

SUBJECT
cc. TRANSPORT, Review of Traffic Laws
10/79

PRIME MINISTER

pa
DMS
25/6

Weekend Box

H COMMITTEE

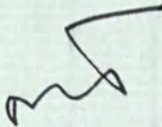
Examinations at 16+

As you know, H Committee approved the Education Secretary's proposals for reforming 16+ examinations, and his statement was made last Wednesday.

Motorway Speed Limit

Rather surprisingly H Committee firmly rejected Mr. Ridley's proposal for consultation on an increase in the motorway speed limit for cars to 80 mph. It was argued that such an increase could lead to higher actual speeds, and would do little to reduce the problems of enforcement. I understand that Mr. Ridley was in a minority of two (with Mr. Clarke) in seeking to rebut these objections.

DMS



20 June 1984

16-plus Examinations

4.15 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Sir Keith Joseph): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement about the action which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I are taking to reform the current system of public examinations at 16-plus. Our objectives are to improve the examination courses and to raise the standard of performance of all candidates. Four measures are needed to this end.

First, the 20 examinations boards need to come together in five groups—four in England and one in Wales. This will reduce the excessive number of examining bodies, syllabuses and subject titles, which are now a source of confusion. Secondly, all syllabuses need to be governed by national criteria now in preparation to improve their coverage and content, and to ensure that all courses achieve a proper balance between acquiring knowledge and acquiring skills and understanding, and between theoretical and practical work.

Thirdly, there is a need for differentiated papers or questions in every subject, so that each subject may be taught and examined in a way that reflects the widely differing abilities of candidates more effectively. Fourthly examination grades should have a clearer meaning and pupils and teachers need clearer goals. We accordingly need grade-related criteria which will specify the knowledge, understanding and skills expected for the award of particular grades.

We have decided that this programme will be implemented most quickly and effectively through a single system of examinations, to be known as the General Certificate of Secondary Education. Such a system has been recommended to us by the Secondary Examinations Council and the great majority of organisations within the education service and outside it. We are therefore today inviting the examinations boards to confirm their support for national criteria which will incorporate both a requirement for differentiated papers or questions for each subject and grade-related criteria as these come to be developed. Given that confirmation, the new system will be introduced for courses beginning in the autumn of 1986 with the first awards in the summer of 1988. I will, with permission, circulate in the *Official Report* a copy of my letter to the boards: copies are also available in the Vote Office.

The GCSE will be a system of examinations, not a single examination. It will have the four features essential for higher standards—fewer examining groups, national criteria, differentiated papers or questions, and grade-related criteria. The certificates will be awarded by each examining group, with a seven-point scale of grades denoted by the letters A to G. Candidates who do not demonstrate the required minimum level of performance will fail. Grades A to C will embody standards at least as high as the corresponding O-level grades A to C now do. They will be clearly distinguished from grades D to G in that, within the examining groups, sole responsibility for setting and maintaining their standards will rest with the GCE boards, which will be required to give specific assurances to my right hon. Friend and myself about the standard of these grades. When one of these grades, A to C, is awarded, this will be shown distinctively on the certificate. The examinations will be supervised by the

Secondary Examinations Council, reporting as necessary to my right hon. Friend and myself.

We propose an additional step to encourage the ablest pupils to pursue broad and balanced courses in the fourth and fifth years of secondary education. We shall invite the Secondary Examinations Council and the examinations boards to co-operate in the introduction of distinction certificates for candidates achieving good grades in a broad range of key subjects.

The new system of examinations will build on the strengths of O-levels and will do more than O-levels to stretch the ablest pupils; it will do more than CSE to motivate other pupils. It will more effectively promote worthwhile knowledge, understanding and skills. It will grade candidates by their performance better than now, on the basis of what they themselves know and can do and without regard to the performance of others. It will be clearer to candidates, their parents and employers than is the present system, and it will be more cost-effective. A single system with the features and safeguards on which the Government insist will be a powerful instrument for raising standards of performance at every level of ability.

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): After five years of Conservative Government deliberation—most would say procrastination—may I congratulate the Secretary of State on coming to a decision? After yesterday's Question Time, when I criticised the Secretary of State for what I believed to be his incompetent handling of the teachers' dispute, may I today welcome the fact that he has at last recognised that having two systems of 16-plus examinations is divisive and wasteful, and come out in favour of a single system of examinations with a single grading system—a change that is supported by most informed opinion including teachers, examination bodies and employers alike?

However, can he explain why he is retaining the old GCE boards when he is abolishing the O-level examination? I hope he is not trying to retain the O-level examination under another name. In this connection what is the purpose of having a distinction certificate? Is it the Secretary of State's sop to the Tory Right, bringing back "matric" through the back door? In which subjects does the Secretary of State believe there should be differentiated papers?

The old CSE and O-level examinations were designed to cover 60 per cent. of the relevant age group. What proportion will the new examination system cover?

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): That depends on how they perform.

Mr. Radice: The hon. Gentleman is not Secretary of State yet.

Can the Secretary of State reassure the House that other types of assessment, particularly profiling, continuous assessment and the modular approach in the fifth and sixth years recommended by Hargreaves, will be encouraged under the new system?

Sir Keith Joseph: I am grateful for the general welcome given by the hon. Gentleman. I believe that the decision has been improved by the delay in the sense that we now have wide acceptance of grade-related criteria and of differentiated examination assessment—the basic imperatives if we are to improve standards throughout the ability range, which is what we all want.

[Sir Keith Joseph]

We are retaining the GCE boards as important components of the standard-setting mechanism. Distinction certificates are proposed by the Government to meet, what is I would have thought, the wish of all Members, the encouragement of excellence. The proportion of the population for whom the new examination system is proposed is 100 per cent. The proportion of people who will achieve graded results within it depends, as my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) perspicuously said, on how they perform.

There will be a parallel initiative by the Government, involving records of achievement which, in answer to the last point made by the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice), will be brought into effect as soon as practicable after pilot schemes.

Mr. David Madel (Bedfordshire, South-West): Is my right hon. Friend aware that included in the general welcome for his proposal there will be particular satisfaction about the greater importance of tests of practical ability which, coupled with the new merged systems of examination, will surely provide a much better guide to and assessment of pupils' ability? Can he say a little more about the development of pupil profiles which, added to the new merged systems of examinations, will give a good guide to the level of a pupil's learning and development?

Sir Keith Joseph: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. It seems to us outmoded that, for instance, the marks for oral competence in a foreign language should be such a small proportion of the total marks. We shall encourage the oral use of foreign languages by giving higher marks for it. As for records of achievement, as I told the hon. Member for Durham, North, they will go through a stage of pilot schemes prior to, I hope, universal introduction.

Mr. Clement Freud (Cambridgeshire, North-East): May I give a rather warmer welcome to the Secretary of State's proposals than came from the Labour Front Bench? Will the Secretary of State accept that the success or failure of the scheme will depend on the co-operation of the teachers? Will he do his best to improve the current strained relationship between his Department and the teachers' union?

On the subject of examinations reflecting the widely differing abilities of candidates, will he confirm that if a pupil chooses to take a question which is in the D-G range and that pupil excels in his answer, he too will be eligible for a distinction?

Sir Keith Joseph: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's welcome. Certainly all effectiveness in education depends upon the co-operation of the teachers. The programme that we are proposing will involve a special in-service training provision for some teachers.

In answer to the hon. Gentleman's specific question, if a candidate reaches high standards in the more difficult questions, even though that candidate has prepared himself or herself for the easier choices, he or she will be eligible for the higher grades. If the candidate earns enough higher grades, he or she will become eligible for the distinction certificate.

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): Is my right hon. Friend aware that outside the House and outside the

somewhat hermetic world of the educational establishment, only one question will be asked as a result of the statement, and that is whether the Government are merging up or merging down. I notice that in his statement my right hon. Friend referred to the introduction of grade-related criteria as and when these are developed. Does that mean that the change in the examination system will be introduced before grade-related criteria are established?

Sir Keith Joseph: To answer my hon. Friend's last question first, I have said when the new system will be introduced. The courses will start in 1986 and the first examinations will be in 1988. At that time grade-related criteria will be in the second half of their pilot scheme stage. As a result of the lessons learnt during the pilot stage we shall hope to go national towards the end of the decade.

On my hon. Friend's first and penetrating point, the Government are merging up. If I were asked to summarise that briefly, I would say that the system we propose will be tougher but clearer and fairer; that it will be more intelligible to users; that it will be better than O-levels for those who have taken O-levels; and better than CSE for those who have taken CSE; that it will stretch the able more; and that it will stretch the average more. We are certainly merging up.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Will the Secretary of State consider that he will need not only the co-operation but the professionalism of teachers? Therefore, should not the Government gradually move the salary scale over several years towards that suggested by Houghton some time ago? Is there not a need to encourage pupils to stay at school, particularly working-class children? Therefore, will he consider an education grant equal to that of the youth training scheme to encourage people to stay on after 16?

Sir Keith Joseph: I must mildly say that teachers are not going a long way to demonstrate professionalism by their present behaviour.

I have explained to the House many times that there is no evidence that significant numbers of pupils are failing to stay on at school for lack of the sort of payment to which the hon. Gentleman refers. Moreover, such a payment would involve large sums of money, most of which would go in deadweight to pay young people who would stay on at school anyway, in their own interests.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Select Committee on Education, Science and Arts in the previous Parliament took the view that a substantial number of pupils taking GCE O-level, and CSE for that matter, were under-achieving and achieving only two, three or even fewer passes, whereas they were capable of achieving five, six or more, and that an incentive such as a distinction certificate or a merit certificate was desirable? That was the view of all members, including Christopher Price and the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery). It is odd to hear the Opposition Front Bench spokesman denigrating the certificate. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the distinction certificate that he has mentioned will not prejudice the award of single-subject pass certificates to pupils who pass only single subjects but that it is a bonus to those who do extra well and an incentive for more children to do so?

Sir Keith Joseph: I am glad to acknowledge that the Government are following the unanimous advice of the

Select Committee in its proposal to introduce distinction certificates. I confirm my hon. Friend's presumption in the last part of his question.

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): May I offer a warm general welcome to the Secretary of State's rather late conversion to what we have been saying for a number of years—that there should be one examination system? Will he assure the House that the Department will provide the necessary money for the transfer to the new system—money that will be required for in-service teacher training, curriculum conferences, amalgamating the boards, and moderating the new examinations? Does he realise that if he cannot give a categorical assurance that he will back up the new proposal with money, teachers, pupils and parents in Britain will view them as they soon learnt to view his Sheffield speech—as well intentioned but ineffective?

Sir Keith Joseph: Once again, I welcome the hon. Gentleman's kind remarks but I must rebut his use of the word "conversion". The background to the Government's decision has three ingredients which owe nothing whatever to the Labour party—grade-related criteria, differentiation, and distinction certificates. The decision to merge into one single system is not in itself any sort of guarantee of improved standards. It is merely a relatively suitable framework within which the Government's predominating desire to see the improvement of standards at all levels of ability, particularly by way of grade-related criteria and differentiation, can be achieved. I acknowledge that there will be a need for resources for, for instance, in-service training. For his part, the hon. Gentleman should acknowledge that the decision will lead to some savings in that fewer young people will be entered for two examinations.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): Is my right hon. Friend aware that many of us will be greatly relieved that he has announced today not a single examination but a single system of examinations, which will enable pupils to take the examinations at different stages in their career depending on their ability? Is not that change long overdue, bearing in mind that previously there were over 20,000 different syllabuses, several hundred different subjects and more than 20 examination boards?

Sir Keith Joseph: I welcome every word of my hon. Friend. It is almost incredible that there are at the moment over 19,000 different syllabuses. We hope that they will be sharply reduced when the new system is introduced.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the Minister aware that those million young people under 25 years of age who are on the scrap heap that has largely been created by the Government, which is known as the dole queue, will not give his proposals a warm welcome? Nor will he get a warm welcome from me. The proposal should be set against a background of 6,300 young miners, some with O-levels and some with A-levels who obtained jobs in the mining industry in 1979, and fewer than 1,800, some with O-levels and some with A-levels, who got jobs in the mining industry in 1983-84. Does he not realise that he can play around with the structures and the cosmetics, he can meddle with the arrangements in schools, but the real problem is, first, that the education service wants more money, secondly, teachers should be paid properly, and, thirdly, those young people who need motivation to pass

examinations must have a job opportunity at the end. Until the Minister or the Government come along and explain when those people will get jobs they will just laugh in the Minister's face.

Sir Keith Joseph: It is a sad fact that the long queues of unemployed owe much to the ignorance and obstructiveness of the attitude of the hon. Gentleman and that small minority which thinks like him.

Mr. Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden): Is not one of the most welcome aspects of the statement made by my right hon. Friend today in introducing a single system of examination based on grade-related criteria the fact that it will help to clear the minds of employers about the standards that young people—potential employees—will be able to offer when seeking work? Might that not also help to motivate the young people?

Sir Keith Joseph: I agree with what my hon. Friend has said. Users will know what any particular grade that has been won means in terms of the skill, understanding and knowledge of the successful candidate—the applicant for a job.

Several Hon. Members rose—

Mr. Speaker: Order. We have a heavy programme in front of us. I shall allow questions to continue until a quarter to five.

Mrs. Angela Rumbold (Mitcham and Morden): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement today, in particular the tidying-up of the examination boards and of the many syllabuses, as well as the introduction of the distinction grade, which will be an enormous help. Nevertheless, may I pursue the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden)? Will my right hon. Friend explain how well he believes he will be able to put across the message contained in his proposals to the average parent and employer in Britain, bearing in mind the length of time that it took the average parent and employer to understand what happened the last time the examination system was changed?

Sir Keith Joseph: My hon. Friend has raised a fairly formidable problem. I have no doubt that if parents knew the details of the proposals they would approve. We shall provide a much clearer picture for parents, pupils and teachers of what is required to get different grades in different subjects. There will be a problem in communicating that.

Motivation—I take up the point made by the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) who cross-questioned me so ferociously and rhetorically just now—is a key factor. The more that we can show candidates that the standards expected to achieve a grade are attainable by them, the more pupils and teachers will gird themselves in a way that they are not now motivated to do to try to get the grades concerned. They will recognise that users will appreciate the value of those grades. I recognise the rather big task of conveying that truth to the public but I believe that we can do it.

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, since this issue has taxed every Secretary of State since Mrs. Shirley Williams, he ought to be the toast of the educational world and, indeed, should have been the toast of the Labour party if more than two Back Benchers had even bothered to take an interest in the issue?

[Dr. Keith Hampson]

When he mentions national criteria so often, is he suggesting that the five new merged boards will be required to set syllabuses within the framework of a national common syllabus? He has emphasised that the boards operating the top three grades will have a formal obligation to him to ensure that grades do not slip. Is there any such obligation on, or arrangement with, the boards operating the lower grades, to ensure that their grades do not slip?

Sir Keith Joseph: The answer is yes. I am slightly flurried at the suggestion that I might be the toast of anybody, but I am grateful to my hon. Friend.

The national criteria are of two sorts. There are subject-specific criteria, which lay down a framework for the assessment of work in each subject, and there are general national criteria, which set a framework as between, say, practical work and theoretical work for all the subjects. These national criteria will provide the framework within which the grade-related criteria will fit. The grade-related criteria are intended to raise standards at all levels of ability in all subjects.

Mr. Timothy Wood (Stevenage): I wish to join the general welcome that has been given to my right hon. Friend's statement because I believe that it will end the confusion that presently exists between the GCE and CSE examinations. However, I should like to pursue one aspect of the various questions that have been raised. Will it be possible to draw a distinction between an excellent performance at a lower level of attainment and a rather indifferent performance by someone who has striven for a high level of attainment? Employers might wish to be able to distinguish between these two categories as well as higher educational establishments.

Sir Keith Joseph: I think that I may have given—and I apologise to the House—an inaccurate reply to an earlier question on a related subject. If a candidate sets himself or herself to the less demanding choice of papers, that candidate will not be able to achieve a higher grade award simply by doing excellently. The teacher and the candidate will have forgone the chance to earn a higher grade by the more timid choice that they have made. On the other hand, if anybody goes for a higher grade and fails to achieve it, he or she may qualify for a lower grade. To the extent that I misinformed the House earlier, I apologise.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Is my hon. Friend aware that congratulations and celebrations may be premature and, although I wish him well in what he is seeking to do, may I ask him to reflect on the fact that there is a real possibility that there could be new confusion? This could become "Joseph's amazing technicolour examination", if he is not careful. If he is to achieve his laudable desire of levelling, or merging, up, it is essential that he accepts the establishment of a series of conferences, seminars and such-like throughout the country, explaining precisely to parents and employers what he has in mind.

Sir Keith Joseph: I accept the last part of my hon. Friend's comments. As to the first part, I am surprised that those concerned tell me that we shall be able to introduce

the new courses two years from now. It is rather sooner than I had expected when I proposed the policy in general at Sheffield earlier this year.

Mr. Peter Griffiths (Portsmouth, North): In welcoming my right hon. Friend's statement, may I ask him to assure the House, that in speaking of the 16-plus examinations, he does not anticipate a rigid restriction on under-age candidates? Secondly, can he assure the House that, despite the reduction in the number of examination boards, he will ensure that there remains a wide choice in the subject matter presented to the pupils?

Sir Keith Joseph: The answer to both questions is yes. I can reassure my hon. Friend on both points.

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): I join in the general welcome for the proposals but agree with my hon. Friends who have stated that there may be a problem of communication in getting across the message of the proposals to parents, employers and, indeed, to children. I appeal to the Secretary of State and his colleagues, where possible, to avoid terms like differentiated examination assessment or grade-related criteria. These terms may mean a great deal to those of us who, when we have time, read *The Times Educational Supplement*, but I am not sure whether they come across to people in the country and, indeed, to many practising teachers in the classroom.

Sir Keith Joseph: The answer is yes, and I invite my hon. Friend to suggest synonyms, for which I shall be grateful. I can assure the House that differentiation means that there will be a vast difference between a grade A and a grade G.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): Does my hon. Friend agree that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), concerned as he is about jobs, has got hold of the wrong end of the stick in condemning the proposals? The reduction in the number of examination boards and the establishment of national criteria will have not only educational but economic value. Does my right hon. Friend further agree that that will tend to impart a degree of flexibility into the economy, particularly in the labour market and with regard to job prospects, in that families with children of school age will be the more ready to move to work in other parts of the country, and the qualifications of school leavers will have a wider acceptability?

Sir Keith Joseph: I would agree even more with my hon. Friend if I could be sure that the teachers themselves understood the importance of adaptability if we are to have an effective trading base to keep our present standards, let alone to improve our general standards.

Mr. Radice: As hon. Members were clearly not listening fully, may I repeat the welcome from the Labour Benches for the Secretary of State's decision, however delayed, to establish a single system of 16-plus examinations? My suspicion that the retention of the GCE boards was a specific gesture to the Conservative Right-wing, has, I am afraid, been confirmed by what the Secretary of State said. We are also unhappy about the distinction certificates, and we will want to probe those further. It would help with the raising of standards if the Secretary of State took the same sort of sensible attitude towards the here and now issue of teachers' pay and industrial relations as he does to the long-term planning of the educational system.

Sir Keith Joseph: Once again, I have to rebut the suggestion that merely going to arbitration will solve a deep seated problem. The problem is one of financial resources, and the hon. Gentleman is at one with his party in always neglecting the realities of finances.

Mr. Greenway: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Labour Benches have been almost empty throughout the questions on the statement, and the Liberal spokesman disappeared after it was made.

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is not remotely a matter for me.

Following is the letter

REFORM OF 16+ EXAMINATIONS

I announced in the House of Commons this afternoon that the Secretary of State for Wales and I had decided that, on certain important conditions which I mention below, a single system of examinations at 16+, based on national criteria, should be introduced as soon as is practicable. The new system is to take the place of the existing O level, CSE and joint 16+ examinations in England and Wales and will be known as the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE).

In my statement to Parliament, a copy of which is enclosed, I said that the Government's main objectives in reforming 16+ examinations are to improve examination courses and to raise the standard of performance of all candidates. We believe that these objectives will most effectively be implemented in the context of a new system of GCSE examinations incorporating the features discussed below. The new system will be as set out in the Government's policy statement of November 1982, "Examinations at 16-Plus", with certain significant additions and modifications. The main features will be:

- (i) Examining groups. The GCSE would be administered by 5 groups of GCSE and CSE Boards—4 in England and one in Wales—as set out in paragraphs 9 to 12 and Annex A of the 1982 policy statement. In relation to the GCSE, no Board should act independently of the group to which it belongs.
- (ii) National criteria. All syllabuses and the procedures for assessment and grading will be based on the national criteria—both the subject-specific criteria wherever applicable and also the general criteria—which are to be approved by the holder of my office and the Secretary of State for Wales.
- (iii) Differentiation of assessment. The Secretary of State for Wales and I consider it essential that the national criteria should make the necessary provision for proper discrimination between candidates so that candidates across the ability range are given opportunities to show what they know and can do. Accordingly, the criteria will need to be explicit on the means by which such differentiation is to be secured, by requiring either differentiated papers or differentiation within papers in examinations for all subjects. The syllabuses also will need to specify how this differentiation is to be achieved. We note that requirements on these lines are consistent with the Joint Council's recent statement that some form of differentiation will be needed in every subject.
- (iv) Grade-related criteria. We likewise consider it essential that the national criteria, and syllabuses based upon them, should as soon as possible embody grade-related criteria. The Secondary Examinations Council has accepted the task of preparing drafts of these grade-related criteria and the associated assessment systems, in consultation with the Boards, for approval by the holder of my office and the Secretary of State for Wales.
- (v) Target group. The general criteria will need to make clear that the standards required of successful candidates in GCSE examinations should be no less exacting than those required in the existing 16+ examinations which, taken together, were originally designed for the upper 60% of the ability range. The grading system for the GCSE should be such as to ensure that candidates, whatever their ability relative to other candidates, only obtain a grade if, and only if, they reach the standard required for the award of that grade as specifically defined in the grade-related criteria as they are developed.

(vi) Certification and grading. Certificates will be awarded in a common form by each of the 5 examining groups. The present O level and CSE grades are to be replaced by a single, 7-point scale of grades. We propose that the new grades should be denoted by the letters A, B, C, D, E, F and G. The certificates will need to give prominence to the grades awarded. The GCE Boards will have responsibility within the examining groups for maintaining the standards of grades A to C; the CSE Boards will have a corresponding responsibility with regard to grades D to G. In the transitional period, when grade-related criteria are available only for some subjects, the GCSE grades will be linked to O level grades A to C and CSE grades 2 to 5. Where grade-related criteria are in operation, no direct comparisons with earlier grades will be possible because the significance attached to the attainment of particular grades will be based on a different approach to assessment.

(vii) Monitoring by Secondary Examinations Council. The SEC will be responsible for monitoring all GCSE syllabuses, assessment and grading procedures, together with all other examination courses offered to pupils during the years of compulsory schooling. It will be for the examining groups and the SEC to ensure that syllabuses, and procedures for assessment and grading, comply with the national criteria including, in due course, grade-related criteria, and to ensure comparability of standards between groups. The SEC will also be responsible, in consultation with the examining groups, for advising the holder of my office and the Secretary of State for Wales on the need for development of and changes in the national criteria, including the grade-related criteria.

As the Joint Council will be aware from earlier correspondence and discussion, the Secretary of State for Wales and I attach great importance to the points listed above: particularly to the inclusion in the national criteria of a requirement for differentiated assessment between or within papers in every subject and grade-related criteria as these come to be developed. We now invite the Boards to confirm their support for national criteria incorporating the elements described above.

We wish also to explore with the SEC and the examining groups the possibility of introducing special GCSE Distinction Certificates for candidates who have achieved a specified number of higher grades in a defined range of subjects. These would be designed so as to encourage the ablest candidates in particular to pursue a suitably broad curriculum in the 4th and 5th years of secondary education. We shall bring forward proposals for discussion with the SEC, the Boards and others concerned in the education service and outside it.

Given the Boards' support as indicated above, we propose that the new GCSE examinations should be introduced for courses beginning in Autumn 1986, with the first examinations following in summer 1988. Since all GCSE courses and examinations will be based on the national criteria it will be essential to complete as soon as practicable the final stages of preparing these criteria in a form which the Secretary of State for Wales and I can approve. We ask the Joint Council and the SEC to collaborate accordingly over these last stages so that final revisions are available before or by Christmas 1984. The Secondary Examinations Council intend to complete, that final revisions are available before or by Christmas 1984. The Secondary Examinations Council intend to complete, in consultation with the Boards, the first stage of work on grade-related criteria in 10 subjects by July/August 1985.

The detailed timetable would be as follows:

July/August 1984	Secretary of State for Wales and I comment on the outstanding draft subject-specific criteria.
September 1984	Grade-related criteria working parties begin substantive work on the first 10 subjects.
December 1984	Submission of revised versions of national criteria for approval by the Secretaries of State.

[Mr. Speaker]

January 1985	National criteria published by the Secretaries of State.
July/August 1985	SEC publishes proposals for grade-related criteria and associated assessment systems for first 10 subjects.
May 1986	Latest date for publication by examining groups of syllabuses based on national criteria, embodying, subject to progress made, grade-related criteria for the first subjects. (Grade-related criteria on other subjects introduced as soon as ready.)
Autumn 1986	First GCSE courses, based on national criteria, begin.
May/June and Winter 1987	Final O level, CSE and joint 16+ examinations.
May/June 1988	First GCSE examinations.

We hope that it may be possible to introduce grade-related criteria for the first subjects simultaneously with the GCSE examination: a final decision on this matter will depend on progress made.

The Secretary of State for Wales and I are aware that the introduction of the new system will involve a great deal of work by the Examinations Boards and the SEC, in addition to all the invaluable work that has been undertaken already. We would wish this work to proceed as quickly as possible; and we ask the examining groups and the SEC to keep in close touch with the Department of Education and Science and the Welsh Office, whose officials stand ready to offer assistance as may be required. Since all GCSE courses and examinations will be conducted by the examining groups, the Secretary of State for Wales and I now ask the Boards to let us know as soon as possible the arrangements which have been made for the constitution and internal structure of each group as requested in paragraph 12 of the 1982 policy statement. It would be helpful if these arrangements could be made final as soon as practicable, and meanwhile if the groups could arrange to act together on all matters relating to the GCSE from September this year.

Copies of this letter are being sent to the Chairman of the Secondary Examinations Council, the Chairmen of all GCE and CSE Boards, and the Chairmen of the Education Committees of the local authority associations. The letter will also be published by circulation in Hansard.

Registration and Accountability of Charities

4.47 pm

Mr. Timothy Yeo (Suffolk, South): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require all charities to be registered; to make regular annual returns (including independently audited financial accounts) available for public inspection, and to grant access to annual general meetings to all financial supporters.

The Bill would require all charities to be registered, to make regular annual returns, including independently audited financial accounts, available for public inspection and to grant access to annual general meetings to all financial supporters.

There can be few people in the country who have not had some contact with charities, in one form or another, whether as a voluntary worker, a financial supporter making a donation or as a direct or indirect recipient of the service of a charity. However, the popular perception of charities remains focused on a few well-known organisations such as Dr. Barnardo's and Oxfam, or, at the other end of the scale, local charitable activities such as — [Interruption.] My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) explained that he would have to leave before I had finished presenting the Bill to the House.

As I said, at the other end of the scale there are local charitable activities such as the repair of a church roof.

Four essential characteristics reflect the state of charitable activity today. First, there is the size. Collectively, charities are very much larger than most members of the public realise. In 1980, the last year for which any accurate estimate is available, total charitable income from all sources amounted to more than £5 billion, which was more than 2 per cent. of the gross national product for that year. It also represented more than half the total defence budget and more than half the total EEC budget at the time. Within that very large collective total there is an increasing number of large organisations, 15 of which have an annual income in excess of £10 million. The organisation for which I was responsible before I became a Member of Parliament, the Spastics Society, now spends more than £25 million a year.

The second characteristic is the extensive tax concessions which charities quite properly enjoy, with full public support. Charities are a uniquely privileged category of organisation. They enjoy complete freedom from income tax, corporation tax, capital gains tax and capital transfer tax, and even enjoy mandatory partial relief from local authority rates. Those concessions are now estimated to be worth more than £500 million a year in total in terms of lost revenue to the Treasury.

The third characteristic is the increased direct financial support that is available to charities from the Government. In 1981-82, central Government grants amounted to £130 million, which was more than three and a half times the amount five years before. In addition, quangos such as the Manpower Services Commission, and other agencies grant more than £100 million a year to charities. Also, a large amount of unquantified local authority grant goes direct to charities.

The fourth characteristic is the almost complete absence of accountability within the charitable sector. Not all charities even have to be registered. Of those that are