

Submission by Dr John Moore

Please accept the following submission to the current enquiry.

I am commenting as a parent of 5 children, 3 of whom are still in primary education.

At a recent introductory session at the secondary school to which our oldest child will attend after the summer, we learned that around 5% of the teaching staff are involved in the delivery of modern languages teaching, currently offering French, German and Spanish. There is an additional informal provision of teaching in Japanese outwith the curriculum.

I do not have information regarding capacity for further provision in the curriculum nor do I have any information regarding the availability of additional funding within the local education department.

Ability to speak foreign languages would appear self-evidently to confer an advantage on those working in international business and must therefore make a positive contribution to economic development. The British Council had a lot to say on this issue in their report "Language Rich Europe".

The choice of languages in schools is generally biased towards the provision of European languages, and I will make further comment on this. In addition, there may be important reasons to nurture minority languages which will not be spoken elsewhere. For example, when Ireland became independent from the United Kingdom, it was deemed important to promote the place of Irish Gaelic in Irish education and society as well as the encouragement of traditional Irish sports. These were all aspects of Irish cultural life which had been seen to be discouraged by the British establishment. It was therefore important for the emerging Irish Nation to reinstate the language and culture contributing to an independent identity.

There are similar important cultural justifications for significant investment in Scottish Gaelic, although it is unlikely that ability to speak the language will enhance the trading position of Scotland in the wider world.

It is regrettable that there is little provision of teaching in other non-European languages, particularly those spoken in important and emerging economies with whom trading links will become increasingly important. Mandarin, Japanese, Urdu, Hindi and Arabic spring to mind. It is unlikely that we have teachers available to teach these languages formally in schools, but there are significant teaching resources in our wider society.

SCILT has found a decline in pupils taking instruction beyond S2, and the ending of the compulsory status of modern language teaching in 51% of schools for S4 pupils.

These are matters of serious concern requiring robust and radical change in our language teaching strategy in Scottish Schools.