

# Press release

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## UK cuts 253,000 Euros in funding for international collaboration on language teaching

With effect from January 1st 2012 the UK is withdrawing from the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) in Graz. The ECML was established through an agreement of the Council of Europe in 1994 in order to encourage excellence and innovation in language teaching and to help Europeans learn languages better. The action is leading directly to a reduction of its programme and will reduce considerably the UK's influence over European policy for languages.

For 17 years the Centre has been a major source of information on language teaching in Europe, stimulating discussion and research, producing publications, leading new initiatives and supporting networks of language teachers. The UK's annual contribution to the Centre was some 253,000 Euros. Although paltry in UK public spending terms, this was a significant proportion of the ECML budget. As a result a number of posts in Graz will be lost at short notice, and the Centre's programme will be substantially curtailed.

This decision was communicated to the Council of Europe on 21 September, just days before the deadline for making such a withdrawal. UK teachers and language experts will no longer be able to coordinate ECML projects or contribute to its development, and will miss out on significant learning opportunities.

The grounds given for the withdrawal were that "the tangible benefits to pupils in schools are not sufficiently well evidenced for us to be able to afford this when budgets are tight".

“This is a particularly short-sighted step at a time when the Government is reviewing the school curriculum and it undermines Mr Gove’s claim that he wants to learn from the best international experience in education,” commented Dr. Lid King , Chair of *Speak to the Future – the campaign for languages* and National Director for Languages from 2003 - 2011. “In fact this gives the impression of isolationist superiority, while saving almost nothing from the education department’s budget.”

Professor Tim Connell, Vice-President of the Chartered Institute of Linguists, added, “Only last month, I was delighted to hear that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) is to invest over £1 million more each year in its language training. It is deeply concerning that we should send such contradictory signals to our European colleagues on the value of language teaching and learning.”

The decision was taken by the Department of Education after consultation with the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Although this decision also affects higher education and the UK’s international standing, the views of the UK Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) and the FCO are not known.

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## Press enquiries

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(see overleaf for notes to editors)

## Notes to editors

### 1. The European Centre for Modern Languages

The European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) in Graz, Austria, was set up in 1994 as an Enlarged Partial Agreement of the Council of Europe. It currently has 34 member states\*.

The mission of the ECML is to encourage excellence and innovation in language teaching and to help Europeans learn languages more efficiently. Its strategic objectives are to help its member states implement effective language teaching policies by:

- focusing on the practice of the learning and teaching of languages;
- promoting dialogue and exchange among those active in the field;
- training multipliers;
- supporting programme-related networks and research projects

<http://www.ecml.at/>

\*Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, “the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, United Kingdom.

### 2. Speak to the future – the campaign for languages

The *Speak to the future* campaign is highlighting the importance of languages, language learning and professional language activities for the UK. Targeting the public, media and government, its initiatives are raising awareness of the issue – and aim to bring about a step-change in attitude and policy in favour of languages.

The campaign is backed by leading academic, professional and business organisations, including the British Academy and the Chartered Institute of Linguists, who are convinced of the importance of language learning for the future of our society, citizens and economy. *Speak to the future* has five clear and ambitious objectives:

1. Every language should be valued as an asset
2. Children in primary school should have a coherent experience of languages
3. Every child should leave secondary school with a basic working knowledge of at least two languages, including English
4. Every graduate should be qualified in a second language
5. We should be producing more professional, highly qualified linguists

<http://www.speaktothefuture.org>