

**PE1795/E**

Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing submission of 3 December 2020

Thank you for the Committee's letter of 17 November to John Swinney, Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, regarding the ongoing petition about the Funding of Spòrs Gàidhlig. I am replying as I have portfolio responsibility for sports.

As previously mentioned in earlier evidence, The Scottish Government and Bòrd na Gàidhlig have been pleased to have been involved with the Spòrs Gàidhlig project since its inception in 2014. We recognise the importance of creating opportunities for young people to use their Gaelic Language skills beyond the traditional school environment and the project have been successful in providing this service.

The Scottish Government met with Bòrd na Gàidhlig on 16 November as part of our ongoing dialogue with them on Gaelic issues. At the meeting officials raised the matter of Spòrs Gàidhlig.

We are pleased that Bòrd na Gàidhlig continue to support the Spòrs Gàidhlig team in finding a funding solution. As the Committee is aware, Bòrd na Gàidhlig believes in the benefits that the project affords young people in using Gaelic in outdoor activities. The Bord are also of the view that it would be helpful in terms of the long term sustainability of the project, that other funders come on board in recognition of the health and well-being benefits of the project for young Gaelic speakers and its contribution to delivering aspects of Curriculum for Excellence. They continue to be involved in these discussions.

In Autumn 2019, Bòrd na Gàidhlig agreed to a £45,000 funding package to cover the period from 1st November 2019 through to 31st March 2021 with the expectation that earned income from sales would grow significantly over that period.

The outbreak of COVID-19 meant that the activities of Spòrs Gàidhlig came to a halt and as a result on 23rd September 2020, Bòrd na Gàidhlig agreed that Spòrs Gàidhlig could use the remaining time and funding through to the end of March 2021 to offer Gaelic medium outdoor learning opportunities to schools and other groups in-situ, rather than these groups having to travel to participate. The charge for these activities has been set at a level to cover the cost of travel and accommodation only.

It is too early to say whether or not this revised method of delivery is working and Bòrd na Gàidhlig is in on-going dialogue with Spòrs Gàidhlig to ascertain this. The view of Bòrd na Gàidhlig remains that it is highly likely that Spòrs na Gàidhlig will require grant support from the public sector for some time, including from Bòrd na Gàidhlig and they will make a decision on this before 31st March 2021.

Notwithstanding the benefits offered by Spòrs Gàidhlig, it should also be noted that schools and other educational settings across Scotland have continuous opportunities to engage in outdoor learning. Outdoor learning is positioned within Curriculum for Excellence as a legitimate and effective way of delivering educational outcomes across the breadth of subjects and the extent of the 3-18 learner journey. Outdoor learning can support educational attainment, aid personal and social

development and improve mental and physical health. In planning to use the outdoors we would expect educators to consider the specific benefits afforded by learning within school grounds, at local community spaces and in partnership with external organisations potentially including, but not limited to, Spòrs Gàidhlig.

The Committee also noted an interest in the Scottish Government's approach to support social enterprises, like Spòrs Gàidhlig, in light of Covid. A £350m emergency communities fund, was announced in March to ensure local authorities, community groups and the third sector were able to support people and communities affected by COVID-19. Included within this funding package was the £50 million Wellbeing Fund to provide support to third sector organisations, including charities and social enterprises, helping them to work with people most affected by the coronavirus pandemic, and the £30m Third Sector Resilience Fund to provide an emergency fund for charities, community groups, social enterprises and voluntary organisations working in Scotland.

Following the closure of the Wellbeing Fund and Third Sector Resilience Fund, and as we moved into the recovery period, the Scottish Government launched the Community & Third Sector Recovery Programme, in September.

The programme delivers more than financial support, organisations can also access specialist advice and support and is delivered via a number of partners. Further information can be found at the following link:

<https://scvo.org.uk/support/coronavirus/funding/scottish-government/community-recovery>, including advice for organisations on applying to the programme, and online application form.

The programme has two distinct aspects.

The Communities Recovery Fund aims to support the delivery of services in communities that were suspended or reduced because of COVID-19, or the creation of new services that tackle new challenges presented. The fund offers grants so organisations can reintroduce the delivery of services and supports the adaptation of existing services or the development of new ones to tackle new community needs resulting from, or existing needs exacerbated by COVID-19.

The Adapt & Thrive Programme aims to support organisational change. Third sector organisations need to adapt to the challenges presented by COVID-19 so they can continue to have a positive impact in their communities. Working with an advisor, organisations will be supported to develop a plan so they can operate sustainably. This may mean developing new income streams, restructuring the organisation, or changing how services are delivered. Funding to implement the plan is also available.'

In addition, the Bòrd has also been quick to support a range of Gaelic organisations across the country since the pandemic resulted in lockdown in March. The Bòrd has actively taken a flexible approach to current funding allocations to allow organisations to continue delivering their services to the Gaelic community. Despite the challenges we are aware of innovative solutions being created to use Gaelic and

we envisage that many of these innovations will become permanent such has been their positive impact.

Furthermore, Bòrd na Gàidhlig established a COVID-19 Support Fund in summer 2020, with over 50 organisations and community groups the length and breadth of Scotland supported to deliver Gaelic projects. A total of £222,300 was awarded. The Bòrd is currently actively considering opening a second round of the COVID-19 Support Fund before Christmas 2020, which they believe will help further mitigate against the on-going impact of the pandemic on Gaelic usage and learning.

I hope that this information is helpful

**Joe FitzPatrick**