

19 March 2007

MAM/MSB

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

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### Response to *A Strategy for Scotland's Languages*

*A Strategy for Scotland's Languages* is to be welcomed as a forward-looking document with aims which are to be applauded.

In 2000, the *National Cultural Strategy* brought to public attention the call for the creation of an Institute for the Languages of Scotland (ILS). With funding from the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland a feasibility study was carried out by the ILS Standing Committee which gathered public opinion from across all parts of Scotland and beyond, all age groups and speakers or users of Scots, Gaelic, travellers' languages, community languages and BSL. Its final report, published in 2003, showed that there was widespread support for an ILS, which would maximise public access to resources to be found in the Linguistic Surveys of Scotland (Gaelic and Scots), both those completed and those planned, the Scottish Place-Name Survey, and the Dictionaries of Older and Modern Scots and Scottish Gaelic, and the expertise which lies behind such projects and their future development. *The Cultural Commission* report of June 2005 recommended the benefits of an ILS.

Many countries have Language Institutes supporting language work and interests and the Finnish model is particularly relevant to Scotland. Finland has a population of similar size, with Finnish and Finnish Swedish, Saami, Romany and Finnish Sign Language served by an Institute which studies, maintains and provides research-based information on these languages. With the forward-looking agenda outlined in the Strategy document, Scotland could lead the way in embracing all the languages used here and take its rightful place internationally, mindful of the great interest in our languages amongst the Scottish diaspora and others.

The consultation and its findings supported the view that "language is at the heart of an individual's identity and of the well-being of the nation as a whole". The successful encouragement of **respect** and **confidence** in our languages depends upon **knowledge** and **understanding** of them. The future stewarding of those resources which Scotland is so fortunate to have, supporting the aims of *A Strategy for Scotland's Languages*, should be a national priority. The ILS would serve the needs of the teacher, of the pupil, of the local resident keen to understand the world around him or her and the place-names which are the key to the landscape and its history, the individual wishing information about language instruction, the government official seeking statistics. Importantly, it would

ensure continuity in our ever-developing knowledge of all Scotland's languages, working with the educational sector.

The creation of an Institute for the Languages of Scotland would provide a firm and dynamic basis on which all six of the objectives of the Strategy for Scotland's Languages could build. Celebrating cultural diversity, promoting respect and confidence, encouraging mobility and communication, facilitating access and inclusion, increasing economic opportunity and enriching education reflect its aims succinctly.

Those associated with the proposal and the subsequent consultation for an ILS are keen to contribute to the success of the Strategy and look forward to an opportunity to be active in this way. Copies of the final report are available from this address.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Margaret A. Mackay". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'M' and a long, sweeping tail on the 'y'.

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16 March 2007

MAM/WG



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### **Response to *A Strategy for Scotland's Languages***

We write in support of the aims outlined in the draft circulated for consultation, being closely concerned with teaching and research into the languages of Scotland past and present and with the stewarding and dissemination of those resources which have been gathered, and continue to be gathered, by experts: language, onomastics, lexicography and folklore and folklife.

Here in Celtic and Scottish Studies we are highly conscious of the roles the Linguistic Surveys of Scotland (Gaelic and Scots), the Scottish Place-Name Survey and the School of Scottish Studies Archives play as foundations to our understanding of Scotland's languages past and present, and we hope that as the strategy for Scotland's languages moves on, there will be opportunities to engage with others in ensuring that such resources and those under development such as Faclair na Gàidhlig, the historical dictionary of Scottish Gaelic, and Tobar an Dualchais/ The Kist o Riches are integral to support for the language initiatives which are so vital to our well-being as a nation.

Yours sincerely

Prof William Gillies  
Head of Celtic & Scottish Studies

Dr Margaret A Mackay  
Director, School of Scottish Studies  
Archives