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Soillse project names new Research Professor

Dr Rob Dunbar has been named as Research Professor for the national Gaelic research project Soillse. Dr Dunbar is currently Reader in Law & Celtic at the University of Aberdeen and will take up his appointment on 7 September.

The Soillse project will co-ordinate and extend research into crucial areas for the growth of the language including the intergenerational transmission of Gaelic, language practice and policy in Gaelic-medium education and the assessment of Government policies on the revitalisation of Gaelic.

Dr Dunbar will lead a national network research team of four Research Fellows, one Lecturer and nine PhD students who will be based at partner institutions across Scotland including Sabhal Mòr Ostaig UHI and Lews Castle College UHI, part of the prospective University of the Highlands and Islands, and at the Universities of Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Glasgow. The post of Research Professor will be based at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig UHI on the Isle of Skye.

Dr Dunbar is a fluent speaker of Gaelic and is an internationally recognised expert on minority language policy and planning, and particularly legal regimes for the protection of linguistic minorities in international and national legal systems.

He is an Expert of the Council of Europe, and frequently works with the Secretariat for the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. He is a Senior Non-Resident Research Associate of the European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI), in Flensburg, Germany. He has advised governments, human rights bodies, and non-governmental organisations in a large number of countries on language and human rights issues, and is currently a special advisor to the Welsh Assembly on new Welsh language legislation that is being considered by the National Assembly for Wales. He is a member of Bòrd na Gàidhlig and is on the board of MG ALBA, and has played a key role in the development of Gaelic language policy over the last decade.

Originally from Canada, Dr Dunbar graduated from the University of Toronto (M.A.), Osgoode Hall Law School (LL.B.), the London School of Economics (LL.M.), and the University of Edinburgh (Ph.D.). He worked in Toronto for several years at Fasken Martineau, one of Canada's leading law firms before moving to the UK.

Professor Boyd Robertson, Principal of Sabhal Mòr Ostaig UHI welcomed Dr Dunbar's appointment saying: "We are very pleased indeed to have secured the services of such an eminent academic to lead the Soillse research programme. Professor Dunbar is an acknowledged international expert on language issues and language planning and brings a wealth of experience in socio-linguistics and in international law to the post. Sabhal Mòr Ostaig will benefit greatly from this appointment in terms of capacity building for research and in increasing the College's research profile and standing."

James Fraser, UHI Principal said: "We are delighted to welcome Dr Dunbar to the project and it is fitting the Soillse project has made such a high calibre appointment. At UHI, we are committed to the Gaelic language as an integral part of the culture of the Highlands and Islands. Gaelic will continue to play an important part in the development of UHI."

Dr Dunbar said: "I am delighted to be involved in a significant way in the Soillse project, and am deeply honored to have been selected for this important post. My goal is to help the Soillse team to produce work that is of real use to Gaelic communities and to policy makers whose decisions have an impact on those communities, as well as being of the highest academic standard and of importance internationally."

Professor Emeritus Richard Johnstone, leader of the team which developed the Soillse proposal, said: "I greatly welcome this appointment. The aim of the Soillse network is to establish a world-class research capacity which will support the maintenance and revitalisation of Scottish Gaelic, and I am confident that Dr Dunbar possesses the leadership and interpersonal skills that this important post requires."

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For further information contact Angela MacGillivray on 01471 888215 or sm00ani@uhi.ac.uk

Notes for Editors

Soillse has been established in recognition of the strategic requirement to provide a much enhanced research capacity to inform public policy towards the maintenance and revitalisation of Gaelic language and culture. If a paradigm shift is to occur in the use of Gaelic in Scotland then it is essential that policy development and professional practice is informed, stimulated and influenced by an enhanced and highly coordinated national research capability.

The aims and objectives of Soillse are aligned with key Scottish Government policies and priorities as well as with the priorities of the National Plan for Gaelic. Soillse is based around a partnership approach that comprises UHI, the prospective University of the Highlands and Islands and the Universities of Aberdeen, Glasgow and Edinburgh. The Scottish Funding Council, Bòrd Na Gàidhlig and Highlands and Islands Enterprise are also key funding partners in Soillse. The challenging aims and targets that have been set for Soillse can only be achieved if full cooperation exists between the academic and public sector partners that are participating in the project. Central also to the success of the Soillse will be the establishment of a meaningful partnership with the Gaelic communities of Scotland.

The total research funding allocated to Soillse is £5.29million. The Scottish Funding Council are investing £1.86million; Bòrd na Gàidhlig £541,000 and HIE £400,000. £2.49million of new and matched funding contributions will come from the 4 Scottish Higher Education Institutions of Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow and UHI that are participating in Soillse.

Soillse represents the largest ever investment in Gaelic-related research and a unique pooling of resources by the key academic institutions that are involved. It is hoped that this approach will yield significant benefits for Gaelic communities, for those researchers involved in Soillse and also for the institutions themselves.

Further information is available at: http://www.smo.uhi.ac.uk/Rannsachadh/soilse_gd.html

