



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## SCOTTISH PARLIAMENTARY CORPORATE BODY LANGUAGE POLICY

### INTRODUCTION

The Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body (SPCB) is committed to ensuring that all people in Scotland have an equal opportunity to participate in and engage with the parliamentary process. The SPCB recognises its duties under the Equality Act 2010 to promote equality of opportunity for all.

The Language Policy supports the Parliament's founding principles of openness and accessibility and reflects the changing landscape of Scotland's communities and the linguistic diversity that exists within them.

The SPCB's [Gaelic Language Plan 2018-23](#), required under the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005, seeks to give effect to the principle that the Gaelic and English languages should be accorded equal respect. The SPCB, for historical and cultural reasons, also recognises the use of Scots.

This policy is written primarily for Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs), their staff and Scottish Parliament staff and the following sections set out the SPCB's approach to language issues from both a business and engagement perspective. The Standing Orders rule 7.1 is the reference point for the use of languages in parliamentary business meetings. Guidance for the public, setting out what the SPCB will provide, is available in a separate document posted on the language pages of the Parliament website. While this policy focuses on engagement with people resident in Scotland it does not preclude communication with individuals or organisations outwith Scotland which may also require translation or interpreting.

Throughout this language policy, translation and interpreting are described as being 'subject to availability' and it is stated that as much notice as possible is required. Experience has shown that a minimum of two weeks' notice is normally required to obtain the services of interpreters, as the Parliament has to hire them from external agencies. Where British Sign Language (BSL) translation is requested, arrangements can be made for BSL video to be provided either online or in hard copy as appropriate.

This policy covers the minimum that we provide for all languages other than English.

## **PART 1: PARLIAMENTARY BUSINESS**

### **General**

1. The working language of the Parliament is English.
2. The Parliament legislates in English only. Therefore, all bills, delegated legislation and their accompanying documents must be in English. When an MSP or a committee considers that there are good reasons for translation into a language other than English they must seek the prior approval of the Head of Scrutiny or of Legislation and Parliamentary Business, as appropriate'. If a bill is translated into a language other than English, the English language version will always be the authoritative version.
3. With the prior agreement of the Presiding Officer, MSPs may use any language in parliamentary debates. In committee meetings, the prior agreement of the convener should be sought. Where possible, two weeks' notice should be given to allow the SPCB to arrange for appropriate interpreting services, if required.
4. With the prior agreement of the Presiding Officer, any person officially invited to address the Parliament may do so in any language. Where possible, two weeks' notice should be given to allow the SPCB to arrange for appropriate interpreting services, if required.
5. MSPs and others may, within the course of a speech, say a few words, such as a prayer, proverb, saying or phrase, in any language. In these instances, an interpreter would not be necessary, on the understanding that the speaker provides an English translation immediately afterwards, as and when required. As a matter of courtesy, it is expected that the speaker will indicate to the Presiding Officer or convener beforehand their wish to do this.
6. Proposals for bills, motions, amendments and questions must be in English, but may be accompanied by a translation in another language provided by the MSP. When such a translation is provided, the SPCB will arrange for it to be published in the *Business Bulletin* along with the English text of the proposal, motion, amendment or question. MSPs, however, remain responsible for the accuracy of the translations they have provided.
7. When a committee produces a report and considers that there are good reasons for translation into a language other than English, the committee must seek the prior approval of the Head of Scrutiny.

### **Petitions**

8. A public petition may be submitted in any language. When a petition is submitted in a language other than English, the SPCB will arrange for it to be translated into English, so that it may be considered by the Public Petitions Committee and others to whom the committee refers the petition.

## **Committee Witnesses**

9. With the prior approval of the committee convener, witnesses may give evidence to a committee in any language. Where possible, two weeks' notice should be given to the committee convener/committee clerk to allow the SPCB to arrange for appropriate interpreting services, if required.
10. When evidence is submitted that the committee considers requires to be translated, the SPCB will arrange this.

## **Official Report**

11. Where a language other than English is used at a meeting of the Parliament or in the public session of a committee meeting, the *Official Report* will normally publish the report of the English interpretation only, with a note to indicate that the text is not in the original language used. The SPCB will offer a witness who uses any other language a translation of the *Official Report* of the meeting or item concerned into the language they used, if required.
12. When Gaelic is used in meetings of the Parliament and committee meetings, the *Official Report* incorporates the Gaelic text before the report of the English interpretation.
13. When Scots is used in meetings of the Parliament and committee meetings, the *Official Report* incorporates that language in the body of the text.
14. When BSL, or another sign language, is used in meetings of the Parliament and committee meetings, the *Official Report* will include only the English interpretation.

## **PART 2: ACCESS AND INFORMATION**

15. Information is made available by the SPCB to facilitate access and improve public understanding of the business, membership and procedures of the Parliament. The SPCB is committed to ensuring that people resident in Scotland who are not fluent in English are able to engage with the work of the Parliament. Full details of the service that the public can expect are published on our website.

### **Gaelic**

16. There is a legal requirement for the SPCB to make and develop provision in Gaelic. The SPCB's Gaelic Language Plan details current services and planned service developments for the use of Gaelic in the Parliament, particularly for public access and information. More information is available at [www.parliament.scot/gaelic](http://www.parliament.scot/gaelic)

### **Finding out about the Parliament**

17. The SPCB publishes information in different languages to facilitate the engagement of people who live in Scotland with their Parliament. Languages selected for translation are reviewed on a regular basis and are updated to reflect

population trends and perceived need. There is flexibility to produce translations in any language for residents of Scotland in response to demand or need, where it is reasonable and required for engagement purposes. Translations can be made available on the website and/or in other accessible formats as appropriate.

18. Although not the main focus of this policy, the SPCB also publishes some information about the Parliament for visitors from other countries who are not fluent in English. These languages are also reviewed on a regular basis and updated to reflect visitor trends and uptake.

### **Engaging with the Parliament**

19. People living in Scotland who are not fluent in English but wish to engage with the work of the Parliament can seek the assistance of the SPCB for an interpreter to enable them to do so. The work of the Parliament in this context covers business in the Chamber, the work of committees – including participation in committee events and fact-finding visits – and public engagement conducted by or on behalf of the SPCB. The SPCB will endeavour to provide an interpreting service subject to availability.
20. Entry to the Parliament is free and, subject to parliamentary business, there is free access for all to public areas and the exhibition. Optional guided tours of the building are conducted in English. Hand-held audio-visual guides in different languages are available free of charge to enable non-English speakers to follow the tour.

### **Official Delegations**

21. The SPCB is unable to provide translators or interpreters for official delegations to the Parliament. Delegations can bring their own interpreters and may be able to make use of the Parliament's technical facilities for simultaneous interpreting. Such requirements should be discussed at an early date and as much advance notice given as possible.

### **Events and Exhibitions**

22. A range of different types of events and exhibitions are held at the Parliament. Some are sponsored wholly by the SPCB, some are in partnership between the SPCB and a third party and a significant number are sponsored by individual MSPs.
23. In the case of SPCB sponsored events and exhibitions, the SPCB will take responsibility for the provision of interpreting and/or translation as and when reasonable in the circumstances.
24. In the case of SPCB partnership events and exhibitions, the provision of interpreting and/or translation requirements will be agreed with third parties as required.
25. It is SPCB policy that the responsibility for planning and provision of interpreting and/or translation for MSP-sponsored events or exhibitions lies with the

sponsoring MSP(s) and/or third-party host organisation (including Cross-Party Groups).

### **Contacting the Parliament**

26. The Parliament welcomes correspondence in any language. When the Parliament has to translate correspondence, it may take staff longer to respond than at other times. Translation of correspondence in languages other than English can usually be arranged within five working days.
27. The Parliament accepts telephone calls and text messages in English and Gaelic. Calls in BSL through [contactSCOTLAND-BSL](#) or using the Text Relay service are also welcome.
28. If film or video footage in BSL is received, the Parliament will respond in BSL, although it may take staff longer to respond than at other times. A BSL filmed response can take up to 20 working days.

### **Supporting MSPs**

29. The SPCB provides MSPs with resources to enable them to carry out their duties as constituency or regional MSPs. MSPs can claim reimbursement under the Reimbursement of Members' Expenses Scheme when translation or interpreting services are used (eg for correspondence or interviews), or if they need to book the services of a sign language interpreter (or other services to facilitate equal access for disabled people, such as lip speakers or the production of information in Braille or in audio format). This ensures that no constituent is disadvantaged by not being able to communicate with their MSP without the assistance of an interpreter.
30. MSPs can obtain advice and details of the translation and interpreting services used by the SPCB by contacting Public Information by email at [info@parliament.scot](mailto:info@parliament.scot) or by phoning the main switchboard number: 0131 348 5000 / 0800 092 7500. MSPs can also contact a local interpreting or translation service.

Reimbursement under the Members' Expenses Scheme applies in both cases.

### **Monitoring language use**

31. When interpreters are employed to enable languages other than English to be used in the Chamber and in committee, this will be monitored and a report sent to the Equalities Manager at the end of the financial year.
32. New requests and take-up rates of information produced in different languages will be monitored and a report sent to the Equalities Manager at the end of the financial year.

The language policy was amended in 2011. It replaces the previous policy which was first agreed by the SPCB in November 2004 and subsequently reviewed in 2008. Any comments or queries on this policy should be made to the Head of Engagement and Communications Group.

(Updated February 2021)