



PRIME MINISTER

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THE MEDICAL RESEARCH COUNCIL: CONSTRAINTS ON FUNDS FOR RESEARCH GRANTS

with DB?

Keith Joseph sent me a copy of his minute to you of 27 July. I must say I agree strongly with the conclusions he comes to about the disproportionate harm which is being done by the cuts in the MRC budget - particularly when one looks at the use to which the funds being given up by the MRC will be put. I had, in fact, already written to Keith to raise my concerns - I attach a copy of my letter.

I am copying this minute to Keith Joseph and Peter Rees, and to Sir Robert Armstrong and Robin Nicholson.

RF

29 July 1984

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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & SOCIAL SECURITY

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From the Secretary of State for Social Services

The Rt Hon Sir Keith Joseph MP
Secretary of State for Education and Science
Department of Education and Science
Elizabeth House
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LONDON
SE1 7PH

4p July 1984

Dear Keith.

MEDICAL RESEARCH COUNCIL: GRANTS

I feel I should register with you my concern about the implications of recent decisions by the ABRC about the budget for the MRC for 1985/86. I understand from my Chief Medical Officer and Chief Scientist that as a result of the £2 million shortfall in 1985/86, the MRC has had to turn down grant applications for a substantial number of high-quality (or 'alpha') research projects which it would, in normal circumstances, have felt well able to support.

In several cases these decisions will mean that the work of existing research teams will have to be curtailed or discontinued. In some instances not only is the work valuable in itself but its cancellation is also likely to provoke a strong and hostile public reaction. If I instance work at Moorfields Hospital on retinitis pigmentosa - a subject on which there has been criticism of British performance in the past - you will see the potential embarrassment. The recent episode about work on cot deaths in Cambridge shows how vulnerable we are to allegations of "health cuts". In that instance, the decision was in fact taken on scientific grounds - although this only became apparent later - but we would have no such defence if the current decisions were to stand.

I do, of course, fully support the need for sensible economies to be made in the running of the research councils but I wonder whether there is not something which can be done to avoid the damaging consequences, both in health research and political terms, which are likely to result from the removal of the quite small sum I understand to be at issue.

Yours etc.

Norman Fowler
NORMAN FOWLER

CONFIDENTIAL

30 JUL 1984

