

IN CONFIDENCE

PRIME MINISTER

NUMBER OF DES MINISTERS

1. After the last election I suggested to you that this Department needed only 2 junior Ministers in the Commons - plus a spokesman in the Lords. Since then my perceptions of what is required have evolved and I now think that a third junior Minister would be justified. (The most convenient disposition would be two in the Commons and one in the Lords.)

2. What has changed is that I have come to recognise that the Non-Advanced Further Education network of over 500 colleges in England and Wales needs much more attention than it has been given and than I had realised.

a. NAFE has, as you know, an important role - skill training across the entire civil field plus school subjects for a growing proportion of the 16-19s, all in increasing cooperation with the MSC.

b. Performance is patchy. The standards and attitudes that should be demanded by employers and supplied by the colleges are not nearly as widely demanded and supplied as in the main competitor countries.

c. Furthermore, we have come to recognise - as now confirmed by the Audit Commission - that many of the colleges do not use their staff efficiently and fail to market their courses effectively.

3. At present one junior Minister, Peter Brooke, is fully occupied with the many difficult policy changes we are implementing in Higher Education and is also responsible to me for civil scientific research.

4. The other junior Minister, Bob Dunn, is equally fully occupied with "Better Schools" policies and our many problems with the teaching profession.

5. There is no Minister who can give NAFE the attention it deserves, though of course I spread my own efforts over all the sectors.

6. Moreover the developing activities of the MSC call for more Ministerial cooperation with the Minister of State at Employment and the Chairman of the MSC than can now be provided.

7. For these reasons I now ask you to consider at a suitable time increasing the junior Ministers here from two to three.

8. Finally I believe that the changes we are trying to make in HE would be easier to put across and the scientific community reassured if the junior Minister involved were to be a Minister of State.

9. I am copying this minute to John Wakeham and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

KJ.

KJ

27 June 1985