

Submission by the Scottish Esperanto Education Group

0.1 This submission brings to the committee's attention the educational value of the easy-to-learn international language Esperanto – not as a means of advancing Esperanto itself, but because of its value as a gateway to learning other languages.

0.2 Drawing upon a very successful pilot project of teaching Esperanto in English primary schools, this submission, prepared in consultation with Angela Tellier who has been heavily involved in the development of that project, comes from individual speakers of Esperanto who support the idea of Esperanto as a bridge to successfully learning other foreign languages, not as a means in itself.

1. GATEWAY LANGUAGES

1.1 Observers of the Scottish educational system will be already well aware of the value of learning languages as gateways to other languages. There are two primary examples of this that have been successful in the country's history of education.

1. Latin – the Latin language has had a great value in the Scottish educational system, for a number of reasons:
 - a. Its similarity with other major European languages – those who have learned Latin in school will invariably find many elements of other European and world languages very familiar. Latin has long been a good basis for an English speaker to then successfully learn other Romance languages such as French, Spanish or Italian.
 - b. Its access to advanced English – a learner of Latin will be considerably aided in the comprehension and use of advanced English, not least in a number of technical and scientific spheres such as medicine, law and biology where much terminology is derived from Latin.
2. Gaelic – the cultural and linguistic value of Gaelic has long been recognised as of important value in the Scottish primary school sector. This is due to:
 - a. A cultural and linguistic value related to the inherent good that comes from protecting, promoting and advancing the Gaelic language not just in its natural homeland but throughout the whole of Scotland.
 - b. An inherent value that is found in an early primary years language that Gaelic provides as a useful foundation for learning other languages. That is, there is value in Gaelic medium education and other opportunities to learn Gaelic in school not only because of its inherent value as Gaelic but in its broader value as simply another language of instruction and learning and as a means to understanding the nature of language in general. It has long been advocated, for instance, that Gaelic gives a significant advantage to primary school pupils not only in

learning a third or fourth language but even in the comprehension of the mechanics of the English language itself.

1.2 Therefore, it is long recognised that learning other languages, whether those connected to other world languages or those connected to the very essence of Scottish culture and identity, have a huge value not only in themselves but in providing a gateway or bridge to the learning of other world languages and in the understanding of English.¹

2. THE VALUE OF ESPERANTO

2.1 Esperanto is an international language founded in the late 1800s as an instrument of simple, easy-to-learn communication. It was intended that the language should form a highly accessible and culturally neutral bridge between speakers of different world languages². The number of active speakers of Esperanto has been estimated to be around three hundred thousand throughout the world³. It is characterised by two main features:

1. A strong connection with the major European languages. The vocabulary of Esperanto was specifically designed to be familiar to speakers of Romance and Germanic languages – those tongues deemed at the time to be most widely recognisable throughout the world. Words in Esperanto are heavily drawn from English, French, German and Latin, and much of its vocabulary will be familiar to speakers of those languages⁴.
2. A very regular grammar and minimal rules to govern the use of the language. The language was designed with little more than a dozen key grammatical rules, to which there are no exceptions. For instance, all verbs are regular, all nouns end in “o” and all adjectives end in “a”. This means that once a learner acquires a basic ability – for instance to change the tense of a verb or the situation of a noun – they can be assured that the rule behind the ability will face no exceptions, and they can with exponential success apply the language with relative ease.

2.2 As such, a new English-speaking learner of the language can acquire a familiarity with the basic rules of the language in a matter of just a few hours⁵,

¹ The rationale behind the teaching of Gaelic is explained in detail here: <http://www.gaidhlig.org.uk/fdp/en/frequently-asked-questions.php>

² The multilingual site <http://www.lernu.net> provides a good introduction to Esperanto as a language.

³ “Esperanto sen Mitoj [Esperanto without Myths]”, Ziko M. Sikosek, Antwerp, 2003.

⁴ A sample text here illustrates Esperanto’s familiarity to an English speaker: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Esperanto#Sample_text

⁵ A study at the University of Paderborn has suggested that 150 hours of study of Esperanto would be required to achieve the same standard as would require 1000 hours of study for Italian or another Romance language, 1500 hours for English or 2000 hours for German. Bruno Flochon, “L’espéranto”, in Guy Gauthier (ed.), “Langues: une guerre à mort”, Condé sur Noireau, 2000

compared to a significantly longer time of the historically widespread “gateway” language Latin.

2.3 The advantage of Esperanto in this context is that a learner can focus on learning the mechanics of a language – such as the nature of verbs, nouns and adjectives, or the role of grammatical cases – without being distracted by the often complex and irregular individual examples that other languages contain.

2.4 This provides a strong foundation not simply for proficiency in Esperanto but more importantly for successfully tackling further national languages such as French, Spanish or German because the knowledge of the basic mechanics of language learning has been so quickly acquired⁶.

3. SPRINGBOARD TO LANGUAGES

3.1 Since 2006, Esperanto has been used in a small number of primary schools in England and the Isle of Man as a so-called “springboard” language⁷. The idea has not been to teach pupils Esperanto because of any inherent value in producing Esperanto speakers, but because of the enhanced ability pupils will have in learning more widely-spoken world languages such as French, Spanish or German.

3.2 A common metaphor used by the Springboard to Languages project is that of the role of the recorder in music. Music teachers do not teach the recorder to primary school pupils because there is a national commitment to creating a nation of recorder players (even if there may be value in this) – they do so because the recorder is a cheap, easy and simple way of producing instruments through which pupils can learn basic musical concepts such as tones, scales, notes and melodies. Pupils who learn the recorder will then go on to be more successful at learning other more complex instruments than if they had simply started out with that other instrument from scratch.

3.3 The metaphor can also extend to Latin. As explained earlier in this report, Latin has historically been widespread in the Scottish school system – not to produce a nation of Latin speakers (again, even if there may be value in this) but because learning Latin will significantly aid the learning of French, Italian and other major European languages.

3.4 Similar foundations may be found in other areas of the curriculum. For instance, mathematics provides a useful foundation not for a nation of mathematicians but for a workforce well equipped for a range of science and engineering subjects.

⁶ “[F]indings from the past hundred years consistently point to the educational benefits that Esperanto can bring to children’s ... L1 and ... L2 learning”. Angela Tellier “Esperanto as a potential aid to language learning in primary schools” in “Esperanto as a starter language for child second-language learners in the primary school”, ed. Angela Tellier, Barlaston, 2012.

⁷ <http://www.springboard2languages.org/home.htm>

3.5 The same is the case with Esperanto. Springboard to Languages has shown that learning Esperanto has a value not simply in creating a nation of Esperanto learners, but in creating a generation of school pupils who have increased language awareness, a strong motivation to learn other languages, and a belief in themselves as good language learners.

“In short, we as teachers fail children by channelling them into learning a language of our choice, at an age when we should be helping them to acquire the tools that will allow them to learn a language of their choice confidently and independently as an older child or adult.”⁸

3.6 Given Esperanto is around ten times quicker to learn, that has a crucial impact on the time that it takes and the cost that it incurs. For example, a primary school teacher, whether a language teacher or not, could achieve an adequate foundation of knowledge for teaching Esperanto in primary schools within about 100 hours.

4. THE WAY FORWARD

4.1 In conclusion, Esperanto provides a financially and educationally sound basis for learning foreign – particularly European – languages. Because of its simple construction it provides not a distraction from learning other meaningful and globally useful languages, but rather an advantage to learning those languages which tomorrow’s politicians and business people will need to know. In other words, it can contribute significantly to enhancing the learning of other globally useful languages.

4.2 Given that learning any second language – be it Gaelic, Latin, French or Esperanto – is proven to make the learning of a third language so much easier, the inquiry will be keen to contemplate the following question:

What language provides the best cost benefit analysis? In other words, what language delivers the best output in terms of numbers of competent speakers in return for a given amount of teaching resource?

In light of the figures cited in this report, Esperanto is the best candidate.

5. SUMMARY

5.1 To answer specific questions posed by the enquiry:

1. Is there enough funding for the Scottish Government’s proposal (including use of EU money)?

⁸ “Esperanto as a starter language for child second-language learners in the primary school”, ed. Angela Tellier, Barlaston, 2012.

The use of Esperanto as a gateway language and an emphasis on language awareness are ideal as an introduction to the learning of multiple languages, at minimal cost.

2. Do existing teachers have the skills and teaching resources available for language tuition? Are existing teachers and teaching assistants equipped to teach languages?

One of the main strengths of the approach we propose is the ease with which non-specialist teachers can begin teaching it effectively to classes within a short while after learning. Because the educational aim is how to learn a language, rather than the language itself, teachers can be up to speed very quickly.

3. Should there be more training and support for new and existing teachers for language teaching?

Clearly, yes, whatever other conclusions the committee comes to.

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

Language awareness has multiple beneficial effects on learning and teaching in other areas of the curriculum.

5. The choice of languages for teaching – which languages should children be learning and why? The role of languages in economic development – what languages should children be learning to benefit their future careers, and to help Scotland flourish economically?

The key point is that the languages which will be useful to children in their future lives will be many and varied, as their lives progress and the world changes, and therefore the flexibility provided by teaching them language awareness is time well spent.

5.2 Esperanto, aside from any value in speaking the language in isolation, provides a strong, effective, successful quick and – above all – cheap introduction to languages. It allows learners not simply to derive a basic competence in a new tongue but to acquire an understanding of the mechanics of language and a foundation for learning other languages.

5.3 Research suggests that those who learn Esperanto first will be better speakers of French, Spanish, German, or indeed any other languages in the world, than those who go straight into that language.

5.4 A dilemma for this inquiry is that spending 100 hours with a pupil on any foreign language is invariably 100 hours not spent on a host of “competitor” languages. 100 hours of Esperanto, however, has the twin advantages of not only exponentially more progress in the language of Esperanto itself, but a

significantly stronger foundation for learning those other key world languages that will be so important to Scotland's economy in years to come.

5.5 This inquiry is rightly concerned with the direction of language teaching in Scotland's primary schools. But besides the question "what languages do we teach?", we urge consideration of another question first: "regardless of what languages we teach, what is the best foundation for starting that teaching?"

5.6 The authors of this submission would be happy to provide, on demand, a variety of further input to support this paper, including:

- Printed copies for all committee members of the research report of the Springboard to Languages project.⁹
- Other research about the value of Esperanto as a gateway language.
- Verbal submissions to an inquiry hearing to reinforce this report and answer any arising questions.

⁹ <http://www.esperantoresearch.org.uk/publications/esperanto-starter-language-child-second-language-learners-primary-school>