

Glasgow City Council's Response to the Scottish Executive's Consultation on the draft Strategy for Scotland's Languages

Introduction

Glasgow City Council welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the strategy for Scotland's languages. Whilst we acknowledge the importance of effective communication with the public and service users, we would question the value of requiring a separate language plan for public bodies. Given the requirements for a Race Equality Scheme, a Disability Equality Scheme and a Gaelic Language Plan, a further plan would be unnecessary duplication.

We would also argue that the consultation fails to address adequately the issue of the resources needed, both people and financial, in order to fulfil the Language Strategy's aim of developing and supporting Scotland's languages, including British Sign Language (BSL) and other minority languages. This issue is of particular relevance to Glasgow where 100 different languages are spoken in the city's playgrounds and where the ever increasing and now unmet demand for ESOL from asylum seekers, refugees and more recently the growing number of migrant workers, is causing difficulties for the city's colleges.

The Council hosts the Glasgow Translation and Interpreting Service, which has the highest volume of demand for language services in the United Kingdom, at over 60,000 requests a year. By comparison Birmingham records 3,500 requests and Nottingham 9,616 for a similar period. Public bodies need to be adequately resourced for interpreting and translating in a country where there is an increasing diversity of languages. This issue is discussed further below.

The shortage of community language and BSL interpreters should be acknowledged in the strategy.

The Council's response to the five questions follows.

1. Do you agree with the reasons given for promoting and learning languages on pages 4 and 5, and that these are the main reasons for supporting current language initiatives in Scotland? If not, why not?

Yes, but there are three areas where enhancement is required. First, with reference to the languages other than English spoken in Scotland it is stated that "those languages will continue to derive their main support from communities outside Scotland". While that statement is true it should also be acknowledged that over time the version of those languages spoken in Scotland might be subtly different from that spoken elsewhere.

Second, with reference to the languages of the EU and beyond, there may be scope for inclusion in this strategy an appreciation of the educational qualifications of migrants to this country, and also a platform for accreditation of Scotland's pupils' certification abroad. There is increasing focus on the 'European Language Portfolio' as a vehicle for accrediting attainment in language learning, but this is not global. Lord Dearing in his Languages Review interim report favours promoting the use of alternative methods of accreditation such as the '*Languages Ladder*'. This may be an area where it could be inserted that native language competence might be accredited within a formal structure such as the SQA, so as to enhance employability for the individual. A migrant's native language is a skill which should be formally

recognised, certified and nurtured so that it does not disappear with time. This needs to be stated in a more explicit way.

Third, there is reference to the cognitive benefits of bilingualism or to bilingualism as a global norm. In the section on enriching education, allusion to the cognitive advantages of being bilingual would be useful. A reference to the widespread incidence of bilingualism and trilingualism across the globe would contrast starkly with current Scottish practice. The development of a language strategy will in part be delivered by enabling cultural change which will recognise that monolingualism is atypical globally and disadvantageous to Scotland both culturally and economically.

2. Do you agree that the language initiatives described on pages 6-12 and elsewhere are key areas for language promotion in Scotland? If not, why not?

The main areas are covered but the practicalities of delivery are not. The description of the 'ongoing initiatives to improve attainment in literacy' is a general statement and does not do justice to the strategies to address this issue in mainstream education.

Strategic thinking is required in deciding which languages should be offered within the school curriculum. Whilst Scotland is part of the EU and consequently has an important relationship with linguistic communities that form part of the EU, other languages also matter. For example, Mandarin is the most commonly spoken first language in the world and it is likely that it will be an important language for our economic future.

The strategy should address more directly issues of numeracy and literacy among Scots. Evidence would suggest that we are not reaching those who need this support the most.

3. Do you agree that the key principles listed on pages 14 and 15 should shape language activity in Scotland? If not, why not?

Yes, but its effective implementation will be undoubtedly resource intensive. Glasgow is experiencing a huge rise in demand for interpretation and translation services, and is acutely aware of the resource implications of trying to respond adequately to such demand.

Currently, we are commissioning research on migrant workers and the early indications are that the key impact is on translation services and the demand for interpreting. Unsurprisingly, there is significant growth in demand for Slovakian and also Russian. Since many A8 nationals speak Russian as a second language, a Russian interpreter can be used if an interpreter in their own language cannot be provided.

We welcome the strategy's statements that "linguistic diversity will be celebrated and multilingualism will be valued" and that "language learning and acquisition will be promoted" as these are consistent with the principles of '*Citizens of a multilingual World*'. The challenge is to promote language learning among school students and others. There is a need for a restatement of existing policy, and a redefining of core provision to learners.

The section on language provision needs further scrutiny in light of the Gaelic Act, the impending National Plan for Gaelic, the consequent development of local Gaelic Plans and the national Gaelic Education Strategy. It is important that there is synchronised advice to public bodies about such language planning. The national framework for Gaelic which is now legally binding and the public scrutiny being undertaken by Bòrd na Gàidhlig should harmonise with any language plan.

There will be distinct aims in a Gaelic plan and specified tasks and service provision. Consequently, there should be clearer advice around the distinct purposes of a generic language plan and of a Gaelic plan. If these are to be conflated, then again, further clear advice around ensuring that the requirements of the Gaelic Act are being met should be provided. It would also be crucially important that the scrutiny processes being undertaken by the Bòrd are synchronised with any advice on generic language planning.

4. Are there any comments you would like to offer on this strategy in relation to the promotion of languages in Scotland?

In developing the strategy, the Scottish Executive should be mindful of the work currently being undertaken by the Commission on Integration and Cohesion. In its interim statement (February 2007) the Commission suggests language, and in particular not speaking English, is the single largest barrier to community relations. The Commission suggests that lack of English language skills hampers people's efforts to integrate economically and access the UK's labour market, and prevents them from developing a sense of belonging. The Commission stated that while learning English was the responsibility of the individual, local authorities, central government and employers have a key role in supporting migrants to improve their language skills.

Although recommendations for local areas will cover England only, the Commission will consider issues that affect Scotland. The Commission is expected to deliver its findings in June 2007, and in its interim statement, it indicated that the final report will include, amongst other things, guidance on the key questions local authorities should be asking before making decisions as to what information to translate into community languages. This in turn may have implications for the language plans that public bodies are being asked to develop.

At a practical level the Council's experience in providing linguistic support to asylum seekers dispersed to Glasgow has shown the need for better sharing of information about language need. Knowledge of the extent of linguistic diversity is based in part on requests for translators and interpreters and may not be accurate.

Given the acknowledged linguistic diversity in Glasgow the strategy might address how an infrastructure might be developed and resourced. No strategy or policy on languages could be meaningful unless we have objective data on what we are talking about. There is a need to have a linguistic census on the languages spoken, where they are spoken and by how many people. This is not only necessary for long term planning, but it is often an immediate necessity. For instance, when a new language community arrives in Scotland, service providers need to know the language and the size of that

community or its anticipated size so that appropriate language resources can be organised.

In a report to the Council's Equalities Sub Committee in January 2006, it was reported that in 2004/05, almost 9,000 people required ESOL support; by contrast, provision stood at just 2,543 or 28% of demand. Waiting lists were in their thousands. Insufficient funding means that this situation has worsened, partly because of the arrival of migrant workers, and that not enough is being done to support the integration aspects of the Scottish Executive's Fresh talent Initiative.

From an educational perspective, for language learning to flourish the demand needs to be articulated more clearly by employers and by organisations responsible for skills planning locally and nationally. As yet, there is too little recognition of the role that language skills can play in economic competitiveness, employability, inter-cultural skills and inclusiveness.

The purposes of language learning are many, and include personal development, confidence building, intercultural understanding – 'Scotland's place in the world' as well as increased employability in a global market. A distinction needs to be made between the purpose and motivation for learning Gaelic as a native Scot and that which motivates a Scot to learn a European or other language for travel, social or work related reasons.

It must not be forgotten that the hugely important area of ensuring a high level of competence in English, the language of the country in which our learners live and work, is enhanced by learning or maintaining the prior knowledge of a second language. Learning another language may increase competence in the mother tongue or indeed the learning of other languages. Our emphasis in the last decades has been on the learning of modern languages.

5. If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, how do you think you may be able to contribute to the success of the strategy?

The Council supports the commitment to ensuring that "all Scottish residents for whom English or Gaelic is not a first language should have access to alternative language provision where necessary in order to enable them to access services and provide opportunities for them to participate in Scottish life". Examples of the work done in Glasgow that may contribute to the success of the strategy are given below.

When publishing Glasgow's Cultural Strategy, Cultural and Leisure Services (CLS) produced the Executive Summary as a Plain English document, which is also available in community languages on request. Braille and audio CD copies have been made available in libraries, and electronic copies are compatible with text to speech software. In addition, Deaf Connections developed a British Sign Language (BSL) version of the executive summary, which is available online.

CLS has a number of initiatives across its range of services which support and encourage participation from members of the deaf community, Black and minority ethnic (BME) communities, people whose first language is not English, as well Glasgow's Gaelic community. Examples of initiatives include:

Supporting the Deaf Community

The overall remit of the Sports equalities and Physical Activities Team is to 'get more people, more active, more often.' However it has been recognised that being deaf and using British Sign Language can be a significant barrier to participation. The CLS Sports Equalities Team have addressed this gap in service provision by developing a unique approach to providing gym and swimming instruction to deaf people by qualified deaf coaches using BSL. Working in partnership with Deaf Connection, CLS has supported members of the deaf community to qualify as gym instructors who work across the city providing gym inductions in BSL in our leisure facilities. So far 33 inductions have taken place, and continued support has been provided through personal training.

This provision has also extended to providing swimming lessons for deaf people or people who are hard of hearing, with instruction provided by deaf swim teachers themselves. There are currently 8 qualified tutors and this initiative is the first of its kind in Britain.

In addition, CLS in partnership with Deaf Connections and other deaf organisations (e.g. National deaf Children's Society, Scottish Deaf Association and West of Scotland Children's Society) has recently launched the Active Futures Sports Project. With a grant from the Big Lottery Fund, this three-year project aims to help sports organisations, coaching course providers and sports facilities to become more accessible to deaf people of all ages. It also aims to increase the number of deaf people who are qualified sports coaches, leaders and volunteers and increase young deaf people's participation in sports and physical activity. One of the methods in which this will be achieved is through the establishment of a new deaf community sport club at Gorbals Leisure Centre, where taster classes will be organised to encourage deaf people to try out new activities.

Glasgow Museums are also working to develop a new set of gallery tours, and a volunteer training programme has recently been established to train members of the deaf community to become volunteer guides with Glasgow Museums. The pilot has been started at the Museum of Transport and Gallery of Modern Art and should be rolled out across all Glasgow Museum venues. The programme consists of a short training course working with an interpreter and Museum staff to learn about the objects and collections

By supporting linguistic access for deaf people in such practical ways, we are not only widening access to services, but also developing the skills and employability of this community.

Within its Disability Equality Scheme (2006-09), has also committed to developing a BSL policy and action plan. This policy will be developed in consultation with deaf people and will enable the Council to take full account of BSL users in terms of planning for the provision of services. Social Work Services is working with colleagues in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde to improve access to BSL and communication support in health services.

Black and Ethnic Minority Communities

As part of this year's *Aye Write!*, Glasgow's book festival, a short story competition was run under the theme 'One Glasgow, Many Cultures' to celebrate the city's diversity of cultures and encourage a new generation of writers. Although entrants were asked to write in English, the competition

included categories for people for whom English is not their first language. Winners of the competition were announced at a celebrity event on the opening day of the festival.

The draft Strategy for Scotland's Languages outlines the role of the cultural sector in contributing to cultural diversity. Cultural and Leisure Services' Arts Development team work with a range of artists from minority ethnic communities and a key challenge for the future will be to support wider programming of such artists within mainstream venues and programmes. In addition, Glasgow Museums offer a positive action traineeship for minority ethnic people that aims to address their under-representation as employees within the culture and heritage sectors.

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

CLS recognises the importance of developing and delivering literacies provision to engage those who have little or no literacy in English and /or who have little or no literacy in their own mother-tongue. Demand for ESOL provision in the city has increased dramatically over the last few years, particularly with the dispersal of asylum seekers and refugees, and the growth in the number of migrant workers from new EU accession states.

CLS' Community Learning provides ESOL courses ranging from Beginners' English to English Study (Intermediate). There is also a non-certified ESOL speaking course for older learners. Priority groups in this category include learners from the settled community, refugees and asylum seekers, migrant workers from EU accession states and partners and spouses of learners. Potential learners range from those with a high level of education and qualification in their home country to those who are illiterate in their mother tongue. Some learners require ESOL qualifications, while others need to develop their listening and speaking skills to participate more fully in society. In 2003/04 581 learners used this service, and in 2005/06 this rose to 1,300.

Many ESOL courses are delivered in community locations and often in partnership with host organisations (e.g. Chinese Healthy Living Centre). The emphasis is on courses which are easily accessible and at times that suit the learners. Courses are supported by crèche facilities, where required, thus removing a major barrier to learning.

In addition, adults with English as a second or additional language are one of the seven priority groups identified in the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Report (ALNIS, 2001). The Glasgow Community Learning Strategy Partnership (GCLSP) is committed to supporting and improving adult literacies provision for these learners. Currently, 10 of the partnership's 45 providers offers a range of services to ESOL learners including one to one tuition and group work, dedicated and integrated tuition. Of particular interest is the emerging need for workplace Literacies for ESOL learners, who may have difficulty securing and maintaining work and upgrading skills due to combined language and literacy difficulties. The GCLSP recognises the need to develop these services and has funded literacies provision specifically for ESOL care sector workers. Impact can be demonstrated through the feedback received by those who attend the ESOL sessions.

Gaelic

With over 10% of Scotland's Gaelic speakers, the largest number outwith the Western Isles, Glasgow is seen as the centre for Gaelic culture in mainland

Scotland. CLS' Arts development team has a part-time Gaelic Arts Officer who has developed a Gaelic Arts Strategy (2006-2009), the first dedicated Gaelic arts strategy for any local authority area in Scotland. Language is one aspect of the strategy, which aims to establish and develop an infrastructure for Gaelic arts in Glasgow, to extend the range of Gaelic arts, and to increase access and participation, thereby developing audiences and raising the profile of Gaelic arts and culture.

The language around Gaelic Medium and Gaelic as a subject should be refined. For example, the "shortage of Gaelic teachers" should read the "shortage of Gaelic medium teachers". Separate allusion should be made to development of the language for learners. Across the section there is considerable imprecision. It would be useful to allude to the GLPS programme in a redrafted section, which clearly delineated Gaelic Medium development from the development of opportunities to learn the language as a subject. GME provision should be identified as cross-sectoral encompassing provision at Pre-5, Primary and Secondary school levels. A further specific allusion to the Sgoil Ghàidhlig Ghlaschu after the sentence on IT delivery would provide a more accurate picture of GME Secondary Curricular development as the school occupies a unique position at present and has a recognised role in developing the GME secondary curriculum in Scotland.

Other Issues

The final two paragraphs of the strategy on cultural/linguistic diversity in relation to other minority/community languages are muddled and unclear. There appears to be confusion around anti-racism, cultural diversity and linguistic diversity. Cultural diversity is not always based on linguistic diversity. Afro-Caribbean culture may be expressed through English but it is nevertheless distinct and adds to cultural diversity. It would be important to clarify here that the language strategy would be focus on language diversity. This may intersect with cultural diversity. There should be a clearly stated aim for the strategy which focuses on linguistic diversity. Subsequent local strategies may develop inconsistencies if this is not clearly resolved at this stage.