

The Development of Policy and Legislation for the School Leavers

Age since 1945

Policy is the course of action that the Government undertakes to develop new Legislation. Legislation is the finalised version of a policy which, once passed through Parliament, becomes Law. 'Legislation is one of the most important instruments of government in organising society and protecting citizens' De Jager (2000). Policy in turn is structured the same way as legislation, where collective research and evidence is found to move forwards in steps of change. By definition a policy is the 'Course of action adopted by government' Ostler and Waite (1994) and when we look at the social aspect of any policies it's in our very nature to develop and place foundations for the future for our own self-pervations.

Policies and legislation around age is what I have based my research on. I believe that this ever changing and fast paced area of our lives to be the best example.

To define age is relatively simple, however once you look at the responsibilities and laws that govern each age bracket, what constitutes age changes drastically and is ever changing and evolving to match the social constructs that we as a race and united nations have. In the last seventy-three years the way in which we view our world especially how we view the changes needed has to be reflected in our own organisation of society.

To put limitations on any area of our lives regardless of how insignificant it may seem we need to identify any and all dangers or risks to those who are most vulnerable. From infancy through the entirety of our lives all the way up to death there are many milestones and during each milestone there are constrictions of what is legally allowed at such an age, what is illegal and what is in between. These views have drastically changed over our history but in some areas of our past some views are still very vague. Looking directly at the question asked which is 'describe the development of policy and legislation since 1945 on a chosen subject' as outlined above I have chosen age; more specifically the policies and legislation on the age that children/adolescents are legally allowed to leave education and join the workforce.

There are two pieces of legislation that have had an effect on the school leavers age and several more pieces of legislation surrounding the issue but not having a direct impact. The Education Act 1944, which changed the minimum school leavers age from 14 years of age to 15 years of age, and The Education Act 1996, which whilst it did not necessarily increase the school leavers age it ensured that every child that entered the education system regardless of if they were born September 1st, August 31st or anywhere in between would receive the same minimum number of full academic years in school, are the two pieces that have had a direct effect on the school

leavers age, whilst there are other acts such as The Education and Skills Act 2008 which targets the school leavers age but doesn't have any impact on it.

In 1944 the education act was pushed through parliament in order for those children whose families were at the bottom end of the poverty scale could receive an education without it having a significant impact on their families financial situation as it had been prior to the 1944 education act 'when poorer children were offered free places, parents often had to turn them down owing to the extra costs involved.' *The Education Act of 1944*. This came after decades of education reforms and pre-war struggles with children not receiving sufficient education leaving many to believe that the future of Great Britain in an academically and technologically expanding world would be one in serious decline 'In 1938 around 80% of children left school at age 14, most having only ever attended an all-age elementary school.' Barber (2014)

The politician behind the legislation was Richard Austen Butler, more generally known as R. A. Butler or Rab, who at the time of the education act 1944 was president of the board of education. The 1944 act is more popularly known as the 'Butler Act' and that it was the first post war boost to education in which all major political parties agreed on. The act made a definitive difference in the schooling system and it still forms the basis of how the current education system works with primary schooling, secondary schooling and further education.

'This legislation is an important milestone in education policy and reform. It established the three progressive stages or sectors of education with which we are now familiar: [primary](#), secondary, and [further education](#)' Wallace (2009)

The direct result after the implementation of the 1944 act was an increase in children continuing secondary education. This resulted in a knock on effect of the number of school buildings that were required to meet the new number of students legally required to stay enrolled in the education system. There were as few as 575 public sector schools in the year 1905, this rose significantly to over 1,300 public schools in the first few years of the 1940s and after the implementation of the education act 1944 the first recorded figures of the number of secondary schools in England and Wales alone had reached 4,500.

The act although stated as the year previous to the question asked was not implemented until a year after the end of the second World War in 1946. The legal age to leave school was officially changed to 15 years of age with the guidance that it was to change to 16 years of age eventually, although it was a rather significant amount of time before this became a reality.

The act was aimed at more than just academic and technological growth but to help the community as a whole to prosper with more skilled and abled residents, which as a result would hopefully increase the overall moral of the entire community. Thus allowing children to create a sustainable future not just for themselves but for the generations that would follow them 'The

1944 act gave local education authorities the duty to contribute towards the spiritual, moral, mental and physical development of the community' Bell (2004)

Society was finally changing to include all regardless of gender or on ability to learn it was recognised that children leaving school at 14 had no understanding of the real world, leaving so many unskilled children looking for employment in a country where unskilled work was slowly reducing. This was very significant and put a massive shift in the perspective of importance and equality required in education.

The changes have always however been met with controversy. Households were facing the possibility of losing out on an extra income for an extra year never mind how small said income was, it would put exceptional pressure on those families towards the bottom of the poverty ladder. Another fundamental implementation of the 1944 act was the introduction of the 11 plus examinations which were originally meant to be introduced as a guide to see what level a child was at and not to be used solely as an entrance examination into grammar schools. Unfortunately with the change in government in 1945 R. A. Butler was no longer in a position to enforce the legislation as intended which allowed the newly formed grammar schools to use the 11 plus results to determine who they accepted and ultimately the exam would decide where your secondary education was. For the most part the 11 plus was believed to be very unfair and was a selection process which didn't include the equality that was originally intended. 'The creation of grammar schools that could select their own pupils condemned the rest to vastly inferior secondary moderns' Horrie (2017) which caused families with several children with varying levels of ability to be segregated.

It wasn't until 1964 that the age of children leaving school was brought to attention again with the age set to be pushed to 16, however this was not implemented until 1972 mainly due to an overload of gap year children who were caught in the system of suddenly being required to complete an extra year schooling and the current level of facilities weren't up to the standards to cope with such a strain and such additional buildings were desperately needed 'These became known as ROSLA (Raising of school leaving age) buildings and were delivered to schools as self assembly packs. Although not designed for long-term use, many schools continued using them.' Anon (2012) The need of still using them clearly shows that numbers are still high enough to require them.

'The Education Secretary at the time Margaret Thatcher wished to push Britain and cause change such as the 1944 act much to anticipated problems of having youths unwilling to cooperate. However when it eventually came into effect it coincided with a lack of employment opportunities and rather than the mass truancy that had been predicted it saw a relatively peaceful transition' (Sheldon, 2008)

In the most recent past there has been many changes such as in 1996 that new law was passed that there would be one singular date to be legally allowed to leave school. With access to the internet and times evolving also down to change of governments new issues and ideology of what the ideal format is policies are ever changing slightly to adapt but not completely change.

The biggest issue which in all my findings crop up is that statistics of those children who leave school earlier with qualifications or skills are most likely to find themselves out of further training and unemployed which the push of a bigger change was needed. 'Despite repeated efforts to tackle this stubborn problem - the most recent figures for England showed that 11% of 16 to 18 year olds are still outside education, training or work.' Anon (2007)

The argument also is staying in further education makes you more likely to succeed in all areas of your life 'The government is raising the leaving age because research shows that young people who carry on learning or training until the age of 18 earn more money, are likely to be healthier and less likely to be in trouble with the police' Anon (2015) In the education and skills act 2008 it was stated that age should rise to 18, England only. This has already been established. Wales however at the time was not to follow suit 'Ministers in Cardiff Bay are not enthusiastic about compulsion, and say there is already a target to keep 93% of Welsh 16-19 years olds in education or training' Anon (2008)

As the current law dictates for England can leave school Last Friday in June if aged 16 by the end of that school year but must further continue education, apprenticeship or 20 hours volunteering or part time working as long as you are still in part time education. In Scotland if your 16th birthday falls between 1st March to Sept 30th you can leave school 31st of May that year or if your birthday falls between 1st October and last day in February you can leave at the start of the Christmas break.

Northern Ireland when your 16th birthday falls between September 1st and 1st of July you can leave school from June 30th and if your 16th birthday falls between 2nd of July and 31st of August you won't be able to leave until 30th June the following year. In Wales this has remained unchanged since 1996 and the last Friday in June you may leave as long as your 16th birthday is by the end of the school year.

However all regions of the country have incentives to try and keep youths in education on their own basis in the form of monetary allowances as to opposed to the benefit system in which the government's intentions are desperately trying to stop them from using

Overall Since the first act 1944 which created a major shift in the legislation around the age of school leaving children the numerous acts and policies which have co-sided each of these bills

have not been based on one area of life but on the multi-communities that surround us all whilst in our younger years and beyond to sculpt the foundation in which we create careers, families and pass these values and desires onto the next generation.

The next logical step would be to unite the kingdoms of Great Britain onto one distinguishable legislation with compulsory education until 18, adding more support to apprenticeships and skilled training so that education is the tool we use to guide our future forward. To push further incentives to gain life skills and experiences, the research is out there to already show how many 16 plus's initially stay onto further education, so looking at a secure support system to keep them there and positively impact on the start of their working lives.

Butler's Act was revolutionary as it caused change which saw positive growth in our societies, the next revolutionary act needs to do the same. It has to be relevant, realistic and achievable, working closely together with all links from the smallest starting at school or those thinking of leaving. More diverse education is required to help tackle the struggles we have with unemployment, poverty and financial struggles.

Age on whole is covered in many more pieces of legislation including the Equality Act 2010 which covers direct discrimination, showing that the importance of the number of years you have lived and experienced is a right to access certain things previously restricted and be treated equally, within reason in this ever adapting ever changing world.

Word count 2301

Reference List

De Jager, H (2000) *Importance of Legislation*, Available at: <https://repository.up.ac.za/handle/2263/14758> (Accessed: 16 November)

Ostler, G and Waite, M (1994) *The Little Oxford Dictionary*. 7th Ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. Polecat | Pollen

The Education Act of 1944, Available at: <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/livinglearning/school/overview/educationact1944/> (Accessed: 16 November)

Barber, M (2014) *Rab Butler's 1944 Education Act brings free secondary education for all*, Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/schoolreport/25751787> (Accessed on: 16 November)

Wallace, S (2009) *A Dictionary of Education*, Available at: <http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780199212064.001.0001/acref-9780199212064-e-142> (Accessed on: 16 November)

Bell (2004) *Change and Continuity: reflections on the Butler act*, Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2004/apr/21/ofsted.schools> (Accessed on: 17 November)

Horrie, C (2017) *Grammar Schools: back to the bad old days of inequality*, Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2017/may/04/grammar-schools-secondary-modern-11-plus-theresa-may> (Accessed on: 17 November)

Anon (2012) *Education Leaving Age*, Available at: <http://www.politics.co.uk/reference/education-leaving-age> (Accessed on: 17 November)

Sheldon, N (2008) *The School Leaving Age: What can we learn from history?*, Available at: <http://www.bbchistorymagazine.com/feature/what-can-we-learn-history> (Accessed on: 17 November)

Anon (2007) *School leaving age set to be 18*, Available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/6254833.stm> (Accessed on: 18 November)

Anon (2015) *What happens after the age of 16?*, Available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/parents/education_after_16/ (Accessed on: 18 November)

Anon (2008) *Will school leaving age be 18?*, Available at: https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/school-leaving-age-18-2184594?fbclid=IwAR0NKQsorFoNrSP3YaLdu1lToKnnysg9F53ulAvPCbA-_bUlhdy3a3grDE (Accessed on: 18 November)