

Submission from North Ayrshire Council

Is there enough funding for the Scottish Government's proposals?

Dr Alasdair Allan, Minister for Learning, Sciences and Scotland's Languages, in his response to the working party's report announced, subject to parliamentary budget approval, an additional 4 million in 2013/14 to local authorities to enable them to begin to plan for implementation of the report's recommendations, with further discussions concerning the longer term. Whilst this announcement is welcome, it is most difficult to advise if this funding will meet requirements. At this moment in time, local authorities are unaware of the recommendations of the Implementation Delivery Group. Until these recommendations become available, it may not be possible to cost the planning and implementation of the initiative. However, in looking at the result of our North Ayrshire audit, it is apparent that in order to provide a range of languages staff will require to be trained in both the appropriate language and pedagogy in order to allow the initiative to proceed. In particular L2 and L3 will require such input in order to provide pupils with a quality experience.

Do existing teachers have the skills and teaching resources available for language tuition? Are existing teachers and teaching assistants equipped to teach languages? Should there be more training and support for new and existing teachers for language teaching.

Whilst it may be argued that teachers should be able to draw upon the skills they possess in respect of teaching, it should be questioned if they are in position to teach a foreign language. In many cases, teachers may not have been exposed to languages since they themselves left school, and this assumes they chose to study such to Certificate Level. Furthermore, if it is intended to teach a diversity of languages to ensure wide ranging global partnership, the proposed languages may differ from those previously studied by the teacher. In teaching languages successfully, there needs to be an acknowledgement that teachers require to be confident in the use of languages. In view of this, it is apparent that learning in the language will be required prior to its presentation. Therefore, it becomes essential that new and existing teachers receive learning in the languages to be taught.

In respect of resources, attention requires to be given to the fact that this initiative is causing Modern Language teaching to begin much earlier than previously the norm. Languages teaching will now begin at 19, requiring the development of suitable age related resources.

What is the capacity within the curriculum to accommodate greater language study? Can language learning be embedded in existing teaching?

North Ayrshire Council welcomes the "1+2 Approach" and understands the ideology behind such. As pupils will benefit from this policy, not only in their childhood but also in their adulthood it is important that the curriculum is able to support its development. Reflecting upon Curriculum for Excellence, and in particular, the four "Contexts for Learning" it can be concluded that this policy can be developed within the curriculum. Each of the four Contexts exemplify a variety of situations where language learning can occur.

The choice of languages for teaching – which languages should children be learning and why? The role of languages in economic development.

Traditionally in Scottish schools, pupils have learned modern European languages such as French, Spanish, German and Italian. Sadly, evidence suggests that today less

pupils are choosing to study languages to Certificate level. In developing a “1+2 Approach” consideration should be given to the purpose of language teaching. Do we continue to teach French as this would appear to be the language in which the majority of teachers are trained? Alternatively, would it be more appropriate to teach Spanish as this is the predominate language of many nations and more popular with pupils and parents. In looking at the current economic situation, arguments can be put forward in favour of the teaching of German as Germany would appear to be the strongest European economy. On a global basis, there is an argument for the expansion of languages such as Mandarin or even community languages such as Urdu or Punjabi. If a “1+2 Approach” argues that through Curriculum for Excellence “there is a recognition of the importance of language learning as a communicative skill which will enable our young people to participate fully in a global society and economy”. It is therefore important that our pupils are taught languages that reflect such. Careful consideration will require to be given to the languages to be taught, beyond opting for those languages that have been taught historically.

Further to the above, recognition has to be given to the place of Gaelic in the learning of Scottish pupils. The Scottish Government’s policy for statutory Gaelic Language planning, and Education Scotland’s promotion of Scots, may influence the choice of language being taught at both L2 and L3.

In conclusion, whilst welcoming “Language Learning in Scotland : A 1 + 2 Approach “, North Ayrshire Council awaits the Scottish Government’s development of an engagement strategy, including an Implementation Delivery Group, to help inform how we take forward such a policy in schools across North Ayrshire.

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