

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Gaelic Committee – 18 February 2010

Agenda Item	
Report No	

Development of Ulpan Gaelic Classes

Report by Director of Education, Culture and Sport Service

Summary

This report briefs Members on the experience to-date in the development of Gaelic Ulpan Classes in the Highland area. Mr David Grant Director of Deiseal Ltd., will give a short presentation on Ulpan

The Ulpan method relates to Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) 4.13, National Outcome 13, to increase the percentage of people in the Highlands describing themselves as “well disposed” towards Gaelic.

1. Ulpan

- 1.1 An Ulpan for Scottish Gaelic based on the Welsh and Israeli model of language learning, was developed by the company Deiseal, with financial support from Bòrd na Gàidhlig, in 2007.
- 1.2 The company had created a new approach to Gaelic learning which began to address the need for a structured and progressive Gaelic learning course which could be delivered in communities by tutors who were specifically trained in the method.
- 1.3 The teaching method which focuses on learning the language through speaking and the repetition of key structures, rather than a grammatical approach, has proved to be popular and demand for classes using this method has grown throughout the area.

2. Range of developments

- 2.1 The Council are presently supporting Ulpan classes in a number of ways. In some instances, the Council are running the provision directly, in others the classes are run in conjunction with partners and in some places Learning Centres are being offered support to provide the classes.
- 2.2 In Inverness the Council began offering community based Ulpan classes in September 2007. These classes are now run in partnership with Inverness College and have grown from three classes with 36 students to 9 classes with over 90 students. Drop-out rates in these classes have been very low and have been mainly due to people moving out of the area or personal circumstances. The majority of students have been extremely keen and have conscientiously worked their way up through the Units over a two and a half year period.

- 2.3 In Dingwall the Council have run one class for a year and have recently expanded to two classes.
- 2.4 The Aviemore Learning Centre was supported to run two highly successful Ulpan classes.
- 2.5 In Skye 30 students have participated in Council run classes run in Portree and Broadford. A further three 3-day courses are due to take place throughout February and March.
- 2.6 Support has been given to Iomairt Lochaber working in conjunction with Lochaber College to train new Ulpan tutors in the West Lochaber area as well as to enable new classes to begin in Fort William, Invergarry, Ballachulish, Roybridge and Acharacle.
- 2.7 CLI Gàidhlig has been given support to run two week-end Ulpan classes in Drumnadrochit, a course is to be run in Ullapool and Ulpan taster sessions are to take place in Mallaig and Acharacle. CLI Gàidhlig are also receiving support to provide help to people who wish to undertake Ulpan training in areas which presently have Gaelic Medium Education and where parents wish to learn the language in order to support their children.
- 2.8 Two classes, run as a pilot in Inverness for Highland Council staff, have been extended for a further 20 weeks. HC staff in other areas now have the opportunity to attend community based Ulpan classes free of charge until June when the pilot will be evaluated.
- 2.9 Most of the finance for these classes comes through GLAIF but others are being supported by the Council Adult Learning Fund.
- 2.10 All Ulpan Gaelic classes being supported by the Council offer a discount for Gaelic Medium parents in order to encourage parents in their efforts to support their children's learning.
- 2.11 The classes being run in Inverness and Lews Castle College are offering Ulpan at the most advanced level in the country which is Unit 120 and over.
- 2.12 Whether or not Ulpan Gaelic classes will ultimately be successful in creating new fluent Gaelic speakers is as yet unknown. The situation in Scotland is different from Wales and Israel, in that there is not an environment where-by learners can walk out of their classes and use the language within the community, thereby affording them the opportunity to consolidate their learning. Creating opportunities for learners to practice the language must now be seen as a vital task in taking Gaelic learning forward.
- 2.13 The key benefits of Ulpan are the confidence it gives learners to speak, the emphasis on learning through hearing the sounds of the language, the focus on key structures, the progressive nature of the units and the fact that the tutors are specifically trained in the method.

- 2.14 The down-side of Ulpan include the 'relative' expense in comparison to traditional Gaelic classes (which tend to be close to self-financing), the shortage of trained tutors, and some aspects of the administrative process which could be stream-lined.
- 2.15 Recommendations for Deiseal from students at the upper levels of Ulpan include requests for speedy progress on the creation of on-line back-up, and an urgent need for the anticipated, structured conversation sessions. Tutors and providers see the necessity for the awaited quality control procedures to be put into place as soon as possible in order to give tutors the support and reassurance they require.
- 2.16 The promotion of tutor recruitment as well as increasing tutor training opportunities are essential if we are to see a real expansion of Ulpan provision and thereby make full use of this resource.

3. Recommendation

Members are asked to note:-

- 3.1 the contents of this report and Mr David Grants presentation; and
3.2 that a separate report on the HC staff pilot course will come before the April Committee.

Signature:

Designation: Director of Education, Culture and Sport

Date: 2 February 2010

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