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PRIME MINISTER

MEETING OF E(EP): 25 MAY

I attach the papers for Wednesday's meeting on assessment and testing. This is the first chance there has been for a discussion of this key aspect of the education reforms since the leak of correspondence on this issue earlier in the year.

You will want to assure yourself that following the further work by TGAT and DES, things are proceeding on the right lines.

The papers are:

Flag A - E(EP)(88)11 - Mr. Baker's paper for the meeting

Flag B - Cabinet Office brief, which raises a number of important questions on the paper

Flag C - a note by Brian Griffiths, together with attachments, which raises fundamental doubts about TGAT/DES approach.

Rec 6.

(PAUL GRAY)

20 May 1988

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cc Spb

PRIME MINISTER

20 May 1988

T.G.A.T.

This is the first proper discussion which E(EP) is having on the crucial subject of testing.

The subject is more complex than it at first appears. The problem is that words are used in subtly different ways and that professional educationalists write in code - meaning one thing among themselves but something quite different to other people.

My conclusion is that if the recommendation of the Black Report goes forward as the Secretary of State suggests it will not be what we intended in the Election Manifesto and will give us no guarantee that standards will be raised.

This note is divided into the following sections:

(a) the Manifesto Commitment

"First, we will establish a National Core Curriculum.

It is vital to ensure tht all pupils between the ages of 5 to 16 study a basic range of subjects - including maths, English and science. In each of these basic subjects syllabuses will be published and attainment levels set so tht the progress of pupils can be assessed at around ages 7, 11 and 14, and in preparation for the GCSE at 16. Parents, teachers and

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pupils will then know how well each child is doing. We will consult widely among those concerned in establishing the curriculum."

(b) The National Curriculum 5-16 - A Consultation Document
July 1987

"(b) Attainment Targets

23. Attainment targets will be set for all three core subjects of Maths, English and science. These will establish what children should normally be expected to know, understand and be able to do at around the ages of 7, 11, 14 and 16, and will enable the progress of each child to be measured against established national standards. They will reflect what pupils must achieve to progress in their education and to become thinking and informed people. The range of attainment targets should cater for the full ability range and be sufficiently challenging at all levels to raise expectations, particularly of pupils of middling achievement who frequently are not challenged enough, as well as stretching and stimulating the most able. This is a proven and essential way towards raising standards of achievement. Targets must be sufficiently specific for pupils, teachers, parents and others to have a clear idea of what is expected, and to provide a sound basis for assessment."

(c) Recommendations of the TGAT Report

Please see over.

XXIII. A LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

227. The recommendations we have made in this report are listed below.

PURPOSES AND PRINCIPLES

1. The basis of the national assessment system should be essentially formative, but designed also to indicate where there is need for more detailed diagnostic assessment. At age 16, however, it should incorporate assessment with summative functions. (Paragraph 27)
2. All assessment information about an individual should be treated as confidential and thus confined to those who need to know in order to help that pupil. (Paragraph 28)
I assume that parents need to know?
3. For summative and evaluative purposes results should be aggregated across classes or schools so that no individual performances can be separated out. (Paragraph 29)
4. Assessment of attitudes should not form a prescribed part of the national assessment system. (Paragraph 30)
5. To realise the formative purpose of the national assessment system, pupil results in a subject should be presented as an attainment profile. (Paragraph 33)
6. An individual subject should report a small number (preferably no more than four and never more than six) of profile components reflecting the variety of knowledge, skills and understanding to which the subject gives rise. Wherever possible, one or more components should have more general application across the curriculum: for these a single common specification should be adopted in each of the subjects concerned. (Paragraph 35)

7. The national system should employ tests for which a wide range of modes of presentation, operation and response should be used so that each may be valid in relation to the attainment targets assessed. These particular tests should be called "standard assessment tasks" and they should be so designed that flexibility of form and use is allowed wherever this can be consistent with national comparability of results. (Paragraph 50)
8. Assessment tasks should be reviewed regularly for evidence of bias, particularly in respect of gender and race. (Paragraph 52)
9. Attainment targets should be exemplified as far as possible using specimen tasks. Such tasks can then assist in the communication of these targets. (Paragraph 56)
10. A mixture of standardised assessment instruments including tests, practical tasks and observations should be used in the national assessment system in order to minimise curriculum distortion. (Paragraph 59)
11. Teachers' ratings of pupil performance should be used as a fundamental element of the national assessment system. Just as with the national tests or tasks, teachers' own ratings should be derived from a variety of methods of evoking and assessing pupils' responses. (Paragraph 60)
12. When the subject working groups provide guidance on the aggregation of targets into a small number of profile components, they should have regard to the need for each component to lead to a report in which reasonable confidence is possible. (Paragraph 61)
13. Teachers' ratings should be moderated in such a way as to convey and to inform national standards. (Paragraph 62)
14. The national assessment system should be based on a combination of moderated teachers' ratings and standardised assessment tasks. (Paragraph 63)
15. Group moderation should be an integral part of the national assessment system. It should be used to produce the agreed combination of moderated teachers' ratings and the results of the national tests. (Paragraph 77)

16. An ~~in~~ bank of further assessment instruments should be available for teachers to use in cases where they need additional evidence about particular pupils. (Paragraph 78).

17. The final reports on individual pupils to their parents should be the responsibility of the teacher, supported by standardised assessment tasks and group moderation. (Paragraph 80)

18. Wherever schools use national assessment results in reports for evaluative purposes, they should report the distribution of pupil achievements. (Paragraph 84)

THE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM IN PRACTICE

19. The ages for national assessment should be 7, 11, 14 and 16; with reporting occurring near the end of the school year in which each cohort reaches the age involved. (Paragraph 92)

20. Each of the subject working groups should define a sequence of levels in each of its profile components, related to broad criteria for progression in that component. For a profile component which applies over the full age-range 7 to 16, there should be ten such levels, with corresponding reduction for profile components which will apply over a smaller span of school years. (Paragraph 101)

21. Levels 1 to 3 should be used for national assessments at age 7. (Paragraph 103)

22. The formal relationship between national assessment and GCSE should be limited, in the first instance, to this one reference point: and accordingly the boundary between levels 6 and 7 should correspond to the grade F/G boundary for GCSE. (Paragraph 105)

23. As they develop the upper four levels of their profile components, the subject working groups should adopt present practices for determining GCSE grades at A/B, C/D, mid-E, and F/G as a starting point. (Paragraph 106)

24. GCSE should be retained in its present form until the national assessment system is initiated at earlier ages. (Paragraph 107)
25. Assessment and reporting for the national assessment system should be at the same ages for all pupils, and differentiation should be based on the use of the single sequence of levels set up to cover progression over the full age range. (Paragraph 112)
26. Support items, procedures and training should be provided to help teachers relate their own assessments to the targets and assessment criteria of the national curriculum. (Paragraph 116)
27. A review should be made of the materials available to schools for detailed diagnostic investigation of pupils' learning problems, and that the need for extra help with production or advice about such materials should be considered. (Paragraph 117)
28. A working group should be established, with some shared membership between the subject working groups, to co-ordinate their proposals for assessment, including testing, at the primary stages, in the light of a comprehensive view of the primary curriculum and of the need to limit the assessment burden on teachers. (Paragraph 123)
29. National assessment results for any individual pupil should be confidential, to be discussed between pupil, parents and teachers, and to be otherwise transmitted in confidence. National assessment results for a class as a whole and a school as a whole should be available to the parents of its pupils. (Paragraph 131)
30. The only form in which results of national assessment for, and identifying, a given school should be published should be as part of a broader report by that school of its work as a whole. (Paragraph 132)

31. Any report by a school which includes national assessment results should include a general report for the area, prepared by the local authority, to indicate the nature of socio-economic and other influences which are known to affect schools. This report should give a general indication of the known effects of such influences on performance. (Paragraph 134)
32. National assessment results, for pupils at age 11, aggregated at school level, should be published as part of each primary school's report. There should be no requirement to publish results for pupils at age 7. (Paragraph 137)
33. National assessment results for pupils at ages 14 and 16, aggregated at school level, should be published as part of each school's report. (Paragraph 138)
34. At age 7 the standard assessment tasks for the national assessment should comprise a choice of three prescribed tasks for each child; each task should be designed to give opportunities for systematic assessment of competence in the range of profile components appropriate to age 7.
35. At age 11 the tests for national assessment should include three or four standard tasks which cover a range of profile components, possibly supplemented by more narrowly focussed tests for particular components. (Paragraph 153)
36. Records of Achievement should be used as a vehicle for recording progress and achievement within the national assessment system. (Paragraph 162)
37. Eventually changes will be necessary to the GCSE and other criteria. Changes derived from the development of the national curriculum should have priority in an orderly process of amendment. (Paragraph 163)
38. Like all children, those with special educational needs require attainable targets to encourage their development and promote their self-esteem. Wherever children with special educational needs are capable of undertaking the national tests, they should be encouraged to do so. (Paragraph 169)

39. A special unit within a chosen test development agency should be dedicated to producing test materials and devising testing and assessment procedures sufficiently wide-ranging and sensitive to respond to the needs of these children. (Paragraph 169)

IMPLEMENTATION

40. Each subject working group should decide on a limited number, usually 4, of profile components in relation to which any pupil's performance will be assessed and discussed. A criterion-referenced set of levels should be set out for each component, to span the full range of performance over the ages for which the component is applicable. (Paragraph 178)

41. Subject working groups should specify, in broad terms and for each profile component, the appropriate tests (standardised assessment tasks) which should be prepared, and the advice and help which should be given to teachers about their corresponding internal assessments. (Paragraph 183)

42. Combination of profile component levels to give a subject level should be by a specified procedure. Uniform ways of describing profile components and the level within each should be specified in language that is helpful to pupils, teachers, parents, employers and other users. (Paragraph 186)

43. Subject working groups should give general advice about the degree of novelty of the assessments they envisage, so that the construction of them and the provision of in-service support for teachers can be appraised. (Paragraph 188)

44. The new assessment system should be phased in over a period adequate for the preparation and trial of new assessment methods, for teacher preparation, and for pupils to benefit from extensive experience of the new curriculum. This period needs to be at least 5 years from the promulgation of the relevant attainment targets. (Paragraph 199)

(d) Issues to be raised

1. Age related targets - are they being abandoned?

The Government's educational policy rests on the reintroduction of objective age related standards of attainment i.e. the identification of knowledge and skills which most children should be expected to have, understand and do at key stages in their development.

"Attainment targets ... will establish what children should normally be expected to know, understand and be able to do at around the ages of 7, 11, 14 and 16 and will enable the progress of each child to be measured against established national standards."

("The National Curriculum 5-16" July 1987.)

TGAT's Report on the assessment of attainment does not believe that such age related standards can be identified. "It must be stressed that 7, 11, 14 and 16 are simply ages at which level each pupil has reached is determined and reported - they are reporting ages only". (Italics in original)

(TGAT: First Supplementary Report; reactions to the main report, para 4)

"Many of the early assumptions (which I take to be the National Curriculum 5-16 as quoted above) about age related attainment targets no longer apply in those terms".

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(TGAT: First Supplementary Report; reactions to the main report, para 4)

Instead TGAT proposes that childrens' performance should be established by reference to a system of ten levels between the ages of 5 to 16 identified independently of age and ability purely through usage and statistical treatment. "Once devised the system (of ten levels of attainment) will rest on the levels and criteria alone through which different pupils may progress at different paces."

In other words age related attainment targets will have no place in the incoming system if TGAT's recommendations are accepted.

The purpose of objective age related targets is to provide readily understood standards at which pupils and teachers can aim, improve performance over time and provide reliable criteria for comparison. TGAT's approach rests on a statistical treatment of what children demonstrate they can do without reference to their age or ability or the expectations which can properly be derived from both these considerations at national level.

Under TGAT's system standards are derived from the methods of assessment used when the original intention of stated government policy is that assessment should measure pre-determined standards. "Attainment targets should be grouped to make the assessment and reporting manageable"

(draft Parliamentary Answer).

The cart has been put before the horse and government policy reversed.

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2. What will be given to parents?

It would seem from Black, that each child would be assessed on a number of different aspects of each subject. Assessment of these would then be aggregated into a profile of that particular subject. The parent would then be presented with a single number on the scale 1-10 which showed how the pupil performed. For example at age 11 students should in general achieve levels 4, 5 or 6. The key point is that the parent would be presented with an aggregated assessment of the child's performance.

"On balance just as we saw dangers in specifying too many profile components so we also conclude that the numbers of attainment targets should be kept small and they should not be too specific and detailed."

I enclose a draft document from the London Borough of Croydon which attempts to give parents more detailed information as to how their children are performing. If we take testing seriously it is surely important to be as specific as possible about attainment targets and also to give parents information which is as disaggregated as possible - in this way they learn far more about how their children are doing.

My suspicion is that those people who do not want a proper system of assessment and testing are using the framework which follows our election manifesto but are emptying it of any substantial content.

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Recommendation

It is vital that attainment targets are explicit and that results are presented in a disaggregated form.

3. What should be the proper mix of standardised tests and subjective assessment?
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If we wish to raise national standards of achievement in our schools it is important that the mix between standardised tests and subjective assessment is heavily biased in favour of the former.

It is not at all clear however from the Black Report that this will be so. Indeed there are many suggestions that the bias will be in precisely the opposite direction.

Recommendation

The Secretary of State needs to be pressed to make sure that standardised tests are the most significant element in his overall framework of assessment and testing.

Brian Griffiths

BRIAN GRIFFITHS

LCBG



PRIME MINISTER

NATIONAL CURRICULUM: A NATIONAL SYSTEM OF ASSESSMENT AND TESTING

Neither Wyn Roberts nor I will be able to attend the meeting of E(EP) re-arranged for Wednesday 25 May which will discuss Kenneth Baker's paper, as we will be involved in the Welsh Grand Committee. I am therefore writing to express my support for Kenneth's proposals, which apply in general terms to Wales also.

The first report of the Task Group on Assessment and Testing has been generally welcomed. Its framework has been adopted as a basis for the working group on Welsh in the National Curriculum which is just starting work. Now that the Schools Examination and Assessment Council has been announced it is important for us to clarify our intentions on assessment and testing. The broad principles set out in Kenneth's paper will help in this, providing a system which is both rigorous and cost-effective. SEAC can be asked to get on straight away with the job of advising on the detailed implementation.

In Wales, we expect to introduce Maths, Science and English on the same timescale as in England. Welsh will probably follow a year later. It would be sensible to indicate this in the proposed Parliamentary Answer, with an addition after the second sentence of the final paragraph along the following lines:-

" These subjects will be introduced in Wales on a similar timetable. In addition my Rt. Hon Friend the Secretary of State for Wales expects to introduce Welsh for the early years of both primary and secondary schools in Autumn 1990".

/ I am copying this to other members of E(EP) and to Sir Robin Butler.

E. H. Davies

PW

Approved by the Secretary of State
and signed in his absence



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PRIME MINISTER

NATIONAL CURRICULUM: ASSESSMENT AND TESTING

E(EP)(88)11

DECISIONS

Mr Baker wishes to announce the Government's response to the work of Professor Black's Task Group on Assessment and Testing (TGAT), so that preparations can be made to introduce the National Curriculum, and the associated teacher assessment and national test procedures, from autumn 1989 onwards.

2. You may wish to concentrate discussion on:

i. the broad principles of the Task Group's report as set out in paragraph 6 of Mr Baker's paper, which he proposes to accept. Issues which you may want to raise on these principles include the use of a ten-point scale for reporting assessments (does it allow sufficient differentiation between pupils?); assessment by teachers (should there be more emphasis on national tests?); and publication of aggregate results for individual schools (should they be required to publish them for 7-year-olds?);

ii. the main questions which Mr Baker himself has listed in paragraph 3. Points you may want to raise include whether sufficient attention has been paid to the needs of the most and least able; and what can be done to make the Group's proposed arrangements less complex and expensive to implement;

iii. publication of the report and the draft Parliamentary Answer which Mr Baker proposes to give, set out in Annex C. One particular point relates to the Task Group's third



supplementary report on the moderation system which he describes in his paper as 'over-weighty' but does not actually reject in the Answer.

BACKGROUND

3. In July 1987 Professor Paul Black of King's College, London was commissioned to chair the Task Group and to recommend a broad framework for a national system of assessment and testing, as part of the development of the National Curriculum. Mr Baker welcomed the Group's main report when he published it on 12 January. Subsequently you expressed concern to Mr Baker about the complexity of the Group's recommendations, their potential cost, their reliance on the judgement of teachers as well as on national test results, their involvement of Local Education Authorities (LEAs) and the time it would take to implement their proposals (this correspondence appeared in the press in early March). The Group have now produced 3 supplementary reports, on the public response to their recommendations, on the application of their broad framework to individual subject groups and on the implications for teacher training and for other forms of support they consider necessary to implement their proposals. Mr Baker wishes to publish these supplementary reports, and the Government's response, in time for the Lords Report stage of the Education Reform Bill.

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ISSUES

Differentiation in pupils' performance

4. The Group appears to suggest that a 10-point scale should be used for reporting assessments, and that it should cover all levels of attainment between the ages of 5 and 16. With only 10 points to cover such a wide range of ability there may be little differentiation between pupils' performance. For example, the Group propose that all 7 year olds will be at levels 1, 2 or 3, with the expectation that most will be at level 2. You may wish to ask Mr Baker whether the recommendations will do enough to differentiate between pupils.



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Balance between teachers' assessments and national tests

5. Mr Baker's paper says that the balance between personal assessment by teachers and national tests can be decided at some future date (paragraph 8(b)). There is of course a risk that assessment by teachers will be insufficiently rigorous. You may wish to consider whether guidance on this should be given to the subject working groups now. You may also wish to ask whether Mr Baker is satisfied with the proposed arrangements for moderation of the marking of national tests, and whether scope will exist for teachers to adjust marks in national test results, through the moderation procedures, before they are passed on to parents.

Publication of results on assessments of 7 year olds

6. You may wish to consider whether schools should be obliged to publish aggregate results of assessment at age 7. Publication will be required at ages 11, 14 and 16. The Group recommend that publication of results at 7 should be at a school's discretion, on the grounds that there will be considerable variations in performance at that age caused by factors beyond a school's control, such as home background and the extent of pre-school provision. Home background will of course continue to be significant at the older ages. Arguably, it is desirable that publication of results at 7 should be a requirement, so that the performance of as wide a range of schooling as possible should be open to public and parental scrutiny. Failure of particular schools to give children a proper grounding in basic skills such as reading and writing is something that needs to be spotted early.

Provision for most and least able

7. Last October Mr Baker asked the Group to consider the application of their proposals to those who were most and least able. Their recommendation to exempt from assessment the least able and those with special educational needs, at the discretion of head teachers, has not been controversial. But little consideration appears to have been given to the development of the



most able, so you may wish to ask for further work on this. In particular, TGAT recommend that 7 year olds should not be tested beyond levels 1-3. You may wish to question this: it would be unfortunate if rigidities in assessment impeded the progress of the most able.

Complexity and Costs

8. The third supplementary report by the group makes proposals on the administration of the new system which, as Mr Baker acknowledges, seem very bureaucratic. In particular they suggest setting up a regional tier of administration formed by GCSE groups and LEAs in partnership. Mr Baker's paper says (paragraph 5) that these proposals are 'over-weighty' and the draft announcement describes them as 'complex and costly'. It promises however that the issues they raise will be discussed with the LEAs and others. You will wish to consider whether the announcement should go further and reject these proposals.

9. The main burden of establishing complicated assessment and testing procedures will fall on the teachers who have to use them. There will, however, be additional costs for Government arising from increased demand for in-service teacher training and from the costs of moderation. Mr Baker says that he will keep a careful watch on the resource implications, and that he will be able to accommodate the additional demands from within his existing provision. The Economic Secretary, Treasury is expected to point out that Mr Baker's existing PES provision only extends for the 3 years up to 1990-91, and that the most substantial costs may well arise in years after that. No clear estimates of the additional costs of assessment and testing have been provided; Mr Baker's paper says that it is difficult to distinguish some of these from the costs of establishing the National Curriculum more generally (paragraph 9). Mr Baker will be examining the Group's proposals for the level of support required to operate their system of assessment and testing, to establish how the costs can be reduced. You may wish to ask him to report back to the Sub-Committee on this.



Role of Local Education Authorities

10. Mr Baker's paper does not comment on the Group's proposals on the role of LEAs. The Group resisted pressure to allow LEAs to adjust national test scores before publication to take account of socio-economic deprivation. They have however recommended that LEAs should be required to provide a description of the socio-economic factors which could affect performance for inclusion in any publication by a school of its national test results.

Timetable to implementation

11. Mr Baker sets out his proposed timetable for implementation in the final paragraph of his draft statement (Annex C). Work on the National Curriculum, and use of associated assessment and test procedures, will start in autumn 1989. Thus the first results for 7 year olds, after a 2 year programme of study, will be expected in the summer of 1991, with 14 year olds following a year later. Mr Baker proposes that the first year should be regarded as a trial, so that publication of results would begin in the summer of 1992. You may wish to discuss whether this is a reasonable timetable.

Announcement

12. Mr Baker's draft written answer, containing the Government's response to the Group's proposals, is at Annex C. Depending on the discussion, some amendments may need to be made, and it may be appropriate for Mr Baker to circulate a revised draft.

HANDLING

13. You will wish to ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science to introduce his Note. The regional Secretaries of State may wish to comment. The Economic Secretary, Treasury may wish to mention the expenditure implications. Other Ministers may wish to contribute to the discussion.

RTW.

R T J WILSON
Cabinet Office

20 May 1988