Purpose

1. To report findings to the Languages Working Group of the cost to Scotland of a monolingual workforce. To support the delivery of an action plan for the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning for the manifesto commitment ‘that all students develop 1+2 languages’ [mother tongue + 2 additional languages].

Background and method

Over the past decade, it is rare that a year has gone by without the publication of a major report lamenting the paucity of British linguistic ability and the crisis in language learning.

2. There is now a considerable weight of evidence highlighting the benefit to individuals, business, culture and the economy of having a workforce able and confident to communicate freely with partners around the globe.

3. Despite that, there has been a decline in language learning in schools, a trend which is particularly marked in state schools. There also remains complacency amongst businesses and the population at large that ‘English is enough’, because of its perceived strength as the international language of business.

4. Taken together this has the effect of investment in language teaching being seen as a ‘nice to have’ rather than a priority which directly supports Scottish growth. The reduction of language teaching in state schools also has the potential for language teaching to be seen as a marker of privilege rather than an entitlement.

5. Little of the literature and statistical evidence that has been published is specific to Scotland, although the UK based reports include evidence from Scotland. For this report I have, where possible asked the authors or organisations to assess how accurately their findings can be extrapolated for the Scottish situation and tried to verify the trends by means of a small number of selected interviews with executives in a cross section of Scottish industries, business leaders or working in the promotion of international trade.

6. The time available for the study required a simple methodology, which could test the validity of the anecdotal evidence and assess the potential value of larger scale collection of data. It builds on the work of SCILT, Scotland’s National Centre for Language; basing both the literature reviewed and the businesses contacts on their experience and expertise. The information is collated from a review of industry surveys and relevant literature; a Web search of recruitment agencies in Scotland and a small number of interviews with businesses and organisations. The interviews were targeted at businesses with a range of interests and sizes. Most were by telephone, getting access to a senior member of staff who was able to talk about the impact of monolingualism on their business was not always easy. Initial calls were made to 48 companies or organisations resulting in only 15 successful interviews. The low level of response may reflect the lack of priority or

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1 Mann, Brassell and Bevan; The economic case for language learning and the role of employer engagement; Employer and Education Taskforce 2011
awareness of the impact of monolingualism on their business; going some way to confirming the culture of complacency.

7. The industries interviewed included – tourism, hospitality, engineering, science and technology, food and drink. The roles identified where language was particularly important were sales, marketing and management for all industries, but the importance of language training for those in technical posts were also mentioned.

8. Organisations included Confederation of British Industries, Federation of Small Businesses, Scottish Development International, Scottish Chambers of Commerce, Scottish Government’s International division, Historic Scotland, the German Consulate and the Centre for Scottish Public Policy.

The Economic Case for Improving Language Skills in the Scottish Workforce

Language is a barrier to trade, which can be represented as equivalent to tax. There is evidence that Britain’s language investment is so low that it imposes a heavier tax on British Trade than the average for the rest of the world.\(^2\)

This ‘tax’ currently equates to 0.5% GDP £7.3 billion to the UK economy, pro-rata that is a cost of £591.3 million to the Scottish economy.

9. Since 2001 the debate about the cost to the UK of the lack of multilingual skills in the workforce has intensified. The most influential and relevant studies are listed at annex 1; together they present a compelling picture. A number of business organisations regularly survey their members and these provide the most comprehensive market test of the demand for languages. Although these surveys do not routinely separate the findings for Scotland, the organisations have confirmed to me that they have active Scottish membership and have indicated that the findings were relevant to Scotland.

10. Foremost amongst these is the CBI survey of their members on education and skills. For a number of years this survey has recorded concern by employers at the lack of language skills. They have identified that while a lack of language skills may not often lead to a direct loss, it dissuades businesses from entering into new global markets. While companies who are proactive in their export approach and adapt their products, services and literature to meet market needs and place a high value on language skills can see their business increase, and export businesses that proactively use language skills achieve on average 45% more sales. In 2009 they set out clear requirements in Stronger Together: what business needs from higher education. The most recent survey published in February 2011, Building for Growth: business priorities for education and skills again highlights the lack of languages skills. “The combination of an increasingly global economy and heightened cultural sensitivities is making new demands on many people at work. Weakness in foreign language skills are nothing new, but are tending to be exacerbated since the requirement to take language at GCSE [S4 level] was ended. 76% of employers are not satisfied with young people’s language skills. In addition, well over half (61%) perceive shortfalls in international cultural awareness among school and college leavers.”

11. In April 2011, CBI’s Making the UK the best place to invest set out a vision for the UK and lists the English language as a strength, but points out that “the UK is attractive to overseas business looking to enter the European market, but is struggling with the barrier of working in multiple languages”. CBI members recognise the impact of that struggle. In

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\(^2\) James Foreman-Peck; Costing Babel the contribution of language skills to exporting and productivity (2007)
November 2011 CBI, in association with Ernst and Young produced Winning overseas: boosting business export performance, a report which seeks to demonstrate in a five point plan how UK business could hold its own on the global stage. Chapter three identifies the domestic barriers seen by businesses as inhibiting export potential, including concern that the UK’s skill base does not support export growth.

“Employers who can communicate in two or more languages – combined with an understanding of local cultures – can make all the difference in the conduct of business, consolidating relationships with existing suppliers and customers and opening the way to new contracts”.

12. This report also records the changing languages required as exports potential in the ‘BRICs’ countries. Almost a quarter of businesses now have a demand for Mandarin and Cantonese and one in five is interested in securing employees with Russian or Portuguese language skills.

13. Surveys by the Federation of Small Businesses echoed these findings, as far back as 2004, in Lifting the Barriers to Growth in UK Small Businesses; yet their most recent survey in Raising the standards: An FSB skills survey in 2011 only identifies 3% of members identifying a specific shortage of language skills and a similar number of businesses investing in language training specifically.

14. The behaviours and attitudes of exporters to language skills were surveyed in the British Chambers of Commerce [BCC] in their Language Survey: The Impact of Foreign Language on British Business (2003). When three quarters of the exporting firms in 1,000 SME’s surveyed believed that they had missed or lost export sales or revenue over the previous two years. A variety of reasons were given, but the research found a significant correlation between linguistic ability and export success. The report also highlighted the contradictions inherent in the debate. Their members considered that English continued to be the language of business, but that language was one of the factors exporters taken into account when developing export markets. Most of the exporters surveyed also questioned the practicality of learning languages to support their business dealings given the breadth of markets covered; yet they strongly supported a drive to improve language teaching in schools.

The Economic Case

15. In 2007 the concern from business was examined afresh by James Foreman-Peck a leading economist, taking as a starting point the premise that a common language causes trade, and trade causes economic growth, therefore, a lack of a language is a barrier to trade. In his work Costing Babel he compared the levels of the investment in language skills in the UK with those of our competitors. He takes a market approach to language skills investment, considering the gross and net private returns on language investment. The impact of the lack of investment on smaller firms’ ability to export alongside the boost to productivity that exporting can provide. He then summarises the trading effect of language skills to the UK. “On reasonable assumptions about the range of substitutability, raising British standards of language competence to the rest of the world average is between a 3% and 7% point tax reduction on British trade”.

16. He concludes that “Language is a barrier to trade, which can be represented as equivalent to tax. There is evidence that Britain’s language investment is so low that it imposes a heavier tax on British trade than the average for the rest of the world. Britain’s ‘common language effect’ is consistent with British underinvestment in languages. The mirror image of the common language advantage is the handicap imposed upon

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3 James Foreman-Peck; Costing Babel the contribution of language skills to exporting and productivity (2007)
international trade by language differences. Even 1% reduction in the language ‘tax’ – much less than the difference between Britain’s ‘tax’ and the world average – would be the equivalent to more than £3 billion increase in productivity. The likely range of the language ‘tax’ (assuming the rest of the world invests the ideal amount) is 3 to 7%, so the minimum possible gains from optimal investment in languages for Britain in 2005 were £9 billion.” Taking account of the global financial downturn, in 2011 he revised the figures down to between £7 and £17 billion.  

17. The central thread of this argument has not been challenged and while Professor Foreman-Peck acknowledged that he had not looked specifically at the Scottish situation, because the Scottish economy is more heavily reliant on small and medium sized enterprises, the arguments could be more relevant here than for elsewhere in the UK.

18. Taking the revised figure for 2011 and calculating it pro rata the minimum effect of the language ‘tax’ for Scotland it would be a little over £0.5 billion. This is therefore, worth Scotland spending up to this amount in order to raise the nation’s language skills. Added to this, he also highlights that “on top of the direct effects of reducing the ‘tax effects’ of language on exports are the productivity impacts of accessing a wider market…these gains seem to be substantial; perhaps as much as a one third increase in output”. The “extra boosts from encouraging greater exports; greater productivity stemming from larger markets in which overheads can be spread, and expansion of more productive firms at the expense of less.”

Languages provide the edge in international trading, so have the lessons been learned?

19. The Council for Europe set out their aspiration that all of its citizens should be able to hold a conversation in two languages other than their mother tongue in 1997 and in the European Year of Languages in 2001 launched a campaign to promote language learning. Barely a year has gone by since without a major report highlighting the lack of investment in language skills and the risks that poses to economic and cultural growth. Crucially, they are written for a wide range of important institutions and official bodies, both in Scotland and at UK level, by a number of informed and eminent authors. Despite coming at the issues from a variety of standpoints they all conclude that improved investment in language skills will improve the nation’s ability to compete globally.

20. In 2008, in recognition of the apparent contradiction of the decline in language teaching at Higher Education level the Scottish Funding Council [SFC] in their report Modern Languages in Scotland: supply and demand in post school education recognises that there is a steady demand for language learning, but that Scotland falls well short of other European countries. It also acknowledges that if there is to be a step change in language learning it needs to start in schools, which would mean more language graduates going into teaching rather than other fields. In the same year HSBCs survey explained why the step change was necessary.

“Four out of five UK businesses plan to grow over the next 12 months and nearly half of those are looking to international trade to make that a reality. Two thirds of businesses cite foreign language as a barrier and eight out of ten feel challenged by differences in culture and etiquette”

21. The SFC report also provides data relating languages training and employment. Taking their evidence from the UK wide “Class of 99” survey, they found that fewer than 10%
of graduates used languages frequently in their job and fewer than 50% of language graduates used their specialist skills. Further; using a survey of 2005-6 Scottish graduates, it found that 66% of language graduates had a graduate level job within six months of graduating, which compares with 72% of all graduates. The survey did not identify any specific wage premium for language graduates.

22. The following year the Higher Education Funding Council for England commissioned a report to review the provision of languages by Professor Michael Worton. His recommendations to ensure the long-term sustainability and vitality of language teaching were widely adopted and taken forward in part by the Universities Council of Modern Languages [UCML] commission to develop tools and research.

23. Because language and intercultural skills form part of the overall skills profile of a wide range of occupations, the number of working linguists cannot be measured in the same way as other professionals, so masking the scale of the shortfall. So in Shaping the Future; Labour Market Intelligence on Languages and Intercultural Skills in Higher Education; UCML authors undertook qualitative research to better understand some of the apparent contradictions; testing ways of measuring labour market requirements on a regular basis. To assess the level of demand, the sectors where languages are required and the combination of skills that are required alongside linguistic and intercultural competence.

24. UCML concluded that there is a demand for languages and intercultural skills across the whole range of occupations. Demonstrating that international experience is a definite advantage in the jobs market, (while the number of UK graduates with languages and international experience is falling, hampering UK graduates ability to compete on the international jobs market). The research also shows that French and German remain overwhelmingly popular with employers, with other European and Non-European languages being in demand in addition to French and German, not instead of. Concluding that there is no right or wrong language to teach, and that there should be a range of language options at Higher Education level, but crucially the numbers of those learning languages must be increased to meet demand from business.

25. The Education and Employers Task Force have produced the most recent and comprehensive assessment of the economic case for language learning. It summarises the litany of reports promoting language teaching but focuses more specifically on the economic significance of language training during a period of economic instability, offering ways in which partnership working between educators and businesses can improve language skills in the workforce. They demonstrate the demand for language skills by using the business surveys that are detailed above, along with evidence from the National Employers Skills survey which has reported a rising demand for language skills in each of the four surveys in the past decade. Pointing out that 65% of employers questioned (in 2009 survey) were interested in conversational level skills. Both sets of surveys suggest that levels of demand are growing as well as finding an indication that employers continue to underestimate their need because of their belief in the dominance of English.

26. The authors have found evidence to demonstrate increased employability of UK language graduates.

"Modern language graduates go into a wide variety of careers, where their many skills are recognised by employers. This is reflected in the fact that the mean salary of language graduates, 3.5 years after graduation is the highest mean salary of all of the

\[\text{Mann, Brassell and Bevan; The economic case for language learning and the role of employer engagement; Employer and Education Taskforce 2011}\]
strategically important and vulnerable subjects – ahead of graduates of Engineering, Mathematical Sciences Physics and Astronomy”.  

The evidence from the Scottish funding Council was less encouraging (see 21) it covered the period immediately after graduation; no figure was available to give a direct comparison after three years. Future monitoring of the evidence would help make the case to individuals that time learning a language was worth their investment.

27. The Education and Employers Task Force 7 used evidence from the USA where “college graduates with a second language earn, on average, wages that are 2% - 3% higher than those without”. However the authors acknowledge that there is very little information on wage premiums from the UK and the Scottish Funding Council could find no wage premium for language graduates, a finding which was supported by the evidence from the companies interviewed for this report. None offered specific premiums for languages in their remuneration packages, although more than one felt that language speakers were able to take advantage of opportunities for advancement that were unavailable to others. Despite the evidence of a demand for language skills and the competitive edge it can give students when entering and advancing in the workplace, there has been a decline in language learning. The Education and Employers Task force summarise the picture using the English school system (although Scotland fares no better) and demonstrates, by means of the Eurobarometer, that the UK has the worst language skills of all 28 countries in the EU.

“If I am selling to you, I speak your language. If I am buying, dann mossen Sie Dutsch sprechen”

Willy Brandt, former German chancellor (1994)

28. Chancellor Brandt’s words are increasingly relevant, historically our principal markets were in the English speaking world; table 1 demonstrates that the USA remains our most valuable trading partner. But this pattern is changing, USA and European partners will remain important, but within a decade, Scottish Development International anticipates that China will outstrip both and the rise of spending power in India, Brazil and Russia are likely to change the face of Scottish trade radically. At the same time the predominance of English as a universal language is being challenged. The Task Force authors demonstrate this by means of the dramatic fall in the use of English in the internet transactions. Falling from 50% of all communications in 2000 to 29% by 2009, with Chinese as the ‘new kid on the block’, going from 5% to 20% in the same period. The Right Honourable Neil Kinnock summarised the risks this poses for the UK in his forward to English is Enough, by David Graddol.

“Complex international, economic, technological and cultural changes are resulting in a gradual erosion of the place of English as the language of the world market…..monoglot English graduates face a bleak economic future as qualified multilingual youngsters from other countries are proving to have a competitive advantage”

6 Higher Education Funding Council for England 2008, quoted The economic case for language learning and the role of employer engagement

7 Mann, Brassell and Bevan; The economic case for language learning and the role of employer engagement; Employer and Education Taskforce 2011
Table 1
Top ten Scottish Export destinations 2010

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<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Destination</th>
<th>Total Exports</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>3,530</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>2,365</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>1,530</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>1,265</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>985</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Norway</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Spain</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Italy</td>
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<td>9</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Switzerland</td>
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29. An audit of language skills undertaken by Centre for Language Training in 2003 is used in their *Talking World Class* to show that language skills tend to be concentrated in the professional and managerial ranks of companies; without necessarily reflecting need. While other countries embrace the skills at all levels. “Yet, in the UK there is a tendency to perceive language learning as an arts-based subject, of little relevance to the worlds of science, technology, business and industry”. More encouragingly, a report for the European Commission ⁸ on creativity and language identified broad potential benefits of language teaching for businesses and individuals. These included enhanced mental flexibility and problem solving; expanded mentallinguistic ability (intercultural skills); enhanced learning capacity and interpersonal ability; including team-working, communications and a broader perspective.

30. The Education and Employers Task Force report also highlights the importance of languages to international trade at the level of individual enterprises, as a determinant of exporting success and to the nation, by underpinning growth. Demonstrating the growing awareness of this barrier at EU level, they quote a 2006 survey; in which 11% of SMEs acknowledged that they had lost business as a result of a lack of language skills and at a UK level, using the BCC survey quoted above at 14 ⁹. But this is also supported by Scottish evidence. Table 2 below presents the most common barriers to export quoted by Scottish Enterprises in 2010. More than 6% of exporting companies identified lack of language skills as a barrier; ahead of export finance, tariffs or trained staff more generally.

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31. All of the enterprises interviewed for this paper confirmed that the business decisions in their organisations were influenced by the level of language skills available. Although, none identified lost export business specifically, several felt that they are more cautious about approaching new non English speaking markets and established strategies for coping with the skills gap – these varied from meeting the gap by employing foreign nationals; to avoiding more difficult markets altogether. Most companies were frustrated by the lack of skills of young people coming out of education. The cost to Scotland of the lack of language skills brought into stark relief by a major petrochemical company, which cited the inability to recruit language speakers as the reason that their Scottish headquarters was unable to bid for (let alone win) the European sales office of the newly amalgamated company, resulting in a loss of jobs worth £4M a year to Scotland.

32. The Task Force authors go further and quote research which recognises that linguists bring skills beyond pure language.

*Linguists are more likely to be discriminating about the intelligence collected, and more innovative in their decision making, but use information responsibly. Those
with international experience are likely to be more active information gatherers and decision makers’.

33. This is not new, the BCC 2004 survey found a direct correlation between the value exporters placed on having language skills within their business and their annual turnover. Not merely because of the language skills, but the enhanced cultural awareness in the companies who valued language skills brought increased productivity, year on year.

Making Scotland a Global Player

34. The importance of language teaching in Scotland has been the subject of periodic Ministerial attention since 1989 when an initiative called ‘Languages for All’ established compulsory language teaching in schools up to S4. A decade later a Ministerial Action Group on Languages recommended a shift from compulsion to entitlement for S1 – S4 pupils.

35. The shortcomings of that approach are now evident in the wide variation of current provision across Scotland, which has resulted in a dangerous cycle of decline. With fewer students taking languages to exam level and at Higher Education level; this can impact on the viability of the language qualifications that SQA can offer and on HE institutions maintaining their investment in language departments. Together this is resulting in fewer new teachers able to teach language skills and fewer linguists to satisfy the jobs market more generally. At a time when the Scottish Government recognises that to create sustainable growth the Scottish Economy has to operate in a global market; making the acquisition of language skills in the workforce more relevant than ever before.

36. Identifying the barriers to progress and de-bunking the myths have started, with the Government setting out with purpose and energy to improve education overall. The Donaldson Report provides a high-level strategy, highlighting areas where there is a need to improve, E-As for languages he suggested there was a particular need for primary teachers to be confident teaching languages. But it is in the manifesto commitment to offer all pupils the opportunity to learn two languages in addition to their native language that the Government recognises the step change in culture that is required to make Scotland a global player.

37. Scotland’s National Centre for Languages has, for the first time in a comprehensive way, set out to draw a roadmap to improve Scottish language teaching. This is articulated in the Modern Languages Excellence Report, which draws together the benefits of improved language teaching, identifies pockets of best practise and ways of delivering excellence to achieve the Government’s ambitious goals. But it does not underestimate the scale of the challenge both structurally and culturally; and provides the clearest illustration of the declining take up of languages at all levels. In La Grande Illusion: Why Scottish Further Education has failed to grasp the potential of modern languages Hannah Doughty completes the illustration of the cycle of decline.

Views of Scottish Business

38. In order to test the evidence in this paper in relation to specific Scottish businesses a small number of interviews were carried out with senior managers in a number of companies. Those willing to take part all had international links so were already conscious of the need for language skills in their workplace. The interviews were semi structured with questions on how language abilities in the enterprise affected:

- the international profile of the companies

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10 Williams and Chanston – Quoted in Mann, Brassell and Bevan
• the current and future markets
• recruitment and international policies and practises
• the level of languages required and whether or not languages are rewarded

The companies or organisations included technology, engineering, food and drink exporters, hospitality and petrochemical industry. They ranged in size from multinational companies and trade organisations to independent SMEs exporting a small range of products.

37. **All of the companies felt that language competency among their workforce affect business decisions, it had a bearing on the markets that they expand into and the pace and direction that they grow exports.** The strategy adopted depended on the scale of the enterprise and the likely returns. The Scotch Whisky Distillers Association has members who export to more markets than there are countries in the United Nations, so while languages are an important and valued skill, the scale of the returns makes it possible for them to establish distribution models which make the best use of native speakers – where necessary in new and challenging markets they draw on the skills of the diplomatic service to advice on local cultural and language requirements.

38. Companies which form part of European or Global Corporations were more likely to have established strategies for employing and developing the language the skills they require. As an example, an international drilling company operating in 22 countries, is developing an internationalisation strategy, which will include cultural and language development within their graduate development programme. A European food retailer similarly values language skills and provides opportunities for managers to develop their language skills – sharing both the cost and time with the employee. Most, including industries from hotel chains to salmon fisheries filled the gaps in knowledge by means of employing native speakers in their overseas offices and distribution networks and importing skills to Scotland when required.

39. The Scottish arm of a Swiss petrochemical company, which trades worldwide and acknowledged that they have skills gap at several levels. Engineers rarely have language skills and while both they and managers could progress within Scotland, unless they are able to speak German or French they could not take the opportunity to go on to work at the highest levels in the company in Europe. They also identified the lack of language skills as a barrier to bidding for jobs within the company, including a new sales team, with the potential of £4M a year in lost jobs.

40. **None of the companies specifically rewarded language skills although several felt that linguists had better chances, in the locations they were able to work and opportunities for advancement. None recruited solely on language skills; they required languages as one of the suite of skills. In seeking to verify how often languages are listed as recruitment criteria a search of 45 recruitment agencies based in Scotland, only 4 include multilingual recruitment as one of their search criteria on the Web. The challenge of getting the range of skills required often meant languages were not given priority. Tourism operators recognised the importance of foreign visitors but generally tried to provide translated written materials rather than skilled staff.**

41. The languages identified as being most valuable to the interviewees follows the national pattern, with French and German dominating, followed by Spanish, Chinese, Japanese and increasingly Portuguese, Russian and Arabic. All recognised that English was losing its dominance and that the rise of the BRICs countries will loosen it further. They also recognised that linguists skills went beyond language, they were considered more likely to be outward looking, more aware of cultural information and have a capacity for learning and communicating.
42. There was also a general recognition that young people coming into the workplace had insufficient understanding of business and there were opportunities for improved links between business and schools; building on the good practise that exists.

Conclusions

“Globalisation has transformed the way we live, learn and work. The pace of technological change, particularly the ease and speed of communication, has continued to accelerate. Scotland is increasingly enhanced by people from different countries, cultures and religions, and who speak languages other than English. Education must prepare young people to flourish in this new and changing world. If we are to achieve the Scottish Government’s purpose of sustainable economic growth and compete successfully in world markets, young people must develop an awareness of global issues and events, and the skills and confidence to be effective contributors in an increasingly global society.”

HMIE (2010)

43. 75% of the world population speaks no English and only 6% are fluent in English. If nothing else shakes our complacency that English is enough, those figures should. But add these to the clear demand from business, and the weight of evidence that improving language skills will enhance life chances for individuals. Enhancing language skills increases the trading capabilities of companies and organisations; and provide growth for the economy, as well as enhancing Scotland’s international cultural reputation. Then the problem shifts from why we should invest in language skills to how we can make it happen.

44. While there may be insufficient data from Scotland to provide a detailed economic impact analysis of the ‘tax on trade’ for Scotland, if we take the minimum suggested by the analysis for the UK of half a billion pounds it is a prize worth securing and a price worth investing in acquiring the skills.

45. Working closely with business organisations will enable Scotland not only to gather specific empirical evidence, but it will also build stronger ties between commerce and education that will bring significant rewards for Scotland.

Doreen Grove

5th March 2012
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