



BÒRD NA GÀIDHLIG'S RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION ON EMPOWERING SCHOOLS

Bòrd na Gàidhlig, through the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 and the Education (Scotland) Act 2016 has statutory responsibilities relating to Gaelic education, and in 2017 the Bòrd published the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education. This is the leading document on Gaelic education and sets out Guidance, based on research, experience and best practice, for education authorities, parents and others, including headteachers.

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the provisions of the proposed Education (Scotland) Bill and all of our comments are based on the principles for Gaelic education set out in our Statutory Guidance.

We welcome Scottish Government's ambition for excellence in education and expect, as a fundamental principle, that any legislation to achieve this recognises and supports Gaelic education to the same level as English medium education.

QUESTIONS 1-7 – HEAD TEACHERS CHARTER

Bòrd na Gàidhlig would like the Scottish Government to ensure that in the new arrangements, - the Headteachers' Charter, Improvement Plans and Regional Improvement Collaboratives, - that Gaelic education is safeguarded, promoted and supported in line with the statutory provision within the 2016 Act and the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic medium education (GME).

Gaelic Education

Gaelic education which includes both Gaelic medium education and Gaelic learner education continues to benefit from Scottish Government and Education Scotland support. This has been important in attracting parents and encouraging those with an interest in supporting growth and an increase in the number of Gaelic speakers. It is important that this support remains in place from both the Scottish Government and Education Scotland.

The central theme in the Bill's proposals is a desire to improve the quality of school education. It should, however, be emphasized that this duty should apply to both the English medium education and the Gaelic medium education sectors.

Curriculum

Despite having made substantial progress, Gaelic education remains very fragile and there is a risk that decisions by headteachers could unwittingly set back Gaelic provision that has been built up over a number of years. Changes in curriculum delivery have already had an impact on Gaelic and other modern languages in the senior phase. The empowerment of headteachers to design and deliver their local curriculum has the potential to offset the impact to date and further improvements in this regard are to be welcomed.

Current Statutory Provision

The new legislative changes and arrangements must ensure protection for Gaelic education. Local authorities should note the provisions of existing legislation and statutory guidance and ensure that there is a strong understanding of this at individual headteacher level so that headteachers continue to support and promote Gaelic education in their schools.

School improvement plans must also have regard to the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic education, agreed under the 2016 Act, and to any statutory Gaelic language plans agreed at local authority level. There is a concern that the Headteachers' Charter may not contain adequate references to promotion and support for Gaelic education. Appropriate engagement and action should be taken to ensure this does not happen.

Associated with this is the potential for headteachers to overlook essential recruitment of staff with Gaelic skills as this would in turn disadvantage the growth and development of both Gaelic medium and Gaelic learner education.

Headteacher Workload

Bòrd na Gàidhlig recognise it is imperative that headteachers are given more freedom to lead teaching and learning development in a more collaborative and flexible manner to gain improvements in attainment. However, it is important that this change is achieved without undue additional responsibility in an already demanding role within education.

There are already many pressures on promoted professionals. This is a challenge for recruitment and also for allowing schools the space to develop a curriculum which is in line with government priorities for attainment and excellence.

Headteacher Support

It is vital that headteachers, engaged in the development and delivery of Gaelic education, receive consistent support at local, regional and national level. This will ensure any development and support across the board is of equal benefit to Gaelic medium education. Headteachers already understand the high level of accountability required to maintain a strong school ethos. Nonetheless, these new responsibilities will require a structured programme of mentoring, local support and training.

Funding

There has been Gaelic education success in Scotland with the growth of both GME and GLE. This is as a result of resources and staffing levels being targeted in a proportionate and planned manner. Any proposed alteration to funding arrangements for schools must recognise the current circumstances that exist for Gaelic education through the Scheme of Specific Grants.

Circumstances of schools providing GME across Scotland vary enormously and there is some concern that a national or local funding formula which does not take account of the distinct circumstances in GME might fail to appreciate this.

QUESTIONS 8, 9, 10 - PARENTAL AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The broad areas for reform are appropriate to engage with parents and strengthen collaboration with schools. Parents are key to children's success in general. Historically and currently, GME parents are very involved in the demand for GME and its success. We welcome reforms which will give a legal structure and consolidate their commitment. It is also appropriate that the duties and powers relating to parental involvement are extended to publicly funded early learning and childcare settings.

QUESTIONS 11 AND 12 - PUPIL PARTICIPATION

It is vital that children's voices are heard and listened to. Young learners should be encouraged to participate fully in their learning development and have the opportunity to take part in discussions which impact directly on their learning journey.

QUESTIONS 13-16 - REGIONAL IMPROVEMENT COLLABORATIVES (RICS)

Bòrd na Gàidhlig is currently working with a wide range of delivery partners to ensure Gaelic education functions effectively at regional and local levels and we are happy to continue supporting these partners and extend these where requested to do so. We feel that this is essential for the continued success of Gaelic education.

Within newly established educational regions, Bòrd na Gàidhlig would seek guarantees that these would support GME, GLE, further opportunities to include Gaelic 1+2 languages strategy and ensure that all staff involved in Gaelic education have opportunities for support and for high quality professional development.

It is crucial that Collaboratives include representation from the Gaelic education sector, targeting advice and driving forward improvement across both EM and GM. Gaelic education must feature in the Improvement Plans of RICs.

Regional improvement collaboratives must also ensure that Gaelic education is promoted and supported. A clearer indication of how and from where regional improvement collaboratives will secure GM sector specific advice is required. This also requires to be formalised.

It is important that each regional improvement collaborative reports regularly to stakeholders. We would recommend reporting on an annual basis.

Any statutory guidance that is developed should take cognisance of the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education.

QUESTIONS 17-18 - EDUCATION WORKFORCE COUNCIL FOR SCOTLAND

The proposed purpose and aims for the new Education Workforce Council for Scotland are applicable within the proposed restructuring of the current Education Review and ensure that continuing lifelong professional learning is replicated across the wider education workforce.

Overall the functions for the EWCS are appropriate. An additional function to independent evidence-based advice on workforce planning, would be recognising the need for more Gaelic practitioners. As an established sector within Scottish education it is imperative that there is recognition and registration for all GM 'practitioners'. It seems appropriate that the Council would collect data on practitioners' Gaelic skills in its role of supporting and enhancing professional development.

Gaelic education is successful and the demand for more staff is increasing steadily, planning for this growth and gathering of data by the EWCS is key.

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