

Consultation Questions

Section 1

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?

Itchy Coo's Response to A Strategy for Scotland's Languages was sent to scotlandslanguagestrategy@scotland.gsi.gov.uk at 17.15 on 18/03/07. And a printed copy delivered by hand to Victoria Quay on 19/03/07. M. Fitt

2. Do you agree that the language initiatives

Itchy Coo's Response to A Strategy for Scotland's Languages was sent to

20/03/2007

<p><i>described on pages 6 & 12 and elsewhere are the key areas for language promotion in Scotland? If not, why not?</i></p>	<p>scotlandslanguagestrategy@scotland.gsi.gov.uk at 17.15 on 18/03/07. And a printed copy delivered by hand to Victoria Quay on 19/03/07. M. Fitt</p>
<p>3. Do you agree that the key principles listed on pages 14 and 15 should shape language activity in Scotland? If not, why not?</p>	<p>Itchy Coo's Response to A Strategy for Scotland's Languages was sent to scotlandslanguagestrategy@scotland.gsi.gov.uk at 17.15 on 18/03/07. And a printed copy delivered by hand to Victoria Quay on 19/03/07. M. Fitt</p>
<p><i>4. Are there any other comments you would like to offer on this strategy in relation to the promotion of languages in Scotland?</i></p>	<p>Itchy Coo's Response to A Strategy for Scotland's Languages was sent to scotlandslanguagestrategy@scotland.gsi.gov.uk at 17.15 on 18/03/07. And a printed copy delivered by hand to Victoria Quay on 19/03/07. M. Fitt</p>
<p>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?</p>	<p>Itchy Coo's Response to A Strategy for Scotland's Languages was sent to scotlandslanguagestrategy@scotland.gsi.gov.uk at 17.15 on 18/03/07. And a printed copy delivered by hand to Victoria Quay on 19/03/07. M. Fitt</p>

Itchy Coo
Response to the Draft Version of
A STRATEGY FOR SCOTLAND'S LANGUAGES

- a. What is Itchy Coo?**
- b. Itchy Coo's Response to A Strategy for Scotland's Languages**
- c. The Benefits of Promoting Scots**
- d. Conclusion**

a. What is Itchy Coo?

With a list of 25 titles and sales in excess of 100,000 books, **Itchy Coo** is Scotland's most successful Scots language publishing imprint for children. Established in 2002 with National Lottery funding, the project is currently funded on a year-to-year basis by the Scottish Arts Council.

Itchy Coo was founded to address the lack of modern high-quality books available in Scots for young readers. It is managed by two writers, James Robertson and Matthew Fitt. James Robertson is the imprint's General Editor and Matthew Fitt is the project's Education Outreach Officer. **Itchy Coo's** publishing partner is Black & White Publishing, Edinburgh.

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Internationally, **Itchy Coo** participated in Tartan Week in the US in 2006 and in the same year represented the Scots language at a conference at the United Nations in New York. In March 2007, the Council of Europe recognised the work of **Itchy Coo** in its *Report of the Committee of Experts on the application of the Charter in the United Kingdom*:

"The Committee of Experts commends the Itchy Coo project as an example of what can be achieved."

For more information about Itchy Coo books and activities, visit www.itchy-coo.com

b. Itchy Coo's Response to A Strategy for Scotland's Languages

We warmly welcome the strong statements made by the draft Strategy about the Scots language in Scotland. What it says about Scots constitutes the most positive views ever issued on the subject by government, either at local, Scottish or UK level.

The Executive is to be applauded for stating clearly that Scots is a language and that it has importance and value within modern Scottish society. Having been frustrated for many years by seemingly official indifference, we are greatly encouraged by the guiding principle in the Strategy that **'the Scots language will be treated with respect and pride.'**

It is imperative however that action is taken to support the stated aims and ambitions of the draft Strategy for Scots. We therefore urge the Executive to consider the following with regard to the final Strategy document.

For Scots to be 'treated with respect and pride', we recommend:

1. that *A Curriculum for Excellence* must state the word 'Scots' by name in its curriculum guidelines. In its current draft (March 2007), its guidelines on Languages advise that Scots is to be inferred from the phrase **the different languages of Scotland** while English, Gaelic, Urdu, Punjabi and Polish are specifically named.

The draft Strategy rightly notes that Scots is included in the school curriculum under the existing National Guidelines on English Language 5 –14, but these guidelines will be replaced in summer 2007 by *A Curriculum for Excellence* which does not include the word 'Scots'. It is a matter of utmost importance that this be corrected. As *A Curriculum for Excellence* presently stands, in future teachers will lack official support from the curriculum for the teaching of Scots, setting the educational development of the language back many years.

2. that, at Local Government level, each Council should seek to appoint at least one education officer (who might be, for example, in the first instance a seconded teacher) who would have particular responsibility for ensuring that Scots is delivered at all levels of the education system.

3. that central government responsibility for the promotion and protection of Scots should be broadened beyond the sole remit of the Department of Tourism, Culture and Sport via the Scottish Arts Council, and in particular for greater responsibility and disbursement of appropriate resources be taken up by the Executive's Education Department.

4. that more systematic and accurate methods of data collection on the numbers of Scots speakers in Scotland be utilised. Statistics generated by the Executive's 2006 Pupil Census registered a 'self-declared', completely unrealistic figure of only 280 children whose family language is Scots. Language organisations are still relying on an estimated figure of the Scots-speaking population produced in 1996 by the General Records Office. A question on Scots usage must be a priority for the 2011 Census.

5. that imaginative ways be explored to celebrate the connections between Gaelic and Scots. Both languages are integral to Scottish culture and there is much to be enjoyed in song, poetry and history that informs this shared experience.

But Gaelic and Scots must be treated equally. The draft Strategy for Scotland's Languages states that Gaelic will be **protected and promoted** but that Scots will be treated with **respect and pride**. It also proposes more concrete measures for Gaelic than it does for Scots. This would tend to suggest that the language of some Scottish people is more highly valued than the language of other Scottish people.

Moves by the Executive to promote a 'Scots Language Act', a 'Scots Language Board' and a 'National Scots Language Plan', similar to those pieces of legislation it has worked hard to secure for Gaelic, would be very welcome in order to address this.

6. that more should be learned from the experience of minority (or sometimes majority) languages in other parts of Europe. Positive official attitudes towards and promotion of Catalan in Spain and Friesian in the Netherlands are two often cited examples of the huge educational, economic and social benefits for the populations of these countries.

7. that proper costings be made for the funding and resourcing of Scots. Unlike Gaelic, which many learners must approach as a totally new language, Scots is already spoken and understood at some level in almost every community in Lowland Scotland. For Scots to be adequately provided for in schools, different funding models, probably at a more modest level per capita, are likely to be required.

The Scottish Executive might also wish to emulate the practical support given by the government of Norway for Norwegian. For example, the government there has a long-standing commitment to buy the first 1,800 copies of every new book published in Norwegian.

c. The Benefits of Promoting Scots

If effective policies and practical strategies are put in place as a result of the Strategy for Scotland's Languages, the conditions could be created for an unprecedented improvement in the cultural and educational well-being of children and young people in Scotland, with social dividends for the wider community.

Literacy

'Without acquiring a sound basis of knowledge and skills in literacy, children will not be able to benefit fully from school education and will face serious difficulties in reaching their full potential.'

It is the experience of many education professionals that increased awareness and use of Scots in schools can lead to improvements in children's written and spoken English. By introducing Scots alongside English to the classroom, pupils are immediately tasked with thinking about language at a

more analytic level. As well as fostering an appreciation of Scots, it can be demonstrated that such language study can enhance a pupil's skills in the pronunciation, spelling, reading and writing of English.

Social Inclusion

'The Scottish Executive is committed to promoting equality of opportunity and social justice for all those who live in Scotland.'

Children whose home language is Scots have long been disadvantaged at school. Traditionally the only opportunity to speak in Scots at school occurs once a year during the annual Scots verse-speaking competitions. While other minority languages are quite rightly included in a school's language provision, Scots is generally excluded from school, denying Scots-speaking pupils the chance to develop writing and reading skills in their first language.

Pupils who are previously regarded as reluctant readers of books in English often surprise teachers and parents by showing great enthusiasm for books written in Scots. Strategies have been put in place in a number of schools to bring pupils to enjoyment of and proficiency in reading and writing in English through a programme of reading in Scots. Teachers have also noted improvement in pupil behaviour when working with classes on Scots language exercises. There is scope for developing Scots further as a strategy for addressing the attainment deficit identified in particular in Secondary 2 boys.

Greater inclusion of Scots within schools will open up new learning opportunities for Scots-speaking children and foster an acceptance of and tolerance towards the language within the wider education community.

Confidence

'The languages that are used in Scotland should be valued and respected. This is a measure of the respect that should be given to all residents in Scotland and to the languages which they use. This respect should result in increasing opportunities for people to use their languages and be confident in them.'

It has been noted in many studies (including the Executive's *Confidence in Scotland Discussion Paper*, 2005) that Scottish children and young people lack confidence. Encouraging pupils to express themselves in Scots can have a significant impact on their self-esteem and perception of themselves as citizens of Scotland and of the world. If pupils from Scots-speaking families continue to be told in school that the language they speak is 'incorrect' or merely 'slang', it is inevitable that many children will go on to develop a low opinion of their language skills and, as a consequence, a low opinion of their own worth.

Scots-speaking pupils who learn that Scots is a language to be valued often acquire a new confidence in their abilities. This can lead to improved English skills, an aptitude for other languages and, significantly, a better sense of themselves as citizens.

Linguistic Diversity

‘The acquisition of additional languages clearly has an important part to play in our success at communicating internationally and our success in attracting tourism and other forms of inward investment to Scotland.’

Bilingualism among Scottish pupils is an ideal to which the Ministerial Action Group on Languages document *Citizens of a Multilingual World* aspires. If Scots is recognised as a language within Scottish education, then effectively many pupils who have English and Scots are already bilingual.

A bilingual learning environment is widely accepted as one which can result in high attainment in pupils. The potential benefits of engaging the English and Scots skills of thousands of Scottish school pupils, many of whom presently believe they speak ‘bad English’ and ‘slang’, are too substantial to be ignored.

Some schools have been using Scots as a starting point in order to celebrate the linguistic diversity within their student body. One class in West Lothian found it had speakers of Scots, English, Gaelic, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Polish, Japanese and the Zimbabwean language of Shona. Another class learned about Galego, the language of Galicia, and recorded a song partly in Scots, partly in Galego which was broadcast on Spanish radio in 2005.

There is another practical linguistic benefit to using Scots to enhance language learning. The velar fricative or /x/ phoneme as in ‘loch’ is rapidly disappearing from the speech of our young people. Without it, pupils are unable to reproduce to a high standard the sounds of German, Spanish, Gaelic, Russian and many other languages. Wider use in schools of Scots would necessarily feature words like *nicht*, *licht*, *thocht*, *mauchit*, etc, giving pupils the opportunity to hear and to practice this sound and lead to an improved facility for foreign languages.

Cultural Entitlement

‘People in Scotland who are not from Scots-speaking families or communities should also be encouraged to celebrate Scots as an important part of our diverse cultural heritage.’

Primary school children who perform poems by Robert Burns and other poets are rarely offered sufficient learning opportunities to fully understand the language of the poetry they are reciting. Students in secondary schools asked to read and comment on poetry by Burns or other writing in Scots find it difficult to understand basic Scots words. In a country which shows such affection for and pride in its national poet, it is ironic that its school children are not able to fully understand and appreciate that poet’s work.

Similarly, many children and young people are not equipped with the knowledge which would enable them to interpret local place and street names. Children who live on a *brae* or a *burn* or near a *kirk* are often at a loss to identify those words as ‘hill’, ‘stream’ and ‘church’.

More effective learning about Scots would ensure that Scottish children would have greater access to Scottish Literature and to the Scots words that they see and use in their day-to-day lives.

Creativity

‘Familiarity with Scots allows us to enjoy not only the great literature of the past but contemporary arts and culture as well.’

It is important to emphasise, as the draft Strategy does, that Scots is not simply a ‘heritage language’ enabling access to the literature of the past, important though this is, but that it is a living, developing language used by hundreds of thousands of people in their daily lives. It is therefore not surprising that Scots continues to be present in almost every area of Scotland’s contemporary artistic and cultural life. We could cite, for example, the Citizens Theatre’s recent production of **Itchy Coo’s** *Wee Fairy Tales*, the songs of Michael Marra and Kris Drever, the BBC’s *Still Game* series, the ongoing presence of Scots at festivals and gatherings from Celtic Connections to events supported by the Traditional Music and Song Association, the poetry of Edwin Morgan, Christine de Luca and Sheena Blackhall, the recent recording by Tom Fleming of St Mark’s Gospel from Lorimer’s *New Testament in Scots* and the Robert McLellan festival in Arran this summer.

Itchy Coo’s own experience has demonstrated the enormous enthusiasm of children and young people for the use of Scots in creative situations. A programme of Scots tuition at the RSAMD has proved extremely successful, as have plays, shows and poetry recitals performed in schools and local communities throughout Scotland. *The Eejits*, **Itchy Coo’s** Scots translation of Roald Dahl’s book *The Twits*, has been a bestseller, provoking comments from young readers such as, ‘It’s funnier’, ‘We dinna say *twits* but we use words like *eejit* all the time’ and ‘I like it because this book’s written in the way we talk.’

We believe that creativity in Scotland would be substantially poorer without the input of the Scots language at all levels.

d. Conclusion

We restate our warm welcome for the positive attitude to Scots articulated in the draft Strategy for Scotland’s Languages. However, we fear that if no clear strategies, or only tokenistic policies, ensue from the Strategy, then the current situation whereby Scots is generally *not* treated with respect and pride will prevail to the continued detriment of the language and its speakers.

Now that the protection of Gaelic has been established, the next great challenge for the Scottish Executive is to secure for future generations the rich expressive language of Scots. We sincerely hope to be able to support and assist the Executive in achieving that aim.

Matthew Fitt & James Robertson
15th March 2007

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