

Response to Public Consultation on National Gaelic Language Plan 2017-2022

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the public consultation on the draft National Gaelic Language Plan 2017–2022. Our response incorporates the views of officers with some responsibility or remit for Gaelic within Glasgow City Council or Glasgow Life.

Glasgow is Baile Mòr nan Gàidheal (City of the Gaels) with a long history of support and engagement with Gaelic language and culture. Our own Glasgow City Council Gaelic Language Plan reflects our citywide support for Gaelic and we would expect to reinforce that message of support in our next Plan in 2018.

The draft National Plan, on the other hand, sets the tone for the whole nation. It should demonstrate ambition, innovation and vision for Gaelic to thrive in a modern Scotland. It should inspire and excite new supporters and give confidence of a brighter future to its longstanding supporters. It should set out Gaelic's place in 21st century Scotland and show how the Scottish Government through Bòrd na Gàidhlig and individuals and organisations throughout Scotland should establish Gaelic as a living and important part of Scottish life. It has to appeal to a wide audience, be accessible, challenging and interesting to read. It should be a national statement of ambition and intent for Gaelic.

Q1. The draft Plan begins with a positive message in the Foreword about “momentum, increased growth and wider impact”. Section 3, Overview, is well structured but overly repetitive. Section 4, National Priorities, contains some important messages but we feel some, such as Gaelic's wider impact, do not feature strongly enough throughout the Plan.

The stated aim of the draft Plan is “to increase the number of people speaking, using and learning Gaelic in Scotland and the number of situations in which it is used”. The draft Plan then identifies three “objectives” to meet that aim yet none appears to focus on the “speaking” element. “Using” Gaelic does not necessarily mean “speaking” and without the spoken word the language, indeed any language, surely would struggle. We would like more emphasis on speaking Gaelic and for the Plan to identify specific measures that would make it more attractive for more people to speak the language, for example additional funding targeted at activity of direct interest to young people outside of school hours. We also considered the re-sequencing of the “objectives” so that “Learning” and “Using” should take priority over “Promoting” Gaelic.

Q2. We agree it is very important to promote a positive image of Gaelic. It is a key message and one that has to be supported with leadership and funding support from the Scottish Government to local stakeholders. The balance between pro-active promotion of the benefits of Gaelic and the current predominantly reactive and negative media environment must be addressed. It is also not enough to expect that the implementation of local Gaelic plans will make a difference on their own. Promotion of local Plans and other positive action for Gaelic should be fully resourced and recognised as such in the draft National Plan.

Q3. While we agree that it is important to increase the number learning Gaelic, any expansion of delivery must be fully resourced with increased numbers of professionally trained staff, properly resourced to do their jobs to continue giving young children and young people the high quality learning experience received by so many since the introduction of GME in 1985. Quality of provision

must be protected. Without a full supply of staff, resources and support for teaching and learning, there is a risk that standards will drop. More emphasis on quality and not just quantity throughout the draft Plan would be welcomed. We recognise there are significant challenges in planning and delivery but this needs to be recognised and addressed in the draft Plan.

The Priority Areas identified, especially in Gaelic education, learning, arts and culture, are ones that we recognise and promote very successfully in the city of Glasgow. We will continue to support those over the lifetime of this Plan.

We recognise the need to strengthen Gaelic in those geographical areas where historically it was widely spoken. However the urban nature of Gaelic development, especially the growth in Gaelic Medium Education, is a factor that also needs to be more recognised in the draft Plan. Urban areas can potentially contribute quite substantially to the “wider impacts” referred to previously and could be a way of encouraging more buy-in from more local authorities. Further research on “wider impacts” would be welcomed.

Regarding the learning sequence (page 8), we would consider “understanding Gaelic” as the first rather than the final stage of the process.

Q4. Gaelic should be recognised as a natural and normal way of communicating throughout Scotland. The reality is that it is portrayed by some as a dead language with no place in Scotland. “Using” Gaelic therefore becomes more difficult as attitudes to it are quite mixed. For the key audiences that this draft Plan must target, especially the different age subsets within the 0-35 age group, that climate of negativity must affect their willingness and confidence to use Gaelic. The draft Plan has to recognise and address those issues with targeted interventions for specific groups, such as young people in their mid-teens, possibly incentivised, and for parents of children aged 0-5 considering Gaelic Medium Education targeted Gaelic awareness/learning campaigns with resources to support their engagement.

Q5. The sections titled “key commitments” are very interesting. We support the rationale and believe these commitments should act as a focal point for action. What is not clear is who will be expected to deliver them and how. Without a substantial increase in the Scottish Government’s Gaelic budget or a reallocation of funds to public agencies, it is difficult to see how Bòrd na Gàidhlig or any public body can deliver all of these commitments.

Q6. The draft Plan is a wide-ranging document that aims to continue the expansion of Gaelic. While we would agree that the language offer in Scotland has to continue evolving, there is a line of thought that we should take some time to reflect on, consolidate and strengthen our position rather than continue reaching for more numbers.

There are key strengths that need special care and attention. The popularity and success of Gaelic Medium Education is the main one but we need to ensure we maintain high standards and strengthen rather than dilute our offer.

Parents have a key role to play in Gaelic and need to be more engaged in the GME experience. Parent Councils and parent organisations work hard to develop positive parental involvement but they need more support from the parent body. Parents need to be encouraged to invest in their own language learning and bilingualism in support of their children’s education.

We also recognise the dips in Gaelic use among school pupils and adult learners outside of formal “learning hours” and especially during long breaks such as the summer school holidays. Post-school maintenance of the language is important, whether that be school trips, holiday camps or even conversation cafes.

We welcome the role of the arts in both the “positive image” and “using Gaelic” sections of the draft Plan. Arts and artists are key to the dynamic identity, usage and evolution of a language and culture. The reference to “arts publishing and creative industries” is important as Glasgow Life Arts has an officer with a creative industries focus who liaises with the Gaelic Arts officer. Creative industries is also a growing sector that is part of the re-imagining and development of traditional Gaelic arts and skills within a 21st century and urban context.

A strength of the draft Plan is that the language is uncomplicated. It is therefore reasonably easy to read although at times a bit wordy and repetitive. It also lacks visuals such as diagrams and maps to break up the narrative but we would expect to see more images in the final Plan. It would benefit from a directory of key organisations, including Bòrd na Gàidhlig, with a one-line description of their Gaelic remit. We also felt the Plan should have included more detail and context as that may have helped us better understand the rationale for some of the content. We would expect the content of the final Plan to be more detailed throughout.

Finally, Glasgow City Council is pleased to have had the opportunity to provide a response to the draft National Plan. We will continue to support the development of Gaelic and will continue to work in partnership with the Scottish Government, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, other public, private and voluntary organisations, and many individuals who are highly committed to the language’s development. The draft National Gaelic Plan pulls that partnership work together and in so doing we hope it will help shape a positive future for Gaelic over the next 5 years.