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Prime Minister

Robin Nicholson is unhappy about this (see minute at A) and recommends a further letter (flag B).

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE
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FROM THE SECRETARY OF STATE

David Barclay Esq
Private Secretary
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This amounts to nothing

Content for me to send this on your behalf?

20 February 1985

Dub 2/2

Dear David,

MAINTAINING THE STRENGTH OF THE SCIENCE BASE: SIR R NICHOLSON'S REPORT

In your letter of 8 January recording the Prime Minister's commendation of the proposals made in Sir Robin Nicholson's Report on closer relations between MOD, Research Councils and the universities, you recorded the Prime Minister's request for a progress report by 8 February. I am sorry that this is late; we thought it best to clear it with the parties involved. It comes on behalf of the Defence Secretary as well as of my Secretary of State.

At the request of the two Secretaries of State, the recommendations in paragraph 8 of Sir Robin's report were discussed at a meeting chaired by Sir David Phillips and attended by the Chief Scientific Adviser to the Ministry of Defence, Sir John Kingman (SERC), Dr J A Catterall (SERC), Dr J Bowman (NERC) the Controller of MOD Research Establishments, and DES officials. The following actions were agreed:

- (i) a collaborative research grants scheme (para 8a):

only 15m?

MOD already fund research collaboration with universities. They will be steadily increasing the money they put into universities over the next 3 years to reach a level of £15M p.a. This will be taken up partly with MOD/university research programmes (along the lines of existing arrangements), partly by the collaborative research grant scheme via SERC/NERC, and partly by university/industrial collaborative programmes of relevance to defence with the assistance of SERC/NERC. The involvement of the Research Councils primarily SERC and NERC) in tri- or multi-partite collaborations would be a welcome extension, not least in helping to get better value for the total money spent. It should include, where appropriate, Councils' own institutes (provided an equitable costing basis for overheads were agreed by the Treasury). Proposals

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would need double vetting - by a Council, for scientific merit and interest, and by MOD for relevance. Sir John Kingman would discuss the proposed development with other Heads of Research Councils, and SERC would then resume discussion with MOD to work out a scheme and its announcement (in which MOD might lead, with Councils giving it wide publicity). The aim would be to launch the scheme for 1986/7. Other MOD schemes (MOD-universities, MOD-universities-manufacturing industry) would continue in parallel although the balance between schemes might change.

- (ii) Joint design and use of major and specialised facilities (para 8b)

Sir Robin's examples were agreed to be a promising start. The next step would be for MOD (Mr Fielding) and Dr Catterall (SERC, but co-ordinating contributions from the other Councils) to exchange fuller lists of major and specialised facilities likely to be of common interest.

- (iii) Current areas of research of mutual interest (para 8c)

Exploration here should include exchanging information about intentions for future capital investment in research equipment. It would be desirable to keep European collaboration in mind. A start would be made with detailed assessment, on a UK basis, of needs for research facilities in two areas:

- Lasers: MOD to lead;
- Oceanographic facilities: NERC to lead.

In each case a seminar of interested parties might be a useful start. NERC will also seek, with MOD agreement, separate talks about collaboration with the Met. Office.

- (iv) Staff Secondment (para 8d)

MOD would prepare a note on current and recent staff movement (eg MOD visiting Professors) for discussion with SERC and NERC. Both MOD and the Councils would actively encourage more movement (eg by NERC publicising the possibilities, short and longer term, open to its staff for working in MOD establishments in its Journal). Beyond that, enlargement of opportunities for staff exchanges should build on developments on (i)-(iii) above.

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The Secretaries of State have endorsed these proposals and have asked officials to keep them informed of progress.

I am copying this letter to Richard Mottram, Richard Hatfield and Sir Robin Nicholson.

Yours,

Elizabeth

MISS C E HODKINSON
Private Secretary

20 FEB 1985

