



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
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18 August 1989

Regional General Managers  
District General Managers  
Chief Executive Health Education Authority  
Chief Executive National Health Service Training Authority

Dear General Manager/Chief Executive

#### GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATIONS WITH SCHOOLS

The Department of Education and Science has produced guidance for other Government Departments and Non-Departmental Public Bodies on communications that they may wish to make with schools. The aim is to ensure that material sent to schools is suitable, effective and well-timed given the changes to the school curriculum affected by the Education Reform Act 1988.

The main provision in the guidance, which is reproduced at Annex A, is to clear proposed materials with DES. Any Regional (or District) health authority proposing to produce material for national dissemination to schools is asked to follow the guidance. The guidance does not apply to HAs preparing material for use in its local schools. In these cases HAs will already be working with Local Education Authorities and it will be for LEA(s) to decide if consultation with DES is necessary.

The Health Education Authority which already consults the DES before producing nationally any material for schools should continue to observe existing practices.

The NHSTA will wish to note that the guidance does not apply to recruitment literature.

This letter will be deleted and cancelled from the current communications index on 17 August 1990 unless notified separately.

Yours sincerely

*J Middleton*

John Middleton  
Assistant Secretary



ANNEX A

GUIDANCE TO GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS AND NDPBs

COMMUNICATIONS TO SCHOOLS BY GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS AND NDPBs

1. Government Departments may occasionally wish to convey messages or information to schools about matters coming within their area of responsibility. Such messages or information may take the form of booklets, posters, teachers' resource packs, films or videos. Such material can contribute usefully to education in schools, if it is well-produced and presented in a way in which it can be readily used by teachers.

2. This letter calls attention to recent legislation affecting the school curriculum in England and Wales and provides guidance on how Departments may ensure that material they send out to schools is suitable and effective. It covers all types of material except recruitment literature.

The 1988 Act

3. The Government is implementing a number of fundamental reforms of the school system following the passage of the Education Reform Act 1988 ("the 1988 Act"). These include in particular the progressive introduction of the National Curriculum beginning in the autumn of 1989. Schools are receiving a stream of communications from the DES and the Welsh Office, including major circulars, advice to teachers on translating the National Curriculum policy into practice, and statutory Orders establishing the attainment targets and programmes of study in the core and other foundation

subjects. (The core subjects are English, Mathematics, Science, and in Welsh-speaking schools in Wales, Welsh: the other foundation subjects are Design and Technology, History, Geography, Art, Music, Physical Education, in Secondary Schools a Modern Foreign Language, and in other schools in Wales, Welsh).

4. Schools are also receiving consultation documents, advice and guidance from the bodies established under the 1988 Act - the National Curriculum Council, the Curriculum Council for Wales and the School Examinations and Assessment Council. This flow of materials to schools is unlikely to abate for 3-4 years at least. Clearly there is a risk that schools will be unable to do justice to any extra material during this period; and they may be unsure how guidance from other Government Departments relates to their obligations under the 1988 Act. Departments are therefore asked to consider carefully the need to send further Government material to schools. If they conclude that it is needed, they need to consider how what they have to say might relate to the National Curriculum and other reforms stemming from the 1988 Act.

5. The DES and Welsh Office stand ready to advise on appropriate content for any communication, on its presentation and on the optimum timing for its release. It is important that the content of, say, teaching packs on a particular topic should be appropriate for teaching the age group(s) of pupils for whom it is intended. It should also be clear how the material might contribute to programmes of study in core or other foundation subjects, or to cross-curricular themes which may run through the whole curriculum (for example, environmental education, health education, or economic understanding). Moreover, the material needs to be available in sufficient quantities to enable teachers to use it in the classroom.

## The 1986 Act

6. Care must be taken to avoid any suspicion of political bias in the materials prepared for schools. Under Sections 44 and 45 of the Education (No 2) Act 1986 ("the 1986 Act"), local education authorities (LEAs), governing bodies and head teachers must avoid the promotion of partisan political views in the teaching of any subject, and must take appropriate steps to ensure that, where political issues are brought to the attention of pupils, the pupils are offered a balanced presentation of views.

7. While this responsibility under the 1986 Act rests with LEAs and schools, it is essential that use of materials originating in Government Departments or sponsored bodies does not give rise to justified complaints of political bias in schools. Where the contents of communications intended for schools are politically contentious, the issues must be presented factually, and must not include comment which could be regarded as politically biased.

## Consulting the Education Departments

8. Departments are requested to consult DES and/or Welsh Office, as appropriate, at the earliest opportunity when they are considering sending materials to schools. Advice should be sought whatever the purpose of the materials and whatever form they might take eg letter, leaflet, teaching pack, video etc. Where any substantial document is involved, or where difficult issues of principle may arise, the approach should if possible be made at least 3 months before the document goes for production.

9. Where schools request materials which have not been cleared previously with the relevant Education Department(s), the Department concerned should satisfy itself that the materials are suitable, and where a Department has any difficulty in making such a decision it should consult the appropriate Education Department. This guidance is not intended to discourage Departments from responding positively to such requests.

10. The above also applies to materials produced by NDPBs for which the Departments have responsibility and this guidance should be drawn to their attention.

11. Where Government Departments or their NDPBs have already established procedures for consulting the Education Departments on materials they produce on a regular basis as, for example, the Training Agency has for TVEI, they should continue to use those channels as appropriate.

12. Consultation with DES should be addressed in the first place to

Mr A J Wye  
Schools Branch 3 Division A  
Department of Education and Science  
Room 4/88, Elizabeth House  
York Road  
LONDON SE1 7PH

GTN: 3914-9828

and with Welsh Office to:

Mr M Evans  
Schools 1 Division  
Welsh Office  
Cathays Park  
CARDIFF CF1 3NQ

GTN:1208-3119

13. Scotland and Northern Ireland have distinct school systems and curricular arrangements which need to be taken into account if material is to go to schools in those countries. Consultation with the Scottish Education Department should in the first place be with:

Mr G A Stuart

Division 1

Scottish Education Department

Room 4/05

New St Andrew's House

EDINBURGH EH1 3SX

GTN: 7188-4500

and for the Department of Education in Northern Ireland:

Education Development and Support Branch

Department of Education

Rathgael House

Balloo Road

BANGOR

Co Down BT19 2PR

TEL: (0247) 270077 Ext 2547

