

Submission from Ms Kirsten Herbst-Gray, Langholm Academy

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Funding

Background information

The money allocated by the Scottish Government to fund its '1 + 2' proposals is £120k for the pilot projects in 2012-13, and £4M after the pilots in 2013-14 (the £4M being subject to agreement in the next draft Budget). Funding for 2013/14 will be for local authorities/ schools to use as they deem necessary to enhance their current language provision – for example, this may be used for teacher training, refresher training or Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunities or taking on Foreign Language Assistants.

1. Is the funding proposed by the Scottish Government sufficient for the 2 + 1 proposals?

As a classroom practitioner, I am unable to assess whether or not the funding is sufficient. However, I can say that as far as my professional circumstances are concerned, funding so far has not been visible.

2. Could more use be made of EU funds to fund the 1 + 2 proposal for Scotland, such as Comenius or Erasmus?

The EU support has proven very useful for schools with sufficient time and staffing allocation to MFL. More use could be made if the curriculum and the management structure in schools allow MFL to play a more significant role and enjoy more support.

It might be worthwhile to establish if EU funding would be available for some closer to home support for language teachers such as full day CPD/in –service days focusing on language practice and teaching methods in the light of CfE, the new national courses and exams.

This type of CPD should be run by classroom practitioners with a sound knowledge of the Scottish education system, the new national courses and who are able to conduct sessions in the target language, i.e French, German, Spanish etc.

These full days/in service days/weekends/holiday sessions should be organised within regions or on a national basis frequently. I consider this at least as efficient and comfortable as CPD abroad.

Skills and resources

3. Should all future primary school teachers have a languages qualification (as recommended by the Working Group)?

All future academic graduates should have a languages qualification as it is common standard in other European countries and across the world. The ability to communicate in a language other than the native language is an indicator of sophisticated education and academic ability. Care must be taken that the over dominance of one language does not lead to a limitation in choice for pupils.

4. Do existing teachers and teaching assistants have the skills and teaching resources available to teach languages? Or do they need more training and support?

Two MFL taught in Scotland seem to be well resourced and well supported. There should be parity between languages; language teachers should be used to their full capacity in all languages they are qualified to teach. Teachers should be given the opportunity to identify areas for development and areas where resources are required. Those needs should be addressed by SCILT, SALT, ES, LEAs. It is necessary for these organisations to work together closely.

The best support for teachers are teachers (classroom practitioners) with a track record of excellence in teaching and commitment to professionalism. Please see question 2 for suggestions how to support teachers closer to home.

5. How can we increase the numbers of language assistants in schools?

Again, this is a time issue question. If schools do not have PTs of MFL but Faculty Heads in charge of a number of subjects, there is a lack of leadership and responsibility to undertake such projects. Also, in some cases, lack of accommodation facilities together with lack of funding are obstacles. Language assistants should be carefully selected to avoid disappointment and extra work for teachers. They should be employed on the basis of a temporary contract.

6. Should headteachers receive extra support to allow them to show leadership on implementing the 1 + 2 proposals?

Headteachers and other members of SMT should be receiving extensive information on the 1+2 proposal together with a briefing on the recommendations of the Language Working Group as there seems to be a need for it as far as I can see. Local Educational Authorities should be leading in the first instance together with subject specialists/Development officers and PTs if applicable. The 1+2 proposal should develop into a policy in the time to come so that there will be need to act upon it.

7. How can local communities and parents be involved in encouraging children to learn languages?

Scotland has a number of bi-lingual children in its schools. There are community languages spoken in big cities. Schools should explore what languages their pupils bring from home and, if possible, help pupils to develop these further. At parents nights and information evenings, Headteachers should give subject specialists a platform to present facts and figures about language learning and the benefits for pupils' development. School language projects could help to get parents involved,

such as questionnaires about languages, projects about family roots and family ties abroad, Scotland as a tourist country and the local area in a tourist context to name but a few.

Capacity

8. What is the capacity within the curriculum to accommodate greater language study?

Primary schools should run a subject-specific curriculum in P6 and P7 with a timetable similar to secondary school. 30 minutes sections for each subject would ensure diversity and correspond with primary pupils attention span. That way, time allocation for MFL can be fixed (four to five 30 minutes sections per week recommended, preferably one section per day) and allows teachers to work systematically. Transition would be more coherent. Input from secondary might be required to support the delivery of MFLs in primary school. In Secondary, more time is required in S1 and S2 to allow progression and give pupils a sense of achievement and success. Ideally, four periods per week for L2 or three periods per week for L2 and two periods per week for L3. (L1 = English, L2= French/German/Spanish, L3= French/German/Spanish) Again, Headteachers require a policy in order to make more room for MFL teaching.

9. What are your thoughts on how language learning could be embedded into existing teaching (such PE for example) to increase language learning time at school?

This is called immersion - a common model in other European countries and across the world. Immersion must begin as early as possible but not too early (Australian research, German research). There is no point in starting immersion if it cannot be sustained or if it is just meant to be a "one off" project. In order to learn a MFL successfully, time and methodology are the key factors to prevail. It would be interesting to run a trial with schools/colleagues who would be willing to take part. An ideal topic area in primary and secondary to develop immersion approaches is talking about the home area/about Scotland. This has been done in my school successfully.

Another important point in MFL learning is the "mother-tongue" principle. Unfortunately, MFL teachers cannot always apply this to its full extent as the mother tongue (English, L1) in its current situation is acquired not taught in Scottish schools. Scottish pupils do not necessarily learn about the linguistic aspects of their native language (lexicology, semantics, syntax, grammar and the roots of the language). In order to establish the 1+2 model successfully, it is necessary to review the teaching of English and the contents of English courses in primary and secondary education.

What types of languages, and when/ how to learn them

10. Are there any specific languages should children be learning, and why

The 1+2 model should give pupils the chance to learn one MFL from each of the European language families, i.e. French/Spanish/Italian for the Romanic language

family and German for the Germanic language family. As Scotland is in Europe and, as a country, is a member of the EU with trade links predominantly to Germany, care must be taken that German does not disappear from the Scottish curriculum and that German teachers, highly qualified and motivated, are utilized according to their specialism. Furthermore, community languages such as Urdu and Mandarin Chinese are to be considered. If possible, schools might think about offering languages such as Russian and Polish to allow pupils to achieve language awards. (This question would not be asked in a science department. All sciences are equal, all languages should be.)

11. What are your thoughts on how to encourage more children to learn languages at primary school?

Here are the things that are required:

- Motivated teachers
- Supportive Headteachers
- Resources that are easily accessible for non-subject experts
- Time allocation
- Review teaching of L1 and tie up wherever possible with requirements to learn and teach L2 and L3
- Making MFL a requirement for university access (like elsewhere in the world)
- Working with parents (benefits of MFL learning)
- Consulting teachers on their needs and requirements
- A language policy

Transition between primary and secondary schools

The Committee have heard concerns that children making the transition from primary to secondary schools may have difficulty in continuing in the languages they have learned in primary – and that resolving this is key to the Scottish Government's 1 + 2 proposal.

SCILT research has highlighted that only a third of primary schools currently have a transition plan on languages with their secondary school.

12. How can we resolve the issue of children experiencing difficulties in continuing with the languages they have learned in primary school when they move to secondary level?

If children learn two MFL in primary school, there should not be a problem. Care must be taken that 1+2 does not contribute to the over dominance of one language but that there is parity and that all languages benefit from the proposal. Local circumstances and staffing issues have to be taken into consideration. Unfortunately, progression is not always an option in S1 as teaching time in primary is insufficient to consolidate knowledge and develop skills to a secure level.

13. Should this transition (and overall joined up working between primary and secondary schools) be managed by local authorities or a national strategy?

Local circumstances should be taken into account and so should staffing. However, MFL would benefit from a stronger national input and from monitoring the implementation of the 1+2 proposal for the benefit of all Modern Foreign Languages. A policy is required to prevail.

Role of languages in economic development

Research commissioned by the Scottish Government Languages Working Group suggests that an inability to engage with foreign business in its own language is a barrier to trade development, and can be measured as a cost equivalent to over £500 million to the Scottish economy each year.

14. How can we ensure that Scottish children are not disadvantaged in their career prospects due to lack of skills in languages compared to children from elsewhere?

That is a very important point and I am glad to see this in this paper. We should ensure that we do all we can to provide coherence and progression in MFL learning and teaching. Leadership in MFLs plays an important role the same as commitment from Headteachers and other stakeholders. The biggest issue for me is the lack of time allocated to MFL learning in the Scottish curriculum and the starting age of the learners. Also, MFL are not linked to the native language English as much as they could be due to reluctant support from English colleagues. Scottish Higher pupils should have a compulsory residential work experience/stay in the country of the MFL they have been learning at school. The studying of a MFL should be a requirement for access to further and higher education. MFL have to be made more relevant.

Comparisons with other countries

15. How you think the Scottish Government's 1 + 2 proposal compares to other countries, European or otherwise?

With over ten years of teaching experience in the German school system, I am able to make a genuine comparison. In Germany, pupils start learning their first modern language (English, French, Danish, Polish, Czech – depending on where they live) at kindergarten age with a playful approach focusing on speaking and listening. In Primary, Germany began to formally teach a MFL in the 1980s and with pupils at the age of 8 or 9. In Secondary, depending on the type of Secondary School pupils attend, they will be able to learn one (low ability pupils, SEN), two (Modern Secondary Schools, Comprehensive Schools) or three modern languages (Grammar Schools). However, EU research has found out that despite of the time allocated to teaching MFL in Germany, only 69% of Germans stated they were able to converse in a language other than German. Compared to Luxemburg, Holland and Sweden with over 90% stating they can speak another language, this is average in the EU. A qualification in a MFL is a requirement for university access and for gaining a PhD. On Cvs and when completing job application forms for German firms, one will always find a section which requires to state what language(s) one is able to speak and to what level (basic, intermediate, advanced, fluent). Knowledge of MFLs is considered to be a character trait of a sophisticated, well-educated person.