

bc re Addison.

cc/bk

P 02158

1. Mr N. H. Lee

From: J B UNWIN
8 July 1986

2. J. C.

MR FAIRCLOUGH

cc Mr Wiggins
Dr Walker

PROPOSED NATIONAL SCIENCE ADVISORY COUNCIL

at that

Some immediate reactions to the letter to the Prime Minister from Sir Georger Porter to which Mr Addison has asked for a draft reply.

2. On the substance, there are two main issues. First, the proposed new Council; and second the suggestion of a merit award scheme for university scientists and technologists.

3. On the Council, I must confess to being sceptical about the utility of yet another advisory body. My impression is that we have no shortage of advice in the science and technology field; the problem lies in finding the resources to implement advice, and to persuade Departments of the need to cooperate and if necessary to subordinate their particular departmental interests to the wider interests of the Government as a whole. MOD R&D is, of course, the classical and most important case of this. Sir George Porter's note (paragraph 8) states that his proposal does not involve any immediate changes in existing advisory bodies. I suggest, however, that the offsetting savings principle should apply. At the very least, we ought to review the need for all the existing bodies before setting up another one.

4. The point about merit awards is on the face of it an attractive one, which would not cost much in overall terms. But it could have repercussions elsewhere, and you will need to obtain Treasury views on this.

5. The other main point raised by Mr Addison is that of the presentation of the Government's science policy. This is in fact just the point I raised recently in my minute to you of 24 June. I am not sure that the establishment of a new Council has much to do with this. But I remain of the view that the Government are not getting near enough credit for the way they are tackling the main issues in this area, and I hope it will be possible to find new vehicles for remedying this. Mr Addison told me the other day that it did not look as if there would be a suitable speech by the Prime Minister in the near future.

Other Ministers could, however, be tried - for example, the Lord President or the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. It might also be possible to persuade the Treasury to include an article on science policy (necessarily with an expenditure angle) in one of the forthcoming Economic Progress Reports. As before, I should be glad to help further on this. It would, however, be instructive if someone could compile a check list of the initiatives that the Government have taken in the last two or three years, including the response to significant ACARD, House of Lord or other recommendations.



J B UNWIN

SCIENCE + TECH George Porter May 86

