CABINET

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

MEMORANDUM BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Following a Cabinet decision of 13th July, (C.C. (65) 37th Conclusions, Minute 4), The Queen's Speech states that "a Public Schools Commission will be set up to advise on the best way of integrating the public schools with the State system". This paper, which has been approved by the Social Services Committee, discusses the terms of reference of the Commission and other related questions.

Definition of schools

2. Our Election Manifesto and The Queen's Speech both speak of "public schools". The only practicable definition of these (which was broadly that used by the Fleming Committee(1)) is "schools now in membership of the Headmasters Conference, Governing Bodies Association or Governing Bodies of Girls' Schools Association". This embraces, first, 276 independent schools (containing 95,500 pupils). Of these, 134 are boys (106 boarding—28 day), 142 girls (83 boarding—59 day).

3. But it also embraces (in addition to 22 maintained schools which I refer to later) 152 (out of 179) Direct Grant Schools, of which 72 are boys (58 day—14 boarding) and 80 girls (79 day—one boarding). I do not want these to come within the purview of the Commission for the following reasons:

(a) Many Direct Grant schools constitute too important a part of local education authority arrangements in their areas to be detached from the maintained school system and put under the Commission.

(1) "The Public Schools and the General Educational System", Report of the Committee on Public Schools appointed by the President of the Board of Education in July 1942. Published 1944.
(b) The Direct Grant schools pose a different problem from most of the independent schools. They are already in some sense part of the public sector; many of them are Catholic; and they are predominantly day schools, whereas two-thirds of the independent schools are boarding. Their inclusion would, therefore, distract the Commission from its main task of dealing with the independent schools.

(c) Above all, our overriding aim for the Direct Grant schools is that they should negotiate and agree directly with local education authorities their future place in local comprehensive reorganisation schemes; and this is already beginning to occur. But if we put them under the Commission, we shall provide the reluctant ones with a perfect excuse for not negotiating and for contracting out of local reorganisation schemes.

(d) I am confirmed in this view not only by the opinion of pro-comprehensive Directors of Education whom I have consulted, but also by the fact that the more eminent Direct Grant schools desperately want to come under the Commission.

(e) On a minor point, the wider definition of all Headmasters Conference, Governing Bodies Association and Governing Bodies of Girls' Schools Association schools would be most untidy; for it would exclude 27 Direct Grant schools while including 22 maintained schools.

I therefore conclude that the Direct Grant schools must be treated as a separate operation, as indeed they are treated in my comprehensive Circular; and I would propose to exclude them by inserting the word “independent” in the definition—though I would sound a further warning note to them at the same time as I announced the Commission.

4. The definition also excludes a further 3,130 private schools. These schools do not present any urgent problem in this context; they were not mentioned in the Manifesto or The Queen’s Speech; they could not possibly be dealt with in the next 2–3 years, being of enormous variety, usually very small and often denominational. I therefore propose to exclude them from the definition but to make a vague reference to them in the Commission’s terms of reference (see Annex).

Tasks of the Commission

5. In pursuance of its general remit of advising on the best way of integrating the public schools with the State system, I propose that the Commission should be entrusted with the following tasks:

(a) To investigate: i.e., to collect and assess information about the schools within its scope (which vary greatly in size and character) and about the need, and existing provision, for boarding education; and to examine possible forms of collaboration between the schools and the maintained sector.
(b) To work out with local education authorities and schools the part which individual schools should play in national and local schemes of integration.

(c) If it so wishes, and subject to my approval, to initiate experimental schemes matching existing provision with different types of need.

(d) To recommend the basic principles of a national solution to the problem of integration; whether this would need legislation should be left open at this stage.

Guiding principles

6. I am sure that, without prejudging the detailed findings of the Commission, we must lay down certain broad guiding principles; otherwise the Commission might make recommendations which were totally unacceptable to us. This was the line which we took in “Signposts for the Sixties”. The principles should reflect the following considerations:

(a) The public schools represent a considerable educational capital; and, at a time of acute pressure on our resources, this should be used to meet the needs of the nation as a whole. In particular, since the schools are two-thirds boarding and account for one-half of the country’s secondary boarding provision, the Commission should consider the boarding aspect first; that is, how the schools might help to satisfy the “need” category along the lines defined in the Martin Report(1) and, more widely, the needs of other children whose home or neighbourhood environment is prejudiced to their education.

(b) Both for the reason given in (a) above, and in order to eliminate their divisive influence on society, the schools must accept a socially mixed entry.

(c) Moreover entry must represent a progressively wider range of academic attainment. We cannot turn each individual school into a comprehensive school (many of them are much too small). But the public school sector as a whole must increasingly conform with our comprehensive policy for the maintained sector. Now that we are abandoning the 11+ in the maintained sector, we cannot perpetuate and indeed intensify academic selection for the public school sector.

(d) The local education authorities are themselves quite heavily involved in boarding provision, though in a very unsystematic and unco-ordinated way. It is vital that the Commission’s work and recommendations should march hand-in-hand with what the local education authorities are doing.

(b) The Direct Grant schools pose a different problem from most of the independent schools. They are already in some sense part of the public sector; many of them are Catholic; and they are predominantly day schools, whereas two-thirds of the independent schools are boarding. Their inclusion would, therefore, distract the Commission from its main task of dealing with the independent schools.

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(b) To work out with local education authorities and schools the part which individual schools should play in national and local schemes of integration.

(c) If it so wishes, and subject to my approval, to initiate experimental schemes matching existing provision with different types of need.

(d) To recommend the basic principles of a national solution to the problem of integration; whether this would need legislation should be left open at this stage.

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(b) Both for the reason given in (a) above, and in order to eliminate their devisive influence on society, the schools must accept a socially mixed entry.

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Lastly, the State-sponsored entry should not be just a tiny minority—we do not want a small-scale Fleming solution. I am sure it would be wrong to lay down in advance any particular percentages; but we should establish the broad principle that, in the long run, entry to these schools should not depend on parental income.

7. I attempt in the Annex to embody these guiding principles in the terms of reference.

Size, finance and administration of Commission

8. I envisage a Chairman (and possibly Deputy-Chairman) who would be half-time and paid accordingly, and about 12 other members who would not be representatives but drawn from a number of interested parties—schools (maintained as well as public), local education authorities, universities, churches—as well as one or two independent members. The Commission would be serviced by my Department.

9. I estimate that the servicing of the Commission might cost £55,000 in a full year. The only other public expenditure for (say) two years would be the cost of pilot experiments—perhaps £100,000 in the first year and not more than £400,000 in the second; I would hope this might be borne by the local authorities. The cost of any research needed for the Commission’s work would be borne on my Department’s research Vote. Once the Commission has recommended, the burden of expenditure will depend on (a) the rate of integration which the Commission proposes, (b) whether the Government accepts this or not (as to which it is of course a completely free agent), (c) the extent to which local education authorities contribute towards the fees of the State-sponsored pupils, and (d) the extent of the parental contribution on which we decide. None of this, as I explained to the Cabinet on 13th July, will fall to be decided for 2–3 years.

Other possible measures

10. A number of other actions which the Government might take have been suggested from time to time. I have considered these and reached the following conclusions:

(a) Application of the teacher quota system to the schools. But it appears on examination that (allowing for boarding and larger 6th forms) the alleged superiority in staffing ratios of these schools is rather small; any possible gain to the 6,000 State secondary schools would be negligible. Moreover, such a policy would need legislation, would be onerous and costly to administer, and would create pointless resentment just at the moment when we want the maximum goodwill. I do not think, therefore, that this is a worthwhile proposition. But the Commission should be asked to consider the point.

(b) Eliminating tax privileges. I am pursuing this point with the Treasury to see whether any action is possible or desirable in next year’s Finance Bill.
(c) Abolishing relief from rates. The great majority of public schools are charities and as such enjoy the same relief as other charities which do not receive University Grants Committee grant. It would be invidious to discriminate against them while others retained their present relief.

(d) Persuading Oxford and Cambridge colleges to give fewer places to pupils from public schools and more to those from maintained schools. The Franks Commission is aware of this problem and I propose to await its findings before pursuing the question further.

Conclusion

11. I invite my colleagues to endorse the terms of reference for the Commission which are set out in the Annex. (I understand that the Secretary of State for Scotland would wish the Commission to deal with Scottish schools coming within the definition.) I shall then proceed to appoint the Chairman and to make a statement to the House.

C. A. R. C.

Department of Education and Science, W.1.
18th November, 1965.

ANNEX

TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS COMMISSION

1. The main function of the Commission will be to advise on the best way of integrating the public schools with the State system of education.

2. For the immediate purpose of the Commission public schools are defined as those independent schools now in membership of the Headmasters Conference, Governing Bodies Association or Governing Bodies of Girls Schools Association.

3. The Commission will be expected to carry out the following tasks:

(a) To collect and assess information about the public schools (including their staffing ratio in comparison with maintained schools); to study the need and existing provision for boarding education; and to examine possible forms of collaboration between the schools (in the first instance the boarding schools) and the maintained system.

(b) To work out with local education authorities and schools the role which individual schools might play in national and local schemes of integration.
(c) If it so wishes, and subject to my approval, to initiate experimental schemes matching existing provision with different types of need.

(d) To recommend a national plan for integrating the schools with the maintained sector of education.

(e) To recommend whether any action is needed in respect of independent schools not now in membership of the Headmasters Conference, Governing Bodies Association or Governing Bodies of Girls Schools Association.

4. In carrying out its tasks the Commission will be expected (while respecting the denominational character of many of the schools), to pay special attention to the following objectives:

(a) To ensure that the public schools should make their maximum contribution to meeting national educational needs, and in the first instance any unsatisfied need for boarding education in the light of the Martin and Newsom Reports. (*)

(b) To create a socially mixed entry into the schools in order both to achieve (a) above and to reduce the divisive influence which they now exert.

(c) To move towards a progressively wider range of academic attainment amongst public school pupils, so that the public school sector may increasingly conform with the objectives outlined in Circular 10/65.

(d) To co-operate closely with local education authorities in seeking to match provision with need for boarding education.

(e) To ensure the progressive application of the principle that the public schools, like other parts of the educational system, should be open to boys and girls irrespective of the income of their parents.
