

Prime Minister.

Ref. A07759

PRIME MINISTER

House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology Report:
Science and Government

I have received from Sir Henry Chilver, the acting Chairman of the Advisory Council for Applied Research and Development (ACARD), a note of the Council's views on the Select Committee report. He asks that the note be brought to your attention. A copy is attached.

2. As I indicated in my minute of 8 January (A07102), I have arranged for the Official Committee on Science and Technology (STO) to consider the advice to be submitted to Ministers on action to be taken and the reply to be made to the Select Committee. I am therefore circulating ACARD's views to the members of STO for their information, and to Mr A M Fraser (Management and Personnel Office) and Dr R B Nicholson (Central Policy Review Staff) who are drawing up proposals for STO to consider.

3. In reply to Sir Henry Chilver, I have said that I am drawing ACARD's views to your attention, as he requested, and that they will be taken into account in considering the Select Committee's report and preparing the Government's response.

REA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

9 March 1982

MR. WRIGHT
CABINET OFFICE

House of Lords Select Committee on
Science and Technology Report:
Science and Government

The Prime Minister has seen and noted
Sir Robert Armstrong's minute of 9 March,
reference AO7759,

WFSR

10 March 1982

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House of Lords Select Committee Report: Science and Government

RESPONSE BY ACARD

1. The Council considers its ultimate aim to be the improvement in competitiveness of the products and services of British industry. This has been the main thrust of ACARD's advice since its foundation.
2. The Council therefore welcomes the Select Committee's report as being particularly timely in view of the impending upturn in the British economy. In this resurgence, technological excellence has a vital part to play, and the Government has an opportunity to stress this in its reply to the Select Committee. To strengthen the body of advice which Ministers receive on applied research and technology would be to implement the report in a way conducive to industry's recovery. We urge the Government to seize this opportunity.
3. Although we do not undervalue the importance of basic research and the education and training functions associated with it, we do feel strongly that the application of research and technology should have first place when Ministers consider matters relating to science and technology in the context of national economic needs.
4. ACARD already has strong links with basic research through cross-membership with the Advisory Board for the Research Councils (ABRC). We envisage that ABRC would continue to be responsible for basic research and its associated functions - including those of a more applied nature such as are undertaken by the Science and Engineering Research Council - and for the "science vote".
5. Our basic research is of outstanding quality and our objective would be to extend the influence of markets so that the nation reaped the benefits of its excellent basic research in terms of the creation of wealth, which can in turn be used for further advances in scientific understanding. The Council considers that its present remit (Annex 1) approximates to that required of the primary advisory body for Ministers in science and technology. There should however be a recognition that technology need not be developed in the United Kingdom for it to be used here effectively. Some adjustment of the Council's title and terms of reference would therefore be needed to define and reinforce its revised role. (A suggestion is at Annex 2).

6. We do not believe that the concentration of responsibilities for science and technology in the hands of a single Minister, or the designation of a single voice for the subject in Cabinet, would improve on the present arrangements. We do not consider that the re-arrangements which the Select Committee proposes would necessarily justify the difficulties and disruption involved. At present, ACARD advises Ministers through the Prime Minister and we consider that the practice should continue under the Council's revised remit.

7. We welcome the appointment of Dr Robin Nicholson as Chief Scientist in the Cabinet Office with responsibilities - so we understand - similar to those advocated by the Select Committee for the "Government Chief Scientist". We consider that the Chief Scientist has a crucial role to play alongside ACARD in bringing issues of applied research and technology to the attention of Ministers at the highest level. No new appointment is therefore necessary. We would however emphasise the need for the Chief Scientist to have adequate resources at his disposal. We understand that this is not the case at present; if so, it should be speedily remedied.

8. An influential body of advice to Ministers will be needed for as long as those in Government are not fully conversant with the implications of technology. We strongly endorse the Select Committee's conclusion that there is an overwhelming case for a changed attitude to science and technology in the Civil Service. The Holdgate report, and many others before it, have stated the problems clearly, but achievement has been patchy. What is needed now is a critical review of ways of achieving progress, not restatements of the problem.

5 March 1982

The Advisory Council for Applied Research and Development (ACARD) was established in 1976 with the following terms of reference:

- 'To advise Ministers and to publish reports as necessary on -
- i. applied R and D in the United Kingdom and its deployment in both the public and private sectors in accordance with national needs;
 - ii. the articulation of this R and D with scientific research supported through the Department of Education and Science;
 - iii. the future development and application of technology;
 - iv. the role of the United Kingdom in international collaboration in the field of applied R and D.'

REVISED TITLE AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

The following revised title and terms of reference suggested for ACARD would enable it to carry out most of the tasks envisaged in the Select Committee's report for the 'Council for Science and Technology'. They would help foster that technical excellence which will be vital for the resurgence of the British economy.

COUNCIL FOR RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGY [CORT]

To advise the Prime Minister and Ministers and publish reports as necessary on:

- applied research, design and development in the United Kingdom;
- the application of research and technology for the benefit of both the public and private sectors in accordance with national economic needs;
- the co-ordination of these activities with basic research and associated functions supported through the Department of Education and Science;
- the role of the United Kingdom in international collaboration in the fields of applied research, design and development related to technology.