

# Literacy and Gàidhlig Curriculum Background and Evidence Paper

March 2026

# Executive Summary

## Overview

In *Working Together to Make Change Happen* (April 2025) it was identified that an outcome from the analysing stage of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC) would be the development of an evidence paper for each curricular area or context for learning published on the CIC website.

This paper provides an evidence base to inform the ongoing Curriculum Improvement Cycle for Literacy and Gàidhlig in Scotland. It draws an evidence-based approach to curriculum improvement, drawing on sources produced by, for example, government bodies, local, national and international stakeholders and the voices of children and young people.

The paper supports the identification of areas of strength and areas for improvement within the existing technical framework and will inform the work of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC) for Literacy & Gàidhlig.

## Main Considerations:

### Growth & Provision

- Gaelic Medium Education (GME) has seen significant growth nationally, with the quality of provision improving in some areas and sectors
- There is significant variation in the richness and extent of GME secondary provision across the country, and the low numbers of GME pupils who achieve a qualification in the language is of serious concern to national bodies and stakeholders.

### Quality of Provision

- Inspection evidence highlights some examples of positive and innovative practice in the GME system
- The way in which play-based learning is implemented in a total-immersion environment needs careful consideration.

### Language Proficiency

- Despite high levels of confidence, there are issues with language proficiency among GME pupils
- Along with proficiency, the way Gaelic is perceived during and beyond school affects the long-term usage of the language among GME pupils – this could be attributed to issues related to identity and connection with the language.

### Research and Policy

- There are a small number of highly valuable academic studies on GME. These studies suggest practitioners need more guidance on curricular planning, approaches to teaching language and grammar, and supporting a diverse range of bilingual learners including ASN
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- The sense that the current curriculum has been designed for a monolingual system has created challenges for GME practitioners, such as in assessment, policy documents, and curricular content
- Welsh Medium Education (WME) and Irish Medium Education (IME) may offer guidance on how to address some of the challenges facing GME, such as the way in which research can support practice.

## **Next Steps**

The points and messages raised in this paper will provide an important grounding from which to progress the work of the CIC. The involvement of practitioners and stakeholders in the work of the CIC will help ensure that curriculum design and implementation support all those involved in GME.

Through the work of the groups and stakeholders involved in the Literacy & Gaelic Gàidhlig CIC, close attention will be paid to these messages with a view to providing solutions which help to bring about an improved GME experience.

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# Contents

1	Introduction.....	1
1.1	Purpose .....	1
1.2	Sources of Evidence .....	1
1.3	Scope of the Review .....	1
1.4	Related National Policies .....	2
2	National Data Sets.....	7
2.1	SQA Attainment and Presentation Data .....	7
2.1.1	Academic Year 2023-24 .....	7
2.1.2	Historical Trends.....	8
2.1.3	SQA Course Reports.....	9
2.2	Labour Market Information.....	11
2.2.1	World Economic Forum .....	11
2.2.2	Skills Development Scotland .....	12
2.2.3	The Gaelic Language Labour Market 2018 .....	18
2.2.4	Short Life Working Group on Economic and Social Opportunities for Gaelic .....	19
2.3	National Statistics .....	20
2.3.1	Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels (ACEL) .....	20
2.3.2	Measaidhean Coitcheann Nàiseanta na Gàidhlig (MCNG) .....	20
2.4	Summary .....	21
3	International Reports and Comparative Studies .....	22
3.1	International Reports .....	22
3.1.1	Scotland’s Curriculum for Excellence: Into the Future .....	22
3.2	International Comparative Assessments .....	22
3.2.1	Welsh Medium Education (WME).....	23
3.2.2	Irish Medium Education (IME) .....	24
3.3	Summary .....	24
4	Education Scotland Evidence .....	25
4.1	HMI Evidence and Reports .....	25
4.1.1	HMI Briefing 2018-19.....	25
4.1.2	HMI Gaelic Local Authority Network (GLAN) Briefings 2024-25.....	27
4.1.3	HMI Inspection Evidence 2019-2025.....	29
4.1.4	Care Inspectorate Reports.....	30
4.2	Education Scotland Reports and Evidence.....	31

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4.2.1	Summary of Gaelic Medium Education (GME) Attainment Analysis – Education Scotland, 2024 (2013–2019)	31
4.3	Summary	32
5	Stakeholder Reports and Reviews	33
5.1	Key Stakeholder Reports	33
5.1.1	Comann na Gàidhlig Conference (2025)	33
5.2	Subject Associations	33
5.2.1	Comann Luchd-teagaisg Àrd-sgoiltean (CLAS)	33
5.3	Professional Associations	35
5.4	Stakeholder Reports and Reviews	35
5.4.1	Stiùireadh Gràmair Report (2015)	35
5.4.2	The Perspectives of Children and Young People	35
5.4.3	Consulting with Children and Young People	36
5.4.4	All Learners in Scotland Matter: National Discussion on Education	36
5.4.5	Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (CNES) Senior Phase Gaelic Survey (Autumn 2023)	36
5.4.6	Fèisean nan Gàidheal - NEART	36
5.5	Summary	37
6	Academic Research	38
6.1	Challenges in Attaining Fluency	38
6.2	Pedagogy and Immersion strategies	39
6.3	Additional Support Needs (ASN) in GME	40
6.4	Gaelic Culture and Identity in a Monolingual System	41
6.5	Language Attitudes and Usage During and After GME	42
6.6	Summary	42
7	Future Trends	44
7.1	Summary	45
8	Points to Consider	46
9	Declaration	48
10	References	49
Appendix A	Selected HMI Summarised Inspection Findings	54
Version History		60

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose

This paper offers a snapshot of the current educational landscape, drawing on a range of research and evidence to illuminate prevailing trends, challenges, and successes across contexts. It serves as a foundation for ongoing curriculum innovation and development, offering insights into the policy environment, learner experience, and professional perspectives. By incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data - alongside contributions from practitioners, learners, and the wider education community - this paper creates space for reflection and informed discussion. While not all available studies are included, those selected reflect the breadth of work currently shaping thinking in this area. The insights outlined here are intended to support Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC) stakeholder groups as they consider key issues and navigate the next steps in the evolution of the curriculum.

## 1.2 Sources of Evidence

A body of research was developed through a collaborative effort involving representatives from Education Scotland's Curriculum, Learning, Teaching and Assessment (CLTA) team, the Data, Performance and Research (DPR) team, Scottish Government Analytical Services, academic expertise, HMI and the Scottish Government Library Support Service. This collaboration brought together a wide range of expertise to support the identification, evaluation, and organisation of relevant literature. The sources drawn upon include, but are not limited to, peer-reviewed academic papers, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education publications (HMI), Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Level (ACEL) data analysis, surveys, government data sets, research produced by national agencies, Scottish Government reports, and international publications from organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations. Additionally, the perspectives of children and young people are represented through the work of bodies such as Fèisean nan Gàidheal and Comunn na Gàidhlig.

## 1.3 Scope of the Review

This paper examines Scotland's curriculum across the full 3 to 18 learner journey, considering the range of educational experiences, learning progression, and outcomes from Early Level through to the Senior Phase. Acknowledging that this journey begins at around age 3, the Early Level spans Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) settings - such as nurseries and childminders - and extends into Primary 1 and beyond for some children. Its role is foundational, shaping the experiences, skills, and dispositions that underpin future learning and development. By considering the curriculum as a continuous and coherent pathway from early childhood to young adulthood, this evidence paper reflects the full spectrum of a learner's experience. It highlights key policy drivers and educational practices that support the development of Literacy & Gàidhlig within Gaelic Medium Education (GME).

The focus of this paper is on Literacy & Gàidhlig specifically; that is to say, the wider range of subjects and areas across the totality of the curriculum delivered in GME are not within the scope of this work. GME in these other areas will be considered and represented in the relevant areas of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle.

This paper reflects on learning and achievement in the broad general education, drawing on national indicators and examines Senior Phase attainment across a range of qualifications, including National Qualifications, Highers, and Advanced Highers. The paper aims to support a holistic understanding of the current curricular landscape, highlighting key themes and emerging patterns that will inform ongoing dialogue and decision-making through the Curriculum Improvement Cycle process.

## 1.4 Related National Policies

Several key pieces of legislation and policy have significantly influenced Gaelic education in Scotland, shaping its development and current status. This section provides a short summary of these and their relevance to Literacy & Gàidhlig, or GME more widely.

### **Education (Scotland) Act 1872**

This Act made elementary education compulsory for children aged 5 to 13 in Scotland. The purpose of the act was to make children literate in English. The omission of Gaelic from this act contributed to an environment that was unsupportive of Gaelic. In some areas, pupils were punished for speaking Gaelic, leading to a decline in its use and transmission. This environment also contributed to the erosion of Gaelic culture and identity, as many parents chose not to pass the language to their children to spare them from punishment. Whilst Gaelic was reintroduced slowly throughout the twentieth century into Scottish Education, the ongoing effects of these attitudes to Gaelic, to which the 1872 Act contributed, are still impacting upon Gaelic and its position in Scotland to this day.

### **Education (Scotland) Act 1980**

The Education (Scotland) Act 1980 places the duty on education authorities (local authorities in the exercise of their education functions) to secure adequate and efficient provision of school education and further education for their area. Many of the key terms used in education legislation are defined in the 1980 Act. The Act has been amended by later Acts and thus remains very relevant to how education is delivered today.

### **Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000**

This Act contributed to the framework for school education in Scotland, emphasising a child-centred approach and setting the framework for national priorities for educational improvement. Importantly, it recognised Gaelic education as part of Scotland's education system and laid the foundation for increased support for Gaelic-medium education (GME), although these provisions have since been superseded.

## **Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005**

This landmark legislation established Bòrd na Gàidhlig, a public body tasked with promoting Gaelic as an official language of Scotland, commanding equal respect to English. The Act required the preparation of a National Gaelic Language Plan every five years. The Act gave Bòrd na Gàidhlig functions to advise on Gaelic education and request public bodies to develop bespoke Gaelic language plans. This framework has been an important tool in promoting the use of Gaelic in public life.

## **Advice on Gaelic Education (2015, 2022)**

Education Scotland's non-statutory Advice on Gaelic Education serves as a key resource for practitioners, local authorities, and policymakers in delivering high-quality Gaelic education. It provides practical guidance on effective pedagogy, curriculum development, and immersion strategies for both Gaelic Medium Education (GME) and Gaelic Learner Education (GLE). The Advice aligns with Scotland's wider educational policy framework, including How Good Is Our School? (HGIOS), which sets national quality indicators for school improvement, and Building the Curriculum 3 (BtC3), which emphasises the importance of a broad and balanced curriculum within Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). By integrating Gaelic education within these broader policies, the Advice ensures that Gaelic provision meets national standards of excellence while promoting language development and cultural sustainability. This alignment strengthens the role of Gaelic within Scotland's education system and supports its continued growth and normalisation in schools.

## **Education (Scotland) Act 2016**

This Act introduced provisions to strengthen Gaelic education, including placing duties on local authorities to promote and support GME. It also established a process for parents to request Gaelic Medium Primary Education (GMPE) for their children, obliging authorities to assess and respond to such requests. This legislation has enhanced access to Gaelic education and supported the growth of GME across Scotland.

## **Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education 2017**

Bòrd na Gàidhlig's Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education provides a national framework for the delivery and expansion of GME and GLE. It outlines local authorities' responsibilities in assessing parental requests for GME, ensuring adequate provision, and supporting Gaelic language development in schools. The guidance sets out best practices for curriculum delivery, teacher recruitment, and immersion methodologies, aiming to create a consistent and high-quality Gaelic education experience across Scotland.

## Islands (Scotland) Act 2018

This Act was introduced to improve outcomes for Scotland's island communities by ensuring they receive fair and tailored policy considerations. Given that many of Scotland's remaining Gaelic-speaking communities are found in the Outer and Inner Hebrides, this Act should be considered as part of the legislative landscape for Gaelic education.

## Realising the Ambition: Being Me

*Realising the Ambition: Being Me* (Scottish Government, 2020) is Scotland's national practice guidance for early years, building on *Pre-Birth to Three and Building the Ambition*. It outlines the developmental needs of children from birth to Primary 1 (Education Scotland focus is from age 3 onwards) and emphasises the importance of nurturing relationships, play-based learning, and responsive pedagogy. *Realising the Ambition: Being Me* supports nurseries and other Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) settings by providing a clear, research-informed framework for delivering the Early Level curriculum in a way that is developmentally appropriate, child-centred, and responsive to individual needs. The guidance supports continuity across transitions and highlights the foundational role of early learning in shaping lifelong wellbeing and educational outcomes.

## Anti-Racism in Education Programme

The programme was established in 2020 and a group tasked with implementing the programme first met in 2021. The group continues to ensure commitment to anti-racism in Scottish Education.

This is done via sub-groups focused on:

1. Curriculum reform
2. Racism and racist incidents
3. Diversity in the teaching profession and education workforce
4. Education leadership and professional learning.

Part of this work included publishing a set of anti-racist principles which focus on children and young people's experience in particular, and provide key points that can help embed anti-racism in a new and contemporary curriculum, for example:

- Meaningfully recognising and fairly representing the rich and diverse communities in Scotland and beyond
- Including learning on Scotland's role in historical world events, including trans-Atlantic enslavement and colonial histories, and their continuing impact today
- Learning about past and present events in a way that amplifies under-represented perspectives and stories
- Developing critical-thinking global citizens who challenge racism, discrimination and prejudice

- Learning about individual and systemic racism, their impacts, and other types of oppression and injustice.

The group recommend that:

- It is not only schools with Black and Minority Ethnic pupils who need to be doing this (anti-racism) work
- Teachers should be better equipped to respond to current events (recent racism on social media and elsewhere towards sportspeople, for example) and acknowledge/address them in the classroom. Accepting that not all teachers will be equipped to do this, putting processes in place to facilitate the quick dissemination of information might be useful
- Explicit reference in the Experiences and Outcomes to anti-racism and Black history would signal that something we care about is being prioritised
- The positive impact/achievement of Black and Minority Ethnic people should be highlighted outside of social studies, across every curriculum area and level.

### **Short Life Working Group on Economic and Social Opportunities for Gaelic (2023)**

This report highlights the urgent need for a comprehensive Gaelic education strategy to address disparities in Gaelic-medium secondary education. This strategy should aim to expand subject availability at certificated levels, ensuring learners gain fuller language proficiency and confidence. Whilst there are a range of recommendations made relating to Gaelic Education, in terms of the curriculum it recommended the development of a Gaelic-medium curriculum that was not simply a translation of the English curriculum but instead integrated language acquisition, Scottish history, Gaelic culture, and unique Gaelic concepts, such as dùthchas (environmental stewardship and connection to place). In its response to the report, the Scottish Government accepted the vast majority of recommendations made by the short life working group and included implementation of the recommendations in its Programme for Government for 2025-26.

### **Education (Scotland) Act 2025**

This Act provides for the establishment and functions of Qualifications Scotland and the establishment and functions of the office of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education in Scotland. In addition to naming Qualifications Scotland/Teisteanasan Alba and His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education in Scotland/Àrd-Neach-sgrùdaidh an Rìgh airson Foghlam ann an Alba bilingually, the Act states that the Chief Inspector must have regard to Gaelic Medium and Gaelic Learner Education as well as the teaching of Gaelic in the provision of further education by local authorities. It also states that Qualifications Scotland and the Chief Inspector must have regard to inclusive communication that meets the needs of Gaelic speakers.

## **National Gaelic Language Plan 2023–2028**

This plan, developed by Bòrd na Gàidhlig, outlines strategic priorities to enhance Gaelic education in Scotland. These targets include the reviewing and updating of the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education, the use of the Gaelic Schools Capital fund to facilitate the establishment of standalone Gaelic Medium schools. The plan also states that a new strategic approach for GME will be developed, along with coordination and support for extra-curricular Gaelic Medium activities, which will sit within a Gaelic Youth Strategy. The plan also focuses on the expansion of GME subject choice at secondary level, along with a coordinated approach to support GME teachers.

## **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024**

This Act, which seeks to fully incorporate the UNCRC into Scots law, strengthens children's rights across all aspects of life, including education and cultural identity. Article 30 of the UNCRC explicitly states that children belonging to minority or indigenous groups have the right to enjoy their own culture, practice their own religion, and use their own language. In the context of Gaelic, this provision reinforces the right of children from Gaelic-speaking communities, or those wishing to learn Gaelic, to receive an education that supports their linguistic and cultural identity. The Act places a legal duty on public authorities not to act incompatibly with these rights in the exercise of relevant functions

## **Scottish Languages Act 2025**

Passed unanimously in the Scottish Parliament on 17 June 2025, the Bill was given Royal Assent on 31 July 2025. The provisions of the Act, which begin to be brought into force by the Scottish Government from 30<sup>th</sup> November 2025 onwards – supported by guidance and secondary legislation. The Act gives Gaelic and Scots official status in Scotland and enhances support for both languages. It requires Scottish Ministers to develop a Gaelic language strategy, replacing the current national plan by Bòrd na Gàidhlig. The Act empowers Ministers to set standards and provide guidance for public authorities on promoting Gaelic, mandates reporting on progress, and allows local authorities to designate areas of linguistic significance. In terms of education, it obliges Ministers to promote Gaelic education and clarifies that local authorities' duty to provide education includes Gaelic education. This legislation marks a significant step forward in strengthening Gaelic's role in Scottish education and public life.

## 2 National Data Sets

This section outlines the high-level messages from the SQA results for Gàidhlig qualifications 2024. Although Foundation Apprenticeships are completed through the medium of Gaelic, they are not recorded as such, and therefore data sets for Gaelic Medium Foundation Apprenticeships are not available. Non-graded qualifications (such National 2 - National 4 qualifications) have also been included here for parity of esteem. HND, HNC, Scottish Vocational Qualifications, and Professional Development Awards are not included here as these are not commonly delivered by schools. This section also outlines the labour market information for 2034 and the implications this might have for the Curriculum Improvement Cycle.

### 2.1 SQA Attainment and Presentation Data

This section draws on national data related to Literacy & Gàidhlig. The focus is initially on academic years 2023-24, with additional historical data included to allow for the analysis of trends over time.

#### 2.1.1 Academic Year 2023-24

The following table presents SQA data based on the qualifications and examination diet 2023-24 for National Qualifications in Gàidhlig (NQs), as a subject.

*Table 1 - total number of entries for SQA qualifications N2-Advanced Higher*

Level	Total Entries	Total Awards
N2	0	0
N3	5	5
N4	35	30
Level	Total Entries	A-D Awards
N5	250	245
H	130	130
AH	30	30

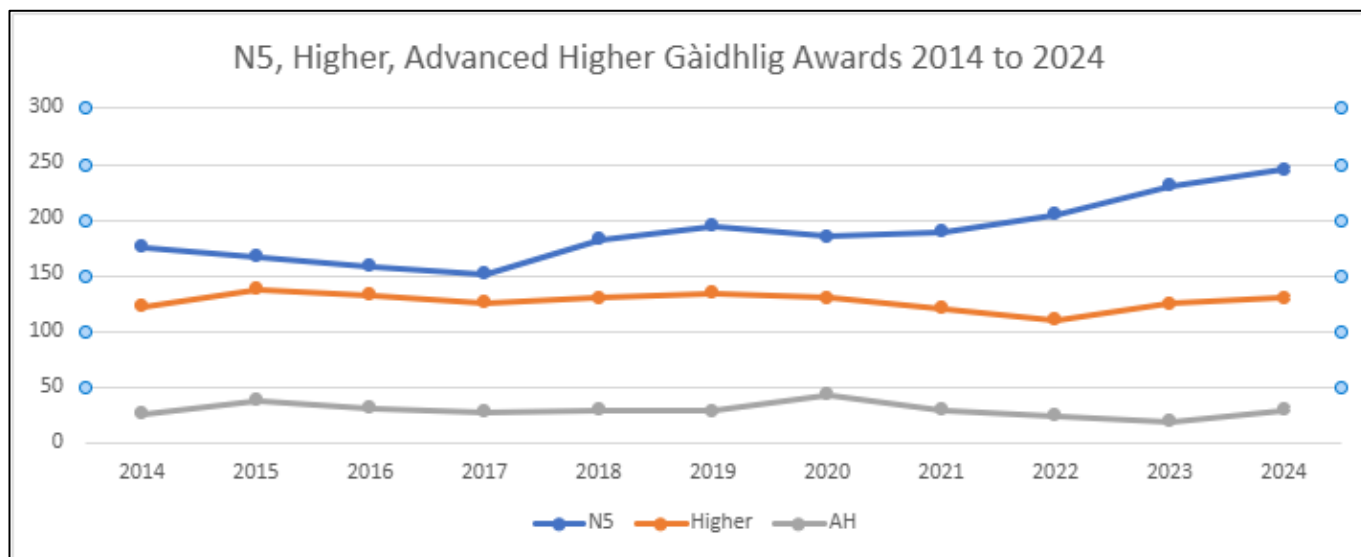
There were low numbers of candidates being presented for N2-N4. This is the group of NQs for which certifying assessment is carried out in schools, i.e. there is no final, externally marked examination.

Attainment is strong among those who are presented for N5, Higher and Advanced Higher Gàidhlig, where almost all candidates entered achieved an award.

## 2.1.2 Historical Trends

There has been a gradual increase in the total number of N5 awards issued since 2020. The numbers of Higher and Advanced Higher Gàidhlig awards issued remain stagnant.

Since CfE NQs were introduced, annual Higher Gàidhlig awards have fluctuated between a high of 138 (in 2015) and a low of 110 (in 2022). This is indicative of a significant drop-off in candidate numbers during the transition from BGE to the Senior Phase. A deeper exploration of this loss is featured in Education Scotland's *Gaelic Attainment Gap* analysis in Section 4.



Graph 1 - N5, Higher and Advanced Higher Awards 2014-2024 (SQA, 2024)

For reference, in the period above, overall numbers of pupils in GME secondary rose from 1,181 in 2013-2014 to 1,651 in 2023-24 (Bòrd na Gàidhlig, 2024). This represents a 40% increase in overall numbers. During the same period, the growth in the number of candidates presented and attaining Gàidhlig NQs has risen by 16%.

### 2.1.3 SQA Course Reports

SQA Course Reports, publicly available for exam diets 2022-2024, give an overview of candidate performance in the respective components of NQs (Scottish Qualifications Authority, n.d.). A summary of key themes for each level, based on the SQA Course Reports, follows.

*Table 2 - Key themes from N5 SQA Course Reports 2022-2024 (SQA, n.d.)*

National 5 Course Component	Key Themes
Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong performance with understanding questions</li> <li>• Difficulties with inference questions</li> </ul>
Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Average overall performance</li> <li>• Issues with answering specific questions, tendency to produce a generic response</li> </ul>
Listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An area of significant challenge for candidates</li> <li>• Performance graded as poor or fair</li> </ul>
Assignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overall strong performance</li> <li>• Some issues assimilating new vocabulary into writing</li> </ul>
Speaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interaction with assessors a strength</li> <li>• Issues with using specialist vocabulary</li> </ul>

*Table 3 - Key themes from Higher SQA Course Reports 2022-2024 (SQA, n.d.)*

Higher Course Component	Key Themes
Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most candidates coped with the length &amp; challenge of the task</li> <li>• Language skills were a barrier to some in articulating responses</li> <li>• Some struggle with questions focused on technical aspects of the passage e.g. imagery, word-choice, etc</li> </ul>
Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lengthy and comprehensive responses</li> <li>• Some issues with connecting evidence to the points being made in the response</li> <li>• Examples of producing responses that were too formulaic/not tailored to the task</li> </ul>
Listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overall good performance in this component</li> <li>• Some issues with questions requiring evidence from the passage</li> </ul>
Assignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Close engagement with the task</li> <li>• Some candidates demonstrate real 'flair' in their writing</li> </ul>
Speaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good interaction with assessor &amp; variety of topics covered</li> <li>• Issues with using specialist vocabulary</li> </ul>

Table 4 - Key themes from AH SQA Course Reports 2022-2024 (SQA, n.d.)

Advanced Higher Course Component	Key Themes
Practical Criticism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overall good engagement with the poetry and prose pieces provided</li> <li>• Some issues with understanding idiomatic use of language</li> <li>• Some responses lacking depth of analysis</li> </ul>
Literature and Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some detailed responses</li> <li>• Examples of good command of the language</li> <li>• Accuracy of spelling and grammar affects the quality of some of the work</li> </ul>
Translation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A small number of very good examples of translation, maintaining original meaning and tenor</li> <li>• Significant issues with some examples: basic grammar and spelling</li> </ul>
Speaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Willingness and confidence to engage with visiting assessor a strength</li> <li>• Detailed knowledge of texts studied supports some candidates' responses</li> <li>• Some candidates not knowledgeable enough about their texts to support discussion</li> </ul>

The tables above highlight relevant trends, successes and areas for improvement within Gàidhlig national qualifications.

Notable points include:

- strong attainment statistics among those presented for Gàidhlig national qualifications
- the high number of GME pupils who do not progress to the Senior Phase
- the areas of strength identified within SQA course reports, such as good interaction in speaking components at all levels, and strong performance in the written assignment at N5 and Higher
- the areas of challenge identified within SQA course reports, such as assimilating specialist vocabulary in speaking at N5 and Higher, and significant issues in some examples with basic grammar and spelling in the writing and translation components at Advanced Higher level.

## 2.2 Labour Market Information

Labour market surveys do not usually include Gaelic language skills or Gaelic-specific occupations among their categories or areas of focus. It is therefore difficult to provide detailed evidence on this topic. This section gives an overview of the available general labour market information, followed by the available Gaelic-specific publications.

### 2.2.1 World Economic Forum

On a global level, the World Economic Forum (2025) *Future of Jobs Survey 2024* outlines the share of employers who consider various skills to be core skills in 2025 and the share of employers expecting skills to increase in importance by 2030. Networks and cybersecurity, as well as environmental stewardship, are listed among the top 10 skills expected to significantly increase in use by 2030; yet are not currently considered core skills for most organisations.

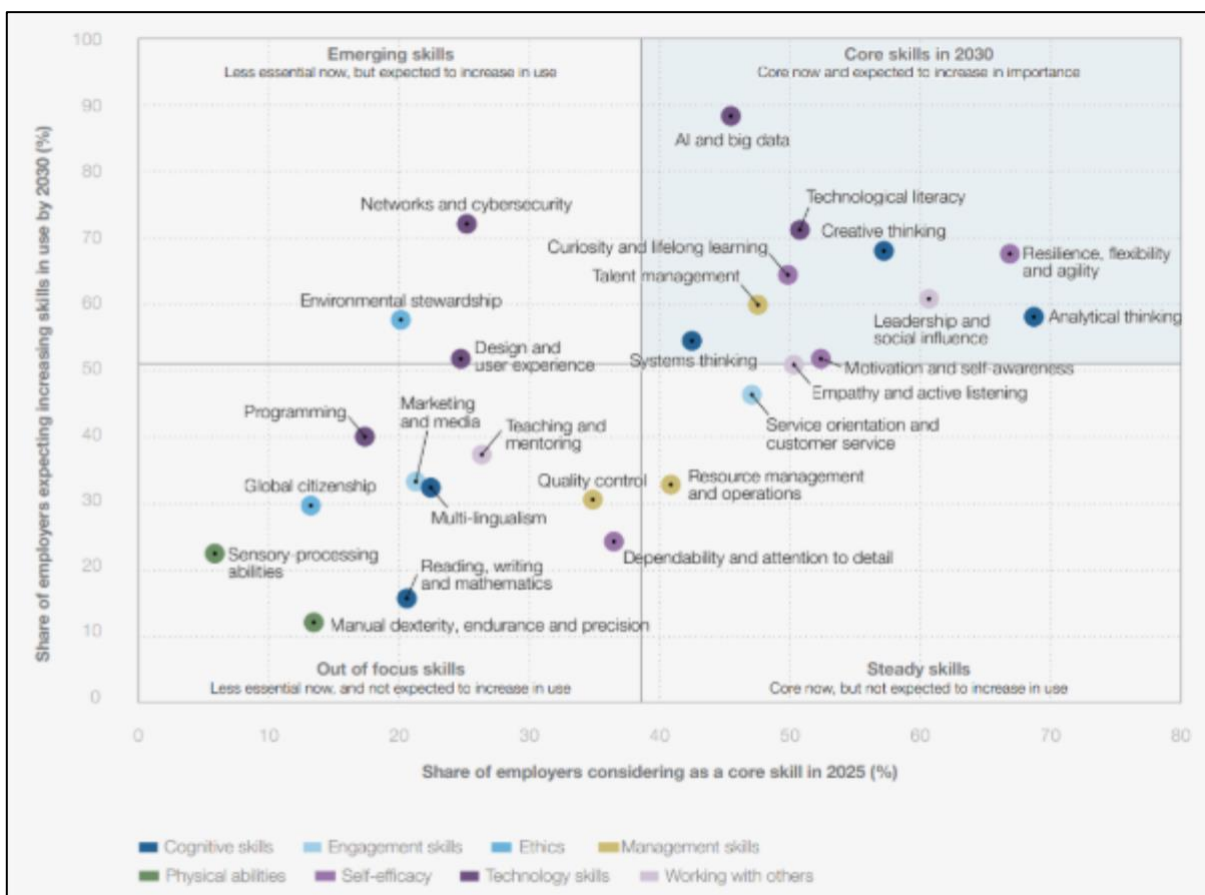


Figure 1 – (View on Tableau Public: [Future of jobs - core skills 30 | Tableau Public](#))

A recent *Horizon Scanning Project: Future Trends for Scotland* (Scottish Government, 2025) outlines 3 key trends for Scotland’s labour market and skills:

- Scotland’s working-age population is growing, however ageing and ill-health create uncertainty for the future labour market

- Automation and decarbonisation are expected to change the labour market, displacing and creating jobs
- The focus on lifelong learning and skills will grow in the future.

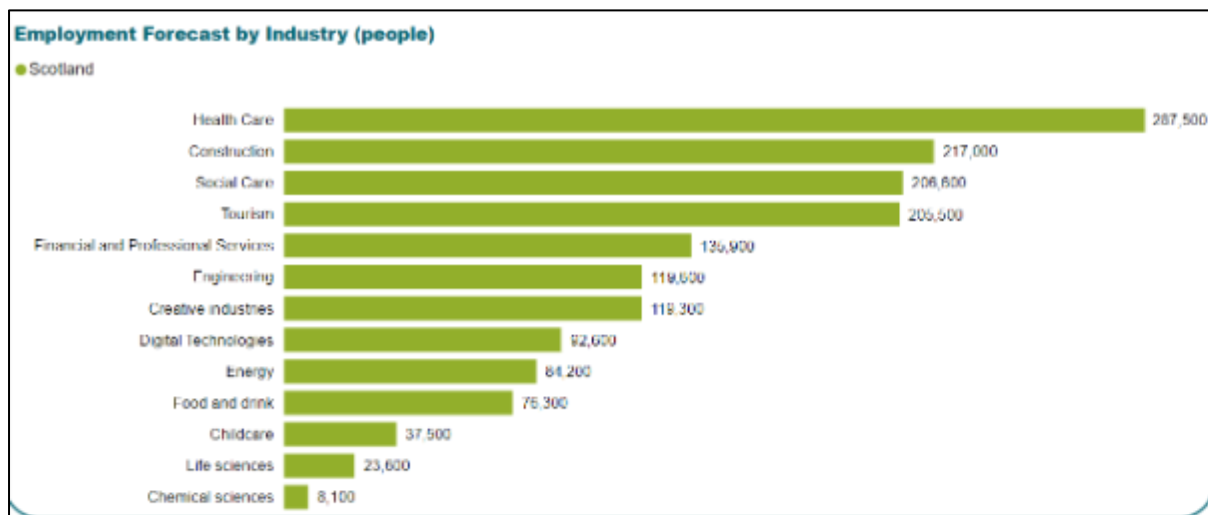
### 2.2.2 Skills Development Scotland

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) provides labour market information using a consistent evidence base to inform future investment in skills, built up from existing datasets and forecasts.

They work with key partners and stakeholders in the production of regional skills assessments to ensure an inclusive approach to their development, dissemination and utilisation. Regional Skills Assessments (RSAs) are published annually, covering all Regional Outcome Agreement areas, City and Growth Deal Regions and rural Scotland. The RSAs offer detailed information on regional labour markets across the country. The data included in these publications, including Oxford Economics forecast data, is the most up-to-date available at the time of writing.

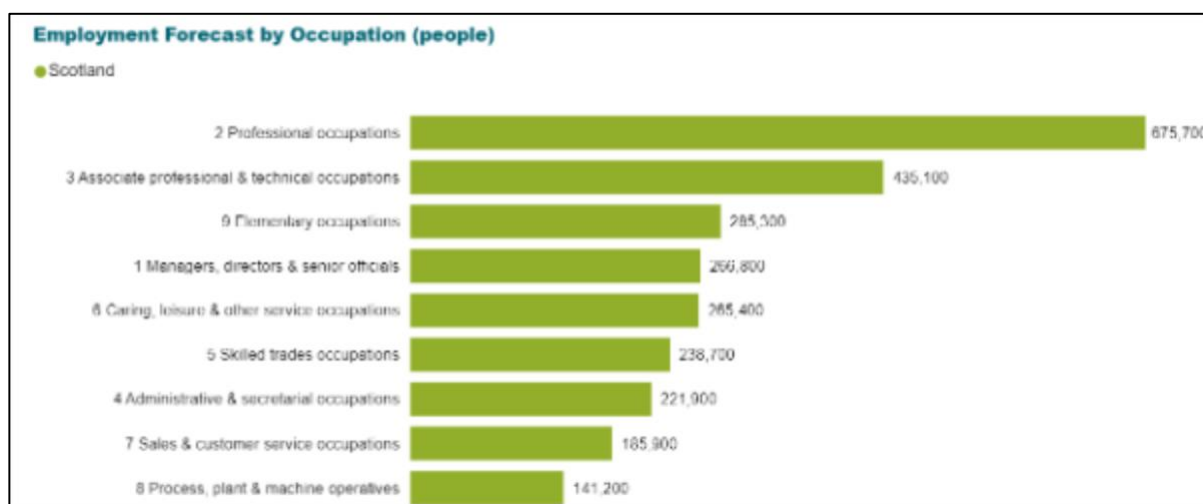
The following graphs uses labour market information access in November 2024 to show a 10 year forecast for Scotland as a whole.

Employment forecast for 2034 by industry:



Graph 2- Bar chart showing the future employment forecast by industry for Scotland in 2034 (SDS, 2024)

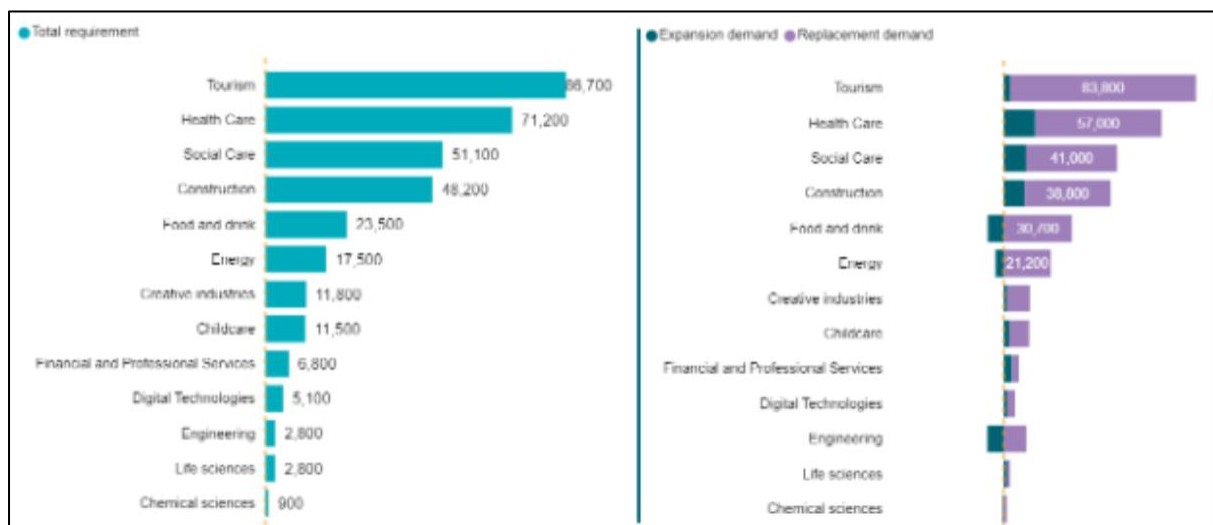
As can be seen from Graph 2, health care, construction, and social care are predicted to be the highest employing industries. Health care and social care have particular implications for Gaelic as many of these services are provided in Gaelic-speaking areas, where service users may use Gaelic as their preferred language. The ability to communicate in Gaelic could, therefore, be of significant benefit to those employees, employers and service users in such areas.



Graph 3 - Bar chart showing the future employment forecast by occupation for Scotland in 2034 (SDS, 2024)

This has implications for the range of pathways at different SCQF levels needed to allow learners to achieve the right level of qualifications for the jobs available. The ability to study subjects through the medium of Gaelic is limited at secondary level and could impact on the career pathways of Gaelic speakers. This suggests further work may be required to improve provision of career pathways.

## Total requirement by industry (2027-2034):



Graph 4 - Bar charts showing the total requirement by industry for Scotland in 2027-2034 (SDS, 2024)

The right-hand side of Graph 4 shows how much an industry is forecast to expand or reduce in requirement, as well as the likely replacement requirement (i.e. how many more people will be required due to people leaving the workforce). The graph on the left-hand side shows the total requirement. These numbers are different from the overall employment forecast as these graphs only show additional requirements and not those who will remain working in these industries. Despite healthcare being forecast to be the largest employing industry in 2034, the actual number of jobs needed to be filled is forecast to be greatest in tourism. Health care and social care also show significant expansion demand, the importance of which for Gaelic speakers has already been discussed. The increase in tourism related careers will have implications for Gaelic speakers. Visit Scotland's *Gaelic Tourism Strategy 2024-2029 (2024)* sets out the economic and social importance of enhancing Gaelic's role in the experience of visitors to Scotland, with five strategic objectives relating to Gaelic language and culture. As an area of forecasted growth, tourism could be of particular importance in terms of Gaelic language skills given the scale of tourism in the Highlands and Islands (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2024).

The recently published report, *Young People's Career Ambitions (SDS, 2025)* collects views from school leavers on a range of areas – ideal job and preferred industries being just two of these. In this report over 3000 participants engaged. One of the questions asked was: "Thinking about the future, what is your ideal job/career?". The following infographic shows a thematic analysis of their responses. The larger the circle, the more the job/career area was mentioned.

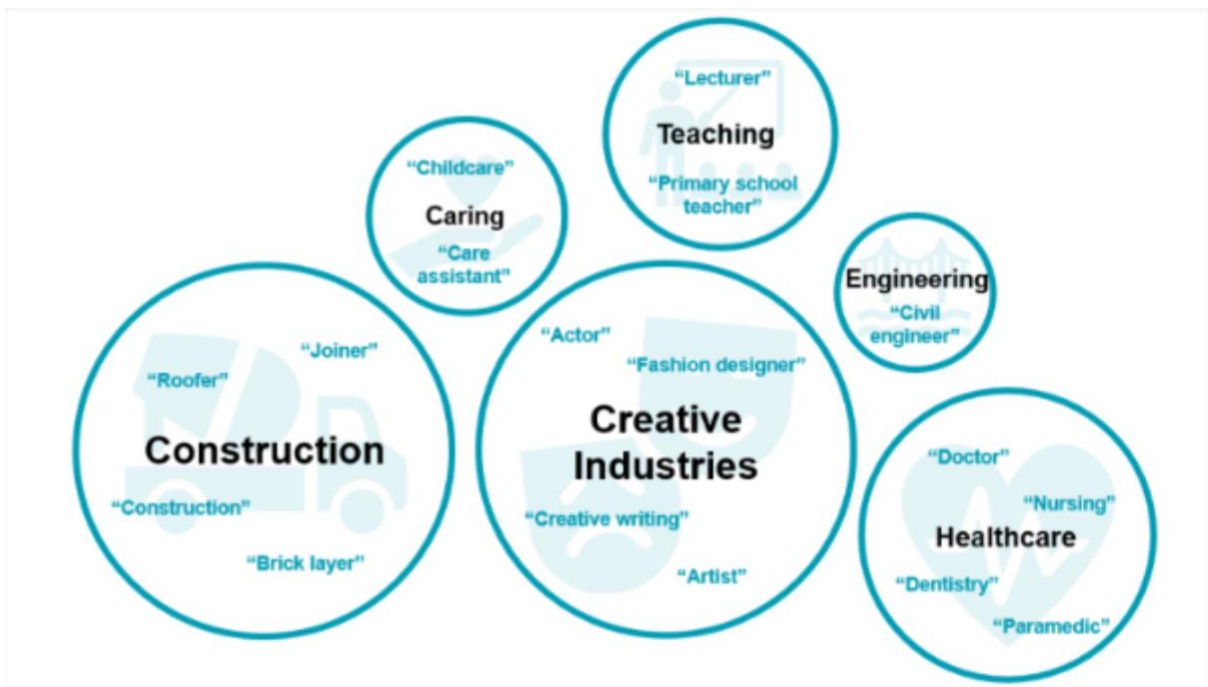


Figure 2 - Young People's Career Ambitions (SDS 2025) thematic analysis of young people's responses to the question: "Thinking about the future, what is your ideal job/career?" (n=1,629)

Whilst there are some similarities to the labour market information, the largest area of interest to young people is creative industries, for which the requirement is less than half of that of healthcare (the top forecast industry in the labour market information). It can be said therefore that there is a mismatch in terms of what young people are interested in and what jobs will be available to them.

Interestingly, a supporting infographic to the report (SDS, 2025) shows that the preferred industry depends on a range of characteristics. For example, the following infographic shows the difference between males and females:

Top Industries (Top 5, % selected)			
Female		Male	
Medicine and health	21%	Engineering	28%
Caring	17%	Construction	23%
Creative Industries	16%	Digital, computing, and IT	15%
Teaching / education	15%	Sport	12%
Media	11%	Media	10%

Figure 3

There are also differences in terms of ethnicity, however the report has low sample numbers for this and does not disaggregate by ethnicity (only offering the categories “white” and “minority ethnic”):

Top Industries (Top 5, % selected)			
Minority Ethnic		White	
Medicine and health	23%	Engineering	16%
Digital, computing, and IT	17%	Construction	14%
Media	16%	Creative Industries	13%
Engineering	13%	Medicine and health	12%
Creative Industries	12%	Teaching / education	12%

Figure 4

The supporting infographic also shows marked differences between young people who identify as LGBT, and those who do not:

Top Industries (Top 5, % selected)			
LGBT		Non-LGBT	
Creative Industries	29%	Engineering	18%
Media	20%	Construction	15%
Digital, computing, and IT	14%	Medicine and health	13%
Caring	14%	Teaching / education	11%
Medicine and health	14%	Sport	11%

Figure 5

There is also a significant difference in industries selected for those from the most deprived areas (SIMD 1) compared to those from the least deprived areas (SIMD 5):

Top Industries (Top 5, % selected)			
SIMD 1		SIMD 5	
Engineering	15%	Medicine and health	18%
Construction	14%	Engineering	16%
Caring	14%	Creative Industries	14%
Medicine and health	11%	Teaching / education	12%
Creative Industries	11%	Media	11%

Figure 6

Care-experienced children, compared to those without experience of the care system, also show differences in their preferred industries:

Top Industries (Top 5, % selected)			
CE		Not CE	
Construction	20%	Engineering	16%
Caring	12%	Creative Industries	14%
Hospitality	12%	Medicine and health	13%
Armed forces, policing or security	10%	Construction	12%
Engineering	10%	Teaching / education	11%

Figure 7

Lastly, learners with disabilities, and those without, also have different preferences:

Top Industries (Top 5, % selected)			
Disabled		Non-disabled	
Creative Industries	21%	Engineering	18%
Medicine and health	16%	Construction	15%
Caring	15%	Medicine and health	12%
Teaching / education	14%	Digital, computing, and IT	11%
Media	13%	Teaching / education	11%

Figure 8

The report also shows small differences in who each of the above groups list as key influencers on their career with the majority listing parents and carers as their top influencers (except care-experienced learners who listed careers advisors). The next most commonly listed influencers were career advisors followed by other family members. Teachers also featured.

Finally, the factors influencing their chosen industry also vary by characteristic with most fluctuating between their “interests and hobbies” and “the need to earn money”. “Qualifications achieved” also feature prominently? and “education/training” to a lesser extent. Interestingly, 35% of young people cited social media as an influence, with TikTok ranking the highest, followed by Instagram and YouTube.

These differences highlight the importance of career education that works for and is inclusive of *all* learners, and that makes use of labour market information to help young people to make informed choices. This should be considered as part of the CIC, when the content and structure of each curricular area is being reviewed, and particularly in relation to skills.

### 2.2.3 The Gaelic Language Labour Market 2018

The most recent publicly-available information comprising Gaelic-specific labour market information was published by Skills Development Scotland (SDS) in conjunction with Bòrd na Gàidhlig and Highlands & Islands Enterprise (HIE) (SDS, 2018a).

The report acknowledges that the Gaelic language “does not constitute a sector” and was, therefore, not captured in existing employment surveys (SDS, 2018a, p. 6). The report also acknowledges its limitations in that the surveys conducted were not exhaustive and did not provide complete national coverage of all employers (SDS, 2018a, p. 6). The following are some of the key messages identified by the summary report:

- The demand for Gaelic skills is predominantly within education, tourism, creative industries, and public administration
  - The number of Gaelic speakers is increasing
  - Enrolment in GME is increasing
  - Many of those with Gaelic language skills do not use them in their employment
  - Embedding Gaelic in apprenticeship schemes offers more pathways into employment
  - There is a possible mismatch between where Gaelic jobs are to be found and where Gaelic speakers are located
  - There are opportunities to promote Gaelic as an economic asset to a range of employers
  - The lack of GME practitioners may inhibit progress of Gaelic language skills.
- (SDS, 2018b)

The report also established several actions:

- Strategic leadership by way of a national group comprised of key stakeholders
- Enhanced monitoring and evaluation of Gaelic-related initiatives and investments
- Expansion of Gaelic skills in response to sector demands

- Strengthening of the evidence base for labour market intelligence on Gaelic. (SDS, 2018b)

Further publications on this topic are unavailable. However, the summary above highlights some important considerations for the CIC: the potential growth areas in the labour market; the potential of apprenticeships; and the need for strategic leadership.

#### 2.2.4 Short Life Working Group on Economic and Social Opportunities for Gaelic

The *Short Life Working Group on Economic and Social Opportunities for Gaelic* for Gaelic was established in 2022 with an aim to strengthen Gaelic by focussing on economic opportunities and to strengthen the economy by making the most of Gaelic opportunities. The report (Scottish Government, 2023) gives wide-ranging recommendations relating to Gaelic and the economy. The following list gives examples of the types of recommendations related to education and training:

- National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET) Entrepreneurship focus should extend to Key Gaelic Communities and support Gaelic entrepreneurs with enhanced incentives and support for business start-ups
- In order to fully realise economic as well as educational benefits, a strategy should be developed urgently to begin overcoming the disparity in provision in Gaelic Medium secondary education in comparison to English Medium secondary education, which inhibits fuller language acquisition and confidence in language use, with the aim of ensuring a broad range of subjects is available through the medium of Gaelic to certificated level
- A range of Gaelic Medium Foundation Apprenticeships should be available in S5-6 for pupils wishing to pursue careers in early years, social care, the creative industries, culture, heritage, tourism, sport, food and drink, and the natural environment where the use of Gaelic would be an advantage or its promotion encouraged
- The partnership established by VisitScotland to support Gaelic tourism should be continued with a wide range of bodies working towards improving the Gaelic experience for visitors
- A range of industry training opportunities should be developed to prepare people to work in the media, as far as possible through the medium of Gaelic, to increase employment opportunities, use of Gaelic and a range of transferable skills.

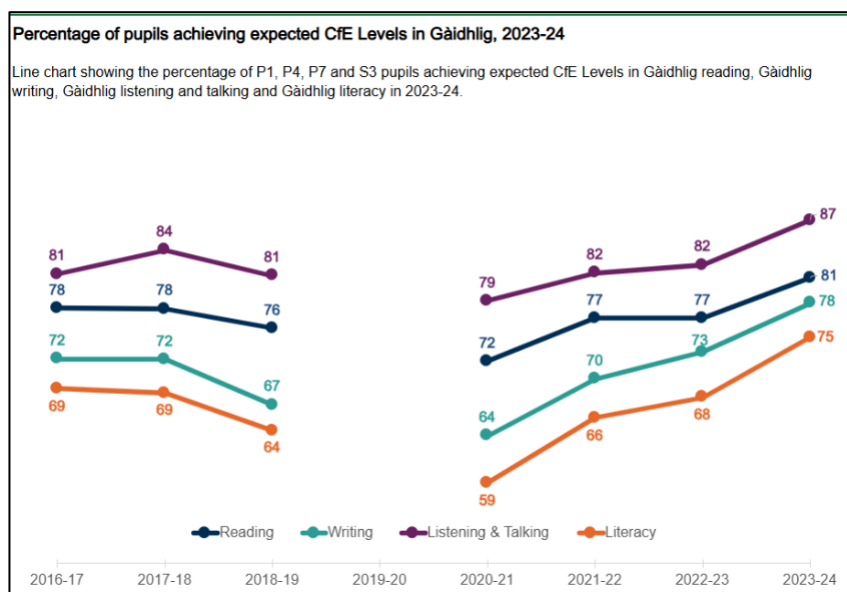
The above recommendations were accepted by the Scottish Government in 2024. The report and subsequent response highlight the importance of Gaelic language skills to the economy, and the role education and training can play in supporting the economy, as well as the language itself.

## 2.3 National Statistics

The data in this section gives an indication as to national trends in attainment in Literacy & Gàidhlig across the BGE and related National Qualifications (NQs).

### 2.3.1 Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels (ACEL)

Overall statistics in the achievement of expected CfE levels in Gàidhlig in the BGE are trending positively, with steady increases across reading, writing, listening and talking, and literacy, compared with 2020-21.



Graph 5 - ACEL data for Literacy & Gàidhlig (Scottish Government, 2024)

ACEL data provides a useful high-level impression of CfE levels, but there is a lack of more detailed data for attainment in Literacy & Gàidhlig (as with other curricular areas) in the BGE.

Graph 5 suggests an improvement across Gaelic language and literacy skills in BGE.

### 2.3.2 Measaidhean Coitcheann Nàiseanta na Gàidhlig (MCNG)

MCNG (Scottish National Standardised Assessments for Gaelic Medium Education) offer teachers valuable diagnostic insights into learners' progress in reading, writing, and numeracy at key stages—P1, P4, P7, and S3. These assessments are automatically marked, providing immediate feedback that supports pupils' ongoing learning and development.

After completion, the assessments generate diagnostic reports for both individual learners and groups. When combined with other forms of assessment evidence, this information helps teachers plan the next steps in learning and supports their professional judgement about each learner's progress. The reports highlight indicative strengths and areas where additional support may be needed, based on learners' responses.

Due to the purpose and nature of these assessments, it is not appropriate to attempt national level analysis nor to identify trends within MCNG.

## 2.4 Summary

Section 2 highlights information related to attainment in Gaelic qualifications, labour market information and economic opportunities in Gaelic, and national achievement data in GME.

The following are of particular interest to the CIC:

- Candidates who come through GME and go on to complete national qualifications in Gaelic perform very well
- The substantial growth in GME in early years and primary settings has not been translated into significantly more young people leaving their school education with a Gaelic qualification
- Significant workforce needs are forecast in areas that pertain to Gaelic speakers
- Improved opportunities for developing Gaelic language skills will help to meet future demand
- Gaelic plays an important role in Scotland's economy
- According to national data sets (ACEL) the number of learners achieving expected CfE levels in Gàidhlig is increasing.

## 3 International Reports and Comparative Studies

This section considers some key international reports and comparative studies, where available, to give a broad perspective on Scotland's curriculum in general and Literacy & Gàidhlig where possible.

### 3.1 International Reports

#### 3.1.1 Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence: Into the Future

The OECD's report *Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence: Into the Future* (2021) provides a comprehensive discussion on Scotland's education system. Whilst the report does not focus specifically on GME, there is an acknowledgment of GME's place in the Scottish education system. As one of the mediums of instruction of CfE, all the recommendations made by the OECD are of relevance to Gaelic.

These recommendations are to:

- Re-assess CfE's aspirational vision against emerging trends in education
- Find a better balance between breadth and depth of learning throughout CfE
- Adapt the Senior Phase to match the vision of CfE
- Continue building curricular capacity at various levels of the system using research
- Ensure stable, purposeful, and impactful stakeholder involvement with CfE
- Revise the division of responsibilities for CfE
- Structure a coherent communication strategy to support developments of CfE
- Provide dedicated time to lead, plan, and support CfE at the school level
- Simplify policies and institutions for clarity and coherence
- Align curriculum, qualifications, and system evaluation to deliver on the commitment of *Building the Curriculum 5*
- Develop a systematic approach to curriculum review
- Adopt a structured and long-term approach to implementation.

The issues present in CfE affect GME, in common with English Medium Education, and so should be taken into account as part of the Literacy & Gàidhlig CIC.

### 3.2 International Comparative Assessments

There does not exist a direct international comparator assessment for GME, i.e. PISA. However, given the similarities between immersion education in Ireland and Wales, a short summary of these contexts provides some important considerations for GME curricular development. These overviews are not comprehensive and are focused on points of particular interest to the Curriculum Improvement Cycle for Literacy & Gaelic.

### 3.2.1 Welsh Medium Education (WME)

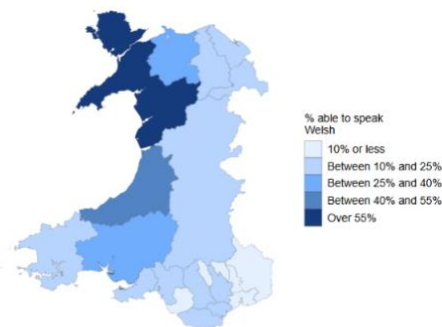
In comparison to GME, Welsh Medium Education (WME) is on a much larger scale. As of January 2023, from a total of 1,463 schools in Wales (Welsh Government, 2023) there were:

- 378 Welsh-medium schools
- 27 dual-stream schools, plus two schools that were in the transition process
- 32 bilingual schools.

Beyond these schools, there are also examples of English-medium schools where the use of Welsh was evident. In total, 30% of all schools provide education through the medium of Welsh. 17% of pupils are taught in designated Welsh-medium schools.

Despite a significantly smaller population size (3.1 million compared with 5.6 million in Scotland) the infrastructure for WME is significantly stronger compared to GME. There are, of course, a much higher number of Welsh speakers (over 500,000) and there are areas where Welsh remains a relatively strong community language:

Map 1: Percentage of people aged three years or older able to speak Welsh, by local authority, 2021



Map 3: Percentage of people aged three years or older able to speak Welsh, by LSOA, 2021

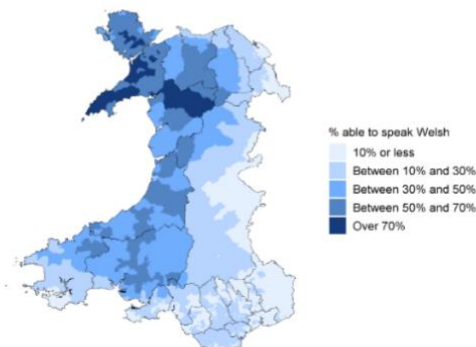


Figure 9 - Distribution of Welsh speakers (Welsh Government, 2022)

Despite the difference in scale, WME faces many of the challenges that GME faces, including:

- teacher recruitment, in particular, subject specialists at secondary level
- teacher proficiency in Welsh
- concerns around children's and young people's proficiency in Welsh and the use beyond school
- transitioning between primary and secondary
- the pivotal role played by leaders (both positive and negative).  
(Estyn, 2023)

The Welsh Government established the *National Strategy for Educational Research and Enquiry* (NSERE) to ensure policy and practice in education in Wales is founded on research evidence

and professional enquiry (Welsh Government, 2021). This research is used to support best practice with a view to improving outcomes for those involved in WME.

### 3.2.2 Irish Medium Education (IME)

Irish Medium Education (IME) consists of two systems: Gaeltacht schools and gaelscoileanna/gaelcholáistí. MacGearailt et al (2021) take these to be two closely-related types of school, yet contextually very different.

The traditional Gaeltacht areas in Ireland still maintain the language as a means of daily communication, to some extent, and this is reflected in a proportion of the pupils attending Gaeltacht schools having Irish as their L1 (MacGearailt et al, 2021). However, it is acknowledged that the extent to which English permeates Gaeltacht daily life and education is growing, at the same time as the number of daily speakers declines (O Duibhir, 2018). The gaelscoileanna/gaelcholáistí are perhaps more like the majority of GME contexts, given that many, if not most, exist in predominantly English-speaking areas.

In relation to curricular and pedagogical considerations, many of the issues GME faces, as discussed in this paper, are present in IME:

- The challenges presented by diverse linguistic backgrounds/capabilities
- Difficulty in attaining fluency and the emergence of hybrid language forms
- Immersion education as conceived is rarely achieved
- The continued focus on meaning and content rather than form
- The need to develop the pedagogical approach.

(MacGearailt et al, 2021)

In response to some of these issues, the Irish Government has implemented a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) pilot study in an effort to augment the learning of Irish in schools (Department of Education, 2020).

## 3.3 Summary

Section 3 highlights international reports and comparative studies. Due to the uniqueness of GME, it is challenging to draw direct comparisons based on these types of data. It is, nonetheless, important to consider comparable contexts which demonstrate successes and challenges relevant to GME:

- WME and IME face challenges regarding the language proficiency of both staff and children and young people
- Despite smaller overall population sizes, WME and IME are delivered on a much greater scale than GME
- Both WME and IME are sought to be improved by government-supported educational research.

## 4 Education Scotland Evidence

This section considers evidence from HMI and Education Scotland. Given the relatively small number of settings offering GME, the date range for the HMI publications ranges from 2018-2025, with the intention of providing a more comprehensive evidence base. The Education Scotland analysis is presented due to the significance of the issues it highlights relevant to Literacy & Gàidhlig.

### 4.1 HMI Evidence and Reports

#### 4.1.1 HMI Briefing 2018-19

An HMI Briefing on Gaelic Education, based on inspection findings from 2018-2019, gives a valuable pre-pandemic overview of progress and areas of challenge within GME at a national level at the time.

The following section highlights some of the key messages identified during this period, grouped by quality indicator theme. The messages are presented as they are in the briefing.

#### **QI 1.3 Leadership of change**

- In most early learning and childcare settings and primary schools, senior leaders are ensuring that the need for change is well understood. In secondary schools, senior leaders are not consistently ensuring that leadership of change is having a positive impact on the Gaelic sector.
- To enable headteachers to be empowered in leading change for the Gaelic sector, they would benefit from regular specialist professional learning and bespoke self-evaluation resources. They require more impact from national strategies for recruiting and retaining teachers and support staff. This needs to operate in tandem with national groups' consistent, high-quality promotion of the opportunities and benefits accrued from Gaelic Medium and Learner Education, and bilingualism.
- There remains scope for self-evaluation to be more bespoke to Gaelic Medium and Learner Education. A number of early learning and childcare settings continue to find some key national guidance challenging to apply to Gaelic Medium Education due to their lack of direct guidance on immersion.

#### **QI 2.2 Learning pathways theme**

- In GLE and GME, there are increasing concerns about young people's uptake for courses leading to qualifications and awards.
- There remain challenges in delivering the entitlements to a broad general education through Gaelic. HM Inspectors evidenced that schools have capacity to increase curricular delivery within existing resources.

- It would be beneficial for schools to refresh their high level statements on 3-18 immersion, based on the best practice described in the Advice on Gaelic Education. The majority of early learning and childcare settings are improving their use of total immersion approaches within playrooms. In a few cases, children are not being immersed for the totality of their time at their early learning and childcare setting. On the whole, more needs to be done to have continuity in play as children progress into P1.
- At early learning and childcare settings and at primary stages, children were learning through interdisciplinary approaches (IDL). At the secondary stages, teachers should be encouraged to make more use of Interdisciplinary Learning (IDL) as another context in which to add to the proportion of the curriculum that is delivered through Gaelic.
- At the secondary stages, young people's fluency was greatly enhanced by having a subject available through the medium of Gaelic. They had a better range of specialised vocabulary, as well as more breadth, depth, and application in their learning.
- Too many secondary schools are yet to strategically plan for a statutory sufficient proportion of the curriculum to be delivered through Gaelic.
- Too many young people are leaving Gaelic Medium Education at the end of the broad general education with no formal recognition for their learning in GME.
- Across secondary stages, staff should strive to ensure that young people who do not continue with Gàidhlig, or learning through Gaelic, maintain their fluency through involvement in whole-school events, such as assembly, personal social education, tutor time, and opportunities for wider achievement.

### **QI 2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment**

- Across 3-18 Gaelic Medium Education, staff, children and young people enjoy positive relationships, which is an important factor to be underpinning learning through immersion.
- For most of the time, teachers and practitioners of 3-18 modelled and used high-quality immersion in Gaelic. Challenges in recruiting teachers reduced children's learning through Gaelic.
- Teachers and practitioners have an improved understanding of approaches to immersion. In early learning and childcare (ELC) settings, practitioners should continue to get a balance between group activities, free-flow play, adult-led activities and child-led activities, whilst always delivering total immersion. Teachers of children in P1 should prioritise ensuring that play is challenging, with regular immersion, commentary, and dialogue in Gaelic.
- As staff produce written statements on what constitutes consistency in high-quality learning, teaching, and assessment they should include what constitutes effective immersion. These statements should be used to improve practice.
- Increasingly, high-quality learner conversations help children and young people to understand and evaluate progress and agree areas for development. Teachers can increase individual feedback on Gaelic grammar and spelling.
- At the secondary stages, headteachers are not tracking young people in Gaelic Medium Education's attainment as a group of learners. As such, they are not confidently able to speak about whether young people are making the best possible progress.

#### 4.1.1.1 QI 3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

- Educators were good at setting a relaxed ethos to underpin immersion. In most provisions there is a strong sense of community and positive relationships where children get on well together.
- Across stages, we saw teachers making good use of differentiated approaches to learning. Where they are available, Gaelic-speaking language assistants and support teachers are providing effective support for learners.
- In most schools, staff receive helpful information and strategies to additional support needs (ASN) in the Gaelic Medium and Learner classroom. Most staff make good use of this information.
- Overall, educators are not yet making sufficient use of the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education, 2017.

#### QI 3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

- In early learning and childcare settings (ELC), the majority of children are making satisfactory progress. There is scope for children to secure better progress through staff's better planning of the curriculum.
- Overall at the primary stages and by S3, most children and young people in GME are making good progress in developing their fluency in Gaelic. In S1-S3, this progress is within a limited range of contexts. There are a number of curriculum areas for which progression is not provided at the secondary stages. At P4 and P7 attainment, particularly in writing could be stronger.
- Attainment in Gàidhlig in the Senior Phase is strong. Most young people entered for national qualifications from SCQF level 5 to SCQF level 7 for Gàidhlig attained a pass at A-C. There are far too few young people doing National Qualifications and awards through the medium of Gaelic, and in Gaelic (Learners) and Gàidhlig.

#### 4.1.2 HMI Gaelic Local Authority Network (GLAN) Briefings 2024-25

HMI briefings to GLAN between 2024-25 provide valuable and recent high-level messages for improvement across GME. The following overview gives a selection of some of the key messages from these briefings most relevant to the CIC. These statements are lifted from the original document and give an opportunity to compare with the pre-pandemic briefings in the previous section.

#### QI 1.3 Leadership of change

- Most staff have a clear understanding of the social, cultural, and economic context of their communities, of which Gàidhlig is part. In successful practice, the agreed vision, values, and aims focus on achieving impact for Gàidhlig as a language, medium and cultural community. Too often at secondary stages, the vision, values, and aims need to be connected more directly to Gàidhlig and national priorities.

- Senior leaders across 3-18 retain a strong emphasis on planning improvements to raise attainment and support children and young people in Gàidhlig Medium Education most affected by poverty and attainment gaps. In àrd-sgoiltean, raising attainment is restricted to Literacy & Gàidhlig rather than how the entirety of the curriculum can support this.

## QI 2.2 Learning pathways

- Most schools clarify progression in and across curriculum contexts. This should be clear on how key entitlements, grammar, skills, capacities, culture, and other important features are taken forward over a child's time in school. The school community should be clear on how important local matters and interests are part of the curriculum, within national and local expectations
- Across both Gàidhlig Learner and Medium Education, there are increasing concerns about young people's uptake for courses leading to qualifications and awards.

## QI 2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

- Teachers should continue to engage in moderation activities with colleagues from local schools, including for talking.
- A helpful next step would be to develop a more strategic approach to having progression pathways for Literacy & Gàidhlig and learning about Gàidhlig language and culture across the curriculum.
- Almost all children and young people are articulate, enthusiastic, and confident. Children are motivated by meaningful leadership opportunities through Gàidhlig. They are very proud of their ability to speak two languages.
- Staff who reflect on their practice continue to develop approaches to delivering high-quality learning, teaching, and immersion. They place increased focus on ensuring appropriate immersion, differentiation, support, and level of challenge for all learners. Too often this is not captured in a policy for learning, teaching, and assessment, which includes advice on the interface between Gàidhlig and English Medium Education.
- In effective practice, staff use intensive total immersion approaches to increase children's fluency at pace. This has accelerated children's progress in Literacy & Gàidhlig.

## Play the Gàidhlig Medium way

- In almost a quarter of sgoiltean-àraich and bun-sgoiltean, staff are asked to develop further approaches to play-based learning. In particular, staff are asked to be clear on total immersion and the role of the adult in having high-quality, regular and Gàidhlig interactions. Across stages, in effective practice, staff have developed guidance on what high standards of learning and teaching through immersion looks like. Teachers use intensive immersion approaches to accelerate children's standards of progress and fluency.

Comparing the GLAN 2024-25 Briefing with the pre-pandemic *Thematic Briefing* highlights some interesting developments and persistent challenges in GME:

- Some secondary leaders appear to be struggling to relate the work they are doing on vision, values, and change with Gaelic and relevant national priorities
- The concerns regarding the number of pupils achieving qualifications in GME and GLE are increasing
- The use of immersion strategies appears to be more effective, although there are concerns about the implementation of play-based learning in an immersion context.
- Overall, there appear to have been many positive developments in GME, such as pupil confidence in using their Gaelic
- Addressing these issues through improved leadership, planning, and support for immersion practices would enhance the effectiveness and continuity of GME from ELC through secondary school.

### 4.1.3 HMI Inspection Evidence 2019-2025

HMI Inspection Evidence, in the form of summarised inspection findings, give an indication as to areas of strength and challenge in GME nationally. The following tables give a selection of some of the messages issued by HMI between 2019-2025.

Table 5 provides a selection of examples of good practice. Table 2 highlights some areas for improvement as identified by HMI. These tables aim to give a selection of messages relevant to the Literacy & Gàidhlig CIC, as opposed to giving a comprehensive overview. For detailed exemplification, see Appendix A

Table 5 - Examples of good practice taken from HMI Inspection Findings (2019-2025)

## HMIE Findings

Examples of good practice based on HMIE inspection findings.  
Including Early Years, Primary and Secondary



 <p style="font-weight: bold; color: white; background-color: #E91E63; padding: 5px; border-radius: 10px 10px 0 0;">LEADERSHIP &amp; MANAGEMENT</p> <p style="font-weight: bold; color: black; background-color: #F080F0; padding: 5px; border-radius: 10px 10px 0 0;">Positive Leaders</p> <p style="font-size: small; color: black; padding: 5px;">There are examples of positive leadership that have increased GME enrolments.</p> <p style="font-size: small; color: black; padding: 5px;">Leaders are passionate about improving Gàidhlig education and serve as positive language role models.</p>	 <p style="font-weight: bold; color: white; background-color: #8BC34A; padding: 5px; border-radius: 10px 10px 0 0;">LEARNING PROVISION</p> <p style="font-weight: bold; color: black; background-color: #E0F0E0; padding: 5px; border-radius: 10px 10px 0 0;">Planning</p> <p style="font-size: small; color: black; padding: 5px;">Teachers plan learning contexts related to Gàidhlig language, culture, heritage and sustainability.</p> <p style="font-size: small; color: black; padding: 5px;">Staff collaborate with partners to explore local Gàidhlig placenames and develop intergenerational links.</p>	 <p style="font-weight: bold; color: white; background-color: #FFC107; padding: 5px; border-radius: 10px 10px 0 0;">IMMERSION</p> <p style="font-weight: bold; color: black; background-color: #FFDAB9; padding: 5px; border-radius: 10px 10px 0 0;">Fluency</p> <p style="font-size: small; color: black; padding: 5px;">Staff use total immersion pedagogy effectively, focusing on oral fluency and specialist vocabulary. They provide high-quality immersion experiences tailored to children's needs and interests.</p> <p style="font-size: small; color: black; padding: 5px;">Staff support sensitively with language corrections.</p>	 <p style="font-weight: bold; color: white; background-color: #00BCD4; padding: 5px; border-radius: 10px 10px 0 0;">SUCCESES &amp; ACHIEVEMENTS</p> <p style="font-weight: bold; color: black; background-color: #ADD8E6; padding: 5px; border-radius: 10px 10px 0 0;">Supporting GME</p> <p style="font-size: small; color: black; padding: 5px;">In one school, middle leaders have used tutor and PSE time to ensure that almost all GME young people who are not studying Gàidhlig as a language receive a literacy award at SCQF Level 4.</p>	 <p style="font-weight: bold; color: white; background-color: #673AB7; padding: 5px; border-radius: 10px 10px 0 0;">POLICY</p> <p style="font-weight: bold; color: black; background-color: #B0C4DE; padding: 5px; border-radius: 10px 10px 0 0;">Advice on Gaelic Education</p> <p style="font-size: small; color: black; padding: 5px;">HTs and staff made use of the Advice to ensure progress in the school.</p> <p style="font-size: small; color: black; padding: 5px;">The curriculum is developed to integrate music, culture, technology, sport, the local area and language to develop children's strong sense of identity within Gaelic and their local area.</p>
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Table 6 - Examples of areas for improvement taken from HMI Inspection Findings (2019-2025)



#### 4.1.4 Care Inspectorate Reports

Care Inspectorate reports have not been included at this stage due to the ongoing development of a new joint inspection programme. This plan introduces a refreshed approach to multi-agency scrutiny and improvement support, which is still in progress. Once the updated framework and findings are fully implemented and published, they will provide a more comprehensive basis for inclusion in future curriculum evidence papers.

## 4.2 Education Scotland Reports and Evidence

### 4.2.1 Summary of Gaelic Medium Education (GME) Attainment Analysis – Education Scotland, 2024 (2013–2019)

This research, conducted in 2024 using Scottish Government data, analysed the attainment of pupils enrolled in Gaelic Medium Education (GME) from S1 (starting 2013). It focused on the number of pupils achieving an SCQF level in Literacy & Gàidhlig, amid concerns that many do not gain any SCQF certification, despite being educated primarily through the medium of Gaelic. The research demonstrates that there is an urgent need for national and local accountability to ensure GME students receive the coherent 3–18 education entitlement as promised by Curriculum for Excellence.

Data from Seemis (school census) and SQA (exam results) were used to inform this work. The research focused on S1 GME cohorts from 2013 to 2019, following them through to their exam years (2017–2023). Public SCQF attainment data was also used to compare GME with English Medium Education (EME).

The study found that, nationally, fewer than two-thirds of GME pupils attain any SCQF level in Gàidhlig. Outside Glasgow and Edinburgh, this drops to around 50% or fewer. Therefore, the Gaelic Medium Attainment Gap (compared to English) is:

- Around 25–30 percentage points at SCQF Level 5+
- Even wider in non-urban areas (up to 46 percentage points at Level 4).

Very few pupils (only 66 of over 800) returned to Gàidhlig after dropping it as a subject, post-S3. The report also found that there is a misuse of Gaelic (Learners) qualifications for GME pupils in some settings, i.e. GME pupils being presented for Gaelic (Learners) awards. The report highlights, however, that those who *do* sit Gàidhlig exams often perform very well.

The research highlights the systemic issues facing Literacy & Gàidhlig:

- Wider data, including progress and attainment data is not consistently recorded for GME pupils
- There is a lack of curricular pathways in schools for GME pupils beyond S3
- Once pupils leave GME, the analysis suggests they rarely return to GME
- The attainment gap highlights challenges around the status and equity for Gàidhlig as a literacy subject in many settings.

This analysis is evidence of a GME “postcode lottery” with regards to access to GME, support, and positive outcomes. Inconsistencies with tracking, monitoring, curriculum design, and leadership often limit progress in GME. Whereas the vast majority of learners attain a qualification in Literacy & English, this is not the case for Literacy & Gàidhlig, where a significant proportion of those entering GME leave with no qualification in the language.

## 4.3 Summary

Section 4 has highlighted some of the key areas of strength and areas for improvement for GME, based on HMI inspection evidence and publications, as well as Education Scotland research. Based on these data sources, important points for consideration regarding the CIC are:

- The key role of practitioners and teachers in providing high-quality total immersion and immersion experiences
- The importance of effective total immersion pedagogies, particularly in early years settings
- The role and impact of school leaders in ensuring a GME-positive approach across a whole school or setting
- The variation in the extent and quality of the GME experienced nationally
- The importance of positive relationships across GME and how this can contribute to confidence in using the language
- The concern around the low numbers attaining a qualification in Gàidhlig, and the impact of systemic and structural issues (such as curriculum design), on the ability of learners to experience a 3-18 immersion experience.

## 5 Stakeholder Reports and Reviews

This section draws on reports and reviews produced by GME stakeholders. While the focus of these reports is not always on the Literacy & Gàidhlig curriculum exclusively, the conclusions drawn may still be of interest and relevance.

### 5.1 Key Stakeholder Reports

#### 5.1.1 Comann na Gàidhlig Conference (2025)

Comann na Gàidhlig (CnaG), the main Gaelic youth development organisation, marked its 40th year anniversary by holding a conference in Stornoway in February 2025. The focus of this conference was the work being carried out on a new Gaelic Youth Strategy, which was reported on by the BBC (2025).

Whilst the conference focused mainly on what was happening beyond the school gates, the following issues were raised by the BBC Report for consideration by curriculum planners and policy makers:

- Learners frequently refer to Gaelic as a “school thing”, as opposed to a language used outside of school in social situations
- Identity and culture are important within GME, and this should extend beyond what happens in the classroom
- Many former GME pupils lose the ability/confidence to use their Gaelic, and don’t go on to use it in their adult lives
- In some areas, GME is thriving, and yet the shift in community demographic can make it difficult for the language to exist in community and social settings.

Overall, there was a recognition of the value of GME, but a clear acknowledgement that, without stronger communities and greater resources, the extent to which GME will lead to a secure and thriving language is severely restricted.

### 5.2 Subject Associations

#### 5.2.1 Comann Luchd-teagaisg Àrd-sgoiltean (CLAS)

Comann Luchd-teagaisg Àrd-sgoiltean (CLAS) is the professional association for Gaelic secondary teachers. The *Discussion Paper* was produced following a members’ conference in May 2024. The paper highlights key challenges and recommendations for improving Gaelic education and curriculum development.

#### **Senior Phase Drop-off**

One of the main concerns is the significant drop-off in Gaelic Medium Education (GME) participation at the Senior Phase. Factors such as the lack of a Gaelic-positive ethos in some

secondary schools, limited immersion time, and the presentation of Literacy & Gàidhlig as an optional subject (unlike English, which is de facto mandatory) contribute to this decline. The paper calls for statutory guidance to ensure that all pupils in GME are tracked, monitored, and expected to achieve a qualification in Literacy & Gàidhlig at the Senior Phase.

## **Improving Fluency**

In highlighting the challenges and opportunities of immersion education, the integration of language and content learning in GME is discussed. The report emphasises that immersion teaching requires specific pedagogical approaches, yet current guidance does not adequately support this. Teachers face challenges balancing subject content with language acquisition, as Gaelic-medium instruction requires additional strategies to support progressive language development. However, Curriculum for Excellence and related policy documents are perceived as being designed primarily for a monolingual population, lacking recognition of the unique needs of bilingual learners in immersion education.

This gap extends to assessment, where the lack of tailored assessment frameworks for bilingual learners reinforces the perception that the current CfE framework does not fully accommodate Gaelic-medium instruction. The paper also discusses reforming assessments to focus on functional Gaelic fluency rather than being a direct translation of English-medium qualifications. The current emphasis on reading and writing in exams is also seen as limiting opportunities to develop oral fluency and sociolinguistic competence.

## **Gaelic Culture**

The report stresses the critical role of Gaelic education in language revitalisation and cultural transmission. GME has been instrumental in maintaining and increasing the number of Gaelic speakers, but GME teachers face additional responsibilities related to language revitalisation that are not acknowledged in wider educational policies. There is a need for clearer curriculum guidance on Gaelic culture, including how it should be integrated into subject areas across the GME curriculum.

## **Leadership**

The paper highlights the need for stronger leadership and professional learning for leaders in Gaelic education. While General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) standards now recognise the distinct pedagogical needs of GME, specialised professional development opportunities remain insufficient. Teachers require greater support for immersion methodologies and language skill development, and school leadership plays a crucial role in determining whether Gaelic education flourishes or declines. The paper suggests further integrating Gaelic education leadership training into the Into Headship programme to ensure consistent support for GME across Scotland.

## 5.3 Professional Associations

Comann Luchd-teagaisg Àrd-sgoiltean (CLAS) is considered to be both a subject and professional association: please refer to sub-section 5.2.

## 5.4 Stakeholder Reports and Reviews

### 5.4.1 Stiùireadh Gràmair Report (2015)

The *Stiùireadh Gràmair* report (Ross et al, 2015) developed by researchers from the University of Glasgow, University of Edinburgh, and Sabhal Mòr Ostaig (UHI), in collaboration with Bòrd na Gàidhlig's Comataidh Comhairleachaidh Cànanain, provides targeted grammatical guidance for contemporary Gaelic users. This document addresses specific usage questions identified as challenging by Gaelic language professionals and teachers.

The report emphasises the need for clear guidelines on complex grammatical structures to promote consistency among Gaelic speakers, including educators and media professionals. Eleven particularly difficult areas of Gaelic grammar are addressed, providing detailed explanations and recommendations to aid understanding and correct usage. The areas identified are as follows:

- Nouns following verbal nouns
- The dative (prepositional) case
- Irregular verbs
- Direct object inversion
- Impersonals (passives) with “rach”
- Lenition of verbal nouns
- Translating “to” into Gaelic
- Relative clauses with prepositions
- Forms of numbers and nouns
- Translating “if” into Gaelic
- Direct object forms with “ga”

These grammar fundamentals are of interest to educators given the prominence afforded to grammatical accuracy and the need to attend to form (NicLeòid, 2016) and could support curriculum planners by informing the focus of a language and grammar framework.

### 5.4.2 The Perspectives of Children and Young People

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) emphasises the importance of listening to children and their views, with Article 12 stating that children have the right to express their views freely and be heard in all matters affecting them, including decisions that affect their lives and wellbeing. This means that children should have a say in matters that concern them, such as their education, health, and living arrangements, and that their views should be taken into account when decisions are made about them. Children’s voices and perspectives are crucial in shaping their curriculum and learning experiences. *Learner Participation in Educational*

*Settings (3-18)* (Education Scotland, 2023) highlights the importance of effective learner participation in ensuring that education can become relevant, valuable, and supportive of achievement and attainment.

#### 5.4.3 Consulting with Children and Young People

This report (Scottish Government, 2022) sits within the wider *Putting Learners at the Centre* led by Professor Ken Muir. This presents the voices and views of learners on the future of education in Scotland. One of the most pertinent points for the Literacy & Gàidhlig CIC is the emphasis placed on respect for culture and language — this is further reinforced by Article 30 of the UNCRC, which asserts the rights of ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities and those of indigenous origin.

#### 5.4.4 All Learners in Scotland Matter: National Discussion on Education

The final report (Scottish Government, 2023) of this consultation highlights the importance of founding education development upon the voices and experiences of a wide range of stakeholders, especially children and young people, and is a guide to meaningful and inclusive educational reform across Scotland. This report highlights the importance of considering the context and status of GME and that appropriate measures are taken to consult with GME sectors and national organisations to ensure developments have a positive impact.

#### 5.4.5 Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (CNES) Senior Phase Gaelic Survey (Autumn 2023)

This survey highlights several key points related to the Gaelic secondary curriculum.

Only 39% of pupils felt that the Senior Phase curriculum was relevant to their needs, suggesting a need to better align the secondary curriculum with student interests and career aspirations. 75% of GME pupils indicated they would be willing to study a GM subject if a broader range of courses were available, emphasising the demand for a more diverse and comprehensive curriculum. The survey points to the crucial role of parental support, with 85% of GME pupils encouraged by their parents to study Gaelic, compared to just 31% of EME pupils.

#### 5.4.6 Fèisean nan Gàidheal - NEART

Neart (e-sgoil, n.d.), a project led by Fèisean nan Gàidheal, focused on educators and young people in the Western Isles. The project, informed by the UNCRC, centred around Gaelic as a vital community asset and examined the role of Gaelic in the community, education, and careers. The Neart project highlighted mixed experiences of Gaelic-speaking young people across the Western Isles. It revealed changing perceptions of Gaelic between primary and secondary education and highlighted the importance of innovative approaches to supporting the language.

The survey carried out as part of this project asked about the areas in which young people felt Gaelic would be important to them:

- 81% of respondents said that it is important that Gaelic be spoken in schools
- 68% said it is important that Gaelic be spoken in the community

- 50% said it is important that Gaelic be spoken in the home
- 54% said it is important that Gaelic be spoken in the workplace.

In questions relating to the opportunity to study subjects through the medium of Gaelic, aside from the Gaelic language itself, the three most popular choices were Music, Maths and Social Subjects.

This project demonstrates some of the key areas of interest for young Gaelic speakers and represents an innovative and enabling process with which to include young Gaels in discussions about education and wider Gaelic issues.

## 5.5 Summary

This section has highlighted some reports and reviews produced by stakeholders. The topics covered are wide-ranging and although, in some cases, not directly related to curriculum design and creation, they do provide important considerations for the Literacy & Gàidhlig CIC:

- The importance of wider Gaelic-language experiences for children and young people in GME
- The demand and need for a more enhanced and comprehensive GME curriculum at secondary level
- The need for more support and guidance in terms of leadership, curriculum structure, pedagogical, and assessment approaches and cultural transmission
- The importance of providing clear and consistent grammatical instruction to ensure accuracy
- The importance of parental support in maintaining a successful GME experience
- The interest in studying a wider range of subjects through the medium of Gaelic, such as Music, Maths, and Social Subjects.

## 6 Academic Research

The GME research landscape is sparsely populated. There are a small number of studies focused on GME specifically – these are highly valuable. Where appropriate, this section draws on the immersion research from international contexts to support data triangulation.

A range of educational research databases, including ERIC, BEI, Education Database, Web of Science and JSTOR were searched using the following terms:

- Gaelic Medium Education
- Immersion education
- Gaelic medium immersion education
- Second language acquisition
- Immersion strategies and pedagogy.

The same search terms were also used to search using Google Scholar. The search was initially limited to research that took place between 2010 and 2024. However, to access a greater volume of material, this was broadened to include papers from any period. Research situated in several nations, including Scotland, was reviewed as part of this process.

Research referred to in this section can be found in the Reference List Papers and have mainly been drawn from the search outlined above but further papers have been included that are aligned to the current work of Education Scotland around Literacy & Gàidhlig (e.g. CLAS conference paper). The following summaries give an overview of key themes emerging from existing research relating to GME.

### 6.1 Challenges in Attaining Fluency

It is widely acknowledged that learners in an immersion education setting often struggle to attain “native-like” levels of competency in productive skills (speaking and writing), despite developing strong receptive skills (reading and listening) (Cummins, 2000).

In discussing corrective feedback methodologies, NicLeòid (2016) highlights a range of fundamental grammar errors present in the Gaelic of GME pupils - it is perhaps surprising how basic these errors are, especially given the apparent confidence with which pupils used their Gaelic in NicLeòid's study. This finding correlates with the Irish context where pupils are regarded by some as having a hybrid or pidgin form of the language (O Duibhir, 2018).

Education Scotland's *Advice on Gaelic Education* (2022) and NicLeòid (2016) advise that a strategic approach to error correction and a focus on form should be adopted, as opposed to simply focusing on pupils managing to achieve communication. Interestingly, this approach is also recommended by MacGearailt et al (2023) in their discussion on the appropriateness of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) in addressing proficiency issues among Irish

language pupils. O Duibhir (2018) also calls for a much stronger focus on form in Irish Medium Education.

The importance of attaining effective productive skills is especially relevant in becoming “socialised” in the language and being able to communicate with others, especially those of older generations (Will, 2011). This is interesting in relation to the discussion in 6.1.4 and 6.1.5 on the findings of Dunmore (2017, 2022) and Nance and Moran (2022) and perhaps goes some way to explaining the challenges of using the language post-GME. O Duibhir (2018) arrives at a similar conclusion in his discussion of Irish Medium Education: that pupils must achieve a high level of proficiency for there to be a chance that they progress to become members of Irish-speaking networks upon leaving education.

Achieving a high level of proficiency is vital not only for attainment, but also for the survival of the language. This has significant implications for curriculum planners, policy makers, and professional learning providers (NicLeòid, 2016) (Andrew, 2018).

## 6.2 Pedagogy and Immersion strategies

In common with immersion systems the world over, teachers in GME require a wide repertoire of immersion strategies to meet the expectations of the system (Lyster and Tedick, 2014). This includes knowledge and skills relating to CLIL, differentiation, form-focused teaching and corrective feedback (Andrew, 2018). This is also true of approaches to assessment, where there must be a “systematic process in place to assess and report student progress in their development of the minority language” (Tedick and Lyster, 2020, p. 67).

However, in her study based on interviews with practising Gaelic teachers, Andrew (2018) highlights a recurring issue with the CfE technical framework:

From the perspective of Gaelic-medium teachers a key issue is its design for a monolingual school population, with no recognition of the altered pattern of learning found in bilingual children. (p. 7)

This uncertainty is echoed by NicLeòid's (2016) study on form-focused instruction for GME, where it was found that GME teachers were uncertain as to the extent to which they should be correcting pupils' spoken Gaelic.

Aside from the work of Andrew (2018), the focus of which is primarily professional learning needs, there are few examples of research on effective GME pedagogy. NicLeòid (2016) provides a convincing argument that GME needs to attend to the form and the quality of spoken Gaelic among pupils and advises a range of strategies to achieve this. McPake et al (2017) provide a preliminary discussion on the potential of “translanguaging” in GME but their findings are inconclusive, suggesting further research is required due to participants' concerns about the possible negative impact of introducing English into a minority language immersion system.

These issues align with themes discussed elsewhere in this paper: that there is a dearth of recognition and guidance on the nuances and challenges of effective teaching in a minority language immersion setting (CLAS, 2024). Until such time as there is sufficient research on GME

practice, exploring comparable immersion contexts, e.g., Wales and Ireland, could help inform policy and practice.

### 6.3 Additional Support Needs (ASN) in GME

Scottish Education has seen a marked increase in ASN figures in recent years, with 40.5% of pupils having an additional support need in 2024 (Scottish Government, 2024). Whilst separate statistics for GME for this time period do not exist, it could be expected that GME would experience similar trends; indeed in his audit on ASN in GME, McLulich (2013, p. 9) observed that ASN levels of 15% in GME reflected the “wider national distribution” – this is the most recent date at which relevant statistics are available.

The impact of increasing levels of ASN has been widely documented. A joint media statement compiled by trade unions and other educational organisations highlighted the strain which the education system is under due to the increasing number of pupils with ASN, and a perceived under-resourcing to meet these needs (EIS, 2024).

Similarly, the *Advice on Gaelic Education* (Education Scotland, 2022, p. 2) suggests that, despite legislation and corresponding responsibilities pertaining to ASN: “At this stage in the development of Gaelic Medium Education, while it is desirable, there are still challenges in providing some of this support through the medium of Gaelic.”

It could be suggested that, if the situation in EME is challenging, the same could be said of GME, if not more so due to the lack of specialist staff. Among a comprehensive list of recommendations, McLulich (2013, p.124 to 125) focuses on an increase in the availability, training and deployment of ASN staff and PSAs. It is worth noting also that McLulich's audit highlights the need for a range of assessment and diagnostic tools to support GME learners and practitioners (2013, p. 124).

In response to the McLulich (2013) recommendations, Stòrlann Nàiseanta na Gàidhlig (the organisation with responsibility for coordination and production of Gaelic teaching materials) held a conference on ASN in GME. Following the conference, an extensive collation of resources to support GME practitioners in meeting ASN was produced (McLulich, 2017). This resource has a wide-ranging scope covering twelve different areas, including:

- Assessing spoken language development
- Assessment of reading skills
- Speech and language needs
- ASN in bilingual children
- Partnership working.

A further guidance paper was published by Education Scotland (2017) offering guidance on how to raise attainment with early intervention, which suggests a variety of different supports, including technology, although some of these solutions have perhaps been superseded by the provision of personal pupil devices.

More recently, Andrew (2020, p. 151) notes that teachers found distinguishing between language delay and additional support needs in GME pupils challenging. The thesis also highlights that teachers identified additional support needs as an area of learning need, as well as the possible additional responsibility placed on GME teachers by a lack of Gaelic ASN specialists (Andrew, 2020, p. 151).

The ongoing challenges around ASN across the education system are clear – it could be argued, as discussed above, that this would be felt more acutely in GME due to a lack of specialist ASN teachers and other resources.

## 6.4 Gaelic Culture and Identity in a Monolingual System

The Advice on Education (Education Scotland, 2022, p. 18) highlights the importance of Gaelic language and culture in the curriculum, placing an onus on teachers to ensure that children's learning links to, amongst other things, “an appreciation of bilingualism and Gaelic language and culture.” Recognition is also given to “Scottish Cultures” in *Building the Curriculum 3* (The Scottish Government, 2008, p. 11), where knowledge and understanding of this area should play an important role across the BGE and the Four Capacities.

In relation to the teaching of Gaelic language and culture, Andrew (2018, p. 18) notes the effect of the aforementioned expectations on the workload of GME teachers: “This revitalisation outcome adds a dimension to the work of immersion teachers that is not expected of mainstream primary teachers.”

However, as suggested in the CLAS paper (2024), the extent to which this responsibility is omitted from wider Curriculum for Excellence documentation adds to the sense that CfE has been designed solely for a monolingual population. Curricular infrastructure that supports the development of culture and identity could help to alleviate this issue (Dunmore, 2017).

How well Gaelic can prosper in a curriculum designed through a monolingual lens has been questioned in wider language research. Kanaki (2020; 2021) suggests that despite Scottish Government policies that appear, on the surface, to be supportive of heritage language learning, such as the 1+2 Languages model, the perception that these policies are devised and implemented from a “neoliberal” and “monolingual” ideology means they operate counter to their stated intention. The “commodification” of language learning brought about by this approach has created a language hierarchy, with greater prominence given to those languages that may be perceived to result in economic benefit, to the detriment of Scotland’s heritage languages (Kanaki, 2021, p. 21).

The CLAS paper (2024, p. 6) in its conclusion, argues that: “...it is clear that a more tailored approach is required to ensure that Curriculum for Excellence and National Qualifications are fit for purpose for Gaelic Medium Education...”

This statement and the findings above suggest that a fresh approach to the Literacy & Gàidhlig curriculum would prove beneficial.

## 6.5 Language Attitudes and Usage During and After GME

There is evidence to suggest that pupils' attitudes towards the Gaelic language during GME are generally positive, particularly with the value placed upon the benefits of bilingualism (Dickson et al 2021; Macleod & Macleod, 2018; Pittas & Tompkins, 2024). However, this positive disposition does not appear to influence usage of the language beyond the classroom, e.g., in the playground or community (Macleod & Macleod 2018).

This trend continues post-GME, with Dunmore (2017; 2022) finding that many GME alumni rarely use the language, unless employed in a job that requires using Gaelic. Dunmore (2017; 2022) discusses a lack of socialisation in the language: the way in which individuals learn and acquire Gaelic and the cultural norms of their community through interaction and communication. This lack of socialisation contributes to the "attrition" seen among post-GME adults (Dunmore 2017; 2022).

There are further examples of the importance of 'socialisation'. Nance & Moran (2022, p. 545) explore issues surrounding identity among GME pupils, who it is suggested aren't viewed by some as authentic Gaelic-speakers due to a lack of "blas", i.e. accent, dialect, register, and idiomatic use of the language. This prompts the authors to pose questions about Gaelic identity, given that an ever-increasing proportion of Gaelic speakers are coming from urban/lowland GME backgrounds yet are not treated as "community insiders" (Nance & Moran, 2022, p. 545). It is proposed that new identities and dialects will emerge because of this demographic shift (Nance & Moran, 2022).

Approaches, opportunities and interventions facilitating the development of Gaelic acquisition, fluency and identity - those which ensure pupils are socialised in Gaelic within and beyond the classroom - are identified as a countermeasure to this trend, with a focus on community and parental involvement, as well as a curriculum that incorporates practical language experiences (Dunmore, 2017; Macleod & Macleod, 2018).

Most strikingly however, is perhaps the lack of research carried out on GME within CfE since its inception. It is clear from the evidence above that the pool of available literature on Gaelic Medium pedagogy and practice is sparse, and whilst there is perhaps more plentiful research on the benefits of bilingualism in general and the policy surrounding GME, it could be argued that a much sharper focus on the processes, pedagogies, and outcomes of GME would be of significant benefit to the overall progress of the system.

## 6.6 Summary

This section has highlighted some of the key pieces of academic research relevant to GME. Clear themes emerge from the available research, relevant to the Literacy & Gàidhlig CIC:

- There are significant challenges with developing the Gaelic proficiency of children and young people

- There is a need for a stronger focus on effective Gaelic immersion pedagogies in a Literacy & Gàidhlig technical framework
- ASN continues to be an area of challenge for practitioners in GME
- Changes and improvements to create the new Literacy & Gàidhlig curriculum must reflect the position of a minority language in a majority language system
- GME pupils need to be better supported to develop a positive Gaelic identity reflective of their context, thereby encouraging them to retain and use their Gaelic in their adult lives.

## 7 Future Trends

This section aims to use evidence and predictions available to outline future global trends, relating these to the likely impact on Scotland and its education system. Given that one of the aims of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle is to co-create a future-oriented curriculum, the trends in this section, whilst not certain, offer some insights for consideration.

Some of the challenges facing the world, common to many future-looking reports and analyses include:

- Rising global conflict (OECD, 2025a; PWC, 2024; Scottish Government, 2025).
- Climate change, biodiversity loss and reduced food security (OECD, 2025a&b; Patton et al., 2016; PWC, 2024; Royal Society of Edinburgh, 2024; Scottish Government, 2025)
- Rise in mental health concerns and obesity (especially in young people) (OECD, 2025a; Patton et al., 2016; PWC, 2024; Scottish Government, 2025)
- Ageing populations (PWC, 2024; Scottish Government, 2025)
- Technological disruption and polarisation via increased use of AI and emerging technologies (OECD, 2025a; PWC, 2024; Royal Society of Edinburgh, 2024; Scottish Government, 2025)
- Widening inequalities (including concentration of wealth, social instability and health inequalities) (OECD, 2020; OECD 2025a; Patton et al., 2016; PWC, 2024; Scottish Government 2025)
- Rising costs of living (World Economic Foundation, 2025).

It is also important to note that trends identified are likely to affect children and young people differently, or disproportionately, compared with impacts for older generations. This is, in part, because children and young people must live with the outcomes of identified trends for longer, and the long-term future has particular importance for those who are youngest now (Scottish Government, 2025). They are increasingly exposed to conflict, displacement, environmental degradation, and unregulated commercial exploitation, especially in digital and food environments, as well as being the first generation to grow up under the “shadow of climate change” (Patton et al., 2016).

Young people may also experience societal transformations differently from older generations because they are often at the leading edge of change or technology adoption. The trends will also have differential impacts for different equalities groups. Intersecting inequalities and disadvantage may reduce resilience or the ability of both households and communities to adapt to future challenges, or to take advantage of future opportunities. In many cases the trends have the potential to drive and deepen inequalities still further (Scottish Government, 2025).

Despite these challenges, there are also opportunities for a future-oriented curriculum:

- Curriculum flexibility and personalisation - a modern curriculum that is fit for purpose, meets individual aspirations and delivers a just society that meets climate goals and achieves strong economic future (OECD, 2020; Royal Society of Edinburgh, 2024)
- Learner agency and co-agency - ownership of their learning and being able to navigate uncertainty (OECD, 2020; Patton et al., 2016)
- Empowerment - education is positioned as a key driver for enabling individuals and communities to understand environmental challenges and take informed, responsible action (OECD, 2025b)
- Bodies and minds - the need for socio-emotional learning, digital wellbeing, and health literacy across all age groups (OECD 2025a; Patton et al., 2016)
- Transformative competencies – that go beyond subject knowledge to include attitudes, ethics, and values allowing learners to create new value, reconcile tensions and dilemmas, and take responsibility (OECD, 2020)
- Skills such as harnessing AI and big data, analytical thinking, creative thinking, resilience, flexibility and agility, and technological literacy are not only considered critical now, but are also projected to become even more important (OECD, 2020; World Economic Forum, 2025) as well as green skills (OECD, 2025b)
- Continued relevance of human-centric skills amid rapid technological advances - leadership and social influence, curiosity and lifelong learning, systems thinking, talent management, motivation and self-awareness are considered important for this (World Economic Forum, 2025)
- Equity and inclusion - curriculum design must address widening inequalities (for example via intercultural understanding) and ensure access to meaningful learning for all, regardless of background or circumstance (OECD, 2020; OECD, 2025a)
- Broader educational goals - education should promote individual and collective wellbeing, sustainability, and social cohesion, as opposed to a narrow focus on academic achievement or economic productivity. Therefore, encouraging society to value all educational pathways and destinations (OECD, 2020; Royal Society of Edinburgh, 2024).

## 7.1 Summary

These trends reflect a global shift toward education systems that are necessarily more adaptive, inclusive, and future-oriented—principles that align closely with Scotland’s Curriculum Improvement Cycle. They encourage co-creation and learner agency, as well as reflecting learners’ lived realities, while preparing them for emerging challenges.

## 8 Points to Consider

This paper has examined a range of evidence relating to the Literacy & Gàidhlig curriculum. There are some examples of highly relevant reports, data sets and research:

- Regular and detailed Course Reports and Exam Data produced by SQA in the form of Course Reports and Exam Data point to trends in attainment at a national scale
- Emerging Education Scotland research on Gaelic Medium attainment clarifies structural and systemic issues affecting GME
- HMI reports and findings highlight areas of strong practice, providing strong improvement messages for the sector
- Stakeholder and partner reports provide a wider perspective on the context of GME
- Academic research focussed on GME practitioner and pupil experiences provides a depth of analysis on the both the practical and policy issues that exist in GME.

It is apparent, however, that more research into GME pedagogy, practice, assessment and outcomes would be of great benefit to the system overall. Furthermore, in some cases, little to no reference is made to GME in national and international reports and data sets.

The list below provides a summary of some of the key points to consider for the Literacy & Gàidhlig CIC. This list is not comprehensive but aims to stimulate the ongoing work of the CIC and to prompt discussion and areas for focus as the cycle progresses.

Points to consider:

- GME has seen significant growth nationally, with the quality of provision improving in some areas and sectors
- There is significant variation in the richness and extent of GME secondary provision across the country, and the percentage of GME pupils who achieve a qualification in the language is of serious concern to national bodies and stakeholders
- Inspection evidence highlights examples of positive and innovative practice in the GME system
- The way in which play-based learning is implemented in a total-immersion environment needs careful consideration
- Despite high levels of confidence, there are issues with language proficiency among GME pupils
- The way Gaelic is perceived during and beyond school affects the long-term usage of the language among GME pupils – this could be attributed to issues related to identity and connection with the language
- There are a small number of highly valuable academic studies on GME which suggest practitioners need more guidance on curricular planning, approaches to teaching language and grammar, and supporting a diverse range of bilingual learners including those with ASN

- The sense that the current curriculum has been designed for a monolingual system has created challenges for GME practitioners, such as in assessment, policy documents, and curricular content
- WME and IME may offer guidance on how to address some of the challenges facing GME, such as the way in which research can support practice
- The important role of academic research and enquiry in supporting pedagogy and policy should be recognised.

## 9 Declaration

The content of this document was written by the author, exercising full professional judgement. Education Scotland approved AI tools were used to support review, clarity, and quality assurance. Education Scotland staff retain full responsibility and have reviewed and approved all content.

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# Appendix A Selected HMI Summarised Inspection Findings

Theme	QI	Key Points	Sector
Leadership and Management	1.3	Across the bun-sgoil, teachers demonstrate well the General Teaching Council for Scotland professional standards relating to Gàidhlig. Staff in Gàidhlig Medium Education completed a qualification in translating to Gàidhlig. They should continue networking with other teachers of Gàidhlig Medium Education on the island. This should be supported with continued protected time for Gàidhlig in the working time agreement.	P
Leadership and Management	1.3	The headteacher and staff's leadership of Gàidhlig Medium Education is resulting in increased pupil enrolments. The headteacher and staff are passionate in driving improvements for children learning Gàidhlig. The headteacher and staff are positive language role models for children. The headteacher has used immersion experiences in the school to be a learner of Gàidhlig. He uses Gàidhlig in important aspects of the school, for example assemblies, teaching and for socialising. This helps children to value speaking Gàidhlig and appreciate how it is integrated into many aspects of life and work in the school.	P
Learning Provision	2.2	Teachers plan contexts for learning that relate to Gàidhlig language, culture, heritage and learning for sustainability. Recently, teachers and children have worked with a range of partners to look at the meaning of local Gàidhlig placenames. Partners included Gàidhlig community learning and development, Portree Archive Centre and Ainmean Àite na h-Alba. Staff have developed local intergenerational links, including to An Acarsaid residential home. Children have opportunities to be successful in personal achievements through the medium of Gàidhlig. They do very well in national and local Mòds. All children across the bun-sgoil sing songs in Gàidhlig. They play shinty and take part in football competitions (Cuach na Cloinne). Staff should continue to connect their curriculum for Gàidhlig to the local community, outdoor learning and learning for sustainability. This will help children contribute well to their local community, increase their physical fitness and	P

		provide purposeful real-life contexts to apply their knowledge and skills in the Gàidhlig language.	
Learning Provision	2.3	In Gàidhlig Medium Education, staff use total immersion pedagogy and strategies very effectively. They are very fluent in their use of specialist vocabulary. This is a strong feature of practice. They devote much needed time to developing children's oral fluency. Children see corrections to written and oral language as helping their learning and teachers support children sensitively to address corrections. Pupil support assistants help children develop the Gaelic language very effectively.	P
Learning Provision	2.3	Practitioners plan learning with a focus on literacy, Gaelic language, numeracy and health and wellbeing. This includes identifying key Gaelic words for practitioners to introduce to children through play. Children contribute regularly to planning by sharing their ideas and interests.	EY
Learning Provision	2.3	Across the bun-sgoil, almost all staff provide high-quality immersion experiences through Gaelic that are relevant, and well matched to children's needs and interests. All teachers have a strong knowledge of the principles of immersion and use appropriate strategies. This is supporting children's confidence in understanding and developing fluency in Gaelic.	P
Learning Provision	2.3	In Gàidhlig Medium Education, staff use total immersion pedagogy and strategies very effectively. At the total immersion stages, they devote ample time to developing children's oral fluency. They have an explicit and thorough approach to phonics before moving to writing. When children require corrections to language, most teachers do so sensitively. Teachers should continue to share this practice to have a consistent approach. A next step would be to develop consistent approaches to teaching literacy and grammar across the curriculum.	P
Learning Provision	2.3	In Gàidhlig Medium Education, staff are fluent speakers. They use total immersion pedagogy and strategies very well. Gàidhlig is visible and can be heard throughout the school. The older children use Gàidhlig well in peer interactions when they are working independently of the teacher. The acting headteacher is implementing a very useful Gàidhlig language framework. This is giving staff clear direction and advice on exciting pedagogy for teaching grammar. When children require corrections in language, teachers do so sensitively.	P

<p>Successes &amp; Achievements</p>	<p>3.2</p>	<p>Practice worth sharing more widely - High-quality total immersion achievement opportunities for all children</p> <p>Staff plan and provide children’s opportunities for achievement using the principles of total immersion. They engage highly effectively with parents, partners and the community when planning and providing learning rich experiences for children which support them to accrue all the benefits of bilingualism across a wide range of contexts, including academic, cultural and social. Staff, partners and parents offer an extensive range of clubs and activities all through the medium of Gaelic which also help children to learn about Gaelic culture and heritage. These include music, arts and crafts, sports and play, as well as breakfast club and after school care. Annually, children compete in the local and national Mòd celebrating Gaelic literature, music and culture. In bun-sgoil, children’s achievements in Gaelic are particularly highlighted, for example ‘Tosgaire na Gàidhlig’ (Gaelic ambassador) awards and the ‘Craobh Soirbheachais’ display (success tree). Children speak enthusiastically about the skills and Gaelic language they develop and the confidence they gain through these experiences.</p>	<p>P</p>
<p>Successes &amp; Achievements</p>	<p>3.2</p>	<p>Practice worth sharing more widely - Learning about the world of work and focus on skills</p> <p>Staff collaborate highly effectively through business, community and parent partnerships to deliver engaging and meaningful employability and skills learning through highly relevant contexts. This supports and enhances children’s learning through the medium of Gaelic. Teachers plan well-considered approaches to support children to learn about the world of work and enterprise. This is embedded across the curriculum and classroom learning. With partners and visitors, children discuss key skills and the use of Gaelic in lives and jobs. As a result, children have a strong understanding of how bilingualism and a wide range of skills are important to their future lives, the local economy and Gaelic community.</p>	<p>P</p>
<p>Successes and Achievement</p>	<p>3.2</p>	<p>Younger children develop listening and talking skills well in total immersion and social contexts. They develop skills in collaborating with fluent speakers in the community in deep and challenging ways. Older children support the younger ones in these situations by planning</p>	<p>P</p>

		questions to ask fluent speakers. By second level, children talk Gaelic fluently across a range of contexts for their learning. Children use Gàidhlig confidently in adult-led situations, and more independently in pairs and groups. They take turns as appropriate. Most children across all stages express their ideas and opinions persuasively. Children's accuracy in grammar is improving	
Successes & Achievements	3.2	In the last year, middle leaders have used tutor and personal social education time to ensure that almost all young people who are not studying Gàidhlig as a language receive a literacy award at SCQF level four. This enables almost all young people to leave school with a minimum of an award in literacy through the medium of Gàidhlig. Given young people's attainment by the end of the BGE, expectations should be raised so that more young people are presented at SCQF level five.	S
Successes & Achievements	3.2	The school has successfully designated a promoted post to taking forward Gàidhlig Medium Education across all aspects of the curriculum. Staff make good use of the Advice on Gaelic Education (2022) to evaluate their provision and set a strategic direction for the curriculum. Most teachers are flexible and teach in more than one subject, as well as take forward activities. This is gradually increasing the proportion of the curriculum available through Gàidhlig. There are 13 subjects available at some point in S1 to S3. For this, staff work together to support developing the curriculum. There are some opportunities for young people to deliver their knowledge, skills and understanding through projects. Young people also develop their skills through working with partners such as BBC Alba, Comann na Gàidhlig (CNAG), as well as local businesses. They develop their identity and sense of belonging to the island and Gaelic through working with the local community. Young people develop empathy for others through raising funds to help others. The young people at the senior stages are establishing themselves as Tosgairean – Ambassadors to create immersion opportunities for their younger peers	S
Successes & Achievements	3.2	Practice worth sharing more widely  Children enjoy learning in the outdoor environment through working with various businesses and partners for Gaelic. There is a strong focus on the skills children will	EY/P

		<p>require as they grow, develop and move on to be successful. Children apply these skills in a variety of real-life contexts across the curriculum. Children contribute to the work of promoting and celebrating Gaelic in the local community through their social enterprise project. The class for Gaelic Medium were runners up in a Social Enterprise Academy competition. All children in P5 to P7 Gaelic Medium and English Medium classes took part in a Developing the Young Workforce project with a focus on Gaelic Employability, learning about how these skills support work. Commendably, the school was the first primary school in Scotland to achieve a Scottish Centre of Languages (SCILT) Gold Languages and Employability Award in Gaelic. This has enabled children and staff to share their work with a large number of partners in Scotland and internationally.</p>	
Successes & Achievements	3.2	<p>Practice worth sharing more widely</p> <p>Staff are making good progress in implementing the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education, 2017. They have increased the promotion and provision of 3-18 Gaelic Medium Education, while working with the local playgroup and parents. This is leading to an increase in the number of children and young people learning the language. There are very good partnerships supporting a seamless transition for children moving from the Sgoil Àraich into P1 and from P7 to S1. This provides a strong 3-18 progressive pathway in Gaelic Medium Education, which will lead to qualifications in the Senior Phase. Children and staff are ambitious. They work with the local care centre to foster intergenerational Gaelic links in the community. They are already competing successfully in national competitions, such as Education Scotland’s Gaelic Education Awards.</p>	EY/P
Successes & Achievements	3.2	<p>Practice worth sharing more widely</p> <p>The headteacher and staff have made systematic and robust use of the “Advice on Gaelic Education” as a self-evaluation audit over time in the school. As a result, there has been steady and successful progress in increasing the numbers in Gaelic Medium Education. Almost all enrolments in the school are for Gaelic Medium Education. The headteacher and staff have a very strong understanding of the principles of immersion and how it</p>	EY/P

		<p>is taken forward. The curriculum is developed to integrate music, culture, technology, sport, the local area and language to develop children’s strong sense of identity with Gaelic and their local area. Former pupils are returning to their school as teachers, and other valuable roles. Children in English Medium Education also experience some high-quality interactive learning of Gaelic as an additional language. Their progress has been interrupted by the pandemic. Teachers apply relevant findings from educational research to impact positively on children’s progress.</p>	
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## Version History

<b>Version</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Detail</b>
Version 1	6 March 2026	First published
Version 2	18 May 2026	The section on National Data Sets p7 – p21 has been updated to ensure the language used is consistent with the language used by Qualification Scotland.
		Addition of Declaration on the use of AI.

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