EDUCATION (SCOTLAND) BILL
WRITTEN SUBMISSION FROM COSLA

Introduction
COSLA welcomes the opportunity to provide written evidence to the Finance Committee on the Financial Memorandum attached to the Education (Scotland) Bill. COSLA’s submission does not follow specifically the questionnaire attached to the Committee’s call for evidence, but instead focuses on a number of key concerns we wish to draw to the Committee’s attention. In presenting these concerns the Committee will hopefully be satisfied that COSLA has also sought to cover the areas of interest set out in the call for evidence.

Key Points;
- The Bill proposes new duties on Local Authorities and these require to be fully funded by Scottish Government.
- The monies allocated to Councils via the Gaelic Specific Education Grant and the Gaelic Schools Capital Fund are already fully utilised by Local Authorities in the provision of Gaelic Medium Education, therefore it is wrong to assume that these resources could be reallocated.
- We are concerned that the estimated number of parental requests and new GME units may be underestimated.

Detailed Comments
Assessment of Parental Requests
The Education (Scotland) Bill seeks to place a duty on Local Authorities to assess the need for Gaelic Medium Education (GME) following a parental request. This is a new burden on Local Authorities and as such requires to be fully funded by Scottish Government.

COSLA notes the costs outlined in the Financial Memorandum (FM) in assessing parental requests. While these would not appear unreasonable, we have concerns that the anticipated number of parental requests and potential new GME units as a result of the Bill may have been underestimated.

In paragraph 41 of the FM, it is assumed that there will only be 1 new parental request in Scotland each year and only be 1 new GME until set up in Scotland every 2 years. Given that this will be demand led, it is difficult for Councils to quantify if this is an appropriate assumption. However, in giving evidence to the Committee on 28 April, the Scottish Government Bill team noted that they expected the Bill to lead to faster growth in GME throughout Scotland. This statement does not seem consistent with the estimate in the FM for the number of additional units which will be created.

The FM also assumes that Local Authorities can meet the costs of the new duties to assessing parental requests, setting up new GME units, promoting and supporting GME by re-allocating funding from existing Local Authority resources for Gaelic, in particular the Gaelic Specific Education Grant (GSEG). The monies allocated to Councils via the GSEG and the Gaelic Schools Capital Fund are fully utilised in the provision of GME. Furthermore, as pointed out in the FM, not all Local Authorities benefit from funding from the GSEG. There are a number of councils which have no GME provision and no associated resources to reallocate in the event that they receive parental requests or
decide to set up a GME unit. Therefore, there are no resources to reallocate and these new duties require to be fully funded.

We are concerned that demand for parental requests, and therefore potentially new GME Units, may be higher than estimated. If government’s aspirations for GM provision are to be achieved they must be adequately supported and resourced. We would therefore welcome an assurance that both the number of parental requests and new GME units that are set up are regularly reviewed and that demand will be fully met by Scottish Government.

**Duty to support and promote GME**
The Bill is proposing a new duty on Local Authorities to support GME. Scottish Government have indicated that the duty to support relates to the provision of resources, training and opportunities for teachers and resources for pupils when a GME unit is set up. The cost of this is estimated at £5K per annum. Scottish Government have advised that further guidance on what constitutes support will accompany the Bill. However, without more details of what support entails, it is difficult to say if the estimated costing is reasonable.

The Bill also proposes a new duty on all Local Authorities to promote GME. The assumption in the FM is that five local authorities will spend £30k per annum and twenty seven local authorities will spend £1K per annum. It is our understanding that decisions on promotional activity are to be made at a local level and the costs outlined in the FM do not appear unreasonable. However, if promotion is to be defined at a national level, then these costings may have to be revisited.

Once again the FM proposes that Local Authorities can meet these costs by reallocation of the GSEG, however, this is a new statutory burden for all Local Authorities and as such national government must fully fund this.

**Additional Comments**
COSLA believe that it is important to reflect the perspective brought to this legislation by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, given the unique position they have in regard to Gaelic Medium Education. Comhairle nan Eilean Siar have real concerns that with the expansion of GME, the financial burden is considerably increasing. With growing GME class sizes, the authority is experiencing an increasing number of children requiring language assistance in addition to ASN support through the medium of Gaelic. The council experience more than 1 parental request per 2 year period. Furthermore, to add additional financial burden, in small schools, there is no corresponding decrease in the English staffing provision when GME provision is made.

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