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The Prime Minister

HOUSE OF LORDS SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT: SCIENCE AND GOVERNMENT

I have read Sir Robert Armstrong's minute to you of 21 May on this subject and looked through the papers he enclosed with it.

The question of Ministerial responsibility is obviously yours, especially since you have yourself been keeping an eye on the adequacy of the overall Government approach in scientific and technical matters. I would only add that I am myself not convinced from the papers that there is much real reward to be gained from having a co-ordinating Minister flanking you in an area like Science and Technology which really ought to be very much built into the policies we all pursue in our departments. I am certainly not aware of any major problems with which I am confronted here because of the lack of another colleague with this remit.

I am also inclined to agree with Sir Robert that we would do better to give ACARD, which seems to me to be a fairly successful body, new terms of reference and a remit to co-operate more positively with the ABRC, rather than set up a new Council on Science and Technology with all the fuss that that might generate. Likewise, since we now have in the presence of Dr Nicholson a Chief Scientist at Deputy Secretary level in the Cabinet Office, I wonder very much about the need for appointing a more senior official over his head. I am advised by my own Chief Scientist that Dr Nicholson has already taken a most useful lead in meeting regularly with his senior colleagues in the different departments and I would have thought that there was much to be said for letting him continue to develop his role in this way.

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My overall feeling is therefore that the approach proposed by Sir Robert - which is essentially low key and involving building on the machinery we have rather than attempting a radical reconstruction is right. I am copying this minute to all members of the Cabinet and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

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For meeting folder for 11 June



Secretary of State for Industry

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3 June 1982

Sir Robert Armstrong KCB CVO
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Dear Robert,

Thank you for sending me a copy of your minute of 21 May to the Prime Minister with the report of the Official Committee on Science and Technology (STO) and the draft White Paper responding to the report "Science and Government".

2 I am strongly in favour of Model 1 in the STO Report which I believe is the only model fully consistent with the responsibilities of Ministers for the integration of science and technology policy with the general policy of their Departments. I am therefore content with the draft White Paper which embodies this model and I believe that the arrangements proposed, at both Ministerial and Official level and set out in the White Paper, will provide us with an effective system of scientific advice and management in Government.

3 I am sending copies of this letter to the Prime Minister and to all members of the Cabinet.

Your ever

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Tatnell*