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Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition [PE1922](#): Cancel all Local Authority expenditure on Gaelic expansion, lodged by Douglas Capon

Brief overview of issues raised by petition

The long title of the [Gaelic Language \(Scotland\) Act 2005](#) is:

“An Act of the Scottish Parliament to establish a body having functions exercisable with a view to securing the status of the Gaelic language as an official language of Scotland commanding equal respect to the English language, including the functions of preparing a national Gaelic language plan, of requiring certain public authorities to prepare and publish Gaelic language plans in connection with the exercise of their functions and to maintain and implement such plans, and of issuing guidance in relation to Gaelic education.”

The 2005 Act established the Bòrd na Gàidhlig and provided for the Bòrd to have the power to require public bodies, including local authorities, to prepare, publish and implement Gaelic Language plans.

The 2005 Act requires the Bòrd to develop a National Gaelic plan, normally every five years. The [Bòrd says of the 2018-2023 plan](#):

“The central purpose of this Plan is to encourage and enable more people to use Gaelic more often and in a wider range of situations. The key messages, aims, priorities and new commitments contained in the Plan all contribute to achieving

this increased use of Gaelic. Principal amongst these are the following:

- Gaelic belongs to the whole of Scotland
- Promoting a positive image of Gaelic
- Increasing the learning of Gaelic; and
- Increasing the use of Gaelic.”

The [2011 Census found that](#) “just over 57,000 people said they could speak Gaelic”. A total of around 87,000 people said they had some skills in Gaelic. This was 1.7% of the population over the age of three. There was wide variation in the reported numbers of people with some skills across Scotland. In Eilean Siar, it was 61.2%, in Highland it was 7.4% and in Argyll and Bute it was 5.9%. In all other local authority areas, the figure was below 2%.

The role of local authorities

The Bòrd’s [website lists 26 local authorities](#) with approved Gaelic Plans, along with other public bodies.

The Scottish Government’s budget 2022-23 sets out its funding to support Gaelic. This includes a number of lines to support Gaelic education: £4.48 million of grants to a total of 27 local authorities, and £3 million of capital and £1 million of resource funding for expansion of Gaelic education. The Scottish Government’s budget also includes £5.1 million to fund the Bòrd as well as around £15.9 million of funding for other activities supporting Gaelic.

The petition focuses on the spend by local authorities on the language. Local authorities may use a range of funding sources to support Gaelic. National data on Local Government finance statistics does not disaggregate the spending on such activities separately, e.g. the spending of Gaelic Medium Education is reported as part of education spend.

Education

Gaelic is one of only two specific subjects protected in statute in education (the other being religious instruction). The Education (Scotland) Act 1980 specifies that school education means (among other things) ‘the teaching of Gaelic in Gaelic-speaking areas’.

The Education (Scotland) Act 2016 created a duty on local authorities to promote and support Gaelic Medium Education (GME) and Gaelic Learner Education (GLE). The Education (Scotland) Act 2016 established a process by which parents can request Gaelic Medium Primary Education (GMPE) from their local authority.

Policy developments

The Bòrd is currently developing a National Gaelic Language Plan 2023-28.

In addition, the Scottish Government plans to introduce a languages bill in the current parliamentary session. The [2021 Programme for Government](#) stated:

“The Scottish Government is committed to increasing the numbers using and learning Gaelic, and we will maintain our support for Gaelic education, arts and broadcasting. We will bring forward a Scottish Languages Bill over the course of the Parliament to take further steps to support the use of Gaelic and the Scots language. We will also explore the creation of a recognised Gàidhealtachd, review the functions and structures of Bòrd na Gàidhlig to ensure Scotland has an effective leadership body, and develop a new national strategic approach to Gaelic medium education (GME) which will encourage the creation of new GME primary and secondary schools.” (p45)

Key Organisations and relevant links

Scottish Government

Bòrd na Gàidhlig

COSLA

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17/01/2022

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

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