

PE1395/J

Petitioner Letter of 16 April 2012

Dear David,

We are writing to reply to the letter received by the Petition's Committee on 21 March 2012 from Mark Batho, Chief Executive of the Scottish Funding Council.

We note with disappointment the SFC's complacency towards the fact that as of the next academic year, there will be nowhere in Scotland to study Polish, Czech and Slavonic Studies to degree level.

In paragraph three, it is argued that the SFC believes case by case assessment to be a more appropriate form of intervention, as opposed to targeted funding. We would like to ask the SFC what case assessment of the proposed closure of these degree subjects was carried out, and what were the conclusions? Similarly, we would like to request a copy of the findings of the 'full and thorough investigation of the supply of, and demand for, provision in Czech, Polish and Slavonic Studies', as referred to in Mr. Batho's letter.

We would like to point out that according to Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005, the Scottish Funding Council is expected to 'have regard to the skills needs of Scotland, while at the same time considering wider economic, social and cultural needs, insofar as these needs can be met by the provision of fundable further or higher education.' (See Explanatory Notes for Section 20/33 of the Act, <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2005/6/notes/division/4/1/5?view=plain>).

Whilst uptake of Czech and Polish has been low in comparison to other academic areas, the petitioners have long argued that whilst Scotland may not need thousands of experts in the field of Slavonic languages and cultures, we need some if we are to establish any kind of meaningful economic, cultural and political relations with these countries. This is particularly pertinent in the age of ever increasing European integration and globalization, but particularly so for a Scotland with an independence-minded government.

Furthermore, and this is not to denigrate their capabilities, evening classes at University language centers and levels 1 and 2 at Glasgow are no substitute for the full 5 year honors courses, and the postgraduate provision at Glasgow. Learning a Slavonic language such as Czech or Polish is a challenging, yet rewarding experience and the honours degrees offered at Glasgow give students a sound understanding of the language and culture which enables them to go on to use them successfully in their careers. There is no substitute. There is a wealth of employment opportunities for graduates in these subjects.

Finally, with regard to Slavonic Studies, there is no comparable course anywhere else in Scotland. Whilst the Central and Eastern European Studies (CEES) at Glasgow shares the same region of study, as acknowledged in the SFC letter, it is a Social Science course which studies the politics and economics of the region, whereas Slavonic Studies takes an arts-based approach to study the culture. CEES fully support and are signatories to the petition, requesting the introduction of targeted funding of Czech, Polish, Russian and Slavonic Studies. The two subjects are absolutely complementary, but also distinct. Implying that there

is replication is like suggesting that cessation of teaching Victorian literature would be acceptable because the era was still available to study in the Department of History.

Whilst there is scattered non-language-based expertise in the study of New Europe in Scotland, this cannot replace the integrated language-based course in the cultures of the countries of the "New Europe" which until recently, were available at Glasgow University. Languages are vital in the study of the region as specialists must be able to access the local discourse. As the research councils ESRC and AHRC acknowledged when they funded the CRCEES centre in 2005-2011, attempts to study a region without the knowledge of the languages is highly ineffective.

The petitioners hope that the Scottish Funding Council will take up its responsibility, as defined by law, for an endangered, unique provision for the study of Central and Eastern Europe and provide the targeted funding to secure the provision from current and future cuts.

Hugh R McMahon, on behalf of 3337 petitioners.