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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

25 February, 1985

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Dear Elizabeth,

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

Thank you for your letter of 20 February, reporting progress with Sir Robin Nicholson's proposals on behalf of your Secretary of State and the Secretary of State for Defence.

The Prime Minister is concerned that Departments are not implementing Sir Robin Nicholson's recommendations as vigorously as she thinks is necessary.

Particularly, on the joint design and use of major and specialised facilities, there needs to be more than just an exchange of information, and there is no mention of establishing a more equitable way of meeting the costs of existing facilities or of ways to ensure that they are used cost-effectively. A means must be established to ensure that research activity in fields of common interest is not duplicated and that results are shared wherever possible: there are many areas of work apart from lasers and oceanography where the Ministry of Defence and others must work together more effectively.

The actions to encourage movement of staff, (paragraph (iv) of your minute) do not go very far towards meeting the recommendation that two separate schemes be set up to encourage movement of staff from the Ministry of Defence to the Research Council and University system and vice versa. The Prime Minister does not believe that sufficient exchange of personnel will take place as a result of an increase in collaborative research and asks that more, imaginative, action be taken than is currently proposed.

The Prime Minister welcomes the fact that Research Councils and the Ministry of Defence will work out a new collaborative grant scheme to support defence-related research in universities and Research Council laboratories. However, she expects the response to necessitate expenditure

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of more than the proposed £15 million by the Ministry of Defence on university research once the scheme is launched. The Prime Minister also wonders whether publicity for staff exchange schemes could be disseminated when the collaborative grants scheme is announced.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Richard Mottram (Ministry of Defence) and to Richard Hatfield and Sir Robin Nicholson (Cabinet Office).

V. J. [unclear]
David

(D. Barclay)

Miss C E Hodkinson,
Department of Education and Science