



Change restores funding to train Eurocrats

By Stanley Pignal in Brussels

Funding for UK graduates wishing to study at the College of Europe, the favoured training ground for eurocrats, will be reinstated, the government announced on Thursday – just weeks after it said it would cut off support from this year.

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills reversed its decision after other Whitehall departments, notably the Foreign Office, argued the funding cuts flew in the face of wider government efforts to boost the number of Britons working in Brussels.

The College of Europe, whose main campus is in Bruges, is a renowned incubator of talent for those aspiring to EU jobs. Britain has funded about two dozen scholarships a year for UK graduates wishing to study there since the early 1990s, before opting to cut the scheme for budgetary reasons in January.

News of the planned cut came within weeks of the Cabinet Office announcing it was relaunching the European Fast Stream scheme, a variant of its accelerated training programme for bright graduates, in an attempt to bolster Britain's presence in senior EU circles.

Civil servants have been looking for ways to increase the number of Britons working in Brussels in the hope that EU decision-making would more closely reflect British interests.

Although Britain represents 12 per cent of the EU's population, it provides only 6 per cent of Commission staff, making it the least well represented country per head of population with the exception of newly joined Romania.

The department said: "We have recently set out a series of measures to increase UK representation in the EU institutions, including the re-launch of the European Fast Stream. For the current year, we believe that restoring scholarships to the College of Europe is a useful part of this broader 'Success in the EU' strategy."

One official said the full amount of funding previously available would be reinstated, but that because of the falling value of sterling against the euro, some cuts in the number of places was likely.

A similar scheme helping fund UK graduates to the university of Bologna will not be revived.

Graduates of the College of Europe include Nick Clegg, the Liberal Democrats leader, and Jonathan Faull, the eurocrat appointed to oversee the EU department in charge of financial regulation.

British europhiles who had lobbied against the department cuts welcomed the decision but the college itself declined to comment, pending official notification.