



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

DRAFT

Education, Children and Young People Committee

Wednesday 22 May 2024

Session 6



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EDUCATION, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE COMMITTEE
16th Meeting 2024, Session 6

CONVENER

*Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)

*Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab)

*Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green)

*Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con)

*Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)

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

*Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD)

*Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Douglas Ansdell (Scottish Government)

Claire Cullen (Scottish Government)

Kate Forbes (Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Pauline McIntyre

LOCATION

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)

Scottish Parliament

Education, Children and Young People Committee

Wednesday 22 May 2024

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:30]

Scottish Languages Bill: Stage 1

The Convener (Sue Webber): Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the 16th meeting in 2024 of the Education, Children and Young People Committee. We have apologies from Stephanie Callaghan.

Agenda item 1 is our final oral evidence session on the Scottish Languages Bill at stage 1. I welcome Kate Forbes, Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic; and, from the Scottish Government, Claire Cullen, head of Gaelic and Scots; Douglas Ansdell, team leader, Gaelic and Scots; Nico McKenzie-Juetten, lawyer, school education division, legal directorate; and Ninian Christie, lawyer, economy and social protection division, legal directorate. We will begin with a short opening statement from the Deputy First Minister.

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes): Mòran taing, agus madainn mhath a bhuill.

Tha e na urram mòr dhomh gun deach mo chur an dreuchd mar Rùnaire a' Chaibineit airson na h-Eaconamaidh agus Gàidhlig, a thuilleadh air na dleastanasan eile a th' agam. Tha uallach glè shònraichte aig Riaghaltas na h-Alba—
[*Interruption.*]

The Convener: I am sorry, Deputy First Minister, but we will have to pause, because the interpretation is not coming through.

Kate Forbes: Tha mi gu math duilich, ach tha sin ceart gu leòr.

09:31

Meeting suspended.

09:32

On resuming—

The Convener: We are back after that short suspension for a technical issue. We begin again with a statement from the Deputy First Minister.

Kate Forbes: Mòran taing, agus madainn mhath a bhuill.

Tha e na urram mòr dhomh gun deach mo chur an dreuchd mar Rùnaire a' Chaibineit airson na h-Eaconamaidh agus Gàidhlig, a thuilleadh air na dleastanasan eile a th' agam. Tha uallach glè shònraichte aig Riaghaltas na h-Alba gus Gàidhlig is Albais a ghleidheadh agus gus ath-bheothachadh a thoirt orra.

'S iad sin, cho math ri Beurla, na cànanan dùthchasach aig Alba a tha fhathast air am bruidhinn san latha an-diugh. Le bhith a' cur taic riutha, tha sinn a' cur taic ri snàithean bunaiteach de chultar is aithne-dùthcha na h-Alba.

Bidh iomairtean a thaobh poileasaidhean foghlaim, sòisealta agus eaconamach agus eile a' cur taic ris na coimhearsnachdan sa bheil iad gam bruidhinn agus ri neartachadh nan coimhearsnachdan sin. Cuideachd, chaidh a dhearbhadh iomadach uair gum bi leithid a dh'iomairtean a' cur ri brìgh is beairteas comann-sòisealta na h-Alba san fharsaingeachd: eadar foghlam, cultar agus an eaconamaidh. Le bhith a' cur fàilte air agus a' toirt taic do luchd-labhairt mhion-chànanan ann an Alba, tha sinn cuideachd a' brosnachadh ioma-chànanas agus daoine a bhith a' sealltainn spèis do chàch a chèile.

San dà ghinealach a dh'fhalbh, chunnacas adhartas nach beag airson na Gàidhlig an lùib foghlam, craoladh, leasachaidhean coimhearsnachd agus planadh cànan airson bhuidhnean. 'S e roinn mhion-chànain shoibheachail a th' ann am foghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig, taobh a-staigh siostam foghlaim na h-Alba, a bhios a' toirt oideachadh do sgoilearan bho air feadh a' chomainn-shòisealta.

Tha foghlam Gàidhlig airson luchd-ionnsachaidh a' toirt cothrom do sgoilearan ann am foghlam tro mheadhan na Beurla gus eòlas a chur air pàirt bunaiteach de chultar na h-Alba. Tha ionadan leithid Sabhal Mòr Ostaig san Eilean Sgitheanach, Cnoc Soilleir ann an Uibhist a Deas agus Ionad Chaluim Chille Ìle a' cur a' chànain air adhart agus a' cuideachadh le bhith a' neartachadh na h-eaconamaidh ann an coimhearsnachdan eileanach.

Mar thoradh air Achd na Gàidhlig (Alba) 2005, agus air obair Bòrd na Gàidhlig a chaidh a stèidheachadh fon achd, tha planadh airson na Gàidhlig a-nis mar phàirt cudromach de poileasaidhean poblach. Tha Bòrd na Gàidhlig air grunn phlanaichean nàiseanta na Gàidhlig ullachadh le cinn-uidhe choitcheann a bhios a' toirt stiùir dhan roinn phoblaich san obair aca gus an cànan a thoirt air adhart.

Tha grunn bhliadhnaichean air a bhith ann bho chaidh reachdas aontachadh gus taic a thoirt dhan Ghàidhlig agus tha cothrom againn a-nis beachdachadh air a' bhuaidh a tha air a bhith aig

Achd na Gàidhlig (Alba) 2005 agus Achd an Fhoghlaim (Alba) 2016 air cùisean.

Tha na cumhachan a thathar a' moladh sa bhile seo a' togail air reachdas is gnìomhan a th' ann mar-thà, agus e na amas gum bi taghadh ùr de chumhachdan nas èifeachdaiche ann a chuidicheas le bhith a' dèanamh adhartas, mar a tha a dhith, dhan Ghàidhlig.

Gu ruige seo, chan eil Albais air taic oifigeil fhaighinn tro reachdas. Ri linn mar a tha taic dhan chànan a' dol am meud, agus ar taic fhèin dhan chànan, tha an t-àm ann beachdachadh air nas urrainn dhuinn a dhèanamh a thaobh sin. Tha buidhnean leithid Ionad na h-Albais agus Faclairan na h-Albais air obair ionmholta a dhèanamh às leth a' chànan.

Tha iad air cur ris na th' ann de dh'Albais a gheibhear ann am foghlam, cultar, agus craoladh. Tha Bile nan Cànan Albannach a' togail air an obair sin leis an amas gum bi Albais nas follaisiche ann am beatha phoblach muinntir na h-Alba.

Tha na dùbhlain a tha ron Ghàidhlig agus ro Albais ro tòrr de chànanan na cruinne. San t-saoghal san latha an-diugh, tha mu eadar leth-cheud is naochad sa cheud den t-seachd mìle cànan a tha ga bruidhinn ann an cunnart a dhol a-mach à bith ro dheireadh na linne seo.

Tha an iomairt gus Gàidhlig is Albais a ghleidheadh is a chur air adhart mar phàirt de na h-oidhirpean air feadh an t-saoghail gus cànanan a chumail beò agus tha dleastanas sònraichte oirnn ann an Alba agus aig Riaghaltas na h-Alba a thaobh na h-iomairt sin.

Mòran taing, agus bidh mi a-nis a' bruidhinn sa Bheurla airson na comataidh.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

Good morning, members. It is a huge privilege to have been appointed as Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic, in addition to my other responsibilities.

The preservation and revival of Gaelic and Scots are the unique responsibility of the Scottish Government. Alongside English, they represent the historical native languages that are still spoken in the country today, and to support them is to support an essential part of Scottish culture and national identity.

Initiatives on behalf of the languages—in education, social and economic policy—strengthen and contribute to the development of the communities in which they are spoken. Those initiatives have repeatedly been proven to be to the general enrichment of Scottish society, whether that is in education, culture or the economy. Alongside welcoming and supporting

linguistic minorities within Scotland, we also advance the wider cause of multilingualism and tolerance.

In the past two generations, there has been major progress for Gaelic across the fields of education, broadcasting, community development and institutional language planning. Gaelic-medium education is a successful minority sector in the Scottish school system and educates pupils from across society.

Gaelic-learner education enables pupils in English-medium schooling to encounter an essential part of Scotland's culture. Centres such as Sabhal Mòr Ostaig on Skye, Cnoc Soilleir on South Uist and the Islay Gaelic Centre—Ionad Chaluim Chille Ìle—advance the language while also contributing to the economic regeneration of rural island communities.

The Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 and its work to create Bòrd na Gàidhlig made Gaelic language planning a key aspect of public policy. Successive national Gaelic plans, produced by Bòrd na Gàidhlig, have provided common goals towards which Scotland's public sector can work to advance the language.

It has been a number of years since legislation was passed in support of Gaelic, and now we have an opportunity to reflect on the impact, in practice, of the 2005 act and the Education (Scotland) Act 2016. The proposed provisions of the Scottish Languages Bill build on measures that are already in place, with the aim of making the new package of measures more effective for the progress that is needed for Gaelic.

Until now, the Scots language has not benefited from formal support from legislation. With growing support for the language, our commitment invites us to consider what we can do in that regard.

Individual bodies, such as the Scots Language Centre and Dictionaries of the Scots Language, have undertaken invaluable work on behalf of the language. Through that, they have increased the presence of Scots in education, culture and broadcasting. The bill builds on that work to further improve its representation in public life and make it more visible.

The challenges that are faced by Gaelic and Scots are faced by many of the world's languages. It is part of a global picture in which 50 to 90 per cent of the approximately 7,000 languages that are spoken in the world today are estimated to be at risk of extinction by the end of the present century. The initiative to preserve and advance Gaelic and Scots is part of wider efforts against global language loss, and it is an initiative for which Scotland and the Scottish Government have a unique responsibility.

I will now continue in English as I talk to the committee.

The Convener: We will move straight to questions from committee members.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): Good morning to the Deputy First Minister and your officials. I appreciated your opening statement. A lot of what you said was about work that is already going on. To what degree is the bill necessary to provide further support for Gaelic and Scots?

Kate Forbes: I see the bill as necessary, but it is not the full picture of what is required for our aims to revitalise and support Gaelic. The committee has taken extensive evidence but, in Gaelic communities, it has always been critical to have the language recognised publicly and legally and to have rights for speakers and for the language enshrined in law.

The bill comes almost 20 years after the 2005 act, which was a pivotal piece of legislation. It was absolutely critical and hugely exciting, and it stands to reason that, 20 years later, we should reflect on what else needs to be done legally.

The bill makes a clear statement about the legal recognition of Gaelic and Scots as languages of Scotland and it places requirements on the Scottish ministers to have an effective Gaelic strategy. It provides ministers with powers to specify standards and requirements for relevant public bodies, and it places a duty on relevant public bodies to have regard to promoting and supporting languages. It also deals with other areas, which I am sure that we will come on to and unpack. For example, it meets the commitment on establishing a Gàidhealtachd through the areas of linguistic significance.

That is my short answer on why the bill is essential, but—this will be a common theme in what I say this morning—I would not want anyone to think that the bill, in and of itself, provides everything that we need when it comes to the Government's aims. It is, however, a critical part of the package of work that is required.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Thank you. Some of the evidence that we have had has supported what you just said, but it has also been suggested that the bill represents incremental and quite slow progress. Professor McLeod said that it is important for us to think about “outcomes, not outputs”. What outcomes could not have been achieved administratively and through existing powers?

Kate Forbes: In responding to that question, I will make a number of points, the first of which is to do with the area of linguistic significance, which is really critical. That measure does not exist right

now, and it will allow a more joined-up approach to be taken to the work that is required.

Much progress has been made in the past 20 years, but the focus on Gaelic plans and on education has perhaps not always given due recognition to the importance of people and communities. At the end of the day, Gaelic thrives in a community, so acknowledging that, in a particular area, multiple agencies and bodies will be responsible and accountable to the community is one significant change.

I completely agree with what Professor McLeod said about outcomes—it is always about outcomes. In that regard, it seems quite important that we are discussing the issue after yesterday's publication of the census results, which indicated that there has been an overall increase in Gaelic skills. That is fantastic and should be celebrated. However, for the first time, Gaelic is now spoken by less than 50 per cent of people in the Western Isles, and that should be a wake-up call in relation to how we approach supporting such communities.

That is why it is essential for the bill to focus on outcomes. The outcome that I would like to see is a breadth and a depth of Gaelic. By breadth, I mean the number of speakers, and by depth, I mean the extent to which it is a living, breathing language. In other words, I want Gaelic to be not just an academic language of the classroom but a language that is used by people who work in communities—by plumbers, electricians, teachers, shopkeepers and so on. It is currently used in that way in communities, and we need to ensure that there is a community-wide approach to preserving the language.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: A report that you commissioned said that

“The needs of the Gaelic language must be considered more fully across all areas of public policy and all levers, current and future, should be utilised to better support the language”,

and the bòrd, the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education all agree that this should not be siloed to education. Do you know why your predecessors decided to make the bill an education bill? What new things does the bill introduce outwith education that will help the communities that you just described?

Kate Forbes: Traditionally, Gaelic policy has nearly always sat within education or culture. I am chuffed that I have responsibility for the economy and for Gaelic, because that gives it a new perspective. The report that you referred to, which I commissioned, was one of the first reports to look at how outcomes for Gaelic should be embedded in other policies, such as housing. Some of what we might call traditionally Gaelic

communities—if that is an acceptable phrase—are struggling with depopulation full stop. It stands to reason that Gaelic would be affected by that issue.

09:45

The report was produced by Arthur Cormack. His team looked at how Gaelic could be supported through economic and social measures, and the report referenced transport and housing. I am not aware of that kind of work having been done before, because Gaelic has traditionally been treated as an education issue.

Education is critical. When we are reviewing things, there can be a tendency to say, “Well, that worked, so now let’s focus on a different area.” Gaelic education has been an enormous success story. We see in the census figures that more than 50 per cent of young starters in primary 1 in the Western Isles are going into Gaelic-medium education.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Can I interrupt you, Deputy First Minister? I appreciate what you are saying, but do you think that it is disappointing that the bill does not include housing, transport or other issues in its scope?

Kate Forbes: The bill has to be focused; it should not say so much that it does not mean anything. I said earlier that the bill has a specific aim. I will take on board the committee’s feedback and what has come through the consultation, and I will look more broadly at other policy areas and think about how we could use transport or housing to further the policy aims, but I would be nervous about trying to make a bill do too much. It is an education bill because education is essential and because Gaelic has historically sat in the education brief.

The Convener: In your letter to the Finance and Public Administration Committee, you stated:

“By providing leadership, focus and priority across public bodies further progress can be made for Scotland’s languages.”

I note the careful use of “Scotland’s languages”, rather than the title of the bill in that. Is legislation needed in order to do that?

Kate Forbes: I think that legislation is needed. There has been a groundswell of support and there is an appetite for legislation that reinforces the responsibilities that public bodies and the Scottish ministers have. On the key point about communities, the policy for designating areas of linguistic significance does not currently exist. To that end, I think that legislation is required, but I will keep making the point that the legislation has a focused aim—we are not expecting it to do everything.

The Convener: You said that the bill has a focused aim, but many have come to the committee and told us that it is largely symbolic. What is your response to that?

Kate Forbes: I would not be content with a bill that is just symbolic. The protection that the bill will give the rights of a minority language is not just symbolic; it is very meaningful. Enshrining rights needs to lead to action. The actions of public bodies and communities will make the biggest difference.

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): Madainn mhath.

The Deputy First Minister will be aware that we have heard various opinions on the view that Gaelic is in crisis. Some people have found using the term “crisis” quite helpful to focus minds and shake things up a bit, although others have felt that it is unhelpful. What is your position on that?

We spoke about the census results. Is Gaelic in crisis in traditionally Gaelic speaking areas? Are we approaching the matter with enough urgency? How does the bill respond to that sense of urgency?

Kate Forbes: It is helpful to start with the data. I do not like reducing people or language to data, but the census figures show that, in the past 10 years, the number of people who have skills in Gaelic has increased by just over 43,000. That is tremendously good news. If those figures were going in the opposite direction, I would be giving you a very different response. If there had been a reduction of 43,000, we would be in crisis territory. That increase is incredible.

The challenge has always been around the areas in which Gaelic is a language of everyday use in the community—clearly, it is a language of everyday use in Glasgow and in Edinburgh in many families. From my perspective, that is part of the much broader issue of depopulation of our rural, coastal and island communities, of which we need to be conscious.

Secondly, a lot of action is being taken to reverse that. For example, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar has a Gaelic-first policy. That is already having an impact when it comes to the number of people starting Gaelic in P1, as I said. It has made a big difference.

I do not like the word “crisis”, but I do like the word “urgency”. The issue requires focus; it requires urgency; and it requires us all to decide whether we represent all of Scotland’s communities, including those that have minority languages.

Ruth Maguire: Thank you. That is helpful.

The 2017 Welsh language strategy has a timeframe up to 2050. Will you articulate the

Government's aims for Scots and Gaelic in the medium and long terms?

Kate Forbes: I followed what was happening in Wales closely long before I had this job. I recall a conversation with the then Welsh language minister, who said that their having ambitious targets and an ambitious deadline, as it were, had focused minds.

I am in two minds about targets. They can be quite dangerous, because they end up focusing a lot of money and attention on particular areas that might be successful but do not reveal the breadth of the issue. Ultimately, my aim is that we have a significant increase in the number of speakers, who will have depth of skills in the language. Having skills in Gaelic might be being able to say "Madainn mhath," or it might be the language being someone's heart language. My aim is to have a substantial increase year on year, and to stop depopulation of, and the reduction in Gaelic speakers in, more traditional communities.

Ruth Maguire: People's having some skills in Gaelic and Gaelic being a community language are different things, albeit that they are not completely separate, because one feeds into the other and helps the language to thrive. Has the Government spoken to communities about what success would look like for them and what their aims would be in the long term?

Kate Forbes: Yes. If officials want to come in on consultation of communities, they should feel free to do so. My understanding is that there has been extensive engagement, consultation and discussion. Often, those are done with community representatives, but we might have to do more in that way. I am certainly open to doing more.

You have had Conchúr Ó Giollagáin at committee. After his book was published, Alasdair Allan and I, in a non-Government capacity, did extensive engagement in communities. We had lots of village hall meetings in order to understand the issue. Interestingly, what came out through them was that people were looking for all the informal stuff that happens on the periphery. For example, they wanted to have for young people routes to work that still allows them to use the language or to be able to get public transport to a youth event where Gaelic could be used. Those peripheral things are important.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): My question follows on quite neatly from that point, because I am interested in how we are actually going to measure success and what the outcomes will look like.

You mentioned the census. It was interesting that the census indicated two directions of travel. On one hand, in places such as Glasgow there is significant growth in the number of children being

educated through the medium of Gaelic, so there is a growth in the number of people who are speaking Gaelic between 9 and 3 on school days. Some, but not all, of them will speak it when they go home, but they certainly will not speak it when they go to the shops or the youth club or when they are on the bus or are applying for a job.

However, as you pointed out, the last remaining majority Gaelic-speaking communities are now no longer majority Gaelic speaking, which means that how we measure success will be different across the country. What do you see as being the key measures of success from the Government's perspective?

Kate Forbes: The primary measure will be what is captured in the census. I do not know whether this exists already, but we might need to think about how to go beyond the idea of skills to survey the depth of language. That would be interesting. The Government should have targets for reversing depopulation in general, which I think would boost Gaelic.

The more concrete aim that I am conscious of is that some of the most critical agencies and organisations have their own targets. I think that the Government should have a target of ensuring that they meet their targets. For example, MG Alba has performance and viewing number targets for BBC Alba, Speak Gaelic has targets for Gaelic learning and Sabhal Mòr Ostaig has targets for student intake. Although it will be a movable feast, we could consider how to formalise the devolved and delegated targets and make them Government targets, because the risk of making targets that sit above all those is that they might undermine the targets that already exist in those organisations. Local authorities should also have targets for Gaelic-medium education in primary schools.

There may be work for us to do in formalising our commitment to support those organisations to meet their targets. If MG Alba meets its viewing targets, if Sabhal Mòr Ostaig meets its intake targets, if Speak Gaelic and local authorities meet their targets, we will be some way towards seeing census figures continue to increase.

Ross Greer: Should the bill include reporting provisions? I completely agree that having blunt national targets could undermine the more nuanced approach that is needed in different communities, but it is important to ensure that there is still a national focus and that there are requirements for Government to report to Parliament, even if that report is, as you indicated, essentially a consolidation of the efforts and outcomes of a range of other organisations. Would you be open to having reporting requirements? It would be a mistake to put too much specific detail into the bill, but could there be mechanisms or

ministerial powers to create reporting frameworks, so that we have something that allows for effective national scrutiny five, 10 or 15 years from now?

Kate Forbes: It is an excellent idea that we consider how to adapt what already exists. At the moment, Bòrd na Gàidhlig has to report to ministers and Parliament. Your point about scrutiny is well made. If the committee has some good ideas in its stage 1 report about how to establish that scrutiny and to make it slightly broader by saying what should be reported, I would be very open to that.

10:00

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Good morning, cabinet secretary. In response to Ross Greer, you talked about the importance of outcomes. Comunn na Gàidhlig has suggested that a powerful and meaningful interim target ought to be 90 per cent of children who enter GME being functionally fluent when they leave secondary school. What is your view of that? Should the concept of functional fluency apply to Scots, too? If so, how is functional fluency assessed if Scots is a category incorporating numerous significantly different dialects?

Kate Forbes: I think that the figure should be 100 per cent—

Liam Kerr: Noted.

Kate Forbes: —in terms of young people leaving Gaelic-medium education. I am a product of Gaelic-medium education, and I did quite well in my advanced higher Gaelic exam, but I would not count myself as being native fluent in that regard.

For me, an aim and an objective should be to try to ensure that children are excelling. However, that speaks to the bigger challenge, which is that genuine fluency has to happen outside the classroom. It is all about the opportunities that a person has through youth work, fun, family and then on to employment.

As English speakers, we all know that fluency in academic terms alone is not always sufficient to ensure that a young person continues with that fluency throughout the rest of their lives, to perhaps pass it on to the next generation. I absolutely agree with CnaG and its aim of 90 per cent functional fluency—although I would like it to be 100 per cent.

Liam Kerr: Do you mean for both Scots and Gaelic?

Kate Forbes: I mean for Scots and Gaelic. The principle applies to Scots, too, does it not? One can demonstrate academic and functional ability to read, write and speak a language, but for it to be a living language, it has to come into use across life.

Therefore, the responsibility on us—indeed, on all of us—is to bring languages to life beyond the classroom. There are a lot of great initiatives for Gaelic that could be replicated in Scots—if they do not already exist in Scots—with regard to youth work and ensuring that a young person does not have to switch to English to access services, leisure facilities and so on. That is what brings fluency.

Liam Kerr: A thought occurs to me based, in particular, on your opening remarks. You mentioned that your job title includes the economy and Gaelic. Are those aspects exclusive or related? If we assume that they are related, what are the implications of excluding Scots from your title, and what economic outcomes would teaching Scots achieve?

Kate Forbes: I do not think that that will have any implications, as it were, for Scots. Obviously, the bill is pretty important for legal recognition of Scots, so it is not exclusive. After all, if ministerial titles referenced everything that we were responsible for, they would be quite lengthy.

What was the second part of your question again?

Liam Kerr: On the assumption that your economy and languages briefs are related, what economic outcomes do you project from teaching of Scots?

Kate Forbes: The economic outcomes are thriving, prosperous and happy communities. Language is embedded in community—there is no community without language. We can often make arguments, which I think are important, about the economic contribution of Scots or Gaelic, because clearly they have an impact on tourism, on all the heritage industries and on the Scottish economic brand. They have a huge economic impact. However, I am a lot more interested in what is happening at grass-roots level.

When you have communities that are able to work, live and access public services in their language of choice, that is meaningful for the economy. If you think of some of the communities where those languages—

Liam Kerr: With respect, in what way is that meaningful for the economy? Will you quantify that? You have a reputation for being all over the economy piece, so you must have given some thought to the economic output of taking those measures.

Kate Forbes: I will quantify that. If you take the Western Isles and their depopulation as a result of a lot of different drivers—

Liam Kerr: Forgive me, cabinet secretary, I realise that I am interrupting you, but I asked specifically about Scots. We have a great focus—

rightly so, in many ways—on Gaelic, but we do not hear so much about Scots. Therefore, I am asking specifically about the Scots provisions and the economy.

Kate Forbes: Such things are very difficult to quantify. It has been done for Gaelic through the work of Highland and Islands Enterprise on quantifying the impact of Gaelic on the economy. It could be done for Scots. I do not know whether the impact has been quantified for Scots—I am not aware that it has been. I think that the impact would be substantial in relation to the industries that I have referenced but, with respect, I am suggesting that, although it is a laudable question, it is not really the main point when it comes to pledging support and offering legal rights to communities with minority languages.

Ruth Maguire: Will you reflect on the inclusion and fairness aspect of people having their first language legally recognised? For Scots in particular, there can be snobbery—for want of a better word—around it. When that is taken away, and the language is given equal status, it is not just about fairness for the individual but about having access to all the talents out there and everyone being able to do their bit and their best.

Kate Forbes: There is extensive academic research that confirms that, for a community to feel that its Government has its best interests at heart, recognising its language really matters. It is not just about the past and recognising the literature, the heritage and the culture that encapsulate the language, but about the present and the future, and feeling that you do not have to switch to English in your nation of birth in order to access public services.

The bottom line is that if Scotland cannot recognise its own languages it is unlikely that anyone else will. We have a moral duty to recognise them legally, but more than that, we have a moral duty to support, recognise and protect the speakers. As I have said, if people cannot depend on the Scottish Government to do that, who can they depend on?

The Convener: Michelle Thomson, thank you for your patience. It is over to you now.

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): Good morning. Deputy First Minister, thank you for doing your opening statement in Gaelic—I really appreciate that.

I will follow on from Ruth Maguire's question before I move on to my substantive questions. In your opinion, to what extent is this a framing bill, rather than a framework bill, that enables advancement of culture, recognition and, arguably, reward, particularly when you look at the early-stage pulling together of all the different Scots that we have?

Kate Forbes: That is an interesting question, because, with a bill on language, we will always struggle to know what to exclude. I suppose that it is maybe a daft comparison in some people's eyes, but if you had an English language bill, what would you include and what would you exclude? You would want to include everything under the sun, because you live your life through English. Everything comes into that—how you access public services, how you learn and study and so on. The same challenge applies to a Gaelic or Scots language bill.

I caveat that by saying that I am very interested in what the committee comes back with. I am certainly not closed to any recommendations that the committee might make and would value them. What we have chosen to put in the bill means that it could be seen as a framing bill, but it has a specific focus on elements such as Gaelic-medium education and Gaelic language plans. It also has legal recognition of Scots—we have gone through that. However, it means that the bill has an opportunity to take into account the committee's feedback.

Claire Cullen (Scottish Government): My understanding is that the bill is defined as an education bill because of which committee the Parliament sent it to as the lead committee for consideration. Although the bill has many provisions that relate to education and deals specifically with Gaelic-medium education and the textual amendments to the relevant acts, it also touches on wider areas. The strategy and standards can move outside of education. For example, HIE, Creative Scotland and VisitScotland all have Gaelic language plans and are already acting positively for Gaelic. My understanding is that the framing of the bill for parliamentary consideration is such that the lead committee is the Education, Children and Young People Committee but that does not necessarily mean that the whole context is education.

Michelle Thomson: Thank you for that clarification. That is very helpful, Claire.

Unsurprisingly, I will ask a couple of questions about the financial memorandum—I have snuck in in disguise from the Finance and Public Administration Committee. A number of witnesses have expressed concerns about the financial memorandum and, specifically, the fact that there is limited extra resource for Gaelic and none for Scots. I fully accept the fiscal challenges that we have, but does that fact worry you at all, Deputy First Minister? I appreciate that you are relatively new in role, but will you want to have a further look at that?

Kate Forbes: I have been spending some time trying to understand the process that the bill has been through and some of the decisions that have

been made. As you said, there is a challenging environment. The overall final cost is £694,000, but I would expect there to be a process to understand where any additional costs can be absorbed because of a refocus on different areas and where additional funding might be required.

You will be aware, perhaps, that broadcasting is a reserved area. A lot of work is going on at the moment in the House of Lords on amendments to the Media Bill to give BBC Alba and MG Alba equity with Welsh-language broadcasting. Welsh-language broadcasting has tens of millions of pounds, whereas Gaelic broadcasting is, in the words of the sector, on a shoestring budget.

I suggest that the financial memorandum alone is not the sum of all money that needs to be brought in to meet our objectives when it comes to Gaelic.

Michelle Thomson: I do not want to take over the role of the finance committee, which will examine the FM, but I have a follow-on question. Public bodies must have regard to Gaelic and Scots under the bill. Will that pull in other public bodies to expend some effort in some capacity? To what extent are you certain that all that potential, in terms of having regard to, is reflected thus far in the FM?

Kate Forbes: Will you clarify your last few words?

Michelle Thomson: If all public bodies need to “have regard to” Gaelic and Scots, to what extent is that reflected in the FM?

Kate Forbes: Got you; yes, I understand. I would expect public bodies—particularly in the areas of linguistic significance—to pay due regard to Gaelic and I would perhaps expect that of public bodies that were not otherwise doing that. I do not see that as a significant additional cost. For example, if you think of a responsibility on a public body to have staff who can answer queries on Gaelic, it might be that, in that area, there are already Gaelic speakers working in the organisation. That would be the case, more likely than not, in the Western Isles. Therefore, where there are responsibilities on public bodies, I would expect them to consider what that means for them.

10:15

Michelle Thomson: In some respects, that brings out the counterpoint that, if public bodies are properly having regard to Gaelic, that should, if they are going through that process in good faith, determine where they do not have exactly that example. They would then need to make provision for that, which could mean incurring extra costs. That demonstrates the point of part of my question. You can give a brief answer just now,

but that is the sort of thing that, in its scrutiny, as appropriate, the finance committee will want to tease out.

Kate Forbes: I think that the point is that nearly all those public bodies are already producing Gaelic-language plans. They are already engaged in work to consider the requirements on them under the current legislation and to respond to those. Therefore, there is already a legal requirement on many, if not all, of them. Douglas, do you want to say more about what public bodies are already required to do, because that is quite important in relation to where there might be additional costs?

Douglas Ansdell (Scottish Government): I will just add that the current structure has put expectations and a dynamic framework in place. There is spend by public bodies and local authorities that is the result of a local decision by that body or authority and that might not be the result of a legal expectation. There is a dynamic movement: local decisions are being taken and funding is increasing from local authorities and public bodies, which is all very welcome. Of course, we understand the points that are being made.

The Convener: I do not want to go back, but I still want to ask a question about the letter that you sent in response to the Finance and Public Administration Committee on the shifting and repurposing of funds. In that, you refer to

“a wider, dynamic approach which takes into account local prioritisation and developing provision, current statutory expectations and resulting activity and new provision resulting from the Scottish Languages Bill.”

I thought that that was quite some sentence. Forgive me, but I was not quite certain what that was trying to tease out and clarify. It would be helpful if you could talk to me a bit more about that.

Kate Forbes: That goes back to part of the conversation that we have just had. In a local authority area or a public body, decisions are already being made. As an example, Highlands and Islands Enterprise will already make decisions on what role it has with regard to Gaelic. There will already be some expenditure. I know that the committee had representatives from HIE here earlier. It already makes those decisions, precisely because of the economic opportunities that come from Gaelic. Therefore, I think that the bill is doing a number of things. It is refining what those responsibilities are, but we are not in 2004, when, for the first time ever, we were suddenly expecting public bodies to have due regard to Gaelic—they already do.

The same goes for Highland Council, which I am intimately acquainted with. Highland Council

has a number of Gaelic-medium units and schools. The elected representatives there will make decisions about how to spend their budget. A number of new schools are currently spending money on expanding provision in Fort William and Inverness.

The Scottish Government is not always calling the shots, as it were, and making demands of those organisations. Those organisations make the decisions right now, off the back of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005, and they often go further because they see an economic, social or educational opportunity. The point that I am trying to make is that there is not a massive suite of new requirements and regulations as though those public bodies are not, in many cases, already doing work that is important. It gives it a legal backing. Does that make sense?

The Convener: I will bring in Liam Kerr on that thread.

Liam Kerr: If I am reflecting properly, you seem to be saying that, in regard to Gaelic, we are not in 2004, when we were expecting local authorities to have due regard to Gaelic—

Kate Forbes: For the first time.

Liam Kerr: Yes. That was done 20 years ago. However, the bill brings in a due regard for Scots. Therefore, the cost that was incurred 20 years ago for Gaelic will now be incurred for Scots, will it not? That goes to Michelle Thomson's point that the bill creates new costs.

Kate Forbes: If you look at what the requirements are for Scots, you will see that the bill places a duty on the Scottish ministers and education authorities to

“promote ... and support Scots language education in schools.”

Take that as an example. Some of that will probably be happening already, if you recall your primary school years and what you may have had to read, or not read—I do not know—

Liam Kerr: It was a long time ago.

Kate Forbes: I can imagine. *[Laughter.]* That was not meant to be—

Liam Kerr: It is lucky that we are friends, is it not?

Kate Forbes: I know, it is.

Some of that work will be on-going, but there is a commitment in the bill to just under £700,000. There is a recognition that there will be some new costs in terms of pivoting work away. I do not know whether anybody else wants to say anything about the process of coming to the financial memorandum.

Douglas Ansdell: We could add that very important things are going on in the Scots language sector. There is significant publishing and there are arts developments. The Scottish Qualifications Authority is very involved in supporting Scots language awards and Scots language units. Recently, we supported the launch of the Open University support materials for Scots language teachers, which were produced by the Open University and Education Scotland. Well over 100 teachers signed up for that. Progress is being made—funding is in place and important developments are under way.

Kate Forbes: From the committee's perspective, this is where our interest lies. We cannot have both counts—that the bill does not do much and that it is very expensive—at the same time. For me, when it comes to Scots, what is critical is the legal recognition and legal backing of a lot of what is happening already, while, hopefully, pushing it further in terms of preparing a strategy for Scots. That is the requirement. Work will be done to prepare that strategy and at that point I am sure that there may be further discussions about finances and what Government may or may not be able to do as an outcome of that strategy. Regarding the bill, however, its requirements have been costed accordingly, but I hear the committee's feedback and the feedback from consultees in terms of the financial asks.

The Convener: Deputy First Minister, we have spoken about the number of public bodies that have Gaelic language plans, but there are far more than 57 public bodies across Scotland that will be expected to have a Gaelic language plan. Surely that is a resource need and a pressure on those organisations that has not been considered.

Kate Forbes: I will make a couple of points on that. First, if there is a legal duty on a body to produce a Gaelic language plan, that will need to be considered. Clearly, that will be considered as part of budgeting processes.

Secondly, I am a lot more interested in what those public bodies are actively doing rather than them just producing plans for the sake of producing plans. The scrutiny is on what those public bodies are doing already.

My last point is that the real focus is on the areas of linguistic significance. Bòrd na Gàidhlig will also have provisions when it comes to its role in supporting public bodies in terms of providing advice, assistance and so on.

There are three quick answers on that.

The Convener: I like a wee quick answer. We move now to Willie Rennie.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I want to focus on the community development of the Gaelic

language. The tone of your comments today is interesting compared with what we have heard previously. You said earlier that there was a danger of doing too much in the bill and that it needs to be focused, and you have talked about refining it. However, many of the previous witnesses have been completely underwhelmed by the bill. We have dug for answers on practical things that it seeks to change and we get vague, general answers on things that could, in reality, be done now, including on areas of linguistic significance. There is nothing to prevent authorities from doing those things now. The census results that were published yesterday show—you have alluded to this—that the numbers of those speaking Gaelic is increasing in the central belt and decreasing in traditional areas such as the Western Isles. On Gaelic, the bill is not good enough, is it?

Kate Forbes: On Gaelic, it is important, but it is not the full story. I was speaking to officials who have counted that, across the different Gaelic organisations, there are about 50 community workers with a mission of Gaelic revitalisation and support. I confess to being quite surprised by that number. My question was whether there is any form of unity and consistency in approach and objectives. That work strikes me as being important when it comes to the community. It does not need legal backing, because it is already happening. It is being done well, and it is happening on a very devolved basis in different organisations.

I do not think that legal routes are the primary or only route to revitalisation. The bill is critical because, if there are no legal rights or legal backing, it is a lot more difficult to get, for example, public bodies to do the things that we want them to do. I do not think that we can ignore that. However, I will maybe come back to the committee at some point, if you are still interested, and talk about what is happening more generally on housing, social interventions and work opportunities, because that is where the real excitement and potential exist.

The bill cannot be dismissed. It has to be part of the picture, and I think that, if you speak to those who are heavily invested in the bill, they will say that having the legal backing matters. When people engage with a public body and they want to be able to access a service in Gaelic, they either have the right to do that or they do not, and they want the right to do it. We cannot dismiss the legal underpinning of that work.

Willie Rennie: That is a good answer. I want to hear that you are going to do more, because you have previously talked about crisis. Do you envisage coming back to us with a new plan on,

perhaps, housing, tax and some other areas of investment?

Kate Forbes: I still have to respond formally to the piece of work that was done by the short-life working group on economic and social opportunities for Gaelic, which is a mouthful. It contains some brilliant recommendations, as you will know if you have seen it—I am sure that you have. I intend to respond formally to that, and I think that that response will capture a lot of the stuff that you are interested in.

Willie Rennie: You would dismiss Professor Ó Giollagáin's comments that the bill is not good enough and that, in effect, we should scrap the Gaelic elements of it.

Kate Forbes: I would not dismiss anybody's comments and I will not dismiss the committee's report either. I will read it with interest. I will review all the comments that have been made by those who have given evidence, and I intend to meet them personally to discuss the matter, including Professor Ó Giollagáin.

10:30

Willie Rennie: I am a bit confused by that. You have said that the bill is important, but you are also saying that his remarks that the Gaelic bits of the bill should be removed—

Kate Forbes: I do not agree with them, but I think that you can meet people without necessarily—

Willie Rennie: Okay, so you are maybe not dismissing them. What are your comment on Professor Ó Giollagáin's remarks, then?

Kate Forbes: I have a lot of respect and admiration for the work that he has done and for the way that he has almost escalated the discussion about Gaelic. He makes extremely pertinent points about supporting traditional communities, because, if we look at this historically, we see that, where the frontier has receded, the language has never come back to those communities. It is a very relevant point, and I think that the census figures concentrate the mind in that regard.

The question, then, is what we do about that. We could all spend for ever and a day in this room talking about whether we should use the word "crisis" and diagnosing the problem. I actually want to solve the problem, and that requires action. It requires legislation, too, but it requires more than that. I am thinking about every intervention that we as politicians make; we all know that legislation is important in underpinning activity, but it does not solve entirely all the economic and social problems that we wrestle with.

Willie Rennie: I have a final question about the areas of linguistic significance. When I arrive on the ferry at Lochboisdale, what will I feel is different?

Kate Forbes: I hope that you will hear Gaelic being spoken the minute you step off the boat, because it is a living, breathing language for those individuals. It remains living and breathing, because when they go into a local shop, go to church or whatever, they do whatever they do in Gaelic. They feel that they can live their lives entirely through the medium that they choose to live in. That is the difference that I hope you will see.

I favour a local-led process. It is not for me to tell the Western Isles what or what not to do, but I am very supportive of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's Gaelic first approach in some policy areas. Indeed, I support it when it comes to everything that you see.

Willie Rennie: What is stopping people doing that now?

Kate Forbes: They could do a lot of that just now, but we are reflecting on the fact that more needs to be done and that work needs to be accelerated and given much greater focus. In the past year, there has been a lot more focus on the community work that Bòrd na Gàidhlig and other community groups do, and the areas of linguistic significance will allow us to think through where those key Gaelic communities are and what a network looks like. How can we support the community work more than we do right now, and what is Bòrd na Gàidhlig's role in supporting it? Bòrd na Gàidhlig has been extremely good at doing a lot of the education work; I think that the community work should be of equal standing, but to do community work, you need to recognise the community. There needs to be an identifiable community.

The Convener: We have been talking a little bit about the areas of linguistic significance, Deputy First Minister, and we would perhaps have some enhanced expectations with regard to the duties to support Gaelic in areas that get such a designation. Why, therefore, is there no additional funding to accompany that, and what incentives or risks might there be for a local authority in making such a designation? Has that been considered?

Kate Forbes: I would make two points. First, a financial memorandum is obviously not a budget—we will still have a budget bill every year. The financial memorandum indicates what we expect the costs to be, and the team have identified £694,000 as what they believe to be the additional costs. That does not mean that, embedded within that, there will be requirements on organisations

and bodies to pivot their work to focus on certain areas and perhaps to focus less on others.

However, committee members know—because they will be scrutinising it—that in every budget there will be discussions about what we can do, irrespective of the bill. Even if the bill did not exist, there would be discussions about how much funding Bòrd na Gàidhlig should get. I hear regular calls from across the public sector for more funding at a time of extremely constrained public finances.

The Convener: You have spoken about where funding for Gaelic provision may or may not be. Are you hoping to consolidate that and have a bigger-picture view of the total spend on Gaelic and how it all comes together?

Kate Forbes: We have that already. If that information is not being provided to the committee, we can see what more we can provide.

In terms of the overall spend on Gaelic, funding goes to the Bòrd na Gàidhlig, and funding is given to MG Alba, which I have talked about already. There is also funding for Sabhal Mòr Ostaig and Stòrlann Nàiseanta na Gàidhlig, and there is other Gaelic development work. Indirect capital also goes to Gaelic. There is funding for Gaelic schools, and there are specific grants that go through local authorities for Gaelic schools.

There is not only one line of funding for Gaelic to allow us to see the full funding package—although that can be drawn out. There is also all the funding that is distributed through schools and so on, and I hasten to add, through broadcasting. The Media Bill, which is progressing through the Houses of Parliament in Westminster, is key. Welsh language television and broadcasting get their financial support from the United Kingdom Government, because broadcasting is reserved, and equity with Welsh is being sought.

The Convener: You spoke earlier about the bill coming to the education committee, but the bill is about much more than education. That is what I am picking through.

Michelle Thomson: On a point of accuracy, you are right about what you said about Gaelic, but there is no funding provision at all for Scots, which is one of the concerns that was mentioned. I just wanted to put that on the record.

Kate Forbes: We already give some additional funding for Scots.

The Convener: The witnesses that we had from the Scots Language Centre said that they would seek more funding but that they did not want it to be on the basis of that money coming from the Gaelic provision. They did not want to rob Peter to pay Paul.

For Gaelic, there is the designation of areas of linguistic significance for different communities and for geographical communities—such as South Uist—and perhaps there can be a community of interest in larger cities, so why is there not similar provision for Scots language in the bill?

Kate Forbes: I will take that away. The bill gives Scots legal recognition, but there is an appetite and an ambition for Scots. The committee has had recommendations and ideas on what more we could do for Scots, and I am keen to listen, engage and see what else we can do.

The Convener: What impact would being an area of linguistic significance have on existing community planning processes? You have spoken about the depth of things, but how would local, regional and national public bodies operate differently as a result of being designated as an area of linguistic significance?

Kate Forbes: The idea is that, where a community is identified as a key Gaelic community, there would be a responsibility on Bòrd na Gàidhlig and on other bodies to support the language and its speakers, and to enhance the service that they give to Gaelic speakers.

I am most interested in the community work that goes on. We are obviously conscious of the formalised role of the state and the work that it does through legislation. However, under the bill, Bòrd na Gàidhlig—it tries to do this already, and it does an excellent job—would be required to support and give advice to people and organisations who are keen to embark on community initiatives or to support Gaelic language use in those communities. It is a far more grass-roots approach than just looking at the formal public bodies.

Ruth Maguire: I will stay with the topic of areas of linguistic significance. Under the bill, local authorities will have the power to instigate designation. We have spoken about Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's good work on Gaelic first. There are perhaps examples of other local authorities that are not being as supportive of Gaelic but have, traditionally, Gaelic-speaking communities in their area. Bearing in mind that success for the language is related to community thriving, would you be open to amending the bill to have community-led designation, not just local authority-led designation?

Kate Forbes: I am sympathetic to exploring that, as it would emphasise the grass-roots approach. There is something quite powerful about things coming from within a community.

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): Good morning to you and all your officials, Deputy First Minister. I want to move to the area of Gaelic-medium education, which is

covered in sections 11 to 25 in chapter 2 of the bill. We heard evidence about the challenges that parents who seek Gaelic-medium education face. I have Edinburgh's GME primary school in my constituency and I used to work at Edinburgh's GME secondary school before I was elected. Could, and should, the process for parents who seek Gaelic-medium education be simplified?

Kate Forbes: Parents already have a legal right to access Gaelic-medium education. I am keen to explore what the current hurdles are to simplifying the process further in some areas. My understanding is that we do a lot to make it as easy as possible to access GME. Do you have any particular hurdles in mind?

Ben Macpherson: There is the hurdle of capacity, which is challenged in a growing city such as Edinburgh.

Kate Forbes: It is a nice problem to have. Your point about Edinburgh could be echoed in Inverness and Fort William, which is precisely why we are working to expand provision.

I ask Claire to come in on what we are doing to expand capacity.

Claire Cullen: As you will be aware, the Education (Scotland) Act 2016 provides the right for parents to ask for Gaelic-medium education and places a requirement on the education authority to go through the process of considering whether there is demand in their area. We are trying to take a number of measures to remove the barriers that were mentioned when we consulted and visited various communities in urban and rural areas.

We are extending that right to ask for GME to early learning and childcare provision, so that the question about GME could be asked when a parent is thinking of enrolling their child in ELC in an education authority. There is already a duty on education authorities to go out every couple of years and ask people in their community what sort of ELC they want and where; that duty is imposed on the authorities to help them plan, so that the services that they design are appropriate to the needs.

At the moment, there is no requirement for them to ask about language—we are aware of circumstances in which that exercise has been carried out but no one has been asked what language they would like their ELC to be in, and that was in Gaelic-speaking areas. One of the provisions in the bill seeks to ensure that that question is being asked, given that that exercise is already being done.

The other element that we hope will help to effect change relates to education delivery planning. Under section 18, an education authority

that has a Gaelic language plan can be asked to include in that plan what kind of Gaelic-medium education it intends to deliver and where. That will provide a greater level of certainty and awareness of what will be made available and where it will be available.

10:45

We are also making changes to transport and to catchment to require local authorities to designate catchment areas. That will mean that there will be a bit more certainty in that, where there is a school, or a unit within a school, that is providing GME, a catchment area will be established for the GME provision.

In Edinburgh, where Crois na Cise—Tollcross—primary school used to provide the Gaelic-medium education, pupils who wanted to receive GME there would have been dealt with through placing requests, whereas the catchment area for Tollcross would have been quite a small area. That requirement has been in the statutory guidance for education since 2017. Highland Council, the City of Edinburgh Council and Glasgow City Council have done exercises to specify catchment areas, which normalises and equalises access rights. There are a number of different provisions in part 2 of the bill that are designed to act on that.

Ben Macpherson: Please correct me if I am wrong, but my understanding is that, at the moment, a parent has a right to ask for Gaelic-medium education for their child, but there is not a right for it to be provided. In the evidence that we have heard, calls have been made for there to be a right to Gaelic-medium education. I am absolutely sympathetic to the ambition to establish such a right, but I think that, in legislating in this Parliament, we need to be increasingly mindful of the need to ensure that we create rights that can be realised. I pose that as an issue that needs to be considered when capacity is a challenge.

Claire Cullen: You are absolutely right that the 2016 act provides a right to ask. It provides a system for that, but the burden on parents is quite heavy in that it requires them to find five children in the same year group who want to receive Gaelic-medium education. It is a relatively cumbersome process, and that is certainly something that we can look at again. At the moment, we have provided a power to change the number of five for areas of linguistic significance and/or other areas, so we could potentially put in a bit more nuance there.

Again, we are grappling with the demand. An education authority's duty to provide education is limited by the requirement for that education to be "adequate and efficient" for its area. All those

provisions knit together, but there is not an outright right to education through the medium of Gaelic.

We are not aware of any other rights to have education that are not qualified in some way. That is the case even in Wales. There are parts of Wales where the only provision is through the medium of Welsh, and there are Welsh-medium education schools.

Kate Forbes: I apologise, but that is what I meant to say: when I said that parents had a right to access Gaelic-medium education, I missed out "to ask"—they have a right to ask for that.

Ben Macpherson: Absolutely.

Earlier, you spoke about the overall ambition. Do you think that the bill will support Gaelic-medium education pupils having wider opportunities to use Gaelic in their homes and communities? How will it increase what you described as the breadth and the depth of Gaelic?

Kate Forbes: I think that the bill will get us closer to that. Engaging in intensive community work in particular localities is more likely to get us there, and that is what the bill seeks to do. When it comes to the choices that people make about what language they speak, those choices are nearly always made in response to their environment, whether that is their home, their school or where they do their leisure activities. If there are environments in which it is instinctive for people to use Gaelic, they will continue to use Gaelic, and they will have the depth of fluency that Liam Kerr asked about.

That is why I think it starts and ends with community—we all live in a community, and our lives revolve around the community. The bill is trying to get more of a focus on that. The bill makes some changes to education, which is important, because school is at the heart of community, but more than that, it relates to communities.

We have to get it right. The bill creates the legal pathway, but how something is ultimately delivered is what makes the difference. If we have a community that feels more empowered to access help, advice and support, and if we can give people who are already trying to battle for that a bit more of a leg up, we can get there.

In the forefront of my mind are the communities in my constituency, such as Staffin. It is very similar to what I described already; however, until a couple of years ago, the guy in the local grocery store would have just instinctively responded in Gaelic, but that has probably changed even in the past few years because of changing personnel. We need to reclaim that.

Ben Macpherson: I will touch on another issue. There was a discussion about the economy

earlier. One of the benefits that I know about from my constituency work is that young people who learn Gaelic also develop skills that help them to learn a number of other languages, which not only gives them the benefit of learning Gaelic but enables them to learn more languages, which in turn helps with their economic contribution and the opportunities available to them later on. In considering young people learning languages more widely, should education authorities prioritise Gaelic as a modern language over other modern languages, or not?

Kate Forbes: I am very supportive of what Comhairle nan Eilean Siar has done, which has led to tangible results in terms of young people opting for Gaelic. I think that parents are voting with their feet, and that is why there is such demand across different local authority areas. Local authorities have a duty to reflect on and recognise that.

When it comes to the responsibilities on local authorities, there will be a lot of parents who want English-medium education, but they also have the right to choose an education in their language of choice. It is about getting a balance, but there are some local authority areas in which there are communities of large numbers of speakers, such as the Western Isles, the Highlands and Argyll and Bute, for which I generally favour a more Gaelic first approach.

Ben Macpherson: In our evidence, we heard feedback on higher education. Will the Government use the powers under the bill to improve the provision of Gaelic-medium further and higher education?

Kate Forbes: Yes, because it needs to go all the way through and we need to see education as a whole. It is not sufficient to have large numbers going through primary school and then dropping off in secondary 4 and 5. We want people to go right through primary, secondary and higher or further education and to take up the opportunities to continue to study the language. However, I am also of the view that we should not get so hung up on higher and further education that we forget the other opportunities for work and apprenticeships through the language. Otherwise, the danger is that Gaelic becomes an academic language of people who have studied it to a high degree; whereas, for a living and modern language, it needs to be used in whatever capacity people find themselves.

Ben Macpherson: In relation to employment and the workplace, you could apply that same argument to Scots.

Kate Forbes: Absolutely.

Ben Macpherson: No more questions from me, convener.

The Convener: Deputy First Minister, you spoke a bit earlier about issues with capacity, but it is not always about the buildings and the space in the classrooms. How will the Government monitor where the availability of Gaelic-speaking staff prevents public bodies from developing their Gaelic provision? As we have heard, that goes from early learning all the way through to subject choices in secondary education. How are you looking to monitor that and to support development?

Kate Forbes: There is a lot of work to attract people in, which my colleagues can speak about if you want. We monitor the number of people who are teaching through Gaelic medium and the number of people who would be able to teach through Gaelic medium but are currently not teaching through Gaelic.

I can share the figures. The number of people who are able to teach through Gaelic at the primary level is 418; the number of those who are currently teaching through Gaelic is 266. For secondary, 183 are able to teach through Gaelic, and 121 are currently doing so. There is an opportunity there. Where you work and what you do is entirely a personal choice, but it is a matter of making Gaelic-medium education an attractive place to work and of attracting as many people as possible who are able to teach in Gaelic to do so.

The Convener: That is the education provision. For other public bodies, I would refer back to the point about depth that you were discussing.

Kate Forbes: Do you mean just in education terms—in relation to additional support and so on?

The Convener: If we draw parallels with additional support for learning and the entire lifelong learning experience, you have the teacher numbers in your pack, and you are monitoring those, obviously, but what about those other things that will help to drive the upswell that you are looking for?

Kate Forbes: For people working more generally ?

The Convener: Yes.

Kate Forbes: There are two parts to that—and Claire Cullen should feel free to come in. The first is creating the opportunities in the public sector; secondly, there is the question of creating opportunities to work with employers in the private sector, too—and some employers are doing that actively by creating a Gaelic-medium environment for work.

Douglas Ansdell: One of the good effects of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 and what followed it is the creation of Gaelic language plans and the appointment of Gaelic language officers to implement and support them. Many

local authorities and public bodies throughout the country that have Gaelic plans will also have Gaelic language officers employed and supported within them. That is a good effect.

Claire Cullen: I refer to the letter that we sent, following up on Ruth Maguire's question during the 1 May evidence session, which I think has now been published on the Parliament website. It sets out a number of measures being taken in response to the education elements, including in relation to early learning practitioners, language assistants and the bursary for teachers to encourage them in. There are also measures there that can equally apply to the workforce more generally, such as the language-learning courses that are available through Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, in Glasgow and at the University of the Highlands and Islands.

One of the successes that we have recently put in place has been to have guidance from the Student Awards Agency Scotland amended to clarify that, if someone does an immersion course before or after their degree, it will be funded. That would allow people to combine courses with language more easily, so someone could do dentistry, medicine, veterinary medicine or nursing with a year of immersion Gaelic either before or after that. There is not a bespoke course for medical practitioners yet, but there is an ability in the system to jigsaw those elements together and assist in that way.

Through Gaelic language plans, some health boards have agreed to do language support for their staff, and they run particular courses. I think that Bòrd na Gàidhlig has provided a list of the funding that it offers. Some of that involves supporting in-work or around-workplace language learning.

We absolutely recognise that there is more to be done, and that such things need to continue to be supported and put in place. More impact could possibly be achieved through even greater collaboration and co-ordination of such elements, but there are elements in place.

Liam Kerr: Cabinet secretary, on the statistics that you gave to the convener regarding teachers who can teach Gaelic but are not currently doing so, just so the committee fully understands this, are you proposing that our already very hard-working teachers double up with Gaelic, or are you proposing that they stop teaching their other substantive subject and become Gaelic teachers instead?

Kate Forbes: No, it is about choice. I am not suggesting that teachers should double up. I personally know a number of teachers who are qualified to teach, for example, maths in Gaelic, who are currently teaching only maths. That is by

virtue of the fact that they are not employed in a Gaelic-medium school, or because of where they live.

11:00

For me, it is about providing pathways: where there are skills that teachers want to use, we should be sure to provide them with opportunities to do that. I can think of an individual who did a four-year degree in Gaelic and maths. It is incredibly rare to be able to teach maths in Gaelic, but she may not be using all her skills because of her current place of residence, or another factor. We need to provide those opportunities in our recruitment, and so on. In that situation, the teacher may want to teach Gaelic and maths or maths in Gaelic, but as the committee will know, there are a limited number of high schools that teach subjects in Gaelic medium

Liam Kerr: To what extent have you considered the Gaeltacht model in the Republic of Ireland?

Kate Forbes: I have been there on a visit. I am not hugely across all the details of how it operates, but I have been in post for two weeks—I think it might have been a week and a half—

Liam Kerr: It feels as though it has been slightly longer.

Kate Forbes: —so I have not been able to do everything that I might have wanted to do as yet, but I will certainly bear that in mind. Is that something that you or the committee has considered? Is there something of interest in that model?

Liam Kerr: My personal view, not the committee's view, is that there is something in that that would be worth being appraised of. Perhaps the committee would be interested, too.

The Convener: We will cut you a little bit of slack on that one because of your tenure in post, Deputy First Minister.

Kate Forbes: Thank you.

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): I will move to Scots. The committee has heard differing views on whether the bill should explicitly recognise the variety of Scots dialects or Scottish languages across the country. In your opinion, should the bill be clearer that it seeks to promote and support Lallans, Doric, Orcadian and Norn et cetera, as opposed to saying, "This is it, and that is the way you've got it"?

Kate Forbes: I will bring in Claire Cullen, as she is closer to the development of the bill and how we got to where we are at with it.

Claire Cullen: The intention of the policy and the instruction to draft the provision was clear that

the definition of Scots was to be inclusive. The intention is that it should include all the different dialectal varieties of Scots. We have listened closely to the evidence that the committee has heard from the range of Scots stakeholders, not all of whom were on the same page about whether certain elements of Scots were a separate language or a dialect. Certainly, the intention is to be inclusive and to provide support to all forms of the language.

Bill Kidd: It is important that all views should be listened to. The idea is that Scots has Government backing, that it should be listened to more and that the opportunities that are attached to it should be increased in the same way as with Gaelic. That is important. However, because of the different pronunciations and dialectical variations across Scotland, there will be issues to do with how it is taught and how it is listened to. Is that being taken on board right at the beginning?

Kate Forbes: Yes, and I take it on board now, as you ask that question. Again, we will engage with those who have made that point. It is a Scottish languages bill, and recognising the diversity and variation within those languages is important.

Claire Cullen: We should also say that, in the strategy and the standards that follow the bill, more detail can be provided, with more exemplification of the different things that Scots encompasses. The provision in the bill relies slightly on parliamentary styles in relation to how the definitions are developed, but the intention is certainly to be as inclusive as possible.

Bill Kidd: On the back of that, some stakeholders and others have told the committee that they can see that Bòrd na Gàidhlig is doing fantastic work, and they are therefore disappointed that the bill does not include the establishment of a Scots board of equal significance. Has the Government heard that evidence, and has it considered whether the bill could or should include a provision on the establishment of a Scots board?

Kate Forbes: I will ask Claire Cullen to talk about the development of the bill. What I would say is that, at the beginning of the meeting, Pam Duncan-Glancy asked about outcomes and outputs, and I am a lot more interested in those and in distributing the funding directly among communities than I am in establishing structures and organisations.

Claire Cullen: The Scottish Government already funds and supports a number of relevant bodies, such as the Scots Language Centre, Scots Hoose, the Doric Board, the Doric Film Festival and Scots Radio. There are a lot of voices out there and a lot of expertise, both in the Gaelic world and in the Scots world. We sought to include

a range of stakeholders with whom to consult in relation to the development of the detail of the strategy and the standards, and we wanted to be as inclusive as possible. Our team already supports education groups and brings Scots voices together, so we are active in that regard.

We have not yet moved towards establishing a body of the sort that you mention, but the provisions in the bill that provide status to the language are a significant step forward.

Bill Kidd: From listening to what was said by stakeholders and others, I think that they see the idea of a Scots board as something that helps to focus thinking and provide a constant push in the way that Bòrd na Gàidhlig does. However, others have said that it is more important is to provide an emphasis on encouragement and support for the bodies that already exist and, therefore, for the people who use the languages and dialects, in order to give them more comfort, rather than providing something that would possibly be an academic body. There are differing opinions.

Kate Forbes: It is important to try to find a way of co-ordinating all the organisations and bodies that currently exist and ensuring that there is a formalised structure of sorts to underpin all the work, but it is also important just to let them get on with doing the good work that they already do.

The Convener: I will bring Liam Kerr back in.

Liam Kerr: I will go back to Bill Kidd's first question. Cabinet secretary, do you recognise the risk that some witnesses have suggested to the committee that, in talking about and defining Scots, the bill will standardise out what are very different dialects, such as Doric and Norn?

Kate Forbes: That is a really important question. There is certainly no intention to do that, and if there was any risk at all of doing that, I would be very concerned, so let me commit to take that away, review the evidence that has been given and consider how we avoid any such risk of standardising out dialects, because those are extremely rich dialects, with a wealth of literature, heritage and culture. I would be concerned if there was any serious risk in that regard.

Liam Kerr: I welcome that, because some witnesses have expressed that as a view. I know that you will do that, because you have said that you will, so I am very grateful for that.

Earlier, you said that Gaelic education has been an enormous success story. Now we are talking about Scots. Therefore, whatever changes were made 20 years ago and since, given that Gaelic education has been an enormous success story, what type of duties does the Government intend to place on education authorities through the Scots language education standards? Although the

financial memorandum does not deal with that, how much do you envisage that that would cost local authorities?

Kate Forbes: I will take those questions in turn, and I will ask Claire Cullen or Douglas Ansdell to come in on the standards. It is a slightly different approach to the one that was taken for Gaelic. When was the first Gaelic-medium school opened—was it 1984?

Douglas Ansdell: It was 1984, yes.

Kate Forbes: Good memory, eh? Therefore, it has been 30 or 40 years in the making, which gives you an indication of how long that work has been going on. There is a different approach to Scots. I ask one of my officials to come in on outlining the different standards.

Douglas Ansdell: At the moment, we have teachers delivering Scots in schools, and we have support going into the schools to support those teachers—for example from the likes of Dictionaries of the Scots Language and Scots Hoose. We have resources being published to support teachers and the work in classrooms. We have courses in place to support teachers who might want to learn how they can deliver Scots in the classroom. Those things are in place and going forward already. With the standards, we can tighten up the expectations and what the support could be. However, as you will appreciate, the standards have not been produced yet.

Liam Kerr: That is quite a key point—it is what I am asking about. With respect, I am not asking about what is there already. Given that new duties are apparently being created, I am asking what that means, so that the committee can produce a report. What does the bill actually mean and, therefore, from there, what will the extra cost be to our cash-strapped local authorities? With great respect, Douglas Ansdell, I think that what I am hearing is that you—the bill team and the cabinet secretary—are not in a position to give the committee an answer to those very important questions. Is that a fair reflection?

Douglas Ansdell: I think that we can say that funding is in place at the moment for many of the initiatives that are going forward.

Liam Kerr: What are they? What are the initiatives that are planned under the bill that require the funding?

Douglas Ansdell: They are the teaching of Scots that is happening in schools at the moment and the support that is going in in the form of resources and to support teachers, so there is a measure of funding already.

Liam Kerr: Perhaps I will stick with that point, cabinet secretary. With regard to the obligations that ultimately may come from the Scots part of

the bill, where would Scots fit in the school timetable? For example, would it be a choice, as Ben Macpherson talked about earlier, along with modern languages, such as French and German? That would be in the context of falling numbers, with fewer children looking to do modern languages, and Falkirk Council seeming to propose a cut to the school week. Where will that teaching fit in?

11:15

Kate Forbes: Obviously, it has to be integrated and there must be local choice. This answer will not satisfy you, but there must be a local element. You are not asking me about Gaelic so I will not give an answer about Gaelic, but I am going to say that we should look at the principle. What the school week looks like in a high school in Glasgow or in Cumbernauld will be very different from what it might look like in the Nicolson Institute in Stornoway. The whole point of the bill is localised distinctiveness.

Some of the work that Douglas Ansdell spoke about is already integrated in the school week. We are not proposing, either with Gaelic or with Scots, that there should be an obligation for every single student in every school to study that throughout their primary school years, but we would like them to be exposed to that. Where that is happening already, or where a school might want to adopt that, standards would be set and there would be support.

On the question about integration, that will look really different from Dumfries and Galloway through to Shetland, not least because, as you suggested, we do not want to standardise what should be distinctive.

I am not sure whether either of the officials would like to say more about how they arrived at the cost figures, but that work is already going on with local authorities. The financial memorandum is an estimate based on the work that is already happening, on the understanding that there might be a need to do a little more work or to pivot to other work.

It is a local choice. A local education committee might want to have more Scots teaching in its schools. That will be an internal conversation for the local authority, because local authorities have the freedom to make decisions. Where funding is already available, we want them to be able to access that. A lot of the work that happens with Scots is done by organisations working closely with schools. I would be really uneasy about making a blanket national statement to answer a question about integrating Scots within the school week, when the whole point is that local schools should reflect local communities.

Liam Kerr: To stick with the question of Scots, you would like children to be exposed to that. Those were your words. Where will the teaching staff come from in a context of falling teacher numbers in many subjects and ever-smaller numbers of specialists in most subjects? Will those teachers come from an existing pool or will there be new ones and what is the projected cost of training them?

Claire Cullen: The committee heard evidence from Sylvia Warnecke of the Open University and from Michael Dempster. Douglas Ansdell and I were with the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills at the launch of the Open University career-long professional learning course, which is funded by the Scottish Government. There are really detailed examples of teachers coming together through the OU course. Some are primary school teachers; some teach secondary school geography, history or literature. They are being empowered and authorised to bring their language into the classroom.

This is not about going out and recruiting another type of teacher or about setting up Scots-medium schools. The English and Scots languages are connected in a way that Gaelic and English are not. The committee heard evidence from Bruce Eunson and from Professor Robert McColl Millar about the American analogy, in which the English of the deep south was compared to Scots English. Those conversations can take place. At this stage in the development of Scots and the state support for Scots, it is about changing and authorising the environment and using the bill to give status to the language.

It is about enabling things that are already funded to be brought into the classroom with confidence. Examples of that include Yaldi Books, which we fund, and the work of Scots Hoose. On 1 May, Douglas Ansdell spoke to the committee about witnessing engagement by Scots Hoose at Denbeath primary school with primary 4 to 5 and primary 6 to 7 pupils, and the pupils' preparation for a visit and use of Scots in their language, and how it brings cognitive and confidence benefits when children are empowered to use their language in the classroom. Also in that 1 May meeting, when we were before the committee as members of the bill team, my colleague Niall Bartlett spoke of the different registers of language that exist in Gaelic and Scots, the benefits of those and the fact that those differences exist in English already.

Liam Kerr: I will just reflect on that briefly, to make sure that I have understood. The idea is that, with regard to Scots, existing teachers will be able to avail themselves of the Open University training and be able to teach in Scots. When they go back to their school, will they teach in English,

as they have always done, or, now that they are trained in Scots, will they be expected to teach in Scots?

Kate Forbes: I will answer that question. I keep coming back to the point about choice. I think that it is a teacher's choice what they wish to do. In terms of—

Liam Kerr: It is not entirely the teacher's choice to decide how to teach their class.

Kate Forbes: It is. At the moment, what does the bill do? First, the bill formalises recognition for Scots—it recognises it. Secondly, it standardises our response in terms of schools and creates opportunities that did not exist.

I recall being exposed to Scots in Dingwall academy through literature. I do not think that my teacher was necessarily trained in Scots. It would have been quite interesting if she had been trained in Scots; however, she would still probably have been my English teacher.

I think that there is an element of choice here in what a teacher does. That is very different from the case of Gaelic-medium education. If you apply for a job in Gaelic-medium education, there ain't no choice in whether you are teaching in English or Gaelic—it is a Gaelic-medium school. When it comes to Scots, it is about working with the schools to identify what demand there is from the young people for teachers who are trained in Scots, and whether a school needs to recruit additional resource for that training. There is a big risk—which you picked up on, Mr Kerr, when you spoke about the standardising away of dialects—of overly formalising what we expect from schools, when they have to tailor their curriculum in that way to local interest and opportunity.

The Convener: Before I bring in the deputy convener, I want to pick up on that response. If you do not want to overly formalise in terms of Scots and you are focused on localisation, what is the point of having the new standards for Scots?

Kate Forbes: It gives a legal recognition. Scots has not had the legal recognition that the bill establishes, and it has not benefited from formal support through legislation. There is a big difference between formal support and formalising that expectation everywhere.

Claire Cullen: The evidence that we provided on 1 May referenced the current structure that we have for education. The Education (Scotland) Act 1980 allows the Scottish ministers to provide standards and requirements for schools, but the power in section 2 of that act only allows us to set a blanket requirement for all schools. With the bill, bearing in mind that we are providing a framework for both Gaelic and Scots in education, we are asking for powers that would allow us to provide

variation, so that, for example, some standards would apply only to Gaelic-medium schools and some would apply only in schools where Scots is being provided. Those powers would give an element of choice, but they would also allow us to develop those standards. There are consultation requirements for each of the standards that we put forward, and they would come back before Parliament.

The Convener: Okay.

Ruth Maguire: In many ways, Claire Cullen and the cabinet secretary have answered my question, but I just want to be clear that this is not about the Government dropping something alien into our schools and making teachers perform something different. Scots education is going on at the moment through drama, music and literature; this is about giving teachers confidence and a framework to ensure that what they are doing in delivering stuff in their community's own language is the correct thing to do. Am I right?

Kate Forbes: I think so. It is about having the legal right to access support and to feel recognised in what they are doing—that is the big shift. If legal recognition had not been given to the Gaelic medium, which—and I do not often say this—happened under the Government of Liam Kerr's party at the time—

The Convener: And the convener's.

Kate Forbes: Indeed. I am sorry, convener—it is easy to forget.

If there had not been that recognition, what has happened in the past 40 years would not have happened. What we are doing here is to give legal recognition to and endorse what, in many cases, is already going on, but also to give a legal right to access support where it currently does not exist.

Ruth Maguire: Thank you.

The Convener: We are going to circle back a little bit, because Pam Duncan-Glancy was looking to get in earlier and I missed her out. I am sorry about that. Over to you, Pam.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Thank you, convener, and there is no need to apologise.

I want to pick up on something that was said earlier by, I think, Claire Cullen on the scope of the bill and the fact that it has come to the education committee. I understand and accept that it is the norm for Parliament to determine which committee looks at which bill, but I would imagine that it is for the Government and the cabinet secretary at the time to determine the bill's scope. When I asked the bill team about the scope of the bill earlier in our evidence-taking sessions, the answer that I got was that the bill's scope is quite narrow. I will ask the question again: is it the Deputy First

Minister's view that the scope of this legislation could go beyond education to perhaps address some of the infrastructure challenges considered in the report that was referred to earlier?

Kate Forbes: I think that the bill already goes beyond education with the areas of linguistic significance. Accepting that it is an education bill—after all, there is a lot about education in it; you can come in if you want to correct me on that—I think that it goes beyond education, if you care a lot about communities. I would be nervous about its going too far into, say, infrastructure, because it is the responsibility of the rest of the Government to have due regard to Gaelic—under, for example, the Scottish Government's language plans—in all of its other policy making.

There is also the issue of island proofing. I am not saying that that is entirely about Gaelic, but it is about communities.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: In that case, Deputy First Minister, can I just check whether at stage 2 you would envisage accepting amendments on things such as housing, transport and the economy in those areas?

Kate Forbes: This is not an excuse, but I am only 10 days in this job, as I think that I have established, and I am still considering all the evidence that I have taken. I have made a commitment to Willie Rennie to engage with some of those who have given evidence, and I am very much in listening mode.

I appreciate that that is unfair to the committee, as it has been taking evidence for quite a while. However, being new in post, I want to familiarise myself with the issue. If there are opportunities to improve the bill and expand it in line with its objectives, I very much want to be constructive and respond well to any amendments that you might want to lodge.

The Convener: Claire Cullen would like to respond to that line of questioning.

Claire Cullen: I should say that, when we talk about scope, the word has a particular meaning with regard to bills. As we understand it, once a bill is introduced, the Parliament is responsible for, or is the gatekeeper of, any amendments that are proposed and it is up to the convener to consider whether they are in or out of scope. It is a technical issue; it is not necessarily for the Government to decide which amendments are in or out of scope, once the bill has been introduced.

The Convener: That brings our evidence session this morning to a close.

I thank the Deputy First Minister and her team of officials for their time today and their very insightful evidence. That ends the public part of today's

meeting. We will consider our final agenda item in private.

11:29

Meeting continued in private until 12:25.

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