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Secretary of State for Industry

DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRY  
ASHDOWN HOUSE  
123 VICTORIA STREET  
LONDON SW1E 6RB  
TELEPHONE DIRECT LINE 01-212 3301  
SWITCHBOARD 01-212 7676

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Ms Caroline Stephens  
Private Secretary to the  
Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
LONDON  
SW1

*Dear Caroline*

Thank you for your letter of 15 December about the invitation to the Prime Minister to attend a meeting with The Engineering Industries Council.

2 The Council comprises a number of Chairmen and Chief Executives of large and medium-sized employers in the private engineering sector. It is an informal body with membership by invitation and acts as a pressure group without executive functions though there is a secretary from the CBI. Departments have had regular contact with the Council and Mr Jenkin, Mr Prior, Sir Keith Joseph and Mr Biffen have all attended meetings over the last three years.

3 By comparison with Continental engineering industries (the German industry in particular) or indeed by comparison with our own chemical and related industries, the British mechanical engineering industry is woefully weak in its trade association structure. In the European context this weakness has been most noticeable, both on the negative side of resisting unwelcome Commission initiatives and on the more positive side of steering matters in the direction we want.

4 The Engineering Industries Council has been active in encouraging improvement in the representation of the mechanical engineering sector. It has been taking a leading role in the development of COMMET (The Council of Mechanical and Metal Trade Associations), which seeks to bring together trade associations in this sector, to present a united voice in dealing with the Government and with the Community.



5 This is not a speaking engagement, but rather a listening engagement. It would be an opportunity for an off-the-record exchange of views. As such, it is very much for the Prime Minister herself to decide whether or not to accept. The EIC is an important and influential body, and such a meeting could prove very useful, but we would not go so far as to recommend acceptance of the invitation.

*Yours sincerely*  
*David Saunders*

DAVID SAUNDERS  
Private Secretary