

SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT – CROSS PARTY GROUP ON GAELIC

(Draft) Minute of the AGM and meeting of the Cross Party Group on Gaelic, held in Committee Room 5, The Scottish Parliament, Holyrood on Wednesday 13th May, 2015 at 5.30pm.

Present: *Angus MacDonald MSP, (Convener); Jamie McGrigor MSP; Donald MacNeill, (Secretary); Coinneach MacÌomhair (Comunn na Gàidhlig); Iain Caimbeul (Bòrd na Gàidhlig); Douglas Ansdell (Scottish Government); Coinneach A Moireach (Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd); Mata MacIver (UHI); Diane MacIntyre (Scottish Parliament); Fiona O’Hanlon (Oilthigh Dhùn Èideann); Iain M MacLeòid (An Comunn Gàidhealach); Carole Henderson; Ann Dessyn; James Graham (An Comunn Gàidhealach); Stuart Pescodd (Scottish Government); Ceitidh Mhoireach; Sheila Carvel; Mairi Nic’illemhaoil (Bòrd na Gàidhlig); Joan Esson (Education Scotland); Jane Renton (Education Scotland); Bria Mason (Oilthigh Dhùn Èideann); Mary Andrew (Oilthigh Dhùn Èideann); Wilson McLeod (University of Edinburgh); Ruairidh MacIntyre (Scottish Government); Jonathon Ferrier (Scottish Government); Marilyn Waters (SQA); Donald W Morrison (Stòrlann); Donald MacRitchie (Stòrlann); Beathag Mhoireasdain – simultaneous interpretation.*

1. Welcome & Apologies

Apologies had been received from: Dave Thompson, MSP; John Wilson, MSP; Cllr. Hamish Fraser (The Highland Council); Ashley Powell (Aberdeen University); DK MacPhee (Glasgow City Council); Donald Campbell (MG Alba); Kirsty MacDonald (Alba Aosmhor).

In welcoming those present to the meeting the Convener apologised that the Parliament’s simultaneous translation equipment was not working. He undertook to raise this issue with the Parliament’s corporate body.

2. Minutes of last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting of Wednesday 26th November 2014 were approved.
Proposed by Jamie McGrigor; Seconded by John MacLeod.

3. Matters Arising.

The Convener reported that work on Additional Support Needs within Gaelic Medium Education was progressing; he also reported on his efforts to secure more use of Gaelic within the Parliamentary Chamber, including the provision of more frequently used phrases for MSP, and that he hoped to see some progress on this.

4. CPG Annual Report.

A copy of this draft report had been circulated along with the Agenda and other papers. However it was in an out-dated format, a new template having been introduced by the Parliament. The content of the form was approved and it was agreed that an updated version, using the new template, be circulated to members.

5. Election of Office Bearers.

(Angus MacDonald MSP removed himself from the Chair for the first election – of Group Convener – this was chaired by Donald MacNeill, CnaG).

CPG Convener. Angus MacDonald, MSP was proposed by Jamie McGrigor, and seconded by Kenny Murray (The Highland Council). There were no other nominations, and those present agreed with the Mr MacDonald's appointment. He accepted the position and resumed his chairing of the meeting.

CPG Vice Convener. Dave Thompson, MSP, was proposed by Carole Henderson, seconded by John MacLeod. It was confirmed that Mr Thompson was happy to stand, and those present agreed the appointment.

CPG Secretary. Donald MacNeill, Comunn na Gàidhlig was proposed by Angus MacDonald, MSP and seconded by Anne Dessyn. Those present agreed the appointment.

This concluded the formal business of the Group's AGM and discussion moved to other matters:

6. The Education Bill (Scotland) 2005

Given this Bill's progress through Parliament, there were limits to what could be said, but Stuart Pescodd of the Scottish Government gave a brief outline of the Gaelic education provisions within this Bill. These originated as an SNP manifesto commitment in 2007, but had moved slightly since then and been incorporated into a wider education Bill rather than Gaelic-specific legislation.

There had been 79 responses to the initial consultation, generally positive, and since then the Scottish Government's Gaelic team had been working to develop the Bill text which was currently before the Education and Culture Committee.

There were 3 key provisions:

1. A requirement on Local Authorities to consider GME on the basis of an appropriate parental request.
2. A duty on Bòrd na Gàidhlig to provide new guidance on Gaelic Medium Education
3. A duty on Local Authorities to promote and support GME.

The Committee is currently seeking views on a number of questions, including relating to Gaelic, and expect to report before the summer recess. There will then be a further period of public consultation – likely in October/November – before Royal Assent about Easter 2016.

In discussion some questions were posed about the practical difference the Bill would make on the basis that its wording could be seen as vague; allowed local authorities some discretion; and that there was no mention of any powers of enforcement.

In response Douglas Ansdell, Scottish Government suggested that the Gaelic provisions in the Bill were building on best practice, and that there would be a much greater degree of consistency and transparency in the way in which local authorities would need to deal with parental requests for GME.

In conclusion the Convener said that questions had been raised in the Chamber about some councils paying lip service to GME promotion and establishment, but that the Bill would help concentrate minds.

7. Education Scotland's advice on Gaelic Education.

Joan Esson, HMIE, gave a presentation on Education Scotland's new *Advice on Gaelic Education*. This is an important document giving strategic direction to the development of Gaelic Education. It offers advice on Gaelic Medium Education, Gaelic Learner Education, Curriculum for Excellence and 1+2 Languages Approach.

Presentation points included:

- The Advice being based on a combination of best practice, inspection feedback, partner feedback and professional dialogue;
- In 30 years of GME there had been a lot of success;
- That teachers were the most valuable resource;
- That strong immersion was key, ideally from the age of 3.
- The use of partners outside school would be important in CfE delivery;
- Priority issues for the next 5 years include;
 - Continuity rates through GME/increasing fluency
 - Tackling inequalities
 - Provision of high quality learning and attainment
 - Developing the 3-18 curriculum in digital learning
 - Quality staffing and leadership

* the Advice is available on the Education Scotland website at:

(<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/resources/a/advicegaeliceducation.asp>)

Discussion followed the presentation raising issues such as the extent of the 'pool' of Gaelic Medium-qualified teachers, which highlighted the difference between those currently training in primary education (27) and secondary (3). It was acknowledged that recruitment remains challenging despite focussed efforts.

Marilyn Waters (SQA) also reported that there was some related concern about a decline in those presenting for Gaelic exams in senior secondary, although the data was not entirely clear yet from this current year's exams diet. This highlighted the importance of securing sufficient secondary teachers to try and improve GME continuity from primary through secondary.

8. Guidelines on GME. Update by Mairi MacMillan, Bòrd na Gàidhlig

As referred to in the discussion on Item 6, the provision of these guidelines will become a new duty on Bòrd na Gàidhlig if the Education (Scotland) Bill is approved in its current form.

As well as outlining the range of development and support systems available for GME, the guidelines will provide further detail: on the process that local authorities would have to use to assess parental requests for GME; on the definitions of what will constitute 'Gaelic Medium Education'; and information on teacher retention and recruitment.

They will also be developed with a specific steering group comprising (among others) the Bòrd, Scottish Government, Education Scotland, Local Authority representation.

The guidelines would come into force at the same time as the Education (Scotland) Bill was entered into statute.

A lengthy discussion followed during which a number of points were raised/considered:

- Difficulties facing probationary secondary teachers;

- The importance of career progression opportunities, and the need for these to be considered for teachers wishing to remain within the GME system;
- Issues in relation to teaching posts not being advertised;
- The potential benefits of greater co-ordination of activity, in the interests of education continuity;
- The need for ‘dual qualification’ of Gaelic Medium Teachers to be reconsidered/approved – if GME isn’t going to suffer;
- That more needed to be done to allow secondary GME to develop to the same degree as primary, including some radical thinking on the provision of teacher training, and greater promotion and leadership of this issue;
- A suggestion of a focussed conference on issues relating to the development of GME secondary. (Education Scotland agreed they could look to take this forward.)

9. AOCB:

Several points were raised as AOCB.

1) It had been hoped to hold a Members’ Debate to coincide with the 10th anniversary of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act, 2005. This would not now take place until September, but this might usefully coincide with the Education (Scotland) Act being discussed by the Education and Culture Committee.

2) That Alasdair Allan MSP, the Scottish Government Minister for Learning, Science, and Scotland’s Languages was happy to attend the next meeting of the CPG.

3) The progress in relation to support structure and materials for Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) in GME. It was reported that there was a deal of work being undertaken by Stòrlann, and nearing completion including 2 new tests currently being developed and piloted.

The presentations and minutes of an Additional Support Needs event held in Edinburgh in June 2014 were also being made available on the Stòrlann website.

4) That there was a requirement for those attending events such as the CPG meetings to respond specifically about their intention to attend, so that details can be given to the Scottish Parliament security/visitor management team.

10. Date of next meeting:

It was agreed that the next meeting would take place to coincide with the National Gaelic Schools Debate, and that it would be held at lunchtime in order to allow sufficient time for discussions.

On that basis the next meeting will be held at 12noon, on Wednesday 25th November, 2015.