



the National Parent
Forum of Scotland



The National Parent Forum of Scotland
Focus Group on the Scottish Government's
"1+2 language approach"

The Brunton Theatre, Musselburgh, East Lothian
Thursday 8th May 2014

Introduction

The Scottish Government want to make Scotland as successful as possible and see language capability as an important part of this success. This means that it is important that young people are attracted to learning languages, and that they become confident and competent linguists, well equipped with the skills and capacities needed in the new Europe and the 21st century marketplace. To achieve this SG have made an ambitious languages commitment "to introduce a norm for language learning based on the European Union 1+2 model – to create the conditions in which every child will learn two languages in addition to their mother tongue." The plan is to introduce this new model of language acquisition for Scotland over the course of two Parliaments or by 2020 and they are working in partnership with Local Authorities and stakeholders to enable learning of the first additional language to start from Primary One with a second additional language to be offered by all schools from Primary Five. This is a long term and very ambitious policy. Further information on this policy can be found here:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education/Schools/curriculum/LanguageLearning>

The purpose of this focus group was to explore parents' current awareness and views on the 1 + 2 language approach.

Summary

Awareness and understanding of 1+2 is low and needs to be addressed in terms of:

- the existence of the 1+2 agenda;
- the basic practicalities of 1+2 such as what it means and when it applies;

- the implications of 1+2 in some complex cases where it interacts with Gaelic agenda and English as an additional language;
- an explanation of how quality of teaching languages and the wider curriculum will be maintained after 1+2 starts;
- the rationale for the changes; and
- the role of parents. Prior to the changes coming into effect, parents will want to be involved in the decisions about which languages are taught in their school and parents need to know how this can happen and when.

The focus group also gave an opportunity to Education Scotland and the Scottish Government to clarify the policy.

It was clear that local authorities are at different stages. There is a need to start informing schools, parents and pupils.

Findings

Focus group attendees reported that they perceived awareness of 1+2 to be very low among parents. Among those at the focus group, parents had only heard about 1+2 very recently and only because of a) the focus group invitation, b) communications from the NPFS representative who sits on the Strategic Implementation Board, Carol Snow and c) at least one primary Head Teacher had included a very short paragraph about 1+2 in a newsletter. Some comments from attendees were:

“I brought it up at Parent Council meeting two weeks ago and none of the fifteen parents there had heard of it.”

“I heard about it last week”

“We need to know about its existence”

Parents do not know the basics of what 1+2 is. The “1” represents the child’s mother tongue and “+ 2” represents the two other languages the child will have the experience of learning. The first language (other than a child’s mother tongue) is introduced from P1 and a second language (other than a child’s mother tongue) is introduced at P5. Not all parents present understood this. Parents raised concerns from themselves or on behalf of other parents about the rationale and practicalities:

“[Children] don’t speak English yet”

“If there is a gap between where we are now and the proposal [for 2020] then we need to know what happens, when and why”

“This is a topic that some people could have problems with. An explanation of what happens in [complicated cases] will be important”.

“What if the secondary does not offer the same language?”

Such questions need to be addressed by each local authority.

Those parents who have an interest in languages themselves wanted to ensure that all parents would understand the wider benefits of learning a language in terms of employability and personal development. It was recognised that this might be difficult to get across to all parents, particularly when parents themselves have not been exposed to languages other than English.

There was a lack of clarity over the timescale for the implementation of the policy across Scotland. Some, but not all, parents attending knew that the implementation deadline was 2020, but they had not realised that this implied that schools would take action soon. Pilot programmes are taking place across Scotland but parents seem to be generally unaware of these pilots and also the success of them.

One specific concern related to the need to allay fears as to how the 1+2 agenda fits with the Gaelic agenda:

“Can I ask if Gaelic is considered a Modern Language?”

“We need to know how this works with Gaelic.”

“Some will think this is Gaelic by the back door.”

Education Scotland recognise that separate advice is required for Gaelic.

Another specific concern was from a parent whose child is in a school where a large number of languages other than English is spoken. Most children in that school will be using English as an additional language already in the classroom setting. So do they need to learn an additional Modern Language apart from their mother tongue and English? The answer given by Scottish Government was ‘yes’. It was recognised that this puts increasing demands on a school. How does the school decide which languages it should offer?

Parents were concerned about the implication on teaching quality and the capacity of teachers to teach additional languages. This related particularly to the embedding of language into the wider school day within primary schools.

“I fear it will be like getting primary teachers to do PE when it is out of their comfort zone.”

It was clear that the parents attending and (based on attendees’ second-hand reports) other parents will want to influence the schools’ decisions about what languages to offer. Parents wanted clarity over how to engage authorities and schools to influence these decisions.

An issue was raised where the experience of some attendees indicated that some languages were more accessible to children with conditions such as dyslexia than others which would guide which languages they wanted their child to learn in those circumstances. This experience would be useful in sharing with the local authorities in terms of reaching decisions of what languages should be offered in a particular school.

“It is likely that parents will say ‘I want my child to do these languages’”.

Parents attending reported that their local authorities did not seem to be consulting parents on these proposals yet, nor communicating with the Head Teachers.

There was a feeling amongst the attendees that if schools engaged with parents as they implemented the 1+2 model this created an opportunity for the school to begin discussion with bilingual parents to offer help.

“Ask people for views even if you can’t promise anything.”

There was some discussion over the benefits of language assistants (foreign language students teaching their native language to Scottish pupils) or similar offers from cultural organisations – there was hope among parents that some best practice opportunities would be available under 1+2 and CfE.

In order to support their children, parents would need some materials to help. Online support materials was suggested. However, there was also a realistic view presented at the meeting that most parents can’t help - *where do you start if you have no other languages [yourself] no interest and have not been anywhere?*”. It was recognised that efforts would be needed to tackle this perceived barrier, to concentrate on the benefits of learning other languages.

Finally, the group also thought that information needed to be made available for pupils and parents to increase awareness. Four options for policy awareness raising were discussed:

- A. Parent language ambassadors appointed through SPION
- B. The SCILT leaflets to be supported by NPFS see here: http://www.scilt.org.uk/Portals/24/Library/oneplustwo/oneplustwoparentleaflet_FINAL.pdf
- C. Other work cascading information through NPFS and parent councils.
- D. SG/SCILT attend NPFS 2014 conference and host workshop for parents.