STÒRLANN NÀISEANTA NA GÀIDHLLIG

RESPONSE TO THE EDUCATION BILL (SCOTLAND) 2015

1 BACKGROUND NOTES

1.1 Stòrlann Nàiseanta na Gàidhlig was established in 1999 to co-ordinate the production and distribution of curriculum resources for Gaelic education. Stòrlann is a limited company, registered number SC 190298, and a charity registered in Scotland as SC 031521.

1.2 Stòrlann undertakes a range of key functions within the Gaelic Learning sector. The main role is the creation of high quality Gaelic resources for distribution to early years education providers, primary schools, secondary schools and lifelong learning groups. The Stòrlann programme is based directly on resource needs as identified by teachers, staff and learners. The organisation’s approach to strategic planning, funding and implementation is supported by appropriate organisations such as Bòrd na Gàidhlig, Education Scotland, Management Review Group (MRG), Education Authorities, Scottish Government and SQA.

1.3 In addition to resource production, Stòrlann develops Gaelic terminology for use in Gaelic resources, assessment documents and reference materials, across a range of subjects and curriculum levels. On the ‘Home/School Community’ front, Stòrlann has a strong relationship with parents and supports this important interface through a well resourced, dedicated website: www.Gaelic4Parents.com

2 GENERAL COMMENTS

2.1 Stòrlann Nàiseanta na Gàidhlig welcomes the Education (Scotland) Bill 2015 and its provisions for supporting and promoting equity of attainment, the assessment of Gaelic medium education requests, promoting and supporting Gaelic Medium Education and Gaelic Learner Education and other various aspects contained therein.

2.2 Stòrlann has based its response on the headline questions provided. However, there is much more by the way of additional information that could be added and to this end the organisation would be glad to provide the committee with further evidence, if called.

2.3 High quality and relevant resources are a vital element of the learning processes that lead to attainment on the part of the individual. It is therefore
essential that growth in pupil numbers and the range of subjects taught are supported, sustained through levels of support and funding that are commensurate with that required for meeting the core needs of the sector.

3 GAELIC EDUCATION

3.1 How significant a change in Gaelic medium primary education will the Bill deliver?

3.1.1 It is anticipated that the Bill will deliver a positive change within the areas for which it makes provision. It is further anticipated that such changes will serve to increase the number of pupils and expand the choices, raise attainment and enrich the experience of the individual in particular. Stòrlann regards these changes as positive and significant.

3.1.2 It is realistic to expect that the aforementioned changes will lead to a significant increase in the volume of teaching resources required by Gaelic learning schools and units. It is therefore vital that appropriate measures are put in place by bodies such as The Scottish Government, Education Scotland and Bòrd na Gàidhlig to ensure that sufficient provision is made for this increase in demand to be met.

3.2 Do you agree these provisions should be limited to primary schooling?

3.2.1 The strengthening of access routes to Gaelic education brings on a high likelihood of an increase in the number of children entering existing and newly created Gaelic Medium learning centres.

3.2.2 An increase, such as this, will inevitably lead to a proportional increase secondary stages of education. The Scottish Government should take cognisance of this change and, in collaboration with agencies such as Bòrd na Gàidhlig, Education Scotland, Local Authorities and Stòrlann, work to ensure that the development of Gaelic resources, at a level that is commensurate with service requirements, is funded and supported.

3.3 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?

3.3.1 In the thirty years, since the advent of Gaelic Medium Education, much has been learned about the process of promoting and supporting. There is a strong pan-authority awareness of various successful approaches to the deployment of Gaelic learning in collaboration with Gaelic development organisations.
3.3.2 Engagement with the Management Review Group (MRG) along with bench-marking with existing service providers would constitute an ideal starting point for education authorities that are new to Gaelic learning provision. Other good examples of collaborative practice include

- GLPS core training and teaching resource – a collaborative initiative that brings together Stòrlann, Edinburgh Council and the GLPS consortium.
- Feisgoil – an initiative that delivers language, music, arts and cultural services to schools, local authorities, public bodies and community groups across Scotland.
- Alltan Beag – a CLPL event for Gaelic early years practitioners developed as a Stòrlann / Bòrd na Gàidhlig initiative.

3.4 What impact is this promotional work likely to have on the Gaelic language and the number of Gaelic speakers?

3.4.1 There is a growing correlation between Gaelic education and the workforce of Gaelic industry and services. Gaelic education is a strong and common feature in the academic background of individual employees and business leaders - many of whom entered the learning system as non Gaelic speakers. It is reasonable that a positive out-turn as a result of promotional work, is expected.

3.5 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”?

3.5.1 Yes, the provisions in the Bill will serve to establish a clear process - a development which makes the promotion of Gaelic education all the more effective.

3.6 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?

3.6.1 Stòrlann, through its resources and Gaelic4Parents programme, currently provide a strong interface and open dialogue with over 1500 parents and supporters through social media streams coupled to an online homework help service. The Stòrlann product, in the form of books, programmes and audio files is widely used by Gaelic home-school communities on a daily basis.
3.6.2 This work serves to transcend language barriers and encourage parental involvement in the learning journeys of their children/wards. The guidance, should build on this area of work by establishing a national strategy and plan for Gaelic learning in the context of home/school communities.

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

3.7.1 The provisions in the Bill will assist with the delivery of Gaelic education. If the Bill serves to facilitate an increase on the current level of investment in resources, a significant expansion of the current Gaelic medium provision will be achieved.

3.7.2 The Gaelic learning system in Scotland is faced with similar challenges as to that faced by its counterpart in English medium education. There are also some additional challenges such as the availability of Gaelic teachers, a lack of standardised terminology for academic subject streams and access to a broad range of learning resources in published and digital formats.

3.7.3 The demand for increasing the range of Gaelic educational resources is ever present. While it is accepted that, in terms of breadth and depth, the range of resources will not match that which is available to English medium education, it is important to note that for ‘equality of attainment’, as featured in the Bill, to be achieved, the key areas of learning (as outlined in the Curriculum for Excellence,) are covered and supported with a broad range of appropriate Gaelic resources.

3.8 What potential impact on other educational services might arise from the local authority having to implement these new duties?

3.8.1 Growth within the Gaelic education sector will inevitably lead to an increased demand on capital, workforce and learning resources. In addition, the demand for Gaelic medium resources, suited to meeting the requirements of additional support needs, will increase. A recent survey of additional support requirements in Gaelic education indicates that around 15% of Gaelic learning pupils require support in one form or another.

4 ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FOR LEARNING

4.1 It is highly important that the Bill makes provision for supporting the production and replication of appropriate Gaelic resources for use in the Additional Support for Learning applications across all stages and levels.
4.2 A recent audit, supported by Bòrd na Gàidhlig, indicates that at least 15% of pupils in GME have additional support needs. This finding is in line with statistics produced by Scottish Government and international research. The audit also indicates that there is an urgent need to develop assessment tools in Gaelic language, produce differentiated support and to provide training that places a focus on the management of pupils with ASN in GME.

4.3 This deficit in provision is also noted in the recent ‘Advice on Gaelic Medium Education’ issued by Education Scotland. Whilst Stòrlann, as the lead agency for resource development in Gaelic language, has commenced with the development and production of materials and events that respond to such resource deficits, there is an urgent need for more.

4.4 The ASN resource deficits in GME, are identified through research and consultation with frontline teaching staff, in relation to pupils with ASN. Work conducted to date by Stòrlann, and affirmed by research, indicates that these developments should be expanded and sustained to meet the legislative requirements of supporting pupils with ASN in all schools. This area of needs links directly to the delivery of the aspirations for ASL, as featured in the Bill.

5 FINANCIAL MEMORANDUM

5.1 Stòrlann welcomes the direct linking of additional funds to the founding of new Gaelic learning units, as featured in the Financial Memorandum. However, it is important that the Bill makes provision for further investment to facilitate expansion of the current range of Gaelic medium and Gaelic learner resources. This development would link to all levels of 3 to 18 education, including subjects taught through the medium of Gaelic in Secondary and the well documented resource requirements of Additional Support Needs.

6 FURTHER EVIDENCE

6.1 As stated in section 2 under General Comments, Stòrlann is pleased to offer its services for the purposes of providing further evidence if the committee feels that such an engagement would be of benefit to the Bill.

Donald W Morrison
Chief Executive Officer