

# **Governing Education in England and France<sup>1</sup>**

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***Abstract***

This article investigates changes in educational governance in England and France. Paradigms of new governance are required to make sense of organisational complexity in both countries. English-style educational governance encompasses new forms of central steering, private techniques of public management, a culture of consumer-led evaluation, and new (bounded) forms of school autonomy. French-style educational governance is exemplified by organisational change, enhanced political and administrative decentralisation, the growth of educational partnerships and the circulation of new policy ideas. National administrative, institutional and political traditions provide conceptual lenses to understand change, but the two countries share common ground on many substantive issues of policy.

This article investigates changes in educational governance in England and France. Paradigms of new governance are required to make sense of organisational complexity in both countries. We develop our understanding of governance in some detail elsewhere (Cole and John, 2001, John, 2001, Cole, 2001). We use governance to highlight deep processes of institutional fragmentation, changing parameters of state action and the blurring of boundaries between public and private. As a generic concept, governance is best understood as a new form of regulation of an increasingly complex, indeterminate and multi-layered polity. In this article, we use governance in four main senses. Governance signifies new forms of public management, described in some length throughout the article. Governance also refers to the changing nature of central state action, producing new attempts to steer at a distance, whether through administrative decentralisation in the French case, or the creation of semi-autonomous agencies in the UK. Governance includes the emergence of more interdependent and networked political practices, in part contingent upon the creation of new policy actors (such as the elected regions in France) and levels of decision-making. Governance also signifies reflexivity, in the form of deep and ongoing reflection upon the lessons for policy of past and comparative experience.

We begin our article by setting out the contrasting institutional frameworks for governing education in England and France. We then consider in more detail the governance of education in our two countries. We conclude that national administrative, institutional and political traditions provide essential conceptual lenses to understand change, but the two countries share common ground on many substantive issues of policy.

### **The context of educational policy-making in England and France**

Comparative Franco-English educational studies generally present England and France as examples of the most different comparison. Archer (1979) contrasts the two countries as exemplars of decentralised and centralised decision-making systems. Broadfoot (1985) analyses three mutually reinforcing aspects to the distinctive French and English national contexts: prevailing educational policies and priorities, institutional infrastructure and dominant ideological traditions. Duclaud Williams (1995: 3-4) contrasts 'an active, interventionist French state with the capacity to employ and control education with a view to producing modernisation and a reluctant non-interventionist limited English state, certainly unwilling and probably unable to intervene in similar fashion'.

Contrasting State traditions in France and the UK were exemplified in the field of education. By the early twentieth century, one French ministry concentrated educational provision, while there were a plethora of central bodies in the English State: the Charity Commission, the Treasury, the Board of Education, the Science and Art department. As early as the 1830s, French Education minister Guizot was able to interest himself in primary and university-level teaching. English elites adopted different attitudes to education. In England, partly because the traditional social and political order was never destroyed, education was not used as blatantly for social engineering. The British State feared expanding its educational role for fear of alienating the religious orders who provided most of it. This gave rise to a pattern of decentralised development in which the state was reluctant to intervene too closely in

the autonomy of the operational units. This benefited English local authorities and teachers who were free from central state supervision. Both systems were predicated upon a particular path of historical development and a contrasting pattern of Church-State relations.

National traditions (institutional contexts, political configurations and referential paradigms) have an obvious bearing upon the structure of the policy communities involved in both countries. In England, educational policy communities traditionally operated mainly at the local government level. While teaching unions engaged in national pay bargaining, much educational policy and all of its administration was carried out by the local education authorities, the traditional focus of professional educational expertise in the English system. In France, the existence of a nationally regulated and hierarchically regimented state education system formed a powerful symbol of French republican culture. The national educational policy-making community traditionally consisted of a strong administration - the Ministry of National Education - and several corps of teachers organised into powerful trade unions. These partners were determined to preserve the centralised character of policy-making and its independence from local and societal pressures. While in France, long traditions of educational centralisation and the independence of the professions have been mutually reinforcing (Archer, 1979), the decentralised English system has been much more open to external influences (notably from elected politicians).

We take as our starting point the dynamic tension between the distinctive national contexts of education policy-making in England and France and the similarity of

common policy problems faced by decision-makers in each country. Moving to the main body of the article, we now examine in more detail the governance of secondary education in contemporary England and France.

### **Policy-Making and Education in England**

The history of the government of English public education is one of central government legislative action and local democratic administration. Central government set out the broad outlines of the system, but locally elected government administered educational provision. The localism of the system was explicit between 1870 and 1944, when local education committees, set up by the Forster Act of 1870, had substantial autonomy. In the run-up to the landmark 1944 Education Act, local autonomy appeared to be threatened by the proposal to nationalise public education and bring it under the control of central government. The 1944 Act set up the duty of the Minister for Education as ‘to promote the education of the people of England and Wales and the progressive development of institutions for that purpose and to secure the effective execution by local authorities under his control and direction’. As many have commented, the 1944 Act set up a partnership between central and local government. The former was the senior partner, but the latter had much discretion and autonomy. Once the reforming impetus died down at the end of the 1940s, local education authorities discovered they had extensive autonomy in such matters as secondary school organisation, curriculum administration, school funding, training and management. The role of central government was as a promoter rather than a director of policy (Griffith 1966). By virtue of their independence, local authorities

exercised a strong influence over policy-making, either individually or in national communities of professionals in partnership with central government

The direction local policy-making took owed much to the political orientation of the particular local council. Urban Labour councils and rural Conservative ones each followed different policies. The senior officers of the local education authority, who had a high level of prestige, expertise and legitimacy in the post-war education system, were key actors in determining local education policies. Chief education officers were powerful people, both locally and as a national force. In some places chief officers held sway over the councillors. In general, however, there was a close alliance between local politicians and the chief education officers that resulted in locally adapted solutions to education problems during much of the 1950s and 1960s. Local education authorities were embedded in various close relationships with teachers, parents and other community organisations (Saran 1973) as well as in local political relationships. Most education areas retained selected education, under the influence of elite and parent pressure for grammar schools.

The pattern of local education authority dominance gradually declined from the 1960s onwards. In many ways the decade saw the culmination of local education authority dominance through the adoption of comprehensive education, which the government encouraged through its famous circular 10/65 in 1965. The advocacy by education professionals of comprehensive solutions to problems of educational underachievement and social equity now became the new consensus. What had been adopted by progressive and some rural local education authorities was extended to the rest of the country through central encouragement, incentives and finally legal power.

The manner in which school reorganisations took place showed a large degree of local discretion. Even when central persuasion turned into a mandatory policy, local education authorities were able to negotiate their own reorganisation schemes (Ranson 1992).

The politics of the 1960s and 1970s led to the reforms of the 1980s. The voice of the 'consumer' started to be articulated against the decisions of the local education authority, in the form of resistance to comprehensive reorganisation schemes. At the national level the concern for the voice of parents was expressed in such forums as the Taylor Committee, which argued for an enhanced role for parents on the governing bodies of schools. In time these concerns emerged on the political agenda and became proposals of the main political parties. They were also adopted by some local education authorities, though the LEAs remained the repository of professional educational influence and resented outside interference.

At the same time as concerns about the voice of the consumer were growing, central government started to become more concerned about educational performance. Here the influence of economic pressures drove central government. First, fiscal pressures caused central government to look closely at the levels of expenditure and the value taxpayers were getting from it. These fiscal pressures were, in part, caused by the international crisis of the 1970s that had affected the English economy more than its competitors. Controlling public expenditure was essential to the government's economic policy strategy. The other economic impetus for reform was a concern for standards in education and how they affected economic performance. However indirectly, the concern for economic competitiveness affected the central

government's reforms of education. Economic considerations were not the only ones; other factors included the concerns of public opinion and the circulation of new ideas in the education policy community and in other arenas.

As early as 1975 the central government started to review standards and the content of the curriculum. These were given support in a famous speech of prime minister, James Callaghan, at Ruskin College in October 1976, which lamented the state of state education. The proposals for reforms and the public rhetoric that ensued became government policy in the 1977 Green Paper, *Education in Schools*, which stressed the national basis of education, its relationship to the world of work, the importance of central government in ensuring standards and importance of the curriculum. At this time the Department of Education enhanced the Assessment of Performance Unit (set up in 1974).

It is important to mention these initiatives of the 1970s in order to add further criticism to the view that the Conservatives made a massive break with the past when they entered office in 1979. They extended developments and worked with parts of the education policy community to introduce a series of reforms, many of which were gradually gaining acceptance. The Department of Education and Science led many of these changes, and gradually changed its strategy from persuasion, to pressure and finally to control (Ranson 1992). Just as Mrs Thatcher presided the move to comprehensive education when she was Secretary of State for Education in 1973 government in spite of her personal opposition, so she pushed along the reforms of education in the 1980s. As in other policy areas, they began with some incremental reforms in the early 1980s, and when these seemed to work, they radicalised their

proposals to encourage wider change. It is important not to overplay the cohesion of Conservative education policy, which was shaped by a struggle for influence between traditionalists, modernizers and market-liberals (Barber 1996, Kenyon 1995). The resulting mix of reforms was an uneven one, as organisational decentralisation co-existed with rule-enforced central regulation, justified either in the name of choice (its ideological rationale) or efficiency (in deference to the canons of the new public management).

The Conservatives came to office with a belief in the role of parents and criticism of bureaucratic organisation which gave an additional bite to policies affecting the power and legitimacy of local education authorities. Right-wing pressure groups and think tanks were influential on education policy, such as the Hillgate Group, the Institute for Economic Affairs and the Adam Smith Institute. This affected the provisions of the Education Act 1980 which gave representation and power to parent governors, which were strengthened in 1986. The government also enacted measures designed to make the curriculum more responsive to employers by setting up the Training and Vocational Educational Initiative (TVEI), and also the Youth Training Scheme (YTS) under the control of the Manpower Services Commission.

The 1988 Education Reform Act was a particularly important staging post of Conservative education policy (Ransom, 1992, Ball, 1994, Lawton 1992). The 1988 Act engaged in the parallel process of decentralising to 'below' the education authority and centralising 'above' it. The main sections of the 1988 Act included open enrolment, the creation of grant-maintained schools, the national curriculum and local management of schools. School autonomy was enhanced by the local

management of schools with its pupil-weighted formula funding and the gradual delegation of budget and staffing decisions to school governors. Schools henceforth had control over most of their budgets. This broke the umbilical cord with the local education authorities, though LEAs continue to set the overall formula for funding schools and decide the total amount of the education budget. The Act extended parents' ability to choose their school, and allowed some schools to 'opt' out of local authority control by obtaining direct funding from central government. The Act also set up city technology colleges, established the National Curriculum Council and introduced testing at 7, 11, 14 and 16. While local management embedded local schools, the national curriculum has provided the stimulus for further moves to central regulation, and for the exercising of a much tighter central supervision over local school management. The creation of a national agency for school inspections (OFSTED) and a national teacher training agency (TTA) further removed functions previously exercised by the local authorities.

The obvious losers of the 1988 Act were the local education authorities (LEAs). The LEAs lost out in several respects: through the provisions for formula funding (which reduced their financial discretion) through 'opting out' (which removed some schools from their tutelage altogether) and through open enrolment (which made future planning more difficult). The link between the formula for the budget for schools and the freedom of parents to choose where to send their children created a 'quasi-market' whereby schools receive more resources if they attract more children and less resources if they become unpopular. The effect of these changes has been to encourage the expansion of popular schools, and to provoke the closure of several unpopular schools. Critics argue that the needs of longer term educational planning

have been sacrificed to those of short-term choice. They also point to the unintended consequences of open enrolment, in terms of environmental policy (the ‘school run’), local property markets and selection criteria.

The effects of these changes on local authorities have been profound. They no longer run the government of education. Education officers and politicians share responsibilities with head teachers, chairs of governing bodies, professionals, parent groups and other pressure groups such as private sector businesses. The empowerment of governing boards and schoolheads has created new, unpredictable centres of decision-making within schools. Local education authorities have shed their direct training function, and many of their other personnel and support functions are bought in by the schools themselves. Their powers have been reduced to those of special education, setting the budget and formula, closing and opening schools, transport and capital programmes. The powers and democratic legitimacy of LEAs remain considerable. They continue to be a powerful force in local education policy-making and spend by far the largest proportion of local authority budgets. But their influence depends increasingly upon the partnerships they can create.

The strengthening of schools as autonomous actors has had an unpredictable impact on the functioning of the educational system. Decision-makers have had to address new issues of regulating school management and reconciling greater school autonomy with the broader objectives of the public education system, and the implementation of a prescriptive national curriculum. The requirement since 1992 for schools to produce (and for the government to publish) a range of performance indicators to

inform parental choice and to encourage efficiency has demonstrated the central government drive for increased regulation as the corollary for micro-decentralisation.

National regulatory styles have strongly influenced organisational responses to regulating school governance. Strong models of administrative control have prevailed in France, while market-based forms of evaluation have progressed in the UK. The agency model has been most prevalent in the governance of education in England.

The National Curriculum acted as a catalyst in this respect. Various non-governmental agencies (such as the Funding Agency for Schools, and the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority [now the QCA]) were created to implement the 1988 Act and manage its consequences. The most controversial of these agencies is the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED), the agency in charge of the school inspection service. OFSTED was created in 1992 as a 'non-ministerial department independent from the DfEE' (OFSTED, 1998). OFSTED could have been invented to provide a case study in the new public management, a central plank of English-style governance. OFSTED operates as an independent regulatory agency. It awards school inspection contracts on the basis of competitive tender from qualified inspectors, in line with the market-principles characteristic of the new public management style. Inspectors having undertaken OFSTED training and agreeing to its Framework for Inspection are eligible to bid. Its powers to intervene in failing schools (such as the Ridings School in Calderdale in 1996) have demonstrated the force of OFSTED as an agency. Its acceptance by the incoming Blair government ensured its organisational survival. But OFSTED is highly contentious and dissatisfaction with the agency is high. Schoolteachers see its members as not properly trained and complain that OFSTED inspections undermine the confidence of the teaching

profession. Local authorities highlight OFSTED as an example of their diminished status. Not only have local authorities lost control of the function of co-ordinating academic inspections in the schools they control; they are subject to regular OFSTED visits themselves.

Though these reforms were formulated and implemented during the Conservative period of rule, there have been strong elements of continuity under the Blair administration. The Labour government has accepted the national curriculum, local management of schools (rebaptised 'fair funding'), open enrolment, OFSTED and the slimming down of local education authority functions. There have also been several significant changes: most notably the repealing of the assisted places scheme (financial assistance to the private school sector) and the restoration of grant-maintained schools to local authority control. The Blair administration has its own educational style, emphasising the role of training and the importance of transferable skills with the same arbour as its Conservative predecessors stressed choice. If anything, the New Labour government has increased central direction in its focus on standards and has moved further toward a partnership model in tackling educational problems through Education Action Zones in which local education authorities may play a role but do not necessarily lead. The emphasis on partnership within the community responds to the political imperative for New Labour of being seen to promote joined-up government.

The acceptance by the Blair government of the main reforms of its predecessor confirmed the lasting impact of the Conservative period in office in the sphere of educational governance. An imperfect and uneven consensus has built up around the

highly controversial reforms of the late 1980s and early 1990s – local management, the national curriculum, testing and evaluation - as comprising essential reforms addressing the long-term trends of the English economy and the need to broaden the skills base in a more flexible labour-market. Stripped of their ideological overtones, developments in England were comparable with those in countries as diverse as Canada, New Zealand, the Netherlands and Belgium. Whatever their economic or educational merits, patterns of school governance and of local decision-making have been transformed by these countervailing pressures.

More than in any other domain, political reforms in English education have challenged the traditional model of local self-government. The management of secondary education has been a laboratory of English local governance. Over the course of the past two decades, power has ebbed away from the locally elected authorities to central government, to agencies and to schools, and has created a far more complex and unpredictable form of policy-making. We shall now consider the extent to which educational change is nationally unique, or part of a broader European movement.

### **Policy-making and Education in France**

The French and English systems of secondary education represented two contrasting examples of educational governance. While in England and Wales, the central state defined general principles without intervening closely in the day-to-day running of schools, France had a far more directive system of school management. According to one of the most prominent authorities (Durand Prinborgne, 1991) and four principles

traditionally underpinned the French educational system. First, the state has a pre-eminent role, recognised in the constitution and it directly administers a public education service. Second, there is freedom of choice in education; private, mainly confessional schools exist to provide an alternative to the state sector. The bulk (95%) of such schools choose to contract themselves with the state in exchange for financial assistance. Third, the Education ministry regulates all teaching, including in 'contracted in' private schools. Fourth, local authorities must contribute to the functioning of the state education system; in specific circumstances, they may also give forms of assistance to 'contracted in' private schools.

Centralisation and uniformity have traditionally been presented as the key principles underpinning the French secondary education system. As it had developed by the end of the nineteenth century, the French model of school management was extremely centralised. Central government was responsible for the general organisation of the education system, the building and maintenance of secondary schools (lycées), the setting and regulation of national examinations, the content of the curriculum from the primary to the University sectors, the training of teachers, the organisation of school timetables and the close control of teaching methods.

From being mainly the responsibility of the clergy during the *ancien régime*, education was transformed into a central state activity in the Napoleonic period. Napoleon created the Imperial University, which contained within it the structure of the future Education ministry itself; this involved the division of France into 22 Academies, each headed by a Rector. The first lycées were also established by Napoleon. The legacy of central state regulation survived Napoleon. As early as

1833, the Guizot law, named after the French Education minister, set down the principles of primary education for boys. The Ferry laws of 1879-1886 created a system of universal primary education. This was specifically designed to instil pupils with republican citizenship values and to combat the influence of a dense network of confessional schools. From the 1880s onwards, primary schools provided the bedrock of support for the Republic. Though primary schools were regulated at the national level, they were financed by municipal authorities, and in practice they were open to diverse local influences (Legrand, 1988).

The existence of a centrally regulated state Education system was a powerful symbol of French republican culture. There was a close linkage between education and citizenship; schools aimed to inculcate the universal values of the Republic. Loyal to a particular model of republican integration and threatened by a holistic Catholicism, the founding fathers of the Third Republic viewed schools as the means to integrate young citizens into the universal, lay and modern values of French republicanism. Education was openly a form of social engineering. A national Education system was valued as a means of disseminating republican ideals and transforming France's variegated provinces into loyal subjects. It was also a means for breaking the hold of traditional conservatives over the peasantry. The spread of national education through the 19th and 20th centuries gradually broke down older regional barriers and succeeded in inculcating a well-defined sense of Frenchness (not least through imposing the use of French over minority languages and regional dialects). The strongest defenders of this system were to be found amongst republicans for whom centralisation was a guarantee of equality of provision.

Ideas and widely disseminated beliefs have been of primordial importance in sustaining a centralised pattern of school management. The referential framework of public service provides a particularly constraining set of ideological beliefs concerning the role of teachers, parents and consumers. The centralising forces in French education (especially the main teaching union – the SNES - and the central ministerial divisions) are sustained by a strong normative attachment to public service, equality of opportunity and national standards. Public schools have traditionally been isolated from their social, cultural and economic environments in order to satisfy criteria of natural justice and equality of opportunity and to lessen the effects of social and economic inequalities on education outcomes (Derouet, 1991). Public school teachers believe in their pedagogic and civic missions. The prestige and security of French schoolteachers has depended on an effective system of central control and regulation. Teachers adhere to the principle of national recruitment and control of the curriculum. Secondary teachers are public servants. They are recruited by competitive examination and are attached to a state corps [lycée, or collège], and an academic discipline group before being posted to a specific institution.

The Education ministry has been taken to exemplify the French state model (Ambler, 1985). As an organisation with 1,300,000 employees in 2001, the French Education ministry is one of the world's largest bureaucratic structures; the weight of this bureaucratic leviathan, and the strength of the vested interests therein, is an additional force favouring centralisation. The civil servants of the main divisions within the Education ministry and the teaching unions (previously the FEN, now the SNES) have traditionally acted as the gatekeepers of professionalisation at a national level. Salaries, pay and promotions are determined by mixed parity committees, composed

of trade union representatives and Education ministry officials. Educational mobility generally remains determined at the national level; and only a small number of annual transfers between schools are allowed on the basis of seniority.

Though habits of centralisation are deeply ingrained, we should guard against over-simplified classifications. The prevailing image of a uniform educational system runs against the complexities induced by local influences, parental strategies, private provision, organisational reforms and political decentralisation. The prevailing image underplays the degree of parental choice within the system. Though church schools were subject to fierce attack throughout the late nineteenth century, confessional primary and secondary education has always been an alternative to state public schools. In the 1951 Barangé law, such schools were allowed to receive a public subsidy. In the Debré law of 1959, schools receiving public subsidy were invited to sign a contract (contrat d'association) with the state. For all practical purposes, these schools have to conform with national educational policy, including strict adherence to the national curriculum. But they have proved popular as they offer a measure of parental choice, allowing families to escape the narrow geographical catchment area of state schools. The attempt by the Socialist government of 1981-86 to incorporate church schools into the national Education system rapidly mobilised parents and Catholic associations. The 1984 Savary bill was abandoned under the pressure of mass demonstrations.

The received wisdom is that the French education ministry is notoriously resistant to change. It sheds secondary responsibilities only in order to be able to concentrate on new tasks (Durand-Pringborne, 1989). Bureaucratic capture, it is argued, is a

fundamental trait of French educational policy. Each incoming minister, armed with an ambitious reform project, is eventually captured by a close alliance of officials and trade unionists. As the former Education minister Allègre (1997-2000) discovered to this cost (notably over lycée reform), any moves which appear to threaten established positions or to water down the provisions of public service invariably run into bureaucratic and professional opposition.

This portrayal overstates the immobility of the Education ministry. The Education ministry has been amongst the most innovative in experimenting with various new management techniques, such as management by objectives ('projets de services') and financial decentralisation ('globalisation'). It has contributed to the effort to modernise the public sector through adopting new procedures of evaluation and contractualisation. Indeed, it has gone some way to hiving off functions to semi-autonomous agencies, a model familiar in England. Thus, the Jospin government created EDUFRANCE in November 1998, as a semi-autonomous agency to export French knowledge and attract foreign students to France - functions previously assured by the ministry. Much more radical proposals were mooted within the Education ministry, with former minister Allègre favouring the creation of separate agencies to deal with competitive civil service examinations, staff recruitment, school examinations and academic inspection. Allègre was unsuccessful: the mainstream view remains that agencies are synonymous with a privatisation of educational management, and a threat to the equality and neutrality of the state.

The practice of evaluation has also made great strides in French education (Fixari and Kletz, 1996). There has been an increasing use of institutional audits in schools, and

since 1995, the Education ministry has published league tables of school performance, classifying schools both in relation to their absolute and their 'value-added' performance (Thélot, 1994). The Education ministry has developed increasingly sophisticated performance indicators – IPES – during the past ten years. New, previously sacrosanct, areas of professional life are being opened to evaluation at the time of writing. In 2002, the ministry would, for the first time, be able to evaluate the performance of school-heads. When a school head is nominated s/he is now given a 'letter of objectives', which sets out targets in terms of examination performance, the ratio of repeat years and other objectives. In the opinion of one top official, this represented a 'managerial revolution'. The evaluation agenda was being pushed by a small number of modernising civil servants, in the face of indifference from incumbent ministers and hostility from established professional interests. Since 2000, the national Inspectorate (IGEN) has also been evaluating the performance of individual academies, as a counterpart to their enhanced decision-making capacity.

Along with the drive to administrative decentralisation, contractualisation was the centrepiece of Allègre's project to modernise the Education ministry. The emphasis on contracts within the Education ministry forms part of the discourse of management by objectives that has penetrated the education policy community since the Jospin law of 1989. During the Allègre ministry (1997- 2000) two specific types of contract were experimented; those agreed between the ministry and the academies (the regional field services of the Education ministry); and those – limited to four pilot regions – concluded between the academies and individual schools. These public sector 'contracts' are consistent with the main traits of French style governance. They are not legally enforceable contracts. They are more akin to mission statements that

set out aims, objectives and means to achieve them rather than mutually binding pledges. Unlike the State-Region planning contracts, moreover, Education contracts were concluded between different actors within the Education ministry; they did not extend to external partners such as elected regions or parents. Whatever their limitations, these contractual procedures were an organisational innovation in the context of the Education ministry. For the first time, the Academies were called upon to define their own pluri-annual objectives, to set out a method for achieving these and to allocate resources for implementing goals from increasingly decentralised ('global') budgets.

Contracts are not limited to vertical channels within the Education ministry. The emergence of new educational actors has given rise to more interdependent, networked and contractual policy processes at the regional level. The procedure known as the Contract of Objectives, introduced in the 1993 Training Act, was a centrally inspired attempt to involve business more closely in the definition of its training objectives. Contracts are signed between the state, the region and a particular profession, with each party agreeing to specific commitments, financial or otherwise. A training contract will typically include the regional council, the rectorate, the regional prefecture, a professional federation and other training agencies. Other education-related contractual processes included the University 2000 scheme, whereby French regions and other local authorities were called upon to contribute financially to the construction of a generation of new universities.

Though the strong model of administrative control in France has not been fundamentally overhauled, some observers argue that the effect of incremental

reforms and regulations has been to create a French-style new public management (Demailly, 1993). The regulatory framework of school governance in France has undergone important changes. At the territorial level, successive measures of administrative decentralisation since the 1960s have strengthened the regional level field services of the Education ministry (the rectorates) while the decentralisation reforms of 1983 and 1985 gave local and regional authorities important new responsibilities in secondary education (Cole, 1997). The parallel movements of administrative and political decentralisation are central to understanding the new policy dynamics of educational governance.

How did this pattern of educational governance come about? The overly bureaucratic and centralised French educational structure began to crack under the pressure of delivering educational services. The pressures for some decentralisation in the sphere of secondary education were overwhelming. The familiar arguments of proximity, of adaptation to local needs and of local participation were raised in education as in other policy fields (Marcou, 1992). The policy-makers of the early 1980s believed that the quality of educational services could be improved through increased school autonomy, and the involvement of the meso-level local authorities (Departmental and Regional councils) in educational planning. The involvement of locally elected councils in planning infrastructure (buildings and equipment) and making educational forecasts would alleviate the burden on the overloaded central state. Local and regional authorities would contribute to financing the efforts of national education policies, notably as a consequence of the decision taken in the 1989 Jospin law that 80% of an age cohort should achieve the baccalaureat. This commitment required a large-scale expansion in the number of lycées; the new Regional authorities would

finance this expansion. Educational Reforms (in 1983, 1985, 1989 and 1999) also attempted to open up schools to their external environment, notably through the creation of school projects ( projets d'établissement), new teaching methods (team and tutorial teaching) and the involvement of parents, local authorities and local businesses on the governing boards of schools.

Educational planners believed that the benefits of organisational decentralisation could be achieved without calling into question the underlying bases of a national education system. There has been no fundamental shift of power to individual schools as has occurred in England (Fialaire, 1992a, Cole, 1997). Control over core functions (staff movement between academies, overall pedagogical orientation, and the distribution of financial resources to the Academies) remains determined at the central level. Even the partial decentralisation of secondary education met determined resistance from the key actors of the anti-local coalition; teachers, central civil servants and powerful forces within the ruling Socialist party itself (Marcou, 1992, Mény 1990, Hatzfeld 1991, Fontaine 1992). Many civil servants and most teachers were highly suspicious of any local autonomy in educational provision. The involvement of local authorities would, it was feared, be detrimental to the prevailing ethos of egalitarianism and uniform standards within the education system (Corbett and Moon, 1996). This explained the incomplete nature of the education decentralisation reforms of 1983 and 1985. Local and regional authorities were given several narrowly defined functions: new building operations, extensions and renovations to existing buildings, the supply of material equipment, provision for the daily functioning of schools and the - contested - right to produce educational forecasts. This division of responsibilities was based on the idea that the state could

abandon its secondary functions (buildings and equipment) without losing control over the education system. As we will now demonstrate, this belief was immediately challenged by assertive local and regional authorities.

Along with administrative reforms within the Education ministry, the emergence of new policy actors is the most tangible sign of change in French education. The French regions have emerged as the significant new policy-makers. As with local authorities in the UK, education forms by far the largest item of the regional council budgets (usually over 50%). Though the 1983 and 1985 laws envisaged a secondary role for the elected regions ('buildings and equipment'), many French regions have become assertive in pursuit of their policy objectives and have attempted to tie funding to the pursuit of precise educational or economic policy objectives (Mény, 1990).

Producing educational goods is tied up with establishing the legitimacy of the regions as relatively new institutions. The strategies adopted by particular regions have varied, depending upon factors such as their size, the nature of the policy problem they had to face and their political identity. Far from being devoid of influence, however, the input of the regional councils has been demonstrated in spheres such as the renovation and construction of school buildings, the physical location of lycées, training policy, and – through the regional education forecasts (schéma prévisionnel de formations) procedure - the definition of educational priorities (Cole, 1997).

Opening evoking the principle of 'who pays decides', some regional politicians have attempted to trade agreement to build new schools off against influence over what is taught therein. The principal weaknesses of the regions derive from their meagre organisational, financial and specialist resources and their inadequate functioning as democratic institutions.

Change in French education also refers to the weakening of the traditional neo-corporatist style of public management. Neo-corporatism refers to a close interdependent relationship between professional interest groups and the machinery of the state. Ambler (1985) diagnosed three neo-corporatist features: a mass membership trade union movement in the form of the Fédération de l'Éducation nationale (FEN); a centralised form of bargaining and access to central policy-makers; extensive delegated administrative powers. Powerful trade unions participated in the formulation and implementation of national education policy, especially in relation to matters of staff management (pay, promotions, transfers). The neo-corporatist character of policy-making has weakened during the past two decades. Setbacks (over church schools in 1984), declining representativity, weakening ministerial access and conflicts of interest between primary and secondary teachers produced a formal split within the FEN in 1993. The most powerful contemporary schoolteachers' union - the SNES - enjoys a less cosy relationship with the Education ministry, openly preferring direct action tactics to behind closed doors accommodations. The fall of the Allègre ministry in March 2000 demonstrated the persistence of a strong capacity for collective action.

In the French case, the emergence of new actors has produced more interdependent relationships. This is most apparent at the regional level, where the elected Regions have attempted to influence the direction of educational policy-making. The main actors in the new sub-national governance of French education are the regional field services of the Education ministry (the rectorates), the elected Regions (and to a lesser extent the other elected local authorities, départements and communes), and,

increasingly, the employers' associations. Trade union influence remains strong, but this manifests itself above at all national level. The relationship between the various actors involved in educational governance is one of competitive interdependency. In spite of intense organisational rivalry, actors are bound to each other by a tight pattern of resource dependencies. The rectorates determine teaching needs, but in practice they depend upon the co-operation of the regions to build schools and finance equipment. Though the 1983 and 1985 laws confirmed the prerogatives of the French state in matters of pedagogical definition (academic orientation, teaching posts and examinations), the regions themselves were given the right to make educational forecasts (schéma régional des formations) and to produce regional investment plans (plan prévisionnel d'investissements). The smooth functioning of the system necessitates the co-operation of the state, the regions and - increasingly - the professional branches. In most circumstances, it is in the narrow organisational interests of each partner to co-operate, quite apart from there often being a statutory duty to do so.

There has certainly been much change in French secondary education. New actors have emerged; new management practices have been introduced; new types of horizontal and vertical relationships have evolved; new ideas have circulated. Insofar as it is increasingly contractual, negotiated and inter-organisational, secondary education is exemplary of the underlying trends of French-style governance.

### **Comparing the governance of Education in England and France**

Education has traditionally appeared more resistant to pressures to reform the state than other policy sectors. As schools promote equality of opportunity, socialisation and citizenship - goals promoted by the state itself - the preferences of the educational policy community have often been broadly diffused amongst public policy makers, who traditionally sought to insulate schools from external interference. This began to change in both countries during the 1980s. The close linkage between education and economic performance operated by policy-makers has driven the move to mass secondary and higher education in both countries. There have been common pressures across developed nations to improve economic performance by investing in human capital. The direction of change in both countries has been for the opening up of schools to their external environments and by moves to more autonomous models of school governance. Explicit contrasts have been drawn between the move to more central regulation in England from the late 1980s onwards and the weakening of a traditionally more directive French model of school governance (Judge, 1988). There is far less ideological distance between the English and French models as educational reforms in both countries have undergone reverse trajectories.

Even as the two countries have moved closer, however, they have reasserted nationally distinctive patterns of managing similar policy problems. This is apparent when considering policy change in English secondary education. English-style educational governance encompasses new forms of central steering, private techniques of public management, a culture of consumer-led evaluation and new (bounded) forms of school autonomy. Consistent with English central-local traditions, radical change was imposed by central government with little or no consultation with local government, in the name of choice and efficiency. Educational

governance has been genuinely transformed since the late 1980s by the introduction of a English-style new public management: management by objectives, performance indicators, quasi-markets, organisational decentralisation and central regulation. Even in this clear cut case of English dogmatism, however, central government has been forced to maintain interdependent relationships with local authorities. Local education authorities have retained an important role, in many senses functionally equivalent to that of the rectorates in France (both provide demographic statistical provision, and determine the opening and closing of schools). In the English dual state tradition – one of weak territorial decentralisation of the spending ministries, including DfES - the efficient management of schools continues to rely upon the logistical infrastructure provided by the local education authorities. But there has been a qualitative change which has definitively weakened local authority control over education. The new educational governance no longer operates within a clear framework of local political accountability, preferring responsiveness to parents in the quasi-market to more traditional forms of local self-government.

There is also evidence of change in French education, and it is possible to discern some movement in the direction of the easing of an over-bureaucratic, over-centralised system. French-style educational governance is exemplified by organisational change, enhanced political and administrative decentralisation, the growth of educational partnerships and the circulation of new policy ideas. In the French case, internal change has been driven by the diminishing capacity of an over-centralised state to provide educational services alone; by the overarching decentralisation reforms of the early 1980s which legitimised sub-national authorities as policy stakeholders; by organisational reforms within the Education ministry, and

by the opening up of schools to their environments. As in other spheres of public administration, French-style governance is embodied in contractual processes and new forms of inter-organisational relationship. The pattern of centralisation has been modified, and the traditional form of neo-corporatism has weakened somewhat. In the French case also, there has evolved a new style and a new discourse in school management, where school projects, auto-evaluation and value-added performance tables are the counterpart to enhanced school autonomy.

French-style governance assumes certain path dependent qualities. Consistent with national traditions, the French style of new public management is a top-down discourse, developed in the Education ministry and resisted elsewhere. Attempts to introduce genuine school autonomy run against the firm opposition from teachers - and the indifference of parents. Even local and regional authorities usually prefer not to intervene too closely in matters of educational governance. The ideology of public service and equality of opportunity in education provides a strong point of reference for most French people. The referential paradigm of education as a public service - run by public servants with security of tenure and a monopoly of professional expertise - limits moves to English-style governance.

While the institutional starting points are highly distinctive, the common problems confronting education systems in both countries are ultimately more important than the structural properties of educational systems themselves (Moon, 1996; Legrand and Solaux, 1996). Both countries have experienced the shift from an elite to a mass education system, moves to comprehensive forms of secondary education, the expansion of higher education, and the implementation of curriculum change (Barber,

1996). Though each carries its own genetic imprint, the two countries share common ground on many substantive issues of policy.

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