

SPCB Draft Gaelic Language Plan – detailed consultation report

The consultation

1. The public consultation was open from 20 February 2023 until 3 April 2023 and was carried out by means of an online questionnaire on [CitizenSpace](#).
2. The public consultation generated 700 page views on our website and 124 responses (a high level). Promotional methods included:
 - a. Posters and leaflets
 - b. A news release
 - c. The Scottish Parliament website
 - d. Social media posts on the corporate Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts and on the Scottish Parliament Gaelic twitter, POs account and other Scottish Parliament satellite accounts.
 - e. A podcast
 - f. The Scottish Parliament e-newsletter and BSL newsletters
 - g. Internal communications via Corporate Bulletin
 - h. An email to national and local Gaelic groups.

Response rate and responses

3. 124 responses represents a high level of response for a statutory Gaelic Language Plan. Full statistics and a detailed analysis follow this summary.
4. Of the responses:
 - a. Eight were from groups and organisations.¹
 - b. 116 were from individuals, including eight internal responses (from MSPs/MSPs staff, Scottish Parliament Staff and contractors working in the Scottish Parliament).
5. 11 of the responses were in Gaelic and the remainder were in English.
6. Of those answering, the ability in/or connection to Gaelic was as follows:

Category	Number	%
A fluent speaker	17	14%
A Gaelic learner	68	55%
Someone with an interest in Gaelic	14	11%
Other	25	20%

Consultation responses – Executive Summary

7. There was widespread support among respondents for the Gaelic Language Plan. There was strong support for all seven areas in the plan (visibility, staffing, day to day operation, communications, corpus, mainstreaming and Parliamentary business).
8. The key emerging themes from the responses were as follows:

¹ The groups who responded were: University of Edinburgh, the Highland Council Gaelic Team at Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Glasgow City Council, City of Edinburgh Council, Dumfries & Galloway Council and Scottish Women’s Convention

- a. The importance of staff training, both awareness training and language training, including the importance of it being open to all working in the Parliament.
 - b. The importance of facilitating and publicising the use of Gaelic in Parliamentary Business to increase its use.
 - c. The need to make use of our bilingual signage and visibility of Gaelic in general to give more context about the language to visitors to the Parliament and to signpost them to services and information about the language.
 - d. Support for a review of our Gaelic communications products.
9. Many of the comments are already reflected in our plan's commitments, That said, we suggest the following minor amendments to the Gaelic language plan in line with the feedback:
- a. Adding in a new commitment on visibility
 - b. Amending the priority we had given to staffing by bringing delivery forward by a year.

Visibility:

Add the following new committment:

1a	Investigate ways to build on visibility of existing signage in the building as a way to give more context and understanding of the language to learners and non-speakers. This might include QR codes, posters, web contact or leaflets that take people to more information.	PCO PESO
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Staffing:

Move this commitment from year 2 of the plan to year 1 in view of the importance given to the issue by respondents:

5	Develop internal strategy for supporting Gaelic learners, including establishing a conversation group, supporting Duolingo learners etc
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Detailed Analysis of Consultation Responses

10. A series of questions were asked with respondents given the opportunity to write their views in open text after each question. The breakdown of the responses are summarised below.

Q: Do you agree with the Parliament's commitments regarding visibility of Gaelic?

	Number	%
Strongly agree	73	59%
Agree	27	22%
Neither agree nor disagree	2	2%
Disagree	3	2%
Strongly disagree	18	15%
Didn't answer	1	0%

Feedback:

11. There was strong support for this area with 81% of respondents agreeing or agreeing strongly with our plan and its commitments.
12. Many respondents stated the importance of visibility for the status of the language and awareness raising. It was seen to be a part of mainstreaming the language by many.
13. Many respondents also commented on the need for Gaelic to be shown equal respect in terms of prominence and size. This is current practice.
14. On the issue of visibility, one recurring theme was the need to contextualise the visibility of the language given the low levels of public awareness and misconceptions surrounding the language. Some argued that the Gaelic signage in the Parliament could be built upon to give more context and understanding of the language to learners and non-speakers, for example those visitors who don't know a great deal about Gaelic or its history, who want to know more about the Parliament's Gaelic services or who might wish to learn Gaelic.
15. Those who opposed visibility questioned the relevance of Gaelic and the cost.

Our reflection:

16. As we already commit to, we have guidance on equal respect and will continue to work with colleagues to ensure they are used and understood, including by contractors:

1	Add further information to the brand guidelines on the use of Gaelic and other languages and include guidance on "equal respect" for Gaelic visually
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17. We will investigate ways of using our signage as a means of giving visitors more background to Gaelic in addition to the commitments in the plan and are including a new commitment:

1a	Investigate ways to build on visibility of existing signage in the building as a way to give more context and understanding of the language to learners and non-speakers. This might include QR codes, posters, web contact or leaflets that take people to more information.	PCO PESO
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Q: Do you agree with the Parliament's commitments regarding staffing?

	Number	%
Strongly agree	68	55
Agree	33	27
Neither agree nor disagree	1	1
Disagree	3	2
Strongly disagree	19	15
Didn't answer	0	0

Feedback:

18. There was strong support for this area with 82% agreeing or agreeing strongly.

19. There was general agreement as to the importance of Gaelic Awareness training and supporting Gaelic language training. Working with other public bodies to share training was also widely welcomed.
20. However, some respondents felt that the plan was too vague with regard to training opportunities and as to the definition of “sufficient” Gaelic speaking staff. In their response for example, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar’s Gaelic team stated:

“Thathar a’ faireachdainn, ge-ta, gur dòcha gu bheil beagan fiosrachaidh a dhith a thaobh a bhith a’ buileachadh ro-innleachd airson luchd-ionnsachaidh na Gàidhlig. Bhiodh e feumail, s’ dòcha, iomradh a thoirt air dòighean teagaisg cumanta an seo, mar SpeakGaelic. A bharrachd air sin, thathar a’ faireachdainn gu bheil e caran lag a bhith ag ràdh gu bheil e “a’ beachdachadh air” buidheann còmhraidh a chur air chois.”²

21. With regard to language training, several correspondents suggested that taster courses were not enough, and that wider provision should be made to ensure staff may become fluent in Gaelic, whether within the Parliament or through support from the Parliament to use external courses or a mixture of this. Some called for increased staff or resources to facilitate this. Others called for more places to be funded on the [Cùrsa Inntigidh](#) online course or other similar courses.

For example:

“In terms of language acquisition, it seems a lost opportunity not to tie in the Parliamentary calendar with multi-year language learning rather than taster and ab initio classes.”

22. Several internal respondents stated that they would like more information and support with Gaelic learning and opportunities for get togethers. Better internal communications for Gaelic learning opportunities were suggested. It was also stated that provision to learners should be open to all working within the Parliament. One respondent said:

“Maybe a lunch club for learners in the Parliament to help and encourage each other learning, whether via SpeakGaelic, Duolingo etc. Maybe an online club for staff online.” Another respondent suggested that Gaelic should be considered as an equalities issue by the Scottish Parliament.

23. Those registering opposition to the staffing proposals all expressed concern with the potential cost.

Our reflections:

24. This is the issue which seems to have gathered the largest level of interest in the consultation. We will prioritise the issue of Gaelic training in our

² Translation: *It is felt however, that more information is required about the implementation of a strategy for Gaelic learners. It might be useful to mention some of the common learning methods here, such as SpeakGaelic. Additionally, it is felt that it is somewhat weak to say that we are “considering” establishing a conversation group.*

implementation of the plan. Learner provision will include all working in the Parliament.

For this reason, we propose to move our existing commitment 5 from year 2 of the plan to year 1 in view of the importance given to the issue by respondents:

5	Develop internal strategy for supporting Gaelic learners, including establishing a conversation group, supporting Duolingo learners etc.
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Q: Do you agree with the Parliament’s commitments regarding day-to-day operational issues?

	Number	%
Strongly agree	69	56%
Agree	25	20%
Neither agree nor disagree	5	4%
Disagree	4	3%
Strongly disagree	18	15%
Didn’t answer	3	2%

Feedback:

25. There was strong support for this area with 76% agreeing or agreeing strongly.
26. In this area, many comments were received but many of them related to other areas of the plan and have therefore been considered under these sections.
27. The importance of being able to access services in Gaelic was mentioned by several respondents as was the importance of this being actively offered.
28. Three respondents welcomed the commitment to selling Gaelic books in the shop.
29. Two respondents stated that services should be tailored to Gaelic (non-fluent) learners where possible.
30. One respondent said that the SPCB should be more active in the support of the Commissioners/officeholders as it sets the budget and terms and conditions of their appointment.
31. Those opposed to this section said that it was not a priority or a good use of resources.

Our reflections:

32. Services for those who are learning Gaelic will be considered in our broader work around Gaelic learning. See paragraph 24 above for more details. We consider our commitment to the Officeholders to be met by the following commitments which we will publicise on an active offer basis.

6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaelic awareness training to be offered to SPCB supported Officeholders and their staff.
13a	<p>Support the independent officeholders in public positions by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing advice and assistance relating to Gaelic if requested by the Officeholders supported by the SPCB

Q: Do you agree with the Parliament’s commitments regarding communications?

	Number	%
Strongly agree	74	60%
Agree	25	20%
Neither agree nor disagree	5	4%
Disagree	2	2%
Strongly disagree	17	14%
Didn't answer	1	0%

- 33. There was strong support for this area with 80% agreeing or agreeing strongly.
- 34. The proposals to review our Gaelic communications products was welcomed.
- 35. Four respondents raised the view that it is important that Gaelic has a continued presence on corporate communications products such as publications and social media in addition to facilitate cross-promotion and order to raise awareness for the language and show equal respect, in addition to dedicated Gaelic social media channels and other communications products.
- 36. In terms of communications products, three respondents welcomed our plans to consult with the Gaelic community. That all sections of the Gaelic community – traditional and new communities - should be reflected in products was also suggested.
- 37. How our communications products could be of use to, or cater for learners, was raised.
- 38. Those opposed to this section said that it was not a priority or good use of resources.
- 39. We asked in a separate question about any initial views on potential new communications and web products which were the subject of a commitment in the plan. Relatively few views were received, however those that did respond stated that Gaelic material should be of equal quality to English materials and that it was important that Gaelic should continue to be visible on other Scottish Parliament communications products in English. One suggestion was that we could consider a Gaelic podcast.

Our reflections:

- 40. Our plan commits us to continuing to use Gaelic on our corporate channels.

CP	Material in and about Gaelic also regularly appears on the corporate Twitter and other Scottish Parliament social media channels.
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- 41. As we already commit to, we will consult with Gaelic speakers and learners on the content and format for the website and communications products in line with our plan commitment. We will make sure that all sectors of the Gaelic community are consulted.

14	In line with content strategy and user need which underpins this, consult with the Gaelic community as to the best way to convey news and information about the Parliament that best meets their
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	<p>need. Based on this consultation, we will produce new communications products for the Gaelic community containing news about areas such as parliamentary business, events and engagement. The exact content and format will be decided upon in consultation upon with the Gaelic community. This will replace translation of all news releases with the aim of producing a more attractive and popular news and information product. We will also review the current online offerings – e.g. webpages, blog and social media, to ascertain the best content, formats and channels to reach the Gaelic Community. Channels will be kept under review to ensure that the provision is in line with our priorities and ensuring we are going where the community is based</p>
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Q: Do you agree with the Parliament’s commitments regarding corpus?

	Number	%
Strongly agree	69	55.5%
Agree	26	21%
Neither agree nor disagree	6	5%
Disagree	2	2%
Strongly disagree	18	14.5%
Didn’t answer	3	2%

Feedback:

- 42. There was strong support for this area with 76.5% agreeing or agreeing strongly.
- 43. The importance of ensuring accuracy, consistency and clarity was often raised.
- 44. Several respondents raised the issue of ensuring that corpus planning was balanced so as to ensure ease of understanding, avoidance of too much ‘Beurlachas’ (English language influence) and that it is not done at the expense of the diversity of Gaelic dialects.
- 45. Some respondents expressed concern at the use of Computer Assisted Translation (CAT), we believe they understood this to mean Machine Translation. These respondents were concerned that the SPCB proposed to use Machine Translation (such as Google translate), rather than professional translators and were concerned in terms of quality and in terms of work for translators. Machine translation is not our model of work – we employ human translators. Computer-aided translation (CAT) is not Machine Translation and assists human translators in the translation process. For example, it retains content already translated for re-use and helps to ensure consistency.
- 46. On the subject of Machine Translation, some respondents suggested that we make it clear to passholders in guidance on Gaelic use that Machine Translation it is not an alternative to conventional translation and should never be used for issues such as writing correspondence, newsletter text or signage due to the high risk of errors and misinterpretation.
- 47. Edinburgh University suggested that we participate in their [project to create a large data AI model](#) to aid automatic Gaelic subtitling by supplying copies of public-facing Gaelic texts produced by the Parliament.

48. One respondent suggested the possibility of an event for staff, members and their staff by [Ainmean-àite na h-Alba](#) (the official placenames expert group for Gaelic) about placenames, such as the names of constituencies to raise awareness.
49. Some comments from those opposed to this section included some comments on the possible cost but more typical were comments negative about the language itself such as “there are literally no words to describe how stupid an idea this is”, “much of the language of the 21st century doesn’t even exist in Gaelic”.

Our reflections:

50. We agree that ease of understanding, accuracy and consistency should be key to corpus planning, that unnecessary use of English words or calques should be avoided and that corpus planning should not adversely affect dialect diversity.
51. We would be happy to participate in the Edinburgh University project. We consider this can be part of our existing commitment 32. When we know more we will look at the prioritisation of this commitment:

3	Investigate whether the Gaelic content of the Official Report can be archived in appropriate Gaelic archives.
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52. We will investigate the possibility of an event with *Ainmean-àite na h-Alba* and can explore an event with them through our work in our existing commitment 30 and current practice:

CP	The SPCB uses place name forms recommended by <i>Ainmean-àite na h-Alba</i>
CP	The SPCB participates in the work of <i>Ainmean-àite na h-Alba</i>
30	We will commission <i>Ainmean-àite na h-Alba</i> to research the correct Gaelic form of place names appearing in Parliamentary publications/social media which are not yet in the Gaelic placenames database

53. We will add advice and guidance on the uses and limitation of Machine Translation to our intranet guidance and FAQs on Gaelic named in the plan. This ties in with existing commitment 22 and current practice of the plan.

22	Produce FAQs about Gaelic, and Gaelic in the Parliament for internal and external use.
CP	Publicise the support available to Members through the Members’ Expenses scheme for Gaelic translation. Prepare advice for Members on sourcing translation. Develop stock Gaelic phrases and any appropriate templates that include Gaelic for optional use on MSP surgery posters, adverts, newsletters, twitter cards and annual reports.

Q: Do you agree with the Parliament’s commitment regarding mainstreaming?

	Number	%
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		(rounding up/down results in total of 99%)
Strongly agree	67	54
Agree	27	22
Neither agree nor disagree	5	4
Disagree	3	2
Strongly disagree	19	15
Didn't answer	3	2

Feedback:

54. There was strong support for this area with 76% agreeing or agreeing strongly. Many raised the importance of mainstreaming Gaelic in general. For example, one respondent stated:

“Feumaidh muinntir na h-Alba fàs cleachdte ri Ghàidhlig a leughadh, a chluinntinn, fhaicinn. Nuair a bhios a’ chànain a’ faireachdain àbhaisteach, bidh ùidh nas motha ann air a son.”³

55. One group responding stated:

“We would suggest though that while transitioning the Gaelic Working Group into a formal diversity and inclusion network, it will be important to retain the focus on Gaelic and the commitments in the plan.”

56. In this section, some respondents suggested that this section was too vague and didn't sufficiently normalise the language. Others pointed out that the plan would only mainstream Gaelic if fully implemented and pointed out the importance of doing this.

Our reflections:

57. We are committed to mainstreaming Gaelic.

58. We see the Languages Diversity and Inclusion network as a way of sharing good practice and achieving synergies between Gaelic, BSL and other languages and see this as improving our focus on Gaelic rather than diminishing it, as per our existing commitment:

34	In GLP 3 we said: Gaelic Working group to implement Gaelic Plan and ensure mainstreaming of Gaelic in the work of the Parliament. Over the duration of the plan, we will seek to transition the existing Gaelic Working Group into a formal diversity and inclusion network in order to embed Gaelic in our corporate thinking on equalities. We are reviewing how best to take this forward based on hybrid working and wider language context. We are investigating establishing a Languages Network including Gaelic, BSL and other languages.
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Q: Do you agree with the Parliament's commitment regarding parliamentary business?

³ Translation: *“The people of Scotland need to get used to reading, seeing, and hearing Gaelic. When the language feels normal, there will be more interest in it.”*

	Number	%
Strongly agree	62	50
Agree	25	20
Neither agree nor disagree	10	8
Disagree	3	2
Strongly disagree	22	18
Didn't answer	3	2

Feedback:

59. There was strong support for this area with 70% agreeing or agreeing strongly.

60. Many respondents felt that the use of Gaelic in parliamentary Business is crucial for the status and visibility of Gaelic and to encourage Gaelic speakers to use the language. There were many comments on relative infrequency of use of Gaelic in committee business and there was a clear desire amongst respondents for increased use of Gaelic. For example:

"I think having Gaelic visibility in parliament is a bonus, especially where speeches or questions are given in Gaelic, showing that Gaelic is a living and daily spoken language."

"Seeing elected representatives use Gaelic will grow confidence in the language and supporting them in their presentations will help."

"Tha iad [na gealltanasan plana] math ach gun teagamh bhiodh e math nan robh na buill a' cleachdadh na Gàidhlig nas trice, gu h-àraidh an co-cheangal ri gnothaichean seach a' Ghàidhlig fhèin."⁴

61. On the issue of Parliamentary business, the issue of interpretation and ease of access to it at present was raised. Three respondents, including an MSP, mentioned the current lack of facilities to enable simultaneous interpreting in Parliamentary Business for hybrid meetings and the importance of ensuring that this is made available as soon as possible. One respondent pointed out that this was a particular issue for traditional Gaelic speaking committees.

"I am aware of issues with using Gaelic at the moment, virtual witnesses to committees are unable to give evidence in Gaelic to hybrid meetings. Given there is a lot of crossover between who may wish to give evidence in Gaelic and who may benefit from hybrid meetings, this should be addressed."

62. Some respondents also raised concern about the notice required to use spoken Gaelic.

63. The importance of encouraging and facilitating Parliamentary Questions (spoken and written) in Gaelic was also raised.

⁴ Translation: They [the plan commitments] are good but it would be if members used Gaelic more often, particularly for matters other than Gaelic itself.

64. One respondent suggested that the Presiding Officers could be encouraged to use some stock phrases in Gaelic or bilingually to raise the profile of the language:

“Between those members with good levels of Gaelic and learners using the language for prewritten questions there is scope to increase usage of the language in the chamber significantly. This would improve the status and visibility of the language nationally via reporting. Likewise, the presiding officers should be able to use the language as part of proceedings, particularly given the formulaic aspects of their role. There are many multi-lingual chambers in the world - I think it would be beneficial for the parliament to commission a study of approaches and best practice elsewhere with a view to implementation of a more pro-active approach to normalising the language.”

65. Those not supportive of this section opposed it on cost grounds or said it was unnecessary, some pointing out the small number of MSPs able to speak Gaelic.

Our reflections:

66. While language use by Members and by the public in parliamentary business is a personal issue, we already have plan commitments to ensure Members and the public are aware of opportunities to use Gaelic in parliamentary business and to proactively encourage and facilitate its use. This relates to many commitments in our Parliamentary Business Section but particularly to the following under current practice:

CP	Publicise resources available to support MSPs in using Gaelic (e.g. Abair Beagan and Sgrìobh Beagan) via regular communications to MSPs.
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67. We will draw the suggestions regarding stock phrases to the attention of the Presiding Officer’s office and consider this part of current practice, as in paragraph 66.

68. We will investigate how other legislatures use languages other than English to inform our practice. This is already included in our commitments:

13	<p>In order to develop networks, exchange good practice and continuously improve, the team will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn from good practice in other legislatures relating to language provision, e.g. Senedd Cymru, Northern Ireland Assembly.
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69. Installation of infrastructure to enable simultaneous interpretation for hybrid committee and chamber business is already in the plan and is due to be implemented during the last half of 2023.

35	The Scottish Parliament has hardwired simultaneous interpreting equipment available in the Chamber and in two committee rooms to facilitate interpreting.
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	<p>The introduction of hybrid meetings has presented technical challenges with providing interpreting for meetings of this type. However, the Parliament is committed to ensuring that Gaelic interpreting is facilitated in Parliamentary business.</p> <p>During the time of this plan we will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that Gaelic interpreting is compatible with members participating remotely in hybrid meetings. • Explore ways of making Gaelic interpreting available for hybrid committee meetings. • Investigate possibility of using remote interpreting for Parliamentary business.
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70. In terms of notice, we always seek to be as accommodating as possible of requests to use spoken Gaelic and we will attempt to fulfil all requests that are made. However, the extremely limited availability of Gaelic interpreters, particularly in the central belt, is a constraining factor so we continue to have to ask for as much notice as possible. We hope that by being able to facilitate remote interpreting within the first year of the Gaelic language plan, the number of interpreters available will be increased by removing the requirement for them to work onsite. We feel our existing commitment 35 addresses this point.

General feedback:

71. The final question gave respondents the opportunity to comment on the plan in general. We received many supportive comments on the plan, such as

“Tha sinn airson meal a naidheachd a chur air Pàrlamaid na h-Alba airson plana soilleir, làidir, le amasan is clàran-ama a ghabhas coileanadh. Tha e follaiseach cuideachd gu bheil dealas làidir aig a’ Phàrlamaid gus Gàidhlig a chleachdadh agus a dh’àrdachadh cho mòr ’s as urrainn anns a h-obair làitheil, agus gu bheil am Plana dhà-rìribh a’ togail air na trì planaichean cànanain a chaidh a chur an gnìomh ron seo. Mealaidh ur naidheachd a-rithist!”⁵ (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar Gaelic team).

“For any public body preparing to write their Gaelic Language Plan, this is a very good example of a Plan that increases the use and learning of Gaelic and also promotes a positive image of the language. It clearly fulfils the objectives of the National Gaelic Language Plan. Finally, the officers of the SPCB should be commended for their delivery of quality Gaelic services and for their work in developing this Plan.” (Glasgow City Council).

72. The value of the commitments regarding joint-working was mentioned frequently, particularly by organisations responding.

⁵ Translation: “We would like to congratulate the Scottish Parliament for a strong plan with clear objectives and achievable timetables. It is also evident that the Parliament has a strong commitment to use and promote Gaelic as much as possible in its daily work, and that the Plan really builds on the three previous plans. Congratulations again!”

73. The importance of provision for Gaelic learners within and outwith the Parliament was also frequently raised.
74. Of the remainder of the comments, most related to Gaelic issues outwith the scope of the SPCB Gaelic language plan.
75. Those opposed to the plan stated that it was unnecessary or not a good use of resources. One respondent said “the language is being used to discriminate against English speakers.” A point made here and elsewhere in the survey was that promoting Gaelic is party-political and that the SCPB Gaelic plan is therefore inappropriate.

Our reflections:

76. In terms of comments made on resources, our plan states that “the activities within the Plan will be funded from existing SPCB budgets.”
77. In terms of the suggestion that promoting Gaelic is a party political act, the SPCB Gaelic Language Plan is a statutory obligation under the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 which was passed unanimously with cross-party support.

Note on scope of Answers:

78. Many of the responses both for this question and throughout the survey commented on Gaelic development in general or on Gaelic initiatives by other public bodies rather on matters within the remit of the SPCB. In particular, many correspondents commented on Scottish Government or local authority Gaelic policy such as education, school transport and provision for learners and also on broader socio-economic issues impacting on traditional Gaelic communities and government responses to these.
79. This was particularly the case for comments from those who were opposed in principle to Gaelic development and/or to expenditure on Gaelic, many of which mentioned areas such as road-signage and emergency service vehicles.
80. Those opposed to Gaelic development and/or expenditure on Gaelic also often tended to express this in general terms rather than commenting in detail on the content of the SPCB Gaelic plan. It should be noted that a few of these responses contained offensive language and were highly negative towards Gaelic.