



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

SPCB LANGUAGE POLICY INTRODUCTION

The Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body (SPCB) is committed to ensuring that all people in Scotland have an equal opportunity to participate in and engage with the parliamentary process. The SPCB Language Policy reflects its responsibilities and commitments under current legislation and has been developed to support parliamentary business and help promote parliamentary participation and engagement among those resident in Scotland who are not fluent in English.

The Language Policy supports the Parliament's founding principles of openness and accessibility and reflects the changing landscape of Scotland's communities and the linguistic diversity that exists within them.

The SPCB's Gaelic Language Plan 2008-2013, required under The Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005, seeks to give effect to the principle that the Gaelic and English languages should be accorded equal respect. The SPCB, for historical and cultural reasons, also recognises the use of Scots.

The SPCB recognises its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA), as amended by the Disability Discrimination Act 2005, to promote equality of opportunity for disabled people. As part of its duties under the DDA, the SPCB must make reasonable adjustments for disabled people in order to ensure that they are not in any way treated less favourably for a reason related to their disability. An example of a reasonable adjustment that the SPCB has made is the provision of British Sign Language (BSL) services in the Parliament, to remove barriers for Deaf people in communicating with the Parliament. BSL is an officially recognised language and for the purposes of this policy should be considered as a language in its own right.

The SPCB also recognises its duties under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 to promote equality of opportunity and good race relations between different racial groups. It therefore assists people resident in Scotland but not fluent in English to engage with the Parliament.

This policy is written primarily for MSPs, their staff and SPCB staff and the following sections set out the SPCB's approach to language issues from both a business and engagement perspective. Guidance for the public, setting out what the SPCB will provide, is available in a separate document posted on the language pages of the Parliament website. While this policy focuses on engagement with people resident in Scotland it does not preclude communication with individuals or organisations outwith Scotland which may also require translation or interpreting.

Throughout this language policy, translation and interpreting are described as being 'subject to availability' and it is stated that as much notice as possible is required. Experience has shown that a minimum of two weeks' notice is required to obtain the services of interpreters, as the Parliament has to hire them from external agencies.

PART 1: PARLIAMENTARY BUSINESS

General

1. The working language of the Parliament is English.
2. The Parliament legislates in English only. Therefore, all bills, delegated legislation and their accompanying documents must be in English. When an MSP or a committee wishes the SPCB to produce a translation of a bill and/or its accompanying documents they must seek the prior approval of the SPCB.
3. With the prior agreement of the Presiding Officer, MSPs may use any language in parliamentary debates. In committee meetings, the prior agreement of the convener should be sought. Wherever possible, at least two weeks' notice should be given to allow the SPCB to arrange for appropriate interpreting services, if required.
4. With the prior agreement of the Presiding Officer, any person officially invited to address the Parliament may do so in any language. Wherever possible, at least two weeks' notice should be given to allow the SPCB to arrange for appropriate interpreting services, if required.
5. MSPs and others may, within the course of a speech, say a few words, such as a prayer, proverb, saying or phrase, in any language. In these instances an interpreter would not be necessary, on the understanding that the speaker provides an English translation immediately afterwards, as and when required. As a matter of courtesy, it is expected that the speaker will indicate to the Presiding Officer or convener beforehand their wish to do this.

6. Motions, amendments to motions and questions must be in English, but may be accompanied by a translation in another language provided by the MSP. When such a translation is provided, the SPCB will arrange for it to be published in the *Business Bulletin* along with the English text of the motion, amendment or question.

7. When a committee produces a report and considers that there are good reasons for it to be sent for translation in order to print and publish it in a language other than English, the committee must seek the prior approval of the Clerk/Chief Executive for the required budget spend.

Petitions

8. A public petition may be submitted in any language. When a petition is submitted in a language other than English, the SPCB will arrange for it to be translated into English, so that it may be considered by the Public Petitions Committee and others to whom the committee refers the petition.

Committee Witnesses

9. With the prior approval of the committee convener, witnesses may give evidence to a committee in any language. Wherever possible, at least two weeks' notice should be given to the committee convener/committee clerk to allow the SPCB to arrange for appropriate interpreting services, if required.

10. When written evidence is submitted that the committee considers requires to be translated, the SPCB will arrange this.

Official Report

11. When Gaelic is used in meetings of the Parliament and committee meetings, the *Official Report* incorporates the Gaelic text before the report of the English interpretation.

12. When Scots is used in meetings of the Parliament and committee meetings, the *Official Report* incorporates that language in the body of the text.

13. When BSL, or another sign language, is used in meetings of the Parliament and committee meetings, the *Official Report* will include only the English interpretation. Where possible the sign language interpreter will be filmed, to enable a record of the original language used to be made.

14. In the case of all other languages, the *Official Report* will normally publish the report of the English interpretation only, with a note to indicate that the text is not in the original language used. The SPCB will offer a witness who uses any other

language a translation of the *Official Report* of the meeting or item concerned into the language they used, if required.

PART 2: ACCESS AND INFORMATION

15. Information is made available by the SPCB to facilitate access and improve public understanding of the business, membership and procedures of the Parliament. The SPCB is committed to ensuring that people resident in Scotland who are not fluent in English are able to engage with the work of the Parliament. Full details of the service that the public can expect are published on our website.

Gaelic

16. There is a legal requirement for the SPCB to make and develop provision in Gaelic. The SPCB's Gaelic Language Plan 2008-2013 details current services and planned service developments for the use of Gaelic in the Parliament, particularly for public access and information. More information is available at <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/vli/language/gaelic/gaelicplan.htm>

Finding out about the Parliament

17. The SPCB publishes information in different languages to facilitate the engagement of people who live in Scotland with their Parliament. Languages selected for translation are reviewed on a regular basis and are updated to reflect population trends and perceived need. There is flexibility to produce translations in any language for residents of Scotland in response to demand or need, where it is reasonable and required for engagement purposes. Translations can be made available on the website and/or in other accessible formats as appropriate.

18. Although not the main focus of this policy, the SPCB also publishes some information about the Parliament for visitors from other countries who are not fluent in English. These languages are also reviewed on a regular basis and updated to reflect visitor trends and uptake. For practical resource reasons, the SPCB does not arrange translations for visitors from other countries beyond the core leaflets provided for them.

Engaging with the Parliament

19. People living in Scotland who are not fluent in English but wish to engage with the work of the Parliament can seek the assistance of the SPCB for an interpreter to enable them to do so. The work of the Parliament in this context covers business in the Chamber, the work of committees – including participation in events and fact-finding visits – and public consultations conducted by or on behalf of the SPCB. It also covers the work undertaken by the Parliament's

Education and Community Partnerships team. The SPCB will endeavour to provide an interpreting service subject to availability.

20. Entry to the Parliament is free and, subject to parliamentary business, there is free access for all to the public areas and the exhibition. Optional guided tours of the building are conducted by professional tour guides in English. Hand-held audio guides with commentaries in over ten different languages are available free of charge to enable non English speakers to follow the tour.

Official Delegations

21. The SPCB is unable to provide translators or interpreters for official delegations to the Parliament. Delegations are welcome to bring their own interpreters and may be able to make use of the Parliament's technical facilities for simultaneous interpreting. Such requirements should be discussed at an early date and as much advance notice given as possible. Delegations are also expected to organise and resource their own sign language interpretation.

Events

22. A range of different types of events are held at the Parliament. Some events are sponsored wholly by the SPCB, some are in partnership between the SPCB and a third party and a significant number are sponsored by individual MSPs.

23. In the case of SPCB sponsored events, the SPCB will take responsibility for the provision of interpreting and/or translation as and when required.

24. In the case of SPCB partnership events, the provision of interpreting and/or translation requirements will be agreed with third parties as required.

25. In the case of MSP sponsored events, the provision of interpreting and/or translation will normally fall to the third party host organisation (including Cross-Party Groups), unless otherwise agreed by the SPCB, the MSP and the third party host organisation.

Contacting the Parliament

26. The Parliament welcomes written correspondence in any language. When the Parliament has to translate correspondence, it may take staff longer to respond than at other times. Translation of correspondence in languages other than English can usually be arranged within five working days.

27. The Parliament accepts telephone calls, textphone and text messages in English and Gaelic. Calls using the RNID Typetalk service are also welcome.

28. If film or video footage in BSL is received, the Parliament will respond in BSL, although it will take staff longer to respond than at other times. A BSL filmed response can take up to 20 working days.

Supporting MSPs

29. The SPCB provides MSPs with resources to enable them to carry out their duties as constituency or regional MSPs. MSPs can claim reimbursement under the Reimbursement of Members' Expenses Scheme when translation or interpreting services are used (eg. for correspondence or interviews), or if they need to book the services of a sign language interpreter (or other services to facilitate equal access for disabled people, such as lip speakers or the production of information in Braille or on audio tape). This ensures that no constituent is disadvantaged by not being able to communicate with their MSP without the assistance of an interpreter.

Monitoring language use

30. When interpreters are employed to enable languages other than English to be used in the Chamber and in committee, this will be monitored and a report sent to the Equalities Team at the end of the financial year.

31. New requests and take-up rates of information produced in different languages will be monitored and a report sent to the Equalities Team at the end of the financial year.

This language policy document was revised in 2008 following research and consultation with stakeholders. It replaces the previous policy which was agreed by the SPCB in November 2004. Any comments or queries on this policy should be made to the Head of Public Affairs.

(Revised September 2009)