

Submission from Jamie Wallace

Call for views on learning foreign languages in primary schools

I agree that children starting primary school should be learning at least one other language in addition to their mother tongue in general. However due to the make-up of Scotland, and its various languages spoken, I believe that two additional languages on top of a mother language is justified. **The Scottish Parliament already recognises English and Gaelic officially – so they should be two of the languages, I believe.** For example: a child born in Scotland, to a traditional Scots family should be attending high school with at least English, Gaelic and another language – perhaps Scots, or even French. A child entering primary school from an Asian background, for example, where English is not their mother tongue, could have English as their second language and Scots, Gaelic, French or even Chinese, et cetera as their third language.

I am however, a bit concerned by the word ‘foreign’ in the title – what is your definition of this word? I get the impression from the proposed 1+2 model that learning two foreign languages would mean learning two local languages would not be possible. Is the Scottish Government recommending that those with Gaelic for example have to choose between Gaelic or English before considering two foreign languages?

I was taught in Milton Primary School in Lesmahagow. My recollection of language learning is that it was scarce. The teaching of **English grammar had been done away with, and were we to speak our mother tongue we would be shot down in flames for not speaking English!** I think this is why modern languages appealed to me in high school, because it was like discovering a freedom. In primary school, language was used as a device by the education establishment to put the pupils down and to toe them into an English way (or British way) of thinking. In high school however, French and German gave me the opportunity to break away from that mould, and it gave me a wider perspective on Europe and the rest of the world. I was fortunate to have had experienced teachers – the **young teachers entering schools today are very lacking in life experience** unfortunately. There was much positive talk of the EU and the opportunities the EU could bring us too. I must have visited France and Germany about five or six times to practice the language through both school exchanges and the local twinning association – in fact I was the youngest active member of the twinning association. **I would recommend Tapping in to local twinning organisations.** My interest in languages took me to college where I received an HND in languages, and won the prizes for best student in French and in German. Fifteen years later, I started learning Gaelic with which I hope to use in my future employment. Today I also learn Portuguese as I recognise that both Portugal and Scotland are suitably matched for future partnerships; and also I hope it will give me a better chance to work for Brazil’s Organising Committee of the Olympic Games in 2016.

Whilst at high school, the school made an informal link with a school in Aniche, Nord-pas-de-Calais near Douai. The French language assistant came from the town and helped to set it up. We started by writing to French penpals from the school there and we did a trip out to the North of France, living with our penpals as host families. I have been very fortunate, as I still keep in touch with my penpal 20 years later. I, and my family, went to her wedding. We visit each other most years, and I even took them to visit the Scottish Parliament just a couple of years ago. Last summer I visited and met her sons, one of whom was still in the womb when they visited Scotland before! I guess what I am leading to is, **if it were not for learning languages, I would not be as fortunate as I am today with the relationships I have developed and the experiences I have encountered.**

It must also be borne in mind that English, Gaelic and Scots are foreign languages to many people living and working in Scotland and that an assumption should not be made that English is the first language. I would hate to see English, for example, being forced on people and used divisively such as it is in UK politics where it has a bearing on immigration policies.

Language learning will brighten Scotland's future, and encourage each child to meet their potential in life. By broadening their horizons, they will no longer be made to feel subdued. I also believe that such a move to increase language learning in Scotland will create a more healthy and socially responsible society.

I look forward to the day where Scotland as a whole has moved away from being a backward monolingual nation, to one which is multilingual and forward thinking. We Scots have so much to offer not only our country or Europe, but the world as a whole. The best place to start though, is in the primary school – if not sooner.