

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

More or less

In the 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?:

Not quite. I explain below

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

I'm not answering this question in so confrontative and technically challenging way in this forum.

In the light of your response to the above question, what projects do you view as being essential to implementing these priorities (some examples are offered in Appendix I)?:

All of them

And are the right organisations identified as being the primary players in implementing these priorities?:

NO. See comments below.

Do you have any other comments on the draft National Plan which you would like to submit?:

Dear BnG,

you have full permission to circulate these comments, my address or whatever.

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I agree with the comments by Helen Ross, Roddy MacLean, Alison Lang and others regarding the need for brevity, clarity and precision in the National Plan for Gaelic.

In its present form it looks like a creature designed by a committee whose members are not in full communion with each other. The result looks like a bit of a donkey.

I would add my own comments on:-

1. Language Acquisition.
2. Social Inclusion.
3. Relationships between Bòrd na Gàidhlig and the main 'players' named in the Plan, particularly the BBC.

1. Language Acquisition. It is very encouraging to see that the importance of the home and community are recognised in the plan.

It is also encouraging that the plan acknowledges something of the importance of language acquisition outside the formal systems of education currently in place.

However, there is no vision of how detailed strategies for language acquisition can develop from the plan.

It's great that the Plan recognises that native speakers and learners have a wide range of learning needs. However, As Alison Lang shows in her very helpful and well-reasoned analysis of the plan, the Bòrd needs to show that it can properly distinguish between different kinds of learning and different learning needs and how these might be applied to the development of realistic acquisition strategies.

I would add that the qualitative aspects of language ability should be addressed in the Plan. It's not enough to look at increasing numbers of people ticking boxes in census returns. The full range of language abilities and use should be addressed.

While the Plan rightly recognises the need for corpus development, the emphasis is too strongly on the formal aspects of language use. The relationship between corpus development and language acquisition should be made clear. The Bòrd should make clear that corpus development should also apply to the informal use of Gaelic in the home, community and workplace and that dictionaries and reading materials should reflect dialectical variation.

This would help to address the very rational fear that there is a hidden agenda of imposing a 'nuadh-Ghàidhlig' from above. There are many people working in Gaelic who firmly believe that a written standard can and should be applied as a spoken standard. This is a damaging and mistaken belief and further undermines what traditional confidence remains in the local, spoken dialects of Gaelic.

While there is mention in the Plan of the present lack of understanding of the psychology, sociology and economics of Gaelic and the need for research, there is no mention of the lack of a coherent theory of language acquisition. There is no clear evidence in the Plan of any will to involve the research institutions in this country and abroad who might be able to help. For example, the Human Communication Research Centre (HCRC), an interdisciplinary research centre at the Universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow <http://www.hcrc.ed.ac.uk/>; The International Association for Languages and Intercultural Communication <http://www.ialic.arts.gla.ac.uk/index.html> or the International Commission on Second Language Acquisition, based at Herriot-Watt in Edinburgh <http://www.hw.ac.uk/langWWW/icsla/>.

Without a clear and honest attempt to link the acquisition and re-acquisition of our threatened language with language research organisations of international importance then Gaelic will continue in its default position of reliance on people recruited through the Scottish education system. People who might be well-intended, might even speak Gaelic themselves, but are not likely to have the understanding of language acquisition necessary for the development of a range of successful acquisition strategies.

And if language research teams in our universities don't hear from Gaelic promoting organisations who might offer them a chance to solve some real language acquisition problems in the real world on their own doorstep, then they will continue on their own anglocentric course.

The potential spin-offs from Gaelic acquisition are big. If working solutions to some of the problems of acquisition and re-acquisition of Gaelic can be developed then the whole Gaelic initiative will have something to sell to the rest of the world.

The Plan makes reference in it's introductory sections to the importance of language abilities, opportunities for use and to demand. At the moment one big

problem facing Gaelic is the widespread belief that only a few gifted individuals can learn it, (or any other language) without an expensive investment of time, money and energy and that in any case, the end result will be disappointing, that it won't really be Gaelic.

While that view can be distorted by monoglot speakers of English who might have no interest in second language acquisition in any case, it is still a very reasonable belief to hold, given the facts. Not many people learn Gaelic. Even out of those who really try, very few succeed.

The acquisition or re-acquisition of Gaelic by significant numbers of people in Scotland is the main goal of the Plan but there is a lack of honesty as to how this really is to be achieved.

This is an empirical problem in the real world and should be addressed as such.

2. Social Inclusion

The Plan refers to Gaelic as 'The language of choice' of an increasing number of Scots and others.

At the moment it is a choice that seems to be exercised mainly by middle-class people with disposable income who know a good thing when they see it.

It's a sensible choice, like wholemeal bread, extra safety features on a car or music lessons for the children.

It's a choice that does not impact on most ordinary people.

The Plan has a comment on "Positive inclusion policies with Gaelic learning opportunities for all pupils."

Is that it? There is no attempt to say just what exactly this means.

There is also no attempt to address the social class issues facing Gaelic.

These issues go to the heart of the problem of ownership of Gaelic. Whose language is it anyhow?

The Plan makes a very welcome multicultural statement as part of its vision. However, it is quite incredible that it makes no real attempt to address the problems of social inclusion/exclusion that face any attempt to plan for Gaelic.

Many of those who have contributed their views have called for more emphasis on the importance of learners.

I would disagree with this simple view.

More support for learning in all its forms and to address the full range of learning needs as part of a national acquisition strategy, yes.

But the tired old call of more support for learners is not one that I would want the Bòrd to respond to.

Learners have made an immense contribution to Gaelic development. It seems obvious that without this contribution there would be no Gaelic Act and no Plan to discuss.

However, too much of what has passed for Gaelic development has been to service the market for learners and that has been to the detriment of native speakers

learning needs and has excluded ordinary people who don't have the money or the background to engage in learner-oriented activities.

To the ordinary person with a Highland background and some understanding of Gaelic from tradition, 'Gaelic' events involving learners can be unpleasant places to be.

The petty competitiveness, anglo-clique mentality and rigid manners of the middle-class learner patrons of Gaelic have made Gaelic events seem about as attractive as a high-school reunion with learners playing the role of prefects.

Most Gaelic events might as well display signs at the door saying 'Ordinary Folk Not Welcome' , especially if they speak some Gaelic learned at home.

The image of Gaelic as an exclusively middle-class interest does great damage to the attempt to promote Gaelic as a Scottish national language. Most Scottish people do not associate themselves with what Gaelic represents to them in terms of social exclusion.

3. Relationships with 'player' organisations.

It is odd that the section on the print media makes no mention of Comhairle nan Leabhraichean. Neither does it mention the NUJ. Indeed, it doesn't really distinguish between the book and newspaper sectors.

The most unusual omission from the whole Plan is any clear statement of the relationship between the Bòrd and the BBC. Even if the Bòrd has no power over the BBC then surely we might expect its views to be persuasive. And equally we might expect that the BBC would have views and experience that the Bòrd might find helpful.

While there are repeated references to the BBC and to the 'Gaelic media' there is no real statement of how for example, BBC Radio nan Gàidheal could contribute to all aspects of the Plan.

Home, Community, Workplace. Language acquisition, status of the language, use of the language, corpus development. Radio nan Gaidheal is involved in all of these.

Radio nan Gaidheal appears to have taken language planning decisions to broadcast mainly English content, introduced in Gaelic, in the afternoon and early evening, leaving the Gaelic content to the morning and to evening repeats.

A decision with language planning implications. What does it say about the status of the language that so much of the content of Radio nan Gaidheal consists of country and western, pop and 'celtic' recordings in English? Content that can easily be accessed elsewhere.

It looks like we have two versions of Radio nan Gaidheal. One that is important, Gaidhealach and has a clear identity and purpose. The other is trivial, English and appears to serve no useful end whatsoever.

Is this a reasonable decision? Is it one taken with clear language planning objectives? Has the Bòrd got nothing to say about this?

If there is one institution that impinges on every aspect of the Bòrd's Plan then that is Radio nan Gaidheal.

Leaving them out of the plan looks well dodgy. It must lead to questions. Why? It can't be accidental.

John K Campbell

I agree for my views to be made public: Yes

I agree for my name and area to be made public: Yes