

PRIME MINISTER

Sir George Porter came to see you last month to talk about two ideas he had:

- (i) for a new national science advisory council;
- (ii) for increased rates of pay for some science professors in universities.

Your inclination was that yet another advisory body in the science area was not required, but that it would be worth looking into Sir George's ideas on pay. John Fairclough's note, at Flag A, is very much in line with your reaction. Also attached at Flag B is a note from DES. A draft reply to Sir George's letter, at Flag C, which he sent in following the meeting is attached for your signature at Flag D.

MEAT

MEA

25 July 1986

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10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

Thank you for your letter about a National Science Advisory Council and a merit awards scheme for university scientists.

On the proposed National Science Advisory Council, the Government has, as you know, taken substantial steps to strengthen the central machinery for considering science and technology matters, the most recent being the establishment of the new Science and Technology Assessment Office which was announced on 2 July. In addition to the advice which I receive from ACARD, and from the Chief Scientific Adviser in the Cabinet Office, there are regular meetings of Chief Scientists. The Annual Review of Government Funded R & D provides an overview which is considered by Ministers and officials, both of whom have frequent occasions to discuss science and technology matters interdepartmentally. I am also awaiting with interest the outcome of the discussions on ways of implementing ACARD's recommendation for a forum, outside Government, which would bring together industry, academia and Government to identify exploitable areas of science for the future.

So, while I fully appreciate the Royal Society's concern, and while the Government greatly values the opportunities for discussion with the scientific community, I am not convinced that there is a gap in our central machinery which would justify setting up a further advisory body.

On your second proposal, I think the idea of a merit awards scheme for university scientists is an interesting one, and I am pleased that you intend to pursue it with the Department of Education and Science and the University Grants Committee.

Sir George Porter, P.R.S.

Sir G. PORTER

DG2AJC
(Back-up)



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

28 July 1986

The Prime Minister has seen your minute to me of 17 July about Sir George Porter's letter, and the Royal Society proposal for a National Science Advisory Council.

Ry || The Prime Minister has commented that some way must be found of finding a role for the Royal Society within the existing machinery before she replies to Sir George, possibly by putting its President ex officio on one of the scientific committees - perhaps ACARD or the ABRC. I should be grateful for urgent advice from you, in consultation with Rob Smith at the Department of Education and Science, as soon as possible.

The Prime Minister has noted the point you make about science seminars and confirmed that the idea should be pursued.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Rob Smith (Department of Education and Science), John Mogg (Department of Trade and Industry), Michael Stark (Cabinet Office) and Brian Unwin (Cabinet Office).

Mark Addison

J. W. Fairclough, Esq.,
Cabinet Office.

CJ



DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

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FROM THE SECRETARY OF STATE

Mark Addison Esq
10 Downing Street
LONDON SW1

23 July 1986

Dear Mark,

SIR GEORGE PORTER'S LETTER OF 1 JULY TO THE PRIME MINISTER

You sent me a copy of your note to John Fairclough of 7 July about the Royal Society's proposal for a National Science Advisory Council (NSAC) and Sir George Porter's ideas about how to tackle the brain drain. I understand that Sir Robert Armstrong is considering a suggestion that that Sir George Porter might be invited to the October Sunningdale conference of Permanent Secretaries for an agenda item on science policy.

My Secretary of State welcomes this suggestion. Although, as I indicate below, we have some reservations about a NSAC, he thinks it important to maintain dialogue with the Royal Society and if possible to understand better what lies at the root of their concern. He has asked Sir David Phillips to probe this further in informal discussion with Sir George Porter. Hence we think a somewhat temporising reply would be appropriate for now.

As to the NSAC there seem to be two main objectives - to foster public appreciation of the importance of science and technology and to help the UK develop a coherent national approach to the planning and exploitation of science and technology. We wholeheartedly endorse these objectives; as you know they feature strongly in a good deal of the Department's work in this area. The doubt is whether a NSAC would be an appropriate or useful piece of machinery.

Although it is probably not apparent to the outside world, in practice there is considerable - and increasing - co-ordination of Government policies in science and technology. The establishment of E(RD) and E(RD)(0), and the development of the work of the Chief Scientific Adviser and his secretariat in the Cabinet Office (notably through the Annual Review of R and D) are major steps towards achieving more coherent policies on R and D. As to the fuller involvement of industry (suggested as one of the objectives of the NSAC) the Government already has plans to do this through the machinery for generating debate about science and technology

priorities which ACARD recommended in its report "Exploitable Areas of Science".

Quite apart from these new developments, there is a considerable number of existing bodies - not just ABRC, ACARD and other Departmental advisory bodies, but also (apart from the Royal Society) the Fellowship of Engineering, the Engineering Council, the British Association for the Advancement of Science, the Council for Science and Society, and the Select Committees of the two Houses. Given this collection it is not clear what a NSAC would distinctively add. This is one of the matters which we hope Sir David can illuminate from his further talk.

Sir George's letter also mentions the idea of a merit award scheme for reducing the brain drain. In principle the idea is attractive, although we note that the evidence from Sir David Phillips's 1985 enquiry was that it was the facilities that tempted British scientists overseas rather than higher salaries. A merit award scheme also raises difficult issues of selection and funding. Sir George mentioned the idea to Mr Walden recently and we have subsequently written to Sir George for further information. We suggest that all the Prime Minister need say in response to Sir George is that she understands that he has already taken up the idea with DES and they will be pursuing it with him.

You also asked for advice on ways of improving the presentation of the Government's science policy. One point here, which I think Mr Fairclough is already addressing, is that the establishment of the new Ministerial Committee E(RD) is subject to the Cabinet committee confidentiality rules. We think it would be desirable to make its existence known as evidence of the Government's interest and concern in these matters. We hope that an exception might be made in this particular case. On presentation more generally, Mr Baker will be looking, over the next six months, for an opportunity to make a major speech on science policy. We are also considering the possibility of the Department producing a short booklet about the Government's policies in HE and science. And in 1987 Mr Baker expects to receive strategy advice from the ABRC - which he would expect to publish for wider discussion, and on the basis of which the Department will formulate policies on such major matters as strategic subject priorities for the DES-supported science base.

I am copying this letter to Mr Fairclough and to John Mogg and Brian Unwin.

yours sincerely,
R L Smith

R L SMITH
Private Secretary

SCI + TECH
SIRG. PORTER
5/86

