



BEMIS Comments on the Scottish Executive

A Strategy for Scotland's Languages

Draft Version for Consultation

Strategy for Scotland's Languages

BEMIS Comments on Draft version

In general, the draft strategy policy paper has been successful in identifying and addressing many issues surrounding Languages. This indicates the commitment of the Scottish Executive to promote, support and celebrate the rich diversity of languages spoken in Scotland.

BEMIS comments on this strategy are a collective feedback from our members and networks on various levels, with particular interest on organisations and community groups at local areas. Thus the comments might not include every item within the policy documents. However, the following represents some of the Ethnic Minority (EM) input:

Community language Schools

Most of these schools used to be funded through New Opportunity Fund (NOF). However this fund has now been terminated, leaving many EM language schools with no or very limited support. Local authorities who took the responsibility differ in supporting EM community language schools. There are no clear guidelines on who provides the support (education, community services, and other department), which community is eligible, what kind of support or funding is available, how to apply, where can the community find information and how the information has been disseminated to communities.

In line with Scottish Executives "One Scotland Many Cultures" The policy encouraged public bodies to adopt a coherent approach to guide the development of languages in Scotland with the development of language plans as a basis for their commitment. It would be "for different bodies and authorities to consider what would be appropriate for their area and at what level".

BEMIS support this principal, however for successful implementation of these policies, a monitoring and compliance procedures should be in place!

It can be difficult to obtain information regarding available funds, their application criteria and the decision-making process. Similarly, the monitoring of grants can differ significantly and this can lead to a considerable administrative burden on communities.

Assistance to new migrants

Children of new migrants from Eastern Europe need language support (English). The local Education departments are over stretched and resources are scarce, yet these departments reluctant to engage with volunteers from these communities who are capable and in many cases are qualified. It is understood that standard and regulations should always be maintained but, it is not understood why it is made impossible?

Engaging with those volunteers by training them and obtaining the required disclosures would resolve major obstacles from this increasingly serious problem, it is also a cost effective approach!

BEMIS agree with the idea of bilingual teachers from Eastern Europe and beyond to be brought to Scotland on short-term contracts to help schools.

There was a report of inadequate interpreting support for students (even at exam time) which had unpleasant results. The reasons given by education services were lack of funding!

We believe that interpreting should be provided to all who needs it regardless? And education services should not link this support to resources.

ESOL

ESOL is the term most frequently used to describe English language learning for those whose first language is not English. Demand for **ESOL** comes from both migrants to this country and settled minority ethnic community. The policy indicated that an “adult ESOL strategy for Scotland, which will be launched shortly”

We hope this strategy would not restrict access to free ESOL classes. The Scottish Executive need to study the implication of the Westminster debate that, people should pay 30 per cent of fees this year, rising to 50 per cent in 2010. It is very important to be a full and active citizen in this country and for people to be able to communicate and that means fluency in English. English language is also the benchmark for the citizenship test.

Accountability

There is difference between **consultation** and **influence**. Many poor consultation processes has failed due to misconversations and those being consulted feeling that the decisions have already been made or that their input has been ignored. The use of The National Standards of Community Engagement is a useful tool; it is vital to asses how communities feel and that their engagement can influence polices and decision makers. Communities are often not consulted at the earliest stages of service planning which can lead to communities feeling excluded from the planning processes that impact upon them.

Conclusion

The Scottish executives should be applauded for producing this comprehensive strategy which would guide the development of Scotland’s languages. The language plan is an organisational commitment by local authorities of how they could assist deferent languages and communities.

Policies often lack the power and position in local government hierarchies to challenge finance driven initiatives.

We highlight the gap between the formulation of policy at high levels within the organisation and its application in the work place. Selective use of these policies in local government would undermine the policy itself and can themselves become instruments of discrimination.

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Kind Regards
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With Compliments

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