

The Cost of Promoting Government Education Policies

Susan Starkings

South Bank University

The Department for Education (DFE) publicity spending has in recent years reached astronomical proportions, see Table 1. It is noticeable that there is a significant increase on publicity just before the last 2 general elections. See Table 1 for the years 1986-87 and 1991-92. The overall spending has increased particularly from 1990.

Table 1

DFE Spending on Publicity since 1979	
Year	£000's
1979-80	103.8
1980-81	67.2
1981-82	136.8
1982-83	39.7
1983-84	84.5
1984-85	169.1
1985-86	198.9
1986-87	1,065.0
1987-88	1,739.0
1988-89	1,671.0
1989-90	1,399.8
1990-91	4,520.0
1991-92	8,880.6
1992-93	6,886.5
1993-94*	8,774.6

Source: Labour/Hansard

*estimate

The use of public money to promote the departments activities has been heavily criticised by Ann Taylor and other Labour MPs who have tabled Commons questions on the spending. The opposition MPs accuse ministers of using public money to promote Tory education policies. For example, in the past 5 years the DFE have spent £31.6 million on its publicity machine, compared with just £4.8 million in the previous 5 years.

The Parents' Charter cost £2.8 million and £1.6 million was spent on promoting grant-maintained school since their creation in 1988. One thing that seems certain is the growing cost of promoting Government Education policies the latest example being is the DFE and BBC Radio 1 roadshow. They did a tour of 25 towns throughout England in July at a cost £250,000 to the taxpayer.

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A further £149,000 on printing and distribution of an information leaflet about school tests was spent to try to justify why these standardised tests, known as SATs, are to be carried out. A pity that the schools running these tests were not paid any extra money for the implementation and marking of these tests. This is to be changed for the 1995 tests. This was partly due to the teachers boycott of this years Key Stage 3 tests. Gillian Shepherd, the Education Secretary, is trying to get the teachers to run these government imposed tests next year and this payment is to be used as a sweetener. John Patten was unsuccessful in his attempt to get teachers to carry out, mark and submit the marks this year. Where is the extra money coming from to mark these tests? Also if the money can be found for next year why was there no offer of any financial assistance for this year? What is to be cut in order to pay for these tests? Sir Ron Dearing was brought in to review the National Curriculum and in particular the testing programme. Whether this Dearing review turns out to be popular or not is immaterial. There has still been a significant amount of money spent on the process, let alone the publicity spending it has incurred.

One of Gillian Shepherd's first tasks as an incoming Education Secretary was to put out a press release. The message was to tell teachers and parents that she would like to talk to them. How much did this cost ?

Finally a DFE spokesman, in July (see Sutcliffe 1994), acknowledged the increase in the publicity budget, saying it reflected the Government's concern to provide more information!

References

Sutcliffe, J. (1994). PR machine revs up to bury Patten legacy, Times Education Supplement

Articles for the next magazine should be sent to the editors, by end of October 1994.
