

NATIONAL PLAN FOR GAELIC – OBSERVATIONS

Circulated at the Consultation Public Meeting, Thistle Hotel, Inverness, 21st August

The publication of the National Plan for consultation process is very much to be welcomed. The production of this document is very warmly to be complimented for its vision, ethos, principles and recommendations. I take the opportunity firstly to comment upon details of the text, as it is presented, and later to make some basic and critical points regarding methodology and procedure. In so doing I do not wish in any way to detract from the overall impression that the Plan gives: of mature consideration, previous consultation processes on this issue, and of insight into the business of language-planning. I wish the plan every success, and it is for this reason that I raise a number of important aspects which I believe have been overlooked.

This is our final and now our only chance to secure the prospects for our speech-community and language group. If we do not seize the present chances and make the most of them, in five years' time it will be too late. We shall have lost the opportunity for ever. If the provisions outlined within and underlying this plan, and the paradigm of institutional provisions for the language (Act, Charter, Bord, Plan, GME, etc.) do not work, then a contingency or default Plan B will have to be envisaged for a language occupying an even more reduced and radically different place within Scottish society. The following observations and the ensuing critique are made with these contingencies very much in mind and are put forward in the spirit of helpful and constructive criticism.

OBSERVATIONS ON DETAILS

Introduction

The figure for Gaelic speakers for 2001 needs to be qualified as for ages 3+. The total for all ages was 58,969. (Gaelic Report 2005 Table 4) However, I have often commented that overall head counts of census data are not so important or crucial for language-maintenance and policymaking as structural analysis and cross-tabulation with other significant factors. (See Appendix Figures 1-3 for age-structure and subsequently for other other analysis.).

The Background (P. 5)

This makes various points regarding census figures, actual patterns of use of Gaelic, and 'recent research'. It does not detail as to what exactly this 'recent research' is. The Western Isles Language Plan has yet to process its data on Gaelic speakers and recent correspondence indicates that owing to lack of funds they are unlikely to do so. I would have felt that this was an urgent and obvious priority both for that organisation and the Bòrd. The most recent (and only) national survey of Gaelic use was the Euromosaic Survey 1994/5. It was quota sampled and was of very modest size (322 respondents). There is urgent need for an up-to-date and methodologically more refined survey to be undertaken. Since the early 1990s Welsh has undertaken three such exercises. Without them language-planning would have been very greatly hindered.

It is quite fundamental to policymaking for the appropriate 'market research' to be undertaken – and applied in all aspects of planning and policymaking. It is a clear priority that analysis of the Western Isles Gaelic speaker sample should be undertaken without further delay. It would be quick and very cheap to do so. The second priority is to plan an adequate and penetrating national survey of language usage and attitudes amongst Gaelic speakers. The Plan draws attention to the Western Isles situation, but 2001 census findings show that 73% of all Gaelic speakers live elsewhere.

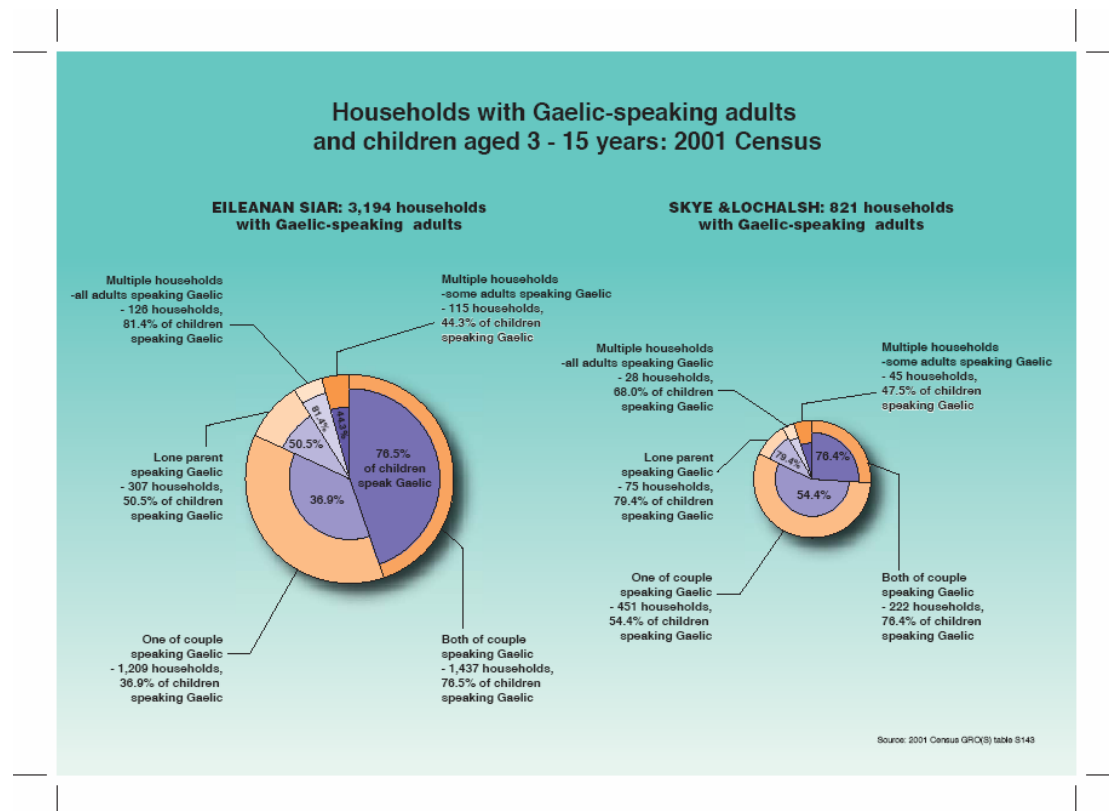
The text says that the census does not address questions of actual usage and that ‘a vital task is to conduct research that will help understand them.’ The Plan contains no outline of a research policy, and its elements are scattered throughout the document and lack coherence. As I understand it, when its research convener was deselected, the Bòrd stood down its research committee and has subsequently constituted no such apparatus for considering these questions.

‘Recent evidence in Edinburgh’ is cited for Gaelic speakers in Edinburgh. (p. 6) The document does not refer to any evidence in the Western Isles or elsewhere. The most recent study of Gaelic usage in the Western Isles (Euromosaic 1994/5) indicated that only 28.8% of the children of Gaelic speakers were then using the language always or mainly. Twelve years later that can only be less.

Euromosaic National Gaelic Speaker Survey 1994/5: NATIONAL SAMPLE = 322								
Table 1: LANGUAGE SPOKEN BY RESPONDENT’S CHILDREN (Question 18 KIDSLANG)								
Extent of languages spoken between children with percentages at usage levels:-								
			Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	
AREA	Without children	With children	Always English	Mostly English	Both equally	Mostly Gaelic	Always Gaelic	TOTAL
Western Isles	64	66 <i>100.0</i>	23 <i>34.8</i>	9 <i>13.6</i>	15 <i>22.7</i>	11 <i>16.7</i>	8 <i>12.1</i>	130
Rest of Scotland	87	105 <i>100.0</i>	67 <i>63.8</i>	19 <i>18.1</i>	10 <i>9.5</i>	2 <i>1.9</i>	7 <i>6.7</i>	192
Isle of Skye	10	16 <i>100.0</i>	11 <i>68.8</i>	5 <i>31.2</i>	0 <i>0.0</i>	0 <i>0.0</i>	0 <i>0.0</i>	26
Western Is + Isle of Skye	74	82 <i>100.0</i>	34 <i>41.5</i>	14 <i>17.0</i>	15 <i>18.3</i>	11 <i>13.4</i>	8 <i>9.8</i>	156
Highlands	29	31 <i>100.0</i>	20 <i>64.5</i>	3 <i>9.7</i>	3 <i>9.7</i>	1 <i>3.2</i>	4 <i>12.9</i>	60
Total Gaidheal-tachd	103	113 <i>100.0</i>	54 <i>47.8</i>	17 <i>15.1</i>	18 <i>15.9</i>	12 <i>10.6</i>	12 <i>10.6</i>	216
Lowlands	48	58 <i>100.0</i>	36 <i>62.1</i>	11 <i>18.9</i>	7 <i>12.1</i>	1 <i>1.7</i>	3 <i>5.2</i>	106
Total Mainland Scotland	77	89 <i>100.0</i>	56 <i>62.9</i>	14 <i>15.7</i>	10 <i>11.2</i>	2 <i>2.3</i>	7 <i>7.9</i>	166
Total Scotland	151	171 <i>100.0</i>	90 <i>52.6</i>	28 <i>16.4</i>	25 <i>14.6</i>	13 <i>7.6</i>	15 <i>8.8</i>	322

Source: Equip Euromosaic / Research Centre Wales, Bangor 1995

Survey organisation: K. MacKinnon 1994/5. Analysis: Copyright © 2006 SGRÙD Research.



Analysis of the 2001 census reveals that in the Western Isles only 51.4% of children aged 3-15 in all types of family with Gaelic-speaking adults were returned as speaking the language. I wonder whether the Plan realises just how weak the situation actually is. It is however stronger in Skye and Lochalsh : 53.9%. But of course even weaker in the rest of Scotland where the vast majority of Gaelic families today resides. Nationally the figure is 34.4%, and 24.9% in the rest of Scotland, excluding the Western Isles, and Skye & Lochalsh. (See Appendix Figures 13-14.)

The Plan target of raising these proportions to 50% is a very bold one. (p. 12) Significantly no time limit is stated. The target of 1% of persons aged 3 and over being able to speak Gaelic actually represents a **decline** from present levels. Neither target can even hope to reverse language shift. If realistic language-planning is to be undertaken in the Western Isles it essential for WILPP to publish up-to-date findings on these issues.

This section rightly draws attention to the importance of intergenerational transmission and language-use in family, community and workplace. (p. 6) How this challenge is to be met remains an open question.

The weakness of the provisions for planning in the private and voluntary sectors is observed (p. 7) These are the areas which have the greatest impact on people's daily lives, and the overall objectives of the Bòrd and its Plan will not be achieved without proactive policies in these areas.

The Plan as it stands addresses governmental and official sectors. Its recommendations are timely and necessary. It does go beyond this brief to address family and community life. The majority of

personal lives are also affected by the private, commercial and voluntary sectors. For the present Plan to achieve its objectives there needs to be a further plan detailing policies in these further areas.

Language Planning

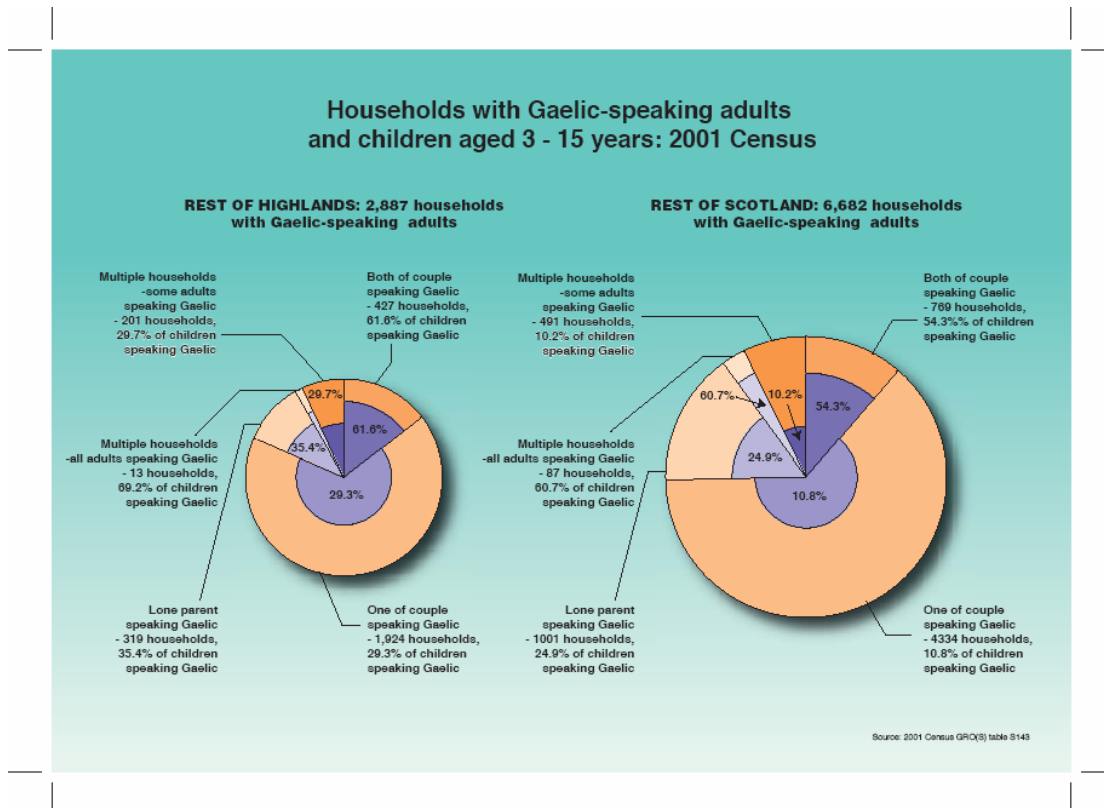
Attention is drawn to the needs for motivational, attitudinal, and psycholinguistic research. This is crucial to any policy for addressing family and community usage and transmission. How will the Bòrd undertake, commission and monitor this process? It has dismantled its own research apparatus. The Bòrd's own research needs also to encompass performance monitoring of its own activities and continuous assessment of the language-group itself. Catalan and Basque have permanent research units, censuses and surveys carrying out these functions – with conspicuous success. They would tell you that they would not know how to work without them. As a priority measure, the Bòrd urgently needs to set up its own research and statistics unit – a point which has originally been made by Hecla Consulting.

Vitality

The targets (p. 12) seem to be 'plucked out of the air' There is no explanation of why these levels have been determined – or on what demographic analysis, survey data, or research findings they are based upon (either here – or elsewhere). Studies on intergenerational transmission ratios seem to have been ignored or just not known about. As will be clear from the very much simplified diagrams above and below, family structures are today highly complex and diverse. One size will not fit all. A 50% transmission rate will not ensure anything like viability and growth back to an earlier state. It will do little if anything to deliver Reversing Language Shift (RLS). These and other figures seem to have been set in order not to raise undue alarm.

As a rule of thumb, under-25s need to comprise at least one-third of the language group in order merely to retain numbers. So too must the ratio of speaker incidence in mean single years of childhood need to exceed the mean single years of parenthood. And the proportions within the age-groups need to show intergenerational gain i.e. : proportion of speakers amongst young people greater than proportions amongst older (i.e. the parental age-group). These conditions obtain – but only just – in only six Scottish education authority areas. (For details see Appendix Figure 11 – and for comparison of Gaelic with other Celtic language situations, see Appendix Figure 10, and for age-structures see Figures 4-8.)

As a priority measure the Bòrd needs to set up its own research and statistics unit.



What is clear from this analysis is that the family is a crucial area for Gaelic language maintenance. Simplistic images of what comprises ‘a family’ are outdated. The area needs to be approached with specialist understanding and the circumstances call for a Gaelic family outreach initiative with dedicated professional staffing and support services. It needs to operate amongst Gaelic families throughout Scotland. The Euromosaic Survey indicated that nowadays there is very little difference in circumstances and transmission rates within majority Gaelic areas as compared with elsewhere. Demographically the 73% living ‘elsewhere’ are necessary to maintain the numbers of the language group nationally.

The conclusion is greatly to be welcomed (p. 13) that research, dissemination, and implementation of strategies for home, community and workplace clearly call for an initiative of motivational research, and a monitoring programme. Similarly regarding proposals for The Home:

Home (p. 14)

This underlines the urgency, if it is realised just how weak family transmission has become.

Although this is an area of weakness, there is a potential strength here. For every household with Gaelic speakers throughout Scotland could become its own ‘mini-Gaidhealtachd’. Modern support systems and communications can link them together onto a national Gaelic Net.

Community (p. 15)

What about a national competition for the best community for of getting Gaelic heard in everyday life ? On the lines of Britain in Bloom – or Glór na nGael in Ireland. – Guth nan Gaidheal ?

Workplace (p. 16)

What about a grants scheme for young Gaelic-speaking business studies graduates to help them acquire key community businesses like village post-offices and shops? Otherwise these local key communication hubs switch to English directly they are bought up by non-Gaelic incomers.

Status (p. 18)

Points re awareness imply continuing to monitor public opinion on Gaelic matters. There have only been two previous studies: my own in 1981 for An Comunn and MRUK for BBC/ BnG 2003.

Gaelic as the language through which the whole of it is experienced is a reminder of R.M. MacIver (Lewisman, and founding father of 20th Century sociology), whose famous saying defined community studies: 'The mark of a community is that the whole of life can be lived within it.'

This can be most tellingly applied to the language of community itself.

Awareness (p. 23) – placenames: add personal names.

Education (p. 24)

The target of 1.2% for the 15-24 age-group in 2011 is presumably in terms of overall national percentage in 2001. (- which was more precisely for ages 3+ 1.197%.) The % in 2001 for 15-24 was 0.967% In order to increase this proportion to 1.2% two things will be necessary:-

- i) a substantial increase – or quantum leap - in Gaelic-medium education;
- ii) a motivation and outreach programme amongst young people to maintain their Gaelic speaking ability and identity.

Can this be done within the next 4 ½ years? If so – how?

It is questionable whether this target will enable RLS. It will barely hold the status quo – if that. The target will be a poor one even in terms of language-maintenance levels. To achieve anything even of this order will necessitate a rethink on the place of Gaelic in education.

The target figure seems to have been deliberately chosen to look modest and not to alarm the Scottish Ministers or their civil service – and perhaps even to be capable of achievement on current trends. Even so, it is deceptively ambitious, and if education is to be the means to achieve this outcome, it will require the whole of the Gaelic-medium system – primary and secondary – to be increased by an average of 133 pupils per primary and secondary year over a ten-year period. This has been the case so far as primary has been concerned between 2001/2 and 2005/6. But there is a massive shortfall on transfer to secondary – and this is where gains in primary are lost. The situation for the last school year is shown in the Appendix Figure 15.. The graph shows the shortfall between the numbers of Gaelic pupils in each school year and the annual mean rate of language loss 1991-2001 which was 733. In order to maintain the speech community at 2001 levels this is the target figure.

There are now only just four-and-a-half years remaining before 2011 in which to achieve the Plan's targets, and it is highly questionable whether the system is realistically capable of this. Can pupils be attracted, can their numbers be held, and can teachers be found to teach them? And after the school years, can the young Gaelic speakers be motivated to maintain their language and continue to identify themselves as Gaelic speakers even? How will that be done?

Part of the rethink necessary on Gaelic education needs to quantify future needs – especially regarding teacher education (p. 25) as well as the new forms that Gaelic education is taking. Current practice, and proposals in the Plan point to a multi-modal approach:-

- i) Gaelic medium units;
- ii) Gaelic-medium schools;
- iii) Gaelic for learners and fluent speakers in secondary;
- iv) Gaelic as second language in primary;
- v) A means of getting this provided for all; and to this end, I would add:-
- vi) Introduction/taster/experience packs even where teachers do not speak Gaelic;
- vii) Gaelic education on videolink receivable anywhere.

School years (p. 27)

Diverse language learning clearly implies a multi-modal approach as above. Time for a pause and a rethink on what Gaelic-medium education is all about.

Gaelic-medium Education – Purposes / rationales

	Purpose / rationale	Source of idea	Does it deliver?	Success of outcome?
1.	Contribution to Scotland's cultural diversity	Ministerial rhetoric, political consensus.	Yes – an ingredient	Language –yes; culture – doubtful.
2	Provision of distinctive education experience	Parent-led bodies: CnP, CNSA	Yes – a quality experience	Yes – for the favoured few
3	Transmission of Gaelic cultural heritage	Gaelic cultural bodies, conventional wisdom ?	Not really – delivers mainstream and global cultures	Highly problematical. Delivers Gaelic version of 5-14 curriculum.
4.	Reversing language shift societally	Gaelic development agencies, National Plan	Cannot realistically be expected to.	A blip on the chart
5.	Personal Gaelic language skills	Gaelic media / education, etc., 'Gaelic MacFia'.	Yes - produces effective Gaelic speakers	Supplies Gaelic job market effectively
6.	Acculturation of incomers	(Head) teachers	Yes – 1/3 rank outsiders, 1/3 non-native Gaels.	Yes – does a good job within its limits.

If the principal purpose of GME from the Plan's point of view is RLS, a massive rethink is overdue. As presently constituted GME cannot reasonably be expected to deliver. Education is a means to successful RLS in Wales – but their system is constituted very differently. In heartland areas, **all** pupils become bilingual. We have no such areas in Scotland.

Tertiary and Life-long learning (p.28)

The 2001 Census revealed for the first time a potential 29,327 Gaelic 'understanders' who could not speak Gaelic, but who are probably for the most part 'semi-speakers', lacking practice and confidence to use the language. Mike Watson, as Gaelic Minister, gave MAGOG that challenge. Despite all that has happened since, we should not forget it. It is our main chance of increasing numbers in 2011. (See Appendix Figure 9.)

Culture (p.30)

Another % target: 3.5% employed in culture, media and sport. The rationale for this is not explained. Neither how will it be achieved. The Census authorities provide a table on all persons aged 16-74 with all Gaelic abilities: Table 24 of the 2001 Census Gaelic Report. This quotes a percentage of 2.6% of all persons with any Gaelic ability as employed within this sector. The target implies an increase from (approx.) 1,074 persons in 2001 to a notional 1,445 on 2001 figures in 2011. (But less if the number of Gaelic-speakers declines !) The corresponding figure for all persons employed in these sectors was 1.5% (approx. = 33,392.) Gaelic abilities are punching well above their proportional weight in this sector anyway ! Where though does the Plan envisage the extra 371 or so in this sector coming from or going to? This is an expanding sector anyway – is this target just taking advantage of a rising tide?

Will the Census authorities provide detail on this in 2011 ? Has the Bòrd begun to engage with GROS on what it wants in 2011 ? Now is the time to start asking census to do things like this. The consultation process for 2011 is already well under way. Get your research and statistics unit working on this right now!

Gaelic has traditionally been associated with the crofting way-of-life. Gaelic urgently needs to be embedded in new lifestyles. Culture, media and sport may well lead the way (?) And for starters, let's have a national Gaelic football chant – and display 'Alba' on the strip.

Globalisation at odds with cultural values of local communities. (p. 31) Find ways of using globalisation to advantage – it will not go away. International anglophone culture is delivered by powerful economic interests funded by massive resources. Smaller community cultures such as Gaelic need to be adept in developing equally appealing countervailing measures on much more modest resources. Prizes for bright ideas and practical schemes.

Highlands and Hebrides as a traditional Gaelic speaking community. (p. 31)
Migration studies supplied to the Bòrd earlier this year have indicated just how fast that is changing. The 'heartlands' become more like lace doileys by the day. Present trends indicate that they may not be around for very much longer. Euromosaic (1994/95) found that its Gaelic-speaking respondents in the Western Isles were only using their language over the previous day for 65% of the time, and within the community as a whole for 46% of the time. (Quoted from Western Isles in Euromosaic Study also supplied to the Bòrd earlier this year.)

Plans and policies need to provide for the needs of Gaelic speakers in a highly mobile Migration Society. (See Appendix Figure 12.) If Plan A under the present paradigm cannot cope, then Plan B is an urgency as a default position – and will need to conceptualise new ways in which Gaelic will be relevant in a changing society.

Broadcasting Distribution, (p. 39)

A fulltime Gaelic radio station is long overdue – and maybe a case should now be made for more than just the one in order to provide the variety which is provided today on myriad English-medium stations available everywhere.

National Gaelic Education Strategy (p.42)

Looked at objectively the Gaelic (medium) system is small-scale and modest in scope. As presently constituted it falls far short of being an effective element in an RLS strategy. There has been no quantified study or analysis of what is needed to enable education to develop to fulfil this function.

If support policies are envisaged so that the families with Gaelic speakers can effectively transmit the language, readily available educational support will be vital for this. Analysis of 2001 Census results suggests that only one Gaelic speaker in five (19.5%) lives in a family all of whose members are Gaelic speaking. Without access to supports outwith the home, children will not become effectively Gaelic speaking and fulfil Plan ambitions and targets.

Facts on this imply an urgent task for the Bòrd's research and statistical unit.

Entitlement and language access (p.44)

Re: data on pupils learning Gaelic. In addition to this we need to know how many of our schoolchildren are mother-tongue Gaelic speakers and have other Gaelic language abilities. The School census produces data on Gaelic medium uptake, second language learning, and pupils in fluent speakers classes. How many Gaelic speaking schoolchildren are there apart from these categories? Another question for the Bòrd's research and statistics unit. A question also needing to be addressed by our Scottish Ministers.

The document has been highly stimulating to this commentator at least. I wish to see it succeed, and for that reason I conclude by making the following suggestions.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

The Plan as it stands lacks a research culture and rationale. Successful businesses run on business plans. These essentially include and are driven by market research. Without it business is groping in the dark – and so are we if we do not understand what is going on, on the ground.

It is little use importing some business advice and having someone show the Bòrd a colourful slide show for twenty minute sandwiched between more urgent business. Research needs to underlie all strategic thinking, and inform all policy-making all the time. That is why I have called repeatedly for research initiatives in the work of the Bòrd.

The case for an appointment of specialist professional research staff is quite apparent. The Bòrd is in urgent need of a research and statistics unit.

I have also strongly urged attention to transmission in the family as a crucial area for the future of the language. The appointment of a family outreach officer and fieldworking staff is likewise clearly apparent. I do not believe it is sufficiently realised just how weak family transmission has become. I have had great difficulty interesting anyone in research findings in this area, and I believe a great deal of denial has been the case.

The research needs of Gaelic development:

- A National Plan should imply a national language usage and attitudes survey. There has only ever been one. It was quota sampled, and small scale (322 respondents) and it is now 12 years out-of-date. There have been two or three larger scaled surveys (arts, Gaelic economy, etc. and often purposively or opportunistically sampled) but these were not language use surveys as such –

they were targeted at other objectives. The Government's Social Surveys could be immediately utilised in this manner – they are large scale and are generally randomly sampled. (Scottish Household Survey, Manpower Survey, Opportunity Survey, Scottish Social Attitudes Survey, etc. – they are public services and are there to be used.)

- ❑ Get WILPP to analyse their Gaelic speaker data. It would be cheap and quick to do. I cannot understand why they are so reluctant to do this when their work depends on knowing what their survey has to tell them about Gaelic speakers in the Western Isles. I cannot understand why the Bòrd is not interested in doing this either.
- ❑ Motivational, etc., research at individual and family level.
- ❑ Market research to monitor what the public and the Gaelic public think of your policies.
- ❑ Internal monitoring and performance assessment of the Bòrd's work.
- ❑ Further use of census data (including Samples of Anonymised Results – SARS) to develop more sophisticated measures to assess progress of policies amongst target sectors – especially with 2011 census results in mind.
- ❑ An action research conference of specialists in Gaelic demography, language-planning and motivational research
- ❑ A working conference of all the talents on Gaelic in the family and intergenerational transmission.

Summary of other needful measures discussed in this paper:

- ❑ A National Gaelic Plan for the Private, Commercial, and Voluntary Sectors.
- ❑ An annual national competition for the best Gaelic community.
- ❑ A Gaelic young enterprise grants scheme to enable key community businesses to be acquired by Gaelic speaking business graduates.

.... and finally:

May I take this opportunity to wish the Plan every success, and likewise wish the Bòrd every success in its work and in securing its objectives. I also trust that this present consultation exercise will prove fruitful and helpful – as indeed previous similar efforts have been.

In this connection I would be happy to consult further, and would be happy to discuss with the Bòrd any aspects of this paper, as detailed above. In the time available (three days between availability of the documents and the first consultation meetings) it has only been possible to respond with a relatively brief an rapid overview of problems raised

in this material. However, the Bòrd will be aware of studies which I undertook whilst I was a member:-

- paper on research needs of Gaelic development;
- paper on models of language planning;
- comparison and evaluation of 1981 and 2003 public opinion surveys on Gaelic;
- analysis of education statistics, and production of graphics illustrating GME;
- analysis of what is happening within the families of different types in different types of area, and production of illustrative graphics;
- analysis of census data and liaison with census authorities on production of the topic report for Gaelic published October 2005, and question formulation for the census test in 2006, and the next census in 2011.

The Bòrd will also be aware of research studies and analyses which I have undertaken since I was a member, and which I have forwarded earlier this year for its interest:-

- paper on Migration as it affects the Gaelic language-group.
- further analysis of Gaelic in the family from 2001 Censu
- Euromosaic Survey – further analysis of Western Isles data.
- Research paper on Gaelic Policies, Migration, Family and Education given to:-
 - Language Policy and Planning Seminar, Celtic Department, University of Edinburgh, 8th. March 2006;
 - the Centre for Language Policy and Language Planning, Celtic Department, University of Aberdeen, 9th. May 2006;
 - the Gaelic Cross-Party Group, The Scottish Parliament, Holyrood, Edinburgh, 31st. May 2006;
 - the Eighth International Conference on the Languages of Scotland and Ulster, Ionad Chaluim Chille Ìle, 5th. July 2006.; and
 - Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig 4, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, 19th. July 2006 .

I have also been invited to give papers and plenary addresses to the following international conferences, which will incorporate research findings on Gaelic as discussed in this paper, and detailed in the above:-

- Sixth Language and Politics Seminar, Queen's University of Belfast, 30th August – 1st September 2006;

- 21st Century Celts, University of Exeter, Truro, 8th – 10th September 2006; and
- Eurolinguistics West Seminar, von Humboldt University, Berlin 6th – 8th October, 2006.

I shall similarly hope to communicate these papers to the Bòrd, and shall be very happy to discuss any of these aspects further.

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