



Scottish Funding Council

Promoting further and higher education  
Our Ref 238357293

Comhairle Maoineachaidh na h-Alba

A' brosnachadh foghlam adhartach agus àrd-ìre

25 July 2012

Stuart Todd  
Assistant Clerk to the Public Petitions Committee  
Scottish Parliament  
T3.40  
Edinburgh  
EH99 1SP

*Dear Mr Todd*

**Public Petition PE1395: targeted funding for lesser taught languages and cultures at universities**

Thank you for your letter of 15 May seeking a response to the questions arising from the meeting of the Petitions Committee on 1 May.

The Committee has asked for further details of the case assessments carried out on the degree subjects the petitioner is concerned about and the conclusions. The Committee has also requested a copy of the findings of our investigation into the provision of Czech, Polish and Slavonic Studies.

To address both questions, I enclose a copy of the findings of our review of the provision of Czech, Polish and Slavonic Studies, dated 16 March 2012.

I would also like to note that recently I had a very useful meeting with the petitioners, Jan Culik and Hugh McMahon, during which we explored these issues in some depth. Following that meeting, I spoke with the Principal of the University of Glasgow who confirmed our understanding that the university is retaining the capacity to provide Czech and Polish teaching up to Level 2 (i.e. the second year of an undergraduate programme). Therefore it is intended that the academic capacity, and the capacity to teach these languages, will not be lost.

The petitioners were also keen for us to understand that the (suspended) Slavonic Studies degree is language and culture based, in contrast to the continuing degree in Central and Eastern European Studies the focus of which is the politics, economics, history and sociology of the region.

We were glad of the opportunity to explore these issues with the petitioners, but our position remains unchanged: that is, we do not believe that the potential impact of the decisions that the University's Court has taken are such that it is necessary or appropriate for SFC to intervene.

**MTS Batho**  
Chief Executive

## Targeted funding for lesser taught languages and cultures at universities

SFC briefing note: 16 March 2012

### Summary and conclusions

- Public petition PE1395 calls for targeted funding for lesser taught languages and cultures at Scotland's universities. The petitioner's immediate concern is that Polish and Czech studies, and the cultural aspects of Central and East European studies, may be lost to Scotland as a result of funding cuts.
- Czech and Polish are no longer offered at Honours level in Scotland. This is the result of a decision taken by the University of Glasgow – the only institution offering academic studies in these languages – to focus capacity on areas for which there is greater demand. Demand for Czech and Polish at Honours level has been very low in recent years (and on average only around half of the students studying these subjects are Scottish).
- It is still open to undergraduates to study Czech and Polish in the first and second year of a degree programme. Hence the capacity remains, should there be sufficient demand in future, to reinstate these options. Czech and Polish language teaching is also on offer, alongside a range of other Central & East European languages, in the non-academic language facilities in several of Scotland's universities, but again the demand is weak.
- The non-language based degree offered by the Slavonic Studies Department at the University of Glasgow has been discontinued, but the university is continuing to offer its degree in Central & Eastern European Studies. Studies of Central and Eastern Europe are not only the preserve of the University of Glasgow; other institutions, notably the universities of Edinburgh and St Andrews, have academic interests in the region across a range of disciplines.
- SFC's current assessment is that, overall, modern languages in Scotland's universities are continuing to thrive and demand remains healthy. The sector supports academic studies in a wide range of languages and cultures, including Mandarin, Japanese, Arabic and Russian, all of which are politically and economically significant and, importantly, are in demand. The sector also supports a range of studies of political and economic institutions, including the EU.

- In terms of reintroducing a targeted approach, as requested by the petitioner, SFC considers that it is important that it should continue to monitor modern languages provision in Scotland's universities in order to ensure that such provision is coherent and responsive to demand. Judgements on the continuation or otherwise of subjects for which demand is low will never be easy, but SFC considers that an approach which involves monitoring the health of all subjects and considering intervention on a case by case basis is a more effective approach, in terms of overall provision, than a targeted approach based on a list of strategically important subjects.

## **Targeted funding for lesser taught languages and cultures at universities: SFC briefing note**

### **Background**

- 1 The Petitions Committee of the Scottish Parliament is considering a petition calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government (SG) to instruct the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) to provide targeted funding for lesser taught languages and cultures at Scottish universities. The petitioners are Jan Culik and Hugh McMahon.
- 2 The petition has been prompted by decisions taken by the University of Glasgow (UoG) to discontinue Czech and Polish at Honours degree level and to discontinue its non-language based degree in Slavonic Studies.
- 3 The petitioners' concern is that because of cuts in funding for higher education the university is discontinuing provision which is not on offer elsewhere in Scotland, putting these subjects at risk.
- 4 SFC has investigated this. As part of its investigation, SFC officers have visited the three institutions with academic interests in Central and Eastern European languages and cultures (Glasgow, Edinburgh and St Andrews). What follows is a briefing to inform SFC's response to the petition and its response to direct correspondence from the petitioner.

### **What is being discontinued, and what will be the impact of that?**

#### ***Language-based study***

- 5 In 2009, a review of the School of Modern Languages and Cultures (SMLC) at the UoG recommended the withdrawal from Czech and Polish, at Honours level, to focus on specialist postgraduate and more basic language teaching. These subjects are not attracting large numbers of students: the University's submission shows that the Honours classes have only attracted 1-4 students per year in recent years. HESA data shows that on average Scottish students make up around half of those students whose course aim includes Czech or Polish.
- 6 UoG is the only Scottish institution to offer Czech and Polish languages as part of a programme of degree level study. These languages will continue to be on offer as options within the first and

second year of degree programmes, and so the capacity to teach these subjects will not be lost.

Figure 1: Students at Scottish HEIs studying towards a first degree (all years of study) whose course aim includes an East European language (2010-11), shown by student's home country

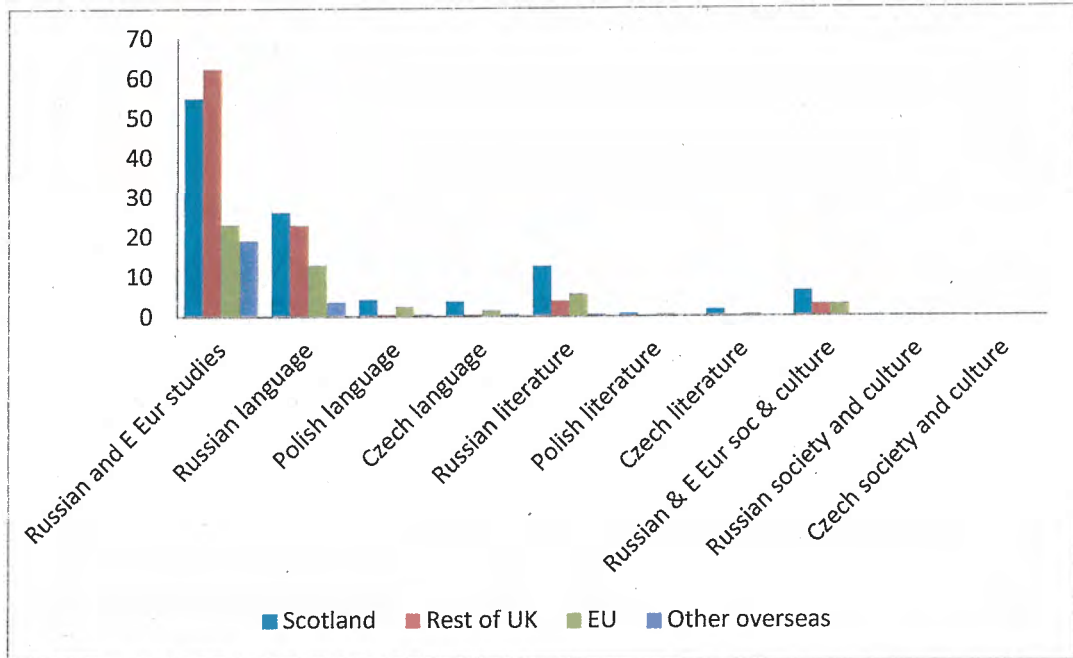
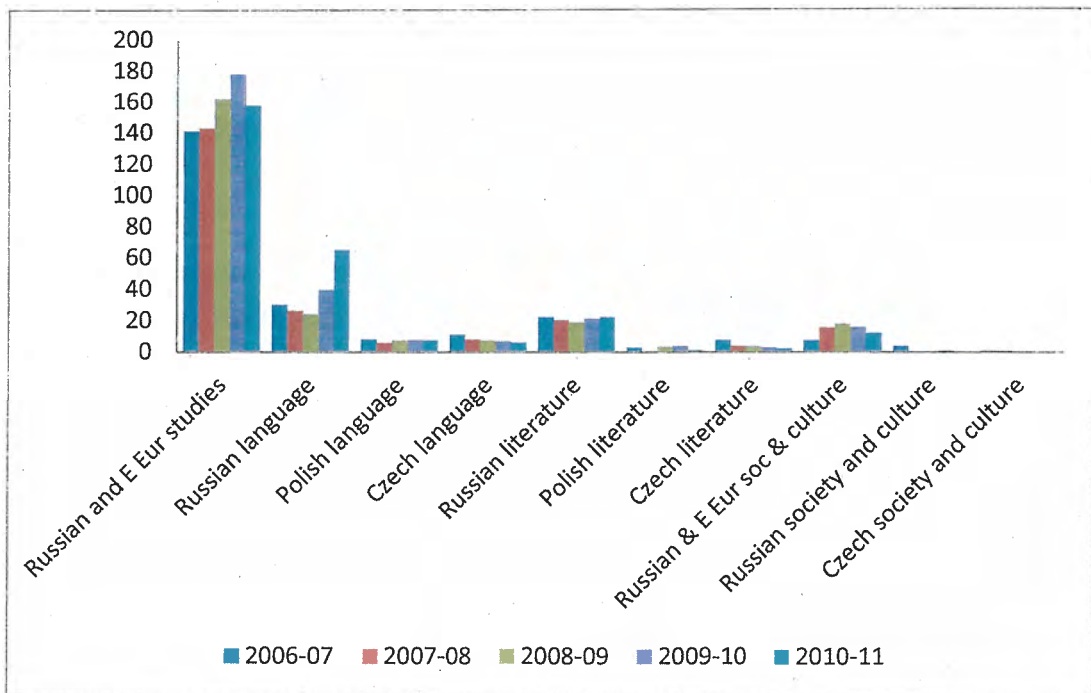


Figure 2: Students at Scottish HEIs studying towards a first degree (all years of study) whose course aim includes an East European language (2006-07 to 2010-11)



- The UoG offers teaching in 27 languages across its functions, many of which are offered outside the SMLC. While the SMLC offers Russian, Polish, Czech and Slovak, the University's Centre for Russian, Central

and East European Studies (CRCEES) offers teaching in several other languages of the region (Latvian, Estonian, Lithuanian and Ukrainian).

- 8 It is also worth noting that other institutions in Scotland offer tuition in a wide range of languages through their open studies/lifelong learning centres. This includes: the University of Edinburgh (UoE), whose offering includes Russian, Polish, Czech and Romanian; and the University of Strathclyde, which offers Polish and Russian alongside a wide range of other modern languages. Should there be sufficient demand, these languages can be studied up to the highest level of language learning. The UoE reported to us that it is currently meeting demand for Polish at the basic levels but there is no demand for courses at the more advanced levels, and that there is currently no demand for Czech language learning.

### *Cultural/area studies*

- 9 In a separate review, the University Court confirmed in 2011 that it would suspend entry to the non-language based Slavonic Studies degree, which examines Central and Eastern Europe through literature, film and culture. This was to allow staff in the Department to continue to support specialist language teaching for students in the Centre for Russian, Central & Eastern European Studies (CRCEES), which is part of the University's School of Political and Social Sciences.
- 10 The University is continuing to offer its degree level programme in Central & Eastern European Studies (options include Single or Joint Honours), run by the CRCEES in the School of Political and Social Sciences. This multidisciplinary degree programme studies the history, economics, politics and sociology of the countries of Central & Eastern Europe.
- 11 The study of Central & Eastern Europe is not restricted to UoG. For example, the Centre for Soviet, Russian, Central and East European Studies at the University of St Andrews brings together relevant academic interests from across the university – including history, international relations and art history – to offer a postgraduate qualification in Central & Eastern European studies and a range of undergraduate options in each of these fields. The UoE, similarly, has a range of academic interests in the region which crosses several disciplines including politics, history, law and music.

### *A note about Russian*

- 12 Russian is still on offer at the UoG as a Joint Honours subject, and is also available at the UoE (Joint Honours) and the University of St

Andrews (Single or Joint Honours). Both UoE and the University of St Andrews reported to us that their Russian departments are thriving and that demand for undergraduate study is on the rise. Russian as an academic subject involves not only the learning of the language but also the study of the Russian-speaking region's history, politics, literature and culture.

## **Funding**

- 13 The petitioner is arguing that there is targeted funding for vulnerable subjects in England, but that this was discontinued in Scotland before devolution. He also makes the point that in 2006 SFC, together with HEFCE, provided seed-corn funding for the Centre for Russian, Central and East European Studies (CRCEES) at the University of Glasgow but that SFC discontinued its funding for this in 2011. These two points have subsequently become confused in the debate.

### ***Targeted funding for vulnerable subjects in England***

- 14 Until 2011, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) provided support for strategically important and vulnerable subjects (SIVS). These were listed and included courses relating to recent EU accession countries and modern foreign languages.
- 15 From 2012, HEFCE has developed a new policy approach to SIVS. It will continue to support those subjects which have until now been identified as strategically important and vulnerable, but it is proposing no longer to have one single list of SIVS. Instead HEFCE and its partner organisations will monitor the health of all subjects, and, where necessary, it will intervene collaboratively to address risks to particular aspects of subject provision. This approach is closer to current practice in Scotland.

### ***CRCEES***

- 16 The Centre for Russian, Central & East European Studies (CRCEES), based at UoG, received a strategic grant from 2006-11 from two of the UK research councils, the Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and the ESRC. This was part of a wider programme of Language Based Area Studies (LBAS) investments by the two research councils to address UK capacity issues in the interdisciplinary combination of language studies and area studies in particular geographical areas. The LBAS awards were supplemented in the universities in their own jurisdictions by SFC and by HEFCE. The LBAS award at Glasgow was therefore contributed to by SFC. This



LBAS award allowed CRCEES postgraduate students to access specialist teaching from the School of Modern Languages & Cultures.

- 17 It was made clear in 2006 that SFC did not intend to renew its funding for LBSA beyond 2011, although the AHRC is making modest further support available through a bidding process in 2012-13 and the ESRC is supporting some PhD studentships at the Centre which will require language teaching.

### **The future of modern languages**

- 18 In 2011, SFC convened a meeting of representatives of each of the universities with provision in modern languages. It was reported at that meeting that demand for languages at degree level remains strong overall, although demand is shifting away from pure language degrees and towards degrees which combine languages with other disciplines.
- 19 While demand remains reasonably strong for the study of western European languages and cultures (French, German, Spanish, Italian), and for Russian, Scottish universities are also responding to the increasing demand for language and cultural studies relating to regions of future economic and political significance – including Mandarin, Japanese and Arabic studies.

### **Conclusions**

- 20 SFC's current assessment is that, overall, modern languages in Scotland's universities are continuing to thrive and demand remains healthy. The sector supports academic studies in a wide range of languages and cultures, including Mandarin, Japanese, Arabic and Russian, all of which are politically and economically significant and, importantly, are in demand. The sector also supports a range of studies of political and economic institutions, including the EU.
- 21 In terms of reintroducing a targeted approach, as requested by the petitioner, SFC considers that it is important that it should continue to monitor modern languages provision in Scotland's universities in order to ensure that such provision is coherent and responsive to demand. Judgements on the continuation or otherwise of subjects for which demand is low will never be easy, but SFC considers that an approach which involves monitoring the health of all subjects and considering intervention on a case by case basis is a more effective approach, in terms of overall provision, than a targeted approach based on a list of strategically important subjects.