



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## Finance and Public Administration Committee

Jenny Gilruth MSP  
Cabinet Secretary for  
Education and Skills  
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By email

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Dear Cabinet Secretary

### Scottish Languages Bill

The Finance and Public Administration Committee (the Committee) is currently undertaking scrutiny of the Financial Memorandum (FM) for the Scottish Languages Bill. As part of its scrutiny, the Committee ran a call for views on the FM between 23 January and 1 March 2024 and received 15 responses, all of which have been published on the Committee's call for views website<sup>1</sup>.

The written submissions received raise a number of concerns regarding the costs associated with the measures proposed by the Bill, as well as funding for the support of Gaelic and Scots more generally.

The FM states that “the main impact of the Bill provisions is a shift in activity, a repurposing of resources in terms of effort and attention. The Scottish Government considers that provisions do not create wholly new costs or a requirement for wholly new spend.” Stakeholders, including Bòrd na Gàidhlig, however questioned “whether any legislation can be achieved without new spend, particularly legislation which changes the functions of organisations [...] and places new requirements on public bodies, for example by introducing Areas of Linguistic Significance, and establishing

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<sup>1</sup>[Scottish Languages Bill Financial Memorandum | Scottish Parliament Website](#)

monitoring procedures for enforcement of language standards and the proposed National Gaelic Language Strategy". The Committee highlights concerns such as those raised by the Scots Language Centre that, "enacting this bill without the funding to allow meaningful engagement from funded bodies and individuals is a significant underestimation of what is required from the bill as introduced".

### *Support for the Gaelic language*

The FM outlines that "this is a Bill to ensure that there is a structure in place across government and the wider Scottish Administration to meet the needs of Gaelic and Scots communities and languages for the future", while the Policy Memorandum for the Bill explains that "Scottish Government expenditure for Gaelic and Scots has remained relatively stable since 2010/11 with some increases for media, learning and Gaelic development throughout that time". Submissions received by the Committee stress that this represents a real-terms cut for Gaelic and Scots, with implications for language preservation and development, and that the Bill's aims may not be "achievable under the current financial model".

Bòrd na Gàidhlig explain, in their written submission, that the funding made available and the role and purpose of Bòrd na Gàidhlig are a result of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 and that "Government at the time commissioned advice that recommended that to deliver the requirements of the 2005 Act would require an annual funding allocation of £10M to Bòrd na Gàidhlig. In 2007 the funding allocated was £5M, and it is this funding that has remained static since that time, with minor one-off increases at various points to supplement this core amount." Bòrd na Gàidhlig therefore goes on to argue that "any resource requirement for implementing the Bill would have to be provided from the Government as there is no flexibility in currently heavily constrained development budgets".

We note that the Bill would allow local authorities to designate communities as areas of linguistic significance based on the number of people with Gaelic language skills, historical links, educational provision and Gaelic activity. The submissions received by the Committee raise questions regarding the practical implications of such a designation, in the absence of additional funding, "if this initiative is to be anything other than a descriptive label". Comann Luchd-Teagaisg Àrd-sgoiltean (Gaelic Secondary Teachers' Association) stated that "it seems naive for there to be no additional spend anticipated, in particular where the responsibility for designation may lie with local authorities, some of whom are proactive in regards to the Gaelic language and its cultures, whereas others have a record of being unsupportive and reluctant to support development activities." Stakeholders further noted that "a reasonable interpretation would be that different kinds of supportive or protective measures for Gaelic would be required" and "in the absence of a financial incentive to local authorities to encourage such designations, it seems unlikely this power will be used".

Local authorities and COSLA also noted that promoting Gaelic education will incur costs in the provision of education, the training of staff and resources required, particularly in the context of existing shortages in Gaelic teachers. COSLA also highlighted a lack of clarity regarding whether local authorities will receive additional funding to cover the costs set out in the FM. More generally, stakeholders

questioned what the impact of language status would be in the absence of additional funding.

### *Support for the Scots language*

The Policy Memorandum states that the Bill aims “to provide further support for the Scots language and improve its status, profile and use both in public life and in community life”, while the FM notes that no increase is expected to the £300,000 per annum grant currently provided to Scots bodies.

The submission received from the Scots Language Centre (SLC) raises concerns regarding the significant financial impact of the Bill on the SLC and the level of demand which, it argues, “has not been reflected in the financial memorandum”. The SLC states that “any topical mention of Scots increases demand for the Scots Language Centre to comment, advise, and interpret the matter at hand, and also increases general interest”, leading to additional costs for the SLC.

**The Committee seeks the Scottish Government’s reflections on the issues raised in evidence regarding the adequacy of funding in the FM to achieve the aims of the Bill, as set out above. We would also welcome further information from the Scottish Government on the following issues—**

- **How it has assessed what activities can be shifted and resources repurposed in order to determine that “the provisions do not create wholly new costs or a requirement for wholly new spend.”**
- **What activities it considers will have to be reduced or stopped in order to provide funding to achieve the policy aims of “providing further support for Scotland’s indigenous languages”, particularly in relation to the designation of areas of linguistic significance, and**
- **How the additional demand for the provision of advice and resources in relation to Gaelic and Scots languages can be met without increased funding to meet any additional demand.**

We would welcome a response by Friday, 17 May 2024.

I am copying this letter to the Convener of the Education, Children and Young People Committee for their information.

Yours sincerely

**Kenneth Gibson MSP  
Convener  
Finance and Public Administration Committee**