

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?

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar is supportive of the Draft Plan's fundamental aim, *"to increase the number of people speaking, using and learning Gaelic in Scotland and the number of situations in which it is used"*, is clear-sighted and unambiguous, and provides a wide platform on which to build meaningful strategies to revive Gaelic in Scotland. The Plan is also well-structured, and by focussing on three headline actions to achieve this aim, namely; *"Promoting a positive image of Gaelic, Increasing the learning of Gaelic, and Increasing the use of Gaelic"*, this leads naturally to an identification of key, Priority Areas. In particular, the Comhairle welcomes the following seven Priority Areas:

- *Promoting a positive image of Gaelic and raising awareness through: Gaelic media; Gaelic education at all levels; and Gaelic arts;*
- *Gaelic in Early Learning and Childcare (ELC);*
- *Gaelic medium education (GME) in primary and secondary schools;*
- *Gaelic learner education (GLE) in primary and secondary schools;*
- *Post-school and adult Gaelic learning;*
- *Initiatives which promote the use of Gaelic in homes and communities;*
- *Initiatives which promote the use of Gaelic by young people.*

Priority Areas

*Support for Gaelic from the Scottish Government and wider political support
Gaelic language plans implemented by public authorities (local authorities and public bodies)*

Promoting a positive image of Gaelic and raising awareness through:

Gaelic media

Gaelic education at all levels, and

Gaelic arts

Positive messages about Gaelic and diversity and inclusion

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?

Gaelic Media / Gaelic Arts

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar concurs with the emphasis on the importance of promoting a positive image of Gaelic in the media and the arts. This is because the normalisation of Gaelic usage in these fields sends a clear message that the language is dynamic, modern and relevant. This, in turn, encourages the further development of, and participation in, Gaelic-related arts and media activity. In doing so, therefore, the language planning principles of language usage and language status are fully adhered to.

Gaelic Education at All Levels

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar has always recognised the significant role that Gaelic education has in promoting Gaelic across all levels, and continues to encourage the expansion of Gaelic education in all of its schools. Gaelic school and pre-school education is, of course, vital to the process of developing and nurturing new Gaelic speakers, but schools can also raise awareness more generally of the importance of the language to Scottish culture as a whole, thus attracting new potential Gaelic speakers. Therefore, in promoting a positive image of Gaelic in education, the language planning principle of language acquisition is fully adhered to, in addition to the language planning principles of language usage and language status.

Scottish Government

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar considers the support for Gaelic from the Scottish Government to be fundamental to the continued growth of the language and to work within a politically supportive climate generally, with the necessary institutional support having been put in place. It is therefore correct that the Plan identifies this as a Priority Area.

Gaelic Language Plans

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar has committed to its own Gaelic Language Plan and would emphasise the importance of public authorities taking ownership of their plans ensuring that while such plans must be aspirational, they must also be realistic and deliverable.

Young People?

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar feel that a separate Priority Area of “promoting a positive image of Gaelic amongst young people” more generally should be highlighted. In Joshua Fishman’s 1991 work, *Reversing Language Shift*, he devised an eight-stage “Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS)” scale for endangered languages, where the eighth Stage equated to language being in the process of becoming obsolete. At Stage 5, he pointed out that without “extra communal reinforcement” of language literacy, a language would soon, nevertheless, progress to Stage 6. It is therefore vital that young people, who are the future of the Gaelic language, are given encouragement and reasons to use the language outwith formal educational institutions in as wide a range of activities and domains as possible. This would assist greatly in creating a positive image for Gaelic, and aid intergenerational transmission of the language. In this context, it is also perhaps worth considering the need for an online social media strategy for revitalising the use of Gaelic.

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?

Priority Areas

Gaelic in Early Learning and Childcare (ELC)

Gaelic medium education (GME) in primary and secondary schools

Gaelic learner education (GLE) in primary and secondary schools

Post-school and adult Gaelic learning

Gaelic medium workforce recruitment, training and supply

Resources and support for learning

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar believes the Draft Plan is correct to identify education and Gaelic learning as being central to Gaelic revitalisation strategies, and the Priority Areas highlighted are vital to achieving this end if we are to achieve “replacement level” of Gaelic speakers (i.e. the level at which the loss of mostly older Gaelic speakers is balanced by the creation of new speakers).

Gaelic Learning for Teachers?

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar would further suggest that it would be beneficial to highlight “Gaelic learning for teachers” as a Priority Area, both in order to focus efforts to obtain more teachers with the necessary Gaelic skills to deliver classes through the medium of Gaelic, (through enrolment on Gaelic Immersion For Teachers (GIFT) courses, for example), but also to strengthen the Gaelic ethos of schools.

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?

Priority Areas

Initiatives which promote the use of Gaelic in homes and communities

Initiatives which promote the use of Gaelic by young people

Gaelic in traditional and new media

Gaelic in the arts, publishing and creative industries

Gaelic language plans

Gaelic in the workplace

Gaelic use in heritage, tourism, food and drink, environment and leisure

industries Initiatives which strengthen language richness, relevance and consistency Initiatives promoting links with Gaelic abroad and with minority languages

Homes and Communities / Young People

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar considers that that “*Initiatives which promote the use of Gaelic in homes and communities*” and “*Initiatives which promote the use of Gaelic by young people*” are vital in order to ensure effective intergenerational transmission of the language. The Comhairle agrees that the emphasis placed on their importance within the Draft Plan is appropriate and would support further initiatives to ensure young people’s engagement with the language. . These can certainly be considered to be the most important Priority Areas of all in terms of Gaelic usage, because if the language is to survive as a community language in the parts of Scotland where it is still spoken, these initiatives must succeed.

Traditional and New Media / Arts, Publishing and Creative Industries

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar The other Priority Areas listed are also important, particularly in terms of Gaelic usage in traditional and new media, and in the arts, publishing and creative industries. The explosion in the use of online social media alone necessitates a strategy to make the most of the opportunities which exist for Gaelic to be used and promoted in this domain of language usage.

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?

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar endorse the following six key commitments were felt to be particularly important:

Communications

“A stronger narrative on Gaelic will be developed through agreeing strong messages, by regularly issuing positive news and stories about Gaelic in Scotland and responding to negative, misleading stories.” – It is very important that as much positive news as possible appears in traditional and new media about the value of Gaelic to Scotland’s culture as a whole, and the scientifically-proven cognitive benefits of early bilingualism.

GME in Areas with Significant Numbers of Gaelic Speakers

“The 2011 Census listed fifty civil parishes with 5% or more Gaelic speakers. The aim will be to see GME available to young people in all of these fifty parishes.” – Comhairle nan Eilean is committed to making GME available in all areas in the Western Isles and would agree that other local authorities, where there are significantly higher levels of Gaelic usage than the national average of 1.1%, be encouraged to make similar provision.

e-Sgoil

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar is pleased to have progressed the e-Sgoil initiative with the support of the Scottish Government and Bòrd na Gàidhlig. *“The aim of extending the delivery of key subjects through the medium of Gaelic by e-Sgoil will be supported.”* – The initiative directly addresses the issue of teacher shortages in a range of Gaelic medium subjects on offer in secondary schools, and is already impacting local authorities’ capacity to deliver education in niche subjects where there is a shortage of specialist teachers. The Comhairle believes that e-Sgoil has the potential to expand the teaching of Gaelic not only in the Western Isles, but in Scotland as a whole.

Families

“Gaelic use in families and those communities with a significant percentage of Gaelic speakers is critical. Current initiatives will be reviewed to improve effectiveness, identify gaps and new opportunities.” – Comhairle nan Eilean Siar understands the importance of intergenerational transmission of Gaelic, which takes place mainly in the home, and agrees that all Gaelic speaking parents must have all the necessary support and encouragement to pass on Gaelic to their children. For parents of children in GME, who do not have Gaelic skills themselves, it is also necessary to make sure that all available support is available to them, including information about Gaelic learning opportunities and online Gaelic resources. The Comhairle would also stress that the communities

play a huge part in ensuring that there are opportunities to speak the language and that they must be supported in their efforts to deliver these opportunities.

Young People

“Develop initiatives to increase the range of and participation in attractive activities, sports and digital and new media for young people.” – Comhairle nan Eilean Siar believes that without strategies to encourage young people to use their Gaelic skills, intergenerational transmission of the language to subsequent generations will not occur. Therefore, it is important that there is provision of extracurricular and leisure opportunities for young people to use, and be enthused by, Gaelic. This is particularly the case in terms of new online media, such as social media, where it is vital to link the use of Gaelic with youth culture.

Communities with High Levels of Gaelic Speakers

“Establish a multi-agency fund to support proposals from Community Land Scotland members for projects that will boost the social and economic value of Gaelic.” – Comhairle nan Eilean Siar agrees that it is crucial to support projects within these areas which are sympathetic to the development of the Gaelic language and culture. It is recognised that the social value of the language can be intrinsically linked to how it is viewed as an economic asset.

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.

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar Draft Plan, as stated previously, is well-structured, clear, unambiguous, and easy to read. It is also aspirational, positive, and strikes the correct note in terms of taking the development of Gaelic promotion, learning and usage to the next stage nationally. The Comhairle would like to suggest that it may be beneficial, to include some idea of timescale, and further detail in terms of hitting targets in initiatives developed to address identified Priority Areas.

The Comhairle would like to congratulate Bòrd na Gàidhlig on this presentation of its consultation on the National Gaelic Language Plan, and look forward to seeing this third iteration of the National Plan come into force in the near future.