



Advisory Board for the Research Councils

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Prime Minister:

*We are obtaining
a draft reply.*

Senate House,
Tyndall Avenue,
Bristol BS8 1TH.

From the Chairman,
Sir Alec Merrison, DL, FRS.

Your reference

Our reference

Date 18th August, 1982 *24/8*

JF

Confidential

24/8

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Dear Prime Minister,

Thank you for your letter of 9th August confirming the more important points of the conversation we had about the British Antarctic Survey in the context of the Science Vote.

I regret that neither Hermann Bondi nor I could give the British Antarctic Survey a greater scientific priority within the NERC budget nor the Science Budget as a whole. But that is indeed our judgement and it is certainly supported by the Advisory Board for the Research Councils. Naturally, we recognise the considerable strategic importance that the Survey has always had, an importance which has been greatly enhanced by the recent diplomatic and military events in the Falklands.

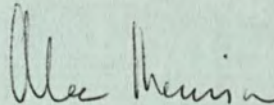
But I should like to repeat what we said to you at our meeting on 12th July about the support of science in general. Your Government, very wisely, has given a considerable protection to science and its applications as a simple investment in the future well-being of the country. Science in the U.K. commands world-wide respect and in the last ten years in particular we have seen an increasing awareness by the Research Councils and universities of the way that science and its applications contribute to the economy of the country and contribute sometimes not only in unexpected ways but unexpectedly quickly. The development of monoclonal antibodies by the MRC and university groups is merely one of a long list of examples of basic science which carry profound economic consequences.

But there is no doubt at all that, particularly with the running down of UGC funding, the Science Budget is now under very great pressure. Again I need not detail for you the new and very considerable opportunities which present themselves continuously for doing science which is both good and will certainly have immediate economic impact. This year, for example, the ABRC is recommending the allocation of large sums for an ambitious programme in the Science and Engineering Research Council on information technology. On our working assumption that the level of the Science Budget will be broadly comparable with last year this would cause considerable difficulties elsewhere in the Research Councils; but we feel that it is vital to support such work at the present time.

It would in my view be extremely damaging to earmark large sums for the BAS at the expense of other and better science. The rate at which we can adjust and still find considerable sums for new developments is of course limited and I know that it would not be your intention to slow down in any way this "dynamic" approach to our work. When it comes to deciding the size of the Science Budget I would hope that you and your colleagues keep these considerations in mind. Earmarking £5m. for BAS within a Science Budget plus at least £5m. is one thing; doing the same within a Science Budget which has not been increased will be damaging.

I apologise for underlining the obvious but since your letter has a rather wider audience than our conversation I would not want these points to go by default. I am copying this letter to recipients of yours.

Yours sincerely,



The Right Hon. Mrs. Margaret Thatcher, M.P.,
Prime Minister,
10 Downing Street,
London S.W.1.