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ELIZABETH HOUSE
YORK ROAD
LONDON SE1 7PH
01-934 9000

Paul Gray Esq
Private Secretary
10 Downing Street
LONDON SW1A 2AA

31 January 1988

*Dear Paul***NATIONAL CURRICULUM: TASK GROUP ON ASSESSMENT AND TESTING**

Thank you for your letter of 21 ^{at flap} January recording the Prime Minister's points of concern about the Task Group's Report.

My Secretary of State has asked Professor Black and his colleagues to offer him further advice in the light of reactions to their recommendations and to look further at the resource implications of their proposals. He will ensure that the Group takes full account of the Prime Minister's points of concern. To that end I understand that Professor Black has already had some helpful discussion of the main issues with Brian Griffiths.

Within the framework which the Task Group proposes it will be for the subject working groups to develop attainment targets and to advise on how they might best be tested and assessed. The assessment system proposed does not itself determine the balance between pencil and paper tests and other forms of assessment. That will be determined by the specific attainment targets set out by the subject groups. The Task Group will however need to look carefully at the costs and overall complexity of the system which they have proposed.

They have been asked in particular to do further work on the proposals for moderating teachers' assessment, the training of teachers required in order to improve the quality of their assessments, and the amount of teacher time needed to make the system work. In some respects, it seems possible that their proposals may not prove as expensive or as complex as may appear at first sight:

- they will replace the considerable time already spent by teachers in carrying out tests and unmoderated assessment, the results of which are put to no good use. Much of what is proposed is aimed at improving existing practice.

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- the two new bodies - the National Curriculum Council and the Schools Examinations and Assessment Council - will be established in any case by the Education Reform Bill: they will replace and take over the work of the School Curriculum Development Committee and the Secondary Examinations Council. The costs of these bodies are already included in the Department's public expenditure provision for 1988-89 and later years.
- the role envisaged for LEAs in the provision of in-service training and monitoring teacher standards is one that they seek to exercise now: the duty placed on LEAs by the Bill to secure the implementation of the national curriculum will serve to underline it. However, the GCE Boards will also have a major role in the procedures for testing and assessment in order to bring their experience and independence to bear fully on the proposed system.

My Secretary of State is at present considering the timetable for implementing the national curriculum including assessment and testing arrangements. Like the Prime Minister, Mr Baker wishes to make progress quickly. In the context of the further work which the Task Group is undertaking, he has impressed on them his desire to introduce new arrangements as quickly as possible, at least for the core subjects.

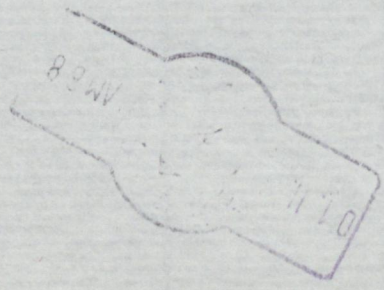
I am copying this letter to the Private Secretaries to other members of E(EP).

Yours,
Tom.

T B JEFFERY
Private Secretary

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EDUCATION: General
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10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

4 February, 1988.

Dear Tom,

**THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM
TASK GROUP ON ASSESSMENT AND TESTING**

Thank you for your letter of 31 January reporting the planned further work by the Task Group. I should be most grateful if you could let me have another progress report which I could show to the Prime Minister once the results of the further work emerge.

I am copying this letter to the Private Secretaries to members of E(EP).

*Yours,
Paul.*

Paul Gray

Tom Jeffery, Esq.,
Department of Education and Science.

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10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

21 January 1988

Dear Tom,

NATIONAL CURRICULUM TASK GROUP ON ASSESSMENT AND TESTING
REPORT

The Prime Minister has now had the opportunity to look in more detail at this Report which your Secretary of State published last week.

Although she agreed to your Secretary of State welcoming the Report as the broad framework into which attainment targets could be fitted, there are a number of aspects which she finds disturbing.

First, the Committee seem to have designed an enormously elaborate and complex system. They suggest it requires setting up two new powerful bodies, the Schools and Examination Council and the National Curriculum Council, and a major new role for LEA's. Is this necessary? And has the sort of approach advocated in the Report in fact been put into practice with the proposed degree of elaboration in any large group of schools? M

Second, the Prime Minister notes that the philosophy underlying the Report is that tests are only a part of assessment, and that the major purpose of assessment is diagnostic and formative rather than summative. As a result the method of assessment places a heavy responsibility on teachers' judgements and general impressions. She is also concerned to note the major role envisaged for the LEA's in the implementation of the system. |

Third, the Report does not pull together the overall costs of the exercise, but the general impression is that these would be very large. In view of the recommendation in section xix the Prime Minister wonders whether, for example, the group has considered the likely costs of training teachers prior to implementation and the regular annual costs of teachers' time once the system was in operation. |

Fourthly, the Prime Minister also notes that, presumably as a result of the complexity of the proposals, the new assessment system could not be introduced in less than five years. Although she recognises the importance of careful |

preparation and introduction of the new arrangements, she is concerned that the process might take so long.

The Prime Minister would be grateful if your Secretary of State could take these concerns into account in his further consideration of the Report and the continuing dialogue with the Task Group.

BF

I am copying this letter to the Private Secretaries to the other members of E(EP).

Yours,
Paul

Paul Gray

Tom Jeffery, Esq.,
Department of Education and Science.