

E. R.

PRIME MINISTER

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Reform of Examinations at 16 +

I attach a letter from DES giving Sir Keith Joseph's response to the doubts which you had expressed about his proposals for merging O levels with CSE.

Do you find this persuasive?

Or would you prefer to discuss further with Sir Keith?

If so, a possible slot would be after your Liverpool meeting on Monday. This would allow time for a discussion before H Committee considers the Secretary of State's proposals that evening.

Yes
Please
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15 June 1984



DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

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FROM THE SECRETARY OF STATE

15 June 1984

Dear David

REFORM OF EXAMINATIONS AT 16+

Thank you for your letter of 14 June. My Secretary of State has asked me to make the following points in advance of his meeting with the Prime Minister on Monday. *[if necessary]*

Sir Keith Joseph entirely agrees that it will be absolutely necessary to stand firm against allowing the GCSE system to be regarded as "O levels for all": there is no question of permitting the lower grades to be equivalent to O level "passes". On the contrary, differentiated papers or questions will discriminate between candidates much better than now. Moreover the present system is widely misunderstood. Many employers and parents wrongly believe that an O level grade D or E represents an O level pass, whereas only grades A to C do so and grades D and E stand for a poorer performance than CSE 1.

Under the GCSE system, the superior standing of the top 3 grades will be marked out as follows:

- The certificate itself will be designed to give prominence to the grades which candidates have actually achieved: my Secretary of State thinks that the outline attached as Annex B to H(84)20 could be improved in this respect.
- The certificate will also bring out the special responsibility of the GCE Boards for Grades A to C (and of the CSE Boards for grades D to G).

(attached)

/cont.

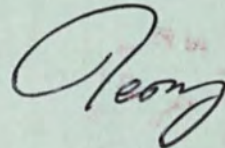
David Barclay Esq
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- The grade-related criteria, when developed, will be a powerful influence because they will, for the first time, make clear what the grades mean. Particular attention will be given to defining the levels of understanding, competence and knowledge required to obtain grade A and grade C (as well as grade E); and measures will be taken to explain thoroughly to employers and others what the grade-related criteria actually say. All will be able to see that the GCSE is a stepped certificate, and the grade-related criteria will mark the steps.
- My Secretary of State proposes to introduce Distinction Certificates for the stronger members of the present O level group.

The large employers can now distinguish the upper grades (the former pass grades) in O level and will not have difficulty with the new system. The CBI and the Engineering Employers' Federation support the single system. There is no doubt that many other employers, and many parents, will need help in understanding the new system. The Department will put a lot of effort into publicising and explaining it.

Yours ever



J F BIRD
PRIVATE SECRETARY

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