

NATIONAL GAELIC LANGUAGE PLAN 2017-2022

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

1. The structure for the Plan consists of an aim, priority areas and commitments. Do you have any comments on how we have structured the Plan and the overall aim we have selected?

The overall aim of the plan – to increase the number of people speaking, using and learning Gaelic in Scotland and the number of situations in which it is used – is endorsed.

However the Plan is very broad, with almost every aspect of Gaelic support covered within the 19 stated priorities. The priorities are so comprehensive that it is difficult to ascertain which aspects of Gaelic support are **not** deemed a priority within this plan. It is recommended that the Plan would benefit from a greater focus on fewer key priorities.

In addition, the current Plan has a strategic emphasis, which would be enhanced by the inclusion of some operational details to outline how the Plan will be achieved.

2. We believe that the promotion of a positive image for Gaelic is essential and we think that the areas above are the key areas that can make a contribution to this. Do you have any comments on the areas we have selected or alternative suggestions?

At present, there is a tendency towards a ‘scattergun’ approach being taken in the efforts made to enhance the status of Gaelic.

It is recommended that pre-school and primary Gaelic Medium Education should be at the core of our efforts, leading on to teacher training. Strengthening the language in Gaelic language communities is also essential in promoting a positive image of the language.

3. We believe education and Gaelic learning are central to this Plan. We have also listed the priority areas that we believe should be a focus for ongoing activity. Do you have any comments on this emphasis and on the priority areas selected for learning Gaelic.

There is minimal reference made in the Plan to the Higher Education sector in spite of the critically important contribution HE makes in creating new speakers of Gaelic who are qualified to take up active roles in the Gaelic workplace. We would like to see the Plan making more of a commitment to supporting recruitment and curriculum development in the HE sector across Scotland.

The main focus within the Plan is on education within Schools, and it is recommended that more attention should be paid to support for the early years, e.g. via teacher training. It is acknowledged that recruitment of Gaelic teachers can be challenging, particularly for teaching posts in remote areas, hence incentives for staff to relocate to these areas (where there is a high demand for their skills) should be considered.

There are opportunities for introducing ‘E-schools’ (internet teaching) to link a single teacher with a number of Schools, and these should be considered further, supported by more imaginative deployment of the existing technology.

There is currently a greater emphasis placed upon Gaelic medium education in schools at the expense of Gaelic learner education, and the balance needs to be redressed to reach a wider audience of Gaelic speakers.

In addition, opportunities to provide further support for older Gaelic learners are currently being ignored. An active marketing campaign showing the opportunities currently available in HE for learners of all levels of Gaelic would demonstrate additional existing pathways to fluency that are not always obvious.

4. We believe the areas selected are important for promoting the increased use of Gaelic. Do you have any comments or suggestions you would like to make in relation to promoting the increased use of Gaelic?

Greater attention should be paid to households where Gaelic is the primary language. Further encouragement should be given to young Gaelic speakers, and supporting those geographical areas where there is some existing traction with the language, to ensure a cost-effective use of the limited resources available. Resources should be concentrated on those areas where there are defined communities, including the 'pockets' within urban areas e.g. Edinburgh and Glasgow.

The Plan should emphasise the partnership opportunities that exist for enhancing the identity and branding of Gaelic. It is noted that Gaelic may be a niche market, but nonetheless it is of significant interest. At present, there is too broad an approach taken to this issue, and it is insufficiently resourced.

More effort should be made in linking together the public and private partnerships. There is a clear opportunity here to sell the economic benefits of Gaelic, particularly for the tourism industry.

5. In questions 2, 3 and 4, you were asked about your views on the priority areas identified. In this question, we would like to hear any views or suggestions you may have on the key commitments we have identified and views on any key commitments you think should be included in order to make progress with the aim of increasing the number of people speaking, using and learning Gaelic in Scotland and the number of situations in which it is used?

We have nothing further to add here, other than to re-iterate those areas we believe would benefit from greater focus:- pre-school and primary Gaelic Medium Education and teacher training, and supporting/promoting the use of Gaelic within the Gaelic language communities in Scotland.

6. The earlier consultation questions have been fairly specific. If there are any other points you would like to make and feel you have not had the opportunity to do so, please write them below.

Gaelic Education Workforce - Institutions are being encouraged to increase the number of students entering into teacher education, which has led to more universities offering such provision. In turn, this has led to increased demand for staff who can deliver these courses, yet there remains a very small pool of qualified professionals to fill these roles. We have struggled to find staff to fill vacant Teacher Education posts due to staff retiring/moving on to other roles. There is a real need to address the number of professionals who can deliver Teacher Education provision to allow this to continue to grow and expand, which in turn leads to the development of more qualified teachers, the ability to expand GME provision and in turn an increase in the number of young Gaelic-

speakers. There could be opportunities here for local authorities to work collaboratively with universities to address issues around recruitment of Gaelic teachers and professionals to deliver Gaelic teacher education programmes, and solutions could address the continued development of teachers and the issues around provision of Gaelic teacher education.

The Draft Plan recognises some of the economic difficulties facing the Highlands and Islands and how this can have an effect on increasing Gaelic support, opportunities etc. There is a lot of emphasis placed on public authorities delivering Gaelic Plans in support of the National Plan, but this draft does not recognise the current economic climate and its impact on public bodies, many of whom have had or continue to experience issues like recruitment freezes and funding cuts which lead to increased demands on limited resource. Like the issues affecting the Highlands and islands, this is not a Gaelic-specific issue, but it does have an impact on the extent to which these bodies can sustainably support the National Plan in a meaningful way.

There is no mention in this Draft about resource to support the Plan's delivery, although it is recognised that the Plan involves the cooperation and involvement of multiple partners. Given the economic climate and issues affecting the public sector, something about the intended approach for managing delivery in light of these difficulties would be welcomed. There are existing funding opportunities through Bòrd na Gàidhlig and Scottish Funding Council, for example. Will these funding streams continue? Will there be any review of this funding to see if it could or should be managed differently to better support the National Plan's delivery?