



The Open University's response to the draft Strategy for Scotland's Languages

Introduction

The Open University welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Scottish Executive's consultation paper on a strategy for Scotland's languages.

The Open University commends the reasons behind the strategy document and finds them entirely in keeping with the OU's own mission. The OU is committed to enhancing the language profile of the Scottish population and helping those who want to learn languages to achieve that aim in a way that suits their lifestyle and learning needs, irrespective of their previous language knowledge.

The Open University currently offers full undergraduate degree courses in French, German, and Spanish, and, from November will also bring Italian into the curriculum. There are currently over 600 students studying language courses with The Open University in Scotland. English language is also offered in a variety of forms.

Promotion of languages in Scotland

In the foreword to the strategy, we suggest that we need to 'value' rather than simply 'accept' cultural and linguistic diversity. Acceptance is a step too little.

We also suggest that we need to have a better view via the census and by other methods of the shifting language profile of Scottish citizens. The current Gaelic question is not giving a true picture of that domain, while the absence of question about mother tongue for all citizens denies us a true picture of the linguistic reality in Scotland.

Reasons for promoting and learning languages

The OU endorses the list as it stands but feels useful additions might be made to the list of reasons. 'Celebrating linguistic diversity' and 'increasing language awareness' should also figure on the list. These are important reasons for the promotion of a language strategy and chime with the concept of allowing our citizens to be more on a par with other European member state citizens in terms of language competence (cf. page 12). Without governmental and societal backing for the usefulness and value of language knowledge per se Scots will not be motivated to increase their own competence. This has to be imbued in those living in Scotland from an early stage (nursery school) so that self-fulfilling prophecies about 'Scots being no good at languages' are not promulgated. Although the link between culture and language cannot be denied, to link language and culture indelibly in all contexts is not always valid in the way people view their identity, so adding these two aims to the list would be useful in this respect.

'Enriching the life of the individual' should also figure on the list. We know from research that not everyone in the lifelong learning context wants to engage in language simply to travel or to communicate with others. Some wish to gain access via improved language competence to for example literature, film or specialised documents or banks of knowledge in their field of interest. A diverse range of motivation certainly characterises our OU language students and the way they use language to enrich their own lives.

How can The Open University contribute to the success of the strategy?

The Open University provides supported open learning at higher education level, based around two principal features: high quality learning materials and effective academic and generic learning support provided by locally based Associate Lecturers. The OU has led the way in the development of blended learning by providing learning materials in print, CD-ROM and online, and providing tuition and student interaction through a variety of forms such as face-to-face, telephone and online audio conferencing.

The OU's Department of Languages has a decade of experience with regard to the teaching and learning of languages online. Its expertise in this field is recognised both nationally and internationally.

The Open University in Scotland has developed and continues to hone an overarching strategy in support of its work in languages, including English. Within this, the OU, as the main provider of quality supported open learning in Scotland, is currently:

- i. Providing a suite of language courses in French, German, Spanish and Italian from beginners' level to Honours level, delivered in a flexible, part-time way to suit student need, with the benefit of blended learning. This model allows the courses to be used by home and work-based learners and potentially by students in schools, colleges and universities where the target language is not currently taught.
- ii. Offering the above courses on a credit transfer basis to other HEIs, colleges and schools to support their curriculum and maintain language provision where this has ceased to exist or is diminishing, using credit transfer as the currency and, for schools, the OU's *Young Applicants in Schools Scheme* as the model.
- iii. Offering these above courses to primary and secondary teachers requiring to upgrade their language skills for professional purposes (cf. p.13, *A Strategy for Scotland's Languages*.)

If the resources were available, The Open University could also:

- iv. Develop at low cost, small and easily accessible chunks of learning material to increase language awareness and language knowledge including for example, information on indigenous, community and foreign languages in Scotland along with cultural and linguistic links. The OU's new open content website, OpenLearn, would be the most appropriate medium here (www.open.ac.uk/openlearn)
- v. Following a UK-wide strategy under development, support ESOL/EAL for migrant workers and their families, building on existing OU developments, combined with the work through Diverse Routes (www.diverseroutes.co.uk).
- vi. Provide courses in Scots literature thus displaying how the Scots language has been used in text.
- vii. Introduce new language opportunities to Scotland, e.g. Mandarin, Arabic and Welsh, subject to funding at UK level and/or in Wales.
- viii. Provide Gaelic courses in partnership with Sabhal Mòr Ostaig.
- ix. Offer staff development in language teaching methods, language study and learning skills and language learner need, at low cost, to teachers and language professionals working in any language area.

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Student figures for Open University language provision in Scotland 2006-07 (Student registrations at the start of the course)

OU student recruitment in languages has risen by 6.9% in 2006-07 on the previous year.

French

Course	SCQF level	Students
Bon Départ: Beginners' French (L192)	7	82
Bon Départ: Beginners' French - online version (LZX192)	7	45
Ouverture: A Fresh Start in French (L120)	7	61
Ouverture - A Fresh Start in French - online version (LZX120)	7	23
French Summer School (Action in French) (LXR122)	7	17
Nouvel Envol (L211)	9	26
Nouvel Envol - online version (LZX211)	9	8
Nouvelles Mises au Point (L310)	10	25
Nouvelles Mises au Point - online version (LZX310)	10	2

German

Course	SCQF level	Students
Auftakt: Get Ahead in German (L130)	7	29
Auftakt: Get Ahead in German - online version (LZX130)	7	11
Rundblick: Beginners' German (L193)	7	46
Rundblick: Beginners' German - online version (LZX193)	7	19
Motive: Moving on in German (L203)	9	12
Motive: Moving on in German - online version (LZX203)	9	3
Variationen: German Language and Society (L313)	10	7
Variationen: German Language and Society - online version (LZX313)	10	5

Spanish

Course	SCQF level	Students
En Rumbo: A Fresh Start in Spanish (L140)	7	82
En Rumbo: A Fresh Start in Spanish - online version (LZX140)	7	15
Portales: Beginners' Spanish (L194)	7	94
Portales: Beginners' Spanish - online version (LZX194)	7	44
Viento en popa: Moving on in Spanish (L204)	9	20
Viento en Popa - online version (LZX204)	9	15
A Buen Puerto: Fast Forward in Spanish (L314)	10	17

English language

Course	SCQF level	Students
Exploring the English Language (U211)	9	59
The English Language: Past, Present and Future (U210)	9	46
English Grammar in Context (E303)	10	15
The Art of English (E301)	10	43

Andante: Beginners' Italian starts in November 2007.