school

experiments to the *Hauptschule* – the lower-tier track of secondary schooling. To increase permeability between the school tracks, the curriculum of the *Hauptschule* was aligned to the *Gymnasium* so as to allow high-achieving graduates of the *Hauptschule* (at age 14) to transfer to the upper level of the *Gymnasium*. Stand-alone upper-level *Gymnasiums* (for the ages 15–18) were also introduced to absorb the increasing number of *Hauptschule* graduates staying on in schooling after the age of 14. Despite these improvements, the compromise resulted in much disappointment among comprehensive schooling supporters within the party, (Matzenauer, interview, 2016; education researcher, interview, 2015).

In 1983, after 13 years of political dominance in Austria, the SPÖ lost its absolute parliamentary majority. From then until 1999, it remained the strongest party but had to seek coalitions, first with the then small FPÖ (until 1986) and subsequently in grand coalitions with the ÖVP (1986–99). During the 1980s, SPÖ school ministers recurrently declared their support for comprehensive schooling as a long-term aspiration (Zilk, 1983; Moritz, 1984; Hawlicek, 1988), but in light of the well-known political opposition from their coalition partner ÖVP no further initiatives for comprehensive schooling emerged from the SPÖ school ministry. Although the party's education spokesperson, Hans Matzenauer (1980–92), and other policy activists tried to keep the debate going (for example, by initiating new comprehensive schooling experiments in Vienna), education received rather low priority on the political agenda in general and on the SPÖ's policy agenda in particular. Among school reform advocates, there was growing awareness that the 1982 compromise marked the end of the optimistic reform decade of the 1970s and the 1980s were generally perceived as a lost decade of 'educational speechlessness' (Gruber 1991; Matzenauer, interview, 2016).

There was a rupture in the eighties, but we didn't know that then or haven't understood it yet. We were aware that there are new laws and they are made of iron. The leader of the ÖVP teacher union at that time said: 'after this law, they will keep quiet for the next 50 years' ... And then we all felt that the reforms had run out of steam. You cannot play reforms for 10 or 20 years. (Oskar Achs,¹⁰ interview, 2015)

In the 1990s, two developments directed some renewed attention to the issue of comprehensive schooling: first, the rising educational demand for places in the *Gymnasium* and

¹⁰ Oskar Achs is an education policy activist and historian specialised on social democratic education policy in Austria

the resulting pressure on the differentiated school system, and second, the preparation of a new SPÖ party programme in the mid-1990s in which education policy became more salient.

Aligning the curricula between the *Hauptschule* and the lower stage of the *Gymnasium* since 1985 had in theory improved the opportunities of children initially not selected by the latter to still transfer to higher levels of secondary and tertiary education later on. However, the hope that this upgrade would increase the appeal of the *Hauptschule* was not realised and parental demand for the *Gymnasium* rose, particularly in urban areas (Spudlich, 1991). *Gymnasium* school places were under pressure to keep up with rising educational ambitions, while *Hauptschulen* in urban areas saw declining numbers (Rohrer, 1993). This continuing mismatch between educational demand and school places caused regular debates about comprehensive schooling in the media and local party-political bickering between ÖVP and SPÖ politicians, despite some agreement on initiating school partnerships between *Hauptschulen* and *Gymnasiums* in Vienna and Graz (Engelbrecht, 2014: 80–9). SPÖ's education spokespeople, Hans Matzenauer (1983–92), and Helmut Seel (1992–94), reiterated their demand for comprehensive schooling in light of the failure of the *Hauptschule* reforms to ease the pressure on transitions at the age of ten. Conversely, ÖVP politicians raised alarm over the 'comprehensivization' of the *Gymnasium*, and instead demanded reinstating entrance exams and a more academic curriculum for the *Gymnasium* while raising the profile of the *Hauptschule* among parents by allowing it to develop distinct curricular profiles (such as IT or sports) and introducing an intermediate school-leaving exam (often called *Mittlere Reife*) for those pupils not destined to take the Matura examinations at 18 (Die Presse, 1992; 1993b; 1993a; Rohrer, 1993; Witzmann, 1993a). While well-covered in the national press, most of these debates remained on a local level, in particular in Vienna. And although the SPÖ reiterated its demand for comprehensive schooling occasionally in its electoral manifestos (SPÖ, 1990) or leadership speeches (Die Presse, 1993b), the party's leadership appeared to be reluctant to engage in this debate. SPÖ's school minister, Rudolf Scholten (1990–94), appeared particularly anxious about getting dragged into this 'blockage of labelling' (*Blockade der Etikettierung*), which he was perceived as paralysing all other school reforms (quoted in Witzmann, 1993b).¹¹

¹¹ During this period, the ÖVP regularly denounced any reform initiated by the SPÖ ministry, such as including disabled children in mainstream schooling or increasing curricular freedoms for schools, as introducing comprehensive schooling 'through the backdoor' (Salomon, 1993).

The SPÖ was responsible for appointing the school minister for 24 years (1970–94), but in 1995 it relinquished its ‘traditional claim’ on the school ministry to its coalition partner, ÖVP. For school-reform advocates, this signified that the party had relinquished its thematic leadership in education policy (Seel and Scheipl, 2004: 49). However, this ‘low point in SPÖ school policy’ (Matzenauer, interview, 2016) also led to new dynamics in the debate. In particular, the aspirations of the new ÖVP school minister to return to clearly differentiated curricula for *Gymnasium* and *Hauptschule* reignited some protest within the SPÖ (Witzmann, 1994; Die Presse, 1995).

In the mid-1990s, school policy gained an additional (small) push on the party’s agenda during the preparation of a new party programme (the first since 1978). After Austria’s accession to the EU in 1994 and the election of social-democratic parties in many European countries, SPÖ leader Victor Klima (1994–99) sought to demonstrate ideological and personal proximity to Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder. Preparations for a new party programme, which aimed give the party a modernised public profile, were then used by SPÖ school-reform advocates to also devise a new education programme – the first comprehensive programme published since 1969 (SPÖ, 1999a; SPÖ, 1999b). This new education programme linked traditional SPÖ ambitions with the emerging debate about life-long learning, which was popular across the EU (Einem, 1999; Swoboda, 1999). The priority Tony Blair had given education policy in his Third Way discourses was also perceived as useful for the SPÖ’s education agenda (Karl Duffek,¹² interview, 2015). Interestingly, Tony Blair’s critique of comprehensive schooling in England was not commented on by SPÖ education policy makers as the party reiterated its support for comprehensive schooling (Wiener Zeitung, 1997). In an attempt to overcome the usual party-political controversies, comprehensive schooling (*Gesamtschule*) was renamed as ‘common schooling’ (*Gemeinsame Schule*):

When we presented the draft of the education program to the media, we were asked: ‘Are you now not supporting comprehensive schooling anymore?’ The Conservatives have succeeded in attaching the comprehensive school to the negative notion of ‘hotpot school’ [*Eintopfsschule*]. We do however still advocate for comprehensive schooling. We will not give up on a concept ... which has been implemented in most European countries (with conservative approval) and which has proven beneficial. (Swoboda, 1999: 14)

¹² Karl A. Duffek was director of the SPÖ think tank Karl Renner Institut from 1990 until his death in 2016

Overall, the SPÖ 1998 party programme (SPÖ, 1998) contained many 'Third Way' elements, such as a generally positive outlook on the market and the new role of the state, and a focus on individual rights and responsibilities (Cap and Duffek, 1999: 136). Despite some similarities between the discourse between New Labour's manifestos in the mid-1990s and this SPÖ program (Stuiber, 1998), however, the SPÖ did not fundamentally alter its programmatic-ideological stance. While holding on to the goal of an expansive welfare state, by the 1980s the SPÖ had already become a centre-left, mainstream-European party with a pragmatic economic policy stance (Pelinka, 2013).

5.1.2 The third attempt for comprehensive schooling (2000–12)

In the 1999 parliamentary elections the SPÖ suffered major losses. Despite remaining the strongest party in parliament (with 33 per cent of the vote), the SPÖ found itself in political opposition for the first time in 30 years when the ÖVP and the FPÖ formed a coalition government. While the SPÖ, under new party leader Alfred Gusenbauer (2000–08), tried to come to terms with this unfamiliar role as opposition party (Gehler, 2006: 49), the incoming centre-right coalition government initiated a programme of welfare-state restructuring and retrenchment (Tálos, 2006). In light of budget cuts for schools and other unpopular reforms – particularly the reintroduction of tuition fees, which the SPÖ government had abolished in 1972 – education policy once again rose on the SPÖ's agenda (SPÖ, 2002).

We had a party leader with Alfred Gusenbauer who was well versed in education policy issues ... And who liked to talk about it. So it was always clear that this is a topic which the party leader emphasises as well ... and the second thing was, we had a good team which was able to work unburdened from daily politics ... being in opposition gives you more opportunities to demand things ... and we were also lucky having a school minister as our counterpart which had a rather unlucky story, with the introduction of tuition fees, so [education minister] Gehrler has really lost all the credit with the teachers and the pupils and the students. And this constellation has facilitated things, but we still had to work hard, there wasn't a month without a press conference from the parliamentary party about education policy and Gusenbauer attended about a third of these. (Erwin Niederwieser, interview, 2015)

In addition to this conducive political context for SPÖ school reform advocates, it was in particular the publication of the first PISA studies (OECD, 2001; OECD, 2004) which awarded

education policy unprecedented attention in media and public debates in Austria (Bauer et al., 2005; Popp, 2010). Although Austrian education researchers had long criticised early selection, it was only with the PISA studies that detailed comparative data on the association between family background and educational achievement became available. In addition to highlighting the particular strength of this association in Austria, the PISA studies also revealed a comparatively average student performance (despite with comparatively high spending), which challenged widespread beliefs among politicians and the public about the superiority of Austria's (selective) education system (Member of the government's Education Expert Commission 2003–05, interview, 2015). Widespread assumptions about educational standards were particularly challenged in late 2004, when the second round of PISA results showed even lower average performance and Austria experienced its own 'PISA-shock' (Bauer et al., 2005). Within this context, demands for comprehensive schooling became additional backing through the explicit recommendation of PISA-representative Andreas Schleicher to postpone the age of selection in Austria (Der Standard, 2004). By the end of 2004, comprehensive schooling had become the dominant topic in political educational debates (Witzmann, 2005), the media was paying greater attention to the Finnish comprehensive school system, and more and more social and political actors were coming out in favour of postponing selection (particularly voices from business, the Church and even the ÖVP; see e.g. Der Standard, 14 September 2003).

SPÖ education spokespeople Erwin Niederwieser and Josef Broukal, perceiving education policy as a key asset in developing the party's profile for the upcoming election in 2006 (Niederwieser, 2008), started to develop a new education programme (SPÖ, 2004) that formally endorsed comprehensive schooling. The education spokespeople regularly reiterated this demand (Die Presse, 2004), but the party's electoral campaign on education initially emphasised policies perceived as less contentious, such as the expansion of early-childhood education and full-day schooling, and abolishing tuition fees for higher education (Niederwieser, interview, 2015). After the publication of the findings of the second PISA round in December 2004, the party became less cautious; SPÖ leader Gusenbauer announced that, in the case of a Red–Green majority in the 2006 elections, it would push for the introduction of comprehensive schooling (Die Presse, 2005b).

In the meantime, the centre-right government found itself under increasing pressure to introduce education reforms in response to the PISA results, and appointed an expert commission led by the Austrian PISA coordinator. In its first report, the commission recommended a fundamental change to the Austrian model of school governance – from 'resource-based input-

steering by the central administration to results-based output-steering' – to improve the quality of Austrian education (Zukunftskommission, 2003: 7). This included implementing a national system of quality control with regular central testing of pupil performance at key transition points (*Bildungsstandards*), as well as devolving greater autonomy and responsibility for quality development to individual schools. Most of these changes required two-thirds of the parliamentary vote. Being in opposition, the SPÖ now became the main veto player for government school reforms.

In these changing political circumstances – with the ÖVP now aiming for introducing educational reforms – ÖVP education minister Gehrler announced her willingness to abolish the two-thirds-majority requirement in all areas of school legislation – a long-term demand of SPÖ school reformers. However, concerns were now raised within the SPÖ about how the end of the two-thirds majority requirement in turn diminishes the SPÖ's status as a veto player for future school reforms by a centre-right government, which could include the introduction of market-oriented reforms in public schooling in Austria (Der Standard, 2005; Die Presse, 2005a). In an unusual coalition, the SPÖ approached the Catholic Church and together they started to advocate for retaining a two-thirds-majority requirement for particular core principles, such as the 'public nature' of schooling (and the ban on tuition fees for public secondary schooling) and the existing regulations on state subsidies for Catholic private schools and religious instruction in public schools. Minister Gehrler retaliated by demanding in turn to keep the principle of differentiated schooling in constitutional rank – an issue for which a platform of Catholic organisations and Conservative teacher associations had started to mobilise very vocally (Die Presse, 2005b; Nimmervoll, 2005; Die Presse, 2005c). In 2005, SPÖ and ÖVP agreed a compromise which abolished the two-thirds requirement for most areas of school legislation, thereby allowing to introduce the recommendations of the expert commission, with the exception of the aforementioned 'core principles' – including the differentiated nature of Austrian school education. While the SPÖ initially insisted that this would not prevent the introduction of comprehensive schooling as such¹³, the party was widely criticised among school policy activists

¹³ The compromise entailed a vague formulation around 'adequately differentiated secondary schooling'. The SPÖ initially insisted that this would allow for the introduction of comprehensive schooling (since the school system would remain differentiated after the age of 14), but constitutional experts remained sceptical (Die Presse, 6 Mai 2005; Kobenter, 2005). The continuing requirement of a two-thirds majority for introducing comprehensive schooling has since become accepted.

as having de facto sold out the future option of introducing comprehensive schooling (e.g. Green Party education spokesperson, interview, 2015).

The 2006 election brought an unexpected victory for the SPÖ. In coalition negotiations, the ÖVP insisted on retaining selective schooling as one of its three conditions for forming a coalition government (Der Standard, 2006). A compromise was found that allowed a small number of school experiments on 'differentiation' and 'individualisation' in secondary schooling (Bundeskanzleramt, 2007) – a vague formation that the new SPÖ school minister Claudia Schmied used to announce experiments with non-selective 'New Middle Schools' (NMS) (*Neue Mittelschule*). A new expert commission, again under the leadership of the pro-comprehensive-schooling PISA Austria coordinator Gunter Haider, was appointed to work out a concrete design for these schools, which would involve a 'new learning culture' based on more flexible forms of internal differentiation and individualisation (including team teaching with *Gymnasium* and *Hauptschul* teachers) (ExpertInnenkommission, 2007).

(Was there ever an opportunity for comprehensive schooling without school experiments?) No, there was such a hostile front ... and I thought ... the door doesn't open that often, we need to try this New Middle School, with the additional resources, with the team teaching, with the new name, so that we take a step ... since the middle of the interwar period, we [have] demand[ed] comprehensive schooling. We can't keep debating in theory, we need to go into the field. That was my motivation, create facts and take it from there. (Claudia Schmied, interview, 2015)

For the ÖVP the *Gymnasium* was set in stone. And with the *Hauptschule*, we knew there were deficits. What can we do? Tracking didn't work, streaming didn't work, we need to do something else. And then there was this idea about the New Middle School, trying to incorporate *Gymnasium* teachers in order to be able to differentiate more internally because the groups were more heterogeneous than in the *Gymnasium*, so we could address problems there and invest additional resources. (Elmar Mayer, interview, 2015)

There was a passage in the coalition agreement around the creation of 'model regions' ... this was worded vaguely, so we have used it politically ... [so] that in alliance with the Länder [governments] [we could] develop model regions for lower-secondary schooling. We, of course, aimed at introducing comprehensive schooling in model regions which would comprise entire Länder ... that was the original idea. (SPÖ senior civil servant, interview, 2015)

The hope that these experiments would involve all schools (including the *Gymnasium*) within 'model regions' (ideally, entire Länder), thereby de facto abolishing the *Gymnasium* as a separate school for ages 10–14, was premature. Over the next five years, negotiations between the SPÖ school minister, the ÖVP, the teaching unions and the Länder governments became increasingly protracted as controversies arose over the number and nature of these experiments which reflected considerable differences in ideology and struggles over influence in schooling provision. Although the ÖVP had become under pressure from a range of societal actors, including influential employer interests (Industriellenvereinigung, 2006; Die Sozialpartner Austria, 2007) to soften its stance, the party maintained its effective opposition to comprehensive schooling. It successfully prevented the introduction of school experiments across whole regions, and insisted that each school applying to participate in the NMS programme required the support of two-thirds of all teachers and parents, thereby largely preventing the participation of *Gymnasiums* (Nimmervoll, 2011).

In 2008, the first NMS-experiments started in five of the nine Austrian Länder. With their additional funding from the federal government for team teaching, the experiments proved popular and Länder governments pushed for their expansion (Der Standard, 2008). However, the negotiations between the SPÖ school minister and the ÖVP university minister soon completely broke down, which necessitated negotiations at the highest level between the SPÖ federal chancellor and the ÖVP vice-chancellor. Additional fights between the parties in other policy areas led to the breakdown of the coalition and preliminary elections in 2008. After both parties suffered their worst election results since 1945, they agreed to form a new coalition, without having come any closer to an agreement over the future of the school experiments. In 2009 and 2010, increasingly hostile negotiations with teaching unions over a new teacher labour code had largely paralysed the SPÖ school minister's policy agenda. At the same time, rising demand for places in the NMS, and their popularity among the Länder, put pressure on the ÖVP to allow the expansion of the programme, and more and more Conservative voices spoke out in favour of postponing selection in general (Die Presse, 2010). After many rounds of negotiations and deadlock, the ÖVP surprised with suggesting to convert all *Hauptschulen* to New Middle Schools. Concerned about the future of her project, the SPÖ school minister eventually agreed (Die Presse, 2011), justifying this compromise with her desire to see at least some changes in school organisation after decades of non-reform.

Interestingly, [the suggestion to convert all *Hauptschulen*] has come, somehow surprisingly fast, from the ÖVP. We wanted to first evaluate the schools, but the

pressure among the *Hauptschul* teaching unions has increased because team teaching would involve more teaching staff and also the pressure from the Länder ... the conversion would certainly have come two or three years later, if we had followed the initial plan ... I'd say this doesn't change much in the overall project ... the teachers that really wanted to participate, they are committed and the conversion of the others just needs a bit more support and guidance, but ultimately it is a matter of time. (Schmied, interview, 2015)

The slogan was, 'the New Middle School comes, the *Gymnasium* stays'. And the school minister tried to fend it off and said we need to fund this, this is a lot of money, and the ÖVP who had the finance ministry ... all agreed ... we'll fund it ... and with the pressure from schools, we want this too, and the demand of the coalition partner to expand it to all schools ... the money is provided ... we were in a predicament and so, for better or worse, we agreed ... and this is an example of this tedious story ... as it happens, the foul compromises in a coalition. (Mayer, interview, 2015)

In 2012, 30 years after the 1982 compromise had ended the political debate on comprehensive schooling, a strikingly similar compromise was found to modernise and improve the *Hauptschule*, while maintaining the differentiated nature of lower-secondary schooling. Compared to the *Hauptschule*, the NMS brought more flexible arrangements for internal differentiation and in theory easier transitions for high-achieving graduates into the upper cycle of the *Gymnasium* (through a differentiated assessment system at age 14) (Eder et al., 2015). By agreeing to convert all *Hauptschulen* to NMS, the SPÖ hoped that the new learning culture around individualisation and team teaching would both sustain the popular demand for the schools and mark the first step towards comprehensive schooling (SPÖ, 2013).

Among comprehensive schooling advocates, however, this renewed '*Hauptschul-Reform*' led to much disappointment as it was seen as further perpetuating the two-tracked nature of the Austrian school system:

Generations of social democratic education policymakers turn in their grave. (Seel, 2012)

A big mistake, they have been led into temptation by the ÖVP. I still hear the slightly jubilant sentence of the ÖVP party leader, 'the middle school comes, the *Gymnasium* stays' ... I had the impression the school minister was rather disconnected at the end, in the ministry there was a defensive circle around the New Middle School, to pull it

through at all costs ... and comprehensive schooling has once again been sacrificed for a short-term gain. (Education researcher and member various government expert commissions in the 2000s; Interview 2015)

Personally, I think that it wouldn't have taken much longer and the ÖVP would have ... had to declare ... where they stand, are they for a segregated school system from the age of ten or are they for comprehensive schooling. We have spared them ... through this New Middle School construction ... and somehow the SPÖ has opened the door where they could slip away and now they have an easy time to argue: 'now that we have the New Middle School, why should we change anything anytime soon?'. (Niederwieser, interview, 2015)

[The New Middle School] was a mistake in its implementation, because the ÖVP demanded to convert all *Hauptschulen*, it didn't give the New Middle School a chance ... some [schools] weren't ready, they didn't want it ... the teachers were not trained, they had never practised team teaching. (Mayer, interview, 2015)

Since the compromise in 2012, comprehensive schooling has remained official party policy (SPÖ, 2013) but disappeared from the agenda of the coalition government, particularly during the term of the last SPÖ school minister (2016–17) (Der Standard, 2016).

5.1.3 Continuity and change in SPÖ school policy

Programmatically, the SPÖ's commitment to comprehensive schooling goes back to the 1920s. Since then, no leading party official has renounced their support for comprehensive schooling, nor openly criticised the principle. In programmatic terms, many aspirations underpinning the educational thinking of the 1920s, and later the 1970s, are still visible in current programmes, but the agenda has generally become more fragmented. Despite continuity in the programmatic demand, political constraints on introducing comprehensive schooling created a split between the party's education policy 'on paper' and its strategy for school policy during its long periods of holding the school ministry, in which it focused on expanding educational opportunities within the existing differentiated system.

At the core of the 'Viennese school reform' of the 1920s was the concept of a common middle school (*Allgemeine Mittelschule*), which linked questions of school organisation and selection to curricular and pedagogical reforms, as well as to an encompassing programme for

improvements in teacher training and social and child welfare (for details see Glöckel and Achs, 1985). Some elements – such as the strong focus on the individual child, the goal of democratisation within and through schooling, and a general emancipatory goal of education policy – still resonate in contemporary programmes (e.g. SPÖ, 2004). These commitments have also been regularly updated with new themes arising from contemporary educational research and international reform discourses. Overall, though, the reform agenda in the party's programmatic and political debates has narrowed – as early as the 1970s – to questions of school organisation (external and internal differentiation), while curricular and pedagogical questions have received less attention.

SPÖ proposals for comprehensive schooling (*Gesamtschule* or *Gemeinsame Schule*) have aimed to unify the lower level of secondary schooling (ages 10–14/15), which would involve integrating the 'general' track of lower-secondary schooling (the *Hauptschule*) with the lower level of the academic secondary schools (the *Gymnasium*). Closely linked with comprehensive schooling in SPÖ's education policy was the demand to unify teacher training for all secondary school teachers. SPÖ policymakers generally saw the differentiated nature of upper-secondary education (ages 14–18/19), with its various school types along the academic–vocational spectrum, as desirable, because it was seen to give young people choices and labour-market opportunities. In practice, efforts here centred on broadening vocational curricula towards more 'general education' (*Allgemeinbildung*) through a greater modularisation of the curriculum in upper-secondary schooling, blurring the line between different types of *Gymnasium* and vocational college routes (Schnell, 1980: 120; SPÖ, 1999a; SPÖ, 1999a).

While comprehensive schooling was intended to overcome the degree of external differentiation in lower-secondary schooling, the SPÖ has never officially endorsed the absence of internal differentiation (mixed-ability teaching, currently supported by the Green Party). In the 1960s and 1970s, key school reformers outlined that some form of internal differentiation was necessary to cater for different abilities and needs (Schnell, 1980: 111; Schnell, 1980: 22; 64), while others were more supportive of mixed-ability teaching (Matzenauer, interview, 2016). Teachers participating in the 1970s experiments also tended to support more flexible forms of mixed-ability teaching (Schnell, 1993: 239), and a few left-wing educators raised concerns over the reproduction of mechanisms of social selection through school-internal differentiation practices in the 1970s experiments (Kutalek, 1976: 9–10). Official party policy has remained in favour of internal differentiation, but proposals have become more flexible; for example, from streaming (in the 1920s experiments and to setting experiments (in the 1970s experiment and subsequently in the

Hauptschule) to more flexible forms of differentiation and individualisation, such as temporary grouping and team teaching, in the NMS experiments (in the 2000s). A key reason for why the SPÖ insisted on some internal differentiation was also the anticipation of political resistance. Highlighting the internally differentiated nature of comprehensive schooling was also seen as a political necessity to counter political attacks and public worries over the levelling down of educational standards, which endangered the whole project of comprehensive schooling (Matzenauer, interview, 2016; Achs, interview, 2015). An additional (and perhaps even stronger) motivation for internal differentiation emerged from the institutional constraints of the secondary school system itself. Comprehensive schooling (experiments) needed to ensure that it remained possible for high-achieving pupils to transfer into the upper level of the *Gymnasium* at the age of 14, which was achieved via differentiating by ability in the *Hauptschule* or the experimental comprehensive schools (SPÖ, 1969; Schnell, 1980; Achs, interview, 2015). Most interviewees stressed the need for internal differentiation in comprehensive schooling today, but implied that this should be flexible and within the discretion of the school or teachers.

In terms of the curriculum, similar pragmatic approaches have shaped SPÖ policy on comprehensive schooling. The 1920s reform programmes had broad ambitions to restructure the curriculum to align the content of schooling to children's life realities (*Lebensrealität*), and to overcome strict divisions between academic and vocational education (Glöckel and Achs, 1985). Most of these aspirations can be found in the SPÖ's programmes throughout of the 1970s, and even within the party's contemporary programmes. These debates – including calls for political education, less subject-oriented curriculum and more modularisation – are visible in school programmes (SPÖ, 1999b; SPÖ, 2004) but rarely debated under the banner of *comprehensive schooling*. Questions around comprehensive schooling specifically have focused on aligning the curriculum of proposed comprehensive schools (and then, in practice, the *Hauptschule*) with that of the *Gymnasium* to enable transitions (Schnell, 1980: 126). The pragmatic alignment of the curricula of the *Hauptschule* and *Gymnasium* allowed the former to have general rather than vocational curriculum, but it also prevented more fundamental debates over what kind of education a 'common school' (*Gemeinsame Schule*) should provide. While the 1970s school reformers engaged in much theorising around the curriculum (see in particular Schnell, 1980), curricular questions have since become rarely featured in comprehensive schooling debates. This was apparent from the interviews conducted for this research, in which, beyond a general endorsement of 'broad general education', questions about the content of comprehensive schooling elicited little response.

The narrowing of the SPÖ's comprehensive schooling around agenda organisational issues is particularly visible in pedagogical questions, which again were a fundamental part of the 1920s vision for comprehensive schooling (Achs, interview 2015). Some left-wing teacher circles tried to reconnect with this debate in the 1970s (and to then-thriving Europe-wide debates over equality and social justice within and through pedagogical practice). This engagement was generally supported by SPÖ school ministers and spokespeople of the time, but failed to gain much ground in party debates or policy practice in schools at that time (Achs, 2013b: 14–5; Kutalek, 1972). Since then, the pedagogical dimension of the SPÖ's education programmes has become less pronounced, apart from a general commitment to more child-centred and individualised teaching and learning and the replacement of rigid numerical grades at the end of each school year (SPÖ, 1983; SPÖ, 1999a; Achs, interview, 2015).

Overall, the party's comprehensive schooling policy in the 1970s was already mostly focused on organisational questions of external and internal differentiation, in the 30 years between 1982 and 2012 the party's comprehensive schooling policy changed very little in terms of its programmatic aspirations.

However, an assessment of SPÖ school policy needs to address the existence of a clear gap between the party's programmatic commitment to comprehensive schooling and its actual policy strategy pursued when it led the school ministry (1970–94) (Hilde Hawlicek, interview, 2015¹⁴, Matzenauer, interview, 2016). The emphasis of creating 'bridges and transitions' (*'Brücken und Übergänge'*) within the differentiated school system gradually improved educational opportunities for those pupils not selected into the *Gymnasium* (Schnell, 1980: 120). In practice, the SPÖ's school policy, however, also included expanding access to the *Gymnasium* itself, particularly of girls and children from rural areas. Overall, the SPÖ's strategic choices in school policy have therefore in the long-run contributed to stabilising the existing differentiated system.

In contrast to England, debates about comprehensive schooling in Austria have not been explicitly linked to school governance questions. However, during the recent (since 2007) episode of school policy change (driven by the SPÖ school ministry) there have been considerable changes in Austria's school governance and administrative framework, with strong input from the OECD. The main emphasis in political debates about school administration in Austria has been the power and influence between the Lander and Federal government, which share

¹⁴ Hilde Hawlicek was SPÖ school minister from 1987-1990

responsibilities for schooling in a complicated constitutional framework. The SPÖ has always tended to favour centralisation of responsibilities at the federal level, reflecting ambitions to overcome regional inequalities as well as the party's stronger power base in the federal government compared to the Länder governments. Within a highly bureaucratic system of school administration in Austria, schools themselves had long essentially functioned as 'subordinate administrative units' (Lassnigg, 2016), with few freedoms to make decisions over their curriculum or teacher allocation. In addition, until recently the allocation of school leadership positions followed a clientelist model based on party membership in either of the two main parties (SPÖ or ÖVP). Since 2007, the SPÖ-led ministry has endorsed the OECD critique of Austria's highly bureaucratic and 'input-oriented' model of school administration, and pushed for a more 'output-oriented' system (Mayer, interview, 2015; see also e.g. Schmid et al., 2004: 50). The latter would involve giving schools greater autonomy over their budgets, curriculum and day-to-day running, while measuring their performance centrally through a new system of national testing of educational standards and the standardisation of high-school-leaving examinations at 18/19 (Eder and Thonhauser, 2015: 45–6). This centralised system of quality assurance and performance monitoring reflects SPÖ's traditional concern with securing equal entitlements and provision, as well as its frustration with hitherto lacking comparable data on educational trajectories and inequalities across the federalised system (Schmied, SPÖ senior civil servants I & II, Niederwieser, interviews, 2015).

The SPÖ's recent support for more school autonomy is a rather new concern. While giving schools more pedagogical freedoms and teachers more participation in delivering education has theoretically been a demand among social-democratic school reformers since the 1920s, the SPÖ has generally been wedded to a more centralised understanding of school administration. In the 1970s, a rather top-down and bureaucratic approach to school reform was reinforced by the aim of overcoming political opposition to school reforms from the ÖVP and the teaching force through a strong steering of the school experiments by the SPÖ-dominated school ministry (Schnell, 1993: 298–9). This has been criticised by educationists for leaving little space for bottom-up pedagogical innovation by teachers (Kutalek, 1972; Dermutz, 1983a: 28; Gruber, 2015: 57). In the early 1990s, under an SPÖ school minister, schools gained more autonomy over some parts of their budgets and some curricular flexibility. From the interviews, it appears that prevalent views within the SPÖ tend to favour school autonomy regarding the internal organisation of teaching and learning and the development of more subject profiles, but most are sceptical towards schools gaining full responsibility for hiring, budgets or even

admissions. However, there appears to be limited shared consensus over the party's approach to decentralisation and school autonomy:

I always tried to avoid the term 'autonomy' and tried instead to talk about responsibility at the school level, more decision-making power, to make responsibility come to live. As long as everything works through regulations and decrees, there's always an excuse ... the evil ministry.. [my aim was] to turn this around. (Schmied, interview, 2015)

If I'm being mean I'd say that the SPÖ currently has no position [on] what autonomy should look like. (Education policy activist, interview, 2015)

We did have clear positions, but [it was] everyone for themselves. For example, during my time we developed a position paper in the parliamentary club and then we negotiated in working groups with the Länder governments and the ministry ... but if you go into detail [about] what is meant by autonomy, then positions diverge diametrically. The Länder governments think we [should] replace a federal centralism with a Länder centralism ... I would rather reduce the latter and give more responsibility to the school level. (Mayer, interview, 2015)

Everybody understands something different by 'school autonomy'; some say schools can have a say in hiring teachers ... the others say local parents should have a say ... I like to look at the Finnish example ... [where] the ministry specifies the content, curriculum and other areas and then there is the school, I could imag[in]e this to work here as well, I'll give the resources directly to schools, depending on their needs, pupil numbers, pupils with migration background or special needs. (Mayer, interview, 2015)

Overall, changes in school governance driven by the SPÖ school ministry in the 2000s have shifted towards a New Public Management agenda but have not explicitly endorsed a market approach to governance (i.e. they have not used school competition as their primary governance mechanism, e.g. by publishing school performance data to stimulate competition) – although there are indications that decentralisation policies have increased competitive dynamics between schools (Altrichter et al., 2005; Altrichter et al., 2015). In the interviews, the possibility of publishing individual schools' performance data, which had become available after the introduction of national testing (*Bildungsstandards*), was generally perceived as positive by SPÖ policy makers (including comprehensive schooling advocates).

I'd argue strongly in favour [of publishing performance data] because I think that this would bring more transparency ... it would increase responsibility ... the conservatives claim that this would lead to an explosion in private schools ... I don't think that ... because I assume that this would only make sense if you have schools which are led well ... I would not give all of them autonomy overnight ... but would act purposefully step by step. (Mayer, interview, 2015)

Summing up, since the 1970s the SPÖ's engagement with comprehensive schooling policy has exhibited considerable programmatic stability, and has sparked rather little internal debate or disagreement over policy and ideas per se. However, the SPÖ's case clearly shows an uneasy balance between repeated ideological commitment on the one hand and hesitant, pragmatic politics, in face of considerable constraints in education policy-making, on the other. Recurrent pledges of support for comprehensive schooling as the centrepiece of social-democratic education policy coexisted, over long periods, with an unwillingness to engage in high-level debates about school policy.

5.2 Policy formation in the SPÖ and the lonely quest for comprehensive schooling

SPÖ school policy has evolved within a context of significant political constraints on school reforms. The source of these constraints has largely been the opposition of ÖVP, the votes of which have until now been required to meet the two-thirds quota for school reforms, and which has become the main coalition partner for the SPÖ. Since the 1920s, the question of differentiation in lower-secondary schooling has attracted a high degree of confrontation, which has left limited leeway for debating the substantial matters of educational reform or research evidence (Robinsohn et al., 1975; Glowka, 1975; Gruber, 2006). Further barriers to school reforms emerged from the mobilisation of the *Gymnasium* teaching unions against comprehensive schooling and the intertwining of constitutional responsibilities for secondary schooling between the federal and Länder governments. In light of these obstacles, the SPÖ has frequently displayed a highly pragmatic and compromise-oriented perspective, and, as a result, has been the target of scepticism as to the authenticity of its support for comprehensive schooling (Dermutz, 1983a; Dermutz, 1983b; Pelinka, 1985; Gruber, 2015)

This section will explore why, given the extent of the aforementioned political constraints, comprehensive schooling has remained on the party's agenda. It will also consider the strength of internal party support for such schooling, as well as key actors' perceptions of the constraints on and opportunities for school reforms, the strategies they have undertaken (or refrained from undertaking) to overcome them, and the tensions this has produced within the party.

5.2.1 Political obstacles

The most dominant characteristic in Austrian school politics has been a fundamental opposition between Social-Democratic and Christian-Conservative camps, which stretches back to the early 20th century, particularly around comprehensive schooling and the role of the Church in education. During the post-war decades, antagonisms and ideological differences between the parties narrowed in many policy areas (Seeleib-Kaiser et al., 2005: 9), but school policy was one of the few areas in which the rigid polarisation survived. To defuse this issue, both parties agreed to a compromise in 1962, which maintained the selective system but allowed the expansion of opportunities for those pupils not selected at the age of ten. To secure this compromise and guarantee both parties a veto position in school reforms, school legislation became part of the constitution, meaning that a two-thirds parliamentary majority was required to amend it.

The ÖVP remains opposed to comprehensive schooling today; it presents itself as the 'defender' of the *Gymnasium* (Gruber, 2015: 63) and regularly pledges its fundamental opposition to comprehensive schooling and its 'commitment' or 'creed' (*Bekanntnis*) to a differentiated school system in which children are sorted into a hierarchy of educational routes, based on their innate abilities and corresponding to different social functions (Olechowski, 1988: 17; Amon, 2006: 548). Key themes in its school policy discourse are merit (*Leistung*), educational diversity and parental rights (Katschthaler, 1983: 111). While the ÖVP has incorporated aspects of New Right thinking into other areas of its policy (Tálos, 2006), it has so far not explicitly supported quasi-markets in education and retains a generally statist orientation to school governance – mingled with the traditional notion of 'subsidiarity' in Catholic social teaching and the emphasis on parents' right to choose the best education for their child (including in Catholic private schools) (Schnell, 1993: 306; Gruber, 2015: 66).

As the previous chapter indicated, though, voices within the ÖVP have become more diverse. Within the party's 'economic wing' and the closely related employer organisations (Economic Chamber and Federation of Austrian Industrialists), in particular, support for

postponing selection have grown over the past two decades. A range of individuals, often in regional ÖVP branches, has also expressed outspoken support for comprehensive schooling, and some (but not all) Catholic or Church-affiliated organisations have likewise expressed support for overcoming the differentiated nature of schooling. In the interviews, SPÖ policymakers regularly highlighted their experience of more pragmatic voices within the ÖVP, as early as the 1960s (Matzenauer, interview, 2016) as well as more recently (Schmied & Niederwieser, interviews, 2015). However, as the most recent episode of school reforms demonstrated, the ÖVP has thus far been able to close ranks around its traditional opposition to comprehensive schooling.

SPÖ actors have perceived the highly organised *Gymnasium* teaching unions, which are well connected within the ÖVP, as the main lobby defending the *Gymnasium*. In 2007, the head of this union was even nominated as the ÖVP's education spokesperson and chief negotiator for school reforms. *Gymnasium* teachers have developed a vested interest in the differentiated system of secondary schooling, which has been reinforced by the differentiation between teachers of the *Hauptschule* and the *Gymnasium* regarding their training, qualifications, and the resultant differences in labour law, pay and social status. Through their influential position in the ÖVP, their strong negotiation position (as part of the highly organised civil servant union) and their influence over the public debate, *Gymnasium* teachers were named in most interviews as the main obstacle to introducing comprehensive schooling.

A strong and influential group within the ÖVP, the *Gymnasium* union representatives ... who are strongly interconnected within the ÖVP and who repeatedly managed to prevent reforms against any reason, because they just make pure clientelistic politics for *Gymnasium* teachers. (Mayer, interview, 2015)

Definitely the group of *Gymnasium* proponents ... The biggest problem in education policy is the fact that education policy issues are dominated by the teaching union so that the ÖVP de facto doesn't take any decision against its teaching union. For me, this was almost a paradox, that a party which calls itself the party of the economy, is in the public sector so controlled by the union ... In reality, it is about ... status thinking ... 'we have studied at university and we are something better', there you already have this superiority–inferiority thinking and this thinking in boxes. (Schmied, interview, 2015)

They think they are something better ... because they went to university and the [*Hauptschul*] teachers have 'only' [been to] the teacher colleges ... in the comprehensive school, the super-intelligent *Gymnasium* teachers would need to sit

next to the dumb ones from the *Hauptschule* in the staff room ... that was [a problem] with the school experiments ... and that remains until today. (Hawlicek, interview, 2015)

Further constraints on policy-making stem from the fragmented and overlapping division of responsibility for education policy in the federalist system, particularly in secondary schooling. While Länder governments are responsible for the provision of the *Hauptschule*, the federal government has authority over the *Gymnasium* (Lassnigg, 2016; Eder and Thonhauser, 2015: 45). Merging the lower-secondary level into a comprehensive school system would therefore require a compromise (in the form of a constitutional contract) over the future division of authority (and resources) in secondary schooling. The potential for Länder governments to block educational reforms became particularly visible in the post-2017 NMS experiments. Länder governments turned out to be a difficult ally for the school ministry. They were helpful in their desire to speed up the school experiments and their expansion and thereby putting pressure on the ÖVP but also challenged the school minister with their insistence on devising their own organisational models. Ultimately, negotiations became a struggle over influence and resources between the federal and the Länder governments, irrespective of their partisan composition (Niederwieser & SPÖ Senior civil servant I, interview, 2015):

[The proposal] was watered down in every round of negotiations. ... From the regional clusters which would have spanned the federal states quickly to smaller units, local or district clusters ... we departed more and more from the initial model character ... what was left was this system of the New Middle School which then started and which was tied in tightly with the question of resources. (SPÖ senior civil servant I, interview, 2015)

Regarding the practical implementation, the heads of the federal states are very powerful in Austria. They threaten their politicians at the federal government, their ministers, to refuse their support if they want to change anything at the cost of the Länder ... I'm a supporter of federalism in many areas but here it is to the detriment of children and education policy. (Mayer, interview, 2015)

Overall, the requirement of a two-thirds majority, the influence of the *Gymnasium* teachers and the nature of education policy-making in a federalist system are three key constraints for most school reforms, and were stated as key barriers to introducing comprehensive schooling in Austria. However, the SPÖ has frequently been accused of having contributed to its own inability

to introduce school reforms, due to its highly pragmatic and consensus-oriented political behaviour after 1945. Within Austria's hyper-consensual post-war politics, both parties shared a strong elite consensus over compromise (Lijphart, 1969; Lehmbruch, 1967; Pelinka, 2006; Pelinka, 2009) and benefited from partisan patronage in educational administration (particularly the inspectorate and school leadership). In education policy, both parties guaranteed their mutual veto position in the 1962 compromise. By creating and upholding this 'educational partnership', the SPÖ has frequently been accused of deliberately undermining its own ideological commitment, particularly in its backing down over comprehensive schooling in 1982 (e.g. Dermutz, 1983a, for a reply see Schnell, 1993: 301). Further evidence for this consensus orientation can be seen in the fact that SPÖ school ministers in the early 1980s could have introduced some measures, such as aligning the curricula in lower-secondary schooling by ministerial decree alone, but instead sought to find a parliamentary compromise with the ÖVP (Wollansky, 1983: 16).

It is difficult to judge the extent to which the post-1980s restraint in SPÖ school policy reflects a pragmatic concern with requiring a two-thirds majority (masking limited support for comprehensive schooling) or a general belief that broad political support is needed to guarantee the viability of comprehensive schooling reforms in the long run. While the party's school ministers remained supportive of comprehensive schooling in the 1980s, the dominance of this topic and the political stalemate around it have been perceived as a barrier to other reforms in the early 1990s:

There is currently no two-thirds majority for new school legislation ... comprehensive schooling [remains] as utopia ... a desirable and aspirational goal. (Zilk, 1983: 5–6)

School reform and school development need both ... on the one hand the big visions ... on the other hand also a method of small steps and compromises ... I think it was right that we put school legislation in constitutional status in Austria ... thereby we can avoid that every political change brings a change in school reforms. (Hawlicek, 1988: 15)

The predominant theme in education debates [is that] ... we are fighting for 30 years over comprehensive schooling or not comprehensive schooling ... my argument was not that this is unimportant, my argument was just that it is not as dominantly important as everyone acts. And if there are already barriers to realise comprehensive schooling, ... then there are enough other areas ... one could, of course, retreat and say 'until we [have] settled the topic of comprehensive schooling, we are not touching anything else', but that would be an excuse that nothing else

happens ... I could be school minister for five years without doing anything ... this appeared very bleak to me. (Rudolf Scholten,¹⁵ interview, 2015)

[Comprehensive schooling] wasn't a taboo, but the school minister [Scholten] said, as they say in Vienna, 'let's not cause waves'. But it was my role, on the other hand, to say, we need this, we are convinced of it. (Matzenauer, interview, 2015)

It is difficult to empirically assert whether the SPÖ's post-1982 school policy has been shaped by an inherent compromise orientation or a lack of political will (or even lack of support) for comprehensive schooling. What seems certain, however, is that the party's office-seeking ambitions have remained strong; its status as the governing party (which it has maintained over long stretches since 1945) seems to have become a crucial dimension for its self-conception and its control of key power resources, the welfare state and the social insurance system (Pelinka, 2013). While the general political culture of consensus orientation among SPÖ and ÖVP party elites in Austria has become much weaker since the 1980s, the SPÖ has become highly dependent on the ÖVP to govern since the loss of its absolute majority in 1983. The ÖVP has thus become not only crucial in preventing a two-thirds majority for comprehensive schooling but also, de facto, the only coalition partner for the SPÖ. The demand for comprehensive schooling has therefore regularly been discarded during coalition negotiations (Achs, interview, 2015; Matzenauer, interview, 2016; see also Seel and Scheipl, 2004):

[in the 1980s] the SPÖ has lost its parliamentary majority ... it was already a minority party and the ÖVP and FPÖ could have formed a government ... the SPÖ continued to govern, but they were weakened and they learned, if the ÖVP says no, then there's nothing you can do and then the pragmatics become stronger. (*Is there still demand for comprehensive schooling?*) Yes, that remained ... but there weren't many people to engage with these issues ... the intellectual capacities were rather lean ... programmatically it remained ... but it didn't reach the coalition agreement. (SPÖ education activist policy, interview, 2015)

The end of the Kreisky era [1983] ended the demand for comprehensive schooling. Too delicate for the coalition partner. And then you couldn't ... then it disappeared, in my perception ... so until the election campaign of Alfred Gusenbauer, you couldn't

¹⁵ Rudolf Scholten was SPÖ school minister from 1990-94

use the term 'comprehensive schooling' anymore ... that was a no-go ... the thorny issue ... let's leave that aside. (Education expert and policy activist, interview, 2015)

It was only when the SPÖ went into political opposition in 2000 (for the first time since 1966-70) that the party's leadership under Gusenbauer started to openly advocate for comprehensive schooling. But even then, the anticipation of having to form a coalition mediated the party's support of comprehensive schooling:

I think [comprehensive schooling] is pedagogically the best school type. I am however aware that we won't reach a compromise with the ÖVP on comprehensive schooling. This will not be feasible within the next four years. We therefore need to take steps to make the school system, its inner quality, more comprehensive in nature. (Gusenbauer, interview in Die Presse, 2007)

But even when ÖVP and SPÖ had agreed on school experiments as part of their coalition agreements in 2007, subsequent negotiations over these reforms strained the coalition, and federal chancellor Gusenbauer frequently appeared to distance himself from both the reforms and school minister Schmied. The SPÖ's concessions to the ÖVP led to much frustration among school policy activists.

In the coalition, all social-democratic educational ambitions went down the drain – given all the concern for the coalition partner, there was not much else ... they just say 'yes we are for comprehensive schooling', but look at the [2013] coalition agreement, it's a joke ... ridiculous small steps ... the coalition agreement does not even contain the smallest common denominator and there is just much frustration, there's no point, there's stagnation, even in the SPÖ, there is no progress. (SPÖ education activist, interview, 2015)

With shrinking electoral majorities since the 1980s and the SPÖ's dependence on the ÖVP to participate in government and maintain its influence over welfare-state administration (its main power resource), the party's office-seeking orientation and generally limited internal mobilisation for comprehensive schooling (discussed below) seem to have been the main constraints for SPÖ advocates of comprehensive schooling. The SPÖ's insistence, in the 2005 negotiations, of keeping parts of the school legislation in constitutional status also indicates that it saw the risk of losing influence over school policy in general (in light of future spells in political opposition) as more significant than that of being unable to introduce comprehensive schooling in particular:

There were many which only opposed [the two-thirds majority] in Sunday speeches, but in reality were okay with it, it was an easy explanation (sometimes maybe even excuse) why this and that was not possible ... during the [centre-right government], the two-thirds majority was particularly protected in the SPÖ, as it gave the opportunity to prevent reactionary changes to the school system. (Niederwieser, 2009).

5.2.3 The party as a tankship

In addition to rather difficult 'external' conditions for school reforms in Austria, the tracing of debates and policy formation processes within the SPÖ revealed a rather limited interest in and mobilisation for comprehensive schooling also within the SPÖ, despite the party's long-standing programmatic commitment to comprehensive schooling, and the general approval of this policy among the wider party. While education programmes are usually adopted unanimously (SPÖ party conference delegate, interview, 2015), frequent declarations of support and references to past reform ambitions under Otto Glöckel and Bruno Kreisky in party debates appear to have a more ceremonial or declaratory character – 'like the Amen in the prayer' (Matzenauer, interview, 2016) – while the actual involvement of the wider party in education debates (e.g. during the preparation of the 1998 education programme) remained limited (Witzmann, 1997).

The impression gathered from the interviews and other party sources was that the majority of party members and officials perceived a need for a juster and less selective school system, but that the explicit policy of comprehensive schooling failed to develop a party-internal lobby or mobilisation strong enough to create the sustained pressure on the party leadership necessary for political action:

There are always two, three headings that are comprehensible for everyone: ... free and universal Kindergarten, comprehensive schooling for 10–14-year-olds and full-day schooling, and the free and open access to higher education ... every SPÖ official can tell these if you wake him up at three o'clock in the morning and ask him what is important in education policy. All the other debates are very technical, that's why the teachers play an important role, they have the capacity to lead these discussions. (SPÖ party conference delegate, interview, 2015)

In principle, everyone is for education, for a juster one, for more equality of opportunity and so on, but if you weigh up the different portfolios then education is

not the one with the highest weight ... it's important for the teachers ... but the wider party public focuses somewhere else, I mean, who is the wider party? Behind the social ministry, there is the union, which determines the social minister, there is a lobby behind it. Which lobby is behind education? The teacher association with their decreasing relevance and declining membership? Who is the lobby for education? (Matzenauer, interview, 2016)

[Motions on education policy at the party conference occur] all the time, ... but this has nothing to do with education policy. This is the culture in the party, there's always this or that motion and motions on school or education policy occupy a central place in this ... it's more about declaring 'the school is important and that's why we are voting on this motion'. (SPÖ party conference delegate, interview, 2015)

Large organisations are always like big tankships that do not move much, but such discussions [about education policy] contribute ... to a sense of self-assurance, where we are and where we go. (Duffek, interview, 2015)

[Were there any debates about comprehensive schooling in the 1990s?] Yes, of course, but always, how can I say, it was always like a taken-for-granted accompanying programme. So you always felt like, this is like the film that is screened in the background, even if it's not the latest one, or the most pressing thing, but it always ran in the background. (Scholten, interview, 2015)

The absence of a strong party lobby for comprehensive schooling became apparent during the 2006 coalition negotiations, when comprehensive schooling and tuition fees were the two main disagreements in education policy between SPÖ and ÖVP. The introduction of 'open access to higher education' (*Offener Hochschulzugang*, i.e. the absence of tuition fees and non-selective admissions) is seen as a historic victory of the SPÖ government of the 1970s, and the reintroduction of tuition fees by the centre-right government in 2001 had sparked a very defensive reaction from the SPÖ. Despite many party policymakers voicing scepticism in the interviews over the progressiveness of free higher education, the principle of open university access seems to have enjoyed stronger internal party backing and mobilisation – among not only the party's pupils' and students' organisation but also the wider party – than the issue of comprehensive schooling.

A potential source of opposition to comprehensive schooling within the party came from the *Gymnasium* teachers. While this group has been largely organised within Christian-

Conservative associations (which have strong links to the ÖVP), some *Gymnasium* teachers are affiliated with the SPÖ and the Association of Social Democratic Academics (BSA), which until recently was perceived as the main opposition to comprehensive schooling within the SPÖ. Although the BSA recently adopted a pro-comprehensive-schooling position (BSA, 2011) and there have always been some social-democratic *Gymnasium* teachers campaigning for comprehensive schooling, on the whole, the teachers organised in the BSA are still perceived as the main opposition to comprehensive schooling within the SPÖ:

The teachers in the BSA ... are at least as conservative as the Christian ones. (Kurt Scholz, former director of the Vienna School Board, interview, 2015)

The only ones that are massively against [comprehensive schooling] are social-democratic *Gymnasium* teachers ... whenever this topic is being discussed, they are the loudest. (Niederwieser, interview, 2015)

Teacher representatives highlighted concerns over the possibility of deteriorating working conditions and pay in comprehensive schools, as well as over the practical aspects of teaching heterogeneous learning groups consisting of children with different academic abilities, cultures and language backgrounds (*Gymnasium* teaching union representative, interview, 2015):

[The BSA is now] strongly in favour of comprehensive schooling, but among *Gymnasium* teachers, it is not easy, there are always debates ... in Austria teachers are predominantly Conservative, which makes it difficult for the BSA and SPÖ, we are losing touch with the grassroots ... in terms of comprehensive schooling ... we don't hear enough the concerns of teachers, who are confronted with a lot of problems, especially in Vienna, there are classes where no pupils is a native German-speaker ... we need to take these concerns seriously. (BSA representative, interview, 2015)

Given the inability to introduce comprehensive schooling beyond school experiments, *Gymnasium* teachers did not need to actively mobilise their opposition and have for example never formally blocked party programmes that include the demand for comprehensive schooling. However, but the party's school-reform advocates were well aware of their potential threat and mobilisation potential, which was highlighted in many interviews.

In contrast, representatives of the Social Democratic Teacher Association (SLÖ), which represents social-democratic teachers of the *Hauptschule* and has its roots in a teacher organisation founded by Otto Glöckel in the 1920s, have traditionally been key supporters of comprehensive schooling. Its members are generally perceived as supportive of comprehensive

schooling (Niederwieser & SLÖ representative, interviews, 2015), but rarely mobilise for it, which has been attributed to either the increasingly depoliticised nature of the teaching force (Achs, interview, 2015) or their political weakness compared to the *Gymnasium* teachers organised in the BSA (representative of Vienna School Board, interview, 2015). While groups of teachers in the 1970s appear to have been more involved and interested in school reform, much of this interest has petered out over time (Kadi, 1995). One reason for teachers' limited ownership of the comprehensive schooling (and other school reforms in general) is indicated in their generally limited professional autonomy, and limited opportunities for bottom-up pedagogical innovation within Austria's highly bureaucratic school governance (including the bureaucratic nature of the 1970s school experiments) (Kutalek, 1972; Dermutz, 1983a: 28; Gruber, 2015: 57; Gruber, 1988). While both *Gymnasium* and *Hauptschul* teachers are highly organised, their activism mainly focuses on interest politics (pay and working conditions) rather than educational issues per se.

5.2.4 Electoral opportunities and dilemmas

Within the context of considerable external political constraints on school reforms and limited mobilisation within the party, advocates for school reforms mainly tried to gain public legitimacy for comprehensive schooling, and thereby increase pressure for reforms. However, during the 1980s and 1990s, education policy was not very salient in the SPÖ's electoral strategies. Although the party was in government, it was prevented from major education policy undertakings by the two-thirds majority requirement, and it seems that education policy was not seen as a useful agenda for mobilising the public (Seel and Scheipl, 2004: 49):

There wasn't a huge interest. At the beginning of an electoral campaign ... there was sometimes a timid 'education policy is important, because it concerns everyone' and so on, but that petered away in the course of the election campaign. (Matzenauer, interview, 2016)

Education policy only became a major element of the SPÖ's electoral agenda when the party was in political opposition (2000–06) – similarly to the late 1960s, when the party was last in opposition. As then, school-reform advocates were successful in criticising the educational record of centre-right governments and 'selling' education policy as a potential electoral asset to the leadership. In the late 1960s, this criticism focused on the governments' inadequate response to rising educational demands, while in the 2000s it focused on the unpopularity of the Christian Democratic education minister due to budget cuts and the reintroduction of tuition fees

(Niederwieser, interview, 2015). Being in opposition therefore enabled the SPÖ to position itself and strengthen its profile through education policy (Niederwieser & Duffek, interviews, 2015). Developing a new education policy programme in 2004, and the many internal and public events associated with it, was seen as useful for externally positioning the party as 'competent' in education policy.

In the past 15 years, educational questions increasingly became a focus of elections; before that, education was a marginal topic. I think people recognise now that education is an important topic and repeatedly surfaces in elections, and one needs to position oneself. (Representative of the Austrian Chamber of Labour, interview, 2015)

In opposition, it was a particular ambition that we are the party which, despite an ÖVP-dominated school ministry, has the competence in education policy ... we always tried with education policy debates, beyond the day-to-day debates, to prove that the SPÖ has a vision in education policy, about the school for the future and it can react to the challenges of the present, that it has something to refer to ... and these events were always a good opportunity for PR [public relations], they positioned the party to the public in education policy. (Niederwieser, interview, 2015)

We had identified school and education policy as a topic of conflict with the government, aside from the classical social-democratic topics. (SPÖ party conference delegate, interview, 2015)

[Education policy] is in my view one of the areas where social democracy can clearly differentiate itself from conservative policy. (Schmied, interview, 2015)

The role of the PISA studies – which for the first time since the 1970s had stimulated broad media coverage of, and public interest in, education in Austria – was seen as crucial to SPÖ's attempt to achieve issue ownership and 'interpretive hegemony' (*Deutungshoheit*) over education policy (Education expert and member of the government education commission, interview 2016).

Because the SPÖ was in opposition for six years, people suddenly noticed education policy and said, 'something needs to happen here'. Gusenbauer said 'let's make a school manifesto' and then things started moving, 'let's make a critique' and this critique was justified ... in 10 years there had not been any school legislation ... at the same time there was an international movement, PISA ... which has strengthened the critique of the SPÖ in opposition; they have presented this critique of the ÖVP-

steered school system in the wider public and the media, and this was an exceptionally strong argument – the same effect would be if Austria loses against Hungary in football 3 to 0 and next week against England 5 to 0. The bad performance of Austria in the PISA test has hit the national pride of the Austrians and has created a reform-friendly climate. (Policy activist, interview, 2015)

There were indications that, during these debates over PISA, public attitudes were becoming more supportive of comprehensive schooling (Witzmann, 2005). However, SPÖ electoral discourse remained cautious, highlighting less controversial policies (such as smaller class sizes, the expansion of early years' education, the provision of full-day schooling and abolishing higher education tuition fees) rather than comprehensive schooling in its electoral campaign (Niederwieser, interview, 2015):

Essentially, people want ... that their children are educated as best as possible ... there is little where there is so much consensus as in this question. And we also know, from our own opinion polls, how much support there is here ... it's a bit torn of course in the question of differentiation in secondary schooling ... *Gymnasium, Hauptschule, New Middle Schools*. [how to address different interests within the electorate?] Oh well, you simply have to convince them. [is this possible?] Yes, I mean, it's simply a matter of providing quality in the day-to-day organisation of a school. If you ensure this, all is won. (Duffek, interview, 2015)

The main challenge in gaining political support for comprehensive schooling was perceived as the public's limited familiarity with the concept. To overcome this, much energy was put into campaigning and awareness raising:

[What were the obstacles for comprehensive schooling?] I think it is not just the teachers – the *Gymnasium* teachers – I think also most Austrians don't have a clear awareness what comprehensive schooling means, and there is still the tried and tested *Gymnasium*, which we've always had. I think the problem is in the heads of the people, to rethink ... and I think there is still much work to do with awareness raising, which has already happened in other countries. (Representative of the Austrian Chamber of Labour, interview, 2015)

Of course, the public would need good information, awareness raising, I think we have tried that over years and we also succeeded. There were frequently surveys where the term 'comprehensive schooling' – many people don't know what that means, and comprehensive schooling [*Gesamtschule*] and full-day schooling

[*Ganztagsschule*] has been mixed up – but the demand for a fairer school system, where decisions are only taken at age 14, this had a majority. But this needed much argumentation and the SPÖ has invested many resources. (Niederwieser, interview, 2015)

As early as the 1960s and 1970s (the last time comprehensive schooling had been on the party's agenda), SPÖ school-reform advocates used OECD reports and other countries' reform experiences as leverage to create popular support. But even back then, comprehensive schooling was perceived as a potential electoral risk and other, less contentious measures (such as investment in educational infrastructure, educational allowances, and free transport and school textbooks) were foregrounded in the party's electoral message, while comprehensive schooling was kept in the background:

[Comprehensive schooling] would not have worked, no, no, with that we wouldn't have won the elections; but the material incentives, they were quite effective ... [comprehensive schooling] was always present as well ... we wanted comprehensive schooling, of course ... but you wouldn't win an election with it. (Matzenauer, interview, 2016)

For decades, ÖVP politician and *Gymnasium* teachers had warned against the comprehensive schooling creating (rather untranslatable) slogans to depict the uniformity of such schooling such as '*sozialistischer Einheitsbrei*' and '*Eintopfschule*'. In the 1970s, SPÖ school reformers had hoped that the scientific evaluation of the comprehensive schooling experiments would allow them to win the 'public battle of arguments' over comprehensive schooling and standards (Schnell, 1993: 300). Many interviewees also indicated that, since the 1970s, the *Gymnasium* had become the centre of educational aspirations within the party's traditional constituencies – especially among the 'aspirational' working and middle classes in the cities – an aspiration partly promoted by SPÖ policy and discourse itself:

Back then our motto was: 'more working-class children into higher schools'... because we knew that the *Gymnasium* is set in stone ... so we said 'our people too', working-class children should also have access to the *Gymnasium* ... we wanted to bring our children in as well. (Hawlicek, interview, 2015)

To understand the low acceptance of comprehensive schooling [in Austria] one has to consider the changed economic and social context. The favourable economic climate [in the 1960s and 1970s] brought many families an improvement of their social

status, many parents saw in the opportunity to send their children to the *Gymnasium* the visible evidence for their social progression and therefore were not interested in creating a common middle school. (Schnell, 1993: 300)

The advancement of a social class ... more children went to the *Gymnasium*, so in many parent circles the desire was fulfilled, our children are on the right track and will automatically achieve something in life. (Matzenauer, interview, 2016).

[*Is comprehensive schooling a topic in elections?*] Yes, but ... more for the core constituencies, for the identity of the core constituencies. ... But the children of the working class, which gave the political majorities in the past were not there anymore ... Vienna was a middle-class society ... the loss of the comprehensive school was also a loss of the working-class majority It's the interests of the middle classes that became important, and the middle classes were the social climbers, ... and they said: 'I better sent my kids to the *Gymnasium*'. (Achs, interview, 2015)

The tension between the party's programmatic commitment to comprehensive schooling and its concern over public opinion is particularly visible in Vienna, the largest city and strongest SPÖ bastion. In the early 1990s, the SPÖ education spokesperson used the increasing competition over *Gymnasium* school places to campaign for comprehensive schooling. However, representatives of the Viennese School Board – traditionally the 'spearhead of social-democratic school policy' (Witzmann, 1997), some of which exhibited much personal attachment to the 'Viennese school reform' of the 1920s (Scholz, interview 2015), became more cautious by the late 1990s and early 2000s. While fostering school partnerships between the *Gymnasium* and *Hauptschulen* to ease the pressure for educational selection at the age of 10, they also tried to distance themselves from the 'ideological debate' of the past and the focus on comprehensive schooling 'by force' (Kadi, 1997; Witzmann, 1998; Witzmann, 2004; Linsinger, 2013):

[In the end] the school partnerships have not changed the fact that in the eyes of the Austrians the *Gymnasium* remains the Rolls-Royce of the school system. When you get in, then everything is fine. But we have at least tried to create more commonality [through the partnerships], but I would lie if I'd say that we succeeded throughout. (Scholz, interview, 2015)

It would require a rethinking on the part of parents. Do I want my child to sit in a class where there are only good ones or do I say it is completely mixed? ... Many fear that, if the pupils of the *Hauptschule* are added, then my child will suffer and probably

won't become so intelligent. There are many, many images in the heads of parents, that is a big issue. (Representative of the Vienna School Board and SLÖ, interview, 2015)

Overall, it seems that the return of comprehensive schooling to the party's electoral agenda around 2006 owes more to its supporters' mobilisation than to a perception of a straightforward electoral appeal. While PISA was a source of legitimacy for demands to postpone selection and educational decisions, it appears that it was trickier to construct a powerful counter-image of comprehensive schooling against prevalent societal images of the *Gymnasium* as the secure route to social mobility. The party's long-term strategy to compensate for early selection by improving alternative educational routes appears to have reduced societal pressure, from among its constituencies, to abolish selection. The main group affected by early selection has become immigrant children. While a few interviewees indicated that comprehensive schooling would be a key contributor to social integration, several others indicated that, in an overall discursive climate over immigration kindled by the right-wing FPÖ, parents have become increasingly anxious about schools with a large share of immigrant children, which has created a certain anxiety among the SPÖ regarding taking a more proactive stance.

5.2.2 Driving for change

Given the considerable political barriers to introducing comprehensive schooling, the doubts over the electoral support and the lack of strong party-internal lobby groups for this policy, why did the SPÖ hold on to this programmatic aspiration?

Since the 1960s, the key driver of comprehensive schooling policy in the SPÖ has been a small group of individuals, clustered around the party's education spokespeople in the SPÖ Parliamentary Club, which is responsible for the programmatic work, including developing the education policy sections in party programmes and election manifestos.¹⁶ While the party leaders remained crucial for placing (or not placing) education policy on the party agenda, particularly during electoral campaigns and coalition negotiations, they were generally not involved in

¹⁶ The position of a parliamentary policy spokesperson is similar to that of a British shadow education secretary. However, the former keep their position in the parliament in case the party participates in the government (and even if the party also appoints the minister in the same policy area). The minister is then responsible for concrete policy development and implementation, and the parliamentarian spokesperson for developing new programmes and manifestos. Both are involved in inter-party negotiations over school reforms.

programmatic discussions regarding education policy, which were generally initiated and led by the party's education spokespeople (Matzenauer, interview, 2016; Niederwieser, interview, 2015; see also Schnell quoted in Kadi, 1995). Other individuals involved in education debates within the party came from affiliated societies such as the Socialist Teacher Association (SLÖ), the *Kinderfreunde* (children's and family association) and the Chamber of Labour; representatives from the social-democratic pupils', students' and parents' associations; and individuals from the school ministry and regional party branches.

Until the 1990s, individual actors tended to be involved in education policy over long periods of time, with a considerable overlap in their functions. Key individuals who shaped the party's programmatic stance from the late 1960s to the 1980s, such as education spokespeople Hermann Schnell (1970–83) and Hans Matzenauer (1983–90), were also heads of the Socialist Teacher Association, the Viennese School Board and the SPÖ (Schnell) and *Kinderfreunde* (Matzenauer). Individuals expressed a strong personal commitment to the goal of comprehensive schooling, as well as to the ideals and programmes of the 'Viennese school reform' of the 1920s (Achs, 1999: 156; Schnell, 1999):

There is still no doubt in the conviction that this would be the best school ... we know for centuries, or at least since the time of Glöckel, ... which solutions would be the best, and throughout the years and the experiences these beliefs have not changed; they have been modified ... adapted to changing situations ... but there is, in reality, no other solution than an internally differentiated comprehensive school. (Matzenauer, interview, 2016)

Good reasons for comprehensive schooling until 14/15 have existed long before the PISA studies, and the social democratic school reformer Otto Glöckel propagated this school form to make use of the reserves of talent available but failed against the forces who prioritised the retention of educational privileges as status privileges. (Niederwieser, 2008: 432)

Comprehensive schooling in the SPÖ goes back to Glöckel, there you have a programme, no need to change much. The question is rather the strategy with which to implement it – this is the challenge, not the contents, because I think the contents are clear. (Representative of the Austrian Chamber of Labour, interview, 2015)

After the comprehensive schooling reform experiments ended in 1982, Hermann Matzenauer and later school spokespeople Herman Seel (1990–94) and Erwin Niederwieser (1994–2007) tried to

keep the debate about comprehensive schooling going; for example, by trying to harness structural problems regarding educational transitions in urban areas, new research findings and international debates to gain legitimacy and raise the SPÖ's education profile among the public (Matzenauer, interview, 2016; Niederwieser, interview, 2015).

Most interviews emphasised that the crucial change in their fortunes for placing comprehensive schooling on the SPÖ's agenda, came in the early 2000s. The party's position in political opposition and the burgeoning PISA debate opened a window of opportunity to present education policy as a potential electoral asset, making education policy attractive to both the party leadership and the wider party. Pushing education policy (and support for comprehensive schooling on the back of it) to the top of the party agenda required significant background work – and, crucially, a new party leader (Alfred Gusenbauer) with a personal interest in education policy (Niederwieser, Duffek, SPÖ senior civil servants, interviews, 2015). During the late 1990s and 2000s, the party's main think tank – the Renner Institute, which is also involved in formulating election manifestos – provided a key link between school-reform advocates and the party leadership:

I met with him [Duffek, the head of the Renner Institute] and we said, let's use the topic, the education topic, and we made many events ... there were many people ... and the media ... and then, to our all surprise, the party leader suddenly says: ... 'the SPÖ wants comprehensive schooling' ... this was the first time ... so we used PISA politically ... we could have never positioned the topic so broadly without it. (SPÖ education policy activist, interview, 2015)

Despite their strong personal attachment to comprehensive schooling, these actors – particularly the education spokespeople, who were also involved in inter-party negotiations (e.g. on coalition agreements and the NMS reforms) – were highly aware of the practical constraints on education policy-making and resultant need for compromise:

There is this shared commitment [to comprehensive schooling], and that's clear, and everything that happens in between are the practical constraints, the requirements in politics to form compromises ... and so we continued this path, this long and stony path, in the hope, I mean, at some point it will have to work out. (Matzenauer, interview, 2016)

However, the drawn-out nature of political negotiations, and the subsequent compromises that the SPÖ enabled, resulted in considerable personal disappointment among comprehensive

schooling advocates. The 1982 compromise, which one interviewee called 'a fall from grace' (Matzenauer, interview, 2016), led to the resignation of the party's long-standing education spokesperson (and embodiment of the 1970s school reform) Hermann Schnell (1970–82) and was followed by what was perceived as a 'long mourning period' and an 'identity crisis of school reformers' (Niederwieser, 1997). Similarly, the gradual watering down – or 'foul compromises' (Mayer, interview, 2015) – of the school experiments after 2007 ultimately contributed to the resignation of education spokespeople Niederwieser and Mayer.

5.3 Conclusion

The SPÖ has been the largest party in parliament for most of Austrian post-war history, leading the government for more than 30 years between 1970-2000 and 2007-2018. However, the need to gain a two-thirds majority for educational reforms, powerful opposition from *Gymnasium* supporters and the complicated nature of responsibilities between different levels of governments have created substantial barriers to SPÖ school policy proposals introducing comprehensive schooling. This was exacerbated by strong office-seeking motivation among the party leadership and its dependence on the ÖVP as a coalition partner. These constraints legitimised non-action while simultaneously enabling the SPÖ to keep its ideological commitment to comprehensive schooling as an abstract, 'unenforceable ideal' (Pelinka, 1985: 32). Internal party disagreements over comprehensive schooling mostly evolved on the question of which political strategy to follow, which largely submerged potential disagreements over the goals and means of educational reform within the party. Within the wider party, comprehensive schooling has until today remained a general policy aim but never developed a strong followership or lobby of beneficiaries; instead, it was confronted with latent but visible resistance. In addition, the SPÖ's long-term policy of expanding educational opportunities within the differentiated system has not overcome the inequalities entrenched in the system, but rather appears to have diminished societal pressure to abolish selection.

These restrictive conditions and the risk-averse attitudes among the party leadership (and, to some degree, the party's school ministers) beg the question: Why has the party not dropped this 'hopeless' policy? And why has this issue come back to the centre of the SPÖ's education policy agenda in the mid-2000s? It appears that the engagement of a few reform-committed actors centred around the party's spokespeople, was crucial. Since the 1970s, the efforts of comprehensive schooling advocates within the SPÖ have centred around building a

case for comprehensive schooling to convince not only the public but also the party itself. These advocates tried to use international reform discourses, as well as problem pressure arising from the school system itself (such as the depopulation of the *Hauptschulen* in the cities), to legitimise the policy of comprehensive schooling. The use of international education research and discourses – particularly around PISA – was therefore geared towards not only creating public pressure on the ÖVP but also convincing the SPÖ leadership that attention to school policy could be electorally beneficial for the party. However, due to their key involvement in inter-party negotiations with the ÖVP, the reform-oriented education spokespeople had to balance their policy commitment with the need for a pragmatic compromise orientation, which frequently led to personal disillusionment and resignations. Today, comprehensive schooling has dropped from the SPÖ's immediate policy agenda but remains, as before, a programmatic commitment – perhaps one a future generation of optimistic reform advocates will mobilise once again.

Chapter 6. Comparative discussion

This research has investigated how two social-democratic parties that were once key supporters of comprehensive schooling policy have positioned themselves on this issue in the period following the 'golden age' of social-democratic school reform in Europe (the 1960s and 1970s). The in-depth case-study analysis, whose findings have been presented in the previous chapters has allowed for delving into the particular meanings this shared agenda has come to adopt in two contexts since the 1980s, as well as the particular processes that have given rise to policy differences between the two parties.

These particularities and distinct trajectories do not easily lend themselves to comparative discussion. The case of the Labour Party indicates a considerable degree of change in its policy commitments to, and interpretations of, comprehensive schooling; whereas the case of the SPÖ reveals a tension between a relatively stable programmatic commitment to comprehensive schooling on the one hand, and the party's political strategy – which is geared towards expanding educational opportunities within (and thereby largely reproducing) the existing differentiated system – on the other. Similarly, the processes through which attitudes and policies have formed within the two parties highlight rather different dynamics. During its long period of exclusion from political power (in the 1980s and early 1990s) the Labour Party underwent a fundamental programmatic transformation, within which the policy of comprehensive schooling became one of the battlefields over the party's ideology and identity. Despite its long period in government office since the 1970s, the SPÖ has been de facto constrained from introducing structural reforms in schooling. Its pragmatic accommodation of this situation mobilised comprehensive schooling advocates, who (more or less successfully) tried to hold the party to its programmatic commitments and heritage.

The aim of the discussion in this chapter is not to isolate factors that explain the divergent developments across countries. Instead, I will discuss the insights that can be gleaned from this in-depth study of two very different cases, and their potential to offer a more nuanced understanding of how similar phenomena have played out in different contexts. This chapter will therefore discuss commonalities in, and differences between, (1) the particular meanings of comprehensive schooling has come to hold for the two parties and how these reflect more national educational traditions and political contestations over education policy in England and

Austria more generally; and (2) the particular processes through which attitudes and policies have formed within the Labour Party and the SPÖ.

More general reflections on the interplay between policy meaning and processes of policy formation, on the role of ambiguity in the functioning of political parties, as well as on the interplay between actors and institutions in these policy-formation processes are then offered in the Conclusion chapter.

6.1 Shared concerns and distinct meanings in school policy

Comprehensive schooling has been one of the most central problems in the history of education policy across Europe. It has become a point of reference in most countries – even those that, like Austria, have never successfully introduced a form of comprehensive schooling. In recurrent political controversies much symbolic value has been attached to this policy. While, in principle, comprehensive schooling addresses the relationship between instruction and selection (and raises the question of whether there can be instruction without selection), debates about it have become fora for more fundamental questions about the role of the school in society. What prompted this study in the first place was the ostensible divergence between two parties' school policy preferences: while the Labour Party appeared to have departed from its traditional commitment to comprehensive schooling since the 1990s, the SPÖ appeared to have recently rediscovered its traditional commitment to this policy (observable in its renewed attempt to bring it about). However, further investigation during this study soon revealed that notions of 'support for' or 'departure from' comprehensive schooling masked several issues:

First of all, there are highly divergent views on what constitutes party 'policy' (or 'positions' or 'preferences') in the first place. In both cases, the tensions between different 'sites' of party policy – i.e. wider attitudes shared within the party, its official policy programmes or the particular strategic choices its leaders make in the electoral and legislative arenas – have turned out to be not only highly visible but also a very fruitful analytical ground for understanding how parties engage with policy. Studying this blurred nature of party 'policy' rather than adopting a more parsimonious definition of it, also made assessments of the degree of change within party policy on comprehensive schooling more nuanced, but also more tentative.

Secondly, tracing the particular debates in both parties soon revealed that actors in the two countries were clearly talking about rather different things when they speak of

comprehensive schooling. Despite a shared concern for a 'common' or non-selective school for all, debates under the similar banners of 'comprehensive schooling' and '*Gesamtschule*' (or '*Gemeinsame Schule*') have had rather different connotations in each country –not only in terms of the specific policy measures and wider ideological questions addressed but also in the ways they echoed past battles, shared aspirations and particular historical contexts. While comprehensive schooling has received much symbolic attachment within the two parties, there remains a considerable degree of ambiguity as to the particular changes such schooling would entail, the wider vision of education and society within which it is embedded, and the political steps necessary to introduce it.

As discussed in Chapter 1, during the 20th century comprehensive schooling was a cornerstone in educational and political debates within the European Left about equality of educational opportunity. Comprehensive schooling advocates, who were often from educational circles and had links to social-democratic parties, were frequently motivated by more radical visions of transforming existing educational structures and practices to overcome educational hierarchies and differentiation. Debates over the 'comprehensive ideal' or the 'common middle school' transcended organisational questions of selection and school admissions to include questions about the content (curriculum) of comprehensive schooling, internal differentiation, pedagogical practices and the role of the school in the wider community and society. In many such debates comprehensive schooling figured as an umbrella concept encompassing various aspirations and policy dimensions; this not only reflected different strands of thinking about radical educational change but also evolved within national educational traditions and realities (for a discussion, see Glöckel and Achs, 1985; Achs, 2013a, Benn and Chitty, 1996; Pring and Walford, 1997; Hewlett, 2006, 61). While the SPÖ and Labour Party provided fora for many of these debates among comprehensive schooling advocates and practitioners, and some of the latter's aspirations found their way into the parties' programmes, the two parties tended to adopt a narrower approach to school reform than many left-wing comprehensive schooling advocates had hoped. As discussed in the previous two chapters, in their policy proposals and political strategies both parties have largely focused on abolishing outright selection and increasing opportunities within existing institutional structures and practices, rather than more radical attempts to alter the structural logic of education and selection in each particular educational setting.

Looking at both parties' policies on comprehensive schooling in parallel, the degree to which their educational thinking and policies reflect (and reproduce) national educational

traditions and structures becomes apparent. Labour's traditional policy on comprehensive schooling has combined support for non-selective school admissions with an endorsement of a particular approach to school governance, which emerged from the 1944 Education Act which had subsequently become one of the 'unwritten' pillars of English comprehensive schooling (Haydn, 2004; Phillips, 2003). In this 'partnership approach' to school governance, central government involvement and standardisation remained limited; the local authority took centre stage in the provision and regulation of schooling, and teachers had a large degree of autonomy in the daily practice of teaching. When introducing comprehensive schooling in 1965, the Labour Party in government therefore refrained from developing and prescribing policy on other dimensions of comprehensive schooling, such as the curriculum which was seen as the prerogative of the schools and teachers. Despite several attempts made by the Labour Party since the 1970s to develop a more encompassing vision of comprehensive schooling, one that would help ensure equal entitlements for all children, these were limited by the powerful notion of 'local democratic control' over schooling in the party's educational thought.

It was New Labour's approach to school governance which signified the biggest change to traditional Labour thinking on education: the powers of the central government and individual school (especially their leaders) were increased, local authorities and teachers lost influence and autonomy. Central state involvement and standardisation increased under New Labour (and the previous Conservative governments), through the expansion of National Curriculum testing and a stronger prescription of teaching practices. Doubts about comprehensive schooling were raised regarding not only its ability to raise educational standards but also, and more fundamentally, the desirability of a 'common school for all'. This line of critique emerged from a wider ideological critique of the post-war provision of welfare and public services, which first entered British political debate in the discourse of the 'New Right' (and the policies initiated by the Conservative governments of the 1980s) but subsequently became influential in Labour Party thinking as well. Initial concerns over the responsiveness of public services and educational provision to parental preferences had first entered Labour's debate in the late 1980s. This developed into a full-fledged critique of comprehensive schooling from the mid-1990s onwards when New Labour politicians started to criticise 'uniform' and 'bog-standard' comprehensive schools for restricting parental choice. Market mechanisms were hoped to only address the more fundamental epistemic problem of state welfare provision of adjusting the supply of public schooling to 'consumer' demands but also contribute to individual freedom and choice; in particular of disadvantaged groups, who were argued to have been particularly let down by vested interests in local

bureaucracy and the organised teaching force (Le Grand, 1997; Griffiths, 2014). Encouraging competition between schools over parents was hoped to enable more accountability of the schools (and the teachers within) and to encourage more innovative approaches to teaching and school leadership, and thereby raising educational standards. New Labour's 'modernised' approach to comprehensive schooling also foresaw that such schooling, while remaining officially non-selective, would become more 'diverse'. Schools received increasing powers (e.g. over funding, curriculum, etc.) and were encouraged to compete for parents through diversifying their educational offer (e.g. through curricular specialisation or the development of a particular 'school ethos'). New Labour's quest for (non-selective) alternatives to traditional comprehensive schools then culminated in the academy schools, which were state-funded but independent of local authorities, which can be run by a variety of non-state providers (on a non-profit basis).

This emphasis on diversity within and between schools in New Labour's educational agenda has been considered a major change to the party's traditional approach to comprehensive schooling. As discussed in chapter 4, critics of New Labour's education policy perceived its embrace of diversity as actively endorsing the possibility of creating a two-tiered (or multi-tiered) hierarchy in the education system. On the other hand, comprehensive schooling in England has never developed uniform organisational forms or curricula; it has always been inherently diverse, and previous Labour policy had not been particularly concerned with overcoming these differences between schools (e.g. in terms of resources or minimum entitlements). The key difference between Old Labour and New Labour endorsements of 'diversity' appears to have been the shift from a stronger 'universalist' notion of diversity (in which schools reflect the needs of their local communities while providing similar entitlements within the community) towards a more individualist and competitive understanding of diversity (which allows for more individual parental choice and stimulating competition between schools in a community). That said, within New Labour, different strands of thinking existed, which differed especially regarding their views on the balance between competition and collaboration between individual schools (as discussed in Chapter 4). In many ways, this shift from universalism to individualism and competition also connects to longer-standing traditions in English education (particularly in the private school sector), which emphasise a strong role for school leaders and the freedom of schools to develop their particular individual mission and 'ethos' (McCulloch, 2003), a notion rather unfamiliar to the Austrian context. So while the Labour Party's approach to school policy clearly changed, the individual tenets clearly reflect the wider repertoire of long-standing English traditions of educational provision.

The evolution of SPÖ school policy in the 20th and early 21st century differs in many respects from Labour's approach. In contrast to Labour's lack of educational doctrine throughout the first half of the 20th century, an encompassing vision for comprehensive schooling had been developed by social-democratic school reformers in Austria already in the 1920s. The SPÖ therefore officially endorsed the goal of comprehensive schooling almost thirty years earlier than the Labour Party. But despite later attempts by SPÖ school reform advocates to revive this heritage which included curricular and pedagogical reform demands, over large stretches of the second half of the 20th century, the SPÖ's school policy has remained largely focused on structural issues of school organisation and postponing selection. Given the political constraints for introducing comprehensive schooling, SPÖ's policy strategy has since the 1950s revolved around expanding educational opportunities within the differentiated system by opening up access to selective schools, and improving alternative school tracks to compensate for early selection. Gradually, the quality of these school tracks (the *Hauptschule* and various post-14 vocational pathways) was improved, the permeability between all educational tracks enhanced and several second-chance opportunities for educational qualifications introduced. In practice, the SPÖ's policy also included a highly pragmatic approach to the selective *Gymnasium* which in theory the party wanted to see abolished (at least its lower cycle, for the ages 10-14). Under a SPÖ-led school ministry, entrance exams for these schools were abolished in the 1970s and the number of schools expanded. Over time, the *Gymnasium* became therefore an increasingly accessible target of educational aspirations for many previously excluded groups, without however mitigating the effects of early selection on educational opportunities overall. While holding on to comprehensive schooling in principle, much of the SPÖ's school policy was geared towards securing transitions and 'security' within the tracked school system, in which specific pathways provided clear credentials for advancement within a differentiated education system and labour market.

In contrast to the Labour Party, comprehensive schooling debates have never been particularly linked with questions of school governance in Austria. The Austrian school system has been marked by a high degree of bureaucratic regulation since its emergence in the 19th century, which has highly restricted the autonomy of individual schools and hindered the development of teacher professionalism. The SPÖ was, to some degree, torn between giving schools more freedoms and teachers more involvement in delivering education – a demand first made in the 1920s reform proposals – and securing a strong role for the central state in order to both overcome regional inequalities in educational opportunities and give the SPÖ a stronger power base in the federal than the Länder governments. Recent changes in Austria's approach to school

governance, stimulated by OECD recommendations, have shifted school administration from a highly 'input-oriented' towards a more 'outcome-oriented' mode of governance and moderately increased school autonomy. The SPÖ has generally viewed the trend towards more 'outcome monitoring' as positive, as it links to more traditional social-democratic demands for data to monitor inequalities and standardisation to ensure equal educational entitlements. SPÖ policy makers generally perceived an increase in autonomy for individual schools as positive for allowing schools more freedom in the organisation of teaching and learning, while few have (at least in the interviews) voiced concerns that school autonomy could lead to increasing competition and potentially segregation between individual schools (in addition to the differentiation and segregation already existing between school types).

Although both parties' understandings of comprehensive schooling have shifted to some degree, both still reflect (and reproduce) national traditions and approaches to education. Both Labour's traditional and 'modernised' policies on comprehensive schooling reflect the diverse and fragmented nature of the English school system; however, Old Labour advocated a more universalist approach, geared towards the local community, while New Labour adopted a more individualised and competitive notion of school policy. In contrast, SPÖ school policy has largely reflected the highly differentiated education system in Austria, which is underpinned by ideas of 'status differentiation' similar to Austria's conservative-corporatist welfare-state model; however, due to previous SPÖ school policy this approach to schooling has received a layer of 'permeability' and 'security' for those in the lower-tier school tracks.

Beyond these systemic differences in the long-term characteristics of school policy in the two countries – which have, to some degree, been reproduced in the parties' educational thinking and policy – there has been more change in the two parties' specific approaches to school policy (as discussed in the two previous chapters). However, despite both parties' continuing commitment to non-selective schooling, interviewees indicated a considerable diversity of views and ambiguity within the parties regarding the ultimate goals of this policy and the means necessary to achieve it. The next section will discuss some general observations about the formation of attitudes towards, and policies on, comprehensive schooling within the two parties.

6.2 The formation of attitudes and policy in the parties

The two case studies revealed the unique dynamics of the processes through which school policy within the Labour Party and the SPÖ has been formed over the past decades, and the nature of the struggles this has involved.

In the case of the Labour Party, comprehensive schooling policy has been shaped by the party's wider ideological-programmatic reorientation towards the end of its 18-year period in political opposition in the mid-1990s. Electoral concerns were crucial in this reorientation but changes in the party's stance on school policy also reflected more profound ideological changes, challenging shared sentiments of what the party stood for overall. The key actors driving this change in party policy were also motivated by individual (and, to some degree, differing) beliefs about the qualities of 'proper' schools, which had a visible bearing on the shape of New Labour school policies.

SPÖ school policy emerged from a struggle between actors wishing to revive the party's programmatic heritage of comprehensive schooling (going back to the 1920s school reforms) and the party's pragmatic strategy of expanding opportunities within the differentiated system. Through attempts to use international reform discourses to legitimise comprehensive schooling among the public and within the party, its traditional programmatic commitment was gradually 'updated'. However, the main school policy struggles within the SPÖ were not over particular policy ideas, the relationship between education and the party's wider social project or what the party stood for, but rather about political strategy and the willingness to take political action.

Despite the unique and complex processes through which party policy has been shaped in both cases, a shared insight to emerge from both is that party policy (and changes to such policy) can only be meaningfully understood by investigating *both* internal party dynamics *and* impulses arising from the party's engagement with its external environment. While these dialectic processes have played out very differently in each case, similar 'dimensions' have been present in both. The next two sections will contrast these dimensions, not with the intention of fully explaining different policy trajectories but instead to highlight how similar 'ingredients' have manifested differently in shaping party policy.

6.2.1 Internal party dynamics

The importance of internal party dynamics is stressed in the literature on party organisation (discussed in Chapter 2), which highlights the nature of parties as internally differentiated coalitions in which different actors or factions attempt to influence party policy in line with their particular interests and motivations. However, political parties share with other organisations or social movements the purpose of uniting members around a common goal and providing a sense of identification and belonging. Both of these theoretical perspectives have contributed to the aim of this research; that is, making sense of party policy on comprehensive schooling in the two cases studied. The two case studies have indicated four strands of interrelated 'internal' influences on party policy: programmatic and ideological legacies; shared experiences and practices; the specific demands of organised groups within the party; and incorporation of new ideas from educational research or international discourses.

6.2.1.1 Party ideology, doctrine and ethos

Classical approaches to political parties understand policy commitments as deriving from the party's overall ideology or its dominant notions of the goals and means for social change, the role of the state, preferences for redistribution, and so on (for a discussion, see White, 2006). However, parties' ideologies are rarely unified, coherent and stable doctrines; rather, they strike an often-uneasy balance between different intellectual legacies and aspirations (Barker, 1972; Paterson, 2003b). The importance attributed to different strands tends to shift over time, creating particular conditions for the development of educational thought. In addition, educational thinking and education policy programmes within the parties have, to some degree, developed independently from the party's overall ideological projects; often, they have been stimulated by debates and practices in the educational world and influenced by national educational legacies. However, over time, ideas about education policy can become embodied within a party's wider social project. It appears that this embedding of comprehensive schooling within a wider project of social reform and the construction of a welfare state has occurred to a considerable degree in Scandinavia. Here, a 'citizenship-based model of comprehensive schooling' is said to have become the cornerstone of the 'Nordic model of education', underpinned by widely shared values of 'social justice, equity, equal opportunities, inclusion, nation-building, and democratic participation for all students, regardless of social and cultural background and abilities' (Imsen et

al., 2016: 1; Oftedal Telhaug et al., 2006). Neither the Labour Party nor the SPÖ, however, has ever given education policy comparable significance in their overall program for social reform, and neither party has positioned education policy as interdependent within a unified social doctrine. That said, in the Labour Party, educational ideas that emerged 'from the ground' in the 1960s have, to some degree, become embedded within the party's wider social project.

In the 1950s and 1960s, non-selective schooling became a key policy demand within the Labour Party's 'revisionist' or 'egalitarian' project of democratic socialism (Crosland, 1956), which evolved around the notion of a universal welfare state and underpinned Labour's terms in government in 1964–70 and 1974–79. Internal party struggles over the 'modernisation' of comprehensive schooling in the mid-1990s indicate that support for the principle of comprehensive schooling had become widely held within the party. Participants in and observers of these struggles (on both sides) understood selection to be a 'totemic issue within the British labour movement, going back to Tony Crosland and when he introduced comprehensive schools' (Ryan, interview, 2015), and comprehensive schooling to be 'one of the most strongly held beliefs of many Labour members' (Riddell, 1996). Interviews and other statements indicated that Labour members' personal experience with the 'divisive' nature of selection featured strongly in both their personal identity and their identification with the Labour Party (Steinberg, 1996; Prescott in Crosland, 2005), and that the introduction of comprehensive schooling was seen as an important 'past victory' and legacy of the Labour Party (Kinnock, interview, 2015). For many in the party, it appears that the symbolic nature of and attachment to comprehensive schooling, and the 1960s egalitarian project in which it was embedded, grew rather than faltered during the discursive and material attacks from the Conservative government in the 1980s. It seems fair to say that comprehensive schooling has become part of the party's 'ethos', or its 'traditions, beliefs, characteristic procedures and feelings which help to animate the members of the party' (Drucker, 1979: 1). However, this did not necessarily involve a nuanced understanding of what comprehensive schooling means in detail (or 'what happens in schools'); instead, it revolved around general support for non-selection and 'local democratic control' over education, as well as scepticism of private-sector involvement in education (as in the case of the academies).

In contrast, SPÖ policy on comprehensive schooling is, in principle, based on a very encompassing educational doctrine developed during the 1920s at the intersection between educational theory and practice. As Chapter 4 highlighted, references to the 'Viennese school reform' and its protagonists (clustered around Otto Glöckel) remain very frequent, particularly among the core comprehensive schooling supporters within the party. Similarly, many individual

aspects of this doctrine are still visible in contemporary party education programmes. However, after 1945, much of this educational thought was largely forgotten until SPÖ school reformers rediscovered it in the 1970s. The party's commitment to comprehensive schooling has therefore not become embedded in its post-war social project of welfare-state expansion and social partnership. Rather than an encompassing comprehensive schooling agenda, it appears that 'differentiated' educational expansion (through the *Gymnasium* and vocational education) achieved considerable 'fit' within this project's focus on security and social protection. In the 1970s, SPÖ school reformers had tried to link the 1920s idea of comprehensive schooling and its egalitarian and emancipatory notions to the party's emerging social modernisation agenda (under party leader Bruno Kreisky). However, within the wider party it seems that 1970s ideas about modernising education and society referred as much to (or perhaps even more than) comprehensive schooling as to opening access and routes of promotion through the *Gymnasium* and the differentiated vocational education system.

While comprehensive schooling has remained a cornerstone of the SPÖ's educational programme, its attachment to this policy and mobilisation potential within the wider party appear to be much weaker than in the Labour Party. As interviewees indicated, ceremonial pledges to comprehensive, non-selective schooling was just part of the inventory at party conferences ('like the Amen in the prayer', Matzenauer, interview, 2016), and comprehensive schooling is seen as one of the pledges 'which every SPÖ member can recite when woken up at three in the morning' (SPÖ party conference delegate, interview, 2015). However, there were many indications that, while *in principle* 'everyone is for education and a more equal one' (Hawlicek, interview, 2015), education policy was not of particular interest to the wider party. Despite this degree of symbolic relevance, and perhaps a 'logic of appropriateness' ('SPÖ school ministers know what the party line is' Matzenauer interview, 2016), comprehensive schooling does not seem to have developed a stronger attachment among the wider party. This lack of mobilising potential appears to be particularly pronounced when contrasted with the issue of free and non-selective university entrance – a legacy of the 1970s SPÖ government that led to considerable mobilisation within the party when a centre-right government reintroduced tuition fees in 2001.

6.2.1.2 Lobbies: teachers and educationists

In both cases, attitudes among teachers within the parties influenced policy, through both their 'vested interests' in particular education systems and their general attitudes towards selection

and student sorting. Labour's commitment to and understanding of comprehensive schooling has largely been shaped by groups within the party that have a particular interest in the policy, particularly teachers and educationists. The drive for comprehensive schooling in the 1950s came from a grassroots movement of parents, teachers and local councillors, and when comprehensive schooling was introduced in 1965, teachers had significant autonomy in shaping the practice of comprehensives and thereby seemed to have developed a strong sense of ownership over this project. The interviews with representatives of teaching unions and educationalists, as well as teacher statements in the media, suggest that teachers in general supported comprehensive schooling (and opposed New Labour's education policy) both on symbolic grounds – having been involved in building the project – and given a continuing vested interest in the system that had provided them with much autonomy in their daily practice. In addition, teachers appear to share a general opposition to sorting of children by ability as such ('non-selective educational ideologies' are 'one of the strongest features of the policy of organised teachers', as one union representative said). Although teaching unions had never been officially affiliated with the Labour Party, teachers had a strong presence among the party membership base, and teaching unions had significant influence over Labour education policy in the past. Until the mid-1990s, many tenets of Labour's policy on comprehensive schooling – such as support for the principle of mixed-ability teaching – stemmed from teacher practices rather than Anthony Crosland's educational doctrine of the 1960s.

Within the SPÖ, comprehensive schooling has never developed a strong lobby among teachers; to the contrary, the structural division within the teaching force (in terms of qualifications and occupational status) have created a latent opposition to comprehensive schooling among SPÖ-affiliated *Gymnasium* teachers. This seems to stem from both their fears over deteriorating status and a general scepticism over the desirability and practicality of teaching in heterogeneous classrooms. Although this opposition was rarely openly mobilised within the party, SPÖ school reformers seemed very aware of the potential for resistance among social-democratic *Gymnasium* teachers. These teachers' opposition has not been matched by a pro-comprehensive-schooling mobilisation among *Hauptschul*-teachers, who in theory would benefit from such schooling (and the unification of teacher training and status). Although the association representing social democratic teachers of the *Hauptschule* has itself a strong connection to the 1920s school reforms, and its leaders have generally belonged to the circle of individuals advocating for comprehensive schooling in the SPÖ, in the interviews, the mass of *Hauptschul*-teachers was perceived as being rather depoliticised and difficult to mobilise for comprehensive

schooling. In many other policy matters (and outside the party), *Hauptschul*-teachers and their unions have often followed the lead of the vocal, well-organised *Gymnasium* unions.

Apart from the structural status divide between teachers, it seems that a lack of familiarity with, and ownership of, comprehensive schooling has prevented the emergence of a stronger lobby for this policy within the SPÖ. In addition, the rather rigid bureaucratic set-up of the 1970s comprehensive schooling experiments seems to have stifled innovation among participating teachers – and thereby a sense of policy ownership among them. The very low degree of teacher autonomy within the highly bureaucratic Austrian school system could be an additional reason for teachers' rather limited involvement in education policy debates (beyond matters concerning their status interests). Compared to England and the Labour Party, there has not been a strong lobby for comprehensive schooling among educational researchers and academics, mostly owing to the long-underdeveloped nature of empirical educational research in Austria. In addition, the inability of research evidence to influence educational reform and overcome the hardened positions between parties in the 1980s appears to have disillusioned many education researchers, who have since disengaged from policy activism.

6.2.1.3 New ideas and challenges to existing policy

By the 1980s, comprehensive schooling had become much more crucial to the Labour Party's 'ethos' than to the SPÖ's – but, by the 1990s, Labour's commitment to such schooling also faced far more fundamental challenges than had the SPÖ's. Since the 1970s, the main challenge to Labour's commitment to comprehensive schooling has been external: a hostile political discourse (and later educational reform) inspired by New Right political thinking. Within the Labour Party, some doubts over school standards and uneasiness with curricular and pedagogical experiments emerged among the Labour leadership in the 1970s. The Labour Party leadership struggled to respond to the changing discursive and policy landscapes of the 1980s but officially held on to its commitment to comprehensive schooling and, largely, the 'partnership' approach to school governance. The fundamental challenge to comprehensive schooling, and the ideas it stood for, came during the mid-1990s from Labour's broader ideological reorientation under Tony Blair. Apart from a new electoral strategy, this counter-project was underpinned by a fundamental reorientation of core values and doctrine, which went beyond pragmatically accepting the previous Conservative governments' changes to education policy and public service governance. Within this reorientation, New Labour's critique of comprehensive schooling went beyond

highlighting its limited success in overcoming educational segregation in England (which potentially could have been addressed by making the school system more comprehensive) but centred on the principle of the policy itself. Comprehensive schooling was associated with an 'outmoded' approach to providing public services – and, particularly, with 'Old' Labour's social project. It came to be seen as one aspect of an increasingly bureaucratic and paternalistic welfare state that did not account for citizens' diverse needs and wants, thereby denying them crucial choices (Blair, 2010: 43). This 'Old' Labour project of egalitarian socialism became the target of 'New' Labour's modernisation counter-project, or the 'Third Way'. In the case of the Labour Party, it therefore seems fair to say that comprehensive schooling had to change because the party's overall social project was deemed in need of change. However, different streams of opinion were apparent within New Labour circles. For some, the modernisation of comprehensive schooling was primarily geared towards tackling school underperformance and reducing disadvantage. Elements of choice and competition were combined with attempts to foster collaboration between schools and with local authorities. Another stream of thinking focused on market principles in school governance, outright support for competition and choice between schools, school independence and the involvement of private-sector actors. Both streams shared the desire to change schools' culture, from 'low expectations' to an ethos of excellence, which involved adopting certain attributes associated with grammar and private schools. The more moderate stream, with its concern for school improvement, found considerable support among the Parliamentary Labour Party (Blunkett was also an important bridge to wider sections of the party in the mid-1990s). However, in particular, Blair and Adonis's more radical project of educational reform (which became more dominant in New Labour's education policy towards the mid-2000s) alienated many previous supporters among the Parliamentary Labour Party.

In the SPÖ, in contrast, the goal of comprehensive schooling has developed a much weaker internal party lobby but has also been spared outright criticism and challenge. The 1980s and 1990s were decades of limited and incremental education reform in Austria, and education policy had become even less embedded in the party's overall project (which has also become less clearly defined). Compared to the Labour Party, the SPÖ saw neither strong ideological struggles and factionalism in the 1970s or 1980s nor a concerted attempt towards ideological renewal since then. The survival of the SPÖ's demand for comprehensive schooling since the 1980s and its return to the party agenda in the early 2000s was largely down to the effort of a small group of actors, clustered around the party's education spokespeople and representatives from a few affiliated societies, which continued to draw inspiration from the 1920s school reforms.

Within the SPÖ, comprehensive schooling advocates have tried to use international debates to legitimise the policy to the public and renew its emphasis in party debates. In the 1990s, for example, they tried to capitalise on the renewed emphasis education in the emerging Third Way debate, both in Britain (despite Blair's departure from comprehensive schooling) and among other European social-democratic parties, to place comprehensive schooling within a wider narrative of the knowledge society and social-investment state. In the early 2000s in particular, the PISA debate and OECD discourse were used to renew a discourse of comprehensive schooling as a prerequisite for 'modernising' Austria's traditional school system. During this time, OECD agendas on school governance reform gained a strong bearing on the SPÖ school ministry's work; interviews indicated that the OECD had become a major source of inspiration and reassurance for the work of the school minister and her staff. However, these new ideas, especially around school autonomy, have not been particularly related to the issue of comprehensive schooling in SPÖ debates about schooling. Overall, the party's education programmes have 'updated' its commitment to comprehensive schooling with arguments from international reform discourses (e.g. the focus on individualisation or competencies), but the policy commitment has not received any major challenges as such.

6.2.1.4 The nature of internal party struggles

The shift in the Labour Party's education policy provoked much internal resistance, particularly in 1995–96 and 2005–06. The school modernisation agenda sparked discontent from teachers, as well as the party's rank-and-file, which resulted in highly visible struggles; for example, at the 1995 party conference, when New Labour's education policy risked defeat. However, New Labour's emphasis on education policy and promise of educational investment and school improvement, as well as its general desire to get back into power, also instigated significant support and hope among the wider party and educational community. In the early 1990s, the visibility of the wider party's critique was also reduced by shifting the arena for policy deliberation from the party conference to the more fragmented – and less visible – National Policy Forum. Tony Blair's large post-1997 electoral majorities further contributed to the strong position of the 'party in government' and the marginalisation of the influence of the party's rank-and-file.

Overall, Tony Blair and New Labour modernisers were highly successful in overcoming internal party opposition to their alternative school project. However, towards New Labour's third term in government, rifts over the government's school policy again became more visible. The

policy agenda had become driven increasingly by Tony Blair and his key education adviser, Andrew Adonis, sidelining the education secretary and increasingly instigating disagreements – even from former allies in the modernisation project. Towards the end of Blair’s leadership, these disagreements over education policy flourished within a climate of increasing personal rivalries between Blair and Brown, as well as the Parliamentary Labour Party’s growing discontent over the radical nature of the modernisation project. The government’s reluctance to regulate school admissions, the increasing marginalisation of local authorities and the involvement of private-sector actors raised concerns even among previous supporters of New Labour’s school reform agenda. In 2005–06, the proposal of ‘trust schools’, which signified the expansion of independent state schools across the school sector, served for many as a sort of litmus test for the overall direction of travel in public-sector reform. The 2006 Education and Inspections Act sparked one of the largest parliamentary rebellions by Labour backbenchers and could only be adopted with the votes of the Conservative Party. This episode indicates that a general attachment to comprehensive schooling (as non-selective schooling under local government control) within the Labour Party had survived the ‘modernisation’ of comprehensive schooling in Labour’s educational thinking.

In the SPÖ, internal party struggles over school policy have been less visible on the surface; they have generally taken place not between different factions or groups but between individuals, clustered around the party’s parliamentary education spokesperson, who have tried to commit the school minister and party leader to pro-comprehensive-school action. However, spokespeople’s involvement in inter-party negotiations – particularly with the ÖVP – also made them highly aware of the political constraints involved in education policy. Since the 1980s, there have been numerous accounts of feelings of resignation (as well as actual resignations) among this group, due to tensions between personal attachment to the policy and the worn-out nature of political negotiations and compromises. While constraining the SPÖ’s ability to introduce comprehensive schooling, this political environment also helped the party to justify inaction while upholding the policy as a long-term aspiration. Overall, the inability to introduce comprehensive schooling enabled, to some degree, the policy to survive as a ‘utopian’ aspiration in the party’s programme. Yet, while this ‘utopian’ nature of this commitment has muted potential internal party opposition to comprehensive schooling, it seems fair to say that it has also stifled more fundamental debates about goals and means of social-democratic school reform.

Studying internal party dynamics in both parties has contributed to a fuller understanding of the evolution of attitudes towards, and the development and contestation of party policy on,

comprehensive schooling. However, as this section has frequently indicated, these developments occurred in a dialectical relationship as the parties engaged with their external environments.

6.2.2 Parties' external interactions

Political parties are often understood in their function of aggregating societal demands and translating these demands into public policy. There are different views in the literature regarding whether parties mainly compete for public office to further the interests of their constituencies through policy or mainly devise a policy to gain popular support and thereby access to public office (Gingrich and Häusermann, 2015). Either way, fighting elections and participating in government are generally seen as key goals for political parties, which can pose dilemmas for their 'policy-seeking' strategies (Helboe Pedersen, 2012). Parties' policy on a particular issue – their programmatic commitments and strategic choices – is therefore not only shaped by long-standing ideological convictions and the ideas and interests of their 'internal' constituencies (as discussed above) but also influenced by the opportunities and constraints they face in the electoral arena and policy-making process.

The particular political system and discursive context produced rather different conditions in each country for the parties' engagement with education policy. While the main challenge to Labour's education policy agenda came from the electoral arena, the main challenge for the SPÖ came from the need to form a coalition government and overcome numerous barriers in the policy-making process. While this general opportunity structure can indicate the main locus of constraints on parties' policy endeavours, its implications for policy are not straightforward; rather, they depend on the particular constellations and perceptions of the actors involved.

This section discusses how the comprehensive schooling policies of the Labour Party and the SPÖ have been influenced by the two parties' quests to gain popular support, their engagement with other political actors and their constraints in policy-making. In this 'external' sphere, activities include decisions over agenda setting (priorities for electoral campaigns or government agendas), electoral discourses, forming coalitions and/or bargaining compromises with other political actors. While the main actors in this sphere – 'the party in public office' (Katz and Mair, 1993) (i.e. the party's leadership), its elected representatives and, frequently, policy advisers – enjoy some autonomy from the wider party to carry out these activities, their mandate is ultimately dependent on the party's support, which can limit their electoral and legislative strategies.

6.2.2.1 *Gaining political support*

Political constraints in accessing government power, as well as on education policy-making as such had a major impact on the SPÖ and its school policy strategy. The requirement for a two-thirds majority for school reforms in parliament, and the continuing opposition of the ÖVP, prevented the introduction of comprehensive schooling even when the SPÖ enjoyed absolute majorities in the 1970s. Since then, the SPÖ's de facto dependency on the ÖVP as a coalition partner made comprehensive schooling a recurring political risk for the SPÖ to participate in government. Two other important veto players that hampered the prospect of introducing comprehensive schooling were the teaching unions and the Länder governments. As a crucial feedback effect of the segregated nature of secondary schooling and teacher education in Austria, *Gymnasium* teachers had developed important vested interests in the status quo. The influence of their highly organised unions on the politics of education reform mainly stemmed from their influence on ÖVP school policy. Another potential veto player for comprehensive schooling reforms were the sub-national Länder governments, which share constitutional responsibilities for the administration of secondary schooling with the federal government. Comprehensive schooling, and the integration of the two school tracks in lower-secondary schooling, therefore required the support of the Länder governments, making reform attempts a battle over influence and resources.

In this highly fragmented system of political power, school reforms require negotiations and compromises in multiple sites, as well as a degree of pragmatism, and SPÖ school policy has clearly been marked by these requirements. Although the party leadership and its school ministers have remained supportive of comprehensive schooling, they were either hesitant to place this policy on the party' agenda or dropped this demand during coalition negotiations. Even school-reform advocates anticipated these constraints, and policy commitments were moderated to some degree. However, this political setting also allowed the party to share power and secure political influence (however constrained) on school policy. Not only has the party remained in power at the federal (and some Länder) levels over sustained periods of time, but the two-thirds majority requirement has also allowed it to remain a veto player for school reforms in times of political opposition – even if this has come at the cost of comprehensive schooling.

The political context for the Labour Party has been very different. Having won three general elections after 1997, Labour governments faced few constraints on their ability to introduce school reforms. In the majoritarian electoral system, winning electoral majorities tends

to produce single-party governments without the need to form coalitions. Apart from the ability to govern without a coalition partner, Labour governments faced limited constraints by local governments. Local authorities' considerable power and influence over schooling in the post-war school governance system had already been drastically reduced during the Conservative governments of the 1980s – with teaching unions having become even more marginalised by Conservative reforms. By the time the Labour Party returned to power in 1997, it appears that apart from the need to secure electoral majorities, the only political constraint for executing its new education policy agenda arose from the need to maintain cohesion among its own parliamentarians (as discussed in the previous section). While the Labour Party faced few formal constraints on carrying out school reforms when it was in government, the majoritarian electoral system also contributed to its de facto exclusion from influencing school policy during its 18 years in political opposition, during which the Conservative governments fundamentally overhauled the educational landscape. This long period of political powerlessness produced a sustained ideological crisis in the party, which was seized by political actors who drove the reorientation of its programmatic outlook. The key political requisite for the Labour Party, and potential constraint on its school policy agenda, thus came from the need to win popular support.

6.2.2.2 Gaining popular support: electoral dilemmas and opportunities

Both case studies have revealed that electoral considerations influenced the development of both parties' educational policies, but this has particularly been the case for Labour. However, there is considerable difficulty involved in assessing the direction and nature of the relationship between education policy and electoral considerations. At times, parties have moderated their policy demands in light of a perceived lack of popular support; at other times, they have continued to promote their desired policy but downplayed its salience, or have gone to great lengths to try to convince the public of the merits of the policy. In both case studies, there was considerable diversity in views on the nature of public attitudes to comprehensive schooling (and their relevance to voting decisions); policy actors perceived a popular concern with selection (stronger in England than in Austria) but also a rather ambiguous support for comprehensive schooling. The perception of comprehensive schooling as lacking popular appeal led in the case of the SPÖ to attempts to increase its appeal, and was used by policymakers in case of New Labour to reinforce such doubts and justify alternative policies. In both cases, increasing the popular appeal of particular policies was also used to overcome political resistance within the party or among

other political actors. Parties' engagement with what they perceive to be popular support and prevalent images about schooling in the public, and the influence this has on their policies, is therefore not a straightforward relationship.

This research has not directly studied the nature of public attitudes per se such; nor has it undertaken an in-depth analysis of parties' electoral tactics and the role of education policy therein. However, several common themes have emerged from party actors' statements on their perception of public attitudes, as well as their strategies to increase popular support for the policy solutions they favoured, which will be discussed in this section.

In the 1980s and 1990s, both parties experienced a decline in electoral support, as well as a general ideological-discursive challenge to the welfare state and Keynesian economic strategy that had been core components of their 'social projects' in the 1960s and 1970s. During Labour's time in opposition, the shift in the overall discursive climate (influenced by New Right thinking) severely challenged Labour's ideological and policy profile. From the late 1980s on, the party attempted to modernise its programmatic profile in order to increase its 'electability' among 'aspirational' groups. Although this 'policy review' did not affect the party's commitment to comprehensive schooling, which was still seen as generally popular, Labour's discourse became increasingly focused on presenting itself as sensitive to parental concerns and educational standards. Being in opposition, the party increasingly perceived school policy as an asset through which it could blame the government; but at the same time, a gradual change in emphasis in its policy took place. The political Right's sustained discursive and material attacks on core features of Labour's traditional policy, as well as consecutive electoral defeats, led to a more fundamental ideological crisis in the party, which was seized in the 1990s by proponents who wished to fundamentally change the party's ideological profile and electoral appeal. As discussed in the previous section, the policy of comprehensive schooling became entangled in struggles over the party's reorientation to New Labour. New Labour policymakers presented comprehensive schooling as a symbol of 'what was wrong' with the traditional approach to public-sector governance – a view they perceived to be (and justified as) shared among the public.

Following Tony Blair's announcement that 'education, education, education' would be his three priorities for a Labour government, education policy served as a device to signal this transformation, and the party's new project of public-sector reform, to the public. Education was chosen as a key policy area through which to signal 'how we saw the role of the state: enabling the fulfilment of potential, not controlling lives or business' (Blair 2010, p. 103). It thus became 'a symbol of reform and modernisation', for 'in the minds of the electorate, in the minds of parents,

what you say about education gives them an impression of what you stand for overall, what your general political offer is' (Blunkett, interview 2016). Within this use of education policy to 'sell' the party, 'modernising' comprehensive schooling played a particular symbolic role; in New Labour's public discourse, the 'bog-standard comprehensive school' epitomised the 'uniformity' and 'unresponsiveness' of public services to consumer demands. The change in the party's education policy served to not only highlight the party as a 'champion' of parents or the 'consumers' of education but also undermine the teachers or the 'producers' of education. In the latter years of Blair's premiership (around the 2005 election), it appears that the electorate's support of him was even more necessary in his quest for radical public-sector reform, as even the party's former pro-modernisation circle increasingly opposed him.

In the case of the SPÖ, the situation has been rather different; its previous 'project' of the welfare state had not become so discredited, and nor had education policy been particularly relevant therein. Although the SPÖ has consistently decreased its electoral share since its absolute majorities of the 1970s, the party has faced less-severe electoral challenges than the Labour Party; it remained the strongest political party throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and remained in government until 2000. After the early 1980s, the party saw some attempts to 'modernise' its public image and programmatic orientation. Although this included a reduced role for state regulation, the SPÖ's transformation has overall been a rather gradual process of de-ideologising an already rather pragmatic centre-left party (Pelinka, 2013; Ucakar, 2006; Seeleib-Kaiser et al., 2005). In contrast to England, the discursive climate in Austria has remained much more stable and within traditional Left-Right parameters. Although the ÖVP recently shifted towards a more neoliberal agenda (Tálos, 2006), compared to the British Conservative Party of the 1980s, this has involved a less-severe attack on the welfare state (which the ÖVP has participated in building since 1945). In school policy, the ÖVP's position largely continued to emphasise a differentiated school system within the traditional bureaucratic model of school governance, with limited initiatives for introducing quasi-markets. Since the mid-1980s, the main discursive and electoral challenge to the SPÖ has come from the right-wing FPÖ, which has shaped public debate around migration.

Compared to the Labour Party, education policy received little attention in SPÖ electoral campaigns until the early 2000s, when the party's unfamiliar position in political opposition and a burgeoning debate about Austria's PISA results opened a window of opportunity for comprehensive schooling advocates to convince the party's leadership of the electoral opportunities involved in focusing on education policy. In contrast to New Labour, the SPÖ

framed comprehensive schooling as a requirement for both a 'modern' education system and a competitive economy. Developing a new education policy programme in the early 2000s, and the many events associated with it, were seen as useful to position the party to the public as 'competent' on education policy – despite it no longer controlling the school ministry. The interviews reflected a general belief that the party's ownership of education policy was crucial to it winning the 2006 elections.

Discursive contexts and electoral dynamics are important for understanding the extent to which parties have undergone programmatic transformation and whether they viewed education policy as a risk or an opportunity to 'sell' the party. In terms of the parties' perceptions of public support for, or opposition to, comprehensive schooling in particular, the two cases exhibit both commonalities and differences.

Labour Party policymakers were concerned about the potential electoral risks of introducing comprehensive schooling as early as the 1960s. By then, selection had become widely unpopular among the middle classes because of restricted access to grammar school places. Abolishing the 11-plus examination was therefore perceived as in line with public opinion. But key actors, such as Antony Crosland, remained nervous about the potential resistance to abolishing grammar schools as such (Lawton, 2005: 11; Francis, 2006). Labour therefore sold comprehensive schooling in the 1960s as 'grammar school education for all', thereby also alluding to the educational aspirations of the working class, for whom grammar schools represented a 'ladder of opportunity' – an alternative means of social advancement to the prestigious private schools (Lawton, 2005: 11). By the 1980s, comprehensive schooling had become the shared educational experience of the majority of children and parents, and Labour perceived it to be generally popular. However, there were some concerns that comprehensive schooling had not established its own 'image' as similar to grammar schools and distinct from secondary-modern schools (Lawton, 2005; Mandler, 2014). Since the 1970s, comprehensive schools had also come under considerable attack from the right-wing media, which portrayed them as lacking discipline and order. In contrast, although only a few grammar schools had survived the comprehensive reorganisation in the 1970s, this school type continued to be seen as an influential, 'symbolic and visible alternative to comprehensive schools in the 1980s and 1990s' (Phillips, 2003: 5).

In the mid-1990s, New Labour actively mobilised perceived parental anxieties over comprehensive schooling and the presumed lack of educational standards therein. Selection was still perceived as unpopular in the public, but perceptions of public nostalgia for grammar schools were strongly mobilised by New Labour to legitimise the 'modernisation' of comprehensive

schooling. New Labour politicians justified not closing down the remaining grammar schools by referring to the potential resistance among voters in areas where such schools remained as well as with their concern that abolishing these schools would send a negative signal to the wider electorate, where grammar schools were believed to be admired as strongholds of excellence, standards and opportunity while comprehensive schools were believed to be lacking such an 'ethos of excellence' in the eyes of the public. Labour therefore emphasised the development of schools' mission, or 'ethos', in its specialist school programme and (in particular) its academies programme, which entailed emulating the characteristics of grammar (and private) schools by focusing on traditional knowledge and learning, discipline, uniforms and so on.

In general, New Labour's education discourse was geared towards mobilising and constructing parental concerns over school standards and their wish to choose the 'right' kind of schools; through this approach, the party attempted to transcend potential distributional conflicts between different groups or social classes. However, during its term in government, tensions regarding this stress on parental choice and the reluctance to regulate school admissions became more visible. Labour voters' concerns regarding school selection and (some groups of) parents' limited choice seems to have been an issue, at least for the Labour MPs who criticised government policy around 2005–06.

Popular support for comprehensive schooling was also mixed in 1970s Austria. A key difference in Austria compared to England was that the *Gymnasiums* were not subsequently abolished; instead, they became more accessible and (to some degree) lost their status as elite institutions. In the 1960s, similarly to England, there was a perception of broad public support for educational reform and expansion (Schnell, 1993); but Austria lacked the strong, grassroots movement for abolishing selection that had developed in England. Subsequently, SPÖ school policymakers perceived comprehensive schooling as potentially electorally risky, as the public lacked familiarity with and understanding of what these schools would entail. During the 1970s, the issue of comprehensive schooling was de-emphasised in the party's electoral campaigns, which instead focused on more popular policies such as investing in educational infrastructure and resources. Supporters of comprehensive schooling hoped that the school experiments introduced in 1971 and their scientific evaluation would increase public acceptance, but comprehensive schooling continued to be discursively attacked by the Catholic–Conservative political spectrum (the ÖVP, the *Gymnasium* teaching union and Catholic associations). By the early 1980s, SPÖ advocates for comprehensive schooling generally perceived themselves to have lost the public argument (Schnell, 1993: 300).

Following its failure to introduce comprehensive schooling, the SPÖ resorted to driving educational expansion within the differentiated system. The expansion of *Gymnasium* school places turned these schools into an increasingly accessible target of educational aspirations for many previously excluded groups (most notably working-class children, girls and children in rural areas). Although sorting children at the age of ten remained (based, de facto, on selection by ability), the switch from examinations to primary school grades and teacher recommendations made this selection criterion more amenable to parental influences. In addition to expanding the number of *Gymnasium* school places, post-14 vocational pathways were upgraded. VET colleges, in particular – which gave access to the Matura qualification (and thereby higher education) – have become an increasingly popular route for upward mobility, which, to some degree, compensates for the continuing practice of early selection (Lassnigg, 2011: 421–2). However, while the *Hauptschule* taught the same curriculum as the *Gymnasiums*, and thereby ceased to be a formal barrier to continuing to (upper level) secondary and higher education, interviewees thought that the public still perceived the *Gymnasium* as a ‘guarantee’ to obtain the Matura.

In the 2000s, SPÖ comprehensive schooling advocates tried to overcome such popular views and to build a case for such schooling through referencing other countries’ experiences and OECD research. They were aware of the public’s lack of familiarity and latent scepticism to non-selective schooling but were generally optimistic that the public could be persuaded of the merits of comprehensive schooling by ensuring the quality of teaching and learning in these schools (or through the ‘new learning culture’ proposed for the NMS). In hindsight, some actors conceded that they had not been successful in constructing and mobilising a successful counter-image to the *Gymnasium*, nor in mobilising support for abolishing selection. Although they perceived a considerable degree of popular dissatisfaction with selection and access to *Gymnasium* places (particularly in cities), the party’s previous strategy of expanding educational opportunities within the differentiated system had in the long run reduced the public pressure and mobilisation required to introduce comprehensive schooling. Furthermore, the expansion of *Gymnasium* school places (again, particularly in cities) depopulated the *Hauptschule*, increasing parental fears of their child mixing with low-achieving students – and, as some interviewees indicated, immigrant children with limited German language skills. Several interviewees indicated that in Austria’s current discursive climate, which is strongly shaped by negative discourse over migration (driven by the FPÖ), this has further contributed to the ambivalence in SPÖ school policy.

Electoral considerations have influenced both parties' engagement with school policy, but this relationship between parties' policy preferences and gaining popular support has not been clear-cut. In both parties, there were instances where policy proposals were modified or downplayed due to perceived lack of popular support, electoral risks or (in particular) difficulties attracting middle-class votes. In both cases, however, there were many instances where actors went to great lengths to frame discourses such that they would persuade the public and gain popular support for a policy (or even used policy to 'sell' the party as a whole). Crucial questions included how education fits into the wider discursive climate at a certain moment, and how it can be used to allude to wider aspirations among voters and the public. An emerging theme during the empirical investigation related to the potential of education policy (perhaps more than other public policies) to construct and convey narratives about parties' wider social projects, tying in hopes and aspirations and painting pictures about social change and the future. In both countries, it appears that popular images of and attachments to selective schools, or the type of education they stand for, put limits to the popular image of comprehensive schooling. This has created considerable challenges for the parties' wish to promote comprehensive schooling. However, as the two case studies and comparison over time have indicated, actors have approached this dilemma in very different ways. Overall, actors' perceptions of electoral opportunities and risks, as well as the discursive strategies they devise for mobilising opportunities and overcoming barriers, remain crucial for understanding the interactions between electoral considerations and party policy.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

This research has aimed to contribute to a more nuanced and contextualised understanding of political parties and their engagement with education policy. First of all, rather than starting from a narrow definition of comprehensive schooling as the absence of selection, the research aimed to investigate the particular *meanings* that the long-standing goal of 'comprehensive schooling' has come to embody in each context and the shifts in these connotations that have taken place over the period from the 1980s to the 2010 which have sparked and were shaped by political struggles. Secondly, this research also aimed to contribute to a more holistic understanding of *political parties*. Although parties are (often) strategic actors, whose policy preferences are influenced by the parties' need to navigate the obstacles of political arenas in their quest for political power, political parties are also internally differentiated coalitions often exhibiting a pluralism of ideas and interests in education policy; and therefore political organisations with their own internal life. The processes through which shared attitudes and party policy are shaped and contested are complex and therefore require empirical investigation. Building on a dialectic understanding of political parties, this research has investigated how the interplay between internal party dynamics and parties' engagement with their external environment has contributed to shaping the formation of party policy on comprehensive schooling.

Summary of findings

Empirically, this research has focused on two political parties which had previously been key political supporters of comprehensive schooling. Since the 1960s and 1970s, and comprehensive schooling has assumed a central position in Labour's and the SPÖ's educational programmes. However, within the particular educational and political contexts in which the demands for comprehensive schooling reform were developed, both parties developed different understandings of this policy. Since the 1980s, the attitudes and policies of the two parties seem to have diverged even more clearly; while Labour appears to have abandoned its traditional approach to comprehensive schooling in the mid-1990s, the SPÖ appears to have rediscovered its traditional commitment in the early 2000s.

Apart from opposition to academic selection, Labour's commitment to comprehensive schooling has since the 1960s rested on the principles of local authority control over schooling and a high degree of teacher autonomy in terms of internal differentiation practices, the curriculum and teaching methods. Since then, the Labour Party's proposals for comprehensive schooling have not extended much further, in terms of either formulating particular aims for such schooling or specifying its practices and contents. Since the late 1980s (and particularly since the mid-1990s), struggles over comprehensive schooling within the party largely focused on issues of school governance – not only the role of market mechanisms (such as choice and competition) in governance but also the increasing role of the central government and individual schools' freedom at the cost of local authority control and teachers' autonomy, which were seen as key pillars underpinning the comprehensive principle. In contrast, the SPÖ's programmatic commitment to comprehensive schooling has since the 1920s built on an encompassing educational doctrine, which included reflections on both the structure of schooling and the curricular and pedagogical practices required for a 'common middle school'. Symbolic references to this current of educational thought, and many individual aspects of it, remain in the party's contemporary programmes today – but the SPÖ's policy proposals for comprehensive schooling now focus on postponing selection from ages 10–14 and emulating the *Gymnasium's* curricular practices in order to secure post-14 educational transitions. Due to its failure to introduce comprehensive schooling in the 1970s, the party's policy strategy when in government has focused on expanding opportunities and transitions within the differentiated system by simultaneously expanding access to selective schooling and upgrading vocational pathways (as alternatives to academic tracks).

Despite clear changes in Labour's policy and the apparent resignation in the SPÖ's reform agenda, a general commitment to non-selective schooling remains largely shared by both parties. This commitment has often included a strong symbolic and emotive dimension. However, in both parties there is considerable ambiguity regarding both what comprehensive schooling actually means (beyond non-selection) and the measures and political strategy required to bring it about.

Struggles over comprehensive schooling have been underpinned by unique dynamics within each party. During Labour's mid-1990s programmatic transformation, comprehensive schooling became entangled with wider struggles over what the party stood for and what its goals were. Considerable ownership over comprehensive schooling emerged among teachers (who had a strong presence in the party) during the implementation of comprehensive schooling in the 1960s and 1970s. Ideologically, comprehensive schooling became embedded in the party's

wider 'egalitarian project' of welfare-state expansion during that time. Indeed, it seems that the principle of comprehensive schooling became a key ingredient of both this egalitarian project and the party's 'ethos' for not only teachers but a large section of the party. New Labour politicians, and their ideas about the role of the state in education and the goals of educational reform, challenged what they saw as 'Old Labour' policy. Within this struggle to redefine Labour's project for social reform, education policy and the 'modernisation' of comprehensive schooling were used to 'sell' the new perspective to the public. However, towards the end of Blair's leadership, internal party contestation among New Labour modernisers revealed not only disagreements over policy and ideas but also uncertainties over the popular support of some measures. Today, the Labour Party has tacitly accepted much of New Labour's educational agenda, but there seems to be considerable uneasiness with this legacy.

In the SPÖ, comprehensive schooling remained torn between programmatic aspiration and pragmatic political strategy in a political context that constrained the potential for far-reaching school reforms. While comprehensive schooling remained a symbolic goal within the party's education programme, it has never become firmly embedded in the party's overall programme for social change, and there has been little internal party debate over the goals and means of educational reform. That comprehensive schooling has remained a programmatic aspiration appears to be the result of the persistence of a few individual supporters, who used international educational discourses (recently PISA) to legitimise the project to both the party and the public. The party's recent failure to introduce comprehensive schooling was largely due to external political constraints, but it appears that its previous policy of expanding educational opportunities within the differentiated system has, in the long run, reduced both popular pressure and internal party mobilisation to abolish selection. Today, comprehensive schooling remains as a symbolic goal in the party's programmes, but has largely disappeared from the party's agenda.

The two case studies revealed not only different (and changing) understandings of the idea of comprehensive schooling, and the goals and policy measures associated with it, but also very unique dynamics through which party policy was formed. These dynamics emerged from the interplays between different actors, motivations and strategies, which played out very differently in particular historical and political contexts. Although the two case studies therefore do not lend themselves easily to comparative discussion, the joint discussion of some of the observations made in each case highlighted a range of dimensions, which have contributed to shaping attitudes towards and policies on comprehensive schooling in both parties.

Important aspects and dynamics regarding the parties' engagement with their *external environment* were:

- The party's need for *popular* support: Its engagement with the electorate; the nature of electoral competition; the overall discursive climate; whether school policy was perceived as a potential cause of electoral dilemmas or as a resource to create cross-class coalitions; patterns of educational demands and competition over school places; and the possibilities of mobilising or overcoming prevalent societal imaginaries of 'the good school' or 'legitimate' selection.
- The party's need for *political* support: Its engagement with other political actors; constraints on accessing and exercising government power; and strategies to overcome, or contribute towards, resistance to reform.

Important aspects underpinning *internal party dynamics* were:

- the role of programmatic legacies of educational reform and their embeddedness in (or detachedness from) wider party projects;
- the emergence of a collective attachment to comprehensive schooling as a value within the wider party, creating support for this policy as a 'logic of appropriateness', or even part of the 'ethos', of the party;
- the strength of internal party lobby groups (such as teachers), their vested interests in the existing system and the degree of ownership over past educational reforms among them; and
- the incorporation of new ideas, discourses and ideological projects and their fit with or challenge to existing commitments.

The joint discussion of findings from the two case studies indicated how the dynamics underpinning policy formation were stimulated by the specific educational and political context, as well as by the wider political-discursive climate. First of all, the *political-institutional setting* in which education policy-making took place provided particular opportunities for, or constraints in, bringing about educational change. The degree to which power is concentrated in the government, as well as the power of veto players, affects how much (and whose) support political parties wishing to change the status quo require, and the likely strategies they will employ. The particularly constrained nature of education policy-making in Austria (the need for a two-thirds majority, the veto-player status of teaching unions and the entangled constitutional

competencies of different levels of government in education policy) contributes to the need to seek broad political support for policy reforms. In contrast, the concentrated nature of government power in England and the absence of strong veto points for school policy-making create fewer constraints on governments wishing to change policy – but also prevents opposition parties from influencing the policy agenda. While the political-institutional setting of education policy-making does not determine political parties' actions, it can influence the 'locus' of potential challenges for parties wishing to introduce policy. While electoral considerations played a role in both parties' school policy projects, the need to win general elections, and therefore the influence of electoral considerations on education policy proposals, appears to have been particularly strong for the Labour Party. Conversely, the SPÖ has not perceived school policy to be a major electoral risk – but it has seen it as a considerable risk for forming coalition governments.

Second, parties are not only unitary actors that strategically navigate electoral and political arenas but also internally differentiated coalitions in which potentially diverging attitudes exist. In addition, this research has also found that *parties themselves* can become institutions in which ideas or values become embodied in a shared sense of purpose or identity. As such, institutions not only provide an external 'opportunity structure' or external incentives for political parties but also affect their internal life, creating a 'logic of appropriateness' (March and Olsen, 1984; March and Olsen, 2006). In this sense, institutions embody social norms, cognitive scripts and cultural symbols that 'affect the very identities, self-images and preferences of actors' (Hall and Taylor, 1996: 939). Support for comprehensive schooling has been seen as 'appropriate' for members or policymakers of both parties; but it seems that in the Labour Party, attachments to comprehensive schooling have extended beyond such 'appropriateness' to become part of the party's 'ethos' (Drucker, 1979). In both cases, this general support did not necessarily imply in-depth knowledge – or even interest – in the intricate matters of school policy. Nor are such shared norms or attitudes entirely stable; as the case of the Labour Party shows, these can become challenged by new ideas and the actors who push them. However, this sense of 'appropriateness' or 'ethos' limited the ability of New Labour modernisers to achieve their goals, and may have even outlived some of the changes they introduced in party policy.

Finally, key to understanding parties' comprehensive schooling policy is not only political institutions but also the *educational context*. The historical perspective this research adopted has highlighted the role of policy legacies, or *feedback effects*, of various sorts. Policy-making rarely starts from scratch; rather, it is shaped by the outcomes of past policies and the power relations they created. Policies can become institutions themselves, and their legacies affect both policy

preferences and the opportunities of, and constraints on, future policy-making (Pierson, 1993; Pierson, 2006; Béland, 2010; Jordan, 2013). Policies can, over time, create group identities and resources, as well as vested interests among beneficiaries, who mobilise to maintain their privileges and thus become powerful actors who oppose policy changes (Campbell, 2012). A key policy legacy that emerged from the case studies was 'group effects', or past policy's creation of vested interests – particularly among the teaching force. In Austria, the two-tiered nature of schooling and teacher qualifications has, over time, created a powerful vested interest in maintaining the status quo among *Gymnasium* school teachers, who therefore oppose the introduction of comprehensive schooling. In England, teachers' involvement (which had not been formally differentiated by school type) in implementing comprehensive schooling created a strong sense of ownership for such schooling among them. The strength of such lobby groups and their involvement in and influence on party policy has varied, but the feedback effect of past policy on group identities and vested interests was an important factor for understanding the politics of education policy in both countries. The general institutional nature of education systems, as well as particular school policies, can also contribute to shaping societal expectations for education and patterns of educational demand. Often called 'regime effects' or 'mass behaviour effects' (Pierson, 2006; Campbell, 2012), these can create (more or less visible) pressure for, or resistance to, reform; this, in turn, provides reform-oriented actors with opportunities or constraints when developing and advocating reform proposals. This research has not studied societal expectations or public opinion as such, but interviewees' statements indicated that actors have reflected on (and puzzled over) the nature of societal demands, and that these perceptions influenced actors' policy strategies for mobilising support or trying to overcome barriers.

Past policies, and the educational institutions they have created, can also have 'interpretive' feedback effects, which shape attitudes regarding desirable policy among both the wider public and policy actors. Traditions and ideas embodied in educational institutions – or 'definition institutions' (Steedman, 1987), such as England's grammar schools and private schools – can have a powerful effect on public attitudes and expectations about what constitutes 'good' education. Both countries' parties have perceived the image of selective educational institutions to have challenged popular perceptions of comprehensive schools (either the existing such schools in England or the proposed ones in Austria). However, national educational traditions and policy legacies also act as 'repositories of ideologies' (Paterson, 2003a: 5), which actors can mobilise to gain (or deny) legitimacy for education reforms. In both parties, actors have tried to frame policies in line with what they perceived to be popular images of selective schools (e.g. by

stressing notions of 'ethos', 'security' and/or 'transitions'). A clear difference, though, is that SPÖ policymakers tried to gain support for comprehensive schooling, while New Labour mobilised (and constructed) such images to undermine Labour's traditional policy of comprehensive schooling.

The two parties' education policies were influenced by the particular political-institutional, discursive and educational contexts in which they evolved, which not only created particular opportunities for (and constraints on) actors to pursue different policy strategies but also, to some degree, influenced actors' attitudes and identities in the first place. However, actors are both shaped by and 'architects' of their institutional context (Hay, 2008: 62), and this research has found that (as Hay argues) actors are not 'analytically substitutable'; indeed, their preferences or rationales cannot be deduced from the particular context in which they engage (Hay, 2008: 64). The political environments in which parties operate are highly complex, lending themselves to various interpretations and alternatives for action. Political and educational settings can include 'real' constraints on actors' successes in realising their ambitions – but these conditions do not predetermine actors' aspirations or strategies. It is through the interpretation of party actors that institutional constraints and opportunities become meaningful in political processes, influencing what parties want and do in education policy. This empirical investigation therefore focused on actors' 'assumptive worlds' (Young, 1977), exploring the structure of actors' environments through their perceptions and interpretations of it. The two cases also illustrated the significance of (often only a handful of) individuals whose opinions and beliefs about 'desirable' education, interpretations of political constraints and opportunities, and strategies to advocate for their policies – both within and outside the party – strongly influenced their party's approach to school policy. These 'change agents', or 'policy entrepreneurs' (Mintrom and Norman, 2009; Little, 2017), were motivated by a range of rationales; they were rarely pure 'instrumentalists' driven by the pragmatic pursuit of power, nor pure 'idealists' driven by commitments to higher educational ideals and ideologies. Actors' beliefs, values and long-term visions of the 'good' society interplayed with their strategic calculations of material gains, pragmatism and power. How these party actors not only *perceived*, but also *constructed* and *mobilised*, what is 'possible' and 'desirable' in education policy remained crucial for understanding the evolution of parties' comprehensive schooling policies.

Implications

In the literature on the partisan politics of education policy, such policy has been largely conceptualised as a *distributive issue* between social classes, the preferences of which depend on the particular benefits and losses they stand to gain from the policy. Indeed, political struggles over comprehensive schooling in the two cases studied here have also revolved around questions of educational opportunities and privileges for different groups. However, neither the redistributive implications of school policy nor popular attitudes towards it are clear-cut. Not only has comprehensive schooling come to mean different things in different countries, and therefore related to different policy dimensions, but also wider notions of educational and social change which have underpinned political debates about comprehensive schooling have differed over time. Yet, through these different meanings and debates, another dimension to the politics of education policy has emerged. Apart from (and intertwined with) distributive conflicts in education policy, *conflicts in values, worldviews and beliefs* – particularly regarding the idea of the ‘good school’ and the role of education in producing social change and social order. Debates over comprehensive schooling revealed not only shared concerns and ambitions across countries but also the importance of particular local or national meanings and the existence of prevalent images of ‘the good school’.

Political parties’ policy preferences tend to be portrayed as either ‘ideologically based’ or shaped by electoral considerations, thereby reflecting the political interests of the key constituencies that the parties aim to represent or attract (White, 2006). By tracing the processes through which policies were formed, this research has highlighted that both dimensions – ideology and strategy – play an important role. However, it is impossible to assess the relative weight of these categories; nor are they clear-cut. Party policy is, to some degree, shaped by internal party dynamics in which programmatic legacies, shared norms and practices, input from educational theory and practice, and the interests and attitudes of particular groups or lobbies interplay in creating a temporary consensus, which can be modified or challenged by the rise of new actors and ideas. Party policy is also influenced by the strategies that parties adopt to engage with their external environment and to win popular support, as well as by them forming political coalitions to implement policy. As this research has demonstrated, it is through the dialectic interplay between these internal and external dimensions that we can gain a better understanding of the shape of, and changes in, party policy. The in-depth investigation of both cases of policy formation has highlighted that party ‘policy’ tends to manifest in different ‘sites’ – widely shared

attitudes within the party, its collectively sanctioned preferences in party programmes, and the strategic choices its elected representatives make in electoral and legislative arenas are closely linked – yet often strained. Party ‘policy’ is therefore not a stable category but rather a temporary, often-uneasy compromise.

This research linked two distinct questions: 1) What does comprehensive education mean, in different contexts and at different points in time?, and 2) How can we understand the formation of political parties’ policy on this issue? The research therefore aimed to evidence the shifting *meanings* of comprehensive schooling across time and space, and to gain insights into the *processes* through which parties’ positions on this policy issue evolved. Despite numerous attempts to limit the analysis to only one of the two questions, it is perhaps the difficulty of separating the analysis of the *meaning* of policy from the analysis of the *processes* through which policy is created that is the main finding of this research. It seems that this interplay – between meaning and process; between ideas and action – is key to understanding the trajectory of these two parties’ education policies since the 1980s. Observing the changing meanings of comprehensive schooling also indicates the processes that make a party what it is: a product of its specific history, which it uses as a point of reference for what should either be done or avoided in the future. Such observation also reveals that a party is a thing that continuously tries to make sense of itself – and, through this process, reproduces itself. While the external environment is important, the influence of that environment depends on how it is reconstructed and interpreted internally. Researching ‘meanings’ thereby leads to findings about ‘processes’, and vice versa. More research on the engagement of political parties with comprehensive schooling in other cultural and political contexts would further contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the interdependency between policy meanings and processes of preference formation of political actors.

Despite significant differences between the two cases in this study, this research also revealed a considerable ambivalence and ambiguity of social democratic parties in the area of education policy. While this is partly related to the complex nature of distributive and value dimensions of education policy as such as well as the political constraints facing the parties in realising their goals, this finding also raises question to more fundamental role of ambiguity in the life of political parties. The frequent difficulty of even identifying party ‘policy’ on a particular issue at any point in time has been commented on in other research, which has resorted to operationalise particular manifestations of party policy; that is either a party’s collectively sanctioned preferences (expressed in official programmes), the strategic choices its leaders have

made in particular policy processes, or less commonly the widely shared attitudes among the party's rank-and-file. However, this fragmentation of party policy in different 'sites', and the interplay between them, is *in itself* a characteristic of a party. What Brunsson (1993) called 'organised hypocrisy' might not only be a part of the everyday life of a political party but also a crucial function for its survival as a political organisation. Indeterminacy and ambiguity might be crucial for a party to simultaneously convey different meanings to different audiences. More research on internal struggles regarding different policy issues and the role of ambiguity and fluidity of party policy would contribute to more holistic understanding the nature political parties and the formation of their policy preferences in other areas.

The research presented in this thesis has suggested the importance of studying the motivations and struggles of different actors within processes of policy formation. These processes take place not in a vacuum but in the particular political and educational contexts in which parties engage, which are (to some degree) structured by institutions – from formal rules and informal policy-making conventions to shared practices, norms and policy feedback effects. This investigation of two case studies was not aimed at uncovering one single type of institution that influences these attitude- and preference-formation processes but rather the contingent interplay of a range of types of institutional factors. The structure of the political system has, to some degree, affected the source of possible constraints on parties' reform ambitions; the need to gain electoral majorities (particularly in majoritarian systems) and the need for coalition-building and consensus orientation (particularly in proportional electoral systems with a high number of veto players for education reforms). The structure of the political arena and the degree of power concentration provides a general perspective on the opportunities and constraints parties face, which can affect their educational strategies. In addition, attention to policy legacies, or the various feedback effects arising from previous education policies, has enabled more nuanced insights into the nature of parties' attitudes and education policies: the emergence of group identities and vested interests from previous policies (within and outside parties); patterns of educational demand within the public (which parties perceive and respond to when devising new policies); and the interpretive feedback effects of previous policies, or educational institutions, in terms of creating popular images of what constitutes a 'proper' education (among both the public and policymakers).

In this sense, institutions can provide resources for, or erect barriers to, actors' reform ambitions – and can influence these ambitions in the first place. However, institutions do not determine actors' perceptions, preferences or strategies; the complexity and unpredictability of

the contexts in which political actors engage leave much room for agency. The importance of particular individuals, or small groups of actors, who aim for policy change has emerged from the two case studies as crucial for understanding the evolution of party attitudes towards, and policies on, schools. These actors were rarely pure instrumentalists, driven by the pursuit of power; nor were they pure idealists, driven by only higher educational ideals. Beliefs, values and visions of the 'good' society interplayed with strategic considerations of gaining political power – both for its own sake and to bring about educational change. At times, actors' beliefs and motivations, and the successes or failures of their strategies for mobilising (and even constructing) opportunities for reform and constraints for alternatives, have enormously influenced the direction and nature of change in party policy. This research indicates the fruitfulness of studying the interplay between institutions and actors' 'assumptive worlds' to better understand the contingency of political processes.

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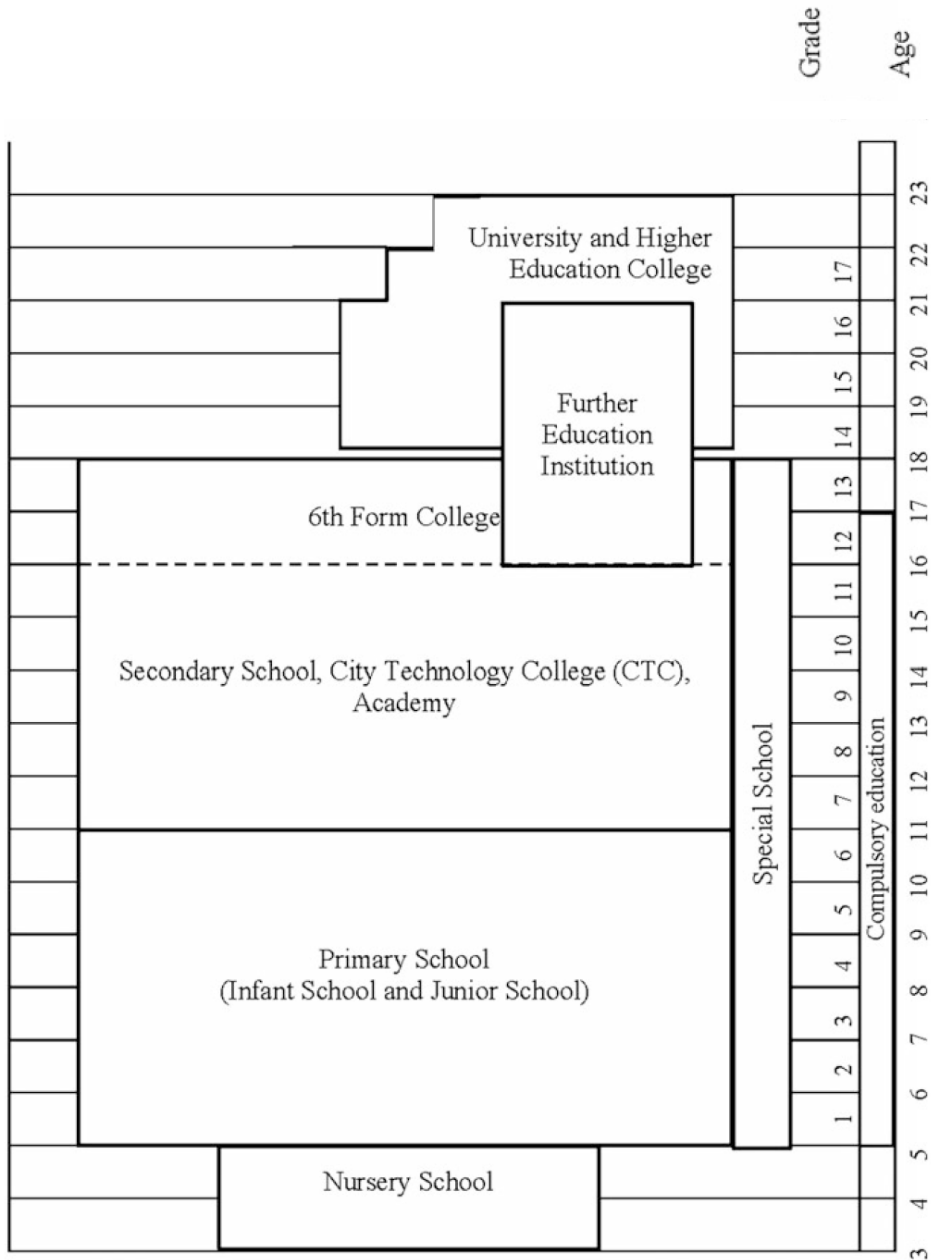
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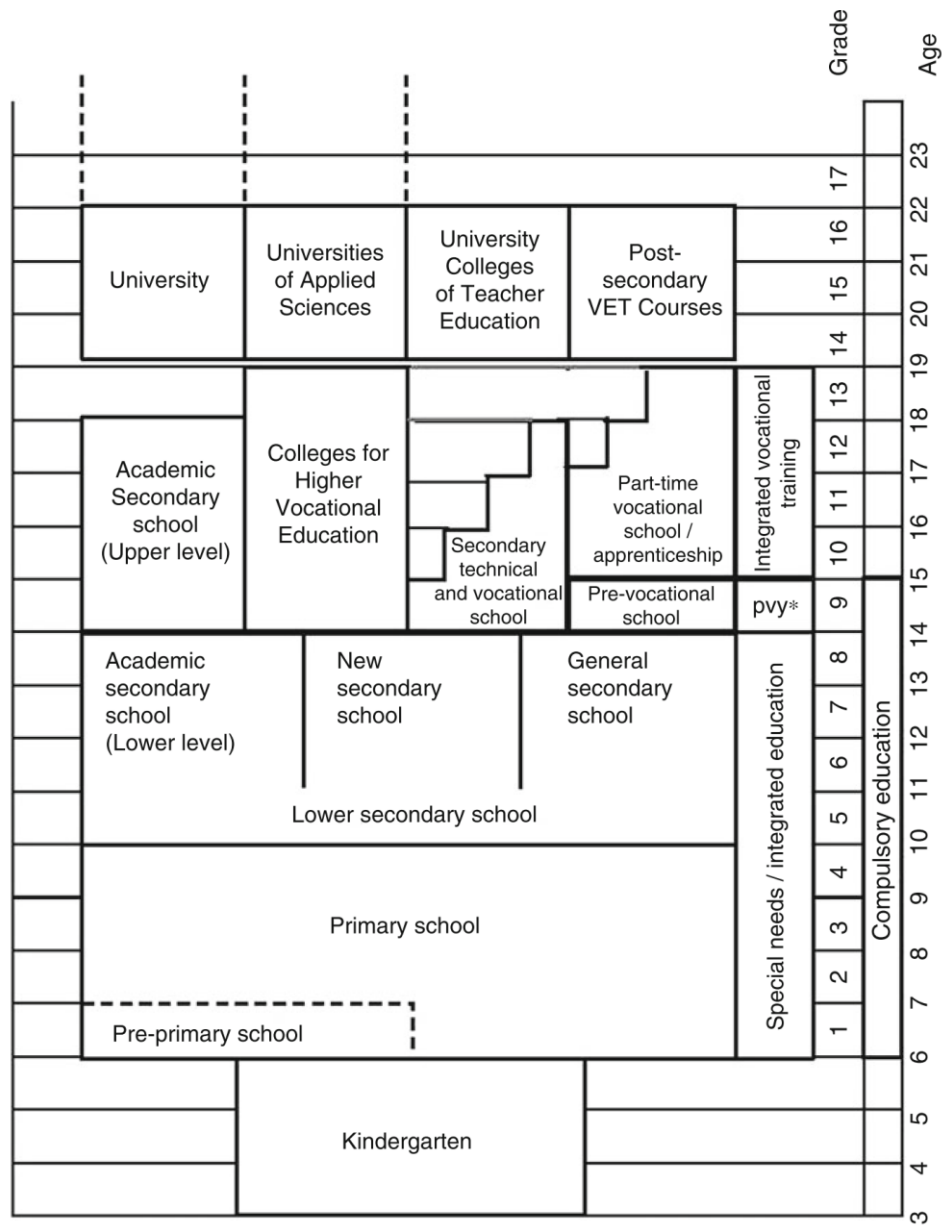
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Appendix A: The structure of the English education system (2015)



Source: Harris and Gorard (2015)

Appendix B: The structure of the Austrian education system (2015)



* Pre-vocational year

Source: Eder and Thonhauser (2015)

