



Scottish Funding Council

Promoting further and higher education

Comhairle Maoinachaidh na h-Alba

A' brosnachadh foghlam adhartach agus àrd-ìre

Allan Campbell  
Chief Executive  
Bòrd na Gàidhlig  
Darach  
Fèith nan Clach  
Inbhir Nis IV2 7PA



6 November 2006

*Dear Mr Campbell,*

### Response to public consultation on Gaelic Language Plans

The Scottish Funding Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft national Gaelic Language Plan and on the draft Guidance to public bodies on Gaelic Language Plans.

It is our view that in terms of policy development and with regard to our operations as a public body, the Council has been proactively seeking to support the use of the Gaelic language. Our new corporate plan 2006-09, states that the Council will seek to improve the pattern of supply of lifelong learning programmes. We look forward to working with Bòrd na Gàidhlig on this.

Our response to the consultation is enclosed.

Deagh dhùrachd,

**David Wann**  
Deputy Chief Executive

# Draft national Gaelic Language Plan: Scottish Funding Council response

## Introduction

- 1 The Scottish Funding Council welcomes the opportunity to respond to Bòrd na Gàidhlig's consultation on the development of a national Gaelic Language Plan and Guidance to public bodies on Gaelic Language Plans.

## Our role

- 2 The Scottish Funding Council for Further and Higher Education is a non-departmental public body (NDPB). We are responsible for allocating in the region of £1.5 billion per annum to colleges and universities in support of Ministerial priorities for further education, higher education and research. Our main functions are to:
  - develop and implement policies and strategies which give effect to the Council's statutory responsibilities and address guidance from Scottish Ministers in respect of the provision of further and higher education and research by colleges and universities;
  - allocate public funding to colleges and universities for running costs related to teaching and research, for buildings and equipment, and for specific initiatives and strategic developments;
  - regulate as necessary the use of public funding by colleges and universities and their activities so as to safeguard the public interest and promote high standards of governance and administration;
  - work with the quality assessment agencies (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in the college sector and the Quality Assurance Agency in the university sector) to assess and enhance the quality of learning programmes;
  - develop strategies for improving knowledge and skills, strengthening the Scottish research base and encouraging knowledge exchange with – and innovation in – the public and private sectors;

- support colleges and universities in their management of major capital projects to develop their infrastructure for teaching, learning and research;
- hold Scotland's colleges and universities accountable for delivering the quantity and quality of further and higher education and research sought by Scottish Ministers, for achieving best value from public funds, and for managing their financial and other resources in a sustainable way;
- collect, evaluate and publish relevant statistical data and other evidence to enable Scottish Ministers, the Council, colleges and universities, other interested bodies and the public generally to be better informed about further and higher education for their own purposes; and
- organising itself and having the necessary infrastructure and resources to carry out all of the above activities effectively.

Further information about the Council can be found on our website at [www.sfc.ac.uk](http://www.sfc.ac.uk).

### **Our response to the questions raised in the consultation**

- 3 We have considered the questions in the consultation document in the context of our role and functions. Where appropriate, we have provided a response setting out briefly our views, giving examples from our own organisation and from the college and university sectors wherever appropriate.
- 4 We have not responded in detail to every question, as not all of them are directly relevant to the Council.

### **General remarks**

- 5 Although colleges and universities are included within the scope of the consultation, as they provide important public services and receive substantial public funding, it is worth bearing in mind that they are not 'public bodies' in the traditional sense; and indeed in many respects they act as businesses, by selling services or by competing internationally for students and funds.
- 6 Colleges and universities are also legally autonomous bodies, with their own governing bodies, and the relationship with the Scottish

Funding Council is different therefore from, say, the relationship between schools and their local authorities.

## Response to questions

*Is the vision of the draft Plan one in which you can share?*

- 7 Yes, we share the vision in the draft plan, although we believe that it presents an ambitious challenge given the existing pressures that are faced by the Gaelic language. In particular, we welcome the fact that the vision places the Gaelic language in the context of a multilingual, diverse Scotland.

*In light of your response to the above question, are the proposed sectoral projects essential to the meeting of the action area aims for 2012? If not, why not?*

- 8 We believe that the sectoral projects are appropriate, albeit that most do not fall within the Council's areas of responsibility and expertise.
- 9 We support the principle of increased access to Gaelic-medium education, where there is demand for such education.

*Are the outcomes for the twenty themes and the priorities for tackling them correctly outlined and prioritised? If not, why not?*

- 10 Again, we believe that the outcomes appear to be appropriate, albeit that most do not fall within the Council's areas of responsibility and expertise.
- 11 In the case of tertiary education and lifelong learning, whilst we agree that it would be desirable to achieve the outcomes of continued growth in numbers of students in tertiary Gaelic-medium education and sufficient staff and teaching resources for educational sectors, such growth will be tempered by the market for such courses and by the choices that people with Gaelic skills make for their careers. Expanding supply without parallel demand-side measures would not be sufficient.

*In light of your response to the above question, what projects do you view as being essential to implementing these priorities?*

- 12 With regard to the provision that is funded by the Council, we:
- have conducted an examination of the pattern of supply and demand for Gaelic, and will soon publish a think-piece on how we can help develop Gaelic through colleges and universities

and use this to help stimulate collaborative projects that the Council will consider funding;

- have reviewed Sabhal Mor Ostaig's (SMO's) funding, financial management and governance arrangements;
- have improved our Gaelic statistics collection in colleges; and
- are expecting a collaborative proposal from the university sector to be presented to the Council's Strategic Research Development Grant early in 2007 to develop research capacity to support the maintenance and revitalisation of Gaelic language and culture.

*If you are responding on behalf of an organization, how do you see yourselves contributing to the success of the National Plan?*

- 13 We see the main focus of our contribution being through the 'education' and 'status' areas of the draft national plan. The types of actions illustrated above, plus our own activities as a public body will contribute to both these domains.

## Draft Guidance to public bodies on Gaelic Language Plans

*Are you satisfied with the interpretation of equal respect on page 8?*

- 14 Yes, the guidance on ‘equal respect’ appears to be entirely appropriate. In particular, we welcome the recognition that equal respect does not mean identical treatment and that public bodies will be expected to take account of the numbers of Gaelic users they serve, and the potential for further development in their planning.

*Are the issues concerning the level of provision on pages 9-10 adequately tackled?*

- 15 Yes, the guidance on level of provision is entirely appropriate. We very much welcome the fact that the draft guidance recognises that different public bodies should be able to develop their Gaelic Language Plans in different ways depending on their particular functions and geographical spread of their work. For the Council, the emphasis of our plan is likely to be on our services and policies.
- 16 We also welcome the guidance that public authorities must have regard to “the actual or potential demand for Gaelic provision in the body’s sphere of operation” and that “the location of Gaelic education (as a subject or as a medium of tuition) should be dictated by reasonable demand.” This seems both practical and realistic.

*Is the advice in each section clear and helpful?*

- 17 Yes, the advice is clear, helpful and well-presented.

*Are the suggestions from page 14 for the content of a Gaelic language plan comprehensive enough and appropriate to the requirements of Gaelic development?*

- 18 Yes, this list of suggestions is helpful in stimulating thought about actions that would be appropriate for different organisations functions, geographical coverage and resources. We welcome the clarity with which the guidance indicates that this is not a prescriptive list.

*Are the percentages proposed on pages 18-19 and page 22 for the triggering of various policy provision and employment requirements, realistic and appropriate?*

- 19 The status of these percentages are unclear – they appear as part of a list of suggestions for inclusion in Gaelic language plans, but this question suggests they might acquire some other status – as benchmarks or requirements for acceptable plans.

- 20 We do not think that percentage triggers for service levels can be set outwith consideration of: demand for the service, economics of supply, resources and availability of expertise.
- 21 We therefore think that organisations should be encouraged to consider targets of this nature, but that Bòrd na Gàidhlig should not set either formally or informally percentage benchmarks of this nature.

*If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, would the draft Guidance adequately assist in drawing up a Gaelic language plan?*

- 22 Yes, we found the draft Guidance very useful, and it has already helped us to identify some areas where we could take further measures to support the Gaelic language.

*If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, not covered by the Gaelic Act, do you feel that this Guidance would be of assistance in drawing up a non-statutory Gaelic language plan?*

- 23 This question is not applicable to the Council.