



**PÀRANTAN
GÀIDHLIG**

DÙN ÈIDEANN

**Comann nam Pàrant
Dùn Èideann is Lodainn
Convenor's Report
November 2021 - December 2022**

Ro-ràdh | Introduction

Comann nam Pàrant (Dùn Èideann is Lodainn) (CnPDE) is the representative organisation for parents with children at all stages of Gaelic Medium Education (GME) in Edinburgh and the Lothians. It aims to promote and develop GME throughout the region. All GME parents in Edinburgh and the Lothians are ordinary members of Comann nam Pàrant.

The group is part of the national organisation Comann nam Pàrant Nàiseanta (CnP Nàiseanta). Comann nam Pàrant is a constituted voluntary organisation, with its activities funded primarily by Bord na Gàidhlig (BnG). Comann nam Pàrant is managed by a committee, including office bearers. The committee serves for a term of one year before standing down at each AGM. All committee positions are open for election at the AGM.

The following report is a summary of the work Comann nam Pàrant (Dùn Èideann is Lodainn) has undertaken on behalf of parents with children and young people in GME. Once again, it has been a busy year, particularly for what is a small group of volunteers.

November / December 2021

Within only a week of the formation of the new Comann nam Pàrant committee in November 2021, City of Edinburgh Council shared a letter between Ian Perry (at the time, Convenor of the Education Children and Families Committee at the Council) and Shirley-Anne Somerville (Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills). The letter stated that the Council wished to bring a report to the Education, Children and Families Committee on 7 December 2021 and would ask the committee to consider starting the statutory consultative process.

Comann nam Pàrant replied requesting that instead the Council took the time to prepare and present detailed pre-consultation information, to communicate and engage with families in a more substantial way, and to fully address the concerns which we had raised in the previous 12 months. We asked the Council to continue discussions with the Scottish Government, to consult with the parent body (especially given that we had entered a new academic year and new children had begun their journey in GME) and to first listen to concerns from families (many of which did not appear to be addressed) and respond to these with detail and diligence. Overall, we noted that pressing ahead without support from GME families would introduce real risk to the statutory consultation process.

Following this, the Council pressed ahead: they presented their report to the Education, Children and Families Committee and asked the committee accept the Council's report on Gaelic Medium Education Statutory Consultation. Despite Comann nam Pàrant's written deputation, which outlined clearly the risks inherent in taking such a step, the Committee voted to accept the report with statutory consultation scheduled to start 31 January 2022. We released a statement in response to this, highlighting our disappointment with the decision, and also expressed this in a letter to to Ian Perry and Alison Dickie.

We were then invited to attend a meeting with the Council to hear an update on their plans, in advance of the statutory consultation. Ahead of this, we contacted GME families through our mailing list, Classlist and social media requesting they take part in a survey. We noted that we urgently needed the community most affected by the proposals to tell us what information they needed from the Council in order to respond meaningfully to a consultation.

Continued

At the meeting on 14 December, we expressed the serious and growing uncertainty among parents regarding the proposals due to an absence of key information and their unanswered questions. We followed this up with a letter to the Council detailing questions from Comann nam Pàrant, a summary of the questions/issues raised by survey respondents as well as additional information, such as the context of Scottish Government, educational benefits and co-location queries. 2021 ended with further correspondence to the Council in response to their letters to the Scottish Government. Our final working day before the Christmas break was 23 December.

January 2022

Our work started again in January 2022. We compiled a report on the responses to our survey which had taken place in December. The survey received 125 individual responses, incorporating almost every current GME year group. Year groups that would be most affected by the proposals, ie C3, C4 and C5, were particularly well-represented. Creating this report was a significant amount of work for a small group.

In addition, the Council then released the papers for the Education, Children and Families Committee less than a week before the meeting was due to take place. We issued a statement regarding this. We worked hard to make our way through the papers and develop a full written deputation, accompanied by a 96-page appendix, and verbal deputation in response. During the same period, we also created a template letter for families to use and encouraged them to contact their own Councillors with their concerns on the proposal. In addition, we created a guide with advice on how to best write to a councillor, as well as a comprehensive list of all wards in Edinburgh and the Lothians.

This multi-pronged approach brought success: rather than proceeding to statutory consultation, the Council instead put forward a motion to give parents and the Council further opportunity to discuss educational benefits and any potentially suitable sites (prior to the next Committee meeting scheduled to take place 1 March 2022). The motion was passed.

We were delighted with this news and we were very thankful to all families who took the time to write to their councillors, to encourage others to use their voice and to support us in our work. We firmly believe that this result was due to the activism of GME families, supported by Comann nam Pàrant. Without such efforts there was a real risk that the Council would have proceeded to an ill-timed statutory consultation.

Follow up letters to the Council continued in January and February. These are available to view on our website.

February 2022

At the start of February, we met with Amanda Hatton, Ian Perry and Lorna French to discuss the next stages in the process for a new high school. It is always beneficial to talk to staff at the Council outwith the formal structure of a Council committee meeting. It offers the opportunity to further make our case, supports a more personable approach and provides a more collaborative environment in which to find common ground.

We followed up noting that a further meeting, for example between Amanda Hatton and representatives from Comann nam Pàrant, and the Parent Council Chairs of Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce and James Gillespie's High school would be welcome, as would a meeting with the Education Team at the Council.

Unfortunately, the offer was not made by the Council. Nor was the agreement that Amanda Hatton might provide a timeline for parents to understand the next steps and the impact that Committee meetings and local elections might have on the schedule for engagement with GME families.

Alison Dickie resigned during January and we wrote to thank her for her work and commitment in the partnership between the Council and Comann nam Parant, especially in her role as Vice Convenor of the Education, Children and Families Committee.

On 10 February, we met with Jim Whannel, Director of Gaelic Education at Bord na Gaidhlig who generously gave his time to discuss pertinent issues. The meeting covered the various potential advantages and disadvantages of co-located and stand-alone schools, as well as primary provision. He described the complex challenges of staffing a GME high school and delivering a broad curriculum, potential innovative solutions to these challenges, and the vital importance of a strong GME head teacher and leadership team in the planning phase. We hope to draw on his expertise and support in the future.

A meeting was originally scheduled with the Council but was later cancelled. Then, on 23 February, the City of Edinburgh Council published papers for their Education, Children and Families Committee meeting which took place 1 March.

March 2022

In response, Comann nam Pàrant submitted a written deputation. This covered key areas including consultation with GME families, Liberton and other potential sites, contingency plans, rising rolls, funding for GME development at Darroch and finance. The day before the meeting, the Council then shared a cross party amendment to their update which included a note that agreed that additional information is required to move forward to statutory consultation. On the day of the meeting, we made a verbal deputation which welcomed the amendments but stressed that a much broader and deeper level of engagement with the GME community was required than had so far taken place.

The day after the committee meeting, we wrote to the Cabinet Secretary calling for an understanding of how the Government was to fulfil the ambitions laid out in the SNP's 2021 election manifesto, ambitions which chimed so closely with those of GME families. We also wrote to the Education, Children and Families Committee seeking information on timescales, catchment reviews and locations, as well as noting the need for clarification from Scottish Government to progress further.

A week later we sent a manifesto letter to all political parties, encouraging each party to give a public commitment to a range of issues affecting GME, including the commitment to build a stand-alone secondary school in a central location, no catchment review of GME pupils at secondary level until a guaranteed, sustainable, long term alternative for secondary school provision is available and no capping of the numbers of children entering GME primary provision. In March we also invited parties to attend April hustings ahead of the May elections.

April and May 2022

Following the success of our 2021 hustings, we held an event this year and council candidates from Scottish Labour Party, Scottish National Party, Scottish Green Party and the Scottish Conservatives attended. The Scottish Liberal Democrats were invited but had no one available to represent them.

Much of the focus was around the vision for a Gaelic Secondary school in Edinburgh, including questions about location, funding, immersion, the practicalities of setting it up, and how to recruit and retain more teachers.

The event was recorded and viewed 142 times. This is a lot lower than our Scottish Parliament hustings from the year before (viewed over 1400) which reflects the lower profile of the election itself but also the national interest in our previous event. That said, given the subject matter we might have expected more interest given that they were talking about issues of immediate concern to this community.

In April we also wrote to Amanda Hatton, Director of Education at the Council, to follow up from an earlier letter sent in March. We sought an update on key issues, including plans for engagement, progress on identifying sites and Scottish Government partnership, and restrictions on catchment reviews for GME pupils.

The elections and formation of a new committee then had an impact on the ongoing communication between Comann nam Pàrant and the Council with a new Education, Children and Families Committee being formed over the summer months.

June and July 2022

On 1 June we contacted the Cabinet Secretary again to follow up on our last letter dated 2 March 2022 to which we have not yet had a response. We noted that there appeared to be no development in discussions with City of Edinburgh Council regarding the new Gaelic Medium High School for Edinburgh, nor an establishment of a short life working work (which we believed would be a welcome step in supporting progression). We invited her to meet with Comann nam Pàrant to discuss how we might progress the SNP's election manifesto commitment to a stand-alone, centrally-located GME High School in Edinburgh.

In June 2022, headteacher of James Gillespie's High School Donald MacDonald retired. We are very grateful for his dedication over the years in supporting, developing and championing Gaelic at James Gillespie's High School and in the GME community more broadly. We are particularly appreciative of his support during a period of enormous expansion of GME in Edinburgh, in nurturing GME at JGHS, as well as his support for GME in sometimes challenging circumstances. We have welcomed his active participation in the Gaelic Implementation Group as well as his role as an active member in the wider GME community, supporting both the local Mòd and Fèis. He will be a much-missed teacher by the committee and by the GME families of Edinburgh and the Lothians.

We also contacted Donna MacIver to congratulate her on the appointment as Depute Head Teacher (GME) at James Gillespie's High School. We have since been working with her in supporting and developing Gaelic at JGHS.

In July, we created a survey to gather the views of GME families in response to the consultation on the Gaelic National Language Plan created by Bòrd na Gàidhlig. Following this, we submitted our [full response](#). We also encouraged GME families to participate directly in submitting their own responses to the consultation.

September and October 2022

In September, we contacted all members of the newly formed committee, introducing ourselves to those who were new and strengthening our relationships with ongoing members. We sent each member a briefing paper on GME covering background information, key issues and additional notes of interest. In September the Council also published a new report ahead of the Education, Children and Families committee meeting on 20 September and again Comann nam Pàrant submitted a written deputation to address this which ended by encouraging the Council to establish a short life working group specifically for GME provision and expansion.

In October we met with the Cabinet Secretary to discuss the GME high school. This positive meeting covered potential financial support from the Scottish Government, confirmation that there are no sites within the Government's own portfolio and a commitment from the Cabinet Secretary to work with the Council, as far as is reasonable and appropriate, to make further progress on the significant and outstanding issue of GME secondary provision. We followed this up with a letter to Joan Griffiths, Convenor of the Education, Children and Families Committee, outlining the key information from this meeting. This was also circulated to all members of the committee.

November and December 2022

In early November, Cabinet Secretary wrote to the Council calling for all parties to recognise that urgent attention needs to be given to the issues facing GME families, asking that the Council continue to meet with Government colleagues and requesting an update on progress.

At the time of writing, we are aware that the Council has responded to Cabinet Secretary but are awaiting further details. The Council has not yet replied to our own letter. We will continue to seek to meet with Council officials and invite them to engage with our community.

The Gaelic Implementation Group will be reconvened. We had attended all GIG meetings until this was disbanded due to election. We look forward to working with the group again.

In November, we also submitted our response to the Scottish Government consultation on the Gaelic and Scots and Scottish Languages Bill. In the run up, we encouraged GME families to participate, highlighting the consultation, as well as our own and Comann nam Parant Naiseanta response, throughout our blog, Classlist, Facebook and Twitter. Opportunities such as this are hugely important to the support and development of GME nationally and locally. The consultation closed 8 December. We are grateful to all those who participated and made their voices heard.

Additional activity

Throughout the year we have also fielded press enquiries, covering radio, print and online, from Edinburgh Evening News, BBC Alba and Radio nan Gaidheal. We'd like to thank Kenny Beaton and James Eglinton who took part in interviews throughout the year. We have also issued proactive and responsive media statements. We are keen for others to get involved in media enquiries. We'll provide key messages and statements for you to draw on. If you have Gaelic, please consider volunteering.

We have also created information booklets for families with children in GME, such as [Get Your Gaelic Going](#) which lists a range of useful resources for families to start, develop or enhance their Gaelic skills.

We've used our social media channels to share our own activity, as well as highlight a range of issues of interest to GME families, including education, culture, children's activity and consultations.

Throughout the year we also undertake research, looking into the Gaelic Language Plans of relevant Local Authorities, their corporate strategies and city planning proposals, and more. We try to seek out different opportunities to strengthen GME.

We also build relationships with councillors in other authorities across the Lothians to raise awareness of the issues affecting the citizens in their area. We are acutely aware of the ways in which the current and future offer for GME affects families in different areas of Edinburgh and the Lothians.

At the end of the summer term, we sponsored a Gaelic dictionary for every C7 leaver. This is a tradition of Comann nam Pàrant and we hope it provides pupils with a memento of their early experiences of language and learning.

Comann nam Pàrant Nàiseanta

Fiona Stephen represented Comann nam Pàrant (Dùn Èideann is Lodainn) at meetings of Comann nam Pàrant Nàiseanta as well as having a role on the national committee. We would like to express our gratitude to Fiona for attending meetings on our behalf. Wilma Laird is also now part of the committee for Comann nam Pàrant Nàiseanta. We are very pleased to have another member to provide an additional link between the national group and our own. You can [view the national report here](#).

Closing words

In addition to a significant output of work, we are also often required to work at pace. With quick turn-around times and official papers released unreasonably late, there have been periods where we have had little choice but to work intensely and at speed. We are hugely grateful to the members of our committee who have taken time out of their busy lives to join together in a collaborative effort. We are always seeking offers of help and are looking to create a bank of ad hoc volunteers that we can call upon throughout the year, particularly during our busy periods. There is also further activity we could undertake across events, advocacy, partner relationships and more, but until we have more hands on deck, there is a limit to what we're able to do. Please consider giving your time to get involved. Thank you to all who have supported us this past year.

Treasurer's Report

The opening balance in the CnPDE bank account on 1/4/21 was £7,212.19. During the period April 2021 to March 2022, CnPDE did not receive any income. Due partly to COVID-19 restrictions, there were no fundraising events/activities, nor did CnP apply for any grants during this period. Expenses incurred by CnPDE during this period comprised: the provision of Gaelic dictionaries to the Bunsgoil Taobh na Pairce 2021 Clas 7 leavers (£852.05) and the annual cost of the CnP Zoom account (£143.00). The closing balance in the CnPDE bank account on 31/3/22 was £6,216.26. None of the funds are ringfenced in any way.

During the current (2022/23) financial year to date, no income has been received and expenses have included the cost of the Zoom account (£143.00), printing of postcards and booklets (£146) and the provision of Gaelic dictionaries to the Bunsgoil Taobh na Pairce 2022 Clas 7 leavers (£563.22). The current balance in the CnPDE bank account is £5,363.16.

Income		
Total Receipts		-
Expenditure		
Clas 7 dictionaries x 59		852.05
Zoom account		143.88
Total Expenditure		995.93
Surplus (Deficit) for the Year		995.93
Assets		
Opening balance		7212.19
Plus surplus for the year		-995.93
Closing Balance		6216.26
Assets represented by		
Bank		6216.26
Cash		-
Total		6216.26* *at end of financial year

