

FILE

DS

Govt Machinery



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

MR. VILE,
CABINET OFFICE.

The Prime Minister has seen Sir John Hunt's minute of 16 May about handling of science matters.

Taking account of the fact that the Prime Minister appointed Mr. Neil Macfarlane to handle the science side at the Department of Education and Science, she is herself prepared to answer questions on science if need be.

The Prime Minister wishes to reserve judgement on the Advisory Council for Applied Research and Development. She remains to be convinced that this is a necessary body.

M. A. PATTISON

21 May 1979

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'M.A.P.' or similar, located at the bottom right of the page.

200

PRIME MINISTER
At present, Neil Macfarlane's responsibilities are as in (i) below.
Agree A, B+C? (subject to quango review)

Ref. A09575

PRIME MINISTER

MAD 13/11

Science

You have not appointed a Minister for Science or made any change in the responsibilities of the DES. I assume therefore that you wish to continue the arrangements of recent years (under both Conservative and Labour Governments) whereby:-
Neil Macfarlane was speaker to the Science side of the Panel.

- (i) DES is responsible for the Research Councils and for the Science Budget.
- (ii) Each major Department is responsible for determining and financing its own R and D programme broadly on the "customer/contractor" principle.
- (iii) There is no "scientific overlord" who tries to run science and R and D from the centre, but a Cabinet Minister is given a general co-ordinating role and acts as the Government's spokesman on general scientific affairs.

A / Agreed

2. If you agree thus far, the next question is which member of the Government should take on this co-ordinating role. Lord Peart did it in the last Government and there is some advantage in having a Peer because the House of Lords is particularly interested in and knowledgeable about scientific matters. Similarly it ought not to be someone with too much of a vested interest. I rather doubt however whether it is Lord Soames' cup of tea, and I wondered whether you would like to ask the Lord Chancellor to take on the job. If he felt able to, I believe his appointment would be very well received. Not a great deal of work would be involved and he would be supported by the Cabinet Office (there is a small section of the economic Secretariat concerned with scientific affairs).

B /

3. Finally, do you also agree that the Advisory Council for Applied Research and Development (ACARD), which was set up by the last Government, should continue? After a shaky start ACARD now seems to be doing a useful job. Its first two reports, on micro-electronics and on the encouragement of innovation, were well received. It has four more now in progress on the employment implications of technological change; joining and assembly techniques; computer-aided design and manufacture; and the implications for the private sector of the

C /

public sector's R and D capacity: and they are also doing a joint study with the Royal Society and the ABRC studying biotechnology. The "co-ordinating" Minister chairs ACARD (the scientific community have welcomed this as a visible token that Government takes the applied end of civil science seriously); but there are two working Deputy Chairmen (Dr. Alfred Spinks and Sir James Menter); all the other members are outsiders but Sir Kenneth Berrill and some Departmental Chief Scientists attend as assessors; and some support (minimal in terms of staff time) is provided by the Chief Scientist in the CPRS (John Ashworth) and the Cabinet Secretariat.

John
JOHN HUNT

16th May, 1979

- ① Neil Parfitt was asked to "do"
the science side of the Ministry
- ② I will answer questions on science
if needed.
- ③ Reserve judgement on ^{possible}
it seems to me to be totally
unreasonable

JH