

Could Do Better: The Second Reading of the Education and Inspections Bill

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The Second Reading of the Education and Inspections Bill (on 15 March 2006) saw the largest backbench rebellion so far during Blair's third term, whilst the subsequent vote – won narrowly by the government – saw the largest rebellion against a programme motion since the procedure was introduced. The night also saw Tony Blair carrying a government bill only because of Conservative support for the first time since 1997. This briefing paper provides details of the rebellions and the rebels.

The votes

The government won the Bill's Second Reading easily, by 458 to 115, a majority of 343. The breakdown of the vote is given in Table 1.

1. Voting on the Second Reading of the Education and Inspections Bill

	<i>Aye</i>	<i>No</i>
Lab	275	52
Con	176	0
LD	0	63
DUP	8	0
SDLP	1	0
Others	0	2
	460	117

Note: Figures include tellers. The 'others' are George Galloway (Respect) and Dr Richard Taylor (KHHC).

As was widely predicted, the Government relied on support from the Conservatives; or, more accurately, they relied on the Conservatives not voting against them. Had the Conservatives abstained (and assuming all other votes remained constant), the Government would have still won, albeit by a somewhat reduced majority of 167. But had the Conservatives voted against the Bill, the Government would have lost by 293 to 284, a majority against the government of nine.¹

The rebellion of 52 Labour cross votes was the largest since the 2005 Parliament began. It was the fourth largest Second Reading rebellion against a Labour government since the party first entered government in 1924, and the third largest since Blair became Prime Minister in 1997. Moreover, although the government had won over several of the rebels who had signed the Alternative White Paper, many of them, including Angela Eagle, Nick Raynsford and Martin

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¹ Moreover, had the Conservatives been voting against, it is likely that the DUP would have been as well, which would have made the defeat even worse, a majority against of 25.

Salter, were decidedly grumpy towards the Government during the course of the debate, and will want to see further concessions from the government as the bill proceeds through the House.

Table 2 reports the figures for the programme motion, won by the Government with a majority of just ten, 300 to 290. Both the Tories and the DUP switched sides, and the SNP, who had not voted on Second Reading, voted against. The rebellion of 30 Labour MPs was the largest against a programme motion since the procedure was introduced, although not as large as the 40 Labour MPs who voted against a business of the house motion in 2001.

2. Voting on the Second Reading of the Education and Inspections Bill

	<i>Aye</i>	<i>No</i>
Lab	301	30
Con	0	183
LD	0	63
DUP	0	8
SNP		6
SDLP	1	0
Others	0	2
	302	292

Note: Figures include tellers. The 'others' are George Galloway (Respect) and Dr Richard Taylor (KHHC).

The rebels

The government managed (narrowly) to win the programme motion vote because the rebellion amongst its own ranks subsided, being 22 fewer than those who voted against Second Reading. Five MPs voted against Second Reading but were then absent from the programme motion vote (Katy Clark, Harry Cohen, David Drew, Alan Keen and Michael Meacher), whilst a further 20 who had voted against Second Reading voted for the programme motion: Ronnie Campbell, Martin Caton, Michael Clapham, David Clelland, Jon Cruddas, Jim Dobbin, Neil Gerrard, Ian Gibson, Fabian Hamilton, Dai Havard, David Heyes, Joan Humble, Tony Lloyd, Austin Mitchell, Ken Purchase, Dennis Skinner, John Smith, Paul Truswell, Desmond Turner and Joan Walley.

There were also three MPs who were absent from the Second Reading vote, but then voted against the programme motion: Paul Farrelly, Mark Fisher and (somewhat surprisingly) Bob Marshall-Andrews.

That brings the total number of MPs to have voted against the government in either of the votes to 55.

Of the 55, all had voted against their whip at some point, either earlier in this parliament or in one of the two preceding parliaments.² Only two (Katy Clark and Linda Riordan) of those voting against the whip were from the new intake, and both have already developed a rebellious habit.

² Of the 55, 17 were rebelling for the first time this Parliament, but all of these 17 had 'form' from the 2001-2005 Parliament.

It is usually very difficult to produce reliable figures for abstentions, but the fact that there were two votes close together allows easier identification of those who were present for some votes but not others (and who were therefore almost certain to be abstaining rather than just absent). We list all those who voted against, or are believed to have abstained, at the end of this paper.

On this basis, there were at least ten abstentions on Second Reading: Fisher, Farrelly, and Marshall-Andrews (who abstained at Second Reading and then went on to vote against the programme motion) along with seven who abstained on Second Reading, but then voted for the Government on the programme motion: Clive Betts, David Crausby, Ann Cryer, John Cummings, Lindsay Hoyle, Eric Illsley and Albert Owen. There were then also at least five abstainers on the programme motion, of MPs who voted against Second Reading, but who then did not vote on the programme motion.

These figures are minima, however, since there were other Labour MPs who did not vote in either of the votes, and who could have been abstaining on both occasions. Excluding three absent ministers, there were thirteen other MPs who were absent from the votes: John Austin; Tom Clarke; Frank Cook; Bill Etherington; Roger Godsiff; David Hamilton; Chris McCafferty; Julie Morgan; Sir Peter Soulsby; Gavin Strang; Graham Stringer; Rudi Vis; and Betty Williams. It cannot be assumed that all of these MPs were abstaining, although they do include many of those known to be unhappy with the Bill. As a result, the number of abstainers on the Second Reading was somewhere between 10 and 23, with the number of abstainers on the programme motion somewhere between five and 18.

There were also absences on the Conservative side, with 20 missing MPs on the Second Reading vote. Of these, seven appear to have abstained, since they voted against the programme motion, but not at Second Reading: Philip Davies, Eric Forth, Roger Gale, Philip Hollobone, Edward Leigh, Ann Widdecombe and Ann Winterton. Excluding Michael Howard, who we assume had a legitimate excuse not to be voting, and David Mundell, the party's only Scottish MP who exercised his usual self-denying ordinance by not voting on English-only legislation, leaves eleven MPs: Michael Ancram, Peter Atkinson, Christopher Chope, Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, Sir Patrick Cormack, Stephen Dorrell, Douglas Hogg, Michael Jack, Peter Luff, Robert Walter and David Wilshire. As with the Labour side, these will be a mixture of authorised and unauthorised absences. Conservative abstentions therefore were somewhere between seven and 18 MPs, with no cross-votes.

Labour rebels on the Second Reading of the Education Bill

Name of MP	<i>Second Reading</i>	<i>Programme</i>
Abbott, Diane	X	X
Betts, Clive	a	g
Burgon, Colin	X	X
Campbell, Ronnie	X	g
Caton, Martin	X	g
Clapham, Michael	X	g
Clark, Katy	X	a
Clelland, David	X	g
Cohen, Harry	X	a
Connarty, Michael	X	X
Corbyn, Jeremy	X	X
Crausby, David	a	g
Cruddas, Jon	X	g
Cryer, Ann	a	g
Cummings, John	a	g
Davidson, Ian	X	X
Dobbin, Jim	X	g
Dobson, Frank	X	X
Drew, David	X	a
Dunwoody, Gwyneth	X	X
Efford, Clive	X	X
Farrelly, Paul	a	X
Fisher, Mark	a	X
Flynn, Paul	X	X
Gerrard, Neil	X	g
Gibson, Ian	X	g
Grogan, John	X	X
Hamilton, Fabian	X	g
Havard, Dai	X	g
Henderson, Doug	X	X
Heyes, David	X	g
Hopkins, Kelvin	X	X
Hoyle, Lindsay	a	g
Illsley, Eric	a	g
Humble, Joan	X	g
Jackson, Glenda	X	X
Jones, Helen	X	X
Jones, Lynne	X	X
Keen, Alan	X	a
Kilfoyle, Peter	X	X
Lloyd, Tony	X	g
Marshall-Andrews, Bob	a	X
McDonnell, John	X	X
Meacher, Michael	X	a
Mitchell, Austin	X	g
Mudie, George	X	X
Owen, Albert	a	g
Prentice, Gordon	X	X

Purchase, Ken	X	g
Riordan, Linda	X	X
Short, Clare	X	X
Simpson, Alan	X	X
Skinner, Dennis	X	g
Smith, Geraldine	X	X
Smith, John	X	g
Taylor, David	X	X
Trickett, Jon	X	X
Truswell, Paul	X	g
Turner, Desmond	X	g
Walley, Joan	X	g
Wareing, Robert	X	X
Wood, Mike	X	X

Note: X indicates a vote against the Government; a indicates an absence, suspected in this case to be an abstention; and g indicates a vote with the Government.