

Matthews B (Barry)

From: Arthur Cormack [arthur@feisean.org]
Sent: 15 March 2007 17:51
To: Matthews B (Barry)
Cc: Cultural Bill Consultation
Subject: Response to Culture Bill

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Attached is Fèisean nan Gàidheal's response to the Draft Culture (Scotland) Bill.

Deagh dhùrachd

Arthur Cormack

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Arthur Cormack

Stiùiriche

Fèisean nan Gàidheal

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NAN GAIDHEAL

Fèisean nan Gàidheal's response to the Draft Culture (Scotland) Bill consultation

Background to Fèisean nan Gàidheal

Fèisean nan Gàidheal's aim is to make Gaelic Arts, Language and Culture more accessible and more widely appreciated through the support and development of community-based tuition Fèisean, primarily for young people. It is an independent organisation offering tuition in Gaelic song, Gaelic drama, traditional music and dance to over 5,000 young people annually.

Fèisean nan Gàidheal is also involved in providing traditional music tuition in schools through the Scottish Executive's Youth Music Initiative, and in 2006 over 6,000 pupils in primary schools within the Highland Council and East Lothian Council areas benefited from that scheme. We also run the only Gaelic theatre-in-education service - part-time due to limited funds - that nevertheless manages to offer a drama experience to around 2,500 school pupils annually. Fèisean nan Gàidheal also runs the Blas Festival in partnership with the Highland Council and the Promoters' Arts Network which, in 2006, attracted an audience of about 5,000 people to over 40 events across the Highlands.

Our funding comes principally from the Scottish Arts Council, Highlands & Islands Enterprise, The Highland Council and Bòrd na Gàidhlig.

Our objectives are to:

- Provide support for the development of individual Fèisean, promoting excellent working practices, and developing their range of activities
- Develop the use of the Gaelic language within the Fèis movement, developing the spoken word as a means of communication and medium for tuition, according to the needs of the community each Fèis serves.
- Develop the work of the Fèisean within the formal education sector
- Deliver strategic projects and contract work, with partners, carried out by Fèisean nan Gàidheal and individual Fèisean
- Develop training to enhance the skills of those involved in Fèisean and promote excellence within the Fèis movement
- Continue to foster closer links between Fèisean, other organisations and other countries, and raise the profile of the Fèis movement through enhanced PR and showcase opportunities

While Fèisean nan Gàidheal exists first and foremost to offer a range of useful services to its member Fèisean, we are also involved in strategic projects that benefit the Fèisean while helping us fulfil our aims and objectives.

Comments on Draft Culture (Scotland) Bill

Fèisean nan Gàidheal supports the general principles of the draft Culture (Scotland) Bill. The development and delivery of local cultural entitlements by local authorities and the activities of Creative Scotland could all, potentially, increase the use and understanding of Gaelic in Scotland, strengthening our work in the process. Fèisean nan Gàidheal would ask Ministers to ensure that the Gaelic arts aspect of their policies for culture is appropriately embedded and sufficiently visible in the draft Bill and guidance. Indeed we would advocate that in the establishment of a new body, the Gaelic arts should be specified in the functions of Creative Scotland as an area that should continue to be supported and developed by it, building on the work of the Scottish Arts Council in supporting the sector over a number of years.



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LOCAL CULTURAL ENTITLEMENTS

The process set out in the Bill and guidance on the development of local cultural entitlements could potentially increase awareness of the cultural provision local authorities will make in their area. However, we believe that there needs to be a minimum provision specified - probably by Creative Scotland - and agreed with local authorities, taking into account the cultural and linguistic landscape of the area they cover. There is a danger in local authorities being demand-led in determining the activities they make available, and we would ask that the Executive seeks to encourage local authorities to explore opportunities to develop Gaelic-medium and Gaelic-related cultural activities, such as those offered already by the Fèis movement. While there may be less 'demand' for such activities, they are nonetheless very important to those who participate and are important in encouraging the use of Gaelic language among young people.

While it is important to ensure that local authorities are resourced appropriately to deliver cultural entitlements, it is equally important to ensure that any additional resources are correctly applied, perhaps monitored by Creative Scotland, to avoid displacement and replacement of funding.

While we agree that local authorities should consider planning for culture through the framework of existing strategies and plans, this should be in cooperation with existing cultural agencies within their areas, or those working across a number of local authorities. We have a concern about cultural planning across local authorities, and what might happen to cultural organisations that deliver across a number of local authorities, but who are perhaps not considered 'national'. It is important that support for such bodies is maintained, but it is not clear to us from the draft Bill whose responsibility that will be. This should be addressed.

While the guidance document gives a list of organisations that can provide advice and assistance to local authorities on cultural planning, 'Gaelic arts organisations' could be added to this section.

Creative Scotland

Fèisean nan Gàidheal agrees that there should be a single, national body responsible for supporting talent and excellence in the arts, culture, creative industries and screen industries. The new body should provide leadership, advice, authority and inspiration. Creative Scotland should fulfil an advisory role to Scottish ministers, and should take the lead strategic role in the development and delivery of the vision for culture in Scotland. Like other public bodies, Creative Scotland should help deliver the strategic policy priorities of Ministers, but it is essential that full discretion in artistic decision-making is afforded to the new body, and perhaps there should be a case for any artistic matters to be exempt from direction of any kind from the Scottish Executive or Creative Scotland.

The Bill does not provide a definition of 'culture', which we think would be useful, particularly to ensure that in relation to Creative Scotland's remit and the development of local cultural entitlements, Gaelic arts will continue to be developed and supported.

In this regard, Fèisean nan Gàidheal acknowledges the exemplary support provided by the Scottish Arts Council to Gaelic arts and culture over many years, and believes that Creative Scotland should seek to maintain and build on the level of support currently provided by the Scottish Arts Council. We would want the Gaelic arts to be a key part of Creative Scotland's remit and, as alluded to in the previous section, we would suggest that the best way to achieve this would be to embed support for the Gaelic arts in Creative Scotland's functions on the face of the Bill, and would strongly suggest that this be considered. This could make a significant contribution to delivering the objective of Ministers to secure the status of the Gaelic language in Scotland.

Fèisean nan Gàidheal would strongly encourage Ministers to ensure that the ability to speak Gaelic is included as a desirable criteria in the person specification used for appointments to the Board of Creative Scotland. In keeping with the aim of Ministers to afford Gaelic equal respect with English, we would hope that the opportunity would not be missed to develop a bilingual corporate identity for Creative Scotland, or to use Gaelic in signage within its offices.

Arthur Cormack
Director, Fèisean nan Gàidheal
March 2007