



















## 2. Introduction

### 2.1. Background

In 2014, Bòrd na Gàidhlig<sup>1</sup> commissioned research to identify the approximate number of adults who were learning Gaelic. That project provided a baseline for measuring numbers of adults learning Gaelic in subsequent years, and for highlighting trends relating to the number of learners and their learning activities.

Bòrd na Gàidhlig subsequently commissioned Tkm Consulting to undertake research on this subject in each of the years 2015, 2016 and 2017. Reports for these are available on Bòrd na Gàidhlig's website.<sup>2</sup>

In 2018, Bòrd na Gàidhlig commissioned Daniel Sellers, Borge Consulting and Dr Nicola Carty to undertake a three-year continuation of this research. This would provide data relating to numbers of adult learners of Gaelic in each of the years 2018, 2019 and 2020.

This report presents findings relating to data gathered from learners and learning providers in November 2019.<sup>3</sup>

### 2.2. Structure of the report

In this report we describe the methodology used to gather and analyse data, and discuss trends we have identified. Percentages are given to one decimal place.

We provide a profile of adult learners of Gaelic, with information on:

- their location, age and gender
- what, where and how they are learning, and their motivations for learning Gaelic
- any barriers they have faced in accessing, or taking part in, learning

This is followed by a breakdown of information gathered from learning providers, on:

- the types of learning opportunity they offer and learner numbers
- whether learning is accredited in any way
- how the learning is provided, by whom, and how it is funded

We offer a headline estimation of the number of adults who are learning Gaelic, by extrapolating the data we have gathered from learning providers to a wider population.

We present our conclusions around key issues and trends from the data. Finally, we provide two case studies illustrating individual learners' experiences of learning Gaelic.

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<sup>1</sup> Bòrd na Gàidhlig is an executive non-departmental public body, responsible through Ministers to the Scottish Parliament. It was established under the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005. Bòrd na Gàidhlig is the principal public body in Scotland responsible for promoting Gaelic development and providing advice to Scottish Ministers on Gaelic issues. Bòrd na Gàidhlig is required to exercise its functions with a view to securing the status of Gaelic as an official language of Scotland commanding equal respect to the English language.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.gaidhlig.scot/bord/research/education-data/>

<sup>3</sup> The Adults learning Gaelic report for 2018, together with an infographic, is available at <http://www.gaidhlig.scot/bord/research/education-data/>



The number of responses from **learning providers** increased by one, to 44, but only ten of these respondents said that they were providing Gaelic learning opportunities during the snapshot week. As was the case last year, we believe our pre-survey engagement was an encouraging factor for providers.

## 5. Analysis of responses to the learner survey

661 individuals completed the learner survey. The data in the following analysis is based on responses from these learners, structured around four themes:

- The individual
- Their learning
- Barriers they have faced in their learning
- The organisation providing the learning

### 5.1. The individual

#### Geographical location

We received learner responses from 29 local authority areas in Scotland. We received no response from a small number of areas.<sup>4</sup>

Appendix 2 shows data relating to where learners live.

Table 3 shows the top five areas for learning activity during the snapshot week (excluding 93 responses (16.4%) from learners who told us they were not based in Scotland).

| Area   | Number of learners active | % of learners active |
|--|---------------------------|----------------------|
| City of Edinburgh                                    | 85                        | 15.0                 |
| Glasgow  | 77                        | 13.6                 |
| Highland: Caithness, Sutherland, and East Ross-shire | 29                        | 5.1                  |
| Argyll and Bute: Oban, Lorn and the Isles            | 26                        | 4.6                  |
| Highland: Inverness City                             | 23                        | 4.1                  |

*Table 3 – Top five areas for learning activity during the week beginning 4th November 2019*

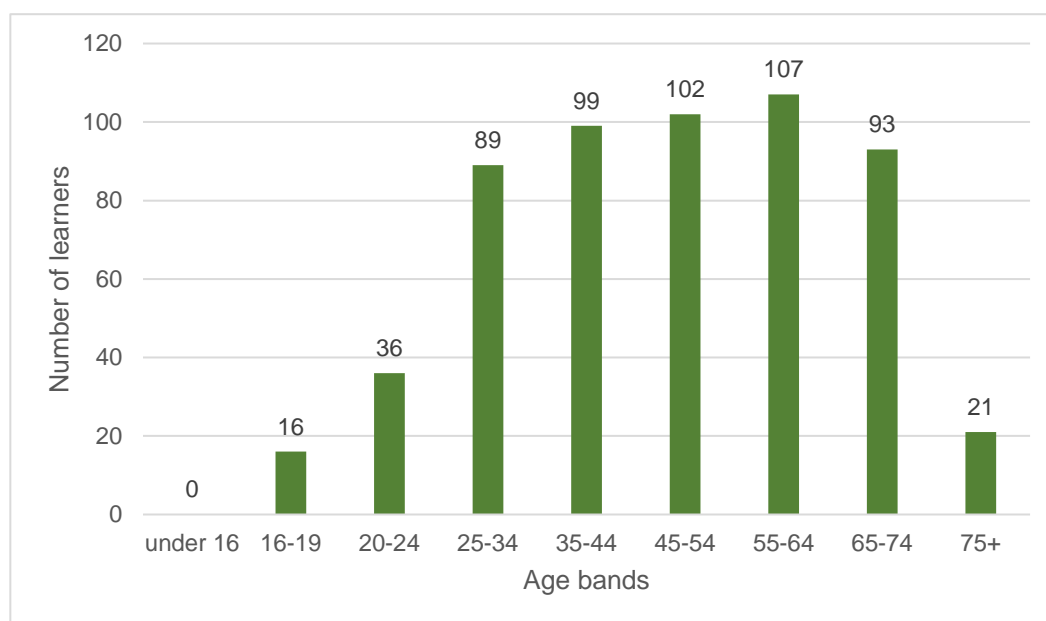
Consistent with previous years, the highest numbers of active learners were in Glasgow and Edinburgh. The cities of Edinburgh, Glasgow and Inverness all featured in the top five areas for learning activity during the snapshot weeks in 2018 and 2019. There were increased responses in 2019 from Argyll and Bute: Oban, Lorn and the Isles, and Highland: Caithness, Sutherland, and East Ross-shire.

#### Age

563 of 567 learners (99.3%) who were active during the snapshot week responded to this question.

<sup>4</sup> Clackmannanshire, Shetland, West Dunbartonshire, Western Isles: Harris, and Western Isles: North Uist, Berneray, and Grimsay

Chart 1 shows the age bands of the learners who were active during that week.



*Chart 1 – Ages of learners active during the week beginning 4th November 2019*

In 2017, 69% of learners were aged 45 and over. In 2018 this had dropped to 58.2%. This figure decreased further in 2019, to 57.4%.

The number of respondents in lower age brackets rose significantly between 2017 and 2018: in 2017, the age range 16–24 accounted for 3.0% of respondents. In 2018 the age range 16–24 accounted for 9.2%, and in 2019, 9.3%.

In 2018 we suggested that the differences reported might have been due to the way we distributed the survey or a reflection of the higher overall participation rate. For example, the extensive and targeted use of social media might have reached more younger learners. We suggest that these reasons also explain this year's results.

## Gender

Table 4 shows respondents' gender.

| Gender   | Number of learners active during snapshot week | % of learners active |
|--|--|----------------------|
| Female   | 371  | 65.4                 |
| Male   | 184  | 32.5                 |
| Prefer not to answer                           | 2  | 0.4                  |
| I prefer to self-describe (please tell us how) | <10  | <1.8                 |
| <i>Non-binary</i>                              | <10  | <1.8                 |
| <i>Genderfluid</i>                             | <10  | <1.8                 |
| <i>Did not say how</i>                         | <10  | <1.8                 |
| No response                                    | <10  | <1.8                 |

*Table 4 – Respondents' gender*

We used a new approach to this question in 2019, asking participants to pick their gender from a list or to self-describe. Again, there were more female than male respondents, which may reflect the general trend for women to respond more to surveys than men.<sup>5</sup> Less than 10 participants in 2019 were gender non-binary or genderfluid, [redacted].

## Disability

52 (9.2%) of the 567 learners active during the snapshot week told us they consider themselves to be disabled. Of the rest, 13 (2.3%) preferred not to say.

As in 2018, this rate of disclosure is lower than was indicated for the Scottish population as a whole in the 2011 Census,<sup>6</sup> where 19.6% of individuals reported being disabled or as having a long-term health condition.

As we suggested last year, it is possible that individuals only disclosed a disability when they felt it impacted on their learning.

## Employment status

Chart 2 shows the employment status of the 567 respondents who were active during the snapshot week.

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<sup>5</sup> See Smith (2008), *Does gender influence online survey participation?: A record-linkage analysis of university faculty online survey response behavior*.

<sup>6</sup> Analysis of Equality Results from the 2011 Census (2014, Scottish Government).

The data shows that adults learning Gaelic are most likely to be working (full- or part-time) or retired, together accounting for 454 (80.0%), which is slightly lower than in 2018, when 84% of learners were in one of these categories.

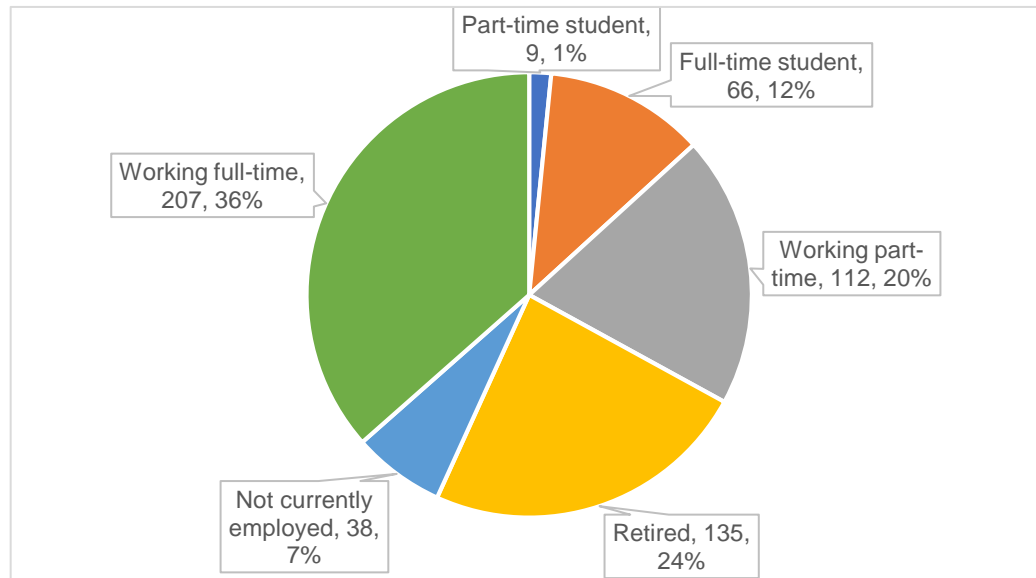


Chart 2 – Employment status of learners active the week beginning 4th November 2019

## 5.2. Learning

The learner survey sought responses from learners in relation to:

- their self-assessed competence in Gaelic
- their motivation for learning Gaelic
- how and in what settings they use their Gaelic

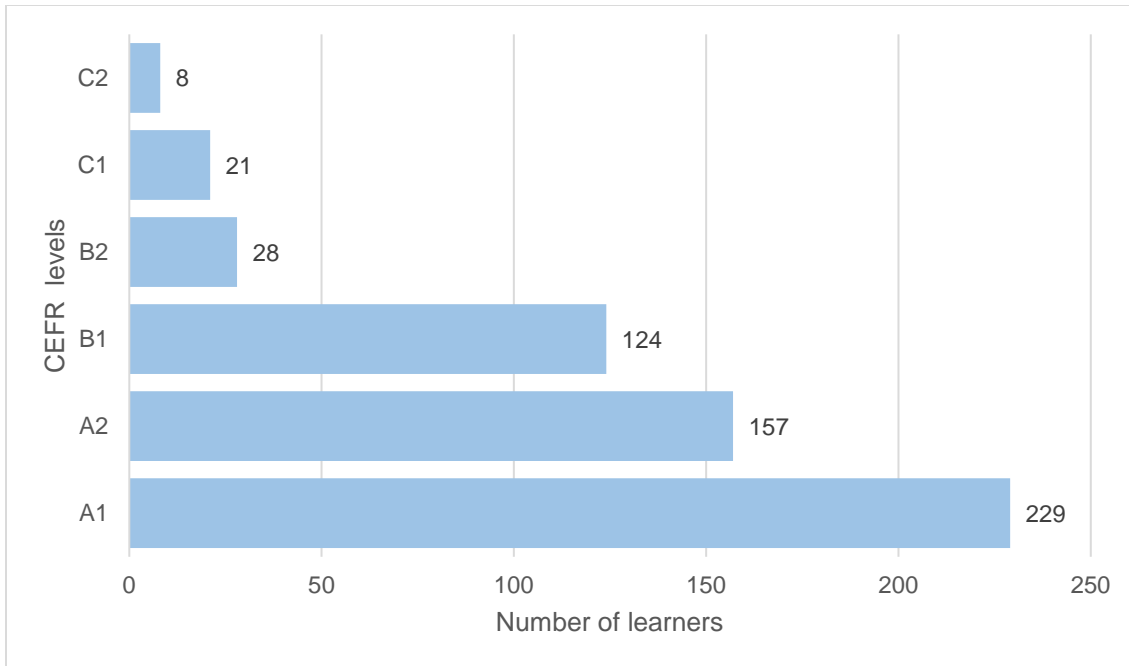
This year we omitted a question we asked in 2018, relating to specific learning activities that learners engaged in during the snapshot week. The question appeared to confuse some of last year's respondents, and we decided to delete it from this year's survey.

### Self-assessed level of competence

We provided learners with descriptors of the six levels of competence in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), where level A1 represents beginner and C2 the most advanced. (These descriptors are attached in [Appendix 3](#).)

We asked learners to read the descriptors and select which level they considered best fitted their overall or general competence in Gaelic (that is, not focusing specifically on reading, writing, speaking or listening).

Chart 3 shows the self-stated competence levels of the 567 learners who were active during the snapshot week, with A1 representing the lowest level.



*Chart 3 – Self-assessed Gaelic competence on the CEFR of learners active during the week beginning 4th November 2019*

This data shows, as in 2018, that the majority of learners active during the snapshot week, 386 (or 68.1%), consider themselves to have a basic level of Gaelic language competence (level A1 or A2). In 2018 this figure was higher, however, at 73.7%.

In fact, between 2018 and 2019 we can see a slight shift in the numbers responding to each level. Table 5 shows the shift, by percentage:

|                                 | % in 2018 | % in 2019 |
|---------------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Levels A1 and A2 (beginner)     | 73.7      | 68.1      |
| Levels B1 and B2 (intermediate) | 22.7      | 26.8      |
| Levels C1 and C2 (expert)       | 3.6       | 5.1       |

*Table 5 – Learners' self-assessed proficiency, 2018–2019*

Recognising that the number of responses we received this year was lower than in 2018, the proportions still appear to have shifted, with fewer respondents claiming to be at the beginner end of the CEFR and more identifying themselves as being at the B and C levels. This could be because learners who responded last year have responded again and now assess themselves as having progressed up a level or levels.

As we suggested last year, the selection by respondents of a CEFR level was subjective and learners may have under- or over-estimated their competence. It is also possible that, in line with the most common barrier to learning (“Not enough opportunities to interact with native

























## Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)

We asked learning providers to tell us the highest SCQF level<sup>7</sup> learners attending their main provision could achieve. We received 30 responses to this question.

22 respondents (75.9%) said their learners would achieve “no particular level”. Despite lower numbers of responses received this year, this percentage figure is almost identical to that we found last year (when 75.6% of responses pointed to “no particular level”).

Colleges and universities were able to identify the highest possible SCQF level that learners in their provision could attain. These were:

- SCQF level 4 – 1 response (3.4%)
- SCQF level 5 – 1 response (3.4%)
- SCQF level 6 – 1 response (3.4%)
- SCQF level 7 – 1 response (3.4%)
- SCQF level 8 – 1 response (3.4%)
- SCQF level 11 – 3 responses (10.0%)

It is possible that many other Gaelic learning providers, particularly those providing informal or non-formal learning opportunities such as conversation circles, have limited awareness of the SCQF. These results tally somewhat with the low amount of accreditation available for learning across all responses.

## Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)

We presented learning providers with the CEFR Global Scale (see Appendix 3) and invited them to identify the level at which they would expect learners attending their main provision to start, and the level at which they would likely finish.

28 of the 34 respondents answered this question fully. This year we received robust data in relation to two types of learning provision (as opposed to four last year):

- Language courses with regular classes
- Conversation classes

Start and end points differed across the range of responses for each type of learning provision. Substituting the numbers 1 to 6 for the six levels of the CEFR (A1 to C2), we calculated mean average start and end points for each type of provision and present them in Chart 8.

These findings ring true in relation to the two types of provision and broadly reflect our findings for these types of provision last year. We were disappointed not to receive more robust data in relation to other types of provision. We believe that promotion of the CEFR among all learning providers of Gaelic could improve the confidence and understanding of respondents and thus result in more responses across a wider range of learning provision types.

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<sup>7</sup> [www.scqf.org.uk](http://www.scqf.org.uk)

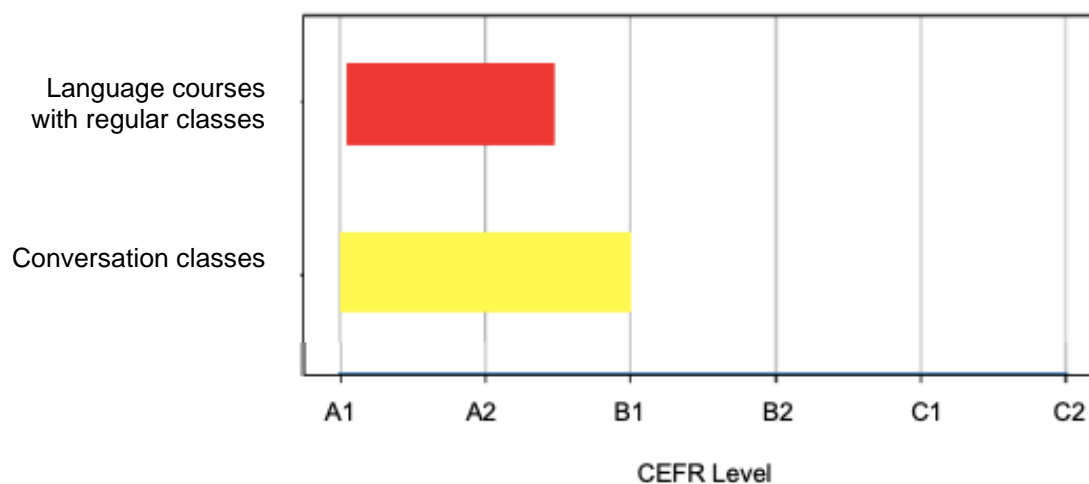


Chart 8 – Typical start and end points on the CEFR for different types of provision

### 6.3. Learning delivery

#### Learning settings

We asked respondents to tell us in what settings the learning they provided took place. Respondents were able to choose more than one option from a list. The results are presented in Chart 9, in descending order.

One provider identified a high school as an “other” setting.

This year, as in 2018, by far the most popular setting for Gaelic adult learning offered by these providers was a community setting such as a community centre or library. While this suggests broad access to Gaelic learning for adults in Scotland’s communities, it also underlines once more the non-formal nature of much of this provision.



Chart 9 – Settings where learning takes place

### Numbers of paid and volunteer tutors

We asked providers how many paid and volunteer tutors delivered their main learning opportunity. We received 31 responses to this question. We found that:

- 28 providers had **only** paid staff
- No providers used **only** volunteers (a marked change from last year)
- 3 providers used **both** paid staff and volunteers

Among the 31 providers employing paid tutors, 1 employed 12 staff, but this was an anomaly. 30 providers used 6 or fewer staff.

The median number of paid staff was 2 (the same as in 2018), and the mean was 2.52 (lower than the 3.17 in 2018).

Where providers used volunteers, they numbered in the 1s and 2s.

### Funding for learning opportunities

We asked providers to identify the **primary source** of funding for the learning opportunities they offer. Their responses are presented in Table 11.

| Primary funding source                                      | Number of responses |
|---|---------------------|
| Individual learners pay fees or receive a concession/waiver | 10                  |
| Local authority   | 9                   |
| Funded by employer  | 8                   |
| Funded by the Scottish Funding Council                      | 6                   |

Table 11 – Sources of primary funding for learning opportunities

Our findings this year tally with those from 2018. Then, as now, the most popular response was that individual learners paid fees or received concessions/waivers, followed by funding from a local authority. This year, we included an option for employer funding, and this proved the third most popular answer this time.

## 7. Conclusions

### 7.1. Number of adults currently learning Gaelic in Scotland

We estimate that there are 3,935 adults currently learning Gaelic in Scotland.

We calculated this figure by extrapolating from the data provided by learning providers, then adding in the number of learners we identified as likely to be teaching themselves. This is the same methodology we used to calculate the estimated number of learners in 2018.

We have submitted our methodology to Bòrd na Gàidhlig for their information and to assure them that our methodology is robust.

This figure of 3,935 represents a significant fall in numbers of adults learning Gaelic in Scotland, compared to last year's figure of 5,460. We believe the fall might be accounted for by reduction in delivery of two types of provision across the country. We have shared our data relating to these two types of provision with Bòrd na Gàidhlig.

### 7.2. Key findings

#### The typical adult Gaelic learner

According to the data we gathered from learners, adults who are learning Gaelic in Scotland are most likely to:

- live in the local authority areas of Edinburgh City, Glasgow City, Highland or Argyll and Bute
- be in the age range 25 to 74 (with the highest numbers in the ranges 55 to 64)
- be female, by a ratio of female:male of almost 2:1
- be in work (full- or part-time) or be retired

In terms of their learning, learners are most likely to:

- consider themselves a beginner learner
- be motivated to learn by an interest in culture and heritage, or by a wish to help preserve the language
- be teaching themselves or attending a class or conversation class that is led by a tutor
- use their Gaelic most days, or at least one day each week
- use their Gaelic in their place of study, at home or online, and in a social environment

- travel less than 10 miles to reach their place of learning (or 0 miles if they are teaching themselves at home)
- have had to overcome a barrier or barriers to their learning
- have lacked opportunities to interact with native or more proficient Gaelic speakers, or been unable to find their preferred type of learning provision locally

Although there have been some changes to specific proportions, these overall trends are the same as those we identified in 2018.

### Typical adult Gaelic learning provision

According to the data we gathered from providers, learning provision in Scotland is most likely to:

- consist of courses or classes run over a number of weeks, or conversation classes led by a tutor
- provide learners with progression that can be matched to the levels of the CEFR
- take place in community-based settings
- be delivered by paid staff
- be paid for by learners themselves
- not lead to a qualification or certificate
- not be levelled against the SCQF or provide SCQF credit points

### Trends from previous years

- **Geographical location** – the most common places where learners lived were similar to 2018, with Edinburgh City, Glasgow City and the Inverness area of Highland local authority all appearing in the top five areas in 2018 and 2019.
- **Learning activities** – the trend we identified in 2018, that the most popular learning activities were self-teaching, attending a course and attending a conversation class, continued in 2019.
- **Barriers faced** – the most commonly perceived barrier by learners continued in 2019 to be that there were not enough opportunities to interact with more proficient speakers.
- **Gender** – more respondents identified as female than male, by a ratio of almost 2:1, reflecting the results from 2018.

### Areas where we identified change

- **Age** – in 2019 the age distribution had shifted in comparison with that in 2018, following a trend from 2017. There were, again, slightly fewer older learners and more middle-aged learners. There were slightly more younger learners in 2019, compared to 2018.
- **Gender** – there was an increase in 2019 [redacted] in the number of respondents who told us that their gender was not represented by a female/male binary. Only













## Appendix 2: Table showing where learners live

The table is divided into Scotland's 32 local authorities. We have sub-divided four of these local authority areas further:

- Argyll and Bute – segmented into three sub-areas
- Highland – segmented into five sub-areas
- North Ayrshire – segmented into two sub-areas
- Western Isles – segmented into five sub-areas

| Area   | Learners active during the snapshot week | %    |
|--|--|------|
| Aberdeen City  | ≤5                                       | ≤0.9 |
| Aberdeenshire  | 9  | 1.6  |
| Angus  | ≤5                                       | ≤0.9 |
| Argyll and Bute (as a whole)   | 38                                       | 6.7  |
| <i>Argyll and Bute: Bute and Cowal</i>                                   | ≤5                                       | ≤0.9 |
| <i>Argyll and Bute: Helensburgh and Lomond</i>                           | ≤5                                       | ≤0.9 |
| <i>Argyll and Bute: Mid Argyll, Kintyre and Islay</i>                    | ≤5                                       | ≤0.9 |
| <i>Argyll and Bute: Oban, Lorn and the Isles</i>                         | 26                                       | 4.6  |
| Clackmannanshire   | ≤5                                       | ≤0.9 |
| Dumfries and Galloway  | 7  | 1.2  |
| Dundee City  | ≤5                                       | ≤0.9 |
| East Ayrshire  | 10                                       | 1.8  |
| East Dunbartonshire  | ≤5                                       | ≤0.9 |
| East Lothian   | ≤5                                       | ≤0.9 |
| East Renfrewshire  | ≤5                                       | ≤0.9 |
| Edinburgh, City of   | 85                                       | 15.0 |
| Falkirk  | 9  | 1.6  |
| Fife   | 17                                       | 3.0  |
| Glasgow City   | 77                                       | 13.6 |
| Highland (as a whole)  | 92                                       | 16.3 |
| <i>Highland: Caithness, Sutherland, and East Ross-shire</i>              | 29                                       | 5.1  |
| <i>Highland: Greater Inverness area, Nairn, Badenoch, and Strathspey</i> | 14                                       | 2.5  |
| <i>Highland: Inverness City</i>  | 23                                       | 4.1  |
| <i>Highland: Skye</i>  | 13                                       | 2.3  |
| <i>Highland: Wester Ross and Lochaber</i>                                | 13                                       | 2.3  |
| Inverclyde   | ≤5                                       | ≤0.9 |
| Midlothian   | 7  | 1.2  |
| Moray  | 8  | 1.4  |
| North Ayrshire (as a whole)  | 8  | 1.5  |
| <i>North Ayrshire mainland</i>   | 6  | 1.1  |
| <i>North Ayrshire: Arran and Cumbrae</i>                                 | ≤5                                       | ≤0.9 |
| North Lanarkshire  | 7  | 1.2  |
| Orkney Islands   | ≤5                                       | ≤0.9 |
| Perth and Kinross  | 13                                       | 2.3  |
| Renfrewshire   | 13                                       | 2.3  |
| Scottish Borders   | 6  | 1.1  |
| Shetland Islands   | ≤5                                       | ≤0.9 |

|   |    |      |
|---|----|------|
| South Ayrshire  | 9  | 1.6  |
| South Lanarkshire                                       | ≤5 | ≤0.9 |
| Stirling  | ≤5 | ≤0.9 |
| West Dunbartonshire                                     | ≤5 | ≤0.9 |
| West Lothian  | 7  | 1.2  |
| Western Isles (as a whole)                              | 20 | 3.5  |
| <i>Western Isles: Barra and Vatersay</i>                | ≤5 | ≤0.9 |
| <i>Western Isles: Benbecula, South Uist and Eriskay</i> | ≤5 | ≤0.9 |
| <i>Western Isles: Harris</i>                            | ≤5 | ≤0.9 |
| <i>Western Isles: Lewis</i>                             | 15 | 2.6  |
| <i>Western Isles: North Uist, Berneray, and Grimsay</i> | ≤5 | ≤0.9 |
| Outwith Scotland  | 93 | 16.4 |

*Table 12 – Where respondents live*

## Appendix 3: Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

### Global scale

|    |   |
|----|---|
| C2 | Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.  |
| C1 | Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.                                       |
| B2 | Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options. |
| B1 | Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.                     |
| A2 | Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.                          |
| A1 | Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.   |

Table 13 – CEFR global scale

## **Appendix 4: Case studies of learners' journeys**

The following case studies illustrate the learning journeys of two learners who completed the survey during November 2019.

We have used only the learners' first names and have not named any learning providers.

We thank Maranda and Ben for their time and their enthusiasm.



## Case study: Maranda

### Introducing Maranda

Maranda is 32 and lives in Perthshire. She works full-time.

Maranda considers herself to be at level A2 in Gaelic, according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for Languages. She finds reading easier than speaking, as “you don’t have to have the same level of confidence to read”. Although she knows she is a competent speaker, Maranda lacks the confidence to speak as well as she can.

Maranda enjoys traditional Celtic folk tales, and is writing a book of short stories about Celtic figures and folklore. She would like to be able to use some Gaelic throughout the book, and has already given one of the stories a Gaelic title.

### Maranda’s motivation for learning Gaelic

Maranda feels that Gaelic is part of her heritage as a Scottish person. She would like to move to Skye in the future, and believes speaking Gaelic could open up opportunities for work there.

Maranda grew up in a household with a positive attitude towards Celtic languages. Despite English being the dominant language at home, Maranda spoke a small amount of Gaelic as a child. She remembers as a small child of three or four enjoying Gaelic-language television programmes, on folklore and fairy tales. Watching these, Maranda picked up some Gaelic words and phrases. She preferred to use the Gaelic she knew over her English when she had the chance; for example, she recalls responding to the question “How are you?” with “Tha gu math,” much to the surprise of the adults around her.

Maranda’s P2 teacher was a native Gaelic speaker who wanted to teach Gaelic to her pupils, but this never came to be. Maranda recalls that her use of Gaelic stopped once she started primary school, in part because there were no Gaelic Medium Education opportunities. She feels she was denied the opportunity to become bilingual as a result. Maranda’s interest in Gaelic remained, however, which led to her taking the language up again as an adult.

### Maranda’s experience of learning Gaelic

Maranda returned to Gaelic as an adult by teaching herself using online resources, but found it difficult to learn without the immediate feedback a face-to-face teacher can provide, and the motivation of attending a class. She felt rewarded on recognising many Gaelic words that had stayed with her since childhood, even though she had not necessarily remembered what they meant.

Maranda found a Level 1 Ùlpan course in the community and, although she was at first sceptical of the method, decided to sign up. She has progressed through several Ùlpan levels, and is amazed at how much vocabulary she has learned since starting. She

enjoys being able to learn through recognising grammatical patterns on her own, and says Ùlpan “feels like a more natural learning process, like you would learn as a child”.

Maranda and the other Gaelic learners with whom she started Ùlpan form a strong community of learners who motivate and support one another. The gaps between course blocks are quite long, and Maranda and her fellow learners have arranged meet-ups to sustain their Gaelic in those periods. For the past year and a half or so, they have used Facebook Messenger almost daily to practice their Gaelic and ask each other questions. Maranda enjoys sharing knowledge with other learners and seeing the different ways of saying things in Gaelic.

The strong relationship with other learners in her class has also spurred Maranda on in her use of Duolingo; when the app was released in November 2019, the students in her class started competing with one another. She describes herself as very competitive, and not only enjoys learning with Duolingo, but also enjoys the friendly competition. Maranda’s overall experience with Duolingo has been quite positive. It gives her the opportunity to practice things she has already learned, to get daily exposure to spoken Gaelic, and to hear a dialect different to that spoken by her tutor.

Maranda finds her tutor very approachable and happy to help, during and outwith classes. Maranda has brought questions to her tutor that have arisen out of her use of Duolingo or LearnGaelic.scot. Maranda also uses the lessons on LearnGaelic.scot to practice new things, or revise topics she already knows. She also uses the dictionary on LearnGaelic.scot which is useful for both vocabulary and pronunciation.

### **What’s next for Maranda and her Gaelic learning?**

Maranda would like to reach level 5 Ùlpan, which is the highest level in her local area. She is concerned that low numbers of interested learners and a lack of funding may mean that she has to stop learning sooner than level 5, however.

Although she does not have the time at the moment, Maranda is considering doing a National 5 qualification in the future, and then building further on that. She would love to be a “properly fluent, near-native” speaker of Gaelic; she is not sure if this is attainable for her, but this is her ideal personal goal.

## Case study: Ben

### Introducing Ben

Ben is 52 and lives in Fife; he has a number of jobs, including part-time teaching in a primary school. He teaches all subjects, but his real interest is in science and outdoor learning. When not teaching, Ben works in the woodlands on his cousin's farm woodlands, cutting and supplying firewood.

Ben has a degree in Ecological Science and a degree in Business Development, as well as a post-graduate certificate in primary teaching. He considers himself to be a lifelong learner who “always needs to be learning something new”.

Ben considers himself a beginner learner of Gaelic. He says: “I write and read better than I speak. I can get the gist of emails and texts in Gaelic, and I can pick up phrases here and there on TV and radio.”

### Ben's motivation for learning Gaelic

Growing up in England but with family links to Scotland but not Gaelic, Ben always wanted to live in Scotland and learn Gaelic.

Ben loves the outdoors and his hobbies include hill walking and sailing. When taking part in these activities, he “sees Gaelic everywhere”. He tells a story about meeting other walkers out on the hills near Tyndrum. The walkers were complaining about having come from a corrie where they had been “blown about”. Ben felt his knowledge of Gaelic had given him an advantage over walkers who didn't know the language: he knew that the Gaelic name of the corrie (Coire Gaothach) meant “windy corrie”, and that the weather in that area might be challenging.

Ben has always had an interest in languages. His father is an Old Testament scholar and studies ancient languages, including Ugaritic scripts written on tablets of clay. Ben grew up with a strong sense that history was important and that old languages should be learned, studied and preserved. He finds Gaelic particularly fascinating because its grammar is so different to that of English and other European languages taught in school.

### Ben's experience of learning Gaelic

Ben first started learning Gaelic in 2016, using the LearnGaelic<sup>8</sup> online beginners' lessons. Then in September 2018, he began Level 1 of an Ùlpan course, which was funded by his employer. Ben found the structure of the course, and the persistence it required of him, very helpful. He also found it beneficial to have to communicate with a native Gaelic speaker. Unfortunately, funding for the course was no longer available, so the next level of the course did not run.

Ben has also undertaken an 18-week course to equip him to teach Gaelic in primary schools. The course, which was delivered in Stirling one day per week, was attended by

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<sup>8</sup> <https://learngaelic.scot/lg-beginners/index.jsp>

teachers from a number of local authorities. Ben has found this course very helpful in building his confidence to teach Gaelic at school.

Ben finds the new Gaelic content on the Duolingo app<sup>9</sup> to be very effective; he has worked his way through most of it, feeling “motivated to do some every day”.

In order to practise his listening skills, Ben often watches Gaelic episodes of the children’s cartoon *Peppa*. He enjoys transcribing the dialogue, finding the visual antics on screen helpful as he works out the meaning. He says: “It’s great fun, like putting together the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle or code breaking, and very satisfying when I work it out; it’s a great way of learning new phrases and idioms.”

Ben also enjoys learning Gaelic songs, both old and new, to help with his learning. He says that the words he learned from a song by Skipinnish enabled him to describe a holiday he had been on at a Gaelic conversation group.

### **What’s next for Ben and his Gaelic learning?**

Ben would like to continue with a local, face-to-face course. He would consider distance learning and has been looking at An Cùrsa Inntrigidh at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig or maybe a National 5 through eSgoil.

Ultimately, Ben would like to work in a job where he has to use Gaelic. He believes that this would “force him to improve”. He says, “I might become fluent if I’m really lucky.”

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.duolingo.com/course/gd/en/Learn-Scottish%20Gaelic>