

EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT COMMITTEE

Monday 17 March 2003
(*Afternoon*)

Session 1

£5.00

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EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT COMMITTEE

8th Meeting 2003, Session 1

CONVENER

*Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab)

*Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)

Irene McGugan (North-East Scotland) (SNP)

*Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

*Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)

Fiona McLeod (West of Scotland) (SNP)

*attended

WITNESSES

Chrissie Bannerman (Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park Authority)

Allan Campbell (Bòrd Gàidhlig na h-Alba)

Bill Dalrymple (Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park Authority)

Councillor Eric Gotts (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities)

Jon Harris (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities)

Boyd Robertson (Bòrd Gàidhlig na h-Alba)

Hilary Robertson (Scottish NHS Confederation)

Fraser Sanderson (Dumfries and Galloway Council)

Lena Wilson (Scottish Enterprise)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Martin Verity

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Susan Duffy

ASSISTANT CLERK

Ian Cowan

LOCATION

Loch Lomond Shores, Balloch

Scottish Parliament

Education, Culture and Sport Committee

Monday 17 March 2003

(Afternoon)

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 14:16*]

Gaelic Language (Scotland) Bill

The Convener (Karen Gillon): I call the meeting to order. We are now in public session. All mobile telephones and pagers should be switched off or in silent mode.

We have received apologies from Irene McGugan and Cathy Peattie. The City of Edinburgh Council was due to give evidence this afternoon, but on Friday it declined our invitation to do so.

The purpose of the meeting is to take further evidence on the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Bill prior to consideration of amendments at stage 2, which the committee hopes to undertake next Tuesday. Various witnesses will give evidence today. Members have copies of the written submissions that we have received.

First, we will take evidence from Bòrd Gàidhlig na h-Alba. I welcome Allan Campbell, who is the board's chief executive-elect, and Boyd Robertson, who is its vice-convener, and invite them to make introductory remarks prior to questions. I understand that Allan Campbell will speak in Gaelic first and then repeat his remarks in English.

Allan Campbell (Bòrd Gàidhlig na h-Alba): Bu toigh leam dìreach facal a ràdh ann an Gàidhlig aig toiseach na cùise bhon is ann air Gàidhlig a tha sinn a' bruidhinn feasgar an-diugh. Tha mi ag iarraidh taing a thoirt dhuibh às leth Bòrd Gàidhlig na h-Alba airson an cothrom seo facal a ràdh ribh. Bha Bòrd na Gàidhlig airson gum biodh an cothrom seo aca tighinn agus taic a chur ris na beachdan a nochd a' chomataidh mar-thà anns an aithisg. Bha sinn cuideachd airson gun toireadh sinn thugaibh na beachdan a rinneadh leis a' bhòrd ann am beagan cothrom a tha air a bhith againn gu beachdachadh air an aithisg gu ruige seo.

On behalf of Bòrd Gàidhlig na h-Alba, I thank the committee for the opportunity to come to the meeting and support the consideration that the committee has given to the bill. I want to show the board's commitment to legislation for Gaelic. The

board has not had an opportunity to consider the bill in great detail, as the board has been in existence for only a matter of weeks, but we thought it extremely important that the board should be represented today and that we should try to help the committee in any way that we can.

The Convener: For the benefit of those who are in the public gallery, the bill has passed stage 1 of the parliamentary process. The committee considered the bill at stage 1 and thought that amendment was necessary in a number of areas at stage 2. However, given the implications of potential amendments, we thought that it was important to take further evidence.

The areas in which it was thought that amendment was necessary centred around the implementation of the bill and whether it should be implemented initially only in the four local authorities that are named in the bill or throughout Scotland from day one. The committee's view was that it should probably be implemented throughout Scotland from day one, but that we should begin to consult on how that could be done. That is one of the main areas in respect of which we are considering amendments.

The second area relates to the role of the board and whether it could have responsibility for overseeing the implementation of Gaelic language plans. The committee has taken advice on that matter and has been told that it would be very difficult for such responsibilities to be given, in view of the non-statutory footing on which the board has been established. However, we want to reconsider the matter and explore in detail with witnesses and the Executive how the board could have a legitimate role in progressing and monitoring the implementation of Gaelic language plans if the bill is amended at stage 2 and passes stage 3.

The final matter for discussion is the ombudsman's role in overseeing, which probably complements well discussion about the board's role. That is the background. We will explore with witnesses how we make progress. I open the meeting to members' questions.

Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP): I thank the board for the paper that has been distributed to us and for the positive stance that was indicated to the committee and the chamber at stage 1. We are now giving the bill detailed consideration, although this meeting is preliminary to stage 2 and is not part of stage 2. Stage 2 will take place only if the Parliament passes a financial resolution, which can come only from the Executive. We will know tomorrow whether that will happen. Should that happen, we will move to detailed amendment of the bill.

As the convener said, legal advice strongly suggests that—as the Executive has said—for

formal involvement in overseeing the bill's implementation, the board would require to be made a statutory body. The bill cannot do that; the Executive would have to do that later.

I presume that you will confirm what I am about to say, but I will put it to you anyway. I presume that the board would be open to an instruction from the minister to become involved in Gaelic language plan development by local authorities and other bodies, in supervising how that was done and in advising those authorities and ministers on how that should be properly done. Suitably resourced, the board could do that willingly on instruction from the minister, rather than merely by statute. Although that might be a second best, would you welcome such involvement if it could be prompted by ministerial instruction?

Allan Campbell: Yes.

Michael Russell: Good. That is excellent and gets us a step further.

The hardest question in the bill is that of implementation throughout Scotland—particularly in areas that do not consider themselves to have a history and heritage of Gaelic, even if they do. The suggestion has been made—it is also in a letter that I wrote to the Presiding Officer this morning as a result of discussion with Executive officials—that the bill might contain a threshold below which bodies would have to prepare a simple Gaelic language plan that said what they were doing, what they would like to do and the ways in which Gaelic was important, but nothing else. Such bodies would not have to meet the minimum requirements in the schedule. Above that threshold, the full force of the bill would apply to the detail of the plans. A lighter touch would be applied to the bill's implementation by authorities that were not in a position to do much about the bill or that felt that it was not central to their concerns. Such points were made in the chamber by George Lyon among others, in relation not to his area, but to other areas.

It has been suggested that the threshold in the bill might be the percentage of Gaelic speakers in a local authority's area. In 17 local authorities, fewer than 1 per cent of people are Gaelic speakers. How would the board react to that in terms of the realpolitik of the situation and the desire to get the bill into operation as early as possible?

Allan Campbell: You will understand that I cannot speak for the board on an issue that it has not discussed in detail. However, I will respond to the concept of language planning as part of a national plan for Gaelic by describing how that thinking has developed. It has never been the intention of Bòrd na Gàidhlig to impose Gaelic on

people who do not want it. The intention is to enable people who want to use it to do so in as many situations as possible. That is what we describe as normalisation of the language. For that reason, the board would probably expect language plan implementation—whether by area, region or whatever—to vary according to the demand from the Gaelic-speaking community in that area. Clearly that means that where there are more Gaelic speakers, we would expect more action to be taken more quickly, and vice versa.

Boyd Robertson (Bòrd Gàidhlig na h-Alba): We could draw some parallels and make analogies with regard to this issue, the most relevant and closest of which would be found in Wales. The Welsh Language Board, which has been established for some time, has taken a consensual approach to language planning in local authorities where differing levels of the Welsh language are spoken.

There is also the model presented by the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, to which various Governments sign up. However, the Governments sign up only to certain parts of the charter and certain instruments within it. That avenue could be explored.

Ian Jenkins (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): At the end of your submission, you state that you want to draw three matters to our attention. First, you say:

“The Bill should relate to the whole of Scotland.”

I take it that, after discussing the matter with Michael Russell, you have accepted the way in which it will apply to the whole of Scotland and the flexibility of such an approach.

You also say that the board

“would require to have a legal basis within the Bill with powers to take decisions on Gaelic planning by public organisations”.

I cannot remember whether it was Michael Russell or the convener who did so, but someone has pointed out that it is not possible to do that in the bill. Would you prefer us to wait and implement such a statutory element all at once or are you quite happy with our gradualist approach, which allows the bill to proceed but does not make Bòrd Gàidhlig na h-Alba a statutory body?

Allan Campbell: I cannot answer that question in detail because, as I said earlier, I cannot speak for the board. We recognise that an aspiration behind the board's establishment is to produce a national plan for Gaelic in Scotland in a cohesive and consensual manner and to achieve that objective through language planning. Indeed, Boyd Robertson highlighted an example of such an approach in Wales.

There is a general acceptance that that approach is the best way forward for Gaelic.

However, the board recognises that if it is to be involved in the process of formulating and implementing any plan, it must have a direct link into the whole planning process. I feel that the board would prefer—and would probably find it easier—to have direct involvement in any plan than to be involved through an ombudsman. I do not think that the ombudsman is involved in Wales; the approach is more hands-on and the link more direct than that. That is the position that we would aspire to.

Ian Jenkins: But Michael Russell has proposed a sort of halfway house where we would encourage the minister to give the board a role that is not wholly statutory but is embodied in some kind of advice or guidance. Do you accept that that is better than nothing?

Boyd Robertson: It is difficult to give you an answer to that question. After all, the board was set up only in January and has not had time to go into the nuances of the debate. However, in general, we would welcome any advance on the present status of the language. Indeed, the establishment of the board enhances that status and several developments have already flowed from it. We would view any move towards securing the language's future on a legal basis as an advance.

As far as the board's powers are concerned, the board will expect local authorities to develop language plans. Enshrining that legally would mark an advance on the present position, but I recognise that we will have to wait for another piece of legislation to put the board on a statutory basis. My position is that I do not want to wait indefinitely for legislation to enhance the legal basis of the language.

14:30

Ian Jenkins: I am simply exploring the idea because you are speaking as if there is some ambiguity about your position because you have met only a couple of times. Someone who did not want the bill to pass could say that we are rushing it and should wait. Do you agree that we should move ahead and that the bill should pass as Mike Russell has prepared it, or should we wait and do it a different way in six or eight months?

Boyd Robertson: It is difficult for us to speak on behalf of the board at this juncture. However, the board has already stated that it wants the bill to relate to the whole of Scotland. That is the board's position and what you have suggested is a movement towards meeting that ambition. It is impossible for us to give a definite view on behalf of the board. We have to speak personally.

Ian Jenkins: Paragraph (7) of your submission says that you want the board to have

"powers to take decisions on Gaelic planning by public organisations."

What kind of decisions would you take?

Allan Campbell: If the board is going to operate in a similar way to the Welsh Language Board, which is the most likely scenario at this stage, it will be expected to work with and advise public sector bodies on the creation and preparation of plans. I hope that this would not happen very often, but if it were necessary to suggest that the plan should be strengthened, the board would do that also. The current aspiration of the board is to work with people rather than imposing anything on anyone.

Ian Jenkins: Perhaps I took that phrase out of context, but it sounded ever so slightly authoritarian.

Allan Campbell: I would not want people to think that the concept of public sector plans for Gaelic is new and is something to be feared. Over the past 10 to 15 years, many public sector bodies in Scotland have been developing plans. Both Highland Council and Western Isles Council have plans that have recently been reviewed and updated. Those plans have existed for quite a long time.

Other organisations that might not be so obviously associated with Gaelic have taken initiatives of their own volition. Those organisations include the Ordnance Survey, which has successfully developed and implemented a Gaelic policy and strategy over the past two years, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the National Museums of Scotland, the Scottish Arts Council and Scottish Natural Heritage. Some of you might have noticed in the press today that Asda is the latest company to join others in the food sector in taking up the cudgels for Gaelic. Interestingly, Asda started to do that in Corby and has developed the practice in Aberdeenshire and Elgin. Tesco, the Co-op, Marks and Spencer, McDonalds, Dunfermline Building Society, Caledonian MacBrayne and ScotRail are also on the honours list as far as Gaelic policies are concerned.

That is not a comprehensive list, but I hope that it is indicative of the fact that a lot of activity is already happening by consensus. I do not see why, as such policies and strategies develop in the future, we should be expecting to run into difficulties that we have not experienced until now.

Ian Jenkins: That is what we learned during the earlier evidence-taking sessions. We hope to move forward in that way because there is resistance to the idea of a heavy hand. I simply wanted to put the matter before you.

The Convener: I assume that the aim of Bòrd na Gàidhlig is the normalisation of Gaelic.

Allan Campbell: Yes.

The Convener: Do you accept that the kind of plans that are in place in the Highlands and Islands would not be appropriate at this stage for some local authorities? However, the driving force for the committee—I cannot speak for the promoter of the bill—is that there might be a need for some kind of plan to allow us to move forward rather than to remain stagnant. The committee believes that things are pretty low and that if we do not do something, they will not get any better of their own accord. The bill is one measure that would help the situation. How should the smaller local authorities in areas where there is no history of Gaelic begin to devise a plan?

Allan Campbell: In the stage 1 debate on the bill, reference was made to the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000, which identifies Gaelic as an educational priority in Scotland. The follow-on was that local authorities were expected to produce a plan on Gaelic-medium and Gaelic education and, if there were no demand in a local authority area, the plan would state that. The implication was that each authority had to be mindful that there was a duty to recognise that Gaelic education was a priority and that the need for it should be considered, whatever the outcome. Clearly, if there were no demand in an area, no major action was necessary.

To a greater or lesser extent, that is how local authorities have dealt with Gaelic in the past 15 years. Twenty-three local authorities in Scotland are in receipt of specific grant funding for Gaelic education at varying levels, which is indicative of the fact that those local authorities have developed ways of addressing Gaelic education.

Boyd Robertson: There is a precedent within the context of the European charter. Wearing another hat, I chair the Scottish Qualifications Authority's Gaelic assessment panel. The SQA received an inquiry from the Scottish Executive about its position on Gaelic, as a result of which a process was put in train, although I must point out that Mike Russell's evidence collection for the bill also helped to stimulate that process. The SQA considered what it does for the language through national qualifications, examinations and other aspects of development such as Gaelic orthography—which is important in its own way—and devised a policy. That example might provide a model for Bòrd na Gàidhlig—or whichever body will institute the process—of how an expectation laid upon an authority to produce a statement of its position and future intentions can work.

It might be presupposed that Dumfries and Galloway Council, representatives of which will give evidence later today, is one of the areas to which the convener alluded as having little involvement with the language. However, I must

point out that Galloway was a stronghold of the language at one stage in history and that William Neill, who is one of the few trilingual poets in Scotland and who writes in all three languages of the country, lives in Galloway. My institution, the University of Strathclyde's Jordanhill campus—formerly Jordanhill College of Education—has had students from Dumfries and Galloway, one of whom now teaches through the medium of Gaelic at secondary level in East Kilbride. It must not be thought that areas such as Dumfries and Galloway do not have the potential to contribute to the regeneration of the language.

The Convener: Thank you—that is an important statement.

Michael Russell: I have one final question, which echoes an earlier line of questioning from Ian Jenkins. We need to be absolutely clear about the position of the board. I am not asking you to make an ex cathedra statement on its behalf, as the position to which I will refer has been notified to me and other members of the committee by the board's convener, Duncan Ferguson.

As I understand it, the position of the board is that it supports the bill and wishes to see it pass in this parliamentary session but thinks that it is important for it to be amended in certain ways. The board says that the bill should

“relate to the whole of Scotland. ... Bòrd na Gàidhlig would require to have a legal basis ... This would dispense with the necessity for an Ombudsman.”

Was that and is that the official position?

Boyd Robertson: I confirm that was the position.

Michael Russell: And it remains the position.

Boyd Robertson: And it remains the position.

Michael Russell: The only difficulty in that position is that it is not possible for the bill to give the board the legal status that all of us wish to see—the committee has indicated that wish and certainly I want it to have legal status. In those circumstances, surely an instruction by the minister might be a step towards that? Although you cannot give an opinion on that, might that be something that the board would consider?

Boyd Robertson: Yes.

Michael Russell: Thank you.

The Convener: There is a lot of myth and potential distrust around what the bill is about. One of the ideas that is circulating is that if the bill is introduced, local authorities throughout Scotland will have to have their road signs in Gaelic. If the bill is amended to apply to the whole of Scotland, what would it do in practice?

Allan Campbell: This is a personal opinion. As I said earlier, I would like the Gaelic-speaking

community in Scotland and people seeking to learn the language to be able to use it in as many situations as possible. It is incredibly important to stress that that does not mean that every public body in Scotland must employ Gaelic-speaking staff or that their staff have to be able to answer the telephone in Gaelic. It will not lead to any of the other absurd suggestions that have been made in the media from time to time about the aspirations of the Gaelic community.

I said earlier that the philosophy is one of normalisation, by which I mean enabling and not coercing people. I would like to think that any legislation for Gaelic would give the people who want to use the language the opportunity and the right to do so, without in any way infringing the rights of those who do not want to use it.

Boyd Robertson: Legislation of this kind, rather like the institution of Bòrd na Gàidhlig itself, would contribute to a climate change on the language—it would place the language in a different context. The bill would elevate the language to national level and give it greater profile and recognition.

At the local level, the bill would help local authorities. That said, we need to be clear that we are not talking only about local authorities, but about national bodies such as the SQA. The bill would allow those bodies to articulate policies and to say clearly what they are doing at the moment and where they would like to go. That is not a million miles from the requirements of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000, which requires local authorities to include language plans in their education planning. The bill opens up the way for such planning in other fields including the arts and community education, which is a key area for the future regeneration of the language.

There are active bodies of learners in parts of the country such as Edinburgh and Dumfries and Galloway, which are not normally thought of as strongholds of the language. We need to support those learners at local and national level. Mr Jenkins asked whether the bill would place an imposition on local authorities. We must move forward by consensus and by providing incentives, rather than by imposing sanctions. I am content that there are no sanctions proposed in the bill. We need to provide incentives—rather like the incentives that are offered under the specific grant scheme for Gaelic education, which is voluntary. Under the scheme, local authorities that want to make provision for the language receive up to 75 per cent of the costs of a new project. That is the sort of change that the bill could achieve.

14:45

The Convener: I thank the witnesses from Bòrd Gàidhlig na h-Alba for their evidence.

We will now take evidence from Fraser Sanderson, director of education and community services at Dumfries and Galloway Council; Jon Harris, director of policy and legislation for the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities; and Councillor Eric Gotts of East Dunbartonshire Council, who is also representing COSLA. We have received your written submissions. If you would like to make introductory statements, you are welcome to do so.

Councillor Eric Gotts (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities): We appreciate being given the opportunity to comment on the committee's stage 1 report on the bill. I wear several hats in COSLA. I am a member of the cross-party group on the education executive—I pass on apologies from Helen Law, who is unable to make it to this afternoon's meeting. I am also the spokesperson for COSLA's leisure and cultural affairs group.

As the convener indicated, we have submitted written evidence to the committee. Our first point, which is an important starting point, relates to linguistic heritage. I refer members to the first sentence of our submission, which states:

"COSLA is happy to support the development of the Gaelic language—and other languages/dialects such as Scots and Doric—regarded as priorities by our member councils."

COSLA represents 29 local authorities, among which there are as many differences as there are similarities—there is great variety among our councils. We welcome the fact that the committee recognises one of COSLA's concerns about the bill, which relates to areas of Scotland where there is no real tradition of Gaelic. Today we will hear from a spokesperson for one such area, Dumfries and Galloway. We are concerned about the practical implications that a lack of Gaelic speakers would have for the meaningful implementation of a council's Gaelic plan. I refer members to paragraph 42 on page 7 of the committee's report, which acknowledges the practical difficulties of implementing the bill.

We seek clarification on two issues. Depending on the answers that we receive, it is possible that we will be more positive about the bill than we were initially. Finance is the first issue. Councils that are already heavily involved in the development of Gaelic have highlighted the need for financial resources—Highland Council talked about that when it last spoke to the committee and you have also heard from Western Isles Council. The need for resources for implementation is crucial—indeed, the need is more crucial at that stage than it is at the preparation stage. It is all very well to have plans, but it is worse not having the resources to implement them than it is to have no plan in the first place. That is a matter of concern to COSLA. We are glad that the

committee mentioned the need for resources and that the issue was debated at stage 1. We will be interested to hear more on the subject.

Flexibility is the other issue that needs to be clarified. We were in the public gallery this afternoon and were heartened by some of the comments that were made. Mike Russell used the phrase “lighter touch” and we heard that a one-suit-fits-all approach would not apply. We, too, have highlighted the need for flexible application if the bill’s provisions are enacted across Scotland.

The committee report hints that there could be amendments. Paragraph 43 on page 7 refers to some specifically. Those amendments would ensure that plans were based on local needs and local demand. That would concur with COSLA’s policy of according maximum flexibility to councils.

We are in favour of the spirit of the bill, but those two issues particularly concern us and we hope that they will be clarified today.

Ian Jenkins: I was glad that you were pleased to hear what we had to say earlier in the meeting. Michael Russell painted a scenario of a potential 1 per cent threshold of Gaelic speakers. Is that a reasonable starting point for ensuring that a local authority with a small Gaelic-speaking population does not have huge impositions put on it? Do you accept that the spirit of that amendment would allow us to say, as we wish to, that Gaelic is a language that should have a national status yet should not impose unreasonable burdens on local authorities?

Councillor Gotts: That would be a useful starting point. I highlighted the fact that local authorities have a variety of matters to deal with. Language development is a crucial factor. Many local authorities have large ethnic minority populations, on which there is a lot of emphasis and into which many resources go. Other councils deal with asylum seekers. Therefore, there are many language-priority issues. Flexibility is important, particularly where little Gaelic is spoken and where there is little Gaelic tradition.

Jon Harris (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities): The capacity to implement is another issue. A number of our councils mentioned the difficulty of recruiting and retaining Gaelic-speaking teachers, as well as of developing a potential in their own staff to speak Gaelic. Flexibility is an issue, too. For example, on time scales, it would be better if artificial restrictions of one, two or three years were not placed on councils in relation to seeing the fruits of the new money that is going into teacher training.

Ian Jenkins: We all recognise that the supply of Gaelic speakers and Gaelic teachers is one of the factors that might hold back the development of the language—quite apart from the terms of the

bill. Mike Russell is making an effort to recognise that and is not taking an authoritarian approach. Distance is a factor in relation to the Borders and Dumfries and Galloway. Aonghas MacNeacail is in the Borders and arrangements have been made to have Gaelic tuition in the area. We wish to encourage that and I take it that you would wish to encourage it, too.

Councillor Gotts: I will bring in the spokesperson from Dumfries and Galloway Council to highlight the issue. There is little Gaelic provision in Dumfries and Galloway and not a great tradition of the language, despite what was said earlier.

Fraser Sanderson (Dumfries and Galloway Council): Despite the somewhat pre-emptive strike from the board’s spokesperson about Dumfries and Galloway, I am not sure that a case can be built on one student who was at Jordanhill several years ago. As Councillor Gotts said, there are occasional requirements, which are met wherever possible, usually in the community-education learning area by small groups of people who wish to develop their skills.

There is no recent embedded tradition in Gaelic language or culture in Dumfries and Galloway, nor is there a demand for it. I would be sorry if the bill were to run into resentment or reluctance because of the imposition on all local authorities. I am relieved to hear about the flexibilities and the thresholds, but there are still questions about funding and personnel and about the time scales and the different shapes of plans appropriate to different local authorities.

The word “consensus” was used. There is a feeling abroad that two areas that have always been part of the bedrock of Scottish education are under threat. First, we arrive at policy and practice by consensus. That might not be how something that is imposed by statute is interpreted. Secondly, local authorities are given flexibility to adapt, develop and implement according to local priorities.

William Neill has been mentioned. We said in our submission that there is a rich heritage of Scots language and local literature in Dumfries and Galloway. We have invested heavily in that. Even William Neill is much anthologised, but in English.

Michael Russell: And in Gaelic.

Fraser Sanderson: I was talking about our local collections, because we put together collections for schools, and there is a translation.

The Convener: I ask members of the committee not to shout over those who are giving evidence. They will have an opportunity to make their points.

Fraser Sanderson: Perhaps I should have said, “predominantly in English”. I am not trying to make

a point about that; I am saying that we chose as a priority to invest in a Scots language development officer. That has worked because there is a good body of literature anthologised and available. The language is accessible to children and they bring it to school.

The second point that Councillor Gotts touched on is that, in any test of appropriateness, people coming into the area with English as a second language or with communication problems occasioned by hearing or visual impairment would be a priority also.

15:00

The Convener: In our deliberations on the bill, the committee has had various discussions about community languages. Everyone who has given evidence has made it clear to us that community languages are important and that we should have a language plan for community languages. However, community languages will not succeed or fail on the basis of what we do in Scotland; they will succeed or fail based on the communities from which they come. We are the only community, apart from Nova Scotia, with responsibility for Gaelic. While recognising the role of community languages, on which the committee has produced a report, we felt it important that, in the specific case of Gaelic, only Scottish people have a guardianship of the language, which they need to uphold and take forward.

On the issue of flexibility—in case you are here under some misapprehension—doing nothing would not be an option under the bill if it applied to the whole of Scotland. Flexibility is about where we are and where we are going; it is not about saying, “We do not have any demand, so we will make no provision at all.” It is important that we dispel that myth. The committee will be looking for development plans rather than just statements of intent to move forward.

You mentioned places where there is no tradition of Gaelic speaking and no demand for Gaelic-medium education. The evidence that we have received has shown that part of the problem is that, in some places, there is now no tradition and no demand and therefore no development of the Gaelic language. The language has been allowed to become stagnant or to decline.

I come to the bill not as a natural supporter of Gaelic, but having been on a pretty steep learning curve over the past four years in the Parliament. I believe that the bill is about halting the decline in Gaelic speaking and about developing the language. The Borders and South Lanarkshire, where I come from, are not traditional Gaelic-speaking areas. However, the evidence that I have received from my constituents is that even people

who do not speak the language want it to survive. The bill is about how we, the Parliament, and you, the local authorities, can help to take that process forward.

How do you see yourselves drawing together a Gaelic language plan in your local authority areas if the bill is passed and applies to the whole of Scotland?

Fraser Sanderson: Was that question addressed to me?

The Convener: To both you and Councillor Gotts. You come from different local authorities with different traditions.

Fraser Sanderson: The question is interesting, as it assumes that the bill has been passed. I find it difficult to answer, given that there are still so many uncertainties about the requirements that would attach to the implementation of the bill and given what we heard earlier. Somebody referred to the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc 2000 Act and the requirement to develop improvement plans. We did that and trawled the area. I have to say that, at the end of that process, we found that there is not a demand for Gaelic, which is why it does not appear among our priorities. If there were a statutory requirement for Gaelic, we would have to go back to the drawing board and develop an awareness of the language, which we would build into school courses. We would review what we are providing in community learning and, where there was a demand for Gaelic education, we would meet that locally.

Councillor Gotts: I totally agree with your comments about the need for Gaelic to be developed, convener. You are dead right to say that flexibility does not mean the status quo; there has to be progress and movement.

Paragraph 43 of the committee's report mentions what happened in Wales. The third bullet point talks about the production and implementation of language plans. However, that must happen in a staged way and it will vary from one authority to another. East Dunbartonshire Council supports Gaelic-medium education at primary school level. In drawing up a plan, we would want to conduct an audit of what we do and find out the weaknesses and gaps in that provision. One of the biggest gaps is at secondary school level. Youngsters can go to high school and learn Gaelic as an academic subject, but they are not taught in Gaelic—they do not get a Gaelic-medium education. That is the next stage.

Some authorities have not even reached the first stage. You are correct to say that there has to be flexibility, but there also needs to be some light at the end of the tunnel. There cannot simply be a for-ever-and-a-day attitude. Ian Jenkins's remarks on the 1 per cent threshold of Gaelic speakers were useful in that regard.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): My apologies for being slightly late. As I told you earlier, convener, I was away to see a group of pensioners. They were celebrating a 21st birthday—not theirs, but that of the sheltered accommodation where they stay. I apologise, therefore, to the witnesses.

I wish to ask Fraser Sanderson a question. The committee is minded to accept the principle of extending the bill's measures to the whole of Scotland, for the simple reason that we do not want to create de facto ghettos of Gaelic speakers. However, the key issue is the practicality of implementation, rather than that principle. I note what councils have been saying about flexibility and time scales and I note what you have said about caution and about whether it is appropriate to go for full-blown language plans. Mike Russell's intention—unless I picked him up entirely wrongly—proposes a minimalist approach for authorities such as Dumfries and Galloway Council, so that there would be little, if any, impact. Given that, might your view change?

Fraser Sanderson: I have been coming out of the red corner on the issue, given that there is a blue corner. I fully appreciate the arguments that have been presented. I was serious when I said that we would caution against engendering resentment around the country by going down a statutory route. The situation would depend on the additional resources that are available and on how resources are diverted from elsewhere to reflect priorities. If you were to push me into my own corner and ask whether I could live with further expansion on the conditions and flexibilities, I suspect that the answer would be yes.

Jackie Baillie: That is helpful. I think that there is a potentially huge variation in the content of language plans, depending on the local authority area in question and on the needs and the size of the population. We will need to do further work on that.

You mentioned resources, as does COSLA's submission. Let me home in on that point. Has COSLA done a scoping exercise and have local authorities given any indication of the resources that would be required in general? I ask you to offer a Dumfries and Galloway perspective on that, given that we suspect that, in relation to the language plans, yours will be the minimum requirement.

Jon Harris: We consulted councils formally in relation to the committee's stage 1 report. Thirteen councils got back to me, including those local authorities that were originally designated. Some authorities still have difficulty in accepting the principle behind the bill. A number of councils are in between; they accept the principles, but their concern is about the extent of the flexibility and

whether the resources will be available. Discussions such as the one that we are having today, on the approach that councils such as Dumfries and Galloway Council or Scottish Borders Council could take, will make it easier to estimate the resources that will be required.

Take the work that is being done on interpreting and translation services across the country. We received some figures on the costs of those services but I think that they are too high for what we are talking about today, as we are not saying that interpreting and translation services are a requirement as of right. However, we will need to reconsider some issues. I am not sure about the time scales that have been proposed for coming back to the committee with estimates. Are we really talking about 24 hours?

Jackie Baillie: I think that we are talking about yesterday.

Jon Harris: In any case, I would not want the committed councils to be disadvantaged. Argyll and Bute Council, Highland Council and Western Isles Council are looking to put in additional resources. The councils that were cautious welcomed the stage 1 report, but wanted clarity on the level of flexibility. On the understanding that there was to be a consensual approach, they would feel much more confident about the resource issue. However, some councils still would not want the bill to be progressed—I have to mention those.

Jackie Baillie: By name?

Jon Harris: I can pass that information on to the clerks. There was no chance to put the matter to the whole Orkney Council, but a leading political spokesperson was consulted. Orkney Council and Dundee City Council would not see the bill as a priority.

Councils will see as constructive the dialogue that we are having about how the language plans might be implemented flexibly. Those in the middle will feel more confident about giving an estimate.

Fraser Sanderson: I would like to add Dumfries and Galloway Council to the list of the councils that would prefer the measures not to be taken forward through statute. I reckon that, if the bill was enacted and we were at the first phase of implementation, that would cost us somewhere in the region of £50,000 a year. That would involve a development officer and materials, and additional resources would have to be put into community learning.

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): We do not have Glasgow City Council representatives before us today, but we have its submission, which apologises in a sense for the fact that representatives have not come today.

The submission states:

"The meaning of Gaelic having equal status to English is unclear and should be clarified."

Do our witnesses believe that that is an issue? Is further clarification of "equal status to English" needed?

Jon Harris: A number of councils were concerned about the meaning of the test of appropriateness and reasonableness. They understood from the stage 1 report that the bill allowed for flexibility. The issue is whether the public would recognise that. There was a concern about whether the bill would be seen as providing entitlement and whether there would be litigation if provision was not made. Some people would think that the bill, given its terminology, provided for entitlement and would perhaps not focus on the issues of appropriateness and reasonableness.

Michael Russell: I welcome Councillor Gotts's evidence, which has moved on a stage since we heard from him previously, which is positive. I apologise to Fraser Sanderson—I cross swords with him often, but usually in correspondence—but I always jump to the defence of my old friend Willie Neill, whose 80th birthday I celebrated some months ago. He wrote extensively about the experience of being somebody who had acquired Gaelic, but from a background where it had been lost. He reflected on exactly the points that Fraser Sanderson was making and on the way in which the things that he mentioned were indivisible.

But enough of literature—can I save you some money? For authorities that are under the 1 per cent threshold—17 authorities are under that threshold—the only requirement will be to draw up a basic plan. That is not firm; thinking is going on and I welcome your views. The basic plan would cover what you are doing, why you are doing it, what demand you think exists within the area and what you might think of doing in the next five years—it would be a five-year plan. There would be no obligation to do anything else and, indeed, the bill would protect your right not to do anything else. You would not have to meet the requirements in the schedule, because you would have made the statement.

If the next census showed that the number of Gaelic speakers in the area had risen, you would have to do more. The bill might be amended later on, but it would require the local authority to consider the issue. In the words that Boyd Robertson used, you would have to raise the profile and put it into the thinking of the authority. People might then come to you and say, "There are more things that we could do—here is a community group that could be set up to do some things."

That plan would be your requirement in the minimalist position. It would be recognised, but it

would not cost you £50,000. Indeed, you would not have to employ anybody, should you choose not to. However, should you voluntarily wish to do it, you could do anything that you wanted.

15:15

Fraser Sanderson: I am grateful for that. It is difficult to estimate something when one is not sure of its basis.

That is a minimalist approach. I am not sure that it would constitute a development plan as such, but it might grow into that. I would be very grateful if there were opportunities to save money.

Michael Russell: The important thing is that, as the representatives of the board indicated, nobody is trying to force this on you. It is essential in some places because of the state of the language and, in fact, the language can be revived in those areas. A national stance is essential. In areas such as yours in the Scottish Borders, all participation would be welcomed. However, that must be achieved by voluntary means, providing that there is a baseline understanding that you should be thinking about it.

Councillor Gotts, does that link up more closely with the evidence that you gave originally, and does it reassure you?

Councillor Gotts: I think so; that is a reasonable way forward. Like all new developments, one must let them sink in and see what the implications and repercussions are. As one of the other speakers rightly said, councils were a bit defensive at the beginning because they felt that they were stepping into the unknown. We know a lot more now and we have had a lot more reassurance, not only today but over the past few months. In fact, COSLA feels more positive towards the bill on the basis of what you have said.

Michael Russell: Fraser Sanderson's note mentions

"The possibility of litigation against the local authority by individuals".

That possibility was raised extensively at stage 1, and I commend not only the stage 1 report but the *Official Report* of meetings at stage 1. The drafting is such that this is not an area in which individuals could legitimately make and succeed in such actions. There is no guaranteed demand. People such as me might like there to be, but the bill does not give that. I commend the stage 1 process, particularly the hearings at that stage.

Jon Harris: It is understood that people would have no basis for litigation. The concern is that, having raised expectations, councils do not like to say no.

Michael Russell: However, councils would be perfectly entitled to say yes, should they choose to do so. They would not find themselves being legally forced to do things. If there were demand, one might see that as part of democracy.

Ian Jenkins: Some authorities are still reluctant to accept the principle that the bill should apply to them at all. We have spoken about the unique place of Gaelic and the fact that we have a particular responsibility for it. However, would it have seemed wrong if the Executive had introduced a bill that said that every local authority should have a plan for languages? Is it conceivable that any authority that formulated such a plan would not mention Gaelic?

Fraser Sanderson: The answer to your second question is yes. Nobody would have resisted the proposal that there be plans for languages, but some might not have included a plan for Gaelic.

A counter-rumour strategy is required because the point about litigation and double-language signage and the fear that somebody who also has English will be entitled to demand an interpreter are part of the hare that is running out there about the bill.

Ian Jenkins: Discussions such as those that we have had about this matter ought to comfort people who are worried about the myths.

Michael Russell: The national park is not the place to talk about shooting hares, but I must say that all attempts are being made to shoot those hares. I hope that they have been well and truly shot by the results of the discussions today.

The Convener: I am not sure whether that was a constructive comment, Mr Russell.

Thank you very much. If there are no further questions, I shall suspend the meeting for five minutes.

15:21

Meeting suspended.

15:30

On resuming—

The Convener: We will now take evidence from Lena Wilson, who is the senior director of customer relations with Scottish Enterprise, and from Hilary Robertson, who is the director of the Scottish NHS Confederation. I thank them for coming. We have their written submissions. If they do not want to make introductory remarks, we will proceed to questions.

Michael Russell: I have not seen Scottish Enterprise's written submission.

The Convener: Maybe there is not one.

Michael Russell: We have not seen one.

I have a couple of questions for Hilary Robertson. I thank her for her evidence, which is extremely positive and sensible and which considers practical issues. Before the bill was lodged, it was decided that it should specifically exclude health service practitioners because of the additional burden that it would put on them. Hilary Robertson's submission is correct that plans

"should reflect ... local circumstances, and that plans are likely to look very different in different parts of the country."

I am particularly impressed by the way in which that point is related to customer demand. What might the national health service do to assess demand in its areas?

Hilary Robertson (Scottish NHS Confederation): The health service is already required to make available services and information in a number of minority languages and mechanisms are in place for that. I envisage that NHS boards would want to work closely with their local authority colleagues in assessing the demand for Gaelic. At present, the languages that the health service deals with tend to be those of people who have come to the country and who do not speak English. The priority for the health service is to ensure that such individuals have access to services and information in their languages, because otherwise they would be disadvantaged and might not receive the health care that they require.

Gaelic is slightly different. I suspect that, apart from for the obvious areas such as the Western Isles and parts of the Highlands, there is not much existing information about what the level of demand for Gaelic would be. Useful and relatively up-to-date information will be available from the census and I expect health boards to use that and to work with local authority colleagues, for example through education, to ascertain the likely demand. An initial assessment might have to be made, which can then be adapted over a period of time.

Michael Russell: The second point in your submission, which is about shared and pooled support for sustaining Gaelic language plans, is eminently sensible. Local authorities might also want to consider ways in which they could work together to ensure that services are available to them. I commend that point and I hope that the committee will bear it in mind as it considers the bill.

I am sorry that because I have not seen Lena Wilson's submission, I cannot ask her anything other than a general question. I ask her what her attitude towards the bill is.

Lena Wilson (Scottish Enterprise): I apologise that you do not have a copy of our written

response, which we sent to the committee. I have a copy with me, which I can hand round.

We are positive about any efforts to promote Gaelic in Scotland. As members know, our remit covers economic development in Scotland. If the lack of ability to write and converse in Gaelic with our customers were an obstacle, we would want to consider the matter positively. We have a lot of experience in dealing with languages from all over the world, including experience in publishing material in other languages.

We have some Gaelic on our Scotland Europa website and Careers Scotland, which is a pan-Scotland organisation, has four or five school publications in Gaelic. Last year, one of our local enterprise companies published a summary of its annual report in Gaelic, Braille and Bengali. We have just been awarded the UK customer charter mark, which requires us to be happy to translate into other languages. Given that, as members will know, we are doing a lot of work on racial equality, we would not want to exclude any minority group or language.

It might surprise members that more than 40 per cent of the Gaelic speaking, reading and writing population resides in the Scottish Enterprise area. Those people are centred in Glasgow and Edinburgh. I was interested in the issue of the 1 per cent threshold.

We are positive about the bill. Colleagues from local authorities raised questions of resources and we have some of the same questions and concerns about what an action plan would mean in terms of implementation. For example, we have a customer helpline. Would we have to have any Gaelic-speaking staff on the helpline? Would we have to have business advisers who speak Gaelic? To what length would we have to go?

I have some estimates of what translation would cost us, if the committee is interested. It would cost about £1,200 to translate our annual report into Gaelic, and a run of 3,000 copies would cost in the region of £3,000 to £5,000, depending on the type of publication. Each local enterprise company is also required to publish an annual report. The cost could be significant.

Michael Russell: It is interesting that you raise those questions. The use of Gaelic in commerce is not directly covered by the bill, but you heard Allan Campbell talk about good practice. Good practice exists in marketing, and Caledonian MacBrayne and a number of the whisky companies are deeply involved in it. The Welsh Language Board was of the opinion that after the initial discussion, commercial bodies eventually came to see the use of Welsh as integral to the work that they were doing. They saw it not as an additional cost but as part of their costs that produced commercial

benefits. Presumably, you would not disagree with that, and you think that that might develop over a period of time.

Lena Wilson: I would not agree with the general premise, but regardless of how it is regarded after some time, initially translation and extra printing in many marketing media would be an additional cost. As new media are moved into, it is much easier to do web-based and less glossy brochures. Portable document format and Word files can be used, which can be printed off, and that can become part and parcel of what is done. We have never in the history of our organisation and the network had a request for anything in Gaelic, as far as I am able to ascertain. We have had many requests for other languages and we are proactive in our international marketing in other languages, but we have never had any requests for Gaelic to date.

Michael Russell: But if you did have requests you would take a positive approach to them, rather than a negative one.

Lena Wilson: If we had a request, we would take a very positive approach to it.

Jackie Baillie: I welcome Scottish Enterprise's support for the principle of the bill, and for extending it across Scotland, but how would you take that forward in a practical sense? Would Scottish Enterprise address the issue centrally, or would it devolve it to the LEC network to take on board? If it is devolved, how would you monitor any variations?

Lena Wilson: To the extent that we are not yet sure exactly what the bill would mean for us, that is a difficult question to answer—I guess that the first answer is that I do not know. However, we would want to take the most cost-effective and customer-oriented approach, so it may be that we would do something once for the whole network and use it many times. For example, we now have only one format for our annual report, not 12, although we allow local content. I imagine that we would take the same cost-effective but market and customer-oriented approach.

Jackie Baillie: A different way into the question is to ask how you handle requests for documents in Punjabi, which might be an issue for Scottish Enterprise Glasgow, but less of an issue for Scottish Enterprise Dunbartonshire.

Lena Wilson: If that request came directly to Scottish Enterprise Glasgow, it would deal with it. If the content could be applicable to the rest of Scotland, Scottish Enterprise Glasgow would make it available. A customer could arrange in advance for an interpreter to be present at an annual meeting to help them to ask questions. We try to make such opportunities widely available, although the take-up is not great.

The Convener: Are there any questions from members? You are getting off very lightly this afternoon.

Michael Russell: Could we ensure that we get a copy of the Scottish Enterprise submission today?

The Convener: Lena, did you say that you have a copy of your submission with you?

Lena Wilson: Yes, we do.

The Convener: It would be helpful if we could circulate copies.

Lena Wilson: The carrier pigeon must have broken down on the way to you.

The Convener: The positive nature of both of your contributions has silenced us. Maybe that is a tip for the future for anybody else who is coming to give evidence. Thank you. I hope that you have enjoyed your afternoon at Loch Lomond.

Our final set of witnesses is from the Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park Authority. Good afternoon and thank you for having us in what is a beautiful setting on a beautiful day. We are probably seeing Loch Lomond at its best.

Bill Dalrymple (Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park Authority): Absolutely.

The Convener: It feels like a warm summer's afternoon when you want to be out there on the boat, but it is nice to be here.

We are joined by William Dalrymple, who is chief executive of the Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park Authority, and Chrissie Bannerman, who is a member of the national park authority. Their submission has been circulated to members. Do they want to make any introductory comments?

Bill Dalrymple: Chrissie Bannerman will read out a statement.

Chrissie Bannerman (Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park Authority): I will circulate an English translation for the few.

The Convener: Could you read out your statement in Gaelic and then read it out in English?

Chrissie Bannerman: Shall I do both?

The Convener: If that would be possible. For the purposes of broadcasting and so that those who may be listening away from this room might understand, it would be helpful if you could do both, if that is okay with you.

Chrissie Bannerman: Yes.

Tapadh leibh airson cuireadh a thoirt dhuinn an seo an-diugh, agus fàilte oirbh fhèin gu Bruaichean Loch Laomainn.

Thank you for inviting us here today. Welcome to Loch Lomond Shores.

Tha e annasach agus iomchaidh gu bheil sinn an-diugh ann am bealach air stairseach Pàirc Nàiseanta Loch Laomainn agus nan Tròisichean a' deasbad dè an seasamh a tha aig a' Ghàidhlig ann am beachd-smuain bòrd na pàirc.

Am mòr thimcheall oirnn, tha an dearbhadh gu bheil a' Ghàidhlig snaighte ann an cridhe na pàirce. Tha i gar cuairteachadh anns na h-ainmean-àite. Tha sinn ri taobh Loch Laomainn, àilleagan na dùthcha. Tha Tùr Dhrum Fhionghuin air ùr thogail le ainm às ar dualchas. Tha Abhainn Leamhann a' sruthadh dhan locha. Faodaidh sinn siubhail a dh'Earra-Ghaidheal, far an do stèidhich na Gaidheil à Èirinn iad fhèin an toiseach ann an 500 AD deiseil gus an cumhachd a sgaoileadh thairis air an dùthaich ris an can sinn Alba an-diugh mar chuimhneachan air na daoine ealanta sin. Eadhon na bu tràithe, aig Caisil air taobh eile na locha, bha iad air dùn a thogail a tha nochdte chun an latha an-diugh. Sin na daoine a dh'fhàg againn an dileab phrìseil—an cultar agus an dualchas a tha sinn a' dìon ann an amasan na pàirc.

Tha buill bòrd na pàirc nàiseanta agus na h-oifigearan glè mhothachail mun dileab phrìseil seo. Dh'iarr sinn air comhairliche tuigseach aithisg a dheasachadh—tha copaidh dheth agaibh—air dè an t-slighe a bu chòir dhuinn a leantainn. Tha sinn a' gabhail allamh ris na molaidhean aige cho fada 's a tha sin ann an comas a' bhùird. Is ann a' leudachadh a bhitheas sinn ma bheir Riaghaltas na h-Alba dhuinn an cothrom.

Tha na h-uimhir de dh'ainmean-àite agus de shoighnichean ann an Gàidhlig. Tha Gàidhlig an lùib nan taisbeanaidhean follaiseach agus èisteachd anns na h-ionadan turasach. Thathar ga cleachdadh gu ìre ann an litreachas fiosrachaidh na pàirc. Ged nach eil a' Ghàidhlig ga cleachdadh mar chànan ann am farsaingeachd na pàirc, is i as nochdte agus as làidire a thaobh cultar agus dualchas.

Is e pàirc nàiseanta a tha seo; buinidh i do dh'Alba gu lèir dìreach mar a bhuineas a' Ghàidhlig. Seach gu bheil a' Ghàidhlig cho cudthromach nar dualchas, is e a tha a dhìth, nam bheachd-sa, gum biodh dà-chànanas cho follaiseach 's a ghabhas e a bhith taobh a-staigh na pàirc. Tha sin an urra ribhse aig a bheil cùram ar cultar agus ar dualchas aig an ìre as àirde an cothrom a thoirt dhuinn le Bile Cànan na Gàidhlig (Alba).

Tha pìos bàrdachd snaighte anns a' chloich a tha air ùrlar na h-ionad turasachd an seo fhèin aig stairseach na pàirc. Tha mi ga mholadh dhuibh:

A òigridh mo dhùthcha,

...

Biodh bhr ceum air a' mhullach,
Is bhr n-uchd ris na speuran.

15:45

It is interesting and appropriate that we should meet today in Balloch, at the gateway to the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs national park, to discuss the Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park Authority's policy on Gaelic.

All around us is the oral and visible evidence that Gaelic is at the heart of our national park. It resounds in the place names. Every time that you mention Loch Lomond, the jewel in our crown, you are speaking Gaelic. Drumkinnon tower—this very place—although it is a new building, takes its name from our heritage. The River Leven, which flows into the loch, bears a Gaelic name. Within the park, we can travel to Argyll, which means “the coastland of the Gael”, where the Gaelic-speaking Scots—or Gaels—from Ireland first settled in 500 AD before extending their power throughout the country that, today, we call Scotland in recognition of those talented people. Even earlier still, at Cashel, on the other side of the loch, they built a fort, which is visible to this day.

Those are the people who gave us the precious legacy of our culture and heritage, which we promise to nurture and protect in the national park authority's aims. The members of the board and the officers of the park authority are highly conscious of their duty to that precious legacy. The interim committee asked heritage consultant Michael Glen to prepare a policy document for us on the use of Gaelic and other languages in informative and interpretive media. You have a copy of that document. We are following its recommendations as far as is feasible in the park authority's life. We hope to develop our commitment, should the Scottish Executive give us the opportunity.

A fair number of signs and place names in the park are in Gaelic; Gaelic is included in the visual and audio displays in the visitor centres; and some Gaelic is used in the park literature. Although it is not used as a spoken language throughout the park, Gaelic is the most obvious embodiment of our culture and heritage. The park is a national park—it belongs to the whole of Scotland—and as Gaelic is so important in our heritage, it is essential that we aim for a highly visible bilingual presence within the park. We rely on you, who are charged with the ultimate responsibility for our culture and heritage, to give us that right and opportunity with the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Bill.

A few lines of poetry by George Campbell Hay are carved into the flagstones on the floor of the visitor centre at the gateway to the park. I commend them to you in translation—perhaps there is a little poetic licence for some of us:

“Youth of my country,

...

Let your step be on the summit
And your breast exposed to the sky.”

The Convener: Thank you very much.

Jackie Baillie: That was most impressive. I think we should conclude there because we do not need to add anything. I thank Chrissie for that presentation, and I would be most impressed if Bill Dalrymple spoke some Gaelic today.

Chrissie Bannerman: He is working on it.

Bill Dalrymple: Slowly.

Jackie Baillie: I am very impressed with the approach that the national park authority has taken, particularly because it has underpinned consideration of the language in its objectives. That clearly shines through from both the written submission and the oral presentation.

However, the devil is in the detail and I am keen to find out more about how you have gone about implementing the recommendations in the consultant's report. I got the sense that there is some constraint. Is money the constraint? If so, what do you need in order realistically to implement those recommendations?

Bill Dalrymple: Obviously, we are at a very early stage in the life of the park authority, having just been designated last summer. As you know, we have been involved in an early-action programme, where we managed to secure approximately £1.8 million for carrying out early-action works, including the commissioning of the report from Michael Glen, to which Chrissie Bannerman referred. We see that as the start of a process that will allow Gaelic to play a key role in delivering our objectives of conserving and enhancing the area's natural and cultural heritage and enhancing understanding of the area.

At this stage, we are still working out our corporate plan policies, so the park authority has not yet set out priorities. The work that we are doing shows our firm commitment to treating Gaelic very seriously.

You might have noticed the road signage that has gone up, but you will not see Gaelic on those signs at the moment. In deciding on a policy for Loch Lomond and the Trossachs national park, we recognised that the area covers 1,860 sq km. There are four distinct districts within that—Loch Lomond, the Trossachs, the northern Kyle and Argyll park and Breadalbane. We are erecting signs in those districts, but there is a strapline along the top of the signs that says “Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park”. We had to delete the word “the” because of the road safety restraints on the size of road signs. If we are already restricted in that way, how can we proceed

to have bilingual signage? As soon as the word "safety" is mentioned in terms of signage or anything else, everything comes to a halt. We have to work through that. Is that a funding issue or is it an issue to do with trying to work through myriad policies?

Although we are at an early stage, we have made a positive start. If we are intent on delivering the aims set for the national park, we will have to make more progress on aspirations such as those of Chrissie Bannerman for the bilingual policy.

One of the interesting facts about the area is that it straddles highland and lowland Scotland. Speaking as a Falkirk bairn, I would hate to lose sight of lowland Scotland. We have to take that on board when we are trying to enhance the understanding of something very special.

Jackie Baillie: That was a helpful response.

Michael Russell: I commend Chrissie Bannerman for her tremendous introduction and for the paper that she has commissioned, which I think is extremely important.

I have two questions to ask and two points to make. The argument about safety and road signs is an old canard that has been introduced into the debate again and again. It is no longer introduced into the debate in Wales and I hope that the agencies in Scotland will take note of that. Once the safety issue has been dealt with—and bilingual road signs are already being erected in some parts of Scotland—do you intend to pursue the matter to a conclusion?

Bill Dalrymple: Yes. I should say that we are spending £400,000 on upgrading existing signage. That was possible only because we had a joint funding project with European support. We also received support through the local enterprise companies in the area and the old interim committee. Signage is a major area of expenditure and providing it would be possible only through joint funding.

Michael Russell: I understand that. Resources need to be found. I commend your signage proposals, which make use of the languages in a sensible way.

My second point is on your policy on interpretation within the visitor centre and the exhibitions and displays. Is it your intention to pursue that progressively and sensibly and to introduce an element of Gaelic into them as appropriate, as the document indicates?

Bill Dalrymple: Absolutely.

Michael Russell: Good.

Bill Dalrymple: For example, the prime function of the national park gateway centre, which I hope you have had a chance to visit, is to introduce

visitors to the area. We currently have four translations of the main leaflet: German, French, Italian and Spanish. We do not have a Gaelic leaflet as such, but each of those leaflets refers to the Gaelic language in the explanations of place names and heritage. In an ideal world, we would want to move towards having a Gaelic leaflet.

Michael Russell: Do you sell teach-yourself-Gaelic materials or books in your shop? Would there not be a market for so doing? People who see Gaelic for the first time might well be interested in learning a little more.

Bill Dalrymple: I have one in my briefcase.

Michael Russell: Excellent, but do you sell such materials in the shop?

Bill Dalrymple: I am not certain. I think that we do.

Michael Russell: I am sure that you will bear that in mind. I commend your evidence, which is a model of its kind.

Chrissie Bannerman: Jackie Baillie noted that, as a park authority, we are ensuring that Gaelic is an integral part of our thinking. It is good that we have taken it on board at an early stage, but what interests and surprises me is that, of the Executive appointees, there was no attempt to appoint a Gaelic speaker. I am here only by chance; I am an elected member.

Ian Jenkins: It was a lucky chance.

Michael Russell: The same chance brought us all here.

Chrissie Bannerman made an important point: a positive effort to appoint to the board people who have knowledge of the language is extremely important.

I have missed one question that I should have asked. Your evidence indicates that you want the bill to complete its passage and to be of use to the people of Scotland. That is your attitude—clearly indicated in your evidence—is it not?

Chrissie Bannerman: Definitely.

Bill Dalrymple: If the bill, as was originally intended, applied only in this area and the area of the former Argyll and Bute District Council, there would be one policy on the east side of Glen Loyne and one on the west.

Michael Russell: But that will not happen.

Bill Dalrymple: Some of the debates that have taken place reflect the flexibility that would be required. We have four local authorities within our boundaries. I am not sure how the 1 per cent threshold would impact on us. It would be interesting for the national park authority if the four councils took different approaches.

Michael Russell: An authority could rise above that if it so chose. It would be interesting to see such co-operation between local authorities. The committee's intention to make the bill apply throughout Scotland has been clearly signalled, so the national park authority's difficulty with straddling that artificial fault line will be removed.

Ian Jenkins: I am always interested in dual signage. What bothers me personally—it is not a big political point—is that although there is dual signage in the Parliament, I have no idea how to pronounce the words. If you know how to pronounce a few words of Gaelic, it generates interest in the language; otherwise, you eventually become blind to the signs because they do not mean anything to you.

I see from your submission that you have taken a sensible and practical view, with what is good for Gaelic underlying the whole approach. The balance must be struck between deciding not to use Gaelic sometimes, because it would be confusing, and deciding to use it at other times, because it would be informative. It is also right to help people to become interested in Gaelic by giving them a guide for saying the words. For example, in the example of signage in your submission there is a wee bit about wood, but there is no guide to pronunciation. I get annoyed at that. However, you are taking a selective, sensible approach, which is commendable.

Bill Dalrymple: No amount of signage can substitute for person-to-person contact, and there is an onus on us to ensure that people have regular contact with the public. One of our rangers has taken it upon himself to move with his colleagues and increase his knowledge of Gaelic, although I do not think that he has reached an advanced level.

The Convener: Thank you very much. Now that he is soon to retire, perhaps Ian Jenkins might learn a bit more of the Gaelic. He could come back and give us lessons.

Michael Russell: Or he could get a job as a ranger.

Ian Jenkins: I heard Gaelic at my mother's knee when I was taken to Stornoway at the age of one. When we came back, my dad taught me several Gaelic phrases. Indeed, it might have made all the difference; in a way, I became interested in languages just because I could say a few Gaelic words.

Jackie Baillie: I think that we should adjourn to the visitors shop so that Mr Jenkins can reacquaint himself with the language.

The Convener: If members have no further questions, I thank everyone for attending. I also thank those who have allowed us to use this

excellent facility. I am glad that Jackie Baillie encouraged us to come.

Chrissie Bannerman: Is e ur beatha.

Meeting closed at 16:01.

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