

Scottish Language Dictionaries

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Dear Sirs,

Scottish Language Dictionaries welcome the draft plan, shares its vision and supports its aims. However, we are concerned that one of the most essential foundations of any language planning programme is not getting the prominence it deserves. An authoritative historical dictionary of the language (such as English has in the *Oxford English Dictionary* and Scots has in *A Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* and *The Scottish National Dictionary*) is a necessary step in promoting the status of the language, in providing a resource for education at all levels, in maintaining a record of the culture through the use of language and in playing a full part in linguistic research within and beyond Gaelic.

We would like to comment on the following aspects of the action areas:

Vitality/Corpus Development

We are very much aware of the importance of this from our own work in Scots. Any language community automatically looks to a dictionary as the authority on prestige or standard forms in their language. It is vital that Gaelic has a dictionary which has a sufficient weight of research and scholarship behind it to make it an authority. Only from such a major work can reliable smaller dictionaries for use in the home, the community and the workplace be derived. Only within the framework of a historical dictionary can lexicographers effectively record the new words which will undoubtedly arise in the revitalisation of the language resulting from the National Plan.

We are glad to note the reference to lexicography in this action area (p17) but would like to see it appear in the final plan as the fountainhead from which all the desired outcomes of agreement on spelling, grammar, vocabulary and naming will flow.

Status/Awareness

It is very surprising to see no overt mention of lexicography under this action area. A Gaelic dictionary of the calibre of the historical dictionaries of Scots and English would confer immense status.

Faclair na Gàidhlig and Scottish Language Dictionaries are already exchanging information and best practice and we believe we can be a model for other countries, given proper support and funding.

Status/Support

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We are pleased to note that one of the priorities refers to support by cultural organisations for Gaelic heritage as an appreciation of the past and an enrichment of the present. This almost constitutes a lexicographer's job description!

Education

The role of well researched and authoritative dictionaries at all levels of education is self evident. Additionally, many lexicographical bodies are now becoming more directly involved in education through outreach work, bringing an increased sense of 'ownership' of these reference works into schools and the community. It would show great foresight to consider this at an early stage as part of the bigger picture.

Cultural Activities

A dictionary is the key cultural resource, as a guide and inspiration to writers, as a benchmark of good practice and as a storehouse of linguistic heritage. *A Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* and the *Scottish National Dictionary* are of immense use to ethnologists and historians as well as to writers and students of literature. A good dictionary will illuminate all aspects of culture including the creative arts, the sciences trades and crafts and material culture.

Communications/Interactivity

This is indeed an exciting prospect. At Scottish Language Dictionaries, we have already benefited from advancements in communication technology with all 22 volumes of our dictionaries now available free online and interactive links being developed with other major scholarly projects. Faclair na Gàidhlig has an important contribution to make as a future online resource.

Faclair na Gàidhlig has some part to play in the implementation of almost every priority but its input is particularly applicable to the priorities discussed above. Faclair na Gàidhlig should be given its proper place in the plan, named as Primary Player and seen as a key strategic element in forwarding the use and understanding of the Gaelic language, in underpinning Gaelic education and documenting culture. The role of Faclair na Gàidhlig should be reflected in adequate long-term funding to allow its staff to expand, plan ahead and undertake their vital work with some urgency.

Scottish Language Dictionaries would like to contribute to the success of the National Plan by supporting Faclair na Gàidhlig in every possible way, but particularly through sharing of information and technology. As an organisation working in support of a beleaguered minority language, we understand and share many of the problems facing Gaelic and would welcome opportunities for cooperation and synergy.

I am happy for this response to be made public.

Yours faithfully,

Christine Robinson (Director).

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