

## **EIS evidence to European and External Relations Committee of Scottish Parliament on 7<sup>th</sup> March 2013 re. Inquiry on learning languages in Primary Schools**

### **INTRODUCTION**

1. The Educational Institute of Scotland welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence to Committee. The EIS is Scotland's largest teacher trade union across all sectors of education.
2. The EIS welcomes the commitment and ambition with regard to promoting the teaching of modern languages in schools with reference to the analysis and benefit, the ambition evident in the enthusiasm of the report, and the Government's commitment in light of its recommendations.
3. It would be difficult not to welcome the radical, ambitious and challenging agenda being set by the Scottish Government in developing modern language education in Scottish schools. The aim is to empower and enable the development of skills and characteristics necessary for success in a fast-changing world.
4. The EIS also welcomes the commitment to developing local strategy as a basis for promoting a practical focus on what needs to be done. The political will to lead and invest will be critical to any degree of success in ensuring development, continuity and sustainability, as will be lessons learned from previous initiatives such as MLPS.

### **The Present Context**

- **Practical Challenges**

5. However, we need to remain practical where key issues raised by teachers need to be addressed: timetabling, flexibility, time, and curricular overload given the context of change, and the growing list of priorities across the curriculum. It can be difficult to square the ambition with the recent developments e.g. the abandonment of FLA's in schools, the reduction and, in many cases, the removal of nursery teachers from pre-5 education including nursery schools and nursery classes in primary schools, and the present danger of unprecedented budget cuts.
6. The long-term benefits of early introduction to other languages may be disputed in some quarters. However, there is a strong consensus that early exposure is extremely important in establishing a base understanding and boosting motivation. This is regardless of the function or desired outcome of learning a language: to increase awareness of other cultures, to promote a deeper understanding of languages in general; or promote linguistic skills in a particular language. Clearly, the role of the teacher is paramount here and

consistent with the aims of Curriculum for Excellence 3-18

7. However, despite the oft-quoted social and cultural obstacles to the promotion of language learning in English-speaking countries, it is clear that failure is neither inevitable nor, it may be added, an option, in a modern, globalised economy with the patterns of migration that Scotland is witnessing, and will continue to experience in years to come.
8. We acknowledge the good work being undertaken in schools, but much has to be done to ensure coverage, continuity and sustainability. We need to ensure a critical mass of provision, including skilled teachers, who can overcome the known obstacles: the postcode lottery phenomenon; the natural occurrence of absence and supply issues; and ensure a range and diversity of provision which ensures access for all especially in relation to equality legislation. The only caveat, of course, is that equality of provision does not necessarily equate to uniformity of provision.

- **Migration and Diversity**

9. This migration can be multi-faceted. It can present a balance of opportunities and challenges. There are significant opportunities in positive, dynamic and culturally rewarding scenarios where we witness ethnic and linguistic diversity in our workplaces and communities as a result of economic success. This can be seen as a result of investment from international companies and the cultural and linguistic diversity this brings.
10. Yet there are also the consequences of political change and the opening of borders which present opportunities for migrant workers. This can present significantly different opportunities and challenges that have to be faced within our schools and communities. This is where the context is not determined by economic success, but poverty and deprivation, and the consequent social and economic challenges that may arise. These demand specific attention and assessment in terms of support and intervention in order to meet the challenges presented and the opportunities provided. There is a growing awareness of these challenges. A policy for the teaching of languages should also address this discrepancy.
11. In these circumstances, due attention should be paid to multi-agency working and exploring additional revenue streams, including any available additional EEC funding.
12. In this regard, the EIS welcomes an approach to language learning in line with Scotland's development as a diverse, multicultural and multilingual nation.

- **The Role of the Teacher**

13. The EIS would underline the central role that the teachers play. Teachers bring specific skills and qualifications not only in terms of linguistic skills but also methodology in respect of learning and teaching. This is important with

reference to developing initial teacher education but also career-long professional learning and development.

14. The EIS would stress the expert role of the teacher from 3-18 consistent with the aims of Curriculum for Excellence.
15. The EIS would underline the need to consider what would be necessary as part of a national recruitment and professional development strategy which focused on the need to build both general capacity and expanded specialisms in primary - whether primary qualified teachers or secondary qualified, or both. The role of the universities, but also GTCS, via professional registration and professional recognition, in developing and promoting linguistic competence and language teaching methodology would be critical.
16. The EIS notes the appeal to imaginative, creative and goodwill solutions in the form of British Council support, parents, and other skilled and trained native speakers of additional languages, including foreign language assistants. (The recent demise of the latter across local authorities in Scotland has been a significant setback and points to the lack of priority in the area of languages and perhaps, moreover, the reality and challenge of local authority funding cuts.)
17. British Council and Comenius projects, for example, have been key to supporting language initiatives, new approaches and promoting teacher engagement in recent times, but these interventions would not be in any way sufficient to deliver and sustain a programme of the kind envisioned by the policy.

## MAIN QUESTIONS

- *Is there enough funding for the Scottish Government's proposal (including use of EU money)? (The money earmarked by the Scottish Government is £120k for the pilot projects, and £4M for after the pilots in 2013-14).*
18. We are not aware of any audit that has been undertaken in this regard. However, it would appear that given the ambition and challenge of the policy, it would not appear that this amount of money would be in any way sufficient to deliver a sustainable, coherent, and quality language policy as outlined. A Government led commitment which underscored the political will to succeed, with funding mechanisms that incentivised, or obliged, local authorities to prioritise a national language strategy based on teacher and pupil motivation and engagement is, however, necessary if there is the determination to succeed. Ring-fencing would need to be an option to be considered here.
- *Do existing teachers have the skills and teaching resources available for language tuition? Are existing teachers and teaching assistants equipped to teach languages?*

19. There are currently insufficient numbers of trained teachers equipped to deliver languages which would match the ambition of this policy.
- *Should there be more training and support for new and existing teachers for language teaching?*
20. Yes. Some have MLPS training from years ago but many no longer use it, especially where they may have a visiting specialist in the authority. We have no figures but many teachers trained in MLPS have now retired or will do so in the near future. From the SCILT 2012 survey referenced below, and from anecdotal experience, it seems that primary teachers are already struggling to fit in the current curriculum demands – and 1+2 may yet be another thing to shoehorn in. There is a need to examine and investigate the successes *and* limitations of the Modern Languages in Primary Schools project which has been in existence for many years and is ongoing, and most recently addressed in the SCILT Survey of Modern Languages Provision 2012.
- [http://www.scilt.org.uk/Portals/24/Library/research/mlsurvey/MLPS\\_Survey\\_2011\\_summary.pdf](http://www.scilt.org.uk/Portals/24/Library/research/mlsurvey/MLPS_Survey_2011_summary.pdf)
- *What is the capacity within the curriculum to accommodate greater language study? Can language learning be embedded in existing teaching?*
21. There would be the need for significant training, upskilling and refresher training. The big question is how and when this would take place, and where would the money and time come from. The present supply crisis in Scottish schools perhaps only underlines the scale of the challenge in terms of taking forward this challenging and ambitious policy.
22. Language teaching can be embedded in existing teaching but teachers will only do this if they have the time and training to do so. Even then, the previous MLPS training where certain trained teachers moved round their own school delivering MLPS did not really work as it often took them away from their own classes, and involved increased workload for them. A preferred model may be to have class teachers trained to embed it in their own teaching but this would require every, or the vast majority of teachers, to be trained.
23. However, a more blended, flexible and tiered approach may be possible where there exists a balance of specialist teachers and external support along with teachers with a level of skills and knowledge which would allow for the language(s) to be reinforced in addition to the specialist input on a cluster and /or visiting model. Here, again, the application of GTCS professional recognition in the context of career-long professional development may be useful but this would, of course, need further consideration and discussion.

24. This could be done through CPD but this would take time and commitment on the part of the teachers, and significant investment by local authorities. And who would undertake the training? Will this be done centrally or locally? It also raises issues of consistency and parity of access.
25. There is talk of changing the teacher training course to make the language component, which is currently optional, compulsory. Even if that were desirable or achievable, what happens when graduates leave and go to a school that doesn't teach the language in which they trained?
  - *The choice of languages for teaching - which languages should children be learning and why?*
26. There appears to be an uncertainty in this area. The EIS would support access to modern languages as earliest as possible and that access be available on a comprehensive and universal basis. However, the needs of schools, communities and individuals are not always the same and there does have to be flexibility – equality of provision does not necessarily mean uniformity of provision.
27. Indeed, a language policy must extend beyond school but there appears to be less provision and access to languages in further and higher education.
28. Discussion needs to take place between authorities/primaries and secondaries to establish the choice of languages. The talk is all a bit woolly about linking languages to the community which would also include community languages, Polish, Urdu etc. and there is also a current fashion of promoting Mandarin, as there was with Russia in the past.
29. Despite this, there remains a strong argument for maintaining a focus on European languages, including French. This would not be inconsistent with focussing on introducing emerging world languages, especially Spanish which has the benefit of accessibility over Mandarin and Russian. And why not Portuguese?
30. The fact remains that we are likely to depend on the existing significant capacity in French in taking forward this policy. Indeed, this may be the single unifying first modern language influence after which a second language may be introduced. We would be willing to be convinced otherwise.

## **CHALLENGES**

31. There needs to be an understanding of the reason for language learning and a realistic approach to what can be achieved through primary and secondary.
  - Linguistic competence needs progress and development with differentiated courses and clear pathways to fluency and excellence.

- An increase in language awareness is a helpful personal and educational achievement which can promote self-esteem and an awareness of one's own native language.
  - Exposure to different languages, albeit superficial, can add to cultural awareness and understanding.
32. These can be pursued in combined and different ways but the rigour, commitment and resources necessary for developing linguistic competence itself does raise issues of choice, opportunity, and differentiation – not everyone will become uniformly fluent in a modern language.
  33. The need for clarity is a prerequisite for ensuring the credibility, but also value for the significant monies that would have to be invested in this policy and for ensuring sustainability of the overall project.
  34. There is certainly a need for clarity and momentum if this policy has any hope of success. At the moment secondary schools are struggling to keep their languages going, many losing their second or third languages as language is increasingly not seen as part of the core subjects. Pupils are being allowed to drop it in 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> year.
  35. There has been a gradual and significant drop in the uptake of languages since the Mulgrew Report in 2000 which promoted languages as a curricular entitlement rather than a core, compulsory element. This led to an increasing number of schools dropping ML's from the core leading to falling presentation and a concentration on fewer languages, including a move to French often only in order to solve transition issues, and the fact that most language teachers were qualified in French.
  36. There is a need to address slippage in schools where language teaching has been marginalised. The pilots would help to point the way forward as would an audit of existing good practice.
  37. There is a need to exploit existing potential and identify latent capacity among teachers who may not be exercising dual qualification or existing language qualifications and experience.

## **THE WAY FORWARD**

38. The EIS hopes that, notwithstanding the radical, challenging and ambitious nature of the policy, at least the damage being presently done can be reversed. A modest and successful practice is better than no policy at all. Despite the consensus around the aims and objectives of this policy, there has to be clarity in terms of how this agenda may be realized in the medium to longer term.

39. The following is a minimum:

- The need for leadership and commitment from above and at all levels, including all Head Teachers.
- Effective professional development at all stages
- Professional dialogue and moderation
- Access for teachers and pupils to native speakers e.g foreign language assistants who themselves need to be skilled and trained
- GTCS promotion and development of professional standards in language teaching and to encourage qualifications, accreditation, professional recognition etc.
- Partnership working and sharing of good practice especially re CfE
- Development of resources
- Highlight the importance of language policy in promoting social cohesion, especially given the challenges and opportunities evident in the increase of a migrant and increasingly mobile population especially to and from within Europe.

## **CONCLUSION**

40. The need to engage teachers at an early stage is crucial. Given the challenges that teachers face re. pensions, pay, conditions, cuts, class sizes, pace of curricular change, narrowing of cpd budgets and opportunities – from where will the powerful gesture come in order to enthuse and engage classroom teachers, in order to win hearts and minds, without whom this strategy could not possibly work? One way would be to acknowledge the key role of the teacher and make a commitment to invest in staff and value them in order to build confidence and capacity. Teachers are more likely to respond to such an opportunity.
41. There appears to be a clear idea about the direction of travel and what is necessary to take matters forward, but less clarity about specifics and how this will be realised in present circumstances. There is a lot to be discussed and considered, and a greater degree of honest accounting needed if policy is to be communicated, developed and delivered across all schools in all local authorities.

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