

Prime Minister 2

As you told Mr Knowles, this problem is currently in the ACAS loop. You could raise it MISE 122 on Monday if you wished.

PRIME MINISTER

10 July 1986

SHORTAGE OF MATHEMATICS TEACHERS

DBJ
10/7

Last week I saw Professor Sir Bryan Thwaites, following his letter of 23 May requesting a meeting.

The major issue which he raised in his paper was the shortage of maths teachers. As if to emphasise the strength of his case, the DES issued a draft discussion document on the day he came to see me and today issued the Consultative Document itself (attached).

Shortage of maths and physics teachers

According to Thwaites, the position of maths in our schools is far more serious than indicated by the Consultative Document.

- The graduate intake in mathematics is now effectively zero, as is the intake of new teachers from any source.
- Mathematics teachers are leaving at a rate far greater than that due to natural retirement.
- For mathematics graduates at age 25, average salaries are roughly double those of teachers.
- Without adequate mathematical back-up, many other subjects crucial to the country's future prosperity will be progressively undermined.

In addition to these points, there are the following:

- Roughly 50% of maths and physics teaching in secondary schools is being given by staff with degrees in different subjects.
- The pupils who suffer most of all are those in the early years of secondary school, which may then bias their choice against science.
- The DES do not publish evidence to show how often a subject is not taught because of a lack of suitable teachers (eg double maths at A Level is probably taught at very few ILEA comprehensives) - but I feel sure HMI would produce some horror stories.

Improving Supply

Thwaites was highly critical of the DES prescriptions for improving the supply (initiatives from employers, ex-Services personnel, qualified teachers returning to teaching, bolstering conversion courses): "Absolutely no new idea at all".

The DES Consultative Document considers everything except the obvious, which is paying (by one means or another) higher salaries for teachers in areas of subject shortage. This is something which Kenneth Baker mentioned explicitly at the press conference, but which is noticeable by its absence from

the Consultative Document, except for a vague reference to giving employers greater freedom, which I take to mean a more flexible interpretation of the use of scales.

Recommendation

Thwaites confirmed the seriousness of the shortage of maths and physics teachers; by comparison to his description of the present crisis as a wartime situation, the DES document is rather bland.

The Secretary of State needs to ensure that teacher shortage is dealt with explicitly in the new ACAS pay structure. This will be resisted fiercely by the unions. Unless, however, one is prepared to tackle a shortage by raising the price, there can be no confidence in solving the problem.

BG.

BRIAN GRIFFITHS

PS: Alternatively, you might suggest to the Secretary of State that he help relieve the shortage directly by releasing some of his 288 statistics and computing staff from Elizabeth House. If these have to be fed by statisticians from the LEAs, he may well be hoarding more qualified staff than the total vacancies of 380 in the whole field of mathematics (see attached)!