

Gaelic Content for Children and Young People: A desk-top study of current activity

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1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of the research exercise was to produce a desktop study establishing:

- the strategy which informs production of content for children and young people in the areas of: books and other reading materials; television programmes; websites and educational resources
- the current level of activity in these areas
- strengths and weakness in provision

1.2 Research methods

The questionnaire at Appendix 6.1 was sent to the following organisations: Comhairle nan Leabhraichean; MG Alba; Acair; Stòrlann; BBC Craoladh nan Gàidheal; Am Baile. Face-to-face and telephone interviews were held where viable.

An additional questionnaire was circulated to children in all Gaelic-medium provisions in Scotland. Respondents were asked to name favourite authors, describe reading habits, give opinion on Gaelic books and indicate whether they read Gaelic books at home or in school only (see Appendices 6.5 and 6.6). For the purposes of comparison a review of commercially available content in English was carried out and broad descriptions of provision for different age levels is attached at Appendix 6.7.

Tables of available Gaelic content were compiled for review purposes and are attached as Appendices 6.2 – 6.4.

1.3 Acknowledgements

The authors of this report would like to thank all those individuals who participated in the review. Their honest opinions and willingness to give up their valuable time was very much appreciated.

2. Research responses

2.1 Agency questionnaire

2.1.1 Comhairle nan Leabhraichean

The Comhairle's response indicates that no specific strategy is in place for the production of Gaelic materials for children and young people, but rather suggests that the organisation views its role as primarily responsive with the onus on publishers to submit proposals for grant assistance. These are considered on a case-by-case basis. Texts submitted for consideration in this manner are sent to external readers for assessment and decisions are made on merit. It is intended to include children in this process in future. The Comhairle accepts publishers' guidance regarding target age ranges when publicising materials.

Staff estimate that recent expenditure on children's materials represents approximately 25% of the Comhairle's resources; this has been subject to increase in recent years.

The Comhairle views the production of Gaelic content for children and young people primarily as the responsibility of Stòrlann Nàiseanta na Gàidhlig.

2.1.2 MG Alba

MG Alba is charged with the delivery of a wide range of high-quality content for distribution via BBC ALBA. The agency assigns high priority to content for children and young people and in the last financial year allocated £1,405,000 to this area, or 15% of grants awarded for broadcast and online materials.

BBC ALBA broadcasts two hours of programming for children and young people every weekday between 5pm and 7pm, starting with programmes for pre-school and progressing to cartoons, magazine and entertainment programmes for older children. Programmes for older teenagers and young adults are also scheduled in the late night and weekend music zones. Half an hour of programmes for pre-school and early primary children continues to be broadcast on BBC Two Scotland every weekday from 8.30am.

MG Alba content has an entertainment focus and the agency does not commission specific education programming for children and young people, but it is involved in the re-broadcast of archive material relevant to the school curriculum. In addition, all content is informed by policies for BBC licensed services, which aim both to entertain and educate.

The schedule priorities of BBC ALBA are set by the commissioning team and applications are then taken from producers. All MG Alba content is informed by research and particularly by BBC editorial guidelines on creation of appropriate material for children and young people. The organisation consults with Bòrd na Gàidhlig, Clì, BBC and independent writers and broadcasters and is able to tap into years of experience of production of education and young people's material through partnership with BBC. The organisation provides a feedback channel to young people through the Sgleog web service and engages through funded projects such as the Film-G competition. Young people were consulted during a recent BBC Trust exercise relating to BBC ALBA, the results of which are not available at the time of

writing, and a TNS/Progressive exercise, which also connected with parents of young children consuming BBC Alba content.

In commissioning material from third parties, MG Alba makes use of BBC editorial guidelines and reserves certain creative approval as a control measure.

2.1.3 Acair

Acair is a partly commercial and partly public-funded publishing company producing a wide range of Gaelic, English and bilingual books. The company has no specific quotas or targets for material for children and young people but rather output is informed by sales of existing materials and available funds.

Acair typically publishes co-editions and a small number of original titles, usually unsolicited submissions. Unsolicited scripts are sent to reader groups and expert readers for consideration and final approval rests with editorial committees. Schools' feedback is sought post publication.

Acair does not commission material due to a lack of funding.

Acair considers the area of content for children and young people to be in the main the responsibility of Stòrlann Nàiseanta na Gàidhlig.

2.1.4 Stòrlann Nàiseanta na Gàidhlig

Stòrlann's remit is to produce educational materials for schools, with copies of the majority of titles also available to the general public. It works to a 3-year operational plan with provisions for specific materials and CPD sessions, covering a range of curricular areas and directed at both primary and secondary. In the current year, for example, programmes include problem-solving books for Maths, novels for upper primary, whiteboard CD ROMs, grammar materials, scripts and Gaelic-medium science and history textbooks.

Publication and commissioning plans are informed by priorities established through national consultation with teachers, and are subject to review by advisory panels. Plans are kept under continuous review, with feedback from all interested parties, to ensure curriculum compliance. Additional funding from agencies such as Learning and Teaching Scotland facilitates additional development.

Publications by educational level were approximately as follows:

0-3:	0%	(pre-statutory)
Early:	16%	
First:	16%	
Second:	16%	
Third:	35%	
Fourth:	15%	

Stòrlann routinely consults with teachers, Advisers, Local Authority representatives, learners and other education agencies. The agency makes use of piloting of beta resources. Consultation with children regarding content is not at the moment undertaken to a significant degree, but Stòrlann is committed to developing this area.

Policies cover language levels, style, curriculum adherence and other areas.

2.1.5 BBC Gàidhlig

BBC Gàidhlig provides content for BBC ALBA. This content is subject to BBC ALBA's commissioning requirements as determined by its service licence and programme

requirements. The BBC prides itself on the diversity of its output, striving to offer entertaining and educational content across the different media outlets of television, radio and online. It aims to provide quality content across age-ranges.

Before decisions are taken on commissioning priorities, the Editor responsible for education material ensures that all staff are aware of Gaelic education content being produced by other stakeholders, which areas of the curriculum are under-served and gaps in provision, and identifies opportunities for BBC Gàidhlig to address deficits, subject to budget constraints. The BBC routinely consults with children when producing programmes, especially programmes in which children are featured. There are no formal language level guidelines, but children regularly participate in a number of programmes and this informs language levels.

BBC Alba aims to make an important contribution to the promotion of education and learning by offering regular support to those learning Gaelic with its programming, and by offering learning resources alongside broadcast content, including subtitles and additional online content. It aims to work with external partners in the Gaelic education sector to promote the learning of Gaelic. BBC Alba aims to offer programming for both pre-school and older children in regular slots each week, and also provide opportunities for informal learning across a wide range of subjects in its factual output.

BBC Alba may take part in pan-BBC learning campaigns, adapting these where necessary to enhance appeal to Gaelic-speaking audiences. It aims to have at least 2 hours per week of all originated programming aimed at those learning Gaelic.

BBC Radio nan Gàidheal aims to promote education and learning by broadcasting formal and informal education series supporting Gaelic Medium Education within national curriculum guidelines.

2.1.6 Am Baile

Am Baile's objective is to facilitate exploration of the culture and heritage of the Highlands and Islands via interactive media. Certain content is available in Gaelic, providing a new resource for Gaelic speakers and learners.

The project does not have a specific remit for producing Gaelic content for children and young people; nevertheless it does provide a number of online education resources in Gaelic and English. There is no specific strategy or budget for such versions and certain of these have been produced with external funding.

Content is informed by curriculum documentation and development of resources is commonly carried out by teaching professionals. Content and language levels are also determined by the service's Gaelic Editor and feedback from schools.

2.2 Children's questionnaire

The majority of respondents classed themselves as enthusiastic readers, citing a wide range of favourite authors and genre preferences, and established reading habits which saw even young children tackle an average of four plus books per month.

The majority of respondents rated Gaelic books as poor and stated that they would not choose to read Gaelic titles at home.

Primary respondents were marginally more positive than secondary, but the following criticisms were levied repeatedly:

- Gaelic books are boring
- Gaelic books are lacking in plot and narrative drive
- Gaelic books are less relevant than English titles
- Gaelic books are not well-designed and covers in particular do not appeal to children
- Gaelic books are too 'young'

Translations proved more popular than original titles, although there was no justification given. It may be that higher production values or familiarity affect perceptions.

Secondary respondents cited many of the above complaints, plus the following observations:

- Gaelic books are old-fashioned
- Gaelic books are predictable
- There is little Gaelic genre fiction
- Gaelic books are difficult to source

3. Additional Comments

All respondents, agencies and readers expressed the strong opinion that expansion in this area is urgently required. There was a general perception that there is a particular dearth of material for teenagers.

Ian MacDonald, Comhairle nan Leabhraichean

'There is a need for writers' courses and training to recruit more writers. The talent pool is too small.'

Norma MacLeod, Acair

'The area most in need of development is books for leisure reading, as too much is currently associated with school and learning.'

Maggie Johnstone, Am Baile

'Production of educational packages is expensive and requires additional funding; Am Baile would like to do more.'

Mairi Kidd, Stòrlann

'I would hold that the present dearth of reading materials for children and young people impacts on the acquisition of Gaelic by those entering school as non-Gaelic speakers (and potentially also those entering as fluent or native speakers).

Reliance on translation (understandable given commercial imperatives and lead-in times on originated content) has perhaps given rise to a situation in which the language to which children are exposed is not particularly directed, which would be useful in an immersion context.'

4. Observations

This exercise has identified key issues in the three areas examined as follows:

4.1 Books and Reading Materials

Resources are not, in all cases, targeted in a consistent fashion

- There is a lack of specific strategy relating to the production of content of books and reading materials for children and young people. This affects value derived from existing resources

- There is a lack of titles overall, and this is particularly acute for certain target age-ranges, particularly teenagers
- Certain of the age-ranges for which the above it true correlate to crisis points for language-loss (i.e. young adults)
- Books are mis-targeted in terms of age i.e. publishers typically cite a target age-range for translated texts three to five years above that cited by the original publisher. This implies a mis-match between language level and content or a deficit in Gaelic language skills amongst the intended readership
- The majority of output is aimed at schools and there is a corresponding lack of leisure reading
- There is no specific commissioning taking place
- There is little or no co-working with colleagues in other Celtic nations or minority language contexts
- There is a confusion regarding roles and remits within the sector, particularly in terms of distinction between schools' and general entertainment/information/education materials

What content is produced is not in all cases informed by need or consultation

- No breadth of genre is available, implying a lack of attention to personal preference as a market factor; there is a relative plethora of certain types of material and none of others
- Little attempt is made to engage with children when designing services
- Translations from English are common for Early Years but there is little reference to market trends for older children

In terms of reading material, the quality produced is not adequate

- Design in particular is poor
- There is no write-off on products, so titles from the seventies are still on the shelf
- There is no routine re-printing of sell-outs
- There is a reliance on translation which has associated issues in terms of language richness

Marketing is poor

- The majority of titles cannot be sourced except by visiting Comhairle nan Leabhraichean
- Technology such as internet shopping is not utilised to its full potential
- There is a lack of information on existing materials available to the consumer

There is a clear requirement for enhanced strategic planning at a national level with clearly articulated remits for organisations. Certain features of the findings of this study would support the inclusion of commissioning as a key element in order to ensure that resources are directed at priority areas in order to work towards parity in terms of genre, age-range etc.

Planning should take into account involvement of children and young people in the decision-making process, enhanced marketing structures and training for writers, illustrators, designers, editors and publishers.

Additional resource is required to make any significant improvement to the present situation.

4.2 Broadcasting

Broadcast materials for children and young people form an important element of MG Alba's overall commissioning strategy and creation of these materials is informed by appropriate policies.

Additional resource is required to extend provision, for which aspiration and demand are perceived to exist.

4.3 Websites and Educational Resources

Specific provision has been made by the Scottish Government and other agencies to address the curriculum resource deficit of Gaelic education through the establishment and development of Stòrlann Nàiseanta na Gàidhlig. Significant gaps, particularly in terms of subject resourcing in the secondary school, are being addressed.

There is in general a predominance of material for first and second stages in online materials, and provision for 0-3 and secondary is less developed. Secondary is a current priority area for Stòrlann; 0-3 provision requires enhanced strategic planning.

At present there is little tie-in between online and broadcast and print content.

5. Recommendations for change and development

The authors of this review recommend that the Working Group considers the following:

- Improving the availability and quality of content for children through enhanced strategic planning, particularly in the publishing sector, with clearly-articulated remits and responsibilities
- Developing policies in areas such as language and style for circulation to all bodies active in the sector
- Developing structures to facilitate the involvement of children and young people in the development of materials and approaches aimed at their age-groups

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December 2009