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CONFIDENTIAL

The Rt Hon Norman Fowler PC MP
Secretary of State for Social Services
Department of Health and Social Security
Alexander Fleming House
Elephant and Castle
LONDON
SE1 6BY

29 March 1985

Dear Norman,

STUDENTS' ENTITLEMENTS TO SUPPLEMENTARY BENEFIT AND HOUSING BENEFIT

I understand that you will be considering with colleagues on MISC III on 1 April the report from the interdepartmental working party which has been considering the scope for ending or reducing the level of support for students through the supplementary benefit and housing benefit schemes.

I appreciate that the present arrangements - involving as they do a division of responsibility for students between DHSS and Education Departments - are not entirely satisfactory. I have no doubt that the whole question of where responsibility for student support lies deserves the most careful attention. However, while I do not object in principle to the kind of rationalisation that the working party has in mind, it could I feel reasonably be argued by those who were critical of the 1985/86 student awards proposals last December that this is a matter which should be considered in a wider context. I should be most concerned therefore if any changes to entitlement which disadvantaged students were implemented in advance of the review of student support on which Keith Joseph and I are now engaged.

I should in particular be concerned about any proposal which was likely to increase my own Department's manpower requirements, and I hope that I will be consulted before any final decisions are taken.

I am copying this letter to Keith Joseph and to members of MISC III.

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