

Response ID ANON-HEFY-KVY1-Q

Submitted to Gaelic and Scots and Scottish Languages Bill: Scottish Government commitments
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Gaelic medium education (GME)

1 Thinking of barriers, obstacles and solutions - What are the key aspects you feel should be included in a new strategic approach to Gaelic medium education?

Please put your response - in English, Gaelic or Scots - in the text box:

Scottish Rural Action welcome a new strategic approach to Gaelic medium education. As well as improving the educational experience and opportunities for pupils, we feel this offers opportunities to improve training and support for education professionals and other learners/speakers, including in communities where Gaelic pre-school establishments and schools act as community hubs.

Key aspects for inclusion in a new strategic approach is:

1. Addressing barriers to inclusion: A focus on the quality of the educational experience, rather than numbers of pupils to shape resourcing. Critically, this means ensuring there is the right kind of assessment and support for pupils who may struggle to participate and learn due to neurodiversity or disability - something which is currently lacking in GME.

2. Addressing barriers to pupil-centred learning: Being clear of the outcomes of the educational experience. GME must be designed to support generations of fluent Gaelic speakers who can be future teachers, scholars and linguists but it is equally important to acknowledge that most pupils will not aspire to this level of fluency. GME therefore should be designed with an emphasis on fostering conversational fluency and the love/understanding of the language and culture, rather than offering a large range of technical subjects in Gaelic.

There should be a review of the approach to encouraging learners to continue with GLE opportunities in secondary school. There are concerns that the relevance and importance of Gaelic to different future career and life paths is not well communicated to pupils. Young people need to be able to see where a subject will take them in the future and frequently make very hard choices about what subjects they will prioritise.

3. Addressing barriers to immersion, which is critical for language acquisition. Immersion opportunities from play groups, croileagan (pre- school), nursery and throughout primary school are needed. We agree with the response submitted by Misneachd, which suggests Scotland explore a similar model of immersion centres to Wales which would apply to primary school aged children.

4. Addressing barriers to the recruitment and retention of education professionals: Holistic support for Gaelic education professionals, including learning support staff and those interested in becoming education professionals, extending beyond training to financial packages and appropriate housing solutions, particularly in rural and island areas.

5. Addressing barriers to community participation in GME and GLE processes: Integration of GME with community-based learning and speaking opportunities, including for parents/carers who are keen to support their children's education but also learn for themselves. Also, extending parental rights, where possible, to requests for early years and secondary GME provision.

6. Addressing barriers to schools adopting flexible approaches to GME: While the aim to create new GME schools is good, a degree of flexibility in the model of provision of Gaelic education in both Gaelic and English medium schools is required so that opportunities for language learning are maximised. This should include a system of additional and accessible grants for EME establishments that want to test approaches to GME. Such a system may be particularly important to engage small rural and island EME schools in the delivery of GME opportunities.

7. Addressing barriers to progression beyond secondary school into non formal educational opportunities to use Gaelic through, for example, programmes supporting placements in different sectors where these may work exclusively through the Gaelic language or provide opportunities for use of the language.

2 What steps do you think should be taken to support and promote Gaelic education and to ensure that any new strategic approach to Gaelic medium education is implemented?

Please put your response - in English, Gaelic or Scots - in the text box:

The points raised in response to question 1 apply to this question. Amongst the most critical steps is to provide holistic support for Gaelic education professionals, including learning support assistants, which enables them to receive appropriate training but also live well in their chosen locations, whether that is Glasgow or Barra. Scottish Rural Action agrees with Misneachd which calls for a new strategic approach to recognise the "significant additional difficulty faced by rural and island schools and communities in attracting and retaining staff, and their crucial importance to the survival of Gaelic."

Additionally, in order to ensure the new strategic approach is implemented there needs to be:

1. Ministerial leadership of the agenda and strategic alignment with a range of relevant policies for example Housing 2040, the Islands Plan and the National Strategy for Economic Transformation.

2. Defined steps to utilise the review of national education agencies in order to ensure they fully integrate GME and GLE in their planning and delivery

processes.

3. Continued commitment to a whole-community approach to Gaelic language strategy as captured in the consultation responses to the National Gaelic Language Plan 2023-28. Improved interactions, for example, between community-based Gaelic initiatives (e.g. Fèisean and Gaelic Officers) and those based in schools would support GME implementation through enabling people, skills and resources to be maximised, particularly in smaller communities.

3 Are there any other points you would like to make about the provision of Gaelic medium education and Gaelic learner education in Scottish education?

Please put your response - in English, Gaelic or Scots - in the text box:

Gàidhealtachd

4 Do you have views on what measures should be in place to support Gaelic speakers in areas with significant numbers of speakers?

Please put your response - in English, Gaelic or Scots - in the text box:

Scottish Rural Action sees value in Gaelic language planning policy devolved to areas smaller than local authorities as this is more likely to allow for place-based approaches that integrate different, localised elements of Gaelic policy including GME, Gaelic broadcasting and online activity, and Gaelic community development with wider policy priorities around housing, transport, culture etc.

We would support an approach for a Gàidhealtachd framework based on Ireland's Gaeltacht Act (2012), specifically in relation to creating a new level of holistic community language planning with more input and control from the community in both island and urban contexts.

The integration of Gaelic community development is particularly key in both these contexts, but it will require placing community development and cultural initiatives on a much firmer, potentially statutory, footing in terms of funding and support. Furthermore, the provision of expert support through Gaelic Language Development Officers or similar posts at Gàidhealtachd level will accelerate local progress and create a network for dissemination of good practice across different Gàidhealtachd.

5 Do you have views on how such areas should be defined?

Please put your response - in English, Gaelic or Scots - in the text box:

We would agree with the position that Gaelic is a language for the whole of Scotland and that some Gàidhealtachd may have clear geographic boundaries while others may be communities of interest (networks) within a large urban area.

There needs to be transparency, if not necessarily 100% consistency, in how areas are defined, with clear evidence of community engagement on the preferred approach and in a resulting Community Plan. Guaranteeing transparency must be within the powers and responsibility of a named agency which will also have the responsibility to support community language development within the Gàidhealtachd once it is established.

6 How would you balance the commitment to put measures in place in areas where there are significant Gaelic speakers with the principle that Gaelic should be a national language for all of Scotland?

Please put your response - in English, Gaelic or Scots - in the text box:

One approach would be to ensure that the Gàidhealtachd should include both communities where there are high proportions of Gaelic speakers and communities with lower proportions with an emphasis on collaboration and tailored local provision captured within the Community Plan. This approach is reflected to some extent in the Skye & Raasay Community Gaelic Language Plan.

Gaelic hubs or networks in urban centres such as Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen may be further recognised under the Gàidhealtachd framework.

7 Are there any further points you would like to make about the commitment to explore the creation of a Gàidhealtachd and the associated commitments relating to Gaelic use in family and community?

Please put your response - in English, Gaelic or Scots - in the text box:

Bòrd na Gàidhlig

8 Do you have any views on the current duties of Bòrd na Gàidhlig and any suggestions of how these could operate more effectively or efficiently?

Please put your response - in English, Gaelic or Scots - in the text box:

Scottish Rural Action would like to commend the work of Bòrd na Gàidhlig and many other organisations in promoting the Gaelic language.

Bòrd na Gàidhlig and several other organisations in their consultation responses have highlighted the opportunities and constraints in the current system. We do not wish to comment further beyond noting it is important that these are all considered in an open and transparent way with a clear idea of what the desired outcomes are for any change introduced.

9 Do you have any views on structural changes at Bòrd na Gàidhlig which could strengthen the promotion of and support for Gaelic in Scotland?

Please put your response - in English, Gaelic or Scots - in the text box:

Additional powers and resources will be necessary should Bòrd na Gàidhlig take on a role with regards to the Gàidhealtachd and support for Community or Inter-agency GL Plans, on top of the almost 70 Gaelic Language Plans produced by public agencies.

These powers and resources have been outlined in the Bòrd's consultation response as well as in the consultation responses of other organisations directly involved in Gaelic policy and policy delivery.

10 Are there any further points you would like to make about the review of the functions and structure of Bòrd na Gàidhlig which seeks to ensure Scotland has the most effective leadership body and network of organisations for the promotion of Gaelic?

Please put your response - in English, Gaelic or Scots - in the text box:

No.

Scots Language

11 Thinking of the work of the key Scots bodies as referred to in the paper - What are your views on the work of the Scots bodies? How would you strengthen and add to the work of these bodies?

Please put your response - in English, Gaelic or Scots - in the text box:

Scottish Rural Action would like to note the exceptional work of the bodies mentioned in this paper in promoting engagement with the Scots language.

We do however also wish to note concerns from these bodies and from others working in promoting the Scots language, of a lack in unifying vision and long-term strategy. Opportunities to collaborate or extend the reach of the work are consistently missed.

We would therefore be supportive of the Bill establishing an agency or strengthening the position of an existing agency to fulfil this purpose, drawing learning from the experience of Bòrd na Gàidhlig and recent legislative developments in Wales and Ireland. It is critical this agency is appropriately resourced.

12 What are your views on the next steps that should be taken to support the Scots language?

Please put your response - in English, Gaelic or Scots - in the text box:

Scottish Rural Action notes that the explicit recognition of Scots and the dignity of its speakers in Scots law will be a significant step in and of itself towards redressing the balance of the linguistic inequalities Scots faces. Any legislation must however be translated to effective policy with transparent governance structures. This includes (a) consideration of our recommendation under Q11 to establish or strengthen an existing agency which will support policy development and implementation and (b) an approach which reviews and builds on the 2015 Scottish Government Scots Language Policy. We would also agree with the Scots Language Centre on their recommendation for Scots to be formally recognised by all public bodies in Scotland, with a plan for how public bodies will be supported to put this recognition into practice.

13 Are there any further points you would like to make about the commitment to support the Scots language?

Please put your response - in English, Gaelic or Scots - in the text box:

We urge the Scottish Government to take the opportunity to support other languages beyond Gaelic and Scots as part of the commitment to 'recognise that Scotland is a multilingual society'. For example, the government could give more support to community 'Saturday schools' organised by many communities of New Scots across the country, and require councils and education authorities to make premises available for these, and the number of community languages available in the school examination system could be increased.

About you

14 What is your name?

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15 What is your email address?

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16 Are you responding as an individual or an organisation?

Organisation

17 What is your organisation?

Organisation:
Scottish Rural Action

18 The Scottish Government would like your permission to publish your consultation response. Please indicate your publishing preference:

Publish response only (without name)

19 We will share your response internally with other Scottish Government policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for Scottish Government to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise?

Yes

20 I confirm that I have read the privacy policy and consent to the data I provide being used as set out in the policy.

I consent

Evaluation

21 Please help us improve our consultations by answering the questions below. (Responses to the evaluation will not be published.)

Matrix 1 - How satisfied were you with this consultation?:

Slightly satisfied

Please enter comments here.:

Matrix 1 - How would you rate your satisfaction with using this platform (Citizen Space) to respond to this consultation?:

Very satisfied

Please enter comments here.: