Comann nam Pàrant is the national organisation which offers advice and support on Gaelic medium education (GME) to parents and it represents the interests of parents whose children are educated through the medium of Gaelic at various levels, from pre-school to secondary level.

Comann nam Pàrant would welcome the opportunity to appear before the Committee.

Since its inception over 30 years ago it has been a struggle to recruit enough teachers to meet the demand for Gaelic medium education (GME). Although there has been a degree of progress in recent years there is still a deficit and the continuing lack of an adequate supply of teachers is having a very negative impact on GME, at all levels. The success of GME in delivering fluent bilingual young people who have experienced good quality education in our schools through the medium of Gaelic is wholly dependent on the availability of qualified fluent Gaelic speaking teachers to provide adequate immersion in Gaelic.

The majority of children entering Gaelic medium education are coming from homes where no Gaelic is spoken; these children therefore require a lot of language support from the class teacher particularly in the early immersion years. Achieving a good foundation in Gaelic is essential if children are to be able to access the entire curriculum through the medium of Gaelic as is expected in GME.

In most cases the early level total immersion teacher has to introduce vocabulary, sentence structure and phonics to the children whilst at the same time ensuring that the needs of any fluent children in the class are being met. Some children will come to P1 GME with no prior knowledge of Gaelic having had no opportunity to attend Gaelic pre-school. We are aware that teachers in English medium education (EME) do sometimes have children in their classes who are not fluent in English but these children are usually the minority in a class and have the advantage of being surrounded by the English language in the whole school environment and surrounding community. Gaelic learners do not normally have any opportunity to experience Gaelic outside their classroom.

In the first years of GME class sizes did tend to be smaller than EME but that is no longer the case and a GME teacher may be faced with teaching 30 children in Gaelic few of which may have any understanding of the language.

There is also the issue of lack of learning support such as speech therapists and educational psychologists in GME which places more responsibility on the class teacher.

There is still a lack of resources for teachers in a GME class and they often have to make their own.

As a result of all these factors the demands on GME teachers is normally more than that of EME teachers but this is not recognised, either through salaries or support given. It should be no surprise that some Gaelic speaking teachers opt to leave teaching in GME for EME or that it is difficult to attract Gaelic speakers to GME teaching.

Gaelic medium education is facing a crisis due to the failure to address the teacher supply situation decisively. Although some actions have taken to develop courses, such as the Gaelic Immersion for teachers’ course, the response has so far been inadequate. Why, for example, have we not seen a fast-track course similar to the one which has just been launched to address the shortage of science and maths teachers?

- What are the main challenges in relation to teacher recruitment and retention?
Most of the challenges in recruitment of teachers for GME are due to the small number of Gaelic speakers from which to recruit as the language has been in decline for so many years.

**Challenges with Recruitment**

**Promotion:**
Promote the option of teaching in GME as a career to school pupils
Promote the option of teaching as a career to fluent Gaelic speakers who may consider a career change. Offer financial support to allow them to do this.
Maintain and support the role of the teacher recruitment officer at Bòrd na Gàidhlig for school outreach work and work with career services.

**Availability and suitability of teacher training courses:**
Increase the number of Gaelic PGDE courses at Primary & Secondary level. Students on PGDE course should also receive more of their tuition through the medium of Gaelic to ensure that they get enough experience in GME to ensure their competency to teach in an immersion classroom.

Offer a variety of routes into teaching routes that would for example allow some practitioners to build on the experience they have gained working in other employment. This would allow, for example, classroom assistants to build on the experience they have already gained in schools.

Provide Gaelic language learning opportunities as part of Career Long Professional Learning.

**Accessibility:**
Provide more incentives for teachers to take up posts in remote areas, relocation packages

**Challenges with Retention**
Lack of support in the class to meet the additional demands on the GME teacher. The role of language assistants should be expanded to support Gaelic learning.

Class sizes in GME are mostly the same as EME and do not take the extra demands of immersion teaching into consideration, in particular at early level total immersion stages. GME class sizes should be smaller with preferential teacher / pupil ratios especially at early level.

Lack of resources (including Gaelic speaking support staff to help cope with additional needs) for Gaelic teaching places an extra burden on GME teachers and should be addressed.

Lack of CPD opportunities for GME teachers is an issue as there is lack of peer support in many schools,

There is no financial incentive to teach in GME rather than EME.

- Are there patterns or key reasons why some trainee teachers do not complete courses, or do not choose to go into teaching having qualified?

There is a lack of recognition of the specific problems faced by Gaelic medium trainee teachers. There should additional support offered to trainee Gaelic teachers to cope with, for example, lack of
resources, lack of Gaelic speaking support staff, that English medium teachers do not have to consider.

- **What is the impact of teacher shortages in certain parts of Scotland or in specific disciplines?**

In Gaelic medium schools teacher shortages has a serious impact on pupils’ language abilities and learning, particularly in early stages. Lack of a full immersion experience, especially in the total immersion phase (P1-3) of GME, does not allow pupils to fully develop their Gaelic language skills. The shortage of teaching staff at secondary level means that many pupils who go through GME at primary level are unable to continue in GME when they reach secondary. This has implications for the number of students who feel competent to go on to study Gaelic at further or higher education level and indeed may adversely affect the number of students who would consider a career in teaching.

The negative impact on children’s education in GME may well lead to a crisis of confidence in GME amongst parents.

- **How effective are the various approaches taken to cover shortages of teachers in schools?**

Although it may be challenging to find Gaelic speaking supply teachers to cover absences some local authorities seem to feel that it is acceptable to use English medium supply teachers and could perhaps make more effort to locate Gaelic speakers. Could available staff be used more effectively with more inter-authority co-operation?

- **What factors influence teachers deciding whether to stay in the profession or to leave?**

- **What factors influence teachers when deciding whether or not to apply for promotion to senior management/headteacher level?**

Just as there are challenges faced by Gaelic medium classroom teachers that are not faced by English medium ones, so too are there challenges faced by Gaelic medium depute and headteachers that are not faced by their equivalents in English medium schools.

Comann nam Pàrant hope that this submission will help inform the committee’s deliberations on teacher recruitment and retention and thank the committee for the opportunity to comment.

M. Wentworth
Parental Officer
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