

Education, Children and Young People Committee

Wednesday 8 May 2024
14th Meeting, 2024 (Session 6)

Scottish Languages Bill

Introduction

1. The Scottish Government introduced the [Scottish Languages Bill](#) on 29 November 2023.
2. The Bill gives the Gaelic and Scots languages official status in Scotland and makes changes to the support for the Gaelic and Scots languages in Scotland. This includes changes in relation to Gaelic and Scots education.
3. The Education, Children and Young People's Committee has been designated as the lead committee for the Bill at Stage 1.
4. A SPICe briefing on the Bill has been published in [English](#), [Gaelic](#) and [Scots](#).

Committee meeting

5. The Committee is taking evidence on the Bill at its meetings on 1st, 8th, 15th and 22nd May.
6. At last week's meeting, the Committee took evidence from representatives from Scottish Government officials who have been working on the Bill along with Scottish Government lawyers.
7. At today's meeting, the Committee will take evidence from two panels.
8. On panel one:
 - Donald Macleod, Chief Officer for Education & Children's Services, Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar, representing the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES);
 - Seonaidh Charity, Chair, Comann Luchd-Teagaisg Àrd Sgoiltean (CLAS);
 - Bruce Eunson, Scots Language Co-ordinator, Education Scotland;
 - Joan Esson, HM Inspector, Education Scotland.
9. On panel two:
 - Dr Sylvia Warnecke, Associate Head of School Students and Nations, School of Languages and Applied Linguistics, Open University in Scotland;
 - Dr Gillian Munro, Principal, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig;
 - Dr Inge Birnie, Co-Chair of the Languages Group, the Scottish Council of Deans of Education;
 - Lydia Rohmer, Principal and Chief Executive, UHI North, West and Hebrides.

Supporting information

10. A SPICe briefing, covering both panels, is included at **Annexe A**.
11. In respect of panel one, CLAS, Education Scotland and HM Inspectors Scotland responded to the call for views. CLAS has also provided an additional submission ahead of this meeting. These are included at **Annexe B**.
12. In respect of panel two, the Committee received call for views responses from the Open University, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, Foghlam Thidsearan (Teacher Education) at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, and UHI North, West & Hebrides. These are included at **Annexe C**.

Call for views

13. The Committee issued two [calls for views](#) – a short survey and a longer call for views - on the provisions of the Bill on 22 January 2024. These ran until 8 March 2024. Respondents could choose to respond to either call for views in English, Gaelic or Scots. There was also a BSL option for the longer call for views.
14. In total, the Committee received 224 responses to the short surveys and 132 responses to the longer calls for views.
15. The responses to the calls for views have been [published](#). A summary of the responses is included in the meeting papers published for [1 May meeting](#).

Clerks to the Education, Children and Young People Committee, May 2024

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An t-Ionad Fiosrachaidh

Education, Children and Young People Committee

8 May 2024

Scottish Languages Bill

Introduction

This briefing is to support the Committee for the second of its evidence sessions on the Scottish Languages Bill.

This week, the focus will be on the education provisions of the Bill. The first panel's focus will be on school education and the second on further and higher education. These elements are interrelated.

The Bill's focus is on school education and further education secured by education authorities (ie not by colleges through SFC funding).

Gaelic education

Key provisions in the Bill

The Bill makes a number of changes to the provision of Gaelic education. These include—

- expanding rights of parents to seek Gaelic Medium Education in Early Learning and Childcare
- including Gaelic education as part of the statutory definition of school education across Scotland.

The Bill would provide for a duty on Ministers to “promote, facilitate and support” Gaelic education. It also would give Ministers a range of powers to set standards and provide guidance on Gaelic education.

Taken together, the Bill seeks to increase local authorities' focus on the provision of Gaelic education and provides the Scottish Government more tools in which to shape or direct the provision of Gaelic education across Scotland or in local areas.

Role of Gaelic education in revitalising Gaelic

The [Bòrd na Gàidhlig's website states](#)—

“Gaelic education and learning are at the heart of Bòrd na Gàidhlig’s aims and aspirations. From Gaelic playgroups to post-graduate studies, this wide-ranging sector is the foundation of our efforts to preserve and revitalise the Gaelic language. With this in mind, education, learning and the development of language skills are key priorities in the National Gaelic Language Plan and are essential for the future and health of the language.”

Measuring success of GME and GLE in relation to supporting the language

Comunn na Gàidhlig’s submission said—

“The success of Gaelic Medium Education is often ‘measured’ by the numbers of GME schools or units, and by the numbers of children entering at P1 level. There is no measurement whatsoever to help us judge whether GME is reaching any linguistic objectives. No linguistic targets or measurable outcomes have ever been clearly stated. Certainly, pupils pass exams, and follow the curriculum, but these are educational measures. Are we sure this investment and this system is contributing sufficiently to the overall health of the language? How many pupils leave their senior secondary phase functionally fluent in Gaelic? These questions are challenging, and not welcomed by those in authority.”

HMIE’s submission stated—

“The proposed legislation is reliant on the use of new powers to create secondary legislation. These are described as regulations, standards, guidance and strategies. HM Inspectors identify as an area for further clarification that there is transparency in how secondary legislation will drive change, the pace of this change, how data will be used to identify the focus of secondary legislation and what will be prioritised.

“Generally, within the Bill, and its associated papers, there could be more urgency in arresting language decline and creating a faster rate of sustaining the language. Measurable targets in increasing the numbers of fluent speakers of Gàidhlig, able to sustain the language’s future, need to be clearer.”

[Stòrlann Nàiseanta na Gàidhlig](#) provides learning resources and materials for Gaelic Medium Education in schools. Sabhal Mòr Ostaig (Teacher Education)’s submission suggested that a specific and distinct Gaelic curriculum be developed. This was echoed by the Language Sciences Institute at the UHI’s submission, which said—

“In order to strengthen the policy and resource frameworks for GME, a stand-alone department/ organisation for Gaelic education should be established. The new organisation/department – **Foghlam Gàidhlig** – would have overall responsibility for Gaelic- medium education, including that of developing a new Gaelic-based curriculum which is not a ‘mirror’ of the English-language based curriculum.

“It is important that the Gaelic-based educational curriculum is founded on the cultural capital of the Gaelic community and framed within a model of minority language communal renewal.”

Current provision

Numbers of pupils in GME and GLE

The number of pupils in GME is growing. The tables below show the total numbers in the pupil censuses in 2013 and 2023.

Primary pupils

	Gaelic Medium Education	Gaelic learner classes	No Gaelic
2013	0.6%	0.9%	98.5%
2023	1.0%	1.2%	97.8%

Source: Scottish Government

Secondary pupils

	Some subjects other than Gaelic taught through Gaelic	Gaelic the only subject taught through Gaelic	Gaelic learner classes	No Gaelic
2013	0.2%	0.2%	1.1%	98.5%
2023	0.5%	0.2%	1.2%	98.1%

Source: Scottish Government

There is significant variation between local authorities’ provision of both GME and GLE. The numbers of pupils in GME and GLE are presented in the annual pupil census. It is sometimes challenging to interpret this data at local authority level, as some data is suppressed to prevent it being disclosive – this could be because the number is very low, or that combined with other data it can be disclosive.

In 2023, 12 local authorities reported no Gaelic education of any kind at primary level. 20 reported no Gaelic education at secondary level.

Nearly all primary and secondary pupils in Na h-Eileanan Siar receive either GME or GLE – in primary school around 46% of pupils are in GME and 54% received GLE. In Argyll and Bute, 4% and 22% of primary pupils receive GME and GLE respectively; in Highland, this is 7% and 9% of primary pupils; in Glasgow this is 2% and 0%; Perth and Kinross is 0.4% and 4%. Different local authorities which provide Gaelic education make different choices in relation to GME and GLE. Professor McLeod last week said that the fact that in some areas either a pupil is in GME or has no access to Gaelic at all is a “very weird layout of provision” he also said that the 1+2 Approach has had a negative impact on GLE in primary schools.

In the context of the proposed powers to set standards for Gaelic education, the policy memorandum accompanying the bill said—

“Although good progress has been seen in Gaelic education, the provision of standards will address a number of the issues which are still viewed as obstacles in Gaelic medium education and will make clear to parents what can be expected when a young person commences Gaelic medium education. In general, the issues that would be considered as areas that need to be addressed in GME/GLE include the following. GME access to provision and local authority promotion of GME, GME as a 3-18 experience and GME continuity, GME subject choice, curriculum and assessment arrangements, GME teacher recruitment, placement, retention and professional learning, Teacher and pupil support and resources, 0-3, early years provision and linguistic acquisition, Class sizes, language assistants, immersion and fluency, Taking account of GME when setting national expectations, Inclusion of GME in the planning for and reporting by schools where GME is provided, Gaelic learner education at all levels and establishing how national bodies and agencies can better work together to support GME and GLE. Some of these have been included in the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic education and will also be addressed in Standards and Strategy.” (PM Para 62)

Sabhal Mòr Ostaig's submission argued that the provision of GME falls short of the demand for GME.

COSLA's submission questioned whether further legislation is required to increase provision and uptake of GME. It highlighted the increase in GME provision in recent years and said, “creating new duties alone, without additional resources, will not enable further increases to Gaelic Medium Education”.

Gaelic Medium Primary Education Assessments

The [Education \(Scotland\) Act 2016](#) provided for a process by which parents/carers can request Gaelic Medium Primary Education (GMPE) from their education authority.

The process requires a parent to apply before their child begins school and then includes an initial assessment followed, potentially, by a full assessment. If the local authority determines that there are five or more potential pupils in the same year group in a particular area, the local authority will move onto the full assessment. The full assessment is essentially a statutory consultation process on whether to establish GMPE in a particular area.

The Bill proposed to extend this process to parents whose children are entering ELC. Comann nam Pàrant's submission was supportive of these proposals. It added that where there is GMPE in place, local authorities should be required to provide GMELC.

Comann nam Pàrant also suggested that the process for parents to request GME be streamlined. It said—

“Although there is no ‘right’ in legislation to GME there is a ‘right’ to request GME. However, the request process is currently overly complicated. The process could be streamlined by replacing the two-tiered assessment process with a requirement that local authorities have one full assessment. All requests made which follow guidance should proceed immediately to full assessment, there should be no need for an initial assessment. The very low number of requests since the process was introduced in 2016, with only 4 of these being successful, is indicative of the challenges parents face with this process. More support is needed for parents from local authorities, who should also have more responsibility for developing GME provision as currently they are not fulfilling their duty under Statutory Guidance to ‘promote and support Gaelic medium education and learning’.”

The [most recent \(2021\) report on the UK made by the Committee of Experts on the Charter of Regional and Minority Languages](#) said—

“The Committee of Experts reiterates its previous position that the authorities should take further measures to make pre-school, primary and secondary education available in Scottish Gaelic. It considers that parents should be actively informed of the advantages of education in minority languages. The authorities and the devolved administration could develop and implement a joint information and promotion campaign to this effect. In the current framework, further measures to also raise awareness among parents of the possibilities of Gaelic-Medium Education are needed. The Committee of Experts notes with concern that requests from parents have to be made in order to receive teaching in Scottish Gaelic in areas where it is not already available, and that these requests may be refused by local authorities despite sufficient demand. The Committee of Experts considers that this runs against the obligations chosen by the United Kingdom authorities under the Charter.”

Standalone schools

Comann nam Pàrant's submission argued that there should be greater focus on ensuring that GME be provided in standalone schools. It said—

"There are no duties in the Bill relating to the establishment of stand-alone GME schools. The current process generally relies on parents campaigning for provision to be made in a dedicated school rather than being delivered alongside English medium provision. We would ideally like to see a system implemented that sought to ensure that GME provision be established in a stand-alone GME school once pupil numbers had reached a certain level.”

A [research report commissioned and published by the Bòrd](#) said—

“Though not definitive, evidence suggests that the ideal model for an immersion school would be a stand-alone institution so as to maximise the immersion experience and to ensure maximum levels of exposure to the language. The Irish organisation emphasises the need to preserve the immersion environment as a ‘language sanctuary’. More generally, the international literature on language revitalisation highlights the importance of creating ‘breathing spaces’ (Fishman 1991) for the minority language – spaces in which there is less pressure for speakers (who are also speakers of the dominant language) to switch languages (see Cenoz and Gorter 2017 for Basque; O’Rourke 2019 for Galician). As such, while this need not imply that a hypothetical co-location model would not be successful, careful planning would be required to ensure that the school remained a ‘breathing space’ for the immersion language.”

Teachers and ELC professionals

One of the factors a local authority should take account of when determining whether to provide GMPE in the statutory process under the 2016 Act is the “the potential to assign or recruit” teachers.

The Scottish Government extended its STEM bursary scheme to attract graduates into Initial Teacher Education to cover Gaelic in 2023-24. The Teaching Bursary (as it is now called) is a £20,000 bursary available for career changers whilst studying for a PGDE.

In relation to the academic year, the SFC’s targets for ITE providers to attract students to become teachers able to teach in the Gaelic medium are—

Undergraduate Primary

- 11 places to the University of Edinburgh for its MA Gaelic Education.

Combined Primary

- 8 places to the University of the Highlands & Islands (UHI) for its BA (Hons) Gaelic & Education programme, offered in conjunction with Sabhal Mòr Ostaig and UHI North, West and Hebrides.

PGDE & Other Primary

- 70 places to the UHI to meet the dual purpose of Gaelic medium and widening access to education in rural areas of Scotland. 10 of these places are for part-time provision spanning two AYs.
- 20 places to the University of Strathclyde for Gaelic-medium provision.

Combined Secondary

- 3 places to the UHI for its Gaelic and Education programme offered in conjunction with Sabhal Mòr Ostaig and UHI North, West and Hebrides.

PGDE & Other Secondary

- 119 places to the UHI for provision across the academic partners of the University, and in a range of subjects. Offered to meet the dual purpose of Gaelic medium and widening access to education in rural areas of Scotland. This includes 5 places specifically for Secondary teachers of Gaelic as a subject.
- 5 places to the University of Strathclyde specifically for Secondary teachers of Gaelic as a subject.

The [SFC's letter accompanying these targets](#) stated—

“The supply of teachers able to teach in the Gaelic medium continues to be a priority for Scottish Ministers. ... universities are free to recruit as many student teachers of Gaelic as possible without being penalised. However, SFC is aware of the difficulties universities face in meeting intake targets specifically for Gaelic medium provision through the PGDE routes. To tackle this, we expect universities to promote this provision on a part-time basis, as well as a full-time basis, and consider the introduction of further avenues to increase the numbers of Gaelic medium teachers in both the Primary and Secondary sectors where possible.”

The [Scottish Government publishes data on intakes to ITE courses](#) against the targets. This does not provide the level of granularity as the targets above. It does list Gaelic as a secondary subject for intake to PGDE courses. Last year the target was 10 and the intake was 4.

Foghlam Thidsearan (Teacher Education), at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig's submission highlighted its concerns about teacher retention. Its submission stated—

“Teacher recruitment issues in Gaelic Education are well documented, but teacher retention is currently an area of great concern. Teachers frequently feel unsupported in their work, and their professional and personal values are challenged when they are unable to access adequate resources to support children with Additional Support Needs from within GME. This has led to teachers leaving the profession in considerable numbers in recent years.”

Thig a Chluich nan Eilean Siar runs parent and toddler sessions. It said—

“Demand exists for early-years provision, but neither the jobs nor the people to fulfil it. Yet, age 0 to 3 is a crucial period in acquisition of any language.”

Duty to support access to GME and catchment areas

The Bill (s19) would place a duty on local authorities to “so far as reasonably practicable, to support a child who is resident in its area to access Gaelic medium education provided in the area of another education authority.” This would apply either where the home local authority does not provide GME itself, or where it does but that provision is not accessible to the individual (ie it is too far from the individual's home).

The Bill makes provision to ensure that local authorities create catchment areas for GME. GME Catchment Areas is an issue that is covered in the current statutory guidance, issued by the Bòrd.

Wider opportunities for pupils to use Gaelic

Last week the Committee heard evidence that argued for greater focus on community development in supporting Gaelic. Commun na Gàidhlig's submission suggested that GME should be accompanied by a "superstructure of language activity" to provide more opportunities and settings for pupils to use Gaelic. The extent to which the GME system is producing fluent Gaelic speakers was questioned by some respondents.

Scots education

Key provisions in the Bill

The Bill defines Scots language education as "education consisting of teaching and learning in the use and understanding of the Scot's language".

Similar to the chapter on Gaelic education, the Bill provides that Ministers and local authorities have a duty to "promote, facilitate and support" Scots language education. Ministers will also have the power, by regulations, to specify standards and requirements in relation to Scots language education. These regulations may apply differently in different areas. The Bill provides that Ministers may also issue guidance on Scots language education.

The Bill provides for a duty on Ministers to ensure that the "progress made in the delivery of Scots language education in schools" is reported on.

The position of Scots in CfE

In [2010, a Ministerial Working Group on the Scots Language](#) reported and made recommendations across a number of areas, including education. This said—

"This is one of the areas in which action is most urgently required, at all levels: pre-school, primary, secondary and tertiary (the latter including teacher training). The situation is particularly critical in that the current lack of resources and priority for Scots in education endangers all the ground-breaking progress made in recent years."

Within [CfE's Es & Os, under "Literacy and English Principles and Practice"](#) it says—

"The languages, dialects and literature of Scotland provide a rich resource for children and young people to learn about Scotland's culture, identity and language. Through engaging with a wide range of texts they will develop an appreciation of Scotland's vibrant literary and linguistic heritage and its indigenous languages and dialects. This principle suffuses the experiences and outcomes and it is expected that practitioners will build upon the diversity of language represented within the communities of Scotland, valuing the languages which children and young people bring to school."

In 2017, Education Scotland commissioned an expert Scots Language practitioner to visit three primary and three secondary schools to observe the learning and teaching of Scots as part of Curriculum for Excellence. The [resulting report](#) explored both Scots texts being part of the curriculum and the use of Scots as the language in the classroom. This found—

“There is clear evidence to confirm the educational benefits of including Scots in Curriculum for Excellence. Scots can support children and young people to develop a range of important skills in literacy, including advanced reading and writing skills required for success in national qualifications. Scots as part of Curriculum for Excellence can support young people in developing their confidence and a sense of their own identity. It can help to engage learners whose mother tongue is Scots by making them feel more valued and included, and therefore more motivated to take part in lessons, to lead learning, and to achieve more highly.”

A [2015 Education Scotland report](#) said that Scots could be linked to the 1+2 Approach and included as an L3 language. Specific funding from the Scottish Government to local authorities for the 1+2 Policy has since ceased. Education Scotland’s submission said that it has a single Scots Language Co-ordinator.

There are a number of Scots bodies which support Scots education. The Scots Language Centre provides information and advice on Scots and promotes the use of the Scots language, culture and education. The Doric Board performs a similar function but focusing only on Doric. The Association of Scottish Literature, Scots Hoose and the Scottish Book Trust, along with the SLC, all (among other things) provide support for Scots education.

Education Scotland’s submission discussed the variety of Scots dialects. It said—

“A fuller, more detailed description of what Scots is and where it is spoken is a key recommendation we would wish to see further explored. Be it ‘Doric’ as speakers in the North East of Scotland have a history of calling their regional variety of Scots, or ‘Dundonian’ in Dundee – given the history of speakers being stigmatised, the onus should not be on the speakers to redefine themselves, it should be the duty of properly prepared legislation to ensure that all individuals are treated fairly and that a Bill such as this meets the needs of minority language speakers by addressing each regional variety or dialect of Scots with equal respect. Best practice in terms of embedded Scots language within education is where the children and young people are engaged in a Scots they recognise and understand, making the acknowledgement of and understanding of dialect diversity essential. This is the approach we take with all our Scots language education materials and in the approaches we take to support the teaching of the language.”

Education Scotland’s submission said that it “has developed materials with many Scottish universities and delivers regular sessions to students at Initial Teacher Education establishments on using Scots in education”.

Scots Hoose’s submission argued for greater focus on supporting the Scots language in schools. It said—

“Even in 2024, hostility, indifference and ignorance o the Scots language among adults are the main inhibitors tae developing adequate Scots language provision for young Scots speakers in schuils. A growing cohort o teachers that teach the language are increasingly frustrated wi the lack of progress for Scots. However, their rationale for teaching Scots is no based on preservation o the language. Teachers teach Scots because it benefits their Scots speaking pupils, mony o them livin in communities o multiple deprivation. Teachers teach Scots because they hae seen how it can improve pupil confidence, behaviour, attitude tae learning and Attainment.”

The Association for Scottish Literature’s submission argued that a wider policy approach will be required to improve the position of Scots in education in Scotland. It said—

“Even the CfE Principles and Practices document for English Language only states that ‘texts may include texts in Scots or Gaelic’ when it really needs to say that they should also be in Scots and Gaelic and that Scottish children should learn to read and write in both English and Scots or Gaelic. While this remains unchanged, Scots may have equality in legal terms with English, but it certainly won’t have equality in most Scottish schools, something that surely infringes equal rights obligations.”

The Scots Language Centre argued for “for a full stream of education and support of Scots from early years through primary and secondary education, integration of Scots with specific qualifications at all SCQF levels”. The SLC also said that it should be clear that teachers can teach in the medium of Scots.

TRACS’ submission stated—

“Fundamental grassroots work in local communities is the way forward for the promotion and safeguarding of all of Scotland’s languages. The seemingly strong emphasis on formal education risks overlooking the important key role of community and intergenerational transmission of the languages, especially the role of non-formal education, traditional arts and cultural heritage.”

SQA Statistics

The SQA provide a range of qualifications at school level and beyond for Scots and Gaelic and GME. The table below shows the entries from local authority schools into a range of ‘National’ qualifications from National 4 to Advanced Higher – one pupil might account for more than one of these entries. It is important to note that the choice of courses offered is determined by schools and local authorities. For context, there were 136,666 pupils in S4-S6 (i.e. likely to be taking qualifications) in Scottish publicly funded schools in 2022-23.

Nationals: Entries in 2023 (Local authority schools)

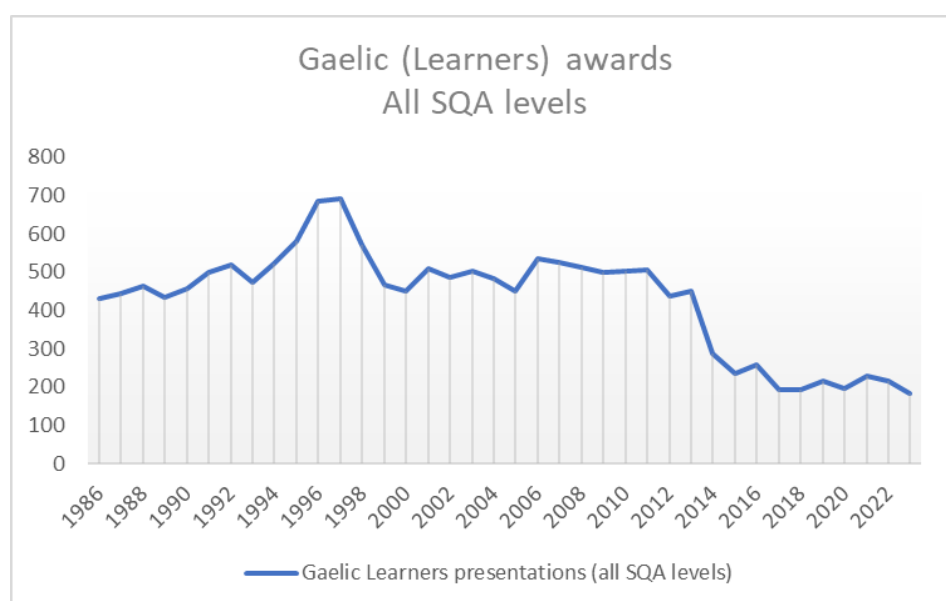
	National 4	National 5	Higher	Advanced Higher
Bith-eòlas (Biology)	0	-	-	-
Cruinn-eòlas (Geography)	[c]	20	[c]	-
Eachdraidh (History)	[c]	30	[c]	-
Gaelic (Learners)	40	85	40	5
Gàidhlig	25	225	120	20
Matamataig (Mathematics)	10	60	40	0
Nuadh-eòlas (Modern Studies)	[c]	25	-	-

[c] = Supressed due to very low numbers (fewer than 5)

"-" = No data presented

CLAS’s submission noted that in the longer term achievement of Gàidhlig (Gaelic for Gaelic speakers) SQA awards has increased. However, it said “it is worth considering the numbers of pupils involved and whether an overall increase in 230 SQA awards over 36 years is satisfactory progress.”

In relation to GLE in secondary schools, CLAS’ submission described the situation as severe. It presented the following chart:



Scots texts and writing can be used in SQA qualifications in English. The SQA has also developed awards which may be relevant to this policy area.

Entries in 2023 (Local authority schools)					
	SCQF2	SCQF3	SCQF4	SCQF5	SCQF6
Scottish Studies Award	35	40	485	855	170
Scots Language Award	-	20	190	160	25

The Scottish Studies Awards may include units covering Gaelic, Scots or English. The Scots Language Award is sized as 12 SCQF points. This is half the size of a National 4, 5 or Higher which are sized as 24 SCQF points. 1 SCQF point nominally equates to 10 hours of learning, including instruction, preparation and so on.

Further and higher education

Provisions in the Bill

The Bill makes provisions around the further education provided by education authorities (local authorities) and indirectly to higher and further education in Scotland's colleges and universities.

Under the Education (Scotland) Act, local authorities have a duty to provide "adequate and efficient" further education. This further education is defined as not necessarily being "the provision of further education within the meaning of Part I of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992, but an education authority shall have power to provide such further education for their area". Section 6 of the [1992 act defines further education](#) for the purposes of that Act – that definition is broadly drawn.

The 1980 act says that further education provided by local authorities currently includes:

- voluntary part-time and full-time courses of instruction for persons over school age;
- social, cultural and recreative activities and physical education and training, either as voluntary organised activities designed to promote the educational development of persons taking part therein or as part of a course of instruction;
- the teaching of Gaelic in Gaelic-speaking areas

The Bill would amend the final bullet to read "the Gaelic language". The Bill also removes the reference to Gaelic-speaking areas under the definition of school education. Officials told the committee last week that due to the breadth of the overarching power to secure the provision of "adequate and efficient" school (and further) education, these amendments are not, in their view, creating obligations in relation to school education.

HMIE's submission stated—

“The amendment to the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 to clarify that all education authorities have a duty to provide Gaelic Learner and Medium Education should increase equity. HM Inspectors also welcome that this amendment applies to further education. We would suggest that further education is captured to mean all adult learning of Gàidhlig, which may or may not be in a further education establishment.”

The Bill would introduce an overarching duty on both Ministers and local authorities to “promote, facilitate and support” the “teaching of the Gaelic language in the provision of further education by education authorities” as well as GME and GLE in schools. Under the Bill, Gaelic education guidance and standards may also apply to in the provision of further education by education authorities.

UHI North, West and Hebrides' submission noted that the Bill provides around Further Education but this is the FE secured by local authorities. It said, “As a college provider of Gaelic-medium education and Gaelic language learning we would suggest the addition of ‘and other recognised Further Education providers’ to [the Bill]”.

Section 25 provides that Scottish Government funding of the SFC may include “terms and conditions for the purpose of enabling, encouraging or increasing participation in fundable further education and fundable higher education in the Gaelic language and in Gaelic culture.”

The Chapter on Scots education is focused solely on school education.

Current provision

An Comunn Gàidhealach's submission noted that post school and adult learning opportunities are important in addition to GME. The Scottish Government supports Sabhal Mòr Ostaig and provides annually funding to the college. In addition, it provides funding for projects including the STREAP teacher education course which is based at the college. A number of universities, including Universities of Glasgow, Aberdeen, Strathclyde and Highlands and Islands, have Gaelic Language Plans, with specific aims and commitments. The [current National Gaelic Plan](#) says—

“There are opportunities to learn and study Gaelic as an adult and for Gaelic learning in Further Education and Higher Education institutions. There are also routes into GME or GLE teaching and opportunities to undertake research and courses through the medium of Gaelic. Gaelic has a presence in the HE and FE sector with both undergraduate and post-graduate opportunities.

“There are also many opportunities to learn Gaelic via important initiatives such as SpeakGaelic, LearnGaelic, GoGaelic, Gaelic for Parents, Duolingo and other language applications. The needs of those who already have some Gaelic skills and want to develop them further is an important focus for learning resources.”

Comann Luchd-Teagaisg Àrd-sgoiltean said, “there needs to be significant expansion in the provision of further and higher education for Gaelic medium, as a

lack of graduates in Gaelic or Celtic Studies has a major impact upon the numbers of qualified secondary teachers.”

Sabhal Mòr Ostaig also argued for a Gaelic medium university and suggested that it should become a small specialist institution to fulfil this function. Professor Wilson McLeod suggested the wider university sector ought to do more for Gaelic development; he said—

“Ensuring that all universities are brought within the scope of the Gaelic Languages Act would be very helpful in terms of Gaelic development. This is particularly the case in relation to Gaelic education: it is highly inappropriate that six of the nine providers of teacher education in Scotland make no provision for Gaelic. There is an ongoing shortage not only of Gaelic teachers of all kinds but also of support professionals and research.”

Sabhal Mòr Ostaig noted that the Gaelic Duolingo course had it had helped to develop has 1.8 million registered users and around 500,000 active users worldwide. The OU highlighted its free [online Scots language and culture courses](#).

The OU also said that it is important to consider the needs of new speakers of Scots, it also stated—

“Writing from our experience of the work we are undertaking in embedding Scots across the Scottish education landscape, a significant contributing factor to normalising Scots in Scottish public life will be the availability of a wide range of opportunities not just for using but also for learning the language – in formal as well as informal settings.”

The Doric Board’s submission said the Government should “consider the role of Scots beyond primary and secondary education, and to encourage tertiary level providers to consider their place in, and response to, enhancing Scots in the wider civic life of the nation.”

**Ned Sharratt, Senior Researcher (Education, Culture), SPICe Research
2 May 2024**

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Annexe B

Comann Luchd-Teagaisg Àrd-sgoiltean (Gaelic Secondary Teachers' Association) response to the call for views

Information about the organisation

We are the Professional Association for Gaelic Secondary Teachers with the stated aim: To advance the education of the public in the use of the Gaelic language by supporting the teaching and learning of Gaelic in Secondary Schools.

Part 1 – Chapter 1 of the Bill

What are your views on these proposals? Is there anything you think should be added or taken away from this part of the Bill?

Regarding the roles and functions of Bòrd na Gàidhlig, CLAS would welcome greater clarity as to the roles and responsibilities in the leadership and development of Gaelic Medium Education (GME) and Gaelic Learner Education (GLE) at a national level.

Regarding Section 4 and areas of linguistic significance, CLAS welcomes this as a development. It however cautions that this should not solely be at the discretion of local authorities, some of which have neglected their opportunity to support and develop the Gaelic language in the past. This is particularly worrying given recent examples of where GME has been revoked by a local authority.

There needs to be clear processes around how areas themselves can apply for such status, (a process such as that for new GME provision, but much more robust and a right to appeal, for example) as well as a fund with which to support any area that does become an area of linguistic significance.

CLAS would like to place on record our concerns about the prospects of areas of linguistic significance in light of the recent decision to cut support to local Gaelic development officers. These individuals are very often crucial partners in developing and delivering a Gaelic Medium curriculum where there are few to limited other options due to the systemic and institutional prevalence of English within the Education system and wider community.

We welcome Section 6, 7, 8 and 9 where the Scottish Government would have the power to give more direction to local authorities and that the local authorities

must be more proactive in reporting on the implementation of their Gaelic language plans. These language plans should include concrete and measurable targets in regards to education, in particular relating to the promotion of the learning of Gaelic through Gaelic Learner Education, as well as ensuring that promoted posts are created with designated strategic and middle leaderships roles for Gaelic Medium Education.

Part 1 – Chapter 2 of the Bill

What are your views on these proposals?

Section 11 - We welcome the duty on Scottish Ministers to promote, facilitate and support the provision in schools of Gaelic learner education and Gaelic medium education and the teaching of the Gaelic language in the provision of further education by education authorities.

Section 12 and 13 - We acknowledge that there will be differing levels of provision across different education authorities, but this will be an important instrument in ensuring an appropriate level of provision is available. A number of schools are identified by HM Inspectors as ignoring both the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education and the Advice on Gaelic Education documents. Therefore the manner in which this is reviewed and enforced needs careful consideration.

Section 15, 16 - There needs to be strategic leadership by educational practitioners at a national and regional level to work in partnership with all schools to develop this. This should integrate the work of e-Sgoil (and any subsequent National Digital Academy) so that this provision is funded sustainably and provides a proper value for money service that complements and adds value to in-person learning and teaching based on the fundamental principles of immersion education. The learning of Gaelic as an additional language should be promoted heavily in all schools in Scotland to ensure that the opportunities provided by this bill are fully realised.

Section 17 & 18 - We refer back to points made regarding language plans. It is vital that all Gaelic language plans by those with educational functions are used to hold education authorities to account when they fail to deliver on their responsibilities to Gaelic and its children and young people. There needs to be reliable data, and data analysis in order to drive improvement, and there should be specific responsibilities placed on local authorities and Education Scotland to improve attainment in Literacy in Gàidhlig.

In regards to Section 19, 20 & 21 - Catchment areas and transport are vital to the well being of Gaelic Medium Education.

We would not like to comment on sections 23-24 other than Early Learning and Childcare is vital to the wellbeing of the Gaelic language, and to the Gaelic education system as a whole.

In regards to section 25, there needs to be significant expansion in the provision of further and higher education for Gaelic medium, as a lack of graduates in Gaelic or Celtic Studies has a major impact upon the numbers of qualified secondary teachers.

Part 2 – Chapter 1 of the Bill

What are your views on these proposals?

We support the bill's provisions around Scots.

Part 2 – Chapter 2 of the Bill

What are your views on these proposals?

We support the bill's provisions around Scots.

General views on the Bill

The Bill's key aims are to promote Gaelic and Scots across Scotland.

Please provide your response in the box provided.:

CLAS welcomes in principle the Scottish Languages Bill. As detailed in our response, the fundamental aims of this bill are to be commended. However, the success of any new legislation hinges on genuine government support and appropriate resource.

CLAS - Additional Submission dated 29 April 2024

Contents

1. Literacy Attainment Gap and Presentation Statistics;
2. Meeting Learning Needs;
3. A national steering group & aims for Gaelic Education

The following narrative aims to give members an overview of the most significant challenges and opportunities for Gaelic Education (entitled 'Context').

There are also suggestions as to how the Scottish Languages Bill could help to fully realise those opportunities (entitled 'Key considerations & recommendations').

Acronyms

GME: Gaelic Medium Education (pupils who have been through a Gaelic immersion primary education)

GLE: Gaelic Learners Education pupils who are learning Gaelic (similar to pupils learning French/Spanish/German etc.)

1. Literacy Attainment Gap & Presentation Statistics

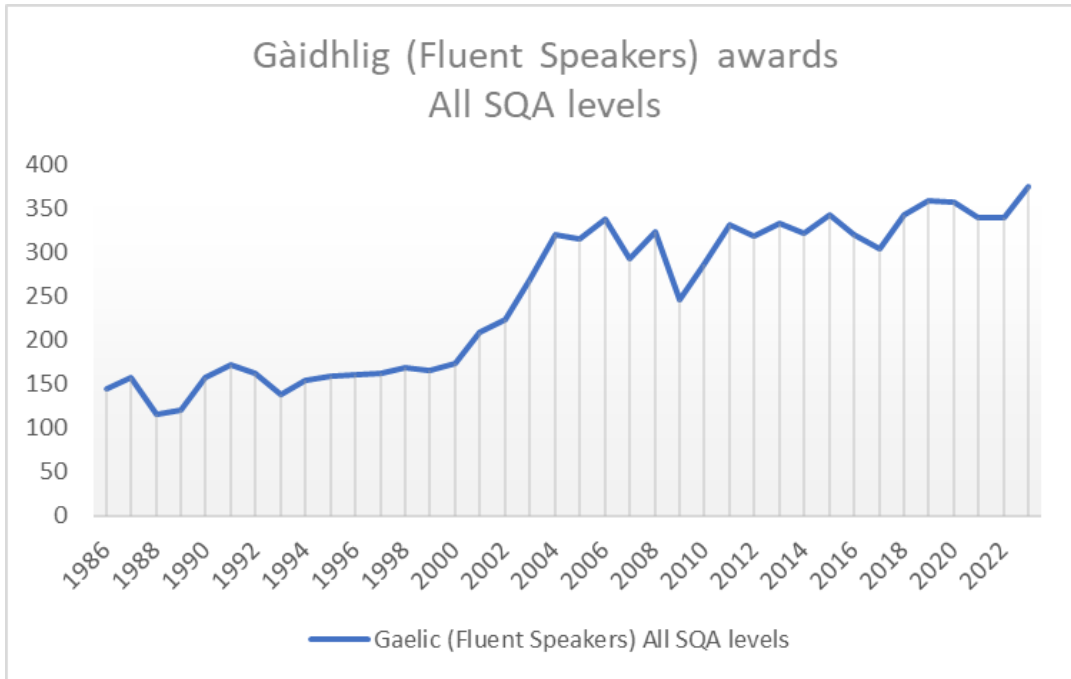
Context

Whilst the overall numbers of pupils in GME have steadily increased in primary, the number of pupils leaving GME with no qualifications in the language is of serious concern. This is a worrying and damaging trend, both in terms of the value afforded to the language of pupils' education and the potential impact this has on efforts to preserve the language.

Recent research by Education Scotland highlighted that 30% of pupils entering GME leave with no certification in the language. This figure rises to 50% if Glasgow City Council and Edinburgh City Council are removed (authorities where pupils must continue with Gaelic until the end of S4)¹.

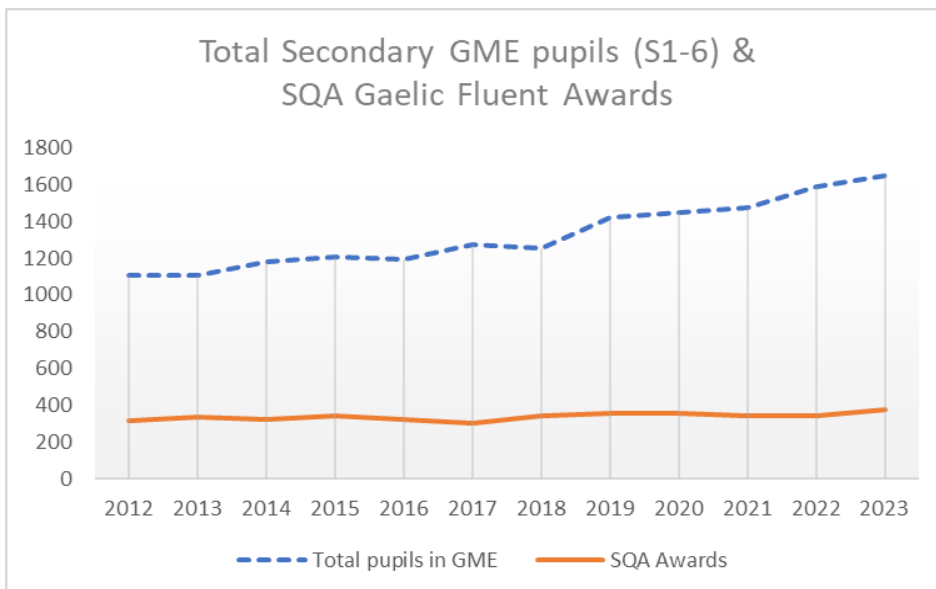
Given the proposals in the Bill regarding the setting of standards, it is interesting to view figures over time and we would encourage the committee to consider the following tables in relation to qualifications gained by GME pupils.

¹ It is worth noting that Sgoil Ghàidhlig Ghlaschu (Glasgow) and James Gillespie's High School (Edinburgh) maintained a traditional course choice/senior phase structure (2+2+2) and also mandate that pupils continue with Gaelic. Again, this is an area in which the Bill could provide much needed guidance and support.



The trend on this graph is clearly positive, overall. However, it is worth considering the numbers of pupils involved and whether an overall increase in 230 SQA awards over 36 years is satisfactory progress.

Furthermore, comparing the total numbers of pupils in GME Secondary education versus the number of SQA awards paints a picture of stagnation².

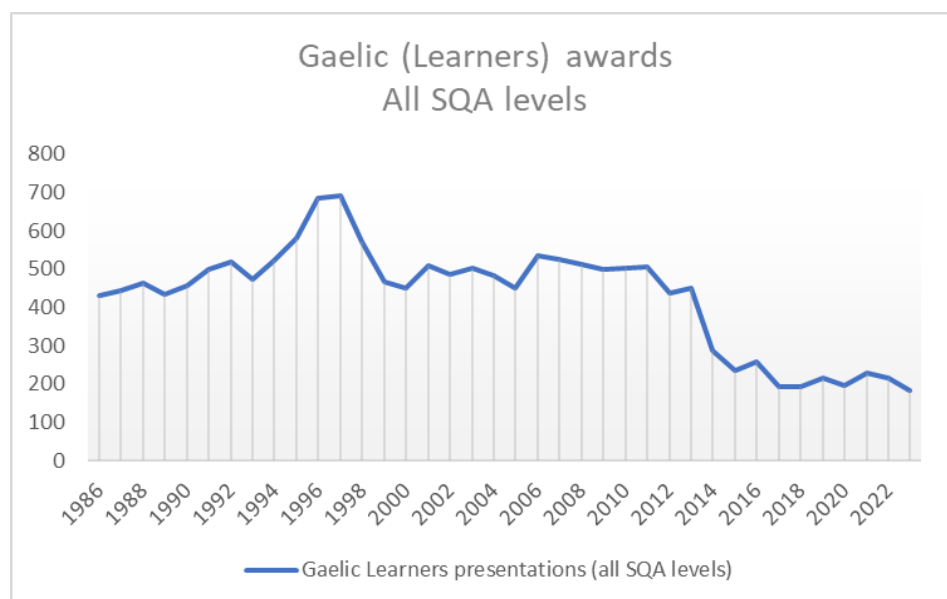


Although only a proportion of the overall figures each year in GME Secondary would be eligible to sit an exam (given that those figures cover S1-6), it is still possible to gain an approximation of the percentage going on to gain qualifications.

The situation with Gaelic Learners awards is severe. CLAS provided evidence in Parliament a number of years ago on the impact of course choices in the senior

² This table only includes the data publicly accessible i.e. from 2012 onwards

phase following the introduction of CfE. The following table paints a distressing picture:



The committee is no doubt aware of the impact of the narrowing of the senior phase course choices. For Gaelic Learners, this has been hugely damaging.

Key considerations & recommendations

- The Bill presents a significant opportunity for the Scottish Government to set ambitious targets for achievement in GME and GLE;
- These targets should arguably already be in place given the guidance in Statutory Guidance Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 (p30,42) and aims of the National Improvement Framework;
- These targets should relate to both quantitative and qualitative data, i.e. the numbers of qualifications gained and also the level to which pupils feel and are identified as being fluent and confident in the language;
- We have had a fantastic groundswell in GME and GLE in primary - it is essential that this Bill supports the need to convert that potential into fluent Gaelic speakers.

2. Meeting Learning Needs

Context

In terms of CfE Experiences and Outcomes, the structure and focus of learning in 'Literacy and Gàidhlig' is largely similar to that of 'Literacy and English' - that being a skills- and experience-based curriculum. Whilst the intentions behind this were no doubt sound, this does not recognise the vastly different language backgrounds pupils have between these two languages.

We are now in the strong position of having much greater numbers of pupils in GME. These pupils come from a rich and diverse range of linguistic contexts - a success to be celebrated. However, the approach to helping these pupils gain fluency in the language remains largely unchanged, despite a vastly different landscape. The impact has been that a proportion of GME pupils are struggling to attain the levels of fluency in Gaelic we might desire.

Experts in second language learning suggest that a greater focus on language acquisition in the curriculum is key to improving this situation. Therefore, clear and measurable milestones in the form of a national Gaelic literacy framework as well as examples of language at key stages are amongst the most regularly raised needs from our members as to how we can meet this challenge. Other developments might include more specific supporting guidance for GME teachers in maximising language acquisition among pupils including structured and consistent language support in Gaelic and GME classrooms in all schools.

This shift would also need to be reflected in the nature of the exams pupils sit in the senior phase of the GME curriculum to ensure the focus is on functional fluency in the language.

GME is not alone in facing these challenges and there is much to learn from how Irish and Welsh medium education are seeking to tackle these issues. Interestingly, many of these issues were raised in the 'Gaelic Education: Building on the successes, addressing the barriers' paper produced by Education Scotland in 2011. It could be argued that little has moved forward since then.

Key considerations & recommendations:

- The Bill and the National Gaelic Language plan present an opportunity to review the successes and development needs of the current GME system;
- CLAS would urge that the structure and focus of the curriculum in relation to Gaelic be more closely aligned with the achievement of fluency in Gaelic;
- CLAS would urge that as part of the setting of standards, clear exemplification of language standards and documentation that supports effective planning for and monitoring of language milestones are of utmost importance;
- The standards set as a result of the Bill ought to mandate specific professional development for immersion teachers.

3. A national steering group & aims for Gaelic Education

Gaelic Education encompasses a wide range of stakeholders, all of whom have important roles to play. What we lack at the moment is coordination and collaboration between these parties. The efforts to develop a more comprehensive secondary GME curriculum is an obvious example of where greater strategic leadership would be beneficial.

At the moment, the reality is that GME curricular provision is a postcode lottery, often hinging on Local Authority and school goodwill, the good fortune of having teachers with relevant qualifications and the inclination of those teachers to go above and beyond in developing resources.

Were we to have a more strategic and collegiate approach to GME curriculum expansion coupled with a development roadmap, set out by the Scottish Government, this would mean:

- schools would be made aware of the opportunities on offer and have designated strategic leaders with responsibility for Gaelic;
- local authorities could include national development priorities in their Gaelic Language Plans (GLPs) and relevant School Improvement Plans (SIPs);
- more rigorous oversight of GLPs and SIPs by a designated group could ensure consistent progress;
- organisations such as Stòrlann and SQA have the necessary time to produce resources for this expansion; and
- e-Sgoil and any future National Digital Academy would have provision for supporting the delivery of the Gaelic curriculum as a named core function and aim.

Key Considerations:

- The Bill could provide the impetus to create a national steering group as described above;
- In order to carry sufficient weight, this group should be lead by the Scottish Government;
- This development could help bring about clearer targets and more effective monitoring of Education Authority Planning and Reporting;
- A clearer, measurable and realistic road map for the development of GME could provide the key framework to ensure the progress we seek is realised;
- To ensure more effective progress, could the Bill allow for Local Authority GME and GLE targets to be set and agreed upon by the Scottish Government and LA as part of the annual Education Authority Planning and Reporting schedule?

References

Gaelic Education: Building on the successes, addressing the barriers (2011) Scottish Government. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/education/> (Accessed: 26 April 2024).

Education Scotland response to the call for views

Part 1 – Chapter 1 of the Bill

What are your views on these proposals? Is there anything you think should be added or taken away from this part of the Bill?

Please provide your response in the box provided.:

[No response provided to this question]

Part 1 – Chapter 2 of the Bill

What are your views on these proposals?

Please provide your response in the box provided.:

[No response provided to this question]

Part 2 – Chapter 1 of the Bill

What are your views on these proposals?

Education Scotland supports Scots being given official status. In 2014, with funding from Scottish Government, Education Scotland appointed 4 temporary Scots Language Co-ordinators to raise awareness of Scots in education and explore the educational benefits for learners when Scots language provision is developed in education settings. From 2016, the number of Scots Language Co-ordinators reduced to one permanent post. The development of this role has involved a great deal of networking, not only within Scottish education, but also across many aspects of cultural and public life for children and families living in Scotland and involves working in partnership with many public bodies to share knowledge, data, and evidence to enhance the place of Scots language in modern Scotland. We welcome a Bill which will create a Scots Language Strategy and allow Scottish Ministers to create guidance for public bodies in relation to promoting and supporting the Scots Language and the development of Scots culture. We recommend that consideration be given to the development of a Scots Board (similar to that which exists for Gaelic) to ensure standards are met and knowledge sharing is properly executed to achieve the best outcomes for all. A number of existing organisations would be best placed

to lead on this, for example, the Scots Language Centre and the Dictionaries of the Scots language.

Part 2 – Chapter 2 of the Bill

What are your views on these proposals?

Education Scotland is in full support of these provisions. Based on the 10 years of work we have done specifically in this area; we see this Bill and its provisions as being essential for the continued development of the role of Scots language in Scottish education. Education Scotland has a wealth of experience in how best to achieve good practice in terms of using Scots language, not only in classroom environments, but also for teacher training. Education Scotland has developed materials with many Scottish universities and delivers regular sessions to students at Initial Teacher Education establishments on using Scots in education. Such experience has allowed us to develop, in partnership with the Open University in Scotland, the first ever professional learning programme for teachers which focusses specifically on using Scots language in education. Such a milestone has been achieved through ongoing discussions and knowledge sharing partnerships with education staff and Scots experts from across Scotland, in particular the Scots Language Centre and the Dictionaries of the Scots Language. The learning materials we have developed and now deliver to teaching staff have been piloted, reviewed, and are now celebrated in growing numbers across Scottish education. Through extensive consultation with teaching professionals from across Scotland, we have successfully addressed not only the needs of Scottish teachers but have also created a safe space for staff to share their views and experiences of embedding Scots language in their education settings. Having this direct relationship with Scottish educators is an invaluable source of data and evidence, which Education Scotland uses to further develop our support and improvement offer to the Scottish education system. Our extensive experience in this area allows us to make recommendations to details contained within this Bill which we feel are essential to its success. One example we recommend be given further consideration is current wordings and related definitions of what “Scots language” means to the various education authorities. Not all authorities in Scotland are in the habit of calling their regional variation of the language “Scots”; two key examples traditionally being the island communities Shetland Islands Council and Orkney Islands Council. The title of the Bill “Scottish Languages” offers excellent scope to ensure the positive outcomes intended by this Bill reach all corners of the country. A fuller, more detailed description of what Scots is and where it is spoken is a key recommendation we would wish to see further explored. Be it “Doric” as speakers in the North East of Scotland have a history of calling their regional variety of Scots, or “Dundonian” in Dundee – given the history of speakers being stigmatised, the onus should not be on the speakers to redefine themselves, it should be the duty of properly prepared legislation to ensure that all individuals are treated fairly and that a Bill such as this meets the needs of minority language speakers by addressing each regional variety or dialect of Scots with equal respect. Best practice in

terms of embedded Scots language within education is where the children and young people are engaged in a Scots they recognise and understand, making the acknowledgement of and understanding of dialect diversity essential. This is the approach we take with all our Scots language education materials and in the approaches, we take to support the teaching of the language.

General views on the Bill

The Bill's key aims are to promote Gaelic and Scots across Scotland.

In terms of the key aims for Scots, we do agree a new law is necessary. The official nature of Scots has frequently been recognised in non-legal documentation and in ministerial statements but not in legislation, making further steps necessary to protect Scots speakers and ensure they are not excluded from society. As stated above, our 10 years of experience in this unique field has given us opportunity to gather evidence directly applicable to what the Bill seeks to address. A key recommendation we would make especially prominent is that for Scotland's children and young people to receive the excellent standard of education they deserve, then there should be two key areas of focus for both the Scottish Government and the 32 education authorities:

1. that no child in Scottish education should be discriminated against for the language they speak; and
2. that no member of education staff at any level should be discriminated against for the language they speak.

A clear aspect of this is a properly developed understanding between Scottish Government and the Scots communities of what Scots is and who Scots speakers are, with another equally important aspect being how this message is disseminated, how standards are ensured, with high quality training and resources made available to those whose duty it is to ensure these laws are observed.

HM Inspectors of Education response to the call for views

Information about your organisation

Education Scotland is a Scottish Government executive agency charged with supporting quality and improvement in Scottish education and thereby securing the delivery of better learning experiences and outcomes for Scottish learners of all ages. Education Scotland's chief executive is responsible to Scottish ministers, within the terms of the framework document, for its management, performance, and future development.

Our status as an executive agency means that we operate independently and impartially, whilst remaining directly accountable to Scottish Government ministers for the standards of our work. This status safeguards the independence of inspection, review, and reporting within the overall context of the National Performance Framework.

HM Inspectors provide independent evidence and advice by:

- providing assurance and public accountability to stakeholders about the quality of education locally, nationally and at individual establishment/service level;
- promoting improvement and building capacity through identifying and sharing effective practice and;
- informing the development of educational policy and practice by providing independent, professional evaluations from observing practice at first hand.

Part 1 – Chapter 1 of the Bill

What are your views on these proposals? Is there anything you think should be added or taken away from this part of the Bill?

1. HM Inspectors welcome the Scottish Languages Bill in that its intended purpose is to continue enacting key reform to secure the future of the Gàidhlig language. The legislation has potential to enable stronger leadership of Gàidhlig. This is through the use of strategies and other statutory instruments to strengthen Gàidhlig Education and increase community empowerment of Gàidhlig. It will create new opportunities to monitor and offer scrutiny of national and local governments, Bòrd na Gàidhlig and the public authorities who have Gàidhlig Language Plans. Gàidhlig needs this legislation to assist with its embedding further within Scottish education and communities.

2. The proposed legislation is reliant on the use of new powers to create secondary legislation. These are described as regulations, standards, guidance and strategies. HM Inspectors identify as an area for further clarification that there is transparency in how secondary legislation will drive change, the pace of this change, how data will be used to identify the focus of secondary legislation and what will be prioritised.
3. Generally, within the Bill, and its associated papers, there could be more urgency in arresting language decline and creating a faster rate of sustaining the language. Measurable targets in increasing the numbers of fluent speakers of Gàidhlig, able to sustain the language's future, need to be clearer. HM Inspectors note that the newly introduced National Gaelic Language Plan, under current legislation, would run for its natural duration. As a result, the first Gaelic Language Strategy will not be introduced until 2027/2028. This pace could be brisker given the urgency of the challenges facing Gàidhlig at this time and the need for solutions.
4. The Bill largely consists of a series of amendments to the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005, the Education (Scotland) Act 2016 and the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. There are also additional provisions connected to the Schools (Consultation) Scotland Act 2010. Having new legislation based on a series of amendments may restrict its scope and potential. HM Inspectors suggest that further consideration be given to ascertaining that the Bill is sufficiently ambitious and aligned with Scottish Government's extensive reform programme in being radical enough to reshape Scotland's educational infrastructure.
5. HM Inspectors note that the Bill focuses on Gàidhlig language in isolation of interconnected factors that strengthen languages, such as socio-economic challenges facing rural and island communities, housing, infrastructure, connectivity, and employment. Similarly, from a national perspective, Gàidhlig needs considered across policy. It is a long-standing issue that new policy is often published without consideration of the distinctive approaches to Gàidhlig language and education. This reduces the pace of implementing change for Gàidhlig.
6. HM Inspectors welcome that Gàidhlig is given official status. It would be useful to have a bespoke impact assessment to accelerate progress with successful implementation of the official status. HM Inspectors suggest that the wording of the Scottish Languages Bill, as introduced, consistently reflects official status.
7. HM Inspectors welcome that the strategic planning for Gàidhlig becomes a responsibility of Scottish Ministers. This results in the National Gaelic Language Plan being replaced with a National Strategy for Gàidhlig. HM Inspectors believe that this has potential to increase engagement with Gàidhlig through Scottish Ministers' influence. However, conditions must be in place to enable this change to be impactful and not merely a change to a planning process. It would be essential to ensure that specialists in Gaelic Education are involved.

8. HM Inspectors recognise that the new strategy needs to be bold, ambitious and outcome focused for Gàidhlig. Consideration should be given to identifying a headline target for the extent to which speakers of Gàidhlig will be increased. This creates a goal and a way of measuring success.
9. The new legislation requires Bòrd na Gàidhlig to produce a corporate plan, which is then approved by Scottish Ministers. Bòrd na Gàidhlig have to scrutinise and report to Scottish Parliament on Scottish Ministers' progress with the national strategy for Gaidhlig. HM Inspectors welcome the required scrutiny. It would be advisable to ensure that this maintains independence and integrity across both processes.
10. There are a few stakeholders listed across the draft legislation with whom the government must consult in formulating standards and giving directions. HM Inspectors would welcome further discussion on how inspection evidence can inform this work.

Areas of linguistic significance

11. HM Inspectors welcome that “areas of linguistic significance” are to be established. These areas need a clear purpose and criteria to ensure impact. Areas of linguistic significance should include traditional areas of indigenous speakers. In addition, collaborative communities of fluent speakers and partners should be built around children, young people and lifelong learners in Gàidhlig Medium and Learner Education. Such approaches provide long-term solutions to challenges in curriculum planning, as well as promoting equity and excellence. These approaches will require strategic planning, resources, evaluation, and funding to be successful. The new National Gaelic Language Plan 2023-28 refers to ‘Community Gaelic Plans’. The layers of planning for Gàidhlig need to set direction and be manageable, without being overly bureaucratic.

Part 1 – Chapter 2 of the Bill

What are your views on these proposals?

12. HM Inspectors welcome that new legislation places duties on the Scottish Government and education authorities to ‘promote, facilitate and support’ Gàidhlig Medium and Learner Education. The amendment to the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 to clarify that all education authorities have a duty to provide Gaelic Learner and Medium Education should increase equity. HM Inspectors also welcome that this amendment applies to further education. We would suggest that further education is captured to mean all adult learning of Gàidhlig, which may or may not be in a further education establishment.
13. HM Inspectors welcome the clarity that the Bill gives in identifying that all education authorities must plan for Gaelic Education. This is a provision where we

recommend some further statutory instruments assist in connecting and streamlining all the required planning, while maintaining purpose and focus on Gàidhlig. It will be beneficial that HM Inspectors are consulted, as detailed in the provisions. We recommend that other organisations, both national and local, are consulted too to increase collaborative, collective leadership and assist with planning the curriculum. A much stronger focus is needed on the curriculum, particularly at the secondary stages. Education authorities should also plan for having sufficient Gaelic schools and placings to meet demand.

14. Provisions in the Bill need to be more clearly connected to increasing the speakers of Gàidhlig. HM Inspectors welcome the increased status given to Gàidhlig Learner Education. There should be a presumption that all education authorities prioritise Gàidhlig Medium Education for its impact in creating, at pace, fluent speakers of the language, who accrue all the benefits of bilingualism. There should be more emphasis on providing continuity in learning from three to 18 and beyond, with qualifications. Additionally, there could also be much more emphasis on integrating learning about Gàidhlig language and culture into all children and young people's education. This should address the very high proportion of young people who leave statutory education without a thorough awareness of Scotland's official languages.

15. HM Inspectors welcome the provisions to assist parents, children and young people access Gàidhlig Medium Education. These benefits relate to establishing a process to request sgoil-àraich (early learning and childcare), benefits of catchment areas, increased clarity on transport and, generally a more strategic approach to Gàidhlig. HM Inspectors would have welcomed more rights to Gàidhlig in education, as is the case in other countries. The extent to which parents have to campaign for access to Gàidhlig should be reduced by Gàidhlig being embedded in Scottish Education. This is particularly pertinent as more rights-based legislation is enacted.

16. Given the views that HM Inspectors have detailed in the previous paragraph, we recommend the new legislation arrangements for establishing sgoil-àraich be more strategic. Data from the implementation of the free 1140 hours of free childcare and learning, and the survey results from the Children and Young People Act, 2014 could direct that sgoil-àraich is set up when there is Gàidhlig Medium Education at the primary stages. Children's earlier commencement of Gàidhlig Medium Education reduces gaps in fluency and attainment as they move through the primary stages. A more strategic approach to Gàidhlig Medium Education is dependent on more teaching and non-teaching staff.

17. HM Inspectors welcome the further considerations around the Schools Consultation Act 2010. We evidence how provisions for Gàidhlig Medium Education having catchment areas, enrolment policy, placing requests, and efficient and realistic travel and transport areas is impactful. Scottish Government should advise further on catchment areas in rural areas where some children and young people stay too far from their nearest Gaelic Medium provision to make enrolment feasible. The suggested timescales of two years for all education authorities to undertake statutory consultation may need to be extended.

Part 2 – Chapter 1 of the Bill

What are your views on these proposals?

HM Inspectors support all of Scotland's languages. This response relates to Gaelic.

General views on the Bill

The Bill's key aims are to promote Gaelic and Scots across Scotland.

Please provide your response in the box provided.:

HM Inspectors welcome the Scottish Languages Bill in that its intended purpose is to continue enacting key reform to secure the future of the Gàidhlig language. The legislation has potential to enable stronger leadership of Gàidhlig. This is through the use of strategies and other statutory instruments to strengthen Gàidhlig Education and increase community empowerment of Gàidhlig. It will create new opportunities to monitor and offer scrutiny of national and local governments, Bòrd na Gàidhlig and the public authorities who have Gàidhlig Language Plans. Gàidhlig needs this legislation to assist with its embedding further within Scottish education and communities.

Annexe C

The Open University response to the call for views

The Open University in Scotland supports people across Scotland to develop their knowledge, acquire new skills and achieve life-changing qualifications.

In 2022/23 we were proud to help over 19,500 students study around their professional or personal life at a pace and level that worked for them. In 2021/22 (the last year for which HESA data is available) we were the fourth largest university in Scotland and by far the largest provider of flexible, part-time study.

Flexible study is core to our offer with 73% of our students working either full-time or part-time in 2022/23.

Most of our graduates (85%) remain in the location where their study is undertaken, which means their talent and skills benefit local communities.

We offer high-quality distance learning to students, lifelong learners, communities, employees and businesses. Our students range from school age to 92. We have formal partnerships with 16 regional colleges and collaborate with local authorities, the NHS, social care, the third sector and employers across Scotland. Our innovative national schools programme, Young Applicants in Schools Scheme, helps S6 pupils access a broader curriculum and bridge school to university level study.

We are committed to widening access to higher education building on our founding principle of being open to everyone, regardless of age, income, geography and background. The majority of our undergraduates in Scotland are eligible for a part-time fee grant to help towards their tuition fees. In 2022/23 28% of our undergraduates in Scotland declared a disability and 22% live in remote or rural areas. In the same year, 23% of our undergraduate entrants joined with qualifications below standard university entrance level and 21% were resident in the most deprived areas of Scotland.

As part of the UK's only four nations university, we are funded to teach students resident in Scotland by the Scottish Funding Council. Over 150 staff operate from our Edinburgh offices with over 400 associate lecturers working across the country.

OU research ranks in the top third of UK universities according to the Research Excellence Framework and we are a trusted partner of many leading organisations for teaching and research including the BBC, NASA, and the United Nations. Our free platform, OpenLearn, reaches over 300,000 learners in Scotland.

1 Do you agree with the proposals in the Bill?

I agree, or partially agree, with the proposals

As the Open University we are focusing on the Scots language in our response to the Scottish Languages Bill consultation, as this is the area where our experience and expertise lies. To provide some background to the Open University's response, we are firstly briefly outlining our work with and for the Scots language.

The Open University fully supports Scots being given official status in this country. Since 2017, the Open University has collaborated with The Scots Language Centre, Dictionaries of the Scots Language, Scottish Book Trust and the Education Scotland Scots Language Coordinator on a range of initiatives to help embed the Scots Language Policy in Scotland's education landscape. For example, the Open University, Education Scotland, and the Scots Language Centre collaboratively produced new curriculum that has been a game changer in making learning Scots, about the language and related cultures accessible.

The Scots language and culture open course has seen over 45,000 visits and 18,000 students, with 49% from Scotland alone, and people enrolling from 129 countries across the globe. This course was produced in the spirit of the Scots Language policy: a co-creation with the Scots language community.

The second development, the first of its kind, is a professional learning programme in Scots language and culture for teachers, delivered by distance-learning. This is aimed at embedding Scots in Scottish classrooms. This was developed in partnership between the Open University and Education Scotland and brings together primary and secondary teachers from across the curriculum who work towards a GTCS professional learning award for their study. This course was officially launched on 6th February and has since attracted 120 enrolments from teachers from across Scotland, including the Highlands and Islands, with 30 more teachers already signed up for the next presentation in September. Scottish Government funding enabled all interested teachers to secure their place on this course. We are gathering significant insights from teaching the first cohort and will be able to provide more detailed information on teachers' motivation to participate, their assessment of the role of Scots in their professional contexts, the needs they identify in

supporting their Scots teaching, their experiences embedding Scots in their classrooms and their vision for Scots in Scottish education.

Feedback from course participants highlights that embedding Scots successfully in the life of a school leads to the language playing a vital role in helping to recognise all pupils' entire range of linguistic and intercultural literacies in their education, enabling schools to reflect more fully the nature of modern Scotland as a multilingual and -cultural society.

Furthermore, an Open University PhD student is currently undertaking the first ever study of individuals who have taken up Scots as adults ('new speakers'), investigating their demographics, motivations for learning the language, attitudes towards Scots, as well as their learning experiences and methods, including barriers and enablers.

We welcome a Bill which will create a Scots Language Strategy and allow Scottish Ministers to produce guidance for public bodies in relation to promoting and supporting the Scots Language and the development of Scots culture.

The Open University is putting forward the following points for consideration as part of the Scottish Languages Bill and the subsequent Scots Language Strategy.

1. We believe that the Scottish Languages Bill provides excellent scope for recognising that Scots and Gaelic are spoken across Scotland and that this legislation can therefore impact their speakers all over this UK nation. We therefore believe the Bill ought to recognise more explicitly that the Scots language is spoken across the whole of Scotland, and correspondingly it ought to recognise and support all dialects of Scots spoken in Scotland. This includes a fuller, and more detailed description of what Scots is and where its dialects are spoken.
2. We recommend that the Scots Language Strategy provides clear instruction on which public bodies fall under its scope. Furthermore, we recommend that consideration be given to establishing a central Scots Board, something like the Bòrd na Gàidhlig, tasked with the monitoring of and reporting on the status, use and learning of Scots in all parts of Scottish life as well as the development of Scots. The Scots Language Strategy could plan for the current Scots Language Centre to become, with additional funding, this central body building on the excellent work it has done to-date. It has played a vital role in bringing together the various Scots dialect communities to collaboratively support the common cause of Scots language revitalisation. It is already undertaking crucial leadership in language revitalisation work, monitoring and reporting activities and has utilised digital media exceptionally well to make the language and related cultures accessible across Scotland and beyond, even

linking with often marginalised minority languages communities internationally, thus raising the profile and status of revitalisation activities in Scotland.

Creating such a central body will play a key role in meeting the requirements of the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages for Scots.

The Open University is in full support of the provisions in relation to education, as outlined in Chapter 2 of the Scottish Languages Bill. In relation to this we recommend:

3. - that the Scots Language Strategy expresses more fully the ambition to normalise Scots as a valid means of communication in all aspects of Scotland's public life on a par with English and Gaelic. This aims at supporting Scots speakers in feeling confident about using the language, without worrying about being threatened and intimidated for speaking it.

Writing from our experience of the work we are undertaking in embedding Scots across the Scottish education landscape, a significant contributing factor to normalising Scots in Scottish public life will be the availability of a wide range of opportunities not just for using but also for learning the language – in formal as well as informal settings.

4. - that the Scots Language Strategy addresses key priorities expressed by teaching practitioners. Evidence from the above-mentioned Scots teacher professional learning programme underlines that building on existing SQA provision (the Scots Language Awards) to establish a Higher qualification in Scots is a key priority for this group, which, for them, would serve as a validation of the value of embedding Scots more fully in young people's education and create new pathways to studying the language at tertiary level. The Open University and Education Scotland are exploring with the SQA opportunities for such a qualification longer term, in the current environment of educational reform. In the first instance, the Open University and Education Scotland will approach the GTCS in relation to this to plan and discuss options for new curriculum development for in-service teachers to enable them to gain an additional qualification for teaching Scots to Higher level.

We will be able to share more detailed insights during the next phase of the consultation.

5. - that the Scots Language Strategy plans structural support and a suitable framework for Scots in Scottish education to enable equal opportunities for all young people in accessing Scots language education. Building on the excellent work of the Education Scotland Scots Language Coordinator, and following the successful example of putting in place development officers for Languages in all thirty-two local authorities during the 1+2 Policy implementation phase, we believe that Scots needs to have similar

representation. This will facilitate the development of nationwide approaches and standards, along with the formation of a strong Scotland-wide stakeholder network.

6. - that in the development of the Scots Language Strategy there needs to be recognition of all learners and potential learners of Scots, including the so-called 'new speakers'. This is a potentially sizable and highly diverse group not restricted to individuals with migration backgrounds. First research findings from the Open University PhD student's research have indicated that some traditional speakers of Scots may be seen as 'new speakers' because of having 'un-learned' the language due to the stigma they have experienced when using Scots. These speakers also reported a lack of opportunity and the existence of barriers in using and learning the language to a high standard as Scots is not represented equally in all aspects of Scottish life.

Moreover, evidence from people belonging to refugee and asylum seeker communities across Scotland underscores that these groups often consider learning Scots as a vital tool for their integration in Scottish society. This desire by new speakers not to be overlooked and to learn the language to a high level is also proof of Scots being a living language in its own right.

Therefore, it would be invaluable to create opportunities for new speakers to learn Scots as their second/third/... language to a high level in a range of formal and informal settings. For example, we believe that in schools Scots should be established as a subject area in its own right that could be located in the Languages departments, since there are many synergies with the teaching of other languages to non-native speakers.

The Open University will be able to provide more detailed insights into this new speaker groups' motivations, strategies, methods, models, and learning experiences in the next phase of the consultation.

7. - that the Scots Language Strategy highlights the importance of Scots in education for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. This requires raising awareness among teaching practitioners of the potential of Scots to facilitate social cohesion and support young people's retention and attainment during their education. Practitioners will need upskilling opportunities for learning about and building their confidence in applying multilingual pedagogies in their classrooms.

Our insights gained from the Scots teacher professional learning programme underline that facilitating full Scots provision in all Scottish schools will have a significant positive impact for young people, especially those with additional requirements, and others from disadvantaged or forced migration backgrounds as it will enable them to build on their full linguistic repertoire and range of

literacies on their educational journey. Together with practitioners on the programme, the Open University and Education Scotland are undertaking much-needed research to inform our knowledge of the impact of embedding Scots in young people's education. We will be able to share more detailed findings during the next phase of the consultation.

Foghlam Thidsearan (Teacher Education), Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, The National Centre for Gaelic Language and Culture response to the call for views

Information about your organisation

Foghlam Thidsearan (Teacher Education) at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, the National Centre for Gaelic Language and Culture, provides Gaelic Medium Initial Teacher Education at undergraduate and post-graduate level via the BA (Hons) Gaelic and Education programme, the PGDE (Gaelic pathway) and professional learning opportunities, including the MEd in Gaelic Education for Gaelic Medium practitioners. The BA (Hons) Gaelic and Education programme is the only Initial Teacher Education in Scotland delivered entirely through the medium of Gaelic. All our programmes place strong emphasis on language acquisition and immersion pedagogies and our staff are experienced Gaelic Medium practitioners at either primary or secondary level. Our focus in this submission is on Gaelic and Gaelic Medium Education and, although we fully support speakers of Scots in their endeavours to secure the future of their language through this Bill, we will restrict our comments in this paper to Gaelic and, specifically, Gaelic Education.

Gaelic Education

Legal Right to Gaelic Medium Education

It is noted that the Bill, as it currently stands, does not consider the legal right for children across Scotland to access Gaelic Education and it is very disappointing that this omission has not been addressed in the Bill. It is recognised that embedding the legal right to Gaelic Education in law could initially prove problematic in terms of adequate staffing, support and resources. However, with more sustained recruitment drives, including greater opportunities to advertise the Teaching Bursary as a secure and viable support mechanism for career changers and more imaginative use of 'grow your own' language learning secondment opportunities at local authority level, teacher numbers working in Gaelic Medium Education could be transformed in a relatively short time. Missed opportunities to enshrine the legal right to Gaelic Medium Education in the Gaelic Language Act (2005) and the Education (Scotland) Act 2016 only emphasise the long and protracted struggle faced by campaigners to secure what is surely fundamental to the future of the language. It is a source of real dismay that parents are still being left disappointed and disillusioned when their children are refused a Gaelic Medium place in school. A legal right to Gaelic Education would provide a stable base on which to build and adequately support Gaelic Education in Scotland and we would ask that this omission in the Bill be reconsidered to reinforce the desire to secure Gaelic's future.

‘Promote, facilitate and support’

Foghlam Thidsearan (Teacher Education) at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig welcomes that it will be the duty of Scottish Government and education authorities to ‘promote, facilitate and support’ Gaelic Medium Education (GME) and Gaelic Learner Education (GLE). Details of these duties are, as yet, unclear and we would ask for clearer definition and a greater signal of intent as regards equity and ‘adequate and efficient provision of school education’.

Teacher retention in GME

Teacher recruitment issues in Gaelic Education are well documented, but teacher retention is currently an area of great concern. Teachers frequently feel unsupported in their work, and their professional and personal values are challenged when they are unable to access adequate resources to support children with Additional Support Needs from within GME. This has led to teachers leaving the profession in considerable numbers in recent years. The research paper *Tha e rud beag a bharrachd air dìreach teagasg/It’s a little more than just teaching* (MacLeod, Armstrong and O’Hanlon, 2015) explores the thoughts and professional opinions of teachers working in GME. In the paper, teachers acknowledge that they have additional responsibilities in teaching the curriculum through (for the majority of children) a language their pupils do not access in the home. That they do this in large and often composite classes, without additional support in the classroom and whilst lacking the resources and appropriate professional advice on early intervention, is a testament to the values and commitment of these teachers. It should be noted however that a successful education system cannot thrive on goodwill and ‘adequate and efficient provision of school education’ must translate to staff being better supported to deliver Gaelic Medium Education and to support the needs of all learners in their classes. Gaelic Medium teachers are a precious commodity that we cannot afford to lose and they must be supported in providing equitable educational experiences for their pupils. It is noted that the Bill states that provision will be made for new guidance on Gaelic Education, and we ask that issues raised above as regards support and equity of provision would be adequately addressed in the new guidance.

Standards

It is interesting to note that the Bill states that ‘Scottish Ministers may by regulations specify the standards and requirements to which an education authority must conform in discharging its functions’ though it is unclear what these standards would cover and how the system would be implemented or, indeed, monitored. In creating these standards, it is noted and appreciated that key stakeholders would be consulted as part of the process, but we would request that there also be a public consultation to allow all interested parties to contribute. We would also request that, in scrutinising the Bill, Members of the Scottish Parliament seek examples of the structure and scope of the standards from the Scottish Government.

A Gaelic Curriculum

The Curriculum for Excellence, whilst offering choice and breadth, is not a specifically Gaelic curriculum and therefore lacks the cultural and linguistic nuances and in-built opportunities for explicit language instruction and a strengthening of ethos and identity that a bespoke Gaelic curriculum could offer. We would ask that a Gaelic curriculum be considered to strengthen the Bill in its current form and in order to reflect the distinct way in which children in Gaelic Medium Education learn and to allow them greater access to cultural education in school.

Secondary School Education, Further Education and Higher Education

The development of Gaelic Medium Education at secondary school level, and particularly at the Senior Phase, is essential if GME pupils are to leave school as fluent and confident Gaelic speakers who can see a viable future for themselves as members of the Gaelic community. Pathways to formally studying Gaelic or working through the medium of Gaelic on leaving school must also be more clearly signposted and developed. Timetabling constraints and the promotion of attractive alternatives have consequently restricted numbers taking Gàidhlig (Fluent Speakers) and Gaelic Learner qualifications at Senior Phase in secondary schools. It is imperative that children, parents and school staff are well-informed and supported when making these choices that have a huge impact on their futures, and ultimately on the future of Gaelic. We welcome that the Bill makes mention of 'fundable further education and fundable higher education' as a viable pathway from school education to continued engagement for children who have accessed GME or GLE in school and also in supporting adult learners to engage and contribute as active members of the Gaelic community.

Conclusion

We appreciate the opportunity to consider the Bill, its implications in its current form and how it might be strengthened to consolidate and enhance Gaelic's position in Scotland. We would ask that Members of the Scottish Parliament consider our thoughts on Gaelic Education above and make representation to ensure that provisions introduced would strengthen Ministerial powers to adequately resource and support Gaelic teaching and learning in schools. A strengthening of the Bill as it stands would lead to more equitable educational opportunities for children in Gaelic Education, enhanced opportunities for children and adults to positively contribute to the Gaelic community and a stable foundation on which to build the long-term future of the language.

Foghlam Thidsearan (Teacher Education)

Sabhal Mòr Ostaig: The National Centre for Gaelic Language and Culture

March 2024

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Sabhal Mòr Ostaig response to the call for views

Sabhal Mòr Ostaig is the National Centre for Gaelic Language and Culture, based in Skye. We are a Gaelic-medium organisation whose mission is to contribute to the revitalisation of Gaelic language and culture in Scotland.

General views on the Bill

The Bill's key aims are to promote Gaelic and Scots across Scotland.

Please provide your response in the box provided.:

Introduction

Sabhal Mòr Ostaig - the National Centre for Gaelic Language and Culture – welcomes the introduction to the Scottish Parliament of this important language legislation. We are delighted to respond to the call from the Education, Children and Young People Committee of the Scottish Parliament for views at Stage 1 of the Scottish Languages Bill (hereafter 'the Bill'). Sabhal Mòr is providing two separate responses: the first, from Foghlam Thidsearan (Gaelic Teacher Education) at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, which concentrates on Part 1 Chapter 2, 'Education'; and this response, which submits views on Part 1, Chapter 1, 'Support for the Gaelic Language'.

Good News! Huge Demand for Gaelic in Scotland

Sabhal Mòr Ostaig celebrated its fiftieth anniversary this year. Over the last half century, we have witnessed the demand for Gaelic education grow steadily, year on year, to the position that most young people in Scotland now express an interest in learning the language. When asked in the 2021 Scottish Social Attitudes Survey, 59% of young adults said that they would like to speak better Gaelic; and recent research has also shown broad parental demand for Gaelic-medium education (GME), with 27% of Scottish adults saying that they would consider GME for their children, if it was offered in their area.

Sabhal Mòr Ostaig is a partner in producing the highly successful Duolingo course in Gaelic, with 1.8 million learners registered and over 500,000 active learners world-wide. At Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, we offer university-level education through the medium of Gaelic, from CertHE up to PhD level, as well as a range of pre-HE qualifications. Enrolment on our courses continues to grow steadily, with over 1600 student registrations in 2022-23, representing a growth of 41% over the past 10 years (Source: High Level Figures spreadsheets. 2013-14 total enrolments as compared to 2022-23).

Parental rights to Gaelic Medium Education for their Children

This enormous demand for Gaelic education is tremendously encouraging for the future vitality of the language, but significant structural barriers to meeting this demand still obtain, and we believe that the Scottish Languages Bill provides us with a unique opportunity to address many of these barriers and issues.

Principal amongst these is the persistent gap between the demand for Gaelic Medium Education (GME) at the primary and secondary levels, and provision of GME in Scottish schools. Currently, GME is only available in 3.1% of Scottish primary schools, and only 1% of Scottish primary students are enrolled in GME. Comparing these figures to the 27% of Scottish adults mentioned above who are interested in GME for their children, it is clear that provision is nowhere near meeting demand - severely limiting the growth of the language.

There is still no statutory right to primary and secondary GME in Scotland, and we believe that such a right should be included in this legislation. Such a right would focus future development on closing this provision gap. Significant numbers of new Gaelic teachers would need to be trained, and current teachers re-trained, but it is well within our capacity to deliver Gaelic teacher education at the scale required. At Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, we are continually working to expand our teacher-training programme. To date, we have trained 53 Gaelic primary and secondary teachers through under- and post-graduate pathways. A further 15 are currently training with us, and our Gaelic teacher training application numbers for 2024-25 are very promising. We have an expanding programme of career-long professional learning (CLPL): currently 19 teachers are studying on our Masters in Gaelic Education, while a further 11 are undertaking a module from the M.Ed as CLPL. With proper funding in place, it would be possible, in a relatively short timeframe, to train many more teachers to teach through the medium of Gaelic – and, indeed, to train other Gaelic graduates, such as media professionals, musicians and experts in all fields relating to the Gaelic language and culture.

A Gaelic University

We need a Gaelic University in Scotland that governs, functions and educates entirely through the medium of Gaelic, in order to provide continuity in GME from pre-school to degrees, to grow our Gaelic Medium teacher supply, to raise the status of the language, and to prepare the next generation of active Gaelic speakers and Gaelic workforce.

Sabhal Mòr Ostaig is in a position to develop quickly into a Gaelic University, with the support of being granted status, by government, as a Small Specialist Institute (SSI), as has been done for the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. From the beginning, the ambition was to offer university-level degrees taught through the language, and to conduct world-leading research and scholarship in the language. Achieving university status would allow Sabhal Mòr Ostaig to fulfil its long-standing mission for the advancement of scholarship in the Gaelic language.

Education in the Community

It is also important that continuity of Gaelic education is provided to young Gaelic speakers outside of school in the community, wherever they live in Scotland. Like many, we were extremely disappointed to hear of the proposed cuts in Bòrd na Gàidhlig's community language officer programme. Sabhal Mòr Ostaig has been involved in the development of Scotland's Gaelic language officer profession from the beginning, providing some of the earliest research in support of Gaelic community development, offering a BA (with Honours) in Gaelic and Language Development/Community Development, and most recently, leading Bòrd na Gàidhlig's pilot project to build a professional network of Gaelic language officers working in communities and organizations around the country.

We believe that community language learning, through a nationwide programme of Gaelic language officers with dedicated funding, should be imbedded in the proposed Areas of Linguistic Significance in the Bill. Each area should have one or more full-time language officers, funded nationally, and the designation of Areas of Linguistic Significance should be particularly keyed to the delivery of Gaelic-medium education in those areas nationwide.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to make comment at Stage 1, as the Scottish Languages Bill begins its journey through the Scottish Parliament. We ask Members of the Education, Children and Young People's Committee and MSP colleagues to consider our thoughts on how the Bill can be strengthened in respect to Gaelic, to meet the rising demand for the language in Scotland and thus secure the future of Gaelic.

Should the Committee and MSPs so desire, we would be delighted to come and speak to the Committee, or more generally to Members of the Parliament, and/or to provide further information.

UHI North, West and Hebrides response to the call for views

Information about your organisation

UHI North, West and Hebrides is Scotland's newest college, having merged on 1 August 2023, bringing together UHI North Highland, UHI West Highland and UHI Outer Hebrides.

The college is an assigned college of the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI), with 680 staff and circa 9000 student enrolments per annum. The college provides over 100 further and higher education courses from access to postgraduate levels, with its portfolio deeply rooted in the culture, location and places of the North and West Highlands, Skye and the Outer Hebrides, with 19 campuses and centres across an area the size of Wales. The college delivers provision into 26 high schools across rural highland and Outer Hebrides, a wide range of work-based learning qualifications and skills to local employers and businesses across the region, and has a significant research and knowledge exchange portfolio, with over 50 researchers and PhD students.

The college pioneers distinctive and sustainable learning shaped by the needs of our rural and island communities. Together with Sabhal Mor Ostaig, the college is the major provider of Gaelic further and higher education courses for UHI. The college covers the Gaelic speaking heartlands of Scotland in the Outer Hebrides, Skye and the North and West Highlands. The college has a joint venture with Ceolas in form of Cnoc Soilleir, South Uist, which was funded with support from the Scottish Government as a bespoke setting for Gaelic language learning, heritage, culture, music and dance and archaeology.

Part 1 – Chapter 1 of the Bill

What are your views on these proposals? Is there anything you think should be added or taken away from this part of the Bill?

The proposal to give Gaelic official status in Scotland is welcomed, but additional funding for Gaelic development would be needed if this is to be regarded as anything more than tokenistic. There is no additional protection or status for the language. If no additional funding has been allocated to this aim, then it is symbolic, rather than practical.

While broadly supportive of the proposed changes to the functions of Bòrd na Gàidhlig, we would suggest that creation of the role of Gaelic Commissioner, following the model used in Wales and Ireland, and with similar powers, may be more effective. When it comes to policy and planning, we would suggest that it is essential that those involved

should have knowledge – or be given training - specific to the needs of minority language policy and planning, and in particular the models from other countries in regards to reversing language shift (RLS).

Given the recent cuts to funding for Gaelic development officers, the commitment to advising and assisting on matters relating to the development of the Gaelic language, Gaelic education and Gaelic culture in a particular area seems hollow. Gaelic Language Development officers in traditional Gaelic communities have been acknowledged as a key element of RLS efforts. Detail is lacking on how this commitment to advise and assist will be implemented.

The proposal to create a power to designate geographical areas as “areas of linguistic significance” is welcome, but we would suggest that more detailed and specific guidance is needed as to what is meant by an area of linguistic significance. It should not be left to individual Local Authorities to decide on such designation. There needs to be much clearer guidance on what criteria will be used (other than the percentage of recorded Gaelic speakers) and what such a designation would mean in real terms. We would like to know if there will be additional Government support for such areas and if they will be subject to different guidelines when it comes to decisions relating to inward investment, planning and education.

The proposal to put a duty on the Scottish Government to prepare a National Gaelic Strategy, which replaces the National Gaelic Plans is welcome, but with caveats. We would suggest that it should be a stated requirement that those developing a National Gaelic Strategy have knowledge of Language Policy and Planning. This is a specialist area, and should be acknowledged as such.

The proposal to give Scottish Ministers (the Government) more powers to put duties on public bodies to promote, facilitate and support Gaelic is welcomed, but we would strongly argue that more funding would be needed if this is to be effective.

Part 1 – Chapter 2 of the Bill

What are your views on these proposals?

In the proposed amendments to the Education (Scotland) Act 2016, the addition of section 6A and the requirement that Scottish Ministers promote Gaelic education is welcome, but we need to ensure that there is Gaelic education to promote. However, in Section 6A (b) there seems to be an implication that only Further Education provided by education authorities is to be promoted, facilitated and supported. As a college provider of Gaelic-medium education and Gaelic language learning we would suggest the addition of ‘and other recognised Further Education providers’ to this section.

The proposed substitution of “used” for “spoken” in Section 18 (2) (interpretation of Part 2) is not something that we would support, as it may be interpreted as promoting visibility (in such as signage) rather than actual community language usage.

We would support the proposal to give Scottish Ministers the power to set standards and produce guidance for public authorities in relation to Gaelic education.

In addition to the requirement that education authorities to support access to Gaelic medium education, we would propose that there must be a clear expectation that support includes positive promotion of Gaelic-medium education. Having a Gaelic Medium (GM) unit or school is not enough if GM education is not adequately explained or promoted.

We would support the proposed changes related to early learning and childcare. This very much aligns with what our own research has shown. UHI North, West and Hebrides is currently developing a Gaelic skills course for Early Years practitioners, which very much ties in with the aims outlined in this part of the Bill.

The aim of widening access to Gaelic education in further and higher education settings very much ties in with UHI North, West and Hebrides’ Gaelic Strategy, where we intend to embed Gaelic learning in a range of courses.

We do note, however, that there is very little detail in regard to promotion of Gaelic at Further Education level. The definition of ‘education authority’ as given in Section 135 (1) of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 [‘a council constituted under section 2 of the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994’] seems to carry the assumption that all Further Education activity is under Local Authority control, whereas this is not the case. More detail on the support to non-Local Authority Further Education providers, and how this will be ensured, including how it would be funded, would be welcomed.

The amendment to the Education (Scotland) Act 2016, with the addition of section 14A, is welcome, but, again, we would seek clarification in the Bill as to what this will mean for Further Education providers which are not under Local Authority control. We would also suggest the addition of the word ‘actively’ between “and” and “support” in 14A (a).

The proposed change to the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005, with the addition of section 9E, is welcomed.

Part 2 – Chapter 2 of the Bill

What are your views on these proposals?

We offer no views on Scots language promotion and support as part of this response.

General views on the Bill

The Bill's key aims are to promote Gaelic and Scots across Scotland.

The aims of the Bill – to promote Gaelic and Scots across Scotland - are laudable. The feasibility of achieving these aims without significant additional funding is, however, questionable.

'Promotion' of a minority language and 'strengthening' a minority language are two different things. Language awareness does not equate to language ability or language usage, and the latter two are what are needed for the strengthening of Gaelic and Scots within Scotland.

In our view, it would be better to have two separate Bills – one for Scots and one for Gaelic. Having both together under the one Bill risks muddying the waters and causing confusion.

Strengthening the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act of 2005, giving more weight to compliance and more focus on bolstering Gaelic in the areas where it is still a 'live' community language would have been more practical, and more realistic.

While the focus on Gaelic provision in schools is welcomed, the Bill needs to take into account that not all Gaelic learning is at this level, and that a significant amount is being done at post-school Further Education level or as part of adult/community learning and development.

In addition, the Bill needs to take cognisance of the fact that Gaelic learning is not just about language acquisition, but also about ensuring that Gaelic vernacular communities are strengthened and supported, so they will not diminish or disappear within a generation. Gaelic needs to be supported as a social and economic asset in Scotland. There are adult fluent Gaelic speakers who would welcome adult literacy classes in Gaelic, having been denied the opportunity to acquire literacy skills in school. There are many latent Gaelic speakers, who could be supported into Gaelic medium job roles, particularly in Gaelic medium early years, education and health and social care. This kind of activity promotes the use of Gaelic by increasing the confidence of the vernacular community, and is the kind of activity which UHI North, West and Hebrides is uniquely placed to support.