

PRIME MINISTER

MISC 128: 5 MAY

Tomorrow's meeting starts after Cabinet; given the light Cabinet agenda, this should give more than enough time.

The Papers

There are three formal MISC 128 papers you have not seen before, although the main one, MISC 128(88)7 - Lord Young's paper - you saw in draft over the weekend. Fortunately none of the three papers is long; they are included in the 1 and 2 dividers.

I have also included a number of earlier papers in the background papers divider. These include the papers considered at the last MISC 128 meeting and the letters from Lord Buxton and Central Television that you saw over the weekend. But there is no need for you to refer back to any of the papers in this divider.

On top of the dividers are:

- a note by the Lord President on the link between a 1988/89 Broadcasting Bill and the overall legislative programme for that year;
- the Cabinet Office brief for the meeting;
- two notes by Brian Griffiths: the first commenting on the papers before the meeting, and the second on the "hidden agenda" about departmental responsibility for broadcasting policy.

Handling the Meeting

I suggest you use the Cabinet Office brief to steer the discussion. The suggestion in it is that you merge all three papers into a single agenda item; I am sure this is sensible given the interactions between the papers.

The key issues to resolve are:

- should further work be done - perhaps by the official group MISC 129 - on Lord Young's latest proposals for use of the spectrum (paper 7)?

Douglas Hurd (paper 8) is content for further work, but both he and Brian Griffiths draw attention to the political sensitivity of viewers having to pay out £200 to continue to be able to receive BBC 2 and Channel 4;

- if further work is to be done on the Lord Young approach, should the plan for two separate Broadcasting Bills in the 1988/89 and 1989/90 sessions be scrapped in favour of a single jumbo Bill in 1989/90?

This links in with the Lord President's note on top of the folder. Like the Cabinet Office, I see considerable force in the argument for dropping plans for a Bill in 1988/89. Aside from the implications for the overall legislative programme, this would substantially relax the immediate timetable constraints on MISC 128's work. It is surely right to get the right decisions on broadcasting rather than be hemmed in by the clock.

*RG*

Paul Gray  
4 May 1988