



Education, Children and Young People Committee Inquiry: Scottish Languages Bill

Submission

08.03.24

About the Open University in Scotland

The Open University in Scotland supports people across Scotland to develop their knowledge, acquire new skills and achieve life-changing qualifications.

In 2022/23 we were proud to help over 19,500 students study around their professional or personal life at a pace and level that worked for them. In 2021/22 (the last year for which HESA data is available) we were the fourth largest university in Scotland and by far the largest provider of flexible, part-time study.

Flexible study is core to our offer with 73% of our students working either full-time or part-time in 2022/23.

Most of our graduates (85%) remain in the location where their study is undertaken, which means their talent and skills benefit local communities.

We offer high-quality distance learning to students, lifelong learners, communities, employees and businesses. Our students range from school age to 92. We have formal partnerships with 16 regional colleges and collaborate with local authorities, the NHS, social care, the third sector and employers across Scotland. Our innovative national schools programme, Young Applicants in Schools Scheme, helps S6 pupils access a broader curriculum and bridge school to university level study.

We are committed to widening access to higher education building on our founding principle of being open to everyone, regardless of age, income, geography and background. The majority of our undergraduates in Scotland are eligible for a part-time fee grant to help towards their tuition fees. In 2022/23 28% of our undergraduates in Scotland declared a disability and 22% live in remote or rural areas. In the same year, 23% of our undergraduate entrants joined with qualifications below standard university entrance level and 21% were resident in the most deprived areas of Scotland.

As part of the UK's only four nations university, we are funded to teach students resident in Scotland by the Scottish Funding Council. Over 150 staff operate from our Edinburgh offices with over 400 associate lecturers working across the country.

OU research ranks in the top third of UK universities according to the Research Excellence Framework and we are a trusted partner of many leading organisations for teaching and research including the BBC, NASA, and the United Nations. Our free platform, OpenLearn, reaches over 300,000 learners in Scotland.

Find out more: open.ac.uk/scotland

Your views on the Bill

1 Do you agree with the proposals in the Bill?

I agree, or partially agree, with the proposals [from tick box options]

Please share the reasons for your answer in the text box provided:

As the Open University we are focusing on the Scots language in our response to the Scottish Languages Bill consultation, as this is the area where our experience and expertise lies. To provide some background to the Open University's response, we are firstly briefly outlining our work with and for the Scots language.

The Open University fully supports Scots being given official status in this country. Since 2017, the Open University has collaborated with The Scots Language Centre, Dictionaries of the Scots Language, Scottish Book Trust and the Education Scotland Scots Language Coordinator on a range of initiatives to help embed the Scots Language Policy in Scotland's education landscape. For example, the Open University, Education Scotland, and the Scots Language Centre collaboratively produced new curriculum that has been a game changer in making learning Scots, about the language and related cultures accessible.

The [Scots language and culture](#) open course has seen over 45,000 visits and 18,000 students, with 49% from Scotland alone, and people enrolling from 129 countries across the globe. This course was produced in the spirit of the Scots Language policy: a co-creation with the Scots language community.

The second development, the first of its kind, is a professional learning programme in Scots language and culture for teachers, delivered by distance-learning. This is aimed at embedding Scots in Scottish classrooms. This was developed in partnership between the Open University and Education Scotland and brings together primary and secondary teachers from across the curriculum who work towards a GTCS professional learning award for their study. This course [was officially launched on 6th February](#) and has since attracted 120 enrolments from teachers from across Scotland, including the Highlands and Islands, with 30 more teachers already signed up for the next presentation in September. Scottish Government funding enabled all interested teachers to secure their place on this course. We are gathering significant insights from teaching the first cohort and will be able to provide more detailed information on teachers' motivation to participate, their assessment of the role of Scots in their professional contexts, the needs they identify in supporting their Scots teaching, their experiences embedding Scots in their classrooms and their vision for Scots in Scottish education. Feedback from course participants highlights that embedding Scots successfully in the life of a school leads to the language playing a vital role in helping to recognise **all** pupils' entire range of linguistic and intercultural literacies in their education, enabling schools to reflect more fully the nature of modern Scotland as a multilingual and -cultural society.

Furthermore, an Open University PhD student is currently undertaking the first ever study of individuals who have taken up Scots as adults ('new speakers'), investigating their demographics, motivations for learning the language,

attitudes towards Scots, as well as their learning experiences and methods, including barriers and enablers.

We welcome a Bill which will create a Scots Language Strategy, and allow Scottish Ministers to produce guidance for public bodies in relation to promoting and supporting the Scots Language and the development of Scots culture. The Open University is putting forward the following points for consideration as part of the Scottish Languages Bill and the subsequent Scots Language Strategy.

1. We believe that the Scottish Languages Bill provides excellent scope for recognising that Scots and Gaelic are spoken across Scotland and that this legislation can therefore impact their speakers all over this UK nation. We therefore believe the Bill ought to recognise more explicitly that the Scots language is spoken across the whole of Scotland, and correspondingly it ought to recognise and support all dialects of Scots spoken in Scotland. This includes a fuller, and more detailed description of what Scots is and where its dialects are spoken.

2. We recommend that the Scots Language Strategy provides clear instruction on which public bodies fall under its scope. Furthermore, we recommend that consideration be given to establishing a central Scots Board, something like the Bòrd na Gàidhlig, tasked with the monitoring of and reporting on the status, use and learning of Scots in all parts of Scottish life as well as the development of Scots. The Scots Language Strategy could plan for the current Scots Language Centre to become, with additional funding, this central body building on the excellent work it has done to-date. It has played a vital role in bringing together the various Scots dialect communities to collaboratively support the common

cause of Scots language revitalisation. It is already undertaking crucial leadership in language revitalisation work, monitoring and reporting activities and has utilised digital media exceptionally well to make the language and related cultures accessible across Scotland and beyond, even linking with often marginalised minority languages communities internationally, thus raising the profile and status of revitalisation activities in Scotland.

Creating such a central body will play a key role in meeting the requirements of the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages for Scots.

The Open University is in full support of the provisions in relation to education, as outlined in Chapter 2 of the Scottish Languages Bill. In relation to this we recommend:

3. - that the Scots Language Strategy expresses more fully the ambition to normalise Scots as a valid means of communication in all aspects of Scotland's public life on a par with English and Gaelic. This aims at supporting Scots speakers in feeling confident about using the language, without worrying about being threatened and intimidated for speaking it.

Writing from our experience of the work we are undertaking in embedding Scots across the Scottish education landscape, a significant contributing factor to normalising Scots in Scottish public life will be the availability of a wide range of opportunities not just for using but also for learning the language – in formal as well as informal settings.

4. – that the Scots Language Strategy addresses key priorities expressed by teaching practitioners. Evidence from the above-mentioned Scots teacher professional learning programme underlines that building on existing SQA provision (the Scots Language Awards) to establish a Higher qualification in Scots is a key priority for this group, which, for them, would serve as a validation of the value of embedding Scots more fully in young people’s education and create new pathways to studying the language at tertiary level. The Open University and Education Scotland are exploring with the SQA opportunities for such a qualification longer term, in the current environment of educational reform. In the first instance, the Open University and Education Scotland will approach the GTCS in relation to this to plan and discuss options for new curriculum development for in-service teachers to enable them to gain an additional qualification for teaching Scots to Higher level.

We will be able to share more detailed insights during the next phase of the consultation.

5. – that the Scots Language Strategy plans structural support and a suitable framework for Scots in Scottish education to enable equal opportunities for all young people in accessing Scots language education. Building on the excellent work of the Education Scotland Scots Language Coordinator, and following the successful example of putting in place development officers for Languages in all thirty-two local authorities during the 1+2 Policy implementation phase, we believe that Scots needs to have similar representation. This will facilitate the development of nationwide approaches and standards, along with the formation of a strong Scotland-wide stakeholder network.

6. – that in the development of the Scots Language Strategy there needs to be recognition of all learners and potential learners of Scots, including the so-called ‘new speakers’. This is a potentially sizable and highly diverse group not restricted to individuals with migration backgrounds. First research findings from the Open University PhD student’s research have indicated that some traditional speakers of Scots may be seen as ‘new speakers’ because of having ‘un-learned’ the language due to the stigma they have experienced when using Scots. These speakers also reported a lack of opportunity and the existence of barriers in using and learning the language to a high standard as Scots is not represented equally in all aspects of Scottish life.

Moreover, evidence from people belonging to refugee and asylum seeker communities across Scotland underscores that these groups often consider learning Scots as a vital tool for their integration in Scottish society. This desire by new speakers not to be overlooked and to learn the language to a high level is also proof of Scots being a living language in its own right.

Therefore, it would be invaluable to create opportunities for new speakers to learn Scots as their second/third/... language to a high level in a range of formal and informal settings. For example, we believe that in schools Scots should be established as a subject area in its own right that could be located in the Languages departments, since there are many synergies with the teaching of other languages to non-native speakers.

The Open University will be able to provide more detailed insights into this new speaker groups’ motivations, strategies, methods, models, and learning experiences in the next phase of the consultation.

7. – that the Scots Language Strategy highlights the importance of Scots in education for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. This requires raising awareness among teaching practitioners of the potential of Scots to facilitate social cohesion and support young people’s retention and attainment during their education. Practitioners will need upskilling opportunities for learning about and building their confidence in applying multilingual pedagogies in their classrooms.

Our insights gained from the Scots teacher professional learning programme underline that facilitating full Scots provision in all Scottish schools will have a significant positive impact for young people, especially those with additional requirements, and others from disadvantaged or forced migration backgrounds as it will enable them to build on their full linguistic repertoire and range of literacies on their educational journey. Together with practitioners on the programme, the Open University and Education Scotland are undertaking much-needed research to inform our knowledge of the impact of embedding Scots in young people’s education. We will be able to share more detailed findings during the next phase of the consultation.

