

VisitScotland response to
The draft Guidance on Gaelic Language Plans
and
The Draft National Plan for Gaelic

VisitScotland welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft National Plan for Gaelic and the draft Guidance on Gaelic Language Plans, and would be grateful if the comments below could be taken into consideration when the final versions of the above documents are being prepared.

As one of the public authorities required to develop a Gaelic Language Plan in 2007-08, many of our comments relate to the draft Guidance on Gaelic Language Plans. Comments on the draft National Plan for Gaelic follow.

Italicised sections are taken from the relevant consultation document.

THE DRAFT GUIDANCE ON GAELIC LANGUAGE PLANS

Gaelic Language Plans (p5)

Gaelic plans should embed ‘Gaelic promotion in the operations, services and policies of bodies...Bilingual corporate identity, bilingual signage and a Gaelic presence on the web are all basic steps.’

VisitScotland is committed to making a meaningful contribution to the overall aims and objectives of Gaelic language plans. We welcome that the Bòrd na Gàidhlig states the intention for ‘a realistic approach to Gaelic plans’ and that ‘such an approach recognises the wide variation across the country in starting points for the development of the language.’

VisitScotland’s approach to implementing both the National Plan and the development of a Gaelic Language plan, will be tailored to reflect national priorities as well as local and regional variations, recognising the diversity of Scotland and in particular, the differences in the extent to which Gaelic is a part of the cultural tradition of an area.

Equal Respect (p8)

With regard to the draft’s interpretation of Equal Respect, and the Bòrd na Gàidhlig’s stated principle that ‘the Gaelic and English languages should be accorded equal respect’, VisitScotland supports this general principle, and appreciates that public authorities should ‘respond to Gaelic users as generously and supportively as possible.’

VisitScotland would also argue that it is important that these principles are applied in a manner that is both reasonably practical and appropriate to the circumstances and objectives of the organisation.

‘The extent to which a public authority will be required to use Gaelic in its operations will be affected by the numbers of Gaelic users it serves.’

We welcome the approach that 'equal respect does not mean identical treatment' and would argue that recommendations contained in the Guidance allow for regional or other specific considerations, such as the number of Gaelic users.

Level of Provision – Geographical Flexibility (p9)

Further to the previous point, we agree with the assertion that 'variation in the level of provision may relate to certain geographical areas, with particularly robust application targeted where Gaelic has a particular significance in the community.'

In relation to the level of provision to be offered, and given the Guide's recommendation that the local concentration of Gaelic users (rather than the percentage of the total local population with a Gaelic skill) should be a main determinant, it would be helpful in the development of a Gaelic Language Plan to receive guidance and information on the levels of Gaelic users in each of Scotland's regions and localities.

Structure – Considerations (p12)

In preparing a statutory Gaelic language plan, the public authority must...have regard to...the actual or potential demand for Gaelic provision in the body's sphere or operation.

As above, guidance and information on 'the actual or potential demand' for Gaelic provision would be useful in the development of the statutory Gaelic language plan.

Structure – Operational Culture (p13)

VisitScotland welcomes the statement that 'Gaelic plans can be prepared with some flexibility in the light of local and specific needs' and that this will allow an 'incremental development of provision for Gaelic.'

Content (p14)

As an official language of Scotland, it is appropriate that this status for Gaelic should be built in to the national image and activities of the body

VisitScotland agrees with this general principle. However, this statement could be amended to state that this should be achieved with consideration for the primary aims and objectives of individual bodies, setting it in a context of what is realistic, reasonable and practicable.

We welcome the statement that 'at a local level the choice of measures may be influenced by the significance of Gaelic locally' and the acknowledgement that more 'robust measures will be appropriate in areas or significant potential demand.'

Specific recommendations

With regard to the list of recommendations listed for implementation, we have addressed individual examples for comment as follows. We note that these 'are only illustrations and represent neither a prescriptive nor a comprehensive range' and that organisations such as VisitScotland will be expected to 'address in some way each of the headings set out below.'

Communication (p15)

We recognise that the use of Gaelic language to provide bilingual information and enrich content is a clear opportunity VisitScotland should embrace in order to enhance the visitor experience.

In relation to the above heading, the Guidance suggests:

- *Bilingual welcome given by all staff*
- *Bilingual message given by answering machines*
- *Gaelic menus offered on automated answering systems*
- *Gaelic speaking staff always available and identified*
- *Bilingual forms*
- *Reference to the body's Gaelic plan and Gaelic provision in all notes to editors in press releases*

VisitScotland recognises the importance of Gaelic-speaking staff in, for example, the Outer Hebrides, where VisitScotland staff do indeed speak Gaelic and encourage the use of and interest in the language and culture.

However, it is important to note that what might be appropriate in a Tourist Information Centre in the Outer Hebrides might not be so appropriate when applied on a wider scale, e.g. to a Tourist Information Centre in Dumfries & Galloway or Fife.

Introducing Gaelic welcomes and bilingual messages across the whole of Scotland could, potentially, cause confusion among VisitScotland customers.

We would argue that measures such as these need to be applied in a reasonable and practical manner, taking into account the demand for and significance of Gaelic locally, rather than as across-the-board, nationally applicable measures.

We are aware of the potential for adding bilingual email signatures, where appropriate. Likewise, referring to a body's Gaelic plan and provision in notes to editors in press releases is something that could be achieved, again where appropriate and within the overall objectives of the communication piece, rather than as an across-the-board measure.

Printed Material, Websites, Exhibitions (p16)

Gaelic culture and language are integral to the rich tapestry of contemporary Scotland and it is clear there are opportunities throughout VisitScotland to embrace and include Gaelic culture and language within its modus operandi. VisitScotland would wish to centre, but not limit, its contribution to the promotion of Gaelic through use of marketing (where appropriate), in order to reinforce distinctive identity. At the same time, it is important to note that we need to avoid any unnecessary cost and duplication in producing bilingual documents, etc., that do not add value.

In relation to the above heading, the Guidance recommends:

- *Gaelic versions or bilingual production of all leaflets*
- *Gaelic versions or bilingual production of all booklets and corporate documents intended for general distribution*
- *Incorporation of Gaelic elements (eg, Gaelic names, bilingual captions, Gaelic summary) in non-Gaelic publications*

- *Gaelic and English web addresses*
- *Reference to Gaelic and the body's Gaelic plan and provision in all display material*

Given the significant implications for resources, it would be unfeasible and unrealistic to produce Gaelic or bilingual versions of all printed and internet material. Resource considerations aside, it would be confusing for certain markets and customers and thus have a potentially negative effect on elements of VisitScotland's operation.

VisitScotland would argue that this could be achieved with a more focused, niche-led approach to bilingual or Gaelic version media production.

Interface – Corporate Identity (p16)

In relation to the above heading, the Guidance suggests:

- Bilingual identity on stationary, badges, passes, and vehicle livery
- Gaelic incorporated into the corporate logo
- Gaelic version of body's name formally registered
- Bilingual slogans and strap-lines
- Gaelic internet domain used in parallel with the existing corporate domain

As above, VisitScotland would emphasise that such measures be recommended for bodies as appropriate.

Interface – Development (p17)

In relation to the above heading, the Guidance suggests:

- Employment of dedicated Gaelic development officers

VisitScotland would argue that any stipulation for the employment of Gaelic development officers should be avoided, given the resource implications and our willingness to develop a Gaelic Language Plan and contribute to the National Plan for Gaelic within our current capacity.

Interface – Signage (p17)

In relation to the above heading, the Guidance suggests:

- Bilingual external / internal signs, of the same font family (colour may vary), with equal prominence for Gaelic and English

VisitScotland recognises that the use of place names can add a new dimension to the visitor's understanding of towns, villages, mountains, lochs, etc, and generate a greater appreciation of Gaelic as a part of Scottish culture.

Currently, tourism signposting in the Outer Hebrides is, wherever possible, bilingual, and, as highlighted above, we recognise the value and importance of this in providing an awareness of Gaelic heritage and identity.

Again, VisitScotland would emphasise that such measures be recommended as appropriate.

THE DRAFT NATIONAL PLAN FOR GAELIC

VisitScotland recognises Gaelic as a national asset and responsibility for Scotland. We welcome the draft National Plan for Gaelic and its general objectives of creating a strategy for promoting, and facilitating the promotion of the use and understanding of the Gaelic language, and Gaelic education and culture.

The vision for the draft National Plan informs five language planning action areas: Vitality, Status, Education, Culture, and Communications. In relation to this, we note that, under the areas of 'Status' and 'Culture', the Bòrd na Gàidhlig has identified VisitScotland as one of the primary players in realising successfully a list of priorities.

We will address these individual points as follows.

Status – Awareness (p22)

In order to increase factual knowledge of Gaelic-related matters, the Bòrd na Gàidhlig has identified VisitScotland as one of the primary players involved in achieving the following six priorities:

- *Promote awareness of, and access to information on, Gaelic in local, regional and national life and history*
- *Promote awareness of, and access to information on, opportunities and developments in Gaelic-medium education and Gaelic learning*
- *Promote awareness of, and access to information on, Gaelic artistic, cultural and heritage activities*
- *Promote awareness of, and access to information on, Gaelic development activities and issues*
- *Promote awareness of, and access to information on, employment and career opportunities requiring the use of Gaelic*
- *Promote the exchange of information and best practice between Gaelic and other language movements in Scotland and internationally*

VisitScotland is happy to support the awareness and knowledge of Gaelic, wherever possible and appropriate, in its marketing and activities. Our website, www.visitscotland.com, contains links to pages on The Gaelic Language, Learning Gaelic, and The Great Book of Gaelic, and also provides basic greetings in Gaelic for visitors. We also have www.visithebrides.com and www.culturehebrides.com.

In 2007, we intend to create a new culture website, which has the potential to incorporate elements of Gaelic culture, including storytelling, music and dance, and increase visitor awareness of Scotland's Gaelic heritage in an enjoyable, informative and engaging way. VisitScotland is happy to explore these possibilities, with a view to integrating the promotion of Gaelic into our own programme of activity.

In the Outer Hebrides and parts of the Highlands, any tourism provider or business known to have Gaelic speaking staff is flagged up for consumers in tourism brochures, allowing visitors to see which providers can speak Gaelic and thus enhancing their knowledge and experience of Gaelic culture and heritage.

We recognise that the use of Gaelic language to enrich content is an opportunity for VisitScotland, and an opportunity we can embrace to enhance the visitor experience.

A dissemination of local and national information on Gaelic history, opportunities and activity, wherever appropriate, could form a significant part of this.

Culture – Heritage (p34)

VisitScotland agrees that Gaelic represents a rich vein throughout Scotland's national history and heritage and that such a heritage offers great potential in selling Scotland's sense of place. The meaning of songs and legends could potentially be conveyed in a manner that intensifies the magic and mystery of 'Romantic Scotland.'

VisitScotland supports and promotes Gaelic festivals such as the National Mod and the Celtic Festival and we recognise there is scope for further promoting Gaelic heritage activities and awareness through some of our activities. This could potentially involve some of our marketing portfolios such as Culture (events, festivals, food and drink, music, literature, etc.), Freedom to Explore (encompassing the Romantic Scotland campaign) and Ancestral Tourism.

With regard to both raising awareness of Gaelic and increasing participation in Gaelic heritage activities, VisitScotland would also be happy to consider the use of technology in achieving this – for example, we recognise the potential for possible Gaelic Podcasts on the aforementioned cultural website.

In order to increase participation nationally in Gaelic language heritage activities, the Bòrd na Gàidhlig has identified VisitScotland as one of the primary players involved in achieving the following six priorities:

- *Increase Gaelic-medium heritage materials and activities through strategic marketing and promotion*
- *Increase the provision of Gaelic-medium heritage interpretation*
- *Promote the use of Gaelic across the tourism sector as a distinctive part of Scottish heritage*
- *Promote the use of Gaelic in heritage interpretation in general*
- *Ensure the quality and reliability of Gaelic heritage interpretation*
- *Promote the investigation and analysis of Gaelic heritage*

We would encourage a realistic, practicable approach that enables bodies to successfully achieve these priorities appropriate to specific areas, demand or projects, rather than under any blanket / nationwide requirements.

Summary

VisitScotland welcomes the National Plan for Gaelic and the Guidance on Gaelic Language Plans.

We appreciate there is potential on a geographic basis for the use of Gaelic in tourist information centres, signage, marketing materials (as appropriate) and within elements of the wider tourism industry, and look forward to integrating Gaelic culture and language into our overall programme of activity.

However, we believe that this must be achieved within the context of our own primary aims, objectives and ambitions, and that a one-size-fits-all approach should be avoided if we are to contribute successfully and meaningfully to the National Plan through our Gaelic Language Plan.

It is clear Gaelic culture, language and heritage can play a role in many spheres of our organisation's activity. The challenge for us, in our Gaelic Language Plan, is to work out the how and when, as our entire approach is completely driven by the demands of the customer.

We believe that this latter point, given the varied demand for Gaelic across Scotland, and the varied nature of our own activities, is key to a successful VisitScotland Gaelic language plan.

We welcome and support the general principles of the National Plan for Gaelic and looking forward to developing and implementing our Gaelic Language Plans in a manner that is reasonable and practicable.