

European and External Relations Committee

Written Evidence

Learning Languages in Primary Schools

25 February 2013

1. The NASUWT welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to the European and External Relations Committee of the Scottish Parliament as part of their inquiry into Learning Languages in Primary Schools.
2. The NASUWT is the fastest growing teachers' union in Scotland and the largest in the UK.

GENERAL COMMENTS

3. The NASUWT is in principle in full support of students having access to foreign languages from primary school. The NASUWT believes that a 1+2 model, as proposed by the Scottish Government to enable all young people to learn two languages, in addition to their mother tongue whilst at primary school, is a laudable aim. It is however essential that sufficient support is provided to schools to ensure that the students are able to access this entitlement.
4. It is understood that the intention of the Scottish Government is to have all children learning a second language from Primary 1, and that the learning of a third language should start no later than Primary 5, and further that this proposal is to be implemented within the next decade. The NASUWT

is concerned that without substantial planning, including in-depth consideration of the logistical challenges and how these are to be overcome, as well as sufficient long-term ring-fenced funding, a ten-year implementation timeframe appears very short and unrealistic.

5. The NASUWT considers that there is a lot of positive work being undertaken in schools across Scotland to engage in and enhance foreign language learning. It is important that the Committee takes time to recognise and acknowledge the commitment, dedication and hard work of the education profession in Scotland in this regard.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS

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.)

6. In the current economic climate significant cuts across Scotland have been made to local authority budgets, and funding for specialist areas, such as foreign language teachers in the primary sector, have been radically reduced, if not withdrawn altogether. The challenges of meeting the aim of a 1+2 approach without adequate funding are great indeed.
7. In order to reap the benefits economically and educationally, any funding must be guaranteed in the long term. Funding should also be ring-fenced to ensure that it is not swallowed up within already over-stretched local authority budgets.
8. It will be impossible to assess whether sufficient funding has been identified to support the proposal if an assessment of the challenges and the solutions has not been undertaken. An effective planning stage will be critically important to the successful integration of this initiative within primary schools.

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?

9. The NASUWT is concerned that making foreign language teaching compulsory in the primary sector could result in all primary teachers being asked to take the lead in foreign language lessons without having the appropriate skill or teaching resources. Teachers come from various backgrounds, all of which provide for a rich and diverse Scottish teaching profession, but this will of course result in different challenges for different members of staff.

10. All primary teachers have been trained as generalists. In order for them to be able to deliver the expected standards, sufficient sources of local expertise in modern languages need to be identified. The NASUWT is in favour of resource sharing between schools, either by local authority or in a cluster. Central support will be needed to ensure that primary schools are not left scrabbling to find expertise in order to fulfil a national commitment.

11. There are two obvious sources of support: firstly, specialist teachers coming in to teach the modern language part of the curriculum and provide expert knowledge and advice in terms of the pedagogy of foreign language teaching and learning; and secondly, non-teaching foreign language assistants who can work alongside teachers. Indeed, in the *Language Learning in Scotland: A 1+2 Approach* report the use of non-teaching staff to provide the relevant language input is discussed.

12. The NASUWT's preferred model would be the use of specialist peripatetic teachers providing language learning in the primary sector while allowing individual teachers to develop areas of interest through lifelong learning. Such a model would secure teacher jobs, recognising the current challenges in maintaining teacher numbers and education funding. There is however nothing to prevent a mixture of both models, provided there is a clear demarcation of the role, and the responsibility for the teaching and learning continues to lie with qualified teachers. Regardless of the model

adopted, to ensure success there must be good external support structures, otherwise there can be no assurance of any consistency of practice.

13. Consideration needs to be given to the training of teachers, not just during their Initial Teacher Education (ITE) but through lifelong learning. The NASUWT is concerned that this inquiry is being viewed in isolation to the equal but different push to encourage students to study Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM). Undoubtedly, there will be some teachers with a greater aptitude for foreign languages, but viewing this in a wider context, it is impossible for primary teachers to be specialists in all fields. The NASUWT considers it is better to allow primary teachers to remain generalists while empowering those with an aptitude or interest to develop their skill using Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and lifelong learning.

14. In order to achieve this lifelong learning model, the role of further education and higher education institutions needs to be examined in depth. A clear plan is needed to establish how CPD would be delivered and what the cost implications would be.

15. The NASUWT is keen to ensure short twilight courses are not viewed as sufficient training to expect primary teachers to lead all foreign language learning, and would suggest detailed consideration is given to Modern Languages in Primary Schools (MLPS) training which would involve day release over an extended period. That is not to detract from the merit of twilight courses which can assist by giving teachers confidence to embed language learning throughout the curriculum in order to reinforce learning and support the specialist teachers.

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

16. Certainly the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence will assist in embedding language learning within the curriculum, as it encourages teachers to use their professional expertise and creativity to show how subjects can be linked, just as they are in life and work.
17. There must be clarity for teachers on the judgements and expectations of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) during inspections on modern languages in the primary sector and there will be an important role for Education Scotland, in conjunction with Scotland's National Centre for Languages (SCILT), to provide guidance and best practice advice to the teaching workforce in this area.
18. The NASUWT remains concerned however that students with additional support needs (ASN) have not had sufficient consideration. It is important that the Scottish Government does not inadvertently create a two-tier system which undermines learning within the mainstream. The NASUWT recommends therefore that a detailed equality impact assessment is undertaken.

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

19. Curriculum for Excellence refers to students 'developing a knowledge and understanding of the world and Scotland's place in it'. Learning foreign languages at primary school is an integral part of preparing young people for life and active participation in a global multicultural society. The global context Scottish schools are operating in will undoubtedly influence the decision on which languages should be taught.
20. The question of which languages should be taught is not simply an academic question, but is a logistical challenge. The current position, where local authorities have had the autonomy to push the foreign language agenda independently has led to considerable variation. Any

attempt to move to a uniform entitlement for all schools will undoubtedly place pressure on the primary sector.

21. The choice of language to be promoted should give consideration to continuity across primary classes and ensuring appropriate primary/secondary links. There is no way to mitigate against pupils moving across clusters and between local authorities, and a decision will need to be made on whether a national or local arrangement would therefore be advisable. Unfortunately, it is not only the transient nature of pupils which will need to be considered. Primary teachers are routinely moved between primary classes from nursery up to P7; headteachers would want to maintain this flexibility for deploying staff, and teachers too would wish to maintain their skill set while approaching different ages and stages throughout their career. Even where teachers are static to a certain year group, this would not account for staff turnover, pregnancy and supply issues during long-term absence. Whilst there may be greater choice in recruitment in the central belt, it is to be anticipated that rural areas may not have the opportunity to recruit teachers with a specific foreign language knowledge. The workforce planning issues and recruitment challenges contribute to making full implementation in the next 10 years difficult.

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

22. The NASUWT would wish to flag the issue of General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) registration. Teachers wishing to teach in the secondary sector must be qualified in their chosen subject. In order to be registered for a second language, applicants must currently, in addition to meeting the requirements for the first foreign language, also have a degree with at least 80 credit points in the second language they want to teach, and have lived for at least three months in a country where the language is spoken before starting the course.

23. Should the Scottish Government decide to promote a language which is not widely taught at the moment, and wish this to flow from the primary to the secondary sector across the board, it would be unreasonable to expect the teaching cohort to move en masse abroad for 3 months to meet the current GTCS requirements; there would be a considerable financial and personal cost to individual teachers who may have family and caring commitments.

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