

Convention of the Highlands and Islands 26 October 2020

(Paper 7)

GAELIC AS AN ECONOMIC ASSET

1. Aim

This paper, and the accompanying visuals, present a summary of the successes, opportunities and challenges for Gaelic as an integral part of the Scottish economy. It aims to encourage even greater collaboration and partnership within and between bodies already engaged in Gaelic development.

2. Background:

At the Convention of the Highlands and Islands meeting in October 2019, Gaelic language and culture was highlighted as a transformational opportunity for the Highlands and Islands.

A healthy community of speakers in the traditional Gaelic speaking communities is essential in underpinning growth of the language. Its place in island and rural communities will be the focus of further discussions at CoHI in March 2021.

3. Context

The focus of this short paper, which has been developed by broad partnership¹, is the economic importance of Gaelic language and culture to Scotland. This has been the subject of research for a number of years² and in light of COVID-19, Gaelic's importance could be argued to be even greater in growing economic, cultural and social resilience.

The National Gaelic Language Plan 2018-23 is the overarching plan for support and developing Gaelic language and culture. Its aim is that Gaelic is used more often, by more people and in a wider range of situations.

It recognises the opportunities and challenges for Gaelic as well as setting out ambitions for a faster rate of growth. The recently published Highlands & Islands Skills Investment Plan 2019 reiterates these messages and explains how Gaelic employment and employment with Gaelic is an important part of the Scottish economy and the challenges and opportunities these present.

The new cultural strategy for Scotland³ sets out its vision as:

¹ xxx

² Ranging from Chalmers, D. and Sproull, A (1998) The Demand for Gaelic Artistic and Cultural Products and Services to Economic and Social Value of Gaelic as an Asset (Final Report May 2014)

³ A Culture Strategy for Scotland, Scottish Government, February 2020

Convention of the Highlands and Islands 26 October 2020

(Paper 7)

Scotland is a place where culture is valued, protected and nurtured. Culture is woven through everyday life, shapes and is shaped by society, and its transformative potential is experienced by everyone. Scotland's rich cultural heritage and creativity of today is inspired by people and place, enlivens every community and is celebrated around the world

The National Islands Plan⁴ recognises the importance of the Gaelic language to many island communities, and the importance of the Gaelic speaking island communities to the survival and sustainability of Gaelic in Scotland. The Plan includes commitments throughout to supporting individuals, communities and organisations in Gaelic speaking island communities in their use of Gaelic.

Since the 1970s and 80s in particular, there has been a growth in structures and support designed to reinvigorate Gaelic, such as Gaelic media and Gaelic medium education (GME) and to enable growth in the numbers of Gaelic speakers and the contexts in which it can be learnt and used. There is, however, still much to be done.

4. Statistics

Baseline Figures

- **Census 2011**
 - **87,100** people in Scotland had **Gaelic skills**, of which **57,600** were **Gaelic speakers**

Headline Figures

- [Scots Gaelic on Duolingo](#)
 - **479,000 learners** registered within 10 months of its launch on Duolingo
- [LearnGaelic.scot](#) (the online resource for Gaelic learning) – statistics for September 2020
 - **Unique visitors: 50,025**
 - Number of visits: 113,314
 - Pageviews: 262,562
- **MG ALBA International Co-productions to the value of £8 million in past four years⁵**
 - China – An Là/ The Tide estimated potential viewing figures of 50 million
 - Canada – upcoming series “Secrets in the Peat
 - South Korea – upcoming series “Rain Stories”

⁴ The National Islands Plan, Scottish Government, 2020

⁵ <http://www.mgalba.com/news/2020/8million-25-02-20.html?lang=en>

Convention of the Highlands and Islands 26 October 2020

(Paper 7)

- **VisitScotland video – [Scottish Gaelic Explained](#)**
 - **c350,000 views** (average view for VS videos c5k views)
 - **VisitScotland Website viewing stats for Gaelic content**
 - Users, new users, and sessions all increased by c. 150% from 2017 to 2018
 - 4 out of 5 visitors who viewed Gaelic content were from outwith the UK
 - Viewers were younger than average – 43% under age of 35
- **E-sgoil**
 - Teaching to/from c. 60 locations in Scotland
 - Gaelic (learners) and Gàidhlig available nationally at Nat 5 and Higher, as well as GM Biology, History and Modern Studies
 - Delivering Gaelic for adult fluent speakers and learners
 - Delivering music tuition for schools across Western Isles

5. Successes

Through valuing, promoting, utilising and exploring the Gaelic language and culture, Scotland can utilise its Gaelic asset to:

Innovate – Developments such as e-sgoil – the Comhairle nan Eilean Siar initiative which was set up to enable Comhairle nan Eilean Siar to deliver equity for pupils in the islands – has led to pupils across Scotland accessing Gaelic learning and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar delivering learning nationally in the UK and internationally.

Engage young people – FilmG, the MG ALBA project to encourage young people to create Gaelic short films, attracts an increasing number of participants at primary, secondary, student and adult levels.

Increase educational attainment and participation - Bilingualism has been demonstrated to increase attainment and enables children to understand how language works and can make it easier to learn other languages. Those in Gaelic medium education (GME) perform on a par or outperform those educated in one language in all subjects, including English.

Support youth employment – parallel to economic growth is the creation of increased opportunities to find employment or create enterprises. This is supported by the collaboration between the Comhairle, MG ALBA, Skills Development Scotland and HIE to provide Gaelic medium apprenticeships in sectors where there is potential for growth, as well as ensuring that Gaelic language is a component for Modern Apprenticeships which are delivered in English-medium.

Convention of the Highlands and Islands 26 October 2020

(Paper 7)

SDS, HIE, CnES, ESgoil and BnG are actively engaged on the Gaelic in the workplace initiative to encourage key Western Isles', Argyll and Bute, and Highland sectors to take on young Gaelic speakers via apprenticeships. These would be employers e.g. construction, aquaculture, hospitality, media, where Gaelic language is used extensively on a daily basis and would encourage speakers to stay, train and work locally. A high level proposal being drawn together with above partners and we are actively seeking to put in some staff resource to multi-agency team to market and promote.

Contribute to wellbeing – Bilingualism has been demonstrated to have positive effects in the context of dementia, the second highest cause of death in Scotland in 2018⁶. Research from countries such as India has shown that people who speak more than one language tend to develop dementia four to five years later. These findings are in line with many other studies, suggesting a milder age-related decline in cognitive ability and a better recovery of brain function after stroke in those who are bilingual.

Gaelic is also an important context which brings people together, reducing isolation and strengthening inter-generational bonds. This has been demonstrated repeatedly since March this year, when many community organisations and others moved their Gaelic events, particularly ceilidhs and concerts, online, providing a sense of community and cohesion at a time of social distancing.

Support economic growth – A number of studies have demonstrated this. In 2014, Highlands & Islands Enterprise led on a study on the economic impact of Gaelic in the private sector; the report quantified that the combined impact on turnover currently attributed to the use of Gaelic, totals £5.6m and has the potential to generate up to £147m. The key sectors are tourism, food and drink, heritage, and creative industries.

MG ALBA's economic impact assessment found that the total impact of MG ALBA was 290 FTE jobs, and GVA of £12.5m (Matthew, 2015). Of this, around 100 jobs are based in the Outer Hebrides and Skye, with wages above average for the area. Recent analysis has shown that its international content is valued at £8 million over past four years (25/02/20).

Develop quality infrastructure – Gaelic is integral to a programme of community-led investments creating high-quality buildings and resources, primarily in the islands with an increasing footprint in cities. These enable activities, support community confidence, create employment and serve as models for partnership. These can be development partnerships – eg Lews Castle College and Ceòlas creating a £10m

⁶ <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data/statistics/scotlands-facts/leading-causes-of-death-in-scotland>

Convention of the Highlands and Islands 26 October 2020

(Paper 7)

centre for traditional music, heritage and learning in South Uist to funding partnerships between Scottish Government, National Lottery, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Highlands & Islands Enterprise as well as the third and commercial sector. The consultation on the Draft Infrastructure Investment Plan 2021-26 offers a further opportunity to ensure that Gaelic is intergrated into infrastructural developments.

Strengthen identity - Gaelic song and music is recognised throughout the world, adding to Scotland's reputation as a country with a rich and diverse heritage. The creative industries also demonstrate Gaelic's contribution to cultural and economic growth, with literature, publishing, drama, film, media, digital as well as music all creating Gaelic content.

Increase community confidence – There are many community-based enterprises which are based on language and culture, such as community historical societies which have purchased former school or other buildings and are renovating them to create community and tourist resources. Within the Western Isles, some 80% of the land in the Western Isles is under community ownership. This, allied to the higher levels of Gaelic speakers in those communities, offers an economic opportunity to retain and increase population levels in traditional Gaelic communities.

6. Challenges

- COVID-19

While the many partners involved in Gaelic development and education responded quickly and innovatively to the current situation, much more is required in order to ensure that language skills are maintained and increased. The impact of lockdown and further measures to combat the spread of the virus has and will have a significant impact on Gaelic education, in community and social activities which strengthen language use, and on the creative and tourism industries.

- Reduction in the working age population.

Demographic modelling shows us that retaining and attracting young people to rural and island communities is one of the major challenges facing us collectively. Tackling this issue is fundamental if we are to capitalise on Gaelic as an economic asset and ensuring that a vernacular community will be sustained for generations to come.

- Increasing the scale and skill of the Gaelic speaking workforce

Growth in numbers of pupils in GME is continuing which is welcome and necessary. The demand for Gaelic language skills allied with professional skills and knowledge also continues to grow and there is a gap between demand and supply. A number of approaches are required to scale up including strengthening confidence and skills in

Convention of the Highlands and Islands

26 October 2020

(Paper 7)

those who already speak Gaelic, increasing the routes to fluency for adult learners and ensuring those in GME or are in Gaelic-speaking homes have sufficient variety of opportunities to use the language regularly in a range of situations.

- Reduced funding due to EU-exit/public sector finances

Scottish Government recently consulted on the Replacement of EU Structural Funds in Scotland post EU-Exit. Organisations involved in Gaelic development have recognised for some time the direct and indirect impacts that EU-Exit would have in terms of local economy as well as the direct support that has been available for Gaelic language and culture developments. As one of the minority languages of the UK, with a small population of speakers, the challenge is to ensure that arguments are made and heard so as to achieve some recompense or replacement for funding which was integral to Gaelic's growth.

- Ensuring that the language and culture are re-invested in to ensure authenticity, sustainability and growth

The attractiveness of Gaelic language and culture is intrinsically linked with the sense of authenticity and a sense of place. Organisations which create economic opportunity and benefit from the language and culture will also need to re-invest in these to ensure their product is sustainable, ethical and attractive to the knowledgeable consumer. More widely and more importantly, other developments, whether infrastructure, economic or environmental, also need to ensure that account is taken of the impact, negative or positive, of the development on language and culture. That is a challenge for the public bodies who support development, whether linguistic, cultural, social, environmental or economic as well as the commercial and third sector.

7. Opportunities

Telling our Stories - In both the creative industries sector and in tourism, authentic, individual stories have significant power to attract and engage. In an increasingly globalised world and competitive marketplaces, the individual, the memorable and the unique offer experiences that stand out.

Particularly in tourism, Gaelic language and culture has been under-valued as part of the Scottish cultural offer. It has also been challenging to access even for those who were aware of it. However, [Gaelic Tourism Strategy For Scotland](#) and the framework it provides to various partners to showcase Gaelic is addressing this. Work being taken forward includes the [joint campaign](#) developed between VisitScotland, Bòrd na Gàidhlig and Calmac, as an example of the more localised activity that this can generate. This shows that Gaelic can be accessed by the entire tourism industry – for speakers and non-speakers alike – and from businesses offering Gaelic immersion experiences, to those providing information on the language, its culture and heritage, to those including some Gaelic in their brand as a USP, there are opportunities. An

Convention of the Highlands and Islands

26 October 2020

(Paper 7)

Outer Hebrides Tourism campaign has been delayed due to Covid, but it is hoped to launch later this year, generating interest for summer 2021.

People react positively to stories, and whether they are told digitally or in heritage-based businesses or hospitality, these can be used to create more 'products' and increased marketing to reach bigger and new audiences, as well as repeat buyers.

The statistics quoted for Duolingo and the video 'Scottish Gaelic Explained' all lead to more opportunities for people with Gaelic skills to generate an economic return from those skills, as individuals, communities and commercial enterprises.

Gaelic skills – Island communities in the Outer Hebrides, Highland and Argyll and Bute have higher percentages of Gaelic speakers than any where else in the world making them uniquely placed to benefit from Gaelic as an economic and social asset – domestically and internationally.

Changing attitudes – Younger people are becoming more positive about Gaelic. Bands such as Peat and Diesel, who are accessing Gaelic language training via e-sgoil so as to strengthen their own use of Gaelic in their music, are changing perceptions about Gaelic and increasing the attractiveness of the language and culture to a growing and different audience.

Gaelic medium education (GME) – With the commitment for 'Gaelic first' (ie GME is the default option for children being enrolled to start primary education in the Western Isles) there is an opportunity to increase the percentage of children becoming bilingual, thereby strengthening the language and increasing educational attainment.

Adult learners – The phenomenal demand for Scottish Gaelic Duolingo since its launch 10 months ago, as well as other learning routes, can create economic opportunities through demand for tutoring, the creation of social networks to use the language, new and additional adult learning resources as well as demand for further routes and courses.

Investment in the digital infrastructure – The Scottish Government's Digital Strategy offers opportunities to support Gaelic in particular economically, through skills and education. We want to ensure that the economic benefits are met through digital connectivity. COVID-19 has changed dramatically our dependence on digital connectivity. Rural and island communities are increasingly able to access high-speed broadband. The potential demand for Gaelic learning and access to the rich language traditions can be facilitated by the digital infrastructure connecting learners and the traditional Gaelic communities to the benefit of both parties and creating a greater Gaelic community. The other aspect of investment in the digital infrastructure is that

Convention of the Highlands and Islands 26 October 2020

(Paper 7)

it would address the desire amongst young people for good broadband and mobile connectivity as essential factors in enabling them to stay in the islands⁷.

Partnerships – The successes described at the start of this paper demonstrate how partnerships across sectors and geographies have delivered in many ways. There are opportunities to make existing partnerships more powerful and impactful and to create new partnerships. Far greater collaboration on Gaelic Language Plans are one route to building consensus and growth, creating greater efficiency and impact.

The building of new partnerships at community level will also be important. These may offer particular opportunities for the devolution of Gaelic language development policy into the actual community with the goal of enhancing inter-generational language transmission. The language also has a role to play in the development of community wealth and the integration of Gaelic language approaches into community wealth building initiatives in the Outer Hebrides may offer both community and economic benefits.

8. Conclusion

Gaelic is demonstrably an intrinsic part of Scottish economic life and of benefit to Scotland. The numbers involved in learning Gaelic through Duolingo demonstrates the demand that exists for the language and this can stimulate increased opportunities for economic growth. CoHI partners can ensure that this growth is realised by ensuring that in developing policy or implementing strategy that the question is asked: what does this mean for Gaelic? Partners can also ensure that Gaelic speakers – staff and the public - are actively encouraged to use Gaelic as much as possible.

In that way, we can ensure that that the essential conditions exist to support Gaelic usage and help it thrive, creating a virtual cycle of maintenance and growth. Increased partnerships and partnership working, combined with innovative approaches, are the challenge and focus for growth.

The Convention of Highlands and Islands is asked to note the activity already underway and to endorse the approach that the opportunities Gaelic brings and the opportunities to strengthen Gaelic are considered in developments progressed under CoHI's aegis.

⁷ Enabling the Next Generation – Outer Hebrides, Highlands & Islands Enterprise 2018

Convention of the Highlands and Islands 26 October 2020

(Paper 7)

Appendix

2011 Census data:

87,100 people aged 3 and over in Scotland (1.7% of the population) had some Gaelic language skills. This included 57,600 people who could speak Gaelic.

- The proportion of people aged 3 and over with some Gaelic language skills was highest in Eilean Siar (61%), Highland (7%) and Argyll & Bute (6%).
- The proportion of people who can speak Gaelic increased in younger age groups: from 0.53% to 0.70% for 3-4-year olds; from 0.91% to 1.13% for 5-11-year olds; and from 1.04% to 1.10% for 12-17-year olds.
- Of people who were Gaelic speakers, 40 per cent reported using Gaelic at home. This proportion was 74% in Eilean Siar, 41% in Highland, 33% in Argyll & Bute and 24% in the other 29 council areas combined.

Strategic Documents

- The National Plan for Scotland's Islands, Scottish Government
- Gaelic Tourism Strategy for Scotland 2018-23, VisitScotland
- Lèirsinn 2021, MG ALBA
- The Gaelic Language Labour Market – The Evidence, Skills Development Scotland 2018
- Ar Stòras Gàidhlig, Highlands & Islands Enterprise 2014
- Enabling the Next Generation, Highlands & Islands Enterprise 2018
- National Gaelic Language Plan 2018-23, Bòrd na Gàidhlig 2018