

PE1395/B

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Assistant Clerk
Public Petitions Committee
Scottish Parliament
T3.40
EDINBURGH EH99 1SP

14 October 2011

You asked for the Scottish Funding Council's views on the issues raised in Jan Culik's petition on targeted funding for lesser taught languages and cultures at universities.

Please note that the Funding Council (SFC) is aware of Dr Culik's concerns on this issue, having responded on 6 July 2011 to his letter dated 8 June 2011. At that time, Dr Culik wrote to Mark Batho and John McClelland, respectively SFC Chief Executive and Chair, to seek support from SFC for his petition for targeted funding for lesser taught languages and cultures at universities.

Our response recognised Dr Culik's concerns and explained that SFC had in June 2011 chaired a meeting of the key providers of university provision for languages to discuss the need to secure capacity, particularly for those languages taught at school. However, our reply emphasised that it is ultimately for individual institutions to determine their own curriculum mix, taking into account demand at a local, regional or national level. It would be inappropriate for SFC to attempt to intervene and influence which languages should or should not be protected at Scottish universities. Further, we explained that the extremely challenging financial constraints under which SFC and institutions are operating mean that the Council does not have the resources to introduce targeted funding, even if it were considered appropriate.

Our views on the issues raised in Dr Culik's petition are consistent with our earlier response to him; that is, it is for individual universities to manage their curriculum in order to meet

demand. Whilst the Funding Council has a duty, through its founding legislation, to secure coherent university and college provision, our aim has been to adopt and encourage a flexible and responsive approach to funding. This means that we aim to invest in a broad but coherent range of provision that enables universities with different missions and specialisms to work to their own strengths and develop and deliver a curriculum mix that takes heed of student demand.

In a time of severely constrained budgets, we recognise that universities may take decisions not to offer particular courses where demand is considered by those universities to be insufficient to sustain the courses. However, we consider it appropriate for universities to prioritise provision based on demand.

Analysis of 2009-10 figures shows that, overall, Scotland appears to be well supplied with modern language provision at first degree level and above. Particular concentrations are evident, namely the high percentage of students at the Universities of Edinburgh, Glasgow, and St Andrew's, but provision is spread across a total of 12 universities. The main three providers all currently offer Russian and East European Studies, which (depending on the institution) includes language courses in Russian, Polish, Czech, Estonian, Hungarian and Lithuanian.

I hope the Committee finds this reply helpful.

MTS Batho
Chief Executive