

STIÙIREADH GNÌOMHACHAIDH POILEASAIDH GÀIDHLIG AIRSON FOGHLAIM – COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR

Feedback on responses to draft implementation guidelines.

The document was circulated to various groups, including:

- Teaching staff consultation focus groups;
- Key personnel within the other Comhairle Departments
- External agencies
- The Gaelic Language and Culture forum.

The document was posted on the website and schools were informed of its availability.

The policy was also discussed with senior pupils in school. The views expressed about their Gaelic medium experience were encouraging. Useful views to enhance the delivery of courses in secondary schools were given. Gaelic related work experience and extra-curricular activities in Gaelic were considered valuable by them.

In general, positive feedback was received on the guidelines, which were seen as strengthening the Comhairle policy, and covering the important areas for development.

There was strong support for educating parents in the huge benefits of bilingualism, which was not seen as the sole responsibility of the Comhairle.

Specific detailed comment from one agency was received as follows. Comment from the Education Department forms the third column.

The Education Department is grateful to those who took the time to provide feedback on the document.

Question	Response	Feedback Comment
What is your view of the structure of the document?	The structure of the document is well laid out and easy to follow. However, only an English version has been prepared and circulated. In accordance with the Council's Bilingual Policy a document of this nature should be produced in both Gaelic and English if "Gaelic and English is to have equal validity as the language of communication	The final version will be bilingual, as is the Bilingual Policy document
What is your view of the level of detail contained in the document?	The document provides detailed statements on the current position and aspirations on how these aims <u>should</u> be delivered. It does not, however, provide any detailed information on how these statements are to be implemented to fulfil the aims of the Comhairle's Bilingual Policy. We feel there should be an additional section or column stating the steps to be taken to implement the statement with clear allocation of responsibilities for each step.	This comment is noted. However, it is felt that the "delivery" section provides an appropriate level of detail for this document. It should be noted that the implementation guidelines document is supplemented by curriculum guidelines in schools, which provide a significant level of detail.
Do you have any comment to make on pre-school education?	Although the document states that "all children in the Western Isles can access Gaelic pre-school provision" there is evidence to indicate that communities continue to face difficulties in securing or maintaining pre-school provision.	The fact that there may be difficulties from time to time which are addressed as they occur does not negate the overall statement.

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Do you have any comment to make on primary education?	The policy, as outlined, is admirable. However, as part of the monitoring exercise there needs to be some mechanism put in place to ensure that the specific aim of the Comhairle on transfer from primary to secondary is in fact being achieved. How do the Comhairle intend to achieve this aim? When will you be able to produce a timetable/targets for the “phased introduction”. Also to what extent is additional support for learning currently available and are efforts being made to recruit more Gaelic speaking staff in order to increase provision? It is essential that Gaelic Medium Education support has at least the same level of support as English Medium Education	<p>There is a timetable for the incremental introduction of English in the section on staffing.</p> <p>It will be appreciated that the move to the Comhairle’s policy aspiration requires a lot of work before a firm timetable can be produced. This work is in progress.</p> <p>The majority of support for learning staff are Gaelic speakers. Arrangements are put in place to cover situations where this is not the case.</p>
Do you have any comment to make on secondary education?	It is not very clear what is meant by a “bilingual curriculum in at least 2 subjects”. There is confusion and uncertainty amongst parents as to what the situation is at secondary level with Gaelic as a subject and other subjects which can be taught through the medium of Gaelic. There is a need for a simple leaflet explaining the situation for parents and pupils, similar to the leaflet produced recently by the Comhairle for pre-school education. Should the Comhairle not be aiming at providing a full Gaelic Medium curriculum at Secondary and certainly more than 2 subjects? This is apparently a lower aspiration than the current policy adopted by The Highland Council.	<p>A bilingual curriculum means that courses are delivered in Gaelic and English, in a minimum of two subjects.</p> <p>Gaelic as a subject is studied by all pupils in S1-2 of secondary schools, as has been the case since the inception of Comhairle nan Eilean. Leaflets are available for primary and secondary as well as for pre-school.</p> <p>The assistance of Gaelic agencies in working with the Comhairle in persuading parents of the benefits of continuing with Gaelic medium education in secondary would be welcome. Two subjects is a minimum level of provision, suggested in the context of the realities of staffing.</p>

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Do you have any comment to make on the section on staff?	Given the extra demands on Gaelic Medium Teachers e.g. as a result of the lack of appropriate teaching aids and materials, the Comhairle should be looking at a lower pupil/staff ratio for Gaelic Medium Education. Again there is a need to specify what measures the Comhairle are taking to “encourage staff who are not bilingual to learn Gaelic and be given the opportunity to do so”.	The Comhairle probably has the most favourable pupil/staff ratio in the whole of Scotland. There is a programme in place – Gaelic Language in the Primary School – which assists teaching staff to acquire Gaelic. This is referred to in the guidelines in the section on staff.
Do you have any comment to make on the section on school ethos?	There is nothing wrong with the statements on aims and delivery in this Section and if they were fully implemented the Western Isles would have a strong bilingual school ethos. However, as mentioned earlier, there needs to be some mechanism introduced to ensure that staff use Gaelic throughout the school day as appropriate; that school newsletters are bilingual and that school notices are bilingual. A designated Officer, at senior level, within the Department should be allocated the responsibility for advising schools and monitoring the implementation of the Policy.	The whole purpose of including these elements in the guidelines is to reinforce the responsibilities of staff. Implementation of this and all elements will be carried out in the context of the authority quality improvement procedures.
Do you have any comment to make on the section on inter-agency working?	Apart from querying if the word “local” should precede “national” in the second sentence of the first box on this page as one of the agencies involved in a number of joint projects with the Comhairle we are perfectly happy with the stated aims and on their practical implementation.	This is accepted, but is a direct quote from the new Gaelic Policy of the Comhairle.

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Do you have any comment to make on the section on language reinforcement and enhancement?	We feel that the role of the Community Education (or CLD) staff in promoting the language and culture outwith the school should be taken into account under this Section.	This is catered for in the section referring to other Comhairle departments.
Any additional comments.	Would welcome a more robust statement and commitment to the promotion of Gaelic Medium Education at all stages including a clear statement on the distinction between the Comhairle's Gaelic schools, Gaelic Units and bilingual schools.	Promotion is included in various sections of the implementation guidelines, including the place of inter-agency working in this element. It is disappointing that it is felt that the Comhairle is not committed to promotion, as much work is done by officers in this regard. The document emphasises the key role of schools in promotion. It should be noted that the guidelines make deliberate use of the terms Gaelic-medium and English medium, which are the only two terms that apply to the operational situation in schools.