

I feel compelled to take issue with your claim, under "Policies", to the effect that Scots is not an endangered language. Given the UK authorities' refusal to collect data on the current extent of use of Scots, there is no sound basis for such a claim.

In its section on Europe, UNESCO's Red Book of Endangered Languages (<http://www.tooyoo.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/Redbook/index.html>) categorises Scots as a "potentially endangered language". The relevant definition is that it has "a large number of children speakers but without an official or prestigious status". However, I regard this description as doubtful in the case of Scots. The section concerned was written in 1993, and I (as a native speaker who uses Scots in everyday domestic and social contexts) would contend that this is more a description of our situation several decades ago. Nowadays, young people with a full and fluent command of Scots are uncommon, and are to be found mainly in small, close-knit communities away from the country's main centres of population.

The Red Book's definition of endangered languages is that they have "some children speakers at least in part of their range but decreasingly so". My perception is that this definition now applies to Scots, and that Scots should now be classified as an endangered language.

It is unfortunate to have to make such statements based mainly on personal perception. A large part of the problem here is that, ever since the demand for it first arose in the mid-1990s, the UK authorities (including their Scottish Executive) have steadfastly refused to conduct full and proper research into the extent to which Scots is still used, in which parts of the country, and among which sections of the population. This could have been done, either in the decennial Census or otherwise, but it has not been done.

By way of general comment about the Strategy, it is not evident to me that it meets the obligations to Scots which arise from the UK's ratification of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. The section under "Policies" is worded entirely in terms such as "recognise", "respect", and "celebrate", which pertain to the realm of the intangible. It will be impossible to determine whether such a policy has actually been implemented (which almost certainly means that it will not be).

Educational provision still has Scots being treated as part of English rather than as an autonomous subject. As a result, there will remain widespread confusion between Scottish English and Scots. (For a crass example of such confusion, see the UK authorities' second periodical report to the COE, on the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.)

Under "Language Provision", it is stated that "the Gaelic language will be protected and promoted", but only that "the Scots language will be treated with respect and pride". From the omission of those words, it is evident that Scots is to be neither protected nor promoted.

Whatever all this may amount to for Scots, it is certainly not the "resolute action" to which the UK committed itself under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

Guidwull til ye,