

Submission from British Council Scotland, Graeme Downie

Scottish Parliament European and External Relations Committee
Inquiry on Learning Foreign Languages in Primary Schools
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1. About British Council Scotland

Established in 1946 in Edinburgh, British Council Scotland's purpose was, from the outset, to promote the best of Scottish culture and learning to the rest of the world – bringing foreign academics, students, policy-makers and artists to Scotland and taking counterparts abroad.

Ever since, British Council Scotland has enabled thousands of young people from Scotland to study and work abroad, helped schools and higher education institutions create partnerships in other countries, and supported professional development through international experience.

In addition, British Council Scotland has brought the brightest students from other countries to work, study and teach in Scotland, broadening the cultural horizons of our young people.

In a globalised marketplace, we believe that Scotland must be an outward-looking nation. Building relationships and trust between the people of Scotland and other countries helps remove barriers to overseas trade and business and so boosts Scotland's economic prosperity.

Today, British Council Scotland is highly valued for its global reach. Through a network of offices in 110 countries, we can pull together overseas knowledge, experience, and perspectives, catalyse relationships and comment on issues affecting Scotland's profile and standing in the world. Our overseas offices are also an invaluable source of support and assistance to visiting cultural and educational delegates from Scotland.

2. Importance of Language in Primary School

British Council Scotland believes the Committee is correct to highlight the importance of foreign languages in primary schools. Early teaching of foreign languages not only enables children to acquire linguistic skills that they will use later in their life, but also has important indirect benefits. These include :

- Enhanced mental flexibility
- Enhanced problem-solving ability (including organisational skills)
- Expanded metalinguistic ability (intercultural skills)
- Enhanced learning capacity
- Enhanced interpersonal ability (team-working/communication and presentation skills/perception of the perspective of others)
- Reduced age-related mental diminishment (dementia, Alzheimer's)

Conclusion 1: The teaching of foreign languages from an early age is essential, both for the direct knowledge it gives children and for the ability that language has to provide cultural education and lift horizons and ambitions

3. Language Rich Europe

In November 2012, 'Language Rich Europe', a major consortium project led by the British Council and funded by the European Commission, provided a baseline report on the provision of modern language teaching across Europe was published. The report, entitled 'Trends in Policies and Practices for Multilingualism in Europe', examined how different European countries approached the teaching and use of regional, minority and foreign languages and included a chapter on Scotland..

The report highlights that Scotland was an early adopter of primary foreign languages (1992). By 2005, practically all Scottish primary schools taught a foreign language. Today, all young people have an entitlement to learn at least one foreign language from the later stage of primary school, but it is not compulsory. In addition, in most cases, Foreign Language teaching is limited to the final two years of primary school – 10 to 12 year olds - and has a small time allocation, There have also been recent concerns relating to teacher training and local authority support (due to funding reductions).

The report concluded by saying that "Although the issue of foreign language learning appears now to be creeping up the political agenda, there is clearly a need to continue to make a strong case for the social, cultural, intellectual and economic benefits to Scotland, as well as to invest in high quality training for teachers."

Conclusion 2: Scotland has led the way in the teaching of foreign languages in the past and it is essential that funding and training is improved if this is to be maintained

4. Economic Impact of Language

An ability to do business with people in their own language is a crucial skill which demonstrates an enthusiasm towards other countries' cultures that can help create goodwill and smooth negotiations.

However, further investigation in the Language Rich Europe report found that Scottish employers tend to circumvent rather than address language skill needs by exporting only to Anglophone countries or those where they can easily find English speakers. This approach is severely limiting Scotland's economic potential when one considers that only 6% of the world's population speak English as a first language and 75% of the world's population don't speak any English.

One attitude might be that because an increasing amount of business is conducted online and the predominant language of the internet is English, speaking a foreign language is less important. However, while English was previously the dominant language of the internet, this is no longer the case. In 2000, English represented

51% of language usage on the internet but by 2009 this was down to 29% due to the steady growth in other European languages and in Chinese.

Conclusion 3: It is critical to Scotland's economic success in the future that businesses realise the importance of language being taught from an early age. The "English is enough" attitude must be challenged if Scotland is to prosper in the future.

5. Scottish Government Initiatives

The Language Rich Europe report also commented on three areas of Scottish Government policy: the "1+2" approach, Gaelic Medium Education and the Scottish Baccalaureate in Languages.

i) "1+2" Approach

British Council Scotland welcomes the objectives of the "1+2" approach and the strong commitment from the Scottish Government to the principle that multilingualism is a good thing that can, in part, be delivered through the school system. We await with interest their plans for implementing this approach to language learning.

ii) Gaelic Teaching

The learning of Gaelic has been treated fundamentally differently in Scotland from that of foreign languages, with the setting up, from 1986 onwards, of Gaelic medium units in primary schools throughout Scotland, complemented by Gaelic-medium pre-school provision in many areas.

The most recent HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) report found that 2,312 children were being educated in the Gaelic medium. Most of these children do not have Gaelic as first language, while Gaelic is also offered as a second language in a number of primary schools. This focused approach, making Gaelic an early requirement for many schools, has clearly had a strong impact in preserving and promoting the language; something the Scottish Government is clearly keen on continuing given the announcement on 4 January 2013 of an additional £4m of funding.

iii) Scottish Baccalaureate in Languages

Although unable to examine this in detail, the Language Rich Europe report found that the Scottish Baccalaureate in Languages is an "interesting and promising initiative" aimed at bridging the gap between school and university and providing skills for learning, life and work.

Conclusion 4: The approach taken to Gaelic-medium education has shown that with focus and investment, language can be taught effectively from an early age and there are early signs that the approach being taken in the "1+2" initiative will be successful as well

6. Programmes to solve the problems

As well as being engaged in policy work through projects such as Language Rich Europe, British Council Scotland also delivers programmes that seek to have a practical impact on solving the issues identified. Two such programmes, Connecting Classrooms and Foreign Language Assistants are described below, along with testimony from those who have taken part about the benefits. We will continue these programmes in Scotland in the future and are, in fact, looking to grow the number of Scottish schools involved in both.

i) Connecting Classrooms

Connecting Classrooms is a flagship British Council programme for international work in schools. It is a three year programme (2012-2015), undertaken in partnership with Department for International Development (DFID). It builds on many years of experience with Global School Partnerships and Connecting Classrooms to be a more costs effective offer for schools, operating in over 50 countries.

We believe it is vital to engage with pupils in primary and secondary schools so that children and young people start to learn about the world around them through personal contacts with counterparts in other countries.

The Connecting Classrooms offer includes:

- A partner-finding service through Schools Online
- International School Award
- Grant funding partnerships
- Access to professional development, both online and face to face

In 2010-11, we worked with 351 schools, 19 higher education institutions (HEIs) and 22 further education institutions across Scotland.

Appendix 1 shows a case study, from Mearns High School, describing their Connecting Classrooms project undertaken with a cluster of six local primary schools, and what can be achieved.

ii) Foreign Language Assistants

Foreign Language Assistants (FLAs) – be they native speakers of French, German, Spanish, Italian or Mandarin Chinese – bring a cultural dimension to language learning that energises students and helps them attain greater fluency in their chosen foreign language.

Bringing FLAs to Scotland is a reciprocal arrangement that allows the British Council to send English Language Assistants (ELAs) from Scottish universities to schools in other countries.

British Council Scotland manages the FLA programme with a grant from the Scottish Government. In 2012-2013, 70 FLAs will work in Scottish schools – an increase of

20% on the previous year. Meanwhile, a total of 365 Scottish ELAs are teaching in other countries this academic year.

iii) Comenius Assistants

Comenius, part of the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme, brings together schools, colleges and local education authorities across Europe and enables pupils and staff to travel and experience life within schools in different countries through the four different strands, School Partnerships, Regio Partnerships, In-service training and Assistants.

Since 2009, Comenius partnerships have created links between Scotland and 25 different European countries ranging, from Norway and Turkey to Portugal and Lithuania.

In 2010–11, a total of 72 Scottish schools and further education institutions took part in Comenius. Scotland welcomed six Comenius assistants, while 52 assistants from Scotland travelled to other European countries. 144 participants from Scotland also received funding for in-service training.

Conclusions

- The teaching of foreign languages from an early age is essential, both for the direct knowledge it gives children and for the ability language has to raise inter-cultural awareness and lift horizons and ambitions
- Scotland has led the way in the teaching of foreign languages in the past and it is essential that funding and training is improved if this is to be maintained
- It is critical to Scotland's economic success in the future that businesses realise the importance of languages being taught from an early age. The "English is enough" attitude must be challenged if Scotland is to prosper in the future.
- The approach taken to Gaelic-medium education has shown that with focus and investment, language can be taught effectively from an early age. There are early signs that the approach being taken in the "1+2" initiative will be successful as well.

British Council Scotland would be pleased to provide more detail by way or oral evidence to the Committee.

Appendix 1 – Case Studies

Connecting Classrooms – Mearns and Surrounding Primary Schools

Over the past three years, Mearns Castle High School, along with their six Cluster Primary Schools - Mearns Primary, Hazeldene Nursery, Eaglesham Primary, Kirkhill Primary and Calderwood Lodge Primary - have been involved in the British Council's Connecting Classrooms project. The broad aims of the project have been to forge links with partner schools from different countries, introducing aspects of the

reciprocal culture into the existing curricula of the schools as well as developing an understanding of the different educational systems across the globe. Mearns Castle High School found all this to be stimulating, but also realised the huge potential in further strengthening links within their own cluster of primary schools.

In 2009, Mearns Castle and its feeder primaries were awarded £6,000 funding over three years as part of the Connecting Classrooms initiative; to create a link between the Scottish schools and seven counterpart schools in Delhi, India. One of the head teachers from the Indian schools came over for an initial visit and while he was over we held a 'Scottish Highland Commonwealth Games' where we invited all of the pupils from the primary schools to come to our school and collaborate in putting on a 'Commonwealth Games' to celebrate the Games being held in India and coming to Scotland the next time.

Following this, seven of our members of staff went over to India for 8 days to find out more about the partner schools and they got a really good feel for the culture of India and Delhi in particular. One of the key things we did was to produce an Indian-Scottish recipe book. We got the pupils in the Indian schools to write down their favourite recipes and combined these with recipes put forward by our own pupils. We had this designed, published and sold over 500 copies as part of our fundraising efforts.

It was through such initiatives that the Connecting Classroom teachers really began to collaborate as a team. The Mearns Castle Cluster was already a positive and energetic group of schools, but the Connecting Classrooms projects brought about a new dynamic and ethos to the team. When we hosted the eight Head Teachers from Delhi, the conversations between all parties was based upon a willingness to find out about each other's cultures and educational systems. As a cluster, we began to further discuss collaborative ideas and further ways to keep the partnerships alive when the British Council funding ends. Indeed, the next event we are hosting as a cluster is an Indian themed sports day.

As the official three years of funding comes to an end, it is clear that we would like to continue to work with our partner schools in India and are currently investigation possible grants to support this. But as a cluster, focusing on international partnerships, the possibilities are endless in terms of what can be achieved. Links between all the schools in our cluster have undoubtedly been further strengthened by the project, with both teachers and pupils developing not only an greater understanding of Indian culture, but also raising awareness of the great work that goes on within each of our schools.

Case Study – Foreign Language Assistance

Zeng Miqun taught Mandarin Chinese at Our Lady's High School, Cumbernauld, North Lanarkshire. She and her students built a 'Great Wall' showcasing Chinese culture and pupils' work.

The Chinese 'Great Wall' project enhanced pupils language skills and raised their awareness of Chinese culture. The display of pupils' work helped them build their confidence and creativity in learning."

“The Chinese class is great fun. We learnt a lot - not just language but also about the culture. I liked trying some tai chi.” - S6 pupil

Comenius Case Study – Pentland Primary School, Edinburgh

Hosting their first Comenius Assistant prepared Pentland Primary School pupils in Edinburgh, Scotland for true international citizenship, not only through their proficiency at mastering another language but also in their confidence and international outlook.

Guillem Montero from Majorca, Spain spent six months as a Comenius Assistant at the school introducing Spanish language and culture and raising awareness of European issues. He was also instrumental in supporting the first year of their Multilateral Comenius School Partnership. He brought a ‘real life’ dimension to the multilateral Comenius project for pupils, parents and teachers and added authenticity in communication between Pentland and its partner school in Spain.

Guillem was involved in all school activities and took the lead role in the Mother Tongue Month activity within the school. He also coached Year 6 pupils entering the City of Edinburgh Euroquiz in February 2010. His work highlighted the global dimension in active citizenship and cultural awareness.

Rebecca Annand, Principle Teacher at Pentland Primary School said: “Through class lessons the pupils gained invaluable insight into life in Majorca and Spain. They were able to share their Spanish holiday experiences with Guillem, and he made it easy for pupils to identify the similarities and differences between life in Scotland and life in Spain. He engaged and motivated pupils to learn through using everyday experiences that they could relate to school life, holidays, hobbies, Christmas and Easter, for instance. His use of technology like YouTube really brought learning to life for the pupils. He also set up an after school class for teachers and pupils to improve their conversational skills in Spanish.”

With their Comenius Assistant’s support, staff and pupils developed their knowledge and understanding of the diversity of European cultures and languages, and the value of this diversity. It gave pupils an opportunity to build upon their basic life skills, enhance their personal development and their European citizenship. In return, the school provided Guillem with a realistic picture of Scottish education and an opportunity to become involved in language teaching, environmental issues and global citizenship. He relished the opportunity to accompany students on school outings as it gave him a better understanding of UK education outside the classroom.

Guillem described his assistantship as being a “great opportunity to get to know the local people and culture thanks to the school community. It gave me the opportunity to reflect and understand the differences between my country and theirs.”

Plans to continue the international dimension at Pentland Primary School are already in hand as the school has been awarded another Comenius Assistant this year. Marko Neumann from Germany hopes to build on the work which Guillem developed

within the school but from a German perspective. The school is also beginning their second year of their Comenius School Partnership.