

## Arts and Culture

# Attitudes Towards the Gaelic Language

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The National Plan for Gaelic was drawn up as a result of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005. As this plan was established to outline the strategic approach to the development of Gaelic in Scotland for 2007 – 2012 the Scottish Government wished to reconsider and review its approach to Gaelic in Scotland. TNS-BMRB was therefore commissioned to conduct research to obtain the views of adults in Scotland towards Gaelic, including awareness of its use and its value as a language in Scotland today.

## Main Findings

- At a national level, awareness of Gaelic usage in Scotland was high, with a majority being made aware of Gaelic through the media, but also through the use of Gaelic in music and the arts, and as a subject taught in schools. The media, and television in particular, was also the main way in which a substantial minority of people came into contact with Gaelic.
- Knowledge of Gaelic was much more limited with only very small numbers claiming to have any fluent Gaelic. Knowledge and fluency was higher in the Highlands and Islands region, often leading this region to have a different perspective on the language than the rest of Scotland.
- Interest in using / learning Gaelic **more** was clearly linked to current levels of knowledge, with those already involved in the language most enthusiastic about extending this. The most mentioned factor that would motivate greater learning would be 'other people speaking it', highlighting the importance of 'social-norming' in achieving any development of the language.
- There was moderate support for the Gaelic language, and for Gaelic to be used more in Scotland. However strength of positive opinion was weaker when considering greater usage of Gaelic, with most indicating they would like to see a little more, rather than a lot more. Additionally, high levels of non-response suggested that a sizeable proportion did not have an opinion on the role of Gaelic in Scotland today.
- There was widespread and strong agreement that Gaelic traditions should not be lost, and that Gaelic is an important part of Scottish culture. Many, although fewer, also felt that Gaelic should be encouraged and promoted and that it is relevant to Scotland nowadays. There was less agreement that Gaelic contributes to promoting Scotland's identity abroad.
- There was a broad level of support for enabling school pupils who wish to do so to take Gaelic as a subject in school, with lower levels agreeing that Gaelic should be encouraged / promoted within education. Awareness of current Gaelic provision was low, but there is evidence of an appetite for school based education, in particular acting as a vehicle for sustaining Gaelic in Scotland. There was also strong and widespread support for the teaching of Scottish studies.

## Background

As the National Plan for Gaelic was established to outline the strategic approach to the development of Gaelic in Scotland for 2007 – 2012 the Scottish Government wished to reconsider and review its approach.

Research on the Gaelic language has not been carried out for several years. This research, funded jointly by the Government and the Bòrd na Gàidhlig (Alba), was designed to take forward research and policy development in this area, particularly in education, and to provide current information on awareness of, and attitudes towards, the Gaelic language amongst the adult population in Scotland.

The specific research objectives were to:

- Explore public awareness of the Gaelic language at a national level;
- Establish how such awareness came about (i.e. by which routes are people made aware of the language);
- Establish the public's awareness of Gaelic provision, and how that awareness was realised (e.g. awareness of Gaelic provision in education, public services, media and culture);
- Explore how the general public value the Gaelic language and its role in Scotland's identity, both at home and abroad;
- Determine use of the Gaelic language, generally and in terms of different settings, and investigate ways in which increased usage could be encouraged.

## Methodology

The research was carried out using the Scottish Opinion Survey (SOS). The SOS is a monthly omnibus survey conducted in-home amongst a sample of around 1,000 adults in Scotland using Computer Aided Personal Interviewing (CAPI). For this research, fieldwork took place during the period 9th to 18th March 2011 and a total of 1,009 interviews were achieved. This sample was representative of the adult population (aged 16 plus) in terms of sex, age, employment status and socio-economic group (SEG). As is the case each month, the achieved sample was weighted to ensure that it represented Scotland's population.

In order to create a reliable sub-sample a small booster survey, comprising an additional 56 interviews, was undertaken amongst adults aged 16 plus with fluent Gaelic. These interviews were conducted face to face in home during the period 28th March to 10th April 2011 in communities with a high density of Gaelic users. The views of the boost sample (n=56) were combined with those of the small number (n= 40) of adults with fluent Gaelic who were identified in the main omnibus survey.

## Knowledge of the Gaelic language today

Overall, four fifths (80%) of the Scottish population were aware of Gaelic being used in Scotland, with highest awareness of Gaelic usage in the media (61%). A further 39% mentioned Gaelic being used in education. Significant minorities were also aware of Gaelic in the music/arts (30%) and Gaelic transport/travel signage (27%).

In total around one in four (39%) of the total sample indicated that they came into contact with the Gaelic language nowadays, with most citing television (32%), followed by music (14%) and the radio (10%).

Knowledge of the Gaelic language was limited, with just over one in ten (13%) of the Scottish population claiming to have at least some knowledge of Gaelic. For the most part this was knowledge of a small number of words/phrases (11%), whereas only 2% in total had any fluent Gaelic knowledge (that is reading, writing or speaking fluently, or understanding spoken Gaelic). Gaelic knowledge was concentrated in the Highlands and Islands – 34% in this region had any knowledge, and some 21% had fluent knowledge.

Amongst those with fluent Gaelic, almost all (98%) used Gaelic currently. Two fifths (41%) claimed to use it 'a lot' and 31% 'fairly often', with one quarter (26%) using it 'occasionally' or 'rarely'. The vast majority of this group also stated that they were able to speak and to understand spoken Gaelic fluently (91% and 93% respectively), whereas just under three quarters (72%) were able to read fluently. The ability to write fluently in Gaelic on the other hand was much lower, with around half (51%) indicating that they were able to do this.

Among those with fluent Gaelic and who spoke it nowadays, two thirds (64%) stated that they spoke Gaelic most at home, with three quarters (76%) doing this at all. However, the vast majority (83%) stated that they used Gaelic when out socialising, and a further 28% used Gaelic when out and about and when at work/on business. Gaelic language was thus the norm in the informal settings of home and with friends and a more limited occurrence in more formal environments.

Overall, 12% stated that they would be encouraged to learn or to use Gaelic more if other people spoke it, and 12% stated that they would be encouraged if they had access to education or courses. However, half of the total sample stated that nothing would encourage them to use Gaelic more or to learn Gaelic.

In line with higher awareness levels of Gaelic in the media and in education in particular, these same industry sectors emerged most frequently when measuring awareness of Gaelic employment opportunities.

## Support for the Gaelic language

Around half (51%) were in favour of the usage of Gaelic in Scotland. By comparison very few (9%) were against it, but a sizeable number (38%) had no opinion either way – suggesting a lack of engagement with this issue amongst a sizeable segment of the population. Amongst those with any fluent Gaelic, 85% were in favour of it being used in Scotland, with the vast majority (80%) strongly in favour.

There was also support for seeing / hearing more Gaelic being used (53%), although strength of positive opinion was slightly weaker. Amongst those with fluent Gaelic nine out of ten (90%) stated that they would like to see / hear more Gaelic with three quarters of this group indicating that they would like to see / hear it a lot more.

Amongst those who wanted to extend the use of Gaelic there was widespread interest in increasing Gaelic in education, which was suggested by 72%. By comparison 20%-30% would like Gaelic to be used more across most other areas, with the exception of at home and on the internet, where interest was lower.

When respondents were asked whether Gaelic versions should be available for public documents / notices, two thirds (68%) of the total sample responded positively (38% held a strong opinion and believed this should 'definitely' be the case, with 31% saying 'probably').

## Identity

Two fifths of the total sample stated that Gaelic was important to their sense of national identity and some 17% claimed that it was very important. However Gaelic's relevance to identity decreased fairly substantially when viewed in the context of personal and local identity, with around one in five claiming Gaelic was important to their identity in these contexts.

Amongst those with fluent Gaelic, almost all (92%) stated that Gaelic was important to their national identity: 86% stated that the language was important to their local identity and 89% to their personal identity.

Those who stated Gaelic was important to their local identity gave a wide variety of reasons to explain why this was the case. The two most widely cited reasons were that it was the national/native language (21%) and it was part of Scottish heritage / history (15%). However, a large number (50%) gave a reason related to Scotland or the nation as a whole, suggesting that for many national and local identity were either considered one in the same, or were closely intertwined.

A varied response was also recorded with respect to reasons why Gaelic was important for personal identity. The most frequently mentioned reasons were as follows: part of personal/family history (14%), the National/Scottish language (14%), part of my heritage (12%), because I'm Scottish (10%). Amongst those with fluent Gaelic, over half (56%) mentioned reasons related to Gaelic being spoken at home, or by friends and family.

## Relevance and Value of Gaelic

Overall, there were high levels of recognition of the importance of Gaelic to Scottish culture and traditions, and agreement that these should not be lost, with between three quarters and four fifths endorsing such views. However, significantly fewer – around three fifths - would like to see it encouraged or developed more.

When considering the relevance of Gaelic to Scotland today, support was relatively low compared to that seen for some of the other statements (57% disagreed that Gaelic is not relevant to Scotland nowadays). Similarly, whilst attitudes were more positive than negative, there was more doubt as to its role in promoting Scotland abroad: around half (49%) agreed that Gaelic makes a valuable contribution in this way.

Positive opinions were more widely held amongst those with fluent Gaelic, whilst those aged 65 and over and in the AB socio-economic group held more negative views.

## Gaelic in education

Just under a quarter (23%) claimed to be aware of any form of Gaelic education in their local area. Awareness of Gaelic in education was much higher amongst those with fluent Gaelic (94%).

A very large proportion of the Scottish population agreed that pupils should learn about Scottish studies (90%) and that Gaelic should be available as a subject taught in school (86%). More moderate levels of agreement were seen for greater opportunities to learn Gaelic (70%) and for greater promotion of the language / encouraging pupils to learn Gaelic (63%). Opinion was more polarised when considering subjects being taught in Gaelic, although respondents were more likely to agree than disagree (43% versus 32%).

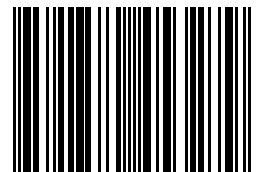
In general, younger groups and those in the lower SEGs were likely to hold more positive views towards Gaelic in education, with those with fluent Gaelic also very positive towards its use in this context.

This document, along with full research report of the project, and further information about social and policy research commissioned and published on behalf of the Scottish Government, can be viewed on the Internet at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/socialresearch>. If you have any further queries about social research, please contact us at [socialresearch@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:socialresearch@scotland.gsi.gov.uk) or on 0131-244 7560.



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