

## Stòrlann Nàiseanta na Gàidhlig

### National Plan for Gaelic: Consultation Response

#### **1 General Comments**

- 1.1 Stòrlann Nàiseanta na Gàidhlig is committed to the support and development of Gaelic education and the Gaelic language, as evidenced by the organisation's partnership activity with Bòrd na Gàidhlig and local authorities throughout Scotland. Stòrlann welcomes the publication of the National Plan and broadly concurs that relevant action areas for the revitalisation of the language have been identified in the document.
- 1.2 The organisational structure of the plan would however benefit from some development, with attention in particular to the following issues:
- (i) since strategic aspirations in language-planning must be over-arching in nature, would it not be appropriate to establish these aims for the long term, as opposed to focusing on the deadline of 2012 dictated by the scope of the present plan? 2012 targets would therefore function as performance indicators within the context of a longer-term strategy.
  - (ii) while compartmentalisation is inevitable in a strategy of this type this was found in places to be at odds with the holistic approach cited as crucial to the success of the plan.
  - (ii) more differentiation between policy and strategy would be welcomed, particularly in the identification of priorities.
  - (iii) concrete targets are at present limited and no consideration is given to the resource implications of the plan.
  - (iv) The inclusion of education as both an action area in the plan and the subject of a separate National Strategy was found to be confusing; would an expanded version of the Strategy alone suffice?
  - (v) a context for Gaelic amongst other European languages would be useful both in itself and in aiding those responding in evaluating the draft Plan in relation to other comparable language-planning documentation.

#### **2 Responses to suggested questions**

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

The Mission Statement of the draft Plan represents an appropriate, far-reaching vision for the development and revitalisation of Gaelic language and culture.

Stòrlann shares Bòrd na Gàidhlig's vision of a holistic strategy for language development and in broad terms concurs regarding the five Action Areas identified by the Bòrd.

2.2 *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?*

The place of the sectoral projects within the wider structure of the plan was not immediately obvious. In discussion below Stòrlann has taken these to be summaries of the priorities under each theme. Certain of these would benefit from expansion and, again, from differentiation between aspirations and implementation strategies.

- (i) Sectoral project: Vitality  
This sectoral project effectively summarises the priorities in the action area, combining elements of acquisition planning with usage planning. The vital commitment to research detailed in the sectoral project is not, however, reflected in the priorities in the themes within the action area.
- (ii) Sectoral project: Status  
This sectoral project again effectively summarises elements of relevant (status and usage) language planning.
- (iii) Sectoral project: Education  
Increased access to Gaelic-medium education is clearly a high priority, but development of that service is equally so and the sector urgently requires attention to guidelines regarding recommended models informed by best practice in immersion education internationally. The sectoral project neglects Gaelic (as opposed to Gaelic-medium) education. Focus on the enhanced experience offered by dedicated Gaelic-medium schools neglects a large proportion of the GME sector.
- (iv) Sectoral project: Culture  
This sectoral project would benefit from considerable expansion; the current wording appears to imply that the framework for cultural activity is largely in place and that marketing and promotion are therefore of highest priority. An increased commitment to development, as outlined in the themes in this action area, and in the summary of the area itself, would strengthen the project.

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

Stòrlann Nàiseanta na Gàidhlig's principal focus is on education and accordingly this response concentrates on the Education Action Area of the Plan. A separate response is given below to the National Gaelic Education Strategy contained within the Draft Plan document.

The Aim for 2012, of expanding 'the provision and uptake of Gaelic education at all levels', would benefit from expansion, to reflect the need for evaluation and development of on-going provision. This is reflective of a general absence of specific provision for research, evaluation and development throughout the education Action Area of the draft. While a separate commitment to research on Gaelic education is listed under Language Planning on page 10, the value of the commitment in isolation is questionable; it would be helpful to have specific examples related to the Action Area.

Stòrlann notes also that language acquisition represents one strand in the experience of learners in Gaelic education and notes that the Plan would benefit from additional focus on excellence in a holistic educational experience.

The following are Stòrlann's specific comments on the priorities in the Education theme:

- (i) the draft does not define what constitutes Gaelic/Gaelic-medium education at present, nor the aspirations of the sector in terms of models or best practice. The Plan should prioritise the development of model(s) informed by best-practice in immersion education worldwide.
- (ii) In Early Years (0-3) development of methodology should be prioritised, particularly since primary players include voluntary providers.
- (iii) 'Learning support' is not a public body. The role of National Health Service Boards requires clarification. Primary players in the implementation of strategies tackling social factors impacting on the 0-3 experience should be cited.
- (iv) School Years (3-18) should be expanded to allow for increased specificity. Development priorities are required for nursery and primary provision in particular.
- (v) Focus on innovation would be welcome; expansion is prioritised over both development and innovation in the present draft. Where are the proactive initiatives, such as tax incentives for parents opting in to immersion education?
- (vi) The establishment of dedicated Gaelic-medium schools should not be prioritised over cross-sectoral expansion; in many areas this is not (yet) a viable option.
- (vii) Why is '*accelerated* growth' the aim for School Years as opposed to '*continued* growth' for Early Years and Tertiary and Lifelong Learning?

- (viii) In the interests of ensuring coherence between Tertiary and Lifelong Learning and School Years, higher priority might be given in the former theme to the development of Gaelic-medium tertiary courses as part of the 'continuum of Gaelic-medium education' cited in the latter.
- (ix) Education Resources priorities demonstrate some duplication and would benefit from considerable streamlining.
- (x) Stòrlann would welcome a reassessment of the provision of educational resource materials as a priority on a par with teacher supply; both under-pin the delivery of all educational developments.
- (xi) Resource developments must be linked to development of the curriculum generally and curriculum-development agencies must work towards the provision of Gaelic versions of national resources.
- (xii) *gàidhlig air-loidhne* is a Stòrlann/LTScotland partnership project and not an organisation in its own right. Teacher Unions are not cited despite representing one of the major stakeholder groups in Scottish education.

2.4 *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)?*

While it is assumed that the focus on project-based activity in implementing the aims of the Plan is dictated by funding-models currently in use, development of this type is dependent on sustained long-term planning. Short-term project-based activity does not allow for an appropriate strategic overview and results in an unacceptable proportion of organisations' time being spent in bidding and associated administrative tasks. Sustained support should be made available to agencies carrying out core tasks.

The implementation of the Plan will require the services of translators and other language-specialists in numbers far exceeding those currently working in the sector. Training opportunities, career structures and entry incentives will be urgently required if activity is to progress at any considerably increased rate.

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

Stòrlann's role is not representative of the wide variety of development in which the organisation is involved, for example the management of the virtual secondary pilot course Cruinn-eòlas aig Astar.

Stòrlann would welcome the rationalisation of primary players to include only relevant bodies and not services/projects offered/managed by these (see discussion of *gàidhlig air-loidhne* etc above).

Cross-referencing between the five action areas in terms of primary players is crucial; for example the SQA is a vital player in corpus development, although that theme appears under vitality and not education in the plan and therefore SQA is not cited as a player.

Bodies representing stakeholder groups (Teacher Unions, school boards etc) are missing from the education area of the plan.

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

Stòrlann Nàiseanta na Gàidhlig is committed to supporting Bòrd na Gàidhlig in implementing the education priorities of the National Plan. A significant increase in funding levels is required in order to achieve this crucial goal and the establishment of sustained support for the organisation, with appropriate allowance for incremental growth, would contribute significantly to the expansion of provision.

### **3. The National Gaelic Education Strategy**

The inclusion of this strategy as a separate item within the Plan document is confusing; confusion is compounded by variation in structure, terminology and priorities.

As in the Education action area of the Plan, Stòrlann would welcome a commitment to the definition and evaluation of Gaelic and Gaelic-medium education initiatives at the present time. There is an absence of discussion of current initiatives in the wider Scottish education community, and of the ongoing review of the curriculum. In the background to the Strategy we note that some statistics are incomplete; the number of providers offering Gaelic-medium secondary subject teaching is not given, for example. Another crucial area requiring expansion is the question of Gaelic-medium qualifications; although the strategy states a commitment to increased access to these there is no detail regarding availability and uptake at the present time.

Again, the Strategy would benefit from concrete targets and examination of the resource implications of its implementation.

The following comments relate to the individual action areas and sections on resources:

- (i) *Entitlement and Language Access*  
Key tasks would benefit from expansion and clarification, and from differentiation between aims and tasks. The commitment 'to engage with young couples and families in encouragement of, and support for, 0-3 Gaelic-medium provision' might be extended to parents or guardians of any age, single or otherwise! The same commitment to support should be extended to parents and guardians of children in the other stages of Gaelic education through community-learning initiatives etc.
- (ii) *Gaelic-medium Education (GME)*

This is a wide and varied sector and would benefit from expanded treatment in the strategy. Commitment is again to expansion as opposed to development.

- (iii) *Language Acquisition*  
This Action Area focuses heavily on the GLPS initiative, without sufficient definition of the aim and role of the initiative in the wider context of Gaelic education.
- (iv) *Teacher Recruitment and Supply*  
This action area includes as an aspiration a task completed some months ago.
- (v) *Continuing Professional Development*  
As an organisation involved in the running of A' Chuisle and other CPD initiatives, Stòrlann would welcome inclusion as a partner/facilitator for this action area.
- (vi) *Tertiary Education*  
While it is understood that the list of providers and facilitators for each action area is not exclusive, the absence of several Scottish universities and colleges offering Gaelic and Gaelic-medium courses of study is notable.
- (vii) *Lifelong Learning*  
Stòrlann would wish to be named as a provider/facilitator for the provision of (resources for) Lifelong Learning; the organisation is currently involved in the development of materials for community learning funded by Bòrd na Gàidhlig and recognises a need particularly for professionally-produced resources aiding long-term learners in progressing in their studies of Gaelic.
- (viii) *Professional Support Services*  
'learning support' might be more usefully termed 'Local Authorities (learning support provision)'
- (ix) *Ethos*  
Again Stòrlann would welcome definition of such terms as 'GME and Gaelic learning'.
- (x) *Corpus Development*  
Stòrlann would wish to contribute to this action area as a provider/facilitator. The organisation is already involved in extensive activity of this type having, for example, recently published a Maths Glossary for the Primary School.  
  
This action area suffers particularly from discrepancies between the Plan and the Strategy.
- (xi) *Specific Grants for Gaelic*  
There is a clear need for expansion in specific grant to allow for expansion in provision to new authorities.

- (xii) *Stòrlann Nàiseanta na Gàidhlig*  
Stòrlann welcomes Bòrd na Gàidhlig's commitment to improvement of the organisation's funding package but recommends that without a sustained support package at a considerably higher level than that of which the organisation is currently in receipt is required to facilitate any significant expansion of the type specified in the plan. The resource deficit of Gaelic education cannot be addressed on current funding levels, nor through time-limited project-based funding packages allocated through a bidding system. The commitment to significant expansion in the provision of Gaelic education must be matched by a significant increase in the funding available to resource that education.

Under Impact Stòrlann would wish accordingly to see commitment to the consolidation of the company's funding and expansion of the company's remit.

- (xiii) *Gàidhlig air-Loidhne*  
Gàidhlig air-Loidhne is a Stòrlann/LTScotland-managed project and not an organisation in its own right. Stòrlann would welcome Bòrd na Gàidhlig's input in discussions regarding the future management of the project but must request that speculation regarding the potential outcome of such discussions be omitted from the Strategy.

- (xiv) *Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS)*  
Stòrlann would welcome considerably expanded detail under this heading. As the agency charged with the development of the curriculum in Scotland and as a major provider of resources, Stòrlann believes that LTScotland's role in the development of Gaelic education is crucial and would wish to see this agency required to bring forward a Gaelic Language Plan at the earliest opportunity.

- (xv) *Virtual Secondary Provision (ICT)*  
It is essential to make the key distinction between IT-delivered resources as a tool to support teaching staff in delivering tuition and these same resources as a replacement for subject-specialist teaching staff. The stated commitment to the exploitation of ICT to deliver subject tuition through the medium of Gaelic would benefit from qualification, as the as-yet largely untested approach of IT-delivery replacing subject-specialist staff is at best a gap-filler until pupil and teacher numbers allow for the presence of subject specialists in every school.

As noted above, Stòrlann was charged with the management of the Cruinn-eòlas aig Astar on-line Geography course, the first of its type delivered through Gaelic and can attest to the fact that high priority must be given to consideration of issues such as the role of the mentor, potential restriction of the learning experience for pupils and the response of the Teacher Unions to the delivery of subject tuition by any other means than on-site tuition by a GTC-registered subject specialist.

The local authorities do not appear as providers/facilitators.