



DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

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FROM THE SECRETARY OF STATE

Tim Flesher Esq
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Prime Minister:

The response to your query. For the moment at least, there seems little alternative but to acquiesce in Sir Keith's view that GCSE must go ahead.

To do otherwise is a contradiction of his position would look like taking the other side of the unions.

After the Teachers' unions' conference I gave - no option to go ahead

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Dear Tim,

1. Thank you for your letter of 27 March about the availability of draft GCSE syllabuses in science subjects.

2. Mr McIntosh informed this office by 'phone on 24 March that his school had two approved syllabuses in biology, two draft syllabuses in chemistry, one draft physics syllabus and various draft syllabuses in integrated science. The Southern Examining Group has confirmed that the London Oratory School was sent draft syllabuses in the individual science subjects and in integrated science in September 1985. Draft syllabuses in science subjects were also available at that time from the Midlands Examining Group and, within the succeeding few months, from the two other English Examining Groups.

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3. You also asked for comment on the resolutions adopted by the NAS/UWT and the NUT at their Easter conferences. The NAS/UWT resolution calls on its members to take no part in the development programme for the GCSE. This position is unreasonable and the Secretary of State made this plain in his address to the conference on 3 April. The resolution asks for the timetable for introduction to be extended to give sufficient time for preparation, and for adequate resources including teaching cover and staffing levels to be provided for in-service training and internal assessment procedures. The Secretary of State's announcement last month about further training seminars, training days in the summer term, and additional capitation allowances for GCSE books and equipment, was intended to meet just such concerns; but for the NAS/UWT to make their co-operation in the GCSE

Not what Mr. McIntosh told me on Sir Keith's 26/3 (or 27/4) 27 March.

conditional on further measures in this direction amounts to blackmail in regard both to resources and to teachers' pay to which in Sir Keith Joseph's view the Government could not give way.

4. The third part of the NAS/UWT resolution concerns scales of fees for teachers who conduct assessment - mainly of oral work and course work - in connection with GCSE examinations. This is a matter for negotiation between the Examination Boards, the local authorities and the teachers' organisations; the GCSE Examining Groups have already established procedures to begin negotiations about this matter. The Department has no locus in these negotiations at this stage; but it may be that at a later stage the wider discussions on teachers' pay and conditions may be able to take this specific question on board.

5. The NUT's resolution goes further than that adopted by the NAS/UWT and calls on its members to ignore GCSE syllabuses and teach to O level and CSE syllabuses from September. On present plans there will be no such syllabuses for pupils starting their 4th secondary year in September.

6. Sir Keith Joseph does not believe that these conference resolutions should cause the Government to change its position. It is apparent that the GCSE is being used by both unions in an attempt to hijack the negotiations on pay and conditions. If the GCSE were postponed, the same negotiating ploys can be paraded by the teachers' organisations next year. The right way forward is to go ahead with the timetable for the GCSE; and to make publicly clear that teachers are only making their own job of preparation more difficult. Many teachers will realise that there is no turning back and that the only sensible course is to prepare for the new examinations properly, taking advantage of the opportunity presented in the package of measures announced on 13 March. Next September, teachers of 4th year pupils will have no option but to teach to the GCSE syllabuses and to make up for their own lost ground. They will be helped at that point by the further phase of training for the GCSE which will take place during the course of the next academic year and which will be devoted to the specific syllabuses offered by the Examining Groups.

Copies of this letter go to Private Secretaries to the Lord President, the Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland and for Wales, and Sir Robert Armstrong.

yours sincerely,
Robert Smith

R L SMITH
Private Secretary

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