

PE1395/D

PETITION 1395: TARGETED FUNDING FOR LESSER-TAUGHT LANGUAGES AND CULTURES AT SCOTTISH UNIVERSITIES

PETITIONERS' RESPONSE TO STATEMENTS BY GLASGOW UNIVERSITY MANAGEMENT, THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT AND THE SCOTTISH FUNDING COUNCIL

1. The University of Glasgow's references to CRCEES funding in its submission.

These appear to be conflating a limited, one-off 5-year CRCEES grant with the kind of targeted funding offered by HEFCE to protect the vulnerable subjects as a strategic priority.

In 2011, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) announced a £350 million programme to support subjects that are strategically important and vulnerable, including courses relating to the former Soviet Union, Central and Eastern Europe, Caucasus and central Asia. <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/aboutus/sis/>. On 11 August 2011, HEFCE voted through an additional tranche of £1.3 million for this purpose www.hefce.ac.uk/news/hefce/2011/lang.htm

2. The University of Glasgow states that “Student demand for languages such as Czech, Polish and Russian – important as they are – is likely to be limited in the near future”.

There is growing interest in Central and Eastern Europe and a need for some expertise in this area. Since Poland and the Czech Republic joined the EU in 2004, student numbers for the whole of Slavonic Studies at Glasgow have increased by over 25%. At the University of Strathclyde, student interest in Czech and Slovak history has risen from approximately 15 to 100 students per year over the past two years. Some of these then come to Glasgow to study the Czech language for their postgraduate research.

65,000 Poles now live in Scotland, there are 35,000 Russian speakers in the Glasgow–Edinburgh area alone and more than 3,000 Czech/Slovak speakers in Govan. Central and East European economies are booming and present exciting opportunities for Scottish businesses. A 2010 CBI report found that 36% of companies recruit employees for their language skills. In 2009, Scotland’s trade with Russia was worth £195 million and £60 million with the Czech Republic. Scottish companies do more business in Poland than in Turkey, Australia or Russia. As the Scottish Funding Council acknowledges in its submission, it has by law to have regard to the economic, social and cultural needs of Scotland.

Czech, Polish and Russian are individual strands within the integrated structure of Slavonic Studies. They cannot be considered separately. Over the past five years, the

Slavonic Studies section has had average numbers of 240 undergraduates per year. This is in line with other language and culture sections such as Italian (187 undergraduates) and German (283 undergraduates). Slavonic Studies also has a respectable number of postgraduate students.

3. The Scottish Government points out that universities should manage their own curriculum and that provision of subjects is a matter for the University of Glasgow. The Scottish Funding Council similarly points out that it would be inappropriate for it to attempt to intervene and influence which languages should or should not be protected at Scottish Universities.

The petitioners agree with the general principle of non-interference by the government in university affairs. They would, however, bring the following to the Scottish Government's attention:

- Glasgow University Senate, which is responsible for academic matters, recommended that Slavonic Studies be retained. The decision taken by the University Court on 22 June 2011 to abolish Slavonic Studies is subject to ongoing legal debate. Experts in administrative law from the Law School wrote to the Secretary of Court expressing the view that under the Universities (Scotland) Act 1966 it was illegal for Court to make such decisions contrary to Senate recommendations.
- The Scottish government response acknowledges that in “some subjects, such as languages, require careful consideration to make sure that they are widely available in universities”. In this case, when the subjects are threatened with immediate extinction, the petitioners feel there is a case for government assistance in saving this provision for Scotland. In highly exceptional cases, such as Slavonic languages and cultures, when provision has a long-standing international reputation, is unique, strategically important and irreplaceable, there are grounds for government support.
- We understand that the Scottish Funding Council is currently negotiating with Glasgow University about targeted funding for Nursing.

4. The SFC response states that Modern Languages are taught at 12 Scottish Universities.

Our petition seeks support for strategically important lesser-taught languages and cultures. Glasgow is Scotland's only centre for the language-based study of Central and Eastern Europe, which until now included a degree level provision for the study of Russia, Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary and the Baltic countries. If targeted funding is not introduced for Slavonic Studies in Scotland on the lines of the HEFCE scheme, this degree provision will not survive.

Increasingly students with East European heritage enquire about the possibility of studying their culture at Glasgow University. Angeliki Petrits, EU language officer from the Directorate-General for translation, emphasized in her lecture at the University of Glasgow on 14 October 2011 that there is a huge demand for English-language translators with Czech and Polish expertise in the EU administrative structures.

5. The University of Glasgow claims that “at least two units, CEES and SMLC”, both “conduct academic activity in areas covered by the petition”.

Only the SMLC (School of Modern Languages and Cultures), offers tuition in Polish, Czech, Russian and Slavonic Studies. CEES remains dependent upon the SMLC to offer this unique provision. CEES students often take Slavonic Studies courses.

6. External funding for Slavonics at Glasgow.

The Czech Ministry of Education funds a Czech *lektor* (language teacher) at Glasgow (£19,500 annually); the Czech government has just newly established the Madeleine Albright PhD Scholarship in Czech Studies (60,000 euro); the Polish Ministry of Education provides 75 per cent of funding for a Polish language *lektor* for Glasgow (£6,500 annually); a Polish lectureship at Glasgow is co-funded from a private donation by Stepek Ltd.; Dmitri Medvedev’s adviser Mikhail Shvydkoy has committed the Russian government to provide funding for the Russian Diploma from 2012-13; Czech Government Beneš and Comenius funds offer grants to students specialising in Czech studies.

7. The University of Glasgow claims, in response to petition 1395, that it “is not cutting or withdrawing from Modern Languages” at Glasgow.

The provision of Czech and Polish at Glasgow has already been cut so severely that, unless immediate action is taken, from 2012 there will no longer be anywhere in Scotland to study for a university degree in these strategically important, yet vulnerable languages and cultures.

- In 2010, undergraduate degree programmes in Czech and Polish were abolished.
- In 2011, the undergraduate degree programme in Slavonic Studies was abolished.
- In October 2011, it was announced that all postgraduate taught courses in Czech, Polish and Russian will be ‘suspended’ in 2012.

8. The Glasgow University response states that Czech and Polish degree programmes were closed on the recommendation of Professor Steve Parker, Head of Modern Languages at Manchester University.

Manchester University does not have Czech and Polish degree programmes. Professor Parker is a specialist in German.

In March 2010, in a mid-term review of the Slavonic and East European provision at Glasgow, Professor Chris Hahn of the Max Planck Institute in Halle, Germany, recommended that maintenance of training in Central and East European languages in Glasgow be awarded the highest priority for continual financial support.

Hugh McMahon, former Member of the European Parliament
on behalf of the 3,336 petitioners

Petition 1395: Targeted Funding for Lesser-Taught Languages and Cultures at Scottish Universities

Petition Rationale

Petition 1395 seeks targeted funding from the Scottish Funding Council to safeguard the teaching of strategically important, vulnerable languages and cultures at Scottish universities.

Ring-fenced funding exists in England and Wales under the Strategically Important and Vulnerable Subjects initiative. Target areas include 'area studies and related minority languages', including the former Soviet Union, Central and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/aboutus/sis/>. Czech, Polish and Russian need to be targeted for Scotland.

One of the Scottish Funding Council's stated legal obligations is 'to have regard to the economic, social and cultural needs of Scotland'.

Scotland's Economic Needs

Central/Eastern European economies are booming and present exciting opportunities for Scottish businesses. To benefit fully, it is vital to understand the languages and cultures of the relevant countries. EU accession countries and Russia are major economic players.

In 2009, Scotland's trade with Russia was worth £195 million and £60 million with the Czech Republic. The figure for Poland is even higher: European Enterprise Network figures show Scottish companies do more business with Poland than with Australia, Turkey or Russia.

<http://www.enterprise-europe-scotland.com/sct/news/index.asp?newsid=2415>

Job Opportunities for Young People

Graduates who understand Central and East European languages and cultures have a competitive edge in the job market and also in the workplace.

The 2010 Confederation of British Industry report shows 36% of companies recruit employees specifically for their language skills. 72% of UK international trade is with non-English speaking countries, but only 1 in 10 of the UK workforce is estimated to speak a foreign language. The 2008 CBI/Pertemps employment trends survey shows 74% of employers are concerned about school-leavers' lack of modern language skills.

Scottish Communities

Scotland has a large Central and Eastern European community. There are 65,000 Poles in Scotland; 35,000 Russian speakers in Glasgow-Edinburgh and 3,000 Czech/Slovak

speakers in Govan alone: **all eligible to vote in Scottish Parliament, local government and European elections.**

Scottish public services need employees at all levels who understand Central and Eastern European cultures and can communicate, translate and interpret in the relevant languages.

Preserving Scotland's Unique Provision

Glasgow is internationally renowned for its outstanding Czech, Polish and Russian provision. If Scotland allows its expertise in these areas to be lost, it will lose out economically, culturally, socially and politically. ***Unless the recently abolished undergraduate Czech, Polish and Slavonic degree courses are reinstated, and the currently 'suspended' postgraduate diploma courses in Czech, Polish and Russian allowed to run, there will be nowhere left in Scotland to study Czech or Polish to degree level from September 2012.*** Targeted funding needs are modest, but urgent.

Further Information

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning Michael Russell will be meeting on Tuesday, 13 December 2011 with the following petitioners:

Hugh McMahon, former Member of the European Parliament
Jan Čulík, Senior Lecturer in Czech Studies, University of Glasgow
Mary Heimann, Reader in History, University of Strathclyde
Amy Mackinnon, Honours student in Russian, University of Glasgow
Matthew Lee, Postgraduate in Czech, University of Glasgow

‘Glasgow in particular, to me, has meant the place where Eastern European languages are kept alive as an area of study... an outpost of something important and enlightened happening’

Sir Tom Stoppard, OBE (speech to the public petitions committee of the Scottish Parliament 20 September 2011)

‘Czech Studies at Glasgow undoubtedly play a major international role in the field of Central and European Studies’

Jan Kavan, Foreign Secretary of the Czech Republic (1998-2002) and former President of the United Nations General Assembly (2003-3)

‘There is a strong tradition and heritage between the University of Glasgow and the Czech Republic’

Madeleine Albright, former US Secretary of State, on the occasion of the awarding of a new PhD Scholarship in Czech Studies to the University of Glasgow (September 2010)

‘The Committee is concerned about the poor linguistic performance of the Scottish population compared with much of Europe’

European and External Relations Committee of the Scottish Parliament

‘As a business leader who has held leading roles in two major Scottish business organizations, I believe the tendency to cut Humanities departments is not only wrong in its own right but is also harmful to the economy’

Martin Stepek, Scottish businessman of Polish origin, Family Business Ambassador Award holder

‘As a member of the Polish diaspora and someone who seeks to improve his ability to speak Polish, I strongly oppose any decision to curtail the teaching of the Polish language at my former university’

David Jenkinson, member of the Sikorski Club, Glasgow

‘These proposed cuts will devastate a fine university and its proud history of educating people in Scotland and beyond. Cultural competence is vital to understanding and engaging with the world around us’

Dr Johanna Kershaw, Clare College, Cambridge

For background see also ‘Help Save Modern Languages at the University of Glasgow’ (online petition February 2011) www.ipetitions.com/petition/glasgowmodernlanguages/

For recent media coverage (STV, BBC, *The Herald*, *The Times*, *Independent*, *Daily Record*, *Evening Times*, *Scotsman*, UK Press Association, etc) see www.savesmlc.wordpress.com/news