

A Strategy for Scotland's Languages

Response by the Scottish Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research

Scottish CILT

The Scottish Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research supports and promotes the learning, teaching and use of all languages relevant to Scotland, apart from English. We are a national body funded by the Scottish Executive and thus well placed to comment on the scope and detail of *A Strategy for Scotland's Languages*.

Context

Scotland is a *multilingual*¹ nation. Languages in use include those of long-standing association with Scotland, such as Gaelic, Scots and English, and those of more recent date, including Urdu, Chinese, Italian, Polish and British Sign Language. Recent data from the Scottish Executive Education Department's School Census showed that 137 languages were spoken by children in Scottish schools, and that 4% of the school population is *plurilingual*.¹

Scotland's history is marked by periods of large-scale emigration, when educated and entrepreneurial Scots took the opportunity to make successful careers for themselves elsewhere in the world, taking Scottish languages, culture, and values to other parts of the globe and building long-lasting and productive relations between Scotland and many other nations. We also have a tradition of welcoming immigrants and refugees of similar stamp to Scotland and benefiting from their commitment to make a better life here for themselves and their families. Since the UK's accession to the European Union, Scotland has been proactive in forging links with other European regions and nations, reaping rewards in terms of the Scottish economy, travel and tourism and cultural and educational exchange. Beyond Europe, Scotland plays an increasingly significant role in trade, aid and development, drawing on old alliances from Canada to Malawi, and building new relationships with countries such as China.

In all of these contexts, competence in languages other than English has an important role to play in promoting Scottish exports, welcoming tourists and new Scots alike to our country, enabling Scots to travel widely and communicate with those they meet, developing a deeper understanding of our own and others' cultures and supporting democratic and responsible citizenship in Scotland, in Europe and in the wider world.

Our response

For these reasons we welcome the decision to produce a strategy for Scotland's languages which values Scotland's linguistic diversity as a strength, promoting cultural wealth, mutual respect and tolerance, mobility, inclusion, economic gains and educational benefits; and which recognises the importance for all Scots of learning additional languages to enhance these benefits. We also recognise the potential of bringing together the range of initiatives already in place to achieve this, although we would argue that a strategy needs not only to consolidate the impact of existing initiatives but also to set goals and plan for future action to achieve these.

¹ Following practice established by the Council of Europe, we use the term *plurilingual* to refer to people who use more than one language in their daily lives, and *multilingual* to refer to societies in which a number of languages are in use.

Our response focuses principally on the elements of the *Strategy* which apply to the formal learning of languages other than English in Scottish schools (and subsequently in further, higher and adult education) given that this is the principal remit of our Centre. However, we welcome the development of a holistic approach which recognises that languages policy in Scotland needs to bring together all aspects of language learning and use, including support for English, Gaelic and Scots, in the context of valuing Scotland's existing multilingualism and concomitant plurilingualism.

We believe that a strategy should seek to consolidate existing good practice, but look forward to Scotland's future needs and aspirations. The Barcelona Agreement, to which the UK is a signatory, is our starting point in this regard. The agreement states that all EU citizens should achieve high levels of competence in their 'mother tongue' and two other languages, a commitment often described as 'one plus two'. For most of the Scottish population, this would mean competence in English as 'mother tongue' plus two other languages, which might include another language in use in Scotland, such as Gaelic, Scots, British Sign Language or Urdu, and one of the languages of our European neighbours, such as French, German or Spanish. For some, this would mean competence in a 'mother tongue' other than English – such as Gaelic, Chinese, Spanish or Polish – plus English and another Scottish or European language. Some plurilingual children grow up with more than one home or community language from an early age; and of course there is no need to limit the number of languages which people may choose or need to learn over a lifetime.

At present, however, Scotland is not well placed to ensure that all citizens can acquire competence in two languages in addition to their 'mother tongue'. As is recognised in the *Strategy* consultation document, almost two thirds of the UK population speaks only one language, according to the most recent *Eurobarometer* figures. Despite investment in languages following the publication of *Citizens of a Multilingual World*, in 2001, the number of Scottish secondary school pupils being entered for Standard Grade (or equivalent) qualifications has fallen from around 99% at that time, when a policy of 'languages for all' was understood to mean all pupils, to around 85% in 2006, when the concept of the learner's 'entitlement' to learning another language has, in some contexts, been interpreted as meaning that language learning, in particular after S2, is optional. Although uptake has not fallen as far or as fast as in England, following similar developments, we do not see this as cause for celebration. We are concerned that in some schools, the view that language learning is not appropriate or feasible for some children and the belief among some learners themselves that languages are too difficult or simply not relevant to their interests or needs, are taking hold. Such ideas fly in the face of the aspirations of this *Strategy*, of those of *Citizens of a Multilingual World*, and of national and European policy.

We welcome the opportunity to review this state of affairs in the context of the new *Curriculum for Excellence*. In its aims to ensure that all Scottish schoolchildren become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors, we agree that languages have a key role to play. Although *Curriculum for Excellence* guidelines for languages are yet to be published, we believe that it will be crucial not simply to describe the structure and content of the languages curriculum, but to set goals which reflect these aspirations. Accordingly we urge those concerned to make use of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching Assessment* (CEFR), developed by the Council of Europe and used by increasing numbers of European countries to support curriculum and assessment design. In particular, we recommend that the following goals be set for lifelong attainment in language learning:

	Additional Language 1 CEFR Level	Additional Language 2 CEFR Level
By the end of P7	A1	
By the end of S3	A2	A1
For those seeking entry to Higher education	B1	A2
For those graduating from Higher education in any subject other than an additional language	B2	B1
For languages graduates	C1	C1 (in the case of joint honours degrees)

We recognise that these goals are ambitious, in that few pupils currently leave school with Higher qualifications in languages (roughly equivalent to the B1 level) and that only some pupils have the opportunity to learn a second language at school at all. In suggesting that B1 in the first language should be regarded as an entry requirement for higher education, we are therefore indicating the need for substantial changes in current provision for languages education in schools and FE colleges. Similarly, in suggesting that B2 should be achieved on graduation from higher education, we are indicating that higher education institutions should be offering all students the opportunity to improve their language skills as part of their degree course, no matter what the degree subject. Achieving similar goals for a second language (albeit at a lower level) would, in this context, represent a very major challenge. Nevertheless, these are the goals which the UK set for itself when it signed the Barcelona Agreement, and we believe that such goals are necessary if the aims of the *Strategy* are to be met.

Some of our European neighbours, such as France, have already set such goals for themselves, both by using the CEFR levels to determine outcomes at various stages, and in insisting that all students, from primary through to degree level should acquire competence in two languages in addition to French. Graduates of French universities, along with those of other European countries are already reaping the benefits of this commitment, not only in their own countries but also in the UK where they are in a better position to secure jobs in companies with an international profile, such as financial services (one of Scotland's key industries). A recent report on graduate recruitment into this field concluded that the failure of UK graduates to acquire not only the language but also the intercultural business skills of their European counterparts means that they are greatly disadvantaged when applying for jobs. Other more specialised fields such as translating and interpreting suffer from a shortage of qualified linguists at every level, from community based interpreting to the translation and interpretation services of the European Union which have recently complained of a dearth of native English speakers able to work from EU languages into English. A lack of such services at EU level affects UK citizens' ability to understand and participate in EU activities, just as a lack of community based translation, interpretation and communication services within the UK limit understanding and participation in social services and democratic institutions of those who do not (yet) understand and speak English well enough for these purposes. We therefore believe that the goals we set out above, though ambitious in relation to the present context for language learning in Scotland, are urgently required.

The bigger picture

The *Strategy* rightly seeks to place language learning in the wider context of language use in Scotland, and we wish also to respond to some of the statements made in this regard. We welcome the recognition that all languages in use in Scotland should be respected, valued and seen as worthy of celebration. We recognise that Gaelic and Scots – and British Sign Language – have a prominent position in Scotland because of their long association with Scotland. Gaelic and Scots have been recognised as regional/ minority languages in Scotland under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and are therefore protected by the Charter's provisions. Gaelic is recognised as an endangered language for which special interventions are required. We suggest that greater consideration to the position of Scots is needed, given the lack of information about its contemporary vitality. Failure to ask questions about the use of Scots in successive Census exercises means that we do not have an accurate picture of use: we do not know whether it is in decline or endangered. The recent School Census, which registered 656 speakers of Gaelic in Scottish schools, but only 280 speakers of Scots, should give some cause for concern. We argue that Scots deserves not only our respect and pride, as set out in the *Strategy*, but also promotion, for similar reasons, if not necessarily in similar ways, to Gaelic.

When we consider the other languages in use in Scotland, we recognise that some of these languages, including Urdu, Punjabi, Chinese, Polish and Arabic, are spoken by relatively large numbers of people: the School Census shows larger numbers of pupils speaking these languages than speak Gaelic, Scots or British Sign Language. Other languages are spoken by very small numbers. While these languages have their origins in other parts of the world and other countries or communities can be understood to have primary responsibility for protecting and developing them, Scotland must accept responsibility for the speakers of these languages who live in Scotland and who are, in many cases, Scottish citizens. Plurilingual children growing up in Scotland have the right to have all of their languages valued, respected and promoted, not simply on the basis of equity, social inclusion, or a commitment to anti-racism, but crucially because plurilingualism is an advantage for them as individuals, and for wider Scottish society. There is now an extensive literature on plurilingualism which has established the intellectual and educational advantages of growing up speaking more than one language – these range from faster cognitive development in certain areas of the brain to a predisposition to acquiring literacy earlier than monolingual learners. In later life, plurilinguals not only have the advantage of being able to communicate in several languages but, it also, in old age, plurilingualism protects against some of the effects of dementia. For this very wide range of reasons, we believe that a commitment to supporting the formal learning of community languages should be included in the *Strategy*, recognising that these languages can be part of the *one plus two* formula described above.

The role of Scottish CILT

Scottish CILT is funded by the Scottish Executive Education Department to provide information about languages for students and teachers, opinion formers and policy makers; to promote the learning and use of all languages of relevance to Scotland; and to conduct research in support of the work of language teachers and other language professionals. We therefore believe that we have – and will continue to have – a key role in promoting the principles of the *Strategy*, in particular the promotion of language learning and the valuing of plurilingualism and linguistic diversity in Scotland. Our current activities include promotion of the guiding principles of *Curriculum for Excellence* – successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors – identifying the ways in which language learning

will contribute to these; and when the guidelines for languages are published later this year, we expect to play an active role in supporting their implementation.

We have also played an important part in raising awareness of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*, drawing attention to the potential benefits for Scotland, and promoting discussion among relevant bodies concerning its adoption, and we expect to take this work further in tandem with the introduction of the new *Curriculum for Excellence* guidelines.

The publication of *A Strategy for Scotland's Languages*, with its emphasis on **all** Scotland's languages, is a welcome development towards joined-up thinking and action concerning language policy and planning in Scotland. A major feature of our work is bringing together the different organisations and groups which work to promote language learning in Scotland. These include the Scottish Association of Language Teachers (SALT), the Cultural Organisations and Local Authorities (COALA) group for language advisers and cultural attachés, Learning and Teaching Scotland, particularly those responsible for the development of the Modern Foreign Languages Virtual Environment (MFLE), the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), in particular those with a responsibility for qualifications in the languages field, the FE Network of language lecturers, the Scottish branch of the Language, Linguistics and Area Studies (LLAS) subject centre for language professionals in higher education, and with languages education lecturers from Teacher Education Institutes across Scotland. We work closely with the other UK CILTs – CILT, the (English) National Centre for Languages, CILT Cymru, in Wales, and NICILT in Northern Ireland – and with the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML), based in Austria. These links have been very valuable in enabling different groups to share expertise and to take advantage of synergies in our work. For these reasons, we believe that there is a need for wider networking of **all** bodies concerned with language learning and the promotion of plurilingualism in Scotland, including those concerned with Gaelic, Scots, British Sign Language, other community languages, and English, and we think that the *Strategy* should promote this as a way of taking forward the principles it espouses.

Moreover, we urge the *Strategy* authors to consider inviting the Council of Europe's Language Policy Division to conduct a Language Education Policy Profile for Scotland. This activity provides member States (or regions and cities) with the opportunity to undertake a self-evaluation of their policy in a spirit of dialogue with Council of Europe experts, with a view to focusing on possible future policy developments within the country. A number of European states, regions and cities – including Norway, Lombardy, Ireland and the city of Sheffield – have already completed profiles, or are in the process of doing so, making use of the support of the Language Policy Division to take policy and planning forward. We believe that Scotland would benefit very considerably from such an exercise and are keen to lend our support to such an undertaking.

Annexes

Links to key documents mentioned in this response are listed below:

- **The Barcelona Agreement** (see paragraph 44):
http://ue.eu.int/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/71025.pdf
- **Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment:** http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/CADRE_EN.asp
- **Pupils in Scotland, 2006:**
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/02/27083941/0>
- **Language Education Policy Profiles:**
http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Profils_EN.asp