

Working with Local Authorities Guidance for Fèisean

1 Background

Fèisean across Scotland have benefitted from support of local authorities over many years. Fewer now support cultural activities directly as this is a service area often devolved to arms-length organisations. However, most local authorities still control school buildings, and the letting policies for them, and many will have access to funding which could assist the Fèisean.

Following discussions held at our 2023 conference in Nairn, we have drafted this short guidance paper to support Fèisean with examples of how they could communicate and develop fruitful relationships with their local authority officers and councillors.

2 Areas for Consideration

- **Cultural, Social, Economic, Linguistic and Wellbeing Impacts of your Fèis**
- **Gaelic development**
- **School lets**
- **Relationships with local councillors**
- **Funding**

2.1 Cultural, Social, Economic, Linguistic and Wellbeing Impacts of your Fèis

One way to persuade your local council that it should support your Fèis is by reinforcing that you are not looking for a handout, but that participation in your Fèis generates many positive social outcomes for young people, enhances their education and engages them with Scottish culture including the Gaelic language. Since you are paying tutors as well as accommodating and feeding them, there are economic benefits for local providers and income for the tutors which are most often freelance artists.

We would encourage Fèisean to consider the following:

- As part of a movement your Fèis is involved, along with all the others, in delivering a wide range of outcomes, which your local authority should wish to support, many of which are explored in more depth in [this report](#), which we would encourage you to read. There is also a film online [here](#) which demonstrates the impact participation in Fèisean had on a few familiar faces.
- There are fewer things more powerful to local authorities than young people talking about their experiences and you may wish to consider producing a short video featuring some of your young participants, which you could use as an advocacy or promotional resource.

2.2 Gaelic Development

The work of Fèisean over the last 40 years has contributed significantly to the development of the Gaelic language in communities across the country.

All Fèisean are required to use the Gaelic language in their activities. Most local authorities in which Fèisean take place will have a Gaelic Language Plan. Those with plans will have an officer with responsibility for Gaelic.

Gaelic Language Plans are statutory documents which outline commitments made by local authorities as to how they will promote and use the Gaelic language as well as, in most cases, provide education in the language for young people and adults.

All local authorities are required to consult on the provisions in their Gaelic Language Plans and Fèisean, as well as individuals involved as parents or tutors, should participate in consultations to ensure that support for your local Fèis is an undertaking in the plans. This binds local authorities to support your activities, although to what extent will depend on what you can get them to agree.

We would encourage Fèisean to consider the following:

- Committees should participate in consultations on Gaelic Language Plans and strive to ensure there are commitments in them to support Fèis activities.
- Where there is no existing relationship, Fèisean should establish contact with officers who have responsibility for Gaelic and explore opportunities for collaboration.
- Assistance with Gaelic development within your programme could be sought from local authority Gaelic officers, which could include in-kind support. This helps them, and you, deliver a wider range of activities in the language.

2.3 School Lets

Fèisean have faced a significant rise in school letting charges which is a barrier to organising activities in some communities. Some Fèisean have been able to source alternative venues but, for many, the school is the only suitable choice which offers a number of teaching spaces, toilets etc.

Schools are, for the most part, paid for from the public purse. Therefore, there is a reasonable expectation that schools should be available for community use free, or at reasonable cost. This should be especially true for initiatives such as the Fèisean which offer young people activities outwith school but which, nevertheless, extend the education of young people in cultural and language skills, areas for which there is patchy provision in the formal curriculum.

Whilst there has always been an acceptance of paying janitorial and cleaning costs, the recent hikes in charges are causing real problems and are unsustainable in the long-term.

We would encourage Fèisean to consider the following:

- Contact the school or local authority department with responsibility for lets at the earliest opportunity to make bookings and confirm costs of hire.
- Where significant charges are being imposed on Fèisean, contact should be made with local councillors who represent the area where the Fèis activity takes place and with councillors who sit on committees that deal with issues regarding hire charges for schools, education, Gaelic and culture to make them aware of the situation and to gain their support.
- In Scots law education should be delivered, as far as is possible, in line with the wishes of parents. Parent power should be used, if necessary, to make the argument that the participation in Fèisean is seen as an extension of young people's education and you, therefore, believe the local school should be made available to your Fèis. It may be worth enlisting the help of local parent councils.

2.4 Relationships with Local Councillors

Fèisean should seek to establish contact and develop a relationship with their local councillors to ensure they are aware of the activities being delivered in their area and that they have a better understanding of the benefits being delivered by volunteers.

We would encourage Fèisean to consider the following:

- Where there is currently no contact with local councillors, send an introductory email/letter to them to make them aware of the Fèis and the programme that is being delivered in the area.
- Invite them to one of your committee meetings to discuss how they can support your work.

- Invite them to events you organise to enable them to learn more about the Fèis and to see what it delivers.
- Encourage them to engage with the young participants so that they hear first-hand what they gain from participation.
- Share any advertising/marketing with them. In addition to email/letters, some councillors may have social media profiles you can connect with.
- Following an event, send a short report with details of numbers of participants, tutors employed etc with some photographs and feedback from participants. This needn't be long, but well worth doing.
- They should be made aware of any challenges being faced by the Fèis including, or in addition to, any letting charges as outlined above.

2.5 Funding and Support

Fèisean in the Highlands and Argyll & Bute receive funding from their local authority through their Fèisean nan Gàidheal grant. Fèisean in the Western Isles received funding directly.

Most local authorities have funds which Fèisean could access at a local level. These might be funds to ensure free places at Fèisean for young people who need that kind of assistance. There may be specific Gaelic or cultural funds. There may be funds, such as those available to coastal communities, to which applications could be made. Your local authority may have an agreement with a local windfarm which might mean funds being available for activities.

We would encourage Fèisean to consider the following:

- Research your local authority website for any funding they may have available and identify council officers who may be able to support you.
- Research opportunities for funding and/or support for participants from low-income families to attend the Fèis.
- Contact your local councillors for their support with identifying funding opportunities.
- Ask local councillors about any discretionary ward funds which could support Fèis activities.

3 Implementation

Fèisean nan Gàidheal will always act as an advocate for more support, or the retention of existing support, for Fèisean. When it comes to local authorities, though, councillors and officers are much more likely to listen and react to local voices raising issues with them.

Fèisean make a significant contribution to local communities in nurturing young people, teaching them skills, often transferable to supporting other local initiatives, before welcoming their return as tutors, performers and organisers. Three generations of Fèis participants have evolved as a positive force within their communities and demonstrate that their culture is essential to wellbeing and contributes towards the social, economic and environmental prosperity of their places.

It is important that Fèisean have good communication with relevant local authority officers and their local councillors to ensure they have their support and understanding of the contribution they make.

Fèisean nan Gàidheal staff will always be willing to assist Fèisean to identify local members and council officers as well as assisting with any communications.