

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition [PE2098](#): Provide essential investment in the Gaelic language to secure its future, lodged by Màrtainn Mac a' Bhàillidh on behalf of Misneachd

Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

The petition is seeking an increase in the Scottish Government's annual grant to Bòrd na Gàidhlig.

The Parliament is currently considering the [Scottish Languages Bill](#) at Stage 1. The funding for the Bòrd is set out as a Level 4 line in the budget and has been listed under the Education and Skills portfolio. Recently this policy area moved into the portfolio of the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy & Gaelic, Kate Forbes MSP.

Funding for Gaelic

The SPICe Bill briefing for Scottish Languages Bill includes [a section on Scottish Government funding for Gaelic and Scots](#). This explained that—

“In 2024-25, of the £25.6 million of resource funding in the Scottish Government's resource budget for Gaelic, around half of this budget, £12.6 million, goes to Gaelic Broadcasting – which is the Scottish Government's contribution to MG Alba. The funding for Bòrd na Gàidhlig is £5.1 million.”

Over the past decade the Scottish Government's direct funding for Scots and Gaelic has stayed fairly stable in cash terms, which represents a real terms cut of around a fifth. Funding for Gaelic will also come from other sources such as local authorities and national agencies (e.g. Creative Scotland, Education Scotland).

The petition is focused on the funding for Bòrd na Gàidhlig. For over ten years, the annual budget for the Bòrd has remained at £5.1 million.

Functions of Bòrd na Gàidhlig

The [Gaelic Language \(Scotland\) Act 2005](#) established Bòrd na Gàidhlig. The Bòrd is the principal public body in Scotland responsible for promoting Gaelic development and providing advice to the Scottish Ministers on Gaelic issues.

The [Scottish Government's consultation](#) in advance of the Scottish Languages Bill set out the Bòrd's current role—

“The general functions of Bòrd na Gàidhlig, as set out in the 2005 Act, can be summarised as relating to the Gaelic language, Gaelic education and Gaelic culture. Bòrd na Gàidhlig has duties to promote and facilitate the promotion of the use and understanding of the language. Bòrd na Gàidhlig has functions to provide advice on language, education and culture to Scottish Ministers and other public bodies. In addition, Bòrd na Gàidhlig has power to advise, on request, other persons on matters relating to the Gaelic language, Gaelic Education and Gaelic culture.

“Bòrd na Gàidhlig is also responsible for duties relating to Gaelic plans and for the preparation of the National Plan for Gaelic. The Bòrd can require public authorities to produce a Gaelic Language Plan setting out what that body will do in relation to Gaelic, can agree the content of the plan with them and request reports on progress on how that is implemented. Bòrd na Gàidhlig is also required to prepare Guidance on Gaelic language plans and on Gaelic education. A significant percentage of the funding allocated to Bòrd na Gàidhlig is distributed through grants by them to other bodies and projects related to support for the Gaelic language.

“The 2005 Act provides that the functions conferred on Bòrd na Gàidhlig should be exercised with a view to securing the status of the Gaelic language as an official language of Scotland commanding equal respect to the English language through increasing the number of persons who are able to use and understand the Gaelic language.”

The Scottish Languages Bill proposes changes to the functions of Bòrd na Gàidhlig. The Bill would remove the duty to develop a National Plan for Gaelic from the Bòrd but would create additional duties for the body.

A significant amount of funding to the Bòrd is disbursed in the form of grants to support the language in communities. The most recent [Bòrd na Gàidhlig annual report covers 2022-23](#). This reported that the total grant in aid (GIA) that year from the Government was £5.735 million – higher than the £5.125 million reported in the Scottish Government budget. £1.754 million (31% of the total GIA) was for running costs, £2.729 million (48% of GIA) was allocated to “funds for Gaelic development”, and £1.252 million was allocated to the “Gaelic Language Plans Implementation Fund” - Gaelic Language Plans are plans that public authorities develop.

In evidence to the [Education, Children and Young People Committee on 15 May 2024](#), the Chief Executive of the Bòrd said—

“We have just put out money from our community fund: we could fund only 39 per cent of the applications that came in, and looking at who we turned down is quite soul destroying. There is a demand and a wish to

take Gaelic forward in our communities, but we are unable to provide the support that the community needs.” (Col 33)

The terms of the petition reflect Bòrd na Gàidhlig’s [submission to the Finance and Public Administration Committee’s call for views on the Scottish Languages Bill](#). This said—

“The budget allocated to Bòrd na Gàidhlig for 2024-25, at £5.125M, is some £5M short of the funding that would be available had the 2007 level of funding been maintained. Adjusting the budget for the lowest calculation of inflation as opposed to any additional investment, Bòrd na Gàidhlig should be receiving in the region of £8.5 million a year, therefore every year where a standstill budget is delivered reflects a real-terms cut in available resources, the impact of which is felt across Gaelic speaking communities. Simply, Bòrd na Gàidhlig is receiving a real-terms cut in funding.”

Financial Memorandum of the Scottish Languages Bill

The [Financial Memorandum](#) (“FM”) sets out the expected additional costs that will arise from the Scottish Languages Bill. In total, the cost of the Bill is estimated to be around £700,000 over five years. The FM states—

“The main impact of the Bill provisions is a shift in activity, a repurposing of resources in terms of effort and attention. The Scottish Government considers that provisions do not create wholly new costs or a requirement for wholly new spend.” (FM Para 13)

The [Finance and Public Administration Committee asked the Government how the aims of the Bill](#), “to provide further support for Scotland’s indigenous languages, Gaelic and Scots”, will be met given the additional funding set out in the FM.

The [Government’s response stated](#)—

“I am aware that there is considerable finance in place to support the provisions of the Bill but I hear the messages from the languages community that additional resources is required. I acknowledge that in a more relaxed financial climate this would be desirable. There are still important stages to consider with this Bill, namely the drafting of strategies and standards and how these will apply to areas of linguistic significance, for example. In relation to this, we will monitor this progress, we will ensure good structures are in place and that implementation proceeds within available resources.”

On 20 March 2024, Parliament agreed that consideration of the Scottish Languages Bill at Stage 1 will be completed by 20 September 2024.

Ned Sharratt
SPICe Researcher

30/05/2024

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public.

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