

PE1395/G

Petitioner Letter of 2 February 2012

Thank for your letter regarding Public Petition 1395 outlining the views of The Department of Higher Education contained in Gillian Morrison's letter of the 12th of January 2012. I would like to make the following comments:

We would like to point out that our petition is specifically in reference to the teaching of strategically important, vulnerable Central and East European languages and cultures (Russian, Czech, Polish), not modern languages in general, which the Scottish government states. Secondly with regard to paragraph two, whilst we agree that this is primarily a matter for the Scottish Funding Council, we query why the Scottish Funding Council has no mechanism for controlled funding for student places for strategically important, but vulnerable subjects. The subjects we are referring to – the languages and cultures of Central and Eastern Europe – have been unanimously recognized by all parties at strategically important but vulnerable. Such funding existed in Scotland prior to devolution and continues in England. (A further £1.3 million was allocated to this purpose by HEFCE in August 2011).

In paragraphs four and six, it is stated that „the most recent review carried out by the SFC indicate that Scotland is currently well supplied with modern language provision at first degree level and above.“ We would note that this review was carried out at least five years ago, before the effects of the 2004 EU enlargement and its economic and social consequences were known. Scottish political, economic and cultural links with Central and Eastern Europe have been evolving rapidly since 2004, and therefore the linguistic need with regards to these areas are significantly different than five years ago.

Furthermore the report itself acknowledges in its executive summary that “current data on modern language provision in both sectors [in schools and universities] are inadequate and need improving”.

We were surprised to read in the report the statement that „most employers do not identify foreign language skills as important to them and graduates with language degrees do not generally earn more than graduates of other subjects.“ This is at variance with the opinion of several bodies, the CBI in particular, whose more recent 2009 Education and Skills survey found that 36% of companies recruit employees specifically for their language skills and stated: „72% of UK international trade is with non-English speaking countries – but it is estimated that only 1 in 10 of the UK workforce can speak a foreign language. In addition to this the CBI/Pertemps employment trends survey 2008 showed that 74% of employers are concerned about school leavers lack of modern languages skills...“ (p. 48)

Furthermore, we understand that the SCDI, CBI Scotland, Scottish Chamber of Commerce and the consuls/ambassadors of several European countries are so concerned at the current position of modern language provision in Scotland that a summit is being arranged with the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning to discuss the situation.

In conclusion we believe that the Scottish government and the Scottish funding Council are not facing up to the seriousness of the situation for Strategic and Vulnerable languages and also to modern language provision in both schools and higher institutions.

They have ignored the findings recent study carried out by the University of Strathclyde for Scotland's National Centre for Languages (SCILT).which using published SQA statistics indicated a decline in most foreign languages except Spanish.

Their use of the 2008 SFC report is outdated and to use a well-known Scots phrase "cauld kail het up" which fails to address the situation in 2012.

Hugh R McMahon, on behalf of 3,337 petitioners.