



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

5 August 1986

Dear Sir George.

Thank you for your letter about a National Science Advisory Council and a merit awards scheme for university scientists. I think the latter is a very interesting idea, and I am pleased that you intend to pursue it with the Department of Education and Science and the University Grants Committee.

I am very sympathetic to the Royal Society's general approach on science and technology and I welcome the work which you are already undertaking in looking at the health of the basic sciences and in promoting the public understanding of science. Vigorous debate about scientific advance and also the application of new technologies should take place and I have sought to promote this in a number of meetings with scientists and industrialists. But I am not convinced that a National Science Advisory Council is the most sensible way of achieving the objectives which we both share.

The Government has, as you know, taken very substantial steps to strengthen the central machinery for considering science and technology matters and Ministers have regular interdepartmental discussion with advice from the Chief Scientific Adviser and from ACARD in the Cabinet Office as well as the advisory machinery which exists within Departments. A major and continuing theme of these discussions is improvement in the contribution made by publicly-funded research and development to strengthening the UK economy. A particular current initiative, whose

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implementation I await with interest, is ACARD's recommendations for a forum, outside Government, which would bring together industry, the scientific community and Government to identify exploitable areas of science for the future. I see this initiative as complementary to the strengthened machinery within Government. I hope that the Royal Society will be active participants in the ensuing debate.

I set great store on the Society's independence and would want to see this fully upheld in all of its dealings with Government. At the same time I am anxious to ensure that Government is enabled, at high level, to learn of the Society's views on scientific and technological matters of public import. I note the substantial input which you already make to the work of the ABRC and the Research Councils. I have suggested to the Secretary of State for Education and Science that, in addition, he might seek periodic discussions with the Society, to give an opportunity for matters to be raised which the scientific community believe should be on the science policy agenda. I believe that it is through such channels that a productive dialogue can take place.

Since you have also put your proposal for a National Science Advisory Council forward in your evidence to the House of Lords Select Committee Sub-Committee on Civil R&D further careful consideration will, I know, be given to it and I will maintain an open mind on the issue until we receive the Select Committee Report.

Yours sincerely
Margaret Thatcher

Sir George Porter, P.R.S.



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Prime Minister:

Attached is a
draft reply to Sir
George Ponter about the
Royal Society and its
involvement in policymaking,
prepared by the Chief Scientific
Adviser. As you will see he
(and RTA) are against ex-
officio places on ACARD —
there would be a whole
series of claimants. The
advice from Mr Farrelough
is at page A

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MR ADDISON

1 August 1986

PROPOSED NATIONAL SCIENCE ADVISORY COUNCIL

I attach a revised draft reply to Sir George Porter's letter of 1 July. It has been prepared in consultation with the Department of Education and Science. Mr Baker has agreed the reference to periodic discussions which he would hold with the Royal Society (RS). The Society already makes a substantial input into the work of the Advisory Board for Research Councils (ABRC) and the individual Research Councils. It is already open to Sir George Porter to sit on ABRC should he so wish. His predecessors have preferred to nominate an officer (Sir John Mason, Treasurer) in order, I understand, to maintain some distance from the formal machinery of Government. Sir George may decide to adopt a different line and I believe that Sir David Phillips will discuss this with him informally. A formal invitation would therefore not be appropriate at this juncture. In addition to ABRC membership the RS has an assessor on each Research Council who is normally a Fellow of the Society in a relevant area of science.

2. ACARD has three members who are FRS's, as are two of the Chief Scientific advisers who attend. Its membership is *ad hominem* and this principle has been strongly defended when representative membership has been sought - most recently by the TUC.

3. It would be inadvisable to breach that principle for the RS, which is concerned in the main with basic science, without recognising the claims of other bodies, such as the Fellowship of Engineering, which are more relevant to applied R & D. Sir George Porter would similarly not have a high claim to personal membership since his scientific strength is not at the applied end of the spectrum. The one exception to the *ad hominem* rule is Sir David Phillips who sits on ACARD as Chairman of ABRC but this is reciprocal and the two bodies have a joint Secretariat. I therefore counsel against Sir George Porter being invited to sit on ACARD.

4. Sir David Hancock has proposed that Sir George be invited to the Permanent Secretaries seminar at Sunningdale in October to open a discussion on Science Policy. I have supported that proposal which Sir Robert Armstrong has accepted.

5. I truly believe that the RS is not looking for direct involvement within the machinery of Government but is seeking to broaden the forum for debate and advice taken into account in reaching decisions on science policy. I think it is a plea for the scientific community to have a stronger influence over the decisions being made which effect its own future development and the contribution which it believes it can make to the economic health and welfare of the country. This is an issue which could usefully be explored and the Sunningdale Conference will provide an important opportunity to discuss it.

6. Because the Royal Society has put the proposal for a new Council forward in its evidence to the House of Lords Select Committee Sub-Committee on Civil R & D I suggest that the proposal should not be flatly rejected at this stage but a strong note of scepticism should be sounded.

7. I am copying this letter to Rob Smith (Department of Education and Science), John Mogg (Department of Trade and Industry), Michael Stark and Brian Unwin here.



JOHN W FAIRCLOUGH
Chief Scientific Adviser

DRAFT LETTER FROM THE PRIME MINISTER TO SIR GEORGE PORTER

SEAH

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Sir G. Porter: SCI & TECH.

May 186.

