



Response to the National Language Strategy Consultation

Our own position on language and our response to the Strategy in general terms, are provided under section 1 below. This is followed by more specific and detailed responses to the main sections of the Strategy.

1. INTRODUCTION and RATIONALE (pages 4-6)

- 1.1 Language is the foundation of thought, communication, and literacy, and hence of knowledge and understanding. Language is fundamental to our identities as individuals, as social, cultural and national communities, and as citizens of the world. It is central to the ways in which we express ourselves, and how we are perceived by others.
- 1.2 Language provides an intrinsic link to all artistic and cultural activity. It is the carrier of literature, drama, storytelling, and song-writing, and even those artforms which do not use language directly rely upon the word as a medium of interpretative communication. In Scotland's case, the country's rich and deep-rooted multilingual nature has been indivisible from the wealth of its artistic and cultural heritage and achievements, both past and present. Most notably, the various languages in which Scottish literature has been composed are a major distinctive quality of the subject. Unlike English literature, which is predominantly monoglot, Scottish literature immediately demands the recognition of the value and validity of different tongues, both spoken and written.
- 1.3 The Scottish Arts Council both welcomes and supports all of the aims outlined. We would argue, however, that there are universal and overarching principles intrinsic to language, such as those summarised above, which should be emphasised at the outset, as they transcend specific policy objectives. We would also argue that, given the centrality of language to Education – 60% of the school curriculum is text-based - that the latter should not be placed last in the aims stated, and be given higher priority than 'increasing economic opportunity'.
- 1.4 Overall, our view is that the Strategy, in its current form, has two main weaknesses:
 - a) it appears to exist in isolation from the wider policy context embraced by the Scottish Executive's new Culture Policy, and the Curriculum Review. There is no reference to *Scotland's Culture*, published by the Scottish Executive in January 2006, or the subsequent draft Culture Bill. *Scotland's Culture* places specific emphasis on the development of indigenous languages (pages 45 – 47), making reference to both Scots and Gaelic. We believe that to be truly effective, a Languages Strategy must be fully integrated into, and co-ordinated with, the broader legislative areas of education and culture, as language is fundamental to both, and all three areas of national life are interdependent.
 - b) it tends towards providing a map or overview of existing activity and legislation in favour of setting out concrete proposals for new initiatives, and/or potential changes and improvements to current structures of support.

2. POLICIES (pages 7-13)

2.1 English

In terms of definition, we would like to question the document's assumption that the 'standard' English used in Scotland is identical to Southern British English, as this is not the case. **Scottish English** is in fact an alternative standard to **South British English**, and carries the same status as American English, Canadian English, Australian English, New Zealand English, and South African English, all of which have their own dictionaries. A dictionary of Scottish English remains to be undertaken.

2.2 Gaelic

2.2.1 The Draft National Plan for the Gaelic Language (The National Plan), published in late 2006 by Bòrd na Gàidhlig, outlines culture as a key action area. The Scottish Arts Council also believes that the arts play a fundamental role in helping the language survive and grow, and are pleased to be acknowledged as a key partner in this area. The Scottish Arts Council published its first Gaelic arts policy in 2003, and maintains strong and regular dialogue with the Gaelic arts sector. We fund a wide range of Gaelic arts activity across the artforms, and four major Gaelic organisations - Proiseact nan Ealan, Feis nan Gaidheal and Feis Rois and the Gaelic Books Council - are all designated as Foundation Organisations in our forward planning for 2007/09.

2.2.2 In addition, we have been informed by Bòrd na Gàidhlig that we will receive formal notification to produce a Gaelic Language Plan in 2007/08. In preparation for this we have begun work on reviewing our Gaelic arts policy and provision and initial preparations on a Gaelic Language Plan, with a view to it informing the remit and functions of Creative Scotland.

2.2.3 The key priority for the Scottish Arts Council is focused on pursuing our own corporate objectives for the coming years. There is a great deal of common ground between the aims and priorities of Bòrd na Gàidhlig and the Scottish Arts Council and we look forward to working with the Bòrd on these areas where there is such common ground.

2.3 Scots

2.3.1 The Scottish Arts Council welcomes the Executive's renewed support for the Scots language. The Scottish Arts Council supports a growing number of Scots language projects and organizations such as the Association for Scottish Literary Studies, Scottish Language Dictionaries, the Scots Language Centre, and Itchy Coe, as well as providing an extensive range of direct support to writers in Scots, and to magazines such as *Lallans* which publish new writing in Scots. Aided by this support, the past few years has seen a greatly heightened public interest in, and enthusiasm for, the language.

2.3.2 We have two major concerns relating specifically to Scots.

a) Education Policy

The Strategy refers to the ongoing curriculum guidelines in *English Language 5-14* with regard to provision for the Scots language in education. However, the Strategy subsequently sets out the vision of the ongoing 3-18 curriculum review, *A Curriculum for Excellence*, with regard to Language Learning. We are very concerned that the *Curriculum for Excellence* makes no specific mention of Scots, and that Scots is to be

inferred from the phrase 'the different languages of Scotland', as this appears to contradict the very positive statements concerning the language in the Strategy.

More seriously, we fear that a failure to name Scots in the new curriculum will damage the use and status of the language in education, and undo the positive effects of specifying Scots in the 1991 curriculum guidelines *English Language 5-14*. This omission will go against the Strategy's aim of treating the Scots language 'with respect and pride'.

b) Structures of Support

As outlined in the Strategy, Scots speakers have had influence on 'disciplines such as science, literature, economics, politics, philosophy and the arts'. The Scottish Arts Council is currently the only public body with a responsibility for the promotion and protection of Scots. While we welcome this role, the situation is anomalous in the context of the policies of other European countries, where the norm is for languages to be directly supported by the state. We believe strongly that the Scottish Arts Council should not have **sole** responsibility for this hugely significant sector, as our primary responsibility is to support and develop the arts.

We therefore contend that for the Scots language to survive and flourish and be truly celebrated, there is a strong case for a broader commitment, and a more robust framework of support than at present. This could be addressed through the establishment of a dedicated agency for support of the Scots language, which we would be happy to explore with other agencies.

3. LANGUAGE PROVISION

3.1 Principles (pages 14-15)

- 3.1.1 While advocating for fluency in English is a laudable principle, we would in addition like to see the principles of **multilingualism** and **bilingualism** enshrined as equally important in their own right, both as aspirations, and as characteristics of our national life. Learning a second language has been proven to improve competencies and performance across the whole curriculum, and this applies not just to learning foreign languages: "the positive feedback from teachers to the Itchy Coo project, for example, indicates that increasing pupils' confidence in Scots increases their confidence in English
- 3.1.2 The principle of providing 'fair and equal linguistic access to information and services' creates some concern for us in terms of resources. The Scottish Arts Council is committed to supporting equality of access to our information and services, but the provision of these services is currently based on need. We feel that 'reasonable and proportionate' would be more appropriate than 'fair and equal'.

Gavin Wallace / Maggie Page
Scottish Arts Council
8 March 2008



Scottish **Arts** Council

8 March 2007

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

Dear Douglas

Please find enclosed our response to the language strategy together with the respondent form.

A copy has also been submitted by email.

Yours sincerely

Maggie Page
Communications Officer - Parliamentary





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