



Prime Minister

Lord Whitelaws  
progress report

PRIME MINISTER

R & D PRIORITIES ACROSS GOVERNMENT

In your minute of 13 September you asked me to arrange for a Ministerial Group to review Government Research and Development Priorities, and to make recommendations by 4 October for changes which could contribute to improving the UK's economic performance.

2. I have held a successful first meeting of the Group, when we discussed the material already prepared in July for E(A), together with further helpful material prepared by the Chief Scientific Adviser, Cabinet Office. I am glad to report that the approach of my colleagues to this task was supportive and constructive, despite the difficulties which changes might face them with. We are keen to produce substantive recommendations which we can be confident will further our objectives, but to do so we shall need a little more time. We agreed that the first step must be for the individual spending Ministers to review their programmes from the standpoint of our exercise, and to produce very quickly papers covering the following ground -

(a) the shape and content of the R & D programmes, including the size of the programme in relation to the relevant element in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the extent of any complementary R & D activity by the Private sector;

(b) the results, their accessibility to other users, and the contribution they make to GDP;

(c) the resources (particularly of scarce skills) used, and the scope for their redeployment elsewhere;

(d) present arrangements for organising and financing the programmes, and the scope for greater private sector involvement in both aspects; and

(e) the relation and relevance of the R & D programmes to actual and potential collaboration in the EC and other international fora.

3. I have asked my colleagues to press ahead urgently with this work, in time for the Cabinet Office Secretariat to prepare further material to focus discussion at our next meeting in the week beginning 14 October. I have very much in mind the relationship between this exercise and the public expenditure round, and I am determined that we should complete a first substantive report quickly thereafter. I expect, however, that we shall then need further meetings both to consider further reports by MISC 110, as you asked in your minute of 13 September, and to develop further our own analysis of the R & D programmes and the steps we might take to improve their contribution to the performance of the economy.

4. I am sending copies of this minute to the Secretaries of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Trade and Industry, Education and Science, Energy, Defence, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Chief Secretary, Treasury, and to Sir Robin Nicholson and Sir Robert Armstrong.

*I will ensure that we take the minimum time necessary. But some patience will be needed if a satisfactory result is to be obtained*

30 September 1985

CONFIDENTIAL

*WSD.*