

# The Linguistic Audit

## Best practice in collecting data on language use and ability in an organization

Dr Timothy Currie Armstrong  
Soillse, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, An t-Eilean Sgitheanach, IV44 8RQ  
sm00ta@uhi.ac.uk 01471 888450

It would be difficult to properly plan and implement a language policy without reliable and valid data on language use and ability among staff in an organization. It is accepted international good practice that one of the first steps in developing a language plan should be to collect this data on language use and ability with a linguistic audit of the organization, and indeed, Bòrd na Gàidhlig recommends that public bodies preparing plans perform such an audit in their *Guidance on the Development of Gaelic Language Plans* (2007: 11).

In 2009, our research team at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig were asked by Bòrd na Gàidhlig to develop a new template for a language audit that could be easily adapted and used by different public bodies throughout Scotland, and in this session, I will explain some of the theory behind the template we developed and discuss how a public body might execute an audit using this template. In 2010, as part of this project, we were involved in an language audit of the Executive Office in Comhairle nan Eilean Siar that used an adaptation of our template, and I will draw on the insights we gained in the course of this audit to highlight some of the issues involved in conducting successful language audits, both as a source of vital data and as a tool for clarifying language policy in an organization.

## [Name of Organisation] Gaelic Language Survey

As part of our commitment to developing a bilingual workplace for our staff and to serving our Gaelic speaking customers and clients, [Name of Organisation] will be conducting an internal Gaelic language survey of all our staff every [period of time]. This information will help us to measure existing Gaelic-language use, to assess our current capacity to provide services, and to understand the Gaelic-language training needs of our staff. [Name of Organisation] is committed to proactively encouraging the use of Gaelic amongst our staff and between staff and clients and customers and the information we gather with this survey will help us plan for the development of greater Gaelic use and visibility at [Name of Organisation].

In accordance with the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005, [Name of Organisation] has prepared a Gaelic-Language Plan and is implementing this plan in the spirit of the Act, namely, "securing the status of the Gaelic language as an official language of Scotland commanding equal respect to the English language." This survey is an integral part of the implementation of our Gaelic-language plan.

The following questionnaire will ask you about your Gaelic-language ability, your Gaelic language training needs and your Gaelic-language use at work. You will also find several open-ended questions at the end of the questionnaire which will offer you the opportunity to let us know how we might better facilitate Gaelic use here at [Name of Organisation]. On average, this questionnaire should take no more than fifteen minutes to complete. Please return the completed questionnaire to [Name of Audit Coordinator] before [date].

Tapadh leibh,

[Name of Organisation Leader or Department Manager]

Name

Department

Date

**Please check the box next to the statement which best describes your Gaelic ability.**

1. Understanding

- I do not yet understand any Gaelic.
- I can understand simple greetings when someone is speaking slowly and clearly.
- I can pick up the general meaning of simple conversations if someone is speaking slowly and clearly.
- I can understand most normal, daily conversations if someone is speaking slowly and clearly.
- I can understand fluent Gaelic speakers talking about every-day subjects at normal speed.
- I would be able to understand fluent Gaelic speakers in meetings talking about specialised subjects connected to my work.

2. Gaelic Speaking Ability

- I do not yet speak any Gaelic.
- I can exchange simple greetings in Gaelic.
- I can take part in basic conversations about every-day subjects if I fill in the gaps in my Gaelic with some English words.
- I can take part in daily conversations on most subjects if I take my time.
- I can comfortably take part in daily conversations with fluent Gaelic speakers at normal speed.
- I would be able to comfortably discuss specialised subjects connected to my work in meetings with fluent Gaelic speakers.

3. Gaelic Reading Ability

- I cannot yet read any Gaelic.
- I can understand a few words on signs or notices, particularly if there is a diagram or picture to help with the meaning.
- I can understand Gaelic children's books with the help of the pictures.
- I can understand Gaelic novels aimed at teenagers with the help of a dictionary.
- I can understand and comfortably read Gaelic books or articles aimed at adult readers.
- I would be able to understand technical writing in Gaelic on specialised subjects connected to my work.

4. Gaelic Writing Ability

- I cannot yet write anything in Gaelic.
- I can write a simple greeting in a thankyou note or birthday card.
- I can write a few simple sentences in an email to a friend with the help of a dictionary.
- I can write an extended letter to a friend with the help of a dictionary.
- I can write about most every-day subjects without difficulty (letters, reports, emails).
- I would be able to write a report in Gaelic on specialised subjects connected to my work without difficulty.

**Please tick the box next to the statement which best describes how often you currently use Gaelic in your work in the following situations:**

5. I speak Gaelic with customers/clients in person:

Never  Yearly  Monthly  Daily  Hourly  I don't deal with the public.

6. Clients/customers initiate conversations on the phone in Gaelic:

Never  Yearly  Monthly  Daily  Hourly  I don't deal with the public.

7. I initiate conversations with clients/customers on the phone in Gaelic:

Never  Yearly  Monthly  Daily  Hourly  I don't deal with the public.

8. I reply to customers/clients on the phone in Gaelic:

Never  Yearly  Monthly  Daily  Hourly  I don't deal with the public.

9. I receive written correspondence by email from clients/customers in Gaelic:

Never  Yearly  Monthly  Daily  Hourly  I don't deal with the public.

10. I write emails to customers/clients in Gaelic:

Never  Yearly  Monthly  Daily  Hourly  I don't deal with the public.

11. I receive written correspondence through the post from clients/customers in Gaelic:

Never  Yearly  Monthly  Daily  Hourly  I don't deal with the public.

12. I write to clients/customers in Gaelic through the post:

Never  Yearly  Monthly  Daily  Hourly  I don't deal with the public.

13. I speak Gaelic with co-workers informally at work:

Never  Yearly  Monthly  Daily  Hourly

14. I use Gaelic with co-workers at meetings:

Never  Yearly  Monthly  Daily  Hourly

15. I speak Gaelic with my manager:

Never  Yearly  Monthly  Daily  Hourly  I don't have a manager.

16. I speak Gaelic with employees I manage:

Never  Yearly  Monthly  Daily  Hourly  I don't manage other employees.

17. I write internal emails in Gaelic:

- Never  Yearly  Monthly  Daily  Hourly

18. I write internal memos in Gaelic:

- Never  Yearly  Monthly  Daily  Hourly

19. I write internal reports in Gaelic:

- Never  Yearly  Monthly  Daily  Hourly

### **Gaelic Training and Confidence**

20. How would you describe your current interest in learning Gaelic?

- I do not wish to learn Gaelic.  
 I have Gaelic and I am happy with my level of fluency just now.  
 I would like to learn Gaelic or improve my Gaelic but I do not yet have the opportunity.  
 I am on a Gaelic course just now.

21. If you are on a course just now, which one?

---

22. If you would like to learn Gaelic or improve your Gaelic, what training opportunities would be of most use to you? (tick all that apply)

- I would like to learn a few greetings and simple phrases which I can use with customers/clients.  
 I would like to gain spoken fluency in the language.  
 I would like to learn to read and write in Gaelic.  
 I would like to improve my confidence in conversational Gaelic.  
 I would like to improve my reading in Gaelic.  
 I would like to improve my written Gaelic.  
 I would like to improve my technical writing on specialised subjects connected to my work.  
 I would like to improve my grasp of Gaelic spelling and written grammar.  
 I would like to be able to give presentations in Gaelic.

23. If you are learning Gaelic or have been learning Gaelic, how would you describe your progress? (tick all that apply)

- My course has ended and I would like to proceed to the next level.  
 My course has ended and I am happy with what I have learned, but I don't wish to proceed further just now.  
 I am on a Gaelic course but my learning is stalled and I need a new approach.  
 I am on a course and making some progress, but I would like to be moving faster.  
 I am learning, but my course is not teaching me the specific skills I wish to acquire.  
 I am on a course and making good progress.

24. If you have Gaelic, how would you describe your current confidence?
- I have some Gaelic but I lack the confidence to use it at all.
  - I have some Gaelic but I often lack the confidence to use it.
  - I will hold a conversation in Gaelic if someone else starts out in Gaelic.
  - I will start conversations in Gaelic with other Gaelic speakers.
25. If you would like to learn more Gaelic, what kind of training opportunities would be most appropriate for you? (tick all that apply)
- Self-funded study on my own time.
  - Employer-funded training on my own time.
  - Employer-funded training as part of my work schedule.
  - Self study on a distance phone/internet course.
  - Evening classes after work.
  - Intensive classes at the weekend.
  - Classes during the day as part of my work schedule.
  - Classes during the day on breaks or at lunch-time.
  - An intensive week-long course close to home.
  - An intensive week-long residential course away from home.
  - Taking a sabbatical to study Gaelic full-time for a year at university.

### **General Questions**

26. If you have Gaelic, in what sorts of situations have you been successful in using the language at work? Please describe.
27. If you have Gaelic, have there been situations where you have been frustrated in your attempts to use the language at work? Please describe.
28. Are there spaces in our workplace that feel particularly "Gaelic friendly" to staff or customers/clients? Please describe.

