

Urras Brosnachaidh na Gaidhlig / The Gaelic Language Promotion Trust

Response to the National Gaelic Language Plan

Section 1

At its Quarterly meeting in Stirling on 18 April 2017, Urras Brosnachaidh na Gaidhlig decided to respond to the Public Consultation on the National Gaelic Language Plan 2017-2022. At its meeting, the Urras took a particular interest in Gaelic Education and its comments concentrate, for the most part, on that area.

The Urras acknowledges the progress that has been made in Gaelic Education in the last 25 years. There has been a remarkable increase in the number of people who want to learn the language and these learners have added enormously to the wellbeing of the language. Above all, there has been the growth of Gaelic Medium Education, one of the great success stories of Scottish Education in the last quarter of the 20th century.

From its discussion, Urras Brosnachaidh na Gàidhlig would make the following points:

- It believes that we now need a cohesive strategy to build on that foundation.
- We need to look anew at secondary school provision which is presently the Achilles Heel of the growth of Gaelic Medium Education.
- The whole subject of attracting and training Gaelic teachers requires a radical new look.
- We also need a strategy that goes beyond 3-18 education. The strategy must involve Further and Higher Education and should be accompanied by a plan to develop extra-curricular activities such as the arts and sport.
- The Urras recognises the unique contribution of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RSO) in promoting and sustaining the Gaelic language and our rich oral, and musical heritage through their traditional Gaelic music and song degree programmes. These learning pathways act as springboards to national and international platforms for young Gaelic talent. The RSO produces some of our most influential role models and ambassadors for the language.
- The Gaelic world should now acknowledge the significance of the awarding of Title to the University of the Highlands and Islands. The UHI offers new opportunities and new methods of working. It has a key role to play in applying new technologies to the learning process and thereby include the remotest of our Gaelic communities.
- The use of such technology would enable the growth of Learning Centres scattered across the Gaelic heartland encouraging and supporting local communities. Adherence to conventional means of delivery is simply not working.
- Within the UHI, Sabhal Mor Ostaig and Lews Castle College must forge a relationship that is modern, creative, imaginative and close for the benefit of both the Gaelic community and for students who wish to live and study within their local

communities. Such a strong partnership could revolutionise the whole future path of Gaelic Education.

Urras Brosnachaidh na Gàidhlig hopes that these thoughts might be useful in formulating a new strategy for Gaelic Education.

Section 2

Following the quarterly meeting, trustees suggested the following more generic proposals for inclusion in the Trust's submission:

- Urras Brosnachaidh na Gàidhlig finally believes that the Gaels should have the opportunity to talk about the future of the language. We strongly recommend the re-establishment of the Gaelic Còmhhdhail (annual gathering) to discuss our aspirations for the future and how we achieve them. We need a model in which the community itself feels a sense of ownership. A top down model is not good enough.
- More needs to be done in terms of fluent speakers creating opportunities for learners to use their Gaelic. UBnG recommends the establishment of a pilot study to assess how local native Gaelic speakers can learn how to encourage and tutor their non-Gaelic friends and neighbours in the language, with emphasis on its local cultural relevance and richness. Initiatives might include linguistic Buddies and befriending schemes to develop learner's communicative and conversation skills.
- More needs to be done to ensure that the impact of local developments in areas where Gaelic is actively spoken is recognised – issues such as housing, land ownership, transport and communications. Without sustainable communities, there will be little chance of developing the language.
- Visit Scotland should be encouraged to do more to inform visitors about the Gaelic language to show that it belongs to the whole of Scotland.
- Public bodies required to produce Gaelic plans need more help in terms of understanding why they are doing it and how they can be a force for good in terms of Gaelic development and sustainability. They are currently exposed to considerable negative media coverage not always of their own making, which does not encourage further development or the alignment of other groups.
- Agencies involved in Gaelic development and the promotion of the language should be encouraged to do more to raise awareness of the benefits of bi/multilingualism and the place of Gaelic in Scotland (historical and current). A more robust mechanism for the defence of Gaelic and the advocacy of its benefits to counter misinformation, spurious attacks and destructive strategies.
- Gaelic development agencies should engage with the various sectors of the Gaelic community through appropriate means, with modern technology and social media being the preferred and most effective way for reaching young Gaelic speakers.

- More needs to be done to re-establish Gaelic as a cross-party priority and to ensure that it is supported and recognised as a national asset being of Scotland for the whole of Scotland.
- Urras Brosnachaidh na Gàidhlig recognises the significant achievements of BBC ALBA since 2008. The Trust also recognises the fragility of the funding basis on which the channel operates. A more equitable funding arrangement should be arrived at to enable the channel to allocate more resources to key areas such as children's programming and material which would be of interest to, and of benefit to learners, in particular a modern version of the highly successful Speaking Our Language.

Urras Brosnachaidh na Gàidhlig hopes that the above suggestions might be useful in the development of a new National Gaelic Language Plan which will make Gaelic Education and Gaelic communities, active, sustainable and productive, contributing to the well-being of Scotland as a whole and the wider world.