

Opportunities for post-COVID recovery - Sustaining and Strengthening Scotland's Indigenous Minority Languages and Cultures

The ask to the Convention of the Highlands and Islands is for Gaelic to be increasingly included in the work of all relevant authority and public body work-streams.

There is an excellent opportunity. The majority of local authorities, public bodies and health boards which belong to CoHI have Gaelic language plans (GLP). In addition to GLPs, there is the National Islands Plan, the Islands Deal, the National Gaelic Plan from which flows the Faster Rate of Progress initiative. These structures promote Gaelic in the work of public authorities, and have the potential to increase the rate of growth of Gaelic and deliver transformational change in many parts of the region. They are also critical to supporting and serving the substantial and excellent community-based developments which are in place.

Impact and Benefits

The benefits are clear.

Increased educational attainment – demonstrated by an increasing number of studies

Strengthening a sense of identity, authenticity and place nationally and internationally – the pandemic has seen growth in numbers participating in and the reach of Gaelic content.

Enrich cultural life – the benefits to arts, culture, tourism and heritage are clear and there is potential for this to increase

Social cohesion – particularly relevant during a global pandemic; online activity primarily for cultural events such as ceilidhs, concerts and discussions/seminars has been unprecedented

Economic contribution – evidenced by HIE, VisitScotland and others; and demonstrated by MG ALBA in its sales of existing productions, such as the continuing drama Bannan, and participation in international collaborations

Wellbeing and good health – from delaying the onset of dementia to providing cultural participation and a vast uptake of online learning, Gaelic language and culture has been to the fore

A model for local and regional sustainability - existing initiatives (in communities, private and public sectors) create bridges to other dialect/language/traditional communities within the CoHI region

Existing Infrastructures

No paper on Gaelic could neglect the outstanding contribution of community and voluntary activity which has sustained the language over many years. Below is a description of the key policies, initiatives and resources in place which support Gaelic throughout Scotland.

Learning (Gaelic medium education (GME) and Gaelic language) – statutory and non-statutory provision; face-to-face and online; with a range of responsibilities across Scottish Government, Education Scotland, SQA, Scottish Funding Council, Local Authorities, colleges and universities; also supported through communities with voluntary provision in early years; extra-curricular activity and adult language learning.

Language and Culture – at national policy level through Gaelic language plans with such bodies as Creative Scotland, Historic Environment Scotland, National Libraries of Scotland, National Museums of Scotland, and also through a range of community organisations working both nationally and locally.

Economy – at regional policy level through Gaelic language plans with such bodies as Highlands & Islands Enterprise, Scottish Enterprise, Skills Development Scotland, and VisitScotland. Also supported by individual businesses which use Gaelic either in their work environment and/or in their promotional and marketing materials.

Media - primarily through MG ALBA, BBC ALBA and BBC Radio nan Gàidheal; creating content, contributing to economic growth and international standing and reach. Harnessing the opportunities of digital media as a social, economic and language driver, through partnership initiatives such as FilmG, Learn Gaelic and the exciting SpeakGaelic which is due to launch in September.

Environment – at national policy level through Gaelic language plans with such bodies as NatureScot, Crofting Commission and Scottish Land Commission. Gaelic language and land are interlinked and interdependent in terms of landscape, usage and traditional culture.

Context

Increased support from the public sector is now required in order to ensure that communities are nurtured, strengthened and empowered to achieve their ambitions.

CoHI area contains approximately 50% of Gaelic speakers in Scotland and the only communities where Gaelic speakers are in the majority. It also contains other indigenous languages, dialects and cultures and this diversity offers opportunities for strengthening approaches and development.

The three types of Gaelic communities described in the current National Gaelic Language Plan are to be found in the CoHI area: island and rural areas where Gaelic is spoken by a large percentage of the population; urban areas where the number of

**CONVENTION OF THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS
15 MARCH 2021**

(Paper 7)

Gaelic speakers is growing; and many people who participate in the online Gaelic community.

During the autumn and winter, the Deputy First Minister and other politicians from across the political spectrum held a series of meetings to hear the voices of Gaelic speakers from island and rural communities along with public bodies that serve those communities. The clear message was, as the National Gaelic Plan states, a faster rate of progress for Gaelic is required.

That progress needs to be delivered for a range of communities – the traditional speaker communities, the growing communities in urban areas and the hugely important online community.

It is clear that Gaelic should be part of the CoHI agenda and the increased use of Gaelic supported by public levers and in public policies. Without a clear articulation of the needs and aspirations of the Gaelic speaking communities, the services provided to them are inevitably reduced and marginalised. Gaelic is in its current situation due to centuries of actions taken to minimise, displace or entirely remove it.

Gaelic language and culture provides opportunities for growth and development. To deliver that, public policies need to include indigenous languages and cultures in their development and implementation.

Background

This paper builds on the presentation to [CoHI in October 2020](#) when the potential of Gaelic language and culture as a transformational opportunity for the Highlands and Islands was detailed. In the intervening period, two key messages that were discussed then have become stronger and more urgent:

- the growing demand for Gaelic language and culture with educational, economic and social benefits; and
- the contribution language and culture makes to well-being, social cohesion and a sense of identity and confidence.

At the same time, the challenges have not receded. The fragility of the language was highlighted at the meeting convened by the Deputy First Minister on 17 December 2020. Many representatives of CoHI members were present then. Elsewhere in the agenda one of the key issues - retaining population in the fragile areas of islands and rural communities - is explored in detail.

Two other themes critical to language survival and growth are ensuring that an appropriately skilled workforce is available to take forward opportunities, re-building confidence in communities hit hard by the double impact of COVID and Brexit and delivering increased value for money in constrained public sector finances.

Conclusion

Members are invited to:

- 1) Discuss the opportunities Gaelic language and other indigenous cultures present for the Highlands and Islands in post-COVID recovery, and**
- 2) Agree and support the outline approach set out in the paper as the basis for a faster rate of growth.**

CONVENTION OF THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS 15 MARCH 2021

(Paper 7)

Appendix 1

Key aspects of existing provision which can be further developed and expanded:

Learning:

Early Learning and Childcare in Gaelic medium;
Primary and secondary Gaelic medium education (GME) and Gaelic in 1+2;
e-Sgoil provision of Gaelic and Gàidhlig learning;
Tertiary level provision (FE, HE and Research);
Education resources through Stòrlann, Giglets and others.

Significant developments include Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's policy of Gaelic First, making GME the default choice for pupils entering P1; Glasgow City Council has just announced the development of the 4th GME school in Glasgow; Scottish Gaelic on Duolingo has some 600k learners registered; and MG ALBA in partnership with SG, BnG, SMO and BBC, has just announced the development of a new national Gaelic learning programme to be broadcast and online from September this year.

Gaelic language and culture organisations:

There are a number of national and local organisations which exist to support access to, sustaining and growth of Gaelic language and culture. Examples include:

An Comunn Gàidhealach – hosting the Royal National Mòd annually and supporting local mòds for access to and provision of Gaelic language and culture;

Acair – publishing Gaelic and bilingual books and related material;

Ceòlas – delivering a renowned summer school and programme of events which celebrate, utilise and promote Gaelic, particularly in South Uist;

Comhairle nan Leabhraichean (Gaelic Books Council) – promoting and supporting Gaelic creative and factual writing and publishing for all ages;

Cnoc Soilleir – a multi-million pound development for Gaelic arts and culture in South Uist, a partnership between Ceòlas and Lews Castle College

Fèisean nan Gàidheal – providing access to and support for Gaelic culture through local community groups hosting teaching events for young people and adults, programmes of activities with schools and other youth work;

Ionad Chaluim Chille Ìle – the Gaelic language centre in Islay which provides language learning and a range of activities as well as a focus for Gaelic on the island

Community:

Gaelic Officers – working with a range of organisations from community land trusts to arts centres; as well as those providing activities to school pupils to increase language use and engagement

Heritage Forums – the Western Isles in particular has a strong network of community heritage forums which have Gaelic language and culture at the core of their operations

Arts Centres – a range of arts venues are engaging with Gaelic speakers and learners to a greater degree primarily through the employment of Gaelic officers to take forward different initiatives

Community land & Local Community Trusts – particularly in the west coast and islands, a range of community organisations are integrating Gaelic into the delivery of their aims and services.