

**Rannsachadh air Poileasaidh Cànan
agus Dealbhadh Cànan**

Research on Language Policy and Planning

REVITALISING GAELIC?

**A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE REPORT OF THE
TASKFORCE ON PUBLIC FUNDING OF GAELIC**

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Tha e ceadaichte an aithisg seo a chleachdadh ann an dòigh sam bith nach eil a chum prothaid, agus tha e ceadaichte lethbhrìc a chur saor 's an asgaidh gu daoine eile, cho fad agus gu bheilear a' cur an cèill cò às a thàinig i, nach tèid atharrachadh a dhèanamh oirre, agus gum fuirich an sanas seo an ceangal rithe. Chan fhaod i a bhith air a sgaoileadh ann an riochd eadar-dhealaichte sam bith no air a cur a-steach ann an bathar no làrach-lìn sam bith a tha a chum prothaid gun chead sgrìobhte. Is e a th'anns an aithisg seo ach beachdan nan ùghdaran a-mhàin, agus cha bu chòir an tuigsinn mar bheachdan Roinn Ceiltis agus Eòlas na h-Alba no mar bheachdan Oilthigh Dhùn Èideann.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report evaluates the September 2000 report of the Taskforce on Public Funding of Gaelic, *Revitalising Gaelic: A National Asset / Ag Ath-Bheothachadh Gàidhlig: Neamhnuid Nàiseanta* ('the Macpherson report'), seeking to locate that report within the broader context of the debate with regard to the future of Gaelic and Scottish Executive policy-making with regard to Gaelic. It is argued that the Macpherson report does not form a sound basis for future Gaelic development policy and that, whether intentionally or not, the remit of the Macpherson committee and the timing of its intervention have served to narrow the debate on the future of Gaelic and to decrease the likelihood that policies will be introduced that will be effective in reversing the process of language shift from Gaelic to English.

Although the taskforce's stated remit was to 'examine the arrangements and structures for the public support of the Gaelic organisations in Scotland, [and] to advise Scottish Ministers on future arrangements', the Macpherson report actually says remarkably little about the present arrangements and structures for the public support of Gaelic organisations, and its recommendations for future arrangements are distinctly sketchy and vague. In particular, there is a crucial ambiguity with regard to a proposed new department within the Scottish Executive: whether this would deal specifically with Gaelic-language issues or more generally with Highlands and Islands issues. The latter prospect could mean that Gaelic-language issues would be relegated to the margins.

While the Macpherson taskforce's key recommendations — the establishment of a Gaelic Development Agency and a Scottish Executive department dealing with Gaelic issues — would benefit Gaelic development, certain other recommendations might marginalise the role of Lowland and urban Scotland in language policy. The report proposes to base Gaelic development policy on a division of the Gaelic community into three geographical sections: (1) 'the "heartland" where the language is still vibrant but vulnerable', (2) 'the large area of Scotland where Gaelic was once healthy but has declined more rapidly in recent years' and (3) 'the remainder of Scotland and the diaspora of Gaelic speakers all over the world'. This geographical division should be rejected on the grounds that the creation of a 'rest of Scotland and diaspora' division would be likely to sideline the cities, the Lowlands, the majority of Gaelic learners and a significant minority of native Gaelic speakers in future Gaelic development. While different policies will be needed in different areas of Scotland, the importance of the Lowlands, the cities and Gaelic learners must be taken into account in Gaelic development policy.

The impact of the report is further complicated by political factors outwith the taskforce's control. The Macpherson committee's deliberations were based on the understanding that a Gaelic language act would be put in place and that the recommendations of the committee would be complementary to this initiative. The Scottish Executive's subsequent reversal of support for a Gaelic language act raises the possibility that the Macpherson report might be implemented as a stand-alone measure rather than as a part of an overall language development strategy. In such circumstances, a Gaelic Development Agency of the kind recommended would be substantially powerless.

Given the deficiencies of the report and the Government's apparent backtracking on its commitment to a Gaelic language act, the implementation of the report could in fact stall further progress towards language revitalisation. Careful reconsideration is therefore needed as the new Ministerial Advisory Group on Gaelic finalises its own recommendations.

INTRODUCTION: THE PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

This report will critically evaluate the September 2000 report of the Taskforce on Public Funding of Gaelic, *Revitalising Gaelic: A National Asset / Ag Ath-Bheothachadh Gàidhlig: Neamhnuid Nàiseanta* ('the Macpherson report'), seeking to locate the report within the broader context of the debate with regard to the future of Gaelic and Scottish Executive policy-making with regard to Gaelic. It will be argued that the Macpherson report does not form a sound basis for future Gaelic development policy and that, whether intentionally or not, the remit of the Macpherson committee and the timing of its intervention have served to narrow the debate on the future of Gaelic and to decrease the likelihood that policies will be introduced in Scotland that will be effective in reversing language shift.

I. THE MACPHERSON COMMITTEE AND THE MACPHERSON REPORT

A. Background to the Taskforce on Public Funding of Gaelic

A ministerial taskforce was appointed by the Scottish Executive in December 1999 to 'examine the arrangements and structures for the public support of the Gaelic organisations in Scotland, to advise Scottish Ministers on future arrangements, taking account of the Scottish Executive's policy of support for Gaelic as set out in the Programme for Government, and to report by 30th April 2000'. The members of this Taskforce were John A. Macpherson (Chair), Maggie Cunningham, Donald J. MacInnes, Donald MacKay and Annie MacSween. This taskforce's official title was the Taskforce on Public Funding of Gaelic but the group was more colloquially and generally known as the Macpherson committee.

Following an extension to its initial deadline, the group reported on 8 September 2000. The main recommendations of its report were that a department should be established at a high level within the Scottish Executive to advise ministers on policy relating to Gaelic and that a new national Gaelic development agency should be created.¹ The executive summary and full recommendations of the report are reproduced in appendix A and B below.

¹As will be discussed later, the exact remit and title of the recommended new government department are unclear from the report, as the English and Gaelic versions of the document present this recommendation in significantly different ways.

To take forward their recommendations, the taskforce advocated that a transitional advisory group of four members be established. This recommendation was accepted by the Scottish Executive and such a group — the Ministerial Advisory Group on Gaelic (MAGOG) — was established in December 2000. The members of this group are Professor Donald Meek (Chair), Jo Macdonald, Donald MacKay and Professor Kenneth MacKinnon. MAGOG is itself expected to produce a report at the end of 2001.

B. The Membership of the Taskforce

A notable feature of the Taskforce on Public Funding of Gaelic was its surprising choice of appointees. Most remarkably for a group with a remit of its type, none of the members appointed had any expertise or training in language planning matters. The members of the group were all Gaelic speakers and undoubtedly brought with them a desire for the revitalisation of Gaelic, together with what was described as ‘an impressive matrix of skills and experience in business, education, communication, social and economic development, and public policy’ (Taskforce on Public Funding of Gaelic 2000: 38).² Such diverse skills, however, cannot make up for the absence of language planning experts.

The choice of appointments can also be criticised on the grounds that not all sectors of the Gaelic community were represented. Every member of the Macpherson committee was a native speaker of Gaelic who had been brought up in the Hebrides. No Gaelic learners were appointed. This is a significant omission. Research has established the existence of many thousands of Gaelic learners in Scotland (Galloway 1995), while the decreasing numbers of native Gaelic speakers and low levels of intergenerational transmission mean that increasing numbers of Gaelic learners must be attracted and brought to fluency if there is to be a realistic prospect of reversing language shift (RLS [Fishman 1991]). It is highly surprising that a group as large and as strategically important as adult learners of Gaelic was ignored in the membership of the Macpherson committee.

In a press release welcoming the news of the committee’s establishment, CLI, the membership body for Gaelic learners and supporters, expressed its disappointment at the makeup of the committee, stating that ‘Gaelic learners have once again been snubbed’ and that ‘we are [...] greatly disturbed that the working party includes none of the many Gaelic speakers who have learnt the language as an adult. Surely this is necessary if the group is to have the confidence of all the Gaelic community and its supporters throughout Scotland, not just that of the native speakers in the Western Isles’ (CLI 1999).

²Henceforth, for convenience, the report will be cited as ‘Macpherson 2000’.

As suggested by the quotation from CLI, the omission of Gaelic learners from the taskforce is not merely a matter of the omission of a representative or representatives of Gaelic learners. It also raises the possibility that the views of Gaelic learners might be overlooked. Because Gaelic learners and native speakers of Gaelic often hold differing views on issues relating to Gaelic (Morgan 2000; McLeod 2001; MacCaluim forthcoming), it is by no means certain that a group composed of native Gaelic speakers from the Hebrides can fully understand the needs and aspirations of Gaelic learners. It will be suggested below that this concern has been proven substantially justified in the recommendations of the report.

C. Format of the report

In addition to the report's substantive content, some aspects of its format are worthy of note. The first is the fact that the report is bilingual but has clearly been written in English and translated into Gaelic at a later stage. The Gaelic translation is often loose and contains many simplifications of the original English text that make it unlikely that a reader could gain a full understanding of the report without also consulting the English version. In some cases the differences in meaning between the Gaelic and English versions of the text are significant. Perhaps the most notable example here is the recommendation that a new department be established within the Scottish Executive: in English this appears as 'a small Gaelic-speaking Department of the Gaidhealtachd' and in Gaelic as 'roinn bheag de luchd-labhairt Gàidhlig a bhiodh a' dèiligeadh ri cùisean na Gàidhlig' [a small department of Gaelic speakers who would deal with Gaelic-language affairs (present authors' translation)] (Macpherson 2000: 4). As shown below, the connotations of 'Gaidhealtachd Department' and 'department dealing with Gaelic affairs' are by no means identical.

The second striking feature of the report is its brevity. Excluding appendices, the report contains just under 5,000 words in total, yet the amount of space devoted to the discussion of the main issues is substantially less, coming in at fewer than 3,500 words when the foreword, acknowledgements, discussion of process and an executive summary are taken into account. While it would be foolish to argue that a good report is necessarily a long report or that a short report is necessarily a poor one, *Revitalising Gaelic* is undoubtedly a very brief report by Scottish Executive standards. It will be argued later that the conciseness of the report has been at the expense of sufficient discussion of the issues in question and at the expense of advancing full justifications for the taskforce's recommendations.

II. THE MACPHERSON RECOMMENDATIONS: A CRITICAL EVALUATION

The main text of the report is divided into four sections: ‘Gaelic and the Scottish Executive’, ‘The Current State of Gaelic’, ‘Vision’ [a vision statement for the future of Gaelic] and ‘Framework for Development’. The first two sections discuss the present situation of Gaelic and the last two make recommendations as to the way forward. The report then concludes with a set of final recommendations for the development of the language.

The section entitled ‘Gaelic and the Scottish Executive’ briefly details current levels of Scottish Executive support for Gaelic. Although this section is useful, it is based upon information that is readily available from sources such as the Scottish Executive’s *Gaelic in Scotland Factsheet* and thus does not constitute original research by the taskforce.³

The second section, ‘The Current State of Gaelic’, is notable for several reasons. The first is its brevity: some 2,000 words, or closer to 1,500 if the lengthy quotations are excluded. Surprisingly, the report does not discuss the present situation of Gaelic in detail but rather gives little more than a very general summary. This summary is less than adequate: instead of discussing facts and examples relating to the present situation of Gaelic and drawing conclusions on the basis of these facts and examples, the report makes statements and conclusions which it does not attempt to justify, quantify or explain in factual terms. This weakens the force of the arguments put forward as the report does not show how the conclusions were reached or enable readers to assess whether or not these conclusions are justified.

This tendency is made even more noticeable by the use of emotive, rhetorical and polemical language (e.g. Gaelic ‘is hanging on by a thread which is getting more frayed by the day. Despite the occasional signs of remission, the prognosis is bleak’ (Macpherson 2000: 8)). While such language is not in itself inappropriate, the failure to back it up with evidence serves to lessen its force. The taskforce’s analysis of the present situation of Gaelic is further weakened by the seeming lack of any coherent line of argument and by a tendency to jump between topics. The report also tends to use vague and ambiguous language that renders the intended meaning difficult to discern.

The most striking characteristic of this section, and of the report in general, is its almost complete failure to examine the subject matter for which the taskforce had been

³The *Gaelic in Scotland Factsheet* is available from the Scottish Executive’s website (www.scotland.gov.uk) and is also included as an appendix to the Macpherson report.

established, namely 'the arrangements and structures for the public support of the Gaelic organisations in Scotland'. Very little indeed is said about the Gaelic organisations in Scotland which the taskforce was charged with investigating. While the taskforce conclude that there is fragmentation and a lack of a coherent framework amongst the Gaelic groups at present, no evidence is given to back up this conclusion, and many topics which one might have expected to have been discussed in detail were not mentioned at all. Although appendix 3 to the report (Macpherson 2000: 32) lists the Gaelic-related organisations receiving government funding and the level of public funding involved, the report nowhere gives a full presentation of the diverse Gaelic organisations in existence, of their activities, their remits, their objectives or their budgets.

The report hints that different Gaelic organisations may have differing agendas and visions for the development of the language (Macpherson 2000: 10). To what extent this is the case, however, and to what extent such diversity might be beneficial or detrimental are not investigated. Similarly ignored is the basic definitional question as to which entities constitute 'Gaelic' groups and which public funding constitutes 'public funding of Gaelic'. This is a question of substantial importance given that a range of groups and projects receive public funding to support 'Gaelic culture' or 'the Gaelic arts' but actually make minimal use of Gaelic in their work or cater for largely monolingual English-speaking audiences. The issue of the relationship between Gaelic cultural projects and the development of the Gaelic language is simply not addressed. Another pertinent question ignored in the report is the issue of democracy and community involvement within Gaelic development, a matter which has attracted considerable attention within the Gaelic community and which the legal scholar and Gaelic policy planner Robert Dunbar (2000) has argued to be of great importance.

Similarly, the issue of whether overlap exists between organisations and whether public funding to Gaelic groups is being spent efficiently and effectively is not considered. Nor is attention given to the case for or against the establishment of a single Gaelic organisation (as advocated by the Minister for Gaelic) or the practicalities of establishing such an organisation.⁴ These omissions are particularly surprising given that resolution of these particular questions seems to have been the prime purpose for the taskforce's creation (Morrison 1999).

Against the background of these criticisms of the 'Current State of Gaelic' section of the report, the taskforce's assessment of the present position of the language will now be

summarised. The report argues that while some progress has been made to develop Gaelic in a variety of fronts in the last twenty years, the language remains very weak, indeed endangered. Further progress is being prevented by a lack of resources, a lack of language planning and the lack of an overall development policy for the language.

The report contends that a variety of actions are needed to remedy this situation, with the Scottish Executive having a crucial role to play. A new organisational model is needed for Gaelic development. Scottish Executive support should be increased to a level more in line with the support given to the Welsh and Irish languages by the administrations of these countries, and future language policy should be founded on a holistic, language planning based approach.⁵ As part of this approach, cultural, social and economic development should be seen as closely connected to the development of the language.

Gaelic-medium education is also said to have an important role to play in the revitalisation of Gaelic. Such education should both continue and expand, supported by a consolidated funding system for primary, secondary and tertiary education and ‘effective measures’ to ensure that more learners achieve fluency. Advantage should be taken of public goodwill towards Gaelic and the value of bilingualism should be promoted.

The short-term goal of language policy should be to stabilise numbers of Gaelic speakers at present levels over the next ten years, with the long-term goal being to ensure an increase in numbers. Gaelic must both be secured in what is described as the Gaelic ‘heartland’ and promoted in what are termed ‘energy centres’ in other parts of Scotland. The report’s section on the present situation of Gaelic concludes with the observation that the language is a national asset, whose revitalisation is both desirable and possible (Macpherson 2000: 11).

Having looked at the present situation of Gaelic, the Macpherson report then goes on to put forward its proposals for the future development of Gaelic in a vision statement for the future of Gaelic, a framework for the development of the language and in the report’s overall recommendations. As with the rest of the report, these sections are very short, consisting between them of only 800 words.

The ‘Framework for Development’ section states that ‘future public funding of Gaelic should be (1) needs-driven, (2) project-based, (3) action-centred, (4) community-orientated and (5) partnership-built’ (Macpherson 2000: 14). The report does not state what exactly is meant by these terms or how these principles were arrived at. It is further

⁴Among the final recommendations of the taskforce is that such a group be established, but no argument is made in favour of this recommendation.

recommended that Gaelic policy should be based upon ‘different emphasis and intensity’ for three different sections of the Gaelic community which are identified by the taskforce: ‘the “heartland” where the language is still vibrant but vulnerable’, ‘the large area of Scotland where Gaelic was once healthy but has declined more rapidly in recent years’ and ‘the remainder of Scotland and the diaspora of Gaelic speakers all over the world’, including cities and towns with strong Gaelic communities (*ibid*).

The ‘Recommendations’ section of the report makes two main proposals. These are, first, that the Scottish Executive should ‘have Gaelic representation at a senior level within the Executive — a small Gaelic speaking Department of the *Gaidhealtachd*⁶ — to advise ministers on policy’ and, second, that a Gaelic Development Agency, responsible to the Scottish Executive and to the Scottish Parliament, should be established (Macpherson 2000: 16).

The Gaelic Development Agency would be charged with producing an overarching strategy and with formulating clearly articulated plans for the development of Gaelic. The agency would develop Gaelic in four ‘functional areas’: (1) education and learning, (2) arts, cultural and heritage; (3) economic and social development, and (4) language planning. The agency would also be responsible for ‘facilitating the process of Secure Status for the language’.⁷ The agency would have a chief executive, four ‘heads of function’ and a board of management including five non-executive directors ‘representative of the Gaelic community and appointed with due diligence by a formal selection process’ (Macpherson 2000: 16).

This agency would become the sole channel of Government funding for Gaelic development and would in the first instance administer Government funding of £10 million annually. It would ‘subsume the strategic development and activities’ of the currently publicly funded organisations, with the result that ‘the number of organisations would be reduced and some or all of the remaining ones would become wholly-owned subsidiaries of the agency’. The group would also form alliances with other public and private bodies and ‘concentrate the management of Gaelic activities in locations in the Gaelic heartland, with appropriate distribution to accommodate the “energy centres” and the language’s national disposition’. It is further recommended that a transitional Advisory Group be established to

⁵Note that it appears from the taskforce’s explanation of language planning (Macpherson 2000: 10) that the terms ‘status planning’ and ‘corpus planning’ were not fully understood.

⁶In the Gaelic version of the text it is recommended that a *Gaelic* department as opposed to a *Gaidhealtachd* department be established.

⁷The significance of this statement will be investigated in more detail below.

take forward the findings of the report and that various measures be taken with regard to Gaelic school and tertiary education (Macpherson 2000: 16).

It can be argued that the taskforce's recommendations for the future are weakened from the outset by the numerous flaws identified above. In particular, the failure to supply evidence or justification for the taskforce's analysis of the present situation means that their recommendations for the future are based on shallow and shaky foundations. This failure to explain or justify the taskforce's viewpoint is continued in the sections dealing with the future of Gaelic, as virtually no argument is put forward in support of the recommendations made. Also absent is any discussion of the views gathered by the Macpherson committee through the various consultation meetings that were held with Gaelic organisations and through the numerous letters that were received from members of the public.

The failure of the taskforce to set out the reasoning behind its recommendations must be seen as a matter of regret. The taskforce calls upon the Scottish Executive to greatly increase its expenditure upon Gaelic. Without a clear justification for this expenditure and for the other changes recommended, the chances of convincing politicians and civil servants of the need to implement the report are likely to be considerably reduced.

The recommendations of the committee are also weakened by lack of detail and by vague and ambiguous wording. Due to the large number of ambiguities, only the most striking will be examined here. The two key recommendations of the report are that a new department within the Scottish Executive and a unified Gaelic development agency should be established. In the case of the Scottish Executive department, only one sentence is given: 'having Gaelic representation at a senior level within the Executive — a small Gaelic-speaking department of the Gaidhealtachd — to advise Ministers on policy' (Macpherson 2000: 16). It is unclear from this description what would be the exact function of the proposed department, or the nature of its relationship with other civil service departments or with the Gaelic development agency.

This vagueness is compounded by the ambiguous title 'Department of the Gaidhealtachd' and by the fact that the Gaelic version of the report recommends a *Gaelic* rather than a *Gaidhealtachd* department. The term 'Gaidhealtachd' can be translated in several different ways in English. It can be used to mean the Highlands, the Gaelic-speaking areas, or, less usually, the Gaelic-speaking people. It is, therefore, unclear whether the department envisaged would be a department dealing with Gaelic issues only or whether its remit would also include a portfolio of general Highlands and Islands affairs or of the general affairs of the islands where Gaelic is a community language.

The recommendation for a Gaelic development agency is laid out in more detail but nonetheless raises many questions. The section dealing with the existing Gaelic organisations is particularly vague: ‘subsume the strategic direction and activities of the currently public-funded organisations. The number of organisations would be reduced and some or all of the remaining ones would become wholly-owned subsidiaries of the Agency’. It is not stated which organisations should be abolished nor which should become wholly owned subsidiaries of the agency. The relationship between this statement and the recommendation that ‘existing or new membership-based or voluntary organisations continue to receive public funding through the Gaelic Development Agency’ is also unclear. The practicalities of merging some of the existing Gaelic groups with a Gaelic development agency or of winding up these groups is not investigated. This issue is by no means a simple one given that some groups receive funding from several sources and that some are membership groups or voluntary organisations which could not simply be abolished or merged by the Scottish Executive.

Also ambiguous is the statement that the Gaelic development agency should ‘concentrate the management of Gaelic activities in locations in the Gaelic heartland, with appropriate distribution to accommodate the “energy centres” and the language’s national disposition’ (Macpherson 2000: 17). This sentence not only fails to define the ‘Gaelic heartland’ or ‘energy centres’ but also seems to be internally inconsistent. The meaning of the phrase ‘facilitating the process of Secure Status for the language’ is also by no means clear (Macpherson 2000: 16).

Above and beyond its vagueness with regard to the main remit of the taskforce — ‘to examine the arrangements and structures for the public support of the Gaelic organisations in Scotland’ (Macpherson 2000: 2) — the recommendations of the report also stray slightly outwith the taskforce’s remit by discussing and making recommendations relating to Gaelic primary, secondary and tertiary education (Macpherson 2000: 11, 17).

In summary, the Macpherson report can be said to have failed to fulfil the remit with which it was charged. *Revitalising Gaelic* is both very short and lacking in detail, and does not fully examine the existing arrangements and structures for the public support of Gaelic organisations. In proposing future arrangements for the public support of the Gaelic organisations, the taskforce’s recommendations are unacceptably vague and ambiguous, and the argument and factual information supplied as justification for these recommendations are sketchy and inadequate. Further, some of the report’s recommendations would appear to cover areas outwith the remit of the taskforce.

III. THE MACPHERSON REPORT IN POLITICAL CONTEXT

The significance of the Macpherson committee and report can only be fully appreciated in the broader context of the politics of Gaelic development and particularly in the context of the campaign for secure status for Gaelic. This section will give a brief outline of the relationship between the Macpherson taskforce and report and the campaign for secure status for Gaelic.

The term ‘secure status’ was coined by the national Gaelic development agency Comunn na Gàidhlig (CnaG) to refer to a series of proposals published in 1997 (CnaG 1997b) for legislation to support the Gaelic language. These proposals were drawn up in response to a widespread perception in the Gaelic community that advances made in Gaelic development since the early 1980s, such as Gaelic broadcasting and Gaelic-medium education, lacked a secure foundation and an overall strategic framework, and were instead dependent upon the whim of national and local politicians. The secure status scheme was, therefore, in the words of CnaG, intended to ‘move the language issue from basic survival and maintenance to purposeful and progressive development in the normal domains of a modern living language’ (CnaG 1997a).

The secure status proposals were drawn up by CnaG’s Working Group on Status, a group established as a recommendation of CnaG’s annual Còmhdhail (Congress) in 1996. The Working Group published a short discussion paper entitled *Securing the Future for Gaelic* in March 1997 (CnaG 1997a), in which recommendations were made for general principles to guide legislation for Gaelic. This document was subject to a full consultation exercise during which over 10,000 signatures were collected in favour of a Gaelic Language Act. Following this public consultation, a more detailed document was developed, *Inbhe Thèarainte dhan Ghàidhlig/Secure Status for Gaelic* (CnaG 1997b), which was presented to the Government in December 1997. This document was augmented in 1999 by a further report, also presented to the Scottish Executive, in which the secure status proposals were presented in the form of a draft Gaelic language bill (CnaG 1999). The secure status campaign received strong support from Gaelic development agencies and from the Gaelic-speaking community (Meek 2000).

The key demand of *Inbhe Thèarainte* was that a Gaelic Language Act should be put in place in Scotland to give Gaelic a measure of official status similar to that afforded to Welsh in Wales through the Welsh Language Act 1993. This act provides that English and Welsh should be dealt with ‘on a basis of equality’ in Wales. Recommendations for the Gaelic act included a statutory right to Gaelic-medium education subject to reasonable

demand, provision for the use of Gaelic in the legal system and in the Scottish Parliament, and a legal obligation upon local authorities and public bodies to draw up Gaelic policies. In this way, CnaG's proposals aimed to 'provide, for those who wanted it, the right to use Gaelic wherever possible' (CnaG 1997a).

Following the elections to the Scottish Parliament in 1999, expectations were high amongst Gaelic campaigners that legislative measures to give Gaelic a significant measure of official legal status were close at hand (Dunbar 2000: 84; Meek 2000). Secure status for Gaelic was endorsed by three of Scotland's four major political parties and was mentioned in the plan for government of the Scottish Parliament's ruling Labour/Liberal Democrat coalition. Minister for Gaelic Alasdair Morrison told the annual Còmhdhail that 'we have given a commitment in the partnership for Scotland agreement to work towards a secure status and I intend to put this on fast track. Officials have already been in discussion with CnaG and these discussions will now be widened to include other parties'. The Minister's statement lent further weight to the widely held belief that the recommendations of the *Inbhe Thèarainte* report were to be implemented (Ross 1999).

In this context, the fact that one of the Minister for Gaelic's first acts should be to appoint a taskforce to investigate the public funding for Gaelic development organisations was a matter of some surprise amongst Gaelic agencies and activists (Dunbar & McLeod 2000; Dunbar 2000). The situation is best described by Dunbar: 'while the various Gaelic organisations welcomed the review, it must be said that, given the present circumstances of the language, minute scrutiny of comparatively small organisations, the work of many of which is carried out in significant measures by volunteers, is hardly a serious priority' (2000: 84). The taskforce's appointment was also surprising in that there had been no public outcry for such a move and in that the issue of overlap between Gaelic groups, seemingly crucial to the Minister's decision to set up the taskforce (*West Highland Free Press* 1999), seemed something of a red herring as there was in fact very little duplication of efforts between Gaelic agencies (Dunbar & McLeod 2000).

Although its creation was by no means met with opposition, the Macpherson committee was perceived by many Gaelic campaigners as an attempt by the Government to delay action on the Gaelic issue and to divert attention from the campaign for secure status. Whether or not the establishment of the Gaelic taskforce was indeed motivated by these factors, there can be no doubt that its creation did both buy time for the Scottish Executive and turn attention away from the secure status issue (Dunbar & McLeod 2000).

If it is impossible to know whether the appointment of the Macpherson committee was part of an attempt by the Scottish Executive to backtrack on its commitment to secure

status for Gaelic, it is certain that such a change in policy did in fact take place over the ten months between the appointment of the taskforce and the publication of their report.⁸ The Macpherson report must, therefore, be viewed against this background.

The first sign of a governmental change of stance on the issue of secure status came in the summer of 2000 when the Parliament's ruling Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition voted down an important amendment to the Schools Bill. This amendment would have implemented one of the key recommendations of the secure status proposals, namely a legal obligation upon local authorities to provide Gaelic-medium primary education where 'reasonable demand' exists (Dunbar 2000: 84-87). The battle between the Scottish Executive and the Gaelic organisations Comann nam Pàrant (the parent's association), CnaG and CLI (the association for learners and supporters of Gaelic) on this issue was a bitter one and led to a great deal of criticism of the Scottish Executive by Gaelic campaigners (Hardie 2000; Dinwoodie 2000).

A still more dramatic indication of a change in government policy on secure status emerged in September 2000 in a newspaper interview with First Minister Donald Dewar (Caimbeul 2000; Campbell 2000) and a subsequent lecture delivered by the First Minister at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig. In these, the First Minister argued against a Gaelic language act, contending that such legislation would not only be inappropriate but counterproductive. From this point onwards, the Scottish Executive has endeavoured to reinterpret the phrase 'secure status' in a way entirely different from that intended by the Comunn na Gàidhlig Working Group on Status who coined the term. While the expression 'secure status' was created to refer specifically to a Gaelic language act, the Executive have exploited the somewhat ambiguous nature of the term by speaking of 'working towards secure status' or working towards 'securing the status' of Gaelic, a process of which a Gaelic language act is not (necessarily) a part. The Scottish Executive has, unconvincingly, attempted to argue on occasion that this has always been its understanding of the term 'secure status'. This position is untenable, however, given earlier ministerial statements in which it is clear that the term 'secure status' refers to a Gaelic language act. This understanding can be seen, for example, in Gaelic Minister Alasdair Morrison's speech during the Parliamentary Gaelic debate on 2 March 2000.

It is perhaps significant that the Government's change in policy on the issue of secure status for Gaelic became clear at virtually the same time as the Macpherson report

⁸It must be emphasised here that there is no evidence of any kind to suggest that any of the members of the Macpherson committee were parties to, or aware of, any Government attempt to use the committee to backtrack on the commitment to a Gaelic language act.

was launched. The First Minister's speech at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig in which he voiced his scepticism about a Gaelic language act took place on the very day that the Macpherson report was launched in Nairn.

While all mention of a Gaelic language act has now been dropped by the Scottish Executive, the Minister for Gaelic has made clear on a number of occasions that the Government will 'work towards' securing the status of the language on an incremental basis with a range of legislative provisions and policy adjustments (Meek 2000). Whatever merits such an approach might have in theory, it does not seem to have been implemented in practice. Key government legislation and policies such as the National Priorities for Education scheme and the National Cultural Strategy, for example, made commitments to Gaelic which fell far short of the minimum aspirations of the Gaelic community and which were so weak as to be virtually meaningless. In many cases, no account has been taken of Gaelic at all, such as in the National Parks Act where no mention was made of Gaelic despite concerted lobbying by Gaelic agencies. Secure status, whether interpreted as an act or a process, appears to be dead as far as the Scottish Executive is concerned.

While the Scottish Executive has made small increases to the budgets allocated to Gaelic organisations and Gaelic education and undertaken other minor Gaelic initiatives in the two and a half years since devolution, it has failed to take any significant action to develop Gaelic. As a result of this perceived lack of progress, a feeling of frustration and disappointment has emerged amongst Gaelic activists (McLeod 2001).

When the Macpherson committee was appointed by the Scottish Executive, it was asked to conduct its research 'taking account of the Scottish Executive's policy of support for Gaelic as set out in the Programme for Government', a policy which included a commitment to 'working towards achieve secure status for Gaelic' (Macpherson 2000: 6, 26). Following the publication of the Macpherson report, and the subsequent appointment of the Ministerial Advisory Group on Gaelic with a remit of implementing Macpherson, it seems that rather than being a part of the Scottish Executive's overall policy for the development of Gaelic, as originally stated, the consideration and implementation of the Gaelic taskforce's report have become more or less the sum total of the Scottish Executive's policy on Gaelic.

As will be investigated in more detail in the next section, the fact that the Macpherson committee's deliberations were based on the understanding that 'secure status' would be advanced by legislation has extremely serious implications for RLS efforts, given that this governmental commitment to a Gaelic language act was subsequently dropped.

IV. MACPHERSON, REVERSING LANGUAGE SHIFT, AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

Having considered the political background to the Macpherson taskforce and the group's policy recommendations, this report now addresses the implications of *Revitalising Gaelic* in terms of RLS. This question will be considered in two separate sections. The first section investigates the implications of the recommendations of the Macpherson report itself. The second section investigates the implications of the fact that a key assumption of the Macpherson report — that the review of Gaelic organisations was part of a broader governmental policy initiative with regard to Gaelic, with secure status at its core — is no longer viable in light of the Government's abandonment of its commitment to secure status.

As noted above, the main recommendations of the Macpherson taskforce were that a department with responsibility for advising ministers on Gaelic policy should be set up within the Scottish Executive and that a Gaelic development agency should be established with an initial budget of £10 million per annum (Macpherson 2000: 16). Although little or no justification is put forward for these recommendations in the report, there can be little doubt that a stronger Gaelic presence within the Scottish Executive and an increase in the level of public expenditure on Gaelic to £10 million would be beneficial to Gaelic development.

The report also advances the principle that the proposed Gaelic development agency should produce an overarching strategy, undertake detailed planning for the language, and distribute public funds on the basis of this strategic planning. The recommendation that the new structures for Gaelic development should be based on a language planning approach is welcome given that a lack of planning has been identified as a key weakness of present Gaelic development efforts (McLeod 1999).

In general terms, these recommendations and principles would undoubtedly aid RLS efforts, but the devil, as ever, would appear to be in the detail. While the overall framework set out in *Revitalising Gaelic* is positive for RLS, some of the more minor features of the Macpherson recommendations could well have negative implications for Gaelic development and work against RLS.

A. The Problem of Geographical Division

As noted above, it is recommended in the English section of the report that a 'Gaelic-speaking Department of the Gaidhealtachd' be established within the Scottish Executive to advise ministers on policy (Macpherson 2000: 16). In the Gaelic section of the

report it is recommended that a department dealing with Gaelic [language] affairs be established (Macpherson 2000 [Gaelic version]: 16). As the term *Gaidhealtachd* is normally taken to mean ‘Highlands’ or ‘Gaelic-speaking area’ when used in English, the recommendation to create a Gaidhealtachd department could be interpreted to mean a department dealing with a broad portfolio of issues relating to the Gaelic-speaking areas or to the Highlands and Islands in general. Such a department would carry serious risks for Gaelic.

It is unlikely that a department dealing with a wide range of Highlands and Islands issues would attach much priority to Gaelic development. The promotion of Gaelic would be likely to be very low on the agenda of such a body as compared to, say, health, housing, transport or economic development. This tendency has already been seen with a wide range of public bodies in the Highlands and Islands such as local enterprise companies and local authorities. It is also unlikely that the presence of Gaelic within the remit of such a body would strengthen the use of Gaelic through the whole range of fields which might fall within the group’s remit. Combining the function of Gaelic development with other functions such as economic development or tourism would also be likely to reinforce the naïve and mistaken belief that developing the Highlands and Islands economically and socially will automatically and necessarily revitalise Gaelic (McLeod forthcoming).

A department with a dual portfolio of Gaelic and the Highlands and Islands (or the Gaelic-speaking areas) would also carry dangers for the promotion of Gaelic outwith the Highlands and Islands. A department dealing mainly with Highlands and Islands concerns would probably be inclined to place relatively little weight on Gaelic development in the remainder of Scotland — if indeed it endeavoured to deal with it at all. Linking Gaelic with a broader Highlands and Islands department might also create — or reinforce — the perception that Gaelic has relevance only to the Highlands and Islands. It will be argued in detail below that the Lowlands and the major cities are strategically important to RLS and that any policy serving to sideline these areas in Gaelic development policy would damage the chances of meaningful progress towards RLS.

A strong argument can therefore be made that a Gaelic department within the Scottish Executive dealing solely with Gaelic matters, as recommended in the Gaelic version of the Macpherson report, would be far more beneficial for Gaelic development than a Gaidhealtachd department, and that the latter prospect contains real risks for the language.

Also potentially damaging for the language is the recommendation that the Gaelic community be divided into three different geographical categories for the purposes of

policy-making. *Revitalising Gaelic* suggests that the following categories should be used for Gaelic development, with different policies being necessary for each: the Gaelic ‘heartland’, ‘rest of Gaidhealtachd’ and ‘rest of Scotland and diaspora’ (Macpherson 2000: 14). While there can be no doubt that different policies for Gaelic development may be appropriate for different areas, the particular geographical model put forward by the Macpherson report seems likely to work against RLS.

Crucially, the report fails to acknowledge that while different policies might be required in different areas of Scotland, some aspects of Gaelic development can best be undertaken at the national level. Many key institutions such as the Scottish Executive, the Scotland Office and the Scottish Parliament, to give but a few examples, are national organisations with a national remit which provide services on a national basis. National groups relevant to the future development of Gaelic include Government departments, quangos and public and private companies. Although there might be regional variations in the services provided by national institutions, many of the services provided by such groups are provided centrally. For these reasons, it is clear that a ‘national’ category is necessary within the Macpherson framework. The role of Gaelic policy on a national scale simply cannot be ignored in any future Gaelic development structure.

In addition to omitting the national element to Gaelic policy, the geographical division of the Gaelic community put forward in *Revitalising Gaelic* is questionable. While it is understandable that a ‘Gaelic heartland’ and ‘rest of Gaidhealtachd’ division have been created for the areas of Scotland where Gaelic speakers constitute a significant proportion of the population and/or where Gaelic was recently a community language,⁹ the ‘rest of Scotland and diaspora’ category presents serious risks for Gaelic development.¹⁰

The assumption that Lowland Scotland, including Scotland’s major conurbations, should be placed into the same category for Gaelic development as Gaelic speakers, learners and supporters outwith Scotland is untenable. The position of Gaelic in Lowland

⁹It should be noted that the boundaries of these Gaidhealtachd divisions are not defined in the Macpherson report. Serious thought must be given to the exact boundaries of these areas if Macpherson’s recommendations on this matter are accepted. This is particularly the case for the ‘rest of Gaidhealtachd’ category. While there is no doubt that the Argyll and Bute and Highland Council areas (or rather the parts of these council areas not contained within the ‘Gaelic heartland’ category) would be included within the ‘rest of Gaidhealtachd’ category, consideration must also be given to the inclusion of other traditional Gaidhealtachd areas such as Highland Perthshire and the Isle of Arran.

¹⁰It should be noted that the use of the term Gaelic ‘heartland’ to refer to areas where Gaelic is still a community language is inappropriate in historical terms. While these areas could be described accurately as the last strongholds of Gaelic, they have not historically been seen as central to Gaelic Scotland. If it is appropriate to talk of a Gaelic ‘heartland’, this would be Argyll and not the Outer Hebrides. The use of the term ‘diaspora’ is also inappropriate as it suggests that Gaelic speakers and learners and people interested in Gaelic outwith Scotland are of Highland / Scottish descent. Research makes clear that this assumption is inaccurate.

Scotland is simply not comparable with the situation of the language in other countries. Lowland Scotland is the home of a large percentage of Scotland's Gaelic speakers. The 1991 census showed that over 40% of Gaelic speakers lived outside the Highlands and Islands, with significant concentrations in the Central Belt, particularly in the cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh (MacKinnon 1996: 3). According to the last census, over 10,000 Gaelic speakers lived in Greater Glasgow. Some 25% of all Gaelic-medium primary school pupils reside in the Lowlands, and research has suggested that a majority of Gaelic learners live in Lowland Scotland, with most of them having been brought up in Lowland Scotland (Galloway 1995; MacCaluim forthcoming).

The situation of Gaelic outside Scotland contrasts sharply with that of Lowland Scotland. There are no large concentrations of Gaelic speakers in any one area outside Scotland; Gaelic speakers tend to be few in number and very scattered.¹¹ Intergenerational transmission of Gaelic is unusual, and there is no expectation that it should take place at all. Outside Scotland few adult Gaelic learners become fluent in the language and opportunities to use Gaelic are typically very limited. There is also no meaningful infrastructure for Gaelic use outside Scotland: less Gaelic broadcasting, no Gaelic-medium education, and limited adult Gaelic classes and courses. In very few areas indeed, with the possible exception of cities such as London, is there any sense of a coherent Gaelic community; and even in areas where such a sense of community does exist, these Gaelic communities are far weaker than those of urban Scotland.

Basing Gaelic policy-making for Lowland Scotland on the mistaken principle that the situation of Gaelic in this area is similar to that of Gaelic outside Scotland would be severely detrimental to the language in Lowland Scotland. The very category of 'rest of Scotland and Gaelic diaspora' carries the implication that Gaelic is a foreign language not only outside Scotland but also within the Lowlands, and that Gaelic is the language of a diaspora, spoken only by people with a Highland background. These are implications which would prove offensive to most Gaelic speakers in Lowland Scotland, and counterproductive to the goal of RLS.

While the Macpherson report refers to Gaelic as being a national language, this 'rest of Scotland and Gaelic diaspora' division would clearly work against the notion of Gaelic as a national language, as it would propound the message that the interests and needs of the Gaelic community of Lowland Scotland are more akin to those of Gaelic speakers and

¹¹Cape Breton Island in Nova Scotia, Canada, where Gaelic has historically been a community language, is an exception here. It should be noted, however, that Cape Breton has far more in common with the Scottish areas placed into the 'rest of Gaidhealtachd' area than with Lowland Scotland.

learners abroad than they are to the rest of Scotland. As there is no realistic prospect that Gaelic will ever be promoted to any great extent outwith Scotland, the creation of a ‘rest of Scotland and Gaelic diaspora’ category for Gaelic policy-making by the taskforce would seem to be based on the assumption that there should be a low level of provision for Gaelic in Lowland Scotland. Many Gaelic speakers would dispute this assumption, and it could well be viewed as divisive.

Placing Lowland Scotland and the ‘Gaelic diaspora’ division together would also appear to be based on the assumption that the Lowlands and cities are marginal to RLS. This view is arguably misguided, for that the Lowlands and cities are in fact of great strategic importance for RLS. A large percentage of Gaelic speakers and learners — and a significant percentage of those active in campaigning for Gaelic — live outside the Highlands and Islands. Any policy serving to marginalise the areas where over 40% of Gaelic speakers, 25% of Gaelic-medium pupils and a majority of Gaelic learners live must be open to serious question.

There can also be no doubt that a large number of non-Gaelic-speakers in Lowland Scotland are interested in Gaelic and that a large number of people in the Lowlands view Gaelic as a national language. A national survey of public opinion on Gaelic conducted in 1981 found that just under half of a representative national sample (49% of the total or 64% eliminating ‘don’t knows’) agreed with the view that Gaelic ‘should be encouraged in Scotland as a whole’ as opposed to ‘in the Highlands and Islands only’. In the same survey 41% of the total sample or 50% excluding ‘don’t knows’ agreed that ‘Gaelic is important for the Scottish people as a whole’ (MacKinnon 1981). In light of the raised profile of Gaelic in the last decade, and in particular the expansion in Gaelic television, there can be little doubt that the percentage of those viewing Gaelic as a national language has grown significantly in the past twenty years.

There is a serious risk that policy-making based on the artificial ‘rest of Scotland and diaspora’ category would not allow the potential of Lowland and urban Scotland to be harnessed for RLS efforts. Rather, the low levels of provision for Gaelic in Lowland Scotland and the challenge to the notion of Gaelic as a national language — as implicit in the ‘rest of Scotland and diaspora’ division — would likely diminish the profile of Gaelic in non-Highland Scotland, and bring about a degree of alienation amongst those already involved with the language in this region.

Failing to take advantage of the large amount of goodwill towards and interest in Gaelic in Lowland Scotland would be severely detrimental to RLS given the extremely precarious situation of Gaelic in the remainder of Scotland. Gaelic has ceased to be a

community language on the Highland mainland and could only be said to be a community language in a limited number of areas in the Western Isles, Tiree and parts of Skye. Even in these communities, the position of Gaelic is rapidly weakening, with less than one-third of primary school children in the Western Isles undergoing education through the medium of Gaelic and with less than half of those aged 25 or less in the Western Isles knowing the language (MacKinnon 1999: 2). In these circumstances, there is no prospect that the number of Gaelic speakers will increase, or even remain stable, unless action is taken to promote Gaelic elsewhere. Unless action is taken to attract more Gaelic learners and to bring more existing learners to fluency, it will also prove increasingly difficult to find staff to teach in Gaelic-medium education or to fill other Gaelic-related jobs (Galloway 1994; MacKinnon 1999: 2). If the Lowland and urban population of Scotland is to be sidelined in Gaelic policy-making, it is difficult to see how the new Gaelic speakers necessary for RLS will be created.

Despite these facts, the recommendations of the Macpherson report ignore such important questions as the views and aspirations of the Gaelic community in the ‘rest of Scotland’, the potential for language revitalisation and maintenance in urban areas, the potential for the formation of new Gaelic communities, the meaning of the concept of ‘Gaelic community’ in modern Scotland, the history of Gaelic as a national language and the need to create new Gaelic speakers and supporters.

The argument that the taskforce did not view the Lowlands and cities as being greatly important to the revitalisation of Gaelic is also suggested by a map used in the report. This map, the only one provided in *Revitalising Gaelic*, shows the percentages of Gaelic speakers residing in different areas of Scotland but fails to show the total numbers of Gaelic speakers in these areas. By doing so, the report gives the false impression that Gaelic has little or no presence in urban or Lowland Scotland. Thus, even though there are more than one and a half times as many Gaelic speakers in Glasgow as there are in Skye, for example, the tens of thousands of Gaelic speakers in Lowland Scotland, many of whom are concentrated in the Greater Glasgow and Edinburgh areas, simply cannot be seen on the map as they form a small percentage of the overall population.

Another difficulty relating to the treatment of Lowland and urban Scotland in the Macpherson recommendations concerns the location of the proposed new Gaelic development agency and of Gaelic-related employment in general. While the report is vague on these points, the little it does say raises many questions relating to social inclusion and to RLS. The recommendation is that the Gaelic development agency should ‘concentrate the management of Gaelic activities in locations in the Gaelic heartland, with

appropriate distribution to accommodate the “energy centres” and the language’s national disposition’ (Macpherson 2000: 17). This recommendation is unacceptably ambiguous. For example, does the taskforce favour the removal of many of the existing Gaelic-related policy-making functions and jobs to the Western Isles? Or is the report advocating that existing Gaelic-related employment elsewhere be retained but that new expansion in this field be concentrated mainly in the Western Isles? It is unclear where the ‘energy centres’ referred to are located, and to what extent Gaelic activities should be ‘concentrated’ in the heartlands and to what extent they should be ‘appropriately distributed to accommodate the “energy centres” and the language’s national disposition’.

This issue is a controversial and important one and it is therefore regrettable that the recommendation is both presented unclearly and made in the form of an assertion rather than an argument. The Macpherson report does not directly address important issues such as whether it would be beneficial for the proposed Gaelic development agency to have enhanced representation in the principal Scottish power centres, Edinburgh and Glasgow. In addition, it does not address the issue of whether centralising Gaelic-related employment in the Western Isles would impact negatively on the maintenance and development of Gaelic in other parts of Scotland and on the perception of Gaelic as a national language.¹² The meaning of this section of the Macpherson report will require very careful interpretation by the Ministerial Advisory Group on Gaelic to ensure that a suitable balance is drawn between the need to sustain and develop the Gaelic communities in the Western Isles and the need to sustain and develop the Gaelic communities in the rest of the country.

Rather than being proceeding from analysis of the present demography of Gaelic Scotland or on the dynamics of RLS, the Macpherson report’s ‘rest of Scotland and Gaelic diaspora’ distinction and its overall treatment of the Lowlands and cities seem to be based on a rather old-fashioned view of Gaelic in which the language is understood as being relevant only to the Highlands and Islands. This view must be challenged not only on the ground that it is historically inaccurate, but more importantly on the ground that it no longer reflects the demography or aspirations of the modern Gaelic community, and increasingly, of the Scottish population in general. Most crucially of all, the basic principle of dividing the Gaelic community along geographical lines should be challenged: as Kenneth MacKinnon has pointed out, ‘There are no such things as “Gaelic-speaking areas”, only

¹²It should be noted that debates on the future of Gaelic broadcasting and Gaelic teacher training have raised the strong possibility that Gaelic broadcasting and perhaps also Gaelic teacher training will in future be centralised in the Western Isles.

people in particular social groups who speak the language for particular social purposes in particular social circumstances.’ (MacKinnon 1984: 494).

B. The Backtrack on Secure Status and its Implications for the Macpherson Recommendations

It has been argued above that some of the recommendations of the Macpherson report would, if implemented, work against RLS and promote social exclusion. These flaws in the report could be easily remedied by a few minor — albeit significant — changes that would not challenge the report’s main principles. (Some suggestions in this connection are given below). Even if this were done, however, a more profound underlying threat to RLS would remain. This is the possibility that the Macpherson recommendations could be implemented in isolation without the issue of secure status for Gaelic being fully addressed.

It has already been seen that the review of Gaelic organisations was initially intended to be, or was at least presented as, part of a broader range of measures for Gaelic development. The taskforce was charged with examining the issue of Gaelic organisations ‘taking into account the Scottish Executive’s support for Gaelic as set out in the Programme for Government’, a document which contains a commitment to secure status for Gaelic. As was pointed out by John Alick Macpherson at the launch of the taskforce report, and on numerous subsequent occasions, it was the understanding of the taskforce throughout its deliberations that there would be secure status for Gaelic. The Scottish Executive admission that it would not in fact be introducing a Gaelic language act did not fully come to light until the Macpherson report was already completed and awaiting launch.

The Scottish Executive’s decision not to support a Gaelic language act in the foreseeable future has profound implications for Gaelic development. The failure of the Executive to endorse the principle of a Gaelic language act not only means that Gaelic will not receive the protection recommended in the *Secure Status* report. It also means that the structures recommended by the Macpherson report will be considered and implemented as stand-alone measures rather than as part of a broader framework for Gaelic development, as the taskforce had understood. In these circumstances, there must be serious questions as to whether the Macpherson recommendations can be of significant benefit to RLS efforts if they are implemented in the absence of a Gaelic language act.

A strong argument can be made that implementating the Macpherson recommendations in such circumstances would not lead to any significant progress towards RLS. Indeed, such a scenario might prove an obstacle to meaningful progress for the language.

Without a Gaelic language act, the Gaelic development agency recommended by the Macpherson report would be certain to inherit many of the weaknesses of the current Gaelic development infrastructure. A key structural limitation of the current Gaelic development agency, Comunn na Gàidhlig, is its lack of power. Since its creation in 1985, CnaG's role has largely been one of advising and of lobbying on behalf of the language and of attempting to raise the profile of the language. While CnaG can advise the Government and other public bodies, these bodies are under no obligation to accept its advice. The disadvantages of this situation are clearly demonstrated by the fact that the Government has failed to support CnaG's key recommendations for language development in recent times: a national Gaelic education policy and a Gaelic language act (CnaG 1997b; CnaG 1997c).

Comunn na Gàidhlig has carried out a great deal of work which has been of benefit to Gaelic development. It has done a great deal to publicise Gaelic and Gaelic education, encouraged strategic thinking about Gaelic development, and played a key role in notable lobbying successes over the years, including the establishment of the Gaelic Broadcasting Fund and a national Gaelic radio service. The fact that CnaG is a 'toothless' group which can only encourage and not compel public bodies to take action to promote Gaelic, however, means that it is severely limited in its ability to raise the profile of the language or to create opportunities for members of the public to use the language in everyday life in dealing with public bodies. At present, the level of provision for Gaelic made by public bodies such as local authorities, quangos and Government departments is minimal, with few having policies on the use of Gaelic and with such policies as do exist typically being very weak.¹³ Gaelic-related initiatives undertaken by such groups are typically ad hoc and dependent on the presence of individuals in positions of power within the organisations who have an interest in Gaelic. This means that relatively few bodies develop Gaelic policies and that the Gaelic policies that are developed are often short-lived and vulnerable to staff changes. This is a situation about which CnaG can do very little. The lack of legal protection for existing provision for Gaelic such as Gaelic-medium education also means that CnaG often has to spend much time and effort fighting rear-guard actions to ward off threats to existing Gaelic initiatives rather than in working towards new provision for the language.

Unless it were accompanied by a Gaelic language act, a new Gaelic development agency as recommended by the Macpherson report would have the same fundamental structural weaknesses as Comunn na Gàidhlig. The new agency with its £10 million budget

¹³See for example, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (1996), Highland Council (1998).

would have more money for research, publicity and lobbying than CnaG and would be able to enter more partnership schemes with the public and private sectors. As the single channel of Scottish Executive Gaelic funding, it would also be able to improve co-ordination and strategic planning amongst the Gaelic organisations. In the absence of a Gaelic language act, however, the new Gaelic development agency would remain largely powerless and as such would not be able to make significant progress towards RLS notwithstanding its larger budget and its co-ordinating function. Without a Gaelic language act, for example, there would be no requirement upon public bodies to create Gaelic language policies or upon local authorities to provide Gaelic-medium education as a right where reasonable demand can be shown.

It is recommended by the Macpherson report that the new agency be charged with 'producing an overarching strategy, and formulating and implementing clearly articulated plans with specified and achievable targets' for the development of Gaelic (Macpherson 2000: 16). While such a strategic language planning approach is much needed in Scotland, the Gaelic agency simply could not produce an effective strategy or series of plans for the development of the language in the absence of a Gaelic language act. Without a language act, the agency would have little or no influence over the vast majority of the areas contained within its strategy and plans and these documents would be unenforceable, rendering a language planning approach impossible. This contrasts sharply with the situation in Wales, whereby the Welsh Language Act 1993 compels public bodies to draw up Welsh language schemes and where each scheme requires the approval of the Welsh Language Board.

In addition to being unable to ensure meaningful direct progress towards RLS, a Gaelic development agency without a Gaelic language act would also make such progress less likely to occur in future. As Gaelic development is not seen by most politicians as a key issue, the establishment of a new and expensive Gaelic development structure as recommended by the Macpherson report would likely use up the quota of goodwill of the Scottish Parliament towards the language for some years to come, and to create the misleading impression that meaningful action had been taken to support Gaelic. For this reason, if a Gaelic language act were not put in place at the same time as the Macpherson recommendations, it is highly unlikely that such an act would be passed for a number of years afterwards. It is also likely that there would be a desire both amongst policy-makers and amongst members of the Gaelic community to give the new Gaelic development agency time to bed down before considering the issue of a Gaelic language act.

Any delay to the passing of a Gaelic language act would have serious consequences. As a Gaelic development agency without a language act would not have sufficient power to make significant progress towards RLS, the longer the issue of a Gaelic language act is delayed, the fewer Gaelic speakers there will be and the weaker the language will be in the family and in traditional Gaelic communities. In such circumstances, it is likely that support for a Gaelic language act will become more difficult to secure among policy-makers and politicians with time as language shift becomes more and more advanced.

Given the circumstances detailed above, the prospect of the implementation of the recommendations of the Macpherson report without the prior or simultaneous passing of a Gaelic language act should be viewed as a real threat to the future prospects of Gaelic and as an ineffective and inefficient use of public money. Rather than acting as a stepping stone to more substantial pro-RLS measures, the implementation of the Macpherson recommendations without a Gaelic language act would be far more likely to act as an obstacle to further progress.

CONCLUSION

Revitalising Gaelic is a very disappointing report in a number of respects and falls well short of the standards which would normally be expected from a report produced on behalf of the Scottish Executive. The report is extremely brief, vague and ambiguous both in its discussion of the present Gaelic development framework and in its recommendations for the future.

Revitalising Gaelic is notable in having largely failed to investigate the remit with which it was charged: to 'examine the arrangements and structures for the public support of the Gaelic organisations in Scotland, [and] to advise Scottish Ministers on future arrangements' (Macpherson 2000: 2). Remarkably little is said in the report about the present arrangements and structures for the public support of Gaelic organisations, and the recommendations for future arrangements which are made are distinctly vague with little or no attempt being made to justify them either by argument or by factual information.

While the Macpherson taskforce's key recommendations for a Gaelic Development Agency and Scottish Executive department would be likely to benefit language development, certain aspects of the *Revitalising Gaelic* recommendations might well marginalise the role of Lowland and urban Scotland in language policy and thus be detrimental to overall language development and bring about social exclusion.

In addition to the weaknesses within the Macpherson report itself, a further and more significant threat to language development is presented by political factors outwith the taskforce's control which surrounded the publication of the report. The Macpherson committee's deliberations were based on the understanding that a Gaelic language act based on the *Secure Status* report would be passed and that the recommendations of the committee would be complementary to this. The Scottish Executive's subsequent reversal of support for a Gaelic language act raises the possibility that the Macpherson report might be implemented as a stand-alone measure rather than as a part of an overall language development strategy. In such circumstances, a Gaelic Development Agency as recommended by Macpherson would be powerless and would not constitute an efficient use of public funding for Gaelic.

The Macpherson report is entitled *Revitalising Gaelic*. It is questionable, however, whether the recommendations of the report would in fact revitalise the language. In the absence of a Gaelic language act and in the absence of revisions to the Macpherson recommendations to acknowledge the importance of Lowland and urban Scotland to RLS,

the implementation of the report could, in fact, be expected to stall further progress towards language revitalisation.

Revitalising Gaelic ends with the words: 'It's time for revitalisation, It's time for a paradigm shift' (Macpherson 2000: 12). The recommendations of the Taskforce on Public Funding of Gaelic do not constitute a paradigm shift for the language and could not be expected to bring about significant revitalisation of Gaelic without some important revisions and without the passage of a Gaelic language act.

In working to implement the Macpherson recommendations, it is to be hoped that the new Ministerial Advisory Group for Gaelic will make revisions to the recommendations of the Macpherson report in accordance with the discussion above and will lend their full and unequivocal support to a Gaelic language act.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Ministerial Advisory Group on Gaelic give serious consideration to the arguments made in this report and consider advising the Minister as follows:

1. That a Gaelic language act based on the *Secure Status for Gaelic* report is essential for the purposes of RLS. Implementation of the recommendations of the Macpherson report in the absence of such an act would not only fail to make any significant progress in the revitalisation of Gaelic but would also be counter-productive through making the achievement of such a Gaelic language act or any other meaningful progress in the development of Gaelic less likely.
2. That the department recommended within the Scottish Executive by the taskforce should be a Gaelic department as recommended in the Gaelic version of the report. This department should deal only with Gaelic affairs nationally and should not have a broader Highlands, Islands and Gaelic remit as is suggested by the term 'Department of the Gaidhealtachd'.
3. That the division of the Gaelic community into three geographical sections as put forward by the Macpherson report should be rejected on the grounds that the creation of a 'rest of Scotland and diaspora' division would be likely to sideline the cities, the Lowlands, the majority of Gaelic learners and a significant minority of native Gaelic speakers in future Gaelic development. While different policies will be needed in different areas of Scotland, the importance of the Lowlands, cities and Gaelic learners to RLS must be recognised and reflected in Gaelic development policy. It should also be recognised that there is a strong national dimension to Gaelic policy-making.

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APPENDIX A:

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF MACPHERSON REPORT

The remit of the Taskforce was to examine the arrangement and structures for the support of the Gaelic organisations in Scotland, and to advise Scottish Ministers on future arrangements, taking account of the Scottish Executive's support for Gaelic as set out in the Programme for Government.

The Taskforce has concluded that Gaelic is in a precarious, even critical, condition and that, without significant Government support it will not survive beyond the mid-point of the 21st century. In order to optimise the development of the language, future public funding must be needs-driven, project-based, and community-oriented.

Our vision for Gaelic is that, as a foundation-stone in the building of the new Scotland, the Gaelic language will be an integral and dynamic component of a self-assured community with economic and social stability and pride in its linguistic and cultural identity.

The key recommendations are as follows:

1. That the Scottish Executive continue to fund Gaelic and enhance its development by:
 - Having Gaelic representation at a senior level within the Executive — a small Gaelic-speaking Department of the Gaidhealtachd — to advise Ministers on policy. It is important that these appointments be made soon, so that the incumbents will be able to assist in establishing the new structures and determining priorities for action.
 - Establishing a transitional Advisory Group of four members representing the four functional areas identified in Recommendation 2 below.
 - Establishing a Gaelic Development Agency responsible to the Executive and Parliament for:
 - Producing an overarching strategy, and formulating and implementing clearly articulated plans with specified and achievable targets.
 - Directing four functional areas: (1) education and learning; (2) arts, culture and heritage; (3) economic and social development; and (4) language planning and development, within the three communities identified in the Framework for Development.
 - Facilitating the process of Secure Status for the language.
2. That the Gaelic Development Agency:

- Is headed by a Chief Executive Officer, assisted by Heads of Function for each of the four functional areas, and with a Board comprising the Chief Executive Officer and five non-executive directors representative of the Gaelic community and appointed with due diligence by a formal selection process. It is recommended that the non-executive directors receive appropriate remuneration commensurate with other public bodies.
- Is the sole channel of Government funding, to be provided in accordance with clear objectives laid out in an agreed timeframe.
- Administer initial government funding of £10 million annually for Gaelic development (not including broadcasting), in order to create the minimum conditions that will stabilise and develop the language.
- Monitor the application and impact of the funding for which the organisations will compete on the basis of the criteria outlined in the Framework for Development.
- Subsume the strategic direction and activities of the currently public-funded organisations. The number of existing organisations would be reduced and some or all of the remaining ones would become wholly-owned subsidiaries of the Agency.
- Concentrate the management of Gaelic activities in locations in the Gaelic heartland, with appropriate distribution to accommodate the "energy centres" and the language's national disposition.

The bottom-line for Gaelic is that, in a new Scotland, the survival and revival of a national asset is surely desirable and possible. It's time for revitalisation, so that the Gaelic language becomes a dynamic component of a self-assured community with economic and social stability and pride in its linguistic and cultural heritage.

APPENDIX B:

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE MACPHERSON REPORT

1. That the Scottish Executive continue to fund Gaelic and enhance its development by:
 - Having Gaelic representation at a senior level within the Executive — a small Gaelic-speaking Department of the Gaidhealtachd — to advise Ministers on policy. It is important that these appointments be made soon, so that the incumbents will be able to assist in establishing the new structures and determining priorities for action.
 - Establishing a transitional Advisory Group of four members representing the four functional areas identified in Recommendation 2 below.
 - Establishing a Gaelic Development Agency responsible to the Executive and Parliament for:
 - Producing an overarching strategy, and formulating and implementing clearly articulated plans with specified and achievable targets.
 - Directing four functional areas: (1) education and learning; (2) arts, culture and heritage; (3) economic and social development; and (4) language planning and development, within the three communities identified in the Framework for Development.
 - Facilitating the process of Secure Status for the language.
2. That the Gaelic Development Agency:
 - Is headed by a Chief Executive Officer, assisted by Heads of Function for each of the four functional areas, and with a Board comprising the Chief Executive Officer and five non-executive directors representative of the Gaelic community and appointed with due diligence by a formal selection process. It is recommended that the non-executive directors receive appropriate remuneration commensurate with other public bodies.
 - Is the sole channel of Government funding, to be provided in accordance with clear objectives laid out in an agreed timeframe.
 - Administer initial government funding of £10 million annually for Gaelic development (not including broadcasting), in order to create the minimum conditions that will stabilise and develop the language
 - Monitor the application and impact of the funding on the basis of the criteria outlined in the Framework for Development.

- Subsume the strategic direction and activities of the currently public-funded organisations. The number of organisations would be reduced and some or all of the remaining ones would become wholly-owned subsidiaries of the Agency.
- Concentrate the management of Gaelic activities in locations in the Gaelic heartland, with appropriate distribution to accommodate the "energy centres" and the language's national disposition.
- Form strategic alliances with the Gaelic broadcasting agencies, Local Authorities, Enterprise Companies and other key stakeholders.

We further recommend that:

- Existing or new membership-based or voluntary organisations continue to receive public funding for projects through the Gaelic Development Agency.
- Urgent priority is given to the launching of a national recruitment and training drive for Gaelic teachers to build on the success of Gaelic Medium Education, and to maintenance of the initiative until supply and demand are in equilibrium.
- The valuable scheme of Specific Grants for Gaelic Education is continued, but also reviewed for effectiveness. Parameters should be established for the funding cycle, from application for grant to proof of performance against agreed policies and plans, recognising additionality and associated costs. Authorities accessing Specific Grants should give an annual accounting of how they are planning, offering, developing and monitoring Gaelic Medium Education.
- The need for funding for Gaelic education in the tertiary sector is addressed.