



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

Human Rights and Democracy Department
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
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7 February 2017

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 REQUEST REF: 0100-17

Thank you for your email of 25 January asking for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. You asked:

I'm currently doing some research into the history of the 'Scots language'.

And I'm interested to know the particular circumstances in which Scottish dialects came to be granted language status back in 2001 under the Council of Europe's Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

I understand that it was the FCO which made the determination.

Would you be kind enough to tell me:

- 1. Who made the application for language status to be granted.*
- 2. What evidence was considered in relation to any application. (and can I have copies, or a link to any such documents).*

and

- 3. Who actually made the decision that Scots was a language rather than a Northern English dialect for the purposes of the European Charter.*

I am writing to confirm that we have now completed the search for the information which you requested.

I can confirm that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) does hold some information relevant to your request.

I would firstly like to clarify the role of the FCO in implementation of the Council of Europe's European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. The Charter is largely the responsibility of the UK devolved governments, with responsibility for Manx resting with the Isle of Man Government, and departmental oversight of Cornish falling to the Department for Communities and Local Government. Although not practically involved with implementation of the Charter, the FCO is responsible for submitting triennial state reports to the CoE on specific measures undertaken by the UK to promote the use of regional or minority languages in public life. Previous reports are available on the CoE website at: <http://www.coe.int>.

The application for language status you mentioned that was granted under the Council of Europe's European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages came from the Scottish Office. The FCO submitted the return for the Scottish Office, as well as on behalf of the other relevant UK authorities wishing to include their regional dialects. The evidence in the application would have been presented to the Scottish Office for consideration prior to approval and submission to the FCO. The FCO was copied into an email sent in 2004 to a member of the public, who asked a similar question. This was the response given by a Scottish Government official:

The recommendation of the Scottish Office at the time was that Scots was a regional and minority language and that the Charter should be signed and ratified in relation to Scots. There was little debate as to whether Scots was a dialect or a language. The points were also made that advocates of the Scots language were in favour of Scots being specified in the Charter. In addition there was brief reference to the use of Scots in schools, to the literary history of Scots and to the activity of Scots language bodies.

I have spoken to officials in the Scottish Government office to advise them of your question and they would be happy to answer any follow-up questions you may have on the promotion of the Scots Language. They can be contacted at ceu@gov.scot.

Yours sincerely,

Human Rights and Democracy Department



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