

British universities

More money and more trouble ahead

Mr Kenneth Baker, Secretary of State for Education and Science in the British government, last week offered a mixture of sticks and carrots to British academics. In his first major statement of higher education since his appointment in the spring, Mr Baker seems to have left the universities with the impression that he is both on their side and on that of the government.

In a speech to the otherwise private annual meeting of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals at Edinburgh, Mr Baker said that there would be more money in the coming year (although the amount will not be known for some weeks) and that he, and the government of which he is a member, were now committed to wider access to higher education for students of all ages.

But Mr Baker also reminded universities of their obligations, in particular the need to concentrate research effort on the stronger departments, the "rationaliza-

tion" of small departments, the need for better management and teaching quality as well as the abridgement of tenure. Using the word "accountability" only in quotation marks, he asked universities to welcome public scrutiny of their affairs, not least because of "the opportunity it also brings to create public support".

The most striking feature of Mr Baker's statement is the declaration of his commitment to wider access, which comes after a long period when the government has sought to control the cost of higher education by restricting student numbers. Last week, the minister said that he wants to see "a higher proportion of our young people, and more older students, going into higher education of all kinds". He said that contraction "simply does not square" with Britain's need for highly qualified manpower.

The other side of the coin is the question of how the system might be paid for. With

the prospect that the cost of the British National Health Service will increase at 1 per cent a year simply to keep pace with demographic change, Mr Baker argued that higher education could not take more out of the economy in the long run than its present £3,000 million a year.

Student loans appear again to be part of the British government's answer to this long-standing problem although Mr Baker acknowledged that change from the present system of mandatory but means-tested maintenance grants for students would take time. His remarks coincided with the discussion by the vice-chancellors of a working paper in which one of the vice-chancellors' own committees had reluctantly come to the conclusion that loans might provide the quickest relief from the present impoverishment of many British students.

Mr Baker went much further, however, by arguing that the cost of higher education should be shared more equally between the government and parents on the one hand and by students and employers on the other. In particular, "we need to consider how employers might be given a more fundamental stake in the education and professional development of their future employees". □

Strategic exports

High-technology export tangle

Washington

IS THERE a pipeline for contraband high technology running from Columbus Ohio straight to Moscow? Possibly not, but that has not stopped the US Customs Service from holding for 15 months equipment worth \$50,000 designed to measure respiration in rats pending the outcome of an investigation of possible export law violations. Jan Czekajewski, president of Columbus Instrument, the company that makes the equipment, is anxious to prove that not only did he violate no laws, but that selling his oxygen analysers to Eastern European countries does not pose a threat to national security.

Czekajewski's troubles began in early 1985. His European distributor, the Finnish firm Anitek, requested samples of Columbus Instrument's latest equipment for a trade show in Moscow. On 30 May 1985, equipment worth \$228,812 was consigned to Burlington Air Freight for shipment to Finland. But on 1 June, at New York's Kennedy Airport, customs agents seized the shipment. They found the analysers, but they also found six computers; four Apple-IIe's, one Rockwell AIM-65 and one "SuperComputer", an IBM-PC clone made in Taiwan.

No export licenses were sought for the shipment as Czekajewski assumed that it did not require one. (The computers were hardly state-of-the-art, while the oxygen

analysers never required any special licence.) Two days later, customs agents went to Columbus Instrument headquarters, searching for other computer and high-technology equipment. Czekajewski says the customs agents made a second visit on 13 June, this time accompanied by reporters and television news crews. Local news broadcasts that night spoke of Customs agents unearthing a plot to ship "supercomputers" and other high-technology equipment to the Soviet Union.

That was more than a year ago. So far, no formal charges have been filed against Czekajewski. In October, the Commerce Department's International Trade Administration determined that all computers in the shipment but the SuperComputer did not require a special license and should be returned to Columbus Instruments. The Customs Service returned most of the shipment in May. Still being held is one oxygen consumption monitor, controlled by the Super Computer.

Customs agents claim that shipping documents accompanying Czekajewski's equipment were misleading. The documents stated the final destination for the shipment was Finland, not Moscow. Czekajewski explains that his company typically lists its distributor's address as a shipment's final destination, since it is never certain to whom it will be sold.

At issue still is whether the SuperCom-

puter operates faster than permitted for unlicensed exports to eastern European countries. The Commerce Department says it does, but it is evaluating the companies claims to the contrary. Czekajewski argues that as the computer is from Taiwan, it should not be subject to US export controls and says it is possible to buy an equivalent computer in Bulgaria.

Information about the case is not easy to come by. The US attorney's office in Ohio will not comment because the case is before a grand jury. Neither will the Customs Service. The Commerce Department says the National Bureau of Standards is testing the SuperComputer to see if it exceeds allowable performance standards, but a spokesperson for the National Bureau of Standards denies that it is doing any such testing.

In August Customs Service associate commissioner Richard Miller wrote to Czekajewski's congressional representative Senator Howard Metzenbaum (Democrat, Ohio) saying that "the terms national security and supercomputer are not issues" in this case, and that the Customs Service is merely attempting to determine whether export laws were deliberately broken. But for Czekajewski, who emigrated to the United States from Poland 18 years ago, the experience has been a nightmare. His message for others that he now stamps on his correspondence: "WARNING! Exporting can be hazardous to your mental health."

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