

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Wednesday 1 December 2004

Session 2

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EDUCATION COMMITTEE

25th Meeting 2004, Session 2

CONVENER

*Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab)
Ms Rosemary Byrne (South of Scotland) (SSP)
*Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP)
Mr Adam Ingram (South of Scotland) (SNP)
*Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
*Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab)
*Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con)
Richard Baker (North East Scotland) (Lab)
*Rosie Kane (Glasgow) (SSP)
Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Mr Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO ATTENDED:

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP)

THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Dawn Corbett (Glasgow City Council)
Tormod Dòmhnallach (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar)
Dr Michael Foxley (Highland Council)
Christine Higgison (Glasgow City Council)
Iain Moireasdan (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar)
Bruce Robertson (Highland Council)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Martin Verity

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Mark Roberts

ASSISTANT CLERK

Ian Cowan

LOCATION

Glasgow City Chambers

Scottish Parliament

Education Committee

Wednesday 1 December 2004

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 09:49*]

Gaelic Language (Scotland) Bill: Stage 1

The Convener (Robert Brown): Good morning and welcome to this meeting of the Education Committee, which is on furlough in Glasgow today. We are pleased to see so many people in the audience, who have come to listen to the evidence and the debate. As we are in public session, will people, including me, ensure that their mobile telephones and pagers are turned off because, apart from anything else, they interfere with the operation of the sound equipment.

We have apologies from Rosemary Byrne and Adam Ingram. Contrariwise, we have in attendance Rosie Kane and Alex Neil, whom I am pleased to welcome. I invite them to declare any interests that may be relevant to the committee's remit. Do you have any interests to declare, Rosie?

Rosie Kane (Glasgow) (SSP): No, Robert, I have nothing to declare. Unfortunately, however, I will have to leave early because of a meeting on other business this afternoon. I apologise for that in advance.

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): I have nothing to declare.

The Convener: It sounds like going through the customs.

We are taking evidence this morning from local authorities, particularly from representatives of Highland Council and Western Isles Council, or Comhairle nan Eilean Siar. I hope that I pronounced that right, but I am sure that I did not. From Highland Council, I welcome Dr Michael Foxley, the vice-convener, and Bruce Robertson, the director of education. From the Western Isles Council, I welcome Iain Morrison, the vice-chair of the arts and leisure committee, and Norman Macdonald, the vice-chair of the policy and resources committee. We have the councils' written submissions, but we will, as usual, invite the representatives to make introductory comments. We start with Highland Council.

Dr Michael Foxley (Highland Council): I am here as the vice-convener of Highland Council, which is committed to a major revival of Gaelic language and culture—the indigenous language

and culture of the Highlands. We face significant challenges in our commitment to Gaelic and we need resources. However, the issue is not just about financial resources, but about political will and the winning of hearts and minds.

Just to give the matter a personal edge, I should say that both my Highland grandparents could read, write and speak Gaelic, as can my wife, who is a Gaelic-medium primary school teacher, and both my children are in Gaelic-medium primary education.

We are looking forward to the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Bill. I think that, in many ways, the future for Gaelic largely rests on the bill and on this committee. The committee of experts in the Council of Europe will be back in Scotland in 14 months. They were critical on their previous visit, but we hope that the situation will have significantly improved when they next visit.

I will sum up what we regard as the advantages of Gaelic. The first advantage is in educational attainment. For example, people who go through Gaelic-medium primary education do better in English than do those who go through English-medium primary education. Speaking Gaelic opens a window to an extremely rich culture, which has been here for 2,000 years. Substantial job opportunities are available through Gaelic not only in the Highlands, but throughout Scotland. Finally and most important, we are committed not only to bilingualism, but to multilingualism. We want bilingualism to lead to people in Scotland in 20 or 30 years being able to speak a number of languages—for example, English, Gaelic, French and Spanish.

Bruce Robertson (Highland Council): Thank you for inviting us to give evidence, convener. I am the director of education, culture and sport for Highland Council. As such, I am responsible not only for advising the council on policy development for the Gaelic language, but for the delivery of a range of aspects on the language. I am responsible for Gaelic in pre-school education, primary and secondary education, and continuing and adult education. I chair a national implementation group on the secondary curriculum, which is charged by the Minister for Education and Young People to develop information and communications technology solutions for the secondary curriculum. I am a member of the General Teaching Council for Scotland and I have been active nationally on the development of different modes of Gaelic teacher training. Gaelic is core business for Highland Council and for me, as director of education, culture and sport. Gaelic is certainly not peripheral for us.

Tormod Dòmhnallach (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar): Bu thoil leam taing a thoirt dhuibh airson a'

chothruim a thoirt fianais dhan chomataidh an-diugh air cuspair a tha, nar beachd-sa, cudthromach chan ann a-mhàin dha muinntir na Gaidhealtachd agus nan Eilean ach dha muinntir na h-Alba air fad. Tha sinn cuideachd taingeil gu Riaghaltas agus Pàrlamaid na h-Alba. [*Briseadh a-steach.*] Gabhaibh mo leisgeil ach tha trioblaid againn leis an uidheam. A bheil sin ceart gu leòr?

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

I thank the committee for the opportunity to come and present our evidence. The subject of Gaelic is important not just for the Highlands, but for the whole of Scotland. We are also thankful to the Executive and to the Scottish Parliament. [*Interruption.*] Is everybody hearing me?

The Convener: I am now, but I was not before.

Tormod Dòmhnallach: Tha sinn taingeil cuideachd gu bheil a' Phàrlamaid agus an Riaghaltas ùr a tha againn ann an Alba air an cothrom seo a ghabhail airson neartachadh a dhèanamh air cànan a tha cho sean ri gin a tha anns an rìoghachd againn. Tha sinn a' coimhead air adhart, mar chomhairle, gu bhith ag obair còmhla ris an Riaghaltas agus ri Bòrd na Gàidhlig airson nan rudan a thathas a' nochdadh anns a' bhile a thoirt gu buil. Chan eil teagamh sam bith againn nach bi am bile math dhan chànan agus dhan dùthaich againn air fad.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

We are thankful that the Executive and the new Parliament have taken the opportunity to strengthen a language that is important for our country. We hope that we can look forward, as a council, to working with the Executive and Bòrd na Gàidhlig to bring forward the bill's provisions, which will be beneficial for the Gaelic language.

The Convener: Thank you. The committee is serious about making the best job that it can of the bill. However, we are struggling with getting to the heart of a number of concepts and what they mean. The first of those is secure status and equal validity, which have been requested for Gaelic by a number of witnesses. Particularly with the councils, we want to dig down a little and find out what that means to the reality of providing resources and what is delivered. What are your views about equal validity, secure status and the rights agenda? How do they relate to what your authorities can deliver at this time? What practical implications are there for schools and courts, for example?

Dr Foxley: We want the bill to contain a form of words that includes legal status, particularly in relation to education, where there is appropriate demand for it. In the Highland Council area, appropriate demand is deemed to be four—that is, four is the appropriate sustainable number of

children who want to receive a Gaelic-medium education. Other models have been discussed elsewhere—between four and five children, for example. Where there is a sustainable demand for Gaelic-medium education from parents and children within a community, they should have the right to receive it. The costs involved are nothing like as great as some people make out, but perhaps my colleague can amplify that point.

Bruce Robertson: The council deliberated on the issue for some time and, although we are pleased with the bill, we would like it to state clearly at the start that Gaelic has legal status as one of Scotland's languages. That would be a welcome and powerful statement, particularly from a new Parliament.

Beyond that, the bill considers carefully the issue of Gaelic-medium education. I suggest that there should be some planning between the wording of the bill and the draft education guidance that is being considered just now. A carefully worded line or two is needed in the bill to make a statutory link to the education guidance and, in particular, to the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000. Some security for parents needs to be established.

The bill looks at Gaelic-medium education, but perhaps it should go beyond that in relation to legal status and examine the position of Gaelic as an additional language in Scotland, in particular as an additional language in our schools, so that a greater number of young people and possibly adult learners might be in a position to learn to speak the language and therefore grow the foundation of the renaissance of Gaelic.

Tormod Dòmhnallach: Tha sinn dhen bheachd gu bheil còir aig inbhe laghail a bhith aig a' chànan gun teagamh sam bith. A bharrachd air sin, bhiodh e na cheum mòr air adhart nam biodh còraichean laghail aig daoine a thaobh a' chànan, gu h-àraid ann an suidheachaidhean mar fhoghlam, mar a thuirt Dr Foxley. Feumaidh sinn coimhead gu math mionaideach air dè na suidheachaidhean far an gabh na comhairlean ri bhith a' libhrigeadh sin agus dè na suidheachaidhean far nach eil e cho comasach sin a dhèanamh. Ach tha mi a' smaoin eachadh gu bheil e fìor chudthromach gum bi inbhe laghail aig a' Ghàidhlig. Chan eil sinn idir a' bruidhinn air co-ionannachd ris a' Bheurla aig an ìre seo, ach ma thig còraichean agus ma thig togail air an sin, agus ma bhios uallach sònraichte air na buidhnean poblach a bhith a' cleachdadh a' chànan, tha mi a' smaoin eachadh gun tig co-ionannachd tro ùine. Is dòcha gur e sin an t-slighe air adhart.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

We are of the opinion that the language should have legal rights, without any doubt. As well as

that, people should have legal rights with regard to the language. That would be a big step forward, especially in situations such as education, as Dr Foxley said. I think that we need to look closely at the situations where such rights would be implemented and other situations where it is not so easy for that to happen. It is very important that Gaelic should have legal status. Perhaps we are not looking for equality with English at this stage, but if we get rights and the issue is raised, there will be a difference in the way in which public bodies use the language and equality will come through that. We think that that might be the way forward.

Iain Moireasdan (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar): Dh'aontaichinn ris na thuirt Tormod Dòmhnallach. Bu chòir gum b' urrainn do dhaoine bruidhinn na Gàidhlig ma tha iad air a shon. Mar chomhairlichean, tha sinn air a bhith a' cur air adhart taobh na Gàidhlig airson iomadach bliadhna. Is e rud math a tha ann am Bòrd na Gàidhlig fhad 's gum faigh e taic gu leòr bhuainn fhin agus bhon Riaghaltas, gus am b' urrainn dha dèanamh nan rudan a dh'fheumas dèanamh airson a' Ghàidhlig a chumail beò.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

I agree with Norman Macdonald. People ought to be allowed to speak Gaelic if they want to. As councillors, we have been promoting Gaelic for many years. The bill is a great thing as long as there is support from ourselves and the Executive to do what needs to be done to keep Gaelic alive.

The Convener: We follow clearly the argument that education is central to the matter and my colleagues will pursue one or two points about that, but I would like to stick briefly with the issue of legal status. From what you say, I take it that there is an important distinction between legal status and equal status. Against the background of resource difficulties, can you give me practical and relevant examples of situations in which legal status might have a meaningful impact—I mean things that councils would do through contacts with social work departments or whatever—and of how things could be delivered with the current resource levels for Gaelic translation and so on?

10:00

Tormod Dòmhnallach: Tha eisimpleir gu math connspaideach air a bhith againn ann an cuid a dh'àiteachan thairis air na bliadhnaichean, agus is e sin soighnichean-rathaid dà-chànanach. Tha cothroman ann airson soighnichean dà-chànanach air feadh na dùthcha. Chan eil e a' dèanamh dragh sam bith do dhaoine nuair a thig iad a-nall thairis a bhith a' leantainn càit a bheil iad ri dhol agus clàran aca a dh'innse dhaibh far a bheil na h-àiteachan agus soighnichean gan toirt an sin.

A thaobh chosgaisean an lùib sin, ma dh'fheumas ùghdarrasan ionadail a bhith a' cur an àird soighnichean-rathaid co-dhiù, cha chosg e mòran a bharrachd soighnichean dà-chànanach a chur an àird. Bu chòir dhuinn coimhead air sin, chan ann a-mhàin anns a' Ghaidhealtachd agus anns na h-Eileanan ach a-mach às na sgìrean sin, mar a thathar a' dèanamh anns a' Chuimrigh, ann an Èirinn agus ann an dùthchannan eile. Bhiodh sin a' toirt a' chànan fo aire an t-sluaigh ann an dòigh a tha a' ciallachadh rud dhaibh agus ann an dòigh a tha follaiseach air feadh na dùthcha. Cha bhiodh cosgais mhòr sam bith an lùib sin a bharrachd air na tha e a' cosg mar-thà. Bhiodh e a' toirt inbhe dhan Ghàidhlig ann an dòigh a tha a' ciallachadh rudeigin do dhaoine aig deireadh an latha. Sin eisimpleir eile a bharrachd air foghlam cothrom a thoirt do dhaoine a bhith a' cleachdadh a' chànan dùthchail.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

Bilingual Gaelic road signs are a good example from the past few years. There are opportunities for establishing bilingual signs throughout the country. Having such signs does not make any difference for people who have come from overseas if they have maps telling them where places are. Bilingual signage does not put them off. The cost to local authorities of putting up such signs will not be much more than the cost of putting up monolingual signs. We want those signs not just in the Highlands, but throughout the country, which happens in other countries such as Wales and Ireland. Bilingual signs raise the status of Gaelic for the people and mean something to the people in an obvious way. I do not think that much more cost would be involved, and status would be given to the language in a meaningful way. Apart from education, that is another example of giving people the opportunity to use the language.

Dr Foxley: It might help if I give a couple of practical examples of costs from my area. West Lochaber has been involved with the erection of bilingual signage from the mid-1980s. The council's policy is to erect such signs at times of replacement and the costs are precisely the same in most circumstances as costs for the existing signage. Lord James Douglas-Hamilton will know the area well. Arisaig, Mallaig, Morar and Acharacle are either Gaelic or Gaelic-Norse words with the odd letter of a difference. If signs are replaced on such a model, replacing like for like, additional costs are zero.

There is strong support for a programme of upgrading trunk road signage. Unlike our policy in the council, which is that if there is only one letter different, the original Gaelic will go up, as most people can cope with "Malaig" with a missing "l" or "Mòrar" with an accent, the policy of using both

languages—although we are talking not exactly about English, but about anglicised versions—and having much bigger signs will mean that costs are greater.

I turn to education and the example of the small rural primary school in Acharacle, which originally had three teachers. When there was substantial demand initially—in 1992, there were 12 children in the first year—an additional teacher was employed, so the school became a four-teacher school. Over time, it settled down to having two Gaelic-medium and two English-medium teachers. The superficial cost of the unit for two teachers plus support might be significant, but the additional cost of Gaelic medium is one teacher. The resource issues and all the training issues need to be considered, but the specific issues with such examples are relatively small.

The Convener: I want to press you slightly for examples. It is clear that education is central and signage is a fairly obvious matter. In the council's view, are there any other areas in which there will be implications from according legal status to Gaelic?

Bruce Robertson: We need to set the Gaelic language in the community context. For example, if a young person in Acharacle, which Dr Foxley cited as an example, is educated through the medium of Gaelic, when that youngster goes through the school gate, there must be a social and economic context for them in which they can use the language.

One or two people do not understand fully the economic benefits of progressing towards legal status and of having the signage that Dr Foxley and our colleagues from the Western Isles have mentioned. We have examined examples of the economic benefits that Gaelic brings throughout the Highlands. We owe it to the young people throughout Scotland who are educated through the medium of Gaelic to ensure that they have a much better community, social, political and economic context in which to live, grow and prosper by giving Gaelic the status that we feel it deserves.

Tormod Dòmhnallach: Ma choimheadas sinn ris a thaobh chòraichean agus a thaobh inbhe laghail, chì sinn gu bheil còraichean aig daoine a thaobh iomadach cuspair eile mar shlàinte is rudan den t-seòrsa sin air feadh na dùthcha. Tha beachd ann ma tha an aon chòir aig daoine gum bi an aon ìre de sheirbheis aca a thaobh slàinte air feadh na dùthcha, ach chan ann mar sin a tha e. Tha mi a' smaoin eachadh gum bu chòir dha na còraichean a thigeadh tro inbhe laghail airson na Gàidhlig a bhith, anns an aon dòigh, a rèir nam feumalachdan ann an àiteachan sònraichte agus gum biodh e a rèir dè ghabhadh a libhrigeadh le buidhnean sònraichte anns a' choimhearsnachd.

Chan eil mi a' smaoin eachadh gu bheil eadar-dhealachadh sam bith ann.

Tuigidh mi gu bheil daoine iomagaineach mu dheidhinn inbhe laghail a bhith aig Gàidhlig anns na cùirtean nuair a thèid daoine gu lagh. Nam b' urrainn do dhuine ann an àite sam bith anns an rioghachd a ràdh gu bheil iad airson fianais a thoirt seachad ann an Gàidhlig, tuigidh mi gum biodh daoine draghail dà-rìribh mu chosgaisean an lùib sin, ach chan ann mar sin a leigeas a leas a bhith. Tha mi a' smaoin eachadh gu bheil e a rèir nam feumalachdan a tha ann agus a rèir dè tha reusanta, agus tha mi a' creidsinn gum biodh Bòrd na Gàidhlig agus an Riaghaltas fhèin gu mòr an lùib dè bhios ceart agus cothromach anns an t-seagh sin.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

We should consider the issue in terms of rights and legal status. People throughout the country have rights on many other issues, such as health. There is an opinion that the same level of health service should be available throughout the country, but the situation is not like that in reality. The rights that come through legal status for Gaelic should be similar; they should be given according to the needs of different places, groups and communities and according to what is available.

People are worried about the legal status of Gaelic in court. It should be possible to give evidence in Gaelic in court. People are worried that that will be costly, but it does not need to be. The rights should be different, depending on the needs in different places. Bòrd na Gàidhlig and the Executive will be greatly involved in deciding what is right and proper on that issue.

The Convener: Before we move to other issues, do members have any more questions on rights and secure status?

Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): I have a question about education. The draft Gaelic-medium education guidance that the Executive produced this year states that authorities that are in receipt of a Gaelic-specific grant should set out

"A commitment to deliver Gaelic medium education as an entitlement at pre-school and primary wherever reasonable demand exists."

You have argued that the term "reasonable demand" ought to be defined in the bill rather than be left to local authorities to interpret as they feel appropriate in their local circumstances. In my area, Dumfries and Galloway Council does a lot to support the Scots language, which has many historic and cultural links with the area. The council is concerned that if it is required to put more resources into Gaelic, that will dilute some of the resources that it provides for measures to support Scots. Let us say that there are four

children in the region who want Gaelic-medium education. Given that you want to beef up the bill, what argument would you present to my colleagues in Dumfries and Galloway that those children should be entitled to that education?

Bruce Robertson: We recently responded to the consultation on the draft guidance and we have provided copies of the response to the committee clerk. Our response indicates that we would advise the Parliament and the Scottish Executive that it would be remiss of them to leave it for councils that are in receipt of Gaelic-specific grant to draw up language and educational plans. That would leave an opportunity open, right from the first base, for councils that do not wish to recognise the bill to do nothing. There is an important decision to be made on the Gaelic-specific grant and on whether education authorities should prepare plans.

In relation to reasonable demand, we have stated in our responses to the consultation on the draft bill and the draft guidance that a link needs to be made between the two documents. Highland Council has interpreted reasonable demand as four pupils. However, far more important than the need to provide a raw figure is the need to look at local circumstances. For example, if there were four pupils but absolutely no youngsters in pre-school looking to enter primary and secondary education in a local community, the claim for reasonable demand would not be well founded. There needs to be a carefully worded analysis of what reasonable demand is. Highland Council would be happy to forward some detail on that to you, if that would help.

The Convener: It would be very helpful if you were able to do that. Thank you.

Bruce Robertson: We also suggest that there is a need to recognise—I return to what Dr Murray said about Dumfries and Galloway—the differences between locations such as the Western Isles, the Highlands and Argyll and Bute and areas of Scotland where Scots or Doric is the chosen language. We would not say that Gaelic must be taught at all costs and against all other languages; there needs to be a first step. In this case, that is about Gaelic, but I would like the Parliament to recognise the rights of other languages in Scotland. That is extremely important.

Tormod Dòmhnallach: Feumaidh sinn sgaradh a dhèanamh eadar foghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig agus Gàidhlig mar dàrna cuspair, no Albais mar dàrna cuspair. Tha eadar-dhealachadh mòr eadar an dà rud. Bidh clann a' faighinn foghlam ge air bith dè an cànan anns am bi iad a' faighinn an fhoghlaim, agus is e cuspair eadar-dhealaichte a tha sin. Mar a thuirte Mgr MacDhonnchaidh, tha còir againn a bhith a'

coimhead chan ann a-mhàin air a' Ghàidhlig ach air cànanan eile, ach is ann mu dheidhinn na Gàidhlig a-mhàin a tha am bile. Bhithinn an dòchas gum bi togail air an obair a thathas a' dèanamh a thaobh Gàidhlig agus a thaobh nan cànanan eile ann an Alba. Chan eil mi a' smaoineachadh gu bheil sin a' ciallachadh gum biodh am bile a' toirt ghoireasan air falbh bho chànan no cuspair-foghlaim sam bith eile le bhith a' toirt Gàidhlig air adhart, mar dàrna cuspair no mar fhoghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig. Tha an inbhe agus an stòras gan cur gu foghlam chloinne co-dhiù.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

We should make the distinction between Gaelic-medium education and the learning of Gaelic or Scots as a second language. There is a big difference between the two. Children learn no matter what language they receive their education in: that is a different subject. As Mr Robertson said, we ought to consider not just Gaelic, but other languages. However, the bill is about Gaelic only and I hope that the work that has been done regarding Gaelic and other languages will be built on. I do not think that the bill means that resources will be taken away from any other language to provide Gaelic-medium education or the opportunity to learn Gaelic as a second language. The funding is being put into children's education anyway.

Dr Murray: I would like the representatives of Highland Council to expand on something that they say in their evidence. Your written submission states:

"Responsibility for the delivery of Gaelic education should remain as it is and not sit with the Bòrd."

What particularly is your concern regarding the bòrd?

Bruce Robertson: We have one or two concerns. First, is the bòrd, as it is currently constituted and staffed, in a position to do anything other than advise on Gaelic developments? I suggest that it is not. It is certainly not in a position to assure the quality of education delivery. Secondly, it is important to retain Gaelic in the main stream of education policy. If there is a suggestion that the bòrd would have a responsibility for quality assurance, strategic development and overseeing the delivery of Gaelic, that would put Gaelic out on a limb compared to any other subject in the school curriculum. For Gaelic, that would be dangerous.

Highland Council suggests that there is a good, productive role for the bòrd in drafting the Gaelic language plan, advising on the nature of Gaelic education developments and overseeing the plans that councils will submit. However, the day-to-day operational delivery and quality assurance needs

to be left to the local authorities, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education and a range of Government bodies such as Learning and Teaching Scotland and the General Teaching Council for Scotland. We must not ghettoise Gaelic education and we must be aware of the danger that that might happen.

10:15

Tormod Dòmhnallach: Tha mi ag aontachadh gu ìre mhòr ris na thuirt Mgr MacDhonnchaidh. Bu chòir an t-aon uallach a bhith air an Riaghaltas airson foghlaim tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig no foghlam Gàidhlig 's a tha air a thaobh foghlaim anns an fharsaingeachd. Ged a shaoileas mi gu bheil e ceart gum bi uallach air Bòrd na Gàidhlig a bhith a' dèanamh cinnteach gu bheil ùghdarrasan ionadail a' coilionadh an dleistanais a thaobh foghlaim tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig agus foghlam Gàidhlig, tha mi a' smaoinichadh gu bheil còir aig an uallach a bhith aig an Riaghaltas, mar a thuirt Mgr MacDhonnchaidh.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

I agree. At the end of the day, the responsibility for Gaelic should be the same as the responsibility for education in general. I think that it is right that the bòrd should have some responsibility. Local authorities have to fulfil their duties, but the Executive should have responsibility at the end of the day.

Dr Murray: You have raised a number of issues around access to Gaelic-medium education, adult learners and Gaelic as a second language. Do those matters need to be dealt with in the bill or are they matters for guidance?

Dr Foxley: They are matters for on-going guidance and development. On Dr Murray's earlier question, reasonable demand is an issue that we have discussed at length in the Highlands. We would be greatly concerned about having the bill define reasonable demand. To come back to the original question, if there is one family in your area that wishes to access Gaelic-medium education, I do not think that anybody would say that that was reasonable demand. However, if parents in the area have voluntarily set up a playgroup and are looking to expand into Gaelic-medium education and we are talking about fairly significant numbers—perhaps 20 or 30 children using the service over a period of time—I think that most people would see that as being reasonable demand.

I would also have a problem with defining reasonable demand in the bill because of an issue with which we are struggling in the Highlands, which relates to the small primary schools in areas where, despite the fact that there are still a substantial number of indigenous Gaelic speakers,

the roll of the one or two-teacher school may not be high enough to lead us to expect that there would be around four Gaelic-speaking pupils a year. Furthermore, as you can imagine, in a school that size, with just one or two teachers, there is an issue about whether one would have two composite classes of primaries 1 to 7, with one being taught in Gaelic and one in English.

The part-time Gaelic-medium education pilot scheme that is running in Kilchoan is in its third year and we are examining other models. We would have concerns about making a hard definition of reasonable demand and saying that there should be at least five children who wish to be taught in Gaelic. As I said earlier, bilingualism and multilingualism bring benefits and Scotland should be encouraging that.

Bruce Robertson: One of the weaknesses of the consultation on the bill and on the draft education guidance is the fact that having Gaelic as a second language has not been recognised as presenting a huge opportunity for development across Scotland.

We regularly consult parents in the Highlands. A few weeks ago, we finished a round of consultation in which we asked parents for their views on Gaelic-medium education and on teaching Gaelic as a second language, in the same way as French or Spanish are taught. There was huge interest in and commitment to the latter option.

If we are to arrest the decline in the number of people speaking Gaelic and grow a base on which the language can flourish, the opportunity of enhancing the language by teaching it as a second language in schools, adult education centres and evening classes should not be undervalued and I strongly recommend that we consider that carefully. There is a huge opportunity, not just in traditionally Gaelic-speaking areas, but throughout Scotland.

The Convener: It is about supporting the hinterland.

Iain Moireasdan: Tha sinne gu math fortanach anns na h-Eileanan Siar, oir faodaidh a' chlann a dhol dhan chròileagan tron Ghàidhlig an toiseach, agus an uair sin dhan sgoil, far am faigh iad a' Ghàidhlig tron sgoil. Ach saoilidh mise gur ann nuair a thèid iad dhan àrd-sgoil a bhios iad a' leigeil seachad Gàidhlig agus a' dol air ais dhan Bheurla a-rithist. Feumaidh sinn feuchainn ri rudeigin a chur a-steach dhan àrd-sgoil airson toirt orra a bhith a' bruidhinn na Gàidhlig.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

We are fortunate in the Western Isles, because children can be educated through the medium of Gaelic at pre-school level and when they start

school. However, when they attend secondary school they tend to revert to English. We need to take action at secondary education level to encourage pupils to speak Gaelic.

Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP): The Highland Council submission makes a fundamental point about the principles of the bill when it emphasises the quality of education. The submission says that the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000 should be amended. The witnesses from Highland Council might want to consult their legal department on this point, but do they think that in order to secure a strong basis in the 2000 act we might need to reconsider the bill's long title, which refers to the bòrd's ability to issue guidance? Section 9 is confused, as you say. Do the witnesses think that, if section 9 is to be broadened to cover all Gaelic education, it should exclude Gaelic-medium education? What is your view on the bòrd's ability to determine guidance on basic education through the medium of Gaelic, given that it will not necessarily include education specialists?

Bruce Robertson: I will consider your first question, which raises an interesting issue. There is a danger that the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Bill is running in parallel with proposals to make further definitions in relation to the 2000 act, as I said. Highland Council thinks that at the minimum there should be a statutory link between the two pieces of legislation. I do not know how that might be done; we can take advice and I am sure that the committee will do so too. My professional view is that it would have been better if the bill had been all-encompassing. However, we must work within the limitations of the 2000 act. It would be a fundamental error and a lost opportunity if no connection were to be made between the bill and the 2000 act.

Dr Foxley: We will take up Fiona Hyslop's offer and speak to our legal department about a form of words that might cover the situation, if that is helpful.

Tormod Dòmhnallach: Tha mi a' smaoin eachadh gun aontaich sinn gum bu chòir ceangail gu math dlùth a bhith eadar Achd Inbhean ann an Sgoiltean na h-Alba etc 2000 agus am bile air a bheil sinn a' bruidhinn an-diugh, agus bhiodh e na b' fheàrr nam biodh tòrr a bharrachd anns a' bhile mu fhoghlam. A thaobh comas a bhith aig Bòrd na Gàidhlig comhairle a thoirt dhan Riaghaltas a thaobh ghnòthaichean foghlam, bhiodh e gu math furasta dhan bhòrd sin fhaighinn, oir tha eòlaichean gu leòr air feadh na dùthcha a thaobh foghlaim agus leasachadh cànan. Bhiodh e comasach gu leòr dhan bhòrd an t-eòlas sin fhaighinn mas e 's gum biodh stòras agus maoin eachadh ceart aige airson sin a dhèanamh. Chan eil teagamh sam bith agam mu dheidhinn sin.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

We agree that there should be a link between the bill and the 2000 act. There should be a lot more about education in the bill. Fiona Hyslop asked whether the bòrd should give advice; that should be quite straightforward as long as the bòrd has the resources and the money to allow it to do that. The bòrd will be quite familiar with the country and its needs.

The Convener: I am told that people at the back of the room are having difficulty hearing the proceedings. I am sorry about that; the acoustics are not as good as they might be. Perhaps we could all raise our voices a little so that the sound penetrates to the back of the room. The Gaelic interpreters in the booth are telling me that they would appreciate that too.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): I have a question about videoconferencing. It was mentioned in earlier evidence that reasonable demand constitutes four pupils. If you had one, two or three pupils—perhaps in the south of Scotland—would you be willing to support working up the use of high technology? The minister said in evidence to us that he was interested in that and I understand that a working group of his officials is working on it. It might be possible to provide opportunities that do not exist at present. Would you be willing to co-operate with that and have input in the process?

Bruce Robertson: I chair the group to which you refer, which is a national secondary curriculum implementation group. The minister has asked us specifically to advise him on the preparation and delivery of a range of materials using new technologies. It goes back to the point that my colleague from the Western Isles made: there is a reasonable foundation for Gaelic-medium education in primary school, but there is not the same opportunity in secondary schools.

Recently we agreed to commission a number of pieces of work in the social subjects in the secondary curriculum based on the new technologies, including videoconferencing. We in Highland already use videoconferencing between schools. Gaelic is one of the subjects for which we use it, but we also use it for subjects such as Spanish. It can be a useful vehicle, and the examination passes are normally very good. Again, we need to put a number of things in place relating to the nuts and bolts, such as timetabling and ensuring that a teacher is in place. Videoconferencing is part of the solution.

Online learning opportunities are a major part of the solution, but parents will tell you that such a way of working can never replace the one to one between a teacher and a pupil. Once an online secondary-based curriculum is in place, a protocol

must also be in place to ensure that there is a subject specialist at the other end of the technology to advise the young person. If one person in Mallaig High School is doing advanced higher physics through an online learning package, they will need a physicist to advise them on the scientific issues and somebody to help them with the language. The technology on its own is not the solution; it is part of a package.

Tormod Dòmhnallach: Tha cothroman sònraichte ann a thaobh teicneòlas agus bidh na cothroman sin ann anns an àm ri teachd. Thathas a' cleachdadh nan cothroman sin cheana, chan ann a-mhàin airson a' chàinain ach airson leasachadh a dhèanamh air an astar a tha eadar daoine gus daoine a tharraing ri chèile. Tha cothroman ann sin a dhèanamh airson Gàidhlig is foghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig is foghlam Gàidhlig anns an fharsaingeachd. Mar a tha am bann leathann ga libhrigeadh a-mach air feadh na dùthcha, is ann as fheàrr a bhios an teicneòlas agus is ann as motha a bhios cothroman ann.

Ach feumaidh sinn cuimhneachadh gu bheil taic ri chur ri pàrantan na cloinne, a bharrachd air a' chloinn fhèin, nuair a tha an clann aca a' dol tro fhoghlam, gu sònraichte foghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig. Is e dòigh eile a bhith a' cur taic ri pàrantan a bhith a' cleachdadh an teicneòlais sin, a tha an ìre mhath anns a h-uile dachaigh andiugh. Chan eil againn ach togail air sin. Tha cothroman sònraichte ann an-diugh nach robh ann a-riamh roimhe seo.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

There are certain opportunities as far as technology is concerned. Those opportunities are being used already not just in relation to language but in order to overcome the distance between places. There are opportunities as far as Gaelic-medium education is concerned and in education in general. The more the technology is distributed throughout the country, the better. Also we have to remember that parents have to be supported as well when children are going through education, particularly Gaelic-medium education. Such technology is another way of giving parents support. The technology is in every house nowadays and we ought to pick up on that. There are opportunities that never existed before.

The Convener: Support for the parents is an important point.

Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I want to ask a couple of questions about teacher supply and training, which you have highlighted in your submissions and which have been highlighted elsewhere as well.

On the issue of quality of teaching, we had the opportunity to visit Portree Primary School and Portree High School. I went into the infants class

at the primary school and it was impressive to see non-Gaelic-speaking children in a totally Gaelic environment understanding everything that the teacher was saying. I was equally impressed by how good the teacher was. As the father of a primary 1 pupil, it is worth commenting that I was impressed not only with the quality of the Gaelic but with the quality of the teacher. I think that her name was Mrs MacDonald.

Teacher supply and training are not covered by the bill, but it is clear from your evidence and the other evidence that we have heard that they are crucial to the future growth and survival of the language. Will you comment on the work that has been done to address teacher training and supply and the problems that you face? What more could be done?

10:30

Dr Foxley: Teacher training and supply have been, and still are, critical issues. The place to start is the careers service—that does not require additional resources. I circulated a leaflet that we produced about career opportunities in Lochaber—I hope that it reached the committee. We produced that leaflet because there was no information available in the local careers office, apart from an excellent general guide that was produced by Comunn na Gàidhlig. The careers service needs actively to go out and promote the job opportunities that are detailed in that small leaflet. Those opportunities are significant, given the growth that has taken place in recent years and the potential for great expansion in the future but, to be frank, that promotion is not happening. Children in high schools and primary schools—and, importantly, their parents—are not being advised that if they are able to speak two languages their chances of a good, secure, well-paid job in the Highlands are substantially greater. We would like that simple message to go out, and we have been trying to get it out for a number of years. That work is about using existing resources better.

On primary education, Bruce Robertson will talk in more detail about the training initiatives that are under way, but we have been saying for years that the potential to produce up to 20 teachers per year is grossly inadequate. Some research that we did two or three years ago showed that we need to produce at least 30 teachers at primary level. The situation at secondary level is, frankly, a national disgrace. At the committee's meeting on Monday morning, members heard from Norman Gillies of Sabhal Mòr Ostaig. He was with me at a meeting in Morar in 1994, after the primary unit was established there, when we highlighted the need, for secondary teachers at Mallaig High School. Ten years on, there are no Gaelic teachers at that school, and I must share part of the blame for that

failure. The Gaelic-medium unit at Morar is a spectacular success, accounting for 80 per cent of the roll in that primary school, but there is no follow-up when pupils move on. There are ways to deal with that, and over lunch I spoke to Norman Gillies about what Sabhal Mòr Ostaig can do. With a limited amount of resources, in the form of finance and manpower, it could roll out courses as of next summer.

This year, Lews Castle College has finally managed to produce a course. Three years after the announcement by the then minister, it has finally received the funding and resources to deliver the course. That is three years in which opportunity was lost. Some rather negative evidence was given on Monday morning about the impossibility of this work, but all that is needed is the provision of training locally—I will ask Bruce Robertson to come in on primary schools—and links with places such as Lews Castle College and Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, where one can get immersion. We are trying to get teachers who are Gaelic speakers to transfer to Gaelic-medium education, to get teachers who have no Gaelic to learn the language and to deal with all the variations in between. The task is not as Herculean as is made out, but we need to face it.

Before I finish, I emphasise a point that Bruce Robertson made. There is a lot of dependence on videoconferencing and IT but there must be human beings at the other end: a specialist adviser and someone who can speak Gaelic. We have had one or two failures in which the videoconferencing links and technology have worked fine but there has not been anybody at the other end to help the pupils to learn. In such cases, pupils end up sitting in front of a television like robots. We must twin-track the two issues and develop both teachers and IT. I ask Bruce Robertson to come in and comment in a bit more detail.

Bruce Robertson: You are absolutely right. The biggest single obstacle to the development of the Gaelic language in Scotland is the lack of a supply of teachers—that is absolutely critical. I have been in post for six and a half years, and every year we have been unable to meet our requirements fully because of teacher supply issues. What do we need to address that? We know what the problem is, but what is the solution? Highland Council has been proactive, working with the University of Aberdeen and, latterly, the University of Strathclyde. We have entered into a partnership with both institutions and have promoted two new courses in teacher training by distance learning. For the first time ever, we have been able to bring teacher training to the Highlands and out of the central belt and the east coast of Scotland. That was a magnificent thing for the council to have done.

As a consequence of that, we will get approximately 10 graduates in June 2005, which will make a huge difference to teacher supply not just in the Highlands and Islands, but across Scotland. Nevertheless, especially for the two-year part-time course that the University of Aberdeen has developed, to which it has committed to continuing—which, for us, is great news that we heard about last week—there is an anomaly of which the committee needs to be aware. If someone follows a one-year postgraduate course to become a teacher, as the vast majority of students do, they have their fees paid. However, currently, someone who follows a two-year, part-time distance learning course does not get their fees paid. The minister is well aware of that and is taking steps to address it through the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council. Nevertheless, secondary education is a desert. Having recognised that, the minister has asked us to try to come up with more innovative solutions, although we realise that it will take some time to get teachers in place.

There is a huge opportunity, as hundreds of young people are coming through Gaelic-medium education in Scotland. They are the teachers of the future. However, unless the careers service, the universities and so on promote Gaelic teaching, those potential teachers will be lost. Let us not miss out on the good opportunity that we have.

The Convener: All the little boys and girls whom we met at Portree Primary School wanted to be Gaelic teachers. That is all to the good.

Bruce Robertson: Let us sign them up.

Tormod Dòmhnallach: Tha a' chiad fheadhainn a chaidh tro fhoghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig a-nis a' ruighinn na h-ìre far a bheil iad fhèin a' coimhead airson am beòshlaint a dhèanamh tron chànan. Tha sinn an dòchas gun tèid cuibhreann math den fheadhainn sin an sàs ann a bhith a' teagasg tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig.

Ach, mar a bhruidhinn sinn na bu tràithe, tha aon rud ann a tha a' toirt dìth misneachd fiù 's do chloinn a tha a' dol tro fhoghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig anns a' bhun-sgoil. Chan eil a' chlann air am bogadh anns a' chànan eadar 12 bhliadhna a dh'aois, nuair a ruigeas iad an àrd-sgoil, agus an ìre far a bheil iad a' dol dhan oilthigh. Tha mi a' smaoinèachadh gur e sin am beàrn as motha an-dràsta. Nam b' e 's gum faigheadh daoine misneachd aig an àm sin, bhiodh tòrr a bharrachd a' dol an sàs ann a bhith a' teagasg tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig. Is e an trioblaid gu bheil gainnead luchd-teagaisg airson nan cùrsaichean sin air feadh na dùthcha. Feumaidh sinn brosnachadh agus misneachadh a thoirt dha daoine gu bheil na cothroman mòra sin ann.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

The first ones to go through Gaelic-medium education are now reaching the stage at which they want to teach, and I hope that a good proportion of them will be involved in teaching. As was mentioned earlier, it is discouraging that, when they reach high school at the age of 12, they are not immersed in the language until they go to university. The biggest gap is between 12 and their leaving school. It would be very encouraging if more were involved in teaching. The lack of teachers for Gaelic-medium education is a problem throughout the country. We must really encourage people to realise that there are big opportunities there.

Mr Macintosh: The draft bill was not designed to deal with Gaelic education, which has been added to the bill as introduced. Should we amend the bill again or possibly even suggest that some of the funding be diverted? I am not saying that that is a good idea, but is that the sort of thing that you would like? Do you have any suggestions about what we could do in the bill, as opposed to the message that we should be giving to the Executive about teacher supply?

Bruce Robertson: I deliberately used the expression that the lack of teacher supply is the "biggest single obstacle" that the Gaelic language faces. I think that there should be a fairly strong statement about that. I go back to the 2000 act. If, through the consultation process that is continuing at the moment, there could be a link between teacher supply and that piece of legislation, that would be very helpful for all of us.

Tormod Dòmhnallach: Nuair a chaidh an dreachd bhile a-mach gu conaltradh, cha robh iomradh sam bith air foghlam ann. Mar sin, tha sinn mothachail agus taingeil gu bheil an Riaghaltas air sin a ghabhail a-steach an dèidh na h-iomairt mòire a chaidh a dhèanamh. Bhathar a' faireachdainn nach robh an achd 2000 a' coilionadh na bha daoine a' smaoineachadh a' urrainn dhi a thaobh na Gàidhlig. Bhiodh e math nan gabhadh ceangal a dhèanamh eadar am bile agus an achd 2000, gu sònraichte a thaobh a bhith a' trèanadh luchd-teagaisg, agus nan robh maoinneachadh agus stòras a chur ann a rèir sin.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

When the draft bill came out for consultation, there was no mention of education and we are very thankful that the Executive has taken the matter on board. People did not recognise that a great effort has been made on that issue. It would be very good if a link could be made between the bill and the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000, especially on the issue of teacher training funding.

Dr Foxley: The Council of Europe report, for which a committee of experts came over to

Scotland in January 2003, says:

"The options for Gaelic chosen by the UK under articles 8 (1) (a) to (c) are the most ambitious available".

Moreover, the report points out that

"Gaelic is a particularly endangered language, and Gaelic-medium education is seen as crucial to its survival"

and that the undertaking for primary and secondary education has been "only partly fulfilled". Indeed, it was found that, in secondary education, there was a

"considerable lack of consistency and substantial gaps"

in Gaelic provision and that the

"overwhelming majority of Scottish schoolchildren learn next to nothing about Gaelic history and culture, a failure that tends to lead to reinforcement of the"

most

"damaging negative stereotypes presented"

sometimes

"in the mass media".

The report's key point is:

"The shortage of trained teachers ... constitutes a substantial barrier to language maintenance ..."

and

"there is an urgent need to strengthen the basic and further training of Gaelic teachers."

The committee of experts will return in January 2006.

I am not sure whether all the aspects that we have been discussing should be in the bill; however, there are limits to what Highland Council and our colleagues in Comhairle nan Eilean Siar can do. We were hoping that, through the committee, the Scottish Parliament would send out a message to bodies such as the careers service and the universities that they should take the issue seriously. In the past, people who wanted to undertake teacher training very often had to leave their home and family and go to Jordanhill College of Education or the University of Aberdeen. We think that demand can be met if we can overcome what might be called a funding glitch, provide not spectacular but relatively limited resources to roll out training courses locally and promote Gaelic-medium education as a career opportunity. We would appreciate the committee's assistance in delivering that.

The Convener: I am very surprised to hear that all the courses at the Nicolson Institute are taught in English. Is there no Gaelic-medium secondary education in the Western Isles?

Tormod Dòmhnallach: Is e glè bheag, mas e càil idir, a tha ga dhèanamh mar fhoghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig anns an àrd-sgoil. Thathas

a' dèanamh Gàidhlig mar chuspair mar iomadach cuspair eile, ach tha trioblaid mhòr ann a thaobh foghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig aig ìre na h-àrd-sgoile. Feumaidh sinn fuasgladh fhaighinn air an t-suidheachadh sin, a tha air a bhith ann bho thùs.

Chaidh iomairt mhòr a dhèanamh airson aonadan Gàidhlig aig ìre na bun-sgoile—agus tha sinn a' faicinn gu bheil buannachd mhòr a' tighinn a-mach à sin—ach cha deach a leantainn troimhe. Is e fear de na h-adhbharan airson sin gu bheil tòrr a bharrachd stòrais ga chleachdadh anns na cuspairean eadar-dhealaichte a thathas a' teagasg aig ìre na h-àrd-sgoile. Dh'fheumadh an stòras sin a bhith air eadar-theangachadh nan robh co-ionannachd a bhith ann eadar daoine a tha a' dèanamh foghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig agus iadsan a tha ga dhèanamh tro mheadhan na Beurla. Tha ceistean tòrr nas motha ann a thaobh foghlam Gàidhlig aig ìre na h-àrd-sgoile.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

There is very little. Gaelic is taught as a subject like any other subject, but there is great trouble with the Gaelic medium in high school. We have to find a solution to the problem, but the situation has existed right from the very start. The campaign for Gaelic-medium primary education, which we are starting to see the fruits of, has not followed through to high school. We need more resources and more equality at high school level, but that raises more complex questions.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have a question about the bòrd, the criteria for appointments and the form of elections. Do you feel that the bill should set out any particular requirements for direct elections and the appointments criteria? We note that the Western Isles requested that the bòrd appointments system should take account of experience, culture and ethnic diversity and that Sabhal Mòr Ostaig suggested that members of the bòrd should have a communicative knowledge of Gaelic. Moreover, I understand that it has been requested that half of the members be directly elected. It would be helpful if you could say a little bit about that and, if you wish to reflect on it, send us draft amendments on proposed improvements to the bill, because those issues will need to be thought out clearly if such amendments are to have any chance of success in the Parliament.

10:45

Dr Foxley: Do you want us to comment on that now?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Perhaps you could say a little, and we can await your proposals in due course.

Dr Foxley: If the bòrd has eight members it will be somewhat small and will not reflect certain important key interests. I am thinking in particular of people who are Gaelic learners who, in a large way, will be the future, rather than native Gaelic speakers. There is also the key constituency of the church.

A lot of developmental issues are involved. Although it is important that the bòrd consists of Gaelic speakers, we do not see that as an overwhelming factor, because the key to the survival of the Gaelic language is ensuring that developmental issues are tackled head on successfully. The other element that has been discussed by us as a council is that as well as having appointments to quangos, we should have direct elections to them. We will come back on that in more detail if it would help.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: To have some chance of success, all the implications will need to be thought through, which I am sure you accept.

Dr Foxley: The other allied matter is whether the roles and functions of existing Gaelic organisations need to be reviewed as Bòrd na Gàidhlig becomes more important after the bill is passed. We have looked at elements of that.

The Convener: Does Western Isles Council have anything to say on that?

Iain Moireasdan: Nuair a tha a' Phàrlamaid a' cur bòrd sam bith air bhonn, mas e Bòrd na Gàidhlig no bòrd eile, tha daoine an-còmhnaidh a' faighneachd carson a chuireadh an duine sin no an duine seo air a' bhòrd. Nan robh taghaidhean ann airson a' bhùird, dh'fhaodadh daoine fhaicinn gun robh làmh aca ann an cò a bha air a' bhòrd agus na bha iad a' dol a dhèanamh.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

When the Parliament sets up a board—not just Bòrd na Gàidhlig but any other board—people ask, why was that person elected to the board? If people are elected to boards, at least we have a say in who is on them.

The Convener: It would be useful if you could elaborate your thoughts on important issues such as who the electorate would be. That could be done later, if you want to think about it.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have questions on another issue. I understand that Western Isles Council has suggested that all public bodies should produce language plans. Could you comment on that? What is your view of the opinion of Dumfries and Galloway Council, which called for flexibility?

Tormod Dòmhnallach: Tha sinn a' cur taic ris a' bheachd gum bu chòir dleastanas a bhith air a h-uile buidheann phoblach plana-cànain Gàidhlig

a bhith aca. Chan eil teagamh ann nach bi na planaichean glè eadar-dhealaichte a rèir diofar cheàrnaidhean den rìoghachd agus a rèir dè tha a' bhuidheann fhèin an sàs ann. Dheighinn na b' fhaide na sin agus chanainn gum bu chòir dhan aon dleastanas a bhith air buidhnean nach eil fo smachd Riaghaltas Dhùn Èideann ach fo smachd Riaghaltas Lunnainn far a bheil iad an sàs ann an saoghal na Gàidhlig.

Mar a thuirt mi, bidh na planaichean gu math eadar-dhealaichte airson adhbharan eadar-dhealaichte, ach chan eil adhbhar sam bith plana no ro-innleachd a bhith aig buidheann ma thathas a' dol ga chur an dàrna taobh aon uair 's gu bheil e air a chruthachadh, gun a choilionadh ann an dòigh sam bith. Is ann mu thimcheall a' chuspair sin a bhios a' chuid mhòr dhen deasbad. Bu chòir dhuinn fàilte a chur air na h-uallaich agus na cumhachdan a bharrachd a bhios aig Bòrd na Gàidhlig an dàimh ri sin. Chan eil teagamh ann nach bi Bòrd na Gàidhlig ag obair gu math dlùth ris an Riaghaltas a thaobh dè na dleastanasan a bu chòir a bhith air an leagail air buidhnean fa leth a thaobh nam planaichean-cànain aca.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

Every public body should have a duty to produce a Gaelic language plan, which would be different in different parts of the country, depending on what the bodies were involved in. I would not go any further than that. Every group that is involved in Gaelic but which is not under the control of the Executive or London should also have a duty to produce a plan. They will be different for different reasons, but there is no point in strategies or plans if they are not going to achieve anything at the end of the day. That will be the subject of debate.

We welcome the responsibilities and powers of the bòrd. The bòrd will work closely with the Executive to work out what duties are required of different bodies in terms of Gaelic.

Dr Foxley: I have had the opportunity to read some of the committee's earlier discussions about the financial consequences of the proposal. Highland Council produced its first draft Gaelic language plan in September and it is now out for consultation. We regard that as a Gaelic language plan for a heavyweight local authority in terms of the progression of Gaelic and think that it provides a useful template for other authorities, such as Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and Argyll and Bute, to discuss. Dumfries and Galloway Council and Shetland Council might have lightweight Gaelic language plans and councils such as Stirling Council might have middleweight plans.

Once the initial piece of work has been done to come up with a template, that can be sent to the appropriate officials in an organisation, who can comment on it, amend it and add to it as they wish.

Having read what Wendy Alexander said about this matter, I should say that we do not want money to be spent on a vast pile of plans that would just gather dust on shelves in local authorities and public agencies. If there is a fairly rational approach, consisting of a range of templates, it should be much easier for a Gaelic speaker or an equal opportunities officer in an organisation to take roughly appropriate templates from elsewhere and adjust them accordingly. That is the way in which we see the process developing.

Dr Murray: Concern was expressed in the Finance Committee about the possible cost of the plans. As both of your organisations have already produced draft plans, perhaps you could provide us with some costings.

Alex Neil: The bill makes provision for public organisations to produce language plans, and there is an issue about the powers over bodies for which Westminster reserves responsibility. However, many of the non-governmental organisations in the private or profit-making sector and in the voluntary sector will be of greater importance in this regard than some of the public agencies will be. For example, some charities could carry information in Gaelic as well as in English, even if they do not produce a language plan. Similarly, you have mentioned road signs, but much road-maintenance work is now done by private organisations such as Amey. It might be possible to impose a contractual obligation on such companies to have signs in Gaelic.

Do you think that the bòrd should have wider grant-giving powers to facilitate charitable organisations' adoption of a Gaelic language plan or production of signage and documents in Gaelic?

Bruce Robertson: I know that the phrase "voluntary sector" covers a huge range of bodies, but, increasingly, it, working in partnership with local government, local enterprise companies and so on, is delivering services on our behalf through service-level agreements. In the Highlands, a prime example of that is in pre-school education.

Alex Neil: Is it in your language plan that provision for Gaelic will be built into service-level agreements as a matter of course?

Bruce Robertson: I was coming to that. Highland Council is quite clear that service-level agreements and contracts that are issued by the departments of the Scottish Executive should contain the sort of commitment that you are talking about. Further, I think that Bòrd na Gàidhlig is well placed to carry out an advisory role in that regard. Your question is a good one and I think that the issue needs to be considered in the final legislation.

Dr Foxley: To give another example, Highland Council has a service-level agreement with HOST, to which we were giving £500,000 a year, part of which was for the promotion of Gaelic language and culture in leaflets. However, the response has been somewhat patchy at times.

I circulated to members some examples where we have used Gaelic—both the language and cultural links—such as for the Sunart oakwoods initiative. It is not about blind duplication of the two languages; it is about giving a sense of place through the leaflets. With a formal body such as HOST, it should be possible to state in the service-level agreement that we expect there to be an appropriate measure of Gaelic language and culture, as Bruce Robertson described; then it is up to the private businesses that are part of the tourism group. Places such as Ireland and certain parts of Canada make a great deal of the sense of place, and a significant segment of the tourism market is interested in going to such places. Whether private businesses want to take advantage of that is down to them, but we certainly feel that where public funding goes in, the responsibility should be there. That is one of the areas in which Bòrd na Gàidhlig would see us being active.

The Convener: What was the public body to which you referred? Was it HOST or something like that?

Dr Foxley: HOST is the Highlands of Scotland Tourist Board.

The Convener: Thank you.

Tormod Dòmhnallach: Chan eil cus agam ri chur ri sin.

A thaobh nam buidhnean saor-thoileach, tha mi a' smaoinachadh gum bu chòir dhaibh taic fhaighinn airson na h-obrach a dh'fheumas iad a dhèanamh airson Gàidhlig a dhèanamh mar phàirt den obair aca. Gu math tric, feumaidh iad sin a dhèanamh airson iomadach cuspair eile co-dhiù. Mar sin, chan eil mi a' smaoinachadh gum bi uallach mòr sam bith ann dhaibh. Chan e gin dhe na buidhnean saor-thoileach nach fheum gabhail a-steach co-ionannachd agus iomadach cuspair eile nuair a tha iad a' sireadh taic bho bhuidhnean poblach airson na h-obrach aca anns an fharsaingeachd.

A thaobh na roinne priobhaidich, tha mi a' dol le Dr Foxley gu bheil buannachd mhòr ann dhan roinn phriobhaidich ann a bhith gan ceangal ann an suidheachaidhean far a bheil e freagarrach dhaibh plana-cànain a bhith aca. [*Briseadh a-steach.*]

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

Voluntary bodies ought to get support for the work that they have to do in relation to Gaelic,

which they often have to do, with other things, on their own. That should not be the case. All voluntary bodies should get support when they seek to support public bodies in the general work that they do. As Dr Foxley said, it is a great advantage if the private sector can link up with that work where it is possible for it to do so. [*Interruption.*]

The Convener: Sorry. The interpreter is finding it difficult to hear Mr Macdonald. I ask him to speak into the microphone.

Tormod Dòmhnallach: Tha mi ro fhada air falbh bhuaith. Tha mi an dòchas gum bi seo nas fheàrr.

A thaobh nam buidhnean priobhaideach, ma chì iad gu bheil buannachd gu bhith ann dhaibh, thig iad gu math aithghearr an sàs ann an gnothaichean Gàidhlig mar a tha a' tachairt ann an dùthchannan eile. Chan eil teagamh sam bith mu dheidhinn sin.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

If private bodies see that there will be a benefit for them, they will quickly join up as far as Gaelic is concerned. There is no doubt that that happens in other countries.

Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab): I will ask a couple of questions about funding. The suggestion of templates that are heavyweight, middleweight and lightweight is a helpful one. I assume that the £10,000 estimate in the financial memorandum is for a lightweight language plan. However, I do not want to pursue that issue.

Are the bill and the new draft education guidelines likely to have implications for other funding streams, such as the Gaelic-specific grant? How should the committee think through those issues?

Bruce Robertson: The Gaelic-specific grant is well established in Scotland; I suggest that, to a certain extent, it is too well established. It would be wise, as part of the development of Gaelic, for Bòrd na Gàidhlig and the Scottish Executive to examine the whole basis of the Gaelic-specific grant, which should be aligned closely to the plan of a local authority or agency.

Highland Council has been proactive in developing Gaelic across the piece, not only in education—although it is clear that education is the biggest spender. The council is in receipt of just under £1 million of specific grant, but we spend £2.7 million on Gaelic. That is our decision. It would probably be wise to review the rationale of the specific grant, align it to plans and take a view on the difference between development funding and core funding.

11:00

Ms Alexander: It would be helpful if you could think about submitting some evidence on this rather sensitive issue. I note that eight out of the 22 authorities that are in receipt of Gaelic-specific grant do not have any Gaelic-medium education at pre-school, primary school or secondary school levels, which seems a significant missed opportunity. That point being made in evidence might be helpful to the committee.

Tormod Dòmhnallach: Feumar coimhead ri maoineachadh airson cànan Gàidhlig anns an fharsaingeachd agus, gun teagamh sam bith, tha sgeama nan tabhartasan sònraichte a' tighinn a-steach ann an sin. Feumar sùil gheur a chur air an dòigh anns a bheilear a' cleachdadh a' mhaoineachaidh sin, a bu chòir a cheangal gu math dlùth ri planaichean-cànain nam buidhnean poblach agus ris a' phlana-cànain Ghàidhlig nàiseanta. Bu chòir an dà rud a bhith air am fighe ri chèile. Bu chòir maoineachadh sam bith a thathar a' cur an sàs airson adhartas a thoirt air a' chànan a bhith air a chur ris na cinn-uidhe sin.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

We have to consider funding for Gaelic in general, and the Gaelic-specific grant is undoubtedly important. We must examine closely how the funding is used. It will have to be connected closely—or interconnected—to Gaelic in public bodies and our national Gaelic plan, the aims of which should be addressed by the funding that is provided to promote the language.

Ms Alexander: I have a supplementary question, which is another request for written evidence, building on what Ken Macintosh said about the supply of teachers and thinking through the financial implications of the bill.

Uniquely, your two authorities have a sense of parental demand for Gaelic-medium education. You also have a definition of "reasonable demand" against which to measure that parental interest, and knowledge of how many people are currently teaching in Gaelic. The 2003 workforce survey suggests that there are only 153 Gaelic-medium primary school teachers and 26 Gaelic-medium secondary school teachers in the whole country. You might be able to quantify for us the gap that exists—at least, in your areas—between the number of teachers at primary and secondary levels and the supply that might be needed to meet "reasonable demand", according to the definition that you discussed earlier. That would be helpful.

Both councils have mentioned the importance of creating routes for existing teachers who have Gaelic to retrain as Gaelic-medium teachers and of having available a range of teaching materials that would allow them to make the transition.

Some guidance on the cost of that would be useful. What might the incentive for existing teachers to retrain as Gaelic-medium secondary school teachers look like—both the incentive to them as individuals and the materials that would be required? That is not absolutely core to the bill, but it would be helpful if we could explore that issue in the context of the wider financial implications.

The Convener: The witnesses are getting some homework to do after the meeting. I hope that they can get back to us on some of the issues.

Bruce Robertson: Indeed, we can. In 2002, I conducted a survey across all local authorities in Scotland and I have some statistics from that. I can update those from the management review group, which is a national group in which all local authorities come together.

The Scottish Executive is committed to having 53,000 teachers in post by 2007. The figures that we are talking about pale into insignificance in comparison to the cost of that. There are major issues for the General Teaching Council for Scotland, as well as for local authorities and the Executive, in providing incentives and in establishing parity with other areas of the school curriculum in which there are shortages. There are some difficult issues for us to tease out.

The Convener: The specific issue is the lack of Gaelic-medium education in secondary schools. I remain surprised that, in Stornoway, in the Western Isles, there is no Gaelic-medium secondary education to any significant extent. We saw some in Portree and there is some in Glasgow, but there is clearly a big gap. Any observations on how we might fill that gap would be useful.

Mr Frank McAveety (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab): I have a brief supplementary to Wendy Alexander's question. She mentioned the status of language plans—heavyweight, middleweight, lightweight, and so on—and the cost figures. When it was suggested that £10,000 might be at the lighter end, the witnesses from Highland Council looked puzzled. It would be helpful to get an approximation of the cost; I know that we will get the detail. We have had submissions from local authorities in which they have suggested that the cost of preparing the language plans will be excessive—even though it will represent only a minuscule percentage of their overall budget. It would be interesting to find out what you think.

I have a further wee supplementary about connecting language plans to outcomes. Over the years, the Gaelic-specific grant has not necessarily had the kind of outcomes that one would have hoped it would have. How do we obtain new developments from those grants?

Dr Foxley: We will come back with the exact figure, but Bruce Robertson and I both thought that the initial cost of preparing the plan amounted to a few thousand pounds—between £2,000 and £5,000, roughly—of officials' time, but we will flesh that out. On top of that is the cost of implementing the plan. In an area in which there is little or no interest in Gaelic-medium education, because the numbers are not there, implementing the plan might just be a question of having available more books that are written in Gaelic in the library. There will be a range of costs.

It would be useful to have evidence from an authority that believes that there is little demand in its area on what it thinks it could reasonably supply. For example, Highland Council and our predecessors both at district and regional level were promoting Gaelic long before we had a Gaelic development officer—it was just part of other officials' responsibilities. If that was the case in Highland until relatively recently, many authorities will not need to employ a Gaelic development officer; promotion of Gaelic should just form part of the role of existing officials and services. It will take up their time, so it will have a cost, but Bruce Robertson and I will do a bit more work on that and come back to you with specifics and on what we think about implementation. As with the teachers situation, I think that much of the issue is to do with displacement and substitution; the cost will be much less than some people fear.

The Convener: I am conscious of time. I assume that Western Isles Council can supplement that information from its point of view, although it is perhaps fair to say that Mr Robertson's other role gives him a wider perspective.

Tormod Dòmhnallach: Tha sin ceart.

Cha leig e a leas a bhith a' cosg a leithid de mhiltean dha buidheann phoblach airson plana-cànain Gàidhlig èifeachdach a chruthachadh. Is dòcha gun gabh tòrr dheth a dhèanamh le daoine a tha mar-thà ann an dreuchdan far a bheil e mar dhleastanas dhaibh a bhith a' cruthachadh ro-innleachdan is planaichean airson iomadach cuspair eile co-dhiù. Chan eil mi a' smaoinichadh gu bheil sinn a' bruidhinn air an ionmhas mhòr a tha cuid de bhuidhnean air a bhith a' bruidhinn air. Bheir sinn am fiosrachadh mionaideach sin air ais dhan chomataidh.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

That is correct.

I do not think that it will cost any public body thousands of pounds to implement a Gaelic plan. Much of the creation of a Gaelic plan has to do with people who are already in place and in work—they have a duty to create strategies and plans. We will come back to you with evidence on that.

The Convener: There are a few issues that we must deal with as we wind up. Frank McAveety has an important question.

Mr McAveety: Many of the submissions that we have received have been about the need to understand not just Gaelic's role as a language, but the role that it plays in culture and in expressions of identity and self-worth. Some of the submissions have had different tones.

My question follows up on the committee's visit to Skye. It is about how we operate the system in practice. In addition to the lack of provision, there is the challenge of the context in which people are able to use the language, which faces not just children of secondary-school age. Both councils have submitted views on broadcasting. Although that is a reserved matter, the fact that the spend falls within the Executive budget means that there is an opportunity to consider digital development. Will you explore that further?

For the record, I express my appreciation of the poetic sensibility of Western Isles Council's submission, which refers to a

"national Gaelic policeman sent out by the Executive to browbeat recalcitrant organisations to sing from the Gaelic hymn sheet."

I thank you for that, notwithstanding the mixed metaphors and my bitter experience of being chased from playing football by Gaelic policemen on the streets of Glasgow 30 years ago. How does broadcasting relate to cultural expression? How might discussion of the bill assist in further opening up the debate that Executive ministers need to have with UK ministers?

The Convener: Thank you for that quick question.

Tormod Dòmhnallach: Tha mi duilich, ach tha eagal orm nach bi an fhreagairt càil nas giorra.

Thairis air na 30 bliadhna bhon a stèidhicheadh Radio nan Eilean, mar a thòisich e, agus Radio nan Gaidheal mar a tha e an-diugh, tha craoladh air eadar-dhealachadh mòr a dhèanamh ann an coimhearsnachd agus ann an saoghal na Gàidhlig. A dh'aindeoin 's gu bheil sinn air a' chuid mhòr den mhadainn a chosg a' bruidhinn air Gàidhlig ann am foghlam, cha bhi Gàidhlig mar chànan maireannach no seasmhach le foghlam a-mhàin. Feumaidh an cànan a bhith stèidhichte anns a' choimhearsnachd agus ceangailte gu mòr ris a' chultar anns na coimhearsnachdan far a bheil sin freagarrach. Tha craoladh cudthromach dha-rìribh airson leasachadh na Gàidhlig.

Gun teagamh sam bith, bidh telebhisean digiteach againn air feadh na dùthcha ann am beagan bhliadhnaichean. Bheir sin cothroman sònraichte a thaobh craoladh tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig na lùib, gun chosgaisean mòra a

bharrachd na dh'fheumas a bhith air a chur an sàs ann co-dhiù. Feumar tòiseachadh a' beachdachadh agus ullachadh a dhèanamh airson sin an-diugh.

A' dol air ais dhan chuspair air an do bhruidhinn sinn roimhe mu dheidhinn ciamar a bheir misneachd do dhaoine a tha a' cleachdadh a' chàin, tha craoladh tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig a' toirt chothroman sònraichte mar-thà dhaibh airson am beòshlaint a dhèanamh agus taic a chur ris an teaghlach. Tha an dà chuspair cudthromach dha-rìribh. Ge air bith dè an dòigh anns an tèid a dhèanamh, feumar rèiteach a dhèanamh air an sgaradh a tha ann an-dràsta eadar Riaghaltas Lunnainn, air a bheil an t-uallach airson cumhachdan craolaidh, agus Riaghaltas na h-Alba, air a bheil an t-uallach airson a' mhaoineachaidh. Feumar dòigh air choreigin air sin a rèiteachadh.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

I do not think that the answer will be any shorter.

In the 30 years since Radio nan Eilean—Highland radio, as it is called today—started, broadcasting in general has made a great difference at community level in the Gaelic world. We have talked about education a great deal, but Gaelic will not last in education alone; it must be based in the community and strengthened in the culture.

Broadcasting is important to Gaelic development. There is no doubt that, in a number of years, digital television will be broadcast throughout the country and will provide special opportunities for Gaelic broadcasting without incurring huge costs. We need to think about that today and prepare for it from now.

To return to the need to encourage people to use Gaelic, there are already opportunities for people to make a living in Gaelic broadcasting. We need to settle the split between the broadcasting powers that are in London and those that we have in Scotland.

Bruce Robertson: There are two dimensions to this; I will talk about the wider dimension. There is a wonderful Gaelic cultural renaissance among young people in the Highlands and Islands—it is now cool to carry a fiddle. The fèisean movement has been enormously successful in bringing genuine interest and activity in Gaelic culture. As a consequence of that, it is leading scores of young folk, and indeed their parents, into an interest in learning the language—witness the annual fèis Rois week in Ullapool, in October this year, when where there were hundreds of young folk from across the Highlands, in particular from Ross and Cromarty.

That cultural renaissance is positive and the bill must make a link between the cultural dimension,

Gaelic culture and language development. Highland Council feels that the issue about funding for broadcasting between Westminster and Holyrood needs to be addressed. There are also issues about the quality, as well as the quantity, of Gaelic broadcasting. Perhaps the vice convener will say something about that.

Dr Foxley: On Monday morning, at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, members heard comments about the quality of what is available, but one of the key issues is to reach out to young children aged between six and 10. I have always thought that if one of the cartoons on children's BBC on a Saturday morning was in Gaelic with English subtitles, the rest of the planet could follow it quite reasonably and it would give a little confidence boost to those who are in Gaelic-medium primary education and would make the language that they are learning relevant not only to their grandparents, uncles and aunts in their community, but to the children themselves.

There is always confusion about the broadcasting control situation, but one of the tasks is to make the funding that is available to broadcasting relevant to the people who want to receive it.

The Convener: That is useful. I am conscious that we still have to hear from Glasgow City Council and that we are coming to the end of our time. There are one or two other quick questions.

Fiona Hyslop: I attended last October's fèis Rois and it was very impressive.

If there are any disputes about the content of language plans, the bill provides that they can be referred to ministers. Sabhal Mòr Ostaig suggests that there might be a need for an independent review mechanism. Do you agree with that or is it excessive?

Dr Foxley: I would not want to add to costs, which have been talked about. The comments about using one of the existing ombudsmen seem reasonable.

Tormod Dòmhnallach: Chan eil beachd làidir againn air sin. Gu ìre, mar a thuirt sinn cheana mu dheidhinn ballrachd Bòrd na Gàidhlig, is dòcha nam biodh rud beag a bharrachd neo-eisimileachd ann gun dèanadh sin a' chùis.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

I do not have a strong opinion on that. We were talking before about the membership of Bòrd na Gàidhlig and perhaps it would be better if there were a bit more independence there.

11:15

Alex Neil: To save time, I shall ask two questions in one go. First, can you spell out in a bit

more detail your proposal for greater incentives for adult learners? We have heard a lot about funding for education authorities and the like, but do you have specific ideas for providing greater incentives to adult learners?

Secondly, the economic benefits were mentioned earlier, and I think that you suggested that you had assessed some of the economic benefits. It would be helpful if you could say a brief word about that and supply us with some additional follow-up.

Bruce Robertson: What we had in mind was the sort of incentive that would take a fluent speaker back into a full-time learning environment. We know that there are many fluent speakers who cannot travel, because of their circumstances, to urban centres such as Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen to further their training. One of the incentives that we could give them, to help them to grow in confidence, would be to help them to access training. Similarly, Government-sponsored agencies such as Careers Scotland could take proactive steps to encourage adult learners into Gaelic. Finally, people could get advice about the job opportunities that such learning might open up to them. That is the sort of thing that we had in mind for people who want not simply to go to an evening class to learn the language—we are not talking about that—but who want career and economic benefits through lifelong learning experiences.

Dr Foxley: Perhaps I can answer the question about economic benefits by giving a couple of examples. The figures for vacancies always surprise me. At present there are 21 jobs in Lochaber, and they are all well-paid permanent jobs. There are eight vacancies and 50 opportunities coming up. In any other context, that would be a major economic initiative. That is one of the messages that we need to get out.

The committee was at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig on Sunday night and Monday morning. I think that, without Sabhal Mòr, the Sleat peninsula would be a backwater of holiday homes, and there would not be too many of those either.

There is a wider point that we should consider. I have been a doctor now for more than 30 years, but I was astonished by the ability to absorb language that my first child had at the age of two—it was quite remarkable. He is a bright kid, but he is not exceptional in any way, and I was able to throw in a bit of French as well, with my poor O level. If we are able to train people so that they have a multilingual brain at an early stage, they might leave Gaelic-medium primary school or a primary school where they have learned Gaelic as a subject and go out into the world and spend the rest of their lives in South America, but their ability to pick up Spanish so that they can work

there will be far greater, and their economic opportunities will also be much greater.

I will leave you with one little fact that I learned at Sabhal Mòr at lunch time. I found out from Sabhal Mòr researchers that people from ethnic minorities are more likely to speak Gaelic and to send their children to Gaelic-medium education. In fact, the Chinese Scottish population has almost double the percentage of Gaelic speakers that the white Scots population has. The same is true in the Indian and Pakistani communities, although there it is not so strong. The issue is the ability of people from such backgrounds to understand the benefit of multilingualism. I feel strongly that we need to pursue that in Scotland, because it will give us an edge over the rest of the UK, which, frankly, just shouts at everybody louder in English.

Tormod Dòmhnallach: Dh'aontaichinn ri sin cuideachd. Chan eil teagamh sam bith ann, agus thathar a' gabhail ris air feadh an t-saoghail, gu bheil comas cànan sònraichte aig clann òg suas gu naoi no 10 bliadhna a dh'aois. Leis gu bheil iad ag ionnsachadh cànan ann an dòigh nach ionnsaich inbhich, tha mi a' smaoinichadh gu bheil cothrom sònraichte ann aig an àm sin.

Ach tha cunnart ann cuideachd, gur dòcha gum faigh a' chlann dìth misneachd nuair a thèid iad dhan àrd-sgoil mura tèid togail air sin agus mura h-eilear a' leantainn air adhart leis an oidhirp agus leis an fhoghlam a fhuair iad. Gun teagamh, tha a' chlann a tha a' dol tro fhoghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig a' soirbheachadh anns a h-uile cuspair nuair a ruigeas iad ìre àrd-sgoil agus ìre oilthigh. Chan eil teagamh sam bith nach bi cothroman cosnadh sònraichte aca aon uair 's gun tòisich iad a' dol an sàs ann an gnìomhachas sam bith, ge air bith am biodh iad a' cleachdadh Gàidhlig no nach biodh.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

I agree with that. Throughout the world, it is accepted that children up to nine years of age have a special ability to learn language in a way that adults cannot. There is an important opportunity at that age, but there is also a danger that kids might be discouraged when they go to high school if there is no continuity in the effort to educate them through Gaelic. There is no doubt that Gaelic-medium kids succeed in all subjects at high school and university and will have exceptional career prospects, whatever language they use.

The Convener: Thank you very much. Although the session went on for rather longer than we had intended, it was very useful. The evidence that we received was good stuff. We are grateful to the representatives of Western Isles Council and Highland Council for giving us their time this morning. We will take account of your evidence in

our deliberations on the subject. We have given you a number of homework items, and I would be grateful if you could come back to us as quickly as you can reasonably manage on the substantive requests that have been made.

We were going to take a two-minute break, but the clerks are anxious for us to press on, as some people have to leave us shortly. We will quickly change panels.

I welcome—without the benefit of headphones in this instance—the representatives of Glasgow City Council. We are pleased to have with us Dawn Corbett, the head of corporate policy, and Christine Higgison, the head of primary schools for the city's education service. We are keen to take the perspective that you can share with us on your Gaelic-medium primary school units and secondary school unit. Perhaps Glasgow City Council can be described—only in this context, I hasten to add—as a middleweight authority.

Do you want to say anything to kick things off? If so, I ask you to be reasonably brief. I think that we have not received a written submission from you.

Christine Higgison (Glasgow City Council):

No, our evidence came through our policy and resources committee as part of the council's response to the consultation on the draft bill.

As the convener said, I am the head of primary schools in Glasgow and have responsibility for the development of Gaelic-medium education in the city. The two main council departments that deal with Gaelic are our education services and cultural and leisure services departments.

Glasgow has been heavily involved in Gaelic-medium education since the time of Strathclyde Regional Council, which was the first council to set up a Gaelic-medium primary unit and, subsequently, a secondary unit. When Glasgow City Council came into being in 1996, parents asked us to look at the further development of Gaelic-medium education. Working in conjunction with an advisory group, we produced a development plan that took account of pre-five, primary, secondary and adult education. In addition, our cultural and leisure services department provides for adult learners and works with An Lòchran to develop the cultural facilities in the city.

Dawn Corbett (Glasgow City Council):

Christine Higgison has covered education and cultural and leisure services. If the bill becomes an act, there will be wider implications for the council.

In the previous evidence-taking session, there was a lot of discussion about the costs of the plan. I have tried to look at some of the costs that could arise outwith education services, although I do not underestimate the difficulties of doing so.

Obviously, the content of the plan will to some extent be determined by the resources that are available. Therefore, it was rather like estimating the length of a piece of string, but I have brought some information, which may or may not be of assistance to the committee in identifying what the costs would be. The only guidance that we have so far is in the financial memorandum, which lays out the core components of a Gaelic plan. It suggests a cost of up to £20,000 for each authority for signage and letterheads. We can incorporate changes to letterheads with minimal cost by changing them incrementally. However, I understand from colleagues in land services that in 25 locations throughout Glasgow a major route comes into the city and there is a sign indicating that it is Glasgow. If we replaced those signs for the purposes of promoting the language, that would cost between £20,000 and £25,000.

The financial memorandum states that up to £10,000 will be available for letters, press notices and advertising. The council's budget for recruitment and public notices is £2 million per annum. There is also to be an allocation of up to £10,000 for printed translations and interpretation at meetings. It is hard to gauge what the demand for that will be, but at present it is negligible. So far this year, we have had four requests for translated information about council services—for the district court, the registrar's office, environmental health services and one other that escapes me. We generally receive about half a dozen requests for translation per year. Based on the cost of dealing with those requests, if that number went up to 100, it would cost about £10,000. That does not give a lot of clarity, but it gives the committee an idea of where the council's responsibilities outwith education might lie.

The Convener: The witnesses from the Highlands and Islands made much of the need for a rights-based approach—they talked about equal validity, secure status and so on. The Gaelic community in Glasgow is significant, although it is obviously not as dominant as it may be in the Western Isles. What is your view on secure status and equal validity in the Glasgow context? Do you attach any meaning to those words? What would you have to do and take into account?

Christine Higgison: A considerable number of people with a Gaelic background live in Glasgow. The city was a traditional area of employment for people from the Highlands and Islands in past years. There are also people who have an interest in developing Gaelic as an indigenous language and who would therefore support the request for secure status for the language. However, Glasgow City Council has a policy of inclusion and must respond to the needs of the many people from other ethnic minority groups who live and work in the city. Therefore, we would still need to take

account of people whose first language is Urdu, Punjabi, Chinese or whatever. The number of asylum seekers in Glasgow has increased the number of languages and cultures in the metropolitan environment. Nevertheless, the Gaelic language must be regarded as an indigenous language in Scotland. While we need to provide for other languages and cultures, they are not in danger of dying out throughout the world, which is the difficulty with Gaelic in Scotland. Therefore, Glasgow City Council supports the desire for secure status for the language because of the need to keep the language living.

The Convener: Do you support the call for what might be described as equal validity with English, which has overtones beyond those of the call for secure status?

Christine Higgison: As we made plain in our response to the consultation on the draft bill, the council supports the call for equal status.

The Convener: To come back to where we began, what does that mean in practice in Glasgow? We can see some of the implications for education services, which we will come to in a moment, but what about other services?

Christine Higgison: Obviously, Glasgow is not the same kind of environment as those in the Western Isles and the Highlands. We would give opportunities to people within the city who requested that status. However, there would be implications for every council service if they were to respond to requests for any correspondence to be dealt with in Gaelic. That would have considerable implications for the city, but it is nevertheless the will of those whom we have consulted through the Gaelic advisory group that the council should support secure status.

11:30

The Convener: Is that the view of the council as well as of the Gaelic advisory group? Does the council have a policy?

Christine Higgison: I do not think that we have a policy. We commented on the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Bill during the consultation.

Dr Murray: What was your reaction to the draft guidance that was issued by the Executive in September this year? The guidance says that those

"authorities in receipt of the Specific Grant for Gaelic education should set out 'a commitment to deliver Gaelic medium education as an entitlement at pre-schools and primary wherever reasonable demand exists'".

How does Glasgow City Council interpret the phrase "reasonable demand"?

Christine Higgison: Glasgow City Council has developed pre-five and primary education

considerably during the past eight years. We had the Gaelic-medium unit and we have been able, until now, to meet the demand from any parent in the city—or from some of the councils outside the city that might have asked for only one or two children to receive education through the medium of Gaelic. As a result, we were asked to develop an all-through Gaelic school. The primary school opened about four years ago with a pre-five unit, and so far we have been able to take in all the children for whom a place has been requested.

We have reached the stage at which, to continue to provide that education, we will need to be able to provide other accommodation for the pre-five and primary elements. We have other pre-five elements throughout the city and, at the moment, we can meet the demands of any parent who wants pre-five education for their child. There is sufficient space within the secondary education unit, but we are doing a consultation exercise on a school for pre-five, primary and secondary education, or an all-through school. The council is considering that at the moment and the matter will go to committee in a couple of weeks. We will then get the views of elected members on the results of that consultation.

We are happy to provide for any parent who wishes their child to be educated through the medium of Gaelic at any of those levels. That is what we wish to maintain. The authority is in receipt of Gaelic-specific grant, which we have used to develop Gaelic-medium education from a small unit. In 1996, there were about 70 pupils in the primary unit and there are now about 171 in the primary school; there were no places for children in pre-five education and there are now 100 part-time pre-five places. We have also continued to develop secondary education needs in Hillpark Secondary School.

Dr Murray: Some respondents to the consultation suggested that the bill should give a specific right to Gaelic-medium education. What are your views on that? From what you have said, it does not sound as though you would have a great problem in fulfilling that at present.

Should the bill include other measures to support Gaelic, such as support for adult learners and for Gaelic as a second language?

Christine Higgison: Support for adult learners is made available through the cultural and leisure services department and through a Gaelic-specific grant. In the past, about three or four secondary schools in the city had demand from Gaelic learners for the teaching of Gaelic as a second language, but since the development of Gaelic-medium education in Glasgow, we have not had that demand. We have considered the implications for Gaelic language in the primary school, which is the equivalent of modern languages.

Our difficulty is that we do not have sufficient staff to teach through the medium of Gaelic. Other local authorities throughout the country would also find it difficult to provide education through the medium of Gaelic. As my colleague said, there are implications not just for financial resources, but for human resources in terms of how many teachers are available. If we go ahead with the all-through school approach in Glasgow, that would enable schools in other authorities in west central Scotland to access the benefits of Gaelic-medium education for their children. That might be a way of supporting other local authorities.

The Convener: I think that I am right in saying that the secondary Gaelic-medium unit that I visited teaches only certain subjects, rather than the whole curriculum, through Gaelic.

Christine Higgison: That is right. That is one reason why parents have requested an all-through school that will develop Gaelic-medium education across more subject areas. Moreover, the children in Gaelic-medium education cannot access the full curriculum in English-medium education because they must take two to three periods a week to develop their Gaelic. The fluency issue for children is such that they are heavily involved in developing their Gaelic when they are in primary. However, if that is not continued beyond primary, their Gaelic stagnates. Their development must be kept going and the best way of doing that is to use Gaelic to teach other subject areas.

The difficulty lies in having enough subject specialists who can teach their subject through the medium of Gaelic. We have had difficulty in recent years in recruiting such teachers. We feel that that situation may be about opportunities for career development for secondary teachers. The provision of an all-through school in the central belt may encourage people to regard Gaelic-medium education as a way not only of continuing career development, but of helping to enhance the development of children's Gaelic education.

Mr Macintosh: Although its path has not been difficult, Glasgow City Council should be praised for its development of Gaelic-medium education. Glasgow is at the forefront, because it had the first Gaelic-medium primary school and it now has the first Gaelic-medium secondary. That is fantastic, particularly because Glasgow is outside the Gaidhealtachd.

I want to pick up on the point about the rights and status of Gaelic. Has Glasgow City Council had difficulty in interpreting individuals' rights to access services from the local authority through the medium of Gaelic?

Christine Higgison: I am sorry, but I am not clear about that.

Mr Macintosh: Perhaps a couple of examples that we heard in evidence will help. We heard

about people not being able to register in Gaelic with the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency and to get a licence with their name in Gaelic. We also heard that the Royal Mail has refused to issue stamps in Gaelic. It is obvious that you have a well-developed Gaelic education policy that can meet demand throughout the city, but are there other areas along the lines that I have indicated that have caused interpretation difficulties?

The examples that I gave illustrate the point about Gaelic having equal status. The issue is not just about providing a blanket of security by sending out the message to the Gaelic community that Gaelic has a future, but about people's rights when they ask a local authority for services through the medium of Gaelic. Has that aspect ever been a practical problem?

Christine Higgison: Not as far as I am aware. One of the things that the council realised when it responded to the consultation paper on the bill was that, if the bill achieved secure status for Gaelic, the council would have to accept its responsibility to respond to people who wished a response in Gaelic. The council has accepted that it would have to develop such provision. Again, as well as having financial implications for the council, that would have resource implications. I appreciate that my colleagues from Highland Council talked about having Gaelic development officers in the council already, but that is because their council serves an area in which there is a great demand for Gaelic from the local population. Glasgow City Council is aware that it would have to develop its approach if the language were to be given secure status. Dawn Corbett might want to add something.

Dawn Corbett: I cannot think of a specific instance of a practical problem arising and I do not recollect a discussion in that context in relation to the bill. However, we have responsibilities under the Race Relations Act 1976 and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. An ethnic group can have cultural and linguistic characteristics, so if someone required a service in Gaelic we would have to bear those responsibilities in mind.

Mr Macintosh: I just wanted to explore the practice, as opposed to the potential for difficulty.

What difficulties do you face in supplying teachers to meet the demand for Gaelic-medium education? Perhaps you do not have any difficulties.

Christine Higgison: We do not have particular difficulties at the start of a new session, because we now take on probationers, which has been a tremendous help. We try to encourage probationers where necessary and we are happy to offer them primary school posts. That approach ensures that we do not lose people who come

through Gaelic training. Before probationers had the opportunity automatically to take up a post for the year after they completed their course satisfactorily, they would look for any job and if they found one in English-medium education they might well be lost to Gaelic-medium education. We have worked with other authorities in the west central belt to try to ensure that probationers are given opportunities. Given the growth of Gaelic-medium education in Glasgow, we have been able to take on the people who have been seeking posts.

However, outside that window or during the year when we need supply teachers to cover absences it is almost impossible to find people—there are just not enough of them. At secondary level, it is almost impossible to find anyone outwith Gaelic history or geography. The social subjects appear to be the areas in which most of those graduates are qualified, so it is very difficult to find someone to teach mathematics, chemistry or computing, for example.

Mr McAveety: Eight or nine years ago, when you embarked on the strategy, could you see its potential? A key message in the submissions of a number of folk is that Gaelic is an opportunity rather than a burden. How do you deal with the questions that might be raised in the city about the language development needs of other ethnic minority groups? There are competing challenges for resources in places like Glasgow.

Christine Higgison: There are competing challenges and such comments have been made by one or two people, but not by the majority. Other ethnic minority groups have been extremely supportive of Gaelic. Glasgow Gaelic School is in an area that has a high ethnic minority population and the school has built close links with the community. Of course, through its bilingual units and asylum seeker projects Glasgow provides considerable support for children from other ethnic minority groups. The international school provides opportunities to learn Punjabi and Urdu, for example, and we support the development of Cantonese, in particular in the primary sector in the Garnethill area. Many opportunities are provided for the development of the languages of people in the city. Obviously the council wants to develop that further if there is demand from those groups.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Should the bill set out particular requirements of members of the bàrd?

Christine Higgison: In what way?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The question relates to the call for some members to be directly elected and to Sabhal Mòr Ostaig's request that members should have a communicative knowledge of Gaelic.

11:45

Christine Higgison: If people are to be involved in developing the language, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig is correct to say that some involvement in the communicative language is needed. Whether members need to be indigenous Gaels is another matter. If the language is further developed, even people with a Gaelic background may not have the language and may therefore be regarded as learners. The council has not taken a view on whether elections should take place.

The Convener: The council has not taken a view on direct elections.

Christine Higgison: We have not.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Would you support all public bodies producing language plans?

Christine Higgison: Yes. If the language is to be taken forward, maintained and developed, the public bodies, which can develop it more successfully, need to have plans.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Does it follow that you wish, although UK bodies do not come under our jurisdiction, that we should express a view to such bodies that operate in Scotland on whether they should produce language plans for their work here?

Christine Higgison: Any body that provides work in Scotland—regardless of whether it is a UK or European body—needs to be subject to the same responsibilities as is any other public body in the country.

The Convener: The position of UK bodies is open to question. We have asked for a background note on that, to make the situation clearer.

Ms Alexander: I dealt with financial issues with the first witness panel. I will not ask you a specific question; I simply invite you to comment on any financial aspects of the bill.

Dawn Corbett: I think that you were out of the room when I spoke initially about some of the costs that the council would probably have to meet for signage, advertising, translating and interpreting as part of the language plan. The amount that is allocated in the financial memorandum contrasts with the costs that may be incurred. For example, the financial memorandum allocates £10,000 for communications, but our advertising budget is £2 million, so a £10,000 contribution to that would be relatively small. However, we do not receive resources from elsewhere to translate materials, so the allocation would naturally be welcome.

Christine Higgison: In authorities such as Highland Council and Western Isles Council, much

has already been developed. The heavyweights may have much in place. One finance issue is that middleweight and lightweight councils would have to build up to that. Those councils would initially require support for development.

As for £10,000 for consultation, Glasgow City Council could spend £10,000 to consult on the development of a Gaelic school. If we consulted all interested parties throughout the city on a plan that would affect not only education services and cultural and leisure services, but every other service, £10,000 would not begin to cover the cost. To meet its requirements, the council would have to increase its staffing, because it has no council officer who could develop Gaelic. That has implications for efficient and effective government.

Fiona Hyslop: You indicated that you support a statutory right to Gaelic-medium education. Unfortunately, we have not seen your written response on the draft bill—I am sure that the clerks will forward it to us—but the draft bill did not refer to education. Are you comfortable with section 9, or do you think that the bill now blurs the edges between the responsibilities of Bòrd na Gàidhlig and those of education authorities, which are responsible for the quality of education under the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000? Do you feel comfortable with Bòrd na Gàidhlig having a responsibility to issue guidance on Gaelic-medium education? Do you agree with Highland Council that there should be a more explicit connection between the bill and the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000?

Christine Higgison: I certainly agree that the connection should be more explicit. The draft guidance on reporting that was issued does not appear to have any link with the bill. I also agree with Highland Council that the responsibility for education lies within the jurisdiction of education authorities and that Gaelic-medium education is an important part of that. As a member of the management review group, to which Bruce Robertson referred, I know that education authorities have close links with Bòrd na Gàidhlig. We wish to continue to develop those links.

Fiona Hyslop: Other witnesses have suggested that disputes over whether a language plan that was submitted to the bòrd was acceptable should be referred to an independent review mechanism. Do you have any views on that?

Christine Higgison: I agree with Highland Council that there are sufficient ombudsman opportunities already. Obviously, elected members would be concerned if the bòrd were to make statements that conflicted with the policy of their local council.

Fiona Hyslop: How should such disputes be resolved?

Christine Higgison: The ombudsman should be able to take into account the particular needs.

The Convener: I want to return briefly to the issues around secure status. I am anxious to get a flavour of what practical things an authority such as Glasgow City Council—a middle-range authority in this context—would have to do for that. I am not asking for an answer today. In effect, Glasgow City Council already has the elements of a Gaelic language plan, given all that it is doing just now and the things that it is thinking about doing. For example, it has been suggested that the all-through Gaelic school might be linked to a Gaelic cultural centre for the cultural hinterland, so the Glasgow scene is not unimportant in that context. Therefore, I want to get a feel for the implications of secure status on things such as bilingual street signage—only the major roads into Glasgow were mentioned, as opposed to all Glasgow streets—and the use of Gaelic in the courts.

It would be helpful if we could get a bit more of a spin-out on what the implications would be for Glasgow City Council if that kind of rights-based approach were to be adopted. Some of those details may have been given in the council's original response to the Executive, but it would be helpful for us to get a flavour of what that kind of approach would mean for an authority such as Glasgow, which has a significant number of Gaelic speakers but is not in the Gaidhealtachd.

I think that that exhausts our list of questions. I thank the witnesses for a useful and helpful session. If they want to come back to us on other issues beyond what they have been asked to do, that would also be helpful. In the meantime, I thank them for their attendance this morning. I also thank the translators for their assistance earlier.

Meeting closed at 11:53.

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