

Strategy for Scotland's Languages – Response from The Scottish Further Education Network for Modern Languages.

(The Network contributed to the SQA response, so there will be similarities but there are additional points we would like to raise).

- 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?**

Partly agree. Whilst we agree that the rationales set out are all valid and congratulate the Scottish Executive for setting these out in greater detail, a further rationale should be included: Scotland UK has signed up to the aims of the Barcelona Agreement, which states that each member state has responsibility to develop the language competence of its citizens to proficiency in three languages, i.e. the mother tongue and two additional languages. Further, the strategy should use the rationales outlined to oblige relevant stakeholder organisations, such as schools, colleges, universities and business & industry to act to help implement set targets.

Promoting respect and confidence (p.5)

To help clarify what is meant by the term 'Scotland's languages' we suggest expanding the paragraph to read thus:

The languages that are used in Scotland should be valued and respected. These languages will include the indigenous languages spoken and used in Scotland such as English, Scots, Gaelic and British Sign Language, but also the languages spoken by the many and varied immigrants that have settled in Scotland (from Europe and beyond).

Further, it will be imperative that the Scottish Executive puts measures in place to ensure that there are sufficient opportunities to enable existing speakers to maintain their competence and that there are strong incentives (including financial rewards) and in some cases requirements for others to gain competence in additional languages.

Increasing economic opportunity (p.6)

The Scottish Executive must do more than simply encourage people living in Scotland to learn languages other than their own. Instead the Executive must declare its commitment provide incentives for people living in Scotland to learn languages other than their own so that the lack of a foreign language is not a barrier to the development of children and young people growing up in Scotland to become "responsible citizens and effective contributors to society" (SEED 2003: A Curriculum for Excellence: p.). At present, the indigenous population is being disadvantaged because the opportunities to learn languages are diminished. The Executive must ensure that all its residents have the same mobility opportunities that people from other countries enjoy. This equality of opportunity will only be achieved through consistent and sustained support for the development in both English *and* additional language skills.

Enriching education

The strategy document should not restrict itself to demonstrating that "there are a range of contexts in which language acquisition is promoted in Scotland". Firstly, the contexts described in the following pages are narrowly restricted to ESOL, Scots, Gaelic and British Sign Language, and with regard to 'foreign' language acquisition are restricted to the school sector. Secondly, it is our understanding that funding for some the initiatives described is being reduced or even withdrawn; in other words language acquisition is not uniformly being promoted. As we have already stated, we believe that a strategy must look forward to certain goals it wishes to achieve, and these aims should include a reference to the commitments subscribed to in the Barcelona Agreement. With these points in mind, levels of competence required by students at different levels in their education and beyond in their working lives should be defined

2. 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?

Don't agree. As already indicated in our response to Q1, it is our understanding that a number of the language initiatives described are either being scaled down and some are no longer in existence. Furthermore, the initiatives described under the heading of 'language learning' only refer to the school sector yet for a national languages strategy to be effective it must address all education sectors as well as the business sector. Indeed it could be argued that the lack of focus on post-school education has been a contributing factor to the decline in language provision in further and higher education.

For example, SQA frameworks for Higher National Certificates and Diplomas (HNC/HND) in tourism and other qualifications with a business and/or international dimension have either relegated language study to the option column or in some cases, removed language study completely. The SQA design principles make the delivery of languages difficult: HNC/D awards require the bulk of units to be at SCQF level 7 or 8. At present it is possible to have language units at SCQF level 5 & 6 within HN awards. However, the position of level 5 units within HND/D awards is about to come under review. It is therefore possible that in future candidates wishing to study languages within an HN award will need to have developed their language skills to at least SCQF level 5 ('Intermediate 2') or SCQF level 6 ('Higher') before entering and HN award. However, unless students have reached these levels in schools they will no longer be able to study a modern language within an HNC/D award.

Keeping in mind Scotland's commitment to the Barcelona Agreement, we recommend that the Executive stipulate a required minimum of language levels that ALL pupils must have reached in order to progress to further education. By contrast, current SQA design principles have sidelined language options in qualifications relating to tourism, business, marketing and other international dimension. The reason for this anomaly is that the need for language skills is always latent and therefore not addressed in the proper manner. There is therefore a need for Sector Skills Strategies to take this issue forward. We would also suggest that funding mechanisms be modified so that it is possible to develop skills in additional language(s) *ab initio* in further education, as is already the case at university. Students should also be able to access discreet language units whilst studying for any HN qualifications in the same way as non-native speakers of English are able to access funded ESOL provision.

The Futureskills Scotland surveys have consistently acknowledged that the biggest skills gap amongst the Scottish workforce is in soft skills. Yet the 2003 survey noted that just 1% of employers provided training to address this gap (Futureskills Scotland 2003: 51). Thus, a low level of training in a certain skills area does not necessarily imply that there is no need for, or no use of, such skills. It is therefore noteworthy that 3% of employers reported training in modern languages (ibid: 51), which suggests that the development of this skill was considered more important than that of other soft skills. There is also evidence supporting the claim that employers draw on the foreign language skills of their staff without explicitly acknowledging this. For example, the largest percentage of workers recruited from outside of Scotland goes to fill positions in the hospitality sector (ibid: 62). It is reasonable to assume that a proportion of this staff have foreign language skills which will benefit the business in terms of ability to communicate with the many foreign tourists that bars and restaurants are dealing with during the tourist season. Yet the language skills of these employees will not be considered the MAIN reason for employment. As Doughty (2005) points out, the need for and use of language skills can be hidden in labour market surveys.

There is evidence to suggest that Scotland is losing out in terms of inward investment because of lack of language skills. As Connell (2002) showed, the concentration of inward investment in London and the South-East of England can be linked to the availability of people with a wide range of language skills. This is consistent with the finding by Futureskills Scotland that foreign-owned establishments were more likely to recruit staff from abroad than indigenously owned ones (Futureskills Scotland 2003: 62). Additionally, a survey of exporting companies by the British Chambers of Commerce found that there was a direct

correlation between the value an exporter placed on language skills within their business and their annual turnover (British Chambers of Commerce 2004: ii). Similarly, it has been shown that the UK's balance of trade is also linked to language skills, with imports outweighing exports from those countries where English is not widely spoken (CILT 2005 Talking World Class:5).

The most recent investigation into the links between language skills and business performance (CILT and Interact 2006) again indicated that lack of language skills leads to significant amount of loss in revenue. However, because it is only every possible to quantify actually perceived losses actual amounts of business lost may be much higher.

There is therefore a strong need for collaboration between the Department of Education and that of Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning in order to improve the interface between school and further education, and on to higher education and the world of work. It should also be noted that further education is now a major contributor to higher education so decisions with regard to these sectors need to be taken together rather than separately. We reiterate the need for changes in funding mechanism in further and higher education to allow language study to flourish.

For all the reasons cited above we believe that there should be one central committee Scotland developing a strategy and which has an overview of all language developments. This would include membership from a range of bodies including the Scottish Executive, Scottish Funding Council, SQA, SFEU, LTSotland, Scottish CILT and others. We need cohesion between bodies in order to move the language strategy forward successfully.

It would be useful to look at successful implementation strategies abroad, and to learn from these.

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

Partly agree. The statements are inconsistent with one another. For example, as many people in Scotland as possible should be equipped with fluent English skills AND with conversational fluency (i.e. SCQF level 6 or above) in at least one other language, and to SCQF level 5 (i.e. Intermediate 2) in a second language. If language learning is started at primary school and integrated within the context of the primary school curriculum, we believe these aims are feasible. Linguistic diversity and multilingualism should be both celebrated and valued. Language learning and acquisition should be actively supported. Mere promotion and encouragement are *insufficient measures*. More explicit references need to be made here to the post-school sectors, business and industry.

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

Although the consultation paper is called A Strategy for Scotland's Languages, the paper doesn't appear to be a strategy but a description of what has happened to date. A strategy *should look to the future and include a detailed action plan of realistic and supported/funded measures*. It should address also the needs of all sectors. The current paper's focus is on the schools sector, but the final document must address FE, HE and the business sectors as well if it is to mean anything. Targets and financial incentives are in place (or are being considered) in the case of ESOL, Gaelic, BSL and Chinese, so similar targets and initiatives need now be developed for Scots and Modern Foreign Languages. However, it is also crucial that these disparate language strategies are being considered together rather than in isolation from one another.

The aims of 'A Curriculum for Excellence' are to develop pupils to become "**successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors to society and at work**" (SEED 2004a: 12, original emphasis). The draft strategy acknowledges that language learning has an important, and indeed essential role to play in this development. However, a mere statement of support is *insufficient to turn this*

acknowledgement into reality. The strategy needs to address all of Scotland's languages on an equal opportunity basis, and include collaboration between all education sectors and the business community. To help achieve this aim the remit of Scottish CILT, which at present only includes the school sector, could be widened to include further and higher education, similar to their sister organisation in London.

Language learning in the European Union (p. 18)

We note that the document states "The European Union believes that languages have a vital role to play..." This phrase should be strengthened by rewording it thus: "The Scottish Executive agrees with the European Union that language have a vital role to play..." This paragraph should also make again explicit reference to the Barcelona Agreement.

We believe that Sector Skills Councils should be including questionnaires to employers in their sector asking about language needs. One in five exporting SMEs was aware of having lost business as a direct result of inadequate language skills in its workforce. It also seems to be the case that many employers do not recognise the existence of a skills shortage or gap until they move towards market expansion. Awarding Bodies must therefore identify and act upon opportunities for integration of languages into vocational qualifications and apprenticeship frameworks.

There is no mention of the Leitch report within the consultation paper. Leitch recommends the improvement of skills across all levels but particularly at the middle/intermediate range. He advocates that the UK should become first class in skills development. Surely this should also include languages.

International Education and Language Learning (p. 19)

There is clearly a need to go beyond the notion of entitlement and to call for languages to be included as a core skill in schools, in further and higher education, as has been asked for on numerous occasions by the CBI. Communication Skills in English and in other languages should be developed at the same time. It should be considered just as natural to learn 'foreign' languages as it is expected from immigrants to Scotland to learn English. In this way it will be possible for many more people to develop further the political and educational links established by the Scottish Executive – not just language specialists, or modern language teachers and students.

In short the Scottish Executive must strive to create an environment in which language learning is regarded a natural as well as an enjoyable activity.

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?

The Qualification Design Team Languages is well placed to develop a range of flexible qualifications to meet and respond to the differing language needs and demands of Scotland's people, both young and old. In these tasks, they can be ably supported by the Scottish Further Education Network Modern Languages, who in turn collaborate with the Scottish Association for Language Teaching (SALT).