

# **Review of Gaelic Early Years Provision (0-3)**

## **A Report for Bòrd na Gàidhlig**

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## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	iii
Abbreviations	iv
Geàrr-chunntas gnìomhach	v
Executive summary	vii
1 Introduction and Overview	1
1.1 Introduction and Overview	1
1.2 Structure of this report	2
1.3 Research methods	2
1.4 Issues with terminology	3
2 Gaelic 0-3 provision: policy, structure and funding arrangements	5
2.1 An overview of early years policy in Scotland	5
2.1.1 Local authority obligations and the funded ELC entitlement	5
2.1.2 Principal strategic and regulatory documents	6
2.2 Policy relating to Gaelic early years provision	7
2.3 The structure of Gaelic 0-3 provision from 2010 to the present	10
2.4 Issues concerning data collection on 0-3 enrolment	12
2.5 Funding arrangements for Gaelic 0-3 provision	12
2.6 Previous research on Gaelic 0-3 provision	14
3 Comparison and assessment of current 0-3 delivery models	17
3.1.1 Local voluntary 0-3 groups and Bòrd na Gàidhlig's Early Years Fund	17
3.1.1.1 Administration of the Early Years Fund	17
3.1.1.2 Experiences of local 0-3 groups	18
3.1.2 Provision by Highland Council	22
3.1.3 Other provision by local authorities	23
3.1.3.1 City of Edinburgh Council	23
3.1.3.2 Glasgow City Council	25
3.1.3.3 Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	26
3.1.3.4 Perth & Kinross Council	26
3.1.3.5 East Ayrshire Council	26
3.1.3.6 West Dunbartonshire Council	26
3.1.4 The Comann nam Pàrant pilot	27
3.1.4.1 Support work in Central Scotland	27
3.1.4.2 Thig a Chluich in the Western Isles	28
3.1.5 Areas where there are no officers/projects in place locally supporting this sector	29
3.1.6 The impact of COVID-19	30
3.1.7 Publicising and promoting Gaelic 0-3 activity	31
3.1.8 Resources for Gaelic 0-3 activity and for parents	33

3.1.9 Training for the Gaelic 0-3 sector _____	36
4 Models of 0-3 provision in Wales and Ireland _____	38
4.1 Wales _____	38
4.1.1 The policy framework for Welsh early years provision _____	38
4.1.2 The role of Mudiad Meithrin _____	40
4.1.3 Cylchoedd Ti a Fi: structure and operation _____	41
4.1.4 Training opportunities _____	42
4.2 Ireland _____	44
4.2.1 The Republic of Ireland outside the Gaeltacht _____	44
4.2.2 The Gaeltacht _____	45
4.2.3 Northern Ireland _____	47
4.3 Comparison with Scotland _____	48
5 Discussion and recommendations _____	49
5.1 The shrinking of the 0-3 sector _____	49
5.2 The importance of Gaelic 0-3 provision _____	50
5.3 Early years policy and the expansion of nursery entitlement _____	51
5.4 Language legislation, national GME policy and the role of local authorities in Gaelic 0-3 provision _____	51
5.5 A new dedicated organisation for Gaelic early years? _____	53
5.6 Expanding Comann nam Pàrant's role _____	54
5.7 The continuing role of Pàrant is Pàiste and the role of voluntary groups generally _____	55
5.8 Gaelic Bookbug sessions _____	56
5.9 Expanding Gaelic-medium childcare provision _____	56
5.10 Support for families _____	57
5.11 Publicity and promotion _____	57
5.12 Staffing, training and further research _____	57
5.13 Summary of recommendations _____	58
References _____	60
Appendix 2 _____	67
Appendix 3 _____	70
Appendix 4 _____	73

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## Abbreviations

BnG	Bòrd na Gàidhlig
CALA	Care and Learning Alliance
CNES	Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
CNNG	Comhar Naíonrai na Gaeltachta
CnP	Comann nam Pàrant
CNSA	Comhairle nan Sgoiltean Àraich
ELC	Early Learning and Childcare
EY	Early Years
FTE	full-time equivalent
GLAIF	Gaelic Language Act Implementation Fund
GM	Gaelic-medium
GME	Gaelic-medium education
MM	Mudiad Meithrin
SG	Scottish Government

## Geàrr-chunntas gnìomhach

Chaidh an aithisg seo a choimiseanadh le BnG gus beachdachadh air ‘Solar Tràth-bhliadhnaichean na Gàidhlig (0-3)’, a’ measadh iomairtean a tha a’ dol an-dràsta san raon seo agus a’ dèanamh mholaidhean airson solar nas fheàrr agus nas cunbhalaidhe.

An toiseach, tha na dòighean rannsachaidh a chaidh a chleachdadh airson a’ phròiseict gam mìneachadh agus cuid de chùisean co-cheangailte ri briathrachas san raon seo gam mìneachadh. Bha rannsachadh airson na h-aithisg seo a’ gabhail a-steach dà phrìomh sheòrsa obrach: (1) mion-sgrùdadh agus anailis air prìomh sgrìobhainnean poileasaidh, iarrtasan tabhartais agus aithisgean agus (2) 47 agallamhan no conaltradh susbainteach le riochdairean bho Bhòrd na Gàidhlig, Comann nam Pàrant, ùghdarrasan ionadail agus buidhnean eile, solaraidhean ionadail 0-3, buidhnean phàrant ionadail agus pàrantan fa leth.

Tha Earrann 2 a’ cur an cèill eachdraidh agus co-theacsa poileasaidh solar Gàidhlig 0-3; tha seo air a roinn ann an sia fo-roinnean. Tha an taisbeanadh seo a’ tòiseachadh le sealladh farsaing air poileasaidh tràth-bhliadhnaichean na h-Alba agus air poileasaidh Gàidhlig 0-3 gu sònraichte. Tha leudachadh air solar sgoil-àraich maoinichte do chlann aois 3-5, a chaidh àrdachadh bho chionn ghoirid gu 1140 uair sa bhliadhna, air a bhith na leasachadh mòr. Tha suidheachadh na roinne 0-3 nas toinnte, ge-tà, leis nach eil dleastanas laghail air ùghdarrasan ionadail ullachadh a dhèanamh san raon seo. Tha suidheachadh a’ phoileasaidh mì-chinnteach an-dràsta, le iomairtean ùra poileasaidh nàiseanta co-cheangailte ris a’ Ghàidhlig air faire, a’ gabhail a-steach Bile Chànanan Albannach ùr, gan ruith.

Tha an aithisg an uair sin a’ mìneachadh structar an t-solair Ghàidhlig 0-3 agus pàtran a leasachaidh thar ùine. Ann an 2011, ghabh Bòrd na Gàidhlig uallach airson solar 0-3 agus chaidh grunn oifigearan tràth-bhliadhnaichean fhadhadh, agus Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd a’ dèanamh solar a bharrachd san raon sin. Chaidh am pàtran libhrigidh seo atharrachadh ann an 2021, nuair a tharraing am Bòrd a-mach às an raon seo agus a thug e uallach airson cuid den t-solar seo do Chomann nam Pàrant. Tha Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd fhathast an sàs anns an raon seo mar bha iad roimhe. Thathas an uair sin a’ toirt geàrr-chunntas air an t-suidheachadh maoineachaidh an-dràsta. Tha grunn shruthan maoineachaidh an sàs an seo, a’ gabhail a-steach maoin shònraichte bho Bhòrd na Gàidhlig, Maoin nan Tràth-bhliadhnaichean, agus na Tabhartasan Sònraichte airson Foghlam Gàidhlig aig Riaghaltas na h-Alba.

Tha Earrann 3 a’ dèanamh sgrùdadh mionaideach air an t-solar 0-3 an-dràsta agus a’ beachdachadh air cuid de na ceistean sònraichte a tha air èirigh. Tha Earrann 3.1.1 a’ dèiligeadh ri Maoin Tràth-bhliadhnaichean Bòrd na Gàidhlig agus na dh’fhiosraich na buidhnean saor-thoileach ionadail a tha air am maoineachadh seo fhaighinn. Bithear a’ beachdachadh gu mionaideach air cùisean practaigeach co-cheangailte ri cùisean leithid eagrachadh bhuidhnean, maoineachadh, na h-àiteachan anns a bheileas a’ ruith sheiseanan, luchd-obrach, sanasachd agus brosnachadh. Tha Earrann 3.1.2 a’ beachdachadh air an t-solar a tha Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd a’ dèanamh. Tha duilgheadasan air a bhith ann leis an t-solar maoineachaidh agus le fastadh luchd-obrach airson nan seirbheisean seo. Thathas an uair sin a’ beachdachadh air suidheachadh sia ùghdarrasan ionadail eile a tha an sàs ann an diofar dhòighean san roinn 0-3. Tha iad sin a’ gabhail a-steach a’ bheag-chuid de dh’ùghdarrasan a tha a’ libhrigeadh sheirbheisean 0-3 iad fhèin, còmhla ri seòrsaichean iomairtean eile, leithid fastadh oifigearan leasachaidh tràth-bhliadhnaichean.

Tha sgrùdadh mionaideach ga dhèanamh air an t-solar aig Comann nam Pàrant. Tha dà shreath san t-solar seo, aon a tha a’ toirt a-steach taic do bhuidhnean saor-thoileach ionadail

ann am meadhan na h-Alba agus an tè eile an sgeama Thig a Chluich anns na h-Eileanan an Iar, anns am bi luchd-obrach tràth-bhliadhnaichean a' libhrigeadh sheiseanan cluiche ann an grunn choimhearsnachdan, gu sònraichte ann an Leòdhas agus na Hearadh.

Chan eil buidhnean saor-thoileach ann an grunn sgìrean ann an Alba a' faighinn phrògraman taic agus tha sin air droch bhuidhean a thoirt air cuid dhiubh sin. Thug Covid droch bhuidhean air grunn bhuidhnean, ged a bha an ìre de bhuaireadh caochlaideach.

Bithear an uair sin a' sgrùdadh nan ro-innleachdan sanasachd is brosnachaidh a bhios buidhnean ionadail a' cleachdadh. Bithear a' cleachdadh diofar dhòighean ach tha cuideam mòr air Facebook agus beul-aithris. Sa chumantas thathar den bheachd gu bheil goireasan airson clann 0-3 math ged a tha duilgheadas air èirigh a thaobh a bhith a' tabhann sheiseanan Bookbug agus a' cur air dòigh an trèanadh a dh'fheumar gus iad sin a libhrigeadh.

Tha Earrann 4 a' beachdachadh air solar 0-3 sa Chuimrigh agus Èirinn agus leasan agus modailean a dh'fhaodadh a bhith ann airson solar nas fheàrr a chur an sàs ann an Alba. Anns a' Chuimrigh, tha a' bhuidheann tràth-bhliadhnaichean Mudiad Meithrin a' cumail lìonra mòr nàiseanta de sholar tràth-bhliadhnaichean de dhiofar sheòrsachan, le buidheann taic làidir. Ann an Èirinn, chan eil solar 0-3 cho adhartach ach tha solar làidir aig ìre na sgoil-àraich agus taic do theaghlaichean le Gaeilge.

Tha Earrann 5 a' beachdachadh air sreath de phrìomh cheistean a tha ag èirigh bho sgrùdadh air an t-solar a th' ann an-dràsta agus a' taisbeanadh sreath de mholaidhean. Tha e na adhbhar iomagain gu bheil, a rèir coltais, an ìre de sholar 0-3 air a dhol sìos anns na beagan bhliadhnanachan a chaidh seachad, mar a tha taic don roinn. Dh'fhaodadh gun toir iomairtean poileasaidh nàiseanta làithreach cothroman airson leasachadh air solar 0-3 agus bu chòir sgrùdadh cùramach a dhèanamh orra sin. Tha leudachadh air an roinn 3-5 (sgoil-àraich) a' toirt buaidh mhòr air an roinn 0-3. Tha molaichean airson gnìomh a' gabhail a-steach beachdachadh air buidheann nàiseanta ùr a dh'fhaodadh a bhith an urra ri solar 0-3, leudachadh air àite Chomann nam Pàrant san raon seo, agus tuilleadh leasachaidh air solar cùram-chloinne Gàidhlig. Tha ro-innleachdan brosnachaidh nas èifeachdaiche air am moladh, mar a tha rannsachadh air grunn raointean a' buntainn ri solar tràth-bhliadhnaichean.

## Executive summary

This report was commissioned by Bòrd na Gàidhlig to consider ‘Gaelic Early Years (0-3 Provision)’, evaluating current initiatives in this field and making recommendations for improved and more consistent provision.

Initially, the research methods used for the project are outlined and some issues relating to terminology in this field explained. Research for this report involved two main categories of work: (1) review and analysis of major policy documents, grant applications and reports and (2) 47 interviews or substantive correspondence with representatives of Bòrd na Gàidhlig, Comann nam Pàrant, local authorities and other agencies, local 0-3 providers, local parent groups and individual parents.

Section 2 introduces the history and policy context of Gaelic 0-3 provision; this is divided into six sub-sections. This presentation begins with an overview of early years policy in Scotland and of 0-3 Gaelic policy in particular. The expansion of funded nursery provision for 3-5 year olds, recently to 1140 hours per year, has been a major development. The position of the 0-3 sector is more complex, however, in that local authorities have no legal obligation to make provision in this area. The policy landscape is in flux at the moment, with major national policy initiatives relating to Gaelic, including a new Scottish Languages Bill, in process.

The report then explains the structure of Gaelic 0-3 provision and the pattern of its development over time. In 2011, Bòrd na Gàidhlig took on responsibility for 0-3 provision and appointed several early years officers, with Highland Council making additional provision in that area. This arrangement was changed in 2021, so that the Bòrd reduced its activity in this area and assigned responsibility for some of this provision to Comann nam Pàrant. Highland Council retains its previous role. The current funding landscape is then summarised. Several funding streams are involved here, including a dedicated Bòrd na Gàidhlig fund, the Early Years Fund, and the Scottish Government’s Specific Grants for Gaelic Education.

Section 3 gives a detailed presentation of the current 0-3 landscape and considers some of the specific issues that have arisen. Section 3.1.1 addresses Bòrd na Gàidhlig’s Early Years Fund and the experiences of the local voluntary groups that have received this funding. Practical issues concerning matters such as group organisation, funding, accommodation, staffing, publicity and promotion are discussed in detail. Section 3.1.2 considers the provision by Highland Council. There have been difficulties with the funding arrangements and with recruitment for this activity. The role of six other local authorities active in different ways in the 0-3 sector is then considered. These include the minority of authorities that deliver 0-3 services themselves, along with other kinds of initiatives, such as the appointment of early years development officers.

The provision by Comann nam Pàrant is considered in detail. This provision has two strands, one involving support for local voluntary groups in central Scotland and one the Thig a Chluich scheme in the Western Isles, by which early years workers deliver play sessions in a number of communities, mainly in Lewis and Harris.

Voluntary groups in several areas in Scotland do not benefit from support programmes and some of these have experienced difficulty. The Covid pandemic also had negative impacts on several groups, although the degree of disruption was variable.



The promotion and publicity strategies used by local groups are then examined. Various methods are used but there is a heavy emphasis on Facebook and word of mouth. Resources for 0-3s are generally considered satisfactory although a difficulty has arisen in relation to the offer of Bookbug sessions and the organisation of the training required to deliver these.

Section 4 discusses 0-3 provision in Wales and Ireland and possible lessons and models for improved provision in Scotland. In Wales, the early years organisation Mudiad Meithrin maintains a large national network of early years provision of different kinds, with a strong support organisation. In Ireland, 0-3 provision is less developed but there is strong provision at the nursery stage and support for Irish-speaking families.

Section 5 discusses a series of key issues that arise from a survey of the current landscape of provision and presents a series of recommendations for action. The extent of 0-3 provision appears to have diminished in recent years, as has support for the sector. Current national policy initiatives may bring opportunities for improvement for 0-3 provision and these should be scrutinised carefully. The expansion of the 3-5 (nursery) sector has considerable ramifications for the 0-3 sector. Suggestions for action include consideration of a possible new national organisation with responsibility for 0-3 provision, the expansion of Comann nam Pàrant's role in this field, and the further development of Gaelic childcare provision. More effective promotional strategies are recommended, as is research on several fronts relevant to early years provision.

# 1 Introduction and Overview

## 1.1 Introduction and Overview

Provision for the youngest children has been an important element in Gaelic education policy and Gaelic revitalisation strategy since the early 1980s. For the last fifteen years, however, the organisation of provision has become increasingly variegated, and strategic development of the sector has been difficult to manage and control. The reasons for this are diverse, some to do with national education policy, some to do with the limited powers of Bòrd na Gàidhlig, some to do with organisational structures and funding mechanisms. As a result, provision is patchy and many providers struggle with a range of operational challenges.

A key difficulty is that provision for children under the age of 3 does not fall within the scope of the statutory education system, as controlled by the *Education (Scotland) Act 1980* and other education legislation, including the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*. Education authorities therefore have no formal legal obligations to make provision in this area. This is much in contrast to the nursery or *sgoil-àraich* stage (for 3 and 4 year olds, and some 2 year olds), as to which education authorities have increasingly extensive obligations, as discussed in section 1.5.1 below.

The *Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005* requires public authorities to prepare Gaelic language plans if notified to do so by Bòrd na Gàidhlig (BnG), and in the case of local authorities these plans address education provision among other services. BnG has little latitude to require local authorities to take measures in relation to 0-3 provision, although several do so on a voluntary basis, as discussed in sections 2.1.2 and 2.1.3 below.

The landscape for Gaelic 0-3 provision is therefore complex and uneven, as detailed in sections 2.1 and 2.2 below. Most provision is organised by local voluntary committees, the great majority of which receive their principal funding from BnG. Some of these groups receive support and advice from officers employed by the Gaelic organisation Comann nam Pàrant (CnP), some from officers employed by local authorities, but some receive little or no outside advice or support. In some cases, play sessions are organised and delivered directly by CnP staff or local authority staff. Finally, in some localities where Gaelic-medium (GM) primary education is available, there is no 0-3 provision, or even 0-5 provision, at all.

This report is written at a time of significant flux in Gaelic education policy and Gaelic language policy in general. In its manifesto for the 2021 Scottish Parliament election, the Scottish National Party indicated that it would take several measures in relation to 3-18 education, 'review the function and structures of Bòrd na Gàidhlig' and 'bring forward a new Scottish Languages Bill which takes further steps to support Gaelic' (Scottish National Party 2021: 66). In autumn 2022 the Scottish Government (SG) conducted a public consultation on these proposals, which included a section on education. The consultation paper proposed 'a new national strategic approach to Gaelic medium education', and included 0-3 provision as a possible area for consideration (SG 2022a: 09). A Scottish Languages Bill is expected to be introduced into the Scottish Parliament in autumn 2023, but there has been no announcement concerning other policy measures that might be introduced to further the proposed 'new national strategic approach to Gaelic medium education' (SG 2022a: 05, 07).

## **1.2 Structure of this report**

This report was commissioned by BnG to consider ‘Gaelic Early Years Provision (0-3) across Scotland’. Initially, the research methods used for the project are outlined (section 1.3) and some issues relating to terminology in this field are explained (section 1.4). Section 2 introduces the history and policy context of Gaelic 0-3 provision; this is divided into six sub-sections. This begins with an overview of early years policy in Scotland (2.1) and of 0-3 Gaelic policy in particular (2.2). Section 2.3 gives an overview of the structure of Gaelic 0-3 provision and how this has developed over time. Section 2.4 describes some of the issues that have arisen in relation to data collection on Gaelic 0-3 enrolment. Section 2.5 describes the surprisingly complex funding arrangements for Gaelic 0-3 provision. Section 2.6 summarises previous research on Gaelic 0-3 provision, which is unfortunately limited in range.

Section 3 gives a detailed presentation of the current 0-3 landscape and some specific issues that arise. Section 3.1.1 addresses Bòrd na Gàidhlig’s Early Years Fund and the experiences of local voluntary groups that have received this funding. Section 3.1.2 considers the provision by Highland Council, and section 3.1.3 addresses the role of six other local authorities in relation to the 0-3 sector. 3.1.4 examines the provision by Comann nam Pàrant. Section 3.1.5 considers the situation in areas where there are no officers or projects in place locally supporting the 0-3 sector, and section 3.1.6 considers the impact of COVID-19 on the 0-3 sector. The remain sub-sections look at issues involving publicising and promoting Gaelic 0-3 activity, resources for Gaelic 0-3 activity and for parents, and training for the Gaelic 0-3 sector

Section 4 discusses ‘examples of successful 0-3 models from countries with minority language provision’, specifically Wales and Ireland. The section concerning provision in Wales was principally prepared by Dr Buddug Hughes of Iaith Cyf.

Finally, Section 5 discusses key issues that arose from the field research and sets out ‘recommendations that would enable Gaelic Early Years (0-3) provision to strengthen & develop resulting in consistent provision across Scotland’. This includes ‘details of resources required to take forward these recommendations, levels of funding, training, staffing, structure of support etc’.

The research is concerned with the organisational, logistical and financial issues associated with Gaelic 0-3 provision and addresses pedagogical issues only to a limited extent.

## **1.3 Research methods**

Research for this report involved two main categories of work: (1) review and analysis of relevant written materials and (2) interviews or substantive correspondence with representatives of BnG, CnP, local authorities and other agencies, local 0-3 providers, local parent groups and individual parents.

Document-based work for the project involved the review and analysis of several different kinds of materials:

- key BnG policy documents concerning early years provision and GME in general
- key SG and Education Scotland policy documents concerning Gaelic EY provision and EY provision in general
- key local authority policy documents relating to Gaelic EY provision
- relevant funding applications to BnG and supporting documentation (including progress reports)
- relevant funding applications by local authorities to the SG's Specific Grants for Gaelic Education scheme
- key policy documents and other materials relating to 0-3 provision in Wales and Ireland

Interviews and correspondence involved the following elements:

- 2 interviews with 3 members of BnG staff, and substantive email correspondence with two others
- 8 interviews with 9 local authority officers with responsibility for Gaelic EY provision
- 3 interviews with 4 members of CnP staff
- an interview with two officers at the Scottish Book Trust
- 3 interviews with 4 officers at relevant language organisations in Ireland
- 30 interviews with 32 representatives of local 0-3 groups in 14 local authority areas
- informal discussions with 16 parents attending playgroup sessions or local parents' meetings

The great majority of interviews were conducted on Teams or Zoom; two were done in person and one on the telephone. Interviews with local group representatives were generally shorter (30-45 minutes) while interviews with officers tended to be longer (45-60 minutes).

All interviewees were given a project information sheet; this is attached as Appendix 1. Interviewees were also given a participant consent form and asked to sign and return this in advance of the interview. The consent form had two slightly different versions, one for local voluntary groups and one for representatives of Gaelic organisations, local authorities or other bodies; the former provides for a higher level of anonymity than the latter. The consent forms are attached as Appendices 2 and 3 respectively.

Interviews with local voluntary groups followed a schedule, although in some cases considerable adaptation was required. The script was adapted from that used by McPake et al. (2015) but with a stronger emphasis on interactions with different kinds of organisations. The questionnaire is attached as Appendix 4. Individuals with officers from Gaelic organisations and local authorities were ad hoc and focused on the specific circumstances of each organisation.

Making contact with local groups was a slow and time-consuming process. Groups were initially contacted by email and if this proved unsuccessful Facebook Messenger was used (directed to the group's Facebook group page). In numerous instances, it took several attempts to secure a response. Three groups did not reply despite repeated efforts, but none of the groups contacted declined to participate.

In the report, individual voluntary 0-3 groups are generally not named except in relation to certain external or structural aspects (e.g. number of hours of operation per week).

#### **1.4 Issues with terminology**

There is some ambiguity about the term 'early years' (and its equivalent in Gaelic, *tràth-bhliadhnaichean*) as this can refer to any kind of pre-school provision from 0-5. This report is specifically concerned with provision for children under the age of 3 and addresses provision for 3-5 year olds only incidentally. As 3-5 provision is now much more formalised within the education system in Scotland, as discussed in the following section, it is important not to lump the two stages together.

There is also some ambiguity about the terminology relating to Gaelic EY provision in particular. The term *sgoil-àraich* was once used to mean any pre-school playgroup but with the introduction of funded nursery places for 3-5 year olds it now almost always refers to a nursery for 3-5 year olds. The term *cròileagan* is sometimes used to mean a playgroup for 0-3 year olds at which parents or carers remain with their children, as in Edinburgh and North Ayrshire; sometimes to mean a group of this kind that serves the entire 0-5 age range, as in Aberfeldy and Perth; and sometimes to mean a setting for 2-3 year olds in which parents leave their children with the playleaders, as in Fort William and Portree. Because of this variation, use of the term *cròileagan* is kept to a minimum in this report. The term *Pàrant is Pàiste* ('Parent and Child') is the usual Gaelic term for a toddler group, typically run by a volunteer parent committee.

## 2 Gaelic 0-3 provision: policy, structure and funding arrangements

### 2.1 An overview of early years policy in Scotland

#### 2.1.1 Local authority obligations and the funded ELC entitlement

The *Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000* placed a legal duty on local authorities to offer nursery provision and enabled them to use external providers to meet demand. The Act gave eligible 3 and 4 year olds an entitlement to 475 hours of provision per year. The *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014* then increased the entitlement to 600 hours per year for all 3 and 4 year olds, and certain 2 year olds and from August 2021 the funded entitlement is 1140 hours per year.

In the case of children who have been in care, or whose parents have been in care or are in receipt of certain income-based benefits, eligibility extends to children aged 2 and over (Audit Scotland 2018: 8; Audit Scotland 2023: 6). It is estimated that approximately one quarter of 2 year olds are eligible (Audit Scotland 2023: 6).

The Scottish Government's *Programme for Government* for 2023-24 includes a commitment to work with local authority and other sectoral partners to further expand the number of 2 year olds covered by the entitlement. The *Programme for Government* also undertook to 'provide funding to uplift pay in the private and voluntary sector to £12 per hour for those delivering funded Early Learning and Childcare', so as 'to support effective recruitment and retention of staff working in the sector' (SG 2023b: 37-38).

However, in 2019-20, the last year for which figures are available, only 58 children across Scotland were in funded GM nurseries (*sgoiltean-àraich*)<sup>1</sup> and this report therefore gives limited attention to this sector.

Notably, the *Education (Scotland) Act 2016* established a qualified entitlement to GM primary education, but did not extend this to Gaelic ELC. Instead, section 14 of the Act gave the Scottish Ministers (i.e. the SG) the authority to make regulations to extend this entitlement to ELC. As of 2023, however, the Government has not exercised this power. Thirteen local authorities currently make GM 3-5 provision available, at a total of 55 settings (36 of them in the Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (CNES) and Highland Council areas), but the decision to offer such provision is essentially a matter for the councils' discretion.

Gaelic nursery provision benefits from the support, supervision and oversight of Education Scotland, including the schools inspectorate, which makes detailed evaluations of individual settings (see Education Scotland 2023a, 2023b). There is no comparable oversight in relation to the Gaelic 0-3 sector, so that it is more difficult to ensure consistency in provision and promote best practice and innovation. The Care Inspectorate does regulate and inspect child care provision, but almost all Gaelic 0-3 settings run for two hours a day or less and are therefore outwith the scope of the Care Inspectorate's oversight.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In 2018-19 there were a total of 1,078 children enrolled in *sgoiltean-àraich*, so that only 5.4% of these were aged 2. These figures are taken from BnG 2019b: 34 (a confidential report made available to the researcher through a data sharing agreement). Although it might be anticipated that the number of 2 year olds in *sgoiltean-àraich* is now rather higher, more recent figures will not become available until 2024-25.

<sup>2</sup> See *Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010*, s. 14.

## 2.1.2 Principal strategic and regulatory documents

EY policy in Scotland has been set out in a series of strategic and regulatory documents issued by Education Scotland and the SG. These policy documents primarily relate to the 3-5 sector and rarely make explicit reference to the Gaelic sector, although they do apply to GM provision. This section gives a brief overview of the key points of the principal current policy documents.

Education Scotland's *Realising the ambition: Being Me – National practice guidance for early years in Scotland* (2020) is a wide-ranging and detailed discursive document that sets out key principles of child development and EY pedagogy, drawing on a range of theoretical frameworks and concepts. This guidance is aimed at all EY practitioners, including 'all staff and adults who are qualified and or registered to work with babies and young children and includes childminders, teachers, headteachers, managers, supervisors, support and out of school care workers' (Education Scotland 2020: 3).

In relation to GM provision, the guidance notes that:

This guidance should be used with Education Scotland's advice on Gaelic Medium Education (GME) [Bòrd na Gàidhlig 2018b] to ensure that the principles of total immersion are followed. Interactions in Gaelic are a key driver in planning progression in the curriculum for GME (Education Scotland 2020: 12).

The guidance then gives links to relevant Gaelic-related advisory materials.

Most recently, in 2021 the SG issued its *Early Learning and Childcare Statutory Guidance* (SG 2021). This is a much more formal regulatory document, 'issued to education authorities who are required to have regard to it when carrying out their statutory functions in relation to securing the funded early learning and childcare entitlement for eligible children in their area' (Scottish Government 2021: 8). In addition to this formal statutory function – which does not extend to 0-3 provision, as explained above – the guidance 'is also intended to assist all those involved in the implementation and delivery of early learning and childcare, including providers in the private, third and childminding sectors, community planning partners, and agencies across all sectors which support the early learning and childcare sector' (Scottish Government 2021: 8). The guidance included a short discussion of GM provision, as discussed in the next section.

Most recently, in 2022 the SG published its *Best Start: Strategic early learning and school age childcare plan for Scotland 2022-26* (SG 2022b). This plan addresses the implementation of the expansion of funded ELC to 1140 hours and the planned further expansion of the offer between 2022 and 2026. Again, then, the plan is not concerned with 0-3 provision outwith the scope of the funded provision. This 33-page document does not make a single reference to Gaelic.

Finally, it is also noteworthy that Audit Scotland has issued three major reports on the expansion of EY provision in Scotland (Audit Scotland 2018, 2020, 2023), but which make almost no mention of Gaelic.<sup>3</sup> This further demonstrates the marginal status of GM provision within the overall system of provision and national policy and planning for this sector.

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<sup>3</sup> The 2018 and 2020 reports make no reference to Gaelic and the 2023 makes a single reference (on p. 17).

## 2.2 Policy relating to Gaelic early years provision

BnG and certain other agencies, notably Education Scotland, have set out a range of commitments, requirements or strategies relating to Gaelic EY provision, including 0-3 provision. These can be understood as establishing a basic policy framework for provision in this area. However, for the reasons given in the introduction, the extent of BnG's leverage and control in this field is relatively limited, although it is possible that this may change somewhat as a result of the legislative and policy reforms currently being developed by the SG.

The two principal policy mechanisms established by the *Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005* are the National Gaelic Language Plan, which must be renewed every five years, and the Gaelic language plans that individual public authorities, including local authorities, are required to produce if notified to do so by BnG. In preparing their plans, public authorities are required to have regard to the statutory guidance on the development of Gaelic language plans. The current version of this guidance has been in place since 2007 but BnG is currently conducting a public consultation on a revised version (BnG 2007, 2023b). Neither version of the guidance makes any specific reference to EY provision, however, and the discussion of education in the current draft version relates specifically and exclusively to 'school education' (BnG 2023b: 6).

The *National Gaelic Language Plan 2018-23* made several undertakings relating to EY provision, but these mainly focused on the 3-5 sector rather than 0-3. The sections on Gaelic-medium Early Learning and Childcare Growth, Early Learning and Childcare Expansion and Early Language and Childcare Training provide as follows:

### **GM Early Learning and Childcare Growth**

The aim is to increase GM ELC and that GM ELC should be attached to every GM primary school or unit.

### **GM Early Learning and Childcare Expansion**

The aim is to ensure GM ELC benefits from the SG's expansion of hours, whilst maintaining all the initiatives that are currently in place.

### **GM ELC Training**

Establish courses in Childhood Practice that will be available through the medium of Gaelic (BnG 2018a: 49).

In contrast, the *Draft National Gaelic Language Plan 2023–28* gives more detailed action points and addresses 0-3 provision more directly. Section 6.2 of the plan deals with the issue of 'establishing and promoting GME Early Years centres, 0-3 provision and related initiatives' and makes four more specific commitments:

[1] The new national pilot Early Years (EY) Project operated by Comann nam Pàrant (CnamP) should be evaluated and appropriate recommendations for further progress agreed and implemented.



[2] Local Authority GLPs should increasingly outline GME Early Years development targets and delivery timescales with evidence of success detailed in GLP Monitoring Reports.

[3] Local Authority Early Years Development teams should increasingly be engaged in GME Early Years support as part of the mainstreaming of GME services.

[4] During the lifetime of the plan further development in EY training should be undertaken building on progress begun at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig (SMO) and others such as Newbattle Abbey College (BnG 2023a: 26).

Of these planned actions, points [2] and [3] can be understood as relating principally to 3-5 activity rather than 0-3, although the guidance urges local authorities to engage with 0-3, and some authorities, notably the City of Edinburgh Council (see section 3.1.3.1 below) are taking steps in relation to point [3] in terms of 0-3 provision. Point [1] relates to the current research on 0-3 provision, while point [4] relates to training for EY as a whole, including both the 0-3 and 3-5 sectors.

In 2013, the Bòrd published a National Gaelic Education Strategy for the period 2013-16 that included several distinct strategies for particular sectors, including a *Gaelic-medium Early Years Strategy* (BnG 2013a). This Strategy specified three priority areas (raising awareness about GME, acquisition and usage of Gaelic language and availability and quality of provision) and set out a range of specific actions to take them forward. The strategy was not renewed after 2016; according to one senior BnG official interviewed for this research, it was felt that a separate early years strategy was of limited value given the Bòrd's limited leverage in this area, which meant that it had relatively little control over actions and outcomes. In addition, the National Gaelic Language Plan already encompasses EY provision and is more useful as a policy instrument given its formal statutory status.

The 2005 Act gave BnG the authority to prepare guidance on Gaelic education, and the *Education (Scotland) Act 2016* strengthened this so as to require the Bòrd to do so. The guidance was duly issued in 2018 (BnG 2018b). The section on Gaelic ELC was very brief, however, a single page in a 44-page document. Crucially, in relation to 0-3 provision generally, the guidance clearly states that

There is, generally, no duty on education authorities to provide early learning and childcare to those aged 0-3; instead, education authorities have a discretionary power to provide early learning and childcare to this age group and can do so themselves or by making arrangements with private providers (BnG 2018b: 23).

In relation to GM ELC, the guidance notes further that

There are no duties on education authorities to provide Gaelic ELC but they may do so and this Guidance recommends that authorities consider establishing Gaelic ELC as a step towards Gaelic medium primary education (GMPE). If an education authority is providing GMPE, it should be actively considering opportunities to establish forms of Gaelic ELC (BnG 2018b: 24).

As such, the decision to offer Gaelic 0-3 provision and indeed 3-5 provision remains a matter left to the discretion of individual local authorities. As discussed in section 3.1.3 below, several authorities have exercised their discretion so as to offer 0-3 provision as part of their

overall GM strategy, but this is exceptional. As noted above, 13 local authorities currently make GM 3-5 provision available, at a total of 55 settings, but this is done on an essentially discretionary basis.

In relation to ELC, the statutory guidance also noted that:

2.8 It is considered essential that Gaelic ELC is led by Gaelic-speaking ELC practitioners who hold the relevant childcare qualifications and are able to deliver immersion in Gaelic. This gives consistency and continuity across provision from age 0-5 and reduces the reliance on parent committees.

2.9 Gaelic ELC also gives parents the opportunity to become involved in their child's Gaelic language development in an informal setting by learning through play, songs, activities and games. This has benefits to both children and parents, many of whom will not have Gaelic in the home. It also gives parents the opportunity to learn about GME through the experiences of other parents with children in GME. Gaelic ELC is open to all with no previous knowledge of Gaelic necessary (Bòrd na Gàidhlig 2018b: 24).

As noted above, in 2021 the Scottish Government issued its *Early Learning and Childcare Statutory Guidance* (SG 2021). This document addresses the issue of Gaelic provision only very briefly (pp. 31, 50) and reiterated that 'there are no duties on education authorities to provide Gaelic early learning and childcare but they may do so'. It also noted that the right to request an assessment of the need for GM primary education set out in the 2016 Education Act, does not include ELC.

The Bòrd then issued its *Gaelic Medium Early Learning and Childcare Guidance* later in 2021, in order to address the issue of Gaelic provision more comprehensively than the Scottish Government had done in its principal national guidance document. This guidance essentially reiterates that the decision to offer GM EY provision (at either the 0-3 or 3-5 stage) is a matter for local authorities' discretion.

In relation to the offer and staffing of 0-3 provision by local authorities, BnG's guidance included the following points:

In Education Authorities where there is currently no GME provision this guidance recommends authorities consider establishing Gaelic ELC as a step towards Gaelic medium primary education (GMPE). If an authority is providing GMPE, it should consider opportunities to establish Gaelic ELC.

It is considered essential that Gaelic ELC is led by Gaelic speaking ELC practitioners who hold the relevant childcare qualifications and are able to deliver total immersion in Gaelic (BnG 2021: 3).

A final policy document of note is Education Scotland's *A' cur taic ris an Ìre Thràth ann am Foghlam Tro Mheadhan na Gàidhlig / Supporting the Early Years in Gaelic Medium Education*, first published in 2017 and updated in 2023 (Education Scotland 2023). This professional learning resource is intended to 'be used as part of professional learning activities to support practitioners working in early learning and childcare settings in evaluating and planning for improvement'. It is principally aimed at the 3-5 sector; although it is also

relevant to the 0-3 sector there was no evidence from the research conducted for the present study that it is being actively used.

### **2.3 The structure of Gaelic 0-3 provision from 2010 to the present**

To a perhaps surprising degree, the current structure of Gaelic 0-3 provision has been shaped by institutional factors that have relatively little to do with educational or linguistic issues.

Gaelic pre-school playgroups played a central role in the movement for GME that developed in the early 1980s. Comhairle nan Sgoiltean Àraich (CNSA, the Gaelic Playgroups Association) was highly proactive in establishing Gaelic playgroups in different parts of Scotland, and this then led to the opening of GM primary units across the country from 1985 onwards.

CNSA (later renamed Taic) continued to organise Gaelic groups in the following decades and received funding from different agencies and authorities for this work, especially BnG from 2006 onwards. As funded 3-5 provision was introduced and local authorities began to take a central role in delivering this provision, CNSA began to concentrate its work on 0-3 provision. Concerns were raised about the management and strategic direction of CNSA/Taic, however, and this led BnG to withdraw its funding from the organisation in 2010.

Following the withdrawal of funding from CNSA/Taic, BnG decided to take over responsibility for early years provision itself. A team of EY officers were appointed, with responsibility for different geographical areas across Scotland. At the peak 5.0 FTE EY officers were employed by BnG. In addition, Highland Council secured extra funding from BnG to appoint, through a partnership with the Care and Learning Alliance (CALA), additional part-time support officers in their area, which had a considerable number of groups in small, widely scattered rural districts. At the highest point four officers (2.5 FTE) were in post. This arrangement with Highland Council continues to the present, as discussed in section 3.1.2 below.

Initially BnG received funding directly from the SG to support this EY work but restrictions were later imposed that precluded public bodies from receiving this funding directly. Instead, SG funding (the Children, Young People and Families Early Intervention Fund & Adult Learning and Empowering Communities Fund (CYPFEIF & ALEC))<sup>4</sup> was channelled through the CORRA Foundation and distributed to CnP. CnP then passed these funds on to the Bòrd.

In 2019, Audit Scotland conducted a review of BnG and found a range of deficiencies in relation to its governance and management (Audit Scotland 2019). This led to the adoption of an Improvement Plan to place the organisation on a firmer footing (Audit Scotland 2021). Within this plan, it was determined that BnG should concentrate on its core statutory functions. Direct provision of services, including EY provision, did not fit comfortably within this more streamlined strategic approach. It was also felt that there was a potential conflict between the Bòrd's role as service provider and its monitoring function in relation to Gaelic language plans. The fact that the Bòrd's EY officers were approaching retirement age provided an additional reason for transferring responsibility for EY support work to a partner

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<sup>4</sup> This fund has now been restructured and renamed the Children, Young People, Families and Adult Learning (CYPFAL) Third Sector Fund.

organisation, as it would otherwise have been necessary to recruit a new EY staff cohort in the near future.

Following this reorganisation, BnG made all but one of the EY posts redundant. This officer now has strategic responsibility for the development of effective GM EY provision.

Rather than endeavour to establish a new organisation with a specific remit for EY, along the lines of CNSA/Taic or the Welsh Mydiad Meithrin (discussed in section 4.1 below), it was decided to establish a pilot scheme by which CnP would take over most of the EY work, as discussed in section 3.1.4. The new arrangement with CnP was originally planned as a one-year pilot beginning in 2021, after which an evaluation would be conducted. Partly due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the programme was extended before an evaluation was conducted, and is currently funded until 2025.

However, CnP's involvement does not currently extend to certain areas of Scotland, including the Highland Council area (where the separate system of support put in place in 2011 remains in place), Argyll & Bute and Aberdeen. There is also now no support officer for Skye, which had been served by a BnG EY officer until 2021.

As discussed in section 2.1.3 below, some individual local authorities play an active role in relation to Gaelic 0-3 provision, although most of those which offer GM 3-5 or primary/secondary GM provision do not do so. This variation reflects the fact that there is no statutory obligation on local authorities to make such provision and that BnG has limited leverage to require action through the Gaelic language plan process.

Current early years provision is also patchy in geographical terms. Of the 43 towns or villages with Gaelic primary schools or units outside the Western Isles, 12 currently have no 0-3 provision (Drumnadrochit, Dunvegan, Forfar, Gairloch, Greenock, Kilmuir, Plockton, Ross of Mull, Staffin, Strath of Appin, Thurso and Tiree).<sup>5</sup> Ten of the 43 GM primary schools or units outside the Western Isles have no *sgoil-àraich* provision (Drumnadrochit, Forfar, Gairloch, Kilwinning, Lochcarron, Ross of Mull, Paisley, Perth, Salen and Strath of Appin). Four areas have 0-3 provision but no 3-5 (Kilwinning, Lochcarron, Newton Mearns and Perth), and four have no GM EY provision at all (Forfar, Gairloch, Ross of Mull and Strath of Appin). There are also 0-3 groups in three localities in which there is currently no GM primary provision – Ballachulish, Tobermory and Peebles – although the first two of these are in reasonable proximity to a GM primary school or unit.

Many 0-3 settings have closed in recent years, although some new ones have also opened. Of the 60 0-3 groups listed by BnG for 2018-19 (BnG 2019a: 7), 28 are no longer in operation.

The pattern of provision in the Western Isles is very distinct: while there is a *sgoil-àraich* in each of the islands' 19 primary schools, there are apparently only two voluntary 0-3 groups currently running, although there were significantly more before Covid (12 in 2018-19). Provision is offered by CnP, almost entirely in Lewis and Harris, as discussed in section 3.1.4.2, while Cothrom Òg in South Uist provides 0-5 childcare there, and an EY officer for Uist has also recently been appointed by CNES. There is currently no Gaelic 0-3 provision in Barra, but the Barra Children's Centre hopes to recruit a Gaelic playleader shortly.

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<sup>5</sup> There is no provision in Condorrat but 0-3 provision is available 6 miles away in Airdrie. The same is true for Salen, for which provision is available 10 miles away in Tobermory.

As discussed in section 3.1.1.2 below, almost all 0-3 groups meet for only a few hours a week. There are currently only three providers in Scotland that offer full-time GM child care for the 0-3 group, in Glasgow, Sleat (Skye) and South Uist. There are also a very small number of private childminders, mostly in the Western Isles and the main urban Gaelic communities.

Because the overwhelming majority of 0-3 settings involve only a small number of hours (as little as 300 hours per year), and vary in their intensity of Gaelic language use, the actual level of exposure to Gaelic for participating children is usually relatively limited. This is significant from the standpoint of language acquisition: a fundamental finding from research in this field is that very extensive exposure to the language, preferably involving diverse kinds of inputs, is necessary to ensure effective language acquisition by children (see, e.g. Unsworth 2016). However, as discussed below, Gaelic 0-3 provision also plays an important role in informing parents about GME and encouraging them to enrol their children in GME. These beneficial outcomes are not dependent on the intensity and richness of Gaelic input in the same way.

## **2.4 Issues concerning data collection on 0-3 enrolment**

Between 2011-12 and 2018-19 BnG gathered and published data on the number of Gaelic 0-3 settings and the number of children enrolled in them (see, e.g. BnG 2019a: 7). This practice has since been discontinued as it was felt that the data gathering system, and thus the published enrolment figures, were insufficiently robust. Unlike *sgoiltean-àraich* or primary schools, there is no formal registration system for 0-3 settings, and children's attendance over the course of a year may fluctuate considerably, so that data collected at particular points in the year may not be representative. Attendance data was skewed depending on what was happening in the local areas when data was collected, including challenging weather, illness, and discontinuities with particular groups. Some groups and local authorities simply did not report.

At present, then, there is no system in place to quantify the overall number of Gaelic 0-3 settings or the number of children enrolled in them. Some data can be gleaned from the funding applications and reports submitted to BnG by individual providers, but not all providers (notably those local authorities that offer GM 0-3 provision) participate in this process and remain unenumerated. The extent to which enrolment is increasing or decreasing over time will therefore remain incompletely understood. To the extent that 0-3 provision is considered an important strand in overall Gaelic development strategy, this lack of clarity is unhelpful.

## **2.5 Funding arrangements for Gaelic 0-3 provision**

Funding arrangements for Gaelic 0-3 provision are surprisingly complex, with a number of different streams and sources playing a role. These include the following.

1. The only funding programme that is specifically directed at Gaelic 0-3 provision is BnG's Early Years Grants (Tabhartasan nan Tràth-Bhliadhnaichean). These are intended to assist 'voluntary early years groups that support parents, families and children aged 0-3 years, to encourage and increase the day to day use of Gaelic, and to encourage continuity into Gaelic education' (<https://www.gaidhlig.scot/en/funding/funding-schemes/early-years-grants/>). The

budget for the scheme in 2020-21 was £145,000 but this was reduced to £120,000 for 2021-22 and 2022-23. This scheme is discussed in detail in section 3.1.1.1 below.

2. Another relevant funding stream is BnG's Gaelic Plans Fund (formerly the Gaelic Language Act Implementation Fund (GLAIF) (<https://www.gaidhlig.scot/en/funding/funding-schemes/gaelic-plans-fund/>). Public authorities with statutory Gaelic language plans may apply for funding to support the implementation of any aspect of their plans. In a few cases, local authorities have received funding that relates to 0-3 provision, including the City of Edinburgh Council and Glasgow City Council (see sections 3.1.3.1 and 3.1.3.2 below).
3. Local voluntary 0-3 groups occasionally secure additional funding from the Bòrd's Taic Freumhan Coimhearsnachd community grants scheme (<https://www.gaidhlig.scot/en/funding/funding-schemes/taic-freumhan-coimhearsnachd/>). These grants do not exceed £5,000 and are more commonly under £2,000. Eight groups received awards from this source in 2021-22 and 2022-23, in a total amount of £23,000. These grants are typically used for Gaelic learning sessions for parents and other kinds of family Gaelic events rather than core EY provision.
4. Some national Gaelic organisations, styled 'Delivery Partners', receive substantial funding from BnG for work that includes aspects of 0-3 provision. The principal bodies involved are Comunn na Gàidhlig, parent organisation of CnP, and Stòrlann Nàiseanta na Gàidhlig. The role of CnP and Stòrlann are discussed in sections 3.1.4 and 3.1.8 below.
5. The SG's Specific Grants for Gaelic Education are targeted at the provision of statutory education (3-18) but some awards have also supported 0-3 provision, including that offered by the City of Edinburgh Council, East Ayrshire Council, Perth & Kinross Council and West Dunbartonshire Council.
6. The SG's Gaelic Capital Fund has also been used to support some developments or purchases that relate to 0-3 provision (see, e.g. <https://www.gov.scot/news/funding-gaelic-projects/>). The City of Edinburgh Council recently received funding for the remodelling of the janitor's house (Taigh an Dorsair) at Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce, while CNES received funding for the purchase of two vans to support EY provision.
7. Individual local authorities have also funded 0-3 activity using their own education budgets, often as a part contribution to an award from the SG's Specific Grants for Gaelic Education. These include the City of Edinburgh Council, East Ayrshire Council and West Dunbartonshire Council. Others make an in-kind contribution by providing space at no charge for Pàrant and Pàiste groups in a council-run school or another council building. More generally, Gaelic Plans Fund awards generally require the recipient organisation to pay some of the costs, typically 20%.
8. Most voluntary groups ask parents to make a small contribution for each session they attend, typically £1.50 or £2. Funding applications submitted to BnG by voluntary groups indicate that the total amount raised in this way rarely exceeds a few hundred pounds per year.

9. Some local voluntary groups have been able to secure funding from charitable organisations of different kinds, including the National Lottery, or from local businesses. One local voluntary group interviewed for this research indicated that they had received a substantial bequest to support the group's work.

## **2.6 Previous research on Gaelic 0-3 provision**

Little research on Gaelic 0-3 provision has been conducted up to now. BnG has commissioned two studies, rather different in their focus, and there have been two academic contributions on policy or pedagogical aspects.

Stephen et al. (2010) conducted a broad review of GM ELC on behalf of SG and BnG. This included 0-3 provision within its scope, but the majority of the provision under consideration related to the 3-5 group, and specific issues concerning the 0-3 sector were not highlighted. The report considered the current extent of GM provision for early years education and childcare', 'the supply, demand and promotion of GM early years provision', 'the strengths and weakness of current provision', and 'the changes or developments needed to improve and extend current provision'.

The report made a number of recommendations to strengthen GM EY provision. In relation to the professional development of staff working in the sector, it was proposed that 'dedicated national training which combines early years and language development for GM provision' should be developed, 'the qualification/training level of all GM early years practitioners and the quality of children's experiences' raised and 'effective mechanisms for sharing knowledge and practice' put in place (Stephen et al. 2010: iv).

In relation to support needs, the report recommended that the 'supply of GM resources' should be improved, steps should be taken to promote the 'growth of GM childcare' and mechanisms developed 'to ensure that GM children have opportunities to use the language at home and in informal contexts' (Stephen et al. 2010: 40-41).

The report also concluded that GM EY 'provision is not promoted as effectively as it should be', and urged the development of a national database of provision and a national campaign to promote early Gaelic-English bilingualism (Stephen et al. 2010: 42).

Finally, the report recommended that further research be conducted into the 'outcomes of attending GM provision for individuals' and the development of Gaelic language skills, the efficacy of different 'language development models' and 'parental perspectives on the supply of and demand for' GM EY provision (Stephen et al. 2010: 43).

McPake et al. (2015), another study commissioned by BnG, addressed six research questions:

1. How do groups establishing and developing GM provision for 0-3 year olds evaluate the level of support which they receive?
2. How satisfactory is the information about national and local initiatives provided by BnG?
3. To what extent do BnG and other organisations and authorities work in partnership with each other and with local groups?
4. To what extent does the funding available from BnG for Gaelic EY development meet the needs of groups supporting 0-3s learning Gaelic in community groups

and at home?

5. How do practitioners working with children aged 0-3 years in GM provision evaluate the availability and appropriateness of the training available to them?
6. Which aspects of BnG's support and strategies for enhancing the development of Gaelic language understanding and use among 0-3-year olds and their families contribute to positive outcomes and which aspects require further development?

In the first phase of the study, the research team held interviews with 19 local 0-3 groups and in the second, conducted case studies of six groups, which involved site visits.

Based on their investigation, McPake et al. concluded as follows:

The policy position and strategies of Bòrd na Gàidhlig are not evident to those involved in the toddler groups. They do not seem to see their group as part of a larger, national movement and are not then able to draw on the strengths that a network of contacts and relationships should offer the language development activities. There seems to be some confusion about which Gaelic organisations are responsible for particular services and which individuals represent which organisations – names and roles are confused and hazy (McPake et al. 2022: 15).

To improve this dynamic, the authors recommended that BnG:

- engage in discussion with EY support workers and trainers for this sector to identify and promote practice which integrates effective language learning with good quality play and social experiences
- work to raise its profile with local 0-3 groups and establish ways of maintaining closer and more frequent links with groups
- provide playleaders and volunteers with ideas and vocabulary to develop Gaelic for use with generic playroom resources and activities
- communicate more frequently with local groups to alert them to training events
- investigate in more detail how playleaders might best support parents who wish to develop Gaelic in the home, and devise training that enables them to offer good advice
- address the issue of quality by collating best practice advice for their training and toddler provision
- raise the profile of the Gaelic 0-3 sector nationally so as to increase awareness and demand for provision

In a case study of the Edinburgh Cròileagan (see section 3.1.3.1 below), MacLeod (2018) considered apparent mismatches between the language planning goals of BnG in relation to 0-3 provision and the needs and concerns of parents who access this provision. Based on attendance at more than 50 Cròileagan sessions and interviews with playleaders and more than 25 parents, she concluded that BnG's strong emphasis on the promotion of GM primary education, as set out in policy documents and its information pack for parents, was out of alignment with the priorities of most parents attending the setting, many of whom had had no contact with Gaelic language or culture before coming to the Cròileagan. Cròileagan play leaders tried to follow a more patient and nuanced approach to informing, supporting and encouraging parents,



mindful that attendance [at Cròileagan] does not reflect a decision about formal education and the enrolment of a child into Gaelic-medium education at nursery or primary level. They appreciate that parents take time to experience and learn from others' experiences of Gaelic-medium education and that decisions regarding formal education are made over time and are based on an ongoing process of experiencing, researching and considering whether Gaelic-medium education is the best option for their child and their family (MacLeod 2018: 37).

Given these dynamics, MacLeod concluded that 'national-level support [for Gaelic 0-3 provision] should actively seek to understand how local endeavours currently contribute to national language planning goals and appreciate that providing appropriate support for parents requires an understanding of their current considerations and interests' (MacLeod 2018: 42).

Most recently, MacDonald (2022) investigated the potential of Gaelic song material for the acquisition of Gaelic as a second language with very young children and their families, and considered ways of supporting practitioners to maximise the impact of group singing activities. Research for this study involved interviews with play leaders and assessment of a corpus of 72 songs used in early years settings. MacDonald noted a range of shortcomings with many of the songs from the standpoint of early language acquisition. A large proportion of them had been translated from English, and the vocabulary used in the songs was often inappropriate in various respects.

To address these issues, MacDonald identified a number of criteria for 'hypothetically Ideal Bilingual Toddler Songs', including 'a strong, exciting rhythm', 'sympathetic composition and key signature', 'carefully constructed tunes to support the joint decoding of music and cornerstone linguistic concepts', 'easy gross-motor actions', 'an element of surprise or a sound effect', 'potential for props, allowing words to be linked with real objects', 'a communicative element for sharing with a caregiver or a friend', 'repetition of key vocabulary/phrases which are meaningful to children and useful in the home', 'narrative exposure to high-value syntax', 'appropriate pace', 'colours and numbers in context' and 'grammatical concepts modelled clearly by practitioners who are secure in their own understanding' (MacDonald 2022: 11-12). A collection of new songs was then produced based on these recommendations.

### **3 Comparison and assessment of current 0-3 delivery models**

This section presents a comparison and assessment of the current delivery models and support systems for Gaelic 0-3 provision, principally those supported by BnG. The role of local voluntary groups is considered first, followed by discussion of the activities in this sector delivered by particular local authorities. It then focuses on the situation of voluntary 0-3 groups in parts of Scotland where there are currently no dedicated officers or projects in place to support this sector, notably in Aberdeen and Argyll & Bute. Finally, issues involving publicity and promotion, resources and training for the Gaelic 0-3 sector are addressed.

#### **3.1.1 Local voluntary 0-3 groups and Bòrd na Gàidhlig's Early Years Fund**

##### **3.1.1.1 Administration of the Early Years Fund**

As noted above, BnG's Early Years Grants (Tabhartasan nan Tràth-Bhliadhnaichean) are intended to assist 'voluntary early years groups that support parents, families and children aged 0-3 years, to encourage and increase the day to day use of Gaelic, and to encourage continuity into Gaelic education' (<https://www.gaidhlig.scot/en/funding/funding-schemes/early-years-grants/>). The budget for the scheme in 2020-21 was £145,000 but this was reduced to £120,000 for 2021-22 and 2022-23 due to reduced external funding for the scheme. According to the scheme guidance (<https://www.gaidhlig.scot/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/stiuireadh-tabhartasan-tb-2023-24.pdf>),

groups that deliver only one session per week can apply for a maximum of £5,000, while groups that deliver more than one session per week can apply for a maximum of £15,000. It is expected that each group will raise money from other sources (i.e. attendance fees or other funding) and that grants from this fund will be up to a maximum of 80% of total group costs.

Successful applicants are required to submit an interim and a final report concerning the delivery of their provision and the use of the grant.

In the 2023-24 funding round, 25 groups were awarded a total of £108,450. Three groups were awarded £15,000 each; 18 of the remaining 22 awards were for under £4,000. Ten groups were in the Highland Council area, three in the Western Isles, two in Argyll & Bute, two in Glasgow and one each in seven other Lowland authorities.

There has been a decline in the number of groups supported by the scheme in recent years. 35 groups received funding in 2018-19, 38 in 2019-20, 18 in 2021-22, 22 in 2022-23 and 25 in 2023-24. As discussed in sections 2.4 and 2.5 below, some of the groups that previously received Early Years Grant funding are defunct while others continue to operate but have been unable to meet BnG's conditions for funding.

In most cases, by far the largest slice of EY grants go towards salary costs for playleaders but applicants also seek assistance with a range of other costs, including room hire.

Local group representatives reported somewhat varying experiences with the administrative aspects of the Bòrd's Early Years Fund. Those who had previous experience with other funding applications reported little difficulty with the process, while others without such experience found it more challenging. In some cases inexperienced applicants reported

having made technical errors in their applications, which meant delays in securing funding. Some groups were able to draw upon substantial assistance in completing the forms from the CnP officer serving their area.

Some interviewees expressed frustration with the annual application process and having to repeat information that they had provided in previous years. It was suggested that some kind of streamlined re-application system could be put in place for previously successful applicants, rather than requiring them to start from scratch.

The deadline for applications to the Early Years Grants scheme is ordinarily in mid-July. Some respondents found this timing to be unhelpful, as it falls in the middle of the summer holidays.

Interviewees offered varied assessments of BnG's new Fluxx interface for grant applications. One found it easier to use than the previous system, but another found the lack of a sharing facility unhelpful.

### **3.1.1.2 Experiences of local 0-3 groups**

Representatives of 33 local groups were contacted for interview and 30 interviews (representing 29 organisations) were eventually conducted. Four of the groups contacted did not respond despite repeated attempts, but one of these actually closed down in summer 2023. The great majority of these groups had applied for funding from BnG's Early Years Fund in 2022-23. Two had previously been in receipt of such funding but were now operating without it, and one was only established in 2023. The discussion in this section draws on interviews with all of the groups in question, although it should be noted that 13 of these are supported by CnP's officer in Central Scotland and that aspect of their experience is addressed more specifically in section 3.1.4.1 below.

Interviews with representatives of local voluntary groups yielded a great deal of valuable information about their aims, experiences and challenges. In some cases, the interviewee had been involved with the group for a number of years and had considerable breadth and depth of information and insight, while in others the group's representative had been involved for a shorter time and had a rather narrower perspective. In two cases two representatives of the group participated in the interview, and for one group two separate interviews were conducted.

The great majority of groups meet only once or twice a week, for 1.5 or 2 hours. One group meets three times a week, in different towns within the council area. A small number of groups, including the groups in East Kilbride and Portree, offer two services, one for children under 2 and one for 2-3 year olds (for which the parents are not present). There are very few services of this last kind; in addition to East Kilbride and Portree, such provision is available in Fort William. An initiative to develop such provision in Inverness is currently under way.

There are only three providers of full-time GM childcare in Scotland for under 3s. Although principally funded by parent fees, Cothrom Òg in South Uist (part of the community learning and training centre Cothrom) and Fàs Mòr in Skye (connected to Sabhal Mòr Ostaig) receive funding from BnG among other sources. The only other full-time provider, Seudan Beaga in Glasgow, is a private, partly Gaelic nursery and does not receive BnG funding.

Interviewees representing 0-3 groups reported that attendance rarely exceeded 20 children and was typically under 12, sometimes only 6-8 on average. Attendance by children tends to fluctuate, with some attending more frequently and regularly than others. There is constant throughput as children get older and move up to the nursery stage and younger ones come in behind them.

As would be expected, Covid had a significant impact on the 0-3 group; this issue is discussed in a separate section of this report, 3.1.6 below.

The great majority of local groups only meet during school terms, although a few operate year-round and some offer occasional activities during the summer, e.g. at festivals of different kinds. Cothrom Òg and Fàs Mòr operate year-round except for short holiday breaks.

Most groups for the 0-3s are aimed specifically at this age group but a few cover the full 0-5 range (e.g. the groups in Aberdeen, East Renfrewshire, North Ayrshire and Perth), and even when the group is principally for 0-3s it is common for a few older children (e.g. older siblings) to attend as well.

As noted above, in a few areas there is no 3-5 provision to follow on from the 0-3 group. Some parents interviewed for this research observed that the absence of 3-5 Gaelic provision in an area makes the 0-3 Gaelic provision less attractive to parents. Issues may arise even when 3-5 provision is available, however. One representative of a Central Belt voluntary group expressed frustration that although there was *sgoil-àraich* provision in the area, the previous offer of wrap-around care following the conclusion of the session was removed once the increased 1140 hour entitlement was implemented, thereby making the *sgoil-àraich* difficult to access for working parents, and in turn diminishing the appeal of the Pàrant is Pàiste group.

Some voluntary groups are very long established, up to 35 years in some cases. Other groups are much more recent, including some that were established in summer 2023 (in North Uist, Oban and Peebles).

As noted above, parents and carers attending voluntary groups typically make a small contribution to costs, usually £1.50 or £2 per session. (This was not the case with some other kinds of provision, e.g. that offered by Perth & Kinross Council and West Dunbartonshire Council (see sections 3.1.3.4 and 3.1.3.6 below) and at CnP's Thig a Chluich sessions in the Western Isles (section 3.2.2)).

Sessions are held in a variety of locations, often village halls or church halls. Church and village halls typically charge a fee to hire the space. A few groups held weekly, year-round outdoor sessions.

Some local authorities provide a space in a school free of charge, including not only authorities that fund or manage the 0-3 provision such as Edinburgh but also Highland Council (Inverness) and South Lanarkshire (East Kilbride). Ideally this space is in the school in which GME is offered, as is now the case in Aberfeldy, Edinburgh, Inverness and Portree, for example. Locating the 0-3 provision in the same building as the *sgoil-àraich* and primary provision facilitates the progression and makes continuity between stages easier.

In a few cases, local groups expressed dissatisfaction with their premises, either because of an inconvenient location or logistical complications of one kind or another. One group had

been unable to meet for a considerable period because a leak in the roof of the building they use caused interior damage which needed to be repaired. Another reported dissatisfaction with their space due to its unappealing location and sometimes poor level of cleanliness.

In the great majority of cases, 0-3 provision is organised and managed by voluntary parent committees. This structure tends to involve discontinuities, as children grow out of the age range and their parents cease their involvement in the group and have to be replaced. Management of bank accounts was often mentioned as a particular difficulty, as the designated signatories need to be changed periodically as parents move on from the group and a substitute is found.

Some interviewees found the responsibility of running a group, particularly in relation to funding and finance, stressful. One group secretary commented:

It's like a lot of ownership on parents like myself, and I'm finding that it's actually a wee bit off putting for me because I'm actually quite stressed with it all.

Another observed that in general, it was difficult to persuade parents to take an active role in the committee:

Parents of young children are incredibly busy. So they don't really want to take an extra thing on.

Local groups reported varying situations in relation to staffing. The best positioned groups benefited from having the same, highly fluent and experienced playleaders in post for a number of years. A representative of a Central Belt group had high praise for their current playleader, who had been with them for several years, but commented that 'without her, we would struggle and we would probably have to look high and low for a replacement'. At the other extreme, two rural groups interviewed for this study reported that they had been unable to find a Gaelic-speaking play leader and had lost their BnG funding as a result. They were endeavouring to carry on with their limited linguistic and financial resources but one indicated that they might, with regret, have to simply become an English group.

In one case, a rural group was unable to find a suitable playleader in the vicinity and had to arrange to pay for someone to come from 75 minutes away, paying for her travel time.

In some cases, it was evident that the group playleader was motivated by a strong sense of personal commitment to Gaelic and that the amount of time and energy they invested in the group was out of proportion to any remuneration they received.

In numerous groups, the playleader was an intermediate-level learner of Gaelic rather than a fluent speaker. One playleader said that they were 'a million miles away from fluent'. This clearly presents an issue in relation to the effectiveness and appropriateness of the sessions from the standpoint of Gaelic, although some interviewees argued that the language used with the children was very simple and within the playleader's repertoire.

In some groups, the playleader (typically a current or former parent) did not have any EY qualifications.

As explained above, research for this project did not encompass attendance at many sessions, and the two sessions visited by the researcher were delivered by very experienced

and fluent playleaders. More generally, this study did not focus on issues of pedagogy, although there is evident room for improvement and development, as highlighted in previous studies of Gaelic EY provision (Stephen et al. 2010; McPake et al. 2015).

A significant number of interviewees, in both the Highlands and the Lowlands, reported that there were very few or no fluent speaking parents who attended the group. One parent reported that she had been involved in her Central Scotland group for seven years and there had never been a fully fluent speaker in attendance during that time. This is unfortunately a reflection of the demographic and sociolinguistic reality of Gaelic in much of Scotland. In contrast, one island interviewee reported that the majority of the parents at the setting had some Gaelic but lacked confidence in using it:

They did Gaelic in school, they've had Gaelic in the house, but they don't really speak it fluently. It's more like a broken Gaelic. They're not very confident with it.

An interviewee from a rural Highland community reported a more positive dynamic:

There's probably about 4 or 5 [parents or grandparents] that are fluent Gaelic speakers and will speak to each other in Gaelic at the playgroup and to their own children, but also each other's children, which is really nice. So it's a nice, friendly environment that just encourages Gaelic. So even if some parents don't speak Gaelic, they're hearing it being spoken to their children. . . . It's also been good for some grandparents coming along who are native Gaelic speakers, who are maybe a bit shy about their Gaelic, and it gives them a nice boost to just converse with the children.

Particularly in small localities where there is a limited range of activities for young children, some groups reported that some of the parents and carers attending the sessions had relatively limited interest in Gaelic. This pattern has been noted in previous studies of the 0-3 sector (McPake et al. 2015: 24). As one interviewee summarised their situation:

Our function is twofold, I think, to bring the Gaelic and to offer a good playgroup and a lot of parents come because we're a good playgroup.

One interviewee described tensions they had experienced in this past in this regard, although the dynamic was now more positive. Some interviewees noted that attendance at the group provided an opportunity to give information about GME and that some parents increased their interest in Gaelic over time:

It doesn't have to necessarily be people that walk through our door knowing that they have . . . a long-term goal to maybe go to GME, it's about getting people into the group. It's about promoting Gaelic in, you know, a happy, positive way. And that is how you'll get people into GME in [Lowland town]. . . . You'll get people that wouldn't necessarily walk through the door thinking they're going to send their children [to GME]. .

In most settings, interviewees reported that many of the parents were making efforts to learn Gaelic, but these tended to be limited in scope given the pressures on their time.

Most interviewees noted that their group had strong connections to the local *sgoil-àraich*, with most of the children attending the 0-3 sessions continuing on to primary GME, but this was not true in all cases. Some groups were quite clear in expressing this purpose:

Our aim is to promote Gaelic and get the children into Gaelic medium. And we kind of do that quite successfully in this area.

Conversely, one interviewee who had children both in the 0-3 group and the local GM primary unit reported that the majority of children entering P1 had not received GM EY provision.

Interviewees gave quite contrasting assessments of their relationship to the local authority in their area. Several reported that they effectively had no communication with the local authority at all. In some cases there was no council officer with specific responsibility for Gaelic but the group had some dealings with the council's EY staff. One Central Scotland group reported that they received help from the council in promoting the group in different ways, through media channels and at local events. At the other extreme, as discussed in sections 3.1.3.1, 3.1.3.4, 3.1.3.5 and 3.1.3.6 below, some authorities actually take charge of the local 0-3 provision.

Interviewees expressed varying levels of awareness of the role of BnG. Some reported receiving relevant information of different kinds but others indicated no awareness of the organisation beyond its role in the Early Years Grant process. Very few appeared to have made use of BnG's Early Years Toolkit (<https://www.gaidhlig.scot/en/education/pre-school/information-and-guidance-for-0-3-early-learning-groups/>). Several representatives of groups formerly served by the Bòrd's Glasgow-based EY officer commented favourably on the support they had received from her. It should be noted that there are sometimes issues with main group contacts not passing on information from BnG to other committee members and playleaders.

### **3.1.2 Provision by Highland Council**

As summarised above, following the withdrawal of funding from CNSA/Taic Highland Council felt that the level of support for 0-3 provision in the council area by BnG was insufficient and BnG therefore agreed to provide supplemental funding for the employment of additional 0-3 officers in Highland. Highland Council then contracted this work to the Care and Learning Alliance (CALA), a third sector early learning and childcare organisation serving Highland and Moray ([www.careandlearningalliance.co.uk/](http://www.careandlearningalliance.co.uk/)). Between 2011 and 2022 staff were employed by CALA but this arrangement has now been discontinued, so that the Council employs the Gaelic EY staff directly.

The level of funding provided for these support officers has remained the same since 2011, despite inflation and other rising costs. At the highest point 4 part-time officers (2.5 FTE) were in post. In spring 2021, four officers were employed, serving Lochaber, Thurso, Easter Ross, Inverness and Moray, and the Ullapool area respectively. The Lochaber officer continues in post and the Council is currently trying to recruit an officer for Wester Ross and the Moray Firth area.

Recruitment for these posts has proven difficult, for two main reasons. First, funding has only been awarded in one-year tranches, without guarantee of continuity. This necessarily made the posts somewhat unattractive to potential applicants. There were also significant delays in getting posts advertised, given the complexity of council systems. Second, in many parts of the Highland Council area there are now very few people with the necessary Gaelic

language skills. As such posts have sometimes had to be advertised 3-4 times, offering an improved salary but still without success.

The remit of the Highland Council/CALA staff was broader than that of BnG's EY support workers:

the CALA Gaelic Toddler Workers aimed to provide a range of support, first and foremost of which was delivering Gaelic language play activities, stories and songs within the group whilst modelling Gaelic language usage to improve language acquisition and parental usage in the home (Highland Council 2023: [3]).

As discussed below, the Thig a Chluich sessions being delivered by CnP in the Western Isles are organised on a similar basis. This issue is then addressed more fully in section 5 (Discussion and recommendations).

Local groups in parts of the Highland area who are currently supported by an EY worker spoke positively of her contribution. One commented that although their group was running well, 'if there was ever an issue or we had questions or needed help, we could absolutely get in touch' with the support officer, who was 'very helpful'. Another spoke positively of her role first in starting up the group and now in providing worksheets and song recordings for the group, as well as visiting the setting fairly regularly.

In contrast, some groups in other areas of Highland that did not have a support officer in post at the moment found the lack of support difficult. One rural group had lost its BnG funding because it could not provide a sufficiently Gaelic-rich environment after its previous playleader left and they were unable to recruit a replacement with enough Gaelic. Another group is currently in a much more stable position but nevertheless spoke very favourably of the support they had previously received from Highland Council/CALA officers and said it would be very helpful to have advice on matters such as how to go about amending the group's constitution.

### **3.1.3 Other provision by local authorities**

As explained above, local authorities are not legally required to make 0-3 provision, and the majority of councils that offer GME have not chosen to do so. Nevertheless, several local authorities, including the City of Edinburgh Council, East Ayrshire Council, Perth & Kinross Council, West Dunbartonshire Council and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar have voluntarily chosen to make provision of different kinds. Funding arrangements for this provision varies, although in most cases BnG funding is not (or is no longer) involved. However, BnG has recently funded certain local authority initiatives in Edinburgh and Glasgow from its Gaelic Plans Fund. The following sections summarise and analyse these various initiatives.

#### **3.1.3.1 City of Edinburgh Council**

Edinburgh Council is unusual among local authorities in that it has taken charge of the local 0-3 provision for decades, and has directly employed the playleaders who deliver these sessions. Edinburgh's provision is known as Cròileagan but these sessions are for 0-3 year olds and parents/carers remain with their children (see the note on terminology in section 1.4 above). Since 2022 the provision is being funded directly by the Council rather than with SG Specific Grant funding, as had previously been the case. Three part-time workers (1.0 FTE) are currently employed for Cròileagan.



The Council's draft Gaelic language plan for 2023 to 2027 includes commitments to 'continue to strengthen our 0-3 Cròileagan provision and extend reach across city' and 'improve [the] cohesion of 0-5 provision . . . and continuing to establish the role of the Gaelic EY Development Officer' (City of Edinburgh Council 2023: [11]).

At present four 1.5 hour Cròileagan sessions are offered per week, plus occasional outdoor sessions; in the past, however, there were as many as six sessions per week. Between 55 and 70 families usually access the service each week. The sessions have been offered in different locations in the city over time but the main setting will now be Taigh an Dorsair, the former janitor's house at Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce, Edinburgh's Gaelic primary school. Taigh an Dorsair has just been remodelled, with a grant from the SG's Gaelic Capital Fund.

Staffing the service has been difficult in recent years. In summer 2023 only 3 playleaders were in post where there had been as many as 8 a few years ago. Running sessions has sometimes been problematic when members of the team are off for one reason or another; this had been easier in the past when there was a larger pool of staff. Recruitment has been challenging, with some advertisements attracting no applicants, although this may be partly attributable to the timing of the advertisement. Some interviewees suggested that the Council was too slow in advertising posts.

Between 2017 and 2019 one of the Edinburgh Cròileagan sessions was specifically aimed at families that were using Gaelic in the home (who constitute a very small minority of those attending the service generally). This session was scheduled at the same time as a standard session. While the initiative was perceived as being successful, it lapsed with the Covid shutdown and has not been reinstated. This initiative appears to have been unique in Scotland.

In 2022-23 the City of Edinburgh Council received GLAIF funding to employ an Early Years GME Development Officer. The Council's funding application explained the aims of the post as follows:

to coordinate development and expansion of 0-5 GME provision, within our Gaelic Medium Education Improvement Plan. The postholder will support our growth strategy by increasing collaboration and improving alignment of Cròileagan groups with Òganan, Sgoil-àraich and EY at TnaP [Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce]. Areas of focus will include evaluating, developing and improving support for families, taking forward and creating new partnership work and promoting awareness of 0-5 GME provision in Edinburgh, particularly in areas where new primary and secondary provision is planned.

The postholder took up her post in May 2022 and current funding continues until April 2025. Her remit is only partly concerned with 0-3; some involves the 3-5 sector. The officer reported that she worked closely with the officer for the city's Capital Gaelic initiative (a multi-agency partnership which organises a wide range of events in the city) and the local CnaG officer for Iomairt Gàidhlig Dhùn Èideann.

At interview, parent representatives were aware of the officer's role in relation to 0-3 events in the city but seemed somewhat unclear about the wider purpose of her post.

### 3.1.3.2 Glasgow City Council

In contrast to Edinburgh, Glasgow City Council has not been directly involved in Gaelic 0-3 provision and does not currently provide premises for either of the two Pàrant is Pàiste groups in the city. The Council's Gaelic language plan for 2018-22 included a commitment to 'work with Bòrd na Gàidhlig to develop 0-3 provision within the city' (Glasgow City Council 2018: 66) but the draft plan for 2023-28 makes no reference to the 0-3 sector (Glasgow City Council 2023).

In 2021, there were 159 children in Gaelic *sgoiltean-àraich* in the city, roughly 80 in each year cohort (Glasgow City Council 2023: 10). Some 140 children enrol in primary 1 at the city's three Gaelic primary schools each year. Attendance at the two 0-3 settings in the city is very small by comparison, no more than 30 per week. There was a perception among Glasgow parents who contributed to this research that the current level of 0-3 provision in the city was inadequate, and that more promotion and publicity was needed.

Glasgow City Council employed a Gaelic Family Learning Officer between early 2022 and June 2023. The remit of the officer extended through all stages of education, primary and secondary as well as EY. As such, only a limited proportion of the officer's work related to 0-3.

According to the former postholder, in relation to 0-3 activity she endeavoured to do things different from those typically offered at Pàrant is Pàiste sessions, supplementing what parents get from attending such sessions. Many of her activities were not particularly 'Gaelic' in nature, but rather track activities that are available in English and thus already somewhat familiar to many parents. These included baby meditation, baby sensory sessions, lullaby sessions, and a range of outdoor activities. She also organised a range of free holiday activities. She collated and circulated information on events and activities on a weekly basis, provided advice to parents on a range of issues, and delivered online Gaelic classes for parents. The officer won the Best Contribution award at the 2023 Gaelic Awards organised by BnG and the *Daily Record*.

The time that she was in post, not long after Covid, was challenging in some respects. Although most activities had resumed by the time she started, the successful Buidheann Disathairne (parent Gaelic classes and child play sessions on Saturday mornings) had gone into abeyance.

One of the Pàrant is Pàiste groups in the city reported that the officer had helped publicise their groups and regularly sent them information. The secretary of the other group in the city said that she had not worked with her at all.

Funding for 2021-22 was provided by GLAIF (as it then was). The 2021-22 GLAIF application stated that 'our commitment is that after a successful year of implementation of the post, we would take this post into our core staffing costs as part of our ongoing commitment to further increasing Gaelic language use and engagement'. Notwithstanding this commitment, the Council subsequently obtained funding for the post for 2022-23 from the Scottish Government's Specific Grant. The Family Learning Officer left her post in June 2023 and as of 6 October 2023 no replacement post had been advertised. Unfortunately, the Council did not submit the required reports on the 2021-22 grant to BnG and the council officer responsible for the funding applications did not reply to repeated requests for information in the course of the current research. It is therefore not clear why the Council did not maintain

the post, and in particular whether it concluded that the initiative had not been successful in any respects.

### **3.1.3.3 Comhairle nan Eilean Siar**

Since 2021 CNES has employed a part-time (0.5 FTE) Gaelic Education Officer, part of whose remit is to develop support for the 0-3 age group, including working to re-establish Pàrant is Pàiste groups in the islands (CNES 2021). Two Gaelic EY officers are in post, one concentrating on the 3-5 sector. In Uist, a 0.5 FTE Gaelic Early Years Development Co-ordinator in Uist has recently taken up post, with funding from the SG Specific Grant. Part of this work will involve the 3-5 sector but it will also include 'develop and deliver services in Gaelic for parents with children aged 0-3 years'. This will involve organising a range of activities for the 0-3 group and working with their parents. As discussed in section 3.1.4.2 below, this provision articulates with that offered by CnP in Lewis and Harris, although there is a potential issue concerning the involvement of two organisations in similar work.

CNES has recently acquired two dedicated vans (with an SG Gaelic Capital Fund grant) that will be used to support EY work. These should be available for the Uist 0-3 officer but there is some uncertainty about the extent the CnP playleaders will be able to use them.

As noted above, the pattern of EY provision in the Western Isles, with very widely available 3-5 provision but much less for 0-3, is distinctive.

As befits an authority serving Scotland's strongest Gaelic communities, the Comhairle's Gaelic language plan contains a particularly detailed section on home, 0-3 and early years (CNES 2022: 18-20).

### **3.1.3.4 Perth & Kinross Council**

Perth & Kinross Council currently uses funding from the SG's Specific Grant for 0-3 provision in Aberfeldy and Perth. In the past GLAIF funding was used for this purpose. The playleaders are directly employed by the Council to organise and promote the groups as well as delivering the sessions. In other respects, they are substantially similar to the sessions run by voluntary groups.

Until early 2022 the Council employed a Gaelic Development Officer who served as line manager for the 0-3 staff and, among other things, dealt with funding applications for the provision. The service has now been restructured so that a single Gaelic Manager deals with all Gaelic matters, principally education.

### **3.1.3.5 East Ayrshire Council**

Pàrant is Pàiste Cille Mheàrnaig has been running in Kilmarnock for many years, with the same tutor. This provision is organised by the Council and funded through the SG's Gaelic Specific Grant, with part funding from the Council itself. Other than the funding mechanism, the sessions here are substantially similar to those run by voluntary groups elsewhere.

### **3.1.3.6 West Dunbartonshire Council**

West Dunbartonshire Council's provision is unusual in two respects. First, its sessions (called Stòiridh le Sandra) are held in Council-run English-medium nurseries (3 per week) and one

primary school. Stòiridh le Sandra sessions are similar to Bookbug sessions in many respects, with a strong element of repetition. Although offered in nurseries, they are also attended by a significant number of children aged under 3 (approximately 40 per week in August 2023).

Second, the Council does not offer GME at any level (*sgoil-àraich*, primary or secondary). Instead, its offer is entirely aimed at Gaelic Learners provision (in four primary schools and one secondary school). The Council's judgment is that this represents the most suitable strategy for developing Gaelic education in the authority, an area of considerable socio-economic deprivation and (unlike neighbouring Glasgow) no significant concentration of Gaelic speakers. BnG has declined a funding application from the Council for a second additional development officer post partly on the grounds that the Council was not providing GME.

Funding for these sessions was previously provided through GLAIF and now comes from the Specific Grant and the Council's own resources.

### **3.1.4 The Comann nam Pàrant pilot**

As explained in section 2.3 above, following the withdrawal of BnG from offering EY services, support work for 0-3 provision has passed to CnP. CnP's provision has two strands, one in central Scotland and one in the Western Isles. These are considered sequentially.

#### **3.1.4.1 Support work in Central Scotland**

CnP has appointed a Management and Early Years Development Officer who has responsibility for supporting 13 voluntary groups in 11 local authorities in central Scotland (as far north as Perth & Kinross). She also serves as manager for the CnP officers in Lewis and Harris (see the following section). The officer has been in post since August 2021 but has only been full-time since April 2023.

The officer has played a very active role in supporting some of the local groups, most obviously in facilitating the restarting of some groups that had become inactive as a result of Covid, or in setting up entirely new groups (most recently in Peebles and Falkirk). She delivers sessions on a weekly basis for two groups which have experienced particular difficulties recruiting qualified staff. She prepares weekly worksheets with songs and key words, which she also provides to some groups that she does not attend regularly. With groups that are well established and have an experienced playleader in place, her contact is less close and frequent. She assists some new groups within funding applications, and arranged interim funding for some groups that experienced difficulties using CnP reserves.

The officer is also involved in delivering Bookbug sessions in five local authority areas in the region.

Representatives of groups with whom the CnP officer worked closely spoke very positively of her role. Asked whether the group was receiving adequate support from CnP, one group representative replied

Definitely, because without her there wouldn't be a toddler group. . . . She's very good at what she does and she's very encouraging of people who want to be involved in it, so I personally, I'm very happy with how they're supporting us.

Another interviewee described the CnP officer as ‘really helpful and approachable’ and ‘very reassuring’ in relation with an unexpected difficulty with the group’s funding, while a third reported

She's been down to see us and she's good for listening and I'm in constant contact with her. . . . Any questions we have for anything, she's been fantastic.

One group representative said that she had only limited dealings with the CnP officer. She had been contacted, but conceded that ‘the ball’s in my court to make an effort there to get in touch’.

Another group representative indicated that she was not aware of the CnP officer and did not recognise her name. It is possible that other members of the group had more interaction with her. One group reported that although they did receive support from the officer, this was not as substantial as with the previous BnG officer.

Some local group representatives showed a degree of confusion about the CnP officer’s role, expressing the belief that she worked for BnG.

#### **3.1.4.2 Thig a Chluich in the Western Isles**

Two part-time (0.5 FTE) CnP officers are based in Stornoway. Here the mode of provision, known as Thig a Chluich (Come and Play), differs significantly from the more prevalent Pàrant is Pàiste groups. The playleaders come out to community or church halls in different communities in a van, bringing toys and other resources, and deliver play sessions, with songs and craft activities, entirely in Gaelic. There are no local parent committees and parents are not asked to make a payment towards the cost of the session.

In September 2023, four Thig a Chluich sessions were offered per week (two on Mondays and one each on Tuesdays and Thursdays), each of them 1.5 hours in length. Of the 16 sessions offered during the month, 6 were held in Stornoway, 2 in Borve, 2 in Point, 2 in Shawbost, 2 in Tolsta and 2 in Tarbert. This is not an intensive level of provision given that there were 536 children in primary GME in Lewis and Harris in 2021-22 (so approximately 77 in each year cohort).<sup>6</sup> There are also 13 *sgoiltean-àraich*.

At present provision is very largely limited to Lewis and Harris, although the CnP officers have made some visits to Uist and Barra. As noted in section 3.1.3.3 above, CNES has recently appointed a Gaelic Early Years Co-ordinator in Uist.

CnP conducted a survey of parents in late 2021, not long after the service started, concerning their experience of the service and preferences for the future. The CnP officers also liaise with parents on an ongoing basis concerning delivery locations and move them as required to more suitable sites in other villages.

The current model of delivery in Lewis and Harris has inefficiencies in terms of the amount of travel time involved and set-up time required in various individual locations. Travelling

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<sup>6</sup> These figures are taken from pp. 23-25 of the full version of Bòrd na Gàidhlig 2022: 23-25, which gives more detailed figures on enrolments in individual schools. This confidential report has been made available to the researcher through a data sharing agreement.

between the staff's Stornoway base and delivery locations elsewhere necessarily involves significant travel time. Hiring a van is expected to cost around £3,800 this year (£100 per week for 2.5 or 3 days over 38 weeks). It may prove feasible to purchase a small van in the future. As noted above, CNES has recently acquired a van to support Gaelic EY provision but CnP was not able to reach a viable agreement with the Comhairle for the CnP team to use the van this term.

### **3.1.5 Areas where there are no officers/projects in place locally supporting this sector**

As detailed above, several areas in Scotland have officers of different kinds to support Gaelic 0-3 provision. Areas where Gaelic 0-3 provision is currently in place but where there is no dedicated support worker in post include Argyll & Bute, Aberdeen, Wester Ross, Skye and (arguably) Barra. This section considers the experience of 0-3 groups that are currently running in these areas, drawing on interviews with representatives of eight such groups.

At present, Skye in particular has experienced discontinuity in provision since the BnG officer who previously supported 0-3 groups left her post in 2021. Three of the five voluntary groups previously running in the island (in Dunvegan, Kilmuir and Staffin) have closed since Covid. Fàs Mòr, the childcare facility in Sleat affiliated with Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, was offered additional funding to take on a support role for 0-3 groups in the island, but this was not feasible for Fàs Mòr due to their limited staff capacity and other practical challenges. There has therefore been no support in place for more than two years.

In relation to the role of the former BnG officer serving the area, one of the interviewees from the two Skye groups still running commented as follows:

I have to say we really miss having that person there. She was a huge support and was a critical link, I would say, between ourselves and BnG. And also just she had the time to scan the horizon, see what was going on, and prompt us when, you know, different types of training was coming up. And things that would be of relevance. So it wasn't just us. She would alert all the local groups on Skye . . . I suspect we're not now aware of as many things as we should be.

Asked whether the group would benefit from having a support officer, an interviewee from the other Skye group (who had only become involved in the group following the departure of the former officer) observed:

I'd say that would be really helpful for the group because we are trying to have, you know, ideas amongst ourselves on how to progress a group and things. But to have someone to guide us, that would be really useful. . . . I feel like we're maybe clutching, kind of, you know, scrambling in the dark a wee bit trying to figure out what the best way is to take the group, you know?

This group had experienced difficulties completing its most recent BnG application properly and thereby failed to secure funding for the year, although this issue was subsequently resolved.

There is no Gaelic EY support officer currently serving Aberdeen, and there is also no longer a Gaelic officer at the council. A representative of the local 0-3 group observed:

I think we would like more support, but the problem is I don't know what I'd be asking for, and I think that's part of the problem.

The position in Argyll & Bute is somewhat more complex. The manager of the Furan Gaelic Centre in Oban (employed by Argyll & Bute Council) has a diverse remit that has included support for 0-3 provision among a variety of other things. 0-3 support has mostly been in the Oban area (including Strath of Appin); most recently, the officer was instrumental in establishing a Pàrant is Pàiste group in Oban, where he delivers the sessions. Less frequently he provides support in Dunoon and Mull and even Tiree and Islay. However, geographical constraints inevitably make support outside Oban problematic.

Two groups in areas currently without dedicated EY support were struggling after having lost their Gaelic-speaking playleader and being unable to find a suitable replacement. They were endeavouring to carry on with the limited linguistic resources available to them but were finding this very challenging. The leader of one group that had lost its BnG funding was very pessimistic about their situation in terms of Gaelic, although the group was very popular with local parents:

There is very little to none, Gaelic, and we are really at the stage now where I feel like we'll just have to go to being an English playgroup or it'll stop. . . there will be no coming back, which is really sad. But I feel like there's only so much that can be done because we can't offer payment at the moment because . . . there isn't enough money in the bank to pay a play leader. And I think that the only way I can personally see this working is if it's tied in, if running this group is tied into another position available with the Gaelic partnership or something like that, that this becomes part of somebody's job. Who has got more hours doing something to do with Gaelic because a couple of hours a week is never going to be enough to pay somebody. And I don't really know where to go from here.

### **3.1.6 The impact of COVID-19**

All 0-3 providers were necessarily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, some more adversely than others, but overall experiences appear to have been somewhat varied.

While some groups stopped all activity while Covid restrictions were in place, several moved to offering online sessions of different kinds, with varying success. Some groups successfully organised outdoor activities, and in a few cases continue to do so on a regular basis.

Starting up again when restrictions were in place in terms of social distancing, washing protocols and masking proved difficult for some groups.

At the extreme, some local groups became inactive during lockdown and were unable to restart once restrictions had eased. This was the case in Cumbernauld and the three former groups in north Skye, for example. Typically this was because the previous organisers no longer had children in the 0-3 age group and no one came forward to replace them. This difficulty in maintaining continuity is a long-standing recurring problem with 0-3 groups, however, and is not limited to the special circumstances of Covid. Between 2011 and 2019 several groups came and went. However, maintaining continuity in normal circumstances is somewhat easier as parents and carers tend to see each other regularly and are therefore able to manage transitions more effectively.

Other local groups managed to restart after a hiatus but struggled to regain momentum once restrictions had been lifted, and in several cases the numbers of children attending sessions have remained significantly lower than they were before Covid. Still others reported that restarting went fairly smoothly and that numbers are as high or higher than before Covid. In one case, a new group was established with a different name and focus, although it was able to draw upon residual funds in the previous group's bank account.

Sometimes a combination of circumstances affected local groups. One group representative reported that the numbers attending the group had declined somewhat since Covid, but that this could be partially attributed to a change of location. The group had previously met in a room at the primary school where GME was offered in the area, making it convenient for parents who also had older children, but was then required to move out to a village hall in a less convenient location.

One representative of a Central Belt group noted that although their group was now running successfully, in the wake of Covid there seemed to generally be less in the way of Gaelic activities and events for families in the area. A similar negative view was expressed by an island interviewee who found a similar dynamic more generally and commented 'People have a different mentality' after Covid 'and they just don't think the same'.

Although this research did not address this aspect specifically, one local authority interviewee noted that another Covid-related impact, that there was a clear negative impact on children now in the early primary stage who had missed out on Gaelic EY provision due to closures during Covid.

The end of Covid restrictions has been followed by a period of high inflation not seen in the UK in decades. The resultant 'cost of living crisis' has had a negative impact on many 0-3 groups. It has been increasingly difficult to fill vacancies across all sectors. Island-based interviewees emphasised this aspect particularly strongly, noting also the serious shortage of suitable housing.

### **3.1.7 Publicising and promoting Gaelic 0-3 activity**

Representatives of local Pàrant is Pàiste groups were asked about how they went about publicising and promoting their group. Almost all cited Facebook and word of mouth as the most important mechanisms, but a considerable range of other means were also identified. In general, publicity and promotion seemed fairly weak; one interviewee conceded 'I don't think our advertising game is very strong'. At the same time, several interviewees noted that parents of very young children often have lots of time to fill and therefore often actively seek out suitable local opportunities.

Almost all the groups have Facebook group pages, most of which are updated to varying degrees. Conversely, no voluntary groups appeared to have a full website or a public blog.<sup>7</sup> It is notable that a large majority of local voluntary groups use the element 'Pàrant is Pàiste' in their names and most do not translate this into English. This may not be ideal from the standpoint of publicity in that the phrase 'Pàrant is Pàiste' is not transparent to non-Gaelic

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<sup>7</sup> CnP's Thig a Chluich in the Western Isles has a blog (<https://thigachluich.blogspot.com/>) as does Edinburgh's Cròileagan (<http://edinburghcroileagan.blogspot.com/>) but these services are not run by voluntary committees.



speakers. It should also be borne in mind that although the platform is widely used, by no means everyone is on Facebook.

Word of mouth has clear benefits of immediacy and personal connection, but is obviously much less than universal in its reach. The limitations of relying on word of mouth are greater in large towns and cities than in smaller towns or rural communities.

A variety of other publicity mechanisms were mentioned. Several group representatives noted that they had put up posters in the school that offered GME in the area, or in public libraries or in local shops. A few had prepared printed leaflets, or placed notices or advertisements in local newspapers or newsletters. Some mentioned that they organised promotional stalls at local festivals or gala days. Two settings indicated that they liaised with the local Fèisean nan Gàidheal group. One group mentioned using Mumsnet and one took out an advertisement with the National Childbirth Trust. One was organising an online shop to sell merchandise promoting the group (mugs, T-shirts etc). One has a banner that they sometimes place at a traffic junction in the town, and this also hangs outside the building while the session is being held.

One local authority that organises 0-3 provision itself relied primarily on Twitter but was now questioning the effectiveness of this given changes in the algorithm used by the site.

A few groups noted that they were near capacity for their current premises in terms of child and parent numbers and as such were mindful of the risk of over-recruiting.

The research methods used for this study meant that those contacted were almost involved in the existing structures of 0-3 provision in some way, but some input was also sought from other parents (in three urban areas) who had no current involvement. These parents were generally quite negative about the visibility and effectiveness of the promotion of 0-3 groups in their area, and felt that many parents would not be aware of the options available to them.

Some interviewees recognised the limitations of current promotional strategies, particularly in relation to families with no previous connection to GME or Gaelic. As one interviewee noted:

if you know what you're looking for . . . you'll find it, however, it's [the publicity for 0-3 group] maybe not out enough in the public domain to catch people's eye that wouldn't necessarily have known about it.

A key difficulty is that in many areas parents who end up choosing GME for their children are not necessarily aware of GME from the outset. Effective publicity will therefore reach parents who require to be informed about GME and persuaded of its benefits. As one Lowland interviewee observed:

It doesn't have to necessarily be people that walk through our door knowing that they have . . . a long-term goal to maybe go to GME, it's about getting people into the group. It's about promoting Gaelic in, you know, a happy, positive way. And that is how you'll get people into GME in [Lowland town]. . . . You'll get people that wouldn't necessarily walk through the door thinking they're going to send their children [to GME]. . . . I think if you are somebody that has Gaelic, who is interested in Gaelic, you will find the group. It's about accessing others.

The only source of Scotland-wide information for Gaelic 0-3 provision is the *neadan* website provided by Comann nam Pàrant ([www.neadan.scot](http://www.neadan.scot)). Information about 0-3 provision is somewhat buried on the site: from the home page the user is required to click on the link for ‘**Gaelic in the Community** Find out about services and learning opportunities for Gaelic across the country’, which is perhaps not obvious as a source for information about toddler groups. It is also notable that the *neadan* site does not appear in the first twenty hits in response to Google searches for ‘Gaelic playgroup’, ‘Gaelic toddler group’, ‘find Gaelic playgroup’, ‘find Gaelic toddler group’ or ‘cròileagan’. It is noteworthy that when they were asked how they went about publicising and promoting their group, no representatives of local groups mentioned *neadan.scot*.

The *neadan* site gives information about 0-3 groups across Scotland but this is incomplete and in some cases inaccurate. As of 2 October 2023, information was inaccurate or incomplete in the following respects:

- sessions currently running in Acharacle, Dunoon, East Renfrewshire, Lochcarron, Newtonmore, Peebles, Stirling and Tobermory were not shown
- the information concerning sessions in Aberfeldy, Oban and Perth was inaccurate
- the information concerning the provision in Edinburgh and North Ayrshire was incomplete
- no contact details were provided for the groups in Pollokshields, Renfrewshire and Tain

The section on the *neadan* site concerning ‘Online & face-to-face Bookbugs’ was also incomplete and out of date. The only events shown were all in the Edinburgh area and related to January and February (presumably 2023). However, in September 2023 there were five Gaelic Bookbug sessions running each week in Glasgow/West Dunbartonshire, among much other provision.

It should be noted that other Gaelic websites that aim to provide information about Gaelic activities in different localities have more acute problems with incomplete, inaccurate or outdated information. As of 2 October 2023, the information on the ‘Course Finder’ on the *learn\_gaelic.net* site dates from 2020, while the *cleachdi.scot* site, which aims to provide information about Gaelic events, clubs and groups and opportunities to meet and use Gaelic, lists a total of six different Gaelic events in all of Scotland during the month of October 2023. The Mòd is not among them. These shortcomings demonstrates how sites of this kind depend on robust information gathering systems, which can be burdensome to operate if there is no overarching organisational structure linking the various providers who would have to supply current information on an ongoing basis.

### **3.1.8 Resources for Gaelic 0-3 activity and for parents**

There is now an extensive range of material to support Gaelic EY provision, prepared by a number of different organisations. A wide range of songs and other material for young children are available at, among other locations,

- Stòrlann’s Gaelic4Parents site (<https://www.gaelic4parents.com/> [0-3 Years section])
- Stòrlann’s Gàidhlig nan Òg site (<https://www.gaidhlig-nan-og.scot/>)
- Scottish Book Trust’s Gaelic Bookbug site (<https://www.scottishbooktrust.com/topics/gaelic>)

- CNES's Goireasan Tràth-ire (<https://www.foghlamgaidhlig.com/e-storas/goireasan-trath-ire/>)
- BBC ALBA's CBeebies (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/shows/alba>)
- various YouTube channels (e.g. <https://www.youtube.com/@missmacdonald9971/>).

Arguably there is too much proliferation across multiple locations here, and it would be helpful to bring the full range of material together in a single repository, or at least to provide better signposting to parents and carers about the diversity of material that is available.

Several sites gives information to encourage and assist parents and families in using or learning Gaelic, or choosing GME EY provision. Arguably there is some duplication between these and some scope for consolidation. Sources include:

- Gaelic 4 Parents, <https://www.gaelic4parents.com/about-gaelic-medium/pre-school/>
- Comann nam Pàrant, <https://www.parant.org.uk/pre-school>
- Foghlam Gàidhlig, <https://www.foghlamgaidhlig.com/gme/>

In general, interviewees who took part in this research expressed a high level of satisfaction with the range of available resources. As one group representative stated, 'there seems to be quite a kind of wealth of Information and things that we can do at home with them'.

However, one interviewee with long experience in the Gaelic EY sector observed as follows:

I think it needs to be people who are actually on the floor dealing with children who actually tell the people who manufacture the goods exactly what they are looking for because things are being produced . . . [that] just seem to be a wee bit off level or just not what you want or what you need for specific teaching.

Other interviewees expressed the view that some written materials translated from English were not suitable as some of the words used the Gaelic versions would not be common among young children. This is also an issue with some song material directed at young children, as noted by MacDonald (2021).

Resources for Gaelic learning by parents are less plentiful. Parent classes have been delivered in various locations over the years, sometimes with funding from BnG's Taic Freumhan Coimhearsnachd, but there has been no research or planning as to exactly what should be taught (and how such classes should be differentiated from general learner's classes). One local authority interviewee suggested that it would be helpful to develop a parental Gaelic learning app.

The role of Gaelic Bookbug sessions proved to be a somewhat controversial issue in this research. Bookbug is delivered by the Scottish Book Trust, which describes it as 'Scotland's universal early years book gifting programme which supports families to read, sing, and play with their little ones from birth to give them the best start in life' (<https://www.scottishbooktrust.com/reading-and-stories/bookbug/about-bookbug>). Families with an interest in Gaelic or a child in GME are entitled to Gaelic Bookbug Bags, which contain Gaelic copies of the books in addition to the English language books and resources provided by the Trust. In addition to the Bookbug Bags, Bookbug sessions are held in different community venues, usually public libraries. These are free events for children aged 0-5 years and their parents and carers, usually lasting around 30 minutes and including

songs, rhymes and a story (<https://www.scottishbooktrust.com/reading-and-stories/bookbug/find-your-local-bookbug-session>).

Gaelic Bookbug sessions have been held for a number of years, and have been made available in many parts of Scotland. These sessions can be somewhat similar to some of the activities carried out in Pàrant is Pàiste sessions. However, in its *Gaelic Medium Early Learning and Childcare Guidance*, BnG advises that Bookbug sessions ‘must be complemented by high quality Gaelic ELC provision which will benefit all children taking part in active learning sessions’ (BnG 2021: 4). At the time this guidance was prepared, BnG recorded a total of 4,589 children and 3,028 parents taking part in Gaelic Bookbug sessions.

The system for training EY workers or volunteers to deliver these sessions has undergone change since 2021. For this reason among others, including the impact of Covid and budget cuts to libraries, the level of Gaelic Bookbug session activity has declined to a considerable extent, although this cannot be precisely quantified. Current provision is clearly patchy in geographical terms, with some areas where GME is available having no Gaelic sessions running. There are three sessions a week running in different parts of Glasgow,<sup>8</sup> but in some other areas sessions are relatively infrequent (e.g., once a month).

Gaelic Bookbug training was previously delivered by one of BnG’s EY workers, in partnership with the Scottish Book Trust. After her departure from the Bòrd, the Book Trust appointed a part-time training officer with responsibility for Gaelic, but also required potential trainees to undergo their general English-medium training first. The Book Trust also organised a webinar to support Gaelic Bookbug session leaders (initially live, and now online at <https://www.scottishbooktrust.com/learning-resources/support-for-gaelic-bookbug-session-leaders>).

Interviews with BnG staff and Book Trust staff revealed clear disagreement about the nature of the difficulty here and how it might suitably be resolved. Other interviewees reported that accessing the Bookbug training has become increasingly difficult. Several parents emphasised the promotional value of Bookbug sessions in terms of heightening the profile of Gaelic EY provision, by making it visible in a prominent public space (public libraries). The issue of Gaelic Bookbug is considered further in section 5 of this report.

A somewhat similar initiative is Leugh is Seinn le Linda (<https://www.facebook.com/LeughisSeinnleLinda/>), which also involves live singing and reading sessions, usually held in Glasgow but often in other parts of the country, and sometimes online. This scheme is principally funded by Creative Scotland, with an additional contribution from the Gaelic Books Council, and participating schools also pay a fee. The majority of the sessions are for primary school children but many are for the 0-5 group and sometimes 0-3 specifically.

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<sup>8</sup> Parents in Glasgow who took part in this research noted critically that these sessions, all run in public libraries, are not listed on the main web page for Bookbug sessions in Glasgow public libraries (<https://www.glasgowlife.org.uk/event/20/bookbug>), which gives no indication that any Gaelic sessions are available.

### 3.1.9 Training for the Gaelic 0-3 sector

Appropriate training for the 0-3 workforce is clearly a desideratum to ensure high-quality provision, although this is best considered within the wider framework of EY provision as a whole, including the 3-5 sector. In the Gaelic EY context, workforce skills can be understood as having two elements, linguistic and professional. Of course, the established distinction between initial and in-service training is also relevant.

A major challenge is the availability of staff with sufficient ability in Gaelic. This is part of a much wider sociolinguistic and policy problem that affects all aspects of Gaelic activity; recruiting staff with strong Gaelic skills is a difficulty in all organisations and sectors. The challenge is all the greater in relation to 0-3 posts, which are typically part-time and poorly paid. There is also a geographical dimension involved here, in that the absolute number of Gaelic speakers in many areas, including many areas that were Gaelic speaking until relatively recently, is now extremely low.

As discussed in section 3.1.1.2 above, some staff currently working in Gaelic 0-3 settings appear to have relatively limited Gaelic skills. The Bòrd has endeavoured to ensure that appropriate standards are maintained but this is clearly difficult to achieve in some cases. Some staff, typically parents, also had no EY qualifications or experience other than within the setting in question.

Some specific initiatives are in train to deal with this challenge. For example, CNES has appointed an Early Years Officer whose main remit is to improve the Gaelic skills of staff working in the Comhairle's *sgoiltean-àraich*. More generally, however, it is difficult to tackle this problem except through taking more general measures to improve learning opportunities for adults and increase the number of school leavers with Gaelic skills. This is a huge challenge, indeed one of the most important challenges for Gaelic development in general.

At the same time, linguistic ability in Gaelic is by no means sufficient to ensure high-quality provision; professional EY training and expertise is obviously required.

In relation to initial training opportunities, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig now offers a Social Services: Children and Young People Foundation Apprenticeship, taught entirely through Gaelic (<https://www.smo.uhi.ac.uk/course/foundation-apprenticeship-in-social-services-children-and-young-people/>). This can be taken over a period of two years starting in S5 or in one year during S6. Sabhal Mòr also offers an online SVQ3 Social Services (Children and Young People) course, which lasts for 18 months (<https://www.smo.uhi.ac.uk/course/svq3-clann-is-oigridh/>). Applicants must already be working as a pupil support assistant in GME to gain entry to the course. Uptake on these courses has been relatively low so far.

Discussions are underway with the newly merged UHI North, West and Hebrides concerning the possible development of courses to support the Gaelic EY sector, but these are at a relatively early stage. It is noteworthy that UHI's current BA Childhood Practice course has no modules dealing with such topics as bilingualism and language immersion (<https://www.uhi.ac.uk/en/courses/ba-hons-childhood-practice/#tabanchor>).

Newbattle Abbey College previously offered courses for staff working in the Gaelic EY sector, funded by BnG but these involved developing language skills rather than EY expertise per se. Unfortunately, these have now been discontinued.

A suggestion articulated by interviewees for this project and other expert commentators would involve establishing a qualification that focuses more specifically on the Gaelic and language immersion context. Alternatively, it might have a slightly broader focus, widening the language dimension to take account of the EAL context and the increasingly multilingual population entering Scotland's education system. A qualification of this kind could be structured as an initial qualification or as an in-service course. Online delivery would probably be the preferred mode for such courses, so as to maximise accessibility and uptake.

BnG has offered several training sessions for 0-3 staff of different kinds but uptake for these has not been strong, and interviewees for this project appeared to have little awareness of them. It was suggested that attendance at such sessions might be made a condition for BnG funding in future.

For a number of years Stòrlann organised the Alltan Beag conference for Gaelic EY practitioners, connected to the annual An t-Alltan conference for GM teachers held in Aviemore. This provided a valuable opportunity to share information and best practice and provided a forum for professional networking. The last Alltan Beag conference was held in 2019, however, and there has been no announcement of an in-person conference since then. Materials from four previously delivered virtual sessions are available on the main An t-Alltan website (<https://www.storlann.co.uk/an-t-alltan/en/early-years/>) but no live online sessions have been announced for 2023.

Only a few interviewees had attended the conference in the past but all of them spoke of it very positively and expressed a wish to have it reinstated. One interviewee commented as follows:

That was really, really good. I attended that and I just thought that was fantastic. That made connections and just the learning that you did and I suppose it was quite refreshing as well. . . Staff need a bit of a boost sometimes. So going in and speaking to other people and taking ideas away, I think that's fantastic.

However, some interviewees noted that it was not feasible for them to attend the conference, either because of lengthy travel time from the islands or the impact on their actual service delivery. A hybrid format, allowing for online participation, might be helpful in this regard.

## 4 Models of 0-3 provision in Wales and Ireland

Experience with the organisation and delivery of 0-3 provision in Wales and Ireland may offer useful lessons for the planning of provision for Scotland. The pattern of provision in Wales is similar to that for Gaelic in key respects, although on a much larger scale. In contrast, 0-3 provision in Ireland is less developed than in Scotland and is not framed as part of the immersion education system. On the other hand, the level of support (and funding) for families and communities more generally is much greater than that available in Scotland.

The section concerning provision in Wales was principally prepared by Dr Buddug Hughes of Iaith Cyf.

### 4.1 Wales

#### 4.1.1 The policy framework for Welsh early years provision

In a manner comparable to Scottish Government EY policy, the Welsh *Government's Programme for Government* makes a commitment to deliver a phased expansion of EY provision to an increasing number of 2 year olds between 2022 and 2025, with a particular emphasis on strengthening Welsh-medium provision (Welsh Government 2021a: 3). The Welsh Government's Childcare Offer for Wales gives working parents a mixture of childcare and early education for children aged 3 or 4 (<https://www.gov.wales/childcare-offer-for-wales-campaign>). The Childcare Offer can be used for up to 48 weeks a year. This includes 39 weeks of term time, and 30 hours for 9 weeks of the school holidays. Childcare providers are paid £5 per hour for each child that is entitled to the Childcare Offer in their care. The Welsh Government's Flying Start programme (<https://www.gov.wales/flying-start-guidance>) targets some of Wales' most deprived areas and provides 12.5 hours free childcare for qualifying 2–4 year olds.

The Welsh Government's national language policy *Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers* (the counterpart to the National Gaelic Language Plan) states the aim to 'expand Welsh-medium provision in the early years as an access point for Welsh-medium education' and 'to reach a position where children under five have had sufficient contact with the Welsh language to be able to start on their journey towards fluency' (Welsh Government 2017: 35-36).

The *National policy on Welsh language transmission and use in families* aims to increase the use of Welsh by parents/carers with their children. This policy has four overarching aims:

- i. Inspire today's generation of children and young people to speak Welsh to their children in the future.
- ii. Reignite the Welsh language skills of those who may not have used Welsh since their school days, or who aren't confident in their language skills, to speak Welsh with their own children.
- iii. Support and encourage use of Welsh within families where not everybody speaks Welsh.
- iv. Support Welsh-speaking families to speak Welsh with their children (Welsh Government 2021b: 16).

The policy then sets out 24 specific actions in its 'Programme of work'.

Under the *School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013* each local authority in Wales is required to prepare a Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) in order to improve the planning and delivery of Welsh-medium education and the teaching of Welsh in its area. The Welsh Government's *Guidance on Welsh in Education Strategic Plans* sets out seven Key Outcomes that it wishes to see as a result of WESP planning. These include:

**Outcome 1:** More nursery children/ three-year-olds receive their education through the medium of Welsh.

**Outcome 2:** More reception class children/ five-year-olds receive their education through the medium of Welsh.

**Outcome 3:** More children continue to improve their Welsh language skills when transferring from one stage of their statutory education to another (Welsh Government 2021c: 14).

Section 22 of the *Childcare Act 2006* imposed a duty on local authorities in Wales to secure sufficient childcare in their area to enable parents to take up or remain in work or to undertake education and training in order to obtain work. In determining whether the provision of childcare is sufficient to meet these requirements, local authorities must have regard to, among other things, the needs of parents for 'the provision of childcare involving the use of the Welsh language'.

In contrast to Scotland, local authorities in Wales make less little direct EY provision, although part-time provision for 3-5 year olds is offered at many Welsh-medium schools under the Childcare Offer.

The Welsh Government's *Childcare Statutory Guidance* amplifies these duties. The guidance provides that 'local authorities will need to play a central role in the development of Welsh medium and bilingual childcare provision in their areas, in partnership with relevant organisations'. Within this, the guidance states that

the local authority will need to raise awareness of Welsh language issues and opportunities to ensure that there is sufficient consideration at all levels where decisions are made about Welsh-medium and bilingual childcare provision funding. Account should be taken of the additional challenges experienced by Welsh medium settings in terms of sustainability and expansion: support to childcare settings wishing to develop and increase their use of Welsh; recruiting and the funding of development workers and play schemes.

The guidance also identifies a number of indicators of 'the likelihood of increased demand for Welsh medium and bilingual childcare provision in the future':

- The rise in the numbers of young Welsh speakers.
- The rise in the numbers of children currently receiving a Welsh-medium education.
- The Welsh Government's Welsh-medium Education Strategy and Welsh Language Strategy.
- Any large-scale economic developments.
- Results of surveys undertaken to assess parental demand for Welsh-medium education.
- The Local Authority's WESP (Welsh Government 2016: 23).



#### 4.1.2 The role of Mudiad Meithrin

The most important provider for the Welsh-medium EY sector, including 0-3 provision, is Mudiad Meithrin (MM), a registered charity established in 1971 (<https://meithrin.cymru/>). MM employs over 200 people in Wales, and between 2,500 to 4,000 additional people work or volunteer in the various settings that it runs. There are several different kinds of settings: Cylchoedd Ti a Fi, Cylchoedd Meithrin, nurserie, and Cymraeg i Blant groups. Approximately 1000 local provisions operate under MM's auspices, and the Cylchoedd Meithrin and Cylchoedd Ti a Fi provide early years experiences for approximately 22,000 children every day. The Cylchoedd are supported by a national network of professional support officers who advise on issues of promoting good practice, staff training, Estyn [schools inspectorate] / Care Inspectorate Wales, charitable status matters, liaison with local authorities and so on.

MM's total income in 2021-22 was £7.6 million, of which £5.1 million came from grants of different kinds and £1.8 million from Meithrinfeydd Cymru Cyf, its subsidiary that provides full-time childcare and nursery services (MM 2022: 39). Total grant funding from the Welsh Government in 2021-22 was £4.45 million and local authorities awarded a further £680,000 (MM 2022: 40-41). Individual Cylchoedd Meithrin are also eligible for Childcare Offer funding and Flying Start funding from the Welsh Government where applicable.

The different kinds of provision offered by MM include:

##### *Cylch Ti a Fi*

The Cylch Ti a Fi provides parents and young children an opportunity to meet regularly with parents / guardians and other children in an informal Welsh atmosphere. The Cylch Ti a Fi activities reinforce the use of Welsh language at home and also gives non-Welsh speaking families the opportunity to use Welsh with their children.

Figures for children attending Cylchoedd Ti a Fi are not in the public domain, and attendance is likely to be fluid. They are mainly 1 hour or 2-hour weekly sessions, with attendance fees ranging from £1 to £5. Ti a Fi is offered in differing formats, including Baby Yoga, Me and my Baby sessions, Virtual Song and Story Sessions and Virtual Baby Massage and Baby Yoga Sessions. The Cylchoedd Meithrin and Ti a Fi are 'sessional' in some areas and can meet for as little as 1 hour per week. Ti a Fi is available within every local authority area, but the number of locations vary from area to area (e.g. they are quite sparse in Powys).

##### *Cylch Meithrin*

The aim of a Cylch Meithrin is to promote the education and development of children from 2 years old to school age. At the Cylch Meithrin a child will have the opportunity to enjoy the company of other children and learn through play.

##### *Clwb Cwtsh*

Clwb Cwtsh is an 8-week Welsh taster course for parents and carers and young children), a joint project between the National Centre for Learning Welsh and MM.

## *Cymraeg i Blant / Cymraeg for Kids*

The main aim of Cymraeg i Blant / Cymraeg for Kids programme is to increase the number of children in Welsh-medium education. The aims of the programme are to support parents, expectant parents, and other family members to introduce and use Welsh in the home and to transmit Welsh to their children, and support children's linguistic development socially and educationally.

MM also runs three full-time Welsh-medium nurseries through Meithrinfeydd Cymru Cyf (see <https://meithrin.cymru/day-nurseries/?lang=en>). There are also 155 private Welsh-medium day nurseries across Wales, with the largest concentrations in Carmarthenshire (30) and Gwynedd (20). Some of these services may be affiliated to MM, but they are privately owned businesses or services, funded through fee payment, Childcare Offer provision, childcare vouchers and Flying Start funding.

### **4.1.3 Cylchoedd Ti a Fi: structure and operation**

To establish a Cylch Ti a Fi group a constitution that states the charitable structure of the Cylch together with the role of the committee is required.<sup>9</sup> If the Cylch Ti a Fi is independent rather than connected to another organisation, a group of volunteers is required to be responsible for managing the Cylch. Committee members are recruited from local communities and parents who attend or support the Cylch. The committee has legal responsibility over the Cylch Ti a Fi, but MM can provide support. Officers need to be identified and elect officers to join the committee and take the roles of Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer. If a Cylch Ti a Fi is part of a Cylch Meithrin the Cylch Meithrin committee is also responsible for the Cylch Ti a Fi.

The Cylch Ti a Fi Management Committee will be responsible for employing and managing the staff. The Management Committee is responsible for ensuring that there is a designated Leader (employed or voluntary) or a team/rota of volunteers who are responsible for leading every aspect of the Cylch Ti a Fi.

It is mandatory for the committee to register the Cylch Ti a Fi with MM every year. By registering with MM a Cylch Ti a Fi will have an insurance package in place. A Cylchoedd Support Coordinator is available to support local committees.

Committee continuity can be a problem as parents and children move on to other educational stages. However, there is no requirement to be a parent or to be able to speak Welsh to be a committee member. It is possible to register interest in volunteering on a Cylch Meithrin committee through the MM website.

A Cylch Ti a Fi must have robust financial procedures. The Cylch Ti a Fi should have a bank account, with at least two signatories. If a Cylch Ti a Fi is part of the Cylch Meithrin, then the Cylch Meithrin's Treasurer will have financial responsibility over the Cylch Ti a Fi.

Cylchoedd Ti a Fi are encouraged to arrange a fundraising timetable for the year and set clear estimates of how much funding will be needed. Funds raised may be spent on anything

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<sup>9</sup> This information concerning the operation of *cylchoedd* is taken from <https://meithrin.cymru/for-our-cylchoedd/?lang=en>.

relevant to the Cylch Ti a Fi, including rent and salaries. MM also run national fundraising campaigns.

The running of Cylchoedd Ti a Fi and Cylchoedd Meithrin is based on a parental fee-paying system. A budget for the Cylch must be set annually and reviewed at each committee meeting. When setting the budget, a fee scale must be agreed sufficient to ensure that the Cylch breaks even. The committee must consider the number of children against staffing costs and the required staff : children ratio.

In 2021-22, the Cylch Development Grant was MM's main grant fund. Members were able to apply for one of three types of grant:

1. £1,000 to help any Cylch Ti a Fi to re-open or to establish a new Cylch Ti a Fi;
2. £500 to help any Cylch Meithrin with broadband subscriptions or installation;
3. An open-ended option where option 1 or 2 were not priorities.

101 applications were received during 2021-22 and a total of £78,927 was awarded in payments (MM 2022: 6).

The grant to reopen or develop a Cylch Ti a Fi proved to be very popular, so MM received additional funding to offer a second grant scheme to (re)open Cylchoedd Ti a Fi. Settings received £1,000 to open a new (or re-open) a Cylch Ti a Fi, using the money to pay for running costs such as employing a playleader, rent or equipment.

In general, however, MM does not provide funding towards Cylchoedd staff costs, so that these must be met from fees to parents or external fundraising. In some cases leaders are volunteers (e.g. parents or grandparents).

According to MM's Annual Report for 2020-21, 'financial challenges are an historic, unavoidable part of the experience of many Cylchoedd Meithrin, with their committees and supporters experiencing continual pressure to raise funds' (MM 2021: 8). The introduction of the Childcare Offer (30 hours) assisted many settings to gain financial stability. However, the Covid pandemic had a high impact, due to the loss of income from parents and the loss of financial sustenance in the form of grants.

In some areas there are peripatetic Ti a Fi leaders serving more than one group, which are funded centrally by MM. In other areas the leaders take responsibility for the session in one location only.

Recruiting qualified staff is often a challenge. MM's 2021-22 Annual Report notes that there were 'several vacant posts for Leaders and Assistants, and *cylchoedd* having to advertise numerous times before attracting applicants' (MM 2022: 10). However, examples of cooperative working were developed with some primary schools 'lending' staff to work in the *cylch* on a temporary basis, or *cylchoedd* working together and releasing staff to work on two sites, again on a temporary basis. This collaboration prevented the temporary closure of some *cylchoedd*.

#### **4.1.4 Training opportunities**

MM offers a number of initial and in-service training opportunities. Initial training opportunities include a Schools Scheme, by which MM work closely with secondary schools to offer a

programme of training which meets the needs of the schools and communities. Post-16 students benefitted by having work experience in *cylchoedd* or primary schools as a part of the course. 17 schools across Wales took part in the scheme during 2021-22, with 165 school students studying various courses (MM 2022: 36).

The National Training Scheme / Apprenticeships in Childcare, Play, Learning and Development are offered at Level 3 and Level 5. The Level 3 course is delivered in partnership with Urdd Gobaith Cymru (Welsh League of Youth), while the Level 5 course is delivered in partnership with the Urdd and Gower College, Swansea.

In-service qualifications for those already in employment are also available through the Cam wrth Gam scheme (<https://meithrin.cymru/camwrthgam/>). For the Level 3 course, which lasts for 18 months, students need to be employed for at least 16 hours a week in a Cylch Meithrin, a Welsh-medium day nursery or a Welsh-medium primary school. Students attend 18 workshops during the course and a course assessor will observe their practice and assess their competence to work with children.

The Level 5 course is 24 months long. The qualification is suitable for anyone in a leadership and management role within the Cylch Meithrin, Welsh-medium Day Nursery or Welsh-medium primary school. Candidates are expected to be employed in the location for at least 16 hours per week and again are expected to attend a series of workshops during the course.

MM has also developed Gair am Air, an introductory resource to language immersion methods (<https://meithrin.cymru/gair-am-air-an-introduction-to-the-immersion-method/?lang=en>).

MM's Academi (<https://meithrin.cymru/academi/>) aims to provide a wide range of development and training opportunities for all staff and volunteers who are part of the MM community. Opportunities for learning offered under the Academi banner covers all aspects of MM's work including linguistic, educational and care, administrative and management issues. During 2021-22 Academi delivered 171 courses to a total of 3,538 members, staff and volunteers (MM 2022: 38).

Several of the various college and university programmes in EY education and care in Wales can be taken wholly or partly through the medium of Welsh, and many students on the Welsh medium programmes go on to employment in the Welsh medium sector. However, none are specifically designed for those intending to work in the Welsh-medium sector and none include modules on language immersion or the particular context of the Welsh-medium sector. The Agored Cymru Entry Level Award in Welsh Language in Nurseries for Early Years Practitioners for learners over 16 years aims to offer a qualification to potential Nursery School Assistants who wish to enhance their Welsh language skills together with those of children in their care (<https://www.agored.cymru/Units-and-Qualifications/Qualification/126627#!>). This qualification is aimed at the acquisition of Welsh language skills for potential nursery school assistants over 16 intending to work in Wales.

## 4.2 Ireland

Education provision, including EY provision, in Ireland is organised in not two but three distinct categories. Not only is provision in the North different from that in the Republic, but provision in the Gaeltacht is conceptualised and organised differently from the rest of the Republic, and served by different development organisations.

In addition, provision for the 0-3 age group is not conceptualised and delivered as a stage of education provision, but principally in terms of support for Irish-speaking families. There are also a number of Irish-medium childcare services in the Gaeltacht and the North.

This section is principally based on interviews with staff at Gaeloideachas, Comhar na Naíonraí Gaeltachta and Altram, and their assistance is gratefully acknowledged.

### 4.2.1 The Republic of Ireland outside the Gaeltacht

The organisation Gaeloideachas (<https://gaeloideachas.ie/>), founded in 1973 and previously known as Gaelscoileanna, was originally established to support Irish-medium schools, primary and post-primary, outside of the Gaeltacht, but its remit now includes the provision of support services for Irish-medium schools in Gaeltacht areas, and for Irish-medium preschools outside of the Gaeltacht. Gaeloideachas, which has a staff of nine, is mainly an advocacy organisation, somewhat comparable to CnP in Scotland; it does not have a role in the management, governance or oversight of EY provision.

Surprisingly, although there is a fairly large and important 3-5 sector in Ireland, there is almost no 0-3 Irish-medium provision outside the Gaeltacht, except for a few individual childminders. As such Gaeloideachas does not deal with 0-3 provision.

Nursery settings for children from 2 years and 10 months up to age 5 are known as *naíonraí*. Provision is typically offered for 15 hours per week. All the *naíonraí* are privately run; there are no state-run nurseries in Ireland. Gaeloideachas conducts an annual survey to gather data from the various *naíonraí* concerning enrolments and other matters, but this depends on the input and cooperation of individual providers. Their data show that in 2021-22, there were 179 *naíonraí* outside the Gaeltacht, providing for 5,244 children (of which only 149 (2.8%) speak Irish at home) (<https://gaeloideachas.ie/i-am-a-researcher/statistics/>). Approximately half the *naíonraí* are located on the same premises as an Irish-medium primary school, but this is an unstable arrangement as the school may need to expand and take over the space. Some *naíonraí* struggle to find suitable premises.

Notably, unlike in Scotland, there is now no procedure by which a successful *naíonra* can build the foundation for establishing a primary school and securing public funding. In the past, a patron organisation that could demonstrate that there was a local demand for it would get provisional recognition from the Department of Education and the school would be funded on that basis. Decisions about opening new schools are now made on a model of public consultation to choose the school's ethos and patronage, and Irish-medium provision may not be seen as a priority within this.

Up to now, data on EY provision in Ireland has not been gathered formally but from 2023, statistics on the Irish-medium EY sector will be available from the Department of Children. A mapping exercise for this is currently in process.

The Irish Government is currently preparing the first national policy on Irish-medium education outside the Gaeltacht.<sup>10</sup> Consultation on this policy concluded in July 2023. An overview report on current provision commissioned to inform the development of the policy did not include 0-3 provision within its scope, but considered early years provision from age 3 onwards (Department of Education 2022: 14-15).

Irish-medium EY provision is funded on the same basis as English-medium provision. For the 3-5 age-group, the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme<sup>11</sup> provides funding for ELC for 15 hours per week and 38 weeks per year (570 hours in total). Outside this, ELC is subsidised through the National Childcare Scheme ([www.ncs.gov.ie](http://www.ncs.gov.ie)) (Department of Education 2022: 14).

Provision for the 0-3 age group is not made within the framework of education but rather in the context of initiatives organised by Teanga Tí ([www.teangati.ie](http://www.teangati.ie)), a scheme to support Irish-speaking families that is delivered by Glór na nGael ([www.glornangael.ie](http://www.glornangael.ie)), which supports the use of Irish in the family, community and business as one of the six Lead Organisations for Irish language development. There are approximately 46 Irish-language toddler groups in Ireland outside the Gaeltacht, 16 of them in the North. The total support budget for these groups is €40,000 per year. This provision is aimed at families who already speak Irish, although it is recognised that there will be a spectrum of competences involved. This is very different from the *naíonraí*, which emphasise language acquisition through immersion and in which the overwhelming majority of children involved come from non-Irish speaking homes.

In 2016 there were 6,254 families in the Republic (including the Gaeltacht) in which there was at least one adult (aged 19+) and one child (18 or younger) who spoke Irish every day outside the education system (Seoighe, Smith-Christmas & Ó hlfearnáin 2021: 33-34). There are no directly comparable data in Scotland but the level of Gaelic language use in families would clearly be significantly lower.

Recruitment for the EY sector in Ireland is very challenging and the issue of low pay is a very significant issue. This is a particular problem for Irish-medium providers as those with the language skills to work in the immersion setting are attracted to the better-paid school sector. These difficulties make the prospect of delivering more extensive Irish-medium EY provision, including childcare services, all the more unfeasible, even if there is parental demand.

There is very little dedicated initial training for the Irish-medium EY sector. Some college or university courses offer some individual modules dealing with Irish or multilingualism, but these are usually optional. Gaeloideachas does offer in-service professional opportunities for *naíonraí* staff but for many it may not be practical to attend.

#### **4.2.2 The Gaeltacht**

As in the rest of the Republic, EY provision in the Gaeltacht (the officially designated Irish-speaking area), is heavily concentrated in the 3-5 sector rather than 0-3, although here there are several full-time Irish-medium childcare providers. The section of the Department of Education and Skills' *Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022* that deals with EY provision

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<sup>10</sup> For details of the proposed policy see <https://www.gov.ie/en/consultation/a6fa7-consultation-process-to-develop-a-policy-on-irish-medium-education-outside-of-the-gaeltacht/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/2459ee-early-childhood-care-and-education-programme-ecce/>

concentrates on the *naíonra* stage and does not bring 0-3 provision within its scope (Department of Education and Skills 2016: 41-44).

The non-profit organisation Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta (CNNG) (<http://www.comharnaionrai.ie/>) is specifically charged with development of the EY sector in the Gaeltacht (CNNG 2023). CNNG run 122 services across the seven Gaeltacht areas, including 70 *naíonra* services. CNNG is principally funded by the Irish Government (through its social support agency Pobal and the department with responsibility for the Gaeltacht)<sup>12</sup> and by Údarás na Gaeltachta (the Gaeltacht development authority). Other funding for parents comes via the ECCE programme and the National Childcare Scheme. Total turnover is approximately €6 million per year.

All CNNG services are entirely through the medium of Irish. The great majority of these are for children three years and over, but the organisation does run five full-time Irish-medium childcare facilities in various parts of the Gaeltacht, providing for around 70 children aged 1 to 3 (and with a substantial waiting list). The first creche service was established in 2010. The organisation has an 11 person management and support team and approximately 220 staff delivering creche and *naíonra* services. CNNG works to ensure consistency of provision across its services, including in relation to language use. A language support manual, *Borradh*, designed with input from experts in immersion practice, supports this work.

Staffing is a serious challenge for CNNG as for other EY providers in the rest of Ireland. This makes running childcare services more challenging to operate as they have much higher demands in terms of staffing, in that they run for much longer periods of time (typically 8am-6pm) and mandated staffing ratios for the youngest children are lower. Creche services are somewhat dependent on connected *naíonra* provision, as they share a building.

CNNG staff are eligible for funding support from Údarás na Gaeltachta and CNNG itself to earn additional EY university qualifications on the condition that they continue to work for CNNG for three years post qualification. This can be an attractive incentive as it is not available to staff working for English-medium providers.

As in rest of Ireland, provision for the youngest age group is also made within support programmes for Irish-speaking families. The organisation Tuismitheoirí na Gaeltachta (<https://tuismitheoiri.ie>) offers a range of support services to Gaeltacht parents and families who use Irish in the home. (According to the 2016 census, only 23% of Gaeltacht families are raising their children with Irish (Ní Chuaig, Ó Brolcháin, Ní Chlochasaigh & Ó Ceallaigh 2021: 2)). These include an extensive range of activities for the 0-3 group.

Pursuant to the *Gaeltacht Act 2012*, the Gaeltacht is divided into 26 separate Language Planning Areas and a language plan has been developed for each of these, supported by a Language Planning Officer.<sup>13</sup> These are comprehensive plans, typically over 100 pages in length, and address ELC and support for families among many other topics. A development budget is allocated to assist with the costs of implementation, and in some cases Irish-medium toddler groups are funded through this local development budget.

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<sup>12</sup> The name of this department has changed on several occasions and is currently known as the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media.

<sup>13</sup> These plans are available at <https://udaras.ie/en/our-language-the-gaeltacht/language-planning-areas/>

There has been a general increase in the number of toddler groups in the Gaeltacht in recent years but there is no central coordination or support for this activity. CNNG provides advice in some cases but lacks the resources to provide more substantial support.

#### 4.2.3 Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, the term *naíscoil* is generally used for a 3-5 setting rather than *naíonra*. There are currently 50 *naíscoileanna* in operation.<sup>14</sup> All of them are private institutions although many are connected to Irish-medium primary schools and so administered with the same governance structure. As in the Republic outside the Gaeltacht, the great majority of children attending these settings are not from Irish-speaking homes, although there is a strong language movement in Belfast in particular. Somewhat in contrast to the Republic, a large proportion of EY settings in the North are located in areas of high socio-economic deprivation. Altram (discussed below) has developed guidance on language immersion for the committees organising Irish-medium EY provision (Altram 2019).

Some *naíscoileanna* offer *tuistí agus tachtán* or ‘Stay and Play’ sessions by which 2 year olds come with their parents at an early stage and experience an early introduction to the language (Conway 2017: 11). Some funding for these is available from Foras na Gaeilge or Glór na nGael, and Altram (described below) also provides advice and support. In addition, as noted above, 16 of the family networks funded by Glór na nGael’s Teanga Tí programme are located in the North.

In contrast to the Republic, there are several providers of full-time Irish-medium childcare in the North, including An Droichead, Ionad na Fuiseoige and Ionad Uíbh Eachach in Belfast. Funding for these services comes from a mix of streams, including parent fees, the Department of Health’s Childcare Partnership, the Department for Communities and other sources, but Conradh na Gaeilge and other organisations are currently urging a more coherent model of support for this kind of provision. Following a recent visit to Belfast, the joint committee of the Oireachtas (Irish Parliament) with responsibility for the Irish language noted the success of these services and recommended that Foras na Gaeilge make funding available to make similar provision available throughout Ireland (Comhchoiste na Gaeilge, na Gaeltachta agus Phobal Labhartha na Gaeilge 2023: 5).

The principal organisation serving the Irish-medium EY sector in Northern Ireland is Altram ([www.altram.org](http://www.altram.org)), which works to support Irish-medium EY providers, improve the standard of provision in the sector and promote the importance of EY in Irish-medium education. Altram was established in 1990 and currently has a staff of seven. Until 2015 it was funded by Foras na Gaeilge, but more recently has received its funding from the Department of Education, initially through Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (the principal representative body for Irish-medium education in the North) but now via a direct agreement. Three posts are funded by the Department of Health.

Among other things, Altram has developed Irish-medium EY immersion education guidance for *naíonra* management committees (Altram 2019).

A Early Learning and Childcare Strategy for Northern Ireland is currently in development. Among other things it is anticipated that this will shift the focus of EY activity from childcare to

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<sup>14</sup> Details are given in the sections for each county at <https://www.comhairle.org/english/schools/>



early learning. It is also expected that the adoption of this formal strategy will improve the funding landscape for Irish-medium EY providers.

It is also anticipated that a current government initiative to bring about greater standardisation of preschool provision in Northern Ireland will bring benefits to the Irish-medium EY sector as this will entail a degree of 'levelling up', backed by additional funding. The Irish language training academy GaelChursaí offers several qualifications relevant to EY through the medium of Irish, including an NVQ at Level 2 in Cúram, Foghlaim agus Forbairt Leanaí (Children's Care, Learning and Development), but these are effectively Irish translations of existing general qualifications. Altram are currently working to develop a specific qualification for language immersion under the auspices of the Open College Network Northern Ireland. This is intended to improve the quality of provision in the Irish-medium EY sector.

### **4.3 Comparison with Scotland**

Comparative study of 0-3 provision in Wales highlights several areas of difference and some potential models that might be suitable for adoption in Scotland, with appropriate adjustments. Most obviously, the success and strength of MM in Wales is a potentially useful model for a counterpart organisation in Scotland. The scale of operation and the extent of funding support for the organisation is on a scale far beyond anything on the horizon in Scotland. In Ireland, 0-3 provision is less organised but the scale of 3-5 provision for Irish is much more extensive than for Gaelic. A key difference from Ireland (and indeed Wales) is the extent of support for Irish-speaking families. The level of funding and the density of the organisational infrastructure is well beyond anything put in place in Scotland. Unfortunately, sociolinguistic evidence makes clear that the level of family use of Gaelic is much lower than is the case with Irish, let alone Welsh.

## 5 Discussion and recommendations

This concluding section considers a range of key issues concerning the 0-3 sector that have emerged from this research and presents a range of recommendations for possible improvements to provision. The research specification for this project requested 'recommendations that would enable Gaelic Early Years (0-3) provision to strengthen & develop resulting in consistent provision across Scotland'.

The analysis begins by considering the evidence of decline in the 0-3 sector in recent years. It then addresses the national context in relation to EY policy and Gaelic development policy, including current SG initiatives and the role of local authorities in Gaelic 0-3 provision. The focus then shifts to the structure of 0-3 provision, assessing the possibility of (1) establishing a new organisation specifically charged with Gaelic EY provision, (2) expanding the CnP support initiative and (3) increasing Gaelic childcare provision. It then turns to issues concerning publicity and promotion, staffing and training, and further research needed to support policy in this area.

### 5.1 The shrinking of the 0-3 sector

Although no systematically gathered data are now available, it is clear that there has been a decline in the level of 0-3 Gaelic provision in Scotland in recent years, especially since BnG cut back its EY team and the Covid pandemic. In 2012-13, BnG recorded 69 0-3 voluntary groups in Scotland, including 17 in the Western Isles and 30 in the Highland Council area (BnG 2013b: [1]). Although new groups have opened in other areas since then, more have closed, and the overall number of active groups is considerably lower.

In contrast, there has been substantial growth in GME enrolment at the primary level in recent years, 48% between 2012-13 and 2019-20 (from 2,500 to 3,701) (BnG 2013b: [3]; BnG 2020: 6).<sup>15</sup> This suggests that 0-3 provision is now playing a less significant role as a support or feeder for primary GME than it was.

This research has not considered the 3-5 sector in detail but the trajectory here might be considered mixed. Enrolment in *sgoiltean-àraich* was more or less static between 2012-13, when 989 children were enrolled, and 2019-20 (the last year for which enrolment figures are available), when there were 1,045 ((BnG 2013b: [2]; BnG 2020: 6). However, with the increase in the level of funded hours (now 1,140 per year), attendance at *sgoil-àraich* now provides a richer language contact experience for children. Some issues concerning the 3-5 sector, and how this provision intersects with 0-3 provision, are discussed below.

Alongside this decline in the level of 0-3 provision on the ground, there has also been a clear diminution in the level of provision for support workers in the 0-3 sector. As noted above, at one point there were approximately 7 FTE EY support workers in post between BnG and Highland Council/CALA. The current level is closer to 3.5 FTE although at time of writing the actual number in post is only 2.5.

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<sup>15</sup> 2019-20 is chosen for comparison because that is the last year for which *sgoil-àraich* enrolment data are available. Primary enrolment grew a further 4.1% between 2019-20 and 2021-22 (BnG 2022: 6).

## 5.2 The importance of Gaelic 0-3 provision

0-3 provision has been recognised as a key stage in the GME system as a whole. One interviewee described it as an ‘absolutely crucial feeder’ into GME and that without it numbers entering GME would drop significantly. Some caution is needed, however, particularly in terms of the use of scarce human and financial resources.

An ideal trajectory for GME would see a child come up from the Gaelic 0-3 group to *sgoil-àraich* to a GM primary school and on into a GM secondary school. This trajectory is only possible in Glasgow, and even there few pupils would actually follow this path. This is for various reasons:

- in several areas where GM primary education is available, there is no Gaelic 0-3 provision
- in several areas where GM primary education is available, there is no *sgoil-àraich* provision
- children often enter GM primary education having received little or no Gaelic EY provision, either because there is no provision in their area, because they have been unable to secure a place in the *sgoil-àraich*, or because attendance is not practicable for the family
- in many localities the scope of GME at primary level and especially secondary level is seriously constrained.

The benefits of receiving 0-3 provision are two-fold. Children have some contact with Gaelic and learn some Gaelic, and parents receive information about GME and encouragement to enrol their children.

However, in linguistic terms, the extent and in some cases the quality of Gaelic that children encounter at 0-3 settings may not be especially rich, unless a model can be implemented that involves much more extensive contact with the language (15-20 hours a week for an extensive period). A question also arises of how often and for how long children attend a Gaelic 0-3 setting. In contrast to primary school, which involves a clearly defined structure lasting seven years, some parents may have a much more fleeting relationship with a Gaelic 0-3 group. In terms of language acquisition and consolidation, however, it cannot be taken for granted that having a child attend once a week, or more than once a week, for two or three years will be significantly more beneficial than attending, say, a couple of dozen times.

Similarly, in terms of the informational and persuasive function of Gaelic 0-3 provision, long-term and consistent attendance may not necessarily be required.

A question that requires investigation is the extent to which parents’ choices to place their children in the *sgoil-àraich* is dependent on previous enrolment in the 0-3 group. The dynamics here may have changed with the implementation of the 1140 hour entitlement, which may make choosing the *sgoil-àraich* more viable for some families than would have been the case previously. On the other hand, for parents with no previous connection to Gaelic, choosing Gaelic nursery provision can be seen as a bigger decision and commitment, so that the previous experience of an 0-3 group may be relatively more important.

In sum, there are several points of uncertainty that need to be taken into consideration in shaping 0-3 policy, particularly in terms of making allocation decisions. There is certainly a

coherent case to be made for significant additional investment in the Gaelic 0-3 sector, but the possible limitations on its benefits should also be borne in mind. In particular, it is certainly arguable that the *sgoil-àraich* stage is more important than the 0-3 stage, and that scarce resources, especially staff resource, may be better allocated to the former.

### **5.3 Early years policy and the expansion of nursery entitlement**

Ongoing or forthcoming national policy initiatives will have a very important role on the future of Gaelic 0-3 provision. BnG, SG and other relevant actors and stakeholders should have regard to the 0-3 sector as these are taken forward, even if this aspect is unlikely to be at the forefront.

In relation to EY provision as a whole, the expansion of the nursery entitlement brings significant opportunities but also has some potentially negative ramifications in relation to 0-3 provision. National EY policy will mean that an ever-increasing number of children under age 3 are being brought within this entitlement, so that the current 0-3 v. 3-5 distinction will become less meaningful and the scope of provision for the youngest children rather narrower.

Ideally, the increase in the number of hours that children are immersed in Gaelic in *sgoiltean-àraich* will mean that they will enter P1 with a stronger foundation in the language. However, strong anecdotal evidence suggests that a significant proportion of children entering P1 GME will not have attended *sgoil-àraich* – some 40% in the case of Edinburgh. Not only does this mean they are not as well prepared linguistically as they could be, having a substantial number of such children in a P1 classroom may mean that the Gaelic language development of the group as a whole will not be as rapid as it might.

There are various reasons why children may not attend a *sgoil-àraich*, typically because their parents need more extensive childcare during the working day or because the family lives too far from the *sgoil-àraich* for attendance to be convenient. However, strong anecdotal evidence suggests that there is a significant shortage of *sgoil-àraich* places in some areas. Difficulty in recruiting qualified staff appears to be a key factor here.

**Recommendation:** In partnership with local authorities and BnG, SG should commission research on the current position of Gaelic nursery provision and the challenges associated with the expansion of funded provision. This should include a close study of the issues connected to recruitment.

### **5.4 Language legislation, national GME policy and the role of local authorities in Gaelic 0-3 provision**

The forthcoming Scottish Languages Bill provides some opportunity for making improvements to Gaelic 0-3 provision, but there are considerable difficulties here. A major issue in Gaelic education policy generally has been the possibility of establishing an enforceable right to GME. This has been on the agenda since the 1990s and remains a central issue as the current legislation is moved forward. Discussion has focused overwhelmingly on the primary sector rather than EY, and the problem of teacher availability has been a key issue here. As noted above, the 2016 Education Act gives the Scottish Ministers the power to extend the entitlement to GM primary education in the Act to early learning childcare. Doing so, either by amending the 2016 Act or through another mechanism in the forthcoming Scottish Languages Bill, would involve complexities above and beyond

those arising in relation to primary education. The structure of delivery of primary education is well established and standardised in terms of its structure, most obviously the number of days involved. This is not the case in relation to 0-3 provision; theoretically, it might be possible to require education authorities to offer 2 hours a week of provision, or 10 or more. In addition, it would be extraordinary to require such provision in the absence of a formal expression of demand, which would be impracticable in the context of 0-3 provision. While the 2016 Act puts in place a complex procedure for the presentation and assessment of demand for GM primary education, this is a slow process that only culminates when the children reach school age. Provision for toddlers does not allow for such long lead times.

Above and beyond the logistical complexities involved here, a senior BnG official suggested that it was extremely unlikely that an obligation of this kind would be legally established in relation to Gaelic unless local authorities were made subject to a more general obligation to make provision in this field, which was considered highly improbable.

**Recommendation:** SG, the Scottish Parliament and Gaelic organisations should carefully consider the prospects for addressing 0-3 provision in the pending Scottish Languages Bill and press the issue as appropriate in the course of the legislative process, while bearing in mind the practical difficulties of imposing legal mandates in this area.

As noted above, the SG has committed to take ‘a new national strategic approach to Gaelic medium education’. The document does make reference to the 0-3 sector but it is very likely that the later stages of education will receive more attention and greater priority. It is therefore important that the issue of 0-3 provision receives due attention in this policy process.

**Recommendation:** SG, local authorities and Gaelic organisations should ensure that the issue of 0-3 provision receives due attention in the process of developing ‘a new national strategic approach to GME’ led by SG.

Given that the process of developing a new national strategic approach to GME has not yet begun in earnest, it is not clear if a revised version of the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education is to be issued. If this is the case, BnG could use the opportunity to encourage, if not require, greater support for Gaelic 0-3 activity on the part of local authorities.<sup>16</sup>

**Recommendation:** If a revised version of the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education is issued, SG and BnG should use the opportunity to encourage (or require), greater support for Gaelic 0-3 activity on the part of local authorities.

One of the main policy mechanisms created by the 2005 Act was the requirement for public authorities to prepare Gaelic language plans if notified to do so by BnG. Assuming that this requirement is retained, or only slightly modified, BnG should consider taking a more directive approach to the activities supported by its Gaelic Plans Fund. At the moment, although BnG assigns responsibility for the supervision of individual plans to one of its Gaelic Plans Officers, the Bòrd does not work with public authorities in shaping their bids to the Gaelic Plans Fund, or recommend particular priorities or initiatives to them. Rather, the Bòrd simply evaluates applications as submitted. This means that there is a potential for very different approaches by similarly situated authorities, most obviously as to whether the

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<sup>16</sup> Section 9(2A) of the 2005 Act as amended requires ‘any relevant public authority having functions relating to, or to the provision of, Gaelic education’ to ‘have regard’ to the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education.

authority decides to make any proposals at all which could benefit from funding. This is a general issue that applies to all public authorities with GLPs. In relation to 0-3 activity specifically, it is not clear why different kinds of EY officers were proposed for Edinburgh and Glasgow (see sections 3.1.3.1 and 3.1.3.2 above), and why 0-3 provision in Uist should be delivered by CNES rather than CnP, despite the overlap with CnP's work in Lewis and Harris (section 3.1.3.3).

**Recommendation:** BnG should work more actively with organisations before they make applications to its Gaelic Plans Fund relating to 0-3 activity.

Irrespective of the mechanism used, there appear to be clear benefits from working closely with local authorities in relation to 0-3 provision, or indeed having the council employ 0-3 staff. As one local authority representative commented:

By having 0-3 welded in with the council it means it can't be forgotten about. It means that people will have jobs with local authority terms and conditions. It means that they have up to date information as to what's happening in the schools.

At the moment, only a handful of authorities directly employ 0-3 staff, as discussed in section 3.1.2 and 3.1.3 above. If the matter remains a matter for councils' discretion this is a more realistic prospect in relation to authorities which have a significant number of children enrolled in GME (the example of West Dunbartonshire Council notwithstanding).

The research did reveal some downsides to working with local authorities. In some cases, there were delays in filling 0-3 posts due to cumbersome administrative procedures for recruitment. In others, Gaelic officers with responsibility for 0-3 provision among other matters left the organisation and were not replaced, for budgetary or other reasons. This suggests that over-reliance on local authorities in relation to 0-3 provision is somewhat risky.

Some local authority interviewees expressed frustration about the short-time funding arrangements for particular initiatives and especially for development and support posts. This meant uncertainty for the authority as well as for staff (and potential applicants for such posts). One suggestion was that BnG funding packages should be made on a five-year basis so as to align with the time frame for the iterations of Gaelic language plans. This might be difficult for the Bòrd to implement, however, given its own budgetary constraints.

**Recommendation:** BnG should encourage local authorities to appoint Gaelic EY officers to develop more coordinated GM provision through the different stages of education.

## **5.5 A new dedicated organisation for Gaelic early years?**

Some consideration should be given to the possibility of establishing a dedicated organisation with responsibility for Gaelic EY, especially the 0-3 sector. As summarised above in section 2.3, funding was withdrawn from the former CNSA/Taic mainly because of issues concerning its strategic direction. However, some interviewees who had direct experience of the operation of 0-3 groups under CNSA spoke of it in positive terms, indeed finding it superior to current provision. The model of Mudiad Meithrin in Wales is very useful here, and the much higher level of funding for its work sobering. The difficulties that arose with CNSA/Taic in its final years should not serve to permanently block consideration of the possibility of a new organisation with responsibility for Gaelic EY.

Detailed and careful consideration would be required in relation to the remit, governance, staffing structure and funding needs of any such organisation. A broad representative governance structure, with representatives from different constituencies and with diverse expertise (including EY expertise) would seem appropriate.

**Recommendation:** If establishing a new organisation with a specific remit for Gaelic EY is an attractive option, SG, BnG and other agencies should assess the possibility in detail, giving attention to the remit, governance and funding needs of any such organisation. The model of Mudiad Meithrin should be taken into account here.

## 5.6 Expanding Comann nam Pàrant's role

The most obvious next step for 0-3 provision would be to broaden the geographical range of CnP's support programme so as to cover all of Scotland. This would include ending the existing arrangement by which Highland Council appoints support officers in some parts of the Highlands, and taking responsibility for Argyll, Angus and Forfar, and indeed any other areas where there is currently no 0-3 provision.<sup>17</sup>

More specifically, the Thig a Chluich provision could be expanded beyond its current base in Lewis and Harris. This seems most feasible in areas where there are several GM primary units in reasonable proximity so that a peripatetic worker could serve them all without excessive travel time. Such areas would include the Inverness/Moray Firth area (seven locations within an hour's drive of Inverness), Skye (six locations within an hour of Portree) and West Central Scotland (twelve locations within an hour of Glasgow). In areas where GM provision is more scattered and travel times between them much greater, however, it would be very difficult to implement this system at reasonable cost.

Most immediately, a mechanism might be sought by which the 0-3 officer in Uist, currently employed by CNES on a temporary contract, might be brought within the ambit of CnP. The current bifurcation across two organisations is odd.

Partly because it would be so difficult to deliver Thig a Chluich in some areas, there would be continuing scope for Pàrant is Pàiste groups, as discussed in the next section. This would mean ongoing need for the kind of general support currently offered by the CnP officer for southern Scotland. In considering the level of such support provision that would be required, careful attention to the remit and workload of support officers would be needed. The CnP officer in Central Scotland appears somewhat overstretched in a way that may limit her ability to provide support for all the groups in the area. Her active role in delivering Bookbug sessions in different areas, although carefully planned, might be re-examined in the context of review of how Bookbug might be better organised more generally (a subject considered in section 5.8 below).

Depending on the level of Thig a Chluich coverage to be provided, an issue addressed further in the next section, this outline would involve appointing 5-8 FTE additional EY officers, including a manager. It would also be appropriate to appoint a research and training officer with high expertise in EY theory and practice.

It should be noted that creating more stable, ideally full-time posts within an established organisation should be helpful from the standpoint of recruitment. For many in the sector,

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<sup>17</sup> In the past, there have been 0-3 groups in Dumfries and Fife, for example.

insufficient hours and precarity have served as barriers or disincentives (alongside, unfortunately, poor pay).

Some interviewees expressed uncertainty as to whether CnP was best placed and sufficiently expert in the EY field to take charge of Gaelic 0-3 provision across Scotland. The main remit of the organisation is geared to representation and advocacy on behalf of parents, particularly in relation to local authorities and the SG, rather than service delivery. Conceivably there could even be some degree of conflict of interest should parents who might ordinarily be expected to turn to CnP for assistance be dissatisfied with provision delivered by CnP. These are by no means insuperable concerns but they should be carefully considered.

Another issue to be taken into account is the role of community agency and community development. The responsibility of running a Pàrant is Pàiste group is clearly daunting to some parents, but the experience is useful. Consideration should be given to ways in which the Thig a Theagasg programme could effectively build in greater parental involvement in terms of organisation, planning, participation and sense of ownership.

**Recommendation:** Consideration should be given to expanding the role of CnP in 0-3 delivery to encompass all of Scotland, with the Thig a Theagasg delivery model put in place to the extent practicable. This would require additional funding and careful evaluation of resource needs and delivery models. At the same time, the suitability of CnP to undertake this work should be assessed, and any appropriate measures taken to moderate any concerns in this respect.

### **5.7 The continuing role of Pàrant is Pàiste and the role of voluntary groups generally**

There are clear limits to the level of provision that can be delivered by salaried peripatetic workers at reasonable cost, particularly bearing in mind that some services run by local 0-3 groups currently run on 2, 3 or even 5 days per week. As discussed in section above, the CnP officers in the Western Isles (1.0 FTE between two officers) are currently providing six hours of Thig a Chluich sessions per week. There would certainly be an appetite to double this and perhaps to quadruple it, but this would involve 4.0 FTE staff members at the current level of delivery intensity. This level of expenditure might be difficult to justify.

In addition to cost factors, some respondents felt that different kinds of 0-3 services should be available alongside Thig a Chluich. An interviewee familiar with the current Thig a Chluich provision in Lewis and Harris felt there was still a need for local Pàrant is Pàiste groups in the area, commenting 'I think in a way it is two different type of things'.

If Thig a Chluich provision were expanded as suggested in section 5.6, this could justify a reduction in the size of the Early Years Grant fund, and the size of awards available, but not its elimination. It is notable that Mudiad Meithrin's support scheme is less generous for local groups than BnG's Early Years Fund, particularly in relation to the payment of playleader salaries.

Regardless of the size of the fund budget, BnG should consider moving the deadline for Early Years Fund applications to a date before the start of the school summer holidays (end of June).



An important issue noted by several interviewees, especially in island communities, was the increasing reluctance of parents to come forward for voluntary roles. This perceived shift is not limited to Pàrant is Pàiste groups but is a wider phenomenon. One interviewee commented ‘it gets quite difficult to get people to actually volunteer, step up and kind of take their turn, so to speak’. Another remarked, with evident frustration, ‘it’s just so difficult to get people to do anything.’

**Recommendation:** Even if the Thig a Chluich programme is expanded, BnG should retain its Early Years Grants, and should move the deadline for applications to a date before the end of the school year.

## 5.8 Gaelic Bookbug sessions

There was consensus from respondents that the current situation in relation to Gaelic Bookbug sessions was unsatisfactory, although there was clear disagreement as to how this situation had come about and how it might be resolved. The Bookbug ‘brand’ is strongly established in Scotland and it is highly visible to parents, so that a strong offer of Gaelic sessions can play an important role in publicising Gaelic, GME and Gaelic EY provision. In some cases this may help get a new 0-3 group off the ground.

It would be very helpful for BnG and the Scottish Book Trust to reach a suitable accommodation in regard to training, with negotiation facilitated by other agencies as necessary. BnG could consider making additional investment in this area commensurate with its previous investment when a BnG EY officer was involved in delivering Gaelic-specific training.

**Recommendation:** BnG should renew its efforts to reach an agreement with the Scottish Book Trust concerning training to deliver Gaelic Bookbug sessions

## 5.9 Expanding Gaelic-medium childcare provision

There is currently very little full-time GM childcare available for under 3s., two all-Gaelic providers and a limited service at Seudan Beaga in Glasgow. Not only does there appear to be demand for increased provision, but an expanded offer could have significant benefits from the standpoint of language development by providing children who attend with much greater exposure to Gaelic than a typical Pàrant is Pàiste setting (20+ hours per week as opposed to 1.5 or 2).

It is noteworthy that the recent report of the *Short Life Working Group on Economic and Social Opportunities for Gaelic* for the Scottish Government noted as follows:

Adequate childcare services should be available in Key Gaelic Communities,<sup>18</sup> with appropriate Gaelic medium training for playleaders, through Foundation Apprenticeships and other means, in immersion methods to ensure as many parents as wish to are available to work, as well as acting as a feeder to Gaelic medium education (Scottish Government 2023a: 21).

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<sup>18</sup> The report ‘defined Key Gaelic Communities as all those in Na h-Eileanan Siar, Skye & some districts of Lochalsh, Tiree, Islay and Jura’ (Scottish Government 2023: 9).

There would clearly be significant challenges here in relation to recruitment and staffing, but this area should be explored further. The most obvious locations where such a service would seem feasible are Stornoway, Portree, Inverness, Glasgow and Edinburgh. Two interviewees from smaller communities highlighted the issue of fluctuating numbers of young children and varying levels of demand, but this would be less of a problem in places with a larger population base.

**Recommendation:** Investigate further the experience of existing Gaelic childcare providers and the possibility of developing other similar services, including staffing issues and the level of parental demand.

### **5.10 Support for families**

Although constraints of space preclude a detailed discussion here, this research has highlighted the issue of the support infrastructure for Gaelic-speaking families and for parents who are learning Gaelic and working to incorporate it into their family life. Provision in this regard is minimal compared to that in place in Ireland and Wales. This of course connects to a wider issue in Gaelic development policy, the extent to which there is sufficient attention to family and community initiatives as opposed to formal and institutional interventions.

**Recommendation:** Research should be commissioned on the needs and challenges of Gaelic-speaking families and on the support needed for parents who are learning Gaelic and working to incorporate it into their family life.

### **5.11 Publicity and promotion**

As discussed in section 3.1.7 above, voluntary groups' strategies for publicising and promoting their sessions appear relatively fragmented and arguably ineffectual. More effective promotion is necessary to reach the full range of parents who might be interested in GME.

With stronger central support, either from CnP or another organisation, better resourced and better planned promotion should be put in place, drawing on the advice of communications and marketing professionals. Some of this work would need to be done at local level but there is also scope for national informational and promotional initiatives, as was originally recommended by Stephen et al. (2010).

**Recommendation:** More effective and better-resourced publicity and promotion for Gaelic 0-3 should be organised and delivered by CnP or another organisation with responsibility for Gaelic EY. This should include an overarching campaign to promote the benefits of 0-3 provision within the wider context of GME.

### **5.12 Staffing, training and further research**

In many respects the staffing position of the 0-3 sector is tightly connected with the larger 3-5 sector. Most obviously, there is a clear shortage of qualified staff in the 3-5 sector, which constrains the availability of provision and has knock-on consequences for the GME system as a whole.

Dedicated training opportunities for the Gaelic EY sector are few, and there can be difficulties accessing these. In relation to initial training, it is important that Gaelic-focused

apprenticeship and other vocational courses be further encouraged and supported, and that new courses are developed that are delivered through the medium of Gaelic and/or include the study of language immersion, bilingualism/multilingualism, and intercultural communication.

As for in-service training, more frequent and more wide-ranging opportunities, reasonably accessible to staff, are needed for linguistic enrichment and in relation to immersion practice. These can be developed in partnership with universities although the professional EY expertise of Gaelic organisations should also be strengthened. It would also be helpful if the Alltan Beag conference, or a similar general conference for EY practitioners and trainees, were to be reinstated, and delivered on a hybrid in-person/online basis so as to maximise accessibility.

**Recommendation:** The annual Alltan Beag conference, or a similar conference for EY practitioners and trainees, should be reinstated, and delivered on a hybrid in-person/online basis so as to maximise accessibility.

The current research has focused on structural issues involving funding, governance and support structures for the 0-3 sector. Additional research and data-gathering is needed on several related topics:

- particularly in light of the expansion of the 3-5 sector and the 1140 hour guarantee, the practical experience of implementation, including availability of places, barriers to access, recruitment, staff's professional and linguistic skills and training
- pedagogical, developmental and curricular issues for Gaelic EY, including 0-3. These issues have been addressed to some extent in previous research (Stephen et al. 2010; McPake et al. 2015), but more work is needed
- more reliable data on the scale of the 0-3 sector and the throughput between different stages of GME (0-3 > *sgoil-àraich* and *sgoil-àraich* > primary, as well as the extent of P1 entry without Gaelic EY foundation)

**Recommendation:** Additional research and data-gathering should be conducted on the challenges faced in the Gaelic 3-5 sector, on pedagogical issues in Gaelic EY, and the effectiveness of progression through the different stages of GME.

### 5.13 Summary of recommendations

1. In partnership with local authorities and BnG, SG should commission research on the current position of Gaelic nursery provision and the challenges associated with the expansion of funded provision. This should include a close study of the issues connected to recruitment.
2. SG, the Scottish Parliament and Gaelic organisations should carefully consider the prospects for addressing 0-3 provision in the pending Scottish Languages Bill and press the issue as appropriate in the course of the legislative process, while bearing in mind the practical difficulties of imposing legal mandates in this area.
3. SG, local authorities and Gaelic organisations should ensure that the issue of 0-3 provision receives due attention in the process of developing 'a new national strategic approach to GME' led by SG.

4. If a revised version of the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education is issued, SG and BnG should use the opportunity to encourage (or require), greater support for Gaelic 0-3 activity on the part of local authorities.
5. BnG should work more actively with organisations before they make applications to its Gaelic Plans Fund relating to 0-3 activity.
6. BnG should encourage local authorities to appoint Gaelic EY officers to develop more coordinated GM provision through the different stages of education.
7. If establishing a new organisation with a specific remit for Gaelic EY is an attractive option, SG, BnG and other agencies should assess the possibility in detail, giving attention to the remit, governance and funding needs of any such organisation. The model of Mudiad Meithrin should be taken into account here.
8. Consideration should be given to expanding the role of CnP in 0-3 delivery to encompass all of Scotland, with the Thig a Theagasg delivery model put in place to the extent practicable. This would require additional funding and careful evaluation of resource needs and delivery models. At the same time, the suitability of CnP to undertake this work should be assessed, and any appropriate measures taken to moderate any concerns in this respect.
9. Even if the Thig a Chluich programme is expanded, BnG should retain its Early Years Grants, and should move the deadline for applications to a date before the end of the school year.
10. BnG should renew its efforts to reach an agreement with the Scottish Book Trust concerning training to deliver Gaelic Bookbug sessions.
11. Investigate further the experience of existing Gaelic childcare providers and the possibility of developing other similar services, including staffing issues and the level of parental demand.
12. Research should be commissioned on the needs and challenges of Gaelic-speaking families and on the support needed for parents who are learning Gaelic and working to incorporate it into their family life.
13. More effective and better-resourced publicity and promotion for Gaelic 0-3 should be organised and delivered by CnP or another organisation with responsibility for Gaelic EY. This should include an overarching campaign to promote the benefits of 0-3 provision within the wider context of GME.
14. The annual Alltan Beag conference, or a similar conference for EY practitioners and trainees, should be reinstated, and delivered on a hybrid in-person/online basis so as to maximise accessibility.
15. Additional research and data-gathering should be conducted on the challenges faced in the Gaelic 3-5 sector, on pedagogical issues in Gaelic EY, and the effectiveness of progression through the different stages of GME.

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**Appendix 1**

Participant Information Sheet

## **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

### **Gaelic Early Years (0-3) Provision**

You are being invited to take part in research on Gaelic Early Years (0-3) Provision that is being carried out on behalf of Bòrd na Gàidhlig. This research is being conducted by Professor Wilson McLeod. Before you decide whether to take part it is important you understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

#### **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?**

The purpose of the study is to evaluate the current delivery models for Gaelic Early Years (0—3) provision supported by Bòrd na Gàidhlig and to make recommendations that would enable Gaelic 0-3 provision to strengthen and develop, resulting in consistent provision in different parts of Scotland.

#### **WHY HAVE I BEEN INVITED TO TAKE PART?**

You are invited to participate in this study because you are involved in the organisation, management or delivery of Gaelic Early Years (0-3) Provision.

#### **DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART?**

No – it is entirely up to you. If you do decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

Please note that your data may be used in the production of formal research outputs (e.g. project report for Bòrd na Gàidhlig) prior to your withdrawal and so you are advised to contact the researcher at the earliest opportunity should you wish to withdraw from the study.

#### **WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF I DECIDE TO TAKE PART?**

If you do decide to take part, please keep this Information Sheet. You will be asked to complete and sign an Informed Consent Form to show that you understand your rights in relation to the research, and that you are happy to participate.

You will be asked a number of questions regarding your experience of Gaelic 0-3 provision, including the availability of information, funding arrangements, and the support provided by Bòrd na Gàidhlig, local authorities and other organisations. The interview will take place in a safe environment at a time that is convenient to you, likely by video call. Ideally, we would like to audio record your responses (and will require your consent for this). The interview should usually take around 30 minutes to complete.

#### **WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE BENEFITS OF TAKING PART?**

There are no direct personal benefits, but by sharing your experiences with us, you will be helping Bòrd na Gàidhlig and other providers make better arrangements for the delivery of Gaelic 0-3 provision.

## **ARE THERE ANY RISKS OR DISADVANTAGES ASSOCIATED WITH TAKING PART?**

There are no significant risks associated with participation.

## **WILL MY TAKING PART BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?**

All the information collected during the course of this research will be kept confidential and there are strict laws which safeguard your privacy at every stage.

## **HOW WILL WE USE THE INFORMATION YOU PROVIDE?**

We will need to use information given during your interview for this research project.

This information will include:

- your name,
- any information given during the interview.

We will keep all information about you safe and secure.

Your name and other personal data will only be viewed by the researcher, Wilson McLeod.

If you are being interviewed as an employee of an organisation in receipt of Bòrd na Gàidhlig funding, it may be necessary to identify you as such in the project report.

For other participants (such as volunteer members of playgroup committees or other parents), your role will not be specified in the project report or in any publicly available research outputs, unless you indicate otherwise.

All electronic data will be stored in a password-protected file on a password-protected computer. No physical copies of your data will be produced. Your consent information will be kept separately from your responses in order to minimise risk.

## **WHAT ARE YOUR CHOICES ABOUT HOW YOUR INFORMATION IS USED?**

You can stop being part of the study at any time, without giving a reason, but we may keep information about you that we already have.

## **WHAT WILL HAPPEN WITH THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY?**

The results of this study will be used in a project report and any subsequent presentations based upon the report.

## **WHO IS ORGANISING AND FUNDING THE RESEARCH?**

This study has been organised by Wilson McLeod, Emeritus Professor of Gaelic at the University of Edinburgh. The study is being funded by Bòrd na Gàidhlig.

## **WHO CAN I CONTACT?**

If you have any further questions about the study, please contact the researcher, Wilson McLeod, [wilsonmacleoid@gmail.com](mailto:wilsonmacleoid@gmail.com)

If you wish to make a complaint about this study, please contact:

Shona MacLellan, Chief Executive, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, [shona@gaidhlig.scot](mailto:shona@gaidhlig.scot)

**Appendix 2**  
**Participant Consent Form (voluntary groups)**

**FOIRM-AONTA COM-PÀIRTICHE**  
**PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

**Solar Tràth-Bhliadhnaichean na Gàidhlig (0-3)**

Gaelic Early Years (0-3) Provision

**Cuiribh ur tùs-  
litrichean sa bhocsa**  
Please initial box

1. **Tha mi a' dearbhadh gu bheil mi air an Duilleag Fiosrachaidh Com-Pàirtiche airson an rannsachaidh gu h-àrd a leughadh agus a thuigsinn.**

I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study.

2. **Chaidh cothrom a thoirt dhomh beachdachadh air an fhiosrachadh a fhuair mi, ceistean fhaighneachd agus freagairtean ris na ceistean agam fhaighinn.**

I have been given the opportunity to consider the information provided, ask questions and have had these questions answered.

3. **Tha mi a' tuigsinn gu bheil a' chom-pàirt agam saor-thoileach agus gum faod mi tarraing aiste aig àm sam bith gun adhbhar agus gun bhuidh air na còirichean laghail agam.**

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can ask to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without my legal rights being affected.

4. **Tha mi a' tuigsinn nach nochd m' ainm no mion-fhiosrachadh mun ròl agam anns an aithisg rannsachaidh air a' phròiseact seo.**

I understand that my name or specific details about my role will not appear in the project report.

5. **Tha mi a' tuigsinn gun tèid agallamhan a chumail air-loidhne no air a' fòn agus gun tèid an clàradh airson an cleachdadh leis an neach-rannsachaidh a-mhàin.**

I understand that interviews will be held online or on the phone and will be recorded for use only by the researcher

**6. Tha mi ag aontachadh pàirt a ghabhail anns an rannsachadh seo.**

I agree to take part in this study.

**Ainm an neach a tha a' toirt seachad aonta**

**Ceann-Latha**

**Ainm-Sgrìobhte**

Name of person giving consent

Date

Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Ainm an neach a tha a' gabhail ris an aonta**

**Ceann-Latha**

**Ainm-Sgrìobhte**

Name of person taking consent

Date

Signature

Wilson McLeod

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix 3**  
**Participant Consent Form (organisation officers)**

**FOIRM-AONTA COM-PÀIRTICHE (OIFIGEARAN)**  
**PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (OFFICERS)**

**Solar Tràth-Bhliadhnaichean na Gàidhlig (0-3)**

Gaelic Early Years (0-3) Provision

**Cuiribh ur tùs-  
litrichean sa bhocsa**  
Please initial box

7. **Tha mi a' dearbhadh gu bheil mi air an Duilleag Fiosrachaidh Com-Pàirtiche airson an rannsachaidh gu h-àrd a leughadh agus a thuigsinn.**

I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study.

8. **Chaidh cothrom a thoirt dhomh beachdachadh air an fhiosrachadh a fhuair mi, ceistean fhaighneachd agus freagairtean ris na ceistean agam fhaighinn.**

I have been given the opportunity to consider the information provided, ask questions and have had these questions answered.

9. **Tha mi a' tuigsinn gu bheil a' chom-pàirt agam saor-thoileach agus gum faod mi tarraing aiste aig àm sam bith gun adhbhar agus gun bhuaidh air na còirichean laghail agam.**

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can ask to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without my legal rights being affected.

10. **Tha mi a' tuigsinn gu bheil mo chom-pàirt anns an rannsachadh seo co-cheangailte ri m' obair airson buidheann agus gum faodar m' ainm no mo dhreuchd a shònrachadh anns an aithisg rannsachaidh air a' phròiseact seo ma tha sin iomchaidh**

I understand that my participation in this research is done in connection with my employment and that my name and post may be referred to as appropriate in the project report.

11. **Tha mi a' tuigsinn gun tèid agallamhan a chumail air-loidhne no air a' fòn agus gun tèid an clàradh airson an cleachdadh leis an neach-rannsachaidh a-mhàin.**



I understand that interviews will be held online or on the phone and will be recorded for use only by the researcher

**12. Tha mi ag aontachadh pàirt a ghabhail anns an rannsachadh seo.**

I agree to take part in this study.

**Ainm an neach a tha a' toirt seachad aonta**

**Ceann-Latha**

**Ainm-Sgrìobhte**

Name of person giving consent

Date

Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Ainm an neach a tha a' gabhail ris an aonta**

**Ceann-Latha**

**Ainm-Sgrìobhte**

Name of person taking consent

Date

Signature

Wilson McLeod

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix 4**

### **Interview schedule**

## Interview Schedule

Date:

Start and end times:

Name of group:

Name of interviewee:

Interviewee's role in group:

1. How often does the group meet? (daily, weekly, monthly, etc.)
2. How long is a typical session? (in hours)
3. When was the group established?
4. Where does the group meet? (e.g. school, community or church hall)
5. Has the group experienced any problems finding or maintaining suitable premises?
6. How is the group run? (e.g. by parent committee, by or in partnership with the local authority, by a registered manager)
7. How is the group promoted and publicised?
8. What numbers usually attend? (of parents/carers? How regularly do people attend?)
9. Children under 18 months? Children 18 months to 3 years? 3-5?
10. Do parents/carers stay with children?
11. Has attendance increased or decreased in the past year? In the past three/five years?
12. What was the impact of Covid? Did you run activities online? Was it difficult to start up again?
13. Do you feel that the group is sustainable? (in terms of attendance, finances, premises, staff, etc. – explain any concerns)
14. What happens when children turn 3? Is there the possibility to attend a Gaelic nursery (sgoil-àraich)?
15. How many staff are employed by the group?
16. How many staff are voluntary?

17. How many are full-time? Part-time? (details of hours)
18. What are the roles of different staff? (probe for details if titles are unclear)
19. What training do different staff have? (three categories: academic, education/care, and Gaelic)
20. Are you satisfied with the availability and appropriateness of relevant training and Continuing Professional Development?
21. Why/why not?
22. What language backgrounds do staff have? (e.g. native speaker/fluent speaker/learner)
23. How long have staff been involved in the group?
24. Has the group experienced any difficulty in recruiting or retaining staff?
25. What are the aims of the group? (including mission statement if available)
26. Is the group directed more towards parents or more towards children?
27. What are the group's specific goals for children and/or parents in terms of language use?
28. What are the group's specific goals for children in terms of other development (physical, intellectual, language, emotional, social)?
29. What Gaelic resources does the group have access to? Where do you access them from (websites etc)?
30. Are you satisfied with the available resources? Why/why not? How could things be improved?
31. Of the parents/carers who attend, what proportion are fluent speakers? Intermediate learners? Beginning learners? Not learners?
32. Are there suitable opportunities for parents to learn Gaelic? What are the main ones used?
33. Do you support parents/carers to use Gaelic at home?
34. How? (e.g. providing resources, signposting to websites)
35. Do you feel well-supported? (in general)

36. Who do you receive support from? What kind of support? How often? (e.g. Early Years support workers)
37. Do you work with the local authority, either through education or community life and leisure? How?
38. Do you work with other local groups (either Gaelic or early years)? How?
39. How do you work with Comann nam Pàrant? In what ways?
40. Do you receive information about national and local initiatives from Comann nam Pàrant?
41. Do you feel the quantity and quality of this information is satisfactory? Why or why not?
42. Do you feel well supported by Comann nam Pàrant? How could this be improved?
43. Do you work with Bòrd na Gàidhlig? How?
44. Have you used BnG's early years toolkit? How? How did you find it?
45. Do you feel direct funding received from Bòrd na Gàidhlig is sufficient? How do you use this funding?
46. Have you applied to the Early Years Fund for the current year (2023-24)?
47. Do you feel Bòrd na Gàidhlig's Early Years Scheme easy to work with?
48. Have you received funding from the Bòrd's Taic Freumhan Coimhearsnachd scheme? E.g. for classes for parents. Were you aware of this opportunity?
49. Do you access any other funding sources? Did/does Bòrd na Gàidhlig support you to access these? Did/does Comann nam Pàrant?
50. Have you received any support from Bòrd na Gàidhlig or elsewhere with regard to committee procedures, insurance, inspection, publicity, or other issues?
51. Have you received or been made aware of training opportunities from Bòrd na Gàidhlig? Which and when?
52. Overall, how satisfied are you with the support received from Bòrd na Gàidhlig?