

Submission by JETAA Scotland, Mr David McAllister

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**Submission by David McAllister, Vice-Chair, JETAA Scotland
On behalf of JETAA Scotland**

**Foreign Language Learning in Primary Schools Consultation
European and External Relations Committee**

Introduction

JETAA Scotland welcomes the opportunity to take part in this consultation on foreign language learning in primary schools.

JETAA Scotland welcomes the recommendation that children should take up a foreign language from the earliest opportunity in primary education, with the potential for a third language to be introduced at a later age.

Given the role of the organisation, it is most appropriate for JETAA Scotland to comment on the final two questions, as set out in the call for evidence:

- ***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?***

Responses to both questions are given on the following page. The views expressed are those of JETAA Scotland based on the experiences of its members.

About JETAA Scotland

JETAA Scotland is the Scottish Chapter of JET Alumni Association UK, which provides a network for alumni of the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme, helping to promote the programme and its aims, and continue to further the cause of British-Japanese relations in the UK.

The Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme, an official Japanese

Government scheme, sends graduates to Japan in order to promote international understanding at grass-roots level and to improve foreign language teaching in schools. Now in its 26th year, the JET Programme has placed around 50,000 participants from over 50 countries in positions throughout Japan.

<http://www.jetaa.org.uk/about-jetaa/chapters/scotland/>

Response to the consultation

The choice of languages for teaching – which languages should children be learning and why?

We recognise the important role of foreign language teaching, particularly at the primary school level, where this may be the first time that children come into contact with a foreign language and a foreign culture. Languages play an important role because they introduce children to new cultures, new ideas and broaden horizons, in addition to helping them to develop key communication skills.

Our organisation (as indicated on page one) has a remit to further connections with Japan and to promote the aims of the Japanese Government's JET Programme, which over and above enhancing cultural understanding, aims to improve foreign language teaching in schools. Therefore, whilst we keen to support the teaching of the Japanese language in particular, we recognise the importance of all foreign language learning in schools.

The majority of our alumni association members have worked gained considerable experience as Assistant Language Teachers in Japanese state schools. The Japanese Government has invested heavily in the JET Programme since it first began in 1987. This has resulted in the largest exchange programme in the world and over 50,000 graduates (primarily English native speakers) working for local authority education boards all across Japan, from the urban to the very rural, teaching English and bringing Japanese primary and secondary school children in to contact with new cultures and world affairs from an early age.

We believe the Japanese Government's highly innovative and successful approach to investing in foreign language teaching can offer useful insights for language learning in Scotland – both in terms of raising children's language skills, but also helping them to understand and explore an ever globalising world. The experience of the JET Programme also demonstrates the valuable return on early investment in language teaching.

The role of languages in economic development – what languages should children be learning to benefit their future careers, and to help Scotland flourish economically?

It is important that children have the option to explore different languages and to consider which languages may open doors for them in the future. This means ensuring that schools offer a broad range of foreign languages and that children be introduced to foreign cultures from an early age.

We support the recommendation that children study foreign languages from primary one, however we would advise against limiting the choice to a small pool of languages. As part of economic development and linking Scotland to countries all over the world through trade, it is important that children have the option to study languages that will enable them to benefit from a diverse range of career opportunities.

If children are offered a wide range of language options from the primary school level, it could increase the number and range of languages being taught in secondary schools and result in increased demand for key languages at the university level. By getting it right at the primary school level, we believe it is possible to stimulate improvement in language learning at all levels of education and in the workplace, enabling Scotland to tap into the full potential of an increasingly globalised and interdependent world.

The Japanese Government's JET Programme can again offer useful insights for Scotland in this regard. Through a focus on foreign languages and intercultural exchange, Japan now benefits from thousands of former JET participants acting in an informal capacity as ambassadors for Japan all around the world – not to mention the benefits of improving foreign language skills amongst its own citizens.

We believe that by enabling children in Scotland to become confident speakers of foreign languages, Scotland could benefit from a better skilled workforce that is able to respond more effectively to the economic demands of an ever globalised and interconnected world.

David McAllister
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