

Consultation Questions
Section 1

We are concerned principally with the implications of the draft strategy for the Scots language. The Executive is correct in its view that we in Scotland have particular responsibility for Gaelic and Scots. There are small numbers of Scots speakers outside the country but it is within our political boundaries that the vast bulk of speakers of the language

09/03/2007

live and go about their daily lives. We agree that Scots is closely linked to our cultural heritage and continues to be a significant factor in shaping our national culture today. However, we can find no adequate reason for the disparities that exist in the provision of resources to support our various indigenous languages and we do not believe that the Executive has been able to explain why support for Gaelic is delivered within a special and particular legislative framework while support for Scots is delivered on a largely ad hoc basis. The framework within which Gaelic is supported largely ignores the existence of other languages - for example, in terms of the requirement it places on public bodies to prepare language plans. The legislation does not require public bodies to take account of the linguistic heritage or linguistic make-up of the public which they serve when drawing up such plans. In our opinion this requirement of the Gaelic Language Act runs contrary to the effective implementation of a language strategy which sets out to treat speakers of Scots with "pride and respect" since in the development of their plans for Gaelic, public bodies and, in particular, local authorities will be required to make provision for often tiny numbers of Gaelic speakers while giving no consideration to the large numbers of speakers of Scots that may live within their boundaries. This is a situation which is neither respectful nor likely to encourage pride. At their core, language plans should recognise the principles of language equality and respect for linguistic diversity. The disparity in terms of the legislative framework and the provision of resources which presently exists is not explained anywhere within the strategy and as a result the thinking which lies behind the various approaches to supporting or not supporting our indigenous languages is not revealed. This is a fundamental flaw in the strategy and it ought to be addressed. We note the Executive's view that English is the main language of Scotland. We are unclear as to the meaning (and, indeed, purpose) of this assertion and believe it would be helpful if the Executive were to clarify its thinking on this matter. Does the Executive mean, for example, that English is the language used most often by most people? If this is so then the Executive ought to make this clear. However, to do so without evidence would be to do nothing more

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?

than assert a point of view and in the context of a language strategy this would seem to us to be an unsatisfactory position to take. The phrase "by custom and usage" is in our view unhelpful and ambiguous. If this phrase is to remain within the strategy it ought to be made clearer what it is that the Executive means by it. The Executive is right to commit itself to tackling discrimination and prejudice but it must not make the mistake of believing that these are matters which only concern incomers to Scotland. The Scots language and Scots speakers have been subjected over very many years to prejudice and discrimination. The institutions of the state have to a great extent been responsible for discouraging the use of Scots yet this is not recognised within the strategy as far as we can see. The incidences of discrimination for which the institutions of the state have been responsible are extensively documented and these have carried on into recent times. The phenomena of school teachers beating children for using Scots and of state officials imprisoning and fining people for using Scots words in court are well known. The practice of using corporal punishment in schools is thankfully in the past but we cannot be sure that other methods of belittling and humiliating school children on the basis of the language they use do not persist. We would like to see the Executive develop plans to encourage linguistic pride amongst Scots speaking children and to explain how it will tackle the lingering prejudice against Scots that exists within the school education system and wider society. The language strategy must contain within it a declaration to the effect that the Executive will not tolerate linguistic discrimination and prejudice from the bodies it funds and for which it has administrative responsibility. It is our view that the proposed language strategy will not be able to tackle effectively matters of linguistic discrimination and prejudice so long as it has at its heart proposals which clearly differentiate between one indigenous language and another in terms of legislative framework and provision of resources. There appear to be no practical, philosophical, moral or other reasons for this approach and one must conclude that the varying proposals are based on either personal or political taste. Why for example, should one language be treated with respect and pride while another is promoted and protected? Why

can't all indigenous languages be promoted and protected AND treated with pride and respect? Where these issues are concerned it would be advisable for the Executive to attend to the beam in its own eye before tackling the mote in someone else's eyes. The place to start this process is with the strategy itself. Scotland is a culturally and linguistically diverse nation. The celebration of that diversity must recognise the reality of the wide range of language used by the citizens of the country. For a very long time there has been little or no official recognition that Scots exists. There remains today in certain policy statements from the Executive a sense that the government is reluctant to accept that the Scots language is a valid and widely used medium of communication. While such an attitude persists it is difficult to see how the state can effectively facilitate and encourage the process of celebrating the country's cultural and linguistic diversity. We very much welcome the Executive's commitment to encouraging mobility and communication. In this area Scots tend to find themselves lagging very far behind the citizens of other European countries. We believe that more should be done to encourage awareness amongst Scots speakers of the links that exist between their language and the Germanic languages that are spoken in neighbouring and nearby countries. It is also our view that people who are confident in the use of one language can more readily become confident learners and users of another. In this regard we would suggest that actions taken to increase understanding and awareness of the Scots language amongst native and non-native speakers of Scots will have the effect of making the process of learning other languages easier. We would encourage the Executive to provide children with opportunities to learn non-indigenous languages from an early age. We would suggest that the methods of teaching these languages must be educationally sound in the sense that there is evidence of their effectiveness in producing competent and confident communicators.

It should be the aim of the education authorities to ensure that those in their charge are able to communicate effectively in English. In order to do this properly it is our view that these authorities must recognise that their pupils have varying levels of knowledge and understanding of English when they come to school. Efforts

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?

should be made to encourage Scots speaking children to learn the differences between Scots and English. To continue the practice of teaching Scots speakers English as if they were native speakers of English is educational folly and in our opinion hugely wasteful of resources. In our view pupils would benefit from being given an early introduction to the concepts of language, dialect and linguistic diversity. In the strategy it is stated that Scots is not an endangered language. This may indeed be the case but the truth is that this assertion cannot be supported or contended without evidence and as with so much in this strategy, no such evidence is cited or offered. The Executive could remedy this matter by providing the support needed to gather evidence about the number and distribution of speakers. A strategy which purports to provide support to a community of language users but which is unable to say how many speakers there are or where they live is not in reality able to deliver anything worthwhile to that community. We are encouraged that the Executive recognises the existence of various dialects of Scots. We note that it fails to do this in the case of Gaelic and English. It is our view that the dialects of Scots require particular support and we would like to see in the final strategy proposals which outline how the Executive intends to encourage and support these dialects. To say that Scots has considerable overlap with Scottish Standard English is to state a matter of fact. It is also the case that Scots has considerable overlap with Standard English and that English of all kinds has a considerable overlap with Scots. Of course Gaelic and Irish have a considerable overlap too - this is not mentioned in the strategy but it is also a well known fact. The particular reason for making this point in the strategy is unclear. Perhaps it is there as a means of tackling the popular misconceptions that exist about the nature of the Scots tongue and its relationship to English. Or perhaps the intention is to perpetuate such confusion. We are uncertain and we suspect anyone else examining or reading the strategy may feel the same. In which case it seems to us that if the strategy is designed to encourage respect for and pride in the Scots tongue then this part of it ought to be reworded with those outcomes more clearly in mind. It is unclear why Scots should be particularly celebrated for the

contribution that it is alleged to have made to modern English vocabulary. Should other languages be celebrated for the same reason? If so, which languages? We agree that non-Scots speaking Scots should be encouraged to learn the language and learn about the language and would like to see more clearly developed proposals in this regard. In view of the widespread popular ignorance which exists about the nature and history of Scots it is surely unhelpful to include Scots in the English Language part of the school curriculum. This can only encourage the view that Scots is a dialect or inferior form of English rather than a distinct language (as is asserted in this strategy). We would encourage the Executive to think creatively about this matter and to find space within the curriculum for the study of Scots and Gaelic separate from English. We note that Gaelic is not presently to be found within the English Language part of the curriculum and can see no reason why Scots should be there either. The Executive must also consider how best to equip appropriate teachers with the ability to teach the language and to teach about the language. We note that there is still debate about whether Scots will be specifically mentioned within the section of the Curriculum for Excellence which addresses language. To omit mention of Scots would not accord with the Executive's proposed policy of respecting the language and encouraging pride in it. The Scots Language Resource Centre was re-launched last year as the Scots Language Centre (www.scotslanguage.com) and references to it in the strategy should be altered accordingly.

The framework within which Gaelic is supported largely ignores the existence of other languages - for example, in terms of the requirement it places on public bodies to prepare language plans. The legislation does not require public bodies to take account of the linguistic heritage or linguistic make-up of the public which they serve when drawing up such plans. In our opinion this requirement of the Gaelic Language Act runs contrary to the effective implementation of a language strategy which sets out to treat speakers of Scots with "pride and respect" since in the development of their plans for Gaelic, public bodies and, in particular, local authorities will be required to make provision for often tiny numbers of

3. Do you agree that the key principles listed on pages 14 and 15 should shape language activity

<p>in Scotland? If not, why not?</p>	<p>Gaelic speakers while giving no consideration to the large numbers of speakers of Scots that may live within their boundaries. This is a situation which is neither respectful nor likely to encourage pride. At their core, language plans should recognise the principles of language equality and respect for linguistic diversity. The disparity in terms of the legislative framework and the provision of resources which presently exists is not explained anywhere within the strategy and as a result the thinking which lies behind the various approaches to supporting or not supporting our indigenous languages is not revealed.</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>The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages places certain obligations on the Executive in terms of the support that it is required to give to the Scots language. We would like to see the Executive implement the provisions of the Charter immediately.</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>The Scots Language Centre recommends that the Executive set up a consultative committee which will have responsibility for developing and implementing policies designed to support Scots. The Scots Language Centre would be delighted to play a full role in the work of any such committee.</p>