

CULTURAL COMMISSION
SCOTS LANGUAGE RESOURCE CENTRE
SUBMISSION

1. Introduction

This paper is intended as an initial submission to the Cultural Commission. In it we hope to address some of the key issues which we believe the Commission must consider when undertaking its work.

2. Our Heritage

We believe that Scotland has a rich cultural heritage. The first job of the Commission should be to recognise that Scotland has experienced many centuries of artistic and cultural expression. All the human inhabitants of this country have sought to understand and manipulate their external and internal environments through creative and artistic activity. Our particular geography, climate and physical and economic relationships have influenced the forms which that cultural expression has taken. We believe that it is essential that the Commission recognises that Scotland has a creative past and that anything that happens in the present or future is built on that cultural heritage.

3. Linguistic Diversity

Scotland is a linguistically diverse country. There are three indigenous languages – Scots, Gaelic and English. The Commission must recognise this basic fact. It is unacceptable that the existence of one of these languages is routinely ignored by government and its agencies. Any policy which is intended to confer rights upon citizens must at the very minimum recognise the diversity of language used by those citizens. At a minimum level this must mean that these indigenous languages should be accorded parity of esteem. (un)Official policy until now has been informed by the view that Scots is not a “real” or “authentic” language. As a consequence it has largely been ignored by government and there has been a reluctance even to name it in official documents. The most recent cultural policy statement from the Scottish Executive fails to mention Scots. It is the language of some of our greatest cultural achievements from the Border Ballads to the poems of Robert Burns. It appears in various forms in poetry, drama and song, yet its existence is virtually unrecognised by the state and its agencies. This helps create conditions in which the wider population becomes estranged from its cultural heritage; it stifles the

creative potential of the language and undermines the cultural confidence of those who use it as their regular means of communication. Scots must be given proper recognition and funding. It must be named in official documents. Material should be made available in Scots and efforts should be made to achieve parity of esteem between Scots and the country's two other indigenous languages. Scots is our national language. It is an instant marker of Scottishness and something which should be celebrated. The routine and widespread denigration of Scots is an ongoing scandal. To enable Scottish citizens to be fully informed about their cultural rights they must have the opportunity to learn about the linguistic diversity of their country and to have those indigenous languages valued and equitably resourced.

4. Realising our creative potential through multi-lingualism

Evidence tends to suggest that the ability to speak more than one language increases an individual's capacity for creative thinking. The more fluent an individual is the more likely it is that he or she will be able to realise their full creative potential. The state's failure to recognise the existence of the Scots language has stifled the creative potential of many of our citizens. Scots should be taught in schools and it should be given official recognition as one of the country's languages. We believe that teaching Scots would improve citizens' understanding of their cultural heritage. It would help release the creative potential of the whole nation by increasing the confidence of those for whom it is a first language. Multi-lingualism is one of Scotland's distinguishing cultural features. The notion that Scotland is, and always has been, a largely monoglot space must be challenged.

5. Enhancing the status of the Scots language

An Australian academic, Professor Jo LoBianco, has suggested that the Scots language needs to have its status enhanced urgently. This process of status allocation should be addressed by the Cultural Commission. Within 25 years it should be quite normal for the Scots language to be heard on radio and television. It should be taught in schools and the works of art available in it should be accessible to students at all levels of the education system. Scots is an audible language but it is not a visible language. The written form of a language gives it enhanced status – it reinforces its position as a linguistic ideal and it attaches the language to the most powerful agencies and people within a community. Efforts must be made to put in place policies which will address the present invisibility of the Scots language.

**Scots Language Resource Centre
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