**Sabhal Mòr Ostaig**

Sabhal Mòr Ostaig is the National Centre for Gaelic Language and Culture on the Isle of Skye. It is the only HE organisation in Scotland that delivers its complete full-time degree programme through the medium of Gaelic, including our initial teacher training programme. We are one of the lead organisations involved in the Gaelic revival in Scotland, conducting research on the health of the language throughout the county, and also research on the provision of Gaelic education on all levels, and we are also the natural destination for high-school graduates (both learners and fluent speakers) seeking to continue their education at the university level through the medium of Gaelic.

Over the past several years we have seen a worrying decline in applications to our degree programmes, both from learners and from fluent speakers, and this is in direct contrast to the continued growth of Gaelic medium education (GME) at the primary level:

All the current data indicates that the Gaelic language in Scotland is in severe decline, and to reverse this decline, we urgently need to accelerate the growth of Gaelic education at all levels. Unfortunately, the trend at the high-school level is in the opposite direction. The numbers studying for a Gaelic learner qualification in high school has decreased by 72% since 2012, while the numbers studying Gaelic as fluent speakers over the same period has remained almost unchanged (-1.1%), while the numbers in GME at primary level have been steadily increasing.

We believe from our consultations with School staff that the narrowing of subjects to a maximum of six subjects at National 5 is the main factor causing this trend. Others cited include a shortage of Gaelic teachers, local-decision making on teacher replacement and recruitment, and curriculum time-tabling. The structure of the Senior Phase of the Curriculum for Excellence and local decision-making are, therefore, undermining the national Gaelic
policy as written in the National Gaelic Language Plan 2018-23 and National Advice on Gaelic Education for local authorities. They also run contrary to John Swinney’s aim for a faster rate of progress in the expansion of Gaelic education across Scotland.

In our discussions with high-school students, it has been made clear to us that time-tableing and a lack of subject choices is the single most important factor militating against studying Gaelic beyond Nat. 5 and continuing on with Gaelic to the university level and our own numbers confirm this.

We have seen an over-all decline in applications to the first year of our degree programmes and this decline has been particularly steep in the last three years. It is our goal as an organization to always be expanding our provision and increasing the number of students who successfully graduate from our programmes. Our success in this respect is critical for the over-all success of the Gaelic revival. At Sabhal Mòr Ostaig we train the next generation of teachers, broadcasters, language-planners, and creatives who will secure a sustainable future for the language into the 21st century, but we cannot perform this crucial role if students stop studying Gaelic early in high school before they ever have a chance to come to the college.

The growth of Gaelic education in Scotland has heretofore depended to a large extent on the goodwill of local councils, but it is clear that councils are often ambivalent, and sometimes even hostile to Gaelic provision in their schools, and that if Gaelic education is to grow at a pace that will guarantee a future for the language, national leadership is required. Other regions in Europe such as the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC) in Spain have succeeded in growing provision in their indigenous languages remarkably quickly. As just one measure of how dramatically provision can grow with the correct combination of political will, funding, and strategic planning, in 1976 less than 5% of primary and secondary teachers in the BAC could teach through the medium of Basque, but with generous bursaries and incentives to learn Basque, most teachers retrained, and by 2007, 85% of primary and secondary teachers in the BAC were qualified to teach in Basque (Gorter et al. 2014):
In contrast, it is clear that the development of Gaelic education at the high-school level is going in the wrong direction, and that for purely structural reasons, fewer and fewer students are opting to study Gaelic in the upper years and onto university. Since the publication of *Inbhe Thèarainte dhan Ghàidhlig* (Secure Status for Gaelic) by the Gaelic development body, Comunn na Gàidhlig, in 1997, which recommended a statutory right to Gaelic education, the Gaelic community has been consistently agitating for such a right wherever reasonable demand exists, and the data above makes clear that this right should include the right to study Gaelic in high school without jeopardising other subjects they may wish to pursue.

Data: