

PRIME MINISTER

FORWARD LOOK

I attach a report on the "forward look" at this Department's programmes for the next five years.

I am sending a copy of the report to Cabinet colleagues and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

KS

22 December 1982

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FIVE-YEAR FORWARD LOOK  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

1. The central commitments to education with which this Government entered office in 1979 were:

"We must restore to every child, regardless of background, the chance to progress as far as his or her abilities allow. ... We shall seek to ensure that the excellence (of much of higher education in Britain) is maintained."

Fulfilment of these commitments is a continuing process. This paper therefore combines the first two of the three subheadings suggested by the Prime Minister, commitments from 1979 and initiatives that will carry forward into the next parliament.

A.+ B. MAJOR COMMITMENTS FROM 1979 TO BE MET IN THE NEXT PARLIAMENT;  
PROPOSALS TO CARRY FORWARD IN THE NEXT PARLIAMENT INITIATIVES  
STARTED IN THIS

i) Schools and teachers

2. a) The initial teacher training system is to be restructured, starting from the autumn of 1983: significant change in the content of courses is intended, combined with a shift of the balance towards Post-Graduate Certificate of Education courses and towards courses in the universities.

b) Efforts will continue, in conjunction with the employers of teachers, to maintain the quality and effectiveness of the teacher force as it contracts in response to demographic and financial pressures. Main aspects of this action include the provision of in-service training, with emphasis on the training of head teachers; the relationship between the qualifications and training of individual teachers and the teaching they undertake; the salary structure; and arrangements for retirement, redeployment and redundancy.

c) The Secretary of State will review in the autumn of 1983 the school curriculum policy of every LEA by reference to a statement of policy made by him in 1981: the aim is to ensure that schools offer a sufficiently broad curriculum which is at the same time more practical and more relevant to adult life and work, at every level of ability.

d) A development programme to improve the education of the least academic will begin in the autumn of 1983.

e) New guidelines are to be developed and published from 1983 onwards for the curriculum in mathematics, science and modern languages.

f) The existing system of examinations at 16+ and 18+ is to be improved.

g) New opportunities will be created for pre-vocational education for those who have completed their period of compulsory education.

h) Fresh impetus will be given to the development of technical and vocational education under the aegis of the MSC scheme.

j) As many school-leavers as possible are to be offered a record of achievement, including (but not limited to) success in public examinations and, it is hoped, graded attainment tests in the case of those for whom public examinations are not designed.

k) The "Parents Charter", as embodied in the Education Act 1980, provides that in due course (with some minor exceptions) every school should have its own governing body and that each such body should have elected parent (and teacher) representatives. So far the Secretary of State has laid down no time-table for bringing these provisions fully into effect; and the process could not now in practice be completed until the next Parliament.

1) In all these matters an important consideration will be to protect and restore the esteem of teaching as a profession and a career, so that the schools can recruit and retain the share of able and suitably qualified people that they need for the future.

ii) Further and higher education

3. The contribution of the education service to overall provision for the 16-19 age group will be further developed. Besides the arrangements for the more academic (see para 2.f), steps are actively in hand to secure the introduction of appropriate courses in schools and colleges with an associated qualification (perhaps to be called "Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education"), for numbers of the less academically able who wish to stay on in full-time education. With many youngsters post-16 in the MSC's Youth Training Scheme, links between that Scheme and the education service are being reinforced, and suitable educational provision ensured for participants in the Scheme. Explicitly vocational types of study are being evolved continuously, especially under the auspices of the Business and Technician Education Councils (soon to be merged into a single Council).

4. The Secretary of State intends to push ahead with an increase in continuing education. Subject to review, the DES programme encouraging mid-career provision by education to meet the needs of industry and commerce (PICKUP") will be sustained. We hope to bring fully on stream the Education Counselling and Credit Transfer Information Service, which will promote study through life for qualifications in ways best suited to individual needs.

5. In higher education, the aim is to restructure all sectors in the interests of greater cost-effectiveness, while ensuring their sufficient contribution to the output of the highly qualified manpower required by the economy and to fundamental research, with attention particularly to

a) a continued shift of emphasis towards science and technology;

b) ensuring the necessary educational input to adequate provision for the new technologies, especially information technology; ||

c) ensuring the necessary pattern of staffing to achieve quality in research and teaching; and

d) changes in the central management of the system (University Grants Committee and the National Advisory Body for Local Authority Higher Education (NAB)) as a consequence of institutional and funding changes.

e) pruning by the NAB of weak courses of low relevance in local authority higher education.

iii) Inspection

6. The impact of HM Inspectorate on the quality of education has been strengthened by the decision to publish all formal reports from 1 January 1983 and to continue the programme of inspections of whole LEAs. Both publication and systematic follow-up by DES will have a cumulative effect on all providers and all parts of the system, and will enable the system's clients to extend a more informed influence upon it.

iv) Science

7. The Secretary of State will continue to foster the constructive involvement of the higher education system and the Research Councils in overall civil science policy. An initiative has just been taken to increase the availability in the system of able young lecturers and researchers. An enhanced role is being developed for the Advisory Board for the Research Councils: the incoming Chairman will give more time to the Board than did his predecessor and there will be closer collaboration with the Advisory Council for Applied Research and Development.

v) Relations with local government

8. In conjunction with Treasury and DOE Ministers, the cash planning and Rate Support Grant systems require to be developed in directions which will encourage systematic planning and effective management in education as well as exercising pressure on spending totals. Within such a framework, the search for better management and "value for money" should continue in all sectors of education. The Secretary of State should acquire an ability to foster developments to which he attaches particular importance through a limited power of direct financial support for specific purposes.

C. MAJOR INITIATIVES REQUIRING LEGISLATION

i) Schools

9. If the Secretary of State's proposals for vouchers and open enrolment are agreed, the next Parliament could see the introduction of a national scheme, fortified by the experience of pilot projects, for enabling more parents to secure for their children either a place at an independent school or at the maintained school of their choice.

ii) Further and higher education

10. Proposals are being developed to introduce loans to replace part of the maintenance support now provided by mandatory student grants. If these are agreed, the new regime could be legislated into being early in the new parliament.

11. Alternative patterns of tuition fees for higher education are being studied. Some changes may be practicable without legislation, but change on a substantial scale, involving re-allocation of responsibilities for the payment of fees, could necessitate legislation.