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CABINET

DISPERSAL TO EAST KILBRIDE

Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

1. The Prime Minister has asked that among the options for dispersal to be considered by Cabinet on 18 March should be the relocation of the Directorate of Overseas Surveys (DOS). As the Directorate is my responsibility I am circulating a note on that subject.

2. As I said in my minute of 22 February there are three reasons why the Overseas Development Administration's (ODA) Scientific Units should not be dispersed:

- a. the cost would be considerable
- b. the highly trained teams could very well break up if dispersed to East Kilbride
- c. they have important links with institutions near to their present sites.

All these reasons apply to the Directorate of Overseas Surveys. This is a Unit of high international repute which provides an invaluable service in mapping developing countries. Such maps are indispensable in planning economic development: without them proper resource planning cannot be achieved.

STAFF

3. The DOS has been subject to a number of searching examinations in recent years of which the most recent and fundamental was in 1977. Experienced staff have resigned as a result and morale is at an all time low. If a decision to disperse the Directorate is taken now, I would expect those members of the staff with any prospect of other employment in the South to leave. The output of the Directorate depends on its production staff; the bulk of these would have little difficulty in obtaining jobs elsewhere.

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4. Unlike the case of the ODA main grades already being dispersed, there will be no possibility of other Government officials in the London area volunteering to take their place or of other staff being recruited in Scotland because the Directorate trains its own staff and is the only source of the skills required. Those remaining would not amount to a viable unit. To recreate the Directorate would involve retraining a considerable number of staff over a period of 3-4 years at a cost estimated in June 1979 to be £10,000 a head. If it were decided not to recreate it money would have to be found for redundancy payments. Thus we should have destroyed the Directorate, incurred considerable costs and be no nearer finding 200 more posts for East Kilbride.

THE BUILDING

5. The Directorate's machines require vibration-free areas and dust-free conditions. The present building in East Kilbride was not planned to provide such facilities and would need considerable modification at additional cost. Since more space per head would be required because of the nature of the work carried out, many fewer than 650 could be fitted into the building. The whole dispersal programme would be seriously delayed and the ODA vanguard could not go up in early 1981 as planned.

6. The Directorate has strong links with the Ordnance Survey at Southampton and much of its work involves close negotiations with consultancy firms in and around London. These contacts would be much more difficult and costly from East Kilbride.

7. The Directorate has been under threat of dispersal for years with disastrous effects on morale. We considered its dispersal again twice in 1979 and the decision was against doing so on both occasions. Nothing has changed since then to make the case for dispersal of the Directorate any stronger than for any of the other units or departments in other Ministries which were let off the hook last year.

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

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