

Parliament

PRIME MINISTER

House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology: Enquiry into Science and Government

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Ian Bancroft and Robert Armstrong are coming in tomorrow afternoon to talk about the evidence which they and others are to give to the Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology, on the provision and co-ordination of scientific advice to Government.

You might like to look back at your letter to Ian Lloyd of 20 August 1979, a copy of which is attached. You will remember that you said in it that you would yourself play a co-ordinating role on issues where it would not be sensible to ask any other Minister to take the lead. In practice, I cannot recall a single scientific issue where you have found it necessary to take such a co-ordinating role yourself. I also attach some Answers you gave in the House in 1979, to Tam Dalyell and Ian Lloyd. As far as I know, these are your only public pronouncements on this subject.

MS

16 February 1981

*Noted in  
eff*

cc DES CSD (MG) Division  
CO Mr. Noel Thompson  
CDL (Cabinet Office)  
LPO  
D/EN  
D/IND

20 August 1979

Dear Ian,

Thank you for your letter and enclosures of 24 July about the administration of science policy.

You will remember that your point was extensively debated here in the early 1970s. In fact there was then a more centralised science budget than there is now. I was responsible for a budget of £200 million (about 1971) which was allocated among the four research councils. But the centralised system was not considered satisfactory.

Our system was given its present shape by the 1972 White Paper "Framework for Government Research and Development" (Cmnd. 5046). The main features are that the Department of Education and Science is responsible for the Research Councils and for funding fundamental research through the Science Budget, the Department of Industry has responsibility for the support of industrial technology, and each major Department is responsible for the determination, financing and exploitation of its own programmes of applied research and development in furtherance of its policy objectives on the "customer-contractor" principle. These arrangements were reviewed by the last Government. The result of the review was published in March this year as a White Paper (Cmnd. 7499).

Our system recognised that Government-sponsored applied science and technology is not an end in itself, but a means of helping to achieve the Government's policies and objectives. It follows that policy on applied science and technology in

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- 2 -

any sector should be associated with policy on investment, human resources, market needs and other factors, and should therefore be the concern of the Minister responsible for overall policy in that sector. But there is one sector - fundamental research - where there is no close link between research and policy. For that it makes sense to entrust responsibility to the Minister who is responsible for those institutions of higher education where much of this type of research is done. Incidentally - our own system was very much admired by all our European colleagues. I met the European Commissioners for Science but can only say they added nothing to what was already being done by other means of collaboration.

If we went over to a centralised system with a separate Minister for Science with his own department we would have to accept the disadvantage of divorcing those responsible for applied R & D from those concerned with formulating and implementing the policies to which their R & D related. In fundamental science we would have an unwelcome division between responsibility for higher education and for the scientific community supported by the Research Councils.

At present we have machinery to ensure that there is no harmful overlap between Departmental R & D programmes and policies, that no gaps arise, that policy questions with a major scientific or technological content are considered interdepartmentally, where this is necessary and that the quality and direction of R & D in any area, or over all areas, can be assessed. Since 1976 a committee of permanent secretaries and chief scientists has provided interdepartmental co-ordination of science and technology matters at high official level; and the Central Policy Review Staff play an active part in the overview aspect. In addition to numerous informal contacts, formal committees for interdepartmental co-operation are established when appropriate, e.g., the Committee of Chief Scientists on Energy Research and Development and the

/Interdepartmental.

Interdepartmental Co-ordinating Committee for Scientific and Technical Information. The membership of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils includes Departmental Chief Scientists, the Heads of the Research Councils and independent members. It is therefore well composed to consider and advise on broad scientific issues within its terms of reference, as well as advising the Secretary of State for Education and Science on the distribution of the Science Budget among the Research Councils.

I note your view that we need for Britain a report on the organisation of our science and the resources that go into it on the lines of what the French are doing. I should like to consider in due course whether such a report would be valuable, seeing that the question of organisation was recently covered by Cmnd. 7499. The Research Councils and several Departments publish annual reports on their R & D, and it may take some time to digest the implications of the reduction in public expenditure to which we are committed. But I am quite sure that we do not need a Minister for Science to prepare such a report: this would be feasible under our present system.

I am not saying that our present system should never be adapted. On the contrary, I intend to keep an eye on how it is and modify it as may be required. I recognise, for example, that under the present arrangements issues may arise which straddle the responsibility of several Ministers to such an extent that it would not be sensible to ask one of them to take the lead. In such a case I would myself play a co-ordinating role; I would also, where this was appropriate, answer questions in the House on broad Scientific and technological issues involving several Departments.

Personally I was very sorry that the House decided not to re-establish the former Select Committee on Science and Technology. I thought it did valuable work and was

/complementary

complementary to the role of departments. But you and I were overruled by the vote - however much we both regret it.

(Sgd) Yours ever,

MARGARET THATCHER

Ian Lloyd, Esq., M.P.

Friday 26 October 1979

(Answered by the Prime Minister on 29 October)

UNSTARRED Mr. Tam Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, which  
NO. 100 Minister or Ministers are responsible for science  
policy, specifying their responsibilities in detail.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science takes the lead on science policy issues arising out of his responsibilities for the Research Councils (on which he is assisted by my hon. Friend , the Member for Sutton and Cheam); the universities; and other parts of the education system.

Ministers in charge of other departments are responsible for policy in connection with research and development within their own areas of concern, In appropriate cases I would play a co-ordinating role myself.

12 July 1979

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#### SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Q4. Mr. Ian Lloyd asked the Prime Minister if she will appoint a Minister of Cabinet rank with specific responsibility for the overall co-ordination of science policy.

The Prime Minister: I do not consider that such an appointment is necessary. There is already full consultation between the Ministers and Departments concerned.

Mr. Lloyd: Although all Members of Parliament assume that my right hon. Friend's sympathies are with the importance of science, is she aware that within the OECD area there are 10 countries which appoint a Minister of Cabinet rank with specific responsibility for science and technology? Is she further aware that if we are to meet our energy aims and ambitions, that will depend entirely upon the scientific and technological community? Can she give it some encouragement that the Government agree with that view?

The Prime Minister: The person who has most responsibility for the future of science and technology is my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science. There is a junior Minister who is responsible for science education. I do not think that it would be an advance to appoint a specific Minister for science and technology. Attention to scientific and technological matters should run through each and every Department, and should not be allocated to one specific Department.

Mr. Frank Allam: Reverting to the question of science, will the Prime Minister say where and when she received a mandate for the figures revealed today which show that a housewife who paid £25 last month for her groceries now pays £28.25?

Mr. Speaker: Order. That comes under the open type of question. That is stretching imagination beyond even what a Welshman can take.

BF 16.2.8



lady

10 DOWNING STREET

Mr. Whitmore

set up for  
1700 on

Tuesday 17 Feb.  
any further  
briefing required?

*[Signature]*

10/2.

as.  
10/2  
~~Mr. Stephens.~~

No.

*[Signature]*

10/2





10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Principal Private Secretary*

SIR IAN BANCROFT

House of Lords Select Committee on  
Science and Technology: Enquiry into  
Science and Government

I have shown the Prime Minister your minute of 6 February about the enquiry into the provision and co-ordination of scientific advice to Government which the Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology are undertaking.

She agrees that it would be useful if you had a word with her to clear the line you should take when you give oral evidence on 25 February, and we will be in touch with your office to arrange a time.

I am sending copies of this minute to Mr. Buckley, Sir Robert Armstrong, Sir James Hamilton, Mr. Ibbs and Dr. Ashworth.

9 February 1981

(I return to me your  
dispute.

W

Clive<sup>Mr.</sup> I've mentioned

this exchange (briefly) to the DES  
Under Secretary who is preparing a draft  
memorandum on a similar subject to the Common  
Select Cttee. I'll let you see that draft; I hope  
before the Bancroft meetings. MJS



10 DOWNING STREET

With the compliments of  
Mr. C. A. WHITMORE



Prime Minister,

Agree to see Sir Ian Roxburgh  
to discuss the general line he should  
take in giving evidence to the Select  
Committee?

Yes  
mt

MW

6:27 PM

MR C A WHITMORE

HOUSE OF LORDS SELECT COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY: ENQUIRY INTO SCIENCE AND GOVERNMENT

The Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology has set up a Sub-Committee, under Lord Sherfield, to consider the provision and co-ordination of scientific advice to Government. The Sub-Committee have formally invited me to give oral evidence to them on 25 February.

2. They want to question me primarily about the machinery of government aspects of the provision and co-ordination of scientific advice and the part that advice plays in support of the objectives of departments. This is, of course, a perfectly legitimate line of enquiry and one on which they are entitled to seek evidence from the Government. There is no alternative for me but to agree to appear before the Sub-Committee; and this I have done.

Naturally, however, I shall confine my answers to questions about the present machinery of government arrangements and not express any personal views on possible future developments. In the short time available, it would not be possible to prepare and clear with all concerned a written memorandum for submission to the Sub-Committee before my appearance in front of them: they have not asked for one: and, in any event, I think it would be better tactically not to put in a written memorandum at this stage.

3. The Sub-Committee will be inviting other Permanent Secretaries and Chief Scientific Advisers to give oral evidence subsequently. Sir Robert Armstrong, Sir James Hamilton, Mr Ibbs and Dr Ashworth are among those who are likely to receive invitations.

4. Work has already begun on the preparation of general briefing about the need for scientific advice and the arrangements for its provision and co-ordination. It will, of course, take account of the correspondence in the summer of 1979 between the Prime Minister and Mr Ian Lloyd about the administration of science policy. It will also take account of Lord Todd's ideas on the subject, which he outlined in his address to the Royal Society on 1 December 1980. He is a member of the Sub-Committee.

5. The Sub-Committee are bound to be interested in the Prime Minister's views on this subject because of her correspondence with Mr Lloyd and her well known interest in science policy. Anything to do with the machinery of government invariably raises wide Parliamentary and Press interest. It would be useful therefore, to clear with the Prime Minister the general line I might take in giving evidence; and I think this might best be done in the course of a brief discussion with her if one can be fitted in during the week before 25 February.



6. I am sending copies of this minute to the Lord President,  
Sir Robert Armstrong, Sir James Hamilton, Mr Ibbs and  
Dr Ashworth.

IBB

IAN BANCROFT  
6 February 1981

CONQUEROR