

Institution: University of Edinburgh		
Unit of Assessment: Panel D - UoA 26: Modern Languages and Linguistics		
Title of case study: Revitalising the Scottish Gaelic language through policy and education		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2001 - 31st December 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:
1. Professor Robert Dunbar	1. Chair of Celtic Languages, Literature, History and Antiquities	1. June 2013 to present
2. Professor Wilson McLeod	2. Lecturer (until 2013), now Professor of Gaelic	2. 2001 to present
3. Dr Fiona O'Hanlon	3. Postdoctoral Fellow (until 2014), now Senior Lecturer in Language Education	3. 2010 to present
4. Dr Stuart Dunmore	4. Postdoctoral Fellow	4. 2015 - 2019
Period when the claimed impact occurred: August 2013 - 31st December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact <p>Research in Celtic and Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh has helped policymakers - and in particular the lead Gaelic development agency, Bòrd na Gàidhlig - address the fragile state of Scottish Gaelic, categorised by UNESCO as an endangered language. The research has influenced the Bòrd's working processes and driven the direction of the third National Gaelic Language Plan approved by Scottish Ministers in 2018. Research providing the evidence that Gaelic Medium Education (GME) can improve pupil attainment has supported government investment in the retraining of teachers to meet the rising demand for GME across Scotland, and has successfully helped strengthen legal obligations in relation to GME. As a result in increased promotion and provision, Scotland saw a 34.4% increase in the number of pupils enrolled in GME between 2013 and 2020.</p>		
2. Underpinning research <p>Celtic and Scottish Studies (C&SS) at the University of Edinburgh is a leading centre for the study of the development of Scottish Gaelic and other Celtic languages. Researchers include Professor Robert Dunbar (2013-), Professor Wilson McLeod (2001-), Dr Fiona O'Hanlon (2010-2014) and Dr Stuart Dunmore (2015-2019). The team's expertise takes in Gaelic languages, literature, culture and society from the late medieval period to the present day. This includes research on Gaelic policy structures and mechanisms, Gaelic Medium Education (GME), Gaelic broadcasting, and initiatives relating to the development of the Celtic languages, including in comparative contexts.</p>		
Language revitalisation - context and challenges <p>Having steadily declined in use over the course of the 20th century, Scottish Gaelic was categorised by UNESCO as 'definitely endangered', and spoken by only 1.2% of Scotland's population, when the Scottish Parliament passed the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005. Established through the Act, Bòrd na Gàidhlig is the non-departmental public body responsible for preparing a National Gaelic Language Plan (NGLP) every five years, monitoring the Language Plans of selected public authorities, advising Scottish Ministers on Gaelic issues, and otherwise facilitating the promotion and use of Scottish Gaelic. C&SS</p>		

studies on the history of Scottish Gaelic offer multiple insights into the significant sociolinguistic challenges faced by the Bòrd as it seeks to reverse the language's long decline. Ranging from current speakers' bilingualism to low levels of Scottish Gaelic literacy and community usage, McLeod (3.1) demonstrates that many of the challenges derive from the length of time Scottish Gaelic has been a minority language, in comparison to other Celtic languages such as Welsh and Irish, as well as public debate around its 'national' value, again in comparison to neighbouring countries. As shown by Dunbar (3.2), despite these differences, Scotland has followed a similar path to Wales and the Republic of Ireland in making language plans central to the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005, as well as prioritising language revitalisation. Drawing on work by McLeod, himself and others, Dunbar likens the Bòrd's conception of the relationship between plans and revitalisation to the Catherine Wheel model developed by Catalan sociolinguist Miquel Strubell, "*a self-reinforcing process of expanded language acquisition and use*".

Assessment of policy and its implementation

As well as setting out the context in which Bòrd na Gàidhlig operates, C&SS research has critically assessed key aspects of the implementation of the 2005 Act, including the content and impact of Gaelic language plans: both the overarching National Gaelic Language Plan (NGLP); and those of selected Scottish public bodies. Some of this research was commissioned by the Bòrd, for example, a detailed evaluation of Scotland's second NGLP in 2015. Co-written with the consultancy arm of the Welsh centre for language planning, Iaith, the resultant Final Report (3.2) draws on C&SS analysis (3.3; 3.4), as well as 211 online questionnaire responses, 12 stakeholder interviews and 7 focus groups. The Report shows close alignment between participants' perceptions and researchers' analysis of the Plan, especially around accountability, accessibility and community engagement, including the need to set clear benchmarks that go beyond the Plan's "*mere circulation*".

Gaelic medium education and attainment

The research on the second NGLP reveals good levels of public confidence in the Plan's objective to increase the number of children entering Gaelic Medium Education (GME) in Scotland. C&SS research has demonstrated the high attainment of GME pupils (3.5), with one key finding from a 2010 study for Bòrd na Gàidhlig being that primary school children taught in the Gaelic medium were comparatively more accomplished in English reading than those taught in English. Addressing the demographic and social challenges associated with teaching in a minority language at scale, the team partnered with researchers at the University of Strathclyde to undertake a comparative study of teacher education programmes adopted in Catalonia, the Basque Autonomous Community, Wales and New Zealand (3.6). Among other findings, the study concludes that proponents of minority language medium education need to understand what does, and what might, motivate teachers currently working in the 'dominant' language education sector to learn the minority language to the required standard and change their career path accordingly.

3. References to the research

- 3.1 McLeod, W. (2020). *Gaelic in Scotland: Policies, movements, ideologies*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. eISBN: 978-1-4744-6241-9.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctv182jr5t> (Can be supplied by HEI on request)
- 3.2 Jones, K., Williams, C., Dunmore, S., McLeod, W., & Dunbar, R. (2016, October). *Assessment of the impact of the National Gaelic Language Plan*. Retrieved from <https://www.gaidhlig.scot/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Jones-et-al.-2017-Buaidh-a-Phlana-N%C3%A0iseanta-CR15-01-x2-National-Plan-impact.pdf>
- 3.3 Dunbar, R. (2018). Organisational language planning: Gaelic language plans in the public sector, in M. MacLeod, C. Smith-Christmas & N. Carty (Eds.), *Gaelic in*

contemporary Scotland: The revitalisation of an endangered language, pp.156-72.

Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. eISBN: 978-1-4744-2066-2.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctv8jnzt2.19> (Can be supplied by HEI on request)

- 3.4 McLeod, W. (Ed.). (2006). *Revitalising Gaelic in Scotland: Policy, planning and public discourse*. Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press (includes Dunbar, R. (2006) Gaelic in Scotland: The legal and institutional framework (pp. 1-23) and McLeod, W. (2006). Leasachadh solarachadh sheirbhisean poblach tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig: Duilgheadasan idè-eòlach agus pragtaigeach [Improving the provision of Gaelic-medium public services: Ideological and practical challenges] (pp. 25-47). ISBN: 978-1-9037-6559-3. (Can be supplied by HEI on request)
- 3.5 O'Hanlon, F., Paterson, L., & McLeod, W. (2012). The attainment of pupils in Gaelic-medium primary education in Scotland. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 16, pp.707-29. This paper reports on a 2010 study commissioned by Bòrd na Gàidhlig. DOI:[10.1080/13670050.2012.711807](https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2012.711807)
- 3.6 McPake, J., McLeod, W., O'Hanlon, F., Wilson, M., & Fassetta, G. (2016). Professional development programmes for teachers moving from majority to minoritised language medium education: Lessons from a comparative study. *Language Policy*, 16, pp.79–105. DOI:[10.1007/s10993-015-9395-6](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10993-015-9395-6) (Can be supplied by HEI on request).

4. Details of the impact

Since the establishment of Bòrd na Gàidhlig through the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005, colleagues in Celtic and Scottish Studies (C&SS) have been advising the Bòrd on the various and often challenging ways in which it can fulfil its aim of securing Gaelic as 'an official language of Scotland commanding equal respect to the English language'. Between August 2013 and December 2020, this has included supporting new ways of working, the preparation of the third National Gaelic Language Plan, the promotion of Gaelic Medium Education (GME), and the retraining of 30 teachers to meet the rising demand for GME across Scotland. The researchers have also directly helped lawmakers strengthen education authorities' obligations in relation to GME as part of the Education (Scotland) Act 2016. As a result, by the 2019/20 academic year, 5,152 pupils in Scotland were enrolled in GME, a 34.4% increase from 2013/14 (5.1 and 5.4).

Impact on Bòrd na Gàidhlig's processes and the third National Gaelic Language Plan

C&SS and laith's critical review of the second National Gaelic Language Plan (NGLP) (3.4) recommended that the next (third) NGLP should be much clearer in its setting of outcomes. The research acknowledged that, in part, this was predicated on the Bòrd changing its internal processes, for example around the collection, analysis, publication and sharing of data. In the third NGLP (approved by Scottish Ministers and published in March 2018; 5.2), the Bòrd committed for the first time to publishing an Implementation Strategy and has already taken steps to increase transparency and accountability, for example publishing the Plan's consultation responses (5.3) and publicly live streaming its board meetings since May 2020. Writing about the many ways in which the research has been "very beneficial to the Bòrd in advancing Gaelic development in Scotland on a number of different fronts, and in helping shape our strategic thinking", the CEO of Bòrd na Gàidhlig has said "The preparation of the 2018-23 plan was aided considerably by the evaluation report... [which] allowed us to sharpen our thinking in relation to identifying strategic priorities and articulating mechanisms for implementation, and also to address procedural aspects of our policy management, including working with public bodies and other important stakeholders" (5.4).

Alongside changing its own processes, Bòrd na Gàidhlig has also acted on C&SS's recommendations around clearer and more inclusive articulation of Scotland's shared priorities for Gaelic revitalisation. This is immediately evident in the way the third NGLP is

laid out, with the introduction of five key messages for the people of Scotland placed before the ministerial foreword, beginning with the statement *“Gaelic belongs to Scotland”* and culminating in a collective call for help and support. Addressing the conclusion in the 2016 research (3.4) that the second NGLP didn’t do enough to promote language use at a community level, particularly in the economically-challenged ‘heartlands’, the third Plan’s top two commitments under *“increasing the learning of Gaelic”* are *“Gaelic in the family”* and *“Gaelic medium workforce recruitment, retention, training and supply”*. Among its key aims, which again are laid out early and clearly, are *“Vital developments in community, education, media and economy - Among these key commitments are taking a fresh look at supporting communities in areas where Gaelic is spoken by significant numbers... [and developing] the opportunities for economic benefits that accrue from Gaelic.”* (5.2, p7).

Impact on trust in, provision for, and uptake of Gaelic Medium Education (GME)

As confirmed by the CEO of Bòrd na Gàidhlig (5.4), findings from the study (3.5) on attainment in Gaelic Medium Education are the key evidence underpinning the Scotland-wide promotion of GME and explanation of its benefits. On the *Parentzone Scotland* website, the Scottish Government executive agency Education Scotland answers the question *“Why should I send my child to a Gaelic Medium school?”* by referring parents and carers to the research, adding *“This high level of attainment is a key attraction for parents in choosing Gaelic Medium Education”* (5.5). The Gaelic resources provider, Stòrlann Nàiseanta na Gàidhlig, uses the research on two websites targeting different audiences: teachers with little or no previous knowledge of Gaelic (5.6); and parents with concerns about bringing their child(ren) up exclusively in Gaelic (5.7). The research is also widely used by other Gaelic organisations, parents’ bodies, Local Authorities and schools.

There has been a long-standing shortage of teachers qualified to work in GME. C&SS’s collaborative research on the feasibility of teacher retraining has led to the creation of a year-long, masters-level Gaelic Immersion for Teachers programme delivered by a partnership of the universities of Strathclyde and Edinburgh, with approximately GBP500,000 per year funding from Bòrd na Gàidhlig and the Scottish Government. Following a design phase in 2013-14 involving McLeod and Joan Macdonald (Gaelic Language Assistant, C&SS), the programme has run annually since 2014-15. Again as confirmed by the CEO of the Bòrd (5.4), the programme has now returned 30 teachers to teach through the medium of Gaelic in various Local Authority areas, from the Highlands to Dumfries and Galloway, including in a number of Scotland’s larger towns and cities.

In its own Gaelic Language Plan (SG-GLP, 2016-2021), the Scottish Government has formally acknowledged *“the importance of the pivotal role that teachers have in helping grow the number of individuals with the Gaelic language”*, adding *“For this reason, we have supported the Gaelic Immersion for Teachers course and will continue to work with Bòrd na Gàidhlig and all those involved in teacher training to ensure that there are a range of opportunities for those considering entering Gaelic teacher training”* (5.8, p34). Crucially, in terms of the continued use of the research by executive agency Education Scotland, the SG-GLP also commits to continuing to promote GME as a *“positive choice for parents”*. In the year the SG-GLP launched, the research was instrumental in persuading lawmakers to strengthen education authorities’ obligations in relation to Gaelic Medium Education as part of the Education (Scotland) Act 2016, which provides a statutory process for requesting GME provision. Writing to McLeod about the research, the Act and its impact, John Finnie, MSP for the Highlands and Islands, noted *“The proposed amendment... had the effect of significantly strengthening the bill... This was based on your research... which demonstrated the need for a robust legal mechanism to guarantee access to Gaelic provision.... Since the Act came into effect, parents in different local authority areas have been able to invoke this provision in successfully persuading councils to offer Gaelic medium education”* (5.9).

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

5.1a Bòrd na Gàidhlig. *Gaelic Education Data 2013-2014*

5.1b Bòrd na Gàidhlig. *Gaelic Education Data 2019-2020*

5.2 Bòrd na Gàidhlig (2018). *National Gaelic Language Plan 2018-2023*

<https://www.gaidhlig.scot/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/BnG-NGLP-18-23-1.pdf>

5.3 Bòrd na Gàidhlig (2018). *Public Consultation: National Gaelic Language Plan 2018-2023*

<https://www.gaidhlig.scot/bord/about-us-gaelic-language-scotland-act-2005/national-gaelic-language-plan-2017-22/>

5.4 Letter from the CEO (Ceannard) of Bòrd na Gàidhlig, 14th December 2020

5.5 Education Scotland / Parentzone Scotland 'Gaelic Medium Education (Foghlam tro Mheadhan na Gàidhlig)'. <https://education.gov.scot/parentzone/my-school/choosing-a-school/gaelic-medium-education/gaelic-medium-education-foghlam-tro-mheadhan-na-gaidhlig/>

5.6 Stòrlann Nàiseanta na Gàidhlig 'Why Gaelic' <https://go-gaelic.scot/about-gogaelic/why-gaelic/>

5.7 Stòrlann Nàiseanta na Gàidhlig / Gaelic 4 Parents 'I'm worried that my child's English reading and writing will suffer if (s)he is in Gaelic education'

<https://www.gaelic4parents.com/faq/132-untitled-18>

5.8 The Scottish Government (2016). *Scottish Government Gaelic Language Plan 2016-2021*. ISBN: 978-1-7856-2939-8.

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-government-gaelic-language-plan-2016-2021/>

5.9 Testimonial by John Finnie, Member of the Scottish Parliament for the Highlands and Islands, 25th September 2020.