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PRIME MINISTER

17 April 1986

ROY GRIFFITHS

Professor McColl's letter to you raises again the question of what to do about the Chairman of the NHS Management Board. We were looking for a dynamic Chief Executive: the sad fact is that, despite his many qualities, Victor Paige does not meet the bill.

Roy Griffiths' contract with Sainsbury's comes to an end this summer. Norman Fowler is in principle very keen to use him - he is a big figure in the health world, an able manager, and would probably come for free. They have met and discussed what he might do. But their discussions remain tentative because it is not easy for Norman Fowler to find a slot for him.

There seem to me to be two ways in which we could make Roy Griffiths Chief Executive of the Health Service:

- i. He could be appointed Chairman of the Management Board, and Victor Paige given some - largely honorific - post (maybe Norman Fowler's Deputy on the Supervisory Board). It would be pretty rough treatment for him, but tough measures are needed. Roy Griffiths would also need to be assured he would have independent authority and not be subordinate to Sir Kenneth Stowe, as Victor Paige has been.

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- ii. Give Roy Griffiths in effect a Junior Ministerial post with responsibility for executing decisions in the Health Service. This would presumably require elevating him to the Peerage. I hope that it would not be necessary to displace the marvellous Baroness Trumpington; so it might be an extra Ministerial post, or she could be moved elsewhere.

I do not think it would be feasible to use Roy Griffiths as an outside expert in the way that, say, Geoffrey Sterling has helped in the DTI. The NHS needs someone with executive authority: nothing else will do.

My view is that either of the two options above could work. They would at last convey the clear message that the NHS was under new management. If you think either of them is worth exploring, perhaps Nigel Wicks could indicate this to Norman Fowler's office.

*David Willetts*

DAVID WILLETTS

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