

**Institution: University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI)**

**Unit of Assessment: UoA 28**

**a. Context**

Achieving impact is core to the raison d'être of UHI and is reflected in the University's purpose, which is "to have a transformational impact on the development and prospects of the region, its people and its communities" (UHI Strategic Plan, 2012-17). Impact is achieved in Unit of Assessment 28 through the work of Celtic Studies, based primarily at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig (SMO), the National Centre for Gaelic Language and Culture, in the island of Skye. SMO was founded in 1973 to help secure the future of the Gaelic language and culture for Scotland through its educational work in research and teaching, and through cultural and economic projects. SMO's main aims continue to be to illuminate, to a national and international audience, the contribution of the Gaelic language and culture in all periods, and to address contemporary issues facing the language and culture. SMO is the only tertiary institution in the world that works almost entirely through the medium of Gaelic, creating employment for Gaelic learners/speakers (thus creating a market for Gaelic learning), and creating new Gaelic educational, cultural and economic resources open to users worldwide. The main forms of research impact include: preserving and presenting cultural heritage in public discourse through various media; presenting evidence to beneficiaries to help them understand and respond to the needs of the Gaelic language and culture (for example, by providing expert advice and services to government and public sector bodies and, thereby, influencing policy); influencing educational curricula regarding the Gaelic language and culture; creating and sharing Gaelic primary resources and research, through innovative ICT methods; and influencing civil society members engaged in the preservation and promotion of indigenous languages, cultures and histories of the region. The main beneficiaries are regional and national public and governmental bodies, educational and cultural agencies, and a wide range of individuals, societies and community groups.

SMO recognises the importance of the media in minority language revitalisation efforts: Lèirsinn Research Centre has, since 1993, provided the statistical base and analysis of viewing patterns and viewers' reactions to programmes for Gaelic media authorities, most recently for MG ALBA and the BBC; this research directly informs national Gaelic programming decisions. Cormack continues to be the main academic in Scotland working with MG ALBA and the BBC on minority language issues in the media, presenting research at conferences attended by media professionals. Two staff members, Dunbar and Campbell, have recently been members of the MG ALBA Board. Bateman and Ó Baoill have produced illuminating, sector-leading published work in aspects of Early Modern Gaelic Literature, including the cultural impacts of women poets and religious poetry, thus increasing national cultural appreciation of Gaelic literary achievement. Bateman's work as a literary critic and literary competition judge in various academic and poetry practitioners' fora, and her work as both academic and practising poet presenting work to cultural bodies such as the Association of Scottish Literary Studies, have fertilised national and regional cultural appreciation of modern Gaelic poetry. Wringe's monthly radio programme, 'Leugh an Leabhar'/'Read the Book', on BBC Radio nan Gàidheal, is the premier, national media literary discussion forum for Gaelic literature.

SMO research in sociolinguistics has led to policy changes. For instance, research in the Western Isles in 2010 led to new policy emphasis on community language planning in Bòrd na Gàidhlig's *National Gaelic Language Plan* (2012-17). The development of a language skills assessment tool for the workplace, and of fluency scales, are used in Gaelic-sector training by Bòrd na Gàidhlig. The Soillse project works with the research needs agenda of Gaelic and public sector bodies, e.g. Bòrd na Gàidhlig, and Highlands and Islands Enterprise: e.g. research for Bòrd na Gàidhlig was conducted by SMO and the University of Aberdeen (2013) that led to new training for Gaelic sector workers. Cheape's work, both in cultural landscape (through expert advice on collections and exhibition policies) and in musicology (in developing public and practitioner understanding of the bagpipe), has influenced work in the National Museums of Scotland and local museums such as Auchendrain in Argyll, and raised intellectual and practitioners' appreciation of the history of the bagpipe. Purser, Forrest and Cheape have led national debate on Gaelic musical tradition through national conference presentations, musical performances and various collaborations with musicians, specialists in musical traditions, academics (e.g. Royal

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Conservatoire of Scotland, School of Scottish Studies) and the public. Stiùbhart has produced cutting-edge scholarship that has changed public perceptions of the work of nineteenth and twentieth century Gaelic folklore collectors, through conferences and publishing, and programmes for the BBC and MG ALBA. Research on the phonology of the Norse element in the Gaelic language (Cox), and of Gaelic place-name etymologies (Mac an Tàilleir) have produced scholarly impact in the form of publications, public lectures and advice to Ainmean Àite na h-Alba (see below) and others. SMO also promotes, in partnerships with other universities, the development of Celtic Studies scholarship infrastructure - using cutting-edge, web database technology - through housing four inter-university KE projects: Tobar an Dualchais/Well of Heritage ('TAD'), Faclair na Gàidhlig/ Dictionary of the Scottish Gaelic Language (FnaG), Ainmean Àite na h-Alba/Gaelic Place-names of Scotland (AÀA); and POOLS-T. Users range from: individuals, cultural societies and performers (TAD); language learners, schools and agencies (FnaG); local authorities, Ordnance Survey, Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Parliament, Forestry Commission and Transport Scotland (AÀA); to language learners, researchers and teachers (TOOLS/POOLS-T).

**b. Approach to impact**

The unit's approach is characterised by detailed planning for impact, and by flexibility to create and respond to emerging opportunities and challenges. Examples of planned impact include TAD, FnaG and TOOLS/POOLS-T, which were conceived specifically to enable worldwide access to their resources, with user feedback being recorded to improve services. Other examples of planned impact include AÀA, offering an advisory service and publications to the public, drawing on Scottish Gaelic place-names research; and Lèirsinn, offering contract research services. Impact is also planned in individual staff research projects: Stiùbhart and Cheape's impact case studies are illustrations of this. Other research has thrown up new opportunities for increasing impact (see 2, below). Supports for impact are described below.

1. Through appraisals and line-management reviews, and the research mentoring scheme, staff agree and implement research impact plans and the required resources. Support is available from: SMO Development (e.g. for developing senior level contacts in government and agencies, such as Creative Scotland); College and UHI Marketing Departments; Research and Education, for, e.g., CPD developments, library archives and exhibition space; Cànan multi-media design and project development consultancy unit; Staff Development funds (e.g. impact/research proposal writing, conference/event attendance, training); exhibition space and exhibitions staff at SMO; SMO's publishing company, Clò Ostaig; and Facilities (offices and accommodation). Benefactors shape research impact through website feedback and participation in project governance.

2. Follow-up of research results' implications: for example, in the Language Attitudes and Abilities research (2011), researchers distributed research results to government ministers and civil servants, won additional monies to present the research to the relevant local authority and a range of public and voluntary sector bodies, persuaded Bòrd na Gàidhlig to fund published research result summaries to all households in the research area, and convinced them to hold a community open day where the research results were presented. These actions resulted in a community language plan, a local development group involving the community and multiple agencies, local action based on mitigating negative trends identified in the research findings, and a new priority of local development plans in the National Gaelic Language Plan (2012-17). New language learning and Gaelic social groups have begun, e.g. master-chef classes and mechanics workshops in Gaelic. Other research projects have, through coordination of research across institutions and benefactors, helped identify impact: e.g. Landgraf's PhD findings on strengths and weaknesses in Gaelic-medium education are being developed into a book for schools, parents and others.

3. Four CPDs were created to utilise research and teaching expertise in language planning. Staff members from Bòrd na Gàidhlig, and from Stòrlann (which creates teaching materials for Gaelic in schools) have attended. Staff also completed a research review of training needs of those in the Gaelic sector, which led to Bòrd na Gàidhlig sponsoring national training for Gaelic agency professionals.

4. Staff were supported to deliver impact by departments detailed in 1, above. Other supports included staff release from other duties, support with sabbatical applications to focus on delivering impact (e.g. Stiùbhart's sabbatical in 2012, funded by the British Academy and SMO, to disseminate knowledge of a seventeenth century collector, Martin Martin, through an open-access, fully searchable website, 8 community lectures, collaboration and joint marketing of the project and seminars with the Islands Book Trust, and two research papers).

**Impact template (REF3a)**

5. Public visits from senior public sector staff and government ministers and officials are much encouraged. SMO hosted - in some cases multiple - visits from government ministers (e.g. First Minister, Minister for Education, Minister for Rural Affairs, Minister for Gaelic). National government press announcements are frequently made from SMO. Senior officials from other organisations are frequently hosted: the SMO Annual Lecture series has featured senior figures from education, arts and cultural bodies and leading national politicians. For example, the Head of Creative Scotland gave the SMO Annual Lecture in 2010. This led to a major international arts conference at SMO in 2013, and contributed to an initiative to extend the Artists in Residence programme at the college from musician-, writer- and artist-in-residence to dramatist -in-residence.

6. Staff members are supported to become members of beneficiaries' advisory boards and groups to help strengthen understanding of beneficiaries' needs: for instance, Campbell is chairperson of Bòrd na Gàidhlig and a member of MG ALBA, and Dunbar was chairperson of the BnG Research Committee and a BnG Board member until 2012.

7. Other strategies include staff information and training sessions on KE, with expertise from the Head of KE at UHI, and planning new buildings infrastructure to include proximate offices for research and KE/business development. The Fàs building was opened in 2009, and houses the TAD, AÀA, FnaG, and Lèirsinn media research projects, two independent media companies, and a state-of-the-art, film studio. A new Administration, Research and Knowledge Exchange building will open in 2015, providing further facilities for research and business development.

**c. Strategy and plans**

This unit of assessment aims to continue to produce robust research and scholarship that has knowledge exchange at its core, in order to contribute to cultural life, education and social policy debates relating to Gaelic language and culture. It will do so by developing a more robust impact strategy through a new SMO Knowledge Exchange Committee (2014), building on the KE@SMO Health Audit of 2013, which identified areas of strength and weakness. The new committee will, through a new KE strategy, build on the 6 research/KE priority areas identified in the Research Strategy for 2014-19; and review and strengthen KE activity in each priority area and identify resources to develop them. The Committee will map and draw together, in a KE Centre, the different university services which support research impact and will draw in beneficiaries, in order to improve impact and identify more opportunities for development. A staff development programme, of training and awareness-raising on developing research impact, will run each year, with invited speakers from within UHI and externals. Knowledge exchange will become a standing item in annual SMO staff development days. The ARKE building (2014) will facilitate new research-KE relationships, which will be planned for in the new KE Strategy.

Impact is being planned for in: Soillse (dissemination of current Soillse research results, and CPD development), Lèirsinn (renewal of contract to provide statistical research to MG ALBA/BBC), TAD (continue building sound recording website and be a service provider for a potential national sound archive), AÀA (membership funding development and further outreach to improve use of service), FnaG (development of materials in database for use in formats suitable for schools etc), POOLS-T (producing materials for teachers), and in the individual /team academic research projects, through continuing publications, developing links with communities of users, and developing user websites.

**d. Relationship to case studies**

Preserving, conserving and presenting cultural heritage is a core area of work at UHI and in this unit of assessment. The two case studies presented exemplify how rigorous, world-class research in the musicology and folklore of Gaelic culture can benefit public understanding of the contribution of different aspects of Gaelic culture. The case studies describe 1. how research has led to new understanding of the history, musicology and sociology of the bagpipe, which has, in turn, influenced understanding in both the academic and piping practitioner worlds; 2. how research has shone new light on previously unknown oral materials and on the collection practices of a significant Gaelic folklore collector. Stiùbhart's research and dissemination of results is leading a new appreciation among all sectors of Gaelic society of the value of the collector's work. Together, these case studies are significant contributions to academic and public knowledge and to the use of Gaelic resources.