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MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC STRATEGY

ADULT TRAINING

Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Employment

The third objective of the New Training Initiative - to widen opportunities for adult training - is of crucial economic importance. It offers the best remedy for skill shortages in the upturn. The main problems flow from outmoded restrictions on adults obtaining and using skills normally achieved through apprenticeship.

2. Industrial relations reform and a general improvement in the industrial relations climate offer employers the opportunity to reduce these obstacles. Developing training to standards and reducing the importance of age in determining access to apprenticeship will also help. We should encourage employers to exploit these opportunities, and should see that gaps in provision are filled and should open ways for individuals to take the initiative in improving their skills.

3. I propose action on two fronts. First, ensuring that existing Manpower Services Commission (MSC) resources - importantly the £250m or so a year (cash prices) provided for the Training Opportunities Programme and Direct Training Services for industry - are used as effectively as possible towards achieving these objectives by:

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- giving priority to helping prevent skill shortages;
- putting more emphasis on use of spare industrial training capacity;
- making greater use of training modules such as those developed by the Engineering Industrial Training Board;
- helping unemployed craftsmen update and extend their skills.

4. Secondly, I propose to introduce an Open Tech programme. This should make an important contribution to training the technicians and managers needed to exploit new technologies. Many adults, whether in jobs or not, are unable to take training courses which would fit them for such jobs, because of job commitments, lack of formal qualifications and other factors that prevent them from undertaking prolonged study in structured classes of the required size at set times. Similarly, many employers either do not know what is available or feel there are gaps in existing provision, particularly for those who are in employment. The MSC's consultative document on an Open Tech was well received and the Annex illustrates needs identified by industrialists in the consultations.

5. MSC have resisted the temptation to propose a large new institution like the Open University to produce, deliver and examine 'open' courses for technicians. Instead, they are proposing a small unit (about 15 people) with a budget of £5m, rising to £15m over the next three years with which they would fund the development of training material to plug gaps in the provisions of suitable 'open' opportunities for technician and junior management grades. The unit would provide information on open learning opportunities for employers or for individuals seeking to better themselves.

6. The unit would be steered by a management board involving industrial, trade union and educational interests. This board would decide which projects to approve. The unit would look to existing mechanisms for examining and validating courses. Students on courses developed or identified under the Open Tech programme would be funded through existing channels and not given preferential treatment.

7. The cost can be met in 1982/83 from existing provision in full and in part thereafter, but an extra £3.6m is needed in 1983/84 and £4.0m in 1984/85. The additional manpower will be found from existing staff totals.

CONCLUSION

I invite colleagues to agree:

- (i) the approach outlined above to achieving wider opportunities for adult training;
- (ii) the Open Tech proposal, at an additional cost of £3.6m in 1983/84 and £8.0m in 1984/85.

Department of Employment
22 October 1981

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APPLICATIONS OF THE OPEN TECH

1. The consultations have thrown up a number of possible needs for an Open Tech. These include:

- modules to be developed for management, supervisory and technical support staff on the implications of technological advances;
- modules showing how long-standing skill shortages can be eased by computer operations and instrument engineering;
- more widespread provision for disciplines in which shortages exist or where needs are widely scattered eg metallurgical technicians and surveying technicians;
- provision to enable craftsmen to develop or update their skills to match new technology or technologists to appreciate and use polymer technology.

2. Material developed to meet these needs by firms, by colleges or others could be made available to individuals who wished to be better informed, trainers or tutors for incorporation in their own programmes, or to firms wishing to construct a programme relevant to the needs of their employees.

Department of Employment
22 October 1981

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