



This briefing for practitioners is intended to explore the aims and purposes of including the Scots language as part of Curriculum for Excellence. It can also be used to inform partners, learners and their parents and carers about the Scots language.

## CfE Briefing <sup>17</sup>

### Curriculum for Excellence: Scots Language

With its various dialects, Scots forms an integral part of Scotland's heritage and cultural life, playing a vital role in children's and young people's learning about Scotland. It can also make a strong contribution to the development of children's and young people's literacy skills. Including Scots as part of Curriculum for Excellence can help motivate some learners and their families by showing them that the language they use at home is valued. This briefing provides background information about the nature of the Scots language, the learning opportunities and benefits offered by the inclusion of Scots in the curriculum. It explores how Scots is developing across educational establishments as part of Curriculum for Excellence, within literacy and languages and across the wider curriculum.

#### 1. What is Scots Language?

Scots is one of the three indigenous languages of Scotland. It is commonly used in everyday speech, in literature and in song. Often used in the workplace and at home, Scots is also occasionally heard in broadcasting. In the 2011 census, 1.5 million people reported that they use the Scots language. In September 2015, the Scottish Government launched its Scots Language Policy, in both [English](#) and [Scots](#), to recognise the important role that school education has in promoting the use of Scots. One aim of the policy is to "promote the acquisition, use and development of Scots in education, media, publishing and the arts". The policy contains an appendix that details Education Scotland's Action Plan for further developing Scots language in education.

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“In September 2015, the Scottish Government launched its Scots Language Policy, in both English and Scots.”

Education Scotland has created an animated [History of Scots](#). This animation details the history of Scots from the middle ages to the present day. Scots has a vast vocabulary, unique history and a wonderful literature. It has a range of features and sounds that are never used in English, as well as some 60,000 unique words and expressions. For these reasons, most linguists and academics today agree that Scots is a language in its own right.

**Schools might wish to develop a specific Scots language and literature policy, or include a Scots section in their existing literacy policy as appropriate.**



2. How does Scots contribute to literacy development?

The [3-18 Literacy and English Review](#) states:

*“A knowledge and understanding of Scots language and Scottish texts allows children and young people to explore and appreciate Scottish culture. Learning Scots can often improve learners’ engagement in learning and their development of wider literacy skills. Through Scots, learners can explore language in more depth, making connections and comparisons with the linguistic structures and vocabularies of other languages. Scots as a context for learning can also provide an engaging platform for children and young people to explore language, register and audience. It can encourage reluctant readers and writers to*

*become involved as texts in Scots can capture the imagination and speak to them in a familiar voice.” (page 23)*

Across the country, schools are increasing opportunities for children and young people to experience Scots as part of normal curricular provision, rather than as part of a special project centred on Burns Night or St Andrew’s Day, and are developing progression for learners across all ages. There is potential for a broad range of increasingly complex texts featuring Scots language to be used to engage learners. The [Scottish Book Trust](#) and [Scottish Poetry Library](#) can suggest a wide range of suitable texts for all stages of the acquisition of Scots. It is important for all learners to develop and apply their knowledge and understanding of language. Scots can contribute effectively to this process when its unique features, such as its vocabulary and grammar, are raised to the same status as other languages and explored in the classroom.

Scots can be an effective and engaging way for children and young people to develop their literacy skills. When learners write in Scots, they have the opportunity to develop their own individual relationship with the language. Learners can also benefit from listening to and reading Scots. In doing so, they develop strategies to understand, analyse and evaluate texts, utilising skills such as cultural knowledge and prior learning. These activities provide an opportunity for learners to use a wider range of language, engaging in critical, analytical and evaluative activities, as well as asking and answering higher order, opened-ended questions. Resources such as the five different Scots versions of *The Gruffalo* can be used to explore not only an extensive

range of vocabulary but also to study the differences and similarities within Scots language, linking directly with skills learned in English relating to word choice, register and writing for a purpose. Children’s books such as *The Gruffalo* offer an interesting and valuable way for learners to develop skills in finding, using and organising information, including developing critical literacy skills. Offering learners the opportunity to come into contact with and explore Scots language when engaging with a broad range of texts (fiction and non-fiction, printed and multi-media, spoken and written) can then be very effective, particularly for reluctant learners. In an environment where Scots is included in the breadth of texts, some learners can produce poetry, stories, films, essays and presentations. These will become increasingly complex, with learners using more sophisticated language and applying skills and understanding in a wide range of new and unfamiliar situations.

Learners’ understanding of structures and features of English language (grammar, syntax, vocabulary) is supported and reinforced when reading and writing in Scots language. Writing in Scots is a way to develop learners’ ability to explore word patterns, text structures and to engage with texts. Re-drafting and reading these texts aloud is then a way for learners to demonstrate an understanding of language and its effects.

Learners with English as an additional language (EAL) often learn Scots along with English, enhancing what linguists call their ‘language capital’. Giving Scots language a place in the classroom benefits their learning, and develops ideas around a shared identity for all the class. Everyone can participate at a basic vocabulary level, including practitioners with little or no Scots.

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**Remember to keep spelling approaches consistent for written work in Scots.**

- If in doubt, check with the [Dictionary of the Scots Language](#) – but bear in mind that there may be regional differences.



3. Is Scots really sufficiently different in terms of vocabulary and grammar to be considered a ‘language’, and taught as such?

A brief comparison with two other European languages may help here. Norwegian and Danish are different languages, but speakers of one can understand speakers of the other. Similarly, much of Scots is readily intelligible, with some practice, to an English speaker. Scots and English are sister languages, in the same way that the languages of Norway and Denmark are. It is important for learners to know the differences between the languages and the times when they might want to use one rather than the other. Recognising and celebrating the differences between English and Scots can help support literacy skills, as well as skills for learning other languages. Learners use skills such as listening and talking, reading and writing when they engage with Scots, all of which are key to successful language learning. There are, however, unique features of Scots grammar, and there is a rich range of vocabulary, as shown in the publication of numerous region-specific dictionaries of Scots dialects,

such as *The Shetland Dictionary* and *The Orkney Dictionary*, as well as much of the content found in the aforementioned *Dictionary of the Scots Language*. The key text on the grammar of Scots language is Dr Christine Robinson’s *Modren Scots Grammar* which deals with the grammar of Scots language using modern terminology, giving readers an understanding of the way language works. It provides readers with the vocabulary to think about and discuss Scots, English and other modern languages and provides the grounding for readers to undertake further exploration and discover language for themselves.

4. Linking Scots to the 1+2 approach to language learning

*Language Learning in Scotland – A1+2 Approach* (2012) sets out the Scottish Government’s ambition for all children and young people in Scotland to learn two languages in addition to their own. The first additional language is known as L2 and is introduced from P1 onwards. The second is referred to as L3, and is studied from P5 onwards. Schools may choose Scots as an L3. As well as language study, cultural and historical aspects of Scots will provide learners with excellent opportunities for learning about their local area and Scotland as a whole. There is also huge potential for the integration of Scots into interdisciplinary learning.

**Consider whether incorporating Scots into your 1+2 programme would be appropriate.**

- Some local authorities may wish their primary schools to explore the possibility of Scots language as an L3.



5. Are all the dialects spoken across the country ‘Scots language’?

In Scotland, it is widely accepted that there are eight different ‘regional varieties’ or dialects of Scots: Insular (Orkney and Shetland), Northern, North Eastern (Doric), Highlands and Islands, West Central, East Central, South Western and Southern. All have equal status. Despite some differences due to the different social, linguistic, cultural and historical influences unique to each area, these varieties are mutually intelligible. Throughout Scottish literary history, generations of writers and artists have adapted Scots spelling and grammar rules previously employed by others to produce new and unique texts. Often the result is a codified Scots that reflects a region of Scotland, or, on occasion, that reflects one individual’s own unique voice.

When including Scots in the curriculum, it is important to use a variety of Scots that is known and recognised by learners. Learners should be encouraged to do the same and express themselves, both in their speech and in the texts they produce, by acknowledging voices and sounds from the community around them. In some cases, that language community stretches across all of Scotland, remaining consistent from Baltasound to Eyemouth, in other ways it changes surprisingly between Banff and Ellon. Not only does writing in such a way show learners’ knowledge and appreciation of literature and culture, it is also a



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demonstration of critical and creative thinking. In creative writing lessons in Scotland today, the Scots produced within one classroom will contain contrasts and varieties, just as it will when comparing the Scots language in a Northern Isles classroom with one in the Borders or a Scottish city. This mirrors what is found in literature published from one area of Scotland to another. For learners to participate in such an exercise, they require competence in the significant aspects of learning: listening and talking, reading and writing. This helps support and embed literacy skills and offers them the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities in Scots, English and other languages.

Education Scotland has prepared lists of online texts that contain examples of the different dialects. Visit the Education Scotland website and find the [Guide to Regional Varieties of Scots](#).



## 6. Scots language as an asset

In the Scottish Government's [Audit of Current Scots Provision in Scotland](#), (2009) language is referred to as 'an asset':

*Language functions as an asset in supporting identities, in providing commonality and community and in the case of regional or minority languages, of providing opportunities for the cultural expression of language identity [...] In addition, the development of the language assets of a regional or minority language can instil a new and/or renewed sense of pride in both local and national identity. It also helps build confidence, particularly in young people who receive the opportunity to both learn it and learn in it.*

Many learners bring Scots language to the classroom. When Scots is presented as a valid medium for communication in educational settings, practitioners may discover that their learners already have a wealth of knowledge about the language. Many pupils can already speak Scots. There is evidence from across the country that developing the place of Scots in learning settings can motivate those who are less engaged, and that many learners can become effective contributors. Scots can assist in producing new and interesting work in creative writing lessons; can provide learners with confidence in debating and presenting; can inspire learners to share unique and personal opinions when describing themselves, their family and where they are from, drawing on Scots vocabulary and experiences of speaking and hearing the language. Education Scotland's initiative 'Keen tae Ken yir Kin' is an

example of this in practice, where two classes from different areas of Scotland are paired to share writing/ audio and video clips in Scots language, exploring the dialect, accent and vocabulary unique to their area.

**Contact Education Scotland to find out more and be involved in a future 'Keen tae Ken yir Kin' partnership.**



**Identify Experiences and Outcomes that could be delivered and achieved through the context of Scots language and texts.**

- Scots language ties in to all of the Significant Aspects of Learning for literacy, and should be considered in terms of reading, writing, talking and listening. Most commonly taught in Literacy and English, Scots also can be included within expressive arts and social studies, with the inclusion of Scots enhancing projects which focus on studying Scotland. Find examples of 'bundles' of Experiences and Outcomes from across the curriculum that can be delivered and achieved on the Education Scotland website in the [Scots language section](#).

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