



PRIME MINISTER

THE SWITCH

Meeting with industrialists on 21 May 1985

Briefing mainly prepared by D.E.S. is attached. The documents are

- i. Opening statement (flag A), drawing largely on your letter to industrialists of 19 March (flag B);
- ii. Suggestions for handling the discussion, and the summing up (flag C); together with the draft of a Press Notice to be issued by No 10 (flag D);
- iii. Main background brief on the Switch, and what the Government want industry to do and contribute (flag E);
- iv. Details of the Switch programme (more formally called the Engineering and Technology Programme) (flag F);
- v. Some notes on points which industrialists may raise (flag G);
- vi. Notes on
 - a. Government initiatives to increase the supply of skilled manpower (flag H);
 - b. Employers proposals on measures they could take to support education, which emerged from Mr John Butcher's Committee on IT Skills Shortages (flag J);
 - c. Action being taken by the Government in the schools to improve the teaching of maths, science and



technical subjects, and to attract more pupils into these courses (flag K);

d. A number of letters from industrialists in response to the Prime Minister's 19 March letter (flag L).

General

2. You will want the meeting to achieve the following:

i. Secure positive commitments from industry to provide direct help to higher education through gifts of equipment, the loan of teaching staff, help in designing courses, the provision of places on sandwich courses, and the sponsorship of more students.

ii. Give a good opportunity to the industrialists to state their view of the situation, and the priorities in tackling it. They may want

a. to emphasise that there is a problem of retraining as well as of training. Higher education establishments will want to work with companies in providing whatever 'conversion' courses are needed, and much is already being done. But the financial responsibility, and the initiative for getting the right courses off the ground is mainly a matter for industry. Companies will need to be much more positive and flexible than hitherto in arranging to develop their staff to meet the demands of a rapidly changing world;

b. to question the sometimes rather academic and unpractical attitudes of university Departments and administrators. Do industry and academic experts agree on which courses are best for business as distinct from best academically?



c. To complain about the way in which companies - many of them not in engineering or information technology - 'poach' people trained mostly by the large companies represented at the meeting. This is essentially a matter for industry and the market, rather than Government; industry can do most to open up career prospects and increase the esteem in which scientists and technologists are held as compared with accountants, marketers, etc. But there is a question whether the Information Technology Skills Agency (ITSA) is broadly enough based to take fully into account the rest of industry's requirements for such skills: how should this be done?

iii. To ensure that there is effective follow up

- a. through ITSA (in England and Wales) and SDA (in Scotland);
- b. through the CBI (with companies notifying the names of their responsible executives to Mr Michael Bury);
- c. when the companies are approached by universities;
- d. (if appropriate) through further meetings between representatives of industry and representatives of higher education institutions, which DES could arrange.

1 3. You may like to ask the Education Secretary to contribute generally to the discussion, and in particular to deal with questions about the curriculum and performance of schools and other education institutions. Other questions are likely to fall naturally to the Trade and Industry and Employment Secretaries.

4. This note and the attached briefing incorporate comments from the Scientific and Economic Secretariats at the Cabinet Office.

M
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Cabinet Office