



9 March 2007

**A Strategy for Scotland's Languages**  
**Scottish Executive Education Department**  
**Cultural Policy Division**  
**Area 1-A North**  
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Dear Sir or Madam

**A Strategy for Scotland's Languages Consultation**

The University of Edinburgh is glad to have this opportunity to comment on the Scottish Executive's Strategy for Scotland's Languages.

The University welcomes the progress made by the Scottish Executive in producing this draft strategy and agrees that a strategic approach will be useful and beneficial in ensuring the effective development and support of languages in Scotland – including for those reasons given on pages 5-6 of the draft strategy document. The draft strategy contains a useful summary of the current state of play and the importance of language capability, and is based upon sound general principles. It would, however, be helpful if the strategy included a clear set of specific objectives and an explanation of how it is proposed that these will be achieved.

The University of Edinburgh wishes to express its particular support for the general principle outlined on page 16 that 'language learning and acquisition will be promoted'. Given that the draft strategy acknowledges the importance of access to language learning and the widespread benefits this brings, it is disappointing that it makes virtually no reference to the significant role that higher education institutes (HEIs) play in this. As well as the provision of undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in a broad range of languages (most of which will include a component of cultural studies), universities also provide the training for the next generation of language teachers. Moreover, many universities, including this University, provide open-access evening or part-time courses in a variety of languages which are a very valuable source for language training within the local community.

Consequently, while the University is pleased to note the additional support the Scottish Executive has committed to support language learning and teaching in schools, it would wish to highlight the vital importance of ensuring that language learning is adequately supported at all levels of the education system. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) has designated modern foreign languages, and area studies and related minority languages, as strategically important and vulnerable subjects, and has asked that higher education institutes inform them at an early stage of any intention to restructure in these disciplines<sup>1</sup>.

A recent analysis carried out by the University and College Union<sup>2</sup> shows that the number of UK HEIs providing undergraduate degrees in French, German and Italian has declined by 15.1%, 25.3% and 9.3% respectively between 1998 and 2007. While the decline in provision has been less severe in Scotland up until now (with one less institution offering undergraduate French degrees, two less institutions offering German degrees and an increase of two in the number of institutions offering Italian degrees) the situation must be monitored carefully as there may be risk of further deterioration in the future as recent press reports of possible restructuring at some institutions have shown.

The University of Edinburgh has a long tradition in the provision of language degrees and an excellent reputation for the quality of this provision, and it is possible in all of these for the student to start with no prior knowledge of the language. In the UK generally, it has become increasingly difficult over recent years to recruit students to language degrees, including European language degrees. However applications to study European languages at this University have increased by 53% between 2005 and 2007 against an overall increase in the UK of just 1.5%. The University would very much like to expand the number of students it accepts into language degree programmes but is constrained by the limited number of places funded by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). Scottish Funding Council support is integral to the provision of all language programmes provided by higher education institutions in Scotland, and we would therefore suggest that it should be fully involved in any forward planning in this area.

Lastly, the University is pleased to note that the strategy acknowledges the importance of the provision of training in non-European languages, and in Chinese in particular. The University fully supports the assertion that it will become increasingly important that Scottish people are able to learn about Chinese culture and language (para.11, page 19). Unfortunately no reference is made to the role that HEIs have to play in the promotion of either. The University of Edinburgh has the potential to make a very significant contribution in this area. The University is home to the first Confucius Institute to be established in Scotland which is part of a global network of institutes created by the National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language and which will offer a programme of language and business courses, as well as language and cultural exchanges. Our College of Humanities and Social Sciences is home to the Scottish Centre for Chinese Studies and offers a Masters course in Chinese Literature, Language and Culture, and, together with Glasgow University, a

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<sup>1</sup> HEFCE Circular Letter 17/2006 [www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/circlets/2006/c117\\_06/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/circlets/2006/c117_06/)

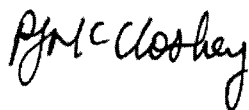
<sup>2</sup> UCU *Losing our Tongues?* Declining numbers of language degree courses in French, German and Italian in the UK 1998-2007  
[www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=2017](http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=2017)

Masters course in Chinese Studies. And through these promotes the study of Mandarin, and of Chinese politics, business, art, media, literature and history.

The University also offers undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in Japanese and Arabic. Together with the Universities of Manchester and Durham it was last year awarded £3.1million jointly by the AHRC (Arts and Humanities Research Council), ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council), HEFCE (Higher Education Funding Council for England and SFC (Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council) to establish the Centre for the Advanced Study of the Arab World (CASAW). This Centre will promote and enhance capacity in Arabic and Arab Studies.

I hope that this response is helpful and I confirm that we are content for a copy of it to be placed in the Scottish Executive Library.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jane McCloskey', written in a cursive style.

Jane McCloskey  
Principal's Policy and Executive Officer