

# Written evidence submitted by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Modern Languages

## Introduction to the APPG on Modern Languages

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Modern Languages (APPG ML) was established in January 2008. It is a cross-party group of MPs and Peers with a common interest in language policy and issues. Full details: [www.ciol.org.uk/appgml](http://www.ciol.org.uk/appgml)

The stated purpose of the APPG on Modern Languages is to:

- Explore the educational, skills-related, employment, competitive and cultural benefits of learning and using languages throughout the UK;
- Provide a parliamentary forum for information exchange and consultation on languages and linguists; and
- Encourage and support policies and action improving the take-up of languages in schools, further and higher education, in the workplace and in the community.

The Chair of the APPG on Modern Languages is Dame Nia Griffith MP (Lab); the Co-Chair is Baroness Coussins (Crossbench); and the Vice-Chairs are Tonia Antoniazzi MP (Lab), Lord Dykes (Crossbench), Baroness Garden of Frognal (Liberal Democrat) and Lord Sherbourne of Didsbury (Conservative).

## Reason for submitting evidence

The APPG ML is committed to increasing and diversifying the nation's linguistic capabilities, including Indigenous languages.

The APPG ML wishes to respond to the first three questions of the Inquiry together, and the fourth question separately.

- 1) What are the key factors determining whether an indigenous minority language thrives?
- 2) What lessons can be learned from countries whose populations achieve widespread fluency in both a majority and indigenous minority language?
- 3) What should be the criteria for judging whether a minority language should receive official status?

**The APPG ML encourages the Inquiry to seek expert views on these areas from the devolved administrations, academia and expert organisations in the UK and internationally (some of whom will be submitting responses to this Inquiry), including but not limited to the following.**

## Academic and policy experts:

- British Academy/UCML Strategic Committee on Languages in Higher Education (SCLHE)<sup>1</sup> and the Languages Lead at the British Academy, Professor Neil Kenny<sup>2</sup>.
- Professor Colin Riordan (President and Vice Chancellor of Cardiff University) for Welsh and expertise on language policy and has advised the SCLHE above.
- Professor Mícheál Ó Mainnín (Queen's University Belfast)<sup>3</sup>, Professor Janice Carruthers (Queen's University Belfast)<sup>4</sup>, Professor Wendy Ayres-Bennett (Cambridge University)<sup>5</sup> for Irish, Scottish Gaelic, Ulster Scots and language policy expertise.
- Professor Michelle Macleod (University of Aberdeen)<sup>6</sup> for Scottish Gaelic and language policy expertise.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/news/the-british-academy-launches-strategic-committee-for-languages-in-he-as-new-data-confirms-mixed-picture-in-modern-languages-provision/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/fellows/neil-kenny-FBA/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://pure.qub.ac.uk/en/persons/micheal-o-mainnin>

<sup>4</sup> <https://pure.qub.ac.uk/en/persons/janice-carruthers>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.languagesciences.cam.ac.uk/directory/wmb1001%40cam.ac.uk>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/sll/people/profiles/m.macleod>

- Professor Bencie Woll (DCAL Deaf, Cognition and Language Research Centre at UCL)<sup>7</sup> for British Sign Language.
- Eowyn Crisfield<sup>8</sup>, who has led on the development and implementation of a Jersey-wide language policy (including Jèrriais).

#### Devolved administrations and language-specific agencies:

- **Northern Ireland:** North/South Language Body<sup>9</sup> and its two agencies, Bord na Gaeilge<sup>10</sup> (Irish) and Ulster Scots Agency<sup>11</sup>.
- Northern Ireland Department for Communities (British Sign Language and Irish Sign Language in Northern Ireland)<sup>12</sup>.  
**Scotland:** Bòrd na Gàidhlig<sup>13</sup> (Scottish Gaelic) and the Scots Language Centre<sup>14</sup>.
- **Wales:** Welsh Language Commissioner<sup>15</sup>.
- **England:** Cornwall Council Cornish Language Office<sup>16</sup> (Cornish).
- **Jersey:** Office du Jèrriais (Jèrriais).
- **Isle of Man:** Culture Vannin<sup>17</sup> and its sub-committee the Manx Advisory Council (Manx).
- **UK-wide:** British Sign Language: The BSL Board<sup>18</sup>; and stakeholder organisations such as BATOD - Association for teachers of the deaf, BDA - British Deaf Association, NDCS - National Deaf Children's Association, RDA - Royal Association for the Deaf and RNID - Royal National Institute for the Deaf.
- The **British-Irish Council**<sup>19</sup> work on Indigenous, minority and lesser-used languages (Irish, Welsh, Gaelic, Scots, Ulster Scots, Manx, Jèrriais, Guernésiais and Cornish).

#### International expertise:

##### UNESCO<sup>20</sup>

UNESCO has been designated as the lead organisation and Secretariat for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022-2032 (IDIL2022-2023). The Global Action Plan for IDIL2022-2023 includes a Theory of Change, Implementation Framework and Monitoring and Evaluation which can inform UK policy.<sup>21</sup>

UNESCO has many decades of experience in the field of language status and the co-existence of official majority languages, official minority languages, and non-recognised minority languages, as well as multilingualism and mother tongue education, with reference to the Sustainable Development Goals<sup>22</sup>.

#### Council of Europe

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/dcal/people/core-team/professor-bencie-woll>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.crisfielddeducationalconsulting.com/copy-of-about-cec>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.northsouthministerialcouncil.org/language-body>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.forasnagaeilge.ie/?lang=en>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.ulsterscotsagency.com/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/topics/languages/sign-language>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.gaidhlig.scot/en/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.scotslanguage.com/articles/node/id/29>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.welshlanguagecommissioner.wales/policy-and-research>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/parks-leisure-and-culture/the-cornish-language/cornish-language/cornish-language-office/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://culturevannin.im/manxlanguage/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/co-chair-appointed-to-bsl-board-advising-government-on-key-issues-for-deaf-people>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.britishirishcouncil.org/>

<sup>20</sup> UNESCO in the UK can be contacted at: <https://unesco.org.uk/meet-the-team#board>

<sup>21</sup> <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379853>

<sup>22</sup> <https://events.unesco.org/event?id=1837970082&lang=1033>

The Council of Europe leads on expertise in language policy and also focuses on education (including language policy) for democracy and human rights. Of particular note:

- **The Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages**<sup>23</sup>
  - The Committee member representing the UK is Rob Dunbar (University of Edinburgh)<sup>24</sup>
- The **European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe (ECML)**<sup>25</sup>.
- The **2022 Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the importance of plurilingual and intercultural education for democratic culture**<sup>26 27</sup> which was co-authored by Professor Terry Lamb of the University of Westminster<sup>28</sup>.

**The APPG ML encourages the Inquiry to consider acknowledging the place of community/home/heritage languages alongside Indigenous languages and indeed English, in recognition that language policy internationally is moving towards an inclusive approach reflecting societies' multilingualisms.**

**In this regard, the APPG ML encourages the Inquiry to refer to:**

- The **Home/Heritage/Community Languages Advisory Group**<sup>29</sup> hosted by the Association for Language Learning and the British Council.
- Representatives of **community settings/out of school settings**, in particular Dr Mon Partovi at the YPF Trust/National Resource Centre for Supplementary Education<sup>30</sup>.
- **UK-based inclusive language policies**, for example:
  - Scotland: *1+2 Language Strategy, 2012*<sup>31</sup>
  - Wales: *Curriculum for Wales, 2022*<sup>32</sup>; *Supporting Triple Literacy, 2011*<sup>33</sup>; *Global Futures, 2015*<sup>34</sup>.
- **Council of Europe** (see above).

#### **4) What should be the role of the UK Government in supporting and developing indigenous minority languages?**

The UK Government should capitalise on the existing commitments it has signed up to, and expertise available to it, through international conventions and treaties such as the UN's International Decade of Indigenous Languages Action Plan, the UK's commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals (especially SDG4), and the Council of Europe (see above).

**In particular, the APPG ML encourages the UK Government to double down on its engagement with and adherence to the European Charter on Regional and Minority Languages (ECRML)<sup>35</sup> and its expert recommendations, as an obvious vehicle for supporting Indigenous languages, together with the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.**

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-charter-regional-or-minority-languages/members-of-the-committee-of-experts>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.ed.ac.uk/profile/rob-dunbar>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.ecml.at/>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/education/-/new-council-of-europe-recommendation-on-the-importance-of-plurilingual-and-intercultural-education-for-democratic-culture>

<sup>27</sup> PDF download: <https://rm.coe.int/prems-013522-gbr-2508-cmrec-2022-1-et-expose-motifs-couv-a5-bat-web/1680a967b4>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.westminster.ac.uk/about-us/our-people/directory/lamb-terry>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.all-languages.org.uk/research-practice/language-zones/home-heritage-community-languages/> and PDF of the Group's vision and goals: <https://www.all-languages.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Vision-statement-for-HHCL.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> Contact via Suzie Yassin at <https://www.supplementaryeducation.org.uk/contact/>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/language-learning-scotland-12-approach/>

<sup>32</sup> <https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales>

<sup>33</sup> PDF: <https://hwb.gov.wales/storage/0f5b4d69-d22d-4c25-b48c-5b573d394ef0/supporting-triple-literacy-language-learning-in-key-stages-2-and-3.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.gov.wales/global-futures-plan-improve-and-promote-modern-foreign-languages>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-charter-regional-or-minority-languages>

**We also encourage the Inquiry, and the UK Government, to consider whether the patchwork of different and inconsistent legal statuses of the UK's languages is a factor in whether the UK is able to support regional and minority languages systematically and in a national way; and to explore the cracks that appear between these arrangements and the Council of Europe's frameworks.**

At present, the UK's Indigenous languages have different statuses depending on the nation (and there is separate ECRML recognition to which the UK is signatory). English itself is the UK's *de facto* (not *de jure*) official language.<sup>36</sup>

There are historical and legal reasons for language policy to be devolved and for different languages to have different statuses in different nations, with locally specific support structures. However, there are instances where support for Indigenous languages appear to be complicated by these arrangements, for example:

- Support for Cornish is at present the responsibility of Cornwall Council but the ECRML Committee of Experts reports that this responsibility is not formally devolved nor is it funded adequately or sustainably, resulting in support for Cornish being subject to “local political debates” due to “competing pressures”<sup>37</sup>. In addition, Cornwall Council can only participate in the British-Irish Council as an observer, as it is not a devolved nation or authority.
- The ECRML does not include sign languages. The UK Government should work with the Council of Europe, the ECML and the ECRML towards the addition of a protocol on sign languages to be added to the ECRML so that British Sign Language and Irish Sign Language (and indeed other European sign languages in other countries) may be included in the framework.
- The UK's involvement in the ECRML covers the United Kingdom and the Isle of Man, but not Jersey or Guernsey and their respective minority languages, Jèrriais and Guernésiais. The UK Government should examine to what extent it might also represent these languages as part of the ECRML, on the same basis as it already does for Manx; or otherwise formally support efforts for these languages to be included in the ECRML.

**10 March 2023**

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**All-Party Parliamentary Group on Modern Languages**  
[www.ciol.org.uk/appgml](http://www.ciol.org.uk/appgml)

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<sup>36</sup> For a discussion of these issues see, for example, Mac Sithigh, D., (2020), *Official status of languages in the UK and Ireland*. Queen's University Belfast. [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3231496](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3231496)

<sup>37</sup> ECRML (2021) *Evaluation by the Committee of Experts of the Implementation of the Recommendations for Immediate Action contained in the Committee of Experts' fifth evaluation report on the UNITED KINGDOM and ISLE OF MAN*. Council of Europe (p.5) <https://rm.coe.int/ukevaliria5-en/1680a287e0>