

Cross-Party Group on Germany

Tuesday 18 January at 6:15pm via Microsoft Teams

Present

MSPs

Colin Beattie MSP
Fiona Hyslop MSP
Michelle Thomson MSP

Invited guests

Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, Angus Robertson MSP

Non-MSP Group Members

Anne Simms
Dr Andreas Zimmer
Peter Friedrich
John Clifford
Alexandra Stein
Peter Müller-McDougall
Sigrid Rieuwerts
Hans-Georg Thönges
Bill Rodger, Treasurer of the European Movement in Scotland

Apologies

Ewan Cameron

1. Welcome & Approval of Previous Minutes

CB welcomed the CPG and previous minutes were approved – subject to some corrections sent to LC by SF.

2. Speaker: Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, Angus Robertson

AR thanks the CPG for inviting him and notes his personal being half German and professional interest in his role as Cabinet Secretary in maintaining ties with Germany.

AR discusses the Scottish Government's long-standing relationship with Germany and notes the recent work of the Scottish Government HUB in Berlin, Germany who have been focusing on building the relationships with German partners. Particularly in developing business links in hydrogen to reach our goal of net zero. In November, Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport, Michael Matheson MSP signed a joint declaration on intent in green hydrogen and hydrogen technologies with Michael Westhagemann, Hamburg Senator for Economics and Innovation. This lays the foundation for a collaboration with the lead hydrogen state in Germany.

Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Economy, Kate Forbes is going to be signing a declaration of intent with North Rhine-Westphalia updates 2003 Memorandum of Understanding.

AR states Scottish Government want to continue to promote and encourage youth exchange. Students remain welcome in Scotland and their contribution is welcome in our educational environment, society and culture. Long-term aim of the Scottish Government is to re-join Erasmus+ and dialogue continues to find a solution to this. In the meantime, the Scottish Government are developing a Scottish education exchange programme to facilitate reciprocal mobility between Scottish international learners and SAAS, this will sit alongside the Saltire scholarships for EU students who wish to study in Scotland. Visa issues remain a problem which is a reserved matter for the U.K. Government. AR acknowledges the work of SR and notes her most recent award presented by the First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon.

AR discusses the economic links and addressed the Deutscher abend (German evening) reception at COP26 co-hosted by the Scottish Government and the Bundesverband der Deutsche (BDI). AR will also speak virtually at the British Chamber of Commerce in Germany's New Year's conference.

AR looks forward to working with German partners and the Consulate in Edinburgh going forward in his role to make the most of the opportunities the Scottish Government have in Germany.

CB thanks AR for his contribution. He notes the long-standing concern of the CPG in German language teaching and provision in Scotland. AR agrees this is an important subject, notes music schools and wonders if schools can be established with a language specialism like bilingual policy in Vienna introduced by Scot Stuart Simpson

where teaching is carried out in English and German. He hopes language learning can be promoted in the next session of the Scottish Parliament.

SR notes University of Mainz has been engaged in this for a long time. Notes 2014 ten-point plan was sent to the Scottish Government things has gone even more downhill with only 94 German teachers left in Scotland and the Councils state they do not have the power to engage externally to get the expertise in or if they have the funding to get language assistant in schools in the next financial year. The German Government can fund 10 language assistants. Recommends one school per Council which has German as a main language and that would be an achievement. SR welcomes AR's words that a solution should be found. AR is shocked by the statistics and will speak to colleagues regarding these concerns.

AZ asks how many applications have been received for the Saltire scholarship programme. AR does not have the latest numbers but will get this shared with AZ.

SR proposes a working group to tackle issues discussed by the CPG in terms of language learning in Scotland. If we assume Scotland re-joins the EU and assume follow the European Framework, it would be concerning in regard to standard of language learning. Scotland needs to get on the level of European Framework which cannot be centred to just one or two schools.

PM mentions result driven activities and how youngsters should be exposed to these opportunities to generate an interest in languages.

MT notes her background in music and cognitive diversity and would apply this to languages. It is time to think differently to the historical approach Scotland has had to education and reflect on different approaches. It is important positioning to how Scotland wants to be seen from the outside and by other countries.

AR thanks the CPG for their questions and comments. Agrees there are a number of ways to gather momentum for language learning in Scotland and room to work with colleagues who wants to promote French or Spanish language teaching for example.

FH shares her experience. Schools of specialism is not a new idea and may be the way forward. The drive for change comes from External Affairs into other areas in Government such as Education, Local Government etc and dissipates down. FH managed to introduce language baccalaureate which meant people could gain more than one higher language and 2+1. This is creating a demand. Very supportive of language learning. Need to think of tactics within Government. Suggests similar with music in education and the importance of it in Scotland. We need to galvanise support within Government but need to be practical.

CB states even the schools can be reluctant to introduce European language. Some schools are favouring mandarin.

3. Follow Up on Previous Action Points

CB addresses action points from the previous CPG. Follows up on the paper discussed with SR.

SR notes Ireland calls Germany an indispensable country. They just came up with a programme evaluating how Germany is important with Ireland and concluded they must start with languages. There are no German teachers left in Northern Ireland which has caused the Republic of Ireland to react. This would be something that could work in Scotland. This would be a good learning point for Scotland and SR would like to include this in the report paper to demonstrate what can be one and how it is manageable.

SR also contacted Karl Leydecker who would be happy to speak with the CPG in future.

SR, AZ and ASt will get together in future to work on the report. However, the pandemic has delayed this. It is hoped the Covid-19 situation will ease and will be allowed. SF is keen for Goethe-Institut, JC, PM and Local Authorities to be part of this too.

HGT provides an update on the work the Goethe-Institut has been undertaking. They are currently restructuring in the field of language teaching and providing online / in person courses. HGT shares his screen to demonstrate the range of courses available. They would like to extend their activities to Edinburgh in partnership with Institut de Français. They are interested in the 1+2 language policy review.

CB is keen to find a way forward for the CPG and the paper will help provide the Scottish Government with our key needs for German language learning / education in Scotland. CB would like a working group on this going forward.

FH mentions the benefits of including a Council and Higher Education champion for practical proposals.

CB mentions MSPs present would be happy to contact their own Councils or even high schools to get involved.

SR asks what is changing with 1+2 policy and CB states we will try find out. LC will action.

CB notes he wants future speakers who can give us a better understanding of language learning in Scotland and the issues it is facing. From there we can feed the information into the paper. SR will pass details of speakers to LC.

4. Political, Economic, Cultural Updates

AZ asks SR about the MoU between University of Mainz and University of Glasgow.

SR states there has been a fully functioning agreement between the two for last 40 years. University of Mainz have an office in Glasgow, this is getting replaced. A language assistant will be in place who is more culture focused. Money has been provided by a sponsor to provide three offices in Scotland but because of the pandemic

this has not be fulfilled yet – it is hoped it will be Glasgow, Edinburgh and perhaps Aberdeen in the Northern Alliance.

ASt mentions the Hope Springs Eternal Project that runs between University of Mainz and University of Glasgow. An exhibition was supposed to be held at COP26 but this has now been postponed to April 2022. SR confirms this is still going ahead but location is TBC.

SR mentions the largest flooding in German history in the Rhineland-Palatinate – the second most costly in the world in 2021 – it is above an hour drive from the University of Mainz. There are still 61 bridges down, still many people without heating and they are relying on donations of heating. University of Mainz has decided that the next GO project for 2022 will invites student from Scotland over to help rebuild and to discuss the climate issues that are affecting the area. It is hoped Scottish partners will take up this effort. An estimate of 30 students will go over.

AOB

BR asks if more can be done to encourage exchanges especially between groups of young people to help individuals use the language. CB agrees it is good to have that but it has become more difficult to facilitate. SR also agrees and states that this is the purpose of the GO project but the visa regulations are making this difficult.

ASi is the secretary of the Odenwald association in Falkirk – they are twinned. ASi is looking for help for the twin town association from the Scottish Government. Found the Scottish Government is keen to encourage twinning but currently financial situation means it is not always possible to fund. Previously the Odenwald association helped facilitate exchanges with youth groups but this was put on hold for Covid. The Odenwald association would like to introduce a conversation café in Falkirk for anyone wanting to learn German or for German speakers to converse. Would like to know the CPGs thoughts on twinning and encouraging twinning? Can an item about twinning be put on a future agenda?

CB states twinning has never been considered a main item for the CPG but it is part of the CPG's interest. Normally, the Council funded twinning groups but is unsure on the situation of the Odenwald association.

ASi responds they have had help from the Council but they are all volunteers and have to raise their own funds. They also have a French link but they have more help from the Council as they are still affiliated whereas Odenwald association branched off. They have invited AZ to come and speak to them.

AZ is currently drawing up a list of who is twinned with who. It has to be matched with who is interested and correct area.

CB will check if there is funding from Scottish Government. LC has already provided funding information to ASi.

SR aims to promote Scottish literature in schools in the Rhineland-Palatinate and they have an idea of twinning schools or even youth groups with a focus perhaps on climate issues. This is funding by the European partners but this is currently being investigated. SR encourages ASi to contact her to provide support through GET programme and would be keen on the idea of the German café.

BR states the European Movement in Scotland tried to encourage twinning post-Brexit and the City of Edinburgh Council were not interested in twinning. Twinning is not in a healthy state in Scotland.

CB adds that twinning has perhaps been neglected as Council budgets have been cut. It can be put on the agenda in future.

LC will provide ASi with SR's details.

Close of Session

CB thanks all for attending.

Meeting finished at 7:45pm.