

Education Reform Consultation

Vision for a Gaelic-medium curriculum

GME is acknowledged as a fundamental requirement for the maintenance and revival of the Gaelic language. Pupils are expected to achieve fluency in the language through GME (3-18 – see below for further comments on progression) but they must also be nurtured and encouraged to undertake a lifelong journey of learning and acquisition with Gaelic as an important part of their identity.

At present Gaelic medium education (GME) delivers the Curriculum for Excellence, which was designed to meet the needs of English medium education (EME), through the medium of Gaelic. GME is based on immersion and practice is guided by two documents, Education Scotland's 'Advice on Gaelic Education' and Bòrd na Gàidhlig's 'Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education'.

It has become clear that the future GME curriculum requires a different delivery model to that of EME. It is essential that there be not only greater recognition of the demands of total immersion but also a better understanding of the importance of activities, which may be extra-curricular, which will improve fluency in Gaelic.

The GME curriculum of the future must instil a sense of pride in pupils of their Gaelic language skills and an understanding of their importance to the future of the language.

Pupils who have gone through GME primary will progress to the fluent Gaelic speakers' course at secondary and may also have the opportunity to study a number of subjects through Gaelic, but this is wholly dependent on individual schools and on the commitment from local authorities. The current system predominantly uses an exam based system to assess achievement. This accreditation system is based on EME and now is the time to look at a bespoke system for GME. Our vision for the curriculum would include some additional certification that would recognise the status of GME and the pupils' fluency in Gaelic.

Curriculum for Excellence provides a coherent progression in the journey of learners (3-18 and beyond) that gives them the best possible educational experience and enables them to realise their ambitions.

There is no coherent progression in 3-18 for GME as a result of a lack of strategic planning for secondary provision. Families choosing GME face a lottery as to what subjects, if any, will be offered in Gaelic at secondary level. There has been no increase to the number of subjects offered at secondary level in years, and there is currently no plan in place to work towards changing this. Pupils in GME deserve to have access to a far broader range of subjects delivered through the medium of Gaelic, and a plan must be put in place to ensure this happens.

There has also been no significant increase in the numbers of pupils sitting SQA examinations through the medium of Gaelic in the subjects that are available. If pupils are reluctant to sit examinations through Gaelic the reasons for this need to be investigated and addressed. This may mean, for example, that pupils require additional time if sitting an

exam through Gaelic. Additionally, all children and young people should leave the GME system with **at least** one qualification in Gaelic, or with a standalone certificate or award that recognises their fluency in Gaelic as recognition of their completion of their education through the medium of Gaelic.

GME parents and carers, having been integral to the creation of GME and who remain integral stakeholders to the provision, should be provided with an annual summary of key development priorities and evidence of progress in each GME secondary establishment as part of their school's annual improvement plan. This should include planning relating to extending opportunities for developing the wider curriculum.

Improvement planning at local authority level for GME is also important and this could be progressed with a better understanding from local authority education departments on the importance of complying with their Gaelic language plans.

There are additional challenges which must be addressed to ensure Gaelic is a vibrant element in the young person's life outwith the immediate confines of the classroom. Additional wider curriculum opportunities through the medium of Gaelic are particularly important in GME secondary CfE delivery so that learning may be consolidated through such social interaction and thus by extension, normalise the process. This could be achieved through better planning, and co-ordination by national agencies, local authorities, and schools. Recent initiatives by Bòrd na Gàidhlig, particularly in planning for improvement at secondary level, are addressing some of the issues but compliance with BnaG recommendations needs to be compulsory for local authorities and schools if there is to be meaningful progress.

There is an opportunity to improve fluency in children coming from non- Gaelic speaking homes if they are able to access 1140 hours of total immersion a week from the age of 2 or 3. However, 1140 hrs early learning is not available in all areas for GME and this presents issues further down the educational road for both children and teachers who must deal with varying levels of fluency within a particular cohort.

The delivery of a GM 3-18 system has been hampered by lack of planning but challenges with staffing have undoubtedly also been a factor. If we are to attract more people into teaching, we must have the coherent 3-18 system which will deliver the fluent speakers who will be the workforce of the future. These Gaelic speaking young people must also be confident that they will be well supported in the profession with curriculum and training appropriate for Gaelic education.

There must be recognition that whilst GME is part of the Scottish education system equal to English medium education (EME) **IT IS NOT THE SAME**. GME has particular demands and specific delivery requirements relating to immersion. In the initial years of GME there were preferential teacher / pupil ratios, but these were gradually phased out. There is now no recognition of the additional workload of a GME teacher – large classes of non-Gaelic speaking children in total immersion, resources still limited in comparison to EME and few

opportunities for pupils to engage with Gaelic in homes and communities. These issues must be addressed so that teachers and pupils in GME have all the support they require to function successfully.

Any education reform should ensure that teachers have sufficient time to be involved in curriculum making which is bespoke to Gaelic medium and Gaelic learner education. As they have less access to additional resources, they may need more time than their English medium counterparts allocated to this particular area of development.

Gaelic teachers at all stages are a precious resource and their time should be protected. For example, teachers at secondary who do not have a full timetable should not be regularly deployed to teach English medium classes but should be supported to spend time developing resources or working on extra-curricular activities which will develop pupils' language skills. Teachers could also be allocated time that would allow them to work towards additional skills that will allow them to teach an additional subject in Gaelic.

The creation of a Curriculum and Assessment Agency

The Scottish Government has moved to a fundamental human rights-based approach in policy making which we strongly welcome. Gaelic is part of the equalities agenda but is not treated seriously in comparison to race, gender, sexual orientation, or disability. A rights-based approach would embed Gaelic Medium Education and give it equal status with English Medium Education in the creation of a new education agency. This would give a clear commitment to the increasing numbers of children educated through Gaelic, promote equality and reflect the desire of the majority of people in the country, that the language is supported. A new Curriculum and Assessment Agency should recognise the fact that children in Scotland are educated through the medium of two languages.

This would ensure that any impacts on GME of any future policy changes will be assessed as an integral part of the process. GME is currently often an afterthought in the process, for example, recently with post-covid recovery guidance, the relevant information for GME appeared some time after that which was provided for EME.

This must be supported by the employment of specialist Gaelic staff at appropriate levels within any structures following education reform.

The full breadth of existing SQA qualifications^[16] play an important part of the curriculum offered by secondary schools.

The decreasing numbers of pupils continuing with Gaelic as a subject, both fluent and learners, at secondary level is alarming. This will without doubt have an impact on the number of pupils able to teach in Gaelic, which will have a further detrimental effect on teacher numbers. This decline in pupil numbers will result in many pupils who, despite attaining a degree of fluency in Gaelic at primary level, will leave school with little or no Gaelic. This approach will not deliver the desired numbers of fluent Gaelic speakers unless

urgent action is taken. We believe that the main reason for the drop off in numbers is due to the limited choices offered to pupils through Curriculum for Excellence at the end of S3.

Data on the number of pupils taking these qualifications is readily available and should be responded to. All educational agencies should take cognisance of data on Gaelic education and act on the information.

If a broader range of SQA qualifications offered in Gaelic was available in the curriculum in secondary schools this would enable pupils to develop their Gaelic language skills in these subjects and would also make it easier for pupils to return to Gaelic (fluent) as a Higher in 6th year if they had not been able to take it in 5th year.

The use of technologies to support curriculum and assessments, and what could be done to deliver improvements.

Technology could be used in developing the delivery of the GM curriculum, especially as an interim measure when numbers of pupils are small and as schools build their provision.

However, the use of e-sgoil in GME has not always been totally successful and we recommend the following, which we believe would help address issues:

- There should always be a Gaelic speaker in the room to support pupils. For example, this could be their Gaelic teacher whilst a remote subject specialist teacher delivers the class via e-sgoil.
- Technology and equipment in the school must be fit for purpose.
- Classes and timetables need to be well planned with pupils having easy access to rooms and equipment.

Clarity on where the responsibilities for the strategic direction, review and updates for Curriculum for Excellence lie.

Parents often find it very difficult to understand who does what in education. This is particularly difficult in GME with many staff in leadership roles at school and local authority level having little knowledge of the pedagogy of GME.

A national curriculum which has a level of autonomy at school level needs more guidance from national agencies in order to deliver GME to a consistent standard across local authorities and schools.

This is usually in relation to compliance with Education Scotland's 'Advice on Gaelic Education' or Bord na Gàidhlig's Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education. Parents with concerns about the implementation of these documents in their school, and who feel that the school and local authority are not addressing these concerns, have an expectation that

either Bòrd na Gàidhlig or Education Scotland will be able to address their concerns. This is often not the case and parents find this very frustrating.

This could improve if inspection of GME were to be more intelligence led rather than the present situation with GM inspections taking place as an element of an EM inspection.

There is a need for greater clarity for parents on the roles of the national agencies. This must include Bord na Gàidhlig who many parents view as the principal authority on Gaelic education.

Historically developments in Gaelic medium education have been driven by parents. They initially led the campaigns for Gaelic medium classes and latterly have been at the forefront of initiatives to see more dedicated Gaelic schools established. Parents choose GME for their children (apart from in the Western Isles where there has been a Gaelic first policy for the past two years) and are very committed to their children's education.

Their dedication to the language is evident in the continued efforts to nurture and consolidate Gaelic for the next generation. Comann nam Parant is proud to represent these parents who wish GME for their child and plays a pivotal role in liaising with key decision makers regarding education and strategy. It is essential that such communication continues at all levels so that parents may be fully engaged in the process.

The core message is that GME be central to all strategy and decision making regarding education so that there is parity with EME and the resulting education system, in whatever form that may take, be fit for purpose for both streams.

Comann nam Pàrant (Nàiseanta)

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