

The Scottish Government's Response to the Report of the Short Life Working Group on Economic and Social Opportunities for Gaelic

November 2024

Ministerial Foreword

The report of the Short Life Working Group on Economic and Social Opportunities for Gaelic was commissioned under the National Strategy for Economy Transformation (NSET). This provides the vision for Scotland's economic development – one which places individual and social wellbeing at the centre of the Scottish Government's programme for growth. In their report, the Short Life Working Group articulates the place which Gaelic has in that vision. Key to their argument is that Gaelic is both an asset to the Scottish economy and that Scottish economic policy is vital to the survival of our traditional Gaelic communities. Within that is a deeper argument for the importance of linguistic diversity to social and economic wellbeing.

They have provided a compelling prospectus for Gaelic development. This prospectus builds on the advances made by the language over the last generation – through the introduction of Gaelic medium education; the rise of Gaelic community development; the expansion of Gaelic broadcasting; and the establishment of Gaelic language planning in public policy. In doing so it highlights how this advancement has been to the benefit of the communities focused on by the report – a benefit which has in turn been felt across wider Scottish society, something demonstrated not least by the growth of Gaelic in Scotland's cities. It is the responsibility of the Scottish Government and our stakeholders to ensure that these advances are sustained. It is also our challenge to enable Gaelic to thrive in new sectors identified by the Group – such as health and social care or entrepreneurship – and to tackle the deeper economic issues – such as transport, housing and population retention – which undermine the resilience of Gaelic communities.

The Group was commissioned as part of NSET's goal of encouraging regional productivity. Its members have identified specific parts of the north-west Highlands and Islands which constitute, in their terminology, Key Gaelic Communities. These are Na h-Eileanan Siar and Skye and some districts of Lochalsh, Tìrè, Islay and Jura – places which the 2011 census recorded as having at least 20% of people with Gaelic language abilities. In the period since the publication of their report the figures of the 2011 census have been superseded by those collected in 2022. The latest figures showed a national increase in Gaelic language ability – something which is to be celebrated. However, they also revealed that the language is still declining in the rural, island districts where it can be considered a major language spoken at all levels of the community. Where Gaelic is a language spoken across the community it faces the full set of challenges encountered by that community. The Scottish Government proudly upholds a national approach to Gaelic with the principle that the language belongs to all. But it is clear that the Gaelic policies we and our stakeholders pursue within the communities identified by this report must now take full consideration of the social and economic aspects of language revitalisation. The insights and recommendations of the Short Life Working Group represent one of the key diagnoses of the task before us. Alongside the Scottish Languages Bill it ranks as the major policy step we are now taking for Gaelic.

In the modern age, Gaelic's contribution to Scotland's national life long predates the contemporary period of Gaelic revival ushered in by the introduction of Gaelic medium education in 1985. Scotland's contemporary system of land reform and

community asset management finds its origins in the Highland Land Reform Movement of the late 19th century and its signal achievement, the Crofters Holdings (Scotland) Act 1886. A movement driven by crofters articulating a political vision derived from Gaelic tenets of land rights and responsibilities has thus become a driver of prosperity across 21st century Scotland – whether through the economic resilience brought by estate trusts to rural Scotland or the efforts of community organisations to revive urban centres in Scotland’s towns and cities. A generation later, the establishment of the Highlands & Islands Medical Service in 1913 introduced a programme of comprehensive health care in response to the distinct geographical circumstances of the north of Scotland. This provided a blueprint for the creation of the NHS in 1948 – highlighting that a service designed in response to the distinctive needs of Scotland’s Highland and Island communities could be key to the establishment of one of the pillars of our public life. The principle brought forth by these two examples recur across the present day Gaelic initiatives cited by the Group. In an age marked by a more enlightened understanding of language, and where linguistic diversity is recognised as an inherent good, it is difficult to argue that the support of Gaelic and Gaelic speaking communities will not continue to be a national investment.

The Short Life Working Group prefaced their report with the following lyrics by Calum and Rory MacDonald of Runrig:

‘Is ged a dh’fheuch iad ri cur às
dhuinn
Chì mo theaghlach cnoc nan linn
Is ged tha ar cànan leòint’ le stri
‘S an tìr seo bidh i beò’

‘Although they tried to destroy us
My children will see the landscape of generations
Although the language has been wounded in its
struggle
In this land, she will live on’

These lyrics demonstrate a keen sense of Gaelic’s historical mistreatment – but one which is tempered by pride in the ability of a language and its community to endure into the present and stake their claim to be heard and valued within a more modern and tolerant society. From this distinctly Gaelic experience we can find a general principle which speaks to the driving mission of this government: the valuing of a diverse Scottish society whose varied communities and cultures are the source of our national wealth. It is fitting that a study of Gaelic speaking communities would bear testimony to that.

Kate Forbes MSP
Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic

Population and infrastructure

3.1.1 As a matter of urgency, infrastructure challenges – housing, transport and digital connectivity – which undermine the ‘parity of starting point’ for NSET ambitions are addressed.

The Scottish Government accepts this recommendation.

The Scottish Government has three strategic documents through which it is approaching the issues of housing, transport and digital connectivity identified by this recommendation: Housing to 2040, the National Transport Strategy and the National Plan for Scotland’s Islands. Scottish Ministers’ forthcoming Rural Delivery Plan will provide a further means by which outcomes on behalf of Gaelic communities are considered as part of the government’s wider approach to rural and island Scotland.

Housing

‘Housing to 2040’ is the Scottish Government’s national housing strategy. Its headline aim is to build 110,000 new affordable homes across Scotland – 10% of which will be in rural and island communities. The means for fulfilling this latter commitment are outlined in the Scottish Government’s Rural and Island Housing Action Plan. Its actions were developed in consultation with the bodies identified for bringing forward this recommendation.

The Action Plan considers four approaches to housing demand in rural and island communities. It recognises the need to deliver more high-quality affordable homes. Current housing stock must be better utilised. Community-led development – already a vital feature of life within the Report’s Key Gaelic Communities – will be further supported. Finally, the question of housing must be approached within the local economic context shaping it. Individual actions within the Rural and Island Housing Action Plan are considered in greater detail against the recommendations below.

The Rural and Island Housing Action Plan also seeks to address disparities in digital connectivity. Through the plan, the Scottish Government will review suppliers’ current and expected gigabit-capable build. This will invite views from wider stakeholders – including those representing Gaelic interests and the Key Gaelic Communities identified by the Short Life Working Group. The Scottish Government is working closely with Building Digital UK as it prepares to launch the first Scottish Project Gigabit procurements. A consultation will be held on requiring developers to deploy and optimise digital connectivity in all new housing developments. Residents of the Report’s Key Gaelic Communities will be encouraged to engage with this consultation and the views of Gaelic stakeholders sought out.

Transport

The Scottish Government is committed to maintaining and improving ferry services that play a key role in supporting the economic, social and cultural development of island, peninsula and mainland communities. The National Transport Strategy’s Islands Connectivity Plan (ICP) is setting out how ferry services, supported by other

transport modes, will be delivered, and strengthened, working towards a long-term vision.

The ICP draft Strategic Approach and the updated Vessels and Ports Plan were published for public consultation, accompanied by community engagement, from 1 February to 6 May 2024. The Strategic Approach sets out a vision that Scotland's ferry services, supported by other transport services including aviation and fixed links, will be safe, reliable, affordable and inclusive for residents, businesses and visitors enabling transport connectivity, sustainability and growth of island and peninsula communities and populations. The vision is supported by four priorities – reliable & resilient, accessible, integrated and low carbon.

The updated Vessels and Ports Plan provides a long-term plan, to 2045, for the vessel and port investment considered necessary to address the key challenges of reliability and resilience on the the Clyde & Hebrides Ferry Services, as well as the Northern Isles Ferry Services, which the Scottish Government is directly responsible for. This will primarily be achieved by upgrading existing infrastructure and replacing the existing vessels with an efficient and sustainable modern ferry fleet.

The outcome of the public consultation and community engagement on both papers were published in August 2024 and can be accessed [here](#). The updated final Strategic Approach and Vessels and Ports Plan is to be published in 2024.

Digital connectivity

The Scottish Government Reaching 100% (R100) programme is delivering future-proofed broadband infrastructure that will underpin economic growth and transform the economic prospects of communities across Scotland. It has already delivered over 49,000 connections together with 16 new fibre optic subsea cables, providing connectivity to 15 Scottish islands. R100 continues to deliver at pace and is currently on track to complete the build and ensure all contracted premises are connected by 2028. Around 70% of the 114,000 premises expected to be connected through the R100 contracts are in rural Scotland, with around 12,000 in island communities. Recognising that it is a key building block for a green and growing economy, the Scottish Government has prioritised investment in digital connectivity in the 2024-25 budget.

The UK Government has set a target to ensure that 85% of premises across the UK can access gigabit-capable broadband by the end of 2025, and a target for nationwide coverage by 2030. This is known as Project Gigabit. The Scottish Government will play a key role in supporting delivery of Project Gigabit in Scotland and is working closely with the UK Government to ensure that Scotland receives its fair share of Project Gigabit funding.

Businesses in Grimsay welcomed the arrival of fibre direct to their doors under the legacy Digital Scotland Superfast Broadband Programme, describing the impact as life changing in both social and economic terms, and believing the benefits will help make their future more sustainable.

The Rural and Island Housing Action Plan also seeks to address disparities in digital connectivity. Through the plan, the Scottish Government will review suppliers' current and expected gigabit-capable build. This will invite views from wider stakeholders – including those representing Gaelic interests and the Key Gaelic Communities identified by the Short Life Working Group. The Scottish Government is working closely with Building Digital UK as it prepares to launch the first Scottish Project Gigabit procurements. A consultation will be held on requiring developers to deploy and optimise digital connectivity in all new housing developments. Residents of the Report's Key Gaelic Communities will be encouraged to engage with this consultation and the views of Gaelic stakeholders sought out.

3.1.2 The Convention of the Highlands and Islands consider the potentially disproportionate impact a lack of affordable housing has on Gaelic-speaking communities, with a view to ensuring more flexible policy and faster provision of housing.

The Scottish Government accepts this recommendation.

The Convention of the Highlands and Islands (CoHI) offers a suitable forum for consideration of these matters with appropriate agenda items brought forward by members. Bòrd na Gàidhlig is a member of CoHI and ensures that the specific needs of Gaelic communities are considered.

We will refresh Local Housing Strategy guidance and through this process we will explore how local authorities could be asked to consider the role of new homes in sustaining cultural – as well as social and economic – aspects of community in line with place-based principles.

3.1.3 NSET Entrepreneurship focus should extend to Key Gaelic Communities and support Gaelic entrepreneurs with enhanced incentives and support for business start-ups.

The Scottish Government accepts this recommendation.

Supporting more people to start and scale businesses is a key economic priority and we are working closely with the Chief Entrepreneur to implement a strategy to establish Scotland as a rapidly growing start-up economy.

We will work with existing programmes and initiatives such as Techscaler, Business Gateway and local authorities to ensure that services, investment and ecosystem building activities are taking full account of the needs of Gaelic entrepreneurs. This will include seeking the advice of the Chief Entrepreneur.

3.1.4 A voluntary 'fair chance scheme' to be explored in relation to selling homes inviting relevant bodies to work with estate agents to enable prioritisation of housing allocation.

The Scottish Government accepts this recommendation.

CoHI will consider this recommendation with the relevant bodies.

3.1.5 A scheme be developed to help sustain Key Gaelic Communities with the provision of grants to enable individuals on low or modest incomes to own their own home, either through the acquisition of a site for a self-build or the purchase and improvement of an existing property for use as their sole residence. This could perhaps be achieved through reorientation of existing Rural and Islands Housing Fund programmes.

The Scottish Government does not accept this recommendation.

The Rural and Islands Housing Action Plan highlights that there are a range of existing mechanisms available under the Affordable Housing Supply Programme to support people to access affordable home ownership across rural and island areas. The Scottish Government provides support for affordable home ownership for first-time buyers and priority groups who could not otherwise afford to buy on the open market through our Low-Cost Initiative for First-Time Buyers schemes which comprise the Open Market Shared Equity and the New Supply Shared Equity Schemes. In addition to the Open Market Shared Equity Scheme which mainly supports people to buy an existing home, other schemes are increasing the supply of new homes including the New Supply Shared Equity Scheme, Self-Build Loan Fund, Rural and Islands Housing Fund and Partnership Support for Regeneration Scheme.

However, we recognise that accessing home ownership in some rural and island areas can be particularly difficult due to the impacts of limited supply, high demand, as well as market conditions such as rising interest rates and inflation. The Rural and Islands Housing Action Plan includes an action to commission independent research as part of a wider review of affordable home ownership in rural and island communities once the Affordable Housing Supply Programme review has been undertaken. This independent research could consider the specific impacts of home ownership on the Key Gaelic Communities identified by the report.

Additionally, operational links will be strengthened between the Scottish Land Fund and the Rural and Islands Housing Fund to ensure their decision making better aligns with the needs of rural and island communities.

3.1.6 In Key Gaelic Communities, landowners should articulate and demonstrate how they support the language in their Land Rights and Responsibilities statement, in particular evidencing initiatives and support for projects delivering social and economic outcomes for the Gaelic language

The Scottish Government partially accepts this recommendation.

We will support initiatives and projects from landowners to deliver social and economic outcomes for the Gaelic language. The duty in the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016 lies with Scottish Ministers, and they must publish a Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement (LRRS) and review it every five years. Land owners are not required to produce a LRRS. While they are encouraged to consider it when making decisions relating to land, this is voluntary and the LRRS is currently not enforceable.

Section 10 of the Scottish Languages Bill, as introduced to the Scottish Parliament on 30 November 2023, modifies the 2016 Act by adding the desirability of promoting, facilitating and supporting the Gaelic language to the list of matters which Scottish Ministers must have regard to in preparing the statement.

The LRRS published in September 2022 refers to the ownership, use and management of land delivering a wide range of social, environmental, economic and cultural benefit, whilst the supporting advisory notes set out that “We have significant cultural connections to land in Scotland through our languages and our history and those making decisions about land should be sensitive to these.” The modification which the Scottish Languages Bill makes to the 2016 Act will be taken into account during the next statutory review of the LRRS.

3.1.7 Adequate affordable homes should be available with a clear strategy to ensure population retention and criteria for allocation aiming to enable and encourage the use of Gaelic in communities which have a significant cohort of speakers, primarily Key Gaelic Communities.

The Scottish Government accepts this recommendation.

It is the statutory responsibility of local authorities through their Local Housing Strategy (LHS) and Development Plan to determine the appropriate housing required in their area, informed by a Housing Need and Demand Assessment. Every local authority in Scotland is required by law to prepare a Local Housing Strategy, supported by a Housing Need and Demand Assessment (HNDA), which sets out its strategy, priorities and plans for the delivery of housing and related services. Housing and planning authorities can augment their Housing Need and Demand Assessments with robust additional data and research where this exists. The Housing Need and Demand Assessment sets out long-term housing requirements, including the likely requirement for new homes as well as trends in affordability and tenure.

We will refresh Local Housing Strategy guidance and through this process we will explore how local authorities could be asked to consider the role of new homes in sustaining cultural – as well as social and economic – aspects of community in line with place-based principles.

The Scottish Government’s [Addressing Depopulation Action Plan](#) (ADAP) aligns with the Rural and Islands Housing Action Plan and contains actions to encourage population retention. The ADAP contains actions directly related to the Report’s Key Gaelic Communities. It also includes action to establish an Addressing Depopulation Fund as well as designing a Population Impact Assessment to ensure population impacts are properly considered as part of public policy.

3.1.8 In recognising the significant cultural strengths of the area, including the Gaelic language, the Highlands and Islands Regional Economic Partnership (REP) should progress the development of a unique socio-economic plan based on supporting and growing the number of Gaelic speakers.

The Highlands and Islands Regional Economic Partnership has been created to provide a collaborative focus on regional economic opportunities and challenges. A primary initial objective was to establish a regional economic strategy – its first ten-year strategy is nearing completion and is due to be endorsed within the next month and formally approved by partner organisations by the end of the year. The Short Life Working Group’s recommendation extends beyond the HIREP remit and geography, however, the draft Highlands and Islands Regional Economic Strategy acknowledges that Gaelic is an important part of the heritage and culture of the region and provides unique opportunities. A key action has been included to “support key Gaelic speaking communities with interventions to promote socio-economic opportunities and enhance resilience.” HIREP is developing a delivery plan which will prioritise activity over the next years.

3.1.9 ‘Gaelic economic zones’ be explored, offering tax breaks including (but not limited to) VAT and rates relief for businesses undertaking Gaelic-related activities or whose business demonstrates significant Gaelic impact. These could be aligned to the proposed Gàidhealtachd or any area in Scotland with a qualifying business.

The Scottish Government partially accepts this recommendation.

While some aspects of tax have been devolved to the Scottish Parliament, VAT policy is still reserved at UK level. Therefore the Scottish Parliament has no powers to act in this area. The Scottish Government believes that full VAT powers should be devolved to the Scottish Parliament so that the decisions that affect people and businesses in Scotland can be made here.

While many of the primary levers remain reserved to Westminster, the Scottish Parliament nevertheless has devolved taxation powers which could be utilised to solve some of the population and infrastructure difficulties experienced in the Key Gaelic Communities identified by the Short Life Working Group. Some relate to Land and Buildings Transaction Taxes. Some relate to reforms of Non-Domestic Rates (NDR) to incentivise the re-use of vacant and derelict sites. It is also suggested additional reliefs on NDR and council tax for newly-built properties on long-standing vacant sites could incentivise reuse. Another relates to consideration of a new power to enable local authorities to continue to apply NDR to newly derelict properties to discourage them from being allowed to fall into disrepair

NDR plays a fundamental role in contributing to the funding of public services by raising over £3 billion per year. Further relief would decrease NDR income and would need to be assessed in light of affordability, value for money and opportunity cost. It would be challenging to use NDR relief to target behaviour such as the use of Gaelic in specific communities. A system where the characteristics or behaviours of the occupier of a property become relevant to the tax liability may fundamentally change the administration of NDR and materially increase the administrative burden on councils. Careful consideration would therefore have to be given to the impact and feasibility of such conditionality within the NDR system. In respect of vacant and derelict sites, councils already have the power to continue to apply NDR to newly derelict properties following the devolution of Empty Property Relief to local authorities on 1 April 2023.

3.1.10 Initially, the Western Isles and Skye should be considered for an entrepreneurial campus approach incorporating Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, UHI North, West & Hebrides, and the creative industries cluster among others. Such a campus could lead on minority language solutions that could be exported across the world and extended to other areas to foster greater collaboration.

The Scottish Government accepts this recommendation.

The University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) have embraced the recommendations of the Entrepreneurial Campus Blueprint (ECB) and have designed a 3-year plan to increase entrepreneurial output and boost economic activity coming out of the different distributed campuses. We remain committed to the recommendations of the ECB and very much welcome UHI and others in their efforts to drive regional and national socio-economic and cultural growth through the Entrepreneurial Campus concepts.

Sabhal Mòr Ostaig is an internationally recognised centre for minority language study – whether in its offering of degrees across different disciplines through the medium of Gaelic or its role in developing our understanding of language planning. As the report notes, the impact which Sabhal Mòr’s campus has had on the Sleat peninsula since its establishment in 1973 is a case study in how a language initiative can be the vehicle for wider economic regeneration. This year’s census results have in turn demonstrated the impact this has on local language usage. Census results for Sleat reveal that Gaelic usage increases with each younger age group – from 35% of over 65s to 80% of 3-15 year olds. These results are a striking illustration of the impact which a strong, economically vibrant Gaelic institution can have on local language revival.

UHI North, West & Hebrides – through its amalgamation of three distinct college campuses in the Highlands and Islands – is providing a further example of innovation in response to the geographical circumstances of a minority language community. Other services on behalf of Gaelic, such as Comhairle nan Eilean Siar’s eSgoil, are also relevant in this regard.

The other bodies listed against this recommendation provide further demonstrations of Gaelic successes which have already achieved international recognition. This includes the awards and nominations gained by Gaelic productions at the Celtic Media Festival or the importance of MG Alba, BBC Alba and Radio nan Gàidheal to the Scottish Government’s ongoing work with counterparts in Canada. Cnoc Soilleir is a salient example of an initiative local to one Gaelic community being the basis for innovation across the wider culture – seen, for example, through its hosting of Climate Hebrides’ recent Gàidhlig Climate Convention. As a project its international significance is already being noted by other minority language communities. For example, the Frisian speaking members of the German-Scottish band An Carra recently cited Cnoc Soilleir’s importance in their decision to pursue musical careers through the Frisian language.¹

¹ [“It just felt natural”: The band bringing Germany and Scotland’s traditional languages together](#), Press & Journal, 23 August 2023

The success which they demonstrate, and the innovation they continue to pursue, are things which the Scottish Government will consider as we develop the ways in which further education is offered in Scotland and the example this can provide for minority language communities across the world.

3.1.11 Issues relating to housing and community-owned assets in Key Gaelic Communities caused by intestacy should be highlighted, and campaigns such as the Crofting Commission's succession advice amplified.

The Scottish Government accepts this recommendation.

Tackling empty homes remains a priority. It is a key part of the solution in meeting housing demand. As stated above, making the best use of existing housing is one of the four categories of action identified in Housing to 2040.

While this recommendation relates to an ongoing issue within the Key Gaelic Communities identified by the Short Life Working Group the government has policies in place which will help.

The Scottish Empty Homes Partnership works with local authorities and private owners to help return homes back to active use. Since 2010 it has succeeded in doing so for 9,000 properties. The Partnership has empty homes services across Scotland and is aiming to build a national network of officers. In September 2023, the Scottish Government published the independent research 'Bringing empty homes back into use: an audit of privately owned empty homes in Scotland'. This provides an overview of Scotland's empty homes and the further actions government could take to bring them back into use. The outcome of these strands of work will be a strategic approach to bringing empty homes back into use which will then be embedded within the Empty Homes Partnership.

We will work with the Partnership, local authorities and owners to bring more empty homes in rural and island communities back into use. Dealing with the specific issues the Short Life Working Group identifies regarding intestacy in its Key Gaelic Communities will form a part of this strategy – as will the amplification of existing campaigns such as the Crofting Commission's advice on intestacy.

3.1.12 There should be consideration of whether a task force is needed to further assess all aspects of public policy and their effect on Key Gaelic Communities along the lines of the recently established Commission for Welsh-speaking Communities.

The Scottish Government partially accepts this recommendation.

The Scottish Languages Bill will place a duty on Scottish Ministers and public authorities to consider Gaelic throughout the exercise of their functions. Assessing the impact of all aspects of their public policy on the language will form part of that. The Bill also places a duty on Scottish Ministers to develop a Gaelic Language Strategy in place of Bòrd na Gàidhlig's current National Gaelic Language Plan. By being developed at the level of Scottish Ministers rather than an NDPB, and cutting

across all aspects of government activity, the strategy will ensure a more comprehensive approach to Gaelic in Scotland's public life.

The existing system of Gaelic Language Plans commits public bodies to establish Gaelic Implementation Groups to ensure the impact of their individual policy areas on the language is considered. The Scottish Government has such a group and it will continue to work through that to meet this recommendation. It will also support Bòrd na Gàidhlig as it monitors other public bodies in their fulfilment of this commitment.

Public Sector and Gaelic Plans

3.2.1 Where a body has a duty to produce a Gaelic Language Plan and a remit, which includes sectors with potential for economic growth, in addition to any corporate outcomes, they must consider and articulate a strategy for Gaelic as *an asset* within their operations.

The Scottish Government accepts this recommendation.

As outlined under recommendation 3.1.12, the current system of Gaelic Language Plans is to be modified by the Scottish Languages Bill. Through the Bill, Scottish Ministers will have a duty to produce a Gaelic Language Strategy. Scottish Ministers and public authorities will be required to consider the Gaelic Language Strategy in the course of exercising their functions. For economic aspects of government this will involve the consideration of Gaelic as an asset within their wider remit. The same will be true for public authorities with an economic role.

This builds on the requirements found within the current system of Gaelic Language Plans for public bodies to consider Gaelic's potential as an asset across their operations. The Bill introduces powers for Scottish Ministers to develop guidance, standards and regulations regarding the implementation of the Gaelic Language Strategy. These will articulate the extent to which public bodies must have regard to Gaelic as an asset within their work.

The strategy and its associated guidance, standards and regulations will be developed in consultation with the bodies identified for this recommendation.

3.2.2 The system of Gaelic Language Plans (GLP) is reviewed to ensure stronger, deliverable commitments and inclusion of support for GLPs produced voluntarily, without notice from Bòrd na Gàidhlig, which may have a positive impact in communities and aid delivery of statutory plan recommendations.

The Scottish Government accepts this recommendation.

The measures outlined under the previous recommendation seek to ensure that the commitments within Gaelic Language Plans are stronger and more deliverable. Throughout the Scottish Languages Bill there is an emphasis on proportionate delivery across public life relevant to the area and extent of a public body's operations.

While strengthening the national framework for Gaelic Language Plans, the Bill also places greater emphasis on community involvement. It introduces measures for Areas of Linguistic Significance whereby community groups within designated areas would have a greater role in the development and implementation of language planning.

This expands on work already being undertaken by Bòrd na Gàidhlig through its cooperation with community language plans such as those being developed in the north-west of Lewis, and Uist.

3.2.3 The ‘Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Language Plans’ is reviewed with an aim to secure more ambitious GLPs while strengthening measurement and delivery.

The Scottish Government accepts this recommendation.

Bòrd na Gàidhlig has reviewed its ‘Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Language Plans’ with a refreshed version published.

Through the Scottish Languages Bill the power to create such guidance will be allocated to Scottish Ministers. This will complement the duty on Ministers to develop a Gaelic Language Strategy and will be accompanied by powers to set standards and regulations. By emanating from the level of Scottish Ministers rather than a Non-Departmental Public Body, as at present, this guidance and its accompanying documents will have greater standing – enabling the development of more ambitious Gaelic Language Plans with stronger measurement and delivery. Bòrd na Gàidhlig’s enhanced role as a monitoring body will further strengthen the measurement and delivery of individual plans.

3.2.4 Legislation should be strengthened to ensure the delivery of GLPs and consideration given to the need for a Gaelic Language Commissioner with a remit to monitor the compliance of public bodies with its provisions.

The Scottish Government accepts this recommendation.

Under the proposals brought forward in the Scottish Languages Bill, Bòrd na Gàidhlig will function as a monitoring body. This enhances the current system for ensuring the compliance of public bodies in delivering their Gaelic Language Plans. Bòrd na Gàidhlig’s current power for reporting on compliance to Scottish Ministers will be complemented by a power to lay reports directly before the Scottish Parliament.

In developing the Bill’s provisions the potential for a Gaelic Language Commissioner – drawing on examples of Language Commissioners in other jurisdictions – was considered. However, this was ultimately decided against. The public consultation on the Scottish Languages Bill indicated an appreciation for the work of Bòrd na Gàidhlig and the value in retaining a public body with a promotional and monitoring functions for Gaelic.

It was recognised that stronger leadership from the Scottish Government and across the public sector could improve the delivery and effect of Gaelic language plans.

3.2.5 Initiatives in key sectors, in receipt of public money, should be required to manifest cognisance of Gaelic in product/services and/or marketing or justify its exclusion.

The Scottish Government accepts this proposal.

The measures introduced by the Scottish Languages Bill for proportionate delivery will outline the extent to which publicly funded initiatives are expected to support

Gaelic in their work. Demonstrating awareness of Gaelic in products, services and marketing will form part of this – as will providing reasonable justification for not doing so. The criteria under which initiatives are expected to fulfil this obligation will be outlined in the guidance, standards and regulations produced by Scottish Ministers for the implementation of the Gaelic Language Strategy.

3.2.6 Ar Stòras Gàidhlig should be updated to give an up-to-date picture of economic growth related to Gaelic since the original study was published in 2014.

The Scottish Government has noted this recommendation.

Subject to budget availability, Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) are now looking to include this in their plans for 2025-26. HIE are undertaking research relating to Regional Transformational Opportunities and have added a language angle to consider the effects on Gaelic speaking communities and Areas of Linguistic Significance of large influxes of workers for projects such as Scotwind.

Also relevant to this recommendation is work being undertaken in relation to the Scottish Languages Bill's Fairer Scotland Duty Impact Assessment. Our initial assessment² highlighted the gaps which exist in our understanding of the connections between Gaelic development and wider social and economic questions. This highlighted for the Scottish Government the value of further research into the intersection of minority language issues and social and economic ones. Relevant datasets have been identified for consideration, and further review of published evidence will be undertaken in the course of the Bill's passage. An update on evidence, as well as an account of any changes to the Bill to address inequalities in response to further evidence, will follow once the Bill has completed Parliamentary passage and the associated Act has been published.

The relationship between economic development and language revitalisation remains an underdeveloped field – whether within academia or among policymakers. The work undertaken through 'Ar Stòras Gàidhlig' a decade ago is just one example of various efforts across language communities to establish what connections exist between economic and linguistic initiatives and how these can be brought to bear in policy. For Gaelic, individual impact studies exist such as those cited by the Short Life Working Group: for example, the economic impact of MG ALBA, Glasgow's Gaelic economy or the studies annually commissioned by An Comunn Gàidhealach for the Royal National Mòd. Internationally, we can cite examples such as Aberystwyth University's Language Revitalisation and Economic Transformation workshop of 2019. The Report of the Short Life Working Group on Economic and Social Opportunities for Gaelic is, of course, its own contribution to this developing field.

Within the planning framework proposed by the Scottish Languages Bill, and building on the blueprint provided by the Group's report, it is expected that the continual assessment of the economic dimensions of Gaelic development will play a key role in future Gaelic policy.

² [The Scottish Languages Bill: Fairer Scotland Duty Summary](#)

Communities

3.3.1 A network of properly resourced Gaelic Officers should be maintained over a sustained period to act as stimulators of a range of Gaelic social initiatives within Key Gaelic Communities as well as other areas. There could be a range of management arrangements in place, but there should be learning opportunities attached to the roles.

The Scottish Government accepts this recommendation.

Since the publication of the Group's Report a network of Gaelic Officers has been established with administrative support from Bòrd na Gàidhlig. This built on grassroots efforts by Gaelic Officers to establish such a network. A representative of the Scottish Government's Gaelic & Scots Division sits on the network's advisory committee. The network brings together Gaelic Development Officers and Gaelic Plan Officers. It also involves officers working within roles which do not explicitly require Gaelic but who integrate Gaelic into their organisations' activities. Its membership includes the Key Gaelic Communities identified by the report as well as officers active in areas across the whole of Scotland.

Among the aims of the network, as expressed by its members, is that it provide a source of continuous professional learning and development for Gaelic Officers. Opportunities for this are being explored and range from members sharing their own experiences to inviting guest speakers from other minority language communities to share best practice. The Scottish Government will continue to support Bòrd na Gàidhlig in its administration of this network and recognises its importance in ensuring co-operation and the sharing of ideas within the wider field of Gaelic development. Among other things, it will play a key role in the implementation of the Scottish Languages Bill.

3.3.2 Adequate childcare services should be available in Key Gaelic Communities, with appropriate Gaelic medium training for playleaders, through foundation apprenticeships and other means, in immersion methods to ensure as many parents as wish to are available to work, as well as acting as a feeder to Gaelic medium education.

The Scottish Government accepts this recommendation.

Local authorities currently have a statutory duty to provide funded early learning and childcare for 3-4 year olds. They must also consult parents and carers every two years to ensure that local models of early learning and childcare meet their needs. The Scottish Languages Bill introduces two amendments to improve the provision of Gaelic medium early learning and childcare. The Education (Scotland) Act 2016 will be amended so that its process for assessing Gaelic medium primary education also covers Gaelic medium early learning and childcare. The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 will also be amended to require local authorities to include Gaelic medium early learning and childcare in their biannual assessments of local early learning and childcare needs.

A national online [portal](#) for early learning and childcare resources has been developed by the Scottish Government. This will provide a single point of access for quality assured ELC resources. The Scottish Government and Bòrd na Gàidhlig – working alongside stakeholders such as Stòrlann – will ensure Gaelic medium resources are available through the portal and encourage its use by stakeholders.

Bòrd na Gàidhlig has also recently published a [report](#) on the national picture for Gaelic medium ELC. This will be part of the evidence base considered by the Scottish Government and our stakeholders as we act on this recommendation.

3.3.3 Public sector roles in Key Gaelic Communities should be designated, as far as possible, as Gaelic essential, particularly those which align with key sectors offering maximum economic and social potential for Gaelic. This Gaelic essential designation should extend to recruitment for any island-based public sector role undertaken remotely.

The Scottish Government accepts this recommendation.

The goals identified are ones which will be worked towards by several measures. Within the Scottish Languages Bill, Scottish Ministers will be required to prepare a Gaelic Language Strategy. The Strategy will emphasise proportionate delivery. Proportionate delivery will include, for example, consideration of the extent to which public bodies can incorporate Gaelic in their recruitment processes. Gaelic Language Plans already contain recruitment commitments for relevant public authorities. The Gaelic Language Strategy will build on progress which has been achieved so far under successive National Gaelic Language Plans.

3.3.4 Entrepreneurial training and awareness of relevant elements of language planning should be offered to Gaelic organisations and third-sector bodies such as community and heritage trusts, as well as the network of Gaelic Development Officers, to ensure they are better supported and adequately equipped to realise economic and social opportunities at the community level.

The Scottish Government accepts this recommendation.

The Gaelic Officers network outlined under recommendation 3.3.1 offers such training and awareness to Gaelic Development Officers. Its membership includes employees of Gaelic organisations and third-sector bodies such as community and heritage trusts. This provides the framework for acting on this recommendation.

This network is at an early stage. As explained above, training and continuous professional development for officers are among its key aims. The entrepreneurial training and language planning awareness identified here will be incorporated as part of that. The network, in turn, will serve as a means by which organisations within Gaelic communities are supported and equipped to realise the economic and social opportunities for Gaelic which exist within their communities.

This will form a key part of the enhanced system of Gaelic language planning which the Scottish Languages Bill is introducing.

3.3.5 Opportunities should be developed for the provision of Gaelic medium training and service delivery in the Health and Social Care Sector, which has the potential for significant economic impact, particularly in island and rural communities, in addition to linguistic and wellbeing benefits. This could start in schools through an expansion of Foundation Apprenticeships delivered in Gaelic, already available in childcare and media in a small number of schools.

The Scottish Government accepts this recommendation.

The Key Gaelic Communities identified within the report fall within either NHS Western Isles or NHS Highland. In their Gaelic Language Plans the two health boards recognise the importance of Gaelic as both an important skill in the workplace and community and one which is of emotional benefit to patients who can receive their health and social care in their first language. Each plan also contains commitments to develop the level of Gaelic among its staff to ensure these advantages are realised. NHS Western Isles recognises its role in “strengthening the Gaelic labour market” through its recruitment processes. NHS Highland aims to work with Skills Development Scotland and Sabhal Mòr Ostaig to develop Gaelic pathways to health and social care qualifications. The Scottish Government will support this work through the appropriate workstreams and fora.

Within both NHS Western Isles and NHS Highland are initiatives which provide evidence for the benefit of incorporating Gaelic into the delivery of health and social care. To take one example, the West Highland branch of Alzheimer Scotland has, for several years now, made use of Gaelic in their work – most notably in their Gaelic conversation groups. This initiative enables Gaelic speakers living with dementia to engage with their first language – one to which many of them revert due to the impact of their condition. The project also incorporates local Gaelic medium primary schools in Portree and Lochaber – enabling pupils to develop their language skills in conversation with older native speakers. Alzheimer Scotland have rightly been praised for this work – most notably through their success in winning the Community Award at the Scottish Gaelic Awards in 2021. It provides an example of how health and social care initiatives and educational programmes can work together for both community and educational benefit while simultaneously strengthening Gaelic. Within such work is a vision of how Gaelic can be used for the benefit of the Health and Social Care sector across the report’s Key Gaelic Communities.

3.3.6 Support should be available for communities to create or acquire assets which offer spaces which would generate economic activity and enable greater social use of Gaelic, or to access existing spaces such as community schools.

The Scottish Government accepts this recommendation.

In the Report, the members of the group identified three Scottish Government supported projects for the economic and cultural benefits they brought their local communities: Sabhal Mòr Ostaig in Sleat, Cnoc Soilleir in South Uist, and Ionad Chalum Chille Ìle. The report also acknowledged the short-term economic benefits these building based projects brought through construction and maintenance jobs. These three examples provide case studies in how the Scottish Government can work towards this recommendation.

That Gaelic has served as an economic asset in its own right is among the key arguments of the Report. It is a point amply demonstrated by the three examples above as well as Gaelic initiatives in other areas of life such as broadcasting. This principle has also informed the Scottish Languages Bill and the duties it places on Scottish Ministers and public authorities to consider Gaelic in exercising their functions. Outwith government initiatives, private efforts such as that of An Taigh Cèilidh in Stornoway provided other examples which can be drawn upon.

Among the actions of the Rural and Islands Housing Action Plan is to build upon community capacity and knowledge of the Asset Transfer process. The Scottish Government, working alongside the other bodies named for this recommendation, will pursue a similar action in relation to the creation or acquisition of community assets.

3.3.7 As far as possible within the public appointments process, there should be a mechanism for the positive recruitment of local, Gaelic-speaking residents to the boards of public bodies and other committees whose activities affect Key Gaelic Communities.

The Scottish Government accepts this recommendation.

Appointments to the Boards of bodies are regulated by the Ethical Standards Commissioner. The appointments are scrutinised by the Commissioner and follow the Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments to Public Bodies in Scotland. The Code is supported by a handbook of statutory guidance which is intended to facilitate both the implementation and the understanding of the Code.

Scottish Ministers are responsible for making fair and open appointment decisions based on the merit of the people who apply. Merit is defined by Ministers for each board position to be filled and is based on that board's specific needs at the time of, and anticipated period for, that appointment and only those that are judged most able to meet the requirements will be appointed. Scottish Ministers value very highly the benefits of having different experience and points of view on Boards and are keen that people from all walks of life apply for public appointments.

For each regulated appointment round, Scottish Ministers delegate responsibility to a selection panel which then draws together an agreed appointment plan, application and assessment methods, and an outreach strategy. The selection panel, as part of their discussions, will determine if the Board requires specific skills and experience which may include local, Gaelic-speaking residents on the board. This may be appropriate for those public bodies whose activities affect Key Gaelic Communities.

In recent years, appointments to the Boards of Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited (CMAL), David MacBrayne Limited (DML), Highlands and Islands Airports Limited (HIAL), Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) and Bòrd na Gàidhlig (BnG) have involved extensive outreach work to ensure that Gaelic speakers and/or those living in rural and island communities are targeted with information about relevant appointments. As an example, the Cabinet Secretary for Transport wrote recently to a range of organisations and bodies in Gaelic speaking rural and island communities

encouraging them to apply for Non-Executive Director roles on the Board of CMAL. Similar letters, from Ministers or officials, have been issued in the past encouraging applicants for roles on a number of Boards including DML and HIAL. As a further example, for a number of years, Ministers have agreed that for HIE board appointments, a proportion of those appointed must have a very close affinity and understanding of the issues impacting on the Highlands and Islands and of the opportunities to support economic and community development across the region. For the most recent round, Ministers agreed that one of the two appointees must live, work, study or invest in the Highlands and Islands. There was also a strong preference that the second candidate also lived, worked, studied or invested in the Highlands and Islands. Finally, for appointments to BnG, those appointed must be Gaelic speakers who can articulate their views with confidence in public discussion online, and in face-to face meetings and gatherings. Board Members are expected to be committed ambassadors for the Gaelic language and advocates for Bòrd na Gàidhlig, willing to engage with Gaelic communities across the whole of Scotland.

3.3.8 Consideration should be given to the further potential of Settlement Officers - who facilitate people moving to, and living in, island communities - to promote the importance of the language in Key Gaelic Communities, as well as resettling people at various transition points.

The Scottish Government accepts this recommendation.

The Scottish Government, local authorities and the Convention of the Highlands and Islands Population Working Group intend to continue working together to support current Community Settlement Officers and will undertake a review of the potential benefits of this approach in building partnerships between public, private and community sectors. The importance of language can also be scoped for future inclusion in roles as part of CoHI's increased consideration of the link between language and housing.

Under the Addressing Depopulation Action Plan, the formation of a semi-formal network of Community Settlement Officers as part of an Addressing Depopulation Delivery Group, including new roles in other parts of Scotland facing depopulation, has been announced. Other aspects of the Addressing Depopulation Action Plan, including in relation to physical and digital infrastructure, access to public services, and supporting local economies, will support outcomes for Gaelic speakers, as a result of the place-based overlap where these interventions will be delivered.

The Scottish Government's independent Expert Advisory Group on Migration and Population includes one Group member, Professor Philomena de Lima, who specialises in social research relating to indigenous communities. As initially highlighted in the Addressing Depopulation Action Plan, the Expert Advisory Group is in the process of finalising a commission which will review and summarise existing data and literature, identifying gaps in relation to the mobilities/migration of young people and adults (16-40 years of age) in rural Scotland, through the lens of a 'life course' approach. This piece of work will include a component on Gaelic communities and the Action Plan commits the Expert Advisory Group to "scope future research about the ways in which Gaelic language and culture and its close association with land, places of learning and socio-economic opportunities can help

towards retention of young people.” These will be taken forward in due course, and will additionally support Community Settlement Officers and the delivery of other interventions, in the implementation of this recommendation.

3.3.9 Guidance from the Scottish Government on proposals for the introduction of Local Place Plans should consider a designation of *Areas of Linguistic Sensitivity* where policy intervention may be required to support and strengthen Gaelic with the development and strengthening of community agency and participation a primary aim.

The Scottish Government notes this recommendation.

The measure within the Scottish Languages Bill for designating Areas of Linguistic Significance has been informed by the report of the Short Life Working Group. It is designed with the aim of enabling policy interventions which both strengthen Gaelic and improve the role of communities in developing and implementing policy. The Scottish Languages Bill and the structures which it puts in place will therefore be the means by which the aims of this recommendation are pursued.

3.3.10 The legal requirement for Island Community Impact Assessments should ensure linguistic impacts are properly considered, and a good practice guide should be available on undertaking community consultation in a way sensitive to the needs of Gaelic in the context of Local Place Plans.

The Scottish Government accepts this recommendation.

The current guidance on Island Community Impact Assessments emphasises the importance of considering Gaelic in policy development. Guidance highlights the potential which public authorities in island areas have to support Gaelic across their operations, the importance of including Gaelic speaker figures in data collection and of engaging island communities in Gaelic. This guidance can be updated in future to strengthen the provision it makes for Gaelic and the linguistic needs of island communities.

The Scottish Government’s Gaelic Language Plan is an additional document which reinforces the emphasis placed upon Gaelic in policy development. Directorates across the Scottish Government are represented on the Gaelic Language Plan’s implementation group. This group emphasises i) the need to consider the linguistic impact of policy development and implementation across the organisation and ii) the need to consider Gaelic’s potential as an asset in meeting wider policy goals. Progress has been seen here – ranging from an increase in government materials being issued in Gaelic, engagement with Gaelic stakeholders or explicit consideration of Gaelic within policy documents.

However, it is recognised that work remains to be done. The Scottish Government looks forward to progressing this recommendation through the means outlined.

Education

3.4.1 In order to fully realise economic, as well as educational, benefits, a strategy is developed urgently to begin overcoming the disparity in provision in Gaelic secondary education, which inhibits fuller language acquisition and confidence in language use, with the aim of ensuring a broad range of subjects is available through the medium of Gaelic to certificated level.

The Scottish Government accepts this recommendation.

As noted, the Scottish Languages Bill brings forward a Gaelic Language Strategy. This will be developed in consultation with stakeholders and supported where necessary by regulations that can set standards in relation to Gaelic education. The Bill also proposes that Education authorities will set out their plans for Gaelic education provision as part of their Gaelic language plans.

Standards could be used to make progress across a number of issues which have been viewed as obstacles in Gaelic medium education and provide a clearer indication of what can be expected by young people when they commence on their journey through Gaelic medium education. This could include enhancing and increasing secondary curriculum provision through the medium of Gaelic.

3.4.2 A new initiative is introduced urgently to attract new teachers while pro-actively persuading teachers qualified to teach in Gaelic who do not currently work in Gaelic education. Both strands may require the establishment of a range of financial incentives, support and confidence-building initiatives to enhance the appeal of teaching in Gaelic.

The Scottish Government accepts this recommendation. There are a number of incentives in place. It is important that these are maintained and kept under review. Workforce challenges require actions by a range of public sector organisations in order to make progress and it is recognised that actions across recruitment and also retention are needed.

The Teaching Bursary Scheme has been extended to include Gaelic medium teaching at both primary and secondary levels as well as the teaching of Gaelic as a standalone subject at secondary. The scheme addresses recruitment shortages in the hardest to fill subjects and provides a £20,000 bursary for career changers wishing to undertake a one year PDGE Initial Teacher Education (ITE) course.

Bòrd na Gàidhlig can fund local authorities to enable teachers to undertake courses to strengthen Gaelic language skills through the Gaelic Language Act Implementation Fund – recently rebranded as the Gaelic Plans Fund.

Local authorities can also include language courses, provision of back fill for teachers to be released for language courses in their annual bids for Gaelic Specific Grant. This is a ring-fenced funding scheme (£4.48 million for 24/25) made available by Scottish Ministers to Scottish Local Authorities for up to 75% of the cost towards delivery of Gaelic education.

The Student Awards Agency Scotland Guidance Previous Study provides that SAAS will waive previous study rules on Cert HE Gaelic Immersion courses. Students who have already received funding for a degree or Higher National level qualification are still eligible to receive funding for this course. If the Cert HE Gaelic Immersion is studied prior to another programme of study (e.g. an HNC or degree), it will not be taken into account for previous study.

Bòrd na Gàidhlig offers Gaelic Education Grants support for those currently working towards a career in Gaelic teaching or Gaelic medium teachers looking to develop their professional skills. Under this fund students from the following can be considered: students undertaking a Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) in Gaelic education; students undertaking a Gaelic early years or Gaelic childcare course; Students undertaking a Gaelic education undergraduate degree; teachers that are employed in a role relating to Gaelic medium education that wish to undertake a course to develop their skills or qualified teachers looking to develop their skills to move into Gaelic medium education.

A campaign promoting the rewards of a teaching career is currently being considered, with the aim of improving recruitment and retention to the subjects facing the greatest shortages. Gaelic will be included in this.

The Scottish Government will continue to support Bòrd na Gàidhlig's ongoing promotion of Gaelic medium teaching.

3.4.3 As far as possible, teacher education should be delivered through the medium of Gaelic with new concerted efforts to ensure GME teacher education is (i) incentivised centrally and (ii) made as accessible as possible, including through the employment of distance learning, as long as that does not compromise the Gaelic language skills acquisition required to produce successful teachers.

The Scottish Government accepts this recommendation.

The annual guidance letter from Scottish Government to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) emphasises the importance of Gaelic teacher recruitment by making clear that the 'supply of teachers able to teach in the medium of Gaelic continues to be a priority for Scottish Ministers. The Scottish Government would like the SFC to continue to assist in promoting provision in this area and to give consideration to any initiatives which could improve effectiveness. We ask that SFC encourage Initial Teacher Education (ITE) providers to increase the places currently allocated to them and to promote a positive approach in relation to applications for all ITE programmes.' This letter also encourages interviews being offered to all applicants for teaching for Gaelic-medium education.

Individual training institutions are responsible for the delivery of Initial Teacher Education. However, the Scottish Government – while being mindful of the independence of ITE institutions – will liaise with the Scottish Council of Deans of Education to explore how this recommendation can be met.

3.4.4 Adequate, regular support for early years practitioners and Gaelic teachers be put in place to improve conditions and retention, including immersion techniques,

ongoing CPL in language skills and the provision of a wider range of quality resources to negate the need for teachers to produce so much of their own materials.

The Scottish Government accepts this recommendation.

In line with Audit Scotland recommendations and the Programme for Government, in 2024-25, Scottish Government plan to:

- take forward work with councils and other stakeholders to develop long-term workforce plans for the sector to address the risks to sustainability and meet future demand
- work with councils to urgently put in place a process for monitoring progress with providers paying the real Living Wage to staff delivering funded ELC
- grow the childminding workforce and trial new methods of improving retention, in light of the significant decline in this part of the workforce in recent years
- further develop the new one stop shop for quality assured continuous professional learning (CPL) resources which launched in March
- engage with the Adult Social Care sector to understand how the ELC workforce can engage in sectoral bargaining and effective voice as a longer-term mechanism for equalising workforce pay and conditions between local authority and PVI workforces

The Scottish Government Gaelic and Scots division is in regular contact with Bòrd na Gàidhlig's early learning and childcare team and Sabhal Mòr Ostaig. That ensures that the distinct requirements of the Gaelic medium sector are reflected in national strategies. This will be further guaranteed by the statutory role the Scottish Languages Bill assigns to Comann nam Pàrant as a consultee in Gaelic educational matters.

Various relevant actions have been outlined under recommendation 3.3.2. These include Bòrd na Gàidhlig's research into the positions of both Gaelic medium and general ELC provision. The findings of this research will inform the Scottish Government's future approach to Gaelic medium ELC.

As detailed under 3.4.1, education authorities will be required to produce Gaelic education delivery plans. These must comprehensively outline how an authority will provide Gaelic education at all levels from ELC to further and higher education. The proper resourcing and training of teachers, according to the techniques required for Gaelic medium education, will be an essential part of these delivery plans.

This is part of a broader strengthening of the Gaelic Language Plan system through the Bill. At present, Gaelic Language Plans commit public bodies to provide Gaelic learning as part of CPL. The Bill's introduction of a ministerial Gaelic Language Strategy with guidance, standards and regulations will strengthen these commitments and strengthen their delivery.

3.4.5 A range of initiatives continue to be supported to facilitate Gaelic learning among adults in communities, the media, online and in further and higher education establishments.

The Scottish Government accepts this recommendation.

The Scottish Government sponsors multiple adult learning opportunities for Gaelic. This ranges from our funding of bodies like Sabhal Mòr Ostaig and services such as SpeakGaelic. Opportunities for community learning are expanded through the growth of centres such as Cnoc Soilleir in South Uist and Ionad Chaluim Chille Ìle. We will continue to support these initiatives as well as to work with other community organisations looking to expand the opportunities and infrastructure for Gaelic learning in their local areas.

This support is something we build on in the Scottish Languages Bill. Among its measures is an amendment of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005 to ensure Gaelic is considered in terms of access to fundable further and higher education in Gaelic language and culture. The Bill also seeks to place a duty on Scottish Ministers and Education Authorities to consider the promotion of Gaelic education at all levels – including adult and community learning.

In addition to these Gaelic specific measures, the forthcoming updated Strategic Guidance to Councils for the next set of 3 yearly community learning and development plans could include messaging around the importance of councils incorporating Gaelic adult learning opportunities.

3.4.6 Gaelic education should be developed at all levels, with access improved through transport and use of technology, where appropriate, and acknowledgement of the economic, as well as educational benefits from improved and expanded provision. In particular, consideration should be given as to how a legal right to Gaelic education may be implemented to ensure expansion in provision and improved access.

The Scottish Government accepts this recommendation.

Through the Scottish Languages Bill, education authorities will have a duty to support access to Gaelic medium education. This will be achieved through supporting children who lack access to GME within their own local authority to access it within another authority. The Bill also proposes to put in place a formal procedure which authorities must follow before transport can be withdrawn from pupils accessing GME. This will bring procedures for Gaelic education in line with the protections in place for transport to denominational educational provision. This measure makes Comann nam Pàrant, alongside Bòrd na Gàidhlig, a statutory consultee in the process.

As noted above, among the major Gaelic projects sponsored by the Scottish Government in recent years have been eSgoil and SpeakGaelic – both stellar examples of the use of technology in advocating Gaelic learning and making it accessible across Scotland and internationally. In addition to their success in advancing Gaelic they have demonstrated how Gaelic educational initiatives designed in response to the language's particular circumstances have, in turn, been assets of wider social and economic benefit. This was seen not least in eSgoil's national utility as an online learning platform during the pandemic.

These projects will continue to be supported and the principles implicit in their success – that Gaelic educational development is an asset to Scotland’s wider public life – will be advanced across the Scottish Government’s policy work. At present the latter is something which is achieved through the Scottish Government’s Gaelic Language Plan and its implementation group. The Scottish Languages Bill elevates this through the duty it places on Scottish Ministers and education authorities to have regard to Gaelic in exercising their functions.

3.4.7 To begin improving the secondary Gaelic medium offering, relevant local authorities should consult on the potential to designate certain secondary schools as Gaelic medium schools, which, through annual reporting, would demonstrate clear ambitions to develop Gaelic secondary provision, even if there are challenges in the short-term.

The Scottish Government partially accepts this recommendation

Standalone Gaelic medium schools are recognised as the preferred setting for immersion education. The Scottish Government is supportive of education authorities, school parents and bodies such as Bòrd na Gàidhlig and Comann nam Pàrant as they work towards this goal. The requirement for education authorities to produce delivery plans for Gaelic education will be a means by which they can articulate how they will do so.

The Scottish Languages Bill provides further measures which will contribute towards this aim. For example, it amends the Education (Scotland) Act 2016 by placing a duty on education authorities to establish distinct catchment areas for Gaelic medium education. For schools with joint Gaelic medium and English medium provision it will be possible to establish a separate catchment area for the Gaelic medium unit.

3.4.8 A range of Gaelic medium Foundation Apprenticeships should be available in S5-6 for pupils wishing to pursue careers in early years & social care, the creative industries, culture, heritage, tourism, sport, food & drink and the natural environment where the use of Gaelic would be an advantage, or its promotion encouraged.

The Scottish Government accepts this recommendation.

At present Gaelic medium Foundation Apprenticeships are offered in early years & social care and creative & digital media by Sabhal Mòr Ostaig. Among the strategic aims of the newly amalgamated UHI North, West and Hebrides is to extend the range of courses it delivers through Gaelic while strengthening the links between Gaelic and employability. The latter aim has an initial focus on health, social and child care and tourism. The Scottish Government supports these institutions in their development of these Gaelic courses and recognises them as a blueprint for further expanding the range of Foundation Apprenticeships available in Gaelic.

The requirement within the Scottish Languages Bill for education authorities to prepare delivery plans for Gaelic education extends to the provision of Gaelic learning in further and higher education. Foundation Apprenticeships across the sectors identified by this recommendation will be among the aspects of Gaelic learning opportunities which education authorities must consider in preparing their

delivery plans. The Foundation Apprenticeship Enhancement Group, set up to take forward improvements to Foundation Apprenticeships will also consider the recommendations in the report.

3.4.9 Gaelic language teaching for learners be compulsory for all S1-S3 pupils in secondary schools in Na h-Eileanan Siar, Skye & Lochalsh, Lochaber, Tìre and Islay along with access for those wishing to gain a qualification in S4-S6. This could apply in other places where GM pupils feed into secondary schools, for example, Inverness, Glasgow and Edinburgh.

The Scottish Government has noted this recommendation.

Local authorities decide the content of their school curricula. The Scottish Government and Education Scotland are able to express a general expectation of what a curriculum will deliver. At present Education Scotland's Advice on Gaelic Education outlines the expectations in relation to Gaelic medium and Gaelic learner education. The Scottish Languages Bill's measure for introducing standards in relation to Gaelic Education will be a future vehicle for expressing the different levels of provision expected.

Education Scotland's Advice on Gaelic Education applies to all sectors of Gaelic Education in Scotland. The Advice on Gaelic Education is integrated within the wider framework of documentation that supports Scotland's Curriculum. Building the Curriculum 3 makes clear the entitlements that all young people in 3-18 education have. In particular, they are entitled to a coherent education, to receive personal support, a senior phase that allows them to continue to develop the four capacities, and achieve qualifications and has a continuous focus on literacy.

The Advice on Gaelic Education clearly differentiates between children and young people in Gaelic Medium Education and Gaelic Learner Education (GLE). Building on the 1+2 Languages policy, all children and young people in Scotland have an entitlement to learning additional languages until the end of S3 which could include Gaelic (Learners) as an L2 or L3 for those in English Medium Education.

The Scottish Government will engage with local authorities through COSLA and the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES) to help to understand the context for this recommendation and whether national support is required to fulfil it. Education Scotland, with a renewed focus on curriculum improvement, will be the lead organisation for curriculum in GME.

The Scottish Languages Bill introduces powers to set standards for Gaelic Education in Scotland. These standards could outline the extent to which local authorities are expected to provide Gaelic medium and Gaelic learner education. Illustrative standards are provided in the Scottish Government's response to the Education, Children and Young People Committee's Stage 1 Report on the Bill.

3.4.10 'Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education' should be reviewed and refreshed, and its status promoted widely within Scottish education with a range of mechanisms put in place through policy, annual reporting and school inspections to ensure adherence to its principles by local authorities and education policymakers.

The Scottish Government accepts this recommendation.

The power the Scottish Languages Bill creates for Scottish Ministers to prepare guidance on Gaelic education will supersede the power currently held by Bòrd na Gàidhlig. Bòrd na Gàidhlig has been considering a refresh of the existing guidance for some time. The transfer of the guidance issuing power on implementation of the bill will in effect result in a renewal of guidance and its status will be enhanced due to it being a product of Scottish Ministers rather than - as at present – an NDPB. Its promotion throughout Scottish education will be achieved by the duty on Scottish Ministers and education authorities to have regard to Gaelic education in the exercise of their functions. Adherence to its principles will be guaranteed by the direction giving power the Bill creates for Scottish Ministers in the event of a local authority failing to fulfil its duties with regard to Gaelic educational provision.

The delivery plans which education authorities must prepare as part of their general Gaelic language plans will provide the means for monitoring their adherence to the statutory guidance. Bòrd na Gàidhlig, in monitoring the implementation of the Gaelic language plans, will be reporting on the implementation of Gaelic education outlined in an authority's delivery plan.

3.4.11 A Gaelic medium curriculum is developed, which is not a translation of the English curriculum but includes ongoing language acquisition, learning about Scottish history, the richness of Gaelic culture and concepts unique to Gaelic, such as the environmental stewardship inherent in dùthchas with a potential tie to 3.5.5.

The Scottish Government accepts this recommendation.

The Curriculum Improvement Cycle will include Gaelic (Literacy) and the Gaelic curriculum and therefore the CIC will be a key route through which this recommendation will be taken forward.

Education Scotland's Advice on Gaelic Education details immersion education, as part of Curriculum for Excellence, and includes the development of social language and ongoing language acquisition. It also provides advice on opportunities for children and young people to develop their understanding and knowledge of Gaelic language and culture as part of Scotland's identity. Partners and Gaelic bodies, through working collaboratively with schools, have a role to play in adding value to children and young people's experiences and outcomes in Gaelic Education and contributing to a curriculum based on local context and Gaelic culture, which can include concepts such as dùthchas.

The context of the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act also provides an obligation to highlight these aspects of Gaelic culture. Article 30 (Children from Indigenous and Minority Groups) provides specific rights for children in minority groups, including linguistic minorities. "While most of what Article 30 says is implied by other Articles of the UNCRC, it exists to make clear that the rights of minority children and young people should not be overlooked by people who think about how to put the Convention into practice." – Children and Young Person's Commissioner – Scotland.

As outlined elsewhere, the provisions within the Scottish Languages Bill relating to proportionate delivery and delivery planning in Gaelic education will improve the extent to which Gaelic is supported across the school system. The development of a Gaelic curriculum – with more subjects offered through Gaelic, and more resources created originally in Gaelic – forms part of that. Education Scotland will act as the lead body on curriculum in GME – as part of a wider focus on curriculum improvement.

The Scottish Government will continue to support stakeholders such as Stòrlann, Acair and Comhairle nan Leabhraichean as they develop Gaelic books and other educational resources.

The system of Gaelic Language Plans also provides another means of working towards this recommendation. In selecting official materials for translation emphasis can be placed on ones which are of relevance to Gaelic Medium Schools – for example, for use within the modern studies curriculum.

Key Sectors

3.5.1 While acknowledging the potential of Creative Scotland's Place Partnership Programme, a national Gaelic Arts Strategy be developed outlining ways to support and enhance the economic opportunities for those working in the arts and screen industries where Gaelic is the medium of delivery or is related to the work being undertaken in the artform.

The Scottish Government accepts this recommendation.

As outlined throughout the response, the Scottish Languages Bill aims to introduce a Gaelic Language Strategy which will replace the current requirement for a National Gaelic Language Plan. The strategy, as a product of Scottish Ministers rather than an NDPB, will provide a more comprehensive outline of how Gaelic must be supported across Scotland's public life. The arts will naturally feature in this. In working towards strategic goals on behalf of Gaelic in the arts and cultural sectors, future Gaelic Language Strategies will build on the success so far achieved by Gaelic Language Plans produced by public bodies such as Creative Scotland, National Galleries Scotland and National Museums Scotland. The insights of organisations such as MG ALBA and independent production companies will also be vital.

Submissions to the public consultation on the Bill revealed the need there was for artistic development to play a greater role in Gaelic planning. It is expected that the measures introduced by the Bill will be a means to ensure this.

3.5.2 In recognition of the economic, social and educational importance of the broadcast and digital media, increased funding should be made available to MG ALBA and others to enable the development of a range of new programmes, a larger proportion to be made in Key Gaelic Communities, for broadcast on television, radio and on digital platforms with a strong language policy which increases the use of Gaelic with optional subtitles.

The Scottish Government partially accepts this recommendation.

The Scottish Government continues to argue that, while broadcasting is reserved, the UK Government needs to consider its current support for minority indigenous languages and whether it is currently demonstrating parity of support and provision. We are clear on the importance of minority language broadcasting and the need to protect and enhance the important role it plays in driving community and economic growth, particularly in rural areas. The Scottish Government continues to support a thriving Gaelic broadcasting industry, with £12.8m funding a year for MG ALBA. The Scottish Government believes broadcasting policy should be devolved to Scotland to ensure that proportionate decisions can be taken which recognise the requirements of audiences and the creative industries in Scotland.

The Scottish Government continues to support skills and education, working closely with Screen Scotland to support programmes across the sector as well as in formal and informal education settings. Screen Scotland will continue to work with film and TV productions to ensure that projects have opportunities attached for new, and

developing, crew and talent. We will encourage engagement with BBC ALBA and Screen Scotland to identify areas where training can be provided to boost skills training and engagement with the Gaelic language.

The Scottish Government continues to support MG Alba in its efforts to increase the recognition of Gaelic broadcasting and digital media. This support will continue.

3.5.3 The partnership established by VisitScotland to support Gaelic tourism should be continued with a wide range of bodies working towards improving the Gaelic experience for visitors.

The Scottish Government accepts this recommendation.

VisitScotland launched its Gaelic Tourism Strategy in February 2024. The strategy emphasises the importance of Gaelic to Scotland's international appeal. Its aim is to enable Scotland's wider tourism sector to integrate Gaelic into the experience offered to tourists. VisitScotland's implementation of this strategy will proceed alongside its continued leadership of the Faster Rate of Progress initiative's tourism workstream.

Beyond the strategy, VisitScotland is also reaching out to tourism bodies in Wales, Ireland and New Zealand to share knowledge of work being done with indigenous languages and culture.

An area which will be addressed is the lack of data available for the value of Gaelic to the visitor economy. This is especially true at the national level. There is an aim to improve our national and regional insights in order to help the tourism industry understand the current and potential value of Gaelic. This will be done in a way sensitive to the language's needs – avoiding tokenism

3.5.4 A range of industry training opportunities should be developed to prepare people to work in the media, as far as possible through the medium of Gaelic, to increase employment opportunities, use of Gaelic and provide a range of transferable skills.

The Scottish Government accepts this recommendation.

The success of Sabhal Mòr Ostaig's DipHE in Gaelic Media and initiatives such as FilmG have demonstrated the value of media industry training for Gaelic speakers. BBC Alba's success in expanding the number of career paths in Gaelic media over the last generation has served to the general enrichment of Scotland's public life. MG ALBA and independent production companies are significant contributors to the economies of Gaelic communities.

The Scottish Government continues to support skills and education, working closely with Screen Scotland to support programmes across the sector as well as in formal and informal education settings. Screen Scotland will continue to work with film and TV productions to ensure that projects have opportunities attached for new, and developing, crew and talent. We will encourage engagement with BBC ALBA and

Screen Scotland to identify areas where training can be provided to boost skills training and engagement with the Gaelic language.

The Scottish Government will work with MG ALBA and the other identified bodies to bring forward this recommendation.

3.5.5 As called for in a 2021 scoping exercise for NatureScot, 'Ecosystem Services and Gaelic', further research be undertaken to explore the role Gaelic language and culture and its relationship with the Highland landscape has in promoting self-esteem, health and well-being with a view to improving knowledge, access and creating social and economic opportunities relating to the natural environment.

The Scottish Government accepts this recommendation.

The expansion of outdoor and landbased learning is among the Scottish Government's priorities.

The ecological arguments for minority language revitalisation have long been articulated by linguists. In Scotland, there is an increasing awareness of the role which Gaelic ecological knowledge can play in formal policymaking – not least in our efforts to counter climate change.

Two recent examples stand out. The first is NatureScot and Ainmean-àite na h-Alba's Coilltean Caillte [project](#). Coilltean Caillte utilised Gaelic placename knowledge to [reveal](#) Scotland's historical woodlands – identifying sites which could be suited for present day reforestation. This is a seminal demonstration of the way in which Gaelic's historical relationship with Scotland's landscape can be a key tool in advancing an urgent contemporary policy goal. The second is Climate Hebrides' Gàidhlig Convention at Cnoc Soilleir in November 2023, which was sponsored by the Scottish Government's Just Transition Unit. This event combined the twin goals of providing an entirely Gaelic forum to discuss the government's Just Transition policies while also being an opportunity to collect local climate knowledge to better inform their future development.

The models these offer of the social and economic – and policy – opportunities offered by a knowledge of Gaelic and its intersection with the natural world will be built on. The immediate means of doing this within the Scottish Government will be through our own Gaelic Language Plan and Gaelic Implementation Group. The increased emphasis which a future Gaelic Language Strategy will place on Gaelic as a general asset for all policy areas will achieve this across Scotland's public sector.

3.5.6 In addition to specific recommendations in 3.5.1-3.5.5, economic opportunities should be strengthened by increasing support for Gaelic organisations, companies and individuals working across the range of key sectors to expand provision, employ more people and strengthen communities further.

The Scottish Government accepts this recommendation.

Alongside the other bodies listed against this recommendation, we will work to increase the support for Gaelic organisations, companies and individuals. Many of

these have contributed so far to the development of the Scottish Languages Bill – through consultation submissions and ongoing discussions with Scottish Government officials. The overarching aim of the Bill with regards to Gaelic is to improve the support which exists for the language and its stakeholders across Scotland’s public life. Responses to the recommendations above have outlined the measures within the Bill which will achieve this. A ministerial Gaelic Language Strategy will place a renewed and more wideranging perspective on Gaelic’s position across Scotland’s public life. An emphasis on proportionate delivery will require public bodies to consider the extent of support the language can receive across their operations. The designation of Areas of Linguistic Significance will be a means of strengthening the community foundations of Gaelic in modern Scotland.

Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) have recently published their updated Gaelic plan, which commits HIE to make an active offer of Gaelic services, to have equal respect for Gaelic and English and to mainstream the use of Gaelic. They are looking to normalise the use of Gaelic through everything they do. HIE are also updating their systems to allow better reporting against investment in Gaelic communities, with the anticipation that within 1-2 years they will be able to provide reports.



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