



A Strategy for Scotland's Languages Consultation

A Response from West Lothian College

Camille Nehme

March 2007

Introduction:

A Strategy for Scotland's Languages is urgently and speedily in need due to the fast demographic changes that have been taking place in Scotland. Since languages are vital for communication and understanding among different people and cultures, having no dynamic language strategy can negatively impact on community relations.

Below are a few comments on various aspects of the draft strategy: (The comments are not directed by suggested questions)

Language learning in primary schools:

While the draft strategy rightly emphasises that language learning should start at primary school, but it would be better if the draft states whether this will be compulsory or not. As it is known in language learning cultures, the earlier foreign language immersion starts, the more effective it is, therefore encouragement to take up learning a foreign language should begin as early as possible.

Minimum number of languages:

Ideally students should leave school having had the opportunity to learn, as a minimum, three languages. Very early at primary a second language could be introduced and a third language could be introduced at secondary. The final result would be that every Scottish student will leave school with three languages (which is the case in many language learning countries).

Bilingualism is not only for migrants:

In the section on Other Minority/Community Languages (pg. 11), the draft strategy states that "recent immigrants and speakers of community languages who are learning English have the potential to become bilingual". It is important to add here that native speakers of English who learn other languages can become bilingual as well, given a supportive environment is provided.

Translation:

While the draft strategy discusses the teaching of languages, it does not make suggestions about teaching Translation at school. This is a gap in the draft strategy. Translation could be introduced early at secondary school to enhance learning languages. While not all people want to become translators, people and/or the economy can benefit from an ability to translate from one language to another.

Emphasis on United Nations official languages:

The strategy rightly emphasises that European languages, Gaelic, Scots and other community languages should be taught but it fails to stress the importance of teaching the United Nations official languages which are spoken by the majority of the world people. Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish are the six official languages of the UN. They are so for obvious reasons. It makes sense that these languages are taught for communication purposes with the rest of the world.

Employers can not be expected to pay for ESOL learners:

It is unrealistic to assume that employers will pay for the English language learning of ESOL learners. If people do not know the dominant language in Scotland (English), they are more likely destined to have menial jobs. Most employers are interested in workers filling these menial jobs by temporary workers. Once temporary workers start to cost employers, employers may consider that employing people whose first language is not English is a burden on their business. This could lead to institutional discrimination.

Funding ESOL:

Not stating a clear funding strategy for ESOL will marginalize ESOL learners and deprive them of the opportunity to become equal and full citizens. It should not be left to ESOL learners to fund themselves or to employers to fund them. Not knowing English denies ESOL learners the vehicle to access their rights.

Current ESOL literacies definition used in Scotland is discriminatory:

The current ESOL literacies definition in Scotland discriminates against ESOL learners who are literate in their own language and perpetuates discrimination. A person who is literate in their own language but cannot speak or read a word of English should be entitled to ESOL literacies or literacies funding as their literacy is not functional anymore. This current situation which prevents individuals who do not speak, read or write sufficient English from free language provision prevents them from reaching their potential, both in the work place and their community/society. The definition has also burdened the conscience of many ESOL practitioners/providers, as they are the ones who implement these discriminatory rules. This also contravenes the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 (pg. 17) – if people of ethnic minorities who are literate in their first language are not entitled to receive free support – then this is not equal opportunities.

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Consultation Questions
Section 1

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?

(Please see the whole response in number 4 below)

2. Do you agree that the language initiatives described on pages 6 – 12 and elsewhere

are the key areas for language promotion in Scotland? If not, why not?

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

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

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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?

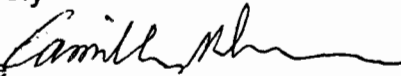
Dear Sir or Madam

Please find a hard copy of the response from West Lothian College for "A Strategy for Scotland's Languages"

The response was approved by the College principal Mrs Sue Pinder.

Yours sincerely

Camille Nehme
ESOL Lecturer



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