

CRAIG COCKBURN

I have two comments on the above bill.

1.

Page 4 of the SPICE briefing makes the note that:

"It is essential that the requirements of this legislation do not result in the Gaelic language being artificially imposed on areas where there is little or no demand for it. In an area such as Dumfries and Galloway there is no tradition of Scottish Gaelic, whereas the Scots language has long been an integral part of our history and culture. (Dumfries and Galloway Council 2004, para 1)."

My comment is this. Galloway has a history of speaking Gaelic until comparatively recent times. The claim there is "no tradition of Scottish Gaelic" in that area is plainly false as the following extract from the Wigton Book Festival website illustrates

Quote from

<http://www.wigtown-booktown.co.uk/fullarticle.asp?articleID=5>

"Gaelic was once spoken throughout Scotland but endured in the South West in Galloway and Carrick till comparatively late...John MacInnes of the School of Scottish Studies, points out that in a visit to Arran in the 1960's the Gaelic speakers he met thought of then whole South Western coast as part of the Gaeltacht since they knew that Gaelic was their tongue in comparatively recent times."

Moreover as someone whose grandmother hailed from Dumfries, I have a keen interest in the local history and culture. It is important that Gaelic be provided there just as much as it is in other places outwith the Highlands. This need not be at the expense of Scots, not would I wish it to be so. Indeed the areas where people can readily access both cultures provides the opportunity for crossover, growth and diversification in each. This is no better demonstrated than by Robert Burns who died in Dumfries and who drew extensively from the Highland tradition and Gaelic musical repertoire to complement his Scots songs.

2.

My second point is regarding the "Key Points" on Page 3 of the SPICE briefing where it is commented that:

Bord na Gaidhlig.. can require Scottish Public Authorities to produce Gaelic language plans (taking account of the number of Gaelic speakers)

It is important to realise that whilst any local authority provision

must take into such numbers, that a local authority should not simply state that its Gaelic plan is to send its citizens to a neighbouring authority which does have Gaelic provision and for the local authority to provide no Gaelic education itself whatsoever. This is the case in West Lothian where I live. For us it is completely impractical to send our three children to Tollcross. Not only are the travelling times excessive (over an hour each way by car at peak times) but it is completely out of the question to take a 5 year old, a three year old and a one year old in and out on the train to drop out eldest off and again to collect her when neither myself nor my wife works in the City of Edinburgh council area. As a Gaelic learner myself, originally from Perthshire, my daughter has already expressed interest in learning about the history around her including the mountains near Callander which we can see from our home or on visits to Granny's in Perthshire.

Yet, in her current school she has already through nursery and Primary one received an introduction not only to French but also to Chinese, neither of which - to use the Dumfries council point - "have any history in this area".

One would hope that if the Gaelic bill is to achieve real progress in revitalising the language that it ensures that councils which are able to give pupils as young as 4 access to a few words of Chinese could do at least as much if not more to Scottish Gaelic in order that said pupils can interpret the placenames around themselves and so that the pupils need not have a 2 hour commute each day to access Gaelic education. I have personally written to the school to ask them to provide an introduction to Gaelic and to illustrate the surprise that my daughter has learned more Chinese words at school than she has words of Gaelic. Several weeks later, I have yet to receive a response.

Whilst West Lothian is clearly some way off having a Gaelic medium unit, currently there is no Gaelic primary education that I am aware of in West Lothian itself. An appropriate balance would perhaps be to provide a few teachers who toured the county spending some time in each school to provide an introduction to the Gaelic language through the medium of English. This would give a basis for the permanent teachers in the school to then carry on using this introduction, complemented by a more general introduction to Gaelic culture and music. This would raise awareness and interest in the language locally and initially could result in additional pupils from West Lothian attending Tollcross school in Edinburgh but longer term could form the basis of a full time Gaelic education locally.

This is the sort of result I would expect the Gaelic language bill to have - access to Gaelic medium education should be appropriate to local needs but no one should be excluded from Gaelic education because it is

inaccessible. Access to Gaelic education must be accessible, appropriate to demand and balanced such that Gaelic exists alongside the teachings of other cultures and languages and is not sidelined by them.

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