

MEETING MINUTES

Cross Party Group on Germany

Tuesday, 25th November 2014, 5.30pm

Committee Room 4

Next Meeting

Tuesday, 27th January 2015, 5.30pm

Committee Room 3

Attendees

Colin Beattie MSP
Liselotte Börgmann, Goethe Institut
Cameron Buchanan MSP
John Clifford, Austrian Consulate
Annette Götzkes, Edinburgh University
Graeme Henderson, Scottish Parliament
Kirsten Herbst-Gray, Langholm Academy
Colin Keir MSP
Jamie McGrigor MSP
Peter Müller-McDougall, Swiss Consulate General
Sigrid Rieuwerts, Mainz University
Jeannette Rissmann, Edinburgh University
Heinrich Schnettger, German Consul
Barbara Strickland, German citizen
Petra Wend, QMU

Apologies Manuela Calchini, Aaron Rhys Doidge, Verena Gräfin von Roedern, Barbara Kaulbach, James Trolland, Maureen Watt MSP

Colin Beattie (CB) opened the meeting at 17.35.

Topics Discussed:

Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages

CB welcomed Dr Alasdair Allan (AA), the Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages to the meeting. AA thanked the group for the invitation and noted that the Scottish Government very much values the connection Scotland has with Germany. AA said that, following the Scottish Government's cabinet re-shuffle, he still had a responsibility for schools and languages and noted that the CPG had

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previously highlighted the issue of maintaining a place for German in Scottish schools.

AA said he was aware of the decline in the number of pupils sitting Higher German, despite the increase in pupils studying other languages, and noted that German was especially important given the strength of Germany economically. AA said that the Scottish Government was aiming to tackle this via the introduction of the '1+2' language learning approach in primary schools, and that there was also a requirement for the importance of modern languages to be highlighted to pupils.

CB asked for AA's thoughts on the drop in the numbers of native German-speaking classroom assistants from around 70-80 in recent years down to six this year. AA replied that there had been a sharp decline overall in modern language classroom assistants but this number had now stabilised, although he recognised that there was still an issue with German assistants. AA noted that there was an imbalance with Scotland sending more assistants abroad than those coming into the country and this needed to be addressed.

AA said that Scotland's decentralised education system meant local authorities had responsibility for employment in education and that the Scottish Government was providing extra funding for the '1+2' programme, which local authorities could choose how to spend on language assistants.

Kirsten Herbst-Gray (KHG) asked if AA would be willing to approach Udo Michallik, the general secretary of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany, who have responsibility for language assistants in Germany, to seek solutions to the language assistant issue. AA confirmed that he would be happy to contact Udo.

KHG asked if, as part of the '1+2' policy, councils could be encouraged to ensure teachers qualified to teach German do so. AA replied that local authorities make these decisions but that the Scottish Government aims to ensure sensible decisions are taken. Liselotte Börgmann (LB) asked if the Scottish Government would consider the implementation of recommended national guidelines for local authorities to follow, such as in the context of prioritising of languages. AA said that at the moment, as '1+2' is a relatively new policy, the current aim is to engage local authorities and get them started and to give confidence to primary teachers but if there were seen to be gaps in the system recommended national guidelines may be introduced.

Jeannette Rissmann (JR) said that there was an issue over where language assistants would go, and that approaching councils and schools hadn't helped. Sigrid Rieuwerts (SR) said that she organises the GET (Get Across Borders) programme, which sends German trainee teachers to Scotland for 6 months. SR noted that some placements had been cancelled as no outgoing students were going to Germany.

SR further mentioned that the number of German teachers in Scotland had been halved in the past nine years, and that to combat this the Scottish Government should give directives to local authorities to spread languages and ideally have a strategy that includes German. AA said that local authorities would be expected to maintain a spread of languages and encouraged to access European funding to help

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with costs. KHG said it was not so much a question of funding as ensuring there was a demand for German to be taught, and that L1 needed to be taught in a more structured way in P6/P7 as well as in secondary education if '1+2' was to be a success.

AA noted that, while initial teacher education could be provided, the challenge lay in ongoing teacher education and ensuring that teaching languages was culturally accepted as being part of the role of being a teacher. John Clifford said he felt that Higher German in Scotland is quite a low level and asked if the level could be set higher to provide a stronger degree of efficiency in the language. AA replied that the Scottish Government did try to provide a range of courses in German and would like to take input from teachers over this.

Heinrich Schnettger (HS) asked if proposals in the form of a strategy paper could be submitted to AA based on this meeting's discussions. AA said he would be happy for proposals to be sent to him.

ACTION POINT – list of proposals / strategy paper to be sent to Dr Allan.

CB thanked Dr Allan for meeting with the CPG.

Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

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

Economic update

HS said that the most recent Ifo Institute for Economic Research monthly report indicated that business expectations were improving, following decreases in the index figures over the last six months. HS felt that, in his opinion, this was an indicator that moods were becoming more positive.

Peter Müller-McDougall (PMcD) noted that a recent statement from Russia said that Russia was doing its utmost to safeguard foreign investments, and also that its doors towards the West were wide open. PMcD mentioned that the latest figures from Switzerland showed a revised GDP growth estimate of 0.2% for 2014 and an estimate of 2.6% for 2015.

CB asked if the sanctions against Russia were having an effect. HS said that the situation in the Ukraine was definitely having an effect but that recent newspaper reports were suggesting that Russia wanted to remain open to dealing with the West especially for financial reasons. Jamie McGrigor (JMcG) noted that, in spite of the sanctions, Scottish fishermen were still selling mackerel to Belarus, Russia was not as strong militarily as may have been thought and that Russia was also likely losing money on oil.

Political update

HS mentioned that the recent G20 summit had been overshadowed by the Ukrainian situation, although Putin and other leaders were still talking to each other. JC said that the Prime Minister of Hungary was maintaining his country's links with Russia.

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CB noted that the UK was tied up with preparing for the General Election, and that the UK was focussing more on the conflict with Islamic State than the Ukraine at the moment. JC said that some Austrian media was taking the viewpoint that the West could stop making the East 'angry'.

Cultural update

SR noted that Edinburgh's Christmas market would not have any German stalls this year. The group discussed how the market had changed since its inception and that it no longer represented a traditional German market. The group agreed to write a letter to Steve Cardownie at Edinburgh City Council inviting him to explain the current concept of the Christmas Market.

ACTION POINT – Graeme Henderson to draft letter after discussion at March meeting

AOB

Colin Beattie closed the meeting at 18.42.