



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH
School of Philosophy, Psychology
& Language Sciences

BILINGUAL POLICY

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Information for policy makers working with bilingual families

Investing in Scotland's future

Language learning has not always been a priority in Scotland – poor language skills are estimated to cost the Scottish economy almost £600 million per year.* But attitudes are beginning to change. For example, the Scottish government's 1+2 plan to introduce two languages at primary school recognises the value of language learning at an individual and societal level.

The 1+2 plan is a fantastic statement of intent. In order to fully invest in Scotland's future, it's important that we **value the home languages** of non-English speaking families as much as those typically found on a modern languages curriculum.

Maintaining their home language is a great opportunity to help a child:

- Preserve a link with their family, culture and heritage
- Develop stronger skills in reading, language learning, attention and thinking

Won't children struggle at school if they don't speak English at home?

Evidence shows that children will soon learn English once they are exposed to it at school, although we recommend that families try and provide their child with some English input before starting school, for example an English language playgroup. Once a child is bilingual, they often find it easier to learn other languages or to learn to read. So in fact, encouraging families to maintain their home language can help **give a child the best start in life.**

What languages are the most important?

Some business sectors may view certain languages as more relevant than others, based on their working environment. But in terms of cognitive benefits (e.g. improved decision making) and social skills (bilinguals often find it easier to take someone else's perspective), **all languages are equally useful.** The increased flexibility often found in bilinguals will benefit a child, whatever their future career path.

* Talking the talk, so that Scotland can walk the walk: a rapid review of the evidence of impact on Scottish business of a monolingual workforce (Scottish Government, 2012).

What is the best way for families to bring up bilingual children?

There is no 'correct' method that will work for all families. What's important is that the child hears both languages in roughly equal amounts, and in a natural setting. It's also important that families feel their home language is **valued by society**.

About us

Bilingualism Matters is a Centre for Public Engagement at the University of Edinburgh. It was set up in 2008 and now has branches all over Europe. We aim to raise awareness of bilingualism in families, schools and the public sector.

What Bilingualism Matters can do for policy makers:

- Offer training on bilingualism and language learning
- Talk to community groups or parents about the benefits of bilingualism
- Support projects introducing language learning in the classroom or community
- Provide further information and resources via our website and e-newsletter

For more information about bilingualism in general and our work with local government and schools, visit our website:

www.bilingualism-matters.ppls.ed.ac.uk

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