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The Rt Hon Nicholas Ridley MP
Secretary of State
Department of the Environment
2 Marsham Street
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See Mail

STUDENTS AND THE COMMUNITY CHARGE

I am replying to your letter of 22 January about the registration of students for community charge purposes. *file with PC*

I recognise that students change their address more frequently than the other major categories of community charge payers, and I would not resist your conclusion that a statutory duty to provide information should be placed on education establishments if it were clear that registration officers could not otherwise satisfactorily perform their functions in relation to students. However, there must be some risk of antagonising both students and institutions if requirements in respect of students alone are introduced into the Local Government Finance Bill without adequate consultation and explanation. There is no such requirement in the Scottish legislation, already enacted. If the Scots are prepared to dispense with a statutory requirement, its introduction in England and Wales will surely invite criticism. How would you answer it?

In my view, therefore, the conclusion that the Bill should impose an obligation on educational institutions is premature, and the question should be further studied by officials of our Departments and the Scottish Office. As for your proposal that students should be required to pay their community charge liability in three instalments, I am afraid that seems to me clearly discriminatory and without justification. I do not believe that students are more likely than any other section of the community to seek to evade their liability. An obligation to pay up to six months' community charge in advance, even at the discounted rate, would undoubtedly cause financial hardship, especially to the many without a full maintenance grant.

I am copying this letter to the other recipients of yours.

Thorne
Smith

LOCAL WOV: RATES

