

# Education Scotland Conference. Dr Alasdair Allan, Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages

Good morning. I am delighted to be at this conference which aims to promote key messages from Education Scotland's Advice on Gaelic Education and also to recognise the successes of Gaelic Medium Education.

As we celebrate 30 Years of Gaelic Medium Education, we appreciate that it is still a relatively new initiative. Its successes, however, are abundantly clear. Gaelic Medium Education is a highly successful example of language learning in Scotland in which children and young people develop fluency in a language and accrue all the benefits of bilingualism. We know that children in Gaelic Medium Education are outperforming children in English medium education in English language, as well as by having fluency in another language. We value the contribution and efforts of our teachers in achieving these successes. We are proud of those first pupils of Gaelic Medium Education who we now note in successful careers, many of whom are giving back to Gaelic. We also recognise the successes of Gaelic Learner Education in how it helps us meet our targets for increasing the numbers of speakers of Gaelic.

The Scottish Government is committed to supporting Scotland's languages and to embedding their use in a modern vibrant Scotland. This is an important time for Gaelic as we continue to strengthen its place within Scottish education. There are a number of current key developments which makes this an exciting and influential time for Gaelic from which we can gain more impact.

The first of these that I wish to mention is Education Scotland's Advice on Gaelic Education. This describes best practice from inspection. It also gives a clear vision for achieving high-quality learning and teaching of Gaelic in our schools. It is important to emphasise that young people in Gaelic Medium Education need to be receiving a high-quality experience, with strong attainment in national qualifications. This is key in attracting parents to choose GME. I am particularly pleased that Education Scotland also advises on Gaelic Learner Education and how schools can include this in a 1+2 Approach to Languages.

The second important development is the provisions for Gaelic in the Education (Scotland) Bill which is currently progressing through the Scottish Parliament. The Bill sets out a process for parents to request an assessment to ascertain a demand for Gaelic Medium Education at the primary stages. It places a duty on local authorities to promote and support Gaelic, both Learner and Medium Education, to help realise an increase in pupil numbers. Schools will also be better supported with resources.

The third important development for Gaelic is the duty that will now be placed on Bòrd na Gàidhlig to write guidance as part of the current legislation. This has potential to address a range of issues and it gives the Bòrd a real opportunity to work with partners to make a difference to addressing barriers to Gaelic.

The Scottish Government is committed to improving the life chances of all our children and young people. I know that the audience at this conference today are key players in achieving this through Gaelic. We recognise that there is still much to be done to secure a sustainable future for Gaelic. The findings and recommendations of the Advice on Gaelic Education present a strong agenda to support improvement.

Gaelic is many things and it is more than just a language. It is a 1,500-year-old part of our heritage and a significant aspect of modern Scotland. It is vital that local authorities, organisations and other bodies continue to work together to significantly shape the future of Gaelic in Scotland. This conference is an important platform for sharing effective practice and identifying ways that all the key organisations can support schools and local authorities for the good of Gaelic.

I hope you enjoy the remainder of the conference and leave with a clear plan of what you can do to improve provision for Gaelic.

Thank you.

June 2015