

20/03/2007

A Strategy for Scotland's Languages
Scottish Executive Education Department
Cultural Policy Division
Area 1-A North
Victoria Quay
Edinburgh
EH6 6QQ

Dear Sirs,

Response to the Draft version for Consultation

On behalf of Language Network Scotland we welcome the fact that the Scottish Executive is preparing to publish a Strategy for Scotland's Languages and also welcome the opportunity to comment on this draft version. We would like the Scottish Executive to take the following points into consideration and have broadly organised them to fit in with the questions that were posed. However, there are some other issues that merit a rather broader response.

- A) We note that the consultation is on a Strategy for Scotland's Languages, rather than on a Language Strategy for Scotland and assume this to be the result of a careful choice of wording on behalf of the Executive. The distinction between the two is important and underlies many of the concerns that we will note subsequently. In our view, the chosen focus is rather inward looking, than outward looking and this is reflected in the balance of the discussion of the languages that Scottish residents use within Scotland, as opposed to the languages that Scotland needs to effectively participate in the global economy and for its future.
- B) The Executive Summary on Page 3 contains insufficient reference to the economic importance of language and cultural skills? The phrase 'a national resource' is not sufficient here and we would suggest that it should make stronger reference to this economic aspect... 'to ensure ... is recognised as a vital economic and cultural resource for the nation'...? And 'to encourage ... other than their own for their personal and professional development as well as that of the country'.
- C) The Draft Strategy as written has a tendency to map what is there rather than provide much of a plan of how to reach a more desirable state. Similarly it does not articulate a clear set of over arching language related goals that

Scotland needs to achieve and by which a successful Strategy can be evaluated. In our view this is an aspect that does need to be strengthened.

1. 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?

We agree these are the main reasons but take the view that the economic impact is not sufficiently clearly and fully articulated. The recent ELAN research project conducted by Professor Stephen Hagen clearly shows a link between access to language skills and national GDP. Similarly language audits by some of the UK Language Networks suggest that 1 in 5 companies may be losing export orders because of failures either to have adequate language skills or to have an understanding of cultural differences in targeted export countries. This economic aspect needs to be more fully and clearly elaborated in the Strategy.

Digital Connectivity and Languages. There is also a tendency to see languages as geographically based, mentioning neighbour countries in the European Union, but the realities of Ecommerce, broadband and the internet mean that geographic proximity and distance are not necessarily any longer important in the selection of which languages are important for business. The E-distance from Scotland to any other point in the world is the same, irrespective of country, consequently the need for access to an increasingly diverse set of language skills increases.

Strategic Languages and Minimum Capacity. We see no mention of a concern to ensure that languages that are at risk, or have a strategic importance, a diplomatic importance or an economic importance for Scotland are maintained and accessible within the country. Similarly there is no recognition that languages need some level of critical mass if they are to survive and that lead in times and long term planning are critical in these areas.

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

More attention needs to be paid to Lifelong Language Learning; as the nation is forced ever further into the global market place our young people are doubly disadvantaged. They have to compete at home with mobile youngsters from abroad with far better language skills and all the business skills needed in today's jobs market. Monolingual Scots cannot take their skills abroad, as they do not have the language base to do so.

IBM in Greenock employs 1,500 staff who require foreign language skills and can only recruit about 50 of those from within Scotland. While depending on the attractiveness of Scotland as a place of work to recruit 1450 staff from within the EU fills those vacancies in the immediate short term, the additional recruitment costs and relatively high churn rate mean that such an approach incurs high costs and reduces competitiveness. Similar factors apply in Call Centres, Contact Centres and Shared Services Centres such as NCR, Shell, Hilton, Sykes International, Honeywell, Cigna etc. Up-skilling the indigenous workforce through work based vocational languages

learning represents another aspect of a Language Strategy that needs to be reflected in its scope.

The Scottish Executive should ensure that good quality language and cultural training is available to all, post school and post University (where training needs to come out of its ivory tower and be available as a bolt-on option to other courses, especially those with a strong vocational element).

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

Yes we agree with these principles but think that an additional principle should be that the Strategy should involve both public and private sectors and also be articulated with economic strategies for the Scottish Executive.

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

While we accept that a broad strategy paper cannot contain detailed targets, we are concerned that unless issues and organisations are specifically mentioned they may well fall below the horizon. There are many issues and organisations that do not appear and are significant for either a Strategy for Languages or a Language Strategy for Scotland to be successful in its implementation. There is insufficient attention paid to the significant role of the private sector and the organisations that liaise between the public sector and private sector that have a concern about Scotland's languages. The language skills of recent migrant workers are an important factor both in the bottom line profitability of private companies but also raise concerns in a number of areas such as the Health and Safety at work. Such a focus is insufficiently articulated in the current draft proposal. I list some of the public and private organisations and issues which merit attention for inclusion: -

The Department of Enterprise Transport and Lifelong Learning - promoting language development post school

Gender and language skills the low participation of boys in languages at higher levels

Erasmus and Leonardo project participation from Scotland

NEETs, employability and foreign language s skills

Language Academies as a means of providing breadth of coverage in languages teaching at secondary school level

The SSDA & Sectors Skills Council's role in vocational language development

GoSkills as the SSC with special responsibility to champion languages

The Language Skills Alliance between SSDA /SSCs and CILT The UK National Centre for Languages

Scottish Council Development and Industry, Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprises, Business Gateway International, Learndirect Scotland, Scottish Chambers of Commerce, Federation of Small Businesses, and all the other organisations which need to advise business on the importance of language in exports, in work with overseas clients and customers which impact on Scotland's economy

VisitScotland and the Scottish Tourism Forum which recognise the importance of languages for Scotland's tourism industry, one of its major sectors.

The 2012 Olympics and the demands for language skills that it will stimulate and the bonuses that increased language skills could bring to the economy.

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?

Language Network Scotland could contribute to the success of the strategy:

- by helping to raise awareness in the school and business communities of the need for and advantages offered by language and cultural skills,
- by building on its experience in working with these communities, to bring them together so that the one can motivate and inspire the other,
- and by creating links which will allow the articulated international communication needs of the business community to inform course and qualification design more efficiently and effectively

LN Scotland, by drawing on the experience and best practice of colleagues throughout the UK, as well as local expertise, is the obvious body to advise on conducting Language Audits, assist organisations to draw up their languages plans and help them to map available expertise and knowledge accurately so as to facilitate access to the most relevant skills.

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