CABINET

MINISTERIAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR EDUCATION, THE UNIVERSITIES AND CIVIL SCIENCE

MEMORANDUM BY THE PRIME MINISTER

When we accepted the major recommendations of the Robbins Committee on higher education we deferred a decision on the problem of governmental organisation until public opinion had had an opportunity to express itself. So far as it has been expressed collectively, university opinion has now shown itself in favour of a separate Minister for higher education on the Robbins model, but some notable individuals have dissented. Local educational authorities and teachers’ associations favour a single Ministry. So, in general, does unattached opinion, including the Press. There is considerable opposition to the idea of a separate Ministry for the educational elite. The Royal Society has declared the weight of scientific opinion to be in favour of linking responsibility for civil science with that for the Universities, and this view has also been supported by the bulk of university opinion which has expressed itself on this issue.

A Single Minister

2. I have concluded that the right solution is to have a single Minister, who would be a Secretary of State. His title might be Secretary of State for Education, Learning and Science. Under him there will be a single department, but it will include two distinct administrative units and this will give the organisation a federal flavour. One unit will be concerned with the schools, further education and perhaps with UNESCO and other international bodies; and the other will deal with civil science and, through the University Grants Commission (U.G.C.), with institutions of university status, including the Colleges of Advanced
Technology. It would be convenient for the teacher training colleges to go for the time being with the schools, although they might be transferred later. The Ministerial arrangements can be presented as providing for the difference of “administrative style” on which the Robbins Committee and collective university opinion have been so insistent.

3. The Secretary of State will be supported by two Ministers, called respectively Minister for Education and Minister for Universities and Science. Legally they will have the status of Ministers of State, as not having charge of departments.

Scotland

4. The Secretary of State for Scotland will remain responsible for the schools and the lower ranges of further education in Scotland. Scottish universities will continue to be financed through the U.G.C. and will thus come within the sphere of the Secretary of State for Education, Learning and Science; but the special interest of the Secretary of State for Scotland will be recognised, as it is at present, by consultation on the appointment of members of the U.G.C. and on other university matters. Scottish universities will no doubt wish to retain their right of direct access to him.

Science

5. I believe that for the present it is right to adopt broadly the reorganisation of the various research agencies operating under the Minister for Science which was recommended by the Committee on the Organisation of Civil Science (the Trend Committee). But there must be close and fruitful co-operation between the research agencies and the Government Departments which are concerned with the fields in which they operate, and this must be recognised in the arrangements for appointing the controlling Boards or Committees.

6. Three new bodies will be created: a Science Research Council responsible for research in the universities in pure and applied science; a Natural Resources Research Council; and an Industrial Research and Development Authority (I.R.D.A.) to take over the majority of the research stations now managed by the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research and to support industrial research. These three new bodies, together with the Medical Research Council and the Agricultural Research Council, will become the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Education, Learning and Science. But the National Research Development Corporation, which exists to promote the industrial exploitation of inventions, will continue to be associated with the Board of Trade. Certain details of the reorganisation should be considered further by the Education and Research Policy Committee: for example, responsibility for the Road Research Laboratory and the Building Research Station and the scope of the Natural Resources Research Council.

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The Arts
7. The Robbins Committee recommended that the Government’s responsibility for the Arts should be exercised by the Minister responsible for higher education and science. They did not however take evidence on this question and it is plain that there is strong opposition to their proposal. I propose therefore to leave responsibility for the Arts with the Treasury, at least for the time being. Similarly, the position in Scotland will remain as it is.

Legislation
8. The changes in Ministerial responsibilities can be made without legislation, and it should be possible for the new Department to be set up by April or May. A Bill will be needed ultimately to put the disbursement of money on U.G.C. advice on a statutory footing, to set up the new research bodies and to deal with various minor points; but we need not legislate this Session.

Announcement
9. I propose to make a brief general announcement of this decision next week; and I shall promise a fuller statement later when details have been worked out.

A. D.-H.

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