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Gaelic in post-devolution Scotland:

A new era of Gaelic language policy and
revitalisation?

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Steven Kellow – ID: 51229970

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Introduction

“There shall be a Scottish Parliament” were the opening words of the Scotland Act 1998 that ushered in the era of devolution in Scotland. In a referendum the previous year, 74% of the electorate opted to devolve a range of new powers to Edinburgh after a long political struggle.

After being “re-convened” for the first time in 300 years on the 12th of May 1999, the Scottish Parliament set to work on re-shaping Scotland in the policy areas that were devolved to better suit what MSPs believed to be the needs of the public and the nation.

Gaelic speakers were accustomed at this point to long political struggles with the powers-that-be at Westminster on behalf of their language and culture, and many viewed the Scottish Parliament as a brand new opportunity to secure Gaelic’s future within Scottish society.

The “Gaelic renaissance” that began in the 1960s saw a new wave of activism by the Gaelic community to encourage politicians to intervene and protect the language, which had been in decline for generations. Through campaigning efforts, legislation to formally introduce Gaelic-medium Education and broadcasting was enacted in the 1980s and 1990s. It was hoped that a Scottish Parliament would bring further opportunities to legislate for Gaelic.

This dissertation will examine the progress made in developing Gaelic language policy and status in Scotland since 1999 and determine whether devolution has enhanced Gaelic’s position within Scottish society.

The first chapter will investigate what the positions and beliefs of political actors in Scotland have been towards Gaelic before and after devolution, including that of the Labour/Liberal Democrat-led Scottish Executive and the SNP Scottish Government, as well as evaluating the roles of the opposition parties and wider political culture – with the aim of analysing Gaelic’s position within Scotland’s new political era.

The second chapter will examine the legislation that has been specifically drafted to promote and sustain Gaelic, in particular the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act of 2005, and compare with pre-devolution attempts to legislate for the language, evaluating the relative impact that it has had.

The final chapter will discuss the status of Gaelic within Scotland today and review the effects of devolved decision making in improving Gaelic’s presence within Scottish public life.

Throughout the dissertation, the aim is to study both the input factors that have created change for Gaelic, such as the institutional values of the Scottish Parliament and a new found sense of Scottish identity that it has brought to the country, as well as the output factors that have changed the way in which Gaelic is seen across Scotland.

The dissertation ultimately hopes to evaluate what the Scottish Parliament era of Scottish politics has done for the Gaelic language and its’ community, and whether or not it has succeeded in advancing the Gaelic cause.

Gaelic in the devolved political arena

The creation of a devolved political arena where Scottish issues could be debated and legislated for ultimately changed the way in which Scotland's political parties prioritised their policy platforms. This meant that parties in Scotland could now propose and implement policies of major consequence in areas such as health and education that the electorate could judge them on. It also provided control over other areas of cultural significance to Scotland, with one of them being Gaelic, which allowed for legislative influence over Scottish society.

This chapter will discuss Scotland's political parties' stances on Gaelic-related issues and define how they have changed with devolution. It will examine the role Gaelic has played within devolved party politics and evaluate whether the language has been better represented in the new era. It will also investigate Gaelic's role within other political elements of post-devolution Scotland, most notably in the debate over Scottish independence, and whether the language has constituted an important part of political discussion.

Party attitudes towards Gaelic

An analysis of party behaviour in Scotland by Hepburn showed that while Gaelic was a policy area in which parties seek to engage, it constituted merely a "valence issue" in the grand scheme of Scottish politics. (2014: 12) This is because of its relative population size and the existence of other "dialects" and languages in the country such as "Doric... and Scots or 'Lallans'". (ibid.)

All parties believe Gaelic "should be recognised and protected" but also that it "should not be imposed on the Scottish population". (ibid.) This attitude is further

explained by the understanding that “Gaelic is an important, constituent part of Scotland’s culture” but not “central to its identity”. (ibid.: 13)

The conclusion of this study was that the Scottish National Party (SNP) was the “owner” of the “language question”, being the most supportive of Gaelic’s position in Scottish society, with Labour and the Liberal Democrats being “previous owners” due to their current positions on maintaining the language and their efforts whilst in Government. The Scottish Conservatives were deemed to be least supportive of the language, stemming from their position of being “critical of funds allocated” to Gaelic causes although still in favour of its’ revitalisation. (Hepburn, 2014: 22)

These positions also fall in line with findings in other cultural paradigms such as multiculturalism, where the SNP were now the “owner” while Labour and the Liberal Democrats were sympathetic “previous owners”. (ibid.: 21) This indicates that party positions in relation to Gaelic appear to come from parties’ wider social views for Scotland rather than an innate desire to maintain Gaelic culture.

This party support translates into wider public opinion regarding Gaelic, as “those who are more pro-Gaelic seem to be more inclined to identify with the SNP than any other political party on both UK and Scottish levels.” (Chhim & Bélanger, 2015: 5) The reverse of this relationship is also true, with SNP supporters more supportive of Gaelic, as shown by data from the 2012 Scottish Social Attitudes Survey:

	Conservative	Labour	Liberal Democrat	Scottish National Party	Green Party	Other	Total
Not at all	14.5	9.2	10	9.3	12.5	17.4	10.9
Where it already is	67.8	56.8	72.9	45.5	41.7	52.2	55.9
Everywhere in Scotland	17.1	32	17.1	43.8	45.8	26.1	31.4
Don't know	0.7	2	0	1.4	0	4.3	1.8
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
N=	152	403	70	290	24	23	1229

Table 1. “Which political party do you think you would be most likely to support?” vs. “View of encouraging use of Gaelic in Scotland?” (NatCen, 2012)

Interestingly, these figures show a continuation of party-related attitudes from a 1981 survey for An Comunn Gàidhealach where:

“in almost every case SNP voters were most supportive, followed by Liberals and SDP, Labour was intermediate, and Conservatives and those with no clear voting intention evidenced least support of all.” (Mackinnon, 2011: 5)

These findings collectively show that there is a historic and sustained connection between party identity and support for Gaelic, and one that has not significantly altered since the advent of devolution. These public beliefs form a cyclical relationship with political decisions on behalf of the parties themselves. This has led to the establishment in MSPs’ attitudes towards Gaelic whereby they themselves “attributed ownership over the issue of Scottish languages to the SNP”. (Chhim & Bélanger, 2015: 5)

Gaelic manifesto pledges in Scottish Parliament elections

While these general themes describe the political parties of Scotland’s attitudes towards Gaelic and provide political context to the post-devolution status of Gaelic,

they do little in providing explanatory depth compared with the initiatives they have proposed for moving the language forward.

Gaelic has featured in the manifestos of major parties in all four previous Scottish Parliament elections, although with widely varying endeavour in displaying a vision for the language.

The Scottish Conservatives, Scottish Liberal Democrats and SNP all featured commitments in their 2003 manifestos to place the newly established Bòrd na Gàidhlig on a statutory footing, which was ultimately achieved by the Gaelic Language Act passed in 2005 with cross-party support. (Scottish Conservatives, 2003: 17; Scottish Liberal Democrats, 2003: 21; SNP, 2003: 18)

However, the major opposition parties at the time, the Scottish Conservatives and the SNP, both made promises in their 2003 manifestos to introduce a much stronger commitment to Gaelic-medium Education. The Scottish Conservatives said that: “Where there is a demand, [they would] also allow parents, teachers and communities to set up their own schools with state funding” (2003: 16) while the SNP said they would “guarantee in law the right to a Gaelic medium education at primary level, where demand exists”. (2003: 12) Had these proposals made their way into the Gaelic Act of 2005, it would have marked a significant expansion of Gaelic-medium Education, but they were not adopted by the Labour/Liberal Democrat Executive.

Despite the 2003 promise of a “guarantee” to Gaelic-medium Education, which was copied almost verbatim – with the word “reasonable” being prefixed to “demand” – in their manifesto for their successful 2007 election campaign (SNP, 2007: 53), the

SNP have been extremely muted in their legislative action towards Gaelic, as is discussed in the following chapter.

More recently, rather than concrete policy pledges, parties have stated general support towards Gaelic. In 2011 the Scottish Conservatives said they “remain committed to the promotion” of Gaelic; the Scottish Green Party said they “recognise the cultural benefits of supporting” Scotland’s languages; the Scottish Labour Party said they “support opportunities for learning Gaelic... [and] will encourage Gaelic broadcasting, Gaelic arts and increased visibility for the Gaelic language”; the Scottish Liberal Democrats said they will “support Gaelic-medium Education where there is demand” and the SNP said they “will promote the acquisition, use and status of Gaelic”. (Scottish Conservatives, 2011: 27; Scottish Green Party, 2011: 19; Scottish Labour, 2011: 88; Scottish Liberal Democrats, 2011: 26; SNP, 2011: 33)

These statements, from each of Scotland’s five largest parties, are almost identically vague about their platform for Gaelic, with none identifying a single actionable policy. While Scotland’s political parties still consider Gaelic to be an issue worth raising in their manifestos, it is not one that they are highlighting as part of their campaign.

The underlying theme, therefore, of manifesto commitments towards Gaelic is that of grand but tokenistic pledges that promise much but deliver little. The position of the SNP as “owners” of the Gaelic question can only be justified by their stronger rhetoric on the issue as their actions have been far less powerful.

Gaelic has cross-party support, but no party that has taken the issue forward firmly both in principle and in practice, which has resulted in minimal progress for the language's position in policy since devolution. Indeed, the language's strong cross-party support "might actually be considered a warning sign" in that with no strong debate on the issue it has been relegated to a lower status than is necessary to provide strong, impactful legislation. (McLeod, 2005: 19)

Gaelic and the independence referendum

Gaelic's presence within normal political life therefore is minimal and rarely used as a party political issue. This has also been the case during the defining debate of the devolution era surrounding Scottish independence.

The SNP Government's 'manifesto' for independence was published in November 2013 in the form of a white paper entitled *Scotland's Future*. This contained details of how they envisioned an independent Scotland would be run, and included specific information about the role that Gaelic would have in Government and society.

The following is a passage which outlines the ministerial oversight the Government planned to introduce for Gaelic:

"The Cabinet Secretary for Education will have responsibility for primary, secondary, further and higher education, as well as Gaelic and Scots."
(Scottish Government, 2013: 49)

This proposal would actually remove the present Minister for Scotland's Languages post, which was previously a role called Minister for Gaelic before the remit was expanded to include promotion of Scots. The Minister for Gaelic position itself was a very late invention of the pre-devolution era, with Labour's Brian Wilson being appointed to the post after their UK General Election victory of 1997, but the role

has proven to be an important feature of accountability between the Government and the Gaelic community.

A further section of the white paper went on to describe what role Gaelic would have in the legislative agenda of an SNP Government of an independent Scotland, stating:

“We plan to create a secure future for Gaelic in Scotland by increasing the numbers learning, speaking and using Gaelic, through Gaelic education in all sectors and all stages such as early years, primary and secondary education. We will continue our support for the work of Bòrd na Gàidhlig in promoting the use of Gaelic in Scottish public, cultural and community life. In addition, we will maintain our support for MG ALBA, which has brought significant benefits for Gaelic.” (ibid.: 334)

Whilst a firm statement of commitment to Gaelic, there is no suggestion that these measures would go beyond anything that the SNP have proposed for the language in the devolved Scottish Parliament. This again shows a particular lack of conviction with regards to Gaelic.

The Scottish Government published a Gaelic version of the white paper, albeit a truncated 49-page summary of its contents rather than a full translation. Rather interestingly, this version did not include any detail whatsoever towards what the language’s position would be in an independent Scotland, with the word “Gàidhlig” being completely absent from the document. (Scottish Government, 2013)

Although there was an effort towards setting out a position for Gaelic in an independent Scotland it was far from a priority and the tokenistic publication of a Gaelic version of the white paper was even so brief as to ignore the language it was written in and the community to which it was targeted.

It is of note that some sources did both use Gaelic and address it as a referendum issue during the independence campaign.

The popular pro-independence information resource the *Wee Blue Book*, published by prominent online blogger Wings Over Scotland, was translated fully into Gaelic as *An Leabhar Beag Gorm* and received a significant circulation throughout Scotland, setting out the arguments for an independent Scotland through the medium of the language. However, this publication again neglected to suggest how independence could further the position of the Gaelic. (Wings Over Scotland, 2014)

There was also online coverage of the language as a referendum point through modern media, such as articles on *Bella Caledonia* – although some of which particularly emphasised the lack of stature Gaelic has had within the campaigns (McLeod, 2014a) – and a debate held in the language at the University of Edinburgh that is featured on YouTube. (CeltScotVideos, 2014)

Therefore while the official Yes campaign and the SNP Scottish Government did not advance Gaelic as a major area of interest in the referendum campaign, as neither did the Better Together campaign or any of the parties opposed to independence, the issue was brought into the fray by several other sources. This shows that while the issue of Gaelic was considered relevant by some sections of society, its position was not of enough importance to be addressed more substantially by the official referendum campaigns.

What it shows more clearly, though, is that the most prominent voices in favour of advancing Gaelic's cause in the political arena continue to come from civic society rather than political parties, and that devolution has not provided the platform to

address Gaelic issues in the way that was first hoped by organisations such as Comunn na Gàidhlig when the Scottish Parliament was re-convened.

Discussion

Gaelic has not been a major issue in devolved Scottish politics and has been treated as a “valence issue” by major political parties. All parties believe in the maintenance and preservation of the language and its’ culture, and this has been displayed in the tokenistic presence within party manifestos that it has held that has gradually weakened since the first Scottish Parliament elections in 1999. No party, however, has taken on the Gaelic issue as a central tenet of their political platform.

The SNP are considered by the public and their political opponents as the party most amiable to the Gaelic cause, but as the following chapter will discuss, progress towards legislating for the language has seldom been a party political issue and therefore progress under their leadership has been lacking.

Gaelic was also largely absent from the independence referendum debate, meaning its role in the most consequential political decision in Scottish history was severely diminished.

On the whole, Gaelic has been largely eclipsed in devolved political discussion and this has had consequences for legislation on its’ behalf.

The Scottish Parliament and Gaelic public policy

The re-convening of the Scottish Parliament was a brand new opportunity for the creation of policies to cater for Scottish interests, and in the spirit of a new Scotland the hope among the Gaelic community was that devolution would bring about a new era of policy-making to protect and enhance Gaelic's status in modern Scottish society.

This chapter outlines the progression of efforts to legislate for Gaelic from 1980 through to the present day, whilst evaluating the impact that the devolution of powers to the Scottish Parliament made to those efforts.

It will also focus on the Gaelic Language Act 2005 and discuss the extent to which the Act delivers on the *Commun na Gàidhlig*'s aim of "secure status" for Gaelic as envisioned at the dawn of devolution.

Finally, the chapter will discuss the issue of funding for Gaelic institutions and how legislative action has impacted upon funding levels whilst explaining the role in which the UK Government has played in Gaelic's post-devolution position.

Gaelic legislation pre-devolution

Attempts to legislate for Gaelic long predate the Scottish Parliament, although the successes of bills aimed at a very small minority of the British population were understandably more limited within the UK Parliament.

The Education (Scotland) Act of 1980 was to provide the basis for teaching Gaelic in Gaelic-speaking areas but the committee considering the bill dismissed these provisions "by nine votes to six". (Caimbeul, 2000: 55)

A 1980 bill introduced by the MP for the Western Isles, the SNP's Donald Stewart, was debated and included provisions to officially designate Gaelic-speaking areas and that "anyone so wishing would have the right to use the language in legal proceedings", but it did not come to a vote due to a filibuster by a Welsh-speaking Conservative MP, Thomas Hooson. (Caimbeul, 2000: 54-55; Dunbar, 2005: 466)

A breakthrough came however in 1984 when "the Scottish Office established Comunn na Gàidhlig (CnaG)... to promote Gaelic language and culture and coordinate language policy". (Glen, 2010: 48) CnaG became a fundamental pressure group in lobbying politicians for legislative change on behalf of the Gaelic community and quickly became successful.

The ubiquitous Gaelic road signs were first permitted in legislation by the Road Traffic Regulations Act 1984 and the National Heritage (Scotland) Act of 1985 "permits financial support to be given to organisations for the promotion of the Gaelic language and culture." (Dunbar, 2005: 470)

Through successful lobbying by CnaG at Westminster, Gaelic-medium Education was established in 1985 and was further supported in 1986 with the passage of The Grants for Gaelic Language Education (Scotland) Act which funded "projects aimed at teaching Gaelic." (Glen, 2010: 48)

CnaG was also instrumental in advancing the cause of Gaelic broadcasting, which resulted in the "establishment of the Gaelic Television Fund...in 1992 for Gaelic broadcasting under the 1990 Broadcasting Act", giving the first legislative basis for a protected Gaelic broadcasting service as well as a major boost in funding. (MacLeod, 2008: 100)

These measures amounted to a piecemeal approach though, with Gaelic being a very marginal part of legislative consideration. Most of the policy provision made for Gaelic in the pre-devolution era was as a corollary to existing legislation “and therefore did not represent a comprehensive approach to protecting the Gaelic language”. (Glen, 2010: 48)

What can be observed though is that pre-devolution legislation has created a large section of the institutional framework through which Gaelic education, broadcasting and promotion exists today, “although they have been extended” and entrenched by further action since 1999. (MacLeod, 2008: 100)

The Scottish Parliament as an instrument for Gaelic development

The creation of the Scottish Parliament was widely recognised as a means through which Scottish political parties could bring Scottish solutions to Scottish problems. The campaign for a new Scottish Parliament throughout the late 1980s and 1990s capitalised upon a “growing sense of Scottish identity” and was hailed as an opportunity to “put in place a new sort of democracy in Scotland, closer to the people and more in tune with Scottish needs” by future First Minister Henry McLeish. (Brown, 2000: 543-550)

Various institutional factors of the Scottish Parliament’s creation created an environment more conducive to producing Gaelic-focussed legislation. The semi-proportional Additional Member electoral system used in Scottish Parliament elections improved “the representative nature of the Parliament” (ibid.: 551), which ensures the concerns of minorities are considered more thoroughly. The devolution of “low politics” elements such as “social policy, transport and the like” also meant

that the Scottish Parliament would have more focus upon issues that more closely affect people's day-to-day lives. (Bulpitt in Cairney & McGarvey, 2013: 6-7) The ability of the Scottish Parliament to create Non-Departmental Public Bodies was also key, as these "new agencies, civic institutions, special purpose bodies [such as Bòrd na Gàidhlig] and the like are becoming the new arenas of Scottish public service delivery" and form a more engaged governance that deals more closely with specific concerns. (Cairney & McGarvey, 2013: 147, parenthesis my own)

Therefore, the Scottish Parliament could scarcely have been better conceived as a vehicle through which Gaelic legislation could be introduced, debated, consulted upon, passed and ultimately implemented.

As such, the hope of the Gaelic community prior to the Scottish Parliament being re-convened was that the ongoing progress for Gaelic could be maintained and enhanced. This was particularly articulated by Comunn na Gàidhlig's "Secure Status" document published that year which was subsequently developed into a draft Gaelic Language Act in 1999.

This draft act contained some of the fundamental principles that ultimately formed the basis of the Gaelic Language Act 2005, including "an expression of the principle of equal validity for Gaelic and English in Scotland"; "an advisory body created... which is appointed by and answerable to the Scottish Executive" and "a body... which would have professional expertise with respect to the preparation of Gaelic language plans." (CnaG, 1999: 1-9)

Scotland's political parties engaged positively with CnaG's proposals and created a belief that "the aspirations of the Gaelic community" could be realised by the new politics that devolution could bring. (Caimbeul, 2000: 64-65; CnaG, 1998: 6)

The Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005

Undoubtedly the most important event for Gaelic in the devolution era has been the passage of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act in 2005. The Act can be said to have been a "significant step forward in legitimising the maintenance of Gaelic in Scotland, and providing a legal framework for its development" and has created an institutional recognition of Gaelic that has resulted in it being better funded than ever before. (MacLeod, 2008: 112)

The Act was modelled after similar language planning legislation enacted for other Celtic languages, most notably the Welsh Language Act 1993 and the Official Language Act 2003 in Ireland, which afforded the languages far more legal power and created institutions to protect them. (McLeod, 2005: 21-22)

In-keeping with Celtic precedent, the Act's main provision was putting the recently established Bòrd na Gàidhlig on a statutory footing, thus fulfilling the manifesto commitment of the Liberal Democrats from the 2003 election. (Dunbar, 2005: 472) This gave the Bòrd the power to implement policy for the Gaelic language independently of the Government which marked a paradigm shift in the way Gaelic-related issues were to be addressed.

The most powerful function given to Bòrd na Gàidhlig by the Gaelic Act was the ability to demand public authorities to produce a Gaelic Language Plan for their organisation to provide services in the language. (MacLeod, 2008: 110) This allows

Gaelic's presence within public life to be strengthened and institutionalised and ultimately means that more services are available in the language across the country, which is important in advancing Gaelic's status in Scotland.

This function is undermined, however, by the inability of Bòrd na Gàidhlig to demand enforcement of the Plans in the way that is afforded to the Language Commissioner roles in both Wales and Ireland. (Glen, 2010: 49; McLeod, 2014b: 7) The Scottish Government is ultimately the body that rules whether public authorities are meeting up to their obligations under the Gaelic Act. Without the oversight of a Commissioner, as was originally suggested in CnaG's 1999 Draft Language Act (1999: 9), the provisions of the Gaelic Act with regards to language plans are significantly weaker and do not effectively secure Gaelic's role within public life.

The "Act was supported by all political parties in the Parliament" and passed unanimously. (Paterson et al., 2014: 430) However, that cross-party support does not reflect a significant belief in the Gaelic community that the Act was not as strong as it could have been and failed in its' ultimate goals of securing Gaelic's future, with the legislation being "weak in comparison to language legislation in [other] jurisdictions." (McLeod, 2014b: 6) Responses to the Executive's consultation on the bill drew "more than 3,000 submissions... then the largest number for any legislative consultation since devolution" but despite comments being "largely negative", the legislation was not majorly altered to endow stronger powers to Bòrd na Gàidhlig. (McLeod, 2005: 21)

The weakness of the Gaelic Act is most apparent in that it gives Gaelic speakers themselves no further rights to use their language than they had already. (Dunbar,

2005: 478; McLeod, 2014b: 7) This is in spite of pressure from CnaG and “quite widespread willingness to accord rights” to it from the Scottish public at-large. (Paterson et al., 2014: 446) The Act is thought to have excluded such provision because the “Scottish Executive was concerned that this might allow claims for exclusive Gaelic use in all circumstances” (Glen, 2010: 49), which would have proven far more costly than the eventual compromise of “equal respect” status and Bòrd na Gàidhlig enforcement through language plans.

Therefore, judging the Gaelic Act from eleven years on suggests that while it provided a turning point for the language’s position in Scottish governance and society it failed to fully match the aspirations of the Gaelic community by providing it the “secure status” it needs to survive. It was an important step in Gaelic’s legislative journey, particularly in the context of what went before it, but not by any means a final one.

Gaelic in UK and Scottish post-devolution legislation

Despite the perceived weakness of the Gaelic Act, however, there have been very few significant measures to enshrine support for Gaelic in legislation. The only notable exception to this period of neglect was the inclusion of a Gaelic-medium section in the Education (Scotland) Act 2016 whereby “education [authorities] must decide to secure the provision of GMPE” (Gaelic-medium Primary Education) unless it is deemed unreasonable against objective criteria outlined in the Act. (Scottish Parliament, 2016) While falling short of the establishment of a right to Gaelic-medium Education, this is an important step that makes accessing it much easier for parents and children outwith the Gàidhealtachd. This, however, represents minimal progress for the language since the Gaelic Act of 2005, with the nine years of SNP

Government providing very little in the way of real progress, contrary to what the party's image as "owners" of the Gaelic issue would suggest.

Throughout the devolution era, the UK Government has phased out its involvement in Gaelic language policy, leaving the issue to the Scottish Government and Parliament instead.

As the competency of broadcasting remained reserved to the UK Parliament under the 1998 Scotland Act, the UK Government was still responsible for legislation to further Gaelic broadcasting, which had become one of the central institutions of the community.

The UK Government signed the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in 2000 and ratified it in 2001, which required that the Government "provides for special measures of support to such 'traditional' or 'autochthonous' linguistic communities" such as Gaelic, Welsh and Manx. (Dunbar, 2002: 102)

Provisions of this charter required national governments to provide a level of service to these languages, and these have become particularly important and relevant to Gaelic. One such provision was:

"to encourage and/or facilitate the creation of at least one radio station and one television channel in the regional or minority languages" (Moring & Dunbar, 2008: 38)

A Committee of Experts was tasked with evaluating the UK Government's existing efforts towards Gaelic in relation to this objective and reported that:

"In the case of Gaelic radio broadcasting, the Committee of Experts considered that the undertaking was only partly fulfilled, and in respect of television, they found that it was not fulfilled". (ibid.)

The Committee made several suggestions including ensuring that radio coverage was improved so that all areas of Scotland could receive Radio nan Gàidheal, which was deemed sufficient to bring the radio service up to standard.

However, for television the experts deemed that the existing coverage of Gaelic delivered by the BBC and STV was not sufficient and that “UK legislation dealing with broadcasting matters... did ‘not expressly provide for the promotion or establishment of a Gaelic TV channel’”. (ibid.: 39) Therefore they recommended that:

“compliance... requires more than simply creating a legal framework within which a channel can exist; it requires positive action (including where necessary funding)”. (ibid.)

This created a legal impetus, building upon existing social pressure, for a new Communications Act which was passed in 2003 to create *Seirbheis nam Meadhanan Gàidhlig*, now known as MG Alba, which would go on to facilitate the establishment of the BBC Alba digital television channel. This marked a major advance for Gaelic broadcasting and the language’s visibility across Scotland, and it is notable that this was set in motion by the UK Government and delivered largely by funding from the Scottish Government.

One of the developments of the Scotland Act 2012, which provided more powers for the Scottish Parliament on the recommendation of the Calman Commission, was that while broadcasting remained a matter reserved for the UK Parliament that the “Scottish (not UK) Government” would now be “responsible for payments to the Gaelic Broadcasting Fund.” (Cairney & McGarvey, 2013: 247)

This marked the beginning of the final withdrawal of the UK Government from funding the Gaelic language, which was completed in the Spending Review of Autumn 2015 as the Conservative Government cut their final £1 million of support for MG Alba. This gesture comes with “cultural and political symbolism” (Crichton, 2015) in retracting the UK Government’s support of Gaelic, which was instrumental in forming the broadcasting system that we have today. Ultimately, the Scottish Government announced that they would recompense MG Alba for the funding lost by adding an additional £1 million to their support for the organisation. (BBC News, 2016) This furthers the scenario whereby the Scottish Government is now funding Gaelic broadcasting but with no legislative oversight from the Scottish Parliament, creating a weakness of accountability for MG Alba.

The progression of Gaelic funding

In considering the progress made in legislating for Gaelic it is also helpful to understand the legal delivery mechanism, particularly in the way Gaelic projects have been funded.

The graph below shows and itemises UK and Scottish Government expenditure on Gaelic related projects from 1979 to 2016, with the solid vertical line indicating the point of devolution:

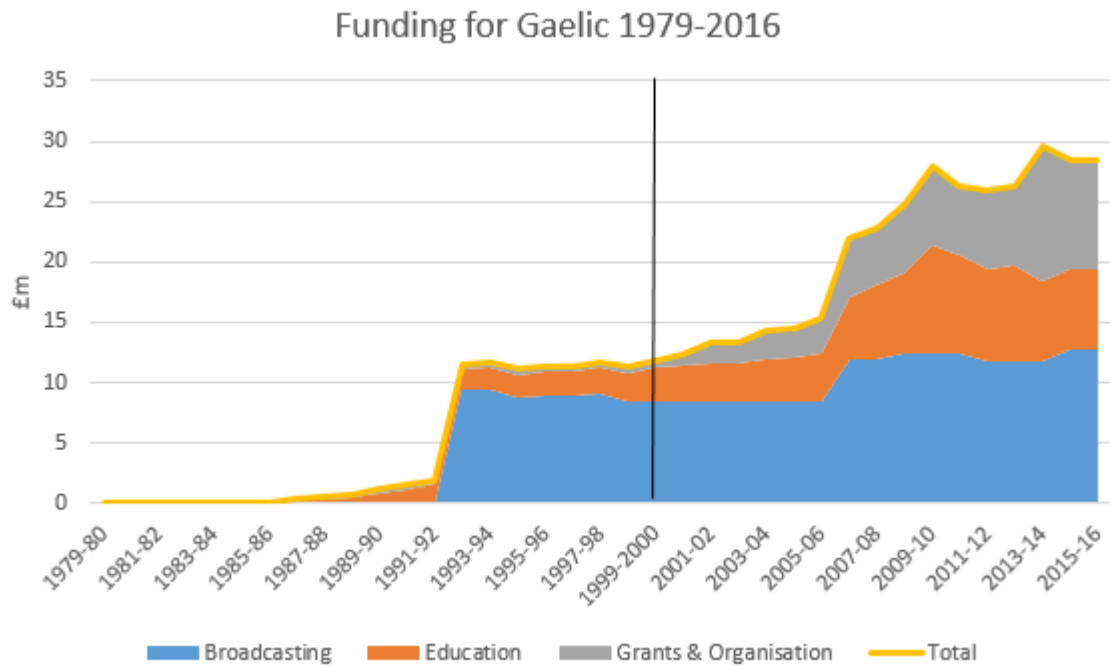


Figure 1. Scottish Office/Scottish Executive/Scottish Government funding for Gaelic 1979-2016. (Scottish Executive, 2000: 4; Scottish Government, 2016)

Spending on Gaelic was minimal until the Broadcasting Act 1990 was passed by the Conservative Government contributing £8 million towards the creation of a Gaelic Broadcasting Fund which assured the continuation of Gaelic programming on the BBC and support of the fledgling Radio nan Gàidheal service. (Cormack, 1995: 277)

The graph shows that the levels of funding for Gaelic have risen almost continuously through the post-devolution era, with a significant boost of 43% in the financial year following the passage of the Gaelic Act, as Bòrd na Gàidhlig's statutory establishment resulted in greatly expanded funding for the language. (Scottish Government, 2016)

This shows that there has been a much more concerted effort on a Government level to invest in rehabilitating Gaelic in the last two decades, and it is likely that having

the levers of power over cultural features including languages, as was delivered via devolution, was crucial in driving this funding increase.

In comparing the funding priorities of the Labour and Liberal Democrat Executive with the SNP Government, while the SNP have maintained a high level of funding for Gaelic and spending has increased by 25% since they came to power, the average annual funding increase is only 3.1% compared to the previous administration's 4.6% (excluding the year following the passage of the Gaelic Language Act). Furthermore, total spending on Gaelic-medium Education has only increased by 6.3%, and has fallen steadily since the 2009-10 financial year. (Scottish Government, 2016)

These figures do not suggest the SNP are as favourable to funding the Gaelic language as their position as the political "owners" of the language would suggest, however when considering the financial climate and that the Scottish Government budget has only grown by 1.3% in that time, the fact that the SNP have protected and increased funding for Gaelic is one that shows their commitment to the language. (Scottish Executive, 2006: 2; Scottish Government, 2015: 4)

Discussion

Devolution has created a renewed focus on developing public policy for Gaelic and resulted in significant new legislation that enshrines Gaelic's position in Scottish society. This new legislative action has also resulted in a large increase in funding for the institutions of the Gaelic community which has enabled them to further their revitalisation efforts and expand the roles of Gaelic-medium education and broadcasting in particular.

Despite the progress that has been made, though, the “aspirations of the Gaelic community” have not been fully realised as there are important caveats attached to the claimed success of measures such as the Gaelic Language Act. The provisions of the Act are weak and do not give Bòrd na Gàidhlig sufficient powers to enforce language planning in the public sector which hampers revitalisation progress efforts considerably. There has been little progress under the SNP Government to address this, although there has been a sustained level of funding for Gaelic organisations.

Therefore devolution has not quite ushered in the new era of public policy that was hoped for the language, although the Scottish Parliament does have the power to do so, and this has had an impact on the status of the language in Scotland.

Gaelic's status in modern Scotland

Regardless of how positive Scotland's political parties are towards Gaelic in their public statements and manifestos and regardless of the policies that the Government make and Scottish Parliament pass – the real measure of Gaelic's vitality is in its' use and status in Scotland.

This chapter will analyse the output effects of party and public policy on Gaelic within Scotland and determine whether the devolution era has had any effect on the precarious position in which Gaelic finds itself. It will discuss key performance indicators such as Census population figures, educational enrolment as well as public opinion to determine whether Gaelic's status within Scotland has improved since devolution.

Gaelic's population problem

One of the key indicators of Gaelic's status within Scotland is the strength of its' population, with "the concept of reversing language shift [being] the process whereby the contracting language-group reverses this process and gains in numbers." (MacKinnon, 2004: 110) With this in mind all organisations within the Gaelic community, from the grassroots to the Government, see growing the language base as a priority.

The number of people speaking and using the Gaelic language has been in perennial decline throughout the recorded history of Census data.

In 1991, the most recent census at the time of devolution, there were 65,978 Gaelic speakers across the country which declined by a further 11% to 58,652 speakers in 2001. (Scotland's Census, 1991 & 2001)

However, in the decade between censuses the developments of devolution do seem to have had an impact on speaker numbers. In 2011, there were 57,602 Gaelic speakers identified by the census – a drop of only 2%, which is the smallest decrease in Gaelic speaker numbers in over 30 years. (Scotland's Census, 2011)

Bòrd na Gàidhlig believe that the arrest in Gaelic's decline “can be largely attributed to the progress that we have seen in Gaelic-medium education” across the country. (Bòrd na Gàidhlig, 2014: 5) Census figures show that the number of under 20s who can speak Gaelic grew very slightly by 0.2% between 2001 and 2011, giving credence to the Bòrd's claims that there can be “hope and confidence as we look to the future.” (ibid.)

That hope and confidence is shared at the highest levels of the Scottish Government, as First Minister Nicola Sturgeon re-iterated whilst giving the annual Sabhal Mòr Lecture in 2015. There, the First Minister stated that the number of children beginning Gaelic-medium Education in Primary 1 had “increased by half” since the SNP Government came to power in 2007 and that she believed there was now:

“the opportunity in the coming decade to reverse, not just slow down the decline in Gaelic which for generations has seemed almost inevitable.”
(Sturgeon, 2015)

As discussed in the previous chapters, action is the most meaningful indicator of change rather than intention, and the nature of generational language shift is that it

will not be until the 2021 or 2031 censuses that we see real evidence of any change in direction for Gaelic language speaker numbers.

Bòrd na Gàidhlig's initial National Gaelic Language Plan set ambitious targets for the language into the future – with the aim of having 65,000, 75,000 and 100,000 speakers in 2021, 2031 and 2041 respectively. (Bòrd na Gàidhlig, 2007: 15)

While the rate of decline in the language base had indeed slowed between the 2001 and 2011 census, there is little evidence to suggest that there will be such considerable growth in the near future.

Gaelic-medium Education

Gaelic-medium Education is seen as one of the key processes through which speaker numbers can recover and has been expanded greatly in the post-devolution era. In 1999-2000 there were a total of 1,835 pupils in 59 primary and 13 secondary units. By 2013-14 this had expanded to 2,791 pupils in 62 primary units and 792 pupils in 36 secondary units. This amounts to a 52% increase in primary school numbers, which by any means is a considerable growth. (National Statistics, 2014; Robertson, 2000: 95-6)

However, there has only been a net gain of three primary schools built since 1999. While it has been a major achievement of the Scottish Parliament era that Gaelic-medium Education has been entrenched and strengthened, with the Gaelic Language Act 2005 and Education Act 2016 representing legislative progress, the expansion of provision is far from matching the requirements to replace speakers lost by failures of intergenerational transmission, with estimates that “the numbers enrolled... would

need to grow five-fold simply to maintain the existing Gaelic-speaking population.” (McLeod, 2014b: 8)

Therefore while the uptake of Gaelic-medium Education has been encouraging, the fragile and inconclusive progress that has been made thus far with regards to the language base is still far from sufficient to restore Gaelic to “a state of natural growth” as the Bòrd aim to do. (Bòrd na Gàidhlig, 2007: 15) Progress in other language acquisition areas outwith the school have been largely neglected. The institution of education within the Gaelic community has been strengthened, but perhaps by not enough to have initiated true revitalisation yet, certainly not on its own.

Gaelic and public opinion

The Scottish Social Attitudes survey data presented in Table 1 (p. 5) showed that there is broad support for the language, with more people believing that Gaelic should be encouraged everywhere in Scotland than that it should not be encouraged at all. However, it is clear that the majority of respondents believe the optimum level of support for Gaelic is to encourage it where it already is established, with that being understood as the Gàidhealtachd.

None of this evidence suggests that the changes in Scottish politics since devolution have particularly affected public opinion towards Gaelic, at least as a party political issue. This could be as a result of Gaelic's continued cross-party support since devolution.

However, general support for Gaelic and its role within the modern Scotland do appear to be “strengthened over a 30-year period” as Mackinnon’s survey analysis suggests:

	1981	2003	2011
Importance of Gaelic to the Scottish people and Scottish Culture	41%	68%	78%
Gaelic as important or relevant in Scotland nationally	70%	87%	86%
Availability of Gaelic in schools studies throughout Scotland	49%	66%	63%

Table 2. Gaelic's importance in Scotland. (Mackinnon, 2013: 15-16)

This suggests a much more positive public attitude towards Gaelic since the advent of devolution, one which can be attributed to a stronger Scottish identity and Gaelic being seen “by a large majority as being important to the heritage of the whole of Scotland.” (Paterson et al., 2014: 446) People now believe that “the Gaelic language contributes to constructing Scottish national identity symbolically.” (ibid.: 448) The position of Gaelic within society is becoming entrenched through what Bilig called:

“a ‘banal’ aspect of national identity, something in the background that impinges little on most people’s lives but which is taken for granted in quite a positive way.” (ibid.: 447)

Therefore, we can determine that attitudes from the Scottish public towards Gaelic have been more favourable since devolution – with cross-party public support and increased presence in public life creating a stronger position for Gaelic and for further progress towards the language’s revitalisation.

Gaelic’s public visibility

Bòrd na Gàidhlig’s power to demand public authorities to produce a Gaelic language plan has been an avenue through which Gaelic’s visibility has slowly gained ground

in public consciousness, which may indeed have had one of the most significant positive impacts for the language since devolution.

These language plans are created with consideration to the National Gaelic Language Plan published by the Bòrd whilst also requiring the “authority to set out its core commitments as to how it will use Gaelic in its internal processes and in dealing with the public”. (Dunbar, 2011: 163)

At present at least 25 different public authorities have active Gaelic Language Plans, including 10 local authorities – with Glasgow and Edinburgh city councils among them – and other national institutions related to education, tourism and heritage.

Despite limited resources, Bòrd na Gàidhlig has succeeded in its role of managing Gaelic language planning in the public sphere, which have contributed to “increasing the visible and audible profile of the language” and further entrenching the language in the national consciousness. (ibid.: 164)

However, existing Gaelic Language Plans can often be limited in scope and fail to deliver the “real, substantive changes” necessary for Gaelic’s preservation and despite a progression in the availability of Gaelic’s services across Scotland it still does not, “represent the step-change in provision...and for the use of Gaelic...that the present state of the language requires.” (ibid.: 165)

Discussion

Gaelic is still in decline even after seventeen years of devolved policy-making, and that suggests that either not enough progress has been made through legislation or that the Gaelic community’s revitalisation aspirations for devolution were too ambitious.

However, whilst Gaelic's decline is still ongoing there is evidence that it is slowing. Speaker numbers are still dropping but the rate has been dramatically reduced between 2001 and 2011, and coupled with the growth in Gaelic-Medium Education there is reason for optimism.

Gaelic has also benefitted from an increased status in public life through the language plans demanded by Bòrd na Gàidhlig, and despite some media criticism there is still widespread public support for the protection of Gaelic across Scotland.

It would be naïve to suggest that Gaelic was in a positive state, but true revitalisation of the language and its' community is closer now than it has been for decades.

Conclusion

Devolution has been a major development for Scottish politics by which parties can consider solutions to problems that are distinctly in line with Scottish values.

This development has also provided a range of new opportunities for Gaelic and its' continued revival, but the nation's political actors have not yet capitalised on them.

With Gaelic's relative position as a "valence issue" in national politics (Hepburn, 2014: 14), particularly in light of major political and economic events such as the financial crisis of the late 2000s and, of course, the debate over independence – this has meant that Gaelic has been minimised in its' priority in the Scottish Parliament thus far.

Cross-party support for Gaelic has been a blessing and a curse, as the general goodwill of parties has ensured that the issue is given tokenistic consideration in Parliament but the lack of political debate over the issue has meant that legislation has passed without enough political scrutiny which could have produced measures of real benefit to the Gaelic community. Public and civic society groups have tried to lobby for real, impactful change, but their efforts have fallen on deaf ears.

Figures show that major expansions in funding for Gaelic have come alongside new legislation for Gaelic, namely the Broadcasting Act 1990 and the Gaelic Language Act 2005. Funding has increased more steadily in the post-devolution era, showing the Parliament's renewed commitment to the language as a Scottish issue. This has been crucial in expanding institutions that have been vital in the Gaelic community, most notably in education and broadcasting and entrenching them further into public life.

The Scottish Parliament's creation has created a new avenue through which Gaelic could now be afforded status and protection in the way of rights for speakers, but this has been lacking from legislation. In particular, the symbolic creation of the Gaelic Act of 2005 is particularly weak in its provision of rights for the language's speakers, which fails to deliver the "secure status" that Gaelic civil society had hoped to gain from devolution.

Gaelic has taken on a larger presence within Scottish public life in the post-devolution era than it has had in generations, with important advances in Gaelic-medium Education and the establishment of a Gaelic media framework contributing massively. Bòrd na Gàidhlig's slow but steady progress in requiring public authorities to create Gaelic language plans has also shown signs of institutionalising Gaelic within the wider Scottish community. However, the decline of Gaelic's language base is still continuing and efforts to stall it have not proved to be as successful as hoped as of yet and this will be key in effecting a real revitalisation of the language.

Devolution has brought a new era of Gaelic policy making to Scotland, but not quite a resurgent revitalisation. Gaelic is still in serious jeopardy and despite the decline of the language being softened of late there is still a long way to go before the goal of "secure status" for Gaelic is fully achieved.

Gaelic's revitalisation, and even survival, requires strong support from Scotland's political parties who advocate and debate new legislation that provides far more rights for Gaelic speakers and responsibilities for Bòrd na Gàidhlig. Only then can it

really be said that devolution has delivered a new era for Gaelic and that secure status has been achieved for it through the Scottish Parliament.

But as we know, Gaelic speakers are accustomed to long political struggles, and they shall continue on in their quest for their language's cause.

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