

PRIME MINISTER

AA 3024

White Papers on Educational Policy in England and Wales
and in Scotland

(CP(72) 133; CP(72) 136)

Background

The Home and Social Affairs (HS) Committee approved on 3rd October, subject to the consideration of the public expenditure implications in the PESC review, the proposals by the Secretary of State for Education and Science and the Secretary of State for Scotland on educational strategy (HS(72) 25th Meeting). The conclusions of the Committee were reported to you by the two Secretaries of State in a minute dated 9th October.

2. HS agreed that White Papers should be prepared by the two Secretaries of State for consideration by the Committee. In view of the urgent timetable the drafts have been circulated for consideration by the Cabinet without having been seen and considered by HS. This will therefore be the first opportunity for the Cabinet to consider the Government's long-term policy for education.

General

3. The White Papers are concerned primarily with the allocation of resources during the next ten years and with organisational matters, not with the content of education (though this is briefly discussed in the Scottish draft White Paper. Would it be advisable for this to be made clear in the drafts, bearing in mind the considerable public concern about illiteracy, hooliganism in schools, etc., which might give rise to suggestions that the White Papers are evading some major issues?

Nursery education

4. There has been steady Parliamentary and public pressure for an expansion of nursery education during the last few years. The proposals should therefore be popular. Is it acceptable, however, that the expansion of nursery education should, as proposed, be achieved by means of a shift of resources away from higher education?

5. Two detailed points may also merit consideration. These are:

- (a) The Secretary of State for Education and Science proposes that effect should be given to the recommendation of the Central Advisory Councils (under Lady Plowden and the late Professor Gittens) that provision should be made by 1981 for 90 per cent of 4-year old

children and 50 per cent of 3-year old children (paragraph 5(a) of CP(72) 133 and paragraph 16 of the draft White Paper for England and Wales). The Secretary of State for Scotland proposes a programme of expansion which would enable nearly 40 per cent of pre-school children to receive some form of education by 1976-77 and would be continued thereafter until public demand was met (paragraph 3(b) of CP(72) 136 and paragraph 38 of the White Paper for Scotland). Is it acceptable that there should be these two differently expressed targets?

- (b) As regards the nature of the provision to be made, the White Paper for England and Wales favours the addition of nursery classes to primary schools rather than the development of separate nursery schools (paragraph 24). The Scottish White Paper, on the other hand, envisages that the attachment of nursery classes to primary schools will not infrequently be undesirable and proposes the development of separate nursery schools in such cases. Can these differences in approach be satisfactorily defended?

6. On these and any other similar points, should the two Secretaries of State consult together and report the outcome to you?

School building

7. The proposals to introduce a programme to replace or improve obsolete secondary schools and to expand the programme for special schools catering for handicapped children should be favourably received. The main criticism is likely to be that the progress proposed is not fast enough, particularly bearing in mind the extent to which priority has recently been given to the improvement of primary as against secondary schools.

Staffing

8. The proposed improvements in staffing ratios also seem likely to be welcomed, although again it may be asked whether higher priority should not have been given to reducing the size of classes.

9. The Secretary of State for Scotland refers to the stabilisation of the teacher/pupil ratio in Scotland (paragraph 3(e) of CP(72) 136). Does the Secretary of State for Education and Science envisage a further improvement in the ratio for England and Wales after 1981?

Provision of books

10. The Scottish draft White Paper places considerably more emphasis upon increased expenditure on the provision of books and teaching equipment than does its English counterpart. Is this likely to lead to criticism that this part of the educational service is being neglected in England and Wales?

Auxiliary staff

11. The Scottish draft White Paper envisages an increase in the number of auxiliary helpers. There is no comparable proposal for England and Wales. Is the Secretary of State for Scotland satisfied that the wider employment of auxiliaries will not lead to difficulties with the teaching profession, because of fears of dilution? Are the different approaches proposed for the two countries likely to cause the Government any embarrassment?

The training of teachers

12. The James Report on Teacher Training related to England and Wales only. This accounts for one of the major differences between the two draft White Papers, because the subject is discussed at some length in that for England and Wales.

13. The proposals for in-service training and improved induction arrangements for teachers in England and Wales seem likely to be welcomed. The draft White Paper does, however, discuss other aspects of the James Report at some length. That Report caused considerable controversy when it appeared. Is the same likely to be true of the proposals in the draft White Paper? (It should be borne in mind that the Government's attitude towards the James Committee's recommendations have not previously been considered in any detail by Ministers collectively).

Higher education

14. This is potentially the most controversial part of the proposals. Although higher education will continue to expand, the criterion proposed by the Robbins Committee in 1963 - meeting demand from qualified school-leavers - is now being abandoned. The supporters of unlimited expansion of higher education may argue that the Government are expanding nursery education at the expense of higher education but that it is in fact unnecessary to make a choice between these priorities in a time of economic expansion. This line was taken by Lord Annan in his Dimbleby Memorial Lecture and appears to be supported by the Association of University Teachers. Can a satisfactory reply be made to such an argument? And is there a satisfactory defence against criticism that the polytechnics are being favoured at the expense of the universities?

15. Paragraph 126 of the draft White Paper for England and Wales refers to the possibility of relating tuition fees more closely to economic costs and to consideration of the introduction of a loan element into the support system for postgraduate students. Are there dangers in the context of this White Paper in referring to these potentially explosive issues without announcing any firm decisions?

Presentation

16. Publication on 6th December is proposed. If the draft White Papers are approved, the Secretaries of State for Education and Science and for Scotland might be invited, in consultation with the Lord President of the Council and the Home Secretary, to consider how they can most effectively be presented to the public and to the Party, and what Press briefing and accompanying publicity will be required. Particular care will be needed because the White Papers are bulky documents and the main issues may not emerge at first glance.

Lucy King

29th November, 1972