

DRAFT

Question 1: Do you think the draft Plan contains the optimum mix of ambitions, targets, aims, areas of activity and actions for Gaelic at this time or what would improve this?

Targets

We welcome the inclusion of measurable targets.

Many of these measurable targets, however, will only be possible with the co-operation of Local Authorities. This may, to some extent, be possible through the language planning process but we feel it is essential that legislation is introduced which will help ensure that these targets are achieved. Legislation should include family rights to Gaelic medium education (GME) and additional powers for Bòrd na Gàidhlig especially with regard to local authority plans.

For example, the current draft Gaelic Language Plan for Glasgow City Council under the High Level Aim - Continue to develop plans for the expansion of Gaelic medium primary and secondary education provision in Glasgow states "2022: No expansion possible due to physical spacing and staffing requirements". This policy has resulted in a number of families who want Gaelic for their children being denied the opportunity. If there is to be continued growth in GME local authority decisions such as this must be challenged.

Another current example is the refusal of Argyll & Bute Council to consider a stand-alone Gaelic school, although there has been established parental demand in Oban for a number of years for a school.

Increased funding will also be crucial if these targets are to be met.

The action "Local Authorities and SG promote, support and grow GM Childcare and Early years, Primary and Secondary provision" is welcome but would be strengthened with the inclusion of more specific targets. We welcome the target on stand-alone Gaelic schools, but we would like to see a target relating to pre-school provision which would take advantage of the opportunities offered by 1140 hours funded provision. We would also add a target for school leavers exiting GME with a certificate in Gaelic language. This could be either a SQA award currently available, or a new certificate specifically related to GME.

Aims

We agree with the aims of increasing usage and learning of Gaelic. We suggest the addition of a third aim - to improve fluency in Gaelic, especially oral proficiency. We realise that increasing usage and learning will hopefully improve fluency, but we feel that the issue of quality of language ability is so important to the future of the language that it must be highlighted. In Gaelic medium education improving language acquisition will require a number of actions which we have detailed later in our response.

Activities

We welcome the commitment to increase the availability of activities for young people. It is essential that our young people in GME have opportunities to use Gaelic in a wide variety of situations with activities that are attractive to their age group. The work of Comunn na Gàidhlig's Iomairtean Officers and Spòrs Gàidhlig are both models that should be extended.

We would like to see more activities for families included. Family activities are an opportunity to encourage parents and children to use Gaelic together, build language bonds between family members including grandparents and encourage adults to learn Gaelic along with their children.

The impact from Gaelic Language Plans has frequently disappointed so the commitment to build greater impact is welcome. We particularly welcome the reference to NHS Boards in the plan as we feel that there could be a better link between Gaelic in homes and families with Health Board Gaelic Language Plans. Opportunities could be developed to share information with parents on language use at the ante-natal stage and the early years.

Question 2: There are a range of ambitions and targets which set the direction of the Plan. Do you think these are the appropriate ambitions and targets or do you have suggestions for others?

Whilst we welcome the inclusion of annual improvement planning and the commitment from Scottish Government to expand the range of subjects taught in Gaelic at BGE and senior phase, we are concerned at the drop in numbers of pupils studying Gaelic as a subject. We would suggest that a target to improve these numbers be included in the plan.

Measurement of year-on-year growth in GME should take cognisance of pupil loss from 3-18.

The possible impact of the current educational reform process on all aspects of Gaelic education should be included, as well as opportunities for improvement through educational reform.

A target relating to pre-school provision which would take advantage of the opportunities offered by 1140 hours funded provision.

A target for school leavers exiting GME with a certificate in Gaelic language. This could be either a SQA award currently available, or a new certificate specifically related to GME.

The commitment to fund new reading materials is welcome and much needed especially for young readers. Not just translations of English books, especially for early years, which are often too hard for parents beginning their language learning to read but written in Gaelic with simpler words. Support will be needed for Gaelic writers and illustrators to publish. There is a lack of books for children reading Gaelic for pleasure (aged 8-12ish).

We would like to see books and other resources that are available promoted by Local Authorities, for example through the library service. This may be something that could feature in Gaelic Language Plans.

We are aware that the process has begun to review the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education but think that it is essential to include a target in the plan for an improved and strengthened Statutory Guidance. For example, the target in the draft plan to increase the number of stand-alone Gaelic schools to 16 is welcome but will be easier to achieve if Statutory Guidance included guidance on progressing from GME delivery in schools which also deliver EME to stand-alone Gaelic schools. At the moment this progression to a mode of delivery in GME which is the norm in minority language education is too dependent on parental activism with parents often facing strong opposition from local authorities.

Question 3: There are a range of actions relating to each area of activity. Do you think that specific goals should be attached to the actions and if so, your suggestions on what these should be would be welcome?

Gaelic learning in the home and with families

This is possibly the most important area of development for Gaelic, and the most challenging. There needs to be a concerted effort made to address some of the main issues regarding the interruption of intergenerational transmission of the language, as well as to empower families to re-establish Gaelic as an integral part of their daily lives. The role of Comann nam Pàrant is rightly recognised in the draft plan, and we agree that as a national organisation working closely with families in GME, we have an important role in this area of development. We already have a number of initiatives, some in early stages, with a focus on Gaelic within families, with some of these detailed below:

- The Early Years are important as they are the first contact many families have with Gaelic and Gaelic education and is the best time to support parents beginning their language learning. Our early years pilot covers the Western Isles and the Central Belt. This has been an opportunity for Comann nam Pàrant to deliver support for early years and has led to a more co-ordinated approach in developments in GME, especially in new areas such as Renfrewshire. We hope that we will be have an opportunity to expand our provision in the early years.
- Our websites parant.org.uk Neadan.scot (referred to as Togi in the draft plan) both provide advice for families on the use of Gaelic in the home. Neadan.scot is still in early stages and will be added to shortly – for example with podcasts we have recorded with young Gaelic speakers.
- Comann nam Pàrant are currently in the initial stages of a project mirroring the ‘Siarad Babi’ resource in Wales – this will be an opportunity for native Gaelic speaking parents to share the language they use with their children, ‘parentese’. It is hoped that this will be a comprehensive resource to help those who are fluent in Gaelic but who lack the necessary language required in all aspects and pressures of parenthood. We have support from Mhudiad Meithrin for our work on this.

There needs to be an acknowledgement of the diverse range of needs and challenges within the Gaelic speaking community with further support for those raising their children with Gaelic.

If we are to make further progress and provide this support for families, we need more resources dedicated to supporting Gaelic in the home. This resourcing will include additional staffing for Comann nam Pàrant. Extra resources would allow us to:

- With partners run an early years campaign with a clear message that learning starts at home – what do I as a parent have to offer my child? This campaign would target parents with all levels of fluency from fluent speakers to parents with no knowledge of the language.
- Develop a (small) information pack to be shared with all families on enrolment to GME – preferably at nursery but at P1 if parents have had no pre-school contact. These would be distributed through local authority networks.
- Extend our early years scheme so that officers cover every area of the country and provide consistent support for all families interested in Gaelic. With the support of additional officers, we could create more opportunities to support families use Gaelic in their homes. Our goal should be for families to have access to 0-3 Gaelic groups in all areas where GME is available. Early years (0-3) provide a strong foundation for families entering GME.
- Build on the work we are currently delivering in support of family learning. We are aware that there are different approaches required depending on the language abilities of parents.
- Fluent / semi-fluent speakers who are raising a family with Gaelic as the children’s first language may feel isolated. To address this, we could create networks of families using

media such as Instagram and WhatsApp groups. In some areas it should also be possible to bring these families together for activities.

- Some parents are reluctant or unable to use their Gaelic with their children. A campaign/programme of support addressing the speakers' lack of confidence and/or perceived/real lack of proficiency could support these parents. This could be achieved through the creation of 'safe spaces' such as cultarlann. A doctrine of 'cuideachadh seach càineadh'?

SCHOOL

Develop and extend an appropriate GME curriculum offer for both Broad General Education and Senior Phase in the secondary sector – specific goals could include detail on what is meant by an 'appropriate GME curriculum offer' as well as a target for new qualifications.

Local Authorities support and grow Gaelic as a modern language in line with the 1+2 national initiative – as an absolute minimum there should be a goal for all schools with a Gaelic medium class to have Gaelic as +2 for their English medium classes as part of the creation of a bilingual ethos throughout the school. A second goal would be for all primary feeder schools to a secondary with a Gaelic learner offer should have Gaelic as +2. A third goal could be a percentage of all other schools to offer Gaelic as +3.

Ensure provision of high quality GME and GLE staffing and resources – attaching specific goals to an activity such as this would give some information on how this is to be achieved – what specifically will be done, by who and when.

Ensure progress and delivery of SG commitments on GME – it is not clear how this can be achieved, and again specific goals would provide more information.

Question 4: The Plan takes a broad and inclusive approach to the promotion and support for Gaelic. Do you think a broad approach is the right approach for Gaelic at this time?

We welcome an inclusive approach but would like to see more focus on support for pupils and teachers in GME. It is recognised that GME is essential to the future of Gaelic and as such deserves to be the main focus of the national plan with the aim of having a high quality immersive educational experience which results in fluent adults equipped to pass the language on to the next generation.

Question 5: The Plan wants to see Gaelic having a stronger appeal to individuals and families and to see an increased confidence in the use of Gaelic. What more do you think could help with this?

Demand for Gaelic medium education would increase if the issues which have a negative impact on parental confidence could be addressed. The situation varies between local authority areas but the main concerns that parents raise with us are:

- Lack of suitable transport
- Issues around teacher supply
- Transition – especially primary to secondary
- Difficulty in accessing pre-school
- Lack of wrap-around care

We have been encouraged recently to see some progress with discussions on language assistants posts for GME classes but feel that the development of these posts must be a target in this plan. There are too many pupils leaving GME with not enough confidence in their Gaelic language skills to either continue their studies or use Gaelic in their home and work lives. To address this, we need more support with language acquisition in early years and primary, an improvement in secondary provision and more support to access Gaelic activities for pupils and families.

Question 6: What else do you think would ensure a promising future for Gaelic in Scotland?

A substantial increase in Gaelic budgets.

Legislation which complies with the UNCRC and which will give:

- Parental Rights to GME
- Equal status for GME with EME
- Equal status for Gaelic with English as an official language of Scotland
- More powers for BnaG / introduction of language commissioner

More use of educational data on pupils in GME in determining policies.

Research on delivery of Gaelic medium education to identify any variation between Local Authorities. This would help inform the discussion on whether Gaelic medium education requires a different system of delivery to English medium education.

More identification and sharing of best practice in Gaelic medium classrooms. Consideration of better networks between Local Authorities and Gaelic and educational organisations. Although there is the 'Gaelic Local Authority Network' (GLAN) which meets regularly, officers attending from Local Authorities who have been given Gaelic education as part of their remit seem to be in post for short periods leading to little consistency with membership of the group.

The main focus of this plan should be actions which will enable a substantial increase in fluent Gaelic speakers as the end product of Gaelic medium education. The pupils in GME are our best opportunity to achieve a generation of Gaelic speakers with the confidence to continue using Gaelic throughout their lives and become part of the Gaelic speaking workforce that we so desperately need. In our responses we have detailed some of the actions that we feel would enable this to happen.