

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of Aberdeen		
Unit of Assessment: 26 (Modern Languages and Linguistics)		
Title of case study: Adult Gaelic Acquisition		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2012-2019		
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:
Michelle Macleod	Professor of Gaelic	2004 - present
Marsaili MacLeod	Lecturer in Gaelic	2010 - 2018
Moray Watson	Senior Lecturer in Gaelic	2004 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2015-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>The Scottish Government is seeking to increase the number of adult learners of Gaelic. Research led by Professor Michelle Macleod and Dr Marsaili MacLeod has enabled this by informing policy, shaping pedagogy and influencing practice in this area. Macleod and MacLeod identified weaknesses in earlier learning provision, such as the over-reliance on one teaching method, the lack of learning materials and the absence of a means to measure progress. Their work has underpinned a significant change in how funds for supporting adult learning are distributed and, working with colleague Dr Moray Watson, influenced the creation and implementation of new teaching methods and materials and assessment tools for adult Gaelic learners worldwide.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Gaelic in Scotland is a minoritised language with around 50,000 fluent speakers and a learning population of approximately 3,000 at any one time. Significant investment by the Scottish Government, through the Non-Departmental Public Body <i>Bòrd na Gàidhlig</i>, has attempted to slow the decline in speakers and increase the number of learners. A key element of this strategy has been the <i>National Gaelic Plan 2012-17</i>, priorities of which include: 'extending access to, and participation in, a wide range of Gaelic learning opportunities for adults' and 'ensuring good resources are available to support adults learning Gaelic'. For adult learners, a key aspect of Bòrd na Gàidhlig's provision was through significant funding of the <i>Ùlpan</i> method.</p> <p>In 2015, MacLeod and Macleod were commissioned by Bòrd na Gàidhlig to produce a research report on adult Gaelic acquisition, <i>Delivery of Gaelic to Adults through Ùlpan</i>, in order to assess the success, or otherwise, of their policy decision to invest in this mode of Gaelic teaching [P1]. Their report [1], drew attention to a number of important shortcomings regarding this investment.</p> <p>MacLeod and Macleod demonstrated that adult learners undertaking the <i>Ùlpan</i> programme were lacking in motivation, were not progressing through the levels, found the rigidity of the pedagogy to be stifling and needed additional materials for out-of-class support. MacLeod and Macleod's research showed that learners were not aware of what progress they were making or how to record their progression [1]. Adult learners were looking for additional learning opportunities (more grammar instruction, more opportunities to hear and speak the language) and for the ability to measure their progress [1; 2], and those needs were not being met by the <i>Ùlpan</i> programme.</p> <p>Macleod and MacLeod also found that 'heritage' learners (those who have Gaelic in their family background) taking the course in the Western Isles, where Gaelic is still a community language, were having more success in acquiring fluency compared to those elsewhere. A follow-up study</p>		

[P2] concluded that more exposure to the spoken language was enabling 'heritage' learners to achieve better results than learners without this aural exposure [P2].

In parallel with the *Ùlpan* [1] research, Macleod, collaborating with the University of Glasgow, was funded in 2014 by the Scottish Funding Council and Bòrd na Gàidhlig [P3] to create a new framework for measuring Gaelic language competencies [3]. The aim of the project, Comasan Labhairt ann an Gàidhlig (CLAG) / Gaelic Adult Proficiency (GAP), was to lay the groundwork for a methodology to map proficiency scales in Gaelic from beginner to advanced level, aligning Gaelic language learning with the gold-standard Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) as well as existing assessment frameworks used by the Scottish Qualifications Authority and the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework. Macleod's contribution to the project led to the production of linguistic baselines for measuring competency (from native speaker recordings) and also assessed and aligned existing frameworks with the new one [P3]. Watson, co-editor of *Edinburgh Companion to the Gaelic Language* [4], collaborated with Michelle Macleod and external partners to explore how these new linguistic baselines could be assessed [P5].

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

[1] **MacLeod, Marsaili, Macleod, Michelle**, Milligan-Dombrowski, Lindsay and Jones, Kathryn (2015). *Delivery of Gaelic to Adults through Ùlpan*. Report for Bòrd na Gàidhlig. Inverness: Bòrd na Gàidhlig. Link: <https://www.gaidhlig.scot/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Libhrigeadh-Gaidhlig-dh-Inbhich-tro-Ulpan-Delivery-of-Gaelic-to-Adults-Through-Ulpan.pdf>

[2] **Michelle Macleod, Marsaili MacLeod**, Lindsay Dombrowski, (2019) 'Perceptions of creativity and authenticity when acquiring a minoritised language as an adult'. *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 31, p. 48-69

[3] *CLAG – Common European Framework for Reference: 'Gaelic; A Commissioned Report for the Scottish Funding Council and Bòrd na Gàidhlig'*. Nicola Carty, **Michelle Macleod**, Susan Ross, Roibeard Ó Maolalaigh, March 2019

[4] **MacLeod, Michelle** and **Moray Watson**, *The Edinburgh Companion to the Gaelic Language*, Edinburgh University Press, 2010: 320p.

Key Grants

[P1] **MacLeod, Marsaili** Delivery of Gaelic to adults through Ùlpan (Bòrd na Gàidhlig), 10/12-11/13; GBP19,996.12

[P2] **Macleod, Michelle** Heritage Learners of Gaelic in the Western Isles (Soillse Small Grants), 2016; GBP3,000

[P3] **Macleod, Michelle** (and University of Glasgow) Gaelic Adult Proficiency, Scottish Funding Council and Bòrd na Gàidhlig, 2015; total value GBP360,000 – GBP16,000 to Aberdeen

[P4] **Watson** – Glossika consultancy GBP18,000 (2017)

[P5] **Watson and Macleod** – Bòrd na Gàidhlig, Gaelic Language Act Implementation Pilot Fund - for piloting CLAG / CEFR Gaelic language tests – 08/19-08/20; GBP18,369.90

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

Research led by the University of Aberdeen has impacted the policy, structure and delivery of adult learning of Gaelic in Scotland and worldwide by:

- informing key funding decisions regarding learning methodology by Bòrd na Gàidhlig;
- developing frameworks to assess language competencies;
- developing innovative learning materials.

Informing Bòrd na Gàidhlig strategy

MacLeod and Macleod's *Ùlpan* report [P3] has been used by Bòrd na Gàidhlig to re-design their policy on supporting and developing adult language acquisition. According to Bòrd na Gàidhlig 'The research was invaluable in informing our policy decisions regarding adult language acquisition and informing the National Gaelic Language Plan 2018-23'. Bòrd na Gàidhlig confirms that the report 'has had a significant, positive impact on Gaelic for adults in Scotland and has been an important part of the development of this sector in recent years' [S1]. Prior to Aberdeen's research, Bòrd na Gàidhlig allocated most of its funding for adult learning through the *Ùlpan* method: this method, as reported by MacLeod and Macleod, was not well supported by materials outside of the class, leading to reduced engagement by learners, who in turn faced difficulties assessing their own progress. MacLeod and Macleod's findings raised Bòrd na Gàidhlig's awareness of the issues regarding the *Ùlpan* method and helped to inform Bòrd na Gàidhlig's decisions regarding funding allocation [S1].

Developing frameworks to assess language competencies

Michelle Macleod worked with the University of Glasgow to create the first empirically derived framework for the measurement of Gaelic linguistic competencies. The Comasan Luchd-ionnsachaidh na Gàidhlig / CLAG framework (based on the international standard Common European Framework of Reference for languages) has been adopted by LearnGaelic.net (the national portal for information about learning Gaelic) to support learners' progression. Macleod's contribution led to the production of linguistic baselines for measuring competency, derived from native speaker recordings, and also aligned the CLAG framework with existing measures (e.g. the SQA and SCQF) with the new one. This provided an objective means of describing learner proficiency. The pages went live on the LearnGaelic.net website on 6 January 2020 and, as of December 2020, 4371 people have accessed the site's self-assessment tool [S2]. Bòrd na Gàidhlig has said, '*The resource will sit within a suite of resources envisaged in the strategy currently being developed by the Bòrd and other national partners*' [S3]. With funding support from Bòrd na Gàidhlig, Watson and Macleod undertook a CEFR-GLAG test implementation pilot for the first level of the framework with 12 adult learners from across Scotland, which took place on 1 August 2020 [P5; S4]. Agreement has been reached with LearnGaelic.net to roll out more tests at different levels in the future.

Developing innovative learning materials

Macleod and MacLeod's research [1] pointed to the need for more innovative learning materials. In 2017 Dr Watson worked with international language company Glossika (<https://ai.glossika.com/>), to develop language courses for a global audience for Scottish Gaelic, Irish, Welsh and Breton Fluency 1-3 [P4]. Glossika is an immersive learning portal, supported by a team of linguists and polyglots based in Taiwan, dedicated to helping learners achieve fluency through a spaced repetition language-learning method, which is completely audio-based. Watson worked with Glossika to develop content for both Scottish Gaelic and other Celtic languages. The Scottish Gaelic course, which is freely accessible on the website, is available via the Glossika app and has had 2514 registered learners (4 December 2020) [S5]. The online newspaper *Isle of Man Today* cited the Manx language development officer for Culture Vannin saying: '*This is a fantastic addition to the already substantial body of on-line material available for the learner of Manx. It is also great that Glossika are providing the course free to learners as a way of supporting minority languages. This will be of long-term benefit to the language and culture of the island*' [S6]. According to Glossika, Gaelic was the third most popular free course on Glossika [S7]. In addition to the Glossika materials, and in line with one of the recommendations of [1] that there was a need for more learning materials, Watson has published three new Gaelic textbooks during the census period adding to his *Progressive Gaelic series*:

Progressive Gaelic 3, Aberdeen: Follais Books, 2017: pp. 220.

Progressive Gaelic 4, Aberdeen: Follais Books, 2018: pp. 230.

Impact case study (REF3)

Gaelic Workbook 1, Aberdeen: Follais Books, 2020: pp. 222.

His most recent edition, 'Gaelic Workbook 1: Progressive Gaelic Level 1 Workbook', published in May 2020 remains #2 best seller out of 64,000 [S7]. A user review from Reddit Gaidhlig [S8] highlighted the accessibility of his research material:

'I have found the best books so far, for me, have been the Moray Watson Progressive Gaelic books (on Amazon). Very strong but operate at a pace that respects the capacity of the learner' [S8].

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

[S1] Letter of support from Bòrd na Gàidhlig stating how our impact has shaped policy and funding in this area.

[S2] LearnGaelic CLAG test user figures – email from LearnGaelic

[S3] Preview of CLAG to LearnGaelic (full version launched in 2020). Link: https://lg-measgachadh.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/CLAG_scale.pdf

[S4] Implementation pilot, <https://www.gaidhlig.scot/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Aontaidhean-GLAIF-2019-20.pdf>

[S5] Glossika user figures – email from Glossika

[S6] 'A new online course to learn Manx Gaelic', 'News', July 2018. Link: <https://bit.ly/3rbp8Fz>

[S7] 'Most Popular Free Languages on Glossika in 2018' The Glossika Blog. Link: <https://ai.glossika.com/blog/most-popular-free-languages-on-glossika-in-2018>

[S8] Reviewer feedback of teaching materials and Amazon bestseller data