

(2)

PRIME MINISTER

SIR GEORGE PORTER

When you met Sir George recently he put two proposals to you:

- (i) there should be a new National Science Advisory Council, preferably chaired by you, to advise on science policy and to report to Cabinet;
- (ii) a small number of university teachers should have their salaries increased by a significant amount for a set period to act as an incentive and to help stem the brain drain.

Sir George has now provided a note on his proposals, as he promised.

It is very difficult to see how a new National Science Advisory Council could be effective, and I think this was your reaction at the meeting. It would inevitably duplicate the work of the ABRC, ACARD and now the Cabinet Committee looking at Government expenditure on research and development. It would be a further drain on the time of key people in the field. It would fit uneasily into the Government machine - supposedly advising Cabinet, but being chaired by you. There would be problems of confidentiality and access to papers. John Fairclough and his Secretariat would not have the time to give it the service it would need. I believe, however, the real concern lying behind Sir George's proposal is his feeling that the presentation of the Government's science policy to the scientific community is not as good as it should be. A great deal of good work in Government is going on, but it is difficult to publicise it, and the "Save British Science" lobby is accordingly able to capture support.

On the second proposal, I had thought that Sir George was proposing that Chairs supported by the Royal Society should be halved in number, but the salaries doubled. The proposal in

his letter is a rather different one, and goes wider. (I rather think, too, Sir George has misunderstood your reference to "peanuts". I do not think you were referring to the extra public money that might be involved, but to the overall impact his scheme might have on the brain drain it was supposed to counter).

All this is for information at this stage. I shall ask the Cabinet Office to co-ordinate a reply to Sir George's proposals. If you agree, I shall also ask them to provide advice on what might be done to improve the presentation of the Government's science policy.

Mark Addison

Mark Addison

4 July 1986

Agreed - but we
must do it
fairly soon.
not



ShH

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

MR. JOHN FAIRCLOUGH
CABINET OFFICE

BF 1
Sir George Porter has now provided the Prime Minister with the note he promised at their meeting in May. This outlines the Royal Society's proposal for a National Science Advisory Council, and Sir George's ideas about how to tackle the brain drain.

I should be grateful for a draft reply for the Prime Minister to send Sir George, in consultation with other departments as necessary.

The Prime Minister believes that one of the reasons lying behind the Royal Society's proposal for a new Council may be a feeling that the presentation of the Government's science policy needs to be improved. The Prime Minister would accordingly be grateful for advice on what might be done more generally to get over more effectively the considerable amount of work which has gone on, and which is still under way, in the science policy area.

I am copying this minute to Rob Smith (Department of Education and Science), John Mogg (Department of Trade and Industry) and Brian Unwin.

Man Addison

MARK ADDISON

7 July 1986

EC