In 2011, up until October 2013, I was the co-ordinator for a European Lifelong Learning Programme project entitled *Lang2Tech – Second Language Competency for Technicians in Industry*. The project was led by the University of Edinburgh, with partners in Germany, Italy, Spain and Lithuania, and was granted nearly 300,000 Euro by the European Commission. Here is the summary of the project as it appeared in the application that drew this sum:

“Research shows that across Europe, technician workforce supply is not aligned with locations of increasing demand for skilled technicians, as evidenced for example in national shortage occupation lists. The most significant constraint on these technicians’ occupational mobility is absence of second-language competency. This derives from lack of opportunity or incentive for language-learning in technicians’ education, training and work socialisation.

Objective 3.3 of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme deemed foreign language provision in Europe inadequate and called for new methodologies. Lang2Tech's response will be to adapt and transfer, for technicians' use within the Open Source Mahara e-portfolio system, the e-portfolio tool from the Leonardo project European Certificate of Basic Skills (EUCeBS). Lang2Tech is predicated on a key notion: that demonstrating basic skills through the medium of a second language is proof of successful communication in that language.

We will analyse the content and outcomes of existing language-learning programmes in the partner countries to determine where technicians’ second-language needs are not catered for. We will develop, based on the results, a Lang2Tech Tutor's Manual and a Language Learner's Handbook which will support technicians to evidence their second-language competency in their Lang2Tech e-portfolios. The pilot test of our products will be with technicians already trained and qualified in their own disciplines to EQF Levels 3-6, in five countries with five languages (Italian, Spanish, German, Russian and English). We will use a blend of formal teaching and supported individual non-formal and informal learning in the workplace, and use outcomes-based assessment to provide new Lang2Tech Certification across the six levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). We will establish a robust protocol for cross-moderation, between countries, of e-portfolio evidence of language competence, and through this, establish a European standard. Through their common use of the CEFR, Lang2Tech Certification and the Europass European Language Portfolio will articulate.
Our consortium includes language-teaching units at two universities, a national agent for Leonardo Mobility placements, an association of researchers specialising in European integration, a consultant on employee competences in industry, a large multinational corporation with a technician workforce, the Scottish Lifelong Learning Directorate, and Unite the Union.

The Lang2Tech products will be available in the five project languages on an Open Source basis, and the partners will be active after the project lifetime in promoting Lang2Tech and licensing organisations to award Lang2Tech Certification. Our expected impact centres on the placement of Lang2Tech Certification at comparable levels within Europe’s emerging NQFs, and on a consequent increase in occupational mobility for technicians.”

Lang2Tech was a considerable success, demonstrating clearly the efficacy of our ePortfolio approach to proving an individual’s technical language competency as part of a wider overall language competency. We awarded 45 Lang2Tech Certificates to our enrolled technicians, in five different languages in five different countries and based on a variety of technical disciplines. The only part of the work proposed in the project summary that was not wholly completed, and thus still needs action, was pegging Lang2Tech Certification to consistent levels within the partner countries’ NQFs – but after the Brexit vote, any scope for doing this would seem to have narrowed considerably.

During the project’s funded time the Lang2Tech partners took a decision to extend, in the future, the use of the Lang2Tech ePortfolio to non-classroom contexts, so that individuals would be able to initiate by Internet their own access to Lang2Tech Certification. Consequently the partners have determined to try to start a new international company and have recently lodged, with Edinburgh Research and Innovation’s Mentorshed facility, the following business-opportunity description (this description was lodged prior to the vote for Brexit):

“An opportunity exists to sell specialised foreign-language certification to skilled technicians, and to sell, to agencies which train and employ such technicians, franchises to award this certification. The certification would be pegged to an immutable pan-European standard which would be secured and maintained by a new international company…”

As you will realise, I’m concerned as to how Brexit will affect Lang2Tech’s chances of becoming an international company headquartered in Scotland, insofar as Lang2Tech branch offices in European member states already exist. I fear that now, after Brexit, further funding from the European Commission cannot come to Scotland for the further development of Lang2Tech. Lang2Tech could however continue in the branch offices - and Lang2Tech Certification could be awarded - without the involvement of any UK office. The University of Edinburgh has offered each of the Lang2Tech international partners a no-strings-attached license to use the Lang2Tech project products in perpetuity, so Lang2Tech’s headquarters could be in any of the partner countries, and funding from the
European Commission could be pursued from there. The preferred option, though, is to obtain financial backing for Lang2Tech, possibly through the putting up of equity, from within Scotland.

A general effect of Brexit could be fewer technicians, and fewer others in industry in European countries, choosing to learn English. Combined with the current low level of interest in Scotland (and in the UK as a whole) in learning languages other than English, particularly post-school, this could constitute a new risk to current plans in Scotland for robust international trade and economic growth.

Thus I would hope the proposed new Lang2Tech company would seem more, not less, attractive to potential financial backers in Scotland following the vote for Brexit. It would seem imperative to take account of the importance of multilingualism for Scotland’s economic health at this crunch time in European history.

The UK referendum of 2016 showed conclusively that Scotland values its European inheritance, traditions and hopes of future collaboration. Its interests as indicated here are obviously at risk in the present situation and the will of the Scottish people coheres with what Lang2Tech has done and wants to do.