

Firstly can I say that this is an excellent document with very good structure and a high level of detail.

Although I didn't see any emotion and I think heaps of passion and pride are going to be required to make a difference.

It may be that my response is not nearly as structured and that some of my comments are already covered and others belong in the implementation phases instead of the planning phase but bear with me.

By way of brief introduction, I am an English born son of an East coast Scot. Our Forbesees of old would probably have spoken Gàidhlig but not for several hundred years.

I have been interested in the language since I was a teenager(now 42) and tried many times to teach myself without a great deal of success. My biggest hurdles have been a) Having no one to correct me and teach me and not being able to find much spoken Gàidhlig to listen to - I have now found a discussion group meeting fortnightly in Cambridge, and b) despite being educated to degree level, I managed to learn almost no grammar - you will know better than I that Gàidhlig is a very strict grammatical language whereas English has all but lost any grammar that there was - certainly it is not taught in most English schools any more. My children have no idea what genitive and dative mean.

My comments fall broadly into the following 5 categories:-

The decline

The causes

Stemming the decline

Focus on supporting current speakers, learners and their groups/societies,

Grow the pool of speakers and learners

COMMENTS

1. The decline

Page 5 of the plan -The Background - Last paragraph.

Population of the Western Isles is falling - and will always be so, especially young people will want to get out and see more of the world as well as search for better employment opportunities usually in areas where they cannot use their native language so they start to lose it. At the same time the community that they left loses the next generation.

The population decline is why any effort concentrating on the Hebrides will surely fail. If the rest of Scotland cannot be persuaded to take up their language then this fantastic opportunity becomes nothing more than delaying the inevitable.

2. The causes of the decline

English of course is rapidly becoming the world's language and people from different countries cannot communicate without it. We can't all speak 10 different languages but we can speak our own plus English. We have all heard Germans and Greeks/Spanish having to speak English to understand each other. In Berlin, Prague, Budapest etc., English is the trendy language and English shop signs and slogans are everywhere. So much so that some of those countries are having to take measures to protect their own languages.

This is both an advantage and a disadvantage for native English speakers. we don't have to learn the international language, we are born into it but we also have no private language. On holiday in Cyprus my daughter and I were speaking to each other and were aware that the Italians on the next table could speak to the waitress in Greek but also understood what we were saying and were talking about us. I switched to pidgen Gàidhlig to confuse them and make my daughter

smile as well as referring to their rude child as droch isean after my daughter complained that they would understand me calling him a brat. Why shouldn't we have a private language? Maybe this could be used as a motivation for people to learn. Some Scots often declare that they hate the English, maybe they should stop using their language then, whatever angle works.

I am very hopeful about the plan but think it is exceptionally ambitious as I can see big problems, problems that other minority languages do not face. Firstly there is the East / West divide, my own cousins, Grandfather and his brothers of Auchmithie, Arbroath, Dundee refer to the language of "them over there" meaning the Highlands and think/thought it has nothing to do with them despite the origins of the names of the places where they were born and lived all of their lives.

People need to be encouraged to 'own' the language, it is theirs, keep it, develop it, use it instead of ignoring it or trying a bit like we do French at school but not really progress it.

Secondly there seems to be some kind of shame attached to being a speaker - is that historical from the ban? or something else?

I know a lady who covers her books so she can read them on the train without people asking awkward questions. Can you imagine an Arabic reader doing that? Do I tell all my mates that I am learning Gàidhlig? No, why not? I don't know I can't explain.

Irish used to be associated with poorly educated rural folk in the South and West and was regarded as a yokel, backward language at one time but now can be heard in Dublin pubs, spoken by young students bringing pride back to the language. Welsh does not seem to have ever suffered from the same attitude, speakers have always been fiercely proud and rightly so. That is what Gàidhlig needs.

Has anyone done any research into why Scots don't / won't speak Gàidhlig and investigated the quoted reasons? They must know it exists but are simply not interested?

Page 6 - Edinburgh Gàidhlig speakers use it only infrequently - they need pride not hide.

3. Stemming the decline

It is essential to implement measures to link up isolated pockets of speakers and learners (abbrev. SAL) using modern and well developed resources such as satellite tv and the Internet which are available to as many people as possible. It is important to remember that apart from the quoted number of SAL in Scotland there are also individuals and groups in the rest of the UK, Ireland, Europe, Canada and (dare I say) America. etc.

There is only a population of 5m in Scotland which includes a significant immigrant population who bring their own languages and will never learn Gàidhlig.

Moreover, many many Scots leave to join the armed forces or move to England and further afield for better job prospects and they should not be discounted from these efforts since they will still want or need access to their roots. Support should be solicited from wherever it can since, as you say, the language is in a perilous state.

There was an Internet forum on www.savegaelic.co.uk which included people from all over the world as well as Scots in Scotland and England but unfortunately it is in private hands and after negative comments following the decision to put the site up for sale the forum was closed thus removing the benefit for isolated SAL.

I found that forum very useful but what we need is an official replacement (maybe Government or BBC hosted) that is not subject to the whims of a privately run business.

Alliances with Welsh and Irish language organisations for support would be desirable - strength in numbers and all that. Maybe Celtic language societies would bring more support. Welsh has enjoyed a very successful revival and Irish has its university strongholds as well as Government support.

Has Gàidhlig got equal rights with Welsh on this Island? I suspect not. Whenever I receive DVLA information I see it is in English and Welsh.

My last council leaflet came with an offer to translate it into one of 15 languages (not including Welsh) consisting of some in alphabets I can't recognise but also Arabic, Chinese, French for French speaking Africans, Thai, Spanish, Polish and Russian.

What would be my chances of getting a Gàidhlig copy?

Gàidhlig needs greater protection and support than this, greater emphasis needs to be placed on the 3 languages that belong here if they re not to die and be replaced by others.

All Governement public information leaflets should be available in any of the 3 languages or available on request.

4. Focus on supporting current speakers, learners and their groups/societies,

The BBC do a great job as far as I can see but their Gàidhlig efforts are still junior to the Welsh offering which grates a bit with me and should not be the case. The Welsh BBC site and news site look very much like the English equivalents whereas the Gàidhlig site is still quite basic.

The reason for this is clearly the number of speakers the sites are maintained for and the size of the pool of speakers who can help run and update the sites.

In a similar way, at the last count, SKY had 34 Asian channels, 1 French, 1 German, 1 Spanish, 1 Portuguese, 1.5 Welsh and the smattering of Gàidhlig on BBC2 Scotland. Clearly this partly represents the size of the audiences but is also disproportionately unbalanced by certain communities who passionately defend their community, culture and language and are prepared to pay to support them. We have a lesson to learn here.

We also have an advantage, Gàidhlig belongs on this island and now has the protection of the Government but that is no use if nobody wants to use it.

5. Grow the pool of speakers and learners

A key opportunity is to interest young people and have them adopt it as a 'home' language and pass their knowledge down to their children, that is the only way the language will survive as a native language instead of being preserved as a dead one such as Latin.

People need more than a passing desire to learn the language they will need a strong urge, whether that is to prevent the language dying or so that they cannot be understood by English only speakers (or Asians, Polish or anyone else who have their own language) or whether it fits in with a passionate pride of being Scottish, a Gael or Celtic.

A start could be to introduce those who show an interest to some choice everyday phrases that can be thrown into an English conversation rather like planting a seed. How often does pòg mo thon get thrown around?

Gàidhlig needs to be seen as "Cool" but how is that achieved? I firmly believe pride needs to be re-established and the young need to be targeted most. This is their language to own, use, protect and maybe keep amongst themselves. It might be desirable to engineer a feeling of being left out for those who cannot understand any as an extra incentive.

They will need to see it, hear it, understand it, write it and speak it in that order - it needs to be visible everywhere.

The Internet has Gàidhlig gu leòr but television badly needs to follow. It can easily be read but it is much more difficult to find some to listen to. We need to be able to hear and read the language at the same time because Gàidhlig is not a phonetic language like Welsh.

It may also be necessary to consider further simplification to make the language easier to learn so that it does not put off learners in the early stages. I find silent, lenited consonants difficult, especially words beginning with fh that sound like they could be spelt a number of different ways and could mean a number of different things - or is it me?

Clearly, there needs to be only one standard. BBC Gàidhlig if you like. Has enough work been done to establish a standard and then promote it over regional differences which need to conform so as not to confuse learners as soon as they visit/move areas and find they can no longer converse.

P12 speaking in the home - children naturally bring language from school into the home so that phrases are picked up by the whole family e.g. Danke schon etc. - why not moran taing instead?

It is necessary to guard against those who would argue that teaching Gàidhlig or teaching THROUGH Gàidhlig will detract from the quality of other studies and lead to an overall poorer education. Maybe exam passes should carry more points if taken through Gàidhlig since twice as much learning has been done (for non-native speakers). This could be an incentive for students to opt FOR GME to maybe give them an edge over students purely taught in English when it comes to University admission competition?

This already happens in some areas, when I took my professional ITIL exams any non-native English speaker (especially Dutch people) could write that fact at the top of their exam paper to be given some allowance for not being able to express themselves as well as others.

Another danger to guard against is those who might argue that there are too few Gàidhlig speakers left to bother about.

P16 - signs in the workplace - excellent idea, it will sink in sooner or later, much like Mnà and Fear on the toilet doors seen in an Irish club in England.

I hope some of this is helpful and hope that you/we are very successful.

Rick Forbes