

CENTRAL COLLEGE OF COMMERCE/GLASGOW CALEDONIAN UNIVERSITY
Response from Modern Languages Staff to consultation on Scotland's
Languages

Q1 Do you agree with the reasons given for promoting and learning languages on pages 4 and 5, and that these are the main reasons for supporting current language initiatives in Scotland? If not, why not?

Yes, the reasons for supporting languages are sound and laudable and the Scottish Executive clearly wishes to support languages and cultural diversity.

We feel however, that a strategy should do more than “achieve a consensus around the outcomes”

We know that there is a problem with Scots learning languages and think that a strategy should attempt to address the issue. (See Royal Society of Edinburgh –European Policy Forum 24 March 2006)

The acquisition of additional languages has more than an important part to play- it is a vital skill which Scots are lacking.

ENCOURAGING MOBILITY AND COMMUNICATION

This is a fine objective but SQA rules that the Core Skill of Communication can only be achieved in English. Surely it is time to allow this to be achieved in other languages.

Mobility is facilitated by competence in another 1 or 2 languages. If Scots lack these skills they will be disadvantaged.

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

The document states that a lack of English should not be a barrier to employment. It is also the case that a lack of additional languages is a barrier to business and tourism both in and outwith Scotland. Scots are being denied equality of opportunity because of this and are relying on others to speak English.

The loss of business is, of course, difficult to quantify (see Barbara Beedham-Languages and Business, RSE 24 March 2006) but businesses with a good languages portfolio are shown to do better than those with only English skills. We, as a small country, cannot afford to miss business opportunities because our staff cannot handle eg phone calls, front –desk enquiries etc

Q2 Do you agree that the language initiatives described on pages 6-12 and elsewhere are the key areas for language promotion in Scotland?

No. The language initiatives are praiseworthy in themselves and it is true that the Scottish Executive has supported them, but they do not show how they will “promote” languages. If 62% of UK people admit to being monolingual, we assume the same figure is true for Scotland and this should be addressed as a matter of urgency. Commitment to providing opportunity for language learning seems to be insufficient.

Admittedly, Citizens of a Multilingual World addressed the lack of modern foreign language teaching in the Primary School. However, while it has had beneficial effects for the uptake in secondary schools, this has not impacted on diversification into languages

other than French.

Of Further Education and Higher Education, which are key areas for progression and for initiatives, there is but a single mention. In colleges and universities there is accreditation of prior learning and opportunities for progression for each student.

The commitment to Lifelong Learning should be raised in the Further and Higher Education sectors.

The recognised skills gap needs to be treated seriously by employers and areas for improvement have to be identified.

Q3 Do you agree that the key principles listed on pages 14 and 15 should shape language activity in Scotland? If not, why not?

No, the principles are statements describing an ideal situation.

Q4 Are there any other comments you would like to offer on this strategy in relation to the promotion of languages in Scotland?

Although the document admits that there is a problem with Scots' acquisition of 2nd and 3rd Languages, a strategy is not laid out to address this.

A strategy requires:

- 1 Priorities
- 2 Linkage between sectors
- 3 Knowledge of who takes responsibility
- 4 Clear curricular goals.

A Curriculum for Excellence

We all agree that we would like Scots to be “successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors to society” This cannot be the case if those people are unable to converse in any language other than English.

A Policy of Diversification. We must insist that pupils do not require to be linguistically gifted to undertake the study of one or many languages and/or cultures. The system has to be flexible enough to allow them to develop and to change languages, taking up a language of their choice.

A Policy of Progression. Further and Higher Education is ideally placed to allow this kind of flexibility and indeed when students have the opportunity to learn a new language they grasp it.

The Higher National Design Rules should be more flexible to allow for this diversification and progression through the languages career of students. They should be allowed to take up a beginner's language at SCQF level 5 on **any** Higher National Course.

Moreover, in subject areas such as Tourism, International Hospitality, International Business or where there is an exchange to another country, languages must be

- a) An entry requirement and
- b) A core element of the course itself.

This is certainly the case in Europe and we are relying on our European counterparts to speak English wherever we lack skills. This is not equality of opportunity, this is denial of opportunity. Many key jobs insist on language ability and students from other countries where language learning is highly valued will be better placed to fill vacancies. Only by showing a commitment to the Barcelona Agreement which the UK has signed and showing our students that languages are a core element of successful education will they be able to compete in a global economy.

Q5 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?

At Central College of Commerce and Glasgow Caledonian University, the combined language team is in the fortunate position of having expertise in Further and Higher Education and we teach students with a range of abilities from Access to Honours Degree level in 4 languages-French, German, Italian and Spanish.

We have found success with school leavers who take a National Qualification in Tourism and who study 3 languages in the year, mainly ab initio.

In many Higher National Courses, where languages form a major part, they are successfully integrated into the content of those courses eg Tourism, International Trade and Business.

In Higher Education, wherever there are options for students to study a language they do so in large numbers and in fact, the introduction of Italian as a new option for HE students last year, rather than diminishing any other language, has actually increased the total number of students overall.

Many of these students are exchange students who seize an opportunity to add to their languages portfolio and increase their employability.

We endeavour to recognise the prior learning of all students so that they have progression but likewise we offer them opportunities for taking up new languages.

Beside this, we have an increasing demand from adults for evening classes. Many of these represent SME's or individuals who, having only had the opportunity to learn French at school, motivated by economic or personal reasons, have now decided to take up a second or third language.