

Key issues Report:
Seminar on the Future of Gaelic Drama

A Report for:

Bòrd na Gàidhlig

by

HECLA CONSULTING



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Introduction

This is a key issues report of the Gaelic drama seminar that took place on 23rd May in Inverness. The report is in three parts.

Part 1 provides a synopsis of the key findings from the seminar of the 23rd May at which participants discussed issues and opportunities relating to the future of Gaelic drama.

Part 2 develops the conclusions that emerged from this seminar into a possible strategic framework that would drive the future development of the Gaelic drama sector. At this stage the proposed strategic framework is viewed as a mechanism to facilitate discussion amongst stakeholders. The proposed framework is clearly subject to change and adjustment as agreement emerges amongst stakeholders on a way forward to support the future development of all sectors of Gaelic drama.

Part 3 sets out a draft plan to guide the next development actions to support the future of Gaelic drama.

Strategic Context

Development actions relating to Gaelic drama need to take place within the context of the National Plan for Gaelic and be also aligned with the strategic aims and objectives of the Scottish Arts Council and, from 2008, Creative Scotland. As such this is an opportune time for the support frameworks linked to Gaelic drama to be realigned in the context of wider national cultural policy but specifically within the context of Gaelic language development policy.

The National Plan for Gaelic identifies arts, culture and heritage as a principal development area for language regeneration through enabling community participation and engagement in the Gaelic based creative industries.

The 2002 Scottish Arts Council policy paper on Gaelic stated that “The Scottish Arts Council values the Gaelic language and culture, as a national cultural asset that is rooted in communities and has international relevance and potential’. In addition, “The Scottish Arts Council’s support will prioritise activity that is both contemporary in its practice, develops and delivers quality and seeks to reach the widest audience.”



PART 1

Key points from presentation sessions

Iain Campbell: Overview of Research undertaken by Bòrd na Gàidhlig

- A fragmented approach is evident within the Gaelic drama sector in terms of strategy, planning and funding. However, some excellent examples of Gaelic drama exist through the work of, for example, Meanbh Chuileag, Out of Eden, Theatre Hebrides and community groups like Sgioba Uibhist, and Cluicheadairean Dhun Eideann.
- There is a high dependency on volunteer effort to maintain the existence of community drama groups.
- A skills and training plan is required to support all elements of the Gaelic drama sector.
- The coordination and existence of resources to support Gaelic drama is now at a low level.
- Funding streams are inadequate leading to fragmentation, competition for scarce resources and a lack of coordination and networking.
- Gaelic drama needs to be recognised as a key element in planning for language regeneration and as such will require sustained effort in terms of support systems that will need to include strategic core funding; management coordination and networking; audience development and community participation.
- Bòrd na Gàidhlig and the Scottish Arts Council have pivotal roles in shaping the future of Gaelic drama.

Ian Murray: An independent view

- Drama inherent in the cultural lineage of the Gael.
- Lack of published Gaelic drama texts.
- Lack of information and access to the available texts.
- Some doubt as to the primacy of Gaelic drama within the aims and objectives of development support agencies.
- Serious consideration needs to be given to establishing a National Project for Drama. Such a project would link strategy development and coordination; funding; skills and resources; and audience development.



TOSG - Mairi Bremner

- The work in which TOSG engages in is wide ranging and possibly beyond the resources currently available to the company. Currently TOSG employs 3 members of staff.
- A network of community officers is needed to support the work of drama companies.
- Bringing Gaelic drama to a wider audience requires a high level of resources.
- The audience for Gaelic drama outputs need to encompass all age groups.
- Risk and uncertainty in Gaelic drama need to be managed downwards through establishing a more structured approach to funding and in developing better career paths for individuals who wish to work in this sector.
- A mechanism needs to be developed that will enable professional groups to provide support to community drama groups.
- There is demand for a range of drama outputs but a more sustainable foundation is required for these outputs to flourish within and across communities.
- Core funding resources over a long-time period are required to develop the sector.
- Lessons can be learned from the evolution of Radio nan Gàidheal from small beginnings to the coverage and depth of programming currently available.

Meanbh Chuileag: Dougie Beck and Dòmhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart

- So far... performances in 150 schools and 6,000 children as audience participants. Performs plays and provides drama workshops in both Gaelic and English language schools throughout Scotland.
- Materials based on the 5-14 curriculum, thus high level of positive engagement and participation with schools.
- An important part of *Meanbh Chuileag's* approach is collaborating with other Gaelic drama groups to reach their target audience.
- Another key element of the *Meanbh Chuileag* approach is establishing ways to generate a rapport with the local community through performance engagement.
- *Meanbh Chuileag* provides an important support resource for school teachers who are struggling to generate materials and find time within the school curriculum for drama.



- Drama is an important part of personal development generally and is particularly important in improving and enhancing Gaelic language skills.
- Better linkages need to be established between schools and community drama groups.
- Career pathways and job opportunities in the drama sector need to be highlighted and encouraged but this requires creating a more sustainable foundation on which young people can make better informed and secure career choices.

Out of Eden: Judith Aitken, Ruairidh Nicolson, Catriona Lexy Campbell

- The drama support programme developed around the Eden Court venue could be replicated elsewhere across the Highlands and Islands.
- The original outreach programme was targeted at schools within relatively easy travel time access to Inverness. Classes in the P4 to P7 formed the first target groups.
- The use of ‘experts’ was highly important in the in-house training of Eden Court’s outreach staff.
- There exist well established links to schools across the Highlands area – demands exist for increasing the drama workload but the development opportunities and geographic reach of the outreach programme is limited by the availability of financial and people resources.
- Drama projects create a very strong bond between communities and their respective local schools. This important linkage needs to be developed further to enable skills and knowledge to be transferred between young people and cultural tradition bearers within Gaelic communities.
- The following opportunities exist for the future:
 - More work with the secondary schools.
 - Extend the range of drama activities targeted at the learners grouping.
 - Provide Continuous Professional Development support to teachers.
 - Develop opportunities for adult community drama.
 - Provide drama classes for the under 5’s age group.
- The New Eden Court will have custom built education studios that will provide major opportunities to extend the range and scope of current drama output.
- It is estimated that the Gaelic drama outputs coordinated from Eden Court could be increased two-fold.



Scottish Arts Council – David Taylor

- In 2008 'Creative Scotland' will be created from the merger of SAC and Scottish Screen.
- In 2007 National Theatre of Scotland will have a budget of £4 million.
- An increasing role for Local Authorities in ensuring the provision of: cultural entitlements and access to the arts.
- Consolidation of support to PNE, Eden Court, An Lanntair, Fèisean nan Gàidheal.
- Other points:
 - How does Gaelic drama relate to contemporary theatre (and other artforms) in Scotland, the UK, Europe and the rest of the world? Is it where you want it to be and if not, what needs to happen to get it there?
 - What opportunities are offered within the existing (and enhanced) infrastructure within Gaelic arts, and arts in the Gàidhealtachd in the next two to three years, especially the new roles and capacities of An Lanntair and Eden Court? Also new The Scottish Arts Council funds such as Creative Hubs, **partners**, programming, and fellowships.
 - What opportunities are offered by the coming together of live arts and screen based arts in Creative Scotland?
 - What small steps can you identify to move Gaelic Drama forward?
- The Scottish arts are in a period of change but significant opportunities are available to support Gaelic drama across a wide range of situations.

Key points from workshops

Skills, Resources and Management

- A Skills and Training plan is needed for the drama sector including the provision of tutors of Gaelic drama.
- Adequate funding is required to implement training plan.
- Linkages need to be established between schools/colleges and drama sector.
- Linkages need to be established with other sectors i.e. health, business.



- Linkages need to be established with other minority language cultures.
- Skills development programmes need to be developed around central cluster location e.g. Eden Court, SMO, and An Lanntair.
- Sector needs to be coordinated otherwise development focus will be fragmented.
- Texts and scripts for Gaelic drama to be commissioned and published.
- Production systems to be extended and improved.
- Audience development including methods of participation.
- Improved marketing and promotion of the Gaelic drama product is required.

Structures, coordination and development

- SAC/BNG to support a strategic drama project.
- Community drama officers.
- Sharing of resources and identification of storage spaces.
- Increase amount of drama on radio.
- Research and evaluation frameworks vis-à-vis Gaelic drama outputs and drama from other minority language cultures need to be developed.
- Networking and communications to be improved considerably.

Funding and support systems

- A drama development model based on Fèisean na Gàidheal.
- A simplified grant support system.
- Funding support from a range of bodies including Local Authorities.
- Establishment of a 'bridgehead' between younger and older age groups both in terms of performers and audience development.
- A national drama project that would establish linkages to other creative industry sectors i.e. radio and television, publishing, other arts.

Conclusions from seminar

General

- Specific action is needed to ascertain views and issues relating to the functioning of community drama groups.



- Another session is required to reflect on the issues that have emerged as a result of the seminar and to consider which development actions need to be taken forward to the next stage.

Specific

- Drama is a key element in the transmission and development of Gaelic language and culture. Linkages need to be established between the drama sector and all sectors of Gaelic cultural society.
- A requirement to establish a national identity/partnership for Gaelic drama.
- A drama skills and training plan is a key requirement to support the development of the sector across community, educational outreach and professional groups.
- A more efficient network to coordinate and share skills, resources and experiences.
- Funding needs to be at a level adequate to support the future development of the sector.



PART 2

Looking forward – A Gaelic Drama Partnership: a model for discussion

Introduction

The expression of Gaelic culture through drama is an integral and essential part of our society. Gaelic drama has its roots in the cultural traditions of storytelling, poetry, music and dance that have defined Gaelic society over millennia. By investing in Gaelic Scotland's cultural capital, a legacy is created for future generations through releasing the potential of individuals, groups and communities across the nation as whole.

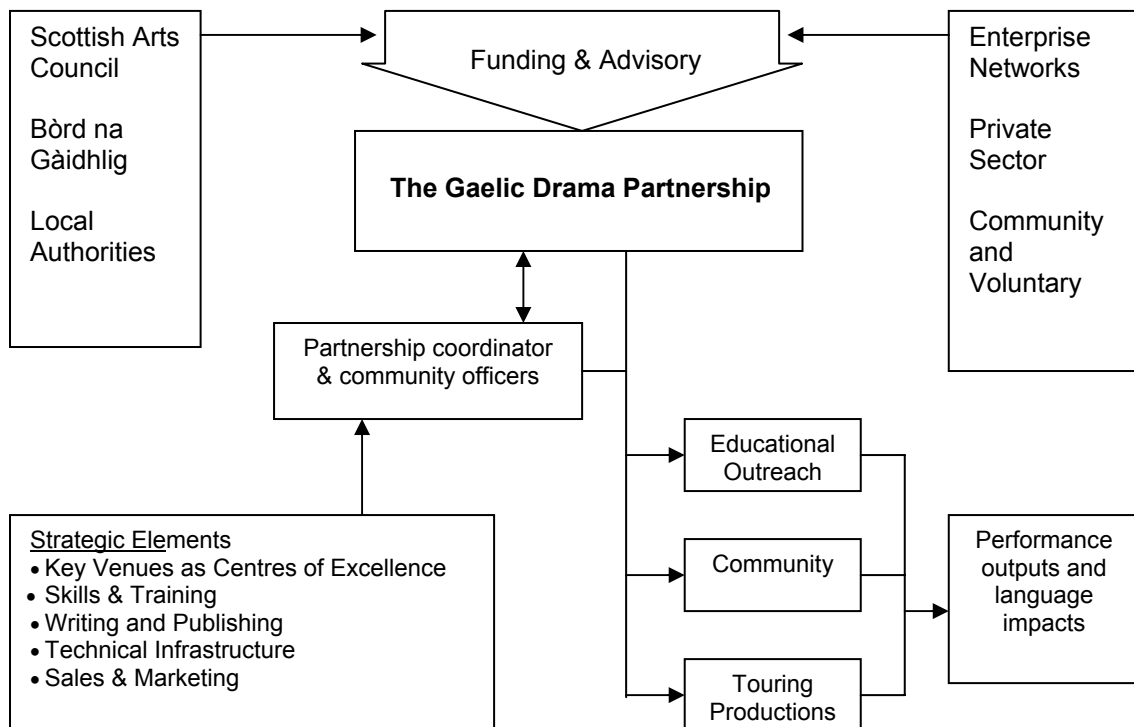
However, there is a need to strengthen the institutions and structures that support the Gaelic arts, particularly drama as this artform contributes to the success of many artistic activities, including language development, and is itself an interpreter of traditional and contemporary Gaelic culture.

As discussion at this seminar clearly articulated there is a clear need to strengthen community drama as well as putting the established professional companies like TOSG on a more sustainable platform. In addition, the linking of professional skills with community led drama projects should release a wide array of local talents that would generate a dynamic and confident environment for the delivery of the Gaelic arts to a wider audience. However, much of the present development effort depends on a high degree of voluntary support and the full potential of Gaelic drama is further diminished through insufficient funding and the lack of an efficient and effective strategic and operational framework. A paradigm shift is required to move Gaelic drama on to a new level of operational activity and audience participation.

A potential model to enable discussion on the best way forward is shown at Figure 1 overleaf.



Figure 1: An Operational Model to support the Development of Gaelic Drama



A Brief Description of the Gaelic Drama Partnership Model

Introduction

The above model has been developed as a frame of reference to enable discussion on developing the most effective approach to support Gaelic drama within the context of the National Plan for Gaelic and other cultural policy frameworks. The proposed strategic and operational framework has been kept as brief as possible so as not to prejudge subsequent discussions as to how Gaelic drama can be supported within the cultural development frameworks extant across Scotland’s public bodies. The final version of the business model will need to be agreed in discussion with stakeholders involved in the funding, development and production of Gaelic drama.

The key elements of the model are briefly described below.



Funding and Advisory

The above model has been developed as the best ‘fit for purpose’ approach that can address as many as possible of the strategic and operational issues raised at the drama seminar.

It is essentially a federal approach where delivery of agreed aims and objectives are delegated to appropriate partner organisation task groups e.g. Out of Eden, An Lanntair, TOSG etc. The membership of the Partnership consists of both funding and advisory roles with the option of “technical experts” co-opted as appropriate. The primary purpose of the Partnership is to drive forward delivery of specific actions to support Gaelic drama across the agreed areas of educational outreach, community drama and touring productions. The Partnership will also identify future areas for development for Gaelic drama within the context of partner strategies and will also have responsibility for monitoring and evaluating achievements across the different strands of Gaelic drama delivery. The partnership approach that drives the operational model will strengthen and enhance the profile of Gaelic drama across Scotland. The Partnership is also envisaged to establish operational linkages to other drama organisations across Scotland, for example, the National Theatre of Scotland and Scottish Community Drama Association.

For all arts based partnerships and organisations access to adequate and sustained funding can be a particular problem. The funding of Gaelic drama is no different from funding other artforms across Scotland. However, for Gaelic there is a particular immediacy for creating critical mass in the supply and demand of Gaelic language based products and services. Gaelic drama is a key mechanism in achieving critical mass in terms of users and speakers of Gaelic. To achieve this goal requires sustained long-term funding comprising a significant element of core strategic funding to specific groups and organisations. Any funding package should also recognise the distinction between the community drama group and the more professional organisation. A seedcorn funding package should be established to support community groups based on an appropriate mechanism which would include an element of voluntary/private sector support.



Partnership coordinator

The role of the partnership coordinator is pivotal to ensuring the success of the Gaelic drama partnership. The person appointed to this post will be a creative and innovative individual capable of coordinating and leading the work of the Partnership across a range of development areas. Specific duties for the post, if implemented, are likely to include:

- A key liaison role with the core funders to the partnership.
- The ability to explore and source funding opportunities across all groups and facilitate the creation and implementation of a core funding strategy.
- A liaison role with stakeholder groups and other organisations involved in Gaelic language development activities.
- The coordination of drama production activities within the identified 'cluster' areas.
- The coordination of technical resources including the sourcing of appropriate drama texts. (*Management of existing and new texts needs to be undertaken in partnership with appropriate publishing bodies*).
- Liaison with community drama/educational outreach officers.

In addition to the Partnership coordinator it is also envisaged that at least one development officer is appointed to support this important sector of Gaelic community drama.

Appropriate discussions would need to take place to ascertain the role of community drama officers employed by Local Authorities in the further development of Gaelic drama. The model provided by Highland Council with the Out of Eden project would be an excellent starting point. Exploratory discussions will also need to take place to establish the role, if any, of Comunn na Dràma in supporting the work of local community drama groups. It is also possible that with some realignment of budgets and job roles that other Gaelic organisations could take on development activity with community groups e.g. Fèisean nan Gàidheal, GASD, Pròiseact nan Ealan, CNAG, and/or An Comunn Gàidhealach.



Strategic Elements

A number of the key elements inherent to the efficient working of the proposed model are briefly highlighted below.

(a) Key Venues as Centres of Excellence:

A particular approach that would increase the profile of Gaelic drama and provide value for money in the use of public funds would be to focus on “creative hubs” based around specific locations. These locations would act as coordination points for both community and professional groups creating the environment for ideas, skills and resources to be shared to the benefit of all participants and the local community.

Significant expenditures have been made on arts/cultural infrastructure across the Highlands and Islands in recent years and Gaelic drama should become an integral part of the roles and capacities that these buildings/locations provide within their respective communities. Initial consideration could be given to identifying the following four locations as centres of excellence to promote Gaelic drama.

- Eden Court.
- An Lanntair.
- Sabhal Mòr Ostaig.
- An Lochran.

Each of the four locations could provide a range of services to Gaelic drama development across the three development categories set out in the proposed Partnership framework. Linkages would be established and maintained with community groups in each locale and over time a strong network of mutual cooperation would evolve generating positive outputs for Gaelic language and drama.

(b) Skills & Training:

A central element of the Drama Partnership will be a focused and adequately funded skills and training strategy.



This requires a major shift away from the current ad-hoc approach which acts as a barrier to attracting more people to careers within the Gaelic performing arts.

Drama and theatre productions are labour intensive with people their key resource. To attract and retain people within the Gaelic drama sector requires a proper pay and rewards structure that is linked to a system of continuous professional development. The articulation of the linkages between theatre drama and radio & television also needs to be made within the context of the Gaelic arts sector. The establishment of a Drama Partnership itself should signal to aspiring young entrants to this sector that opportunities now exist and are set on a more sustainable foundation than in the past.

(c) Writing and Publishing:

The presentation by John Murray highlighted the precarious nature of the number of available drama texts. The commissioning and publication of scripts will be an important element within the funding budget of the proposed Partnership.

A range of potential options are available to extend the range of available drama texts but these options need to be pursued in a focused and coherent manner. Furthermore, support systems to writers of drama texts and scripts should take place within the core funding mechanisms managed by Comhairle na Leabhraichean. See Appendix A for a simplified linkage model.

(d) Technical Infrastructure:

An issue identified in the background research undertaken for the seminar is the lack of suitable storage space for equipment. Coordination and management of technical resources across the community drama groups would ease some of the resource difficulties currently being experienced. Linking the storage of technical equipment to the proposed centres of excellence would be an important first step in bringing a more coherent approach to the current set-up.



(e) *Sales & Marketing:*

A critical issue for Gaelic drama is to build new audiences. Although there are some successes like the plays *Metagama* and *Tigh Mairi Anndra* along with the work of Meanbh Chuileag the number of people with access to Gaelic drama is low. This needs to change if justification for additional funding in the long-term is to be maintained.

A system needs to be developed by the Partnership that facilitates this access and engages the community with drama performances taking place within their respective locales. Gaelic drama without an audience is no drama!



PART 3

Next Steps

Introduction

A preliminary meeting took place at the Bòrd na Gàidhlig office on 15th June 2006 to discuss the next steps based on the Parts 1 and 2 of this report. Attendance at the meeting comprised members of the steering group set up by Bòrd na Gàidhlig and included the following individuals:

¹Arthur Cormack – Fèisean nan Gàidheal

Marisa Macdonald - Pròiseact nan Ealan

Simon MacKenzie – TOSG

Callum Macdonald – Comunn na Dràma.

David Taylor – Scottish Arts Council.

Donald Morrison - Bòrd na Gàidhlig

Eilidh Johnston – Bòrd na Gàidhlig

Iain Campbell – Hecla Consulting.

The prime focus of the discussions centred on Part 2 of the seminar report and the suggested operational model to support the development of Gaelic drama for the future. The key points of discussion included the following:

- The strategic cultural and arts development context within which Gaelic drama development would take place, particularly in relation to the emergence of Creative Scotland in 2007.
- The role and responsibilities of the main funding sponsors.
- The importance of coordination, cooperation and leadership.
- The importance of training, skills and the identification of career opportunities and the linkages that need to be strengthened across the Gaelic creative industries sector.
- The options available to support the Gaelic drama sector in terms of structures and human resources.

¹ Arthur Cormack and Marisa Macdonald took part in the discussion via a phone link.



Draft Action Plan

The primary action emerging from the June 15th discussion was the need to establish a partnership group representing key interests associated with Gaelic drama and which would coordinate the development of a strategic and operational management model along the lines suggested at Part 2 of this report. The key actions for the next stage are:

- Bòrd na Gàidhlig to issue the Gaelic drama seminar report and invite any relevant feedback from stakeholders.
- Bòrd na Gàidhlig to invite relevant parties to form a partnership development group to set up the support mechanisms for the future development of Gaelic drama.
- Bòrd na Gàidhlig and Scottish Arts Council to identify a modest level of funding to support the initial setting up, administration and planning costs of the Partnership.
- The Drama Partnership to commission the development of a business plan to take forward actions to support Gaelic drama within the context of the National Plan for Gaelic and cultural and arts policies supported by the Scottish Arts Council.



Appendix A: Gaelic drama linkage to the Writing and Publishing Supply Chain

