

10 December 1981

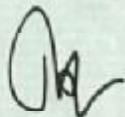
Policy Unit

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PRIME MINISTER

NATIONAL STANDARDS AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE

1. I thought I should mention this rather specialised subject to you. It came up in a recent CPRS paper to MISC 14.
2. CPRS have argued strongly for a much more vigorous attempt to improve and co-ordinate product standards, as a very important contributory factor to increasing exports (and probably also impeding imports, in some cases).
3. The difficulty is that Trade, who are responsible for National Standards, are very sluggish and half-hearted about it; while Industry is very keen to take it over and get moving. I mentioned this to Keith, who raised the general question of split responsibilities, during discussion at a recent MISC 14. A couple of days ago, however, John Biffen wrote round to MISC 14 members in an attempt to head-off any further discussion about Departmental responsibility for standards. I suspect that this issue will shortly be raised with you and I believe there are strong arguments for moving responsibility to the Department of Industry.



JOHN HOSKYNS



From the Secretary of State

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The Rt Hon Patrick Jenkin MP
Secretary of State for Industry
Department of Industry
Ashdown House
123 Victoria Street
London, SW1E 6RB

10 December 1981

Dear Patrick,

NATIONAL STANDARDS AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE: MLSC 14(31)2nd

You and I are asked to report within three months on the implementation of the recommendations of the CPES paper on National Standards and International Trade and I am writing to suggest how we handle the mechanics. The subject is wider than can be handled by the Inter-departmental Committee on Quality Assurance and Standards (IQS) so I think we need a small ad hoc group that can establish a work programme and 'chase' it. It should be chaired at Under Secretary level and I have asked Tony Eden to take this on. You, of course, need to be represented as do Geoffrey Howe, Norman Tebbit, Michael Heseltine and Robin Ibbs. We need to keep the numbers down but there are several other colleagues who have an interest, for example, David Howell, Norman Fowler, Peter Walker and John Mott though they might be content to receive papers and perhaps be represented, as necessary. If you agree, I will ask Tony Eden to arrange an early meeting of the group.

On the specific recommendations, we clearly need to get the Solicitors together to consider the feasibility, initially within existing legislation, of giving standards a legal status comparable to that in Germany. On the enforcement of arrangements for assessing and accrediting certification bodies and on introduction of a

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From the Secretary of State

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national mark I suggest that IQS, which has already had several discussions on the subject, be asked to give this aspect of their work priority and report to the ad hoc group.

I have also to report further before the coming recess on the implementation of the decisions reached by the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Economic Affairs. As you may know, work is well in hand within IQS to enable me to fulfil my obligation.

I am copying this to the members of MEBC 14 and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

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John Biffen

JOHN BIFFEN



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From the Secretary of State

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The Rt Hon Patrick Jenkin MP
Secretary of State for Industry
Department of Industry
Ashdown House
123 Victoria Street
London, SW1E 6RB

7 December 1981

Dear Patrick,

MEETING OF MISC 14: 30 NOVEMBER 1981

I have just seen the minutes of our meeting on Monday and feel I must record my surprise that you brought up the subject of Departmental responsibility for standards. As you may know, this subject is not new - it was last discussed at a meeting of E(EA) in May last year - when the conclusion was that the Department of Industry should be more closely involved in standards at all levels. This resulted in a representative of your Department being appointed to BSI's Board and a greater input from your Department.

I, of course, fully recognise the importance of maximum co-ordination of work on standards and for this reason the inter-Departmental committee on standards was set up in the early 1970s. We have also recently re-issued some guidelines so that Government representatives speak with the same voice on standards writing committees.

However the whole field of standards and their relationship to international trade, their use in legislation and their use in purchasing is complex. I do not believe that solutions lie in changing Departmental responsibilities but with changing industry's attitudes to the importance of standards. Here

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your Department's greater involvement in the standards writing committees can do nothing but good. I hope therefore that we can put the question of departmental responsibility to bed for the second time.

I am copying this to members of MISC 14.

J. Biffen
John Biffen

JOHN BIFFEN

21 DEC 1987



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