

# SCOTTISH COUNCIL FOR DEVELOPMENT AND INDUSTRY

## A STRATEGY FOR SCOTLAND'S LANGUAGES

### Introduction

1. The Scottish Council for Development and Industry (SCDI) is an independent membership network, which strengthens Scotland's competitiveness by influencing Government policies to encourage sustainable economic prosperity. Its membership includes businesses, trades unions, local authorities, educational institutions, and the voluntary sector.
2. In summer 2006, ahead of this year's Scottish Parliament elections, SCDI surveyed its members on their public policy priorities for the Scottish economy. The top priority was identified as 'skills development and workforce issues including demographics, skills shortages and lifelong learning.' Language skills are one element of this issue and SCDI therefore welcomes the opportunity to comment on this strategy.
3. Languages are clearly important to Scotland's economy and its communities. There are many reasons for the adoption of a languages strategy and the promotion of languages. SCDI recognises all of these, and the range of benefits languages can bring to several areas of life, but comments will focus particularly on the economy and the strategy aim of 'increasing economic opportunity.' It is welcome that several of the other aims, such as 'encouraging mobility and communication' and 'access and inclusion', also support the economy.

### General Comments

4. SCDI welcomes the shared focus on teaching English to non native speakers, as well as the learning of other languages. Both are of great importance to the Scottish economy. English training for speakers of other languages (ESOL) increases their chances of accessing the labour market and allows them to maximise their potential. Increasing foreign language skills amongst the Scottish population can help tourism and inward investment opportunities, as well as helping Scottish business people to trade and access foreign opportunities.
5. SCDI understands the importance of the Gaelic and Scots languages and welcomes the emphasis in the document on protecting and promoting them. They are clearly of great importance to our cultural heritage, and a sustainable future can only be guaranteed if young people understand their importance and are engaged in protecting them. SCDI therefore welcomes the steps set out in the strategy to achieve this.
6. The starting point of any language strategy must be to set out the benefits of language learning. SCDI welcomes the emphasis on the economic benefits of languages. There are also personal and social benefits of speaking another language and understanding another culture. However, it is important not only that people are given the opportunity to learn another language, but that they understand these benefits. As such it is vital that the benefits are widely publicised.

7. As Scotland welcomes increased levels of migrant workers, and their families, ESOL provision becomes all the more important. Ensuring that residents in Scotland can speak English brings social and economic benefits. It is essential that a lack of English does not act as a barrier to employment, nor as a barrier to integration into the community. SCDI believes there should be additional funding granted to provide language services, including translation, in areas where the population has risen due to migrant workers and their families.
8. While many consider English to be the language of international business, evidence suggests that successful business is maximised through better cultural understanding and linguistic skills. As the global economy is changing, so should the languages on offer to Scotland's school pupils. SCDI welcomes moves to make Chinese languages eg Mandarin more widely available in Scottish schools. In its Policy Agenda 2006/07 SCDI stated that it would like to see this continue and, among European languages, called for Spanish to be more generally taught. This training should not end when pupils leave school but must be available to students and adults.

### **English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)**

9. SCDI has in the past been, and continues to be, supportive of the principle behind the Fresh Talent Initiative and other initiatives to bring migrant workers to Scotland and forge a productive and cosmopolitan workforce. However, there are concerns regarding the level of support available to migrant workers and their families. While the Relocation Advisory Service offers advice for people prior to coming to Scotland, it is important that these employees, and employers, feel that they have sufficient support to help with the wider issues of integration once the workers have arrived. The employer must take into account the social, moral and cultural responsibilities of taking on foreign workers. It is recognised that the organisations who employ migrant workers and gain benefits from them being in the country must play a role in providing them with the support they need. However, support must be available to help employers meet these responsibilities. Language support is clearly a fundamental area where support will be needed in many cases. SCDI is aware that support does exist for businesses employing migrant workers. However, this should be available to businesses across Scotland and should not be determinant on which area they are based.
10. Despite a statement in the draft document that an ESOL strategy is 'to be launched shortly', SCDI is disappointed that this is yet to be addressed. This is an important aspect of ensuring that the benefits of migration to Scotland, and the potential of the Fresh Talent initiative, are maximised. SCDI urges the Scottish Executive to ensure that the ESOL strategy is not only launched, but implemented, without delay.
11. SCDI is concerned that figures from the Commission for Racial Equality Scotland in its manifesto 'Maximising Scotland's Potential' estimate that only 18% of those who would benefit from ESOL provision are currently accessing it.
12. It is important for the Scottish economy not only to attract workers to Scotland, but also to ensure that they will want to stay here. This will only happen if they integrate into their local community. Language is one of the keys, and can also be one of the

barriers to integration. It is important that language provision is available for not only workers but also their families. The figure quoted above suggests that this is not the case and this issue must be addressed. The Guiding Principles state that ‘Scottish businesses could also give consideration to the provision of specialist English language provision for those requiring a certain level of professional and technical English within particular professions’. SCDI accepts this, but feels support must also be available for English language provision for family members.

13. SCDI is aware that high demand is leading to waiting lists for ESOL provision. The Scottish Executive should engage not only with public sector bodies, but also with the private sector to ensure that demand is met with affordable, high quality teaching at appropriate levels. A simple accreditation system could be introduced to ensure that only providers of an acceptable standard could access the available funding. Courses must also be made available in the evenings in order to accommodate those who work during the day.
14. A Scottish Executive report for the 2006 school year shows that 9486 pupils are speaking 137 different first languages in Scotland, including Punjabi, Urdu, Cantonese and Arabic. However, the number speaking other European languages, particularly Polish, is also growing. It is vital that this increase and any further increase in these numbers is matched by an increase in funding. This would allow education authorities to provide the support needed by pupils and their teachers.

### **Foreign Language Teaching**

15. 56% of citizens in EU Member States can hold a conversation in a language in addition to their first language, and 28% speak two additional languages. However, in the UK 62% of people do not know any language other than their mother tongue. The EU has introduced an objective to improve language learning in the EU and to encourage all EU citizens to speak and understand at least two languages in addition to their own. A Commissioner for Multilingualism has recently been appointed and this objective is clearly being taken seriously. The UK is already far behind other EU Member States and it is vital that we don't fall further behind, and that we try to bridge the gap.
16. In order to improve the situation it is vital that there is an increased emphasis on lifelong learning. Lifelong learning is crucial in improving productivity and supplying Scotland with a quality workforce. The Languages Strategy draft for consultation focuses on school pupils. Learning a foreign language should not just be for school pupils and SCDI believes that this must be reflected in the strategy.
17. However, it is widely acknowledged that learning a language is easier at an earlier age and SCDI welcomed the commitment to introduce language learning at primary school age, as well as to introduce other languages through the Languages Fund. As additional languages are introduced it is important that these are linked to economic opportunities and the global economy. As mentioned in paragraph 6 above it is vital that students, and potential students, of languages understand the benefits developing such a skill can bring. There must be a relevance demonstrated and there is perhaps the opportunity to involve local businesses in order to show the employment opportunities which exist for those who can speak other languages. This will be

easier to demonstrate should the languages on offer be linked to economic opportunities.

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