



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Education, Children and Young People Committee

Wednesday 8 May 2024

Session 6



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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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EDUCATION, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE COMMITTEE
14th Meeting 2024, Session 6

CONVENER

*Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)

*Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab)

*Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green)

*Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con)

*Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)

*Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)

*Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD)

*Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Dr Inge Birnie (Scottish Council of Deans of Education)

Seonaidh Charity (Comann Luchd-Teagaisg Àrd Sgoiltean)

Joan Esson (Education Scotland)

Bruce Eunson (Education Scotland)

Donald Macleod (Association of Directors of Education in Scotland)

Dr Gillian Munro (Sabhal Mòr Ostaig)

Lydia Rohmer (UHI North, West and Hebrides)

Dr Sylvia Warnecke (Open University in Scotland)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Pauline McIntyre

LOCATION

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)

Scottish Parliament

Education, Children and Young People Committee

Wednesday 8 May 2024

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:03]

Scottish Languages Bill: Stage 1

The Convener (Sue Webber): Welcome to the 14th meeting in 2024 of the Education, Children and Young People Committee. The first item on our agenda is to continue hearing oral evidence on the Scottish Languages Bill at stage 1. We have two panels of witnesses today, and I welcome our first panel. Thank you very much for joining us.

I start by asking our witnesses to introduce themselves and say which organisation they are representing.

Donald Macleod (Association of Directors of Education in Scotland): Madainn mhath. Tha mi toilichte a bhith còmhla ribh. I am the chief officer for education and children's services with Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, but my presence here today is to represent the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland.

Seonaidh Charity (Comann Luchd-Teagaisg Àrd Sgoiltean): Madainn mhath. Tapadh leibh airson a' chothrom seo. I am here representing Comann Luchd-teagaisg Àrd-sgoiltean, which is the professional association for Gaelic secondary teachers. I am also a Gaelic teacher for Highland Council.

Bruce Eunson (Education Scotland): Good morning. I am here from Education Scotland, where I work as the Scots language co-ordinator.

Joan Esson (Education Scotland): Madainn mhath dhuibh. I work with Education Scotland as an HM inspector.

The Convener: Thank you. I formally note apologies from Stephanie Callaghan.

We will move directly to questions from members, and I will bring in Pam Duncan-Glancy first.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): Good morning to you all. Thank you for joining us. The inspectorate's submission says that

"the Bill focuses on Gàidhlig language in isolation of interconnected factors that strengthen languages, such as socio-economic challenges"

and that

"from a national perspective, Gàidhlig needs considered across policy."

My first question is for Joan Esson. Is the scope of the bill wide enough?

Joan Esson: The inspectorate welcomes the bill. We see that the bill will bring change and that it will have an impact through the strategy that has been proposed and the reporting that is taking place via Bòrd na Gàidhlig. It will also have an impact through the strengthening of existing provisions around the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 and the definition of education.

We are an evidence-based organisation, so we are always looking for impact. We look for working across organisations, and we see that in the improved leadership of Gaelic in Scotland since the inception of Gaelic-medium education. We see that there is leadership from Government, local government, schools, senior leaders, Gaelic organisations and national organisations. The continued approach of collectively working together across policies so that Gaelic is always considered is a very important aspect of taking the bill forward.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Do you think that the specific focus on education is enough to do what the bill needs to do—in particular, to address the required urgency that you speak about in your submission?

Joan Esson: We think that the strategy and the bill will have impact, but we also note the standards and the secondary legislation that sit with the bill. We see things in that secondary legislation that will be very important to shifting Gaelic to get more impact, so we are very interested in those things being taken forward—indeed, we recognise those things as the issues, challenges and successes that we find in our inspections. That would help the bill to have further impact.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: I have a final question for you, and then I have a question for Donald Macleod. How do you think the bill fits with wider reforms in education?

Joan Esson: Wider reform is a Scottish Government agenda, but we are always looking for the very best for Gaelic and for Gaelic to keep pace. Gaelic-medium education is obviously a less mature system. We are still building the system up, so our expectations, our steps and the actions that we take for Gaelic will be bespoke to the sector and might look different from those in the English sector.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: I appreciate that. Donald Macleod, if it is okay, I will come to you. We just heard briefly that the standards that the bill looks

to include could be important in relation to Gaelic-medium education. How do your members feel about that, and how will they approach Gaelic-medium education going forward?

Donald Macleod: First, the association broadly welcomes the spirit of the bill and the understanding of the priorities that it aims to achieve. As has been recognised, the standards are not themselves included in the bill. There is a degree of concern among our members, because we would like to have an understanding of what the proposed standards are, how they will be measured and identified and what accountability local authorities and education authorities will hold across the country in relation to Gaelic and Scots.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Have your members been involved with the development of the proposals in the bill?

Donald Macleod: To differing degrees, yes. Some authorities, such as mine, which have a strong presence of Gaelic and Gaelic-medium education, have had a greater degree of involvement. However, by the very nature of the subject at hand, there is a diverse picture across the nation and, as such, we have differing views and different degrees of involvement in both Gaelic and Scots.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Do you think that Gaelic education, and specifically what the bill proposes, including on standards, is enough to arrest the decline in the Gaelic language?

Donald Macleod: As a membership, we have some concerns about the detail of the bill, how it will lead to change, how it will be measured and what the accountability on education authorities will be. There is, however, recognition that the bill will be important in arresting the decline in the language and giving greater prominence and urgency to supporting the provision of education, particularly in languages. It is about not just the formal medium education as first-language learning, but whole communities learning these languages as a second language.

So, yes, we think that the bill is important and that it is heading in the right direction, but we are concerned about the granular detail, its measurement and the accountability of education authorities, which our members feel need to be more clearly defined.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: My final question is probably still for you, Donald, if that is okay. The policy memorandum lists quite a number of areas that the standards will need to comment on, including access to provision, access to Gaelic-medium education as a three-to-18 experience, subject choice, teacher and pupil support and resources, and class sizes. All of those are highlighted as needing to be addressed. What will

your organisation and your members need in order to address all of those things?

Donald Macleod: We absolutely recognise that, and it goes back to my earlier response, to some degree. We need, first of all, clarity on the detail of the standards, the expectations that education authorities will have of implementing the standards, how they will be measured and evaluated, and what the potential negative consequences are for an education authority if those standards are not met. Those are important things to be clearly defined.

As a national organisation that represents the 32 local authorities, we know that there is a broad and differing picture across the nation. In an authority such as my own, which is very much a Gaelic heartland, we welcome the bill and feel that we can confidently move forward with it. However, other authority members are concerned because they feel that there is likely already sufficient legislation in the Education (Scotland) Act 2016 to address the growth of Gaelic-medium education, and they are concerned about the potential imposition of standards that their community does not aspire to. We are trying to capture that diverse picture across the nation in an act that is going to cover the whole of Scotland.

The Convener: There were a lot of questions in there. Seonaidh, do you wish to comment on any of them?

Seonaidh Charity: On standards, as we detailed in our written response, we would like to see a greater focus nationally on ensuring that Gaelic-medium education is a three-to-18 experience. As you can see from some of the statistics that we have submitted, to all intents and purposes, in many schools, GME ceases to be a thing at the end of secondary 2 or S3, depending on subject choices. Literacy in Gaelic cannot currently be considered as having parity with literacy in English, because that would not be allowed to happen in English-medium education. Pupils would not be able to leave the subject without a qualification or without developing fluency or competence in the language.

An important part of the standards will be in setting the expectation that we are investing a lot of money. We have excellent numbers of pupils in Gaelic-medium primary education, but what happens when they go to secondary school? How are we maximising the potential that exists with the numbers in primary school growing as they are? Are we converting that into fluent speakers? I do not know whether we will come to that later on.

The Convener: I hope so. I think that we will.

Seonaidh Charity: I will just stop there.

The Convener: Obviously, there will be some questions specifically about Gaelic and there will be some specifically about Scots, but if anyone wants to come in after a question has been directed to someone specific, please catch my eye. We have a lot to juggle because of the hybrid nature of today's meeting.

We will move on to questions from Ruth Maguire.

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): Thank you, convener, and madainn mhath.

We have covered a fair bit in the first questions. I just want to drill down a little more. Do members of the panel agree that there is a need to increase the focus of local authorities on Gaelic-medium education? I was interested in Donald Macleod's response about the 32 local authorities having differing views. Can you say a bit more? You said that they think there is enough in the existing legislation.

09:15

Donald Macleod: That is the challenge for ADES as an organisation that represents the education authority representatives of 32 local authorities. In my own authority, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, we would absolutely welcome the strengthening of that focus and the additional provisions that the bill proposes. However, across the nation, there are challenges in areas where there are no specific histories of involvement in Gaelic-medium education—or in Scots, for that matter. Overall, the proposed legislation is welcomed, but some of our membership feel that there is sufficient provision in the 2016 act with regard to parents wishing to seek Gaelic-medium education and that the functions are there to enable that.

I recognise that the bill aims to reduce the bureaucracy and simplify the process for parents who want to be able to pursue the establishment of Gaelic-medium education provision for their children. The answer is complex—it is not a straight yes or no, because there is a diverse picture depending on the history of the communities that our local authorities work within and what they aspire to achieve.

Ruth Maguire: Seonaidh Charity, you spoke about the need for GME from three to 18 and rightly pointed out that that is not available everywhere. Do you think that the focus should be on having that provision from the early years right through to secondary level, perhaps in fewer locations? What would your members' view be?

Seonaidh Charity: At CLAS, we would like to see a national road map that has different destinations depending on the levels of

development. As Donald Macleod said, a lot of local authorities might not have GME provision at this point in time, whereas others might have had GME for 20 or 30 years.

For us, the ideal situation would be a staggered progression that said, "This is when you start with GME and this is how you progress." For more advanced—for want of a better word—local authorities, there might be a clearer direction of travel with regard to the subjects that are being offered throughout secondary school, as well as more planning and support around the provision of resources for those subjects. That is what we are alluding to while acknowledging that some local authorities do not have Gaelic-medium or Gaelic-learner education and that targets and progression should be appropriate to the stage that each authority is at.

Ruth Maguire: Is there any concern that trying to do a little bit everywhere is perhaps not the most effective way of lifting the language and protecting it?

Seonaidh Charity: It is important to remember that Gaelic belongs to everyone in Scotland and that everyone should have the opportunity to engage with the language. That being said, some communities—such as the community where Donald Macleod is from—have more of a historical connection with the language, and you might seek to further augment what is happening in that local authority with regard to the opportunities that are presented in schools.

However, I think that creating tiers of expectation based on historical connections and community traits and features would be a dangerous line to go down. It is difficult to provide a one-size-fits-all response that covers all authorities, but it is important to take note of where different authorities are and what could be done in various steps.

Donald Macleod: Our membership has spoken about another factor, which is trying to keep strength in the bill while also trying to keep hold of local decision making as much as possible. It is really important that we keep hold of that, again in recognition of the diverse nature of language learning across the nation and the prevalence of different languages in different communities. We need to try to keep hold of the power to have local decision making through local authorities while respecting the aspiration to set standards nationally. There is a wee bit of rub between setting national standards while keeping local decision making and respecting the position of local authorities. It is a difficult balance to strike.

Ruth Maguire: You probably know what I am going to ask you now. Is there something in the bill

that needs to change in order for us to get that balance right?

Donald Macleod: Perhaps we could have more recognition in the bill of the need to be able to have some local decision making. Again, it comes back to the detail of the standards. Having adaptive standards would allow us to have focused measures in different communities that reflect where they are in their journey towards developing language. That may be an area where we could recognise local context and the duties and responsibilities of local authorities to meet that need in a local setting. Again, however, we have to recognise the diversity across the nation and the different nuances of where there is a history of Gaelic-medium education and the diversity of Scots across the authorities that are more influenced in that regard.

Seonaidh Charity: I appreciate what Donald says about the diversity of local authorities. The caveat, though, is that, historically, local authority provision has been very patchy. I appreciate the need to have a balance, but there is an inherent risk that you would be dependent on individual officers and local authorities making decisions about Gaelic-medium education and Gaelic-learner education, which is why we are pushing for clearer expectations and standards.

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): Good morning to the panel. I will build on the previous questions and answers. Do you support the proposal that Scottish ministers should set standards for Gaelic-medium education?

Donald Macleod: Yes, ultimately, I do. To pick up on Seonaidh's last response, there is no opposition to having the standards, but we feel that they should be carefully defined in the bill, because the local authorities that will be accountable for the standards need to understand in granular detail what the standards are, how they are going to be measured and how they will be ultimately accountable for their delivery. There is no opposition to the standards in and of themselves, but there is a wish for there to be more detail of what they will contain and how they will be measured and evaluated.

Seonaidh Charity: Our written submission tries to make it clear that the current approach is not working very well, as is shown by the output that we are getting at the end of Gaelic secondary education. I have read lots of written responses and have heard many discussions about what it means to be fluent in Gaelic, and a national 5 qualification does not necessarily guarantee that. There is a lot of work to be done, which I may come back to.

If we look at what has been invested in Gaelic-medium education so far and at the number of pupils who are getting their qualifications, we can see that it is not an efficient process. The number of Gaelic learners has taken a nosedive to the point that there is an existential threat to the qualification. Luckily, we have very supportive officers at the Scottish Qualifications Authority who are willing to keep pushing and promoting the subject. We have let things grow organically and there is a postcode lottery across Scotland as to whether a child will be able to achieve a qualification in Gaelic and whether the structure of the curriculum and the course choices will facilitate their being able to do that.

We would be looking for standards that would support the development of students to become fluent in the language and to achieve a qualification. We would want it to be clear to everyone who is involved in GME that there is an expectation that pupils would continue with Gaelic to gain a qualification in the language and that they would gain an ability and competency in it. In many ways, those pupils are the lifeline of the Gaelic development project.

Joan Esson: The setting of standards by Scottish ministers would be a way of improving the current situation. It would encourage the process to be more strategic and would ensure that there were better operational criteria and governance processes around it. We understand that the approach needs to be driven by data. Where there is interest and demand for Gaelic-medium education, we need to use the data to remove barriers and highlight those interests. We appreciate that there would need to be collaboration between education authorities, parents, teachers and national and local organisations. Given the way in which the standards have been written and described in the papers accompanying the bill, there is the potential for them to drive that change.

Ben Macpherson: Bruce, do you want to add anything?

Bruce Eunson: I am here to speak specifically about Scots.

Ben Macpherson: Sorry—please excuse me.

Donald Macleod: I have a very small point to make about standards, which builds on what Joan Esson has said. It is important that the standards focus on quantity and quality. In the history of Gaelic-medium education, there has been a concern about measures of quantity, which are important in and of themselves, but we should also have measures of the quality of the provision.

Ben Macpherson: Thank you—it was helpful to hear your views. Following on from those answers, I am also interested to hear your views on the

operation of the statutory process for requesting GME in primary schools. What are your views on its being extended to include Gaelic-medium early learning and childcare? Should there be a right to Gaelic-medium education? Given that I have a Gaelic-medium education primary school in my constituency, I know about some of those issues at first hand.

Mr Charity, do you want to come in on that question? It feeds back into some of the points in your previous answer.

Seonaidh Charity: As you heard last week and as you will have seen in a lot of the written responses, it is a source of great disappointment that the right to GME has not been included in the bill in the way that people might have hoped for. We absolutely support the idea in principle. We would caution that the situation that we are in at the moment with staffing, recruitment and, particularly, the retention of Gaelic-medium teachers calls for more rigorous and urgent action. The latest teacher census shows that 418 primary teachers are able to teach through the medium of Gaelic, but that only 266 currently work in Gaelic-medium education, so a big question is: why are people who are capable of teaching Gaelic not working in Gaelic-medium education? What does that mean for future progression and any right to GME that might be included in the bill? As I said at the start, for our members, the fact that the right to GME has not been included in the bill is a source of great disappointment. We would be very keen to see its inclusion.

Joan Esson: As an inspectorate, we were involved in the 2016 process, and what we have found is that it gives parents a way to speak to local authorities about setting up Gaelic-medium education at primary 1. We very much see the extension of the process to early learning and childcare as a positive step. We would see it as helping attainment and helping children make better progress in improving their fluency. In that process, parents discuss the matter with the local authority, which decides whether to take it forward. We would see it as beneficial to have the same process for early learning and childcare, too, so that there is more equity between English-medium and Gaelic-medium education.

My colleagues have referred to rights for parents. Parents are very committed to Gaelic-medium education; when they make such a choice, they look for quality and high standards, and part of our inspection role is to provide quality assurance and to be involved in that process. I would add that there are rights for children, too, with regard to experiencing a quality, progressive, coherent journey through Gaelic-medium education. We would, from the learner perspective, see that as important going forward.

Donald Macleod: In Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, we have had Gaelic ELC provision for a considerable amount of time; indeed, in some instances, Gaelic and English-medium ELC provision sits side by side. The provision of Gaelic-medium ELC is a massive driver of onwards uptake of Gaelic-medium primary education and a key foundation stone of that three-to-18 Gaelic pathway. It is really important that the bill includes ELC, given the ask in that respect and, in particular, the fact that, in ELC settings, we get the very beginnings of the acquisition of oral language. As I have said, it is a driver of future uptake of Gaelic-medium education; it absolutely starts people on the positive path towards Gaelic education and is a really important first step in engaging parents in supporting that journey. As Joan Esson has said, they are always passionate about doing so.

As for ADES and the ask to strengthen legislation for Gaelic-medium education provisions, be they ELC, primary or otherwise, we again urge caution and highlight the need to ensure that there is genuine, sustainable and resourced demand and that the legislation leads to the creation of viable provisions where there is a genuine need for them to be established. We do not want requirements being imposed on authorities where demand is not sustainable, simply as a side effect of the legislation.

09:30

The Convener: Our colleague Willie Rennie, who joins us online, has some questions.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): First, I ask Donald Macleod to respond to the question that Seonaidh Charity raised earlier about why teachers qualified to teach Gaelic are not teaching the subject in schools. Why is that happening? What research has been done on that?

Donald Macleod: My response has to be, to some degree, anecdotal, as we do not have immediate access to widespread research on the matter. Again, though, I can speak specifically from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's experience, because we have Gaelic-medium education in almost every school that we operate.

A very specific answer to that question is that the biggest single driver that we see in teachers who are capable of delivering Gaelic-medium education but who are not doing so is a lack of confidence in their language ability. As a local authority, we have been trying to address that by supporting teachers who have degrees of fluency in Gaelic but who require professional development and learning to help them. Often, it is as much about increasing their confidence as it is about improving their skills, so that they can take

the step into Gaelic-medium education. Indeed, we have supported quite a number of our staff in that.

At the moment, in Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, we have a healthy provision of Gaelic-medium education primary teachers. I cannot say the same about secondary but, in answer to the specific question, I think that this is predominantly about ensuring that there is a support network for staff, so that their confidence in the language is sufficient for them to take the step into Gaelic-medium education. Support for Gaelic-medium education is genuinely there but, for teachers, there can be a concern about their fluency in grammar, their accuracy of spelling and the detail of the language. It is a personal confidence thing, but they want to ensure that, when they teach it to others, they get it right.

Willie Rennie: Are you making progress on that front? Are you managing to keep some of them in the classroom?

Donald Macleod: Locally, within Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, the answer is yes, we absolutely have. We have used a combination of local resources to support teachers, through team teaching and mentoring, and we have also supported teachers to work on the Gaelic acquisition for teachers programme.

Willie Rennie: Seonaidh, do you want to give your perspective?

Seonaidh Charity: “It is a little more than just teaching”, which was written in 2015, is an interesting paper, and it has been referenced in one of the Sabhal Mòr Ostaig responses. It describes the role of a Gaelic teacher, which goes above and beyond just teaching in the classroom; they are actually an ambassador for the language. In many cases, people are creating resources and working hand to mouth with teaching materials.

I can break it down into three key areas, based on my perceptions that this is all down to professional learning. Gaelic-medium immersion teachers do not necessarily have access to enough specialist professional development to equip them to teach a diverse range of learners in the classroom. Excellent programmes, such as the Sabhal Mòr Ostaig master’s degree in Gaelic education, are now emerging. I know people who are doing the course and they are very strong in their praise of it. However, it is a master’s degree that teachers do in their spare time, so it is not necessarily suitable for all Gaelic teachers.

The lack of additional support needs staff and guidance for Gaelic-medium education has been widely discussed. With increasing class sizes in primary schools across the country, that is becoming more of an issue. In previous years, primary classes had smaller numbers, which was

more manageable for teachers; now, though, they are trying to deal with bigger numbers in composite or full primary classes.

It also comes down to resources, such as pupil support assistants and classroom assistants. In some authorities, it is a real struggle to get Gaelic-speaking staff who can provide support in the classroom. All of those things add to the fact that being a Gaelic teacher is not just a privilege, but a burden, particularly at the primary stage.

Donald Macleod: I want to make one further point, building on what Seonaidh Charity has said. If we are to have a robust, deep, high-quality Gaelic immersive experience in a school, teachers will obviously be the fundamental resource, but we also need Gaelic-speaking staff across the system. As Seonaidh has said, that includes pupil support assistants, administration staff, clerical workers and ELC staff. We are trying to grow the Gaelic population across the whole staff population.

A related challenge concerns ASN staff, who are important in schools. What we need around the school are Gaelic-speaking staff and support services, such as national health service speech and language therapists—in other words, access to Gaelic-speaking staff who are part of the holistic team supporting children.

Willie Rennie: In a previous evidence session not related to this bill, we heard that those in traditional Gaelic-speaking areas are sometimes not able to recruit a sufficient number of teachers in the language, because many of them are going off to the central belt to pursue a different life, albeit still within Gaelic-medium education. Is there a danger that, if we expand provision elsewhere, the language could be undermined in its heartland?

Donald Macleod: Absolutely—there is no doubt that that is a reality, to some degree. Our authority has seen a two-way movement in that regard. We have lost some of our staff to the attractions of larger authority areas and cities, which bring other aspects to their wider life while still allowing them to teach in Gaelic-medium education. However, we have also seen a benefit to us in regaining them and recruiting them back into our system. We now have quite a number of Gaelic-medium education teachers who have worked in other authorities and have come back home, as it were, and the benefit to us has been their widened experience and the skill sets that they have gained and brought back.

As Gaelic grows, as we all hope it will, there is no doubt that the market will become increasingly competitive. However, the same applies in both English-medium and Gaelic-medium education, and it is a matter of working with the teacher

education authorities and training bodies to ensure that we match supply and demand in the best way possible.

As far as we are concerned, there is not too much of an issue with Gaelic-medium education primary teachers just now. We have been working on a growing our own programme, partnering with the University of the Highlands and Islands. However, meeting the demand in secondary education has been and continues to be a much more considerable challenge. As part of the implementation of the bill, there definitely needs to be a look at how we manage the workforce and resources in that respect.

Seonaidh Charity: This is all tied up in socioeconomic issues that affect the Highlands and Islands in a number of ways. The most notable issue is housing, as it can be difficult for teachers to find housing in rural areas, particularly in the early stages of their career.

Picking up on what Donald Macleod has said, the grow your own approach has been used very successfully in the Western Isles and in Skye, where, as part of a Sabhal Mòr Ostaig initiative, school pupils can go to the college and learn a bit more about being a teacher at that early stage. It is a matter of capturing people young and cementing in them the idea that there is a career here as well as a pathway that allows them to stay and be successful in rural areas and to go on and contribute to Gaelic education as a whole.

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): Thanks very much for all the evidence so far.

The Glasgow Gaelic school in the west end is very big, and its pupils start from a very early age and go right through. It has more than teaching staff; support staff and all sorts of others work there, too, and of course they do it all in the Gaelic medium. However, some of them have been under pressure with regard to job stability, and I just wonder whether the situation is the same across the country—I am hoping that it is not. I know of people on two-year or three-year contracts, and those contracts are running out, with no intention to extend them. Is it the same across Scotland?

Donald Macleod: That situation is echoed in many authorities across Scotland, because we are all working with one-year budgets, be they local authority budgets or the grant funding available to support Gaelic-medium education. There has certainly been a degree of discussion about trying to create financial security in the system to allow for longer-term planning and security of employment for not just core teaching staff but staff in all provisions.

This is a huge challenge for local authorities across the nation, which are being challenged in their budgets and in providing security of funding

to support language education. Resourcing the growth that we hope that the bill will achieve is definitely a concern, given the challenges in resourcing the existing provision.

Seonaidh Charity: It is probably fair to say that the issue applies across Scotland, but it permeates education as a whole. The short-term contract thing is as damaging to Gaelic as it is to any other subject. Having high numbers of teachers on short-term contracts has an effect on the stability and continuity of education in any subject area and in any context.

Joan Esson: Adding to what my colleagues have said, I think that we see creative ways of supporting staffing across the country. Extending contracts—trying to have full-time contracts—is important in attracting staff, as is looking at some of the barriers in particular areas, such as housing. Indeed, some local authorities support teachers with the likes of housing. We are also seeing the promotion of technology, with teaching being delivered through technology in order to support staffing and to extend the range of areas in which the Gaelic medium can be delivered.

We are also seeing some creative use of promotional structures in places where it might have been difficult for a local authority to recruit. During the past inspection year, we have visited one of those schools in which, in order to increase the numbers being attracted, they have looked at how to make the job more attractive—for example, by advertising it as a principal teacher post.

As for areas that my colleagues have spoken to, we, too, have seen the growing your own approach, where young people who have been in Gaelic-medium education are returning to it to teach or to take up other roles in schools. That is a success of the system.

Donald Macleod: I just want to make a quick point to build on what Joan Esson has said. I think that it was last week that the committee heard a little about e-Sgoil, which was developed in my own authority over a number of years and has received significant Scottish Government support. Its genesis lay in trying to find some way of addressing the teacher shortage and the demand in Gaelic, in particular, but since then, it has grown to cover other things. It has had huge support and real success in how it supports the language and digital teaching in Gaelic. That said, it is challenged, particularly in the outmoded conditions of service for teachers, and we need to work actively with trade unions to address that issue and to open up the massive potential for expanding digital learning and getting digital teaching online. We need to work more strategically across the nation to support that.

The Convener: Earlier, Donald Macleod spoke about the importance of a deep and immersive experience in school, and Seonaidh Charity spoke about the need for support services to be holistic and about the challenges of support staff not speaking Gaelic. What are local authorities and others doing to support pupils to use Gaelic outside of the school environment? I turn to Donald Macleod first.

09:45

Donald Macleod: The point has been made that Gaelic exists not only in the classroom. Fundamentally, it will not survive if it exists only in the classroom. It is a community language and it must have genuine presence and use across the community. I am fortunate that, in my local authority, there are genuine Gaelic heartlands and fantastic community work happening across the area. What the bill is aiming to do with regard to areas of linguistic significance is important.

It is important to recognise real-life and meaningful opportunities to engage with the language. Some of the most successful things that we have done have been things such as intergenerational projects, working with community organisations to bring Gaelic speakers into schools or to bring schools to the Gaelic speakers, working directly with communities on special interest projects and, in local historical contexts, working with historical societies, and ensuring that there are real-life connections between the language that children are learning in the schools and the way that they use it in communities.

There are formal aspects of that, where it is planned and structured, but we also need to create more informal opportunities through community events, such as ceilidhs and performances. That is where we join up the language with culture and music, which are fundamental aspects of the wider Gaelic culture. Those applications of the language are fundamentally important in securing the future, so I welcome what the bill is trying to do to ensure that the language moves beyond the learning context. That is really important in securing the future of the language and giving young people a sense of value.

Another important thread that is connected to that is socioeconomic activity and the value of Gaelic for young people who are going along the three-to-18 pathway and into further learning and work. Gaelic needs to be seen as an asset and a factor that can distinguish them from somebody else. There are huge opportunities not only with some of the things that we have mentioned with regard to education, but in many other sectors where Gaelic could be a huge strength and asset. Moving away from some of the more typical routes

into the likes of the media—which are still valid—there are roles in health and social care and supporting communities. There are many jobs in island communities in particular that are important in feeding in to population retention—keeping hold of our young people so that they live, work, learn and earn in their own communities.

I am sorry for the long-winded answer.

The Convener: No, no, that was very helpful. You gave useful examples, which we always like to get.

Joan Esson: I want to highlight that this is where we are seeing the impact of the advice and existing statutory guidance in relation to immersion. We are evidencing that there is a much better understanding in our schools about immersion and how it is important not just to have a strong immersion experience in school, but to use, learn and sustain Gaelic outwith the classroom and the school. We are seeing community work, partnership work, intergenerational work and adult learning work. All that joins up and increases the opportunities of children and young people to use Gaelic.

Another important aspect is that there are Gaelic learning opportunities for all the children in the school where we have Gaelic-medium and English-medium learners together. That increases the opportunities to use Gaelic, increase the immersive experiences and give children and young people themselves responsibility for using their language. That is an area where we are seeing growth but also looking for more connection in the use of accreditation and more joint working across partners so that we can increase that further.

The Convener: That is great, thank you, Joan.

Seonaidh Charity: I support everything that Donald Macleod and Joan Esson have said. That is a crucial part of developing fluency in Gaelic.

With regard to how I frame my thinking on that, there is a linguist economist who talks about the capacity-opportunity-desire model: that is, if you want people to use a minority language, you need to have those three things in place. You need to have the capacity, which means that the pupils are able to talk in Gaelic fluently, and then they need to have the opportunities and the desire to do that. We can discuss the curriculum and how you achieve the first two of those.

One of the key things that pupils need is those opportunities. As a teacher who works in high school, I can say that we benefit greatly from the work that is done by Comunn na Gàidhlig, which has regular meetings with our pupils, FilmG, Spòrs Gàidhlig and FC Sonas. There is actually a rich landscape in terms of opportunities for school

pupils. In my work as a board member of Bòrd na Gàidhlig, I see the range of youth work that is going on throughout the country. That is really positive to see, and it is absolutely vital that that continues and grows along with GME as a whole.

The Convener: I am going to ask a question that is for all four members of the panel, as we start to move into a section on Scots—get ready, Bruce.

How has Gaelic and Scots been supported through the one-plus-two policy approach, and how has that helped? We will start with you, Bruce, if that is okay.

Bruce Eunson: Scots is very popular as an L3 language in the one-plus-two strategy. For a language to be an L2 language, pupils have to be able to sit a higher exam in it, so there are numerous languages that only become L3 options. Scots is one of the most popular choices outside the L2 options, along with British Sign Language. Scots is spoken across Scotland, so all 32 local authorities have the opportunity to include Scots language learning in their curriculum as well as the more traditional Scots literacy lessons.

Scots has so many links to other modern European languages, including French, Dutch and German, and Gaelic and English, that it is a great source of information that the bairns in schools recognise and can make links to. The Scots language links so much to other areas of the curriculum that it has been a very popular feature of the one-plus-two policy thus far.

The Convener: Does anyone else want to comment?

Donald Macleod: The one-plus-two approach has been really important in raising the prominence of language learning in general in the school setting. Again, from personal experience, I have found that Gaelic as an L2 subject for children who are coming into school into English-medium education has been a really important area of focus for ensuring that there is a pathway for young people to reach the curriculum aspirations and requirements of Gaelic as a learner language.

There is still a lot of work for us to do there. In a lot of our schools, the focus has been—rightly so—significantly on Gaelic-medium education as a first language, but we need to ensure that there is a robust language 2 pathway in Gaelic for those who are not in Gaelic-medium education. Gaelic as a language 2 has been an important platform for that in my authority and across the country. Gaelic has benefited from being a popular language 2 choice, in particular across the west coast of Scotland; it may well be a language 3 choice in other areas, too.

Overall, the approach has been a positive, but in some areas, we have more work to do to ensure that children are reaching their full entitlement.

The Convener: Joan, do you want to come in?

Joan Esson: The benefits that we see from the one-plus-two model is that it has created a pathway for children in Gaelic-medium education to be able to study more than one language, in particular in primary, so that there is a clearer route for them. This is an area in which we would like more impact, and we would like to see more progression from primary 1 through to the senior stage.

Seonaidh Charity mentioned earlier that the numbers of Gaelic learners were low, and we talked about how we sustain the language and arrest decline. The one-plus-two model is one of the ways in which we see potential for growing Gaelic and for having a stronger system in school.

We report on that approach and set actions for it with schools, and we talk about areas for improvement. We have various methods by which we have been raising the need to look at better pathways for Gaelic learners in the curriculum.

The Convener: You talked about wanting “more impact” just now; I am trying to figure out what you mean by that.

Joan Esson: We would like to see more children and young people in our schools learning Gaelic as part of the one-plus-two model, or under the existing statutory guidance in Gaelic. Part of that guidance encourages all children and young people to be learning Gaelic in school, and we would like more schools to take up that opportunity.

The Convener: Thank you for that clarity.

Seonaidh Charity: As someone who delivered much of the Gaelic language at primary school programme in James Gillespie’s cluster primaries when I first started teaching, I think that the one-plus-two strategy was fantastically beneficial in spreading Gaelic to a wider community. When it has been used effectively, it has exposed huge numbers of young people to Gaelic and perhaps piqued their interest in the language and pushed them to consider doing it further on in school.

However, I go back to the previous point, which is that the numbers that we see coming out at the end of the certification process are dwindling. There is therefore a contradiction, in that many more pupils are studying Gaelic at primary school but fewer are achieving qualifications in secondary school. Although the sentiment of the one-plus-two strategy has been excellent, the key focus now for ensuring that such progress continues into the senior phase is on ensuring that what is happening in primary schools continues to develop

and that in secondaries the structure of the curriculum and the provision that is in place allow them to continue it.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Good morning, panel. I will come to Bruce Eunson first. I would like to move to part 2 of the bill, which is on Scots. I am interested in how Scots, in particular, can be supported in education. Education Scotland's submission notes that we need a

"more detailed description of what Scots is".

Slightly unhelpfully, in my view, the bill defines "Scots language" as "the Scots language". In your view, what definition of the Scots language will professionals need to use? If we accept that it is something of an all-encompassing term that incorporates various dialects—for example, Doric—is there an accepted definition of which dialects are included, such that a teacher can be confident that they are teaching Scots?

Bruce Eunson: That is an excellent question, and an important detail that I was keen to address in producing the submission on behalf of Education Scotland.

The title of the bill—the Scottish Languages Bill—is particularly apt, in that it can include Gaelic, Scots and whichever other names speakers use, and have used for centuries, for their local branch of Scots. For example, in Aberdeenshire, it is Doric. We want teachers in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire to know that the bill means that they can carry on with their Doric teaching and that the bill represents the rights of Doric speakers. It is the same on Orkney, with Orcadian, and Shetland, with the Shetland dialect.

We want the bill to increase the rights of all speakers, whether they are bairns in the classroom, parents at home, or teachers. Further awareness raising will need to be done if we are to achieve more widely what Orkney Islands Council said in its submission about being proud of the work on using Orcadian that it has done in its schools for generations, of its links to local culture, and of how it retains the population and engages young people.

Although the bill has a bit more work to do on the definition of "Scots language", it certainly represents a step forward in getting all the areas—the airts and pairts o Scotland—to respond on the good work that schools have done for generations.

Liam Kerr: I understand. My colleagues might wish to come in on that, but I would like to ask a further question. Would you accept, then, that "the Scots language" as envisaged by the bill is a catch-all term for various dialects, which will require to be promoted as individual dialects in individual areas?

Bruce Eunson: Yes.

Liam Kerr: Is there any way of defining exhaustively what those dialects are, or is there a certain level at which a pattern of speech—if I can call it that—requires to become a dialect?

Bruce Eunson: Two of the speakers whom the committee heard from last week—Robert McColl Millar from Dictionaries of the Scots Language, and Michael Dempster from the Scots Language Centre—have done an immense amount of work in that area. They have defined what the dialects are, where they are spoken, what their unique features are, where vocabulary is the same across the dialects and where it changes, and where there are differences in grammar use. However, all that certainly comes together under the term "Scots language" and, for the purposes of the bill, it all comes under the term "Scottish languages", or languages that are unique to this country.

All 32 local authorities will have schools that use Scots in some form—they just might not be in the habit of calling it Scots. Speakers in Aberdeen will call it Doric, speakers in Orkney will call it Orcadian and speakers in Shetland will perhaps call it Shetland dialect, Shetlandic or just Shaetlan.

We want the bill to ensure that when local authorities are asked for evidence of what they have been doing, they will all answer with details of that work. The work might be unique to their dialect, and they perhaps do not consider it to be Scots—and there is nothing wrong with that. Let us not attempt to redefine or rebrand speakers. Let us respect them, wherever they are in Scotland and whatever name they have been using for generations, while ensuring that the bill makes it clear that we want to hear about whatever work they have been doing. The work that they have been doing in schools has been fantastic, from my experience of seeing it.

10:00

Liam Kerr: I am very grateful for that.

We have heard about local authorities, which are, no doubt, not flush with resources and cash at the moment, for whatever reason. When discussing Gaelic earlier, Donald Macleod said that one of the issues with Gaelic is that teachers are not confident. He talked about confidence in spelling, and Seonaidh Charity talked about teachers having to create resources.

Joan Esson, are there existing resources for the Scots language in grammar, spelling and accepted words for each dialect that we have just heard about, or will those require to be produced for each? If so, who will do it and at what cost?

Bruce Eunson: I would be happy to reply to that.

Liam Kerr: Sure.

Bruce Eunson: That is work that we have already been doing. It has been my approach, at Education Scotland, to create resources for individual dialects. It is important to understand that the resources are often the same, and that there are just different spellings and different features. Like any good work that happens in education, the more preparation and hard work we put in at the start, the better the results are. The children in the class need to be addressed in a language that they recognise as being their own. It cannot be alien to them or be a foreign concept that sounds like something from somewhere else; it needs to be language that they use. Teachers mirror that approach.

The work that I do with Sylvia Warnecke at the Open University on training teachers for the first time in using Scots, shows that they are very eager to write their lesson plans and to adapt from one another's lesson plans. There is a real community in Scots language education, with teachers sharing work, helping each other, giving one another resources and perhaps then tweaking them, in the same way as they do it for every other subject in education. Many teachers take a resource that exists in a central service or from one of their peers, and they adapt it to suit the learners who are in front of them in their classroom. That is best practice in modern Scottish teaching.

One of the best things about the bill is that we will validate that: we will give teachers confidence that what they have been doing is correct and can carry on doing what they have an immense amount of skill in. That has come out strongly in evidence that we have gathered on the work that we have done in training teachers. We have gathered their views on how best Scots is used for the educational benefit of children and young people in Scotland. Teachers tailor what they teach to meet the needs of the children who are in front of them, in the same way as they do for all subjects.

Liam Kerr: I will press you on that. Just to be clear, if the bill is passed, will Education Scotland be producing materials for each dialect, or is it the expectation that the individual classroom teacher will produce the materials with which to teach?

Bruce Eunson: It will be both. I create some resources for unique dialects, and we have great resources that each have unique dialect elements. Individual teachers will then tailor those, as they use their professional judgment. That is very common practice in education.

The web statistics team at Education Scotland gives me results on which resources have been most popular on the website. The most popular resource is frequently a very simple one that we wrote years ago, called "100 key Scots words". It

breaks words down into the various dialects: there are 100 Shetland words, 100 Orcadian words and 100 Doric words. That has been the most popular resource and it is very simple. You will understand what I mean—that it validates the idea that teachers do not need to worry about a central Scots or the Scots that is most spoken, and that it is okay to be unique.

That chimes with the values of many other education-related policies, such as the linguistic rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and getting it right for every child—GIRFEC. Every child has unique qualities. People come together in areas of Scotland where certain features are shared; teachers will recognise and address that. That is where you see the best education results.

Liam Kerr: I would not be surprised if the committee would appreciate having the data that you just talked about, as well as links to those resources.

I am going to ask Donald Macleod a question, but Bruce Eunson will want to stand ready, because he might want to come back in.

Earlier, Seonaidh Charity talked about the difficulties with training and recruiting Gaelic teachers and enabling Gaelic teachers to teach their specialism. Given something that you said earlier, Donald, do you have any ideas around how we train teachers to deliver teaching in their dialect of Scots, and can you give an indication of where we might be offering places for that, and, indeed, whether there is a demand for that from teachers?

Donald Macleod: I am afraid that I do not have that data. I know the position specifically for Gaelic-medium education, but not for Scots. Bruce Eunson might be better able to talk about provision for teaching Scots.

Bruce Eunson: Last week, Michael Dempster and the two civil servants, Douglas Ansdell and Claire Cullen, told you about the first-ever Scots teacher training course, which has been created by Education Scotland and the Open University—that is, by myself and Sylvia Warnecke, whom you will hear from later this morning. For generations, the profession has been asking for training specifically on using Scots in the classroom. An obvious reason for that demand is a change in policy, from the previous position in which Scots was not allowed in the classroom, as it used to be seen as a language only of the playground and the home. Teachers need support and training as a result of that change, and teachers have asked to sign up to the training course that we have created.

I have also done an immense amount of work in Scottish universities on the initial teacher

education and post-graduate diploma in education courses, and have given lectures on how to use Scots in the classroom. You will be delighted to hear that that has been met with a huge amount of enthusiasm, particularly among young people who have just finished school and have been vaguely aware that it was something that they could have been doing more of. They are immensely enthusiastic about teaching Scots more, once they get their qualification and get a place in a school.

The bill is incredibly timely in giving validation to all those teachers, who are eager and interested, and gives them confidence that they can do this. The training is very much about raising confidence, sharing resources and having a group of peers with whom you can work in a community and who can support each other. That is what we have found from running the course, thus far.

Liam Kerr: When they are training in Scots, what are they training in? Are they training in Doric Scots, Orkney Scots and so on? How does that work?

Bruce Eunson: Sylvia Warnecke and I do not dictate the Scots that they use. The teachers are either Scots speakers already or are new Scots speakers, just like learners in the classroom. Scotland is a multilingual nation and the Scottish classroom is a multilingual space. Teachers come in either as Scots speakers who have already done some lessons as part of their teaching profession and would like further support, or they are teaching bairns who are Scots speakers and they want to develop those skills further because they see the benefits that come from giving Scots a prominent place in the classroom.

On use of Scots, we leave it to teachers to recognise who in their classroom will benefit from the Scots being used in the room. They can then get support from us or from partner organisations such as Dictionaries of the Scots Language and the Scots Language Centre, as well as from other teachers in the school and—to go back to this point—other staff members, such as janitors, playground support workers or headteachers. When staff in the school have a conversation about who speaks Scots, many hands start to go up. That mirrors what happens in the classroom when the teacher asks, “Who here speaks Scots and would like to use it more in their learning?”

The Convener: I have a brief question on that, Bruce. How could the Scots language standards that are spoken of in the bill be used to support greater use of Scots?

Bruce Eunson: The immediate effect of the legislation will be validation, which will be followed by confidence then increased numbers. We mentioned the one-plus-two approach; I think that a further effect of the bill will be that we will see

Scots being studied as part of one-plus-two offer, with Scots being chosen as an L3 language by schools because it is another language that teachers have skills in. Scots is a sister language to English and is also a language that is spoken all around us. Teachers will want to harness the Scots that is used in the classroom and see the educational benefits flourishing. If we continue down a longer road in terms of progression and we get more Scots qualifications, Scots might also be an option as an L2 language, and we could see its role in the one-plus-two offer develop even further.

That is relevant with regard to what the 32 local authorities can report on. If Orkney Islands Council is asked to report on Scots, it might say that it is not sure whether Scots is being taught, or it might say that Scots is not being taught. However, if it is asked to report on what it is doing with regard to Orcadian and the Orkney dialect, it will have an immense amount to report on. If that approach is taken, we will see that all 32 local authorities are keen to build on that and, with support from me and from the other organisations that you have heard from, we will see the educational benefits for the children and young people increase year on year.

The Convener: Thank you. Bill Kidd will ask the next questions.

Bill Kidd: My questions are mostly for Bruce Eunson.

When I was at school, young people were ridiculed or given the belt for speaking Scots, but then the class would be taught what Rabbie Burns said. My thoughts on teachers go from one direction to another sometimes, to be honest.

How would the quality of Scots language education in schools these days be assessed? How would you know who was delivering it to the best and highest standards? Will people have to have a qualification in it in order to teach it, as they would if they were teaching Gaelic?

Bruce Eunson: Scots is not currently something that a teacher would have to be qualified in, but the option for training exists. Many people, like you, experienced either ridicule or actual punishment for using Scots, which highlights how much of a cultural shift we are facing in promoting the language. You can imagine how many teachers who come to me for training tell me that they wish that they had had this as part of the training that they did years ago.

It is a policy reversal, but it is a timely one that has been needed for a long time. No child in Scotland should be discriminated against for the language that they speak, particularly if it is a language that their parents brought them up speaking, and no member of staff in Scottish

schools should be discriminated against for being a Scots speaker. It is another string to their linguistic bow—it is more language capital, it is further vocabulary and it chimes with the four capacities of the curriculum for excellence, which are being an effective contributor, being a successful learner, being a confident individual and being a responsible citizen.

The role of Scots has been needing work like that which we see in the bill for a long time, and I have a huge amount of confidence that the teaching profession will continue to teach the language to a high standard. We hear from the SQA that the work that is submitted in Scots—creative writing for English higher folio pieces, in particular—is of a very high standard and is full of creativity. That should come as no surprise, given the wealth of literature that Scotland has produced in the Scots language, including by Robert Burns and many modern-day writers.

It is important that we take responsibility for offering teachers training and guidance. Education Scotland has taken that seriously for the 10 years for which I have been in the organisation, and I am aware that I am just standing on the shoulders of many other Scots language advocates, intellectuals and activists from previous generations, who have wished to see a policy such as the one that is in the bill being put in place. The time is now for that to happen for Scots.

I believe that the teaching profession will do incredibly well and will embrace Scots, and that it is up to us to provide guidance and support. We will do that with the same approach that has got us to this point, as part of a community. Education Scotland will work with Scottish universities, Dictionaries of the Scots Language, the Scots Language Centre and MSPs such as yourselves in order to ensure that we get it right for Scots and for every child in Scotland.

Bill Kidd: I believe—although I am not sure that this is true—that pupils in Gaelic-medium schools have an enhanced capacity for learning other languages. Does anyone know whether that is true?

10:15

Seonaidh Charity: The benefits of bilingual education—Gaelic or otherwise—are widely documented. It has an enormous range of cognitive benefits, and not just in language acquisition. It provides benefits across learning. That is well established by research.

Bill Kidd: That would be beneficial for everybody—Scots and Gaelic speakers—when going abroad, instead of people having to find a pub where English is spoken, for example. That

does not apply if you are a child, of course. *[Laughter.]*

In recognition of the importance of the bill for both Gaelic and Scots, should the bill include Scots-medium school education in a much more up-front way? At some point, once we are more confident, could we have a Gaelic language bill and a Scots language bill? I am happy that the bill exists as it does, but could things develop in such a direction?

Bruce Eunson: The timeline for that would probably be much longer.

A detail that often gets muddled when it comes to Scots-medium education is that Scots is a sister language to English, and Scots and English are often used in parallel, whereas in a GME setting people use not English but specifically Gaelic. A Scots-medium school would have English being used a lot, so it would be a very different set-up.

I believe that Scots-medium education happens far more than we are aware of, especially in rural settings, where class numbers are smaller and the teacher will know, “Every bairn here speaks Scots so, if I speak Scots, every child will understand.” It will be happening more than you think, and there might be less of a need to have designated spaces.

However, to go back to the point about education in another language, you learn so much more. The value of language creates so much space for fulfilment of the four capacities of curriculum for excellence that, regardless of whether it is Gaelic or Scots, it is of benefit to much of children’s educational experience.

The Convener: Joan Esson has been keen to come in on some of your questions, Mr Kidd.

Joan Esson: I will come in on the question that you asked about assessing quality. As an inspectorate, Education Scotland very much welcomes the new legislation for Scots. We appreciate that it has a resource implication for us. We are keen to support and evaluate Scots in education as part of our inspection work, so we will look at that.

We are also very keen to ensure that we use all our inspection evidence and all that we can report as much as possible, using our ability to see first-hand observations for both Scots and Gaelic. We have our embedded processes for Gaelic, because legislation for Gaelic is further on, and we envisage looking at how we can support Scots in appropriate ways.

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): Good morning. I will touch on an area that we have not really considered thus far, which is what the bill might enable in improving access to adult education—types of further education—in either

Gaelic or Scots. I suspect that Donald Macleod and Joan Esson will have a view, as will Bruce Eunson, from a Scots perspective. Will the bill enable anything more when it comes to further adult education or other sorts of education?

Donald Macleod: It absolutely will, and maybe on several different levels. We have spoken about the three-to-18 pathway, which has been recognised in terms of the importance of continuing language learning into adulthood for those who started that journey in their early learning and childcare or primary 1, and linking that to important socioeconomic drivers in each Gaelic-speaking—and Scots-speaking, for that matter—community.

However, as I have seen in my local authority, there is also a real thirst for and demand among adults for beginning language learning—particularly, for instance, among parents who have chosen Gaelic-medium education for their children and who wish to undertake adult learning in the language in order to support their children and learn alongside them. There is definitely evidence of an increasing demand for adult language learning, in particular—in my context—in Gaelic.

I hope that the provisions of the bill will allow—a possible benefit of identifying areas of linguistic significance will be—greater prominence of that for the whole community. In that respect, there is huge potential for more community partnership. That relates to what we discussed earlier about Gaelic and Scots being active community languages, and how it will be important for adult learners, too, to have the confidence to speak the language in community settings such as the local shop or events. People should feel able to learn the language and have that supported by the local authority or the learning provider, but they must also have the confidence to use it in their own communities. I therefore very much agree and hope that the bill brings growth in adult learning in both those areas: the pathway from education into post-school destinations, and among adult learners who are engaging with language for the first time.

Michelle Thomson: I will bring in Bruce Eunson. To overlay your earlier comment about changing culture through creating an environment in which people have permission to speak in what is, in effect, their own language, do you agree that the bill will enable further adult education participation from local authorities? From your perspective, will it also enhance legitimisation of Scots?

Bruce Eunson: Of course, any education policy has to be mindful of the views and the values of the parents. In Education Scotland, Joan Esson and I have colleagues who are community learning and development officers for adult

learning. I have done partnership work with them many times.

Sometimes, when you think of adult learning, you think of a much older age range, perhaps from 50 to 70. However, a lot of adult learners are aged 20. They have left school, so why does a 20-year-old return as an adult for more learning? Generally, it is because their school experience was not very good and they want to enhance their qualifications and to get more of them.

In a great many cases, that 20-year-old is a Scots speaker, so offering Scots provision in adult learning is as important as it is for children aged three to 18, or for people at university level. An adult learner could be someone like Bill Kidd, who wants to reflect on their school experience and the wrongs that were done to them when they spoke Scots at school and were punished unjustly. We want to make sure that that feeling can be embraced among the adult learners—that their Scots is something that they can be proud of, that it is recognised at the Scottish Parliament and that there is legislation to make being a Scots speaker a protected characteristic.

Joan Esson: I support what my colleagues have said. We see the benefits of adult learning and of Gaelic and Scots as identities in themselves, but also as part of the totality of learning and Gaelic and Scots being vibrant and living in the community. We see the possibilities for that with the bill.

Seonaidh Charity: I agree with what the other witnesses have said. Gaelic in particular—I am sure that this is also true of Scots—needs to be normalised in day-to-day life and to become part of people's considerations when they look at careers. When it comes to further and higher education, does the education that is in place allow people to continue from their school education using the medium of Gaelic—for example, through apprenticeships or foundation apprenticeships that start in fifth or sixth year? How do we continue that provision into adulthood, to keep people engaged with the language?

This big question will follow once we are happy with the outcomes in education: how do we maintain that connection with the people who have graduated from Gaelic-medium education or Gaelic learners education and who continue to use the language in adulthood in their day-to-day lives?

The Convener: That brings our first evidence session of the morning to an end. I thank you all for coming along this morning and for an interesting session. We will suspend to allow for a change of witnesses.

10:24

Meeting suspended.

10:45

On resuming—

The Convener: We will now take evidence from our second panel this morning on the Scottish Languages Bill. Welcome, everyone, and thank you for joining us. I am going to—*[Interruption.]* There is echoing through the headsets. I suspend the meeting for a second.

10:46

Meeting suspended.

10:47

On resuming—

The Convener: Okay, that is better. We will start again. Someone from the Parliament's business information technology team is coming to check that everything is working.

I want to start by asking our witnesses to introduce themselves and to say which organisations they represent.

Lydia Rohmer (UHI North, West and Hebrides): Good morning, convener and committee. I am the principal and chief executive of UHI North, West and Hebrides.

Dr Sylvia Warnecke (Open University in Scotland): Good morning. I am representing the Open University, where I am currently the associate head of the school of languages and applied linguistics.

Dr Inge Birnie (Scottish Council of Deans of Education): Good morning. I am representing the Scottish Council of Deans of Education languages group.

Dr Gillian Munro (Sabhal Mòr Ostaig): Madainn mhath. Is mise Gillian Rothach, prionnsapal Sabhal Mòr Ostaig. Tha Gàidhlig agam agus tha Beurla-Ghallta agam cuideachd. 'S e Doric a' chiad chànan agam. Tha mi moiteil a bhith an seo.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

Good morning. My name is Gillian Munro. I am the principal of Sabhal Mòr Ostaig. I speak Gaelic, and I speak Scots, too—Doric was my first language. I am very proud to be here.

The Convener: We will move straight to members' questions. Members will direct their questions to specific panel members, but should you wish to come in, please catch my eye or the eye of one of the clerks. We have a lot going on due to the virtual nature of today's meeting. I should say to Lydia Rohmer that if she wants to come in to please put an R in the chat, in case I do not see her waving or trying to catch my eye.

For the first questions in this session, I call Willie Rennie, who is also online. This is going to test us, I think.

Willie Rennie: My question is for Dr Birnie, and it is about teacher recruitment. What are the challenges in recruiting Gaelic teachers, and how effective has the recent policy change been in improving recruitment into ITE courses?

Dr Birnie: Can I just clarify which policy you referred to? Was it the bursary scheme, or another policy?

Willie Rennie: I am asking about all policies—I am supposed to ask you the questions. *[Laughter.]* I would like to know about the benefit of any changes that have been implemented.

Dr Birnie: Currently, we are facing challenges with recruiting Gaelic and Gaelic-medium education teachers. To be able to teach Gaelic as a subject at secondary level, you are required to be a proficient Gaelic speaker and to have a minimum number of credits in the Gaelic language, which is typically delivered through a Gaelic-medium course, such as those provided by our colleagues at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, or a Celtic studies degree. I cannot speak for Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, but the number of people who take Celtic studies courses is quite small, which impacts on the number of people who want to become Gaelic teachers at secondary level.

For Gaelic-medium primary education provision, we require a level of proficiency at the entry point, although the standards for that are not set. Typically, we recruit undergraduate primary education students who have gone through the Gaelic-medium education system and are proficient speakers of the language. The numbers are quite small and are currently not sufficient to meet demand. In short, we are facing significant recruitment challenges, as you need to be proficient in a language if you are to teach in it.

In order to meet demand, we would need to increase the number of teachers. There have been several recruitment drives to promote Gaelic teaching as a career path, which have been quite successful; we have also increased the opportunities for people to deliver different subjects at secondary level through the medium of Gaelic, and there have been opportunities for teachers who are already teaching in English-medium education to retrain or to be supported to work in Gaelic-medium education at both primary and secondary level. Those initiatives have been reasonably successful, too, but again the numbers are quite small and will continue to be so, due to the small number of proficient Gaelic speakers.

Willie Rennie: Does anyone else want to come in?

Dr Warnecke: Is the question about Gaelic only, or can I provide some input on Scots?

Willie Rennie: We can talk about Scots, too.

Dr Warnecke: When I was listening to the previous evidence session, it struck me that the two languages are at very different stages with regard to the infrastructure available to support them. For Scots, it is a very different story to what we have just heard about Gaelic from Inge Birnie. As it stands, there is no qualification, as such, for teachers to become teachers of Scots. Bruce Eunson on the first panel talked about working with teacher training colleges on providing input. In the teacher course that we run, we see that members of the teaching profession have a real appetite for qualifications to be developed. We believe that, as was mentioned in last week's evidence session, we need an incremental approach, as we also need to gather data on what is working and what is required to meet people's needs.

We decided to offer our teacher training course to every teaching professional working in primary and secondary education across the curriculum, and we were bowled over by the amount of people who wanted to participate in it. To date, 150 teachers have signed up—and that was with very little advertising at our end. We are keeping the course open and an increasing number of teachers are coming forward for its next presentation. The teachers believe that the course enhances the curriculum and that it is making an important contribution to helping them meet the needs of Scots speakers already in school.

We heard from the previous panel about the differences in dialects in classrooms in those areas where other dialects are spoken, but teachers are telling us that they are finding approaches that work for them as well as their pupils. At the end of the day, bringing Scots into education is about empowering learners to bring their linguistic repertoire to the classroom.

Recruitment is not so much of an issue; empowerment and validation are what teachers need. That is why we are so welcoming of the bill—it will provide those things. Teachers have told us verbatim, in feedback, that that is what they want.

Willie Rennie: Thank you. That is all that I have, convener.

The Convener: We come to questions from Ross Greer.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): Good morning, everybody. You might have caught some of the evidence from Donald Macleod in the previous session. We began to touch on the

position in early learning and childcare, particularly some of the workforce issues.

This question might be for Inge Birnie in the first instance. What is the current qualification pathway for somebody who wishes to work in ELC in a Gaelic-medium setting?

Dr Birnie: At present, there is a higher national certificate offered through UHI—my colleagues will put me right if that is not correct—but we rely mostly on the current linguistic ability of our early years practitioners to deliver Gaelic-medium education effectively. That relies on their being proficient or confident speakers of the language. The current pathway is the same as it is for early years provision in English-medium education.

One of the issues—I am sure that this was touched on in the previous session, as it comes up often—is that, while providing children with a language-learning experience early on can be a powerful tool, we need to recognise that, for many of our young children, Gaelic is an additional language. We cannot just assume that the teaching of languages even to two, three and four-year-olds is the same as acquiring their mother tongue. It requires a different pedagogical approach that needs to mesh with best practice in early years provision, which in Scotland is very much play based.

Currently there are not many pathways for providing that, but some opportunities are offered through Sabhal Mòr Ostaig—I am sure that Gillian Munro will put me right if that is not the case. Many of those in the early years workforce are delivering Gaelic-medium education through their own proficiency in the language and through the same pathway as is used for the English-medium provision.

Ross Greer: I am keen to hear from Gillian Munro and Lydia Rohmer on that, but first of all, I just want to check something. Does the current pathway involve getting a higher national diploma, or did you say that it was a higher national certificate?

Dr Munro: It is an HNC.

Ross Greer: And is that currently available only through UHI?

Dr Munro: Tha mi cinnteach gu bheil e ri fhaighinn tro lìonradh Oilthigh na Gàidhealtachd is nan Eilean. Tha an cuideam a' dol air sgilean fileantachd, gum bi an luchd-obrach fileanta sa chànan agus cuideachd gum bi iad aig sàr àrd-ìre a thaobh curraicealaim.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

Yes, it is through the UHI network. It places precedence on fluency skills so that staff are fluent

in the language and are at the top level in terms of the curriculum.

Ross Greer: Can that course be delivered remotely at present, or is it delivered only as part of an in-person experience?

Dr Munro: Tha e ga libhrigeadh air astar.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

It is delivered remotely.

Ross Greer: Looking more widely—that is, beyond the initial qualification—we talked in the previous session about the workforce challenges with not only recruiting but retaining teachers in GME. Is the situation similar with the retention of ELC staff in GME settings?

Dr Birnie: I have personal experience of that, and I can tell you that it continues to be challenging. For early years provision, staff recruitment and retention is an issue across the board. It is particularly so in Gaelic-medium settings, because of the additional challenges—which I am sure were touched on in the previous session—in respect of language acquisition and supporting young people in reaching proficiency in the language before they start primary school. There are additional challenges over and above the challenges that English practitioners face, and there are recruitment and retention challenges that are similar in primary and secondary school provision.

Ross Greer: Lydia, would you like to add anything?

11:00

Lydia Rohmer: It is a really relevant question. Having clear pathways into Gaelic-medium work, workforce and vocational sectors is really important. UHI North, West and Hebrides is based in the Gaelic-speaking heartlands, and we work closely with our colleagues in Sabhal Mòr Ostaig and UHI to improve access to Gaelic-medium vocational pathways, including into early years health and social care. Those are key sectors not just for supporting early years language acquisition for young people but for linking generations and communities in living Gaelic-speaking communities and for supporting and strengthening those communities, particularly in areas where Gaelic has linguistic significance and is part of those communities' predominant identity of culture and heritage.

The Convener: Ruth Maguire has a supplementary question on that theme. Perhaps we can keep this line of questioning going before I come back to you, Ross.

Ross Greer: Yes, please do.

Ruth Maguire: Madainn mhath. How many are taking up the course via distance learning? We heard earlier that the offering from three to 18 is really important. Obviously, communities will have playgroups, Pàrant is Pàiste and all those things, but how many folk are taking up early learning qualifications by distance learning? Do you have any notion of which parts of the country they are from?

Dr Munro: Chan eil an àireamh agamsa ach tha fios agam gu bheil cuideigin san luchd-èisteachd aig a bheil an àireamh ma tha sibh ga h-iarraidh.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

I do not have the number but somebody in the public gallery will have that, if you want it.

Ruth Maguire: Mòran taing.

The Convener: If you wish to submit that information, Dr Munro, we can get it from you after the meeting.

I will now go back to Ross Greer.

Ross Greer: I will stick with Dr Munro for the next question. With the three-to-18 curriculum for excellence model, we have, in essence, a curriculum that is designed and produced in English, and we then work backwards to deliver it in GME. Would there be particular advantages to a curriculum model that originated in Gaelic? What would be the challenges in developing that?

Dr Munro: Dh'fheumainn a ràdh gu bheil goireasan fìor mhath timcheall oirnn a b' urrainn dhuinn a bhith a' cleachdadh nas trice. Tha sinn a' cur taic ri pròiseact Tobar an Dualchais mar eisimpleir. Tha goireasan mìorbhaileach san tasglann a tha sin. Cuideachd, tha an aon rud fìor mu dheidhinn Sgoil Eòlais na h-Alba, a thug seachad cuid de na stuthan gu Tobar an Dualchais. Tha stuthan ann a chuireadh ri beartas cainnt, stuthan a chuireadh ri beartas eòlais, a chuireadh feòil air na cnàmhan rud beag tana ann an curraicealam airson sàr-mhathais a thaobh cultar airson na Gàidhlig.

An-dràsta, tha pàiste agam fhèin agus tha mi a' faicinn an t-seòrsa oideachadh a tha am pàiste sin a' faighinn. Ann a bhith a' coimhead mar eisimpleir air leughadh, gu math tric, chan eil sgeul air a' chultar a tha timcheall orra. Le sin, tha mi a' smaoinichadh gu bheil goireasan a-muigh an sin a dh'fhaodadh a bhith a' beartachadh, a' mathachadh curraicealam airson sàr-mhathas.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

We have great resources all around us that we can use more often. We are supporting the Tobar an Dualchais project, for example, which has fantastic resources in its digital archive. The same is true with regard to the school of Scottish studies, which gave some of its resources on

idiomatic language and enriching knowledge to Tobar an Dualchais. That is putting a bit of meat on the bones with regard to the curriculum for excellence and culture in relation to Gaelic.

At the moment, I am involved in tutoring and looking at reading. There is nothing involving the culture that surrounds that. However, there are resources that could enrich the curriculum for excellence and make it better.

Dr Birnie: Mòran taing, Gillian. I will mirror some of the submissions that have been made this morning and online. One aspect is that currently, by and large, we are treating Gaelic-medium education as a translation of the English-medium curriculum. That brings particular challenges for young people. It is important to raise those issues because, if they see that the only difference in their education is the language in which it is taught, they are going to ask, “Why are we doing this in Gaelic if we can also do it in English?”

With regard to the cultural aspect, best practice from other educational contexts has shown us that including a cultural element is so important for developing the pluricultural identity, by which I mean children learning about a sense of place and space in Scotland and where Gaelic fits.

I mirror Gillian Munro’s point that there are some great resources out there. There are also resources such as reading schemes, which she touched on, that are translated from English. One of the challenges might be that we are looking at something that is not the same as but equivalent to an English-medium curriculum. Some aspects of that may be challenging. In particular, parents would need to be carefully informed about how the English-medium and Gaelic-medium curricula align in terms of further opportunities, especially as we move into secondary provision.

We are currently looking at provision from three to 18. Parents have some concern about Gaelic-medium education because they want to ensure that it is of the same quality as what English-medium education provides. There are options within the current curricular frameworks for supporting that or for making changes. As was discussed earlier this morning, that may involve putting a greater emphasis on Gaelic-language learning acquisition and cultural aspects associated with the Gaelic language, which would strengthen its position within the curriculum.

Ross Greer: That is all from me, convener, unless anybody else on the panel wants to comment on that point.

Dr Munro: Cuiridh mi beagan a bharrachd ris. Tha mi cho moiteil a bhith a’ suidhe ann am Pàrlamaid na h-Alba is sinn a’ toirt aire do na cànan agus do na cultaran a tha daoine a’

bruidhinn anns na coimhearsnachdan timcheall oirnn. Fada ro fhada, tha sinn air a bhith a’ mùchadh sin, agus tha e cho cudromach gun tèid am bile seo tron Phàrlamaid. Tha e na adhbhar dòchais gu bheil na pàrtaidhean uilig timcheall air a’ bhòrd an-diugh, gu bheil na pàrtaidhean uile air a’ chomataidh thar-phàrtaidh airson na Gàidhlig anns a’ Phàrlamaid, agus gu bheil sibh uilig a’ cur taic ris na cànan.

Bha mi air m’ uabhasachadh an t-seachdain ’s a chaidh a bhith a’ cluinntinn, ann am beachd cuid, gum bu chòir dhuinn stad a chur air an obair a tha sin a’ dèanamh air a’ bhile. Tha cruaidh fheum air. Tha fichead bliadhna ann, mar eisimpleir, bho chaidh Achd na Gàidhlig 2005 troimhe, agus tha an t-àm againn barrachd a dhèanamh airson sluagh na h-Alba.

Tha na puingean sin fhèin a tha sinn a’ togail mu dheidhinn curraicealam airson sàr-mhathais na eisimpleir air cho tana ’s a tha sinn a’ tuigsinn na tha sinn a’ toirt seachad do phàrantan agus do chlann. Tha an t-àm ann curraicealam airson sàr-mhathais a dhèanamh freagarrach airson cultar na Gàidhlig agus cultar Beurla-Ghallta.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

I am so proud to talk in the Scottish Parliament today, giving precedence to the language and to the cultures in the communities around us. Normally, they get disregarded. It is so important that the bill goes through Parliament, and it is a reason to be hopeful that all the parties that are represented round the table on this cross-party committee support the language. I was really upset to hear opinions from others that we should stop doing this work with the bill. We really need it. It is 20 years since the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 went through, and it is time to do more for the people of Scotland.

The points that we raise on curriculum for excellence provide one example of just how little we understand what we are giving to parents and children. It is time to make curriculum for excellence better for Gaelic culture and for Scots, too.

Liam Kerr: I have a question for Lydia Rohmer, based on what Dr Munro has just said. Lydia, you say in your submission:

“it would be better to have two separate Bills—one for Scots and one for Gaelic. Having both together ... risks muddying the waters and causing confusion.”

You have heard how passionately Dr Munro has just spoken about the Gaelic side of the bill. Will you elaborate on what you would like to happen in terms of splitting the bill and whether it would be good for the committee to take that idea on board?

Lydia Rohmer: The point that we try to make in our submission is that Gaelic is in a very fragile

state despite all the efforts and despite the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005. The bill seeks to strengthen the 2005 act, but it also includes new provisions for Scots. While those are important for their own reasons, further effort is required to strengthen Gaelic.

I whole-heartedly support the emotion and the position of Gillian Munro and the sentiment that she has just expressed. Gaelic is a vital part of identity and cultural life and history in Scotland, and it requires more to be done. Despite all the previous legislative efforts, we have not significantly increased the numbers of Gaelic speakers in Scotland. Any bill on the subject, including the one that is before us, needs not only to demonstrate a commitment to what happens in schools, but to set out what needs to be done to support those communities where Gaelic is actively spoken. Without further intervention and very targeted support, generations that speak Gaelic as a native language, such as the current generation, may not be with us any more.

There is an intrinsic link between what happens in schools in order to ensure Gaelic-language education and moving that into the much bigger portfolio of Gaelic-medium education, supporting fluency and proficiency in Gaelic not just as a language, but as an economic and social asset. That means, alongside all the efforts that are made in statutory education, also supporting the parents of those children, whether they are Gaelic learners or latent speakers of Gaelic.

Dr Munro talked about the need for a distinctive Gaelic literacy framework that is not just a translation of the English language approach. That is needed not just in school settings but also to meet the literacy needs of adult learners, who were often unable to exercise Gaelic while they were in school or post-school and who come from an oral tradition but would value access to Gaelic-medium adult literacy.

There is also a need to recognise the role of post-school provision in making pathways into vocational areas available in the Gaelic medium. At the moment, beyond Gaelic-medium teacher training and perhaps one or two other areas, as has been described, there is not really a concerted effort in Scotland to make post-school Gaelic-medium pathways available to a wider audience.

There are many opportunities and lots of resources, but it is the harnessing of those resources to seriously drive an increase in proficient Gaelic speakers across all areas of public life that will create the environment in which Gaelic-medium education and Gaelic language acquisition in schools will become much more natural. I would welcome some recognition of what success would look like following implementation of the bill's provisions, together with a framework

of measurements, outcomes and impacts that signify the distance that should be travelled through the bill.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Sorry for the interruption with the technology earlier. I appreciate your patience on that.

I want to ask about the number of learners who are achieving SQA qualifications. We heard from CLAS in the first evidence session this morning, and its submission says:

“the number of pupils leaving GME with no qualifications in the language is of serious concern.”

The submission also notes:

“it is worth considering the numbers of pupils involved and whether an overall increase in 230 SQA awards over 36 years is satisfactory progress.”

Do you believe that that is satisfactory, given what we have all just heard is important for Gaelic education?

Dr Birnie: Any progress is progress, but I agree that it is perhaps not satisfactory given the long-term outcomes that we want for Gaelic. I mirror the concerns that were raised in the previous evidence session. We have greater numbers of young people enrolled in Gaelic-medium education and doing Gaelic qualifications, but that does not mean that those young people do not have any proficiency in Gaelic; they just do not have the bit of paper yet to prove they have proficiency in Gaelic, and we measure things by bits of paper—by qualifications. We could look at that.

Gaelic learners are a different strand. There may be questions about them later, but the progress in relation to the overall outcomes may not be satisfactory in sustaining Gaelic for the future.

Dr Munro: Tha mi ag aontachadh le Inge Birnie. Chan eil e gu leòr agus chan eil na h-àireamhan àrd gu leòr. Tha cnap-starradh mòr ann agus, gu mì-fhortanach, chan eil dad sa bhile aig an ìre seo a tha a' dol gar cuideachadh. Chan eil a' chòir aig pàrantan air foghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig anns a bhile seo, agus sin an rud a bhiodh a' fosgladh nan dorsan gu fuasglaidhean air iomadach duilgheadas.

Tha e mì-chiatach nach eil ach aon duine às a' chiad ann am bun-sgoil a' dèanamh foghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig. Gun a bhith a' toirt cothrom gu pàrantan air còraichean air foghlam tro mheadhan an Gàidhlig, chan eil sinn a' dol a dh'fhaicinn fàs. Sin a' chiad rud a dh'fheumas sinn dèanamh.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

I agree with Dr Birnie. It is not enough—the numbers are not high enough. There are great

obstacles in the way and, unfortunately, there is nothing in the bill at this stage that will help us. The bill does not give parents the right to demand Gaelic-medium education. That would open the door to solving various problems. It is disappointing that the numbers in primary schools are too low. We need to give parents rights. Without that, we will never see growth. That is the first thing that we need to do.

11:15

Pam Duncan-Glancy: What do you believe is preventing a greater uptake of the range of SQA qualifications in the area?

Dr Birnie: The picture is complicated. Part of it is to do with low numbers and low uptake, and part of it is to do with the documented perception that doing a qualification such as a geography qualification through the medium of Gaelic is more complicated than doing it through the medium of English. Because those qualifications matter to young people's career progressions, they often opt to do them through the medium of English even when they are available through the medium of Gaelic.

With regard to doing the Gaelic language—for example, Gaelic learners education—the issue goes back to earlier provision. If young people are not provided with opportunities to learn the language in primary school, it is much harder to stimulate the uptake in secondary school.

Languages face challenges all round—Gaelic is not alone in that—and the numbers get smaller the higher up the qualifications are. That has also impacted on schools. Should they offer a language that does not have a high uptake by pupils? The picture is very complicated.

I want to pick up on what Dr Munro said about making Gaelic-medium education more readily available. The committee may come back to that later, but the complication of having to demand Gaelic-medium education and having quite a complicated process to ask for it are significant barriers for parents in enrolling their children in it. It requires a significant effort on the part of parents to ask for Gaelic-medium education where it is currently not available, and that prevents parents from enrolling their children.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Do others want to comment on the points that have been raised about what we need to do to increase the uptake of SQA qualifications?

The Convener: I will bring in Inge Birnie—sorry; I mean Sylvia Warnecke. It is very confusing when I have an earphone in.

Dr Warnecke: I will add some comments on what is happening in the Scots picture. Again, the

situation is different. We have SQA awards and we are seeing real growth in the numbers, especially in schools in which teachers are beginning to implement Scots. They are really building on that. That is a brilliant way to certify pupils' linguistic repertoire—the skills that they bring to their education anyway. Teachers are asking for that.

Teachers repeatedly say that they want a higher in Scots. They want something that will allow them to plan from the early years through three to 18, with a qualification to finish off and a pathway—everybody has talked about this this morning—into higher education with the language. That is an important message. We have spoken to the SQA about what such a higher could look like. In the context of educational reform, we of course need to plan carefully and gather more evidence, but I think that that would be an excellent way to prepare a qualification for teachers.

We have already looked at coming up with a certificate for continuing education for in-service teachers, who could then add Scots to their portfolio and deliver the higher in schools. That would be an easy-access way to then think in the longer term about bringing Scots into initial teacher education. There is already a lot of will and desire in the community to move in that direction.

Lydia Rohmer: E-Sgoil should be highlighted to the committee as a way to increase access to Gaelic for learners as well as Gaelic-medium speakers and to increase the number of people doing SQA qualifications.

As a college, we are partnered with e-Sgoil and we provide Gaelic at levels 5, 6 and 7 to e-Sgoil—and, through e-Sgoil, to a national audience. The enrolment numbers are increasing. We had 88 enrolments in 2022-23, and this year we have had 145 enrolments. That is a mix of school pupils and adults who are beyond school, as e-Sgoil is also open to adults. The dominant trend is for adults who are beyond school to take up those qualifications.

E-Sgoil has a high success rate for a course that is delivered online; about 66 per cent of people who are enrolled with us achieve a formal qualification. It is fair to say that the higher the qualification level is, the smaller the number of people achieving it is. It is also important to recognise that, for those who seek Gaelic proficiency, certification along the way is not always desired. There are different reasons for that. School pupils who are in the senior phase and who already come from a Gaelic-speaking background may not see the relevance of taking up an SQA qualification and could be looking to prioritise other qualifications for their career

choices, so they do other national 5s, highers and advanced highers.

For those who seek to learn Gaelic, it is potentially competing with another foreign language, and where does Gaelic take them beyond achieving the qualification, both within the senior phase pathway and beyond school? That is why promoting Gaelic as an economic asset that is relevant to a workforce—where there are jobs linked to Gaelic—forms an important part of incentivising young people to take up Gaelic opportunities while in school.

Dr Birnie: I have got two points: one is to do with Gaelic and the other is to do with Scots. Gaelic provision is linked to having teachers who are available either to deliver Gaelic as a subject or to deliver subjects through the medium of Gaelic. There is currently a national shortage of teachers who can deliver different qualification levels through the medium of Gaelic, with very few secondary schools able to provide the full curriculum through the medium of Gaelic due to a lack of teachers who are able to do so.

I will also pick up on something that Sylvia Warnecke mentioned about Scots. Currently, one of the barriers to primary schools introducing the Scots language as part of the one-plus-two languages policy is that the L2—the second language, which is introduced from early primary school—is expected to be delivered up to and including qualification level. Without a qualification in Scots being available, the option for schools is often to deliver Scots as the L3—the third language—which means that they can also deliver it as an interdisciplinary learning project. Therefore, the news that a qualification will be available for Scots will open up opportunities for the inclusion of Scots as an L2 across Scottish primary schools.

The Convener: Sylvia Warnecke, I see that you want to come in—briefly, if you do not mind; I have my eye on the clock again. Pam Duncan-Glancy has another question, as well.

Dr Warnecke: In talking about aspirations in that scenario, something that is coming through strongly to us is the need to provide a range of flexible opportunities to access learning the Scots language and learning about the language. That ranges across the curriculum and includes delivering for learners who are non-native speakers who come to Scotland—like some of us on the panel. It includes adult education and provision in schools.

We are seeing the pedagogical approaches that teachers are developing on our teacher training course. They are building a lot on pedagogies from teaching languages. That can be powerful in order to bring in Scots as a language subject.

There are different places in the curriculum for the language; in addition, as Inge Birnie said, it needs to be related to culture.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Some of what you just described is already being done. Like Inge, I welcome some of the changes that you have spoken about.

Is there anything in the bill that needs to change in order for it to deliver what you think it needs to deliver for Gaelic-medium education?

Dr Birnie: When we speak about achievements and targets, we need to be clear about the outcomes, in particular the linguistic outcomes, for Gaelic-medium education. It is very difficult to describe that in a bill—it might have to be in secondary legislation or policy—but it is important that we clarify what Gaelic-medium education is for and what we hope it will achieve. That includes the proficiency levels of young people and what we hope that they can do with the language when they leave school.

I applaud the amazing work that our teaching workforce is doing in supporting language acquisition across Scotland, both for Gaelic-learner education and Gaelic-medium education. We can strengthen the bill by making clear provision around linguistic outcomes and what we expect, with a clear pathway for our young learners to follow in terms of progression and outcomes.

Dr Munro: Bidh mi gu math goirid. Tha feum air còir laghail air foghlam Gàidhlig a bhith aig pàrantan agus clann. Còmhla ri sin, tha feum air iomairt mhòr a bhith a' trèanadh thidsearan agus a bhith a' dèanamh sin coltach ri, mar eisimpleir, Dùthaich nam Basgach. Dh'fhaodamaid coimhead air Dùthaich nam Basgach agus mar a rinn iadsan diofar cho mòr ann an ùine cho ghoirid. Bha e' a ciallachadh a bhith a' pàigheadh tidsearan an làn thuarastal agus gum biodh ùine gu leòr aca a bhith a' fàs fileanta sa chànan agus a bhith ag iompachadh gu bhith teagasg tro mheadhan Basgais.

Carson nach dèan sin fhèin rudeigin coltach ri sin? Sin ceist mu dheidhinn resources, tha mi cinnteach, ach is math dh'fhaodte nach eil am bile a' dèiligeadh ri sin, ach dh'fhaodamaid a bhith gu math radaigeach agus a bhith a' moladh dòigh ùr air tidsearan a thrusadh, a thrèanadh is a thaiceachadh. Tha feum aig tidsearan cuideachd an treas rud, air tòrr a bharrachd taic.

Chaidh bruidhinn roimhe air cho aonaranach 's a tha e a' bhith ag obair ann an clas a' teagasg tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig—nach eil na goireasan ann agus nach eil an taic ann san fharsaingeachd, agus nach eil na goireasan agad gu h-àraid ma tha pàistean agad anns a' chlas le feumalachdan a bharrachd.

Cuideachd, ma tha thu a' teagasg ann am foghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig, bidh thu tric a' teagasg clann aig diofar aoisean. Tha an nighean agam fhèin ann an clas le 3 diofar ìrean. Tha sin fhèin na dhuilgheadas is feumar coimhead air ciamar a chumas sinn taic ri tidsearan a tha sna suidheachaidhean seo.

Chan eil a' cur iongnadh orm gu bheil mòran air misneachd a chall. Tha e nas fhasa a bhith a' teagasg ann am foghlam tro mheadhan na Beurla. Ma tha sin dha-rìribh ag iarraidh Gàidhlig agus Beurla-Ghallta a bhith beò, feumaidh sinn rudan really làidir a dhèanamh aig an ìre seo, agus a bhith a' fàgail is dòcha ceistean ionmhais aig daoine eile.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

I will be brief. I think that we need a legal right to Gaelic education for parents and children. Alongside that, we need a big initiative to train teachers. In doing that, we could look to the Basque country and how it made a big difference in such a short space of time. That meant paying teachers a full salary and ensuring that they had enough time to grow fluent in the language in order to transform themselves into Basque teachers. We need something like that.

There is the question of resources; I do not think that the bill deals with that completely. We need to be radical and recommend a new way of recruiting teachers and supporting them. Teachers need a lot more support. We have already spoken about how isolating it can be for teachers who are teaching a class through Gaelic; we do not have the resources, and in general there is no support there.

If teachers do not have the resources for those children with additional support needs, it is difficult. Also, if you are teaching through Gaelic, you often teach mixed-age-group classes. I know of a girl who is in a class where children are at three different language levels, and that is a problem. We need to look to how we support teachers in those situations. I do not have the solutions, and I have lost a lot of confidence. It is easier to teach through English. However, if we want Gaelic and Scots to carry on being living languages, we need to do something really strong and leave the questions about finance to others.

The Convener: Lydia Rohmer is looking to come in, and then I will bring in Sylvia Warnecke.

11:30

Lydia Rohmer: I echo what Gillian Munro has highlighted as being key issues for the bill. I would emphasise the issue about teacher training initiatives. Together with Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, colleagues in UHI are looking to create new part-

time pathways for teacher training, particularly postgraduate training. That should not be just for Gaelic teaching; as Gillian Munro has said, it should also support teachers in other disciplines—through targeted funding initiatives and sabbaticals—to move their subject area into Gaelic-medium education.

It would be advantageous if Scotland looked to other countries, including other nations within the UK—particularly Wales, where, following the Welsh Language Act 1993, initiatives have been successful in providing funded opportunities for teachers to move into Welsh-medium teaching.

I echo the view that the bill needs to make it as easy as possible and as normal as possible not only to recognise Gaelic as an official language in Scotland but to use it throughout and reinforce what happens for parents and children in school and in the wider community and the workplace.

The Convener: Sylvia Warnecke might want to come in on this issue, too. Do you agree that, with the exception of the right to Gaelic-medium education, many of the things that you have both outlined do not really require legislation?

Dr Warnecke: A clear statement of aspiration is important. Picking up on what Lydia Rohmer said, when we look at the workplace and the wider community, we can see that, because of language issues, there are many barriers to social cohesion. For example, the Open University is currently working with the NHS Scotland Academy because the academy wants to create dedicated teaching materials for overseas staff coming to work here. It has already identified that staff who come here with good English still struggle not only in the staff community but outwith the workplace—for example, if they go out into the community as carers—because of a lack of Scots language skills and a lack of understanding of the related culture. Therefore, the academy wants us to produce a curriculum to help with that.

We see that issue in many other workplaces. In our submission, we mentioned a PhD study that is currently being undertaken at the OU, which is the first-ever study of individuals who have started learning Scots as adults. It has gathered a lot of evidence that suggests that new speakers decide to learn the language because they feel that a lack of that skill is a barrier to their inclusion in the workplace. That is another aspect that we should look at, beyond the issue of school education.

The Convener: I will bring in Bill Kidd. There might be a bit of overlap in the questions, but I will let him pick up whatever issues he wishes.

Bill Kidd: Yes, there is an overlap between the Gaelic school education issue and the Scots school education issue.

How are teachers supported in initial teacher education to promote Scots usage in the classroom?

Dr Warnecke: We heard Bruce Eunson talking about that earlier. As it stands, the support has amounted to him working with different ITE institutions in Scotland. There is no substantive curriculum at the moment, but teachers can get an introductory session on Scots. That is another important area to look at.

Evidence that we have gathered shows that a lot of probationers signed up to our course because they were passionate about bringing Scots into the classroom. Unfortunately, in accordance with General Teaching Council for Scotland rules, we had to turn the probationers away for a year until they finished their probation. However, it was encouraging to see that lots of young people see a huge value in bringing the language into the classroom.

At the moment, there is no substantive provision, but we would be keen that the aspiration would eventually be to train teachers in the language at the ITE stage.

Bill Kidd: I think that Inge Birnie wants to come in.

Dr Birnie: Scotland's languages tend to be taught as part of the literacy and languages strand. In ITE provision, when we look at the different curricular areas, Scots and Gaelic will be typically bundled together with other languages as part of the one-plus-two policy. There might be specific aspects where we look at literacy and those languages, but they tend to be bundled as part of the one-plus-two provisions in ITE teaching programmes, with the exception of Gaelic-medium provision, where the focus is very much on the Gaelic language and pedagogies associated with that.

Bill Kidd: Parents will look for the best provision of education for their children as they go forward and, unlike their children, they might even frequently look forward to exams. How is the qualifications side of things being developed? As you said, we need to get the numbers of teachers in the first place, then the school time and all that sort of stuff, and then exams have to take place. Is that all working cohesively just now, or is there a problem?

Dr Warnecke: The outcomes are interesting. Sometimes teachers report that, when they ask children in the classroom to say something in Scots, they say that they do not know that language, while speaking Scots. To come back to what Liam Kerr talked about, the issue of what makes Scots a language and people's awareness of it being a language also applies to parents.

However, when teachers begin to teach Scots in the classroom, parents can relate to that because, as you mentioned, they had very different experiences. They often say that it is a positive thing that pupils can bring their identity to the classroom and make it count. More positive attitudes are developing among parents.

We also need visionary management in schools to buy into that. Again, I come back to the point that that is why it is so important to have the bill as validation, as well as clear guidance and standards, so that it will be a proper subject. That will lead to higher numbers.

Bill Kidd: So, we are talking about the development of self-confidence, which can run throughout families and communities, should the opportunity present itself or be presented to them.

Dr Warnecke: Exactly. We have evidence that parents want to come into schools. Earlier, intergenerational learning was mentioned. That also applies to Scots. We have evidence of members of staff who have toned down their Scots when in school because they felt that it was not appropriate, who have then offered to develop classroom materials for teachers on our course. There is a lot that we can build on and make count, so we do not have to start from scratch.

Bill Kidd: There are challenges in ensuring that teachers in different areas of Scotland have the resources and the skills to support education in different dialects, such as Lallans, Doric and so on. We are looking at people having the opportunity to use their acquired language to the best advantage of the children who are being taught. Are there challenges for teachers in learning in that respect? They cannot necessarily learn from a person who is 100 miles down the road.

Dr Warnecke: Only this morning, on the train, I read some statements that teachers had shared with us as part of their assessment and reflections on their practice. One teacher reported that she was a Glaswegian Scots speaker now working in Aberdeenshire, teaching a primary class. She thought that she should adopt the Doric to make things authentic for the pupils. She reflected on that, we had discussions in the forum, and it transpired that that was not actually necessary. Part of good language education involves comparison between different dialects and different language use. We can add through that, with teachers speaking in a different dialect while allowing the pupils to be empowered and to bring their dialect into the classroom, which allows for a deeper understanding of Scots, or any language.

Materials are an issue but, as Bruce Eunson said, teachers are sharing a lot of materials, and we can take that away as a task for other

institutions and partners to consider in developing more materials in this area. Sometimes we do not know what is out there, so it is a matter of building better signposting and databases for teachers. That can easily be achieved.

That is a challenge, but much of it is about awareness and confidence.

Bill Kidd: As I said during our discussion with the first panel—I believe that you were in the public gallery at the time—the advantage of learning or developing language in school is that it frequently encourages an interest in the learning of language. Therefore, children might go on to be interested in learning Italian or German or whatever, too, and perhaps also Gaelic, if they have not had that opportunity before. Do you think that the development of such an acquired skill needs to be encouraged anyway?

Dr Warnecke: I totally agree. That helps people to overcome the stereotype of having to be clever to learn languages. Many people do not appreciate that, in speaking Scots and English, they are bilingual. In the public course that we produced, we got a lot of feedback from members of the Scottish public who had studied Scots, who had begun to understand what it means to be bilingual and what an asset that is for them. As we know, uptake of languages is really challenged in Scotland at the moment. Using the route through Scots, a language with a low threshold because people have skills in the language already, will encourage them to see that languages are actually not that difficult.

The Convener: Mr Kerr—I was about to call you Dr Kerr there.

Liam Kerr: That would do. [*Laughter.*]

The Convener: Do you wish to pick up on anything here?

Liam Kerr: Yes.

The Convener: Perhaps we can come to Dr Munro for an answer.

Liam Kerr: This is specifically on the same line of questioning, so I will stick with Dr Warnecke, if I may.

Dr Warnecke, your submission discusses how the Scottish languages strategy needs to provide a “detailed description of what Scots is”,

and of the dialects that are spoken and where. Do you have any indication of whether that is happening, or would it be better to include that in the bill, such that there is clarity about what is being taught and what resources might be needed?

Dr Warnecke: That is a very good question. Foregrounding Scots as much as possible is

useful, because there is still such a lack of awareness of Scots being conceptualised as a language in its own right, with a range of dialects across the country. I come back to what we have heard from the community and from practitioners in schools: that would give them the required validation to explain why they are teaching it as a subject, which would build confidence.

Lots of work is happening in that space already, so we could draw on a lot of what is out there. Foregrounding Scots is important for the community, as it lets people know that they are speaking a proper language, which is not bad English or slang.

Liam Kerr: I was interested in your earlier anecdote about the teacher with a knowledge of Scots. Earlier, you spoke about the course that is being run by the Open University. You said that 150 people are enrolled on it: 120 are on it just now, and 30 are already signed up for the future.

Dr Warnecke: From the start—yes.

Liam Kerr: What Scots is being taught on that course? How is it standardised—or is it bespoke to each individual learner, or teacher, for their area?

11:45

Dr Warnecke: That is a very good question. The course does not teach the teachers Scots as such.

We have the public course, through which we teach students about the language of Scots, where and how it is used, and its key features. We include the commonalities of vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar that Dr Dempster mentioned last week, so that we can raise awareness, and offer an understanding, of what makes Scots a language in its own right.

We teach the teachers strategies to allow pupils to bring their Scots skills to the classroom. That is the first step in acknowledging Scots as a part of pupils’ linguistic repertoire, so that they can make it count in their education.

To progress from that point, we should consider teaching Scots as a subject, and as a language, to people who are new to it, and who have come to Scotland. For example, teachers report to us that many primary pupils who are refugees say, “I want to learn Scots.” Actually, they say, “I want to learn Scottish”—that is what they call it—to speak to their friends and their families. We are therefore talking about an incremental development in how we teach other languages.

We know that Scots does not have a standard, as was discussed in last week’s evidence sessions. There is a decision to be made on the kind of standard that we want. I think that the key

is a written standard. A lot of work has already been done to develop such a standard that can be agreed with the community of speakers. However, as Bruce Eunson said earlier today, we should celebrate the way in which Scots is spoken in different areas. If we look at examples from other countries, such as the one where I grew up, people could speak their local dialects in the classroom, but they had a common written standard for the language. That was normal practice.

Liam Kerr: Forgive me—I guess that I had misunderstood what you said earlier. I had thought that we were training teachers to teach the Scots language, but that is not what the OU is doing, is it? Perhaps you could confirm that when you respond to my next question, if you would. The Scottish Government is paying for the course that you are providing. For how long is that funding guaranteed, and how many students will it put through the course?

Dr Warnecke: Initially, we were blown away by the numbers who applied, and we asked the Scottish Government for help to embed the course. We agreed on an arrangement for one cohort and then we wanted to see how things evolved.

Maybe I was wrong to say that we are not teaching Scots at all: we do. We offer different teaching for different needs. On the course, we have teachers who are fluent and who have already taught Scots, but who want validation that they are doing the right thing, and we also have people who are non-Scots speakers who want to learn how to teach it. Many are people who have come to Scotland from elsewhere who want to make it part of their work. We give them opportunities and resources to learn the language if they need it. We cover a lot of ground through the course. As I said, it addresses the diverse needs of a lot of practitioners from diverse backgrounds.

Liam Kerr: I understand. Forgive me for pressing the point. You have just mentioned people wanting to learn Scots and to teach it. My initial question was based on the anecdote that you gave earlier, when you said that you had been reading, on the train, about a teacher who had learned what we might call Glaswegian Scots, but who was now teaching and responding to Doric, which the teacher reported would be rather different. How does a provider—whether it be the OU or anyone else—structure a course in Scots, when what Scots means in one part of Scotland is arguably completely different from what it means in another?

Dr Warnecke: That builds on what Bruce Eunson said earlier. We must embrace the Scots that learners or pupils bring to the classroom. If

the teacher speaks a different dialect, that should raise awareness of differences, but it should also show commonalities within the use of the language in different areas of Scotland.

We are not yet at the stage where we can say that text has to be written in a certain way and that there is a standard against which teachers will mark. It is not like the situation with English, where we can say, “You’ve written this word the wrong way.” That does not exist in Scots at the moment, so we are dealing with a non-standard language. We mentioned the aspiration of bringing in a written standard. Gaelic has one, which was developed with the community of speakers.

We are at different stages in what we teach and how we can teach it, because of the situation that the language is in. Our main aspiration was to raise awareness of Scots, to bring it into pupils’ education and to give them opportunities to use the language that they speak at home through speaking and writing.

Ben Macpherson: Good morning. My questions are on further and higher education.

What is the scale of current Gaelic-medium further and higher education provision in Scotland? Perhaps you could build on what you said in your previous answers. What would be the benefits of delivering Gaelic-medium university provision? How successful has the Gaelic plans’ approach been in supporting the language in colleges and universities? Should the bill have a greater focus on the colleges and universities sector?

I have asked several questions there, but they are all in the same space. Please answer in whichever way you think might be helpful. I am not sure who would like to go first.

Dr Munro: Faodaidh mi feuchainn ri pìosan den fhreagairt a thoirt. Chan eil againn ach Sabhal Mòr a thaobh foghlam bogaidh ann an àrainneachd gu tur tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig—sin an aon chothrom a th’ agad ann an Alba, agus san t-saoghal.

Tha cuideachd provision againn ann an Colaisde a’ Chaisteil, mar a bh’ air—an-diugh, North, West and Hebrides, no UHI a Tuath, an Iar agus Innse Gall. Chan eil an aon bhogadh ann taobh a-muigh a’ chlas, ach tha cùrsaichean a’ ruith an sin ann an colaiste cuideachd.

Cuideachd, tha foghlam Gàidhlig ri fhaighinn anns na h-oilthighean mòra ann an Dùn Èideann agus Glaschu, agus tro fhoghlam thidsearan aig Srath Chluaidh.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

I can try to answer. On your point about scale, we have only Sabhal Mòr Ostaig. It offers the only

opportunity, in Scotland and across the world, for immersive education in Gaelic. We also have provision at Lews Castle College. The courses there do not offer the same kind of immersion outside the class environment, but classes are run there. Gaelic education is also available in the larger universities, including in Edinburgh and Glasgow, and in teacher training courses at the University of Strathclyde.

Ben Macpherson: Thank you.

Dr Munro: Faodaidh mi leantainn air na puingean no ceistean eile ma thogras sibh, ach is dòcha gu bheil daoine eile airson freagairt.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

If you like, I can carry on with the points that I wanted to make on your other questions, but perhaps others will want to come in.

Dr Birnie: Ben Macpherson raised the issue of Gaelic language plans. Those have been very helpful in emphasising the importance of Gaelic in further and higher education provision and in ensuring that it remains embedded as part of courses, as we discussed earlier in the context of teacher recruitment and retention. Recruitment starts before people begin their initial teacher education programmes, with proficiency programmes that start in schools and go on into universities. Therefore ensuring that universities have a plan for Gaelic is vital, especially in the current funding climate for language provision.

We have seen the challenges that the University of Aberdeen has experienced in trying to keep its languages department going. At the University of Strathclyde, where I am based, that approach has raised the profile of Gaelic within the wider university and has allowed students to come forward and express their interest in Gaelic. It might not have increased the number of speakers directly, but it has raised the profile of Gaelic in the wider further and higher education environment.

The Convener: Dr Munro, you can carry on if you wish to respond to the other points that were raised.

Dr Munro: Thank you very much—gabh mo leisgeul, cumaidh mi orm sa Ghàidhlig!

A thaobh nam buannachdan a thigeadh le oilthigh a bhiodh ag obair tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig, tha sinn cleachdte ri bhith a' smaoinneachadh air oilthighean mar ionadan foghlaim eagalach mòr, ach tha a' choimhearsnachd Ghàidhlig cho beag is mar sin, carson a bhiomaid airson slatan-tomhais nàiseanta airson ionadan Beurla a chleachdadh airson ionad Gàidhlig?

Tha sinn ag iarraidh gum bi e comasach gum faod thu a bhith a' bruidhinn na Gàidhlig, ga

cleachdadh ann an iomadach pàirt de do bheatha bho òg gu sean, agus gum faigh thu foghlam bho òg gu sean cuideachd.

An-dràsta tha foghlam Gàidhlig ri fhaighinn ann an diofar chruthan—cuid math, cuid nach eil math gu leòr—bho ìre neoni suas gu 180 puingean, ach am pìos a tha a dhìth, 's e ionad a tha gu tur ag obair tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig, le inbhe oilthigh. Bheireadh e spèis—agus bheireadh e oirnn a bhith a' smaoinneachadh oirnn fhèin le spèis.

Nuair a bha sibh a' faighneachd na bu tràithe am bu chòir an dà chànan a bhith anns an aon bhile, chanainnse gum bu chòir. Tha iomadach cothrom ann a bhith ag ionnsachadh bho chàch a chèile agus a bhith a' neartachadh càch a chèile.

Thuir Lydia Rohmer na bu tràithe gu bheil a' Ghàidhlig is docha beagan nas cugallaiche na tha a' Bheurla-Ghallta. Chan eil fhios agam a bheil sin fìor, oir airson an dà chànan, tha cion fèin spèis aig bann nan trioblaidean uilig, agus tha mi fhèin a' fulang le sin.

'S e a' Bheurla-Ghallta a' chiad chànan a th' agam ach às dèidh 20 bliadhna ag obair airson na Gàidhlig mar activist, fhuair mi mi fhèin air trèan ann an Obar Dheathain a' faicinn cuideigin le deise a' coimhead gu math spaideil. Bha agam ri Beurla-Ghallta a bhruidhinn ri bràthair m' athair agus chaidh mi dhan trannsa eadar an dà charbad gus nach cluinneadh e mi. Cha do thuig mi cho domhainn sa tha cion fèin spèis nuair nach eile thu a' faighinn a' chànan no a' chultair agad ann an diofar phiosan de bheatha phoblach, ann am foghlam mar eisimpleir. Le sin, tha iomadach rud an a' b' urrainn dhuinn a bhith ag ionnsachadh bho chàch a chèile.

Cuideachd, chanainn gur e call a th' ann nach eil sinn a' bruidhinn air cànan eile. Chaidh bruidhinn air British Sign Language roimhid, gur dòcha gum bu chòir sin a bhith ann, ach dh'fhaodamaid coimhead air na coimhearsnachdan Sìneach agus Innseanach agus cànan às a h-uile dùthaich eile a th' againn an seo.

Duilich—tha mi a' falbh rud beag bho bhith a' bruidhinn air oilthigh Gàidhlig, ach is dòcha gu bheil sin gu leòr mu dheidhinn sin an-dràsta.

Bha mi cuideachd airson aon phuing bheag a dhèanamh. Ann a bhith ag èisteachd an-diugh, tha sinn a' cluinntinn mòran mu dheidhinn cho cudromach 's a tha dualchainntean ann am Beurla-Ghallta.

Ann an saoghal na Gàidhlig, tha sinn a' tuigsinn gu bheil dualchainntean àlainn agus cho inntinneach agus cho cudromach a thaobh fèin-spèis, ach aig deireadh an latha, tha an ùine a ruith oirnn. Tha an ùine a' ruith a-mach agus feumaidh sinn an cuideam a chur air an leubail

san fharsaingeachd—air a' Ghàidhlig—agus gun a bhith a' gabhail dragh a bheil tidsear bho Ghlaschu a' teagasg na Gàidhlig ann an Leòdhas no tidsear bho Leòdhas a' teagasg na Gàidhlig anns an Eilean Sgitheanach.

Chan eil tìde gu leòr ann a bhith a' deasbad sin. 'S e an rud as cudromaiche gum bi an cànan ga theagasg agus gun tuig clann agus tidsearan gu bheil e cudromach a bhith a' tuigsinn dualchainntean eile agus a bhith a' toirt spèis do dhualchainntean eile—ach, aig deireadh an latha, 's e an cànan agus an cultar as cudromaiche.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

Thank you very much. Excuse me; I will carry on in Gaelic.

On your point about the benefits of having a Gaelic-medium university, we are used to thinking about universities as great big education centres. However, the Gaelic community is so small, so why would we want to have standards from the English world for a Gaelic centre? We want people to be able to speak the language and use it in various parts of their lives, from their earliest years to older age, so that they have education throughout their lives. Nowadays, some Gaelic education is good and some not so good—it goes from zero to 180. Our having university status is important because people would then think of us with respect.

Earlier, we were discussing whether we should have both languages in the same bill. I think that we should. There are many opportunities for us to learn from and find strength in each other. Lydia Rohmer said that Gaelic is perhaps in a wobblier situation than Scots, but the lack of self-respect is at the root of the problem.

Scots is my first language, but after 20 years working as a Gaelic activist I found myself training in Aberdeen, where I had to wear a smart suit. I had to speak Scots to my mother's brother. I did not understand how a lack of self-worth in your own language and culture, and in different aspects of your public life such as in education, all have an impact. There are lots of things that we can learn from each other.

I would say that it would be a loss if we were not to talk about other languages. We should talk about British Sign Language, which should be in there, too.

Talking about communities of colour—

Sorry. I have moved on from talking about a Gaelic-speaking university, but I wanted to make another point. We have heard a lot about how different dialects are important in Scots. In the Gaelic world, we understand that dialects are beautiful—they are so interesting and it is so important to respect them. However, time is

running out: we have to put emphasis on the wider Gaelic label without worrying whether, for example, someone from Glasgow is teaching in Lewis, or someone from Lewis is teaching in Skye. We do not have time to be debating that kind of thing. The most important points are that the language is taught, and that children and teachers understand it. It is also important to teach dialects and to give them respect but, at the end of the day, the language and the culture are most important.

The Convener: Thank you, Dr Munro. Lydia Rohmer would like to come in on that.

Lydia Rohmer: On the scale of further and higher Gaelic-medium education in Scotland, I am with Gillian Munro in saying that the only fully immersive environment is in Sabhal Mòr Ostaig. However, the University of the Highlands and Islands, which covers the Gaelic-speaking communities, has an important role to play. My college is situated in those communities in the Outer Hebrides and the Highlands. In Gaelic language learning, we have about 300 learners. Part of that group is in further and higher education provision—predominantly, in further education uptake. Together with Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, we run an initial teacher education course in Gaelic and education. We also have primary and secondary postgraduate diplomas in education.

The college has a share of those Gaelic-medium education courses. As the newest college in Scotland, through a merger that took place just last August, we have taken the opportunity to create a Gaelic strategy for the college. The strategy builds very much on four areas, which are about recognising the importance of Gaelic in the community, and recognising the importance of Gaelic for the curriculum, for research and for the economy and people.

12:00

We are in the process of developing a bespoke plan for how to increase our Gaelic-medium provision in a range of areas. First, it will address the proficiency of Gaelic language learning, but it will link that intrinsically to our courses in the creative cultures and in heritage. We will build on our joint venture with Ceòlas Uibhist in South Uist, where we are making a concerted effort to build a curriculum and research culture around a Scottish Government centre—Cnoc Soilleir—that actively promotes Uist Gaelic, culture and heritage in the area.

We are working with partners including Bòrd na Gàidhlig and Highlands and Islands Enterprise to support the Gaelic economy. We are looking at the further education level in order to develop access

to Gaelic-medium provision of early years teaching and health and social care courses in particular. In addition, we are looking to develop Gaelic-medium content that we can build across our vocational curriculum courses in business, tourism and hospitality. That work will also include subjects such as construction and renewable energy, in relation to which there is significant investment in our Gaelic-speaking economies, in order to equip the future workforce with the ability to interact with Gaelic-speaking-first communities in those areas.

It is important—we make this point in our submission—that the bill recognises the role of further education providers beyond the statutory role that is assigned to local authorities for further education beyond school education. There is scope to recognise more the role of universities, and not just those that are involved in teacher training. Those teacher-training providers should all be assigned a mandatory role to provide Gaelic-medium pathways for teacher training, but all universities should also look at opportunities in their curriculum to recognise Gaelic learning opportunities within their various degree pathways.

These are very good questions. The roles of further and higher education need to be strengthened in the bill. As I said earlier, I think that the interaction between providing a strengthened role for Gaelic in the community and, in turn, supporting the activities of young people through school, in Gaelic acquisition, is important and should be recognised more formally in the bill.

The Convener: I am the nasty convener here; I have my eye on the clock. We still have a number of questions to ask, so I ask for responses to be succinct, if that is okay.

Dr Birnie: This will be a very quick response. Although Sabhal Mòr Ostaig is in a unique position in being able to deliver immersive Gaelic-medium further and higher education, it is important that we also maintain the various options and pathways for engaging with Gaelic through the universities, and that we perhaps expand beyond current provision. We need to create opportunities across Scotland's university network for learning and teaching Gaelic.

Dr Munro: Feuchaidh mi ri bhith goirid cuideachd.

Aig deireadh an latha, tha a h-uile pàirt den t-siostam foghlaim ann an saoghal na Gàidhlig uile ceangailte. Bidh e an aon rud ann am Beurla-Ghallta cuideachd. Gun na h-àireamhan a bhith a' tighinn tro na bun-sgoiltean agus tro na h-àrd-sgoiltean, cha bhì gu leòr againn aig ìre colaiste no oilthigh.

Le sin, 's e cnag na cùise gu bheil feum air leasachadh aig ìre bun-sgoil agus foghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig a bhith na chòir aig

pàrantan. An uair sin, chì sinn fàs agus gun till sinn is dòcha ann an deich bliadhna eile le rudan a barrachd as urrainn dhuinn dèanamh airson FE agus HE.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

I will try to be succinct, as well. At the end of the day, all parts of the education system are involved with Gaelic, and it will be the same with Scots. They are all connected to each other.

Without numbers coming through primary schools and high schools, we will not have enough learners at college and university level. At the end of the day, we need development at primary school level and for there to be a right for parents, then we will see growth. Then, in 10 years' time, there might be more that we can do for FE and HE.

Dr Warnecke: I echo what everyone has said. Calling the bill the Scottish Languages Bill raises awareness of the indigenous languages of Scotland. We have so many commonalities in the challenges that we face that that can only give us strength to move forward. I agree that we definitely need to aspire to bringing Scots into FE and HE.

There is no qualification in Scots, yet. We are thinking about innovative ways of collaborating on that because numbers are a problem, so we need to come together to make that happen.

The Convener: Is there anything that you want to pick up on, Ben?

Ben Macpherson: No. Thank you, convener.

The Convener: That moves us nicely on to Michelle Thomson.

Michelle Thomson: I will come to Sylvia Warnecke first, because we started to touch on this area. The bill includes no provision for Scots in the higher and further education sectors. I would appreciate hearing your view on that, and any further perspectives.

Dr Warnecke: As I just said, I think that we should aim high. We should think about how we can put Scots on an even par with other languages that exist, and are taught, in this country. There is a real appetite among universities to include Scots. The University of Glasgow has repeatedly said that its aspiration is to offer a qualification in Scots—not just in studying the language but in learning it, and learning about the culture, as part of that.

Michelle Thomson: I know that Lydia Rohmer will want to come in here. Could I have your reflections, please?

Lydia Rohmer: I apologise; I have no response to give on Scots specifically. My comments, and

the comments of my college, were on the Gaelic language only.

Michelle Thomson: Okay. Would Inge Birnie like to comment?

Dr Birnie: I echo what Sylvia Warnecke has just said about the importance of bringing Scots further into FE and HE in order to raise the status of the language: the Scots scholar Robert McColl Millar was at the committee last week. To my knowledge, people cannot currently learn Scots in a university programme. It would help with the status of the language if they could.

I spoke about progression earlier. If we could start with Scots at primary and secondary school then take it into further and higher education, that would carry a lot of weight not only with our young people but with their parents, who make some of the decisions with their children.

Michelle Thomson: Dr Munro might want to come in on this. This morning, we heard some reflections that the bill is not just about the language, but is about legitimisation and the cultural element. You are here from the Gaelic side, but if you were advising on how to get greater reach and legitimacy, and really pinning Scots in our society, based on what Gaelic has been through as a medium for education, would you hope for provision on Scots in higher and further education?

Dr Munro: Chuirinn fàilte chridheil air a leithid de leasachadh. Chan eil mi a' faicinn carson nach biodh Sabhal Mòr Ostaig ann airson na Beurla-Ghallta, gum biodh tu ann ann an suidheachadh bogaidh ag ionnsachadh mun chànan ach ag ionnsachadh cuspair eile cuideachd.

Aig Sabhal Mòr tha thu ag ionnsachadh tron chànan ach tha thu ag ionnsachadh cuspairean eile. Tha thu ag obair air gach taobh gum bi thu aig sàr àrd-ìre a thaobh fileantachd ach gum bi thu cuideachd a' faighinn eòlas a leigeas leat a dhol do na meadhanan no a bhith a' sgrìobhadh leabhraichean no a dhol a-mach is a' teagasg. Carson nach gabhadh an aon rud dèanamh aig an treas ìre airson Beurla-Ghallta.

Cuideachd, bhiodh e uamhasach math faicinn leudachadh air an teagasg a tha air a dhèanamh air Beurla-Ghallta anns na h-oilthighean an-dràsta. Mar eisimpleir, nuair a thòisich mise aig Oilthigh Dhùn Èideann anns na 1980an bha pìos ann den chùrsa English language—dh'fhaodadh tu coimhead air a' chànan agad fhèin no air Beurla-Ghallta an lùib sin. Thug sin tòrr moit dhomh.

Nam biodh cùrsaichean mar sin ann aig ìre FE is HE nuair a bha mise 18, is dòcha nach bithinn ann an saoghal na Gàidhlig idir, ach ann an leasachadh saoghal na Beurla-Ghallta. Tha mi a' coimhead air adhart ris an ath ghinealach a bhios

a' leasachadh saoghal na Beurla-Ghallta cuideachd.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

I would warmly welcome that type of development and I see no reason why Sabhal Mòr Ostaig could not be there for the Scots language. We could have immersive education. While people are learning about other subjects at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, they learn through the Gaelic language, so they are working on both sides at the highest level of fluency. That also develops their knowledge in order for them to go into the media, write books, or go out and teach. Why could we not do the same for Scots at tertiary level? It would be really good to see extension to Scots of the teaching that universities are now doing.

As I said, I started a degree at the University of Edinburgh in the 1980s. There was a little bit of the English language course in which we could look at our own language, so Scots was there. That made me really proud. We could have courses like that at FE and HE level. If I had done something like that at 18, I might not have ended up in the Gaelic world at all—I might have ended up in Scots language development. I am thinking about the next generation of people who will work in Scots language development.

The Convener: Earlier, we heard about the e-Sgoil online platform, a link to which the clerks have helpfully brought up for me. What is the role of online and distance learning in supporting Gaelic and Scots further and higher education? I will come to Sylvia Warnecke first, as she is nodding away.

Dr Warnecke: We already have some experience of that through various courses. The public course that we have developed, which has been accessed by about 47,000 people from 129 countries, is raising the international profile of the language. It means that we have greater reach. In addition, we can deliver the teacher training that we are undertaking across the whole of Scotland, and we delivered the primary languages programme to support the embedding of the one-plus-two model.

The course can be used as a tool to set certain standards across the nation, because everybody goes through the same programme, which is very accessible. Practitioners in the Highlands and Islands are joining us as well, because that is the only way that they can access such learning.

An additional benefit is the great community of practice that is evolving through the course. People can learn about what is happening in other parts of the country and different dialects. The course offers so many additional benefits, which were not even written into the course, but which happen through its online delivery.

The Convener: Lydia Rohmer wants to come in.

Lydia Rohmer: I have already spoken about our engagement with e-Sgoil, but UHI is one of the organisations that has a very highly developed digital learning pedagogy approach that connects learners in our area. As Sylvia Warnecke has said, the big attraction of online and digital learning is the increase in reach that it provides by enabling learners to access formal learning.

Especially post Covid, it is important to set standards for high-quality online and digitally enabled learning. Young people in particular had a very mixed experience with online learning during Covid, and it is important that they are not put off continuing to learn, whether languages or other subjects online.

In our experience, we often find that we have to explain what online learning means and what the benefits of it are. We explain that it is not just self-directed distance learning, but learning that connects learners in real time with a lecturer and teacher at the same time. It is a different way of delivering learning that gives learners the opportunity to be part of a community that comes together in a different way through digital technology.

As Sylvia said, I think that online learning is a way of connecting lots of individual learners of different ages and stages, who come from different geographies. It also provides an opportunity to work nationally and internationally. However, best practice needs to be adopted in order for it to be effective.

When a lot of the provision is delivered online, we also need to ensure that people do not fall into any digital divides or digital poverty traps. People need to be equipped in order to access online and distance learning.

The Convener: Thank you for that very thorough response.

I will bring in Dr Munro, before coming to Dr Birnie.

12:15

Dr Munro: Tha mi ag aontachadh gu bheil libhrigeadh air astar riatanach airson fàs nan cànan—a' Ghàidhlig agus a' Bheurla-Ghallta. Aig Sabhal Mòr Ostaig tha e san DNA againn a bhith a' libhrigeadh air astar.

Bha sinn a' libhrigeadh foghlam air astar airson mòran bhliadhnaichean a-nis—mus robh mi aig Sabhal Mòr, agus tha mi air a bhith ann cha mhòr fichead bliadhna. Tha sinn a' ruith cùrsa-inntrigidh—immersion course—airson daoine aig a bheil ùidh sa chànan.

Chan eil mi cinnteach mun bhliadhna, feumaidh mi aideachadh, ach roimhe seo, tha sgoilearan air a bhith ag ionnsachadh bho air feadh an t-saoghail bho ochd air fhichead diofar dhùthchannan agus thairis air còig diofar continents.

Chan eil na h-àireamhan cho mòr 's a tha sinn ag iarraidh ach gabhaidh na h-àireamhan sin fhàs. Le foghlam air astar, chan eil crìoch air an àireamh de sgoilearan as urrainn fhoghlamachadh, ma tha an luchd-obrach agaibh.

Tha tòrr den luchd-obrach againn cuideachd air astar. Tha cuideigin againn a' teagasg na Gàidhlig bho Ameireaga a Deas mar eisimpleir. Feumaidh sinn a bhith anns an t-saoghal ùr, a bhith sùbailte, a bhith a' coinneachadh nam feumalachdan aig an luchd-ionnsachaidh—ma tha iad ann an diofar time zone, feumaidh tu smaoinichadh ciamar as urrainn dhuinn clasaichean a libhrigeadh nuair a tha iad fhèin nan dùisg agus mar sin air adhart. Tha sinn a' tuigsinn cho cudromach 's a tha seo.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

I agree that distance learning is incredibly important for the growth of Gaelic and Scots. At Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, we have a pedigree for delivering in that way and we have been providing distance learning for many years, even before I was there, and I have been there for almost 20 years.

We run an immersion course for people who are interested in the language. I am not sure about this year, but previously we have had people speaking 28 different languages from different continents all around the world on that course. The numbers are not quite as big as we would have liked and, with remote learning, there is no end to the numbers that we could educate if we had the staff.

Many of our staff work remotely. We have someone teaching Gaelic from South America, for example. We need to be in the new world, as it were, and to be flexible and look to the needs and requirements of learners. If they are in different time zones, we need to think about how we can offer classes while they are awake, and that kind of thing. We understand how important this is.

Dr Birnie: I am a successful graduate of the Sabhal Mòr Ostaig distance learning programme, so I can testify to the effectiveness of such a programme. Distance or online learning can be an effective tool in our toolbox for delivering languages. I include e-Sgoil delivering Gaelic to young people who would otherwise not be able to access the language within their local education authority, although my word of caution would be that we should not use opportunities such as e-Sgoil as a reason not provide Gaelic language education in our schools. There is nothing better for young people than a real community of practice

rather than a virtual one, although it might be different for slightly older learners. We all recognise that digital technology and learning have a role to play in creating Gaelic communities through online media, for example, but we should not rely on it as the only means of delivering Gaelic-medium education or Gaelic where there is currently no provision.

The Convener: Thank you. That was an interesting response.

The final question that we have heard this morning about how education is linked to supporting communities to use Gaelic and Scots in everyday life, and I am sure that many of you will agree with that. How is that working? We heard earlier from Lydia Rohmer about the Gaelic plan and working with creative culture and heritage and the curriculum for that area. Is it an aim for education providers? If so, how would that aim be evaluated? I will bring in Gillian Munro first.

Dr Munro: 'S e fìor dheagh cheist a tha sin. Tha mi cho toilichte cluinntinn gu bheil ceist ann mu dheidhinn nan ceangal eadar foghlam FE/HE agus coimhearsnachd, oir gun choimhearsnachd—dè th' ann?

Tha e uamhasach cudromach gum bi na cùrsaichean a th' ann ri fhaighinn anns na coimhearsnachdan, le oidean às na coimhearsnachdan as urrainn na stuthan sin a libhrigeadh.

Duilich—tha m' aidreanalain a' dol sìos is tha mi a' fàs slaodach a-nis.

Tha Sabhal Mòr, mar eisimpleir, a' smaoinichadh gun robh e uabhasach cudromach a bhith an sàs ann an iomairtean le buidhnean eile. Mar eisimpleir, tha sinn an sàs le Duolingo. Tha sinn air a bhith gu mòr aig cridhe sgrìobhadh nan stuthan Duolingo anns a' Ghàidhlig. Tha fios againn gu bheil 1.8 millean duine air clàradh ann an diofar choimhearsnachdan a bhith a' cleachdadh nan stuthan.

Tha fios againn gu bheil mu leth mhillean dhiubh gu trang ag obair bho latha gu latha no bho sheachdain gu seachdain a' cleachdadh nan stuthan sin. Tha clasaichean taic ri fhaighinn cuideachd anns na coimhearsnachdan.

Tha Sabhal Mòr a-rithist an sàs le SpeakGaelic, iomairt nàiseanta le taic maoinichaidh bhon Riaghaltas. Tha Bòrd na Gàidhlig agus MG ALBA cuideachd an sàs. Tha prògraman gan craoladh ach tha stuthan ri fhaighinn anns na coimhearsnachdan as urrainn dhut cleachdadh le clasaichean de dh'inbich.

Tha e cho cudromach cuideachd gum bi FE/HE a' cuideachadh pàrantan aig a bheil clann a tha a' dèanamh Gàidhlig anns an sgoil—ann am foghlam

tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig gu h-àraid—gum bi clasaichean anns na coimhearsnachdan airson taic a chumail riutha, gun urrainn dhaibh a bhith misneachail, gu bheil iad a' leantainn, mar eisimpleir, an obair dachaigh a tha mar phàirt de dh'fhoghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig.

Tha e cuideachd uamhasach cudromach gum bi sinn a' ruith chlasaichean anns na coimhearsnachdan, mar eisimpleir, an t-Eilean Sgitheanach, sna h-Eileanan Siar, ann an Glaschu agus Obar Dheathain, agus gum bi sinn a' ruith chlasaichean airson daoine a tha a' tuigsinn na Gàidhlig, is dòcha, no aig a bheil beagan ach aig nach eil misneachd no a tha a' faireachdainn nach eil na comasan bruidhinn aca. Tha e really cudromach gum bi sinn gu mòr an sàs ann an sin.

Cuideachd, pròiseactan nàiseanta mar Tobar an Dualchais—

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

That is a great question. I am so glad to hear a question about the link between this type of education and communities. Without communities, what have we got? It is important that the courses are available in the communities themselves, with tutors from the communities who can deliver that provision.

Apologies—we are both getting a bit slow.

We think that it is important to be involved in initiatives with other organisations. For example, we have been at the heart of writing the Gaelic material for Duolingo and we know that 1.8 million people in different communities have registered to use those resources, and half a billion are busy working day to day and week to week using them. Support classes are also available in the communities.

Sabhal Mòr Ostaig is involved in SpeakGaelic, which is a national initiative, with support from the Government. MG Alba and Bòrd na Gàidhlig are involved. Programmes are broadcast and materials are available in communities that can be used for adult education classes.

It is really important that FE and HE help parents with children in Gaelic-medium education especially and that there are classes in communities to support them so that they can be confident and people can carry on with their homework, for example, if it is delivered through Gaelic.

It is also really important that classes are run in communities in Skye, the Western Isles, Glasgow and Aberdeen, for example, for people who understand Gaelic or have a smattering of it, but do not have confidence and do not feel that they can speak it fluently. It is really important that we are involved in that, too.

National projects such as Tobar an Dualchais—

The Convener: Dr Munro, what we are hearing is a wee bit delayed, and I am trying to find an opportunity to intervene. You have spoken about many different things that are happening. How are the impacts of some of those programmes being evaluated in those communities?

Dr Munro: Math dh'fhaodte gum b' urrainn ar measadh air buaidh a bhith nas fheàrr agus nas fhoirmeile. Mar as trice, bidh slatan-tomhais aig daoine is feumaidh iad aithris a dhèanamh orra, a bheil iad a' ruigsinn sin.

'S e am prìomh amas a bhith a' brosnachadh agus a' cruthachadh barrachd luchd-bruidhinn. Sin an seòrsa rudan a bu chòir do na slatan-tomhais a bhith a' measadh.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

We could be more formal in our approach to evaluation and measure in a more effective way. There could be better reporting on whether people are reaching their aims and whether we are firing on all cylinders and getting people to fluency. That should be part of the standards that we use to evaluate.

The Convener: Before I bring in Lydia Rohmer, I know that Ruth Maguire has a supplementary question for you.

Ruth Maguire: Yes. Thank you. We have heard this morning about youth work and opportunities to play sport and do art, drama and singing and speak Gaelic. Are such things important for embedding language, particularly for young people, so that it is not just about school, but about life?

Dr Munro: Gu dearbha. Feumaidh a h-uile rud a bhith an sàs ann a bhith a' cruthachadh coimhearsnachd, gu cinnteach.

Tha mi ag obair aig Sabhal Mòr is bruidhnidh mi beagan mu Shabhal Mòr. Tha sinn cuideachd air a bhith ag obair, mar eisimpleir, le Comunn na Gàidhlig, a' coimhead air ciamar as urrainn dhan lionradh de dh'oifigearan barrachd taic fhaighinn is a bhith a' tighinn còmhla.

Bha sinn a' faireachdainn, às dèidh pìos rannsachaidh, gu bheil gu math tric cion misneachd aig oifigearan. Gu math tric, tha iad òg, agus gun robh feum air daoine a thoirt còmhla agus coimhead air cothroman trànaidh do dh'oifigearan a tha a' dol a-mach do na coimhearsnachdan agus ag obair le buidhnean de chloinn agus de dheugairean.

Tha Sabhal Mòr mar aon eisimpleir air buidheann ann am foghlam a tha ag obair le buidhnean eile, a' tuigsinn gu bheil feum air cur-seachadan, tachartasan eile agus cothroman

nàdarra, mar gum biodh, daoine a bhith a' tighinn còmhla is a' cleachdadh a' chàinain.

Is fheàrr dhomh cothrom a thoirt do chuideigin eile.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

Absolutely. Everything has to work together to create a community.

I work at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, so I will talk a little about our situation. I can also talk about working with Comunn na Gàidhlig and how we can expand the network of officers to get more support and come together.

After the research, we felt that officers had a lack of confidence and that we still need to bring people together to look at training opportunities for officers who go out into communities and work with organisations, groups of children and teenagers. Sabhal Mòr Ostaig is an example of an education organisation that works with other groups and understands that we need hobbies, events and chances to explore nature to bring people together and use the language.

I should give an opportunity to someone else.

Lydia Rohmer: I will not repeat the points that I made in response to earlier questions about that. Supporting communities is about not just supporting fluency or language acquisition in those communities as far as Gaelic is concerned; it also needs to be about community development. The resources that go into community development need to be specifically to do with community language development. It is good to see that community language development officers were reinstated as part of the budget from the Scottish Government for this year. Without that resource, it is very difficult to take forward the range of initiatives that Gillian Munro has spoken about.

In some of the areas that my college supports, we have serious issues with depopulation. Supporting communities to keep the language alive is intrinsically linked to other efforts to support the population and to support continued population of those communities. In Uist, there is a population plan, which could be seen as a blueprint for supporting Gaelic living communities. The issue is linked to attracting people into those communities from elsewhere to settle there, and to the provision of appropriate housing, infrastructure and jobs. That involves working in partnership across the public and third sectors, but also with employers, to link job opportunities to language, culture, heritage and the lived experience of the language.

I emphasise that not just formal post-school opportunities, but all the efforts that are made outwith school and the provision of informal

opportunities, as well as economic planning, are really important in supporting communities.

In terms of impact—

The Convener: I am sorry, Lydia, but I am going to have to move on to Dr Birnie, in the interests of time.

Dr Birnie: I want to bring the discussion back to the question of why we are enrolling children in Gaelic-medium education. Our ultimate aim is that those young people will grow up to become users of Gaelic. When we measure Gaelic, we look at the number of people who are able to speak Gaelic, whereas it might be more effective to look at the number of daily users of Gaelic, which might be significantly lower, as was touched on last week.

For young people, it is vitally important that they can see the language being used in their community. That will look different for a young Gaelic user in Glasgow than it will for a young Gaelic user in the Western Isles. It is vitally important that there are opportunities to use the language outwith the education system so that, rather than it being something that people learn and use only in a classroom setting, it becomes a living language through which they can live their lives, have friends, do their hobbies and have their social lives. It is vital that we make the link between those two aspects.

We do not want to bring up young speakers of Gaelic who do not go on to use the language as adults. Supporting community initiatives is vital in promoting the wider use of Gaelic, and one of the measures might be to measure Gaelic language use.

The Convener: The final comments of the session will come from Sylvia Warnecke. We have not heard enough about how the impact of Gaelic language provision is evaluated; perhaps you could address that in your answer.

Dr Warnecke: I will try. It is a big responsibility.

I can only echo what has just been said. The Open University has just embarked on a big research project with colleagues from across the four UK nations to look at opportunities for refugees and migrants to learn indigenous languages. There are not enough opportunities out there.

With regard to how the impact can be measured, we can definitely follow examples. There are other languages that are taught in the community, and we can apply the measurements in exactly the same way. It depends on who you are teaching. We have different target audiences. When it comes to new speakers, we have great examples. For example, at Banff academy, where we piloted our teacher course, we have introduced

project-based learning, which involves the pupils going out into the community and engaging with the language there through different subject areas.

Intergenerational learning has been mentioned. We need to look at a range of opportunities that can fit the needs of different types of learners or speakers.

The Convener: Thank you very much. I thank all the witnesses for their time; it has been a very interesting evidence session.

The public part of today's meeting is now at an end. We will now consider our final agenda item in private.

12:29

Meeting continued in private until 12:47.

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Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

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