



SPCB LANGUAGE POLICY

INTRODUCTION

This policy is the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body's (SPCB) response to the linguistic diversity that exists within Scotland. The policy:

- provides a framework for the work carried out in Gaelic by the Parliament to provide information and enable people to participate in the work of the Parliament in this language,
- is designed to break down the language barriers that might prevent people who live in Scotland but who are not fluent in English from participating in the work of the Parliament or finding out more about how the Parliament works,
- explains the steps the SPCB has taken to provide information about the Parliament and how it works for visitors to Scotland who are not fluent in English, and
- complements the information on the use of languages set out in the Parliament's Standing Orders.

The SPCB's view is that there are strong historical and cultural reasons for the Parliament to carry out work in Gaelic, as well as encouraging the use of Scots, and that there are strong access reasons for carrying out work in other languages, including sign language.

Comments on this policy should be sent to the Head of Public Affairs.

PART 1: PARLIAMENTARY BUSINESS

PARLIAMENTARY BUSINESS – Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs)

1. The normal 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 they are introducing, 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. When MSPs use a language other than English or Scots, the SPCB will arrange interpretation.
4. With the prior agreement of the Presiding Officer, any person officially invited to address the Parliament may do so in any language. When they use a language other than English or Scots, the SPCB will arrange interpretation.
5. 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.
6. When the adoption of English as the normal working language of the Parliament compromises an MSP's ability to participate in the proceedings of the Parliament, the SPCB will take steps to provide appropriate communication support.
7. When a committee produces a report and considers that there are good reasons for it to be published in a language other than English, the committee must seek the prior approval of the SPCB.

PARLIAMENTARY BUSINESS – Witnesses

8. Witnesses may give evidence to a committee in any language. Witnesses who wish to use a language other than English or Scots must provide as much notice as possible to allow the SPCB to arrange interpreting services, subject to availability. Witnesses should notify the clerk to the relevant committee.
9. When a witness uses a language other than English, Gaelic or Scots, the SPCB will offer them a translation of the *Official Report* of the meeting or item concerned into the language they used. When a witness uses British Sign Language (BSL) or another sign language, individual arrangements will be made.

PARLIAMENTARY BUSINESS – How it is reported

10. 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.
11. When Scots is used in meetings of the Parliament and committee meetings, the *Official Report* incorporates that language in the body of the text.
12. 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. A note in the *Official Report* will also indicate that the text is not in the original language used. Where possible, such business will also be filmed to enable a record of the original language used to be made.

13. When a language other than English, Scots, Gaelic or a sign language is used, 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.

PARLIAMENTARY BUSINESS – Petitions

14. 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.
15. The SPCB publishes information on how to submit a petition in Arabic, Bengali, Chinese (traditional), English, Gaelic, Punjabi and Urdu.

PART 2: PUBLIC ACCESS AND INFORMATION

PUBLIC ACCESS AND INFORMATION - *Finding out about the Parliament*

16. The SPCB has appointed two officials who are responsible for building links between the Parliament and Gaelic speakers. They provide a range of services in and about Gaelic, to MSPs, SPCB staff and to the general public. For further details please see *Gaelic in the Scottish Parliament*.
17. The SPCB publishes printed information about the Parliament in the following languages: Arabic, Bengali, Chinese (traditional), English, Gaelic, Punjabi, Scots and Urdu. These are also available on the website. The Parliament produces information on video in British Sign Language. Such videos can be requested from the Parliament's Public Information Service or viewed on the Parliament's website.
18. The SPCB also publishes information about the Parliament in French, German, Italian, Russian and Spanish for visitors who are not fluent in English, and these languages are included on the website.
19. For the benefit of members of the Network of Regional Parliamentary European Committees, we include information in Catalan on our website.

PUBLIC ACCESS AND INFORMATION – *Visiting the Parliament*

20. If a member of the public intends to visit the Parliament and requires an interpreter to follow a parliamentary debate or Committee meeting, the SPCB endeavours to provide an interpreting service for that person, subject to availability. Anyone who requires this service should contact the Parliament's Public Information Service, providing as much notice of their visit as possible, as interpreting services can be difficult to source.
21. With the exception of BSL, the SPCB does not normally provide interpreting services for visitors in other situations. However, official delegations to the Parliament are welcome to bring interpreters and may be able to make use of

the Parliament's technical facilities for simultaneous interpretation. Again, such delegations should provide as much advance notice of this requirement as possible.

22. The signage in the Scottish Parliament building uses symbols and numbers to assist speakers of all languages. The signs in the public areas are also in Gaelic.
23. The SPCB offers official guided tours of the Scottish Parliament building in a range of languages. Please contact the Parliament's Public Information Service for further details.

PUBLIC ACCESS AND INFORMATION – Writing to the Parliament

24. 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.
25. When it is appropriate for the Parliament to respond to a particular piece of correspondence, we will normally respond in the language used by the correspondent.
26. In rare cases, responding in the language of the original correspondence may create an unjustifiable demand on the SPCB's resources - for example, in cases where we receive persistent correspondence from one individual. Different arrangements may therefore be made in such circumstances.

PUBLIC ACCESS AND INFORMATION – Contacting MSPs

27. The SPCB provides MSPs with allowances to enable them to carry out their parliamentary duties. When they need translation or interpretation services (e.g. for correspondence or interviews), costs are met from the Members' Support Allowance.
28. In addition, when MSPs 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 or information in Braille or on audio tape) the costs of these services can be met from the Disability Allowance. Details of Members' allowances are available on our website.

This policy was agreed by the SPCB in November 2004.