

**NATIONAL LANGUAGES CONFERENCE – TUESDAY 27
NOVEMBER 2012: MINISTER FOR LEARNING, SCIENCE AND
SCOTLAND’S LANGUAGES**

I am delighted to attend today’s joint Scottish Government and ADES National Languages Conference.

Today’s event gives us an opportunity not just to consider where things stand currently in terms of languages in Scotland but to define the future agenda for language learning in Scotland’s education system for years to come.

As a government we have committed ourselves to creating the conditions, over the lifetime of two Parliaments, in which every child will learn two languages in addition to their own mother tongue.

This is an ambitious and visionary commitment. It is about changing attitudes to languages in schools and society; and it is about preparing our young people for a radically different world than the one we know today. One where young people with an interest in, and a positive disposition towards learning languages, will be at an advantage.

I know that the presentations this morning will have made the case for languages. I would reiterate the message that improving performance on languages is good for Scotland’s young people and good for our economy. This is a message that is clearly set out in the report of the Languages Working Group published in May. I would like to record my thanks to Simon Macaulay and the group’s members, some of whom I know are here today, for their radical and challenging report.

I welcome the report's key messages that we must do more to provide our young people with a better language learning experience. This includes celebrating Scotland's increasing diversity of languages, including our own languages.

I don't intend covering all of the report's 35 recommendations in the short time available to me, but as our response which is now on the Scottish Government website, makes clear we welcome the report and its recommendations, either in full or in part. Collectively, the report's recommendations set a new direction for language learning in Scottish schools. I believe that successful implementation of Recommendation 1 alone, that schools should introduce language learning from Primary 1, rather the current norm of Primary 6, is one that will help transform the languages landscape in Scotland.

It is interesting to note that this recommendation has been given added significance with a recent European Commission report confirming that children are starting to learn foreign languages at an increasingly early age in Europe. So the Languages Working Group's recommendation that we should do so in Scotland is in line with what is happening elsewhere in Europe and, indeed, in many Asian countries.

Having said this there is no doubt introduction of a 1+2 approach raises challenges for local authorities, schools and the range of stakeholders involved in supporting language provision in schools. What I would like to do is to try and focus on what these challenges mean for action at national and local levels.

National level

As a government we recognise that successful delivery of our 1+2 languages commitment will require the engagement and sustained support of the range of stakeholders, especially education authorities. I am delighted that, as a first step in this, ADES has joined with us today on putting on this conference and I am grateful to Neil Logue, Director of Education at Angus Council, for his agreement to chair this afternoon's session.

We recognise that delivery of a 1+2 model will take time and our manifesto commitment is framed within the context of delivery over two parliaments. We recognise the need for a clear, well considered and realistic national strategy encompassing all sectors of the education system. We will develop an engagement strategy, including an Implementation Delivery Group, to take forward the introduction of a 1+2 languages model for Scotland's schools.

We want to build on the very good practice to be found on languages in schools across Scotland, to demonstrate the best of what is happening and show how this can be replicated across schools. Our pilot project programme for the 2012-13 school year will help identify lessons or taking forward the 1+2 commitment. They will consider, in particular, how earlier access to languages in primary can be delivered but will also consider aspects of delivery across primary and secondary.

These will be evaluated by Education Scotland and SCILT and used to inform wider implementation from 2013-14 onwards.

I know that introduction of a new languages policy raises a question of resourcing. I know also the current pressures that local authorities are facing and recognise that delivery of the commitment will require resourcing over time. During the languages debate in May I indicated that the Government has already proposed a budget for developing the Scottish schools curriculum and within that and subject to Parliamentary agreement of the next Budget bill, in 2013/14 we intend to provide an additional £4 million to assist local authorities with taking forward a new languages policy. We will be discussing deployment of this allocation and the longer term resourcing issues with local authorities and COSLA shortly.

Local level

At a local level there will be strategic and operational issues for education authorities and schools. Introduction of a 1+2 policy will require strategic planning and commitment and I welcome the report's recommendation that local authorities should develop local language strategies.

While these will vary to reflect local circumstances I agree with the group's view that they should be developed on a broad inclusive basis. They need to reflect a common commitment to promote the value and benefit of language learning and they should recognise and acknowledge all languages that children bring to school.

For example, this might include children for whom signing is their main language, or children for whom English is not their first language,

Education authorities should consider the range of language provision that can be made available across its schools, whether this comprises, in the words of the report, modern European languages, languages of strong economies of the future, Gaelic and community languages.

I know from visiting schools such as Sacred Heart Primary School in Glasgow that introduction to language learning from early primary is possible and that primary and secondary schools can offer more than one language. The challenge is how to ensure that early language learning becomes the norm and to look at how a second additional language can be introduced. There is a need to consider how well teachers are set to meet this challenge in terms of their current language skills and confidence.

No doubt education authorities and schools will wish to review their current provision in terms of languages delivered at different stages and the number of trained teachers. They will also wish to consider their programmes for career-long professional learning to ensure that teachers receive the support they need to deliver the 1+2 policy

Education authorities and schools should consider how to enable closer working between primary and secondary schools to ensure mutual support and smooth transitions for children in terms of language study. This will become increasingly important as children develop their first modern language in greater depth, through learning from P1.

When it comes to secondary, language learning needs to part of the Broad General Education in S1 to S3. When it comes to making choices, young people should have the necessary information to help them recognise the value of languages for their future development and life chances.

As recent work by SCILT has shown there is value in considering the use of Business Champions to show how businesses can support language learning in schools by demonstrating the importance of language skills and cultural understanding in the workplace. This is of particular relevance given concerns expressed that a lack of language skills is leading Scots companies to limit their export markets to English-speaking countries.

Education authorities and schools should also consider how they can ensure that the benefits of language learning are made known to parents. For example, we need to promote the huge contribution that studying another language can make to the development of young people's literacy skills. In addition, we should promote strongly the generic skills for learning, life and work which young people develop through learning another language.

Schools should also consider how they can use partners, including international links and links with cultural organisations, to assist teachers in making language study motivating and relevant. As a government we have welcomed the support that Consuls General and the various cultural organisations have given to supporting the promotion of languages in Scotland's schools.

I am pleased to see that several of them are represented here today and I thank them for the work that they are doing to support teachers and learners across the country.

The Working Group report encourages the use of Foreign Language Assistants, or native or fluent language speakers, where this fits with teachers' own classroom planning. In this context I was interested to see the work that Edinburgh University international students have done with local schools to help teachers with the development of children's language skills and learning. Recent evaluation of this initiative suggests that it has served to demonstrate the potential of partnership working between schools and universities and, where this is well-planned, how such work can enthuse children about learning another language.

Teacher skills

In terms of teacher skills, there is an important discussion about how we prepare our teachers of the future and this, of course, applies to more than just languages. The National Partnership Group report published earlier this month has important proposals for improved education for teachers and better outcomes for our young people. In our response to the NPG report we indicated clear support for the establishment of formal partnerships between local authorities and universities as a way to enhance the early phase of teacher learning.

This is the background against which we need to consider the Languages Working Group recommendations on issues such as entry or exit qualifications, course content and career long learning.

Such recommendations fall within the statutory responsibilities of the General Teaching Council Scotland or within the remit of universities and colleges. We will discuss with further and higher education stakeholders how far and to what extent these can be applied. In this regard I welcome the GTCS offer to consider the group's recommendation on entry criteria in its forthcoming review of the Memorandum on entry requirements for programmes of initial teacher education. More broadly, we will examine with GTCS and HE institutions the implications of a 1+2 languages model for the future training needs of teachers.

Conclusion

To conclude, we have set an ambitious and challenging goal to radically improve Scotland's performance in languages and to give our young people more and better opportunities for developing the language skills they will need in future. We recognise that there is still much to be done to effect the cultural shift that will be required to deliver our 1+2 commitment. We need to do more to identify language champions and win support of key stakeholders, including parents and teachers.

However, I am convinced that our commitment to a new direction in language learning is one that is right for Scotland's young people for their future prospects. It sends a strong signal that Scotland is open to business and the world and that we are determined to give our young people every advantage as they engage with this world. As the Languages Working Group report makes clear introducing two additional languages is an ambitious goal but one which, with the right approach and resources, is achievable.

I hope that this is an ambition that excites and encourages everyone here today and that your discussions will help set us on the first steps to realising this ambition.

I look forward to hearing the outcome of these discussions and we will take your ideas into our development of an engagement strategy that will seek to harness the support of everyone with a role to play in shaping the nature of language provision in our education system over the coming years.