



Prime Minister

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Gaut Mack

This arose from your conversation

with Sir R Armstrong in February about
the excessive copying of my letter about
the Loan Guarantee Scheme - "the first 50 Failures"

Ref. A083/1061

MR SCHOLAR

Your minute of 25 February sought proposals for taking forward the possibility of a scrutiny about the inefficiency of excessive copying.

Await action

2. Several scrutinies have already touched on problems of excessive paper. For example:

promised in para 4?

a. The Treasury had a scrutiny of typing and secretarial services in 1981 (which is where the estimate of 10½ million copies comes from). One recommendation was for periodic anti-paper campaigns (as practised in Marks & Spencer). Treasury Ministers rejected this idea in favour of an office notice about continuing effort to reduce paper (issued in January 1982 - copy attached).

MCS 13/4

b. An MOD scrutiny, also in 1981, tackled the large problem of how to target information on those who should act upon it. This recommended a move from paper to microform and steps to make authors focus on who are their intended audience. MOD Ministers have expressed support for the recommendations, but have not been able to find the once-for-all cost of between £3 million and £5 million to make the change.

c. The Inland Revenue looked at the contents of PAYE files in 1981 when the examining officer concluded that for the 20 million or so taxpayers whose affairs are straightforward the amount of paper held could be largely eliminated. Tests of the scheme are under way and first indications are promising.

d. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food had an excellent scrutiny in 1982 about the generation and handling of paper. It estimated that only a third of a typical in-tray is for action, and identified many problems of excessive paper (including



prolific photocopying by private offices). The report made proposals to put things right, largely by example from the top (ie Ministerial offices). It also put forward adoption of paper control exercises every two to three years. The action document is due shortly, and the outcome will be reported to the Prime Minister.

3. Partly as a result of these findings, we have included in the 1983 programme of efficiency work a review of support services for administration, which will focus on how efficiently and effectively information is handled in Government. Six Departments are looking at these aspects of a sample of their operations:

Home Office - criminal policy

Inland Revenue - capital taxes

Customs & Excise - subject undecided but focussing on paper

Management and Personnel Office - the Civil Service Commission

Employment - subject undecided

Environment - information flows between HQ and the regional offices

4. The review is being co-ordinated by Mr I B Beesley in the Rayner Unit and uses the scrutiny method. After the completion of departmental reports a central report on the results and any wider lessons will be made to the Lord Privy Seal and the Prime Minister. I am reasonably confident that we can expect substantial improvements to flow as a result (including use of new technology). This scrutiny will cover the problem the Prime Minister has identified in excessive copying.

5. A review specifically of Departments' use of reprographics is due later in the year. This will also include photocopying, and will approach the problem from a different angle. As a result management guidelines will be promulgated to Departments; these will stimulate improvement by setting standards.

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

13 April 1983

GOVT. MACB
Raynes
PT 14



3 APR 1983



COMPTROLLER

H M TREASURY
OFFICE NOTICE

ON (82)6
8 January 1982

REDUCING PAPER IN THE OFFICE

Mr D R Norgrove's recent Rayner review of the Treasury's secretarial and typing services drew attention to the enormous amount of paper which the Treasury uses. 10¹/₂ million photocopies are taken each year, that is about 20,000 for each member of the Treasury Divisions.

Most of this paper is necessary. The precision imposed by writing things down is necessary in Treasury work and there is not time to communicate orally everything which needs to be communicated. But large intrays are deadening and reading can reduce the time available for getting things done.

Producing typewritten paper is expensive. The cost of each sheet of paper is something like:-

£5-£10 of a desk officer's time to write or dictate it;

£3 of a secretary's time to type and check it;

£1 of a secretary's and clerk's time to photocopy; distribute and file it.

and perhaps

£2 for the time taken by recipients to read, consider and dispose of each copy.

So we need to be vigilant for ways of reducing unnecessary paper.

ACTION

All members of the Office who send out papers should ask themselves -

Is this piece of paper really necessary?

Does it have to be typewritten?

Do all the people marked to receive copies really need them?

If it is a circular, is it still serving a useful purpose?

Correspondingly recipients are asked to ask themselves whether they really need each document they receive. When they receive a copy of a document they do not need, they should not take the easy course of putting it in the waste paper basket or marking it to someone else or to a file, but are asked to return it to the originator asking that they be taken off the distribution list for future papers in the series. Before deciding to remain on the circulation list on the chance that a future document may contain something relevant, they should weigh the cost of that decision to the Office and themselves.

Secretaries of Committees are being asked by the Head of Committee Section to review the distribution lists of their Committees, if they have not recently done so.

Private Secretaries to Ministers are being asked to review their policy over the distribution of papers from Private Office to see if it can be reduced.

Any questions arising from this Notice should be addressed to Mr A Batchelor
(233 5359)

PFC