1. Summary

1.1 This paper is intended to summarise the views of Comann nam Pàrant Dùn Èideann & Lodainn (“CnP Dùn Èideann”) in response to the Education and Culture Committee’s call for written submissions on the Education (Scotland) Bill which was introduced in to the Scottish Parliament by the Scottish Government on 23 March 2015.

1.2 CnP Dùn Èideann is a voluntary association which aims to promote and support Gaelic-medium education (“GME”) in Edinburgh. It is the representative body for parents with children in GME.

1.3 The Education and Culture Committee has invited views on:

- How the bill will affect GME primary education.
- The most appropriate ways for education authorities to promote and support GME.
- A number of specific questions.

1.4 In summary:

- We are encouraged by the support that GME receives from the Scottish Government and other parties at Holyrood.
- We hope that parents can be involved in the construction of a national vision for taking GME forward.
- CnP Dùn Èideann continues to strongly advocate the introduction of legislation making access to GME a right for families in Scotland.
- CnP Dùn Èideann supports the proposal to introduce a statutory structure for local authorities to deal with requests for GME as progress towards such a right.
- We would like to see an immediate national focus on the current issue of teacher numbers.
2. How significant a change in Gaelic Medium Primary Education will the Bill deliver? Do you agree these provisions should be limited to primary schooling?

2.1 Legislation at nursery and primary levels particularly regarding minimum numbers is a valuable addition in that it will give local authorities a structure for dealing with what may be seen as small numbers of annual requests for GME.

2.2 The legislation should also allow development to continue in areas where GME is currently successful. For example in Edinburgh, the opening of Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce has resulted in more families being attracted to GME, to the extent that numbers entering the nursery and primary may soon have to be limited.

2.3 To continue the development of GME and the creation of new Gaelic speakers, an agreement will be required with the City of Edinburgh Council as to how the demand for GME places will be accommodated. The legislation is helpful in terms of providing a guide as to when the local authority should be supplying an additional teacher and teaching space at an additional site.

2.4 The legislation above could result in the formation of a number of new small GME units in mainstream primary schools. There will be a need for a focus on teacher numbers, and the maintenance of quality through a national support network and the provision of high quality materials. Currently, teacher supply does not meet demand and this situation is expected to intensify as expansion continues. It would be useful also to consider the pupil/teacher ratio carefully to ensure the standard of immersion continues to improve. An increase in the number of language assistants and enhancing their role within the classroom environment would facilitate this improvement.

2.1 Secondary Schooling

2.1.1 CnP Dùn Èideann believes that the provision of GME at secondary levels requires a similar focus. Most secondary GME is delivered in mainstream secondary schools, which offer very few subjects through the medium of Gaelic and lack opportunities for language usage outside of the classroom. The delivery of GME through timetabled subjects is therefore crucial.

2.2.2 In the long-term, we hope to see local authorities being required to deliver GME at secondary level where there is a cohort above a given size of fluent speakers leaving primary school.

2.2.3 Legislation on Secondary GME would require a detailed discussion to properly define it. This discussion is overdue. Parents and local authorities invest much effort in supporting children through GME at primary and we all want to see these children becoming fluent adult speakers of Gaelic.

2.2.4 The Scottish Government and national Gaelic organisations also invest much in the early years of GME, and in providing educational resources and capital finance for primary schools. There is a risk that the return on that investment will be
significantly reduced without a similar focus on secondary. Decisions about GME at secondary level should not be entirely devolved to local authorities.

2.2.5 Defining secondary GME in terms of how much secondary timetable should be delivered through Gaelic would be a good first step in giving better focus to local authorities and national Gaelic organisations; and would highlight where teaching resources are needed most.

3. **What are the most appropriate ways for education authorities, particularly those with low levels of Gaelic usage, to promote and support GME and Gaelic learner education? What impact is this promotional work likely to have on the Gaelic language and the number of Gaelic speakers?**

3.1 The experience of parents within Edinburgh has included the following:

3.1.2 The appointment of an Early Years specialist concentrating on improving access to and development of Gaelic Education within the 0-5 year group.

3.1.3 Establishing Gaelic playgroups (Cròileagan) in chosen areas within a local authority. This may be due to demand or a suitable venue being found eg. local libraries and community centres. Within the playgroups Edinburgh council has appointed play-leaders who have a good level of Gaelic where the children and parents attending can learn words and phrases, play games and have access to material relevant to the stage of development of the children.

3.1.4 Once an early years development strategy has been established this can then be used to promote awareness of GME and also request from parents for GME within the local authority area. If the numbers of families becoming involved in early years GME increases this could then be used as a strong indicator that there is likely to be demand for GME at primary level.

3.1.5 Parents of children involved in early years GME often then are interested in becoming adult learners.

3.1.6 Parents in Edinburgh used a variety of different methods to increase the numbers becoming involved in GME. These included but were not limited to:

- Word of Mouth
- Social Media
- Stalls at local events where local parents could ‘sign up’ to receive information regarding GME.
- CnP Meetings

3.2 With promotion of GME it is reasonable to expect that demand would increase and the numbers of learners and speakers would increase. It is the view of CnP Dùn Èideann that if more children are in GME schools that there will be an increase in the number of speakers and the increased use of the language. If the targets of the National Gaelic Plan 2012-17 are to be met then increases in GME must be targeted right across Scotland. CnP Dùn Èideann considers that Gaelic-medium education will be crucial in safeguarding the future of Gaelic.
4. Do you agree that the Bill “will establish a clear process for authorities to follow in considering parental requests for an assessment of the need for Gaelic Medium, primary education”? Do you agree with the thresholds proposed in the Bill in relation to the assessment of parental requests?

4.1 GME units have historically begun with small numbers of children (e.g. Edinburgh began with seven children in a composite class), and can achieve rapid growth with proper support and advertising. The requirement that a teacher is provided if there are a specified number of families requesting GME will allow development to begin in new areas.

4.2 CnP Dùn Èideann believes that children numbering 5 or more is a fair policy to be applied for Councils who have received a request for GME.

4.3 CnP Dùn Èideann believes that due consideration should be given to the following:

4.3.1 The Bill requires that one parent submits the request for GME on behalf of 5 children. This requires one parent to speak for all parents and may prove to be difficult to manage. It may be more appropriate in some circumstances for parents to be represented by local groups or to form a local group which would represent the parents’ right to request GME.

4.3.2 Local authorities need not consider requests for GME where there has been a request considered within the previous 2 years. It is important that a process of appeal is clearly established should there be a change in circumstances within that timeframe.

5. Under existing legislation, education authorities must have regard to Bòrd na Gàidhlig’s education guidance when they are producing their annual statement of improvement objectives. What will the requirement in this bill add to this?

5.1 The Bill makes provision to amend s. 9 of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 to oblige Bòrd na Gàidhlig to make guidance with regard to Gaelic education. CnP Dùn Èideann believes that such guidance could be of assistance in ensuring a consistency of approach to Gaelic medium education. Currently, there is no single definition of what constitutes Gaelic medium education and, although there is some curricular guidance, local authorities have a good deal of flexibility in their approach to Gaelic education. Whilst that is in part a reflection of the different situations in different schools, a more consistent approach to this issue may be helpful, both for current arrangements and for local authorities setting up Gaelic medium provision.

6. Overall, to what extent will the Bill help to deliver the Scottish Government’s commitments to grow and strengthen Gaelic education?

6.1 CnP Dùn Èideann is satisfied that the Bill is, overall, a positive step which provides parents with the right to request GME for their children.
6.2 In local authority areas where there is currently no provision it does provide a framework in which GME can be supported. All local authorities should take steps to support the national commitment to grow Gaelic education, and this will include supporting families who express the wish for a Gaelic education for their children. Some of the steps outlined above could assist in this task.

6.3 Gaelic-medium schools increase the status of the language and are more attractive to many families than GME units. The increased status and visibility of Gaelic education with the establishment of the new school in Edinburgh has resulted in an increase in demand for places. Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce is attractive to families from all ethnic and cultural backgrounds. During a recent multi-cultural week it was determined that there were children from 27 different cultural backgrounds in the school.

7. What potential impact on other education services might arise from the local authority having to implement these duties?

7.1 CnP Dùn Èideann considers the potential impact on other education services to be significant and positive. On a practical level, Gaelic schools often take the pressure of numbers off oversubscribed catchment schools. The benefits therefore, for those children are explicit with successful management of overcrowding issues. It is noted also that as GME establishes a core expertise in Gaelic this benefits the wider realm as exemplified by GLPS. This in turn helps local authorities meet their targets as set out in the National Gaelic Language Plan 2012-2017.

Conclusion

Comann nam Pàrant Dùn Èideann considers the proposals contained within the Education (Scotland) Bill to be a positive step pertaining to the development of GME generally. The need for a formal statutory structure which enables local authorities to deal with requests for GME is of particular importance. When such procedure is clear to all parties it removes the potential for misinterpretation.

A recurring theme throughout all discussions regarding GME is that of teacher numbers. Demand for GME continues to grow but will not be satisfied unless this issue is addressed satisfactorily. CnP Dùn Èideann considers this matter to be crucial in the continued development and successful expansion of GME.

CnP Dùn Èideann agrees that Gaelic medium-education will play a central role in efforts to secure the future for Gaelic in Scotland and considers that ensuring that it is as widely available as possible as well as adequately promoted to parents is absolutely essential.

CnP Dùn Èideann considers that legislation making Gaelic-medium education a right for every child in Scotland is the best way to achieve that aim and hopes to see such legislation introduced in the timeframe covered by the current National Gaelic Language Plan.