

PE1483/B

Strategy and Constitution Directorate

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**The Scottish
Government**
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

Andrew Howlett

Public Petitions Committee

T3.40

Scottish Parliament

Edinburgh

EH99 1SP



LEGACY 2014
XX COMMONWEALTH GAMES
SCOTLAND

22 October 2013

Dear Andrew,

Consideration of Petition PE1483

Thank you for your letter of 23 September inviting the Scottish Government to provide a response setting out its views on the above petition.

The Scottish Government's priority for the referendum is that all those who are eligible to vote in the referendum should be able to do so. It is important that the vote is seen to be run fairly and this means running it in a manner that is familiar to voters and to those organising the local polls. It is for this reason that the Scottish Independence Referendum Bill replicates the standard arrangements in place at elections and referendums in Scotland and the UK.

The ballot paper, therefore, will be provided in English only, but counting officers may choose to display a translation of the ballot paper at polling stations if they consider this appropriate. The Electoral Commission, which will be responsible for ensuring that voters know how to register and how to vote in the referendum, is expected to produce information in Gaelic and also in other languages and formats. Voter information will also be available in other languages on request. This is standard practice for all elections.

This approach was supported by respondents to *Your Scotland, Your Referendum*, the public consultation undertaken between January and May 2012 which received over 26,000 responses. I would draw your attention to paragraph 4.14 of *Your Scotland, Your Referendum: An Analysis of Consultation Responses*, which indicates that only a very small proportion of respondents suggested changes to the proposed ballot paper, such as providing it in Gaelic. In addition, paragraph 5.10 states that 'Respondents... suggested that it would be simplest and fairest to keep the same arrangements that are used for other major votes.'

The Scottish Government recognises that the issue is not about Gaelic speakers' understanding of English and remains committed to promoting the use of Gaelic. This commitment can be seen across many sectors.

In Education for example, Gaelic continues to grow from early years education to teacher training. Through our Specific Grant for Gaelic Education and the Schools Capital Fund we continue to offer strong financial support for Gaelic. This funding has recently resulted in additional support and resources for existing Gaelic schools and units and has been crucial for establishing standalone schools in both Edinburgh and Glasgow.

With continued Scottish Government support for MG ALBA, BBC ALBA has continued to flourish and is now available on Freeview. The BBC's new website Learngaelic.net, which received support from the Scottish Government, has also proved to be extremely successful.

As their main funder, we work closely with Bòrd na Gàidhlig to ensure Ministerial objectives for Gaelic are being met throughout the country. This involves working closely with public authorities as they prepare Gaelic Language Plans and working closely with Gaelic organisations in promoting Gaelic in throughout Education, Arts, Heritage and Media.

The final decision on how the referendum should be run will be for the Scottish Parliament to make once MSPs have completed their scrutiny of the Bill. MSPs recently voted unanimously to support the general principles of the Bill during the Stage 1 debate on 12 September 2013, and stage 2 proceedings were completed on 10 October. Parliament's final consideration of the Bill is expected to take place during the week beginning 11 November.

Yours sincerely

Louise Unwin
Elections and Referendum Team
Scottish Government