

## SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT – CROSS PARTY GROUP ON GAELIC

**DRAFT** Minute of the meeting of the Cross-Party Group on Gaelic, held in Committee Room 6  
The Scottish Parliament, Holyrood on Wednesday 30 May 2017 at 1pm

### Attendance:

Present: Kate Forbes MSP (Convener);  
John Finnie MSP  
Angus MacDonald MSP  
Calum Iain Macleod, Comunn na Gàidhlig (Asst. Secretary);  
Shona NicIllinnein (Bòrd na Gàidhlig);  
Murchadh Moireasdan (Bòrd na Gàidhlig)  
Mata MacIver  
Dòmhnall Caimbeul (MG ALBA)  
Iain Macaulay (Comunn na Gàidhlig)  
Donald MacNeill (Comunn na Gàidhlig)  
Donald Morris (Comunn na Gàidhlig)  
Ailean Caimbeul (An Comunn Gàidhealach)  
Iain Moireasdan (An Comunn Gàidhealach)  
Ceitidh Mhoireach (Cearcall Comhraidh Dhun Eideann)  
Rob Dunbar (Oilthigh Dhùn Èidinn)  
Conchúr Ó Giollagáin (Oilthigh na Gàidhealtachd is nan Eilean)  
Julian de Spáinn General Secretary, Connradh na Gaeilge  
Dr Davyth Hicks, Secretary, European Language Equality Network  
Joan Esson (Education Scotland HMI)  
Dòmhnall MacGhillemoire (Stòrlann)  
Carole Henderson (Parent)  
Ruairidh MacIntyre (Scottish Government)  
Magaidh Wentworth (Comann nam Parant)  
Bria Mason  
Stuart Pescodd  
Linda Roberts  
Jonathan Ferrier  
Beathag Mhoireasdan – simultaneous interpretation.

### 1. Welcome & Apologies

Kate Forbes MSP, CPG Convener, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies had been received from: Calum Alex Macmillan (Feisean nan Gaidheal); Maeve Mackinnon (Foghlam Alba); Derek Mackenzie (Skills Development Scotland); Ann Dessey; Calum Duncan (Comunn na Gàidhlig); Rhoda Grant MSP; Joan MacAlpine MSP, Marcus Mac an Tuairnear; Wilson MacLeod (Oilthigh Dhùn Èidinn); Jane Renton (Foghlam Alba); Hugh Dan MacLennan, Iain MacLeòid, Agnes Rennie, Margaret Mary Murray; Sheila Carvel (GME)

## 2. Election of Cross Party Group office bearers:

**Convener:** Kate Forbes MSP was elected Convener of the Group  
**Vice Convener:** John Finnie MSP was elected Vice-Convener of the Group  
**Secretary:** The meeting agreed that Bòrd na Gàidhlig assume the role of providing Secretarial support to the Group.

The Convener opened the meeting by welcoming all those present and extended a special warm welcome to Guests who would be leading a debate on the subject of *Brexit and the potential impact on Gaelic and other UK minority, indigenous languages*.

## 3. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

## 4. Panel Debate: *Brexit and the potential impact on Gaelic and other UK minority, indigenous languages*.

The Convener welcomed and introduced the Panel members:

Prof. Rob Dunbar, Edinburgh University  
Prof. Conchúr Ó Giollagáin, University of Highlands & Islands  
Julian de Spáinn General Secretary, Connradh na Gaelige  
Dr Davyth Hicks, Secretary, European Language Equality Network

### **Professor Rob Dunbar:**

Professor Dunbar spoke about the history of politics, minority languages, numbers of speakers and the status of minority languages in Europe. He informed the Group that the indirect impacts of Brexit are an equally important aspect when considering the effect of Brexit.

He used Sabhal Mor Ostaig as an example of potential impact of Brexit and also developments in relation to the island of Canna. Both of these had been in receipt of European support, and he went on to say that Gaelic developments in general have been supported by significant European funding.

In addition to the support to Gaelic language projects, he cited other potential threats such as the threats to sustaining populations in island and rural areas where Gaelic is spoken by significant numbers and that any decline in population, particularly amongst the young and economically active would have a detrimental impact on the language. He also highlighted the impact of Brexit leading to a potential loss for Gaelige as well.

### **Prof. Conchúr Ó Giollagáin:**

Prof Ó Giollagáin has prepared a written paper on the impacts of Brexit on language. He envisages it as a highly challenging situation but also that it offers opportunities as well. He outlined a number of factors and dimensions in relation to Brexit, including civil society, developments and infrastructure, academia, cross-border co-operation and political risks. He also highlighted the curtailment of possible involvement in EU projects such as the rural development programme, LEADER.

He surmised that any compensatory budget from UK Government is unlikely to address any shortfall from the withdrawal of European funding. Brexit is likely to bring socio-economic threats to speakers of minority languages in the UK and there will be a need for central and devolved governments to compensate.

The impact on universities is likely to be significant, arising mainly from the restriction on free movement of academics between the rest of Europe and the UK and the curtailment in funding opportunities for research.

He stated that issues relating to minority languages are likely to be lower down the political agenda over the years following Brexit. In his view Brexit will be damaging and restrictive with respect to collective learning and cross-border partnerships. In addition, the political risks associated with Brexit include minorities being restricted with little or no access to those wielding power. The border between Northern Ireland and Irish Republic could be particularly affected by a hard Brexit. There was also the question of the status and continuity of the British/Irish Council.

### **Julian de Spáinn General Secretary, Connradh na Gaeilge (CnaG):**

Mr de Spáinn gave a brief history of the organisation which was formed in 1893 and currently has in excess of 200 branches, including one in Glasgow. It is a social and cultural organisation which promotes the Irish language in Ireland and worldwide. It has a development plan which has been agreed but the necessary funding needs to be sourced to enable implementation.

Mr de Spáinn outlined the main challenges as:

- Structure of language organisations – a hard border post-Brexit would negatively impact on their work across Ireland and that groups working in Northern Ireland and the Republic might be barred from such works
- Education – impact on universities and the significant work carried out during the annual summer camps when students of Irish develop their language skills.

The main effects of Brexit:

- Fòras na Gàeilge, which is a cross-border agency is likely to have its budget reduced
- Challenging for the Irish language in the North

He outlined that the Irish Language Act needs to be enabled and requested the support of Scots and Gaelic communities for this.

### **Dr Davyth Hicks, Secretary, European Language Equality Network (ELEN):**

Dr Hicks gave an overview of the situation regarding minority languages in Europe in which there are 60 minority languages spoken and some 55 million people speak a minority language. ELEN represents 44 languages, with 22 European States involved and has a membership of 150 organisations.

It is involved in advocacy work on behalf of the languages. Implications from Brexit include loss of direct funding such as ERASMUS and also indirect funding such as LEADER. Funding is only currently guaranteed until 2020. He stated that it is vital to make the economic case for languages. In his view, Welsh will be particularly badly affected due to the loss of farming subsidies. With regard to Cornish, all language projects at risk as UK government assistance looks unlikely.

In the academic field there is a high level of dependency on partnership and not being able to invite UK partners may impact negatively on funding applications. In the recent EU Resolution there were no mention of Structural Funds.

He cited the attitude of the UK Government, for example, walking out of meetings, having a potential impact on languages and jobs. ELEN was seeking post-2020 guarantees from UK Government. He noted that the agriculture and fishing sectors were lobbying hard and urged that lesser used languages should be doing the same. He recommended that devolved governments and administrations need to be heavily involved and that figures on impact were required from the government. He recommended setting up an inter-government working group, possibly based on the British/Irish Council and that it should include Cornwall County Council.

In the general discussion that followed the following points were made.

Shona MacLennan talked about the impact of Brexit on the Western Isles, the forecast population decline and the economy of Gaelic speakers - needs investment plan.

Mata MacÌomhair reported that the Council of Europe in Strasbourg was losing faith in Scotland and the UK. He urged that Edinburgh/Wales/Ireland need to be aware of what happens in Europe; that in his view, Northern Ireland was the only devolved organisation taking interest in what happens in Europe and that there was a need for new Scottish Gaelic language strategy and minority languages.

Davyth Hicks suggested that young people need to see the opportunities available; also that language impact assessments, eg in town planning projects, are developed and implemented.

Rob Dunbar responded that economic development is difficult but needs to be done and will support language development.

D W Morrison recommended that the Gaelic is included in the forthcoming Islands Bill and that we should encourage people to make this representation.

Conchúr Ó Giollagáin recommended that the governments in Wales, Scotland, Dublin and Belfast need to meet.

Kate Forbes MSP talked about the role of broadcasting and education post-Brexit.

Julian de Spáinn made the comparison between funding for S4C and TG4. He recommended that young people should be brought to the language through education, either in part or full immersion, as children should enjoy using languages.

Kate Forbes MSP questioned whether we work closely enough with other Administrations.

Dr Davyth Hicks recommended that Scottish Government should take the lead.

Rob Dunbar noted that links are in place already eg S4C/BBC ALBA; that there is need for more community involvement and we should look at Brexit impact on broadcasting, eg is Brexit a possible barrier to programmes being sold in Europe.

Shona MacLennan talked about community development, such as happened through CeangalG where Gaeilge and Gàidhlig communities had opportunities to learn from each other through exchange visits. She also highlighted Iomairt Cholm Cille which had been established as part of the Good Friday Agreement.

Conchúr Ó Giollagáin highlighted that in change there are always opportunities and we should seek to take advantage of these but the main challenge is funding sources diminishing or drying up. At this point it is not clear what will be available instead and each devolved administration needs to act. He recommended pooling resources and warned against the disempowerment game whereby minority language communities and their issues are considered tiresome.

Iain MacAulay agreed with Conchúr Ó Giollagáin that it is essential to have economic opportunities, including jobs, that will promote and encourage Gaelic.

Rob Dunbar argued that Gaelic Plans require greater focus on Gaelic in economic development.

### **Summary/Actions**

- Joint statement regarding the requirement for a good deal for minority languages in Brexit
- Write to Scot Government re co-ordinated approach with other devolved administrations
- The Islands Bill – impact on Gaelic/Scots
- Possibility to progress a joint meeting with Welsh and Irish colleagues
- Work with ELEN
- Update on what is happening in Brussels
- Assessment of European funding for Gaelic

## **5. Update on progress with BBC ALBA, FilmG and LearnGaelic**

### **Donald Campbell, Chief Executive, MG ALBA:**

Donald Campbell thanked all around the table for their support. He followed up on the debate on the impact of Brexit with information relating to broadcasting, such as the total annual costs of S4C/TG4BBC ALBA being £170million; the trend for broadcasting is to be more international; leading to empowerment to production companies, for example the Port series will see more internationalisation. Other trends include fewer people watching television. In general, people are happy with BBC ALBA. However, the main challenge for ALBA is the satisfying the under-45 audience.

He gave a brief update on FilmG which has focused on community empowerment through such developments as the *Vlog a' Mhòid* competition.

In campaigning for increased finance for the channel, the ambition is to achieve 10 hours per week of new programming from the BBC. The BBC has agreed to increase from 5 hrs to 7.2 hours by 2020. This will allow BBC ALBA to broadcast 2.1 hours of new programmes each day (currently 1.8).

Mr Campbell informed the meeting of the consultation Ofcom, as the new Regulator of the BBC, is carrying out. Ofcom sets the standards for BBC channels and is now consulting on a draft BBC Operating Licence. He encouraged all organisations to submit a response to the Ofcom consultation which closes on 17 July

**6. Date of Next Meeting**

To be confirmed. The Convenor thanked Dòmhnall MacNèill and Comunn na Gàidhlig for their excellent Secretarial support since the Cross-Party Group was established.