

Appendix A

Àrainn Steòrnabhaigh Meeting Findings

Àrainn Steòrnabhaigh

The Àrainn Steòrnabhaigh initiative arose from discussions between An Lanntair, An Taigh Cèilidh, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar Library Services and Sgioba na Gàidhlig.

Attendees were invited to participate in a discussion about the future of the Gaelic language, in and around Stornoway, in **An Lanntair on Tuesday 2nd Sept. 2025, 2:00-4:00pm.**

The aim of the discussion was to ascertain whether there was a desire and willingness on the part of local organisations and businesses to work together to maximise potential socio, cultural and economic opportunities related to Gaelic, and if there was, to identify next steps towards the creation of a strategy.

The format was as follows:

1. Welcome.
2. Introduce Àrainn Steòrnabhaigh concept.
3. Group discussion: How does Àrainn Steòrnabhaigh benefit from Gaelic currently?
Feedback
4. Group discussion: How could benefits from Gaelic be increased and expanded?
Feedback
5. Identify possible short-term actions for individual organisations / businesses.
6. Agree broad parameters for a long-term, strategic approach.

56 delegates from 34 organisations attended the session. A number of organisations and delegates were engaging with the Gaelic agenda for the first time.

It was agreed that the socio-cultural and educational benefits of bilingualism were generally accepted, and that the focus for discussions should instead be on raising awareness of the current and potential economic benefits of Gaelic to the economy of the islands.

The fact that the linguistic landscape of the islands is changing due to demographic shift was noted. Plans to address support for Gaelic in Àrainn Steòrnabhaigh will have to be designed to take account of this.

Responses to the set questions were as follows:

How does Àrainn Steòrnabhaigh benefit from Gaelic currently?

Gaelic-related employment in the Stornoway area (salaries): Stòrlann; Acair; MG Alba; Bòrd na Gàidhlig; Schools – Primaries & Secondary & e-Sgoil – teachers, classroom assistants & administrative support role; UHI NW&H, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (CnES) – Sgioba na Gàidhlig; Accredited Skills and Training; CnES Multimedia Unit; Library Service; An Lanntair; An Taigh Cèilidh; Careers Scotland; An Comunn Gàidhealach; Fèisean nan Gàidheal; Gaelic tutors; remote workers; translators; proofreaders; IT specialists; marketing; freelance journalists; media companies, Radio nan Gàidheal, Comunn na Gàidhlig; singers, musicians & performers; producers of Gaelic arts & craft, Third Sector Hebrides.

Revenue: Project grants for above mentioned organisations; Gaelic Specific Grants; skills development, etc.

Capital: Investment in buildings; technology, etc.

Economic Impact Analysis

Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) staff are currently planning to commission an economic impact analysis of the value of Gaelic to the local economy. CnES looks forward to collaborating with them and other interested public and private sectors organisations in this undertaking.

How could benefits from Gaelic be increased and expanded?

- Produce an up-to-date analysis of Gaelic economic impact.
- Present findings to the general public in accessible and digestible formats.
- Incentivise the use of Gaelic.
- Increase collaboration, reduce duplication and focus on outcomes and best value.
- Increase public awareness of the damaging effects of over-correction and the need to actively encourage learners or lapsed speakers.
- Normalisation and use of Gaelic in as diverse a range of situations as possible.
- Identify examples of best practice from other minority language settings to share locally.
- Focus on bridging the gap between school and community / world of work usage.
- Create more learning opportunities – especially in light of the expected increase in workforce migration to islands.
- Ensure a strategic and sustained approach to maximising potential benefits accruing from Royal National Mòd and Fèisean.
- Ensure a wider range of organisations are aware of potential funding opportunities and minimise bureaucracy when it comes to applying for funding.

Can you identify some short-term actions for your organisations, or you as an individual, that will lead to increased use of Gaelic?

Suggestions were as follows:

- Create micro-climates conducive to the use of Gaelic e.g. taxi signage. *Tha Gàidhlig gu leòr agam, Tha beagan Gàidhlig agam* or *Bruidhinn Gàidhlig rium*.
- Incentivise through e.g. discount for ordering in Gaelic in An Taigh Cèilidh.
- Take a conscious decision to speak Gaelic more frequently in the workplace and socially, because it costs nothing!
- Be a bit more assured of your right to use Gaelic and explain the rationale – ‘pride over politeness’.
- avoid repeating tasks /events that have little positive impact on promoting the use of Gaelic meaningfully.

What longer-term strategic approaches should be adopted?

- Produce a rationale for Àrainn Steòrnabhaigh and reach a wider audience by celebrating success/ impact using engaging social media, etc.
- Ensure more Gaelic is spoken and heard, and is more visible in Àrainn Steòrnabhaigh – signage etc. Lead by example.
- Work closely with Gaelic development officers and organisations from other areas to share best practice.
- Focus on the delivery of effective language outcome e.g. officers produce public-facing signage and user-friendly support materials rather than lengthy, bureaucratic reports of limited reach.
- Conduct awareness-raising sessions about the importance of intergenerational transmission with parents, grandparents and the wider community.
- Ensure that there a range of flexible learning pathways related to employment that are built into recruitment and selection procedures.
- Ensure that communities and agencies adopt a collaborative, strategic approach to language promotion: training, learner class provision, etc.
- Foster private sector buy-in.

The Gaelic landscape

Positives

1. Political support for Gaelic has aligned at a national level.
2. Bile na Gàidhlig received unanimous cross-party support and Achd na Gàidhlig has been passed by the Scottish Parliament.

3. Draft criteria for Areas of Linguistic Significance are being drawn up and there is an opportunity to influence the process.
4. The National Census evidenced an increase in the number of Gaelic speakers in several areas of the Scottish mainland.
5. There are more flexible options for learning Gaelic than ever before (e.g. Duolingo, SpeakGaelic, e-Sgoil, etc.) resulting in more people learning Gaelic.
6. CnES has adopted a Gaelic First Policy.
7. The percentage of young people entering Gaelic Medium Education in the Isles is at 58%, and increasing.
8. The possibility of opening a Gaelic Medium secondary school is being investigated.
9. Evidence of the socio, economic, linguistic, cultural, educational and medical benefits associated with bi / multilingualism is increasing.
10. The public attitude towards Gaelic at national level has greatly improved.
11. Àrainn Steòrnabhaigh has benefited significantly from Gaelic budgets and spin-offs.
12. New technologies make it easier for people separated by distance or tied to their location (e.g. due to illness or caring duties) to engage with each other and use the language.

Challenges

1. The number of Gaelic speakers in the Western Isles has dropped below 50% in the national census.
2. The number of pupils carrying on with Gaelic Medium subjects into the Senior Phase is alarmingly low.
3. A strategic, multi-agency approach to Gaelic is lacking, as the language is often deemed to be the responsibility of schools.
4. There are few truly “Gaelic environments” where people can be confident that if they speak in Gaelic, they will be understood, and efforts made to understand those not yet fluent but trying to speak Gaelic.
5. There is still a degree of animosity towards Gaelic in the wider local community.
6. Many Gaelic speakers have a strong sense that speaking Gaelic in the presence of non-Gaelic speakers is impolite and some non-Gaelic-speakers do agree with this.
7. Many Gaelic speakers lack confidence, either due to lack of practice or unfamiliarity with ‘new’ vocabulary. This is often used as an excuse for not engaging rather than as an opportunity to learn.
8. Activity is often aimed at the ‘lowest common denominator’ meaning that those fluent in Gaelic have limited opportunities to develop their Gaelic skills and ability.

9. The implementation of CnES's Gaelic First Policy is being hampered by lack of fluent Gaelic applicants.
10. Recruiting to Gaelic posts is challenging and many of these roles result in the individual working in a silo rather than with other Gaelic speakers, (e.g. Gaelic officer for an agency), and offer limited career progression.
11. Intergenerational transmission continues to be adversely affected by fluent speakers reverting to English with Gaelic Medium pupils and learners of the language.
12. Population structure in rural areas changing dramatically with young people moving to more densely populated areas, and rural properties being bought as Air B&Bs, second homes or by retirees. Inward migration for large-scale infrastructure is likely to lead to further dilution of the language.
13. Dialectal differences, over-correction and purism are obstacles for many learners and those less confident in using Gaelic.
14. There is a lack of clarity as to what Areas of Linguistic Significance will be, and what governance and funding will underpin them.
15. It is often unclear who can, and welcomes, being spoken to in Gaelic, so it is easier to start conversations in English.

A copy of the feedback will be circulated to all delegates and others who expressed interest in the initiative but were unable to attend.

A second meeting of Àrainn Steòrnabhagh will then be convened in order to form a short-life working group which will formulate an action plan and identify priority actions in consultation with all stakeholders.