

Institution: University of the Highlands and Islands		
Unit of Assessment: UoA 26 Modern Languages and Linguistics		
Title of case study: Addressing Gaelic linguistic fragility in the Gaelic-speaking communities of Scotland and Ireland		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2007–2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Gillian Munro Conchúr Ó Giollagáin Tim Armstrong Iain Mac an Tàilleir	Principal Gaelic Research Professor Senior lecturer Senior lecturer	2001–present 2014–present 2009–present 2004–2020
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2013–2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Gaelic, as a spoken community language in Ireland and Scotland, is in a critical condition. Our pan-Gaelic research has had a transformational impact on public and political attitudes regarding the importance of supporting traditional speech communities, and on identifying and influencing the strategies and interventions necessary to support them.</p> <p>The research has led to increased national awareness of linguistic, social and economic fragility in traditional Gaelic areas, and attendant calls for new interventions. Specific new measures introduced include a new Gaelic Medium Education primary education policy in the Western Isles of Scotland and new legislative instruments in Ireland. It has provoked a significant shift in public discourse regarding Gaelic development, and has stimulated an expansion of community-based grassroots initiatives.</p>		

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

The research underpinning this case study was published by teams of scholars in Scotland and Ireland. Taken together, their work formed the first pan-Gaelic, modern sociolinguistic research initiative investigating language ability, use and attitudes in traditionally Gaelic-speaking communities. Most of the research also reflected on the role of the state and governmental bodies in initiating and supporting Gaelic development.

The researchers' work focused on four related areas relevant to this impact case study. The first looked at Gaelic language abilities, and cross-referenced these to age, family language background, gender and other factors: examples of this work are *Barail agus Comas Cànan* [3.1], *Nuashonrú ar an Staidéar Cuimsitheach Teangeolaíoch ar Úsáid na Gaeilge sa Ghaeltacht: 2006–2011* [An Update of the Comprehensive Linguistic Study of the Use of Irish in the Gaeltacht: 2006–2011] [3.2], *Comas is Cleachdadh Cànan* [3.4], and *The Gaelic Crisis in the Vernacular Community* [3.5]. The second area was language use within the family, community and in wider social and economic contexts. Like language ability, this was explored in relation to different socio-economic factors [3.1- 3.5]. The third area the research focused on was language attitudes – correlated with the above factors – exemplified in 3.1., 3.2., 3.4. and 3.5. Finally, the roles and actions of government and development bodies in supporting the languages were investigated in particular by Ó Giollagáin and colleagues in 3.2., 3.3. and 3.5.

Specific research findings:

The research has produced four sets of findings which have had significant impacts during the current REF period:

1. Gaelic language abilities: a focus on significant variables influencing linguistic ability, highlighting, in particular, historical, social and economic variables that have led to significant decline in Gaelic abilities and community use [3.1-3.5];
2. Gaelic usage: drawing attention to personal, family, community factors and variables that lead to strong Gaelic usage patterns and, more frequently, rapidly declining language use particularly among those under 50 [3.1-3.5];
3. Gaelic attitudes: the research demonstrated very high levels of community support for Gaelic, with positive messages about the languages' intrinsic value to community life, children in the future, and local and island identity, as well as wide support for Gaelic language policy [3.1-3.5];
4. Community and policy interventions: the research in Ireland and Scotland draws attention to the critically endangered status of the languages in their traditional areas, and the research has brought about step changes, both in Scotland and Ireland, in understanding the languages' situations. It examines public policy and its effectiveness in stemming the language decline. It also proposes new models to support the revival of Gaelic in its communities, advocating for community and wider public discussion of the situation, and discussion of support measures to regenerate Gaelic in its community settings [3.1, 3.2, 3.5].

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

3.1 Munro, G. Armstrong, T.C. and Mac an Tàilleir, I.S. (2010) *Barail agus Comas Cànan: Aithisg Rannsachaidh airson Bòrd na Gàidhlig* [Bòrd na Gàidhlig research commission £40,000] <https://www.gaidhlig.scot/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Rothach-et-al.-2010-Barail-comas-CR09-02-Attitude-ability.pdf>

3.2 Ó Giollagáin, C. agus Charlton, M. (2015) *Nuashonrú ar an Staidéar Cuimsitheach Teangeolaíoch ar Úsáid na Gaeilge sa Ghaeltacht: 2006–2011* [An Update of the

Comprehensive Linguistic Study of the Use of Irish in the Gaeltacht: 2006–2011]. Na Forbacha, Co. Galway: Údarás na Gaeltachta. [Údarás na Gaeltachta research commission €24,200, commenced in NUI Galway but substantially conducted in UHI, as follow-on research from the original 2007 study]

https://www.udas.ie/assets/uploads/2020/11/002910_Udaras_Nuashonrui%20%81_FULL_report_A4_FA.pdf.

3.3 Ó Giollagáin C. and Ó Curnáin, B (2016) *Beartas Úr na nGael: Dálaí na Gaeilge san Iar-Nua-Aoiseachas* [A New Deal for the Gaels: Irish in Postmodernity]. Indreabhán, Co. Galway: Leabhar Breac. ISBN: 9781911363002

3.4 Rothach (Munro), G., Mac an Tàilleir, I. and Dòmhnallach. B. (2016) *Comas is Cleachdadh Cànan sa Choimhearsnachd, agus an Cunntas-Sluaigh 2011*. Inverness: Bòrd na Gàidhlig. [research report for Bòrd na Gàidhlig published on-line in 2019: www.gaidhlig.scot/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Rothach-et-al-2016-Coimhearsnachd-Cunntas-CR13-02-Community-Census.pdf]

3.5 Ó Giollagáin, C., Camshron, G., Moireach, P., Ó Curnáin, B., Caimbeul, I., MacDonald, B., and Péterváry, P. (2020) *The Gaelic Crisis in the Vernacular Community: A comprehensive sociolinguistic survey of Scottish Gaelic*. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press. ISBN 9781857520804 [peer-reviewed; REF 2021 submitted]

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Impact on government policy, language planning frameworks and local language planning initiatives

The research in Ireland and Scotland has had a deep and lasting impact on government policies, planning frameworks and local language initiatives in relation to language planning, maintenance and usage [3.1, 3.2., 3.3, 3.5]. In Ireland, the 2015 update of the CLS [3.2] became the evidence base for the work of the 26 Irish Language Planning Committees, where ‘The intellectual framework and language planning model entailed in this groundbreaking study has been an invaluable analytical and statistical resource’ [5.1]; and ‘... has encouraged us to prioritise key concerns for the future sustainability of the Irish-speaking communities in our areas’ [5.2].

Beartas Úr [3.3], published a year later than the CLS update, promoted the integration of language revitalisation aims with socio-economic planning for the Gaeltacht region [5.1]. Another impact was on the work of the community language organisation Tuismitheoiri na Gaeltachta, with Gaelic-speaking families, where parents speak Irish to their children: *Beartas Úr* has, critically, given staff and families confidence and language strategies to protect their vulnerable Gaelic language environment [5.3].

In Scotland, the research [3.1, 3.5] has also had significant impact on national and regional policy and planning, and on community Gaelic language initiatives. Described as a model of best practice in community research by Bòrd na Gàidhlig, it is used by key national development agencies in language policy and planning work [5.4]. The Shawbost research findings had a clear impact on the Communities strategy in the National Gaelic Language Plan of 2012–2017, and are reflected in the National Gaelic Plan (2018–2023) [5.4].

The research played a significant part in the adoption of the Gaelic First policy by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western Isles Council), culminating, in spring 2020, with the announcement that all new primary school children would be automatically enrolled in Gaelic Medium primary education from 2020–21 [5.4]. Misneachd [Courage], a voluntary campaigning body for Gaelic, drew heavily on the Shawbost research in their national manifesto for action for Gaelic and Gaelic communities, the *Radical Plan* [5.6].

The *Gaelic Crisis* publication has had a huge impact on public debate about Gaelic since summer 2020, and has stimulated national, cross-party political interest. The MSP for the

Western Isles, Dr Alasdair Allan [5.9] drew governmental attention to the findings: 'In the first instance I have written to John Swinney, the Minister with responsibility for Gaelic, highlighting some of the principal findings of the research. I have also asked the Scottish Parliament's Education Committee to consider taking evidence on the subject'. Dr Allan, following publication of the *Gaelic Crisis*, also presented his findings from community consultations on Gaelic support [5.10]. A Gaelic Ministerial Summit was held in December 2020, where both the Shawbost and *Gaelic Crisis* research were presented as context for renewed commitment to Gaelic. New national projects, to further support Gaelic in the community, were proposed by the Scottish Government, for discussion and agreement approval in 2021.

Impact on public awareness of linguistic and community fragility

As well as influencing policy, the research has had a very significant impact on national and local public debate about the fragility of the Gaelic languages in their traditional communities. In Ireland, Ó Giollagáin and colleagues have made over 50 media appearances on national and regional TV, radio, newspapers and social media [5.7], leading to very significant community action for change [5.1-5.3].

Misneachd, drawing on the Shawbost findings, called for increased Gaelic family support and the integration of language into socio-economic planning [5.6]. In Shawbost itself, the research led to increased Gaelic development activity, community and agency partnership, community action, a language plan, and award-winning development work [5.5].

The *Gaelic Crisis* was accompanied by significant national and international media and public coverage, in, for example, CNN, BBC News, all the main Celtic country English-language and Celtic channels; in the *Guardian*, the *Irish Times*, and Scottish national newspapers. This gave a total potential engagement of over ten million people. Gaelic-related social media discussions (mainly through the *Guardian* (2.7.2020) with 8.8 million daily readers (PAMco stats)) on the launch day were among the top ten Twitter topics (cf. Deepminer data analytics); and six months after its publication, the book was the focus of the *Herald's* Big Read on the 26.12.2020.

In addition to the media coverage of strong cross-party political support from MSPs including Dr Alasdair Allan [5.10], community social media support responses included the #Dèantainmathaort meme, and a community Action Committee was established [5.9].



5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

5.1 Statement from Dr. Éamonn Ó Neachtain, the Strategy and Research Director in Údarás na Gaeltachta/Gaeltacht Industrial Authority on **[3.2]**.

5.2 Statement from Dónall Ó Cnámhsí, the Executive Officer of the Donegal North West Gaeltacht Language Planning Committee on **[3.2]**.

5.3 Statement from Sorcha Ní Chéilleachair, Director of Tuismitheoirí na Gaeltachta (a Gaeltacht community development body running support initiatives for Irish-speaking parents and families) on **[3.3]**.

5.4 Bòrd na Gàidhlig, statement of the impacts of **[3.1]** and **[3.4]**.

5.5 Corroborating statement, Dòmhnall MacNèill, Chief Executive, Comann na Gàidhlig national, Gaelic development agency, on the impact of the Shawbost research on community and language development work

5.6 Statement from Misneachd (Gaelic language activist group based in Ireland and Scotland) on the influence of **[3.1–3.5]** on their activism and on their *Radical Plan for Gaelic*.

5.7a) Media impact in Ireland **[3.2]**: RTE *Nine O' Clock News*: 29.5.2015

<http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2015/0529/20789289-report-finds-daily-use-of-irish-language-declining/#page=3>

b) 'Report finds daily use of Irish language declining': *Irish Times* 29.5.2015:

<http://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/stark-warning-for-future-of-irish-in-gaeltacht-areas-1.2231140> 'Stark warning for future of Irish in Gaeltacht areas'.

5.8 Media impact in Scotland **[3.1, 3.5]**

'Scots Gaelic could die out within a decade, study finds': *Guardian* 2.7.2020:

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/jul/02/scots-gaelic-could-die-out-within-a-decade-study-finds>

5.9 Examples of the media coverage of the *Gaelic Crisis* study **[3.5]** at:

<https://www.uhi.ac.uk/en/research-enterprise/res-themes/humanities-and-arts/language-sciences-institute/publications/press-coverage-of-the-gaelic-crisis-study/>

5.10 MSP Alasdair Allan <https://www.bbc.co.uk/naidheachdan/55333065>;

<https://www.alasdairallan.scot/comhraidhean-gaidhlig>); December 2020 report to Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills John Swinney, 'Community Conversations on the Future of the Gaelic Language within the Vernacular Community', on **[3.5]**.