

SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT – CROSS PARTY GROUP ON GAELIC

Approved Minute of the AGM and meeting of the Cross Party Group on Gaelic, held in Committee Room 5, The Scottish Parliament, Holyrood on Wednesday 25th November, 2015 at 1pm.

Present: *Angus MacDonald MSP, (Convener); David Thompson MSP; Donald MacNeill, (Secretary); Coinneach MacÌomhair (Comunn na Gàidhlig); Bruce Robertson (Bòrd na Gàidhlig); Stuart Pescodd (Scottish Government); Coinneach A Moireach (Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd); Mata MacIver (UHI); Diane MacIntyre (Scottish Parliament); Fiona O'Hanlon (Oilthigh Dhùn Èideann); Iain M MacLeòid (An Comunn Gàidhealach); Carole Henderson; James Graham (An Comunn Gàidhealach); John Morrison (An Comunn Gàidhealach); Ceitidh Mhoireach; Sheila Carvel; Steven MacÌomhair (Bòrd na Gàidhlig); Maeve MacKinnon (Foghlam Alba); Jane Renton (Education Scotland); Prof Lyndsay Paterson (Oilthigh Dhùn Èideann); Ruairidh MacIntyre (Scottish Government); Jonathon Ferrier (Scottish Government); Marilyn Waters (SQA); Donald W Morrison (Stòrlann); Calum I Duncan (Comunn na Gàidhlig); Seumaidh Uallas; Kirsty MacDonald (Àruinneachd Eachdraidheil Alba); Collier Beardsley; Angus MacDonald; Doileag NicLeòid (CnES); Cllr Norman A MacDonald (CnES); Cllr John A MacIver (CnES); Dr Hugh D MacLennan (University of Edinburgh); Kenny Muir (Scottish Parliament); James Townsend (Scottish Parliament); DK MacPhee (Glasgow City Council); Jennifer McHarrie (SQA); Neil M Graham (MG Alba); Beathag Mhoireasdain – simultaneous interpretation.*

1. Welcome & Apologies

Apologies had been received from: Jamie McGrigor, MSP; Allan MacDonald (Bòrd na Gàidhlig); Cllr.Hamish Fraser (The Highland Council); Ashley Powell (Aberdeen University); Donald Campbell (MG Alba); Joan Esson (HMIE).

Shortly after the Convener's welcome to those present it became apparent that there was an issue with the simultaneous translation equipment. The Convener apologised, and it was suggested that an alternative room within Parliament be booked for subsequent CPG meetings (*It has since become apparent that the equipment itself was fine – the issue was a 'conflict' with the hearing loop within the Committee room.*)

2. Minutes of last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting of Wednesday 26th November 2014 were approved.

3. Matters Arising.

A number of issues were raised from the Minutes:

- A written question on Gaelic teacher recruitment and available employment vacancies was put to the meeting, relating in particular to the number of posts available to give employment to all probationary teachers. Bruce Robertson said a considered response would be sent to the author by email.
- A point was made about the holding of a specific conference to discuss GME in secondary education. This was raised in order to ensure that such an event, which was deemed important, did not 'fall off the agenda'. Addressing this point Jane Renton of Education Scotland said that one event had been held on May, and that there was no budget for a second event in the same financial year. However consideration would be given to this in the next financial year, perhaps in association with Bòrd na Gàidhlig.

- The issue of the use of Gaelic within the Scottish Parliament chamber and debates was raised. In relation to this, the Convener was able to confirm that new resources, including leaflets and sound files were being prepared and circulated to address this. It was hoped this would encourage the use of Gaelic within the Parliament, but also act as an example of good practice to other public bodies.
- The question of ‘dual qualification’ of Gaelic teachers was raised – to say that the GTC were moving to reinstate this.

(To better suit the diary commitments of contributors, and to allow a more logical progression of topics, it was agreed to take the presentation on Gaelic within the census data ahead of the Bòrd presentation on the work being done to produce statutory guidance on Gaelic Education).

4. Gaelic within the 2011 census – further detailed analysis. Prof Lyndsay Paterson and Fiona O’ Hanlon, Edinburgh University.

(A copy of this presentation is circulated with the Minutes. It is also to be made available on the National Records Office website.)

A presentation was given on this work, jointly carried out by Edinburgh University and Soillse. The intention was to undertake a comprehensive and innovative look at the Census data, to better inform policy makers.

Some key points made:

- Old “parish level” analysis gives some historical resonance; there are 7 with >50% Gaelic speakers (GSp); 7 with 25-50% GSp; and 20 with 10-25% GSp;
- 43% of GSp live in areas where there are fewer GSp than the national average;
- Incidence of GSp aged 5-11 is up 25% between 2001 and 2011;
- Incidence of GSp aged 65 plus is down 14% over the same period;
- The number of Gaelic Speakers has ‘held its own’, while the population as a whole has declined;
- 40% of those who can speak Gaelic do so at home (80% of these are in the Western Isles parishes);
- In terms of recorded Gaelic use, there was a strong link not just with ability, but with the amount of Gaelic in the community;
- Gaelic use and encouragement at individual, home and community levels all matter;
- The ‘home’ matters – but remains a difficult area for policy makers/intervention;
- Success of GME can be seen as being about the individual – a good system - but there is evidence of the contribution to the overall Gaelic development effort.

Following the presentation a number of points were raised/discussed:

- Whether this had any implications for funding? The response was that this is a crucial area of policy debate – whether to focus resources on the areas with strongest concentration of GSp at community level, or to ‘spread out’ the funding more widely;
- Whether GME success at primary level was identifiable at secondary level? This is difficult to assess and would need specific survey exercise to track Gaelic speakers over time. The data shows that of young GSp (12-17 y/o) 40% live in non GSp households; therefore they get Gaelic during primary education, but it’s likely this declines over time once they have left GME.

5. **Progress on preparation of Statutory Guidance on GME – Bruce Robertson, Bòrd na Gàidhlig**

Bruce Robertson (Interim Head of Education, Bòrd na Gàidhlig) made a presentation on the work being undertaken to prepare the Guidance document – a statutory obligation on the Bòrd, and arising from the Education Bill (Scotland) 2005.

(A copy of the presentation is circulated with the Minutes).

A number of ‘engagement sessions’ had been held, throughout Scotland, to seek views on this new Guidance.

Bòrd na Gàidhlig itself had discussed the issue at length and were of the view that it needed strengthening:

1. A ‘presumption in favour’ of GME across Scotland (where the agreed criteria were met);
2. Creating a clear ‘learning journey’ from pre-school through to secondary level;
3. Clear Guidance on GME is essential;
4. A robust Financial Memorandum – to provide clarity on the resources available.

GME overall had been a huge success. The current challenges are largely down to that success and the demand it has created. The new Education Bill (and eventual Act) will be a significant milestone in the progression of GME. The Bòrd is seeking views on the statutory guidelines to be followed. A number of specific consultation questions are highlighted on the Bòrd website.

A key step forward will be the duty on Local Authorities to promote and support GME, and how they respond to parental GME requests will be critical.

Another key issue will relate to the management of examples of ‘non compliance’ with the Guidance.

In the following discussion a number of points were raised:

- The question of teacher recruitment. The response was that the Bòrd would do what it could to see that Gaelic teaching was attractive; and that the Colleges and Universities were responding positively to the requirement to have teachers trained and willing to work in a GME setting;
- That workforce planning also needs to take into account the parental demand for Gaelic learning in schools (as opposed to GME streams);
- That Additional Support Needs provision was not in the legislation, but that will be covered in the guidance;
- That the question of classroom support would also be considered to support those children from non-Gaelic speaking households;
- That the biggest threat currently facing GME and Gaelic education overall was the current budgetary and public finance situation.

During further discussion a point was also raised about Freedom of Information requests put to, and addressed by Bòrd na Gàidhlig, in relation to Gaelic teacher numbers. The response was that while the Bòrd had a good overview on the position, it was not the owner of the detailed data and could not therefore issue it in response to FOI requests. A further difficulty (in the sense of data availability) was that Local Authorities are the actual employers rather

than the Bòrd or Scottish Government. Some LAs had changed pupil:teacher staffing formulae leading to a decline in teacher numbers. However the Bòrd said it was important that everyone be working from the same dataset and that they would try to address this. This was welcomed by those present.

6. Bòrd na Gàidhlig’ – a general update on the Bòrd’s position and priorities – Bruce Robertson.

A number of issues were presented:

- The Education Bill – currently a focus of a great deal of work, and an important milestone; there was good Parliamentary support and the Bill was being strengthened; would see the final shape of the Bill by mid-December; that initiatives to attract teachers were being developed; that secondary education was an increasing priority and that this led into a debate about a deliverable core curriculum matched to workforce planning.
- That there should be ‘fit for purpose’ adult education and Gaelic arts strategies, including operating models. In terms of Gaelic arts it was disappointing about PnE, but that the Bòrd was continuing to work with the sector and Creative Scotland to develop an ‘exciting offer’ which would be announced early in the New Year. Activity at community level would form an important element of this;
- Working alongside MG Alba in the areas of online and digital solutions;
- An advert had gone out seeking new Bòrd members. It was hoped to recruit up to 6, and that interviews would be held the following week;
- CEO vacancy – that the interim management team of Joe Moore, Bruce Robertson, and Neil Graham had prepared and submitted a report which would be considered by the Bòrd the following week. It was anticipated that an advert for the CEO post would be published early in the New Year.

7. AOCB

(In relation to the news of Pròiseact nan Ealan being wound up) – A question was asked on the funding position between Bòrd na Gàidhlig and PnE: Were the Bòrd actual funders of PnE? The response was that they were, and that an offer of further financial support had been made. Given this, the Bòrd themselves were surprised by the PnE announcement. However it was said there were issues with other funders.

Disappointment was raised that an organisation like PnE had previously lost its core funding status – and that such support was necessary to allow it to develop and lever in project funding. It was stated that PnE had a ‘reach’ far beyond the Gaelic community and suggested that the CPG should take further interest in the position.

It was agreed that the CPG would write to Creative Scotland voicing concern at the demise of PnE and seeking assurances about ongoing support of the Gaelic arts in a more general sense.

There was also discussion on Gaelic broadcasting and the threatened cut in funding from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport in Westminster. A ‘form of words’ that could serve as the basis for consultation responses was tabled by John MacLeod of An Comunn Gàidhealach (*circulated with these minutes*).

This discussion also covered MG Alba’s call for a greater degree of funding support from the BBC towards the ‘BBC Alba’ output. An additional 10 hours/week from the BBC would be a significant contribution, and even at that, not close to parity with what the BBC contributes to S4C in Wales. BBC Alba is a significant contributor to Gaelic language development, but also to the Scottish economy, with multipliers demonstrating useful levels of employment – particularly important in more remote areas.

8. Date of next meeting:

With Parliament dissolving on 23rd March 2016 in advance of the Scottish Parliament elections, it was agreed that a further meeting would be held during this session. This would allow more discussion on the Education Bill and the Gaelic elements within that.

The date of 16th March was proposed, and it was suggested this should be an evening meeting to allow fuller discussion. Further details to be circulated.