

Education

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Gibb was very relaxed about being asked to make way for the returning senior Liberal Democrat, David Laws, and so maintain the agreed balance in ministerial positions. He continued to be used by the government as a schools spokesman and returned to be an education minister in July 2014.

The three ministers were not the only early departures from the DfE. Four senior civil servants, including the permanent secretary, Sir David Bell, left during 2011. They all went to senior posts, with Sir David becoming vice chancellor of Reading University. But it was also reported⁸ that the secretary of state was not sorry to see them go because he had become frustrated by what he saw as passive resistance from officials, particularly at the junior level, close to the left-leaning education establishment. If Michael Gove sensed resistance in the department, little came from the Labour party. All through the 2010 Parliament they struggled to find a distinctive alternative narrative for schools. In truth, their 2010 manifesto proposals for education did not differ markedly from those that were agreed by the coalition. But there were also frequent changes of shadow secretary: Ed Balls lasted five months; Andy Burnham, a year; Stephen Twigg, two years; and the present incumbent, Tristram Hunt, nineteen months, if he survives to the end of the parliament. The coalition phased out or

Unfinished Business.

The Coalition government has left significant unfinished business. The shape of the future schools system is still unclear. Is it envisaged that all state schools will eventually become academies, and if so how will they be coordinated, regulated and administered? GCSEs and A-levels are being reformed on a very tight timetable with the risk of slippage as the details of what is involved are fully taken on board. The attention given to academic qualifications has meant that the reform of vocational qualifications is only just getting underway, and the flagship apprenticeship programmes are left without clear ladders to them from schools. There has been no real attempt to redesign education 14-18 to optimize the benefits of raising the participation age to 18. The switch from university-led to school-led teacher training runs the risk of teacher shortages in the short-term and with the training now so devolved it is harder to obtain the data to get the picture clear. The separation of higher education from school education in government departments has left further education neglected. We still await a Fair Funding Formula for distributing money equitably to schools. The finances of higher education will become an incubus for future governments if the student loan arrangements are not sorted out.

The Coalition embarked on the final year of the parliament with new people at the helm of

new minister for universities and science, Greg Clark, is keeping such a low profile that he
s replacement, was

three special advisers¹² (Cummings had left in January 2014 but had still been a frequent
visitor), although it might have been expected that at least one would be asked to stay on to

