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P 03251

PRIME MINISTER

PROGRESS WITH EDUCATION REFORM

[Relevant Papers: minute of 21 October on this subject from Secretary of State for Education; separate minute on National Curriculum English Working Group First Report from Secretary of State; and the Report of the Working Group (the Cox Report) itself.]

DECISIONS

1. You said in May that it would be useful to institute a series of six-monthly meetings between yourself and Mr Baker about progress with key aspects of the education reforms. This is the first such meeting.

2. There is a great deal to discuss. Rather than spend too much time on the procedural detail and deadlines of all the reforms, you may wish to concentrate first, on discussing the main issues on which decisions need to be taken; and second, on checking that you are satisfied with the speed at which the main reforms are likely to make themselves felt, taking them in the following order:

i. attainment targets in English. Mr Baker and Mr Walker want to go out to public consultation on formal Government proposals for attainment targets and programmes of study on English, following receipt of the Report of the English Working Group (the Cox report);

ii. attainment targets etc in history and geography. Mr Baker wants to set work in hand by appointing a working group to look at history before Christmas, and another working group on geography early in the New Year.

I suggest  
you leave  
this till  
last - otherwise  
the other subjects  
will get  
squeezed out.  
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iii. progress with other reforms. There are a number of points which you may wish to raise on the annotated agenda attached to Mr Baker's minute of 25 October: see below.

## NATIONAL CURRICULUM ISSUES

### Background

3. There is an elaborate statutory procedure for setting attainment targets for subjects in the national curriculum:

i. a working party is set up to formulate proposals.

Working parties on maths, science and - with the Cox report - English have now submitted their reports. A fourth working party, on technology, is currently still at work: it is due to submit an interim report soon and a final report by April 1989. Mr Baker wants your agreement to setting up further working parties on history (before Christmas) and on geography (early in the New Year) with modern languages being tackled before the end of 1989. That would leave art, music and physical education, for which it has been agreed that no attainment targets are to be set;

ii. the Secretary of State then publishes the report of the working party together with his proposals based on them, as a basis for formal statutory consultation by the National Curriculum Council (NCC). This is the stage which maths and science have now reached. Mr Baker wants to add English to them;

iii. the NCC puts its final recommendations to the Secretary of State. On maths and science he expects to receive these recommendations by 30 November. They will be published in accordance with the Act;

iv. the Secretary of State then prepares a draft Parliamentary Order which he has to publish and issue for consultation for a minimum period of one month;

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v. the Order is then laid before Parliament and becomes law. The attainment targets and programmes of study are subject to negative resolution procedure.

4. Overall Mr Baker's aim is to introduce attainment targets for maths and science at <sup>age</sup>11, and maths, science and English at <sup>age</sup>5, from September 1989. The timetable for English is tight: the NCC will be required to make its final recommendations by mid-February 1989, so that Mr Baker can complete the Statutory Order-making process by around April/May.

#### ISSUES

5. There is a great deal which could be debated in the Cox Report. You may wish to concentrate on the following.

6. First, there are the main subjects which are to be covered by attainment targets. The Report proposes that there should be three 'profile components' with six attainment targets (paragraph 1.8):

i. speaking and listening. Here it proposes one attainment target, as follows:

"Pupils should demonstrate their understanding of the spoken word and the capacity to express themselves effectively in a variety of speaking and listening activities, matching style and response to audience and purpose" (paragraph 8.12);

ii. reading. Here it proposes two attainment targets. The first, which would have 70 per cent weighting (paragraph 9.26), would be:

"the development of the ability to read, understand and respond to all types of writing" (paragraph 9.2). The second, with 30 per cent weighting would be:

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"the development of reading and information-retrieval strategies for the purpose of study".

iii. writing. Here it proposes three attainment targets. The first, which would attract 70% weighting (paragraph 10.41), would be:

"a growing ability to construct and convey meaning in written language".

The second, with 20% weighting (paragraph 10.41), would be: "spelling". The third, with 10% weighting, would be: "handwriting".

7. You will wish to consider whether you are content with the general shape of these proposals. For instance:

*Spelling*  
i. whether it is right to include listening and speaking and to give it 100% weighting compared with, say, 20% for spelling. Mr Baker believes that reading and writing must assume greater importance after 7 and should therefore be given greater weight in the later primary years;

ii. whether the attainment targets are adequate and clear enough. The comments which Mr Baker proposes to publish indicate that he thinks the statements need greater exemplification and may need to be made more specific to provide an adequate basis for assessment.

8. More generally, you may wish to consider whether the general content of the attainment targets and programmes of study look about right. For instance:

i. spelling and punctuation. Mr Baker in his minute to you welcomes the inclusion of spelling and punctuation. The relevant passages appear to be paragraphs 5.33 and 10.2) of the Report. But is the weighting of 20% right (see above)? And is the faintly dismissive tone on 'secretarial' skills justified (see paragraph 10.41, for instance)?

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ii. grammar and 'terminology'. Mr Baker believes that these must be given greater prominence and made clearer and more precise. The Report itself comes down against exercises and drills (paragraph 5.13 and 5.26, last sentence) in favour of introducing terms, as they become necessary and appropriate at different stages of teaching (paragraph 5.33);

iii. reading. You may wish to glance at the list of authors in paragraph 6.12.

9. Overall, there is the question how far the National Curriculum should promulgate Standard English. On this the Report (chapter 4) appears to be tentative. For instance, its language is wary: "all children have an entitlement to learn, and if necessary to be explicitly taught, the functions and forms of Standard English" (paragraph 4.2 and paragraph 8.11). It comes down in favour of a gradual policy on the use of standard forms (paragraph 4.19), accepting that Standard English should be taught "for its uses in formal, public and especially written language" (paragraph 4.24) but also hinting at age 16 as the sort of age at which it should definitely be taught (paragraph 4.17 and 4.24) and leaving it to schools to decide "exactly when and how standard English should be taught" (paragraph 4.24). You may wish to ask Mr Baker whether he is content with this approach.

10. One possibility would be to ask Mr Baker to involve Professor Griffiths closely in the remaining stages of the preparation of the Parliamentary Order on attainment targets. You may wish to suggest this.

#### History and Geography

11. There has been some debate on whether there should be attainment targets for history and geography. E(EP) last October remained unconvinced of the case for doing so; and in subsequent correspondence Mr Baker told you in a minute of 11 November that "the Bill as drafted gives total discretion to the holder of my office on whether or not to specify attainment targets, programmes

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of study and assessment arrangements for each of the foundation subjects". He mentioned the issue again in E(EP) on 14 April this year, and now wants to make early progress with setting up the necessary working parties. If you are content in principle, you may wish to ask to be consulted at an early stage about the names of the people whom he intends to appoint to the working party, including the Chairman. You might also seek confirmation that, as agreed by E(EP) he has no plans for attainment targets on maths, science and physical education.

#### ANNOTATED AGENDA

12. You may wish to raise the following points on Mr Baker's annotated agenda:

i. schemes of local management of schools. Are there any local education authorities which are not pursuing this with vigour? Our understanding is that about half a dozen may not be doing so. If this is correct, the question then is what he is going to do about them;

ii. admissions. The Department of Education have stuck firmly to 1990 as the earliest date at which schools can be required to admit pupils up to their physical capacity. You may wish to ask how many schools in practice are likely to be operating the policy next September; how many applications they expect to get from schools wishing to change their standard number (our understanding is that the figure may ~~be~~ about 1000, which is roughly 20 per cent of the total); and whether the DES circular which he mentions encourages schools to make early progress in implementing the policy.

iii. opting-out. The key question is how many schools are likely in practice to achieve grant-maintained status, and how quickly. Mr Baker refers to enquiries from "over 300 schools". He should have a fair idea by now how many of these will opt out by September 1989, since their applications will need to reach him by around the end of this year:

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what is the number? (Our understanding is that it might be in the range 8 to 20). And how many does he expect to achieve GM status by September 1990? What are the obstacles and how can they be removed? There have been Press reports of one local authority - Thameside - circumventing opting-out by leasing school premises and assets to a private company, wholly owned by themselves. Is this a loophole?

iv. collective worship. You may wish to ask when Standing Advisory Committees on collective worship are expected to be in place; and how the new provisions are to be enforced more effectively than before;

v. governing bodies. You may want to ask what success there has been in involving local businessmen, and in getting new parent governors on to the governing bodies of schools. Has there been a radical shift in the nature of the bodies and the way they will operate in future?

vi. CTCs. Progress is reported to be slow. One problem is finding sites for them. Mr Baker is reported recently to have had a meeting with Mr Fowler to talk about taking over redundant skills centres: you may want to ask about this possibility.

vii. ILEA. There have been a lot of Press reports about developments in ILEA. For instance, there have been reports that switching control to the inner London boroughs is costing much more than expected, with for instance Wandsworth spending 92 per cent more than was allowed for; and the Times today reports Mr Baker as having given the Association of London Authorities some kind of assurance about keeping spending broadly in line with its present level. You may wish to ask how many schools ILEA has closed so far this financial year, given falling rolls, and how its surplus places look.

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viii. Universities. You may wish to ask about Mr Baker's current thinking on the possibility of funding higher education through vouchers. We understand that DES are putting a substantial effort into exploring proposals on this.

ADW.

R T J WILSON  
Cabinet Office  
25 October 1988

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