

An Lòchran

Response to Draft National Plan for Gaelic

1. Is the Vision of the draft Plan one in which you can share?

An Lòchran shares and supports the vision outlined in the Plan. We believe that we can play a significant role in the outworking of the Plan and in the realisation of several of the projected outcomes.

The Vision would be enhanced by placing the regeneration of Gaelic in an international context drawing on appropriate parallels. The reference to “no diminution” in status or support for other languages is unnecessarily defensive, almost apologetic. The last bullet point covers these sensitivities adequately.

The Vision would also benefit from being more inclusive. While it is right to aim to have Gaelic as the language of choice of an ‘ever-increasing number of Scots and others’, there is a parallel need to expand the number of Scots bilingual in English and Gaelic. Gaelic needs to recruit new users not only among young people but also among adults. The language community needs to embrace non-speakers and demonstrate that in its policies and practices.

The role of the arts in society does not appear to be fully appreciated in the Plan. The arts should be at the heart of social, economic and language policy and should be seen as integral to the Action Areas of Vitality, Status and Education and not compartmentalised as a section of Culture. High quality professional arts activities can play a significant part in making the language and culture more accessible and in winning the hearts and minds of the non-Gaelic-speaking majority of the Scottish population.

We welcome the adoption of a Language Planning approach and the citation of the Welsh Language Board Plan 2000-05 as a model. The recognition of the need for a programme of research to underpin Language Planning is also welcome. An Lòchran is currently engaged in a major programme of audience research.

The financial resources provided for delivery of the Plan are not indicated. Whilst appreciating that funding will be determined by the Scottish Executive against competing priorities, it is hoped that the budget allocated will recognise that the launch of the first National Plan for Gaelic is a unique and momentous event and that decisions taken now could seal the fate of the language. There is little point in devising a Plan if it is not resourced in such a way that it can be implemented fully and effectively.

The Plan not unexpectedly focuses on the role of agencies but the future of the language will hinge in large measure on the responses of individuals. It would be appropriate to have a section in the Plan illustrating how individuals might set their own objectives for language renewal and formulate personal language strategies.

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 five sectoral projects listed have appropriate enough aims but are rather loosely defined. Given the success of dedicated Gaelic schools here in Glasgow, it is gratifying that the Plan

refers specifically to increasing access to ‘the enhanced education experience’ dedicated schools provide.

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

The outcomes and priorities listed are generally apposite. However, there are a number of points we would wish to raise.

In the area of Vitality, appropriate emphasis is placed on Reversing Language Shift and due recognition is given to the need for children to have ‘maximum exposure to Gaelic’ to counteract the prevalence of English. That is a principle that should apply at all levels of Gaelic Medium education.

In relation to the Community dimension, one of the main aims of An Lòchran is to provide children in Gaelic Medium Education with social and recreational opportunities to use and reinforce their Gaelic. Targeted arts projects have been shown to be effective in reaching the 16-24 age group identified in the Outcome. Art is ‘cool’ for this age group and Gaelic arts agencies should be Primary Players in this field. An Lòchran has engaged very successfully with young people through a writing and performance project for young women aged 16-25, a mentoring scheme for young storytellers and an apprentice scheme for 16-18 year olds at Fèis Ghlaschu. We also offer through activities such as Ceòl is Craic settings for the interaction between learners and fluent speakers identified in Priority 6.

In the area of Status, the role of language planning in addressing the lack of confidence among Gaelic speakers generated by previous societal prejudice against the language is properly acknowledged. The target of 10 authorities per year producing language plans seems modest. Time is of the essence in the regeneration of the language and Bòrd na Gàidhlig should be given adequate resources to enable the production of a considerably higher number of plans per annum. A question arises as to what level of language planning will be required of Gaelic agencies such as An Lòchran.

We consider that the Awareness raising dimension is one in which An Lòchran can play a prominent part. We seek to promote awareness of, and access to, Gaelic artistic and cultural activities and to local, regional and national heritage in line with Priorities 1 and 3.

An Lòchran is also active in the Support aspect of Status. We engage actively in the forms of promotion outlined in Priorities 4 and 5 and would wish to develop our role in these areas.

Culture is the Action Area in which An Lòchran is most directly involved and it is pleasing that the role of the arts in language transmission and regeneration is acknowledged and that the relevance of Gaelic heritage to the development of Scotland’s sense of place is articulated. An Lòchran endorses the six Priorities identified under Cultural Activity and is happy to be listed among the Primary Players in this domain.

While our primary focus is on culture, we have a locus in education and an involvement in the interface between the arts and education. The National Gaelic Education Strategy is thus of direct interest. In the Action Areas listed in the Strategy, the aspirations expressed in the Key Tasks and Impact sections are generally endorsed 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. It is reassuring that a

'Strategically planned programme for the expansion of dedicated GME schools' is one of the Impacts specified for Gaelic-Medium Education.

Early Years Education has been shown to be crucial in the development of Gaelic medium education (GME) in Glasgow. The need for closer articulation between the arts and education is demonstrated by the fact that a number of children enrolled in GME in Sgoil Ghàidhlig Ghlaschu this session as a direct result of being introduced to the language through Fèis Ghlaschu.

4. In the light of your response to the above question, what projects do you view as being essential to implementing these priorities?

It is assumed that the examples listed in Appendix 1 are illustrative at this stage and that there will be a process of consultation with sectoral interests before determining the projects that should have highest priority in each Action Area. Research is a prerequisite of language planning in all spheres and the inclusion of four strands of research activity is to be commended. It is hoped that these strands will incorporate research projects in audience development and in the economic impact of Gaelic arts.

5. Are the right organisations identified as being the primary players in implementing these priorities?

Whilst we acknowledge that the list of Primary Players is indicative, An Lòchran should feature in the list of agencies in the Arts section of Culture as we are actively engaged in all of the priorities identified. In the Ethos aspect of the Education Strategy, An Lòchran should be added to the list of Providers and Facilitators in regard to the promotion of cultural and arts activities through the education system.

6. How do you see yourselves contributing to the success of the National Plan?

An Lòchran envisages that it will be a key player in the delivery of elements of the Plan. Our Gaelic Arts Strategy maps out a programme of artistic activity and cultural development in Glasgow for the period 2006-09 which articulates closely with the spirit and substance of the National Plan. It is, in fact, a model for local cultural planning which could be adapted and applied in other communities. An arts strategy should be an important component of language planning at community, regional and national levels.

Glasgow has led the way in the development of Gaelic medium education in recent years and the city, with its large hinterland and concentration of Gaelic speakers, will have a hugely significant part to play in the future promotion and revitalisation of Gaelic. An Lòchran will be an agent of that regeneration and the establishment of a Gaelic Cultural Centre will provide an essential hub and source of energy for the evolving Gaelic community in the city.

A G Boyd Robertson,
Chair