

A STRATEGY FOR THE LANGUAGES OF SCOTLAND: A RESPONSE FROM THE FACULTIES OF ARTS AND EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

The present submission represents the combined views of representative departments, centres and schools within the Faculties of Arts and Education at the University of Glasgow. We warmly welcome the Executive's draft 'Strategy for Scotland's Languages' and its guiding principles as a first step in the right direction in the acknowledgment of the importance of language in a culturally diverse and inclusive Scotland. The distinction which is drawn between Scotland's autochthonous heritage languages, whose survival depends to a large degree on domestic language policy, and other languages whose duty of care lies elsewhere, is to be highly commended. The document represents a concise statement of current activity and current policies: the second stage in the preparation of Scotland's Language Strategy must entail the development of a courageous new vision for the future which builds on past and current successes.

The Strategy and its vision could be enhanced and strengthened in a number of ways: the comments, suggestions and criticisms offered below are submitted in the hope that they will contribute constructively to the development of a robust strategic vision for Scotland's languages in the foreseeable future.

1. Do you agree with the reasons given for promoting and learning languages on pages 4 and 5 [5 and 6], and that these are the main reasons for supporting current language initiatives in Scotland? If not, why not?

We broadly agree with the rationale as outlined in the Strategy although we note that it is less comprehensive than the detailed rationale published in the Executive's *Citizens of a Multilingual World*, and specifically lacks engagement with crucial issues surrounding the interconnections between language, identity and power. There remains an impression that languages other than English might be neglected or treated in a tokenistic manner: see question 3 for further comments on the key principles. The word 'celebrate' seems bland and vague in practical terms: we would suggest 'Engaging with cultural diversity' as being more meaningful in the present context.

The study of languages, particularly foreign languages, is presented and emphasised as a communicative tool which enables mobility within the European job market and as a means of accessing 'economic opportunity' (pp. 3, 5, 6). The case for second and third language acquisition, whether it be local heritage or foreign, is of course greater than that, and includes access to, understanding of and respect for other cultures and communities as well as a range of cognitive benefits, all of which are acknowledged in *Citizens of a Multilingual World*. By emphasising the economic benefits for the resident population, including the in-migrant communities within it, the wider vision of a greater comprehension of language, culture and communities within Scotland and elsewhere is overlooked. However, this type of intercultural understanding is a vital contributory ingredient to the development of an international 'outward looking [Scottish] society' (p. 4). It is important to add also that an international view of the world and an appreciation of Scotland's place within it must be based on, and balanced with, a confident sense of identity derived from an informed view and knowledge of Scotland's own cultural and linguistic heritage, which has long been treated with disrespect within educational settings; this has engendered a loss of

confidence and inculcated a good deal of ignorance about Scotland's linguistic heritage among both teachers, students and the general populace. More balance is needed in the Strategy between economic and educational factors, and also between national and international perspectives as motivators in the promotion of linguistic diversity. The adoption of the European Commission's aspiration that every person be offered the opportunity to learn at least two languages in addition to his or her mother tongue would set the document in a wider European framework, which would counterbalance the emphasis on internal drivers while promoting a real sense of confidence and self-respect.

While acknowledging the range of educational institutions and contexts mentioned under the heading 'Enriching education' (p. 6), including further and higher education, adult and community education and workplace learning, the document on the whole tends to focus more markedly on the place of schools and the needs of young people. While recognising the vital importance of investing in the language skills and awareness of future generations, we would also suggest that adult students tend to show a marked interest in, and engagement with, learning other languages that younger people often lack, and we would hope that the balance of the needs of older and younger learners would be recognised within a clearly recognised commitment to lifelong learning in Scotland. Similarly, the important role which universities play as providers of language tuition and as trainers of tomorrow's language teachers is not recognised in the current document: universities are a vital link in the language education continuum in their provision of post-Higher, *ab initio* and adult learner courses. A strategy which focuses on economic factors in the promotion of languages must take cognisance of the role that universities play in the production of linguistically trained graduates, either specialist or otherwise, and their contribution to the economic welfare of Scotland. The uptake of languages at third level could be enhanced by developing strategic alliances through SFC (possibly through Wider Participation) between HEIs and secondary schools, as is currently being piloted in England with funding from HEFCE. See question 4 for further comments on the role of universities in the context of the Language Strategy.

2. Do you agree that the language initiatives described on pages 6 – 12 [7–13] and elsewhere are the key areas for language promotion in Scotland? If not, why not?

We would urge the Scottish Executive to recognise Scottish English as the main variety of English used in Scotland in the section describing 'English' (p. 7).

We commend the various language initiatives described and the broad sense of balance among them, and the way in which they are designed to enhance active language skills and promote linguistic diversity. However, once again a stronger case needs to be made for the benefits and advantages of local and foreign language learning; and adult education could be more visible beyond basic literacy initiatives. Recognition must be given to the fact that tuition up to S4 and national certification level at that point is not of itself adequate to fulfil the aspirations of mobility and communication. Though allusion is made in the document to the 3–18 curriculum review, *A Curriculum for Excellence*, no mention is made of the articulation between S4 and onward to Higher and Advanced Higher, nor to the advantages offered by continuing languages to university level either as language-specific degrees or as a

component within degrees specialising in other disciplines. The rationale for language learning in *Citizens of a Multilingual World* highlighted the motivation for study to Higher which the graduate employment figures for languages afforded. This point can help underpin the initiatives described here.

The Strategy refers to ‘entitlement’ and ‘opportunity’ to languages (e.g. p. 18) but not to ‘mandatory requirements’. It is to be noted that the replacement of compulsory requirements by entitlements to language study has generally resulted in fewer school children studying languages beyond S4. A limited mandatory requirement would undoubtedly increase the number of language learners. In this context, we note that the recently published Dearing Report (*Languages Review*, p. 24, §§4.13–15) stops short of making language study prescriptive, although it does suggest that a modified mandatory curriculum should be imposed if the recovery of languages cannot be achieved by the measures proposed in the Report. We would urge the Executive to consider adopting such an approach to provide a fallback strengthening position for this important principle.

While recognising and applauding the Executive’s responsive engagement with new community minority languages and BSL, we would advise the Executive as a matter of urgency to engage at a similar level of understanding and commitment with the very serious problems facing Scotland’s indigenous minority languages before it is too late: this involves increased investment at community level and wider provision throughout the education system. We would beseech the Executive to establish a specific grants scheme for Gaelic education at third level, in line with similar schemes which have been designed with great effect to advance Gaelic education in nurseries and schools, in order to add significantly to the maintenance and revitalisation of Gaelic in Scotland. Additional practical measures must be taken to actively strengthen the position of Gaelic where it still exists as a community and domestic language in the Highlands and Islands, and strategies must be sought and implemented which will support the significant urban Gaelic communities elsewhere in Scotland. We note a certain imbalance between what is desired for Gaelic and Scots: Gaelic is to be ‘protected’ and ‘promoted’ whereas Scots is to be ‘treated with respect’ and ‘pride’: although their respective needs are different in some but not all respects, a more robust commitment to Scots is required. The existing detached position of Scots within the 5–14 guidelines is further weakened in the emergent *A Curriculum for Excellence*, as it is not recognised as a minority language, despite its acknowledgment as such by the European Community; we note in passing here a general lack of cohesion between the Languages Strategy and *A Curriculum for Excellence*, which ought to be addressed.

We acknowledge that Gaelic is now available at all levels of education (p. 9), although the provision is nationally very patchy and under-developed at the secondary level. We would recommend that the Executive establish mandatory innovative ‘language studies’ modules or strands to be delivered nationally throughout the Scottish school system. Modules of this nature, which would raise awareness about language in society, should have at their core Scottish English and the heritage languages of Gaelic and Scots, supplemented by Scotland’s other historical and community languages: these modules would address issues such as language acquisition, the nature of language generally, the relationship between language and social context / factors, linguistic change and variation, historical change, digital

literacy, the intersections of graphics and words; we believe this would be a very effective and meaningful way of celebrating, engaging with and promoting Scotland's linguistic heritage.

The issue of specific assessment of language in the English curriculum should also be revisited, so long as what is to be assessed is not narrow knowledge, definitions or rules but a richer sense of language in context. The Scottish curriculum and assessment arrangements for English as presently constituted do not provide a clear and incremental focus on knowledge about English or Scottish language, recognised in certification, until Advanced Higher. In other words, teachers and pupils are offered a superstructure of qualification at the highest level, with no clearly defined or assessed infrastructure of knowledge in the preceding years of education upon which to site it securely. Understandably, the uptake is minimal.

The emphasis of the draft Strategy is understandably on currently spoken, mostly European, languages. However, we ignore to our great detriment the various historical languages which have contributed to Scotland's heritage, including their literary and onomastic traditions. Although the classical languages are fleetingly referred to in the Strategy (p. 13), their significance is understated. In a document which seeks to be 'outward looking' and European in perspective, it is important to emphasise the general cultural importance of Latin and Greek for modern Europeans, and the stimulating challenge which their study offers learners; the study of these languages often appeals to those who are less at ease with the oral dimension of modern languages. A grounding in these languages can be a helpful basis for learning and using modern languages, especially the Romance languages but also English itself. It is also important to stress that Latin has been one of Scotland's principal languages for well over a millennium, and indeed was the language used for the 'Declaration of Arbroath' in 1320, generally regarded as the charter of Scottish nationhood. The study of Latin holds the key to much of Scotland and Europe's literary, cultural and historical heritage, and therefore deserves more prominence in the Strategy.

We would urge the Executive to increase awareness of Scotland's historical languages generally by integrating across the school curriculum, especially in subjects such as history and literature, relevant Scottish texts in translation from languages such as Gaelic, Irish, Welsh, Latin, Old English, Norse and French. We note that the introduction of such materials together with the language modules already referred to would contribute significantly to the achievement of the seven principles for curriculum design in the new *A Curriculum for Excellence*, namely 'challenge & enjoyment', 'breadth', 'progression', 'depth', 'personalisation & choice', 'coherence', and especially 'relevance'.

The sections on 'Language Learning' (pp. 12–13) and 'Language Learning in the European Union' (p. 18) should refer and be more strongly related to the Council of Europe's *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF)*, which describes the linguistic skills needed by language learners to become competent speakers of another language; we refer here also to the Languages Ladder (LL) of the English Language Plan, and to the useful mapping of existing qualification levels (between NQF, NC, LL and CEF) at:

www.dfes.gov.uk/languages/languagesladder.cfm. The 'Related initiatives' (pp. 17–

19) might usefully refer to UNESCO's 1996 declaration of linguistic rights, which can be found at: <http://www.unesco.org/cpp/uk/declarations/linguistic.pdf>.

3. Do you agree that the key principles listed on pages 14 and 15 [15 and 16] should shape language activity in Scotland? If not, why not?

We commend the set of principles outlined, and suggest that an overarching focus on intercultural understanding and respect be introduced, which would provide a unifying and cohesive effect to the principles themselves and the document as a whole. In the seven principles enunciated we welcome the emphasis which is given to internal Scottish-based and protective principles, ensuring that native languages are served well and that appropriate support is given to non-English speakers (principles [1]–[5], [7] as listed on pp. 15–16). The principle of linguistic diversity ([5]) recognises the importance of ensuring first language use in the context of public bodies but nowhere else. Individuals and communities should be supported in maintaining their first language in other contexts also as an important symbol of identity, self-confidence and self-respect: this is of particular import for indigenous minority languages but is also an issue for other community languages in Scotland as is acknowledged on p. 11 of the Strategy. Note the Language Strategy is out of kilter here once again with the guidance on languages associated with *A Curriculum for Excellence*, which 'encourages schools to support children and young people in maintaining their own first language'. In implementing principle [1] ('As many people in Scotland as possible will be equipped with fluent English language skills'), care must be taken not to undermine the proficiency or domains of usage of minority languages. The Executive should consider adding a new principle or, at the very least, modifying principle [5], so as to support the maintenance of citizens' first languages in a variety of social contexts. The gloss on the only outwardly-looking principle ([6] 'Language learning and acquisition will be promoted', p. 16) should be strengthened by indicating that the entitlement to language from P6 to S4 lays a foundation for further progress in language through Higher and beyond into Higher Education.

We have already commented on the disparity between what is desired for Scots in comparison to Gaelic. We endorse the encouragement of Scots language, culture and literature in the school curriculum, and welcome it. We commend the Executive for its general and specific commitment to the Gaelic language, and would reiterate the point that we would like to see the profile of Gaelic language, culture and literature raised more widely within the education system.

The promotion of language learning and acquisition for employment, study and travel is heartily endorsed. Again, we would note the potential of a lifelong learning approach to languages, and suggest that taster courses in a whole range of European, Slavic and Eastern languages not to mention Scotland's indigenous languages would be a valuable addition to the educational curriculum at different stages.

4. Are there any other comments you would like to offer on this strategy in relation to the promotion of languages in Scotland?

The Language Strategy needs to envisage a future beyond current activities and policies. A distinction could usefully be made between short- and longer-term objectives. The Strategy would benefit from a list of prioritised outcomes, against

which the success of the Strategy could be usefully measured. But most of all, a meaningful strategy must be supported by dedicated financial investment. We note that each of the above elements is present in England's Language Strategy, *Languages for All: Languages for Life. A Strategy for England* (2002).

The significant role which universities play in teaching and promoting languages is largely overlooked in the Strategy. Universities represent an important node in the education continuum, and an initial point of contact for local and foreign languages for many students. We have already referred to the contribution of language departments within universities to the economic and educational welfare of Scotland by producing highly qualified graduates with specialist and general linguistic skills. It is widely accepted that language instruction, learning and assessment is more time consuming and requires more resources than other Arts and Humanities subjects. This well-known fact is recognised by HEFCE, which funds languages at a proportionately higher rate. This anomaly places Scottish language students at a clear disadvantage compared with their counterparts south of the border. It is high time that the Scottish Executive and SFC acknowledged this fact by implementing a higher banding for languages within tertiary education, thus giving Scotland's languages, teachers and students the resources required to ensure that Scotland remains competitive with its neighbours and provides the best possible service in languages provision at third level.

Universities have a central role to play in the research of Scotland's local indigenous and other community languages, research which in turn contributes to public knowledge, to education and language policies and also to the creation of education materials. It is surprising to note that the proposed Institute for the Languages of Scotland (ILS) is nowhere alluded to in the Languages Strategy despite the fact that the Scottish Executive's *Achievement Audit: The National Cultural Strategy 2000–2004*, published in July 2005, states that 'A centre for the languages of Scotland will be considered within the context of the Executive's 2003 "Partnership for a Better Scotland" commitment to introduce a national language strategy.' (p. 19) We recommend in the strongest terms possible that the Executive give serious and urgent consideration to the establishment of ILS and that it be given a prominent role within the finalised Language Strategy. We draw attention here to a feasibility study, funded by the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland and published in May 2003, which argues persuasively and conclusively for the establishment of ILS, and which can be found at: www.arts.ed.ac.uk/celtscot/institutelanguagesscotland.

In its current form the Strategy document is not clear as to who it sees as a language learner and therefore for whom the Strategy is designed. In the main this is presumed to be a school pupil, in the range P6–S4, although reference is made to the 3–18 age range of the *A Curriculum for Excellence* without picking up the issues of falling numbers of presentations in languages at Higher. However, at times the supposition is that the learner is an adult non-English-speaking learner. At no point does it appear to address the adult learner of a foreign language either as a school-leaver, or as a later mature student of degree-level study or engaging in study of the language for social purposes. It would be helpful if the document could define its target students, and clarify which groups are covered by which measures.

At present, all adult learning courses have to be accredited academically in order to earn the subsidy that may make them affordable to students. This means that the academic level of such courses has to become perhaps more rigorous than is necessary or enjoyable. We would suggest that consideration be given to subsidising non-accredited courses, and to exploring the full range of teaching and learning strategies in language instruction that can engage non-academic learners who would nevertheless benefit from provision of languages either for work or leisure.

The Strategy seems ambitious in the numbers of teachers and translators envisaged. Language plans that are merely aspirational and have no realistic possibility of fulfilment can lead to institutional tokenism and / or public cynicism. Thus the training needs required to cope with a genuinely enhanced provision have to be seriously costed and considered.

The Strategy recognises the importance of language in understanding our literary and historical heritage, and contemporary arts. The important areas of broadcasting and publishing are not mentioned, both of which have central roles to play in promoting a wide range of language activity, celebrating cultural diversity, promoting respect and confidence, encouraging mobility and communication, facilitating access and inclusion, increasing economic opportunity and most of all in enriching education.

Cooperation Agreements with France and China are referred to on p. 19. There would be much benefit educationally and economically in developing similar links with other countries with which Scotland has cultural and / or historical connections, including not least Ireland, Scandinavian countries and Canada.

5. If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, how do you think you may be able to contribute to the success of the strategy?

As well as providing education in a research environment and undertaking strategic and applied research, the University of Glasgow aims 'to make a major contribution to local, regional, national and international communities through widening access and through working in partnership to support economic regeneration', and 'to sustain and add value to Scottish culture, to the natural environment and to the national economy'. Its Mission Statement therefore accords very well with the Strategy's main aims and principles, and as such the University of Glasgow can be seen to be genuinely committed to promoting and supporting Scotland's rich linguistic diversity.

Our Faculty of Education in a major civic university is in a position to offer staff development courses in English, Scots and Modern European languages, methodologies for primary and secondary classrooms, ELT experience, Adult Education courses in literacy and languages, and contacts with networks of tutors. We have access, through the Erasmus and Grundtvig schemes and professional contacts with European universities, to a range of young students, beginning teachers and adult practitioners whose energies might contribute to fulfilling the Strategy's aims. The University of Glasgow's educational and language expertise might also be of assistance in helping institutions and authorities in the framing of their policy documentation and the implementation of their language planning.

Within the Faculty of Arts the University of Glasgow's language departments will continue to teach, research and promote both local and foreign European languages. At undergraduate level they will continue to produce graduates with a range of linguistic skills covering a very wide spectrum of languages. At graduate level two externally funded strategic initiatives will be of direct benefit to specific groups of students who in later life will be important members of the Scottish community. The School of Modern Languages and Cultures is the Scottish hub of a UK-wide initiative providing research training skills specifically to graduate students of modern languages. The University is also the lead institution for a Centre for Russian, Central and East European Studies which promotes language study alongside area studies at post-graduate level. The Scottish Funding Council is one of the funders and other Scottish universities involved are the Universities of Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Paisley, St. Andrews and Strathclyde. Glasgow's role is specifically to provide teaching in Czech, Polish, Russian, Estonian, Latvian, and Slovak, for graduate students of Glasgow and other partner universities whose main focus of study is another field (e.g. Economics, Politics, History, etc). Both these initiatives will produce high quality students, experts in the field able to proceed immediately to employment in policy-making and advice, business and the non-governmental sector, as well as preparing students for further research and academic careers. Non-language students as well as language-specific students take advantage of the links that exist through the Erasmus and other exchange schemes to experience living and studying in a foreign country. In addition language students take advantage of the British Council Language Assistantship scheme to gain valuable work experience in a foreign country. In all these ways the University of Glasgow will be making a major contribution to the success of the strategy.