

Education, Children and Young People Committee

Wednesday 22 May 2024
16th Meeting, 2024 (Session 6)

Scottish Languages Bill

Introduction

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

Committee meeting

5. The Committee is taking evidence on the Bill at its meetings on 1st, 8th, 15th and 22nd May.
6. The Committee has so far taken evidence from:
 - Scottish Government officials who have been working on the Bill along with Scottish Government lawyers;
 - institutions and organisations concerned with the provision of Gaelic and Scots education in schools, Further Education and Higher Education;
 - public bodies; and
 - Bòrd na Gàidhlig.
7. At today's meeting, the Committee will take evidence from the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic, Kate Forbes MSP, who is the Minister in charge of the Bill.
8. The Deputy First Minister will be accompanied by:
 - Douglas Ansdell, Team Leader, Gaelic and Scots,
 - Claire Cullen, Head of Gaelic and Scots, Scottish Government;
 - Ninian Christie, Lawyer, Economy and Social Protection Division, Scottish Government Legal Directorate; and
 - Nico McKenzie-Juetten, Lawyer, School Education Division, Scottish Government Legal Directorate.

Supporting information

9. A SPICe briefing prepared for the meeting is included at **Annexe A**.
10. Since last week's meeting, the Committee have received written submissions from Comunn na Gàidhlig and Comunn nam Pàrant. The Committee has also received correspondence from the Scottish Government, following on from the 1 May meeting. These are included at **Annexe B**.

Call for views

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

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

Annexe A



Education, Children and Young People Committee

22 May 2024

Scottish Languages Bill

Introduction

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

This is the final evidence session during the Committee’s Stage 1 consideration of Scottish Languages Bill. This week, the Committee will hear from the Deputy First Minister.

Outcomes

Aim of the Bill

The Policy Memorandum states—

“The policy objective of this Bill is to provide further support for Scotland’s indigenous languages, Gaelic and Scots.” (Para 4)

The [Business and Regulatory Impact Assessment accompanying the Bill](#) says that the Bill is intended to “ensure that there is a structure in place across the Scottish Government and wider public sector to meet the needs of Gaelic and Scots communities and ensure the future of the languages in a modern, growing and diverse Scotland.”

On 1 May, the Committee asked the Bill team how the Bill’s success will be measured. The Bill team noted that individual public bodies are expected to monitor progress against their own plans (col 3) and, more broadly, the Committee was told—

“We are trying to create conditions in which people feel confident to pass their language on to their children and where children feel confident to continue in

GME and seek out national qualifications. We want them to be given access to national qualifications so that they can continue their learning journeys and not stop at primary school or at the end of the broad general education. If they have the vision and they continue to study languages and develop their linguistic abilities in a range of domains, they will be able to take them into the work environment, pass them on and use them in service provision. Those things are all markers of success, but they are pretty difficult to measure. We need action across a whole range or basket of measures in order to create those conditions and provide state support, but that can only go so far.” (Col 5)

Wider policy outcomes

The policy outcomes in relation to language policy tend to be expressed in general and iterative terms rather than measurable outcomes and it is not clear what policy success will look like in the medium or longer term.

Last week, James Wylie from Orkney Islands Council said that success is when the language is “just happening” in everyday life. Donald Macleod told the Committee that it is difficult to capture success in relation to Gaelic development and Gaelic education. He argued that there should be a more holistic approach to this. He suggested that the Bill alludes to a better framework for measuring success and he expects that this could be developed in secondary legislation – and that there should be more clarity over measuring outcomes and accountability. Iain MacMillan from Bòrd na Gàidhlig said that bringing the responsibility of developing the national strategy into the Scottish Government will mean clearer accountability and that the National Strategy should include a measurement framework. Professor McLeod told the Committee—

“The question of ultimate measures of success is very difficult. We should think in terms of outcomes, not outputs. It is easy to point to things that have been produced and so on, but, eventually, we are looking for a wider use of Gaelic—more people speaking Gaelic more frequently and in more contexts.” (1 May, Col 39)

Professor Ó Giollagáin told the Committee that there should be better measures on the fluency of pupils who have experienced GME. Comunn na Gàidhlig’s submission said—

“The success of Gaelic Medium Education is often ‘measured’ by the numbers of GME schools or units, and by the numbers of children entering at P1 level. There is no measurement whatsoever to help us judge whether GME is reaching any linguistic objectives. No linguistic targets or measurable outcomes have ever been clearly stated.”

Dr Birnie from the Scottish Council of Deans of Education said, “We can strengthen the bill by making clear provision around linguistic outcomes and what we expect, with a clear pathway for our young learners to follow in terms of progression and outcomes.” (8 May 2024, Col 42)

Professor Ó Giollagáin suggested that there is a crisis in the position of Gaelic in areas where it is currently most commonly spoken. Last week, Donald Macleod from

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar said that the Gaelic education provision in his area was working well but there needs to be more focus on a broader view of ensuring that Gaelic is used in different areas of life. Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach from the Bòrd na Gàidhlig said that there is a crisis for Gaelic – a funding crisis; Iain MacMillan suggested that the use of the word crisis has been useful to focus and reset how Gaelic is being supported.

The results of the 2022 census covering individuals' ethnic group, national identity, language and religion will be published on 21 May.

Accountability

The 2005 Act provided that the Bòrd may monitor the implementation of public bodies' Gaelic plans and refer issues to Ministers. Ministers may then direct the authority in question to implement any or all of the measures in its Gaelic language plan.

The Committee has heard that some stakeholders would like a commissioner to be established to support greater accountability and challenge on public bodies in relation to supporting Gaelic. The Bill Team told the Committee on 1 May, "there is more opportunity to make a lot of progress with Scottish Government leadership and by having public bodies working collaboratively and being positive about the language, rather than by having an ombudsman in an adversarial role at this point."

The Policy Memorandum explains that the Bòrd will have a role to monitor progress in relation to Gaelic both nationally and at the level of public bodies. It says—

"The Bill requires Bòrd na Gàidhlig to prepare and publish reports about the Scottish Ministers' progress towards meeting the objectives in the Gaelic language strategy, and the compliance by relevant public authorities (either generally or specifically) with their duty to have regard to the Gaelic language strategy and to comply with standards and requirements specified in regulations, and to publish and lay these reports before the Scottish Parliament. This reporting requirement will encourage Bòrd na Gàidhlig to highlight good practice and share examples of progress along with identifying areas which need attention and suggesting what actions could be considered to address gaps."

Some submissions questioned whether the Bòrd would be empowered to critique the Government's progress on the strategy. Last week, the Bòrd said that it would be able to report on Government's progress with sufficient independence.

In contrast, the Government itself will report on progress against the Scots language strategy (section 28) and "secure the provision of reports" on progress in relation to Scots language education in schools (section 34).

Finance

The Financial Memorandum sets out the expected additional costs that will arise from the Bill – around £700k over five years. The FM sets out the costs of taking forward the provisions in the Bill, not the costs of the consequences of those actions.

For example, it provides estimates of the costs to develop strategies, but not costs of delivering on those strategies.

The FM states—

“The main impact of the Bill provisions is a shift in activity, a repurposing of resources in terms of effort and attention. The Scottish Government considers that provisions do not create wholly new costs or a requirement for wholly new spend.” (FM Para 13)

Last week, Donald Macleod expressed concern about the idea of repurposing funding; the funding is currently being spent with a purpose. James Wylie from Orkney Island Council said that “we should stop kidding ourselves” that repurposing resources will create the outcomes desired. Joanna Peteranna from HIE said that to make meaningful progress, additional resource will be required.

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar’s submission stated—

“The reality for local authorities is that funding for Gàidhlig has ‘remained relatively static since 2010/11.’ The Scottish Languages Bill is being introduced at a time when even the most supportive of local authorities are having to consider reducing spending on Gàidhlig markedly. ... Any funding that is provided ought to be aligned to wider strategic planning initiatives at a local level, with measurable outcomes.”

Last week the Bòrd na Gàidhlig said that the funding model is “inadequate” and that particularly the community development aspects of supporting Gaelic should receive greater funding and support.

Iain MacMillan from Bòrd na Gàidhlig said that a lesson to be learned from the last 20 years is that there should be plans for what should happen if policy succeeds and how policy and resource would develop in that scenario.

Gaelic development

The Bill declares that Gaelic has official status in Scotland. The Committee explored this with the [Bill team on 1 May](#) who confirmed that the obligations “do not necessarily flow from the statement of official recognition” but that if the Bill “did not make a strong statement on status, its absence would be noticeable”. (Col 6)

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar’s submission said—

“As the Bill is framed in very general terms and contains no concrete language rights, tightening and strengthening of legislation is required. Future enforcement of policy and plans in relation to Gàidhlig will not be possible unless obligations and rights are set out clearly, from the outset, in terms of legislation, regulation, timelines and guidance, with measurable, preferably SMART targets.”

[On 1 May](#) Professor Conchúr Ó Giollagáin argued that the Bill in its current form should be scrapped. He said that the key consideration should be whether the policy will protect and support the “native-speaking community of Gaelic” (Col 34). He said—

“I do not think that it introduces anything new that will help the vernacular community in the islands with the linguistic crisis that they live with. Basically, it is a re-bureaucratisation of the existing set-up, and, as the crisis emerged under the existing set-up, the only way out of the crisis is radical change, and the bill does not amount to radical change.” (Col 30)

At the same meeting, Professor Wilson McLeod described the Bill as “cautious and incremental” and said “but it has considerable potential if it can be strengthened in appropriate ways as it goes through Parliament.” (Col 31) Last week, Bòrd na Gàidhlig said that the Bill is an important and positive step.

Ministerial powers and duties

National Strategy

A key change to the Gaelic policy landscape that Section 5 of the Bill proposes is that the Bòrd will no longer produce the National Gaelic Plan, rather the Government will produce a National Gaelic Strategy. The Financial Memorandum indicates that the first National Gaelic Strategy will be issued around 2028, at the end of the period covered by the current National Plan.

The Policy Memorandum comments that—

“In order to make progress with Gaelic it is essential that there is an agreed set of priorities for the language and that the provision of a Gaelic language strategy will be given increased status by being issued directly from Ministers.”

The Bill provides that both Scottish Ministers and public bodies will be required to have regard to the National Strategy when exercising their functions. Public authorities will be required to have regard to the National Strategy when developing their Gaelic Plans – currently they must have regard to the National Gaelic Plan. This is a potentially significant change – the number of relevant public bodies that would have to have regard to the strategy, guidance etc would be more than the current number of public bodies that have Gaelic plans in place.

The move away from the Bòrd producing National Gaelic Plans to the Government producing a National Strategy may make accountability for outcomes for the language clearer. The Bill sees the strategy as having a five-year timeframe. Iain MacMillan from Bòrd na Gàidhlig said that language development has a horizon of longer than this – e.g. 20 years. He said that the strategy and the aims therein could sit within longer term aims. The [Welsh language strategy was published in 2017 and covers a period up to 2050](#), alongside this, there are 5 year plans.

On 1 May, the Bill team gave a number of examples of cross-portfolio working to support Gaelic. However, last week, Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach from Bòrd na Gàidhlig suggested that Gaelic policy is within a silo of the education department. Bòrd na

Gàidhlig said it hoped that the profile of Gaelic within the Scottish Government would be raised and improve greater cross-portfolio working.

Standards and guidance

The Bill provides a suite of powers that Ministers can use to create duties or obligations on public bodies' through regulations (standards), guidance and directions.

Last week, James Wylie from Orkney Islands Council said that there is concern as to the lack of detail on how duties would apply to the OIC in relation to Gaelic and that any such duties should be created in collaboration with local authorities and the communities they serve. Joanna Peteranna from HIE said there could be more clarity over what the duties would be on public bodies.

Donald Macleod from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar said that it is important that any duties reflect the different position of Gaelic and Scots across Scotland. James Wylie from Orkney Islands Council said that authorities have a responsibility to support languages. However, public bodies should be able, when there is a strong argument to do so, to opt out of obligations in consultation with the Government. Joanna Peteranna said that such a decision must reflect the desires of the communities and be backed up with a robust community consultation.

Role of Bòrd na Gàidhlig

The 2005 Act established Bòrd na Gàidhlig as a Non-Departmental Public Body. The Bòrd is the principal public body in Scotland responsible for promoting Gaelic development and providing advice to the Scottish Ministers on Gaelic issues.

On 1 May, Professor McLeod described the Bòrd as “hugely underpowered in what they are able to deliver, especially with regard to action on the ground and community development work in Gaelic, which is hugely underfunded” (Col 32). He said “it cannot push public bodies hard to demand strong language plans and does not really have the power to enforce them effectively.” (Col 37) Last week Jennifer McHarrie from the Bòrd said that there is a balance to be struck in supporting public bodies and those public bodies delivering the services which are their responsibility.

The Bòrd will retain its powers to require public bodies to develop Gaelic language plans. The Bill would create additional duties on the Bòrd. These include:

- reporting on progress on the objectives of the National Strategy
- reporting on the compliance with any standards set by Ministers and agreed by Parliament
- reporting on public bodies' fulfilling the general duty to “have regard to the desirability” of supporting Gaelic and Gaelic culture.

The Bill seeks to provide for greater accountability of the Bòrd to Ministers and Parliament through a new duty to prepare a corporate plan. Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach from the Bòrd welcomed the greater accountability and visibility of the Bòrd's work envisaged by the Bill.

Public Bodies' Plans and Reporting

Around 60 public bodies currently have Gaelic Plans.

On 1 May, in relation to public bodies' Gaelic Plans, Professor Ó Giollagáin said that "some are more useful than others" and "they generally tend to emphasise the symbolic value of Gaelic rather than suggesting any practical support for learners or speakers".

Last week Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach from Bòrd na Gàidhlig said that public bodies can be on a journey in terms their engagement in Gaelic development and this can be seen in successive Gaelic plans.

Last week, Iain MacMillan from Bòrd na Gàidhlig said that a missing piece of the policy landscape is a voice for communities to ensure that public bodies are delivering for those communities. He also said that public bodies' plans should remain part of the landscape and should knit together with the new strategy, standards and guidance.

Joanna Peteranna from HIE said that public bodies should be accountable for delivering on their plans which should be in line with an overall strategy and reflecting the local circumstances; however, public bodies should also be sufficiently funded to do so.

Areas of Linguistic Significance

The Bill provides local authorities the power to designate part or all of their area as "areas of linguistic significance".

The Policy Memorandum stated that "designating areas of linguistic significance provides a community framework within which Gaelic language planning activity can take place." (PM para 49). The Financial Memorandum identifies costs of the designation process but identifies no additional costs to improve the support for Gaelic in those areas. The Bill Team told the Committee on 1 May—

"The policy device of areas of linguistic significance seemed to suit the profile of Gaelic in Scotland. It seemed that it could provide for areas where there are higher numbers and a higher density of speakers, but it also seemed to offer something for areas where Gaelic is growing and is being spoken. Therefore, we see it as a device that, as well as contributing to strengthening areas where there are a significant number of speakers, is of benefit to areas where Gaelic might be growing in towns and cities." (Col 11)

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's submission supported the proposal for areas of linguistic significance. It said that "the main emphasis of the Bill should be directed towards reviving Gàidhlig in community settings." Last week, Donald Macleod said that he hoped the Bill would ensure that Gaelic would be a "genuine community asset" and that there would be greater focus on a community-wide approach to supporting Gaelic. Mr Macleod also said that it is unclear what an ALS would mean in practice and what duties might flow from that.

Joanna Peteranna from HIE said that Gaelic does not exist only in the classroom and the wider community support, such as housing and transport and the breadth of support should be reflected in the Bill and policy. Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach said that planning and delivery in ALS should pull in the range of delivery agencies in the area, for example health services. Lydia Rohmer from UHI agreed and told the Committee on 8 May—

“Supporting communities is about not just supporting fluency or language acquisition in those communities as far as Gaelic is concerned; it also needs to be about community development. The resources that go into community development need to be specifically to do with community language development. It is good to see that community language development officers were reinstated as part of the budget from the Scottish Government for this year. Without that resource, it is very difficult to take forward [a range of community-focused initiatives].” (Col 64)

Last week Bòrd na Gàidhlig said that it is very important that planning in communities should come from the communities themselves. Donald Macleod, speaking on behalf of CnES last week, said that the planning for an ALS should be led by the communities involved, but that to deliver on a community’s aspirations, there will need to be sufficient funding at the local level. He said that he hoped that what you should see and feel in an ALS is that there is a Gaelic-first community where there are a range of community-based services to support the language. He said the barrier to doing this work now is a lack of resource – but that the Bill could provide greater focus to such work.

Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach said that the look and feel of each ALS would reflect the desires of the community. Iain MacMillan from Bòrd na Gàidhlig questioned how communities would be defined within this process.

The Bill provides that a public body’s Gaelic Plan must set out the measures that it will take in relation to an ALS if it exercises its functions in that area. The Government would also be able to set out duties in standards or include details of expectations on public bodies in the national strategy or statutory guidance.

James Wylie from OIC described what an ALS would look like for the Orkney language – he told the Committee about the range of areas in transport, culture and education that takes place in the Orkney Islands. The Bill makes no provision for ALS for Scots.

Designation process

The Bill proposes that areas that meet either of the following criteria could be designated an area of linguistic significance:

- at least 20% of the population of the area have “Gaelic language skills”
- the area:
 - “is historically connected with the use of Gaelic”
 - has GME provision, or

- has “significant activity relating to the Gaelic language or Gaelic culture”.

The Bill provides that local authorities would initiate this process and an ALS could cover some or all of the local authority’s area. If a local authority is minded to make such a designation, it would be required to consult with the Bòrd na Gàidhlig and “such other persons as the local authority considers appropriate”. The local authority then submits the proposed ALS to Ministers who may then accept or reject the proposal or accept with modifications. Should Ministers choose to accept with modifications, they must consult with the relevant local authority. There is a similar process should a local authority seek to revoke or vary an ALS.

Professor Conchúr Ó Giollagáin described the proposed criteria as over complicated and suggested that there should be two categories, “the remaining vernacular communities, and the other networks of learners and speakers in other parts of Scotland.” He continued—

“There is a risible element in the bill, which is that the areas with the designation of more than 20 per cent Gaelic speakers have to compete with areas where there is a historical interest, which means areas with few or no Gaelic speakers. That is the opposite of giving priority to the crisis at the minute.” (1 May, Cols 50-51)

Professor McLeod disagreed with Professor Ó Giollagáin. He said—

“When we talk about a 20 per cent threshold, that includes areas where there is limited day-to-day use of Gaelic but where there is potential. We must harness the potential for Gaelic in different parts of Scotland and it would be unwise to write off the potential for growth. ... There are huge problems in harnessing that potential and providing a context for the social use of Gaelic in urban communities, but it is a significant part of the challenge and it is important that that element is taken into account in the legislation and in wider Gaelic language policy.” (1 May, Col 51)

Bòrd na Gàidhlig’s submission welcomed the proposals and suggested that this is an area of the Bill that deserves significant amount of attention. It questioned “which level of Government is the most appropriate to make the designation of area of linguistic significance, and the role of the community itself in the process.” On 1 May Professor Wilson McLeod also questioned why local authorities would have the lead role in designating a ALS.

Ealasaid Dhòmhnaillach from Bòrd na Gàidhlig said that there should be some process within the Bill for communities to request that their area be designated as an ALS. Bòrd na Gàidhlig’s submission asked—

“What is the incentive for declaring an Area of Linguistic Significance? With the lack of commitment to resources in relation to implementation of the Bill, consideration must be given that local authorities may choose not to designate due to inability to resource at this current point, as well as a lack of clarity on what such a designation will mean in practice. The expectation amongst communities will be that such a designation will result in more activity and increased development spending.”

Gaelic education

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

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

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

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

Current provision of Gaelic education

Gaelic education has two aspects. Gaelic Medium Education (GME) and Gaelic Learners Education (GLE). GME is where the education is through the medium of Gaelic. GLE is where the language is taught as any other modern language.

Sabhal Mòr Ostaig’s submission argued that the provision of GME falls short of the demand for GME. Professor McLeod’s submission stated—

“Almost twenty years after the passage of the 2005 Act, it is deeply disappointing that the level of provision for Gaelic in the education system should remain so low. It is noteworthy that 9 of the 11 local authorities that do not offer GME or GLE at either primary or secondary level in any of their schools have statutory Gaelic language plans agreed with BnG. It is to be hoped that the new Act will bring a significant improvement to provision.”

The Policy Memorandum stated—

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

these have been included in the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic education and will also be addressed in Standards and Strategy.” (para 62)

Last week, Ealasaid Dhòmhnallach from Bòrd na Gàidhlig said that GME is producing confident speakers in her area. Jennifer McHarrie highlighted some of the issues facing the access to Gaelic education, particularly in secondary schools. Seonaidh Charity from Comann Luchd-Teagaisg Àrd Sgoiltean illustrated some of these issues the previous week and told the Committee—

“To all intents and purposes, in many schools, GME ceases to be a thing at the end of S2 or S3, depending on subject choices. Literacy in Gaelic cannot currently be considered as having parity with literacy in English, because that would not be allowed to happen in English-medium education. Pupils would not be able to leave the subject without a qualification or without developing fluency or competence in the language.” (Col 4)

Seonaidh Charity also said that in primary schools “the one plus-two strategy was fantastically beneficial in spreading Gaelic to a wider community”, (8 May, Col 18) but in secondary the number of “Gaelic learners has taken a nosedive” (8 May, col 8). Donald Macleod, representing ADES, said “we need to ensure that there is a robust language 2 pathway in Gaelic for those who are not in Gaelic-medium education.” In relation to GLE, Professor McLeod told the Committee on 8 May—

“There is limited, patchy provision at secondary level. Even places such as Glasgow and Edinburgh, which have extensive Gaelic-medium provision, do not offer Gaelic-learner education in their schools. Therefore, either your parents choose Gaelic education for you at age five or four and a half, or you are locked out of Gaelic education through the statutory education system. It is a very weird layout of provision.” (Col 53)

Commun na Gàidhlig suggested that GME should be accompanied by a “superstructure of language activity” to provide more opportunities and settings for pupils to use Gaelic. Donald Macleod, representing ADES, said on 8 May the “bill will be important in arresting the decline in the language and giving greater prominence and urgency to supporting the provision of education” but “it is about not just the formal medium education as first-language learning, but whole communities learning these languages as a second language.” (Col 3) Professor Ó Giollagáin told the Committee on 1 May—

“There are three issues. First, it is about pedagogy; secondly, it is about the young being socialised into speaking Gaelic among their peer group; thirdly, it is about support from the wider community. Those aspects all have to work together to produce functionally fluent speakers, but we are not properly tying up those different aspects of Gaelic development.” (Col 54)

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

“Teacher recruitment issues in Gaelic Education are well documented, but teacher retention is currently an area of great concern. Teachers frequently feel unsupported in their work, and their professional and personal values are challenged when they are unable to access adequate resources to support

children with Additional Support Needs from within GME. This has led to teachers leaving the profession in considerable numbers in recent years.”

The Scottish Government extended its STEM bursary scheme to attract graduates into Initial Teacher Education to cover Gaelic in 2023-24. The Teaching Bursary (as it is now called) is a £20,000 bursary available for career changers whilst studying for a PGDE. Dr Inge Birnie from the Scottish Council of Deans of Education said that recruitment drives to promote Gaelic teaching as a career path have been “reasonably successful”; however she said—

“Currently, we are facing challenges with recruiting Gaelic and Gaelic-medium education teachers. To be able to teach Gaelic as a subject at secondary level, you are required to be a proficient Gaelic speaker and to have a minimum number of credits in the Gaelic language, which is typically delivered through a Gaelic medium course, such as those provided by our colleagues at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, or a Celtic studies degree. I cannot speak for Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, but the number of people who take Celtic studies courses is quite small, which impacts on the number of people who want to become Gaelic teachers at secondary level. For Gaelic-medium primary education provision, we require a level of proficiency at the entry point, although the standards for that are not set. Typically, we recruit undergraduate primary education students who have gone through the Gaelic-medium education system and are proficient speakers of the language. The numbers are quite small and are currently not sufficient to meet demand. In short, we are facing significant recruitment challenges, as you need to be proficient in a language if you are to teach in it.” (8 May, Col 30)

Dr Birnie also noted that “there have been opportunities for teachers who are already teaching in English medium education to retrain or to be supported to work in Gaelic-medium education at both primary and secondary level”. (8 May, Col 30) Joan Esson from HMIE said that she and her colleagues “have seen the growing your own approach, with young people who have been in Gaelic-medium education returning to it to teach or to take up other roles in schools.” (8 May, col 14)

The Scottish Government’s letter dated 14 May set out a range of activities to support staffing of Gaelic education. This letter said, “supply of teachers able to teach in Gaelic-medium education continues to be a priority for Scottish Ministers”.

Donald Macleod, representing ADES, noted that in GME, it is not only the teachers who should be Gaelic-speaking but also “pupil support assistants, admin staff, clerical workers and ELC staff.” (8 May, col 12)

In relation to ELC professionals, Dr Birnie said that “for early years provision, staff recruitment and retention is an issue across the board” and that this is particularly the case in Gaelic-medium settings. (8 May, Col 33) Lydia Rohmer from UHI North, West and Hebrides said, “having clear pathways into Gaelic-medium work, workforce and vocational sectors is really important.” (8 May, Col 33)

E-Sgoil was developed in CnES partly to address the teacher shortage and the demand in Gaelic. Donald Macleod said that while it has been a “real success in how it supports the language ... it is challenged, particularly in the outmoded conditions of service for teachers, and we need to work actively with trade unions to address that issue and to open up the massive potential for expanding digital

learning and getting digital teaching online.” (8 May, Col 14) The panel representing higher and further education providers also agreed that distance and online learning can be “an effective tool in our toolbox for delivering languages”. (8 May, Col 60) Dr Birnie from the SCDE said—

“We should not use opportunities such as eSgoil as a reason not provide Gaelic language education in our schools. There is nothing better for young people than a real community of practice rather than a virtual one, although it might be different for slightly older learners.” (8 May, Col 61)

Sabhal Mòr Ostaig (Teacher Education)’s submission suggested that a specific and distinct Gaelic curriculum be developed. The Committee explored this issue on 8 May. Lydia Rohmer from UHI said that there is a need for “a distinctive Gaelic literacy framework” both in school education and for adult learners. (8 May, col 37)

Gaelic Medium Education Assessments

The Bill would extend the process for parents/carers to request an assessment of the need for Gaelic medium primary education from their local authority. This process is set out in the Education (Scotland) Act 2016 and the Bill makes a number of amendments to that Act which extends the process to include Gaelic Medium Early Learning and Childcare.

Comann nam Pàrant’s submission suggested that the process for assessment of GMPE in the 2016 Act, and the proposed assessment process for GMELC should be streamlined and an independent appeal process should be put in place. Last week, Donald Macleod, representing CnES, agreed that the process could be streamlined and be less bureaucratic and said that there is a balance to ensure that service provision meets the needs of communities.

The week before, Donald Macleod, representing ADES, said “Gaelic-medium ELC is a massive driver of onwards uptake of Gaelic-medium primary education and a key foundation stone of that three-to-18 Gaelic pathway”. He continued—

“As for ADES and the ask to strengthen legislation for Gaelic-medium education provisions, be they ELC, primary or otherwise, we again urge caution and highlight the need to ensure that there is genuine, sustainable and resourced demand and that the legislation leads to the creation of viable provisions where there is a genuine need for them to be established. We do not want requirements being imposed on authorities where demand is not sustainable, simply as a side effect of the legislation.” (8 May, col 10)

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

Ministers' and Local authorities' duties

Section 11 provides a new duty on Scottish Ministers to “promote, facilitate and support” Gaelic education in school education and adult education provided by local authorities. Similarly, the Bill provides that every local authority must “promote, facilitate and support” Gaelic education in school education and adult education provided by local authorities. This creates a broader duty on local authorities than currently. Section 15 of the 2016 Act provides that local authorities must “promote the potential provision” of Gaelic education. Those authorities that provide Gaelic education must “so far as reasonably practicable, promote and support” that provision.

Section 12 would provide that Ministers may make regulations which “specify the standards and requirements” for local authorities providing Gaelic education. These regulations may set standards which apply differently to different areas. The Bill also provides Ministers with the power to issue guidance on Gaelic education to public authorities and to make directions for individual local authorities in relation to their provision of Gaelic education.

Donald Macleod, speaking on behalf of ADES on [8 May 2024](#), told the Committee that ADES “broadly welcomes the spirit of the bill and the understanding of the priorities that it aims to achieve”. He continued—

“There is a degree of concern among our members, because we would like to have an understanding of what the proposed standards are, how they will be measured and identified and what accountability local authorities and education authorities will hold across the country in relation to Gaelic and Scots.” (Col 3)

The Bill team told the Committee on 1 May that “Gaelic development should be proportionate and that support should be improved and made stronger where there are more speakers.” (Col 11). The Bill reflects this in that the standards that ministers can introduce can make different provisions for different areas. Seonaidh Charity from Comann Luchd-Teagaisg Àrd Sgoiltean told the Committee on 8 May—

“The ideal situation would be a staggered progression that said, ‘This is when you start with GME and this is how you progress.’ For more advanced—for want of a better word—local authorities, there might be a clearer direction of travel with regard to the subjects that are being offered throughout secondary school, as well as more planning and support around the provision of resources for those subjects. That is what we are alluding to while acknowledging that some local authorities do not have Gaelic-medium or Gaelic-learner education and that targets and progression should be appropriate to the stage that each authority is at.” (Col 6)

The Bill would remove the reference to Gaelic-speaking areas under the definition of school education in section 1 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 and make Gaelic education as a statutory part of school education for all education authorities. Officials told the committee on 1 May that due to the breadth of the overarching power to secure the provision of adequate and efficient school (and further) education, these amendments do not create obligations in relation to school education.

Officials said—

“We are trying to be clearer that school education includes Gaelic in Scotland, and that, in their determination of what constitutes ‘adequate and efficient’ school education for their areas, education authorities should consider whether Gaelic-medium education and Gaelic-learner education are required to meet that test.” (Col 20)

While the Government’s position is that the Bill does not create a duty to provide Gaelic education, the proposed drafting of the legislation can be interpreted differently. HMIE’s submission stated—

“The amendment to the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 to clarify that all education authorities have a duty to provide Gaelic Learner and Medium Education should increase equity.”

A supplementary submission from Professor McLeod raised this issue. He said—

“As written, the bill expands the general duties of education authorities in Scotland to make provision for Gaelic. This obligation would now extend to all authorities. This is a welcome and overdue reform. However, the evidence provided by the Scottish Government on 1 May and some statements in the Explanatory Note and Policy Memorandum on the bill are somewhat confusing on this point. It is important that the bill proceeds as written and not on the basis of the much weaker position articulated by the Scottish Government. ... The Government’s view of this language in section 1 of the 1980 Act, which is contradicted by the plain language of the bill as submitted, would strip it of any significance. Education authorities are already allowed to offer Gaelic learner education and Gaelic medium education. Gaelic learner education has thus been offered by some authorities outside the Gaelic-speaking areas since 1947 and Gaelic learner education has been offered by some authorities outside the Gaelic-speaking areas since 1985.”

Last week, Iain MacMillan, Director of Development, at the Bòrd na Gàidhlig said that placing Gaelic education as a core part of school education framework is a significant step. In doing so, he suggested that this would allow more focus on community development.

Disputes over whether education authorities are meeting duties under education legislation would (in most circumstances) be considered by Ministers under section 70 of the 1980 Act. It would require a relatively simple amendment to make the intention of Parliament more explicit here – whether the intention is that all local authorities provide at least some Gaelic education or alternatively that any education authority may provide Gaelic education.

The Committee has heard about disappointment from some that the Bill does not include provide for a right to Gaelic-Medium Education.

Further and Higher education

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

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

Donald Macleod told the Committee that he hopes the Bill will support better pathways for people developing their Gaelic skills after leaving school and opportunities for adults to begin learning Gaelic. He said that there is a “real thirst for and demand among adults for beginning language learning— particularly, for instance, among parents who have chosen Gaelic-medium education for their children and who wish to undertake adult learning in the language in order to support their children and learn alongside them.” (8 May, Col 27)

Seonaidh Charity said—

“When it comes to further and higher education, does the education that is in place allow people to continue from their school education using the medium of Gaelic—for example, through apprenticeships or foundation apprenticeships that start in fifth or sixth year? How do we continue that provision into adulthood, to keep people engaged with the language? This big question will follow once we are happy with the outcomes in education: how do we maintain that connection with the people who have graduated from Gaelic-medium education or Gaelic learners education and who continue to use the language in adulthood in their day-to-day lives?” (8 May, Col 28)

Comann Luchd-Teagaisg Àrd-sgoiltean’s submission said, “there needs to be significant expansion in the provision of further and higher education for Gaelic medium, as a lack of graduates in Gaelic or Celtic Studies has a major impact upon the numbers of qualified secondary teachers.” Sabhal Mòr Ostaig’s submission also argued for a Gaelic medium university and suggested that it should become a small specialist institution to fulfil this function.

Lydia Rohmer told the Committee—

“The roles of further and higher education need to be strengthened in the bill. As I said earlier, I think that the interaction between providing a strengthened role for Gaelic in the community and, in turn, supporting the activities of young people through school, in Gaelic acquisition, is important and should be recognised more formally in the bill.” (8 May, Col 55)

Scots language development

Under Chapter 1 of the Bill, the Bill declares that Scots “has official status within Scotland”. This is to be given effect “by the provisions in this Act conferring functions on the Scottish Ministers and other persons in relation to promoting, supporting and facilitating the use of the Scots language.” The Bill defines Scots as “the Scots language as used in Scotland”.

The Bill provides that Ministers must produce a Scots language strategy. Ministers and Scottish public authorities will have to “have regard to” the strategy in performing their functions. Ministers may also issue guidance and again, all Scottish public authorities will have to “have regard to” this guidance. Ministers will report on

progress of the strategy. Progress in the Gaelic strategy will be reported on by Bòrd na Gàidhlig rather than the Government.

The Committee has explored how a national Scots policy framework can reflect and respect the variety of dialects across Scotland. The Doric Board's submission emphasised the "linguistic richness and diversity" of Scots and said that it is "a language of dialects". The Doric Board argued that "the recognition of (and indeed support for) this important nuance is critical in the successful promotion of Scots." HIE's submission stated—

"We welcome the provision of official status to Scots in Scotland. We would also recommend recognition of the associated dialects including Shetlandic, Orcadian and Doric. This is a significant milestone for the Scots Language and its protection, support and development."

In evidence last week, James Wylie from Orkney Islands Council argued that the language in Orkney is separate to Scots and that this ought to be explicitly recognised in the Bill. He also said that Orcadian permeates across much of cultural life across the Orkney Islands and OIC welcomes the protection of the language as an asset to communities.

Professor Robert Millar said—

"On the other hand, if we were to call ourselves a collective of different dialects, that would really not make us very strong; it would be an easy way of picking us off, one at a time. If speakers of those dialects do not agree with that viewpoint, that is their right. They would still get funding and encouragement. The point is that there would be a connection between the different parts of Scotland, which has never been encouraged in the past. ...

"there has to be some way of articulating different views and different dialects. That sort of thing is commonplace practically everywhere, apart from anywhere that speaks English." (1 May 2024, Cols 43-44)

Dr Dempster from the Scots Language Centre said that national policy making should not lead to a standardisation of Scots. Although he suggested that it is possible that, in terms of written Scots, an "official form" might arise organically through public bodies' converging on a particular form. He said—

"One o the strengths o the Scots strategy is that we can bring thegither dialects and see what they have in common. Where dae we work fae, fae here? How does the Shetland speaker speak wi the Dumfries speaker? What is common there?" (1 May, Col 44)

The Committee also explored with witnesses whether a Scots Board should be established to support the Scots Language. Professor Millar said "Some kind of body has to exist, otherwise why should we bother saying that something is official?". Both he and Dr Dempster said that any such body should reflect the users of Scots across the country. (1 May, Cols 54-55)

Scots Education

The Bill defines Scots language education as “education consisting of teaching and learning in the use and understanding of the Scot’s language”. Bruce Eunson from Education Scotland suggested that this should be clear that this would include “whichever other names speakers use, and have used for centuries, for their local branch of Scots.” (8 May, Cols 19-20) Mr Eunson also said that “the immediate effect of the bill is validation, which will be followed by confidence then increased [use of Scots in education].” (8 May, Col 23)

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

The Bill is not clear whether these standards will be around the teaching of Scots or teaching in Scots. Bruce Eunson from Education Scotland said—

“I believe that Scots-medium education happens far more than we are aware of, especially in rural settings, where class numbers are smaller and the teacher will know, ‘Every bairn here speaks Scots so, if I speak Scots, every child will understand.’ It will be happening more than you think, and there might be less of a need to have designated spaces.” (8 May, Col 26)

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

The use of Scots can currently form part of school education. Within [CfE’s Es & Os, under “Literacy and English Principles and Practice”](#) it says—

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

There are a number of organisations that support the use of Scots in schools. The Scots Language Centre provides information and advice on Scots and promotes the use of the Scots language, culture and education. The Doric Board performs a similar function but focusing only on Doric. The Association of Scottish Literature, Scots Hoose and the Scottish Book Trust, along with the SLC, all (among other things) provide support for Scots education. Bruce Eunson from Education Scotland said that the resources he has produced have reflected the variety of Scots spoken across Scotland and that teachers will adapt resources to suit their pupils. He said—

“The children in the class need to be addressed in a language that they recognise as being their own. It cannot be alien to them or be a foreign

concept that sounds like something from somewhere else; it needs to be language that they use. Teachers mirror that approach.” (8 May, Col 21)

Dr Sylvia Warnecke from the Open University noted that “there is no qualification, as such, for teachers to become teachers of Scots.” She continued—

“In the teacher course that we run, we see that members of the teaching profession have a real appetite for qualifications to be developed. ... To date, 150 teachers have signed up—and that was with very little advertising at our end. We are keeping the course open and an increasing number of teachers are coming forward for its next presentation. The teachers believe that the course enhances the curriculum and that it is making an important contribution to helping them meet the needs of Scots speakers already in school.” (8 May, Col 31)

Dr Warnecke later said—

“Our main aspiration was to raise awareness of Scots, to bring it into pupils’ education and to give them opportunities to use the language that they speak at home through speaking and writing.” (8 May, Col 50)

Joan Esson from HMIE said—

“As an inspectorate, Education Scotland very much welcomes the new legislation for Scots. We appreciate that it has a resource implication for us. We are keen to support and evaluate Scots in education as part of our inspection work, so we will look at that.” (8 May Col 26)

The Chapter on Scots education is focused solely on school education and does not make provision in relation to further or higher education. Dr Sylvia Warnecke said that “we definitely need to aspire to bringing Scots into FE and HE.” (8 May, Col 56)

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

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Annexe B

Comunn na Gàidhlig Additional submission dated 13 May 2024

Comunn na Gàidhlig has made a full submission to the ECYP Committee's call for views. This paper will briefly cover some points raised during the first two of the Committee's verbal evidence sessions on 1st and 8th May.

Given that the Bill is currently in Stage 1 "General Principles" it is a source of some surprise to us that the representatives called to give evidence to the Committee in relation to Gaelic have been from Scottish Government; Academia and Public Bodies. Some bodies have been represented several times, some individuals will appear on more than one occasion, albeit in different roles. This is not to say that those giving evidence are in any sense ignorant or unaware of the challenges facing Gaelic. In many instances they are directly involved in the speaker community themselves, however there is no specific representation from what could be called the 'Gaelic community' - those most directly affected by the success or failure of the provisions discussed - and the current approach is very official and 'top down'.

That said, we do believe that during these sessions to date the Committee have heard a solid cross-section of opinions and concerns; challenges and recommendations relating to Gaelic development. There has also been some predictable pushing back against further pro-Gaelic initiatives (notably a view from some Education Authorities via ADES that the current support for the creation of GME is sufficient).

Of those who have spoken in relation to Gaelic, the most obvious divisions of opinion relate to 'Bill or no Bill'; or 'Scottish Languages Bill vs. separate Gaelic and Scots provisions'. However what we have found most striking and welcome even among those taking different positions here, is the underlying commonality of focus on the critical state of the Gaelic language, and the need for more resources across the board.

During the first session, at least one Member of the Committee said that there was no more money to be had. We understand this position, at least in the short term, but we believe that this strong theme underpinning so much of the discussions so far must demonstrate to the Committee how much a lack of resourcing, over some considerable period, is damaging the language; and that all of the positive recommendations made should give the Committee confidence that Gaelic development is not a 'lost cause' given adequate focus and resources.

We are aware of the limitations of the ECYP consideration of the Bill; and of the contents of the accompanying Financial Memorandum, but would suggest that in the face of such unity and strength of evidence on the question of resources, individual

Committee Members, and the Committee as a whole ought to highlight this in budgetary/resource discussions in due course.

We would particularly support these comments made in relation to Gaelic Medium Education during the session on 8th May.

- We believe that a comprehensive GME offering, from 3 – 18 is critical to the future of Gaelic;
- There needs to be a re-focusing of GME on linguistic outputs – “functionally fluent” speakers;
- A dedicated GME curriculum (with attainment parity with the ‘English’ curriculum) would be a huge step forward;
- That extra-curricular activities beyond the classroom and in the community are essential;
- That legislation needs to change to lessen the burden on parents calling for the establishment of new GME provision.

Some discussion has been made during the first and second sessions in relation to the definitions of success: what would success look like; what targets should be said. As was said, we need targets and outcomes that fit our own contexts. Language development is a long-term goal – even with all the recommendations heard so far in place, and with the necessary financial and political support, it would take years to see the reversal of language decline. We would suggest that a powerful and meaningful interim target ought to be that 90% of children entering GME should be assessed as ‘functionally fluent’ when they leave Secondary school. Such a target would drive a focus on language ability, and provide a cohort of new speakers for the future.

In conclusion it should also be emphasised that it is enormously encouraging just to hear a key Committee of the Scottish Parliament engaging seriously with these issues; to hear proper consideration of some of the challenges facing the survival of Gaelic being discussed within the context of new, supportive legislation. If properly framed and resourced, this will be a massively important milestone for Gaelic development.

We sincerely thank all of the Members of the Committee for their time and commitment so far, and wish the Committee every success throughout the rest of this process.

Donald MacNeill,
Chief Executive,
Comunn na Gàidhlig
13th May, 2024

Comann nam Pàrant Additional submission dated 13 May 2024

As the national organisation which represents families with children in Gaelic medium education Comann nam Pàrant is disappointed not to have had the opportunity to appear before the committee to represent the views of parents, main stakeholders in Gaelic education, on a bill which has huge potential to support future developments in GME. There have been a number of points raised at the evidence sessions held so far that we would like to comment on, and hope that members will be able to consider our views.

Right to Gaelic medium education (GME)

A number of witnesses have referred to the lack of a parental right to GME. We share the opinion that Gaelic belongs to all of Scotland and therefore all families should have access to GME if they desire it. The Education Act of 2016 did provide a process whereby parents have the right to request GME, and we believe that this process could progress the rights of parents to GME for their children, if a number of issues around the provisions in the act were to be addressed:

1. A more robust requirement for local authorities to support parents with the process and raise awareness amongst parents of the opportunity to request GME. At present Statutory Guidance does place a duty on education authorities to promote and support GME but leaves the means of promotion up to the authority to decide. This has resulted in minimal promotion, with most local authorities limiting their actions to basic information on their website, with the result that most families are not aware of the process.
2. Take action to expand the under-resourced 0-3 Gaelic medium sector. Once families do access information on the process it is complicated. One of the challenges facing parents is summed up by a parent who contacted us recently "I had a look at the request form on the Scottish Government website and I'm a little confused with what's expected in it? It seems to suggest I need to know other parents who want their child learning Gaelic too". A number of years ago there was a funded Gaelic early years organisation who established early years groups in areas with no GME provision and parents had an opportunity to meet other families with an interest in Gaelic. There is no longer such an organisation and although Comann nam Pàrant now has a small early years' team, we do not yet have enough resources to develop many new areas. Parents are quite right to query a process that requires them to locate other interested families with no signposting to the support that is available from an organisation such as Comann nam Pàrant.
3. The process could be streamlined by replacing the current two-tiered assessment process with a requirement that local authorities have one full assessment. All requests made which follow guidance should proceed immediately to full assessment, there should be no need for an initial assessment.

Status

Several witnesses, both in giving evidence and in their submissions, have referred to the issue of official status for Gaelic and the importance of also embedding the principle of 'equal respect' in the bill. The principle of 'equal respect' will support the rights of children to have an educational experience in GME which has the same status as English medium education, and we support the request to include 'equal respect' in several sections of the bill as suggested by witnesses.

The general definition of 'school education' in the Education (Scotland) Act 1980

Comann nam Pàrant support the view expressed that the bill should proceed as written so that school education will include Gaelic learner and Gaelic medium education and that all local authorities will be required to make some provision for Gaelic education.

National Standards

There has been discussion at the sessions around the setting of national standards, particularly with reference to the diverse nature of the 32 local authorities in Scotland. Whilst we recognise that local authorities are at different stages with regard to delivery of GME, we are of the opinion that the issues that would most likely be addressed in the standards listed in the Policy Memorandum are all issues relating to quality of GME provision and as such should be applied nationally. Local decision making has often failed parents and they are looking for clarity in standards with a clear accountability framework for local authorities. However, there is currently a lack of detail on measures and targets. We are led to believe that these will exist in the finer details of the bill, but without seeing them it is impossible to know how successful this bill might be. We do, however, in recognition of the diverse nature of the education authorities, agree with the view expressed that there should be a national roadmap depending on stage of development with staggered progression. It is clear that in some areas there has been very little or no progression for a number of years. A recent example of this lack of progress is the failure of Argyll & Bute Council to engage with GME parents in Oban to establish a standalone Gaelic school, a request first put to the council in 2004. Indeed, instead of holding a meaningful consultation with parents on making provision for a school in Oban, the council has now opted to hold, in our view, a divisive and vague consultation on a Gaelic school for Argyll & Bute in order to fulfil the commitment in its current Gaelic Language Plan to hold a consultation with parents.

Scotland will be the only minority language in the UK without a Language Commissioner. Since Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education was published in 2017, we have seen no vigorous implementation of the Guidance, and without a Language Commissioner we have concerns that this will not change. There needs to be a method of enforcing the details of the bill, and in the absence of a Language Commissioner, there must be absolute clarity on how Scottish Government will ensure compliance with standards and guidance.

We agree wholeheartedly with **all** the concerns raised by CLAS in their additional submission dated 29 April 2024 to the committee. We would also argue that the majority of pupils in GME need additional support with language acquisition (as Gaelic is not their first language) and out of school access to Gaelic should be an essential provision for every area that offers GME.

We support the CLAS recommendation that a National Steering Group on Gaelic Education led by Scottish Government be set up to lead on GME development.

In their own submission, the Scottish Government has stated that this bill is about 'incremental steps'. Arguably, the time for incremental steps in Gaelic has passed. Lack of community representation at the evidence sessions does not give confidence to the Gaelic community that this bill is designed with them in mind. It adds to the concerns about the bill being yet another exercise in bureaucracy. This bill must give agency to parental and community organisations.

M. Wentworth

Scottish Government follow up evidence dated 14 May 2024

Dear Convenor

Thank you for hearing evidence from the Bill team for the Scottish Languages Bill at the Education, Children and Young People Committee on 1 May. The Committee asked for a written response to the following question -

“What consideration has been made of the availability of Gaelic-speaking teachers, specialist education staff, and ELC professionals to support the expected expansion of Gaelic education? “

It is recognised that there are workforce challenges existing across both Gaelic medium education and English medium education streams. The supply of teachers able to teach in Gaelic-medium education continues to be a priority for Scottish Ministers

A number of measures are in place across Scottish Government, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, local authorities, relevant public bodies and Gaelic sector funded bodies to try to address some of the challenges. Some of the main initiatives are set on in the **Annex A** to this letter. Some of these aspects have already been referred to in evidence before the committee in recent weeks.

A range of actions by different bodies in the system is required to effect change and to contribute to ensuring that workforce recruitment, retention and professional support is in place. This planning and approach should consider both Gaelic and English provision as integral. Some of the actions referred to have been in place for a long time and need to be continued, supported and expanded, whereas other initiatives are relatively new and will need to be continued, strengthened and evaluated over time.

Thank you for opportunity to provide more specific details in relation to the question. I hope this response is helpful and answers the question.

Your sincerely

Claire Cullen
Head of Gaelic & Scots

Teachers as a Priority

- Scottish Government is committed to protecting teacher numbers and is offering local authorities £145.5 million in 2024/2025 budget for that purpose.
- This funding will allow local authorities to protect teacher numbers, in order to support children's education. This funding can be applied across Gaelic and English medium streams.
- The Strategic Board for Teacher Education (SBTE), which is made up of a range of key education stakeholders, is looking at issues around the recruitment and retention of teachers in Scotland in detail, including promoting teaching as a valued profession. To further support this a target, it has been included in the more recent Gaelic National Plan.

Scottish Government Guidance on Initial Teacher Education

- The annual guidance letter from Scottish Government to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) emphasises the importance of Gaelic teacher recruitment by making clear that the 'supply of teachers able to teach in the medium of Gaelic continues to be a priority for Scottish Ministers. The Scottish Government would like SFC to continue to assist in promoting provision in this area and to give consideration to any initiatives which could improve effectiveness. We ask that SFC encourage Initial Teacher Education (ITE) providers to increase the places currently allocated to them and to promote a positive approach in relation to applications for all ITE programmes.' This letter also encourages interviews being offered to all applicants for teaching for Gaelic-medium education.

Pathways and Routes into Gaelic Initial Teacher Education

There are a range of options for Gaelic courses and Gaelic teacher training courses which provide a route into GME teaching. This section provides some examples of courses offered at certain establishments.

- Sabhal Mòr Ostaig offers a 4-year specific BA (Hons) Gaelic and Education for fluent and learners with a focus on immersion and bilingual teaching practices in schools. Year 3 and 4 of the degree are available at other UHI colleges by distance learning.
- At Sabhal Mòr Ostaig a PGDE Gaelic pathway is also on offer at primary and secondary and available by means of distance learning at other UHI colleges

- Both Sabhal Mòr Ostaig and Glasgow University offer one year Gaelic immersion courses to support teachers who wish to transfer to GME teaching.
- University of Edinburgh offers an MA GME primary for both Gaelic learners and fluent speakers.
- Strathclyde University, Additional Teaching Qualification for modern language teachers to be able to teach Gaelic as a modern language.
- Strathclyde University, BA and PGDE, primary and secondary for Gaelic medium teaching.
- Sabhal Mòr Ostaig offer an MEd Gaelic Education Course for postgraduate teachers and a range of professional support and learning opportunities such as podcast series [Oideas - Sabhal Mòr Ostaig \(uhi.ac.uk\)](https://www.uhi.ac.uk) and forum for discussion of research papers (Club Irise).

Teacher and Student Bursaries, Funding and Support

- In 2023 the bursary scheme to incentivise career changes into teacher training was extended for Gaelic. Prior to 2023 the focus of the bursary was STEM subjects. Prospective teachers who wished to teach STEM subjects (Physics, Maths, Technical Education, Computing Science, Chemistry, Home Economics) through the medium of Gaelic were eligible to apply for those subjects. From 2023 the scheme was extended to also include Gaelic as a secondary subject and Gaelic medium education across all secondary subjects and in primary.
- Bòrd na Gàidhlig can fund local authorities to enable teachers to undertake courses to strengthen Gaelic language skills through the Gaelic Language Act Implementation fund – recently rebranded as the Gaelic Plans Fund. A previous initiative, Gaelic Immersion for Teachers ran for a period allowing teachers over an academic year to transfer from English to Gaelic medium.
- Local authorities can also include language courses, provision of back fill for teachers to be released for language courses in their annual bids for Gaelic Specific Grant. This is a ring-fenced funding scheme (£4.48 million for 24/25) made available by Scottish Ministers to Scottish Local Authorities for up to 75% of the cost towards delivery of Gaelic education.
- The Student Awards Agency Scotland Guidance [Previous Study - SAAS](#) provides that SAAS will waive previous study rules on Cert HE Gaelic

Immersion courses. Students who have received funding for a degree or Higher National level qualification already are still eligible to receive funding for this course. If the Cert HE Gaelic Immersion is studied prior to another programme of study (e.g. an HNC or degree), it will not be taken into account for previous study.

- Bòrd na Gàidhlig has a fund to support those currently working toward a career in Gaelic teaching or Gaelic medium teachers looking to develop their professional skills. Under this fund students from the following can be considered: students undertaking a Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) in Gaelic education; students undertaking a Gaelic early years or Gaelic childcare course; Students undertaking a Gaelic education undergraduate degree; teachers that are employed in a role relating to Gaelic medium education that wish to undertake a course to develop their skills or qualified teachers looking to develop their skills to move into Gaelic medium education - [Gaelic Education Grants 2023/24 – Bòrd na Gàidhlig \(gaidhlig.scot\)](#).

GME Support for Professional Learning and Language Learning Resources

- Stòrlann [An t-Alltan - Co-labhairt do thidsearan Gàidhlig](#) provides resources for Gaelic medium education which once produced are free for authorities. Stòrlann also provide career long professional learning. Stòrlann is funded by Scottish Government and Bòrd na Gàidhlig.
- Local authorities also provide career long professional learning for their teachers and those from other authorities. Some local authorities provide CLPL for Gaelic medium education. Education Scotland also provides support for GME teachers.
- A number of other organisations are funded to provide materials for Gaelic medium education – there are many however one example is Keep Scotland Beautiful - [Sgoiltean-Èiceo sa Gàidhlig \(keepscotlandbeautiful.org\)](#).
- In June 2023 Sabhal Mòr Ostaig held a conference on Gaelic Medium Education . Recordings from sessions are available on line. [Foghlam na Gàidhlig: An-Dè, An-Diugh, agus A-Màireach - YouTube](#)
- Sabhal Mòr Ostaig offer Gaelic language at different levels include “An Cùrsa Comais” (for intermediate learners) and Gàidhlig is conaltradh” (fluent) on site at Scotland's National Centre for Gaelic Language and Culture. A Gaelic Summer School is being provided in 2024 as a bridging course for complete beginners to allow summer study leading to direct entry on to An Cùrsa Comais

- SMO provide a Social Services: Children and Young People course part time over one or two years foundation apprenticeship and a Professional Development 18 months distance learning SVQ3 for pupil support assistant or early years practitioners in Gaelic medium education - [SVQ3 Social Services \(Children and Young People\) - Sabhal Mòr Ostaig \(uhi.ac.uk\)](#).
- Sabhal Mòr Ostaig also provide a range of distance learning Gaelic courses for language “An Cùrsa Inntigridh” which progresses onto “An Cùrsa Adhartais” which in turn can provide access to the second year of degree courses.
- Fèisean nan Gàidheal has a network of development officers that support a growing range of activities which include Fèisgoil, its education services.
- The Go Gaelic course offers support and learning for primary teachers who may wish to deliver Gaelic learning at either L2 or L3 in primary schools.
- [Gàidhlig | e-Sgoil](#) delivers Gaelic & Gàidhlig SQA courses in partnership and in 2022-23 60 candidates were presented for both learner and fluent Gaelic courses at National 5, Higher & Advanced Higher level, with a pass rate of 97%.
- The work of Comann nam Pàrant [Gaelic Education | Comann Nam Pàrant](#) in providing support for 0-3 cròileagan groups also requires to be referenced. For many families this can be a first encounter with Gaelic and GME or a touch point for those returning to the language in adulthood with their own family. The welcome and language support provided to families can be a step for many to roles in ELC, teaching and across the sector - [Support for Parents | Comann nam Pàrant](#).

Additional Support

- e-Sgoil Misneachd programme consists of focussed sessions for P1 – S3 Broad General Education (BGE) Gaelic medium or ex-Gaelic medium pupils with the aim of improving pupil confidence to help retain and strengthen Gaelic language skills. These sessions are driven by learner need and school requirements and can thereby provide targeted support to learners with certain Additional Support Needs enabling them to continue to engage with Gaidhlig across the BGE. This provision is funded and freely available to all Scottish schools and is currently at capacity.

GME Teacher Promotion

- A campaign promoting the rewards of a teaching career is currently being considered, with the aim of improving recruitment and retention to the

subjects facing the greatest shortages and Gaelic will be included in any forthcoming activity. However, in recent years - following a General Teaching Council of Scotland (GTCS) survey of teachers - Bòrd na Gàidhlig produced a booklet 'So You Want to Teach in Gaelic' which outlined the pathways to teaching and other professional careers in GME. [Becoming a Gaelic teacher ; So you want to teach in Gaelic?](#) Bòrd na Gàidhlig has also created a padlet outlining the routes to teaching. [Teach in Gaelic](#) . Alongside this Bòrd na Gàidhlig launched a campaign, #DèanDiofar (make a difference), on social media with videos of six tutors discussing how they came to teach and why they enjoy it. This is being followed up by a similar initiative for early years staff. #DèanDiofar Tràth-bhliadhnaichean (Make a difference in the Early Years).

- A teacher recruitment officer has been a requirement of the annual grant in aid letter between Scottish Government and Bòrd na Gàidhlig and quarterly reports on activity are provided. The Scottish Government continues to support Bòrd na Gàidhlig's ongoing promotion of opportunities and pathways for Gaelic workforce.
- The National Gaelic Language Plan 2023 – [2028 National Gaelic Language Plan 2023-28 \(gaidhlig.scot\)](#), which was approved by Scottish Ministers and published by Bòrd na Gàidhlig in December 2023 has some specific GME workforce related targets including: “Gaelic-medium Education will be considered as an integral part of the work of education groups such as the Teacher Workforce Planning Advisory Group, the Strategic Board for Teacher Education and across all aspects of education reform” and “A co-ordinated approach to GME support for teachers in schools will be developed.”

Data

- Bòrd na Gàidhlig has published research on the numbers in Gaelic education for some time. Currently available on the Bòrd na Gàidhlig website is education data from 2011/2012 onwards. This has included numbers of full-time equivalent staff in Gaelic nurseries, primary and secondary with a breakdown of local authority area. Pupil numbers in GME at ELC, primary and secondary are also published. [Education Data – Bòrd na Gàidhlig \(gaidhlig.scot\)](#). At the time of writing the most recent statistics available on the website are for 2022/2023. There have been some changes in the way that the information has been gathered and presented over that period.
- The Bòrd na Gàidhlig website, for example, shows that in 2011/12 there were 189 teachers in GME primary (169 FTE) whereas in 2022/23 this has risen to 239 FTE. GME teachers in secondary was listed as 98 in 2011/12 and had risen to 126 in 22/23.

- Scottish Government collect data including number of teachers who are teaching through the medium of Gaelic and those able to teach through the medium of Gaelic. These numbers for 2023 are included below.

Primary and Secondary teachers by ability to teach through Gaelic - 2023

	Able to teach through Gaelic	Currently teaching through Gaelic	Teaching Gaelic language
Primary	418	266	NA
Secondary	183	121	85
Total	601	387	85

- The number of teachers able to teach through Gaelic but not currently teaching through Gaelic was referred to in evidence before the Education, Children and Young People Committee on 8 May by Mr Charity of CLAS (Comann Luchd-teagaisg Àrd-sgoiltean). Mr Macleod, Chief Officer for Education and Children services, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar speaking on behalf of the ADES (Association of Directors of Education in Scotland) also made references to some of the actions that can be taken by authorities to grow their own pathways and support staff in local areas.
- Innovations that can assist with recruitment and retention include for example: employers being clear that Gaelic is a ‘desirable’ or ‘essential’ skill in general recruitment for relevant posts. Offers of support with language classes, communities of practice, opportunities provided in workplace to connect with other speakers to use language in work-place setting either formally or informally. Encouragement of active offer by employers and service providers. Rolling recruitment for posts in difficult to fill areas; advertising Gaelic medium posts in advance of recruitment for English medium posts; or measures to assist with identifying suitable accommodation in an area. These are examples of things which can be deployed separately or in conjunction to assist with recruitment and retention.