

**CONFIDENTIAL****THIS DOCUMENT IS THE PROPERTY OF HER BRITANNIC MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT***Printed for the Cabinet. October 1963***C. (63) 173****Copy No. 62***1st October, 1963***CABINET****THE ROBBINS REPORT****MEMORANDUM BY THE CHIEF SECRETARY TO THE TREASURY AND  
PAYMASTER GENERAL**

The Report of the Robbins Committee on Higher Education will be published on 23rd October. The terms of reference were as follows:

"to review the pattern of full-time education in Great Britain and in the light of national needs and resources to advise Her Majesty's Government on what principles its long-term development should be based. In particular, to advise, in the light of these principles, whether any new types of institution are desirable and whether any modifications should be made in the present arrangements for planning and co-ordinating the development of the various types of institution."

2. The Report is unanimous with the exception of a reservation by Mr. Shearman, a former chairman of the London County Council and of its Education Committee, on teacher training and the machinery of government.

3. The First Secretary of State in the Annex to his paper (C. (63) 175) sets out the matters on which the Education Policy Committee recommended that an early statement of Government policy be made. I fully agree with these proposals.

4. The Report is a large one containing some 180 recommendations. Many of these are on academic issues that do not directly concern us; others such as those relating to the machinery of government are matters on which it is not possible for the Government to make up its mind until the Report has been published, and individuals and bodies affected given an opportunity to express their views.

**Basis of the Report**

5. The basic theses of the Report are:

- (a) Courses of higher education should be available for all those who are qualified by ability and attainment to pursue them and who wish to do so.
- (b) The expansion should be carried out mainly by development of existing kinds of institutions—existing universities, the creation of new ones, the granting of university status to Colleges of Advanced Technology (CATs) and later to some Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs) and Regional Technical Colleges.
- (c) All these university institutions, and the remaining TTCs (which the Report proposes to remove from local authority control and associate with universities), should be self-governing and financed by grants distributed through an independent Committee like the present University Grants Committee (UGC), with limited control by Government and accountability to Parliament.

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### International Comparisons

6. The Report is reassuring about the comparative position of British higher education compared with elsewhere, and rebuts the alarming conclusions that are sometimes drawn. In the United States the proportions receiving higher education are much greater than in this country: *vis-à-vis* Western Europe, fewer people here embark upon full-time higher education, but a much greater proportion of the starters completes the course; and our annual output of those with degrees (or the equivalent) compares well with theirs. Our system is different, but no worse for that. The Report emphasises strongly the scale of expansion under way elsewhere, and insists on the need for comparable expansion here in order to keep pace.

### Scale of Expansion

7. The Report recommends the following expansion:

					ACADEMIC YEARS			
					('000 full-time places)			
					1962-63	1967-68	1973-74	1980-81
Total	...	...	...	...	216	328	390	(560)
of which—								
Universities (including CATs, etc.)	...	...	...	...	129	197	217	(350)
					(£ million)			
Cost per year (Report estimate)*	...	...	...	...	206	296	440	(742)

\* Grows from 0.8 per cent of gross national product in 1962-63 to 1.3 per cent in 1973-74, assuming 4 per cent per annum increase in gross national product. The Department regard these cost figures as under-estimates.

8. This would achieve remarkable social change in one decade. At present, 13 per cent (men) and 6 per cent (women) of each age-group successfully complete a course of higher education. By the mid-1970s, it would be about 22 per cent (men) and 12 per cent (women)—as big a proportion of men getting a degree as now gets three or more "O" levels or better.

9. The Report recommends that detailed planning should be made for a period extending 10 years ahead (i.e., to 1973-74). Their proposed expansion to 1973-74 is not substantially greater than is implicit in our present announced plans for universities and other higher education institutions. We propose to accept it.

10. It is unnecessary to decide now the scale of expansion to 1980, and the Report does not propose that we should: but we shall probably need a considerable further expansion after 1973-74, and we should say so.

11. "Emergency Programme".—The Report attaches great importance to acceleration of the increase of places in the next few years as the post-war birth-rate "bulge" reaches the universities. Our existing plans provide higher education places for almost exactly the same proportion of the age-group (10.1 per cent), throughout the "bulge", so that the individual's opportunity is maintained. But they do not allow for the greater competition for places as an increasingly large proportion of the age-group stays on at school and qualifies for the university.

12. I am advised that it would be possible to achieve an acceleration (raising the university target from the present 150,000 in 1966-67 to 170,000 in 1967-68, and 4,000 extra places in CATs, etc.) on an "emergency" basis. This might involve an extra cost of £5 million in the first year, rising to perhaps as much as £20 million (plus capital cost) in 1967-68. I would aim to keep this extra cost down to £15 million in 1967-68.

13. I agree that this additional charge can be accepted if it is regarded as having priority both within the educational field and indeed over other proposals for increased expenditure. The Cabinet laid down (C.C. (63) 52nd Conclusions) a permitted growth of total educational expenditure at 5.9 per cent per annum up to 1967-68. I have discussed these proposals with the Minister of Education. We are satisfied that provided the Cabinet is prepared to accord to the expansion of higher

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education some measure of priority in the development of educational provision. It will be possible to accommodate the Robbins proposals within the 5·9 per cent rate of growth. This will, however, involve securing that the expansion of higher education is effected in an economical manner, with much emphasis on getting full value for money.

14. *Overseas Students.*—About 10 per cent of the places in higher education (30 per cent of postgraduates) are now filled by overseas students. The Report envisages that this proportion should be broadly maintained. I agree with this in the long view; but in the “emergency” period in which we are coping with the “bulge” in our population, there is no logical reason why we should increase provision for overseas students *pari passu*. I recommend that the UGC and the Education Departments should informally tell those institutions that take large numbers of overseas students that the purpose of the expansion is to provide for the increased demand for places for home students, during the “emergency” period of the “bulge”.

15. The Report emphasises the anomaly that our present method of university finance gives a hidden subsidy of public funds (now about £8 million a year) to overseas students; and the capital cost of places for them has probably been about £40 million. Acceptance of the Report’s recommendation in favour of a greater reliance on fees would help to deal with this situation, but there is no need in my view to refer to this in our first statement.

16. *System of Finance.*—The Report raises many issues about fees and student loans and the distribution of the rapidly rising cost of higher education between State, local authorities and recipients: this is important to the academic freedom problem as well as financially and socially; and has considerable importance for the discussion on the burden of rates. An internal review by the Official Committee which is advising the Education Policy Committee has been set on foot. Meanwhile in public discussion it is desirable to leave this issue completely open.

17. The Cabinet will wish to be aware of, but will probably not wish at present to consider, a number of controversial issues which are raised in the Report but which, as they cannot in any event be included in our early announcement, are not referred to in the Annex to the First Secretary of State’s paper. These include the proposal to set up a new Minister of Arts and Sciences responsible both for higher education, for the Research Councils, the Museums and Galleries and generally for the arts. There is also a recommendation for the removal of teacher training colleges from the local authorities in England and Wales and for their attachment to universities. Both of these matters would require legislation; on both of them public opinion must be given an opportunity to express itself and both of them are the subject matter of the reservation by Mr. Shearman. The first of these also can hardly be considered until we have the Trend Report on the organisation of civil science.

18. It is also desirable to leave open for the time being the delicate issue of public accountability in the light of the proposal that the freedom at present enjoyed by the universities from investigation of their books by the Comptroller and Auditor-General should be extended to the other components of the new extended system of higher education.

19. My colleagues will wish to have in mind the very heavy increase in public expenditure involved in acceptance of these recommendations. The cost of the 10-year programme to 1973–74 will be of the order of £3,500 million, involving more than a doubling of the present annual cost by that date. The basis of a decision to proceed with these proposals can only be a decision to give a definite measure of priority over other activities to this very large expansion in the provision of higher education. The immediate addition to public expenditure, *i.e.*, for the year 1964–65 will not be very large but I am sure that my colleagues will have in mind the very large scale of the ultimate commitment and the large long-term allocation of national resources therein involved.

J. A. B-C.

*Her Majesty’s Treasury,  
Great George Street, S.W. 1,  
30th September, 1963.*

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