

CNPDE response to Language Bill Consultation

Consultation Questions on GME

Thinking of barriers, obstacles and solutions – What are the key aspects you feel should be included in a new strategic approach to Gaelic medium education?

Intervention in Edinburgh:

- There has been significant delay in progress on a GME high school to serve Edinburgh and the Lothians, largely due to previous lack of clarification on financial support available from Scottish Government, poor communication from the Council to partners, as well as little attempt at broad and meaningful engagement with GME families by the Council. The situation requires urgent attention at national level.

Stand-alone schools:

- Commitment to stand-alone primary and secondary provision over co-located alternatives - co-located options do not create the conditions to maximise the immersion opportunity
- Commitment to the creation of GME primary schools (rather than GME 'units' within English Medium schools) in areas of Edinburgh other than the north of the city, where Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce is located

No catchment reviews:

- No catchment reviews of GME pupils at secondary level until a guaranteed, sustainable, long term alternative for secondary school provision is available - catchment reviews disproportionately affect Gaelic pupils in Edinburgh and the Lothians who do not have alternative GME provision other than one primary and one secondary.
- There are currently 52 children attending GME who are not resident in Edinburgh (15 in secondary and 38 in primary - figures from May 2021), almost all of whom live in either East Lothian, West Lothian or Midlothian. GME is arguably a bigger commitment for these families than those who live in Edinburgh, due to the distances involved. It is understood that there is no GME provision in any of these other local authorities. Scottish Government to ensure that City of Edinburgh Council provides for all of the Lothians as provided for within the existing agreement between council until provision within the Lothians is developed

No capping:

- No capping of the numbers of children entering GME primary provision - not only because these pupils have a right to be taught in Gaelic but also because the increase of pupils at primary levels then bolsters a GME secondary. In the case of Edinburgh and the Lothians, the rights of younger children to access Gaelic Medium Education at primary level should not be adversely affected by outside factors, especially ones which are not intrinsically linked to GME, such as the rising rolls issue across the city

Early years:

- Support the development of Cròileagan and Early Years GME provision and that this be aligned with plans for the expansion of primary provision to ensure sustainable growth of GME overall.

Primary provision:

- Primary provision requires expansion so that there is a greater critical mass of GME high school pupils sooner rather than later. Additional GME primary provision would have the further, eventual benefit of creating additional streams of GME students who would transfer to a thriving GME high school, enabling young GME students to meet new people, embrace new ideas and broaden their horizons at this hugely important time in their lives. One of the current constraints of GME in Edinburgh is that the opportunity to mix with Gaelic-speaking peers, other than the group that have spent their entire early years and primary school careers together, is limited.

Training, recruitment and retention of teaching and support staff:

- To support the training of teachers who can work in the Gaelic sector, including more action from Scottish Government such as the 20k bursary scheme introduced to deal with the crisis in science teachers. More support for teachers with better resources, smaller classes and language assistants in classes.
- Detailed approach from Scottish Government on the development of GME teaching at both primary and secondary level
- Retention and recruitment - there has been a recent significant decline in the number of staff teaching through Gaelic at JGHS in Edinburgh - we seek tangible plans for the recruitment and retention of staff
- Investment in teaching is required now - it is vital in order that a robust cohort of Gaelic speaking staff are in a position to lead thriving dedicated GME schools in future

Support for continuous learning:

- Action to address the fall in numbers of pupils studying Gaelic as a subject at secondary and more opportunities for pupils to develop their Gaelic language skills at secondary level. This is essential in order to create the potential new teachers for GME.

Community:

- Support the budding community built in the new GME high school and surrounding areas, recognising that due to wide catchment area and nature of the community that support will require a different approach.

What steps do you think should be taken to support and promote Gaelic education and to ensure that any new strategic approach to GME is implemented?

Short Life Working Group:

- Participation from Scottish Government in a Short Life Working Group in Edinburgh to ensure that progress on a GME high school is made and that any proposals align with the national strategy for GME

Action with Local Authorities:

- Greater collaboration with Local Authorities, calling for them to make stronger commitments to the promotion of Gaelic in their work
- Regular assessment of Local Authority progress against their Gaelic Language Plan commitments
- Local Authorities must have strategic plans specifically for Gaelic education with clear targets and programme for delivery. Local Authorities must also be required to budget accordingly for GME - City of Edinburgh Council has no budget in its Capital Programme to deliver a GME secondary school. It appears that the development of GME provision, particularly at secondary level, is entirely dependent on financial support from the Scottish Government.
- Local authority Gaelic education implementation groups, which include parents, in each local authority who will provide advice and monitor progress with GME.
- Specific actions for GME secondary and primary provision might also be incorporated into multi-year strategies such as City of Edinburgh Council's City Plan 2030.
- Clear financial commitments from Scottish Government in order to implement and sustain development in GME

Community:

- Collaborate proactively with the Gaelic community and organisations to create regional hubs so that the language may be used outwith the school setting to further bolster its use within educational environments

Are there any other points you would like to make about the provision of Gaelic medium education and Gaelic learner education in Scottish education?

- Equal status for GME given access to at least the same level of resources and support as EME - it is important that GME children receive parity of esteem and the same assurances of certainty of educational pathway as their EME counterparts.
- A legal right to GME – 3-18 – early learning and childcare is currently not included in legislation.
- Improvement to the breadth and quality of Gaelic immersion
- Robust guidance from Education Scotland on GME education, ensuring that the best education provision is being provided by all GME schools
- Consistent approach to developing Gaelic as a language across Scotland. This will improve teaching, outcomes, educational pathways and the long term development of Gaelic in Scotland.
- More support in the classroom and outside school to improve Gaelic fluency of GME pupils, eg. Language Assistants in classrooms and additional funding to CnaG and Spòrs Gàidhlig to enable them to increase their reach. More support from local authorities and other providers for Gaelic medium extra-curricular activities – a 'Gaelic First' policy with English only as a last resort for GME pupils.
- Parental engagement and support is crucial - statutory consultations from councils should be neither the first nor only opportunity for parental engagement or for building support for any GME proposals.

Consultation Questions on creation of a Gàidhealtachd

Consultation responses are invited on the question of exploring the creation of a Gàidhealtachd.

In any Gàidhealtachd area all schools should be Gaelic schools, with English medium provision limited to a small number of schools and eventually phased out.

There should be no reduction in support for GME in other areas of Scotland.

Consultation Questions on Bòrd na Gàidhlig

Do you have any views on the current duties of Bòrd na Gàidhlig and any suggestions of how these could operate more effectively or efficiently?

- Bòrd na Gàidhlig and language commissioner to have powers to monitor compliance with the legal duties on local authorities to support and develop GME and investigate any complaints regarding non-compliance. Parents need clarity on where responsibility sits for Gaelic education.
- Legal intervention by Bòrd na Gàidhlig where necessary - for example, in 2016 Edinburgh Council proposed restricting the number of pupils going to JGHS based on their distance from the school, disproportionately affecting Gaelic pupils, denying access to GME for some, and splitting the small GME cohort across different secondary schools. This proposal was also withdrawn following campaigning by Comann nam Pàrant and legal intervention by Bòrd na Gàidhlig. We would seek assurances from BnG that they would intervene should this matter rise again (which is a current risk). Similarly we would hope for intervention should City of Edinburgh Council continue to suggest that capping numbers of GME pupils is a potential option.

Consultation Questions on Scots language

Consultation responses are invited on the question of support for the Scots language.

Comann nam Pàrant (Dùn Èideann is Lodainn) recognises the importance of Scotland's indigenous languages. Both Gaelic and Scots are part of our history and culture and play a vital role in people's identity today.