

Arthur Cormack submission of 16 March 2022

PE1922/E - Cancel all Local Authority expenditure on Gaelic expansion

The petitioner calls for the cancellation of all local authority expenditure on Gaelic expansion but goes on to state there is no demand “in the Central belt”. Does he seek cancellation of expenditure in the Central Belt alone, or does the petitioner acknowledge there is demand in local authority areas outside the Central Belt. If so, why should expenditure be cancelled in those areas?

It is surely a matter for local authorities on what they spend their money - limited or otherwise – while the parliament should have a role in ensuring all local authorities abide by legislation to support general promotion of the Gaelic language and provision of Gaelic education.

To examine the petitioner’s claims:

1. There is no demand in the Central belt

The petitioner has offered no evidence to back up this claim.

There is plenty evidence of demand for Gaelic education in the Central Belt to which local authorities have a duty to respond. There are healthy pupil numbers in places such as Condorrat (North Lanarkshire), East Kilbride and Inverclyde and it is difficult for the local authorities in Glasgow and Edinburgh to keep up with demand. The petitioner claims in his submission that: “We should not confuse demand for Gaelic in schools with the demand for smaller class sizes”. Presumably, he implies class sizes in Gaelic are smaller than in English education. This is not the case.

So the debate does not focus on education alone, it should be remembered there is demand for Gaelic arts in the central belt demonstrated by the participation by hundreds of young people in Fèisean which take place regularly in Glasgow, Edinburgh, North Lanarkshire, South Lanarkshire, Falkirk and North Ayrshire. Gaelic artists appear, often before sold-out audiences, at major festivals in the central belt such as Celtic Connections, Piping Live!, The Edinburgh International Festival, Edinburgh Festival Fringe and Edinburgh Tradfest. Those artists support recording studios, graphic designers,

accommodation and food establishments and provide content for broadcasters which all, in turn, contribute to Scotland's economy.

Large numbers of adults are learning Gaelic, many of whom will be based in the central belt. 1 in 3 visitors are drawn to Scotland, in part, by their wish to learn more about the Gaelic language.

2. Funds are limited and should be spent wisely

The question of availability of funds and the sense in which they are 'limited' is a matter for debate. The petitioner has, again, offered no evidence to back up this claim.

According to attitudinal research, Gaelic speakers and learners are content for public funds to be used in supporting services in the language. The SPICE briefing outlines government expenditure on Gaelic. In my experience any expenditure on Gaelic by local authorities, additional to funds provided by the Scottish Government and Bòrd na Gàidhlig, is likely to be extremely modest.

In the case of education, since children have to be offered a free education by their local authority, it matters not the language in which they are taught. The cost of a teacher in front of a class of children in Gaelic education is the same as the cost of a teacher in front of a class of children in English language education. Beyond one-off or initial capital costs, there are no additional revenue costs incurred in the provision of Gaelic medium education. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest the cost per head to a local authority of teaching a pupil in Gaelic is less than that of teaching a pupil in English.

Despite expenditure on Gaelic being transparent the petitioner claims: "no-one is coming forward with figures on how much this is costing". There is no evidence of a cover-up!

3. There is no evidence of Gaelic being the "national" language (except in Ireland)

Yet again the petitioner has offered no evidence to back up this claim. It is incorrect, perhaps legally, and certainly factually and historically. His stance has changed somewhat from there being "no evidence", to dismissing as "irrelevant" Gaelic's place as the predominant language historically.

Very few people involved in promoting Gaelic would refer to it as "the" national language of Scotland, but it is certainly "a" national

language. The Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 aims to secure the status of the Gaelic language as an official language of Scotland commanding equal respect to the English language. Scotland's placenames confirm Gaelic was more widespread than is now the case. Given the dispersed nature of 21st century Gaelic, it is a national language in the sense that its speakers are spread across Scotland and need support. In terms of heritage and culture, its influence across Scotland is undeniable.

Scotland benefits, economically, from Gaelic in education, broadcasting, arts & culture, tourism, heritage, food & drink and more. It is one of Scotland's unique assets and Highlands & Islands Enterprise calculated the potential return Gaelic could generate for the economy in its *Ar Stòras Gàidhlig* report. If the figure of £148.5m were attained, an additional £4 would be generated for every £1 spent by the Scottish Government.

Gaelic should be supported to reach its full potential. Local authorities have a key part to play and I urge committee members to close the petition with no further action. To follow it up, or seek further information, would be a waste of everyone's time.