

PE1395/F

Employability, Skills and Lifelong Learning Directorate
Higher Education and Learner Support Division



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Ms Alison Wilson
Assistant Clerk to the Public Petitions Committee
The Scottish Parliament
T3.40
EDINBURGH
EH99 1SP

12 January 2012

Dear Ms Wilson

PUBLIC PETITION NUMBER PE1395

You asked for the further views of Scottish Government on the petition raised by Jan Culik on targeted funding for lesser taught languages and cultures at universities.

In relation to the Committee's question about the provision of controlled funding status for lesser taught languages and cultures, this is a matter for the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). There is currently no mechanism for controlling funded student places for lesser taught languages and cultures and, it is our understanding that the SFC does not consider that there is any need to change this.

Ultimately, it is for individual institutions to determine their own curriculum mix, taking into account demand at a local, regional or national level. It would be inappropriate for the SFC or Scottish Ministers to attempt to intervene and influence which languages should or should not be protected at Scottish universities. However, the SFC has a duty in law to secure coherent provision by the fundable bodies, having regard to the economic, social and cultural needs of Scotland. Fulfilling this duty is a matter for the SFC rather than Scottish Ministers.

That said, Ministers do provide guidance and, in addition to his most recent letter of guidance to the SFC referred to in our last letter to the Committee, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning has recently written to the SFC to ask that the Council keeps under careful review the provision of Russian, Polish, Czech and Slavonic studies across the fundable bodies in Scotland. The results of 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.

The SFC is also aware of the Scottish Government's proposals as set out in 'Putting Learners At the Centre: Delivering our Ambitions for Post-16 Education', the pre-legislative paper published on 14 September 2011 regarding reform of the university, college and training sectors in Scotland. These proposals confirm that maintaining the opportunity to learn to speak a second language is important to Scotland, both culturally and economically.

In response to the further question, the Minister for Energy, Enterprise & Tourism is aware of the issues supported by a wide range of people in the Petition. He considers languages as especially important for the young people of Scotland and for the economy, which is reflected in the Government's commitments to language learning in schools. He is satisfied that the SFC has taken into account the economic, social and cultural needs of Scotland in conducting its review of modern language provision in Scotland. There are no plans to make funding available from the Enterprise or Tourism budgets for this purpose.

I hope the Committee finds this reply helpful.

Yours sincerely

Gillian Morrison
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Employability, Skills and Lifelong Learning Directorate