

Chapter 8. Postscript

8.1. Policy towards GLAC in the period up to 1997

The most recent major review of the situation of the Scottish Gaelic speaking communities before the 2002 'MacPherson' report (MacPherson 2002), was the 1982 'Cor na Gaidhlig' report (MacDonald 1984) from the Highlands and Islands Development Board. Cor na Gaidhlig had the remit of advising the HIDB on the need and scope for more effective forms of help for developments in the Gaelic community in the Highlands and Islands, and led directly to the formation of the main Gaelic agency Comunn na Gaidhlig (CnaG), with as one of its main remits

“{working at} the interface between the linguistic, and the social, cultural and economic aspects of development” (MacDonald 1984: p6)

Amongst the proposals put forward within the report were:

- Exploiting the potential of Gaelic for tourism
- A study of the future implications of video and audio visual technologies for the health of the Gaelic communities
- Investigation of the market for Gaelic arts and culturally related objects, such as calendars, diaries, posters etc
- Development of an annual festival (in addition to the National Mod and of a different kind). This should encompass 'a wide range of Gaelic music and culture, and act as a shop front for all aspects of current communal activity and development'
- Close attention to the (then formative) 'Feisean movement'

Although GLAC was not yet appreciated as a possible motor for development, the report also recommended that

“cultural and linguistic dimensions should be considered along with social and economic factors in any realistic holistic view of community and regional development, and that accordingly that the HIDB should examine its development policies with a view to allowing these dimensions to feature in the consideration of development projects” (MacDonald, 1984: p 9)

Following the publication of *Cor na Gaidhlig*, 1993 saw a report on the Dynamics of Gaelic Development for Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the successor organisation to HIDB, where a call was made to ‘consolidate and increase the provision of Gaelic television’ (which had recently received its major boost in Gaelic related funding), and for the development of ‘Gaelic Tourism’ – closely integrated with recent developments in Gaelic arts and broadcasting. (Pedersen 1993). Where necessary, this would entail ‘effective training to be provided in a variety of areas from the acquisition of Gaelic, to skills appropriate to the emerging Gaelic industries’. The Dynamics of Gaelic Development also called for ‘strategic co-ordination through institutional support’ and for ‘an early review of how best to focus, co-ordinate and resource the management of Gaelic development to achieve maximum effectiveness’. The strategy subsequently adopted by Highlands and Islands Enterprise¹ had as its stated aim

“The development of the Gaelic language and culture as a means of raising self-confidence and stimulating economic and social development” (Lingard, Pedersen et al. 1993: Executive Summary)

Specifically, provision was to be made for:

- The Gaelic Arts as a means of reinforcing the creation of a new Gaelic broadcasting industry
- Gaelic development including training and business growth
- The integration of Gaelic into the tourist industry.

Following this, Comunn na Gaidhlig adopted as two of its priority areas, Cultural development, and Economic development, (together with Gaelic Education and Promotion). Within this, the development of the National Gaelic Arts Project² and the

¹ Lingard, R. A., R. N. Pedersen, et al. (1993). *Iomairt na Gàidhlig - A strategy for Gaelic Development in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland*, Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

² Now known as the Gaelic Arts Agency

Feisean were highlighted, with the acknowledgment that '*cultural expression is..an important driving force for economic development*' (Pedersen 1995) Again the development of Gaelic tourism was highlighted, with note being taken of the need to address both 'internal Gaelic tourism' – aimed at those already speaking Gaelic, and a 'volume market' comprising of visitors from outside the Highlands and Islands area, attracted by a hoped for growing interest in all things Gaelic and Celtic. In regard to Gaelic tourism, it was envisioned that this would be private sector led, but supported by funding partnerships involving the HIE and Scottish Enterprise networks and others.

The background to this focus on economic development was, an increasing appreciation of the opportunities afforded by the expanded Gaelic television coverage now coming on line. (Sproull and Ashcroft 1993)

8.2. Policy between 1997 – 2001

Following the election of the 1997 Labour Government, a series of positive policy changes and investigations were put into motion. For the first time, a Minister for Gaelic was appointed, one of whose first actions in relation to Gaelic Medium Education was to request HM Inspectors to re-examine their 1994 conclusion that '*expansion of Gaelic-medium provision at secondary level was neither desirable nor feasible in the foreseeable future*'. A report by Sproull and Chalmers published at the same time had also highlighted the interdependence of the Gaelic Arts and Gaelic Medium Education (Sproull and Chalmers 1998: p78) and called for further recognition of this by policy makers.

Similarly, an influential report for the Scottish Executive by Blake Stevenson Ltd on the role of the arts in regeneration, (Blake Stevenson Ltd 2000) gave high praise to the Gaelic community arts festival Ceolas, in a comparative study of regeneration through arts in Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow and South Uist. Quoting the conclusion of the Scottish Arts Council that arts could make a *crucial* difference to community development in fragile areas, and could be *pivotal* in regenerating areas, the report went on to award six out of seven possible positive outcomes to this event. Started by the Gaelic Arts Agency as an annual event in 1996, and now linked to the HIE's 'Initiative at the edge' strategy, Ceolas was a Gaelic arts led, community based

initiative aiming explicitly both to reinforce indigenous Gaelic arts and culture and to regenerate the area. Amongst other achievements it had won the Thistle award for excellence in cultural tourism, filled all available beds (600+) in the 'fragile' area of South Uist, over a period of one week, brought in almost £50 thousand extra spending to the area in this period, created a temporary 6 months job for one individual and 16 temporary jobs for the period of the festival and had also led to longer term community based initiatives, such as a language and music course at the local college. The original agency, the Gaelic Arts Agency was now planning a 'controlled exit strategy' (Blake Stevenson Ltd 2000:p90) as the festival was now considered to have embedded itself in the local community. Ceolas had been part of the Gaelic Arts Agency's *policy* which it hoped would be adopted at regional policy level as *strategy*. (Blake Stevenson Ltd 2000:93)

The provision of a Minister for Gaelic was carried over into the new Scottish Executive and Parliament upon its inauguration in 1999, where a programme for Government of the new Executive, 'Partnership for Scotland' specifically pledged support for the Gaelic language and culture. This agreement also stated that the Executive would work to achieve 'secure status' for Gaelic and would invest in Sabhal Mor Ostaig, the Gaelic College in Skye.

In addition to the above agreement, several key policy reviews relative to Gaelic related matters were also put into motion, including the Fraser report into Gaelic Broadcasting into the digital age (Fraser 1998), the Milne Task Force on Gaelic Broadcasting, (Milne 2000), and the MacPherson Report entitled 'Gaelic: Revitalising Gaelic a National Asset (MacPherson 2002). Subsequent to this, the Education, Culture and Sport Committee of the Scottish Parliament undertook a lengthy investigation into and report on the Gaelic Broadcasting Committee. (Scottish Parliament 2001). Finally in December 2000 a ministerial advisory group on Gaelic ('Magog') was set up with the aim of translating the vision encapsulated within the MacPherson report into a practical strategic plan for Gaelic, and for achieving consensus on the way forward for the language. This reported in May 2002 with Cothrom Ur don Ghaidhlig - A Fresh Start for Gaelic (Meek 2002) together with Plana Naiseanta na Gaidhlig - The National Plan for Gaelic from the same body. Some two

years earlier, the main Gaelic agency CnaG, had published 'Gaelic PLC – a Development Plan for Gaelic' with as one of its three main objectives "Developing the Gaelic Economy" (CnaG 1999). Within this objective was stated the aim of *'Including Gaelic as a clearly identified developmental resource within the strategies of Highlands and Islands Enterprise, and its Local Enterprise Network'* It is from within the perspective of these reports, and in light of the evidence presented by this thesis, that future policy may best be judged as to whether it is adequate to answer the demands of the coming period in terms of the economic development within Gaelic speaking areas.

8.3. Towards a National Plan?

The background to the growing volume of reports was an increasing concern that despite the work done since the late 1980s, it was by no means certain either that the future of the Gaelic language was secure, or whether the measures put in place to integrate the language art and culture with economic development, was sufficient or well targeted. In the words of the MacPherson report:

"Despite some significant successes, beneath a façade of well-being introduced by palliative measures, Gaelic is a critically ill patient on life support....the prognosis is bleak" (Scottish Executive 2001: p4)

Criticisms had also begun to be raised of how the strategy of integration of GLAC with economic regeneration had been carried out:

"initiatives have tended to be uncoordinated and haphazard, driven without guidance of theory or the control of planning. Resources have been allocated unevenly, with some fields receiving disproportionate funding and others being severely neglected." (Scottish Executive 2001: p4)

These findings echo some of the evidence suggested within this thesis regarding the uncoordinated nature of Gaelic support agencies in the period just previous to the collection of data. In addition, the willingness of the Civil Service to carry out the demands of their ministers regarding Gaelic related priorities was also severely criticised by former ministers, dissatisfied with delays in meeting previously agreed priorities.³

³ See 'Gaelic is being neglected' Brian Wilson MP, The Scotsman 22.5.2002

Crucially however, whilst initiating a widely welcomed review, a more negative aspect of the MacPherson report⁴. was its stated assumption that all existing centrally funded Gaelic support agencies would ultimately merge into the one body This initiated a major period of uncertainty for the organisations concerned, resulting in a form of ‘planning blight’ in the medium term.

The Meek report, far from showing complacency, had starkly criticised the contemporary delay in turning evidence and investigation into action:

“there was a feeling that the timetable had been extended at best, or that all parties had reneged on their commitment to legislate for the language....This situation was compounded by the absence of an overall development policy...There was a feeling that the “continuing review had retarded if not paralysed development” (Meek 2002:p16)

In a comprehensive review of the state of Gaelic, the Meek review acknowledged the existing uncertainty which the continuing period of review had caused and called for the establishment of an adequately funded Bòrd na Gàidhlig (Gaelic Development Agency) which (rather than subsume) would have power to *co-ordinate* Gaelic development including specifically mentioned *economic and social development* (Meek 2002:p7). The basis of the board’s work would be a *Plana Naiseanta na Gaidhlig* (National Plan for Gaelic), which called inter alia for a radical programme of “promotion and support for GME, reinforced through radio and TV output and widespread celebration and touring of Gaelic music, literature and drama” (Meek 2002:p23)

While recognising the key role which GME had to play in Gaelic development, the report called for effective holistic planning which required ‘synergy across and between all sectors including the arts, media, community development and social and economic development.’ (Meek 2002:p25). Gaelic education alone would not save the language, its survival needed cultural enriching and *socially and economically tangible* rewards – a conclusion which could draw strong support from evidence presented in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

⁴ Interview with Alan Campbell, Director, CnaG 2nd March 2003

To aid the 'normalisation' of the language, a national Gaelic cultural plan would be established, (Meek 2002:54) allowing a more focused strategy for cultural development, targeted training facilities, helping the Gaelic creative industries and their links with broadcasting, publishing, sport and heritage (again all issues identified as important in Chapters 4 – 6 of this thesis)

This would also mean the encouragement of entrepreneurial activity in Gaelic arts and culture and a radical shift in prominence afforded to Gaelic by Scottish tourist authorities (again issues identified as important by this author). The mechanism by which this would take place would be through the tendering for projects by existing Gaelic support organisations, thus safeguarding their integrity, whilst fitting in to a more coherent overall plan.

Specifically on the issue of economic and social development, a series of Gaelic community plans would be prepared in order to integrate Gaelic with the maximum spheres of activity possible – once more, this approach would find support from the evidence presented in this thesis where the emphasis has been on local *availability* and removing apparent mismatches from the market for GLAC related goods and services.

While the evidence provided by this thesis would clearly lend general support to the policy approach now being adopted at a macro level, there remain nevertheless significant areas of concern to the researcher regarding micro level policy.

Whilst marketing was flagged up as a significant matter of concern by several respondent organisations, it appears that some organisations have been more adept at seizing existing opportunities than others. For instance, not all organisations have reacted at the same speed to internet based possibilities, and the potentialities arising from new target audiences such as young people. Some significant successes are reported from organisations such as Macmeanmna⁵ and the Gaelic Arts Agency⁶, while other breakthroughs into GLAC related provision and its subsequent marketing (such as the very successful Speaking our Language series) have not

⁵ Interview with Arthur Cormack, director FnG, 4th March 2003

⁶ Interview with Malcolm MacLean, director Gaelic Arts Agency, 28th February 2003

originally emanated from the traditional Gaelic support organisations, but rather commercial organisations such as STV⁷.

Again with training, recognised as an area of weakness, it has nevertheless been possible for some organisations to assess these weaknesses and work to overcome them. An example of this is the Feisean nan Gaidheal which in order to cope with the negative impact of a dearth of skilled trainers in tutoring and music skills, entered into an agreement with the Scottish Arts Council for joint provision in a three year contract, with a training officer serving the needs of the Feisean on a part time basis, and the needs of the SAC the rest of the time. Similarly the Gaelic Arts Agency through its fast track training courses has also worked in partnership with others on this issue⁸. Where it has been adopted, this approach of individual organisations working jointly in order to buy in services seems to have offered some success even in a period of uncertainty. On the issue of co-ordination of agencies, apparent successes have been seen within the enterprise network, where more joint work has taken place between the majority of the LECs - now working much more strategically under the direction of HIE - and with money pooled from the Enterprise network, CnaG and Europe to fund the Gaelic in the community scheme⁹.

Thus it is clear that whilst great changes have been underway in the overall framework of Gaelic related provision, more enterprising strategies at a local level have continued to offer evidence of success.

8.4. Gaelic TV on standby

Like the other reports the Meek report gave full support to a digital channel for Gaelic (while acknowledging that responsibility for legislation regarding this continued to lie with Westminster as a reserved matter). This support reflected a growing consensus amongst most policy practitioners that *integral* to the

⁷ This of course is good in its 'mainstreaming' but shows possible weakness in conception from other more traditional areas or provision

⁸ Interview with Malcolm MacLean 28th February 2003

⁹ Interview with Arthur Cormack, 4th March 2003

development of Gaelic was the inauguration of a dedicated Gaelic digital channel, to be announced within the new communications bill¹⁰.

Despite the many and crucial positive achievements of the Gaelic media (as outlined above in Chapter 4) there was a growing realisation that fundamental problems still existed with this service which were now becoming more visible. This consensus had emerged mainly within the evidence given to the Scottish Parliamentary enquiry into Gaelic broadcasting (Scottish Parliament 2001:vol1; 2001:vol2)

In the view of the Gaelic Arts Agency (echoed by the BBC, independent producers and others), much of the positive impact had been achieved despite, rather than because of the legislation which brought the CCG into being. 'The legislative, financial and operative framework within which the CCG operated was profoundly flawed'¹¹ One independent film maker suggested that 'Even if one tried, one couldn't really build a more contorted unsatisfactory provision'¹² Although the 1990 Broadcasting Act had been a major break through at the time, it was 'more a consequence of urgent necessity and inspired opportunism than holistic consideration of the most effective and efficient design for a lasting Gaelic broadcasting service'¹³ Again this echoed many of the concerns expressed within the data arising from the practitioners survey.

Fundamentally at fault in the view of the Gaelic Broadcasting Committee themselves, was the reality that 'non Gaelic priority broadcasters were the 'gatekeepers' in Gaelic broadcasting'. This had led to a negative mismatch between linguistic impact (lessened) and economic impact. (substantial) For example the majority of childrens' programmes were shown when children were at school and were thus inaccessible. In addition, wording in the Broadcasting Act still allowed the main broadcasters to broadcast in general at non peak times with detrimental impacts on viewing figures¹⁴.

¹⁰ Support for the principle of such a channel had already been given within the most recent Queens speech

¹¹ Scottish Parliament, E. C. a. S. C. (2001). Report on the Gaelic Broadcasting Committee Volume 2. Edinburgh, Scottish Parliament: 134.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Notwithstanding the franchise obligations imposed by the ITC, a significant proportion of the material reluctantly carried by the Scottish ITV companies is now transmitted in the middle of the night. Milne, A. (2000). Gaelic Broadcasting Taskforce Report. Edinburgh, Scottish Executive: 22.

One of the two main broadcasters (SMG) now openly stated that ‘the obligation on the Channel 3 commercial companies to broadcast Gaelic in peak times is no longer sustainable (Scottish Parliament 2001: vol1_02 p19)

The future from the point of view of most broadcasters, and Gaelic speaking viewers (and one which would gain support from evidence within this thesis) was that a dedicated digital channel, combining both programme commissioning and broadcasting was the way forward, thus overcoming the present unsatisfactory split framework. If successful this would help creating the positive knock on effects similar to those outlined in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 of this thesis, and in addition would boost the numbers and technical expertise of those employed in Gaelic broadcasting at present.

The 1996 Broadcasting act had stipulated half an hour per day Gaelic digital broadcasting should take place at peak times. From 1999 this had been undertaken by a CCG linked company (TeleG), using the CCG Studio Alba in Stornoway. However, the Milne report had further proposed the establishment of a full 3 hour daily broadcasting of new Gaelic programming at a cost of £41m per annum. (Milne 2000: Executive Summary)

Research by Leirsinn had shown that 74% of Gaelic speaking viewers supported the digital channel and that 69% felt the digital channel would have a positive impact on language¹⁵ Reference has been made in Chapter 5 to the perceived impact of the Gaelic media on language use (under present broadcasting conditions). These statistics would also tend to give support to this view.

The BBC and SMG had also come out in favour of a digital Channel which they saw as creating a ‘whole new context’ for the CCG and the rest of the Gaelic broadcasting industry (Scottish Parliament 2001: vol02_03 p4). Finally the Scottish Executive had thrown its weight behind the move, pointing out however, that given that broadcasting legislation was a reserved matter for Westminster, the setting up of a digital channel would in all likelihood necessitate a funding partnership.

¹⁵ Scottish Parliament, E. C. a. S. C. (2001). Report on the Gaelic Broadcasting Committee Volume 2. Edinburgh, Scottish Parliament: 134.

Within the general consensus of the need for a channel, differences did remain, as to who should run the channel. The Gaelic College Sabhal Mor Ostaig wished a public service broadcaster to be given this task. The CCG suggested the experience of TeleG could be built upon, with the CCG as the operating vehicle for the new channel. SMG believed that a new Gaelic Broadcasting authority was not necessary, and implied that SMG themselves had the expertise (and willingness) to run such a new channel. In its own summary, the Scottish Parliament Education Culture and Sport Committee had come out in favour of one of the existing broadcasters (i.e. BBC/ SMG as the most likely commissioner/ broadcaster). This conclusion (which was strongly contested by the CCG) was due to what the committee perceived as insufficient experience/ investment to date in the CCG as presently constituted.

On the feasibility of the channel, doubts were also expressed to the committee (by the BBC) as to whether 3 hours daily broadcasting of original Gaelic material was realisable at present, with committee member Mike Russell MSP similarly suggesting that the present weak state of the Gaelic independent film sector would result in a long 'lead-time' for preparation for the new service. While acknowledging this possibility, the Gaelic Arts Agency however, were of the opinion that the new Channel could be situated in the immediate term as the 'Scottish Cultural channel', comprising of Gaelic, Celtic and subsidiary cultural programmes in the short to medium term with the long term aim of a full Gaelic digital service, thus capturing both the positive social and economic impacts.

8.5. Immediate prospects for GLAC development in light of ministerial decisions regarding Gaelic Broadcasting and a Gaelic Development Board

On 7th May 2002, the UK government published its draft Communications Bill on British broadcasting including the future of Gaelic Digital Broadcasting. (Department of Trade and Industry 2002) Contrary to expectations however, the Bill did not announce the planned setting up of a Gaelic Digital Channel, but rather announced an intention to build upon the basic structure of the existing Gaelic Broadcasting Committee and to strengthen its role in developing a programming strategy in collaboration with the main broadcasters and other interests.

In replying to a written parliamentary question regarding the Government's intentions in this regard, Scottish Secretary Helen Liddle replied:

“The Milne Committee recommendations have helped to focus on the need for overhaul of the current structures but we do not agree that the scale of change and extra resourcing they proposed is feasible or justified”(Liddle 2002)

With regard to the conclusions of the Meek report and the proposals for an overarching Bord na Gàidhlig, the minister for Gaelic, Lord Watson announced the Scottish executive's agreement to this at the Comhdhail (Congress) 2002 of Comunn na Gaidhlig, meeting in Nairn on 14th June 2002. In addition, renewed pledges were given on a series of measures to improving the availability of Gaelic Medium teachers in the immediate and longer term. At the time of writing however, he was unable to confirm the scale of funding which the new Bord was to receive.¹⁶ Although he left the door open for on-going discussions once the board had been appointed. Overall this would appear to be a positive measure, notwithstanding what many supporters of GLAC development see as a potential serious setback in relation to the utilisation of Gaelic broadcasting to its maximum impact.

8.6. Implications of this thesis for current policy

The evidence presented within the body of this thesis has suggested that existing experience of GLAC related activity is overwhelmingly positive and importantly, runs with the grain of current thinking in terms of an evolving, endogenous, community based and holistic approach to local economic development. As this postscript has illustrated, growing appreciation is now given to the role of arts and culture in the development of peripheral areas, such as the Gaelic economy. Where previously it may have been seen as an add-on, it is increasingly being seen now as a central element to the whole process of *development*.

Notwithstanding this, evidence suggests however, that moving from a position of overall acceptance at a macro level, to one of practical and effective implementation at a micro level is one which has taken and is taking substantial time in the eyes of current critics of policy. It is clear that continuing pressure exists throughout the

¹⁶ An initial tranche of £250,000 had been requested, with the aim of eventual underpinning of a planned programme costed at £10 million annually

Gaelic speaking community for this process to be given higher prominence through higher funding, greater planning and swift action. It is clear that the period of uncertainty which accompanied the recent plethora of reports, has revealed the fragility of many of the recent gains acknowledged within this thesis, although some organisations have proven more adept at grasping opportunities than others.

The appointment of the Bòrd Gàidhlig na h-Alba, the new Gaelic language planning authority has surely come at a crucial time for the future of the Gaelic language and its arts and culture in general. The new 2001 census figures illustrate the size of the issue to be tackled, but the confidence of the Gaelic speaking community will surely be with the new board in its preparation of a holistic plan for advancement. The conclusions of this thesis while not expressly aimed at language development, but rather at economic development through the prism of language, arts and culture, can surely play a key role in helping underpin the case for the language with an additional, solid economic foundation.

While it is too early to say exactly how the final policy positions adopted in the reports outlined within the postscript will be implemented and whether their adoption will help lead to realisation of the vision of Highlands and Islands Enterprise in its aim of making the Highlands:

“an area where the outward migration of centuries has ceased, where knowledge and innovation are the valued basis of our prosperity , and where quality of life is preserved and enhanced. It will be one of Europe’s most desirable places to live learn, work and relax”¹⁷

It is hoped that the insights and knowledge offered by this present thesis may however contribute to such an achievement

¹⁷ Highlands and Islands Enterprise (2002). Smart Successful Scotland - the Highlands and Islands dimension. Inverness, HIE: 24.