

Ref. A04627

PRIME MINISTER

Information Technology

Prime Minister
The proposed ACARD sub-
Committee on IT has nags.
RTA has agreed an
alternative arrangement
with Mr Baker, which would
still avoid a new quango.
Agree? MP 3/4

At your meeting on 3rd March you and your colleagues agreed upon setting up:

- (i) a Ministerial Committee under your chairmanship;
 - (ii) a Sub-Committee of ACARD to be a source of outside advice;
 - (iii) an Information Technology Secretariat in the Cabinet Office.
2. The ACARD Sub-Committee was a replacement for the original CPRS proposal of an Advisory Group, composed partly of outsiders and partly of civil servants, because an Advisory Group would look like a new quango.
3. There have been further second thoughts about the method of providing the outside advice. When I discussed the matter with the Chairman of ACARD, he made it clear that he would prefer a new advisory group (the need for which he accepted) to be completely independent of ACARD. If necessary, a sub-committee of ACARD could no doubt be made to work; but it would in his view have to be chaired by a member of ACARD and to include at least one other member of ACARD in its composition; and, though it would be able to advise the Government direct, it should also report periodically - say, every quarter - to ACARD itself.
4. On this basis the idea of an ACARD sub-committee does not suit the book of the Minister for Information Technology (Mr. Kenneth Baker), with whom I have now discussed the matter further. He wants to deal direct with the outside advisers, and he thinks that what is envisaged would make for divided responsibility and crossed lines; he wants an arrangement which is more flexible and informal than the ACARD sub-committee seems likely to be; and he wants to draw the advisers from a different stream and generation from members of ACARD. On the other hand he recognises the objections to setting up a new quango.



5. It begins to look as if the idea of an ACARD sub-committee is not going to work very smoothly, and it is certainly not what either the Chairman of ACARD or Mr. Baker wants.

6. I therefore propose that the Minister should nominate five or six people from the industries to act as unpaid external advisers. They would be available, either singly or collectively, to advise and to be consulted by the Minister and the Information Technology Secretariat in the Cabinet Office, and they would also interact, both at meetings with the Minister and direct as appropriate, with the senior civil servants directly involved in information technology. They would be designated as individual advisers and not appointed or constituted as a group; but it would be important for them to interact with each other as well as with the Government, and thus to be able to advise collectively when they needed or were asked to do so.

7. Mr. Baker would be content to proceed in this way. May I tell him that you agree that he should do so?

8. The arrangements for setting up the Information Technology Secretariat are getting on well. We have earmarked one civil servant and one outsider. It has taken a little time to find the right Under Secretary to lead the Secretariat, but I shall have done that by the middle of next week; and as soon as he is appointed and in post we shall get ahead with finding the second outsider, and I shall (without waiting for that) make formal proposals to you for the composition and terms of reference of the new Ministerial Committee under your chairmanship.

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

3rd April, 1981

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RF

Mr. Wright

Information Technology

The Prime Minister has read Sir Robert Armstrong's minute of 3 April, and has reluctantly agreed with his proposal that there should be unpaid external advisers on information technology, rather than a sub-committee of ACARD. She has noted that the arrangements for setting up the IT Secretariat will shortly be finalised.

T.P.L.

6 April, 1981.

SS