

PETITION 1395 – Targeted Funding for Lesser Taught Languages and Cultures

The Petitioners' Response to the letter by Gillian Morrison, Higher Education and Learner Support, The Scottish Government, dated 26th October, 2012, and MTS Batho, Chief Executive of the Scottish Funding Council, dated 25th October, 2012

We note with concern that the Scottish Government and the Scottish Funding Council have decided NOT to provide long term strategic protection for the language-based study of the cultures of Central and Eastern Europe, disregarding the factual arguments about the political, economic and cultural importance of this subject area for Scotland. Scottish Universities now operate primarily on the commercial principle, whose application may be detrimental in the long run to the strategic interests of the country. The petitioners would like once again draw the attention of the Petitions Committee to the fact that if long term strategic protection for the language-based study of Central and Eastern Europe is not provided by the Scottish Government, this unique provision, currently placed at the University of Glasgow, will be lost to Scotland, at a time when the economic, political and strategic importance of Central and Eastern Europe is growing. We hope that the consequences of this loss will be seriously considered by the committee. As in our previous submission, we strongly recommend that this unique programme be expressly protected in the Outcomes Agreement concluded between the SFC and the University of Glasgow.

We are gratified to note that as a result of the intercessions of the Petitions Committee, Glasgow University now says that it will reinstate the full Honours Slavonic Studies programme, dealing with the languages and cultures of Central and Eastern Europe, including the suspended postgraduate Diplomas in Czech and Polish, although the Scottish Government and the Scottish Funding Council have refused to protect this subject area at Scottish Universities. However, the petitioners would like to warn that under current commercial pressures, without the express protection of this programme in the University's Outcomes Agreement, the continued long term existence of the programme is in doubt.

This is because the study of languages and cultures is labour intensive and expensive and many decision-makers still regard Central and Eastern Europe as “distant” and “exotic”, although the situation has radically changed over the past few years. For instance, there is now a large constituency of Central and East European population in Scotland whose children are requiring to have an opportunity to study their cultural roots. Qualifications in Central and Eastern European languages and cultures provide a wide range of graduate job opportunities. In the 2012 CBI Education & skills survey, UK businessmen stressed that they need graduates with the knowledge of foreign languages. For instance, Polish is regarded as the fifth most important foreign language in the UK, with 19 per cent of UK managers rating it as useful for their organizations. (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/9487434/Graduate-jobs-Best-languages-to-study.html?page=0>)

Response to the Scottish Government letter

“We are satisfied that the SFC has carried out a review of the current position in relation to

language provision across Scotland's universities and has concluded that it is neither necessary nor appropriate to intervene in the decision made by Glasgow University at this time," says Gillian Morrison.

This statement is not substantiated by any facts and it ignores all the factual argumentation presented by the petitioners over the past year. No information about the SFC review is available. In spite of our requests for the review to be published, it does not seem to be available.

"Where there is little or no demand for a particular course of study, universities must consider whether it is right for that course to be suspended or closed. In this specific case, we understand that the University has retained the capacity to reinstate the provision should demand increase in the future," says Gillian Morrison.

The petitioners would respectfully like to remind the Petitions Committee that the University of Glasgow decided to close down the Slavonic Studies programme in spite of the fact that in 2010, there were more than 100 students on this course.

"It is our position that we do not consider that Outcome Agreements are an appropriate forum for detailing the provision of such individual courses of study," says Gillian Morrison.

We understand that it is one of the aims of the Outcomes Agreements to ensure **coherence of provision** throughout Scotland. If a firm commitment 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 is not included in the SFC Outcomes Agreement with the University of Glasgow, the **coherence of provision will be disrupted** because this subject area will disappear from the university provision in Scotland. The current Outcomes Agreement for Glasgow University does include a concrete commitment by the University to teach Czech and Polish up to Level 2. (Article 26, p. 11 of the current Outcomes Agreement.) Why, then, is it inappropriate for the future Outcomes Agreement to include a commitment to a full Honours programme in this area of study?

Response to the SFC letter

The SFC letter to the Petitions Committee of 9th August 2012 stated, incorrectly, that *"[Glasgow] University continues to offer post-graduate diplomas in all 3 languages (Czech, Polish, Russian) along with Slovak"*. The petitioners pointed out in their submission dated 20th September, 2012, that this was factually incorrect. In his response of 25 October 2012, Mark Batho says: *"We understand that the University's calendar currently lists postgraduate diplomas in Russian Language, Polish Language, Czech Language and Slovak"*. We have to reiterate that these postgraduate courses have been suspended. These courses are currently not being taught and there are no students on them.

Mark Batho's letter continues: *"We understand that these courses have recruited very few students in their own right and almost none from Scotland."* This information is also factually incorrect. Glasgow University limit for "large" postgraduate courses is six students. For instance, in the summer of 2011, there were 11 applicants for PG study of Diploma in Russian. Some of these

students were told by the University of Glasgow that the course had been suspended, so they went away. Eventually, the course was run with four students in 2011-12, which was the last time the programme was run. Most of the applicants for these PG courses are from Scotland. The Czech and the Polish Diplomas provides a valuable language pathway for future researchers in Central and Eastern Europe and there is a steady stream of applicants who, unfortunately, are currently being turned away. Even though Czech and Polish are no longer taught to Honours level at Glasgow University, student numbers have increased. The Czech language classes include a number of postgraduate researchers who wish to progress with their study.

“We are satisfied that the University retains the capacity to respond appropriately to future shifts in demand for these languages”, says Mark Batho.

The statement is problematic. If courses are not available, there will be no student demand. Students cannot apply for non-existent courses.

“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 experiences,” says Mark Batho in his letter.

The petitioners must reiterate that what is at stake here is the protection of a full university undergraduate and postgraduate provision, which cannot be replaced by evening classes.

Glasgow 15th November 2012