

# Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

2nd Meeting, 2023 (Session 6), Wednesday 8  
February 2023

PE1982: Review funding arrangements for  
higher education to help ensure more funded  
places are available for Scottish ballet  
dancers at the Royal Conservatoire of  
Scotland

**Petitioner** Gary McKay

**Petition  
summary** Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to  
review the funding provided to the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland  
and help enable more places to be made available to Scottish  
students pursuing ballet at this level.

**Webpage** <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1982>

## Introduction

1. This is a new petition that was lodged on 21 November 2022.
2. A full summary of this petition and its aims can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe B**.
4. While not a formal requirement, petitioners have the option to collect signatures on their petition. On this occasion, the petitioner elected to collect this information. 321 signatures have been received.
5. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered. A response has been received from the Scottish Government and is included at **Annexe C** of this paper.

6. A submission has been provided by the petitioner. This is included at **Annexe D**.

## Action

The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take on this petition.

**Clerk to the Committee**

## Annexe A

### PE1982: Review funding arrangements for higher education to help ensure more funded places are available for Scottish ballet dancers at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

#### Petitioner

Gary McKay

#### Date Lodged

24/10/22

#### Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to review the funding provided to the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and help enable more places to be made available to Scottish students pursuing ballet at this level.

#### Previous action

I have contacted the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, Shirley-Ann Somerville MSP, and the office of the First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon MSP. In both cases, they refused to consider the situation.

#### Background information

There is currently a cap on funded places at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, with a maximum of 5 places available to Scottish domiciled student ballet dancers. The majority of student ballet dancers are forced to study elsewhere, and fund themselves.

Pupils of The Dance School of Scotland have been funded by the Scottish Government and Glasgow City Council for up to 6 years. During this time they have received the best tuition in ballet the country has to offer. However, at the end of this, when they then need to finish their training, there are limited opportunities for them to enter Conservatoire level training in Scotland.

In 2022 only 3 Scots were accepted onto funded places in the whole country.

Many others were accepted onto Conservatoire courses in London. However, without access to funding, they face a potential debt of £80,000 for three years training, substantially more than they would pay in Scotland.

The only conservatoire here offers 75% of its dance places to fee-paying, non-Scottish domiciled students.

In my view, Scottish domiciled student ballet dancers are being discriminated against in Scotland in favour of overseas or English students who will pay higher fees to attend our only conservatoire.

## Annexe B

The logo for SPICe, featuring the letters 'SPICe' in a white, sans-serif font on a dark purple background.The text 'The Information Centre' and 'An t-Ionad Fiosrachaidh' in white, sans-serif font on a dark purple background.

### **Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition [PE1982](#): Review funding arrangements for higher education to help ensure more funded places are available for Scottish ballet dancers at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, lodged by Gary McKay**

#### **Brief overview of issues raised by the petition**

The petitioner is calling for a review of Scottish Government funding provided to the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. They are concerned that there are not enough funded places for Scottish ballet students to pursue educational training programmes.

The petitioner highlights that secondary school students at the Dance School of Scotland have fully funded places for up to 6 years of dance education. When they leave school not all those with expertise in ballet will be able to secure a place at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. Pursuing courses at other UK centres of ballet training can be expensive.

#### **Higher education funding in Scotland**

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are autonomous bodies, though they receive significant funding from the Scottish Government via the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and deliver agreed priorities in exchange for this funding. These priorities are set out annually in the [SFC's outcome agreements](#).

Each year, the Scottish Government via the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) provides funding for around 130,000 eligible Scottish domiciled students. Each university is allocated a number of full-time equivalent places and [can recruit up to 10% over this allocation](#).

The Scottish Government does not direct how many funded places individual universities make available for eligible students, with the exception of 'controlled subjects,' such as medicine and teaching. Universities are autonomous institutions and can decide how to allocate places among courses.

The Scottish Government and Scottish Ministers are unable to intervene in internal institutional matters. Institutions are allocated a finite amount of money; it is then for the institutions themselves to decide how to distribute these places between faculties. It is also for the universities to decide which courses they offer; and how many of the total funded places will be available on each course.

In 2022-23, the SFC provided funding to the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland for 675.4 full-time equivalent places, and in 2020-21 this included 30 places for Scottish domiciled students studying dance including ballet.

### **Royal Conservatoire of Scotland**

Founded in 1847 as a national academy of music, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland now offers specialised teaching across music, drama, dance, production, film and education. They also work in partnership with all five of the National Performing Companies to provide students with opportunities in their areas of expertise.

They offer both undergraduate and postgraduate courses in a variety of performing arts subjects, as well as a series of youth and community classes.

The process for applying for the BA Modern Ballet course includes meeting a series of academic requirements and undertaking an audition.

### **The Dance School of Scotland**

The [Dance School of Scotland](#) is a secondary school that is incorporated into Knightswood Secondary School in the West End of Glasgow. The school is a Centre of Excellence for vocational dance and musical theatre training.

Pupils take part in the curriculum and complete specialist tuition classes offered during and after school hours. There is a residence for pupils who live too far from the school to travel in daily. The school is fully funded by the Scottish Government and as a result there are no tuition fees.

Entry to the dance course, which has a focus on ballet, is from S1-S5, and there is an [audition process](#) for entry.

### **Scottish Government policy**

The Scottish Government have published their policy as it relates to culture in the document [A Culture Strategy for Scotland](#). While, it does not mention the Conservatoire directly, there is a part of the strategy that relates to it.

The strategy recognises the importance of the five National Performing Companies (including Scottish Ballet) and their role of providing formal education programmes to improve access to artistic and creative work. It states that:

“The five National Performing Companies work to improve access to artistic and creative work amongst communities across Scotland... They provide a full range of formal education programmes – at nursery, primary, secondary, further and higher education levels – and outreach programmes which give people across Scotland of all ages and socio-economic groups the opportunity to experience and participate in the companies' work.”

**Laura Haley**  
**Researcher**  
[21/11/2022]

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at [spice@parliament.scot](mailto:spice@parliament.scot)

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

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## Annexe C

### Scottish Government submission of 20 January 2023

#### PE1982/A: Review funding arrangements for higher education to help ensure more funded places are available for Scottish ballet dancers at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

Like all Scottish Universities, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RCS) receives government funding through the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) Main Teaching Grant however unlike most universities, RCS also receives additional funding through the Small Specialised Institutions (SSI) grant, which was £6.5m in Academic year 2022-23. Scottish universities, including the RCS are autonomous institutions and as such the Scottish Government does not intervene in internal institutional matters. Universities are allocated a finite amount of money by the SFC and it is then for the universities themselves to decide: how to distribute these places between faculties; the courses they offer; and how many of the total funded places will be available on each course.

International students and those from other parts of the UK (rUK) are not eligible to access the funded places which have been protected for eligible Scottish students. However universities such as the RCS, are able to offer as many places to rUK and international students as they wish. The Scottish Government welcomes the contribution that international students make to our society, culture and economy. These students add to the diversity of our communities, enrich the learning experience and support local businesses and jobs.



## Annexe D

### Petitioner submission of 27 January 2023

#### PE1982/B: Review funding arrangements for higher education to help ensure more funded places are available for Scottish ballet dancers at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

I would like to respond to the Scottish Government's submission.

I agree that the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland is a small specialised institution and it has autonomous jurisdiction over its own affairs.

However, to specifically address the single argument in this case; that there are simply not enough places available for Scottish young dancers who have been trained and have specialised for many years to a point of readiness at a high standard equalling at the very least that available in the rest of the UK, due to the exemplary funding by Glasgow City Council in support of the arts.

Some dispensation by the Scottish Government must be available to intervene in internal institutional matters in this case to ensure institutions are not discriminating against Scottish Students for the purpose of their fiscal interests. To simply allocate 5 places out of a total of 25 places to the entirety of the Scottish dance population is an outrage. The deal struck with the Scottish Government serves to provide the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland with a means of increasing its business turnover. It certainly does not represent the country whose name it uses for its branding purposes. The 5 places available to Scottish students are then merely a token gesture, a licence perhaps, to allow them to operate. It does not solve the problem of providing places for our young elite who may not have the financial resources and financial means to actually seek this level of education elsewhere.

However, it does provide an open door for students from all over the world as long as they have a chequebook to buy their way into a cultural service that Scotland surely should benefit from?

Merely because they have the means to do so; by allowing students from other parts of the UK and other parts of the world to fill 80% of the

places we are seeing our own students deliberately discriminated against. Talented young Scottish dancers have no option but to leave the country whether they have the means to pay or not, declined by The Royal Conservatoire “of Scotland “.

Has it been taken into account that perhaps some students might wish to stay in Scotland even if it means that they would have to pay the same rates as other parts of the United Kingdom? Limited scholarships if you will? I then consider that the admissions would increase domestically. This is about money pure and simple.

It seems that they are not even offered this possibility. They are immediately discriminated against purely because of the country of their birth and their perceived entitlement to funding.

Can you reasonably state that 5 places available for the entirety of the Scottish student dance population is sufficient? Perhaps even 10 might be sufficient? A small incremental increase in the scheme of things? We are talking very small numbers here.

I have no argument with you that international students and those from other parts of the UK are welcome. We welcome the contribution that these students make to our society, culture and economy but by using this in your response there is an implication that I have some kind of xenophobic or racist motivation for my argument.

This is entirely not true. My family are multi-ethnic but all born within Scotland and raised within the Scottish education system. I do not desire that any of my children get preferential treatment because they are Scottish; I only ask that they have an open and even playing field in which to compete.

According to the current situation there is no such open and evening playing field. Scottish students by definition of their nationality and their birth are discriminated against within their own country pure and simple.

If I was required to pay a contribution towards the education of my children because there weren't enough places or suchlike, then I would possibly be able to find the money to do so. However, that would also be asking me to discriminate against those who could not afford to do this and therefore that argument should not be entitled to exist.

I do find this last statement in your response quite insulting as it implies that I have some sense of racist motivation which I am deeply offended by.

I would request that you pass on my argument to The Royal Scottish Conservatoire and request that they provide me with information on any remedial action they plan to put in place.