

MEETING MINUTES

Cross Party Group on Germany

Tuesday, 27th January 2015, 5.30pm

Committee Room 3

Next Meeting

Tuesday, 31st March 2015, 5.30pm

Committee Room 4

Attendees

Colin Beattie MSP
Eleoma Bodammer, Edinburgh University
Liselotte Börgmann, Goethe Institut
Cameron Buchanan MSP
John Clifford, Hon. Austrian Consulate
Annette Götzkes, Edinburgh University
Verena Gräfin von Roedern, Consul General of Germany
Graeme Henderson, Scottish Parliament
Kirsten Herbst-Gray, Langholm Academy
Peter Müller-McDougall, Swiss Consulate General
Sigrid Rieuwerts, Mainz University
Heinrich Schnettger, German Consul
Dr Dan Tierney, ex-University of Strathclyde
Petra Wend, QMU

Apologies Aaron Rhys Doidge, Barbara Kaulbach, Jeannette Rissmann, Barbara Strickland, James Trolland

Colin Beattie (CB) opened the meeting at 17.42.

Topics Discussed:

Approval of previous minutes

The group read through the previous minutes. Sigrid Rieuwerts (SR) requested that, on page 2:

‘...sends German trainee teachers to Scotland for 3-6 months’

be changed to:

‘...sends German trainee teachers to Scotland for 6 months’

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Subject to this change the minutes were approved.

Heinrich Schnetter (HS) confirmed a strategy paper had been submitted to Dr Allan, the Minister for Languages and Learning, and that he was awaiting a response. John Clifford (JC) gave the CPG's thanks to the colleagues from the German Consulate for their work on this.

The CPG agreed to look at the German Market letter to Edinburgh Council after the meeting in March.

Dr Dan Tierney

CB welcomed Dr Dan Tierney (DT), previously from Strathclyde University, to the meeting. DT thanked the group for the invitation, noted that he had recently retired from the University and spoke about the Scottish Government's '1+2' language initiative.

DT said that he had no vested interest in German as a language and was looking at the situation from an objective perspective. He stated that reasons for learning German include:

- Its economic and cultural significance
- That there are 110m German speakers in the EU, making it the largest group of speakers
- German is easier to learn than languages such as Arabic or Chinese

DT expressed his concerns over the '1+2' programme. These include:

- That there is no hierarchy of languages; a more coherent policy could be gained if children were given the option of French/German or French/Spanish
- Leaving local councils to prioritise languages will not provide a nationwide, joined-up approach
- There is a lack of clear and coherent national objectives
- There needs to be continuity throughout the schooling system

CB asked DT what he thought were the reasons for the reduction in German teaching. DT noted one reason was that traditionally Catholic schools would teach French and Spanish, as compared to non-Catholic schools that would traditionally teach French and German, and that this would continue into university studies. DT further noted that double language learning declined, with French largely becoming dominant and Spanish becoming popular as a subsequent second language. Some Universities then stopped teaching German as a result of this.

Liselotte Börgmann (LB) felt that, where previously promoters of the German language had good economic, cultural and linguistic arguments, structures such as the Curriculum for Excellence and the '1+2' system were actually defeating these arguments. John Clifford (JC) noted that some universities don't ask for German as a course requirement despite its relevance to the course being taught.

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Kirsten Herbst-Gray (KHG) said that the actual teaching of German was very important, and noted that local councils can make decisions without taking any advice. KHG further noted that there was no requirement to have a language as part of a career these days, and there was a lack of linguistic knowledge for pupils and on overdominance of French. KHG said that pupils believed it was easier to learn other subjects than a new language, and felt that this was related to an understanding of the 'toolkit' of the English language.

SR made a comparison between the Scottish Government's policy of the expected level of language attainment in Scotland, which the new Cabinet Secretary for Education has suggested should be A2, and in Germany, Austria and Switzerland, where universities generally require two languages at B1 or B2 level.

CB invited DT to comment on the discussion to this point. DT noted that the national situation had become worse over time and that there was no national motivation for pupils to learn languages. From a local perspective, DT noted that councils often leave decisions to headteachers and that there need to be a more coherent policy.

DT said that both employers and universities should be required to ask for languages. CB asked if there was research employers were doing so. LB said there was. DT noted that job adverts rarely mentioned languages as a requirement.

LB said that she personally welcomed the Scottish Government's attainment level of A2 as that would be better than what we have at present. Annette Götzkes (AG) noted that German is one of Edinburgh University's strongest foundation/open language courses, which suggested that German learning is growing.

Petra Wend (PW) said that the Cabinet Secretary's agenda is dealing with the attainment gap, and further noted while language requirements may be increasing with employers, they're still fairly low down the agenda of most employers. PW mentioned that financial issues may influence the decisions made by local councils.

Verena Gräfin von Roedern (VGR) felt that more teaching of grammar would improve the ability of pupils to learn foreign languages. DT said that grammar might be part of it but that we might be comparing different levels of pupils, and he felt that ultimately there needed to be a motivation to learn languages.

CB asked if this should be mandatory or by persuasion. SR believed languages should be a compulsory part of university entrance requirements. PW felt this was unrealistic but languages should be compulsory at school level. SR noted that primary school teachers were not required to have a language.

JC asked if Scotland had considered other ways of teaching languages. The Group discussed the merits of teaching other subjects in a foreign language, and this was felt to be a good thing.

CB asked for suggestions as to where the Group goes from here. The Group agreed to email comments to Graeme Henderson (GH) to be collated into a document to present to the Cabinet Secretary for Education when CB next meets with her.

Action point – CPG members to email Graeme Henderson with comments/suggestions by Friday 30th January

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The Group discussed the next steps once the Scottish Government's position had been outlined through Dr Allan's response to the strategy paper and the Cabinet Secretary's response to the collated document. It was suggested that the CPG could write letters to the CBI Scotland, Chambers of Commerce (Lothians), and VisitScotland outlining the business benefits of promoting German, and referring to research that a lack of German can actually hurt business. These groups can be invited to partner with the Group in its subsequent presentations to the Scottish Government. The Group also discussed writing to the Association of Directors of Education Scotland to set out the educational perspective.

Action point – Graeme Henderson to draft letters once the SG's position is clarified in response to the CPG's documents

The Group gave their thanks to Dr Tierney for meeting with them.

Economic update

VGR noted that the German economy had grown by 1.5% in 2014 compared with the previous year, while the economic situation had stabilised going into 2015. VGR said that the main driving force for the increase in GDP had been consumption expenditure.

Cultural update

SR showed the group copies of a play based on the story of *Kindertransport*, which was being shown in German schools as part of Holocaust Day.

VGR informed the group about the "Gathering the Voices" project the German Consulate had been supporting. This project has gathered and made available online oral testimony from men and women who sought sanctuary in Scotland to escape the racism of Nazi-dominated Europe. VGR also told the group of a Holocaust Memorial Day function she attended (organised by the son of a Holocaust survivor), and subsequently sent the group a speech by Michael Roth, Germany's Minister of State for Europe, that was delivered at the UN, and details of other events in Germany.

AOB

AG welcomed Eleoma Bodammer, from Edinburgh University, to the Group.

CB noted the Group had been provided with a list of potential speakers and asked the Group to take this away for consideration.

Colin Beattie closed the meeting at 19.08.