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Secretary of State for Trade and Industry

20 February 1985

Sir Keith Joseph MP  
Secretary of State for Education  
and Science  
Elizabeth House  
York Road  
LONDON  
SE1 7PH

D Keith,

THE SWITCH TO SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

We need to consider how the funds which we have agreed should be made available for the Switch should be allocated.

2 We have, I suggest, three objectives. The first is to obtain the maximum value for money; by securing the maximum number of new higher education places of the right quality.

3 The second objective is to introduce an effective change in the way the higher education system responds to changing industrial and commercial needs.

4 The third is to secure the active participation of industry. The private sector's contribution is central. We need their advice on which proposals are most likely to produce graduates with relevant skills. Indeed, industry will see this as a pre-condition for their support in cash or in kind to supplement the money being put up by Government.

5 Much of the machinery is already in place. The UGC has asked for, and has received, proposals from the universities for expanding their undergraduate intake in information technology and associated fields, and arrangements have been made for these proposals to be sifted, the obvious non-starters eliminated, and the remainder analysed by discipline and ranked in a rough order of merit. Following the report of John Butcher's Skill



Shortages Committee, industry is in the process of setting up an Information Technology Skills Agency with the twin purposes of analysing demand for IT skills and of co-ordinating industry's contribution to the "partnership for change" which John Butcher's Committee recommended. We have also received innovative proposals from Salford, Cranfield and the Open University which have been worked up with industry. And I believe that we should not shut the Polytechnics out of the Switch, who so clearly have a cost-effective and industrially-relevant track record which should be fostered and continued. We clearly need a machinery for drawing all the threads together, and we need also to move very quickly if proposals are to be approved and funded in time to influence the intake for the 1985/6 academic year.

6 I suggest that the best way forward would be to establish a small group which your Department would chair to consider the proposals as they emerge from the UGC's sift alongside other proposals and decide which should be supported in terms of excellence and industrial relevance. The group would include representatives of the Departments that have contributed to the Switch, plus the UGC (including, I would hope, at least one industrial member) the NAB and the ITSA. The involvement of industrialists at this stage would considerably assist the ITSA in its subsequent task of rallying private sector support for the selected courses and making the new partnership a reality. It would be helpful to the "new partnership" if these points could be borne in mind when defining the machinery to implement the decisions made on 6 February.

7 I am sending copies of this letter to the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Secretaries of State for Defence, Employment, Scotland and Wales, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Sir Robert Armstrong and Sir Robin Nicholson.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Norman Tebbit', written over a horizontal line.

NORMAN TEBBIT

21 FEB 1985

U.S. AIR FORCE  
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