

Cross-Party Group on Germany

Tuesday 17 May 2022 at 6:15pm

Minutes

Present

MSPs

Colin Beattie MSP
Fiona Hyslop MSP
Michelle Thomson MSP
Dean Lockhart MSP

Invited guests

Bethan Owen, Quality Improvement Education Officer 3-18 Languages at City of Edinburgh Council
Ann Robertson, 1+2 Languages Advisor at East Lothian Council, Midlothian Council and Scottish Borders Council
Heiko Stahl, Co-head of the European and International division with the Ministry of Education in the State of Rhineland-Palatinate
Frank Strang, The Scottish Government

Non-MSP Group Members

John Clifford
Annette Gotzkes
Sigrid Rieuwerts
Hans-Georg Thönges
Bill Rodger
Sheila Dickson

Apologies

Murdo Fraser MSP
Peter Müller-McDougall

Welcome & Approval of Previous Minutes

Sigrid Rieuwerts submits an amendment to the previous minutes.

Minutes approved.

AGM

The Group nominates:

Convener – John Clifford nominated Colin Beattie MSP.

Vice Convener – Colin Beattie MSP nominates Dean Lockhart MSP and Andreas Zimmer.

Secretary – Colin Beattie MSP nominates Laura Cunningham.

All nominees accept and the Group unanimously agrees to all nominations.

Language Learning in Scotland and Germany

Bethan Owen, Quality Improvement Education Officer 3-18 Languages at City of Edinburgh Council

Ann Robertson, 1+2 Languages Advisor at East Lothian Council, Midlothian Council and Scottish Borders Council

Heiko Stahl, Co-head of the European and International division with the Ministry of Education in the State of Rhineland-Palatinate

BO and AR share a PowerPoint slide discussing the framework for language learning in Scotland which covers the Scottish Government's 1+2 policy.

BO explains that the concept of entitlement is central to this policy so all learners and all settings have access to this model of provision. Pupils have a broad access to education until Secondary Year 3 and as they move into the senior phase (S4, 5 and 6) where pupils choose subjects to study further or choose to discontinue with certain subjects. It is possible to stop at S3 but pick up again later in the senior phase.

From Primary 1 to Secondary Year 3, there is a continuous experience of L2 in Scotland. L2 is the first additional language aside from the main language of learning (English). This is intended to be a continuous progressive and high-quality language learning experience. Under this policy, young people in Scotland should have 10 years of learning that second language continuously.

Beyond S3, schools can offer pupils to opportunity to continue with that second language if they choose through a certificated pathway – this is awarded by the Scottish Qualifications Authority. They can receive a National 4 or 5, Higher or Advanced Higher. Some schools offer languages for life and work and baccalaureate.

In terms of L3, this starts no later than Primary 5 – no later than 10 years of age. That also needs to be offered at some point between S1-S3. However, there is no requirement for this to be continuous beyond the transition from primary to secondary education which makes the L3 model more flexible. Some schools offer a continuous experience but there can be issues with staffing, skills and confidence in teaching staff.

It is typically taught as a learning block which can offer flexibility also. If a school is learning about a specific country, they can learn the culture and also the language in that learning block. This can link into local communities so schools can opt for Polish, Nepalese, or BSL. The L3 is more explorative and can help look at the transferable skills pupils learn from learning language and culture.

AR explains that to ensure continuous learning for L2 and the learning of L3, a group of associated primary schools and high schools would agree the planning around the language offered. The vast majority of the schools in the South East of Scotland chose French at the L2 language. It is the responsibility of the classroom teacher to teach the language – this is because they have the most contact with the children therefore the second language can be imbedded into their classroom practice in their daily routines, linking to other areas of the curriculum such as art and music.

Schools can offer other languages. Eyemouth cluster, for example, offer German because German is taught extensively in the secondary school. Other schools may have chosen Spanish.

In terms of language competency, this depends on the exit point pupils choose. After 10 years of language learning, many pupils will not receive a recognition or certification. This is an issue highlighted with the current education system. There is a want for this to be recognised.

In terms of support, the 1+2 policy is funded by the Scottish Government and has been for over 10 years. This supports the employment of language development officers and organise staff training. Networks and partnerships are key support systems and increasingly local authorities are working in regional partnerships. They also have links with the University of Edinburgh's Moray House where they recently completed a language toolkit for language learning. Other programmes such as the GET programme which facilities German education trainees to come to Scotland and do part of their course in Scottish schools.

Other network and support bodies include: SCILT is the National Languages Centre which supports languages learning in Scotland through resources and research. Languages and Network Group Scotland (LANGS) are a professional network which brings together local authority officers, officers from universities and other public bodies which have an interest in language teaching in Scotland.

In relation to the European Framework, it is stated greater alignment with this framework would help with coherence. It would benefit schools in Scotland to understand this framework and the benchmarks of the framework. AR states it would be beneficial for students and pupils to understand where they sit within the framework and for that to be part of the accreditation system Scotland has in place.

To address the point of changes BO or AR would like to see made to the 1+2 policy in Scotland – it was agreed they would like to see the policy evolve rather than change geared towards a more multi-lingual culture of language learning. This will also allow greater inclusion of heritage and community languages. It would also be beneficial for more awareness around the skills set progression in terms of language learning also. It is hoped with the curriculum reform in Scotland more scope is given for language learning and more languages can be included in the 1+2 provision.

For Primary level, BO states greater emphasis of languages, skills and pedagogy for teachers entering the profession. Universities all offer language as an option with primary teaching but it can vary from university to university. It would support workforce planning if there was more cohesion and more input from newly qualified teachers as an exit requirement. This would help in terms of their career development. Having languages as part of an everyday business of our schools would require a cultural change but would serve Scottish schools well. The 1+2 policy has gone some way to achieve this compared to 11/12 years ago, but this could go further in this respect.

For Secondary level, AR agrees that workforce planning is a key issue in developing language learning in Scottish schools. More work can also be done with universities to help implement changes BO discussed and expand 1+2 policy. AR would like to see a next phase of 1+2 that encompasses the multilingualism mindset and adopts the cultural shift towards that. In terms of issues with the current language learning provision, it was highlighted that the disengagement with languages particularly at the secondary stage where pupils can choose their own subjects is and the reiteration that it seems unfair after 10 years that they receive no recognition in terms of accreditation. There are also pupils who already speak multiple languages including English but do not receive recognition for those additional languages.

Overall, it is ultimately vital for pupils to see why languages are beneficial to learn which was one of the main advantages the Erasmus scheme offered. When learning a language, it is important pupils are offered the chance to use their skills in a meaningful way. Now Scotland is no longer part of Erasmus the lack of opportunity is being felt and has a great impact pupils.

CB asks what happened to German language assistants. SR mentions the GETS Programme support this. AR/BO respond that there have been financial cuts which has made getting a language assistant harder. Decisions have to be made where money is best spent.

Heiko Stahl, Co-head of the European and International division with the Ministry of Education in the State of Rhineland-Palatinate:

HS outlines the school system in the Rhineland-Palatinate:

- Primary – children start around 5/6 year old and they have 4 years of primary schooling. In these first four years there is some French and English language 'teaching'. This is however more play based for the younger children. This includes: singing, baking and learn to go shopping. At this level, teachers are not trained to teach languages in a structured manner.
- In year 5 / the first Secondary year: The more structured language learning starts. The languages would typically be French, Latin or English.
- In year 6: Pupils would start to learn the other language they did not in year 5. Pupils must take English at this stage, it is compulsory and they must learn English for at least 4 years.
- In year 10/11: Pupils can choose different subjects but they have to take one foreign language until the end of their schooling years if they would like a qualification. 85% of pupils choose English. Other languages include: French, Latin, Ancient Greek, Spanish and Russian.
- In Germany overall English is the predominant second language that every pupil has to take for a required period of time.
- English is also classed as one of the major subjects in German schools which means more hours of learning per week than other subjects. In the Rhineland-Palatinate they state they must have 3 contacts per week which means the language teacher needs to meet their class at least 3 times per week to ensure the learning is ongoing and continuous.

In terms of the European Framework, this is displayed on every pupils diploma when they leave school. It will state the level the pupil has reached in a certain language such as B2 for example.

In terms of language hierarchy, English is the priority language. Community languages in the Rhineland-Palatinate include Portuguese, Polish and Turkish for example and students can study but this is not on offer at every school. This would also be included on the diploma.

If a pupil's mother tongue is not German, they are able to state this as one of their other languages alongside English. This would mean they have 3 languages.

Some schools in the Rhineland-Palatinate offer bi-lingual classes. This would be subjects such as History taught in English or French.

The Rhineland-Palatinate geographically is close to France and Luxembourg. This means they have teachers from France teaching in the State. Teachers are given the training to be able to teach their subjects in both languages. They are able to also advance in educational courses on offer in the Rhineland-Palatinate.

HS states there are around 1500 schools in the Rhineland-Palatinate and they usually have around 75 to 80 language assistants per year, mainly from France, UK, Canada, Russia and China. Majority come from French speaking countries. The language assistants mainly go to secondary schools and not every school gets a language assistant. Budget wise they have around 550,000 euros to spend on language assistants in the State. This programme started about 1905.

Questions

AG asks about teachers in Scotland and their proficiency in the foreign languages. Are there any plans to make this a compulsory exit requirement or an entry requirement to university? Are there any additional courses for teachers to learn?

BO: I am not personally involved in any discussions on this or the current framework. At this moment there is not a concrete plan, but it is certainly something they are keen to explore. In terms of other models of teacher training, there are some weekend courses for training and upskilling. A lot of this content is online.

AG: Are there any plans to formalise this into a requirement?

AR: This is not in the remit of local authority language development officers to formalise. It would sit with universities or national agencies. There is framework there that allows people to see where they are on their learning journey and what the next steps are being used in Europe, it could help Scotland if they were to adopt similar to allow teachers to gain confidence and assess their own learning against this framework.

HS adds the European Framework is not just important in schooling but society. For example, if you apply for a job within Germany, the European standardised document (Europass) to put in all the information for the position you are applying for. One main element is language competencies and the levels of competency – A1, B2, C1 for example.

HS mention in terms of universities in Germany, in particular STEM subjects, if you go to study a STEM subject a lot of the literature is in English. This helps German students understand the 'Why' to learning English especially if they want to study a STEM subject. A certain proficiency is helpful but also required.

SR contributes that students are working hard in Scotland to learning languages but receive no recognition. Perhaps if this is introduce the language portfolio Europe has, it would help demonstrate a person's skills. In Europe, the single CV / Europass is a requirement for many things such as jobs and universities – people could be unable to study without this. If a student is coming from the UK, they must be tested to assess their language skills. For many European universities, it is a requirement to have two languages. In respect of the education of teachers, the primary teachers in

Scotland manage to pedagogy and skills well but also many do to have the grounding in language skills themselves. With a main focus being on French, it is hard to get teachers through the system who can do the L2 in German and this will continue to diminish. It is important to ensure they have German teachers but this will not happen if the focus remains on French.

CB asks HS what Scotland could be doing differently?

HS raises the point about students being able to opt-out of languages. There should be a requirement for a deeper understanding of another language to a level of proficiency that they person can use the language. It may also spark an interest in learning another language also. In the Rhineland-Palatinate, offering Latin for example allows learners to understand a new culture and a different way of thinking. It applies to learning any language. Languages can provide great mobility to learners that is invaluable.

AOB

Most members agree that some form of certification for learners in Scotland for the 10 years of their L2 language would be beneficial.

CB raises the UK alternative the Turing Scheme to Erasmus. HS mention the issue with this is that it is a one way programme for people in the UK to go to Europe and not an exchange. SR mention no teachers can come to the UK either under this scheme.

CB thanks all for joining.

Meeting ends at 7:45pm

Next date: Sept/Oct 2022