

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL SERVICES

**Response to Gaelic National Plan Consultation
October 2006**

- ***Is the vision of the draft Plan one in which you can share?***

The Gaelic Plan is highly aspirational and demonstrates a range and depth of vision for the survival of the Gaelic language and culture.

The vision both clarifies the place and importance of Gaelic in Scotland and its relationship to the other languages of Scotland.

To that extent, the vision for Gaelic expressed in the Plan is to be commended.

- ***In the light of your response to the above question, are the proposed sectoral projects essential to the meeting of the action area aims for 2012? If not, why not?***

All of the sectoral projects – identified under the headings vitality, community, home, education, culture and communications - are important to the revival of Gaelic. However, the Plan describes a large number of projects and it is not clear that the Gaelic community can provide sufficient personnel or the resources to take all of these forward within the timescale described. The Bòrd na Gàidhlig on behalf of the Gaelic community will require to prioritise its aspirations.

The essential focus must be on securing more speakers of the language. Unless this can be achieved, the whole Plan will fail.

The Plan must therefore outline ways to produce more teachers who can teach Gaelic and teach through Gaelic at all levels of the education system. The role of local authorities, the main drivers in early years, primary and secondary sectors and in community learning over the past twenty years, must be recognised.

In addition, the Stòrlann Nàiseanta na Gàidhlig, which provides support to Gaelic education through professional development for teachers and the production of resources, must also be placed at the heart of all developments, not seen as a separate issue.

- ***Are the outcomes for the twenty themes and the priorities for tackling them correctly outlined and prioritised? If not, why not?***

The outcomes for the themes, while they are correctly outlined, are not prioritised in any achievable way.

While the Scottish Parliament and the Executive are supportive of the aims and aspirations of the Gaelic community and can be relied on to support the scope and tone of the Plan as it now appears, there will rightly be a demand to cost the delivery of the Plan and to justify what is likely to be a considerable expenditure in its implementation. At that stage there is a danger that the Plan as it currently stands will be seen as unrealistic, in effect “a wish list.”

- ***In the light of your response to the above question, what projects do you view as being essential to implementing these priorities (some examples are offered in Appendix I)?***

The projects described in Appendix 1 are small-scale and relatively easy to deliver. It would be interesting to see the delivery of some of the more challenging projects outlined. For example, the wish expressed in the Plan to bring commercial organisations not currently involved in the revival of Gaelic “on board” is clearly very important. This is likely to be a major difficulty for the Gaelic community and strategies to achieve this goal must be set out early on. Similarly, the requirement for public bodies to produce a Gaelic Plan is likely to be an issue for those organisations which currently do not take the needs of the Gaelic community into account in their day-to-day operations; a set of strategies is also needed if the good will of these bodies is to be secured.

- ***And are the right organisations identified as being the primary players in implementing these priorities?***

Although the primary players are comprehensively identified, their roles are not prioritised and not defined.

The Gaelic Plan must specify initially a strategic approach to Gaelic development, with a small number of clearly identified medium- and long-term priorities, involving the Bòrd working with a small number of principals rather than the long list of players named here.

In addition, most of the primary players named operate within Scotland. There is a need to look further afield and learn from the experiences of public bodies in areas such as Catalonia and Wales, where language revival is at a more advanced stage than it is in Scotland; and in Eire, where revival has had to be re-thought and re-started. In this, the European Union’s Bureau for Lesser-used Languages (BLUL) has a role, in enabling information from these areas to be shared with the Gaelic community and also in helping to build a strong community of speakers of lesser-used languages.

- ***If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, how do you see yourselves contributing to the success of the National Plan?***

East Ayrshire Council has, since its inception, supported the development of the Gaelic language and culture at all levels: among adult learners, including the parents of children in Gaelic Medium Education or destined to enter Gaelic Medium Education; through early years provision; and by means of Gaelic immersion and Gaelic learners’ education, both in the primary and secondary

sectors. The Council will continue its provision, and will hope with suitable guidance from the Bòrd to build on the present strong foundation Gaelic enjoys in the Council area.

- ***Do you have any other comments on the draft National Plan which you would like to submit?***

The Gaelic language Plan, published as part of the wider National Gaelic Plan, is ill-conceived and in places shows a lack of understanding of the education system within which Gaelic operates.

The Language Plan provides no model for Gaelic education, either for immersion or learners' classes, but takes each sector as a "stand-alone" provision rather than, as is the case, part of an overall 0 to 18 years provision which needs to be developed coherently. The provision of a model is crucial, since it would allow local authorities and Scottish Executive to cost developments and devise a long-term plan for the expansion of Gaelic provision.

The role of CNSA in encouraging early years education is exaggerated: the main drivers of the early start to Gaelic are the local authorities. The references to early years education in the Plan mention only children from 0 to 3 years. The future development of the Gaelic education of pre-schoolers is a growing area and one which increasingly produces the primary Gaelic immersion population. The provision and impact of this sector must be debated in order to devise a workable and affordable model.

References in the Plan to Gaelic Specific Grant ignore the financial contribution made by local authorities to the development of Gaelic education. Any discussion of Gaelic education funding needs to have a wider focus than Gaelic Specific Grant. There is a particular need to provide guaranteed five-year funding for the Stòrlann in order to facilitate true long-term planning of resource development.

In 2003, the Stòrlann identified the resources needed – and the costs of providing these – to move the Gaelic language forward. These needs require to be re-visited urgently before the Plan is published in its final form.

Given the present format of the plan, the place of young learners and adult beginners remains as insecure as ever. References to young learners should suggest an entitlement and the lifelong learning section of the Plan should specify incentives that might be used to persuade adult learners to enter immersion courses.

John McCarney
Head of Service: Schools Support
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