

Submission from the Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS)

1. The Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS) is an independent education charity (Scottish Charity No. SC018033) representing over 70 member schools in Scotland which educate around 32,000 children of mixed abilities from diverse backgrounds. SCIS promotes choice, diversity and excellence in Scottish education. SCIS member schools are registered with the Scottish Government's Registrar of Independent Schools and are inspected by Education Scotland and, where appropriate, by the Care Inspectorate.

2. SCIS welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Committee's inquiry into languages learning in primary schools and we aim to address the five points which the Committee has set out for consideration. We will be happy to identify appropriate witness from within the sector, should the Committee find this helpful. The majority of independent primary schools in Scotland offer at least one modern foreign language from middle primary onwards (some offer Latin); many schools start languages teaching at P1 or in nursery. Languages are generally taught by subject specialists (either full-time members of staff or visiting teachers) and foreign languages assistants. Over a third of the foreign languages assistants teaching in Scotland in 2011/12 were teaching in independent schools¹.

1 Source: British Council data

2 Source: SCIS analysis of data supplied by SQA

3. 80% of independent schools offer all-through education from P1 to S6; some schools also have a nursery. This enables schools to plan continuity in languages learning from first words to certification both in terms of curriculum and teaching staff. Securing progression in learning through primary and secondary is complex but is just as important as continuity in curriculum. Language learners need stage-appropriate challenge to maintain interest. It is crucial that the S1 scheme of work for languages takes into account the level of language achieved in primary, and does not start from scratch. If adequate progression is not built into the languages programme in primary, it is not clear how the extra years of language learning will have an impact on language proficiency at S4. Securing this progression and continuity may be particularly complex where pupils entering S1 come from feeder primaries where different languages have been taught.

Uptake of languages in independent schools is relatively high. This may be related to the common practice of starting languages at primary level and to the continuity of an all-through school. Although fewer than one in ten of the S6 roll is educated independently, more than one in five Advanced Higher entries in German, French and Italian are from candidates in independent schools.

Entries from candidates in independent schools as a % of all entries, 2012 post-appeals²

4. SCIS cannot comment on the level of funding required to implement the Scottish Government's proposals in Local Authority schools. Although some independent schools employ specialist languages staff, others take advantage of existing expertise within their teaching body. Around 1,000 primary school teachers are employed in independent primary schools: the pupil-teacher ratio in these schools is 12.7.

In the future, consideration may have to be given to the registration conditions of languages teachers at both primary and secondary level. Foreign language proficiency may need to be given stronger emphasis in initial teacher education programmes. On the other hand, there may be an argument for relaxing the registration requirements for secondary teachers to enable native speakers or qualified languages teachers to teach at a basic level in their third language. It is currently very difficult for languages teachers to have their GTCS registration extended to cover the teaching of other languages. For example, a native Spanish speaker who is GTCS registered to teach French at secondary would have to gain a degree in Spanish before being allowed to teach Spanish. On the other hand, teachers with no specific post-school qualifications in languages - and in some cases little confidence in foreign languages - are being asked to teach at primary level. The 1+2 Approach will require the activation of all language skills and resources available to schools if it is to be successful.

5. Flexibility in the curriculum is central to enabling schools to teach two foreign languages at primary level and beyond. The evidence from the independent sector suggests that there is capacity within the school week to accommodate considerable language study. For example, one primary school teaches French twice a week from Nursery onwards; Spanish once a week from Primary 4; and Latin once a week from Primary Five onwards.

6. The question as to which languages should be taught needs to take account of children's enjoyment, cultural relevance, future career choices and available teaching resources. French has been the most popular language - as can be seen from the table below - possibly as a result of historical connections and geographic proximity. It would take a number of years to reverse this trend, even if this were desirable. In choosing languages for study, some consideration should be given to the possibilities of pupil exchange and travel to that country, as well as the availability of language assistants. If schools are able to build on the existing language skills of teachers, this could extend the range of languages which could be offered.

At SQA Higher, in independent schools uptake in German and Spanish is increasing while uptake in French is decreasing (see tables on Page 3). Italian and Russian have relatively few entries each year but uptake is stable. The picture in Local Authority schools is a little different: uptake in French and Spanish is increasing while uptake in German is decreasing. In both cases, the popularity ranking of languages runs: French, Spanish, German. 3

Languages uptake – independent schools 2006-2012
Languages uptake – Local Authority schools 2006-2012 4

Languages entries from candidates in independent schools: all levels, 2012 post-appeals	Entries
Language	
French	2,026
Spanish	902
German	636
Latin	484
Chinese	107
Languages	
Italian	78
Classical Greek	24
English for Speakers of	17
Other Languages	
Russian	8
Gaidhlig	1
Urdu	1
Total	4,284