

University of Strathclyde Response to National Plan for Gaelic

The University welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Draft National Plan and commends the vision and strategy for language regeneration set out in the document. Given its status as an autonomous institution, the University will not be one of the public agencies required to produce a language plan. Nevertheless, the University would wish to adhere to the spirit of the Gaelic Language Act 2005 and of the National Plan. The Faculty of Education at Jordanhill has had a long and distinguished involvement in Gaelic education in general and in teacher education in particular and the University has, since the merger with Jordanhill College, taken a number of important initiatives in the Gaelic field. These include:-

- The provision of Gaelic Studies classes in the Faculty of Law, Arts and Social Sciences open to students on any University course
- The introduction in collaboration with the University of the Highlands and Islands Millennium Institute (UHIMI) of a Postgraduate Diploma in Education (Primary) with Gaelic course using a blended learning model and delivered both on-campus and offsite at colleges of UHIMI in Lewis, Inverness and Argyll
- Participation with the Universities of Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Glasgow and Sabhal Mòr Ostaig UHIMI in a major long-term venture to produce a Historical Dictionary of Scottish Gaelic, Faclair na Gàidhlig
- The creation of a Gaelic Pathway in the BEd course in Primary Education
- Specific entry arrangements and on course provision for Gaelic medium students on the Postgraduate Diploma in Education (Secondary) course

The University through its Faculty of Education is eager to develop its role in Gaelic education and to build on the substantial contribution staff already make in initial and post-initial teacher training, curriculum development, the production of teaching and learning resources, research and consultancy. The University's forward thinking on Gaelic is exemplified by current discussions with potential partners and funding bodies on the development of a Gaelic version of future platforms of Microsoft Windows.

The following comments are offered on specific aspects of the draft Plan:-

The Vision

The vision outlined is measured and realistic. The adoption of a language planning approach is welcomed as is the citation of the Welsh Language Board Plan 2000-05 as a model. It is heartening that specific reference is made to the need for a programme of research to underpin language planning. The University would wish to play a full part in such a programme both through involvement in the inter-university research capacity building network on Gaelic language and culture and through local projects. The University makes a significant

contribution to the building of a knowledge base about Gaelic through the collection, collation and analysis of data on the uptake of Gaelic education in schools carried out annually by Boyd Robertson, Head of Language Education.

Action Areas

The emphasis placed on Reversing Language Shift is appropriate and due recognition is given to the need for children to have ‘maximum exposure to Gaelic’ to counteract the prevalence of English. The vital role of corpus development in promoting Language Vitality is acknowledged and training is seen to be a necessary part of corpus development. Strathclyde can contribute to training initiatives and other aspects of corpus development.

Strathclyde can also offer the courses referred to in Workplace Priority 2 ‘designed to improve workforce language skills’ through CPD. The University welcomes the intention in Workplace Priority 6 to develop work placement schemes for students and graduates.

The University would wish to be involved in the establishment of a national lead body for corpus development. Indeed, the concept of a Gaelic Academy was first mooted by Boyd Robertson in a presentation on the developmental needs of Gaelic education at a Comunn na Gàidhlig congress in Inverness.

The Faculty of Education has staff equipped to provide professional translation and interpretation training and is highly experienced in the development of lexicography, orthography and modern terminology. As already indicated, Strathclyde is a partner in the inter-university initiative to produce a historical dictionary of Scottish Gaelic, Faclair na Gàidhlig. The Faclair project should be added to the list of Primary Players in this field.

Priority 6 in the section on Prestige recognises the need to promote and market the benefits of Gaelic Medium Education (GME). Gaelic staff in the Faculty have been deeply involved in developing Gaelic medium education in Glasgow, Edinburgh and other parts of the Central Belt and are thus well-placed to contribute to the production of materials which identify those advantages.

Staff in the Faculty are actively engaged in the activities recommended in Awareness Priorities 3 and 6 through Celtic and Gaelic Studies classes and through international networks such as Mercator Education and Voces Diversae.

The Action area on Education will be the one in which the University will be most directly involved. The points in the preamble on Early Years about the consequences of not having provision in Gaelic at this stage are well made. This is borne out in practice in local contexts. The primacy of GME in terms of language acquisition is underlined and the need for ‘significant development of provision’ in the secondary sector is signalled. Expansion of immersion course provision is

rightly accorded a high priority but the provision of a continuum of learning opportunities for adults affording a progressive pathway to fluency is overlooked.

The Faculty of Education at Jordanhill is the leading provider of initial teacher education in Gaelic and has worked closely with education authorities and other agencies to diversify routes into teaching. Further initiatives designed to increase the pool of Gaelic Medium teachers and to enhance linguistic and professional training would be considered if adequate financial resources were provided.

The University makes provision for Priority 2 in the section on School Years. In the PGDE (Secondary) course, a separate coding has been introduced for each specific subject where an ability in Gaelic is claimed by applicants. On course, a module in GME and school experience in a Gaelic Medium setting is provided.

The extensive experience Faculty staff have in curriculum development, CPD, production of materials etc can be exploited by Bòrd na Gàidhlig and local authorities in addressing all six Priorities in the section on Education Resources.

Within the Action Area of Culture, the Faculty can facilitate the achievement of Cultural Activity Priority 4 through preservice and inservice training of staff in Expressive Arts. It could provide training in the Gaelic arts and help promote the role of Gaelic in festivals such as Celtic Connections. The University also has the capacity to promote 'investigation and analysis of Gaelic heritage'. The Faculty offers training in Outdoor Education, Health Education and Community Education which could be harnessed in addressing Priorities 2 and 3 in Sport and Recreation.

The University can provide significant input to the Action Area, Communications. It has the skills base necessary in Gaelic and Journalism to provide training for Gaelic writing and editing in the Print Media. It is well positioned to contribute to programming designed to increase access to, and enhance appreciation of, Gaelic language, culture and heritage. The University has been involved in the production of interactive educational materials and services and would be happy to extend this activity in the realisation of Interactivity Priority 2.

National Gaelic Education Strategy

While it is gratifying that the annual statistics on Gaelic education produced by the University are quoted, it is regrettable that the source is not acknowledged. The assertion that 4,500 Primary pupils learn Gaelic through the GLPS scheme could be misleading – 'learn some Gaelic' or 'are introduced to Gaelic' would be more accurate. It is neither realistic nor meaningful to say that 'There is the potential to offer GLPS provision in all Scottish primary establishments'. That would require a very substantial level of investment in resources, human, financial and material, not to mention training and attitudinal change.

Action Areas:

The aspirations expressed in the Key Tasks and Impact sections are generally laudable but there is a lack of definition of the actions and activities to be undertaken. It would be beneficial to have examples of specific projects and programmes that would create the Impacts envisaged.

Gaelic-Medium Education

It is reassuring that a 'Strategically planned programme for the expansion of dedicated GME schools' is one of the Impacts specified. The absence of any reference to an increase in the number and levels of subjects examined through the medium of Gaelic at certificated levels by SQA is a serious omission.

Language Acquisition

Expansion of access to the study of Gaelic at Secondary level across Scotland is neglected while the potential of GLPS is overplayed.

Teacher Recruitment and Supply

It is curious that no reference is made in this section to the Report of the Gaelic Medium Teacher Action Group.

Teacher Education

This Action Area is rather slight given its significance in the development of Gaelic Education. Issues such as the need for GME teachers to be certificated to operate in the sector, the need for specific funding for Teacher Education Institutions for developing teacher education provision in Gaelic and the need to provide training for students across a range of subject specialisms in Secondary school are not highlighted.

Tertiary Education

The Scottish Funding Council and FE Colleges should be located among the Providers and Facilitators. Reference should be made to the SQA Report on Gaelic Immersion Courses and to implementation of its recommendations.

Specific Grants for Gaelic

These Grants are currently only available to local authorities. Provision should be extended to Tertiary and Higher Education institutions to enable expansion of provision in this sector.

Resources : BBC Education Scotland

While an increase in the range and number of BBC education resources would be welcome for Gaelic education in all its forms (not just GME provision), it should be acknowledged that the quality of existing programming is of a high order. It should also be acknowledged that the BBC produces resources for Learners.

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