

Institution: The University of Edinburgh
Unit of Assessment: 28A Modern Languages
Title of case study: Gaelic Language Policy in Scotland: Revitalising and Sustaining the Gaelic Language
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Successive governments have emphasised the importance of Gaelic as a key element in Scottish culture, even though it is spoken by a small minority. Since 2001 the Department of Celtic and Scottish Studies (C&SS) at the University of Edinburgh has played a leading role in research concerning policies to revitalise and sustain Gaelic in Scotland. These policies have fundamentally altered the role of Gaelic in Scottish public life. Our research has made vital contributions to the work of Bòrd na Gàidhlig, the government body charged with promotion of the language, and other public bodies, especially in relation to education, from pre-school to adult learner provision, e.g. to date 1,500 pre-school pupils have benefitted from the recommendations in the early years report we produced in collaboration with the University of Stirling.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>C&SS at Edinburgh has since 2001 led research on the Gaelic language in contemporary Scotland. Researchers in C&SS have made a particular contribution to the evaluation of the strategic structures necessary for successful maintenance, promotion and institutionalisation of the language in order to halt its historic decline. Professor Wilson McLeod (appointed Lecturer 2001, Professor 2013-) has studied and animated the policy process leading to the adoption of legislative protection for Gaelic. His research, and also his involvement in working groups and policy reports for Gaelic agencies, played an important role in making the case for the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act that was passed in 2005.</p> <p>The Act aims to “secure the status of Gaelic as an official language of Scotland commanding equal respect to the English language”. To this end, it established a language planning board, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, which must produce a National Gaelic Language Plan every five years. Since 2005, McLeod’s academic research has placed the new policy infrastructure for Gaelic emerging in the mid-2000s in the longer historical context of Gaelic development and in the international context of minority language planning (3.1). He has also assessed the strategic opportunities presented by the Gaelic Language Act, suggesting ways in which it might be most effectively implemented, while analysing the strengths and weaknesses of the first statutory Gaelic language plans developed by public bodies in Scotland (3.2, 3.6).</p> <p>Based on his outstanding record of research concerning the implementation of language legislation, and also his involvement in policy-making, in 2010 the Bòrd commissioned McLeod to prepare a detailed evaluation of the first nine statutory language plans adopted by Scottish public authorities. This work dovetails with his academic publications on the implementation of the Gaelic Language Act (e.g. 3.5), which uses theoretical frameworks in language planning (e.g. Strubell’s “Catherine wheel” model) to analyse the strategic capacities of different kinds of bodies to enhance their provision for Gaelic and contribute meaningfully to Gaelic revitalisation.</p> <p>Another major strand of McLeod’s research centres on Gaelic-language education, from pre-school to adult learners, and involves collaboration with Dr Fiona O’Hanlon (Research Fellow C&SS, appointed Sept. 2010), Professor Lindsay Paterson (School of Social and Political Science, appointed 1998), and partners from the Universities of Stirling and Strathclyde (see e.g. 3.4). Most recently, O’Hanlon, Paterson and McLeod have researched language models used in the delivery of Gaelic education, discovering a significant degree of variation in practice among schools, which was previously unrealised by providers and policy-makers</p>

(<http://tinyurl.com/nurg5al>). Led by O'Hanlon, this report builds on their research and resultant co-authored journal article (2012) on the attainment levels of bilingual pupils educated through Gaelic (3.3). Funded by the ESRC, the Scottish Government and the Bòrd, O'Hanlon and Paterson have also conducted research on **public attitudes to the Gaelic language in Scotland**; O'Hanlon developed a special module of questions that were used in the 2012 Scottish Social Attitudes Survey, an authoritative study conducted annually by ScotCen Social Research (<http://tinyurl.com/ofq95wl>). Her expertise in the field of Gaelic policy and Gaelic education (3.3) enabled the creation of questions that inform academic and policy debate about the place of Gaelic in Scotland.

As a result of this research expertise at the University of Edinburgh, in 2009-10 Bòrd na Gàidhlig and the Scottish Government commissioned C&SS, following a competitive tendering process, to carry out three reviews on 1) **adult education**, 2) **Gaelic-medium primary and secondary education** and 3) **Gaelic early years education** (this report was carried out with the University of Stirling; McLeod contributed expertise on the Gaelic language in the education sector). The results of these three reports have significantly impacted on the Bòrd's *National Plan for Gaelic 2012-17* (see section 4). Between 2008-13 we obtained £235k research funding from the ESRC, the Scottish Government and the Bòrd to finance the five reviews featured in this section.

3. References to the research

3.1 McLeod, Wilson (2010). 'Leasachadh na Gàidhlig: paradaim ùr?' [= Gaelic development policy: a new paradigm?]. *Coimhearsnachdan Gàidhlig An-diugh/Gaelic Communities Today*, ed. by Gillian Munro and Iain Mac an Tàilleir. Edinburgh: Dunedin, 1-17. (Can be supplied by HEI on request).

3.2 McLeod, Wilson (2006). 'Securing the Status of Gaelic? Implementing the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005'. *Scottish Affairs* 57: 19-38. (Can be supplied by HEI on request).

3.3 O'Hanlon, Fiona, Lindsay Paterson and Wilson McLeod (2012). 'The Attainment of Pupils in Gaelic-medium Primary Education in Scotland'. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*. 15: 1-23. Listed in REF2 [[DOI:10.1080/13670050.2012.711807](https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2012.711807)]

3.4 Stephen, Christine, Joanna McPake and Wilson McLeod (2012). 'Playing and Learning in Another Language: Ensuring Good Quality Early Years Education in a Language Revitalisation Programme'. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*. 20 (1): 21-33. [[DOI: 10.1080/1350293X.2012.650009](https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2012.650009)]

3.5 McLeod, Wilson (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], in *Revitalising Gaelic in Scotland: Policy, Planning and Public Discourse*, ed. by Wilson McLeod. Edinburgh: Dunedin, 25-47. (Can be supplied by HEI on request).

3.6 McLeod, Wilson (2011). 'Planaichean reachdail Gàidhlig: cothroman is cnapan-starra' [= Statutory Gaelic plans: opportunities and obstacles], in *A' Cleachdadh na Gàidhlig: Slatan-tomhais ann an Dion Cànan sa Choimhearsnachd*, ed. by Richard A. V. Cox and Timothy Currie Armstrong. Sleat: Clò Ostaig, 227-48. (Can be supplied by HEI on request).

4. Details of the impact

A key requirement of the Gaelic Language Act is the obligation on public bodies to produce Gaelic language plans, when requested by Bòrd na Gàidhlig. McLeod's report on these plans for the Bòrd, underpinned by research outputs such as 3.6, has informed the process of plan design and approval, establishing a framework to help the Bòrd analyse the structure and implementation of other bodies' plans.

The three reports dealing with early years education and childcare, attainment and choice in primary and secondary education and adult Gaelic learning opportunities profoundly influenced the formation and implementation of the National Plans for Gaelic for 2007-12 and 2012-17 (5.4). Iain Caimbeul, then Deputy Chair of Bòrd na Gàidhlig, wrote “to confirm the importance that Bòrd na Gàidhlig places on the educational research that has recently been completed by yourselves [O’Hanlon, McLeod and Paterson]” and to “confirm that your educational research outputs have impacted on policy discussion and development at the Bòrd” (5.5).

In the wake of the **early years report** (<http://tinyurl.com/oe48nl6>) initiatives to restructure Gaelic early years provision have been put in place (5.2). The Bòrd is now implementing a new framework for provision, with a more direct role for the Bòrd itself in place of other agencies, and it organised three workshops in March 2011 to provide training in line with the report’s recommendations. The school inspectorate’s recent strategy document on Gaelic education noted the value of the 2010 report in “map[ping] the way ahead in pre-school provision” (5.8). In 2010 alone, the report affected 127 pre-school settings (851 pupils). To date the total number of schoolchildren who have benefitted from the recommendations we made in our report is ca. 1,500.

Following the publication of the **adult education report** (<http://tinyurl.com/oxdjzga>) the Bòrd gave a significant injection of funding to the course provider, Deiseal Ltd., to improve the offer of Gaelic classes to adults across Scotland. The Bòrd’s media release concerning this injection of funding referred specifically to the recommendations in this report (5.3). The findings of the report have directly influenced Glasgow City Council’s Gaelic Language Development strategy for adult learners (5.9).

The **report on choice and attainment** (<http://tinyurl.com/pakma3a>) has had a significant impact on official efforts to promote the uptake of Gaelic-medium education. Cabinet Secretary for Education Michael Russell “hoped [that] the report would encourage more families to opt for Gaelic education” and that “this report should give parents reassurance that choosing this path for their children will only benefit their educational journey” (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-11774353>). The importance of the report has been noted in the school inspectorate’s Gaelic strategy document (5.8), in the Scottish Government’s Curriculum for Excellence Gaelic Excellence Group report (2011, 5.6) and in Bòrd na Gàidhlig’s website and publications, including the *National Plan for Gaelic 2012-2017* (5.4). In March 2011 O’Hanlon made a presentation of the research findings to the Highland Council’s Gaelic Committee: the Council has quoted key findings from the report in its recent promotional leaflet on Gaelic education (5.7), as has Western Isles Council. Comann nam Pàrant, the organisation representing parents of children in Gaelic education, has also flagged up the research in its promotional materials (www.parant.org.uk/foghlam).

In 2011 O’Hanlon held eleven seminars in the schools that had taken part in the research. The Bòrd funded these events as part of its effort to maximise the impact of the research. The seminars provided discussion forums in which people involved in Gaelic education debated how the research might ratify or change their own understanding, experience or practice. Those attending were senior managers of schools with Gaelic streams, Gaelic advisers to local authorities, teachers in Gaelic- and English-medium education, local office bearers of Comann nam Pàrant and individual parents.

The importance of our research on attainment and choice was recognised by its inclusion in the Academy of Social Sciences’ *Making the Case for the Social Sciences: Scotland* (2012) booklet, where it is noted as a case study that has contributed “knowledge and evidence to policy, practice and public life” (5.1).

The **report on language models in Gaelic-medium** (<http://tinyurl.com/nurg5al>) was discussed at meetings of Bòrd na Gàidhlig’s National Gaelic Education Steering Group and Early Years Working Group in August 2012. O’Hanlon’s subsequent invitation to lead workshops in November 2012 in Uist and Stornoway and for new Gaelic teachers from across Scotland (65

teachers participated) indicates the impact of these discussions.

The research on **public attitudes to Gaelic** has been invoked by Scottish Government ministers, including the First Minister Alex Salmond, to explain and justify the Government's initiatives to promote Gaelic, especially in relation to education. Salmond has said: "We should be delighted by the indications from public opinion surveys that there is widespread public support for Gaelic-medium education [...]. That is a spectacular achievement, which should be celebrated by everyone in the chamber". Salmond has also noted the decision (20 February 2013) of the Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages, Alasdair Allan, to grant £90k to fund, alongside other initiatives, further summer schools in Gaelic communities for trainee teachers (<http://tinyurl.com/nsb97tp>).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

The following sources can be supplied by the HEI on request. All listed weblinks are to an original page, but should they be unavailable a PDF can be found at:
<http://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/REF2014REF3B/UoA+28A>

5.1 Academy of Social Sciences (2012). *Making the Case for the Social Sciences: No. 7, Scotland*. London: Academy of Social Sciences (PDF file). Corroborates the Academy of Social Sciences' assertion that our research on attainment and choice has contributed to policy, practice and public life.

5.2 Bòrd na Gàidhlig (2010a). 'Bòrd na Gàidhlig welcomes Gaelic Medium Early Years Education Report'. Press release, 25 June 2010 (PDF file). Corroborates the role of the early years report in bringing about the Bòrd's commitment to a new early years initiative as part of its new Action Plan.

5.3 Bòrd na Gàidhlig (2010b). 'Bòrd na Gàidhlig a' cuideachadh le taic is cothroman dhan luchd-ionnsachaidh' [= 'Bòrd na Gàidhlig helping with support and opportunities for learners']. Press release, 12 October 2010 (PDF file). Corroborates the impact of the adult education report on the Bòrd's funding for course provider, Deiseal Ltd.

5.4 Bòrd na Gàidhlig (2012). *Plana Nàiseanta na Gàidhlig 2012-2017: Fàs & Feabhas / The National Gaelic Plan 2012-2017: Growth & Improvement*. Inverness: Bòrd na Gàidhlig, pp. 7, 13 (PDF file). Corroborates that the three reports have profoundly influenced the formation and implementation of the National Plans for Gaelic 2007-12.

5.5 Email from the Deputy Chair of Bòrd na Gàidhlig, 12 July 2012 (PDF file). Corroborates the importance of educational research for the Bòrd's plans, and also that educational research in C&SS at the University of Edinburgh has impacted on policy discussion and development at the Bòrd.

5.6 Curriculum for Excellence Gaelic Excellence Group (2011). *Curriculum for Excellence Gaelic Excellence Report*. Edinburgh: The Scottish Government, pp. 17-19 (PDF file). Corroborates the importance of the report on choice and attainment for Scottish educational planners.

5.7 <http://tinyurl.com/o795lp9> Corroborates the importance of the report on choice and attainment for the Highland Council's Gaelic Committee.

5.8 HMIE (2011). *Gaelic Education: Building on the Successes, Addressing the Barriers*. Edinburgh: Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education, p. 4 (PDF file). Corroborates the importance of the early years report and the report on choice and attainment for the school inspectorate's strategy document on Gaelic education.

5.9 Milligan, Lindsay, et al. (2011). *Gaelic Language Development Strategy*. Glasgow: Glasgow City Council, pp. 8-9 (PDF file). Corroborates the importance of the adult education report for Glasgow City Council's Gaelic Language strategy.