

# Mentions of Oxford and Oxbridge in Parliament

**Date: May 2014**

- 1) Commons, Adjournment debate: Abortion, mention
- 2) Lords: Adjournment debate; several mentions
- 3) Lords: Immigration Bill, Report stage: mention

## MPs debate abortion on the ground of disability

Wed, 9 April 2014

### **Mention**

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con):

I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for this opportunity to speak on a sensitive subject. Few would disagree that Britain is a friendlier place for disabled people than it was a few decades ago—better, that is, unless we are talking about a disabled baby in the womb. The contrast between the way we see disabled people before and after birth could barely be starker. A disabled unborn child has effectively no rights up to birth. Many people are shocked to learn that he or she can be aborted right up to birth—as many as 16 weeks beyond the 24-week threshold for able-bodied babies. But the moment after birth, a whole panoply of rights and support suddenly comes into play for the disabled child. I know that from personal experience, and here declare an interest. My own son, Sam, was born with a club foot, one of the defects for which an abortion up to birth can be obtained. Yet within minutes of his birth, the hospital telephoned its specialist in treating club feet, who was on leave at the time and who rushed in within two hours to begin manipulating Sam's foot.

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con):

On the issue of abortions up to birth, does my hon. Friend share my belief that where the disability may be relatively minor—a cleft palate or something such as that—the public would be very concerned to learn that these were allowed literally right up to birth?

Fiona Bruce:

Indeed I do, and I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. Although there are not many such abortions, there are still some taking place for treatable and relatively minor defects, such as a club foot. My son had physiotherapy every day for the first year of his life. He wore a calliper in his early years and he had two operations until into his teens, but now one would never know, unless one was a specialist, that he had been born with a foot defect. Yesterday, Sam was 21, and in the past few days has heard that he has been admitted to **Oxford university**. It is hard to think that such a treatable disability could have deprived him of life, and he is far from alone. I believe that the footballer, Steven Gerrard, was born with a club foot.

## Lords debate Higher Education

Wed, 9 April 2014

Lord Bilimoria (CB):

My Lords, last Friday, Professor Venkatraman Ramakrishnan—known as “Venki”—the winner of the Nobel Prize in chemistry 2009, joint chair of the structural studies centre at the University of Cambridge and a fellow of Trinity College, received an award at the Asian Awards at the Grosvenor House Hotel for outstanding achievement in science and technology. In his acceptance speech, he said:

“I was very touched by the Prime Minister who gave us such a warm welcome address in a video message earlier this evening but I have to say, over the past 10 years, the level of xenophobia and anti- immigration rhetoric has been ramming up—visa laws are increasingly restrictive, so that’s hard for us senior scientists to attract the best talent! They do not see necessarily that actually Britain is really a wonderful place. I get offers regularly to go back to the U.S and I always decline, because I love working here. That perception has to be changed and can only come”

from the Government changing their policies on immigration. There I end the quote from one of the world’s great scientists.

Foreign academics make up 30% of all the academics at our top universities, including **Oxford and Cambridge**, and foreign students are some of our most talented undergraduates and postgraduates. If people such as Professor Ramakrishnan are saying things like this, who knows how many future Nobel Prize winners are choosing not to take up a position at our universities?

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The Lord Bishop of Winchester (Bp)

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The world-view of the great medieval universities such as **Oxford and Cambridge** and those of the modern universities such as Berlin and London meant that they were such institutions. Universities such as these require investment for the common good by those who have responsibility for the common good. However, focusing research in just a few universities and in certain kinds of disciplines will undermine the very inquisitiveness and spread of research required. I am delighted that Liverpool Hope University has one of the best research centres on world Christianity. It might be a key resource for understanding today’s renewal of global religion and its impact on our societies.

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Baroness Greenfield (CB):

I congratulate the right reverend Prelate on his inspiring and insightful speech. I warmly welcome him to your Lordships’ House and look forward to his continuing contributions on a wide range of issues, including economics, social welfare and the Navy. Turning back to universities, I join other noble Lords in thanking the noble Lord, Lord Ahmad, for introducing this important debate.

Having spent most of my working life in the university sector, I am fully aware of the diverse issues that we need to explore. I have been in turn an undergraduate, a postgraduate and a tutor of medicine at **Oxford University**, where I remain a senior research fellow at Lincoln College. In addition, I served for seven years as chancellor of Heriot-Watt University, as well

as working in higher education establishments abroad; namely, the Collège de France in Paris and New York University Langone Medical Center. I am also aware of the thrills and spills involved in commercialising university science, having recently spun out a biotech company, Neuro-Bio Ltd, where I am chief scientific officer.

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That brings us to the appeal of university-based research to investors. **Oxford University**, for example, prefers to retain the IP and offer instead exclusive licence agreements. While the merit obviously lies in insuring against an investor failing to realise the true potential of the invention, as an opening condition in negotiations it is a disincentive. Moreover, the fees paid to the scientist on such a licensing deal would be fixed at 15%, with an eye-watering 85% retained by the university. This is hardly an attractive incentive to the scientist, any more than the alternative option of starting up a company where, before any investment is made, the university already owns 50% of the equity.

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Baroness Deech (CB):

My Lords, there has been a great deal of comment today about fees and the economic impact of university education. My contribution might however be titled, “Never mind the quality, feel the width”. That is, my concerns are about the quality of higher education, its overregulation in some areas and underregulation in others. Your Lordships should not doubt my devotion to the cause and my understanding of what difference a university education can make. I confess in public that it took me nine goes over three years at the entrance examinations before I was able to get my place at **Oxford**, when the numbers of women were very limited.

Fast-forwarding half a century, when I was head of an **Oxford college** I spent half my time fundraising. Teaching in the humanities is hardly funded at all and institutions are heavily reliant on the good will of alumni donations. Yet the alumni themselves will be paying off their loans and, later on, financing their children’s education for much longer than hitherto. It was predictable from the start of the new loans system that many would never earn enough to repay. Indeed, there is a subtle message in the system to women: government policy makes it sensible to find a husband while at college and never work, or take the lowest-paying part-time jobs in order to avoid reaching the threshold for repayment. It was clear that others would escape the jurisdiction and that enforcement would lead to a situation as expensive to the nation as the one it replaced.

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Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws (Lab):

My Lords, I declare my interests: I am the principal of **Mansfield College, Oxford**; I was the president of the School of Oriental and African Studies at London University; and, prior to that, I was the Chancellor of Oxford Brookes University. In the early 1990s, I sat on the National Commission on Education and was invited by the noble Baroness, Lady Shephard, when she was the Secretary of State for Education, to chair a committee that looked at further education. I have therefore had quite a lot of experience, cutting across the whole range of further and higher education. I am currently the president of a small foundation that provides bursaries for disadvantaged students travelling from further education into higher education, and am interested in further education as a second chance for many people to get into higher education. It is with that background that I stand before your Lordships today.

If the Government or the Opposition are interested in serious research, I recommend that of Professor Howard Hotson, a fellow at **St Anne's College, Oxford**, whose work is not only compelling but also rather difficult to refute. There is now a large body of readily available data showing that marketisation of higher education does not function in the way in which its advocates initially supposed. I remind your Lordships of the arguments that were presented to the nation for going down this road. The idea was that market competition would require universities to compete with each other to attract student customers, and that attracting students customers would require offering the best quality education possible at the most affordable price. Those universities which served the needs of students best would attract many customers and would expand and prosper; those universities which failed to do so would wither and die. The invisible hand of the market, we were told, would therefore reshape higher education in the interests of customers far better than any government state planners ever could. Thus we would unleash the power of the market and all would be well with the world.

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Baroness Perry of Southwark (Con)

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Today, in addition to the links between Cambridge and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the university has its first research centre outside the UK, in Singapore, dealing with advanced research in energy efficiency. Back in Cambridge, more than 250 academics are working also on energy-related topics, solving some of the complex problems of the issue of energy which face our world today. Those 250 academics are drawn from 27 different departments, faculties and centres in the university. They focus on the issue of energy but bring their expertise from the physical and life sciences, from technology and social science. The university believes that it is in such multidisciplinary approaches that solutions will be found to these complex problems.

It is my opinion that one of the reasons for the success of Cambridge—as is the case, of course, for **Oxford** and other universities—is its democratic management structure. At Cambridge, more than 3,500 people have the right to vote over every important decision proposed. Budgets are devolved to departments and not centrally controlled. Teams of researchers usually have total control over the use of their grants and their income from externally funded projects. It is all about trust. The best and most talented people can and should be trusted. If they are left alone they will do their work in the best possible way, following their own professional passion and enthusiasm. The simple fact is that that works. If we are going to bring out the best in people and see the best results from their efforts in higher education, it is infinitely more likely that they will work well if they are left free rather than regulated and controlled.

Baroness Bottomley of Nettlestone (Con):

My Lords, I have a sense of anxiety in addressing the House today, because I feel that I need to explain that I did not go to the University of Cambridge. I am not saying the same for they who begat me or they who we begat or he who I married, but I wish they House to be aware that I did not go to University of Cambridge.

Secondly, I most warmly congratulate the right reverend Prelate on his maiden speech. I did not entirely agree when he described himself as some jobbing priest, because I fear that he trained for the priesthood at the University of Cambridge. He was also at **Oxford**, and started off at another very distinguished university, the University of Durham, but I claim great affinity with him, as I am Baroness Bottomley of Nettlestone, on the Isle of Wight,

where I was christened and married and spend much time. He will know that the educational attainment and expectation for people on the Isle of Wight is all too pitifully low. I know that he will join others in doing all that he can to work on that critical issue. I also want him to know that I have an honorary doctorate from the University of Portsmouth, of which I am extremely proud.

### Lords Report Stage - Immigration Bill (Day Three)

Mon, 7 April 2014

Lord Pannick (CB)

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In practice, it seems likely that a deprivation of citizenship would normally occur while the individual is out of this country. However, that raises a concern that other countries may well say that the individual was allowed in only by reason of the fact that they were travelling on a British passport, and now that that status has been removed and the person has no other nationality, we, the United Kingdom, can have them back. Your Lordships may have seen the advice of Professor Guy Goodwin-Gill, professor of international refugee law at **Oxford University**, that in those circumstances this country would have an international law obligation to the other state to readmit that individual, however objectionable their conduct.