

Consultation on the National Gaelic Plan 2017-2022

Response from the School of Education, University of Strathclyde

The School of Education at the University of Strathclyde welcomes this opportunity to respond to the consultation on the *National Gaelic Language Plan 2017-2022*. We endorse the Plan's commitment to increasing the number of people speaking, using and learning Gaelic in Scotland. As a School of Education with a major role in providing teacher education for prospective Gaelic-medium teachers and teachers of Gàidhlig (for fluent speakers) and Gaelic (for learners) we have a particular interest in aspects of the Plan which relate increasing the learning and the use of Gaelic, while recognising that this work also contributes to the promoting a positive image of Gaelic. Our response is therefore principally in relation to **Question 3**, concerning priority areas for education and Gaelic learning.

Six priority areas are listed in the new Plan:

1. Gaelic in Early Learning and Childcare
2. Gaelic medium education in primary and secondary schools
3. Gaelic learner education in primary and secondary schools
4. Post-school and adult Gaelic learning
5. Gaelic medium workforce recruitment, training and supply
6. Resources and support for learning

Each of these areas has a significant part to play in increasing the numbers of people who can and do use Gaelic in their daily lives. However, we see **Priority 5** as critical to the success of the other areas, reflecting our awareness of a continuing shortage of Gaelic-medium education (GME) and Gàidhlig/Gaelic teachers in Scottish schools, and of practitioners in the early years with educational qualifications which prepare them to promote early bilingualism. We would therefore like to see the following actions to build on current provision:

- an enhanced national recruitment programme highlighting both initial teacher education (ITE) and career long professional learning (CLPL) opportunities for both fluent speakers of Gaelic and adult learners (new speakers) of Gaelic;
- an accredited national system of ITE and CLPL for GME teachers which would recognise and develop the distinctive linguistic and pedagogical skills required for working in GME, in addition to those needed for teaching in English-medium classrooms, aligned with the GTCS standards for registration, CLPL and leadership & management;
- similarly, an accredited national system for early years GME practitioners which would recognise and develop the distinctive linguistic and pedagogical skills required for working in this sector;
- a coherent national system for teaching and accrediting young and adult learners' progression in Gaelic learning, one advantage of which would be to establish the minimum linguistic competence required for GME practice in the early years and teaching in the primary and secondary sectors;
- collaboration between local authorities and national bodies to develop a long-term strategy concerning GME teacher supply (e.g. by establishing priority subjects at secondary level) to inform recruitment strategies and the focus of ITE and CLPL provision;

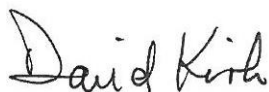
- a national evaluation of the contributions of current ITE and CLPL provision in Scotland, and identification of gaps, to inform future development.

In addition, we advocate a national evaluation of the outcomes of GME and the teaching of Gàidhlig/ Gaelic at the end of the secondary phase, complementing the earlier studies of Johnstone et al. (1999) and O’Hanlon et al. (2010). These studies focused mainly on outcomes at the end of the primary sector, and relate to the period before the implementation of *Curriculum for Excellence*. There is now a need for:

- an evaluation of the level of competence in Gaelic achieved by pupils who have experienced GME in the primary phase and, where available, in the secondary phase, at the end of their secondary careers to determine the level of linguistic competence achieved or retained;
- an evaluation of the impact of GME on attainment in other areas of curriculum by the end of the secondary phase;
- a consideration of any ‘value added’ competences demonstrated by GME pupils who sit national examinations through the medium of Gaelic rather than English and the implications for UCAS tariffs;
- an investigation into the attitudes of GME graduates, at the end of their secondary school careers, to their experiences of bilingual education and to their expectations of using Gaelic after they leave school.

Such an evaluation would enable all those committed to promoting and expanding GME to quantify the gains made by pupils who have had the opportunity to learn in this sector, to establish the contribution that this provision makes to the revitalisation of Gaelic, and to identify aspects of provision which could be enhanced.

During the period covered by the previous National Gaelic Plan (2012-2017), the School of Education at the University of Strathclyde played a valuable role in supporting the goals set, through its provision of ITE and CLPL routes for prospective GME and Gàidhlig/ Gaelic teachers, its contributions to the work of national bodies concerned with Gaelic-medium education, and research into Gaelic in the early years and into teacher education; and we are committed to supporting the implementation of the 2017-2022 plan to the best of our ability.



David Kirk, Head of the School of Education

References

- Johnstone, R., Harlen, W., MacNeil, M., Stradling, R. & Thorpe, G. (1999). *The Attainments of Pupils receiving Gaelic-medium Education in Scotland*. Stirling: Scottish CILT.
- O’Hanlon, F., McLeod, W. & Paterson, L. (2010) *Gaelic-medium Education in Scotland: choice and attainment at the primary and early secondary school stages*. Report for Bòrd na Gàidhlig. Edinburgh: The University of Edinburgh.