Responses to the Committee’s Questions

I am the parent of two children currently in Gaelic Medium Education (Primary 6 and S2) at Sgoil Ghàidhlig Ghlaschu. They previously attended a Gaelic Medium Unit in Kilmarnock. We took my younger child out of the Unit in Kilmarnock in September 2014 because the fluent Gaelic-speaking teacher who was due to take his class unexpectedly left and the Unit has not been able to provide proper GME since then.

10. How significant a change in Gaelic medium primary education will the Bill deliver? Do you agree these provisions should be limited to primary schooling?

- It is hard to see what significant change this Bill can realistically deliver without a clear definition of standardised Gaelic Medium Education (GME) to be applied nationally, together with an effective way of enforcing its provision (in the same way as English Medium Education is enforced). At present GME is an inconsistent postcode lottery with local authorities free to make up their own definition of GME, which is often contrary to Education Scotland guidance (as set out in the recent document ‘Advice on GME’). In East Ayrshire parents having been raising concerns about the quality of GME provision for some time, but the authority refuses to acknowledge there is any problem. We took our son out of the GM Unit in Kilmarnock in September 2014 and around the same time another five children were removed for the same reasons – from a Unit which only had 29 children in it. The authority did not contact parents to find out their reasons for removing their children. But if the same percentage of children had been removed from any English Medium primary school it would have generated national headlines.

- When proper standardised GME at primary level is more securely established then secondary provision would be the next logical step. Without proper secondary provision there will no real progress in increasing the number of Gaelic speakers and in providing the next generation of Gaelic-speaking teachers, which will be essential for GME at all levels and the long-term sustainability of Gaelic.

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

- Instead of relying on local authorities alone to promote GME within their own boundaries there should be a national campaign of promotion and awareness-raising. This, together with properly enforceable standards, would help the nationwide provision of standardised GME.
• At present our local authority (East Ayrshire) does not promote its own GME provision.

The primary unit is currently located in two small classrooms which could not accommodate any increase in pupil numbers, and there is a strong suspicion that this is one of the reasons for the lack of promotion/publicity. The Unit is due to be relocated in 2017 to a new-build school where there should be more space. To date, however, there has been no promotion or publicity about this, even though parents of children who will be due to go into Primary 1 when that new school opens should be made aware of it now so that they have enough time to properly investigate the option of GME for their children.

For further comment on the lack of promotion by our local authority, please refer to the attached copy of a response submitted in March 2014 to East Ayrshire’s Gaelic Education for 3-18 years Consultation.

12. 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?

• See answer to question 10 above. Current provision needs to be standardised and strengthened before encouraging requests for further provision.

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

• Annual statements are no use if commitments to improvement objectives cannot be enforced. Without enforcement it is unlikely that the requirement in this Bill can improve anything.

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

• At this stage it is difficult to be optimistic that this will make any positive change for the reasons outlined above.

• Furthermore the shortage of properly-qualified fluent Gaelic-speaking teachers must dealt with before there can be any significant increase in the number of children going into GME.