

Comann nam Pàrant (Dhùn Èideann & Lodainn)

Committee@gaelic-education.org

Public Consultation Response to the draft Second National Gaelic Language Plan 2012-17 January 2012

Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Summary | 2 |
| Education and Learning | 3 |
| Pre-school Groups..... | 3 |
| General GME Issues | 4 |
| GME Staff | 4 |
| Parental Entitlement to GME..... | 5 |
| Support for Adult Learners | 5 |
| The Context of Gaelic Education..... | 6 |
| Implementation of the GLP..... | 6 |
| City of Edinburgh Council Plan..... | 6 |
| Community Plan..... | 7 |
| The GLP Structure and Consultation Process..... | 7 |
| Conclusion..... | 8 |
| Appendix 1: Edinburgh context for a Community Language Plan | 9 |
| Early years growth in GME..... | 9 |
| Community planning..... | 9 |
| Arts/Bothan..... | 10 |
| Youth/Student support | 10 |

Summary

Comann nam Pàrant (CnP) is a voluntary association which aims to promote and support Gaelic-medium education (GME) in Edinburgh and the Lothians. It is the representative body for parents with children in GME.

Edinburgh now has the largest GME unit in the country, surpassed in numbers only by Glasgow with its own dedicated Gaelic-medium School, *Sgoil Ghàidhlig Glaschu*.

GME in Edinburgh is a great success story and has a key role in increasing the number of Gaelic speakers in Scotland. The number of GME families in Edinburgh is certain to continue to grow in the years 2012-17 with the opening of a dedicated Gaelic-medium school in the city in August 2013.

This paper responds to the draft Second National Gaelic Language Plan 2012-17 as prepared by Bòrd na Gàidhlig (the GLP) dated October 2011.

In summary, it is the view of CnP that:

- We agree with the vision and targets set out in the GLP, and in particular the recognition that as the main generator of new Gaelic speakers is now through GME, there needs to be a particular focus on supporting education. As a CnP group we have a particular interest and experience in the area of education and learning through Gaelic.
- There are a number of specific areas where GME parents have particularly strong views:
 1. the recruitment and training of GME teachers;
 2. support for activities to allow GME children to use Gaelic outside of school; and
 3. support for adult learning to allow better use of the language within the home.
- We believe that groups such as our own will play a crucial role in the implementation of the objectives of the GLP, and it is our view that a properly supported Community Language Plan could be a successful route towards implementation.

We hope to be able to engage with Bòrd na Gàidhlig on an ongoing basis to address the priority issues and implementation of the GLP. CnP believes that **coordination of effort** and **direction of resources** are the two key areas where we can engage in discussion to help achieve the aims of growth and quality.

More detailed comments can be found below.

Education and Learning

Pre-school Groups

Reference to GLP Educational Outcomes: 1.1 Parents and prospective parents aware of the benefits of being bilingual and of Gaelic-medium education, leading to an increase in the number of children enrolled in GME; and 1.3 Rapid and substantive growth in the number of children, young people and adults in Gaelic-medium education and learning across the learning curriculum 0-18 and beyond. (GLP pages 32 and 33)

In Edinburgh we have over the past few years seen a very significant growth in the number of families entering GME, with our Cròileagan groups providing a particular driver for that growth.

We have Cròileagan groups provided in 3 different areas of the city, currently with 4 sessions per week, with a plan to expand to 5. There are now over a hundred children involved in the different groups. Our experience in Edinburgh is that promoting GME through Cròileagan to families with young children is a very effective way of increasing numbers entering GME. There is a high transfer rate from Cròileagan to Gaelic-medium nursery and in due course into primary education.

We would therefore like to see greater support and promotion of Cròileagan: as matters stand the groups across the country remain relatively isolated from each other and from central bodies, which lessens the possibility of mutual support and sharing good practice. There is also little offered in terms of centrally-produced educational and teaching resources for Cròileagan to help ensure good uniformly high quality provision across Scotland.

The GLP refers to a “major publicity and information campaign” (GLP page 15). Our experience in Edinburgh is that the development of a strong, child-friendly brand has brought great returns for very little financial output. We believe that a campaign which targets young families can be successful in assisting growth, if it is evidently family friendly and supported by a good quality website.

Reference to GLP Educational Outcomes: 3.3 Extended range of Gaelic education and learning resources available....to support all areas and sectors or Gaelic learning. (GLP page 36)

We would hope to see a specific output and target timescale to relate to the pre-school age range. Currently it is very difficult for non-Gaelic speakers to read books with their children – an important activity in language acquisition. More books with listen-along CDs or web-based resources are required.

In terms of “normalising” the learning experience we also hope to see targets for Gaelic books availability in mainstream libraries.

General GME Issues

GME primary units can exist in relative isolation, with children in one unit or school largely disconnected from other children in a similar learning environment and thus a lack of awareness of the context in which they are learning. Given the importance of “normalising” the Gaelic learning experience there should be support for ensuring greater opportunities for contact between school children in different locations are provided, whether at a distance or by way of exchanges.

Another major issue is managing the move from primary to secondary, and the stage at which children with the potential to become fully fluent adults are often lost to Gaelic. There are so many factors contributing to this issue that it is difficult to deal with them in the broad context of the consultation. However, it is worth remarking that experience shows that this is not a problem that can be left to local authorities to remedy.

GME Staff

Reference to GLP Educational Outcomes: 1.5 A confident and reflective workforce equipped to deliver a high quality, progressive and supported Gaelic education system, in line with Curriculum for Excellence. (GLP page 33)

A particularly important issue, of which Bòrd na Gàidhlig is of course aware, is the difficulty in locating and recruiting GME staff. Although in theory such staff do exist, the current difficulties must be testament to some obstacle or obstacles preventing suitably qualified staff from working within GME. Given that this is such a crucial problem and which will prevent the growth in GME numbers required by the GLP, **this issue must be seen as a priority.**

Efforts to deal with this issue may include widening teacher-training provision, and greater promotion of GME to students and student teachers at an earlier stage of their education. Access to Gaelic teacher training was restricted as recently as December 2011 when Aberdeen University stopped their part-time distance learning course (in response to decreased funding) leaving the only Gaelic PGDE course at Strathclyde University and full-time. This presents a big disadvantage to anyone unable to take a year off work to study or who are unable to travel to Glasgow. A specific target for the establishment of a distance-learning or part-time course elsewhere in Scotland should be achievable within the 5 year timeframe of the GLP.

Research may also be required into the barriers to potential teachers entering GME. Consideration should be given to options such as a financial incentive for GME teachers (as has been done for other “hard to recruit” subjects such as maths and science), or identifying Gaelic-speaking experienced teachers currently teaching in mainstream, and assessing what cross-training or other support they require to enable and encourage them to teach through Gaelic.

It would be reassuring to parents to see as an outcome the commitment to **meet the demand of rising GME numbers with adequate staffing** in each unit or school within a defined timescale; with a commitment to provide the financial resource necessary to meet this outcome.

Parental Entitlement to GME

Reference to GLP Educational Outcomes: 2.1 Parental entitlement to Gaelic-medium education recognised in law. (GLP page 35)

The campaign for a dedicated Gaelic school in Edinburgh has been a lengthy and often difficult process which has required the input of many parents over a number of years. This process would have been far less arduous had there existed a legal entitlement to a Gaelic education.

Without this legal entitlement, we may have to reconstruct all the same arguments against capping in future years when Edinburgh's Gaelic school reaches capacity. The existence of legal entitlement would also serve to focus the attention of local authorities on the provision of Gaelic-medium teaching staff.

We hope that the output can be redrafted to be more specific and positive than simply investigating the possibility of future legal entitlement.

Support for Adult Learners

Reference to GLP Educational Outcomes: 4.1 More opportunities for adults, parents and carers to learn Gaelic and/or develop their Gaelic literacy skills. (GLP page 37)

The timescale for the output on this issue does not appear to be sufficiently ambitious. There already exist organisations funded by Bòrd na Gàidhlig to deliver adult learning and they should be tasked with providing services specifically aimed at GME parents.

The existing funded bodies should be tasked to take on more to reduce the workload on parent volunteers in setting up Gaelic classes for parents.

There is no doubt that GME parents constitute a group of motivated learners who can contribute significantly to the use of Gaelic within the home. Along with committing to providing adult learning courses accessible to parents, Bòrd na Gàidhlig should recognise the crucial role of the provision of funding for childcare in making Gaelic classes accessible to the parents of young children.

The Context of Gaelic Education

Reference to GLP Educational Outcomes: 4.3 An increase in the availability of Gaelic recreational activities for young people, both in school and the wider community. (GLP page 37)

This is an area of concern for many GME families and needs to be strengthened to refer specifically to support for Sradagan, youth clubs and holiday camps for all ages right up to 18; and to developing options for high school pupils to use Gaelic outside of the classroom.

We hope the target and timescale could be more ambitious to aim to provide all GME children with one extra-curricular activity per year by 2014.

Implementation of the GLP

One apparent issue with the GLP is the heavy reliance on others to deliver the ambitious targets – ie local authorities, health boards, arts bodies, etc. Many of these bodies will not have a strong commitment to or interest in Gaelic and this may hinder significantly the implementation process.

However, appropriately supported Community Plans, as proposed in the GLP, could offer greater effectiveness in securing the future of Gaelic than seeking to meet community needs through public body and other plans alone, especially in communities like Edinburgh.

A supported Community Plan could be the solution for delivering some of the local GLP outcomes in Edinburgh.

City of Edinburgh Council Plan

In Edinburgh, we are now at a stage where Gaelic has strength and can grow significantly, and where its value and quality can increase rapidly, given the right support.

It is important to work with our local authority, the City of Edinburgh Council, to secure this growth. Working co-operatively in this way is essential to achieve understanding and buy-in on the part of the Council.

However, our experience over the past years has been that working through the Council's Gaelic plan as the main roadmap for the city has led to a number of difficulties. While it was possible to overcome these difficulties with regard to the Gaelic school campaign, the single focus on a school prevented other areas being significantly progressed through the local authority plan, and it may remain difficult to secure progress in these areas.

Work on the Council's plan must continue, as there is still some way to go with the job of normalising Gaelic within the Council, and of fostering ownership of Gaelic development within that organisation.

Community Plan

However, we believe that task will be made easier and accelerated if this is done in parallel with an appropriately supported Community Plan. This would allow the community to set priorities and tackle major difficulties, and would assist the Council in focussing its resources where needed.

While a Community Plan has been considered in the past, without support it was mainly about setting out aspirations. A formal plan mechanism would grant status to the Community in liaising with Edinburgh Council and other bodies, offer transparency and allow comparison and sharing with Community plans in similar areas.

Such a plan would require a degree of resourcing, as we know from experience that voluntary effort alone, though strong in Edinburgh, is and will remain stretched.

The resources required would include:

- expertise and authority to bring together relevant groups;
- administrative and other support where this would be more efficient/effective than relying on volunteers, or would free up volunteers to do other important work; and
- funding support, especially for start-up and development towards normalisation and sustainability.

The experience of the past few years in Edinburgh shows that voluntary effort can achieve great results. However, the tasks involved in significantly growing the language would be facilitated significantly with a basic level of support such as access to office space, funding for communications, etc. Such administrative level support would also better enable sharing of resources / expertise between groups around Scotland.

A number of issues which would be priorities for CnP and the Gaelic Community in Edinburgh in a Community Plan are set out in Appendix 1.

The GLP Structure and Consultation Process

The major thrust of the GLP is education and full participation in the consultation therefore requires the engagement of parental bodies and of individual parents. Holding the consultation over the busiest part of the school year for families in the run-up to Christmas will without doubt reduce the number and quality of useful responses to the consultation. Although there may be deadlines to meet, the issue of timing when consulting with the public is one which should be considered more carefully in future if the objective of the process is to gain useful feedback.

One administrative point is that for ease of reference to and discussion of the GLP, it would be useful if each of the implementation outcomes were separately numbered in future drafts.

It may also be worth considering “headlining” certain priority issues and setting clearer and more ambitious targets for these issues with better defined timescales for achievement. Given the particular support from the current government at Holyrood, the next 5 years could present a good opportunity to make concrete gains.

Conclusion

CnP in Edinburgh is very grateful to Bòrd na Gàidhlig for the immense support parents have received over the past years in the campaign for a Gaelic primary school in the city. We also recognise that the significant growth in the number of families entering GME in Edinburgh has only been possible with the consistent financial support year on year from the Bòrd.

As a group we support the aims of growth and quality, and we believe we will be able to make a significant contribution to the ambitious targets for growth in numbers of Gaelic speakers.

We hope that the educational issues we have raised in the comments above will prove useful in the process of revising the draft GLP, and that particular attention will be given to the issue of teacher recruitment and training.

We look forward to discussing these issues with Bòrd na Gàidhlig, along with the best methods of implementing the GLP targets.

Appendix 1: Edinburgh context for a Community Language Plan

Drafting such a plan would require input from many sources. Some of the key issues which CnP would expect to be addressed are set out below. These could form part of a Community Plan:

Early years growth in GME

With a healthy and growing intake at pre-school, there will be sufficient numbers to grow community at all ages in the decades to come, provided the rest of the system can grow with it.

The growth in Cròileagan numbers we note above does not appear to be matched with sufficient foresight for nursery, wraparound and after-school care. Although the Council is considering how pre-school provision can be established at the new school, the provision may be unable to meet the imminent (and potential) demand.

It is important for parents to be able to access Gaelic-medium nursery, and therefore a second Gaelic nursery facility at a convenient location in Edinburgh is a high priority for parents. Wraparound care has always been seen as particularly vital in Edinburgh to allow working parents to be able to access GME at nursery stage. It is the view of CnP that after-school/wraparound care should both provide GME care. We also see Gaelic-speaking non-teaching staff as an important in the new Gaelic school.

While the Council will understand these needs, these may not be prioritised sufficiently highly. A supported Community Plan with these aims would help raise the profile, and might allow community development funding to unlock normal funding streams.

We also believe that a Community Plan focussing on support for Gaelic in the home is likely to be an effective and efficient, and possibly necessary addition to promotion and support through formal bodies.

Community planning

We also believe that a Community plan could assist in developing outreach.

Key to this would be developing Leith community links, through existing community groups, Leith festivals, and through outreach activities based at and around the school.

At the same time we believe it is important to maintain wider city links through existing community groups that meet in other locations including Tollcross, and in particular Iomairt-

led activities, as well as exploring other avenues for outreach and city-wide publicity. A community hub or base would greatly assist in this work, and is something the community has been striving to see implemented for a considerable time. This would allow all aspects of community – social, arts, learning, commercial and volunteer to come together in a shared space, and would facilitate links with Gaelic development bodies and national networks.

Such community work if based on a Community plan could be monitored and adapted to make best use of successful practices. Shared resources would enable work to be more effective.

Arts/Bothan

Arts development currently relies mainly on voluntary effort, despite the Council's Gaelic Arts policy being in place for years. The arts field has the potential to generate much more interest in Gaelic, as well as offering a genuine way for a Gaelic economy to develop. Edinburgh is a hugely important cultural and arts centre, and it is fair to say that Gaelic and traditional arts in general are under-developed.

A Community plan which would seek to move the Council Arts plan along, and to highlight and advertise opportunity, rather than just meeting obligation, has the potential to achieve a lot if properly supported. This would make a lot more sense than leaving this to voluntary effort, and to individual locally-based Gaelic-related artists to promote themselves.

Youth/Student support

Secondary GME and Gaelic-learners education is another key area where a plan would be highly valuable. While gains have been made, GME at secondary in particular faces some uncertainties and is still fragile.

Components of a plan would include working with national agencies to achieve planned curricular progress, and working with Edinburgh Council to ensure implementation difficulties are overcome (e.g. the current long-standing unfilled teaching vacancy which is hampering progress).

This will also include supported extra-curricular development, which while encouraging developments have occurred still suffers from lack of volunteer effort.

A role of the plan would be to facilitate this, and with numbers at secondary now growing, this could be student driven as much as possible with modest start-up support.

The above activity we see as being important to a Community Plan, and we hope Bòrd na Gàidhlig can enable this to happen through its GLP.

Edinburgh is well-placed to develop such a plan, with a strong Gaelic community involving many young people, with strength and opportunity in the new Gaelic School, and a committed, and growing volunteer force. It has high visibility for its successes, and links with every part of the country.

However, we also believe that Community plans should be supported elsewhere, and can and should be tailored to local needs.