

The Scottish Languages Bill

Fairer Scotland Duty summary

Fairer Scotland Duty summary template (Interim)

Title of Proposal

The Scottish Languages Bill

Summary of Aims and Expected Outcomes of Proposal

The Bill aims to make statements on the status of the Gaelic and Scots languages. The Bill will also introduce measures relating to Gaelic medium education (GME); the structures and functions of Bòrd na Gàidhlig; the establishment of Areas of Linguistic Significance; and measures relating to the Scots language.

Its expected outcomes are to improve the standing of the Gaelic and Scots languages. For Gaelic medium education, it seeks to establish a new strategic approach to its provision across Scotland, addressing some of the gaps and challenges within the current system. Modifying the structures and functions of Bòrd na Gàidhlig will enable it to work more effectively as the body with national responsibility for monitoring support of Gaelic across Scotland's public sector. The establishment of Areas of Linguistic Significance is a measure by which Gaelic language planning can be better integrated with community development and public service provision within parts of Scotland which have a particularly significant relationship to the language. Introducing measures on behalf of the Scots language will give it standing and support within Scotland's public life and education system.

In relation to education - existing legislation already requires Scottish Ministers and local authorities to have due regard to exercising their powers in a way which reduces inequalities of outcome for pupils as a result of socio-economic disadvantage. This duty applies whether education is provided in Gaelic medium or English medium and is not being changed by the provisions of the Scottish Languages Bill.

Summary of Evidence

Gaelic and Scots speakers live across Scotland and face the same range of social and economic issues as the Scottish public at large. It is recognised that particular geographical areas also have particular concentrations of speakers. The Bill is expected to deliver positive outcomes for the support of both languages.

Gaelic medium education has been part of Scotland's state school system since 1985. In the decades since it has grown to become a successful minority sector within the wider national framework. It is found across Scotland – between rural and urban settings, island and mainland communities. Recent analysis of GME pupils by Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) quintiles confirms that there is GME representation in each quintile. This data suggests that GME uptake is patterned by SIMD. 43% of GME pupils are in the third quintile; 18% and 19% are in the second and fourth quintiles; 9% and 11% are in the first and fifth quintiles. It is not yet known why this patterning exists or what it tells us about disadvantage at a household level. Further research is required in this area.

Research has suggested attainment benefits for children attending GME as opposed to English medium education (EME). For example, children in GME have been found to have higher English reading skills than counterparts in EME. This is an area which would benefit from further research to understand the correlation, if any, between these findings and the social and economic background of those attending GME schools.

Indications also exist for the positive impact which GME schools can have on inequality within their local areas. For example, Glasgow's forthcoming fourth Gaelic primary school is to be based in the former St James Primary School in the Calton. The provision of a GME school in this location will see an historical public asset regenerated within an area ranked between the first and second quintiles of the SIMD. This can also be seen in the original establishment of Sgoil Ghàidhlig Ghlaschu (Glasgow Gaelic School) in 1999 coinciding with the wider regeneration of the Finnieston area. A tentative inference can therefore be made about the broader impact of efforts on behalf of Gaelic medium education upon social and economic outcomes. This is a subject which would benefit from further research.

The purpose of the Scottish Languages Bill is to provide further safeguards on behalf of Gaelic and Scots and to increase access to Gaelic and Scots services for those who speak, learn or otherwise support the languages. If social and economic inequalities in access to either language were identified in the course of the Bill's development options would be considered for the Bill to positively impact them. Likewise, if opportunities were identified for the Bill's provisions to improve outcomes for disadvantaged children then these would be taken into account during the Bill's implementation. The social and economic impact of the policy will be monitored going forward.

Summary of Assessment Findings

The provisions of the bill have been considered against the information available. However the connections between minority language provision and questions of social and economic inequality within Scotland are poorly understood and under researched. The evidence stage told the Scottish Government that further and continued research into the intersection of minority language and social and economic issues would be valuable. Relevant datasets have been identified for consideration, and further review of published evidence will be undertaken in the course of the Bill's passage. This interim assessment is published to accompany the introduction of the Bill and inform debate. An update on evidence, as well as an account of any changes to the Bill to address inequalities in response to further evidence, will follow once the Bill has completed Parliamentary passage and the associated Act has been published.

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