

NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL

REPORT

To: Education Committee	Subject: Development of Modern Languages in North Lanarkshire
From: Director of Education	
Date: 30 th April 2001	
Ref DS/KM	

Purpose of report

This report informs the members of the key factors of the report of the Action Group for Languages, ‘Citizens of a Multicultural World’, and seeks approval for the authority’s proposed action plan for the development of modern languages in the light of the Action Group’s recommendations.

Recommendations

The education committee is asked:

- (i) to note and approve the contents of the report
- (ii) approve the proposals outlined to support the development of modern languages in North Lanarkshire

Michael O'Neill

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NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL : DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN LANGUAGES IN NORTH LANARKSHIRE

Report by the Director

1 Purpose

- 1.1 This report informs the members of the key factors of the report of the Action Group for Languages, ‘Citizens of a Multicultural World’, and seeks approval for the authority’s proposed action plan for the development of modern languages in the light of the Action Group’s recommendations.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 In 1998, Helen Liddell, then Scottish Education Minister, established the Action Group on Languages, in response to concerns about provision for modern languages in Scottish schools. Membership was drawn from representatives from teaching, education management, the inspectorate, industry, parent groups and national bodies with an interest in languages education. The Minister emphasised that she regarded the effective teaching of modern languages as vital to the future economic prosperity of Scotland.

- 2.2 The aims of the Action group were:

- to secure the place of modern languages within the curriculum
- to improve the quality of modern languages at Standard Grade
- to ensure a greater degree of continuity in language learning in schools

- 2.3 The Action Group reviewed the available research, inspection and policy evidence relating to languages in Scottish schools. The Action Group also consulted with stakeholders over the future of languages education.

- 2.4 The importance of languages for all has been emphasised in the findings although the issue of motivation is recognised. The group concluded that all pupils should have an ‘entitlement’ of 500 hours language learning. To increase awareness of the value of modern foreign languages, up-to-date information on languages should be made available in schools and the wider society so that proficiency in languages is perceived as being achievable, relevant and useful.

- 2.5 The value of language learning is emphasised in the areas of European and global citizenship, social inclusion, mobility, employment and lifelong learning.

3. Current Position

- 3.1 Many of the developments described in the report are already being undertaken within North Lanarkshire schools. Individual schools have extended the teaching of a foreign language to classes in addition to P6 and P7, thereby exceeding the normal requirements. There are similar examples of language teaching in several nursery classes. Moreover, this authority offers four foreign languages for study: French, German, Spanish and Italian. Historically, French has been predominant and its place has been based on tradition rather than need. Following national guidelines, all pupils study at least one foreign language from Primary 6

till the end of fourth year in secondary school, at which point a national award is possible. It is accepted nationally, however, that the current approach has failed to increase uptake of modern languages and has not met the needs of students or society in general.

- 3.2 A re-evaluation of the position of foreign language learning is required to ensure that proficiency in languages is perceived as being achievable, relevant and useful. Such an evaluation should be based on the most up-to-date information to recognise the social and economic value of languages as well as the potential for career development post-16. Language learning should be promoted as a valued part of life-long learning within a multi-lingual, inclusive society, thereby guaranteeing our young people the same access to job opportunities and mobility as their European peers.
- 3.3 The report states that there is a 'climate of negativity' surrounding the learning of foreign languages within schools. This is due partly to the kind of experience offered to students and partly to the lack of an appropriate knowledge of the positive aspects and advantages of learning a foreign language in personal, social, economic and employment terms. The relevant information necessary to make informed decisions regarding study and career choices needs to be sourced and made available to all interested parties. Current curricular practice should be reviewed in order to provide options and courses that respond to clients' needs. A positive climate should be encouraged to promote language learning.
- 3.4 The current national recommendation for foreign language learning states that a pupil should begin the study of a foreign language in P6 and continue with the same language to the end of S4. While this recommendation is generally followed in North Lanarkshire schools, there are some inconsistencies, emanating from an attempt to provide diversification of language provision within schools. The issues of diversification and continuity of language, in light of the Action Group report, require to be revisited and advice should be given to schools on future implementation.

4. Action Group Proposals

- 4.1 The Action Group proposes that the status of foreign languages be improved by making languages more accessible on the timetable and by making available better information for parents, students and schools regarding the place and value of language learning in a multicultural world. Schools, especially senior management teams and guidance teachers should have access to high-quality information to offer good advice on further study and career opportunities.
- 4.2 All pupils should have an 'entitlement' to 500 hours of foreign language learning and access to a national qualification, with the possibility of studying a second foreign language during their period of compulsory schooling. The notion of 'native-speaker' competence should be replaced by 'pragmatic competence' and pupils should make increased use of real and/or virtual contacts in order to develop competence and strategies for learning other languages.
- 4.3 Local authorities should be responsible for ensuring a diversified provision of a first foreign language within the authority, if not within each school. This would meet the national need for a variety of languages rather than French alone. The place of languages should be made more central and secure in the curriculum and in examination arrangements for the upper secondary school
- 4.4 ICT should have a central role in supporting language learning and use from P6 onwards. Opportunities should be greatly increased for pupils to put their languages to real use in contact with native speakers, including foreign language assistants.
- 4.5 Modern Languages should be declared a priority for innovation and training. To this end a special Languages Innovation Fund should be established to allow local authorities and others to bid for national funding in support of local innovation and specialised training for teachers.

4.6 In order to deliver the pupils' entitlement to languages through high quality courses, all teachers of modern languages in primary and secondary should receive substantial and continuous professional development support from national and other bodies.

5. Proposed Action Plan

5.1 While it is recognised that many of the recommendations contained in the report are already current practice in North Lanarkshire schools, it is acknowledged that additional measures are necessary to meet the full requirements of the report. Below is a proposed set of actions to ensure that the authority carries the recommendations detailed by the Action group.

5.2 In response to the Action Group's recommendations and improve the status of modern languages, the authority proposes to:

- provide guidelines and advice for senior management teams and guidance teachers in schools regarding the new status of languages
- offer advice on timetabling
- implement the recommendation of the Action Group regarding resources and continuous professional development of staff
- consider the possibility of immersion courses in primary and secondary
- aim to increase links with outside agencies, industry and other countries.

5.3 The authority will consult with schools on the manner in which the pupil 500 hours entitlement will be delivered. and on strategies for securing the place of languages in the upper school, taking into account the current range of provision within our schools. Support and advice will be provided for school management teams, guidance teachers and teachers of modern languages on the implementation of possible models. Guidelines and advice will be provided regarding the issue of continuity of language from P6 to S4.

5.4 North Lanarkshire is currently one the few local authorities offering four foreign languages in primary school. A review will be made of current provision and the need for different languages. A whole-authority approach to diversification will be determined and support will be made available to schools to implement the same.

5.5 As well as the use of ICT to increase motivation and make language more relevant, pupils will have greater access to real and/or virtual contacts. This will be achieved by:

- the restoration of foreign language assistants
- the increased use of ICT for emails, video-conferencing, information
- ensuring the ICT resource levels indicated in the Action Group report
- continued creation of study visits and school and education department links with schools and education departments in France, Germany, Spain, Italy and elsewhere
- increased links and exchanges to facilitate the use of language in real-life contexts
- accessing existing local links

5.6 North Lanarkshire has already established new training initiatives by successfully bidding for European funding for teacher training. Similar support for students has been secured from other sources, including the Education Business Partnership. In order to encourage and support further innovation, bids will be formulated to access the Action Group's proposed Languages and Innovation Training Fund (LITF).

5.7 The authority will aim to secure the place of languages in the curriculum and address the wider issues included in the Action Group report. The provision of relevant, quality courses and programmes of study will be crucial to the success implementation of any proposed

changes along with advice on timetabling and the new place of language study. To this end, the authority will provide support for schools and teachers by devising a programme of training:

- to meet the demands of the new **5-14** modern languages programme
- to provide training in the use of ICT
- to update teacher competence, as appropriate
- to assist modern language teachers and guidance teachers meet the recommendations
- to support school managers

5.8 In general terms, the authority will promote the notion of life-long language learning and the value of a multilingual, inclusive society. Closer links will be forged with the world of work and outside agencies. The department undertakes to publicise the value of languages in the area of post-16 employment in a European and global context. A local rationale will be published to reflect the report's recommendations.

6. **Recommendations**

6.1 The education committee is asked to

- (i) note and approve the contents of the report
- (ii) approve the proposals outlined to support the development of modern languages in North Lanarkshire.

Michael O'Neill