

SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT – CROSS PARTY-GROUP ON GAELIC

Minute of Meeting of the Cross-Party Group on Gaelic held in Committee Room Q1.04, Parliament Building, Holyrood, Edinburgh on Wednesday 26 September 2007 at 6.30pm.

Present

J.F. Munro, MSP; Fionnlagh M. MacLeòid, CNSA; Seumas Mac a' Bhreatannaich, Scottish Parliament; Ceitidh Mhoireach, Am Bothan; Mata MacIver, BnaG; Calum Iain MacLeod, CnaG; D. J. MacIntyre, CLI Gàidhlig; Douglas Ansdell, Scottish Government, Donald Weir, CnES; Neil Fraser, SnMG; Ailig MacLean, SnMG; Mairi A. MacInnes, SnMG; Margaret Cameron, SnMG; Dòmhnall Caimbeul, SnMG; Duncan MacInnes, SnMG; Niall M. Greumach, SnMG; Maighread Lobban, FÀS; Alasdair Allan, MSP; Micheil MacNeil, BBC Alba; Rob Dunbar, SnMG/BnG; Iain MacDonald, CNP Dhun Èideann; David Thompson, MSP; Iain MacKenzie, working in Edinburgh; Rob Gibson MSP; Eairdsidh MacGilleathain, CnaG.

Simultaneous translation provided by Alison Lang.

1. Welcome & Apologies

J.F. Munro MSP, Convener of the Group, opened the meeting and extended a warm welcome to all present.

Apologies had been received from:

Cllr Hamish Fraser, The Highland Council; David Smillie, Highlands and Islands Enterprise; Morag Anne MacLeod; The Highland Council; Dr Wilson Macleod, University of Edinburgh; John MacLeod, An Darach Ltd; Alasdair MacLeod, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar.

2.(i) Report from representatives of the Gaelic Media Service

Donald Campbell, Chief Executive of the GMS reported on progress towards the establishment of a Gaelic digital service. He referred to recent reports in the media that there would be a further delay in the introduction of the new service. He assured the group that the service was still scheduled to start in Spring 2008. There were discussions still to be had and decisions to be made regarding the most effective use of scarce resources and that was inevitable given the funding restrictions in place. It cost the BBC £100m to fund BBC3 and £50m to fund BBC4. It would cost £17m to provide a service broadcasting 1.5 hours of Gaelic content per day.

This partnership between the GMS and the BBC was completely new for both organisations. The partnership with the BBC provided access to new facilities at Pacific Quay as well as to the expertise of BBC staff.

SnMG has 5 main objectives for the period to 2012, namely, to establish and develop a Gaelic multimedia service; to deliver a strategy for the development of talent and skills within the Gaelic community; develop the use of Gaelic as the language of the industry; to be involved in the national debate on broadcasting and to develop a long term strategy for Gaelic media; enabling access to the industry and developing communities of interest.

These objectives would not be easily achieved and it was imperative that GMS work in conjunction with the Gaelic community to ensure that progress was made. In particular, it was

vital that the legal standing of the GMS was maintained and enhanced and also that a suitable funding formula was put in place for the long term.

(ii) Questions & Discussion

J.F. Munro thanked Donald Campbell for his report and invited Group members to ask questions or to comment.

The issue was raised as to what extent Gaelic would be spoken by TV company staff producing programmes for the new service.

It was recognised that all staff were not Gaelic speakers and it was imperative that they were given the necessary support and training. Some staff were already attending Gaelic classes and GMS would continue to support them as they worked towards fluency. It would also be possible to develop courses to meet the needs of the industry, including the use of broadcasting terminology, and allowing staff time off to attend intensive Gaelic courses.

How would the Gaelic community ensure ownership of the new service?

This would be ensured through the management structure of the new service, with a Management Board including two representatives of GMS and two from the BBC. The Board would make decisions on funding allocation and on the types of programmes being produced.

How could the Gaelic organisations support the work of the GMS?

It was felt that Gaelic organisations should continue to lobby at government level and also to work with the BBC to ensure the quality of the service. There was a need to ensure that the legal status of the service was protected. Broadcasting was still a power reserved by the Westminster government. It was important that Gaelic broadcasting was included within the remit of the newly established Broadcasting Commission.

It was felt that there was a general lack of awareness in the Gaelic community especially in relation to technical issues such as bandwidth etc. It was felt that the new service should be available on Freeview. However, the cost at this stage of achieving this were prohibitive, for example it cost £12m per annum to broadcast Film4 on Freeview. It was important that the community was made aware of these issues so that it could work with the GMS to develop the service.

3. Minute of meeting of 20 June 2007

The Minute of the Meeting of 20 June was approved.

4. Matters arising from the last meeting

Item 7 – Bilingual Signage

Clarification was required on the Executive's policy on bilingual signage, and in particular on the main trunk roads to the Highlands and Islands, the A9 and A82.

The issue was also raised as to the correct spelling of Loch Abar on one road-sign in Fort William.

Action: A. Maclean to make enquiries.

Item 9 - The new ÙLPAN Language Learning Course.

D.J. MacIntyre of CLI Gàidhlig updated the group on progress with the Ùlpan course. 30 tutors had now been trained and the courses were being delivered in various locations in the Highlands and Islands.

That the post of the Parliament's Gaelic Outreach Officer be filled without delay. It was proposed that the Group should write a letter to the parliament's HR section to take this forward. (This had been actioned by A. Maclean).

5. Updates from members

Finlay MacLeod of CNSA spoke about the perilous state of the language in the Western Isles and the need to recognise that if nothing was done within the next few years then the language would die out in some traditional Gaelic communities, in Barra for example, where few parents spoke Gaelic to their children. He added that the membership of Bòrd na Gàidhlig's Board should be drawn from the community it served.

JF Munro stated that significant progress had been made in progressing Gaelic, with the passing of the Gaelic Language Act 2005 and the publication of the National Plan for Gaelic

A. Allan MSP spoke about the need to change perceptions re Gaelic medium education. People referred to English medium education as mainstream, the inference being that Gaelic was somehow of lesser status or an add-on provision.

There were also plans to run an Ulpan course within the parliament for staff and MSP's.

Dr. R. Dunbar commented on the need for research in order to inform the development of Gaelic plans and the other work being carried out to maintain and develop the language.

6. A.O.C.B.

There was no other competent business.

7. Date of next meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting of the Group would be held on Wednesday 24 October at 6.30pm. The meeting after that would be held on Thursday 29 November to coincide with the final round of the Schools BT Debating Competition, which would also be held in the parliament. This would be followed by the Annual Reception.