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SALTIRE
SOCIETY

Barry Mathews
Cultural Policy
Education Department
Cultural Policy
Victoria Quay
Edinburgh
EH6 6QQ

19th February 2007
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Dear Barry Mathews,

Thank you for inviting our comments on the draft paper, *A Strategy for Scotland's Languages*. This is an important subject which has concerned the Saltire Society since our inception in 1936.

We consider that your paper makes many excellent points on the whole question of languages in Scotland, but we strongly urge the section on Scots should be much more robust. It is simply inadequate to say that Gaelic "will be protected and promoted," but that Scots only "treated with respect and pride." We are strongly in favour of both languages, but both need more protection and support.

Scots is the language of an important literature from medieval times to the present, and the vehicle of much of our best poetry, many of our best plays and at least the dialogue of many of our best novels. If we lose the language we shall lose access to our own literature.

The affinity of Scots to English is more of a threat to the survival of the language than an advantage because it tends to make people think that Scots is merely bad English. Indeed many of our schools encourage that attitude. Generations of Scots have had their self-confidence and ability to communicate undermined by their school telling them that their native language was wrong and unacceptable.

Of course, the main emphasise in schools, apart from those concentrating on Gaelic, has to be on English, which is a valuable means of international communication. Scots has a large common vocabulary with English, as well as with French, Scandinavian, Dutch and German cognates. Scots and English together therefore offer an introduction to bilingualism, which stimulates the intelligence and facilitates the acquisition of other languages.

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One of our Past Presidents, the distinguished historian Geoffrey Barrow, had described the failure to create a Scottish organisation for public service broadcasting as the “greatest cultural disaster suffered by Scotland in the 20th Century”. A consequence of this is Scots is seldom heard on radio or television, which are the most influential means of cultural expression. Scots has declined as the language of everyday speech in consequence. It is unfortunately, therefore not true to say (as your draft does on page 9) that Scots is not an endangered language.

We hope that your draft paper will be amended to provide for at least as vigorous “protection and promotion” for Scots as for Gaelic.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Henderson Scott', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Paul Henderson Scott
Vice Convener
The Saltire Society