

National Plan for Gaelic Consultation

This constitutes my response to the above consultation process.

I welcome the plan and am in general agreement with its content. In particular, I am glad that intergenerational transmission in the family is prioritised. I am also glad that corpus planning and the proposal for a Gaelic academy are prioritised.

I believe that the draft National Plan contains several fundamental flaws at present but I feel that these flaws can easily be remedied.

I would like to consider 4 major strategic issues before covering some more specific details and more minor points. These issues are:

- The Vision
- Language Planning
- Adult Learners
- National Status of Gaelic

The Vision

At present I cannot share in the vision of the national plan as I feel that it has a crucial and central weakness.

It is stated that the vision “recognises Gaelic as a national asset and responsibility”.

This should be changed to read “recognises Gaelic as a national and official language of Scotland which is a national asset and responsibility” or to “recognises Gaelic as one of Scotland’s national languages and as a national asset and responsibility which is relevant throughout Scotland.”

The current wording is ambiguous and can be read in more than one way. Recognising Gaelic as a “national asset and responsibility” is not the same as recognising Gaelic as a national language or as a language with relevance throughout Scotland.

Crofting, for example, could also be said to be a national asset despite only operating in the Highlands and Northern Isles. Linguistically, the unique dialect of Orkney is also certainly a national asset and responsibility. To say so would not, however, be taken to mean that action should be taken for its promotion throughout Scotland.

At present many public bodies and decision makers are under the mistaken belief that Gaelic is important only to the Highlands or to the Outer Hebrides and are unaware of the historical significance of Gaelic throughout Scotland and of

the high proportion of Gaelic speakers, learners and Gaelic medium pupils currently living in other parts of Scotland, many of whom do not come from the Highlands. The national plan for Gaelic must challenge these misconceptions or it risks reinforcing and imbedding them in Gaelic development policies.

Likewise, saying that Gaelic is a national responsibility is not the same as saying that Gaelic is a responsibility nationally. Unless the wording changes, decision makers in large parts of Scotland will continue to see Gaelic as being someone else's responsibility.

I think it would also be useful to add the following bullet point to the "this is a vision which" section (p8):

This is a vision which "promotes the recognition of Gaelic as a national language with relevance throughout Scotland".

As intergenerational transmission is the central goal of RLS, the vision statement itself should also be amended as follows:

"As a self-sustaining language community with an expanding core of mother-tongue speakers".

Language Planning

Fishman's model of Reversing Language Shift (RLS) puts forward some important principles for language planning, none of which I feel is currently followed in the national plan.

The first is that there should be prior ideological clarification amongst pro RLS-ers on key issues relating to the promotion of the language before development efforts begin. Without such prior discussion and clarification, differences in terms of aims, tactics and levels of commitment within the RLS movement can cause ongoing tension and splits over fundamental questions of principle.

One particularly important and potentially divisive issue is the question as to what extent (or whether) Gaelic should be promoted as a national language and to what extent (or whether) Gaelic should be promoted only as the language of the Highlands. Even within the Highlands there is the unresolved issue to what extent (or whether) Gaelic development initiatives should concentrate on the area as a whole or be geared primarily to communities such as Skye and the Western Isles where a significant percentage of residents are Gaelic speakers. Despite the importance of this ongoing debate, however, this area is not clarified in the national plan. Instead, the plan is very ambiguous on this area.

How this question is tackled will be of central importance to the future of development of the language. Decisions on practical matters such as which

services are available in Gaelic in different areas and where Gaelic employment is to be made available, and on symbolic issues such as the level of public visibility of the language nationally, will have a profound effect of the success or failure of RLS efforts. I believe that the national plan should address this question clearly both through its vision statement and in the aims, targets, policies and projects in the plan. I put forward suggestions for the view which the Plan should take on this issue below.

Fishman's second principle is that pro-RLSers must engage in strategic planning for the language involving concrete, realisable goals based on step-by-step action. These should be implemented on the "first things first" principle, dealing with the most important things first.

On this basis, I do not feel that the draft National Plan can truly be said to be a language plan in language planning terms at present. At present there are few concrete goals in the plan and little detail as to how they will be realised, by whom and what level of priority is to be attached to each. More detail is required on these matters. More worryingly, I don't feel that the targets, even if achieved, are necessarily good markers for RLS.

I believe that there should be more, and more detailed, targets and timetables and that there should be an explanation for why each target has been chosen. Given that RLS will take longer than five years, there should be also be longer term targets. Of the few targets, all are based on the 2011 census. In addition to the census, a range of new research needs to be commissioned by Bòrd na Gàidhlig and targets based on these research findings. I believe that Bòrd na Gàidhlig should establish its own research unit and work closely with the Celtic Departments to ensure that RLS work is informed by research. Research should be prioritised in line with Fishman's model.

I am also concerned that the primary players and other groups mentioned in the plan are overwhelmingly Gaelic groups and that little is said about other groups with a central role to play in normalising the language. The fact that the issue of the economy is almost totally absent from the national plan is also a significant gap.

Fishman also states that intergenerational transmission should be placed at the centre of language planning efforts. While the national plan rightly recognises that intergenerational transmission in the family is central to RLS, however, it fails to mention adult learners in this context. This is a very serious omission.

In his influential books, *Reversing Language Shift* (1991) and *Can Endangered Languages be Saved?* (2001), Fishman has argued that adult learners have a very important role to play in reversing language shift in the case of languages such as Scottish Gaelic where intergenerational transmission is at a very low level and is in rapid decline. He argues that when a language's intergenerational

transmission has largely broken down and when its community use is faltering, RLS efforts must focus on bringing about the conditions in which the endangered language will be acquired by significant numbers of young adults who will in turn ensure the intergenerational transmission of the language to their offspring as a mother tongue.

In Scotland, intergenerational transmission of Gaelic in the family has almost entirely ceased.¹ Language shift has now progressed to the extent that there are very few fluent and confident native-Gaelic speakers of child-bearing age. This means that the potential of intergenerational transmission from existing native speakers is limited. As Fishman and various other academic commentators have also pointed out, it is also highly unlikely that Gaelic-medium education, despite its undoubted importance, will lead to any significant level of intergenerational transmission of the language. In these circumstances, the issue is not how to maintain Gaelic in the family and home as assumed in the national plan, but rather how to get it into the family and home in the first place. Adult learners are the key to this and the vitality section of the national plan should be adapted to recognise this.

Page 12 paragraph 2 should be amended to stage “Language planning also seeks to encourage potential parents to learn Gaelic and to raise their children as Gaelic speakers” and the section dealing with education / tertiary and lifelong learning and the national education plan should be amended to recognise the centrality of adult learners to intergenerational transmission and RLS in general.

Adult Learners

I am very concerned indeed about the lack of priority given to adult learners in the draft national plan for Gaelic. The issue is barely touched upon in the plan or in the national Gaelic education plan and what little discussion there is is focussed almost entirely on full-time immersion courses. I am also concerned that two of the key stakeholders are not identified as primary partners with regard to Lifelong/tertiary education: Clì Gàidhlig and the university Celtic departments.

Rather than being sidelined in this way, I believe that adult learners should be prioritised by Bòrd na Gàidhlig and that creating an effective Gaelic learning infrastructure should be just as central an aim of the national plan as the development of Gaelic-medium education.

Prioritisation of the Gaelic for adults sector is essential for the following reasons:

- The intergenerational transmission of the language
- Contributing to the numbers of Gaelic speakers
- Filling Gaelic related posts

¹ Of the few families who are raising Gaelic speaking children, my personal experience is that a significant proportion contain at least one parent who has learnt Gaelic as an adult. This is another reason for prioritising adult learners.

- Adding to the skills base and diversity of the Gaelic community
- Adding to the number of lobbyists for the language and consumers of Gaelic services and products
- Gaelic learners are a cost effective and simple way of contributing to numbers of Gaelic speakers and aiding RLS
- Few incomers to Gaelic speaking areas currently learn Gaelic
- Gaelic learners are the key to solving the Gaelic teacher shortage

With regard to Gaelic teacher training and supply, the national plan and education plan seem to be based on the assumption that shortages can be solved mainly through native Gaelic speakers and former GME pupils undertaking teacher training and also through Gaelic speaking teachers transferring from English to Gaelic-medium education. Relying on these groups will be sufficient at best, to allow Gaelic-medium education to remain at its present level and perhaps to expand a little. For a significant expansion to take place, the only solution is a sabbatical scheme to allow existing teachers who are not Gaelic speakers to learn the language through immersion courses that would allow them to convert to Gaelic-medium education. This has been used to great effect in the Basque country.

I therefore suggest that a **National strategy for Adult Gaelic learners** should be included in the national plan covering Gaelic for adults provision of all types. The aim of this should be to ensure that an infrastructure for Gaelic learning is created to ensure that large numbers of fluent learners are created. *This should be the main project for the Education/Tertiary and Lifelong learning strand of the plan and should also be a central component of the national education strategy.*

This should address the following:

- A research programme on adult learners.
- A target and timescale for expanding the numbers of fluent adult learners.
- Creating a national coordinating body for Gaelic classes for courses and classes in Scotland to address the current ad hoc and uncoordinated situation and to fill in gaps in provision.
- Address the issue of funding for the development and provision (throughout Scotland) of full-time immersion courses for adults.
- Provision of funding support for students wishing to undertake full time Gaelic courses irrespective of their previous educational qualifications.
- Development of a national training and certificate system for language tutors and other measures to address the national tutor shortage.
- Promote and develop provision for Gaelic degree courses in the Celtic Departments. Develop and fund a scheme by which students enrolled on Gaelic degree courses in the Celtic Departments are enabled to live or study in a Gaelic environment for one year. Existing courses are often not able to bring students up to full fluency. Such a scheme

would be comparable to the long-established 'year abroad' programmes for students of Continental European languages.

- Expand Gaelic as a subject for learners in secondary schools as a means of increasing uptake of adult learners courses and of awareness raising.
- Develop a marketing programme to address more adult learners.
- The ULPAN system should be fully supported as part of this strategy.
- Teaching Gaelic to non-Gaelic speaking teachers as a means of addressing the current shortage of Gaelic school teachers.
- A strategy for encouraging incomers to Gaelic-speaking areas and creating an infrastructure to enable them to do so.
- Research into the 26,000 people in the census who noted that they could understand Gaelic but were not fluent speakers of the language. There has been a tendency to assume that this group is made up of native semi-speakers or lapsed native-speakers. I think it likely, however, that a large proportion are non-fluent adult learners who have learnt Gaelic from scratch.

I am delighted with the priority given to the GLPS scheme in the national plan and education plan, but am disappointed that very little is said about encouraging Gaelic as a subject for learners in secondary school. I feel that this area should be mentioned as it is closely related to the uptake of Gaelic tertiary and university courses and given also its important role in language awareness raising. At present, Gaelic is more or less totally unavailable as a secondary subject for learners in cities such as Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and is unavailable in the majority of secondary schools in the Highland Council and Argyll and Bute areas. This is unacceptable – at the very least all pupils in the Highlands and main conurbations should have the option to study Gaelic. An expansion of the availability of Gaelic as a subject for learners would also be a logical step following on from GLPS. The relevant priority in education / school years should therefore be changed from:

“Promote diverse language learning provision to enable the study of Gaelic alongside other languages” to “Increase the availability of Gaelic as a secondary school subject for learners and promote diverse language learning provision to enable the study of Gaelic alongside other languages”.

Finally, I profoundly disagree with the statement that “Immersion courses will never be an option for many” (p25). I see no reason at all why these courses cannot be expanded to have many hundreds or even thousands of students each year. It is also inaccurate to use the term “diaspora” (p19) to describe the present Gaelic community. Most Gaelic learners and a large percentage of Gaelic-medium pupils in the Lowlands come from the Lowlands and many have no or no recent Gaelic/Highland descent.

For more discussion of issues concerning Gaelic learners and their importance to RLS, I suggest that you read the following book based on PhD research on adult learners and their place in RLS which is to be published next year by Cló Ollscoil na Banríona:

MacCaluim, Alasdair: Reversing Language Shift: The Social Identity and Role of Adult Learners of Scottish Gaelic.

National Status of Gaelic

As stated above, I do not feel that the national status of Gaelic is taken into account sufficiently in the national plan.

I believe that the national plan should make it clear that Gaelic is viewed as a language with relevance to all of Scotland, basing policy recommendations on the historical significance of Gaelic and on a recognition that around half of Gaelic speakers live outwith the Highlands, that around $\frac{3}{4}$ of Gaelic speakers live outwith areas where Gaelic is the community language, that most learners and around $\frac{1}{4}$ of Gaelic medium pupils are in the Lowlands and that RLS efforts are unlikely to succeed unless Gaelic is viewed by Gaelic speakers and non-Gaelic speakers alike as a national language. It should also be based on the assumption that Gaelic must have an appropriate level of visibility throughout Scotland in order to raise the profile of the language, to encourage positive attitudes and to encourage its learning.

More priority needs to be given in the plan to strengthening Gaelic in urban and Lowland communities and in creating new communities (vitality/communities) as this is essential for RLS for the reasons mentioned above. This should be higher up the priority list and should not only apply to “emergent forms of Gaelic-medium community” but also to promoting the language through more conventional network based-urban communities. After all, it must be remembered that network-based urban communities are the basis of the lives of the vast majority of people living in Scotland. Ways of promoting Gaelic in urban areas include measures such as Gaelic community centres for Glasgow and Edinburgh, Gaelic community newspapers, encouraging Gaelic columns in local papers, combined with increased opportunities to use the language. It is also crucial that the plan makes clear that Gaelic related employment should be available in the cities to sustain and develop the urban/lowland Gaelic community and that it does not become centralised in Inverness and the Western Isles.

I am glad that “increase the visibility of Gaelic in the community through its use on signage” is included as a priority (vitality/communities). However, “throughout Scotland” needs to be added. Otherwise, policy makers will assume that it refers to the Highlands only. I believe that signage and bilingualism should be promoted in the following ways:

- Through encouraging national groups to adopt bilingual corporate identities (e.g. the PCS union currently uses a logo featuring PCS Scotland – Alba.)
- Bilingual signs in strategic places in the Lowlands such as main railway stations, airports, ports, border crossings, and entrances to major cities and local authority areas.
- Use of Gaelic in high promotional campaigns such as the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games bid and the Glasgow: Scotland with Style campaign.
- A promotional campaign for Gaelic.

Measures such as these are highly important symbolically and are also low cost and politically uncontroversial. They can be expected to reap rich rewards in terms of public awareness and Gaelic learning.

The 2012 aim for status should be changed to read:
 “To achieve the popular recognition of Gaelic as a national language of Scotland and as a personal and national asset”.

The following sentence in the section on status (p19) should be changed to read:
 “in the context of general societal acceptance of Gaelic as a national and official language of Scotland commanding equal respect with English”.

Miscellaneous Points

- Bòrd na Gàidhlig should set targets for the number of non-statutory language plans to be developed with non-devolved public bodies and with commercial and voluntary bodies.
- I strongly support the education plan’s support for an expansion of GME at all levels and the key task “to expand provision through dedicated GME schools”. However, I think it should also include a commitment to making Gaelic-medium education standard in the Western Isles and Skye and any other appropriate areas. This is normal practice in the Irish Gaeltacht and in strongly Welsh-speaking areas and there is absolutely no hope for the retention of Gaelic as a community language or avoiding a catastrophic fall in the number of Gaelic speakers in the Scottish Gaidhealtachd unless this measure is taken very soon.
- The national education strategy should enclose detailed targets for numbers of pupils in GME, numbers of pupils studying Gaelic in secondary school, numbers of teachers trained, numbers of adult learners to reach fluency etc.
- The section dealing with culture should make it clear that only cultural and activities which make meaningful use of Gaelic should receive support from Bòrd na Gàidhlig and that all cultural projects be assessed on the basis of how far they will use and promote Gaelic. At present a large number of “Gaelic” cultural/arts projects use very little Gaelic and do

nothing at all to reverse language shift. The national plan should make it clear that this is unacceptable and that such initiatives will not be funded in future.

- I disagree strongly with the statement (p31) that “Young Gaelic speakers are increasingly bombarded with cultural messages derived from the influences of globalisation which are often at odds with the cultural values of the local communities within which they live. Appropriate strategies are required to enable them to develop new forms of cultural expression”. While I agree strongly that new forms of cultural expression should be developed, the preceding statement ignores the existing diversity within the Gaelic community and seems to be based on the assumption that global culture is a ‘bad thing’.

I trust that my comments will be of use.