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A charaid coir.

Many thanks for sending a copy of the draft plan and the draft guidance documents, and for providing opportunities for face-to-face contact with your staff at the public meetings now coming to a close.

My comments on the plan, given below, are from a 70-year old long-time lover of Gaelic (*an cànan agus am bardachd*) and admirer of the cultural traditions attached to those. Sadly, due largely to the turns my life and career have taken, I have progressed only in a very modest way in language capability and so am compelled to respond in English.

Regarding the background from which your "plans" have arisen, I should say that I am cynical about the present Scottish Government's motives in passing the Gaelic act in the form they did – I see it largely as tokenism under pressure from other quarters: nevertheless glad to see it at all and hopeful that it might be strengthened by further legislation in the not-too-distant future. Going back to the precedent reports Macpherson, Meek etc), though they were competent and inspiring in many ways, I thought their perspective on the extra public budgetary resources needed to save the language from extinction was out of scale by a factor of about 10: Gaelic has declined so very far that any hope of reversal will demand urgent and radical measures to achieve that, including the tasks of reversing all the history of anti-Gaelic indoctrination and counteracting the huge wave of "anti-culture" Americanising propaganda through the media which have so effectively disaffected a huge chunk of the Scottish population

So to your documents. I have had to read the plan rather hurriedly and only skimmed lightly through the "guidance" document, so forgive me if I have misinterpreted or been unfair to the authors.

In order to achieve an expansion in the language community, I see one of your main problems as the "political" or at least attitudinal conflict between those who identify themselves as the guardians of Gaelic – mostly native speakers, many with limited education or external experience, who live within what you describe or define as the heartland (*Gaidhealtachd*) – and others. I see this geographical distinction as badly out-of-date and even delusional, and being kept alive mostly for political advantage by the politicians at all levels of government representing these areas. You must know, as I have sensed and seen confirmed by research findings from the 2001 Census, that only tiny pockets survive within dispersed parts of that "heartland" where Gaelic continues to be the day-to-day "majority" language in the community. The heartland protagonists conveniently ignore the toxic effects of the high proportion of recent incomers who are uninterested if not openly hostile to Gaelic and the not insubstantial proportion even of native speakers who have become disaffected by indoctrination. As far as the Bord accepts their myth it becomes complicit itself in prejudice against the welfare and potential of the language community outside that definition. As someone brought up in Perthshire (part of the heartland not so very long ago!) and with historical family links with Sleat and also with Ireland, I feel far from comfortable when I come across such attitudes, and certainly not encouraged by that to learn the language or even visit "their" territory. Your documents should try much harder to avoid even an ambiguous show of favouritism in that direction if you are to exploit the full potential of the "non-heartland" population.

As someone involved in the town planning profession all my working life, I am quite familiar with the idea of planning and with the diverse definitions and forms of **plan**. The general criticism I have about your draft plan is the apparent lack of any indication of the scale of finance backing the plan or of the perceived division of these funds at least as rough percentages against, say, each of the main 5 headings ("action areas") in the plan. I raise this point as someone who has acted as chair/ secretary/ treasurer/ committee member of various voluntary organisations, where budgets tend to be fragile and uncertain even into the near future. While I appreciate that this is the first attempt "for real" at producing the statutory plan, and that too definite statements about finance could be counter-productive or even out of order (legally speaking), I would urge you to consider even for this plan but more so for its reviews-to-come that the better you can define your goals by monetary indicators, the more useful it will be, particularly to voluntary organisations.

There is probably too little acknowledgement in your draft plan of the importance of *bardachd* and too little emphasis on its potential for attracting learners into the Gaelic community. I say this as someone with an early love of music and participation through singing and playing the harmonica. Although my interest in the language began through hillwalking and map-reading, I listened to the radio on Friday and Saturday when Scottish country dance music programmes included Gaelic tunes and the late John Bannerman invited us to "Thig a' steagh" with "Caristiona Caimbeul" thrown in for good measure. Having been brought

up in modest circumstances and later working outwith Scotland and in the “Far East” (Fife). I did not have the opportunity (or confidence) to visit the Hebrides until fairly late in life – still haven’t made it to Barra! But the glue that has held my interest all these years has been the incredible heritage of Gaelic tunes, songs and poetry that can provide such enrichment of one’s life. Twice I have attended evening classes in Gaelic during these years, and twice I had to give up after 6-10 lessons because of work and household pressures.

The above paragraph is really a preface to my comments here about how An Comunn Gaidhealach features in your report. I have been a life-member for about 25 years. As Vice-Convener of the local committee when we held the Mod in Perth 2004, I am probably as aware as most people of its faults as an organisation. On the other hand, it has survived for well over a century and it would be difficult to imagine a world without the Mod (including Alan Campbell’s entertaining stories as we await the adjudication on the Gold Medal). The paid staff, supported by the national office-bearers, perform miracles annually on a shoestring budget with all the problems of a rotating venue and having to deal with different local councillors and committees every year. The Mod itself as an event has expanded considerably over the 40-50 years that I have known it, and surely that event and the provincial Mods could be used as a coathanger for more promotional investment in Gaelic parallel with these events.

Let me become more detailed in my suggestions. Your draft cites An Comunn perceived as a “primary player” in only 3 instances – CULTURE: cultural activity, CULTURE: heritage, & COMMUNICATIONS: print media. I see at least an additional seven themes where An Comunn, with sufficient resources, could contribute appropriately within the organisation’s aims. These are

VITALITY: community

STATUS: prestige, STATUS: awareness, STATUS: support

EDUCATION: resources

CULTURE: the arts

COMMUNICATIONS: radio & TV, COMMUNICATIONS: content

In making this comment, I am mindful that An Comunn exists not solely as a central-administration but also as Branches across the country and has attached to it potentially useful “organs” such as the Choirs Association and the Music Experts Group who recommend set pieces etc annually, also perennial links with Pan-Celtic, North American event organisers etc.

As a wrinkle, I have noticed what could be interpreted as age discrimination here and there. While I fully appreciate the logic behind this (return on investment etc), it may be worth considering whether age discrimination legislation could be expanded beyond its present application to employers, at Euro/ UK/ Scotland-wide levels; and whether the policy implications of any such “discrimination”, if it persists, should also be applied to, say, Board members, in order to be consistent. These comments are all intended as a constructive and positive contribution to your work, and I hope that they will prove to be so.

Wishing you all success in your endeavours. *Suas leis a’Ghàidhlig!*

Beannachd mòr leibh



Anthony (Tony) Ramsay