

# **PE2098/B: Provide essential investment in the Gaelic language to secure its future**

## **Petitioner written submission, 9 August 2024**

We would like to thank the Petitions Committee for their time in considering our petition, SPICe for their useful briefing paper and the Government for their response. We would like to take this opportunity however to highlight several misunderstandings and connotations in the Government response.

As is clearly stated in the SPICe briefing – and in the petition itself - our petition relates specifically to Bòrd na Gàidhlig's funding which has indeed been static over the last 10 to 15 years, and therefore suffered a real-terms cut of around 30% over that time. Our petition specifically calls for this funding to be increased in line with inflation.

While some of the activities relating to spend on education, media, and the various quangos will trickle down to communities in one way or another, this spend does not directly address the ongoing rapid language shift in the traditional Gaelic speaking communities. Highlighting the statistic that “investment (£13 million) in MG ALBA supports 350 jobs indirectly” begs the questions – how many of those jobs are Gaelic speaking and how many are based in rural island communities?

The 2021 SNP Manifesto committed to: “ensuring it (Gaelic) has a sustainable long-term future” and stated that: “In particular we will have a focus on arresting the intensifying language shift in the remaining vernacular communities.” As Kate Forbes MSP highlighted in an article for the National (Gaelic cuts risks ripping core out of our communities, 02/03/24): “community is where language lives or dies”. At present nowhere near enough is being done, or spent, in these communities to have any meaningful impact on the “intensifying language shift in the remaining vernacular communities.”

Two panels of Scottish Government appointed experts estimated in the early 2000s that to fulfil its obligations Bòrd na Gàidhlig would need an annual budget of £10 million – it has only ever received around £5 million per annum, and this sum has never risen in line with inflation. Even the initially inadequate budget of £5m per year would equate to between £8 and £10 million today just to maintain its real-terms value.

We understand that budgets across Government are under pressure, but Gaelic community development has been chronically underfunded since the inception of Bòrd na Gàidhlig. In 2010-11, the Scottish Government's total budget was £34.6 billion with £25m spent on Gaelic and Scots - meaning the share of expenditure was 0.072% of the overall budget – less than a tenth of one percent. At that time Bòrd na Gàidhlig's budget was £5.4m which was 0.016% of overall Scottish Government expenditure and 21.6% of the Gaelic and Scots budget.

In 2023-24, the Scottish Government's total managed expenditure was £59.7 billion with £29m allocated to Gaelic and Scots, which means the share of expenditure has decreased to 0.049% of the overall budget – less than half of a tenth of one percent. In 2023-24 Bòrd na Gàidhlig's baseline budget was £5.179m, which is 0.009% of overall Scottish Government expenditure and 17.9% of the Gaelic and Scots budget.

There will not be a second chance to preserve Gaelic as a spoken vernacular language in Scotland. If greater investment is not made in the community use of the language, then all other efforts in support of Gaelic will be in vain. At the very least, decisions taken by this Government now will prove decisive in whether Gaelic has a future as a community language.

We believe an urgent review is necessary of the overall funding allocated to the Gaelic language, as part of a strengthening of the Scottish Languages Bill, to ensure every penny spent on Gaelic is being used effectively and efficiently in encouraging the daily use of the language in the community and in the workplace.