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From Prof. P.J. Corfield (History)
writing as President of the International Society
for Eighteenth-Century Studies (ISECS)
Home address =
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To the Rt. Hon. Priti Patel, MP, Home Secretary
Re: UK Visas and Immigration Service
c/o Home Office, 2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

12 September 2019

Dear Home Secretary,

Visa Difficulties facing Overseas Academics

I am writing as President of the International Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (ISECS), with the concurrence of the EC of this international body, to protest at the unnecessary visa delays and difficulties experienced by *bona fide* overseas scholars who planned to attend our recent International Congress, which was held in Edinburgh on 15-19 July 2019. (This event was devoted to the theme of 'Enlightenment Identities'. A copy of the printed Congress brochure is available, if required).

Four scholars from countries which are predominantly Islamic in their religious affiliation were not successful in obtaining visas, despite being able to show that their names were listed in the Congress programme and (in two cases) that ISECS had awarded them bursaries to cover costs of travel and accommodation. Numerous other scholars from India and Russia, also reported vexatious delays; and some were discouraged from attending by the difficulties.

This message of protest is couched in general terms, as the scholars concerned are unwilling for me to cite their names. They fear that any such information might be used against them, in the event of some future visa application.

Nonetheless, while couched in general terms, our protest is heartfelt. These delays and refusals are seriously harming the UK's capacity to host gatherings of international scholars.

In our case, ISECS has been working hard to extend participation from many different parts of the world, only to find our efforts being hampered. Moreover, because such visa problems are becoming widely known among opinion-formers overseas, very dark clouds are being thrown over the UK's reputation as a place that is truly 'open for business' on a world stage.

My colleagues and I would like to know why the Immigration Service did not check with the Congress organisers, who could have advised on the good faith of the various applicants? Surely some system of validation for academic and scholarly applicants can be devised that will aid, not mar, Britain's reputation?

In this general context, we note that the Royal Society of Great Britain on 18 July 2019 called publicly for urgent reforms to the UK's immigration and visa service, to make the system more favourable to the operation of international scholarship and research. We associate ourselves strongly with that message. Otherwise, Britain risks excluding itself from the international exchange and development of knowledge, which is a communal world resource with long-term benefits for all.

I look forward to hearing from you:

Yours sincerely,

Penelope J. Corfield
Prof. Emeritus Royal Holloway
University of London
Egham Surrey TW20 OEX

With copies to:

Seema Kennedy, MP
Minister of State for Immigration

Rt. Hon. Diane Abbott, MP
Shadow Home Secretary

Lord Alf Dubs, House of Lords
Member Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights

Sir Venkatraman Ramakrishnan,
President of the Royal Society

Sir David Cannadine
President of the British Academy

Prof. Margot Finn,
President of the Royal Historical Society

Dame Marina Warner
President of the Royal Society of Literature