

A Strategy For Scotland's Languages

**Response to the Consultation Document
on behalf of the members of
Strathisla Scots Spickers**

"Leids an brigs ar aye needin supportit"

Auld Brig, Keith

Strathisla Scots Spickers
C/o 35 Main Street, Newmill, Keith, Banffshire AB55 6UR

To: A Strategy for Scotland's Languages
Scottish Executive Education Department
Cultural Policy Division
Area 1-A North
Victoria Quay
Edinburgh
EH6 6QQ

The following response to the consultation of the proposed *Strategy for Scotland's Language* as set out in the Scottish Executive document of February 2007 is on behalf of members of the Strathisla Scots Spickers. We are responding as a group and give consent for the content of our response to be made public.

Summary

The Strategy contributes nothing new to assist the Scots language. Any mention of the Scots language is mainly taken from the factsheet drawn up by Michael Forsyth around 1995. It is telling that the Scottish Executive has nothing new to add from the previous twelve years and has nothing concrete to offer for the future protection or promotion of the Scots language. Previous Government promises to support Scots (to include a question in the household survey, to advance a Centre for the Languages of Scotland etc) have obviously been abandoned as they have not happened to date and they haven't been reiterated in this proposed Strategy.

As it stands, this Strategy will contribute to the continuing and deliberate decline of the Scots language. This is unacceptable. It is the responsibility of the Scottish Executive to show leadership and act to protect and develop the Scots Language. It should not be the role of the Scottish Executive to encourage deterioration and decline by their inaction.

Rationale (pages 5 - 6)

While Scotland's responsibility as custodian of our indigenous languages is highlighted in the Introduction (page 4), this has mysteriously been dropped from the Rationale of the Strategy (page 5). The unique nature of our indigenous languages and the unique responsibility of our institutions to promote and protect them should be highlighted as an important reason for adopting any language strategy.

Omitting the Scottish Executives duty to protect our indigenous languages from the rationale of the Strategy ensures it is omitted from the whole of the Strategy. This is particularly pertinent to the Scots language as, unlike Scots Gaelic, the Scottish Executive has no policy, statistics, national language plan, or priorities for the future development of the language, culture, broadcasting or education.

Language Initiatives / Policies (pages 7 -13)

The section on Scots in the language initiatives section of the policy (pages 9 – 10) is at best non-committal spin and at worst demeaning and disrespectful. The Strategy quotes that "*.. Scots is not an endangered language..*" (page 9). The Strathisla Scots Spickers rejects this statement and insists it be removed. We have made a request under Freedom of Information for copies of the evidence the Scottish Executive has used to make this statement. To date no evidence has been produced. As the Scottish Executive has chosen not to collect figures on the numbers of Scots speakers, readers and writers we do

not see how they can make this statement. A lack of information on the decline of the language does not mean the language is not under threat – it merely means there is a lack of information! Indeed the Cultural Strategy set out in 1999 stated that “...*the dominant position of English arguably has a negative effect upon Scotland’s other languages and dialects...*”

The background information on Scots language contained in the Strategy is disrespectful and seems designed to promote inequality. Examples include “*Unlike Gaelic, Scots... has considerable overlap with Scottish Standard English*”. This is a strange statement to make for what are effectively cousin languages. Why are the overlaps of other languages not highlighted as well? Norwegian and Swedish, Catalan and Spanish, Scots and Ulster Scots, Irish and Scots Gaelic? Also why should we celebrate the contribution Scots has made to the modern English vocabulary? Why not celebrate the contribution English, Gaelic, French, German, Norse etc has made to modern Scots vocabulary? Although these points may seem small and petty, when put in the context of this document it all contributes to an underlying ethos of inequality and discrimination towards the Scots language and Scots language speakers.

When the language Initiatives are listed there is only one in relation to the Executives involvement with Scots language. This is the Executives National Guidelines on English Language 5-14. It should be made clear in the description that these are non-prescriptive and have been in force for twelve years. It should also be made clear that there is no evidence being gathered on the effectiveness of these guidelines and whether they are contributing in any way to the protection or promotion of the Scots language. This may also be a good place to mention the lack of any provision for teacher training in Scots language.

Mentioning the important contribution of groups like the Scots Language Society, Scots Language Resource Centre etc merely highlights the lack of action and ambition from the Executive and shows it is lagging behind rather than showing leadership.

Key Principles of Language Provision (page 14 – 16)

The Principles which guide the Strategy in relation to Scots language are weak and have to be improved if the Strategy is to have any impact.

Like Gaelic, the Scots language will have to be protected and promoted. To say it is to be treated with respect and pride will do little to prevent any decline in its usage.

The principles under the heading have no definitive purpose. To say that “the use of Scots *should* be encouraged..... that the Executive will *continue* to support policies to promote Scots *where appropriate*..... and that Public Bodies will be *encouraged* to *explore opportunities* to promote Scots” is pointless and mere spin. At the very least the Executive should commit to work up and present a Scots language Bill to enshrine the protection and development of the language in Law.

Additional Comments

As proposed by the Scottish Sub-Committee of the European Bureau of Lesser Used Languages, The Scots language is entitled to similar legislative provision as the Gaelic language. In order to achieve this it will be necessary for the Executive to set up a Ministerial Advisory Group on Scots, similar to the Advisory group for Gaelic to examine and advise the Executive on the measures which should be adopted to promote and develop the Scots language.

In the short term such work would involve ascertaining accurate numbers of Scots speakers and their needs and to initiate research into Scots language development. This should lead to ensuring that Scots is taught in our education system with proper backing, finances, training and support.

The logical outcome of any Ministerial Advisory Group would be the setting up of a *Board of Scots* to ensure that Scots is given official status and recognition equivalent to that accorded English and Gaelic.

Conclusions

This document cannot accurately be described as a strategy. This has taken a number of years to write and is merely a listing of the Scottish Executives actions to date. It does not set targets, goals or aims and contributes nothing to assist the development or protection of the Scots language. In relation to Scots it is mainly a reworking of the Scots language factsheet drawn up by Michael Forsyth MP around 1995.

It is the responsibility of the Scottish Executive to show leadership and act as custodian of our indigenous languages. This should be reflected in the Strategy.

There is no evidence to back up the assertions that Scots is not an endangered language and this deliberate misinformation should be removed.

The Principles which guide the Strategy in relation to Scots language are weak and have to be improved if the Strategy is to have any impact. Like Gaelic, the Scots language will have to be protected and promoted. To merely say it is to be treated with respect and pride will do little to develop the language.

The Scots language is entitled to similar legislative provision as other indigenous languages. Therefore it will be necessary for the Executive to set up a Ministerial Advisory Group on Scots with the aim of eventually introducing a Scots language Bill to ensure that Scots is given official status and recognition equivalent to that accorded English and Gaelic.

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