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14 May 2013

Principals and Directors of Scotland's colleges and universities

Dear Principal

Strategic support for Gaelic education in the Scottish further and higher education sectors

Purpose

1. I am writing to draw your attention to the availability of strategic funds to support developments in Gaelic education in the further and higher education sectors.

Background

2. In May 2008, SFC published circular SFC/25/2008. This announced the decision to provide strategic funding for Gaelic education opportunities in further and higher education, focussing on three areas: immersion opportunities; small cohorts; and strategic development of Gaelic education, potentially including development of educational materials & resources and market research & marketing.
3. In recent years, priority has been given to immersion opportunities and small cohorts in the college sector, together with support for the Faclair na Gàidhlig project (recent investments are noted in Annex A).

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Ongoing support opportunities

4. SFC has recently confirmed its intention to continue to make funds for these purposes available during the lifetime of the current National Gaelic Language Plan¹. Reflecting demand for these funds to date and available resources, the budget is currently set at £200,000 per year, across both sectors.
5. Applications for modest levels of support for work contributing to institutions' own work or to collaborative projects involving several institutions will be considered at any point in the academic year. Potential proposals should be discussed at an early stage with the officers noted at the end of this letter.

Priorities

6. Priority will continue to be given to immersion opportunities and small cohorts.
7. Immersion opportunities provide language students with the chance to progress towards fluency by practicing the language they are learning in real-life settings. In other modern languages this has often taken the form of a 'year abroad'. Funding is available to support institutions, working in partnership where possible, in providing immersion opportunities for Gaelic language students, as similar as possible to those available to other modern language students. Sector-wide summer schools are currently being co-ordinated by the University of Glasgow for the university sector and by Stow College for the college sector.
8. SFC is aware that student numbers signing up for Gaelic classes may not reach levels normally regarded as financially viable for an institution's language courses. Potential Gaelic learners may therefore be turned away, and Gaelic learning opportunities not offered, not because there are *no* students, but because there are not *enough* students. This in turn can threaten an institution's capacity to offer these courses. Small cohort funding is available to support institutions – particularly colleges – in providing Gaelic classes where student numbers are at educationally viable but financially non-viable levels. This can include maintaining, reinstating or introducing Gaelic classes.
9. SFC wishes to encourage colleges and universities to consider further activities which can develop or strengthen the capacity of further and higher education to enrich the profile of Gaelic in Scotland. These might include: the introduction or reintroduction of Gaelic language classes, of Gaelic elements in other courses², or of classes delivered through the medium of Gaelic; the development of educational resources for use across the further and higher education sectors; or appropriate staff development.

¹ <http://www.gaidhlig.org.uk/bord/en/national-plan-for-gaelic/index.php>

² Eg <http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/38219.html> or <http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/40228.html>

10. Securing the quality of school and early-years Gaelic medium education is important in supporting the National Gaelic Language Plan's purpose of increasing the numbers of Gaelic speakers. An emerging area where support may be considered is the development of colleges' and universities' roles in training the education profession in Scotland, including, for example, Gaelic-medium childhood development officers, early-years workers and additional support needs staff such as speech and language therapists, educational psychologists and language assistants. SFC has also been asked by Ministers to pursue new avenues to increase the number of students training as Gaelic medium teachers and to invest in innovative work in the universities to enhance the effectiveness of Gaelic teacher education.

Sabhal Mòr Ostaig

11. Sabhal Mòr Ostaig (SMO) forms a major part of the sectors' contribution to the support of the Gaelic language. As the National Centre for Gaelic Language and Culture, committed to developing and enhancing Gaelic language, culture and heritage through educational opportunities, SMO is already supported to address many of the issues for which these funds are provided. As in SFC/25/2008, the funds covered by this letter are therefore not normally available directly to SMO for these purposes, although work by Scottish colleges and universities in partnership with SMO will be considered.

Further information

12. For further information, please contact Morag Campbell, Assistant Director, Skills, Research and Knowledge Exchange (mcampbell@sfc.ac.uk, 0131-313 6530) or Kathy O'Loan, Policy/Analysis Officer (0131-313 6523, koloan@sfc.ac.uk).



Paul Hagan

Director of Research and Innovation

Strategic Gaelic projects already supported include:

1. Support for small cohorts at Edinburgh's Telford College, Inverness College, Lews Castle College and Stow College.
2. Piloting the introduction of Ulpan courses at Inverness College.
3. Immersion summer schools for college and for university students.
4. Dictionary of the Scottish Gaelic Language/Faclair na Gàidhlig project 2010-13.
5. Development of UHI's Diploma in Gaelic Media.
6. Pilot Gaelic Language Initiative at the University of Glasgow.
7. A pilot GLPS (Gaelic Learners in Primary School) teacher education summer programme at the University of the West of Scotland.