SLD's (Draft) Response to the *Strategy for the Languages of Scotland*

The positive and unequivocal recognition of Scots as a language to be treated with respect and pride is welcomed by Scottish Language Dictionaries. In this response to the *Strategy for the Languages of Scotland*, we have commented on each section of the draft in the order and end by suggesting some ways in which we can contribute to the success of the strategy.

Rationale

We agree strongly with the reasons given for promoting and learning languages and are pleased to note that there will be increased opportunity for people to use the languages of Scotland and be confident in using them. Lack of confidence in the use of Scots and Scottish English has long been a problem for Scottish people and the learning of an additional language is greatly hampered by lack of knowledge about and confidence in one's own language. In order to show respect for the languages of others, it is essential to have respect for one's own language and to know that it is respected by others.

In welcoming *Fresh Talent* to Scotland, it would be helpful if programmes to assist with the acquisition or improvement of English were to recognise the special features of Scottish English and to take into consideration the extent to which the Scots and Scottish Gaelic languages will be encountered. This could avoid a great deal of confusion and will have the strongly positive effect of underlining Scotland's rich and unique linguistic diversity.

We have noted the disastrous fall in the numbers of school pupils sitting Highers in modern languages. The emphasis that this *Strategy for the Languages of Scotland* places on language learning will lead to a better level of teaching of Scottish English and Scots in schools, an absolute prerequisite for confident learning of other modern languages.

Policies

With respect to English, any *Strategy for the Languages of Scotland* should recognise that **Scottish English is not the same thing as South British English**. Failure to recognise the status of Scottish English as an alternative standard to South British English has been responsible for lack of confidence in its speakers. It has also produced a number of anomalies in early literacy teaching which fail to take into consideration the differences between the vowel systems of Scottish Standard English and Received Pronunciation. It should also be noted that **although American English, Canadian English, Australian English, New Zealand English, South African English and so on all have their own dictionaries, there is no Dictionary of Scottish English**.

We are very pleased to note the many initiatives that are taking place in respect of Scottish Gaelic and hope that Scots will eventually be promoted by the Scottish Executive with equal enthusiasm.

We would respectfully point out that Doric (or North East Scots) and Lallans are both dialects which are included in the Scots Language**. We would strongly take issue with the claim that Scots is not an endangered language.** Although it is used by many speakers in Scotland and most, if not all Scots understand some items of Scots vocabulary, there is a rapidly accelerating decline in the number of Scots words in daily use or even in the passive vocabulary of younger Scots. The fact that Scots shares many words with English is in itself a threat to Scots; Scots is being killed off because education in English without simultaneous education about Scots inevitably shifts speakers along the Scots~Scottish English spectrum in the direction of Scottish English. However, we are confident that any action plan for implementing the *Strategy for the Languages of Scotland* will take strong measures to halt and reverse this attrition.

Again, we are very please to note that the *Strategy for the Languages of Scotland* clearly states the importance of recognising Scots as a distinct language. As signatories to The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, the UK should, by this time, through education and through leading by example, have rendered this debate obsolete.

We would agree that literature in Scots is there to be enjoyed by all. Just as Scots speakers, who are willing to make an effort with unfamiliar language, still enjoy the works of Chaucer, Shakespeare and Milton, so the works of Gavin Douglas, William Dunbar, Robert Henryson, Sir David Lindsay were once read and enjoyed throughout Britain. These internationally acclaimed works nourish and complement the work of the many talented Scots writers of today. Those teachers who teach Older Scots literature find that pupils embrace it as part of their heritage and even non-Scots speakers are not daunted by it.

The Executive's National Guidelines on English Language 5-14 were indeed very supportive of Scots. We note, however, **that the draft of A Curriculum for Excellence makes no mention of Scots whatsoever,** although English, Scottish Gaelic, Urdu, Punjabi and Polish are all named. Given the proven positive benefits of using Scots in the classroom, this is highly surprising. **It is also totally at odds with the robust attitude taken in the *Strategy for the Languages of Scotland.***

Please note that there are two errors in the list of groups supporting and promoting Scots: The Scots Language Resource Centre is now The Scots Language Centre; and Scottish Language Dictionaries is now the principal body responsible for the custodianship and stewarding of Scots lexis with responsibility for the *Scottish National Dictionary*, *A Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* and the online *Dictionary of the Scots Language*.

Language Provision

Language provision for Scots, as agreed to in the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, will need strong and explicit support from the Scottish Executive. As we have seen in the example of A Curriculum for Excellence, it is not always easy to ensure that Scots is recognised, far less actively provided for. The authors of the *Strategy*

for the Languages of Scotland are therefore to be congratulated on stating the clear principle that 'The Scots Language will be treated with respect and pride'.

The Contribution of Scottish Language Dictionaries

Scots

There are two key areas in language planning: these are codification and elaboration. Dictionaries have an important role to play in both.

Codification: if Scots is a language, does it have a dictionary?

Yes. For two centuries, Scottish lexicographers have been building up a record of language in Scotland. In 1808, Jamieson published the *An Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language*, a methodological trailblazer for dictionaries world-wide. In the early 1920s, work began on the *Scottish National Dictionary* (10 volumes) and A Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue (12 volumes), both of which we have recently made available free online as the *Dictionary of the Scots Language* at www.dsl.ac.uk. This is a major achievement for a minority language and one that Scotland should be extremely proud of. There is a constant need for updating and revision both in the light of new scholarship and because the language continues to change.

There are also two key areas where Scottish lexicography is sadly deficient. **There is no Scots~Scots dictionary. Such a dictionary would give a clear message about the status of Scots as a language**. The other, more pressing, **need is for a complete dictionary Modern Scots.** Although *A Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* aimed to record all words used in Older Scots, whether or not they were also in use south of the Border, the record of Modern Scots provided by the *Scottish National Dictionary* is incomplete because it contains only those words that differ from English or which, if shared with English, differ markedly in usage. (The fact that this still amounts to 10 volumes is remarkable in itself!) However, just because a word is shared with English does not make it non-Scots and thus a large proportion of Scots words have been excluded from the dictionary. The Scots equivalent of English 'internet', for example, is 'internet'. This is a project which is very high on Scottish Language Dictionaries' list of priorities, not only because it would facilitate the creation of additional resources such as a spellchecker, but also because the absence of such a dictionary is a complete absurdity.

Codification: if Scots is a language, where is the grammar book?

There is a pressing need for an authoritative, well-researched grammar of Scots. Data collected for the dictionaries are rich resources to assist in the production of a descriptive grammar of Scots, in addition to data available in the SCOTS Corpus at the University of Glasgow. Scottish Language Dictionaries would be prepared to assist with this task if asked to do so.

Elaboration: pushing boundaries

One reason why Scots is perceived as lacking language status or being only 'half a language' is its infrequent use in higher registers in modern Scotland. For those who wish to write, or speak, formally, in Scots, the *Dictionary of the Scots Language* is

invaluable. I**t stimulates creative use of the language and gives authority to the user.** As the use of formal Scots increases, Scottish Language Dictionaries must be ready to record developments.

Scottish English

Although there are dictionaries of American English, Canadian English, Australian English, Indian English, Australian English, New Zealand English and so on, there is no Dictionary of Scottish English. This serves to perpetuate **the myth that Scottish English is in some way inferior to other Englishes.**

The Dictionary of Scottish English must be compiled with the proper application of lexicographical principles such as Scottish Language Dictionaries currently employs. We are uniquely qualified to undertake this work.

Education

Scottish Language Dictionaries is already involved in outreach projects in the classroom and in community groups. Through storytelling, discussion and educational activities **we engender respect for the Scots language and pride and self confidence among its users,** whether they be members of the prison population, Brownies, members of the SWRI or writers groups. We extend our outreach as widely as we can. Members of our staff regularly lecture at the University of Edinburgh, the University of Glasgow and the University of the Highlands and Islands Millennium Institute. They are also active in Continuing Professional development for teachers. We would welcome any opportunity to extend our outreach role.

The Languages of Scotland as a National Asset

Scotland has the potential to become a world leader in language scholarship and dissemination of knowledge. The great historical Scots dictionaries, thanks to the perseverance of dedicated individuals, are astonishing productions for a minority language, and a very modest long-term investment would safeguard them by allowing revision in the light of modern scholarship and by ensuring constant updating to retain their currency. The Dictionary of the Scots Language and the SCOTS Corpus give Scots scholarship a formidable online presence and we look forward to an online Scottish Gaelic dictionary in due course. A proposed Linguistic Survey of Scotland, embracing all the indigenous languages of Scotland, designed for regular updating and disseminated online would complete a set of linguistic resources to set an international standard.

This would be greatly facilitated by a Board of Scots, working alongside the Bòrd na Gàidhlig within an Institute for the Languages of Scotland as recommended in the *Cultural Commission Report* (June 2005).

There is a strong international interest in the languages of Scotland. Scottish Language Dictionaries receives inquiries from scholars from all over the world. Recently, for example, we have had an increase in interest from Japan, Poland and the Ukraine. Scottish Language Dictionaries would be delighted to take part in a coordinated strategy to attract students from abroad to study Scots language and literature in Scotland.

We have an active international outreach programme. Through this we are aware of the lively interest in Scots language and literature throughout the world and would like to participate in initiatives to develop the promotion of Scots as an asset to the tourist industry. We are currently developing publications for the tourist market.

Scottish Language Dictionaries do all this on a very small budget and are carrying out very long-term projects on short-term funding. With adequate funding, we could go a long way to removing the absurd anomaly that exists in the UK whereby, Ulster Scots (a dialect of Scots), is very generously funded by Westminster, while the parent language struggles on the mere pittance the Scottish Arts Council can spare.

As an organisation which has both grass-roots and academic foundations, we are well qualified to be a major partner in implementing the Strategy for the Languages of Scotland.