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15 February 2007

Dear Mr Matthews,

Consultation paper: A Strategy for Scotland's languages

Thank you for informing me about the Strategy paper. I take this opportunity to make a few general comments of a personal nature.

I welcome the paper and think that it strikes overall a good balance. I agree with the broad thrust and approach. I appreciate the pragmatic and open-natured tone of the paper. It provides a starting point for an ongoing process of dialogue and reflection. The issues are ones which are always present and constantly require review and reassessment through time. The main thing is to provide oneself with the vehicles and apparatus to allow that to take place on a smooth and evolving basis. I think the paper provides a foundation for that and I hope that it will be followed up with the deeper reviews which are proposed. The tone is very general, and one is eager for more specifics, but one must start somewhere.

In particular, I agree with the emphasis on English; this is fundamental and the aspects relating to other languages can be seen as building on and supplementing this foundation. The role of English in the world is expanding fast, as I have personally experienced. However, the other languages form an essential part of the cultural identity and it is interesting to see the developments with Gaelic. This is an enrichment. Knowledge of language opens doors to personal and cultural development - but also to concrete business and career opportunities, as I have found out to my immense benefit. In this connection I would argue that the paper does not place sufficient emphasis on the hard business side to languages and language knowledge: there are real financial benefits to business through understanding the language(s) of clients and customers better and their needs. Language knowledge is underestimated as a factor for business and career success through opening doors to opportunity, otherwise closed, and I think that the paper reflects also this tendency through tending to placing the emphasis on culture and neglecting the business side.

I note that there is legislation and a plan for the Gaelic language and that thereby a vehicle has been created to continue reflection on the role and needs of users of that language. On the other hand, I am curious that the other native Scottish language, the Scots Leid, or Scots Language, has not received this treatment and I am wondering why, as there seems no obvious logical reason. I understand from the Paper that the language is not threatened, but I must admit that I was under the impression that there was, precisely, a certain anxiety about its future. I had been reading that it was dying at a rate of about 10 per cent of vocabulary per generation, ie every fifteen, or so, years. Is this wrong? (Mr David Crystal has published a book on language death, which seems to be relevant to the matter.) Obviously, Scots is close to English and it would seem that there is considerable confusion as to just what it covers, since there is no established official grammar and vocabulary for it. Yet, these would rather seem to be reasons why there is a need to reflect on the language and the needs of its users. Who are they? Where are they? How many are they? What are their real needs? I do not know if anyone really knows for sure. It seems to me fairly basic that if Scots is to be included in the school curriculum, as proposed, it might be a good idea to have some idea of what is

involved, even if only to assist in the allocation of scarce financial resources and improve efficiency in the allocation of budgetary expenditure.

What puzzles me is that the Strategy Paper does not set out a method by which the situation of the Scots language can be discussed and assessed, whether in terms of policy formation or allocation of resources or support. I would have thought that some form of plan, or strategy, or other ongoing vehicle could be useful and I would have expected to find this mentioned in the Paper. Presumably there is a question of degree of commitment behind the matter and if so, then perhaps the underlying question relates to the degree of commitment to the Scots language and its users. As I am living abroad and mainly speaking other languages, I do not feel I can offer an opinion as to what should or should not be done within Scotland, but I do notice this question of planning for the language as being one of the key issues which has perhaps not been fully addressed, since, by my way of thinking, I do not see the existence of a plan as automatically meaning that one has to make significant change, but merely give oneself the tools for an ongoing quiet reflection as circumstances evolve and change. I worry that without this tool, it may not be possible to address latent issues concerning the needs of the users of that language in an efficient manner, as can now be done for Gaelic.

With these few personal observations, I would just like to finish by saying that I enjoyed reading the paper from the points of view of content and style. (I did wonder about the term 'in-migrants' (p. 7) as a neologism.) I look forward to learning how matters develop.

With my best wishes for the success of the Paper,

Yours sincerely,

C D Robertson



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Your ref: «Yourref»
Our ref: «Ourref»

1 March 2007

Dear Mr Robertson

Thank you for your response to our consultation paper A Strategy for Scotland's Languages Consultation which we issued on 5th February 2007. We received your response on 15th February 2007 and have allocated it the reference number 12. Please quote this reference number on any future correspondence.

Accessing responses to the consultation

We intend making all non-confidential responses to the consultation available to the public in the following ways:

In hard copy at the Scottish Executive Library, **K Spur, Saughton House, Broomhouse Drive, Edinburgh, EH11 3XD** by 28 May 2007. Copies of responses can be viewed by visiting the library or can also be provided by post. Charges for photocopies are made on a cost-recovery basis. To request copies by post and enquire about charges or make an appointment to view responses at the library, contact the Library on 0131 244 4565 or SELlibrary@scotland.gsi.gov.uk.

On the Scottish Executive consultation web pages (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/consultations>) by 28 May 2007.

We require your permission to make your response available to the public, and therefore would be grateful if you could return the Respondent Information Form [attached] in the SAE provided as soon as possible, to enable us to handle your response appropriately. If you ask for your response not to be published we will regard it as confidential. confidential and we will treat it accordingly. You should be aware, however, that the Scottish Executive are subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 and would therefore have to consider any request made to it under the Act for information relating to responses made to this consultation exercise.

Accessing Scottish Executive consultations

All Scottish Executive consultations can be viewed on line at the Scottish Executive consultation web pages (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/consultations>). You can telephone Freephone 0800 77 1234 to find out where your nearest public internet access point is.



The Scottish Executive now has an email alert system for its consultations (SEconsult) (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/consultations/seconsult.aspx>). This system allows stakeholder individuals and organisations to register and receive a weekly email containing details of all new Scottish Executive consultations (including web links). SEconsult complements, but in no way replaces our distribution lists, and is designed to allow stakeholders to keep up to date with all our consultation activity, and therefore be alerted at the earliest opportunity to those of most interest. We would encourage you to register.

Thank you again for your contribution to this consultation.

Yours sincerely



PP Douglas Ansdell
Cultural Policy

