



The Scotland-Russia Forum Форум Шотландия – Россия

www.scotlandrussiaforum.org
Registered charity no. SC038728

The Scotland-Russia Institute
9 South College Street
Edinburgh EH8 9AA
Tel. 0131 668 3635
Email info@scotlandrussiaforum.org

11 August 2010

Janet Brown
Chief Executive
Scottish Qualifications Authority
The Optima Building
58 Robertson Street
Glasgow
G2 8DQ

Dear Ms Brown

SQA National Courses in Russian

I am writing to ask you to reconsider your decision to abandon SQA National Courses in Russian.

If the courses are not available it is highly unlikely that any Scottish school will consider reintroducing Russian and it is surely not the intention of the SQA that one of Europe's five major languages should be inaccessible to Scottish young people.

Scotland is one of very few countries in Europe where pupils don't have the opportunity to learn Russian. Yet Russia is a large and fast growing economy, dominating the world oil and gas industry in which Scotland also plays a smaller but significant role – that alone, out of many other reasons, should set the country thinking on how to get Russian back onto the school curriculum.

There is no lack of demand for Russian. The Scotland-Russia Forum, an Edinburgh-based charity working to promote understanding of Russia has seen its membership and attendance at events rise rapidly since its foundation 7 years ago: this year over 3,500 people have attended our events (an active programme of business events, lectures, exhibitions and language classes) and membership is the highest of any Russian society in the UK. Extracurricular classes held at Fortrose Academy and other schools as well as classes at the supplementary schools in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen are all popular and well attended.

Please see the attached document for some reasons why we believe you should reconsider your decision.

I would be delighted to discuss this with you in more detail.

Kind regards,

Jenny Carr
Chairman

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Hon. Vice-Presidents: The Baroness Smith of Gilmorehill; Lt Commander Dairmid Gunn OBE Royal Navy (Retd).
Founder President (2003-7): Tam Dalyell





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WHY SCOTS NEED TO LEARN RUSSIAN

We believe the decision to cease offering SQA National Courses in Russian is both misguided and extremely short sighted – saving very little money but causing immense damage both to the educational opportunities of Scottish pupils and to the future of Scottish business and society by removing the opportunity to learn one of the major European languages.

Scottish pupils are missing out

The SQA are right that presentations have been falling, they are just wrong about what to do about it.

Until relatively recently Russian featured strongly on the Scottish school curriculum but Scotland is now unique in Europe in its lack of provision of Russian (apart from a small number of extra-curricular classes and supplementary schools for heritage speakers). In Europe as a whole Russian is one of the 5 most frequently taught languages according to the EU's education agency Eurydice. Even England has a number of schools in both the maintained and independent sectors which offer Russian.

Abolishing the exams makes it highly unlikely that pupils will get the chance to learn Russian in future. Why would schools consider introducing a language if pupils could only be presented for GCSE and GCE? This would raise considerable administrative and pedagogical hurdles.

The children of Russian-language immigrants will miss out too – they will no longer be able to sit SQA exams in their parents' language, an option which is still available to speakers of Chinese and Urdu.

Scotland needs Russian speakers

Russia offers huge opportunities for Scottish business – not only is it a major fast growing emerging market economy but it is also very important in the oil industry, which it dominates worldwide and which is very important also to the Scottish economy. Russian tourism too is growing, and with it job opportunities for Russian speakers.

Companies which rely on the interpreting skills of a foreign partner place themselves at a disadvantage: how can a Scottish company understand all the nuances of what is being said at the negotiation table if no-one in the Scottish company has the skill to understand the partner's language? The most important information in a set of negotiations is not necessarily that which is expressed in official circles.

Russian is useful for communicating with the many Russian speakers in Europe and beyond and as such should not be ignored by a Government which believes that the Scottish nation should take its place as an independent nation within the European Union. Russian is an important minority language in the Baltic European Union countries for example. Scottish organisations and individuals are active in many Russian speaking countries in not only in Europe and in Russia itself but also in Central Asia and the Caucasus where Russian can be a useful lingua franca: even the SQA is working in Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania and Latvia!

Russian is important for educational and cultural reasons too. It is a European language, similar in structure to German for example, and complements the study of other European languages on the curriculum. It is not particularly "difficult" – around the same level as German according to the Foreign Office. Russian history and politics rightly have their place in the Scottish school curriculum – study of the language too is essential to pupils' understanding of a very important world player. And last but not least Russian art – especially literature, theatre and dance – has an important and influential role in the world.

In conclusion

Russian could be a valuable part of the portfolio of major languages on offer to Scottish pupils. Removing the examinations makes this all but impossible.

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