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RB?

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

Ref. A083/1812

MR BUTLER

Mr Hancock has sent me privately a copy of a note prepared in his Department during the Election period for submission to an incoming Conservative Secretary of State. Mr Hancock thought that the Prime Minister --- might like to see it.

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

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23 June 1983

I have told Mr. Hancock about this date. *Robin* *CF*  
 FEBS 1.7. 14.00 on *for*  
 Misc Stephen Wednesday *me*  
 6<sup>th</sup> Ch 3016  
 Can you pl. suggest a time  
 for Mr. Hancock to come to talk  
 to the PM about the attached.  
 FEBS  
 29.6.

ms

This note (by the Permanent Secretary and the three Deputy Secretaries) offers some general comments for a new Secretary of State on the English education system and on science. It deliberately does not discuss at any length the particular policy proposals in the government's election manifesto on which separate and specific briefs have been prepared. Instead, it aims to give an impression of certain key issues and to identify a major tactical problem with which the Secretary of State will have to come to grips at an early stage - namely how to conduct relations with the local education authorities.

The English educational system - good, bad or indifferent?

2. Most people think that education matters; but it is not possible to give a simple answer to the question how far the public outside the education system is satisfied with its performance. In some quarters our education system is sharply criticised and even saddled with most of the blame for the disappointing performance of the British economy since World War II. Rather oddly, the system is far less often given credit for the virtues of English life, such as the quality of our learned professions, our financial institutions, our retail system, our theatre and our music, for our remarkable record of Nobel Prize winners or for the respect for the rights of individuals and minority groups which, despite much published lapses, still impresses foreigners who live here. Some parents strongly criticise our schools, particularly for low standards of work and behaviour; on the other hand many parents seem remarkably satisfied. Employers speak with many voices, partly no doubt because their requirements vary greatly and because some are much more successful than others in recruiting those whom they think they need.

3. We accept that there are grounds for concern about a

number of aspects of our education system. We believe that the scope for improvement is very great: the system would be transformed if what the best institutions do for their pupils and students were to be matched by the rest. The principal points on which we believe the critics are justified are the following:-

- i. the premature and excessive specialisation in the education of our pupils and students and particularly the more able; the failure of many schools to stretch pupils at every point in the ability range and to fulfill the potential of the least able 40% of the school pupils; and the excessively "academic" (or insufficiently practical) bias of much of the school curriculum;
- ii the quality of our teacher training system; and
- iii. our relative failure to produce able and literate technologists and engineers capable of non-specialist as well as specialist careers.

What about  
basic standards  
of literacy and  
numeracy?

PERB  
MHI

4. Our concerns about our system are paralleled by similar concerns of those responsible for the education systems of other industrial countries. We see no valid grounds for believing that standards have in general fallen in this country or that the performance of the English education system, taken as a whole, is seriously defective by comparison with other countries or with other parts of the UK. Much pioneering educational work of great value and potential is done in England and this is a judgment internationally acknowledged.

They should  
have risen  
substantially

#### A national service

5. Most of what happens in the education system is

conditioned by the relationship between central and local government. By comparison with most other local services, the discretion of local authorities in relation to education is heavily circumscribed by statutory duties and important statutory powers vested in the Secretary of State. The education service is in many respects a national service, but its general direction by the Secretary of State relies as much on influence as on the exercise of statutory powers. The result is that much education policy is a continual push-and-pull between the claims of local autonomy on the one hand and the pressure on Ministers to use their national authority to secure improvements on the other. We believe that the new government will be obliged to move further in the direction of central control along the lines already laid down by the 1979-83 administration; but that considerable skill will be needed in the process - see further paragraphs 16-18 below.

Value for money

6. The Department is in many ways seeking to increase the educational return from the vast sums invested in the education system by taxpayers and ratepayers. Important recent developments have been the decision to publish HMI reports on formal inspections; the "Teaching Quality" White Paper; the creation of a National Advisory Body for local authority higher education; and the general guidance given to the UGC about the management of the university sector. More could be achieved if the Government accepted the case for a modest increase in resources in order to secure greater value for money in the system as a whole - for example, by an increase in the complement of certain key DES branches and a significant (but not dramatic) increase in the size of HM Inspectorate.

which  
why-

## Teachers

7. The English education system's most important resource is teachers. We are lucky to have teachers ready to accept responsibility to educate the whole person and to adapt to changing needs without waiting for directives from government. But in a number of respects the training and management of the teaching force leaves much to be desired. The proposals in the White Paper "Teaching Quality" seek to improve the calibre and training of new entrants to school teaching, and to match what teachers are qualified and trained to teach with what they are expected to teach. These proposals make new demands on the local education authorities to manage their teaching forces and they will require substantial changes in attitudes among both the authorities and their teachers. These changes will not be easily or quickly effected and will call for great determination and persistence on the part of Ministers and officials.

8. Linked with these matters is a need to increase the professional competence of teachers in post and to raise morale. Much of this the teachers should do for themselves by self evaluation. But more in-service training will be needed and the expectations which the government rightly have of the teaching profession may be incapable of realisation without some longer term improvement in its relative pay position and a reformed salary structure which will enable local education authorities more adequately to reward professionalism and responsibility. (The Burnham Committee has relevant work in hand.)

### Too many or too few resources?

9. Exactly how important resources are to the performance of the education system will probably always be a matter for debate. An increase in resources is not always a necessary

condition nor often a sufficient condition for a real improvement in quality - but that statement does not take one very far. There are at the moment signs of strain in all sectors of publicly financed education and much of the scope for redeployment has been used up in the last few years. Opportunities available to different sections of the population have tended to become more unequal in recent years. The fall in the school pupil teacher ratio that has occurred is a necessary accommodation to falling rolls.

10. Most of the policies which are designed to improve the curriculum offered to pupils and students imply some increase in unit costs. For example, the aim of making the school curriculum broad, rigorous and apt for each pupil, and with a strong practical element at all levels, implies more and smaller teaching groups, more in-service training, more support for teachers from non-teaching staff and more books and equipment. If such an increase in resources were made available, the government could legitimately ask teachers in return to accept sharper standards of appraisal and wider differentials in pay between the high and low performers.

Who's aim?

This is not realistic

3 The unit? Or what system?

11. Another example of an increasing claim on resources results from greater participation in education both immediately following the end of the compulsory school period at 16 and also in later life. If this development is to be encouraged more resources will sooner or later have to be provided.

Scientific Research and Technology Transfer

12. The recent substantial reductions in the funding of universities, following on a previous period of steady decline, have provoked claims that the country's scientific research capacity has been seriously eroded. The cuts have not in fact seriously affected the "Science Vote", which is the source of funds for the Research Councils; but Science Vote spending is not the whole story. The long-term effects

of what has happened to UGC finance are inevitably hard to assess; the "harder times" have done some good by compelling the universities (and also the Research Councils) to look more rigourously at how they manage their affairs. However, there is some hard evidence that a significant amount of first class research work is not going ahead through lack of funds and that the quality of work in laboratories, even in some cases the best centres of research, is suffering from under-provision?. The Secretary of State may therefore need to consider, at an early stage, whether the planned level of funding of scientific research is adequate. → Ps. what?

13. At the applied end of the spectrum of scientific and technological research lies the vexed issue of technology transfer. It is widely believed that the achievements of pure science in this country are poorly translated into industrial products. Improvements in technology transfer are therefore being sought through a range of endeavours initiated chiefly by higher education institutions and the Science and Engineering Research Council. Ministerial support - from DES as well as DOI- can significantly enhance the efforts of those directly involved in higher education and in industry.

#### Priorities for early action

14. Among the many policy questions on which the new Secretary of State will need to take early decisions, we should like to call attention, in particular, to the following:-

- i. The proposal endorsed by the previous government for a new Act to give the Secretary of State power to make grants to local authorities in order to further particular national objectives (Education Support Grants).

- ii. Improvements in our system of examinations and qualifications and its effect upon the curriculum.
- iii. Securing a shift in the curriculum towards technical and vocational education.
- iv. Improvements in teacher training for primary schools, secondary schools, special schools and further education.
- v. The future development of non-advanced further education (NAFE) both in the provision which it is increasingly having to make for the less able post-16 year olds and in the developments needed to remedy shortages in vocational skills and knowledge.
- vi. Future provision for the many types of adult and continuing education.
- vii. Future provision for higher education on both sides of the so called "binary line" [ie that between the universities on the one hand and the public sector institutions on the other].

What movement  
can they make  
without

competent teachers in 3 years? If not, why not?

### Leadership

15. Over time, progress in achieving a government's educational objectives is much influenced by the nature and quality of the leadership which Ministers give to the education system. The Secretary of State is, by the nature of his office, at the apex of the system in England and his leadership sets the tone and to some extent the pace. He has at his disposal important statutory powers, and the influence of his office. HM Inspectorate also



constitute an important instrument for improvement and change. The Secretary State will need to give early and explicit attention to the way he intends to discharge his leadership role.

*So write P.U.S.!*

Relations with local authorities - an urgent tactical problem

16. Many of the issues mentioned briefly in this note pose important problems for the government's relations with the local authorities. They are displaying signs of anxiety about what they see as a series of indications of policy changes that are likely to erode their relative power, for example:

- i. the proposed limits on rate increases;
- ii. the abolition of the Metropolitan Councils and the GLC;
- iii. rumours of proposals for "voucher" schemes;
- iv. Education Supports Grants (which would undeniably restrict local freedom of choice);
- v. greater central guidance - for example, over the curriculum.

*no time to do with education*

17. A great deal of what the government wishes to achieve depends on the co-operation of the local authorities. For example, the Secretary of State will shortly receive a submission about making local authority advisory services more effective. This is important for raising standards in schools and colleges; but it is not realistic to suppose that real progress will be made on matters of that sort without the active cooperation of the authorities.

18. Policy towards the authorities must therefore be considered as a whole. Piecemeal decisions could damage the chances of overall success.