

**WRITTEN RESPONSE TO THE CALL FOR EVIDENCE FROM THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT EDUCATION AND CULTURE COMMITTEE**

**EDUCATION (SCOTLAND) BILL.**

**Gaelic**

**10. How significant a change in Gaelic medium primary education will the Bill deliver? Do you agree these provisions should be limited to primary schooling?**

At present, given the spread and delivery of Gaelic Education across Highland, it is very difficult to assess the level of change in Gaelic Medium Primary Education (GMPE) resulting from the Bill. As the largest provider of Gaelic Education, through 22 Primary and 16 Secondary provisions, the effects of targeted, increased promotion and publicity may provide a platform for increased numbers. This includes development work in the Pre-Birth to age 3 sector.

We believe that the Bill should not be limited to Gaelic Medium Primary Education and, indeed, makes reference to Pre-School provision. The Bill should address the varied nature of Gaelic education delivery, which includes Gaelic Pre-School provision, standalone Gaelic Medium Primary Schools, Gaelic Medium Primary Schools with English Medium Departments and English Medium Primary Schools with Gaelic Medium Departments. In addition, it should also address the different Gaelic delivery methods in Secondary School stages; Gaelic Medium Subject learning, Gaelic studied through the medium of Gàidhlig and Gaelic Learners Education. (See response to Q13 below.)

**11. What are the most appropriate ways for education authorities, particularly those with low levels of Gaelic usage, to promote and support Gaelic medium education and Gaelic learner education? What impact is this promotional work likely to have on the Gaelic language and the number of Gaelic speakers?**

We are unable to comment on Authorities with low levels of Gaelic usage, as Highland already has an established, thriving and geographically dispersed Gaelic Education provision. As such, it is anticipated that this proposed legislation would likely affect Highland in a different way to other authorities. Gaelic is promoted within the Council with a centralised Gaelic Team in place which provides support for education and other Gaelic related activities. Additional resources and funding to assist with promotional work will be required; and will be welcomed.

Gaelic Education is crucial to a healthy and sustainable future for the language and targeted, high profile promotional work could provide a platform to encourage parents to choose Gaelic Education; thereby increasing the number of speakers. This work could usefully include:

- Regular and high-level Ministerial references, support and encouragement for Gaelic and Gaelic Education, giving Gaelic appropriate status, priority and profile;

- More publicity and easily accessible information (especially web/app based) on the significant benefits associated with Bilingualism through GME;
- More flexible, accessible, community and on-line Adult Learning resources and opportunities; to support and develop the language skills of Parents who choose GME for their children;
- More marketing initiatives especially around Gaelic careers including Teaching - Scottish Government/Skills Development Scotland/Bòrd na Gàidhlig/Local Authorities etc.;
- maximising use on social media which is currently so important to young people;
- Education Scotland, SQA and SFC would also be very important partners in promoting GME across their significant spheres of influence. Increasing Gaelic profile in their work would provide additional status and credibility to Gaelic Education across Scotland's National Education hierarchy;
- The GTCS could also play an important role in promoting Gaelic Education; by publicising/confirming the status of teaching Gaelic within its formal professional and regulatory processes;
- Some "marketing" support and various types of encouragement for a programme on BBC Scotland TV (as opposed to BBC Alba) on Gaelic Medium Education; and the remarkable success story of Gaelic education in the last 30 years.

It would also add strength to the foregoing to have clear messages highlighting the academic research into, and the supporting educational evidence collated on, the Benefits of Bilingualism.

**12. Do you agree that the Bill "will establish a clear process for authorities to follow in considering parental requests for an assessment of the need for Gaelic medium primary education"? Do you agree with the thresholds proposed in the Bill in relation to the assessment of parental requests?**

Highland Council agrees that a clear, transparent and consistent process should be put in place whereby authorities can assess parental requests for Gaelic medium education. We currently publish an online map of where we provide our sustainability model (Pre-School provision feeding through directly to Primary and Secondary education); so we make it clear where we provide Gaelic education. In that context, we would be keen to contribute to the development of a national process to respond to parental requests for the provision or expansion of Gaelic education.

The process must be flexible and not a "one size fits all". In addition, geographic, transportation and demographic challenges must also be borne in mind. Any process to assess demand must be based on the sustainability and long term likely

success of provision; and the best use of resources. The process must be clear, efficient and time bound, non-bureaucratic, proportionate and affordable.

**13. Under existing legislation, education authorities must have regard to Bord na Gaidhlig's education guidance when they are producing their annual statement of improvement objectives. What will the requirement in this bill add to this?**

Section 9 of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 states that "The Bòrd *may* prepare and submit to the Scottish Ministers guidance in relation to the provision of Gaelic education and the development of such provision."

Section 14 of this Bill confers new statutory responsibilities on Bòrd na Gàidhlig, in that the Bord now "*must* prepare and submit to the Scottish Ministers guidance in relation to the provision of Gaelic education and the development of such provision."

Any Guidance should be drafted in partnership with Local Authorities and should define, in the first instance, what constitutes Gaelic Medium Education in solely Gaelic Medium Primary Schools. There is also scope for the Guidance to define the other modes of delivering Gaelic Education which, in addition to GME schools, include:

- Pre-school and Primary Language Learning (PLL) or GLPS – linked with the 1+2 Strategy. (National Framework currently being worked on.)
- Gaelic Medium Primary Schools with English Medium Departments ("not Units"). (What might the difference be between these Schools and fully GM schools?)
- English Medium Primary Schools with Gaelic Medium Departments("not Units"). (What might the difference be between these Schools and fully GM schools?)
- Secondary School phases for Gaelic Medium/Gàidhlig Fluent and Gaelic Learners.

The Guidance would therefore set out what type/level of Gaelic education should be delivered at Pre-school, Primary and Secondary levels including associated linguistic competence and learning aspirations/targets especially in the early stages.

This would create a clear, shared, national understanding of 3-18 Gaelic Education for pupils, teachers, parents/guardians and officials.

**14. Overall, to what extent will the Bill help to deliver the Scottish Government's commitments to grow and strengthen Gaelic education?**

As mentioned earlier, Gaelic Education is crucial to a healthy and sustainable future for the language and this Bill could provide a positive platform to encourage parents to choose Gaelic Education; thereby increasing the number of speakers. The Highland Council has sought to build a sustainable, strategic GME delivery model,

based on our Gaelic Pre-school provision feeding through to Primary and Secondary provision across a network of schools in Highland.

This Bill has the potential to clarify, through extensive consultation, what the differing elements of Gaelic Education consist of; and this would be of enormous help to teachers, parents and authorities. Consequently, this would provide everyone with a clear understanding of what is expected within a consistent and quality assured framework for Gaelic Education across Scotland.

**15. What potential impact on other educational services might arise from the local authority having to implement these new duties?**

Growth in Gaelic Education will result in the consequential expansion of staffing and expertise in other related support and specialist support areas including Qualified Pre-School Practitioners and Additional Support Needs staff. We would also anticipate additional staff training and development costs to maintain knowledge and expertise and related Continuous Lifelong Professional Learning. Another area where significant costs could be incurred is in pupil transportation; and we would need to look across the board at the potential impact on other educational services in order to factor these into the overall picture relating to additional funding support requirements.

We have already mentioned above, the importance of colleagues in Education Scotland, SQA and SFC in promoting GME. It would be worthwhile considering if the Gaelic Education landscape might be improved by strengthening the interface between these organisations and Stòrlann Nàiseanta na Gàidhlig. Resources and Translation of Gaelic Education Materials (particularly in the Secondary sector) is hugely important and should be factored into considerations when English resources/materials are being prepared and distributed. Establishing more formal and robust links between these organisations could bring significant benefits and a streamlining of education resource creation, translation and production.