

Submission for the Education (Scotland) Bill

Overall I am in agreement with the principles set out in the Bill as regards Gaelic Medium Education. There is, however, one key omission in *Section 13 Duty to promote and support Gaelic medium education and learning*. This regards issues pertaining to IT in schools providing Gaelic Medium Education (GME).

In my view, there should be a legal requirement on councils which provide GME to include specific references to the special requirement of Gaelic IT in any invitation to tender for the supply of services. These requirements are:

- provision of enabling technologies (such as appropriate default keyboard settings, text entry methods, spellcheckers, screen readers etc.)
- provision of a Gaelic software environment to the utmost extent possible (such as providing the Gaelic version of the Windows operating system or the Gaelic version of web browsers such as Firefox)

Rationale

IT services (both hard- and software) have been outsourced to 3rd party suppliers by most councils. The contracts between the suppliers and the councils make no reference to the special IT needs of GME and as a result, virtually all computing is exclusively in English, even though many programs, apps and services are now available in Gaelic.

The lack of contractual requirements, resulting in a lack of interest by these suppliers coupled with a very limited ability by the schools to alter the IT setup means that in most cases:

- no Gaelic software is provided by default and it is virtually impossible for schools to install available Gaelic software (such as Firefox or LibreOffice) even if this is freely available at no extra cost
- it makes it highly inconvenient for staff and students to even write Gaelic on computers or tablets as the settings are geared entirely towards English. For instance, while it is theoretically very easy to enter accented characters such as àèìòù via the English United Kingdom Extended keyboard setting on PCs, schools are not able to choose this setting because the supplier have installed a different, less flexible keyboard. Similarly, although predictive texting tools are available for tablets (Android and iPads), these are not provided to GME as the contract makes no such requirement.

Overall this results in a considerable intrusion of English into the day to day operation of GME and also unfortunately leaves GME children with the lasting impression that IT and Gaelic do not mix.

Having tried to assist Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce in Edinburgh during their move from Tollcross, it soon became blatantly clear that even the most basic requests (such as a request for the keyboard settings mentioned above) will be ignored by IT suppliers unless they are legally required to do so.