



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

3 October 1985

Dear Rob,

I attach a copy of a record of the Seminar held at Downing Street by the Prime Minister on 2 October together with, for the record, a guest list. I have not attempted to present the discussion as a unified exchange, since it did not take that form. Instead, I have sought to give a fairly full account of the main points made by those who introduced each item together with other points made during the discussion with some attribution. I hope this proves useful for your purposes.

I am sending a copy of this letter and the record to John Mogg (Department of Trade and Industry) and Leigh Lewis (Department of Employment) whose Secretaries of State also attended the discussion.

Yours ever
Tim

(Tim Flesher)

Rob Smith, Esq.,
Department of Education and Science.

Sam

RECORD OF THE SEMINAR TO DISCUSS EDUCATION HELD AT
DOWNING STREET AT 1700 HOURS ON 2 OCTOBER 1985

HIGHER EDUCATION

Professor Minogue, opening the discussion, said that there was more sympathy for the Government's general approach to higher education than was sometimes imagined. In particular, there was sympathy both for the desire to cut back the burden of taxation and to emancipate the higher education sector as well as encouraging closer links between higher education and industry. There was however a paradox that a Government which was committed to autonomy had become more dirigiste. For example, new blood posts and student numbers had become subject to excessive central direction. This position was complicated by the split in responsibilities between the Department of Education and Science and the University Grants Committee: universities were often in the position of having to second guess two sets of reactions. Another problem was the national system of salary determination which had kept university salaries too low to keep anyone except the mediocre and the dedicated. Other points made by Professor Minogue included: the quest for relevance had, in his view, gone too far; the tenure system was a source of fatal immobility; and that planning in universities had been made virtually impossible by major changes in tax provisions such as the imposition of VAT on building works and increased National Insurance contributions at the upper end of the earnings scale. He proposed as a means of freeing universities from the unnecessary constraints imposed by Central Government that they be empowered to charge students economic fees with a system of scholarships for home students.

Privatisation

Lord Beloff argued strongly that there should be an experiment in the privatisation of two or three universities.

The annual grant to those universities should be compounded as a capital sum and then the universities should be left to sink or swim. Dr. Muffett, drawing on his American experience, broadly supported Lord Beloff's proposal adding that it would prompt greater competition between universities. Professor Pollard supported both privatisation and the charge of economic fees in an attempt to make education more demand-led. He hoped that the UGC would eventually disappear. Professor Crawford was less sanguine about the prospects for privatisation. American universities received only about one-third of their income from their endowment. A further half came from gifts from alumni: such contributions amounted to about £6 billion in America compared with only £23 million for British universities. If privatisation were to be successfully accomplished there would need to be a radical change in British culture. There would moreover need to be a substantial increase in fees. In addition because universities were labour intensive their costs were rising more rapidly than general inflation, and this gap would always need to be bridged.

Binary system

There was some discussion of the desirability of maintaining the binary system. Dr. Rickett said that polytechnics were at a disadvantage in having to respond to the needs and policies of the local education authorities although Dr. Marks commented that in financial terms the universities had been subject to more pressure than polytechnics. Councillor Venn agreed with Professor Minogue that the boundaries of the binary system had become confused and messy but there remained sufficient difference in their approach to justify the distinction. There could however be more cross-fertilisation: universities for example might benefit from the kind of CNAAs scrutiny to which polytechnics were subjected.

"Relevance"

There were differing views on the extent to which universities encouraged the teaching of subject relevant to wealth creation. Mr. Silk argued that universities were essentially uninterested in subjects such as design and always encouraged potential students to study academic subjects at A level. Professor Dilks however argued that such attitudes were not universal throughout universities. Leeds, for example, insisted that their careers officers had industrial experience. What was needed was close liaison between schools and universities to give practical guidance to students seeking places at university. Mr. Esp endorsed this view.

Student unions

Lady Cox was concerned at the extent to which student unions were widening their activities beyond the provision on facilities of students, engaging especially in political censorship of views with which they disagreed. The Government should seriously consider making membership of student unions voluntary.

University size

Lord Quinton, commenting on American and French experience suggested that a number of British universities were not large enough to be efficient in economic terms. Professor Crawford disagreed. A number of successful American universities were no bigger than small British colleges. What was needed was tighter management including an end to automatic progression up salary scales and an end to tenure in its present form.

SCHOOLS

Opening the discussion Mr. McIntosh said that he had been dismayed that more progress had not been made under the present Government to raise standards, resist centralisation

and prevent politicisation. Things had in fact got worse. Parents were now entirely disenchanted with secondary education in London: the appeal system could not work if all the possible choices were equally bad. The politicisation of education by the ILEA had continued with the imposition on schools of requirements such as racism and sexism programmes. Schools were being bombarded with political material. Moreover the ILEA were by-passing head teachers and undermining their authority. Morale in the teaching profession was extremely low with poor salaries and a bad career structure. Headmasters had too few incentives to run good schools and were prevented from punishing disruptive pupils. Mr. McIntosh made a number of suggestions. He proposed: that the Government should raise the political profile of education as an issue; consider extending the free market in secondary education, giving schools more autonomy and parents more choice as well as applying the principles of the voluntary aided scheme; that the Government should introduce legislation to limit political spending by local education authorities and to limit their control over individual schools; that the Government should review the role of inspectors and advisers who were being used by the ILEA to impose their political directives; and that increased powers should be available to headmasters to impose discipline.

Political indoctrination

Mr. McIntosh's points on indoctrination were supported by a number of speakers. Dr. O'Keefe believed that a very large number of teachers were now teaching standard left-wing dogma. Sir John Butterfield referred to the experience of French schools where indoctrination had been rife. He considered that something would need to be done in this country. Professor Pollard thought that political bias could partly be offset by a renewed concentration on religious instruction, which was the only subject which the 1944 Education Act made compulsory. Mr. McGowan argued that political bias was another reason for the introduction of assessment. Teachers were able to get away with indoctrination because the

classroom was too private. Assessment was a means of opening it up.

Autonomy

There were differing views on Mr. McIntosh's call for greater freedom for individual schools from LEA control. Mr. Norcross agreed with Mr. McIntosh that interference could be excessive especially where the education authority wished to impose its own political imperatives, for example, on the recruitment of staff. A number of speakers on the other hand felt that the situation described by Mr. McIntosh do not apply elsewhere. Mr. Sams, Mrs. Peart, Dr. Muffett and Mr. Fone all recorded good relations between local education authorities and schools. Mr. McCloy however said there should be more autonomy for individual schools while retaining a strategic authority in charge of education. Mr. Naismith said that there was a need for an element of honest control: without it the curriculum in individual schools was a lottery, with no requirement for teachers to tell parents what they were teaching. This did not mean that there was no scope for enabling individual schools much greater control over their use resources and scope for parental contributions. Mrs. Peart counselled against imposing too many conditions on efficient, low spending and successful authorities such as Sutton in order to inhibit bad authorities such as the ILEA.

Assessment

There was general agreement that the Government should press ahead with its proposals to introduce teacher assessment. Mr. Everest expressed particular concern that the system of assessment should retain the idea of efficiency barriers in pay scales. The problem was not so much teachers who were bad at their jobs; it was those who were just not very good. An efficiency barrier would be an effective management tool for headmasters.

Pay and morale

There was also general agreement that an early end to the present dispute was highly desirable and that morale in the teaching profession was low. The large majority of teachers were very good and dedicated. Sister Bell recorded that this was equally so amongst student teachers. Nevertheless the Government should stick to its plans to improve teachers' pay and career structures. Dr. Muffett stressed the need for separate arrangements to be negotiated for headmasters and other teachers.

Parent governors

Mrs. Peart recorded that the first elections of parents to governing bodies had suggested that they would be politically active. She warned against excessive optimism about the extent of real parental control the scheme would bring.

Assisted Places Scheme

Different views were expressed on the desirability of extending the Assisted Places Scheme. Mr. Naismith thought that both the Assisted Places Scheme and a return to direct grant schools merely scratched the surface. Mr. Smith was however unreservedly in favour of both.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Introducing the discussion Professor Ashworth said that he welcomed the extension of YTS to two years although he hoped that too much stress would not be placed on time served at the expense of competence. The two year scheme also stressed the need for comprehensive and compatible vocational qualifications. There was also a strong case for the introduction of modules within the two year YTS. For other age groups Professor Ashworth hoped that there would be greater possibilities for regional coordination with

pump-priming grants rather than direction from the DES. Recent cooperation between the University of Salford and other institutions in the region had demonstrated that the scope for entrepreneurship by higher education. He felt however that the kind of courses which were being offered would be more attractive if their cost could be made tax deductible. More generally Professor Ashworth felt that criticism of universities had been slightly misdirected: it was not that they were anti private enterprise, it was that as bureaucracies, they were best fitted to train students for other bureaucracies, whether private or public sector, rather than to start their own businesses. A new graduate enterprise programme was needed. He also felt that given Britain's poor record of funding vocational training, the Government would have to impose a requirement on industry, through a pay roll tax for example. The administration of a wider vocational training scheme should be through the CBI or Chambers of Commerce.

Vocational qualifications

There was general support for Professor Ashworth's argument for compatible vocational qualifications, a point particularly stressed by Mrs. Jones.

Links with industry

There was general support for the development of links between schools and industry. Mr. Fulford suggested experimental schools covering the age group between 16 and 19, with an elite entry, not tied to the existing academic year and keeping close links with industry.

TVEI

Mr. Fone, with general support, said that the TVEI had proved an enormous success in his school. He hoped that it could now be extended. More generally however Mr. Bambrough argued that the Government should not make the mistake of

treating education and training as identical. The pursuit of relevance could be as undesirable for vocational as opposed to political reasons. Training was supplementary to education, not identical with it.

CONCLUSION

The Prime Minister thanked all those present for their contributions to the discussion and said that the Government would consider all the points which had been made. On schools she remarked that the discussion had emphasised the extreme difficulty of legislating for local education authorities and schools with widely differing approaches and experiences.

TIM FLESHER

3 October 1985

LIST OF INVITEES TO EDUCATION SEMINAR

Professor John Ashworth	University of Salford
Mr. J.R. Bambrough	Sr. John's College, Cambridge
Mrs V.R. Barrington	Northolt Combined School
Mr. C. Bayne-Jardyne	Henbury Mixed School
Sister Dorothy Bell	Digby Stuart College
Lord Beloff	House of Lords
Professor Sir John Butterfield	University of Cambridge
Mrs Judy Chaplin	Conservative Central Office
Baroness Cox	Centre for Policy Studies
Professor F.W. Crawford	University of Aston in Birmingham
Professor David Dilks	University of Leeds
Mr. Derek Esp	Director of Education, Lincolnshire
Mr. C.J. Everest	Drayton Manor High School
Mr. D. Fone	Northfield Upper School
Mr. C.P.J. Fulford	Blackpool Collegiate School
Mr. A.E.W. Green	Judgemeadow School & Community Coll.
Mr. R. Honeyford	Drummond Middle School
Mrs Anne Jones	Cranford Community School
Mr. John McIntosh	The London Oratory School
Dr. John Marks	Polytechnic of North London
Mr. R.J. McCloy	Director of Education, Kingston-upon-Thames
Mr. Bruce McGowan	The Haberdashers' Aske's School
Professor K.R. Minogue	London School of Economics and Political Science
Dr. D.J.M. Muffett	Chairman of Education Cttee, Hereford & Worcester
Mr. D. Naismith	Director of Education, Croydon
Mr. L.J. Norcross	Highbury Grove School
Dr. Dennis O'Keefe	Polytechnic of North London
Councillor Mrs Peart	Chairman, Education Committee, Sutton
Professor Arthur Pollard	University of Buckingham & Chairman of Education Committee, Humberside
Lord Quinton	Trinity College, Oxford
Dr Raymond Rickett	Middlesex Polytechnic

Councillor Brian Sams
Mr. Dennis Silk
Mr. D.A.G. Smith
Councillor Maurice Venn

Chairman, Education Committee, Bexley
Radley College
Bradford Grammar School
London & South East Region Advisory
Council for Further Education

Mr. Archie Hamilton, MP
Mr. Harry Greenway, MP
Mr. Alan Haselhurst, MP

Ministers

Secretary of State for Trade and Industry
Secretary of State for Education and Science
Secretary of State for Employment
Minister of State, Department of Education & Science,
Mr. Chris Patten, MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, DES
The Hon. Peter Brooke, MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, DES
Mr. Robert Dunn, MP

Officials

Mr. Stuart Sexton, Department of Education and Science
Mr. Oliver Letwin, Prime Minister's Office