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Language

**SCOTS LANGUAGE RESOURCE CENTRE
AND
SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT CROSS PARTY GROUP ON THE SCOTS
LANGUAGE**

**RESPONSE TO STAGE TWO OF THE CULTURAL COMMISSION'S
CONSULTATION PROCESS**

1. Introduction

The SLRC is a small organisation with 1.4 FTE staff. Our resources are already stretched to the limit. It takes considerable time and effort to answer 62 complex questions. We are unable to do this and have used the headline themes to guide our responses. The SLRC and the Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group on the Scots Language have agreed to make a joint response to this phase of the consultation process in order to maximise the use of resources and to emphasise the close working relationship which exists between the two bodies. The SLRC and Cross Party Group's responses to the first stage of this process were not listed in the interim report. We would be obliged if efforts could be made to ensure that our contributions are acknowledged on this occasion.

2. Cultural Rights

Everyone should have the right to use their language as a means of personal and cultural expression. Efforts should be made to end discrimination against the Scots language. Equal levels of funding and state support should be given to each of Scotland's indigenous languages. Language is the key which unlocks our cultural heritage. If the majority of people are not given opportunities to learn about their linguistic heritage and about the linguistic diversity of the geographic, intellectual and cultural spaces they occupy they will be unable to exercise their cultural rights. State schools should encourage respect for linguistic diversity and provide opportunities for pupils to learn about the variety of languages and dialects used in Scotland. Opportunities for young people to learn Scots and learn about Scots must be provided as soon as is practicable.

The Executive should implement the provisions of the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages as these apply to Scots.

The Executive must take urgent action to end discrimination against the Scots language.

The Executive should make a firm commitment to producing a national language strategy within the next year.

3. Leadership

Distinguished Australian linguist and language planning expert, Professor Jo Lo Bianco, has suggested that urgent action needs to be taken to raise the status of Scots. Not only

would this increase the sense of self-esteem of the language's speakers but it would help release the creative potential of the language. This would enable Scots speakers to make a greater contribution to the cultural life of the nation.

The status of Scots could be enhanced by key institutions and bodies making use of the language in a variety of physical and virtual spaces.

The Executive should provide leadership by immediately applying the provisions of the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages as these apply to Scots.

The Executive should embrace the concept of linguistic diversity by employing staff whose job is to promote and protect Scotland's indigenous languages.

The Executive should use the Scots language in its publications and on its website.

Local Authorities in Scots speaking districts should use the language in their publications, on their web-sites and in their signage. Local dialects should be encouraged.

All state-funded cultural institutions should use the Scots language in their publications, web-sites and signage.

The Scots language should be given equal status with English and Gaelic in the Scottish Parliament.

All schools in Scots speaking areas should provide opportunities for children to learn Scots and learn about Scots. In other areas children should have the opportunity to learn about Scotland's linguistic history and diversity.

The BBC should provide broadcasting and web space for the Scots language. The BBC should be obliged to produce a language policy as soon as is practicable. The BBC should give Scots equal status with English and Gaelic and develop high quality programming in and about Scots.

All of the above actions require co-ordinated action. We believe that progress in implementing many of these proposals could be made by establishing an Institute for the Languages of Scotland. An Executive supported survey revealed widespread support for the establishment of such an institute. The Executive should be set up the Institute for the Languages of Scotland as soon as practicable. As well as co-ordinating and overseeing the development of language policy, the institute should provide leadership in promoting and protecting Scotland's indigenous languages and encouraging respect for linguistic diversity.

We support the retention of the arms length principle. We are concerned that this principle appears to be under threat and that decisions are increasingly politically motivated. We would urge government to resist the temptation to intervene in the

decision making processes of its agencies. However, government is obliged to ensure that these agencies carry out their functions effectively and that they provide good value for money. Close scrutiny of the relevant agencies will be required to ensure that high standards are maintained.

4. Pan-sectoral planning

Pan-sectoral planning should be encouraged. Voluntary and state funded language organisations, cultural organisations and local authorities should be encouraged to work together in promoting and protecting Scotland's indigenous languages. This could be carried out under the auspices of the Institute for the Languages of Scotland.

Surveys should be undertaken to determine the extent to which the Scots language is used. This would enable public institutions to make appropriate levels of provision for the language and its speakers.

A question on Scots should be included in the next Census.

5. Funding arrangements

The current disparity in funding for Scotland's indigenous languages must end immediately. English is supported through the state education system and by the state's main institutions and agencies. Gaelic is supported by a variety of agencies and by subsidies from the state. Scots language organisations receive tiny levels of state funding even in comparison with poorly funded Gaelic. This blatant discrimination which serves to underscore Scots lowly status must be addressed if progress is to be made in promoting and protecting the language and releasing the creative potential of its speakers.

An equitable language policy would ensure equitable levels of funding.

6. Standards and Evaluation

Funding must be used purposefully and clear aims should be agreed. Agencies which consistently fail to meet their objectives should be subject to sanction. However, sanctions must be applied equitably and efforts must be made to solve problems before any drastic actions are taken.

7. Operations and administration

Efforts should be made to minimise costs and maximise support to the sector. The establishment of an Institute for the Languages of Scotland and the development of a national language strategy could help ensure that resources were used effectively.

8. Local Authorities

Local authorities should develop language policies and strategies. There should be recognition within local authorities of the linguistically diverse nature of the communities they serve. Appropriate levels of funding should be set aside to support the provision of services to these diverse language communities. Where appropriate, local authorities should work in partnership across geographical boundaries in an effort to provide the highest levels of service to their various language communities.

As the country's principal providers of education services, local authorities have a special responsibility for ensuring that school students and adult learners have an opportunity to learn, and learn about, the country's indigenous languages.

9. Regional Bodies

Efforts should be made to minimise the duplication of service provision. The establishment of appropriate regional bodies might help to prevent such a situation arising.

10. National

By their nature national bodies should provide a country-wide service. They should be able to rely on central support to carry out their functions. The establishment of an Institute for the Languages of Scotland would provide Scotland's language communities with the central support that they require. Such a body should be established by the Executive.

11. Cross Cutting

The implementation of effective language policies depends on the involvement of a number of agencies and individuals. These should work together where appropriate. Scotland is a linguistically diverse country and those agencies which disseminate information about the country must accept this truth. Scotland is by no means unique in this regard. Fears about the negative impact which knowledge of Scotland's multi-lingual character may have on the attitudes of investors and visitors seem to us to be entirely misplaced. We would urge those agencies which have responsibility for promoting Scotland abroad to develop and apply language policies which recognise the linguistically diverse character of the country.

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