

Michael Russell MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
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25th January 2011

**A Call for Action regarding the Scots Language and Scottish Literature
in Scottish Education**

Dear Mr Russell,

We, the undersigned, are calling on the Scottish Government this Burns' Day to end generations of neglect of the Scots language and Scottish literature within Scotland's education system.

Successive Scottish Ministers and education policy makers have said that Scotland's language and literature are important to learning and teaching in this country. The national curriculum documents *English Language 5-14* and *Curriculum for Excellence* contain statements encouraging teachers to engage with our country's language and literature. But each administration has failed to invest adequately in training and resources to support this and to ensure that this engagement actually takes place at every level. The result is that Scotland has a teaching profession often ill-equipped to teach Scotland's young people about their own country's language and literature despite the positive interest of many of its members.

This is a shameful situation which affects education in Scotland in a number of ways. The absence of Scots language and Scottish literature from many classrooms sends the message that our own language and literature are simply not important. The lack of any mandatory formal assessment of Scottish literature in the examination system reduces its status in the eyes of many teachers and often denies our students access to the literature of the land in which they live. And the continuing low level of Scots language provision perpetuates discrimination against those tens of thousands of pupils in our schools for whom Scots is their first language.

Under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, the Scottish Government has responsibilities to support the Scots language. Yet Scotland remains one of the very last countries in Europe not to make its language and literature an integral part of mainstream education. We appreciate recent initiatives by the present Government to raise the status of Scots in general, but consultations and well-meaning statements about Scots language and Scottish literature in education are no longer enough. Action and investment are long overdue and urgently required.

In order to address this neglect we call on the Scottish Government to take the following first steps as a matter of urgency.

Curriculum and Exams

If our children are to develop an appreciation of 'Scotland's vibrant literary and linguistic heritage and its indigenous languages and dialects', as recommended in *Curriculum for Excellence*, course guidelines must require the study and assessment of 'a wide range of texts' across the whole range of our linguistic heritage, including texts in Scots, to ensure that 'this principle suffuses' the curriculum. It is particularly important that the Scottish Qualifications Authority's current project to develop assessment arrangements for upper stage qualifications should address this issue. Weak and imprecise recommendations like 'at least one Scottish text should be studied' (Discussion Paper on new National Qualifications) will fail to achieve this. Curricular and exam guidelines should also specify that students may use Scots in any oral or written assessments if they wish to do so. In the examination system there should be a minimum mandatory Scottish literature element at every level: e.g. in the current system, at least one exam essay at Higher/Intermediate and at least one folio essay at Standard Grade must be on a Scottish text. These steps could be implemented from next session and would have insignificant cost implications.

SEQIA

We strongly support all the proposals recently put forward by the Ministerial Working Group on the Scots Language, but especially for the appointment of Scots Language Co-ordinators at Local Authority level. To complement this proposal we feel it is essential that a designated full-time post or department responsible for Scots language and Scottish literature should be created within the new flagship education organisation, SEQIA (Scottish Education Quality and Improvement Agency). This agency's remit, which is to drive forward the *Curriculum for Excellence* and support effective innovation, should, in our view, entail delivery of essential continuing professional development for teachers at a time when local authorities have drastically reduced their own CPD programmes. It should work with other literary and linguistic agencies to help support the teaching of Scottish literature at all stages. It should act as a central point for producing and sharing resources and on-line teaching materials. And it should support education professionals in their development of good teaching practice in Scots language and Scottish literature.

Establishing a Scots language and Scottish literature post/bureau within SEQIA to respond to teachers' needs would require only a moderate level of investment. There is already tremendous goodwill, interest and growing commitment within Scotland's education community on which Government could build. The return on any investment would be huge in terms of social inclusion, improved language and literacy skills and the individual confidence of our young people, all aims shared by the Scottish Government.

On the anniversary of the birth of our national Scots poet, we are asking the Scottish Government to take action immediately to give all our children and young people the means to access, fully explore and enjoy their own linguistic and literary heritage. In 2011 more than ten years after devolution, Scotland's teachers and children have the right to expect their Scottish Government to take at least these few small inexpensive steps towards ensuring that the Scots language and Scottish literature have a central role in the life of our schools.

Yours aye,

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