

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

5th Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), Wednesday
23 March 2022

PE1922: Cancel all Local Authority
expenditure on Gaelic expansion

Note by the Clerk

Petitioner Douglas Capon
Petition Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to
summary abandon the expansion of Gaelic.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1922>

Introduction

1. This is a new petition that was lodged on 17 January 2022.
2. The petition seeks to end all Local Authority expenditure on the expansion of Gaelic, including the removal of funding for dual language road and rail signs, documents and website translations. The petitioner believes there is no demand for Gaelic in the central belt, funds are limited and there is no evidence of Gaelic being the national language in Scotland. A full summary of this petition and its aims can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe B**.
4. While not a formal requirement, petitioners have the option to collect signatures on their petition. On this occasion, the petitioner elected to collect this information. 385 signatures have been received.
5. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered. A response has been received from the Scottish Government and is included at **Annexe C** of this paper.

6. A submission has been provided by the petitioner. This is included at **Annexe D**.
7. The Committee has also received submissions from Bòrd na Gàidhlig, Alasdair Laing and Arthur Cormack which can be found in **Annexe E**.
8. The Scottish Parliament's Gaelic Blog [posted about this petition](#) in response to interest from the Gaelic community. The blog provides details about the petition's aims, information about how to submit a written submission and highlights that the petition and SPICe briefing are available in Gaelic.

Action

The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe A

PE1922: Cancel all Local Authority expenditure on Gaelic expansion

Petitioner

Douglas Capon

Date lodged

17/01/2022

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to abandon the expansion of Gaelic.

Previous action

Written to MSP for Greenock & Inverclyde and MSPs for West of Scotland

Background information

In my view:

1. There is no demand in the Central belt
2. Funds are limited and should be spent wisely
3. There is no evidence of Gaelic being the "national" language (except in Ireland)

We do not need scarce money spent on dual language road & rail signs, document and website translations, Local Authority employee language education. Have we suddenly become rich with money to burn? I consider that there is no economic benefit in what is a frivolous, vanity project.

Annexe B

The logo for SPICe, featuring the text 'SPICe' in white on a purple-to-blue gradient background.

The Information Centre
An t-Ionad Fiosrachaidh

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition [PE1922: Cancel all Local Authority expenditure on Gaelic expansion](#), lodged by Douglas Capon Brief overview of issues raised by petition

The long title of the [Gaelic Language \(Scotland\) Act 2005](#) is:

“An Act of the Scottish Parliament to establish a body having functions exercisable with a view to securing the status of the Gaelic language as an official language of Scotland commanding equal respect to the English language, including the functions of preparing a national Gaelic language plan, of requiring certain public authorities to prepare and publish Gaelic language plans in connection with the exercise of their functions and to maintain and implement such plans, and of issuing guidance in relation to Gaelic education.”

The 2005 Act established the Bòrd na Gàidhlig and provided for the Bòrd to have the power to require public bodies, including local authorities, to prepare, publish and implement Gaelic Language plans.

The 2005 Act requires the Bòrd to develop a National Gaelic plan, normally every five years. The [Bòrd says of the 2018-2023 plan](#):

“The central purpose of this Plan is to encourage and enable more people to use Gaelic more often and in a wider range of situations. The key messages, aims, priorities and new commitments contained

in the Plan all contribute to achieving this increased use of Gaelic. Principal amongst these are the following:

- Gaelic belongs to the whole of Scotland
- Promoting a positive image of Gaelic
- Increasing the learning of Gaelic; and
- Increasing the use of Gaelic.”

The [2011 Census found that](#) “just over 57,000 people said they could speak Gaelic”. A total of around 87,000 people said they had some skills in Gaelic. This was 1.7% of the population over the age of three. There was wide variation in the reported numbers of people with some skills across Scotland. In Eilean Siar, it was 61.2%, in Highland it was 7.4% and in Argyll and Bute it was 5.9%. In all other local authority areas, the figure was below 2%.

The role of local authorities

The Bòrd’s [website lists 26 local authorities](#) with approved Gaelic Plans, along with other public bodies.

The Scottish Government’s budget 2022-23 sets out its funding to support Gaelic. This includes a number of lines to support Gaelic education: £4.48 million of grants to a total of 27 local authorities, and £3 million of capital and £1 million of resource funding for expansion of Gaelic education. The Scottish Government’s budget also includes £5.1 million to fund the Bòrd as well as around £15.9 million of funding for other activities supporting Gaelic.

The petition focuses on the spend by local authorities on the language. Local authorities may use a range of funding sources to support Gaelic. National data on Local Government finance statistics does not disaggregate the spending on such activities separately, e.g. the spending of Gaelic Medium Education is reported as part of education spend.

Education

Gaelic is one of only two specific subjects protected in statute in education (the other being religious instruction). The Education (Scotland) Act 1980 specifies that school education means (among other things) ‘the teaching of Gaelic in Gaelic-speaking areas’.

The Education (Scotland) Act 2016 created a duty on local authorities to promote and support Gaelic Medium Education (GME) and Gaelic Learner Education (GLE). The Education (Scotland) Act 2016 established a process by which parents can request Gaelic Medium Primary Education (GMPE) from their local authority.

Policy developments

The Bòrd is currently developing a National Gaelic Language Plan 2023-28.

In addition, the Scottish Government plans to introduce a languages bill in the current parliamentary session. The [2021 Programme for Government](#) stated:

“The Scottish Government is committed to increasing the numbers using and learning Gaelic, and we will maintain our support for Gaelic education, arts and broadcasting. We will bring forward a Scottish Languages Bill over the course of the Parliament to take further steps to support the use of Gaelic and the Scots language. We will also explore the creation of a recognised Gàidhealtachd, review the functions and structures of Bòrd na Gàidhlig to ensure Scotland has an effective leadership body, and develop a new national strategic approach to Gaelic medium education (GME) which will encourage the creation of new GME primary and secondary schools.” (p45)

Ned Sharratt
Senior Researcher
17/01/2022

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. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

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Annexe C

Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills submission of 22 December 2021

PE1922/A – Cancel all Local Authority expenditure on Gaelic expansion

I am responding to the Committee on behalf of the Scottish Government in relation to Petition PE1922, raised by Douglas Capon, which calls for the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to cancel all local authority expenditure on Gaelic expansion.

Mr Capon appears to have raised the issue following the release of Inverclyde Council's consultation on their Gaelic Language Plan on 10 December.

As you will be aware, the Gaelic language was spoken throughout Scotland for many centuries and at times has been the language of church, court and community. However, the language and its speakers have faced significant opposition and it is only right that the Scottish Government, with broad support from the Parliament, takes important steps to reverse this ill will to the Gaelic language and put in its place support for all who wish to learn and use the language in their daily lives.

The Gaelic (Scotland) Act 2005 was passed with unanimous cross party support and has helped revive the fortunes of the Gaelic language and those who wish to speak it. The Act created Bòrd na Gàidhlig and gave it the power to ask public authorities across Scotland to produce Gaelic Language Plans. These Gaelic Language Plans should demonstrate how the body will support and promote Gaelic through its everyday activities and operations. There are now around 65 public bodies involved in this process with Plans in various stages of development.

It is important to note that Bòrd na Gàidhlig works extremely closely with these public bodies to ensure that their Plans are proportionate and affordable. I have also directed the Bòrd to ensure that an open dialogue continues with the authority throughout the Gaelic Language Plan

development to ensure that any change in circumstances is reflected in this work.

There is often a misunderstanding around Gaelic signage and I would like to set the record straight in this regard. As I mentioned above, there is a need to be proportionate in our efforts to support the Gaelic language whilst ensuring such work is affordable. With this in mind it is standard practice that any signage is created as part of a replacement or renewal process which therefore ensures costs are kept to a minimum. In addition, the Bòrd has a Gaelic Language Act Implementation Fund which is open to bids from any public authority to help meet any project costs or developments associated with their Plan, including such activities as signage or staff training.

Mr Capon suggests that there is no interest in Gaelic in the central belt. This could not be further from the truth with various local authorities, including Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverclyde and North Lanarkshire all witnessing growth in demand for Gaelic medium education. It should be noted that the Education (Scotland) Act 2016 places a duty on all local authorities across Scotland to promote the Gaelic education that is provided and I am pleased to acknowledge the work of local authorities in this regard.

As we are seeing the growth of Gaelic education, it is important that the Scottish Government continues to provide support. In connection with this, we are currently helping to meet demand through our Scheme of Gaelic Specific Grant and the Gaelic Schools Capital Fund. Both these funding streams are open to local authorities across Scotland to help meet the costs of Gaelic education.

I hope that this information is helpful to the Committee in its consideration of the petition.

Annexe D

Petitioner submission of 13 January 2022

PE1922/B – Cancel all Local Authority expenditure on Gaelic expansion

In response to the Scottish Government submission, I feel that –

1. The information that Gaelic was (arguably) the predominantly language 400/500/600 years ago is irrelevant
2. We should not confuse demand for Gaelic in schools with the demand for smaller class sizes.
3. There is already too much street furniture and this will be exacerbated by doubling the language content
4. Most of all, no-one is coming forward with figures on how much this is costing

Annexe E

Bòrd na Gàidhlig submission of 16 March 2022

PE1922/C – Cancel all Local Authority expenditure on Gaelic expansion

“There is no demand in the Central belt”

There is evident demand, as follows:

At the 2011 Census central belt local authorities (i.e. City of Edinburgh, East Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire, Falkirk, Glasgow City, Inverclyde, Midlothian, North Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, West Dunbartonshire, West Lothian) accounted for more than one quarter (30%) of those living in Scotland who had some skills in Gaelic.

There is growing demand for pre-school, primary and secondary Gaelic medium education in, for example, Glasgow and Edinburgh, with 2% of pupils in primary education in Glasgow are in Gaelic-medium education. There is also growing demand for provision in areas where there is presently none - eg. East Renfrewshire.

There are longstanding ambitions to develop Gaelic Centres in both Glasgow and Edinburgh. These would be a physical space where it is recognised that Gaelic is used as the main language provided a space for fluent speakers and learners to use their skills.

“there is no economic benefit in what is a frivolous, vanity project”.

On the contrary, there are a range of examples of economic benefits, such as:

- Employment in Gaelic essential and Gaelic desirable posts in central belt local authorities - notably in education.
- Creative industries - e.g. posts in Gaelic media - some of which will be held by people who have received Gaelic medium education at schools and universities in the central belt.

- Events and festivals. For example, the 2019 Mòd Nàiseanta Rìoghail (Royal National Mòd) is reported to have generated £3.2 million for Glasgow's economy.

[Research](#) has found that businesses in the creative industries, tourism, heritage, and food and drink sectors benefit from their use of Gaelic, and that this has the potential to bring significant economic value. This “could be in the region of between £82 million and £149 million.” It is estimated that around 25% of that value would be in central belt local authority areas.

The significant potential of Gaelic is recognised in VisitScotland's [Gaelic Tourism Strategy for Scotland](#). This states that “The Gaelic language and its associated culture represents a compelling opportunity for the Scottish tourism industry”. The underlying Mission is “To support the growth of the Scottish tourism economy through engaging more visitors in discovering and experiencing the unique Gaelic language and its associated culture.”

Gaelic as a “Unique Selling Point differentiator and authentic part of the experience of visiting Scotland” means there “significant economic potential of our Gaelic language and culture”. The economic potential flows from “a dynamic, contemporary Gaelic cultural scene spanning music, festivals such as Celtic Connections and Fèisean, regional and national Mòds, literature, drama”, as well as through media, food and drink, and sport”. The Strategy also states that “Gaelic has an exciting and growing presence in lowland and urban Scotland”.

A VisitScotland survey in 2016 found that, with no prior promotion, more than one in three (34%) visitors felt that Gaelic, as a national language of Scotland, enhanced their visit and they would like to find out more about it. Interest was primarily amongst overseas and first time visitors.

A number of central belt local authorities' Gaelic Language Plans include actions to increase the economic benefits from Gaelic tourism. For example:

- Glasgow City Council - “support the work of other public bodies in the promotion of tourism and cultural heritage”.
- Inverclyde Council - “The Council is working to develop its tourism offer, and the National (Gaelic) Plan will be used to inform this development”.

- City of Edinburgh Council - "Continue to identify links to Gaelic in tourism policies and strategies".

Alasdair Laing submission of 16 March 2022

PE1922/C - Cancel all Local Authority expenditure on Gaelic expansion

I write to you today to ask that the Committee and Parliament disregard this petition.

Government spending on Gaelic remains frozen at just £28m out of a Government budget of some £75bn (0.03%). This is a real time budget cut of almost 30% since 2006. Meanwhile, Gaelic is understood by some 2%+ of the population throughout Scotland and Gaelic Medium Education is more successful than ever before.

It is important to remember that the Gaelic Language Act 2005 was passed unanimously and each and every party in the Scottish Parliament supports the Act as it stands and indeed advocated for further support in their most recent 2021 manifestos. If Gaelic is ever to be a healthy vibrant language again, as it once was, it requires support - arguably more than the meagre amount spent up until now.

In my view, there is bigotry and ignorance shown towards the Gaelic language and community in Scotland, issues which have sadly become more commonplace over the last few years.

In conclusion, it is my view that the Committee and Parliament should not listen to the hypocritical arguments of those who wish the language well on one hand, yet with the other wish to remove all forms of support available. The Gaelic language must be supported and limited frozen funding increased, not decreased.

Arthur Cormack submission of 16 March 2022

PE1922/E - Cancel all Local Authority expenditure on Gaelic expansion

The petitioner calls for the cancellation of all local authority expenditure on Gaelic expansion but goes on to state there is no demand “in the Central belt”. Does he seek cancellation of expenditure in the Central Belt alone, or does the petitioner acknowledge there is demand in local authority areas outside the Central Belt. If so, why should expenditure be cancelled in those areas?

It is surely a matter for local authorities on what they spend their money - limited or otherwise – while the parliament should have a role in ensuring all local authorities abide by legislation to support general promotion of the Gaelic language and provision of Gaelic education.

To examine the petitioner’s claims:

1. There is no demand in the Central belt

The petitioner has offered no evidence to back up this claim.

There is plenty evidence of demand for Gaelic education in the Central Belt to which local authorities have a duty to respond. There are healthy pupil numbers in places such as Condorrat (North Lanarkshire), East Kilbride and Inverclyde and it is difficult for the local authorities in Glasgow and Edinburgh to keep up with demand. The petitioner claims in his submission that: “We should not confuse demand for Gaelic in schools with the demand for smaller class sizes”. Presumably, he implies class sizes in Gaelic are smaller than in English education. This is not the case.

So the debate does not focus on education alone, it should be remembered there is demand for Gaelic arts in the central belt demonstrated by the participation by hundreds of young people in Fèisean which take place regularly in Glasgow, Edinburgh, North Lanarkshire, South Lanarkshire, Falkirk and North Ayrshire. Gaelic artists appear, often before sold-out audiences, at major festivals in the central belt such as Celtic Connections, Piping Live!, The Edinburgh

International Festival, Edinburgh Festival Fringe and Edinburgh Tradfest. Those artists support recording studios, graphic designers, accommodation and food establishments and provide content for broadcasters which all, in turn, contribute to Scotland's economy.

Large numbers of adults are learning Gaelic, many of whom will be based in the central belt. 1 in 3 visitors are drawn to Scotland, in part, by their wish to learn more about the Gaelic language.

2. Funds are limited and should be spent wisely

The question of availability of funds and the sense in which they are 'limited' is a matter for debate. The petitioner has, again, offered no evidence to back up this claim.

According to attitudinal research, Gaelic speakers and learners are content for public funds to be used in supporting services in the language. The SPICE briefing outlines government expenditure on Gaelic. In my experience any expenditure on Gaelic by local authorities, additional to funds provided by the Scottish Government and Bòrd na Gàidhlig, is likely to be extremely modest.

In the case of education, since children have to be offered a free education by their local authority, it matters not the language in which they are taught. The cost of a teacher in front of a class of children in Gaelic education is the same as the cost of a teacher in front of a class of children in English language education. Beyond one-off or initial capital costs, there are no additional revenue costs incurred in the provision of Gaelic medium education. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest the cost per head to a local authority of teaching a pupil in Gaelic is less than that of teaching a pupil in English.

Despite expenditure on Gaelic being transparent the petitioner claims: "no-one is coming forward with figures on how much this is costing". There is no evidence of a cover-up!

3. There is no evidence of Gaelic being the "national" language (except in Ireland)

Yet again the petitioner has offered no evidence to back up this claim. It is incorrect, perhaps legally, and certainly factually and historically. His stance has changed somewhat from there being "no evidence", to

dismissing as “irrelevant” Gaelic’s place as the predominant language historically.

Very few people involved in promoting Gaelic would refer to it as “the” national language of Scotland, but it is certainly “a” national language. The Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 aims to secure the status of the Gaelic language as an official language of Scotland commanding equal respect to the English language. Scotland’s placenames confirm Gaelic was more widespread than is now the case. Given the dispersed nature of 21st century Gaelic, it is a national language in the sense that its speakers are spread across Scotland and need support. In terms of heritage and culture, its influence across Scotland is undeniable.

Scotland benefits, economically, from Gaelic in education, broadcasting, arts & culture, tourism, heritage, food & drink and more. It is one of Scotland’s unique assets and Highlands & Islands Enterprise calculated the potential return Gaelic could generate for the economy in its *Ar Stòras Gàidhlig* report. If the figure of £148.5m were attained, an additional £4 would be generated for every £1 spent by the Scottish Government.

Gaelic should be supported to reach its full potential. Local authorities have a key part to play and I urge committee members to close the petition with no further action. To follow it up, or seek further information, would be a waste of everyone’s time.