

## A Strategy for Scotland's Languages

Response to draft consultation paper

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This response concentrates on the Scots Language element in the paper.

As far as Scots is concerned there are several sections of the paper to be welcomed, namely the recognition of Scots as a language, Scotland's particular responsibility as a custodian of Gaelic and Scots with its duty therefore to protect and celebrate the languages, the recognition that interest in and study of Scots should not be confined to Scots-speaking families and communities, acknowledgement of the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages, the declaration that the Scots language will (and not merely "should") be treated with respect and pride, the encouragement of the use of Scots in the school curriculum, awareness of its valuable role in promoting self-confidence and pride in those who speak it, and the positive encouragement of public bodies to promote and develop the language.

I do, however, have several concerns. These are linked to the separate sections of the consultation paper as follows:

### Executive Summary

I suggest that the Scots language needs to be promoted as well as treated with respect and pride. I accept that Scots is not such a parlous state as Gaelic as far as the number of speakers is concerned it is already suffering from impoverishment of vocabulary and idiom. This trend will only be reversed by active promotion of the language; promotion is as important for Scots as for Gaelic. In addition Part Two of the European Charter specifies promotion of the language to be a government responsibility.

### Introduction

Third paragraph. This is a particularly important statement and it would be helpful if the contribution of Scots and Gaelic to our sense of national identity were included in this introductory paragraph.

Sixth paragraph – learning of foreign languages. It is important to recognise the contribution of bilingual study of the language pupils bring to School (English and Scots/Gaelic) as a facilitator of additional language learning.

### Rationale

#### Facilitating access and inclusion

Note should be taken of the value of respecting and using the languages pupils bring to school (Scots or Gaelic, in addition to English) in this area.

#### Enriching education

We should emphasise that language education begins with education in Scotland's indigenous languages – i.e. English, Scots and Gaelic. One reason, I suggest, why Scotland's record in learning foreign languages is so poor is that pupils suffer from a lack of stimulating study of their own languages.

## English

The development of literacy skills, particularly among pupils from areas of social deprivation, would benefit from more attention to Scots - the first language of many of these pupils.

## Scots

We should add to the first sentence the clause "and a key element in our national identity."

Reference needs to be made to the different risk that Scots faces, compared to Gaelic, of erosion of its vocabulary etc. (See first paragraph under Executive Summary, above.)

Paragraph three. The implications of this (that specific education in Scots is provided across the country) should be spelled out.

Paragraph four. I am worried by this reliance on the 5-14 Guidelines as the basis for promoting Scots in schools. This far too weak. A recent survey by the Cross-Party Group on Scots on the extent to which Scots is taught in schools (with a response from 50% of Local Education Authorities) revealed while there were some encouraging initiatives in three authorities very little was being done in the vast majority of schools. A much stronger policy is required if Scots is to be genuinely promoted and respected (and the requirements of the Charter of Minority Languages are met). Scotland does not have a national curriculum but SEED does require that certain subjects are taught and Scots really should be one of these. This, of course, would require serious attention to Scots in teacher training.

Page 15 – The Scots Language will be treated with respect and pride.

In the second sentence "encouraged" should be replaced by "required". (This sentence, by the way, is an unfortunate example of poor English!)

In the third sentence "continue to support policies which encourage" should be replaced by "develop policies to ensure". And in the last sentence "encouraged" should be replaced by "required". If these changes are not made I doubt very much if there will be much change in the present unsatisfactory situation.

One very serious omission is any reference to an Institute for the Languages of Scotland. The Executive has already made a commitment to establishing such a body and fulfilling this commitment seems to me an essential part of a credible strategy on the languages of the country.

In conclusion I welcome the draft paper as a starter for discussion but suggest that as far as Scots is concerned an essential next step is the formation of a Ministerial Advisory Committee along the lines of the Meek Committee for Gaelic to bring forward specific policies on Scots if the language is to be given its rightful place in Scottish society and treated with "respect and pride".