Edinburgh University Students’ Association Supports Gaelic

What will we do?

1. Develop a bilingual English/Gaelic Edinburgh University Students’ Association logo (giving equal prominence to both languages) to replace at the nearest opportunity the current monolingual logo in key positions (principal signage, website header, printed matter cover pages, screens, headed paper, merchandise etc.), and optionally wherever else space allows. If feasible, also develop a monolingual Gaelic logo for use in potential future Gaelic-only communication.

2. Develop and make publicly available a plan and timescale for the replacement of key signage in Students’ Association venues with bilingual signage in consultation with the University’s Gaelic Officer.

3. During the annual week-long Edinburgh Gaelic Festival (which is led and developed by the University), include Gaelic-language music on the playlist for Students’ Association venues.

4. Identify specific contexts that can be used as vehicles to use, promote, celebrate and normalise Gaelic (e.g. printed matter and events relating to the Highlands, whisky, Highland/cèilidh dancing etc.) and take appropriate action to ensure these are being exploited to this end.

5. Continually work on identifying opportunities for incorporating Gaelic into general communication.

6. Continue to offer opportunities for use and acquisition of Gaelic.

7. Declare and acknowledge in appropriate channels that Edinburgh University Students’ Association supports the aim of securing Gaelic as an official language of Scotland commanding equal respect with English, as per the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005.

What is the background to this?

1. The Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 established Bòrd na Gàidhlig, a body responsible for developing strategy for the development and promotion of Gaelic language and culture. The Bòrd prepares a National Gaelic Language Plan, and also has the power to ask public bodies to prepare Gaelic Language Plans outlining the actions they will take to work towards the aims of the Act. The University of Edinburgh has published and is following such a Plan, which includes commitments to create and develop opportunities for use and acquisition of Gaelic, as well to incorporate Gaelic into corporate identity and communication. We have already seen some of these put into practice, for example:
   a. the University flying bilingual Welcome/Fàilte banners;
   b. bilingual principal signage in the new School of Literatures, Languages and Cultures building;
   c. the issuing of bilingual tote bags to LLC freshers;
d. a photography competition run by the International Office in which both the theme (“Faodail | Dùn Èideann: A lucky find | Edinburgh”) and category titles were formulated primarily in Gaelic;

e. development of a Gaelic University logo for use in Gaelic-related contexts and a commitment to explore incorporating Gaelic into the main logo at the next opportunity;

f. publishing of a Bilingual Signage Policy stating that principal signage in Pollock Halls and the Main Library, as well as signage designating the names of buildings throughout the University will be replaced with bilingual versions as needed.

2. Edinburgh University Students’ Association offers opportunities for use and acquisition of Gaelic, but is currently lagging behind the University in terms of incorporating Gaelic into its identity and communication.

3. In a 2012 survey run by the University and answered by 1,853 individuals representing all schools and staff groups, 67.4% in total, or 70.2% of student respondents, rated supporting and promoting Gaelic as ‘very important’ or ‘quite important’.

4. In the same survey, 60.2% of respondents (1,116) were either taking a Gaelic course (2.3%) or indicated they are/might be interested in learning Gaelic (57.9%). Of this group of 1,116 respondents, 323 (28.9%) had a national identity from outside the UK or its constituent nations. Interest in learning Gaelic was strongest among those from Poland (83.3%), Greece (80.0%), the USA (79.5%) and China (76.9%) (all groups had at least 10 respondents). This corroborates the experience of An Comann Ceilteach/The Highland Society, which is often approached at activity fairs by international students wishing to learn more about Gaelic language and culture – they are assets that the Students’ Association should exploit.

5. 933 respondents (50.4%) favoured ‘increased visibility of Gaelic in public spaces (e.g. corporate/visual identity, signs, stationery)’ as an additional initiative for increasing the status of Gaelic.

6. The websites and logotypes of Aberystwyth University Students’ Union (www.abersu.co.uk) and the UCD Students’ Union (www.ucdsu.ie) may serve as examples of successful integration of a second language into contemporary and attractive branding.

7. The decline of Gaelic in Scotland is largely due to active persecution of Gaelic speakers by governing powers, be it in form of punishing and eradicating the use of the language in schools or the forced displacement of whole communities during the Highland Clearances. Edinburgh University Students’ Association has done great work in fighting the cultural oppression of women.

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1 http://www.ed.ac.uk/files/imports/fileManager/Gaelic%20Questionnaire%20Report%202012%20REVD2.pdf
and BME and LGBT+ people, and we believe the cause of revitalising Gaelic fits well into this general policy. Declarations of support by influential institutions are especially important now that economic hardship threatens a rise in anti-Gaelic sentiment.

What beliefs motivate the actions you propose?

1. The plan of action is designed to increase the visibility of Gaelic language and culture on campus and within the student community at little cost to Edinburgh University Students’ Association. It is also designed to normalise the use of Gaelic, presenting it not as a relic from the ancient past but as a living language relevant to today’s multicultural Scotland, and the world.

2. International students often express great interest in Scottish culture, including the Gaelic language, and the Students’ Association would benefit from marketing itself as a place where they can learn a bit about this, and where they can come into contact with real Gaelic as opposed to the likes of ‘slangevar’ and ‘usquabae’.

3. Explicitly stating that Edinburgh University Students’ Association considers Gaelic a part of its identity will send a powerful message of support to Gaelic speakers, learners and communities, affirming that the Students’ Association believes in a Scotland that cherishes both its Lowland and Highland culture and heritage equally, and that it will work to make sure Gaelic is welcome in the student community. This will become increasingly important as people going through Gaelic medium education reach university age.

4. It should be stressed that none of these actions are meant to diminish the importance of other languages and cultures in contemporary Scotland: however, Gaelic is the oldest continually spoken language in Scotland that finds itself endangered after centuries of oppression. Polish may be spoken by more people in Edinburgh than Gaelic, but independently on that, Polish is also an official EU language with roughly 40 million speakers and full institutional support. Neither do we propose to promote Gaelic at the exclusion of Scots – in fact, we hope that the development of Gaelic sets the precedent for Scots to finally gain the legislative footing it deserves.

Submitted with 20 student signatures