CABINET

SOCIAL INVESTMENT: EDUCATION

MEMORANDUM BY THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION

Since the Cabinet last considered the proposed drive in education (C.C. (58) 73rd Conclusions, Minute 5) the Secretary of State for Scotland and I have been discussing with the Chancellor of the Exchequer the extent to which investment resources can safely be committed for this purpose.

2. We are now agreed that the main feature of the drive in England and Wales should be a five-year major school building programme totalling about £300 millions, of which £55 millions’ worth of projects would be started in the first year (1960-61). The minor works programme, which can be adjusted fairly quickly either upwards or downwards, will provide the necessary flexibility to meet changing economic circumstances.

3. The Secretary of State and I are anxious to publish our proposals as soon as possible. I therefore ask the Cabinet to approve for publication the draft White Paper for England and Wales attached to this memorandum.

4. Subject to further consultation with the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster nearer the time, I would like to publish the White Paper during the first week of December simultaneously with similar action by the Secretary of State for Scotland.

G. L.

Secondary Education for All
A New Drive

Presented to Parliament by
by Command of Her Majesty
1958

LONDON
HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE

Cmd. 
SECONDARY EDUCATION FOR ALL

A NEW DRIVE

1. The Education Act of 1944 provided that all children of secondary school age, and not just the selected few, should have a secondary education in accordance with their age, ability, and aptitude. Substantial progress has been made but a great deal remains to be done before this aim is fully achieved. The next few years provide a unique opportunity to make a further big advance. The Government intend to seize this opportunity and this Paper describes the measures they have decided to take and the approach which, in their view, will best serve the interests both of individual children and of the nation as a whole.

Progress under the Act

2. The record of progress and achievement since 1944 has been an impressive one.

First, children have been staying on at school longer, partly as the result of deliberate policy, and partly because of the voluntary decisions of parents. The school leaving age was raised to 15 for all children in 1947. The sixth forms of the grammar schools have nearly doubled in size. There has been a large increase in the number of boys and girls stopping on voluntarily beyond the age of 15 in secondary schools of all kinds: in maintained schools the number went up from 187,500 in 1948 to 290,600 in 1958, and there is evidence that it will go on growing even more rapidly.

3. Secondly, there has been a notable advance in the numbers of students attending technical colleges and universities. During the last ten years, the number of full-time students in our technical colleges has risen from 47,000 to 76,000; part-time day students from 220,000 to 470,000; and evening students from 1½ million to nearly 2 million. As for the universities, the number of university students is now double the pre-war figure.

4. Thirdly, there is the increase of well over a quarter in the school population. The Ministry of Education and the local education authorities have had jointly to plan, not only for the wider opportunities introduced under the 1944 Act, but also for the exceptionally large number of children born in the years immediately after the war. Four thousand new schools have been built and 2,000,000 new school places altogether have been brought into use. These new school places have been provided at very reasonable cost; indeed, the architects of the local authorities and the Ministry have co-operated so successfully that a school place is one of the very few things which actually cost less to-day than nine years ago.

5. Fourthly, many more teachers have been trained and recruited. The number has risen by 85,000 since the war to a total of 260,000. Even so the profession has been hard pressed. For years many primary classes have been far too large, and the same is true of many secondary classes—especially in secondary modern schools—to-day. But it should not be forgotten that for the country as a whole, despite these adverse factors, the average size of a school class is smaller in 1958 than it was in 1948; and this applies both to primary and secondary classes.

6. But educational advance is not something that can be measured by statistics alone; it is something that needs also to be experienced. There are few more encouraging aspects of British life to-day than the sight of a
primary class getting on with their work in bright and airy surroundings; or of older children learning for the first time how to make the best use of a library; or of children and teachers jointly putting in work out of school hours in order to make the final preparations for a school play. The growing interest shown by many schools in artistic pursuits is admirable; but these subjects have not been fostered at the expense of the more basic elements in education. Standards in the arts have risen, but so—measurably—he; standards in reading; science and mathematics have been given an increasing, prominent place in the curriculum of the schools; and there has been a remarkable increase in the number of pupils competing successfully in the examinations for the General Certificate of Education, at Ordinary and at Advanced level.

7. There has also been a most encouraging growth of public interest in educational matters. They have received a far larger share of attention in the press, both national and local, and also prominent treatment in sound and television broadcasting. This growth of public interest has been brought about, first, by the widespread realisation that Britain's national future is closely bound up with the rate of progress in the schools; and, secondly, by the concern of individual parents that their children should enjoy the best possible start in life.

8. The Government believe that the present moment provides a particularly appropriate occasion to take stock, not only of what has already been achieved since 1944, but also of what still remains to be done. During the next year or two, the number of children in the schools will continue to rise, but at a far less rapid rate than in recent years; and the pressure of numbers will soon begin to subside. In the late 1960s the number of children will probably begin to rise again; but the next five or six years offer an unparalleled opportunity for carrying out a vigorous policy of improving our schools, freed from the sheer pressure of growing numbers.

The Tasks Ahead

9. It is not difficult to point out many of the main defects in our schools to-day which need most urgently to be remedied. First, many classes are still far too large. Secondly, many schools are still housed in old buildings that fall very seriously short of the standard of the best school buildings of to-day; in particular, a large number of secondary schools of all kinds need more space and more up-to-date equipment for the teaching of science. And thirdly, some 7 per cent. of senior children are still in "all-age" schools; this means that the older children have no opportunity of a full secondary education, while the younger children do not enjoy the advantages of a school planned and organised to meet their own special needs.

10. But it will not be enough merely to remedy defects in individual schools, important though this undoubtedly is. We must also eradicate a more general defect in our system of secondary education—a defect which is the root cause of the concern that is currently felt over what has come to be known as the "11-plus examination". The fact is that there are, to-day, too many children of approximately equal ability who are receiving their secondary education in schools that differ widely both in quality, and in the range of courses they are able to provide. And this means that a number of these children are not getting as good opportunities as they deserve.

11. There are still too many areas in which it has not yet been possible to give the secondary schools, and in particular the secondary modern schools, the resources that they need. And this is why many parents still
believe that, if their children go to a secondary modern school, they will not have a fair start in life. It is entirely natural and right that every parent should wish his children to attend the school from which they will derive the greatest possible benefit; and the anxiety of parents over "11-plus" will be finally allayed only when every secondary school, no matter what its description, is able to provide a full secondary education of each of its pupils in accordance with his ability and aptitude.

Furthermore this is a matter of prime importance, not only to individual parents, but also to the nation as a whole. For if Britain is to earn her living in world markets that are growing increasingly competitive, then we cannot afford to waste any potential source of skilled manpower. We need not only first-class scientists and technologists but also an ample supply of technicians and craftsmen. And we cannot hope to attain the objectives laid down in the 1956 White Paper on Technical Education unless all our secondary schools, including the secondary modern schools, make their full contribution. The Government regard it as the most pressing of their immediate objectives to make certain that every child shall be able to travel along the educational road as far as his ability and perseverance can carry him, irrespective of the type of school to which he goes.

The Organisation of Secondary Education

13. No matter how secondary education is organised, there must remain a substantial element of selection, in the broadest sense of the word, if we are to do justice to the different needs of individual children. For children do differ considerably in their mental powers, in their special gifts, in vigour, in industry, and in their ability to concentrate. By one means or another they must be grouped into courses which are suited to their particular capacities. But this does not mean that a child's performance at the age of eleven should determine the remainder of his school career once for all, or that any process of selection will enable us to fill a given type of school with a given type of pupil. Every school, however it is described, is bound to contain a wide range of capacity among its pupils. And there will always be pupils of broadly similar capacity in different schools.

14. Given the different needs of children and the varying circumstances of individual localities, it would be wrong, in the Government's view, to aim at anything like a uniform pattern for the whole country. The history of education in this country is, to a large extent, a series of local histories. Individual schools have grown up in response to, and have been shaped by, local needs. The result is a considerable variety in the schools themselves and in the local schemes of organisation within which they work. This variety is a valuable foundation on which to build for the future. The Government are convinced that this approach is best calculated to satisfy the needs both of the nation and of individual children.

15. A wide range of possibilities is, in fact, open. The Government do not wish, for example, to rule out experiments by authorities with comprehensive or similar schools. On the contrary, they recognise that there are two types of area, in particular, where schools of this kind may well be justified on educational grounds. There may, first, be a strong case in country districts both in England and Wales where the population is comparatively sparse. In these districts, local education authorities may be faced with the alternatives of maintaining separately a small grammar school and a small modern school, or of replacing them by a single school. Not only will the second alternative often prove more economical, but it may also enable the combined school to benefit from better buildings, a better staff, and a wider range of courses than could be offered in separate small schools.
16. Secondly, there may also be a good case for setting up similar, but larger, schools, catering for all levels of capacity and a wide range of interests, in areas of extensive new housing, where there are no existing schools with a well-established tradition as grammar or technical or modern schools. It would obviously be doctrinaire for any Government to insist that, in areas of this kind, local education authorities must always provide separate grammar and modern school accommodation for children of secondary school age. Such rigidity would be in direct contradiction to the concept of the education service as a service which, within a broad framework of national policy, is administered locally; and it is not the basis on which the Government have considered the proposals of local authorities. There are indeed already in existence about 100 comprehensive or similar schools which are intended to cater for a wide range of ability in their pupils.

17. But it is quite another matter when an authority proposes to bring to an end an existing grammar school, which may well have a long and distinguished history, simply in order that a new comprehensive school may enjoy a monopoly of the able children within its area. It is only under the most exceptional circumstances that the Government could agree to a proposal of this kind. For it cannot be right that good existing schools should be forcibly brought to an end, or that parents' freedom of choice should be so completely abolished.

18. Indeed, the Government's doubts regarding comprehensive schools relate principally to those very large town schools which are deliberately planned on this scale in order that they may be able to cover the full range of educational opportunity with streams of a reasonable size. No one could visit the best of these very large schools without being impressed both by the variety of courses that are offered, and by the outstanding ability with which problems of organisation have been so largely overcome. But it is only the most exceptional man or woman who can infuse a spirit of unity into a school with an annual entry of, say, fourteen forms, or over 2,000 pupils in all: for this, if for no other reason, it would be unwise to build too many of these schools.

19. Other plans have been adopted in some parts of the country which avoid selecting children for separate schools at the age of 11 and also avoid establishing very large secondary schools. One is the scheme being tried out in two areas of Leicestershire which will, when fully operative, achieve this without damaging the integrity of well-established schools. But all such schemes are experimental; it is too early to pass judgment on them.

20. For this reason, many local education authorities prefer to plan, at any rate for most of their areas, a system of secondary schools with a broad distinction between the ranges of capacity for which they cater. There is plenty of room for variation within this pattern. Advanced technical courses may be concentrated in separate technical schools or provided in grammar schools alongside more traditional courses. Secondary modern schools may each be encouraged to develop a wide variety of courses; or the necessary variety may be achieved by encouraging each to develop its own speciality appealing to different aims and interests—technical apprenticeships, careers in commerce, nursing, and so on. There should be arrangements for a boy or girl who would obviously do better in another type of school to transfer as early as possible, but such transfers can never be anything but exceptions to the normal rule and there must be—and be seen to be—opportunities in all the secondary schools, and not just in the grammar and technical schools, for boys and girls to go forward to the limits of their capacity. The essential conditions of success are that all secondary schools should be enabled to be
good in their own ways, and that there must be full recognition of the fact that, where separate grammar and modern schools exist, there will be a wide overlap in the capacity of the pupils and that therefore the courses offered must overlap also.

21. The two opposing errors to be avoided are that each school must do everything, and that each type of school must have a fixed and self-contained territory into which no other must enter. Neither of these conceptions offers the freedom which is needed if different needs are to be met, as they should, in different ways; the Government see ample opportunity for healthy development between these two extremes.

A five year programme of school building

22. As the first essential step the Government propose in co-operation with the local authorities and the Churches to launch and carry through a continuous building programme for primary and secondary schools covering the five years from 1960–61 to 1964–65. The value of projects started in 1960–61 will amount to £55 (m.) and in 1961–62 to £60 (m.). It will be the Government’s aim to get work costing £300 (m.) started in the five year period. So far as major building jobs are concerned, the first part of the programme covering the two years 1960–61 and 1961–62 will be settled with the local authorities and the Churches as quickly as possible.

23. In addition an immediate increase is being made in the volume of “minor” works which local education authorities and school managers or governors will be allowed and encouraged to undertake. This should lead to a steady flow of much-needed improvements, for example to sanitation, staff rooms, and playgrounds. The limit of cost for a minor project will be raised from £10,000 to £20,000, in order to bring within local education authorities’ discretion a wider range of projects including more substantial measures of modernisation.

24. The main programme will be designed to complete the reorganisation of the remaining “all-age schools”. There are still about 150,000 pupils of 11 and over in these schools. The number is already being steadily reduced and during the next two years the improvement will be particularly marked in country districts because of the rural reorganisation programme launched by the Government four years ago. About a third of this programme remains to be started. In addition, the steady progress of urban reorganisation, which has hitherto been achieved only as a by-product of school building needed for other purposes, will be hastened by a programme directed to this specific end. In the towns the proportion of voluntary schools among the schools needed for this purpose will be high and it will be necessary for the Churches as well as local education authorities to make every effort in their power.

25. Resources will also be found for improving conditions in existing secondary schools. Some are secondary schools only in name or are accommodated in buildings long since out of date which it would not be sensible to improve where they stand; these must be replaced. Others, though satisfactory for smaller numbers, are over-crowded; this has been unavoidable during the period of heavy pressure, but early relief is essential and the gradual decline in secondary school numbers will not everywhere be enough to provide it. Others again, though adequate in some ways, lack some of the facilities needed for proper secondary education, above all in scientific and technical subjects. A limited start has already been made on improving science facilities, but much more needs to be done to make the older schools comparable with the new ones.
26. The Government's aim will be to carry out the most urgent jobs first. They are aware, for instance, that a number of grammar schools with long traditions behind them have had to put up with the growing deficiencies of out-of-date buildings for many years, and they will figure prominently in the five-year programme. Equally urgent are the claims of some modern schools which have come into existence in make-shift premises to provide some sort of secondary education for the time being. The Government will ask each local education authority to tackle first those jobs that will most quickly improve the secondary school provision of its area. The task of bringing all secondary school buildings up to modern standards cannot be completed by a once-for-all drive. But the Government believe that, if first things are put first, a big advance towards real secondary education for all can be made within a five-year programme.

27. The Government recognise that good primary schools are as important as good secondary schools and that much remains to be done before the nation's primary schools can be made as good as they should be. But they are satisfied that the most urgent task is to provide secondary schools in which a sound and varied secondary education can be offered to all children of secondary school age. This does not mean that no advance will be possible for the primary schools. On the contrary, the size of primary school classes is already falling in most areas; and the reorganisation of all-age schools will greatly benefit not only those who go to a new secondary school but also the younger children who will for the first time have a primary school of their own. The building programme will also allow for the building of any new primary schools needed to meet local increases in the number of children, or to replace the worst existing schools: and the enlarged programme of minor works should be specially useful for bringing many primary school buildings up to date.

Smaller classes; and more and better teachers

28. The Government are taking vigorous steps to meet the growing and ever more diversified needs of the schools for teachers. It has never been more important than now to give new recruits the best possible preparation. That is why the Government have re-affirmed their decision to introduce a course of three years' training and education in all those teacher training colleges where it has hitherto lasted only two years. This will apply to students admitted in 1960 and later years.

29. But the need to reduce the size of classes, in both primary and secondary schools, is equally urgent. The Government have therefore already set in hand a £15(m.) building programme designed to provide 12,000 additional places and to increase the capacity of the teacher training colleges by some 50 per cent. by the autumn of 1962. Thanks to the developments that have already taken place in the secondary schools there is good reason to expect that enough good students will be forthcoming to fill the colleges.

30. This will mean that from 1963 onwards the output from the colleges is likely to be 50 per cent. higher than it would otherwise have been after the introduction of the three year course. In addition, the number of graduates entering the teaching profession from the universities has been growing steadily in recent years and the Government will encourage this so far as they can, taking advantage of the continued growth in the output of the universities. The Government's policy will, in fact, be to increase recruitment from training colleges and also from universities, so far as this is consistent with the maintenance and improvement of quality.
31. The Government consider this far more important than trying to fix precise dates by which given stages in the reduction of class sizes will be achieved. Estimates of this sort are always liable to be upset by events which cannot be planned or controlled. Recent experience has shown, for example, that substantial changes in the size of the teaching force can be brought about from one year to the next by unforeseeable decisions of individual teachers, in particular by the retirement of women teachers for family reasons. But the Government's intentions can be stated simply. They are determined that the size of primary classes should continue to be reduced as quickly as possible, so that primary classes with more than 40 children are virtually eliminated by the middle-1960's. For the next year or two, while the number of senior pupils continues to rise, the staffing of many secondary schools is bound to be difficult, particularly in those areas which do not find it easy to attract teachers. Some improvement, however, can be expected in most areas where classes are now too large; and there should be a decisive overall improvement within the next five years.

Cost

32. To improve the nation's schools, as proposed in this Paper, will require not only the programme of capital expenditure mentioned in earlier paragraphs, but also a substantial increase in annual expenditure, in particular to allow for a big increase in the number of teachers. For many years the Government have shared the burden of this expenditure with the local authorities, and this partnership will be continued under the new grant arrangements which are about to come into effect. In fixing the grant for the first general grant period the Government have taken account of the policies proposed in this White Paper; and in respect of future grant periods they will take into consideration the need to develop the education service in accordance with this policy. The Government do not doubt that the local authorities will be as willing as in the past to play their full part. So far as the school building programme is concerned, the Government recognise that the Churches may need some further help if they are to be enabled to play their full part in carrying out their share. They therefore propose to initiate discussions with the interested parties with a view to introducing such amending legislation as may prove to be necessary for this purpose.

Conclusion

33. The cost will therefore be great, but the gain will be great also. By the mid-1960s the worst inadequacies of the schools will have been remedied. There will be more and better school buildings. There will be more and better trained teachers. Classes will be smaller.

34. There is however nothing in this White Paper about fixing dates for the introduction of measures extending the compulsory period of education, whether full or part-time, as provided for in the Act of 1944. The Government consider that it would be wrong to dissipate the improvement in educational standards to be secured under an immediate five year programme by attempting too much too soon. The right policy at this stage is rather to concentrate on encouraging those young people who wish to stay on voluntarily at school beyond the minimum school leaving age. This is a main objective of the advance now proposed.

35. During the past few years there has been a great increase in the demand for courses which mean stopping on at school till 16, 17 or 18. Not only have the Sixth Forms in grammar and technical schools continued to get bigger every year, but there has been a remarkable growth in the number of boys and girls staying on in modern schools till the age of 16 or over, in
spite of all the difficulties with which these schools have been faced. This is a spontaneous demand on the part of parents and children and there is no doubt that a vigorous effort to develop extended courses and to provide proper facilities for them will meet with enthusiastic response. It is the Government's aim to do everything possible to meet these demands, and so to enlarge the opportunities open to young people with ability and determination.

36. Nor will the enlargement of individual opportunity stop at school. The Government have already taken steps to enlarge the universities, and to improve and extend the varied opportunities for technical and other courses outside the university field. Indeed, the variety of courses now available in the country's schools and colleges is already so large that positive steps need to be taken to make sure that parents, teachers and pupils are aware of all the choices open to them. This is primarily a local problem, but it will be an important objective of Government policy during the five year plan to ensure that young people and their parents know what the education service has to offer them. As the plan takes shape, they will certainly discover that the school to which a boy goes at the age of 11 need not finally determine the educational goal which he will be able to reach. That will depend on his own ability and determination, and on the encouragement given him by his parents.

37. The programme set out in this White Paper is therefore part of a concerted drive to create an educational system adequate to meet both national and individual needs in the modern world. For the Government are convinced that, in the field of education, national and individual needs point in the same direction. The keynote is opportunity. There must be opportunity for the individual boy or girl to go as far as his keenness and ability will take him. And the nation must grasp the opportunity to develop the educational system so that it can better fulfil its task of producing citizens who are fitted by character, knowledge and skill to play their full part in an increasingly educated and responsible democratic society.
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