

Fiosrachadh Pearsanta/Contact Information

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Ceistean | Questions

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?

The structure of the plan seems sound enough and fit to its purpose. It usefully seeks to delineate a primary aim, priority areas to achieve that aim and commitments that will support the aim.

On the other hand, what is missing is truly surprising: no reference is made to the parlous state of the language as a living language and what measures may be needed to reverse that.

It is no exaggeration to say that the language is in a state of crisis. A proxy indicator of that is that in 1978 there were 6,300 pupils in the Comhairle Nan Eilean area; there are now less than one-half of that number spread across these Gaelic heartland communities. My expectation (based on my own experience, what I hear, and what I read) is that only a frighteningly small proportion of that number are active Gaelic speakers. (By 'active', I mean using the language in the home, within the peer group and in the surrounding community, to a significant degree. The use of English is natural and correct in settings where that is appropriate; but the use of Gaelic in settings where it is appropriate is fundamental to its survival.)

How that 'significant' level of usage can be defined and encouraged is the central question for the Bord in pursuing its primary aim.

2. Tha sinn dhen beachd 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?

A 'positive image for Gaelic' would seem to indicate an aspiration that individuals, the general public and organisations that take an interest in Gaelic as a language - and in particular, it's continuation as a living language - should view it as worthwhile.

That is an acknowledgment that such a view is not always the case; and attempts to counter negative opinions about the legitimacy of the language and efforts to preserve and revitalise it, through the areas indicated (Gaelic media, Gaelic education at all levels, and Gaelic arts) are a legitimate part of the 'Public Relations' effort that needs to be deployed in defence of such efforts and the expenditure they entail.

What is missing is any reference to the 'image' Gaelic has with its most important constituency: those who speak it, those who could speak it, those who could return to it and those who could learn it. An intensive public information effort is required to explain to all those interested in the language, (a) how and why it is being lost, (b) the crucial importance of using the language in the family and in the community, (c) its importance in creating personal and cultural identity and (d) the pride Gaels should have in the language and the culture it carries. These issues need to be brought to the attention of people: they do not ordinarily occur to individuals in the course of their everyday concerns.

Within that, there is an issue of confidence that needs to be tackled. Perfectly adequate speakers often feel that their Gaelic is not as good as others (older people or people from other communities or with higher educational achievement). This is often felt also by learners - especially in their efforts outside the learning environment. These feelings need to be acknowledged in order to help people to see beyond their inhibitions.

3. Tha sinn dhen beachd 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

or learning Gaelic?

Education and Gaelic learning are certainly important aspects of the plan. Much has been achieved and much can still be achieved through education and learning activities. However, what should be central to the plan is the encouragement of Gaelic in the home, in the peer group and in the community. A rationale for this is described in my paper "Language and Identity" which I enclose as a central part of my response to this consultation.

Education and formal learning adds to and embellishes language and it is central to the vigorous development and use of a language in a modern context. BUT it does not produce the demotic language that is the foundation of any language. Again, my reasoning for this is given at length in my paper.

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?

All the priority areas are important - BUT stress should be laid on "homes and communities" and "young people" - these are seminal. All the other areas are only viable if these areas prosper

5. Ann an ceistean 2, 3 is 4, chaidh iarraidh oirbh ur beachdan a thoirt air na prìomh raointean a chaidh achomharrachadh. 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?

That there is a modest increase in the number of people under 25, who claim some ability to speak, while there is a decrease in the total number who claim this, is a very disappointing outcome. It cannot be overemphasised that it is the number of people that use the language that matters – numbers reflecting people claiming some competence are much less relevant to the central aim of preservation.

Simple number-counting is routinely used by civil servants in monitoring initiatives; numbers are a reasonable proxy measure of the progress of many initiatives. Some reliance on this rather simplistic measure will, no doubt, continue in future analyses. While this give a crude indication of progress (or otherwise) there is a need to get behind these 'surface' figures.

A more incisive measure could be the proportion of people using the language to a significant (requires definition) degree in the relevant (requires definition) communities. The age-profile of such people is critical, given the population decline in younger age-groups.

The educational effort promises to be very well supported - but it remains the central element in the plan. Education alone CAN NOT ensure transmission of a language, nor of its associated culture.

Under 'Learning Gaelic', the assumption seems to be that learning happens in formal settings. The most important form of learning happens in the home, where the developing child absorbs the language and culture of the family - and of the surrounding community – particularly where the family is embedded in a Gaelic speaking community. The emphasis on Gaelic use in families and those communities with a significant percentage of Gaelic speakers, and on young people is heartening.

In this context, the text mentions a 'range of initiatives' and 'current initiatives' that are to be reviewed. It would have been useful to give an account of what these initiatives are, their methodology and objectives. It is in this area of policy making and practical effort that gains are to be made in preserving and transmitting the language.

The projected effort in the recruitment, training and retention of the workforce is crucial. An emphasis on an educational workforce may well be appropriate at this stage – but scope should be built in for broadening this base to reflect the tasks that need to be undertaken at community level. While a training in teaching and a high level of fluency are excellent skills, training in community leadership and enablement skills would also be of great value. A 'super-professional' hybrid, devoting some time to the classroom and some time to community leadership of an initiative based on the SIP document 'A Guide for Planning the Future of Our Language' (<https://www.sil.org/guide-planning-future-our-language>) may be fanciful. Teams of 2 (or more!) could be more realistic, in terms of time-

share, workload and support. Such initiatives are possible; indeed, something resembling this kind of effort may now be unavoidable if real progress is to be made at the grassroots.

I am aware that there is a feeling abroad that the Gaelic initiative has been led by an urban elite, with little input from rural communities. Indeed, I have had comments from several people to that effect. I do not mean that as a criticism. Rural communities do not have a glittering record in creating new initiatives for all sorts of good practical reasons. In fact, someone has to take the lead and it is entirely usual for elites to lead initiatives. They have the vision, knowledge, power and commitment to do so. (Objectivity and vision often come with having left a culture and being able to 'look back' at it.) What is required in this instance, is that they take all those with an interest in preserving the language along with them; there is a need to seed projects, co-work with people in communities and form partnerships with new and existing initiatives. Listening, enabling and partnership are the key activities required.

It would be useful to listen carefully to - and incorporate the knowledge, energy and commitment of - Gaelic 'activists' already engaged in community or teaching initiatives. Some form of 'Gaelic Plan' would seem appropriate as a part of any community initiative in the relevant (requires definition) communities. For example, the development of a new community centre/hub could well include proposals for ways in which Gaelic should be included: when and where should it be spoken? When, where and how should it be taught? How can the new facility contribute to the preservation, revitalisation and development of the language as a spoken language?

A recent opinion, with which I concur, is that different initiatives should be tailored to urban situations and the rural heartland communities. This seem to make sense, but brings with it the inevitable questions around resources, priorities and where the most meaningful gains can be made.

There is a need to inform the public – and particularly the affected population – about the plight of the language and what might be done to preserve and revitalise it, through some sort of 'public information' initiative. This brings with it a raft of questions: is being a Gael an ethnicity to be respected like any other? How can we avoid offending people with no interest in the language? How do we deal with the virulent anti-Gaelic feeling – and the backlash from that? Is it politically correct to privilege a language, culture or ethnicity in seeking to protect and develop it? How does equal opportunities feed into this?

All these and many other questions face the Bord and all interested others, at this time.

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.

I wish to stress again the logic of the situation. All languages at all times exist and are transmitted in demotic forms. This is the primary level of language usage. Education and formal learning of the language are embellishments - even enhancements - of the basic demotic language; but these are secondary activities. If energy and resources are devoted to these secondary activities at the expense of the primary areas of the demotic use and transmission of the language, it will be in danger of becoming "Latinised": of dying out and becoming the preserve of an interested elite. This is explained at greater length in my paper "Language & Identity" which I enclose/attach as a part of my submission.