

*From the Master
Lord Ashby, F.R.S.*

*Clare College
Cambridge
CB2 1TL*

5 November 1974

Professor Paul Berg,
Stanford University Medical Center,
Stanford,
California 94305,
U.S.A.

Dear Paul,

Here is a prompt answer to your letter of 1 November. We are drafting our report now. We are trying to get it through as promptly as possible, so there may not be time to send you a draft for comments; but as soon as there is an agreed document, I will, of course, let you have it in confidence.

Briefly, our consensus (and it is a consensus) is that the pause has been valuable in prompting workers in this field to assess the situation; that there are two techniques for minimising hazards - the traditional techniques of containment such as are used in dealing with dangerous pathogens, and the additional techniques of "disarming the bug" by building in mutations which would make it non-viable in humans. We shall also have something to say about monitoring and epidemiological studies. Furthermore, we are making it clear that we are publishing not a final policy paper but a paper for discussion by experts and the Royal Society will arrange a meeting sometime early next year to discuss our report.

✓ All this seems consistent with your plans for the February conference. I think it may be a good idea if the Royal Society conference comes before yours; then the consensus in Britain (if there turns out to be one) can be fed into your conference.

As to representatives at your conference I am sure you are right to select people on their personal qualifications and not to represent official bodies. I would not expect the MRC or our Department of Health to take any exception to this. Over the Royal Society I am a little less certain (I believe that the President was slightly disappointed that he was not consulted about the membership of our working group). Since he is himself a biologist, I would suggest that the most diplomatic move on your part would be to write to him, telling him that you would not wish to ask the Royal Society to nominate representatives because this would lead to complications with scientific bodies in other countries; but that you have in mind to invite (and then give a list of names) and if he, in his personal capacity, has any other names to suggest, will he please do so. Then you will have what will be the benefit of a Royal Society representation without it being so officially. I shall be seeing the President myself in the next few days and I will take the opportunity of putting this kind of case to him anyway.

Yours sincerely,

Eric.

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Sender's name and address

Lord Ashby
Clare College,
Cambridge,
England

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Stanford University Medical Center,
Stanford,
California 94305,
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