

## PE1395/V

Petitioner Letter of 2 April 2013

We note with concern that, as follows from Universities Scotland letter, dated 14th March, 2013, once a degree course is abolished, it is very difficult to re-instate it. As Universities Scotland notes, "The establishment of new courses would be a major strategic decision for a department or the institution as a whole and would be taken not only on the basis of information on demand, but also the match to existing academic strength and the opportunities and risks in establishing new capacity. (...) If an institution wished to create provision in a wholly new area, it would have to assure itself that a sustained demand would likely to be present and would wish to assure itself that the quality of its provision would be such that students would choose to study the course."

The Universities Scotland letter explains that "every higher institution in Scotland publishes an annual prospectus. (...) For most UK students, the UCAS website is a main source of information on course availability."

The petitioners would like to point out that all references to language-based culture courses dealing with Central and Eastern Europe have now been deleted from Glasgow University's annual prospectus and from the UCAS website. At the moment, there is nowhere in Scotland for students to enrol for an undergraduate language-based Honours course dealing with the cultures of the new EU member states in Central and Eastern Europe. Yet, currently, for instance, there are more speakers of Polish living in Scotland than there are speakers of Gaelic. Young people from Central European families, living in Scotland, are increasingly interested in studying their Central and East European heritage, but they cannot now do so in Scotland. Students on the existing language-based Honours courses, dealing with the cultures of Central and Eastern Europe at the University of Glasgow are now being taught out. No new students are being admitted to these courses.

As the petitioners have pointed out in our previous submissions, Scotland needs to produce experts in Central and East European regional studies for economic, political and strategic reasons. Qualifications in Central and Eastern European languages and cultures provide a wide range of graduate job opportunities. These courses should be not only protected and supported, but they should be actively advertised. University managers and politicians should realise that communism fell almost a quarter of a century ago and Central and Eastern Europe is now open for business. Graduates in Central and East European languages and cultures are highly employable. It should be explained to applicants for university study that there are remarkable employment opportunities for the graduates in the languages and cultures of the new EU accession countries and it is to the economic detriment of Scotland that they are being overlooked.

Businessmen seem to be aware of this. As we have pointed out before, 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>).

But students cannot now enrol for a degree course studying Polish language and culture anywhere in Scotland. The same applies to the other languages and cultures of the new EU accession countries. In response to questions from the Public Petitions Committee, Alex Scrimgeour from the University of Glasgow has explained, in a letter dated 27th February, 2013, that in assessing changes in student demand, "important factors" for the University of Glasgow "are our close links to business and the third sector". Regrettably, the University of Glasgow does not seem to have taken into consideration the above-mentioned CBI survey.

The petitioners have repeatedly pointed out that for strategic reasons, an undergraduate Honours provision in language-based Central and East European cultural studies should be available at least at one Scottish University. This argument has been ignored both by the Scottish Government and Scottish Universities, who seem to be guided only by short-term commercial concerns, not by long-term strategic, political, social and economic concerns.

The petitioners would like to thank the Public Petitions Committee for consistently supporting this important issue. The Universities Scotland letter of 14th March, 2013, points out that "If Scottish Government were to identify a subject of strategic importance, it might ask the Scottish Funding Council to engage with the [higher education] sector as to how this provision might be developed and secured."

It is obvious that unless the Public Petitions Committee finds, even at this late date, a way of persuading the Scottish Government to do protect the strategically important language-based study of cultures of Central and Eastern Europe, the provision, knowledge and expertise in this area, which still exists at the University of Glasgow at the moment, while existing students are being taught out, will be irretrievably lost, to the detriment of Scotland.

On behalf of the petitioners

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