

Institution: University of Aberdeen
Unit of Assessment: UoA 28 – Modern Languages
Title of case study: SOILLSE: Building an Infrastructure for Gaelic
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>There are three stages to the impact. First, key advice was provided to the Scottish Government on its 2005 Gaelic Language Act by Dr Rob Dunbar, then reader at the University of Aberdeen, and a world expert on language legislation. This helped shape both the nature of the legislation passed by the Scottish Parliament and the plan for its implementation.</p> <p>Second, a bid was made, in which Aberdeen was again a lead organisation, for funding to strengthen the infrastructure for Gaelic-language research, so making it possible for the Scottish Government's policy to be properly informed by a sufficient body of Gaelic-language researchers. This resulted in the <i>SOILLSE</i> project ('A Research Strategy for the Maintenance and Revitalisation of Gaelic Language and Culture'), which secured £5.28m in funding from the Scottish Funding Council's 'Societal and Public Priority' scheme, Bòrd na Gàidhlig (the agency charged with carrying through the Government's policy), Highlands and Islands Enterprise, and the four universities involved – Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow and the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI), whose establishment as a research institution was one of the outcomes of the funding.</p> <p>Third, specific research contracts were undertaken by Macleod and MacLeod to provide non-governmental agencies with information about the effectiveness of their implementation of government policy. <i>SOILLSE</i> is now at the half-way point in its overall trajectory, but the research being produced is already influencing the government and community agencies (Bòrd na Gàidhlig and Comunn na Gàidhlig) involved in delivering Gaelic language policy, while the fees paid for commissioned research have been used to fund additional PhDs in Gaelic.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The underpinning research also came in three stages. First, the analysis and identification of the ways in which minority languages could be sustained in a globalising world for which English was the <i>lingua franca</i>, research that linked with broadly-based policy reports by the European Union on what was required for a minority language to flourish in the context of European integration. This was a key element in the work of Dr Dunbar, reader and then Professor at Aberdeen 2004–2010, whose publications on minority languages in the context of European and international law helped shape Scottish Government thinking about the provision of a legal framework in which the future of a minority language might be secured.</p> <p>His individual work was supported by a series of annual conferences on 'Language and Politics' run by the AHRC Centre for Irish and Scottish Studies at the University of Aberdeen, which brought experts from across Europe to inform discussions about language policy in the Republic of Ireland, Ulster and Scotland (see Kirk, <i>Language and Politics of the Gaeltacht and Scotstacht, 2000–2010: Review and Impact</i>, 2011), and also by the researches of those involved in the Forum for Research on the Languages of Scotland and Ulster, which was directed for 25 years from Aberdeen by McClure (English) and subsequently by Millar (Linguistics); Watson is a current committee member. Both of these produced a substantial number of books and journal issues devoted to issues of minority languages, the threats they faced and the requirements for their sustainability, as well as their economic needs and their potential economic and cultural benefits.</p> <p>Second was research commissioned by the Scottish Government and its agencies in order to inform the delivery of its policy on Gaelic language. Here the work of Dunbar continued to be significant but the work of Michelle Macleod, as someone who had worked both in university research and as a language planning manager in Bòrd na Gàidhlig, was equally important, especially in her role as Co-Director of <i>SOILLSE</i>. Part of the aim of the <i>SOILLSE</i> project was to develop the resources of the Colleges in the Scottish Highlands and Islands to enable them to become a University with a full research agenda. This was achieved in 2011, with the University of</p>

Aberdeen validating UHI's research degrees (MacLeod was part of the validation team).

Delivering the infrastructure which would support such an institution, however, required research into the ways in which Gaelic language teaching was provided, how Gaelic language research at tertiary level could be sustained, and the means by which Gaelic could be the language for the delivery of academic research. This became the third element of underpinning research, in the examination of how specific policy objectives could be met by practical implementation at a grass-roots level. **MacLeod** and **MacLeod's** work on Gaelic language use in the classroom, on Gaelic language skills in the workplace, on the delivery of Gaelic to adult learners through Ùlpan (a programme run on behalf of Bòrd na Gàidhlig) and on Continuous Professional Development for Language Workers, has helped inform policy for a variety of organisations seeking to implement the Scottish Government's language framework.

3. References to the research

- Tom Moring and Robert Dunbar, *The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and the Media*, Regional or Minority Languages, No. 6, (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2008)
- Kristin Henrard and Robert Dunbar, eds., *Synergies in Minority Protection: European and International Law Perspectives*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008)
- Robert Dunbar, Gwynedd Parry and Simone Klinge, eds., *The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages: Legal Challenges and Opportunities*, (Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2008)
- Robert Dunbar, "Gaelic in Scotland: the legal and institutional framework", in Wilson McLeod, ed., *Revitalising Gaelic in Scotland: Policy, Planning and Public Discourse*, (Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press, 2006), pp. 1-23
- Dr Michelle MacLeod, 'Leasachadh Gàidhlig anns a' choimhearsnachd: dùbhlain agus siostaman taic' (Gaelic Development in the Community: challenges and support systems) *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, 2013.
- Dr Michelle MacLeod, 'The Human Factor: Community Language Workers and National Language Strategies' forthcoming in *Belfast Studies In Language, Culture And Politics*, Proceedings from Conference Strategies for Language: Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, and Scotland, 2010
- Rothach, NicLeòid, Armstrong, Mac an Tàilleir 'Dealbhadh Prògram CPD airson obair choimhearsnachd Ghàidhlig' (Designing a CPD programme for Gaelic community work) – Bòrd na Gàidhlig Report, 2013
- Dr Marsaili MacLeod, 'Gaelic Language Skills in the Workplace' in D. O' Baoill, J. M. Kirk, and R. Cummings, eds, *Language and Economic Development: Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, and Scotland*. Belfast: Cló Ollscoil na Banríona, 134-152, 2009

Grants

Soillse Funding: £5,289,669 total (breakdown of funding £400k from Highlands and Islands Enterprise, £541k from Bòrd na Gàidhlig, £928k of new funds from the academic partners, and £1.555 million of matched contributions from the academic partners by Scottish Funding Council, £1.866) -- share to Aberdeen: c. £800,000

Further grants:

- Delivery of Gaelic to adults through Ùlpan (Bòrd na Gàidhlig): £19,996.12 – 2012
- CPD for Community Language Workers: £9,864.16 (Bòrd na Gàidhlig), PI Dr Gillian Munro; Co-I Dr Michelle MacLeod (£1,571.70 as Aberdeen's share) – 2012
- Survey of Language Practices in Gaelic Medium Education (Bòrd na Gàidhlig), 2008, - £6,700 + VAT

4. Details of the impact

The major milestones of the impact have been:

(i) the adoption of a Gaelic Language Act by the Scottish government in 2005. Scottish nationalism is not, like Basque or Catalan nationalism, founded on defence of a threatened language, and there was no imperative, therefore, for a Labour and Liberal coalition government in Scotland to adopt a Gaelic language policy for political reasons. Rather, the Government came to approach the issue in terms of European policies in support of minority languages, a European approach to which the research of Dunbar, himself a lawyer, had significantly contributed. Providing a legal framework for the support of a minority language brought Scotland in line with other European jurisdictions in a non-politicised context (the bill received cross-party support);

(ii) the establishment of the University of the Highlands and Islands as a research university with a strong commitment to Gaelic language research. This was in significant part an outcome of the *SOILLSE* initiative, but its broader aim has been to normalise the use of Gaelic for academic research, in the communications of public bodies and in the delivery of outreach education for adults as well as in Gaelic-medium education for children. The Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig conference held in Aberdeen in 2010 and the *SOILLSE* conference in 2011 witnessed considerable increase in the number of papers about language planning delivered through the medium of Gaelic itself, and part of the result is the development of a terminology which has been disseminated into daily usage by those engaged in promoting the language at grass-roots level;

(iii) Aberdeen leads on the 'Community and Family Language Usage' strand of *SOILLSE*'s activities. **Macleod** has directed two research projects in this area: the first examined the working patterns of community language development officers, and aimed at improving their effectiveness by providing training in project planning and the assessment of outcomes. This was a 'cascade' project, dealing initially with 15 of the key professionals in the field who could relay what they had learned to others at more diversified levels of language delivery. **Macleod** was also involved with *SOILLSE* colleagues in a commissioned research project into the CPD needs of professionals working in Gaelic language development in the community. Based on the results of this project Bòrd na Gàidhlig have decided to implement new training strategies and **Macleod** has been appointed to the training steering group.

(iv) **Macleod** and **MacLeod** have been involved in various commissioned research projects to support the delivery of community-based language learning. A project on the Delivery of Gaelic to adults through Ùlpan was commissioned by Bòrd na Gàidhlig in order to inform their policy on supporting adult learners: the report will shape future delivery mechanisms. A second has been designed to support Gaelic medium education delivery in primary schools and the researchers have worked alongside teachers in developing the project so that the end results will properly support the teachers in their work. They have also undertaken primary research into the use of Gaelic in specific environments (e.g. **MacLeod**'s on Gaelic Language Skills in the Workplace' and **Macleod**'s on community language workers and national strategies) which have helped shape the agenda of Bòrd na Gàidhlig.

The impact thus ranges from influence on national language strategies down to the local organisation of the delivery of language training in specific environments. The *SOILLSE* project will run until 2016 and harnesses the work of non-governmental agencies, non-departmental public bodies, local authorities and a variety of local educational institutions. It has led directly to a wide range of employment opportunities, from a professorship and a non-academic administrator through postdoctoral research fellows and postgraduates. There is a *SOILLSE* website which receives more than 2,000 hits per year, and on which research reports are made available to the general public, including research digests written for non-academic audiences. The website, together with the *SOILLSE* Facebook page and twitter account, all help in disseminating research to non-specialist audiences both locally and internationally.

Impact case study (REF3b)**5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

1. Testimony from Daibhidh Boag of Bòrd na Gàidhlig corroborating the importance of the work of SOILLISE in developing training for Gaelic community development staff.
2. Testimony has been received from Chief Executive Comunn na Gàidhlig regarding the development and delivery of a training module for Comunn na Gàidhlig's community and youth development staff.

Invitations

3. Invitation to Dr Macleod to give keynote address to national language planning symposium in Ireland on the importance of community planning (*available from HEI on request*).