

## **Submission from Professor Robert Dunbar**

I am writing to express my support for the Scottish Government Working Group's recommendations regarding the teaching of other languages than English in primary schools—I use the word 'other' rather than 'foreign' as I am of the view that one such language which should be taught in primary schools is Scottish Gaelic, which is certainly not a 'foreign' language; I would also support the teaching of Welsh, Irish and other indigenous languages of the United Kingdom, in cases where there is sufficient demand for such languages.

I shall not deal with all five of the questions raised on the inquiry website (<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/57808.aspx>) but I would like to begin with the fourth of those questions, what languages should children be learning, and why? I believe that one such language which children should have the choice of learning is Scottish Gaelic. Generally, aside those primary pupils enrolled in Gaelic medium education (GME), there is at present very few opportunities for primary students to learn Gaelic, and nothing like what would be available were the Scottish Government Working Group's recommendations to be implemented and Gaelic included as one of the languages which could be chosen. There has been a useful initiative, Gaelic Learners in the Primary Schools (GLPS), which has been developed and implemented in a few council areas, but this programme does not provide the sort of intensive, structured programme of language learning that the recommendations foresee.

There are a number of reasons why Gaelic should be included. First, since the passage of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005, and indeed well before the passage of that landmark legislation, successive governments of all stripes have been supportive of Gaelic language maintenance and revitalisation, and Gaelic education (in the broadest sense) in particular. If the growth of the language is to continue, something which is supported by all political parties and is central to Bòrd na Gàidhlig's work (and to the National Gaelic Language Plan), numbers of speakers must be grown. GME plays an important role in this, but its role needs to be supplemented by the creation of other opportunities for people of all ages, including primary school students, to learn the language. Second, Gaelic is already offered as a subject at secondary level—I am also of the view that provision at secondary level should be greatly expanded—and provision at the primary level, especially in those areas where Gaelic at secondary is already available, would clearly enhance the progress of students opting to study Gaelic towards full fluency. Third, wherever the opportunity to learn Gaelic has been provided, either through GME or through Gaelic classes, the general experience is that there is considerable latent demand for the language that is released. People have a wide range of motivations for learning the language, but given that it is a living, vibrant language of contemporary Scotland, given the increasing employment opportunities in the language (and the increasing numbers of jobs which require Gaelic language skills), and given its presence in the

media, not least through BBC ALBA, considerably expanding the opportunities to learn Gaelic simply makes good sense. Finally, as is recognised in the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 and by Bòrd na Gàidhlig, Gaelic is a national language, which belongs to all the people of Scotland. It is present in our family names and our place names. While not every child who may ultimately receive instruction in Gaelic in primary education will become a fluent speaker, they will know the language exists, is a vibrant one, and the mysteries of things like the names of many of our mountains, towns and villages will be unlocked.

I have suggested that Welsh, Irish and other indigenous languages of the UK should also be made available, where there is demand for them. Irish is, of course, closely related to Gaelic, and is a language which forms part of the heritage of many Scots. While few Scots may recognise it, Welsh is also part of the fabric of Scottish identity—the languages from which modern Welsh descends were once spoken in many parts of Scotland, a fact now recognised by Lothain Buses, the livery of whose buses on the Penicuik route now bear the Welsh version of the name, on which Penicuik is based. Welsh is increasingly present in modern Wales, as a language of wider communication, and certainly some Scots might want their children to be exposed to this language as well.

With regard to other languages, I should note that I am from Canada; we were required to learn French, and for most children of my generation in my home province of Ontario, instruction only started at the end of primary school. I achieved fluency in French and still use it, but I would have benefited greatly had it been available at an even earlier stage in my primary school education. In addition to French, I also speak Portuguese and Spanish (I am also a Gaelic and Irish speaker), and I can read Catalan; unfortunately, I now struggle with German, a language which I learned to some degree as a subject at secondary school—had it been available at an earlier stage, I have no doubt that my German would today be stronger. I have found all of these languages both useful and enriching, and I still use them all. They have created many opportunities, social, intellectual and even economic (understood in a narrow and utilitarian way, in the sense that they have directly created economic opportunities for me). Certainly, all of those languages should potentially be available, where there is demand; all are important European languages, and all have the potential for creating the very same sorts of opportunities for others as they have for me. I would add, though, that the net should be cast widely, and the languages available should reflect people's wishes. There are now a large number of 'community' languages spoken in Scottish households, and education in at least some of those languages should in principle be available. Instruction in other languages of the EU should be a priority, as knowledge of other EU languages will assist in EU integration and mobility within Europe, for economic purposes but also for tourism, retirement, study, cultural purposes, and so forth.

With regard to the last question, concerning language and economic development, from what I have said about my own experience, I think that it is obvious that the knowledge of other languages creates economic opportunities. While English is without a doubt becoming an international lingua franca, knowledge of English alone, in the context of its new status, actually limits English-speakers as compared to those who are multilingual. My own experience has been that, while an increasing number of people, including business people, now can communicate in English, where you are able to communicate with them in their own language, you immediately create a positive impression—you tell them that their languages and identities are respected, and respect is undoubtedly ‘good for business’. As noted, we live in an increasingly integrated and highly mobile world, and those who can only operate in one language are in real danger of becoming ‘second class citizens’, both in terms of employment and other opportunities. It makes no sense to limit young Scots in this way. Finally, while the economy is important, it is also important not to get ourselves in the trap of thinking in an overly instrumentalist and, indeed, reductionist way about the link between multilingualism and economic opportunities. Increasing amounts of research now show that multilingualism is positively linked to cognitive development, that it may retard dementia and other forms of loss of mental skills—something of obvious importance in an aging population which is living longer—and different forms of creativity. Multilingualism opens us up to other cultures, literatures and ideas. For many, it is simply life-enriching. All of the foregoing contributes to a healthier, happier, more enriched and more able and productive population, and I have no doubt that multilingualism contributes considerably, albeit in a number of indirect ways, to a more successful country, in economic terms.

Finally, there are questions about the capacity for greater language study to be embedded in the curriculum, and about ‘supply’ issues, including the availability of teachers to implement the recommendations. With regard to the curriculum, I do not believe that there is any good reason why a 1 + 2 model could not be implemented; all curriculum design is about choices, and priorities, and some European countries (including some which would be considered highly ‘successful’ on any number of measures) have been able to institute such a model in curricula that are subject to just as many demands as are Scottish curricula. With regard to resources, I doubt that a 1 + 2 model could be implemented across the country immediately; to do so would require the creation of many more teachers with the requisite skills, and this will take time. However, this is really a ‘chicken and egg’ issue: if made a priority, the necessary resources can be developed, as has been shown in many other jurisdictions.

I hope that the foregoing has been of some help.