

MEETING MINUTES

Cross Party Group on Germany

Tuesday, 25th March 2014

Committee Room 4

Next Meeting

Tuesday, 27th May

5:30pm

Committee Room 5

Attendees

Colin Beattie MSP
Cameron Buchanan MSP
Lilo Börgmann, the Goethe Institut
Stefan Büttner, Scottish Parliament
John Clifford, Austrian Consulate
Annette Götzkes, Edinburgh University
Verena Gräfin von Roedern, Consul General of Germany
Graeme Henderson, Scottish Parliament
Dr Huw Lewis, Edinburgh University
Dr Alan Macniven, Edinburgh University
Peter Müller McDougall, Swiss Consulate General
Jamie McGrigor MSP
Sigrid Rieuwerts, Mainz University
Jeanette Rissmann, Edinburgh University
Ann Robertson, Edinburgh City Council
Heinrich Schnettger, German Consulate
Barbara Strickland, German citizen
James Trolland, Scottish Democratic Alliance
Maureen Watt MSP
Petra Wend, Queen Margaret University

Apologies Manuela Calchini, Ken Macintosh MSP

Colin Beattie opened the meeting and welcomed the guest speakers, Ann Robertson, Huw Lewis and Alan Macniven.

Topics Discussed:

Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes & Matters Arising

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Colin Beattie went through the minutes. There were no changes to be made.

The group approved the minutes.

Colin Beattie confirmed he had written to Alasdair Allan and a copy of the question and response was given to the group. Colin Beattie noted that Ann Robertson, both Alan MacNiven and Huw Lewis had all been invited and were in attendance. Graeme Henderson had written to Edinburgh's private schools and copies of correspondence were given to the group. Colin Beattie noted it was not easy to compare the responses, and that there was a wide variety of approaches and engagement of the German language.

Colin Beattie confirmed that Fiona Hyslop will be attending the May meeting. Graeme Henderson confirmed Annette Götzkes had sent him the link to the 'Friends of Germany' Facebook page, and that he had circulated it around the group.

German Education in Scotland

Colin Beattie asked Ann Robertson to present to the group. Ann Robertson stated that, in her role as Education Support Officer at Edinburgh City Council, she has responsibility for all languages across all sectors.

Ann Robertson noted that an audit of languages, conducted across Edinburgh's schools 3 ½ years ago, found big concerns over German. Clusters of schools were moving away from German to teach other languages for a variety of reasons. The Council identified the schools that were at risk of losing German from their curricula and did targeted work with the senior management teams and modern languages department. Ann Robertson said that the Council drew on its partnerships with the Goethe Institut, the German Consulate and others to support it in this work.

Ann Robertson stated that, of the 23 secondary schools in Edinburgh, 14 now offer German and of these seven run German through from primary school. Of the 87 primary schools 24 deliver German and that number is expected to increase over the next few years due to the introduction of the '1+2' programme.

Ann Robertson noted that Edinburgh City Council was one of the few councils to still have language assistants, and she was pessimistic about this situation as the funding for assistants has just been cut.

Ann Robertson discussed the '1+2' programme. This initiative is defined by the '1' being the mother tongue and the '2' being two additional languages that are taught from primary school through to secondary. The programme utilises a 'rolling' system, for example where French is taught to one group of primary sixes and the next year German is taught.

Ann Robertson confirmed that five German Education trainees had been recruited as part of the GETS scheme to be assigned to work within a cluster of schools for the next eight months. These trainees would help maintain consistency of delivery and promote the status of German within each school.

Colin Beattie asked if the number of language assistants was related to funding. Ann Robertson confirmed that it was, and that without funding the Council would not be

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able to keep them. Ann Robertson felt that this was a national issue rather than one that was confined to certain areas.

Jamie McGrigor asked if the '1+2' programme was related to the Barcelona project. Ann Robertson said that it was but that the Barcelona project only goes into primary schools. Lilo Börgmann noted that the Goethe Institut had, over the past six months, seen a big difference in numbers of requests for resources, attendance at seminars, requests to visit schools and so forth. Lilo Börgmann felt that it was an encouraging time for the German language in Scotland and hoped that funding would not be taken away from such initiatives.

Sigrid Rieuwerts noted that her institution had coped with funding issues by reducing the number of months each assistant stays from twelve to six months. This allowed twice as many assistants to be sent. Sigrid Rieuwerts said that, when their programme first started two or three years ago, there were seven assistants and this year they have interest from 15 or 16.

John Clifford asked where the funding came from. Sigrid Rieuwerts said Europe. Ann Robertson clarified that Edinburgh Council's programme was separate from Sigrid Rieuwerts', which is run through the British Council.

Cameron Buchanan asked if there was a difference in the standard of teaching when schools had foreign language assistants. Ann Robertson gave the example of a primary school where the support of a foreign language assistant had provided the teacher with a huge amount of confidence in teaching the language, and had given the pupils a 'real' experience of learning the language.

Colin Beattie introduced Dr Huw Lewis from the University of Edinburgh.

Dr Lewis stated that he is the head of European Languages at Edinburgh University. Dr Lewis noted that the teaching of German language is variable across Scottish Universities. The University of Strathclyde had strategically redeployed German to Glasgow University, but still had some German staff and is keen to re-introduce some German teaching. Dr Lewis mentioned that in 2011/12 Edinburgh University's German section had 112 students admitted to the first year, and this year had 106 students. Dr Lewis made a comparison with the open language/non-specialist courses, which have risen from 78 in 2010/11 to 180 this year.

Dr Lewis mentioned that, on 30th April, Edinburgh University would be hosting a symposium on Scotland's '1 + 2' policy and the role universities can play. Dr Lewis said he would send Graeme Henderson a link to the website/flyers to be circulated around the CPG.

Colin Beattie asked what sort of funding University of Strathclyde would need to re-introduce German teaching. Dr Lewis said this would probably require paying salaries for one or two members of staff, while supporting the '1 + 2' programme would depend on the model adopted.

Maureen Watt asked what language cutbacks were like at other universities. Dr Lewis stated that it varied, depending on the languages and other subjects taught and the area the university is in.

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Stefan Büttner asked if students of the non-specialist courses get credits that count towards their degrees. Dr Lewis said it depends on the individual student and curriculum. They are allowed to take them as additional credits on top of their degrees, but if there is space within their curriculum the credits can be incorporated as part of that. Dr Lewis estimated that no more than 10 per cent take them as additional credits, with the majority preferring to take them as part of their degrees. Annette Götzkes noted that the students are required to take these language courses.

Stefan Büttner asked if universities do now appreciate the role these courses can play towards life sciences and business. Dr Lewis said that Edinburgh University does but this was not necessarily the same elsewhere.

James Trolland mentioned that he had attended the CPG on Scottish Economy, where the discussion had included internationalisation and how businesses were struggling due to an imbalance in languages. James Trolland suggested that the two CPGs could jointly discuss this issue as the separate discussions were closely related.

Colin Beattie introduced Dr Alan Macniven from Edinburgh University.

Dr Macniven said he is the head of the teaching organisation of modern European languages at Edinburgh University. Dr Macniven stated that the organisation is keen to stimulate interest in the wider community in the study of German, and has been working with Ann Robertson in this regard. Dr Macniven mentioned that they have 45 4th-year students at present studying in Germany. Annette Götzkes said that they already have 12 students lined up to go to Germany next year. Petra Wend asked where the students were sent to. Dr Macniven said to schools and universities all over Germany.

Dr Lewis mentioned that next year the University was introducing a course of primary education in German, which it is hoped will further enhance the '1 + 2' programme.

Lilo Börgmann circulated a leaflet entitled 'Passport of Scottish-German Friendship', which had been produced by the Goethe Institut and was being given to pupils as part of the Institut's programme of school visits. Lilo Börgmann noted that the programme's funding had been extended beyond its original three years.

John Clifford asked if pupils at German schools were allowed to drop foreign languages. Sigrid Rieuwerts said they were not. John Clifford asked if students needed a degree of proficiency in a foreign language to be admitted to universities. Sigrid Rieuwerts said students needed to be proficient in two languages to be admitted, and some courses required an older language such as Latin on top of this.

Sigrid Rieuwerts further noted that several of their key German university texts had not been translated into English, requiring Scottish students to take German lessons. Sigrid Rieuwerts stated she had asked the Scottish National Library how they would add foreign texts to their digital library, but the response was that such texts are not even tagged. John Clifford asked Colin Beattie if this was something he could look into in terms of policy.

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ACTION POINT – Colin Beattie to look into national library policy for storing foreign texts.

Colin Beattie thanked the three speakers for attending the meeting.

Economic Update

Colin Beattie noted that situation in the Ukraine was a cause for concern, especially in relation to energy supplies. Verena Gräfin von Roedern mentioned that the EU is considering further sanctions. Verena Gräfin von Roedern further noted that Germany only takes around one-third of its fuel from the Ukraine, and that due to the relatively mild winter Germany may be able to source this fuel from elsewhere.

Colin Beattie stated that Sweden was increasing its military budget. Verena Gräfin von Roedern noted that the German defence minister had remarked that NATO needs to be prepared to send support to the Baltic countries.

John Clifford felt that there was a slightly different situation in Austria where, as a neutral state, there was not expected to be an eastward expansion of NATO. Cameron noted that Moldova may be the next country to be annexed. John Clifford said that the present situation may be as a result of a lack of dialogue about signing the Ukraine up to NATO.

Peter Müller McDougall mentioned that the Ukraine and Russia had signed a deal respecting territorial integrity, a part of which involved the return of nuclear weapons. Peter Müller McDougall further noted that new pipeline was in the process of being built – the TAP (Trans Adriatic Pipeline). The Swiss have financed 55% of the pipeline, and Peter Müller McDougall felt that the project is expected to be pushed massively in the next couple years given recent developments. Peter Müller McDougall noted that, in the near future, there will be a referendum on increasing the airforce in Switzerland.

James Trolland noted that the ‘high north’ (Canada, America, Norway etc.) would also be affected by the Ukraine situation in terms of energy, and there would further be an impact on the North Sea.

Colin Beattie asked if there were any further economic updates. Verena Gräfin von Roedern noted that German unemployment was still low and that next year’s growth was estimated to be around 1.8%. Colin Beattie stated that Scottish unemployment was around 6.9%. Stefan Büttner noted that there was a large difference in youth unemployment with Scotland being around 20% and Switzerland, Austria and Germany being below their national averages. Verena Gräfin von Roedern felt this displayed the importance of vocational training, and further mentioned that Germany will shortly be introducing a minimum wage. John Clifford said that such methods reduce situations whereby one employer can ‘steal’ employees from another company when their training has ended. Maureen Watt noted that the oil and gas industries have now begun training their own staff.

Political Update

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Colin Beattie mentioned that the main issue in Scotland was the independence referendum. Verena Gräfin von Roedern felt that the the Crimean situation was overshadowing many of the key issues. Stefan Büttner asked about the effect the annulment of the 3% threshold for entry to the European Parliament might have. The group agreed to hold this question over to the next meeting.

Culture Update

Annette Götzkes mentioned that the Edinburgh Film Festival this year will focus on Germany.

Other business

Colin Beattie noted the group had been invited to meet with a delegation of the SPD in the Landtag of Sachsen-Anhalt on 24th June.

ACTION POINT – Graeme Henderson to distribute details of meeting

Annette Götzkes asked if an action point could be raised for the CPG to meet with the CPG on Scottish Economy. Colin Beattie noted that CPGs don't tend to meet with one another. Maureen Watt suggested that speaking to the convener may be a suitable solution.

ACTION POINT – Colin Beattie to speak to Chic Brodie

Peter Müller McDougall noted that on the 9th February the Swiss immigration restriction was voted through in a public referendum.

Colin Beattie mentioned that Fiona Hyslop would be in attendance at the next meeting, and closed the meeting at 19.03.