



25 October 2012

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

Dear Stuart

Consideration of Petition PE1395

Petition by Jan Culik on targeted funding for lesser taught languages and cultures at universities

Thank you for your letter of 10 October seeking responses to the points raised in the petitioner's submission of 20 September 2012. I set out our response below (the petitioner's points are shown in italics).

- 1. The SFC letter of 9 August 2012 states: 'The University has also confirmed that it continues to offer post-graduate diplomas in all 3 languages (i.e. Czech, Polish, Russian) along with Slovak'. The postgraduate diplomas in Czech, Polish and Russian have been suspended. No students were allowed to matriculate for the 2012-13 session. Furthermore, Glasgow University has never run a postgraduate diploma in Slovak and is not doing so now. The Slavonic Studies course dealing with the cultures of Eastern Europe, which attracted more than 100 students in 2010, has been closed down.*

We understand that the University's calendar currently lists postgraduate diplomas in Russian Language, Polish Language, Czech Language and Slovak. We also understand that these courses have recruited very few students in their own right and almost none from Scotland.

- 2. Mark Batho's letter of 9 August 2012 continues: 'The University of Glasgow will continue to offer teaching in Czech, Polish and Russian in academic year 2012-13'. This statement overlooks the fundamental point that as from this year, teaching of Polish and Czech language only will be offered at levels one and two (the first two years of a degree) and*

students are currently no longer able to study the Polish and Czech languages and cultures to degree level.

All universities necessarily adapt their programmes from year to year in response to a range of factors, one of those being demand for programmes. We understand that, because of low demand, the teaching of Polish and Czech language is currently only offered at levels one and two within the undergraduate curriculum and – as we have stated previously – we are satisfied that the University retains the capacity to respond appropriately to future shifts in demand for these languages.

3. *The SFC letter of 9 August 2012 states: 'The University's Centre for Russian, Central and Eastern European Studies (CRCEES) (..) has developed and expanded its activities, including providing teaching materials in Russian'. This statement is misleading. Slavonic Studies section is part of CRCEES. It is Slavonic Studies that provides language tuition in Slavonic languages for students at the University of Glasgow. Yet it is the Slavonic Studies language and culture Honours provision which has been cut and the Slavonic PG Diplomas suspended, in conflict with the requirements of CRCEES.*

It is not for SFC to comment on whether or not the University's decisions are in conflict with the requirements of CRCEES.

4. *The SFC letter 25 July 2012 quotes the SFC briefing note of 16 March that states: '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'. Whilst these universities have pockets of interest in the region, they do not offer language-based degree-level university courses studying Central and Eastern Europe. They are unable to access the local political, social and cultural discourse in these countries, which are conducted in the vernacular languages. Glasgow's provision is unique.*

We recognise these unique aspects of the University's Slavonic Studies degree – and indeed there are unique aspects to many undergraduate degrees – but this does not change our position, which is that we do not believe that the potential impact of the decisions the University has taken are such that it is necessary or appropriate for SFC to intervene.

5. *The SFC briefing note points out that there are a number of evening classes in Central and East European languages provided by various institutions throughout Scotland. This is immaterial to this discussion which is about the protection of a full university undergraduate and postgraduate provision. The Slavonic languages are difficult and complex languages which require serious study to achieve mastery.*

The petitioner has argued that it is important to retain in Scotland the study of the languages and cultures of the region. Therefore we do not think it is immaterial to take into account the opportunities that exist for the wider community to take up and advance their learning of Czech, Polish and other languages through various universities' open studies and lifelong learning programmes. However we have noted in several of our previous responses that we recognise that the University has taken the decision to suspend entry to the Honours level courses in these subjects, largely because of the current lack of demand.

For the unique provision at Glasgow to survive, we believe a firm commitment must be made in Glasgow University's Outcome Agreement to retain an integrated Honours language-based cultural studies course dealing with Central and Eastern Europe, allowing students to pursue full degree pathways in Czech, Polish, Russian and Slavonic Studies at undergraduate and postgraduate level. The teaching must be both in the languages and cultures of the region.

The purpose of university outcome agreements is to demonstrate the return for public investment in the university sector and, in order to achieve that, to agree with individual universities the contribution that they will make to the overall impact of the sector. This is captured with reference to the achievement of particular outcomes. More information can be found in SFC's guidance on outcome agreements for 2013-14: www.sfc.ac.uk/guidance/outcomeagreements/UniversityOAGuidance.aspx.

Universities' course portfolios are constantly changing. It is not unusual for programmes to be suspended because of lack of demand, or in order to focus resources on areas of growing demand, and so we would not usually expect to discuss provision at individual programme level. Universities are autonomous bodies with their own decision-making structures and they have to take account of a wide range of factors in making decisions about their course portfolios. We do ask universities to discuss with us any major changes that they propose, but only in very exceptional circumstances would we expect to enter into negotiations at the level of individual programmes.

In this case, the University has made a decision to focus the department's resources on its more successful programmes of study and, particularly given that the University is retaining capacity in this field, we do not believe this warrants our intervention as the petitioner suggests.

MTS Batho
Chief Executive