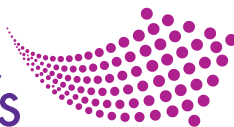




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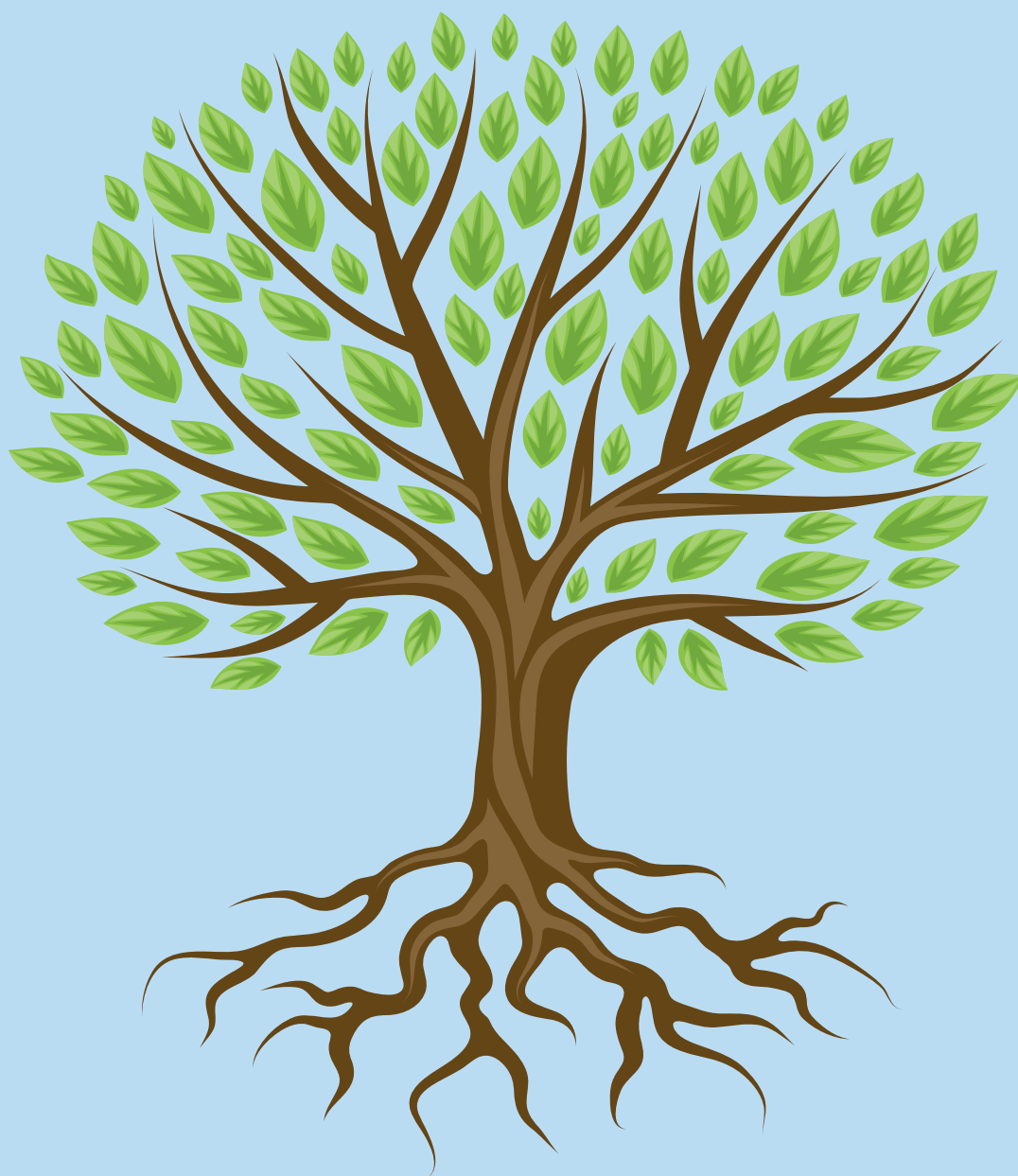
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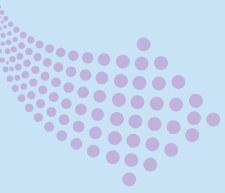
Gaelic – what would success look like?

ALBA 2030

A' Ghàidhlig – Buaidh is Piseach

The Scottish Parliament, Friday 6 December 2019





Introduction



Gaelic matters: it is part of who we are and part of Scotland's rich cultural identity.



To continue the Futures Forum's exploration of Scotland in 2030, Ken Macintosh MSP, Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament and chair of the Futures Forum, chaired a discussion on what success would look like for one of Scotland's official languages by 2030.

With contributions in Gaelic, English and Irish, this multilingual event challenged participants to reflect on the current status of Gaelic in Scotland and the challenges and opportunities that it presents, and to think creatively about the future of the language up to 2030 and beyond.

Panel members

Professor Wilson McLeod

Wilson is director of research for Celtic and Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh. He presented on the state of Gaelic yesterday, today and tomorrow, based on his research into the history of Gaelic policy and campaigns over the past 150 years.

Mary Ann Kennedy

Mary Ann is a musician and broadcaster. Having been brought up in Glasgow in a Gaelic-speaking household, she is currently co-director of her own creative business in the West Highlands. She spoke about the future of the language from an artist's point of view.

Professor Tadhg Ó hÍfearnáin

Tadhg is Professor of Modern Irish at the National University of Ireland in Galway. He provided a perspective based on the Irish experience of protecting and supporting an indigenous language, and spoke about the lessons that Scotland can learn from Ireland.

Panel Discussion

Presentation:

Professor Wilson McLeod

From the outset, Wilson aspired to be truthful rather than hopeful. He began by describing the gloomy situation of Gaelic many decades ago. In 1958, the Celtic languages expert Professor Kenneth Jackson said:

“Scottish Gaelic will be quite extinct by the middle of the next century, unless some new factor is introduced which radically alters the present situation”.

Wilson described the shift in the status of Gaelic from the 1970s onwards, aided by language renaissance initiatives by the then Western Isles Council. At the end of the 1970s, Dr Finlay MacLeod, whom Wilson described as the architect of bilingual education, stated:

“It has become a political act for Hebridean parents to bring up their children as Gaelic speakers.”

As Wilson pointed out, the Gaelic revival began because campaigners declared a state of emergency for the language. The 1980s saw the establishment of a sound basis for Gaelic policy, which has been built up consistently over the past 30 years, like placing stones on a cairn. By 1992, however, less than 20% of primary school pupils in the Western Isles were fluent in Gaelic.

Wilson chose to focus on a ‘very good case scenario’ rather than a ‘best case scenario’, although he emphasised that even the former might not come to pass. He focused on three main areas: education, media, and planning and development structure.

Education

Education has been at the heart of Gaelic development initiatives since the 1970s, and Wilson predicted that that would continue. He detailed a few outcomes that may come to pass by 2030:

- A 50% increase in the number of primary school pupils in Gaelic-medium education.
- 66% of primary school pupils in the Western Isles in GME.
- An increase in the number of Gaelic primary schools from seven to 14.
- An increase of 75% in the number of secondary school pupils in GME.
- An expansion in the number of Gaelic secondary schools from one to three or four, and an increase from 33% to 50% in the number of Gaelic learners in secondary schools overall.

In addition, we might see:

- The creation of a Gaelic exam certificate system for adult learners based on the Common European Framework.
- The development of a project involving speaking ability in Gaelic, with the re-establishment of immersion courses throughout Scotland.
- The establishment of community language hubs to give people an opportunity to use Gaelic; the hubs would vary in nature for different communities.

Media

Wilson asserted that it would be more difficult to identify successful outcomes for Gaelic in the media, as technology is moving so rapidly. It is essential that Gaelic media keeps up with the technology that people, especially young people, are using. In 2030, Gaelic should be available and used creatively in the most important media of the day, although he suggested that that would not be easy to achieve.

Planning and development structure

Wilson highlighted the important question of whether the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 and Bòrd na Gàidhlig should be:

- kept as they are
- developed further
- replaced by something totally new.

He cited the recent Deloitte audit report on the governance and management of Bòrd na Gàidhlig, which identified several basic weaknesses. He noted that, while many people hope and expect that developments will be implemented in response to the report, we have yet to see what comes out of it.

He referred to Bòrd na Gàidhlig's current lack of capacity as a key weakness that, to an extent, stems from a lack of money. However, he argued that the Bòrd can be improved in other respects, and that much more can be done with the current legislation. In his view, the Bòrd requires:

- To become stronger, more robust and more open.
- To be closer to the community, especially in communities where Gaelic is strong.
- To appoint more Gaelic officers at community level.

He suggested that, if fundamental change does not occur in response to the Deloitte report, a new Gaelic act might be required. He also floated the idea of establishing a new post of Gaelic commissioner, equivalent to the current post of Welsh Language Commissioner in Wales, although he said that that would not be easy.

In considering whether a more ambitious and adventurous approach could be taken, Wilson outlined three main visions for a new pathway for Gaelic, although he said that it was not certain whether any of them would come to pass.

Vision 1

Scotland will gain independence in the 2020s, leading to a transformation of the place of Gaelic. Wilson said that there was not much evidence in the SNP Government's record since 2007 or in what was promised in the 2014 referendum campaign to instil confidence that such a transformation would occur in the event of independence.

Vision 2

Much stronger economic and social support to the Western Isles will lead to stronger language policies, lifting the yoke from the people and awakening their spirit to revive Gaelic. Again, Wilson stated that he did not see any evidence to support that view.

Vision 3

A new Gaelic self-identity will draw people to the language and give energy and impetus to a deep far-reaching movement, resulting in the kind of transformation that has occurred in the Basque Country over the past few decades. However, Wilson noted that such a self-identity cannot be created with goodwill alone.

Conclusion

Wilson argued that, while his predictions were a little depressing, we must start with an honest appreciation and understanding of the world in which we live. He concluded that, in order to move forward, we need to look at politics and the social aspects of community in Scotland and in the Gaelic communities.



Presentation:

Mary Ann Kennedy

Looking at the state of Gaelic from an artist's point of view, Mary Ann began by singing a few lines from her version of Aonghas 'Dubh' MacNeacail's poem "Sìth na Coille" (*The Peace of The Forest*):

"Bitheamaid gu moiteil cinnteach gu bheil duais am miannach stàth – ged nach ruig sinn cinn nam fireach, faic an dùrachd fhèin mar bhàrr"

"Let us be proud and certain there's a prize in seeking good – though the peaks may be beyond us, see the wish itself as crown"

She said that she believed in the very good case scenario to which Wilson referred, and argued that we cannot think about where we are going to be in 10 years without considering how we get there. She asserted that it is not naïve to be hopeful, but we need to be challenging and active.

Mary Ann pointed out that the world is uncertain, and the same goes for Gaelic; everything is intertwined. She did not think that party politics would make much difference to Gaelic today, tomorrow or in 10 years' time. She stressed that there is no benefit in differentiating between those who live in the city and those who dwell in rural areas – it is a small world and we all rely on each other.

She stated that the stronger the people, the stronger their authority, and that is where the opportunity lies. There has been a voluntary movement from the root, from the community, which has created opportunities for people to get into the Gaelic world.

Mary Ann went on to talk about on grey squirrels and red squirrels – the analogy used by Professor Donald MacLean at the University of Glasgow to differentiate between the strategy-based approach in the wider world and the natural way that people work in smaller organisations.

The grey squirrel is driven by capitalism: it smothers everything in strategies and keeps the red squirrel down – an analogy that can be applied to minority languages.

She highlighted that there is more flexibility at the grassroots community level, and questioned whether we really want to ask communities to be more like the grey squirrels, when it is those squirrels that need to change.

Instead, we need to recognise the value of the grassroots movements for Gaelic, because they are important and strong. The red squirrels know how to look after themselves and get the best out of the world in which they live.



Mary Ann also mentioned community movements, and innovations such as the new Duolingo app for learning Gaelic and the *Daily Gael*. She emphasised that many initiatives are undertaken without Government support. While we do not know what steps will be taken in the next 10 years, they will come naturally with proper roots in the communities, and the changes will be long-lasting.

She said that, although she had been asked to give her opinion on where Gaelic would be in 10 years, that is what the grey

squirrels would want to know, but she is a red squirrel: she has the Gaelic, and she follows a Gaelic route.

Mary Ann said that she sees the same approach in many different people who are coming to the Gaelic – in her own generation, in the people who went before her and in those who follow today and will carry on the movement in the future. That is where the Gaelic world will be in 2030, if we want to follow a new route or – as she sees it – return to the route that we once followed.



Presentation: **Professor Tadhg Ó hIfearnáin**

Tadhg began by drawing out the similarities between Scotland and Ireland, which are close linguistically and similar economically. He emphasised the importance of activism around the Irish language over the past 120 years.

Has Irish language policy been successful?

Tadhg challenged the view that language policy in Ireland has been unsuccessful, arguing that the issue is more that it is not detailed or nuanced enough. Irish is not spoken by everyone everywhere in Ireland, so in that sense the policy has not been a success, but nonetheless a lot of minority-language speakers across Europe and around the world would be jealous of the current status of Irish. Furthermore, as Tadhg pointed out, there is a lot to be learned from the elements of policy that have been successful. He responded to the three broad themes that Wilson spoke about, beginning with structures and the state.

Role of the state

According to Tadhg, the biggest issue is the nature of our society today. We need to look at what is possible and what is not, and consider the structural obstacles that we face. In Ireland, the first half of the century saw ambitious policies in play, as the state had the authority to take sweeping actions. Today, however, the state does not have the authority to undertake such a role, as there would be resistance from communities.

Picking up on Mary Ann's argument that a strong community has more power than the state, Tadhg asserted that, in modern society, the state needs to entice the community to come with it and adhere to its policies rather than forcing it to do so. The big question therefore concerns what communities can do and what the state can do. The state still has a huge amount of power, and as such it is not acceptable for it to offer no leadership on linguistic questions.

The linguistic community: complicated questions

Tadhg suggested that the most important goal is to ensure that the challenge of raising children with a minority language should be less daunting and difficult for parents. He cited research in Ireland on how many families raise their children with Irish, which does not happen by accident – it is a conscious decision.

He highlighted that the proportion of families raising children through Irish in the core communities has been relatively stable over the past 30 years. Nonetheless, the number of individual speakers seems to be falling. He argued that we need to think about the entire political system and focus on the whole linguistic community, including the weaker areas, otherwise there is only maintenance rather than growth.

The situation in Scotland

Tadhg highlighted that the islands and mainland areas in Scotland where Gaelic is spoken are in a similar situation to Ireland. The Gaelic heritage is extremely important, but other things are also important to the people who live there. It is important that Gaelic identity forms a core part of the local identity, and that should include people with different levels of linguistic ability.

Education

On education, Tadhg pointed out the similarities between Ireland and Scotland, although he noted that Irish-language education is more developed because the sector is much larger. He highlighted some questions with regard to the number of people attending schools that teach in a minority language:

- Are those people learning the language well?

- Are they able to speak it fluently when they leave school?
- Do they have a strong linguistic ideology that would encourage them to use the language of their own accord after school?

Broadcasting

On broadcasting, Tadhg raised a big question around the role of the state and public authorities. He said that the majority of students studying Irish at his university do not listen to Irish radio or watch Irish-language television, but instead get their media input from podcasts and websites. He discussed the question of how the state can operate in the sector, which is dynamic and fast moving, and emphasised that interventions need to be effective.

He went on to highlight some positive aspects in Ireland:

- The Irish language is relatively strong in the media.
- Thousands of children are learning the language in school.
- Irish is an official language that people can – and do – use in the universities, public administration and the European Parliament.

Tadhg concluded by emphasising that the language policy in Ireland has not been a complete failure. There have been significant developments in policy and in the status of the language that could not reasonably have been predicted 120 years ago.

Looking towards 2030 and at the situation of Gaelic in Scotland, Tadhg asserted that we have to be realistic and recognise the challenges that lie ahead so that we can be flexible in order to overcome them.



Q&A Discussion

Political priorities

The discussion kicked off on the subject of political planning. In the context of the first possible scenario that Wilson described, in which Scotland became independent, participants discussed whether pro-independence parties had plans for an effective language policy. It was suggested that the 2014 Scottish Government White Paper “Scotland’s Future” had not taken a revolutionary approach to Gaelic.

It was noted that most areas related to Gaelic are already devolved to Holyrood, so the Scottish Government has the power to move ahead with many of the actions that are required. It was argued that the problems lie in a lack of structure and implementation.

Regardless of who is in power, we may need stronger legislation that offers no escape routes for Government. It was suggested that the Scottish Government will never prioritise Gaelic in the same way as health, for example.

Participants suggested that, while the 2005 Act has enough in it, Bòrd na Gàidhlig may not have enough employees. A comparison was drawn with Wales, where the former Welsh Language Board had four times as many employees and 500 language plans. In Scotland, there are only 60 plans, and the rate of growth is very slow.

However, it was argued that simply promising more funding to the Bòrd would not necessarily improve matters, and that the points raised in the Deloitte report must be addressed.



Regardless of who is in power, we may need stronger legislation that offers no escape routes for Government.





People have to take control of the language themselves, as that is where the strength lies.



Roles and responsibilities

Talking about the actions of Government led to a discussion about the roles and duties of the state and communities respectively. It was argued that if authorities and Governments keep putting layers above the grassroots, communities will be smothered and held back.

However, it is unfair of the state to simply ask communities to come up with solutions and save the language themselves; it was asserted that leadership is needed from the top down as well as the bottom up. Equally, it was highlighted that there is a responsibility on the community to act on the language with appropriate support from the state.

The effectiveness of local Gaelic plans was discussed, and it was argued that they can be useful. However, it was noted that the system in Ireland under the Gaeltacht Act 2012, which asks communities to develop their own plans, has not been particularly successful because communities do not have the infrastructure and the skills at local level.

That means that the legislation is simply a way for the state to pass responsibility over to communities without giving them the power to do anything.

Participants gave examples of how the younger generation are already moving things forward voluntarily in the way that they want to see. It was asserted that people have to take control of the language themselves, as that is where the strength lies.

Measuring success

Participants considered the important question of how success in Gaelic policy can be measured. For example, do we look at the numbers of people who attend Gaelic-medium education or who actually speak Gaelic?

It was argued that, while learning through GME is an advantage, the number of people who speak the language should be the fundamental concern. It was emphasised that the biggest goal should be to normalise speaking the language, so people can converse in their own language without making apologies or excuses.

The issue of human resources was discussed as a big issue in both Scotland and Ireland. It was noted that, if we want to see schools everywhere in which Gaelic is spoken, including in rural areas – the question of a new school for the Western Isles was raised – we need to ask who will fill those teaching roles.

It was suggested by one participant that adult learners of Gaelic need to become fluent within a year, otherwise around 80% of them are lost. Participants also noted that we need to find a way of getting Gaelic into the home, as homes create communities.

The participant also suggested that language teaching should concentrate on speaking rather than reading, writing, translation and grammar. Some people felt that the situation in Scotland is the wrong way round – we need to get people speaking first if we want to build strong Gaelic communities.

Workshop Groups



After the Q&A discussion, participants were split into smaller workshop groups to consider how Scotland might change over the next ten years and, in that context, their hopes for Gaelic.

The following notes capture key points to come out of the discussions, as well as a post-event survey through which participants could share reflections anonymously.

Scotland in 2030

Participants were initially invited to consider how Scotland might change over the coming 10 years and reflect on the changes that would be particularly important for the development of the Gaelic language.

The following context was provided to stimulate discussion:

In 2030, Scotland's population is roughly the same as now, but with an older average age and a greater number of people above 80, many of whom are living with complex medical conditions such as dementia.

In 2030, Scotland experiences a higher number of extreme weather events, including frequent storms and high winds, regular flooding and colder winters. International tourism has declined due to carbon taxes, but domestic tourism has increased.

In 2030, new technology affects all aspects of our lives, with driverless cars and drones common across the country, decisions on public services taken by artificial intelligence, and miniaturised robotics revolutionising our home and working lives. Everyone in Scotland has access to a superfast internet connection.

In 2030, the job market in Scotland has changed, with a greater number of people working part-time or with portfolio careers in which they move frequently between short-term contracts.

In 2030, some 40% of people in Scotland are obese but younger people are eating more healthily and exercising more than their parents.

In 2030, in line with other developed economies, economic growth, and the tax revenue it is based on, continues to be slow – although other measures of success beyond GDP form a greater part of political discussion.

Participants noted the following key areas of change for the future of Gaelic.

Environmental changes

Climate change will be a major factor over the coming decade. This will provide challenges to remote and rural communities, including traditional Gaelic communities in the Highlands and Island.

People will have to adapt their behaviour to cope with warmer, drier summers and wetter and windier winters, while rising sea levels were also mentioned – how will that affect the islands and other coastal communities?

With society exploring how to live more sustainably, there may be a greater attention on Scotland's natural environment. Given the strong link between the Gaelic language and our natural heritage, is there an opportunity for the Gaelic language?

Technological changes

Technological developments may provide positive and disruptive opportunities. Translation technology will continue to develop, and it will be easier to develop and spread Gaelic language resources, both for learners and users.

However, will we even need translators in 2030? Will technology do it for us? And, if it is easier to communicate in different languages without having to understand them, where does that leave the development of a language like Gaelic? We may see and hear Gaelic more widely without people having to learn how to speak, read and write it.

How will robotics and automation affect society? Will we have moved to a three-day working and some form of universal basic income? Will people have more free time and, if so, will it give people more time to learn Gaelic?

Social changes

As the context for our lives changes, so will society. There may be a strengthening confidence in Scottish identity – and regional identity within Scotland – that is both linked to and separate from the Scottish independence movement.

As Scotland continues to increase in diversity, there will be the opportunity of bringing Scotland's new communities into speaking Gaelic. There may also be opportunities to reach out to international and diaspora Scots, who may take a more readily positive approach to the language.

The shifting sands of society will be reflected in the changes in the media we use. As more of us have the opportunity to share our ideas and find an audience online, the grassroots generation of content and

the professionalisation of social media influencers may allow for more Gaelic content online. But if the media fragments, how will that Gaelic content reach new audiences?

Public services

The nature of public services is likely to change significantly over the next 10 years. As ever, this provides opportunities and challenges for the future of the Gaelic language.

Education, including Gaelic medium education, may have a very different shape, with opportunities to build further connections between those in the education system and their local communities. As jobs change and disappear, there will be greater attention on adult education and retraining, potentially providing a new source of language learners.





What would success look like for Gaelic in 2030?

Numbers and infrastructure

In 2030, more people are speaking the language, more people are hearing the language, and more people are learning the language. There is an expansion in the ability, literacy and vocabulary of Gaelic users, both learners and fluent speakers.

The tools of life are available in Gaelic: public services, education and learning resources and IT tools such as Microsoft Windows. Gaelic is more visible in the choices offered by the private sector, too.

There are physical spaces – formal and informal – where people can use Gaelic: a presence for Bòrd na Gàidhlig in Edinburgh, more classes for learners throughout the country, and Gaelic centres with coffee shops that attract tourists too.

Gaelic in our lives

Gaelic is familiar – we see it, hear it and recognise it throughout Scotland, in formal and informal settings.

More parents and families are using Gaelic in the home. Parents raise their families through Gaelic, with friends who do the same thing, providing natural opportunities for people to use Gaelic with their families in an informal way. Gaelic is the unmarked choice between children and between generations, and it not just confined to safe and organised spaces.

We see Gaelic in our leisure time, and people take part in social events in their communities in Gaelic – cèilidhs, music courses, book groups and volunteering. Gaelic is one of the languages of the new media, with new vocabulary developed beyond traditional activities to reflect the changes in society driven by technology.

We have fun in Gaelic: playing and watching sport and music, and on film and television. There are more creative, subversive and fun things like Graficanna, the Daily Gael and Peat and Diesel, we watch Gaelic language stand-up comedians, and Gaelic-language dramas on television draw audiences worldwide.

Gaelic in public life

Gaelic is visible and audible in public life, with Gaelic routinely used for non-Gaelic issues. We often hear Gaelic being used in public life, such as by MSPs on the television, at train and bus stations, and other public spaces.

More Gaelic is sought on job adverts. Jobs where Gaelic was used in 2019 still have people using Gaelic in 2030 and, beyond that, jobs that were done only by monolingual English speakers are now also done by Gaelic speakers – jobs in technology, tourism, health, art and retail.

Gaelic is normalised within many workplaces across the country, with all organisations assuming they have to incorporate Gaelic in any work or development they undertake. There are enough speakers and translators to support those organisations, with a Gaelic professional skills network and mentorship scheme supporting public and private sector bodies throughout the country.

Scotland's development as an exporter of renewable energy is linked to its natural heritage and the Gaelic language, with international attention drawn to the language. Translation technology enables the first Gaelic millionaire through social media influencing.

Gaelic in education

There is steady growth in Gaelic-medium education in all parts of Scotland, with enough staff for more schools that are fluent in Gaelic.

Education at secondary level includes the opportunity for school pupils to develop science, technology, engineering and maths [STEM] skills in Gaelic for university and for work. Language resources are regularly updated, and there are frequent opportunities to use the language in virtual communities.

In further education, there are a growing number of courses taught in Gaelic, including in STEM subjects, while Scottish universities are branded through their Scottish linguistic identity, with both Gaelic and English included. Open University courses and apps like Duolingo enable people to develop their skills at all levels.

Confidence and pride

Overall, there is widespread acceptance that multilingualism is not just good but the natural state for all people living in Scotland and that Gaelic is one of the most important languages used here.

The Gaelic community is driving and influencing policy and delivering major programmes, and it is not apologetic or defensive about wanting Gaelic choices.

Gaelic first is a realistic option, and those who don't have the Gaelic respond positively. The non-Gaelic speaking population are comfortable about publicly backing the language and taking pride in Gaelic, its culture and heritage.

We are confident and comfortable speaking Gaelic whenever and wherever we like.

»»» Emerging questions

Although there was a lot of agreement on the ambition for Gaelic to be heard and seen more, there were naturally some disagreements on some issues. The following questions emerged during the discussions and survey.

The solutions may not be mutually exclusive but the point to decisions that will need to be made it comes to the most effective use of scarce resources.

What should our aims be for the use of Gaelic?

To increase the use of Gaelic in Scotland, there will have to be an increase both in the number of new learners and in the skills of current learners. Some participants pointed to the value of a living culture on the lips of the people, which might be more respected than things on paper. Others hoped for literacy abilities at the same level as speaking abilities, noting the benefit in expanding human potential.

In developing the language, what is more important: formal literacy skills or people's ability to speak and use the language in informal settings?

Type of intervention: structural support v community action

That Gaelic requires support to survive and thrive was not disputed, but there were questions about the best type of intervention. Participants identified a wide range of ideas: applying equality standards to linguistic minorities, sharing tactics to give people the confidence to use Gaelic, and developing strategies for dealing with online trolls.

It was also suggested that community-led initiatives could have more impact – the development of the Scots Gaelic Duolingo app being an example.

Sustainable and appropriate funding is key to all the ambitions, but how can we balance the need for Gaelic to have formal status in certain areas, with the importance of supporting communities to develop their own solutions?

Role of education

To increase the number of speakers – both learners and fluent – education is needed at all levels. There are different target audiences: children and young people, both at school and outside; their parents and carers; working-age adult beginners and improvers; and an increasing number of retired older people. Each has different needs and motivations: for example, do adult households have more time to learn than those with children?

How can we make education available to those who want and need it – in a manner that suits them and makes them more likely to succeed?



Economy v history: how important is culture to the future for Gaelic?

As Scottish society changes, communities in which Gaelic was traditionally strong may continue to decline, and there is a risk that Gaelic will be lost in 'traditional jobs' such as fishing, crofting and the Church.

The role of Gaelic culture – and Gaelic as a way of life – was also mentioned as a key component of Gaelic medium education. Equally, participants identified the potential for Gaelic to (re)develop in different areas and the importance of making Gaelic central in new economic sectors such as technology and renewable energy.

There is a strong connection between Gaelic and Scotland's natural environment, but is it more important to link its future to new economic sectors?

Geographic focus of interventions

One continuing question will be the relative merits of supporting the language in traditional Gaelic areas and in the cities, which are among the fastest growing areas for the language.

Gaelic in the traditional communities is fragile, and the communities generally face challenges of depopulation and adaptation to climate change. That said, these are the places where it is still spoken as a community language, and many believe that it is in those areas that the battle to save Gaelic will be won or lost. There may also be opportunities with immigration to Gaelic areas and new communities embracing the language.

Equally, the Gaelic speaking communities in cities may benefit from the infrastructure available to them. Others also noted the importance of casting the 'net' further than Scotland. Jobs should be advertised in England and further afield, for example, and there may be a global interest in the language that will help build confidence in Scotland.

With that in mind, where should be the geographic focus of support for Gaelic?



Key themes of conference

Drawing together the feedback sessions and the post-event survey, the following key themes emerged from this conference.

Education is not a magic bullet

To grow the language, more people will need to learn Gaelic through formal learning. Education is therefore hugely important and should be developed with further support, better resources and more teachers. However, the future for Gaelic will not be secured through education alone.

Change is coming

It is essential that Gaelic is at the heart of all economic initiatives as Scotland changes in response to the twin challenges of climate change and technological disruption. Development that does not mainstream and prioritise Gaelic could do more harm than good. We should therefore put more emphasis on industry to insist that the Gaelic is spoken in sectors like tourism, hospitality and medicine. It is not good enough for Gaelic to be considered “an advantage”; it should be “essential”.

A social network

Families are crucial – intergenerational transmission of the language is essential for a positive future – and community networks for the families are needed too. Infrastructure has to be built from the grassroots, and communities require support, funding and guidance from outside to do this effectively – from the Government, universities and other public, voluntary and private groups. With an aging population, we also need to make provision for older people.

The power of stories

For Gaelic to have its rightful place in society, the different media now available must be used as effectively as possible. BBC Alba should be just the start – STV and other BBC channels should be encouraged to air programmes in Gaelic too. There should also be more Gaelic books, films and podcasts, and we need more Gaelic social media influencers. As well as engaging speakers and learners, this will help to build confidence among Gaelic speaking community and help people lead their lives in Gaelic as much as possible.

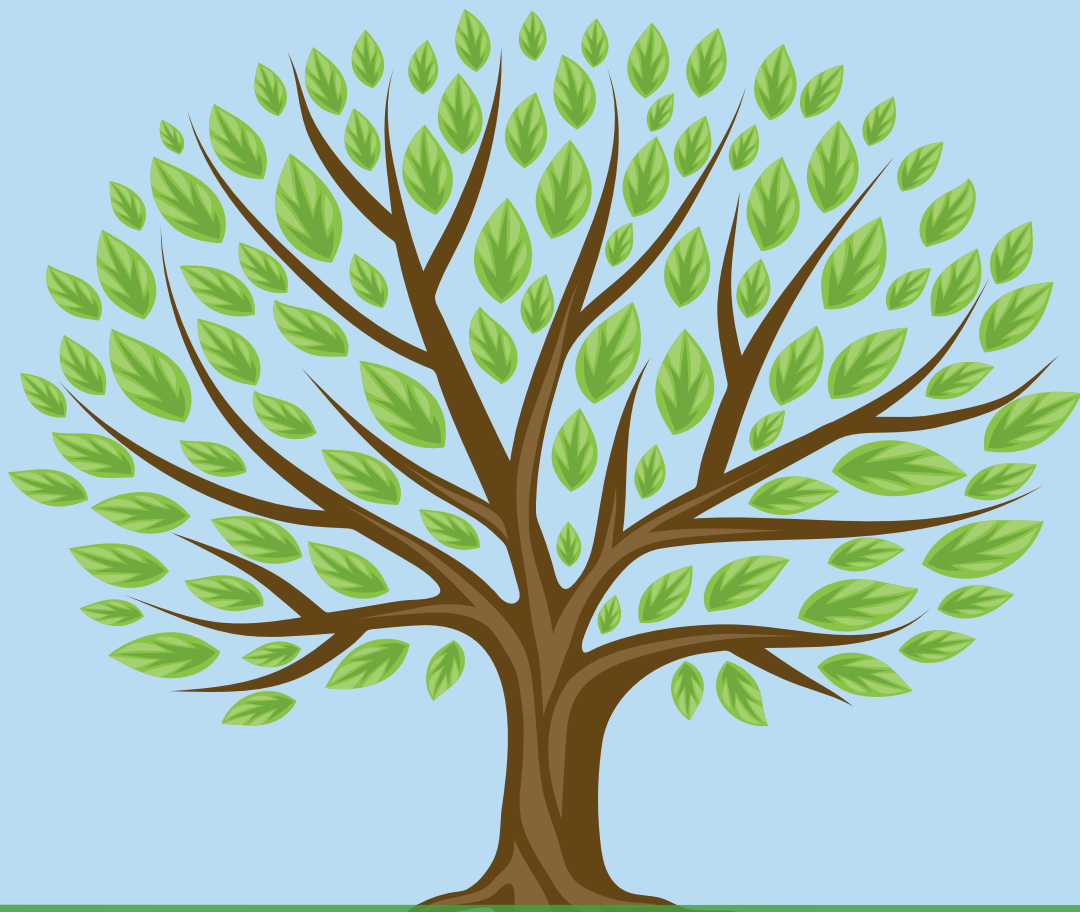
Part of all our lives

It is important that Gaelic is normalised in services, policy and strategy. This requires continued support from politicians across the spectrum. Gaelic is a language for everyone – regardless of their views on independence, Brexit or any other political issue – and the Scottish Parliament’s Cross-Party Group on Gaelic will continue to be a vital forum for debate.

Come together as a community

Gaelic cannot be saved in two minutes: the situation is complicated, and vision is needed, even beyond 2030. All interested groups need to work much more closely to build a positive future for Gaelic. Events like this one must happen more frequently, including with young people who will be a key part of the future of Gaelic.

As one participant said after the event:



The different pieces we have (like education, media, events, and the law) are the roots of the tree of living Gaelic. The tree will not survive if we only water one root. The land under the tree is the community, and the government is the water: if the water renews the whole tree, it will be much healthier. No single root can save our language: they all need each other.





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