

# Cross-Party Group on Germany

Tuesday 26th October 2021, 6pm

Virtual Meeting – Microsoft Teams

Present

MSPs

Colin Beattie MSP  
Dean Lockhart MSP  
Michelle Thomson MSP

Non-MSP Group Members

John Clifford  
Sigrid Rieuwerts  
Alexandra Stein  
Dr Andreas Zimmer

Apologies

Eleoma Bodammer  
Ewen Cameron  
Annette Götzkes  
Peter Müller-McDougall  
Hans-Georg Thönges

## **1.** Welcome & Approval of Minutes

CB welcomes everyone and introduced himself as convener. All attendees introduce themselves.

All approve previous minutes.

## **2.** Discussion on the Future Focus of the Group

CB proposes the Group discuss the future focus of the group and acknowledges the Group have always had a wide interest on a variety of issues. Previous issues include German language teaching but it has been a while since this has been raised.

SR states since the Covid-19 pandemic of the six universities offering German in Scotland, two have now abandoned teaching of the language.

SR suggests this would be a good time to focus on the Scottish Government's 1+2 policy which is up for review, the commitment made in 2011 to increase German language learning has had the opposite effect. This aim from ten years ago should be reviewed again. SR would like to initiate discussion on Scotland wanting to be part of the European nations and on the other hand not living up to this expectation when it comes to languages.

CB asks the Group to think of suggestions of the future direction of the CPG.

### **3.** Speaker: German Consul General Dr Andreas Zimmer

AZ notes these are currently interesting times in Germany with the change of the Government. After 16 years there will be a new Chancellor. For the first time a coalition will be likely formed by three parties: SPD, Greens and FDP. We will see how it works out in the coming month.

AZ states with COP26 on its way where many German people are coming to Glasgow to meet politicians and delegates and the Consulate have some requests to set up meetings.

AZ proposes there are two main topics which should be part of the future of the CPG. The first culture and language -educational exchanges for example have become more difficult after Brexit due to UK visa issues. The second is the economic ties between Scotland and Germany which should not be neglected. He hopes the Group can help improve ties over the course of the next Parliament between the two countries in these areas. He mentions he would like a working programme for the Group and would like to see encourage visitors to join the Group to speak at future meetings.

AZ thanks CB for re-establishing the Group and opens up discussion. CB thanks AZ for his suggestions.

### **4.** Open Discussion

CB turns back to the future focus of the group and states he does not want to repeat previous issues. He agrees with Members previous suggestions that this is a good time to review language learning in Scotland and refers back to the point SR on the review of the 1+2 policy. In order to improve language learning the Group need to better our relationships with universities who can help us, and we can invite people from universities to future meetings to explain their language policies and how German takes priority. JC states universities would be willing to contribute.

DL refers to the economic ties and notes Germany is one of the biggest export markets for Scotland. This may be worth reviewing again with the Covid-19 pandemic and how this has caused disruption of supply chains. Scottish Enterprise and the Scottish Chamber of Commerce have been hosting and organising virtual trade missions between Scotland and different countries so when travel restrictions mean you cannot physically meet for trade conferences activity can still take place on a regular virtual basis. Suggests having a session with them to ask what is happening in terms of trade promotion between Scotland and Germany and what is the current situation? What support is required to facilitate trade in this new Covid environment? It would be worth knowing is Covid has brought new opportunities as well as the challenges it presents.

SR responds to DL. A meeting just took place in Frankfurt with the British Chamber of Commerce (BCC) where Scottish Government representatives from Berlin were also present. SR was invited along and reports there is a new initiative. However, an issue remains that we do not get interns and SR would like to open this up through industry. It would be an idea to have Scottish Companies and a representative from BCCG along for a meeting to discuss this. SR is meeting with representatives to see if a database of companies and students can be established to facilitate this and notes AS has also been involved. This could be a future meeting for the CPG.

CB mentions Scotland is looking at their own version of the Erasmus scheme. SR notes this will only help students but not help internships. These are two different types. The issue with internships lies with problems with visa regulations. AS is also involved in this and mentions it would be easy to get

the BCCG in Germany's Managing Director Ilka Hardman involved as they have a good working relationship and keen to get involved in Scotland. DL and CB agree this would be a good agenda item and ask if she would be able to come along as a guest speaker. SR and AS will work together and report back.

JC asks if there are any updated figures on German language assistants in Scottish schools?

SR responds that numbers have been cut but there are currently 15 in Scotland. This is still strong in comparison with other languages. Prior to Covid there were 30. They are currently waiting for another 3 which will take the total to 18. Issues with the North in Aberdeen and some places are being subsidised with DAAD (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst) funding where students can be placed in locations where the Scottish councils cannot provide the funds for language assistance. In total the DAAD have provided 10 places but at the moment only 3 are filled. This is due to one of the requirements being that these individuals need to be linked up with a university – Edinburgh Napier University is no longer a possible option, therefore discussion will need to be had with the University of Edinburgh again. However, this week has been informed that they are also losing their office at the University of Edinburgh.

SR asks if she can discuss this further with JL. Another option is Queen Margaret University.

Discussion needs to be had to push to Scottish Government to provide funding in the years to come. Currently, they are providing services to 26 primary schools in Edinburgh through 7/8 assistants. There would not be German in these schools otherwise. Edinburgh does not have German as a first language only as a second – the same in Aberdeen.

SR continues to state Brexit has made it difficult to get students over to Scotland which has been raised with the British Council. This was due to issues with the application form being tailored for the English education system and meant no German student could come to Scotland legally. This was raised with the British Council and eventually this was changed. SR has been in talks in Ireland as two

EU countries in partnership to safeguard EU funding for Scotland. German language is in demise in Northern Ireland and has started discussions with the University of Limerick on this. The issues with the application form also impact Northern Ireland.

JC asks if this time to go straight to the Scottish Government? Can the Cabinet Secretary of External Affairs lend a sympathetic ear?

CB responds we will try to get Angus and Cabinet Secretary for Education, Shirley-Anne Sommerville for future meetings.

SR states German teaching numbers in Scotland are low and funding is available through DAAD – half a million to be exact. We need to have the universities on board and there is a discussion between the University of Aberdeen and the RP on 12<sup>th</sup> November. Scottish Government's Berlin office have just visited RP trying to link all 19 universities from Scotland with 12 universities in RP.

CB asks: Would we be about to get people from Scottish universities to speak at the CPG and discuss these issues?

SR responds: Yes. Senior Vice-Principal Karl Leydecker from the University of Aberdeen and is fluent in German. He is showing a strong interest in this issue. The University of Mainz would like to open an office in Aberdeen to support German in the northern alliance.

CB asks for contact information to be sent to Laura and asks if we should invite anyone from Universities of Edinburgh or Glasgow?

SR mentions Nolan from Edinburgh Napier.

CB asks if Germany have an equivalent to CPGs in German politics? Is this better done at state or federal level? Would they be interested in dialogue with this CPG?

AZ states they do. We should look at state level. We could address some people from federal parliament also but they probably will not set up a group for Scotland – there is a U.K. group.

CB thinks it would be good to link in in some way with the U.K. group and have a Scottish input. We also do not have the capacity to link with every state, but it would be useful if we tried to link with 2 or 3 at most and hear their views.

AZ states would have to do this through the foreign ministry who have contacts in the Parliament. Once the new groups have been set up we could address them, but we have to wait until they are constituted. The President of Lower Saxony is visiting Scotland and I will discuss with her.

AS notes Higher Education is fully devolved. As part of the U.K.'s engagement with the German federal group, is there a case to be made by helping the group understand how devolved politics works? And to also under the Scottish Higher Education system. The Higher Education system in Scotland for example is a 4 year degree not 3. It is notably different.

SR states this is important. This was the reason Scotland signed the deal only with the RP. The Ministers for Education, Higher Education and Culture have all met up from the Scottish side and the RP side. This might be a good way of getting all the ministries involved again.

MT adds to back up the comment on higher education. It is also the nature of the 4 year degree themselves. For example, Scottish undergraduate degrees are Masters of Arts which is much more akin with Europe and it is the English structure that is out of kilter. This is a problem MT tried to overcome as a MP and touring with the business committee.

CB asks if this can be left with AZ to follow through in terms of a link with the Federal group? It would be useful to develop some relationship with 1 or 2 Länder.

AS agree with SR. RP would be the obvious starting point giving that we already have a good working relationship. Otherwise, look at other states where Scotland has a closer relationship – Bavaria, Baden-Württemberg, North Rhine-Westphalia and Hamburg. Unless, there are any particular universities where we know there is a strong relationship we would like to pursue. We can also leave

the door open so other states can communicate through the state we have a relationship with. This has happened with students from one state asking if it was possible to exchange through the RP.

SR: There are students from Leipzig are part of the GETS programme. It is difficult to link because of the visa regulations. In the first year, student numbers have dropped by 42% for MA and MSc programmes. Colleagues in academia are worried about cuts to Scottish universities. We also need to realise the English speaking working is no longer in favour in Europe. Now is the time to do multilingualism. Scotland will need languages more than ever before now.

CB states this is a good point. As far as relationships with the equivalent of the CPG in Germany, we will leave to AZ, AS, and SR to come up with the best options.

AZ, AS, SR all agree.

CB moves conversations back to language tuition in Scotland. It is important. We should get the Cabinet Secretary for Education in. We should take advantages of the fact the 1+2 policy is going to be under review and discuss what we would like to put into it. We can discuss with her some of the issues then do follow up on that with something in writing. We will try to invite her along to the next meeting. If JC and SR can also provide names of the appropriate people to invite along to discuss the issues regarding German language tuition.

SR states we can also invite DAAD.

MT mentions we need to consider capacity. What if lost would be a difficult position to come back from? What can we not lose sight of? Things to consider.

CB agrees and states we are trying to take information where we can focus and make an effective impact.

SR shares why we have won this money for Scotland and to help Scottish teachers do what we are doing with the local councils. 'L plus' means we leave everything as it is in terms of degree structure but offer the plus which means summer schools, teacher training in RP and that is an offer we are making to the Councils through the universities.

CB responds: It sounds like a great opportunity. Would it be useful if the CPG wrote to the Councils and asked about their participation?

SR responds this might be a good idea. Also points out the last week in January is also languages week. SR further asks if it would it be an idea to get together a paper with questions and problems? We all come from different experiences and how we can help. Will this help the Minister?

CB thinks this would be essential. She would be better equipped to give us a talk and answer our questions.

AZ, SR and AS happy to work together on this.

AZ states it is crucial we need to explain the advantages of learning German.

JC adds that AZ makes an important point. We learn to think in other modes when learning a language. When learning German you also learn other ways of thinking.

CB will get together with LC and put action points together.

## **5.** AOB

SR shares news that she will be officially adopted by Nicola Sturgeon as her 'God Child' after winning the Konstanzer Konzilspreis 2021. Link - [Dr. Sigrid Rieuwerts receives Constance Council Prize 2021 | JGU Mainz Scotland Hub \(uni-mainz.de\)](#)

CB gives is congratulations on behalf of the CPG.

## **6.** Future Date and Close of Session

Proposed future date 25th January 2022 – may need changed.

CB thanks all for attending.