

Bòrd na Gàidhlig

Draft National Gaelic Language Plan 2017-22 – Public Consultation Comments from The University of the Highlands and Islands

1. The Plan is well structured and at a high level covers the most important themes around education, community, the use of Gaelic and its image, and the arts, for example. However although the overall aims are clearly articulated, we feel that some more detail to illustrate more precisely how the plan will be implemented may be useful. We recognise that it is not possible or desirable to be too specific here, but some illustrative matter would convey an enhanced sense of the depth of the plan.
2. In addition to the point at (1) above, the University believes that there would be advantage in the plan articulating more clearly a sharper focus on future outcomes as a key measurement of success, not just for Bòrd na Gàidhlig, but for the profile of Gaelic within Scotland.
3. In regard to the Gaelic speaking areas we recognise the plan's commitment to encouraging the continued use of the language in communities, but we feel that further acknowledgement should be given to the economic well-being of these areas and consider that this should be an area of explicit priority. Ultimately the lack of strong local economies in Gaelic speaking areas will undermine the use of the language at the heart of vibrant and thriving communities.
4. In relation to the enhancing the use of Gaelic, the University feels that latent Gaelic speakers should be included more overtly in priority areas on promoting Gaelic through social activity, This would allow latent Gaelic speakers to be part of the educational dimension of the language.
5. In regard to provision for Gaelic learners at all levels (from school to adult learners), the University believes it would be worthwhile to undertake systematic evaluation and research into the effectiveness of various teaching approaches, so that good practice can be identified and disseminated. In addition, we consider that it may be desirable for investment in learning materials for learners at all levels, so to ensure that these are contemporary and portray a positive up to date image of the language, as well as supporting effective learning.
6. The University is in agreement with both of its academic partners, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig UHI and Lews Castle College UHI in regard to the lack of mention of these institutions in the plan and the University believes that the plan would be enhanced with reference to both institutions, including an acknowledgement of Sabhal Mòr Ostaig UHI as the national centre for Gaelic language and culture.





Taken together Sabhal Mòr Ostaig UHI and Lews Castle College UHI have a huge impact on local economies and more generally the provision of Gaelic services, language infrastructure and influence in communities across Scotland. More generally, for communities to thrive and Gaelic to flourish it is important that the Universities and Colleges in general, and the University of the Highlands and Islands in particular are facilitated to have a direct impact on language and community growth.

7. The University recognises its responsibility to respond to the increasing demand for Gaelic medium teachers within schools. In regard to the quality of Gaelic medium teachers, and particularly the quality and accuracy of Gaelic language that new teachers use, the University would suggest that the plan could be enhanced with more specific reference to the more explicit monitoring of the language standards of new Gaelic medium teachers. We contend that standards of Gaelic should be maintained and robust validations of teacher education programmes, perhaps with specific national threshold standards are key to this. With the increase in applications for Gaelic Medium Education, quality should always take priority over quantity.
8. The University believes that the 5- year plan provides clear strategic effect to the Bòrd's aspirations to support Gaelic in speaker communities. However we believe that Language planning in relation to the existing Gaelic-speaking communities needs to progress beyond the aspirational sentiments in relation to this vital aspect of language policy as indicated in previous plans. The University contends that it may be helpful for the plan to articulate more closely illustrative steps it plans to take in order to support Gaelic in Gaelic speaking communities.
9. Overall the draft new National plan is well put together and Bòrd na Gàidhlig should be congratulated on achieving this. Some adjustment in certain areas, and some further articulation of detail, would be desirable as indicated in this response and the University would encourage the Bòrd to develop a programme of follow up individual meetings with key organisations and agencies so that a clearer picture is created of how key stakeholders can support the implementation of the core aims and objectives of the plan.

