



DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

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FROM THE SECRETARY OF STATE

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17th July 1986

In Michael,

Thank you for your letter of 30 June with which you enclosed Professor Durrands' letter of 22 June to the Prime Minister about my recent decision to withdraw approval from the Part I Architecture course at Huddersfield Polytechnic and North East London Polytechnic (NELP).

I can well understand Professor Durrands' disappointment, and that of local Conservatives, at the outcome, but neither Keith Joseph, who took the provisional decision, nor I, who confirmed it, did so without careful consideration. All the concerns now expressed by Professor Durrands were explicitly addressed.

First, Professor Durrands talks about "highly questionable procedures and flawed evidence". But it was precisely because Keith did not believe that the advice he was given in December 1985 by the Committee of the National Advisory Body, NAB, about the future pattern of architecture provision was satisfactorily substantiated that he initiated a further review by the Department. The purpose of this review was to establish whether it would be reasonable to proceed, as NAB's second tier Board had recommended, to close the Part I Architecture courses at Huddersfield and NELP.

Reasonable on what grounds?

by whom? Keith's review took the form of an independent survey of the evidence available to NAB. During the course of it Huddersfield and NELP were themselves invited to comment on the accuracy of the factual evidence. In the light of that review Keith took his provisional decision. The reasons underlying his decision were communicated to both NELP and Huddersfield together with an invitation to make further representations of which both took advantage in meetings with Keith in April. Before confirming Keith's decision, I saw not only the results of his review, but also the written representations made for and on behalf of both polytechnics and the records of the meetings Keith had held.

/As to

As to the criterion of quality, Professor Durrands' second main concern, it was consulted at every stage of the review process. But it was not the sole, nor determining criterion. It could not be because all the public sector architecture schools were at the material time judged by HMI, on the basis of the findings of inspection visits to all public sector architecture courses, to be above an acceptable threshold of quality. The schools at Huddersfield and NELP were identified for closure not because of poor quality, but in relation to other planning criteria. In particular, they were located in areas otherwise well-provided for with architecture courses and were among the smallest schools in 1984 when a census of enrolments was taken. Huddersfield in fact was the smallest, with a total enrolment of architecture students well below the recommended minimum. The quality point at issue was thus whether the closure of the two courses on these planning grounds would nevertheless represent a serious loss of quality to the sector as a whole. The view of HMI was that, in terms of quality, both schools fell in the lower half of the range of public sector schools and consequently their closure would not, in the judgement of HMI, constitute a serious loss of quality to the system.

Finally, Professor Durrands suggests that there are alternative ways of saving public money on architecture training. This I take to be a reference to the possibility, canvassed by Councillor Mrs Carter of the Kirklees Authority, of cutting the formal period of architecture education, which the majority of aspirants to the profession follow in publicly maintained institutions, from 5 years to 4. To do so would indeed secure a saving. But it would not do anything to curb the existing over-supply of architects diagnosed by the transbinary group, chaired by Lord Esher, which was commissioned by the NAB and UGC in 1983 to review architecture education. On the contrary it would merely maintain it - a state of affairs which, for as long as the majority of architects continue to receive their formal professional training at public expense, I do not believe to be easily justifiable. The transbinary group therefore considered that the number of entrants and hence of graduates needed to be reduced, leading in turn to a reduction in the number of courses, rather than reducing student numbers by shortening the course, which it confirmed should in the view of the profession remain at 5 years.

I set all this out for your own and the Prime Minister's information. I do not believe that the Prime Minister should respond to Professor Durrands in similar detail. That would be inappropriate against the background of the legal action which Professor Durrands contemplates. I gather that Huddersfield is now definitely seeking leave for a judicial review of my decision. In so doing it will be following the example of NELP which has already secured leave. Instead I suggest that the Prime Minister reply on the lines of the accompanying draft.

Yours
Humen

But the main criterion

Quality between them

Figures for all please

Are all these open in the appendix

of results?

Excellent idea what we do up about the over supply of lawyers has been said some reduced course