

PRIME MINISTERAcademic Tenure

The Education Secretary's minute of 12 March at flag A seeks colleagues approval for his proposals to phase out academic tenure in the universities. He concludes that the Government should act only in respect of new contracts - ending tenure for existing staff would be very expensive.

The Policy Unit agree with this (see note at flag B), but they point out that it could be at least 10 years before the bulk of the academic population are subject to the new rules.

Even though existing staff would not be affected, Sir Keith's proposals are bound to encounter considerable opposition from those with a vested interest in the maintenance of tenure.

Content, subject to colleagues, for the Education Secretary to discuss his proposals with the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, on the basis that the Government would be prepared to legislate on this subject if necessary?

Yes Sir.

Dub

16 March 1984



GF: B/H  
for

MR BARCLAY

TENURE IN THE UNIVERSITIES

Keith Joseph wants to abolish tenure for all new university contracts, including those taken out by academics who are changing jobs. This does not mean that these university teachers would henceforth be on short-term contracts. It means, rather, that they would be subject to dismissal for reduced efficiency, redundancy, and 'financial exigency', and would be entitled only to normal rates of compensation. We believe that this is the correct course: new academics should be subject to dismissal like everyone else; but they should not be put onto short-term contracts, because this would leave them constantly at the mercy of the professoriate, and would threaten their freedom to challenge established ideas.

We also support Keith Joseph's suggestion that probationary periods should be extended. Experience in Cambridge, where it takes many years to become a fully fledged lecturer, shows that extended probation enables faculties to make better judgements about the quality of new academics.

Keith Joseph does not want to abolish tenure retrospectively: those in post would still be protected against dismissal for all reasons except gross misconduct. This may at first sight seem unsatisfactory, since it would take at least 10 years before the bulk of the academic population were subject to the new rules. But we believe that Keith Joseph is right: tenure is a kind of property; to abolish it retrospectively with compensation would undoubtedly cost several hundred million pounds; and to abolish it retrospectively without compensation would be a form of robbery. We understand that the Lord Chancellor is almost certain to support this view.

*Oliver Letwin*

OLIVER LETWIN

Policy Unit  
14 March 1984





FROM: CHIEF SECRETARY

DATE: 16 March 1984

pa  
DMS  
26/3

PRIME MINISTER

(2)  
Prime Minister : To note.

*MR*

The Chief Secretary is content  
with the Education  
Secretary's proposals on  
tenure.

TENURE IN UNIVERSITIES

DMS  
19/3

I have seen Keith Joseph's minute to you of 12 March about the future of academic tenure in universities. I agree with him that further persuasion is likely to achieve little and that we should now consider legislation. I am content to accept his judgement on the form which legislation might take.

2. I see from the paper attached to the minute that extra financial provision might be needed to meet additional compensation payments. I would imagine that it is too early to say what this might amount to, and it would depend, in any case on what other efficiency savings the universities might identify in the forthcoming review. But as soon as a clear picture starts to emerge, I would be grateful if officials here could be consulted.

I am copying this letter to other members of H Committee, Sir Robert Armstrong and to First Parliamentary Counsel.

*PR*

PETER REES





file ECL

10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

19 March 1984

Dear Elizabeth,

Tenure in the Universities

The Prime Minister was grateful for your Secretary of State's minute of 12 March setting out his conclusions on the way forward on tenure in the universities. She has noted in particular his view that action should be taken only in respect of new contracts. Subject to the views of colleagues, the Prime Minister is content with the line proposed by your Secretary of State, and agrees that he should discuss his proposals with the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, on the basis that the Government would be prepared to legislate on this subject if necessary.

I am sending copies of this letter to the private secretaries to the recipients of your Secretary of State's minute.

Yours ever,

David

David Barclay

Miss Elizabeth Hodkinson  
Department of Education and Science

ECL