



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

Top Copy.

Govt Machinery, July 1979

appointment of Govt Machinery
dec Pliatzky to consider Quangos

MR VILE

The Prime Minister has considered Sir Leo Pliatzky's report on the non-departmental bodies for which the Cabinet Office is responsible.

In respect of the Advisory Council for Applied Research and Development, the Prime Minister agrees with Sir Leo's recommendation. She is content that ACARD should continue for a further two years, and she would like Sir Robert Armstrong to report to her on its current performance, and the case for continuing it or bringing it to an end, within that time scale. I suggest that Sir Robert should aim to report to the Prime Minister before the end of the 1981 summer recess.

The Prime Minister looks forward to receiving Lady Young's proposals on the future of the Women's National Commission. As you know, the Prime Minister takes the view that for political reasons a "leave well alone" policy will prove most appropriate. She has it in mind that half an extra secretary should be provided. She recalls that, in her time as co-chairman, there was some part-time help in addition to the two secretaries.

I am sending copies of this minute to Alex Stewart (Department of Education and Science), Sir Leo Pliatzky and to David Laughrin (Civil Service Department).

29 October 1979

M. A. PATTISON

Top copy: Galt Mach, Pt 3, Quagos.

PRIME MINISTER

FROM SIR LEO PLIATZKY

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MR PATTISON

NON-DEPARTMENTAL PUBLIC BODIES: WOMEN'S NATIONAL COMMISSION
AND ACARD

1. This is to let you have my comments on the two bodies for which the Cabinet Office is responsible - the Women's National Commission and the Advisory Council for Applied Research and Development.

Women's National Commission

2. This body was set up in 1969 and has the following terms of reference.

"To ensure by all possible means that the informed opinion of women is given its due weight in the deliberation of Government on both national and international affairs."

3. The Commission comprises 47 representatives of national organisations, who provide one of its two Co-Chairmen; the other is Baroness Young, Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science.

4. The Commission are serviced by one Principal and one Clerical Officer, who last year cost the Cabinet Office about £26,000. The travelling and subsistence expenses of the Commission's members cost £7,000.

5. The Commission's terms of reference are extraordinarily vague and it appears to be an ineffective body which does not satisfy most of the criteria adopted in the exercise on public bodies generally. I understand that Baroness Young agrees with this assessment as regards the Commission in its present form, but she considers that it is politically out of the question to abolish it, and that it should be given different and more specific terms of reference and increased staff support. She shares, I believe, the view of officials that this could not take the form of a link with the Secretariat of the Equal Opportunities Commission, which has a different remit and is located in Manchester. This need not in itself rule out some other arrangement for closer links between the two organisations.

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6. Without making excessively heavy weather of this issue, it would be helpful to be as clear as possible about the objective. Is it to give due weight to the informed opinion of women on both national and international affairs, when there must be many subjects on which there is no opinion of women as such? Or is it to safeguard the interests of women in particular spheres where these certainly do exist? If so, is this really best achieved by the present kind of arrangement involving a great number of women's organisations?

7. The answer may be that it is politically too difficult to disengage from this arrangement and, even if there is no positive value in continuing it, there would in this sense be disadvantage in terminating it. In that case it is not clear that matters would be much improved purely by a change in the terms of reference and an increase in staff support. The Cabinet Office would naturally not welcome having to provide this within their staff ceiling as adjusted by recent cuts, and the question might arise whether this role should remain with them.

8. The Prime Minister may wish to discuss these matters with Baroness Young and the Secretary to the Cabinet. If the Commission is given new terms of reference and an enhanced staff, I suggest that on this basis it should be given a limited lease of life, say three years, after which a fresh decision would be needed to continue it. I am likely to put forward in my report a suggestion on these lines with regard to advisory committees generally.

Advisory Council for Applied Research and Development (ACARD)

9. ACARD was set up in 1976 to advise the Government on applied research and development and technological development. Its membership was chosen so as to make it industrial and engineering in outlook rather than theoretical and scientific. Last year it cost the Cabinet Office about £42,000 to service it, and travel and subsistence expenses were a little over £1,000.

10. It is clearly not an essential body, but it has some general value as a forum for both outsiders and Government Chief Scientists in an otherwise highly decentralised governmental system in relation to science and technology; and its work has some practical value in promoting awareness of technological possibilities, a contribution which some people would rate fairly highly and others less so.

11. ACARD is said to have got off to a poor start but to be doing better now. The tenor of the views which I had from Sir John Hunt and Sir Kenneth Berrill was that the abolition

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of ACARD would leave something of a gap and would lead to pressure from a number of interests; some, such as the Royal Society, would want to revive the old Council for Science Policy, while others would want to replace ACARD by a more expensive arrangement following the publication of the report of the Finniston Committee of Inquiry into the Engineering Profession. A move to combine ACARD and the Advisory Board for the Research Councils is conceivable but the outcome would be uncertain and might save no money, and the change would certainly take a great deal of negotiation.

Amend
12. My advice is to give ACARD a further lease of life of up to two years, before the end of which Sir Robert Armstrong should report to you on its current performance and the case for continuing it or bringing it to an end. During this period further thought could be given to the idea of a new arrangement involving the Advisory Board for the Research Councils.

13. I am sending copies of this to the Private Secretary to Baroness Young, to Sir Ian Bancroft and to Sir John Hunt.

L.P.

LEO PLIATZKY

23 October 1979

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