

MEETING MINUTES

Cross Party Group on Germany

Tuesday, 29th January 2013

5:30-6:30 PM

Meeting Room Q1.03

Next Meeting Date

Wednesday, 17th April 2013

5:30-6:30 PM

Meeting Room TG.20

Attendees Colin Beattie MSP, Colin Kier MSP, Jamie McGrigor MSP, German Consul General Verena Gräfin von Roedern, Goethe Institut – Barbara Kaulbach, Annette Gotzkes, Austrian Honorary Consul John Clifford, German Consul Heinrich Schnettger, Stefan Buettner, Katrina Edmunds, Sophie Richardson, Signe Olander, Patrick Harte, Petra Wend, Louise Gardiner, Nicola De Paoli, Jana Seydel

Apologies Petra Wetzel, David McLetchie MSP, Maureen Watt MSP, John Pentland MSP, Maureen Watt MSP, Lewis MacDonald MSP, Alex Galloway, Max Scharbert, Manuela Calchini, Swiss Honorary Consul Peter Muller-McDougall

Forthcoming Diplomatic Visits: None discussed at this meeting

Colin Beattie MSP welcomed everyone, recognising and introducing the guests from Edinburgh University and Edinburgh Napier University.

Barriers from Universities Perspective

Katrina Edmunds started stating that many of the barriers are more perceived barriers than actual barriers. She outlined the perceived difficulties:

Finance:

Students can be covered by ERASMUS or Edinburgh provides short study abroad programmes.

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Petra Wend added that at QMU the Vice-Chancellors Fund has been started and it has grown over time from 5 to 10 to 30. Programme just need time to grown and become well known among students.

Colin Beattie spoke about the new pilot programme being launched by the Scottish Government for academic year 2014/15, which will entitle Scottish students studying in the EU to receive the same bursary and loan support as students attending universities in Scotland.

Katrina Edmunds suggested again that finance is a perceived barrier and that there are funding opportunities out there.

Language Skills

Katrina suggested that students find language as a barrier, but again it is a perceived barrier

ERASMUS has classes taught in English and forging language skills programme to help student become comfortable with the language.

Annette Gotzkes mentioned the Languages for All Programme at Edinburgh which will allow non-language students to take language classes and received language qualifications at the end.

Colin Beattie asked if anyone was aware of the number of Scottish Foreign Language Assistants there are teaching in the EU

Alyson will inquire as to the number of Scottish FLAs in the EU.

Katrina continued other perceived problems involve students finding a study abroad irrelevant or daunting. That there is a lack of option within the degree programme or they have family commitments.

Colin Beattie previous talk indicated that there seems to be barriers in losing a course year and not completing modules on time so their degree runs longer. Is that the case?

Katrina answered saying the four year degree allows for the 3rd year to be done abroad when it is a University approved exchange. It does require pre-approval form the University which again becomes a perceived barrier.

There are significant challenges in overcoming these perceived barriers. Shorter study aboard programmes allows students to have an international experience and encourage them to take long study abroads. There is a programme over the next four years which will provide such short term abroads

The question was asked if more students seek placements in English.

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All sorts of placements are offered, yes in English, but foreign languages as well. Foreign languages are harder to place.

It is difficult to get students who have confidence enough in their language skills.

Patrick Harte, Senior lecturer in the Business School at Edinburgh Napier University explained the Business School guarantees classes taught in English for business students in their study abroad programmes.

The full English track is breaking down the perceived barrier of language and helping individuals to become culturally aware and consider gaining language skills.

Patrick asserted that ERASMUS has failed because Scottish Universities do not send enough students out. Increasing short term mobilisation is good as it gives students a taste of international experience and they are more likely to take up the opportunity later.

Representatives from University of Edinburgh and Edinburgh Napier University both clearly stated that they are actively recruiting.

Both suggested that the best recruiting comes for student to student contact. Individuals telling their friends that they had a good experience and encouraging them to participate.

There are also mobility offices which widen access and provide information to students.

Colin Beattie asked what the CPG could do to help encouraging students to participate.

Barbara Kaulbach of the Goethe Institut suggested that in helping students learn languages before they go, their online programme has worked well.

Annette spoke about how the Languages for All programme which will be aimed at non-language degree students, but it will only teach to an intermediate level. To study at a German University a student needs a B2 or higher. So Languages for All give them a good foundation to start.

Stefan who studied international business received his English language qualification from a language instruction institution. Who are able to take language learning beyond the B2 level and a greater detail for specific areas. Maybe this group could extend their services to students finishing the Languages for All Programme or the like at other Universities so students can continue to develop their language skills.

Jamie McGrigor added that the Bologna Process is designed to assist with continuity between universities across Europe to better enable students to study abroad and increase mobility.

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Colin Beattie asked specifically what can the CPG on Germany do to help the situation.

University representatives suggested that there is a general lack of awareness among Scottish students. They tend to be ignorant of the possibilities and benefits. Universities are doing what they can, but their needs to be early intervention.

Universities end up being reactive as they can only start once a student has entered University. The desire for studying abroad or learning a language must come earlier.

The Scottish Government needs to start encouraging parents and students at an early age. Absolutely essential to get parents on side.

There also need to be a perception change so students are aware they can study in another country and learn in their native language while learning a foreign language and culture. No need for them to be fluent right away.

Scotland is under performing with only 1% of University population studying abroad. The UK as a whole has the same issue and the UK Government has started a mobility taskforce.

While there are many perceived barriers there seems to be no clear picture of the real issues.

Colin suggested that the Governments 1+2 language policy should help with early intervention.

Jamie McGrigor explained the Barcelona Project with help with the continuity of teaching from primary school to secondary school.

Colin Beattie brought up the briefing the CPG received from the NUS which discussed students missing out a year of study and losing credit because they were going on a study abroad.

Katrina and Patrick explained that certain subjects could be restrictive because of the modules taught or not taught.

While that could present a problem learning outcomes can be met very effectively at a foreign university and the Bologna Agreement should equalize the outcomes. Really it is another perceived barrier, because universities are willing to work with students.

Vast majorities of disciplines can map the learning and outcomes so as not to lose credits. It is just for students to inquire.

Colin asked if students were aware of their options, is communication an issue?

Alison Hahm was given the floor to present her brief from the meeting of the European and External Relations Committee held on the 24th January focusing on

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Foreign Language Learning in Primary Schools. Full briefing can be obtained upon request.

Colin pointed out that it is clear from the briefing that the problem is being taken seriously.

Alyson will also write to Universities Scotland to see what they are doing to support study abroad programmes and if they are taking forward their discussion with individual universities.

The propose of writing will be to encourage universities to focus on the issue and remind them it is not something to give up on.

The Consul General Gräfin von Roedern handed out a summary of what German institutions in Scotland are doing in regards to promoting the German language. Full summary can be obtained upon request.

Concern over what is being taught in secondary schools for highers and how exams are being administered.

Alyson will write to Scottish Government about the level of foreign language writing required for higher exams and how much is incorporated in teaching.

The CPG agrees that the Swiss language expert may come to a CPG meeting to present the Swiss perspective on the language issue.

The CPG also agreed to send a representative to speak to the German-Scottish Business and Lawyers Association. The group voted that Colin Beattie would be the speaker.

Nicola de Paoli was given the floor to present her Scottish travel magazine. The magazine will be distributed across Germany twice a year. There will be both print and online versions

As of now there has been a printed pilot which has reached nearly 7,000-10,000 people. The focus is of course to inspire Germans to visit Scotland.

The Consul General Gräfin von Roedern presented the results of the election in Lower Saxony held on the 20th January. Minister-President David McAllister and his Christian Democrats who had been in government lost majority by one seat. The Social Democratic Party and Greens created a coalition.

The results were thrown by a poor voting system and by the number of small-scale votes.

This local election will impact the Federal Election because the balance in the second chamber has changed. Social Democrats and Greens will have to campaign together.

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Areas of interest for future meetings

Renewables

Sustainable Housing

Colin Beattie thanked the guest who attended from University of Edinburgh and Edinburgh Napier University. Both offered to contribute in future if there was something they could add to the discussion.

Colin Beattie closed the meeting

Future Meetings

11th June 2013