

**European Language Initiative
Draft National Plan for Gaelic
Observations to Bòrd na Gàidhlig**

These brief notes are the response of The European Language Initiative (TELI) to the invitation to comment on the draft National Plan for Gaelic. It is a particular pleasure to be able to make a contribution to the work of Bòrd na Gàidhlig and the other bodies in Scotland which have given their support to our projects over the past several years.

BACKGROUND

TELI is a Europe-wide organisation which exists to provide support materials for languages in public service. Our main area of activity is lexicography, and since established in 1991, we have produced and published ten dictionaries in fifteen languages, possibly more than any other body in the European Union. They include the official bilingual dictionaries for the devolved parliaments / assemblies within the UK, viz the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Assembly, the latter as a joint project with the Irish Parliament, the Oireachtas.

Since completing Faclair na Pàrlamaid, we have implemented its Interactive Online Service (IOS), completed Pròiseact an Dearbhair, and are currently working on the Gaelic thesaurus, Pròiseact a' Cho-fhaclair.

The comments below are put forward on behalf of TELI as an independent language consultancy and do not necessarily reflect the views of individual colleagues who have worked on TELI's projects in Scotland or elsewhere. Because of the specialised nature of our activities, our comments relate mainly but not solely to lexicography and the development of dictionaries.

GENERAL OBSERVATION

The draft National Plan gives a balanced appraisal of the strengths and weaknesses of Gaelic at the present time, accepting its position as a lesser-used language. It can be argued that a Ferrari is a lesser-used car – one does not see many of them on our highways – but it is no less a vehicle for all that, and no less a thoroughbred. This comparison is of course of limited currency since a Ferrari is a luxury, whereas Gaelic is essential to Scottish life and identity. The draft National Plan is right to combine cautious optimism with a determination to make progress within realistic ambitions.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

1. GAELIC LANGUAGE ACADEMY

We wholeheartedly support the idea of creating a Gaelic language academy, which is cited as a possible project in Appendix I. Gaelic could only benefit from such leadership to support corpus development and standardise usage across the whole language.

2. A STANDARD ENGLISH-GAELIC DICTIONARY

We welcome the initiatives that have led in recent years to the publication of a number of small bilingual dictionaries of Gaelic and English. As a further development we believe it is now desirable, indeed essential, to produce a major (50,000+ headwords) authoritative dictionary of English–Gaelic to standardise the language. Such a volume has a key role to play in the development of a bilingual society. It has to be recognised that this is a project that will take some years to complete and require a substantial team to bring it to fruition.

3. AN INTERACTIVE ONLINE ENQUIRY SERVICE FOR THE WHOLE LANGUAGE

Our experience in running IOS for Parliament over the past few years has shown that the demand exists for an online enquiry service for the language as a whole. It would be possible to expand IOS from its existing role of supporting parliamentary/administrative terminology to offering a general online interactive dictionary service. This could be provided without delay, at reasonable cost, and could operate under the aegis of the Gaelic language academy if this body is instituted.

4. SPECIALIST DICTIONARIES

Experience also suggests that Gaelic needs further specialist dictionaries to focus on important subject areas where the language would benefit from detailed scrutiny and possible development. In recent years advances have been made in parliamentary terminology. The next subject areas for priority treatment should perhaps be business, local government and legal vocabulary. It should be noted that considerable demand has been expressed for an expanded second edition of Faclair na Pàrlamaid. This should ideally be produced when the current two-year expansion phase of IOS is completed.

5. HISTORICAL DICTIONARY OF SCOTTISH GAELIC

We are aware of the project to create an historical dictionary of Scottish Gaelic, Faclair na Gàidhlig. We would like to support this proposal as it will be a major resource in its own right and will become a platform for the development of future dictionaries.

We believe that the resources mentioned above are in line with the policy recommendations contained in the draft National Plan and could play a significant part in furthering them.

The European Language Initiative would like to congratulate Bòrd na Gàidhlig on its strong leadership and wish it every success in this vital initiative and in all its future endeavours.

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The European Language Initiative

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