

Comann nam Pàrant (Dun Èideann)

Response to the Public Consultation on the National Gaelic Language Plan 2017-22

Comann nam Pàrant (Dun Èideann) (CnPDE) is a voluntary organisation representing parents and carers with children at all levels of Gaelic-medium education (GME) in Edinburgh. We welcome the opportunity to comment on and provide input for the draft National Gaelic Language Plan 2017-22 (the Plan). Our comments will focus mainly on the aspects of the Plan which are concerned with Gaelic education in general and GME in particular. We will in addition make general comments on other areas.

This response is submitted on behalf of an organisation and is also endorsed by Taobh na Pàirce Comhairle nam Pàrant (Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce Parent Council).

Appended to this consultation response is our CnPDE discussion paper on *Sustainable GME Development March 2017* (CnPDE Discussion Paper), which sets out our expectations of the entitlement of children in GME to an immersion education and the challenges to be overcome in meeting that entitlement. Our response should be read in conjunction with this document, as we believe that meeting the challenges currently facing GME should be the main focus for Gaelic development in the next five years.

1. Tha cumadh a' Phlana a' gabhail a-steach amas, cuspairean, prìomh raointean agus gealltanasan. A bheil beachd agaibh air cumadh a' Phlana agus air an àrd-amas againn?

The structure for the Plan consists of an aim, priority areas and commitments.

Do you have any comments on how we have structured the Plan and the overall aim we have selected?

As an overall structure, we believe that it is sensible to have a high level aim, which is then backed up by priorities and commitments. We believe it is important for the Plan to contain a level of detail sufficient for the success of the aim and the underlying commitments to be measurable. Where targets are set, we believe that there should be clarity as to what steps will be taken to achieve these targets, and the timescale for taking such steps.

“Our aim is to increase the number of people speaking, using and learning Gaelic in Scotland and the number of situations in which it is used.” (Plan p.6)

CnPDE believes that this high level aim is appropriate for the Plan. Parents of children in GME would consider an increase in the number of Gaelic speakers a very positive step forward. It would be particularly beneficial for GME children to see an increase in the number of situations in which Gaelic is used.

The Plan includes lengthy introductory remarks. We accept that this is necessary in a national level document which we hope will have a wide audience, some of whom will

have little prior knowledge of Gaelic.

GME parents, and other experts in Gaelic, are looking for this high level approach to be supported by a measurable action plan to deal with very specific issues. Other organisations at both national and local levels are required to produce GLPs with detailed action plans, including timescales for delivery. It would be appropriate for the National Plan to contain such an action plan.

For example, the Plan includes GME at primary and secondary levels as a priority area; supported by the commitment to increase the number of Gaelic schools and to recruit, educate and retain Gaelic teachers. We believe that these commitments should be further supported by a detailed action plan to demonstrate the steps that will be taken to successfully meet these commitments.

Action plan steps might include for example a specific year on year target for increasing the number of recruits into Gaelic teaching courses.

Without such a detailed action plan, it is not possible to evaluate the success of the implementation of the Plan's aims, or to make necessary corrections as the five year period of the Plan progresses. Without the addition of specific goals, the Plan risks being only a list of worthy, but nebulous, objectives, and of little concrete use in supporting those tasked with implementing the Plan.

2. Tha sinn dhen bheachd gu bheil e riatanach gum bi deagh ìomhaigh aig a' Ghàidhlig agus gum bi na raointean shuas a' cur gu mòr ri sin. A bheil beachdan agaibh fhèin air na raointean a thagh sinn no càil eile co-cheangailte ris a' chuspair seo?

We believe that the promotion of a positive image for Gaelic is essential and we think that the areas above are the key areas that can make a contribution to this.

Do you have any comments on the areas we have selected or alternative suggestions?

CnPDE agrees that the promotion of a positive image for Gaelic is very important. We believe that positive views of Gaelic are best achieved through increasing the number of Gaelic speakers and the opportunities for them to use the language. This will assist with the promotion of Gaelic as a useful, living language.

For children in GME a positive image of Gaelic is essential to encourage them to use the language outside of school and to continue the revitalisation of Gaelic through use in their own homes as they grow to adulthood. As children become older and more aware of views of others outside their own circle, we must be aware of the effect of negative and inaccurate reports about Gaelic in the press, and consider a strategy to counter this issue.

Bòrd na Gàidhlig has an opportunity to influence the promotion of a positive image for

Gaelic through its approval of GLPs from other organisations. How are local authorities and national organisations being encouraged or required to promote Gaelic positively? Organisations such as the National Museum of Scotland could play a significant role in helping to normalise and positively promote the language, and this can be monitored through their GLPs.

Gaelic is gradually becoming more visible in the public domain, but CnPDE is concerned that some national cultural organisations still have a weak commitment to Gaelic with low levels of visibility and promotion. There can be a tendency to use Gaelic only where there is a specific “Gaelic” subject interest, rather than in relation to their service more generally. This has a detrimental effect on Gaelic’s visibility in national life and, which is more concerning, severely limits the opportunities for children being educated through Gaelic to engage in educational experiences outside of school – which is essential to achieve the outcome of fluency in the language.

CnPDE believes that organisations such as Fèisean, and activities supported by Comunn na Gàidhlig, are crucial to give GME children the opportunity to meet children from other GME schools and to participate in fun Gaelic activities outside the classroom. We trust that these activities, which are highly reliant on voluntary effort and national funding, will continue to be supported and expanded.

3. Tha sinn dhen bheachd gu bheil foghlam agus ionnsachadh na Gàidhlig aig cridhe a’ Phlana seo. Tha sinn air liosta a dhèanamh de na prìomh raointean airson leasachadh san àm ri teachd. A bheil beachdan agaibh air seo, agus air na prìomh raointean a thagh sinn airson ionnsachadh na Gàidhlig?

We believe education and Gaelic learning are central to this Plan. We have also listed the priority areas that we believe should be a focus for ongoing activity. Do you have any comments on this emphasis and on the priority areas selected for learning Gaelic?

We believe that Gaelic education and learning should be the central focus of the Plan. With the aim of the Plan being to increase the number of people who can speak and use the language, special focus should be given to GME. Immersion learning is proven as a highly effective method of language acquisition, and the effective delivery of GME is crucial in increasing the number of fluent speakers of Gaelic.

It is important to emphasise that increasing the number of learners does not necessarily lead to an increase in the number of adult Gaelic speakers. It would be useful to establish a means of evaluating the outcomes from GME schools, and the relevant factors contributing to success or otherwise.

Our views on the development of GME are set out in our attached CnPDE Discussion Paper where we set out the challenges facing GME development, and how these

challenges might be addressed.

We believe that the Plan needs to be clearer in recognising that there is currently a critical shortage of GME teachers, which threatens to seriously disrupt the immersion education of many GME children by removing them from GME during periods of their primary education.

Furthermore, having an increasing number of non Gaelic-speaking teachers in classrooms in GME settings could increase the workload and impact on the morale of Gaelic-speaking staff. This would work against the commitment to recruit and retain GM teachers.

The key outcome for GME of producing fluent and confident speakers of Gaelic will not be met without the staff shortages in GME being addressed.

4. Tha sinn dhen bheachd gu bheil na raointean a chaidh a thaghadh cudromach airson cleachdadh na Gàidhlig a bhrosnachadh. A bheil beachdan agaibh air mar a dh'fhaodamaid piseach a thoirt air ìre cleachdaidh na Gàidhlig?

We believe the areas selected are important for promoting the increased use of Gaelic.

Do you have any comments or suggestions you would like to make in relation to promoting the increased use of Gaelic?

The Plan notes that there are growing Gaelic communities based around GME schools in lowland urban centres of population (Plan p.16). These centres of population may require a different approach to community promotion and support than the traditional rural Gaelic speaking areas. There is a strong argument for a community and education development officer to be based in the central belt, as the population centres of Glasgow and Edinburgh are likely to be the locations of the largest number and fastest growth rates of new speakers.

We believe that Gaelic would also be better promoted by providing easy to access translation facilities. This would help to encourage organisations and companies without fluent Gaelic speakers to use Gaelic in printed or online materials.

5. Ann an ceistean 2, 3 is 4, chaidh iarraidh oirbh ur beachdan a thoirt air na prìomh raointean a chaidh a chomharrachadh. Anns a' cheist seo, bu mhath leinn ur beachdan fhaighinn air na prìomh ghealltanasan a chomharraich sin agus air gealltanasan a bharrachd a bu chòir a bhith ann gus an dèanar adhartas ann a bhith a' leasachadh na th' ann de dhaoine a tha a' labhairt, cleachdadh is ionnsachadh na Gàidhlig ann an Alba agus ann a bhith a' leudachadh nan suidheachaidhean anns am bi i air a cur gu feum?

In questions 2, 3 and 4, you were asked about your views on the priority areas

identified. In this question, we would like to hear any views or suggestions you may have on the key commitments we have identified and views on any key commitments you think should be included in order to make progress with the aim of increasing the number of people speaking, using and learning Gaelic in Scotland and the number of situations in which it is used?

Promoting Gaelic

The Plan includes a commitment to produce a strategy for equality and diversity issues connected to Gaelic. In the context of GME, a move towards more equality requires a focus on children with additional support needs.

Children in GME who require additional support with Gaelic literacy are often let down by a lack of resource and funding. With local authority education budgets already stretched, there may be a need to look national level at how Gaelic specific grant budgets are allocated to ensure that additional support needs are a priority.

It is recognised that funding for Gaelic TV does not adequately allow for new programming in a variety of areas identified by MG Alba, including children's programmes. That being the case however, CnPDE would like to see a positive approach to Gaelic programming for children, including specific schools programming to support children learning through Gaelic.

Learning Gaelic

Our key comment is that the Plan requires a clearer focus on the outcomes of GME, namely that GME will produce fluent and confident speakers of the language, who will go on to use Gaelic in their adult lives, and pass it on to their own families.

The Plan also lacks acknowledgement of the critical lack of GME staff that is threatening the effective delivery of GME. There is a disconnect between the support for parents in their requests for GME and the encouragement of GME to grow, and the reality of the lack of GME teachers.

With regard to GM Early Learning, it should be recognised that a lack of capacity and difficulties with organising wraparound childcare can make GM nursery level inaccessible for families. It is really important that solutions are put in place to address these issues, so that all children who enter GME at P1 level have had access to high quality GM pre-school education.

Where children enter P1 without having attended Sgoil-àraich, it may be appropriate to consider providing a special conversion class. In Welsh-medium education "reception classes" are used for this purpose.

CnPDE recognises the important steps forward that have been taken within the life of the previous National Plan to clarify some key areas of discussion in GME. We acknowledge the importance of the two key documents:

1. The document produced by Bòrd na Gàidhlig dated February 2017: *Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education* (Statutory Guidance).
2. The document produced by Education Scotland / Foghlam Alba dated February 2015: *Advice on Gaelic Education* (Advice).

We consider the Statutory Guidance to be a very positive step towards the aim of making GME a right for all parents in Scotland who wish it for their children. Given that the Statutory Guidance places a statutory duty on local authorities, the National Plan should provide specific detail about how the Statutory Guidance will be enforced.

The Foghlam Alba Advice is also a very useful document for parents in clarifying the entitlement of children of children in GME to a continuing immersion education. The Plan needs to include more detail about how the level of immersion in GME schools will be monitored, maintained and improved.

One of the commitments is for the number of Gaelic schools to increase from six to ten over the life of the Plan. Although GME parents see the positive side of an increasing number of GME pupils and the opportunities that gives our children to use their Gaelic in adult life, there is an understandable level of unease given the current issues with staffing.

A significant amount of additional detail is required to be added to the Plan to demonstrate how the proposed new Gaelic schools will be established without adverse effect on the children who are pupils in existing GME schools. The Plan does not even give detail as to whether the proposed schools are primary or secondary.

Assuming that four new primary schools are to be established, this could represent a notable increase in GME capacity nationally. Given that it is likely that a significant proportion of future GME teachers will come from a GME background, it is worth looking at the pool of potential recruits for the GME teaching profession, how the pool of potential teachers is expanding, and whether such a rapid capacity expansion is manageable.

The establishment of the initial tranche of GME schools was highly successful and led to an immediate uplift in the entrants to GME. In Edinburgh we saw a significant uplift in the 2014 P1 intake. These children, were they to choose to train as teachers, would be coming into the workplace by around 2032. At CnPDE we believe that the long term picture for GME looks positive, if there is a focus on best practice immersion in GME schools.

However, there needs to be an acceptance that simply expanding capacity will not necessarily meet the required outcome of producing more fluent Gaelic speakers. A strategic approach to expansion needs to be in place to ensure that expansion in capacity does not result in children being removed from immersion learning. Our attached CnPDE Discussion Paper provides further detail.

In terms of the primary GME experience, we would also like to see more commitment to an enrichment of the quality for children.

There is a need for greater and more focused support for literature for children in Gaelic, both for use in the school, but also for reading for pleasure. There is little available beyond Early Years and at the point that English reading is introduced into the curriculum there is no counterbalance of Gaelic reading books to keep children engaged in Gaelic, although it is their first reading language. This has a serious effect on children's level of comfort with Gaelic reading and with extending their effective Gaelic vocabulary, and helps to reinforce the idea that Gaelic is only for use in school.

CnPDE also believes that there should be key commitments around Secondary GME to try and bring secondary in line with the best practice contained in the Advice. According to the Advice, GME immersion should continue to the end of Broad General Education (S2 or S3). The Plan should consider investigating how many GME children currently do not receive this level of immersion, and consider solutions for the staffing issues at secondary.

We would like to see more focus on the ability of secondary schools to produce Gaelic-speaking adults at the end of secondary education. It is not clear, from the numbers entering secondary from a GM primary education, how many will continue using and learning Gaelic throughout secondary and what their level of fluency will be at the end of their secondary education. It would be worthwhile to introduce some form of longitudinal study of children in GME to track the outcomes from GME entrants at Early Years and Primary stage, and to identify the important factors in terms of supporting children to adult fluency.

CnPDE has concerns about the lack of opportunity for children to use and learn through Gaelic at secondary, other than during Gàidhlig lessons, and the fragility of provision when one teacher leaving a school can mean that a whole subject area is lost.

There is a clearer strategy needed to ensure sufficient numbers of secondary teachers are available to teach through the medium of Gaelic, with focus particularly required on the subject areas for which the SQA offers Gaelic subjects (Nuadh-eòlas, eachdraidh, Cruinn-eòlas, matamataig agus Gàidhlig). There is also a need for a more imaginative and far-reaching approach to how secondary GME should be delivered in an environment which for many GME pupils will be largely English-speaking. At the moment an ad-hoc approach is taken by different schools and the Statutory Guidance is very broad in this regard. Such an approach is unlikely to deliver fluent adult speakers and therefore undermines the core aim of the Plan.

We support the e-sgoil initiative and hope to see it available nationally, with training provided for teachers in user schools. The e-sgoil will be a useful supplement for GME secondary pupils but should not be seen as an alternative to recruiting additional qualified GME staff at secondary level.

In terms of out of school activities, it can be difficult to maintain the interest of teenagers

in Gaelic. There is a need for a youth strategy to ensure there is something available for everyone to keep their interest in the language.

6. Tha na ceistean co-chomhairleachaidh a nochd na bu tràithe air a bhith rudeigin mionaideach. Ma tha sibh airson puingean eile a thogail, agus mura robh cothrom agaibh sin a dhèanamh thuige seo, nach sgrìobh sibh iad gu h-ìosal.

The earlier consultation questions have been fairly specific. If there are any other points you would like to make and feel you have not had the opportunity to do so, please write them below.

As noted above, CnPDE would like to see an Action Plan associated with the Plan which sets out detailed, measurable steps to achieve the Plan's commitments. This is particularly the case with regard to education targets.

CnPDE understands that local authorities have the key responsibility for the delivery of education, and that Bòrd na Gàidhlig may be limited in terms of its authority. However, we believe that the Bòrd has a crucial role to play in terms of strategic leadership to address the critical and urgent shortage of GME staff, and the positive delivery of GME outcomes.

Some basic actions could be taken immediately. These actions might include:

- An immediate census of all education authorities to determine the number of GME pupils who are not receiving their entitlement to an immersion education, and to assist with workforce planning.
- Support for all education authorities to carry out a survey of English-medium education teaching staff to identify Gaelic speakers who could be supported to transfer to GME.
- The establishment of a new conversion course at an appropriate level to reflect the stage of Gaelic of teachers who most usually wish to convert to GME. This may require funding teachers for a significant period of study – possibly a year spent in Gàidhlig immersion, followed by a conversion course such as GIfT.
- Enhancements to Continuing Professional Development/ Continuing Lifelong Professional Learning to recognise the additional requirements of GME teachers to continually develop their language skills (particularly literacy and grammar skills) in order to deliver the curriculum through Gaelic. For example, GME specific courses should be developed for in-service days.
- Support for the development of the e-sgoil, including the delivery of training for teachers in user schools nationally.
- The appointment of a full time graduate-level GME development officer to work in the central belt region, alongside local education authorities, to manage workforce planning and deliver national level initiatives.

- Targets for all universities in Scotland offering teacher education programmes to ensure a percentage of places are allocated to GME teachers.
- A social media strategy as a starting point for beginning to counter negative and inaccurate reports about Gaelic.