

Note of a meeting of the Working Party on the future of Research Group policy held in the Cockcroft Hall on Tuesday, 17th March 1959.

Present: Mr. D.W. Fry (in the Chair)
Dr. E. Bretscher
Dr. J.V. Dunworth
Mr. L. Grainger
Dr. W.M. Lomer
Dr. L.B. Mullett
Dr. T.G. Pickavance
Dr. R. Spence
Mr. D.R. Willson
Mr. R.M. Fishenden (Secretary)

... The Director attended at the start of the meeting to brief the Working Party on its task. He read an extract from minutes of the A.E.A. meeting held on January 30th, of which a copy is attached to this note. (AEX(59)5th Meeting Min.11)

The Director said Mr. Fry and Mr. Willson had suggested that this working party should be set up to advise him of the effects on the Research Group of Authority policy. He had thought this was a valuable suggestion and the working party was now in being. The Director then invited Mr. Fry to take the chair, and left the meeting.

The meeting took the form of a general discussion, in which the following are some of the main points made:-

(a) The R.G. staff has grown for the last 4 years at about 14% p.a. It is now limited to 8% p.a. with the prospect of further restriction in about 3 year's time. During this period the rate of capital expenditure has grown by about £1.4m. p.a., and staff increases have barely matched this growth of capital. The rate of increase of capital expenditure shows no sign of slackening for at least the next 3 years.

(b) In the past new scientific commitments have been taken on without any careful assessment of the consequential service commitments. Although this has not led to serious difficulty during a period of expansion, a similar policy would lead to difficulty with a fixed staff level.

(c) In Authority discussion of R.G. expansion, four different criteria for limitation have been used:-

- (i) Total numbers on Harwell site.
- (ii) Total R.G. staff.
- (iii) Management load.
- (iv) Expenditure.

It is important to know which of these aspects is uppermost in the Authority's mind.

(d) A careful review, involving substantial pruning, of the reactor programme has already taken place. Dr. Dunworth said he believed the remaining programme could be achieved with the staff available.

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(e) Mr. Grainger said that although the reactor programme had been reduced to the smallest practicable level, he was doubtful whether the 8% proposals provided the effort required to support it. I.G. investigations had led to the conclusion that increased support for the reactor programme would be required from Harwell.

(f) Dr. Spence said the French were already spending as much as the U.K. on their nuclear power programme. They would soon be able to start more adventurous projects than we could. He thought this would lead to national comparisons which would not be tolerated in the U.K.

(g) Room must be left for starting new projects. If the ceiling is fixed we must therefore be ruthless in stopping old work, or getting it off the site.

(h) Some members thought that the sort of small prunings that would be possible offered little scope for relief. In the long-term major fields e.g. exponential experiments might be put out to industry, but such a development would take some time to achieve.

Summing up Mr. Fry said it was clear that the two priority tasks for the Research Group were:-

- (i) Support for the nuclear power programme.
- (ii) Provision of staff to work on new ideas and basic research including basic technology.

After further discussion it was agreed that the working party should proceed as follows:-

(a) Members of the working party would go through paper DHC(59) 11 (Distribution of Research Group staff by project) and make a list of projects which they thought could be stopped or moved away from the Research Group. They would send this list privately to the Secretary, who would assemble the items into a paper circulated anonymously to working party members. It was agreed that lists should reach the Secretary by March 31st.

(b) A note should be sent to all Division Heads asking them to suggest, on the assumption that their complement was to remain fixed, what work they would stop or put out to contract.

18th March, 1959.

R.M. Fishenden

A.E.R.E., Harwell.

Circulation: Mr. D.W. Fry
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..... Summing up the Chairman said that the discussion had shown that to limit the annual increase of professional and ancillary staff to 8% a year would be a reasonable target for the next three years. He proposed, therefore, that the Research and Industrial Groups should work to this figure. Professional staff and ancillaries should be treated separately, in order to preserve a balance, and factory staff should be excluded from the exercise since their requirements would be determined by the production programme. Similarly, the staff at Amersham should be related to the isotopes production programme. It was however, important that the increase in staff should not continue indefinitely beyond the next three years. After 1962 the staff of the Research and Industrial Groups ought to decline if there were no further commitments additional to those now foreseen. The Groups' programmes should not therefore include commitments which would compel further increases in staff after 1962. So far as the Industrial Group were concerned this condition appeared to be met, but the Research Group programme should be re-examined to see whether there were any commitments proposed which would entail further staff increases after 1962.

The Meeting

- (1) approved the course of action proposed by the Chairman and invited Sir Leonard Owen and Dr. Schonland to implement it;
- (2) invited Sir Donald Perrott to discuss further with Dr. Schonland how the 8% should be calculated in the Research Group, with particular reference to the staff to be transferred to the National Institute;
- (3) invited Sir Donald Perrott, in consultation with Dr. Schonland, to examine the Research Group programme in the light of the policy proposed by the Chairman in regard to commitments affecting staff levels after 1962;
- (4) invited Sir Donald Perrott to arrange for the Research and Industrial Groups to study further and report in, say, 3 months on their considered redeployment of staff within the limits now proposed and their proposals for increased extra-mural work and cooperative working with industry, with reference to any general or organisational problems arising therefrom;