

SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT – CROSS PARTY GROUP ON GAELIC

Meeting held on Wednesday 16th March 2016 at 7.00pm Committee Room 2, The Scottish Parliament, Holyrood

Present: *Angus MacDonald MSP, (Convener); David Thompson MSP; Calum Iain Macleoid, (Acting Secretary); Coinneach MacIomhair (Comunn na Gàidhlig); Magaidh Wentworth (Comann nam Pàrant); Bruce Robertson (Bòrd na Gàidhlig); Allan Macdonald (Bòrd na Gàidhlig); Ann Desseyn; Diane MacIntyre (Scottish Parliament); Charlotte Matthar (Scottish Parliament); Bria Mason (Oilthigh Dhùn Èideann); Carole Henderson; Steven MacIomhair (Bòrd na Gàidhlig); Maeve MacKinnon (Foghlam Alba); Jane Renton (Education Scotland); Joan Esson (HMIe); Ruairidh MacIntyre (Scottish Government); Seumaidh Uallas; Donald Campbell (MG ALBA); Margaret Mary Murray (BBC ALBA); Iain MacIllechiar – simultaneous interpretation.*

1. Welcome & Apologies

The Convener welcomed all present to the meeting. He apologised for the delay in commencing the meeting and explained that this was due to Parliamentary business running late. This had also caused the postponement of the play *An Iolaire*, which was to have been performed in the Parliament prior to the CPG meeting. The new play, *An Iolaire Disaster*, written by William Hershaw, and performed by Stenhouse Primary School and Tynecastle High School, brings alive the story of this tragic event and its aftermath. The event had been organized by Iomairt Ghàidhlig Dhùn Èideann, and the play has been funded by Bòrd na Gàidhlig. It is hoped to to reschedule the production at another date and time of mutual convenience.

Apologies had been received from: Donald MacNeill (Comun na Gaidhlig); Cllr Norman A Macdonald (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar); Cllr John A Maciver (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar); Cllr.Hamish Fraser (The Highland Council); Kenneth Murray (The Highland Council); Mata Maciver; Beathag Mhoireasdan; John Macleod (An Comunn Gàidhealach); John Morrison (An Comunn Gàidhealach); James Graham (An Comunn Gàidhealach); D K Macphee (Glasgow City Council); Katie Murray; Sheila Carvel; Stuart Pescodd (Scottish Government).

2. Minutes of last meeting

The Minute of the last meeting of the Cross Party Group on Gaelic, held in Committee Room 5, The Scottish Parliament, Holyrood on Wednesday 25th November, 2015 at 1pm was approved.

The minutes of the last meeting of Wednesday 26th November 2014 were approved.

3. Matters Arising

3.1 Update on Conference to discuss GME in Secondary Education

Jane Renton informed the meeting that a conference to discuss GME in Secondary Education was being held at the Drumossie Hotel, Inverness on Tuesday 31 May 2016. The conference was being held jointly by Education Scotland and Bòrd na Gàidhlig. The conference would look at:

- Transition from Primary 7
- Secondary Curriculum structures and pathways
- Curricular Partnerships
- Workforce Planning
- National Qualifications

Following a question regarding who the conference was open to, it was confirmed that it was aimed at Local Authority officers, head-teachers, teachers, Gaelic groups and national agencies, but that parents could also participate.

The conference would consist of round-table discussions seeking practical solutions. Examples of good practice within local authorities would be considered, digital learning would be explored, partnerships would be encouraged and recruitment of staff would be discussed.

4 Education Bill (Scotland) 2015

Bruce Robertson, Interim CEO of Bòrd na Gàidhlig provided the CPG with an update on the Education Bill (Scotland) 2016. He informed the meeting that the Education Bill had been passed by the Parliament and that we now had the Education Act (2016) which contained important Gaelic provision. One of the most important elements regarding Gaelic education contained in the Act was that there is now an presumption in favour of GME, across Scotland, where there is reasonable demand.

The Bòrd is awaiting final “sign off” of the National Guidance on Gaelic Education, which is part of the legislation, and once it has that will be putting it out for a 12-week consultation period. This could not go ahead until the Education Bill had been approved but now that the Act is in force, it is hoped that the consultation will take place in spring/early summer to enable the Guidance to be in place in time for the new 2016/17 school term.

5 Commitments to Gaelic in the political parties manifestos for 2016 Scottish Parliament election

Allan MacDonald, Cathraiche of Bòrd na Gàidhlig, informed the meeting that the Bòrd had written to the Leaders of each political party, ahead of this year’s Scottish Parliament election, seeking their support for the language in the future.

The Bòrd was looking for support, from all the parties, in the following ways:

- Support the aims of the current National Gaelic Language Plan and also the aims of 2017-22 National Gaelic Language Plan, where priority will be given to young people 0-30, but with particular focus on 12-18;
- Recognition of the importance of Gaelic-medium education and also the teaching of Gaelic learners;
- Support for recruitment of Gaelic-medium education teachers initiatives;
- Support initiatives aimed at increasing the number of adults learning Gaelic;
- Support for the Gaelic plans in place with local authorities and other public bodies;
- Support for BBC ALBA, the Gaelic broadcasting service, which underpins much of the Bòrd’s work, especially with young people;
- Recognise the economic impact Gaelic has, and maintain pressure on the agencies with responsibility for economic regeneration. It is a paradoxical truth that the Gaelic language is strongest in areas where the economy is at its weakest, often in areas where depopulation is a huge problem. Research carried out in 2013/14 estimated Gaelic to be worth in the region of £150million to the Scottish economy.

Mr MacDonald concluded that he was happy that Gaelic continued to enjoy cross-party support in the Scottish Parliament.

Following a question on the Bòrd’s record on teacher recruitment, Bruce Robertson admitted that, despite an increasing number qualifying every year, there was still a shortage of Gaelic teachers but that the Bòrd had introduced a number of initiatives to further increase the numbers. They included

providing bursaries for students to enrol for teacher training courses; providing funding to enable non-Gaelic-speaking teachers to enrol for Gaelic immersion course and the most recent initiative, working with UHI, is designed to enable island-based adults to undertake teacher training course in their own communities, without having to leave the island. This is already happening in Lewis and there are plans to replicate this in Uist and Barra if there is sufficient demand.

Following a question on local authorities' willingness/ability to make probationary placements available for teachers qualifying, Bruce Robertson was satisfied that all teachers qualifying this year would have a placement, although it was still a work in process, and final details would not be known until after the Easter holidays. He admitted that it was never easy placing all the teachers in precise areas they had requested but with goodwill on both sides he was happy they would all be placed

6 Briefing on the Bòrd na Gàidhlig symposium, 17 March 2016

Bruce Robertson informed the meeting that the symposium was the first step of the journey to the production of the 2017-22 National Gaelic Language Plan and that it was crucial to get input from as many and as wide a range of individuals and organisations as possible prior to the commencement of the writing of the Plan. 160 delegates were expected to attend and the Bòrd was looking for ideas as to what the core strands of the Plan should be, how these core strands should be delivered and who the key players should be. It was very much the start of a process and there will be many further opportunities to feed into the process in the coming months.

7 Cross Party Group – looking ahead to the next Parliament session

The Convener informed the meeting of the process surrounding the dissolution of the current Parliament, including CPGs.

There was unanimous agreement that the Gaelic Cross Party Group played an important role in current efforts to revitalise the language and that it was vital to re-establish a Gaelic Cross Party Group, following the coming election, and that this was done as soon as possible.

Angus Macdonald, Convener paid tribute to the work undertaken by his colleague David Thompson MSP who was attending his final CPG meeting tonight, as he was standing down as MSP at the next election. David, who was a past Convener of the group, regularly attended CPG meetings and was always promoting the language both within and out with the Parliament. The meeting passed on their sincere thanks for David's support and best wishes for his retirement.

At this point Coinneach MacIomhair expressed his thanks to the Convener for his hard work and support for the language over the term of the Parliament. This was unanimously echoed by the meeting. Angus, in response, stated that it was an honour and a privilege to be in a position to help with current efforts in revitalising the language and that he would continue to do so. He cited one example earlier in the day, whilst debating the Crofting Reform Bill where he had managed to get unanimous agreement that at least one representative on the new Scottish Land Commission must be a Gaelic-speaker. This was a significant move.

8 Gaelic in the Media

8.1 "Working Group" on promotion of Gaelic

Steven MacIver, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, provided members with an update on progress on ways of combatting negative press on Gaelic.

Following a couple of meetings to discuss this matter a "working group" has been formed to try and better co-ordinate matters. The "working group" members include Donald MacNeill (CnaG);

Iseabail MacTaggart (MG Alba); Art Cormack (Fèisean nan Gàidheal); Hugh Dan MacLennan (Edinburgh University); Donald Morrison (Stòrlann); Steven MacIver (Bòrd na Gàidhlig). They are looking at three areas of activity:

- The development of a 'reservoir' of accurate content to facilitate quicker responses to the most common criticisms of Gaelic/Gaelic development;
- The establishment of a network of respondents in the community – prepared and able to write and make replies when unjustified criticisms or attacks are made. These would be the people – among others – who would use the content reservoir above to prepare accurate, informed and fair responses.
- Consider further co-ordination to take forward points 1 & 2 above, but also to consider who might best respond to any given 'attack'; and to try and ensure that some response was made when necessary.

It should be said perhaps that it is entirely correct that differing opinions are raised about Gaelic. We can't expect everyone to share the same views, and it can be an opportunity to engage in discussion with someone rational and fair, who is prepared to listen. The objective here is to provide fair and considered responses to anti-Gaelic attack, not to engage in negative or vitriolic dialogue. The group is particularly focusing on the reports and stories which appear with little or no substance, or perhaps little or no relation to the truth. This could be seen as a small beginning, but hopefully something will come from it.

8.2 Establishment of Communications and Marketing Manager at Bòrd na Gàidhlig

Steven Maciver informed the meeting that a new post, Communications & Marketing Manager, was being established as part of the Bòrd's new structure. The post's remit would include support and promotion of Gaelic across all areas and it is expected would work closely with the newly established "working group" on promotion of Gaelic.

8.3 National Campaign on Gaelic-medium Education

Steven informed the meeting that a national campaign, on the benefits of Gaelic-medium education would be launched towards the end of March.

9 A. O. C. B.

9.1 Bòrd na Gàidhlig - New Structure, new Members and Ceannard

Allan Macdonald, Bòrd Chair, informed the meeting that about a year ago the Bòrd agreed, that prior to looking ahead to the next 5-year Plan, it should review how it operated and propose changes if this was required.

Bòrd Members agreed that the number of Members should be increased and, in the past fortnight, 5 new Members were announced.

The committee structure has also been changed. In future there will be only 2 committees – a Planning and Delivering Committee and a Audit & Risk Committee. The Bòrd will however form Member/Officer Working-Groups to focus on particular issues, the Arts eg. The Bòrd would also establish an education advisory working group, where they would use the Bòrd's own expertise but also bring in expertise where this was necessary.

Allan stated that he was now happy that the Bòrd, at Board level, was in a position to start looking ahead to the 2017-22 Plan.

There are also changes at management level. The new management structure would have the Ceannard, a newly established post of Director of Gaelic Education and a Director of Community Development. Supporting them would be a Head of Corporate Affairs, a Head of Finance and a Communications & Marketing Manager.

Interviews have taken place for the post of Ceannard and it is hoped that the new incumbent will be announced in the next couple of weeks.

9.2 Primary Education in Edinburgh and Glasgow

9.2.1 Primary Education in Edinburgh

Bruce Robertson informed the meeting that the Bòrd had acted swiftly and decisively immediately they were informed of the recommendation being taken to the Edinburgh City Council, that not all the children on P7 in Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce would be placed in James Gillespies. The Bòrd took legal advice and initiated discussions with the Council, which quickly backed down. A long-term solution will have to be worked out, in discussions with the Council.

9.2.2 Primary Education in Glasgow

The problem in Glasgow is due to the huge success of GME in Glasgow with a huge demand for places in the two Gaelic primary schools. There is simply not enough space. The problem for this year has not yet been resolved as the Placements Appeals process is still ongoing. The Bòrd will continue dialogue with the Council, but the long-term solution is either a third new school or increasing the space available in one of the existing schools.

10 Date of meeting of CPG in new Parliamentary term

It was agreed that the initial meeting of the Gaelic CPG would be held on 15 June 2016. It would be held in the evening as it was hoped to try and reschedule the Iolair play for the same evening.