

SRF AGM: Chairperson's report

Jenny Carr, 11.12.13

The Scotland-Russia Forum was established to promote understanding of Russia and her neighbours in Scotland and of Scotland in those countries. Our main emphasis has been on the former.

- *How is the understanding of Russia and her neighbours getting on?*
- *What are we doing and are we making any impact at all?*
- *How can you, our members and readers, help?*

How is the understanding of Russia and her neighbours getting on?

The first thing to say is that there is much to be done. The lack of Russian in schools, both independent and maintained, signals and reinforces to the widest possible audience the perceived lack of importance of Russian affairs to Scottish society. Russia is also largely absent from our news media. The Scottish Government seems to place a low priority on Russia and its neighbours, although they might be more interested in the Year of Russian Culture in 2014 and we look forward to the Culture Minister's forthcoming statement on that.

- *What are we doing and are we making any impact at all?*

We are trying to raise the profile of the area through publicity of relevant events. To compensate for the closure of the Scotland-Russia Institute, with its 3000+ visitors a year, we have increased our online presence, and the print run of this magazine, in order to continue to reach as wide a spectrum of society as possible. Takeup of all these media is gradually rising: email bulletins (1070 addressees), Facebook (630 followers), the magazine (500 copies printed and distributed, online version too), Twitter (240 followers).

We are trying to get Russian back into schools. Second language teaching will start at the beginning of primary school in future (the Scottish Government "1+2" programme), with another language taught from the age of 10. Our immediate aim is to interest schools in Russian in order to persuade some to consider introducing Russian at this stage. We have worked successfully with RCS Haven to establish weekly Russian clubs in 3 Glasgow schools but have been less successful in Edinburgh, with a recent mailing to Edinburgh primary schools resulting in only one positive response. We participate actively in the COALA group, a meeting of all the cultural organisations, local authority and government representatives and others concerned with language teaching in schools - and this helps keep the issue of Russian alive. This is an area which should really be addressed by a Russian government agency, not a small voluntary organisation!

We collaborate with as many related organisations as possible, in Scotland and the UK as a whole. We also have a huge postbag, and deal with a wide variety of enquiries on Russian language teaching, requests for publicity, and many other Russia-related issues.

How can you, our members, help?

You already help a lot by sticking with us and supporting us via your subscription, as well as coming to events like this.

We are always keen to hear from energetic, committed members willing to plan and organise events, or run any other aspect of our work, including anyone with the time to take responsibility for our administration and correspondence.

Even if you don't have time to help but have ideas for the improved efficacy of our work please let us have them. And - not least - please continue to support our work financially through your annual subscription. Although we do not employ anyone we have rent and other costs to find and very much appreciate and rely on the support of our members.

Thanks and Farewells later

Particular thanks to Ian McGowan, one of the SRF's three founders. Ian is stepping down from the Treasurer position he has held since our foundation in 2003. He has done far more than the accounts and will be much missed. Thanks also to: Varvara Bashkirova, hardworking and resourceful editor of the Review; Joe Wake, for his successful programme recruiting English Language Assistants for Russian universities; Helen Williams for creating and maintaining our excellent small library; Sheila Sim, our most efficient committee secretary who will be taking on some of Ian's responsibilities in future; other committee members; members who have generously given us extra donations this year.

Apart from Ian we are losing Andrei Rogatchevsky from the committee as he leaves Scotland for a professorship in Norway - congratulations and thanks, Andrei. In January we will also say goodbye to a good friend of the SRF, the outgoing Russian Consul General Sergei Krutikov, and we wish him well.

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