

**SALT CONFERENCE, SATURDAY 3 NOVEMBER 2012:  
KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

**MODERN LANGUAGES IN SCOTLAND – PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE:  
“*Ver fremde sprachen nicht kennt, weiß nichts von seiner eigenen*” [Goethe]**

**Some reflections**

I am delighted to have this opportunity to share with you some reflections on Modern Languages provision in Scotland, past, present and future. These reflections were captured initially in a paper which I prepared for the national Languages Working Group – on which I represented the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES). The report of the Working Group was published on 17 January 2012.

As the time-honoured French expression goes, “plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose”. The challenges that Scottish Government is seeking to address in relation to Modern Languages provision in Scotland’s schools are essentially the same challenges that have attracted significant ministerial attention in recent decades. We have been here before! In 1989, the then Minister, Michael Forsyth, Secretary of State for Scotland, introduced, via a SOEID circular, an initiative entitled, ‘Languages for All’. That change to the secondary curriculum resulted from extensive deliberations and lobbying - including lobbying from SALT - about the value of learning modern languages and the positive contributions which foreign language skills can bring to a country whose economic prosperity depends, in significant measure, on exports. After all, Napoleon saw us (Les Anglais) as ‘une nation de boutiquiers’ The ‘Languages for All’ initiative, which essentially involved the adoption of a modern language as a **compulsory** subject of study throughout S1-S4, was complemented by a parallel commitment to introduce the teaching of modern languages in primary schools.

While, arguably, the MLPS initiative – due, in significant measure, to relatively generous national funding for training programmes – was, and continues to be, regarded as a success, the requirement for **all** pupils to study modern languages throughout S1-S4 had encountered growing disappointment and difficulties through the 1990s. It has to be said that, notwithstanding the arrival of ‘certification for all’ in the form of Standard Grade, a sizeable number of modern linguists were less than enthusiastic about **children of all abilities** being expected to continue with the study of a language post S2. Those difficulties led in part to the then Minister, Helen Liddell, establishing in 1998 a Ministerial Action Group on Languages. That Group reported in 2000 and the Scottish Executive responded in September 2001. A major outcome of the work and recommendations of the Ministerial Action Group was a shift from a ‘**compulsion**’ to an ‘**entitlement**’ model for delivering modern languages in the S1-S4 curriculum. As you will be acutely aware, learner **entitlements** are at the heart of the new curriculum

That 90s 'entitlement' model has resulted over time in a wide variation of provision and uptake across Scotland. Whereas some authorities – like Angus – have promoted and indeed supported an expectation that a majority of pupils - defined as 85%+ - continue with a foreign language in S3, others have adopted a more 'laissez-faire' approach, which has resulted in some schools across the country experiencing low uptakes post S3 - 30% or less (such schools may or will face considerable challenges in managing national expectations about modern languages provision in the Broad General Education phase of the new curriculum). [To pause there and digress a little, there is now **absolutely** no doubt, (despite last year's bemusingly artificial debate about a "3+3 v. 2+2+" curriculum model for secondary schools) that Scottish Government and Education Scotland envisage all pupils being entitled to a broad general (and deep) education **to the end of S3**, with subject choice for the senior phase occurring mid-way through S3 – CfE, to quote Dr Alasdair Allan, Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages, is about "broadening not narrowing the curriculum". Any residual doubts in some quarters will surely have been dispelled by advice targeted at parents/carers and published in August 2012 in an Education Scotland CfE 'Briefing' In my view, any continuing cavilling on this score can only be the result of a worrying desire to maintain the 'status quo' and, despite the impressive and supposedly transformational claims made for CfE, to ensure that a **largely unchanged examination system** drives the curriculum, determines the nature and scope of children's learning and threatens the success of CfE ambitions. There are already worrying signs that in some parts of the country very little is changing and that preparing pupils for external exams as early as possible continues to be seen by some as **the** major purpose of the secondary school curriculum. Given Scotland's expensive, if not industrial, commitment to a national external examination system, that outcome was perhaps inevitable. Quite a contrast with, let's say, Finland... It is a matter of sad fact that, for many pupils in the first secondary CfE generation, the current S3, BGE (and the study of a Modern Language) ended in S2. So much for change!

The decline hitherto in the uptake of pupils studying a modern language beyond S3 and the no less disappointing decline in the numbers of pupils registering for SQA examinations in modern languages was the subject of unambiguous coverage in the issue of TESS, published on 20 March 2011. Headlines, such as "*Tongue Tied – the Decline of Modern Languages in Scottish Schools*" and "*Poor Language Skills put Young Scots at a Disadvantage*" captured simply but powerfully the parlous state of modern language learning in Scottish schools in 2011/ 2012/ 2013??.

**So why, as a society, are we in roughly the same place we were in 1988 vis à vis modern languages in the school curriculum?** As a former Modern Languages specialist, it seems to me that modern languages teachers, here and now, are encountering the same barriers encountered by your predecessors in the 1970s and 80s. Those barriers are in the main, cultural, societal and attitudinal in nature. In terms of attitudinal barriers, I am absolutely clear these exist across the education community and possibly too within the ranks of Modern Languages teaching. They certainly exist to some degree within the ranks of head teachers and Directors of Education.

Since the dominance of English is now ever more global, it is, of course, not difficult to understand that native speakers of English are much less motivated to learn a foreign language than native speakers of other languages. Unsurprisingly, examples of public figures in the English-speaking world who are comfortably bilingual or multilingual are few and far between, whereas examples of public figures in other European member states that are bilingual or multilingual are legion. We need only think of the worlds of politics, music, cinema, and sport. Throughout the UK, there is an almost inevitable reticence, even among educated professionals, about learning another language when English is as dominant as a 'lingua franca' across the world.

Sadly, albeit amusingly, the Basil Fawlty (Rab C.Nesbitt !!!!?????) attitude to communicating with speakers of other languages (*Speak to them in **English/ Glaswegian** as you would - and with no concessions whatsoever- when speaking with native speakers or, in rare moments of respectful sensitivity, speak slowly or slowly **and loudly**, as the mood or circumstance dictates*) is more an accurate stereotype than a baseless caricature of the British/Scottish attitude towards other languages.

Native speakers of English do not have the same behavioural motivation to master another language that is common among non-native learners of English. In Scotland, we simply have not yet nurtured either a cultural or educational environment that is conducive to the majority of children and young people feeling attracted by or motivated about the prospects of becoming competent in another language. **How many people UK-wide, how many educationists, really believe that the ability to communicate in another language is one of the hallmarks of a well-educated citizen?** I am constantly amazed how unembarrassed UK professionals are in instinctively expecting their European/international counterparts/colleagues to have a ready command of English. Ironically and sadly, such expectations are rarely unfulfilled.

The key task facing the Languages Working Group and the Scottish Government was and is to consider ways in which the learning environment in Scottish schools can be changed in order to revitalise modern languages provision. From where I sit, the Scottish Government's ambitions in relation to the European Union's '1 + 2' model are commendable. Work to address these ambitions is likely to be, however, a more arduous undertaking in Scotland and elsewhere in the United Kingdom than in other European Union member states where motivation for learning languages is undoubtedly much stronger. The **35 ambitious, albeit**, I believe, realistic recommendations of the Languages Working Group Report, published on 17 May 2012, set down key markers for actions which are needed – absolutely needed – if we are to change or transform the landscape of language learning in Scotland. **I will return to these.** But first, let's consider what I believe are the '*sine qua nons*' - the essential 'a priori' conditions – for a transformation, I suspect and hope, many in this room would welcome.

Whatever the scale of the task, the Scottish Government's welcome and ambitious commitments to the 2002 Barcelona agreement will require (i) **resolute leadership**, based on a bold and invigorating vision for language learning in Scotland, (ii) a **clear, well considered and realistic national strategy** encompassing **all** sectors of the education system, and, (iii) a deliverable and **resourced** plan for **career-long teacher education and support, à la TSF (the Donaldson report).**

If the Scottish education system is to avoid, two decades hence, repeating the soul-searching exercise now in place about the state of modern languages learning, there will be a requirement for bolder action by Scottish Government and by key players – **including, education authorities, head teachers, Modern Language teachers** – throughout the education system than has been the case over the past two decades. It is very difficult not to conclude that the unarguable and welcome ambitions of previous ministerial commitments and related initiatives have simply not been matched by the type of powerful actions – for example in respect of teacher education – needed to tackle the nature and range of challenges or barriers to language learning described earlier. The shared vision now needed ought to articulate and promote, **above all else**, a confident belief in the contributions that learning another language can make to the overall linguistic development and learning skills of children and young people. To quote Goethe “*Ver fremde sprachen nicht kennt, weiß nichts von seiner eigenen*”

In the context of a secondary school, teachers of modern languages and English teachers should surely now collaborate as never before in taking forward the new curriculum’s emphasis on cross-curricular approaches to nurturing literacy / language skills. Knowing how languages work (“knowing about language”) should now be more formally and more systematically incorporated within and across learning programmes. That purpose or benefit of language learning is, of course, captured in the preface to the CfE ES.

“Learning a new language encourages children and young people to broaden their horizons as they explore the language and its associated culture.

Through my learning of a new language:

- **I gain a deeper understanding of my first language and appreciate the richness and interconnected nature of languages**
- I enhance my understanding and enjoyment of other cultures and of my own and gain insights into other ways of thinking and other views of the world
- I develop **skills** that I can use and enjoy in work and leisure **throughout my life**.

The study of language plays an **important role in all language learning and the development of literacy skills.**”

For that cross-curricular ambition to succeed, head teachers ought to lead and English and Modern Languages teachers **ought to champion jointly** - with due training and support - a new and sustainable whole school approach to promoting literacy/language across the curriculum.

The national vision for language learning which I am proposing should, therefore, first and foremost, seek to **nurture a respect for language, whether native or other**, and thereby promote the importance of learning about language and of **acquiring the dispositions and lifelong skills** which will enable learners to be confident about **using language** and about **tackling another language**, when and as necessary. The vision should inform a national strategy which is **realistic** about current fairly negative attitudes towards learning languages (which happen also to be held, as I have already suggested by (too) **many influential professionals including head teachers, civil servants, politicians and, yes, Directors of Education**). That strategy has to be **equally realistic and honest** about the capacity of the system, as currently organised and resourced, to effect the improvements envisaged by the 2002 Barcelona agreement. **New beginnings** (and that

is what is needed here) require **new approaches, new attitudes and, most important of all, a new culture. Modern languages teachers should be to the fore in fostering that new culture or, if I may be permitted a neologism, ‘linguapolitik’.** I would urge ML practitioners – and not just enthusiastic and committed SALT members – to be quixotic/evangelical; build on the uplifting examples of outstanding practice including practice captured in SCILT’s Excellence Report, and the many interesting examples showcased in today’s programme.

There is a need to be creative and energetic in seeking to overcome the still powerful obstacles that lie in the way of progress towards achieving ambitions that, pleasingly, we now appear to share with our European neighbours and partners. Changing the culture in Scottish society and in the education system and winning hearts and minds will require leadership from you AND, YES, OTHER KEY PLAYERS and commitments that go beyond simply developing and sharing a renewed vision, however compelling. Once agreed, that new vision should be launched in ways that engage **stakeholders, decision-makers and ‘influencers’**. However unrealistic or gimmicky it might appear, the launch of the vision and related national strategy would be given a huge boost, for example, by key political and professional leaders, in the course of the year following the launch, being encouraged to pledge to learn or tackle through a simple, say, ten weeks introductory course, **another language of their choosing**. That élite group, who can be expected to promote the new vision **from the front**, should include head teachers, university and college principals, senior civil servants, senior education authority officers, and, members of the Cabinet. Gimmicks or gestures along these lines would have high and possibly lasting impact. Actions - and certainly bold actions - tend ultimately to be more eloquent than (fine) words.

**I would like now to turn to Teacher Education and Support [NB- a key focus of the Working Group’s report – Recommendations 20-29 refer]**

The national strategy needed to transform Scotland’s attitudes to learning languages and our capacity to teach languages will require to be supported by a **joined up plan** that promotes related actions in **school education, further education and tertiary education** – the recommendations of the Languages Working Group offer possible ingredients for such a plan. The current lack of coherence across the Scottish education system merits early attention. It is ironic that, at a time when worthy national ambitions are being framed for changing the landscape of language learning, university language departments are either closing or reducing capacity and the study of foreign languages in the further education sector is fast disappearing. Reducing capacity in those sectors – the consequence, yes, of unprecedented financial challenge – is at odds with an emerging interest in expanding foreign language training for teachers either in initial teacher education or in the type of post-qualification continuing professional development environment envisaged by the Donaldson report. Even if it were possible to reverse, in the course of the next two parliaments, (and that **is** the timeframe for Scottish Government’s new model of language learning), the decline in modern languages capacity in Scotland’s universities, there will still be an absolute need to review, through post-Donaldson deliberations and with reference to the work and imminent recommendations of the National Partnership Group, the purpose and nature of existing training programmes, in particular, for teachers in the primary sector.

The 27 days of direct instruction which was a key feature of the original national MLPS training programme **(and which have been reduced in those local programmes that still exist) were never sufficient** to give teacher learners the competence and confidence required to teach a language effectively. Teacher involvement in MLPS programmes has necessarily had to be supplemented by the actions of local authorities and by individual teachers themselves, for example, through additional personal learning and/or through placements abroad, undertaken often, but not always, with European Union or local authority support.

Effective teacher education and teacher support programmes are needed to build modern languages capacity within the system. For quite some time there has been worrying signs of a return to the dominance of French in MLPS programmes and to a corresponding lack of diversification in secondary schools. The latter trend often results from a crude but understandable interest on the part of head teachers in achieving timetabling efficiencies beyond the point of subject choice, **hitherto** in S2. Secure and sustainable diversified provision depends on a regular supply through ITE of dual qualified teachers or on an effective system for practising teachers to undertake post-qualification training in another language. If the ambitions of the '1+2' model are to be realised, **the as yet unaddressed recommendations of previous ministerial groups, in respect of ITE foreign language requirements, need to be revisited. The status quo will plainly not deliver.**

In terms of providing a relatively inexpensive way of supporting teachers either to acquire or refresh foreign language skills, serious consideration ought to be given nationally to resurrecting the FLA programme that is now, sadly, close to extinction. Related matters are the subject of Languages Working Group Recommendation 30. It is salutary to note that in 2011-12 the total number of FLAs (59) deployed in Scottish schools was ten fewer than the total number deployed, for example, in Tayside Region in session 1989-90, the first year of the national MLPS pilots. As a former FLA, teacher and Modern Languages Adviser, that contrast is dispiriting. However, it is far from surprising, given the negative attitudes to foreign languages that are prevalent throughout the Scottish education system.

Carefully selected, well supported and well deployed, FLAs provide welcome and valuable opportunities for pupils to engage directly with a native speaker of the target language. By, literally, bringing the foreign language alive, FLAs can drive home for pupils the relevance of learning another language and demonstrate the access it can offer to the contemporary culture of another country. They are also a ready and often enthusiastic source of up to date linguistic advice and support to teachers. In the context of the new curriculum, **at their best**, they can make powerful contributions to a range of language activities and, of course, to interdisciplinary programmes that have a focus on **intercultural** awareness.

The benefits that well managed FLAS can bring to pupils and staff far exceed the relatively low annual costs (£7911 at current values) of employing 'de facto' teaching assistants whose deployment originates from ambitious reciprocal agreements between the UK and other European governments. Steps - **which clearly require 'buy in' from local authorities and head teachers** - to reverse the demise of FLAs and the withdrawal of support for those agreements would underscore the Scottish Government's resolve to take all possible steps to invigorate the language learning environment in Scotland's schools.

**[Refer to Recommendation 31 re recruitment/ deployment of native speakers and support from cultural organisations – Recommendation 33]**

The key message that I have sought to highlight this morning is that the implementation, over the mid-term, of the Government's ambitious commitments to the European Union's '1+2' model for language learning will require:

- ✓ **a determination to transform Scottish society's attitudes to learning languages and to nurture a new respect for language 'per se'**
- ✓ **confident and ambitious leadership at all levels**
- ✓ **a correspondingly fresh and bold vision likely to support new ambitions / new expectations**
- ✓ **an aspirational but realistic national strategy and coherent action plan which secures the involvement of universities, colleges, education authorities and schools - based on the key recommendations of the Languages Working Group**
- ✓ **a commitment to fund and manage teacher supply and support in order to meet the diverse other language learning needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century Scotland (NB – Recommendation 35)**

**Next steps:**

- **Letter of 28 June from Scottish Government in respect of Scottish Government's languages commitments including commitments to fund projects in respect of:**
  - **ML from P1 (Recommendation 1)**
  - **More effective primary-secondary links (Recommendation 8)**
  - **Languages in BGE (Recommendation 9/ Recommendation 11)**
  - **Language opportunities in the Senior Phase [Recommendations 12 & 16-18]**
- **Scottish Government's imminent response to the recommendations of the Languages Working Group**
- **ADES/Scottish Government summit/conference later this month .....engagement strategy..... preparation of new policies at local level [Recommendation 2/ Recommendation 13]**
- **Funding by way of £4m matched funding to be made available in 13-14**
- **Major challenges – Tough Times – Tough Choices. But when the going gets tough, the tough get going. Brave decisions lie ahead. Courage; Animo!**

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2 November 2012