

Scottish Executive

Consultation on Scotland's Strategy for Languages

Response by the National Library of Scotland

The National Library of Scotland (NLS) is pleased to respond to this consultation. This is especially timely as NLS is currently developing its first Language Plan, in order to make our collections, services and expertise as widely accessible as possible, both within Scotland and throughout the world.

In general terms, we have to say that we feel the Strategy is somewhat superficial. Whilst it draws attention to links between languages and broader policy goals, the lack of detail or action plans means that it is difficult to see the document being very effective in influencing policy and best practice.

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?

Broadly, yes. The Executive may wish to add another – 'creating knowledge'. This is to recognise that greater multilingualism will improve the national capacity for research, and the creation and development of knowledge. We suggest that this is sufficiently distinct from 'enriching education'.

We believe that the Strategy should say more about the important role of tertiary education in support of language provision – development of in-depth language ability (in a range of languages) in Scotland will contribute significantly to several wider policy aims (including increasing economic opportunity).

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?

Broadly yes. We feel that the Strategy could be clearer with regard to the relationship between policy language and cultural diversity. The paragraph on the role of cultural bodies talks about initiatives to extend access to museums to people from black and ethnic minority groups, but the role of *languages* within this initiative is not described.

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

The Strategy states that: *Scottish public bodies should seek to provide access to high quality translation, interpretation and communication support (tics) services in order to ensure fair and accessible services for everyone.*

Whilst we agree with the aspirations of this statement (fair and equal treatment for all), we do not think that it is realistic to develop expectations that public services will be made available to people in any language through translation or interpretation. Multilingualism should be promoted and valued, but all Scottish residents should be encouraged (and if necessary supported, for example through the forthcoming ESOL strategy) to have a reasonable grasp of English. This will ultimately be a more effective way of ensuring fair and equal access than spending by public bodies on translation and interpretation services.

We believe that the Strategy somewhat underplays the dynamism of migration and the importance of responding quickly to new social trends which have important linguistic dimensions. It is important that new immigrant communities have opportunities to learn English and become familiar with local community activities and information. The role of local public libraries in providing free and local access to English language materials, and also to minority languages used by local communities (which might include Polish, Latvian or Lithuanian) is likely to be important here.

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

NLS acts as an important national resource for Scottish cultural output, along with other national collections (notably the National Archives of Scotland). Locally, public libraries form a crucial local resource for providing information in many languages (including minority languages) and the role that the library and information sector plays in promoting access to languages, and in support of the general policy aims highlighted in the consultation should be recognised in the Strategy.

The Strategy should consider the role and potential of the internet in enhancing access to information in multiple languages.

The Strategy should refer to the role of Creative Scotland (to be set up under the Culture Bill) with regard to cultural language and literature issues.

The Strategy appears largely aimed at the public sector, although there are some references to business. If it is the case that this strategy is aimed primarily at public bodies, it would be helpful for this to be stated more explicitly; if not the case, a clearer explanation of the role to be played by the private sector would be beneficial.

We feel the practical influence of the Strategy would be enhanced if more explicit links were made with other government policy areas. Reference is rightly made to the important school curriculum review for example, but there is no reference to the Executive's International Strategy or Cultural Policy, nor to relevant UK or European initiatives. There is an opportunity here to highlight the role of languages in contributing to these policy areas.

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?

In fulfilment of our role as a major international research library, NLS has been collecting material in foreign languages and about foreign cultures since the late 17th century, especially where there is a connection or affinity with Scottish subjects (or where there is a clear demand from Scottish researchers). As well as our collections, our customer demands (both actual and potential) are obviously important factors for us to consider. NLS is not able to provide multilingual services in all aspects of our services (website, phone/email enquiries, reader services, etc) and so we have to develop practical and cost-effective ways to manage potential demands. In considering our own language provision, NLS therefore needs to balance a number of factors, which are summarised below.

Factor	Examples of Languages
Current non-English customer profile through the reading rooms	Chinese, Japanese, Korean.
Potential demand for material	Any
The linguistic and cultural demography of Scotland and the need to recognise and cater for diversity	Chinese, Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, Polish, Gaelic
Current (non-English) collecting patterns	French, German, Italian, Spanish, Russian
The overall pattern of our collections (shaped partly by historic collecting priorities)	French, German, Italian, Spanish, Russian, Scandinavian languages, Esperanto, Braille (and other languages for blind people)
The special place of Gaelic, and Scottish policy towards Gaelic.	Gaelic

NLS is currently developing a language plan to co-ordinate our policy and practice in this area.

We note that the European Commission, through its digital library initiatives (see http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/digital_libraries/index_en.htm) is seeking to bring cultural material held by member states together and aims to introduce a degree of multi-lingual functionality to this material so that it can be enjoyed and understood beyond national language communities. NLS is seeking to play an active role in such initiatives.

NLS has a number of specific activities which are of critical importance in supporting access and development of languages in Scotland including maintaining the Bibliography of Scotland, the Bibliography of Scottish Gaelic and the Bibliography of Scottish Literature in Translation (BoSLiT), which records Scottish publishing translated into foreign languages and is an important barometer of global interest in Scottish writing.

In general terms, and in line with our role as Scotland's National Library, NLS would be pleased to contribute to the further development of language policy in any appropriate way.