

**BÒRD NA GàIDHLIG'S**  
**NATIONAL GAELIC LANGUAGE PLAN 2017-2022**  
**PUBLIC CONSULTATION**

**RESPONSE OF THE BOARD OF CELTIC STUDIES SCOTLAND**

The Board of Celtic Studies Scotland (BOCSS) was established as a forum through which issues of common interest and concern to higher education institutions in Scotland that teach Celtic Studies and related disciplines. Originally comprising representatives from the Celtic Studies departments of the Universities of Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Glasgow, and from the Faculty of Education at the University of Strathclyde, the Board now includes Sabhal Mòr Ostaig. Activities in which BOCSS is involved include the Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig conferences, held every second year since the year 2000, and established to promote support research on all aspects of Gaelic Studies and increased scholarship through the medium of Gaelic.

BOCSS welcomes the Draft National Gaelic Language Plan 2017-2022, and we are of the view that there is a great deal in the draft plan that is very useful. Rather than responding to the various consultation questions, though, we will simply make reference to issues which are of most direct relevance to BOCSS, leaving it to the institutions themselves and individual staff members to respond to those questions, should they wish to do so. We do, however, support the general aim, set out on p. 1 of the draft plan, of increasing the number of people speaking, using and learning Gaelic in Scotland and the number of situations in which it is used. We also support strongly the means by which the Bòrd proposes to do this, namely 'promoting a positive image of Gaelic', 'increasing the learning of Gaelic', and 'increasing the use of Gaelic'.

We believe that the university sector, of which BOCSS participants are a part, have a very important role to play with respect to each of these three areas, and we are glad that universities are recognised in several places in the draft plan. However, we are concerned that, in places, insufficient attention is given to the contribution of the university sector in particular and tertiary education in general. With respect to learning Gaelic, for example (p. 8), six priority areas are identified, but no specific reference is made to our sector, merely to 'Post-school and adult Gaelic learning'. In our view, the university sector in general, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig and the Celtic/Gaelic studies departments in particular make an extremely important contribution to Gaelic learning and Gaelic development in general that merits much clearer recognition and support. Through our courses, including our language courses, significant numbers of students who have gone through Gaelic-medium education (GME) or who have learned Gaelic as a subject at school greatly enrich their written and oral language skills, and a not insignificant number of ab initio learners of Gaelic come to fluency. Graduates of our programmes have, we would suggest, played a disproportionately large role in all aspects of Gaelic development, as evidenced by large numbers of our graduates who have gone on to take employment in Gaelic education, Gaelic media and, increasingly, in Gaelic organisations and public sector institutions which have Gaelic language plans.

We note that our role is not merely to equip students with strong Gaelic language skills, something which is unquestionably of great importance, but to equip our graduates with a deeper understanding of Gaelic culture, and of Gaelic's place in Scottish society both historically and at present. We are firmly of the view that while learning Gaelic as a language

is essential, linguistic ability must be complemented by an enriched understanding of Gaelic culture, literature (both written and oral), and history. Celtic/Gaelic departments and related institutions such as university special collections and archives also play a crucial role as custodians of Gaelic culture, from rare manuscripts to valuable sound, video and photographic archives to important book collections. Through our research and teaching, we constantly disseminate valuable cultural knowledge, not only to our students, but through participation in media and other fora. Colleagues in BOCSS also play a crucial role in conducting and disseminating research relating to all aspects of contemporary policy for Gaelic, something which is recognised to some extent in the draft plan, we are happy to acknowledge. We also make a very considerable contribution to Gaelic corpus planning, something which, again, we are happy to see recognised in the draft plan.

As a result, we would be very happy to see the specific role of universities with Celtic/Gaelic specialisms more explicitly recognised as a priority area in relation to ‘Learning Gaelic’ (p. 8, p. 22). While we are happy that ‘Further and Higher Education’ is recognised in the first paragraph under the heading ‘Post-school Gaelic Learning’ (p. 8), we would again suggest that the role of our institutions is specially recognised, partly because, in addition to learning the language, we provide a broader education in all aspects of Gaelic culture, literature and history, and that such education is also essential for Gaelic development. We note in relation to that passage (p. 8) that the Celtic/Gaelic departments at Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Glasgow also offer a range of further and higher education courses through the medium of Gaelic, as well as Sabhal Mòr Ostaig; as does Lews Castle College UHI, we understand. We would also note that our institutions play a crucial role in relation to the priority area ‘Gaelic medium workforce recruitment, retention, training and supply’. As noted above, our graduates play a disproportionately large role in Gaelic education and media, in Gaelic organisations, and in public sector Gaelic development. Our role in Gaelic teacher training, both indirect (as many of our graduates go into Gaelic teacher training) and direct (some of our participant institutions provide Gaelic teacher training and CPD for teachers already in the education system who are seeking to improve their Gaelic language skills) is particularly important, and should, in our view, be more explicitly recognised.

Finally, we think it is important that the Bòrd provides support for particular initiatives of importance to BOCSS participants, and that the Bòrd signals such support in the National Gaelic Language Plan 2017-2022. One initiative is the summer school which has been held the last several years for students who are studying Gaelic in our participating institutions, and which has been hosted by Sabhal Mòr Ostaig UHI and Lews Castle College UHI. While the summer school has received some support from the Scottish Funding Council and the Bòrd, the future funding of the summer school is uncertain, and we would welcome recognition of the importance of the summer school and of the Bòrd’s desire to ensure that it is funded on a sustainable and long-term basis. Another initiative is the biennial Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig conference. In addition to greatly enhancing research on all areas of Gaelic studies, the conference proceedings have greatly enriched the scholarly literature, much of which is now in Gaelic, and which is essential to Gaelic education, both at tertiary level and more generally. Third, while we welcome the recognition in the draft plan of important research initiatives such as DASG, we would like to see recognition of the importance of the broad range of research that is being carried out in our participating institutions, and by others working in the Higher and Further Education sectors, both in Scotland and, in many cases, abroad (not least in Canada, for example).

We are grateful to the Bòrd for the work that it has done since its creation, and for the work done on the draft plan and in conducting this consultation. We hope that this response is helpful.

With best wishes,

Prof. Thomas O. Clancy,  
University of Glasgow,  
Chair of Board of Celtic Studies Scotland

Prof. Robert Dunbar,  
University of Edinburgh,  
Secretary, Board of Celtic Studies Scotland