

R7  
From THE PRINCIPAL

SOMERVILLE COLLEGE

OXFORD

OX2 6HD

Telephone: 0865/55880 (College)

0865/57015 (Home)

1st November, 1979.

The Prime Minister,  
10 Downing Street,  
London.

Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing to you about the fees proposed for overseas students from 1980 onwards.

not copied to PM

I hope that you have seen the letter of 18th October, 1979 from Sir Alec Merrison, Chairman of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals of the Universities of the United Kingdom, to the Secretary of State for Education and Science expressing the deepest concern at the Government's proposals for the future funding of our universities, and particularly at the effect of these proposals on overseas students.

The Fellows of your college and I share this concern. We are well aware of the urgent need for economy in public spending, but we are equally conscious of the immense value to our universities and the country as a whole of the education that Britain has for so long provided for overseas students side by side with our own. As Sir Alec Merrison points out, under the new proposals the amount that would have to be charged to overseas students in university fees alone, leaving aside college fees and maintenance, would be far in excess of the charges of any other university in the world. It would put our universities right out of the reach of all but a very few very rich students, or those paid for by Marshall, Commonwealth and comparable scholarships, the number of which would have to be drastically reduced. Students would inevitably turn elsewhere for the education previously sought in our country. (As one who has worked abroad for 19 years in four widely different countries, I have no doubt of the very high regard in which our education is held.) Moreover, the astonishment and resentment that the new charges would provoke would not be forgotten, even were we later to revert to something like our present charges. The irreparable damage inflicted would be no less great because it cannot be quantified. I do not mean only the damage inflicted on other countries, in which our high educational standards have had so much influence, but the harm to ourselves: to our prestige, our understanding of other nations, our trade and the opportunities open

/cont.

to our own students. The demand from overseas for our books, for example, equipment and technical knowledge would slump, and there would be bound to be retaliation when our own students need to pursue their studies abroad. Why should the German Academic Exchange Service, for instance, and the best of the American universities continue to offer free places with their present generosity to citizens of this country if we price our own higher education out of the market for their citizens?

We might reflect on what this country owes to such men as Kenneth Wheare, Ronald Syme, Howard Florey and Abdus Salam, none of whom had wealthy fathers and all of whom came to Britain for a significant part of their higher education and made their homes here. But at least as important to us are the great numbers of young men and women of high intelligence whose presence has enriched our universities and polytechnics, and who have taken back what they themselves have learned to their own countries, where their influence has been of a value out of all proportion to what they have cost us.

The Fellows and I most earnestly beg you not to allow a step to be taken by your Government which will do such grave and lasting harm to our universities and the whole nation.

Yours sincerely,

*B. D. Craig*

B. D. Craig (Mrs.)