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## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **RAISING SCHOOL LEAVING AGE HAS NO HISTORY OF SUCCESS**

Legal compulsion for students to stay in education until aged 18 'is going to be a tough policy for Government to implement successfully', argues Oxford education historian Nicola Sheldon, in her paper: 'Can compulsion work? What history has to say about raising the school leaving age', available now, online at History and Policy.

The Government's latest education policy initiative seems to be an all-encompassing measure to reduce school absenteeism by 15 -16 year-olds; as well as reaching out to the 'reluctant 23% of 16-18s who don't do any education or training once they leave school,' states Dr Sheldon.

The new leaving age policy initiative is expected to become law this autumn (2008), but will not be enforceable before 2013 – which, according to Dr Sheldon, 'is a delay typical of past measures to increase the school leaving age; and also serves the purpose of defusing opposition to the measure, while creating a time-frame for acceptance by parents, schools and pupils, alike.'

All Government's education initiatives, from 1899 to the present, that revolve around raising the school leaving age are rooted in making people more employable, thus producing 'a better-qualified workforce; and in this case, the new policy will give government time to win over employers who will be critical to the success of the plan for training schemes for 16-17 year-olds,' according to Dr Sheldon; and reiterated that raising the school leaving age has

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always been part of a wider economic and social policy aimed at boosting the skills and employability of young people and reducing crime, anti-social behaviour and delinquency.

Increasing the school leaving age, in many instances, has been accompanied by such measures as continuation part-time schools, technical education, and secondary-modern schools – all meant to motivate pupils to remain longer in formal education. Their historic lack of success has been put down to their being inadequately resourced. This has implication for the current government which does require that ‘reluctant learners’ of today, under the new initiative, will need to continue their education for up to two extra years.

Thus, as Dr Sheldon argues, the critical problem is not legal compulsion, but the quality of what has been on offer to teenagers forced to stay in education; and questions whether this Government, in raising the school leaving age, ‘will do any better than its predecessors in fulfilling its promises about the quality of what’s on offer when they do turn up.’

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